



## THE EVERLASTING ARMS OF GOD

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The prophet Isaiah says this about God.

**He tends his flock like a shepherd:  
He gathers the lambs in his arms  
and carries them close to his heart;  
He gently leads those that have young.** (40:11 niv)

Anthony Showalter was leading a singing school in an Alabama church in 1887. When he returned to his boardinghouse room one night, two letters awaited him. Both were from former students, and both men told of the recent loss of their wives. He wrote back, seeking to comfort the young men in the midst of their grief.

But what to write? When he came to the end of each letter, he wanted to include a bible verse. He picked Deuteronomy 33:27, **“The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms ....”**

He pondered the words of that verse as he penned them into the letters, and the lyrics of the chorus of *Leaning on the Everlasting Arms* came to his mind. He wrote to his friend, Elisha Hoffman, explaining that he had a chorus, but no verses. Mr. Hoffman wrote back with the rest of the words of this famous hymn.

Sam Duncan, a student and nephew of Mr. Showalter, was given the class assignment to write the tune for this poem. The piece was published under his uncle's name in the book *Glad Evangel for Revival, Camp and Evangelistic Meeting Hymnal*.

The first verse and refrain give us a sense of how one can lean into God's care and love.

What a fellowship, what a joy divine,  
leaning on the everlasting arms;  
what a blessedness, what a peace is mine,  
leaning on the everlasting arms.

*Refrain*

*Leaning, leaning, safe and secure from all alarms;  
leaning, leaning, leaning on the everlasting arms.*

As people of the Christian faith, there have been times in our journey that we have gone through rough times and good times; fun times and sad times; smooth times and struggling times. There are opportunities to get through some tough situations with the prayers and support of others. Like the people around you.

Sometimes a person remains alone within their internal struggles without anyone knowing. When we find that one, we seek to help, support and pray for them. It is hard sometimes because some folks just don't want anyone to know. Yes, loneliness is real and strikes at the very heart of a person's life. Yet, God knows everything that is going on in our lives. Everything! God knows!

There are times when a person is stuck in a descending spiral of emotional struggles that cause a person to lose themselves within oneself. The reaching out for support in the medical community can assure a person of ongoing care. Even in that care community, one can find others who will be with them through it all and give them companionship. Over it all, God provides care and support for any of us who struggle with depression, psychological challenges, health concerns and even loneliness. God is there.

Within this congregation, there are many ministries of caring, presence, prayer partners, grief support, flowers and cards sent as well as stephen ministry, prayer shawl ministry, faith & health opportunities, visiting with others and calls to members. There are also times for worship and communion at La Joya, transporting of members and serving Communion to homebound individuals. The many aspects of caring and support in this church are linked with pastors in the overall member care of God's children. So the actions and ministry we live out here sustains the surrounding arms of the Living God. So that we know that God is holding us in special ways.

The song of praise in Psalms chapter 145 verses 8 thru 14 helps us to acknowledge a God who is always undergirding us. There is a heartfelt sense of God's everlasting arms supporting the Psalmist, King David, and us.

The passage shows us the compassion of the Creator God that David experienced. **<sup>8</sup>The LORD is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.** God is ever disposed to show favor and full compassion whenever misery is present. He is slow to anger and full of great mercy and steadfast love. In other words, God shows us the fullness of his goodness and divine nature.

David writes, **<sup>9</sup>The LORD is good to all, and his compassion is over all that he has made.** This marvelous compassion is for all of his children. When we claim to be God's children, we affirm the existence of a gracious and loving God in our lives. We are thankful.

David sings, **<sup>10</sup>All your works shall give thanks to you, O LORD, and all your faithful shall bless you.** Like David, the faithful acknowledge with gratitude that the Father Creator is good to all people. The word faithful, in some versions of the bible means "saints", is for the compassionate ones who experience mercy from God.

David professes, **<sup>11</sup>They shall speak of the glory of your Kingdom, and tell of your power, <sup>12</sup>to make known to all people your mighty deeds, and the**

**glorious splendor of your Kingdom.** The faithful are to speak of God's glory and mercy to all people. So it is our calling to advocate for God's glorious kingdom by introducing his wonder, splendor and power to others. So they can feel the love of God.

David continues, <sup>13</sup>**Your Kingdom is an everlasting Kingdom, and your dominion endures throughout all generations. The LORD is faithful in all his words, and gracious in all his deeds.** <sup>14</sup>**The LORD upholds all who are falling, and raises up all who are bowed down.** The promises of God live throughout every generation while always holding up those who are weak and who are experiencing misery or for whatever reason or need a helping hand. One's weakness can be strengthened by a gracious and loving God. We all need to be loved. We all desire to be close to God.

The story is told of one of God's faithful missionaries named, Allen Gardiner, who experienced many physical difficulties and hardships throughout his service to the savior. Despite his troubles, he said, "While God gives me strength, failure will not daunt me."

In 1851, at the age of 57, he died of disease and starvation while serving on Piton Island at the southern tip of South America. When his body was found, his diary lay nearby. It bore the record of hunger, thirst, wounds, and loneliness. The last entry in his little book showed the struggle of his shaking hand as he tried to write legibly. It read, "I am overwhelmed with a sense of the goodness of God."

Indeed, God's presence holds up the faithful Christian who acknowledges him as goodness, love and mercy. The everlasting arms of God are always there. We just need to remember that God is the one who extends love to each of us as well as to all people. We are the recipients of God's love.

We all believe that Jesus was sent to love us and not condemn us. He came to embody love throughout his ministry to all who came to him. He always made it a point to show people the way to God's kingdom through unconditional love and acceptance.

Our Savior showed us that he was and is present with all people who want to know him. Through him, we see how God works and God cares. The wisdom of God is made known to those who are infants or simple people and not only to the "religious leaders who think themselves wise and the intelligent." [Cambridge Annotated Study Bible without Apocrypha.]

It says in the Gospel of Matthew chapter 11 verses 25 thru 30. <sup>25</sup>**At that time Jesus said, "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants; <sup>26</sup>yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. <sup>27</sup>All things have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.**

Jesus teaches that God is the only one who is the Eternal and Sovereign One who dispenses all things. In this belief, God gives us the caring and loving Jesus for us to choose and emulate.

My dear sisters and brothers, Christ openly invites all who choose to accept him and follow him. When we take upon ourselves the goodness of God's love and grace, the invitation from the Savior is complete. Jesus said, <sup>28</sup>**"Come to me, all**

**you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.**

**<sup>29</sup>Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. <sup>30</sup>For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”**

As disciples of Christ we are given the choice to follow him and embrace his loving care. When we do, we are able to embrace others with that love and let them through us that is taking care of that person.

Friends, our Savior calls us to seek him in everyday life no matter the situation. He is Immanuel, God with us, and will never leave us alone when we experience unconditional love. He is with us and always will be.

God is always holding us in his everlasting arms as we go through the many opportunities and challenges of discipleship, life and health. Yet, we can affirm that God continually embraces us as we move through faith and life.

So we are also reminded in the last verse of *Leaning on the Everlasting Arms* how our lives are guided by an ever present God who surrounds us and holds us near with care and love.

What have I to dread, what have I to fear,  
Leaning on the everlasting arms;  
I have blessed peace with my Lord so near,  
Leaning on the everlasting arms.

Let us pray: thank you, O God, for loving us and caring for us as we go through different types of struggles everyday. It is wonderful to know that you love us unconditionally and you accept us as we are. May our love resonate in life as we too extend grace and care to others. In Jesus name we pray. Amen.

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#### Scriptural Support

Psalm 145:8-14 (NRSV)

<sup>8</sup>The LORD is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.

<sup>9</sup>The LORD is good to all, and his compassion is over all that he has made.

<sup>10</sup>All your works shall give thanks to you, O LORD, and all your faithful shall bless you.

<sup>11</sup>They shall speak of the glory of your kingdom, and tell of your power,

<sup>12</sup>to make known to all people your mighty deeds, and the glorious splendor of your kingdom.

<sup>13</sup>Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and your dominion endures throughout all generations. The LORD is faithful in all his words, and gracious in all his deeds.

<sup>14</sup>The LORD upholds all who are falling, and raises up all who are bowed down.

Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30 (NRSV)

<sup>16</sup>“But to what will I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to one another, <sup>17</sup>‘We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we wailed, and you did not mourn.’ <sup>18</sup>For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, ‘He has a demon’; <sup>19</sup>the Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, ‘Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!’ Yet wisdom is vindicated by her deeds.”

<sup>25</sup>At that time Jesus said, "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants; <sup>26</sup>yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. <sup>27</sup>All things have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. <sup>28</sup>"Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. <sup>29</sup>Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. <sup>30</sup>For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

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**Hymn: Leaning on the Everlasting Arms of God.**

What a fellowship, what a joy divine,  
Leaning on the everlasting arms;  
What a blessedness, what a peace is mine,  
Leaning on the everlasting arms.

*Refrain*

*Leaning, leaning, safe and secure from all alarms;  
Leaning, leaning, leaning on the everlasting arms.*

O how sweet to walk in this pilgrim way,  
Leaning on the everlasting arms;  
O how bright the path grows from day to day,  
Leaning on the everlasting arms.

*Refrain*

What have I to dread, what have I to fear,  
Leaning on the everlasting arms;  
I have blessed peace with my Lord so near,  
Leaning on the everlasting arms.

*Refrain*