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The Shadow of the Almighty

We are with God – God is with us!

In 1958 Elizabeth Elliot - widow of one of the five missionaries killed trying to reach a previously un-contacted people group in Ecuador - published the life-and-death story of her husband, Jim Elliot. As the son of missionary parents in remote reaches of the Congo, we heard the news of their martyrdom over the crackling radio. It made a major impression on my life, realized more fully after three decades of pastoral ministry in the U.S., when with my wife Ruth Hidalgo, I moved to Peru to work full-time with indigenous peoples in the Amazon basin of Peru. Elizabeth Elliot titled her husband's biography with those words from Psalm 91: "the shadow of the Almighty".

"He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High
will rest in the shadow of the Almighty.
I will say of the LORD, 'He is my refuge and my fortress,
my God, in whom I trust' ."
Psalm 91:1-2 (NIV)

Psalm 91 is a deeply personal and pastoral teaching, using lessons learned from the history of Israel, the people of God. It is set between prayer and praise: Psalm 90 ends with a prayer: "May the favor of the Lord our God rest upon us"(90:7 – 91:1), and the call to praise in Psalm 92: "It is good to praise the LORD, and make music to your name, O Most High" (91:1,9 – 92:1). The Psalm is replete with references to God's Names: Most High - Almighty - LORD. The psalmist uses important metaphors from Israel's history to describe God (in the English text): refuge - fortress - mother bird (an eagle?) - shield - rampart - our dwelling - rescuer - protector - deliverer - savior.

Where Psalm 90 locates us in the midst of our short-lived stories, often filled with disobedience, secret sins, trouble and sorrow, Psalm 91 reminds us of God's protection as we live our lives secure in his dwelling place. In our lives we are confronted with attack, with disease (lit: *epidemics*), conflict, disaster, spiritual opposition. God sends his angels to guard us, even against "the great lion and the serpent". God himself rescues and protects those who acknowledge him.

Finally, while the psalmist opens with our confession: "I will say of the Lord, 'He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust'," it closes with God's speech. Because we love him (v. 14a) - a deeply affective relationship, because we acknowledge him (v. 14b) - a powerfully

public relationship, God responds to us personally: “I will protect him - I will answer him - I will be with him - I will deliver him and honor him - I will satisfy him and show him my salvation” (vv. 14-18).

We live often difficult and dangerous lives, but, as John Wesley spoke on his deathbed: “Best of all, God is with us.”