



### Covid 19: Feeling powerless, helpless and scared? Me too

Never in my life have I felt so utterly helpless. The whole world is in crisis due to a virus, and we have no weapons to fight it. It can strike anyone, anywhere, and at any time. And it's not like war where you can see the enemy and have weapons to defend yourself. This virus thingy sneaks around unseen, and the only effective defence we have, it seems, is to cut off its supply line by staying behind closed doors. But stay behind closed doors for too long and the economy collapses and so do so many people's lives. Their stories are heart-breaking. And I can't even risk helping people either, because I'm a Senior in the most vulnerable category.

But I have felt helpless before. Not as helpless as right now in this world-wide virus crisis, but certainly overwhelmed by not having a clue what was happening to me at the time, or what to do about it. But it was during that worst time in my life that I discovered the book of Psalms in a tattered version of the New Testament a friend gave to me. Why Psalms was included with the New Testament I have no idea, but it was part of "The Message" translation, and it was written in a way I had never seen any book of Psalms written before.

So I read every Psalm, highlighting the bits in each Psalm that jumped out at me with a yellow felt tip. And one Psalm in particular stood out - Psalm 116. It starts off with "I love God, because he listened to me." And that got me thinking, because how did the author of that Psalm know God was listening to him?

Did it have anything to do with what the psalmist asked for? He said he "begged for mercy." But why mercy? *Racham* - the Hebrew word for mercy in Psalm 116 - means "to love or have compassion," so the psalmist is begging God to come down to his level, see through his eyes, feel what he's feeling. And somehow he knew that God was doing that. In fact, the psalmist continues, "He (God) listened so intently as I laid out my case before him."

Imagine that, having someone actually listen intently while you explain what you're going through. No interruptions, no jumping in with advice, no "quick fix" solutions, no "church speak" pat answers, no pious, patronizing preaching, no missing the point of your concerns when it's the turn of the other person to speak, or drifting off the subject. The person just listens in love and compassion. And the intensity of his listening is obvious too.

And in such company, what happens? Well, I've never forgotten the man who first did that for me. I loved him for what he did, because I felt great, just like the psalmist loved God for listening.

But silly me, I'd never pictured God as listening intently while I laid out my case before him. I didn't think he had time for that, so after talking to God, or what I thought was "talking to God" in those mind-numbing prayers I mumbled and drifted through, I never felt great.

But faced with a worldwide crisis that's wiped out my daughter's source of income, and all the other frightening scenarios unfolding that could ruin my other kids' lives, that could kill my wife and me, and create chaos in the streets with people looting stores and homes, I had some real worries on my mind I needed to talk to someone about, because I felt utterly powerless, helpless and scared.

I need someone merciful enough to take the time out just for me. But everybody else is feeling powerless, helpless and scared too, because they've never been through anything like this before either, so no one can give me a definitive answer as to when all this will end, nor can they give me a decent reason for hope.

For the first time in my life I realize I have no one but God to turn to. But I have no idea what to say to him, because what answers does he give in such a situation? Will he miraculously stop the virus? But he didn't stop the Spanish Flu killing 50 million people at the end of World War 1, did he? Will he protect me from getting sick if I ask him? Will he prevent economic collapse? How does he work in such cases?

I really don't know. So I admit, just like the psalmist, that "Up against it, I don't know which way to turn." So what did the psalmist do? He "called out to God for help: 'Please God, save my life.'" And that was it.

That was how he laid out his case before God, by simply admitting he needed help that only God could give. He didn't need to say more

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to God, because God obviously knew already what the man was thinking. For days already the poor man had probably been doing nothing but rolling his situation over and over in his head and talking to himself endlessly about it. So God knew the details by heart by now.

And the psalmist obviously knew that God knew, because he didn't waste any time explaining to God what he was so upset about. He just said: "Please God, save my life." But he also based his request on knowing "God takes the side of the helpless." And how did he know that? Because "when I was at the end of my rope, he saved me."

Some time in the past, then, the psalmist had come to that realization that God is merciful. He'd taken that to mean "God takes the side of the helpless," and he'd believed it. So he'd laid out his case before God and God had "saved" him.

So now he knew that God listened. But it took that first time of believing in God's mercy enough to lay out his case before God. And that's how he discovered God listened, because at the end of it he felt great. In his own words he said he was able to "relax and rest."

When he reached that same spot again, therefore, he knew he didn't have to spend a lot of time explaining his situation to God, because he knew God knew about it already. All he had to say was, "Please God, save me."

And since this is what happened to him, it gives me hope that it can happen to me too. All I need do is honestly admit to God I feel utterly powerless, helpless and scared, and I have no one to turn to but him. I can also admit I have no idea what to actually say to him, or how to pray. And in some way or other I will feel great because of it. And that will tell me God listened intently.

Feeling utterly helpless, then, is just what I need to turn to God as the helper of the helpless, and let him take it from there. In just laying out my case to a merciful God he will prove to me he listens intently. And right now is my opportunity to prove it, so that whenever I'm overwhelmed in future I can say with confidence, "Please God, save me." And if that's all we can think of saying, it's enough, because God knows what's been rolling over and over in our heads already, the proof of which will be God bringing us to the point we relax and rest.

No wonder the psalmist loved God, having experienced that himself too.

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