

DEVOTIONAL



Title: Covered, Held, and Loved: Even When We Run

There have been several moments in the last year when I have been brought to my knees, where I have questioned my stability, my decisions and at times, my sanity.

These moments, fear seem to rise much faster than faith in Jesus, plan A turns into endless ruminations, everywhere I turn, most friends I speak to, something truly painful, sad or undeserved is all I see and hear. I want to believe this experience is not unique to me. We all have our moment when life shows us a different side.

The Bible does not pretend that life is not filled with these challenging seasons, rather, scripture names them honestly, calls them out factually and offers us acceptance, grace and guidance.

This devotional is for when we feel the urge to quietly retreat in shame, to take steps back in conflict, to isolate in confusion, or to run away in fear – anything to preserve ourselves when it just feels too much to bear.

Buried deep in the gospel of Mark, where Jesus was being arrested, it mentions an unnamed man who as well as others deserted Jesus. For some reason, his clothing or lack thereof was mentioned in this passage and I find that this is yet another evidence of the kindness of God to include this for us in scripture.

I pray that as you go on this 5-day devotional journey, you will come to know that you are **covered, held and loved** no matter where you are.

I pray that you will realise that Jesus goes ahead even when you turn back or run away.

He takes your shame, addresses your fears, does not accuse you and wants to draw you closer to a place of peace, security and truth in him.

I pray that you see what you are meant to see in Jesus' name.

Mark 14: 51-52

*A young man, wearing nothing but a linen garment,
was following Jesus. When they seized him,
he fled naked, leaving his garment behind.*

DAY 1 – WHEN FOLLOWING FEELS HARD

“ Then everyone deserted him and fled”. Mark 14:50

The reality that you may have walked with the Lord intimately does not always mean that you don't run when life becomes difficult; in the face of disappointment, relationship breakdown, loss of a loved one... the list goes on. You may have had remarkable encounters with the Lord, yet you find yourself at times struggling to cope. I want to encourage you, you are not alone, you are certainly not condemned.

The disciples had spent years with Jesus, seen his miracles and heard his teachings, eaten with him, prayed with him, tried to wait and watch with him at Gethsemane while he prayed... yet they all deserted him and fled.

Sometimes, it is just hard – simple as that. Jesus proceeded with his mission to die a painful death; hard as it must have been for him, given that he had just prayed to the father to ***‘take this cup from me...’ Mark 14:36***.

Human instinct would propose that he should have legged it along with everyone else, but he did not. He goes ahead for you in spite of, because of, no matter your running state.

You are covered. He takes your place today like he did then, no matter where you are. You are accounted for through Jesus, you are covered.

Prayer

Father Lord, I bring you the moments when following you feels hard and heavy, take away condemnation, meet me with your patience, let me catch your loving gaze, teach me to be honest with myself, and then with you.

Surround me with your warmth and cover me with your grace in Jesus' name. Amen.

DAY 2 – THE INSTINCT TO RUN

“Even the bravest warriors will flee naked on that day...” Amos 2:16

Running is much more about survival than it is about rebellion. The need for fight or flight is as instinctive as breathing. The pressures that can make you feel like you cannot go on, it is all too much, which slowly turns into things like ‘I’m not good enough’, ‘I’m not smart enough’, ‘I’m not strong enough’...these lies often fill our heads especially when we are faced with situations that make us think there is no way out, we either run or hide.

There are several examples where scripture recognises these instincts without condemnation, rather with recognition, support and help.

Elijah wanted to die – **1 Kings 19:4**; God gives him rest, feeds him, then gently speaks to him in a whisper.

Hagar runs away into the wilderness with her little son – **Gen 16:13**; God acknowledges her, quenches her thirst, then gives her a lasting promise.

Peter said affirmatively that he never knew Jesus – **Mark 14:71**; Jesus reconciled their relationship, dines with him and then sends him into leadership.

That same God is your God. He understands the instinct for even the brave, strong warrior to see opposition and run with complete abandon. He continues to respond the same way to you today, no matter how ‘strong’, ‘smart’, ‘good’ you may feel, your father in heaven wants you to be assured that **He sees you**, He wants make provision for your exact needs, He wants to engage in conversation with you, you already know that He covers you and mostly, He wants to give you His peace.

Prayer

God of compassion, you know my limits much more than I do. Help me bring my fears into your light, help me bring my dilemmas into your truth, help me not to hide or run away from you in Jesus’ name. Amen.

DAY 3 – STRIPPED BUT SEEN

“I was afraid because I was naked; so, I hid.” Genesis 3:10

Some of the things I’d been most ashamed of, were not things I did, but rather things that were done to me. If like me you recoil, literally wanting to roll into a shell like a snail when the memory flashes through your mind, then you are in good company. I’d stay up at night recounting all the conversations I’d had in the day and wondering why I said that or didn’t say that – basically worrying, sometimes, rather ashamed of myself for this or that.

When you feel exposed, or feel like you have been caught out not doing your best, or being your best, the enemy uses these moments to make us feel stripped; stripped of confidence, stripped of dignity, stripped of our grounding, tripped of our identity or anchoring in Christ.

When we become vulnerable, and the natural response is to retreat – who wants to be caught out – No one! Adam and Eve certainly did not. They heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden of Eden and they hid – they hid. **Gen 3:8–9.**

They had noticed their nakedness, their exposure, their vulnerability. Feeling stripped of their confidence in the God who made them ruler of His precious garden, a God who spends the cool of the day with them...they felt stripped of their identity in this God. Can you identify with Adam and Eve?

God proceeded to clothe them, to restore their dignity and make a new covenant. He continues to restore your identity and anchoring by sending His only son; Jesus Christ to cover us, take our place, intercede for us and give us His peace.

Prayer

My saviour, you see me fully, as I truly am. Teach me to come out of hiding, even in my vulnerable state. Helping me to know you intimately and continue to do your restorative work in my heart and mind that I can be more and more like Christ in Jesus’ name. Amen.

DAY 4 – EVERYONE RUNS, JESUS STAYS

***“Strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.” Zechariah 13:7;
Mark 14:27***

Jesus is the one who already knows that we would run, hide, deny him, blaspheme, place other gods before him, not love our neighbours as we ought and so on... Yet He stays. He stayed to be beaten in our stead, He stayed to be crucified for sins He did not commit, He stays sat at the right hand of the father interceding for us, He stays.

Jesus stays.

He stays with you in your illness, He stays in your lack, He stays in your loss, He stays in your doubt, He stays in your pain, He stays in your heartbreak, He stays in your conflict, He stays in your quiet seasons, He stays with you in the valley, He stays in the hospital, He stays by your bedside when you don't feel like getting up, He stays at when it feels like you have no allegiance. He still stays.

He said to His disciples “You will fall away..., I will go ahead of you...” **Mark 14:27–28.**

Jesus also stays in your joy, He stays in the divine encounters, He stays in the celebrations, He stays in the victories, He stays in the successful interviews, He stays in the promotions, He stays when sadness turns to joys, He stays on the mountaintop, He stays in the singing and rejoicing,

He stays with you no matter what!

Prayer

Faithful Jesus, thank you for staying when I don't. Thank you for being steadfast when I cannot. Thank you for never letting me define you. I pray that you will continue to remind me that I am anchored to your love for eternity and I am not anchored to myself or my shortcomings. I put my hope in you in Jesus' name. Amen.

DAY 5 – FROM RUNNING TO REDEMPTION

“They saw a young man dressed in a white robe...” Mark 16:5

It is not always easy to imagine the end of a situation when you are in the thick of it. It takes a lot of strength and maturity to alter our perspective especially during difficult seasons. Yet, we know that at the end of every winter season comes spring. We also know that at the end of spring, comes summer. Year in, year out, these seasons change. It may be dry season to wet season – whatever climate you are in, there are some consistent recurrences.

Now, I hope you can be reminded particularly during hard times, that there was a man who lost his linen cloth and ran away naked when Jesus was being arrested to be crucified, **Mark 14:51–52**, this man ran in fear, he ran for his survival, he ran in shame – leaving behind his clothing, anything to not be caught up in Jesus’ plight.

There is also a man mentioned 2 chapters later when life as they knew it was over and a new dawn had begun. Jesus has risen. This man was present at Jesus’ tomb dressed in white sitting on the right side, **Mark 16:5**.

This young man was not running, neither was he losing his clothing. There was calm, it felt like he was anchored, assured of his place by Jesus’ tomb, full of confidence, full of hope.

The first man was fleeing in fear, the second man sitting in confidence and hope – Like changing seasons, this is how what Jesus did show up for us – we are flailing and panicking, He comes, covers, holds, loves us and we can show up clothed in clean white, restored, anchored, confident, hopeful by the grace and mercy of God. Remember this is your inheritance too.

Prayer

God of new beginnings, hold my unfinished story with your strong, caring hands. Lead me away from fear and towards hope and confidence in you one day at a time in Jesus’ name. Amen



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