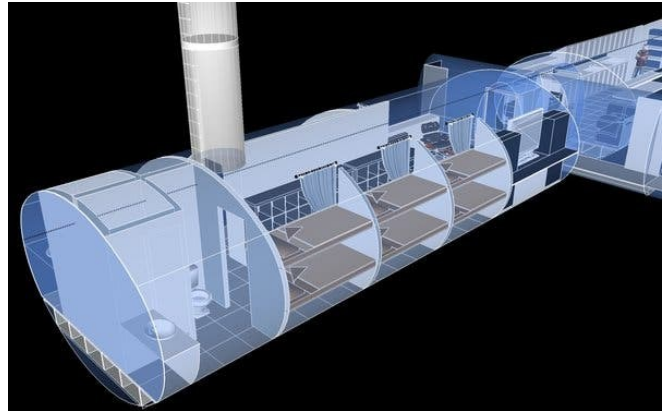




PRAYER GUIDE "RETURN TO ME"

Making the Most of Wednesday, July 8 "You are a hiding place for me" — Ps. 32:7



BETWEEN 6:00 AM—9:00 AM: These pictures come from a recent New York Times article about the bunker craze. Nervous people in record numbers are hiring specialized contractors to install underground shelters. The basic design includes plank flooring, air vents and ground hatches to store supplies. Bigger spenders can customize with kitchens and systems for water and septic.

As you can imagine, business is booming in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. One company, Atlas Survival Shelters, reported 47,000 new YouTube subscribers to their video channel over the last few months. As one representative noted, people build bunkers not to protect themselves from the virus, but because they sense that scarier disruptions are on the way, and they want to prepare.

If you're intrigued by the bunker idea, please invest your money elsewhere, like in the church, missions and projects for the poor. We Christians already have a Bunker. God himself is our "strength...rock...fortress...deliverer, refuge...shield...horn of salvation...and stronghold" (Ps. 18:1-2). Our lives are fixed on the solid rock of King Jesus' promises and discipleship program (Matt. 7:24).

However, God knows that we get rattled and rundown. He wants us to feel enclosed and protected. We learn this from the story of Elijah. In our theme passage, God orders the prophet to retreat to a specially prepared natural bunker when the pressure was on. Why was Elijah feeling the heat? Because he just told King Ahab, the most evil king in the history of Israel, that drought was on the way, and it was Ahab's fault. Elijah's safe asylum was a cool, canyon brook called "Cherith." The name in Hebrew means "cutting off." And for his own wellbeing, Elijah needed to be cut off for a time from the violent regime, societal chaos and idolatry. And consider this: Elijah was isolated from the steady stream of bad news. We need that too. That's why we're encouraging you to be "cut off" for the day from the unrelenting stream of sorrowful headlines and sit by God's restorative brook. Read the passage, picture the scene, and rest.

^{ESV} **1 Kings 17:1** Now Elijah the Tishbite, of Tishbe in Gilead, said to Ahab, "As the LORD, the God of Israel, lives, before whom I stand, there shall be neither dew nor rain these years, except by my word." ² And the word of the LORD came to him: ³ "Depart from here and turn eastward and hide yourself by the brook Cherith, which is east of the Jordan. ⁴ You shall drink from the brook, and I have commanded the ravens to feed you there." ⁵ So he went and did according to the word of the LORD. He went and lived by the brook Cherith that is east of the Jordan. ⁶ And the ravens brought him bread and meat in the morning, and bread and meat in the evening, and he drank from the brook.₁



Above, write a line of praise, or scribble down an insight or write nothing at all as you revel in the Lord's sheltering presence.

24 *Be strong, and let your heart take courage, all you who wait for the LORD!*

23 *Love the LORD, all you his saints! The LORD preserves the faithful but abundantly repays the one who acts in pride.*

22 *I had said in my alarm, "I am cut off from your sight." But you heard the voice of my pleas for mercy when I cried to you for help.*

21 *Blessed be the LORD, for he has wondrously shown his steadfast love to me when I was in a besieged city.*

20 *In the cover of your presence you hide them from the plots of men; you store them in your shelter from the strife of tongues.*

19 *Oh, how abundant is your goodness, which you have stored up for those who fear you and worked for those who take refuge in you, in the sight of the children of mankind!*

18 *Let the lying lips be mute, which speak insolently against the righteous in pride and contempt.*

17 *O LORD, let me not be put to shame, for I call upon you; let the wicked be put to shame; let them go silently to Sheol.*

16 *Make your face shine on your servant; save me in your steadfast love!*

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

14 *But I trust in you, O LORD; I say, "You are my God."*

13 *For I hear the whispering of many-- terror on every side!-- as they scheme together against me, as they plot to take my life.*

12 *I have been forgotten like one who is dead; I have become like a broken vessel.*

11 *Because of all my adversaries I have become a reproach, especially to my neighbors, and an object of dread to my acquaintances; those who see me in the street flee from me.*

10 *For my life is spent with sorrow, and my years with sighing; my strength fails because of my iniquity, and my bones waste away.*

9 *Be gracious to me, O LORD, for I am in distress; my eye is wasted from grief; my soul and my body also.*

8 *and you have not delivered me into the hand of the enemy; you have set my feet in a broad place.*

7 *I will rejoice and be glad in your steadfast love, because you have seen my affliction; you have known the distress of my soul,*

6 *I hate those who pay regard to worthless idols, but I trust in the LORD.*

5 *Into your hand I commit my spirit; you have redeemed me, O LORD, faithful God.*

4 *you take me out of the net they have hidden for me, for you are my refuge.*

3 *For you are my rock and my fortress; and for your name's sake you lead me and guide me;*

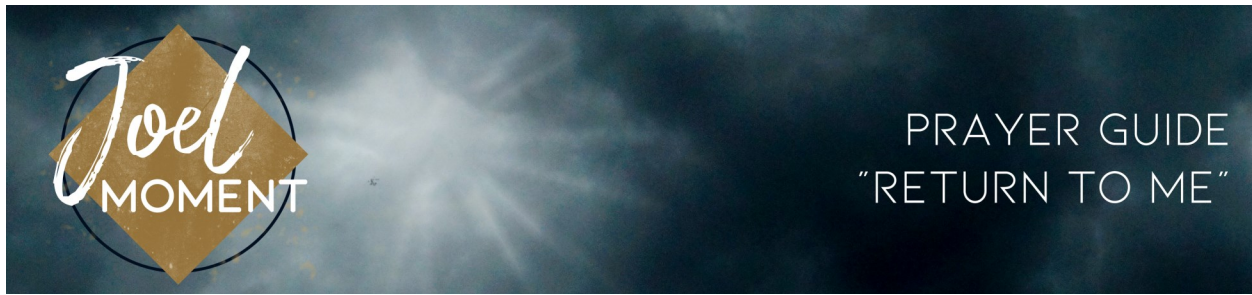
2 *Incline your ear to me; rescue me speedily! Be a rock of refuge for me, a strong fortress to save me!*

1 *To the choirmaster. A Psalm of David. In you, O LORD, do I take refuge; let me never be put to shame; in your righteousness deliver me!*



What's this woman doing? She's "bouldering." That means she's climbing on smaller rocks to improve her skills safely. (Notice the pads at the bottom and the man waiting to catch her.) It's slow and allows the climber to get to know the rock, because her nose is just inches away from the granite as her hands feel the texture and her toes press into tiny divots. She'll be rewarded with a fine view from the top.

What are we doing in this exercise? We're bouldering up Ps. 31. Please grab a pen, pencil or highlighter and climb up each of the 24 verses, marking words and phrases that attract your attention. (Notice that we printed the Psalm in reverse order to picture the idea of moving up.) Pause often, sharing your thoughts and impressions with the LORD. At the top, when you're "high upon a rock," don't be surprised if your concerns appear small in comparison with your Mighty King (Ps. 27:5).



BETWEEN 12:00-3:00 PM: Nourish yourself on what God’s ravens left for you in the refrigerator (1 Kg. 17:6). Then take a nap or just close your eyes. Give yourself permission to let God watch over the world, your family, health and financial concerns. Then, when you awake, go back over the words and phrases from Ps. 31 that elicited your ink strokes, asterisks and underlines. Then talk to God about those words and phrases in particular. Also, ask God to be touching your Valley Church brothers and sisters as they sit by their rocks and brooks. Pray for the godless “Ahab’s” in the world that they would repent and find rest.

BETWEEN 3:00—4:00 PM: Join the ***Joel Moment Prayer Gathering***. Go to *Zoom.com* and enter Meeting ID and Password.

BETWEEN 4:00-9:00 PM: It’s time for another visit from the ravens. If you fasted from social media and the news today, how many times did you reach for your phone without thinking about it? Did you go on autopilot and find your pulse rising as you clicked on *heartattacknews.com* by mistake? How would your life and perspective improve if you had a regular media fast?

BETWEEN 9:00—12:00 AM: Revisit your climb up Ps. 31 for a third time. Maybe the ravens left you some ice cream in the freezer. Scoop some into a bowl. Then, read the Psalm again with a different color pen or highlighter in hand. Think about what Andy Wu shared in the Joel Moment Prayer Gathering about betting all on God. Review the lyrics from the song Thomas Sorrentino shared. Reflect on the prayer that Joe Proctor led us in. Remember that we should only fear God Almighty (Matt. 10:28). The truth is that when King Jesus comes back to vindicate his servants and pay back evildoers for their evil deeds, those who rejected him won’t be able to hide in their bunkers.

^{ESV} **Revelation 6:16** *calling to the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb, ¹⁷ for the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?"*

The whole new creation will be our eternal fortress, with its capitol being a holy city full of God’s glory. What’s more, its pearl gates will never close. Lawbreakers, bandits, criminals and vicious animals will be no more. Make this first verse of “All the Way My Savior Leads Me” your evening prayer.

All the way my Savior leads me
What have I to ask beside?
Can I doubt His faithful mercies?
Who through life has been my guide

Heavenly peace, divinest comfort
Ere by faith in Him to dwell
For I know whate'er fall me
Jesus doeth all things well



ANDY W. [A reflection on betting everything on God instead of human supports.]

ESV Isaiah 25:4 For you have been a stronghold to the poor, a stronghold to the needy in his distress, a shelter from the storm and a shade from the heat; for the breath of the ruthless is like a storm against a wall,

THOMAS S. [A song about how God is our Supreme Shelter.]

“Our God” by Chris Tomlin

Water You turned into wine
 Opened the eyes of the blind
 There's no one like you
 None like you
 Into the darkness You shine
 Out of the ashes we rise
 There's No one like you
 None like you

Our God is greater, our God is stronger
 God You are higher than any other
 Our God is Healer, awesome in power
 Our God, Our God

Into the darkness you shine
 Out of the ashes we Rise
 No one like you
 None like you

Our God is greater, our God is stronger
 God You are higher than any other

Our God is Healer, awesome in power
 Our God, Our God
 Our God is greater, our God is stronger
 God You are higher than any other
 Our God is Healer, awesome in power
 Our God, Our God

And if Our God is for us, then who could ever stop us?
 And if our God is with us, then what can stand against?
 And if Our God is for us, then who could ever stop us?
 And if our God is with us, then what can stand against?
 Then what can stand against?

Our God is greater, our God is stronger
 God You are higher than any other
 Our God is Healer, awesome in power
 Our God, Our God
 Our God is greater, our God is stronger

JOE P. [A reading of the Lord’s Prayer followed by a prayer that God will use our church in fresh ways to advance his gracious reign through us in places near and far.]

NAS Matthew 6:9-13 "Pray, then, in this way: 'Our Father who art in heaven, Hallowed be Thy name. ¹⁰ 'Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, On earth as it is in heaven. ¹¹ 'Give us this day our daily bread. ¹² 'And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. ¹³ 'And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.'



GROUP PRAYER PROMPT #1 (7 min.): *"The LORD lives, and blessed be my rock, and exalted be the God of my salvation (Ps. 18:46). Cast praise on your Heavenly Father in your Zoom group. Tell God the reasons why you love and revere him.*

GROUP PRAYER PROMPT #2 (7 min.): Elijah didn't stay by the secret brook indefinitely. There will be new battles to fight and opportunities to represent God and meet the practical needs of suffering people. Pray for each one of these special ministries/partners: (1) Valley Church's VBS; (2) International Student Fellowship; (3) City Team; and (4) Real Options.

GROUP PRAYER PROMPT #3 (7 min.): Jesus himself said: *"Come away by yourselves to a desolate place and rest a while" (Mk. 6:31). Ask that God's people will find rest in Jesus and then have energy to contend in this present tribulation with loving actions and bold witness.*

Record what God shows you in Joel Moment, Part 2 — that is, the time after 4:00 PM — when we share Scripture, intercede and support each other as the Holy Spirit leads us.
