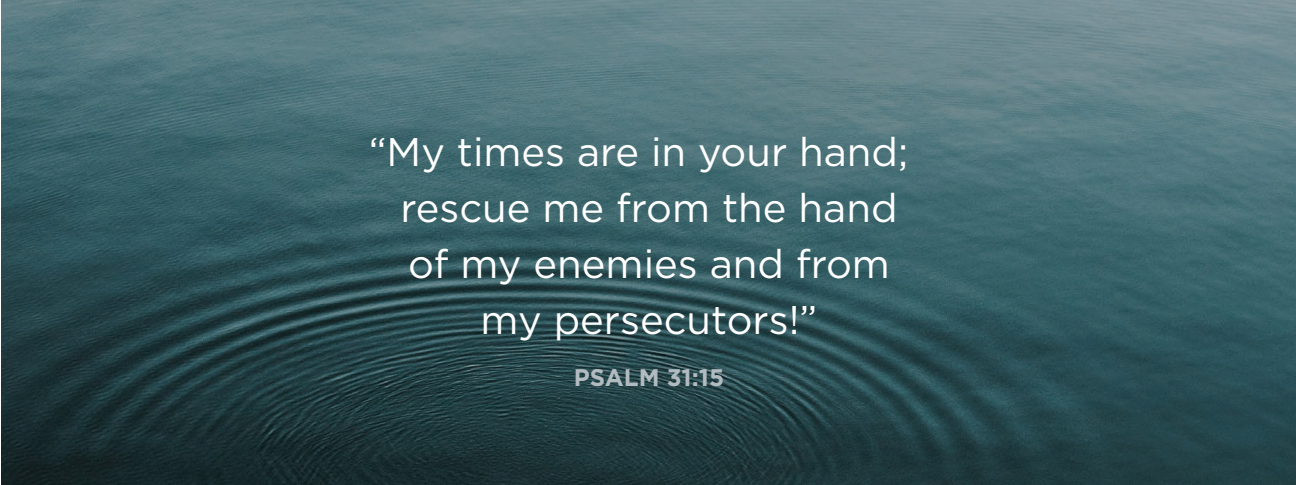


My Times Are in Your Hands

A Study in God's
Faithfulness in Affliction

STUDY GUIDE





“My times are in your hand;
rescue me from the hand
of my enemies and from
my persecutors!”

PSALM 31:15

A great disservice

has been done to the cause of Christ by those who have tended to suggest that Christianity is all brightness and laughter. Such a perspective is true neither to the biblical record nor to the human experience.

So how do we navigate hardship and suffering? Drawn from a series of messages by Alistair Begg entitled *My Times Are in Your Hands*, this companion study guide will give you a deeper understanding of God’s sovereignty in the midst of affliction. By exploring questions like “Why did God create a world in which bad things happen?” and “Why was Jesus willing to suffer so that bad people might be forgiven?” this twelve-session study will help you to “count it all joy” when you come upon trials. Including Scripture passages, hymn lyrics, and questions for contemplation, this guide can be used for personal reflection or small group discussion.

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Each session includes four parts:

- 1)** Getting Started: a quote from the message, followed by an introductory question
- 2)** Key Scriptures: important Bible verses referenced in the message
- 3)** Going Deeper: questions to help you process the messages' main ideas
- 4)** Giving Praise: a poem or hymn that can be committed to memory and incorporated in worship

The following words in the opening message provide a great summary of the overall themes and purpose for this series:

“No one solves the problem of pain and evil and suffering by rejecting God. All that they do is then remove the possibility of providing a meaningful answer to the predicament. If there is no God who is wise and in control, then the events of life are purely happenstance. ... Without belief in God, we can never be sure that anything has any ultimate purpose or meaning, not least of all our suffering. ... Christianity is not about how to escape from the difficulties of life, but it is about how to face the difficulties of life.”
—Alistair Begg

SESSION ONE

“WHY SUFFERING?”

Getting Started

Some have tried to deal with suffering by saying it's an illusion. Others have tried to deal with it by rejecting God. And others still have tried to deal with it by redefining God.

Which of these three responses to suffering have you encountered the most among friends and family? Which of these three responses are you more likely to navigate towards in suffering, and why?

Going Deeper

1. *Why did God, who in His sovereignty knows everything, plans everything, and controls everything, create a world in which He knew things would go wrong? What two answers did Alistair provide for this question?*

2. *When you read the Bible, you discover that its explanations about suffering and pain are not provided in terms of cause and effect—not in terms of origins, but in terms of goals. Why is this distinction helpful to remember?*

KEY SCRIPTURES

“My face is red with weeping, and on my eyelids is deep darkness.” (Job 16:16)

“Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope.”
(Romans 5:3-4)

3. Alistair provided five answers to the question *Why do the righteous suffer?* Did one of these answers stand out to you more than the others, and if so, why?

4. *Christianity is not about how to escape from life's difficulties; it is about how to face them.* Have you adopted this life-changing outlook? If so, was this your perspective when you became a Christian, or did it develop over time?

5. How does Alistair's closing reflection on the cross help us to see God's relationship to suffering in a new way?

GIVING PRAISE

When darkness veils His lovely face,
I rest on His unchanging grace;
In every high and stormy gale,
My anchor holds within the veil;
On Christ, the solid Rock, I stand;
All other ground is sinking sand.

“THE SOLID ROCK” BY EDWARD MOTE

SESSION TWO

“GOD’S FAITHFULNESS IN AFFLICTION”

Getting Started

Affliction is a reality in everyone’s life at one time or another. ... God does not suspend the laws of human nature and physical existence simply because we are redeemed.

What life experiences have led you to go deeper with this series and seek God’s perspective on suffering and affliction?

Going Deeper

1. *If all is not well, if trouble is in our way, if we are facing difficulty and illness and despair, then we are tempted to find ourselves far more akin to the counselors of Job.* What mistakes did the counselors of Job make in responding to his affliction?

2. Alistair said that *suffering comes in all kinds of different ways.* What different ways of suffering can you think of in our world today and in your life in particular?

3. *Suffering does not necessarily bring us closer to God, but it may.* Not only are there different kinds of suffering, but also there are different responses to suffering. What are some different ways suffering can affect us?

KEY SCRIPTURES

“Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice insofar as you share Christ’s sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. ... Therefore let those who suffer according to God’s will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good.”

(1 Peter 4:12-13, 19)

4. *The faithfulness of God in the experience of affliction is in our lives in order to deepen our insight into the heart of God.* How would you restate this in your own words?

5. *The faithfulness of God in the experience of affliction comes to us in order to enable us to help others in their trials.* How have you seen this truth displayed in your own life?

6. How does suffering reveal to us what we really love?

GIVING PRAISE

See from His head, His hands, His feet,
Sorrow and love flow mingled down!
Did e’er such love and sorrow meet,
Or thorns compose so rich a crown?

“WHEN I SURVEY THE WONDROUS CROSS”

BY ISAAC WATTS

SESSION THREE

“WHEN TRIALS COME: PART ONE”

Getting Started

Most of our contemporary life is lived in such a way that we don't have to deal with trials, believing that if we can get rid of trials, then we can have joy.

How have you seen our cultural obsession with convenience, efficiency, and comfort affect our attitude toward life? Are we becoming an increasingly thankful or joyful society? If not, then why?

Going Deeper

1. *God's Word was not given to us, ultimately, that our knowledge might increase but rather that our lives might be changed.* How can the truth about trials here in James change your life?

2. J. B. Phillips paraphrased James 1:2 as follows: “When all kinds of trials and temptations crowd into your lives my brothers, don't resent them as intruders, but welcome them as friends!” How would you paraphrase this verse?

3. *One of the greatest illusions in life is to look at another person and think, “I wish I was him,” or “I wish I was her.”* Do you agree with this statement? Why or why not?

KEY SCRIPTURES

“Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds.” (James 1:2)

“You have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, ‘Abba! Father!’
... Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or
persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?” (Romans 8:15, 35)

4. How is it possible to have joy in the midst of trials?

5. *If we were ever to admit the sorry mess that we really are, then maybe that would magnify the wonder of who God really is and draw people to God rather than to us.* How does our weakness magnify God’s goodness?

GIVING PRAISE

God moves in a mysterious way
His wonders to perform;
He plants His footsteps in the sea
And rides upon the storm.
Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take;
The clouds ye so much dread
Are big with mercy, and shall break
In blessings on your head.

**“GOD MOVES IN A MYSTERIOUS WAY”
BY WILLIAM COWPER**

SESSION FOUR

“WHEN TRIALS COME: PART TWO”

Getting Started

Thomas Goodwin, commenting on James 1:2, said, “This is the hardest duty that ever was required of the distressed hearts of men. And yet God would not require it if it were unattainable.” God is not asking from us what He is unable or unwilling to provide for us.

Do you ever try to obey the Word of God without depending upon His power? How can you increasingly trust Him to provide you with what is needed to follow Him?

Going Deeper

1. *James is not suggesting that trials in and of themselves are a source of joy. ... James would have been prepared to acknowledge that trouble hurts, that trials are painful, and that loss is difficult. Why is this clarification helpful to keep in mind?*

2. What *perspective* is needed to ensure a proper response in trials?

3. What is the *process* by which trials can lead to growth?

KEY SCRIPTURES

“Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.” (James 1:2-4)

“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.”
(Romans 12:2)

4. If someone is not a Christian, where must they begin in responding to God?

5. *Most of us want a crown without any perseverance, to be able to go straight to the graduation class without doing the study. God is so gracious and kind that He won't allow it.* How does God show His kindness by not allowing us to take shortcuts in holiness?

GIVING PRAISE

Trusting only in Thy merit,
Would I seek Thy face;
Heal my wounded, broken spirit,
Save me by Thy grace.
Thou the spring of all my comfort,
More than life to me,
Whom have I on earth beside Thee?
Whom in heaven but Thee?

**“PASS ME NOT, O GENTLE SAVIOR”
BY FANNY CROSBY**

SESSION FIVE

“GOOD NEWS, BAD NEWS”

Getting Started

Joseph was not a fatalist. ... He recognized that all of his days and all of his decisions were under God's providential care. But he recognized also that God had given him a mind to think and that He had given him the ability to take initiative.

How does the truth of God's sovereignty spur you to activity and initiative?

Going Deeper

1. *There will be seasons in our lives where we find ourselves on the receiving end of accusation, slander, maligning, or imprisonment. It may happen in our homes, in our school, in our work, or even within the framework of the church.* In which of these four areas have you experienced injustices?

2. Why should we not be surprised at unjust suffering?

3. Since the New Testament is clear about suffering in the Christian life, why do you think many Christians today assume that God will prevent all suffering in their lives?

KEY SCRIPTURES

“Only remember me, when it is well with you, and please do me the kindness to mention me to Pharaoh, and so get me out of this house. For I was indeed stolen out of the land of the Hebrews, and here also I have done nothing that they should put me into the pit.” (Genesis 40:14-15)

“Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all.”
(Romans 12:17)

4. How should we expect our pluralistic and syncretistic culture to respond to the exclusive claims of Christianity?

5. What challenged you most when Alistair spoke about not seeking revenge?

6. Is there someone you might uniquely minister to because of an affliction you've experienced?

GIVING PRAISE

Jesus guide me through the tempest;
Keep my spirit staid and sure.
When the midnight meets the morning,
Let me love You even more.

**“JESUS DRAW ME EVER NEARER”
BY KEITH GETTY²**

SESSION SIX

“LESSONS FROM THE DUNGEON: PART ONE”

Getting Started

“I cannot do it.” Those are four crucial words for anybody who ever wants to be used by God. In fact, these are the four most singular important words if you’re ever going to be used by God!

In a culture that idolizes self-reliance and independence, how do you joyfully communicate your dependence upon God?

Going Deeper

1. What’s the difference between living with a self-centered focus, living with a circumstance-centered focus, and living with a God-centered focus?

2. John Calvin said these words: “Man never achieves a clear knowledge of himself unless he has first looked upon God’s face, and then descends from contemplating him to scrutinize himself.”³ What conclusions do people make about themselves when they neglect to first know God?

3. Why is it critical to learn how to tell the truth without ambiguity, whether it’s good news or bad news?

KEY SCRIPTURES

“They said to him, ‘We have had dreams, and there is no one to interpret them.’ And Joseph said to them, ‘Do not interpretations belong to God? Please tell them to me.’” (Genesis 40:8)

“I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.”
(John 15:5)

4. Although we are not interpreting dreams like Joseph, what bad news must we be truthful about in our own day?

5. Are you prepared to die? If you die before the day is over, will you go to heaven? What actions can you take today in preparing to die well?

GIVING PRAISE

Whenever I am tempted, whenever clouds arise,
When songs give place to sighing, when hope within me dies,
I draw the closer to Him, from care He sets me free;
His eye is on the sparrow, and I know He watches me.

**“HIS EYE IS ON THE SPARROW”
BY CIVILLIA D. MARTIN**

SESSION SEVEN

“LESSONS FROM THE DUNGEON: PART TWO”

Getting Started

As Christians, we have no place for pessimism. We have no place for anxiety. We have no place for pride. And we have no place for defeat. For in the amazing understanding of who God is and what He is doing, we find that we are humbled and that we are secure, realizing that even our failures and our sins are under His control.

How would your life change if you really lived by faith, trusting that God is in control?

Going Deeper

1. What is the main way in which the Bible exhorts us to prepare for death—buying insurance, getting a will, reserving a plot, or something else?

2. *Christians, of all people, ought to be able to have parties. Really good parties! Not mediocre, boring parties, but fantastic ones.* How are believers able to celebrate life in ways that unbelievers cannot?

3. What or who is worthy of our celebration as we thank God for the life He's given us?

KEY SCRIPTURES

“Only remember me, when it is well with you, and please do me the kindness to mention me to Pharaoh, and so get me out of this house.’
... Yet the chief cupbearer did not remember Joseph, but forgot him.”
(Genesis 40:14, 23)

“Jesus said to her, ‘I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?’”
(John 11:25–26)

4. What can we learn from Joseph about how to deal with disappointment and unfulfilled hopes?

5. What does it mean to rest in God’s faithfulness on a practical level?

GIVING PRAISE

Do thy friends despise, forsake thee?
Take it to the Lord in prayer!
In His arms He’ll take and shield thee,
Thou wilt find a solace there.

**“WHAT A FRIEND WE HAVE IN JESUS”
BY JOSEPH M. SCRIVEN**

SESSION EIGHT

“STILLING LIFE’S STORMS”

Getting Started

The Gospel is not ultimately a collection of doctrines. It is the revelation of a person in Jesus. We can talk about salvation, and that's fine, but let's talk about our Savior. We can talk about redemption, but let's talk about our Redeemer. We can talk about justification, but let's talk about Jesus.

How do you keep Jesus in the focus of your mind and in your presentations of the Gospel so as to not allow your faith to become too abstract?

Going Deeper

1. *Jesus had a body just like us. That's why He got thirsty, that's why He was hungry, that's why He got tired. And that's why He can express sympathy. If He did not know fear, if He did not know fatigue, how in the world could He ever be the one to whom we run today in difficulties? How should Jesus' humanity affect your relationship with Him?*

2. *We want God to tolerate our flaws, and He wants us to tolerate the flaws of one another. Why is it helpful to remember that even within the body of Christ we will experience fear, doubt, and flaws in one another?*

KEY SCRIPTURES

“They were filled with great fear and said to one another, ‘Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?’” (Mark 4:41)

“He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.” (Colossians 1:15-17)

3. What practical application did Alistair give in reflecting on Jesus’ tenderness with His disciples?

4. *The manifestation of the power of Jesus created fear and wonder.* What does it look like for us to live in fear and in wonder of Christ?

5. *Jesus is a living Christ, a realistic savior, a genuine friend, and an unchanging companion.* Is there someone whom you can introduce Jesus to in the next few days?

GIVING PRAISE

Be still, my soul; the waves and wind still know
His voice who ruled them while He dwelt below.

“BE STILL MY SOUL”
BY KATHARINA A. VON SCHLEGEL

SESSION NINE

“ON DEATH AND DYING”

Getting Started

It ought to be Christians who are prepared to do what the secular world is unprepared to do, and that is to look death full in the face and to acknowledge that there is no way to deny it, there is no way to escape it, and therefore, we need to find a way to approach it.

How does our society try to cover up death and avoid thinking about it?

Going Deeper

1. Think back on the first funeral that you attended where you were old enough to remember some of the details. What do you remember about it?

2. C. S. Lewis wrote, “I believe in Christianity as I believe that the Sun has risen, not only because I see it, but because by it I see everything else.”⁴ How does thinking about death from God’s perspective help us see things we could not otherwise see?

3. *For the Christian, death’s sting is drawn.* What does this mean?

KEY SCRIPTURES

“Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil.”
(Ecclesiastes 12:13-14)

“Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there were none of them.”
(Psalm 139:16)

4. When thinking about death and dying, why is it critical to remember that our bodies will also be resurrected in the future?

5. What truths about God and the Gospel do you hope to have displayed in your own funeral or memorial?

GIVING PRAISE

Yea, when this flesh and heart shall fail,
And mortal life shall cease,
I shall possess, within the veil,
A life of joy and peace.

**“AMAZING GRACE”
BY JOHN NEWTON**

SESSION TEN

“CHRISTIANS GRIEVE TOO”

Getting Started

Jay Adams writes, “Grief may be called a life-shaking sorrow over loss. Grief tears life to shreds; it shakes one from top to bottom. It pulls him loose; he comes apart at the seams. Grief is truly nothing less than a life-shattering loss.”⁵

What events can cause grief in our lives, other than the death of a loved one?

Going Deeper

1. Paul addresses his readers as “brothers” and speaks of some as “the rest.” This *is the distinction between faith and unbelief, between life and death, hope and hopelessness, rock and sand, broad and narrow, and light and darkness.* What accounts for this distinction?

2. Why is *cemetery* an appropriate word for a graveyard?

3. Paul could not regard death as something “far better” (Phil. 1:23) than life unless he understood it to bring him into a closer, richer, fuller experience of Jesus than he had ever known on earth. How do we see this truth also displayed by the thief on the cross in Luke 23:39–43?

KEY SCRIPTURES

“We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep.”
(1 Thessalonians 4:13-14)

“He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.” (Isaiah 53:3)

4. *The fact that our loved ones are with the Lord lightens but does not remove the experience of loss and loneliness.* How should Christians grieve?

5. How should Isaiah’s description of Jesus as a “man of sorrows and acquainted with grief” affect our approach to grieving?

GIVING PRAISE

Man of Sorrows! what a name
For the Son of God, who came
Ruined sinners to reclaim.
Hallelujah! What a Savior!

**“HALLELUJAH, WHAT A SAVIOR”
BY PHILIP P. BLISS**

SESSION ELEVEN

“MY TIMES ARE IN YOUR HANDS: PART ONE”

Getting Started

Without God, life is a train going nowhere. It's a boat with a hole in it. It's an airplane with no engines. It's a life without purpose. Is that where you want to live?

How should the hopelessness of life without God compel us to witness to others?

Going Deeper

1. What contemporary examples reveal the ongoing belief on the part of some that they are trapped in the grip of blind forces?

2. What contemporary examples reveal the ongoing belief on the part of some that they are tossed about on the ocean of chance?

3. How does belief in God's providence differ from deism?

KEY SCRIPTURES

“But I trust in you, O LORD; I say, ‘You are my God.’ My times are in your hand.”
(Psalm 31:14-15)

“The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth ... made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, that they should seek God.” (Acts 17:24, 26-27)

4. How does belief in God’s providence differ from pantheism?

5. *God will use the good, the bad, and the ugly in our lives in order to conform us to the image of His Son and enable us to say, ‘My times are in Your hands.’* How would you restate this truth in your own words?

GIVING PRAISE

My times are in Thy hand;
My God, I wish them there;
My life, my friends, my soul I leave
Entirely to Thy care.
My times are in Thy hand;
Whatever they may be;
Pleasing or painful, dark or bright,
As best may seem to Thee.

“MY TIMES ARE IN THY HAND”
BY WILLIAM F. LLOYD

SESSION TWELVE

“MY TIMES ARE IN YOUR HANDS: PART TWO”

Getting Started

We live in a generation of trumpet blowers, drawing attention to ourselves and our achievements. And we can't even speak but for the providence of God.

Why is it so easy at times to forget just how dependent we are upon God?

Going Deeper

1. Why should prosperity not be an occasion for pride for those who believe in God's providence?

2. *The Puritans said providence is a soft pillow for anxious heads.* How would you restate this truth in your own words?

3. Why should adversity not become an occasion for self-pity for those who believe in God's providence?

KEY SCRIPTURES

“You are my rock and my fortress; and for your name’s sake you lead me and guide me; you take me out of the net they have hidden for me, for you are my refuge. Into your hand I commit my spirit; you have redeemed me, O LORD, faithful God.” (Psalm 31:3–5)

“Neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth.” (1 Corinthians 3:7)

4. Which biblical example of this truth stood out most to you and why?

5. Does the truth of God’s providence remove responsibility from us? Why or why not?

6. How does Corrie ten Boom’s story about the train ticket help us picture what it means to walk by faith and not by sight?

GIVING PRAISE

His oath, His covenant, His blood
Support me in the whelming flood;
When all around my soul gives way,
He then is all my hope and stay.
On Christ, the solid Rock, I stand;
All other ground is sinking sand.

“THE SOLID ROCK” BY EDWARD MOTE

ENDNOTES

¹ Thomas Goodwin, *Patience and Its Perfect Work under Sudden and Sore Trials: Being an Exposition of James 1:1-5*, in *The Works of Thomas Goodwin, D. D.* (Edinburgh, 1861), 2:430.

² Keith Getty and Margaret Becker, "Jesus Draw Me Ever Nearer," EMI, 2006. Used by permission. License #548034.

³ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeil, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (1960; repr., Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2006), 1:37.

⁴ C. S. Lewis, "Is Theology Poetry?" in *The Weight of Glory: And Other Addresses* (New York: HarperOne, 2001), 140.

⁵ Jay E. Adams, *Shepherding God's Flock: A Handbook on Pastoral Ministry, Counseling, and Leadership* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975), 136.



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