

FAITH IN GOD WHEN LIFE IS HARD!

A series of three sermon outlines on ***Faith in a God that finds us when...***

- ❖ *we are depressed - from Ps 42*
- ❖ *amidst burnout – from 1 Kings 19*
- ❖ *when life is hard - from Lamentations 3.*

Preached as a sermon series the Rev Andries Combrink.

1. PSALM 42

Faith in God when we are depressed.

Introduction:

Like most psalms of lament, also Psalm 42 displays that curious combination of lamenting God's absence in a prayer that is nevertheless addressed **to** that same God. There is no doubting that this psalmist feels distant from God. But it's not as though he has concluded that there is no God. No matter how desperate the Bible's psalms or songs of lament get--and here and there the language of lament is frightfully dark - you never find a psalmist who arrives at some form of agnosticism, much less atheism.

Why God seems so far away, why God is not *doing* something to rescue the psalmist from his woes, why even the most passionate of prayers are failing to be answered - all these mysteries drive the psalms of lament. But the only reason these questions are acute in the first place, is because of the core belief that at the centre of the cosmos there *is* a God of love, grace, holiness, and beauty. The psalms of lament were written at those points of disconnect between an Israel who knows who God is and those harsh situations in which none of those divine qualities seems to be making any difference. You would never write a psalm of lament, if you did not believe in a good, holy, and just God to begin with.

In Psalm 42: the poet is panting to find God in the same way that an animal pants in the heat of summer. But like a deer in the midst of a drought, so this psalmist cannot find the water he needs to save his life. Tears, salty tears, are the only answer he can find, but saltwater only increases one's thirst. Meanwhile the world sometimes exploits the tragedies of believers by taunting them with the mocking question, "Well, where is your wonderful God *now*? Can't even you now see how hollow all religion is? Give it up!"

1 As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God. 2 My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God? Psalms42:1-2

When we go through dark despondency, we often experience a sense of "God-forsakenness." This sense of God's absence usually has very little to do with a God that went away, but rather that our daily experience shows us that we should feel that He is far away.

We have all been there: Prayers with no answers, the loss of enthusiasm in worship, the experience that the Bible seems to be as dry as wood and being offended by people who seem to find it easy to experience God's closeness and mercy, are all symptoms of a believer caught up in the emotional pain of depression. With it comes the feelings of guilt, telling me that I should be closer to God, have more faith, should read my Bible more and pray with "bigger" faith.

None of these seems to work when depression hits. Deep down we know that it is God we need. We feel the extreme thirst of a deer so close to the water and yet unable to drink it and receive its cool revitalisation.

If you have been there or you are there now, take courage! You are not alone. Your experience is recorded in Scripture. It is recognised by the inspired writings of God. There were other, much more mature believers, who before me also walked on this hard road and have, in spite of faith in a loving and just God, not found water and no peace, however painful the thirst was.

3 My tears have been my food day and night, while men say to me all day long, "Where is your God?" Psalms42:3

People coming for pastoral counselling often complain that they just cannot stop their tears. They are crying all the time. This is a common symptom of more serious forms of depression and is a complaint of men and women alike.

When this happens, we need help. The Psalmist in a short sentence describes more symptoms of depression: utter despondency and an experience of being without hope or power, with emotions that are out of control. Tears have replaced decent nutrition and sleep patterns are seriously disrupted. An overwhelming tiredness impacts on all the poet does.

People around him taunt him, asking: "Where is your God?" He might have boasted that he was going to do something with God's help and it wasn't working out. He might have suffered setbacks and people believed that this was a sign that he was no longer blessed by God. Disappointment strengthened by ridicule, is often what lies at the heart of depression: We have had certain expectations and verbally expressed them, but in reality it never came about.

But the Holy Scriptures record this kind of emotional pain and the very human reality that it can even happen to the writer of worship songs, to someone in the "ministry", such as this Old Testament poet and psalmist.

But God is not detached from our pain. He understands it. He has more than empathy. He even respects our reaction to feelings of God-forsakenness.

Remembering restores faith.

By the time you get to verse 5, this page of the Bible is wet with the psalmist's tears and the air is echoing with the world's taunts. But it is just here where the role of memory begins to assume a curiously high profile. At the lowest point of this psalmist's pain, he says something totally arresting. In verse 6 he screams out his depression, but then says, "Therefore, I will remember You."

Somehow this simple act of remembrance flashes a few shafts of light across the verses of this dark psalm. The psalmist mentions a few places in his life where God was more visibly active and more personally present. And it helps. It doesn't solve everything. Following verse 6, there are still plenty of bitter words to be said in this song of lament. Following verse 6's recalling of better times, nothing is different, yet everything is changed.

Hope sneaks back into this poem. There is some confidence that at some point in the future, the psalmist will yet again be able to sing to God. In fact, the memory of God's past actions prompts the psalmist to declare that there can be no other resting place for his hope than God alone. Because of who God is, a fitting song of praise will eventually again pass the psalmist's lips. Although not today yet and maybe not tomorrow, either. Perhaps it will not even be next week or next month. But someday, in some way, he will again praise the God to whom even these bitter, tear-drenched words are addressed.

Some of you may know that when stargazing, the best way to see the faintest stars is to *not* look directly at them. Because of the way our eyes are designed, faint objects can be seen best when you look sideways from them. Just look to the side of a dim star, and you will suddenly see it in your peripheral vision.

Maybe faith is like that, too. It seems to have been the case for the writer of Psalm 42. Unable to see God in the present moment of crisis and pain, he instead glances into the past. Not only was the psalmist able then to see God in the past, but somehow it energized his hope in the present moment too. By looking just to the side of his current circumstances, God appeared in the "peripheral vision" of the eyes of his soul once more. A simple act of remembering turns this psalm around. It transforms this poem from an ode to despair into a statement of faith and hope.

How does this work, one wonders? Can it be that simple? What is the mechanism that can take a distant memory of something God once did and use it to re-tool the present? **It finally is a mystery how God's Spirit can use the past to give us hope for the future. Yet it happens.**

We do not always know just where to "find" God in any given present moment. Particularly in moments of great pain, uncertainty and helplessness, we feel completely lost. We do not know what God is "up to" or why he is failing to answer our prayers. Only the truly arrogant would ever dare to claim that they always know what God is doing and why. Often we just do not know why something terribly disappointing and excruciating painful has happened. But perhaps the recovery of our hope doesn't depend on making sense of the present moment. Maybe in life's darker, deeper valleys, it is our memories of who God is and what he has done, that will pump some air back into our deflated balloon of faith.

This way of thinking is not strange to the Old Testament. Just reflect for a moment on all those feasts and celebrations we find in OT worship. It was all about remembrance: God's liberation from slavery in Egypt, or God's announcing His law on Sinai, or God providing a holy temple for the sake of His presence amongst His people, and many others. During these feasts, of which the Passover feast was the most significant, faith meant to remember what God has done and to believe that He could and wanted to do the same again. And then Jesus, on the night He was betrayed, at the Passover, instituted a new feast with bread and wine, commanding His people to do this, in remembrance of Him. It is not just our individual memories, not just what God did for you somewhere in the past that will strengthen your faith-vision and in spite of dark depression, will open the eyes of the soul, in order to see the finding-God in faith again. It is also the collective memory of Christ's people that is given to us to restore our faith in a God that will find us.

We cling to our collective memory as the Body of Christ on earth. Ultimately and at the core of our faith experience, we cling to the memories that cluster around the holy Table: the memory of what Jesus did on the cross as Scripture's "great cloud of witnesses" brings it to us. For the sweetest thing that Christians do, is to break bread and share wine in remembrance of Jesus.

Christians have made these sacred gestures not only in brightly lit sanctuaries, or, not only in gracious cathedrals. Christians have also secretly shared these elements in catacombs and prison cells, there at the beginning, or when being persecuted during the times of the Reformation, or being on the run from communists in China, or in the midst of utter poverty, somewhere under a tree near a village in our pain-plagued Africa. Christians have shared the body and blood of Jesus not only while organs played awe inspiring music by Bach, but also while air raid sirens cut the air outside the church with their frightening warnings of life threatening bombers, or while helpless mothers cried out loud, because their children were dieing of hunger.

Application:

Again and again, often in dark circumstances where they could no more see God on the move than could the poet of Psalm 42, Christians remembered Jesus. They have glanced to the side of the present darkness to recall that past event, once and for all accomplished on the cross. And as they have done so, they have again and again discovered that Jesus is no mere memory. He is here, He is alive! He has mercy on us!

Whether or not some of you can sing God's praises right now with as much delight as you can remember singing it in the past, the promise is that you will do so again.

Whoever you are, whether there is a spring in your step or a lump in your throat, whether times of spiritual growth are today's reality or yesterday's memory, you are called to remember and, through that, to believe.

As you do so, you will discover that to remember Christ is no mere memorial of a dead hero, but it is an encounter with a living Lord. And if in the end you, like the psalmist, find your face wet with tears, let that water remind you of your baptism, recalling God's cleansing floods, mysteriously catching all of us up in a love that will not let us go.

Because when we remember Jesus by his Holy Spirit, then we are reminded that we will praise him again. He remains our only Saviour and our God. We can believe in Him when life is hard.

This is the word of God.

In the Name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Amen.

2. ELIJAH RECEIVED FAITH IN A GOD THAT FINDS US, AMIDST BURNOUT. 1 KINGS 19 V.4

"But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a juniper tree: and he requested for himself that he might die; and said, It is enough: now, O Lord, take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers" (1 Kings 19: 4).

Introduction:

Hope means hoping when things are hopeless, or it is no virtue at all. As long as matters are still hopeful, hope is only a cliché; it is only when everything is hopeless that hope begins to mean strength.

Thomas Edison worked 18-hour days and practiced super-human patience. Once he recognized the value of an idea, Edison stayed with the process until he discovered its secret. His alkaline storage battery became a reality only after 10,000 failed experiments! Focus, endurance and determination are excellent traits that lead to astounding success.

But we also need to understand the value of rest. One man challenged another to an all-day wood chopping contest. The challenger worked very hard, stopping only for a brief lunch break. The other man had a leisurely lunch and took several breaks during the day. At the end of the day, the challenger was surprised and annoyed to find that the other fellow had chopped substantially more wood than he had.

"I do not get it," he said. "Every time I checked, you were taking a rest, yet you chopped more wood than I did."

"But you didn't notice," said the winning woodsman, "that I was sharpening my axe when I sat down to rest."

It seems that Elijah did not take time to sharpen his axe. He became so tired, so burned out, that we read that he said, in verse 3: **"It is enough: now, O Lord, take away my life"**. (Our text today).

This is definitely a case of depression as a result of Elijah's burnout. There is a stigma in the world regarding depression, burnout and despondency. This stigma is also found in the church.

Yet in *James 5: 17* we read that ***Elijah was a man just like us***. In other words this most powerful of all prophets, had a human nature like our own. Therefore, **if it could happen to him, it can happen to us**, because we have the same weak, human nature. It would seem from the context that Elijah never

expected this to happen to him. He was taken by surprise by his own actions, and by his own way of thinking.

How does a believer - and believers are not exempt from burnout - think in such times? How does he act, how does he feel and what is his language when he becomes so tired, that he just could not carry on? And how does God treat His children, when something like this, happens to us?

1. GOD'S CHILDREN CAUGHT UP IN THE CONSEQUENCES OF BURNOUT.

What we must remember is that human nature is a unity of soul or spirit, and body. It is clear from the context that Elijah was both mentally and physically exhausted. We do not read that he was eating and we do not read that he was sleeping.

Sometimes the believer is so busy with important work, that he or she forgets these things. We even forget that we have a body to consider! When the body goes down, the mind may fight to stay alert, but it cannot fight against what is called the emotional 'gravity' within human nature. If the body goes down, it will drag down the mind with it. It would seem that Elijah's disappointment and the threat of Jezebel to kill him acted as a trigger on his already internal state of exhaustion. It was the last straw that tipped the balance. What did this pagan-prophet-slaying hero do, when Jezebel threatened him?

He fled for his life!

When a person is burned out, he no longer perceives things in a rational manner. We read: "he was afraid..." (v.3). When he saw Jezebel's threat to himself "he ran for his life" (v.3). This was irrational. He had already stood against greater odds than one woman and many threats. They had tried to hunt him down for many years and he stood before them all, because he was conscious of standing in the presence of God. Do you see how irrational his perception of the threat of Jezebel was: if God had protected him all these years, why should he suddenly turn and run now? But he did.

Elijah's strongest trait was his faithfulness. He always took a stand, but now he flees for his life. A great change had occurred in him: he was exhausted, and yet look at his activity: he walks into the desert until he falls down. A person who faces burnout, often becomes irrationally restless. They look for rest but they cannot find it. Sleeping escapes them. Although Elijah was exhausted, he was restless and he just wanted to get away from everything.

Do you see how Elijah says, "I am the only one left"? (v.10) He felt he was on his own. It did not matter much to him until this point, but in his weakened condition of mind and body - of exhaustion - it did matter. He began to feel his loneliness. He began to feel the lack of support that he was receiving. He was disappointed in himself. When a person experiences burnout, he or she finds it difficult to cope with himself. Extreme feelings of depression set in.

If you are driving a car and a red light, with the word "oil" underneath starts flashing on the dashboard and you stop immediately, you will have a minor repair to take care of. But, if it is flashing and you keep driving on, you will have a major problem to deal with.

Elijah's strength always came from God. This is a reprimand to anyone who thinks he can go through this life without depending upon God. If we are going to get through this life, we have to lean on our Lord. But unbelief within us will tempt us to say, "I can manage this without God. It is only a small thing. I can use God for the bigger things in life, but this little thing, I can manage by myself." We ignore the red light's flickering and we cause major damage to our lives. When the Lord Jesus said, "without me you can do nothing" (John 15:5), He meant every word of it. When the red warning lights we find in this passage flicker on our life's dashboard, put your foot in the brakes, and seek help immediately!

Elijah is exhausted. He feels that he is beaten, that he is a failure and that there is nothing he can do about it. That is why he cried: "I have had enough, LORD, take my life.

People in despair, with an absence of hope and caught up in the devastation of burnout, often want to die. Elijah felt that he had disappointed God and could no longer be used by Him, because he had turned away from the Lord's service: he "sat down under a bush: and he requested for himself that he might die; and said, "I have had enough, LORD, take my life!"

2. GOD'S TREATMENT OF HIS CHILDREN WHEN THEY ARE SO TIRED THAT THEY WOULD RATHER DIE!

First of all the Lord cared for the body of Elijah. God cares for the body and we should care for it too. There is a kind of pseudo-spirituality that says you do not have to care for your body. But the Lord's care, you notice in our text, is always in His wisdom, according to our needs. ***The primary need that the Lord saw in Elijah's life at this point of extreme exhaustion, was the need for the body to recover strength: to sleep, to eat, to drink.***

When people experience sleep deprivation, their mind is certainly affected; we need sleep. How many people actually pray that God would give them a good, restful sleep? Man is a unity. Sleep deprivation will affect your mind for the worse. We need to sleep, eat and drink. The Lord ministered to Elijah first of all, by allowing him to sleep – and then to strengthen his body with bread and water. Jesus also taught us to pray for our daily bread, even before we reflect on our needs to repent of our sins and to seek protection against evil!

After his bodily strength was restored - which would also affect his mind - *Elijah then had the capacity to hear what God was going to say.*

If you talk to an exhausted person, feeling depressed as a result of burnout, they will not take in what you say. You are speaking to a person who does not yet have the capacity to act rationally and to respond to what you say. But when they are restored to strength, then God can speak into their lives again.

Notice that God did not rebuke him. He asked Elijah a question and then He did something that we would be wise to follow: He listened. He allowed Elijah to talk about his feelings, without preaching at him.

God then responded through a gentle whisper. (v.12). He did not rebuke Elijah. God listened, questioned and emphasized, but He did not rebuke. There was a gentle voice; Elijah was experiencing understanding and gentle support.

Application:

It is more than comforting that the Lord does not cast off His people when they are exhausted and feel despondent. The Lord brought Elijah back to a place where he would be useful for the ministry, after looking after his body and ministering to his emotions and restoring his faith. God said: "Go back the way you came". (v.15). Find a friend to work with you and start working on a new mission that I, the Lord, will give you. "Take Elisa", the Lord said, "and enjoy the company of a like-minded friend (v.16) and then anoint a new king for God's people." Become part of the reformation and restoration process again, because, I restored you and called you anew, was the message Elijah needed to hear.

Jesus, our Head and our Leader, carried our sufferings and exhaustion, triumphed over our burnout and gave us the power of His Holy Spirit. He cares about our body, soul and spirit. Even though I go through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for He is with me.

This is the promise of God's Word. Even to those battling with despondency and depression, because they are facing the dire consequences of burnout! His bread and water and His rod and His staff, His counselling and His love, will sustain us.

*In the Name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
Amen.*

3. HAVE FAITH IN A GOD THAT FINDS US, WHEN LIFE IS HARD

Scripture Reading: Lamentations 3:1-20

I am the man who has seen affliction by the rod of his wrath. 2 He has driven me away and made me walk in darkness rather than light; 3 indeed, he has turned his hand against me again and again, all day long. 4 He has made my skin and my flesh grow old and has broken my bones. 5 He has besieged me and surrounded me with bitterness and hardship. 6 He has made me dwell in darkness like those long dead. 7 He has walled me in so I cannot escape; he has weighed me down with chains. 8 Even when I call out or cry for help, he shuts out my prayer. 9 He has barred my way with blocks of stone; he has made my paths crooked. 10 Like a bear lying in wait, like a lion in hiding, 11 he dragged me from the path and mangled me and left me without help. 12 He drew his bow and made me the target for his arrows. 13 He pierced my heart with arrows from his quiver. 14 I became the laughingstock of all my people; they mock me in song all day long. 15 He has filled me with bitter herbs and sated me with gall. 16 He has broken my teeth with gravel; he has trampled me in the dust. 17 I have been deprived of peace; I have forgotten what prosperity is. 18 So I say, "My splendour is gone and all that I had hoped from the LORD." 19 I remember my affliction and my wandering, the bitterness and the gall. 20 I well remember them, and my soul is downcast within me.

Life is hard in Lamentations

Lamentations 3:1-20 is a tough passage in a hard book. The context is the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C., as the Babylonians conquered the beleaguered Jewish army, stole the sacred artefacts from the temple, burned it all to the ground, and took the finest citizens into exile in Babylon. Jerusalem, the blessed city of God, had been destroyed.

The Jews read the book of Lamentations, every year, on the commemoration day of the destruction of the temple of Solomon! It was read on a day of mourning and during a time of remembering loss – yes, a terrible loss that was the result of disobedience to God and of sin. The point it makes, is to never forget the extreme pain that is a result of leaving God, and as a result of that, being left by God!

The writer describes not only the tragic suffering of Jerusalem, but also his own experience in the midst of this catastrophe. This is what we find in Lamentations 3. Here are some of the author's experiences, either literally or metaphorically:

starvation (3:4); oppression (3:7); physical pain (3:11); jeering from his fellow Jews (3:14); anxiety (3:17); hopelessness (3:18); discouragement (3:20)

All of this would have been bad enough, but to make matters worse, the suffering of Jerusalem came as a result of Jerusalem's persistent disobedience to God (Lam 1:8). The terrible things coming upon the Jewish people were, in fact, God's judgment (1:17). Yet the author of Lamentations doesn't accuse God of wrongdoing. On the contrary, he says in 1:18, speaking as a representative of all the people: "The LORD is in the right, for I have rebelled against his word."

This means that the writer's personal suffering is not merely a result of living in a fallen world, or feeling the pain of having made bad choices. Rather, what he experiences, is coming from God. This increases the pain beyond measure. Not only is life intolerably hard, but also, in this particular case, God is responsible for the pain.

The Bible is realistic

Lamentations 3 makes it clear that life can be extremely hard. One of the things I like about the Bible is its realism about life. So often spiritual writings are offensively positive. They look only on the bright side of things. They only employ positive and even wishful thinking. This might work for you if you are in a great place in your own life. But that great place never lasts forever. The time will come when the inexperienced, unrealistic clichés of smiley-religion just can not provide the truthful answers I need to hear.

But in the Bible we find a different story. From the beginning, Scripture is clear about the real struggles and sufferings of this life. Consider the fact that one of the first stories in the Bible is about a brother killing a brother out of jealousy (Genesis 4). As we continue to read through Scripture, we find more division within families, murder, rape, parents grieving over their dead children, starvation, disease, hunger, famine, the slaughter of innocent children, discouragement, and despair. These things are all in the Bible, and much more.

Pretending and denial are contrary to God's will for us. The Bible tells it like it is. It describes real life and it reveals how God makes a difference, not in a perfect world, but in our world that is filled with pain and difficulty.

Life is hard in our World

I am not denying the blessings of this life. But how can we ignore the tragedies and the sufferings of our communities and our people, if not of our own lives?

We live in tough times. Although the Indian Ocean tsunami happened right at the end of 2004, we began 2005 faced with unprecedented devastation and death throughout southern Asia. Since then we became aware, as never before, of the scourge of AIDS in Africa, which orphaned millions of children. We also became more aware of the poverty and hunger throughout the world, ***learning that over six million children die every year, only because they are poor.*** We anguished time and again hearing about the violence in our world, as currently in the Middle East, and elsewhere. We watched helplessly as natural disasters wrecked many countries. We far too often feel the terror of the victims of crime.

The last 2 years were also hard for many of us in this church. We faced painful division in families. Many of us were challenged by serious illness, either our own, or that of our loved ones. Others encountered financial hardship. We had more deaths of the family of members of this congregation during 2006 than ever before in our church. I know about at least three households having to deal with robberies, only during this year. Even for the congregation itself it was, for many reasons, a hard time!

During 2006, we often found ourselves weeping with those who weep as we shared in the pains of our brothers and sisters in Christ. Life is hard, not only in Scripture, but also in our world, and in our church, and in our personal lives.

Here in Centurion we are greatly blessed, and we live with greater comfort and security than many others in our country. We often feel as if we have to pretend that is the way our lives really are, even though on the inside we might be falling apart. Driving down the neat sophisticated streets of our suburbs, it might seem like just another day in paradise. But inside our homes, and inside our families, and inside our hearts, and inside our church, life is hard.

What to preach?

I know that for some of you, this message hits the bull's eye of your soul, because you are struggling with very difficult things right now, and you desperately want to know where God is and how He can help. I also know that some of you are enjoying a season of blessings, thanks be to God! You may wonder how a sermon on *"having faith in a God that finds us, when life is hard"* is relevant to your life. Let me explain.

Firstly, the bad news. No matter how wonderful your life is today, you will face hard times somewhere in your life. It is unavoidable. So if this passage from Scripture did not speak to where you are now, it will prepare you to be able to find the Lord when difficult times come in the future. Take notes, because you may need them sometime, somewhere.

Secondly, the good news. Even if you are experiencing the best time in your life right now, you should grab the privilege of sharing in the struggles of your sisters and brothers in Christ. We are to be a body

in which we "bear one another's burdens" (Gal 6:2), and in which we "weep with those who weep" (Rom 12:15). This means that no matter how great your life is today, you have the opportunity to share with those to whom life is painful right now. Why do I call this the good news? Because there is nothing more meaningful in life than being a source of God's comfort for people who are hurting. And, because you are a member of a burden-bearing church family, it means that when your time of trial comes, you also will not be alone.

So, even if today is a lovely day for you, this message is for you too. It will prepare you for the future and it will help you to be a loving member of Christ's family.

Is it possible to believe in God when life is hard?

Is it even possible to find God when life is hard? I believe it is. In fact, I know it is.

I will admit that this can feel impossible, especially if you are in a tough place in your life and God seems a million kilometres away. But for thousands of years people have indeed found God in the midst of life's suffering, or, it is better to say, God found them.

Consider, once again, the case of Lamentations. Earlier we read the first twenty verses of chapter 3. The writer was suffering profoundly, not only as a result of his own pain, but because his people were devastated. Now we are going to read another portion of Lamentations 3:

But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope: The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. (Lamentations 3:21 -23)

Here, right in the middle of extreme suffering, we find one of the most faithful and positive passages in Scripture: "The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness." Somehow, in the middle of his suffering, when life was just about as hard as it gets, and when he was putting his pain into bitter words, the author of Lamentations finds God.

Faith in a God that finds me, when life is hard

God will reach out to you in the midst of a hard time, because He is a God who seeks and finds. We believe in a finding God. There is no question that when we struggle, we look for God, a God who sometimes seems to be frustratingly absent. But not only are we in the business of finding God when life is hard, but also, in the midst of life's pain, we meet a finding God; a God who seeks out and finds the one who is lost, even you and me; a God who gave his Son, because He cares and a God that triumphed over all our enemies, because He loves us.

The message certainly is not about our effort to deal with hardship and the depression that goes with it! We need to do more than looking for God in the right places. More importantly, we need to meet once again - or perhaps for the first time - the *finding, seeking* God, revealed in Jesus Christ:

- the God who hears the cries of His people when they hurt;
- the God who is with us in our suffering;
- the God who knows our sorrows;
- the God who entered into this hard life, in Jesus of Nazareth;
- the God who took our suffering on Himself and redeemed us from it;
- the God who ensures that we are never alone;
- the God of all comfort;
- the God who gives us strength;
- the God who sustains us when life is hard;
- the God who gives us hope, a hope that will not disappoint.

Life is hard. We know this from experience. We know this from Scripture. Yet in this hard life God makes Himself known to us. He draws near to us. He seeks us and finds us, because He is a finding God.

If you are in the midst of a difficult time, or if you are filled with rejoicing, no matter what your situation may be, may God give you the grace to know the truth, and consequently to have hope that comes from faith in a God that finds us, when life is hard!

This truth is:

In Jesus Christ, the steadfast love of the Lord never ceases. His mercies never come to an end. They are new every morning, new every morning. Great is thy faithfulness, O Lord. Great is thy faithfulness!

This is the Word of God!

In the Name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Amen!