

When was the last time you laid in bed unable to sleep because of some difficult circumstance in your life? Think back to the last trying situation you had to face, or the difficult decision you had to make. If you're anything like me, though you fondly remember that there was a precious season of your life when you never laid awake worrying about the days ahead...a long time ago. In my life today, sleep is a precious commodity. I don't get enough of it as it is...and unfortunately the sleepless nights are coming more frequently than ever. The worst part is, the more aggressively I pursue what I believe God has for me, the more frequent those difficult seasons come and keep me up at night. Let me tell you about a sleepless season in my life...

Going to college for me was a leap of faith...with a crash landing. I remember moving five hundred miles away from home and everything I had known growing up to go to college in pursuit of what God had for me, only to find myself living with reckless roommates. Roommates who played pranks at every opportunity, kept me up all night, and didn't care about passing their classes. Halfway through the first semester they even threw my computer out of our second floor window without any apology or regret. I remember laying awake on my bed many nights asking God, why did you bring me here? And asking myself, is this really worth it? I found myself tempted to pull back from what I believed God had called me to, pack up, and find an easier road. Life seemed so unstable.

I'm sure you've had some moments in your own life when you felt the same way. When you've been ready to abandon this life you feel God has called you to because it just seems too unstable. It feels as if your life is a tottering tower of Jenga blocks and you have this looming fear that if one more thing goes wrong, everything is just going to come crashing down. And you are tempted to abandon what you feel God has called you to. Maybe you feel that way right now. Maybe you are ready to find an easier road, even if it costs you the pursuit of what God wants. You lack boldness, and so you give up on your God-given ambitions and dreams.

I'm not trying to accuse you. I am just telling you how I feel. I think you might be dealing with these things because I am facing them. As I pursue work after graduation, I am tempted to go and get a higher paying, less-scrutinized secular job. I want to avoid ministry in an unstructured, undeveloped church planting environments. And I want to fall into a safe, secure church job with a salary and benefits and a retirement package, rather than pursue any notion of the radical, lucrative ministry God is calling me to. Instability robs me of boldness, and without boldness I am tempted to take the easy route, rather than God's route.

Today what I am saying is that we need boldness if we are to do all that God is calling us to do. We will face difficulties and uncertainty that will tempt us to shrink back in our ministry. Today I want to let the Scriptures talk to us about boldness and about stability. I want us to hear the confident cry of the Psalmist, and understand the stability that our lives have because of our pursuit of God—stability that should give us the courage to put aside our fears and take up our holy ambitions. I want you to know that "God gives us the stability to live boldly!" [repeat]

Let's look at Psalm 125 together, and see three things in the psalm that should inspire bold living in response to the stability that God gives our lives: a picture of protection, a reason for our security, and an expectation that God is actively securing us. A picture, a reason, and an expectation of stability to live boldly.

First, let's look at the picture of protection that the Psalmist paints for us. Verse one tells us the message of the Psalm, that those who seek the Lord have stability in their lives.

However, instead of simply stating the simple fact, the psalmist uses the city of Jerusalem as an illustration of this. In the first stanza, verses 1 and 2, he uses it in two ways, and links these descriptions together with the powerful theme word: forever. First, he uses the city to portray stability. Cities are unmovable—unconquerable. His picture of stability is of a fortress—a seat of a nation's government and power that took armies months and even years to conquer in ancient days. It's the most secure symbol available to the psalmist in the ancient world. That's why he uses it to portray stability that is permanent...forever. That's the stability our lives have as we seek God.

Second, the psalmist uses Jerusalem to describe the source of our protection. Jerusalem is surrounded by mountains that tower above it on every side like giant city walls. Looking around you from inside the city of Jerusalem would have been visually stunning: you would have seen these mountains and their deep, narrow valleys surrounding Jerusalem and simply known no one was able to harm you. Armies would have been so limited and vulnerable in their approach that they'd be rendered useless. In the same way, the psalmist says that we are surrounded with protection—and not simply from walls or mountains, but we have God as a wall of protection, surrounding us. And God is protection on every side, continual protection, and unending protection. Forever.

The source for the stability of our lives is in God's protection. Those who seek Him are surrounded by His protection. [To me, the 21st century equivalent to the psalmist's picture is the starship and its shields. No one attacks a giant starship in the movies. They are practically invincible. I think of Star Trek and Independence Day and Star Wars where everything depends upon disabling the enemies shields.] In the same way, our lives are strong in pursuit of God, and He adds a layer of protection—shielding that is impermeable, always present, and indestructible.

Though our lives may feel chaotic and unstable at times, God will not allow things to knock us off our course to live out His will. I have seen it personally many times, and I hope you recognize it too, when God protects you. When I was at college and my roommates threw my computer out the window and into the woods from the second story of our dorm, it was able to retrieve it and get it to work...the tube monitor and desktop somehow survived the fall intact. And that's just one of a dozen stories I could tell about ways God has providentially protected me. I am sure you have stories as well—it's good to reflect on them from time to time. God has been my wall of protection these many years of following Him.

Our lives are indestructible in our pursuit of God. God is our wall of protection. That's the psalmist's picture of the stability we have in our relationship with Him. God is our wall of protection.

Secondly, the psalmist gives us a reason for our security. In the second stanza, verse 3, he adds an argument for our stability. He moves from the visual-emotional picture of Jerusalem and the idea of protection, to an argument of logic. His assertion: God does not allow the righteous to be oppressed for long. [repeat]

We know better than to expect our lives to be easy and smooth in our walk with Christ. Here the psalmist provides a key insight for specific times of opposition: they are of limited duration. In the theme of cities and conquest the psalmist pictures the scepter, the symbol of a ruler's power, as unable to come to a stop over the land of a righteous nation. The psalmist knows that God maintains an order that rewards only the righteous, and so he explains that God will not allow the oppressor to appear successful over the extent of time.

The righteous person is not tempted by the success of wicked people, because that success does not last.

The records of the Bible teach us that evil nations will always be repaid in the course of history...and the revelation of the New Testament promises us that each individual will be judged by God for their individual deeds. Like the great majority of our movies, good always wins out in the end and evil always gets repaid. God does not allow the righteous to be oppressed for long. This truth should be our encouragement while we endure times of attack at the hands of wicked people. Regardless of whether brief means hours or days, weeks or months, years or decades, God is at work in our world to ensure that oppression will end. God does not allow the righteous to be oppressed for long. The success of the wicked is ALWAYS short lived. In the case of my roommates, they were caught and expelled after a semester—it was a long 4 months.

The Reason we are secure is that God does not allow the righteous to be oppressed for long.

Finally, we hear the expectation that God is securing us. The psalmist closes his song of Ascents with a cry of confidence toward God. In the final stanza, verses 4 and 5, his expectation is that God is actively at work to secure him. Our expectation should be that God is actively at work securing us too. Listen to his bold words: "Do good," he cries, "to those who are good...but as for those who turn aside to their crooked ways, the LORD will lead them away..." That's the boldness we must have if we are to live lives in a way that truly pleases God to the utmost.

We need to exercise the boldness of the raving sports fanatic. You know this guy—he's the one who goes to every team game just expecting the win. He doesn't let the plays take him by surprise, he anticipates victory. In the same way, we've heard that God is the one who provides our stability, now we must choose to live in a way that truly believes that. We must live each day believing that He will protect us and remove oppression. We should expect to see Him at work around us, even anticipate what things He might do.

Practically this takes us back to where we started. Feeling like a Jenga tower, but pressing on like we have foundations of steel. We have to remember what's at stake: living out the fullness of our calling to ministry. We have to remember the pitfalls of those who live without confidence: giving up (fully or partially), settling for a secure job rather than a dynamic ministry, refusing to take risks, and avoiding challenging situations. Fear, doubt, and anxiety all threaten to drive our ministries. Boldness is what needs to replace them. "God gives us the stability to live boldly!" and we must choose to do so.

Let me sum it up for you: First, remember the Psalmist's picture: our lives are indestructible. God is our wall of protection. He is our shield. Second, remember the psalmist's reason: oppression will only be of brief duration. The success of the wicked is ALWAYS short lived. Finally, remember the Psalmist's expectation: God is actively at work to secure us. We should expect to see Him at work around us, securing us and removing the wicked.

In short, "God gives us the stability to live boldly!" [Repeat]

I want my future to be an illustration of this Psalm, God providing stability while I live boldly pursuing the ministry He has for me. I don't just want the past to reflect that lifestyle. I still have sleepless nights...I am not always sure when and how God will come through, or exactly what stability in each situation looks like. I am not always sure what things I need

to take care of and which things are God's...but I am compelled by the fact that as I walk boldly, I see God at work around me. I dare not shrink back.

"God gives us the stability to live boldly!" Live Boldly!