

No Matter What

God is rich in mercy, bringing healing and wholeness to our lives. The psalmist recalls God's steadfast love in bringing the people of Israel back from exile – God acted to save. As Christians, we also know God's saving action through Jesus the Christ. We turn to God in faith and praise. God loves and cares for us, no matter what!

Focus Scripture: Psalm 107:1–3, 17–22

Picture the scene – pilgrims have come from the four corners of the earth to the Jerusalem temple to give thanks to God for blessings received. The choir begins, "O give thanks to the LORD, who is good" and the pilgrims joyfully respond, "Whose steadfast love endures forever" (NRSV Inclusive Language Version).

Perhaps the temple officials sort the worshippers into groups, according to the intention of their thanks-offering. Verses 4–16 mention travellers who were rescued from the desert, saved from hunger and thirst, and set free from prison.

The focus verses speak of those who are ill, reporting that some are sick because of their "sinful ways." Today we understand more about the causes of disease, and recognize the danger of regarding illness as judgment for things one has done wrong. Some illness may have its origins in things a person does or neglects to do. The Greek word for sin means "missing the mark." When we sin, we are off course and need to be restored to our true centre. However, other illness comes as undeserved suffering. The psalmist describes the despair a person might feel when ill – no matter what the cause of the distress – and trusts that God restores those who are ill. God is able to transform lives into ones of wholeness.

These pilgrims called to God in their trouble, and God saved them. Now they have come to the temple to give thanks. Perhaps each group steps forward as the choir sings of their situation, urging them to thank God and make a thanksgiving offering. The people rejoice in God's steadfast love and sing songs of praise.

This psalm was probably compiled after the exile ended (536 BCE), to give thanks to God for deliverance from all the hardships of that experience. God had acted faithfully

throughout Israel's history to deliver and restore, and gathered the people in from the whole earth.

No one is excluded. God shows "steadfast love," from the Hebrew *hesed*, a word that implies a kinship relationship. Today, we join the psalmist in rejoicing that we are God's people, living in close relationship with God, who creates and sustains, leads and forgives.

Numbers 21:4–9 tells one of the stories of hardship from Israel's history. After their escape from Egypt, the Hebrew people wandered in the wilderness; some became impatient and complained. God sent fiery serpents among them, a symbol of purification. Healing comes when Moses places a bronze serpent on a pole. Those who are bitten look on the bronze serpent and live. God does not take the serpents away, but, in mercy, restores wholeness of life to those who respond in faith.

John 3:14–21 picks up the image of the bronze serpent. Just as the bronze serpent brought restoration of life to those who had been bitten in the wilderness, so belief in Jesus Christ brings new life to us. Through Jesus, we can know the brilliance of God's healing love and follow in God's paths.

Ephesians 2:1–10 continues the theme of the richness of God's mercy. We are saved by grace through faith. Our response is living lives that issue in action, lives of good works for the neighbour.

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God's desire is to bring mercy and healing to us, no matter what. Whatever our distress, we know that God responds in steadfast love. Where do you see signs of God's merciful actions? How can you embody the healing message of God's steadfast love? How do you and your church sing songs of thankfulness and joy today?

March 22, 2009

Focus Scripture
Psalm 107:1–3,
17–22

Additional Scriptures
Numbers 21:4–9
Ephesians 2:1–10
John 3:14–21

Loving God,
you guide the
wanderer, heal
the sick, free the
captive, nourish
the hungry. You
love and care for
us. Accept our
response of praise
and thanksgiving,
and gather us from
every place into
the community of
your mercy and
grace.
Amen.

If you have Internet access, visit www.spiritseasons.com to access Spirit Sightings for connections between current events and the focus passage.

