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To
Julie

my
“sweet psalmist”

Prologue

THROUGH. Not to. Not into. Not around. Not toward, over, under or against. *Through!* We must pray through. Life must be prayed through as a whole—an unbroken, lifelong thread of communion with God. Life also must be prayed through one episode at a time—wringing from it every opportunity for intimacy with God. It is not that we don't pray—we pray *about* our concerns, *over* worrisome matters, *before* big events, *in* distress, *for* our wishes, *under* stress, *concerning* troubles, *around* the issues, *toward* a desired end and *against* feared outcomes—but too often we don't pray *through*.

Praying through is not a quick-fix remedy, nor a speedy escape from life's pain. There is no assured formula to praying through, guaranteeing that at a fixed point the pain will lessen. We don't pray through for just five minutes, five days or five months; there can be no fixed timetable to a breakthrough to the other side. But there is the guarantee that God is there all the while and that there is a breakthrough into His life. There is another side. There is another life, God's divine life that He is extending to us, longing for us to enter into. Praying through is not one more treatment, method

or option to be tried and weighed for its suitability for our needs. Praying through is the divinely ordained narrow road to life, a shared life, God's life as your life.

But what does that mean? What does that look like? How would that sound? What would be said? Must *anything* be said? Our questions are answered, our ears tuned, our eyes enlightened when we turn to the book of Psalms.

*It is not that we don't pray, but too often we don't pray through. Praying through is not a quick-fix remedy for life's pain; it is the divinely ordained narrow road to life—
God's life*

The Psalms, however, are not simply a book. They are no mere collection of poems but a compilation of life—all of it, the highs and the lows, the ecstasies and the agonies, the invocations and the imprecations, the praises and the screaming doubts. This is precisely why we need the Psalms. They are *life*. They are for *all* of life—*my* life, *your* life. As Kathleen Norris has noted, “In these poems of Scripture,

you'll find rage, loneliness and fear—in other words, you'll find yourself.”¹

As the psalmists' words become our words to God, we find ourselves praying through the problems of life. Athanasius long ago noted that as we pray the psalms they “become like a mirror to the person singing them.”²

The psalms were prayers set to music. The ancient Israelites apparently had no system of musical notation or score, or at least none that has survived. But what remains is the throbbing intensity of the cries, imprecations, lamentations, praises and prayers of souls just like ours. The fourteen psalms before us are those psalms of David whose titles bear some

historical footnote as to the time and circumstances of their composition.³ As we trace them chronologically,⁴ we find ourselves praying through life—through David’s, through ours—and most importantly, into God’s. Here we find life not merely as we wish it to be, but as it is, and, if we are willing, as God will make it to be.

I invite you, then, to come journey through David’s life. We’ll travel not merely the trails of history and fact, but those of a heart praying through the passages of earthly life and emerging into the divine life God offers us.

Should we choose to live in the Psalms, our souls will find their voice. We will discover that in the midst of life’s flow, we speak, God hears, and even if nothing appears to have changed, everything will be different.