

Suffering - His Presence

*The LORD is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit.
(Psalm 34:18, ESV)*

We all have enjoyed a great comeback story or two in our lives. On the other hand, most of us have also watched, heard about, or participated in a massive collapse from an all-but-assured victory. Experiencing defeat when you have already mentally rehearsed your victory speech is a crushing blow to the soul.

It is virtually impossible to feel what Mr. Palmer felt after giving up a seven-shot lead on the final nine in the 1966 U.S. Open to lose the following day in an 18-hole playoff to Billy Casper.

The pain of Adam Scott's loss to Ernie Els in the 2012 Open is immeasurable. To lead by four shots with four to play and lose would certainly keep a man up at night. It hurts to think about it.

Adding insult to injury, someone comes along and says, "Right, but it's just a game." This person has either never played golf or has a rock-hard heart. The last thing anyone needs in moments of crushing defeat is a knucklehead trying to give perspective.

Snatching defeat out of the jaws of victory on a golf course is one thing; experiencing crushing losses in life's journey is yet another. Examples abound: Being terminated at work, especially when they say, "We are downsizing," or a spouse's betrayal, especially when it comes out of the blue, or an unexpected diagnosis from your doctor.

How do we process such horrific news? I don't know about you, but I want to be surrounded by my immediate family and closest friends.

But, most especially, I desperately want and need to sense the "nearness of God." The Puritans called this experience "the felt nearness of God." The Christian God (there is no other) is always near, but we are not always aware of his presence.

Experiencing the "felt presence" of the Father through the mediating

work of the Son by the power of the Holy Spirit is a supernatural work of grace, to be sure. Having a positive mental attitude is important, but it can't compare to knowing the nearness of God.

As the Psalmist captures it, "The LORD is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit." Having an awareness of his presence in moments of suffering provides the needed strength to "...press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus (Philippians 3:14).

As James promises, "Draw near to him, and he will draw near to you" (James 4:8). Let us "go vertical" and discover the goodness of the Lord and the vast storehouse of his infinite resources to battle the darkness that assail us.

Prayer: Lord! I confess that I need to sense your nearness and experience your strength when I am weak.

READING - Psalm 34; James 4:8

1. How have you historically handled those moments when you have collapsed in a match, especially when you were confident of victory? Reminisce and discuss.

2. After reading all of Psalm 34, make a list of the many assurances that the Psalmist clings to in the midst of trying circumstances. Discuss.

3. How might one go from seeing these promises in Psalm 34 to practically experiencing them in the rough and tumble of real life?
