

NOT LIKE THAT FORK Psalm 34:1-3

As I've said before that when Laurie and I were on vacation I banged my leg on a reef in the ocean and it got infected. I had a hunch for a couple of days that it was infected, but I didn't want to go to the doctor. I didn't want to spend a few hours of my vacation in a doctor's office, but there were some other things holding me back. I was pretty sure they would want to clean out that wound. I've been through that before and it was not a kiddie ride at Disneyland. But the bigger issues were I feared a doctor would tell me I couldn't go back in the ocean because it would make the infection worse and they would give me antibiotics that made me sensitive to the sun. So there we would be in Hawaii on vacation and I would have to stay out of the sun and the ocean.

Several people I spoke with in the area told me that such infections are quite common there and very stubborn. Since they are hard to defeat, I was told, you really need to get on top of it. So I reluctantly went to see a doctor. I was right about the cleaning out, the no ocean and the antibiotics. Fortunately the drug they gave me didn't make me sensitive to the sun so we could still have something of a vacation. But the curious thing was that the main treatment for my leg wound was to take a pill. Someone who lived hundreds of years ago might have thought this was some dumb idea. Hey, the wound is on my calf so what good is taking a pill going to do? Shouldn't we be focusing on where the wound is, which is a long way from my mouth? But we now have a better idea about how bacteria work so I didn't think twice about taking the pills. And to my considerable relief the treatment, after some adjustment, worked just as the doctor hoped. My leg healed up just fine.

Today I want to give you a treatment for your soul. Like swallowing a pill when you have a wound on your leg, this treatment is not usually the first thing you think of when life turns upside down on you. Yet this is the best treatment you can get. It is especially important when you are in the downside of life, no matter what that downside might be. We will see this treatment in Psalm 34:1-3.

DAVID'S CIRCUMSTANCE WAS EXTREME

The little foreword of this Psalm gives us the historical context of its origin, and I think that context is important. "Of David. When he pretended to be insane before Abimelech, who drove him away, and he left." Abimelech wasn't a name, it was a title, sort of like Pharaoh, a king of Egypt. It referred to a Philistine king. This description refers us to incidents recorded in 1 Samuel 21.

In 1 Samuel 19:11 we get the picture of what was happening in David's life. "Saul sent men to David's house to watch it and to kill him in the morning." Though David was totally loyal to King Saul, Saul was teetering on the raw edge of insanity. His paranoia had taken over. Throughout human history one of the most common ways the transfer of power took place is a usurper assassinated a king. Saul was paranoid because he feared that was going to happen to him. He saw David as a clear and present danger. David was wildly popular and hugely admired by the troops. He had proven himself strong and courageous in battle. So what do you

do if you're the king and you see an obvious rival growing in power and becoming a threat? You launch a pre-emptive strike and take that chess piece off the board. Saul not only decided he needed to get rid of David, he became obsessed with the idea. So David went on the run. I've read that his favorite movie during that time was *The Fugitive*, in which Harrison Ford starred as a man falsely accused of a crime on the run from government forces using all of his wits to avoid them, but I've not been able to verify this.

We have all experienced the downside of life in one form or another, but I would be willing to bet my house that none of us here has ever been in the situation where the government's forces have staked out our house, watching for us in hopes of spotting us and killing us. That pretty much eclipses my downsides, but there was more in store for David.

David avoided that first trap Saul set for him and fled to the town of Ramah where the prophet Samuel lived in a neighborhood called Naioth. Saul had an APB on David out, and David was immediately spotted. When Saul got word of his location he sent a SWAT team to get David, but when they got there a bizarre thing happened. They found David with Samuel but then they somehow completely forgot their mission and joined Samuel in prophesying. God somehow sort of took over their brains and diverted them. This is one of the funniest episodes in the Bible, but it gets funnier. Saul sent another team to get David, but SWAT 2 had the exact same result as SWAT 1. Saul sent a third team, but the same thing happened yet again. Finally, fed up with all the failure, Saul himself went. Verses 23-24 say, "But the Spirit of God came even upon him, and he walked along prophesying until he came to Naioth. He stripped off his robes and also prophesied in Samuel's presence. He lay that way all that day and night. This is why people say, 'Is Saul among the prophets?'" That is a humorous way of saying, "Yeah, uh, is that a total failure or what?" Hey, with their top two defensive backs injured the Chargers had to play their third string cornerback to defend against Peyton Manning and the Broncos last week. Yeah, um, is Saul among the prophets? In other words, how badly did that go? Pretty badly. They cut the guy from the team 4 days later.

When David was in Ramah Saul had him dead to rights. He was surrounded with no way out. What did he do to escape that seemingly hopeless situation? Absolutely nothing. God protected him. It didn't matter how many troops Saul sent to kill him, they had no chance. What David should have learned from that was that he was safe if he would just trust God. God had promised him he would be king. He couldn't be king if he was dead. So either God was wrong or he was safe. He needed to trust that God would take care of him, even if it involved Saul prophesying all day and night against his own will. Sadly David was as human as we are. He had trouble really believing God would protect him even after that hilarious event. That failure would prove tragic.

In 1 Samuel 21:1 David escaped to the town of Nob where he sought help from Ahimelech the priest. We're told "Ahimelech trembled when he met him." It's not hard to understand why. David was at the top of the FBI's most wanted list. The king of Israel was out to get him. David was there looking for help, but if Ahimelech helped him Saul would see it as treason and would make sure that the priest never helped anybody else ever again. His life after helping David would be painful and short. On the other hand David was rather intimidating. He had killed

hundreds, even thousands of men in battle, including Goliath. Not exactly a guy you'd like to get on the wrong side of. Ahimelech had no good options.

In verse 2 David comes up with what he thinks is a brilliant stratagem to encourage the priest to help him. "David answered Ahimelech the priest, 'the king charged me with a certain matter and said to me, "no one is to know anything about your mission and your instructions.'" In other words, "My name is Bond... James Bond. I'm on a secret mission from Saul. That whole thing about Saul trying to kill me is actually part of my cover story. So no need to worry about helping. This is a national security matter. Saul will probably reward you for your efforts."

David was lying through his teeth. He wasn't believing that God would protect him. No, he was relying on his own "clever" scheme. He compromised, doing what God has prohibited as he told his lie. So Ahimelech helped him. The result was horrific. 1 Samuel 22:18 tells us Saul had a subordinate kill not only Ahimelech but a total of 85 priests at Nob. David's lie cost the lives of 85 innocent and godly men, including Ahimelech. In 22:22 David later confessed to Abiathar, the son of Ahimelech, that it was his lie that was responsible for the death of his family.

David didn't know where to go after Nob. Nowhere in Israel was safe so he left Israel. He went to Gath, a main city of the Philistines. The problem with Saul started when Saul heard people singing, "Saul has slain his thousands and David his tens of thousands." But the tens of thousands David had killed were Philistines! David wasn't exactly the most popular man in Gath. He was responsible for the deaths of countless residents of Gath. It is difficult to understand why he thought it would be a good idea to go there. Perhaps he thought he wouldn't be recognized. After all, they didn't have television, magazines or newspapers, so no one had seen his picture. He would be recognized everywhere in Israel, but among the Philistines maybe he could just go incognito and stay off the radar.

It was not to be. He was quickly recognized. No doubt some Philistine soldier saw him and said, "Hey, I know that guy. That's David! He destroyed us in battle." His presence was reported to Achish, the local Abimelech. Realizing he was blown, David went to plan B. Verse 13 says, "He pretended to be insane in their presence: and while he was in their hands he acted like a madman, making marks on the doors of the gate and letting saliva run down his beard."

Well that's just terrific. There's the future king of Israel, drooling all over himself and acting like a raving lunatic. It was a reasonable plan, I guess. While the Philistines weren't exactly the most gentle and compassionate of people nevertheless they left the schizophrenics in their midst pretty much alone. And David's act made some sense because hey, who but a crazy man would go to a place where he was known for killing thousands of the residents? So David figured he had to go to the humiliating length of appearing to be an utter whack job, drooling and scratching at the walls to convince everyone he was looney tunes. How would you like to have your continued existence rely totally on your ability to convince people that you not only didn't have both oars in the water, you weren't even in the boat? How awful to have to maintain that image and have your deepest hope be that everyone would avoid you, thinking you are as crazy

as a loon. Achish in disgust asked, “What, we don’t have enough crazy people here so now we’re importing them from Israel? Get him out of here.”

David was scared. He was desperate. He was hunted and vulnerable and feeling nearly hopeless. He humiliated himself. He was guilty, knowing his lies had cost good people their lives. He was about as low as he would ever get in his life. Talk about the downside of life, it doesn’t get much lower than that. And it was in that context that he wrote this Psalm.

DAVID RESPONDED WITH EXALTATION

I believe this Psalm is a statement of growth in David’s life. Many scholars have discussed the fact that there doesn’t seem to be much in the Psalm that ties directly to the incidents in David’s life. However, this Psalm comes out of David essentially getting his spiritual feet back under him. He realized he needed to quit relying on his own schemes, stop lying and start trusting God to protect him. This Psalm is David coming out of a dark place full of fear and spiritual compromise into a place of trust and peace despite threat.

Verses 12-13 suggest this. “Whoever of you loves life and desires to see many good days, keep your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking lies.” Can’t you see David shaking his head, sadly reflecting on how in fear and panic he had forgotten all about how God had protected him? Can’t you imagine his remorse over the terrible results of his lie to Ahimelech? Can’t you see him saying to himself, “That’s it. No more lies. No more con jobs, no more schemes. From now on I trust God.”

This is a cool poem. The first letters of the verses run through the Hebrew alphabet, so it is quite creative. There are 22 letters in the Hebrew alphabet, so 22 verses in the Psalm. But the part that catches my attention comes early on. In those first 3 verses we see the words extol, praise, boast, rejoice, glorify and exalt. At perhaps the lowest moment of his life, certainly the lowest up to that point, David’s response was to exalt God, to praise him. He was committed not just to do that once, or even maybe in the temple on the Sabbath. He says, “I will extol the Lord *at all times*. His praise will *always* be on my lips.” He was telling himself what he needed to do, and that was to praise God always, even, or maybe especially, when he was at a low point. He needed to respond to every situation that occurred in his life with boasting about his God. When Saul threatened him he would bless God. When he was paralyzed by fear, he would exalt God. When he felt hopeless he would praise God.

David realized that had he been praising God when he went to Nob, he would not have lied to Ahimelech and the priest would still be alive. He was reminding himself that had he been extolling the Lord and boasting of his greatness he would never have figured the best course of action would be to run to enemy territory hoping no one would recognize him there. He would have been strengthened. If he had been praising God for protecting him at Ramah in a way that was downright hilarious, he would have been strengthened to trust God to protect him going forward. He was stating the truth that the best thing he could do when he was fearful, discouraged and desperate was to exalt the name of his God.

The New American Standard translation and the English Standard Version both read “I will bless the Lord at all times” in verse 1. This is the more accurate translation, but it leaves me wondering how I bless God. I know what it means for God to bless me. He gives me good things. But what can I give God? How can I bless him?

There is a sense of the word “bless” that we don’t use that often. In our society it comes up in the situation where a young couple asks for the blessing of the young woman’s parents on the idea of the two of them getting married. It has come to mean essentially giving permission, but a better way to think of it is giving approval. They bless by “saying good” about the relationship and approving of it. So to bless God is to give him our approval and say good about him. One powerful way we can “bless” God is by expressing our approval of him, saying good about him, especially when we are in difficult times. It is a way of affirming faith in God’s goodness even when we can’t see it in our particular circumstances.

Again in verse 3 where our translation reads “glorify” the other translations have a more accurate “magnify.” Literally “make great.” Now can we make God great? No, we can’t make God anything. But the idea here is to make his greatness known. Tell others about his greatness. When we make known what God is like we are magnifying him. To magnify something is to make it look bigger, and that’s what we’re to do, to help other people see God as bigger and greater. In other words, to see him as he really is.

In his book, *Praise: A Matter of Life and Breath*, Ronald Allen wrote about “praise from the depths.” He said that the most important thing we can do in those difficult times of life we all face is to praise God. We have considered some of the downsides of life in the past few months, things like anxiety, suffering, disappointment, chaos, loneliness and discontentment. In all of them, the one constant that can help us most is to praise God.

Psalm 52:9 says, “I will praise you forever for what you have done.” Psalm 71:6 says, “From birth I have relied on you; you brought me forth from my mother’s womb. I will ever praise you.” Verse 8 says, “My mouth is filled with your praise, declaring your splendor all day long.” Notice the words forever, ever and all day long. The message is it is always the right next thing to do to praise God. What a difference it will make when all day long we declare the splendor of our God, when our mouths are filled with praise. Psalm 44:8 says, “In God we make our boast all day long, and we will praise your name forever.” The best method of handling any and every downside of life is to praise God all day long at all times.

IMPLICATIONS

WHY DOES GOD TELL US TO PRAISE HIM?

One woman told me that her daughter has an objection to God. It has to do with this. Why would God want us to praise him? What sort of a person makes a big deal about insisting that other people praise and exalt them? Doesn’t that sound a little sick? Actress Julia Sweeney recently said, “The whole idea that there’s a God who cares whether people believe in him or not, like why would God care if people believed in him or not? That was one of the many things that I found so shocking reading the Bible. First of all, how insecure God is. I mean, God is so

insecure he needs everyone to say, ‘You’re number one, you’re the number one over all the other gods, you’re the top god.’ And like, it’s the most insecure character.”

That’s a good question. If I insisted on people always praising me and talking about how wonderful I am, I think you’d want little to do with me. You’d think I was a puffed up, egotistical jerk. And it wouldn’t take long for you to decide you’d avoid me whenever possible. So why is it good for God to want to be praised, but for it to be a problem for me?

First consider this question from the perspective that God loves us perfectly and unconditionally. 1 John 4:8 says that God is love. God is the embodiment of love. He is the source of all good, meaning he is the source of all love. Love is the character of God. This means that love is the motive for *everything* God does. So if God commands us to praise him it is because he loves us. In other words - it is for *our good!*

Perhaps you don’t understand that. That’s all right. No one ever said you had to understand it. In fact, think about the original question: why does God...stop right there. Any time you ask a question of God that begins with why, you have wandered off the reservation. You’re out into water that is way over your head. We are not going to understand why God does what he does. We can get some hints and make some guesses, but we’ll never have a complete understanding because he is infinite and we are finite. There is a gap between the finite and the infinite that is so vast it cannot even be explained in terms that are fathomable to the finite.

Laurie and I have a soft spot in our hearts for dogs. Part of the reason for this is that we had a dog we dearly loved for 16 years. His name was Luke, and he was one of the best dogs ever. Near the end of his life he developed a serious problem with his eyes. He had to have surgery on one and we had to put drops into both eyes to save his sight. We also had to put the dreaded cone on him. He hated that cone. It was awkward and so terribly frustrating for him. He resisted it and would paw at it, wanting to get it off him. But we made him wear it. It was hard for us, but we had to do it for his good. You could almost see the confusion and hurt in his expression. “Why are you doing this to me? What did I do wrong? Why are you inflicting this on me?” He couldn’t understand why the people he loved, people who had always cared for him, were suddenly being so mean to him. We were doing it because we loved him and wanted good for him. But how do you explain to a dog that if he didn’t wear the cone he would paw at his eyes and would do serious damage to them? You can’t. That’s the problem. He couldn’t understand why we were doing what we did because he did not have the ability to comprehend what we said.

So you’re saying that praise is the spiritual equivalent to the doggie cone of shame? No, it’s not equivalent. But the principle is that someone of much higher intelligence might do what is best for a lesser being and that being would not understand. In such a case the being can only trust the love of the higher being. So we must trust God asks us to praise him out of his love, knowing *we need it!* Something about praising God brings health and wholeness to our souls.

When we stop praising God we are doing injury to our own souls, and we will subsequently also inevitably do harm to others, for that is what wounded, damaged, unhealthy souls do. The

person who says, “Why should God want to be praised? That makes no sense to me and I’m not going to praise and serve such a God,” is doing some real harm to their own soul. There is a sickness in it. And that sickness is going to cause them to inflict harm on others, harm that may not be obvious but is real nonetheless.

HOW DOES PRAISING GOD HELP US?

It orients us properly

Let’s think about what we are doing when we praise God. We are saying he is the ultimate good and that is why he is worthy of honor from everything and everyone. Every human has some idea of what ultimate good is, something that is deserving of praise and of service. When we don’t praise God we are saying that something or someone else is the ultimate good. And right there we have a problem. If God truly is the ultimate good and we substitute something for God, we have just opened the door for evil. We are saying that which is not truly good is good.

Consider, for example, the old classic movie, *The Karate Kid*. It’s old, but so classic it has already been remade back in 2010. The original has a theme that applies to what we’re thinking about. What is the true good in karate? For Mr. Miyagi it is serenity, balance, confidence that one can defend oneself but only if absolutely necessary. The true good in karate is peace. But for Johnny Lawrence and the Cobra Kai karate school, karate is about power and the ability to defeat and dominate other people. Failure to honor the correct and true good leads to all manner of evil. It leads to bullying and injuring other people, to arrogance and fighting. The whole theme of the movie is that understanding the true good is far more important than learning the techniques of karate.

My point here is that God teaches us to praise him because it has massive implications for the kind of people we will be. We will eventually become like that which we admire and praise. If God truly is ultimate good, meaning the perfect embodiment of it, and we fail to praise him, we will never become truly good. We will have something less than good in our lives, which means at least some evil.

We define good for ourselves and begin to pursue the wrong things. We might define the true good as gaining power or pleasure or comfort for ourselves. We can even find ourselves in the place David was, where the good was that he be safe even if gaining that goal meant other people were put at risk and even suffered. Yes, David was safe, but Ahimelech and 84 other priests died.

As we praise God we remember how great he is and that as Romans 11:36 says, “from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever.” As I praise God I am reminded that creation is not about me and that even my own life is not about me. It is from him and to him. Even my life is for him.

The problem is we are created and intended to live not for our comfort or glory, but for God’s glory. When we use our lives and resources for things they weren’t intended for problems result. It reminds me of years ago when we were having a barbecue and I had to chop up some ice for the drinks. The ice was all frozen into a block but I didn’t have an ice pick. So I used a

cooking fork. It didn't work out well. The fork got bent out of shape and was then useless as either an ice pick or a cooking fork. In fact it was useless for anything. And that's what happens to us when we don't praise. Praise reminds us of what we are on the planet to do.

Human nature has a scary flaw. It wants to live by the idea that life is really about me. It tells me that my purpose in existing is to make me happy, and really circumstances and life ought to cooperate to accomplish that goal. That idea is so strong in us it is like a powerful gravitational force that pulls us into orbit around it. We break away briefly but then get pulled right back to it.

The problem with that idea is when we live by it we are praising something other than the ultimate God. We are therefore introducing evil into the system. We do damage to other people and to ourselves. What's really scary is you won't even recognize what you're doing. You can't see it because it seems normal and right to you.

It may seem normal, but in addition to doing evil you will become like a person with a little pebble in your shoe. I recently went on a walk with Laurie and noticed something in my shoe. It wasn't painful, but it was annoying. I was surprised at how small the tiny pebble was. When we fail to praise God as the focus of life we will have that sense that something is off. At best it will be annoying, at worst it will become painful. So we must praise God in order to set ourselves right.

It strengthens us

In Psalm 57:4 David wrote, "I am in the midst of lions; I lie among ravenous beasts—men whose teeth are spears and arrows, whose tongues are sharp swords." Clearly he was in dire straits and he was feeling frightened. But in verses 9-10 he says, "I will praise you, O Lord, among the nations; I will sing of you among the peoples. For great is your love, reaching to the heavens; your faithfulness reaches to the skies." You can feel him being reassured and gathering strength to fight the battles before him.

This is a common theme in the Psalms. The writer begins pouring out his pain to the Lord, but then begins speaking of God's greatness, love and might. In the process of praising he is encouraged. The same thing happens with us.

There is something powerfully encouraging about remembering who our God is. Just the reminder of his character and of what he has done in the past gives us hope. In 2 Chronicles 20 Judah was attacked by what is described as a "vast army." Two rival nations, Moab and Ammon had allied and ganged up on Judah. It looked like disaster. King Jehoshaphat called the people together and he prayed. We see his prayer in verses 6-7. "O Lord, God of our fathers, are you not the God who is in heaven? You rule over all the kingdoms of the nations. Power and might are in your hand. O our God, did you not drive out the inhabitants of this land before your people Israel and give it forever to the descendants of Abraham, your friend?" He is praising God, even while facing certain calamity. They went out the next day praising God as they went and God defeated the enemy.

In Acts 4 Peter and John were arrested for preaching Jesus, then beaten and warned to never mention that name again. They went back to their friends and told them what had happened. Look at the response of the first Christians in verses 24-28. “When they heard this, they raised their voices together in prayer to God. ‘Sovereign Lord,’ they said, ‘you made the heaven and the earth and the sea, and everything in them. You spoke by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of your servant, our father, David: Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the Lord and against his Anointed One. Indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed. They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen.” They began by praising God!

Psalm 121:1-2 says, “I lift up my eyes to the hills—where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth.” What we most need to do is lift our eyes up to God. To look at him and see him as he is. Praise focuses our eyes on him. Praise reminds us that God can be trusted so we can be at peace.

Remember the old Popeye cartoons? They always followed a pattern. Some crisis would come up, usually big bad Brutus would be the cause and Olive Oyl would be in danger, and Popeye, muttering the whole time would seem weak and unable to defeat the threat. But then he would eat his spinach, and he would turn into a powerhouse and win the day. Praise is our spinach. It is what we need when the downside threatens to drown us, for it strengthens our trust in our almighty God. It's not so much that we become powerful, but we get reinforced by the power of God.

WHAT SHOULD WE DO?

Practice the habit of praising all day long. Make it your habit whenever anything happens, good or bad, to praise God. Even when nothing is happening take time to praise God.

Recently you all know I have made the attempt to play bass guitar with the worship team on occasion. I did that because I knew there would be some Sundays when we might need it. I am not like the rest of my family. I am not musically gifted like they are. I can tell just by watching somebody field a ball or swing a bat whether that person is a baseball player. You can see it in the way they move. Someone who isn't, has to do things in a sort of mechanical way. There is a parallel with musicians. Good ones, real musicians, just play the music. They almost feel it. People who aren't real musicians who try to play an instrument tend to do it mechanically. It's sort of a musical equivalent to painting by the numbers. That's me. I only had a couple of weeks to learn how to play the instrument before the first Sunday I tried to play. It was so nerve wracking for me that Sunday. It's amazing what happens when you have to play an instrument with other musicians when other people are observing you play. Everything happens very fast and your mind jumps all over the place.

All of which to say that morning as we practiced I was something way beyond nervous. It occurred to me that since I was trying to praise God with an instrument, perhaps I ought to praise God before and while I praised God, if you know what I mean. So that's what I did. I

remembered to just praise God. I told him he is truly worthy of glory and honor, he is good and deserving of excellence. So I told him I would give him the best I had even if it wasn't much, and asked him to somehow honor his name with the little I had to offer. I still was nervous and mechanical in my playing, but it took the pressure off. I was able to say, "Oh, right, this is for his glory. If he wants me to look like a waste of DNA to everyone here, if that will honor him, then so be it."

We should make that our habit continually as we go through our days. My habits are get 8 hours of sleep nightly. Eat good healthy meals. Brush my teeth twice a day, floss once a day. Exercise at least 5 times a week. And praise God at all times. Have his praise continually be on my lips.

Praise God for who he is and what he has done. Sometimes we aren't sure what to say when we praise God. The Psalms are full of praise to God. If you pay attention you will see they focus on these two themes. Praise God because he is the Creator of all, because he is sovereign, because of his might and power, because of his love and his goodness, because he is holy, and so on. Praise him because he has rescued us, because he has heard our prayers, because of all that he has given us, because of the many good things he has blessed us with.

Don't be the "Lone Praiser." I've always thought it was significant that the Lone Ranger wasn't really alone. He had Tonto. That says something about human nature. But I'll just use it to remind you that you and I should be not thinking about praising God in private so much. Yes, we should do that, but we have a bigger need to praise God with other people. It is a good thing when I praise my wife and tell her that she is so encouraging and so wise and such a delight. But it is a really powerful thing when she hears me praise her by telling other people those things about her.

We are both called to praise God in the presence of others and we actually need to do that. Notice Psalm 52:9 ends with "I will praise you in the presence of your saints." When Laurie and I visited New Orleans last summer with Michael and Carissa I was proud of myself because I broke out of my comfort zone. I am generally one of the more conservative eaters you will ever encounter. But on that occasion I committed to trying things that I suspected I would not like. So I had gumbo, boudin, crawfish etoufee and all manner of bizarre culinary mysteries. But we also went to Café du Monde and had beignets. Out of the three nights we stayed in New Orleans we had beignets there three times. I loved them. But the cool thing is, we got to talk with each other about how good they were and that caused me to enjoy them even more. And I get a kick now when someone is going to New Orleans out of telling them they have to go to Café du Monde and get beignets. I praise the beignets, and find that even in praising them I enjoy them all over again.

We strengthen our own hearts and fill them with joy when we praise God to other people. We also strengthen their hearts. That's why our gathering together on Sundays to praise God is so precious and so important. Let's make sure we continually praise God together, and all the more when we are experiencing the downside of life.