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A BEND IN THE ROAD

A Quick Focus

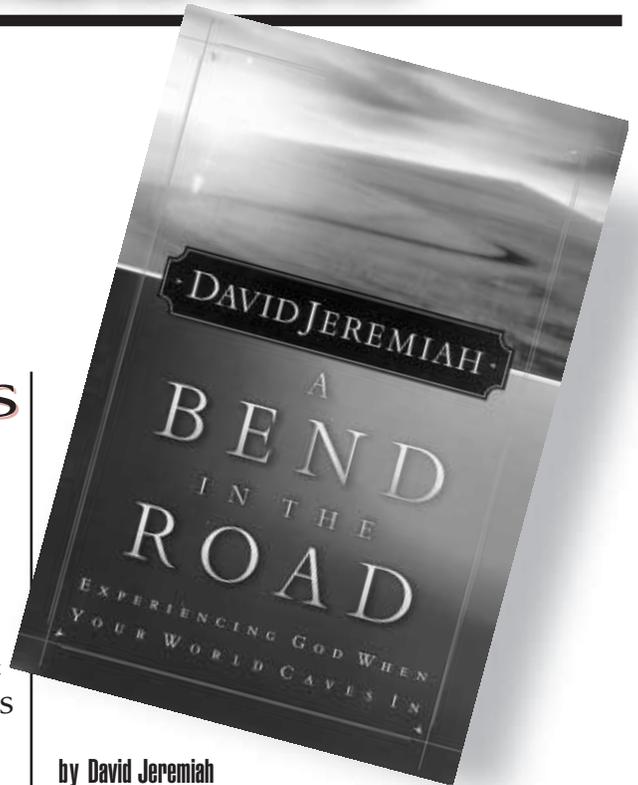
The Book's Purpose

- Demonstrate how God cares for us through the troubling times of life
- Communicate hope from the Psalms for those who face life's disruptions
- Reveal how the author's battle with cancer deepened his faith in Christ
- Teach us how God uses "bends in the road" to shape our lives

The Book's Message

God never promised that life would be easy. In fact, there are times when things get so bad that we become desperate and grasp for anything that will ease the pain. What God did promise is that He would walk with us when dips and bends in the road obscure the road ahead.

No one is exempt from "dark nights of the soul." But through these troubling times, we can learn how to focus on God. We can learn how to pray. We can



by David Jeremiah
Word Publishing

learn how to worship. And we can learn how God's grace is sufficient to sustain us~and give us victory~even in the worst of times.



Eleven Main Points

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Handling Life's Disruptions

A Bend In The Road

Monday, September 26, 1994 began as any ordinary day, as Pastor David Jeremiah mused about the previous day's services while driving to the hospital for a routine physical. By the time he left the clinic, he encountered a bend in the road for which he was not prepared. As the doctor probed his abdomen, he discovered an enlarged spleen and recommended a CAT scan.

Asked what the enlarged spleen meant, the doctor told Jeremiah that they would be able to tell him in 24 hours when they received test results.

Jeremiah's wife Donna was scheduled to fly to New Hampshire later that day, so he decided not to ruin her plans with the news. He would wait to receive the full medical report, then tell her.

The next day, the doctor phoned and calmly told Pastor Jeremiah that the tests confirmed a mass on his spleen. The diagnosis was lymphoma, a cancer that attacks the lymphatic system.

Two days later, Jeremiah flew to New Hampshire and Maine for some speaking engagements and to meet up with his wife. It was in the hotel room that night that he gave her all the details.

"A bend in the road took us to that room. There, far from our home, on the other side of the continent~there, in a strange hotel~we huddled together to face the most challenging moment of 30-plus years of marriage."

Two Key Scriptures

Life is difficult. Everyone faces bends in the road. Gordon MacDonald refers to them as "disruptive moments." We don't anticipate them~and we'd certainly avoid them if we could.

During the early days of adjusting to his life-changing news, Jeremiah found great comfort in two passages of Scripture: 2 Corinthians 12:7-10 and Hebrews 12:5-11. Both teach us how to view life's difficulties from God's perspective.

In the Corinthian passage, Paul states clearly that the purpose of his trials was to shield him from the sin of pride. Multiple theories seek to explain his "thorn in the flesh." Perhaps it's best that we don't know for sure. That way, Paul's story more easily becomes our story. If God's grace was sufficient for him, we can rest assured that it will be sufficient for us too.

God did not answer Paul's request to remove the thorn, but He did promise that He would provide for him. God told him the thorn would magnify His power and that no one would be able to explain his experience in mere human terms.

"When 'this little light of mine' becomes dimmer, His great floodlight shines all the more brightly."

Suffering brought him into a relationship with God that was deeper than he had ever experienced.

Five Lessons from Disruptive Moments

1. View disruptive moments as divine appointments.
2. Recognize that disruptive

moments develop Christian character.

3. Remember that God always promises to provide grace.
4. Focus on the fact that adversity produces dynamic spiritual growth.
5. Realize that blessings depend on how we respond to disruptive moments.



Lessons for the Dark Days

Psalm 71 has no inscription indicating authorship, but some scholars believe that David may have written it as a sequel to Psalm 70. As Pastor Jeremiah lay in the hospital bed with a morphine drip going into his body, these words carried him from his own troubles to the pain of a hurting parent-king. David had led the nation to its highest days of glory. Now, near the end of his life, he faced the insurrection attempt of his own son Adonijah.

The Reality of Dark Days

Who created the notion that believers are exempt from trials? Nothing could be further from the truth. It is evident that the poet in Psalm 71 knew first-hand the reality of dark days. Why do we face obstacles?

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LESSONS FOR THE DARK DAYS continued

First, because of an uncertain future. "Do not cast me off in the time of old age; do not forsake me when my strength fails" (v. 9). The aging process, with all the uncertainty it brings, can indeed cause dark days.

Second, because of unfaithful friends. Sometimes, unfortunately, our darkest days are actually precipitated by those closest to us. In David's case, the trouble originated from within his own family—not from foreign powers.

Third, because of an unparalleled heavenly Father. Some trials actually come from the Father Himself. To discipline us, to grow us, and to strengthen us, He sometimes sends dark days into our lives.

The Results of the Dark Days

The choices we make determine the kind of people we become. Severe trials produce a mixture of feelings, such as vulnerability and insecurity. As king, David was in the public eye. Already exposed from previous problems, he knew that people would be watching and scrutinizing his response to this crisis.

David wanted to escape his problems. He cried for assurance

that God wouldn't leave him when his strength failed. David turned to God as his refuge and fortress.

How Do We Respond to the Dark Days

We need a theology of adversity that goes beyond mere positive thinking.

1. We must focus on God's character. In trying times it is easy to focus on our problems instead of God's glory, strength, and faithfulness.
2. We must celebrate. Psalm 71 is filled with statements of praise.

"This is the mark of the truly godly: In the very midst of life's deepest misery, their voices are lifted in praise of God."

3. We must reclaim our confidence in God. Dark days make us better people. They prove to us that because of our reliance upon God, we can go the distance.



Where Does My Help Come From?

In an internal monologue, the psalmist sought help. He looked around, and he looked within; but it wasn't until he looked above that he discovered that true help comes from the Lord.

The verses describe God as the one "who made heaven and earth." As Creator, He is all-powerful. When we look to God for help, we recognize not only that He *cares* but that he also *can*. He is able to help. He is our Creator and Sustainer.

Three Promises to Claim

First, the Lord sees. He knows your name and the number of hairs on your head. He's always awake and never out of town. Nothing escapes His notice.

"God is always there, no matter when you need Him. In the loneliest, darkest hour of the night, He is there because He doesn't slumber or sleep."

Second, the Lord protects. Verse 5 says, "The Lord is your keeper; the Lord is your shade at your right hand." In the Scriptures, God's right hand signifies His power. He is always at our side, day and night. What a great boost to our courage!

Third, the Lord preserves (vv. 7-8). He preserves us from evil. Imagine the most evil thing that could happen. It is not outside of His control. The Lord also preserves our existence. Death is a comma, not a period. When we breathe our last, life keeps going.

He also preserves us every day. It is reassuring to know that even in the midst of our hectic schedules, God is involved in the whole of life. And He preserves us eternally, "from this time forth and forevermore" (v. 8). As we age, it seems time passes more quickly each year. God's care for us spans all of time and eternity.



Help for Life's Journey

As the Israelites traveled long distances from their homes to Jerusalem to worship and celebrate the great feasts, they often sang to express their joy and faith in God. Fifteen of these songs appear in Psalms. We call them Songs of Ascents.

The pilgrimage from a foreign land translates easily to our culture today. Life is a journey filled with hazards. In spite of the mountainous crags and desert wastelands on the journey, we can trust God to care for our needs each step of the way.

Psalm 121 is one of the 15 pilgrim songs. Each verse is filled with the assurances that God guides us and cares for us when the trip becomes confusing and hazardous.

Learning from God's Delays

There are times when life gets desperate. We cry out to God for relief. His timing is often too slow for our liking, as we try to navigate our problems on our own steam.

Having slain Goliath and even anointed as king, David was a hero forced to live as a fugitive. For eight or nine years, he fled from King Saul's wrath and vicious jealousy. It was out of this painful experience that he wrote Psalm 13. Four times in these verses he cried in desperation, "How long?"

When God Delays, How Do We Feel?

First, we feel forgotten. Everyone has a point where faith unravels—a time when we feel that God has either abandoned or forgotten us. God says, "I have inscribed you on the palms of my hands" (Isaiah 49:16). Our names are engraved on His hands. No matter how desperate life may get, we're always on the mind and heart of God.

Second, we feel forsaken. This is worse than being forgotten. One definition of the word forsaken is

"premeditated forgetfulness." These words remind us of the Messianic prophecy in Psalm 22: "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" It is comforting to know that David felt forsaken. But it is life-changing to recognize that Jesus not only *felt* forsaken. He *was* forsaken.

"He turned His back upon His son so that He would never have to turn His back on you."

Third, we feel frustrated—especially when we've prayed for a matter for years, but God doesn't seem to be listening. At the heart of David's frustration were his own emotions. (He reached a point where his problems were dealing with him more than he was dealing with the problems.) The

other component of David's frustration was his seemingly endless battle with Saul. Indeed, David must have felt that God had taken on more than He could handle! But God had him exactly where He wanted him.

When God Delays, How Do We Pray?

In the midst of desperation and delays, David cried out to God. His fears brought him to his knees. As he prayed, his focus became God's power and this brought him new courage as he remembered the many ways His Lord had delivered him in the past. His faith burst into worship, into a song of thanksgiving and triumph.

God always brings resolution in His own timing. We may become preoccupied with our circumstances; God is more preoccupied with our character. Be encouraged. God is in control, and He never makes mistakes.



What to Do When Life Crashes

It happens to everyone at some point in life. Life crashes. We're never prepared for it. During times like these, isn't it wonderful that we not only have a Savior and Lord, but we have a Friend who sees us through? Psalm 138 reminds us that God knows every need. He is interested in the minute details of our lives. Our best response is to worship.

Worship in Times of Present Trouble

During present trouble, we must worship the Lord with gratitude. Focusing on our misery locks out the blessings of God's healing and wisdom, but a grateful heart provides us admission into the courts of godliness.

We must also worship the Lord wholeheartedly. God gave His all for us through His only Son. When life crashes, it is imperative that we approach God with an undivided heart.

Moreover, we must worship the Lord courageously. In verse 1, David proclaimed, "Before the gods I will sing praises to You." He was not swayed by his pagan culture. He was prepared to stand in the middle of every false god to worship the true, living God.

Finally, we must worship God intelligently. How must we praise Him? We praise Him for His loving kindness and truth (v. 2). And we praise Him for His trustworthy Word and His mighty provision.

Worship in Times of Future Triumph

In verse 4, David's focus transitions from his present troubles to the future. Looking ahead, he focuses on the fact that one day all the rulers of the earth will give praise to the Lord. Every knee will bow. Every people group from every culture, the lofty and the lowly, will acknowledge the Lordship of Christ.

Worship in Times of Uncertainty

"Though I walk in the midst of trouble, You will revive me." (v. 7). The words "in the midst of" imply "stuck" in trouble. We all face troubles every day. But there are times we are in a crisis with no resolution in sight. In these times of uncertainty, the Lord continues to protect us and perfect us.

With all his troubles at home and on the political front, David easily could have received a degree in a "Crises and Catastrophes" curriculum!

"When we navigate troubled waters, God is the master of not only the waves, but also the ship. He never abandons His plans or His people. He will see the voyage through to its final destination."

When life crashes, we must see our troubles from the perspective of the Psalms. Doing so will increase our hope and intensify our love for God.



A Journey in the Desert

Another major bend in the road for David occurred when his son Absalom staged a coup d'etat against his father-king. Using clever strategies, Absalom built a strong coalition of followers. He convinced the masses that the king was no longer capable of leading the nation.

Knowing that he had missed opportunities to squelch the rebellion, David had no recourse but to flee the city. With a few faithful followers, he fled into the desert of Judah, where he hoped to sort out the mess he allowed to happen.

These events serve as the backdrop to Psalm 63. We may never have to live our lives on the run, but we do face times in the desert, times of desolation and despondency.

Hungering for God

The desert mirrored David's own soul. In the opening verses of the psalm, he cried out to the God who created the desert. He knew that he was in a mess that only God could fix. Notice the three phrases indicating his intense hunger for God: He seeks for God, he thirsts for God, he hungers for God. In both body and spirit, he longed for God to send revival and recovery.

To understand verse 2, we need to recall the story line in 2 Samuel 15. Two of David's loyal followers, Abiathar and Zadok, crept into the sanctuary and took the Ark of the Covenant with them as they fled the city. David was unaware they had done this. When he found out, he sent the ark back to the city. He needed more

than a symbol of God's presence. He desired the presence of God Himself.

Worshiping God

David's longing for God was not just lip service. He yearned with deep urgency to be in the presence of God and to worship with God's people. It is in the desert experiences of our lives that, out of obedience and discipline, we must lift our voices in praise to God. Notice three things David did.

"When the enemy closes in, we'll never defeat him using his own weapons. Instead, we load the weapons of our lips, our tongues, our hands, our wills...with the most powerful gunpowder that has ever been discharged on earth~worship and praise."

First, he praised God. Praise during adversity makes no sense by worldly standards. But it is the very thing that unleashes God's miraculous power.

Second, he pictured God. He had a cure for sleepless desert nights. He turned his thoughts heavenward. Meditating upon God produces hope and encouragement. And hope reminds us that He is perpetually faithful.

Third, he prayed to God. "My soul follows close behind You...." (v. 8) In crises, we need to cling to God and hold on tightly.



Life on a Roller Coaster

The superscript to

Psalm 30 reads, "A Song at the dedication of the house of David." It refers to the earlier days of David's reign when he returned the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem to remind the people of the glory and power of God. The Philistines had taken the ark as a battle trophy, but sent it away when they began experiencing terrible problems.

King Saul had forgotten the ark, but David remembered its significance. So he sent a group of men to retrieve it. Transporting it back, Uzzah touched it, and God instantly struck him dead. After the ark's stay in the home of Obed-Edom, who was immensely blessed by keeping the ark in his house, David carefully returned it to Jerusalem.

He worshipped the Lord with great joy and dancing. Most likely, he wrote the song of Psalm 30 to express his heartfelt gratitude to God.

David's whole life seemed to be like a roller coaster—from the death of Uzzah to the exuberance of celebrating the ark's return. David's experience is much like ours—running the gamut from joy to depression. This psalm depicts several contrasts describing life on a roller coaster.

1. From Hurting to Healing.

We're not sure of the nature of David's sickness, but he cried out for God to have mercy on him. Then he praised God for lifting him up. A joyful and grateful attitude is essential to God's healing.

2. From Weeping to Joy.

When we experience the lowest points in our life, as in the death of a loved one, we wonder if we can ever smile again. But

in time, God restores a measure of joy. Moreover, we must never forget the eternal nature of this promise. One day there will be no mourning or pain.

3. From Prosperity to Poverty.

Verses six and seven teach us a painful truth. We experience times when everything is going well, and we are deceived into thinking that nothing can make us fall. But David's experience reminds us otherwise. Recall the story of Nebuchadnezzar, who learned the hard way that there is no room for arrogance in God's scheme.

4. From Mourning to Dancing.

When the ark returned to Jerusalem, David's mourning turned into a victory parade that included dancing. The dancing was a physical way of expressing excitement for God's mighty deeds. In other words, the king threw a godly party. 

How to Overcome Discouragement

According to the superscript, Psalm 142 is a song David expressed to God while seeking refuge in the cave. Fleeing from Saul and from all the other bad things happening to him, he finally found a place where he could be alone to rest, pray, and sort things out. But before he could enjoy any semblance of respite, hundreds of distressed and disheartened followers found their way to him. In this Psalm, David expressed his emotions with brutal honesty.

The Emotions of Discouragement

First, David felt disoriented. His spirit was "overwhelmed" (literally,

"muffled"). His life, entangled with problems, was a picture of disorientation. Feeling responsible for Saul's slaying of an entire village and being pursued by the king's army and his own suffering followers, with a sinking heart he wondered, "God, what now?"

Second, he felt deserted.

**"Look on my right hand and see, for there is no one who acknowledges me; refuge has failed me; no one cares for my soul."
(Psalm 142:4)**

The cold, dark cave symbolizes the darkness into which his soul had plunged. He was lonely, even though surrounded by hundreds of followers. They were more interested in what he could do for them than in caring about him. No one knew the depths of his despair, and no one cared.

Third, he felt depressed. "I am brought very low" (v. 6). Some discouragement leads to hopelessness so deep that people take their own lives. Could it be that David's emotions approached that intensity? There was no hope, no joy. Falling back on his own resources, his well had run dry. No longer did he sense God's presence.

Fourth, he felt defeated. His focus turned to his enemies. They were stronger than he. Had he taken a legal pad and made two columns, one for good news and one for bad news, the bad news column would have far outweighed the good news.

Steps to Overcoming Discouragement

Doubt defeated David.
"He had sent a stone into a giant's head; now he had encountered a giant that could get into his own head."

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HOW TO OVERCOME DISCOURAGEMENT
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But eventually David defeated discouragement and left a roadmap for us to follow.

1. He verbalized his problems to God. He didn't hold back, but told God exactly how he felt.
2. He recognized his presence before God. David remembered that God is all knowing, and was working on his behalf, even in his despair.
3. David realized his provision in God. And he held on to the fact that His provision is not just for eternity, but for the everyday problems.
4. David renewed his praise to God. He knew that prayer could transport him right through his discouragement to the heights of joyful song.



Help for the Helpless

Psalm 107 is a song expressing thanksgiving to God when the storms of life render us helpless. God is our faithful friend during these difficulties.

Four Pictures of Helplessness

These verses portray four word pictures depicting the difficulties God's people face.

The first landscape is a desert (vv. 4-9) and describes the helpless feeling of being lost, hungry, and thirsty. Many people today have lost their way. Their lives are devoid of purpose and meaning.

The second word picture is a prison (vv. 10-16). Some "prisons" result from poor choices we make. They have names like addictions, abuse, and improper relationships. Other prisons result from circumstances over which we have no control. Both types place us in cells of helplessness.

The third scene is a hospital (vv. 17-22) where affliction and illness lead into a corridor of death. The people in this scene have destroyed their lives through their own sin.

The final scene is a storm (vv. 23-32) in which nature unleashes itself with a fury. This scene deserves deeper study.

God's Help in the Storm

The Place of the Storm. The worst place to weather a storm is out on the open sea with no land in sight. These verses provide needed encouragement when we step out in faith from the shoreline to pursue the God's will.

"Great works are done in deep waters. If you're diving for pearls, you have to move out of the shallow end."

We have a choice. Stay close to the shore, where we're safe from the waves. Or step out into the deep waters—where it may not be smooth sailing, but the blessings of God await us.

The Producer of the Storm. Verse 25 teaches that God sends the rains. We must not blame Him for every storm, because we cause some of them on our own. But in this context we are referring to those storms God sends into our lives. Job and Jonah learned this lesson well.

The Prayer in the Storm.

"They cry out to the Lord in their trouble, and He brings them out of their distresses" (v. 28). Whether the scene is a desert, a prison, a hospital, or a storm, the only way to escape is to look up. God often brings us to our knees to remind us that we must depend totally on Him.

The Peace in the Storm. The God who brings the storm is also the Master of the storm. When He removes the storm, we fall down in worship. But while it still rages, remember this:

"We are far more secure in the storm with Jesus in our boat than we will ever be on the shore without Him."

He is the one who delivers us and brings us peace and strength when we find ourselves in helpless situations.



When Trouble Comes

In the fall of 1998, Pastor David Jeremiah encountered another major bend in the road, a reoccurrence of his cancer. Living out this nightmare, he found great comfort in the Book of Psalms.

"Whenever I have suffered, the psalms have provided my medicine. When I have been wounded, they have bandaged me and pointed me toward healing...I've drunk deeply of them, bathed in them, and let them wash over me until I've felt the dust of the world cleansed away by the hope and peace of God's presence in the music of the psalms."

Background to Psalm 46

In 701 B.C., King Sennacherib of Assyria journeyed to Egypt on a

WHEN TROUBLE COMES continued from page 7

conquering mission. Judah lay directly on his path. He sent warnings to King Hezekiah to surrender. Heeding the advice of the prophets, the godly king ignored him and brought his concerns before God. God assured him that He would take care of the Assyrian army. He confused the armies, resulting in the executions of 185,000 Assyrians. (See 2 Kings 18.)

Psalm 46 reminds us that all things are possible with God and that victory is always within reach.

God, Our Refuge

God is an awesome refuge. The word *refuge* suggests a quiet place for protection. We try many alternate means of refuge such as our own resources, family, friends, and counselors. But only God is a very present help when we face trouble.

God, Our Strength

Within us lies a secret power. For defense, Hezekiah constructed an underground water supply into the fortified city. God's Spirit is the eternal spring of living water. He resides within our souls and provides for us all the strength we need in times of trouble.

The Assyrian army may have outnumbered Judah's. But like the fourth person in the fiery furnace, God showed up and routed the enemy.

"We're safer in raging flames sheltered in His arms than in the coolest and calmest climate without Him."



Reflecting on God's Goodness

David wrote Psalm 16 during a brief respite from all the trauma of running from King Saul. Sneaking into the king's camp one night while the army was asleep, David had the opportunity to kill Saul with the king's own sword. But he refused, saying that it would be sin for him to kill the Lord's anointed.

Saul felt shame when confronted with David's act of grace. He backed off from trying to kill David. During this period of tranquility, the soon-to-be king reflected on the goodness of God.

God's Goodness in the Past

God is awesome in that He presides over creation and knows every detail of our lives. David knew that apart from God, he could find no goodness. Trace back any good thing as far back as you can go, and you will find God.

David also experienced the goodness of God through those who risked their lives for him. After we go through troubling times, we can look back and see that God sent special friends to see us through.

God's Goodness in the Present

God never takes a break. He is always at work on our behalf, even though we may not understand. He supplies our daily needs and takes care of all our circumstances. It is simply impossible to count all the ways He blesses us. It is God who produces contentment in our lives. He is always available to provide counsel. In Him we have confidence even when the forces of this world align themselves against us.

God's Goodness in the Future

David's words are prophetic. He rejoices in his own resurrection. "For you will not leave my soul in Sheol" (v. 10). He knew that God's care would continue at the grave and beyond. He also looked ahead and rejoiced in the resurrection of Christ. "Nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption" (v. 10). These words represent one of the mountain peaks of the Old Testament. Peter, in his message at Pentecost, confirmed that David was referring to the resurrection of Christ.

Through every bend that appears along the path, we must always remember that the best is yet to come. Whether our troubles are health problems, family trauma, or financial crises, the Lord is our rock and our salvation.



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