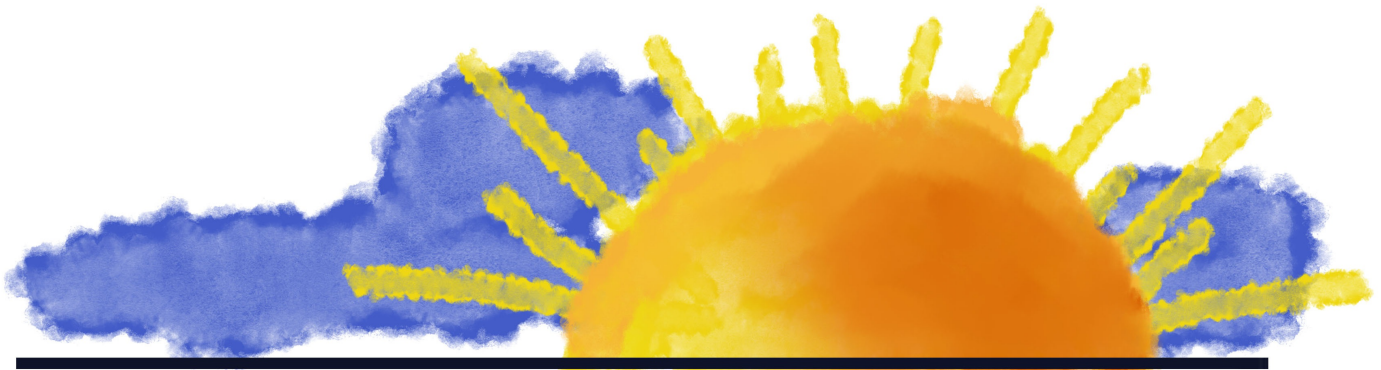


The  
“Just Because”  
Devotional

Devotionals and Other Readings  
for any day of the year.



New Providence CP Church  
Elizabeth Daniel, Pastor (and Editor)  
May 2021

## Introductory Statements

### Use Any Time of the Year

This is a devotional for you to use any time of the year. Please allow this booklet to help you strengthen your relationship with the Lord. This devotional is set up for topical readings, so you can start in the middle of the book, skip around, even start at the end and read toward the first devotional reading. It is yours to use however suits you best.

### Sections

This book is not divided into days. The devotionals each come right after another. This allows you the flexibility mentioned above.

### Scriptures May Be Repeated

You will find that some scripture is repeated. I have used different biblical versions to help enhance the understanding, but some scriptures just lend themselves to more applications.

### Titles

Not all writings included here had titles in the originals. I've added a title where otherwise there was none. In addition, I have changed the English spelling of words, such as favour, fulfil, labour, etc., to the American spelling for the convenience of the reader.

### Page for Notes

A space for notes, reflections, prayers, etc. is provided at the end of each topic so you can write about your thoughts and reflections on that topic. Journaling is believed to be a great way to develop our faith as we can see later how and where our spiritual journey has taken us.

I hope you use and enjoy this book! – Elizabeth Daniel



### Key to the Bible Translations and Paraphrases used:

CEV = Contemporary English Version

MSG = The Message

NAB = New American Bible

NCV = New Century Version

NIV = New International Version

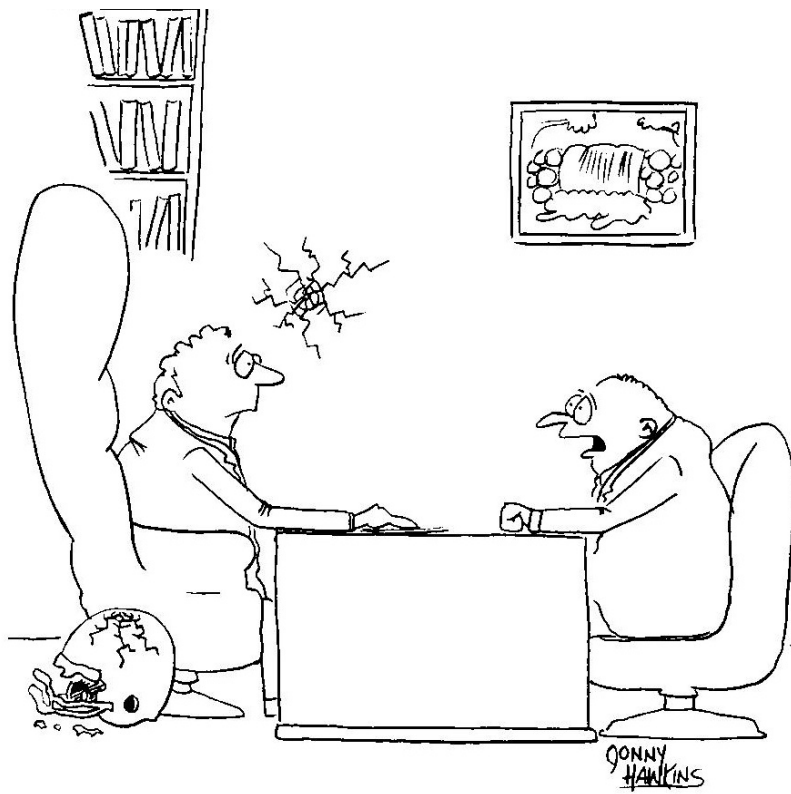
NLT = New Living Translation

TLB = The Living Bible

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“Pastor, what do you do when you experience sermon block?”



# It Feels Like a Monday .....

Days when you feel:

you got up on the wrong side of the bed .... distracted .... you have two left feet .... you're just going through the motions of the day .... you just want to stay in bed the whole day .... you might have a panic attack .... you are worried .... uncomfortable .... anxious .... and frustrated.

## The Bad News Preacher ...The God of Stubborn Faith

I didn't like the preacher I sat by on the plane. I know, I know. You're supposed to like everyone, but this fellow ...

To begin with, he took the seat next to me. I'd hoped it could stay vacant. The plane was crowded. It was a Sunday afternoon, and I was tired from Sunday-morning services. I was speaking that evening in Atlanta and had planned on taking a nap on the flight.

But this fellow had other ideas. Though he had been assigned another seat, he took the one next to me since it was closer to the front. And when he took it, he took every inch of it – and then some. Forgive me, but I get a bit territorial about armrests. This guy staked his claim on the one between us and never relinquished his position.

Knowing I couldn't sleep, I figured I'd review my thoughts for the evening lesson, so I opened my Bible.

"What ya' studying there, buddy?"

I told him, but he never heard.

"The church is lost," he declared. "Hellbound and heartsick."

Turns out he is an evangelist. He speaks in a different church every weekend. "I wake 'em up," he growled. "Christians are asleep. They don't pray. They don't love. They don't care."

With that pronouncement, he took on his preaching tone and cadence and started listing all the woes and weaknesses of the church, "Too lazy-uh, too rich-uh, too spoiled-uh, too fat-uh ..."

The folks around were beginning to listen, and my face was beginning to redden. I shouldn't have let it bug me, but it did. I'm one of those fellows who never knows what to say at the time but then spends the next week thinking, I wish I'd thought to say that.

Well, I've spent the last few days thinking about it, and here is what I wish I'd said to the bad new preacher: God's faithfulness has never depended on the faithfulness of His children. He is faithful even when we aren't. When we lack courage, He doesn't. He has made a history out of using people in spite of people.

Need an example? The feeding of the five thousand. It's the only miracle, aside from those of the final week, recorded in all four Gospels. Why did all four writers think it worth repeating? Maybe they knew some preachers like the one I sat next to. Perhaps they wanted to show how God doesn't give up even when His people do.

The day begins with the news of the death of John the Baptist. It continues with the return of the disciples from a short-term missionary journey. Following the disciples are five thousand men and their families. Jesus tries to get away from the crowd by crossing the sea, only to find the crowd waiting for Him on the other side. He wanted to mourn in solitude, but instead He was surrounded by people. He wanted to spend time with just the disciples, but instead He got a crowd. He wanted time to think, but instead He had people to face.

He spends time teaching them, and then He turns to Philip and inquires, "Where can we buy enough bread for all these people to eat?" (John 6:5). Keep in mind that Philip has been forcing out demons and healing the sick (Mark 6:13). We'd expect him to be optimistic. A bit of faith would be appropriate. After all, he's just spent several weeks seeing the impossible happen.

But how does Philip respond? He sounds like the preacher I met on the plane. He knows the problem, but he has no clue as to the solution. "We would all have to work a month to buy enough bread for each person to have only a little piece" (John 6:7).

He can cite the stats, but he can't see how to help. He can crunch the numbers, but he can't construct the answer. And though the answer to prayer is standing next to him, he doesn't even pray.

Equally disturbing is the silence of the other disciples. Are they optimistic? Read their words, and see for yourself. "No one lives in this place and it is already very late. Send the people away so they can go to the countryside and towns around here to buy themselves something to eat" (Mark 6:35-36).

Come on, guys. How about a little faith? "You can feed them, Jesus. No challenge is too great for you. We've seen you heal the sick and raise the dead; we know you can feed the crowd." But that's not what they said. If faith is a candle, those fellows were in the dark.

It never occurred to the disciples to turn the problem over to Jesus. Only Andrew had such a thought, but even his faith was small. "Here is a boy with five loaves of barley bread and two little fish, but that is not enough for so many people" (John 6:9). Andrew at least comes to Jesus with an idea. But he doesn't come with much faith. In fact, one would be hard pressed to find much faith on the hill that day.

<sup>10</sup> Jesus said, "Have the people sit down." There was plenty of grass in that place, and they sat down (about five thousand men were there). " Jesus then took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed to those who were seated as much as they wanted. He did the same with the fish.

- John 6:10-11 (NIV)

[continued]

Philip was cynical. Andrew was doubtful The other disciples were negative.

The preacher I met on the flight would've felt right at home with these guys. Look at them: They aren't praying, they aren't believing, they aren't even seeking a solution. If they are doing anything, they are telling Christ what to do! Send the people away. A bit bossy, don't you think?

Looks like the disciples are "hellbound and heartsick." Looks like they are "too lazy-uh, too rich-uh, too spoiled-uh, too fat-uh." Let me be clear. I agree with the preacher that the church is weak. When he bemoans the condition of the saints, I could sing the second verse. When he laments the health of many churches, I don't argue.

But when he proclaims that we are going to hell in a handbasket, I do! I simply think God is greater than our weakness. In fact, I think it is our weakness that reveals how great God is. He told another struggler: "When you are weak, my power is made perfect in you" (2 Cor. 12:9). The feeding of the five thousand is an ideal example The scene answers the question. What does God do when His children are weak?

If God ever needed an excuse to give up on people, He has the one here. Surely God is going to banish these followers until they learn to believe. Is that what He does? You decide. "Then Jesus took the loaves of bread, thanked God for them, and gave them to the people who were sitting there. He did the same with the fish, giving as much as the people wanted" (John 6:11).

When the disciples didn't pray, Jesus prayed. When the disciples didn't see God, Jesus sought God. When the disciples were weak, Jesus was strong. When the disciples had no faith, Jesus had faith . He thanked God. For what? The crowds? The pandemonium? The weariness? The faithless disciples? No, He thanked God for the basket of bread. He ignored the clouds and found the ray and thanked God for it.

Look what He does next. "Jesus divided the bread and gave it to His followers, who gave it to the people" (Matt. 14:19). Rather than punish the disciples, He employs them. There they go, passing out the bread they didn't request, enjoying the answer to the prayer they didn't even pray. If Jesus would have acted according to the faith of His disciples, the multitudes would have gone unfed. But He didn't, and He doesn't. God is true to us even when we forget Him. God's blessings are dispensed according to the riches of His grace, not according to the depth of our faith. ....

I'll probably never see that proclaimer of pessimism again, but maybe you will. If you do, will you give him a message for me? God is faithful even when His children are not. That's what makes God, God.

– Lucado, A Gentle Thunder, 89-93

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## An Empty Vessel Needs Filling

Behold, Lord, an empty vessel that needs to be filled. My Lord, fill it. I am weak in the faith; strengthen me. I am cold in love; warm me and make me fervent that my love may go out to my neighbour. I do not have a strong and firm faith; at times I doubt and am unable to trust you altogether. O Lord, help me. Strengthen my faith and trust in you. In you I have sealed the treasures of all I have. I am poor; you are rich and came to be merciful to the poor. I am a sinner; you are upright. With me there is an abundance of sin; in you is the fullness of righteousness. Therefore, I will remain with you, of whom I can receive, but to whom I may not give. Amen. – Martin Luther, from Counsel, p. 179

**<sup>6</sup> For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made His light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God's glory displayed in the face of Christ. <sup>7</sup> But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. – 2 Cor 4:6-8 (NIV)**

**<sup>3</sup> He will keep in perfect peace all those who trust in him, whose thoughts turn often to the Lord! <sup>4</sup> Trust in the Lord God always, for in the Lord Jehovah is your everlasting strength. – Isaiah 26:3-4 (TLB)**

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## Is Your Mind Stayed on God?

Is your mind stayed on God or is it starved? Starvation of the mind, caused by neglect, is one of the chief sources of exhaustion and weakness in a servant's life. If you have never used your mind to place yourself before God, begin to do it now. There is no reason to wait for God to come to you. You must turn your thoughts and your eyes away from the face of idols and look to Him and be saved (see Isaiah 45:22). – Chambers, February 11

## Think, or Worry?

Worry is a heavy burden, but a kind word always brings cheer.  
– Proverbs 12:25 (CEV)

You can think about your problems or you can worry about them, and there is a vast difference between the two. Worry is thinking that has turned toxic. It is jarring music that goes round and round and never comes to either climax or conclusion. Think works its way through problems to conclusion and decisions; worry leaves you in a state of tensely suspended animation.

When you worry, you go over the same ground endlessly and come out the same place you started. Thinking makes progress from one place to another; worry remains static. The problem of life is to change worry into thinking and anxiety into creative action.  
– Harold B. Walker, from Wallis, 227

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## His Nature and Our Motives

No one can make himself pure by obeying laws. Jesus Christ does not give us rules and regulations – He gives us His teachings which are truths that can only be interpreted by His nature which He places within us. The great wonder of Jesus Christ’s salvation is that He changes our heredity. He does not change human nature – He changes its source, and thereby its motives as well.  
– Chambers, July 24

I tell you, unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter into the kingdom of heaven.  
– Matthew 5:20 (NAB)

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For freedom Christ set us free; so stand firm and do not submit again to the yoke of slavery.  
– Galatians 5:1 (NAB)

## And Can It Be?

And can it be that I should gain  
An interest in the Saviour’s blood?  
Died He for me, who caused His pain?  
For me, who Him to death pursued?  
Amazing love! How can it be  
That thou, my God, shouldst die for me? ....

Long my imprisoned spirit lay  
Fast bound in sin and nature’s night;  
Thine eye diffused a quickening ray;  
I woke; the dungeon flamed with light;  
My chains fell off, my heart was free,  
I rose, went forth, and followed Thee.

– Charles Wesley, from Counsell, p. 317

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## Judge Not....

He has the right to criticize who has the heart to help. – Abraham Lincoln, from Wallis, 79

“Do not judge, or you too will be judged. – Matt. 7:1 (NIV)



## Gifts

Love never gives up. Love cares more for others than for self. Love doesn't want what it doesn't have. Love doesn't strut, doesn't have a swelled head, doesn't force itself on others, isn't always "me first," doesn't fly off the handle, doesn't keep score of the sins of others, doesn't revel when others grovel, takes pleasure in the flowering of truth, puts up with anything, trusts God always, always looks for the best, never looks back, but keeps going to the end. – 1 Cor 13:4-8 (MSG)

To your enemy, forgiveness.  
To an opponent, tolerance.  
To a friend, your heart.  
To a customer, service.  
To all men, charity.  
To every child, a good example.  
To yourself, respect.  
– Unknown, from Wallis, 107

## Find a Little Refreshment

God never meant for us to live frenzied lives. Backbreaking schedules are not His idea. How can we, believers in Christ, restructure our lives and find a little refreshment?

So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.

– 1 Cor 10:31 (NIV)

- \* Reestablish the goal. Isaiah 43:7 tells us we were created for His glory. The purpose of our brief journey on this planet is to glorify God. He desires for us to pour the best of our energies into God works. Go back to the basics.
- \* Redirect your focus. Matthew 6:33 makes a revolutionary promise. If we seek God first, He will direct our schedules and help us to discern His priorities through the work of the Holy Spirit. Give the Matthew 6:33 approach a try! It really works!
- \* Rethink your motivation. Galatians 1:10 prompts us to ask ourselves if any of our activities are seeking man's approval rather than God's. If we seek to appease people rather than God, rules will constantly change and expectations will soar.
- \* Rest in God's will. Hebrews 4:10 says, "Anyone who enters God's rest also rests from his own work." Sounds wonderful, doesn't it? God is not unreasonable. He does not heap on stress and then refuse to grant us rest. None of us can do one hundred things to the glory of God. Let's find rest in His will and do a few things well.  
– Moore, 29

<sup>3</sup>They all ate the same spiritual food <sup>4</sup>and drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ.

– 1 Cor. 10:3-4 (NIV)

## Rock of Ages – Augustus Toplady, from Counsell, 333, and Hymnal, 342

Rock of Ages, cleft for me,  
Let me hide myself in thee;  
Let the water and the blood,  
From thy riven side which flowed,  
Be of sin the double cure;  
Cleanse me from its guilt and power.  
Not the labors of my hands  
Can fulfill thy law's demands;  
Could my zeal no respite know,  
Could my tears forever flow,  
All for sin could not atone;  
Thou must save, and thou alone.

Nothing in my hand I bring,  
Simply to thy cross I cling;  
Naked, come to thee for dress;  
Helpless, look to thee for grace;  
Foul, I to the fountain fly;  
Wash me, Saviour, or I die.  
While I draw this fleeting breath,  
When my eyelids close in death,  
When I soar through tracts unknown,  
See thee on thy judgement throne;  
Rock of ages, cleft for me,  
Let me hide myself in thee.

## Reputation and Character

<sup>3</sup>“God blesses those who are poor and realize their need for him, for the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs.

<sup>4</sup> God blesses those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

<sup>5</sup> God blesses those who are humble, for they will inherit the whole earth. <sup>6</sup> God blesses those who hunger and thirst for justice, for they will be satisfied. <sup>7</sup> God blesses those who are merciful, for they will be shown mercy. <sup>8</sup>

God blesses those whose hearts are pure, for they will see God. <sup>9</sup>

God blesses those who work for peace, for they will be called the children of God. <sup>10</sup> God blesses those who are persecuted for doing right, for the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs.”

– Jesus, in Matt 5:3-9 (NLT)

The circumstances amid which you live determine your reputation; the truth you believe determines your character.

Reputation is what you are supposed to be; character is what you are. Reputation is the photograph; character is the face.

Reputation comes over one from without; character grows up from within.

Reputation is what you have when you come to a new community; character is what you have when you go away.

Your reputation is learned in an hour; your character does not come to light for a year.

Reputation is made in a moment, character is built in a lifetime.

Reputation grows like a mushroom, character grows like the oak.

A single newspaper report gives you your reputation; a life of toil gives you your character.

Reputation makes you rich or makes you poor; character makes you happy or makes you miserable.

Reputation is what men say about you on your tombstone; character is what angels say about you before the throne of God.

– William Hersey Davis, from Wallis, 45

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## One of My Favorite Devotionals

Lord Christ, I thank you for your love so strong

May that love flow through me to others

May I be patient when change comes slowly

May I be kind when life seems harsh

May I be gentle when others feel bruised

May I be humble when things go well

May I be peaceful when anger rises within

May I forgive when wronged

May I rejoice when the truth is discovered

Love never fails, but I do

May I hope when things seem hopeless

May I persevere when the way is hard.

– Roger Hurdling, from Counsell, 486

**Read the Beatitudes again (Matt. 5:3-9 – see the above devotion), but this time from a different perspective.**

**“And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.”**

– Jesus, in Matt. 16:18 (NIV)

## Temptation

Temptation is like a winter torrent, difficult to cross. Some, then, being most skillful swimmers, pass over, not being whelmed beneath temptations, nor swept down by them at all, while others who are not such, entering into them, sink in them. As, for example, Judas, entering into the temptation of covetness, swam not through it, but, sinking beneath it, was choked both in body and spirit. Peter entered into the temptation of the denial, but having entered it, he was not overwhelmed by it, but manfully swimming through it he was delivered.

– Cyril, from Lytle, 75

## Gossip, Lies, and Other Malicious Talk

### Three Gates

If I am tempted to reveal

A tale someone to me has told  
About another, let it pass,  
Before I speak, three gates of gold.

Three narrow gates: First, is it true?

Then, is it needful? In my mind  
Give truthful answer, and the next  
Is last and narrowest. Is it kind?

And if, to reach my lips at last,

It passes through these gateways, three,  
Then I may tell the tale, nor fear  
What the result of speech may be.

– Beth Day, from Lytle, 75

### A Fundamental Law

We are too hasty to believe every evil report. Many an innocent person has been injured by a tale that was without foundation. It is a serious matter to do an injustice to a fellow man by a report that we spread. The first thing, the least thing that one can do before he passes on a story that has come to him, is to stop long enough to ask if it is true. One of the ten fundamental laws of character is “Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor.”

– Unknown, from Lytle, 75

### Gossip

There is so much good in the worst of us and so much bad in the best of us, that it ill becomes any of us to find fault with the rest of us.

– Unknown, from Lytle, 74

## A Heart Like His

What if, for one day, Jesus were to become you?

What if, for 24 hours, Jesus wakes up in your bed, walks in your shoes, lives in your house, assumes your schedule? Your boss becomes His boss, your mother becomes His mother, your pains become His pains? With one exception, nothing about your life changes. Your health doesn't change. Your circumstances don't change. Your schedule isn't altered. Your problems aren't solved. Only one change occurs.

What if, for one day and one night, Jesus lives your life with His heart? Your heart gets the day off, and your life is led by the heart of Christ. His priorities govern your actions. His passions drive your decisions. His love directs your behavior.

What would you be like? Would people notice a change? Your family – would they see something new? Your co-workers – would they sense a difference? What about the less fortunate? Would you treat them the same? And your friends? Would they detect more joy? How about your enemies? Would they receive more mercy from Christ's heart than from yours?

And you? How would you feel? What alterations would this transplant have on your stress level? Your mood swings? Your temper? Would you sleep better? Would you see sunsets differently? Death differently? Taxes differently? Any chance you'd need fewer aspirin or sedatives? How about your reaction to traffic delays? (Ouch, that touched a nerve.) Would you still dread what you are dreading? Better yet, would you still do what you are doing? Would you still do what you had planned to do for the next 24 hours? Pause and think about your schedule. Obligations. Engagements. Outings. Appointments. With Jesus taking over your heart, would anything change? [continued]

<sup>1</sup> Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, <sup>2</sup> then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. <sup>3</sup> Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, <sup>4</sup> not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others. <sup>5</sup> In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus.

– Philippians 2:1-5 (NIV)

Keep working on this for a moment. Adjust the lens of your imagination until you have a clear picture of Jesus's leading your life, then snap the shutter and frame the image. What you see is what God wants. He wants you to "think and act like Christ Jesus" (Phil. 2:5).

God's plan for you is nothing short of a new heart. If you were a car, God would want control of your engine. If you were a computer, God would claim the software and the hard drive. If you were an airplane, He'd take His seat in the cockpit. But are a person, so God wants to change your heart. . . .

God wants you to be just like Jesus. He wants you to have a heart like His.

I'm going to risk something here. It's dangerous to sum up grand truths in one statement, but I'm going to try. If a sentence or two could capture God's desire for each of us, it might read like this:

God loves you just the way you are, but He refuses to leave you that way. He wants you to be just like Jesus.

God loves you just the way you are. If you think His love for you would be stronger if your faith were, you are wrong. If you think His love would be deeper if your thoughts were, wrong again. Don't confuse God's love with the love of people. The love of people often increases with performance and decreases with mistakes. Not so with God's love. He loves you right where you are. . . .

God's love never ceases. Never. Though we spurn Him. Ignore Him. Reject Him. Despise Him. Disobey Him. He will not change. Our evil cannot diminish His love. Our goodness cannot increase it. Our faith does not earn it anymore than our stupidity jeopardizes it. God doesn't love us less if we fail or more if we succeed. God's love never ceases.

God loves you just the way you are, but He refuses to leave you that way.

When my daughter Jenna was a toddler, I used to take her to a park not far from our apartment. One day as she was playing in a sandbox, an ice-cream salesman approached us. I purchased her a treat, and when I turned to give it to her, I saw her mouth was full of sand. Where I intended to put a delicacy, she had put dirt.

Did I love her with dirt in her mouth? Absolutely. Was she any less my daughter with dirt in her mouth? Of course not. Was I going to allow her to keep the dirt in her mouth? No way. I loved her right where she was, but I refused to leave her there. I carried her over to the water fountain and washed out her mouth. Why? Because I love her.

God does the same for us. He holds us over the fountain. "Spit out the dirt, honey," our Father urges. "I've got something better for you." And so He cleanses us of filth; immorality, dishonesty, prejudice, bitterness, greed. We don't enjoy the cleansing; sometimes we even opt for the dirt over the ice cream. "I can eat dirt if I want to!" we pout and proclaim. Which is true – we can. But if we do, the loss is ours. God has a better offer. He wants us to be just like Jesus.

Isn't that good news? You aren't stuck with today's personality. You aren't condemned to "grumpydom." You are tweakable. Even if you've worried each day of your life, you needn't worry the rest of your life. So what if you were born a bigot? You don't have to die one.

Where did we get the idea we can't change? From whence come statements such as, "It's just my nature to worry," or, "I'll always be pessimistic. I'm just that way," or, "I have a bad temper. I can't help the way I react"? Who says? Would we make similar statements about our bodies? "It's just my nature to have a broken leg. I can't do anything about it." Of course not. If our bodies malfunction, we seek help. Shouldn't we do the same with our hearts? Shouldn't we seek aid for our sour attitudes? Can't we request treatment for our selfish tirades? Of course we can. Jesus can change our hearts. He wants us to have a heart like His.

Can you imagine a better offer?

– Lucado, Just Like Jesus, I-7

"This is how much God loved the world: He gave his Son, his one and only Son. And this is why: so that no one need be destroyed; by believing in him, anyone can have a whole and lasting life. God didn't go to all the trouble of sending his Son merely to point an accusing finger, telling the world how bad it was. He came to help, to put the world right again." – John 3:16-17 (MSG)

## Teach Us, Lord

Lord, teach us to understand that your Son died to save us, not from suffering, but from ourselves; not from injustice, far less from justice, but from being unjust. He died that we might live – but live as He lives, by dying as He died who died to Himself. – George Macdonald, from Counsell, 416

## God Save the People

When wilt thou save the people?  
O God of mercy, when!  
The people, Lord, the people,  
Not crowns and throne, but men!  
Flowers of thy heart O God are they;  
Let them not pass like weeds away,  
Their heritage a sunless day;  
God save the people!

Shall crime bring crime forever,  
Strength aiding still the strong!  
Is it thy will, O Father,  
That man shall toil for wrong?  
'No,' say they mountains; 'No,' thy skies;  
Man's clouded sun shall brightly rise,  
And songs be heard instead of sighs;  
God save the people!

When wilt thou save the people?  
O God of mercy, when?  
The people, Lord, the people,  
Not crowns and thrones, but men!  
God save the people, thine they are,  
Thy children, as thy angels fair;  
From vice, oppression and despair  
God save the people! – Ebenezer Elliott, from Counsell, 342-343

<sup>1</sup> Afterwards Jesus returned to Jerusalem for one of the Jewish religious holidays. <sup>2</sup> Inside the city, near the Sheep Gate, was Bethesda Pool, with five covered platforms or porches surrounding it. <sup>3</sup> Crowds of sick folks—lame, blind, or with paralyzed limbs—lay on the platforms (waiting for a certain movement of the water, <sup>4</sup> for an angel of the Lord came from time to time and disturbed the water, and the first person to step down into it afterwards was healed).

<sup>5</sup> One of the men lying there had been sick for thirty-eight years. <sup>6</sup> When Jesus saw him and knew how long he had been ill, he asked him, "Would you like to get well?"

<sup>7</sup> "I can't," the sick man said, "for I have no one to help me into the pool at the movement of the water. While I am trying to get there, someone else always gets in ahead of me." <sup>8</sup> Jesus told him, "Stand up, roll up your sleeping mat and go on home!" <sup>9</sup> Instantly, the man was healed! He rolled up the mat and began walking!

– John 5:1-9 (TLB)

<sup>13</sup> It is written: "I believed; therefore I have spoken." Since we have that same spirit of faith, we also believe and therefore speak, <sup>14</sup> because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us with Jesus and present us with you to himself. <sup>15</sup> All this is for your benefit, so that the grace that is reaching more and more people may cause thanksgiving to overflow to the glory of God.

<sup>16</sup> Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. <sup>17</sup> For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. <sup>18</sup> So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal. – 2 Cor 4:13-18 (NIV)

## Oppressed with Sin and Woe

Oppressed with sin and woe, a burdened heart I bear;  
Opposed by many a mighty foe, yet I will not despair.

With this polluted heart, I dare to come to thee –  
Holy and mighty as thou art– for thou wilt pardon me.

I feel that I am weak, and prone to every sin;  
But thou, who giv'st to those who seek, wilt give me  
strength within.

I need not fear my foes; I need not yield to care;  
I need not sink beneath my woes, for thou wilt answer  
prayer.

In my Redeemer's name, I give myself to thee;  
And, all unworthy as I am, my God will cherish me.

– Anne Bronte, from Counsell, 367-368

## Good Habits and Character

Good habits are not made on birthdays, nor Christian character at the new year. The workshop of character is everyday life. The uneventful and commonplace hour is where the battle is lost or won.

– Maltbie D. Babcock, from Wallis, 45

<sup>1</sup> The Lord also said to Moses, <sup>2</sup> “Give the following instructions to the entire community of Israel. You must be holy because I, the Lord your God, am holy. <sup>3</sup> Each of you must show great respect for your mother and father, and you must always observe my Sabbath days of rest. I am the Lord your God.” – Leviticus 19:1-3 (NLT)

## When Adversity Comes

Even when I walk through the darkest valley, I will not be afraid, for you are close beside me. Your rod and your staff protect and comfort me.

– Psalm 23:4 (NLT)

True believers, although they dwell safely under the protection of God, are, notwithstanding, exposed to many dangers, or rather they are liable to all the afflictions which befall mankind in common, that they may better feel how much they need the protection of God. David, therefore, here expressly declares that if any adversity should befall him, he would lean upon the providence of God. Thus he does not promise himself continued pleasures; but he fortifies himself by the help of God courageously to endure the various calamities with which he might be visited.

– Calvin, Day 75

## West Point Cadet Prayer

O God, our Father, thou Searcher of men’s hearts, help us to draw near to thee in sincerity and truth. May our religion be filled with gladness and may our worship of thee be natural. Strengthen and increase our admiration for honest dealing and clean thinking, and suffer not our hatred of hypocrisy and pretense ever to diminish. Encourage us in our endeavor to live above the common level of life. Make us to choose the harder right instead of the easier wrong, and never to be content with a half truth when the whole can be won. Endow us with courage that is born of loyalty to all that is noble and worthy, that scorns to compromise with vice and injustice and knows no fear when truth and right are in jeopardy. Guard us against flippancy and irreverence in the sacred things of life. Grant us new ties of friendship and new opportunities of service. Kindle our hearts in fellowship with those of a cheerful countenance, and soften our hearts with sympathy for those who sorrow and suffer.

– Clayton E. Whear, from Wallis, 47

<sup>1</sup> Jesus said to His disciples: “Things that cause people to stumble are bound to come, but woe to anyone through whom they come. <sup>2</sup> It would be better for them to be thrown into the sea with a millstone tied around their neck than to cause one of these little ones to stumble. <sup>3</sup> So watch yourselves.

“If your brother or sister sins against you, rebuke them; and if they repent, forgive them. <sup>4</sup> Even if they sin against you seven times in a day and seven times come back to you saying ‘I repent,’ you must forgive them.”

<sup>5</sup> The apostles said to the Lord, “Increase our faith!” <sup>6</sup> He replied, “If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, ‘Be uprooted and planted in the sea,’ and it will obey you.”

– Jesus, in Luke 17:1-6

## God Disciplines His People

<sup>4</sup> You are struggling against sin, but your struggles have not yet caused you to be killed.

<sup>5</sup> You have forgotten the encouraging words that call you his children:

“My child, don’t think the Lord’s discipline is worth nothing, and don’t stop trying when he corrects you. <sup>6</sup>

The Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as his child.” (Proverbs 3:11–12)

<sup>7</sup> So hold on through your sufferings, because they are like a father’s discipline. God is treating you as children. All children are disciplined by their fathers. <sup>8</sup> If you are never disciplined (and every child must be disciplined), you are not true children. <sup>9</sup> We have all had fathers here on earth who disciplined us, and we respected them. So it is even more important that we accept discipline from the Father of our spirits so we will have life. <sup>10</sup> Our fathers on earth disciplined us for a short time in the way they thought was best. But God disciplines us to help us, so we can become holy as He is. <sup>11</sup> We do not enjoy being disciplined. It is painful at the time, but later, after we have learned from it, we have peace, because we start living in the right way.

<sup>12</sup> You have become weak, so make yourselves strong again. <sup>13</sup> Keep on the right path, so the weak will not stumble but rather be strengthened. – Hebrews 12:4-13 (NCV)

The Lore is a disciplinarian. Never doubt it. He is far too faithful to let us get away with some of the things we think, say, and do. He has obligated Himself to grow us, be gloried in us, and give us away to His Son as a fitting bride “made ... ready” (Rev. 19:7). Completing the good work He began in us demands discipline.

What definition of disciple does the writer intend? Take another look at verse 11. We can describe the Lord’s discipline as His means of teaching profitable lessons in painful ways. Granted, some are more painful than others. The writer of Hebrews offers us wonderful encouragements in the midst of discipline. Let’s consider a few.

God only disciplines those He loves. Today’s text gives us reason to be concerned if we’ve never experienced the Lord’s discipline. If you have, beloved, count yourself among His children. Unbelievers sometimes experience God’s wrath; but, according to Hebrews 12, only His children undergo His discipline. How do we know the difference? Wrath is condemning in nature. Discipline is correcting in nature.

God always disciplines with expertise. He is the expert parent and disciplinarian. [While] our fathers disciplined us because as they thought best (v. 10), God disciplines us because He knows best. Unlike us, God won’t have parently regrets. He doesn’t get wiser with age. .... HE is omniscient. .... He reads every thought, and He discerns every heart. He applies His loving discipline perfectly.

God never disciplines without profit in mind. Heb. 12:11 lists at least three benefits discipline brings the teachable child: righteousness, peace, and healing. The straightforward approach of Proverbs 12:1 makes me laugh, “He who hates correction is stupid.” No wonder. Look at those gains!

God is presently doing what I asked Him to do. He is very strict with me, and I never attempt to cross a line that I don’t

find Him standing on it. In order to cross it, I have to absolutely defy His authority. I’ve never been so disciplined – and I’ve never been so free. I am still capable of defying Him horribly, but, if I dare, I pray His loving discipline will jerk me home.

Oh, beloved child of God, Father knows best.

– Moore, 89

## Character

– both from Wallis, 46

Character is what you are in the dark. – Dwight L. Moody

The measure of a man’s real character is what he would do if he knew he would never be found out. – Thomas Macaulay

<sup>14</sup> “You are the light that gives light to the world. A city that is built on a hill cannot be hidden. <sup>15</sup> And people don’t hide a light under a bowl. They put it on a lampstand so the light shines for all the people in the house.

– Matthew 5: 14-15 (NCV)

## Grace of God

<sup>4</sup>Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous, it does not brag, and it is not proud. <sup>5</sup> Love is not rude, is not selfish, and does not get upset with others. Love does not count up wrongs that have been done. <sup>6</sup> Love takes no pleasure in evil but rejoices over the truth. <sup>7</sup> Love patiently accepts all things. It always trusts, always hopes, and always endures.

– I Corinthians 13:4-7 (NCV)

We have need of patience with ourselves and with others; with those below and those above us, and with our own equals; with those who love and those who love us not; for the greatest things and for the least; against sudden inroads of trouble, and under our daily burdens; for disappointments as to the weather, or the breaking of the heart; in the weariness of the body, or the wearing of the soul; in our own failure of duty, or others' failure toward us; in everyday wants, or in the aching of sickness or the decay of age; in disappointment, bereavement, losses, injuries, reproaches; in heaviness of the heart or in sickness amid delayed hopes. In all these things, from childhood's little troubles to the martyr's sufferings, patience is the grace of God, whereby we endure evil for the love of God.

– Edward B. Pusey, from Wallis, 46

## Teach Me, O God

Teach me, O God, so to use all the circumstances of my life today that they may bring forth in me the fruits of holiness rather than the fruits of sin.

Let me use disappointments as material for patience;

Let me use success as material for thankfulness;

Let me use suspense as material for perseverance;

Let me use danger as material for courage;

Let me use reproach as material for longsuffering;

Let me use praise as material for humility;

Let me use pleasure as material for temperance;

Let me use pains as material for endurance.

– John Baille, from Counsell, 450

<sup>22</sup> In contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, <sup>23</sup> gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. <sup>24</sup> Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified their flesh with its passions and desires. <sup>25</sup> If we live in the Spirit, let us also follow the Spirit. <sup>26</sup> Let us not be conceited, provoking one another, envious of one another.

– Galatians 5:22-26 (NAB)

## The Devotion of Hearing

And the Lord came and called as before, "Samuel! Samuel!" And Samuel replied, "Yes, I'm listening."

– I Samuel 3:10 (TLB)

Just because I have listened carefully and intently to one thing from God does not mean that I will listen to everything He says. I show God my lack of love and respect for Him by the insensitivity of my heart and mind toward what He says. .... Have I disobeyed some command of my Lord's this week? If I had realized that it was a command of Jesus, I would not have deliberately disobeyed it. But most of us show incredible disrespect to God because we don't even hear Him. He might as well never have spoken to us. ....

If I am united with Jesus Christ, I hear God all the time through the devotion of hearing. A flower, a tree, or a servant of God may convey God's message to me. What hinders me from hearing is my attention to other things. It is not that I don't want to hear God, but I am not devoted in the right areas of my life. I am devoted to things and even to service and my own convictions. God may say whatever He wants, but I just don't hear Him. The attitude of a child of God should always be, "Speak, for Your servant hears" [or, "Yes, I'm listening"]. If I have not developed and nurtured this devotion of hearing, I can only hear God's voice at certain times. At other times I become deaf to Him because my attention is to other things – things which I think I must do. This is not living the life of a child of God. Have you heard God's voice today?

– Chambers, Feb. 13



## Notes and Prayers for “It Feels Like a Monday...”

(Use the next page, too)

# Notes and Prayers for “It Feels Like a Monday...”





## I'm Gonna Tell Mama!

For days when you feel:

up to no good .... angry for no reason .... angry for good reason .... in a foul mood .... disgruntled .... like being a rebel (with or without a cause) .... the rules don't apply to you .... discontented .... irritated .... furious .... tempted to do something you know you shouldn't.

## Be Slaves to Righteousness

The first thing I must be willing to admit when I begin to examine what controls and dominates me is that I am the one responsible for having yielded myself to whatever it may be. If I am a slave to myself, I am to blame because somewhere in the past I yielded to myself. Likewise, if I obey God I do so because at some point in my life I yielded myself to Him.

If a child gives in to selfishness, he will find it to be the most enslaving tyranny on earth. There is no power within the human soul itself that is capable of breaking the bondage of the nature created by yielding. For example, yield for one second to anything in the nature of lust, and although you may hate yourself for having yielded, you become enslaved to that thing. (Remember what lust is – “I must have it now,” whether it is the lust of the flesh or the lust of the mind.) No release or escape from it will ever come from any human power, but only through the power of redemption. You must yield yourself in utter humiliation to the only One who can break

the dominating power in your life, namely the Lord Jesus Christ. “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free ....” (Jesus, from Luke 4:18 NIV, based on Isaiah 61:1).

When you yield to something, you will soon realize the tremendous control it has over you. Even though you say, “Oh, I can give up that habit whenever I like,” you will know you can’t. You will find that the habit absolutely dominates you because you willingly yielded to it. It is easy to sing, “He will break every fetter,” while at the same time living a life of obvious slavery to yourself. But yielding to Jesus will break every kind of slavery in any person’s life.

– Chambers, March 14

<sup>15</sup>What then? Shall we sin because we are not under the law but under grace? By no means! <sup>16</sup>Don’t you know that when you offer yourselves to someone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one you obey—whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness? <sup>17</sup>But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you have come to obey from your heart the pattern of teaching that has now claimed your allegiance. <sup>18</sup>You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness. – Romans 6:15-18 (NIV)

<sup>13</sup>“And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.

<sup>14</sup> For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. <sup>15</sup> But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.

– Matthew 6:13-15 (NIV)

## The Hallway (Part One: Grace Received, Grace Given)

I’d like to talk to you about bounty hunters, nitro around the neck, one of the greatest principles in the Bible, and okra and anchovy sandwiches. But before I do, let’s start with a thought about hit men.

Living in the cross hairs of a hit man is no treat. I should know. I had one after me for three months. He wasn’t a Mafia member, nor was he a gang member. He didn’t carry a gun with a scope; his weapons were even deadlier. He had a phone number and a commission – track me down and make me pay.

His job? Collect past-due payments for a credit card company.

I hope you’ll believe me when I say I had paid my bill. He certainly didn’t believe me. I knew I’d paid the bill – I had the canceled check to prove it. The only problem was that the check was on a boat with all our other belongings somewhere between Miami and Rio. We had just moved to Brazil and our possessions were in transit. I wouldn’t have access to my bank statement for three months. He wasn’t about to wait that long.

He threatened to ruin my credit, sue the travel agency and call the police; he even said he would tell my mother (the big tattletale). After weeks of calling me collect, he suddenly quit bugging me. No explanation. All I can figure is that he raced the error to north of the equator rather than south, and he left me alone. He also left me amazed. I remember asking Denalyn, “What kind of person would enjoy such a job? His profession is aggravation.”

A good day for him means a bad day for everyone he contacts. Don’t get me wrong,

[continued]

I understand why such an occupation is necessary. I just wonder what kind of person would want such a job? Who wants to be a missionary of misery? Collectors spend the day making people feel bad. No one wants to take their calls. No one is happy to see them at the door. No one wants to read their letters. Can you imagine what their spouse says as they go to work? “Make ‘em squirm, honey.” Do their bosses motivate them with the “blood out of a turnip” award? Who is their hero? Godzilla? What a job. Their payday is in your paycheck, and they are out to get it. Can you imagine spending your days like that?

Perhaps you can. Perhaps all of us can. Even the best among us spend time demanding payment. Doesn't someone owe you something? An apology? A second chance? A fresh start? An explanation? A thank you? A Childhood? A marriage? Stop and think about it (which I don't encourage you to do for long), and you can make a list of a lot of folks who are in your debt. Your parents should have been more protective. Your children should have been more appreciative. Your spouse should be more sensitive. Your preacher should have been more attentive.

What are going to do with those in your debt? People in your past have dipped their hands in your purse and taken what was yours. What are you going to do? Few questions are more important. Dealing with debt is at the heart of your happiness. It's also at the heart of the Lord's prayer.

Having reminded us of the grace we have received, Jesus now speaks of the grace we should share. [See scripture above.]

Through the center of the Great House of God runs a large hallway. You can't get from one room to another without using it. Want to leave the kitchen and go to the study? Use the corridor. Want to take the stairs to the chapel? Use the corridor. You can't go anywhere without walking the hallway. And you can't walk the hallway without bumping into people.

Jesus does not question the reality of your wounds. He does not doubt that you have been sinned against. The issue is not the existence of pain, the issue is the treatment of pain. What are you going to do with your debts?

Dale Carnegie tells about a visit to Yellowstone Park where he saw a grizzly bear. The huge animal was in the center of a clearing, feeding on some discarded camp food. For several minutes he feasted alone, no other creature dared draw near. After a few moments a skunk walked through the meadow toward the food and took his place next to the grizzly. The bear didn't object and Carnegie knew why. “The grizzly,” [he] said, “knew the high cost of getting even.”

We'd be wise to learn the same. Settling the score is done at great expense.

– Lucado, Great House, 119-122

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## The Hallway (Part Two: The High Cost of Getting Even)

[From Part I: Settling the score is done at great expense.] For one thing, you pay a price relationally.

Have you ever noticed in the western movies how the bounty hunter travels alone? It's not hard to see why. Who want to hang out with a guy who settles scores for a living? Who wants to risk getting on his bad side? More than once I've heard a person spew his anger. He thought I was listening, when really I was thinking, I hope I never get on his list. Cantankerous sorts, these bounty hunters. Best leave them alone. Hang out with the angry and you might catch a stray bullet. Debt-settling is a lonely occupation. It's also an unhealthy occupation.

You pay a high price physically.

The Bible says it best: “Resentment kills a fool” (Job 5:2 NIV). It reminds me of an old Amos and Andy routine. Amos asks Andy what that little bottle is he's wearing around his neck. “Nitroglycerine,” he answers. Amos is stunned that Andy would be wearing a necklace of nitro, so he asks for an explanation. Andy tells him about a fellow who has a bad habit of poking people in the chest while he's speaking. “It drives me crazy.” Andy says “I'm wearing this nitro so the next time he pokes me, I'll blow his finger off.”

14-15 “In prayer there is a connection between what God does and what you do. You can't get forgiveness from God, for instance, without also forgiving others. If you refuse to do your part, you cut yourself off from God's part. – Matthew 6:14-15 (MSG)

[continued]

Andy's not the first to forget that when try to get even, you get hurt. Job was right when he said, "You treat yourself to pieces in your anger" (Job 18:4). Ever notice that we describe the people who bug us as a "pain in the neck"? Whose neck are we referring to? Certainly not theirs. We are the ones who suffer.

Sometime ago I was speaking about anger at a men's gathering. I described resentment as a prison and pointed out that when we put someone in our jail cell of hatred, we are stuck guarding the door. After the message a man introduced himself as a former prison inmate. He described how the guard at the gate of a prison is even more confined than a prisoner. The guard spends his day in a four-by-five-foot house. The prisoner has a ten-by-twelve-foot cell. The guard can't leave, the prisoner gets to walk around. The prisoner can relax, but the guard has to be constantly alert. You might object and say, "Yes, but the guard of the prison gets to go home at night." True, but the guard of the prison of resentment doesn't.

If you're out to settle the score, you'll never rest. How can you? For one thing, your enemy may never pay up. As much as you think you deserve an apology, your debtor may not agree. The racist may never repent. The chauvinist may never change. As justified as you are in your quest for vengeance, you may never get a penny's worth of justice. And if you do, will it be enough?

Let's really think about this one. How much justice is enough? Picture your enemy for a moment. Picture him tied to the whipping post. The strong-armed man with the whip turns to you and asks, "How many lashes?" And you give a number. The whip cracks and the blood flows and the punishment is inflicted. Your foe slumps to the ground and you walk away.

Are you happy now? Do you feel better? Are you at peace? Perhaps for a while, but soon another memory will surface and another lash will be needed and ... when does it all stop?

It stops when you take seriously the words of Jesus. [See selected verse in Parts I and 2.] Through this verse we learn the greatest cost of getting even. I've suggested that you pay a high price relationally and physically, but Jesus has a far more important reason for you to forgive. If you don't, you pay a price spiritually.

Before we discuss what these verses mean, it would be wise to point out what they do not mean. The text does not suggest that we earn God's grace by giving grace. At first blush, the phrase appears to present a type of triangular peace treaty. "If I forgive my enemy, then God will forgive me." A casual reading suggests we earn our forgiveness by offering forgiveness to others. Mercy is a merit which saves me. Such an interpretation is impossible for the simple reason that it conflicts with the rest of Scripture. If we can attain forgiveness by forgiving others (or any other good work), then why do we need a Savior? If we can pay for our sins through our mercy, why did Jesus die for our sins? If salvation is a result of our effort, then why did Paul insist, "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9)?

Salvation is a free gift.

The question from the last chapter surfaces again. If we are already forgiven, then why does Jesus teach us to pray, "Forgive us our debts?"

The very reason you would want your children to do the same. If my children violate one of my standards or disobey a rule, I don't disown them. I don't kick them out of the house or tell them to change their last name. But I do expect them to be honest and apologize. And until they do, the tenderness of our relationship will suffer. The nature of the relationship won't be altered, but the intimacy will.

The same happens in our walk with God. Confession does not create a relationship with God, it simply nourishes it. If you are a believer, admission of sins does not alter your position before God, but it does enhance your peace with God. When you confess, you agree; you quit arguing with God and agree with Him about your sin. Unconfessed sin leads to a state of disagreement. You may be God's child, but you don't want to talk to Him. He still loves you, but until you admit what you've done, there's going to be tension in this house.

But just as unconfessed sin hinders joy, confessed sin releases it. When we admit sin we are like a first grader standing before the teacher with a messy paper. "I colored outside the lines too many times. Could I start over on a clean sheet?" "Of course," says the teacher. Happy is the first grader who gets a second chance, or as David wrote: "Happy is the person whose sins are forgiven, whose wrongs are pardoned" (Psalm 32:1 NCV). So we dash back to our seat and start over.

[continued]

Would there ever be a case when the teacher would leave you to draw on your soiled paper? There might be. I can think of one example when the teacher might refuse to give you a second chance. Suppose she witnesses your mistreatment of the kid in the next desk. A few minutes earlier she saw him ask you for a piece of paper out of your tables, and you refused. Though you had plenty to give, you clutched your Big Chief with both hands and refused to share. And now here you are making the same request of her?

Who would blame her if she said, "I tell you what, I'm going to grant you the same kindness you gave your classmate. The way you treat Harry is the way I'll treat you. You're still my student, and I'm still your teacher. I'm not kicking you out of class, but I am going to give you a chance to learn a lesson." Now we're getting down to the nitty-gritty of the verse, for this is exactly what the phrase means "Forgive our debts as we forgive our debtors."

– Lucado, Great House, 122-126

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## The Hallway (Part Three: One of the Greatest Principles in the Bible)

"Treat me as I treat my neighbor." Are you aware that this is what you are saying to your Father? Give me what I give them. Grant me the same peace I grant others. Let me enjoy the same tolerance I offer. God will treat you the way you treat others.

In any given Christian community there are two groups: those who are contagious in their joy and those who are cranky in their faith. They've accepted Christ and are seeking Him, but their balloon has no helium. One is grateful, the other is grumpy. Both are saved. Both are heaven bound. But one sees the rainbow and the other sees the rain.

Could this principle explain the difference? Could it be that they are experiencing the same joy they have given their offenders? One says, "I forgive you," and feels forgiven. The other say, "I'm ticked off," and lives ticked off at the world.

Elsewhere Jesus said: 37 "Don't judge others, and you will not be judged. Don't accuse others of being guilty, and you will not be accused of being guilty. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. 38 Give, and you will receive. You will be given much. Pressed down, shaken together, and running over, it will spill into your lap. The way you give to others is the way God will give to you"(Luke 6:37-38 NCV).

It's as if God sends you to the market to purchase your neighbor's groceries saying, "Whatever you get your neighbor, get also for yourself. For whatever you give him is what you receive."

Pretty simple system. I'm not too bright, but I can figure this one out. I love thick, juicy hamburger meat, so I buy my neighbor thick, juicy hamburger meat. I'm crazy about double-chocolate ice cream, so I buy my neighbor double-chocolate ice cream. And when I drink milk, I don't want the skimpy skim stuff that Denalyn makes me drink. I want Christian milk, just like God made it. So what do I buy my neighbor? Christian milk, just like God made it.

Let's take this a step further. Suppose your neighbor's trash blows into your yard. You mention the mess to him, and he says he'll get to it sometime next week. You inform him that you've got company coming and couldn't he get out of that chair and do some work? He tells you not to be so picky, that the garbage fertilizes your garden. You're just about to walk across the lawn to have a talk when God reminds you, "Time to go to the market to buy your neighbor's groceries." So you grumble and mumble your way to the store, and then it hits you, "I'll get even with the old bum." You go straight to the skim milk. Then you make a beeline to the anchovies and sardines. You mach right past the double-chocolate ice cream and head toward the okra and rice. You make a final stop in the day-old bread section and pick up a crusty loaf with green spots on the edge.

Chuckling, you drive back to the house and drop the sack in the lap of your lazy, good-for-nothing neighbor. "Have a good dinner." And you walk away. All your brilliant scheming left you hungry, so you go to your refrigerator to fix a sandwich, but guess what you find? Your pantry is full of what you gave your enemy. All you have to eat is exactly what you just bought. We get what we give. [continued]

<sup>13</sup> And don't let us yield to temptation, but rescue us from the evil one.

<sup>14</sup> "If you forgive those who sin against you, your heavenly Father will forgive you. <sup>15</sup> But if you refuse to forgive others, your Father will not forgive your sins. – Matt 6:13-15 (NLT)

Some of you have been eating sardines for a long time. Your diet ain't gonna change until you change. You look around at other Christians. They aren't as sour as you are. They're enjoying the delicacies of God, and you're stuck with okra and anchovies on moldy bread. You've always wondered why they look so happy and you feel so cranky. Maybe now you know. Could it be God is giving you exactly what you're giving someone else?

Would you like a change of menu? Earlier I referred to a men's conference where I spoke on the topic of anger. A couple of weeks after I returned home I received this letter from a man name Harold Staub:

Max,

Thank you so much for speaking on forgiveness at Promise Keepers in Syracuse, NY, on June 7 and 8. I was there. Just want you to know I went home, talked to my wife on many subjects about forgiveness – the best two weeks of my life. You see, she went home to be with the Lord on June 14, totally forgiven. How wonderful is His love. Thank you very much.

When we called Harold to ask his permission to print his letter he shared the touching details of his final days with his wife. He didn't know she was near death, nor did she. He did know, however, that some unresolved issues lay between them. Upon arriving home he went to her, knelt before her and asked forgiveness for anything he'd ever done. The gesture opened a floodgate of emotions and the two talked late into the night. The initial effort at reconciliation continued for two weeks. The marriage enjoyed a depth not yet known. When Harold's wife died suddenly of an embolism, he was shocked. But he was ready and now he is at peace.

What about you? Would you like some peace? Then quit giving your neighbor such a hassle. Want to enjoy God's generosity? Then let others enjoy yours. Would you like assurance that God forgives you? I think you know what you need to do.

So, what will you be eating? Chocolate ice cream or okra? It's up to you.

– Lucado, Great House, 126-129

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## Save Us From Ourselves

True humility and respect for the Lord lead a man to riches, honor, and long life. – Proverbs 22:4 (TLB)

Pride leads to destruction; a proud attitude brings ruin.  
– Proverbs 16:18 (NCV)

O God, our Father, give us the humility which realizes its ignorance; admits its mistakes; recognizes its need; welcomes advice; accepts rebuke. Save us from pride in our knowledge, and make us to think of the great ocean of truth all undiscovered before us. Save us from pride in our achievement, and make us to remember all that we still have to do. Save us from pride in our performance, and make us to remember how far short of perfection our best must still fall. Help us in the days ahead, to study with diligence; to learn with eagerness. And give us a retentive memory to remember that which we have learned; and a resolute will to put it into action. Amen.

– William Barclay, from Counsell, 463

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## Rescue Me, Lord

Save me, Lord, from the distraction of trying to impress others, and from the dangers of having done so.

Help me to enjoy praise for work well done and then to pass it on to you.

Teach me to learn from criticism, and give me the wisdom not to put myself at the centre of the universe. – Angela Ashwin, from Counsell, 559

Come to the Lord, all you who are not proud, who obey his laws. Do what is right. Learn to be humble. Maybe you will escape on the day the Lord shows his anger. – Zephaniah 2:3 (NCV)



## The Power of God

Certainly we find that all our fears arise from this source that we are too anxious about life, while we acknowledge not that God is its preserver. We can have no tranquility, therefore, until we attain the persuasion that our life is sufficiently guarded, because it is protected by His omnipotent power. The interrogation, too, shows how highly David esteemed the Divine protection, as he thus bodily exults all his enemies and dangers. Nor assuredly do we ascribe the due homage to God, unless, trusting to his promised aid, we dare to boast of the certainty of our safety. Weighing, as it were, in scales the whole power of earth and hell, David accounts it all lighter than a feather, and considers God alone as far outweighing the whole.

Let us learn, therefore, to put such a value on God's power to protect us as to put to flight all our fears. Not that the minds of the faithful can, by reason of the infirmity of the flesh, be at all times entirely devoid of fear; but immediately recovering courage, let us, from the high tower of our confidence, look down upon all our dangers with contempt. Moreover, we must extend this confidence still further, in order to banish all fears from our consciences, like Paul, who, when speaking of his eternal salvation, boldly exclaims, "If God be for us, who can be against us?" (Romans 8:34).  
– Calvin, Day 95

The Lord is my light and my salvation –  
whom shall I fear?  
The Lord is the stronghold of my life – of  
whom shall I be afraid? – Psalm 27:1 (NIV)

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Lord, I am blind and helpless, stupid and ignorant. Cause me to hear; cause me to know; teach me to do; lead me.  
– William Carey, from *Counsel*, 354

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But now that you've found you don't have to listen to sin tell you what to do, and have discovered the delight of listening to God telling you, what a surprise! A whole, healed, put-together life right now, with more and more of life on the way! Work hard for sin your whole life and your pension is death. But God's gift is real life, eternal life, delivered by Jesus, our Master.  
– Romans 6:23 (MSG)

## The Discipline of Hearing

Sometimes God puts us through the experience and discipline of darkness to teach us to hear and obey Him. Song birds are taught to sing in the dark, and God puts us into "the shadow of His hand" until we learn to hear Him (Isaiah 49:2). Pay attention when God puts you into darkness, and keep your mouth closed while you are there. Are you in the dark right now in your circumstances, or in your life with God? If so, then remain quiet. If you open your mouth in the dark, you will speak while in the wrong mood – darkness is the time to listen. Don't talk to other people about it; don't read books to find out the reason for the darkness; just listen and obey. If

you talk to other people, you cannot hear what God is saying. When you are in the dark, listen, and God will give you a very precious message for someone else once you are back in the light.

After every time of darkness, we should experience a mixture of delight and humiliation. If there is only delight, I question whether we have really heard God at all. We should experience delight for having heard God speak, but mostly humiliation for having taken so long to hear Him! Then we will exclaim, "How slow I have been to listen and understand what God has been telling me!" And yet God has been saying it for days and even weeks. But once you hear Him, He gives you the gift of humiliation, which brings a softness of heart – a gift that will always cause you to listen to God now.  
– Chambers, Feb 14

## Splendid Gift

<sup>26</sup> “So do not be afraid of them, for there is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known. <sup>27</sup> What I tell you in the dark, speak in the daylight; what is whispered in your ear, proclaim from the roofs.” – Jesus, from Matthew 10:26-27 (NIV)

Live your life while you have it. Life is a splendid gift. There is nothing small in it. For the greatest things grow by God’s Law out of the smallest. But to live your life you must discipline it. You must not fritter it away in “fair purpose, erring act, inconstant will” but make your thoughts, your acts, all work to the same end and that end, not self but God. That is what we call character.

– Florence Nightingale, from Wallis, 47

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. – John 1:5 (NIV)

## The Night Has Come...

The night is come, like to the day,  
Depart not thou, great God, away.  
Let not my sins, black as the night,  
Eclipse the lustre of thy light.  
Keep still in my horizon; for to me;  
The sun makes not the day, but thee.  
Thou whose nature cannot sleep,  
On my temples sentry keep.  
Guard e ‘gainst those watchful foes,  
Whose eyes are open while mine close.  
Let no dreams my head infest,  
But such as Jacob’s temples blest.  
While I do rest, my soul advance;  
Make my sleep a holy trance;  
That I may, my rest being wrought,  
Awake into some holy thought,

And with as active vigour run  
My course, as doth the nimble sun.  
Sleep is a death; O make me try,  
By sleeping, what it is to die!  
And as gently lay my head  
On my grave, as now my bed.  
Howe’er I rest, great God, let me  
Awake again at last with thee.  
And thus assured, behold I like  
Securely, or to wake or die.  
These are my drowsy days; in vain  
I do now wake to sleep again;  
O come that hour, when I shall never sleep again, but  
wake forever!

– Sir Thomas Browne, from Counsell, 270-271

## Make a Pearl

Most of us can afford to take a lesson from the oyster. The most extraordinary thing about the oyster is this: irritations get into his shell. He does not like them; he tries to get rid of them. But when he cannot get rid of them he settles down to make of them one of the most beautiful things in the world. He uses the irritation to do the loveliest thing that an oyster ever has a chance to do. If there are irritations in our lives today, there is only one prescription: make a pearl. It may have to be a pearl of patience, but, anyhow, make a pearl. And it takes faith and love to do it. – Harry Emerson Fosdick, from Wallis, 223

<sup>3</sup> When the wine was gone, Jesus’ mother said to Him, “They have no more wine.”

<sup>4</sup> “Dear woman, why do you involve me?” Jesus replied. “My time has not yet come.”

<sup>5</sup> His mother said to the servants, “Do whatever He tells you.”

[Then Jesus turns water into wine....]

– John 2:3-5 (NIV)

## The Diary of David Brainerd

Jonathan Edwards edited and published the diary of his friend Brainerd, who had been a missionary to the Native Americans.

One morning, while I was walking in a solitary place, as usual, I at once saw that all my contrivances and projects to effect or procure deliverance and salvation for myself were utterly in vain; I was brought quite to a stand, as finding myself totally lost ..... While I remained in this state, my notions respecting my duties were quite different from what I had ever entertained in times past. Before this, the more I did in duty the more hard I thought it would be for God to cast me off ..... Now I saw that there was no necessary connection between my prayers and the bestowment of divine mercy ..... I saw that I had been heaping up my devotions before God, fasting, praying, etc., pretending, and indeed really thinking sometimes, that I was aiming at the glory of God; whereas I never truly intended it, but only for my own happiness ..... the whole was nothing, but self-worship, and an horrid abuse of God ..... I continued, as I remember, in this state of mind, from Friday morning till the Sabbath evening following (July 12, 1739), when I was walking again in the same solitary place ..... I thought that the spirit of God had quite left me; but still was not distressed; yet disconsolate, as if there was nothing on heaven and earth could make me happy. Having been thus endeavouring to pray – though, as I thought, very stupid and senseless – for nearly half an hour; then, as I was walking in a dark, thick grove, unspeakable glory seemed to open to the view and apprehension of my soul. I do not mean any eternal brightness, for I saw no such thing; nor do I intend any imagination of a body of light, somewhere in the third heavens, or any thing of that nature, but it was a new inward apprehension or view that I had of God, such as I never had before, nor anything which had the least resemblance to it. I stood still; wondered; and admired! ..... My soul rejoiced with joy unspeakable, to see such a God, such a glorious divine Being; and I was inwardly pleased and satisfied, that He should be God over all for ever and ever. My soul was so captivated and delighted with the excellency, loveliness, greatness, and other perfections of God, that I was even swallowed up in Him; at least to that degree, that I had no thought (as I remember) at first, about my own salvation, and scarce reflected that there was such a creature as myself. – Counsell, 321-322

<sup>17</sup> The arrogance of man will be brought low and human pride humbled; the Lord alone will be exalted in that day, <sup>18</sup> and the idols will totally disappear. – Isaiah 2: 17-18 (NIV)

<sup>9</sup> It is he who judges the world with justice,  
who judges the peoples with fairness.

<sup>10</sup> The Lord is a stronghold for the oppressed,  
a stronghold in times of trouble.

<sup>11</sup> Those who know your name trust in you;  
you never forsake those who seek you, Lord.  
– Psalm 9:9-11 (NAB)

## Prayer in Time of Distress

O Lord God, great distress has come upon me;  
my cares threaten to crush me,  
and I do not know what to do.  
Give me strength to bear what you send,  
and do not let fear rule over me;  
take a father's care of my wife and children.

O merciful God, forgive me all the sins that I have committed  
against you and against my fellow man.  
I trust in your grace and commit my life wholly into your hands.  
Do with me according to your will and as is best for me.  
Whether I live or die, I am with you, and you, my God, are with me.  
Lord, I wait for your salvation and for your kingdom.  
Amen. – Dietrich Bonhoeffer, from Counsell, 461

# Notes and Prayers on “I’m Gonna Tell Mama!”





## It Hurts So Bad.

For days when you experience:

sorrows .... tragedy .... difficulty .... adversity .... hardship .... grief .... emotional and/or physical pain .... and think you can't handle any more of life's disappointments and trials.

## Taking the Initiative Against Depression

The angel in this passage did not give Elijah a vision, or explain the Scriptures to him, or do anything remarkable. He simply told Elijah to do a very ordinary thing, that is, to get up and eat. If we were never depressed, we would not be alive – only material things don't suffer depression. If human beings were not capable of depression, we would have no capacity for happiness and exaltation. There are things in life that are designed to depress us, for example, things that are associated with death. Whenever you examine yourself, always take into account your capacity for depression.

When the Spirit of God comes to us, He does not give us glorious visions, but He tells us to do the more ordinary things imaginable. Depression tends to turn us away from the everyday things of God's creation. But whenever God steps in, His inspiration is to do the most natural, simple things – things we would never have imagined God was in, but as we do them we find Him there. The inspiration that comes to us in this way is an initiative against depression. But we must take the first step and do it in the inspiration of God. If, however, we do something simply to overcome our depression, we will only deepen it. But when the Spirit of God leads us instinctively to do something, the moment we do it, the depression is gone. As soon as we arise and obey [get up and eat], we enter a higher plane of life.

– Chambers, Feb 17

<sup>1</sup> Now Ahab told Jezebel everything Elijah had done and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. <sup>2</sup> So Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah to say, "May the gods deal with me, be it ever so severely, if by this time tomorrow I do not make your life like that of one of them."

<sup>3</sup> Elijah was afraid and ran for his life. When he came to Beersheba in Judah, he left his servant there, <sup>4</sup> while he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness. He came to a broom bush, sat down under it and prayed that he might die. "I have had enough, Lord," he said. "Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors." <sup>5</sup> Then he lay down under the bush and fell asleep.

All at once an angel touched him and said, "Get up and eat." <sup>6</sup> He looked around, and there by his head was some bread baked over hot coals, and a jar of water. He ate and drank and then lay down again.

<sup>7</sup> The angel of the Lord came back a second time and touched him and said, "Get up and eat, for the journey is too much for you." <sup>8</sup> So he got up and ate and drank. Strengthened by that food, he traveled forty days and forty nights until he reached Horeb, the mountain of God. <sup>9</sup> There he went into a cave and spent the night.

– I Kings 19:1-9 (NIV)

<sup>25</sup> It was nine in the morning when they crucified him. <sup>26</sup> The written notice of the charge against him read: THE KING OF THE JEWS.

<sup>27</sup> They crucified two rebels with him, one on his right and one on his left. <sup>28</sup> [See Luke 22:37]

<sup>29</sup> Those who passed by hurled insults at him, shaking their heads and saying, "So! You who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, <sup>30</sup> come down from the cross and save yourself!" <sup>31</sup> In the same way the chief priests and the teachers of the law mocked him among themselves. "He saved others," they said, "but he can't save himself!" <sup>32</sup> Let this Messiah, this king of Israel, come down now from the cross, that we may see and believe."

Those crucified with him also heaped insults on him.

– Mark 15:25-32 (NIV)

## The Good Friday Reproaches

Christ on the cross cries:

My people, what wrong have I done to you?

What good have I not done for you?

Listen to me. Is it nothing to you, all you who pass by?

Look and see if there is any sorrow like to my sorrow.

We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you,  
because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

– Probably tenth-century French, from Counsell, 126

## Discouragement

As our Saviour Jesus Christ, when hanging on the cross, and when ready to yield up His soul into the hands of God, His Father, made us of these very words of David, who represented a type of Christ (Matthew 27:46), we must consider how these two things can agree, that Christ was the only begotten Son of God, and that yet He was so penetrated with grief, seized with so great mental trouble, as to cry out that God, His Father, had forsaken Him. As Peter, in Acts 2:24, clearly testifies that: "it was not possible that He should be holden of the pains of death," it follows that He was not altogether exempted from them. And as He became our representative, and took upon Him our sins, it was certainly necessary that He should appear before the judgment seat of God as a sinner. From this proceeded the terror and dread which constrained Him to pray for deliverance from death, not that it was so grievous to Him merely to depart from this life; but because there

was before His eyes the curse of God, to which all who are sinners are exposed. Now, if during His first conflict "His sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground" and He needed an angel to comfort Him (Luke 22:43), it is not wonderful if, in His last sufferings on the cross, He uttered a complaint which indicated the deepest sorrow. Christ, although subject to human passions and affections, never fell into sin through the weakness of the flesh; for the perfection of His nature preserved Him from all excess. He could therefore overcome all the temptations with which Satan assailed Him, without receiving any wound in the conflict which might afterwards constrain Him to halt.

If God so severely exercised His most eminent servant David, and abased Him so far that He had not a place even among the most despised of men, let us not take it ill, if, after his example, we are brought low. We ought, however, principally to call to our remembrance the Son of God, in whom we know this also was fulfilled, as Isaiah had predicted (53:3), "He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain. Like one from whom people hide their faces he was despised, and we held him in low esteem." — Calvin, Day 69

<sup>1</sup> My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

Why are you so far from saving me,  
so far from my cries of anguish?

<sup>2</sup> My God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer,  
by night, but I find no rest.

<sup>3</sup> Yet you are enthroned as the Holy One;  
you are the one Israel praises.

<sup>4</sup> In you our ancestors put their trust;  
they trusted and you delivered them.

<sup>5</sup> To you they cried out and were saved;  
in you they trusted and were not put to shame.

<sup>6</sup> But I am a worm and not a man,  
scorned by everyone, despised by the people.

<sup>7</sup> All who see me mock me;  
they hurl insults, shaking their heads.

— Psalm 22:1-7 (NIV)

## Gethsemane

He went away a second  
time and prayed, "My  
Father, if it is not possible  
for this cup to be taken  
away unless I drink it, may  
your will be done."

— Matthew 26:42

All those who journey, soon or late,  
Must pass within the garden's gate;  
Must kneel alone in darkness there  
And battle with some fierce despair.

God pity those who cannot say:  
"Not mine but thine"; who only pray:  
"Let this cup pass" and cannot see  
The purpose of Gethsemane.

— Ella Wheeler Wilcox, from Wallis, 226

## Our Negatives Are Sometimes God's Positives

Apologies are difficult, especially when they are not accepted.

David Brainerd was born in Connecticut in 1718. Shortly before he entered Yale in 1739, he experienced a profound conversion to Jesus Christ.

Brainerd's years at Yale were difficult. Yale had been founded because Harvard had become Unitarian, yet the many religious activities there appeared to have little effect on the student body. The main diversions of the students were drinking parties, gambling, and harassment of the townspeople.

In August 1740 Brainerd's tutor noticed that he was spitting up blood, the first sign of tuberculosis. His tutor recommended that he return home to recuperate.

While Brainerd was at home, George Whitefield, the 25-year-old Anglican evangelist, preached at Yale. Brainerd returned to Yale in November, and by the following February the fruit of George Whitefield's preaching was beginning to manifest itself.

In March, Gilbert Tennant, an Irish American evangelist, preached at Yale and had a great impact upon the students. However, by September of 1741, Thomas Clap, the rector and president, and the college trustees took a stand against the revivalists. They condemned the students who were in support of what became known as the Great Awakening and passed a resolution stating "that if any student of this college shall indirectly state that the rector .... the trustees or tutors are hypocrites, carnal or unconverted men, he shall for his first offense make a public confession in the Hall, and for the second offense, be expelled."

David Brainerd, now a junior, spent many hours discussing spiritual things with his fellow students. One day the discussion was about a certain tutor. When one of Brainerd's friends asked him what he thought of the tutor he replied, "He has no more grace than this chair." A freshman overheard Brainerd's remark, and soon President Clap learned of it and summoned Brainerd. David admitted making the comment, and the president told him that he must make a public apology to the student body. Brainerd refused, believing that a public confession was inappropriate since it had been a private remark. To President Clap this was an act of rebellion, and he immediately expelled Brainerd.

A law recently passed in Connecticut state that no minister could be installed in a church unless he was a graduate of Yale, Harvard, or a European university. Because of his expulsion David Brainerd was not cut off from his calling. On September 15, 1743, Brainerd wrote a letter to President Clap and the trustees of Yale confessing his sin in his handling of the situation and offering to make a public apology to the student body. His appeal was rejected.

Yet God worked the situation out for His glory and for Brainerd's good. Group of ministers sympathetic to the Great Awakening licensed Brainerd to preach and appointed him as a missionary to the American Indians. In the few remaining years before his death he brought the Great Awakening to the Indians of Massachusetts, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania.

But the results of Brainerd's expulsion from Yale went far beyond his ministry to the Indians. Jonathan Dickinson and Aaron Burr Sr., both graduates of Yale and Presbyterian pastors, took an interest in Brainerd's efforts to be re-admitted to Yale and were disillusioned with the college's refusal to re-admit him.

Brainerd's expulsion brought to a head the Presbyterians' dissatisfaction with Yale and solidified the resolve to begin a college of their own. The College of New Jersey, later Princeton University, began in 1741 in Jonathan Dickinson's home, where David Brainerd, now 29, was living in his final months. Brainerd is thus considered to be the college's first student. Brainerd's expulsion from Yale precipitated the founding of Princeton.

– Rusten, 518-519

<sup>19</sup> But Joseph said to them, "Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God?" <sup>20</sup> You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. <sup>21</sup> So then, don't be afraid. I will provide for you and your children." And he reassured them and spoke kindly to them.

– Genesis 50:19-21 (NIV)



## Three Spirituals

<sup>6</sup> My life is being given as an offering to God, and the time has come for me to leave this life. <sup>7</sup> I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. <sup>8</sup> Now, a crown is being held for me — a crown for being right with God. The Lord, the judge who judges rightly, will give the crown to me on that day — not only to me but to all those who have waited with love for him to come again. — 2 Timothy 4:6-8 (NCV)

### Nobody Knows the Trouble I See

Nobody knows the trouble I see, nobody knows but Jesus;  
Nobody knows the trouble I see, Glory, Hallelujah!  
Sometimes I'm up, sometimes I'm down, O yes, Lord!  
Sometimes I'm almost to the ground, O yes, Lord.  
Nobody knows the trouble I see, nobody knows but Jesus;  
Nobody knows the trouble I see, Glory, Hallelujah!

### Oh, Wasn't That a Wide River?

Oh, wasn't that a wide river, river of Jordan, Lord?  
Wide river, there's one more river to cross.  
Old River Jordan is so wide, (one more river to cross),  
I don't know how to get on the other side, (one more river to cross).  
Oh, wasn't that a wide river, river of Jordan, Lord?  
Wide river, there's one more river to cross.

### Trials dark on Every Hand

Trials dark on every hand, and we cannot understand  
All the ways that God would lead us to that Blessed Promise Land.  
But He guides us with His eye and we'll follow till we die.  
For we'll understand it better by and by.

By and by, when the morning comes,  
All the saints of God are gathered home.  
We'll tell the story how we overcome.

For we'll understand it better by and by. — from Counsell, 473

## Meditations on the Good Use of Sickness

Lord, you are good and gentle in all your ways; and your mercy is so great that not only the blessings but also the misfortunes of your people are channels of your compassion. Grant that I may turn to you as a Father in my present condition since the change in my own state from health to sickness brings no change to you. You are always the same, and you are my loving Father in times of trouble and in times of joy alike.

O my Saviour, since I share in some small way your sufferings, fill me to the brim with the glory which your sufferings won for mankind. Let me share in some small way the joy of your risen life.

O Lord, let me not henceforth desire health or life except to spend them for you, with you and in you. You alone know what is good for me; do therefore what seems best to you. Give to me or take from me; conform my will to yours; and grant that with humble and perfect submission and in holy confidence I may receive the orders of your eternal providence, and may equally adore all that comes to me from you; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

— Blaise Pascal, from Counsell, 286

<sup>8</sup> Rather, it was simply that the Lord loves you, and he was keeping the oath he had sworn to your ancestors. That is why the Lord rescued you with such a strong hand from your slavery and from the oppressive hand of Pharaoh, king of Egypt. <sup>9</sup> Understand, therefore, that the Lord your God is indeed God. He is the faithful God who keeps his covenant for a thousand generations and lavishes his unfailing love on those who love him and obey his commands.

— Deuteronomy 7:8-9 (NLT)

## To One in Sorrow

<sup>3</sup> Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, <sup>4</sup> who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God.

– 2 Cor. 1:3-4 (NIV)

Let me come in where you are weeping, friend,  
And let me take your hand.  
I, who have known a sorrow such as yours,  
Can understand.  
Let me come in – I would be very still  
Beside you in your grief;  
I would not bid you cease your weeping, friend,  
Tears bring relief.  
Let me come in – I would only breathe a prayer,  
And hold your hand,  
For I have known a sorrow such as yours,  
And understand.

– Grace Noll Crowell, from Wallis, 227

## Steadfastness

Only in winter can you tell which trees are truly green. Only when the winds of adversity blow can you tell whether an individual or a country has courage and steadfastness.

– John F. Kennedy, from Wallis, 226

Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord,  
the people he chose for his inheritance.

– Psalm 33:12 (NIV)

<sup>20</sup> “My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, <sup>21</sup> that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you.

– John 17:20-21 (NIV)

## The Explanation for Our Difficulties

If you are going through a time of isolation, seemingly all alone, read John 17. It will explain exactly why you are where you are – because Jesus has prayed that you “may be one” with the Father as He is. Are you helping God to answer that prayer, or do you have some other goal for your life? Since you became a disciple, you cannot be as independent as you used to be.

God reveals in John 17 that His purpose is not just to answer our prayers, but that through prayer we might come to discern His mind. Yet there is one prayer which God must answer, and that is the prayer of Jesus – “that all of them may be one, just as we are one” (17:22). Are we as close to Jesus as that?

God is not concerned about our plans; He doesn't ask, “Do you want to go through this loss of a loved one, this difficulty, or this defeat?” No. He allows these things for His own purpose. The things we are going through are either making us sweeter, better, and nobler men and women, or they are making us more critical and fault-finding, and more insistent on our own way. The things that happen either make us evil, or they make us more saintly, depending entirely on our relationship with God and its level of intimacy. If we will pray, regarding our own lives, “Your will be done” (Matthew 26:47), then we will be encouraged and comforted by John 17, knowing that our Father is working according to His own wisdom, accomplishing what is best. When we understand God's purpose, we will not become small-minded and cynical. Jesus prayed nothing less for us than absolute oneness with Himself, just as He was one with the Father. Some of us are far from this oneness; yet God will not leave us alone until we are one with Him – because Jesus prayed, “... that all of them may be one...”.

– Chambers, May 22

## Compassion from the Cross

I have often meditated on this tender scene when both a screaming throng and the searing pain of crucifixion momentarily gave way to another concern. In the middle of unimaginable torture, with every breath a struggle, the sight of Jesus' grieving mother and horrified friend capture His attention. Inconceivable compassion spilled from His heart as He bid them to love and support each other.

I see great significance in the fact that He did not minimize their loss or grief. He did not consider their pain as insignificant detail in a work of far greater glory. He did not wonder how they could think so temporally. His heart broke with compassion, and He reached out to them in their need.

A glimpse of Christ's heart in this tender moment can be healing for us if we'll let it. You see, He looks on us with the same compassion. Imagine – at the very moment Christ was dying on the cross, salvation was secured for all who would believe. The enemy was defeated. Hell was trembling. Demons were howling, God was momentarily turning His face as every sin known to man was heaped on His Son. The hours Christ spent on the cross represented the most significant moments since time began.

John and Mary's grief and confusion were nothing compared to the awesome work accomplished that afternoon. However, the friend and the mother did not look through eternal eyes to "see" the work of the Savior. They saw the impending loss of someone they loved and wanted nearby. Still, Christ looked upon their suffering and said, "Dear woman, here is your son," and to the disciple, "Here is your mother."

Jesus knew they could not comprehend the greater glory at work. He knew they wanted Him to climb down off the cross and live. For their sakes, He could not suspend His glorious works, yet Christ's heart poured forth compassion.

My friend, at times Christ will do glorious works that involve suffering and loss. He persists in a greater glory even when we kick and scream and beg Him to do otherwise. Why? Because He will not allow us to cheat ourselves of something more marvelous than we can conceive. He knows one day we will understand.

Someday we will celebrate Christ's unwillingness to give in to our demands – even when our begging broke His heart. He is working the greater work. Still, He has overwhelming compassion for our pain and confusion. Christ doesn't grow impatient and wonder how we can be so foolish to hurt over earthly losses. He doesn't even sigh and whisper, "If you only knew." His heart bleeds with mercy, and He comes to our aid.

Oh, beloved, can you trust a heart like His?

– Moore, 172

<sup>17</sup> Carrying his own cross, he went out to the place of the Skull (which in Aramaic is called Golgotha). <sup>18</sup> There they crucified him, and with him two others – one on each side and Jesus in the middle.

<sup>19</sup> Pilate had a notice prepared and fastened to the cross. It read: JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS. <sup>20</sup> Many of the Jews read this sign, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city, and the sign was written in Aramaic, Latin and Greek. <sup>21</sup> The chief priests of the Jews protested to Pilate, "Do not write 'The King of the Jews,' but that this man claimed to be king of the Jews."

<sup>22</sup> Pilate answered, "What I have written, I have written."

<sup>23</sup> When the soldiers crucified Jesus, they took his clothes, dividing them into four shares, one for each of them, with the undergarment remaining. This garment was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom.

<sup>24</sup> "Let's not tear it," they said to one another. "Let's decide by lot who will get it." ..... So this is what the soldiers did.

<sup>25</sup> Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. <sup>26</sup> When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to her, "Woman, here is your son," <sup>27</sup> and to the disciple, "Here is your mother." From that time on, this disciple took her into his home. – John 19:17-27 (NIV)

Never stop praying. – I Thess. 5:17 (NLT)

O Lord, cure our infirmities, pardon our offenses, lighten our burdens, enrich our poverty; through Christ our Lord. Amen.

– Christopher Sutton, from Counsell, 233

## We Are Safe In You

O God, animate us to cheerfulness. May we have a joyful sense of our blessings, learn to look on the bright circumstances of our lot, and maintain a perpetual contentedness under they allotments. Fortify our minds against disappointment and calamity. Preserve us from despondency, from yielding to defection. Teach us that no evil is intolerable, but a guilty conscience, and that nothing can hurt us, if, with true loyalty of affection, we keep thy commandments and take refuge in thee; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

– William Ellery Channing, from Counsell, 322

But he said to me, “My grace is enough for you. When you are weak, my power is made perfect in you.” So I am very happy to brag about my weaknesses. Then Christ’s power can live in me. – 2 Cor. 12:9 (NCV)

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Speak to Him thou for He hears, and spirit with Spirit can meet –

Closer is He than breathing, and nearer than hands and feet.

– Alfred Lord Tennyson, from Counsell, 361

Our Father in heaven,  
Reveal who you are.  
Set the world right;  
Do what’s best—  
as above, so below.  
Keep us alive with three square meals.  
Keep us forgiven with you and forgiving others.  
Keep us safe from ourselves and the Devil.  
You’re in charge! – Matthew 7:9-13 (MSG)

## Deliver Us

O God, you know our hearts, and you see our temptations and struggles. Have pity on us, deliver us from the sins which make war upon our souls. You are all-powerful, and we are weak and erring. Faithful God, our trust is in you. Deliver us from the bondage of evil, and grant that we may hereafter be your devoted servants, serving you in the freedom of holy love; for Jesus Christ’s sake. Amen.

– Eugène Bersier, from Counsell, 379

## The Never-Forsaking God

What line of thinking do my thoughts take? Do I turn to what God says or to my own fears? Am I simply repeating what God says, or am I learning to truly hear Him and then to respond after I have heard what He says? God will never forsake you. So we may boldly say: “The Lord is with me; I will not be afraid. What can mere mortals do to me?” (Psalm 118:6).

“He will never leave you nor forsake you” – not for any reason; not my sin, selfishness, stubbornness, or waywardness. Have I really let God say to me that He will never leave me? If I have not truly heard this assurance of God, then let me listen again.

“He will never leave you nor forsake you.” Sometimes it is not the difficulty of life but the drudgery of it that makes me think God will forsake me. When there is no major difficulty to overcome, no vision from God, nothing wonderful or beautiful – just the everyday activities of life – do I hear God’s assurance even in these?

We have the idea that God is going to do some exceptional thing – that He is preparing and equipping us for some extraordinary work in the future. .... If we have God’s assurance behind us, the most amazing strength becomes ours, and we learn to sing, glorifying Him even in the ordinary days and ways of life. – Chambers, June 4

Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the Lord your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. – Deut. 31:6 (NIV)

## Martin Luther's Daughter

And now, dear brothers, I want you to know what happens to a Christian when he dies so that when it happens, you will not be full of sorrow, as those are who have no hope. – I Thess. 4:13 (TLB)

Martin Luther, the father of the Reformation, married Katharine Von Bora, a former nun, in 1525. Luther and Katie, as he called her, had six children, Hans, Elizabeth, Magdalena, Martin, Paul, and Margaretha.

In 1542 when Hans was sixteen, the Luthers sent him to Torgau to school because Wittenberg did not have an appropriate school for his education. Scarcely had he arrived there than his thirteen-year-old sister, Magdalena, became deathly ill. Martin Luther wrote to Hans's teacher:

My daughter Magdalena is nearing her end and will soon go to her true Father in heaven unless He sees fit to spare her. She longs so much to see her brother, for they were very close, so I am sending a carriage for him, in the hope that a sight of him will revive her. I'm doing all I can lest afterwards the thought of having neglected anything should torment me. Please ask him to come at once without telling him why. I shall send him back as soon as she has either fallen asleep in the Lord or been restored to health. Farewell in the Lord.

Hans returned home, but Magdalena's health continued to deteriorate. Luther prayed. "Oh God, I love her dearly, but thy will be done." Then he asked her, "Magdalena, my little girl, would you like to stay with your father here and would you just as gladly go to your Father in heaven?"

She answered, "Yes, dearest father, as God wills."

It grieved Luther that in spite of all the blessings he had received from God, he found himself unable in this situation to give thanks.

On September 20, 1542, as Magdalena's death drew near, Luther knelt at her bedside, praying through his tears that God would receive his little one. Katie stood at the end of the room, unable to watch as Magdalena died in her father's arms. Turning to his grieving wife, Luther said with compassion, "Dearest Katie, let us think of the home our daughter has gone to; there she is happy and at peace."

As Magdalena was laid in her coffin, Luther remarked, "My darling, you will rise and shine like the stars and the sun." Then he said to Katie, "How strange to know that she is at peace and all is well and yet to be sorrowful."

To his friends who came to mourn with him, he said, "Let us not be sad. I have sent a saint to heaven. If mine could be like hers, I would gladly welcome death at this very hour."

Luther wrote the epitaph for her grave:

Here, I, Magdalena,  
Doctor Luther's little maid  
Resting with the saints  
Sleep in my narrow bed.  
I was a child of death  
For I was born in sin  
But now I live, redeemed, Lord Christ,  
By the blood you shed for me.

Three days after her death, Luther wrote a letter to his friend, Justus Jonas:

I expect you have heard that my beloved Magdalena has been born again into Christ's everlasting kingdom. Although my wife and I ought to rejoice because of her happy end, yet such is the strength of natural affection that we cannot think of it without sobs and groans which tear the heart apart. The memory of her face, her words, her expression in life and in death – everything about our most obedient and loving daughter lingers in our hearts so that even the death of Christ (and what are all deaths compared to His?) is almost powerless to lift our minds above our loss. So would you give thanks to God in our stead? For hasn't He honored us greatly in glorifying our child?

– Rusten, 528

# Notes and Prayers for “It Hurts So Bad”





## Mary Lou and Billy Bob Need Help!

For days when you are called to:

serve others .... reach out to help a family .... lend a hand to a tornado victim .... go on a mission trip .... be there for a friend in need .... listen to someone in pain .... and show love and mercy to someone else.

## “Am I My Brother’s Keeper?”

Has it ever dawned on you that you are responsible spiritually to God for other people? For instance, if I allow any turning away from God in my private life, everyone around me suffers. “If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it” (1 Cor 12:26 NIV). If you allow physical selfishness, mental carelessness, moral insensitivity, or spiritual weakness, everyone in contact with you will suffer. But you ask, “Who is [qualified] to be able to live up to such a lofty standard? “Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God” and God alone (2 Cor 3:5).

“You will be my witnesses....” (Acts 1:8). How many of us are willing to spend every bit of our nervous, mental, moral, and spiritual energy for Jesus Christ? That is what God means when He uses the words witness. But it takes time, so be patient with yourself. Why has God left us on the earth? Is it simply to be saved and sanctified? No, it is to be a work in service to Him. Am I willing to be broken bread and poured-out wine for Him? Am I willing to be of no value to his age or this life except for one purpose and one along – to be used to disciple men and women to the Lord Jesus Christ? My life of service to God is the way I say “thank you” to Him for His inexpressibly wonderful salvation. ....

For none of us lives for ourselves alone, and none of us dies for ourselves alone.

– Romans 14:7 (NIV)

– Chambers, Feb 15

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They might not need me; but they might. I'll let my head be just in sight;  
A smile as small as mine might be precisely their necessity.

– Emily Dickinson, from Wallis, 121

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<sup>18</sup> Jesus came and told his disciples, “I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth. <sup>19</sup> Therefore, go and make disciples of all peoples, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. <sup>20</sup> Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

– Matt. 28:18-20 (NLT)

## Anonymous Prayers

Infinite Lord and eternal God,  
Rouse your Church in this land,  
Restore your people’s sense of mission,  
And revive your work in holiness and strength.  
By your Spirit, teach us to give our energy,  
Our time, our money, our service and our prayer,  
That your kingdom may be advanced  
Here and in all the world;  
In the name of Jesus Christ our Lord.

– The Church in Wales, from Counsell, 581

Lord of light – shine on us;  
Lord of peace – dwell in us;  
Lord of might – succour us;  
Lord of love – enfold us;  
Lord of wisdom – enlighten us;

Then, Lord, let us go out as your witnesses, in obedience to your command;

To share the good news of your mighty love for us in the gift of your Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ.

– The Church in Wales from Counsell, 581



## A Helping Hand

When your own burden is heaviest, you can always lighten a little some other burden. At the times when you cannot see God, there is still open to you this scared possibility, to show God; for it is the love and kindness of human hearts through which the divine reality comes home to men, whether they name it or not. Let this thought, then, stay with you: there may be times when you cannot find help, but there is no time when you cannot give help.

– George S. Merriam, from Wallis, 123

<sup>29</sup> Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls. <sup>30</sup> For my yoke is easy to bear, and the burden I give you is light.”

– Matthew 11:29-30 (NLT)

<sup>13</sup> “You are the world’s seasoning, to make it tolerable. If you lose your flavor, what will happen to the world? And you yourselves will be thrown out and trampled underfoot as worthless. <sup>14</sup> You are the world’s light—a city on a hill, glowing in the night for all to see. <sup>15-16</sup> Don’t hide your light! Let it shine for all; let your good deeds glow for all to see, so that they will praise your heavenly Father.

– Matt 5:13-15 (TLB)

## The Torchbearer

The hero is one who kindles a great light in the world, who sets up blazing torches in the dark streets of life for men to see by. The saint is the man who walks through the dark paths of the world, himself a light.

– Felix Adler, from Lytle, 117

## My Daily Prayer

<sup>34</sup> “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. <sup>35</sup> By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”

– John 13:34-35 (NIV)

If I can do some good today,  
If I can serve along life’s way,  
If I can something helpful say,  
Lord, show me how.

If I can right a human wrong,  
If I can help to make one strong,  
If I can cheer with smile or song,  
Lord show me how.

If I can aid one in distress,  
If I can make a burden less,  
If I can spread more happiness,  
Lord, show me how.

– Grenville Kleiser, from Wallis, 123

<sup>12-14</sup> So, chosen by God for this new life of love, dress in the wardrobe God picked out for you: compassion, kindness, humility, quiet strength, discipline. Be even-tempered, content with second place, quick to forgive an offense. Forgive as quickly and completely as the Master forgave you. And regardless of what else you put on, wear love. It’s your basic, all-purpose garment. Never be without it.

– Colossians 3:11-14 (MSG)

## The Cost Is Small

Kindness has been described in many ways. It is the poetry of the heart, the music of the world. It is a golden chain which binds society together. It is a fountain of gladness, words produce their own beautiful image in man’s soul. Everyone knows the pleasure of receiving a kind look, a warm greeting, a hand held out in time of need. And such gestures can be made at so little expense, yet they bring such dividends to the investor.

– The War Cry, from Wallis, 123

## The Winsomeness of Holiness (Leading or Misleading)

“Though His ministry follows mine, I’m not even worthy to be his slave and untie the straps of his sandal.”

– John the Baptist, John 1:27 (NLT)

John the Baptist would never get hired today. No church would touch him. He was a public relations disaster. He “wore clothes made from camel’s hair, had a leather belt around his waist, and ate locusts and wild honey” (Mark 1:6). Who would want to look at a guy like that every Sunday?

His message was as rough as his dress: a no-nonsense, bare-fisted challenge to repent because God was in His way.

Didn’t matter to John if you were a Jew, a priest, a Baptist, or all three. What mattered was that you get off your duff and get right with God because He’s coming and he don’t mean maybe.

No, John would never get hired today. His tactics lacked tact. His style wasn’t smooth. He made few friends and lots of enemies, but what do you know? He made hundreds of converts. “All the people from Judea and Jerusalem were going out to him. They confessed their sins and were baptized by him in the Jordan River” (Mar 1:5).

Look at that. “All the people of Judea and Jerusalem...” How do we explain such a response? It certainly wasn’t his charisma or clothing. Nor was it his money or position, for he had neither. Then what did he have?

One word. Holiness.

John the Baptist set himself apart for one task, to be a voice of Christ. Everything about John centered on his purpose. His dress. His diet. His actions. His demands.

He reminded his hearers of Elijah. And he reminds us of this truth: “There is winsomeness in holiness.” You don’t have to be like the world to have an impact on the world. You don’t have to be like the crowd to change the crowd. You don’t have to lower yourself down to their level to lift them up to your level.

Nor do you have to be weird. You don’t need to wear camel’s hair clothing or eat insects. Holiness doesn’t seek to be odd. Holiness seeks to be like god.

You want to make a difference in your world? Live a holy life:

Be faithful to your spouse.

Be the one at the office who refuses to cheat.

Be the neighbor who acts neighborly.

Be the employee who does the work and doesn’t complain.

Pay your bills.

Do your part and enjoy life.

Don’t speak one message and live another.

Note the last line of Paul’s words in I Thessalonians 4:11-12:

<sup>11</sup> Do all you can to live a peaceful life. Take care of your own business, and do your own work as we have already told you. <sup>12</sup> If you do, then people who are not believers will respect you.

A peaceful life leads nonbelievers to respect believers. What if John’s life had not matched his words? What if he’d preached repentance and lived in immorality? What if he’d called for holiness and yet had a reputation for dishonesty? If John’s life had not matched his words, his message would have fallen on deaf ears.

So will ours. People are watching the way we act more than they are listening to what we say.

St. Francis of Assisi once invited a young monk to accompany him to town to preach. The novice was honored at the opportunity. The two set out for the city, then walked up and down the main street, then several side streets. They chatted with peddlers and greeted the citizens. After some time they returned by another route to the abbey.

The younger man reminded Francis of his original intent. “You have forgotten, Father, that we went to town to preach.”

“My son,” he replied, “we have preached. We have been seen by many. Our behavior was closely measured. Our words have been overheard. It was by thus that we preached our morning sermon.”

John was a voice for Christ with more than his voice. His life matched his words. When a person’s ways and words are the same, the fusion is explosive. But when a person says one thing and lives another, the result is destructive. People will know we are Christians, not because we bear the name but because we live the life.

[continued]

It's the life that earns the name, not the name that creates the life. Here's a story that illustrates this point.

A Jewish couple were arguing over the name to give their firstborn. They finally asked the rabbi to come and intercede.

"What is the problem?" the rabbi asked.

The wife spoke first, "He wants to name the boy after his father and I want to name the boy after my father."

"What is your father's name?" he asked the man.

"Joseph."

"And what is your father's name?" he asked the woman.

"Joseph."

The rabbi was stunned. "So, what's the problem?"

It was the wife who spoke again. "His father was a horse thief, and mine was a righteous man. How can I know my son is named after my father and not his?"

The rabbi thought and then replied, "Call the boy Joseph. Then see if he is a horse thief or a righteous man. You will know which father's name he wears."

To call yourself a child of God is one thing. To be called a child of God by those who watch your life is another thing altogether.

– Lucado, *Gentle Thunder*, 153-155

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## Do With Me As You Will

May your kingdom come and what you want be done, here on earth as it is in heaven. – Matthew 6:10 (NCV)

My Father, I abandon myself to you. Do with me as you will. Whatever you may do with me I thank you. I am prepared for anything. I accept everything, provided your will is fulfilled in me and in all creature. I ask for nothing more, my God. I place my soul in your hands. I give it to you, my God, with all the love of my heart, because

I love you. And for me, it is a necessity of love, this gift of myself, this placing of myself in your hands without reserve in boundless confidence, because you are my Father.

– Charles de Foucault, from *Counsell*, 408-409

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Die when I may, I want it said of me by those who knew me best,  
that I always plucked a thistle and planted a flower where I thought a flower would grow.

– Abraham Lincoln, from *Wallis*, 124

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## Influence

The least may influence the greatest. It was St. Andrew that influenced St. Peter to "come and see" Jesus. One least spoken of among the apostles influenced the one who took the foremost place among them as if to show that such power is independent of personal superiority. It is not the great and gifted alone who exercise this mysterious power of influence. It is a universal law of life. These personal influences, first of Jesus on Andrew, then of Andrew on Peter, were the beginning of the conversion of the world.

– T.T. Carter, from *Lytle*, 118

<sup>40</sup> Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, was one of the two who heard what John had said and who had followed Jesus. <sup>41</sup> The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, "We have found the Messiah" (that is, the Christ). <sup>42</sup> And he brought him to Jesus. – John 1:40-41 (NIV)

“Your attitude must be like my own, for I, the Messiah, did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give my life as a ransom for many.”  
– Matthew 20:28 (TLB)

## The Determination to Serve

Paul’s idea of service was the same as our Lord’s – “ourselves as your servants for Jesus’ sake” (2 Cor 4:5 NIV). We somehow have the idea that a person called to the ministry is called to be different and above other people. But according to Jesus Christ, he is called to be a “doorman” for others – called to be their spiritual leader, but never their superior, Paul said, “ I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in

want” (Philippians 4:12 NIV). Paul’s idea of service was to pour his life out to the last drop for others. And whether he received praise or blame made no difference. As long as there was one human being who did not know Jesus. Paul felt a debt of service to that person until he did come to know Him. But the chief motivation behind Paul’s service as not love for others but love for his Lord. If our devotion is to the cause of humanity, we will be quickly defeated and brokenhearted, since we will often be confronted with a great deal of ingratitude from other people. But if we are motivated by our love for God, no amount of ingratitude will be able to hinder us from service one another.

..... [N]o matter how badly others may have treated Paul, they could never have treated him with the same degree of spite and hatred with which he had treated Jesus Christ (1 Tim 1:13). Once we realize that Jesus has served us even to the depths of our meagerness, our selfishness, and our sin, nothing we encounter from others will be able to exhaust our determination to serve others for His sake.

– Chambers, Feb 23

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It is not up to us to save anyone. It is up to us to make the introduction. God does the work, not us.

– Elizabeth Daniel

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## Neighborliness

Blessed Lord, by word and example you have shown us the meaning of neighbourliness, and the way of love; grant that we may learn to recognize as our neighbor every fellow human being who needs our help, and to serve them with a love that is costly and unselfish, like your own love for us. We ask this for your name’s sake, O Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

– attributed to William Thomas Manning, from Counsell, 430

<sup>36</sup> “Now which of these three would you say was a neighbor to the man who was attacked by bandits?” Jesus asked.

<sup>37</sup> The man replied, “The one who showed him mercy.” Then Jesus said, “Yes, now go and do the same.”

– Luke 10:36-37 (NLT)

Now I say to you that you are Peter (which means ‘rock’), and upon this rock I will build my church, and all the powers of hell will not conquer it.

– Matthew 16:18 (NLT)

## The Church

A reading church is an informed church;

An informed church is an interested church;

An interested church is an acting church;

An acting church is a serving church;

A serving church is a Christian church. – Various, from Wallis, 120

## Look Before You Label (Caring or Condemning?)

<sup>1</sup> As Jesus was walking along, he saw a man who had been born blind. <sup>2</sup> His followers asked him, “Teacher, whose sin caused this man to be born blind—his own sin or his parents’ sin?”  
— John 9:1-2 (NCV)

Recently we took our kids on a vacation to a historical city. While going on a tour through an old house, we followed a family from New York City. They didn’t tell me they were from New York. They didn’t have to. I could tell. They wore New York City clothes. Their teenager had one half of his head shave and on the other half of his head, his hair hung past his shoulders. The daughter wore layered clothes and long beads. The mother looked like she’d raided her daughter’s closet, and the dad’s hair was down the back of his neck.

I had them all figured out. The kid was probably on drugs. The parents were going through a midlife crisis. They were rich and miserable and in need of counseling. Good thing I was nearby in case they wanted spiritual counsel.

After a few moments they introduced themselves. I was right; they were from New York City. But that is all I got right. When I told them my name, they were flabbergasted. “We can’t believe it!” they said. “We’ve read you books. We use them in our Sunday school class in church. I tried to get over to hear you when you spoke in our area, but that was our family night and ....”

Sunday school? Church? Family nights? Oh, boy. I’d made a mistake. A big mistake. I’d applied the label before examining the contents.

We’ve all used labels. We stick them on jars and manila folders so we’ll know what’s inside. We also stick them on people for the same reason.

John tells of a time the disciples applied a label. Jesus and His followers came upon a man who had been blind from birth. Here is the question the disciples asked Jesus: “Teacher, whose sin caused this man to be born blind—his own sin or his parents’ sin?” (John 9:2).

Never mind that the man is a beggar in need of help. Never mind that the man has spent His life in a dark cave. Never mind the man seated in front of them is in earshot of their voices. Let’s talk about his sin.

How could they be so harsh? So insensitive? So ..... blind.

The answer? (You may not like it.) It’s easier to talk about a person than to help a person. It’s easier to debate homosexuality than to be a friend to a gay person. It’s easier to discuss divorce than to help the divorced. It’s easier to argue abortion than to support an orphanage. It’s easier to complain about the welfare system than to help the poor.

It’s easier to label than to love.

It’s especially easy to talk theology. Such discussions make us feel righteous. Self-righteous.

As long as I’m confessing sins, I might as well confess another. We had such a theological discussion in Brazil. We missionaries debated whether we should offer Communion to people who are not members of our church. Our reasoning? What if they aren’t faithful? What if they aren’t truly converted? What if their hearts aren’t right? If we offer them Communion, we could be leading them to eat the bread or drink of the cup in an unworthy manner, thereby leading them to sin (see I Cor II:27). So we decided that first-time visitors could not partake.

We meant well. It sounded right. But I learned a lesson.

Guess what happened. That very week a friend told me he would like to visit the church. The same friend we had been inviting for weeks. The same friend who had shown no interest was suddenly interested. At first I was elated; then my heart sank. I told him he could come, but he couldn’t partake in Communion.

As long as I live, I’ll never forget the look on his face as he passed the Communion plate to the person next to him. He never returned. Who could blame him? We’d applied the label before we looked inside.

Is that to say religious discussion is wrong? Of course not. Is that to say we should be unconcerned for doctrine or lax in a desire for holiness? Absolutely not. That is to say there is something wrong with applying the label before examining the contents. Do you like it when people label you before they know you?

“So, you’re unemployed?” (Translation: must be a bum.)

“Hmm, you’re an accountant?” (Translation: must be dull.)

[continued]

“She’s an Episcopalian.” (Translation: must be liberal.)

“She’s an Episcopalian who voted for the democrats.” (Translation: must be liberal beyond help.)

“Oh, I’m sorry; I didn’t know you were a divorcee.” (Translation: must be immoral.)

“He’s a fundamentalist.” (Translation: Narrow-minded half-wit.)

Labels. A fellow gave me one the other day. We got into a lively discussion about some ethical issues. Somewhere in our conversation he asked me what kind of work I was in. I told him I was a minister, and he said, “Oh, I see,” and grew silent.

I wanted to say, “No, you don’t. Don’t you put me in that box. I’m not a minister. I am Max-who-ministers. Don’t you put me in that box with all those hucksters and hypocrites you may know. That’s not fair.”

Labels. So convenient. Stick them on a person, and you know what pantry to use.

What if God did that with us? What if God judged us by our outward appearance? What if He judged us based on where we grew up? Or what we do for a living? Or the mistakes we made when we were young? He wouldn’t do that, would he?

“Don’t judge other people, or you will be judged. You will be judged in the same way you judge others, and the amount you give to others will be given to you” (Matt. 7:1-2).

Be careful when you judge. That doesn’t mean we shouldn’t discern. That does mean we shouldn’t pass the verdict. The amount of grace you give is the amount you get.

Jesus had another view of the man born blind. Rather than see him as an opportunity for discussion, he saw him as an opportunity for God. Why was he blind? “So God’s power could be shown in him” (John 9:3).

What a perspective! The man wasn’t a victim of fate; he was a miracle waiting to happen. Jesus didn’t label him. He helped him. Jesus was more concerned about the future than the past.

Who do you best relate to in this story? Some of you relate to the man born blind. You have been the topic of conversation. You have been left on the outside looking in. You’ve been labeled.

If so, learn what this man learned: When everyone else rejects you, Christ accepts you. When everyone else leaves you, Christ finds you. When no one else wants you, Christ claims you. When no one else will give the time of day, Jesus will give you the words of eternity.

Others of you will relate to the observers. You’ve judged. You’ve labeled. You’ve slammed the gavel and proclaimed the guilt before knowing the facts. If that is you, go back to John 9:4 and understand what the work of God is: “While it is daytime we must continue doing the work of the One who sent me.”

What is the work of God? Accepting people. Loving before judging. Caring before condemning.

Look before you label.

– Lucado, Gentle Thunder, 157-160

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## The Serenity Prayer

Let the message about Christ, in all its richness, fill your lives. Teach and counsel each other with all the wisdom He gives. – Colossians 3:16 (NLT)

God, give us grace to accept with serenity the things that cannot be changed, the courage to change the things that should be changed, and the wisdom to distinguish the one from the other.

– Reinhold Niebuhr, from Counsell, 451

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## Doers of the Faith

Write upon our hearts, O Lord God, the lessons of your holy word, and grant that we may all be doers of the same, and not forgetful hearers only; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

– Alexander Campbell Fraser, from Counsell, 416

My Christian brothers, what good does it do if you say you have faith but do not do things that prove you have faith?

– James 2:14 (MSG)

“Repent, for the kingdom of God is near. .... You brood of vipers!”

– John the Baptist, Matt 3:2,7 (NIV)

## Confessions

We confess that in our lives we do not always choose  
the way of peace.  
We spread gossip which fans the flame of hatred.  
We are ready to make any sacrifice when the world demands,  
but few when God invites.  
We worship the false God of security.  
We hold out one hand in friendship,  
but keep a weapon in the other behind our back.  
We have divided your body of people  
into those we trust and those we do not.  
Huge problems challenge us in the world,  
but our greed, fear and selfishness prevent us from uniting to solve them.  
Lord, we need your help and forgiveness, your reconciling power.

– The United Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (1990), from Counsell, 578

<sup>9</sup>Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. <sup>10</sup>Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves. <sup>11</sup>Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. <sup>12</sup>Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. <sup>13</sup>Share with the Lord’s people who are in need. Practice hospitality.

– Romans 12:9-13 (NIV)

## Sacrifice

There can be no real and abiding happiness without sacrifice. Our greatest joys do not result from our efforts toward self-gratification, but from a loving and spontaneous service to other lives. Joy comes not to him who seeks it for himself, but to him who seeks it for other people.

– H.W. Sylvester, from Lytle, 120

## Sins of Society

Someone has said that the seven deadly sins of society are these: Policies without principles; wealth without work; pleasure without conscience; knowledge without character; commerce and industry without morality; science without humanity; worship without sacrifice.

– “Observer,” from Lytle, 120

<sup>1</sup>Once you were dead because of your disobedience and your many sins. <sup>2</sup>You used to live in sin, just like the rest of the world, obeying the devil—the commander of the powers in the unseen world. He is the spirit at work in the hearts of those who refuse to obey God. <sup>3</sup>All of us used to live that way, following the passionate desires and inclinations of our sinful nature. By our very nature we were subject to God’s anger, just like everyone else.

– Ephesians 2:1-3 (NLT)

## The Cave People (Will You Share the Light?)

Long ago, or maybe not so long ago, there was a tribe in a dark, cold cavern. The cave dwellers would huddle together and cry against the chill. Loud and long they wailed. It was all they did. It was all they knew to do. The sounds in the cave were mournful, but the people didn't know it, for they had never known joy. The spirit in the cave was death, but the people didn't know it, for they had never known life.

But then, one day, they heard a different voice. "I have heard your cry," it announced. "I have felt your chill and seen your darkness. I have come to help." The cave people grew quiet. They had never heard this voice. Hope sounded strange to their ears. "How can we know you have come to help?"

"Trust me," he answered. "I have what you need." The cave people peered through the darkness at the figure of the stranger. He was stacking something, then stooping and stacking more.

"What are you doing?" one cried, nervous.

The stranger didn't answer.

"What are you making?" one shouted even louder.

Still no response.

"Tell us!" demanded a third.

The visitor stood and spoke in the direction of the voices. "I have what you need." With that he turned to the pile at his feet and lit it. Wood ignited, flames erupted, and light filled the cavern. The cave people turned away in fear. "Put it out!" they cried. "It hurts to see it."

"Light always hurts before it helps," he answered. "Step closer. The pain will soon pass."

"Not I," declared a voice.

"Nor I," agreed a second.

"Only a fool would risk exposing his eyes to such light."

The stranger stood next to the fire. Would you prefer the darkness? Would you prefer the cold? Don't consult your fears. Take a step of faith."

For a long time no one spoke. The people in groups covering their eyes. The fire builder stood next to the fire. "It's warm here," he invited.

"He's right," one from behind him announced. "It's warmer." The stranger turned and saw a figure slowly stepping toward the fire. "I can open my eyes now," she proclaimed. "I can see."

"Come closer," invited the fire builder.

She did. She stepped into the ring of light. "It's so warm!" She extended her hands and signed as her chill began to pass. "Come, everyone! Feel the warmth," she invited.

"Silence, woman!" cried one of the cave dwellers. "Dare you lead us into your folly? Leave us. Leave us and take your light with you."

She turned to the stranger. "Why won't they come?"

"They choose the chill, for though it's cold, it's what they know. They'd rather be cold than change."

"And live in the dark?"

"And live in the dark."

The now-warm woman stood silent. Looking first at the dark, then at the man.

"Will you leave the fire?" he asked. She paused, then answered, "I cannot. I cannot bear the cold." Then she spoke again. "But nor can I bear the thought of my people in darkness."

"You don't have to," he responded, reaching into the fire and removing a stick. "Carry this to your people. Tell them the light is here, and the light is warm. Tell them the light is for all who desire it."

And so she took the small flame and stepped into the shadow.

– Lucado, Gentle Thunder, 181-183



## The Delight of Sacrifice

Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends. – John 15:13 (NIV)

Once the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit, we deliberately begin to identify ourselves with Jesus Christ's interests and purposes in others' lives (Romans 5:5). And Jesus has an interest in every individual person. We have no right in Christian service to be guided by our own interests and desires. In fact, this is one of the greatest tests of our relationship with Jesus Christ. The delight of sacrifice is that I lay down my life for my Friend, Jesus. I don't throw my life away, but I willingly and deliberately lay it down for Him and His interests in other people. And I do this for no cause or purpose of my own. Paul spent his life for only one purpose – that he might win people to Jesus Christ. Paul always attracted people to his Lord, but never to himself. He said, "I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some" (I Cor 9:22).

When someone thinks that to develop a holy life he must always be alone with God, he is no longer of any use to others. This is like putting himself on a pedestal and isolating himself from the rest of society. Paul was a holy person, but wherever he went Jesus Christ was always allowed to help Himself to his life. Many of us are interested only in our own goals, and Jesus cannot help Himself to our lives. But if we are totally surrendered to Him, we have no goals of our own to serve. Paul said that he knew how to be a "doormat" without resenting it, because the motivation of his life was devotion to Jesus. We tend to be devoted, not to Jesus Christ, but to the things which allow us more spiritual freedom than total surrender to Him would allow. Freedom was not Paul's motive at all ... (Romans 9:3). Had Paul lost his ability to reason? Not at all! For someone who is in love, this is not an overstatement. And Paul was in love with Jesus Christ.

– Chambers, Feb 24

<sup>28</sup> One of them, named Agabus, stood up and through the Spirit predicted that a severe famine would spread over the entire Roman world. (This happened during the reign of Claudius.) <sup>29</sup> The disciples, as each one was able, decided to provide help for the brothers and sisters living in Judea. <sup>30</sup> This they did, sending their gift to the elders by Barnabas and Saul. – Acts 11:28-30 (NIV)

## Help for the Struggle

The greatest object in the universe, says a certain philosopher, is a good man struggling with adversity; yet there is a still greater, which is the good man that comes to relieve it.

– Oliver Goldsmith, from Wallis, 124

May God grant that we who have worshipped Him in His church may be witnesses to Him in His world.

– Alexander Campbell Fraser, from Counsell, 416

## Chivalry

Some say that the age of chivalry is past. The age of chivalry is never past, so long as there is a wrong left unredressed on earth, or a man or woman left to say, "I will redress that wrong, or spend my life in the attempt." The age of chivalry is never past, so long as we have faith enough to say, "God will help me to redress that wrong; or, if not me, He will help those that come after me, for His eternal will is to overcome evil with good."

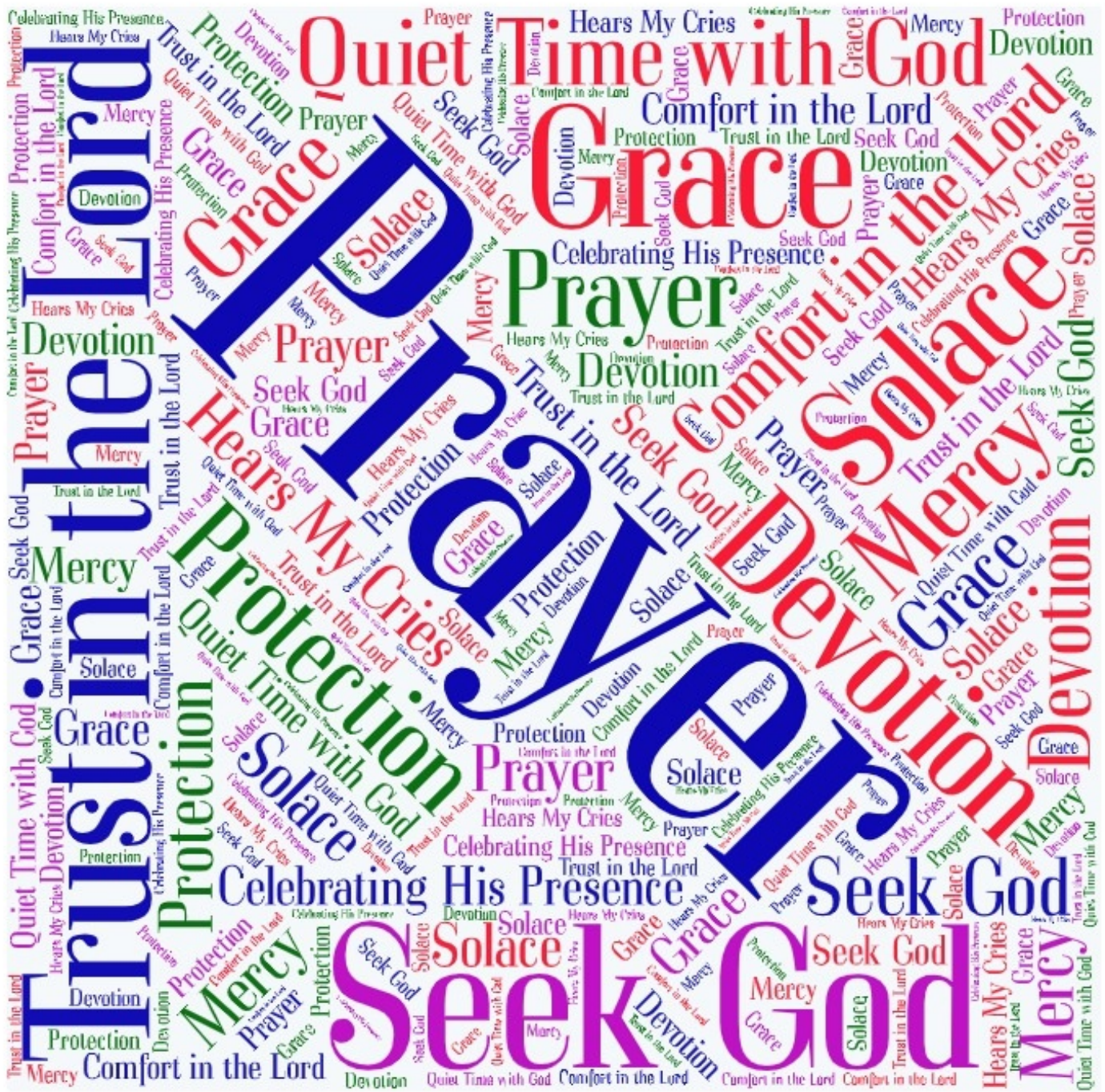
– Kingsley, from Lytle, 128

<sup>1-2</sup> Before anything else existed, there was Christ, with God. He has always been alive and is Himself God. <sup>3</sup> He created everything there is – nothing exists that He didn't make. <sup>4</sup> Eternal life is in Him, and this life gives light to all mankind. <sup>5</sup> His life is the light that shines through the darkness – and the darkness can never extinguish it.

– John 1:1-5 (TLB)

Notes and Prayers for “Mary Lou and Billy Bob Need Help!”





## Look to Our Divine Daddy

It's all about PRAYER:

having quiet time with God .... seeking His solace and comfort .... making a closer connection with Jesus .... surrounding yourself with His good Word .... spending time with God .... and just celebrating being in His presence.

## The Purpose of Prayer

Prayer is not a normal part of the life of the natural man. We hear it said that a person's life will suffer if he doesn't pray, but I question that. What will suffer is the life of the Son of God in him, which is nourished not by food, but by prayer. When a person is born again from above, the life of the Son of God is born in him and he can either starve or nourish that life. Prayer is the way that the life of God in us is nourished. Our common ideas regarding prayer are not found in the New Testament. We look upon prayer simply as a means of getting things for ourselves, but the biblical purpose of prayer is that we may get to know God Himself.

"Ask, and you will receive" (John 16:24). We complain before God, and sometimes we are apologetic or indifferent to Him, but we actually ask Him for very few things. Yet a child exhibits a magnificent boldness to ask! Our Lord said, "unless you become as little children" (Matt 18:3). Ask and God will do. Give Jesus Christ the opportunity and the room to work. The problem is that no one will ever do this until he is at his wits' end. When a person is at his wits' end, it no longer seems to be a cowardly thing to pray; in fact, it is the only way he can get in touch with the truth and the reality of God Himself. Be yourself before God and present Him with your problems – the very things that have brought you to your wits' end. But as long as you think you are self-sufficient, you do not need to ask God for anything.

To say that "prayer changes things" is not as close to the truth as saying, "Prayer changes me and then I change things." God has established things so that prayer, on the basis of redemption, changes the way a person looks at things. Prayer is not a matter of changing things externally, but one of work miracles in a person's inner nature.

– Chambers, August 28

One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples." – Luke 11:1 (NIV)

<sup>19</sup> "Again, truly I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything they ask for, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. <sup>20</sup> For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them." – Matthew 18:19-21 (NIV)

## The Fulton Street Prayer Meeting

What do you do if you announce a prayer meeting but no one comes?

The summer of 1857 was a frustrating time to be a Christian in New York City. In the commercial district wealthy bankers and real estate speculators conspicuously thanked God for their profitable deals. Yet in the vast slums poverty was inescapable. The revival fires of the Second Great Awakening had been dampened 20 years earlier by the financial panic of 1837.

Jeremiah Lanphier was a man who wanted to make a difference. Born south of Albany, he had come to New York City to enter the mercantile business. Then at the age of 33 he unexpectedly discovered that Jesus Christ was real and that he had paid the penalty for his sins. Lanphier gave his life to Jesus and joined the Brick Presbyterian Church, spending much of his spare time as a street evangelist. Then in the summer of 1857 the Northern Dutch (Reformed) Church on Fulton Street decided to hire a full-time lay evangelist to reach the immigrants living around their church. They chose the energetic fellow from Brick Presbyterian, Jeremiah Lanphier.

Lanphier immediately started passing out invitations to the church to all who lived within walking distance, but found few takers. He began praying, Lord, what do you want me to do? The answer he received was that God wanted people to pray. As he mulled this over in his mind, an idea started to take form. He would have a prayer meeting for businessmen from Noon to 1:00 p.m. It would be simple and flexible. Businessmen could come for a few minutes or for the whole hour. It would include singing, prayer, and exhortation, and a bell would ring if anyone spoke over five minutes.

Lanphier printed up a handbill inviting the public to a weekly prayer meeting at Noon on Wednesdays in the third-floor meeting room of the North Dutch Church on Fulton Street. The first prayer meeting would be held September 1857.

[continued]

The appointed day arrived and at Noon Lanphier went to the room and knelt to pray. Ten minutes passed, and no one came. Twenty minutes passed and still he was all alone. Finally at 12:30 he heard the door open from the street and the sound of footsteps coming up the stairway. One man entered the room and without saying a word knelt down next to Lanphier. Then another man came, followed by another until by 1:00 there were six.

But the following week there were twenty. Then in the first week of October the meetings were held daily, and the number gathered increased to forty. The fourth week attendance average over 100 with many under conviction and inquiring how they might be saved.

New York City was to see a great need for God when on October 18 a financial panic seized the city, collapsing the economy into a brief but steep recession. "The Fulton Street Meetings," as they became known, soon filled all the rooms at the Northern Dutch Church and spilled over into the nearby John Street Methodist Church. Soon many other churches were opening their doors both at Noon and before work in the morning. Even police stations and firehouses opened their doors to meet the need for places to pray. Within six months, ten thousand businessmen were gathering for prayer daily.

Although the revival was the most spectacular in New York City, businessmen's prayer meetings sprang up in many cities around the country. Within the next two years approximately one million converts were added to the churches of America.

– Rusten, 534

<sup>27</sup> "But will God really dwell on earth? The heavens, even the highest heaven, cannot contain you. How much less this temple I have built! <sup>28</sup> Yet give attention to your servant's prayer and his plea for mercy, Lord my God. Hear the cry and the prayer that your servant is praying in your presence this day. <sup>29</sup> May your eyes be open toward this temple night and day, this place of which you said, 'My Name shall be there,' so that you will hear the prayer your servant prays toward this place.

– I Kings 8:27-29 (NIV)

## Hear My Prayer

Lord, teach us how to pray aright  
With reverence and with fear;  
Though dust and ashes in thy sight,  
We may, we must, draw near.

We perish if we cease from prayer;  
O grant us power to pray  
And, when to meet thee we prepare,  
Lord, meet us by the way.

God of all grace, we bring to thee  
A broken, contrite heart;  
Give what thine eye delights to see,  
Truth in the inward part;

Faith in the only Sacrifice  
That can for sin atone,  
To cast our hopes, to fix our eyes,  
On Christ, on Christ alone;

Patience to watch and wait and weep,  
Though mercy long delay.  
Courage our fainting souls to keep,  
And trust thee though thou slay.

Give these, and then thy will be done;  
Thus, strengthened with all might,  
We, through thy Spirit and thy Son,  
Shall pray, and pray aright.

– James Montgomery, from Counsel, 339

## Guidance in Prayer

Imagine daily prayer as a house with seven rooms, with sample prayers to be said in each room.

Room 1: Affirmation of God's Presence. As I bow in the quiet room I have made in my heart, O Lord, let the hush of thy presence fall upon me.

Room 2: Adoration and Praise. I turn my thoughts quietly, O God, away from self to thee. I adore thee. I praise thee. I thank thee. I here turn from this feverish life to think of thy holiness – thy love – thy serenity – thy joy – thy mighty purposefulness – thy wisdom – thy beauty – thy truth – thy final omnipotence. Slowly I murmur these great words about thee and let their feeling and significance sink into the deep places of my mind.

Room 3: Confession and Forgiveness. Dear Lord, forgive me in that so much of my religion is concerned with myself. I want harmony with thee. I want peace of mind.

I want health of body – and so I pray. Forgive me, for I have made thee the means and myself the end. I know it will take long to wean me from this terrible self-concern, but O God, help me, for hell can be nothing else but a life on which self is the centre. Can I ever abandon self as men a sinking ship, only to find that the waves will bear them up and a divine hand will rescue them? My salvation can come only from thee, O Lord. Leave me not. Forgive and uphold me and make me truly thine in utter committal to thee.

Room 4: Relaxation. Help me now to be quiet, relaxed and receptive, accepting the thought of thy healing grace at work, deep within my nature.

Room 5: Petition. I pray, O Lord, that today I may know with keener awareness that I am in thy hands; well or ill, happy or sad, at work or at play, with others or alone, may I become increasingly conscious that I dwell within thy purposeful providence.

Illness does not mean punishment or thy disfavor. Fun is not 'secular.' The trifles of my life do not forfeit thine interest in me.

Grant me the sense of thy presence, born of thine indwelling and of thine enfolding love, and let me increasingly pause to recollect that, in every circumstance, I live within thy life and am always the object of thy care.

Room 6: Intercession. I lift up my heart, O God, for all who are the prey of anxious fears who cannot get their minds off themselves and for whom every demand made on them fills them with foreboding, and with the feeling that they cannot cope with all that is required of them.

Give them the comfort of knowing that this feeling is illness, not cowardice; that millions have felt as they feel, that there is a way through this dark valley, and light at the end of it.

Lead them to those who can help them and understand them and show them the pathway to health and happiness. Comfort and sustain them by the loving presence of the Saviour who knows and understands all our woe and fear, and give them enough courage to face each day, and rest their minds in the thought that thou wilt see them through.

Room 7: Meditation. Come, in this quiet moment of meditation; call me again, lead me in thy way for me, let the assurance of thy friendship take away my fears. Let every shadow make me look up in to thy blessed face. Let me rise up now and follow thee.

– Leslie Weatherhead, from *Counsell*, 453-454

<sup>9</sup> To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everyone else, Jesus told this parable: <sup>10</sup>“Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. <sup>11</sup> The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other people—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. <sup>12</sup> I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.’

<sup>13</sup> “But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, ‘God, have mercy on me, a sinner.’

<sup>14</sup> “I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”

– Luke 18:9-14 (NIV)

<sup>1</sup> You have searched me, Lord, and you know me.

<sup>2</sup> You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar.

<sup>3</sup> You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways.

<sup>4</sup> Before a word is on my tongue you, Lord, know it completely.

<sup>5</sup> You hem me in behind and before, and you lay your hand upon me.

<sup>6</sup> Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain.

– Psalm 139:1-6 (NIV)

## Confiding

Lord, I don't know what I should ask of you; you alone know what I need: You love me better than I know how to love myself. O Father, give to me, your child, that which I do not know how to ask. I don't dare ask either for crosses or consolations; I simply present myself before you; I open my heart to you. See my needs that I don't know myself; see, and do according to your tender mercy. Smite, or heal; depress me, or raise me up; I welcome all your purposes without knowing them; I am silent; I offer myself in sacrifice; I yield myself to you. I would have no other desire than to accomplish your will. Teach me to pray; pray yourself in me. – updated from Selected text from Lytle, 152

<sup>5</sup> My steps have held to your paths; my feet have not stumbled. <sup>6</sup> I call on you, my God, for you will answer me; turn your ear to me and hear my prayer.

– Psalm 17:5-6 (NIV)

## Prayer Is the Soul's Sincere Desire

Prayer is the soul's sincere desire,  
Uttered or unexpressed;  
The motion of a hidden fire  
That trembles in the breasts.

Prayer is the burden of a sigh,  
The falling of a tear,  
The upward glancing of an eye  
When none but God is near.

Prayer is the simplest form of speech  
That infant lips can try;  
Prayer the sublimest strains that reach  
The Majesty on high.

Prayer is the contrite sinner's voice,  
Returning from his ways,  
While angels in their songs rejoice,  
And cry, "Behold, he prays!"

Prayer is the Christian's vital breath,  
The Christian's native air,  
His watchword at the gates of death:  
He enters heaven with prayer.

The saints in prayer appear as one  
In word, in deed, and mind,  
While with the Father and the Son  
Sweet fellowship they find.

O thou by whom we come to God,  
The Life, the Truth, the Way,  
The path of prayer thyself hast trod;  
Lord, teach us how to pray.

– James Montgomery, from Counsell, 339-340

Blessed are you, Creator and giver of peace. Peace be upon us; peace be upon this place; peace be upon this day. The deep, deep peace of God, which the world cannot give, be upon us and remain with us always.

– David Adam, from Counsell, 523

## A Basic Form of Prayer: ACTS

A method of prayer that is well tested and proven to be a sure-fire way to pray effectively is called A.C.T.S. (Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication). (Here's a plug for Bible study: Start off with the right F.A.C.T.S.: Faith, plus Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication. Try mixing some Bible study into your prayer time so that your ACTS turn into FACTS .....

Always be joyful. Pray continually, and give thanks whatever happens. That is what God wants for you in Christ Jesus.

—1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 (NCV)

**Adoration:** We should start all our prayers with a statement of adoration to God. This is the worship part of our prayer. Adoration sets the tone for our prayer. If we start off our prayer focused on God, on His glory and power, we have removed any emphasis on us. This prayer is about our personal communication with the Creator of the universe. Look to Him first, foremost (and always). Adoration will help us to slow our pace down. It removes the hustle and bustle of our lives.

When we focus on God, we are reminded of His attributes. We think of His character and personality, as we know it. This helps us get to know God better. We get a better understanding of exactly who He is and why He is important in our lives. Look at some of His wonderful characteristics (in case we need help when we start praying with this method).

God is:	faithful	gracious	steadfast	merciful	loving	righteous
	generous	compassionate	attentive	powerful	all-knowing	forgiving
	loyal	infinite	just	sufficient	personal	

You could have more words to describe God's character. That's great.

Focus on these characteristics when you start your prayer. All of a sudden you may become acutely aware of just how incredible, how awesome, how wonderful our God is. And you can see very clearly why it is so easy to adore, praise, and worship Him.

Adoration is purifying. Praising God helps our hearts to soften. Adoration cleanses our hearts and helps to get ready for the rest of our prayer.

If you initially find it hard to come up with the right words to praise God, you can "pray the Psalms." Pick out special Psalms and read those to God. The trick is to mean the words you are reading. As long as the Psalms speak for you sincerely, go for it! These Psalms might help you: Psalms 8, 19, 23, 46, 84, 95, 100, 145, 148, 150. Check out all of the Psalms. There might be better ones for you. Remember this is personal communication. If you need the Psalms, pick the right ones for you.

If this feels weird when you get started, remember that, like all good things, it takes practice to make it work right. Just be patient, and keep doing it. Pretty soon, the adoration will just flow off your lips because you will want to tell God how wonderful He is.

One special note: Adoration and Thanksgiving are not the same thing. You adore God for His greatness and you thank Him for His gifts.

**Confession:** Most of us don't like to discuss our sins. So, we use a nice little convenience: "Lord, forgive my many sins." And then we move on. Now, that didn't hurt a bit, did it?

If it doesn't hurt, it doesn't work. If I ask God to forgive all my trespasses without any detail, I'm cheating. It has taken me a long time to understand that if I am going to surrender to God, part of that surrender is going to hurt. I hate to admit my sins. One at a time. Even when I'm praying to God without another living soul nearby. It is uncomfortable.

But, confession is good for the soul. I have no idea who said that, but I'm learning that it is true. Getting things off my chest and "laying them at the foot of the cross" really helps me. Stress levels are lower. I'm at peace more. And the reason for this is simple. As soon as I sincerely ask for forgiveness, I am forgiven. Immediately. That brings on a peaceful, easy feeling (to paraphrase a song by The Eagles). And as soon as we reach this point, it is time for gratitude.

**Thanksgiving:** There is a difference between gratitude and expressing thanks. Look at the story of the 10 lepers who are healed by Jesus. The story is found in Luke 17:11-19. All ten lepers were grateful to be healed. But only



one returned to thank Jesus for the miracle. I am so grateful for all the goodies God has given me. Definitely thrilled with them. But how many times do I actually tell Him that?

Thank God for the blessings He has given. You can use categories such as Answered Prayers, Spiritual Blessings, Relational Blessings, and Material Blessings. Maybe you can think of another group that would work for your life. These categories could help you get started in identifying your many blessings from God. Once you've identified them, be thankful. By concentrating on this, you will see that God has blessed you in many ways. Be open to see what God has done for you. Recently and some time ago. All of it. You will see a long list of blessings. This will put you in the best mood!

Supplication: After you have recognized and praised God's greatness, released your sins to Him, and thanked Him for His blessings, it is time to give Him your requests. To ask for help. Supplications. Put your needs and wants last.

What should we ask for? Anything. Whatever is on your mind. God can handle it all. Nothing is too big or too small. And don't concern yourself if a request is legitimate. You can ask God how to pray for that request. But bring it before Him. Talk to Him about it. About all your concerns, wants, and needs.

You can break down your requests by categories, such as family, work, church, school, friends, the world, America, and personal. These categories (or whatever categories you select) can help you stay focused on your requests. Keep a list of these requests. Use a Prayer Journal. Keep track of the requests you've made. Watch and see what God does. And when you see He has answered some of your prayers, remember to thank Him in your next prayer.

– Daniel, edited, 27-30

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## Bless Our Country

Bless our beautiful land, O Lord, with its wonderful variety of people, of races, cultures and languages.

May we be a nation of laughter and joy, of justice and reconciliation, of peace and unity, of compassion, caring and sharing.

We pray this prayer for a true patriotism, in the powerful name of Jesus our Lord.

Blessed is the country with God for God; blessed are the people He's put in His will. – Psalm 33:12 (MSG)

– Desmond Mpilo Tutu, from Counsell, 476

<sup>14</sup> Wearing a linen ephod, David was dancing before the Lord with all his might, <sup>15</sup> while he and all Israel were bringing up the ark of the Lord with shouts and the sound of trumpets.

– 2 Samuel 6:14-15 (NIV)

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## We Dance Before You

Great is, O King, our happiness in your kingdom, you, our King. We dance before you, our King, by the strength of your kingdom. May our feet be made strong; let us dance before you, eternal. Give praise, all angels, to Him above who is worthy of praise.

– A prayer in a sacred dance of the Zulu Nazarite Church, from Counsell, 524

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## God Is Our Refuge

This [Ps. 16:1] is a prayer in which David commits himself to the protection of God. God is ready to succour all of us, provided we rely upon him with a sure and steadfast faith; and that He takes under His protection none but those who commit themselves to Him with their whole heart.

David begins by stating that can bestow nothing upon God, not only because God stands in no need of anything, but also because mortal man cannot merit the favor of God by any service which he can perform to Him. At the same time, However, he takes courage, and, as God accepts our

<sup>1</sup> Keep me safe, my God, for in you I take refuge. <sup>2</sup> I say to the Lord, "You are my Lord; apart from you I have no good thing."

– Psalm 16:1-2 (NIV)

devotion, and the service which we yield to Him, David protests that he will be one of His servants.

Two things are distinctly laid down in this verse [verse 2]. The first is, that God has a right to require of us whatever He pleases, seeing we are fully bound to Him as our rightful proprietor and Lord. David, by ascribing to Him the power and the dominion of Lord, declares that both himself and all he possessed are the property of God.

Let men strive ever so much to lay themselves out for God, yet they can bring no advantage to him. Our goodness extends not to him, not only because, having in himself alone an all-sufficiency, he stands in need of nothing, but also because we are empty and destitute of all good things, and have nothing with which to show ourselves liberal towards him.

It is impossible for men, by any merits of their own, to bring God under obligation to them, so as to make him their debtor. The sum of the discourse is, that when we come before God, we must lay aside all presumption. When we imagine that there is any good thing in us, we need not wonder if He reject us, as we thus take away from him a principal part of the honor which is His due. On the contrary, if we acknowledge that all the services which we can yield to Him are in themselves things of nought, and undeserving of any recompense, this humility is as a perfume of a sweet odor, which will procure for them acceptance with God.

– Calvin, 38

<sup>9</sup>“So when you pray, you should pray like this: ‘Our Father in heaven, may your name always be kept holy. <sup>10</sup>May your kingdom come and what you want be done, here on earth as it is in heaven. <sup>11</sup>Give us the food we need for each day. <sup>12</sup>Forgive us for our sins, just as we have forgiven those who sinned against us. <sup>13</sup>And do not cause us to be tempted, but save us from the Evil One. The kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours forever. Amen.” – Matthew 6:9-13 (NCV)

## His Model. Our Guide.

Doesn't it feel wonderful, knowing we're home where we belong? Here, in the place where our spirit has longed to rest .... the place where we feel safe and secure.

Could I make a suggestion for your life in God's Great House? Each day, as you awaken in His presence, remember the blueprint. And as you talk to your Father, trace the floor plan in your mind. It's a helpful way to enter His presence. Here's an example of how the Lord's Prayer can guide your prayers:

Our Father  
Thank you for adopting me into your family.  
who is  
Thank you, my Lord,  
for being a God of the present tense;  
my Jehovah-jireh (the God who provides),  
my Jehovah-raah (The caring Shepherd),  
my Jehovah-shalom (the Lord is peace),  
my Jehovah-rophe (the God who heals),  
and my Jehovah-nissi (Lord, my banner).  
in heaven,  
Your workshop of creation reminds me:  
If you can make the skies,  
you can make sense out of my struggles.  
Hallowed be thy name,  
be holy in my heart.  
You are a “cut above” all else.  
Enable me to set my sights on you.

Thy kingdom come,  
Come kingdom!  
Be present, Lord Jesus!  
Have free reign in every corner of my life.  
Thy will be done,  
Reveal your heart to me, dear Father,  
Show me my role in your passion.  
Grant me guidance in the following decisions ....  
On earth as it is in heaven,  
Thank you that you silence heaven to hear my prayer.  
On my heart are the ones you love.  
I pray for ....  
Give us this day our daily bread,  
I accept your portion for my life today.  
I surrender the following concerns  
regarding my well-being ....

–continued–

Forgive us our debts,  
I thank you for the roof of grace over my head,  
bound together with the timbers and nails of Calvary.  
There is nothing I can do to earn or add to your  
mercy.

I confess my sins to you ....

As we also have forgiven our debtors;  
Treat me, Father, as I treat others.  
Have mercy on the following friends  
who have wounded me ....

Lead us not into temptation,  
Let my small hand be engulfed in yours.

Hold me, lest I fall.  
I ask for special strength regarding ....

Our Father .... give us .... forgive us .... lead us  
Let your kindness be on all your church.

I pray especially for ministers near  
and missionaries far away.

Thine – not mine – is the kingdom,  
I lay my plans at your feet.

Thine – not mine – is the power,  
I come to you for strength.

Thine – not mine – is the glory,  
I give you all the credit.

Forever. Amen.

Thine – not mine – is the power. Amen.

– Lucado, Great House, 177-179

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## Inspired by the Lord's Prayer

Our Father, O God, how good you are to allow us to call you 'our father'! Not only do you allow it, you command it. What gratitude, what joy, what love, and above all, what confidence it inspires in me. And since you are so good to me. I should be good to others. You are Father to all people, so I should feel like a loving brother towards everyone, however wicked he may be. Our Father, our Father, teach me to have your name continually on my lips.

Who art in heaven. Why did you choose this qualification rather than any other – such as 'righteous Father', or 'holy Father'? It was doubtless, O God, that my soul might be uplifted from the very beginning of this prayer, high above this poor world, and placed at the outset where it ought to be, in heaven which is its native land. It was also to put me at the outset into a state of joy, remembering that you, O God, love me and care for me for all eternity.

Hallowed be thy name. What is it, O Lord, that I am expressing in these words? I am expressing the whole object of my desires, the whole aim and purpose of my life. I want to hallow your name in all my thoughts, words and actions. And this means that I want to imitate your Son, Jesus, since he hallowed your name in his every thought, word, and action.

Thy kingdom come. In these simple words, I am asking that you reveal the fullness of your glory, and that you make all people holy. Your kingdom will come when all people acknowledge you as Master, seeking with all their minds to obey you, with all their hearts to love you, and with all their energies to serve you. So in saying those words, I am committing myself to spread the knowledge of your glory to all mankind.

Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. These words show me to what extent every offence against you, and every sinful act of one person against another, cause you pain and grief. With feelings far deeper and far greater than we could ever understand, you desire all people to be reconciled with you and with one another. You desire earth to be a mirror of heaven. So when people strive to break that mirror through their sinfulness, your heart breaks. Yet equally, for the same reasons, you experience great joy at even the least act of goodness. And your heart is filled with fatherly pleasure whenever any person turns to you in prayer.

Give us this day our daily bread. You desire me, O Lord, to look to you for my every need. And in looking to you, I know that you will provide me with bread to eat, clothes to wear, and a warm place to rest. But it is not only

<sup>9</sup> "Pray along these lines:  
'Our Father in heaven, we  
honor your holy name. <sup>10</sup>  
We ask that your kingdom  
will come now. May your  
will be done here on earth,  
just as it is in heaven. <sup>11</sup>  
Give us our food again  
today, as usual, <sup>12</sup> and  
forgive us our sins, just as  
we have forgiven those who  
have sinned against us. <sup>13</sup>  
Don't bring us into  
temptation, but deliver us  
from the Evil One. For  
yours is the kingdom and  
the power and the glory  
forever, Amen.

– Matthew 6:9-13 (MSG)

material bread which you provide; you give also spiritual bread. Whenever I eat the bread of Holy communion, I am reminded that your Son gave His body to die on the cross, to give me spiritual food for all eternity. And in this phrase, I note that it is not ‘me’ for whom I pray, but ‘us’. You do not want me ever to pray selfishly, but always to pray for other’s needs, because only through such mutual charity do I become fit to receive the true bread of eternal life.

Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive. Having spoken to you so intimately as ‘our Father’ – having climbed so high, I now realize how low I really am. I remember how I fail to obey your will or work for your kingdom. And so I say, ‘Father, forgive me’. With my whole soul I see how horrible are my sins to you, how they disgust and insult you, and what a price your Son had to pay to redeem me from them. I realize how much pain I have caused you; and in that realization I feel pain myself, crying with remorse at what I have done. At the same time I recognize that I have no right to ask your forgiveness for my sins, unless I forgive others their sins. And, of course, the sins which others commit against me are as nothing compared with the sins I have committed against you. Thus in truth I am asking that all mankind might be forgiven.

Lead us not into temptation. This is a cry suitable for every hour and every minute of my life – a cry for help. I am so beset by temptation that it is impossible for me to accomplish the smallest good deed unless I call for help continually. Indeed my every prayer is in truth a call for help.

Deliver us from evil. If you were to deliver all people from evil then they would all be saints, glorifying you in their holiness. Thus your purpose and my desire would be wholly fulfilled, that you would reign as King over the whole world. But it is not fit for me to worry about the evil of others, unless I first turn inwards to my own soul. I ask only that your purpose be accomplished in me.

– Charles de Foucauld, from *Counsell*, 410-412

<sup>9</sup> “Pray like this: Our Father in heaven, may your name be kept holy. <sup>10</sup> May your Kingdom come soon. May your will be done on earth, as it is in heaven. <sup>11</sup> Give us today the food we need, <sup>12</sup> and forgive us our sins, as we have forgiven those who sin against us. <sup>13</sup> And don’t let us yield to temptation, but rescue us from the evil one. For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.”

– Matthew 6:9-13 (NLT)

## The Lord’s Prayer

Our Father. The prayer begins with the worship of God. Through worship, we acknowledge God’s power, His sovereignty, His worth. We give God the honor and reverence which is due Him. The beginning of The Lord’s Prayer is a reminder that we are addressing the Creator of the universe. The one True God. The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The God of Israel. The God of the world.

Look at Jesus’ use of the plural pronoun, “our.” Not my father. But our Father. We sense a community of believers here. A connection with others who worship God like you do. Our Father. You are part of a group, a community of believers who pray to the same God.

Consider, too, that Jesus was inviting us to pray with Him. To come to the Father in prayer with Jesus. This is an interesting (and comforting) concept in that when we pray, we can do so with the full knowledge that Christ is with us when we pray.

When Jesus taught His disciples this prayer, He called God by a different title than anyone had previously called Him. Jesus called him “Father.” God is a loving Father. He loves us very much. So, when we address God at the opening of The Lord’s Prayer, remember we are praying to a Father who is accessible to us just by calling on His name.

Paul chose the use of the word “Abba” (or “Daddy” in our vernacular) because it means praying to our loving God who loves us very much. Each of us matters to Him. He wants to hear what we have to say to Him. Intimacy and affection are felt in the words, “our father.” This intimacy and affection are two-directional (you to God; God to you). And it is felt more strongly during prayer.

Who Art In Heaven. While it may sound like God is at some great physical distance from us, don’t be distracted by Jesus’ intent here. “Heaven” is not a place like you and I might think. A place that has some street address

attached. No, Jesus didn't want us to think of God's being in one "place." He wants us to remember that God dwells in our hearts. In the purity of love. In that special place that is neither seen or heard. It is everywhere. Heaven is God's domain. His "street address" is 777 My Heart Place. ☺ (The "777" comes from Matthew 18:21-22, when Peter asks Jesus about how many times he should forgive his neighbors and Jesus tells him 777 or 7x70, depending on the translation.)

"Who art in heaven" is also a reminder of God's sovereignty. His majesty and omnipotence. God is the "mountain mover." Nothing is too difficult for Him. He is greater than any problem you could bring to Him. Focus on Him, on His ability. And forget any thoughts about our worth or strength.

Hallowed Be Thy Name. When we recognize that God's name is sacred, we are saying that His name demands respect from us. We must show Him honor and respect. His name is sacred. To come before Him in prayer with any less significance would be to belittle His existence. Prayer is coming before our fabulous Father with respect and esteem.

The word 'hallowed' means respect that has developed over time. Think of it this way. If you say that "Betty Lou has made a name for herself," you are not saying that she has made up her name or that she created a unique way to spell her name. You are saying that she has developed a reputation; a reputation that has taken time to develop; a reputation that stands behind her name. So, when you pray that God's name be respected you are saying that God's reputation is outstanding and that you are going to show Him the respect that His reputation demands.

We realize that He is worthy of every good thing we can say to Him. Our focus should shift from us to God. To His glory, power, and greatness. When we hallow God's name, we push out selfish or worldly thoughts and focus on God's name, on His glory. This leads us to worship Him. And this is the core to the phrase, "hallowed be Your name." It's time to worship God in our prayers.

Thy Kingdom Come. Jesus will come back, as promised. The New Testament is quite verbal about the expectation of Christ's imminent return. So, we pray that Christ will come back here to find us ready and willing for His return. We ask that God help us to stay ready and willing.

"Thy Kingdom Come" is also a sure sign of our allegiance to God's sovereignty. An allegiance to the One True God who is more important than anything else. When we consider this idea, it makes us think. Allegiance? That's a strong word. You bet it is. We should pledge nothing short of total allegiance to God who is our Creator, Sustainer, Protector, Father, Mother, Best Friend, Guide, and the One True God. We submit our will to His. We surrender everything to Him. God deserves nothing less than complete allegiance. We make an oath of loyalty.

Another thing to think about when you say to God, "Your Kingdom Come," is to recognize God as your King and to acknowledge that the King has plans for you. Those plans include following His rules and His principles. We pray to bring His rules into your life and you are ready to allow His principles to take priority in your life.

Thy Will Be Done. Submit your will to His. We do not have the last say. His will is what matters. Remember that submitting your will to God's can be a joyous and peace-giving experience.

What do we mean by "God's will"?

First, God's will could include His plans for your personal life, the big picture of your life. Imagine it like an architect's blue-print of a building that a construction crew will follow when building the structure. It contains the big picture of what that facility will be like when it is finished. God's will, in this example, would be the blue-prints for our lives that only He sees. With our submission to Him, He can 'construct' the person He wants us each to become. But we have to be willing to let Him do the constructing. After all, He is the architect and knows the plans inside and out.

Second, praying for God's will shows that we trust God's ability to guide us. We trust that He is competent to be our Leader. Who wants to go on a rugged hike through unknown terrain and in unforeseeable conditions with a guide we don't trust? That rugged hike is our lives and the terrain and conditions represent our future which is unknown to us. So, 'Your will be done,' means that I trust God to know what He is doing.

God's will is expressed in several ways. One of those expressions is automatic. Like the laws He created to run the universe. The things that keep everything intact. Gravity would be one of those automatic expressions of God's will. Laws of nature, that sort of thing. Praying for God's will ("Your will be done") for something like this is not necessary. It will happen automatically. [continued]

A second expression of God's will is His desire. He wants what is best for us. He gave us free will, so we can choose on our own certain things in our life, such as choosing to follow Christ. We should definitely pray for God's will in cases of the choices in our lives and in the lives of others.

Another expression of God's will is what God commands us to do. God has told us over and over that He wants us to be holy, to be set apart, to follow His rules. We usually have a really hard time doing that. So, we must pray for His help in keeping us on His path. We want to do what He commands, but we need help. Never be afraid to ask God for His guidance.

On Earth As It Is In Heaven. This is usually connected only with "Thy Will Be Done." We submit our will to God's will here just like everyone does in heaven. So it should be on earth, too. We want His will to "win the day" on earth, in our lives. It can mean more than that, too.

We have just prayed the first half of the prayer, focusing on God's name, His glory, His power, and His will. "Like it is in heaven." All those things are perfect in "heaven." We are now asking that all those things be on earth, too. Practice saying each line followed by "On earth as it is in heaven." For instance, "Hallowed be thy name on earth as it is in heaven." This helps us to see a different perspective on the first half of this prayer.

Also remember, heaven is not a physical place. No street address (other than 777 My Heart Place). So, consider this. If we want His will to be done on earth, we mean our lives. We want God's rule to govern our actions and the actions of those around us all over the world. Then we add, 'like it is in 777 My Heart Place.' We ask God to allow our hearts to be pure and filled with His love and goodness. So that we actually want, desire, and yearn to do His bidding.

Give Us This Day Our Daily Bread. This is the part where Jesus encourages us to come to God with any request we have. Just like Paul told the believers in Philippians 4:6-7 we need to tell God what we need.

God did not create us to be self-sufficient. We depend on Him to help us. We can't do it all by ourselves. We need God. Don't be afraid to ask Him for your needs – your daily bread. When you do, you bring God into your heart during your times of need. It is both humbling and satisfying to depend on God for your needs. We recognize our worth – cheap – and realize that God is the only true source of real power.

Remember, He wants to hear from us. Whatever is on your mind. Big or small. Don't be timid when approaching God. After all, He is your loving Father. He is gracious, and giving, and every other positive adjective you can come up with. That's our Father. So, talk to Him. About anything on your mind.

Forgive Us Our Sins, As We Forgive Those Who Sin Against Us. We are "fallen" people. I have come to understand my connection with Adam and Eve. If it hadn't have been for them, it might just as well have been me. I would have done the same thing they did: sin against God. Sin means to separate ourselves from God. We do it everyday. Whenever we sin, we create a barrier, a wall, between God and us which breaks our fellowship but not our relationship with God. The relationship will always be there, just like a child who disobeys his father. The father/son relationship is not null and void when this happens, just the 'fellowship' between the two. When we sin against God, we break the "good report" we share. Not the relationship. We still are children of God. And we need that fellowship in our relationship. That's why we seek forgiveness. A clean slate. And God is the only one who can do it.

Remember anytime you ask for His forgiveness, you must be willing to do three things:

1. Confess. We acknowledge that sin has blocked our fellowship with God. Until we face this sin, we can't remove it. Don't let "denial" keep you from restoring fellowship with the Father. And when you confess, you are on the way to being forgiven!

2. Repent. We have to be willing to never commit that sin again. We promise God that we will actively turn away from doing it again. We have to mean it. I once heard a story about what repentance means. Imagine taking a road trip, intending to go to New York. Somewhere along the way, you realize you're actually heading to Florida. Unless you stop the car and turn it in the opposite direction you will be going the wrong way. Repentance is like being in that car. You can't just say, "Sorry," and keep going in the wrong direction. You have to actually turn the car around and head the right way.

3. Forgive others. People are going to do things that irritate us, that hurt us, that cause us pain. Before we ask God to forgive us, we must be willing to forgive those people who have caused us pain, stress, irritation, [continued]

or whatever. Matthew 6:15-16 is very clear on this subject: “For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins” (NIV). There is no wiggle room here. Just like with the Sacrament of Communion, you must have a cleansed heart to make it work.

Another aspect of this request in The Lord’s Prayer is to ask God to forgive sins we may not know of. If this is the case, God will reveal those sins to us and we will become aware of them. Then we can ask for specific forgiveness. This could be called a “blanket” prayer. (Be wary of blanket prayers since many times these requests are merely spoken and not felt. If the request is not heart-felt, God will see it for what it is.) In this case, however, sincerely asking for forgiveness of sins in general while praying The Lord’s Prayer could reveal ‘hidden’ sins.

Lead Us Not Into Temptation. Oh, Lord, keep me away from trouble. Give me the strength I need to turn away from sin before I actually commit that sin. And understand that asking God for this is not a suggestion that He might be tempting you. “Don’t blame God when you are tempted! God cannot be tempted by evil, and He doesn’t use evil to tempt others.” –James 1:13 (CEV) This part of The Lord’s Prayer provides our heart-felt request to have the strength to turn away from being tempted by things we know we should avoid in the first place. It will never hurt you to be girded with God’s strength. The previous request (forgiveness of sins) deals with past sins. This phrase (keep us from temptation) deals with future or potential sins. It is like a prevention prayer.

This request acknowledges the need for our Leader. We need God and His help. This is a deeply heart-felt request for God to stay with us and give us “victory in Jesus.”

But Deliver Us From Evil. But if we do get into trouble, it is wonderful to know that God will deliver us. Just ask Him.

While studying for this lesson, I read The Lord’s Prayer in nine translations (KJV, NRSV, NASB, NCV, CEV, NIV, NKJV, NAB, and NLT) and one paraphrase (The Message). Six of these translations and the one paraphrase said to deliver us from “the evil one.” More simply put: Satan, the Devil. This brings a whole new dimension to this prayer. The concept of spiritual warfare. Good vs. Evil. The Devil against God. Spiritual warfare.

It is okay for us to think about angels and happy heavenly thoughts, as it were. But when we mention Spiritual Warfare or the Devil, most of us get a wee uncomfortable. We’d just as soon change the subject. But in all reality, we must not be so naive or blind. We all know the Devil exists.

We see things that make us sad. Crime is rampant. Terrorism seems commonplace. We see things that make us angry. And while it is people committing these atrocities and other activities, we must acknowledge that Satan is behind much of it. And he could infect us, too. Satan is real and very active in our world. When we pray, “deliver us from evil,” (or “the evil one”) ask God to protect you from the devices of the Devil. Ask God to keep you from his worldly power – to be granted God’s strength to combat him when the times come. And then move on. Don’t dwell on Satan. C.S. Lewis said there are two mistakes we make about the Devil: (1) we naively refuse to believe in him, and (2) spend too much time thinking about him. So, let’s move on, shall we?

For Thine Is The Kingdom And The Power And The Glory Forever. Give me a G! Give me an O! Give me a D! What’s that spell? God! God! God! Yessiree, it is God’s kingdom. God’s power. And God’s Glory. Forever. And ever. And ever.

We acknowledge God’s power, sovereignty and glory whenever we pray to Him.

Amen. “May things happen the way You, God – in Your infinite wisdom – decide they should.” Jesus personified the perfect example of ‘amen-in-action’. Jesus, because of His love for us, endured what we endure in life and lived it out – pain and all. Can you imagine how lonely He felt in the Garden of Gethsemane that Thursday night, praying to God? Knowing what was ahead of Him? His disciples were mere feet away, snoring instead of keeping a watchful eye. He did not beg off of His job. He knew the hardship that awaited Him. But He did not falter. He said, amen. I’ll do it. I’ll follow my Father’s will. Jesus put His personal signature on that love letter when He hung on that cross for us. Amen says “Let it be so.”

– Daniel, edited, 7-17

## A Meditation on the Lord's Prayer

<sup>9</sup> You should pray like this:

Our Father in heaven,  
help us to honor your name.

<sup>10</sup> Come and set up your kingdom,  
so that everyone on earth will  
obey you, as you are obeyed in  
heaven.

<sup>11</sup> Give us our food for today.

<sup>12</sup> Forgive us for doing wrong,  
as we forgive others.

<sup>13</sup> Keep us from being tempted and  
protect us from the evil one. The  
kingdom, the power, and the  
glory are yours forever. Amen.

– Matthew 6:13 (CEV)

Our Father, who art in heaven.

Help me to believe this day that there is a power to lift me up which  
is stronger than all the things that hold me down.

Hallowed be thy name.

Help me to be sensitive to what is beautiful, and responsive to what  
is good, so that day by day I may grow more sure of the holiness of  
life in which I want to trust.

Thy kingdom come.

Help me to be quick to see, and ready to encourage, whatever brings  
the better meaning of God into that which otherwise might be the  
common round of the uninspired day.

Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Help me to believe that the ideals of the spirit are not a far-off  
dream, but a power to command loyalty and direct my life here on  
our real earth.

Give us this day our daily bread.

Open the way for me to earn an honest living without anxiety; but let me never forget the needs of others, and  
make me want only that benefit for myself with will also be their gain.

And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.

Make me patient and sympathetic with the shortcomings of others, especially of those I love; and keep me sternly  
watchful only of my own. Let me never grow hard with the unconscious cruelty of those who measure themselves  
by mean standards, and so think they have excelled. Keep my eyes lifted to the highest, so that I may be forgiving,  
because I know how much there is of which I need to be forgiven.

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

Let me not go carelessly this day within the reach of any evil I cannot resist, but if in the path of duty I must go  
where temptation is, give me strength of spirit to meet it without fear.

For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever and ever. Amen.

– Walter Russell Bowie, from Wallis, 203

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## Love

We sometimes fear to bring our troubles to God, because they  
must seem so small to Him, who sitteth on the circle of the earth.  
But, if they are large enough to vex and endanger our welfare, they  
are large enough to touch His heart of love. For love does not  
measure by a merchant's scales, nor with a surveyor's chain. It hath  
a delicacy which is unknown in any handling of material substances.

– Reuben Archer Torrey, from Lytle, 154

<sup>7</sup> “Ask and it will be given to you; seek  
and you will find; knock and the door  
will be opened to you. <sup>8</sup>For everyone who  
asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and  
to the one who knocks, the door will be  
opened.

– Matthew 7:7-8 (NIV)



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Father in heaven, when the thought of thee wakes in our hearts,  
let it not awaken like a frightened bird that flies about in dismay,  
but like a child waking from a sleep with a heavenly smile.

– Søren Kierkegaard, from Wallis, 201

<sup>6</sup>I call on you, my God, for you will answer me; turn your ear to me and hear my prayer.

<sup>7</sup>Show me the wonders of your great love, you who save by your right hand those who take refuge in you from their foes.

– Psalm 17:6-7 (NIV)

## Private Prayer

Private prayer is our refuge from troubles. High above the beating waves, and near Heaven, it is our fortress. What sometimes would become of us, if we might not shut the door upon mankind, and find repose in our Father's bosom? The afflicted Christian, entering his citadel, says, like persecuted David, "I give myself unto prayer." Thou, who knowest all, and changest never, art on my side. If I grieve any, I would

not grieve Thee. I would not make Thee my enemy, I would retain Thy favor. Oh my, Almighty Friend, "say unto my soul. I am thy salvation." Heavenly Father, Thy smile invigorates me. I am glad and safe when I hear Thy voice.

– Walter Robinson, from Lytle, 153

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## Slow Me Down Lord!

Slow me down, Lord!

Ease the pounding of my heart by the quieting of my mind.

Steady my hurried pace, with a vision of the eternal reach of time.

Give me, amidst the confusion of my day, the calmness of the everlasting hills.

Break the tension of my nerves with the soothing music of the singing streams  
that live in my memory.

Help me to know the magical restoring power of sleep.

Teach me the art of taking minute vacations of slowing down.

To look at a flower; to chat with an old friend or make a new one;

To pat a stray dog; to watch a spider build a web; to smile at a child;

Or to read from a good book.

Remind me each day that the race is not always to the swift; that there is more to life than increasing its speed.

Let me look upward into the towering oak and know that it grew great and strong because it grew slowly and well.

– Orin L. Crain, from Wallis, 192

But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!"

– Luke 10:40 (NIV)

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I have lived to thank God that all my prayers have not been answered.

– Jean Ingelow, from Lytle, 153

# Notes and Prayers for “Look to Our Divine Daddy”





## God is So Good.

For days when you realize God has:

blessed your life immeasurably .... answered your prayers .... heard your cries for help and comfort .... shown His mercy .... been faithful through everything in your life .... protected you .... been at work in your life .... and shown you His grace repeatedly.

## Blessings of Jesus and the Holy Spirit

Jesus Christ, the love that gives love,  
You are higher than the highest star;  
You are deeper than the deepest sea;  
You cherish us as your own family;  
You embrace us as your own spouse;  
You rule over us as your own subjects;  
You welcome us as your dearest friend.  
Let all the world worship you.

Holy Spirit, the life that gives life,  
You are the cause of all movement;  
You are the breath of all creatures;  
You are the slave that purifies our souls;  
You are the ointment that heals our wounds;  
You are the fire that warms our hearts;  
You are the light that guides our feet.  
Let all the world praise you.

<sup>16</sup> God is wonderful and glorious. I pray that His Spirit will make you become strong followers <sup>17</sup> and that Christ will live in your hearts because of your faith. Stand firm and be deeply rooted in his love. <sup>18</sup> I pray that you and all of God's people will understand what is called wide or long or high or deep. <sup>19</sup> I want you to know all about Christ's love, although it is too wonderful to be measured. Then your lives will be filled with all that God is.

– Ephesians 3:16-19 (CEV)

– Hildegard of Bingen, from *Counsel*, 122

<sup>1</sup> Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory in the heavens.

<sup>2</sup> Through the praise of children and infants you have established a stronghold against your enemies, to silence the foe and the avenger.

– Psalm 8:1-2 (NIV)

## Wonderful Power and Glory of God

David sets before his eyes the wonderful power and glory of God in the creation and government of the material universe. There is presented to us in the whole order of nature, the most abundant matter for sharing forth the glory of God, but, as we are unquestionably more powerfully affected with what we ourselves experience, David here, with great propriety, expressly celebrates the special favor which God manifests towards mankind: for this, of all the subjects

which come under our contemplation, is the brightest mirror in which we can behold His glory. David, when reflecting on the incomprehensible goodness which God has been graciously pleased to bestow on the human race, and feeling all his thoughts and sense swallowed up, and overwhelmed in the contemplation, exclaims that it is a subject worthy of admiration, because it cannot be set forth in words.

David declares that the providence of God, in order to make itself known to mankind, does not wait till men arrive at the age of maturity, but even from the very dawn of infancy shines forth so brightly as is sufficient to confute all the ungodly, who, through their profane contempt of God, would wish to extinguish His very name. He says that babes and sucklings are advocates sufficiently powerful to vindicate the providence of God. .... David, therefore, has the best reason for declaring, that although the tongues of all, who have arrived at the age of manhood, should become silent, the speechless mouth of infants is sufficiently able to celebrate the praise of God. And when he not only introduces babes as witnesses and preachers of God's glory, but also attributes mature strength to their mouth, the expression is very emphatic. In other words, so early as the generation or birth of man, the splendor of Divine Providence is so apparent, that even infants, who hang upon their mothers' breasts, can bring down to the ground the fury of the enemies of God.

– Calvin, II (emphasis in original)

## Answers

Answers to prayer often come in unexpected ways. We pray, for instance, for a certain virtue; but God seldom delivers Christian virtues all wrapped in a package and ready for use. Rather he puts us in situations where by His help we can develop those virtues. Henry Ward Beecher told of a woman who prayed for patience, and God sent her a poor cook. The best answers to pray may be the vision and strength to meet a circumstance or to assume a responsibility.

– C.B. Findley, from Wallis, 203

<sup>26</sup>In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. <sup>27</sup>And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God's people in accordance with the will of God.

<sup>28</sup>And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

– Romans 8:26-28 (NIV)

<sup>9</sup>“You parents—if your children ask for a loaf of bread, do you give them a stone instead? <sup>10</sup>Or if they ask for a fish, do you give them a snake? Of course not! <sup>11</sup>So if you sinful people know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give good gifts to those who ask him.

– Matthew 7:9-11 (NLT)

## Faith

During the Civil War fourteen inmates of Andersonville Prison, on August 20, 1864, bowed in prayer to the Almighty that He would send them water; and a spring broke out on the outside of the wall and ran through the prison. The people there were unanimous in their belief that it was of divine origin, the water in the nearby stream being fearfully unwholesome. The spring is reported to be still flowing.

– Christian Endeavor World, from Lytle, 154

## Prayer of an Unknown Confederate Soldier

I asked for strength that I might achieve;  
I was made weak that I might learn humbly to obey.  
I asked for health that I might do greater things;  
I was given infirmity that I might do better things.  
I asked for riches that I might be happy;  
I was given poverty that I might be wise.  
I asked for power that I might have the praise of men;  
I was given weakness that I might feel the need of God.  
I asked for all things that I might enjoy life;  
I was given life that I might enjoy all things.  
I got nothing that I had asked for, but everything I had hoped for.  
Almost despite myself my unspoken prayers were answered;  
I am, among all men, most richly blessed. – from Counsell, 429

“Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.”

– Matthew 7:7 (NIV)

He who runs from God in the morning will scarcely find Him the rest of the day.

– John Bunyan, from Lytle, 156

## The Unseen Bridge

The Lord has heard  
my plea; the Lord will  
answer my prayer.

– Psalm 6:9 (NLT)

There is a bridge whereof the span is hidden in the heart of man,  
And reaches, without pile or rod, into the plentitude of God.

It carries all that honestly is faith or hope or charity.

No other traffic will it bear; this broad yet narrow Bridge of Prayer.

– Gilbert Thomas, from Wallis, 201

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## Never Be Sorry

You will never be sorry —

for thinking before acting,  
for hearing before judging,  
for forgiving your enemies,  
for being candid and frank,  
for helping a fallen brother,  
for being honest in business,  
for thinking before speaking,  
for being loyal to your church,  
for standing by your principles,  
for stopping your ears to gossip,  
for bridling a slanderous tongue,  
for harboring only pure thoughts,  
for sympathizing with the afflicted,  
for being courteous and kind to all.

<sup>22</sup> But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our  
lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness,  
faithfulness, <sup>23</sup> gentleness, and self-control. There is no  
law against these things! – Galatians 5:22-23 (NLT)

– Unknown, from Wallis, 114

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## Take My Life and Let it Be Consecrated

I am the Lord your God.  
Keep yourselves holy for me  
because I am holy.

– Leviticus 11:44 (NCV)

Take my life, and let it be consecrated, Lord, to thee;  
Take my moments and my days, let them flow in ceaseless praise.  
Take my hands, and let them move at the impulse of thy love.  
Take my feet, and let them be always, only for my king.  
Take my lips, and let them be filled with messages from thee.  
Take my silver and my gold, not a mite would I withhold.  
Take my intellect, and use every power as thou shalt choose.  
Take my will, and make it thine; it shall be no longer mine.  
Take my heart, it is thine own; it shall be thy royal throne.  
Take my love; my Lord, I pour at thy feet its treasure store.  
Take myself, and I will be, ever, only, all for thee.

– Frances Ridley Havergal, from Counsell, 382, and Hymnal, #597

## Ladder of Achievement

100% — I did.  
90% — I will.  
80% — I can.  
70% — I think I can.  
60% — I might.  
50% — I think I might.  
40% — What is it?  
30% — I wish I could.  
20% — I don't know how.  
10% — I can't.  
0% — I won't.

May we shout for joy when we hear of your victory and raise a victory banner in the name of our God. May the Lord answer all your prayers.

– Psalm 20:5 (NLT)

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O Lord, thou knowest that which is best for us.  
Let this or that be done, as thou shalt please.  
Give what thou wilt, how much thou wilt, and when thou wilt.

– Thomas á Kempis, from Wallis, 201

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## Two Gospel Songs

For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. – Jeremiah 29:11 (NIV)

Can't Nobody Do Me Like Jesus

Can't nobody do me like Jesus,  
Can't nobody do me like the Lord.  
Can't nobody do me like Jesus,  
He's my, he's my friend  
He picked me up, turned me around,  
He picked me up, turned me around,  
He picked me up, turned me around,  
He's my, he's my friend.

– Unknown, from Counsell, 476

I Don't Know What the Future Holds

I don't know what the future holds, I don't know about today,  
But I know who holds my hand, and I know who leads the way.  
Come what may from day to day! I will never fret  
For the Lord's been good to me, and he's never failed me yet.  
Tomorrow might find me broke without a dime,  
But I don't worry 'cause he's gonna step right in on time.  
I might be friendless, left all by myself,  
But as I got a friend in the Lord, I don't need nobody else.

– Unknown, from Counsell, 477

## From Conscientious Objector to War Hero

Life on the farm in 1887 was tough in Fentress County, Tennessee, where a boy name Alvin York was born. His father, William, needed to farm, hunt, and blacksmith to support a family that eventually included eleven children.

You can get the horses ready for battle,  
but it is the Lord who gives the victory.

Alvin worked with his father on the farm. He especially enjoyed hunting with him and became a crack shot at an early age. But in 1911 Alvin's father died from a kick by a mule, leaving Alvin as chief provider for the family since his two older brothers had already moved away.

Floundering under the responsibility of caring for his family, Alvin began drinking the local moonshine. The more he drank, the rowdier he became, often ending his evenings in bloody fights. After every binge he would stumble home to his mother's two room cabin where night after night she faithfully prayed for him.

One night about midnight, when Alvin lurched home from a night of drinking and fighting, his mother plaintively asked him, "When are you going to be a man like your father and grandfather?"

She had nagged him for years about his drunkenness but had never before compared him to his father and grandfather. Neither of them had drunk and both were legendary for their fairness and honesty.

His mother's words made Alvin suddenly realize that his life was hopeless and that all he deserved was God's wrath. Of that moment he later said, "God just took ahold [sic] of my life. My little old mother had been praying for me for so long, and I guess the Lord finally decided to answer her." He fell to his knees and shed tears of repentance in his mother's lap. As his tears turned to joy, he said, "Mother, I promise you tonight that I will never drink again. I will never cuss or fight again. I will live the life God wants me to live." It was the wee hours of New Year's Day, 1915, the dawn of a new day for Alvin York.

At the next revival at a nearby church, Alvin York walked down the aisle and to his neighbors' amazement publicly dedicated his life to God. He soon became an elder and song leader in his church.

Things were going well for Alvin until in 1917 the United States declared war on Germany. Joining the army was the last thing that York wanted to do because his church opposed war as a violation of the commandment "Thou shalt not kill." Then he received a notice requiring him to register with his draft board, the head of which was his pastor. He was in a quandary as was his pastor. He applied to be a conscientious objector but was turned down. He had no choice but to go to war.

On September 26, 1918, the battle for the Argonne Forest began. The great achievement of the battle, in fact the greatest single military achievement of the war, was performed by a corporal from Tennessee named Alvin York. As a member of a patrol sent to silence a group of German machine-gun nests, York personally killed more than twenty Germans and took 132 prisoners all by himself. He forced a German major to order all his soldiers to surrender. It all took place within three hours and fifteen minutes.

That night after recounting the day's event in his diary, he wrote, "So you can see here in this care of mine where God helped me out. I had bin [sic] living for God and working in the church some time before I came to the army. So I am a witness to the fact that God did help me out of that hard battle; for the bushes were shot up all around me, and I never got a scratch."

For his heroism Corporal York, soon to be Sergeant York, received the Congressional Medal of Honor. General Pershing called him "the greatest civilian soldier of the war."

– Rusten, 540-541

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Thou has made us for thyself, O Lord; and our heart is restless until it rests in Thee.

– Augustine, from Wallis, 153

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## The Habit of Having No Habits

<sup>5</sup> For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, virtue with knowledge, <sup>6</sup> knowledge with self-control, self-control with endurance, endurance with devotion, <sup>7</sup> devotion with mutual affection, mutual affection with love. <sup>8</sup> If these are yours and increase in abundance, they will keep you from being idle or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>9</sup> Anyone who lacks them is blind and shortsighted, forgetful of the cleansing of his past sins.

– 2 Peter 1:5-9 (NAB)

When we first begin to form a habit, we are fully aware of it. There are times when we are aware of becoming a virtuous and godly, but this awareness should only be a stage we quickly pass through as we grow spiritually. If we stop at this stage, we will develop a sense of spiritual pride. The right thing to do with godly habits is to immerse them to the life of the Lord until they become such a spontaneous expression of our lives that we are no longer aware of them. Our spiritual life continually causes us to focus our attention inwardly for the determined purpose of self-examination, because each of us has some qualities we have not yet added to our lives.

Your god may be your little Christian habit – the habit of prayer or Bible reading at certain times of your day. Watch how your Father will upset your schedule if you begin to

worship your habit instead of what the habit symbolizes. We say, “I can’t do that right now; this is my time alone with God.” No, this is your time alone with your habit. There is a quality that is still lacking in you. Identify your short-coming and then look for opportunity to work into your life that missing quality.

Love means that there are no visible habits – that your habits are so immersed in the Lord that you practice them without realizing it. If you are consciously aware of your own holiness, you place limitations on yourself from doing certain things – things God is not restricting you from at all. This means there is a missing quality that needs to be added to your life. The only supernatural life is the life the Lord Jesus lived, and He was at home with God anywhere. Is there some place where you re not at home with God? Then allow God to work through whatever that particular circumstance may be until you increase in Him, adding His qualities. Your life will then become the simple life of a child.

– Chambers, May 12

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The fewer words the better prayer. – Martin Luther, from Lytle, 156

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## Help

God brings no man into the conflicts of life to desert him. Every man has a Friend in heaven whose resources are unlimited; and on Him he may call at any hour, and find sympathy and assistance.

– Robert Hugh Morris, from Wallis, 153

God is faithful, and by him you were called to fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

– I Corinthians 1:9 (NAB)

<sup>3</sup> Strengthen the feeble hands, steady the knees that give way; <sup>4</sup> say to those with fearful hearts, “Be strong, do not fear; your God will come, He will come with vengeance; with divine retribution He will come to save you.”

– Isaiah 35:3-4 (NIV)

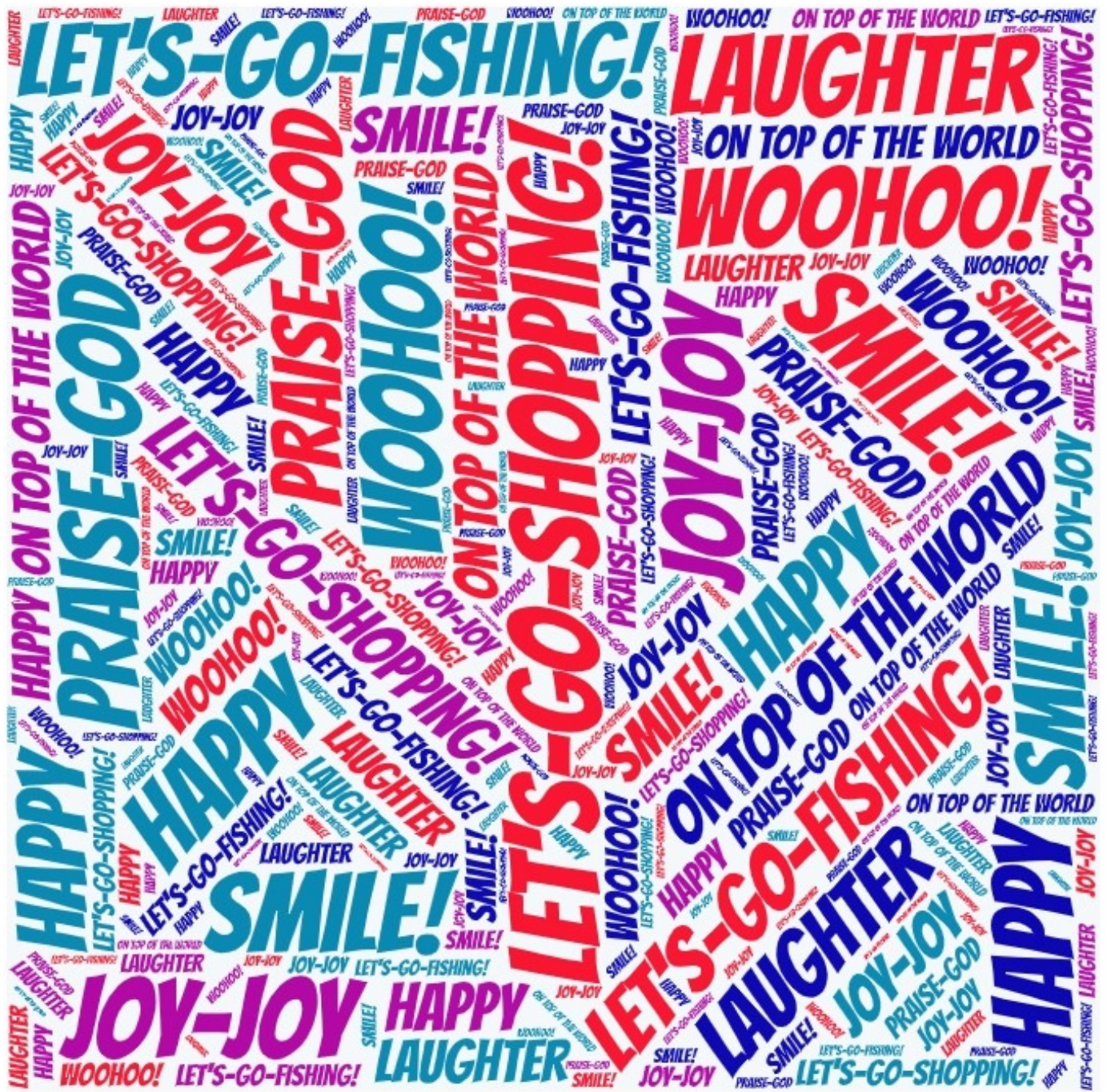
## Submission

May our Lord’s sweet hand square us and hammer us, and strike of all kinds of pride, self-love, world-worship, and infidelity, so that He can make us stones and pillars in His house.

– Samuel Rutherford, from Wallis, 155

# Notes and Prayers on “God Is So Good”





## Let's Go Shopping! (Or Let's Go Fishing!)

For days when you feel:

everything's great .... the world's smiling on you .... just happy .... like shouting "Wooahoo!" .... you're on top of the world .... and like praising God just because.

## Love

Love has many ways of expressing itself, but in general the ways are two – the practical and the sentimental. Which is the higher and better way? It is merely a question of appropriateness under the circumstances. Love must express itself very often in coal, and cornmeal, and salt pork, and clothes. But let it not be concluded that love may not express itself in acts of pure sentiment. The soul has needs. Sympathy and tenderness and friendship are just as real and more enduring than coal and wood. Sometimes a flower is more important than flour; sometimes a word of cheer is better than gold.

– Ferral, from Lytle, 86

If I could speak all the languages of earth and of angels, but didn't love others, I would only be a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.<sup>2</sup> If I had the gift of prophecy, and if I understood all of God's secret plans and possessed all knowledge, and if I had such faith that I could move mountains, but didn't love others, I would be nothing.<sup>3</sup> If I gave everything I have to the poor and even sacrificed my body, I could boast about it; but if I didn't love others, I would have gained nothing.

– I Corinthians 13:1-3 (NLT)

<sup>1</sup>In the beginning, when God created the heavens and the earth — <sup>2</sup>and the earth was without form or shape, with darkness over the abyss and a mighty wind sweeping over the waters — <sup>3</sup>Then God said: Let there be light, and there was light. <sup>4</sup>God saw that the light was good. God then separated the light from the darkness.

– Genesis 1:1-4 (NAB)

## Confidence

I can see how it might be possible for a man to look down upon the earth and be an atheist, but I cannot conceive how he could look up into the heavens and say there is no God.

– Abraham Lincoln, from Wallis, 63

## Four Prayers from Kierkegaard

O Lord Jesus Christ, I long to live in your presence, to see your human form and to watch you walking on earth. I do not want to see you through the darkened glass of tradition, nor through the eyes of today's values and prejudices. I want to see you as you were, as you are, and as you always will be. I want to see you as an offence to human pride, as a man of humility, walking amongst the lowliest of men, and yet as the saviour and redeemer of the human race.

Teach us, O God, not to torture ourselves not to make martyrs of ourselves through stifling reflection; but rather teach us to breathe deeply in faith, through Jesus, our Lord.

Lord, give us weak eyes for things which are of no account and clear eyes for all your truth.

God, our heavenly Father, when the thought of you wakes in our hearts, let its awakening not be like a startled bird that flies about in fear; let it be like a child waking up from its sleep with a heavenly smile.

– Søren Kierkegaard, from Counsell, 364

<sup>3</sup> “You're blessed when you're at the end of your rope. With less of you there is more of God and his rule.

<sup>4</sup> “You're blessed when you feel you've lost what is most dear to you. Only then can you be embraced by the One most dear to you.

<sup>5</sup> “You're blessed when you're content with just who you are—no more, no less. That's the moment you find yourselves proud owners of everything that can't be bought.

<sup>6</sup> “You're blessed when you've worked up a good appetite for God. He's food and drink in the best meal you'll ever eat.

<sup>7</sup> “You're blessed when you care. At the moment of being 'care-full,' you find yourselves cared for.

– Matthew 5:3-7 (MSG)

The amazing grace of the Master, Jesus Christ, the extravagant love of God, the intimate friendship of the Holy Spirit, be with all of you. – 2 Corinthians 13:14 (MSG)

## Is There a Santa Clause?

Dear Editor, I am eight years old. Some of my little friends say there is no Santa Claus. Papa says, “If you see it in The Sun, it’s so.” Please tell me the truth: is there a Santa Claus?

– Virginia O’Hanlon, 115 West 95<sup>th</sup> Street

Virginia, your little friends are wrong. They have been affected by the scepticism of a sceptical [sic] age. They do not believe except [what] they see. They think that nothing can be which is not comprehensible by their little minds.

All minds, Virginia, whether they be men’s or children’s are little. In this great universe of ours man is a mere insect, an ant, in his intellect, as compared with the boundless world about him, as measured by the intelligence capable of grasping the whole truth and knowledge.

Yes, Virginia, there is a Santa Claus. He exists as certainly as love and generosity and devotion exist, and you know that they abound and give to our life its highest beauty and joy. Alas! how dreary would be the world if there were no Santa Claus. It would be as dreary as if there were no Virginia’s. There would be no childlike faith then, no poetry, no romance, to make tolerable this existence. We should have no enjoyment, except sense and sight. The eternal light with which childhood fills the world would be extinguished.

Not believe in Santa Claus! You might as well not believe in fairies! You might get your papa to hire men to watch in all the chimneys on Christmas Eve to catch Santa Claus, but even if they did not see Santa Claus coming down, what would that prove? Nobody sees Santa Claus, but that is no sign there is no Santa Claus.

..... Nobody can conceive or imagine all the wonders there are unseen and unseeable in the world.

You may tear about the baby’s rattle and see what makes the noise inside, but there is a veil covering the unseen world which not the strongest man, nor even the united strength of all the strongest men that ever lived, could tear apart. Only faith, fancy, poetry, love, romance, can push aside that curtain and view and picture the supernal beauty and glory beyond. Is it all real? Ah, Virginia, in all this world there is nothing else real and abiding.

No Santa Claus! Thank God! he lives, and he lives forever. A thousand years from now, Virginia, nay, ten times ten thousand years from now, he will continue to make glad the heart of childhood.

– “Casual Essays” from The Sun, from Lytle, 87

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I was about Virginia’s age when I asked my father whether there was a Santa Claus.

Daddy said: “There is no chubby man in a red and white suit. But there definitely is a Santa Claus.”

– Elizabeth Daniel

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## Road Maps

Would ye learn the road to Laughtertown,  
O ye who have lost the way?  
Would ye have young heart though your hair be gray?  
Go learn from a little child each day.  
Go serve his wants and play his play,  
And catch the lilt of his laughter gay,  
And follow his dancing feet as they stray;  
For he knows the road to Laughtertown,  
O ye who have lost the way.

<sup>4</sup>Oh, sing to him you saints of his; give thanks to his holy name. <sup>5</sup>His anger lasts a moment; his favor lasts for life! Weeping may go on all night, but in the morning there is joy.

– Psalm 30:4-5 (TLB)

– Katherine D. Blake, from Lytle, 88

## Our House

What is a house? Walls of protection, a refuge, a fortress, a place to rest and fellowship, often a place that defines our worth, our status. A place to call our own. Each of us builds a house for ourselves in one way or another.

Then came the storm. In every life what we've built is subject to raging winds and rising floods. They will come. Christ warns that the only indestructible house is the one built upon the rock of His teachings. He strength of our houses is not dependent on our salvation. It's no dependent on our faith. It's dependent on our willingness to live according to Go's Word. An unsettling thought indeed.

You see, we can be never-miss-a-church-service Christians but still never get "into" God's Word. Excuses like "I'm just not the studious type" don't cut it. We are a people desperate for God's Word. More than anything, God's people need to know His Word and be willing to give Him the freedom to adjust our lives to its precepts. Guarantees comes from living our lives according to Scripture.

Yes, storms will come, but we have an absolute promise – our lives will not collapse. Every time we leave a Bible study or a sermon and methodically begin to discount the truth we've heard or apply it to others, a few shingles slide off our roofs, the Sheetrock crumbles in a place or two, and our foundations crack just a little bit more.

But the best of news prevails. Every time we receive, believe, and heed His Word, He nails new shingles to our roofs, He reinforces our walls with fresh Sheetrock, and His wet cement hardens beneath our feet. The storms come – but the house stands. As long as we have breath, it is never too late for a foolish man to become wise.

Better to have a hut on the Rock than a castle on the sand.

– Moore, 65

<sup>24-25</sup> "These words I speak to you are not incidental additions to your life, homeowner improvements to your standard of living. They are foundational words, words to build a life on. If you work these words into your life, you are like a smart carpenter who built his house on solid rock. Rain poured down, the river flooded, a tornado hit—but nothing moved that house. It was fixed to the rock.

– Matthew 7:24-25 (MSG)

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Those who bring sunshine to the lives of others cannot keep it from themselves.

– James M. Barrie, from Lytle, 83

Ill-gotten gain brings no lasting happiness; right living does.

– Proverbs 10:2 (TLB)

## Radiant Witnesses

We do not please God more by eating bitter aloes than by eating honey. A cloudy, foggy, rainy day is not more heavenly than a day of sunshine. A funeral march is not so much like a the music of angels as the songs of birds on a May morning. There is no more religion in the gaunt, naked forest in winter than in the laughing blossoms of the spring, and the rich, ripe fruits of autumn. It was not the pleasant things in the world that came from the devil, and the dreary things from God! It was "sin brought death into the world and all our woe;" as the sin vanishes the woe will vanish too. God Himself is the ever-blessed God. He dwells in the light of joy as well as of purity, and instead of becoming more like Him as we become more miserable, and as all the brightness and glory of life are extinguished, we become more like God as our blessedness becomes more complete. The great Christian graces are radiant with happiness. Faith, hope, charity, there is no sadness in them; and if penitence makes the heart sad, penitence belongs to the sinner; not to the saint; as we become more saintly, we have less sin to sorrow over.

– Robert William Dale, from Lytle, 83

## The Gate of the Year

And I said to the man who stood at the gate of the year;  
“Give me a light, that I may tread safely into the unknown.”  
And he replied:  
“Go out into the darkness and put your hand into the Hand of God.  
That shall be to you better than light and safer than a known way.”  
So, I went forth, and finding the Hand of God, trod gladly into the night.  
And He led me towards the hills and the breaking of the day in the lone East.  
So, heart, be still:  
What need our little life, our human life, to know, if God hath comprehension?  
In all the dizzy strife of things both high and low God hideth His intention.

Be still and know that I am God.  
– Psalm 46:10 (NIV)

– M. Louise Haskins, from Wallis, 137

## The Glory That’s Unsurpassed

Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, “Brother Saul, the Lord—Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here—has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit.”  
– Acts 9:17 (NIV)

When Paul received his sight, he also received spiritual insight into the Person of Jesus Christ. His entire life and preaching from that point on were totally consumed with nothing but Jesus Christ – “For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified” (1 Cor 2:2). Paul never again allowed anything to attract and hold the attention of his mind and soul except the face of Jesus Christ.

We must learn to maintain a strong degree of character in our lives, even to the level that has been revealed in our vision of Jesus.

The lasting characteristic of a spiritual man is the ability to understand correctly the meaning of the Lord Jesus in his life, and the ability to explain the purposes of God to others. The overruling passion of his life is Jesus. Whenever you see this quality in a person, you get the feeling that he is truly a man after God’s own heart.

– Chambers, April. 2

## African Prayer

O, Chief of chiefs, we kneel before you in humble adoration. Like the bird in the branches we praise your heavenly glory. Like the village sharpening stone, you are always available and never exhausted. Remove, we pray, our sins that hide your face. You know that we are poor and simple; that we are often hungry while work. Send rain at the right time for our gardens so that our food may not fail. Protect us from the cold and danger by night. Help us to stay healthy so that we may rejoice in our strength. May our villages be filled with children. Set us free from the fear of the fetish and the witch doctor and from sorts of superstitions. Save the people, especially the Christian boys and girls in the villages, from the evil that surrounds them. All this we ask in the name of Jesus Christ your son.

– A prayer from Zaire, from Counsell, 525

<sup>1</sup> Praise the Lord! Praise God in His holy place! Praise Him in the heavens of His power! <sup>2</sup> Praise Him for His great works! Praise Him for all His greatness! <sup>3</sup> Praise Him with the sound of a horn. Praise Him with harps. <sup>4</sup> Praise Him with timbrels and dancing. Praise Him with strings and horns. <sup>5</sup> Praise Him with loud sounds. Praise Him with loud and clear sounds. <sup>6</sup> Let everything that has breath praise the Lord. Praise the Lord!  
– Psalm 150 (NLT)

## Forgive

Your heavenly Father will forgive you if you forgive those who sin against you; but if you refuse to forgive them, he will not forgive you.  
– Matthew 6:15 (TLB)

We may, if we choose, make the worst of one another. Every one has his weak points; every one has his faults; we may make the worst of them; we may fix our attention constantly upon these. But we may also make the best of one another. We may forgive, even as we hope to be forgiven. We may put ourselves in the place of others, and ask what we should wish to be done

to us, and thought of us, were we in their place. By thought of us, were we in their place. By loving whatever is lovable in those around us, love will flow back from them to us, and life will become a pleasure instead of a pain; and earth will become like Heaven; and we shall become not unworthy followers of Him whose name is Love.

– Anonymous, from Lytle, 91

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## Make Me a Witness

Stay with me, and I will shine as to be a light to others. The light, O Jesus, will be all from you. None of it will be mine. No merit to me. It will be you who shines through me upon others. O let me praise you this way, in the way which you love best, by shining on all those around me. Give light to them as well as to me; light them with me, through me. Teach me to show your praise, your truth, your will. Make me preach you without preaching – not by words, but by my example and by .... sympathetic influence, of what I do – by my visible resemblance to your faithful believers, and the evident fullness of the love my heart bears to you.

– John Henry Newman (updated language), from Counsell, 392

<sup>1</sup> Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a huge crowd of witnesses to the life of faith, let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily trips us up. And let us run with endurance the race God has set before us. <sup>2</sup> We do this by keeping our eyes on Jesus, the champion who initiates and perfects our faith. Because of the joy awaiting Him, He endured the cross, disregarding its shame. Now he is seated in the place of honor beside God's throne. <sup>3</sup> Think of all the hostility he endured from sinful people; then you won't become weary and give up. – Hebrews 12:1-3 (NLT)

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## The Watchman

<sup>4</sup> Love is kind and patient, never jealous, boastful, proud, or <sup>5</sup>rude. Love isn't selfish or quick tempered. It doesn't keep a record of wrongs that others do. <sup>6</sup> Love rejoices in the truth, but not in evil. <sup>7</sup> Love is always supportive, loyal, hopeful, and trusting.

<sup>8</sup> Love never fails!

– I Corinthians 13:4-8 (CEV)

Nothing is sweeter than love, nothing more courageous, nothing higher, nothing wider, nothing more pleasant, nothing fuller nor better in Heaven and earth, because love is born of God, and cannot rest but in God, above all created things. Love feels no burden, thinks nothing of trouble, attempts what is above its strength, pleads no excuse of impossibility .... It is therefore able to undertake all things, and it completes many things, and warrants them to take effect, where he who does not love would faint and lie down. Love is watchful and sleeping, not slumbering.

Though weary, it is not tired; though pressed, it is not straightened; though alarmed, it is not confounded; but, as a lively flame and burning torch, it forces its way upwards and securely passes all.

– Thomas á Kempis (slightly updated), from Lytle, 90



## The Victory Course

Some years ago, a newspaper ran an article entitled, “The Walls of Jericho Really Did Come Tumbling Down.” Imagine that. God always does what He says, but sometimes He gives conditional promises: “if you will – then I will.” Such as the case in Jericho. God said, “See, I have delivered Jericho into your hands, along with its king and its fighting men.” Joshua must have looked at that imposing city with its impenetrable wall and thought, It doesn’t look like mine to me! God’s message was: “The victory is already yours, but I want you to do a few things to take it!”

When the trumpets sounded, the army shouted, and at the sound of the trumpet, when the men gave a loud shout, the wall collapsed; so everyone charged straight in, and they took the city.

– Joshua 6:20 (NIV)

God often directs us in similar ways. In the battles we face, victory is already ours by position, but victory may never be ours by possession if He gets no cooperation. God has overcome our every enemy by the blood of the Lamb, Jesus Christ. But some victories are ours, not just to have but to take. Here are a few biblical suggestions for possessing the victories that are ours because of Christ:

1. Stay armed for battle (see Josh 6:3,9). These men were armed with swords, not guns. The Word is our sword (see Eph. 6:17). We’ll never possess our victories without it.

2. Stay on course (see Josh 6:3,14). Continue to “march” in the center of God’s will. Don’t give up. Don’t lose hope. The battle is the Lord’s, and He will be faithful. He will not only give you the victory if you remain faithful, but He also won’t waste a moment of the battle.

3. Stick close to your battalion (see v. 13). March closely to fellow overcomers – those dedicated to living in victory. We win very few battles disconnected from other victors in Christ. Remember, not everyone in Christ is pursuing victory. Be careful not to surround yourself solely with victims.

4. Stay alert (see v. 18). Aggressively avoid things you know will be your own destruction. Most of the time we are well aware of our potential pitfalls. The enemy often wraps temptations in appetizing, colorful, or sensuous packages, “but keep away (see v. 18) for your own good!”

These steps are not easy, but the victorious life is worth the work. Do you suppose Joshua and the Israelites preferred to stay home and read about the crumbled wall in the Canaan Chronicle? Or do you think they were astounded and privileged to participate and observe God at work firsthand? We want to be smack in the middle of God’s victories. No way to do that without being smack in the middle of the battlefield.

Want a little extra motivation? These steps don’t just lead to victory. Each step represents a victory of its own! Until the big one – hang in there. Victory is coming!

– Moore, 124

Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see. This is what the ancients were commended for. By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God’s command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible.

– Hebrews 11:1-3 (NIV)

## Undergirding

Faith is a living, daring confidence in God’s grace, so sure and certain that a man would stake his life on it a thousand times. This confidence in God’s grace and knowledge of it makes men glad and bold and happy in dealing with God and with all His creatures, and this is the work of the Holy Ghost in faith. Hence a man is ready and glad, without compulsion, to do good to everyone, to serve everyone, to suffer everything, in love and praise of God who has shown him this grace.

– Martin Luther, from Wallis, 65

## My Strength

There is no better way of serving God than to love Him. No doubt, the service which we owe Him is better expressed by the word reverence. .... But as He requires nothing so expressly as to possess all the affections of our heart, and to have them going towards Him, so there is no sacrifice which He values more than we are bound fast to Him by the claim of a free and spontaneous love. On the other hand, there is nothing in which His glory shines forth more conspicuously than in His free and sovereign goodness. Moses, therefore (Deut 10:12), when he meant to give a summary of the law, says, "And now, Israel, what does the Lord your God require of you but to love Him?". In speaking thus, David, at the same time, intended to show that his thoughts and affections were not so intently fixed upon the benefits of God as to be ungrateful to Him, a sin which has been too common in all ages. Even at this day we see how the greater part of mankind enjoy wholly at their ease the gifts of God without paying any regard to Him. David, to prevent himself from falling into this ingratitude, in these words makes as it were a solemn vow, "Lord, as you are my strength, I will continue united and devoted to you by unfeigned love" (Ps 18:1-2).

When David thus heaps together many titles by which to honour God, it is no useless or unnecessary accumulation of words. We know how difficult it is for men to keep their minds and hearts stayed in God. They either imagine that it is not enough to have God for them, and, consequently, are always seeking after support and succour elsewhere, or, at the first temptation which assails them, fall from the confidences which they placed in Him. David, therefore, by attributing to God various methods of saving His people, protests that, provided he has God for his protector and defender, he is effectually fortified against all peril and assault.

– Calvin, edited, 50

<sup>1</sup> I love you, Lord God, and you make me strong. <sup>2</sup> You are my mighty rock, my fortress, my protector, the rock where I am safe, my shield, my powerful weapon, and my place of shelter.

– Psalm 18:1-2 (CEV)

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Communion with God is a great sea that fits every bend in the shore of human need.

– Harry Emerson Fosdick, from Wallis, 65

<sup>26</sup> All of you are God's children because of your faith in Christ Jesus. <sup>27</sup> And when you were baptized, it was as though you had put on Christ in the same way you put on new clothes.

– Galatians 3:26-27 (CEV)

## Grant Us Faith

O Lord, grant us faith, the faith that removes the mask from the world and manifests God in all things; the faith that shows us Christ where our eyes see only a poor person; that shows us the Saviour where we feel only pain. O Lord, grant us the faith that inspires us to undertake everything that God wants without hesitation, without shame, without fear, and without ever retreating; the faith that knows how to go through life with calm, peace and profound joy, and that makes the soul completely indifferent to everything that is not you, O Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

– Charles de Foucauld, from Counsell, 409

# Notes and Prayers for “Let’s Go Shopping (Or Let’s Go Fishing)”

(There’s another page for notes, too.)



# Notes and Prayers for “Let’s Go Shopping (Or Let’s Go Fishing)”





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## **New Providence CP Church**

1307 Fort Campbell Blvd.  
Clarksville, TN 37042

[www.newprovidencecumberlandpresbyterianchurch.com](http://www.newprovidencecumberlandpresbyterianchurch.com)

email: [elizabeth@newprovidenccepcchurch.com](mailto:elizabeth@newprovidenccepcchurch.com)

239-671-0325 (Pastor's Cell)

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