

Psalm 94:17-19 *“Unless the LORD had been my help, My soul would soon have settled in silence. ¹⁸ If I say, “My foot slips,” Your mercy, O LORD, will hold me up. ¹⁹ In the multitude of my anxieties within me, Your comforts delight my soul.”*

**The Lord’s Loving Support System:
For Bill and For You**

Just on the surface, this sure seems like a fitting text for the funeral sermon for Bill Hartmann. *“If I say, ‘My foot slips,’”* the Psalmist writes. Certainly, Bill saw his fair share of foot slippage over the past couple of years. For a while, it seemed like every time I talked to Liz, Bill had taken another fall. *“In the multitude of my anxieties within me,”* another fitting phrase for Bill. We all know first-hand that he was a man with many anxieties and concerns constantly on his mind. The last few years Bill voiced to me some of those concerns, oftentimes worrying about things that weren’t even there.

I thank the Lord, that in the midst of all this he equipped Bill with a wonderful support system in his final days and years. He ended up using a walker for support, which curbed, I think, much of the foot-slippage. He had a faithful wife who stayed by his side most hours of the day to keep him safe, to care for him. God blessed him with children who would frequently come to help mom and dad, even from Wisconsin, to be that much-needed support. Even grandchildren played their part as Bill’s support system near the end when Grandma and Grandpa needed them the most.

But the truth is, this Psalm is fitting not just as a description of Bill’s final days, but of his entire life. Certainly, Bill was a man with many struggles, and as great as some of them were, none were greater than his struggle with sin—the same which could be said of any of us. In fact, earlier in this Psalm, the Psalmist wrote, *“He who planted the ear, does he not hear? He who formed the eye, does he not see?”* (Ps. 94:9) Do you think the God who gave us the ability to see and hear would Himself be able to see and hear? Yes, very plainly. In fact, He can see right into our hearts to understand the attitudes which we so cleverly hide. He can hear the thoughts in our heads, many of which we’d never want to give voice to. As the Psalmist goes on, *“He who teaches man knowledge —the LORD—knows the thoughts of man, that they are but a breath.”* (Ps. 94:11)

These are some terrifying thoughts, or at least they ought to be for sinners like us and like Bill. Bill’s final days should have been the scariest of his life, with the thought that he was about to stand before the God who can see and hear and who promises to judge. And yet, from my visits, I don’t gather that Bill was scared at all. If he had been scared, why was it that—even after he was no longer eating any food or drinking any water and absent the strength to stand anymore on his own—why then was he singing hymns with all of his strength together with the rest of us?

No, there was no fear at all in those final days. I know that, Liz, you said that in these last couple months, your evening prayer would be that simple children’s prayer which we all know and love. *“Now I lay me down to sleep, I pray the Lord my soul to keep. If I should die*

before I wake, I pray the Lord my soul to take." We say that at home most nights with our children, and when I think about that phrase in relation to my kids, *"If I should die before I wake..."* honestly, I don't want that to happen to them. Not while I'm still around anyways, but that's because of my weakness. But when my 3-year-olds pray it, it's with the simple, child-like confidence that the Lord will take care of it. And that's the same child-like confidence that 71-year-old Bill Hartmann had in his final days.

You see he had learned something from early childhood, a truth which he held onto until the end. It's that he had a support system which was even better than a loving family. He had the support of a loving Lord. As our text says, ***"Unless the LORD had been my help, My soul would soon have settled in silence."*** The Lord was the support system that Bill needed his whole life, which kept him from seeing death for 71-and-a-half years and still keeps his soul from seeing death.

Consider this encouragement from the Apostle Paul: ***"If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died-- more than that, who was raised-- who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? . . . No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.*** (Rom. 8:31ff)

It's a beautiful reminder as we enter into Holy Week. Jesus' ministry lead Him into this week, the beginning of which saw Him ride into Jerusalem as King, which we celebrated today. During that week He also instituted the Lord's Supper as a meal of comfort and forgiveness for us. He then prayed in the Garden that His Father's will would be done. He was then betrayed, arrested, tried, mocked, scourged, beaten, and crucified. His body was buried, but He didn't stop there. He then rose, proving once and for all that death has no power over God. But He didn't stop there. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of God. But He didn't stop there! No, even now, He ***"is at the right hand of God, [interceding] for us,"*** Paul writes.

It's because of that, that Bill could maintain his child-like confidence through to his dying day. It's because of that, that Bill had no need to be afraid lying on his deathbed. For the Lord's Loving Support System didn't end the day he took his final breath like our support did. The Lord's Support continues still. The Lord's Support continues to testify on Bill's behalf, ***"The blood of Jesus Christ, [God's] Son, cleanses [him] from all sin."*** (1 Jn. 1:7) The Lord's Support is that which, as we read responsively from Psalm 25, does not remember Bill's sins, but instead remembers Him according to His steadfast love. The Lord's Support continues to promise to Bill, that He will not leave his body in the grave, but that it will be raised incorruptible. It will be without any of the weakness of body or mind with which he was afflicted in this life. ***"There shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain."*** (Rev. 21:4) That's all ancient history for Bill.

So I think we can agree, Bill has the best Support System of all, which caught him with gracious forgiveness whenever he slipped, which continued to comfort him even when all other earthly comforts faded. But this isn't just the Lord's Loving Support System *for Bill*, this is each of yours as well.

Losing a husband of 51 years, losing a father, losing a grandfather—none of that is easy. And there will be days coming when your feet slip, when your minds are filled with anxiety as you wrestle with the new normal. But in those days, remember that the Lord is your never-failing Support System. In those days, you can declare with the Psalmist, ***"If I say, 'My foot slips,' Your mercy, O LORD, will hold me up. In the multitude of my anxieties within me, Your comforts delight my soul."***

In His Support for you, God invites you in the coming days with this encouragement, ***"Cast your anxieties on Him, because He cares for you."*** (1 Pet. 5:7) He exhorts you in the Psalms, ***"Cast your burden upon the LORD, and He will sustain you; He will never allow the righteous to be shaken."*** (Ps. 55:22) The truth is, you have nothing to be anxious about, not with regard to our dearly departed, not with regard to your own lives. For as Paul writes, ***"I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope. For (as) we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus."*** (1 Thess. 4:13-14)

Just as the Lord granted Bill a peaceful departure from this life, in Christ Jesus He will also grant us a joyful reunion. As Jesus declares, ***"In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also."*** (Jn. 14:2-3) I know when we memorize that in the New King James Version in confirmation, we memorize it, ***"In my Father's house are many mansions."*** But the real image being described is not that we each get our own mansion in the skies, but that in God's house, there will be room for each of us. No longer will you have to go across the driveway to stay at the neighbor's house since there isn't enough room in the one.

No, there will come a day, when God calls each of you to Himself, and you will be reunited in one and with one Lord. You will stand as one of that host arrayed in white, sins washed away in the blood of the Lamb, waving palm branches and singing ***"Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!"*** . . . ***Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever!"*** His Support continues on for Bill, and it continues on for You. He will never leave you nor forsake you. (cf. Heb 13:5) Thanks be to God. Amen.

"And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."
(Philippians 4:7) Amen.

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