

The Lord Is My Light and My Salvation: A Wonderful Missionary Promise That Sustained Darlene Diebler Rose Through Many Trials and Tribulations As She Served King Jesus Among The Nations

Psalm 27

- 1) “Remember one thing, dear: God said He would never leave us nor forsake us.” Those words were spoken on March 13, 1942 and would be the last words Darlene Diebler would ever hear from her husband Russell as they were permanently separated in Japanese prison camps during World War II. She was a missionary in her early twenties. She did not even have a chance to say goodbye. Listen to her own words and thoughts as she honestly and hopefully reflected on that heartbreaking day: “Everything had happened so fast and without the slightest warning. Russell had said, “He will never leave us nor forsake us.” No? What about now, Lord? This was one of the times when I thought God had left me, that He had forsaken me. I was to discover, however, that when I took my eyes off the circumstances that were overwhelming me, over which I had no control, and looked up, my Lord was there, standing on the parapet of heaven looking down. Deep in my heart He whispered, “I’m here. Even when you don’t see Me, I’m here. Never for a moment are you out of My sight.” (*Evidence Not Seen*, 46).
- 2) Psalm 27 was a favorite of Darlene Diebler, and became increasingly so during more than 4 years of imprisonment for being a Christian missionary

and an American. This psalm of adoration (vs. 1-6) and lament (vs. 7-14) written by David, is part of a trio (Psalm 26-28) that instruct us on seeking and finding the Lord, especially when “an army is encamped against me” and “war arise against me” (v. 3). “When false witnesses rise against us and they breathe out violence.” (v.12). Our study will follow the four movements of the psalm, a psalm that is confident that: 1) the Lord saves and delivers (vs. 1-3); 2) the Lord protects and lifts up (vs. 4-6); 3) the Lord hears and guides (vs. 7-12) and 4) the Lord sustains and strengthens (vs. 13-14).

I. We can be confident the Lord will save and deliver 27:1-3

- The Psalm begins with an exclamation of confidence in the saving power of Yahweh, “The Lord is my light and my salvation.” Interestingly the Septuagint translates the word salvation as “Savior!” Since the Lord is my light and my salvation, “whom shall I fear?” Since He is “the stronghold (refuge, strength) of my life, of whom shall I be afraid?”
- Verse 1 is a beautiful example of synonymous parallelism as the second line re-enforces the first. This is also a great missionary verse, a great missionary psalm, for those taking the lifesaving gospel of Jesus Christ into the difficult and dangerous places of the world, where opposition is intense and even life threatening.

Light appears at the beginning (Gen. 1:3-4) and the end (Rev 22:5) of the Bible. Its source is God and it overcomes and defeats darkness (John 1:4-5). It is the source of life, allows people to see, is a symbol of purity, holiness, goodness and blessing. It finds its grand fulfillment in a person, the Lord Jesus, who said, “I am the Light of the World” (John 8:12).

- In verses 2-3 David speaks of the wicked, enemies, foes, an army that come against him (“assail me”) to “eat up (devour) his flesh,” and those who “through war rise up against me.” Indeed they “encamp against him” surrounding him on every side. There is no escape. And yet he can say at the end of verse 3, “Yet I will be confident.” In what? Verse 2 provides the answer: “they stumble and fall.” My enemies will be defeated by my God.

The Lord who is my light and Savior takes them down. They may try and overcome me, they may surround and enclose on me, but my God can handle them all!

- Darlene Deibler found all this to be true. Darlene Mae McIntosh was born on May, 17, 1917. Her father was not physically well, her mother a hardworking lady. At the age of 9 she put her trust in the Lord Jesus Christ as her light and salvation. One year later, at the age of 10, during

a revival service, she sensed God's calling to give her life to missions (p.131). On that night she promised Jesus, "Lord, I will go anywhere with You, no matter what it cost" (p. 46). How could that little girl know what the Savior had planned for her in the not too distant future?

- Darlene would marry a pioneer missionary in S. E. Asia named Russell Deibler on August 18, 1937. She was only 19 years old. He was 12 years her senior. Later she would write, "My ignorance of the future held no cause for anxiety, for my spirit witnessed within me that God was and would be in control" (p.135).
- After six months of church meetings in North America and six months of language study in Holland, the Deiblers eagerly returned to Russell's pioneer missionary work in the interior of New Guinea. Darlene accompanied Russell into the jungle to establish a new mission station near a previously unevangelized, stone age tribe that had only been discovered just a few years earlier.. Darlene, the first white woman any of them had ever seen, grew to deeply love these child-like primitive people she was ministering to for King Jesus.

World War II broke out in that part of the world in 1941 and engulfed the missionaries in January 1942 after the Deiblers had served in New Guinea for three years. Though they could have left and returned safely

home they, and many others, chose to stay. 10 Christian Missionary Alliance (CMA) missionaries and 1 child would die in captivity during the war. The Japanese soon took control of the area, put them under house arrest. Later they herded all foreigners into prisoner of war camps, interring the men in one location and the women and children in another. Darlene had pledged as a 10 year old that she would follow Jesus anywhere regardless of the cost. She could have never imagined what that meant. “Anywhere” would cost her unbelievable suffering. Over the next four years Darlene would endure separation from her husband and then widowhood, the brutal conditions of a WWII Japanese internment camp including near-starvation, forced labor, inhumane conditions, false accusations of espionage, many serious illnesses, solitary confinement, and torture. Through it all, Darlene was sustained by God, who never left her nor forsook her, just as He had promised. He remained her light and salvation. In time, He would cause her adversaries to stumble and fall.

II. We can be confident the Lord will protect and lift us up. 27:4-6

- David now expresses the soul’s desire of all who have experienced the Lord’s strength and His salvation. “One thing I have asked of the Lord, that will I seek after” (v. 4). And what is it that we should seek? “That I may

dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze upon (behold) the beauty of the Lord.” This beauty, he says, is found in His temple (v.4), His shelter (v.5), and His tent or tabernacle (vs 5 & 6). It is found in His presence wherever that might be.

- “The temple was the visible expression of the Lord’s presence” (Van Gemeren, 244). David is saying the one thing that matters most and rises above all others is to be in the very presence of the Lord beholding his beauty and pursuing Him wholly and completely. Jeremiah 29:13 promises, “and you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart.” To see His beauty is to see His glory, know his love, and enjoy His presence as Father, Savior, and Protector, and Sustainer. David saw this as 1) the Lord hid him in his shelter in the day of trouble, 2) concealed him under the cover of his tent and 3) lifted him high upon a rock of safety and security (v.5). David saw this as the Lord lifted his head up above his enemies all around him (v.6). The only proper responses to this great God is worship! “I will offer in his tent sacrifices with shouts of joy; I will sing and make melody to the Lord.”
- To sacrifice, shout, sing and rejoice in the Lord is easy when everything is good. It is something else when your heart is broken and God is silent and seems distance. Nothing illustrates this like the day this faithful missionary

received news of her husband's death at the all too young age of 26. On a Sunday evening in November 1944, Darlene was informed that Russell had died having been very ill for some time. The fact was he had been dead for 3 months by the time the news reached her. In her own words she writes, "I was stunned—Russell is dead. He'd been dead three months already! It was one of those moments when I felt that the Lord had left me; He had forsaken me. My whole world fell apart....In my anguish of soul, I looked up. My Lord was there, and I cried out, "But God . . . !

Immediately He answered, "My child, did I not say that when thou passest through the waters I would be with thee, and through the floods, they would not overflow thee?" Prayer, memorized Scripture, and song would be a three-cord spiritual rope that sustained Darlene during those terrible days. In fact, she writes,

"Much time was passed repeating Scripture. Starting with A, I would repeat a verse that began with that letter, then on through the rest of the alphabet. I discovered that most of the songs we had sung when I was a little girl were still hidden in my heart, though I hadn't consciously memorized many of them.

As a child and young person I had had a driving compulsion to memorize the written Word. In the cell I was grateful now for

those days in Vacation Bible School, when I had memorized many single verses, complete chapters, and Psalms, as well as whole books of the Bible. In the years that followed I reviewed the Scriptures often. The Lord fed me with the Living Bread that had been stored against the day when fresh supply was cut off by the loss of my Bible. He brought daily comfort and encouragement—yes, and joy—to my heart through the knowledge of the Word” (p. 143).

God has often used that same trio of encouragers for those who have suffered in a similar fashion to Darlene. However, in the midst of her sorrow, on that very day, something truly remarkable and providential occurred, the full outcome of which would not be known for many years. As the news of Russell’s death spread throughout the camp Darlene was summoned to Mr. Yamaji’s office, the prison camp commander. He was a hard and brutal man who had beaten a male POW to death in another camp. He was standing behind the desk, and the following conversation took place:

“Njonja Deibler, I want to talk with you,” he began. “This is war.”

“Yes, Mr. Yamaji, I understand that.”

“What you heard today, women in Japan have heard.”

“Yes, sir, I understand that, too.”

“You are very young. Someday the war will be over and you can go back to America. You can go dancing, go to the theater, marry again, and forget these awful days. You have been a great help to the other women in the camp. I ask of you, don’t lose your smile.”

“Mr. Yamaji, may I have permission to talk to you?” He nodded, sat down, then motioned for me to take the other chair.

“Mr. Yamaji, I don’t sorrow like people who have no hope. I want to tell you about Someone of Whom you may never had heard. I learned about Him when I was a girl in Sunday School back in Boone, Iowa, in America. His name is Jesus. He’s the Son of Almighty God, the Creator of heaven and earth.” God opened the most wonderful opportunity to lay the plan of salvation before the Japanese camp commander. Tears started to course down his cheeks. “He died for you, Mr. Yamaji, and He puts love in our hearts—even for those who are our enemies. That’s why I don’t hate you, Mr. Yamaji. Maybe God brought me to this place and time to tell you He loves you” (p. 111).

Mr. Yamaji uncharacteristically jumped from his chair and left the room in tears. Darlene respectfully waited, and then quietly left when she realized he would not return to the room. The God who saves and delivers, who

protects and lifts up was there and He was working as we will see before we are finished!

III. We can be confident the Lord will hear and guide us. 27:7-12

There is a significant mood change in vs. 7ff. Some have speculated that we actually have 2 psalms: 1) vs 1-6 and 2) vs 7-14 that have been joined together. However, there are literary, rhetorical and content evidences that would support the original unity of the Psalm. In a sense vs 7-14 provide the context from which vs 1-6 arose. Our God is a promise keeping God and we can rejoice and rest in that. David highlights several areas in particular where we can count on the Lord to keep His Word.

The voice that shouts and sings to Him in worship (v.6) can be confident that the Lord will hear that same voice when we pray (v.7). A merciful and gracious answer can be our confident expectation.

- Speaking to the Lord means seeking the Lord. What David does in vs. 4 he is instructed to do in vs. 8. And His response is what ours should be: obedient and immediate. “Your face, Lord, do I seek.” David’s petition is complemented by 4 negative requests in verse 9 followed by a word of hope at the end (read v. 9). Even his parents might abandon him (in death or possibly desertion) but the Lord will extend adoptive parental love and care. “The Lord will take me in” (v. 10).

Ps 119:105 teaches us, “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.” We need the light of God when we face difficult and trying times. We must not rely on our emotions or feelings. We dare not trust our heart or experiences. We must stand firmly on Christ our Rock and the rock solid direction of His Word.

David asks the Lord to “teach me Your way, Oh Lord” (v.11). Let me live and respond to what I may face as you would.

David also asked the Lord to sovereignly, providentially, precisely and specifically guide his life. “Lead me on a level (*NIV*, “straight”) path, because of my enemies (v. 11). Give me not up (*NIV*, “turn me over”) to the will (desire, the hands) of my adversaries” (v. 12). And why? “For false witnesses (liars) have risen against me, and that breathe out violent” (would do me harm).

Eugene Peterson in *The Message* paraphrases it this way:

“Show my enemies whose side you are on.
Don’t throw me to the dogs,
Those liars who are out to get me,
Filling the air with their threats.”

On May 12, 1944 the Kempeitai, the Japanese secret police (Gestapo) came for Darlene. She was falsely accused of being a spy. The Kempeitai took

her to a maximum security prison where she was to be kept in solitary confinement. They took her Bible away from her. Over the door of her cell in Indonesian were the words, “This person must die.” After the guard unlocked the door and shoved her inside she knew she was on death row, imprisoned to face trial and the sentence of death. She sank to the floor. Never had she known such terror. She prayed, “O God, whatever You do, make me a good soldier for Jesus Christ” (p. 125). But suddenly she found herself singing a song she had learned as a little girl in Sunday School:

Fear Not, Little flock,
Whatever your lot,
He enters all rooms,
The doors being shut.
He never forsakes,
He never is gone,
So count on His presence
From darkness ‘till dawn.

Only believe, only believe,
All things are possible,
Only believe.

She would later write, “So tenderly my Lord wrapped His strong arms of quietness and calm about me. I knew they could lock me in, but they couldn’t lock my wonderful Lord out. Jesus was there in the cell with me” (p. 126).

She was kept for weeks in a cell about six feet square and had only small amounts of rice to eat each day. She spent a great deal of time killing mosquitoes saying, “I was tortured by hordes of them at night. They clung to the wall, too full of my good red blood to do anything else” (p. 137).

Frequently she would be taken to an interrogation room where two Japanese officers she dubbed “the Brain” and the “Interrogator” would accuse her of spying, of having a radio, of getting messages to the Americans and knowing Morse code; they said they had proof of her treachery. All this she would deny, but in the process they would strike her at the base of her neck or on her forehead above her nose. There were times she thought they had broken her neck. She walked around often with two black eyes. Her beautiful black hair turned gray and white. “Bloodied but unbowed” (p. 141), she never wept in front of them, but when she was back in her cell she would weep and pour out her heart to the Lord. When she finished she would hear Him whisper, “But my child, my grace is sufficient for thee. Not *was* or *shall be*, but it *is* sufficient.” Oh, the eternal, ever-present, undiminished supply of God’s glorious grace!” (p. 141).

The Kempeitai did not believe anything Darlene said. They informed her they had sufficient proof of her involvement in espionage—she knew she would be condemned, without formal trial, to be beheaded as an American

spy. However, in her autobiography she writes of one of the ways the Lord had prepared her for the ordeal she now faced:

“Just two weeks before I was brought to this prison, the Lord had laid it on my heart to memorize a poem by Annie Johnson Flint. Now I knew why. After drying the tears from my face and mopping the tears from the floor with my skirt, I would sit up and sing:

He giveth more grace when the burdens grow greater,
He sendeth more strength when the labors increase;
To added afflictions He addeth His mercy,
To multiplied trials, His multiplied peace.

When we have exhausted our store of endurance,
When our strength has failed ere the day is half done,
When we reach the end of our hoarded resources,
Our Father’s full giving is only begun.

His love has no limits, His grace has no measure,
His power no boundary known unto men;
For out of His infinite riches in Jesus,
He giveth, and giveth, and giveth again.

Strength came, and I knew I could go through another interrogation, and another, and another. I was physically weak, and desperately frightened, but God gave me the courage to deport myself like a good soldier for my Lord before those cruel men” (141-42).

One day Darlene pulled herself up to the window of her cell and began watching some women who were in the courtyard. One woman’s actions

intrigued her. The woman inched toward a fence covered with vines. When she was close enough and the guard wasn't looking a hand clutching a small bunch of bananas thrust through the vines; the woman grabbed the bananas, folded them into her clothes and walked calmly back to another group of women.

Bananas! Darlene began to crave bananas. She got down on her knees and said, "Lord, I'm not asking You for a whole bunch like that woman has. I just want one banana." She looked up and pleaded, "Lord, just *one* banana." Then she began to think—how could God possibly get a banana to her? There was really no way it could happen. She couldn't ask anyone to do it. It was impossible for her to get a banana. She prayed again, "Lord, there's no one here who could get a banana to me. There's no way for You to do it. Please don't think I'm not thankful for the rice porridge [her daily ration had changed because she suffered from dysentery and could not handle rice.] It's just that—well, those bananas looked so delicious!"

The morning after she saw the bananas she had a surprise visitor—Mr. Yamaji. [He had warmed toward her following her husband's death]. When her door was opened and she saw Mr. Yamaji's smiling face she clapped her hands and exclaimed, "Mr. Yamaji, it's just like seeing an old friend!"

Tears filled his eyes and he didn't say a word but walked back into the courtyard and talked to the officers for a long time.

When he returned Mr. Yamaji was sympathetic. "You're very ill, aren't you?"

"Yes, Sir, Mr. Yamaji, I am."

"I'm going back to the camp now. Have you any word for the women?"

The Lord gave her the confidence to answer, "Yes, sir, when you go back, please tell them for me that I'm all right. I'm still trusting the Lord. They'll understand what I mean, and I believe you do."

"All right," he replied, and turning he left.

When Mr. Yamaji and the other officers left Darlene realized she had not bowed to the men! "Oh Lord, they'll come back and beat me," she thought.

When she heard the guard coming back she knew he was coming for her.

She struggled to her feet and stood ready to go to the interrogation room.

The guard opened the door, walked in and with a sweep of his hand laid at her feet—*bananas!* "They're yours," he said, "and they're all from Mr.

Yamaji." Darlene was stunned as she counted—there were *ninety-two bananas!*

In all my spiritual experience she said, I've never known such shame before my Lord. I pushed the bananas into a corner and wept before Him. "Lord,

please forgive me; I'm so ashamed. I couldn't trust You enough to get even one banana for me. Just look at them—there are almost a hundred.”

In the quiet of the shadowed cell, He answered back within my heart:

“That's what I delight to do, the exceeding abundant above anything you ask or think.” I knew in those moments that nothing is impossible to my God

(pgs 148-50).

Time and time again God showed Himself to be powerful and faithful to Darlene. Shortly after this, she was within moments of being beheaded as a spy only to be taken from the Kempeitai back to the prison camp in Kampili. The Lord again had heard her prayers leading her to a level path against her enemies.

IV. We can be confident the Lord will sustain and strengthen us. 27:13-14

This psalm concludes on a high note of confidence and assurance, even triumphant and victory. Because of the power and might of the God who is our light and salvation, we can trust and rest in the Lord no matter what may come.

This verse literally reads, “Unless I had believed to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living?” The *NKJV* translates it in a neg. manner supplying the words, “I would have lost heart.” The *NIV*, *ESV*, and *HCSB* all

translate the Hebrew with a positive emphasis, and I especially like the *HCSB* which says, “I am certain that I will see the Lord’s goodness in the land of the living.” How awesome it is that we can pray these words in full confidence, absolute faith, and complete certainty. The greater Son of David, the Lord Jesus, prayed such a prayer on the cross as His enemies surrounded Him (v.3), slandered Him (v.12), and violently took His life (v.12). He commended His life, His destiny, into the hands of a heavenly Father knowing, in full confidence, He would see the goodness of the Lord 3 days later in the land of the living thru glorious and powerful resurrection. Thus, in faith, he waited on the Lord (v.14). He was strong in the Lord (v.14). His heart took courage (v.14) trusting in the perfect and sovereign plan of a good and gracious and great and heavenly Father.

The God who sustained and strengthened Jesus, and David, will sustain you and me. He certainly sustained and strengthened the wonderful missionary Darlene Deibler Rose throughout her life.

God sustained and strengthened her in her salvation at 9 years of age.

God sustained and strengthened her call to be a missionary at the age of 10!

Yes 10!

God sustained and strengthened her as a young bride at age 19.

God sustained and strengthened her when she headed to the jungles of New Guinea at 20!

God sustained and strengthened her when placed under house arrest by the Japanese when she was 25.

God sustained and strengthened her when she and her husband Russell were separated into separate prison camps, never to see each other again in this life in 1942.

God sustained and strengthened her as she ate rats, tadpoles, dogs, runny oatmeal and maggots, and other unimaginable foods.

God sustained and strengthened her as she and others were forced to present 60,000 dead flies a day to Mr. Yamiji because they bothered the pigs they tended who were to be treated better than the POW's.

God sustained and strengthened her through dengue fever, beriberi, malaria, cerebral malaria (p. 142), dysentery, beatings and torture, attacks of rabid dogs, false charges of espionage, the promise of beheading, solitary confinement, Allied bombings, and many other inhumane abuses.

God sustained and strengthened her when told of the death of beloved husband Russell and his own tortures and sufferings.

God sustained and strengthened her when she and the other POW's were finally released, and she was allowed to visit the grave of her husband.

She weighed all of 80lbs.

God sustained and strengthened her when he brought her home to America but kept the fire of missions burning in her soul.

God sustained and strengthened her when he brought another missionary into her life, Gerald Rose, whom she would marry (1948) and return with him to New Guinea in 1949.

God sustained and strengthened her as she labored on the mission field of Papua New Guinea and the Outback of Australia for over 40 years evangelizing, teaching, building landing strips, delivering babies, facing down headhunters and loving them to Jesus.

No wonder she was so fond of quoting Charles Spurgeon who said, "I can thank my God for every storm that has wrecked me on the Rock, Jesus Christ."

Conclusion: On February 24, 2004, Darlene Diebler Rose quietly passed away and entered into the presence of the King she so deeply loved and faithfully served.

She was 87 years old. According to her obituary in the Chattanooga, TN newspaper, "Together, Darlene and Jerry were used of God to bring hundreds of Aborigines to the Lord and discipling them to Christ. They were also instrumental

in beginning several indigenous churches that are pastored by natives” (2-29-2004).

However, there is one person who came to Christ through her faithful witness that particularly stands out as a testimony to the mysterious plans and providences of God. Following the end of World War II, Mr. Yamaji, the prison camp commander where Darlene was imprisoned, was tried and sentenced to be executed for the brutal beating to death of a man while he was in another POW camp at Pare Pare. His sentence was later commuted to life imprisonment with hard labor. Still later that sentence was also commuted and he was released. Many years later, in 1976, Darlene would learn from a friend that Mr. Yamaji had been heard on Japanese radio. He was heard sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ with the Japanese people, testifying to his cruelty in World War II, but also bearing witness that he was now a different man because of Christ! Remember who first told him the gospel?! On the very day she learned of her husband’s death because of Japanese abuse and cruelty!

All throughout her life, when sharing her story, Darlene would say, “I would do it all again for my Savior.” No doubt many in New Guinea are grateful for her devotion. No doubt, Mr. Yamaji is grateful too! You never know what the Lord who is our light and Savior is going to do when we say and obey, “Lord, I’ll go

anywhere with You, no matter what it cost.” (p. 47). He will be with you as Psalm 27 promises. Are you willing to GO?