HIDDEN IN GOD

'Your life is hidden with Christ in God.' (Colossians 3:3)

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To Jack Walker, 'in the shadow of the Almighty.' (Psalm 91:1)

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1. Introduction

I love to hide. I love to get off the grid of life, even just for half an hour. I sometimes make a cup of coffee, turn off my phone, and sit on the floor somewhere in a back room of the house, or in the shed, and just close my eyes.

We live in a torn and broken life. Think about your day for a minute. Everything we do is survival: working for money, using it buy food to ward off hunger, to pay rent for a roof overhead; washing clothes for work, sleeping for energy to work, appointments for health, for teeth, for hair, for repair... car breaks down and insurance won't pay. And then there are relationships. Misunderstandings, disappointments, gossip, envy, regrets, insecurities, bullies... All day every day, every year till you die. Moses put it this way:

'Our days may come to seventy years, or eighty, if our strength endures; yet the best of them are but trouble and sorrow, for they quickly pass, and we fly away.' (Psalm 90:10)

We pick up on life's pressures – and dangers - from a very young age. For this reason kids love to make forts in their bedrooms, little shelters within shelters, so to speak. And as adults we do exactly the same thing, from secret societies to country clubs, we are just trying to huddle and hide.

God gets this. He knows we are weary and afraid. Jesus ached to give us safety and shelter. He once said, looking out over the people: 'How I have longed to gather you together as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings.' (Matthew 23:37)

In this short book we look at the safety God offers us, a hiding place for our souls even now as we do life, and then forevermore...

2. Free Will

One of the most amazing things to me is the 'free will' that God gives us. He lets us choose what we do, what we think, how we act.

Now, this 'free will' is simply 'ability', it is not license. In fact, it is really 'free will' to destroy yourself. It is not free will to get away with stuff. God made us, and he has made very clear that if we do not recognize him as the Giver of life, the Creator of everything, he will punish us for that and ultimately destroy us.

God gives us 'free will', in other words he puts on us the responsibility for our actions. Then he calls us to account for these actions. If they dishonored him – and other people – God will punish.

A long time ago, back in the Old Testament times, Jerusalem, a city of God, was in a good economic and political relationship with a city named, Tyre. This city is still in Lebanon today. Well, Jerusalem was punished by God, and destroyed by an enemy. When Tyre saw that Jerusalem – a wealthy city – was no longer fortified, it moved in and stripped it further. Tyre had the ability to do good, or to do evil. Tyre chose evil. And like you and I, Tyre has the ability to do things that it chooses to do, even if it goes against what God has commanded us to do. But then God will judge and punish. Look at

the words of God in this passage. It is important to let them sink in:

'Tyre has said of Jerusalem, 'Aha! The gate is broken; now that she lies in ruins I will prosper.' Therefore this is what the Lord says: 'I am against you, Tyre. I will bring you to a horrible end and you will be no more. You will be sought, but you will never again be found." (Ezekiel 26:2,21)

And yes, Tyre was obliterated. It was 'horrible'. God takes our sin seriously, and will judge it all. Jesus himself said we would be accountable for 'every word spoken.' (Matthew 12:36)

People are so arrogant because they think that they can do what they want and get away with it. It can feel like this, too. I watch the news and see some world leaders that are evil, continue in power year after year, worshipping power, money, lust and self, and nothing seems to happen. But do not be fooled. Don't believe it for a second. We are told that it is a 'terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God.' (Hebrews 10:31), and that every man, woman and child will stand alone before the judgment seat of Christ. (2 Corinthians 5:10)

Here in this world we sometimes see consequences for sin in our own lives, and in the lives of others, but generally we do not. Look what Paul says of this: 'The sins of some are obvious, reaching the place of judgment ahead of them; the sins of others trail behind them.' (1 Timothy 5:24)

Christ claims to own 'all souls', and he spoke strong words about sin. In one instance he spoke about sinning against a child and said it would be better to have been drowned in the depths of the ocean. In another, he told a man to his face it would have been better to not have been born than to face the judgment coming to him. In another, he told all people that if we are ashamed of him - Jesus - he will be ashamed of us before the angels of God. Some people talk about the angry God of the Old Testament, but the judgment Jesus speaks of – even promises – is more concerning, has much longer-lasting impact. The God of the Old Testament tended to move in quickly and snuff a person out. The judgment of Christ does not start and stop in this life, but lands on the eternal soul of a person.

My point in this chapter, believe it or not, is to encourage you, a righteous person. You see, good people want to hide away because they 'grieve evil'.² They are so overwhelmed by the sin and darkness and lies and envy and violence... that they crumble. They pull a blanket over their head, their heart, and say, 'Oh God, I can't take it.'

¹ Ezekiel 18:4; Matthew 18:6; Matthew 26:24; Luke 12:8-9

² Ezekiel 9:4

But here Jesus whispers to us, reminds us, that every shred of darkness that makes us want to hide now, will be pulled into the light, held accountable, and punished completely. The righteous will rejoice! Tears will turn to laughter. Scars will vanish. 'Then you will trample on the wicked; they will be ashes under the soles of your feet.' (Malachi 4:1-3) It is not vindictive to long for this day. This is the heart, will and promise of God.

'When a crowd of many thousands had gathered, so that they were trampling on one another, Jesus began to speak first to his disciples, saying: 'Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy. There is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known. What you have said in the dark will be heard in the daylight, and what you have whispered in the ear in the inner rooms will be proclaimed from the roofs.' (Luke 12:1-3)

3. The Hiding Place

'Your life is hidden with Christ in God.' (Colossians 3:3)

God has provided the trap door to escape, to the hiding place for your soul. It is God himself, in the person of Jesus.

'Jesus said, 'I am the door, and anyone who goes through me will be saved. They will go in and come out and find new life." (John 10:9)

This is an incredible statement. There is no other prophet or religious person in history that ever said this or anything like it. Jesus said he is the door to God and all truth. Jesus said he is the 'bread of life'. He said he was the very source, the 'Vine' of God, and that people are the branches. He said he could put a wellspring in a person – the Spirit of God – that was 'living water'. These words, these promises, have never been spoken by anyone in history other than Christ.¹

He would ask us things that spoke to the very heart of a person, to the very depths of the soul: 'Are you thirsty? Come to me and drink.'² He promised things that no other religion even dares to suggest they can offer you: forgiveness of sin

¹ John 6:35; John 15:5; John 4:10

² John 7:37-38

and eternal life.

If God did exist and he was true, and if he did create the world and me personally, I would need this God to appear in human form so I could trust that he understood me. I would need to see this God actually command creation, so I could trust he owned creation, like still the winds or walk on water. I would need this God to crush death in my past, my sin; and I would need this God to crush death in my future, my body. I would need to see this God defeat death, pay for sin, or how could I know?

The story of Jesus is very simple. God made it this way so that even a child could understand it, and every adult could come back to the understanding of a child, and see it. Jesus said, 'Unless you become like a child, you cannot enter the kingdom of God.' (Matthew 18:3) The story is simple and goes like this:

God created the world and everyone in it. He gave us free will to choose him back, to love him back. But we chose to go our own way and do our own thing. We chose to sin and die. God did not leave us here. He came after us. God told people that one day he would come to earth, pay for sin, and open up the way for people to come back to God. He would destroy death. Until that happened, people needed to make sacrifices for their sin, because sin was very serious. People paid for sin with a symbol – killing an innocent

lamb. Sin had to be paid for by death.

Then God did fulfil his promise, he stepped down onto earth in the person of Jesus Christ. He was pure and holy, innocent in every way. He was going to be the real and final sacrifice for sin. For this reason he was called, 'The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.' (John 1:29) Sin is death, and Jesus came to pay for it. He died one complete, holy, final death for sin, so that we could be forgiven and live forever.

'Jesus sacrificed for sins once for all when he offered himself.' (Hebrews 7:27)

Jesus then rose from the dead, and calls to us. He showed his power, his peace, his mercy, and his defeat of death, and he calls us back to Paradise. He said the 'door' to this new life, to this perfect and eternal hiding place for the soul, is himself.

'Come to me all who are weary and I will give you rest.' (Matthew 11:28)

Jesus is the hiding place for the soul. He calls to us in Spirit, and we go to him in faith. We say, 'Yes, you are Lord, I receive you.' This enters us into the very Spirit of God, like a cloud enveloping us. When we go to Jesus we go through the door of God to eternal rest, eternal hiding.

'The name of the Lord is a strong tower, the righteous run into it and they are safe.' (Proverbs 18:10)

If you receive Jesus by faith into your heart, your soul, your sins are forgiven. His Spirit pours into you. You are hidden in God, now and forevermore.

4. Confidence!

'Jesus said to the disciples, 'Do you see all these church buildings? Truly I tell you, not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down." (Matthew 24:1-2)

I remember back in my teens when I decided to start following Jesus. I was sixteen, and pretty tight with an immoral group of teenagers. My call to Jesus was more a call *back* to Jesus, as I knew he was true but had wandered completely. No one now associated me with Jesus, and no one associated Jesus with me. I was a party guy, about myself only.

One quiet afternoon Jesus whispered to my spirit. He said, 'You know I am true, but you live like I am not true.' In that instant I broke. I felt false to the core. I felt like my true self was a man of faith in Jesus, but I had buried that man, hidden that man, under rubble, under sin, under shallow living. What now? Well, I had to repent. I had to stop in my tracks, and let sin go on without me, so to speak. Let my friends party on without me. I had to stop here and go another way, the way of the cross.

In this moment my heart broke. I did not want to be this person of faith. It felt too serious, too somber. This road of Christ was a narrow one, a hard one. But I could not be false anymore. I had seen and known that Jesus is Lord. I knew it. What else is there? What else is actually real, genuine, true? Jesus had said, 'Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.' (John 18:37) I had heard his voice, seen his face, and whatever the cost now I needed to be true.

The next few months were the most lonely of my life. I lost almost all my friends over night. Some awkward, tough, honest conversations about my new faith and road. I had a girlfriend that I also had to break up with. But primarily there was just abandonment - if I did not go to the party, well, I was alone. If I did not swear and smoke, well, I just wasn't comfortable in the gathering and conversation — so I was alone. As I turned away from sin and foolishness I lost my friends, because all the friendships I had at that time had been built on sin and foolishness.

I remember feeling so lost, like I had just fallen off a ship at sea, or off a spaceship in the dark galaxy. I had Christ, and nothing else. I would get up early before school to read my Bible and pray, and walk around the block in the dark morning whispering to Jesus. After school, after lunch on my own, and very few interactions really, I would bike home, get a cup of tea, go to my room, turn on the lamp and read my Bible again, pray, and rest. I felt like I had died and was in a tomb. I felt depressed. I felt like crying all the time. I felt like I was uninteresting, no personality anymore, and isolated.

It was a deep, dark few months, in the tomb with Christ. Now listen, I have to say, it was the sweetest of spiritual times with Christ that I can remember. The whole world faded to me, and only Christ was true. I felt lost in myself, in the world, but I felt found by Jesus. My friendship with him – and he does call us 'friend' – was honest, real, true. He knew the real me, and loved me. I knew the real him, and was standing with him. Finally.

As I staved true to the Lord, it was as if the sun suddenly came up after a dark storm. It was as if the dawn broke through after a cold and long night. Suddenly people started interacting with the 'new me', and in a light-hearted way. Friends from before seemed to now see and accept that I was a sincere Christian. Some of them, one by one, approached me for deeper conversations. questions about my faith, questions about God. Sometimes this would become a group gathering, and there would be laughter and some familiarity, because we had hung around together for years. Things were thawing out on a level, in a true way. I was no longer one of them. but I could still connect with them on a pure, friendly level.

And then Jesus started building a new family around me in church. I started seeing and valuing other Christians like never before. I had never respected their sacrifices to be followers of

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¹ John 15:15

Jesus. I had never considered these Christians to be strong, deep, true in a world that battered against them. But now that I was feeling the cost of following Jesus, I had new respect for his other followers – my new brothers and sisters in Christ

'Jesus said, 'Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?' Pointing to his disciples, he said, 'Here are my mother and my brothers. For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother." (Matthew 12:48-50)

Now let me jump to the point of this chapter, which is 'confidence'. You see, when I started following Jesus it was a meek time for me, a humble one. I was apologizing to friends and family, I was shutting up and not speaking up, and this was long overdue. However, as the years have gone by, and Jesus has started and finished certain seasons of discipline in my life, he has now shown me another side of being on his side: zeal and fire.

The Scripture at the start of this chapter is from when Jesus was looking at the temple buildings with his followers. They were all in awe of the beauty of these religious structures. I can be too, sometimes, when in a big, beautiful church lobby with coffee aromas floating up and down the halls. But Jesus squared up with them, and brought them back to earth. He said: This whole

church thing is going to fall to the ground one day, and be no more.

As Christians – with Christ as King of the heart – we are just passing through this world. It is his, but is condemned like a condemned house. It might stand for a while longer, and people may even live in it, and come and go; but it is going to get razed to the ground one day. Everything in it. It's too far gone. Sin is in the walls. Got to go!

So now – let me just be honest – I am in a season where almost an exhilarating spirit blows through me when I pass through ungodly wealth – buildings, parties, work spaces, some Christian churches, some Christian homes, and some of my own stuff... Why? Because I know it is all going to go up in smoke one day. And praise God! Yes, we will beaver away as 'good stewards' of this worldly stuff (an excuse that is way over-used and mis-applied), but Jesus does whisper to us – in order to take pressure off us and keep our eyes on the 'unseen': 'This is all going to disappear one day soon, not one brick left on another.'

'So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen... what is seen is temporary, what is unseen is eternal.' (2 Corinthians 4:18)

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¹ 2 Peter 3:10-11

The stuff matters still, like the temple still mattered when Jesus spoke these same words about the temple. Jesus was using the temple all the time, to preach there, fellowship there, etc. Yes, life matters here still, and we need to steward it and enjoy it. But... we are warned over and over again, by Christ and by the apostles, that money and stuff will steal Christ from us:

'Jesus said, 'The worries of this world and the deceitfulness of wealth choked the Word of God in these people..." (Matthew 13:22)

Paul writes: 'Some, eager to get rich, have wandered from the truth and pierced themselves with many griefs.'
(1 Timothy 6:10)

And there are so many more teachings about this, by Jesus himself and by the apostles. Money is not the problem. The heart of man is the problem. But to keep us sober, Jesus whispers: 'Don't be too taken by this beautiful religious building or project, because these are not the things that will last.'

So now, with a zeal in my spirit, a committed follower of Jesus, I have such a deep peace when passing through the great systems of this passing world. My heart is hidden. My soul is banked. I am invincible, eternal, and I can look all around me and say, 'This is nothing. This is

passing. And yet I am hidden in God, here and now, and always.'

This makes me smile, and this makes me kind to people even in those systems. I don't envy them at all. I pity them. So I can be kind and celebrate their new car, home, yacht, whatever. If it makes them happy, I'll rejoice with them. But I have zero desire to compete with that, zero desire to acquire all that. The more you have, the more will burn, especially if it is not invested in God.

I used to feel so left out and lost in this world. And now I am so glad that I am left out and lost to this world. I pass through it now with such deep peace in my soul. I'm not even here anymore. As Paul writes:

'I have been crucified with Christ. I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body I live by faith in the Son of God...' (Galatians 2:20)

Yes, there is a time for meekness, and gentleness. Truly, this should always brand our spirits. However, Jesus, the most purely meek, the most genuinely gentle, also made a whip of cord and went through the Christian conference and bake sale flipping tables and money jars, chasing people out of the place. So true meekness and zeal for God's judgment go hand in hand.

Yes, go through this world as a good witness, a kind person, a gentle soul. But smile in your soul all the while, and feel the confidence God gives you in your hiding place, in your safe place. Rejoice in your inner being that you are set apart and saved. This honors God. It will, believe it or not, make you even kinder and more patient with those of the world around you. Because you no longer want what they have, or to be who they are.

'But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.'
(1 Peter 2:9-10)

5. Held

'God knows those who are his.'

(2 Timothy 2:19)

I had a neighbor, Phil, an elderly man. He began to lose his memory. I remember when this had just started happening, and he was aware of the demise. One day he said something that really impacted me: 'I have to just believe I was a good father, because honestly I can't remember if I was or not.'

We put so much store in our own minds and memory. We invest so heavily in knowledge and certificates, facts and figures. But we are putting all this data into a decaying container: our brains.

If we are not even going to remember whether we lived good lives or not, whether we were loving parents or not, what is the point? Unless, of course, someone else is taking note, and will remember, and reward. Only God will remember what we forget.

Let's probe this just one degree more. If I am not going to remember whether I did good or evil, and my victims won't remember either, why do good? Ultimately I will forget, and those I loved or hated will forget. So if there is not a God who cares about my moral life, there is zero point in being 'moral' if I don't want to, and if I can get

away with it. Zero. My conscience might bother me a little, but if there is no ultimate right or wrong, and no one knows, well, my conscience can just shhhhhh.

However, if there is a God, an Authority on right and wrong, and if he cares and says he will iudge everything, everyone, well, this changes the game completely. In this case it doesn't matter what I think about right and wrong, it only matters what God thinks. And it doesn't matter what I will remember or forget, it only matters what God remembers and forgives. I can die and rise again and find myself in the courtroom of God, and have no memory whatever about what I did or how I lived. And it will be God who reminds me, and then judges it. Now if this is what's real – and the Bible says it is – then everything changes. Regardless of what I forget, God remembers. I will lose my memory, like my neighbor, but God will not forget.

Now, for the man or woman who has cried out to Jesus, this is great news. And here's why: You may even lose memory of your relationship with Jesus. Or, you may lose vision and conviction at some time, due to hardship and fatigue. However, when we are saved by Christ, even if we wane in our commitment, weaken in our spirit, he is faithful.

'What if some were unfaithful? Will their unfaithfulness nullify God's faithfulness? Not

at all! Let God be true and every human being a liar.' (Romans 3:3-4)

John the Baptist was a man sent by God – even created by God – with only one purpose: To proclaim to the world that Jesus was the Savior sent by God. When John was in the womb of his mother, Elizabeth, he 'leaped' when Jesus in the womb of Mary came near. From inception John was made to recognize Jesus as God. And yet, after many years of doing just this, proclaiming to the world that Jesus was the One, John found himself imprisoned by a cruel man, king Herod. Here in this prison, after a time, John sent messengers to Jesus to ask him this: 'Are you the One?"

These messengers, sent by John, asked Jesus publicly on behalf of John, if Jesus was in fact the Savior. This was a public expression of doubt. John had been the highest profile and most respected witness to Jesus, and here in the presence of the people he was questioning his legitimacy. Note what happened: Jesus answered gently and sent back word with the messengers to reassure John that he was the One, Lord and Savior. No condemnation, no disappointment, just reassurance. Then right away Jesus turned to the people, those who would have witnessed this undermining question to Jesus, and said:

¹ Luke 1:41; Matthew 11:1-15

'Truly I tell you, among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist.' (Matthew 11:11)

John had not lost his reward, even though he had lost faith. His faith in Jesus had faltered, but the faithfulness of Jesus to John had not. Jesus held him when he fell.

'Underneath are the everlasting arms.' (Deuteronomy 33:27)

We call on Jesus now while we can. But our ultimate hope and confidence is not in our hold on him, but his hold on us. We will falter, we will forget, we will fail, but Jesus will remember and remind us: 'You are mine. You walked with me.'

I finish this chapter drawing back our attention to the verse at the beginning of it:

'God's solid foundation stands firm with this inscription on it: God knows those who are his.' (2 Timothy 2:19)

6. Not of This World

'Earth has nothing I desire besides you... God is my portion forever.' (Psalm 73:25-26)

Sometimes I glimpse the sheer worth of Jesus. I mean, I can see and feel that my vision of him – the fact that I know he is Lord – is worth everything. I glimpse how everything else in life, in comparison with this vision, this knowledge, is nothing. People are distracted, empty, chasing dreams and running from nightmares, exhausted... I look around and see and feel the futility of this busy world and shallow people. And here's what happens sometimes, I think I need to dumb down quickly, get real. I can't live or operate with this vision of Jesus, believing and feeling that he is everything, and life is nothing.

Or can I?

I mean, Jesus did. He was pretty calm about life, about the marketplace. He ate with people, laughed, taught, worked. So did his followers. Jesus was a normal guy, feet on the ground, grounded. So were his followers. And yet he was God. And he did slip into his teachings things like: 'The flesh counts for nothing, the spirit gives life...' (John 6:63) Jesus did not mean that the simple things in life did not matter, or should be scorned. On the contrary, Jesus seemed to give life's basic elements and life's

most humble people, the highest honor. No, Jesus did not disdain life as unimportant. However, he did keep in his vision the highest call, the highest truth, and he would not let the spirit of this world take that from him. It's all about spirit.

When we see Jesus, we see what the world does not see. Jesus said it was like a man finding a treasure in a field, and then going away and selling everything so he could buy that field. The treasure he saw was worth everything. (Matthew 13:44) The world will never accept this. It is dangerous to try to make your faith and the worth of Christ fit with the world around you. Yes, take pains to get along with people and not be weird. Paul did. Look what he said:

'We are taking pains to do what is right, not only in the eyes of God but also in the eyes of people.' (2 Corinthians 8:21)

Why? Well, we strive to be at peace with people because we carry dynamite, we carry a cause, a mission, a treasure that is actually worth life – their life. In the same way Jesus carried this revelation with gentleness, sometimes not even revealing his identity to people – and telling his followers not to, either – we need to realize the weight of what we carry. We have a name, a Spirit, a message, that saves people. This is a burning light, a cross, a power, that we carry like we carry a prized ornament: with care. It's too

powerful to dump on people. We need the Spirit's leading.

Now, this said, we never forget who we are or what we possess. We fake it a little for people around us, not because we are ashamed but rather because we really want it to reach them. It's counter intuitive. We see this gentleness and shrewdness in the life and teaching of Jesus. But in ourselves, we never let the light dim. We never actually deny Jesus. No! On the contrary, we often slip away from the crowd, as did Jesus, disappear from view so we can gaze on this revelation. We whisper all day long to Jesus. who walks with us by his Spirit. We whisper with the Psalmist: 'Whom have I in heaven but you, and earth has nothing I desire besides you...' We hide away when we can, not in fear anymore, but in meditation, in anticipation, hearing the tick of the clock and knowing that we are seconds closer to heaven itself.

You are a minority. Jesus said you would be. You are a 'chosen people', and on the narrow road that leads to life, which Jesus said, 'only a few find.' (Matthew 7:14)

But we are proud of our inheritance. We go outside the camp and stand with Christ, and 'bear the disgrace he bore.' (Hebrews 13:13) We know what we know, and we know that although the world might look on us as foreign, as foolish, that they are the ones destined to

fade, their spirits will be returned to their maker. (Ecclesiastes 12:7) So we pity people, we will be gentle with them, but we will never deny what we see, or the treasure we hold.

'What we have received is not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God... We speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, explaining spiritual realities with Spirit-taught words. The person without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God but considers them foolishness, and cannot understand them because they are discerned only through the Spirit.' (1 Corinthians 2:12-14)

So be free to enjoy, to gaze on, to be shaped by Jesus in you. Prize him. Like Mary, break and pour your treasure over him in worship. He has saved you, and hides you even now. You are safe from this world. You can smile, you can sigh. You can go anywhere, speak to anyone, work any job, deal with anything, because you are passing through, every hour closer...

'In Christ you have an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. It is kept in heaven for you, and by faith you are shielded by God's power until the coming of your salvation.' (1 Peter 1:3-5)

¹ Mark 14:1-11

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'Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the Lord, 'He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust."

(Psalm 91:1-2)