



(SPRING) VERB

1. A MOVEMENT UPWARD 2. BRING ABOUT THE ESCAPE OR RELEASE OF A PRISONER 3. A PLACE WHERE WATER WELLS UP FROM AN UNDERGROUND SOURCE

for the week of 17 April: Can it be alright when everything is so wrong?!

"Easy belief" does not come easy for me. There are too many people I care about whose marriages are at risk, who are fighting afflicting circumstances, whose bodies fight cancer or crippling impairments, and whose mental capacities are diminishing. But the pain of people in my orbit do not compare to the global afflictions and sufferings present in our world today.

"Easy belief" floats in a cloud of denial and delusion above torment and pain. It has no grit or substance. It dispenses platitudes, warm-fuzzies, and confident declarations of promise and welfare that are completely disconnected from the circumstances of pain that encrust an afflicted soul. "Easy belief" ultimately erodes faith because the God who desires to light the darkness and comfort the afflicted is not permitted entry. Instead a "hollow god" of smiles and petty victories is presented. This god will only disappoint and, if this is the only god offered, bound to disintegrate a person's faith, longing, or search. This god is too weak to save, to aloof to love, and to insensitive to feel. If this is the only god offered than count me an atheist too!

"Deep belief"-- real faith-- is an exercise of your deepest self, down where your primeval feelings flow. This is the place of deep feelings. Feelings that are deeper than our passing emotions. These are the feelings that grab you at the core of your being and tell you whether life is good or rotten. These are the feelings that push your life towards joy or misery, freedom or oppression, light or shadows. In this space is the window of our being where we are either open or closed to God and others.

It is in this place, when I feel loved while everything about me says I am unlovable, that I discover "deep belief". "Deep belief" is discovered when I feel that life, within the valley of the shadow of death, is precious, worth living, and vital. When I feel that there remains a foundation of goodness and grace amidst brokenness, heartache, and affliction, then I have discovered "deep belief".

I say, "discovered" because I do not think this is an achievement as much as it is a gift. "Deep belief" does not come by trying harder. It comes from the depths of God's love and arises deep within us. It is a voice or impression that I can choose to surrender to or mute. This voice gently testifies, "It is all right even while everything is all wrong." There, deep within our affliction and turmoil, God's deep grace will light up the dark night of our soul with His presence and comfort. This "deep belief" has comforted and sustained God's loved ones for centuries and is available to all of us today...

Maybe you find it hard to trust God because you have only put your hope in the "hollow god" whose voice is a pop jingle for "easy belief". The God I trust promises to embed Himself in our darkness and comfort our souls while we await deliverance, answers, and resolution. Praise erupts from this place, from among souls whose dark nights are lit by His Light, comforted by His Presence, and embraced by His Love...

Enjoy your LifeGroup,

Mark

getting to know one another better...

What is your first memory of suffering? What were the circumstances, how did you feel, and did you experience comfort?

reflecting on 2 Corinthians 1.1-11...

Read 2 Corinthians 1.1-11

1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, To the church of God which is at Corinth with all the saints who are throughout Achaia:

2 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, 4 who comforts us in all our affliction so that we will be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. 5 For just as the sufferings of Christ are ours in abundance, so also our comfort is abundant through Christ. 6 But if we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation; or if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which is effective in the patient enduring of the same sufferings which we also suffer; 7 and our hope for you is firmly grounded, knowing that as you are sharers of our sufferings, so also you are sharers of our comfort.

8 For we do not want you to be unaware, brethren, of our affliction which came to us in Asia, that we were burdened excessively, beyond our strength, so that we despaired even of life; 9 indeed, we had the sentence of death within ourselves so that we would not trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead; 10 who delivered us from so great a peril of death, and will deliver us, He on whom we have set our hope. And He will yet deliver us, 11 you also joining in helping us through your prayers, so that thanks may be given by many persons on our behalf for the favor bestowed on us through the prayers of many.

How does Paul describe his feelings in these verses? What words does he use?

How would you describe Paul's state of mind based on these verses?

How does Paul describe God in verses 3-5? What do these words mean to you?

According to verses 4-5, what does God do when we are troubled?

According to these verses can suffering, affliction, and loss have a purpose? Why or why not?

Do you think all suffering, affliction, and loss must have a purpose? Why or why not?

What do you think it means in verse 10 that Paul says God "delivered us"; "will deliver us"; and "He will yet deliver us"? Do you think Paul has been completely delivered from his affliction based on this verse? Why or why not?

Is "despair" and "faith/trust" mutually exclusive? Why or why not?

How do you normally react to hardship, affliction, suffering, and/or difficult circumstances? Do you include others like Paul? Why or why not?

How can you rely more on God and your Christian community instead of yourself in times of hardship, affliction, and despair?

Make a list of anyone you know (from casual acquaintance to good friend) who may be experiencing hardship right now. How can you tangibly and practically express God's and your love, concern, and comfort to them? How do you walk with people through their hardships when there are no immediate solutions and deliverance does not appear imminent?

How do we create space in our relationships and our LifeGroup so that people can share their afflictions and not be blamed or judged for lacking faith?

my prayer requests (think of what you want to share in advance)...

praying for my group...