

Give ear to my words, O Lord,
 Consider my groaning.
 Heed the sound of my cry for help, my King
 and my God,
 For to You I pray.
 In the morning, O Lord, You will hear my
 voice;
 In the morning I will order my prayer to
 You and eagerly watch.

For You are not a God who takes pleasure
 in wickedness;
 No evil dwells with You.
 The boastful shall not stand before Your
 eyes;
 You hate all who do iniquity.
 You destroy those who speak falsehood;
 The Lord abhors the man of bloodshed and
 deceit.
 But as for me, by Your abundant
 lovingkindness I will enter Your house,
 At Your holy temple I will bow in reverence
 for You.

continued...

In the

Morning

tHIS COUNTRY DOMICILE includes five cats. The four females dwell comfortably indoors, while their brother resides out in the garage. But don't cry for Thornton. He loves his garage, and, for an outdoor cat, he has a pretty good life. This winter his thickly blanketed basket is in a curtained alcove, to reduce drafts, and comes complete with a heating pad. While the blizzard howls on the other side of the garage door, he remains cozy and warm in his heated bed.

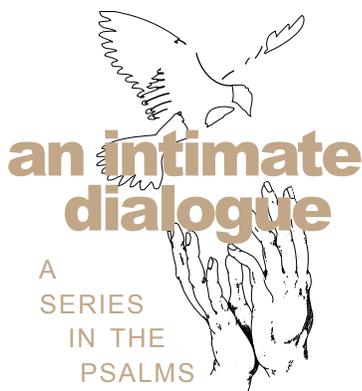
In warmer seasons the first thing Thornton does upon rising in the morning is head outside to make his rounds surveying his territory. He begins with a circuit around the house, poking his nose under the deck, sniffing around the wood pile, and checking the condition of all the doors. Has a strange cat passed by, rudely leaving its mark where it doesn't belong, so close to his family's dwelling? After this, he widens his circuit to include the north orchard, the gardens, the barn and nearby timber,

and a close inspection around the edges of the pond.

Thornton's purpose during his morning jaunt is to determine who visited during the night—friend or foe?—and to make his plans for the remainder of the day. Will he while away the day in thoughtful repose, or will he have to take action against a foe who encroached on his territory? Will he do a little hunting, or will he find a soft spot for a well-deserved nap?

groanings

When we rise in the morning we may not go prowling around our territory like Thornton. But in those early morning hours we often retrace in our minds what occurred the day before, and contemplate what challenges await us in the new day. In the morning we take stock of where we have been, what our condition is at the moment, and what obstacles, trials or fears lie before us. And for many of us that process begins on our knees.



Please hear me, O Lord, and make sense out of my stumbling words. Move closer, my King; incline your ear, my God, to hear better my cry. For my prayer is to You—the only One who can help. O God, at break of dawn You are already attentive to my needs; even as I rise, I am putting in place my thoughts of You, and listening for Your reply.

Every morning we rise to a challenge, for, as believers, we dwell in hostile territory. But we never rise alone. We have a God, a King, a *Father* who cares, and who is able to translate our groanings into the language of heaven.

In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words; and He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

Romans 8:26-27

the path

If there is a cry for help, there is also the assurance that help is present and real. If we voice a complaint about those who stand against us in the approaching day, there is also the confidence that God will meet out justice upon them.

You find no pleasure in evil things, You do not even permit it to visit. Those who live a life of lies and murder You loathe—in fact, You send them off to perish in a desert crafted from their own deceit. But while You have shut the door to evil, O God, You have invited me in—not by merit, but by Your great and limitless love for me. Therefore I will come in and worship You, my terrible and gracious God.

O Lord, You know the way through those who lie in wait to ambush me. Your way is the only way—the way of goodness and truth. That is the path I choose; take me down it.

enemies

Even with this confidence in our God, however, there are mornings when

we can't shake the tremulous stirrings within our soul. For we have dealt with these foes before. They seem to take pleasure in making our lives miserable—and they very often succeed. We know it is a blasphemous thought, but there are times when our enemies appear stronger than our faithful Protector. We know them well, and we want to make sure God knows what we are up against.

I can't believe a word they say. They are evil and corrupt to the core. Death and corruption spew from their throat while their smooth tongue oozes flattering lies. They are guilty, O God: pronounce judgment on them! Let their own evil plottings define their end.

In our anxiety and irrational fear we cry out to our God to meet out justice upon these who are being so unfair to one of His children.

Push them off the cliff, God! Banish them, for they have rebelled against Your righteousness.

the shield

But even within the fevered clutches of this early hour entreaty, His truth reaches our anxious heart. He reaches down to calm our fears, to remind us of who He is—and how much stronger He is than any challenge we might face.

But, unlike my foes, may those who trust in You and seek Your protection be encouraged. May those who call upon Your name jump for joy! For everything good in our lives comes from You, O Lord. I need not concern myself about my enemies, for You have accepted me as Yours, so I am surrounded by Your strong shield.

Enveloped in His comforting embrace we find strength for the new day. Rising to our feet, we know now that we have nothing to fear. Challenges will indeed come; the enemy has not yet been vanquished. But we will face them with the Lord at our side.

His strong, impenetrable shield will never leave us.

O Lord, lead me in Your righteousness because of my foes;
Make Your way straight before me.
There is nothing reliable in what they say;
Their inward part is destruction itself.
Their throat is an open grave;
They flatter with their tongue.
Hold them guilty, O God;
By their own devices let them fall!
In the multitude of their transgressions
thrust them out,
For they are rebellious against You.

But let all who take refuge in You be glad,
Let them ever sing for joy;
And may You shelter them,
That those who love Your name may exult
in You.
For it is You who blesses the righteous
man, O Lord,
You surround him with favor as with a
shield.

Psalms 5:1-12