

# UNLOCKED

DAILY READINGS FOR TEENS

the words of eternal life



OCTOBER • NOVEMBER

# UNLOCKED™

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## *Unlocked—Daily Readings for Teens*

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Cover Story:

*Planted*

See page 70

# CONTENTS

| <b>OCTOBER   TITLE .....</b>              | <b>PAGE</b> |
|---|-------------|
| Jesus Prayed for Us.....                  | 5           |
| Desert Years .....                        | 6           |
| He Keeps His Promises .....               | 7           |
| Ask Questions.....                        | 8           |
| Broken Is Beautiful .....                 | 9           |
| The Archer .....                          | 10          |
| The Comparison Game .....                 | 12          |
| Comprehending God’s Love .....            | 13          |
| Rest Is Productive .....                  | 14          |
| Me, God, and the Fire Chief .....         | 15          |
| Seasons of Beauty .....                   | 16          |
| Prayer Is Powerful...Because God Is ..... | 17          |
| Paths Like Pretzels .....                 | 18          |
| Closer than a Brother? .....              | 19          |
| Salt and Such .....                       | 20          |
| A Hidden Treasure (Part 1) .....          | 21          |
| A Fulfilled Promise (Part 2).....         | 22          |
| Instant Changes .....                     | 23          |
| Where Is the Lamb?.....                   | 24          |
| Five Friends.....                         | 25          |
| God of All Nature .....                   | 26          |
| Focus .....                               | 27          |
| The Thief .....                           | 28          |
| Brokenhearted .....                       | 29          |
| Limits .....                              | 30          |
| Struggling to Follow .....                | 31          |
| A Fresh Start .....                       | 32          |
| Reflections of the Heart .....            | 33          |
| God Loves You.....                        | 34          |
| Temporary Situation.....                  | 35          |
| Traveling Alone.....                      | 36          |
| <br>                                      |             |
| <b>NOVEMBER   TITLE .....</b>             | <b>PAGE</b> |
| My Psalm.....                             | 38          |
| Maker .....                               | 39          |
| Issue of Blood.....                       | 40          |
| A New Accent.....                         | 41          |

| <b>NOVEMBER (CONTINUED)   TITLE.....</b>                       | <b>PAGE</b> |
|--|-------------|
| The Right Season .....   | 42          |
| Ensemble .....   | 43          |
| The Fleet of Laioma .....                                      | 44          |
| The Tears of God.....  | 46          |
| Jesus Answered Confidently.....                                | 47          |
| Prayer Warriors.....   | 48          |
| Storms.....  | 49          |
| Under Your Nose .....  | 50          |
| The Past.....  | 51          |
| Not Alone in Anxiety and Worry.....                            | 52          |
| Forgotten Legacies.....  | 54          |
| Wahyo Boon .....   | 55          |
| The Sacred Heart .....   | 56          |
| Why Can't We Be Perfect? .....                                 | 58          |
| The Story of Lazarus .....                                     | 59          |
| Going Through .....  | 60          |
| Thriving in Exile .....  | 61          |
| Always the Same .....  | 62          |
| Senses of Thankfulness.....                                    | 63          |
| Temporary Treasure.....  | 64          |
| Homemade Bread .....   | 65          |
| God's Art Gallery .....  | 66          |
| Weary and Burdened .....                                       | 67          |
| A Listening Ear.....   | 68          |
| The Perfect Lamb .....   | 69          |
| Planted .....  | 70          |
| What Does It Mean to Know Jesus? And Why Does It Matter? ..... | 72          |


## JESUS PRAYED FOR US


READ: JOHN 17

**H**ow amazing is it to think that Jesus took time to pray for His followers, including us? In John 17, we read Jesus's prayer—a conversation between Jesus, who is God the Son, and His Father in heaven. Jesus knew that He was going to the cross in a matter of hours, that He would die, rise again, and then ascend into heaven while His followers stayed on earth. He knew they would have struggles. He had seen the darkness **this** broken world holds, the darkness He came to save us from.

And though Jesus promised to be with us always through the Holy Spirit, and to one day come again and make all things new, He knew there would be hardships before He returned.

So, Jesus asked His Father to look out for His followers and protect them after He ascended. Jesus went on to pray not only for the followers who were with Him at the time, but also for us...for those who would someday hear and believe the message His first followers would share.

This chapter hit me differently when I read it recently. I don't remember knowing that Jesus took the time to pour out His heart regarding us and that He asked for help for us. John 17 shows how much Jesus cares about us. It can encourage us and remind us of how much He loves us. Jesus knew how difficult life could be (Hebrews 4:14-16). He knew that trouble and persecution would come for those who follow Him. He reached out to the Father to ask for help for those people. For us.  *Emily Acker*

 Have you ever had someone tell you they were praying for you, such as a friend or family member? How did it make you feel? How similar or different does it feel to know that Jesus prayed for you? (In fact, Jesus continues to pray for you. See Hebrews 7:25 and 1 John 2:1.) \_\_\_\_\_

 Consider taking some time to read John 17:11-26 slowly and imagine Jesus's voice praying these words for you. What sticks out to you? \_\_\_\_\_

*"I [Jesus] am praying not only for these disciples but also for all who will ever believe in me through their message." John 17:20 (NLT)*

## DESERT YEARS

READ: DEUTERONOMY 8:2-18; PSALM 13; MATTHEW 11:28-30

**W**hat are deserts? Many people think of places like the Sahara—rolling dunes of hot sand with no signs of life. Some consider parts of the Arctic to be a desert. It makes sense—rolling dunes of snow with no signs of life. In either case, deserts are big, empty, and hostile.

Do you ever feel like you're living in a desert? I do. Sometimes the season of life we're living in feels extreme, difficult to bear, and void. We may think: *How could God possibly be working in my life right now? I'm doing nothing but surviving—barely. My life isn't like the heroes of the Bible. My life is empty.*

However, nearly all the people in the Bible had what I call “desert years.” One of the most obvious examples is the Israelites’ forty years of desert wanderings (Numbers 32:13). But there are also Moses’s years as a shepherd in the desert before God called him back to Egypt (Exodus 2:15–3:10), David’s years of hiding in desert caves before God fulfilled His promise to make him king (1 Samuel 23:25), and Abraham and Sarah’s years of nomadic desert life before God gave them a child (Genesis 12–20). And Jesus didn’t skip the desert experience when He came as a human to die for our sins and bring us new life through His resurrection. He spent forty days in a desert before He began His ministry (Matthew 4:1-11).

For some of these people, not much is written about their desert years. But that doesn’t mean God was absent or that these years were meaningless. Think of the Israelites wandering aimlessly in the desert. In that time, God showed His loving, fatherly faithfulness. Their shoes never wore out and God provided them with food and water (Exodus 16–17; Deuteronomy 29:5). God showed that in the absence of all other things in life, He was present. How is God working in your desert years? I don’t know. But I know His life-giving presence is there. 🕯️ *Abigail Scibuir*

🕯️ Have you gone through a season of your life that felt like a desert? Do you feel like you’re going through desert years right now? Are there any Bible passages, memories of past experiences with God, or trusted Christians you can draw near to for comfort during this time? \_\_\_\_\_

🕯️ When we’re in our desert years, it doesn’t always feel like God is present. But if we know Jesus, He lives in us through the Holy Spirit. We can bring these feelings of loneliness and distance to God in prayer and ask Him to remind us of His nearness anytime.

*Satisfy us in the morning with your unfailing love, that we may sing for joy and be glad all our days. Psalm 90:14 (NIV)*

## HE KEEPS HIS PROMISES

READ: 2 CORINTHIANS 1:18-22; GALATIANS 6:2-5; HEBREWS 10:19-25

**O**n the way home from a road trip, I peered out the window of our minivan and noticed a slogan that said, “Helping the World Keep Promises.” This bold statement emblazoned on the side of a truck advertised the company’s reliability.\* I assumed they wanted customers to know they would deliver their cargo on time, every time.

*We DO need help keeping our promises*, I mused. Maybe we need reminders, to-do lists, or a date circled and highlighted on the calendar. Maybe we need to have accountability, a friend or mentor who will check in with us to be sure we’re following through on our commitments and goals. Keeping promises can present challenges for us, even when we long to keep our word and fulfill what we’ve committed to do.

But something else came to mind. We may need assistance in keeping our promises, but God never does. Righteous and holy, God will never fail to keep His word. He will always remain faithful to His character. Once we’ve put our trust in Jesus, we can know that His promises are for us, too. We can pour out our hearts to the Lord. He listens to our cries, He hears the stories of our brokenness, and He gives us rest in Himself. We can have confidence that He delivers on His promises on time, every time. **✚** *Allison Wilson Lee*

**✚** When do you need help keeping your promises? God knows that we all need support to follow through on our commitments, and He invites us to lean on Him and trusted people in our lives to help us. But sometimes, we bite off more than we can chew, and we need to apologize and tell others we won’t be able to do what we said. God wants to help us in these times too. Who are trusted people in your life who can help you set good boundaries around your commitments? \_\_\_\_\_

**✚** When is it hard for you to trust that God will keep His promises? We all experience this from time to time, and it can be helpful to remember examples of His faithfulness..Jesus promised to rise from the dead, and He did! Jesus also promised the Holy Spirit would come after He ascended, and that’s exactly what happened. Now, we’re waiting for Jesus to fulfill another huge promise: to return and make all things new, free from sin and death, so that everyone who trusts in Him can live with Him forever. Then, there will be no more broken promises, and all will be well. \_\_\_\_\_

\*Old Dominion Freight Line

*Let us hold tightly without wavering to the hope we affirm, for God can be trusted to keep his promise. Hebrews 10:23 (NLT)*



## ASK QUESTIONS

READ: PSALM 119:34; PROVERBS 1:1-7; ACTS 17:10-12; EPHESIANS 1:15-23

**A**s we grow in our faith, it's good to ask questions. Questions help us dive deeper into the Bible and learn more about God and how He reveals Himself in Jesus. God loves it when we bring our questions to Him. And it's rewarding to pursue answers that help us live out our faith with wisdom and share the gospel (or good news) with others.

The Bible is full of wisdom, mysteries, truth, and life. It tells the story of Jesus: God in flesh coming to live with His people, die on the cross, and be raised from the dead to make the way for us to be with God forever. There are so many things you might be curious about when it comes to the Bible and your faith. Maybe you wonder about the people who came before you, who walked with God thousands of years ago. You can study the Bible to learn more about them. And what you find may leave you with even more questions!

It's so good to take the time to ask all the questions you have. Jesus gives us community with other believers through the Holy Spirit, so you can talk to those who share your faith and bring your questions to them. You can learn from those who've been following Jesus and studying their Bibles a lot longer than you have. You can seek out trusted mentors and friends who will get into deep conversations, listen to your questions with patience and understanding, and pursue answers with you. You can also look for good books and other scholarly resources that will teach you some of the things you want to learn.

When you have questions to ask, ask them. Find answers. And when you don't find answers, ask more questions. Dive deep into the Word and learn more about the God who loves you more than you could ever imagine. 🕯 *Bethany Acker*

🕯 What kinds of questions do you have about God, the Bible, and your faith? Do you have someone in your life who can help you pursue answers, such as pastors, parents, youth leaders, or counselors? If not, you can ask God to help you identify someone in the future. \_\_\_\_\_

🕯 God wants us to live according to His wisdom because He loves us and He knows that His ways lead to true life. He generously reveals His wisdom in Scripture and gives us understanding through the Holy Spirit. What are some ways we can study the Bible, either alone or with others? \_\_\_\_\_

*I pray that your hearts will be flooded with light so that you can understand the confident hope he has given to those he called—his holy people who are his rich and glorious inheritance. Ephesians 1:18 (NLT)*

## BROKEN IS BEAUTIFUL

READ: ISAIAH 61:1-3; 64:6-8; 2 CORINTHIANS 4:6-10

**H**ave you ever heard of the Japanese artform called *Kintsugi*? The word means “golden joinery” or “golden repair.” The art is created when a treasured ceramic, like a clay bowl, is broken. Instead of throwing away the old pieces and making a new ceramic altogether, the artist takes the broken pieces and mends them together by mixing lacquer with powdered metal such as gold. The effect is the same shape as the original beloved ceramic, but with all the cracks now filled in with gold, the cracks become the focus of the clay pot. Repairing the damage in this way creates a stronger and more beautiful object than what existed before.

The artform of Kintsugi can remind us to embrace the beauty found in our flaws and develop resilience through the hard parts of our lives. Greater still, the art of Kintsugi can help us see God’s great love for His own Creation. The prophet Isaiah describes human beings as clay in God’s hands (Isaiah 64:8). In His love, God not only gave us life, but sculpted something He thought was beautiful and “very good” (Genesis 1:31). Sadly, sin brought brokenness throughout creation, and in our brokenness we tend to forget how great our beauty is in the eyes of our Lord.

I often focus on my imperfections, giving me a low view of myself. It’s hard not to look at our bodies and notice where we’re broken or what we think our flaws are. But this is not how God views His children or how He wants us to view ourselves. He wants to restore brokenness. He invites us to acknowledge our pain and receive His compassion and forgiveness. But we don’t stop there. By grace through faith in Jesus Christ, God is redeeming us, making us stronger and even more glorious than before. Second Corinthians 12:9-10 even says we can delight in our weaknesses because Jesus’s power “is made perfect in weakness.” Remember, when Jesus rose from the dead, He still displayed His wounds from His crucifixion. Jesus’s body was and is broken for us. His wounds reveal how deeply He loves us and our bodies. Because of His love, we can love every part of our bodies, looking forward to the day Jesus will raise us from the dead and all our broken places will be fully healed and glorified. As the artwork of our Creator, let us use our bodies to bring glory to our great Artist. 🕯 *Peter J. McDonough*

🕯 Can you think of a time you viewed an imperfection in your body in a way that made you feel bad about yourself? God takes the same exact moment and says you are beautiful, His Creation He is redeeming. How might God be inviting you to view this imperfection in light of His grace? \_\_\_\_\_

*We are the clay, you are the potter; we are all the work of your hand. Isaiah 64:8b (NIV)*

## THE ARCHER

READ: JOHN 3:14-18; 14:5-10; ROMANS 3:21-27

I jumped when the solid oak door slammed behind me, its banging echoing through the empty chamber. The dust from the floor blew up into my nose, and I coughed, the nervous pit in my stomach growing even tighter.

*Just one shot...one shot...* I repeated to myself as I looked up to see the fabled target, glaring down at me from its perch on the wall.

One day every year, the king allowed new prisoners the chance to walk free if we could do one thing: shoot an arrow into the very center of this target with only one shot. Each prisoner got to try once. It was either make this shot and rejoin the kingdom with a clean slate, or miss and spend the rest of my life in the dungeons.

Our kingdom was famous for its archers. Our nobles were some of the most accurate and skilled—I'm even excellent according to some. But better archers than me had missed this shot. And now it was my turn.

Trembling, I reached back into my quiver and pulled out the one arrow I was allowed, anchoring it on my bowstring. *Breathe...breathe...* I lifted my bow, aiming the tip of my arrow for the target's bright red center. My fingers clenched, threatening never to loose the arrow.

And then I saw him.

The prince. Like a ghost, he had appeared in the doorway out of the dungeons. Of all the king's archers, he was the best. He never missed. I looked at the target, then back at him. Suddenly, I knew. He was the only one who could make this shot.

His kind eyes met my terror-filled gaze, and without another thought, I barely whispered, "I'm sorry...Help me...please." He approached me and said, "Don't be afraid. My Father sent me." He took the bow from my hands, and I felt the weight of the task lift from my shoulders.

He anchored, aimed, and...

The arrow hit—dead center.

I'm free. 🦉 *Raven Merz*

*For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God's glorious standard. Yet God, in his grace, freely makes us right in his sight. He did this through Christ Jesus when he freed us from the penalty for our sins. Romans 3:23-24 (NLT)*

- 🔑 Today's story is an allegory. Did you know the Greek word *hamartia* is often translated as "sin" in the Bible, but it's also an ancient archery term that could be translated as "missing the mark"? How could it be helpful to think about sin this way? \_\_\_\_\_

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- 🔑 We've all missed the mark of loving God and each other (Matthew 22:37-40), and that means we've all sinned. The consequence of sin is death. There's no way we could undo our sin or escape death...but God wants to save us. Because God loves us and wants to be with us, Jesus came and lived among us as a human. Jesus is God the Son, and He is the only human who never sinned, never missed the mark, and so He was able to save us by living a righteous life of obedience to God the Father, dying on the cross for our sins, and rising from the grave to defeat death. He hit the mark on our behalf. So now, everyone who puts their trust in Jesus can stand before God as though they never sinned. If you've put your trust in Jesus, you can rest in God's unbreakable forgiveness and never-ending love for you. And you can look forward to the day when Jesus will return and raise you from the dead to live with Him forever in a world free from sin and death! (If you want to know more, go to page 72.)
- 🔑 According to Hebrews 4:14-16, we can boldly approach God's throne because of Jesus. Even though we will all continue to struggle with sin until Jesus returns, we can know that Jesus empathizes with us because He faced the same temptations we do—yet He didn't give in. We can be totally honest with Him about all our struggles and shortcomings. He already knows it all, and He wants to cover our faults with His mercy and help us walk in His good ways. Consider taking a moment now to come to Him in prayer. Whatever you want to say, He wants to listen. \_\_\_\_\_

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## THE COMPARISON GAME

READ: ROMANS 12:1-11; EPHESIANS 2:8-10; 1 JOHN 4:19

**H**ave you ever found yourself playing the comparison game? When we look around us and see what everyone else can do, it's easy to try to figure out if we're better or worse at certain things than others. Maybe your friend Blake is better at soccer than you are, so you might try to make yourself feel better by comparing yourself to Skye, who is a weaker player than both of you. But comparison is a never-ending game, and it leaves us feeling stressed, not satisfied.

We all struggle with comparison from time to time, but thankfully we don't have to keep playing the comparison game. Instead, Jesus frees us to embrace the gifts God has given us. He created each of us with different talents and abilities—He didn't leave anyone out. And once we put our trust in Jesus, the Holy Spirit gives us spiritual gifts too. God calls all of us to share His love with others, but every person does this in their own unique way. So, when we try to measure ourselves against other people, it doesn't really work. But when we focus on using our own gifts to serve the Lord, we find joy in discovering how He made us. All our abilities come from God, and He'll help us use them for His glory and to point others to Jesus.

Playing the comparison game is a waste of time. But in Jesus, you're free to be who God created you to be—yourself! You have an important purpose in His kingdom. When you feel like others are more valuable than you because they can do different things, remember: you belong to Jesus. He made you and delights in you just as you are. You are eternally valuable because God made you. And you are infinitely loved by Him, no matter what you do. 📖 *A. W. Smith*

📖 We live in a broken world where comparison is all around us. From social media to athletics to academics and more...we're constantly given ways to measure ourselves against other people. But, as we find our identity in Jesus, we find freedom from the comparison game. As Christians, we are forgiven children of God who have meaningful work to do in His kingdom. Instead of trying to figure out if we are better or worse than others, we can thank God for how He created each of us wonderfully unique. Consider taking a moment to thank God for a few of the people you might be tempted to compare yourself to, and also thank Him for the abilities He's given you. \_\_\_\_\_

📖 Do you know what some of your talents or spiritual gifts are? Who are trusted Christians in your life who could help you discern what your abilities are and how to use them well? \_\_\_\_\_

*God has given each of you a gift from his great variety of spiritual gifts. Use them well to serve one another. 1 Peter 4:10 (NLT)*

## COMPREHENDING GOD'S LOVE


READ: PSALM 139:6-12; EPHESIANS 3:14-21


**W**e try to comprehend a lot of things in life. And the fact is, God created us with the ability to learn. Knowledge and discovery are gifts from Him. He invites us to explore this vast universe He has made, and He calls us to dig deep into Scripture so that we can understand more and more about who Jesus is and what it means to live in relationship with Him. But can we ever really understand just how much God loves us? Can we ever really know just how much He cares about us? Can we ever wrap our minds around the fact that He never stops loving us, no matter what we do?

Ephesians 3:19 says that God's love "surpasses knowledge." And yet, throughout the Bible God gives us glimpses of how amazing His love is. God created us and was happy with His work. From the beginning, He loved us. He loved the first humans. He loved humankind.

Even though humans rejected God, His love for us did not change. In the Old Testament, we see how God led generations of individuals, caring for each group and helping them through struggles. He loved them even when they continued to reject Him and go against His good ways.

In the New Testament, we see how God came and lived among us. Jesus is fully God and fully human, and He revealed the depths of God's love by giving His own life to save us. Jesus went to the cross and let Himself be killed...but then He rose from the dead, because nothing—not even death—can stop God's love (Romans 8:38-39). Jesus defeated sin and death once and for all, so now everyone who puts their trust in Him is forgiven and restored to relationship with God, and they will live with Him forever.

God's love is eternal. We deal with humans every day who love and then stop loving. God is not like that. We will always be loved by Him. There is nothing we can do that will take us so far away from Him that His love won't reach us. We will always have a place with Him if we just turn back. He will welcome us home with open arms (Luke 15:11-32).  *Emily Acker*

 Consider taking some time to reread Ephesians 3:14-21. What do you think it means to "know this love that surpasses knowledge" (verse 19)? \_\_\_\_\_

 If you want to come home to God's love, you can, right now. You can find out more on page 72.

*The LORD is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love.  
Psalm 103:8 (NIV)*

## REST IS PRODUCTIVE

READ: GENESIS 2:1-3; EXODUS 20:8-11; MATTHEW 11:28-12:13; MARK 6:27-32

**T**he other day, I heard someone say, “Rest is productive,” and I flinched a little. That can’t be, can it? Resting is the opposite of being productive, right? Sometimes I struggle with feeling guilty when I rest or take a break. Or I’ll remember how productive I was in the past and think I’ll never compare to that now with all the rest I’m taking. But God teaches us that not only do we need rest, but it’s also an important and productive part of becoming more like Christ.

God created the Sabbath with the purpose of resting in mind. In the book of Exodus, He commanded His people not to do any work on the Sabbath, the last day of every week, inviting them to trust Him to provide for their needs. And in Genesis, God even gave us an example of rest right at the beginning: God finished His work of creation, and then He rested.

When we rest, we can quiet our minds and listen to what God may be trying to tell us. Or we can simply enjoy and be present in the gifts of creation God has given us.

Jesus often went off alone to pray, and in Mark 6:31, Jesus called His disciples to come away with Him to rest and take a break after they had just come back from their missionary journeys and heard the news of John the Baptist’s death. Jesus is fully God and fully human, and He shows us that rest is an important and integral part of our daily lives. Not only that, but Jesus also said, “Come to me, all you who labor and are heavily burdened, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28). God wants us to rest, and He provides that rest in Jesus. **✎** *Naomi Zylstra*

**✎** As Christians, we don’t practice the Sabbath the same way God prescribed in the Old Testament. These laws were just a foretaste of the ultimate rest God was preparing to give His people in Jesus. But God still calls us to take times of intentional rest, and to do this often. (And one way we can rest is by gathering with other Christians and listening to His Word together.) When was the last time you took an intentional break? How did you feel during your break? \_\_\_\_\_

**✎** Jesus is the One who provides rest. If we’ve put our trust in Jesus, believing He died on the cross and rose from the dead for us, we get to enter God’s rest. We can be free from striving because Jesus has already done the work of saving us, making us whole, and restoring us to relationship with Himself. So, when we take time to pause from our work and from what seems productive to us, we get to express our trust in God and enjoy His good gifts. What makes you feel well-rested? How could you incorporate at least one of these things into your life this week? \_\_\_\_\_

*“Come to me, all you who labor and are heavily burdened, and I will give you rest.”  
Matthew 11:28 (WEB)*

## ME, GOD, AND THE FIRE CHIEF

READ: DEUTERONOMY 6:4-9; PSALM 1:1-2; MATTHEW 22:36-40

I recently accepted a job working in the office of my local fire department. This was something I never expected to do. I had very little knowledge about how fire departments even worked. But the fire chief knew this when he proposed the plan for me to take over some of his responsibilities. He knew it would be a long journey, but he offered to take the time to teach me.

Since then, I've fallen in love with my position. I spend hours working with the chief to learn what he does. I have a picture of the firefighters to memorize names and faces. I put military time on my phone to understand how their 24-hour shifts are recorded. I made a study guide that I add to daily as I learn new information. I've read up on topics like mental health in firefighters, consolidating fire and police forces into public safety officers, cancer in firefighters, and how to support them. I ask a million questions: *How do you name fire engines? What do fire investigators do? How do you become a captain or lieutenant?* All that I'm learning consumes my thoughts, day and night. I see fire trucks and stations everywhere I go.

And this made me wonder, maybe I can pursue knowing God, His Word, and my role as a Christian like I am learning to be an assistant in the fire department. In Deuteronomy 6:4-9, God calls His people to learn Scripture and think about His Word every day, all throughout the day. As we read the Bible, we get to know more about Jesus and how to live in relationship with Him. The more time we spend in God's Word, the more we'll be reminded of Scripture and God's promises everywhere we go. Dedicating ourselves to learning Scripture could include using the tools we have available to us, like putting verses as our screen backgrounds or researching Bible study resources like scholarly books, articles, videos, and podcasts.

The fire chief wanted me to work there even though he knew I would be learning from scratch and there would be lots of failures ahead. When I'm struggling to get something, he is patient and forgiving. In the same way, God knows we won't be perfect, and He has covered all our imperfections through Jesus's death and resurrection (Romans 3:23-24). We could never uphold God's law perfectly, but Jesus did. If we've put our trust in Jesus, we are His forever, and God helps us grow in loving Him and loving others as He loves us. 🕯️ *Natty Maelle*

🕯️ What are some practical ways you could take time to ponder God's Word this week? \_\_\_\_\_

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*"I [Jesus] did not come to abolish the law of Moses or the writings of the prophets. No, I came to accomplish their purpose." Matthew 5:17b (NLT)*



## SEASONS OF BEAUTY

READ: JOSHUA 1:9; PSALM 96:11-12; ECCLESIASTES 3:1-8; 1 THESSALONIANS 5:16-18

**W**hat's your favorite season? I don't know if I have one; I always have trouble answering that question. There are things to love—and not love—about every season. In winter I love the snow, the beauty of the world just being covered with a blanket of white. The cold certainly isn't my favorite thing though. In spring watching the plants sprout and the earth come back alive is rejuvenating. In summer the heat makes it fun to swim and kayak. In autumn watching the trees change color before the leaves begin to fall is beautiful.

With every season, I'm reminded of God's wisdom in creation. He is the One who crafted the seasons with beauty; He is there in every season. This is true not only for the seasons of the earth, but also for the seasons of our lives. He is there, and He adds beauty—things to be thankful for—in every season.

I've been going through a season of health issues and unemployment, and this is a season that definitely has struggles. But through all of it I've felt God's presence, and He has shown me beauty many times over. I've found out how many people care about me in my church and are praying for me. I've also had more time to pursue my writing.

Whatever season you're going through right now, no matter if it's a great one or a not so great one, God is with you. He loves you, and He is making this season beautiful. 📌 *Kimberly Brokish*

📌 Isn't it amazing that the God who created the earth, with all its beautiful seasons, wants to be in relationship with us, His creation? Jesus is "God with us" (Matthew 1:23), and because He died and rose again, everyone who puts their trust in Jesus gets to be with God forever. When Jesus returns, He will put an end to all pain, sorrow, sickness, and evil (Revelation 21:1-5). And in the meantime, Jesus promises to be with us, moment by moment. He brings beauty to our lives, often when we least expect it. What beauty can you find in your current season? Consider taking a moment to thank God for this. \_\_\_\_\_

📌 What season of your life have you felt God's presence most in? If you've never felt close to God, that's okay. You can ask God for this anytime—He loves answering these prayers. \_\_\_\_\_

*He has made everything beautiful in its time. Ecclesiastes 3:11a (NIV)*



## PRAYER IS POWERFUL...BECAUSE GOD IS

READ: LUKE 11:1-13; HEBREWS 4:14-16; JAMES 5:13-16

**H**ave you ever wanted to help someone who was struggling, but you didn't know what to do? There is always something you can do, even when you feel like you have nothing to give. When you have nothing else, you can still do the most important thing, and that is to pray. When a friend or family member is going through a difficult situation and you aren't sure how you can offer to help, you can pray for them. When you see someone struggling financially and you don't have much money to offer, or when they need some other kind of help that you can't give them, you can pray for them.

Throughout the Bible, God calls us to lift each other up in prayer. He hears our prayers and is ready to help. Sometimes, we feel like we're doing nothing when all we can do is pray, but James 5:16 says, "The earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power." Who is a righteous person? Well, none of us can be righteous (or sinless) on our own, but God loves us so much that He gives us His righteousness and forgives all our sins when we put our trust in Jesus (Romans 3:10, 22). So, even though we will continue to struggle with sin until Jesus returns and makes all things new, we can "come boldly to the throne of our gracious God. There we will receive his mercy, and we will find grace to help us when we need it most" (Hebrews 4:14-16).

Whenever you encounter a difficult situation, whether in your own life or someone else's, you can take it to God. Prayer is powerful because God is the all-powerful One. He loves you deeply, and He wants to help you with whatever you're facing. 📖 *Bethany Acker*


📖 Christians throughout history have prayed to God when they needed help, and God has answered their prayers. Sometimes God responds in the way we expect, or He might respond in a different way. When we pray, God not only changes situations, but He also changes us. As we come to Him with our struggles and concerns, we grow in our faith. We get to know God better, we come to trust Him more, and we start seeing things the way He does. Can you think of anyone who's struggling right now? Are you struggling? Consider taking a moment to pray about anything that comes to mind. If you're not sure what to pray, you can follow a prayer from the Bible, like Numbers 6:24-26, Luke 11:1-4, Ephesians 3:14-21, or Philippians 1:9-11.



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*And we are confident that he hears us whenever we ask for anything that pleases him.  
1 John 5:14 (NLT)*

## PATHS LIKE PRETZELS

READ: PSALM 139; ISAIAH 41:10, 13

**M**y life has taken me  
 Down twisting and turning paths  
 Like a pretzel  
 I have never had it easy  
 My path has never been a straight line  
 Through every question and every fear  
 Through every change in my course  
 I have felt You with me  
 I have leaned on Your guidance  
 I have known I am not alone  
 My life has made me wonder  
 And question where I'm going  
 The rocky paths  
 They've made me think I need to turn around  
 But I have kept going  
 You have held me through it all  
 You have helped me find my way  *Emily Acker*

-  Have you had times in your life when everything feels confusing and every decision feels wrong? When we don't know what to do, how could it be freeing to know that God doesn't expect us to have all the answers, and He invites us to rely on Him? \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
-  God sees us, in all our questions and uncertainties, and He has compassion on us. He doesn't always give us answers to every question, yet He does promise to be with us and help us. Though the journey of our lives may seem twisting and turning, He is working out His good purposes through every bend in the road and every setback, and He is transforming us more and more into the image of our loving Savior, Jesus (Romans 8:28-29). How might knowing that God understands every detail about our lives, even when we don't, give us hope in times of uncertainty? \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

*Your word is a lamp for my feet and a light on my path. Psalm 119:105 (CSB)*

## CLOSER THAN A BROTHER?

READ: PROVERBS 18:24; ISAIAH 43:1-2; JOHN 15:15

**D**o you have a younger sibling? Do they sometimes follow you everywhere and mimic your every move? This can get pretty annoying, but did you know Jesus is kind of like that? He doesn't annoy you or mimic you, but He is with you wherever you go.

Proverbs 18:24 says, "there is a friend who stays closer than a brother." When Jesus came and lived among us, existing as fully God and fully human, He called us His friends. When things get tough, Jesus wants you to lean on Him. He will see you through each and every storm, trial, and struggle you face. He won't leave you alone, because He loves you.

Joshua 1:9 says, "the LORD your God is with you wherever you go." Wherever doesn't just mean when you're having a great day, but also when you mess up...and mess up some more...over and over again. Once you've put your trust in Jesus, every sin you've committed in the past—and will commit in the future—is forgiven because Jesus died on the cross and rose from the grave for you, paying the price for your sin. Even now, Jesus is interceding for you, keeping you close to Himself (Romans 8:31-39; Hebrews 7:25; 1 John 2:1-2). And whenever you fall down, He'll help you get up and continue walking with Him.

No matter what you do, Jesus is always with you. He wants to be your friend. You can trust Him with your life. You can lean on Him through the good and the bad. Jesus loves you like a brother, and He will never leave you. 🕯

*Josefine Engle*

🕯 Have you ever thought of Jesus being "a friend who stays closer than a brother" (Proverbs 18:24)? Everyone goes through hard things in life, but as Christians we can know that Jesus is right there with us, and He is not going anywhere (Psalm 139:7-10). What trials or storms have you been facing? How might Jesus be inviting you to lean on Him through these storms? \_\_\_\_\_

🕯 If you want to know more about trusting Jesus and becoming His friend, check out page 72.

*I will never leave you or abandon you. Hebrews 13:5b (CSB)*

## SALT AND SUCH

READ: MATTHEW 5:13-16; PHILIPPIANS 2:13; COLOSSIANS 4:2-6

**Y**ou're groggy this morning, and you walk barefoot to the kitchen in that foggy, sleepy state. Once you arrive in the kitchen, you mindlessly and wordlessly prepare your oatmeal. Soon you sit down at the table and have the first taste of your handiwork.



*Ugh. So bland.* You add more sugar and try again. Still frown-worthy. You add still more sugar. *Blech.* You're about to add even more sugar, when your mind clears and you realize, *This needs salt, not sugar!* You try a pinch of salt...and the oatmeal finally tastes good.

As Christians, it's good to be reminded of how salt enhances the flavor of things. After all, we're salt too! In Matthew 5:13, Jesus told His disciples they were "the salt of the earth." What does that mean? Jesus went on to say they were also "the light of the world," and then He said, "Let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven" (verses 14-16). This applies to all Christians. We have a calling to season people's lives with the flavor of God's love. His love compels Him to help us, even to the point of dying on the cross for us. The way we treat others can help them get a glimpse of Jesus's enormous love for them (Matthew 25:34-40).

How? By the power of the Holy Spirit in us, we can be attentive to the needs of people around us. Do you know someone who's sick? Is there someone who feels left out at your school or church? Is one of your classmates or siblings struggling with schoolwork? As we encourage others and offer to help with what we can, we get to share the joy Jesus has brought into our lives, and invite them to experience His joy too. Without Jesus, life can be pretty bland and discouraging. So let's shake some salt into someone's life today! **!** *A. W. Smith*

**!** Can you think of a time someone seasoned your day with the salt of Jesus's love? What did they do?

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**!** Why is it important to remember that we love others because Jesus loved us first? That He loved us *before* we could do any good deeds? (Romans 5:6-8; Galatians 2:20-21; 1 John 4:19) \_\_\_\_\_

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*"You are the salt of the earth." Matthew 5:13a (NIV)*

## A HIDDEN TREASURE (PART 1)

READ: LUKE 1:26-38; MATTHEW 1:18-25

**A**s Rosa walked toward town to meet up with her fiancé Antonio, she was passing by the old mines when something shiny caught her eye amidst the rocks and tumbleweeds. She was leaning down to look when suddenly a voice from above rumbled, “Go and take this gold. It is a gift for you and a promise of more to come. I will restore this town and bring it out of poverty.”

Shaking with surprise, Rosa said, “Who’s there? Who are you?”

“I am the One who watches over you. And I will restore this town, starting with you. Go and tell the people of my promise.” So Rosa picked up the shining object, excitement coursing through her veins. It was a perfect gold nugget. Rosa ran into town, looking for anyone to share the good news with. The first person she ran into was the banker.

“Look what I found! The old mines are going to open again—this whole town can be restored!” She shoved the nugget into the banker’s hands, and he gave it, and her, an appraising look. “Well, it looks like a perfect gold nugget—too perfect to be real. Besides, there’s no way this could have come from the mines. They’ve been closed for decades. Now, who did you flirt with to get this?”

“Flirt with?” The sheriff overheard their conversation and stepped in. “How do you know she didn’t steal it? Let me see that!” The sheriff grabbed the nugget in one hand and Rosa’s arm in the other. “I think we should have a little talk at the station.” Rosa struggled. “I’m no thief! I found the gold, and a voice told me that more would come!”

“No, she’s right.” Antonio pushed his way through a gathering crowd of onlookers. “I had a strange dream last night that the mines re-opened and there was more gold than we could imagine.”

“Thank you,” Rosa mouthed as the sheriff grumbled some excuse and let go of her arm.

Antonio smiled at her. “I didn’t know what the dream meant until you found the gold—this is great news!” Rosa smiled back and whispered, “It’s going to be a miracle.” **✎ Naomi Zylstra**

**✎** Consider taking some time to read the Bible passages today’s allegorical story is based on. God chose a humble teenager, Mary, to give birth to the Savior. Why do you think God chose to save the world this way? Imagine yourself in the banker’s or sheriff’s shoes, hearing Rosa’s story. What must it have been like for Mary to be doubted and scandalized? \_\_\_\_\_

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*“Don’t be afraid, Mary,” the angel told her, “for you have found favor with God!”*  
 Luke 1:30 (NLT)

## A FULFILLED PROMISE (PART 2)

READ: MATTHEW 28:1-10; LUKE 24:1-12; JOHN 20:1-18

**E**lena didn't have time to walk all the way around the quarry. She had dinner plans with friends. Ever since Rosa had said the mines would re-open, the town had been chaos. Finally, after weeks of debating whether Rosa had *actually* found the gold nugget, then a few more weeks of arguing if she had *actually* heard a voice, the mayor finally decided to re-open the mines after thirty years to do some exploratory mining. So the main trail was closed, and Elena had to walk all the way around. Elena had never known life with the mines open. Her grandfather had worked in the mountain's mines, and her father had too, right before they closed.

Elena was lost in thought when suddenly the rocks to her left shifted. She had to jump to dodge a few smaller rocks that rolled onto the path. Her heart racing, she looked over and saw a crack had appeared in the mountainside. "Come and see." Elena heard a voice in her mind. "This is the restoration I promised." Still a little wary of the rocks above, Elena walked over and peered through the crack. Veins of gold shone on every wall. Elena gasped at the beauty of it.

"Now go and tell the good news," the voice spoke to her. Elena remembered Rosa mentioning a voice and wondered if it was the same one. She ran to the town and almost ran into her friends at the well. "Gold! I found the gold—this side of the quarry! It's just like Rosa said would happen!" Elena panted as she told her friends Arturo and Nicolás.

"No way! I gotta see this!" Arturo ran off. Nicolás shrugged and followed, leaving Elena alone to catch her breath and tell the others. A while later they returned. Arturo said, "You were right. So much gold!"

"Why would I lie?" Elena laughed, but she was hurt her friends didn't believe her word.

"It really is a miracle," said Nicolás. Elena gave a small smile; she had to find Rosa and tell her the news. "This is going to change everything." **📖 Naomi Zylstra**

**📖** Consider taking some time to read the Bible passages that today's allegorical story is inspired by. On more than one occasion, God first gave big news to women, including the news that Jesus had risen from the dead! Why do you think God chose to do it this way even though, in that society, a woman's testimony was not considered as trustworthy as a man's? \_\_\_\_\_

**📖** Why is knowing Jesus the most valuable treasure? (Matthew 13:44-46; Philippians 3:8) \_\_\_\_\_

*The women ran quickly from the tomb. They were very frightened but also filled with great joy, and they rushed to give the disciples the angel's message. Matthew 28:8 (NLT)*

## INSTANT CHANGES

READ: JOHN 10:27-30; ROMANS 8:31-39



**M**y favorite baseball team made it to the playoffs one fall, and I was excited to watch the first playoff game with my brother and sister. We were preparing food ahead of time so we wouldn't have to worry about it during the game, but as I was working in the kitchen my finger slipped—and before I knew it I had a bad cut. I went from excitedly preparing food to crying on the floor, a towel wrapped around my finger. I thought I would have to go to the emergency room. I didn't know if I would even make it back in time for the game. Just like that, the thing that had been my main focus—the baseball game—wasn't a big deal to me. I was only concerned about my finger.

Have you ever had something happen that changed your focus in an instant? Maybe someone died suddenly. Maybe you lost your home. Maybe you got injured or heard bad news out of the blue. When things like this happen, we are no longer able to focus on whatever else was on our minds. But even when our heads are spinning and our hearts are racing, God holds us. No matter what comes our way, He will be with us.

When things here on earth feel so uncertain, it's good to remember what Jesus said about those who know Him: "I give eternal life to them. They will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand" (John 10:28). As Jesus's followers, we can rest knowing that He holds us. And we get to look forward to Jesus's return, when He will renew His creation and raise us from the dead to live with Him forever. In the meantime, we can cling to Him, knowing that He will be with us no matter what happens in our lives.

I think of how life can change in a moment, and I realize just how important it is to know that God holds me, now and forever. 📖 *Emily Acker*

📖 Have you had an experience where suddenly your life was changed and your priorities were different? God is strong enough to hold us through the worst that life throws at us. Consider taking a moment to remember a time you felt overwhelmed, and imagine God holding you through it. What does that feel like? \_\_\_\_\_

*"I [Jesus] am with you always, even to the end of the age." Matthew 28:20b (WEB)*



## WHERE IS THE LAMB?

READ: GENESIS 22:1-18; EXODUS 12:12-13, 21-23; 1 JOHN 2:1-2

**T**he story of Abraham taking his son Isaac up to the mountain Moriah to be sacrificed has always been a difficult one for me to read. Why would God ask Abraham to sacrifice his son? And then why does God instead provide a different sacrifice to take Isaac's place?

Even Isaac himself is confused by the ordeal. He sees the firewood but asks his dad, "Where is the lamb for the burnt offering?" (Genesis 22:7). Abraham tells his son that God will provide the lamb. And yet, look at Genesis 22:13. Did you catch the type of animal God provides for the sacrifice? It's a ram, not a lamb.

The Israelites who read this story were probably left with the same question we are: Where is the lamb? In Exodus 11-13, the Israelites got their first answer. While they were enslaved in Egypt, God instructed them to sacrifice a lamb and spread the blood on their door posts. This sacrificial lamb would save their firstborn sons from the final plague that passed over Egypt. This sacrificial lamb mirrors the events with Abraham and Isaac—God provided an alternative sacrifice to save a firstborn son.

Later, God the Father would again send a sacrifice to save, but this time it was His only Son, Jesus. Jesus is fully God and fully human, and He is the lamb God the Father provided as a sacrifice, except His sacrifice took the place of more than just a firstborn son. Jesus's loving sacrifice on the cross took the place of all of us.

And when Jesus rose again from the grave, He defeated sin and death so that all who trust in Him will one day rise with Him. Not only were our sins paid for by His sacrifice, but we also get to participate in God's kingdom as coheirs with Jesus (Romans 8:17). This is something only the perfect lamb could achieve. And, after years and years, we can look back at Genesis 22:13 and get the answer to our question: Where is the lamb? The Lamb is Jesus. *✦ Naomi Zylstra*

**✦** Often, we can understand Bible passages more fully when we look at the Bible as a whole. This is because the entire Bible points to Jesus (John 1:45; 20:31; Acts 10:43), and we can only know God through Jesus (more about this on page 72). As Christians, when we read the Bible we are reading words written by and about someone we have a personal relationship with. And He helps us grow in our understanding of His Word through the help of the Holy Spirit and fellow Christians. Which Bible passages are difficult for you to read? Who could you ask about this? \_\_\_\_\_

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*John saw Jesus...and said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" John 1:29 (CSB)*

## FIVE FRIENDS

READ: MARK 2:1-12; LUKE 5:17-26; JOHN 15:12-15

I was reading through Mark 2 last night, and I was struck by all that a group of friends chose to do in order to bring one man to see Jesus. Mark 2:3-4 says four men carried a paralyzed man to Jesus. “Since they could not get him to Jesus because of the crowd, they made an opening in the roof above Jesus by digging through it and then lowered the mat the man was lying on.” The Bible doesn’t tell us very much about these five men, but they seem like a group of friends, and it’s clear that one of them was unable to walk on his own. We don’t know how this man came to be paralyzed. Maybe the friends had been doing something together that they shouldn’t have been doing, and the one friend got hurt. We don’t know. What we do know is that the four who were able to walk chose to carry their friend and bring him to the place where Jesus was.

But the house was so crowded, they couldn’t get in. The friend group could have turned around and left. The four could have taken their paralyzed friend back home. Instead, they somehow got him up on the roof. That had to be a lot of work. Then, they made a way to fit him down through the roof and lower him to the floor of the house so that he could be seen by Jesus.

The friend group in Mark 2 was caring. They didn’t abandon their friend because he was unable to move like them and do everything they could do. And these friends had faith. Because of their faith, the one who couldn’t walk got to meet Jesus. Jesus not only forgave him, but He healed him too. The man who had been paralyzed was able to stand up and walk—and the book of Luke tells us that he “went home praising God” (Luke 5:25).

Jesus cares deeply about us; He will never abandon us (Hebrews 13:5; 1 Peter 5:7). Once we know Jesus, He calls us His friends, and He also transforms our friendships to reflect His love. Like the friend group in Mark 2, we can help others come to Jesus. When life gets tough, we can remind each other that Jesus brought us close to Himself through His death and resurrection. And as we see and respond to each other’s needs, we remind each other that we are seen by God. 🕯️ *Emily Acker*

🕯️ Do you have any friends who care about your needs and who want you to be close to Jesus? If so, how could you be intentional about spending time with them? If no one comes to mind, you can ask God to help you identify people in your life you could become good friends with. \_\_\_\_\_

*A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for a time of adversity.  
Proverbs 17:17 (NIV)*

## GOD OF ALL NATURE

READ: PSALM 148

I love getting out in nature and exploring all that God has made. And I've always enjoyed traveling and getting to see places and things that are new to me. Over the years, I've been able to go to several national parks and see a wide variety of God's stunning creations. From views of the Atlantic Ocean framed by colorful trees at Acadia National Park in Maine, to gorgeous sunrises over the desert of Death Valley National Park in California, I was amazed by God's work.

God made this world so varied, each different landscape beautiful in its own way. Just think about the variety of trees alone—from palm trees that grow in desert oases to maple trees that change their colors in the fall. As we behold trees, mountains, and oceans, it's amazing that we can know the God who made all of it.

God created a stunning world, and we get to live in it. I am so grateful to Him for that. There are many reasons to praise God every day, and one of those reasons is that He made everything—from the deserts to the oceans—and He invites us to delight in His creation with Him! When we get outside and experience all kinds of beautiful things, we can praise the God who crafted them. It's amazing to see the care He put into making the world, and it's amazing that we get to enjoy it with Him. 📖 *Bethany Acker*

📖 Have you ever had an experience in nature where you were more aware of God? What was it like?

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📖 The Creator of everything wants to be in relationship with us (Acts 17:22-31). That's why Jesus came—He died and rose again so that we could know the One who made the deserts, the oceans, the trees...and us. When we know God personally through Jesus, our experience of nature is even more meaningful. If you have questions about what it means to know Jesus, see page 72.

*Let them praise the name of the LORD, for at his command they were created.*  
*Psalm 148:5 (NIV)*



## FOCUS

READ: JOHN 10:27-30; HEBREWS 4:14-16; 12:1-3

**C**lick-click-click-click. Drumsticks rose and fell in unison. As drumline leader in our marching band, it was my job to ensure the drummers played tightly together, with sticks all rising up to the same height and hitting the drums with the same intensity. To do this, I had to watch the drum major, who marched ahead of us and kept time. While playing with the whole marching band under the drum major's lead, I had to make sure that our hits exactly shadowed the drum major's direction so we didn't sound as random as a popcorn machine. Otherwise, the entire band might fall apart.

The competition field provided plenty of distractions: black-jacketed judges critiqued us as we marched on fields that were often slippery with ice or mud. Depending on the season, the summer heat made us sweat or the winter chill made our fingers numb. And rowdy spectators (most of them our slightly embarrassing parents) cheered and tooted plastic horns from the stands. These distractions caused me to lose focus at times, which then made the drumline sound like popcorn. And with popcorn, the song began to crumble.

But the drum majors were there to hold it all together, to provide a steady pulse and direction for the entire band. No matter where I was on the marching field, my eyes must be fixed on the drum major. And if I lost focus for a moment, I immediately refocused on them.

Much like my focus can wander because of the distractions of the marching field, my focus can also wander from God. Then I feel more chaotic, with less peace and less patience. When I fix my eyes on Jesus, it doesn't take away the difficulties or distractions of life, but He provides peace and hope through every difficult circumstance.

With each pulse of life, we can remember that Jesus lived through difficulties just like us. He provides hope as the One who beat sin and death on the cross so we could live forever with the God who loves us unconditionally. God knows the pulse of life, and as we fix our eyes on Him, we find peace and hope that always hold steady. *✦ Amanda Gott*

✦ We all lose focus on Jesus sometimes. When that happens, we can rest secure in the knowledge that He never loses focus on us. We are always in His care, and He is always with us. How could this sure hope help us refocus on Jesus in the midst of chaos and distraction? \_\_\_\_\_

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*And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus...  
Hebrews 12:1-2 (NIV)*

## THE THIEF

READ: LUKE 5:17-26; 23:32-43; EPHESIANS 2:1-10

icy iron chains bind my hands behind me, weighing me down more and more with every step as I'm led toward the throne room. My heart pounds in my chest and sweat slides down my temple. *Why did I have to be so foolish?! Why did I think it would be a good idea to steal from the King's table? What was I thinking!* The groan of the great, gold doors of the throne room opening snaps me from my thoughts, and I gulp. Up ahead is the King, full of majesty and glory. With slow, halting steps I make my way toward the foot of the throne. I barely notice the murmurs of the court as I curl into myself. *I should have listened to my mother. She told me my thievery would get me killed someday.*



I fall to my knees before the throne, my whole body shaking with fright at what I'm sure will be a death sentence. *After everything I've done, I'd deserve it. Stealing isn't even the worst crime I've committed.* I keep my eyes on the floor. For a moment silence reigns in the room; then a gentle voice speaks. "Why are you frightened young man?" the voice asks.

"Because I've done wrong against the King and the people of this kingdom," I say, my voice shaking.

Then a hand gently lifts my chin to reveal the King smiling kindly at me. *He moved from his throne—he came down to be near me, a criminal.* Awe washes over me and I stare, not understanding why the King of all people would be smiling at me.

"Be at peace young man," he says kindly, "you are forgiven, and your name is cleared. Be free." At those last two words my chains fall, broken, to the ground, and I stare in awe as tears fill my eyes.

"Why?" I rasp, and the King smiles. "Because I choose to." ❧ *Caelin Allred*

❧ What stuck out to you in today's allegorical story? Jesus is King of the universe. He humbled Himself by coming to earth, fully God and fully human, and living among us. He was on a rescue mission to forgive us, knowing full well all the wrong things we do that separate us from Him. For everyone who puts their trust in Jesus, He has secured our forgiveness through dying on the cross and rising from the grave. If you want to know more about this good news, check out page 72. \_\_\_\_\_

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*Blessed is the one whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered.*  
*Psalm 32:1 (NIV)*

## BROKENHEARTED

READ: GENESIS 16:13; PSALM 34:17-22; 2 CORINTHIANS 1:3-4

**T**he LORD is close to the brokenhearted” (Psalm 34:18). He knows about every one of your heartbreaks, both big and small. God knows when you’ve been having a tough day or year. It’s not always easy to see God during those times, but He sees you. He sees you during a breakup, and He wants to help you through it. He sees you when you lose a loved one, and He is ready to comfort you.

God is close when things go wrong. When humanity’s sin brought brokenness to creation, God was heartbroken. Yet He was determined to restore what had been lost and unite us to Himself again. That’s why Jesus came. He is “God with us” (Matthew 1:23), and He was born into this messy world where so many things are wrong, because He loves us. He died and rose again to defeat sin and death. When He returns He will finally heal every brokenness, and right now He sits beside us in our sorrows, weeping with us, comforting us, and strengthening us.

If you know Jesus, His presence is always with you. He reminds you that you will be alright because He is holding you. It might still take time. Your heart might be slow to heal from the loss of a loved one or something horrible you experienced, but you will have His comfort through it all. Remember Psalm 34:18 says God is close to you when you’re brokenhearted; He saves you when your spirit is crushed. If you’re going through any kind of heartache now, remember that God is near. He is ready to give you comfort and peace. You can rest knowing that He is with you, and He will help you through this time. 🕯️ *Bethany Acker*

🕯️ What kinds of heartbreaking things have you experienced lately? How might God be inviting you to receive His comfort? \_\_\_\_\_

🕯️ One of the primary ways God helps His people is through His people. If you’ve been feeling overwhelmed by loss, or experiencing sadness that won’t go away, who are trusted adults in your life you can talk to, such as parents, pastors, counselors, or teachers? If you’re not sure who to talk to, you can set up an appointment for a one-time complimentary phone consultation with a Christian counselor through the Focus on the Family Counseling Service. In the United States, call 1-855-771-HELP (4357) weekdays 6:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. (Mountain Time) to set up an appointment. In Canada, book your appointment by calling 1-800-661-9800 between 8:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m. (Pacific Time) and ask to speak with the care associate.

*The LORD is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.  
Psalm 34:18 (NIV)*

## LIMITS

READ: MATTHEW 11:28-30; 1 PETER 4:10-11

**D**o you know what I hate? Limits. I hate that I'm a finite being and I can't do everything. I hate that I can't have all the skills, all the energy, and all the knowledge. I can't do all the things, and I can't be all the things. And I hate that.

But I'm learning not to hate it anymore. I used to think it was valiant to hate limits. I've always been told that I can do anything, be anything. And limits keep me from doing everything I want to do and being everything I want to be. So I have to hate them and overcome them, right?

Well, sometimes. Some limits do need to be overcome. But not all of them. Because, do you know who gave me these limits? God. And do you know the only one who doesn't have limits? God. So when I try to push past every limit and when I start expecting myself to be able to do everything, I'm trying to do God's job. I'm trying to be God. And I am definitely not God.

God has given me gifts and abilities and energy, and I'm so grateful for them. They are valuable and wonderful and useful. But there are some gifts and abilities that I don't have, and my energy is not endless. And that's okay. I'm learning to accept that. Because my worth is not found in my abilities. My worth is found in Jesus, who took on our limits by becoming human. He died and rose again to make the way for me to be with Him forever. He put me in community with other believers who have other gifts and abilities, so we can lean on each other instead of trying to do everything ourselves. When I rest in that truth, my limits become less scary.

So when I bump into my limits, I don't have to be ashamed or afraid. I can say, "Well, I can't do that right now. And that's okay." I am securely loved by our limitless God. I can trust Him to care for me and do the things I can't do. And that fills me with limitless peace. 🕯️ *Taylor Eising*

- 🕯️ What kinds of limits have you experienced? Are there things you wish you could do that you just can't do? Consider taking a moment to talk to God about these things. He invites us to be totally honest with Him about all our frustrations, fears, hopes, dreams, and hurts. \_\_\_\_\_
  
- 🕯️ God comforts us in our struggles, and He promises to make all things new when Jesus returns. Then we will have limitless energy, and we will get to enjoy doing wonderful things we can't even imagine yet! Consider taking a moment to read 2 Corinthians 1:3-11. Why do you think God allows us to experience limits? How does He help us in the midst of our struggles? \_\_\_\_\_

*"Come to me, all of you who are weary and burdened, and I [Jesus] will give you rest."  
Matthew 11:28 (CSB)*

## STRUGGLING TO FOLLOW

READ: PSALMS 39:7; 119:49; LAMENTATIONS 3:13-26

In the Bible, we see over and over again how the Israelites (God's people) turned away from God, abandoning His good ways and embracing sin. But God still had a great love for His people, even though they sinned and no longer followed His commands. He often sent prophets, people He spoke through supernaturally to remind the Israelites of His love and His good ways. One of those prophets was Jeremiah, who spoke God's instructions to the people.

Yet Jeremiah grew disheartened and full of despair because of the people's disobedience. He lost hope. His strength grew weak. Overcome by all the sin and wrong, sorrow filled his heart.

But in this moment, he remembered God's unshakeable faithfulness. We see this in Jeremiah's writings in Lamentations 3. Jeremiah remembered God's forgiveness and great love. He says in verses 22-23, "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." When Jeremiah was surrounded by faithless people, he found hope in God's faithfulness. It gave him strength to continue following God, and to call the rest of God's people to do the same.

When we are overwhelmed by the sin and brokenness in the world around us and in our hearts, we can remember that God is still there. He has not given up on us. Like Jeremiah, we can tell others about God's love, forgiveness, and His good ways. We can rest in Jesus, the just King Jeremiah foretold in his writings. Because of Jesus's death and resurrection, we can know that He will someday return to bring about wholeness. And we can share this hope with others.

God will be with us no matter how difficult things get. No matter what others do, we can lean on our loving God and follow His good ways. And, like Jeremiah, we can pray fervently that everyone will see God's goodness and put their trust in Him. 📖

*Anna Gregory*

📖 Have you ever felt like Jeremiah? We all need lots of reminders of God's faithfulness. Those reminders could come in the form of Bible verses or Bible stories, or from people around you, or memories of times you've seen God's faithfulness in your own life or in the lives of others. Or it could be something else, like a song or something in nature. Consider making a list of things that remind you of God's faithfulness, then take some time to thank Him for these things. \_\_\_\_\_

📖 When you see someone you love walking away from God's good ways, how could you show them God's love? \_\_\_\_\_

*The LORD is good to those whose hope is in him, to the one who seeks him.  
Lamentations 3:25 (NIV)*



## A FRESH START

READ: PSALM 32:1-5; ROMANS 3:23-24; 1 JOHN 1:8-9

**H**ave you ever buttoned your shirt wrong? One button off can cause a shirt to hang longer at the bottom on one side than the other...or cause a sagging of extra fabric in the middle. Usually, the only way to fix this problem is to unbutton the entire shirt, start with the top button, and work your way down. No one likes to do a task all over again, but this is often the only way to correct things. It gives you a fresh start.



That's true with shirts and with life. The Bible says we all do wrong (we all sin) and it makes a mess of things. We need a fresh start. On our own, this isn't possible, but if we trust Jesus and confess the wrong things we do, Jesus will forgive us and cleanse us. We can put our sins behind us and start all over again.

All of us have done things that are wrong. Are you thinking of something right now that you're sorry you did? Do you wish you could undo it and start over again? You can't undo what's been done, but you can have a fresh start. You can confess your sin to the Lord—and to others who have been affected by it. This may seem daunting, but remember that Jesus loves you, so much so that He died and rose again for you so you could be forgiven. And He's ready to help you begin again, fresh and clean. 📖 *A. W. Smith*

📖 Sometimes, even as Christians, we get so tangled up in doing things in a way that doesn't love God or our neighbors that we need to start over. Repenting of our sin and the systems we may have built in the process isn't easy, but Jesus is with us and is ready to help us turn away from these harmful things so we can turn to Him and start over again. We will need fresh starts moment by moment, but all along the way Jesus will remind us that we can rest in Him. He will never run out of love and forgiveness for us (Matthew 18:21-22). He calls us to confess our sins often, so consider taking a moment now to pray and confess any sins that come to mind. If you're a Christian, you can know that Jesus has already secured your forgiveness through His death and resurrection, and He is already empowering you to live in His good ways through the Holy Spirit. If you haven't put your trust in Jesus and you want to know more, check out page 72.

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*Finally, I confessed all my sins to you and stopped trying to hide my guilt...And you forgave me! All my guilt is gone. Psalm 32:5 (NLT)*

## REFLECTIONS OF THE HEART

READ: MATTHEW 12:33-37; ROMANS 12:2; EPHESIANS 4:22-24, 29-32

**T**ake a moment to remember a compliment that has stuck with you. For example, I remember a friend telling me I was very intentional, and I really appreciated that.

Now, think of something someone said that was harsh. Maybe it was a biting remark, a lie, or a put-down. Unfortunately, those can come to mind much easier, and the negative things said to us can stick around longer than we want them to.

The Bible has so much to say about our words and their power. Our words can calm people down or rile them up; they can encourage or discourage the people around us—whether in person or online (Proverbs 12:18, 25; 15:1; 16:24). Our words can even show others our true intent. We see this when Jesus was confronting the Pharisees in Matthew 12. He explained how their words reflected the evil in their hearts. What was inside their hearts became the words they put into the world. Their words were more than just talk; they were a reflection of their hearts.

And that's true for all of us. Our speech reflects who we are.

Sadly, without Jesus, all of our hearts are corrupt. We need Jesus to heal our hearts of sin before our speech can be truly wholesome. The good news is, as Christians, our hearts were cleansed the very moment we believed in Jesus (Acts 15:8-9). Now, as we rely on Jesus's love for us, His death and resurrection, and His Holy Spirit's power in us, God is continually transforming us more and more into the image of Jesus...and our speech reflects that transformation. We are forgiven, beloved people—so we can forgive and love those around us.

We've been given the amazing gift of communication, and this gift can help us live into the kingdom of God. Because Jesus died on the cross and rose from the grave to save and restore us, our words can bring life instead of death, healing instead of hurt, and encouragement instead of destruction. Of course, we won't do this perfectly until Jesus returns, but as we are being transformed by our loving God, our words will follow (Philippians 2:13). 🕯 *Naomi Zylstra*

- 🕯 Can you think of someone whose words often reflect who Jesus is? Consider taking a moment to thank God for that person, and maybe even find a way to encourage them today. If nobody comes to mind, you can ask God to reveal someone in the future.
- 🕯 One of the primary ways the Holy Spirit transforms us is through Scripture. How could meditating on God's words in the Bible help our words reflect Jesus? \_\_\_\_\_

*Gentle words are a tree of life; a deceitful tongue crushes the spirit. Proverbs 15:4 (NLT)*

## GOD LOVES YOU

READ: 1 JOHN 4:7-11; ROMANS 8:38-39

**O**ne thing I wish I could go back and tell my younger self over and over is “God loves you.” It’s something I wish every young person could grasp and believe.

Life can be tough, especially when you’re a teenager. You’re trying to learn about yourself. You discover your style, your likes and dislikes, and how you differ from your friends and family. It can be a hard journey, and at times you might not feel good enough. You might feel unsure of yourself or wish you had more confidence.

But if I could remind younger me and any younger person of anything, it would be that God loves them. You don’t have to try to impress anyone. You don’t have to worry about all the little things. God cares so much for you, and nothing can shake His love for you.

Five or ten years from now, you might dress differently or listen to different music. Life could look very different, but God will still love you. If you’ve put your trust in Jesus, you will still be able to rest in the truth that He is with you and cares about you.

God loves you so much, and you are good enough for Him. He showed how much you’re worth to Him when Jesus died on the cross and rose from the grave for you. You don’t have to earn His love. You don’t have to impress anyone. Instead, you can lean into His love and know that, because of Jesus’s death and resurrection, you are good enough in His eyes. **✝** *Bethany Acker*

**✝** What kinds of things make you wonder if God really loves you? Things people say, expectations you put on yourself, lies you’ve heard, ways you’ve been mistreated, etc.? The enemy always wants us to doubt God’s love for us, but because of Jesus’s death and resurrection, we can be confident that “nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:39).

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**✝** When you begin to doubt God’s love for you, who are trusted Christians in your life who can remind you of His love, such as friends, parents, pastors, youth leaders, or counselors? If you can’t think of anyone right now, you can ask God to help you identify someone in the future. \_\_\_\_\_

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**✝** Consider taking some time to pray, and just thank God for His incredible love for you. \_\_\_\_\_

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*This is real love—not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son [Jesus] as a sacrifice to take away our sins. 1 John 4:10 (NLT)*

## TEMPORARY SITUATION

READ: 1 CORINTHIANS 15:42-49; 1 JOHN 3:2

**H**ave you ever been involved in renovating a house? It's usually pretty chaotic. Maybe there's a constant dripping in the bathroom sink, the walls are covered with holes, the carpet is old and worn out—plus a long list of other things that need fixing! In the midst of the chaos, we hold onto the hope of how nice it'll be once our home has had all the renovations it needs. Soon everything will be like new, all in working order as it should be.

That's a good way for Christians to think too. In our world broken by sin, we see many tragic things that seem to have no end. This can be especially disheartening when it's our own health that's suffering—whether it's our physical, mental, or emotional health.

Do you have a health problem that has you feeling discouraged? Perhaps you have a condition there's no cure for here on earth. Jesus sees us in all our pain, and He weeps with us. In His great compassion, He comforts us, and He promises to make us new. Because Jesus stepped into our broken world and experienced pain and suffering in His own body, we can know that He empathizes with us. And because He died on the cross and rose from the dead for us, we can rest in Him, knowing that health problems are just a temporary situation. If our trust is in Jesus, we know that we will have perfect bodies someday when He returns and makes everything new.

Whenever you feel discouraged, you can come to Jesus. He cares about you so deeply, and He promises to return and make everything in this world free from sin and death—including our bodies! Then we'll never have to deal with sickness or death ever again. We'll be healed and whole in His wonderful presence. **✦** *A. W. Smith*

**✦** What things in our broken world have been weighing on you lately? How might those things change when Jesus returns? Consider taking a moment to talk to Jesus about them. Remember that He doesn't pass over our pain; He grieves our hurts with us. \_\_\_\_\_

**✦** When you need encouragement and support, who are trusted people you can reach out to, such as counselors, therapists, teachers, pastors, parents, etc.? \_\_\_\_\_

*But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. 1 John 3:2b (NIV)*

## TRAVELING ALONE

READ: JOSHUA 1:9; ECCLESIASTES 4:9-12; ISAIAH 43:1-3; MATTHEW 28:20

**E**inar pushed open the portal door of his new habitat and started down the desert path. He'd only lived on the planet Themisto for a few weeks, and he still wasn't used to its dry climate—or its moonless nights. Even in the afternoon sun, he shivered at the thought of the nocturnal creatures that came out after sunset. This place was nothing like the frigid moon he had been stationed on most of his life.

He was going to visit Leif, his nearest neighbor and newfound friend. They worked together at the research base, and today Leif was going to teach Einar how to grow native vegetables in a shade garden.

In the light, Einar loved the desert with its prickly plants, shining rocks, and glittering sand. But at night, arid breezes whistled eerily through the brush. It was easy to imagine bumping into the hard cactus spines, stumbling over a blue neidr snake, or feeling the fuzzy legs of a pry copyn (which was similar to a tarantula, but bigger). The coyote-like creatures, called blaidds, prowled at night here too. Needless to say, Einar always made sure to be home before dark.

As he walked down the dusty path, he remembered the Scripture that had helped him on the long journey to this new world: "Be strong and courageous! Do not be afraid or discouraged. For the LORD your God is with you wherever you go." He whispered a prayer to the Almighty, double-checked that his anti-venom kit was attached to his utility belt, and gripped his stun-spear tighter. Still, he didn't feel very courageous.

When Einar reached Leif's habitat, Leif and his roommate Colborn were already outside gathering cacti. Soon Einar was working and laughing alongside them. He was so fascinated with the shade garden that he forgot about the time. But when he saw where Themisto's sun was in the sky, his jaw dropped. "I need to get home," he said. "It's getting dark already."

Leif stood up and brushed the dirt off his hands. "No worries. We'll walk home with you. It will make the journey safer." Einar was about to say no, he was used to traveling alone. But then Colborn spoke up, "After all, two people are better off than one...and three are even better!" Einar recognized the Scripture, and a smile spread across his face. He nodded, grateful, and soon they were on their way.

When Einar arrived home, he breathed a sigh of relief. The walk over had been filled with laughter, not fear. They'd even shared some of their favorite Scriptures as they walked. As Leif and Colborn headed back, Einar waved. "Don't trip over a neidr snake!" They laughed, and before his friends were out of earshot, Einar called, "Thanks...for coming back with me." Einar couldn't see them anymore, but he heard Leif's voice through the dark. "The Almighty is with you, and we will be too." ❧ *A. W. Smith*

*“And be sure of this: I [Jesus] am with you always, even to the end of the age.”  
Matthew 28:20b (NLT)*

- 🔑 Consider taking a moment to read the Bible passages quoted in today's story, Joshua 1:9 and Ecclesiastes 4:9-12. Have you ever had a Bible verse help you in a difficult time? What was it? \_\_\_\_\_

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- 🔑 Can you think of a time you were faced with a new or scary situation? Did you feel like you were supposed to handle it alone? As Christians, we don't have to face anything alone. Jesus is always with us, and that's why we can be courageous. Not only is He present with us through His Spirit and His Word, but also through His people. He is the One providing people for us, people to be His hands and feet in the lonely moments. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_
- 🔑 Presence is a big deal to God. Jesus is “God with us” (Matthew 1:23), and He came so that He would always be with us. Jesus so much wants to be with us that He died and rose for us...and then placed us in His community. Everyone who trusts in Jesus will live with God—and the rest of His people—forever. Jesus promises His followers, “I am with you always” (Matthew 28:20). And He calls us to be present with each other as He is present with us—to love, support, and encourage one another. Who are trusted Christians in your life? What are some ways you could practice being present with each other? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_
- 🔑 While Jesus doesn't promise that scary and difficult things won't happen, He does promise to be with us through them. Are you facing anything new, stressful, or difficult in your own life? How could you ask for help—both from God and from other people? \_\_\_\_\_

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**MY PSALM**

READ: PSALM 116

**W**hen I was fifteen, my grandma passed away. I had never dealt with a loss like that before, at least not one I remembered well (I had been much younger when my grandpa passed away). I was devastated.

It was a hard time, and I couldn't imagine her being gone. I wanted more time with her. In the midst of my sadness and grief, I was reading in the book of Psalms and came across Psalm 116. It might not seem like the most significant psalm to everyone who reads it, but at the time, it was just what I needed. I sort of claimed it as my psalm after that. I would read it over and over again.

That psalm helped me through some of the hardest days of my teen years. It still has a special place in my heart over a decade later. I love reading Psalm 116 because I remember how much it comforted me then, and because it still reminds me of God's comfort and goodness.

Have you ever come across passages in the Bible that really speak to you? It can be so meaningful to claim books or chapters or verses as your own and memorize them or read them over and over again.

The Bible is such a rich gift that God has given us. He has so much to offer us in His Word. He longs to comfort us in times of grief, and He is eager to reveal who He is and how much He cares about us. And the entire Bible points to Jesus. God became human and lived among us, ultimately dying on the cross for us and rising from the grave, so that everyone who trusts in Him can live with God forever. We can find hope in this good news all throughout the Bible, at any time in our lives. 📖 *Bethany Acker*

📖 Have you ever come across a Bible verse or passage that God used to speak to you in a special way? What was it? \_\_\_\_\_

📖 Have you ever tried to memorize Scripture or read the same chapters or books in the Bible over and over? How could these practices help us understand the Bible, and the God who gave it to us, in deeper ways?

*I love the LORD, for he heard my voice; he heard my cry for mercy. Psalm 116:1 (NIV)*

**MAKER**

READ: GENESIS 1:9-31; PSALM 119:73

I've always loved going on road trips for various reasons, one being that I get to see so much of God's creation along the way. Traveling gives us an idea of how beautiful and large the world is. Just the United States of America alone is so big that when I road-tripped from Wisconsin to California, it took over thirty hours to get there.

The scenery we passed through on our way was amazing. The landscape changes time and time again. God made His world so beautiful. The nature that surrounds us is awesome. God created this stunning, big world that we live in, and He created us too. He made us with just as much care as the mountains out west and the deep oceans. He made us with just as much care as tall waterfalls and gorgeous sunsets. In fact, you might say He made us with even more care because He crafted us in His own image.

Nature shows us how excellent God's work is and how much care He puts into His creations, even though they are large and many. And God loves us even more than He loves the other works He has made. How great does it feel to realize that?

Even if you aren't able to travel far, it's great to look at nature wherever you are and admire God's work. He put so much care into it, and He put so much care into creating you and giving you life. 📖 *Bethany Acker*

📖 What are some of your favorite things in nature? Have you ever been surprised by the beauty that surrounds you? How does it feel to know God made all of it and made you too? \_\_\_\_\_

📖 Colossians 1:16-17 says, "Everything was created through him [Jesus] and for him...he holds all creation together." How might knowing that we are created through Jesus and for Jesus affect the way we view ourselves, and the rest of creation? \_\_\_\_\_

*So God created human beings in his own image. Genesis 1:27a (NLT)*





## ISSUE OF BLOOD

READ: MATTHEW 9:20-22; MARK 5:25-34; LUKE 8:43-48

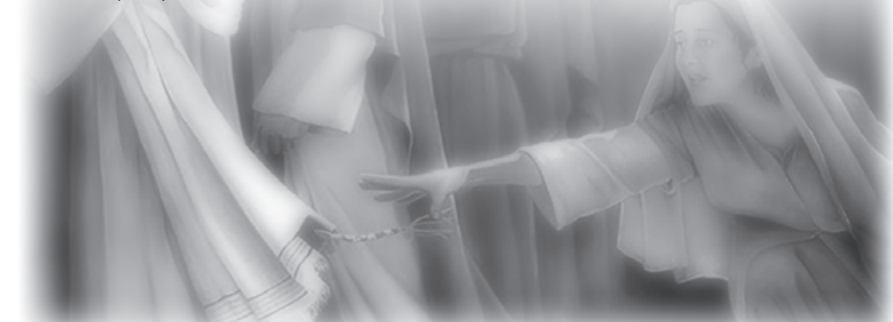
**D**rained, the blood flows,  
 Labelled, “unclean” and “lost”  
 Doctors fail, trying everything  
 I don’t care about the cost.  
 “The healer is here, Jesus,”  
 An echo of Your name  
 Sings in my ears.  
 Can He heal my shame?  
 In pain, I scabble on my hands  
 Battling through loud crowds.

Desperately needing You  
 Humbled, by the proud,  
 Crawling in faith,  
 Jesus, I trust in You,  
 Touching Your cloak, trembling,  
 Power surges through,  
 “Daughter,” our eyes connect,  
 No longer unclean, nor outcast,  
 “Your faith has made you well,”  
 You smile, I am free at last. **!** *Cindy Lee*

**!** Today’s poem imagines what it was like for the woman who Jesus healed from chronic bleeding. Her condition labeled her as unclean and made her an outcast—but Jesus healed her, forgave her, and enfolded her into His family. Have you ever felt desperate for Jesus? The reality is, without Jesus, we are all unclean outcasts, trapped in the sickness of sin that leads only to death. We all desperately need Jesus to heal us of sin and brokenness. The good news is, Jesus longs to heal us. He so much longs to restore us to wholeness and to relationship with God and His people that He went to the cross for us. He gave up His life for us—unclean outcasts that we are—and then, He rose from the grave. So now, everyone who trusts in Jesus is made clean and enfolded into God’s family. And when Jesus returns, we will be fully healed (Revelation 21:1-5). Until that day, Jesus promises to always be with us, responding to our pain in love.

**!** Are you or anyone you know struggling with illness? Jesus has so much compassion on us, and He wants us to come to Him. Sometimes He gives us physical healing, and sometimes He gives us other good gifts. Consider taking a moment to talk to God about anything that’s been weighing on you. You can present all your needs to Jesus, who loves you dearly. \_\_\_\_\_

*“Daughter,” he [Jesus] said to her, “your faith has made you well. Go in peace.”  
 Luke 8:48 (NLT)*



## A NEW ACCENT

READ: EPHESIANS 5:1-2; COLOSSIANS 3:8-10

**W**hen you hear an accent different from yours, do you find yourself slipping into the new accent? For example, maybe you say *y'all* around your grandparents or *brilliant* around your British friend. Whatever it looks like, switching accents is a pretty common and often funny phenomenon.

Thinking about accents can actually help us understand a truth we find in the Bible. After Jesus died on the cross, rose from the grave, and ascended into heaven, God sent the Holy Spirit to be in Jesus's followers. Soon after this, Acts 4:13 says that when the Jewish religious leaders interacted with two of Jesus's disciples, Peter and John, they recognized that they "had been with Jesus."

As we get to know Jesus better, our speech and actions begin to reflect Him. Like Peter and John, all Christians have the opportunity to spend time with Jesus, talking to Him and listening to Him any time, because we have the Holy Spirit in us. Even though we won't see Jesus face-to-face until He returns, we can still experience the "inexpressible joy" of knowing Him through faith (1 Peter 1:8). As we pray, read His Word (both individually and with fellow Christians), and interact with the Holy Spirit as we go through our daily lives, we get to know Jesus better and better...and His love overflows from us to others.

If we trust in Jesus, He will help us grow to become more like Him—more kind, patient, loving, and forgiving—so our words and actions will show others that we know Him. And as we spend time with Jesus, we can grow to understand His love for everyone and pick up His accent in the way we talk to and treat others. 📖 *A. W. Smith*

📖 Have you ever been encouraged by seeing a Christian friend copying Jesus's accent? What were they doing or saying? \_\_\_\_\_

📖 Why do you think spending time with Jesus often leads to acting more like Him? (If you want to dig deeper, read John 15:1-17 and Galatians 5:22-23.) \_\_\_\_\_

*Live a life filled with love, following the example of Christ. He loved us and offered himself as a sacrifice for us, a pleasing aroma to God. Ephesians 5:2 (NLT)*

## THE RIGHT SEASON

READ: ECCLESIASTES 3:1-14

**D**o you ever feel like you've been stuck in the age you are forever? Maybe you have big dreams for the future, but you just don't have the resources or experience or age to do the things you want to do yet.

The teenage season of life has its own challenges and joys. And, just like in every season of life, there will be individual variations on how each person experiences these years between childhood and adulthood. But just like crops won't grow if they're planted in the wrong season, it will be difficult for us to grow if we try to live in the wrong season. Think about how the different seasons follow one another: at the end of winter the days will get warmer, then the bare trees will be covered in leaves, then the crops will be ripe and ready for harvest, and then the world will grow cold again as it takes a winter rest before the next spring.

Seasons—in life and in weather—won't last forever, and that is a great comfort. But the greatest comfort of all is that Jesus is with us throughout all the seasons of our lives. This gives us the freedom to feel what we need to feel and grow how we need to grow...right in the season we're in.

Are you finding space to enjoy and experience the time of life you're in right now? Remember that Jesus walks with us through all the various seasons in our lifetime, and He uses each one to teach us new things and help us grow. Instead of trying to skip ahead, we can look around right now. We can find things to thank God for in all of life's seasons, talk to God about how we're feeling, and trust Him to be with us through every season. 🕯️ *A. W. Smith*

- 🕯️ What is going on in your season of life right now? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- 🕯️ What things might God be inviting you to set aside for a future season? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- 🕯️ What beautiful things might God be inviting you to notice and enjoy in your current season? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- 🕯️ The seasons of our lives are leading to the ultimate fulfillment of Jesus's return, when He will make all things new. How can the promises in the Bible help us weather the stormy parts of every season? (One passage that's full of these promises is Romans 8.) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

*There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens.  
Ecclesiastes 3:1 (NIV)*

## ENSEMBLE

READ: PSALM 66:16-20; JAMES 1:19-27; 3:13-18

**S**ometimes our orchestra would split into ensembles. In these smaller groups, we'd sit down with our sheet music, then all start at the same speed, or tempo. But sometimes, it didn't stay that way for long. Soon the cello had sped up, the violin had slowed down, the bass was too loud, and the viola was ready to quit from sheer exasperation. The song did not sound like music.

So, how did we get the song to sound...like a song? We had to learn to listen to each other. Our director taught us to know our sheet music so well that we could look up at each other while playing. She trained us to tune our ears to the music. When we focused on listening to the instruments around us, our fingers and arms would naturally adjust. When we started to feel like we were off, we'd make eye contact, and pretty soon we'd be playing together again.

Of course, this didn't always work. After all, we were still learning! Sometimes we'd get lost, and we'd have to stop, laugh it off, and talk about what went wrong. After listening to one another's explanations so we could understand how all our parts fit together, we'd try again.

This reminds me of living as a Christian...with other Christians. Throughout the Bible, God calls us to listen to each other. Because, even if we know Bible verses like the back of our hand, if we aren't open to hearing and learning from others' perspectives, and if we aren't sensitive to each other's needs, how can we obey God's second-greatest command: to love each other (Matthew 22:36-40)? But we can also fall to the opposite extreme. We might be listening to others, but if we aren't spending time in God's Word for ourselves, learning what He says and wrestling with the sections that don't come easily to us, how can we play the songs of God together? It would be like trying to play in an ensemble without ever learning the sheet music.

Thankfully, God hasn't left us to figure things out alone. After Jesus died, rose again, and ascended into heaven, the Holy Spirit came to live inside us, His followers. The Holy Spirit helps us understand the Bible and empowers us to care about others and humbly listen to their thoughts, sensibilities, and needs. Instead of trying to follow God in our own strength and wisdom, God invites us to lean on Him and support each other. Together, we can make beautiful music. 🕯️ *Hannah Howe*

🕯️ Can you think of a time when listening to others helped you understand God's Word and/or follow His good ways? What happened? \_\_\_\_\_

*Come and listen, all you who fear God, and I will tell you what he did for me. Psalm 66:16 (NLT)*

## THE FLEET OF LAIOMA

READ: EPHESIANS 2:11-22

**T**he village of Koselig had begun building ships. For too long the Blodugur clan had pillaged their tiny coastal town (and they, in turn, had done the same to them) and now the village of Koselig had made plans to leave before more bloodshed. But they are too late.

A horn bellows, alerting Koselig to gather. Blodugur approaches, and they must prepare for battle. The people exchange worried glances, drawing their swords. The clan leader runs out in front of them. They stand poised for a rousing speech from their Chief.

“People of Koselig!” he shouts. “There, battle awaits.” He points to the Southern Forest where Blodugurian warriors slink along the tree line. “Remember now that when we gather, *then* our God will fight for us! Trust in Him!” The Chief pauses as the Elder of Koselig approaches and whispers into his ear. When he shouts again to the people, his posture has shifted. “This time though, drop your weapons and your shields. Do it quickly.” Confused, the people begin to lower their weapons to the ground. *How do you fight an army with no weapons?* They murmur.

Knowing the people’s unease, their leader continues, “We are going to send a diplomat urging them to join us instead of creating more bloodshed for us all. Pray for her, pray that God will speak through her.”

The people watch a woman ride toward the enemy alone. Some recognize the rider: her name is Laioma. At the tree line she stops and speaks. After the sun has gone to kiss the North Sea, the rider hurries back, the Blodugurian warriors trailing behind.

“Praise be to God today, people of Koselig!” she calls hoarsely. “He has heard our cries and gifted us with a new ally, not an enemy.” Most of Koselig replies with joyous shouts. But some clench their fists; others pull their children closer. Laioma continues, “Yes, much blood has been shed because of the violence between our two clans. And we grieve these losses with deep sorrow, as God does. But let us also remember the One He sent, who shed His own blood for us all. Because His love is greater than death, today the Blodugur clan joins us as members of the same body. We are fellow citizens who will search for new lands together, led by the One who brought peace, the One who is making us into the new humanity.”

The Elder brings the ceremonial goblet to Laioma, and she raises it for the newcomers to drink. The celebration proceeds into the night and into the day. While some are suspicious of one another, in the coming weeks meals are shared,

trust is built, and among the people spreads the joy of the unity made possible by something beyond themselves. The forgiveness of the One has made the way for them to live in peace with one another. 🗝️ *Peter J. McDonough*

*For he [Jesus] himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility...His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace. Ephesians 2:14-15 (NIV)*

🗝️ Today's allegorical story shows how God has made unity possible through Jesus. We find the theme of unity throughout the Bible. For example, in Ephesians 2 Paul tells the Christians living in Ephesus that both Jewish Christians and Gentile (or non-Jewish) Christians “have access to the Father by one Spirit” (verse 18). They are all “fellow citizens” of God’s kingdom and also “members of his household” (verse 19). Jesus is the only One who could make this unity possible. Through His death and resurrection, He forgives all who trust in Him, uniting them with God...and uniting them with other believers. We cannot live in unity or love each other well apart from Jesus—the fact is, unity is a gift from God, and He empowers us to love one another through the Holy Spirit (John 15:1-17; 17:20-26). Can you think of any examples of ways you have seen God’s people living in unity with each other and loving each other well? What was that like? \_\_\_\_\_

🗝️ As the Koselig and Blodugurian people had to learn to work together, so we also are called to be in community with fellow Christians who are different from us, including those who don’t look like us, talk like us, think like us, or vote like us. This can be difficult, but God is eager to help us. Where do you see division...in the world around you, in your own life, maybe even in your local church? Consider taking a moment to imagine what it might look like for God to bring healing and wholeness to these difficult places and relationships. As you ponder these things, you can pray for God’s kingdom to come and His will to be done. (Matthew 6:9-13) \_\_\_\_\_

🗝️ If you want to dig deeper, you can read in Acts 10 about the time God gave Peter a vision that resulted in Peter, a Jew, going to the home of a Gentile (which was against Jewish law). Peter then shared the good news with a deeper understanding of what Jesus had accomplished through His death and resurrection.



## THE TEARS OF GOD

READ: JOHN 11:32-36; ROMANS 12:15; HEBREWS 4:14-16

**T**here are a lot of lies in our world, and one of them is that real men don't cry. But what about Jesus? God became human, and it was well-documented that Jesus cried, including when His friend Lazarus died. In John 11:35, Jesus was crying with grief at His friend's death.



We live in a world where terrible things like death are the norm. This is because humanity's sin resulted in God's good creation being broken. So where is God in all this brokenness and sorrow? He's right here. Jesus is God with us—and He weeps with us.

As Christians, we don't need to be ashamed to show we have feelings. It shows we care about the people and world God made. Jesus knows the fullness of human experience and emotions, and He is the picture of what it means to be a human without sin (Hebrews 4:14-16).

Have you ever thought you needed to act tough or prove that you're strong? Have you ever felt like you should hide your feelings when something hurts you or causes you sorrow? Jesus didn't do that. He wept and shared the grief of Mary and Martha when their brother—His friend—died. When you share in the sorrow others are experiencing, you're showing them His love.

Jesus is both loving and strong. These are not mutually exclusive. He died on the cross and rose from the grave three days later—beating sin and death to save us. That's real strength and love. If you're looking for what it means to be a man—or a human in general—look no further than Jesus. He is the Creator who became human, the King who became a servant, the Savior who wept. **✦** *A. W. Smith*

**✦** What emotions seem to be unwelcome in your culture? Based on the truths about Jesus from today's Bible passages, how might Jesus be inviting you to approach these emotions differently? \_\_\_\_\_

**✦** In John 11, Jesus wept at Lazarus's death, and then He raised Lazarus from the grave. In the same way, Jesus shares our sorrows with us now, and when He returns to restore His creation, He will raise His people from the grave to live with Him forever—and there will be no more need for tears. If you want to know more about this good news, see page 72.

*Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. Romans 12:15 (NIV)*

## JESUS ANSWERED CONFIDENTLY

READ: JOHN 8

It can be hard to answer people who question us about our beliefs, especially if they speak aggressively and make us nervous. Studying the Bible can help us have answers in our heads, but getting those answers out can still be an issue.

In John 8, Jesus was questioned by some Pharisees, a group of Jewish religious leaders who wanted to trap Him and accuse Him (verse 6). Jesus had an answer for everything they threw His way. He would say one thing, and they would question Him about it, and His answer would lead to more questions from them. He stayed calm and kept responding, knowing just what to say each time. He was able to share so much with them; He was ready with an answer for each question they had.

Isn't it encouraging to know that God is never stumped by our questions? He can handle anything we throw His way. In fact, He invites our questions! And He is eager to reveal Himself to everyone who seeks Him (Jeremiah 29:13; Luke 11:9-13).

So, as we try to figure out how to respond to the questions people throw at us, we can look to Jesus. He remained calm even when people openly accused Him of being an imposter. Once we've put our trust in Jesus, we have His Holy Spirit inside us, giving us peace and empowering us to love people even in stressful situations.

Reading through John 8 left me feeling more in awe of Jesus than ever; it left me with more respect for Him. I'm happy we've been saved by someone who knows everything and has an answer for each question that comes His way. 🙏

*Emily Acker*

🙏 Has someone ever asked you a question about God that you struggled to answer? Do you have questions that other people haven't been able to answer? Throughout our lives, we'll continue to have questions, and God invites us to ask every single one. Discovering the answers may be a long process, and there are some things we won't fully understand until Jesus returns and makes all things new. But even when we have unanswered questions, we can rest in God's sure love for us. Jesus, who is God in flesh, was willing to go to the cross for the same people who wanted to kill Him on it. And He rose from the grave, so everyone who trusts in Him will live with God forever. God's answer to every question is deeply connected to His immeasurable love for us. \_\_\_\_\_

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*But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect. 1 Peter 3:15 (NIV)*



## PRAYER WARRIORS

READ: EPHESIANS 6:18-20; 1 TIMOTHY 2:1-4; JAMES 5:13-16

One day, I heard a beautician chatting to her colleague as I was selecting a nail polish. She said, “I’m trying to stay strong, but when I’m alone, my husband’s illness overwhelms me.” My heart lurched. Sadness welled up inside, and immediately I knew I needed to pray for both this woman and her husband.

Not long after, I overheard a snippet of conversation on the train, from a commuter whose daughter was terminally ill. Again, the thought stirred inside, *I need to pray.*

Does this happen to you? I often find myself feeling called to pray for someone’s needs. I know that some Christians excel at assisting people in practical ways, but my role tends to be different. Maybe, like me, you are quiet and wonder how you can reach out to people. Becoming a prayer warrior is an amazing way of doing this. You don’t need to shout about it; no one ever needs to know but you and God (Matthew 6:5-6). It makes a difference even if you never find out the results of your requests. And it may not be in the way you expect.

Every day there are people who are facing challenges, who feel helpless, and who, for whatever reason, can’t pray. Either they haven’t received the precious gift of faith, or they are too exhausted or ill. As Christians, when we encounter people who are hurting, we have the opportunity to do something without even saying a word. The world we live in is broken, but Jesus has come to heal and save.

Whenever I hear about a tragic situation, I’m reminded how much God loves us all. He loves us so much that even when people are suffering, and have neither the strength nor the faith to pray, He sends believers to hear their pleas and intercede on their behalf. God sees us when we’re hurting, He cares, and He responds. 🕯️ *Cindy Lee*

🕯️ Psalm 145:9 says, “The LORD is good to all; he has compassion on all he has made.” God wants all people to know Him through trusting in Jesus, and He invites us to bring Him all our concerns and requests (1 Timothy 2:4; 1 Peter 5:7). Once we know Jesus, we have the Holy Spirit, who guides us and helps us pray. When we notice an opportunity to intercede—or pray for—a person or situation, it’s okay if we’re not sure what exactly to pray for. We can simply ask God to help, or we can pray a prayer from the Bible, such as Numbers 6:24-26 or Ephesians 3:14-21. Who could you pray for today? Consider taking a moment to pray for them now. \_\_\_\_\_

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*The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective. James 5:16b (NIV)*

## STORMS

READ: PSALM 46:1-7; MATTHEW 8:23-27

**W**hat's the scariest storm you've ever been through? When you're in the middle of a storm, you never know what could happen. As the wind picks up, trees start blowing wildly. Branches come crashing down. The wind hurtles at the windows and makes a loud shriek. The house feels like it's shaking—or worse, if you're driving it feels like the wind might pull your car off the road or into oncoming traffic.

When the rain starts pelting down, the sound can be deafening. You wonder if it will let up soon, or if the storm will just worsen. Rain might turn to hail, and hail is terrifying. Chunks of ice are literally falling from the sky. And then there are tornados and floods and hurricanes. The aftermath of these storms can be devastating.

We never know what can happen during a storm, just like we don't know what's going to happen during the storms in our lives. When things start to go wrong, we might want to hide away like we would hide from a bad storm. But just like during the storms outside, during any storm that's happening in your life, God is there. He is with you. He will help you through.

God promises that He will never leave us (Hebrews 13:5). He knows what's happening during all the storms in our lives, and He wants to help us. Just look at Matthew 8. When Jesus was in a boat with His disciples, “suddenly a furious storm came up on the lake, so that the waves swept over the boat” (verse 24). But Jesus got up and spoke to the very wind and waves that were threatening to capsize them. And then, “it was completely calm” (verse 26). Just as Jesus calmed that storm, He can calm the storms in our lives.

Jesus reveals that God loves us deeply, and when we suffer, He hurts with us and extends His mighty arm to help us. We can turn to Him during the storm and know that He will provide shelter. The wind and rain might not immediately stop, but we can have peace in our hearts despite the storm when we trust in Him. 🕯

*Bethany Acker*

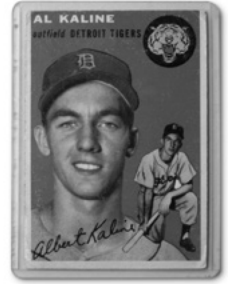
🕯 Our ultimate hope in any storm is that Jesus has promised to return and make all things new. On that day, He will raise us from the dead, and everyone who has put their trust in Him will live with God forever in restored creation. In the meantime, we can rest knowing we are secure in His arms, and nothing can snatch us away from Him (John 10:27-30). What kinds of storms have you been through? Have you ever experienced God's power and love in the midst of a storm? \_\_\_\_\_

*“Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.” Hebrews 13:5b (NIV)*

## UNDER YOUR NOSE

READ: PSALM 119:14; PROVERBS 2:1-5; JAMES 1:5-11

**H**ave you ever cleaned out an attic in search of treasure? Like an old baseball card that could be worth a lot of money, found in a dusty old box. Or maybe a precious painting worth millions of dollars under a cobwebby tarp. Or maybe a sentimental letter from a long-gone relative tucked away in a faded envelope. You never know what treasures you might find right under your nose.



But while dusty, valuable treasure is fun to find, all wealth eventually fades. Money and accomplishments are incredibly fleeting and can often puff us up with pride.

By contrast, the riches of God's Word are worth far more than money. They contain the greatest treasure—right under our noses.

And what is that treasure? The love of God. The hope of Jesus—and all He's done and promises to do. The seduction of greed and power pales in comparison to life with Jesus. Because Jesus died on the cross and rose from the dead, everyone who puts their trust in Him is restored to relationship with God. And we have the promise of forever life on the new heavens and earth, where we will be free to love God and others as He intended us to. Even as we wait for Jesus to return and make all things new, we find true community in Jesus's family and true purpose in following Him and having meaningful work to do here and now.

The good news of Jesus is true riches—riches that will never fade and can never be taken away, even in an uncertain and ever-changing world. And God is pleased to give this treasure to us (Luke 12:32). So what are you waiting for? Go on a treasure hunt for Jesus's promises today! **!** *A. W. Smith*

- !** What would be your dream treasure to find in a dusty old attic? \_\_\_\_\_
- !** What are some of your most treasured promises from Jesus? How can remembering these treasures help us avoid the seduction of greed and power? \_\_\_\_\_
- !** Paul often wrote about the riches of the mystery of Jesus. If you want to dig deeper, read: Romans 11:33; 16:25; 1 Corinthians 2:7; 15:51; Ephesians 1:9; 3:2-9; 6:19; Colossians 1:24-29; 2:2; 4:3; 1 Timothy 3:16.

*This message was kept secret for centuries and generations past, but now it has been revealed to God's people. For God wanted them to know that the riches and glory of Christ are for you Gentiles, too. And this is the secret: Christ lives in you. This gives you assurance of sharing his glory. Colossians 1:26-27 (NLT)*

## THE PAST

READ: PSALMS 32:5; 103:8-14; EPHESIANS 6:10-18; 1 PETER 5:6-11

**A**re you ever reminded of something bad you did, and just the memory of it makes you feel like you just did it again seconds ago? Sometimes all I remember is the bad stuff. It pops into my mind and hangs out there. I've asked God's forgiveness, and I know I've been forgiven, yet I can't get this stuff out of my mind. I'm reminded of how mean, stupid, or unforgiving I've been. At times I've failed to tell someone about Jesus's great love. As I remember my failures, I feel like I've failed all over again. In moments like these, the words of 1 Peter 5:7-9 can help us: "Give all your worries and cares to God, for he cares about you. Stay alert! Watch out for your great enemy, the devil. He prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour. Stand firm against him, and be strong in your faith."

When we feel like useless failures who cannot do anything for God, we can bring all these worries and cares to God. He frees us from guilt and shame, replacing regrets with peace and joy. Because Jesus died for us and rose from the grave, we can know that our forgiveness is secure. And we can continue to confess our sins to God regularly, as He calls us to do.

Once we've put our trust in Jesus, the Holy Spirit lives in us, reminding us of God's great love and helping us lay our heavy burdens at Jesus's feet—and leave them there. The Holy Spirit reminds us we've been forgiven. And God gives us His strength to "stand firm against all strategies of the devil" (Ephesians 6:11).

My heart desires to go forward with my Lord. Daily, I'm learning to place the past in His hands and trust all these memories and unforgiveness feelings to Him.

As we lean into our relationship with Jesus, He will lead, guide, and direct us in the right path. As we lay our burdens at Jesus's feet and listen for His voice, He will help us continue forward with Him. Even when we hear accusations that we are no good, not capable, or not a child of the King, Jesus will lift us up with joy, peace, and hope. As He fills us with His love, He reminds us we are forgiven, blessed children of the King who will live with Him forever (Romans 5:5; 10:9-11; Ephesians 1:3; 1 John 2:12). 🕯️ *Anna Gregory*

🕯️ We can learn to discern Jesus's voice as we listen carefully to His Word. Understanding who Jesus is and pondering His story helps us see that the accusations against us are not nearly as strong as God's love for us. According to today's Bible passages, how does Jesus see you? \_\_\_\_\_

*Give all your worries and cares to God, for he cares about you. 1 Peter 5:7 (NLT)*

## NOT ALONE IN ANXIETY AND WORRY

READ: PSALM 94:17-19; MATTHEW 6:25-34; 11:28-30

**T**here are a lot of anxious and worried people in the world today, but that's nothing new. People have been worrying for a long time, otherwise the Bible wouldn't address worry like it does. We're not the first people to have days when we feel anxious or nights when we lose sleep because we're worried about what the future might hold.

Moses worried that he wouldn't know how to speak when God sent him to Pharaoh to bring the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt (Exodus 3-4). The proverbs talk about how a person can get weighed down with anxiety (Proverbs 12:25). The psalms are filled with verses that were written by people experiencing worry and anxiety. For example, Psalm 13 begins with the words, "How long, LORD? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and day after day have sorrow in my heart?" Throughout the Bible, we see over and over again how God responds to all our worries, and how He meets us with compassion in times of anxiety.

Jesus is "God with us" (Matthew 1:23), and He took time to talk about worrying—and even more than that, He experienced anxiety firsthand. On the night before He went to the cross, Jesus went to a quiet place to pray. He was "deeply distressed and troubled," and He told His disciples, "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death" (Mark 14:33-34). Jesus was "in anguish," and as He prayed earnestly, "his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground" (Luke 22:44). Jesus was willing to go through all this distress and sorrow and hurt... because He loves us. In Jesus, we see how God bore our weaknesses and took our pain, ultimately dying on the cross, so that we could be free (Isaiah 53).

Anxiety, worry, and fear are nothing new. God understands what we're feeling and how our thoughts can be so unsettling. Jesus is fully God and fully human, so He can truly empathize with our struggles, and He wants to help us (Hebrews 4:14-16). We don't have to be ashamed when we experience anxiety. We are never alone in our worrying. Life in our broken world is full of challenges, but one day Jesus will return and put an end to worry and anxiety for good. Until that day, Jesus holds us in our distress, and He never lets us go (John 10:27-30). 🕯

*Emily Acker*

*When anxiety was great within me, your consolation brought me joy. Psalm 94:19 (NIV)*

🔑 Do you sometimes find yourself thinking that life would have been simpler if you had been born in the past, that you wouldn't worry so much if you didn't have to live in this modern world? Ultimately, it's the fear of death and loss that are at the root of most worries, and these fears are timeless. Similarly, there are lots of things in this broken world that can signal to our bodies that we are in danger and we need to be ready to take action or hide...so while it's good that our hearts can beat faster and our muscles can get tighter when we need them to, it's not very helpful when our bodies feel like we're in danger when we're actually not. As humans, we all have times when we feel anxious or worried, not just in our teen years but throughout our lives. How might it be comforting to know that God is not surprised by our worries and anxieties—and He doesn't expect us to be able to handle all the stresses of life on our own? \_\_\_\_\_

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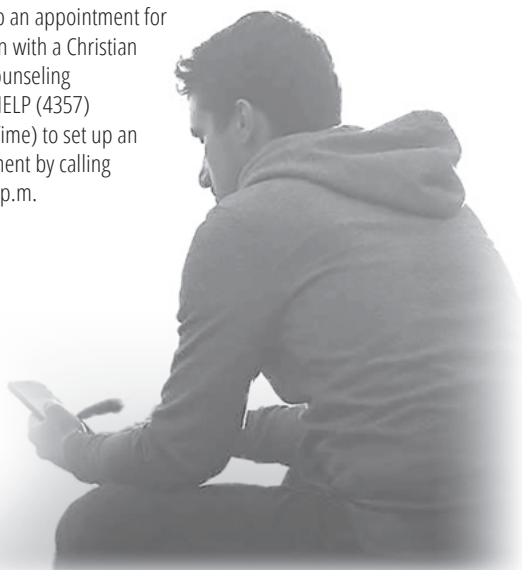
🔑 What kinds of things make you feel worried or anxious? Consider taking a moment to bring these things to God in prayer. He loves you, and He longs to listen to your hurts and remind you that you are held safe in His arms. You're not a burden when you're anxious—you are valuable beyond measure, and you are worth caring for. (1 Peter 5:7) \_\_\_\_\_

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🔑 When Jesus rose from the dead, He defeated sin and all its effects, including death, pain, sickness, fear, and all forms of worry and anxiety. When Jesus returns, He will make all things new—and everyone who has put their trust in Him will experience total peace and joy in His wonderful presence! Until that day, He promises to stay with us always. As we rely on Him, He helps us grow. And He provides trusted people who show us compassion and help us learn to manage stress in healthy ways—such as medical and mental health professionals who can help us figure out if what we are experiencing is worry, anxiety, or something else. It's important to remember that we all need help from others, and it's good to be honest about our struggles. If you find yourself feeling afraid, stressed, or worried a lot of the time, or if your thoughts keep going to “what if” scenarios and you can't seem to stop, who is a trusted adult you could talk to, such as a parent, pastor, teacher, or counselor? \_\_\_\_\_

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🔑 If you need someone to talk to, you can set up an appointment for a one-time complimentary phone consultation with a Christian counselor through the Focus on the Family Counseling Service. In the United States, call 1-855-771-HELP (4357) weekdays 6:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. (Mountain Time) to set up an appointment. In Canada, book your appointment by calling 1-800-661-9800 between 8:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m. (Pacific Time) and ask to speak with the care associate.



## FORGOTTEN LEGACIES

READ: PSALMS 33:12-22; 78:1-8

**Y**ou may know that the Wright Brothers invented the first functional airplane, Alexander Graham Bell invented the telephone, and Louis Pasteur developed a process that makes milk safe to drink. A lot of people also know Pasteur developed a vaccine for rabies in humans.

But few people know that modern physical therapy was introduced by Sister Elizabeth Kenny, a nurse in Australia. It was part of her Kenny Method to treat polio. And regrettably, most people have never heard of Dr. Ignaz Semmelweis. Dr. Semmelweis developed an antiseptic method of child delivery. Despite overwhelming proof his antiseptic method greatly reduced the deaths of new mothers, most physicians refused to adopt it until years after his death.

Each of these people left a legacy that will continue to benefit humanity for years to come. Some are widely remembered. Some are not.

It's the same in the Bible. We may be aware of Moses and the forty years he devoted to leading the Israelites to the promised land. We might remember Peter and Paul's incredible missionary work, Queen Esther's courage, and Mary's quiet obedience.

But, do we remember Shiphrah and Puah? The king of Egypt ordered these two midwives to kill all Hebrew baby boys at birth. Instead, the midwives let the baby boys live (Exodus 1:15-22). Do we remember Lois and Eunice, Timothy's grandmother and mother who raised him in the faith (2 Timothy 1:5)? Or Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea, who were secretly disciples of Jesus? They were the ones who prepared Jesus's dead body for burial and placed Him in a tomb—the same tomb Jesus would rise from three days later (John 19:38-42).

As believers in Jesus, we can know that He is with us, empowering us to follow Him and take part in His good work. Much of what we do out of love for God will go unnoticed by others or someday be forgotten. But even when we forget, our loving God sees and remembers the contributions of everyone. 🕯️ *Kathy Irey*

🕯️ Have you ever felt like nobody notices what you do? Even when other people don't recognize or remember our contributions, what we do matters. The things we do out of love for God and our neighbors, big and small, have eternal significance. And God honors all these things. What are some ways we can celebrate with others and encourage them when they accomplish something? (Romans 12:15; 1 Thessalonians 5:10-13)

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*For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago. Ephesians 2:10 (NLT)*

## WAHYO BOON

READ: PSALM 139:1-6; ROMANS 8:26-28

**H**ave you ever had to interpret for a toddler? As little ones learn their words, it can be hard for them to get the pronunciations right. Water might become “wawa.” Dog might become “dah.” Potato might become “bay-yo.” And yellow balloon might become “wahyo boon.” Often, a little one needs an interpreter from their household to explain what they’re saying to any visitors who aren’t used to this toddler’s own personal dialect.



In a way, we’re all a little like toddlers. Just like these little ones need help communicating, all Christians need that kind of help sometimes when we pray. We don’t always know what to say or even what to ask God for, but Jesus has given us the Holy Spirit to help us. The Holy Spirit makes our requests clear and right before God.

Romans 8:26-27 says, “The Holy Spirit helps us in our weakness. For example, we don’t know what God wants us to pray for. But the Holy Spirit prays for us with groanings that cannot be expressed in words. And the Father who knows all hearts knows what the Spirit is saying, for the Spirit pleads for us believers in harmony with God’s own will.”

Do you ever feel like you don’t know how to pray? Is it sometimes hard for you to tell God what you need or how you feel? This happens to all of us! When we have trouble finding the right words, the Holy Spirit takes our prayers and makes them just right. So we don’t need to worry when we find it difficult to pray—God hears our prayers and will give us exactly what we need. **✦** *A. W. Smith*

**✦** Can you think of a time when you didn’t know what or how to pray? How might it be comforting to know that God still understands us and knows what we need? \_\_\_\_\_

**✦** Sometimes we don’t have words at all. When we pray, we can use the words in the Bible to help us too. Almost the entire book of Psalms is prayer in song form, and in Matthew 6, Jesus lays out what’s known as the Lord’s Prayer or the Our Father, a simple prayer that shows us how to pray for God’s kingdom to come as we talk to God about our daily needs—even when our words fail. Are there any prayers from Scripture that have resonated with you? Which ones? \_\_\_\_\_

*But the Holy Spirit prays for us with groanings that cannot be expressed in words.  
Romans 8:26b (NLT)*



## THE SACRED HEART

READ: 1 SAMUEL 16:1-13; LUKE 10:25-37

Just above the sea's drop off into the cold depths lay the city of Aquis. Turrets of shell and pearl sparkled under the liquid bubble that encased the city, allowing its inhabitants protection and breathable air. Most of the Colo colony had come from above the sea, before the war and fires had burned and destroyed everything they once held dear. The Colo were a proud people, fiercely loyal to their own, and determined to never again be forced from their home.

Cor wiped sweat off his face as he completed his morning strengthening routine. His golden skin glistened as waves from a passing pod of dolphins rippled the surface of the bubble. He jumped as Viva popped out suddenly from behind a fof plant, its puffy pink petals raining down. "Have you heard the latest?" Viva blurted as she pushed her long, plaited braids off her shoulders. "What's the latest?" Cor asked. "With you, it could be anything." She lowered her voice. "There's been a disturbance in the dark side of the sea." Cor's coal black eyes turned grave. "Gigas?" Viva nodded. The great creature lived in the depths, rarely surfacing. Yet when it showed its spiny face and thrashed its powerful body, devastation was left in its wake.

Suddenly, a deafening roar shook the sand beneath their feet. Cor and Viva watched through the bubble in horror as creatures of the deep clawed, swam, and fought their way out of the drop off. Among them were the Nura people. The Nuras weren't enemies of the Colos, nor were they friends. They simply stayed in the depths, occasionally speeding up to the surface to do no-one-knew-what. Most of the Colos assumed they were up to no good. As unsightly as the Nuras were, something inside Viva's heart broke as she watched them struggle to escape from the Gigas's claws, some holding the hands of small children or clutching babies in their arms.

"We have to help them! Open the gates!" Cor sprinted toward the gates where he was blocked by several Colos. "What are you doing?" Viva shrieked in anger. "Can't you see they're being slaughtered out there?" The tallest of the Colo shook his head. "Most unfortunate. However, we must protect the Colo. We know nothing about these Nura creatures."

A Colo woman in the group wrinkled her nose in distaste. "Just look at them! Grey, spikes and spines, not a sheen of color—not to mention they are land *and* water creatures! Who knows what havoc they might wreak in Aquis!"

Viva glanced back and forth between the Colo blocking them and the chaos that reigned outside the bubble's surface. "Cor, we need to do something!" Her voice quivered with emotion. "How can we get through to our people? What would the Author do?" Viva watched indecision war on Cor's face until a calm determination settled in her friend's gaze.

Cor broke free from the group and climbed a turret while Viva blew the Conch Shell of Gathering. “Colo friends,” Cor’s voice rang out clear and strong. “When we founded the city of Aquis, we did so under the guidance of the Book of Wisdom. The Author commands that we be people of the Sacred Heart. Because He loves us all, we are to love the Author with all our hearts, and then to love our neighbors as ourselves.”

Viva joined her voice with Cor’s. “The Author wrote that others look at the surface, but He looks at the heart. Let us be people of the Sacred Heart, who view all hearts as sacred, who value our neighbors as the Author values us all. With His very life, He wrote that we are worth dying for.”

Silence descended over Aquis as the spoken words settled like fine sand onto the Colos’ hearts. Hearts that, Viva prayed, would be receptive and emboldened. Cor’s eyes glistened with tears as a chant rose gently, then swelled to a crescendo: “Open the gates!” **✦ Savannah Coleman**

*We love each other because he loved us first. 1 John 4:19 (NLT)*

**✦** Consider taking some time to read the Bible passages mentioned in today’s allegorical story, 1 Samuel 16:1-13 and Luke 10:25-37. Jesus is “the author of life” (Acts 3:15). He is God in human flesh. Because of His great love for us, He was willing to die for us so that we could be saved from death and sin and evil. He died for people who are like us, and people who aren’t like us. For people we like, and people we don’t like. And then He rose again, triumphant over all the powers of darkness. How does God’s immeasurable love—both for us and for others—make it possible for us to respond to His call to love our neighbors as ourselves?

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**✦** As humans living in a broken world, we have a tendency to judge by outward appearances. It can be easy to view others who are different from us as distasteful or suspicious. But the Lord helps us see everyone the way He sees us—His beautiful creations who bear His image (Genesis 1:27). When do you find it difficult to see people through the eyes of God, to listen to them and love them with His heart? Consider taking a moment to pray about this, confessing any sins that come to mind, resting in Jesus’s sure forgiveness, and asking for help and guidance in how to move forward in His love. In addition to talking to God, who are trusted Christians in your life you could talk to about all this? \_\_\_\_\_




## WHY CAN'T WE BE PERFECT?


READ: HEBREWS 10:14-18; JAMES 1:2-7; 1 PETER 1:13-16

**S**ometimes, we feel like we should be perfect, having no faults and never doing anything wrong. We might read James 1:4, which says, “For when your endurance is fully developed, you will be perfect and complete, needing nothing,” and then throw up our hands in frustration and say, “But I’ve tried lots of times before, and I just can’t do it. I give up—I’ll never be perfect!”

Perfection is a tricky concept. Try thinking about it this way: When a baby arrives, people often say, “She’s perfect,” as they cuddle and coo over the new addition to their community. But why? Babies can’t do what adults can do, yet people describe them as “perfect.” But if a baby were to stay like a newborn for six months and not grow at all, people would be worried. So, when we talk about babies being perfect, we often mean they’re just right for their age.

Let’s look at James 1:4 again. It uses the word “perfect” in a similar way. It’s not saying Christians never do anything wrong. The fact is, only Jesus meets God’s standard for perfection, which is why we need to put our trust in Him to have a relationship with God. Even though we’ll keep struggling with sin until the day Jesus returns and makes all things new, verses like James 1:4 give us hope, saying that as we grow in our relationship with Jesus, we mature spiritually. So, to be a “perfect” Christian doesn’t mean we never mess up; it means we grow and learn from our failures, and we patiently trust God to continue shaping us to be more like Jesus.

If we’re perfect in that sense, it doesn’t mean we’ll never sin, maybe by losing our temper for example, but it does mean we’ll learn to say we’re sorry when we do. It means we’ll learn to depend on God to help us be self-controlled when we feel upset. As we grow spiritually, we can remember that Jesus is walking with us every step of the way. And we can remember the hope He gives us in Philippians 1:6, “God, who began the good work within you, will continue his work until it is finally finished on the day when Christ Jesus returns.”  *A. W. Smith*

 Have you ever wondered how you could possibly be perfect or holy as God is (Matthew 5:48)? In one sense, you are already perfect if you know Jesus as your Savior because He has given you His perfection and forgiven your sins! But God also says you are “being made holy” (Hebrews 10:14). We become more like Jesus as we grow in our relationship with Him. What might it look like for us to be patient with ourselves and other Christians as we learn and grow together? \_\_\_\_\_

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*He forever made perfect those who are being made holy. Hebrews 10:14b (NLT)*

## THE STORY OF LAZARUS

READ: JOHN 11:1-44; 15:15

**A**s a child, John 11 was one of my favorite Bible passages. I loved listening to the story of Lazarus. Part of it may have been because the town where Lazarus and his sisters Martha and Mary lived shared my name: Bethany. But the more I heard this story, the more I loved it for other reasons as well.

I loved hearing how Jesus resurrected Lazarus from the grave. I loved how Jesus had such a close friendship with these three siblings, and how both sisters believed that if Jesus had been there sooner, their brother would not have died.

One verse that always stood out to me was the shortest verse. John 11:35 says, “Jesus wept.” He was overcome with emotion and cried. He cared so much for His friend that He shed tears for him.

But that wasn’t how the story ended. I liked listening when Jesus told Lazarus to come out of the grave. Lazarus had been in the tomb—dead—for four days, and when he walked out he was still wrapped in burial cloths, so Jesus told the people to unwind them. Lazarus came to life again by the hand of Jesus.

This story reminds me of how Jesus will raise us to life again too. If we’ve put our trust in Him, we get to look forward to the day He will return and raise us from our graves, no matter how long we’ve been dead, and we will live with Him in renewed creation forever. Jesus has guaranteed our future by dying on the cross for us and rising from His own grave. He is the God who defeated death, the God who calls us His friends. 🕯 *Bethany Acker*

🕯 Do you have a favorite Bible story you like to revisit over and over again? What about it captivates you? The amazing thing about the Bible is that God speaks to us through it, and the Holy Spirit helps us notice and understand more and more throughout our lives. So the Bible passages we’re drawn to when we’re young can continue to come alive to us as we grow older. \_\_\_\_\_

🕯 Consider taking some time to read John 11:1-44 slowly. What sticks out to you today? What makes you wonder? \_\_\_\_\_

*Jesus said to her [Martha], “I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die.” John 11:25 (NIV)*


## GOING THROUGH


READ: PSALMS 13:1-6; 23:4

**F**eeling sad is the worst. It makes me feel helpless, small, and weak. So I try to avoid it. I distract myself, tell myself everything is fine, find something to be angry about instead, or simply ignore it. But one way or another, sadness always comes back—usually stronger than before. So how do we avoid avoiding our sadness? As they say, “The only way out is through.” We can’t skip over feeling sadness; we have to go through it. But we don’t have to do it alone.

Once we’ve put our trust in Jesus—believing He died and rose from the grave for us—He is with us through the Holy Spirit. He feels our sadness, and not in a distant way. Jesus knows firsthand what it’s like to be sad. Isaiah 53:3 describes Him as “a man of sorrows, acquainted with deepest grief.” This verse brings me great comfort. It reminds me that when I tell Jesus about my sadness, He can sincerely say, “I know what that’s like.” It makes me feel less alone.

Similarly, the lament psalms also make me feel less alone. These are specific songs or poems in the book of Psalms where people bring their sadness, anger, and complaints to God. In Psalm 13:1-2, for example, David accuses God of forgetting him, saying, “O LORD, how long will you forget me? Forever? How long will you look the other way? How long must I struggle with anguish in my soul, with sorrow in my heart every day? How long will my enemy have the upper hand?” These raw, honest words remind me that everyone experiences deep sadness, even people following God thousands of years before me. The lament psalms remind me that I can tell God about my feelings with complete honesty, trusting Him to love me.

Remember when I mentioned “the only way out is through”? If we keep reading Psalm 13, we see this truth play out. Instead of shrinking away from his sadness, David brings it to God and lays it all out. He walks *through* the sadness with God. And at the end, we see that he does get through it. Verses 5-6 say, “But I trust in your unfailing love. I will rejoice because you have rescued me. I will sing to the LORD because he is good to me.” How beautiful is that? This is what God wants—to walk with us through the painful sadness so He can bring healing to our hearts. When I run away from feeling my sadness, I’m also running away from that healing. The only way out is through. But praise God; He goes through it with me.  Taylor Eising

 Consider taking a look at a few lament psalms, such as Psalm 13, 25, 86, and 88. Then consider writing your own lament psalm, pouring out your sadness to God. Remember, Jesus came—and died and rose again—to be with us in our sadness. \_\_\_\_\_

*The LORD is close to all who call on him, yes, to all who call on him in truth. Psalm 145:18 (NLT)*

## THRIVING IN EXILE

READ: DEUTERONOMY 30:1-10; JEREMIAH 29:4-19; MATTHEW 28:18-20

Imagine being exiled from your home where you've lived all your life and forced to move to a faraway land...for seventy years. Would you panic? Complain? Would you keep your bags packed just in case you're allowed to go home earlier?

In the Bible, God warned His people, the Israelites, that if they turned away from Him by putting their hope in false gods, oppressing the poor, and doing violence, they would be punished and lose their land. And it all happened just as God said. When Israel was taken into captivity by Babylon, a powerful enemy nation that worshiped idols, the Israelites thought it was the end—that God had abandoned them for good. Then some false prophets started saying God would rescue them from captivity very soon (Jeremiah 28). The Israelites were probably happy to hear that, wanting to get out of captivity as soon as possible and return to normal life. And if they wouldn't be exiled forever, why bother to unpack and settle down among their enemies?

But then God told the exiled Israelites they would be in exile for seventy years. And, while they were there, He told them to do something surprising: to seek the good of the city—to seek the good of Babylon, their enemies—and not live like they are going to leave the next day. He told them to make homes, build families, and plant gardens. God wanted His people to invest long-term in the places they lived so He could bless their new home through them.

Sometimes, the Christian life can feel like an exile too: lonely, isolated, and discouraging. God's good world has been broken by sin, and while we wait for Jesus to return and restore creation, sometimes this place can feel hopeless. But God makes desert plants thrive in the most desolate, dry places of the world, and He can do the same in your life, even when situations are not ideal. He has you where you are in your school, workplace, neighborhood, or country on purpose, and He is with you. He loves you, and He has equipped you to bring life and make the most of unique opportunities to share the good news of Jesus's life, death, and resurrection through words and actions. God works in beautiful ways, even in the midst of exile. 🕯️ *Abby Ciona*

🕯️ Have you ever felt like you were stuck in exile? Did you see any glimpses of God's goodness? \_\_\_\_\_

🕯️ What are some ways God has equipped you to share His goodness and love right where you are? If you're not sure, you can ask God about it anytime, and you can also reach out to trusted Christians in your life to ask for their insight. \_\_\_\_\_


*"And surely I [Jesus] am with you always, to the very end of the age." Matthew 28:20b (NIV)*


## ALWAYS THE SAME

READ: PSALM 102:25-28; HEBREWS 13:5-8

It can be comforting to have something in your life that always stays the same. You might have dinner with your grandparents every weekend, or you might have a pet who meets you at the door every day when you get home from school. No matter what goes on in your life or what causes you stress, knowing that one part of your life is going to be the same no matter what can be comforting.

During 2020, when the world seemed to be falling apart, I remember being comforted by the sound of a train. I live close to train tracks, and while some people would find that annoying, I find it comforting. Every evening, I hear at least one train. I hear the trains now, and I heard them all through the time when the world seemed to shut down and many were staying home from work.

Hearing the trains every evening also reminds me that God does not change. His love for us does not change. No matter what goes on in our lives and how scary things might get, He stays the same. Like the trains that kept going all through 2020, 2021, 2022, and now 2023, God keeps being there for us and helping us. Nothing can shake Him or stop Him. We can trust Him to stay the same.  *Emily Acker*

 Especially when our lives feel out of control, how can it be comforting to know that God does not change? God is so generous, and He reveals His unchanging love for us in so many ways. But the ultimate revelation of His never-failing love is in Jesus's death and resurrection. Once we've put our trust in Jesus, we can rest knowing that we are close to God, always. And because "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever" (Hebrews 13:8), we can depend on Him each and every day. Consider taking a moment to talk to God about anything in your life that feels unsettled. You can find rest in His sure love for you. \_\_\_\_\_

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*The LORD appeared to us in the past, saying: "I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with unfailing kindness." Jeremiah 31:3 (NIV)*



## SENSES OF THANKFULNESS

READ: PSALM 104; COLOSSIANS 1:15-23

I love seeing the fall colors as the trees turn in autumn, the white snow that falls to the ground in winter, the new sprouts and flowers that come in spring, and how beautiful the lakes look in summer. All the seasons make it easy to see God's amazingness in creation. But what about our other senses? We can admire His creation through more than just what we see!

I enjoy laying down in my hammock every once in a while, closing my eyes, and just listening to the sounds of nature. The birds chirping, the leaves rustling in the wind, and the mosquitos buzzing—those mosquitos are also the reason I usually end my time in the hammock.

I imagine you use your sense of touch to enjoy God's creation without realizing it. Do you have a dog or cat you pet? Their fur is God's creation. We also touch various foods that He is responsible for—like strawberries, carrots, and oranges. Every food has a unique texture and shape that God gave it.

We can use our sense of smell to thank God for the flowers and herbs He created. And taste might be my favorite—God gave us so many foods to taste and enjoy. He could have made food tasteless, but instead He gave everything a unique flavor to enjoy and mix with other flavors to make delicious meals.

God created and gave us so many things to be thankful for. And He gave us all our senses that we can use to enjoy this world even more. Don't we have an amazing Creator? **!** *Kimberly Brokish*

**!** God delights in what He has made, and He invites us to share in His joy by being mindful of the world around us and thanking Him for what delights us. What can you see...hear...feel...smell...and maybe even taste right now? Consider taking a moment to thank God for making so many good things for us to experience. \_\_\_\_\_

**!** Even though our world has been broken by sin, and sometimes the things we see, smell, taste, touch, and hear cause us pain or sorrow, God has promised to restore His creation. Because Jesus died and rose again, everyone who has put their trust in Jesus gets to look forward to the day He will return and make all things new—free from sin, death, and decay. If you want to know more about this good news, check out page 72.

*For in him [Jesus] all things were created: things in heaven and on earth...  
Colossians 1:16a (NIV)*



## TEMPORARY TREASURE

READ: MATTHEW 6:19-34; 22:36-40



**W**hat's your greatest treasure on earth? Maybe it's a prized collection of vintage postcards, or a beautiful and rare electric guitar, or maybe it's a sizable bank account. None of these things are wrong or bad—things like these can help us enjoy life and take care of ourselves and our loved ones, which are good pursuits. However, it is wrong to make any earthly treasure so important to us that it comes before loving God or loving our neighbors.

Since humans first sinned and brought brokenness into the good world God made, it's really easy for us to get possessive and even violent about keeping our stuff, so much so that we often begin to block out God and other people, instead of loving them like we're called to do.

The good news? There is real treasure in Jesus. He died and rose again to save us from sin and death, and He is making all things new, including our hearts. His promises are stored in heaven where they will never be damaged, unlike earthly possessions (1 Peter 1:4).

If we've put our trust in Jesus, we have treasure in heaven. As we look forward to Jesus's return, we can enjoy and thank God for all the good things He has given us here on earth, but Jesus frees us from getting too attached to any of these things. They're all temporary. What matters most is having a relationship with Jesus and the neighbors He's put in our lives. When we rest in His love instead of our possessions, we usually find it's much easier to love our neighbors more than our stuff—and we will store up treasure in heaven where it will last forever. **✦** *A. W. Smith*

**✦** Have you seen any stories in the news lately about people valuing earthly treasure over God and their neighbors? When have you been tempted to do the same? Consider taking a moment to talk to God about this, confessing any sins that come to mind, thanking Him for securing our forgiveness through Jesus's death and resurrection, and talking to Him about the earthly treasures in your life. \_\_\_\_\_

**✦** How might the promises of Jesus help us avoid the temptation to become possessive and to choose stuff over loving God and loving our neighbors? (1 Timothy 6:17-19; 1 Peter 1:3-9) \_\_\_\_\_

*Store your treasures in heaven, where moths and rust cannot destroy, and thieves do not break in and steal. Matthew 6:20 (NLT)*

## HOMEMADE BREAD

READ: EXODUS 16:4-16; JOHN 6:1-15, 25-59

**W**here I live, making homemade bread was more of a trend during the earlier days of the pandemic, but I'm a little late to the trend. I've started making my own bread more recently, and even though I'm new to the hobby I'm growing to love it more each time I do it.

Now, it's difficult to find store-bought bread I like better than homemade. Sometimes as I make bread I think about how frequently bread is mentioned in the Bible. God used it as the subject of multiple miracles, from feeding a poor widow in 1 Kings 17:7-16, to feeding over 5,000 people in the Gospels. Not to mention, He fed *all* the Israelites with manna in Exodus 16.

Even such a simple food can be a powerful reminder of God's presence. In my house, bread is one of our food staples. We've always had it around, even before I started baking it at home. If we ran out of bread, we would make a trip to the store.

In the Bible, Jesus refers to Himself as bread in multiple ways. After Jesus miraculously multiplied five small barley loaves to feed over 5,000 people, He told them, "I am the bread of life" (John 6:35, 48). Jesus explained that God gave His people manna from heaven to keep them alive in the wilderness. Similarly, Jesus is the One who gives eternal life to all who trust in Him. He is our life-giver. This symbol of a basic food that many of us eat regularly shows how Jesus will not abandon us. He is like the household staple we all need. But, unlike bread, He will not run out, and He has the ability to sustain us forever.

On the night before Jesus went to the cross, He broke bread and gave it to His disciples, saying, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me" (Luke 22:19). Here again, God uses bread to show us that Jesus gave up His life for us by dying on the cross. And just as Jesus rose from the grave, He will also raise us and give us eternal life.

So, as I slice into my fresh loaf of bread, I'll be excited to eat, but I'll also be thinking about how Jesus sustains me and gives me life like a hearty slice of homemade bread. 🍞 *Naomi Zylstra*

🍞 Why do you think bread comes up so often in the Bible? What do you think it means that Jesus is the Bread of Life? (If you want to dig deeper, you can read about Jesus miraculously feeding thousands of people in Matthew 14:13-21; 15:29-39; Mark 6:30-44; 8:1-8; Luke 9:10-17; John 6:1-15...and about communion in Matthew 26:26-29; Luke 22:14-20; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26.) \_\_\_\_\_

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*As they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it, gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take and eat it; this is my body." Matthew 26:26 (CSB)*

## GOD'S ART GALLERY

READ: PSALM 19:1-6; JOHN 1:1-14; COLOSSIANS 1:15-20

**H**ave you ever gone to an art gallery? For a graphic design class I took this year, I went on a field trip to a large art gallery, and it got me thinking. Art can be difficult to understand at times, especially abstract art! However, as I learned more about art, I began to recognize the works of different artists. It wasn't just from their names on the wall or their signatures; their styles, mediums, subjects, and themes became distinct and recognizable to me.

We can learn a lot about an artist from what they create: their values, passions, quirks, and personalities. Often, artists' work reflects aspects of who they are. Do you ever think of God as an artist? Out of nothing, He created everything—from the farthest star to the deepest cave.

God's signature is on all creation, and through His work, we can learn more about Him. The ravens teach us about God's provision and care for the smallest details in our lives (Luke 12:24). The resilience of wild animals shows God's concern about every part of creation, even that which no human sees (Job 39). The powerful oceans remind us of God's awesomeness, that He is in control even in the wildest storms (Psalm 89:8-9). The complexity of the human body points to God's intentional design: we are not here by accident but are wonderfully created in God's image with a purpose (Genesis 1; Psalm 139:13-16). Though our sin brought brokenness into the good world God made, His loving care is still written all through creation.

And, all creation ultimately points to Jesus. He is fully God and fully human, the Creator who came to live among us. Jesus, the same Artist who crafted everything from nothing, came to save us from sin and death and to make our mess and brokenness into a masterpiece. We can't do anything to deserve this: it's God's beautiful gift of grace, a work of art that we get to share with the world! 🕯️ *Abby Ciona*

🕯️ What is your favorite part of God's creation? What could this reveal about its Artist? \_\_\_\_\_

*For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made... Romans 1:20a (NIV)*

## WEARY AND BURDENED

READ: PSALM 116:1-7; MATTHEW 11:28-30

**L**ord, I need Your help

*Come*

I don't know where else to go

*Come to me*

I'm so tired

*All who are weary*

This burden is more than I can handle

*All who are burdened*

Can You help me?

*And I will give you rest*

I want to believe You can

*I will give you rest*

I trust You now, take this burden from me

*I will give you rest*

I lean on You, my Savior

*I will give you rest.* 📖 *Eliana Canfield*

📖 Today's poem is based on Jesus's words in Matthew 11:28. Jesus has made the way for us to enter God's rest by dying on the cross and rising from the grave for us. If we've put our trust in Jesus, we can rest in God's love and be free from striving. We also have the Holy Spirit as our Helper, who reminds us of Jesus's words and helps us rest in Him (John 14:26). How might it be comforting to know that, whenever we need help and rest, God is pleased to give us these things? \_\_\_\_\_

📖 In what ways do you need help and rest today? Consider taking a moment to ponder Jesus's invitation in Matthew 11:28-30, and then talk to Him about anything that's weighing on you. \_\_\_\_\_

*"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest."*  
Matthew 11:28 (NIV)

## A LISTENING EAR

READ: PSALMS 32:6-8; 86:1-7; 120:1

**L**ifeguards are pretty amazing. Even when they're stationed at a crowded beach or a noisy pool, their eyes and ears are trained to see people in trouble. Before anyone can work as a lifeguard, they have to take a lifesaving course where they learn how to rescue struggling swimmers from the water and perform critical first aid like CPR. When lifeguards are on duty, they continually watch for anyone who might be in trouble and need help. But, while even the most highly trained lifeguards might not hear a call for help, there is someone who never, ever misses one. Someone who always hears His children when they need Him.

God is constantly watching over you, attentive to your every prayer. He loves you and wants you to turn to Him whenever you're facing a tough situation, whenever you feel alone or confused or in danger. Rest assured, Jesus hears our prayers. Jesus is God, and—like a lifeguard—Jesus is our Rescuer. God's promise to hear and answer and rescue is all grounded in Jesus's ultimate rescue: He saved us from sin and death through His own death and resurrection.

Throughout the Bible, God reminds His people He is listening to us, and He is always present. In Jeremiah 33:3, God says, "Call to me, and I will answer you." In Psalm 86:7, David declares, "In the day of my trouble I will call on you [God], for you will answer me." In Matthew 6, Jesus shows His disciples how to pray for God's kingdom to come as they pray for the minute-by-minute needs they have. In 1 Peter 5:7, Peter reminds us that we can bring our every concern to God, who cares for us.

Those are just a few of the verses that tell us God hears when we call to Him, and they only scratch the surface of God's ability to hear and answer our prayers. Even though God has lots of people to listen to—way more than a lifeguard—He still hears us all, and each one of our voices is important to Him. **✦** *A. W. Smith*

**✦** Consider taking some time to reread today's Bible passages: Psalm 32:6-8; 86:1-7; 120:1; Jeremiah 33:3; Matthew 6:9-13; 1 Peter 5:7. Which verse(s) stick out to you? \_\_\_\_\_

**✦** Do you ever feel like God doesn't hear you or isn't mindful of you? We all feel like this from time to time. God has compassion on us, and He wants us to tell Him about all this. He invites us to spend time in His Word and with fellow Christians, being reminded of His deep love and care for us. Who are trusted Christians in your life you can talk to when you feel unnoticed by God? \_\_\_\_\_

*"Call to me, and I will answer you..." Jeremiah 33:3a (WEB)*

## THE PERFECT LAMB


READ: EXODUS 29:38-45; MATTHEW 27:45-53; JOHN 19:30


**W**hen I'd hear the bell go off in school, I knew that class was done. Because we heard the bell every day, we were conditioned to react to this particular sound.


Something similar happened in ancient Israel. Twice a day, a priest would kill a one-year-old lamb. Some scholars say this sacrifice was marked by the blowing of a ram's horn, or shofar. The ram's horn harkened back to the ram that God provided in place of Abraham's son Isaac as a sacrifice (Genesis 22:1-18). When the Israelites would hear the ram's horn being blown, they would know that a priest was sacrificing a lamb, and they would have an opportunity to remember the mercy their loving God had given them. God provided for this lamb to take their place, giving its life so they could be made holy and enter into God's presence in the temple.

This shofar blowing and sacrifice was a daily part of the Israelites' routine and happened at the same time each day, once in the morning and once in the afternoon.

But there was another sacrificial lamb that aligned with the blowing of the shofar. When Jesus was put on the cross in the morning (Mark 15:25), it may have aligned with the first shofar blow and the first sacrifice of the lamb. People across the city would have heard the shofar, looked up, and known the first lamb of the day had been sacrificed.

Around noon, darkness fell across the land. Later in the afternoon, people heard the shofar blow a second time and looked up. This time, the darkness was lifted, the curtain in front of the Holy of Holies in the temple was torn in two, and people were raised up from their graves. And those who were near Jesus on the cross would not only hear the shofar being blown for the second lamb, they would also hear Jesus say, "It is finished."  *Naomi Zylstra*

 Jesus is the Lamb of God, the perfect sacrifice that covers all our sins, not just for a few hours but for eternity. And because Jesus rose from the grave, everyone who believes in Him will one day be raised from the dead to live with Him forever. Consider taking a moment right now to remember Jesus's sacrifice and thank Him. \_\_\_\_\_

 Do you have anything that reminds you daily of God's mercy? Some people like to pray at particular times of the day, or wear a piece of jewelry to remind them of who Jesus is, or set an alarm on their phone as a reminder to pray and reflect on the gospel... \_\_\_\_\_

*John saw Jesus...and said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"  
John 1:29 (CSB)*

**PLANTED**

READ: PSALM 1:1-3; JEREMIAH 17:7-8; JOHN 7:37-39; 15:4-17

**M**inutes before sunset was my favorite time of day. I sat on an outcropping of rock, dangling my bare feet above a crystalline spring of water. My home, this floating island in the sky, was level with the setting sun precisely at this time. Golden light skimmed the surface of the water as I splashed my feet in, smiling.

Overhead, the wind rustled the leaves of the silvery bark tree I sat beneath. The roots of the tree stretched out like fingers, thirsty for the life-giving stream water. It was like this all over the island, roots running to the streams, streams spilling over the rocks, water cascading off the island into the sky.

Before my people trusted Yahweh, our home was devoid of all this life. Try as we might, the roots of our trees were withering, and there was no fruit to fill our families' aching hunger. When Yahweh came, He taught us a better way. No longer did we place our trust in ourselves, but we listened to the One who gave us life.

Yahweh showed us how to plant our trees by the streams so the roots could reach deep into the water. Day after day, we experienced growth—and, finally, fruit. I pulled a golden fruit from the tree I lounged under and took a bite. I sighed as I tasted its ripe juices, sweet and nourishing.

*Yahweh, help me trust You each day, I prayed as the leaves above me rustled in the evening breeze. I want to delight myself in You and meditate on You. Sometimes my heart quakes when hard times come, but I know I don't need to fear. Your love is constant as a stream that flows and never runs dry. May my roots be deep in Your life-giving water.* 🕯 Savannah Coleman

*"Lord [Jesus], to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and to know that you are the Holy One of God." John 6:68-69 (NIV)*

🕯 In today's allegorical story, we see that when we are apart from God, we are devoid of life. But when we are with God, we have life to the full (John 10:10). Though we have all been separated from God because of sin, He made the way for us to be near Him through Jesus: Because of His great love for us, God the Son came and lived among us. Yahweh, the great "I AM," took on human flesh, and gave up His life for us so that our sins could be forgiven. And the God of life could not be held by death—three days later He rose from the grave. Now Jesus gives eternal life to everyone who puts their trust in Him. If you want to know more about this good news, check out page 72.

🕯 Jesus is "God with us" (Matthew 1:23), and He taught His followers, "I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing...As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love" (John 15:5, 9). What do you think it means to remain in Jesus's love? \_\_\_\_\_

🔑 Jesus invites all who are thirsty to come to Him, and He promises them living water—this living water is the Holy Spirit (John 4:10-14; 7:37-39). Once we've put our trust in Jesus, His Holy Spirit begins to transform us, helping us grow to become more like Jesus and bear fruit. According to Galatians 5:22-23, "the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control." Have you ever tried to produce these fruits in your own strength? How did that work out? \_\_\_\_\_

🔑 Our lives bear fruit when we are living in reliance on God, resting in His love and following His lead. He invites us to trust Him and rely on Him for everything. Even when hard times come, He will never fail us. In what areas of your life do you find it difficult to rely on God? Consider taking a moment to come to Jesus in prayer (Matthew 11:28-30). You can be honest about all your struggles, frustrations, fears, and hurts. He longs to remind you of His deep love and help you with everything you're facing.





## WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO KNOW JESUS? AND WHY DOES IT MATTER?

**Christianity rests on four truths about Jesus, the One the Bible is all about:**

- 1. Jesus is fully God.** He is the Creator of the universe, the definition of good, the giver of life, and King over all.
- 2. Jesus is fully human.** He came to earth to save us from our sins. Sin is doing anything against God's good commands. Sin twists and breaks everything it touches, and it's the root cause of brokenness and death. It broke our relationship with our holy (or perfect) God, who must punish sin or He wouldn't be good or just.
- 3. Jesus offers us the only possible rescue** from sin and death. We can be rescued by putting our faith in Jesus. He is perfect, yet He took the punishment for our sins: dying on a cross. Then, He beat death by coming back to life. Knowing Jesus through faith restores our broken relationship with God because Jesus forgives our sins and clothes us in His sinlessness, as if we never sinned. He also gives us the Holy Spirit, who empowers us to begin to reject sin and live as new people in Christ.
- 4. Jesus is coming back** to make everything new. God's people will be raised from the dead, living forever with God and each other, free from sin. But those who have refused His offer of rescue and relationship will face eternal judgment (or punishment) for their sin.

**Romans 10:9-10 sums up these truths:** *"If you openly declare that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is by believing in your heart that you are made right with God, and it is by openly declaring your faith that you are saved"* (NLT).

**So, if you believe and that belief compels you to openly say that**

- you are a sinner,
- Jesus is Lord, the true God and King of the universe,
- you trust Him as the only way to save you from sin and death...

**then you are a Christian.**

Some people say a prayer when they become a Christian. There are no magic words, but you are welcome to use the following prayer as a guide: *"Dear God, I'm a sinner. I need to be saved from sin and death. You are the only way to save me because You are the living God and King over all. I trust You to save me, and I acknowledge that You are good and in control. In Jesus's name, Amen."*

**Still not sure? That's okay!** If you need more details about what it means to know Jesus, dig into the Bible—God's Word to us—and talk to a trusted Christian in your life, such as a camp counselor or pastor. Some great books of the Bible to start with are Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, or Romans. If you want to look up the Bible verses we used to create this page, go to [unlocked.org/knowjesus](https://unlocked.org/knowjesus) 📖