

Wendy's October Prayer Thoughts

I was thrilled to spot several bald eagles on a three hour journey from Washington DC to Ocean Beach, Maryland, situated on the Chesapeake Bay of the Atlantic. They were unmistakable, because of their wingspan silhouetted against the clear blue sky, as they soared with slow powerful wing beats. If I could have had a closer look at them I would have discovered that they are not bald. Their heads are covered with white feathers, as are their tails. 'Bald' once meant 'white haired.' Their body plumage is dark brown to black, making their bright yellow eyes and feet stand out. Being a symbol of the USA an estimation of their numbers is made annually by the Wild Life Department. In July 2023 Maryland recorded an estimate of 1400 breeding pairs.

Doug Bachelor's Devotions of Amazing Facts mentions 2 ornithologists making a survey of bald eagles nests in the spring of 197, in northern Wisconsin. I use his material in an enhanced way. Eagle's nests are gigantic, some 4-5 feet in diameter, 2-4 feet deep. They are largely interwoven by the female, the male foraging for the sticks and fillers of grass and moss. Their average weight is 1 ton. The pair return to the same nest each year, simply adding 1-3 feet of new material. In making their survey the ornithologists were flying over the nests. They noticed some odd as they looked into one of them. Could it be a dead eagle? The next morning they visited the nest from the ground. As they arrived 2 two adult eagles circled around making their high pitched whistling sound, showing they were sensitive to disturbance. People are advised to stay 300 feet away from nests. Bald eagles are monogamous, mating for life. By their scolding it was obvious that a young bird was alive in the nest.

The men were even more puzzled as they climbed the tree to take a closer look. Inside there was an eagle that had been dead for about a month, and a live young chick about 5 weeks old. How could that be? Looking around they saw that lightning had struck the tree. Large limbs were lying on the ground, and there were burb marks near the nest. The men could only assume that the lightning strike had killed the mother, but by a miracle the young bird had survived. Maybe the mother was still incubating the egg when the storm raged, or had she stretched out her wings to protect her newly born chick and was struck herself? It was impossible to say. Incubation takes 24-26 weeks and the fledgling is nursed for 8-14 weeks after the birth. The ornithologists came to the conclusion that soon after the mother's death, the father had recruited another mate to care for and feed the little chick. It was his responsibility to secure sufficient food by using his sharp vision and strong talons. He could dive at 99 mph, (160kph), to catch fish, small mammals, reptile's birds including Canada geese, to take back to the nest which must be near to water. Eagles can carry 4 times their own body weight.

It struck me that protection is the dominant role for the bald eagle, both male and female. The writer of Psalm 91 knew how vital this was for his life, by using the image of a protective bird, as he sought to share his faith, it was a faith firmly grounded on God as we learn from the first verse. "You who live in the shelter of the Most High, who abide under the shadow of the Almighty."

He assures us that God is our dwelling place, that there is security in Him. The Psalmist wanted us to know that he felt at home in God's presence. He expands on this by mentioning that just as a shadow provides shade and protection from the blistering sun, so the Almighty guards us, and keeps us safe. David also described God's protection as being under a shadow. "How precious is your steadfast love O God. All people take refuge under the shadow of your wings." Psalm 36:7.

Returning to Psalm 91v.1 we realise that the believer's trust is in the covenant God of Israel, who was bound to His people in love. The divine name Almighty is the translation of Shaddai, the 'All Sufficient One,' the God of unlimited power. The Jewish Prayer Book suggests that the Psalm should be read each night "before retiring to rest." It's a wonderful reminder for us that each night we begin night prayers, we are placing ourselves into God's loving care. God is our Guardian, so with Him we are safe and secure. The Passion Translation reads, "When you abide under the shadow of Shaddai, you are hidden in the strength of the Most High." Surely that must prompt us to begin our prayers by expressing our thankfulness to the One who never leaves us.

With that knowledge, we can be bold to claim God as "**my** refuge and **my** fortress, **my** God in whom I trust v.2. Let us continue in prayer by thanking God for His faithfulness; for His commitment to be our refuge, our safe place. The Hebrew word for refuge is derived from *chasah*. meaning "to flee for protection to," "to confide in," "to put one's trust in." He is a fortress for us, providing us with total security. We have His protective presence within us, through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit; the One whom Christ promised would abide with us, comfort and guide us.

"For he will deliver you from the snare of the fowler, and from the deadly pestilence." v.3. These are poetic descriptions of the dangers that could weaken our trust in God. Being caught in the hunter's trap refers to the plots used by Satan to lure us, and keep us from walking with Christ. "The deadly pestilence" refers to a pandemic, with its sufferings and death. Let us pray that God will be our shield, so that we do not fall prey to Satan's schemes. .

Verse 4 reminds us that God protects His own because He is a caring God. The Psalmist likens God to a mother bird sheltering her young. "He will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you will find refuge, his faithfulness will be your shield and buckler." NIV. Feathers in their softness provide comfort and warmth... They symbolise the gentleness of God's love. The strong extended wings shield the young bird from harm. They remind us of the strength we receive from God's covering protection, as he surrounds us on all sides with His love. Aware of this we can with confidence repeat in our prayers the blessing which Moses spoke over the people of Israel prior to his death. "The eternal God is your refuge (some translations prefer dwelling place), and underneath are the everlasting arms."...

May we trust in God, and rely on Him for security and safety.