SCRIPTURE:
Shout for joy, you heavens; rejoice, you earth; burst into song, you mountains! For the Lord comforts his people and will have compassion on his afflicted ones (Isa. 49:13, NIV).

I know that my redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand on the earth (Job 19:25, NIV).

MEDITATION:
There is someone I know, whom I am very close with, who suffers from a mental illness. It impacts the way they think and feel about themselves and others, and affects their ability to function in everyday life. The highs and deep lows of their emotional roller coaster, as they struggle with internal and external situations, is very difficult to watch, especially knowing there is nothing I can do to help. Over the years I have often wondered, where is God? Why won't he do anything? Does he even care? In these moments, I am reminded of Job's cry to God, "[Oh God,] the waters wear away the stones; the torrents wash away the soil of the earth; so you destroy the hope of man. You prevail forever against him, and he passes, you change the countenance, and send him away" (Job 14:19-20, ESV). Job too felt hopelessness, but he was not ashamed to express it to God.

The Bible does not shy away from hopelessness. When the soldiers took Jesus away at the Mount of Olives, all of his disciples scattered, except for three: Peter is named and the other two are assumed to be John and Mark. They followed the soldiers to see where they would take Jesus. Peter and John went together, while Mark appeared to go on his own. At the Sanhedrin, Peter denied he knew Jesus three times. When the soldiers tried to stop Mark, he ran away naked. Judas, in his despair, hung himself, and the other disciples hid. Their hopes were dashed. The new kingdom with Jesus as king appeared to be gone. Jesus was condemned and died. Jerusalem was on alert looking for Jesus's followers.

The disciples expected so much. They had seen so many incredible miracles and so many lives changed. But reality was cruel. Where was God? Their faith in God must have been shaken. What should they do now? Where could they go? As a modern-day reader, looking back on these events, the answer is obvious, "Of course, God cares. Jesus came back to life and hope was restored." But would I truly believe this if I were in the disciples' shoes?

In seasons of hopelessness, I reflect on these words, "For the Lord comforts his people and will have compassion on his afflicted ones" (Isa. 49:13b NIV). God is not afraid of our hopeless moments. He cares about us, in our joy, anger, and distress. In the darkest of times, unexpectedly, a light can shine that changes everything.

The person I mentioned at the beginning, and the ones who love them, are still where Job was long ago, looking to God in our hopelessness. But I am reminded that Job's story ended with restoration, just how the disciples' hope was restored by Jesus's resurrection. The future is never certain, God's purposes are not always clear, but I know I can put my trust and hope in this, "my redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand on the ear" (Job 19:25, NIV).

REFLECTION:
- Do you know someone with a mental health issue? Go to them. Even in their darkest times when you have nothing to give, just be with them. Show them by your actions that they are not alone. When they resurface, they will be thankful for your patience.
- Are you going through a hard time? Your redeemer lives! Find someone to talk to, someone who is safe and with whom you can open-up.
To have a good life, does it have to result in joy, wealth, all your desires met? In Luke 22:42 NIV, Jesus prayed, "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done." The cup was not taken away. John the Baptist was beheaded, but do we think of him as a failure?

- Remember the phrase, count your blessings. Read Isaiah 49:13 and journal about events in your life that you consider were answered by God's faithfulness to you.
- Reflect about God's care.
- Show someone love.

PRAYER:
Father in heaven, thank you for the life of Jesus. You came to Earth to show us the Father. We can know the character of God by observing the ways you behaved when you were on the earth. Teach us to be compassionate with others. This world is filled with pain and anger. You call us to be the ambassadors of peace. Help us show patience to our hurting brothers and sisters, and to those not in the family of Christ. You showed your love to a world that did not love you, help us show love to this world, and to those nearby to us. Forgive us of our shortcomings. Thank you for your patience. Please help those who are struggling now and bring healing. Bring us all to you. In Jesus's name. Amen.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:
Joseph P. Vybihal teaches at McGill University in the School of Computer Science. He co-chairs the Undergraduate Committee in Computer Science and chairs the EDI Sub-committee of Computer Science. His research interests are in intelligent software systems, which mixes software engineering with artificial intelligence. He is currently researching multi-agent autonomous robotic systems, focusing specifically on the artificial intelligence in robotic planning and cooperation, and how sensor noise hinders proper reasoning. He leads the Montreal chapter of the CSCA/ASA. He is the CEO of vSolutions a small software development shop. He also leads a small Bible study group in his house with his wife, which is on a break now due to COVID. He skis and rides horseback English style. He loves dogs. He is deeply in love with his wife Electra and two daughters Abigail and Bethany.
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