

This Psalm is a prayer for help. There are times in all of our lives when a prayer like this is the most appropriate prayer.

There are some of you today who need God's help for tough times. I think of Aaron Johnson, and his family. Our hearts go out to the family and friends at this time.

There are others among us who are facing challenging times. Sometimes we ask, "Does God care? Is there hope? How can we get through this?"

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Several years ago one of our members went through a very difficult time. Her name is Jenny Wolf. I am delighted that I can call her a friend, along with her son, Tevan. And about one year from today I get to officiate at Jenny and Brock's wedding!

Jenny went through a difficult time a few years ago. I asked Jenny this week if she would be willing to write down her story for us to hear and to learn from, as one who has gone through a hard time. She bravely said she would try.

As Christians we are not immune from tragedy. But God is faithful to help us through the tough times. In her own words, Jennifer tells us her story of one such time, read for us by Vicki...

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The day has arrived, June 12<sup>th</sup>, 2002. The day I was scheduled to go in to Meritcare to have Tessa Lynn. I got registered, settled in, laying in the hospital bed with Tevan right next to me. The doctor comes in, does an ultrasound, and finds out Tessa has gone breach, which means a scheduled C-section. I was told the day before not to eat, but with me and breakfast – I had a biscuit. When the doctor finds out about that, the C-section can't be performed until the next day.

June 13<sup>th</sup> arrived. Tessa would finally be here. Tessa was coming breach, so a C-section was scheduled. My doctor comes into my room, makes sure I am doing ok. She asked me if I was ready and wheeled me in, with my mom walking next to the bed. The minute I was in the operating room, they were all ready and moving so fast. I think it had to be within ten minutes that my daughter Tessa was born.

That is when my heart sunk... The operating doctor said how tiny Tessa was. Then she looked at my doctor with such a “different” look. The next thing I remember: 3 or 4 doctors are running into the operating room and grabbing my daughter and running her down the hall. I only got a quick glance at her. I didn't even get to hold her. I was taken back into my room.

A specialist came in and asked to just talk to me and my parents. I really didn't understand a word he was saying. The only word I remember understanding was.....fatal.....

After hearing that word, nothing else seemed to comprehend. I didn't want to hear anything else.

Tessa was born with Trisomy 18, a chromosomal defect that causes defects in either the brain, kidneys or heart. Most babies are either stillborn or don't make it past the first day. Less than 10 percent live more than a few days. Tessa lived for 50 days.

Tessa was born with the heart defect caused by Trisomy 18. She had very few physical abnormalities: Her eyes were a little smaller, her fists were held tight, her ears slightly lower.

I finally got to see Tessa. She had tubes everywhere. I was so scared to even touch her. The nurses helped.

I just couldn't get past how she got this? Trisomy 18 is supposed to happen to mothers over the age of 40; I was 24 at the time! I was told Trisomy 18 is basically just a fluke: she had an extra 18<sup>th</sup> chromosome. It is not hereditary... It is no ones fault... I couldn't prevent it... I just didn't understand.

Tessa was in the hospital 5 days. I walked into the ICN that day, and Tessa had a party dress on. That meant she was able to go home. I was so excited to be leaving there. I just wanted the time I had with Tessa to be spent with me and my family.

I remember Hospice, and how great they were. They were so concerned and wanted not only Tessa, but my son, Tevan, and I to be comfortable. Hospice was there **EVERY DAY**, and I still can't thank them enough.

One of my first things I really wanted to do was to have Tessa baptized at Pontoppidan. It was such a special day. Tessa had her big brother and favorite cousins standing up there with her. The whole congregation watched as Tessa became a part of God's family that day.

The days went by. I would wake up every 3 hours to feed Tessa. I had to set my alarm clock, because Tessa was weak and did not cry; all her feedings were scheduled.

I remember sitting there, in "Tessa's rocker," and feeding her. Just staring at what I saw as a perfect baby. She did not look sick to me. So why was she going to leave me?

Tessa got to go the fair, to concerts. We tried to bring her to as many places as she could. I didn't want her to miss out on anything.

About the beginning of August, Tessa had another checkup. I was told her lungs were filling up with liquid and to stop feeding her. I could not and would not stop feeding her. I just could not do that. At her next appointment my doctor told me she wasn't storing anything she drank.

That was August 2nd. That was the day my son, Tevan, just held her, so peacefully, just sitting with her.

At around 9 that night, I was holding Tessa and had just put her in her swing, and looked at Tessa, and that was the first time she stopped breathing.

I was told by my Hospice nurse to call my parents. As soon as my parents had arrived, they called Pastor Doug. Pastor Doug was there with in ten minutes.

Tessa left us and would come back several times. She did not want to leave us. She had stopped breathing – I would say 5 times.

Then someone – Pastor Doug or the Hospice nurse – asked me if I had told Tessa it was OK for her to leave me. My family and Pastor Doug and the nurse stepped out into the hall.

I looked at Tessa and I told her, “Tessa, you need to know Tevan and I will be OK. You will be healthy and so happy where you are going. Tevan and I love you so much and will never stop thinking of you.”

At that exact moment, they all came back in and Tessa opened her eyes for one of the first times since she was born. With a big smile she looked at me, and went to heaven.

Almost every day we drive by her cemetery. Tevan says “hi” Tessa, Adriannah, her cousin, goes downstairs and looks at Tessa’s things. It is so special to Adriannah to get to put some of Tessa’s lotion on.

You sit there and wonder so much. Why was Tessa taken from us? Was it because I was going through hard times, and God thought Tevan and I needed our little angel to keep us going in life? I still don’t know and don’t think I ever will.

Sometimes I actually think that Tevan, only 9 right now, understands her death more than I ever will. Tevan often associates little things with Tessa. When its raining, he looks up to the sky and says, “Are you OK, Tessa?” He is wondering if she is crying. Tevan just stares into the sky and looks at the stars and knows that Tessa is the brightest one.

Every night I ask Tevan who his best friends are. He says, “Tessa, Mom, Brock and Jesus.”

To go through something like this, I really don’t think I could if it weren’t for my family. My family was there the moment Tessa came to us, till she went to heaven.

I know the only way I got through this was with the support of my family and Church and Jesus. The congregation sent their prayers and called so much to see how things were. All the food and pies were greatly appreciated. Someone's buttermilk pie somehow made certain days that much better!!! The support and talking is what made it so much more understanding and helpful.

Every night Tevan and I would sing "you are my Tessa, my only Tessa." That was "our" song. It is such a special song to sing and to remember. Things like that – having a song – is what helps Tevan and I keep Tessa alive in our hearts. She is and always will be our little Tessa, our angel!

I do believe one of the ways I made it through this was my faith and the support of my church. Tevan was given an elephant from Laverne Johnson to hold and sleep with when ever he was sad. He sleeps with that elephant still. Little thoughts like that have made such an impact.

Thank you.

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Sometimes we can teach one another about God's grace and help in times of trouble. Jenny has done that for us this morning.

Let me add just a few thoughts for those who need help in painful times, based on Psalm 54.

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*The Psalm says: God is my rescuer.*

When the going is tough, talk to the one who rescues you. If you are hurting this day, tell God. It is the first place people of faith go when they are hurting.

I watched a child once who skinned their knee. It was a significant skinning of the knee. It must have hurt.

- The child looked first at the knee – dirt and blood were mixed.
- Then the child looked around – looking for one person in particular.
- Having found that person, the tears began to flow, and the legs began to move them towards that person. From the mouth of the child came the cry, "Mommy!"

Cry out to God when you hurt. Let God know. God truly wants to know. The Bible says: *“Let him have all your worries and cares, for he is always thinking about you and watching everything that concerns you.”* [1 Peter 5:7]

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The second help for people who are facing painful times: *The Psalm says: God is my helper.*

Help comes in many different versions. For Jennifer it was God working through a stuffed elephant, a piece of buttermilk pie, and especially through the smile of her daughter saying, “Mom, I am OK. I am going to play in heaven!”

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If you are hurting, keep your eyes open for how God might be helping you. Satan tries to convince us that everything is out of control; that there is no hope. But that is a lie. The Bible says, *“Those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength.”* [Isaiah 40:31]

If you are hurting, find a person of faith who has gone through painful times, who will sit with you and be there for you. They can help to keep one’s perspective, and to look for the ways that God is helping.

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And the third help for people who are facing painful times: *The Psalm says, God is worthy of praise.*

The Psalms that ask God for help always end with the call to praise God. It is a call to act on one’s faith even in the midst of sadness or despair or loss. It is a call to stay engaged, even with life is hard. A call to keep acting on one’s faith.

The journey is not always easy. Sometimes we need help in painful times. That help is just a prayer away.

Remember how Jenny said that Tessa smiled at her? God is smiling at you today. You are going to make it – whoever you are. Life is tough, but Jesus is tougher. Let’s pray...