

121 I lift up my eyes to the hills. From where does my help come? ² My help comes from the LORD, who made heaven and earth.
³ He will not let your foot be moved; he who keeps you will not slumber. ⁴ Behold, he who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.
⁵ The LORD is your keeper; the LORD is your shade on your right hand. ⁶ The sun shall not strike you by day, nor the moon by night.
⁷ The LORD will keep you from all evil; he will keep your life. ⁸ The LORD will keep your going out and your coming in from this time forth and forevermore.

125 Those who trust in the LORD are like Mount Zion, which cannot be moved, but abides forever. ² As the mountains surround Jerusalem, so the LORD surrounds his people, from this time forth and forevermore.
³ For the scepter of wickedness shall not rest on the land allotted to the righteous, lest the righteous stretch out their hands to do wrong.
⁴ Do good, O LORD, to those who are good, and to those who are upright in their hearts! ⁵ But those who turn aside to their crooked ways the LORD will lead away with evildoers! Peace be upon Israel!

Who Moved My Cheese? is an allegorical book, about two mice, who put on their running shoes each morning and go running out into the maze where they live. They come to the cheese holding area, where they “graze” all day until time to return home at night. They are content with their life, and it is good. They are so content with their life that they begin to take off their running shoes. They are so content with their life that they do not pay attention enough to realize that the supply of cheese is dwindling. They are so content with their life that they can’t picture life being any different.

Then one day, without warning in their complacent lifestyle, the cheese runs out. That’s hard for them to believe. Day after day they return to the cheese cache, but the result is still the same – NO CHEESE! Finally, one of the mice decides to strike out into the maze once more to look for more cheese. It takes him quite a long time, before he finds a new storehouse of cheese, but, almost at the point of starvation, he does. He returns once to find his friend to try to coax him to come with him to search for new cheese, but with no luck. His friend insists on staying in the empty cheese house to wait for something -- he knows not what -- to save him.

Although the parable book does not say so, we are left with the clear impression that the lethargic mouse eventually dies, while the mouse which strikes out to find something new lives.

The book has been a bestseller. Its author, Dr. Spencer Johnson, **extols the virtues**

- **of change,**

- of being ready for change,
- of being willing to adapt to change in life, and
- of not being afraid to make changes in life.

I can see how it could, and has, had a powerful effect on people's lives – particularly people who have gotten themselves into deep and harmful ruts in life.

Then I read Psalm 125, which extols the virtue of holding fast. The theme carried forward in the psalm is: **"If it had not been the Lord who was on our side..." we'd have been toast.**

Some of us may be a bit skeptical of the idea that God has a "hands on" approach to humanity and to life. But the writer of this psalm had no such qualms. **The psalmist clearly believes that if our eyes are open to see the action of God in our lives, we will realize that it's true: God doesn't let us down. Our task is to stand firm, trust in the LORD.**

Indeed, if we don't believe that God gets involved in human life, that pretty much rules out the whole notion of God's work through Jesus or of prayer.

I began to see a divergence of primary ideas between the **STAND FIRM, WAIT UPON THE LORD message of Psalm 125**, and the **PUT ON YOUR RUNNING SHOES AND MOVE ON, WHENEVER YOUR CHEESE IS MOVED** of the **post-modern secular humanist parable** of Spencer Johnson.

- Which is the thing for us Christians to do?
- When calamity hits us, what should we do?

In the October 10 entry of the 2006 *Upper Room Disciplines*, a 90 year old woman, whose house was taken for the interstate, told of her situation: **Dark times will come, but God will see you through. I wonder why God has allowed this to happen to me. At times I FEEL God has forsaken me, but it's ONLY a FEELING and not a FACT. I have trusted God since my childhood, and I will trust God now.**

Feelings are important for many things – essential and valuable. **But** they tell me next to nothing about God nor of my own relation to God. **My security comes from Who God is, not how I feel.** Can you repeat that, please?
My security comes from Who God is, not how I feel.

¿So the Bible says that **Who Moved My Cheese** is wrong?

Don't jump to conclusions. Stacked up against the notion of Mt. Zion in Psalm 125, which the Psalmist says, "Cannot be moved, but abides forever" are other Biblical images:

- **Abraham was called by God to "go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you" – a very new thing.** (Genesis 12:1)
- **Didn't the prophets say that God is doing a new thing?** (Isaiah 42:9; 43:19; 48:6; Jeremiah 31:22, 33-34)
- **Didn't Jesus say you "can't put new wine into old wineskins"?** (Matthew 9:17)
- **Judaism changed (for some) into the more inclusive Christianity.**
- **Saul changed into Paul.**

I was leading a VIM team in Russia – leading from the rear – looking over my flock as they walked along. My eyes fell upon a sight in the waning sunlight of the Russian day in Sychee: a carpenter-farmer, who had accompanied me on just about all my work teams, who had this year brought his wife for the very first time.

There they were -- walking along, this couple in their 70's, who had been through a lot of hard times, I knew from previous conversations over the years with him. There they were -- walking along, simply holding hands and bending over every now and again to look at some different kind of flower. There they were -- simply holding hands, occasionally laughing like school children, and showing all the world who would pay

attention, that they had hung together, had not cut and run when times were tough, and now were enjoying the simple goodness of life. They knew what was important and eternal; they knew when to stand fast.

I turned to **Bishop Ives** and pointed. He nodded and said, “**Yes, it is holy.**”

It’s not always easy to know **when to run after new cheese** and **when to stand firm.**

Two Things I DO Know: (1) – **you can’t go just with feelings.** (2): **we need to hold onto the eternal values – hold on to the things that last.**

Eugene Peterson once remarked that **all of the water in the ocean will not sink a boat unless it gets inside the boat.** Likewise, **all the trouble in the world will not ultimately harm us unless it gets inside us.**

As important as feelings are for many things in life – no good life is lived by logic alone, without feelings – **feelings REVEAL NEXT TO NOTHING about the nature of our relationship with God.** Some people think that the **Holy Spirit only** works when there is a tear in the eye or a knot in the throat. But they are wrong.

God is like the mountains. Regardless of how we feel, God is always with us. God always wants the best for us. It’s just not always easy for us to see OR FEEL it in the moment.

I had lunch with a person from the Church this week, who told me about a period of unemployment in his life. He said that learned so much from that time; it was SUCH a learning laboratory. After a pause, he said: **Of course that’s how I feel about it now. I didn’t much think it was good while I was going through it.**

The **apostle Paul**, I believe, had **the steadfast love of God** in mind, when he wrote the words: **“for we walk by faith, not by sight.”** (2 Corinthians 5:7)

The way to walk by faith and not by sight is to **REMEMBER INTO THE FUTURE.**

I can almost never see very well into the future. My crystal ball is just so foggy, I’m learning to not try to use it at all. **BUT** I do **REMEMBER** that whenever I have been in a difficult place, my looking back upon it (*i.e.* my **“rear view vision”**) has shown me that **God really was in that moment** with me; that **God really did uphold me**; that **God**

really did work for good, when I loved the Lord and allowed myself to be called according to God's purpose.

So while I can't see into my future now – **my memory tells me** that I can trust God. My *momentary feelings* may be *fearful*, but **my memory tells me that God can be counted on**. I just have to lean on that memory; I just have to hold onto God – even WHEN IT FEELS LIKE GOD IS ABSENT.

As I stood in the midst of the ruins of ancient Ephesus, I looked about all me and tried to imagine what it was like with Paul when he came there to establish a church. So much had changed. But then I suddenly got this notion: I lifted my eyes unto the hills surrounding me. I realized that they had not changed. They had been there back then, as now, and as they will be into the future.

And I wondered if Paul might have also stood in that same exact spot, in the midst of all his uncertainty and lifted his eyes unto the hills and had the VERY same thought – GOD WAS WITH HIM, GOD WAS IN CHARGE & HE WAS IN GOD'S HANDS.

It's a *good thing for us to live here in this valley*, at least in this one regard. Whenever things get rough; whenever we get fearful of what lies ahead; even whenever it FEELS like God is not present – we can almost always be in a place *where we can lift up our eyes unto the hills and remember from whence our help comes*.

✦ **God is with us.**

✦ **God loves us.**

✦ **God's Son Jesus told us that He will never desert nor leave us.**

✦ **Hold on to the eternal.**

✦ **Trust in God's reliability.**

✦ **Remember into the future.**

✦ **All things really do work together for good for those who love God and are called according to God's purpose.**

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. AMEN.