

## Love God. Live Free.

Summer 2024

Dear Friends, Comrades, Allies,

Summer is in full swing here in the Northern Hemisphere! The BBQs are out, flowers are blooming, vegetable gardens growing, crickets chirping, and the hummingbirds are zipping around the feeders. I *loooooove* summer!

This summer, I've been enjoying listening to the Psalms on audio as I putter about the yard. The themes of creation revealing God and nourishing our souls seem to fit beautifully with this season.

As I was praying about this letter, I sensed that God wanted me to share with you what the Psalms have especially brought to my attention. It begins with these verses from Psalm 16:

I will bless the Lord who guides me;  
even at night my heart instructs me.  
I know the Lord is always with me.  
I will not be shaken, for he is right beside me. (Psalm 16:7-8 NLT)

What has my attention is the idea *I will not be shaken*. I love the firmness of that. I crave it. David is not merely expressing a personal resolve (*I'm going to do my best not to be shaken*), he is articulating a reality (*the presence of God grounds me, and I find I am not shaken, thrown, knocked sideways, rattled by circumstance*).

Wouldn't that be lovely?

As I followed some of the *I will not be shaken* "hyperlinks" around the Old Testament, I read this in Isaiah:

"Though the mountains be shaken  
and the hills be removed,  
yet my unfailing love for you will not be shaken  
nor my covenant of peace be removed,"  
says the Lord, who has compassion on you. (Isaiah 54:10 NIV)

I love these passages. I wish they were truer of me, emotionally speaking. I don't like how easily I can be thrown by hard news, relational tension, a sudden upset in circumstances.

Years ago when Brian Johnson released the fabulous worship song "We Will Not Be Shaken" (Bethel, 2015), I played it over and over again. Not so much because I was right there in that place, but because my soul *wanted* to be. It was worship as "alignment"—bringing myself into alignment with who God is and what he has promised. (There are different forms of worship, of course: worship as adoration, worship as intimacy, worship as proclamation, celebration, etc.) Stasi and I were using that song in worship as proclamation: *We declare this to be true!*

How do you typically handle times of "shaking"? Think about it for a moment—the vacation that gets rained out, the troubling news from your doctor, the unexpected bills that take your balance right down to zero. How do you typically handle these moments?

If we would be unshakable people, let's give attention to the path to it through these passages. First, notice things from David's point of view:

I know the Lord is always with me.  
I will not be shaken, for he is right beside me. (Psalm 16:8 NLT)

**WILD  
AT HEART**

As another translation has it,

I have set the Lord continually before me;  
Because He is at my right hand, I will not be shaken. (NASB)

He has “set the Lord” continually before him; that’s the key. He has a God-centered life and a God-centered view of reality. God has his attention. So when adversity comes, David is *already situated* in God. From that place, he is unshakable. (Most people run to God *after* adversity hits, which is fine but not ideal. Better to already be tight with him!)

Second, there is the promise from God’s point of view:

“Though the mountains be shaken  
and the hills be removed,  
yet my unfailing love for you will not be shaken  
nor my covenant of peace be removed,”  
says the Lord, who has compassion on you. (Isaiah 54:10 NIV)

God has bound himself to us. He will never abandon or forsake us. If we anchor ourselves in his faithfulness, we are steady when things look like they’re falling apart.

The 2020 pandemic is in the rearview mirror, but I wonder if we learned anything at all from it.

As for me and my house, we realized that we needed to be more “ready” for adversity. Not expecting it, not in a fearful sense, but in the sense of 1) I am not going to let the comfort culture lure me into a false sense of security, and 2) I am going to choose a way of living whereby we are situated in God each day, eyes fixed on him, hearts fixed on him. Trusting in his faithfulness, whatever the circumstances might be. This is how we can say—and sing—“We will *not* be shaken!” This is my starting place.

The world is beautiful but fragile, friends. When adversity strikes (or disappointment, illness, loneliness—you know your hard things), being shaken doesn’t have to be inevitable. As Jesus counseled us, “Do not let not your hearts be troubled,” which means a troubled heart is not inevitable (John 14:1 NIV). We have a choice; we can prepare our hearts and souls ahead of time by setting the Lord continually before us.

And when something hard does happen, I always start with *Jesus—catch my heart. Catch my heart, Lord. Catch my thoughts, my interpretations, my emotions, my reactions. Catch me.*

I pray you don’t need this counsel this summer. But keep it in your hip pocket.

Offered in love,



John

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