

# **Today in Christ**

**366 Devotional Readings**  
to nurture your daily relationship with  
the Living God

**Reflections, Prayers, & Hymns**

**Ken Bible**

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## **Introduction**

In the end, only one thing will matter:  
your relationship with Christ.

This daily devotional book focuses on that relationship.  
Its goal is to help you live *Today in Christ*.  
It touches on a wide variety of subjects,  
always with the intent of  
nurturing our daily walk with God.

Prayer,  
Bible reading,  
faith, and  
relationships  
are just a few of the broad topics covered.  
Various narrower topics are also treated, such as  
finding God's will,  
resisting temptation, and  
money.

We pray that each of these truths stimulates  
your mind,  
your faith, and  
your desire for God.

What a wonder,  
what a joy it is to  
know Him,  
trust Him,  
enjoy Him, and  
grow in Him!

My prayer is that this book helps you  
do all these!

Many of the daily readings end with a link to a recorded hymn.  
Click on the link, and it will take you to that hymn's page on  
[LNWhymns.com](http://LNWhymns.com).

There you'll find the recording of the hymn (in the upper right-hand area of the page),  
the lyrics, and a copy of the printed music of the hymn.  
Everything there is downloadable and  
completely free.

Enjoy...and draw closer to our Magnificent God!

--Ken Bible

# Beginning the Day

## Reflection on Psalm 5

Father, I awake this morning  
    needing You,  
    seeking You.  
Hear my words,  
hear my heart  
    as I turn to You first of all.

As I rise, I am on the battlefield against evil.  
As I face the morning sun,  
    I face the darkness.  
Even in this silence,  
    the noise of sin begins.

I know that in time, You will make this world  
    entirely like Yourself.  
But today, Lord,  
    make **me** like Yourself.  
Make me loving,  
    joyful,  
    trusting You,  
    focused on You.  
Make me holy, Father.  
That's what I want for today:  
Keep me living wholeheartedly unto You,  
    fully and naturally,  
    every moment.

Today, Father,  
keep me in You.

Hymn: [Psalm 5](#)

## **A Unique Opportunity**

Marvelous Creator,  
Designer of each snowflake,  
You have given me this day as a  
unique opportunity.

Today I can know You better.  
Today I can walk step-by-step in Your Spirit.  
Today I can live Your marvelous love  
in fresh, new ways.  
Today I can  
please You and  
praise You and  
love You.

Keep me open to  
all this day can offer.  
Keep me open to  
all You want me to  
see and  
savor and  
share.

Father, today  
keep me open to You.

*Father, the highlight of my life is  
the smile of Your  
presence and  
approval.*

*I wake up every morning to  
a living relationship with You.*

*Every day You bless me with Yourself.*

*Thank You, thank You, thank You, my Father!*

**Hymn: [Today in Your Presence](#)**

## **Let There Be Light**

Creation began in formless, empty darkness.

The first thing God did was create  
light.

In fact, God's first recorded words are

“Let there be light” (Genesis 1:3, NASB).

The light became the framework for the passage of time,  
morning and evening,  
day by day.

Every morning, light dawns on us again.

It is the light of

God's presence,  
His warmth,  
His care,  
His generous, joyful revelation of Himself.

Every new day begins with the glow of His glory  
here among us,  
over all He has made.

Every new day is a new creation,  
a bright, new beginning.

Each morning,

before you do anything else,  
before you even get out of bed,

begin your bright, new day with  
Him.

*Father, may my  
every thought,  
every plan,  
every desire,  
every day  
begin with You.*

**Hymn: [When Morning Dawns and Evening Fades](#)**

## **A Prayer for Today**

Today, Eternal God, we live and move and breathe in You.  
Help us live this day  
    abundantly,  
    in the reality of all You are.

You are our Father.  
Help us walk in  
    all the privileges of the children of God.

You are our Savior, who gave Yourself for us.  
Help us rest in  
    Your all-encompassing love.

You are the Spirit.  
Help us love and serve  
    here in Your presence,  
    out of the rich abundance of Almighty God.

We ask all this  
    in Your name and  
    for Your glory alone.  
Amen.

*Father, when I begin to realize  
    who You are,  
Your lavish gifts are not enough.  
I want to know You and  
    please You and  
    worship You.  
I want to love You and  
    walk with You and  
    trust You  
    every moment.  
I want to live  
    in You and  
    for You and  
    to You alone.*



## **Morning Thanksgiving**

Father, this day has just begun, and  
already thanksgiving bubbles up in my heart.

Thank You for the light and beauty that shine all around me.

Thank You for wrapping me in Your tender care.

Thank You for the natural rhythms You bring to my day.  
In Your wisdom, You lead me  
to both toil and reflection,  
to both work and rest.

Father, Your love takes so many beautiful forms!  
But thank You most of all  
for the gentle assurance of Your presence and  
the whispers of Your peace.

You are with me today, Father, and I  
worship You and  
praise You!

*Father, You are with me  
wherever I go.  
And where You are,  
You are goodness and power,  
provision and care.  
Wherever You are,  
You make the ordinary  
gloriously divine!*

**Hymn: [Thank You for the Beauty of This Day](#)**

## Top Priority

In Bible times, important tasks seem to have been started early in the morning. Whether the task was leaving on a journey (Genesis 22:1-3), gathering the day's food (Exodus 16:21), or beginning the day's work (Matthew 20:1-4), they began first thing, in early morning.

This was particularly true when the task was in obedience to God (Genesis 22:1-3; 28:18; Joshua 6:12-21; Nehemiah 8:1-3; Luke 21:37-38). Artificial light was limited, and daylight was precious. Starting a task early meant it was important. By his or her actions, the doer was saying, "This task has top priority with me. I am eager to start, and I want to make sure it gets done."

For the godly, that principle applied to prayer as well.

*In the morning, O Lord, You will hear my voice;  
In the morning I will order my prayer to You and eagerly watch. (Psalm 5:3, NASB)*

*I, O Lord, have cried out to You for help,  
And in the morning my prayer comes before You. (Psalm 88:13, NASB)*

*I rise before dawn and cry for help;  
I wait for Your words. (Psalm 119:147, NASB)*

These psalmists are saying,

"Praying to You about this is the most important thing to me.  
I'm not leaving it to chance or 'If I get around to it.'  
Lord, I need YOU!"

What are you saying to God by how you prioritize prayer –

"Father, I am completely dependent on You!" or  
"Maybe later"?

*Father,  
are there any ways in which  
my daily actions don't live up to  
my commitment to You?  
In Your mercy, show me.  
I want to walk in You.*

## **Begin with God**

Father, I look to You.  
All that is began with You.  
All that is flows from You –  
    all truth,  
    all beauty,  
    all goodness.  
So I begin this day with You.

Father, how much truer,  
    how much clearer,  
    how much more loving  
would my thoughts and desires be  
    if they always, only began with You?

Today, my Lord, may  
    every word and  
    every action  
arise only from  
    love for You and  
    a longing for Your glory alone.

*Father, today  
may my life sing of You  
with all the  
clarity,  
beauty, and  
passion  
that You deserve.*

**Hymn: [Lord, May Our Thoughts Begin with You](#)**

## **Use Me Today**

*I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ. (Philippians 3:12-14, NIV)*

Lord, it's the start of a new day.  
I want this day to count for You.

I want it to be a good day with You.  
I want to know You better.  
I want to draw closer to You.  
I want to please You.  
I want to be used by You to help others,  
    to love them for You,  
    to draw them to You.

Lord, use me today.

*Father,  
there is nothing like  
Your blessing.  
You bring meaning and fulfillment to our lives.  
You multiply our limited resources.  
You cause our puny efforts to bear good fruit.  
Bless our lives today as  
we live them in You.*

**Hymn: [Through Me](#)**

## Make This Day Holy

*I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God – this is your true and proper worship.*  
(Romans 12:1, NIV)

Lord, no matter what day of the week it is,  
make this day a Sabbath,  
set apart entirely to You.

Make every moment holy.

Every thought, holy.

Every word, an offering.

Give every act the fragrance of love.

Make my mind a temple of prayer.

Today, Lord.

Make my life a living sacrifice.

Make **me** a living sacrifice,  
holy and  
pleasing to You.

**Holy**, Lord.

Make this day holy  
by Your presence and  
loving control.

*Father,  
Peter was awestruck  
when he saw Your transcendent glory in  
a Galilean peasant and  
a catch of fish (Luke 5).  
Help me recognize Your holy glory  
shining around me today.*

Hymn: [Holy in You](#)

## **Reinvest My Thoughts**

*Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear...For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.*  
(Matthew 6:25, 32-33, NIV)

Father,  
You take such good care of me that so  
little thought can profitably be spent  
on myself.

Take my thoughts,  
my hopes,  
my energies -  
all of them -  
and invest them where they will get  
their best return.  
Invest them where they will  
glorify and please You.

*Today,  
Father,  
fill my mind and  
my time  
with what matters most to You.*

**Hymn: [My Mind Is Yours](#)**

## **A Day of Love**

*Be imitators of God, as beloved children; and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and sacrifice to God.  
(Ephesians 5:2, NASB)*

Jesus,  
let love for You  
so fill my heart and mind today  
that it expresses itself in  
    each thought,  
    each attitude,  
    each word.

Make today a day of prayer  
    in Your wonderful presence.  
I love You, Lord.

*Father,  
as the sick thronged to Jesus  
in their desperation to be well,  
we come to You,  
longing to be  
    holy,  
    loving,  
    patient, and  
completely pleasing to You.  
We look up in childlike faith.*

**Hymn: [In Simple Response to You](#)**

## **Lord, Today**

*You do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. (James 4:14, NIV)*

My life is a breath.

I appear,  
then disappear.

I can't speak with confidence about  
the next moment,  
much less about the future.

When I think about the future,  
it usually turns to  
useless speculation and  
worry.

I get anxious about my own selfish concerns, and  
I miss today's opportunities for  
blessing those around me.

Lord, I don't know what the future holds.  
But I know You are there.  
I know You are working today  
to draw us further into  
the fullness of Your great blessings.

Lord Jesus,  
today matters.  
Today I will keep  
my eyes and my heart  
fixed on You.

*Father, my responsibility today is to  
follow You today,  
focusing on each task You put in front of me.  
The future is beyond my knowledge and control.  
I leave it in Your wise and loving hands.*

**Hymn: [Joy in Your Presence](#)**



## **Celebrate Your Resurrection**

The resurrection accounts in each of the four gospels make two facts clear:

1. Jesus rose on the first day of a new week.
2. He rose at the very crack of dawn.

Jesus' resurrection marked a new beginning:

a new day,  
a new week, and  
a whole new era.

In a sense, Easter sunrise was the dawning of a new creation,  
as if God was speaking again into our

formlessness,  
emptiness,  
death, and  
darkness,

commanding,

"Let there be light!"

Each morning God's glory dawns over creation,  
just as at creation itself.

Each morning God's glory dawns  
as at that resurrection sunrise.

If you trust in Christ,  
eternal day has already dawned within you.

Not even death itself will interrupt your life in Him.

Your eternal "now" in Him has already begun.

Let each morning remind you of  
all that is yours  
in Him.

**Hymn: [Good Morning, All Who Trust in Christ!](#)**

## I Can Live in Christ

*Not that I . . . have already been made perfect . . . but one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.*  
(Philippians 3:12-14, NIV)

I look forward to all that Christ is going to do for us. Imagine being perfect physically like He is, sharing His glory. Imagine being in constant touch with Him, responding fully to His presence. Imagine being one with Him and complete in Him, holy and loving as He is.

The more we realize our own weaknesses, the more wonderful these promises become. We will live in Him forever.

But here's a possibility that's even more exciting: I can live in Christ right now. I can live in His Spirit here, today, in this moment. When I look long-term, all I see are my inconsistencies and weaknesses. But right now I can live in Him.

I'm not saying I can live a perfect life by any means, even for an hour. But right now I can remember that He is here with me. I can breathe prayer to Him and foster that openness to Him that is the key to spiritual growth.

This moment I can turn to Him with my concerns. I can depend on Him and know His peace.

This moment I can find joy in Him, no matter what has happened or will happen.

This moment I can endure temptation and difficulty as I trust Him, knowing I will come through them stronger and closer to Him.

This moment I can be truly loving in Him.

Don't think about how impossible it is for you to be all Christ wants you to be for the rest of your life. Look to Him this moment. Live in His presence now. You know what He can do when You trust Him – you've experienced it. Trust Him now. Be glad in Him in the present moment. Tell Him how you feel about Him.

Oneness with Christ is not a someday blessing. He does not put it off until tomorrow. We put it off. His Spirit is always with us, always in us, always eager for fellowship. Enjoy Him. Enjoy Him now.

**Hymn: [Turn Your Thoughts to God](#)**

## **Please Yourself, Lord**

My Lord Jesus,  
I am amazed at  
    how much life You have breathed  
        into my deadness,  
    how much loving wisdom  
        into my selfish ignorance,  
    how much consistency,  
    how much holiness,  
    how much of Yourself You have grown in me.

Loving Lord,  
Almighty God,  
Merciful Friend,  
this is my prayer today:

Please Yourself in me.  
Wrap Yourself around my thoughts,  
    permeate my feelings,  
    seize my heart,  
    energize all You have made me.

Fulfill in me  
    all that Your wisdom has planned and  
    all that Your love has dreamed.

Lord, please Yourself fully in me today.

*Father,  
I am from You.  
May all I am flow back to You  
for Your glory alone.*

**Hymn: [One with You, My Jesus](#)**

## **Creation's Prayer**

*All you have made will praise you, O Lord. (Psalm 145:10, NIV)*

On a Saturday morning in spring I was trekking through woods near my home. At one point, a dead tree caught my eye. It was taller than the green trees around it, and its branches were high, close to the trunk and pointing upward. Against the clear blue sky, the tree seemed to stand in solemn silence, lifting praise to God in an endless liturgy.

That one glimpse helped me see again that all creation is God's temple, quietly but constantly reminding us that

He is here;

He is great, beyond our imaginations;

He is love. He lavishes Himself upon us, holding nothing back.

When I look at creation and believe that He shaped it all for His purposes, I realize I am surrounded by many liturgies to God. Each tells us about Him in ways that are more universal, more lasting, and more tangible than human language. I look into the night sky and am awestruck by His vastness. I swing through the round of day and night, season after season, and experience His unchanging faithfulness. The incredible network of life that packs every layer of our world, from water drops to endless oceans, paints Him as a fountain of rich, unbounded life. And every breath I take reminds me that He shares His eternal life, Himself, with me.

I live in a natural world that stands in a constant attitude of prayer to God. Its attitude is dependence:

*All look to you to give them their food at the proper time. . . . When you open your hand, they are satisfied with good things. (Psalm 104:27-28, NIV)*

Creation's attitude is praise:

*The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. (Psalm 19:1, NIV)*

Creation reminds me that the purest faith, the most profound prayer, the deepest worship we offer God is not expressed in words. Such prayer is expressed in being and doing. It is not heard in church services or read in books. It is seen in the faithful lives of His people, living to God and for God and in God, day after day, age after age.

I want to be part of that prayer. I want my whole life to sing trust and praise and love to Him, faithfully and constantly, forever and ever.

**Hymn: [Look! His Goodness Fills the Morning](#)**

## **Eternal Dawn**

See a new day dawn, and  
imagine that the all-encompassing light is  
    not from the sun  
    but is the radiance of God Himself.  
The light of His unbounded life inflames the sky,  
    streaking it with colors unimagined.  
The glow of His love now warms the earth.  
Its entire surface sparkles  
    all bejeweled,  
    bathed in the rays of His magnificent glory.

The earth soaks in His glorious light and is  
    transformed.  
All creation glows and grows and blossoms  
into a beauty that is  
    all-embracing and  
    all-permeating.  
The beauty doesn't merely  
    tickle the eye for a moment.  
It soaks into the soul.  
His beauty fills our  
    mind and heart and being.

The truth is no longer mere facts.  
It is a rightness,  
    a harmony,  
    a dance that makes all existence  
        joyfully one.

In the light of His face,  
in the warmth of His breath,  
    what will blossom?  
    What will grow and fill the earth?  
Imagine...  
and greet each morning as a whisper,  
    a promise,  
    a glimpse of all that soon will be.

**Hymn: [I See the New Creation](#)**

# Prayer

## A Better Life Is Waiting

We all have hopes that drive us, things we look forward to. Some are long-term: a better house, a better job, a better life for us and for our families. Some are short-term and daily: more time off, less demands on our energies, more leisure.

But as time goes by, God keeps reminding me of one key fact. Through good times and bad times, successes and failures, no matter what happens or doesn't happen, only one thing will make life happier. Only one thing will make it more meaningful, more peaceful, and more satisfying—all I want it to be. That one thing is not a job, a house, money, or more time off. Our only lasting happiness will always be this: enjoying God's presence right now, in the present moment. In this life and through all eternity, our only true joy will be knowing Him.

Because of this, each of us has a better life awaiting us. It doesn't matter where you are in your journey—whether you're seeking God or you're a new Christian or a mature believer. You have a better life awaiting you through a closer, more constant relationship with God.

I'm learning that such a closer, more constant relationship comes primarily through prayer. It comes through spending more of life turned toward God. Just as with marriage, communication is key to enjoying a closer relationship.

Perhaps nothing generates more fear, guilt, and uneasiness among people than the subject of prayer. We know we should pray more, but we're not sure how. It seems so fuzzy, scary, and difficult.

But let me assure you: we were made for God. Talking to Him is simple and natural. Your educational level, your culture, your financial status, your personality—none of that matters. We were all made for God. You can talk to Him and have a relationship with Him that is personal, natural, and ever growing.

You have no reason to be afraid. God your Father only gives good gifts. And all He ever asks of us is to trust Him one step at a time.

Hymn: [I Have the Truth](#)

## **Prayer Is Simply Talking to God**

Prayer is conversation with God.

### ***Who can pray?***

Absolutely anyone.

God only asks that we trust Him—  
that we believe He is listening and  
will respond to us.

### ***How do I pray?***

Simply talk to Him from your heart.  
You can pray in silence or out loud,  
sitting, kneeling, or in any position.

### ***How long should I pray?***

Prayers can be as short as a single sentence, or  
as long as you need them to be.

### ***Where should I pray?***

God is always with you and is  
always listening.

Pray anywhere—at home, at work, or  
in the privacy of your car as you drive.  
Pray alone or with others.

### ***What should I talk to God about?***

Whatever is on your mind.  
Thank Him for each blessing, big and small.  
Immediately share each concern  
as it arises and ask for His help.  
Pray for others—  
for your family, your friends,  
your nation, your world . . . or  
for the person ahead of you in line.

***God is always with you.***

***He always listens when you pray.***

Hymn: [As I Pray](#)

## **Just Talk with Him**

Prayer has sometimes been difficult for me.  
I've felt like I was struggling to contact a  
    Someone  
    way out there somewhere.  
I tried to  
    get myself in the right frame of mind and  
    concentrate,  
    but often I just couldn't.

What a tremendous difference it makes  
when I remember to just  
    talk with God like a friend who is  
    sitting there next to me.  
Knowing that He is always with me,  
prayer becomes so much more  
    free and  
    natural.

Since I never leave His presence,  
    prayer never has to stop.  
I can talk to Him  
    anywhere,  
    anytime, and  
    about anything.  
I can thank Him on the spot when He blesses me.  
And when problems come up and  
    worries start to creep in,  
I can turn to Him immediately and  
know that He is already working things out for my good.

*Talk simply and honestly to your Father.  
Remember that He is always with you,  
    always knowing you,  
    always loving you.*

**Hymn: [Simple Faith](#)**



## **Constant Prayer**

*Rejoice always;  
pray continually;  
give thanks in all circumstances;  
for this is God's will for you.  
(1 Thessalonians 5:16-18, NIV)*

Father, I haven't set my mind  
on You enough lately, and  
I've missed You.  
Without You, I'm left with me, and  
that's not nearly good enough.

Father, I love You.  
Father, I worship You.  
Father, I need You.

I long to live in the privilege of constant prayer.  
You offer it.  
You keep calling me to it.  
Lord, help me make each moment Yours.

This moment I turn my thoughts to You.  
They are Yours.  
Take them where You want them, Lord:  
to praise;  
to praying for others;  
to simple quietness in You.

*Father, as I walk this daily journey,  
I want to be less distracted by other things and  
more turned to You.*

**Hymn: [As I Trust You](#)**

## God Enjoys Your Company

*Let us rejoice in our Maker . . . For the Lord takes delight in His people.*  
(Psalm 149:2, 4, para.)

The “you” God sees is not your temporary home, your physical exterior. He is not distracted by the way you decorate your body and your personality to appear more attractive to others.

He is not put off by your ignorance. He realizes that there is so much you cannot know or fully understand. He is patient with your inconsistency and imperfect motives.

This is the way He thinks of you:

*The Lord your God is with you . . .  
He will take great delight in you,  
in his love he will no longer rebuke you,  
but will rejoice over you with singing.*  
(Zephaniah 3:17, NIV)

*As a bridegroom rejoices over his bride,  
so will your God rejoice over you.*  
(Isaiah 62:5, NIV)

God enjoys just being with you. He takes pleasure in your company, the way a bridegroom enjoys being near his bride.

Pray that way. Talk to Him as One who is delighted to hear from you, who longs to share your thoughts, who deeply loves the most basic “you.”

*The Sovereign Lord of all reality  
speaks to us and  
invites us to speak to Him—  
simply, freely,  
anytime, anywhere, about anything.  
He promises to listen and respond.  
How can we not take advantage of  
such a marvelous offer?*

Hymn: [Ephesians 1](#)

## **Called Aside**

*He makes me lie down in green pastures,  
he leads me beside quiet waters.  
(Psalm 23:2, NIV)*

Jesus, I feel You calling me aside this morning.

Sometimes I sense You calling me  
in stressful times,  
inviting me to seek and find rest  
in Your presence.

But sometimes, like this morning,  
when I have done  
my normal devotional practice,  
I feel You calling me aside further.  
You prompt me to  
put away other good things and  
spend more time with You.  
You invite me to experience  
closer fellowship with You.

Jesus, I come to You now with joy.  
Thank You for wanting me,  
for enjoying me,  
for desiring to bless me and  
be close to me, and  
for wanting me to be close to You.  
I come, Lord.

*God speaks to us.  
Listen and obey, and  
enjoy the  
ever-increasing riches of  
knowing Him.*

## Turn to God

*I have set the Lord continually before me;  
Because He is at my right hand,  
I will not be shaken.*

(Psalm 16:8, NASB)

My day is so busy.  
Every moment is planned.  
But right in the middle of it all, Lord,  
You remind me to look to You—  
to think of You and  
talk to You.

I do, Lord.  
And in that moment of personal worship,  
face-to-face with You,  
my world starts to turn  
right-side-up again.

As I talk to You,  
life looks better.  
Peace begins to flow back into me  
like a stream.

Lord, seeing You is  
life's top priority and  
greatest pleasure.

*As we chase all the best of life,  
we too often ignore its most precious possibility:  
a constant,  
personal,  
interactive,  
loving,  
transforming  
relationship with  
the Living God.*

Hymn: [Psalm of Trust](#)

## **The Music of Prayer**

*Truly my soul finds rest in God.*  
(Psalm 62:1, NIV)

At the end of a workday,  
sometimes I'm so tired and tense that  
even my favorite music doesn't help.  
It just increases the noise.  
I try different recordings,  
but even the most soothing irritates me.

Then through the tension and noise,  
I hear a quiet voice calling me to pray.

When I finally give in,  
I find that nothing soothes and quiets my heart  
like the music of prayer.

Lord, fill my life with  
the music of prayer.

*Lord, as I become more and more  
aware of Your presence,  
fill my heart with  
the joy of being with You, with  
the desire to share in all You are.  
Fill my heart with  
Yourself, my Lord.*

**Hymn: [It's So Good to Be with You](#)**

## **Be Open with God**

*I have loved you with an everlasting love. (Jeremiah 31:3, NIV)*

When something happens to seriously shake my wife's confidence, she immediately withdraws emotionally, hiding her feelings behind a wall of silence and shallow smiles. She is overwhelmed with fears about herself, so she instinctively protects herself from further pain. For a while, she will not share herself with me.

Those brief periods are among the most painful in my life. I am cut off emotionally from the one I love. I feel powerless to help her when she needs me the most. Praying for the Lord's guidance, I work on communicating with her until she begins to open up. When she does, there is at first an outpouring of pain, frustration, and anger. But I welcome it because it is honest, and because it paves the way to closeness.

Her withdrawals stem from fear. Mine stem from preoccupation. My mind fills with my own thoughts and projects, and without even realizing it, I distance myself from her. She senses my withdrawal and waits patiently – or not so patiently – to regain my attention. She wants that connection. She wants to know that the eyes of my heart are fixed on her, that I am sharing myself with her and that I am open to her sharing.

If we crave such openness with those we love, how do you think God feels toward us? He doesn't operate out of emotional need, but out of real, deep, burning love. How must He feel when He sees us struggle with concerns and needs we have never shared with Him? How must He feel when we so seldom look to Him or turn our hearts toward Him?

He died willingly, gladly, to take away our sins. His forgiveness is total, immediate, and from the bottom of His heart, without any recrimination whatsoever. How then must He feel when we hesitate to simply come to Him and lay our sins and failures before Him?

Does God desire anything more than constant closeness with us? He has eliminated all the barriers of time and distance: He is personally with us moment by moment. We were unworthy, but He has made us worthy, welcoming us warmly, with open arms.

You live every second of your life in His presence. Share yourself with Him. Treat Him like someone with whom you are deeply in love. Turn to Him immediately with every concern, every need, every joy. Nothing in life – nothing – matches the excitement of experiencing God responding to you and loving you and growing inside you.

**Hymn: [Holy Father, Only You](#)**

## **Honest with God**

We humans spend much of our time and effort trying to present  
a more acceptable, more attractive image to others.  
The version of ourselves that we give to most people around us is  
sanitized and highly edited.  
We instinctively hold them at arm's length from the real "us".  
We do it without even realizing it.

Don't treat God that way!  
When you pray, don't show Him a false face.  
Always show Him the real you.

The truth is, God knows you completely and constantly, from the inside out.  
He knows you beneath any fear, hiding, and pretense.  
His knowledge of you and His care for you are  
intimate and inescapable.

Break the habit of hiding any part of yourself from God.  
He knows you!  
He makes His home in your innermost being,  
beneath your words and half-formed thoughts.  
Don't waste your effort by hiding.  
You will only succeed in clouding your relationship with Him.

Honor Him with honesty.  
Keep your words to Him simple, open, and trusting.  
When you're worried, tell Him. Lay it out before Him.  
When you need guidance, ask for His wisdom. He offers it freely.  
When you're wrong, repent, and turn away from your sin.  
When things go well, thank Him and give Him all the glory.

Instead of hiding from His all-seeing eye, seek it!  
Ask Him to examine you, inside and out.

*Search me, O God, and know my heart;  
test me and know my anxious thoughts.  
See if is any offensive way in me,  
and lead me in the way everlasting. (Psalm 139:23-24, NIV)*

## **Always Face to Face**

Father, You invite us to ask –  
    You challenge us to ask.  
And You promise that You will give it.  
So this is what I ask.  
This is what I truly want:

I want to be more prayerful.  
So many of my thoughts are  
    self-centered,  
    empty,  
    vain, and  
    fruitless.

Since You are always with me.  
I want to live in Your presence,  
    talking to You,  
    listening to You,  
    trusting You, and  
    worshiping You.

Magnificent God, I want to  
    live and  
    love  
in full, unbroken response to all You are.

I want the relationship that Jesus enjoyed with You  
    when He was as human as me.

Father, my Father,  
draw me to Yourself  
    every moment  
    forever.

**Hymn:** [The Father's Face](#)



## **Jesus Models Prayer**

Jesus had so little time for His earthly ministry – only three years – yet He spent so much time praying. He was God’s own Son, completely divine, yet He depended on prayer. His days were so busy that He often prayed either early in the morning before the day or late at night after the day was done. He normally went off by Himself and prayed in private (Mark 1:35; Luke 5:15-16).

He prayed at meals, thanking His Father for the food and blessing it. He prayed at key times, before important decisions, sometimes praying all night:

- Luke 3:21-22 – At his baptism, as the Father and Spirit both testified to who He was, Jesus was praying.
- Luke 4:1-12 – When tempted by Satan in the wilderness, Jesus refused to turn His concerns toward Himself. He kept His focus on the Father.
- Luke 6:12-13 – Jesus prayed through the night before choosing His disciples.
- Matthew 14:22-23 – After feeding the five thousand and before walking on the water, He spent the night on the mountainside praying alone.
- Luke 9:18 – When the time came for Jesus to ask His disciples the key question, “Who do you say I am?”, Jesus had been praying.
- Luke 9:28-36 – Jesus was transfigured while He was praying.

One of Jesus’ most fascinating prayers is at the raising of Lazarus (John 11:41-42). It’s His most amazing miracle, yet His prayer is not a thundering invocation. It is so simple. “Father, we’ve already talked, and You’ve already heard My prayer, like always. I’m only praying now so that everyone knows that You are doing this.” The prayer necessary for the miracle had already taken place privately between Jesus and His Father. Then at Jesus’ command, a man who had been dead for four days walked out of the tomb.

Most of Jesus’ recorded prayers take place the week of His death. He prayed for His disciples, knowing He was about to leave them. When overwhelmed by grief, He prayed. He asked that if possible, the horrible death He was facing be taken from Him. Yet in the end, He humbly yielded to His Father’s will. As He was dying on the cross, Jesus prayed not for Himself, but for those around Him. His concern was God’s will and God’s glory, not His own comfort.

For Jesus, prayer didn’t seem to be a duty or a burden. It was refreshing. It wasn’t a drain on His time and energy. It was rejuvenating. He didn’t keep prayer in the first-aid kit for emergencies only. Prayer was the breath of life. It was His connection with the Father He loved so dearly, the Father with whom He wanted constant fellowship. Jesus was drawn to prayer, not driven to it.

That’s the kind of prayer life I want.

## **Teach Me to Pray**

*Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God.  
(Luke 6:12, NIV)*

Jesus, You prayed so much  
    when You were here on earth.  
At times You ministered to people through the day,  
    then prayed through the night.

How did You do it, Lord?

For You, was prayer work,  
    or was it rest?  
Did You need to rest from praying,  
    or was prayer itself a type of rest?

For me, should prayer be labor,  
    an activity requiring  
        energy and discipline,  
    an obligation to be endured?  
Or should it be rest,  
    a retreat into You?

If I trusted the Father as You did and  
    relied on Him completely,  
then what would prayer be for me?

Jesus, my Savior,  
You are my example.  
Teach me to pray.

*Father, I am challenged and drawn by  
    the prayer life of Jesus.  
I want to know You as He knew You and  
    depend on You as  
    constantly and completely as He did.  
    Teach me to pray.*

**Hymn: [Teach Us to Pray](#)**

## Prayer in Gethsemane

Matthew 26:36-46

As Jesus ate the Passover with His disciples, we sensed His burden. Now it seems to be almost crushing Him. *“My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death”* (Matthew 26:38, NIV). Physically, He is facing extended torture and an excruciating death. Emotionally, He is already under tremendous pressure, and soon complete isolation and humiliation will be added. Spiritually, He is about to experience a sense of separation from the Father Who has been His constant companion and strength.

It is Jesus' final hour or hours before His arrest. How does He spend them? He prays. His life has been filled with prayer. He has seemed in almost constant communication with His Father. He came to pray in Gethsemane so regularly that Judas knew where to find Him, even though he had left during the meal. What can we learn about Jesus from His prayer in Gethsemane?

- When burdened or pressured, pray. Jesus didn't resort to recreation or diversion or bodily rest. He prayed.
- He was honest with God about His feelings. *“Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me”* (v. 39, NIV).
- It's OK to struggle, IF we keep our eyes on the Father and continue to trust Him and stay committed to Him.
- You may have heard people say that we're supposed to give our concerns to God in prayer, then leave them there; don't ever go back to them. But here Jesus kept coming back, repeating the same prayer. Some burdens are so heavy that we can't just pray about them once and forget them. They keep pressing on our minds and emotions. Jesus' example teaches us to keep bringing our concerns to God whenever they come to mind. That's not doubt. It's faith.
- *“Your will be done”* in verse 42 (NIV) is the exact same Greek phrase used in the Lord's Prayer in Matthew 6:10. Jesus modeled and lived out the Lord's Prayer. The Lord's Prayer isn't just words. It is an attitude toward God, a relationship with Him, a lifestyle. If you want to understand its meaning for life, look to Jesus.
- *“Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak”* (v. 41, NIV). When Jesus' hour of trial came, He was ready. The disciples, who slept instead of praying, crumbled. Watch and pray.
- When every fiber of Jesus' being was screaming to run the other way, He submitted because He remained focused on the Father and continued to trust Him. We can too.

Hymn: [A Garden in the Night](#)

## **Praying Like Christ**

Father, the more I talk to You,  
the more I realize that  
    I don't know how to talk to You.  
I want to better know how to pray.  
I look to Your Son Jesus as my example, and  
I hear such beautiful, personal faith in His prayers,  
    such trust,  
    submission, and  
    worship.  
But His only prayers I see recorded in the Gospels  
    are a few prayed on special occasions,  
    intentionally formed for His disciples to hear.  
How did He speak to You when  
    You and He were alone?  
On those occasions when He prayed all night,  
    what did He say?  
    What did You talk about?  
I wish I knew what He said.

But, Father, You show me that  
Jesus helps our prayers in  
    far greater ways than this.

When His disciples asked Him how to pray,  
He gave a short prayer that  
    models how we are to speak to You.  
Through that prayer,  
He taught us to speak to You  
as a child speaking to his or her Father,  
    simply,  
    honestly,  
    trustingly,  
    with our hearts turned to You.

My Father, help me to pray like Your Son,  
    Jesus Christ.

## **Christ Prays with Me**

*Read Romans 8:15, 26-27*

Father, I want to pray like Your Son, Jesus Christ.

I thank You that He taught us how to pray.

But what's more, He prays

with us and

in us.

He has given us His own Spirit.

This Spirit leads us to You and

binds us to You,

as Father and child.

His new life cries out to You from within us, saying,

"Daddy! Father!"

Your Son Jesus helps us pray,

not by leaving us His prayers written on a page,

but by breathing His own Spirit within us.

This Spirit helps us pray

when we don't know how.

He takes our simple,

childish,

fumbling prayers

and speaks directly to You on our behalf

as only He can.

So, Father, I come to You as Your Son taught us.

I come as a child, not pretending to be anything else.

I come with no hiding, with my weaknesses,

failures, and

imperfect self in full view.

I come in the Spirit of Christ, relying on Him to

shape my heart,

form my words, and

graciously speak for me.

Father, I come to You in Jesus Christ,

praying in Him alone.

*God understands your weakness and ignorance.*

*As you pray,*

*His own Spirit will help you pray effectively.*

## Surprising Examples

*Read Matthew 8:5-13; Luke 17:11-19*

Jesus was a wise teacher. He didn't just pour out information. He taught in a real-life setting. He told stories pulled straight out of common, everyday situations. He gave object lessons. He taught by example. But He didn't just teach by His own example. He took opportunities to point out examples they encountered in their travels.

One example was a Roman centurion who came to Jesus and asked Him to heal a valued servant. Jesus offered to come and heal the man. Surprisingly, the centurion refused: *"Lord, I am not worthy for You to come under my roof, but just say the word, and my servant will be healed. For I also am a man under authority, with soldiers under me; and I say to this one, 'Go!' and he goes, and to another, 'Come!' and he comes, and to my slave, 'Do this!' and he does it."* (Matthew 8:8-9, NASB)

This Gentile soldier may have had little or no knowledge about the Scriptures, but he clearly grasped two truths: 1. He himself was unworthy of Jesus. 2. Jesus had divine authority. He didn't have to come to his home to heal the centurion's servant. All He had to do was speak the word right where He was, and the servant would be healed.

This non-Jew was a living example of praying humbly, in simple faith.

Another foreigner supplied a lesson in thanksgiving. Jesus was passing through a Samaritan village when ten lepers shouted to Him, begging for healing. Jesus told them to go and show themselves to the priest. In the Old Testament, if a leper thought his leprosy was gone, he was to show himself to a priest, who could declare him "clean." That's why Jesus told the ten to show themselves to a priest, even though their disease was not yet gone. They were to take a step of obedient faith.

When they showed themselves to the priest, all ten were indeed healed. Nine apparently cared only about their newfound freedom from the disease. They went about their lives, never bothering to thank or acknowledge Jesus. But one did return and fell on his face before Jesus and humbly thanked Him.

Jesus used the incident to emphasize the importance of thanksgiving. It is more than just the polite thing to do. When we give thanks: 1. We put ourselves in a right relationship with God, acknowledging that He is good, the Source of all blessing, and we are needy, completely dependent on Him. 2. We bring joy to ourselves and to those around us. 3. We please the loving heart of our Father God. We show Him that we His children are growing out of our childish self-centeredness and are beginning to see the world and ourselves in the light of all He is.

## A Model for Prayer

Read Matthew 15:21-28

Read the scripture above, and pay close attention to this model for prayer. This Gentile woman came humbly.

*Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up. (James 4:10, NIV)*

She came presenting her need.

*Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. (Philippians 4:6, NIV)*

She came in faith.

*If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer. (Matthew 21:22, NIV)*

She came unselfishly, driven by love.

*You do not have because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures. (James 4:2b-3, NIV)*

She came submissively, content to accept whatever God would give.

*Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name,  
your kingdom come,  
your will be done,  
on earth as it is in heaven. (Matthew 6:9-10, NIV)*

She came persistently.

*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)*

She came to Jesus Christ, putting all her hope in Him.

*Father, I will bring You  
all my sorrow, all my anxiety,  
all my joy, and all my desiring.  
You are the One I love and trust.  
You are my God.*

Hymn: [Only You](#)

## **Ask #1**

In teaching us about prayer, Jesus emphasizes one point over and over, in the strongest possible terms: Ask! Bring all your needs to God your Father. Jesus repeatedly drives this message home, with both word and example.

### **Matthew 7:7-11**

In the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5, 6, 7), Jesus teaches us how to live in the presence of our almighty, all-wise, all-loving Heavenly Father. He says that since we live every moment in the presence of such a God, it only makes sense to bring all our needs and concerns to Him. He delights to answer our prayers! Even an earthly father enjoys granting his child's requests when the child asks for something good. If we earthly fathers, with all our flaws, eagerly give good gifts to our children when they ask, won't our Heavenly Father gladly grant our good requests?

*"Ask, and it will be given you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you." (Matthew 7:7, NASB)*

Luke's version of this teaching adds a meaningful twist. There Jesus says that if we ask our Heavenly Father for something good, He will give, not just a good gift, but the very best gift: *the Holy Spirit* (Luke 11:13, NASB). The gift that our Father most delights to give is Himself!

### **Luke 11:5-8**

Jesus drives this point home with a story. Suppose a friend comes to you in the middle of the night, long after you've gone to bed, and asks to borrow food to feed an unexpected guest. What's more, imagine yourself in that time and place. It's dark, and there are no electric lights. You'd have to get up and light a candle or lantern. The door is bolted, and your family is all asleep with you, probably on the floor of your one-room cottage. Answering the friend's request means waking up the whole household.

You'd like to tell him, "Don't you know what time it is?!? Go away! Don't bother me!" But because he asks, you won't turn him away. You'll get up and give him all you can, as much as he needs.

Your Heavenly Father never sleeps, He's never inconvenienced, and His supply is endless. Won't He gladly grant your good requests if you are bold enough to ask?



## Ask #2

### Luke 18:1-8

Here Jesus spins a story that makes His “Ask!” message even clearer. Notice how He uses exaggeration to emphasize His point. Suppose the weakest, most helpless member of society (in that culture, a poor widow) needs the help of the most uncooperative of all public officials (a stubborn judge who cares nothing about God, people, or justice).

He won’t willingly help her. He’ll do his very best to ignore her. But if she keeps asking long enough, he will give her what she wants just to get her off his back.

If even such an unkind person will honor persistent asking, how about our loving, just, ever-faithful Father?

Jesus ends the story with this: when we face a need, God’s faithfulness is never in question. The only question is, will we trust Him enough to persevere in prayer?

### Mark 11:12-14, 20-25

Finally, during the last week of His earthly ministry, Jesus made His point vividly, using a living object lesson that His disciples would never forget.

It was Passover week, and Jesus and His disciples were staying in Bethany, just two miles from Jerusalem. As they were walking to the city one morning, Jesus was hungry. He saw a fig tree at a distance, so he walked up to it, apparently looking for something to eat. But when He got close, the tree had nothing but leaves. He said to the tree, “*May no one ever eat fruit from you again!*” (Mark 11:14, NIV). He made sure the disciples were listening.

The next morning they passed the same tree, and it was completely dead. At Jesus’ word, what had been a healthy tree the day before was now withered from the roots up.

They all knew that it wasn’t the season for figs, so they understood that Jesus wasn’t concerned with food. They were all ears as He made His point clear:

*“Have faith in God. Truly I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, ‘Be taken up and cast into the sea,’ and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says is going to happen, it will be granted him.”* (Mark 11:22-23, NASB)

### **Ask #3**

Why does Jesus teach us to be so persistent in our prayers? Since God already knows our needs before we ask (Matthew 6:8), why must we continue to ask to get what we want?

Communication and trust are the life-breath of any relationship. Communication and trust – that is, prayer and faith – are the life-breath of our relationship with God.

For example, in a marriage, one of the most demanding challenges is learning to live with the inherent differences between husband and wife. So in our relationship with God, consider the incredible differences between Him and us. We are time-bound, pain-sensitive, narrowed-visioned, self-centered creatures. God is eternal, all-powerful, all-wise, and all-loving. He is constantly way ahead of us and high above us. His sense of timing is completely different from ours. He understands much that we can't begin to grasp. Thus living in relationship with Him will require commitment, persistent trust, and patient endurance.

Our Father wants prayer to be our response to every need. Since our neediness will never end, prayer must never end. Faith will require us to continue to ask and continue to trust, sure that He will give what is best, and at just the right time.

*I have a personal, constant relationship with  
the Lord of all reality.  
We converse freely.  
We walk together in relaxed silence,  
like loving Parent and child.  
What could be more wonderful than this?*

**Hymn: [Seeds of Prayer](#)**

## **I Am Asking, Father**

Father, I know that You bless us with many good things, sometimes without us even requesting them. But with other blessings, we only seem to get them if we ask.

Why is that? Doesn't Your heart desire to pour out on us everything good?

But I think of myself with my own children. When they were growing up, I provided for all their basic needs whether they asked or not. I also provided special requests when they asked and when it seemed good for them. And I gladly gave them gifts they didn't expect or request.

But some things I did not share with them unless they came to me, opened the subject, expressed a sincere interest, and gave me the chance to talk with them about it.

This is true of my writing. It is near and dear to me. It burns on my heart, and I gladly talk about it when someone expresses a sincere interest and gives me the chance to talk. But I will not force myself on anyone.

So, Father, I am coming to You. I am asking: I want to know You better. I have begun to realize that knowing You is the sweetest part of life.

Father, what do You want me to know? Is there anything You long for me to understand? What does Your heart want to tell me about Yourself?

Also, I ask this for the sake of Your children and Your glory: Enable me to express Your truths, and the truths about You, in ways that will make them most effective in turning hearts to You. May my words somehow make the real You more real to them. I ask this in Jesus' name, only as pleases You, and for Your glory alone.

*Even as a believer,  
most of the discontent in my life  
flows from a heart that  
sees too little of God.*

## **Reshape My Desires**

Father, You have been teaching me that the way we pray expresses our faith in You and our heart for You. I confess, Lord: too often I have prayed to You only to feed my human desires.

You genuinely want me to bring my needs and concerns to You. I know You do. It forms the relationship of trust and dependence that You want with me, and it honors You as my Father.

But it's like an adult child who only goes to his parents when he wants something. If the parents can genuinely help without providing an unhealthy crutch, they are glad to do so. But they want their relationship and their conversation with their child to be so much more.

Or it's like me getting the privilege of having a personal conversation with a great, wise, and truly unique person, and then spending our entire time prattling on about self-centered trivialities.

Father, I want to continue to bring my every concern to You, and You want that too. But my heart wants so much more than that from You and with You. I want to know You, Lord. I want to share Your heart. I want to breathe Your Spirit, live Your love, and be more and more like Your beautiful, holy Son. Increasingly, Father, may these be the desires that draw me to You and pour out of my heart.

*Father,  
my life here is  
uncertain and  
temporary.  
Help me to spend my brief time  
looking to You.*

**Hymn: [Lord, Life Becomes More Simple](#)**

## **Come Humbly**

In Luke 18:9-14, Jesus told a story as to how we should come to God. Two people come to the temple to pray. The first sounds like a good Christian. He is considered one of the holiest people of his day. He thanks God for His many blessings in his life – and thankfulness is a great virtue! The man seems to be doing everything right. The second person is a sinner, pure and simple. Choked by shame, He won't even lift his head in God's presence. So why is God pleased with the second person and not the first?

Pride is self-centered and self-serving. It is one of the biggest barriers to a true relationship with the Living God. Pride fails to see God for who He is and ourselves for who we are. Pride prevents God from filling our lives and being to us all He wants to be.

When we first come to God for salvation, we realize our unworthiness and neediness. We come to God in utter humility, totally dependent on His mercy. Sometimes after we've been a Christian for a while, we forget that in ourselves, we are just as unworthy, just as dependent on His mercy as we ever were.

Most relationships are a two-way interchange. Each party contributes something. But in our relationship with God, we bring nothing. The only thing we bring is our sinfulness and unworthiness. We come empty. Only when we see God for who He is and ourselves for who we are can we have a true, honest, open relationship with Him.

Listen to the prayer of the Pharisee with the ears of a person today caught in the darkness of sin, and you may hear what they hear when they listen to our church talk. When Jesus talks, I never hear harsh condemnation for sinners, those outside the faith. He saves His harsh criticism for those who are comfortable in their righteousness, those caught up in the externals and forgetting **love**.

When I listen to the church talk through the media about the social "sinners" of our day – for example, homosexuals – I too often hear strident condemnation. If I were a sinner outside the church, that's what I'd hear. And when I listen to the condemnation, spoken in such strident tones, I hear fear. I don't hear confident, secure children of the Father, focused on showing the world how much He loves them. I hear a fearful, embattled minority focused on self-protection.

We don't have to work to conjure up humility. All we have to do is get a glimpse of who God is and who we are without Him. Love, trust, and humility are at the very core of proper relationships with God, with our fellow believers, and with the needy world around us.

## The Blind Man of Jericho

Read Luke 18:35-43

What if you were the blind man, doomed to spend every day begging as life went on around you? Then suddenly you learn that your only hope for healing is passing nearby, right now, at this very moment. A once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. *“Jesus . . . have mercy on me!”* (Luke 18:38, NIV)

It was a cry of weakness and need, of complete helplessness. “Jesus, I’m desperate! Please notice me! Help me! Lord, care about me!”

Have you ever noticed what happens when someone speaks too loudly or has an emotional outburst that seems inappropriate? It disrupts decorum, and the whole atmosphere becomes tense. Everyone is suddenly uncomfortable . . . and annoyed. *Those who led the way rebuked him and told him to be quiet.* (V. 39, NIV)

But he was desperate, so he yelled even louder and more insistently: *“Son of David, have mercy on me!”* (v. 39, NIV)

This cry arose from the depths of his heart, all the way up through his being. Propriety, reputation, and embarrassment didn’t matter. Nothing else mattered. He was in the presence of One who could give him his sight. “Jesus, HELP ME!”

We can approach God like that man. All of us have felt some measure of what the blind man felt before God: crushing need, helplessness, desperation. When you feel that way, cry out to God. He is not offended by honesty, no matter how brutal. Read the Gospels. Read the Psalms. He honors faith.

*Jesus said to him, “Receive your sight; your faith has healed you.”* (V. 42, NIV)

No poverty should make us too ashamed to come to God. Whether the need is moral or emotional, large or small, you are welcome in His presence. You are an invited guest. And He will look you straight in the eye, straight in the heart, and work in your life. He may not act according to your plan or on your timetable, but trust Him through your pain. His wisdom and love will prove themselves perfect. *He received his sight and followed Jesus, praising God. When all the people saw it, they also praised God.* (V. 43, NIV)

Hymn: [From These Depths, O Lord](#)

## **Come like Jesus**

Lord, I come to You,  
not in pride,  
    but in humility,  
not in strength,  
    but as a helpless child.

I come with no worthiness of my own,  
    no righteousness,  
    no goodness,  
    no wisdom,  
    no power.

But I come joyfully,  
    eagerly,  
    comfortably,  
for I come as Your child.  
I come like Jesus,  
Your dearly-loved Son,  
    utterly dependent, but  
    utterly confident in You.

*Father, help me to talk to You  
    simply,  
    in faith,  
    as a child to his father,  
asking plainly and persistently for what I need.*

**Hymn: [We Are Children](#)**

## The Lord's Prayer in Context

Read Matthew 6:9-13

During Jesus' earthly life, He often taught about prayer. But He summarized much of His teachings in one model prayer, which we call the Lord's Prayer.

This prayer occurs in a passage called the Sermon on the Mount, in Matthew, chapters 5, 6, and 7. In this sermon Jesus gives lots of strong, practical wisdom about the way we should live day to day, here and now. Much of what He teaches here will at first seem strange and difficult, even backward:

- *"Blessed are the poor in spirit . . . Blessed are those who mourn . . . Blessed are those who are persecuted."* (5:3-4, 10, NIV)
- *"If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also."* (5:39, NIV)
- *"Love your enemies."* (5:44, NIV)
- *"Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear."* (6:25, NIV)

But behind all this Jesus lifts up a picture of our loving Heavenly Father, always with us, always caring for us. As we become aware of His presence and start looking to Him, everything begins to change. We begin to live in response to Him rather than in reaction to our needs and fears.

We have a loving Father who cares for everything we need. Thus we can depend on Him rather than scramble to look out for ourselves. Worry is unproductive and unnecessary. We are freed from the burden of self-concern, freed to love other people just as our Father loves them.

We can talk to Him person to person. He becomes our focus: we live to please Him alone, and we learn to trust Him with all our concerns.

Since our Father is always with us and always loves, heaping up lots of words in our prayers is unnecessary and distracting. He already knows what we need. We don't have to badger, beg, or convince Him. Simple trust needs only simple prayer. We can bring our needs to Him openly and directly as His children. He already knows the details. He is always listening, and He always wants the best for us.

Jesus gives us the Lord's Prayer in this setting as a model for simple, personal conversation with our loving Father.

Hymn: [Today, Father](#)



## Six Wishes

Notice how short and simple is this model prayer. Nothing long-winded and fancy. Short phrases. Simple words. The shape is also simple. The prayer is framed by an opening, “*Our Father in heaven*”, and a closing, “*for yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.*” The body of the prayer is six short petitions:

- *Hallowed be your name*
- *Your kingdom come*
- *Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven*
- *Give us today our daily bread*
- *Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors*
- *Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one*

Think about this for a moment. What if God were to give you six wishes? You could ask for these wishes each and every day. What would they be? Money, health, comfort, a fulfilling life? But look at the “six wishes” Jesus gives us in the Lord’s Prayer. Our loving Heavenly Father knows and wants what’s best for us. What does He tell us to ask for every day? None of our typical requests are anywhere on the list.

Have you ever listened to children when they’re on an outing? It doesn’t matter what magnificent sights are all around them. Their requests are, “I’m thirsty,” “I’m tired,” “Is it lunchtime yet?” They react out of temporary desires, out of pain, fatigue, or false expectations. They don’t know what’s best for them. They can’t see the whole picture. They are entirely wrapped up in their own immediate comfort.

As God’s children, we tend to react the same way. What we ask from God often has very little to do with our real happiness. We don’t know what’s best for us.

So why does our Father give us these six petitions to pray every day? The first three teach submission, asking for God’s will. The last three teach dependence, asking for God’s daily provision, His forgiveness, and His help in avoiding sin.

Why these six? Because they focus first and foremost on our relationship with our Father. They say, “Father, I need You. I need Your will, Your provision, Your forgiveness, Your protection.” Our relationship with Him is the key to happiness, to peace, strength, and harmony in every aspect of life. Remember the example of Jesus. What we need most is a true and right relationship with our Father.

What kind of relationship with God does this prayer teach and form in us?

- Simple, natural, open, intimate
- Submissive, obedient, devoted
- Trusting, dependent

## **How Do I Use This Prayer?**

So how should we use this prayer? Should we repeat it by rote over and over, like a magic chant?

Would you talk to your closest friend that way?

Remember, in Matthew 6:7 Jesus taught us to avoid meaningless repetition.

True prayer doesn't come from our mouths anyway. God isn't fooled or distracted by our words. He listens more deeply. He listens to what pours from our hearts. Remember, prayer is the breath of our relationship with Him. It is the personal communication between Him and us, being-to-being, face-to-face.

Therein lies the greatest benefit of the Lord's Prayer. It encourages a proper relationship with God, a relationship of submission and dependence. The prayer not only expresses our trust in Him but also strengthens and forms that trust. As we pray the prayer every day, it begins to shape our thoughts, our focus, our relationship with God, our entire lives.

So how do we use it on a daily basis? I make it the framework for my prayers. I pray one petition at a time, personalizing them as I go. I put each request in my own words and add in my concerns where they fall naturally.

Among the following pages are articles on the various phrases in the Lord's Prayer. Most open with an example of how that petition might be personalized, just to get you started. Also included are brief explanations of the words along with practical life applications.

But remember, the main point is this: come to your loving Heavenly Father simply and honestly, seeking His will and trusting every aspect of your life to Him. As you come to Him this way, you'll find that He responds to you in very personal and wonderful ways.

*Father, help me  
serve You alone and pray to You alone,  
simply, singly, sincerely,  
with no other motive but love for You.*

**Hymn: [Our Father in Heaven](#)**

## **The Way I Pray**

Father, since prayer is talking to You,  
I want my prayers to reflect You,  
    the One to Whom I am speaking.  
You are unspeakably great and holy.  
You are all-powerful,  
    all-loving, and  
    all-wise, knowing all my needs before I ask You.  
Help me to talk to You accordingly, Father.

May my prayers be sincerely spoken to You alone,  
    not sham performances  
    aimed at impressing others.  
How rude!  
    No one would like being talked to  
    with the speaker actually trying to impress someone else.  
When we pray to be heard by others,  
    we are saying that we value their approval over Yours.  
    We believe in them and fear them more than You.

May my prayers be simple, direct, and trusting,  
    not a river of words that  
    beg for Your attention and response.  
Such praying would show little confidence in  
    Your Fatherly wisdom and love.

May my prayers be dominated by You and Your greatness.  
Thus may they be focused on Your glory,  
    Your kingdom,  
    Your will,  
    Your faithful, daily provision,  
    Your forgiveness, and  
    Your keeping.  
Father, may the way I pray reflect my faith in You.

*When faith is simple,  
prayer is simple.*

**Hymn: [Beyond All Thought](#)**

## **Turned Toward God**

Recently this old hymn has been on my mind:

Prayer is the soul's sincere desire,  
Unuttered or expressed,  
The motion of a hidden fire  
That trembles in the breast.

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 Soul's Sincere Desire," by James Montgomery, 1818)*

I've found this description true to my own experience. Prayer is turning toward God.

My morning walks are my prayer time. For twenty-plus years I have used the Lord's Prayer as the outline for my prayers, but even so, my daily prayers are quite varied. Some days He leads me more toward petition. Some days, praise. Sometimes I sing as much as I speak. Some days my praying involves lots of thinking and reflecting. Some days He even leads me to write as I talk to Him.

But consistently, the attitude that nurtures my heart is the attitude of the Lord's Prayer:

*Father, Your glory,  
Your kingdom,  
Your will.  
Your bread for today,  
Your forgiveness,  
Your keeping.*

Prayer is the single-mindedness of a heart turned toward God, desiring God, talking to God, listening to God, seeking Him alone.

*This attitude is at the heart of our relationship with God:  
Stay turned to your Father,  
trusting Him, wanting only His will.  
The beatitudes teach it,  
the Lord's Prayer models it, and  
Satan attacked it when he tempted Jesus in the wilderness.*

**Hymn: [As Simply as a Child](#)**

## **My Prayer Is a Promise**

Father, when I pray to You,  
I am expressing my faith in You.  
And faith is a promise.

When I turn to You and talk to You,  
I am saying that  
I trust You, and  
I will trust Your answer to my prayer,  
whatever it is.  
Even if Your answer is not what I had hoped for,  
I will trust that it is best and wisest  
because it comes from You, my Father.  
I promise to continue to trust  
Your wisdom and  
Your love.

When I bow my head or my heart in prayer,  
I am saying that  
You are great, and  
I am not.  
Since I trust You,  
I will obey You.  
True faith always expresses itself in obedience.

As I pray to You, my Father,  
these are my promises:  
I will trust You, and  
I will obey You.

*Trusting Christ,  
I am strong.  
Trusting Christ,  
I am sufficient for  
anything my Father allows to come to me.  
Trusting Christ,  
I am holy, loving, and at peace.*

## **The Lord's Prayer Paraphrased**

Father, may Your name be glorified today,  
not mine.

May You be completely in charge of this world,  
not me, not us.

May Your will be done today,  
not mine.

What we need most and want most is  
Your name, Your kingdom, Your will  
here on earth just as it is in heaven.

Father, we simply ask You for  
today's provision for today's needs.

Forgive us for the wrongs we do  
as we forgive those who wrong us.

Guard us from desiring the wrong,  
and deliver us from anything that would displease You.

Father, may all the authority,  
all the power, and  
all the glory

be Yours and Yours alone,  
forever and ever!

Amen.

*All rightness begins with  
a right attitude toward God,  
the Source and Goal of all.*

*Look to Him,  
worship Him,  
trust Him,  
treasure Him above all.*

**Hymn: [Reign in Me](#)**

## Our Father in Heaven

The Jews rarely called God Father before Jesus came. The whole nation of Israel was called God's son, and the king, representing the entire nation, was sometimes called God's son. But an individual would not call God "Father."

To the Jews, God's name was so holy they wouldn't even speak it. Those who copied scripture would take a bath before writing it. Yet here came this uneducated peasant calling God His Father. The Jews' response: *The Jews were seeking all the more to kill Him, because He . . . was calling God His own Father, making Himself equal with God.* (John 5:18, NASB)

Yet Jesus teaches us to speak to God the same way. In fact, we are encouraged to call Him "Abba," which roughly translates as "Daddy." Though we are weak and pitiful creatures living on a speck of dust in one corner of the universe, the great, transcendent Creator wants us to speak to Him in the most personal and familiar terms.

Since prayer is the breath of our relationship with God, how wonderful to address Him as *Our Father*! A warm, trusting relationship is established from the very beginning. What a privilege to call God by this simple, personal name!

When I call Him "Father," I am one-on-one, face-to-face with Him. Prayer is no longer the daunting task of trying to reach up and talk to an unseen Spirit way out there somewhere. Prayer is personal conversation, a quiet whisper directly from my heart to His. Simple. Warm. Intimate. He loves me. He is listening. I belong. I am welcome here.

This one I call "Father" is *in heaven* – ruling in the power center of all reality, high above, almighty, all-knowing, holy. And this One who is above all is Father to me. I can come to Him as a small child with all my needs, unafraid and in complete confidence.

*"Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"* (Luke 11:11-13, NIV)

When I come to God, He not only gives me what I need but also gives me His own Spirit. He gives me Himself. Somehow He joins His life to mine, enabling me to be the person He wants me to be. What a wonderful gift! What a loving Father!

Hymn: [Father, Your Name](#)

## **I See You More Clearly**

Father, Jesus taught us to come to You and address You as  
*Our Father in heaven.*

He taught us to daily pray for and desire only  
*Your glory, Your kingdom, and Your will.*

As I do, Father,  
as I come,  
as I pray,  
    my vision of You is reshaped.  
I see You more and more both  
    in Your highness and holiness and  
    in Your tender, personal love.  
I see You more and more as both  
    *our Father* and  
    *in heaven.*

Day by day,  
I see You more and more for  
    who You are and  
    all You are.  
Seeing You more clearly,  
    I see everything more clearly.  
Seeing You more clearly,  
    I trust You more simply.  
Trusting You more simply,  
    I enjoy more and more of  
    the peace and perfection of  
    all You are.

Thank You for prayer, Father.  
Continue to show me Yourself and  
    draw me to Yourself.

*Live a life of simple faith,  
imprinted with the reality of the Living God.*

**Hymn: [God My Father](#)**



## **You Call Yourself My Father**

Infinite God, You come to me  
from far beyond and  
high above my knowing.

You freely show Yourself to me through this world  
of which I am a part.

All things speak of You –  
the wisdom, the power,  
the beauty, the mystery,  
the pattern, the endless parade of individuality,  
the love, the connectedness of all this varied life,  
the engulfing shower of light,  
the vastness, the intimacy,  
the eternity, the now-ness.

They all speak and sing of You.

I begin to glimpse You and  
wonder at You  
through my sense and experience.

Infinite God, personal God,  
You come to me  
in skin and fragile flesh and bone.

You come just like me.

You call Yourself my Father.

Holy God,

Loving God,

God of peace and joy and unbridled giving,

You say that I came from You, and

You call me back to You.

You only ask that I come as a child,

as Your child,

honest and trusting.

Infinite God, personal God,

Father God,

I come.

Make us one again!

**Hymn: [My Loving Father](#)**

## **Seeing a Greater God**

Even after many years of following You, Father,  
much of my life makes no sense in light of  
who You are.

You are perfect power,  
perfect wisdom, and  
perfect love.

Yet the faith I live is so weak.

My thoughts and actions proclaim a God who is  
only a vague shadow of You,  
a God who is limited and  
unreliable.

So much of me is still unmolded by the truth of  
all You are.

My daily walk is clouded by ignorance,  
fear, and  
self-centeredness.

Almighty Father, I long to know You in a way that is  
all-transforming.

I want to respond to You always,  
constantly,  
for all You are.

I hunger to think and speak and walk each moment  
in the light of Your full greatness.

Continue to draw me to Yourself.

Through prayer,  
Your Word, and  
Your loving discipline, Father,  
help me to see You more clearly and  
trust You more simply.

*Father, continue to grow my faith.  
Help me to live in the light of  
more and more of Your magnificence.*

**Hymn: [High and Holy Sovereign God](#)**

## **That Place**

*Read Revelation 4*

My Father,  
there is a place that fully reflects Your glory,  
    the beauty and magnificence of Your being,  
a place where everyone fully responds to  
You and Your greatness,  
    praising You,  
    serving You,  
    bowing to You continually,

There is a place where the worship has  
    nothing humanly contrived  
but flows purely from the reality of Your being,  
proclaiming  
    Your holiness,  
    Your power,  
    Your everlastingness,  
a place where all You have made  
owns You and worships You as  
    Creator.

Father, I want to live in that place.  
I want my heart and life to be that place.

*Father, forgive our small ideas about  
    who You are and  
    what You do.  
Help us to know You and  
    trust You for  
    who You truly are.*

**Hymn: [My Mind Will Be Your Holy Place](#)**

## **Pray as One of His Children**

When I first started using the Lord's Prayer on a daily basis, I was struck by one fact: there was no place for intercession. There was nothing that allowed me to pray for the needs of others.

Then I noticed that throughout the prayer, it doesn't say "I" or "my," but "we" and "our." The prayer is written from a "we" perspective, with others in mind.

Yes, I can still pray for my personal concerns. "I" am included in the "we," and my Father asks me to come to Him. But the point is this: My prayers can be as broad or as narrow as my concerns at the time. My petitions can be personal. They can be universal.

How broad are your prayers? Or to ask it a different way, how low are your eyes? Are they focused entirely on yourself? Are they raised a little higher to take in those few immediately around you? Or have you looked up and realized that you are surrounded by an entire world of need, an entire race that's lost, desperate, hungry, and dying? God is *our* Father. Every person is His as well. He is deeply conscious of them.

Are you?

There is nothing wrong with praying for personal and family concerns. But each of the petitions of the Lord's Prayer challenges us to lift our eyes, our hearts, and our prayers toward other people near and far. God is *our* Father. We all need His will in our lives, His daily provision, His forgiveness, His protection from evil.

Pray to your Father, not just as His child, but as one of His children.

*Father, whenever I come before You,  
help me bear on my heart  
all those You have given me to  
love and  
nurture and  
draw to You.*

## **Pray in the Truth**

*Read 1 Timothy 2*

Father, as I pray to You, help me  
to remember the truth about You and  
to pray in faith accordingly,  
sharing Your desires:

You are the Lord of all nations and of history.  
Help me to pray for our leaders.

You want everyone to be saved and  
to come to a knowledge of the truth.  
Help me to share this desire with You and  
to pray boldly toward this goal.

You are the God of all.  
Jesus is the Mediator between You and us,  
for all of us.  
He gave Himself for all of us.  
Help me to look to You and pray to You as  
the Lord and Savior of  
every human being.  
Help me to think of every human being as  
one for whom Christ suffered.  
Help me to pray always,  
reaching out to all, and  
without anger or  
ill-feelings toward them.  
Help me to honor You and witness to You  
by the way I dress, talk, and  
walk among people.

*Father, with all our political leaders,  
even the ones with whom I strongly disagree,  
help me to treat them as Your servants.  
I will obey them,  
give them the honor due their office, and  
pray for them.*

## **Preoccupied with Love**

*Do everything in love. (1 Corinthians 16:14, NIV)*

When your mind wanders, where does it go? What do you think about in your spare moments – when driving, eating, waiting, or daydreaming?

During one particular vacation, I was in the same room with a number of family members, all near and dear to me. Yet I caught myself being so self-absorbed that my heart and mind were not awake to them and their concerns. If they had felt problems or pain or confusion, I would not have sensed it. I would not have reached out to them to offer a listening heart.

The Lord has graciously showed me that I waste too much of my time and thought on myself. I want to be preoccupied with loving other people. What could I accomplish if I let the Lord's love dream through me? I want to be awake to the kaleidoscope of concerns around me, ready to be Christ's presence however I can.

I want to be more Christlike. I'm tired of being insensitive in the little things I say and in the little things I don't say. I want to have the mind and heart of Christ.

How does this happen after a lifetime of being self-centered? Resolutions and guilt trips don't work. But I'm finding the answer is much simpler. Whenever I realize that I stand in Christ's presence, my heart is drawn to Him in prayer. And as I turn to Him, He soon brings other people to mind. When I pray, He frees me from bondage to myself and into the freedom of love. And I can pray anytime.

Sitting in church on a Sunday morning, the Lord prompts me to pray for the needs around me:

- to my right, a family numb from years of dealing with a delinquent son;
- behind me, an elderly man apparently about to lose his wife;
- to my left, a young person (remember those years?);
- in front, the mother of two young children facing a painful divorce.

In traffic, passing co-workers in the office, or in my home, He is ready to share His mind and His heart with me. He just calls me to turn to Him more often as I live in His presence.

*Father, the individuals around me matter to You.  
Help me to stay faithful in  
praying for them, encouraging them and  
setting a good example for them.*

## **When I Drive**

*Bless those who persecute you;  
bless and do not curse. (Romans 12:14, NASB)*

My driving habits have mellowed a bit with age,  
but I'm still a nervous driver.  
In my experience, nervous drivers are  
impatient,  
uptight, and  
too often unkind.

A few years ago, after reacting inwardly to another driver,  
the Lord challenged me to  
pray for everyone He puts in my way –  
whether on the road or elsewhere.  
And I assume that whoever is in my way,  
the Lord put them there.

It's a habit that is not yet fully formed.  
But when I remember to pray for that person in front of me,  
it calms me.  
It connects me with that driver as with  
a real human being,  
not as a mere inconvenience to me.  
Such prayer brings my heart back  
where it belongs.

Thank You, Lord!

*Father, help me to pray with  
the heart of Christ.*

## **I Thank God for You**

*I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy . . . being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.*

*It is right for me to feel this way . . . since I have you in my heart . . . All of you share in God's grace with me. God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus.*

*And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ – to the glory and praise of God. (Philippians 1:3, 5-11, NIV)*

Try it.

Begin praying for people you know:

your family,  
your friends,  
those who serve with you at church.

Thank God for them.

Specifically mention their good qualities.

Verbalize what God is doing in and through their lives.

As you do, you'll find your affection for them  
immeasurably deepened.

You'll appreciate them in a way you never have before.

But further, you'll see God forming Himself in them.

What an incredibly exciting process!

Even their annoying qualities will begin to appear as seeds,  
as promises of virtues not yet fully formed.

Prayer helps us see others through the eyes of Jesus Christ.

*If you care so much for your loved ones,  
imagine God's tender and constant concern for them.  
He is their Father, Creator, and  
Savior, and  
His love and patience are infinite.*



## **The Bond of Prayer**

When I was raising my children, I often prayed for them as I drove to work. When we were apart, especially when problems aroused my love and concern, prayer was a way of reaching out to them. But one particular morning I realized that when we pray for someone from our hearts, we relate to them on a deeper and more basic level than we usually do.

For instance, when I prayed for my kids during those growing-up years, I didn't think of them as children, or in terms of their sometimes-annoying, childish ways. I thought of them as souls, as fellow beings before God, as friends and equals. My greatest desire for them was God's highest good. I longed for them to know the same satisfying relationship with Him that He had planted in me. That is still my greatest desire and deepest longing for each of them.

As I pray for them, the bond between us is Christ's own love – His love active within me. I love God, and I love my children, and in prayer this love reaches out to both God and them, seeking to draw them together.

I believe that kind of prayer is an example of the teachings in Ephesians, chapters 5 and 6. There we are told that all of our relationships should be "in Christ": we react to others as if we are reacting to Christ Himself, and our love for Him is expressed in the way we treat others. Praying for others helps make this a reality. My love for Christ reaches out to embrace and include those for whom I am praying.

This is what He wants us to do, not just with our immediate families, but with others around us. He wants us to love Christ and love others enough that our hearts seek to draw them to Him, that they might share our relationship with Him. This often begins with prayer, but if our prayer is from the heart, we will love them through words and deeds as well. In this way, Christ's love works to unite us all in Him – each one drawn to Christ, and each one drawing others to Him.

As we let Christ live in us, His love can be the beauty of each friendship, each marriage, each family, each relationship. This is how He has planned for us to live. And eventually, His love will unite us fully with Him, with each other, and with all creation.

What a wonderful way to spend eternity!

## **Christ Is Praying for Us**

*Read Romans 8:26-27, 34; Hebrews 7:25; 9:24*

Father, as I love You more and more,  
    my love grows for those You love all around me.  
Out of love for You and  
    love for them,  
I long to draw you together.  
I eagerly reach out to them through my prayers.  
    through my words,  
    through my actions.  
I long to attract them to You.

Your holy and perfectly-loving Son  
    loves You and loves us  
with a deep, yearning love beyond our imagining.  
Just as I pray for others,  
    He prays for us.  
He lifts us up to You,  
    speaking our names,  
    interceding for us as He communes with You heart to heart.

If prayer arouses my love for others,  
    what must He feel for us as He prays?  
How must He yearn to draw us into  
    His intimate fellowship with You!  
How must He long for us to share in the  
    life and love that flows  
    full and unbroken between You!  
How must He gently nourish in us and fan into flame  
    our every small desire for You!

O Father, complete this deep desire that You share with Him!  
Unite us all in love,  
    fully and forever!  
And help me to play my part here and now  
    by showing Your love for those around me.

**Hymn: [Father, As You Love Your Son](#)**

## **All in Christ**

Father, in Your love, by Your Spirit,  
this is my prayer and my desire:  
that every person I know be in Christ:  
    trusting Him, one with Him  
    joined deeply, completely, forever with Him.

My spouse in Christ,  
each of my children in Christ,  
each dear member of my family,  
in all their variety and individuality, in Christ,  
each of my neighbors in Christ,  
my co-workers in Christ,  
every member of my church, of every age, in Christ;  
And far beyond them, Lord,  
every family, every nation,  
every human being in Christ.

Holy in Christ, loving in Christ,  
joyful, at peace, and free in Christ.

I begin to imagine it, Father.  
    Each and every person  
    completed forever in Jesus Christ,  
    for Your everlasting glory.  
I begin to desire it  
    because You desire it.  
You love them and long for each one  
    as only a parent can.

Father, permeate my heart, my thoughts,  
    my prayers, my daily life  
with Your unquenchable, universal love.

*Father, I want for my loved ones  
    what You want for them:  
to be rich, fruitful, and complete in Jesus Christ.*

**Hymn: [All in Christ](#)**

## Hallowed Be Your Name

*Hallowed be Your name.*

*May Your name be lifted up as holy.*

*May You be honored, worshiped, feared, and exalted.*

*I worship You.*

*I stand in awe of You, Father.*

*May all the world worship before You.*

Hallowed be Your name – literally, may Your name be sanctified or set apart as holy. God's name is His reputation. When we speak of someone having a good name or a bad name, we're referring to their reputation.

So what are we asking for when we pray this petition? We are wanting God to be respected, worshiped, and exalted.

By whom? Are we praying that God be exalted in our own hearts or in the hearts of those around us or by the whole world? The answer is yes – to all three. Remember that the Lord's Prayer never specifies the realm of the petition. It can be as narrow or as broad as our own concerns.

This petition can be personal. It is an opportunity to praise God for all He is and all He has done in our lives.

This petition can be a chance to get beyond our self-centeredness: *Father, may You be glorified today, not me. May You be honored in my thoughts, in my words, in everything I do.*

This petition can be a prayer that those we love may come to know and worship God. Or it can express the deep desire that the entire world may honor and exalt the Living God. Can you imagine such a world? It is coming! This petition gives us a daily vision of that hope: our entire race bowing, worshiping before the one true God.

*Lord God, may my children praise You.*

*May my neighbors and friends praise You.*

*May that struggling heart praise You right now.*

*May Your Church praise You.*

*May all the earth, all creation praise Your holy name forever and ever!*

**Hymn: [From You, Through You, to You](#)**

## **Your Kingdom Come #1**

*May Your kingdom come in my life today, through all I do.*

*May Your kingdom come in that meeting today . . .in my family . . .  
in our city . . .in our world.*

A kingdom is a territory or a people ruled by a king. It is the domain of a king. A kingdom also includes all that the king brings to his people: his presence, his authority, his protection, his shaping of their lives.

Jesus came proclaiming, "The Kingdom of God is at hand!" The presence and rulership of the King had come in Jesus Himself. He began establishing God's control over sin and all its effects in our lives. He forgave our wrongs. He cast out evil spirits. He healed our diseases. He taught us the right way to live.

But God's kingdom won't be fully established until God asserts His complete control in our world. Then there will be no more hunger or thirst. No more sin. No more tears. No more death. And we will hear the words: *The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah, and he will reign for ever and ever.* (Revelation 11:15, NIV)

But you might wonder: Why does an all-powerful God take so long to establish His complete control over what He Himself created? Did He lose control somehow? Hasn't He always been in control?

We can't pretend to understand all the ways of God. But as we read Scripture, we see that God has chosen to let His creatures exercise their free will – within His limits, to an extent and for a time. He allows us to make decisions. He allows us to choose, for He wants us to freely choose Him. Eventually those who separate themselves from God will die, for they have cut themselves off from the only source of life. Those who join themselves to God by simply trusting Him will be joined to Him fully and forever. God's kingdom will then be established in its fullness.

O Father, Your kingdom come!

## **Your Kingdom Come #2**

When we pray, “Your kingdom come,” we are asking God to exert His complete control in our world. We are asking that His wisdom and His love be given their full right of way in all things.

God’s kingdom – His rulership among us and in us – is like a small seed. It grows very gradually, almost imperceptibly, even when we aren’t conscious of it. (See Mark 4:26-34.) As we see its beauty growing in our lives, as we experience its benefits, we pray ever more urgently, “Your kingdom come!” We long for the day when it will come completely.

As with the rest of the Lord’s Prayer, we can pray, “Your kingdom come,” for our own lives, for the lives of our loved ones, for our community, and for the entire world.

This prayer is an excellent response to specific problems: Father, may Your kingdom come in this situation. I like this prayer because it is both bold and submissive. It is bold in faith, trusting and exalting God, holding up the beauty of His magnificent plan and believing He will fully accomplish it. It is submissive regarding ourselves, laying down our interests completely for the sake of His kingdom.

Isn’t it remarkable? We spend our daily energies trying to gain more and more control over our lives and over the world around us. But when we get a taste of God’s control and the wonderful blessings it brings, we realize we need to learn to turn loose of the control we have so fearfully grasped. We begin to pray each day:

*Father, my wisdom is too limited.  
My thoughts are too anxious and too selfish.  
May Your kingdom come  
in my thinking, in my speaking,  
in all my work, and in all my relationships.  
Help me to move today  
by the wind of Your Spirit  
in the rhythm of Your will.  
Father, in my heart, in my world,  
may Your kingdom come!*

**Hymn: [Hallelujah Hymn](#)**

## **Your Will Be Done**

*Loving Father, I face a tough decision.  
May Your will be done.  
Many thoughts and desires are pulling at me.  
I only want Your will today.*

Your will be done.

Read Matthew 26:36-46,

which recounts Jesus' prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane.

Especially note the closing words of verse 42.

In the original language, Jesus is praying

the exact words He taught us to pray here in the Lord's Prayer.

In agony over what lies just ahead,

sweating great drops of blood,

He submits to His Father:

Your will be done.

Jesus' use of these words gives us their flavor.

This prayer reaches out to God in

surrender and trust.

We are simply asking God to do

whatever He wants to do.

We are leaving our situation, ourselves,

our families, our every concern

completely in His hands.

*Prayer does not enable a  
small, ignorant, self-centered creature like me  
to manipulate the  
all-loving, all-wise, all-powerful God.*

*Prayer enables a  
small, ignorant, self-centered creature like me  
to receive the very best from the  
all-loving, all-wise, all-powerful God.*

*Prayer conforms my will to His will,  
my heart to His heart.  
It helps me want only what He wants.*

**Hymn: [Focus](#)**

## **As It Is in Heaven #1**

*Father,  
may You be glorified,  
may You be in control,  
and may Your will be done  
on earth, just as it is in heaven.*

*On earth as it is in heaven* apparently applies to all three phrases that precede it:

- hallowed be your name  
on earth as it is in heaven;
- your kingdom come  
on earth as it is in heaven;
- your will be done  
on earth as it is in heaven.

The phrase brings to mind the vision of God's heavenly throne room from Isaiah 6:1-7. Picture this. God is seated on a great throne, high and lifted up. The train of His robe fills the entire temple. Winged creatures surround Him, bowed in His presence, eager to do His bidding, continually praising Him. Even the doorposts, considered the most stable part of a structure, shake at the sound of the thunderous worship. The entire room is filled with smoke, a sign of the mystery and majesty of God's presence. Everything, every creature is responding fully to the unspeakable wonder of God's presence.

Now lift your eyes to a day just ahead. All the earth has become God's throne room. Every creature and all creation respond fully and forever to the awesome magnificence of God. Praise, worship, and obedience are natural, joyful, and unbroken. Imagine it!

The Lord's Prayer plants that vision deep in our hearts. Your glory . . . Your control . . . Your will on earth as it is in heaven. The prayer lifts our eyes. It reminds us and points us in the right direction. It fuels our longing for God in His fullness. Day by day it gently assures us of the wonder that soon will be.

*Father, You are  
the only desire worth nurturing,  
the only goal worth pursuing,  
the only eternal destination.*



## **As It Is in Heaven #2**

When I was younger, prayer was primarily  
telling God what I wanted.

The opening petitions of the Lord's Prayer were only "ought tos."

If reminded of them,

I would force myself to think of a few things for which to thank God,  
then hurry into my concerns.

"God, I need this, and this . . . right now!"

My prayers were filled with the same self-centered anxiety that ruled my life.

But as I've gotten older, I've begun to realize that  
my daily needs come and go.

God always meets them,  
one way or another.

He is so faithful!

What I really need is to start each and every day with  
God's perspective.

I need to realign my heart and mind with  
Him and  
His purposes.

The pressures of the day so easily  
knock me out of focus.

The Lord's Prayer provides  
a daily refocus,  
a tune-up,  
a renewed hope and vision.

It's like a morning shower,  
natural and refreshing.

In other words, what I really need every day is *Him*.

I need to reorder my life around *Him*,  
who He is and  
who He is to me.

I need to see again  
His complete power,  
His unlimited love, and  
the beautiful wisdom of His plan for my life and my world.

### **As It Is in Heaven #3**

For me the Lord's Prayer is a daily realignment with God...a reminder...a refocus.

Note that there is no "I," "my," "we," or "our" in the entire first half. No mention of anyone but God. I'm reminded that what's really important, what I really want, is that He be glorified. I want Him to be in complete control and His will to be done, just as fully here on earth as it is in the throne room of heaven.

Do you want to hear what God has to say to you? We're often told that we need to get quiet and wait before Him. There's value in that. But realize that it's not primarily physical noise that keeps us from hearing God. He doesn't usually speak audibly anyway. What blocks His loving whisper is the noise of our own plans and desires. We're so wrapped up in what we want that our hearts aren't tuned to His desires and His plan.

That's why the Lord's Prayer is so important. It quiets our hearts and minds before Him. We want only His plan. We desire only His will.

Some mornings I get so caught up in this opening portion of the Lord's Prayer that I don't get to any other concerns. I've come to realize that God's great blessing to us is not giving us what we want in our selfishness, ignorance, and shortsightedness. His blessing is helping us to want only the best, to want only what He wants, knowing that He will gladly give it. He doesn't so much change reality to fit our desires. He changes our desires to fit His reality.

Therein is the secret of Jesus' relationship with His Father: He wanted only what His Father wanted. This prayer that Jesus taught us fuels that same desire in us.

*Father, today  
no glory but Yours,  
no control but Yours,  
no will but Yours.*

**Hymn: [God Alone](#)**

## Father, Glorify Yourself through This Need

[Jesus replied,] *“Now my soul is troubled, and what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. Father, glorify your name!”* (John 12:27-28, NIV)

When some current concern stirs up our anxieties,  
we desperately pray for deliverance.  
We beg God to take away the need.  
Sometimes He is glad to do so and removes it quickly.  
Sometimes He does not.

Do you want a prayer that God will  
always answer and always grant?  
Pray this: *Father, glorify Yourself through this need.*  
Express your concerns to Him  
simply and honestly,  
but make His glory the focus of your prayer.  
When God is glorified in the eyes of people –  
that is, when they see how  
loving and beautiful and wonderful He is –  
the good far outweighs the meeting of  
the one immediate need.

Remember, Jesus teaches us that  
when we come to God, we are to pray this way:  
*Our Father, high above us in heaven,  
may **Your** name be glorified,  
may **Your** kingdom come,  
and may **Your** will be done  
here on earth, just as it is in heaven.*  
(Matthew 6:9-10, para.)

*The glory of God is  
the greatest possible good in every situation.  
Always pray for His glory above all –  
that is, that He will use that circumstance to show how  
great and good and present He is.*

Hymn: [Father, We Come](#)

## **God Will Be Exalted**

*Be still, and know that I am God;  
I will be exalted among the nations,  
I will be exalted in the earth. (Psalm 46:10, NIV)*

Though the mountains collapse into the sea,  
though the earth goes up in flame and  
the sun shines no more,  
we need not fear, for  
*God will be exalted.*

Though our personal world collapses,  
though others abandon us and  
our body decays,  
we will lift our eyes, for  
*God will be exalted.*

This will be our joy,  
our peace, and  
our security:  
*God will be exalted.*

Whatever happens or doesn't happen to us,  
this is our goal,  
this is our prayer,  
this is our one concern, that  
*God will be exalted.*

*Father, as I bring You my daily concerns,  
I ask also that You teach me to  
share Your concerns.  
You are the highest good, the only good.  
I long for Your glory, Your kingdom, Your will.  
Teach me to pray with  
Your heart, Your mind, Your Spirit.  
Form Christ in me.*

**Hymn: [God Will Be Exalted](#)**

## **Your Kingdom Come, Father!**

The mall near our house isn't doing well. As a businessperson myself, familiar with the pain of financial struggle, I empathize. It saddens me to see so many store spaces unrented and so many shops crammed with merchandise but empty of customers. The mall's attractive façade puts on a smiling face, but its emptiness sings a mournful song of failure and loss.

But today, Father, You whisper to me that this is the story of all our world. Separated from You, separated from its Creator and His life, His wisdom, and His power, this world is bankrupt. It is doomed to struggle, emptiness, bitter disappointment, and utter failure.

But I hear new management is coming to the mall, and they have a vision. They have a plan, and they are working. They hope to transform this shell into a bustling, useful, successful shopping area.

You are working as well, our Father. You have promised that You will transform our dying world into a new creation, overflowing with life, love, fulfillment, fruitfulness, and joy. We have seen You work before, and we know You always accomplish Your purpose.

Your kingdom come, Father. Your kingdom come!

*Our reality is too small and self-centered.  
Every day we need to pray,  
"Our Father high above us,  
may Your name be glorified,  
may Your kingdom come and  
Your will be done  
on earth, as it is in heaven."*

**Hymn: [Your Kingdom, Your Power](#)**

## **I Offer You My Silence**

Father, seeking Your glory, Your kingdom, and  
Your will demands  
    my worship,  
    my obedience, and  
    my active service.  
But it also demands  
    my listening.

How can I seek Your best  
    without listening,  
    without giving You the chance to  
        speak and be heard?

O Father, give me a listening heart.  
Teach me to offer You,  
    not only my seeking,  
    but my silence.  
Give me a heart that is tuned to You –  
the heart of Jesus Christ,  
a heart seeking only  
    Your glory,  
    Your kingdom, and  
    Your will.

*The Lord is in His holy temple.  
Let all the earth be silent before Him.  
(Habakkuk 2:20, NASB)*

*Father,  
may our prayer life include both  
words and  
silence,  
in a natural rhythm.  
But may my heart be  
always, entirely Yours!*

## **Listen for His Word**

*The voice of the Lord is over the waters;  
the God of glory thunders . . .  
The voice of the Lord is powerful;  
the voice of the Lord is majestic. . . .  
The voice of the Lord twists the oaks  
and strips the forests bare.  
And in his temple all cry, "Glory!" (Psalm 29:3-4, 9, NIV)*

God spoke, and the universe came into being.  
He didn't need to shape it by His hands.  
He is completely sovereign.  
When He expresses His will, matter obeys.  
He is the Lord of all reality.

Yet we seldom listen for His Word to us.  
We rarely hunger for His perfect wisdom  
or trust His unfailing love.  
We chase what is too petty to satisfy us.  
We seek security in what is  
weak and small and sure to pass away.  
We refuse to fully face His greatness  
and our utter helplessness.

*Show me your ways, O Lord,  
teach me your paths.  
Guide me in your truth and teach me,  
for you are God my Savior,  
and my hope is in you all day long. (Psalm 25:4-5, NIV)*

*Listen!  
Your God is calling!  
What does He want to say to you?*

**Hymn: [Is There Any Word from the Lord?](#)**

## **A Hearing Heart**

*The Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream at night; and God said, "Ask what you wish Me to give you."*

*Solomon said . . . "Give Your servant an understanding heart." (1 Kings 3:5-6, 9, NASB)*

Solomon had succeeded his father, David, as king of a united Israel. David's reign had been the golden age for the country, and now the young Solomon was stepping into his rather-intimidating shoes.

God appeared to Solomon in a dream and asked him what he wanted from Him for this huge new responsibility. Solomon was acutely aware of how unprepared he was for the task:

*"I am but a little child; I do not know how to go out or come in. Your servant is in the midst of Your people which You have chosen, a great people who are too many to be numbered or counted. So give Your servant an understanding heart." (1 Kings 3:7-9, NASB)*

Solomon didn't ask for wealth or success, health or long life. Literally, he asked for a "listening" heart, a heart that hears and obeys.

Father, that is what I want. I want a heart that hears You every time You speak, a heart that eagerly listens and follows wherever You lead. Truth is so little valued in our world. People shout whatever they want us to believe, usually to advance their own petty self-interests.

Father, You always speak the truth, in perfect wisdom and perfect love. When You speak, I want to hear every word. I want to listen and obey.

*Father,  
as we walk every step together  
now and forever,  
give me a heart that is  
always eagerly listening.*



## **Listening to a Friend**

*“Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.” (1 Samuel 3:9, NIV)*

Jesus, Friend yet stranger,  
    silent singer from within,  
I hear, but hear too little,  
    of the music simple faith alone begins –  
O so little of the harmony  
    of need and plenty, pain and prayer,  
so little of the rhythm of the dance  
    of holy joy You long to share.  
Jesus, Friend yet stranger, Lord, I look—  
    be less a stranger now in me.

Deafened by my worry,  
    with no song to bring relief,  
I fill the fearful silence of my neediness  
    with noisy unbelief.  
As my dreams and drives and disciplines  
    preoccupy my cluttered heart,  
the voice of calm sufficiency I used to hear  
    seems muted and remote.

Jesus, Lord, I listen,  
    and as fretful thoughts subside,  
I sense the gentle guidance of  
    a Living Presence singing from inside.  
More and more I learn to listen,  
and I hear, in place of anxiousness,  
    a love that's never silent and  
    a wisdom never bored by small requests.

Jesus, calm my heart and keep me listening,  
    living Presence, Lord, and Friend.

*As you go about your daily life, know that your Father is  
always with you, always watching, always protecting, always providing.  
Listen,  
and you will hear Him speaking to you  
in His way and in His time.*

## **Hungry for a Word**

*Lord, to whom shall we go?*

*You have the words of eternal life. (John 6:68, NIV)*

Loving Father,  
Living Truth,  
You speak to me—  
to *me*, Lord God.

Is my heart listening?

My life is hungry  
for a Word,  
for a Song, with harmony,  
for a Dance  
that will let my body and soul,  
my deepest desires and disjointed days,  
move together  
with joy and  
ease and  
music.

Dance with me, Lord;  
dance with me.

Sing,  
and I will move to the music.

Speak a Word,  
One Living Word.

I am listening.

*Father,  
Your perfect, loving wisdom  
rules my life completely  
when I obey You.  
Give me a listening, obedient heart.*

**Hymn: [When Jesus Speaks](#)**

## **Speak, Lord**

*Read 1 Samuel 3:1-10*

Father, You speak to us when we are  
too young,  
too ignorant, and  
too self-absorbed to know Your voice.  
You come and  
stand and  
speak.

You speak our name.  
You, the Almighty, the Transcendent,  
the Timeless One, speak to us  
individually,  
personally,  
one on One.  
You come to call us to Yourself,  
(Why do you CARE?) and  
to invite us to  
a personal relationship with You.  
You call us into Your service  
that we might play a part in  
Your greater work.

Thank You for the privilege  
of hearing Your voice,  
of knowing You personally,  
of serving Your gracious purpose  
for all humankind.  
Thank You, Father!

Speak, for Your servant is listening!

*Father,  
help me to listen to  
each of Your whispers and  
obey.*

## **Relax in the Silence**

*As for me, it is good to be near God.  
(Psalm 73:28, NIV)*

Sometimes I catch myself  
feeling restless when I'm alone.  
I fill the silence with noise –  
anything to chase away the uneasiness.

But, God, You are with me, and  
I want to be open to You.  
I want to learn more about You.  
I want to know You better.

I don't need to strain to hear You.  
If I just relax and am  
willing to listen,  
You will speak so that I will  
hear and understand.  
I can rest in the confidence that  
You will speak  
in Your way and  
in Your time.

God,  
when I am alone,  
You are with me.  
I can relax in the silence.

*All-knowing, ever-present Father,  
I can hide nothing from You.  
Help me to quit trying.  
As we stand here face to face,  
help me put aside all fear,  
all hiding,  
all protecting and pretending.  
Fill our relationship with  
openness,  
love, and  
joyful trust.*

## **Listen**

*I will hear what God the Lord will say;  
For He will speak peace to His people. (Psalm 85:8, NASB)*

God, Your ways,  
Your wisdom,  
Your guidance  
are so precious,  
so perfect,  
so life-giving.  
They are always spoken in the purest love, and  
specifically for me.

You lead me moment by moment.  
When I have a need,  
Your love never fails.  
Your wisdom never falls short.

But, Lord, I fear at times that I miss some of Your  
most delicate,  
most tender,  
most precious words to me.  
I fear Your voice is drowned out by the noise of  
my own plans and  
foolish desires.

God, I set aside my desires and  
open myself to You.  
When You speak,  
I want to hear every whisper.

*In a world filled with distractions, and  
in a heart noisy with plans and desires,  
God whispers.  
We only hear Him if we truly want to.*

**Hymn: [God Is Speaking](#)**

## **Lord, I Am Listening**

*Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.*

(1 Samuel 3:9, NIV)

What a great encouragement  
when I learned for myself that  
    God delights to speak to us.  
He knows how to speak to us, and  
    He will speak to us.  
We don't have to strain to hear Him or  
    work up just the right frame of mind.

But He doesn't shout.  
We need to listen.

He doesn't insist.  
We need to obey.  
    He will let us ignore Him if we choose.

We need to read the Bible  
with our heart and mind tuned to  
    listen and to  
    obey Him.

Speak, Lord.  
I am listening.

*Father, in all the  
distractions and  
demands of life,  
may I always choose the  
one thing that is  
most important:  
listening to You*

**Hymn: [We Come Seeking You](#)**

## **Give Us Our Daily Bread #1**

*Give us today our daily bread.*

*Lord, give me the wisdom I need for that problem.*

*Help my son with his test today.*

*Be with my wife in her situation at work.*

*Encourage those who are suffering today, and give them boldness.*

Remember, the Lord's Prayer answers this question: How do we talk with a loving God who is always with us? He already knows our needs, so we don't have to argue or beg or bury Him in words. We can talk to Him simply and directly, as children to our Father.

The Lord's Prayer has only six short petitions. The first three focus on God alone. We seek His glory, His control, His will. The last three petitions concern our needs. Of these three, two focus on sin, specifically its forgiveness and its avoidance. Only one petition addresses the needs that usually consume most of our concern and our prayer. It is this: Give us today our daily bread.

The original word translated here as "daily" was found on an ancient shopping list. The word "daily" marked those items the shopper needed to buy day by day (since there was no refrigeration).

Both Scripture and personal experience teach us that God gives us what we need just one day at a time. One Bible story especially helps us understand and remember this: the story of manna (Exodus 16:11-31). Traveling through the desert on their way to Canaan, God's people had no source of food. God waited for them to ask, and when they did, He gave them "daily bread." It was a flake-like substance called manna.

Each morning it appeared on the ground after the dew evaporated. Each morning they had to gather a supply for that one day. If they tried to keep enough for the next day, it rotted. But on the day before the Sabbath, they were to gather enough for two days. God didn't want them to have to work on the Sabbath. In this case, the manna kept overnight and didn't rot.

The result: manna was a daily provision, sufficient for any need but impossible to hoard. God could have provided for their hunger any way He chose. Why would He choose this way? He was teaching them to depend on Him every day, one day at a time. *He humbled you and let you be hungry, and fed you with manna which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that He might make you understand that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the Lord.* (Deuteronomy 8:3, NASB)

## **Give Us Our Daily Bread #2**

*Give us today our daily bread.* Since the Lord's Prayer gives us only one petition to cover all of our normal wants and needs, doesn't this one seem small and unsatisfying? Most of us aren't worried about starving, at least not today. Why waste our one petition on such an unambitious request?

We want more. We want enough to feel secure. We want enough to relax a little in what we have. God wants the opposite. He works to keep us resting in Him alone.

Why? Because He enjoys flexing His power and His control? No. He loves us, and with a perfect wisdom. He knows that a constant, close relationship with Him is the key to our happiness and well-being. Daily dependence teaches and forms that relationship.

He is our Creator. He Himself is the only source of all that is. We are weak and limited creatures, totally dependent on Him. We spend our entire lives, from birth to death, cradled in His care. *In him we live and move and have our being* (Acts 17:28, NIV).

The essence of well-being, of having a right and true relationship with God, is realizing our utter dependence on Him and living in that dependence. Do you want complete peace and deep-down rest? Learn to trust your Creator's abundant wealth, not what you can grasp in your tiny hands.

Our loving Father longs for that close, constant relationship with you. Because of His love, He will work throughout your life to teach you daily trust. You will never graduate from His school of dependence. He will not let you hoard everything you need, and you cannot see the future. Any security you think you've grasped is only an illusion. He will always and forever be your only security and your only supply. Even in the wealth and abundance of heaven, He Himself will be the only source of every blessing.

*Father,  
You are completely unlimited by  
space and time.  
You never lack  
time or  
materials or  
expertise.  
Help me to look beyond  
my own limitations and  
simply rest in all You are.*



## **Give Us Our Daily Bread #3**

Daily dependence on God is not a burden. It is wonderful freedom! *Give us today our daily bread* lifts the weight of a futile concern for the future. It frees us to fully enjoy today. What a pleasure to accept each and every day from the loving hand of our Heavenly Father! Each need draws us closer to Him. Each provision reminds us of His presence and His love. Each meal becomes Thanksgiving.

Jesus taught us in Matthew 6:25-34 to look around at God's creation. The Father abundantly provides food and clothing for all His creatures, for all He has made.

We spend too much of our lives fretting about material things. We want, want, want, worry, worry, worry. But Jesus' prayer sweeps all our physical concerns into one simple prayer that asks only for today. No hoarding. No grasping for a security that will always elude us.

The rest of the Lord's Prayer is spent on God and our relationship with Him. This underlines what Jesus emphasizes later in the same chapter:

*Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things [the necessities of life] will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. (Matthew 6:33-34, NIV)*

What do you and your loved ones need today? Wisdom? Financial help? Physical or emotional strength? Bring your concerns to your loving Heavenly Father and begin to trust Him one day at a time.

*Father,  
continue to nurture  
my neediness for You.  
Keep me hungry for You,  
looking to You,  
depending on You.*

## **Dependence**

*Read Psalm 121:1-2*

My Creator, I am completely dependent on You,  
whether I recognize it or not.

You are the very breath of life within me.

Should you withdraw for a moment,  
I would return to dust.

I, and everything I know, exist only by  
Your love and  
timeless wisdom.

Help me trust that love  
in each simple concern of my daily life.

Help me rest in that timeless wisdom  
instead of listening to  
each tick of my own clock.

And Lord God, my Holy Father,  
help me come to You more quickly,  
more eager to see You and  
know You and  
know that I am with You,  
till my every breath be faith and  
prayer and  
love.

In all the beautiful glories of heaven,  
You will still be the only Source.

Let me look to You now,  
my Savior,  
my Light of Life,  
my God.

*Father, when I need Your provision,  
help me to simply ask,  
then trust You to give  
whatever is best.*

**Hymn: [I Quiet Myself in Your Love](#)**

## God Answers Prayer

*Read Philippians 4:5-7*

Many years ago, I started writing out my prayers. After I read the Bible, I write a prayer in response to what I've read. It's a practice I highly recommend!

One day I read back through some of those prayers. To my amazement, I saw a recurring pattern: I would pray about a need, often in desperation, and a short time later, that need was provided. I prayed. God answered. But by the time the answer came, I was already concentrating on another concern. Thus I sometimes didn't recognize the answer when it came. And I completely missed the pattern until I looked back.

I rediscovered what I was taught as a child in Sunday School: God answers prayer. When I trust Him enough to bring Him my concerns, He responds. But as James says, "*You do not have because you do not ask God.*" (James 4:2, NIV)

Read Philippians 4:5-7. I've found that these straightforward verses are beautifully true and abound with practical teaching about prayer.

***The Lord is near*** (Philippians 4:5, NIV). Remember, we are never out of God's presence. Thus we can *pray continually* (1 Thessalonians 5:17), turning to Him anytime, anywhere, as to a Friend right next to us. Prayer can be our constant and natural response to need or to blessing or to just realizing that God is with us.

***Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God*** (Philippians 4:6, NIV). I'm weary of the "worry cycle" in my life: small problems arise (often the same ones over and over); they start to gnaw at me; then, little by little, they consume my thoughts, chewing up my energy, my joy, and my peace. To fight this cycle, God urges us to immediately bring our concerns to Him, as soon as we're aware of them. Bring them again whenever they come to mind.

***And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus*** (Philippians 4:7, NIV). The result is one of the warmest and most practical gifts possible: God's peace. This peace is so deep, so all-encompassing that we cannot even imagine it enough to ask for it. And this peace will guard our hearts and minds, keeping them in Christ Jesus.

Hymn: [Almighty God Is Near!](#)

## **Neediness**

*Read 2 Corinthians 12:9*

Need has come to bless us once again.  
Heaviness and grief descend  
to lift our load of self-deceit.  
They shine their light to show us just  
    how vast our insufficiency,  
    how constant our inconstancy,  
    how fragile our illusions of well-being and control.

Problems are invitations,  
silent whispers from a Friend:  
    “Remember?  
    Remember Me?  
    Come and rest in Me again.”

My Lord, I praise You  
    for the longing of this moment's need.  
Let it remain – not the need,  
    but the neediness,  
    the neediness for You.  
Let it stretch and spread  
    through all I think I can and cannot do.  
Let it reach for You  
    and all You are,  
    for all Your life and love can be in me.

For the plenty of Your presence,  
    let the hunger,  
    let the neediness remain.

*Father, You feed us with  
suffering, waiting, and need  
in order to increase our hunger for You,  
our dependence on You, and  
our focus on You alone.*

**Hymn: [Back to You](#)**

## Keep the Focus on Him

In the years I've used the Lord's Prayer as the pattern for my daily prayer, I've spent most of my time in the first half of the prayer:

*Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name,  
your kingdom come,  
your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.* (Matthew 6:9-10, NIV)

I gravitated to that first half of the prayer because every morning I crave seeing Him again. When I focus on God, high and lifted up, everything else falls into place.

Often I spent less time on the second half of the prayer:

*Give us today our daily bread.  
And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.  
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.*  
(Matthew 6:11-13, NIV)

After focusing on the transcendent God during the first part of my prayer, I felt uncomfortable shifting the focus to our needs in the second half. Yes, I was still talking to God, but now my heart seemed focused on us, not Him. I came to realize that this made the second half of the prayer feel smaller and less meaningful.

Then one morning God showed me that I should pray the second half of the prayer like the first, with my focus still on Him. For example:

*Father, we joyfully depend on You for all our needs today.  
We depend on Your forgiveness for our sins  
and for Your help in forgiving others.  
We depend on You for deliverance  
from temptation and from the evil one.  
Keep our hearts and minds on You alone.*

We can keep our focus on Him, even while presenting our needs. We can confess our dependence on Him out of a burning desire to live in Him more constantly and completely. When we pray with our hearts fixed on God alone, the entire Lord's Prayer becomes an act of deep, life-centered worship. We come seeking, not His gifts, but Him.

Hymn: [Our Father Exalted](#)

## **Forgiveness #1**

*Read Matthew 6:12*

*My Father, holy and loving,  
forgive me.  
I have been wrong in  
my thoughts,  
my words, and  
my actions.  
I have failed to trust You,  
and I've fallen short of  
Your perfect and wonderful will.  
Forgive me, Lord.  
Restore me.  
And help me forgive those who have wronged me.*

If you wrote down a list of your most pressing needs, what would it include? Notice that when Jesus taught us to pray daily about our needs, two of the three petitions concern evil in our lives. He understood what was truly important in life, and He said that sin should be one of our chief daily concerns. Thus this fifth petition seeks forgiveness for the wrongs we've committed. The next one seeks to avoid them in the future.

Remember that the Lord's Prayer teaches us how to relate to a loving God who is always with us. We are weak creatures, unstable and inconsistent. If we're going to maintain a healthy, intimate, unbroken relationship with a holy God, a time of confession and forgiveness is essential.

We fail to trust Him, and thus we hinder His working in our lives. We fail to act in love. Without even thinking about it, we revert to our selfish thoughts and selfish ways. We need His forgiveness. We need His daily renewal.

The wonder is this: if we turn to God openly, in simple trust, not even our sins need keep us apart from Him. He invites us to come to Him in daily confession, assured that His boundless love will freely, gladly forgive us.

**Hymn: [Song of Confession](#)**

## Forgiveness #2

We can be so blind to our own faults. We cover them up. We rationalize them. We blame them on circumstances or on others. We do anything we can to sweep them under the rug. Often we successfully ignore our wrongs until we are faced with them in the pain and anger of those we love.

We tend to excuse ourselves and blame others. The Lord's Prayer teaches us the opposite. For our own good we need to be more conscious of our own failings and more willing to forgive the failings of others. For all of us, for an entire race caught in its own sinfulness and helplessness, there is no alternative to forgiveness. Sin is a debt we cannot pay.

But we cannot embrace forgiveness for ourselves without embracing it for others, including those who have wronged us. Forgiveness cannot flow *to* us until it can flow *through* us to others. Notice that after giving us the Lord's Prayer, this is the one point Jesus emphasizes. *"If you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins."* (Matthew 6:14-15, NIV)

Either we accept forgiveness as the response to sin or we don't. We cannot choose it for ourselves and deny it to others. Remember, the debt others owe us is infinitely small compared to the debt we owe God. (Read Matthew 18:23-35.)

When a wrong has been done, pain is the result. Releasing that pain is difficult whether we committed the wrong or someone else wronged us. But God's forgiveness is both free and freeing. In the grip of guilt, we always have the option of receiving His forgiveness, simply and immediately.

And when we've been hurt by another, He gives us the freedom to forgive that person completely. We always have the privilege of passing along the wonderful forgiveness we have received. We don't need to wait for the other person to come to us. If we look to God and depend on Him, He will enable us to love and understand others as He loves and understands them.

Loving Father, morning by morning bathe our hearts, our homes, our friendships, our workplace, our church, and our world in the healing and peace of Your forgiveness. Spread Your beautiful forgiveness through me.

Hymn: [The Joy of Forgiveness](#)

## **Daily Forgiveness**

Father, You know my heart.  
You know that I want to live and breathe as Your child.  
I want to be one with You every moment and in every way.  
I long to walk in total obedience to  
    Your perfect and loving will.

But You also know how I live day by day.  
My responses to You are so sporadic and cool.  
I want to live a loving life  
    constantly and completely,  
but I shrink back into myself so often and so easily.  
As I trust You, You always enable me  
    to live a holy life in Your presence.  
You are so faithful!  
But how often I fail to trust You as You deserve!  
Faith is still a response that is  
    only partially formed in me.

The closer I grow to You, the more I am aware of the  
    magnitude and constancy of  
    my failures before You.  
You deserve so much better than me!

But Your grace is perfect, even though my behavior is not.  
Your forgiveness is free for the asking!  
Though my shortcomings are a never-ending stream,  
Your mercies are new every morning.

I count on Your forgiveness, Father,  
    but help me never take it for granted.  
Give me a growing openness with You.  
Give me a constant awareness of  
    who You are and  
    who I am.  
May confession be an ongoing process between us,  
    a daily healing,  
    a regular realigning,  
    a natural part of our unbroken communion.



## **Hold on to Love**

Peter came to Jesus and asked Him this:

*"Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times?" Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven." (Matthew 18:21-22, NASB)*

Paul spoke to the same need when he said:

*Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. Follow God's example, therefore, as dearly loved children and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us. (Ephesians 4:31—5:2, NIV)*

Those we love sometimes hurt or disappoint us.

The cause may be a misunderstanding or  
human weakness or  
plain old selfishness.

Even the highest human love  
sometimes falls short.

When that happens, we can let bitterness and anger sweep in and  
widen the separation.

We can put at risk the love we've held so dear.

Or we can hold on to that love with both hands.

We can continue to reach out and  
seek to understand.

Even in our own hurt,  
we can do what love is designed to do:  
focus on the other person rather than ourselves.

When we forgive this way,  
we not only let the other person experience  
the beauty of God's love,  
we experience it ourselves.

*Father, You have given me such a  
marvelous gift in  
complete forgiveness.  
I will gladly give it to others as well!*

## **I Bring that One to You**

*Love your enemies,  
do good to those who hate you,  
bless those who curse you,  
pray for those who mistreat you. (Luke 6:27-28, NIV)*

Father, I bring that one to You –  
that one with whom my relationship is strained,  
that one who arouses  
angry or bitter feelings in me  
every time I think of them.

Bless that person with  
Your wisdom and  
Your presence.  
Bless them with the full and free forgiveness  
that You have lavished on me.  
Bless them with  
Your smile,  
Your patient forbearance,  
Your beautiful, life-giving renewal.  
Bless them with all Your very best, and  
as pleases You,  
bless them through me.

And Father, our Father,  
keep me quietly humble  
before them and  
before You.

*All our relationships are to be shaped by  
the love of the Father –  
His love for them,  
for us,  
for all of us.  
He loves “them” as much as “us”.  
In every relationship,  
only His unselfish love is worthy of Him.*

## **Deliver Us from Evil #1**

*Read Matthew 6:13*

*Father, deliver us from the evil one today.*

*I ask for myself, for my family, and for my brothers and sisters in Christ.*

*Protect us, Lord. Help us to watch and pray.*

After we ask God to forgive our wrongs, we ask Him to help us avoid them in the future. Face it: without God's grace, sin is a debt we cannot pay and a trap we cannot avoid. We are opposed and surrounded by spiritual forces much stronger than us. We are weak, and our *enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour* (1 Peter 5:8, NIV).

But the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world (1 John 4:4). Deliverance is always available as we trust our Heavenly Father who is always able, always with us, always in us. That is the beautiful message of the Lord's Prayer.

In all our weakness, we can live in constant, close fellowship with a holy God. Christ has fully provided us that amazing privilege by His forgiveness and His Spirit within. What hinders us? We get our eyes off God and onto lesser things. We forget that our greatest need is not comfort or respect or any of the "necessities" of life. Our greatest need is our own weakness. Our greatest need is the sin, the faithlessness, the lovelessness that plagues our lives and our hearts. We forget that without God's grace, sin is a debt we cannot pay and a trap we cannot avoid.

To get a picture of your daily neediness, read Matthew 26:36-46. In the Garden of Gethsemane, facing His arrest, trial, and crucifixion, Jesus met the crisis with prayer and stayed faithful to His Father. The disciples crumbled and fled.

Why? They weren't even aware of their need. Their thoughts were elsewhere. Jesus had told them: *"Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak"* (Matthew 26:41, NIV). Instead they slept. Instead of meeting their weakness with prayer and dependence on God, they simply gave in. They failed to trust God, so they failed.

When we fail to trust God, we fail. Like the disciples, our hour of need is upon us, but we are preoccupied with other things. We are dull and lethargic. Like them, we need to watch and pray so that we will not fall into temptation. Our intentions are good, but we are weak. We must realize our constant need, then turn to God with that need. The Lord's Prayer helps us do that, day by day.

## Deliver Us from Evil #2

*Lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from evil. (Matthew 6:13, NIV)*

Why do we pray, *lead us not into temptation*? Does the question imply that God might lead us into sin unless we ask Him not to?

The basic petition is, *deliver us from the evil one*. For emphasis it is stated in a negative way, *lead us not into temptation*, then in a positive way, *but deliver us from the evil one*. God will not lead us into evil, any more than He will let us starve unless we pray for daily bread.

The purpose of the Lord's Prayer is not to tell God something He needs to hear. The purpose is to align our hearts and desires with Him, to look to Him in our needs, to open ourselves to His working in our lives. We seek His glory, His control, His will. We turn to Him for our daily provisions. We seek His forgiveness and His deliverance from evil.

In summary, stay aware of the danger of sin. Stay aware of your weakness. When life presses in, watch and pray. When you get spiritually drowsy, watch and pray. Day by day, watch and pray.

And remember: the Lord's Prayer is *us*, not just *me*. Our loved ones also need God's guidance and protection in a world of evil. Lift them up to your Father. Ask Him to build a hedge around them. Ask Him to keep them and lead them to Himself.

*Like Peter,  
I overestimate  
the strength of my own will.  
Father, I turn to You and  
watch and  
pray.*

Hymn: [Do You Talk to the Lord?](#)

## Stay Alert and Pray

Our daily battle with evil is very real. *Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.* (Ephesians 6:11-12, NASB)

We are urged to put on *the full armor of God*:

- the belt of truth
- the breastplate of righteousness
- the boots of the gospel
- the shield of faith
- the helmet of salvation
- the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God

But Paul doesn't stop there. To deal with evil day by day, pray! *Pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people.* (Ephesians 6:18, NIV)

He's not saying, "And oh, by the way, don't forget to say your prayers at night." He is describing aggressive, constant, serious prayer.

- *Pray in the Spirit*, in that personal connection you have with the Almighty, Living God. You are talking to Him about matters of utmost importance. Come with confidence that His own Spirit is helping you pray.
- *Pray on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests.* Never tire of coming to Him regularly, constantly, with every need.
- *Be alert*, literally, *stay awake!* Stay watchful! You and those you love are in a struggle of eternal life vs. eternal death. You could come under attack at any time, and prayer is one of your main defenses. You are on guard duty. Stay alert!
- *Always keep on praying for all the Lord's people.* Don't let your prayer life shrink down to yourself and your immediate circle of family and friends. Lift your eyes to the people around you, to your church, your community, your nation, your world.

The evil all around is stronger than you, but God is more powerful than them all. Pray!

## The Closing

*For yours is  
the kingdom and  
the power and  
the glory forever. Amen.*

The Lord's Prayer closes with this doxology, which is an expression of praise. These words are not included in the earliest manuscripts of the Bible, so many scholars believe this ending was added later.

But whether these words are original or not, they are scriptural. They seem to grow from David's prayer recorded in 1 Chronicles 29:11:

*Yours, Lord, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the majesty and the splendor, for everything in heaven and earth is yours. Yours, Lord, is the kingdom; you are exalted as head over all. (NIV)*

The Lord's Prayer closes as it began, seeking God's glory, His kingdom, and His will. Our whole relationship with an Almighty, all-loving, all-wise God is framed in this deep desire that He have His way completely, always and forever.

*Father,  
may You be all in all  
in my life,  
in my family,  
in the Church,  
and throughout all creation,  
both now and forevermore.  
Amen, Lord, Amen.  
Let it be!*

Hymn: [Great Lord of All Reality](#)

## Look to Jesus #1

Remember where we started? The key to happiness is a constant, personal relationship with God. It is enjoying God's presence with us moment by moment, always and forever. Prayer, simple communication with God, is the breath of that relationship.

We have looked at what Jesus taught about prayer because He embodied that constant, unbroken relationship with God.

Thus it should come as no surprise that Jesus exemplifies the lifestyle taught and formed by the Lord's Prayer. Read one of the Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John, and this truth will leap out at you.

- ***Our Father in heaven*** – Jesus called God “Father.” That was His name for God. That was the way He thought of Him and interacted with Him – as His Heavenly Father.

- ***Hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven*** – Jesus was entirely devoted to God's glory, God's rulership, and God's will. “‘My food,’ said Jesus, ‘is to do the will of him who sent me’” (John 4:34, NIV). He lived and died in obedience to God and for God's glory alone. Facing His torture and death, *Your will be done* are the exact words Jesus prayed.

- ***Give us today our daily bread*** – Jesus lived on daily bread. He modeled complete and constant dependence on His Father. He only said what the Father told Him to say and did what the Father showed Him to do. He was homeless, earned no income, and died with only the clothes on His back. Yet He lived a full life, always sufficient for every demand.

- ***Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors*** – Jesus modeled forgiveness. He forgave even the vilest of sinners during His lifetime and died praying for the forgiveness of those murdering Him.

- ***Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one*** – Jesus endured the full range of human temptation yet remained perfect and sinless. *We do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin* (Hebrews 4:15, NIV).

Hymn: [Each Moment by Faith](#)

## Look to Jesus #2

Jesus not only lived out the Lord's Prayer. He lives it out in us, today, every day. Jesus has given us His own Spirit. As we trust Him step by step, He lives within us, filling us with Himself, joining His Spirit to our innermost being. Jesus not only helps us to pray as we should. **He Himself is the answer to each petition of the Lord's Prayer.** God's greatest gift to us is not a "something." It is His Son. It is Himself!

- The Spirit of Jesus within us gives us that connection with God that enables us to know Him as **Father**. *Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!"* (Galatians 4:6, NASB).
- The Spirit of Jesus will **glorify God through us**. As others see our loving deeds and sense the Spirit of Jesus in us, they will be drawn to God and will end up praising Him.
- Jesus Himself brings the **kingdom of God** into our hearts and lives. He is God's presence, God's rulership, God's sovereign protection.
- The Spirit of Jesus nurtures God's righteousness in our lives and leads us into **His perfect will** for us.
- Jesus said, *"I am the **bread of life**. . . I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live forever"* (John 6:48-49, 51, NIV). Jesus Himself, God's presence with us and in us, is God's daily provision for our needs.
- Jesus **forgives our sins**. By His loving Spirit He also gives us the strength to forgive those who have wronged us.
- As we follow the leading of the Spirit of Jesus, He will draw us **away from temptation** and deliver us from the evil one.
- Jesus is **worthy to receive the kingdom and the power and the glory forever**. One day every creature in heaven and earth will sing in one grand unison, *"To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb [Jesus] be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!"* (Revelation 5:13, NIV).

Do you want to understand the Lord's Prayer? Look to the life of Jesus. Do you want to absorb the spirit of the Lord's Prayer? Look to the life of Jesus. Do you want to enjoy Jesus' own relationship with God our Father? Pray as He taught us to pray. As you trust Him step by step, day by day, need by need, He will join His Spirit to yours and live His beautiful life in and through you.



## **For Today**

Father, I only want what Your  
    holy,  
    joyful,  
    loving,  
all-sufficient Son wanted:  
    only Your glory,  
    only Your kingdom,  
    only Your will.

Gain or loss,  
success or failure,  
need or abundance,  
sunlight or shadow,  
this is my focus,  
this is my desire:  
    Your smile and Your approval.

Your Son was sure of Your presence,  
    Your abundance, and  
    Your loving faithfulness.  
Thus He didn't fret about tomorrow.  
He only needed bread for today.  
Father, that's all I need as well.

Your Son came to pour out on us  
    Your forgiveness,  
    Your cleansing,  
    Your holiness,  
    Your impenetrable keeping from all evil.  
I will live joyfully and confidently in  
    that forgiveness, that holiness, that safekeeping.

Father, as I trust You today,  
    I am in Christ, and  
    He is in me, and  
    we are in You every moment.  
Praise be to You, our Father, forever and ever!

**Hymn: [Jesus' Life Is All a Promise](#)**

## Dependent on Prayer

I can't describe how exciting and satisfying it is to discover Christ as a real Being, One who is always with me and in me. He is taking a more and more active role in my daily life. The Lord is teaching me to depend on Him more constantly and more practically in all I do. I'm learning to turn my time over to Him, letting Him direct my schedule. I'm learning I can look to Him for guidance and enabling in all my responsibilities, resting in Him to accomplish through me all that needs to be accomplished.

Having started to experience this way of living and serving, I want so much to be this way only and always. It's wonderful – more productive, more fulfilling, and more natural. God is becoming more real and dear than ever.

But I'm also finding that, accordingly, prayer is more essential. *Depending on God is depending on prayer.* Prayer is the very breath of the relationship. In daily life, with so much pressing us and distracting us, prayer is necessary to keep our hearts and minds turned to Him. We must bring our needs constantly to Him, remaining open to His influence and prompting.

I'm not just talking about time alone devoted only to prayer, as important as that is. I'm finding that I need a heart given to prayer on a constant basis, learning to turn to Him quickly, moment by moment, in petition and thanksgiving, looking to Him for guidance in everything I face.

As with human families and friendships, communication is a key to a more satisfying relationship. To improve a relationship, we must improve the communication. We must make it more open and more constant.

To get a feeling for such openness, read about Christ in the Gospels. You get a sense of that unbroken communication between the Father and Jesus. Jesus seems to be always listening, always aware of His Father's presence and power. You can almost feel the bond of trust between them.

That's the kind of relationship He wants with us. And having just begun to taste it, that's what I want as well.

*Father, I see Jesus, and  
He is the person I want to be.  
I want to live like Him.  
I want His relationship with You:  
constant, open, personal, trusting, loving.*

## **Focus on God**

*Read Psalm 90*

Do you want to spend your life wisely?  
Do you want to stay humble and  
    not become the victim of foolish pride?  
Do you want to remember  
    your true glory as a  
    God-made individual?  
In short, do you want to maintain  
    a true perspective  
    in the constant push and pull and deception of daily life?

Keep your eyes on God.  
Practice simple prayer throughout the day.  
Turn to Him and  
    trust Him in every need.  
Thank Him immediately for  
    every blessing and  
    every little joy.  
Nurture your relationship with Him.

*For with You is the fountain of life.  
When we see You,  
we see everything else more clearly.  
(Psalm 36:9, para.)*

Our past,  
our present,  
our future are  
    all in Him.  
The only way to keep life in focus is to  
    keep God in focus.

*Do you want to know God better?  
Read about Him.  
Talk with Him.  
Trust Him.  
As you trust Him, you will know Him.  
As you know Him, you will trust Him.*

## **Alone with Jesus**

*As the deer pants for streams of water,  
so my soul pants for you, my God.  
(Psalm 42:1, NIV)*

During busy, pressured days,  
I used to dream of  
    driving to work the long way,  
    leisurely, unhurried by schedule.  
I used to dream of  
    leaving work in the middle of the day and  
    going to some pleasant spot just to  
        walk,  
        think, and  
        drink in the atmosphere.

I've done those things now.  
I've enjoyed them, and  
    still do.

But I've learned that  
as much as I enjoy solitude,  
    solitude itself isn't satisfying.

Being alone with Jesus is satisfying.  
I turn to Him, and  
    He is with me.  
I can talk freely to Him,  
    person to person, or just  
relax in the silence and  
    wait for Him to speak.

His presence is life's greatest joy.  
It's a gift He will never take away.

*Father, help me to offer You  
each of my spare moments.*

**Hymn: [Peace in Christ](#)**

## **Shape Me with Your Presence**

*I am doomed!*

*I am unclean!*

*My whole race is unclean.*

*Yet I have seen the King, the Lord God Almighty! (Isaiah 6:5, para.)*

Lord, I am so self-centered.

I spend so much of my day  
    thinking about myself.

At the slightest excuse,  
    I get puffed up with pride.

At the slightest excuse,  
    I get negative and complain.

But I've found that when I talk to You,  
when I turn my attention to You,  
    my attitude changes.

Seeing You,  
    I am humbled.

Seeing You,  
    I fill with praise.

Seeing You,  
    my thoughts become loving.

I love You, and I begin to love those around me.

God, I turn to You.

Shape my attitude  
    with Your presence.

*Father,  
    anger and anxiety grow  
    when I get my eyes off You.  
Help me to live in Your presence  
    as Christ did,  
    face-to-face.*

**[Jesus, I Need Your Spirit](#)**

## **Creative Communicators, Make Prayer a Priority**

If you are a creative communicator in any sense of the term—artist, writer, pastor, teacher, parent—remember this key fact: the only thing you will ever have to communicate is what you personally know of Jesus Christ.

If Jesus Christ and your relationship with Him is the substance of your life, then start right where you are, today, this moment, and make prayer a bigger part of your daily life. Many years ago God challenged me to do that, and nothing – absolutely nothing – has been as vital or as fruitful in my life as prayer.

Your opportunities for prayer will vary in the different seasons of your life. Don't be discouraged by what you can't do. Focus on what you can do. No matter how tight your time, look for the opportunities your schedule affords and take them. Ten minutes in the morning. Your drive time. The quiet moments when you first wake up and after the lights are off at night. Pray for opportunities to pray!

Whatever prayer time you set apart, it's even more important that you turn to Him throughout the day, wherever you are and whatever you are doing. Nurture the habit. Let every concern draw you to Him. Immediately bring each need and anxiety to Him. Immediately thank Him for each joy and blessing, including little daily blessings: each meal, each conversation with a friend. The more you love God, the more you will want to share your life with Him. You will want to stay in touch with Him through the day. You will be drawn to Him by hunger, not driven by guilt.

Remember, whatever happens or doesn't happen in your life, through time and eternity your greatest joy will always be the pleasure of enjoying the Living God in the present moment. Don't let anything rob you of that treasure.

*Our God is  
consumed with love and  
unlimited in power.  
What ministries,  
now unimagined,  
would He choose to do through us if we  
prayed more boldly,  
trusted Him more simply,  
made ourselves totally available  
to Him and  
in Him  
moment by moment?*

## **My Own Prayer Retreat**

Father, this morning You seemed to be  
calling me apart to Yourself.

You want us to have a place –  
not a physical place  
but a retreat within my spirit –  
a place where I  
look to You alone,  
rest in You alone, and  
take pleasure in You alone.

Father, that is what my heart wants as well.  
So many things distract me –  
duties from the outside and  
desires from the inside.

But help us build such a retreat together,  
a place fashioned by  
simple trust and  
simple prayer,  
a place of  
worship,  
praise, and  
rest,  
a temple richly blessed by  
Your holy presence.

*In my thoughts,  
Father,  
less of me and  
more of You.*

# Reading the Bible

## The Bible

*I rejoice in following your statutes  
as one rejoices in great riches.  
(Psalm 119:14, NIV)*

I love the Bible. I'm passionate about it! There are many other books I enjoy and find stimulating (C.S. Lewis is my favorite author), but none compare to the Bible. It is satisfying intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually. It has depth. It has a powerful clarity, yet a richness and mystery that have to be tasted and experienced.

One of the reasons we should read books written in other ages is that they expand our perspective and challenge our presuppositions. One author wrote that the chains that bind us the most are the ones we feel the least. Writers from other ages help us feel those ideas that chain us, and perhaps lead us to throw off a few.

But the Bible is the one book that rises above the limited perspective of every age. For that reason, it sometimes seems hopelessly out-of-step. In our arrogance, we call it naïve and unenlightened. We patronize it as we would a doddering old man who stubbornly clings to the "old ways". We fearfully battle each other over the term "inerrancy". But for me, forget the labels. I trust the Bible. I trust it completely. It speaks, I listen. It's that simple.

If you want to know the Living God better, read the Bible. It shows Him interacting with people over a period of 1500 years or more. All kinds of personalities, cultures, and situations, but one unchanging God. He treats individuals individually, but He's always consistent with Himself.

The Bible will enflame your love for Him. It will embolden your trust in Him. It will nourish your creativity like nothing else can.

In an age of relativity, marinate your mind in unchanging truth. Anchor yourself in an unchanging God.

Hymn: [Your Sovereign Word](#)



## **What Is the Bible?**

The Bible is not a single book but a library of 66 books. It was written over a period of approximately 1600 years by about 40 different human authors.

What is the Bible about? The Bible is about God. It is intended to help us know Him and thus better understand ourselves. It is the account of God's dealings with the human race, how He is saving us and drawing us to Himself. That's why the Bible is sometimes said to tell "the history of salvation".

The Bible is not only highly varied in its time period and in its authorship, but in its content. It contains a wide range of types of literature: history (with many fascinating stories), law, poetry, wisdom literature, prophecy, parables, letters, and sermons.

The Bible was originally written in three different languages. The Old Testament was written primarily in Hebrew, with a few passages in Aramaic, a language closely related to Hebrew. The New Testament was written in Greek, specifically koine Greek, the common language of the day.

The Bible is organized into two sections. The Old Testament contains 39 books and covers the period from the creation till just before the birth of Jesus Christ. The New Testament, made up of 27 books, covers the period from Christ's birth through approximately 100 A.D.

Within these two testaments, or covenants, the books are organized by literary type and time period. The first five books of the Old Testament, called the books of law, Genesis through Deuteronomy, cover the period from creation through the Exodus of the nation of Israel from slavery in Egypt. Then come the books of history, Joshua through Esther, telling the history of Israel from their arrival in Canaan through their return from the Babylonian exile. Following them are the books of poetry and wisdom, Job through Psalms, then the prophetic books. Isaiah through Daniel are called the major prophets, simply because they wrote more, not because they are more important. The minor prophets finish up the Old Testament, Hosea through Malachi.

The New Testament opens with the gospels, which record the life and teachings of Jesus. They are told by four different authors, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, for four different purposes. They beautifully complement each other. Then comes the history of the early Church, the Acts of the Apostles, usually simply called Acts. It covers approximately the first 30 years after the resurrection and ascension of Christ. The rest of the New Testament consists of 22 letters, or epistles, written by Christian leaders to various churches or individuals during the first century A.D.

What a rich and marvelously varied library!

## **Practical Tips for Reading the Bible**

**How do you go about reading such a large and varied book?** There are many methods. Some read it straight through from beginning to end, from Genesis through Revelation. Some do that every year. Some pick out isolated chapters or verses, perhaps as recommended by a devotional book.

I read the Bible a book at a time. I choose a book and start reading from the beginning. Each day I read until I get something to think about or apply to my life. Then I'll stop and write a prayer in response to that passage. I ask any questions I have, record observations, apply the truth to my life, and pray that God will help me. Then I'll pick up at that point the next day till I've read the entire book. Then I'll choose another book. I make a point of reading all the books of the Bible. You'll be surprised at what beautiful truths you discover in lesser-known books and passages!

**What should I do when I don't understand what I've read?** You're in good company! Even the most able Bible scholars find much they don't understand. The Bible is unique in its ability to reward beginning readers while challenging even the most experienced readers. When you read something you don't understand, start from what you do understand, no matter how general or obvious. Apply that truth, and build from there.

Then begin to look at what you don't understand. Read the context – the verses before and after. Pray to God and ask Him your questions. Pray for understanding. A study Bible or Bible reference books can also help. For example, many Bibles have other Bible passages footnoted in the center column or at the bottom of the page. Read the passages footnoted to the portion you want to understand.

Most of all, don't be discouraged! Don't worry if you don't understand what others seem to understand. Experts study the Bible their entire lives and don't understand it all. Experienced Bible readers may have read a passage hundreds of times, then they'll suddenly see something they hadn't noticed before. But you can read the Bible for the very first time and begin to understand it.

If you want to know God, He will speak to you as you read, no matter how inexperienced you are. He inspired the Bible so that you can know Him. If you want to know Him, He will show Himself to You. He loves you and is reaching out to you.

*Father,  
Your truth is the only truth.  
Feed my mind and heart.  
Nourish my faith.*

## **Welcome the Silence**

Release your plans and dreams –  
    free your hands,  
    free your heart –  
and there before God,  
welcome the  
    silence.

In the silence, welcome  
    listening.

In the listening, welcome  
    the Word of God,  
    the will of God,  
    the wisdom of God,  
    the light of God,  
    the love of God, and  
    all the rich blessings of God.

Release your plans and dreams, and  
in the silence, welcome  
    Him.

*God's light is always burning,  
    day and night  
    forever.*

*He is always with us,  
    always watching,  
    always seeking,  
    always blessing,  
    always drawing us to Himself.*

**Hymn: [Father, Speak Your Word Again](#)**

## **Is the Bible Accurate?**

*Read 2 Timothy 3:16-17*

Looking back over history, people of a variety of cultures, personalities, and life situations have tried the Bible, just as I have. They, too, have found it reliable, accurate, and satisfying. Many have died for it.

Looking back over that same history, human knowledge in any age has proven to be substantially inaccurate and woefully inadequate. It's been shot through with ignorance, arrogance, and stubborn blindness. It's been seriously distorted by self-interest and by the passing winds and fads of the times. We have every reason to believe that our knowledge and our basic assumptions will prove no better than in the past.

Is the Bible accurate? It's stood the test of time. It's stood the test of life. Is the Bible outdated? It certainly doesn't keep in step with whatever ideas are currently popular. That's how it avoids becoming dated. For example, the Bible speaks with a degree of authority that isn't considered intellectually respectable today. Many believe that there is no absolute truth, especially morally. Everything is relative. The Bible flatly states otherwise.

But don't take my word for what it says. Read it for yourself. You'll find it an incredible, intriguing book. It's full of stories, history, poetry, laws, prophecies, letters, and very practical advice.

It's an honest book - probably the most honest you'll ever read. Even its heroes are shown with all their warts unretouched. There they are in all their humanity. The Bible shows life as it really is . . . but also as it can be.

You've heard about it. You've heard people praise it, mock it, fight over it, and try to reason around it. Read it for yourself.

Time and change sweep away almost everything - social movements, political parties, fashions, lifestyles, even scientific beliefs. Yet as each generation has discarded what seems outmoded and has clung to what seems valuable, the Bible has endured, for thousands of years.

Find out why generation after generation, culture after culture, person after person of every age, personality, education level, and political preference have called it THE WORD OF GOD.

Hymn: [The Word of God](#)

## **Reflection on Psalm 1**

O Father, how blessed and wonderful are  
    Your words to us!  
Through them You freely share  
    Your deeds,  
    Your ways,  
    Your character, and  
    Your heart.

As I read, meditate, and pray over them,  
    You fill my mind and heart with Yourself,  
    O magnificent Father!  
As I turn to You and  
    trust You day by day,  
Your unbounded life courses through me and  
    keeps me fruitful and alive in You.  
Without You, I am chaff –  
    dry,  
    lifeless,  
    worthless,  
    temporary,  
    quickly driven away by the winds of time.

With You and  
in You  
    I am nourished by Your Spirit.  
    I am known and loved  
        as Your child.

Praise to You, my Father!

**Hymn: [Psalm 1](#)**

## **The Blessings of Obedience**

*Read Matthew 7:24-27; James 1:22-24*

To close the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus drives home a sobering reality. He tells the parable of a wise man, who safely endures the worst that life can bring, and a foolish man, whose entire world collapses around him. What is the only difference between the two? Both have heard God's word, but only the wise man has put it into practice.

God's Word does us no good until we actively, intentionally obey it.

Listen to how many times Jesus emphasizes the importance and the great blessings of simply keeping His commands:

- As we make disciples, what are we to teach them? To live as Jesus taught (Matthew 28:20).
- Those who obey His commands will never die (John 8:51-52).
- Obedience is proof of our love for Jesus (John 14:15).
- Those who keep Jesus' commands share in the intimate, unbroken love of Father and Son (John 14:21; 15:10).
- Wouldn't you love to be a warm, personal friend of Jesus Christ? Do what He says (John 15:14)!
- Do you want to enjoy the full assurance that you personally know God and live in relationship with Him day by day? Live as He teaches (1 John 2:3-4).
- Do you want God's love to live in you in all its fullness and beauty? Do you want to walk constantly in Him? Live as Jesus taught. Live as Jesus lived (1 John 2:5-6).
- His commands are not a burden. They are a gift of His tender love for us. They are easy and joyful (Matthew 11:28-30; 1 John 5:3).

**Hymn: [I Build My Life on You](#)**

## **Feed the Fire**

*I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands. (Paul to Timothy in 2 Timothy 1:6, NIV)*

God lights a fire within us –  
the fire of His Spirit,  
the fire of His power and love within.  
But starve any fire –  
deprive it of oxygen or fuel –  
and it will quickly die.

Feed the fire.  
Nurture that life-giving relationship.  
Respond to Him in faith and obedience.  
Listen for His gentle whispers.  
Answer when He calls.  
Tell Him how much you need Him.  
Tell Him how much you love Him.  
Give Him top priority every day.  
Put to death old habits and start new ones.  
Thank Him every time He blesses you.  
Come to Him quickly with every concern.  
Serve Him eagerly,  
with gratitude and enthusiasm.

Read His Word.  
Talk to Him.  
Trust Him.  
Praise Him.  
Feed the fire.

*Father, You want my life to be  
constantly interwoven with  
rejoicing,  
praying, and  
giving thanks.  
May they fill my  
heart and  
mind and  
mouth  
all day today!*

## Saturate Yourself with the Truth

Read Psalm 119:14, 18, 32, 36, 111

To nurture your creativity and your life in Christ, be a passionate, lifelong student of the Bible. When I was in my late twenties, my mentor, Dr. Morris Weigelt, gave me a line paraphrased from Henry David Thoreau\*: *Saturate yourself with the truth, and the truth will exhale from you naturally.*

That statement stuck with me, and it has proven so very true. God's Word is the truth about reality. But more importantly, it helps us know God as a Living Being. You've probably experienced how rewarding it can be to get to know a human being, whether a spouse or a close friend. The process for getting to know God is very similar, but infinitely more fascinating and rewarding.

Realize that everything He does is aimed at one goal: to share Himself with us. Son and Spirit, creation and redemption, need and abundance, life here and hereafter, His entire agenda is to give Himself to us and draw us into Him. He wants you to know Him.

Simply cooperate with His loving desire for you. Seek Him for His own sake, not for your own ends. Marinate your mind in Him and in His Word, and He will reshape not only your thoughts, but your imagination, your heart, and the person you are in your daily life. Remember the old saying: *Sow a thought, reap an act. Sow an act, reap a habit. Sow a habit, reap a character. Sow a character, reap a destiny.*

Saturating myself in God's Word and in knowing Him has proven vital, not only in the big picture of life, but in my daily writing as well. When I'm writing a hymn, for example, I don't laboriously go through my research notes and try to construct every idea into verse. Instead, it's more like eating. I ingest the food. I take in the truths until they are personally, emotionally meaningful to me. I saturate myself. Then through processes I can't see or fully control, the words are born.

Communicators, creators, believers, saturate yourself with the truth. Then experience the amazing and varied ways God causes that truth to exhale through you.

\*For the full context, see *The Journal of Henry D. Thoreau, Autumn, Nov. 1, 1851.*

*Father, make Your precious Word fruitful in me.  
Plant it deep in my heart, and  
I will nurture it with the best of my  
time and energy.*



## **Improving God's Word**

*The words of the Lord are flawless,  
like silver . . . purified seven times.  
(Psalm 12:6, NIV)*

As workers began restoring Da Vinci's famous fresco, The Last Supper,  
they had to dig through many layers of  
"improvements" made by later artists,  
in order to get down to the  
beauty and  
purity of the  
original masterpiece.

As I desire to restore my life to the  
beauty and  
purity  
that You intended, Lord,  
I find I have to dig through many layers of  
"improvements" I've made on Your teachings.  
As I've studied Your Word,  
I've tended to interpret it in ways that were  
most comfortable for me.  
My "improvements" have been  
so subtle and  
so frequent that  
I need Your help in recovering  
Your original masterpiece.

Open my heart and  
my mind, Lord.  
Speak –  
I am listening.  
I will obey.

*Father, Your written Word comes from  
beyond our limited human knowledge.  
It brings us eternal truth about  
You and  
a greater reality.  
Help us read,  
understand, and  
obey.*

## A Love Letter

*Oh, how I love your law! I meditate on it all day long. (Psalm 119:97, NIV)*

Why do I find the Bible so intriguing?  
Why do I never tire of reading it,  
though many see it only as so much history and poetry—  
dry, strange, and irrelevant?

Because I read it as  
a love letter  
from You to me, Lord God.  
It speaks to me about You  
in all Your mystery.  
It shows me how You work and react.  
It expresses Your love for me on every page.  
It tells me how my life can be blessed by You.

Thus I find Your Word  
encouraging,  
enlightening, and  
heartwarming.  
I find it satisfying  
mentally,  
emotionally, and  
spiritually.

Every time I read it, I hear  
more of Your passion.  
I grasp more of Your amazing plan for us.  
Lord, how wonderful it is to learn of You!

*Father, we are so focused  
on ourselves and  
on the small picture that  
we fail to appreciate many of  
Your greatest blessings.  
They are too far above us.  
They are too broad in time.  
We cannot trace Your love and  
all its magnificent ways.*

## **Treasure God's Word**

*Nehemiah 8*

Imagine if you could see, all at once,  
the impact of God's written Word on your life.  
Imagine if you could see  
all the beautiful blessings of reading and obeying it, and  
all the pain and suffering caused by ignoring it.  
Imagine if you could see all this for  
yourself and  
all the people you influence.  
Imagine!

Perhaps then,  
like the people of Nehemiah 8,  
you would  
weep over your foolish disobedience,  
find great joy in discovering God's Word,  
treasure it,  
eagerly anticipate its reading,  
hunger for it,  
thirst for it,  
hang on its every word.

*Your statutes...are the joy of my heart. (Psalm 119:111, NIV)*

*Do you want to be truly blessed?  
Do you want the Sovereign God to  
decree your well-being?  
Then listen to His Word and  
do what He says.*

**Hymn: [The Bible Song](#)**

## Beautiful Words

Today I went to a church that seemed far different than my own. There I heard beautiful words:

*Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty;  
the whole earth is full of his glory. (Isaiah 6:3, NIV)*

*Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!  
(John 1:29, NASB)*

*“The Lord is with us every day in a profound and perfect way.”*

But as spoken by the people, the words seemed like seashells – exquisitely lovely, but empty and dead for so long that no one seemed to think of them as created out of life, and for life. Mouths murmured the truths, but did any hearts hear their music? Did any souls join the singing?

Why were the people there – thirtyish, middle-aged, and older; executives, housewives, and workers; whites and Hispanics? Why did they come at 7:00 a.m. on a busy Tuesday, amid demanding, concern-filled lives? Were they drawn by a sense of “oughtness”? Were they taking refuge in the familiar? Did they think that coming would keep them in good standing with God? How many were driven by anticipation, and how many cruised in on automatic pilot? Was it habit, or hope?

I saw hungry faces, needy people reaching out. But when they ate the bread and drank the wine, how many truly feasted on Christ? How many received life and strength from His dying love and living presence? How many met Him, heard Him, trusted in Him, and went away rejoicing, “I saw the Lord!” How many hearts could hear and heed the benediction, “Go in peace”?

For years I have attended church every Sunday, and I hear beautiful words.

*Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.  
Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who  
looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and  
immediately forgets what he looks like. (James 1:22-24, NIV)*

## Can We Reasonably Trust the Bible?

*Read Psalm 119:89, 91, 96-97*

Can we trust everything the Bible says? Does it contain any errors? Can a book that is so thoroughly human in its origins reasonably claim to be completely and timelessly accurate? We claim that it is inspired by God, but does that make it any more accurate than all the other writings that God has, in some sense, inspired?

Without pretending to give complete answers to these questions, let me share these thoughts. First, I find it meaningful to look to Jesus Christ. John 1 refers to Him as the Word – that is, the Word of God. He also was fully human in every way, yet fully divine. His thoughts, His words, and His life were uniquely, beautifully, flawlessly true.

If we affirm that the Bible is the Word of God, we find confidence that it also can be uniquely, beautifully, flawlessly true. Just as He was one perfect, human-but-divine life among many righteous-but-flawed lives, so we can reasonably believe that the Bible is one perfectly inspired, human-but-divine book among many inspired-but-flawed books.

The perfection of the Bible is thus driven by the same energy that drove the life of Christ: God's loving desire to be fully known by His people. We also must take seriously what the Bible says repeatedly about itself, or at least portions of itself:

- *Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling **the word of truth*** (2 Timothy 2:15, NASB).
- *All Scripture is inspired [margin: **God-breathed**]* (2 Timothy 3:16, NASB).
- *The law of the Lord is **perfect...sure...right...pure...clean...true*** (Psalm 19:7-9, NASB).
- *The words of the Lord are **pure words**; as silver tried in a furnace on the earth, **refined seven times*** (Psalm 12:6, NASB).

I trust the Bible as

one perfect book among  
many good-but-imperfect books

for the same reason I trust Jesus Christ as

one perfect person among  
many good-but-imperfect people:

because I trust my Father's passion for being fully and accurately known by His people.

## Gaining the Mind of Christ

*In [Christ] are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. (Colossians 2:3, NASB)*

Sitting down to read the Bible, I've asked myself: What am I looking for? What good do I want this to do me? I've found that when Bible reading is most helpful, it is because it brings me the mind of Christ. It doesn't always bring specific direction on a certain question. And I don't suddenly know all Christ knows or totally think like Him. But in some partial way, I begin to get His view of my life, of my problems, of other people, and of God himself.

Sometimes I get a new picture of His love and faithfulness. Sometimes, His comfort. Sometimes, a challenge or a new heart focus.

That's why I'm drawn to the Bible – not driven to it, but drawn to it. When I neglect looking to God, I can tell the difference in myself. Before long my perspective slips; I forget, and my attitudes get off center.

Then I remember how God has helped me through His Word. And as He helps me again, my hunger for that help gets stronger and stronger. Gaining some measure of Christ's viewpoint is so uplifting, both in mind and in heart.

And that's the most exciting part. His Spirit doesn't just give us information. He actually molds the way we think and feel and look at things, from the inside. His wisdom is more than what we know. It is living wisdom. It is who we are. And like all His best blessings, that living wisdom is available if we just pray to Him and ask for it. *If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. (James 1:5, NIV)*

God, as I read, I seek You. Today, this morning, give me the light I need by the light of Your face. Give me Your mind, Lord Jesus.

*Father, as long as I see only  
my own temporary discomfort,  
much that You do will  
never make sense.  
Help me to share  
Your heart,  
Your purpose, and  
Your perspective,  
which are so much bigger than my own.*

## **Prayers to Begin Bible Reading #1**

*Speak, Lord, for Your servant is listening.* (1 Samuel 3:9, NIV)

Father, Your Word is like a lamp in my darkness.  
Shine Your light on what You want me to understand today.

Today, Father, I admit my ignorance. Teach me.

Father, thank You for holding Yourself before my eyes again this morning  
as I read and pray.  
Knowing You is joy.  
Trusting You is peace.

Father, I'm sure I have false and flawed assumptions that misguide my thinking.  
Today help me to know You better and  
see the truth more clearly.

Father, in Your Word You are communicating precious, eternal truths to me,  
and at such a cost!  
By Your Spirit, help me to hear each one and  
put it into practice.

Father, as I read, show me Yourself.  
I want to know You.

Father, Your voice called a universe out of nothing and filled it with  
life, love, and beauty.  
Speak to me.  
I am listening.  
I will obey.

Father, You have yet more truth about Christ to shine  
into me and  
through me.  
Open my mind, my heart, and my life to  
all He is and  
all He wants to be in me.

## **Prayers to Begin Bible Reading #2**

Father, today I will read Your Word as  
    Your love letter to me.  
Help me to hear more of  
    Your heart,  
    Your wise parental warnings, and  
    Your deep desire to bless me with all You are.

Father, help me to begin living  
    all the truth You teach me today.  
Your Word will do me no good until  
    I actively, intentionally obey it.

As I read today, Father, may the Spirit of Truth begin to reshape not only  
    how I think, but  
    who I am.

Father, as I read, I come seeking You.

Father, as You sow Your Word in me today, I will receive it with  
    an open mind and  
    a listening heart.  
Then help me nurture it with trust and obedience,  
    that it might bear its beautiful fruit in me.

Father, as I read today, help me to understand  
    everything You want me to understand.

Father, Your Word is not just words.  
It is my life,  
    my happiness,  
    my wholeness,  
    my completeness,  
    my truth, and  
    my entire future.  
I bow and read and listen.

Father, feed me. My heart is hungry for You.



# Living in Christ

## A Real Person

The most eye-opening point in my life came when I realized this one simple truth: God is a real Being. He is not an impersonal force or the creation of our minds. He is a real "person," a living Being. I can interact with Him, and He delights to interact with me.

What's more, He deeply loves me. He provides for me and works in my life. He patiently teaches me and changes me from the heart. He forgives me when I do wrong. And He is with me. He is personally, constantly right here with me. For me, the real attraction of the Christian life is not the lifestyle, although I've found that it's the wisest and most natural. What's compelling about being a Christian is Jesus Christ himself.

I find it so sad: when people hear the term "Christian," they too often think of stuffy religion or perhaps a certain political persuasion or cultural flavor. They think of living by lots of rules. Or saddest of all, they think of people who sometimes seem self-righteous, narrow-minded, and condemning. Being a Christian is none of those things. Christianity is simply this: knowing and trusting Jesus Christ as a real person, face-to-face.

Christianity is the simplicity and warmth of a personal relationship. It is knowing the One who created you. It is knowing the One who loved you from the moment He conceived you, long before you were born. It is knowing the One who suffered and died to remove the evil from within you. It is trusting an intimate Friend who is always loving, always wise, and always with you.

Walking with Him, step-by-step, is making my life more wonderful than I ever dreamed it could be. I can talk to Him anytime throughout the day and know that He hears me and is pleased that I'm talking to Him. When I'm concerned, I can turn to Him and lean on Him. When I'm happy, I can thank Him. When I'm wrong, I can ask forgiveness, knowing He gives it gladly and completely.

In myself, I'm no more perfect than anyone else. But because He is with me and in me always, He is making me more loving. He is helping me love others at home and wherever I go.

He brings wonderful gifts to my life – genuine love, deep peace, a sense of security, a joy that isn't dependent on circumstances. But none of His gifts are as wonderful as He is. *He* is peace. *He* is beauty. *He* is life itself.

I have been reunited with the One who made me, and the reunion is marvelous.

## Living a Relationship

*I want to know Christ.* (Philippians 3:10, NIV)

Being a Christian is not living a set of rules.  
It is living a relationship.

It's like a marriage.

What God wants most from us is to

*love the Lord your God with all your heart . . . soul . . . mind and . . . strength*

(Mark 12:30).

I've learned that when my wife wants something –

when she's irritable or withdrawn –

what she usually wants is *me*.

She wants to share with me.

She wants us to truly be together for a while.

Jesus is the same.

When He wants something from me,

He wants *me*.

Not some great work of service –

*me*.

He wants me to turn to Him.

He wants to live that moment,

every moment,

in relationship with me.

He wants us to walk together

day-by-day,

step-by-step.

*God is not a set of rules*

*but a person.*

*He Himself is the only source of*

*all that He wants for us, of*

*all holiness, love, and goodness.*

*So His primary goal for us is*

*always only*

*relationship with Himself.*

## **What Was Jesus Really Like?**

What was Jesus really like as a person? What IS He really like? If we were to physically spend some relaxed time with Him, how would we honestly describe Him?

We have no photos, movies, or even personality profiles of Him. But we have four accounts of how He lived and interacted with a wide variety of people in various situations. What do their reactions tell you about Him?

**SINNERS:** Jesus related comfortably to the morally disreputable people of His day. Other religious people shunned them. Jesus spent casual time with them. And they enjoyed being with Him. (Matthew 9:9-13; 11:16-19; Luke 15:1-2; 19:1-10)

**WOMEN & CHILDREN:** Jesus struck up a socially-unconventional conversation with a woman – a Samaritan woman at that, one who had been married five times and was living with another. Then notice how the Samaritans, who were alienated from other Jews, were drawn to Jesus and wanted Him to stay with them (John 4:1-42). When His disciples thought little children were a waste of precious time, Jesus rebuked them. He liked children, made time for them, and held them in His arms (Mark 10:13-16). Women believed in Jesus, generously supported Him, and even traveled with Him (Matthew 26:6-13; Mark 15:40-41).

**THE COMMON PEOPLE:** Large crowds rose early and traveled long distances to hear Him. They sometimes followed Him around for days. Though Jesus was officially unlearned, they sensed an unusual authority in the way He spoke (Matthew 7:28-29; Mark 8:1-8; 12:37b; Luke 21:38; John 7:14-15).

**ROMANS:** Generally, Romans knew little about God and had little use for Jews. But a Roman centurion sensed Jesus' spiritual authority and trusted Him completely (Matthew 8:5-13). Pilate could tell Jesus was innocent even as the Jewish authorities accused Him (Matthew 27:18), and a Roman soldier, watching Him die, knew He was the Son of God (Mark 15:39).

The lowly people of Jesus' day were drawn to Him. What does that tell you about Him?

**Hymn:** [Jesus, Full of Truth and Grace](#)

## Enjoying His Presence

It was a Thursday evening, with most of a long week behind me. My wife was out for the evening, and I felt the urge to take a long drive, just to relax with a change of scenery. I had planned to drive north or west, toward a store or somewhere with people, but instead I felt led to drive south, into more open country.

On a back road I was stopped by a train, and while waiting, I looked up at the sky. It was so clear. The moon, just past half full, was sparkling and bright. It was one of those beautiful scenes that just makes you smile all over. And in those moments, I realized God had brought me out there just to sense and enjoy His presence. He just wanted me to know He was there.

I am discovering that God makes a wonderful companion. When I was dating, I had to save up topics to talk about in order to keep a conversation going. But in God's presence, you don't have to talk all the time, and you don't have to strain to listen for His voice. When you know that He will speak when He's ready, you can relax.

I don't imagine God wants us to feel ill-at-ease in His presence. I don't like it when people feel uncomfortable around me. It usually indicates they don't know me, don't like me, or don't trust me. Like any good Friend, God wants us to feel relaxed in His presence, sharing our words or our silence, whichever our need may be.

The writer of Psalm 73 must have had a similar experience with God. Through most of the Psalm, he complains that the wicked prosper while the righteous scrimp to survive. He was beginning to wonder if living a righteous life was worth it...till he entered the sanctuary. There, after experiencing God's presence, he understood how swift and certain the destruction of the wicked would be, as they would be cut off completely and forever from the goodness of the Creator.

The Psalmist then ends his Psalm. Note the warm, personal tone of one who knows he is with God at that very moment:

*I am always with you; you hold me by my right hand.  
You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will take me into glory.  
Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you.  
My flesh and my heart may fail,  
but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever...  
it is good to be near God. (Psalm 73:23-28, NIV)*

Perhaps what God most wants you to know is that He is right there with you, as a real, living being. Knowing that, and treating Him accordingly, can transform your entire life.

## In Christ

*Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. (Colossians 3:1-3, NIV)*

Salvation is not so much what Christ *does* as what He *is*. All the blessings that come to us through Christ – love, peace, joy, and more – are His own personal characteristics. They do not come to us as a “something”, wrapped up and handed to us. They come as *He* comes to us and unites His Spirit with ours. They come ***in Him***.

There is a living union with Christ that can best be described as being ***in Him***. It is a union that began in the heart of our Father before the foundation of the world.

*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us ***in Christ*** with every spiritual blessing.*

*He chose us ***in Christ*** before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before Him.*

****In Him*** we have redemption through his blood.*

****In Christ*** we have also obtained an inheritance.*

****In him*** you...were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit. (Ephesians 1:3, 4, 7, 11, 13 NRSV)*

*In Christ the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have come to fullness ***in him***. (Colossians 2:9-10, NRSV)*

Like all the blessings of salvation, living ***in Christ*** comes to us by grace, through faith (Ephesians 2:8). Our union with Him is a living, ongoing relationship of trust. We are one with Him as we trust Him. It's that simple.

Brother or sister in Christ, share with me this one deep longing and constant goal: to live every moment ***in Christ***, trusting Him, now and forever.

*All that matters now,  
all that will matter forever, is  
who we are in Christ.*

Hymn: [I'm in You](#)

## A Living Relationship

*It is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.*  
(Philippians 2:13, NIV)

If I could snap my fingers and make it so, I'd always be centered on Christ, conscious of Him, breathing prayer to Him, resting in Him completely. I'd make it so in a minute if I could. But I can't. It doesn't work that way. And as it is, my focus gravitates from Him to myself. My will is weak and inconsistent.

But to my joy and amazement, I'm finding that I can have a living relationship with Him, one that changes daily, yet is stable. It is stable not because I can make it stable – I can't – but because His love never changes and because His Spirit in me is faithful.

I can love Him and trust Him and grow in Him. I can experience pain and frustration and disappointment, yet still be in Him. And through it all, my relationship with Him grows closer and richer and more personal and wonderful.

Do you need proof for yourself? Look back on your own life. No matter where you are in your walk with Him, you'll see that your spiritual life has been more stable than you could ever have made it.

Look around at the Christian people you know. What an infinite variety of personalities, backgrounds, and levels of maturity! Yet God is able to keep them stable, no matter how flawed and weak they are.

I still wish my heart and mind were immovable in Him, and someday they will be. But for today, I like the living, growing feeling about our relationship. It's so real and warm and human. There's so much room for hope and comfort, pleasure and surprise in Him.

Thank You, my Lord, for staying with me.

*Father, we cannot grasp Your holiness as  
our own permanent possession.  
We only share Your holiness  
through the Holy Spirit of Your Son, Jesus.  
Help us to live  
in His Spirit, in His humility, in His love,  
in His eagerness to please You.*

Hymn: [Now in Christ](#)

## **Daily Life in Christ**

*Don't chase emotional experiences with God.*

*Nurture a continual relationship with Him.*

*Praise Him the way Jesus did:*

*by a life immersed in  
prayer,  
faith, and  
obedience.*

*Love, struggle,  
comfort, challenge,  
work, rest,  
knowledge, mystery—  
all these You give me  
every day.*

*Thank You, Father, for  
the privilege of sharing Your life!  
What an amazing gift!*

*Focus your heart and life  
where your future lies,  
where your  
joy,  
purpose, and  
hope lie—  
in Jesus Christ.*

*Invest yourself completely in Him.  
In all your relationships and  
all your tasks,  
make Him the One you are  
loving and  
serving.*

## Living with Our Imperfections

*Read Philippians 3:7-14*

When we live in close, constant relationship with Jesus Christ, we become aware of how imperfect we are compared to Him. How do we find stability through all our imperfections? Let's follow the example set by the Apostle Paul.

*Whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ, and may be found in Him (Philippians 3:7-8, NASB)*

Turn loose of your past life and the things you used to consider important. Turn loose of them every day. Jesus Christ is your new identity, your new future, your new goal. Focus completely on Him.

*...not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith, that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead. (Philippians 3:9-11, NASB)*

Turn loose of your own worthiness. You cannot make yourself perfect. Living a holy life and pleasing God flow from trusting Jesus step by step.

*Not that I have already obtained it or have already become perfect, but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus. Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 3:12-14, NASB)*

No, you are not yet perfect. But Jesus Christ began this new life in you, and He will perfect you in His way and time as You trust and follow Him (Philippians 1:6). He is your daily strength, your goal, your future. Focus on Him! Through all your imperfections, continue to press ahead toward Him!

Hymn: [The Upward Call](#)



## **Closer, Lord**

I have responsibilities.  
I have needs and concerns.

But Lord, let me dwell on my concerns  
only as much as  
    faith permits and  
    love demands.

Instead of allowing them to  
distract me from You,  
    let's share them, Lord.

Through them,  
    draw me closer to You,  
    Beautiful God.

Let them become opportunities to  
    love You and  
    trust You and  
    make You real to those around me.

Spirit of Christ,  
    breathe my every thought.

Fill my mind,  
    my imagination,  
    my dreams with  
Your love and  
    the wonder of Your presence.

You are my Lord forever!

*Today  
God is drawing you  
toward Himself.*

## **Breath of God**

In both the Old Testament (Hebrew) and the New Testament (Greek), the word we translate as “spirit” also means “breath”. Every living being shares God’s breath in a physical sense. He is the source of all life. All life flows from Him. We breathe His breath. If He withholds it, we die (Psalm 104:29-30).

Our spiritual life is the same: we breathe His breath. His Spirit joins with our spirit as we allow Him...as we trust Him. We don’t become more Christ-like, more holy, more consistent, more adequate for life’s challenges by trying harder. Such personal efforts are useless and frustrating (Romans 7:7-25). God longs to share His own life, His own holiness, His own sufficiency with us. He longs to breathe His Spirit, His breath through us. We just have to trust Him, step by step, need by need.

Life in Christ, and Christ living within us, is beautiful and natural. Joy doesn’t need to be just a temporary emotion. It can flow from our relationship with Him. It can be as unchanging as He is. Life need not end with this physical body. If our life is His life, that life will go on forever.

Oneness with Jesus Christ is the great blessing of heaven. There it will be constant and complete. What a wonderful reality it will be! That oneness is also the greatest good of life here and now. Make it your greatest goal and deepest desire.

*Father, You deliver us from  
futile, self-centered rule-keeping into  
the freedom of walking in Your Spirit,  
trusting Jesus Christ.  
What delicious fruit Your Spirit is  
growing in us!  
Thank You, Father!*

**Hymn: [Life of God](#)**

## Enjoying Christ

*I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. (John 15:5, NIV)*

My ministry. My "mission."  
I get so focused on my work that it becomes  
my preoccupation and my goal in life.

But Lord, You kindly check me at this point.  
Do I really want to do anything more than  
to live in fellowship with You,  
to be conscious of Your presence?  
No, Lord, I don't.  
I want nothing more than You.

All my fruitfulness is in You.  
I don't need to get caught up in achievements or milestones.  
I can relax from the pressure to succeed.  
Moment by moment  
all the wisdom,  
all the working is Yours, my Lord.

I want to simply enjoy You and  
my journey with You,  
remaining open to Your leadership.  
Thank You, Lord!  
Thank You for Your personal love to me.

Jesus, You love me.  
How else could I respond but to love You every moment?

*Lord, I know that more is expected of  
a spouse than of a casual friend, and  
You are the Bridegroom.  
My life is Yours.  
Draw us nearer.  
Help me to hear every word from You as  
the call of love.*

Hymn: [Fruitful in You](#)

## Freedom in Christ

Jesus said,

*"Come to Me...Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light."* (Matthew 11:28-30, NASB)

The Apostle Paul wrote:

*It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. . . . Do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.* (Galatians 5:1, NIV)

Lord Jesus, in what ways am I still in bondage?

In what ways am I not enjoying all the freedom I have in You?

Give me the freedom from self that  
only Your Spirit,  
only Your love brings.

Give me freedom from binding lifestyle patterns and habits  
that limit me from walking constantly in You.

Give me freedom from the anxiety  
that is unnecessary for me now as a child of God.

I come to You, Lord Jesus.

Help me to walk more completely and freely in You.

I am Yours.

I am listening.

I will obey.

*God is all-in-all.  
We can never be free  
FROM Him.  
We can only be free  
IN Him.*

Hymn: [Father, You See Our Need](#)

## If Jesus...

*Offer yourselves to God,  
as those who have been brought from death to life; and  
offer the parts of your body to him as  
instruments of righteousness. (Romans 6:13, NIV)*

If Jesus had your life,  
how would He live it?

If Jesus had your job,  
how would He perform it?

If Jesus had your skills,  
how would He use them?

If Jesus had your money,  
how would He spend it?

If Jesus had your neighbors,  
how would He treat them?

If Jesus had your family,  
how would He show His love for them?

If Jesus saw the needs you see,  
how would He respond?

*The model to which we aspire is not  
money, glory, or  
any standard of human success.  
Our model is Jesus Christ,  
humble,  
obedient,  
self-giving,  
suffering,  
dying, and  
risen forever in the glory of the Father.*

Hymn: [In Your Steps](#)

## Living God

Jesus said, *"My sheep listen to my voice;  
I know them, and they follow me.  
I give them eternal life, and  
they shall never perish;  
no one can snatch them out of my hand.  
My Father, who has given them to me,  
is greater than all;  
no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand.  
I and the Father are one."*  
(John 10:27-30, NIV)

We hear so many voices, both  
from the outside and  
from inside.

But Jesus, when you speak,  
we recognize Your voice.

We recognize  
the Father's love,  
the Father's power,  
the Father's wisdom, and  
the Father's tender care for us.

Jesus, we trust You and  
gladly follow You.

*Father, I long to see  
the whole shining path  
open up before me.  
But You know I can only take  
one step at a time.  
You know the way.  
I will simply walk with You.*

Hymn: [Good Shepherd](#)

## Taking Thoughts Captive

*We take captive every thought  
to make it obedient to Christ. (2 Corinthians 10:5, NIV)*

As she spoke,  
    I felt the obligations piling onto me.  
I started to tighten up as I saw  
    my time and freedom  
    slipping away.

Jesus, You quickly reminded me to  
    commit every task to You.  
I did, and  
    peace returned.

Lord, teach me to take every thought captive and  
consciously turn it to You:  
    every temptation to pride  
    every sense of responsibility  
    every dream  
    every concern  
    every uncertainty

By Your Spirit, turn me  
    more and more toward You.  
Not just my thoughts, Lord.  
    Turn *me* toward You.

That is my greatest need.  
That is the prayer of my heart, Lord Jesus:  
    turn me toward You.

*Father, consume more and more of  
my thought, time, energy, and resources with  
the things that matter most to You.*

**Hymn: [I Fix My Thoughts on You](#)**

## Thank You!

*How can I repay the Lord for all his goodness to me? (Psalm 116:12, NIV)*

Father, thank You!

I thank You for Your beautiful appearances in my daily life.

You whisper Your love for us through simple pleasures.

You share Your wisdom by guiding us at unexpected moments.

You let us glimpse Your power

as You lead us around and through a myriad of needs and problems.

You are so kind and so good!

But Father, I too seldom thank You for Your grander gifts.

They so permeate my heart and my life that I don't always see them.

I can't imagine life without them.

You forgive all my sins,

you heal all my wrongness, and

you set me apart entirely to Yourself,

all at the price of Your own Son.

You sent Him to suffer cruelly for me.

Thank You, Father!

You have poured out on me, and on every believer,

Your own Spirit!

You have breathed into us Your own holy, eternal life!

You give us the mind of Christ and

You grow in us the love of Christ,

all as we simply trust You!

What a gift! Thank You, Father!

Thank You for *blessing us in the heavenly realms*

*with every spiritual blessing in Christ.* (Ephesians 1:3, NIV)

Thank You for giving us

*everything we need for life and godliness.* (2 Peter 1:3, NIV)

Almighty God,

*with you is the fountain of life;*

*in your light we see light.* (Psalm 36:9, NIV)

Thank You, our Glorious Father! Thank You!



## **Seeking Me**

You are the Giver.

I am always the taker,  
never satisfied.

You are love, pure and beautiful.

I am foolish pride.

You are the seeker.

I am the fugitive,  
running from You in blind fear.

You are forever seeking me.

All my existence, from birth to death,  
through every joy,

every pressure,  
every failure,

no matter what I am pursuing,

You are pursuing me.

Through all the magnificence around me and  
through every whisper in my heart,

You are reaching out to me,  
eager to share all You are.

God Almighty,

consumed with love,  
patient and tireless,

You are working to make me  
free and strong,  
beautiful and complete in You.

Every day,

Father,  
Savior,  
Spirit,

You are seeking me.

**Hymn: [Seeking Me](#)**

## **Working and Resting in You**

Eternal God, I lift my eyes to You.  
You are above all time and its sovereign Lord.  
Time cannot rush You or restrain You.  
You created it in love, and  
    You wield it in perfect wisdom.

We are limited creatures, locked into the here and now.  
So how foolish we are to pretend to be the masters of our time.  
We frantically try to manage what is beyond our control.  
Our rushed schedules are futile attempts at bringing  
    productivity and balance into our  
    confused and tired lives.

But Father, You show us Jesus.  
Teach us to live as He lived.  
He had so much to do  
    in so little time,  
    yet He never seemed rushed.  
He was busy,  
    but not hurried or tense.  
His life was endless interruptions,  
    yet He seemed to flow with them, easily and naturally.  
Many of His most beautiful words and works  
    grew out of those unscheduled encounters.

How did He do it?  
What made Him so different,  
    so **able** in every situation?  
He had only one agenda, Father:  
    Your will, wherever it led, whatever it demanded.  
He was constantly, completely available to You.  
He was constantly, completely at peace in You.  
Pleasing You was His only goal.

Like Jesus, Father, You are all my peace.  
    You are all my fruitfulness.  
Today, help me to live like Him.  
Today, help me to live as a branch in the Vine, always  
    working and resting in You.

## Lord of Time

(Hymn)

I fight with time. I rush. I wait.  
I plan. I press. I stay up late.  
I try so hard to regulate  
What only You control.

Great Lord of time, above its flow,  
You give us time to change, to grow,  
To learn to live the love we owe  
To You, all-gracious God!

In Christ we learn what time can be:  
A frame for love unrushed and free,  
The pure and perfect harmony  
Of life immersed in You.

The fruitfulness that we pursue  
Flows not from what our plans can do  
But Lord, from living all in You,  
The ever-fruitful Vine.

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### Hymn: [Lord of Time](#)

*Father,  
in the pressures of the day,  
help me to be  
less focused on my circumstances and  
more focused on You –  
knowing You,  
trusting You, and  
serving You.  
Keep me focused on  
Your agenda, not mine.*

## **Moment by Moment**

*Read John 5:19-20, 30; 14:10*

Father, Jesus always only  
said what You told Him to say and  
did what You showed Him to do.

Thus He was  
always in You,  
always in the moment,  
always focused on You,  
always fully responding to You.

That is what I want, Father.  
Give me His mind and  
His Spirit.

I am too often  
distracted from You and  
distracted from the individuals, needs, and opportunities  
right in front of me.

Father, may my heart and mind be  
always here,  
always now,  
always trusting,  
always listening,  
always open to the gentle wisdom of Your love.

Keep me  
like Christ,  
in Christ,  
moment by moment.

*For Himself and  
for His followers,  
Jesus measures success  
only one way:  
pleasing His Father.*

**Hymn: [Like Christ, in Christ](#)**

# **Growing in Christ**

## **The Miracle of Growth**

*Read Genesis 1*

Great Creator, You love to grow things!  
I am struck by that truth as I look all around me.  
Growth is woven into the very fabric of this world.

Living things start  
    smaller and  
    weaker,  
then gradually grow  
    larger and  
    more mature.  
In their maturity they produce more of their own kind.  
Wow!  
What a glorious privilege that is  
    for all Your creatures!

Growth leads to maturity.  
Growth leads to fruitfulness.  
Your full and perfect will for each of Your creatures comes through  
    growth.  
That is Your way.

O my Creator, that's what I want:  
    I want Your full and perfect will.  
    I want to grow into all You designed me to be.

*When our relationship with  
the True and Living God is right,  
we become who we were created to be.*

## Consider the Seed

Jesus said:

*“Behold, the sower went out to sow; and as he sowed, some seeds...fell on the good soil and yielded a crop, some a hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty.”*  
(Matthew 13:3-4, 8, NASB)

Consider the seed.

It's so small and  
hard and  
dry –  
very unspectacular in appearance.

We bury it in the earth.

We water it. We tend it.

We protect it. We watch it.

And do you know what happens?

Nothing.

Nothing happens... at least not immediately.

But hidden in that seed is a mysterious, powerful, irrepressible life.

And if we wait patiently,

one day a tiny, tender sprout begins to push up through the earth.

That sprout becomes a little stem,

and after much more watering and tending and protecting,  
it produces flowers for us to see and smell.

It gives delicious fruit for us to eat and enjoy.

But do you know what else it produces?

More seeds!

Our one seed is now hundreds, even thousands of seeds.

And if those seeds fall to the ground and die,

some will bear flowers and fruit and  
give more and more seeds.

The entire earth could become a beautiful, fruitful garden  
from one seed.

Jesus Christ was

one seed.

Each of us is

just...one...seed.

## Your Kingdom Grows

Read Mark 4:1-32

Father, You choose to work through growth.

Growth is woven into the fabric of Your creation.

Your own Son made Himself part of this creation and shared its growth:

*The child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was on Him.* (Luke 2:40, NASB)

Your Son came bringing Your Kingdom, and

like every other living thing in this creation,

it would start small and grow.

*"The kingdom of God...is like a mustard seed, which is the smallest of all seeds on earth. Yet when planted, it grows and becomes the largest of all garden plants." (Mark 4:30-32, NIV)*

The seed of Your Kingdom is powerful and fruitful.

In some ways it seems to grow all on its own.

*"This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the ground. Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how. All by itself the soil produces grain – first the stalk, then the head, then the full kernel in the head. As soon as the grain is ripe, he puts the sickle to it, because the harvest has come." (Mark 4:26-29, NIV)*

But the soil must receive the seed.

The soil must allow the seed to take root.

The soil must not allow fruitless weeds to choke out the powerful, fruitful, life-giving seed.

*"These are the ones who have heard the word, but the worries of the world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful." (Mark 4:18-19, NASB)*

O Father, You have sowed Your gracious word in the soil of my heart.

I joyfully receive it!

I will give it room to grow.

I will give it priority in my heart, knowing that as I do,

it will grow and bear all the beautiful fruit of

Your life, Your love, and Your holiness in me.

Praise to You!

## Grow Us in Christ

Some soil won't receive and nurture the seed of God's Word.  
But the life in the seed is so powerful that  
wherever it is sown,  
it finds receptive soil and  
produces abundant fruit.

*So is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it. (Isaiah 55:11, NIV)*

Read the book of Acts and watch the promise come true.  
Struggles and problems come, but the Word keeps growing (Acts 6:1-7).  
Persecution comes, but the Word keeps growing (Acts 12:20-24).  
Opposition is strong and persistent, but the Word keeps growing (Acts 19:18-20).

God makes things grow, and He cannot be stopped.

And what is His task?

What is He doing?

He is growing a people (1 Peter 2:9-10).

He is growing

- a conquering Church (Matthew 16:18),
- a fruitful vine (John 15:1, 5),
- a living temple (Ephesians 2:19-22),
- a holy bride (Ephesians 5:25-27),
- the body of His glorious Son, Jesus (Ephesians 4:11-15).

Father, we want to be included in all You are growing.

Grow in us

- the grace of Christ,
- the knowledge of Christ (2 Peter 3:18),
- the faith of Christ (2 Thessalonians 1:3), and
- the love of Christ (Philippians 1:9).

Grow us more and more

- like Him,
- in Him, and
- unto Him.



## **Care for Your Precious Plant**

If you had a precious plant,  
    whether a flower, vine, tree, or crop,  
and you very much wanted it to reach its maximum health and fruitfulness,  
    what would you do?  
    How would you care for it?

It's true that only God can make it grow (1 Corinthians 3:6-9).  
But you are His fellow worker.  
What could you do to help your plant  
    reach its full potential?

- You would give it the right amount of nourishment.
- You would give it the right amount of water.
- You would place it so that it gets the proper amount of light.
- You would repeatedly, diligently remove anything that fruitlessly saps the life of the plant.  
    You would  
        weed it or  
        prune it.
- You would make sure the plant remains connected to its source.  
    A disconnected branch or  
    an uprooted flower  
    will quickly wither and die.

Your relationship with God is a living thing.  
    Nourish it.  
    Keep it exposed to the Light.  
    Remove anything that hinders it.  
    Make sure it stays connected to its Source.  
Keep it healthy!  
Keep it growing!

## **Prune Me**

*Read John 15:1-8; 1 Corinthians 6:12; 10:23*

Father,  
Creator,  
Source of all that is good,  
    all life and fruitfulness flow  
        from You  
        through Jesus Christ.

He is the Vine, and  
    I am a branch in Him.

All that is  
    good and  
    beautiful and  
    life-giving,  
all that is You in me,  
    flows through my connection with Him.

Prune me, Lord.  
Clean away all that fruitlessly drains Your life-giving sap.  
Cut off all that hinders the flow of the Spirit between  
    Christ and  
    me.

Remove all that clutters my  
    mind,  
    heart, and  
    life  
without connecting me closer to Him.  
Strip away  
    all that is not love,  
    all that is not Christ.

O merciful, all-wise, all-loving Lord,  
    prune me  
that more of You  
might flow freely  
through me.

**Hymn: [Life in the Vine](#)**

## **Hold Steady While He Works**

I went to the dentist today.  
He crowned one of my teeth,  
    giving new life to  
    a tooth beyond repair.  
On another he filled a cavity  
    where decay had set in.

Most of the time I didn't understand what he was doing.  
I certainly could never have done it for myself.  
He did everything.  
All I did was trust him.  
    I sat quietly.  
    I cooperated with him,  
        doing as I was asked.  
His work wasn't always comfortable –  
    I knew it wouldn't be.  
But when the discomfort came,  
    I tried to bear it patiently,  
    without flinching.  
I knew he was working for my best.

It made me think of You, Father.  
I often don't know what You're doing.  
Sometimes it hurts.  
But I know you have my best interests at heart.  
So I try to do my little part.  
    I cooperate with You.  
    I try to do as You ask.  
    I wait patiently, though it sometimes seems to take forever.  
    When it hurts, I hold steady.  
I trust You, Father, and  
I am so grateful for the wonderful things You are doing in me  
    far beyond my understanding.

## How Can We Describe It?

Father, today Your life  
fills my entire being.  
How can I describe it?  
Your Word says  
it is like breathing the breath of God.  
It is like a river of life constantly flowing within.  
It is like a deep, inexpressible joy.

Father, as I trust You,  
Your life grows in me,  
day by day.  
Your Spirit joins with my spirit, and  
I become more and more like  
Your human, holy Son,  
Jesus Christ.  
He lives in me,  
constantly and forever, and  
I in Him.

*God has planted His life within us.  
If we allow,  
He will blossom and  
grow and  
make us beautifully fruitful.  
But keep your heart and life weeded.  
Concerns for this earthly life and  
desires for other things  
can choke the precious seed.*

**Hymn: [Living Christ](#)**

## Growing Me to You

*"The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed...  
This is smaller than all other seeds,  
but when it is full grown,  
it is larger than the garden plants and becomes a tree."  
(Matthew 13:31-32, NASB)*

God, You are growing me to You.

Sometimes I want to leap to You.  
Sometimes I want You to lift me up to You.

But You just keep growing me –  
through all the pain,  
the joy,  
the mysteries, and  
the discoveries that growing brings.

You are God Most High,  
perfect and complete.  
You cannot grow.

But You are growing us all to You.

*Depending on the Spirit  
frees us from  
slavery to our own weakness.  
He is growing in us the  
glory,  
greatness, and  
beauty of Jesus Christ.*

Hymn: [Walking with You](#)

## Knowing Jesus Better

*I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ...  
may give you the Spirit of  
wisdom and  
revelation,  
so that you may know him better.  
(Ephesians 1:17, NIV)*

If being a Christian is  
knowing You, Jesus,  
then growing spiritually is  
knowing You better.

I don't want to just know *about* You, my Lord.  
I want to know *You*.  
I want to know You as You really are –  
as You really are right now, here with me.

Saul turned from killing Christians  
to vigorously arguing for You in just a few days (Acts 9:1-22).  
The difference wasn't additional study.  
The difference was meeting You.  
He saw You as You are,  
and it changed him radically, forever.

Jesus, my Lord God, I want to know You.

*Father,  
I come to You this morning  
through Your Word,  
eager to know You better and  
hungry for  
the mind and Spirit of Christ.*

Hymn: [I Want to Know You](#)

## **One with Christ\***

God's goal and desire is to make us one with Himself. Each of us. All of us. That has always been His amazing purpose.

But for many believers, Jesus is like an unnoticed guest, shut up in some little-visited closet in a corner of their house. He has been there since they believed in Him and received Him. He longs to make Himself known to them, to be one with them in their daily lives and share in all their interests. But He will not force Himself on anyone.

They walk through their lives unaware of their Guest, ignorant of their marvelous privileges. They come and go, lay their plans, make their decisions, pursue their joys here and there, long for peace, stumble through relationships, and inwardly mourn their unsatisfying lives, all with little reference to Him.

Believer, hear this beautiful, life-changing truth: The Lord is with you! The Lord is in you! Throw open every door to Him. Make Him the center of every part of your life. Talk to Him. Thank Him. Consult Him. Trust Him. Lean on Him. Get to know Him.

But this picture of Jesus as a guest doesn't fully express the reality. He longs to join His innermost life to our innermost life, to the essence of who we are. Through a living relationship, built on trust, He will come more and more into real union with us. His will becomes our will. His actions become our actions. His love, His passion, His holiness become increasingly ours – not in theory, not in ecstatic emotion, not someday and far away, but now, in living, daily reality.

Like every part of salvation, this happens by God's love, through simple faith. It comes by turning to Him and trusting Him, one step at a time.

*\*\*"One with Christ" was inspired by chapter 17 of "The Christian's Secret of a Happy Life", by Hannah Whitall Smith, 1875.*

*Father, You put within me  
the Spirit of Your holy Son Jesus,  
a Spirit that  
longs for You,  
trusts You, and  
worships You.  
Help me to keep in step with His Spirit.*

## **More and More**

*We instructed you how to live in order to please God, as in fact you are living.  
Now we ask you and urge you in the Lord Jesus to do this more and more.  
(1 Thessalonians 4:1, NIV)*

Jesus, in what areas have I been instructed how to live, and  
perhaps I'm living that way to some extent,  
but You want me to live more and more that way?

Help me be  
    more and more loving to others in practical ways and  
    more sensitive to their needs.

Help me trust You  
    moment by moment,  
    more and more.

Help me turn to You  
    more often throughout the day.

Keep my thoughts  
    pure and  
    holy and  
    full of thanksgiving to You.

I love You, Lord!  
Increase our fellowship  
    more and more.

*Father,  
Jesus is  
everything You are and  
everything You want us to be.  
We daily feed our  
    minds,  
    hearts, and  
souls on Him.*



## What Gifts Would You Give?

*Not that I have already obtained all this, or  
have already been made perfect,  
but I press on to take hold of that for which  
Christ Jesus took hold of me...  
Forgetting what is behind and  
straining toward what is ahead,  
I press on toward the goal to win the prize  
for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.  
(Philippians 3:12-14, NIV)*

Father, what riches await me in Christ?  
What gifts would You eagerly give  
if I would receive them,  
if I would just look to You and  
trust You more simply?

What peace,  
what Christlikeness,  
what love,  
what living truth,  
what natural fruitfulness?

I look to You and long for You, my Father.  
Lead me out.  
Lead me on.

*Father, we don't receive  
all the wonderful gifts  
You would gladly give,  
but only what our  
cluttered hearts and lives will allow.*

Hymn: [Lead Me On](#)

## Titus 2:11-14

[Jesus] gave himself for us to redeem us...and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good. (Titus 2:14, NIV)

Redeemer, redeem my time.  
Break wasteful patterns and petty addictions.  
Relaxing in You, let me  
    rise in You and  
    walk in You throughout the day,  
    listening and following unafraid.

Redeemer, redeem my mind.  
As I look to You,  
    my thoughts are purified and focused.  
Let me look to You more naturally and eagerly, Lord Jesus.

Redeemer, redeem my words.  
Let bitterness and selfishness be gone forever.  
Let me always speak with  
    the gentleness of love and  
    the warmth of Your presence.

Redeemer, redeem me, not just in name but  
    through and through.

*Father, following Christ is not  
    a part-time job or even  
    an occupation.  
    It is to consume  
all my energies, all my concerns, and  
    all my relationships.  
    It demands everything I am,  
everything I control, everything I influence.  
Father, I want to be like Jesus,  
    live like Jesus, and  
    love like Jesus.*

Hymn: [Always in You](#)

## Our Patient Father

*To the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be holy...I always thank God for you because of his grace given you in Christ Jesus. For in him you have been enriched in every way – in all your speaking and in all your knowledge...Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed. He will keep you strong to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God, who has called you...is faithful. (1 Corinthians 1:2, 4-5, 7-9, NIV)*

These glowing words to the church in Corinth don't seem surprising until I read the rest of the book and learn how carnal and spiritually immature they were. *"Sanctified...you have been enriched in every way - in all your speaking and in all your knowledge...you do not lack any spiritual gift...He will keep you strong to the end...blameless."* Lord, I'm not sure I would have spoken to them in these terms.

I am amazed that You look at us this way, Father. We are so selfish and immature at times - and yes, so pagan. Yet You have put Your life within us. We are rich in You, fully equipped in every way, on the road to being blameless. You patiently nurture and teach and correct us. You are not short-tempered with us. In fact, You seem to enjoy our growth process.

Father, thank You for Your tenderness. Keep me tender and patient toward those to whom I minister, those who share my failures and shortcomings. Give me Your view of them, Your heart for them, Your joy in their gradual growth.

Praise to You, wonderful Father!

*Master Gardener,  
You grow us.  
You raise us from unlikely beginnings and  
transform us into  
beautiful creations that  
glorify You.  
How amazing You are!*

Hymn: [Growing in God](#)

## **Shape Me, Lord**

My Father,  
I see You only dimly.  
I see little of the needs around me,  
    or of the depths of my own need.  
I do not see what the future holds.  
You see.  
Shape me, Lord.

I am weak and  
    selfish,  
    inconsistent and  
    short-sighted.  
I know but do not do.  
You are love.  
Shape me, Lord.

You are Creator and Provider,  
    Shepherd and Servant,  
    Helper and Healer,  
    Forgiver and Friend and Holy Father.  
I want to be Your child.  
Shape me, Lord.  
Shape me.

*Father,  
as I bow to You,  
You see the needy creature that I am.  
Without You I am  
helpless and  
unworthy.  
I look up to You and  
trust You and  
wait on You.*

**Hymn: [Hear His Call](#)**

## **Running the Race**

*Read Hebrews 12:1-3*

Father, help me lay aside  
everything that is weighing me down and  
holding me back.  
Everything, Lord.  
Every habit,  
every false and fuzzy way of thinking,  
every misplaced priority,  
every laziness.  
Fix my eyes on Jesus –  
His life,  
His holiness,  
His complete devotion to You.

Father, are any of my former  
thoughts,  
words, or  
ways  
still clinging to me?  
Cleanse them away.  
Help me to put them off completely.  
I want to be like Jesus Christ.

If you are following Jesus,  
you are traveling  
against the current.  
Expect resistance.  
You are going  
the right way in  
a wrong-way world.

## Lead Me Out, Lord

*"Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden light.*  
(Matthew 11:28-30, NASB)

Lord, thank You for calling me to a  
deeper, more peaceful place in You.

I don't want my life  
to be encompassed by  
my fears,  
my ignorance, and  
my own comforts.

Lead me out, Lord.  
Lead me out further  
into Christ,  
into Yourself,  
into a life encompassed by  
love,  
trust,  
and single-minded devotion to You.

Revise my life.  
Rewrite it freely.  
Renew it in Your image.  
Lead, my Lord, and I will follow.

*Don't squander your life on  
shallow and temporary stimulations.  
It's not enough to  
FEEL better.  
You can  
BE better.  
You can breathe  
the life and love of God.*

Hymn: [Lord, Draw Me On](#)

## **What Is Hindering Me?**

Jesus, I fix my eyes on You.  
What is hindering me from  
    following You more boldly?  
What is distracting me from  
    hearing Your words more clearly?  
What will I gladly throw aside after  
    just one glimpse of eternity?

Speak, Lord.  
Speak Your love, and  
    I will listen.

*Father, I know that  
even Your judgment is  
an expression of Your love.  
You destroy in order to build up.  
Do I have any  
    habits or  
    attitudes  
You'd like to destroy?  
In what ways am I not living up to  
Your full provision for me?  
Do what pleases You, Father.*

**Hymn: [Nothing Between](#)**

## What Is Beneficial?

*“Everything is permissible for me” – but not everything is beneficial. “Everything is permissible for me” – but I will not be mastered by anything. Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body. (1 Corinthians 6:12, 19-20, NIV)*

Father, guide my lifestyle and shape my habits by these verses.

Everything is allowable to me, but  
    which things are beneficial?  
Which are beneficial to our relationship, Father, and  
    to Your purposes?  
Which are beneficial to those I influence?  
Those things that are not beneficial,  
    things that bind me,  
    things that hinder our relationship or Your work or Your people,  
help me to set them aside.  
I must not let them encumber  
    Your ministry through me.

Cleanse my life of them, Father.  
Take each one away.  
You know that I need Your help with this, but  
    as You lead, I will obey.

I am Your temple.  
I am bought with Your blood.  
I am not my own.  
Lord, help me to glorify You  
    with every part of me,  
    with everything I do and say.

*Father,  
if any of my habits have enslaved me,  
    delivery me.  
My time and energies are  
    Yours alone.*

Hymn: [Open Hands](#)



## **Love That Teaches**

*Read Hebrews 12:5-11*

“Father” has grown to be the name for God that is most dear and meaningful to me. This personal name expresses intimacy and belonging. It reminds me of His deep love for me as His own son. And when I speak it to Him, the word says, “I love You and trust You and reverence You.”

But the scripture above adds a new side to this picture of God as my Father. It says that God disciplines all His children...including me.

I remember when my three children were teenagers. I came to realize that they would only grasp many truths through personal experience. I could talk and talk, but some lessons would never penetrate their shells. Like all of us, they would base their decisions on how they saw the world. Unfortunately, there is so much of the world they had not yet seen. But pain is a great teacher, and they would learn, just as we did.

I think of my own life. If I didn't experience all the tough times, how much would I really understand of God's tender, personal love for me? Would I realize that He cares about my finances, my car, my children, my job – everything I care about – and that He is willing to be involved in all those areas?

How often did I cry out in desperation, “Lord, You are able. Why don't You just take away these desires?” Yet without those shameful failures, would I have learned how totally, constantly I must depend on Him? Would I have tasted the depths of my own self-centeredness, the terrible bondage of sin, or the wonderful freedom of holiness?

Without the demands of family life, would we ever understand the demands of love, or its blessings?

He has spoken so many truths to us in the Bible, and He has called us to simply trust Him. But these truths often don't come alive for us until we experience life's discipline.

Remember, God is not a scowling disciplinarian, standing over us with a switch in His hand. Our Father is not like that. He is eager to teach us, eager to lift us and show us how deeply He cares. His heart is anxious to give us His very best, and not even the life of His only Son is too great a price to pay. Trust Him. Look to Him in everything, and let each situation teach You more about His love for you.

**Hymn: [The Father's Gifts](#)**

## Inspiration

In her book, [\*A Pilgrim at Tinker Creek\*](#),

Annie Dillard describes how inspiration works.

She says a muse doesn't tell us to "Write this!"

A muse suggests.

A muse prompts.

"Get up.

I want to show you something.

Stand here and look that direction."

I've found her description so true.

That is the way God has so often inspired me.

He doesn't demand,

"Copy this down!"

He is a gentle voice in odd moments.

"Read this."

"Look there."

"Ask yourself this..."

Many of my most precious and fruitful times have begun  
exactly that way.

I'm still learning to turn to Him

when I have a few spare minutes,

to stay open to

small promptings,

mundane tasks, and

unscheduled visits.

These are life's priceless opportunities.

The Lord often shows up

in disguise,

without warning.

I never ever want to ignore Him when

He comes to me unannounced.

*Like any loving father,  
You spend individual time with Your children.  
You speak to us personally and  
delight when we converse with You.*

Hymn: [Here I Am](#)

# **The Beatitudes**

## **Living in the Father's Presence**

We are needy creatures living in a material world. We need food, shelter, and clothing. To meet these needs, we work, we worry, we gather and grasp. And if we get more than we need for today, we hungrily store it away for the future.

By nature, we are self-centered, driven by desires of which we are only vaguely aware. We long to wrap ourselves in pleasure and security and the admiration of others. We crave glory and gold.

And so it goes. We live, we long, we scramble, and we die, with our hearts entwined with the physical world around us.

But our Creator made us for better things. He made us to be like Himself, to share the endless abundance of all He is. He designed us for love...for eternity. But when we turned away from Him so long ago, we lost sight of our birthright and our destiny. We degenerated into the fearful, selfish creatures that we are.

But our Creator didn't abandon us. He sent His own divine Son as a human being like us, to show us Who He is and who we can be. He came to renew us in the full image of our holy and loving Creator. He came to teach us that this Creator is our Father, and that He longs to be our Father in a deeper and more personal sense. He wants us to realize that He is always with us. His loving eye focuses always on us. He wraps our entire existence in Himself.

Jesus Christ came to teach us and show us what it means to live in the presence of this Father who is all-powerful, all-knowing, and all-loving. He is already aware of our every need. And this Father requires of us only one thing: that we trust Him.

As we trust Him and live before Him, the logic of daily living is turned upside-down. With such a Father, trusting makes sense, not worry. Giving is logical, not grasping. A close relationship with this Father is our highest good, our greatest security, and our deepest pleasure.

## **Blessed**

Jesus spent His entire ministry here teaching and demonstrating a new relationship with our heavenly Father. Life could be full and complete by simply, actively trusting Him. These teachings are especially concentrated in Matthew, chapters 5, 6, and 7, the passage we call the Sermon on the Mount.

Jesus begins His description of this new upside-down life by summarizing God's recipe for success. This recipe is called the beatitudes. Here He pronounces God's blessing on eight character traits. He says that God has decreed the eternal well-being of people who possess these qualities.

But like much of the Sermon on the Mount, the list is surprising, even shocking. Human society tends to prize people who are strong, assertive, and confident, people who provide themselves and others with the physical goods, security, and pleasure.

Jesus' recipe for success is completely different. Realize that only He has experienced both life on this earth and eternal life in heaven. Only He has a complete perspective on what is best. And He says that the person who is truly blessed by our Creator is poor in spirit, meek, merciful and pure in heart. That person mourns, desires righteousness above all else, makes peace, and gladly suffers persecution for obeying God.

What unexpected keys to success! None of these qualities are strength, skill, material goods, or human accomplishment. All these qualities flow naturally from trusting and loving God.

These traits come with wonderful promises from our Father. He has decreed that all who show these qualities will be blessed with the Kingdom of heaven, their Father's rich comfort, rulership of the entire earth, a complete rightness to life, mercy from God, the promise of seeing Him, and the glorious reality of living as His dearly-loved children.

All these blessings concern our inner, eternal person. None are simply material. All will outlast this world. Jesus, the only person with a total view of all of life, urges us to seek these gifts as our Creator's greatest blessings.

**Hymn: [Beatitudes Hymn](#)**

## Blessed Are the Poor in Spirit

*Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*  
(Matthew 5:3, NASB)

God has decreed the well-being of those who are  
poor in spirit.

His sovereign word says they  
will have abundant life and  
will be “prosperous” and “successful” in an ultimate sense, beyond mere money.  
But what does it mean to be “poor in spirit”?

To be poor is to lack possessions.

To be poor in regards to spirit is to have  
a spirit, or a heart, that lacks possessions;  
a spirit that does not “possess” or claim ownership of anything;  
a spirit with no wealth, no glory, no will or way or strength of its own.

Such a spirit is what we had in Eden before the fall.  
Then we were surrounded by God’s abundant gifts,  
but none of them had taken root in our hearts.

We possessed nothing.

We clung to nothing.

We claimed ownership of nothing.

God was all-in-all, and  
our spirits, hearts, and desires  
were reserved for Him.

When we are again poor in spirit, possessing nothing as our own,  
we are free to cling to God alone.

When we do, we enjoy all things in Him.

All He has, all He is, His entire Kingdom  
is ours, and  
we are entirely His.

Blessed indeed is such a person!

Hymn: [Poor in Spirit](#)

## Blessed Are Those Who Mourn #1

Father, we are Your people.  
As we live in Your presence, You say to us,  
    *Blessed are those who mourn,*  
    *for they shall be comforted.* (Matthew 5:4, NASB)  
In what ways should knowing You, Lord,  
    cause us to mourn?

We see this world, and we remember Eden.  
We remember all You had planned for us.  
Now we see all these people You created for Yourself,  
    into whom You breathed Your own life.  
They are so very far from You,  
    their only source of good.  
They sin,  
    they suffer,  
    they cause suffering, and  
    they die.  
O our Father, we mourn for all that has been lost!  
O God, forgive us!  
We see all these dear ones,  
    engulfed in grief and pain,  
    dying in the darkness every day, and  
we mourn with You, loving Father.

We mourn our own sin.  
We were like them, so far from You.  
Evil filled our hearts and minds and hands.  
You redeemed us,  
    You bought us back at the price of Your only Son.  
But even now as Your children,  
    our response to You is so cold and inconsistent.  
We still think and act selfishly.  
We are still fearful and mistrusting,  
    though cradled here in Your loving arms.  
We are easily distracted from You and  
    so indifferent toward You.  
We see You, glorious Father, and  
    we see ourselves, and  
    we mourn.

## **Blessed Are Those Who Mourn #2**

Father,  
    we live in Your presence;  
    we know You;  
    we love You;  
and we mourn.

The nearer we grow to You, Father,  
    the more we mourn  
    our separation from You.  
The more we love You,  
the more we long to be with You  
    completely and  
    constantly,  
    with no separation,  
        no distance,  
        no barriers,  
        no veils,  
    nothing but You.

Father, You Yourself are  
    the comfort for our mourning.  
Your presence is fullness of joy.  
You promised us Your Son, and  
    You have given Him.  
You promised us Your Spirit, and  
    He is with us and in us right now.  
You have also promised to live among us as  
    our God and  
    our Shepherd.  
You have promised to wipe every tear from our eyes.

Father, we are waiting for that day.  
We long for You.  
We mourn for You.  
O Lord, come!

Hymn: [We Mourn](#)

## Blessed Are the Meek #1

*Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. (Matthew 5:5, NIV)*

Father, as we see Your greatness,  
we face our smallness.

As we glimpse Your power,  
we grasp our weakness.

As we marvel at Your transcendence,  
we embrace our lowliness.

Standing before You, humility is  
natural,  
honest, and  
sweet.

As we worship You,  
we forget ourselves.

As we crown You Lord,  
we gladly resign the throne of our lives.

Self-protection is unnecessary, for  
You, Sovereign God, are our protection.

With Psalm 123, we pray:

*As the eyes of slaves look to the hands of their master...  
so our eyes look to the Lord our God. (vv.1-2, NIV)*

As we gaze on Your great glory,  
we abandon our own.

James 4 says:

*God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble...  
Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up. (vv.6, 10, NIV)*

As we rely completely on Your provision,  
we no longer grab and grasp and worry.

We simply pray:

*My heart is not proud, O Lord,  
my eyes are not haughty;  
I do not concern myself with great matters  
or things too wonderful for me.  
But I have stilled and quieted my soul;  
like a weaned child with its mother,  
like a weaned child is my soul within me. (Psalm 131:1-2, NIV)*



## Blessed Are the Meek #2

Father, when Your own Son came to us,  
filled with all the fullness of the godhead,  
He was meek.

He was completely empty before You,  
completely dependent on You.  
He relied on You for everything He said and did.

This Jesus invites us to come to Him. He says:

*Come to me,  
all you who are weary and burdened, and  
I will give you rest.  
Take my yoke upon you and  
learn from me,  
for I am gentle and humble in heart, and  
you will find rest for your souls.  
For my yoke is easy and  
my burden is light.* (Matthew 11:28-30, NIV)

Jesus invites us to lay down  
our constant, crushing burden of self-concern and  
take up the one easy burden of  
simply trusting You.

Father, give us the Spirit of Your Son Jesus.

Give us His Spirit of meekness—  
not weakness, but meekness.

And from His Spirit, grow within us  
His gentle heart with  
His gentle words and  
His gentle hands.

Make us truly and completely Your children, meek before  
You,  
Your people, and  
the world.

Father, empty us of ourselves  
that we may be filled forever with You.

Hymn: [Meekness](#)

## **Hunger and Thirst for Righteousness #1**

*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. (Matthew 5:6, NASB)*

We are not self-sufficient, self-contained beings.

We have needs outside ourselves:

food, water, and air,  
shelter and security,  
relationships and fellowship,  
purpose and meaning,  
knowledge and wisdom.

We are needy, and the Source of all things is God.

We need God in absolutely every way.

We are inherently, completely, eternally, inescapably dependent on Him.

But we have broken our relationship.

We have turned away from Him and

have tried to supply our needs through other sources.

But all these sources are secondary and shallow,

temporary and painfully inadequate.

We have aspired to be gods,

self-sufficient and self-contained.

But we are not and can never be.

This is especially true of our greatest need,

a need we rarely face and only vaguely realize:

We need help to be who we ought to be.

Our most desperate need is our inward weakness.

On our own, we cannot think or act as truth demands.

We sense this weakness, but we don't want to admit it to ourselves or to others.

We don't grasp how broad it is or how deep it goes.

Our own will-power is no match for this weakness,

and none of our reasoning or acquired wisdom can enable us to conquer it.

We are deeply wrong, and

we cannot make ourselves right.

Lord, have mercy!

## Hunger and Thirst for Righteousness #2

Father, You are completely right, and  
we long to be right as You are right.  
O God, we are hungry for it.  
We are thirsty for it – so...very...thirsty!  
We've tried and tasted everything else, and nothing satisfies.  
Nothing can touch this hunger, this thirst.  
All that we've tried is like drinking dust: it only makes us more thirsty.

Our God, we hear Your invitation:  
*Ho! Everyone who thirsts, come to the waters;  
And you who have no money come, buy and eat.  
Come, buy wine and milk  
Without money and without cost. (Isaiah 55:1, NASB)*

We come to You.  
We turn to You, thirsty for Your own Spirit to fill us. Jesus said:  
*"If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, 'From his innermost being will flow rivers of living water.'" But this He spoke of the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were to receive.  
(John 7:37-39, NASB)*

As we come, we find that You are not far away.  
Before we ever thought of coming to You, You came to us.  
You gave Yourself to us,  
You who are the Living Bread. Jesus said:  
*"I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me will not hunger, and he who believes in Me will never thirst." (John 6:35, NASB)*

You Yourself are the Water of Life. Jesus promised us this:  
*"Everyone who drinks of this water will thirst again; but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him shall never thirst; but the water that I will give him will become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life." (John 4:13-14, NASB)*

Almighty God, our Creator, our Father,  
You Yourself are what we long for.  
You Yourself are what we need.  
We hunger and thirst for Your rightness.  
We hunger and thirst for You.

Hymn: [We Taste Your Life and Long for More](#)

## **Blessed Are the Merciful #1**

*Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.” (Matthew 5:7, NASB)*

Father, You are merciful.

You are kind to the  
undeserving.

You are generous even with the  
greedy and selfish.

You freely forgive those who  
wrong You.

You warmly welcome the  
unworthy.

You are gracious and  
patient and  
always good.

You call us to be the same.

If we are to be Your children,  
we are to think and  
love and  
act like You.

We are to be merciful.

What's more, the giving and receiving of mercy are inseparably linked.

We cannot receive Your forgiveness  
unless we extend it to others.

Your forgiveness cannot flow *to* us until it flows  
*through* us.

Until we grant forgiveness to those who have wronged us,  
we remained enslaved by sin,  
suffering the lovelessness,  
resentment,  
anxiety and  
anger that injustice brings.

We can only free ourselves by also  
freeing those who have wronged us.

If mercy is the solution for sin,  
it is the solution for every last one of us.

## Blessed Are the Merciful #2

Father, Your Son showed us the way of mercy.  
While being tortured till death, He prayed,  
    *"Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing."*  
    (Luke 23:34, NASB)  
When I suffer because of someone else,  
    give me His Spirit.  
    Give me His love.

When I am asked to share with the undeserving,  
    give me Your generous heart.  
You lavishly pour out an entire world of blessings on both  
    the wicked and  
    the good.

Father, grow in me  
    Your compassion,  
    Your open heart,  
    Your open hand,  
    Your freedom from selfishness.

May the needy sense in me Your eagerness to  
    smile and help and bless.  
Let all who cross my path,  
    including the unkind,  
get a glimpse of Your beautiful, life-giving mercy  
    through me.

*Every time I interact with someone, Father,  
    help me to remember that  
        You love them  
    as much as You love me.  
Help me treat them that way.*

Hymn: [Let Mercy Shine](#)

## Blessed Are the Pure in Heart #1

*Blessed are the pure in heart,  
for they shall see God. (Matthew 5:8, NASB)*

That echoes Psalm 24, where it says,  
*Who may ascend into the hill of the Lord?  
And who may stand in His holy place?  
He who has clean hands and a pure heart,  
Who has not lifted up his soul to falsehood  
And has not sworn deceitfully.  
He shall receive a blessing from the Lord  
And righteousness from the God of his salvation. (vv.3-5, NASB)*

Father, I long to be pure.  
I long to want only what You want.  
I long for my every desire, every thought, and every action  
to flow from love for You.  
You have planted this desire deep within me.  
I know that I can only live in Your holy presence  
if I have clean hands and a pure heart.

But Father, purity is beyond me.  
I was born in sin.  
My roots sink deeply into it.  
Even when I want to do the right thing,  
without You I am too weak.  
Only You are pure, and  
only You can make me pure.  
You call me to a purity that only You can provide.  
And gracious Lord, You have promised it to me:  
*"I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from  
all your filthiness...I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you...I  
will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes."*  
(Ezekiel 36:25-27, NASB)

Father, You have promised me purity, and  
You have provided it completely through Jesus Christ.  
Praise to You!

## Blessed Are the Pure in Heart #2

Father, thank You for giving me a pure heart through Jesus Christ.  
But what is my part?  
Am I only a passive observer in all this?  
How should I respond to what You have done for me?

Paul wrote:

*Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.*  
(2 Corinthians 7:1, NASB)

*In reference to your former manner of life...lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit...and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.* (Ephesians 4:22-24, NASB)

*Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature.*  
*Rid yourselves of all such things.* (Colossians 3:5, 8, NASB)

Father, Your promises are always a call to faith, and  
faith always demands action.

My faith is in You.

I believe that in Jesus Christ, Your *divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness* (2 Peter 1:3, NIV).

I believe that as I walk in the light,  
I have unbroken fellowship with You, and  
You deliver me from all sin (1 John 1:7).

I believe that as I turn to You and trust You,  
You help me lay aside my old self and  
put on the new self You have created for me.

Holy God, I believe that as I trust and obey You,  
You help me purify my heart and mind and life.

Thank You, Father!

Continue to make me more and more like  
Your pure and beautiful Son, Jesus Christ!

Hymn: [Holy in Me](#)

## Blessed Are the Peacemakers #1

*Blessed are the peacemakers,  
for they shall be called sons of God. (Matthew 5:9, NASB)*

Father, You are the God of peace.  
In You there is no conflict of any kind.  
You are wholeness and harmony.  
You are complete and pure well-being.

You are the ultimate peacemaker.  
You sent Your only Son from Your heavenly peace  
into our battleground world.

Prophets announced Him as the Prince of Peace.  
Saints and angels greeted Him as the coming of Your peace.  
Throughout His 33 years He lived Your peace and taught Your peace  
while wrapped in the most severe poverty and persecution.  
And before returning to You, He spoke Your perfect peace  
into the hearts and lives of His followers:

*“Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give  
to you. Do not let your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful.” (John 14:27, NASB)*

In Christ, You have brought Your peace to us.  
*He Himself is our peace. (Ephesians 2:14, NASB)*

In Christ, we have peace with You.  
*Having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus  
Christ. (Romans 5:1, NASB)*

In Christ, our hearts and minds are wrapped in Your peace  
throughout every circumstance:

*Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with  
thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God,  
which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in  
Christ Jesus. (NASB)*



## Blessed Are the Peacemakers #2

Father, Your peace is more than just a state of mind.

In Christ, You have promised to permeate all creation with Your perfect peace:

*The wolf will dwell with the lamb,  
And the leopard will lie down with the young goat,  
And the calf and the young lion and the fatling together;  
And a little boy will lead them.  
They will not hurt or destroy in all My holy mountain,  
For the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord  
As the waters cover the sea. (Isaiah 11:6, 9, NASB)*

In the meantime, Father, You have left us here, wrapped in Your peace,  
to be Your peacemakers.

You are the ultimate peacemaker.

You made peace here  
by coming to us,  
by crossing every barrier to reach us in our need.

You made peace by  
loving,  
healing,  
forgiving,  
talking,  
listening, and  
giving,  
by accepting suffering daily, and  
in the end, pouring out Your life completely.

You call us to make peace the same way,  
by daily, constantly pouring out our lives for others.

And as we make peace,  
You call us Your children.

Father, what reward could be greater?  
How could we do any less than share the precious gift of  
Your peace?

Hymn: [God of Peace](#)

## Blessed Are the Persecuted #1

*Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

*Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you. (Matthew 5:10-12, NASB)*

The Sermon on the Mount, and particularly the Beatitudes, teach us how to live in the presence of our Father who is almighty, all-wise, all-loving, and always with us. Trusting such a God turns our usual way of living upside-down. Giving now makes sense, not grasping...meekness, not pride...hungering and thirsting after holiness rather than glory and gold. We mourn what others consider normal or even good.

But here, as we suffer persecution and injustice, the opposite happens. In a situation where others mourn, we rejoice. Consider these verses:

*When people insult you and persecute you...rejoice and be glad. (Matthew 5:11-12, NASB)*

*Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials. (James 1:2, NIV)*

*Do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering...rejoice. (1 Peter 4:12-13, NIV)*

Why should we rejoice when life is painfully unjust? Why should suffering that is unfair and even life-threatening become a compelling reason for joy? God's Word gives us these reasons:

1. If we suffer for doing the right thing, we are blessed by Sovereign God. He has decreed our eternal well-being. That is reason to celebrate! (Matthew 5:10-12; 1 Peter 3:14; 4:14)
2. In exchange for temporary suffering, we gain a reward that is infinitely greater and more lasting. It will be the best exchange you ever make! (Matthew 5:10-12; Mark 10:29-30; Romans 8:17-18; 1 Peter 1:3-7; Revelation 2:9-10; 7:13-17)
3. Suffering for doing good puts us in great company. The saints of all the ages, the prophets, and Jesus Christ Himself went through such suffering and are now enjoying their rich reward. They are like an entire stadium full of encouragers, watching as we run our race, cheering us on. (Hebrews 11:1 – 12:3)

## Blessed Are the Persecuted #2

The writers of the New Testament were personally familiar with suffering for Christ. Why do they repeatedly urge us to rejoice when life is painfully unjust? Here are more reasons:

1. Suffering is extremely fruitful. When we are willing to suffer for Christ and for what is right, others take notice. Christ considered His suffering to be His best chance to glorify His Father. It is our best chance as well. As we suffer, we are planting seeds that will grow an abundant, eternal harvest. (John 12:23-28a; Philippians 1:12-14; 2 Timothy 2:8-10)
2. Suffering tests and refines our faith, which is our vital connection with the unseen God. Suffering builds priceless character traits that can't be developed any other way. (Romans 5:1-5; James 1:2-4; 1 Peter 1:6-7; 4:12-14)
3. Most importantly, as we suffer *for* Christ, we are suffering *with* Christ. We are united with Him more deeply. In a very tangible way that goes beyond words, we are embracing His faith in the Father, His commitment to the salvation of the world, and His eternal destiny. We are throwing in our lot completely with Him. We are bound to Him, not just by our promises, but by pain and sacrifice. (Philippians 3:7-11; Colossians 1:24; 2 Timothy 2:11-12)

When Jesus listed the qualities that God blesses most richly, the qualities that are the keys to true and eternal success, the climax of His list was suffering for Christ.

Father, when I have to suffer for following Christ, help me not to be surprised, discouraged, angry, or afraid. You offer each believer a unique opportunity to share in His sufferings in some small way. When my opportunity comes, help me to accept it for what it is: a precious and personal gift from You.

Hymn: [Captives of Eternal Love](#)

## The Beatitudes Describe Jesus #1

Do you want to better understand the Beatitudes,  
or any of the Bible's teachings, for that matter?  
Look at the life of Jesus.  
The Beatitudes are describing Him.  
He is the fullness of the person they are recommending.  
He is the way to the Father,  
the truth about the Father, and  
the life of the Father made human flesh (John 14:6).

He is thoroughly pleasing to His Father.  
At His baptism, the Father spoke from heaven:  
*This is My beloved Son,  
in whom I am well-pleased.* (Matthew 3:17, NASB)

At the transfiguration,  
as Jesus was about to be  
rejected,  
humiliated,  
tortured, and  
murdered by the Jewish leaders,  
the Father repeated His words of glowing approval:  
*"This is My beloved Son,  
with whom I am well-pleased;  
listen to Him!"* (Matthew 17:5, NASB)

The Apostle Paul, having described Jesus' humble obedience  
even to the point of death,  
phrased the Father's pleasure and blessing this way:  
*Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is  
above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven  
and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is  
Lord, to the glory of God the Father.* (Philippians 2:9-11, NIV)

Jesus' life is the life most fully blessed by the Father.  
To understand the Beatitudes, look to Him.

## **The Beatitudes Describe Jesus #2**

To understand the Beatitudes, look at Jesus.

He was poor in spirit.

He had emptied Himself of all His own power and glory.

He made Himself completely dependent on His Father for every word and every action.

Though Lord of all, at His death He owned absolutely nothing.

His only possessions, the clothes on His back,  
were divided by the soldiers as He died.

Yet truly the entirely kingdom of God was His.

He wept with the other mourners at Lazarus' death, and

He wept over unrepentant Jerusalem.

Though already full of righteousness and pure in heart,  
pleasing His Father was His

food and focus and constant passion.

He was meek, and He was merciful.

He spoke one-on-one with people from all walks of life,

including the very lowest levels of society, and

He always showed each individual dignity and respect.

He forgave the worst of them,

even His enemies as they were torturing and killing Him.

Though He was persecuted, pressured, and pursued most of His public life,

He constantly lived God's peace and

spoke God's peace.

In the face of Jewish leaders intent on His execution and

an angry mob calling for His life,

He remained silent and calm.

He never defended Himself, speaking only to faithfully witness to the truth.

Jesus is the life blessed by our Father.

Embrace Him. Exalt Him.

Desire Him. Follow Him.

Be filled and led by His Spirit.

**Hymn: [All in You, Breath by Breath](#)**

# Desiring God

## I Hunger for You

*Read Psalm 63*

My God,  
    my Creator,  
    my Father,  
You are all I hunger for.  
In a world full of  
    broken cisterns and  
    empty promises,  
You are the spring of living water.  
You are rich, eternal food for all I am, for  
    heart and  
    mind and  
    spirit.

You are holiness,  
    rightness,  
    life,  
    joy, and  
    constant, complete sufficiency.  
You are surely, eternally making me  
    more than I ever dreamed I could be.

O God, my God,  
    I long for You!

*Father, You Yourself are  
my treasure, my life, my joy.  
Grow our relationship.  
Teach me to nurture it more and more,  
so that our relationship can become more like  
Your beautiful relationship with  
Your Son, Jesus.*

Hymn: [Psalm 63](#)

## **Reflection on Psalm 16**

Almighty,  
eternal,  
all-encompassing God,  
my Father,

You are my hiding place.

You are my only God,  
my only good,  
my one delight.

Seeking other gods and  
other “goods”

only multiplies trouble.

I choose You,  
all-wise,  
all-loving,  
all-sovereign Lord.

My present and eternal welfare is  
entirely in You.

In *You*, Father –

what a wonderful place to be!

You teach me and guide me with Your  
perfect wisdom and understanding.

I listen for Your voice.

You are my focus.

Your personal presence  
comforts,  
protects,  
sustains, and  
inspires me.

You are my unshakable security.

You are the fullness of joy.

You are the pleasure that  
satisfies and delights me,  
completely and forever.

**Hymn: [Psalm 16](#)**

## **Reflection on Psalm 25**

Almighty Father, I lift my entire being up to You!  
I desire You!  
I need You!

I cannot make myself who I need to be.  
Have mercy on me!  
Teach me.  
Lead me.  
Forgive me.  
Recreate me.

O wise and loving Father, give me  
Your wisdom,  
Your holiness,  
Your strength of heart,  
Your truth, and  
Your unfailing love.

You are my deliverance from evil.  
You are my only protection from  
the vicious enemies of my soul.

You are the only source of  
all that I need.  
You are my only hope.

O God,  
my eyes are continually fixed on You!

*Father,  
I want to be a  
clean vessel,  
fit for Your use.*

**Hymn: [Psalm 25](#)**



## **Reflection on Psalms 42-43**

Father, my life is a tug-of-war between  
the voice of worry and  
the voice of faith,  
between  
the brutal reality of my needs and  
the beautiful reality of Your promises.  
Life daily challenges my trust in You.

But in You,  
even these challenges  
become blessings.  
I am weak,  
but You are my strength.  
Life is grief and sorrow,  
but You are my unchanging joy.  
Life is turmoil,  
but You are unshakable peace.  
The world is noise,  
but You are my song.  
In the darkness of my ignorance,  
You are the Light.  
In my anxious grasping for security,  
You are my daily bread.

O my Father,  
Fountain of Life,  
Living Water,  
nothing else satisfies.  
Nothing else gives me what I need.  
Nothing else makes me who I need to be.  
Nothing else lasts.  
I thirst for  
You.

**Hymn: [Psalms 42-43](#)**

## **Reflection on Psalm 73**

Father, You alone are True Light.  
Only as we see You  
does the world come into focus.

When we lose sight of You –  
when our focus sinks to self –  
all we see is distorted.

The result is fear,  
doubt,  
envy, and  
anxious grasping.

Reality now revolves around us,  
not You.

We begin to see life through a lens of unbelief, and  
as we do, the unbelievers' way of life begins to make sense.

We start to share their values and  
their desires.

O Father, as I turn my eyes back to You,  
I see the truth in all its glorious beauty:

**You** are the truth.

I see life at its wondrous best:

**You** are life.

As I look to You, it is like looking into a mirror:  
my own image begins to change.

I start to reflect Your love,  
Your peace,  
Your holiness,  
Your glory (2 Corinthians 3:18).

You are pure goodness.

You are life's beginning and  
goal and  
richest reward.

Your nearness is our highest good.

**Hymn: [Psalm 73](#)**

## **Living Water**

*If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink,  
you would have asked him and he would have given you living water.  
(John 4:10, NIV)*

Jesus, we're like  
the woman You met at the well.  
You come to us with promises so lofty  
we barely understand them.  
It's hard for us to believe that  
You can provide anything greater than  
what we already have and seek.

We're like the pigs in Matthew 7:6.  
You offer us pearls.  
We find we can't eat them,  
so we trample them as worthless.

But Lord,  
if we simply taste the water You offer,  
we find that we want nothing else.  
Nothing else we have ever desired  
has satisfied us.  
We have always ended up thirsty.  
But more and more,  
we want only You.

Lord, we are thirsty.  
Give us this water.

*Father, I come to You now  
as I have always been:  
empty,  
helpless, and  
totally dependent on You.*

**Hymn: [Hungry for God](#)**

## **Hope Has No Ifs**

Hope keeps us going. Positive expectations pull us forward. On a day-to-day basis, where life is mostly lived, these expectations are often tied to circumstances. Our satisfaction has an “if”:

If I had the day off tomorrow...  
If I could sleep late in the morning...  
If I had a week’s vacation...  
If a big raise would come through...  
If I could get out of this job into a new career...

We tend to hinge our happiness on developments that are both out of our reach and doomed to disappoint when they arrive. Time off work proves to be a mixture of joy and turmoil, like the rest of life. That big raise evaporates into the family budget. The new career eventually becomes just another job.

We place our hopes on things that are too temporary to meet our true needs and too shallow to touch the root of our discontent. Our lives are thus driven by misdirected hopes and dragged down by restlessness and frustration.

But we don’t have to let circumstances define our joy or fruitfulness. Recall your personal encounters with God – when you first trusted Him for salvation, and when you’ve trusted Him since on matters big or small. Sensing His reality and His presence, you tasted a satisfaction and a settled rest that are more constant than temporary situations. They grow from a hope that is deep and unchanging.

We all experience a certain restlessness in life. We find ourselves reaching for more, whether that “more” be new purchases, physical pleasure, or personal achievement. But bring your restlessness to God. Direct your restless seeking toward Him, making Psalm 62 your testimony:

*My soul finds rest in God alone...  
My hope comes from him...  
Trust in him at all times...  
Though your riches increase,  
do not set your heart on them.* (Psalm 62:1, 5, 8, 10, NIV)

When God becomes the focus of our seeking, our satisfaction is no longer an “if”. All His promises, all His love ever wanted for us, all He is, has come to us in Jesus Christ. As we look to Him and trust Him, He becomes our happiness and our hope. Only Jesus Christ brings rich and satisfying contentment.

## **Hear the Voice of Love**

*Submit yourselves, then, to God...*

*Come near to God and he will come near to you.*

*(James 4:7-8, NIV)*

I passed the television and  
reached out my hand to turn it on.

But I felt You prompt me to  
turn to You and  
pray instead.

I obeyed, and  
I was glad I did.

I was even gladder when I realized that  
You had specifically wanted me to come to You,  
my Savior, my Brother, and my Friend.

Lord, help me hear all Your promptings  
not as demands from a higher authority but  
as personal invitations from You.

May each request remind me of  
the intimate moments we have enjoyed and  
the many times You have come and met my need.

Each word from You is an invitation to  
draw closer.

Help me to always hear Your voice as  
the voice of love.

*Father, through all my inconsistencies and  
all the troubles of life,  
Your love for me is  
alive and  
warm and  
new every day.*

**Hymn: [Constant Love](#)**

## **Reflection on Psalm 26**

Father, You know my current situation.

You understand it in a way

I cannot.

Examine me.

Test me.

If any of the problem is in me,

purify me.

In Your mercy,

refine away anything that is not

You.

I am opposed and pressured in this evil world, but

I trust

You.

I desire

You.

I love

You.

I praise

You!

I am surrounded by those who choose

evil and

self,

lies and

vanity,

glory and

gold.

But Holy Father, I choose

You.

I choose Your people.

I take my stand with them.

No matter what comes,

we fix our eyes on You!

We follow You!

We trust You!

**Hymn: [Psalm 26](#)**

## **An Undivided Heart**

*Teach me your way, O Lord,  
and I will walk in your truth;  
give me an undivided heart  
that I may fear your name.  
(Psalm 86:11, NIV)*

Father,  
I am so easily distracted.  
Success,  
    failure,  
    abundance,  
    need,  
    pride, and  
    insecurity  
can either draw me away from you or  
    bring me running,  
    kneeling to You and  
    longing for You.

Father, though my mind wanders,  
give me an undivided heart and  
a life wholly devoted to You.

*Father, help me to always live  
    in response to You,  
    not in response to the  
        troubles,  
        temptations, or  
    distractions of the world around me.*

**Hymn: [An Undivided Heart](#)**

## The Simplicity of Love

*I am jealous for you with God's own jealousy, for I promised you in marriage to one husband, to present you as a pure virgin to Christ. But I fear that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts might be led astray from a simplicity toward Christ. (2 Corinthians 11:2-3, author's translation)*

We are engaged to Christ, and we need to hold onto the simplicity of that relationship.

I was drawn to the word "simplicity" in the above verses because at times, my Christianity has seemed anything but simple. My relationship with God seemed fuzzy, distant, and strained. I wasn't sure what was expected of me, nor how to accomplish it. And I wasn't sure what God thought of me with all my failures.

In the original language, the word translated "simplicity" means a singleness of mind and heart. No pretending. No divided loyalties. The word is used lots of different ways in the Bible. Sometimes "purity" is the sense. That's the case above, where the writer refers to the faithfulness of a bride to her husband. Sometimes "sincerity" fits well. When connected with financial giving, "generosity" is the meaning. We're urged to give with a "simplicity" that gives openly, holding nothing back. After all, that's the way God gives to us (see James 1:5).

But with all these shades of meaning, the one word that summarizes it best for me is "wholeheartedness." That means having one purpose and one loyalty. It's a singleness of mind that expresses itself in undistracted devotion.

Notice in the opening scripture that this undistracted devotion comes from an intimate, face-to-face love. It's like the wholeheartedness of a marriage engagement. If you're married, do you remember your engagement? Spending time together, sharing feelings and concerns, expressing genuine love, being totally faithful to each other – all these actions were so natural. You felt no strain, no obligation, no dry routine. You did it all because you simply enjoyed each other. You were in love.

Your relationship with Jesus Christ can be like that. Look to Him, and discover how beautiful He is, and how wonderful He can be in Your daily life. Fall in love with Him – or if you've known Him, fall in love all over again.

Never forget that being a Christian is nothing but the simplicity and wholeheartedness of a personal love relationship with Jesus Christ as a living, wonderful Being.



## **I Cannot Live Half-heartedly**

Father, You love with a burning love.  
I cannot stand before You and live half-heartedly.  
Speak, Lord, and I will listen.  
    I will trust.  
    I will follow You.

### **Help Me to Love Only You**

(Hymn)

You surround me with gifts.  
You surround me with love.  
You have wrapped me in blessings each day.  
But in all You have given, O infinite God,  
Help me to see only You, Lord.  
Help me to love only You.

In this vessel of earth,  
With its weakness and need,  
I am pulled by its pleasure and pain.  
But to You, the Great Giver, I lift up my eyes,  
Longing to see only You, Lord,  
Needing to love only You.

With the eyes of faith  
You are love, pure love.  
All You give is for our best.  
With a heart of praise  
I will thank You, Lord,  
For the daily ways You bless.

In this vessel of earth,  
With its weakness and need,  
In these days full of pleasure and pain,  
Now to You, the Great Giver, I lift up my eyes,  
Eager to see only You, Lord,  
Joyful me to love only You.

## **Nothing but You**

*Whom have I in heaven but you?  
And earth has nothing I desire besides you. (Psalm 73:25, NIV)*

Lord, I have so many goals.  
There's so much I want to accomplish.  
There's so much I want to  
    have and  
    enjoy.  
There are so many areas in which I'd like to improve.

But You seem to challenge me to  
simply enjoy You more and more as the days go by.

When I'm following You,  
    I know I'm walking the right direction.

When I turn to You and talk to You,  
    life is full, and  
    life is sweet.

Lord, this is my one goal:  
    to enjoy You more and more  
    as the days go by.

*Father,  
    outside of You,  
    human beauty is  
    a passing mist,  
    a mirage.  
Your beauty grows  
    deeper,  
    richer, and  
    more real  
the more we know You and  
    trust You.*

**Hymn: [You Are Near, O Lord](#)**

## **Our Deeper Need**

*Read Luke 17:11-19*

They were desperate.

Ten were gripped by the physical and social suffering of leprosy.

In hope they came and cried out, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!"

They saw no immediate healing,

but He told them to go and show themselves to the priest.

That was what a leper would have to do if he or she claimed to be cleansed.

As they obeyed, they were healed.

Nine apparently had what they wanted from God.

He had been a way to make their life their own again.

They had their healing, so they were gone.

One of them thought about God

and about the Man who had brought Him near.

He thought about His great goodness,

about the mercy asked and received.

Somehow he had just met the Living God.

His marvelous compassion was now real and personal.

How could he just walk away?

He had to run and bow to Him.

He had to cry out and thank Him.

He had to worship Him with all his heart and soul.

For him, God's gift was not the end.

It was a beginning.

He had to respond to Him.

He had to come.

*Father, Your work on our behalf  
goes on in realms and realities  
beyond our perception.*

*You love us, redeem us, and bless us  
in ways we cannot fully comprehend.*

*As we trust You,  
You shower us with all Your best.*

**Hymn: [In the Light of the Cross](#)**

## **Drawing Near to God**

*Read James 4*

Father, You have breathed into me  
Your own Spirit,  
Your own life and breath.  
You jealously long for that Spirit  
to return to You,  
to seek You,  
to love You and  
desire oneness with You (James 4:5).  
O Father, that is what I want!

You have promised that as  
I draw near to You,  
You will draw near to me (James 4:8).  
Draw near, Lord!  
Draw near!

Father, I want to exchange  
all my desires for  
Your desires.  
I humble myself before You and ask for  
the holiness,  
the faith,  
the love of Jesus Christ.

*Christ came to  
wash us,  
cleanse us,  
immerse us,  
not in water, but in  
the Holy Spirit of God Himself.*

**Hymn: [Spirit, Come](#)**

## The Only Reasonable Response

*Therefore, I urge you, brothers,  
in view of God's mercy,  
to offer your bodies as living sacrifices,  
holy and pleasing to God –  
this is your spiritual act of worship.  
(Romans 12:1, NIV)*

Today, Lord,  
I present my body to You as a sacrifice –  
    living,  
    holy, and  
    pleasing.  
I consider myself dead completely to sin and  
    alive to You.  
I present each of my members, each of my abilities,  
    as instruments of Your righteousness.

All this is my reasonable, logical service to You who  
    created me,  
    loved me,  
    called me, and  
    redeemed me.

Father, I don't want to be  
    squeezed into the mold of this present age.  
Daily renew my thinking  
that I may know and live Your will for me, O God –  
    that which is best,  
    fully pleasing and  
    perfect in Your eyes.

**Hymn: [Raised from Death to Love and Living](#)**

## **Father, Only You**

*I love You, O Lord. (Psalm 18:1, NASB)*

In all my thinking,  
all my needing,  
all my trying,  
all my trusting,  
all my dreaming,  
all my doing,  
all my hurting,  
all my hoping,  
*Father, only You.*

### **Draw My Desires to You, Lord**

(Hymn)

Draw my desires to You, Lord.  
Draw every thought to You.  
Absorb my heart,  
My soul, my strength,  
And draw my desires to You.  
Lord, draw every thought to You.

Fill all my time with You, Lord.  
Fill every hour with You.  
Take all I plan  
And all that comes,  
And fill all my time with You.  
Lord, fill every hour with You.

## **Every Moment in You**

Father, You desired it.

    You have always desired it.

You planned it.

You prepared it.

You promised it.

And by Your Spirit,

    You have patiently nurtured  
    a hunger for it in my heart.

So now, finally,

    in belated response to all You have done,

    I ask for it,

    I pray for it, as Your needy child:

O Father, I want to live every moment in You

    the way Jesus lived every moment in You

    when He was here.

Because He was weak,

    because He depended completely on You,

He was strong and sufficient in every situation.

My Father, keep me weak and

    keep me strong in You.

He loved You and

    served You and

    glorified You

single-mindedly,

    with His whole heart.

Father, keep me single-mindedly,

    whole-heartedly Yours,

    just like Him.

He was holy and humble,

    bold and gentle,

    fearless and loving in You.

O Father, my Father, every moment

    keep me in You.

## I Delight to Do Your Will

*I delight to do your will, O my God.*  
(Psalm 40:8, NASB)

Father, when You ask me  
to give up some comfort and  
to willingly risk inconvenience:  
*I delight to do Your will, O my God.*

No matter what the situation,  
no matter what You are asking,  
I know You.  
I know Your ways are best.  
I trust You, and  
I anticipate the wonderful things You will do.  
*I delight to do Your will, O my God.*

When a period of time lies before me –  
whether a day, a few hours, or a few minutes –  
I will give it to You:  
*I delight to do Your will, O my God.*

Whenever You speak to me,  
I will not be afraid.  
I will answer:  
*I delight to do Your will, O my God.*

*Just one step, Lord.  
You lead,  
I follow.*

Hymn: [Father, Father](#)



## What Do You Wish?

*The Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream at night; and God said, "Ask what you wish Me to give you." (1 Kings 3:5, NASB)*

Father, if you were to ask me this,  
how would I respond?  
What would I wish for?

Father, You are eternal.  
You are all-wise and  
all-loving.  
You are all joy.  
You are all truth.  
You are harmony,  
perfection, and  
peace.

Father, I want to please You.  
That is my wish.  
I want to please You in my thinking and  
please You in my doing.  
I want to please You in my daily activity and  
please You in the deepest desires of my heart.  
I want to please You in my working and  
please You in my waiting.  
I want to please You in my praying and  
please You in all my unguarded moments.

I want to please You  
as Your Son pleased You.  
Father, give me His mind,  
His heart,  
His faith,  
His peace in You.  
That is what I ask.  
I ask for the Holy Spirit of Your Son Jesus.

Hymn: [O Father, Give Us Jesus Christ](#)

## **Prayer Response to Romans 6**

*Read Romans 6*

Father, I present all I am,  
not to sin,  
but to You,  
as instruments to glorify You:  
my heart, to desire only You,  
my mind, to ponder You and Your truth,  
my mouth, to speak Your words and Your praise,  
my feet, to follow wherever You lead,  
my hands, to freely share Your love.

God of all truth and goodness,  
all life and love and salvation,  
I am Your servant.  
By Your grace and through my obedient response,  
separate me entirely to Yourself.  
Make me holy and  
wholly Yours in  
all I am and  
all I do.

The end of sin is death,  
so I leave it in the past.  
My present and future are in You and  
in Your boundless, unending life.  
Praise to You, my Father!

*Father,  
may I no longer be shaped by  
my past in this evil world,  
but by my  
present and future in You.*

**Hymn: [Romans 6](#)**

## **God Is Drawing Us to Himself**

Do you hear God's Word continually prodding us?

It is urging us to

give thanks to Him!

Sing to Him!

Rejoice in Him!

Praise Him!

Trust Him!

Hope in Him!

Delight in Him!

Do you hear God calling?

God is calling us to Himself.

He is the source of all life,

all love,

all blessing,

all that is good for

heart and soul,

mind and body.

So out of a deep longing for our very best, He is

pursuing us,

inviting us,

eagerly drawing us to Himself.

If you want all the riches that life offers,

seek the God who is seeking you.

Talk to Him.

Walk with Him.

Confide in Him.

Love Him.

Follow Him.

Turn yourself toward

your Source,

your Father,

your God.

**Hymn: [Psalm 33](#)**

## **In the Silence**

*Read Psalm 62*

Father, I live in the endless, all-enveloping noise of  
my plans and my desires,  
my success and my failures,  
my health and my comfort,  
my time and my obligations,  
my money and my possessions,  
my ambitions and my problems,  
my job,  
my relationships, and  
my satisfaction.

All these desperately, perpetually cry for attention,  
shouting their  
empty threats and  
empty promises.

All are too small and too shallow to  
harm or  
fulfill  
my life in You.

Father, I turn from them and  
turn to You,  
the All-encompassing One,  
the All-sufficient,  
the All-in-all.

In the quietness, I find You to be  
all joy,  
all hope,  
all truth,  
all goodness, and  
all peace –  
all I could ever want or need.

So in this endless, all-enveloping silence  
I wait and hope,  
I move and rest in You.

**Hymn: [Psalm 62](#)**

## **The Joy of Your Presence**

*Read Psalm 84*

O Father, how I love being in Your presence!  
When I realize that I am with You,  
all I am sings for joy,  
    body,  
    mind, and  
    spirit.

You are infinitely above me  
    in excellence,  
    in power, and  
    in holiness.  
Yet when I am with You, I sense that  
    this is where I belong.  
I know a freedom,  
    a rightness,  
    a rest in You.

This life is not easy, Father.  
The needs never end.  
There is weariness,  
    darkness, and  
    deep sorrow.  
But when I realize that all of life is a journey to You,  
    everything changes!  
Weariness turns to praise.  
Darkness shines with Your unfailing goodness.  
Sorrow is matched with an inexpressible joy.  
Your presence lights my pathway every day.  
But what is more,  
    You Yourself are the heaven toward which I travel.

O Father, absorb my every thought and  
    every desire.  
You are my joy, now and forever!

**Hymn: [Psalm 84](#)**

## Do What Pleases You

Father, sovereign Creator,  
Source, Sustainer, and  
Ruler of all that is,  
Your power is unlimited.  
You are in command of all reality.  
You do whatever pleases You.

And since You are perfect wisdom and  
perfect love,  
all You do is perfect,  
right, and  
good.

O Father, what a comfort!  
In all my weakness and  
all my ignorance,  
with all my wavering motives,  
I dare not trust myself.  
But I know that You will always act in  
perfect wisdom and  
perfect love.

Father, I praise You!  
I trust You!  
Be Lord of All in every aspect of my life!  
Do whatever pleases You!

*Father, in so much of my life  
I feel I am flying blind.  
I cannot see the future.  
I cannot know what is best.  
But to the extent that I walk in Your Spirit,  
I am guided by Your love and wisdom, and  
I am enabled by Your power.*

Hymn: [My Father, Do What Pleases You](#)

## Father, Give Me Jesus

Father, Jesus is all Your holiness,  
Your wisdom,  
Your purity and love.

He is all Your truth,  
Your completeness,  
Your perfection.

As I know Him,  
I want to know Him more.

As I want Him,  
I gladly release everything else.

Father, You eagerly give me everything good.  
Give me Jesus.

Give me His Spirit,  
His mind,  
His beautiful, unbroken relationship with You.

Give Him to every individual I love.  
Give Him to Your Church,  
to our entire race.

Father, for every hunger,  
every need,  
every day,  
give us Jesus.

*Father, in Jesus Christ You give us  
all that Your boundless love  
ever longed to give.  
All Your power,  
all Your wisdom, love, and holiness are  
complete in Him, and  
He is ours, and  
we are Yours.*

Hymn: [Knowing the Father in the Son](#)

# Complete in Christ

## Jesus Christ, Our Completeness

*Whom have I in heaven but you?  
And earth has nothing I desire besides you.  
My flesh and my heart may fail,  
but God is the strength of my heart  
and my portion forever.  
(Psalm 73:25-26, NIV)*

Loving Father,  
You let us feel and experience  
our profound neediness for Jesus Christ.

Our gnawing inadequacies,  
our disappointments and pain,  
our restless, unfulfilled longings  
bind us to this truth:  
Jesus Christ alone is  
our holiness,  
our peace, and  
our completeness.

He alone is the life and love we crave.

*Father, help me not to cling to  
anything in this world, for  
in You  
all things are mine.  
In You  
I am rich,  
I am full,  
I am complete.*

Hymn: [It's a Gift](#)



## **Christ in Psalm 8**

Father, Your goodness and greatness permeate everything  
I know, see, and experience.  
But in Your human Son, Jesus Christ,  
I see You most clearly;  
I experience You most completely;  
I know You face-to-face.

O Father, in Jesus Christ  
how utterly magnificent You are!  
In Him, I begin to understand the rich blessings You have lavished on us  
since before creation.  
In Him, I see more and more of Your gracious gifts  
all around me  
every day.  
And in Him, I start to glimpse the full scope of  
all You have promised to pour out on us  
through our glorious, eternal, divine Brother.

We are such small creatures in every way –  
so limited,  
so weak,  
so very brief.  
But in Jesus Christ  
You have exalted us to Your side in heaven itself.  
You have made us Your dearly-loved children.  
You have made us like Yourself.

O Father, Your goodness and greatness and presence permeates  
all that is!  
Praise to You!

**Hymn: [Christ in Psalm 8](#)**

## **Complete in Christ**

*In [Christ] are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.*

*In Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, and you have been given fullness in Christ. (Colossians 2:3, 9-10, NIV)*

Not in an abstract sense;  
not just someday,

but right now, Lord.

All the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are in You, Jesus.

All the treasures.

I am complete in You.

Complete as a person.

Complete as the being You created me to be.

Complete in You.

Jesus, help me to remember this in the push and pull of life today.

Remind me of this when other things call for me to

want them and

seek them and

need them.

Today, Lord, all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are in You.

Today I am complete in You.

Today I will desire only You.

*Father,  
my neediness is  
deep and  
wide and  
permanent.  
But in You  
I am sufficient,  
no matter what comes.*

**Hymn: [Complete in Jesus Christ](#)**

## **As I See Jesus**

Father, as I see Jesus,  
I see You.  
In Him I see Your beauty and glory,  
Your holiness and love.  
I see all You are,  
made fully human.

In Him I also see  
who I am becoming.  
I see all You have destined me to be.  
When I am complete in Him, I will be  
Your glorious child,  
living in You and  
loving You,  
joyfully and forever.  
I will glow with  
Your holiness and  
Your goodness.

Father, You are fully  
showing Yourself and  
sharing Yourself with me in Jesus Christ.  
Praise to You!

*Father,  
Jesus' relationship with You was  
the source and  
the goal for  
everything in His life.  
May it be so with me.*

**Hymn: [See All That Human Can Be](#)**

## Today's Focus

*Let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. (Hebrews 12:1b-3, NASB)*

Today, fix your eyes on Jesus.

His beautiful life is your example of  
faith in the Father, of  
deep, unshakable joy, of  
generous, self-giving love.

His death is your deliverance  
from the strangle-hold of sin and  
from slavery to your own weakness.

His resurrected life is  
your strength for today and  
your destiny for all eternity.

Today, fix your eyes on Jesus.

*Your most important,  
most far-reaching legacy will be  
your living testimony to  
Jesus Christ.*

Hymn: [We Fix Our Eyes on Jesus Christ](#)

## **All We Need**

*One greater than Solomon is here. (Luke 11:31, NIV)*

Father, how many great Old Testament saints longed to see Jesus Christ!  
How many longed to know Him as we know Him,  
to be filled with His Spirit,  
to walk even a moment in His personal presence!

People today would travel around the world to see  
Abraham or Moses or Solomon.

One greater than Abraham is here.  
One greater than Moses is here.  
One greater than Solomon is here.  
One greater than the greatest entertainer is here.  
One greater than money or comfort or fame is here.  
One greater than every other good is here.

Father, in Jesus Christ You have left  
no need unmet,  
no thirst unsatisfied,  
no hunger unfilled.  
All the wisdom,  
all the peace,  
all the holiness,  
all the life we could ever want  
are ours in Christ Jesus.

*Following rules  
doesn't make us holy.  
Trusting Jesus Christ  
makes us holy.*

Hymn: [All We Need](#)

## Well-being

Today in You, Father,  
I enjoy a well-being that  
    flows all around me and  
    goes before me,  
a well-being that is  
    deeper and  
    more permanent  
than any temporary, troublesome circumstance.

It is the peace and presence,  
    the power and unfailing goodness  
of You,  
    my Savior,  
    my Lord, and  
    my God!

*Many of God's richest blessings  
come not through some  
special dispensation or  
personal gift, but through  
living in the Spirit of His  
holy and beautiful Son.  
His blessings are inherent in  
a life of faith and love.*

Hymn: [Treasure](#)

## **The Blessed Life**

*God's blessing is not His wish,  
but His decree.  
When Sovereign God blesses us,  
we are blessed!  
More money?  
That's a puny blessing, and  
often no blessing at all.  
Instead of money's false security,  
He blesses us with  
deep dependence on Him.  
Into our spirit He pours  
His own boundless Spirit, giving  
true wisdom,  
undying love,  
perfect peace, and  
so much more.  
He enriches us with Himself.*

*Holiness is not restrictive and limiting.  
It is Your blessing,  
Your gift to us and  
goal for us,  
our ultimate freedom to  
be all You made us to be.*

*Father,  
thank You for a salvation that is  
not limited by my weakness.  
Trusting Christ brings me a  
life and  
love and  
holiness  
that I could never achieve on my own.*

## **Freedom Is Jesus Christ**

Freedom is not simply  
    pleasing myself.  
Freedom is not wallowing in the  
    smallness,  
    ignorance, and  
    selfishness  
of my own desires.

Freedom is the privilege of living in  
    all the richness,  
    all the joy,  
    all the glorious sufficiency  
of Jesus Christ.

Almighty Father,  
today, I am  
    holy and  
    completely free  
in Him!

*In Jesus Christ,  
the Truth is more than mere facts.  
The Truth is  
    beauty,  
    harmony,  
    life, and  
    joy.  
The Truth is not content to merely speak –  
    it longs to  
    love and  
    sing and  
    dance!  
Brothers and sisters,  
live the Truth in Christ Jesus!*

**Hymn: [Freedom in You](#)**



## **Walking in the Spirit**

*Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.*  
(Galatians 5:25, NIV)

All of us want to live a better life.  
But more than that, we want to  
    be better,  
    from the inside out.

How can we do that?  
There are numerous  
    resolutions we could make or  
    disciplines we could try to impose on ourselves.  
But all are partial and rely on our own  
    wisdom and  
    willpower.

Only one resolution is adequate for being better:  
    let us keep in step with the Spirit.  
It covers every aspect of living.

He provides the wisdom.  
He provides the power.

He simply asks  
    that we learn to trust Him,  
    that we be willing to set aside our own agendas and  
    follow Him, step-by-step.  
It's a natural, person-to-person process,  
    like walking with a friend.

*Father,  
    our minds and hearts are  
    too small to grasp  
    all Your plans and purposes.  
    How critical it is, then, that we  
    depend on Your Spirit's guidance  
    rather than  
    trusting our own perspective.*

**Hymn: [Day by Day in You, Our Lord](#)**

## Walk with Me

*"Come, follow me."* (Mark 1:17, NIV)

I get overwhelmed with the world's needs.  
Billions are dying of physical and spiritual hunger.  
Desperate problems surround me every day.

I ask God, "What should I do?"

He answers:

*Walk with Me.*

When I start over-organizing my life,

He says:

*Walk with Me.*

When I get too preoccupied with my work and ministry,

He whispers:

*Walk with Me.*

That was Jesus' call to His first disciples.

They learned to live and serve by

being with Him,

listening to Him, and

obeying Him situation by situation.

Nothing has changed.

Effective living and

effective service

still flow from walking with Him

step-by-step.

*Father,  
as I face decisions today,  
I will not know the way to go.  
Lead, and I will follow.*

Hymn: [Come and Follow Me](#)

## **Jesus, My Power and Wisdom**

*We preach Christ crucified...*

*Christ the power of God and  
the wisdom of God.*

*By [God's] doing you are in Christ Jesus,  
who has become to us,*

*wisdom from God, and  
righteousness and  
sanctification, and*

*redemption. (1 Corinthians 1:23-24, 31)*

Jesus, today

You are my power.

I rest in Your doing.

I move every moment  
in Your enabling.

Jesus,

You are my wisdom.

I pray for Your mind.

I listen.

Jesus,

You are my holiness.

I rejoice in You in me.

I quiet my planning  
and relax in Your Spirit.

Jesus, today

my work will be to trust You.

Glorify yourself through me today.

*Father, engrave Your truth on my heart.*

*Breathe it constantly within me.*

*Fill my thoughts and  
my words with  
the beauty of who You are.*

**Hymn: [Everything I Need](#)**

## **I Need the Mind of Christ**

Father, what I need most right now,  
this moment,  
is the mind and Spirit of Christ.

Facing  
this day,  
these concerns, and  
all the needy people around me,  
I need the mind and Spirit of Christ.  
Nothing less than Him will  
make me who I need to be.

Father, I bow and  
ask and  
depend completely on You.  
Help me  
think and  
speak and  
respond  
like Him.

*Father,  
I get up every morning to  
read and pray and serve,  
confident that by Your Spirit  
You will speak  
to me and  
through me.  
What a marvelous, amazing privilege!*

**Hymn: [When I Speak](#)**

## The Ultimate Treasure

Jesus said:

*"The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field.  
When a man found it, he hid it again, and  
then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field.*

*"Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls.  
When he found one of great value, he went away and  
sold everything he had and bought it." (Matthew 13:44-46, NIV)*

Father, You are life's ultimate treasure.  
You are that one pearl of surpassing value.

Every other good,  
every other goal is  
    a mirage and  
    a passing distraction.  
You are life that never ends.  
You are love that satisfies  
    deeply and  
    completely.  
You are security that can never be threatened.

You are making me  
    more than I ever dreamed I could be.

My Lord, I gladly release everything else and  
    embrace You!

*All truth, all reality  
flows from the truth that is in  
    Jesus Christ.  
Father, make Him  
    the defining truth,  
the defining reality of my life.*

Hymn: [Pearl of Great Price](#)

## **Reflection on Psalm 24**

Father, all that is  
    is Yours –  
the world,  
    all that fills it,  
    everything that shares Your breath.  
We were all created  
    by You and  
    for You,  
to display  
    Your greatness,  
    Your goodness, and  
    Your marvelous presence.

But who of us is worthy to even enter Your presence?  
Only the one who is innocent in all his doings.  
Only one the one who is pure in all his desires.  
Only the one who is absolutely true in all his  
    thoughts,  
    words, and  
    deeds.  
Only Your pure and perfect Son,  
    Jesus Christ, and  
all who trust in Him and  
    live in Him and  
    approach You in Him.

So come, King of Glory, Almighty Lord,  
    we welcome You!  
We receive You joyfully  
    with songs of praise!  
Your throne awaits You!  
Come, Lord Jesus!

**Hymn: [Psalm 24](#)**

## All the Fullness of God

*In [Christ] all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form,  
and in Him we have been made complete* (Colossians 2:9-10, NASB).  
And through the Spirit of Christ within, we can be  
*filled up to all the fullness of God* (Ephesians 3:19, NASB).

What a beautiful reality it is for individuals to enjoy  
the fullness of God within and to be made  
complete in Christ!

But when we trace the idea of “fullness” through Ephesians,  
we discover an even grander truth.  
God paints on a broader, more glorious canvas than we can imagine!

Ephesians 1:10 says that in the *fullness of the times*,  
God will sum up *all things in Christ*,  
all things in heaven and on earth.  
Think of it! All reality one with Christ!

Ephesians 1:22-23 says that we the Church are  
the very body of the glorious, exalted Christ.  
We are *the fullness of Him who fills all in all!*

Ephesians 3:17-19 says that we know the full dimensions of God’s unknowable love  
*with all the saints*, in fellowship with God’s people.  
Only together will we fully grasp and experience God’s indescribable love.

Ephesians 4 urges us to use our Christ-given gifts  
to equip each other for service,  
to build up the Body of Christ,  
until together we become fully mature,  
measuring up to the full stature of  
*the fullness of Christ* (4:30).

In its ultimate form, in its highest fulfillment, the fullness of God will be,  
not just a Christlike individual, but  
a Christlike society,  
an entire race that is so one with Christ that it can only be described  
as His bride...  
as His own body.

In a very real sense, our magnificent God will be incarnate,  
not just in a Person,  
but in a people.

# Trusting God

## Reflection on Psalm 23

Eternal God, the Boundless One, the Source of All,  
is my shepherd.

I lack  
nothing.

He faithfully, patiently, wisely  
provides everything I need:  
food and rest,  
guidance,  
correction, and  
renewal.

Even as I walk through life's deepest, darkest valleys,  
in the looming shadow of death,  
I will not fear,  
for You, my Lord, are with me,  
comforting,  
strengthening  
protecting, and  
walking me through.

Even as fierce threats surround me,  
You pour out on me Your  
rich abundance and  
eternal blessings.

Every day of my life I  
walk and  
work and  
rest in Your presence;  
and I will live in You, O my Father,  
every moment  
forever.  
Praise to You!

Hymn: [Psalm 23](#)



## **Reflection on Psalm 27**

Eternal God, perfect in  
power,  
wisdom, and  
love,

You are  
my light,  
my salvation,  
my defense.

I seek You.  
I hide in You.  
I praise You.  
I pray to You.

You never, ever abandon me.  
When the closest human relationships prove inadequate,  
You come even closer.

So, God of wisdom and love,  
teach me Your ways.  
Lead me on the right path.  
No matter what threats surround me,  
Your unfailing goodness is  
my confidence,  
my anchor,  
my joy.

I am strong in You.  
I am courageous in You.  
I wait and hope in You!

**Hymn: [Psalm 27](#)**

## **Reflection on Psalm 33**

You speak, and it is so.  
Everything that exists,  
    seen and unseen,  
    exists because You spoke it into being.  
Your Word is creative and  
    sovereign.  
Human words are empty and  
    powerless.  
We put all our trust and hope in You.

When You purpose to do something,  
You do it,  
    surely,  
    completely,  
    no matter what it takes.  
What You plan,  
    You accomplish.  
What You start,  
    You finish.  
Human plans are  
    weak and  
    unreliable.  
Our plans are as temporary as  
    the breath in our nostrils.  
We put all our trust and hope in You.

In the end, those who succeed,  
    those whose work endures,  
are not the powerful or  
    the ambitious.  
Those who succeed and endure are  
    those You bless.  
And You bless  
    those who fear You,  
    those who put all the trust and hope in You.

**Hymn: [Our Hope Is All in You](#)**

## **Reflection on Psalm 46**

Almighty,  
unchallenged God  
    sovereign,  
    eternal,  
    all-wise,  
    all-loving,  
we rest in You.

We are threatened by change.  
    We feel helpless before it.  
But You are unchanging.  
Nothing can touch  
    Your goodness or  
    the absolute certainty of Your rich gifts.

Where You are is  
    peace, and  
    You are forever with Your people.  
What You say becomes  
    reality, and  
    You always speak blessings for those who trust You.

O God, our Father,  
    be exalted throughout all the earth!  
We rest secure in  
    Your perfect will.

*Father, help me to  
trust in all You are  
so that I may live in  
the joy of all You are.*

**Hymn: [Psalm 46](#)**

## How Much of a God?

I'm convinced that a question lurks down inside each of us that we'd like to ask God. As we seek God in the face of our needs, we probe for an answer: *How much of a God are You willing to be in my life?*

I believe God exists up there somewhere. I believe He is real, that He forgave my sins, and that someday He'll bring me to heaven. But I have needs now, especially on the inside. I want to know what He is really willing to do and be in me. How much of a practical part can He play, or will He play, in my daily life? For example:

- I have anxieties that waste my energy and destroy my peace of mind.
- I need guidance and wisdom in a thousand hourly decisions and problems, big and small. Uncertainty and inadequacy eat away at me.
- The same old temptations keep returning, and they're hard to face. Can I really be the victor every time and escape all the guilt and the frustration of failure?
- Can I be free from self-centeredness to be thoroughly loving all the time?
- Am I good enough? Am I who I should be, and can I ever totally please God?

In my personal probing I continue to make exciting discoveries. I'm finding that whenever I turn to Him with anything, no matter how daily or small, He is there, my *refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble* (Psalm 46:1, NASB).

When I remember to take my problems to Him, specifically, simply, openly, I find He *is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think* (Ephesians 3:20, NASB).

I find a God who constantly prompts me to speak to Him; who hears and understands every murmur of my heart, every unspoken question, every secret shame; who longs to draw me closer and never stops forgiving me; who, for His part, will never let anything come between us.

I realize that if there is any silence in our relationship, it is not from Him. The silence is my preoccupation with other things, my indifference to Him, my fearful unbelief.

What needs does your Father see you face, yet never hear you share with Him? What concerns does He deeply feel with you that you never bring to Him? How many simple prayers would our God gladly, beautifully, bountifully answer if we simply prayed them?

## Illogical Faith

You promised to make Abraham the father of a great nation.  
But when he was ninety-nine and his wife eighty-nine,  
they still had no child.  
Yet he trusted You.

Then after the miracle child was born,  
His one, dearly-loved, irreplaceable son,  
You asked Abraham to offer him as a burnt sacrifice.  
Yet He obeyed without question.  
He believed that You were the God who  
*gives life to the dead and calls into being that which does not exist...He did not  
waver in unbelief but grew strong in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully  
assured that what God has promised, He was able also to perform"* (Romans  
4:17, 20-21, NASB).

For Abraham, not even death itself was a barrier to faith.

During a lifetime bearing the curse of childlessness,  
did Abraham have any anxious moments about Your promises?  
Probably.

When the only thing between us and impossible need is  
the promises of God,  
will we have any anxious moments?  
Probably.

But the question is this:  
during those times, will we continue to trust Him and obey Him?  
When His promises seem unbelievable and  
His provision is nowhere in sight,  
will we continue to  
praise Him, love Him, rejoice in Him, and depend on Him?  
Will He continue to be  
our joy, our confidence, and our deep-settled peace?

When we face the impossible,  
when trusting God seems naïve and illogical, consider  
the obedient, triumphant, eternally-fruitful faith of Abraham.

## Whom Should We Fear?

Exodus 1:8 – 2:10

*By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden for three months by his parents, because they saw that he was a beautiful child; and they were not afraid of the king's edict. (Hebrews 11:23, NASB)*

The Exodus is a story of fear.

Pharaoh feared the increase of the Israelites (Exodus 1:8-10),  
so he lashed out and enslaved them (Exodus 1:11-14).

But that didn't relieve his fear (Exodus 1:12).

God continued to bless them, and they multiplied even more.

So he used the Hebrew midwives to try to kill all the male children (Exodus 1:15-16).

That didn't work either, for

the Hebrew mid-wives feared God, not Pharaoh (Exodus 1:17-21).

They made excuses to Pharaoh and let the boys live.

Still gripped with fear, Pharaoh took even more drastic action.

He ordered that every newborn son be cast into the Nile (Exodus 1:22).

Moses' parents obeyed –

but only after nurturing him in hiding for three months, and

only after placing him safely in a wicker basket (Exodus 2:1-4).

The result: Pharaoh's daughter saw him,

took him home with her, and

raised him as the grandson of Pharaoh (Exodus 2:5-10).

Moses' biological mother became his nurse,

plus, Israel's future deliverer

was educated and nurtured in the royal palace.

In a way, he got the best of both worlds.

Pharaoh feared the Hebrew people,

which led him to commit inhuman and foolish acts.

In the end, those acts proved both futile and self-destructive.

God's people feared the Lord,

the Sovereign of all reality.

Since they feared Him,

they had no reason to fear anything or anyone else.

## Live with the End in View

Exodus 2:10-25

*By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to endure ill-treatment with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, considering the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt; for he was looking to the reward.*  
(Hebrews 11:24-26, NASB)

Moses had a choice. He could identify with his birth family, who were Hebrew slaves, or with his adoptive family, the royal house of Pharaoh, one of the most powerful families on earth. Identifying with Pharaoh would have meant privilege, respect, comfort, and wealth. Identifying with a slave race meant sharing their bitter oppression in all its forms.

Moses walked away from the royal family and instead embraced the difficulties and danger of leading the Hebrew slaves. Why? Because he chose what was right and best in the long-term over short-term comfort. *The reproach of Christ* (Hebrews 11:26) held more appeal for him than all the pleasures and treasures of an Egyptian palace.

In Hebrews 13, the writer describes how Jesus chose to take our reproach, our curse upon Himself. He suffered *outside the camp* (v.11) as the disgraced and discarded corpse of a sin sacrifice. In v.13, the writer urges us: *So, let us go out to Him outside the camp, bearing His reproach.* (NASB)

That's what Moses chose to do: willingly bear the suffering and *reproach* of Christ. Christ had accepted the reproach that rebellious sinners had heaped on God His Father (see Romans 15:13). We are urged to share that ill-treatment.

When Moses made that choice, *he was looking to the reward* (Hebrews 11:26, NASB). Does that mean that actually, he was simply seeking what was best for himself in the long-run? In the gospels, Jesus often emphasizes our heavenly reward as the reason to choose God over sin. Is our reason for obeying God to simply gain the best outcome for ourselves? Is Jesus endorsing shallow, selfish motives for doing the right thing?

No, Hebrews 11 gives a different perspective. It repeatedly praises those who make the right long-term decisions, in spite of short-term suffering. Such decisions prove their faith in God. Their actions demonstrate their conviction that God is who He says He is and will do all He says He will do. That is the faith that pleases God (vv.1-5).

## Run with Endurance

*Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us. (Hebrews 12:1, NASB)*

Picture a stadium. We living believers are the athletes, in the midst of a long and grueling race. At times we glance up and all around us. Who fills the stands in this immense stadium? It is the witness of all the heroes of the faith listed in Hebrews 11...plus so many more. Their example encourages us and urges us on. If they could speak to us right now, what would they say? Or to phrase it another way, what is their example shouting to us?

“God is always, always, ALWAYS faithful!”

“Just keep trusting Him!”

“The hardship lasts only a short time. It will soon be over. Hold steady!”

“Your faithfulness will bear fruit far beyond what you can imagine!”

“Rejoice!”

“Don’t let anything hinder you!”

That last statement is what the scripture emphasizes here: let nothing hinder you...absolutely nothing! This is a long and demanding race. Top marathon runners ruthlessly shed anything that will weigh them down. They get rid of everything that will hold them back in any way. Their clothing, their own body weight, their diet, their daily habits – every aspect of their lives is examined in detail. Anything that’s a hindrance, even to the slightest degree, must go.

Consider this: even the marathon is short in comparison to life. The struggles of life are so much greater, and its stakes are infinitely higher. Our rewards are deeper, richer, and forever. If a marathon runner must exercise such self-discipline and ruthlessly shed all hindrances, how much more should we who are racing for our eternal destiny?

Honestly examine your life for anything that hinders your race. What about that *small* sin? What about that *small* distraction that eats into your time, energy, or devotion? Ask a marathon runner if there are any *small* irritants or *small* encumbrances. By the end of a long run, they all loom large. Shed them now! God will be glad to help you. Prepare yourself to *run with endurance the race* that is set before you.



## **Immersed in God**

Father, when I focus on myself,  
I get lost in the darkness of my  
    childish fears and  
    frustrated desires.  
I am a prisoner in my own smallness.

But when I look up at the night sky,  
I am immersed in Your glorious immensity,  
    O Sovereign God,  
    Eternal Creator,  
    my Lord,  
    my Father!  
You who guide all this universe  
guide my life as well,  
    silently, seamlessly,  
    as I simply trust You.

I am Your dear child,  
    Your treasure,  
and You leave nothing to chance.  
You embrace me every moment  
    in Your mighty arms and  
    in the blanket of Your perfect love.

O Father, my Father,  
    I am Yours!  
I rest right here in You!

*As we trust and obey God,  
His sovereign Word brings to reality  
    all He wants for us.  
His great love speaks, and  
it is done, surely and completely.*

**Hymn: [Speak, I Am Listening](#)**

## **Faith**

Father, Jesus lived by  
faith in You.  
He was what He was by  
trusting You.  
I cannot be  
capable,  
holy,  
wise or  
loving  
any other way.

You are the only source.  
I must trust You and  
trust that You give us  
all You are and  
all we need  
in Jesus Christ.

Thank You, Father!  
Thank You for  
the rich blessings of faith!

*Father,  
I am weak.  
But Jesus shared my weaknesses, and  
He was always sufficient as  
He looked to You and  
depended on You.  
Help me trust You as He did.*

**Hymn: [By Faith in Jesus Christ](#)**

## **Come to Me**

*Matthew 11:28-30*

What burdens you right now?  
Various situations and concerns probably  
parade through your mind.  
Each involves uncertainty and fear.

Fear creates an imaginary world for us –  
a world in which there is no God,  
with all His love and  
power and  
promised faithfulness.  
Don't live another day in that dark world!  
Christ invites us to come to Him and  
know Him.  
As we do, fear and its imaginary world melt away  
in the light of His love.

But you may carry another burden that doesn't immediately come to mind:  
the burden of self-concern.  
It's the most constant,  
most distracting,  
most draining burden that any of us carries.  
It is the drive to constantly look out for ourselves and  
worry about ourselves and  
promote ourselves to those around us.

It is another burden that melts away as we  
come to Christ and  
know and  
trust Him.  
We come to Christ with many burdens.  
We leave with only one:  
the burden of pleasing Him.  
But what an easy burden it is!  
All He asks is that we  
trust Him who has proven Himself trustworthy and  
love Him who is so loving and lovely.

**Hymn: [Come](#)**

## **If God Is for Us**

*If God is for us, who can be against us?*

*He who did not spare His own Son, but gave him up for us all –  
how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?  
(Romans 8:31-32, NIV)*

Are you plagued by nagging fears?  
Drag them out into the brilliant light of God's presence.  
Do you find anything that He cannot handle?

Is there anything you cannot now,  
this moment,  
entrust to Him completely?

Is there anything beyond  
His sovereign power,  
His infinite wisdom and  
His unfailing love?

He conceived you,  
tenderly nurtured you, and  
willingly died for you.  
His watchful care engulfs you every moment.  
Why do you hesitate to trust Him?  
Why are you ever afraid?

*Father,  
no matter what threats  
confront us today,  
You are still  
Yahweh,  
the Eternal One,  
Lord of all the heavenly armies,  
God of unfailing love and  
absolute dependability.*

**Hymn: [Be Still](#)**

## Learn a New Response to Need

Whenever we feel a need,  
    we want to eliminate it.  
All our focus is on ridding ourselves of  
    the source of our discomfort.

But realize that our neediness is  
    permanent and  
    pervasive.  
We can never eliminate it.  
Eliminate the need that obsesses you right now, and  
    another will soon replace it.

Instead, God is teaching us to rest in His sufficiency,  
    right there in the presence of the need.  
We can find peace in Him,  
    even when the need continues for a time.

What needs are you feeling in your life right now?  
God is using them to draw you to Himself.  
Look past your normal solutions,  
    your usual sources of relief that  
    never prove adequate.  
Turn to Him.  
Bring your concerns to Him, and  
    rest in Him.  
He is peace.  
He is your sufficiency through every need.

*Father, often I think that if You would only give me  
money or knowledge or the right situation, I'd be OK.  
But You know that what I really lack is faith.  
I need to trust You. I need to obey You.  
I need You.*

Hymn: [We Need You, Holy God](#)

## **A Relationship of Trust**

*Zephaniah 3:17*

Praise the Lord when He blesses you.

Praise the Lord when He seems to withhold His blessings.

Faith is not trusting that

God will do what we want.

Faith is trusting Him unconditionally.

Faith is confidence that

whatever God does is  
right and good.

This relationship of trust is one of

God's greatest, most lasting blessings.

His material blessings are wonderful,

but they pass away.

Our relationship with Him,

a relationship of trust and love,  
is His real treasure.

It will last and grow throughout all eternity.

Rejoice in Him, and

rejoice in everything that draws you closer to Him.

*Does your faith in God ever waver because  
you're not fully confident  
He will intervene and  
give you what you want?  
It's true:*

*He may not give you what you want.  
But you can always trust Him to  
give You what is best.  
Are you willing to rest in that?*

**Hymn: [Blind Faith](#)**

## **Faith: The Greatest Bargain in the Universe**

As we trust God, faith bears fruit within us:

- God declares us completely innocent. (John 3:18; 5:24; Romans 5:1).
- He cleanses our hearts from all sin (Acts 15:9).
- He seals us and protects us as His own (Ephesians 1:13-14).
- He gives us His own boundless, everlasting life (John 3:16).
- God invites us to confidently draw near to Him (Hebrews 10:22).
- He draws us into His deep and endless rest (Hebrews 4:3).
- God satisfies all our hunger and thirst with Himself (John 6:35f; 7:38f).
- He gives us a sure hope even death cannot shake (1 Thessalonians 4:14).
- We rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory (1 Peter 1:8).
- God roots us deeply in His love (Ephesians 3:17-19).
- God's Holy Spirit grows His character within us (Galatians 5:22-23).

Faith also bears fruit in our daily, outer life:

- God enables us to obey Him (Romans 1:5; 16:26).
- We overcome the evil world in which we live (1 John 5:4-5).
- God is perfecting us by faith (Galatians 3:2, 5).
- We know the truth, and the truth sets us free (John 8:30-32).
- If we lack wisdom, all we have to do is ask God (James 1:5-6).
- All things are possible to us (Mark 9:23).
- We are fabulously wealthy, even when we are poor (James 2:5).
- We rest our physical bodies in the hands of the Great Healer (James 5:14-15).
- We remain confident and calm through every storm of life (Luke 8:25).
- We walk safely, even when we can't see ahead (2 Corinthians 5:7).
- We stand firm, no matter what problems we meet (1 Corinthians 16:13).

Since faith unites us with Jesus Christ, we are one in Him with all believers of every time and place (Galatians 6:10; Ephesians 4:5):

- We are children of God and members of His family (John 1:12).
- We are children of Abraham and heirs to all God promised him (Romans 4).
- We are God's holy temple (Ephesians 2:20-22; 1 Peter 2:4-7).
- God gives us beautiful, life-giving gifts to share with others (Romans 12:3, 6).
- God gives us the great privilege of suffering with Christ (Philippians 1:29).
- Our example of faith is a heritage we pass on to our children and grandchildren (2 Timothy 1:5).

**Hymn: [If God Is on Our Side](#)**

## Ask for Wisdom

*If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. (James 1:5, NIV)*

This is one of the most practical promises in all the Bible.

We often feel we're in the dark and  
don't know where to turn.  
The problem could be big or small:  
a relationship with a spouse or a child;  
a problem at work;  
a major decision.

Our loving Father makes this blanket offer.  
If you need wisdom, ask.  
He gives it *generously to all without finding fault*.  
He won't scold you for  
the mess you've gotten into.

Ask, then trust Him.  
He will guide you,  
if you're willing to follow.

Father,  
I need Your wisdom.

*Our sight is  
so limited by ignorance and  
so colored by self-centeredness that  
we cannot see much of the reality that  
encompasses us.  
If we walk by our own sight,  
we are sure to go wrong.  
If we walk by faith,  
we walk in the light of  
God's perfect wisdom and  
love.*

Hymn: [Lord, How Good to Rest in You](#)



## Rejoice, Pray, Give Thanks

*Rejoice in the Lord always...Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:4, 6-7, NIV)*

When I feel stressed, I tend to be  
impatient and  
unkind to those around me.

Lord, help me make friends with  
interruptions,  
unfinished tasks,  
unpleasant surprises,  
delays,  
demands,  
uncertainties, and  
feelings of inadequacy.

They are going to come.

How do You want me to react to them, Lord?

1. Rejoice in who You are.
2. Commit my need to You.
3. Give thanks for what You are already doing to meet that need.

*Be at peace in God's presence.  
Open your hands and  
release control of the things around you.  
Don't fret about what you cannot change.  
God sees all those evils more clearly than you,  
yet lets them go on.  
Just do well  
what little He gives you to do.  
(paraphrased from Francois Fenelon)*

Hymn: [Good Gifts](#)

## Where God Wants Me

*I trust in You, O Lord,  
I say, "You are my God."  
My times are in your hands.  
(Psalm 31:14-15, NASB)*

Life never seems to be quite where I want it...  
yet.  
There's always a certain restlessness  
looking ahead to the next step.  
I trust God that circumstances will eventually shape up,  
but no matter where I am,  
life is never quite right yet.

If you catch yourself thinking this way,  
repeat this with me:  
Right here, right now,  
I am where God wants me.

We don't have to always be sitting  
on the edge of our seats,  
waiting and hoping for the next development.  
If we're following Him, we are where He wants us.

We can have that  
"everything is just fine" feeling  
today and  
every day.  
If our present circumstances please God,  
shouldn't they please us as well?

*Father, free me from all dreams of  
glory and gold.  
Keep me  
content with Your provision and  
consumed with Your purposes.*

Hymn: [I Leave It in Your Hands](#)

## **Wait**

God waits.

Because He gave us the freedom to choose,  
because He patiently interweaves  
our human choices with  
His eternal purposes,  
because He perfectly selects the right time to act,

God waits.

We wait on God

because He waits,  
because He is all-wise and  
we are not,  
because He is all-loving and  
we are not,  
because He is sovereign and  
we are unspeakably weak and small.

We wait on God,  
assured that He always does what is  
exactly right at  
exactly the right time.

Always.

Loving Father, we wait on You.

*Believe that God will do  
all He says He will do, and  
you can walk now in  
the joy of  
all that soon will be.*

**Hymn: [Wait on the Lord](#)**

## A Single Step

*My Presence will go with you, and  
I will give you rest.  
(Exodus 33:14, NIV)*

Lord, sometimes I'm scared to follow You.  
What You ask –  
    or what I'm afraid You're asking –  
seems overwhelming.  
It seems beyond my ability and  
    beyond where I feel safe.

But I'm learning that  
    You don't ask the impossible.  
Your demands aren't complicated.  
Each time You lead,  
all You ask is  
    a single step of faith.  
You ask for only one step at a time.

Right now, as You speak, Lord,  
    I look into Your face.  
Jesus, I take that  
    single step of faith.

*All the ways Sovereign God  
    longs to bless you  
mean little until you take  
    your small step of faith.*

Hymn: [I Only Want to Walk in You](#)

## Keep Walking

*Psalm 25*

*Jesus said,  
"I am the light of the world.  
Whoever follows me will  
never walk in darkness,  
but will have the light of life." (John 8:12, NIV)*

We want to follow God.  
But how do we know His will?  
How do we recognize His leadership?

How would you get a blind man to his destination?  
Would you say,  
    "Go down three blocks.  
    Turn left, then go past the school, and . . ."?

No.  
You'd take him by the arm and lead him.  
You'd walk with him step-by-step.  
You'd only expect him to trust you and keep walking.

We are blind.  
And God is always with us,  
    arm in arm.  
He only expects us to trust Him and  
    keep walking.

Lord, I will trust You step-by-step.

*This is my daily prayer  
for every challenge I face:  
    Father,  
    show me the next step.*

Hymn: [Thank You for Your Perfect Will](#)

## An Adventure in Christ

What is your attitude toward the future?  
Are you fearful about what might happen?  
Remember that God is with you and  
is leading You.  
Everything that comes to you,  
comes through Him.

Are you complacent? Coasting?  
Distracted from what is most important?  
Realize that right now God is growing you toward Himself.  
He is the eternal destiny toward which you are moving.  
He is what is most important in life, now and forever.

Look at your life as an adventure in Him.  
When we call something an “adventure,” we mean that it has  
stresses, demands, dangers, and unknowns,  
but it also has excitement and  
discovery of wonderful new things.  
In our stories, adventures always end well.  
Think of your life as an adventure in Christ.

Make this paraphrase of Philippians 3:12-14 your prayer:  
*“I have not yet obtained all God has for me.  
I am certainly not perfect.  
But I am pressing ahead to take hold of His full purpose for me.  
Right now I forget what is behind me and  
reach eagerly toward what is ahead.  
I am determined to obtain all God has for me in Christ Jesus.”*

*Father, help me to lift my eyes  
above today's ups and downs and  
see You, my God,  
my Eternal Confidence,  
my Very Great Reward!*

Hymn: [Immanuel's Land](#)

# **Finding God's Will**

## **Looking Back on God's Leading**

*Psalms 25; 143:8-10; Proverbs 16:9*

Father, I want Your will.  
I seek Your will.  
I hunger to know Your will.  
I pray.  
I listen intently,  
    but I'm not sure I hear anything from You.

Then I look back over my life.  
I review our life together.  
I see that You have always done  
    the planning,  
    the seeking,  
    the working,  
    the waiting,  
    the willing, and  
    the doing.

Usually I haven't even known  
    all that You were up to.  
All I did was trust You in some  
    childish,  
    halting,  
    imperfect way,  
and You did everything else.

I did my best to  
play my one little note, and  
    You orchestrated and performed  
    an entire symphony around me.

Wow!  
Where did all that glorious music come from?  
Not from me!  
Lord God Almighty, it was all You!

## **If I Am Following, You Are Leading**

Father, sometimes when I ask for Your will,  
I hear nothing from You.

But then I look back at the times when,  
in hindsight,  
I absolutely know that You were leading.  
And what do I see?  
You worked through events,  
moving,  
shaping,  
guiding,  
bringing things together as only You can.  
All I did was follow.

Now, Father, I begin to understand.  
I breathe the air of Your will.  
I swim in the ocean of Your will.  
I live and move and exist  
every moment  
in Your will. (Acts 17:28)

I only must  
love You,  
look to You, and  
walk with You one step at a time.  
I am not a sage.  
I am a child –  
I am *Your* child –  
and You are my loving, faithful Father.  
If I am following,  
You are leading.

**Hymn: [Walk by Faith, God's Guarantee](#)**



## **You Still Speak**

Father, You are the pattern from which we were  
conceived and created.

You shared with us Your likeness,  
Your authority,  
Your abundance, and  
Your personal presence.

But as we turned our eyes toward ourselves,  
we turned our back on You and  
the truth of all that You are.

We filled our hearts and our world with fear,  
pain, and  
anxious grasping.

We separated ourselves from the Source of All Life and  
so blanketed our lives in death and darkness.

We no longer heard the music of the truth,  
so we filled the silence with our own voices,  
with angry shouting,  
with the endless noise of our  
fears and self-centered desires.

But You have not abandoned us to this awful din.

You still come to those who will listen and  
speak what only You can say.

You speak magnificent,  
timeless,  
unchanging promises.

You call us to Your greater,  
higher,  
more glorious purpose.

You invite us to live confidently and boldly in  
a new world,  
an eternal reality ruled by Your  
sovereign,  
all-wise,  
all-loving will.

## **The Faith of Abraham**

*Genesis 12:1-3; 15:5-6, 13*

Abraham was heir to some of the most spectacular promises ever made to a human being:

God promised to make him a great nation – in fact, a multitude of nations;  
yet Abraham didn't have a single heir until age 100.

God promised to bless him and make his name great;  
yet most of his life Abraham bore the curse of childlessness.

God promised Abraham's descendants the land of Canaan  
yet Abraham lived his entire life as a wanderer,  
never owning any land but a burial plot.

And his descendants would only inherit the land after  
400 years of slavery.

Our essential connection with our  
great, unseen God is  
great faith,  
and great faith seems to develop only through  
great testing.

Abraham, the father of all who are saved by faith, was  
one of history's most blessed persons and  
one of the most severely tested.

The demands made by faith are not easy,  
but they are amazingly simple:

God only asks us  
to believe that He is  
who He has shown Himself to be and  
to live accordingly.

And He always only asks that we take  
one single step of faith at a time.

As we do, faith grows,  
step by step,  
need by need,  
day by day.

As we simply trust God, we are wrapped every moment in  
His perfect will.

**Hymn: [By Faith](#)**

## **God's Unfailing Promises**

*Joshua 21:45; Hebrews 13:8; 2 Peter 1:4*

Father, Your promises have no expiration date.

They last through every generation.

They endure through

every change,

every disaster,

every disappointment,

every grief.

The endless parade of

human change and

human failure

does not touch You.

Your unchanging purposes and

Your unfailing promises

are eternal.

They are part of You –

they flow from You –

You who are the same

yesterday,

today, and

forever.

Through every generation,

every circumstance, and

every need,

You are

forever faithful,

forever speaking and working Your perfect will.

Praise to You, my Father!

**Hymn: [You Are the Same](#)**

## **Our Shepherd through the Wilderness**

*Deuteronomy 8; Psalm 78:12-16, 52-55*

Father, how do You reveal Your will to Your people? How do you guide us?  
I look at the way You led Your people out of Egypt into the Promised Land.  
You led them as a shepherd leads his sheep.  
Sheep need a leader, and so do we!  
Like a shepherd, You provided guidance, food, water,  
healing, rest, protection, and provision for countless other needs.

I especially notice *how* You guided them.  
Your leadership came in a variety of ways.

You guided through events.  
You interwove circumstances, times,  
places, and people to work Your will.

You guided through people, through human beings like us.  
Moses was the means for You to speak to them and they to speak to You.

You guided them through Your Word.  
You spoke it to them so that they could  
hear, remember, ponder, and obey.

You guided by revealing Yourself in special ways,  
always at Your initiation, by Your chosen method at Your chosen time.  
You appeared to Moses at the burning bush.  
You gave the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night.  
You divided the Red Sea.  
You thundered gloriously at Sinai.  
You miraculously gave them food and water.

Father, You have not changed. Your great, loving heart is still the same.  
You are still blessing us with Your will, guiding events, speaking through people,  
giving us Your Word, and showing Yourself to us powerfully and personally.

Yahweh, Eternal God, our Father,  
You Yourself are our Shepherd through this vast wilderness.  
As You lead, we simply follow like sheep, and we lack nothing.

## **The Promise of the Spirit**

*Joel 2:28-32; Isaiah 30:18-23; Ezekiel 36:22-27*

Father, You have always guided and provided for Your people  
by giving them Your Spirit.

In the Old Testament, You loaned Him  
to specific people, for specific times, for specific tasks.  
Through Your almighty, all-wise Spirit, You gave individuals  
special abilities to do Your special work.  
Through Your Spirit, some of Your people dreamed dreams of the future.  
Some built the tabernacle,  
the physical expression of Your transcendent presence among us –  
a shadow of the tabernacle in heaven itself.  
Some led Your people,  
defended Your people,  
delivered Your people,  
taught Your people, and  
prophesied to Your people.

What a wonderful Gift He was!  
But those special times were just a small taste, a down-payment  
on a day when He would be poured out  
forever, on all Your people,  
young and old, male and female, rich and poor.  
Within each person and  
among all Your people  
He would be Your wisdom,  
Your holiness,  
Your strength,  
Your undying life.

Your beautiful, loving will would no longer be  
an unattainable ideal  
but a living reality within us and among us.  
O Father, what a magnificent promise!  
What a magnificent Gift!

**Hymn: [Ezekiel's Vision](#)**

## **The Man of the Spirit**

*Isaiah 11:1-9; 42:1-4; 61:1-3; John 1:29-34; 3:34*

All God's promises,  
all God's beautiful,  
    perfect,  
    all-encompassing will for His people  
came to be focused on  
    one Man,  
    God's specially Anointed One,  
    Messiah.

He would crush Satan's head (Genesis 3:15).  
He would be the great Prophet who would  
    clearly reveal God's will to His people (Deuteronomy 18:15-19).  
He would fulfill all the beautiful, life-giving perfection of God's law (Psalms 19 and 119).  
He would offer God's wisdom freely to everyone (Proverbs 1:20-21; 8:1-6, 22-31; 9:1-6).  
He would be a great King in the line of David,  
    ruling in peace and justice for all eternity (Isaiah 9:6-7).

But most importantly, He would be specially anointed by  
    God's own Spirit (Isaiah 61:1-3).  
He would be a man of the Spirit,  
    fully equipped by the Spirit (Isaiah 11:1-9; 42:1-4).  
He would express all of God's perfect will,  
    for He would have God's Spirit without limit (John 3:34).

What's more, He would baptize all God's people in this same Spirit (John 1:29-34).  
He would finally, fully enable us all to  
    want God's perfect will and  
    do God's perfect will. (Philippians 2:12-13).

Thank You, Father, for Your unspeakable Gift!  
Thank You for Jesus Christ!

**Hymn: [God in Christ in Us](#)**

## **See Jesus**

*John 4:34; 5:19-20, 30; 6:38; 7:16-18; 14:8-11*

Father, when I want to know Your will,  
    You show me Jesus.  
When I want to know how to know Your will,  
    You show me Jesus.

Every moment of His life He bowed in Your presence,  
    weak,  
    needy,  
    dependent,  
    seeking,  
    listening,  
    obedient.

Thus He lived every moment in every circumstance  
    strong and  
    sufficient.  
He knew Your will, for  
    He only wanted Your will.

You were His strength and  
    sufficiency.  
All that He was,  
all that He needed  
    flowed from a right relationship with You, a  
        constant,  
        dependent,  
        obedient relationship with You.

Knowing Your will flowed from  
    knowing You.  
Doing Your will flowed from  
    living in You.

So it will be with me.  
Father, I want to live in the Spirit of Your Son,  
    wanting You,  
    needing You,  
    trusting You,  
    breathing in You.

## **What a Wonderful Gift!**

*John 14:16-26; 15:26; Galatians 5:16-26*

When Jesus had lived the perfect life,  
offered the perfect sacrifice,  
conquered death, and  
risen back to the right hand of Father,  
He completed all the Father's plan by giving all God's people  
one  
magnificent,  
all-encompassing Gift.  
He gave us His own Spirit  
to live in each of us and  
all of us,  
forever.

Jesus referred to His Spirit as  
the Spirit of Truth,  
for He would guide us into all truth.

His Spirit would allow us to live in the  
full unity and  
unbroken love  
of the Father and Son.  
Imagine it!

Through the Spirit,  
the Father and Son would make their home in us.

The Spirit would teach us,  
remind us of what we must never forget, and  
glorify Jesus  
in us and through us.

Do you want to know God's will and  
live God's will?  
Walk in the Spirit of His holy Son,  
Jesus Christ.

**Hymn: [In Your Spirit](#)**



## **I Need You, Father**

*Philippians 3:7-14*

Indescribable God,  
I know You only partially  
but I know that You are  
stunningly,  
overwhelmingly real.  
You show me Yourself, and  
though it seems only a glimpse,  
I see that You are  
all You say You are  
and more.

You want me to know You, and You  
lead and  
prod and  
entice me toward knowing You better.  
The more I know You,  
the more I know myself.  
And the more I know myself,  
the more I realize how  
deeply,  
completely, and  
constantly I need You.

I need Your strength.  
I need Your wisdom.  
I need Your holiness.  
I need Your peace.

O Father, I need You!

*As we live and serve, Father, it is all  
Your life, Your strength, Your Spirit,  
Your provision, and Your blessing.  
All we are and all that is accomplished through us  
depends entirely on our living relationship with You.  
You are our only source.*

## **Grow Me toward Yourself**

Father, I need Your strength.

I need Your wisdom.

I need Your holiness.

I need Your peace.

But these gifts don't exist outside of You.

They are simply descriptions of You.

I need **You**, Father.

When I need the ability to do and be all that life demands,

I need **You**.

When I need wisdom or guidance,

I need **You**.

I long to be completely,

constantly,

irrecoverably **in You**.

But for today,

grow me toward Yourself.

Through every need,

through every blessing,

grow me toward Yourself.

As I face each new day and grapple again with all my neediness,

grow me toward Yourself.

I am helpless without You, Father.

So today let me

work and rest,

walk and breathe

always only in You.

*Father, Your entire agenda is to*

*share Yourself with us.*

*Son and Spirit, creation and redemption,*

*need and abundance, life here and hereafter,*

*all that You do is in order to*

*give Yourself to us and draw us into You.*

*Make my faith more simple and constant that*

*I may receive You and all You offer.*

## Reflecting Back

2 Corinthians 4:7-12; 12:7-10

What is it like to follow God?

When we respond to His call and follow Him, we are saying “Yes!” to His invitation of love. We are fully embracing a love that never quits, that gladly sacrifices itself completely for those it holds dear.

If you’ve loved a spouse or raised children, you’ve had a taste of what love requires. But look at the life of Jesus, or the Apostle Paul, and you’ll get a fuller idea of what it means to follow God and live His all-giving love.

It’s demanding. Often draining. Sometimes frustrating...and overwhelming.

It lays bare your every weakness, every vulnerability, every failure.

It is a tornado that catches you up and spins you helplessly around. It seems to threaten all you hold dear.

It’s heart-wrenching. At times it dangles you over the brink of despair.

But following God unites you with Him. And in that union, your life becomes infinitely more than it ever could have been. Now you walk as a full-fledged citizen in realms higher and holier than you know you deserve.

When you look back over the years, you see part of what God has accomplished through your stumbling obedience. It’s stunning, and humbling. His grace, operating through your imperfect faith, has made you fellow workers with a God *who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine* (Ephesians 3:20, NIV).

Brothers and sisters, when Almighty God comes to you making lavish demands and lavish promises, follow Him, even at the risk of utter failure. Your failure might become the most important thing you have ever done.

Hymn: [We Are Trusting in the Lord](#)

# Temptation & Forgiveness

## An Introduction to Temptation

In this evil world,  
    temptation is a fact of life for every one of us.  
It was a fact of life for Jesus.  
    Though He was the pure and perfect Son of God,  
    He was not exempt from any of our temptations.  
As long as we are in this world,  
    it will be a fact of life for each of us.  
You will be tempted.  
I will be tempted.

An evil being,  
    constantly, completely, viciously opposed to God and His people,  
    will try to draw us away from Him.  
How we respond to his temptations will  
    harm our relationship with God or  
    nurture and strengthen it.

But know this:  
    if you fail and yield to temptation,  
    forgiveness is always available,  
        constantly, completely, joyfully available!

*Warning:*

1. *Sin is deceitful.  
    It leads to destruction  
    without our being aware of any danger.*

2. *Sin is enslaving.  
    If allowed to remain,  
    it always takes control.*

Hymn: [The Blood-washed Pilgrim](#)

## Satan's Tactics

Read Genesis 3:1-13

As you read how Satan tempted us that first time in the Garden of Eden, some of his tactics should sound very familiar.

- **He muddies the waters about God's commands:** *"Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden?'"* (Genesis 3:1b, NIV). He casts doubt on what God says and what He means. He distracts from God's clear, loving commands. He slanders God, implying that His commands are harsh and unreasonable. How many of God's teachings does the world consider too stern, rigid, and unrealistic!
- **He denies that God will judge us:** *"You will not certainly die"* (Genesis 3:4, NIV). Satan is glad to provide a softer, more appealing interpretation of God's Word.
- **He denies God's goodness:** *"For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil"* (Genesis 3:5, NIV). This is central to nearly every temptation. Satan wants you to believe that God is not really good. He is not giving you the very best. There's a better option open to you. You can enjoy pleasures that He is forbidding.
- **He denies God's sovereignty:** *"You will be like God"* (Genesis 3:5, NIV). He wants you to believe that all knowledge and all power are open to you, there for the taking, if you're bold enough. You can be your own God!

Also notice that once Eve had yielded, Adam apparently put up no struggle at all. *"She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it"* (Genesis 3:6b). We are social creatures. Sin is a far easier sell when "everyone is doing it."

Don't fall for Satan's lies. God's commands are clear. He will do exactly what He says. He is always good, and His ways are always, always, always best. He alone is almighty, all-wise, all-loving God.

*Evil will gradually draw us into its depths, or  
God will draw us up into Himself.  
Each way begins with a small and simple step.*

## **The Temptation of Jesus**

*Read Luke 4:1-13*

The Heavenly Father drove His own beloved Son, with Whom He was thoroughly pleased, into the desert alone, for 40 days without food, to be tempted by His bitter enemy, Satan, who wanted only Jesus' destruction.

How different is our Heavenly Father's treatment of His children compared to us human parents! We do anything we can to spare our children unpleasant circumstances. The Father, knowing what is best for us and how much we can bear, regularly exposes His children to various types of pressure and need. We tend to focus on our children's temporary comfort and preferences. Our Father focuses on our character and eternal well-being. We shouldn't squirm or complain like selfish children when He puts us through difficult-but-necessary preparations for His service.

Here Satan tried to turn Jesus away from His Father. Knowing that the key to Jesus' power was His relationship with His Father, Satan tried to separate them. He tried to turn Jesus toward His own needs.

Jesus stayed focused on His Father. In His responses to Satan, He always spoke of the Father's will. That was His constant concern.

That is also our key in temptation. When you first sense Satan's approach, turn to your Father. Ask for His provision, His will, and His glory. Nothing can shake you if you depend on Him.

*I have set the Lord always before me.  
Because he is at my right hand,  
I will not be shaken.  
(Psalm 16:8, NIV)*

*Facing temptation, Father,  
I choose the pleasure of  
pleasing You.*

## **Do You Recognize These Temptations?**

We experience the same temptations

Jesus suffered in the wilderness:

to wrongly indulge our physical appetites,  
to seek personal glory,  
to serve lesser masters,  
to doubt our unseen God and  
ask Him to prove Himself in our physical world.

Jesus exposed all these as

lies, as  
roads to ruin.

He chose the way of trust.

We will follow Him.

*Jesus returned from the  
deprivation and  
spiritual warfare of the wilderness,  
not weakened  
but strengthened in the Spirit.  
His ministry prospered.  
Father, help me to stay  
focused on You  
through the struggles  
You allow to come to me.*

**Hymn: [With Jesus in Temptation](#)**

## Christ in Psalm 3

The Psalms often pray for deliverance from enemies.  
But for Christians, for followers of Christ,  
who are our enemies?

Jesus faced violent opposition from birth till death, and  
even before He was born (Revelation 12).  
Evil has always opposed Him and  
all those who follow Him (John 15:18-21; 17:14-18).

As a whole, the world is hostile to Christ and  
to all who are in Him.

What is more,  
*Our struggle is not against flesh and blood,  
but against the rulers, against the powers,  
against the world forces of this darkness,  
against the spiritual forces of wickedness  
in the heavenly places* (Ephesians 6:12, NASB).

Our struggle is against an enemy that is  
unseen  
but very real,  
an enemy that is far stronger than us.

When Jesus came to earth in our flesh and blood,  
sharing our weakness,  
He came equipped with the Spirit of God (Isaiah 11:2-5).

And as He sends us out in His name,  
He sends us out in His Spirit,  
equipped with His own life, strength, wisdom, holiness, and truth,  
filled with His own living presence.

Though we are weak in ourselves,  
we are strong in Him (Ephesians 6:10).  
We are safe in Him.  
We are completely secure as we trust in Him.

Hymn: [Christ in Psalm 3](#)



## **Reflection on Psalm 28**

Father, I call to You.  
Listen, please!  
I need You!  
I have no hope but You!

I am surrounded by people who  
    are servants of evil  
    without even knowing it.  
They deceive,  
    they threaten,  
    they entice.  
They do all they can to  
    drag me down to destruction with them.  
They don't see You or know You,  
    so they don't see themselves as they truly are.

But Almighty God, I look to You.  
You are the truth.  
You are my strength,  
    my joy,  
    my protection!  
I trust in You!

*Father, help me to  
turn away from evil  
every time it comes around wearing its  
false face.  
Everything good and beautiful  
comes from You, and  
You alone.*

**Hymn: [Psalm 28](#)**

## I Look to You in Temptation

*No temptation has overtaken you  
but such as is common to man;  
and God is faithful,  
who will not allow you to be tempted  
beyond what you are able,  
but with the temptation will provide  
the way of escape also,  
so that you will be able to endure it.*  
(1 Corinthians 10:13, NASB)

Father, when I handle temptation in my own strength,  
the result is failure and  
frustration.  
The harder I fight,  
the more entangled I get  
in the web of my own weakness.

Teach me to do all I can to flee temptation,  
but when it comes,  
let me hear it immediately as a call  
to look to You,  
to trust my needs to You,  
to rest in You,  
my Father,  
my Creator,  
my loving Savior.

*Even our temptations can  
draw us to our Father  
as we bring them to Him and  
depend on Him.*

Hymn: [Keep Us from All Evil](#)

## Slaves to a Lie 1

Jesus promised His followers:

*"If you continue in My word,  
then you are truly disciples of Mine;  
and you will know the truth,  
and the truth will make you free."  
(John 8:31-32, NASB)*

What did He mean?

From what does God's truth set us free?

He sets us free from

the lies of sin and Satan.

Realize that the truth is never on Satan's side.

He is a defeated foe with  
limited powers.

Therefore lies are always his main weapon.

Jesus said of him:

*"He...does not stand in the truth  
because there is no truth in him.  
Whenever he speaks a lie,  
he speaks from his own nature,  
for he is a liar and  
the father of lies."  
(John 8:44, NASB)*

Sin and Satan continually make promises  
they cannot keep.

When he tempts you,

he is promising

a happiness,  
a satisfaction,

that neither he nor his sin  
can possibly deliver.

Hymn: [Think, Speak, and Live the Truth](#)

## Slaves to a Lie 2

When we give in to the lies of sin,  
we make ourselves its slave.

We give the lie power over us.

Jesus said, *"Everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin."* (John 8:34)

The Apostle Paul wrote:

*Do you not know that when you present yourselves to someone as slaves for obedience, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin resulting in death, or of obedience resulting in righteousness?* (Romans 6:16, NASB)

As slaves of sin, slaves of a lie,  
we are compelled to sin,  
chasing it for satisfactions it can never bring.

When we turn to Jesus and walk in His truth,  
we are set free from that slavery to a lie.

The truth that is in Jesus sets us free.

*Now having been freed from sin and enslaved to God, you derive your benefit, resulting in sanctification, and the outcome, eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.* (Romans 6:22-23, NASB)

This truth that is in Jesus is more than just  
facts to be believed.

Jesus not only speaks the truth.

He also thinks the truth and lives the truth.

Jesus **is** the truth.

*"I am the way, and the truth, and the life."* (John 14:6, NASB)

Jesus is the glorious reality of God's love and life  
filling our world and our lives.

In Him, we think and breathe,  
speak and live

the beautiful, powerful, liberating truth.

*"If the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed."* (John 8:36, NASB)

## **The Full Armor of God 1**

*Read Ephesians 6:10-17*

Father, in this evil world we must struggle with evil –  
evil that threatens us from outside and  
tempts us from within.

Whether this evil approaches us subtly or brazenly,  
its purpose is always the same.

Jesus said it always comes  
*to steal and kill and destroy.* (John 10:10, NASB)

When Jesus came into this world,  
He came armed with the Spirit of God:

*The Spirit of the Lord will rest on Him,  
The spirit of wisdom and understanding,  
The spirit of counsel and strength,  
The spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord.*

*Righteousness will be the belt about His loins,  
And faithfulness the belt about His waist.* (Isaiah 11:3, 5, NASB)

This same Spirit arms us as well.

*For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but  
against the rulers, against the powers,  
against the world forces of this darkness,  
against the spiritual forces of wickedness in heavenly places.*  
(Ephesians 6:12, NASB)

Though Jesus was as human as we are,  
He overcame evil in this world completely, and  
He arms us to overcome it completely as well.

He urges us to be strong  
in Him and  
in His power,  
not our own.

We must put on the full armor He has provided.

**Hymn: [Soldiers of Christ, Arise](#)**

## **The Full Armor of God 2**

*Read Ephesians 6:10-17*

Put on the belt of truth.  
Since we are children of Almighty God,  
    truth and reality are on our side, not Satan's.  
Thus His primary weapon is deceit.  
Protect yourself with the truth.  
Prepare yourself for battle with the truth.  
Know the truth,  
    speak the truth, and  
    live the truth.

Protect your vital organs with  
    the breastplate of righteousness.  
Your ultimate safety in this war is being on God's side.  
A mind, heart, and lifestyle that aren't right with Him  
    leave us vulnerable to the attack of evil.

Strap your feet with the gospel of peace.  
How can we march forward to do God's work  
    over rough, uneven ground?  
We are prepared and protected by  
    the gospel of Jesus Christ,  
    the good news of peace in Him.  
That wonderful message we bring to others  
    also keeps us steady.

All the above are static pieces of armor,  
    fixed to protect various parts of our body.  
But make sure you have the shield of faith.  
You will need to wield it, to raise it against various  
    fears, problems, and concerns that  
    Satan will sling your way.  
When a concern arises, raise the shield of faith:  
    "Lord, we are concerned about this need.  
    We bring it to You and trust You to help us with it."

**Hymn: [Soldiers of Christ, Arise](#)**

## **The Full Armor of God 3**

*Read Ephesians 6:10-17*

As we put on the full armor of God,  
how do we protect the most vital part of our bodies,  
our head?

That is where our thoughts originate, and  
the head guides the rest of the body.

So put on the helmet of salvation.

It protects us with the confidence that  
God's salvation has rescued us completely  
from sin, evil, and death.

The helmet of salvation is not only protective,  
but it is also a decorative helmet of victory.

It reminds us and shows the world that  
the battle has already been won.

Finally, we also protect ourselves with  
the sword of the Spirit, which is  
the Word of God.

God has already proclaimed our final victory!  
All who believe are safe in Him, and  
the war against evil will soon be over and won.

*Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.  
(1 Corinthians 15:57, NASB)*

*Father, help me to make no peace with  
the enemy of my soul.*

*No cease-fire.*

*No compromise.*

*No place in my  
heart, mind, or daily life.*

*His constant, unalterable purpose is to  
destroy my relationship with You.*

*Father, may I leave him no foothold.*

**Hymn: [Soldiers of Christ, Arise](#)**

## **No Fear, No Bitterness**

*God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of  
power, of  
love and of  
self-discipline. (2 Timothy 1:7, NIV)*

No matter how the present situation seems,  
remember:

God has not given us a spirit of fear.  
Do not let appearances intimidate you.

No matter what others have done to you,  
remember:

God has not given us a spirit of bitterness,  
but of forgiveness, love, and peace in Him.

Fear and bitterness are Satan's deceptions.  
Resist them.

Renounce them, and  
embrace love.  
Embrace faith.  
Embrace Jesus.

*Learn to recognize  
Satan's agenda and  
his subtler temptations.  
Often we slip into  
anger,  
anxiety,  
bitter thoughts,  
pride,  
selfishness, and  
lack of faith  
without even knowing  
we are being tempted.*

**Hymn: [A Thankful Heart](#)**



## **Father, Save Us from Fear**

Salvation, in its broadest sense, is deliverance from anything that  
pinches us, oppresses us, narrows us, or  
restricts the free flow of God's life in us and through us.  
We need this salvation not only in moments of crisis, but  
daily, constantly, need by need.

One of our most constant temptations,  
one of the greatest hindrances to our life in Christ, is  
fear – fear of anything but God Himself.

Fear threatens all the most precious gifts and graces  
our loving Father longs to pour through us:  
love, joy, peace,  
patience, kindness, generosity,  
thankfulness, and wholehearted praise.  
When fear takes hold, all these are choked out.  
Fear plunges us into a false reality where  
God is not God.  
Fear causes us to think and act as if God is not  
all-powerful, all-wise, and all-loving.

Sometimes fear expresses itself as outright worry.  
It stares us in the face and  
grabs us by the throat.  
But sometimes it is more subtle.  
We're not fully aware of its presence.  
It simmers beneath the surface,  
making us vaguely unsettled and uneasy.

As soon as anything concerns you, no matter how big or small,  
drag it out into the full light of day and pray,  
"Father, I am concerned about this.  
If there is anything I should do about it,  
lead me, and I will follow.  
Otherwise, I simply trust it to You."  
Pray this way every time that concern comes to mind.

Don't let the Enemy clutter your mind and disturb your peace  
with concerns that are unexamined and unnecessary.

*The Lord is my light and my salvation; Whom shall I fear?  
The Lord is the defense of my life; Whom shall I dread? (Psalm 27:1, NASB)*

## Holy Pride

*This is what the Lord says:  
“Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom...  
or the rich man boast of his riches,  
but let him who boasts boast about this:  
that he understands and knows me.”  
(Jeremiah 9:23-24, NIV)*

Lord, I grow proud at the slightest excuse.  
It doesn't take much for me to start imagining  
how great and wonderful I am.  
It sounds foolish, God,  
but You know it's true.

*Who makes you different from anyone else?  
What do you have that you did not receive?  
And if you did receive it,  
why do you boast as though you did not?  
(1 Corinthians 4:7, NIV)*

Lord, You have left me with  
only one thing to brag about:  
You and all the wonderful things You've done!  
I will take pride only in You.

*Don't let the Enemy of your soul  
discourage,  
deceive, or  
distract you from  
the wonderful things  
your loving Father longs to do in you.*

Hymn: [Isn't He Good?](#)

## Lust

Too often we approach the Bible fearfully, with this question in mind: "How much would it cramp my lifestyle if I followed the Bible?" We seem to assume that we've already found the happiest way to live. We wonder how much we would have to compromise that to please God.

But are we really perfectly happy? Doesn't our loving Creator know the happiest, the best, the most natural way to live? For example, Jesus spoke these words: "*You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.*" (Matthew 5:27-28, NIV)

Seems like a tough standard, doesn't it? But if you've tasted lust, you know that it's like any other addiction. It starts with an offer of pleasant stimulation. So simple. So innocent. But it's progressive. It pulls you in, step by step. It demands more and more, and before you know it, you're on a downhill slide with no power to stop.

The result: shame, humiliation, corrupted thoughts, and a tarnished relationship with the one dearest to you. Unless you find a way to uproot the lust, it will one day bear very bitter fruit.

So what is Jesus saying to us here? "If you want to do yourself one great big favor, don't take that first look." If you've been down that road, you know the wisdom of what He's saying: If you want to be happy with your mate, never allow yourself to be stimulated in any other direction. Even in our sex-soaked culture, that one simple principle applies. It's practical. It works.

Focus all your love - body, mind, and spirit - on that person alone. Devote yourself to pleasing him or her. Reserve for yourself life's greatest sexual pleasure: loving only one person for a lifetime. That is your Creator's precious gift to you. Treasure it. Cherish it. Protect it.

And if you've traded that gift, turn back to Him. Repent and ask for forgiveness and restoration. You'll find Him a God who loves to give second chances. He is glad to heal, renew, and restore. Your Creator has a happier life for you. He really does. Turn to Him. Trust Him.

*Lust is self-centered and longs to take.  
Love is God-centered and longs to give.  
Pursue love.*

## **Self-centeredness**

Temptations approach us in a variety of ways. Some come on strong, seeming irresistible, but if I turn to God immediately, they prove temporary.

But one temptation is very subtle, yet always with me. Insidious and incessant, it occupies my mind so unobtrusively that I rarely recognize its presence. But it does its work, dominating my thoughts, draining my energies, filling my daydreams with pleasant but delusive visions.

That temptation is self-centeredness, or preoccupation with myself, or just plain selfishness. One term can hardly capture all its shades and subtleties. Though I truly want to spend all I have serving our Lord, I catch my mind dwelling on my own recognition, my own comfort, my own well-being. My imagination is conquered by fantasies of my own glorification. They bring a temporary “high” but seem ridiculous and vain in the light of reality.

Such thoughts mock my deepest desires to glorify Him, only and always, completely and constantly. But despite my best efforts, the pull of self-centeredness is more consistent than my efforts to banish it. It just never goes away.

Or almost never. Come to think of it, it is nowhere to be found when I focus on God. When I look to Him, and when faith realizes His presence with me, my mind and heart are so filled with Him that selfishness vanishes. I only find worship, sharing my needs and concerns, confessing my sins, pouring out my heart. Things tumble out of my soul that I didn’t know were there. Sometimes He is more real and “comfortable” than a best friend, yet so exalted that the throne room is here and now.

But there is another time when self-centeredness disappears. When I actively love others and let my energies flow toward sharing God’s love with them, life seems natural, free from the distortions of self. Even when love’s demands cause fatigue and pain, I find a rightness, a liberty, a peace.

Lord, draw my thoughts more and more into You till all my life – all my energies, every moment – flows out in love and worship.

## **Luke 11:37-54**

*You Pharisees clean the outside of the cup and dish,  
but inside you are full of greed. (Luke 11:39, NIV)*

Jesus, sometimes I'm more like the Pharisees than I like to admit.

I excuse myself and condemn others.

I major on minors and minor on majors.

I make the outside appear beautiful but don't root out the ugly self-centeredness within.

I'm passionate about the wrong things.

I love too much the respect of others.

I am insensitive to the burdens of the needy.

I live by the rules but don't live Your love.

Holy Jesus,  
forgive me.

Cleanse me by Your Spirit and  
form Yourself in me.

*Face your God now.  
Strip away all the excuses.  
Abandon all your hiding places.  
Step out before Him into the light.  
Now is the day for forgiveness.  
Now is the time for renewal.*

**Hymn: [Print Your Image](#)**

## Freedom

*Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed,  
for his compassions never fail.  
They are new every morning;  
great is your faithfulness.  
(Lamentations 3:22-23, NIV)*

When I fail to trust God, I fail.  
And I have failed so often.

Sometimes it's been a troublesome, recurrent sin.  
Sometimes  
    pride,  
    worry,  
    selfishness, or  
    unkindness.

But in all these years, I have never used up His mercies.  
I draw on them over and over, and  
    they are never diminished.  
They are "new every morning."

I feel ashamed and presumptuous to  
    come to Him again for forgiveness.  
But He asks me to come, and  
    I come in obedience.

*Whatever your faults and failures,  
    count on this:  
when you simply confess your sin,  
    God forgives it  
    completely,  
    joyfully, and  
    forever.  
Reject any fruitless torment over past failures.  
    It is from Satan,  
    not your loving Father.*

Hymn: [Your Ceaseless, Unexhausted Love](#)

## **Forgiveness Is Always Available**

*When I kept silent, my bones wasted away.  
Then I acknowledged my sin to you...  
I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord"  
and you forgave the guilt of my sin.  
(Psalm 32:3, 5, NIV)*

Are you unsure of your relationship with God?

You don't need to let uncertainty put a cloud between you.  
You don't have to wonder.  
You don't have to wait.

If you think you've failed Him, talk to Him right now.  
Forgiveness is always available.  
He makes it available to you every moment.

Jesus, I accept  
today's forgiveness for  
today's failures.

*When we do wrong,  
we can't hide it from God by  
ignoring it.  
All we do is cloud our relationship with Him.  
Repentance brings full forgiveness and  
unhindered fellowship with Him.*

**Hymn: [Father, I've Failed You](#)**

## **New Driver**

*Read Psalm 103:8-14*

I remember when my son was a new driver. He was so confident in his expertise, assured he could handle any situation (though he had no way of knowing what those situations would be). He was impatient with our parental concerns, eager for independence above all else. He said he could drive. The school said he could drive. The state said he could drive.

And he could drive, as long as it was smooth sailing. When situations were normal and all was clear, he was in control. But when the roads were crowded or unexpected demands were made, when quick thinking and experience were required, he bungled the basics. His reactions were not yet polished. His confidence suffered a sudden attack of realism, and he panicked, took chances, and sometimes used poor judgment.

For example, on his first Sunday in the church parking lot, he turned the wrong way down a one-way aisle, went too fast trying to pull into a parking space slanted the opposite direction, and scraped the side of a car. \$285 in cash (we decided not to bother the insurance company).

Reflecting on this, I realize that to God my Father, I must seem much like my 16-year-old son did to me. I've studied and experienced so much. I *know*.

But when a crisis puts pressure on my faith; when my peace of mind is blind-sided by some anxiety; when a difficult situation demands that I set aside my own concerns and be thoroughly loving, I'm like a new driver. I lack the wisdom, the instincts, the reactions. I too often panic and blow it. In the process, I risk my Father's reputation and the welfare of myself and those around me.

Yet I praise the Lord for His patience and His faithful persistence in teaching me. Though I panic, He does not. And I pray that He might help me listen more eagerly, reacting to His teaching as to loving wisdom, and not as if He were trying to meddle in my affairs or limit my freedom. I long for the day when I handle my daily demands as Christ would handle them, exercising His faith and His love.

What does a father do when his son blows it — when he makes a \$285 mistake? I explained what he did wrong, then forgave him on the spot, gladly and completely. After all, he was doing his best. I was sympathetic with his struggles. It's not easy, and I wanted to encourage him. I wanted him to succeed.

I was really rather proud of him. Still am.

**Hymn: [So Unworthy](#)**



## **Repent**

God, You call us to Yourself.  
You call us out of our sin,  
    out of our wandering  
and into a better life,  
    a richer life,  
    an eternal life in You.

You clearly call us to repent,  
    to change our direction,  
    to change what we think,  
    to change what we do.

This was the call of John the Baptist,  
    the call of Jesus as He walked this earth,  
    the call of the early church,  
    the call of the glorified Christ as He walks among us today.

Their call has always been the same: Repent!  
    Your whole future depends on it!  
    Turn around!  
    Decide to change!

This was Your call when You first came to us.  
This is still Your call  
    every time You come to us now,  
    every time Your love has something better for us.

You come saying: Repent!  
    Change your thinking!  
    Change your doing!  
    Prepare yourself for a blessing!

Father, thank You for the precious gift and  
    the glorious possibility of repentance.

I embrace it.

I repent.

I am ready to change.

I am ready to receive all that You have for me.

Show me what You want me to do, and  
    by Your help, I will do it.

## A Story of Forgiveness 1

Father,  
when shame is all that I deserve and  
regret is my daily bread,  
    You forgive me –  
        simply and  
        completely.

When my guilt never stops accusing me  
    and I have nothing to reply,  
when my punishment can never be enough  
    to make me feel right again,  
You declare me  
    innocent,  
    guiltless, and  
    pure.  
You make me clean!  
Between You and me,  
    my guilt is gone  
        totally and  
        forever.

**God, if You are for me, who can be against me?**

*If You didn't spare Your own Son but gladly gave Him up to save me,  
You are certainly won't hold back anything else.*

**Who can accuse me?**

*No one can. You Yourself have declared me innocent.*

**Who can condemn me?**

*Absolutely no one! Jesus Christ, Your Son, died to forgive me and is right  
now sitting next to You, interceding for me.*

**Who can separate me from Your love?**

*Can trouble or hardship or persecution or hunger or poverty or danger or  
death itself? Absolutely not! In all these things I am more than a conqueror  
because You love me. I know for certain that neither death nor life, neither  
angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers,  
neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to  
separate me from Your love, which You have poured out on me in Jesus  
Christ. (Romans 8:31-39, paraphrase)*

## **A Story of Forgiveness 2**

God, You have forgiven me completely!  
But I realize that my actions still have consequences in this world,  
and I have to live with those consequences.  
But now You help me work through those consequences with  
    grace,  
    hope,  
    patient endurance,  
    gentleness,  
    and yes, even  
    joy!

My life is a story I cannot unwrite.  
But I don't need to.  
The story isn't ended yet.  
You are writing for me  
    a new chapter,  
    a new destiny.  
It will transform my story from  
    a tragedy about me to  
    a love story about You.  
It will all become Your story,  
    not mine,  
one that glorifies You, our  
    magnificent,  
    patient,  
    gracious Father.

Though I can't rejoice in who I have been,  
I do rejoice in who You are and  
    who You are making me.  
My story will still have a wonderful, uplifting ending,  
    one that is happier than I ever dreamed it could be.  
Praise to You, my God!

**Hymn: [Sea of Mercy](#)**

# **Relationships in General**

## **Love**

*Paraphrase of 1 Corinthians 12:31 – 14:1*

Love is the best way to live.

Without it, all other treasures are worthless.

Without it,

knowledge,

eloquence,

faith, and

self-sacrifice

are empty and meaningless.

Love has patience.

Love extends kindness,

does not grow jealous,

does not brag or

puff itself up,

does not act rudely or

seek its own advantage,

does not get provoked,

does not keep track of wrongs done to it,

does not rejoice in wrong but

rejoices in what is right and true.

Love endures through every trouble and  
every circumstance.

It keeps on trusting and  
keeps on hoping.

Love never gives up.

Love never stops.

Prophecies, languages, and knowledge  
are all temporary and imperfect.

One day they will all pass away.

Love will last forever.

Love reigns supreme over all blessings and virtues.

Pursue love!

## **Which Is More Valuable?**

*Read 1 Corinthians 13:8-13*

Imagine how our society would rank the following in value:

- an intelligent person
- one who could foretell the future
- a loving person

It's obvious.

Highly intelligent people are put on a pedestal.

Those who can foretell the future are almost gods.

Being loving is "nice" and admirable, but it's not  
highly sought or  
greatly esteemed.

But read the scripture above.

Knowledge is partial and temporary.

It is quickly replaced by more complete knowing.

True prophecies are rare.

But even they, once fulfilled,  
simply become part of yesterday's newspaper.

Love is the one treasure that

time and change will never supersede.

It becomes more precious as the years pass.

*Father, You know our desire to  
do "great" things in order to  
win respect from other people.  
But help us pursue Your goal for us:  
to live a  
simple,  
sincere  
love.*

**Hymn: [Pursue Love](#)**

## Fill Me with Love

*Love the Lord your God  
with all your heart and  
with all your soul and  
with all your mind and  
with all your strength....*

*Love your neighbor as yourself.*

*There is no commandment greater than these. (Mark 12:30-31, NIV)*

God, You are love.  
And more than anything else,  
You want to fill my life with love.  
You want me to love You and  
love those around me –  
not just in word but  
in action, with  
all I have and  
all I am.

You want to root out the selfishness that  
twists, distorts, and destroys my life.  
You want to fill me with Your love and  
the peace it brings –  
peace with others and  
peace with You.

Jesus, today fill every thought and  
every action  
with love.

*I treasure Your love, Father,  
but it also challenges me.  
I am challenged by Your love for the  
people that make me uncomfortable.  
I am challenged by the truth that  
I can walk continually in the love of Christ.  
Teach me, Father.  
Shape me.*

Hymn: [Pass the Peace of Christ](#)

## **The Essence of Life**

By current U.S. standards, my financial means are modest. I'm comfortable, but my lifestyle isn't lavish. I'm a typical middle-class American. Yet compared to other times and places, I am pampered beyond measure. My luxuries far outstrip what the world's wealthiest could imagine just a few years ago.

I live in a comfortable, climate-controlled environment.

I enjoy virtually instant communication with almost anyone, anytime, anywhere.

With careful planning, I can travel nearly anywhere in the world. And compared to earlier years, travel today is quick, comfortable, and reliable.

I live in relative safety - the best civilization can provide. I live in a strong, stable country where the government works to protect its citizens from a wide variety of dangers.

I have ready access to virtually any educational information I desire.

I have a comfortable home, meaningful work, and a wonderful family. I am in good health and have affordable access to excellent health care. A wide variety of nourishing foods is always at my fingertips.

Freedom of religion, freedom of speech, freedom to go where I want, leisure time, a whole range of entertainments, a strong, active church – all these luxuries and more surround me every day. I have virtually every good thing the human imagination can conceive.

Yet with all this, my happiness is determined not by what I have, but by what I give. It is measured not by what I possess, but by the love I give out and live out day by day. I look at my life. I look honestly at my daily happiness, and I see that it is so.

Specifically, my happiness is determined by my response to what Jesus called life's two greatest commandments:

*Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.*

*Love your neighbor as yourself (Mark 12:30, 31, NIV).*

Love shapes my happiness. Not material goods. Not comfort. Not the finest luxuries. Love.

## **First Things First**

*By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.*  
(John 13:35, NIV)

Christians are not known  
by their politics,  
by their musical styles,  
by their miracles, or  
by their cultural preferences.

Christians are known by their love.

God doesn't require hard or extraordinary things from us.  
He doesn't measure us by our intelligence,  
our talents, or  
our grand accomplishments.

He asks us to love those around us,  
not just in word  
but in action.

Someday, that's how we'll all be judged (Matthew 25:31-46).

Next to loving God, life's  
highest calling,  
greatest challenge, and  
deepest joy

is loving others as we love ourselves (Matthew 22:36-40).

As you set your priorities and goals,  
keep first things first.

*Imagine what your life would be like if  
your every desire,  
every thought, and  
every action  
flowed from love for God.*

**Hymn: [Lord, You Are Love](#)**



## **True Freedom**

*Do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature;  
rather, serve one another in love (Galatians 5:13, NIV).*

I used to think that freedom meant  
doing what I wanted.  
Freedom was the ability to please myself.

But I've learned that in fact, self is life's  
heaviest and  
most constant burden.  
What is more binding, draining, wasteful, and demeaning than  
always thinking about ourselves?

Love is freedom.  
Love for God and  
love for others  
sets us free from the crushing burden of self-concern.  
And it is a truly glorious freedom!  
Taste that freedom, and  
you'll want to live in it always.

We were created to love.  
That is the beautiful purpose for which  
the Creator designed us.  
Only when we love do we find  
fulfillment,  
freedom, and  
peace.

*Bless me with the  
Spirit of Christ, Father, so that  
everything I say to anyone is said  
in love and  
in You.*

**Hymn: [One in Purpose, One in Passion](#)**

## **As I Want to Be Treated**

*In everything, do to others  
what you would have them do to you.  
(Matthew 7:12, NIV)*

Relationships can be so complex and puzzling.  
How do we know how to handle the many  
situations and  
personalities that come our way?

Jesus has given us one simple rule.  
It's easy to remember and  
easy to understand:  
    Treat other people the way  
    you want to be treated.  
This single command sums up  
    all God has to teach us about  
    living in harmony with each other.

Try it!  
And ask Him for help.  
He's glad to give it.

*For God's people,  
love is the law of the land.  
Love is our heart,  
    our breath,  
    our joy,  
    our inheritance.  
We are to treat others  
as we want to be treated.  
We are to love and care for them  
as we love and care for ourselves.  
Nothing less is worthy of the  
loving, self-giving God who calls us  
His children.*

**Hymn: [Live in Love](#)**

## **Daily Gentleness**

*Flee from [the love of money], and pursue  
righteousness,  
godliness,  
faith,  
love,  
endurance and  
gentleness.  
(1 Timothy 6:11, NIV)*

I easily grow insensitive to the people around me.  
I fall into a self-centered indifference toward them,  
a kind of "don't take my time" attitude.

This verse convicts me.  
Along with lofty goals like righteousness, godliness, and faith,  
we're told to work toward a  
daily gentleness toward others.

Such gentleness is valuable.  
It is precious.  
Your Creator, who understands life completely, says:  
Quit chasing money.  
Pursue gentleness.

*Lord, help me to be  
gentle,  
loving, and  
kind  
in every personal contact.*

**Hymn: [Be Love in Me](#)**

## **Daily Love**

*Owe no one anything, except to love one another.*  
(Romans 13:8, NRSV)

Did you know you are in debt to everyone around you?  
You owe each person this:  
to love them as you love yourself.

We have so many grand goals.  
We get wrapped up in so many worthy  
desires,  
ambitions, and  
ministries.

But Jesus said that the most important thing in all the world,  
next to loving God completely,  
is to love those around us as much as we love ourselves.

God is love.  
Turn to Him.  
Talk to Him.  
As you walk with Him,  
He will lead you into a life of love.

Jesus, help me love others  
as I love myself.

*Today your Father calls you to  
willingly,  
lovingly  
subjugate yourself to  
the needs of those around you.*

**Hymn: [I Look to You, and You Are Love](#)**

## In Someone Else's Skin

*Be kind to one another,  
tenderhearted,  
forgiving each other,  
just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.  
(Ephesians 4:32, NASB)*

The next time you have a  
headache or are  
tired or have a  
sore throat,  
look at the people around you and  
ask yourself this:

What would it feel like to be in their skin?  
How would it be

- to deal with their discomforts?
- To be their size, shape, and weight?
- To wake up every day  
in their home,  
to their family,  
with their concerns,  
temptations, and  
weaknesses?
- To see the world through their eyes,  
as colored by their memories?

We are frail, physical creatures.  
Everyone around you is a frail, physical creature.  
Today each of them could use a  
little patience,  
a little understanding,  
a little compassion.

*Father, help me to be  
more patient with everyone as  
You are patient with me.  
People require patience.  
Every relationship goes smoother with  
patience.*

Hymn: [Teach Me How to Love](#)

## Patient with Differences

*Rejoice with those who rejoice, and  
weep with those who weep.  
Be of the same mind toward one another;  
do not be haughty in mind,  
but associate with the lowly.  
Do not be wise in your own estimation. (Romans 12:15-16, NASB)*

Here in the Amazon section of the zoo,  
in a single cage I'm watching  
the squirrel monkeys nimbly leaping around in incessant motion.  
Meanwhile, slow-moving animals graze on the ground, and  
a two-toed sloth just hangs there.

God designs us so differently.  
We share the same space and time.  
But our metabolisms,  
bodies,  
experiences, and  
specific needs  
are so varied.  
We each perceive reality through  
our individual eyes.

Lord, I am a limited creature.  
Keep me humble.  
Help me always be patient with my fellow creatures,  
always kind to them,  
always anxious to learn from them.

*Father, we walk and work each day  
in a garden of precious people, with various  
personalities, strengths, and needs.  
Help us to walk lovingly,  
valuing each beautiful flower.*

Hymn: [Praise to You, Giver of Life!](#)

## Through Eyes of Love

*I thank my God in all my remembrance of you,  
always offering prayer with joy  
in my every prayer for you all. (Philippians 1:3-4, NASB)*

On social media, I'm often struck by how  
people absolutely glow when they talk about those they love,  
especially their families:

children,  
grandchildren,  
spouses, and  
parents.

What's more, these family members also glow  
when described by those who love them.

Through indifferent eyes, they would appear  
ordinary and  
deeply flawed.

But through eyes of love,  
these human creatures glow with  
uniqueness,  
beauty, and  
potential.

They are genuinely special!  
Love gives us a glimpse into the  
lovely and  
intriguing creations  
they were designed to be.

God sees each of us through such  
eyes of love.

And He calls us,  
challenges us, and  
implores us  
to see each other as He sees us, through  
His loving eyes and  
His loving heart.

Hymn: [Our Father's Burning Heart](#)

## **The Taste Test**

*Let us not love with words or tongue  
but with actions and in truth  
(1 John 3:18, NIV).*

Sunday, 9 a.m.

I stopped by the grocery on the way to church  
to buy doughnuts for our Sunday School class.  
I could tell by the casual conversation around the counter that  
the other customers were doing the same thing.

I wondered:  
what would the boy behind the counter  
think of Christianity by the end of the morning?  
His opinion wouldn't hinge on theology.  
It would be shaped by how people treat each other  
during a brief exchange of  
dollars for doughnuts.

Would these "church people" be  
pushy,  
sharp,  
self-absorbed, and  
impatient?

Or in those moments would  
simple kindness and  
a gentle spirit  
show through?

*The Golden Rule is a reminder that  
the Father loves every other person  
as much as He loves you.  
Remember that as you interact with them.  
Treat everyone  
kindly, gently, and generously.*

**Hymn: [The Beauty of Christ](#)**



## **Pray for Those You Pass**

*Pray for each other (James 5:16, NIV).*

My daily walks are my prayer time.  
It's a wonderful, beautiful time alone with the Lord.

But even then,  
    foolish, selfish daydreams  
    invade my thoughts.  
I don't want my mind  
    or my time  
spent that way,  
so I asked the Lord to help me.

He answered my prayer.  
He challenged me to  
    look into the face of the people I pass and  
    pray for them.

When I do, I find that  
my thoughts are turned away from myself and  
    toward those around me.  
The love of Christ is stirred in me.

Prayer is a wonderful privilege.  
It is there throughout the day,  
    always available to  
    realign our hearts and minds with  
    Christ and His love.

*Father, You have  
    wonderful,  
    gracious,  
    life-giving plans for  
    every person around me.  
I am available to play a part.  
Use me as You please!*

**Hymn: [Ever Standing in Your Presence](#)**

## Kind to the Unkind

*If you lend to those  
from whom you expect to receive,  
what credit is that to you?  
Even sinners lend to sinners in order to  
receive back the same amount.  
But love your enemies, and  
do good, and lend,  
expecting nothing in return; and  
your reward will be great, and  
you will be sons of the Most High;  
for He Himself is kind to  
ungrateful and evil men.  
Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. (Luke 6:34-36, NASB)*

Most of us treat others the way they treat us.  
We “give them what they deserve.”  
That only seems right...  
Right?

But that's not what God is like...  
and aren't we glad!  
He gives  
lovingly and  
generously  
to His enemies.  
He is lavishly,  
ridiculously kind  
to the most undeserving people.

And He wants us to be the same.

Jesus, help me to be  
kind to the unkind.

*Father, help me to display  
Your generosity  
by the way I  
give myself to others.*

Hymn: [As You Love](#)

## Come to the Source

*"I am the vine; you are the branches.  
If a man remains in me and I in him,  
he will bear much fruit;  
apart from me you can do nothing." (John 15:5, NIV)*

The demands of love can seem  
overwhelming and  
beyond our ability.

But when God calls us to love,  
He is not pushing us into the impossible.  
He is calling us to himself.  
He is urging us to look away from  
ourselves and  
our own needs and resources, and  
to look to Him.

The more we look to our Father, the more we  
trust Him and  
love Him.  
As we trust Him,  
we are free to be generous with others.  
As we love Him,  
we grow to love those He loves.

Is loving difficult?  
Spend more time with your loving Father.  
As you live in His presence,  
you'll become more and more like Him.

**Hymn: [Ever Full and Overflowing](#)**

## Let Love Fill My Moments

*O God, you are my God,  
earnestly I seek you;  
my soul thirsts for you,  
my body longs for you,  
in a dry and weary land  
where there is no water.*

*On my bed I remember you;  
I think of you through the watches of the night.  
Because you are my help,  
I sing in the shadow of your wings.  
(Psalm 63:1, 6-7, NIV)*

Lord, help me spend my thought time  
more wisely.  
Let's keep an open conversation  
between You and me,  
talking and listening,  
no matter what else is going on.  
As we face each other, Lord,  
let Your love fill all my spare  
thoughts and  
moments.

Make my life a constant gift of love  
from You  
to Your children.

*Father, help me to treat everyone  
in Christ,  
out of my relationship with Him and  
His love for them.  
Let His love for me be  
my living example.*

Hymn: [As You Loved Me](#)

## **Flavored with Love**

*[Jesus said:] Love each other  
as I have loved you.  
(John 15:12, NIV)*

Jesus, You were never unkind.  
You were never rushed.  
You gladly took time with people.  
They were Your agenda.

Jesus,  
    in my thinking,  
    in my speaking,  
    in the decisions I make,  
    in my reactions to others,  
    when I am inconvenienced,  
    when I am under pressure,  
flavor my life with Your love.

Keep me in You, and  
at peace in You.

*Father, make my love  
    wiser,  
    less fearful,  
    more patient.  
Grow Your love in me –  
the love of Jesus Christ.*

**Hymn: [God Is Light](#)**

## **Stay in Touch**

*When the Lord saw her,  
his heart went out to her (Luke 7:13, NIV).*

Often I walk through this world in a shell.  
I see people,  
    but I don't see their needs.  
I hear them,  
    but I don't listen to what they're expressing.  
I'm just not tuned in.  
    I'm wrapped up in myself,  
    encased in my own concerns.

When Jesus was here, He truly saw people.  
He listened to them.  
He touched them.  
He was "moved with compassion."  
And according to the Scriptures,  
    whenever Jesus was "moved with compassion,"  
    He did something to meet their need.

I am not Jesus,  
    but I can have His love.  
I can see and hear the people around me.  
I can be "moved with compassion."  
I can reach out in the love of Christ  
    to help meet their needs.

*Father,  
bless my dear loved ones.  
Bless them with  
    active,  
    sensitive,  
    self-giving love  
    from me.*

**Hymn: [Lord, Keep Us Reaching](#)**

## **God Is Shaping You**

*Live a life of love, just as Christ loved us. (Ephesians 5:2, NIV)*

God uses relationships to  
make us more Christ-like.

Usually when problems arise in a relationship,  
we blame the other person.  
But more often, the reactions of the other person are  
a mirror in which we can see  
ourselves and  
our faults more clearly.

God uses these tough times to  
teach us and  
reshape us.  
He is giving us hands-on training in  
patience, forbearance,  
gentleness, and self-sacrifice.  
He is teaching us  
to set ourselves aside to make someone else happy,  
to reach out and understand the other person,  
even when they seem the most unfair.

Do you want the mind of Christ?  
He forms it in us through people.  
When painful, demanding situations arise,  
live love.  
God is doing a good work in you.

*Are any of your personal relationships difficult?  
Don't be discouraged!  
God is using them to a wonderful purpose!  
Perhaps more than anything else,  
God uses the daily pressures of relationships to  
form Christ in us.*

**Hymn: [Beyond Myself](#)**

## **As We Live in Christ**

As we live in Christ, we share His relationship with the Father.  
We share their love for each other and  
for every human being.

As we live in Christ, we share His bond of love with  
all those He loves and  
all those who love Him.

As we become one with Him,  
we become one with all those who are His.

All our relationships now go through Him.  
He is the unseen partner in each one.

We learn to love others because  
He loves them and we love Him.

As we live in Christ, we grow to love as He loves,  
show compassion as He shows compassion,  
be patient as He is patient,  
absorb wrongs done to us as He absorbed them,  
forgive as He forgave.

In loving all those around us, He is our master,  
our model, our standard,  
our source, and our goal.

Wives, husbands, children, parents,  
bosses, employees, friends, enemies –  
as we live in Christ, we love each one with the  
gentle, self-giving,  
patient, persistent love of Christ.

As we trust Christ, we live in Him,  
and love is the very breath of His heart.

As we trust Christ,  
He fills our beings with His own loving Spirit.

His Spirit helps us love everyone  
in Christ, for Christ, like Christ,  
as loving Christ Himself.

**Hymn: [Live and Love and Grow in Christ](#)**



## **Daily Needs**

*Give us...our daily bread.* (Matthew 6:11, NIV)

God gives us what we need day by day.  
We are “daily” creatures.

Our families need **us** every day.

It wouldn't be good enough if  
    God responded to our needs  
    only when convenient to Him.  
“At my convenience” isn't good enough for our families either.

We've made a commitment to them.  
Whether they verbalize it or not,  
    whether they realize it or not,  
they depend on us for certain needs.  
It may be to talk,  
    to listen,  
    to encourage, or  
    to give help with daily tasks.  
It may be to simply be there,  
    to spend relaxed time together and  
    just enjoy being with them.

When we fail in our day-to-day commitments,  
    they suffer.

Don't give leftovers to  
    the people you love the most.  
Their needs are daily.  
Be there for them daily.

*Father, make me the gift of love  
You long to give to my spouse,  
    to my family, and  
to everyone around me.*

**Hymn: [Our Daily Bread](#)**

## **The Dream**

Rarely are my dreams meaningful or memorable, but some years ago I had a dream that has stuck with me. It came in the early years of our marriage and featured my wife, Gloria, and me. We had switched personalities. She acted and reacted as I do, and I saw as she must see and felt as she must feel. Not only did I get to see myself from her perspective, but I ended up reacting to myself as she does.

In the dream, Gloria was self-confident and busy with her work, caught up in her own life. I was much less certain of myself. Life seemed bigger than me, and the handles that others grasp so confidently eluded me. I was like a non-swimmer in water just a bit too deep – I probably wouldn't drown, but to feel comfortable and stable, I needed someone to help me a bit.

I craved time to talk, an opportunity to express what was on my mind and share my feelings. I needed my wife to take time to listen and talk with me. Relaxed and open conversation with her gave me the support I needed. It helped me feel secure and ready to tackle life. But Gloria often had something else to do or something else on her mind. When that happened, I not only felt very uneasy about myself and about life, but I was incredibly, painfully lonely.

In fact, I remember the loneliness most. Though the dream seemed short, the feelings were so vivid that they made a lasting impact on me. No, I'm far from the perfect husband, and I still get busy and preoccupied. But when I realize I've been too caught up in my own life, the memory of that dream helps me. I don't just mentally understand that she needs time with me, but I remember the loneliness she feels.

The dream makes me wonder how often I have reacted negatively and insensitively to another person, coming from my limited emotional perspective. How would my attitude, values, and life-style change if I actually felt others' motivations and needs, their inner struggles and scars?

They may need me to talk or to listen, to encourage or to give practical help, or to reassure them that I love them and enjoy sharing life with them. They may not even verbalize their needs. But when I fail them and shrink into self-centeredness, they suffer. Many of them are the dearest people in the world to me; yet if I'm not careful, I make them survive on the "leftovers" of my time and attention.

In all close relationships, the sweetest fruits grow from daily touches of love. Constantly" is the way love works best.

## Parenting

Without God's help, the demands of parenting could overwhelm us. At times being a parent requires more wisdom and patience than we have to give. But remember:

*His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness. (2 Peter 1:3, NIV)*

As a parent, be confident in God's gifts to you.

**God offers us His wisdom.** Here's a promise that every parent should write on their bathroom mirror and engrave on their heart:

*If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously without finding fault, and it will be given to him. (James 1:5, NIV)*

**God gives us His Spirit.** We have the presence, the love, the inner strength, the unshakable peace of God Himself. Just trust Him.

*The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. (Galatians 5:22-23, NIV)*

**God is the Father of each and every one of us.** He is your Father, and He is the Father of your children. The wisdom, the love, the strength, and the ultimate responsibility are all His. You are only His steward for a while.

Realize that of all His names and titles, God cherishes "Father" the most. "Father" is what He wants us to call Him. And in His love for you, He has graciously given you a part in His most treasured role: parenting new human lives, lives that will last forever. Parent your children in His love, His strength, and His wisdom. Parent them in simple, daily confidence in God, not yourself.

He is always, always with you — just remember to depend on Him.

Hymn: [Everlasting Father](#)

## Love One Another

*John 13:34-35*

What would you most want to say to your loved ones  
as you prepared to leave them in this world?

Compare your list to what Jesus says to His disciples in John chapters 13 through 16.

One of the things I would say is this:

My loved ones, I ask you, I beg you,

love each other—

deeply, actively, totally,

more and more every day!

Never forget it!

Never grow lax in it!

Never let anything take its place!

Your love can express a portion of the love I have for each of you,  
the love I would show you if I were there.

In my absence, friends, I ask you with all my heart:

love each other!

That is one of the first things Jesus tells His disciples  
to prepare them for His departure.

*Love one another,*

*even as I have loved you.* (John 13:34, NASB)

Later He comes back and says it all again.

We are Christ's presence in this world.

He longs for us to deeply,

daily,

totally,

actively

express His love for those that are so dear to Him.

Do you love Jesus Christ?

Do you care what matters to Him?

Then *love one another*.

Hymn: [Love One Another](#)

## **Do You Want to Make a Difference?**

Years ago I went to a prayer seminar taught by my mentor and close friend, Dr. Morris Weigelt. He asked the group of us to recall the people in our lives who had influenced us the most. Names filled the chalkboard as we fondly recalled a wide range of people who had made a lasting impact on our lives.

Then he asked us why these people had been so influential. What was it about them that left such a deep and permanent effect on us? Again, the chalkboard was filled with reasons.

When they had all had been listed, we looked at them as a whole. To my surprise, there was not a single “professional” ability on the board. No one had been considered influential because they were intelligent or talented or specially capable in some way.

Why had the long and varied list of people been so influential in our lives? All the reasons boiled down to only one: we had each been the most deeply influenced by the persons who had cared about us, who had taken a personal interest in us. The people who changed us most profoundly were those who made us feel valued, respected, and loved. It was the people who had cared about us, not just in word, but by giving of themselves actively, personally, individually, unselfishly. They had said to us by their actions, “You are special! I believe in You!” And because they said it with their actions, we believed them.

Do you want to make a difference? Do you want to have a lasting impact on some person’s life, and therefore on our world as a whole? Go out of your way to give someone your personal attention. Love – active, sincere, sacrificial love – is still the greatest force for bringing change, blessing, joy, and new life to our world. If you want to make an investment that will pay off, invest yourself in people. Invest yourself in love.

*Beloved, let us love one another,  
for love is from God; and  
everyone who loves is born of God and  
knows God...  
God is love.  
(1 John 4:7-8, NASB)*

**Hymn: [Touch a Life through Me](#)**

# Difficult Relationships

## Love Is Not Blind

*“While the prodigal was a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.*

*“The son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’*

*“But the father said to his servants, ‘Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let’s have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’” (Luke 15:20-24, NIV)*

Love is not blind.  
Love sees what no one else sees.  
Others see sin and ugliness.  
Love sees one unspeakably precious.  
Love sees its treasure,  
its child.

Your Father calls you to share His love,  
to live the same love that  
reached out and drew you in.  
Your Father calls you to  
share His heart.

*Father,  
forgive my indifference to  
the lost sheep that  
mean so much to You.  
Make my heart as Your heart,  
my hands as Your hands,  
my life as Your life.*

Hymn: [My Life Is Not My Own](#)

## Love's Wisdom

It was getting late on a weeknight, and I had to pick up my children at church after an activity. When I arrived, I found they had volunteered me to take one of their friends home – one who lived a number of miles in the opposite direction. To me, that was totally illogical. Why should I forfeit so much time when she had a parent at home who should pick her up, just as I had picked up my kids? So I politely suggested that she should call her mother to come get her.

But when I saw her strained smile as she walked away from our van, I knew I had made the wrong decision. I felt cheap and unkind.

Life is filled with situations that force us to decide how far we will extend ourselves for others, whether the “others” are family, fellow workers, or starving people half a world away. Often what seems “right” and “logical” is doing what seems best *for us*.

But the New Testament speaks of two sets of ideas about what is right and wrong – two kinds of “wisdom”. The Bible says the world’s wisdom is based on selfishness. *This wisdom is not that which comes down from above, but is earthly, natural, demonic* (James 3:15, NASB).

Unfortunately, as Christians living in this unspiritual world, we often follow that selfish, unspiritual wisdom in dealing with others. We instinctively and jealously protect our comfort, our “rights”.

But another kind of wisdom exists. *The wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy* (James 3:17, NASB). Love has its own wisdom, and the wisdom of God is the wisdom of love. It is *peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy*. The peace that it brings blesses not only the giver and the receiver, but those around them.

That’s the kind of wisdom I wish I had followed that night at church. God’s wisdom doesn’t just impart information. It guides and shapes our thoughts, emotions, and reactions. It shapes *us*, from the inside. This living wisdom flows from His living presence in our hearts. And because it is His wisdom, it makes us think and react more like Him.

His Spirit makes this wisdom constantly accessible for all the ordinary moments as well as for the crisis times. It is part of the living treasure of Christ in us. How do we access it? *“If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you”* (James 1:5, NIV).

## **Use Me**

*Carry each other's burdens, and in this way  
you will fulfill the law of Christ.  
(Galatians 6:2, NIV)*

Lord, there is one near me who is  
tired,  
stressed,  
overworked,  
anxious,  
carrying a burden too heavy to bear.

Lord, please help them.  
Lift their load.

But can I pray this way without  
being willing to help them myself?

God, please help them, and  
use me however You choose.  
Use me to lift someone's load today.

*Encourage each other.  
Each of us is walking  
the long road of faith.*

**Hymn: [Share Your Father's Heart](#)**



## Loving Difficult People

*We who are strong ought to  
bear the weaknesses of those without strength and  
not just please ourselves. (Romans 15:1, NASB)*

Lord, I'm glad to love and serve other people...  
as long as it's convenient and  
reasonably comfortable.  
I'm willing to give a little money to feed the hungry.

But You want me to bear with those who are  
weak in other ways,  
ways that may be  
inconvenient and  
uncomfortable for me.

You call me to love those who are struggling with  
emotional scars,  
blind spots,  
moral problems, and  
disordered lives.

You call me to be compassionate when  
hidden fears cause  
unpredictable and volatile reactions.

Lord, You have always fully accepted me,  
with all my problems.  
Help me do the same for others.

*Father, help me to treat  
every other human being  
the way You have always treated me:  
with undeserved patience,  
kindness,  
generosity,  
respect, and  
unfailing forgiveness.*

Hymn: [God of All People](#)

## **Hard Changes**

*Read Philippians 2:3-8*

It's coming: the confrontation –  
the big showdown.  
I *know* I am right!  
So much seems at stake.  
The opponent is tough,  
but my cause is "just".  
Everything within me strains forward,  
strengthened by fear.

Yet the opponent seems more and more immovable.  
Righteous indignation fuels my frustration and anger, and  
confusion sets in.

Then I remember that You, Lord, are here with me,  
and I turn to You for solace and direction.  
In Your presence,  
I begin to see the situation in a new light.

Lord, if the change should be in me, if  
the real obstacle is my ignorance, and  
the only things at stake are  
my ego and  
the comfort of the status quo,  
soften my heart;  
pull down my pride.  
I open my clenched fists and  
spread my arms to You,  
bowing in Your presence.  
In Your mercy, grant me  
a trust that is willing to turn loose,  
a humility that is gracious and joyful,  
a Spirit that ever longs to give and heal.

But the lingering unknowns?  
The hurts and unresolved fears?  
I release them to you, my Savior, resting in  
a wisdom that is always selfless and patient, and  
a justice that overflows with mercy.  
I know You care for me –  
for *me*, Lord –  
and that is more than enough.  
I love You, my God!

## Tense Situations

*I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to  
agree with each other in the Lord.  
(Philippians 4:2, NIV)*

Lord, a tense situation faces me.  
The issues are sensitive and serious, and  
I am angry and anxious.

My Lord, nothing matters but me saying  
what You want me to say.  
*Nothing else matters.*  
Help me make whatever adjustments are necessary on my part.

You are with me,  
so I face the situation with relaxed confidence.  
I walk in peace  
because I am at peace in You.

Help me keep my eyes  
off “the issue” and  
on You.  
As long as I am focused on “the issue,”  
I can’t fight off the anxiety.  
But thinking of You with me,  
I rest in You.

God, I renounce all anger.  
I renounce all bitterness, and  
I embrace Your love.

*Rise above every difficult relationship by  
intentionally,  
voluntarily,  
consistently showing  
Christ-like love.*

## **When I'm Angry**

*Let everyone be  
quick to listen,  
slow to speak,  
slow to anger;  
for your anger does not produce  
God's righteousness. (James 1:19-20, NRSV)*

Sometimes when I'm involved in a controversy, Lord,  
I'm so sure I'm right.  
I'm so sure I've been wronged.  
The more I think about it,  
the more stirred up I get.  
Conversations go round and round in my mind.  
I get more and more intense and  
determined to "make things right."

Thank You for reminding me that  
my anger will not work Your righteousness.  
You call me to be  
quick to listen,  
slow to speak, and  
slow to anger.

*Lord, I step back.  
I take my hands off this situation.  
Work Your will  
in Your way.*

**Hymn: [Your Thoughts, Your Words](#)**

## Forgiving Each Other

*Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger...Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. (Ephesians 4:31-32, NIV)*

Lord, I feel I've been treated unfairly by that Christian brother. The hurt is deep, and the damage is more than just emotional. In spite of all our conversation, he and I have not been able to agree on the issue.

Jesus, You long for us to be one in mind and heart. What are my responsibilities in this situation? How do You want me to react?

Lord, what is the loving attitude to take? Help me to extend true understanding to that one for any human weakness or clouded judgment. Jesus, help me to forgive him completely. I pray that You will strengthen and bless him and his work. If there is anything I can do to help him and make his task easier and more effective, Lord, enable me to do it.

I pray also that You give me a continuing sense of my own inadequacy and clouded judgment. Take away my blindness, and clothe me with humility.

Lord, what attitude would faith have me take in this situation? I know Your hand is working, and I accept this circumstance as from You. Merciful Lord, put anger behind me. Build up Your work, and don't let this or anything else hinder it. Bless Your children, and nurture unity among us. Help me to be a gracious distributor of blessing and acceptance and unconditional love.

Lord, fill me with Your Spirit – You who were slandered yet didn't lash back; You who willingly suffered for the salvation of others; You who in Your pain and death rejoiced in doing Your Father's will.

Jesus, my Lord, give me Your Spirit.

Hymn: [The Mind of Christ](#)

## **A Prayer Response to Romans 14**

*Read Romans 14:13-23*

*Do not...destroy your brother for whom Christ died (Romans 14:15, NIV).*

Lord, as I interact daily with people,  
help me always remember that I'm handling  
    Your most precious commodity and  
    Your most valuable work.  
I'm dealing with those you love and  
    for whom You died.

May my actions,  
    words, and  
    manner  
always speak  
    Your love,  
    Your mercy,  
    Your forbearance, and  
    Your self-sacrifice.

Lord, Your presence among us is  
    righteousness,  
    joy, and  
    peace.

May my life be  
    righteousness,  
    joy, and  
    peace in my little world.

May I be the fragrance of Your love  
    to everyone around me.

Jesus, be my comfort,  
    my pleasure,  
    my goal, and  
    my highest good  
as I walk among Your loved ones today.

**Hymn: [Prayer of Intercession](#)**

## Sanctify My Words

*The tongue also is a fire...  
a restless evil,  
full of deadly poison (James 3:6, 8, NIV).*

Lord, the more I see every person as  
someone You love,  
cherish, and  
understand,  
the more I pray,  
“Sanctify my words!”

My Jesus, I want to abandon,  
completely and forever,  
saying any unkind word  
to or  
about anyone.  
Such talk has become distasteful to me.

You love and understand everyone around me.  
Why should I be tearing down Your work and  
trampling Your deepest affections?

My unkind words are hurtful,  
destructive,  
unnecessary, and  
counter to Your great compassion.  
They are out of harmony with You and Your will.  
Such words are always more wrong than right.

Put a guard over my mouth, Lord!

*Father, who am I to judge  
someone You created,  
someone You are working to redeem,  
someone You love with an everlasting love?*

Hymn: [Prayer for Purity](#)

## Relationship Lessons

*Read Colossians 3:12-14*

We expect holidays to be perfect, since they include time off work, fun, food, and being with people we love. But even during holidays, people are people, and unpleasant things happen. Love is a powerful force, and not always a comfortable one. When it is combined with the ups and downs of emotions, stressful situations occur.

Nothing is quite as stressful as having a blockage in a relationship with someone very close to our hearts, about whom we care deeply. When an incident disturbs this relationship, we can think of nothing else. But I've found that God teaches me a lot through such pain – a lot about myself, about love, and about trusting Him. So, although I am no psychologist, let me share a few lessons I've learned during family holidays.

When conflicts arise, at times I'd swear I am totally blameless, only to see, through time and conversation, that I've thought and acted selfishly. It usually comes down to this: when I fail to turn my needs over to God, I am inevitably protective and selfish, although I may be blind to it at the time.

God is always with me, ready to meet even my most personal needs. When I commit those needs to Him, I am freed to be more flexible, loving, and giving in my relationships. I don't need to demand my way, even when some need is crying within me. When love calls me to give way to another's wishes, I can do so in peace, resting my needs with Him.

However, sometimes situations truly aren't my fault. I am the victim. In trying to deal with the debilitating pain, I long for a restored relationship. I just want the other person to apologize, thus opening the way to restoration and normalcy.

But I've learned that the way to healing is not through receiving an apology, but through giving free forgiveness, even when it is not requested. Forgiveness breaks down the walls, relieving the painful tensions and bringing healing. *And we always have the option of extending forgiveness.* God gives us this freedom if we ask Him, and no wrong can take it away.

Forgiveness restores the joy, warmth, and rest to our hearts. The ability to extend forgiveness is yet another gift of His love working within us. We just need to turn to Him, admit our need, and trust Him. His presence works to restore and renew our relationships, no matter what the problem, no matter who is at fault.



## **Help for Difficult Relationships**

*Father, through  
difficult relationships,  
hardship, and  
testing,  
You are giving us the  
beautiful gift  
You most long to give:  
Your holiness.  
Help me to receive it  
joyfully and  
gratefully,  
no matter how it is wrapped.*

*Father,  
give me a gentle spirit,  
for it is better to  
suffer wrong than to  
do wrong.  
Help me to follow in  
the steps of Christ.*

*Imagine how  
ignorant,  
selfish,  
false, and  
unkind  
our words must seem at times to  
our omniscient, holy God.  
Yet He is patient with us and  
genuinely loves us through it all.  
Shouldn't we be a bit more patient with  
the brothers and sisters around us?*

## **Individuals, Not Issues**

I remember when my brother first told us he was gay. For a while, homosexuality itself was the issue. He was anxious for us to understand him and be open to his viewpoint. We wanted him to know that we didn't read the Bible that way.

But eventually, we moved beyond dealing with homosexuality as an issue and got down to personal relationships. The real question for me became, "How do I treat my brother who is gay?"

The answer soon became obvious: I love him like a brother. That's my sole responsibility toward him. It's really that simple.

Then the broader question for me, and for all of us, is, "How do we treat our 'neighbors' who are gay?" And again the answer is simple, obvious, and biblical: we love them like neighbors. We love them as we love ourselves. We love them as Christ loved us.

The natural concern may be, "But aren't we obligated to let them know we don't condone their life-style?" Believe me, gays are deeply and painfully aware that many of us don't approve of them. They don't need reminders.

The real question for us is, "Have we shown them that Christ likes them and loves them, personally and unconditionally?"

When Jesus was on earth, He was accused of being a friend to those considered morally repulsive. "Religious" people wouldn't get near them, but He hung around with them, went to their parties, and in general seemed to like them and care about them. And they liked Him and gladly listened to Him.

While we tend to focus on issues and overlook individuals, Christ did the opposite. He looked past politics and concentrated on persons.

In that spirit, my point is not political or social, but personal. Our responsibility is not to try to change people. We are not responsible to try to convert homosexuals into heterosexuals. Our challenge is first and foremost to be Christ-like so that people are attracted to Him. And we can't do that as long as we are fearfully shaking our fingers in their faces.

Nothing should ever distract us from showing that genuine, face-to-face love of Christ. Nothing. He is the force that changes hearts, not laws.

Do I pray for my brother? Of course. Daily. I pray for him just as I pray for all those I love: that he would experience all the riches and fruitfulness of Jesus Christ.

# Relationships in the Church

## Hey, I Know Them!

*Read Colossians 4:7-12*

At the close of Paul's letters, he often attaches personal greetings to those he knows at the other end, or from those traveling with him. For years I thought of these messages as graffiti, as passing personal scribbles on magnificent, timeless documents.

But recently while finishing the book of Colossians, I began to notice how he referred to his friends, those working with him: dear brother; faithful minister; fellow servant in the Lord; fellow workers in the kingdom of God; a comfort to me.

As I read those phrases, it struck me: Hey, I know them! I was reminded of one Christian friend after another, especially fellow workers. The list got longer and longer. If I were to describe each of them and their relationships to me, I'd have to use the same terms Paul uses.

There are many whom I've come to appreciate and trust deeply as fellow servants of Christ. They are an integral part of my life and service, yet I tend to take them for granted.

Right now, think of those brothers and sisters in Christ who are a part of your life. Using only three or four words, how would you label each of them?

When we get to heaven and gain an eternal perspective, I believe we'll realize that some of the greatest blessings God gave us while here on earth were people – people close to us each day, people that surround us every time we enter God's house.

Thank the Lord for them. Treat them like precious gifts of God, for that's exactly what they are!

*Father of love,  
thank You for weaving  
our hearts and lives together with  
so many people who are  
beautiful in Your love.  
What a magnificent gift!*

Hymn: [I Thank the Lord for You](#)

## **All We Are in Him**

We are God's chosen people.  
What varied and beautiful pictures He draws of  
all we are in Him!

We are His temple, built with solidity and strength,  
built to last.  
Our strength comes from our eternal foundation, which is  
Jesus Christ.  
As God's temple, we are a holy vessel,  
prepared to be filled with His life and  
His worship.

We are branches in the Vine,  
inseparably united with the True Vine, Jesus Christ.  
We have no existence apart from Him.  
As we remain in Him, we are vibrantly alive,  
ever growing, and  
richly fruitful.

We are the body of Christ.  
Christ is our Head.  
We live and function  
from Him, through Him, and to Him.  
We are inseparable from Him and  
organically dependent on Him.

We are the bride of Christ.  
We who are human now glow with  
the radiant, vibrant love of  
our heavenly Bridegroom.  
As we receive His love and give His love,  
we are deeply,  
beautifully,  
eternally one with Him.

Now and forever, we are His temple,  
His branches,  
His body,  
His bride.

## Keys to Happy Relationships

*Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you. (Ephesians 4:31-32, NASB)*

Good relationships within the Church aren't automatic. They require effort: compassion, patience, forbearance, and forgiveness. Good relationships in the Church require the same effort as good relationships in the home:

- Remember to think of the other person's feelings and welfare first, and yourself second.
- Be willing to "go the extra mile" again and again and again.
- Give of yourself freely, without keeping a balance sheet.
- Even in their weakest moments, when they seem the most annoying and unreasonable, even when you are absolutely positive that the blame is entirely theirs, go out of your way to understand them and care about their feelings and see the situation through their eyes.

*When the Church is as diverse  
as Christ wants it to be,  
it will include people with a broad range of  
problems and  
weaknesses.*

*When the inevitable annoyances and conflicts arise,  
show the same  
patience,  
gentleness,  
forbearance, and  
forgiveness that  
Christ shows you.*

Hymn: [Family in the Lord](#)

## **One Body**

*We were all baptized into one body. (1 Corinthians 12:13, NASB)*

Lord Jesus, when I become one with You,  
I become one with every other believer.  
I come into one Body with them.  
When I first answered Your call,  
that's what happened.  
When I answer Your call and surrender to Your will now,  
that's what happens.  
I become one member of Your Body,  
with all its many members.

I get so focused on my individual life.  
I forget that in reality  
I'm one part of a grand picture,  
a panorama that extends  
throughout recorded history and beyond.  
I'm one part of Your own family,  
of Your precious people.

Jesus, teach me to think that way.  
Teach me to pray that way.  
Teach me to work that way.

*In all the world,  
throughout every nation,  
religion, culture, and personality,  
there is only one God, and  
only one mediator between God and us,  
Jesus Christ.  
Imagine us all  
praying and praising together.  
Can you see it?  
Father, help my prayers to be that broad,  
as broad as Your love.*

**Hymn: [We Have Come, God's Living Temple](#)**

## Dream Greater Dreams

*All the believers were one in heart and mind.  
No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own,  
but they shared everything they had.  
(Acts 4:32, NIV)*

Lord, I waste so much time and energy on  
my personal needs and concerns.  
I lavish so much of my thought on  
making myself look good and on  
fulfilling my personal dreams.

Lord, raise my eyes,  
raise my heart  
from the "me" to the "we."  
Wean me from foolish selfishness with all its burdens.  
Teach me to dream dreams for Your Body.  
Catch me up in the well-being of Your people.

Spirit of Christ,  
take over my mind.  
Take over my heart.  
Fill my hands, my words, my life  
with the beautiful love of Christ.

*In this dark world  
we cannot yet see  
our marvelous future or even  
many of the wonderful blessings that engulf us.  
So encourage others by your faith.  
Shine the light of faith across their path, and  
take courage from their faith.  
Let's remind each other of  
the reality that is ours.*

Hymn: [How Precious Are Your People](#)

## Only to Help and Heal

*We who are strong ought to  
bear the weaknesses of those without strength and  
not just please ourselves.  
Each of us is to please his neighbor  
for his good, to his edification. (Romans 15:1-2, NASB)*

We live as if we're in competition with each other,  
each seeking his or her own good.

The Bible teaches the opposite.  
It says we're all connected.  
We're all members of each other.  
Therefore we are wise to  
seek the good of others,  
not just ourselves.

Nowhere is this more important than in  
what we say.  
So often we tear each other down with our words.

Jesus, help me o only speak to  
help and  
heal.

*Father,  
it's so tempting to  
talk selfishly,  
to vent,  
attack, or  
entertain  
at someone else's expense.  
May love be the spring from which  
all my words flow.*

Hymn: [Make My Life a Holy Fragrance](#)



## **Speaking to the Saints**

When you speak to other Christians,  
you are speaking to those God has  
set apart for Himself.

He will soon present these very people to His Father as  
pure and blameless.

When you speak to them,  
you are entering that intimate union  
Christ has with His people.

You are given a part in His communication with  
those He holds dearer than His own life.

You are speaking to His lovely Bride.

Speak only in love.  
Speak only in tenderness.

Be His messenger of  
concern,  
mercy, and  
blessing.

Speak only as He would speak.  
But as His Spirit leads, speak  
freely, fearlessly, and joyfully.

God is choosing to share Himself  
with His people  
through *you*!

*Father,  
in my relationships with other people,  
help me to listen and follow Your leading,  
careful to wait patiently instead of  
running ahead.  
My love for them will never be  
as strong or  
as wise  
as Yours.*

**Hymn: [Chosen in Jesus](#)**

## Speaking and Listening

Read Ephesians 4:25-32; 1 Thessalonians 5:19-22

Father, I need Your Spirit living in me constantly.

But I hear Your warning:

*Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God.* (Ephesians 4:30, NIV)

Do not cause Him sorrow or pain.

And:

*Do not put out the Spirit's fire* (1 Thessalonians 5:19, NIV).

Do not hinder His working among you.

Do not ignore His wisdom or frustrate His love.

Lord, how do I grieve You or cause You pain?

Ephesians 4:25-32 says that

I grieve You by what I say to my fellow believers.

I wound You with words spoken against my brothers and sisters,  
words that are careless, angry, hasty, and self-serving.

When I hurt any member of Your Body, You feel the pain.

And how do I quench Your Spirit?

What do I do that hinders His work?

1 Thessalonians 5:19-22 says that

when I fail to listen when other believers speak,

when I turn them off without hearing them,

I may be ignoring You.

For Your words don't usually come to us

through a booming voice from heaven.

But Your Spirit speaks

Your precious wisdom through

Your children.

Savior, help me cherish Your presence

in each of my brothers and sister.

As I speak to them,

may I always do so with the love I owe You.

As they speak to me,

let me listen from my heart, eager to hear

Your voice, my loving Lord.

Hymn: [Do Not Grieve the Holy Spirit](#)

## **We Are Jesus' Family**

[Jesus] *looked at those seated in a circle around him and said,  
"Here are my mother and my brothers!  
Whoever does God's will is  
my brother and sister and mother."* (Mark 3:34-35, NIV)

Jesus, You look at me as Your brother.

You look around at all of us,  
such a motley and imperfect group, and say,  
"You are My mothers and brothers and sisters!"

Your Father is our Father too.  
What a wonder!  
We who share Your love for Him are  
all members of Your family.

You think of us fondly.  
You love us and feel a deep bond with us.  
You accept us as we are and  
enjoy our company.  
You are comfortable with us and  
want us to be comfortable with You too.

Jesus, thank You for thinking of me this way.

*If we love our Father,  
we will love His children.  
What's the surest way to  
endear yourself to a parent?  
Help their children.*

**Hymn: [Family Tree](#)**

*(Hymn based on the genealogy of Jesus in Matthew 1)*

## **Your Family in Christ**

*Do not sharply rebuke an older man,  
but rather appeal to him as a father,  
to the younger men as brothers,  
the older women as mothers, and  
the younger women as sisters, in all purity. (1 Timothy 5:1-2, NASB)*

To help us meet the hardships of life,  
God has given us a family.  
All the believers in the world,  
and especially those around us,  
are our family.  
How much we enjoy this family is up to us.

We can take pleasure in sharing life with God's children.  
We can enrich them with our love,  
our presence,  
our prayers,  
our labors, and  
the resources God has lent us.  
And we can be enriched by them.

Or we can isolate ourselves and  
impoverish both them and us.

The believers around you are one of  
God's most precious gifts to you –  
and one of His dearest trusts.  
Value them.  
Enjoy them.  
They can make life fuller and sweeter.

*Father, thank You for all the  
beautiful, Christ-like  
individuals that have filled my life!  
What an incredible gift!*

**Hymn: [Children of the Lord](#)**

## **Diversity**

*Read 1 Corinthians 12*

Father, in the Church, in Your Body,  
    we flinch at our diversity.  
How often we wish that others weren't so  
    painfully different than us!  
If only "they" were as enlightened as we are!

But You remind us that diversity is a blessing,  
    a good and perfect gift  
    from You, our all-wise, all-loving Father.  
How could we function as a Body without tough bones,  
    angular elbows,  
    stretchy tendons, and  
    sensitive nerve cells?  
Diversity enables us to be who we need to be as a whole.  
Diversity is given to nurture our unity,  
    not destroy it.  
We need each other!  
We need our differences!

In the Body of Christ there is no place for  
    partisanship or  
    self-centered pride.  
Individually, each of us is  
    small and incomplete.  
Only together, only in our  
    head-spinning  
    ever-challenging variety  
are we the Body of the glorious, universal Christ.

*Together we are the Body of Christ.  
    How crucial it is that we live  
    patient, persistent, forbearing love,  
    for we are members of each other.  
    We are all vitally connected.  
If we harm another believer, we harm ourselves,  
    our brothers and sisters, our cause, and  
    our Savior Himself.*

**Hymn: [One in Jesus](#)**

# Relationships in Society

## Forgive Me, Lord

*If anyone has material possessions and  
sees his brother in need  
but has no pity on him,  
how can the love of God be in him?  
(1 John 3:17, NIV)*

I watched as a flock of Canadian geese  
walked through the grass,  
feeding together.  
And I wondered:

How would I react if I saw one bird  
aggressively taking most of the food,  
hoarding it from the others,  
letting them starve?

Father, I wonder how I look to You  
in my wealth and comfort  
while so many of Your dear ones are in  
desperate need.

You provide enough for all of us,  
as you do for the birds.

But I use so much and  
share so little.

Forgive me, Father.  
Teach me how You want me to live.  
Teach me how to  
love those in need.

*If you want to please Your Father,  
love His children.  
They are His treasure.  
They are where His heart is.*

Hymn: [Listen to Love](#)

## **The Good Samaritan**

*Read Luke 10:27-37*

I see myself in this story.  
But I am not always the Samaritan.

Sometimes I am the expert in the law.  
God's wisdom for us is clear and simple:  
    treat your neighbor the way you want to be treated.  
But when I fail, when the golden rule isn't comfortable,  
I try to "justify" myself with questions and reasoning:  
    "But who *is* my neighbor?  
    How far does my responsibility *really* go?"

Sometimes I am the priest.  
Though a neighbor's need is obvious,  
    I have something more pressing to do, and more convenient.  
Besides, needy people can seem very "unclean".  
I pretend not to see.

But the closer I grow to God,  
    the more His love grips my heart.  
The more I love Him,  
    the more I care about those He loves.  
How can I ignore those that matter so deeply to Him?

Every parent, every loving spouse, every true friend  
knows that love has its own logic and  
    its own agenda.  
It doesn't always make sense to others.  
That is the logic and agenda my Father wants for me  
as I live in this needy world,  
    full of people He loves.  
In every needy "neighbor" He wants me to see  
    my child, my spouse, my dear friend...myself.

When I am needy and hurting,  
I am desperate to see that Good Samaritan come along.  
Father, help me to *be* a neighbor to the needy persons I meet.

**Hymn: [The Good Samaritan](#)**

## Community

*Be devoted to one another in brotherly love.  
Honor one another above yourselves.  
(Romans 12:10, NIV)*

Each of us is part of a group of people –  
a community.

In fact, we are members of multiple communities:  
family,  
church,  
city,  
nation,  
and more.

We have received so much from these groups.  
We owe them a tremendous debt.

In their immaturity, our children are often unaware of such debts.  
They feel obligated only to their own desires.  
They think only of themselves.

It's easy for us to make the same mistake.  
We've inherited so many of the blessings we enjoy:  
roads, schools,  
a stable government;  
knowledge, moral values,  
our Christian faith.

We didn't earn any of these.  
They were left to us by others.

What communities do you belong to?  
To whom do you owe a debt?

*Jesus taught:  
Don't spend your life hoping to  
impress people.  
Spend yourself  
serving them.*

Hymn: [We Thank You, O Lord!](#)



## **Think Beyond Yourself**

*In Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. (Romans 12:5, NIV)*

Our past, present, and future  
is bound up with the communities to which we belong.  
None of us got where we are alone.  
We aren't here alone.  
We won't get where we're going alone.  
And when we get there, we won't be alone.

Look at what you value most.  
Love, respect,  
purpose, even money—  
all grow out of community.  
They are nonexistent outside of interaction with other people.

Self-centeredness is foolish.  
It ignores the reality of community.  
It overlooks our smallness and incompleteness as individuals.  
It is shriveling, binding, and fearful.  
Self-centeredness is a lie from the Evil One.

Love is the bond of unity.  
It is beautiful, natural, and reasonable –  
a wonderful blessing of God.

*Pursue love. (1 Corinthians 14:1, NASB)*

*Father,  
help me to savor  
the deep pleasures of unity  
rather than  
the delusive allure of self-glorification.  
Fill my heart with love.  
Weave my thoughts around  
You and  
those You love.*

**Hymn: [We Will Be Your People](#)**

## Wholeness

*Behold, how good and how pleasant it is  
For brothers to dwell together in unity!*  
(Psalm 133:1, NASB)

It's a scientific fact:

the whole is often greater than the sum of the parts.  
When living tissues come together in certain ways,  
amazing abilities are created that don't exist otherwise.

The same is true with people. When God is drawing us and prodding us  
toward each other,  
toward a mate in marriage,  
toward the needy,  
toward Himself,  
away from self-centered thinking,  
He is drawing us toward wholeness.

In ourselves we are incomplete,  
like one piece of a puzzle.  
But together we can be far more than we are separately.

Love draws us together.  
Love is the magic of life.

*Father, every human family  
flows from You.  
You are the source of  
every household.  
We draw  
not only our lives  
but our unity,  
our love, and  
our connectedness  
from You.*

Hymn: [Philippians 2:1-8](#)

## **The Sweet Fruits of Unity**

*You owe a debt to everyone around you  
to love them as you love yourself. (Romans 13:8-9, para.)*

All of us naturally gravitate toward the fruits of unity,  
even in our selfishness.

We have friends.

We buy, sell, and make agreements.

We depend on others and  
seek their respect.

These are only a few of the many blessings that flow from  
the unity of human relationships.

But we miss the full fruits of unity  
when we fail to practice love –  
the bold, fearless, unselfish love  
that Jesus taught us.

Do you want to appreciate love more fully?

Imagine a world without it.

Then imagine God's love fully realized  
in yourself and  
throughout society.

Imagine it saturating  
every heart and  
every relationship,  
bringing perfect peace.

Such a world is coming.

Let God start it in you right now.

*Are you continuing to grow in  
faith and  
love?*

*Are you nurturing the growth of  
those God has entrusted to you?*

**Hymn: [Revelation 21](#)**

## Don't Forget

I am a conservative, evangelical, Bible-believing Christian. The laws, court decisions, and social movements in this country often conflict with my deeply-held beliefs. That will not change until Christ returns. Like most of you, I wrestle with how I should live as salt and light in this *crooked and perverse generation* (Matthew 5:13-16; Philippians 2:15, NASB).

I can't tell you how you should respond to the moral issues that will continue to stir societal tensions. But I can urge you to remember some basic truths that are easily forgotten in the heat of cultural combat:

1. As children of God, our most basic calling is to show those around us just how much God loves them (Ephesians 1:6). Our responsibility is to love them as we love ourselves (Matthew 22:39). Nothing is ever more important than love. Nothing! Without love, everything we say is as meaningless and obnoxious as a *noisy gong or a clanging cymbal* (1 Corinthians 13:1, NASB).
2. Jesus didn't respond to people as classes. He resisted labels. He dealt with people as individuals, and always with respect. His Spirit should guide every personal interaction. Remember that each individual is unspeakably precious to Him. Treat them that way.
3. Jesus said: "*God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world*" (John 3:17, NASB). He didn't condemn the morally disreputable of His day but openly befriended them and socialized with them. The religious conservatives accused Him of being a "friend of sinners", a charge which He gladly owned. If He did not come to judge sinners, neither have we.
4. People do not become righteous by externally-imposed laws, but by grace through faith. They are drawn to God from the inside, not driven from the outside. Righteous laws don't make a righteous people, nor does a perfect president, a perfect court system, or a perfect Congress. Old Testament Israel was given a perfect legal code, dictated by God Himself, with Moses as their leader. Did that make them a godly nation? Not even close. Neither would Christian laws make America Christian. The Biblical agent for changing individuals and societies is not law, but grace. Shouldn't grace be our focus?

*Father, keep us Christ-like,  
not only in our opinions,  
but in the way we express them.*

Hymn: [God Is Calling](#)

## Citizenship

*Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities,  
for there is no authority except that which God has established.  
(Romans 13:1, NIV)*

Taxes are one of our favorite complaints.  
And we have a legitimate concern that  
they be used to maximum benefit.

But let's never forget that taxes are  
one of the best financial bargains ever.  
Imagine each of us having to purchase all the benefits of government for ourselves:  
building roads,  
securing a full education for all our children,  
protecting ourselves from enemies foreign and domestic  
...and much, much more.

Taxes are a great bargain.  
They are one of the fruits of our union.  
Government itself is a gift of God.  
Appreciate it.  
Do all you can to keep it strong and just.

*Father,  
bitterness and  
discontent  
are like infectious diseases.  
Help me never to give them a start  
in my thoughts or  
in my words.  
I don't want to contaminate myself or  
those around me.*

Hymn: [For Such a Time as This](#)

# Money

## The Pearl of Great Price

Jesus said:

*“The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field.*

*“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it.” (Matthew 13:44-46, NIV)*

Material riches bring only temporary comfort,  
shallow stimulation, and  
a false sense of security.

Material riches are simply a means to an end,  
and often a poor means at that.

What do you really want?

Meaning?

Peace?

Security?

Maybe comfort...or satisfaction?

Are you longing for pleasure that truly lasts, or perhaps  
life that never dies?

Go to the Source.

Jesus Christ is the way, the truth, and the life.

He is the hidden treasure.

He is the pearl of great price.

Release your grip on everything else, and  
reach for Him.

Hymn: [Pearl of Great Price](#)

## **Perspectives on Money**

As a means to  
true satisfaction,  
joy, and  
security,  
money is a complete fraud.  
Run from the love of money and  
instead, chase  
rightness,  
faith,  
love, and  
gentleness.  
(1 Timothy 6:3-11)



Money is a medium of human exchange,  
so it can only bring what  
humans have to give.  
What God has to give is  
deeper,  
more lasting,  
more satisfying, and  
more enriching.  
He enriches who we are and  
who we will be forever.  
He enriches us with Himself.



Money,  
pleasure, and  
pride  
are like most other stimulants:  
they are dangerously addictive.  
Father, keep my heart on You.

## **Money**

I suppose my wife and I hope for the same benefits from our money that most people want: comfort; security; the freedom to do what we'd like. We've been blessed with relative financial stability. Our income has never been high, and finances are tight at times. But we've never been in dire need. We've faced no major catastrophes.

But as with many people, our finances do seem to go in cycles. We experience waves of extra bills, then, on occasion, periods of extra income. Having survived a number of these waves, I can look back and see that no matter how many extra bills have come in, we've always been able to pay them somehow, and always on time. On the other hand, the "extra" income is almost never extra. It is usually gobbled up rather quickly by more bills. On rare occasions, we can add modest amounts to our savings, but not enough to bring any real security.

With all the concern we lavish on our finances, I've come to view money as empty threats, empty promises. The bills have turned out to be less of a threat than we feared at times. And the extra income, on which we tend to focus so much hope, hasn't performed as anticipated. Empty threats, empty promises.

We want comfort, security, and freedom. But life's needs and insecurities run deeper than money could ever handle. Family relationships, a good attitude, health, and most of all, our relationship with God – these are far more critical than money.

As to freedom, God seems to bring us life opportunities that are neither initiated nor limited by finances.

In other words, I'm discovering several basic truths about money. If I want comfort, security, and freedom:

1. Bills aren't the real enemy: anxiety about money is. That anxiety can flourish whether bills are high or income is high. It destroys the sense of comfort, security, and freedom we seek.
2. Extra income isn't my real need: trusting God is. He really can deliver comfort, security, and freedom...and much, much more.

I still catch myself wishing for more income. But what I really want is to keep our finances in His hands, whether the bills or the income seem to be running ahead at the moment. Having our finances in His hands brings satisfaction that income can't give and bills can't take away.



## **Trust God Regarding Money**

When you are obeying God and  
depending on His provision,  
you are living,  
not paycheck to paycheck,  
but blessing to blessing.



Financially speaking,  
focus your desires on  
contentment, not money.  
The desire for money is  
deceptive and harmful and  
will only bring you grief.  
Contentment is true wealth.



Father, deliver me from the craving for money.  
Of all financial problems, it is  
the most common and  
the most deadly.  
Help me to find my  
security and  
contentment  
in You.



*Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness,  
and all these things  
(the necessities of life—food, clothing, shelter)  
will be added to you.  
(Matthew 6:33, NASB)*

## **The Only Good Is Jesus**

(Hymn)

[Recording](#)  
[Printed music](#)

The only good is Jesus,  
The only good in me.  
He's all I've ever longed for.  
He's all I long to be.

The only good is Jesus,  
He's all the life I seek.  
He's love that warms and blesses.  
He's life and love in me.

So why should I keep chasing  
This life of empty dreams  
Where what appears so wonderful  
Is seldom all it seems?

Now why not love Him only  
And turn from all the rest?  
And why not simply trust the One  
Who always gives the best?

The only good is Jesus,  
The only good in me.  
He's all I've ever longed for.  
He's all I long to be.

The only good is Jesus.  
He's all I need to seek.  
I count myself as nothing  
But stand in Him complete.

## The Widow's Mite

*[Jesus] sat down opposite the treasury, and began observing how the people were putting money into the treasury; and many rich people were putting in large sums. A poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which amount to a cent. Calling His disciples to Him, He said to them, "Truly I say to you, this poor widow put in more than all the contributors to the treasury; for they all put in out of their surplus, but she, out of her poverty, put in all she owned, [all she had to live on]." (Mark 12:41-44, NASB)*

Lord God, You are the Source of all being,  
the Source of **my** being,  
my Breath,  
my Father,  
my Creator, and  
my Redeemer.

I cannot put myself in right relationship with You  
by throwing You my spare change.

My only path to peace,  
wholeness, and  
rightness  
is to bow to You,  
trust You, and  
embrace You for  
all You are and  
all You long to be in me.

My only reasonable response is to love You with  
all I have,  
all I touch, and  
all I am.

You are so great, and  
I am so very meager.  
But, Almighty God  
(clink, clink),  
I am Yours.

Hymn: [Love of God, Possess Me](#)

## **Serving God through Money**

Don't set your desires  
on riches, but  
on God,  
who richly gives us  
all things to enjoy.  
Don't seek to be  
rich in money, but  
rich in generosity.



Don't spend a single hour of your life serving  
The Green God, money.  
Give him nothing!  
Do everything as to the Lord,  
as an offering of love to Him and  
only for His glory.



God's wise stewards  
focus where He is focused,  
not on the value of money,  
but on the value of people.



Let's ask our Father to  
guide our financial decisions.  
His use of our money will  
outlast and  
out-earn  
any use our desires might choose.  
His use will bear fruit for eternity.

## **True Riches**

*Read Luke 16:1-13*

Money can only buy what  
    other human beings have to sell,  
    creatures as small and needy as ourselves.  
Its reach is so very limited, and  
    as soon as we die,  
    its value is zero.

So Jesus,  
    the only person to ever experience both earthly life and eternity,  
urges us to use our money with eternity in view.  
This modest medium of human exchange can bring  
    heavenly gain.

If we use money wisely,  
    to worship God rather than to  
    replace Him,  
someday He will give us  
    true wealth,  
the riches of who we are rather than  
    the riches we simply hold.  
He will give us the riches of His eternal being.  
And this wealth will not be a short-term loan.  
It will be  
    our own,  
    forever.

Don't waste your money on  
    shallow,  
    selfish,  
    short-term investments.  
Use it to show God how much You  
    love Him,  
    trust Him, and  
    delight in glorifying Him.

**Hymn: [The Rich Young Ruler](#)**

## **The Circle of Love**

*Read 2 Corinthians 9*

All giving begins with God.  
He is the source of all good things.  
He is full and overflows in love to  
    all He has created.

He gives to us and  
    urges us to share His joy  
    by giving to others.  
He frees us to give generously,  
    promising that He will supply everything we need.

When we give to others,  
    they respond by giving thanks to God.  
They complete the circle of love that God began when He gave:  
    God,  
    to us,  
    to others, and  
    back to God.  
Everyone is enriched.  
Everyone experiences the joys of  
    receiving and  
    giving.  
We are drawn closer to God and  
    to each other.

If we grow too fearful to  
    take what God gives us and  
    share it with others,  
we break the circle.  
Others are left in need, and  
    we cause separation between each other and God.

God is offering us the joy of giving.  
Receive it!  
Be part of the circle of love!

**Hymn: [The Circle of Love](#)**

## **Prayers about Money**

Father, am I enslaved by  
my money and  
material possessions?  
Are they distracting me from You, or  
are they expressing faith and love for You?  
Teach me, patient Father.  
Open my hands and my heart.



Money can only offer  
temporary comfort.  
It brings no relief from  
life's two greatest plagues,  
sin and  
death.  
It cannot satisfy our deeper desires,  
our longing for eternity,  
for depth,  
for love,  
for meaning,  
rightness, and  
wholeness.  
Money brings only  
an illusion of security and  
an empty promise.  
Father, make me rich in Jesus Christ.



Father, You are  
joyfully generous, and  
I want to be  
joyfully generous too,  
just like You!

# **Closing the Day**

## **Reflection on Psalm 8**

*Read Psalm 8*

Father, Your greatness shines all around me!  
All the earth radiates  
    Your splendor,  
    Your glory,  
    Your might and majesty.

But You don't need spectacular displays to prove Your power.  
It is so woven through the fabric of reality that  
    mere children speak the awesome truth of  
    who You are.

Creator, in Your humility,  
    You even display Your glory through us.

When I look up at the clear night sky and  
    see the vastness of time and space,  
I am gripped by how very  
    small and unworthy we are.  
I wonder why You take any notice of us at all.  
Yet You make us lesser versions of Yourself and  
    surround us with Your magnificence.  
You entrust Your own creations to us –  
all the varied creatures of  
    land,  
    sky, and  
    sea.

Your condescension to us is yet another of Your  
    marvelous, amazing works.  
O my God, how glorious is Your name in all the earth!

**Hymn: [Psalm 8](#)**



## **A Word from Your Creator**

*Read Isaiah 43:1-7; 51:12-16*

Hear your God speaking to you:

"I am Your Creator,  
your Maker,  
the One who formed You,  
the Lord,  
the Holy One,  
your Savior,  
the One stretched out the heavens and founded the earth.

I know your face.

I call you by name.

You belong to Me.

When you pass through deep waters, I will be with you.

When you cross raging rivers, they will not flow over you.

When you walk through fire, you will not be burned.

"Why?

Because I AM who I AM.

I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel.

You are precious to me, and

I Myself am intimately, constantly, powerfully with you.

"Child, it makes no sense for you to be afraid of all these lesser things.

I created them, and they bow to me.

They do what I tell them.

When trouble threatens, you tend to forget Me,

that I am the Sovereign Lord of all, and

I love you, and I am with you.

When you're concerned about something, turn to Me.

Talk to me.

Trust me.

"Look! I have covered you with my own hand.

Nothing can trouble you here unless you let it.

You are mine.

Rest in my peace."

**Hymn: [Be Still, My Child](#)**

## **At the End of the Day**

Father, it's nearly bedtime.  
My mind is tired.  
My body is tired.  
But I don't want this day to end  
    without turning to You once more, at its close.

You were good and faithful today,  
    just like always.  
Thank You, my Father!  
You being You  
    is what makes life wonderful!

I was not always like Christ today:  
    harsh words...  
    missed opportunities.  
Too often I was distracted from what was  
    truly important.  
Sometimes I forgot to pray  
    when I needed You.

But Father, You are  
    so good,  
    so forgiving, and  
    so generous  
that I still end this day with a glow of joy.  
You are with me, and  
I am with You,  
    always,  
    completely,  
    forever.  
You love me,  
    deeply,  
    with all Your magnificent being.  
How can I help but smile all over,  
    even when I'm weary  
    and imperfect?  
How can I help but love You?

**Hymn: [Evening Prayer](#)**

# Facing the Future

## I Want to Know You

My life is crowded with so many desires.  
But, Jesus, I truly want only one thing:  
*I want to know You.*

All my ambitions,  
all my goals and dreams of glory,  
I give them to You.  
I release them and cut the cord.  
Nothing else is worth holding onto.  
*I want to know You.*

I look to the future,  
and I know more storms will come.  
But what does it matter?  
Each trouble will help me know You better.  
Each will give me a faith that  
sees You more constantly and clearly.  
*I want to know You.*

My heart leaps at the thought of being found  
always and entirely in You,  
with the baggage of self-interest gone forever.  
Praise to You!  
You are doing it,  
and You always finish what You start.  
I know You now, Jesus, and  
*then I will know You fully, even as I am fully known.*

Thank You, Lord!  
Fill my heart now with the desire  
that will delight me throughout eternity:  
*I want to know You, Lord.*  
*I want to know You.*

*We will soon realize by personal experience  
what has always been true:  
it does not matter how rich we are materially,  
but only how rich we are in Jesus Christ.*

## **Ever Increasing Health in Christ**

*We do not lose heart.  
Though outwardly we are wasting away,  
yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day.  
(2 Corinthians 4:16, NIV)*

We're all engaged in a battle to  
keep our bodies healthy and attractive.  
It is a worthy effort.

But it is a battle you will lose.  
Your body will decay and die.  
In fact, it is happening right now.

On the other hand, that inner core of your life,  
that relationship with God,  
that inner life you share with Him,  
can grow more and more healthy as time goes by,  
no matter what happens to your body.

That is where your future lies.  
That is where your  
time,  
thought, and  
effort  
will yield the richest rewards.

Life is precious.  
Invest yourself in what will last.

*Father, help me to  
spend less of myself on  
things that won't matter eternally.  
Reform my habits to  
better express my faith.*

**Hymn: [Live for God](#)**

## **Hope Devotional**

*Lord, you have been our dwelling place  
throughout all generations.  
Before the mountains were born  
or you brought forth the whole world,  
from everlasting to everlasting you are God. (Psalm 90:1-2, NIV)*

Lord, thank You for the  
    joy and  
    security of  
living in Your presence.  
I look back, and  
    I marvel at all You've done for me.  
You've been with me every moment.

I look ahead, and  
I see You there,  
more real and  
    more wonderful than ever.

And I know You are with us now,  
    loving us and  
    blessing us.  
That gives me confidence and  
    hope for every day.  
You will be with us forever!

*Father, in the new creation  
You are not only preparing  
a home for Your people,  
but a home for Yourself  
among us and  
within us.  
Not only must earth be prepared,  
but we must be prepared as  
Your full dwelling place.*

**Hymn: [We Look Behind at All You've Done](#)**

## **Look to the Horizon**

As you trust yourself to God,  
    what is your destiny?  
When His purpose is complete,  
    who will you be?

Look to the man Jesus Christ.  
See His moment-by-moment relationship with the Father.  
See His calm sufficiency in every situation.  
See His complete dependence on the Father,  
    His full submission,  
    His calm confidence,  
    His unbroken peace.  
See His selfless love toward  
    everyone around Him,  
    both friends and persecutors.  
See the Father's goodness and greatness  
    radiating from Him.

See Jesus Christ.  
He is the Father's  
    desire for you and  
    His promise to you.  
He is the grand horizon toward which our race is moving.

*In heaven we will  
know and experience  
what has always been true:  
    the only Light,  
    the only Life,  
    the only joy is  
    Him.*

**Hymn: [Christ Is Our Horizon](#)**

## **Imagine**

*We know that when He appears,  
we will be like Him, because  
we will see Him just as He is.  
(1 John 3:2, NASB)*

When Christ appears,  
    we will become like Him completely.  
And as we all become one with Him,  
    we become one with each other.  
Not only will each of us individually be  
    all God has planned for us.  
We as a Body will be so as well.

All the passing things that divide us will be washed away:  
    the insecurities;  
    the selfishness;  
    the physical, cultural, and emotional barriers;  
    our inability to see ourselves and each other accurately.  
We will all be one,  
naturally and completely –  
    one with Father, Son, and Spirit, and thus  
    one with a glorified creation and  
    one with each other.  
Unity and individuality will be brought to full bloom together.

One with Christ.  
One in Christ.  
It will begin now as we walk in His Spirit.

*Father, You are pure  
    light,  
    love, and  
    goodness.  
You will soon burn away  
everything that is not of You.  
    What a creation,  
    what a reality that will be!*

**Hymn: [See Christ, Your Bridegroom](#)**

## What We Will Be

*The body that is sown is perishable,  
it is raised imperishable;...  
it is sown in weakness,  
it is raised in power;  
it is sown a natural body,  
it is raised a spiritual body.  
(1 Corinthians 15:42-44, NIV)*

Your body now is only a seed of what it will be.

Now it is designed for earth:  
made from earth's elements,  
sustained by them, and  
soon to return to them.

Then you will be a heavenly being,  
with a body made of and for heaven.  
You will be like the risen Jesus,  
who is the first of a whole new race –  
our Second Adam.

Jesus, thank You for Your eternal, unending life that is  
already in us.  
Help us to spend every breath for You!

*Don't focus on  
the life that will  
die with your body,  
but on the life that will  
go on forever.*

Hymn: [Sown in Tears, Raised in Joy](#)



## **When His Healing Is Complete**

*Read 1 Corinthians 15:36-55; Revelation 7:15-17; 21:22 – 22:5*

Father, You created us from the materials on our planet home and  
enlivened us by Your own breath.

What marvelous miracles we are!

But when we proudly separated from You, we corrupted ourselves,  
including these amazing bodies You gave us.

Though conceived in love, our lives now  
begin in pain and end in death.

In-between, sickness and suffering are  
woven throughout the fabric of our existence.

Even the wonderful pleasures You gave us are tainted,  
imperfect and passing.

Rather than drawing us to You,  
we allow them to distract us from You.

We have turned Your gifts into gods,  
making them avenues for evil.

But Your Son, Jesus Christ, came as the Great Healer.

He began healing us from all the effects of our sin.

And through His resurrection, He became  
the Second Adam, the first of an entirely new human race,  
restored and recreated in Your glorious image.

When His work is complete and we are complete in Him,  
we will have no more pain, no more shame,  
no sorrow, no tears, no death.

The pleasures and sensations of being a physical creature will no longer be  
painful, imperfect, or passing.

Never again will they distract us from You.

Instead, we will be pure vessels, perfectly created for  
Your life, Your love,  
Your presence, and Your worship.

We will feast forever on all that You are.

Life will flow as a river.

It will blossom and grow all around us  
in richness and diversity.

We will be fully, beautifully, forever alive in You!

## **When Christ Our Healer's Work Is Done**

(Hymn)

[Recording](#)  
[Printed music](#)

When Christ our healer's work is done,  
No pain and no more death.  
We'll drink Your life in Christ the Son,  
Your glory, Your breath.  
The shallow pleasures of this earth  
Will hold no more appeal.  
We're made for joys of greater worth.  
No pain, no more death.

No shame or sorrow, no more night –  
Christ will be all in all.  
Our Lord will be our one delight.  
What joy when He calls!  
He'll lead our souls by quiet streams,  
And need will be no more.  
No tears, no grief, but joy supreme  
With Christ all in all.

With bodies made for heaven's life,  
All will be praise to You!  
The day will rise in Christ the Light,  
And all will be new!  
We'll feast on heaven's Bread and Wine  
And thirst for Him alone.  
Then every breath will be divine,  
Our Father, in You!