

Christians, how do you deal with life's troubles? Where do you find the strength to deal with all of these things? Do you turn to yourself, saying that you can do things on your own? "I will have the strength on my own to deal with whatever comes." Do you turn to somebody else and say that in that way you will find strength? "I'll do whatever they tell me to do, and in that way I'll get through it." Or do you just try to ignore it? If I just distract myself or if I just don't think about it anymore, then I know I'll be able to deal with it." Those are all real common ways to try to deal with the troubles of life. But do any of them really work, Christians? Maybe they work for the little things of life, for life's little irritations, the day-to-day kind of stuff. But do they work for the big things? The things that cause us grief, the things that cause us to worry? And what about dealing with someone else's problems? What do you do then? If someone else is suffering, if someone else is going through a very difficult time, where do you turn to find strength in the midst of that trouble? Because Christians, if we turn to ourselves for strength, it's all too easy for us to lose heart. But when we turn to God and trust in him, then we will find the strength that we need to deal with all of these things.

Because Paul in our reading is talking to the Ephesians, and they were dealing with a very difficult situation, but not their own. They were worried because of what was happening to Paul. Because when Paul wrote this letter, he was in prison. He had been thrown into jail for preaching the Gospel. And now, it wasn't very clear what was going to happen to him. Would he be set free? Would he be punished somehow? Would he be put to death because of what he had done? It was all up in the air, and it didn't really seem like there was a clear answer. And I'm sure because of it the Ephesians were also wondering, "What's going to happen to us? If this is what's happening to Paul, is that going to happen to us too? What does the future hold for those who believe in Jesus?" And so they needed something to hold onto. They needed somewhere to turn. Where could they find the strength to deal with all of these problems?

Paul points them to the Lord. It is the Lord who will give them strength. It is the Lord who will lead them through. God will bring them to the conclusion, lead them through every trouble, lead them through all their darkest times. And Paul prays for them in our reading. Prays that they would not lose heart, prays that they would stay with the Lord. Because it is in God that they will find their help. It is in God that they will find their strength. And what Paul writes to the Ephesians, Christians, is also written for us. We will find our strength to deal with all of life's troubles in the Lord our God. In him we will find the strength to face whatever tomorrow may bring.

And we know this, Christians, for three main reasons from our reading for today. The first reason being because God is our Father. Listen to what Paul says, verses 14 and 15: "For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named." Now, a lot of Bibles that you read, including this one, translate verse 15 as "from whom every family." Which is perfectly fine. There's nothing wrong with that translation, because the Greek word that's here is often translated as "family." But the Greek word itself is "patria," like words like patriarch. So in other words, the Greek word for "family" is closely connected to the word for "father." So you could translate this also as "from whom every father in heaven and on earth is named." "From whom all fatherhood is known," as we sang in the first hymn for today.

And that's an important thing to see here, Christians, to know that God is our Father and that every father that we have gets his name from God. When we think of our own fathers, we see a picture of what it means for God to be our Father as well. Because our earthly fathers provided for us. They did everything that they could. They worked very, very hard to support their families, working long days to make sure that we had what we needed. And if our earthly fathers did that for us, Christians, how much more will our heavenly Father provide for us to take care of all of our needs? Our earthly fathers disciplined us. They wanted to show us what was right. They tried to show us the right way. And if our earthly fathers did that for us, Christians, how much does our heavenly Father show us what is right, lead us in the way that we should go? Our earthly fathers were not perfect, of course. They did the best that they could. But despite not being perfect, they wanted what was best for us. They wanted to lead us in the best way. And if that was true of our earthly fathers, how much more is it true of our heavenly Father who is perfect? God's ways are always best, Christians, and God leads us in the best way. And when we know that God is our Father, we will be able to face all of our troubles. We will find the strength to get through them all.

So that's the first reason. The second reason is because God dwells within us. Listen to what Paul says: "That according to the riches of his glory, he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith." And think about what that means, Christians! God's not far off somewhere, telling you what to do, but just leaving you on your own to deal with it. God is near to you. God lives within you. He leads you on the way, because he's never far away. God the Father has given you his Holy Spirit to make you into his own habitation. The Spirit has given you faith. The Spirit has made you a new creation. The Spirit has made you the home of God. And because of the work of the Spirit, Paul says, Christ now dwells within you through faith. And just knowing that, that all by itself is enough to give us comfort. Because God is not far off. God is near. God is with us through all of our troubles.

But it's more than that! Because not only is he within us, but he also gives us the strength that we need. He strengthens us with power through the Holy Spirit so that we are able to face all of life's problems. We are able to go through it all and have the strength and the power that we need to get through it all, because God has given us these things as a free gift from his love. And so in that way, Christians, we can be comforted, knowing that God is not only with us in all of our troubles, but will also give us the strength to get through them all.

And this strength, finally, for the third point, is also the strength to know him, to know him as he is. Because listen again to what Paul says: "That you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God." So God gives you the Holy Spirit, then, so that you can know who he is, so that you have the strength to comprehend the breadth and length and height and depth of God. In other words, to know God as God, to know that he is Lord. God causes you to know that he is your loving Father. God causes you to know that he directs all of your ways. God causes you to know that he holds all things in his mighty hands. And God causes you to know that he directs all of your steps. And when we know that God is in command of all of our days and in command of the way that we are going, we can face all of our troubles. Because no matter how dark that

valley may seem to be, no matter how frightening it is, we know that God is leading us, that this is the way he is leading us towards heaven. And we can get through all things when we know that.

And more than this, he also causes us to know the love of Christ that surpasses all knowledge, to know what we cannot fully understand, to know that Christ is our Savior. Because Christians, Christ in love came down to us. Christ in love became one of us. Christ in love suffered for our sins. And Christ in love died on the cross. And when we know that, Christians, when we know everything that Christ has done to save us, why would we be worried about tomorrow? When we know how much Jesus has done for us purely out of his undeserved love, we can face all things, knowing that Jesus is with us and that he will care for us all of our days.

So Christians, turn to the Lord in the midst of all of your troubles. He is your Father, the one who cares for you, the one who will lead you on your way. He is the one who commands your ways and directs all of your steps. And no matter what you are facing, Christians, no matter what life's troubles may be, God gives you the strength that you need to get through them all. Trust in him and he will care for you in all things. To him be the glory! Amen.

Let us pray. Lord God, heavenly Father, you are the one who commands all of our ways and directs all of our days. We pray that you would cause us to trust in you, knowing that you have given us your Son, Jesus Christ, to be with us in all things. In his name we pray. Amen.