American Decency Association

PO Box 202, Fremont, MI 49412 231-924-4050 www.americandecency.org Encouraging Christians to guard their hearts May 2016

When I Feel Stuck

By: Neil Stewart



When I was growing up in Ireland, we had more than our fair share of wet afternoons. Wednesday Trapped well between weekends, and with an evening full of homework The worst of these times moment of dark despair, ahead, I remember trudgthrough a soaking drizzle. Weighed down with books, their pages wavy with dampness, and socks sodin at the ankles and out at the toes, I was as happy as a cat in a bath (though not nearly so ferocious).

The soul knows its own Wednesday afternoons. All prodigals, we world blighted by Adam's where. What to do? choice. Fallenness dampens every joy. Burdens First, remember: you are heavy with guilt, shame, not alone. All God's chil-

and regret bite into our dren have trodden these shoulders. Fears within paths before. How often the and troubles without loom psalmists felt abandoned, black like thunder. We yet they still reached for yearn to hear more of the God in song. David cried running footsteps of a wel- out: "How long, O Lord? coming father, his strong Will you forget me forevarms wrapped around, er?" (Ps. 13:1). The Sons his tears warm and salty of Korah asked, "Why are on our cheeks. But disap- you cast down, O my soul, pointed longings follow us and why are you in turas constant companions. moil within me?" (42:1). Our best moments are always interrupted, and like the weekend for the midweek schoolboy, heaven can feel far enough away to seem forever away.

go unexplained. No paring back from school ticular sin, failure, or As the psalmists agonize, mistake stands out as the culprit. We feel "blah" and don't know why (Ps. 42:5). In this far place, we den with water that flowed fall easy prey to a dark theology built upon feelings. A depressing inevitability follows: We don't feel God speaking, so we feel. stop reading our Bibles. We don't sense God listening, so we stop saving our prayers. Inertia dampwalk home through a ens everything; we go no-

These saints were coming before the Lord and asking how long God would hide His face from them. There is a lesson here: good men often feel worse than they are. These men begin in a but they do not end there. their hearts leak Scripture. In the darkness, back beneath the sense of dereliction, God is still there, giving them words, helping them Godward, inspiring the Bible. Yahweh is always nearer to us than we

Second, ask God to search for any "grievous" way blocking your communion with Him (Ps.139:24). The roots of "grief" reach back to Adam's bitter choice

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("grief," "toil," and "pain" are all related Hebrew words; Gen. 3:16-17). In the garden, our first father started a family tradition story of his success. But you have to give. don't despair: the Good Physician died to cut the Acknowledging God as this journey that is truer "willing" and the "doing" of such godless choices pang brings great peace. from you (Phil. 2:12–13).

Beyond sin, we should Him (Ps. 42:7). He is the also look for weeds in our hearts, toxic desires that choke life from the soul. Jesus identifies three in the parable of the sower: the mission to God's will are busyness of life, the lies the first and last lessons never let him go. money tells, and the desire for other things (Mark of faith. But John Newton In the end, the best ques-4:19). With weeds on the was right—few are willincrease, we will never feel well. To kill them, the Spirit stands ready with awhile in the school of I know?" the heavenly herbicide of disappointment." richer thoughts of a better life (Rom. 8:5; Phil. What if the darkness does

4:8; Col. 3:1-4). United not lift? Often, the best to Christ, we walk in the path upward is simply to newness of life (Rom. trust and obey. Consider 6:1-14).

Are you at peace with him move from confusion providence? It is hard to (vv. 8-9) through convicdraw near to a God with tion (v. 10) to consecration whom you are secretly angry. Unwanted burdens can be the friend of prayer, exciting our desire and drawing us close (Ps. 55:22). But if we prefer him to a realm the hand to hold on to them, they crowd the prayer closet touch (Heb. 11:1). like unspoken elephants, of reaching for a better dulling our desire to draw "He knows the way that life bevond God. A world near. Be honest with God; I take, and when He has full of gravevards tells the He can carry every burden

> the first cause of every The breaking waves that Him, for He clings to us drown us all belong to principal actor in every difficulty (Ps. 66:10–12). Yet, even then, God is for us. Denial of self and subto be learned in the life ing to learn these lessons "without being trained

the patience of Job (Job 23:8-12). In the teeth of Third, examine yourself: a hostile darkness, watch (vv. 11–12). In a fallen world. Job realizes he will always know more theology than he can feel. Faith bridges the gulf, taking of feelings cannot always

> tried me. I shall come forth as gold" (Job 23:10). Faith has a warrant for than our worst fears, and so we keep clinging to (vv. 11–12). Like a terrier with a toy, Job grips this truth for all it is worth. He can't feel himself holding on to God, but faith sees a stronger hand holding on to him—a hand that will

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Third, examine yourself: Are you at peace with providence? It is hard to draw near to a God with whom you are secretly angry. Unwanted burdens can be the friend of prayer, exciting our desire and drawing us close (Ps. the garden, our first father crowd the prayer closet full of graveyards tells the He can carry every burden

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not lift? Often, the best path upward is simply to trust and obey. Consider the patience of Job (Job 23:8-12). In the teeth of a hostile darkness, watch him move from confusion (vv. 8-9) through conviction (v. 10) to consecration (vv. 11-12). In a fallen world, Job realizes he will always know more theology than he can feel. Faith bridges the gulf, taking him to a realm the hand of feelings cannot always touch (Heb. 11:1).

"He knows the way that I take, and when He has tried me, I shall come forth as gold" (Job 23:10). Faith has a warrant for this journey that is truer than our worst fears, and so we keep clinging to Him, for He clings to us (vv. 11-12). Like a terrier with a toy, Job grips this truth for all it is worth. He can't feel himself holding on to God, but faith sees a stronger hand holding on to him—a hand that will never let him go.

In the end, the best question for wet Wednesday afternoons is not "What do I feel?" but "What do

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