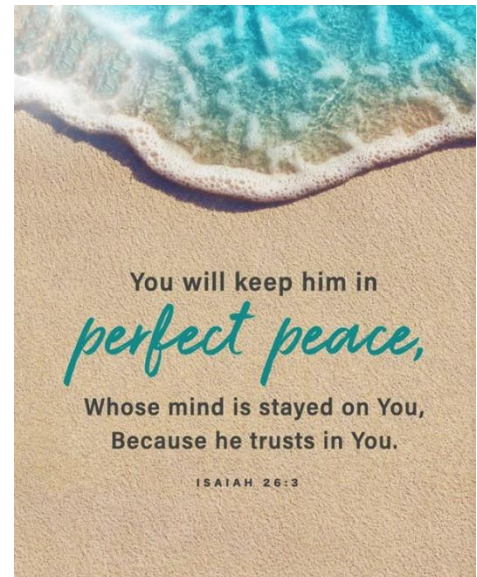


## Devotions

### Kim Harrison

Our mind is where our motivations, emotions, behaviors, and thinking comes from. These components together shape our lives and who we are. How we feel or believe about something will come through our choices and behavior because of the thoughts that are fueled by them. So, when life circumstances triggers anxious feelings or moments of anxiety, we can focus on this verse in Isaiah 26:3. Simply, when we focus our minds on God, we can have stable thinking, decision making, reactions, and ultimately peace. God is sufficient meaning he is able to manage through all He is with all who we are. We can trust in Him.



### Annette Crislip:

What is true in the light is true in dark "In Him was life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it." John 1:4-5 Jerry Stitser, in his powerful book A Grace Disguised describes a dream, a nightmare really, that he had during the first terrible year after a tragic car accident that killed his wife, his mother, and his 4-year-old daughter. "I dreamed of a setting sun. I was frantically running west, trying desperately to catch it to remain in its warmth and light. But I was losing the race. The sun was beating me to the horizon and was soon gone. I found myself in twilight. Exhausted, I stopped running and glanced with foreboding over my shoulder to the east. I saw a vast darkness closing in on me, and I was terrified of the darkness." A few days later he told the dream to a cousin who told him about a poem that points out though east and west seem farthest removed on a map, they eventually



come together on a globe. What appears as opposites in time come together, followed long enough. Later, his sister told him that the quickest way for anyone to reach the light of day is not run west, but to head east, plunging into the darkness until one comes to the sunrise. Stitser says that in that moment, he discovered he had the power to choose the direction his life would head, even if the only choice in the moment was to run from loss or face it the best he could, allowing it take him on journey rather than avoiding it. Some of you know of a really sad chapter of mine and Drew's story. On May 25, 2020, we were suddenly overcome with a reality we didn't want. The

officer said, “Your son has died.” The darkness set in, and we couldn’t deny it, couldn’t avoid it. We were crushed. If the way toward the light is to walk east, how does that journey begin? We had to decide how to think about what had happened. What were we walking towards? Right away, we decided to be honest and vulnerable about Ethan’s struggles, both with mental illness and addiction. We’d been stumbling in the darkness for a while. Back in 2017, as we were struggling to find a way through Ethan’s ever snowballing problems, we read another powerful book by Katherine and Jay Wolfe, *Suffer Strong*. With the book, we had received a little poster which we kept on our bedroom wall all those years- it said “What is true in the light, is true in the dark.” That truth has guided our thoughts and sustained us on this hardest part of our journey. We have known the goodness of Lord, have felt his presence, have rejoiced in our salvation. We have blessed his name “when the sun is shining down” on us, and we choose also to trust him “on the road marked with suffering.” The light really does shine in the darkness.

### **Christie Eastman:**

Scripture: 2 Kings 18: 20- 19:18

Devotion: Why is it that as people of faith, our emotions can be all over the place? Why can we go from a mountaintop experience of faith to the depths of despair, even to the point of wanting to die? Even to the extent of thinking about, attempting, or completing suicide? Why do we, or others, have these shifts where feelings about life go from hopeful to hopeless? For feelings about our own value to go from confident to worthless? Even when we are faithful believers in and followers of God?

There is not one reason, but many. Even the most skilled psychiatrists or psychotherapists, or the most scholarly Christian counselors are often not able to nail down the specific triggers that lead people to sliding down, or falling off, the slippery slope into suicidal despair. But there are real physiological changes that can occur rapidly, or over time, that bring the dark clouds of depression down, covering us in immense pain, and because of that pain, a desperation to know that there is a way out.

Elijah was the forerunner to John the Baptist, the greatest prophet of the Old Testament, and one of only two who appeared with Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration. Yet in a brief period of time went from a moment of great faith, power, and missional success, to isolating himself, seeing himself as no good, and wanting his life to end.

One day on Mount Carmel, Elijah had the bold trust in Yaweh to take on all the prophets of Baal to prove the LORD as the only true God. He went to great lengths to very skillfully set up a “competition” between God and Baal on mount Carmel to make it completely undeniable that God was all powerful and that their false god was absolutely powerless. When the 450 prophets of Baal tried everything they could do to get their god to provide fire for their alter to burn its sacrifice, Elijah’s one request of God resulted in fire that not only completely consumed Elijah’s sacrifice, but all its wood, the stones of the alter, and the overflow of water that he’d poured on his alter. After that display of God’s awesome power, all of the people worshiped the God of

Elijah! This event is one of the great moments of triumph God performed through a mere human in all of scripture. Elijah even felt so stoked that he raced Ahab's chariot on foot as they were leaving that event, and Elijah was the one in the lead!

But Elijah received some troubling news: Jezebel was seeking to kill him, and suddenly all of his thinking went negative. Fear overtook him. He ran for his life. Then, perhaps the worst decision of them all, he separated from his companion and went off alone. Once alone, he sat down, told God he'd had enough, and asked God to take his life. He then fell asleep, clearly hoping that he would never wake up. Why didn't he continue to trust the God who had just poured so much fire down from heaven that it completely burned up an altar and sacrifice soaked with water, and the huge pool of water the altar was sitting in? Why didn't he ride the high of knowing that God had chosen him to be the one to demonstrate his power in such a dramatic way, and had thus used him to turn the people from Baal to the only true God?

Why did Elijah shift his focus from the power and faithfulness of God to the evil intentions of one human being? Maybe he was susceptible to anxiety and depression; maybe he was genetically predisposed to those conditions. Or maybe he was so exhausted that he was depleted enough that his resilience was shot and his system didn't have the strength to combat the fearful news. Or maybe it was the terrible mistake of isolating himself, withdrawing even from his closest companion leaving him alone with his own fearful thinking, that spiraled him downward until all he could think of was escape through death. Scripture doesn't give us these answers. There is most likely a reason why God left the details out so that we wouldn't fall in the trap of applying one person's experience to all people's experience. But in His goodness, He lets us see that even Elijah, the great Elijah, was brought to a point so low that he wanted to die. If Elijah can get to such a dark place, surely there is none among us who is immune.

God sent Elijah His ministering angel. At first, the angel just told him to get up, to eat and drink. The prophet did, and then in his exhaustion (depression is exhausting) he fell back asleep. The angel woke him up again, encouraging him to continue to eat. This time, the angel acknowledged that the journey ahead would be long. This care was enough to get Elijah to the next thing he needed. You and I can be someone's ministering angel. Sometimes it is truly as simple as coming alongside them in their despair, providing our presence and a little sustenance, and an acknowledgement that we understand that their journey is long, and that they are not alone.

Prayer:

Loving and Compassionate God, may we trust you even in our darkest times. May we take care to keep our eyes on you, that the terrors of this world and of our own weakness do not overcome us. And Lord, when we encounter someone during a time of hopelessness, may we have the courage to come alongside them in love and humility, offering the little we have to give, and showing them that we are all in this human condition together. And together we can make it through,

Amen

## Jason Robbins

Like a club or a sword or a sharp arrow is one who gives false testimony against a neighbor. Like a broken tooth or a lame foot is reliance on the unfaithful in a time of trouble. Like one who takes away a garment on a cold day, or like vinegar poured on a wound, is one who sings songs to a heavy heart. -Proverbs 25:18-20 (NIV)

One Tuesday afternoon, as I was making my rounds as an ICU chaplain, I sat behind the nurses' station typing notes from a recent visit when I noticed an odd scene playing out right in front of me. A well-meaning pastor was visiting with a patient immediately in front of the place where I was sitting and was talking to her with such a raised voice that the whole floor could hear him. He quoted many "words of comfort" including several passages of scripture and trait sayings like "God never puts more on you than you can bare," and "All you really need to do to be healed is believe..." I noticed that several times in the conversation, this elderly lady was trying to speak to him, but to no avail. Finally, she covered her mouth with both hands, turned red, and threw up all over the pastor.

The technicians and nurses ran into the room to clean her and the visiting minister. After they finished with her, she looked him in the eye and said, "I'm very sorry pastor, but really... you just wouldn't listen. You were kind of asking for it."

We live in a fallen world where tragedy, illness, and pain wait to strike like a poisonous snake. When trauma impacts our lives, we often need a listening ear more than a litany of trite platitudes or prepared arguments. We need someone who can hear us and guide us through the pain the way "Jesus wept" (Jn. 11:35) with the sisters of Lazarus. We need an empathetic soul to wait with us and calmly stand alongside us to draw out the venom so that the Holy Spirit may restore our soul. We need a gentle, tangible reminder that God, is indeed, with us.

Prayer:

Our all wise and loving Heavenly Father,

Cast us in the image of your Son, who in the darkness brought healing to those who suffered and found their comfort in Him. May we be the listening ear that draws the poison from the wounds of this world. May we be the reassuring presence that You never leave the side of your children. May we be the Hands and Feet of Your Son, who enter into this suffering world bringing the light of Hope and the certain knowledge of Your Love.

In the Most Holy Name of Christ we pray,  
Amen.