



My Times Are in Your Hands

A Study of God's
Faithfulness in Affliction

BY ALISTAIR BEGG

My Times Are in Your Hands

A Study of God's
Faithfulness in Affliction

BY ALISTAIR BEGG

Copyright ©2002, 2011, 2013, 2020 by Truth For Life
P.O. Box 398000 Cleveland, Ohio 44139
All Rights Reserved

All scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken
from the Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV®. Copyright
©1973, 1978, 1984 by Biblica, Inc.™

Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide.
www.zondervan.com

Printed in the United States of America.

My Times Are in Your Hands

In the opening verses of Psalm 31, it is apparent that the psalmist is in anguish. As we read on, he seems to find himself in a position of assurance just a few verses later, only to return immediately to a state of distress.

This cycle of pain and joy is not an unusual experience for the Christian pilgrim. In fact, the recurrence of disappointment and distress is fairly common along the path of faith. Most of us are a jumble of emotions and a cross section of experiences. The good, the bad, and the ugly wash over us regularly.

The key issue is what we do with these experiences. How does being a believer shape the way in which we view these events and our world?

Psalm 31:15 reads, "My times are in your hands." These six words are the affirmation of the person who knows himself to be, despite disasters and difficulties, under the care of Almighty God. It is this certainty that will bring us equilibrium in the span of events that would otherwise inflate our egos or crush our souls. I want to focus now on this phrase throughout the pages of this booklet.

I have found nine truths which emerge from this simple statement, "My times are in Your hands."

1. I am not trapped in the grip of blind forces.

Since our times are in God's hands, we are not trapped in the grip of blind forces. We are not stymied by fate.

Paul, when addressing the intellectuals of his day in the city of Athens (see Acts 17:16-34), discovered that his hearers had been influenced by two fundamental ideas of the day, Stoicism and Epicureanism.

A man called Zeno, who lived during the fourth and third centuries BC, was the father of Stoicism. He believed that the events of the world were determined by a merciless, cold, and impersonal fate. Instead of struggling to change your circumstances, Zeno taught that you should simply cast yourself on this merciless mover. He would have been quick to sing the song, "*Que sera, sera, whatever will be, will be; the future's not ours to see; que sera, sera.*"¹ In other words, Zeno believed in the faceless power called fate.

For the Greeks, this blind, impersonal force was often referred to simply as "nature," just as it is today. You only have to turn on the Weather Channel to hear talk of Mother Nature and her

My Times Are in Your Hands

forces. Whether or not the meteorologists realize it, this is a form of Stoicism.

This notion is more profoundly evident in the pantheistic ideas of “earth prayers” that are frequently propounded not only at New Age gatherings but also in many church buildings. The notion is that we are simply individual cells in a single global organism that constitutes the earth. We are somehow caught up as organisms in the mixture of all that God has done, and He, God, is not distinct from His creation but rather is trapped in it. That is a form of early-twenty-first century pantheism.

Many of our friends, especially university students, have embraced a form of nihilism or nothingness. They are convinced that life has no meaning. They believe that there was nothing before they were born and there will be nothing after they die. They have concluded that they are trapped in the grip of a blind force.

Perhaps you have embraced this philosophy. How do you sleep at night? When you wake up in the morning, what puts a spring in your step? Are you living life trapped, caged by a blind, cold, merciless fate, destined to die and go to who knows

where?

One of the most distinctive features of the Christian faith in the twenty-first century is the way in which we are able to articulate our view of the world. In contrast to the culture around us, the believer says, “My times are in Your hands; I am not trapped by a blind force.”

2. I am not tossed about on the ocean of chance.

This brings us to the other philosophy mentioned in Acts 17. Epicurus lived between 341 and 270 BC. He passed on a system of ethics that is very much alive and well today. For Epicurus, “the good” was what life was all about—and the good could be determined by what brings the most pleasure. Epicureans spent their lives trying to achieve the good by getting as much pleasure as they possibly could. I imagine they would have been very much at home in the 1960s or today.

In the movie *Dead Poets Society*, Robin Williams’s character gathers all his students together in the corridor of their boarding school and shows them pictures of students past. He details the successes of these individuals and tells his students

My Times Are in Your Hands

that they must be careful in life to seize the day—*carpe diem!* He extols them to do their best in the moment that they have.

Now, in one sense, that is a very fine piece of advice. It is important to make good use of our time. The underlying notion, though, as portrayed by Robin Williams's character, was that we must make good use of our time *because there was no yesterday and there will be no tomorrow.*

He was actually propounding the empty philosophy of Nietzsche, which is summarized by Walter A. Kaufmann in this way: "There remains only the void. We are falling. Our dignity is gone. Our values are lost. Who is to say what is up and what is down? It has become colder, and night is closing in."²

Do you ever get that sense? I get it on a beautiful spring day when I see a large group of young people sitting on the wall outside the local coffee shop. Despite the springtime sun on their shoulders, I know that many of them feel that it has become chilly and the dark night is closing in. It is because they are living "without hope and without God in the world" (Ephesians 2:12). They believe their destiny is within their own control.

The Christian must respond by saying, “My times are in Your hands; I am not tossed around on the sea of chance.”

3. I am being trained in the school of God’s providence.

Some men and women are smothered by the pessimism that we have just described. Still others embrace the kind of superficial optimism of hedonism, as characterized by the man who fell out the thirty-story window: as he hurtled down past the tenth floor, somebody heard him shouting, “So far, so good!” There are many people whose lives are just like that. They do not want to know that they are going to hit the ground. They do not want to know that there are only nine floors left. All they want is to know that they are free-falling and that they have not hit the ground yet.

The psalmist says we simply cannot do that. The Christian affirms the truth that God has not abandoned the world He created; that would be deism. Nor has He become absorbed by His creation; that would be pantheism. Rather, the Christian believes God is distinct from what He has

My Times Are in Your Hands

made and is working out everything in relationship to His creation according to His plan.

My wife recently gave me a beautiful globe. As I sat spinning it one night, I felt as if I had the whole world at my fingertips—which, in a sense, I did. It hit me then that God really *does*. He actually moves the world for us. That is why we do not live in an ice age. That is why we have not been burned up. We are in the exact spot we should be according to His divine plan. By the same power with which He created this universe, by His same divine energy, He preserves all of His creatures. He operates in all that comes to pass in the world, and He directs everything to its appointed end.

That appointed end, says Paul in writing to the Ephesians, is to bring “everything in conformity with the purpose of his will” (1:11). In writing to the Romans, Paul further makes it clear that God’s purpose is to conform people to the image of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ (see Romans 8:29). As strange as it seems, the sovereign Creator fashions everything in time and history to this eventuality: He will redeem for Himself a people who are His very own (see Titus 2:14). He will use the good, the bad, and the ugly in our lives to conform us to the image

of His Son, enabling us to say, “My times are in Your hands.” That is an expression of belief and faith.

Psalm 139 describes for us God’s providence as well as any psalm to which we might turn: “O, LORD, you have searched me and you know me. You know when I sit down and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down.” Look particularly at verses 13 and 14: “For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made.”

These verses represent the utmost in human dignity. How can such a truth possibly compare with being told one is the product of a slimy pond somewhere, where DNA introduced itself to DNA? Quite simply, it cannot. It does not make any sense. Behind a facade of wisdom, people have become fools, worshipping created items that you put on dressers rather than bowing down and saying, “My times are in Your hands.”

We cannot even breathe unless God allows us. We cannot get enough juice in our eyes to keep them opening and closing as they need to. What a proud, arrogant rascal man has become as we stand and thumb our noses at the Creator, who holds our

My Times Are in Your Hands

very breath in His hand! He made me in my mother's womb. He determined my O+ blood type and what color my hair would be. Indeed, not only did He know it, but He planned it.

A hundred years ago, men and women by and large took all this for granted. We, though, have lived through the last century diminishing God and elevating man.

Psalm 139:16 continues, "All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be." That is not fate but rather evidence of a Father who loves us with an everlasting love. Is this not the basis of great comfort?

Some people tell me they believe in God, but they do not believe that He sees everything, cares much, or acts in human affairs. I cannot help wondering what their "god" does if he does not do any of that!

God, however, wrote the Bible so that we might know that He sees, cares, and acts. He stepped down onto the globe from the glory of heaven. He revealed Himself in the person of the incarnate Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus affirmed the same truth when He told the crowd, "Not one [sparrow] will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father."

Then He applies it: “And even,” He says, “the very hairs of your head are all numbered. So don’t be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows” (Matt. 10:29–31).

Do you know what that means? It means that we are not trapped in the grip of a blind force or being tossed about by chance, but we are being trained in the school of God’s providence. It means that our times are in His hands.

In Scotland we used to sing the following hymn:

My times are in Thy hand;
My God, I wish them there;
My life, my friends, my soul I leave
Entirely to Thy care.
My times are in Thy hand;
Whatever they may be;
Pleasing or painful, dark or bright,
As best may seem to Thee.
My times are in Thy hand;
Why should I doubt or fear?
My Father’s hand will never cause
His child a needless tear.³

Pantheistic philosophy sounds so trendy and

My Times Are in Your Hands

cool, does it not? But it is total, abject hopelessness. It is a train going nowhere, a boat with a hole in it, an airplane with no engines. It is a life without purpose. Yet people wonder why I am so silly as to believe what I do! “The fool says in his heart, ‘There is no God’” (Psalm 53:1), but as for me, I will declare, “My times are in Your hands.”

4. Prosperity should not be the occasion of pride.

A proud or arrogant individual is someone who has never come to grips with providence. The person who delights in saying “I did it my way,”⁴ puffing out his chest and congratulating himself, is on the wrong end of discovering the doctrine of God’s providence.

Calvin, addressing that very issue, says, “It is an absurd folly that miserable men take it upon themselves to act without God, when they cannot even speak except ... He wills!”⁵

If I were, for instance, a farmer that understood the doctrine of providence, then I would not congratulate myself as I looked out on my fields of plenty. I would be thankful for the fact that my workers and I were diligent, but I would recognize that, as 1 Corinthians 3:7 says,

“only God ... makes things grow.” In the same way, if my enterprises as a businessman have proven successful over the course of a year, then in understanding providence I will praise God.

The degree to which I boast of what I have achieved is an indication that I have not come to terms with the fact that my times are in His hands and have not appreciated the words of Deuteronomy 8:18, which clearly tells us that it is “the LORD your God ... who gives you the ability to produce wealth, and so confirms his covenant” with us.

If we understand that our times are in God’s hands, then we will recognize, as Solomon says in Proverbs 16:7, that “when a man’s ways are pleasing to the LORD, he makes even his enemies live at peace with him.” Moses understood that when God called him to go before Pharaoh in Exodus 3. He thought it was a daunting prospect, but God told Moses that He would bring him up out of the land of Egypt. If you read Exodus 3, you will see that those promises are fulfilled as a result of God’s goodness.

When the doctrine of providence takes root within our hearts, we begin to say, “My times are in Your hands,” recognizing that prosperity is no occasion for pride.

5. Uncertainty should not be the occasion of panic.

When I travel now, my wife looks after me so well that she tells me to take my pillow. And so I do. I feel a bit strange, and I try to hide it under my coat, but I have my pillow. It's a great pillow—otherwise, why would I take it?

What do you put your head on at night? Yes, a pillow... but what do you *really* put your head on at night? The best thing we can put our heads on is the providence of God. Then we can sleep.

The Puritans described providence as a soft pillow for anxious heads. Most of us are anxious at some time. I usually can trace my occasions of worry to a loss of confidence in the doctrine of providence. I may be prepared to say “My times are in Your hands,” but I am not always prepared to live in the light of that truth.

I like to read the *New York Times* in the morning over a coffee and a blueberry muffin. Regularly, I come across the most unbelievably sad stories...

A fifty-four-year-old grandfather takes his two-year-old grandson sledding. They hit a tree, and the little boy is killed as he sits between his grandfather's knees. This is not good news. This

crushes my spirit.

In the same column I read about some kids who were firing paintball guns at the fence of their sixty-four-year-old neighbor. The neighbor decides the only way to settle the situation is to produce a .357 magnum and shoot a nineteen-year-old boy and his father.

Then I read about the forty-two-year-old man who was living with a twenty-nine-year-old woman and her seven-year-old child. The little girl is doing the dishes, but not to the satisfaction of the man, who slaps her so hard that she loses bladder control on the kitchen floor. As a result, he beats her to a pulp, killing her, and her mother places the little girl in a garbage can in the back yard and sets fire to it.

Now, people will inevitably send me letters when I write about such horrible stories. They wonder why I have to describe such dreadful things when folks would rather try cheering themselves up. Well, guess what? I want to know how to cheer myself up in light of these terrible things too. The only place I can lay my head, though, is on the knowledge that somehow, in the mysterious purposes of Almighty God, my times are in His hands. These evil times in which I live have not taken Him by surprise. These

My Times Are in Your Hands

dark and dreadful days have not overwhelmed me, because I know that He is still at the tiller.

On what do you put your head down at night?

6. Adversity must not become the occasion of self-pity.

Joseph might have been tempted to try and operate beyond the pale of God's providence. His life was tragic in many ways. He had missed out on his father's company, he had been sent to a place he did not know, into slavery with people he did not like. He had to learn a new language. If he had focused on all that, then he would simply have been filled with spite.

But do you remember that wonderful scene in Genesis 45? His brothers are brought before him, but they have no knowledge of who he is... until he says, "Come close to me. ... I am your brother Joseph, the one you sold into Egypt!" Then he says, "Now, do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you. ... God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great

deliverance” (Genesis 45:4-7). In other words, God knows what He is doing. Our times are in His hands.

Think of Job losing his family. As chaos, disappointment, and pain descended upon him, he shaved his head, put on his torn robe, and fell to the ground in worship. He said, “Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked I will depart. The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised” (Job 1:21). Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing. In his tears, he trusted in God’s providence.

Most of us have lived through cries of anguish and pools of tears. In the middle of a storm, it can often sound trite to say these things. The fact is, though, that with the passage of time or the change in circumstances we may be able to look back over our shoulders and begin to recognize that there is no trying or even tragic circumstance that God has not sovereignly permitted.

Logically, there is no other choice: you are either a deist or a pantheist, or you believe in the providence of God. You either believe that you are being buffeted by a blind, impersonal force or are adrift on the sea of chance, or you believe that God providentially orders the affairs of time. If the latter

My Times Are in Your Hands

is true, then by His permissive will He allows things to pass to us through His hands, but they do not take Him by surprise.

God is sovereignly involved in the life cycle of the sparrow, and therefore, He is profoundly involved in the circumstances of those whom He has made the special objects of His love. As a result, we can be assured that even in the face of difficulty the fatherly providence of God has permitted these things and He has done so for our good and His glory. He will sustain us and watch over us in the midst of them. One day, He will make clear to us what now we “see through a glass, darkly” (1 Corinthians 3:12, KJV).

7. There is a responsibility to be faced.

Now, this little phrase in Psalm 31:15 does not relieve us of the need to accept personal responsibility for our lives. If we were to treat it in that way, then we would be fatalists. Although the Lord is ruling over all things according to His purpose, you and I are still responsible to Him for all that we are and all that we do. Therefore, we must be sensible in our decision-making. We must be righteous in our

planning. We must recognize that while, as Proverbs 16:9 says, “In his heart a man plans his course, but the LORD determines his steps,” so we must make realistic decisions.

Imagine, for instance, that I am planning to move to Milwaukee. If I am sensible, then I will sit down and weigh the circumstances before making the decision. I will not wait for a package to fall from the sky with “Milwaukee” written on it, nor will I rely on my own insight. Rather, I will take the events of my life, lay them out, and make sensible decisions. It is right to look ahead, to make plans, and to put our affairs in order—but we must do so in submission to God’s will.

Nehemiah faced a challenge from his enemies while he was building his wall. He realized something must be done, so he posted a guard. At the same time, though, he prayed to God. (See Nehemiah 4:7–9.)

I often meet people whose reaction to life’s events is to sit down somewhere and wait for the Lord to act. That is not a good plan. On the other hand, some people are totally frantic in their endeavors; they try to take care of everything themselves, as if somehow the destiny of the world

My Times Are in Your Hands

depended upon them.

Every so often, though, I will meet someone who has grasped the wonder of this truth. There is about him or her a fragrance, a busied restfulness, because they recognize that the providence of God does not remove them from the realm of responsibility.

8. Humility must be fostered

When Pharaoh needed his dream interpreted, he asked Joseph because he has heard how skilled Joseph was. Joseph's reply in Genesis 41:16 was quite humble: "I cannot do it," Joseph replied to Pharaoh, "but God will give Pharaoh the answer he desires." Jesus told the man with the withered hand to stretch out his hand. The man could not—but he *did*, because God made it possible. David said to Goliath the Philistine in 1 Samuel 17, "You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the LORD Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied." He continued, "This day the LORD will hand you over to me, and I'll strike you down and cut off your head. Today I will give the carcasses of

the Philistine army to the birds of the air and the beasts of the earth, and the whole world will know that there is a God in Israel” (vv. 45-46).

Unlike David or Joseph, we usually want people to know about us and our sling rather than Almighty God. At every level, our lives are utterly dependent upon God. Instead of drawing attention to *ourselves*, then, and displaying pride in our power and achievements, we should humbly acknowledge our total trust in God’s providential rule.

If we are honest, we must admit that we have a real problem with this—and until we do, we are going nowhere. Until we stop driving our minivans and SUVs around town with bumper stickers saying we have an honors student here, there, and everywhere, then we will be in great difficulty. Earlier generations knew that such displays were nothing other than blowing your own trumpet—that is, pride. We, however, live in a generation of trumpet blowers. We draw attention to ourselves and our achievements, even though we cannot even speak save for God’s providence.

9. There is a security to be found.

My Times Are in Your Hands

“My times are in Your hands.” This is our great security in life. Says Calvin, “Ignorance of providence is the ultimate of all miseries; the highest blessedness lies in the knowledge of it.”⁶ Instead of living in the fearful expectation of what fate may bring, instead of viewing the world as tumbleweed blown in the winds of chance, the humble believer fearlessly commits himself to God. Calvin again says, “His solace ... is to know that his Heavenly Father so holds all things in His power, so rules by his authority and will, so governs by his wisdom, that nothing can befall except he determine it.”⁷ Now, that is not to say that we like everything that befalls. It is to say, though, that we need not be concerned that we contracted some sickness we were not supposed to get. Here is the security: our Father has it under control.

In her book *The Hiding Place*, Corrie ten Boom tells the story of looking forward to her first railway journey. Although her journey was not for many weeks, she would regularly go to her father and ask him if he had the tickets. He would tell her over and over that he did. She realized that her problem was a lack of trust in her dad: she did not believe he would take care of it. She thought that he would lose her

ticket and that somehow she would be without it on the day she was to travel. She says, “I learned in that lesson that God gives you the ticket on the day you make the journey.”

In my own pilgrimage through heartache and disappointment, in the loss of loved ones or in personal failure, I have learned that that is indeed true: God gives us the ticket on the day we make the journey. Therefore, we must trust Him. On the day that I make the journey from time to eternity, I presume He is going to give me the ticket. If that is today, then the ticket is on its way. If it is not, then what is the use in lying awake wondering if it might be? My times—short or long, rich or poor, sad or happy—are in His hands.

In Zechariah 2:8, the Lord says of His people, “Whoever touches you touches the apple of his eye.” Psalm 55:22 instructs us, “Cast your cares on the LORD and he will sustain you; he will never let the righteous fall.”

In Isaiah 49:15, God asks, “Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you!”

We are not at the mercy of arbitrary, impersonal

My Times Are in Your Hands

forces; we are in the hands of our heavenly Father. He is the one who says to us at this moment, "Come to me, all you who are weary and are heavy laden. Come to me with all your burdens, fears, panics, anxieties, and heartaches. I want you to come to me and take my yoke upon you. Live underneath my jurisdiction, live underneath my hand, because my yoke is easy and my burden is light, and you will find rest for your souls." (See Matthew 11:28-30.)

Is this not a message for the twenty-first century?

Finally, in case you were wondering: I do not have all my questions answered. In my own life, I would have liked my mother to see me graduate, to have her know that I married that American girl that came over to our house. I would have liked her to see my children, to come to our church, to visit at Christmastime. There is not a year that passes that I do not think the same things. Where is my sanity? Where is my security? Here is the answer: Psalm 31:15, "My times are in your hands." My Father knows best.

¹ Ray Evans, “Que Será, Será” (1956).

² Walter A. Kaufmann, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*, 4th ed. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013), 97.

³ William F. Lloyd, “My Times Are in Thy Hand” (1824).

⁴ Paul Anka, “My Way” (1969).

⁵ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (1960; repr., Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 1.16.6.

⁶ Calvin, 1.17.11.

⁷ Calvin, 1.17.11.



About Alistair Begg

This booklet is made available from the teaching ministry of Truth For Life.

Alistair Begg, pastor, author, and Bible teacher, was born in Scotland and spent the first thirty years of life in the UK. Following graduation from theological college in London, he served two Scottish churches, one in Edinburgh and the other in Glasgow. Since 1983, when he arrived from Scotland with his wife, Susan, and their three children, he has been senior pastor at Parkside Church in Cleveland, Ohio.

My Times Are in Your Hands

A Study of God's Faithfulness in Affliction

All Christians face pain and disappointment at some time in their lives. In light of God's providence and love, how should we respond?


Psalm 31:15 reads, "My times are in your hands." These six words are a lifeline for those who know that, despite disasters and difficulties, they rest under the care of Almighty God. This certainty allows us to proceed forward through blinding storms with the full confidence that we will not be overcome.


In this booklet, Alistair Begg unpacks this transformative statement, identifying nine truths that believers can cling to in times of trouble. *My Times Are in Your Hands* will prove to be a useful tool in helping today's Christian understand what it really means to be cared for by the Lord.

TRUTHFORLIFE

P.O. Box 398000 Cleveland, Ohio 44139

phone 1 (888) 588-7884 email letters@truthforlife.org

 /truthforlife

 @truthforlife

truthforlife.org