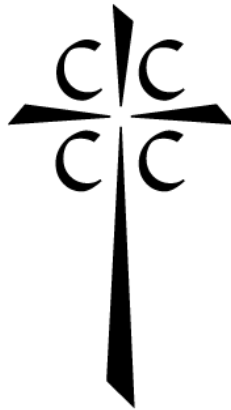




DEVOTIONAL THOUGHTS

52 Weeks of Thoughts About God and His Word



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A Note to the User:

*These devotions are set up so you can use one new devotion each week of the year.
To that end, there are four devotions for each month and then four devotions at the end that may be
used as "fifth week" devotions.*



JANUARY, WEEK 1

Beauty Secrets

Let the beauty of the LORD our God be upon us.

Psalm 90:17

We live in a world obsessed with physical beauty. Evidence of that obsession is all around us. To cite but one example, if you search online for “beauty secrets,” over 43 million web pages will pop up!

Whether or not we see ourselves as physically beautiful, all of us who know and love our Lord Jesus share his beauty—the beauty of his holiness. Scripture assures us this is true, but it’s often hard to believe. We know all too well our failures to pray, to forgive, to love. Still, the psalmist prays this Spirit-inspired prayer and in doing so, invites us to pray it, too: “Let the beauty of the LORD our God be upon us.”

See that sparkle in your eye? It’s evidence of a life redeemed by Jesus. And that beaming smile? It is a reflection of your heavenly Father’s grace. Our beauty comes from our God, from our Savior. He is truly beautiful, and he makes us beautiful in his eyes, too. That’s no secret!

Prayer: Beautiful Savior, wrap me in your grace today as you remind me of your limitless love. Teach me to trust your assurances that you have made me truly and eternally beautiful. Amen.

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JANUARY, WEEK 2

Show-Stopping Beauty

God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God’s glory displayed in the face of Christ.

2 Corinthians 4:6

Our culture idolizes outward beauty and the people who embody it. We all know who the “beautiful people” are. Still, ideas of beauty change over time and across cultures. What is beauty, really? Is there a definition, a portrait of beauty that endures through all time and applies in every place? The surprising answer is *yes*!

At first, though, that picture may surprise you. Unsurpassed, eternal beauty hung on a rough-hewn cross on the day Christians call Good Friday. On Calvary’s cross, true beauty was clearly visible, unmistakable, as in love, Jesus took onto himself the repulsiveness of our sin.

Jesus died to wash away our guilt. Now, he wraps us in his grace, giving us his very own beauty, his own perfect obedience to the law of God. It’s his gift to us, a gift that is at work in us, making us more and more outwardly beautiful—beautiful in forgiveness, patience, and love.

Prayer: My Savior, thank you for making me beautiful. Help me reflect the beauty of your selfless love today and always. Amen.

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JANUARY, WEEK 3



Beautiful? Me?

Let the beauty of the LORD our God be upon us.

Psalm 90:17

Infomercials for self-help beauty products make unbelievable promises, promises that are almost certain to let us down. Even as we sign on, we suspect that we're setting ourselves up for disappointment.

There is one "beauty secret," though, that will never disappoint, a promise that will never let us down. It's Jesus' promise to wrap us in the white robe of his forgiveness and grace. That robe defines the word *sumptuous*. It's woven from the threads of his love—love that died for us on the cross. Jesus places it across our shoulders, transferring his remarkable beauty onto us!

Such beauty doesn't come cheap. Our Savior paid dearly for it, leaving his heavenly throne and becoming a human being who lived here on earth for us. He perfectly obeyed God's Law—all of it—in our place. Then he paid the sin-debt we owed, sacrificing himself on Calvary's cross for us.

The ugliness of Jesus' death gave way to the glorious beauty of the resurrection. Now, he clothes us in the beauty of his own holiness. His righteousness is ours. Believe it!

Prayer: Lord, let your beauty be upon me as you wrap me in the luxurious robe of your very own righteousness. Amen.

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JANUARY, WEEK 4

Wondering What to Wear?

*I delight greatly in the LORD;
my soul rejoices in my God.
For he has clothed me with garments of salvation
and arrayed me in a robe of his righteousness.*

Isaiah 61:10

Before we leave the house, most of us at least glance in the mirror to make sure we're presentable. As God's daughters, we also want to dress with care on the inside. In Colossians 3, Paul describes the contents of "the total Christian woman's" internal closet, clothing perfect for every occasion:

- Compassion
- Kindness
- Humility
- Gentleness
- Patience

Love, of course, is the ideal accessory for each of these outfits. Where did we get such a remarkable wardrobe?

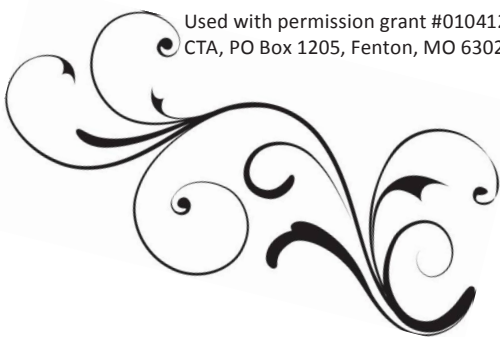
God himself flung open the door and sorted through the rags of sin we had accumulated. He graciously threw away our inappropriate outfits and in their place hung all the beautiful items mentioned above. Because of Jesus and his cross, we now have a brand new wardrobe to wear and clothes to share on every occasion! These clothes bless us and the people around us.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, you have clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of your righteousness! Now, dress me daily for works of love and service in your name. Amen.

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FEBRUARY, WEEK 1



Work Clothes—Humility

Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist.

John 13:3–4

How do you dress for work? Most people choose what to wear based on what we plan to do. A uniform. A suit. Gardening attire.

On the night our Lord Jesus died, he did not dress for work. In fact, he *undressed*, removing his outer clothing. Then, just as a household slave might have done, he took a towel and a basin of water. That night the disciples learned a lesson in humility as their Lord and Master washed their feet.

Each day, our Lord asks us, as his chosen and dearly loved people, to clothe ourselves in humility. In love for Jesus, we lay aside our pride and selfishness, replacing those soiled outfits with a focus on the needs of others. We volunteer for assignments that will probably go unnoticed and unrewarded. As we work at each of them, we follow our Savior in humility.

Such humility is never a do-it-yourself project. Instead, as Jesus works in us, his humble heart becomes our own. Knowing and treasuring his forgiveness, we relate to other people in self-forgetful love.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, help me to mirror your humility in my life. Amen.

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FEBRUARY, WEEK 2

The Finishing Touch—Love

Make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, mutual affection; and to mutual affection, love.

2 Peter 1:5–7

On a tight budget? If you search fashion magazines for advice, and you may find hints on how to combine just five basic items to create an array of amazing outfits. Buy one simple dress, a blouse, a skirt, slacks, and a jacket to mix and match, and you own the perfect wardrobe. You're ready for any occasion. *Almost* ready, that is. The real secret lies in the accessories that turn these five simple pieces into more than twice that number of beautiful and unique outfits.

To the basic pieces of our internal wardrobe, Scripture adds one final, perfect accessory: love—the kind of self-forgetful love our Savior has shown to us. Love adds the finishing touch, tying all the other elements together.

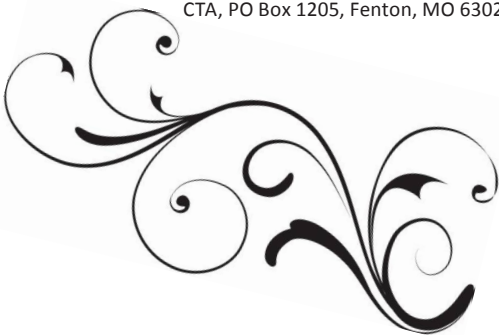
Self-forgetful love brought our Lord to earth, and his love overflowed in a display of the very same compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience in which we clothe ourselves. Love led Jesus to the cross, where he shed his innocent blood for our forgiveness, making us his holy people. Love makes the clothing of our high calling vibrant and always attractive, honoring our Savior.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, how can I thank you for the inward beauty you have created in me? Wrap me in your grace so that each day I reflect your beauty outwardly to all around me. Amen.

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FEBRUARY, WEEK 3



Revlon, Redkin, Revelation

You are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.

Ephesians 2:19–20

How would you describe the perfect foundation? An ideal make-up would cover facial flaws and even out skin tone, yet appear invisible. It would be easy to apply, lightweight, and last all day long. When you wore it, you would glow. That's a lot to ask of a cosmetic!

Whether or not you have discovered the one, perfect facial foundation, God has given us something much more important: the one, perfect foundation for our faith, our Lord Jesus Christ. In the Bible, we read God's many prophecies and promises about Jesus. We also read about their fulfillment in our Savior's life, death, and resurrection.

Jesus Christ is your one perfect foundation. Because of his sacrifice on Calvary's cross, your holy, heavenly Father now sees you as flawless. He welcomes a beautiful new you into an eternal relationship with himself, a relationship that begins now and extends into all eternity.

Prayer: Christ Jesus, you are my perfect foundation. As your Holy Spirit works in me, teach me to build every aspect of my life on your life, death, and resurrection for me. Amen.

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FEBRUARY, WEEK 4

Come Clean

If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

1 John 1:8–9

Some people try to shake off their sins by offering excuses or blaming others. Or they choose to ignore sin altogether, acting as if they needed no cleansing at all. Other people try spiritual self-cleansers. They hope to find a formula that will bring true, lasting peace. They take pride in their volunteer work or in all the money they donate to church or charities. Wonderful as all this is, none of it can ease a troubled conscience or calm an anxious heart.

We can't formulate our own cleanser to remove the stains of our sins. But our Lord Jesus makes us clean. He doesn't offer self-help remedies. Instead, he died on our behalf! Our Savior's sacrifice has become the final, perfect cleanser for our sins, the only one we need.

When you splash your face each morning, think of the one who chose the way of the cross for your spiritual cleansing. Let the meaning of his sacrifice wash over you. Come clean in confession, and allow your Lord to lavish on you the beauty of the holiness he has won for you.

Prayer: Savior-Lord, cleanse me from all sin. Wrap me in your grace as you keep my soul radiant in the beauty of your forgiveness. Amen.

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MARCH, WEEK 1



Mirror, Mirror on the Wall

You will be a crown of splendor in the LORD's hand, a royal diadem in the hand of your God.

Isaiah 62:3

The evil queen in the fairy tale “Snow White” begs her mirror for an answer to the question: “Mirror, mirror on the wall, who is the fairest of them all?” She despairs at the mirror’s brutally honest answer. How about you?

You may feel satisfied with the outward you that your mirror reveals, or your reflection may send you into a funk. Despite your feelings, today’s Bible verse tells the honest truth. Read it again.

A crown of splendor? Really? A royal diadem—a bejeweled tiara? Can God be serious when he says this about us? His words make each of us sound like a real beauty!

It’s true! God sees each of his children as a beautiful crown that sparkles and glimmers, reflecting his love. Best of all, we rest safe in the gracious hands of our Savior. He protects and defends us from anything that may tarnish us. His forgiving love conveys the true beauty that never fades, the beauty of Christ himself alive in us.

Prayer: Dear Lord Jesus, help me see myself as you see me—as a beautiful, royal crown, held safe in your loving hands for now and forever. Amen.

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MARCH, WEEK 2

Beauty Within

To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

Colossians 1:27

Jokes about beauty abound. A male comedian once said, “Beauty is only skin-deep, but ugly goes all the way to the bone!” To which a female comedian replied, “Of course beauty is only skin-deep. That’s deep enough. What do you want—an adorable pancreas?”

All joking aside, what do you believe? Is beauty only skin-deep, or is there a deeper, inner beauty? Can real beauty exist as both an outward and inward reality at the same time? How can we become beautiful both on the inside and outside?

Today’s Bible verse provides the answer. Look at it again. Pay particular attention to the final phrase: “Christ in you, the hope of glory.”

That glory—Christ’s magnificent and beautiful glory—comes to reside within us when we first believe. As the Holy Spirit plants faith in us, our hearts respond. As faith grows, it prompts us to all kinds of service, to many deeds of kindness. We grow more beautiful, inside and out. The inner beauty God gives shows itself in outward acts of beautiful service for others.

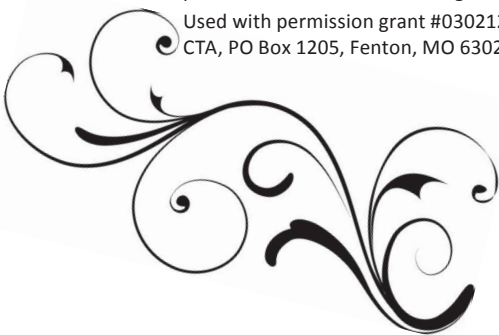
This inner beauty, given by Christ, is not cosmetic. It’s as real as God’s promise, as authentic as God’s work in us!

Prayer: Lord God, make me beautiful inside and out today as you work through me to love and serve those around me. Amen.

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MARCH, WEEK 3



Daughters of the King

Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.

Revelation 2:10

In this world crowns represent power, legitimacy, honor, and triumph. You may be shaking your head in bewilderment as you ask John, the writer of today's Bible verse from the Book of Revelation: "What qualifies *me* to wear a crown?" If you think that, look again at who spoke the words John recorded. It's Jesus! Your Savior and King—yes, your King! He is making a promise to you, a promise you can trust.

God the Father has adopted you into his very own family. In love, he has made you a princess; that's how heaven sees you (Ephesians 1:5)! You have become his legitimate heir. He's chosen you to be his very own child! Your position and inheritance could not be more secure. It will never perish, spoil, or fade. No thief can steal it. It's kept safe in heaven for you (1 Peter 1:3).

None of this would be true if not for Jesus. He, too, wore a crown. A brutal crown of thorns encircled his head as he suffered and died for our sins. Then, bursting from his grave, the risen Savior-King triumphed over death, capturing the crown of life.

Prayer: Words cannot express, dear Lord, my humble gratitude and exquisite joy in knowing you have claimed me as your child. Keep me ever faithful as I look forward to the crown of life you are keeping safe for me in heaven. Amen.

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MARCH, WEEK 4

Unfading Beauty

We wait for the blessed hope—the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Titus 2:13

Beauty that lasts—it's what everyone seems to want. And yet, deep down, we know that nothing we do can stop the effects of aging. If we live long enough, it's inevitable. No magical cream, grueling exercise regimen, or surgical operation can guarantee eternal beauty. Eventually, we will die. Where's the beauty in that?

As we consider all these inevitabilities, we might be tempted to sigh and give in to a bad mood. That would be a mistake. Instead, our Lord invites us to remember an uplifting truth: we are waiting for a most blessed hope! One day soon, our great God and Savior will appear. He will come in glory, and when he does, we will be caught up with him in that glory.

It's a glory that even now brightens and deepens as we live in him. It's a loveliness impossible without him. It's a beauty that shines more fully as we more fully realize how much our heavenly Father cherishes us. It's a splendor that springs from heaven itself.

What a blessed hope!

Prayer: Lord God, help me recognize the lasting beauty you have placed in me. Then show me day by day how to serve in love. Amen.

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APRIL, WEEK 1



Refreshment, Anyone?

I will refresh the weary and satisfy the faint.

Jeremiah 31:25

By some estimates, seven of every ten doctor visits are fatigue-related. That's a lot of weariness! Sometimes fatigue is a symptom of disease. But fatigue has other sources, too. Long-term stress. Grief. Ongoing frustration. Clinical depression. The list of causes goes on and on. Always, though, fear and worry make weariness worse.

Into this darkness the Lord shouts his promise to refresh us. God's promise touches our hearts, planting seeds of hope. "I will refresh the weary," he says.

A tall lemonade on a hot day. That first dive into the pool after the cover comes off in spring. A care package from home during finals week at college. These things refresh us.

How much more refreshing, though, to see a friendly face, to hear a loved one's voice, to receive a hug from someone who cares deeply about us. The presence of those we love during life's lonely, troubled times—now that's refreshing!

That's even more true when the one who comes to refresh our souls is the Savior, who loved us to death—his own death on the cross! Jesus comes to forgive and heal, to refresh and satisfy our hearts with his love for us. In the light of his promise, worries melt and fears shrink.

Prayer: Lord, you refresh me by your presence and in your promises. Teach me to rely more and more on you, especially . . .

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APRIL, WEEK 2

First Things First

Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

Matthew 6:33

In Matthew 6:31–33, Jesus urges us toward a first-things-first lifestyle. Then he identifies our “first things” for us: “Seek first [God’s] kingdom and his righteousness,” our Lord says. What would it mean to seek God’s kingdom first? We see the answer—in perfection—as we reflect on the life of our Lord Jesus: loving God by loving people.

This love told the truth, never mind the consequences. This love refused to be manipulated. This love took our Lord into uncomfortable situations, and it created unlikely relationships. What’s more, Jesus’ love was by no means cheap. In the end, he paid the ultimate price, an unimaginable price. Jesus’ love—his love for you and me—cost him his life!

Our Savior died for those times we focus on ourselves rather than on him. And now, Jesus calls us, his forgiven daughters, into his own first-things-first lifestyle. We may feel timid about stepping out into that kind of risky, self-giving love. But we can do it, knowing we will never walk alone. He walks right beside us, filling us with peace and leading the way.

Prayer: Dear Jesus, you love me, and you’ll never stop loving me. It’s amazing! Be my first thing and my only thing as you teach me to love others . . .

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APRIL, WEEK 3



Rubbing My Nose in It?

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

1 John 1:9

It would be easy to mistake our Lord's invitation to confess our sins as a shaming and blaming ritual, as a way he "rubs our nose" in our wrongdoing. But nothing could be further from the truth. Instead, he intends our confession as a prelude to his reassurance that he will never stop loving us and that he will continue to work in us those thoughts, words, and actions that honor him.

God is faithful. Morning by morning, fresh mercies fall like dew from heaven on our sin-hardened hearts. Morning by morning, we bring our needs, our failures, and our shame to the cross of our Savior. There we receive the bright hope Jesus' cross made possible. That sure and certain hope melts our shame and raises us from the dust to serve our Savior.

God is also just. He could not overlook our rebellion and the brokenness we bring into his once-perfect creation. We are to blame for much of the pain around us. In justice, God must punish sin. But though we are the blameworthy ones, Jesus chose to take our penalty upon himself. He took our blame, leaving us blameless. Ever our gracious friend, our God now credits Jesus' righteousness—his perfection—to our account.

So now, fearless, we open our hearts. And we receive just what we've been promised—forgiveness and purification in the cross of Christ.

Prayer: Lord, I come to you humbly, but in hope, to confess...

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APRIL, WEEK 4

With Christ—Pardon

You forgave the iniquity of your people and covered all their sins.

Psalm 85:2

Sometimes others forgive our misbehavior, no strings attached. Sometimes, it takes some time before they can bring themselves to that point. Once in awhile, forgiveness never comes. The relationship cannot be restored—at least, not here on earth. Friendship and trust never return.

How different it is with our heavenly Father! “You forgave the iniquity of your people,” the psalmist says, “and covered all their sins.” Because of our precious Savior, forgiveness always comes.

The forgiveness he earned for us frees us to live in joy and hope. It plants seeds of humility, awe, and reverence in our hearts. It stirs within us the resolve to avoid living any longer in sin. It drives us into our Savior’s arms, knowing he is our security, our only safe hiding place—and knowing that whenever we come to him, he opens his heart wide in welcome.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, you forgive the sins of your people. And so I come to you in holy hope today with my sins and needs...

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MAY, WEEK 1



Forgiven and Forgiving

If you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.

Matthew 6:14

Forgiveness just doesn't come naturally. We'd rather keep score, tracking the offenses of others against us. Nursing a grudge can feel rather pleasant, at least for a while. Eventually, though, grudges have a way of growing until, monster like, the bitterness we've created devours us.

Our Savior teaches us a better way in today's Bible verse. Almost always when Scripture urges us to forgive, it reminds us in the same breath that our Lord has forgiven us. By forgiving others, we demonstrate that we have understood our need for God's forgiveness—and treasure it. God's forgiveness toward us nurtures and encourages within us the decision to forgive those around us.

As we grow in grace, we come to recognize more and more fully the value of the pardon we have received from Jesus. Then, more and more willingly we pray, "Lord, work your heart of kindness in me and teach me to forgive."

Prayer: Lord Jesus, your cross laid to rest all the grievances you had against me. Thank you! In light of your pardon, teach me . . .

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MAY, WEEK 2

Meet the “What-Abouts”

We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

Romans 8:28

The “what-abouts” of life fly in the face of Paul’s words in today’s text from Romans. “In all things,” the apostle writes, “God works for the good of those who love him.” We want to believe it. But often, when we hear the promise, we find questions forming in our minds. “Yes, but what about . . .,” we want to ask.

Some in our world have corrupted the promise from Romans 8. They have created a new expression. “Everything happens for a reason,” they say. No! No, it doesn’t. Senseless things happen all the time.

But our Savior-God promises to take even the senseless pain of this world and, in mercy, weave it into the fabric of our lives for our good. He promises to do this for “those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.”

“We *know*,” Paul writes, inspired by the Holy Spirit himself!

Prayer: Lord, thank you for the encouragement of this promise. Still, I need your help today with a “what-about” (or two) ...

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MAY, WEEK 3



True Rest

Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.

Matthew 11:28

Most of the time, invitations are exclusive. They rule some people in and other people out.

In light of life's exclusive invitations, Jesus' inclusive words fall on our ears like music, like dew in the desert. Savor them—especially the word *all*. Let the invitation roll over and over in your heart. "Come to me," our Savior says. He speaks to "all who are weary and burdened." Does that include you? The word *weary* in this verse goes far beyond needing one good night's sleep. *Burdened* means much more than those one or two niggling worries that occasionally pop into our heads.

When we find ourselves in the long, dark tunnel of true weariness and heavy burdens, Jesus meets us there. Just think of that! Jesus meets us in life's dark places, in those dark times. When we feel lost, his presence and his promise transform the darkness, making even our weariness and our burdens a blessing. After all, these things have opened our ears and our hearts to his invitation. They drive us into our Savior's embrace.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, your love excludes no one. Your grace invites even me to come, to find rest. Right now, I'm carrying many burdens and, trusting your promise, I want to lay them down...

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MAY, WEEK 4

The Overcomers

In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.

John 16:33

Not all promises warm the heart—and that includes Jesus' promise of trouble in John 16:33:

In this world you will have trouble . . .

As promises go, this one falls under the column labeled “disturbing.” Note, though, that these words are not a threat. Our Lord simply states a fact of life, life that on our fallen planet often includes trials, traumas, and turmoil.

The hope we need comes from the Lord's second promise, the promise that comes at the end of this same verse:

Take heart! I have overcome the world.

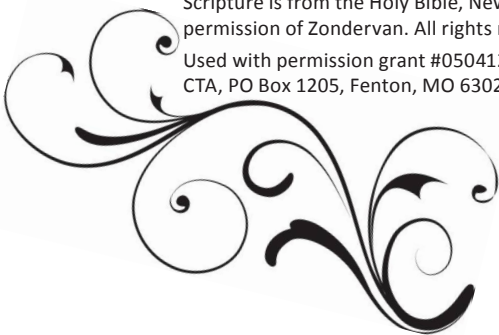
From our Lord's cross and empty tomb flow ample proof of this. Now, when we cling to Christ in faith, we simply cannot lose! Victory belongs to us—in life and in death alike. Christ has conquered! He lives and reigns, now and forever. Trusting that Jesus has overcome and that he shares his victory with us makes every promise of our Savior comforting—even his promises of trouble and trials. Our Friend knows how tough life's troubles can get. He understands and empathizes with us. Far beyond that, his love and power, active in our lives, make us victorious, come what may!

Prayer: My Savior and Friend, you overcame the world. Teach me to “take heart” as right now I face...

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JUNE, WEEK 1



Never Alone

God has said, “Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.”

Hebrews 13:5

God created us for relationship—relationship with him and with one another. That’s one reason this promise matters so much. “Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you,” our Savior says.

Other people leave us all the time and for all kinds of reasons. No relationship on this earth is totally secure. But we can rely absolutely and without question on our Lord’s promised presence. He will *never* leave us. He will *never* forsake us.

Interestingly, this verse begins:

Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have . . .

How easily we can be seduced into thinking money will keep us secure and things will make us happy! Without even realizing it, we can come to rely on 401K accounts or Social Security checks or a steady paycheck to answer our need for peace—the peace only God’s presence can provide.

Instead, our Lord offers us the peace of contentment—contentment in his presence and in the love that flows from the cross of our Savior. That cross towers over every day of our lives, guaranteeing the forgiveness of all our sins and assuring us that our God will keep every promise he has made to us.

Prayer: Lord, remind me of your presence today and then work contentment in my heart...

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JUNE, WEEK 2

Getaways

Give ear and come to me; hear me, that your soul may live. I will make an everlasting covenant with you, my faithful love.

Isaiah 55:3

What's your favorite getaway? A sunny afternoon in your flower garden with a hoe and spade? Two weeks on the beach? We all need to take a break—even from the people, work, and service we love. If you doubt that or feel a twinge of guilt because of it, consider this:

Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, [Jesus] said to [the disciples], "Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest."

Mark 6:31

We all need to get away at least once in awhile. Jesus himself experienced this when he lived here on earth. He knows what fatigue and overload feel like. And so he invites, "Come to me."

Now that's a getaway—one like no other! When we go to him, we find true rest. In the shadow of his cross, our souls live, truly and forever! In his presence there is peace, acceptance, compassion, security. We were born to live there, to live forever in his faithful love. It's what his covenant, his promise to claim us and keep us as his own, is all about.

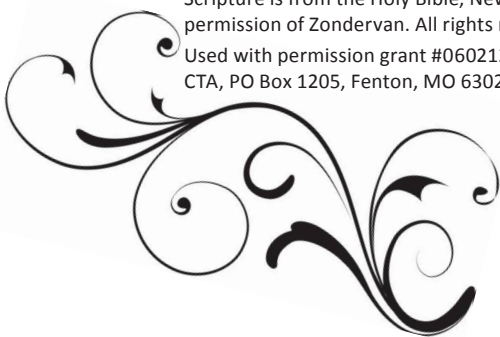
Need to get away? Then run into his arms!

Prayer: Lord, your covenant of faithful love is mine, just as you have promised. You invite me into your presence, so I come...

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JUNE, WEEK 3



Rest

The LORD replied, "My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest."

Exodus 33:14

As God made this promise to Moses, the people were about to break camp and set off into the wilderness toward the land God had sworn to give to Abraham and his descendants. For a year they had lived at the foot of Mount Sinai. There God had given them his Law—the Ten Commandments. There he had provided food and water. There he had begun to heal the scars formed over 400 years of slavery in Egypt.

But now, it was time to move on. Of all the promises God had made, the promise of his presence shone most brightly among them. Can you identify with the people's need for this promise?

Today we know God's presence among us as we consider Christ's cross and empty tomb. In Jesus, God is truly present, living among us. In Jesus, we receive rest—rest from the guilt of our sin, rest from the need to worry about our future.

Prayer: Lord, I need to rest. Let's talk . . .

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JUNE, WEEK 4

Joy in God's Presence—Forever

You have made known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.

Psalm 16:11

Perhaps you've heard the bad news: you can't have your cake and eat it, too. But notice today's psalm verse. Do you see the past, present, *and* future implications there? Turns out, sometimes you *can* have your cake and eat it, too! God himself promises! And he makes it possible:

- At some point in the past, the Holy Spirit planted our feet firmly on the "path of life," the path of true faith. We would never have found that path ourselves as we wandered through life's wilderness. God searched for us and brought us home to life in his family, his church, here on earth.
- Throughout our earthly lives, Jesus will continue to fill us with joy in his presence. Regardless of how we feel at any given moment, our Lord's presence buoys our hopes and calms our anxieties.
- Our eyelids will one day close in death, but that will not end our pleasure in God's presence. Instead, we will experience even fuller joys, joys we can't even imagine now. We'll inherit the "eternal pleasures" of God's presence—all because of the life, death, and resurrection of our Savior.

Prayer: Lord, your promises have graced my life. The joy of your presence fills my heart with wonder...

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\JULY, WEEK 1



Layers of Blessings

Let us come before him with thanksgiving and extol him with music and song.

Psalms 95:2

Did you catch it? Not only does Scripture promise us God's presence, it also invites us to come—to come intentionally—into his presence. Think of that! You're invited!

Of course, God is present everywhere, all the time. But he invites us to come into his presence on purpose, responding to his goodness in our lives, especially his goodness to us in Jesus, our Savior. We can come, as the psalm says, "with thanksgiving...with music and song."

- As we worship, he reminds us of his forgiveness and his love for us.
- As we worship, he works his Word more deeply into our hearts so that it can strengthen and encourage us.
- As we worship, he assures us we're not alone. He's present with us—and we belong to his family.

Prayer: Lord, your promises add layer upon layer of blessings to my life. As I worship with your people, please...

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JULY, WEEK 2

Yes! And Amen!

No matter how many promises God has made, they are “Yes” in Christ. And so through him the “Amen” is spoken by us to the glory of God.

2 Corinthians 1:20

God’s promises to us are *yes* in Jesus, *yes* because of what our Savior has done. In Christ, God forgives. In Christ, God is with us forever. In Christ, every challenge we face becomes a blessing. In Christ, all our needs are fully met. In Christ, all the many promises God has made are fulfilled.

That’s one reason we pray “in Jesus’ name.” The formula isn’t some magical incantation. Instead, it reminds us that in and of ourselves, we have no claim on God or his blessings. As sinners, forgiven in our Savior, we come to God, asking him to fulfill his promises because of what Jesus has done for us.

Enfolded in Christ’s love for us, we can say a glad “Amen” to every one of God’s promises. Most importantly, we can say “Amen” to that specific promise we need to claim right now. The Hebrew word *amen* means, “Yes, so be it” or “Yes, it shall be so.”

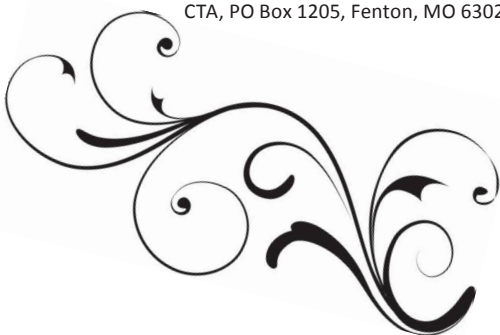
This word, placed at the end of our prayers, expresses trust that our promise-making God will do what he has said. And then, as Scripture points out, God is glorified.

Prayer: My Father, when you gave Jesus into death for me, you demonstrated your intention to fulfill all the promises you have made. Still, trust often comes hard...

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JULY, WEEK 3



Zero Failures

Praise be to the LORD, who has given rest to his people Israel just as he promised. Not one word has failed of all the good promises he gave through his servant Moses.

1 Kings 8:56

Today's Scripture verse comes from a blessing King Solomon spoke over God's people on the day the nation dedicated the temple. By that point in history, Moses had been dead for well over 400 years. God had given his people ample time to observe his trustworthiness. Solomon testifies to what they had experienced:

Not one word has failed of all the good promises he gave through his servant Moses.

What makes Solomon's testimony especially stunning is the fact that during those many years, God's people had chalked up a spotty record in the faith department. Yet the golden cord of God's faithfulness winds its way through every day of all those decades and centuries. Not one word of our Lord's good promises had ever failed. He had proven himself fully trustworthy.

And he will continue to do that in your life!

Are you counting on specific promises today? Or are you worried that your faithlessness or disobedience might have voided God's promises to you? Then turn in repentant faith to the cross of your Savior. Confess your sins and cling to his promise to forgive and cleanse you from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9). Then claim all the other promises you need as well. They are yours in Jesus.

Prayer: Father-God, you are always faithful. Your promises never fail. So now...

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JULY, WEEK 4

Apocalypse Wow!

The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God stands forever.

Isaiah 40:8

Even if no major disaster mars our lifetime, little by little, smaller events can and do change our lives forever. Isaiah was right:

The grass withers and the flowers fall.

Happily, though, he was right about something else, too:

The word of our God stands forever.

Someday, our Lord himself will call a halt to life on earth as we know it. Jesus will descend . . .

. . . with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise.

1 Thessalonians 4:16

But even that won't spell an end to the promises God has made to his people. His word "stands forever." Jesus' promised (and, thus, certain) return will usher in endless peace and joy for all who trust in him as Savior. We will experience at last the fullness of every promise he has made.

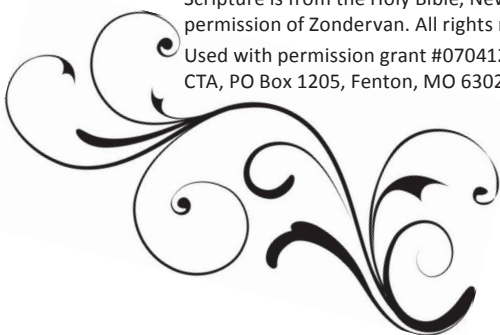
Amen! Come, Lord Jesus!

Prayer: Lord, your word stands forever. Work faith in me...

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AUGUST, WEEK 1



Blessed: A Choice Location

I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well.

Psalm 139:14

“Bloom where are you planted.” This well-known saying often evokes smiles and creates hope, the hope of making a difference. But it can also evoke a bit of cynicism. We may wonder, “What if we’re planted in the wrong place?” Gardens that flourish enjoy just the right location, a location chosen so that whatever is planted can bloom to its full potential.

Even before God created the Garden of Eden, he had each of us in mind. He made the entire universe—his garden—with each of us specifically in his thoughts and on his heart. God knew precisely what mix of talents and gifts he would blend together so that you would bloom in a way different from anyone else. God knew what nurturing you would require, what weeding would be necessary, and what pruning would make it possible for you to branch out to your full potential. Your Lord made you to be beautiful, precious, and cherished. No one else can fill your place in his garden.

Today’s verse gives us only a brief glimpse of this truth; Psalm 139 paints it much more fully. Sometime today you may want to read the entire psalm. Take in each verse, word by word.

Prayer: Lord, you are awesome in wonder! Help me bloom where you have planted me! ...

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AUGUST, WEEK 2

Balanced and Blooming

Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds.

Hebrews 10:23–24

Gardeners spend a great deal of time figuring out what the garden will look like as summer deepens. Which plants should go where to provide the right balance of height? What plants will fill the garden with color each week or month during the growing season, each blooming at a different time?

Choosing what to plant is a bit like putting friends together. Can you point to friends who have helped you blossom, grow, and flourish? These friends may differ from you in many ways, but your friendships fit together to create an artful masterpiece.

Who in your circle of friends provides a sense of balance and helps you thrive? Who complements you as a companion—not overwhelming you, but supporting you? Who is there to listen, to care, and to protect?

God’s garden is sprouting and growing! No one watched as he planned and prepared to plant it, but throughout all eternity, the results will be visible for all to see.

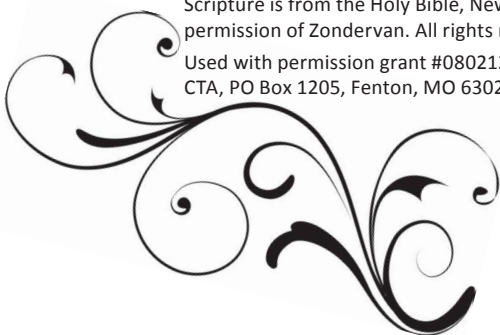
Take heart as you reread Hebrews 10:23–24. Then ask Jesus to bring into your life the kinds of companionship that will spur you on to “love and good deeds.”

Prayer: Lord Jesus, make me an encourager *to* others, even as you encourage me *through* others. Amen.

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AUGUST, WEEK 3



Tenderly Nourished

Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

Matthew 6:33–34

Imagine your garden at the height of summer—a mosaic of color, a masterpiece of design! In fact, you are in contention for the Garden of the Year Award. So, now you can sit back and simply enjoy the beauty and fame, right? Not so fast. Gardens need tending. Garden work is never done! Consider the weeds, those nasty pests that thrive on the very water and nutrients that your flowers and vegetables need!

Now consider your spiritual life. Are “weeds” there threatening to overwhelm you? Are troubles threatening to choke you? Are they stealing your sense of balance and peace? Are you in need of richer spiritual nutrients?

If any of this applies to you today, look to the Master Gardener, who continues to tend to his garden, to care for you personally. Notice the ways in which he uses his Word to help you recognize the weeds of sin. Praise him that as you confess them, and as he forgives and removes them for Jesus’ sake. Receive his Word with humility and faith as he cultivates your faith, causing it to flourish.

Prayer: Father, you bathe me in Son Light each day. May I grow strong and flourish in your love. Amen.

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AUGUST, WEEK 4

A Bouquet of Friends

A friend loves at all times.

Proverbs 17:17

God has uniquely designed each person he has brought into your life. Together, you, your friends, your acquaintances, and even those neighbors you don't quite understand make a brilliant bouquet. Each person comes to you, intended as a blessing from your Lord. Consider these examples:

Do you know Rose? Rose buds begin tightly closed and then slowly, over time, open up to reveal individual layers of petals that lead deeper to the flower's center. She will bless you as she unfolds in God's time.

Do you know Lily? Lily of the Valley, I mean? The valley is a place of growth, but it is often also a place of suffering. Romans 5:3–5 promises blessings to those who persevere in suffering: "We also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit." Yet when trials are severe or persistent, rejoicing isn't so easy. Perhaps God is inviting you to come alongside your "Lily" to encourage her!

Do you know Forget-Me-Not? Forget-me-nots have clusters of small blue flowers—unforgettably beautiful! Have you said good-bye to someone you'll never forget? Their absence leaves you feeling blue, and yet the beauty of your relationship remains. If so, continue to praise your generous Lord for that treasured friend.

Prayer: Lord, I am so thankful for the bouquet of relationships you use to beautify my life. Help me to add beauty to the lives I touch. Amen.

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SEPTEMBER, WEEK 1



Forgiveness

Forgive as the Lord forgave you.

Colossians 3:13

When we're ready to give our floral arrangement shape, depth, and texture, we choose the greenery carefully, putting leaves in just the right places, hiding a misshapen bud, framing a vivid blossom.

Perhaps that's the way God adds "greenery" to our lives. Seeing our uniqueness, he carefully weaves in spiritual qualities we need, making our lives much more beautiful—for now and for all eternity!

For example, maybe whispers to us, "You need to learn forgiveness." Yarrow can symbolize that. A tough little plant with feathery leaves and yellow flowers, yarrow has been used since ancient times for healing. When yarrow leaves are held against a wound, they can stop the flow of blood. Similarly, forgiveness stops the bleeding too, the bleeding of brokenness and hate.

Forgiveness is foreign to our human nature; revenge is more to our liking. Yet Jesus asks us to forgive. In fact, he specifically addresses that issue in the Lord's Prayer, urging us to forgive others as God forgives us.

God's forgiveness is a gift—a pure, simple gift of love that releases the offender. Receiving that gift, that awesome gift, frees us from the heavy load of guilt. Our hearts grow lighter, making it possible for us to ask God sincerely for his grace to forgive others and for the peace that comes when we forgive.

Our Father-Gardener tucks his yarrow gently into our lives, nestling it among the blooms. See its soft leaves brush the flowers, making them appear brighter against its muted green?

Prayer: Lord, your forgiveness, quiet and deep, refreshes my heart. Point me to the cross, and give me a forgiving heart. Amen.

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SEPTEMBER, WEEK 2

Patience

Be patient, then, brothers, until the Lord's coming.

James 5:7

Irises put out long, slim leaves. Cut an iris, mow over it, and it will simply send up more shoots. A late-season frost that leaves other plants struggling usually won't faze a bed of irises. The roots keep right on sprouting more leaves.

Our Lord's patience with us is something like those iris leaves. It's quiet, unobtrusive, and that simply will not quit. Day by day, he bears with us, forgiving us for repeated sins, soothing our hurts, waiting for our return when we stray. 1 Timothy 1:16 tells us that Jesus has unlimited patience as he works to win over those who don't know or trust in him as their Savior.

The Master Gardener knows that we, his daughters, need patience, too. It may take years for his plans to unfold, his will to be worked in our lives. Yet, everything he does, he does for his glory and our good. Trials are meant to lead us to the Father, who longs to carry our burdens. As we learn to trust him, patience begins to grace our lives, iris-like.

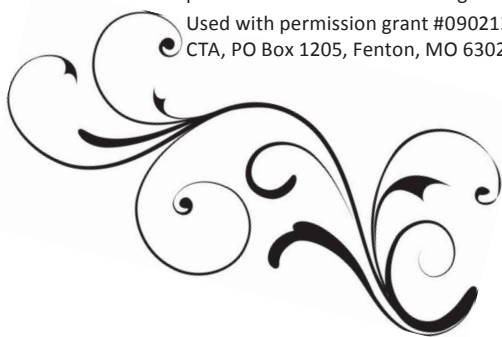
As our Gardener inserts an iris leaf here, another there into our bouquet, he reminds us that we have a special reason to be patient. He has promised to take us home to live with him. Maybe tomorrow. Perhaps next week. Maybe years from now. Today, we wait, and while we wait, we trust.

Prayer: My Savior, I seem to have plenty of opportunities to practice patience! Give me joy and endurance, trusting you are at work in me and in every circumstance I face. Amen.

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SEPTEMBER, WEEK 3



Joy

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Romans 15:13

Picture a palm branch. A strong central stem supports the willowy fronds. Like those fronds, our joy remains strong because it is connected to Christ Jesus and to his love for us. By his death on the cross, he removed the curse of sin. We're freed from sin's guilt, released from sin's shame, and released from the fears sin brings into every life. Unconditional forgiveness and peace with God are ours forever! Sing, oh soul, sing for joy!

Are you struggling with the day-to-day annoyances of life? Add a little palm-branch joy. Are you weary or troubled by a more serious, long-term problem? The Master Gardener wants to plant joy in your heart. He wants it to sprout such deep roots that no trouble or challenge can destroy it. He wants to give you the kind of true joy that springs from a heart that trusts him every step of the way, in good times and bad.

Problems can't ruin godly joy, and obstacles can't quell it. That's because our joy is heaven-focused, not tied to this earth. Joy looks ahead in hope to the eternal home that awaits us, far beyond the confines of time and space.

Prayer: Lord, sink your "palm branch" of joy deep into the water of faith in my heart. I need joy, *your* joy! May my life shout hosanna to my Savior-King! Amen.

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SEPTEMBER, WEEK 4

Faith

Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.

Hebrews 11:1

Faith flows from God as his gift to us. It forms the backbone to which other spiritual blessings anchor. Faith keeps us going when our walk is uphill and getting steeper all the time. Faith takes us beyond ourselves, past today, over the bumps of tomorrow, all the way through and beyond life on this earth.

Living in the light of Jesus' resurrection, we can be certain, too, of God's gift of eternal life to us—individually and personally. We can “be confident of this, that he who began a good work in [us] will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus” (Philippians 1:6)!

Our Lord urges us to cultivate the faith he has given us by spending time in his Word and in prayer. As he nurtures us, we become mature, our spiritual blessings adorning our own lives and also nourishing the lives of others. Like the pine tree, which stays green all winter, established faith makes perseverance possible. It gives us a stick-to-it attitude that stubbornly persists, even when doubt pounds on the door and life throws stones.

Prayer: Lord, let all the other spiritual blessings you have worked in my life shine in beauty against the faith you have given. Then show me how to share my faith with others. Amen.

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OCTOBER, WEEK 1



Shaped to Display God's Glory

We are the clay, you are the potter; we are all the work of your hand.

Isaiah 64:8

Scripture sometimes refers to a vase, or pot, as it describes God's relationship with his believers. Carefully molded and shaped by the Creator's hand, you have been fashioned for his service. And your life's purpose involves something much more important than simply displaying floral arrangements.

Picture yourself as a vase—a container—into which God has poured out his abundant love. You have been touched by the Potter's—God's—own creative hand. Through good times and not-so-good times, your heavenly Father is gently molding and shaping you into just the right form—perfectly fashioning you for his purposes. What is your purpose? To display the glorious bouquet of God's many, many blessings.

Your life has eternal significance. It will ultimately impact the generations that will come after you. How? As you display the grace of God in your day-to-day actions and words, co-workers will be drawn to Christ's love. As you model forgiveness in your family and neighborhood, young and old will see your Savior's love in action. When you tell about the blessings in your life, you will give God glory. And the Potter will most certainly smile!

Prayer: Lord Jesus, you continue to shape and mold me just as you have done all my life long. May my life testify to your love and beauty, and may I bring you joy as I live to honor you. Amen.

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OCTOBER, WEEK 2

Shaped to Contain the Water of Life

[Jesus said,] “If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink.”

John 7:37

The Bible mentions water over and over again. Sometimes, water is simply water. Quite often, though, Scripture uses water as a picture of the Holy Spirit. Consider John 7:37–38, which records Christ’s own words:

If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him.

The thirst Jesus mentions here is so much more than physical thirst. It’s the longing for relief from all the hurt sin has brought into our world. It’s the longing for a personal conflict to finally end. It’s the soul’s cry for justice or an aching body’s plea for a peaceful night’s rest. Most of all, it’s the guilt-ridden heart, wondering if God will really forgive—again. That’s thirst. Real thirst.

Did you catch Jesus’ promise? Those “streams of living water” are the Holy Spirit (John 7:39). The Spirit stands ready to quench your desert-dry soul. While God does not author life’s troubles—job loss, divorce, illness—he intends that our trials drive us to his Word. And it is there that the Spirit pours out his life-giving, life-sustaining power.

Prayer: Lord, fill me with your Spirit. Let the water of life restore my hope and bring peace, healing, and strength. Let me bloom again! Amen.

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OCTOBER, WEEK 3



Standing Firm

Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!

Matthew 25:23

The bouquet of blessings you have received from God requires special placement:

- If you set it on the low, rickety table of worldly values, you'll soon find yourself battered and bruised by the world's disapproving opinion; many in our society consider love, joy, peace, and patience old-fashioned, impractical virtues.
- If you expose your bouquet of blessings to the claws of society's values, you'll find your exquisite blossoms mangled.
- If you engage in self-promotion and people-pleasing behaviors, you will upend the Spirit-inspired motivation to love and serve others for the glory of God.

Let the Holy Spirit place you on the high, safe, and solid shelf of his love and acceptance. Let him lift you high above the negativity of worldly values. Let him work in you the confidence and love that make it possible to use every gift God gives for the good of others.

Most important of all, let the Holy Spirit's gift of solid, immovable faith keep you blooming until the day God says to you, "Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!" (Matthew 25:23).

Prayer: Holy Spirit, deepen my confidence in you, not in myself. Then show me how and when to use the gifts and abilities you have given me to help others. Amen.

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OCTOBER, WEEK 4

Forgiving and Being Forgiven

Forgive, and you will be forgiven.

Luke 6:37

In the language of flowers, a rose means “I love you.” A rose with thorns, however, means “I am angry with you.”

The alluring fragrance of a rose attracts people. Even when hearts are heavy with trouble and sorrow, the gentle perfume of a rose can lift the spirit and lighten the mood. Roses can be heart-lightening and day-brightening. If you’re giving out roses, people want to be around you!

Thorns, however, repel others. Ill temper, criticism, and lack of forgiveness describe a prickly personality. No one wants to come too close!

In the cross of his Son, the Master Gardener has reached into our prickly lives, bringing the peace of forgiveness. Knowing the fragrance of his love, we can come to him in hope, confessing our thorniness. At the same time, we can forgive those whose thorny attitudes and actions have wounded us. We can forgive...and forgive...and, yes, forgive..., all because Jesus keeps on forgiving us.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, I want to hand out roses today—roses, fragrant and without thorns. Work your love in me so that those around me see my life set in your love, honoring you and encouraging them. Amen.

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NOVEMBER, WEEK 1



Identity

To all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.

John 1:12

An elderly nurse looked through the large plate-glass window where three young men stood, anxious to get a glimpse of the newborn babies. Secretly, they guessed which soft bundle belonged to them. The puzzled expression on each new father's face betrayed his uncertainty. Which baby belonged to whom?

The nurse began to match babies and fathers. She motioned for each new daddy to hold up his arm. Narrowing her eyes, she squinted to see the names printed on their wristbands. Double-checking each new father's identity, she matched each baby with care. The young fathers chuckled in amusement, then thanked her for her conscientiousness as she opened the door and handed the babies, one by one, to their respective dads. As she turned to go, she overheard one of the young men whisper, "I knew you were mine all along."

We who have answered Jesus' gentle call, we who know him as Lord and Savior, are identified with him. We belong to him forever. He knows our names; he has written and sealed them in his Book of Life. This promise is the solid foundation of God's people: "The Lord knows those who are his" (2 Timothy 2:19).

Prayer: Dear Lord, I belong to you. You redeemed me on Calvary. I have been bought and paid for by your blood, shed on the cross. Thank you ...

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NOVEMBER, WEEK 2

Brevity

*You have made my days a mere handbreadth; the span of my years is as nothing before you.
Each man's life is but a breath.*

Psalms 39:5

Read the psalm verse again. If ever two sentences deserve a hearty “amen” in response, those two sentences do!

The apostle James notes, “Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes” (James 4:14). How true! God gives each of us the same 24 hours each day. He lets us spend them in whatever ways we choose. Will we waste those hours? Or will we fill them with balance and appreciation, seizing and making the most of each and every moment?

As I grow older, I find that the minutes, hours, days, and weeks pass by too swiftly. I want to shout, “WAIT!” I want to savor each precious day and cherish each moment, for they will soon evaporate, lost in the vastness of infinity, never to be recaptured.

Prayer: Today, I thank you, Jesus, for enduring the agony of the cross, for dying in my place to earn the forgiveness I need so much. I know my days on earth are brief. Help me to make the most of them, even as I look forward to spending eternity in heaven with you.

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NOVEMBER, WEEK 3



Gravity

I can do everything through him who gives me strength.

Philippians 4:13

The astronauts floated in their space capsule, cavorting and somersaulting on the evening news. What freedom and ease of movement! Against the vastness of outer space, later images of their space walk showed tiny, gray-and-white figures clumsily maneuvering a few feet or inches at a time as they worked to repair the International Space Station. How fascinating! And how terrifying! Only a skinny tether attached to the ship kept them from floating forever in a direction away from earth.

It reminded me to thank God for gravity! Gravity pulls everything to the center.

God created the amazing forces that hold the planets, stars, and moon in place. Even more wonderfully, he pulls us to himself. Just as the invisible force of gravity pulls matter toward the center of the earth, so we are held secure by his incredible love.

God poured that love out for us in the sacrifice of his beloved Son on Calvary's cross for our sins. Tethered by that love, we can stand firm and well grounded on the one, solid, eternal Rock. No matter what happens, we need not be afraid. Our Savior steadies our steps. He keeps us from drifting away.

Prayer: Almighty God, thank you for your love in my life . . .

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NOVEMBER, WEEK 4

Frivolity

A cheerful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones.

Proverbs 17:22

“A little frivolity never hurt anybody,” Mother would say. She knew how to make the most mundane tasks fun! Racing to complete household chores or singing while we worked made daily drudgeries seem more like games. “A happy heart makes the face cheerful” (Proverbs 15:13).

No matter how stressful, serious, or somber our lives become, a dollop of frivolity is never out of place. As God’s redeemed, forgiven, dearly loved daughters, we honor him through every appropriate emotion—whether gales of laughter, oceans of tears, or even the surge of anger that leads us to correct injustice. So look for ways to add a little frivolity to your day today! You’ll be glad you did—and so will those around you!

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank you for creating me in such a way that I can experience emotions—feelings of all kinds. Thank you for the fun, the thoughtfulness, and the courage they have brought into my life. Bless me today as I look for a way to...

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DECEMBER, WEEK 1



Creativity

By the word of the LORD were the heavens made, their starry host by the breath of his mouth.

Psalms 33:6

In a muted, yet very real sense, the creativity of God's daughters mirrors our Creator's own. Genesis 1:1 tells us, "In the beginning God created." We worship him as we enjoy the beauty and majesty of his creation. We thank him for making us in his image and instilling within us skillful imaginations. Most of all, we praise him for his Son, Jesus Christ, born on earth to be our Savior, born to die on the cross and rise again, leaving behind an empty tomb.

Forgiven in that Savior, we are free to become all that he intends for us to be as he recreates us to become more and more like him.

Prayer: Creator-God, I thank you for the joy your creation brings to my life and for the gift of creativity you give people here on earth. Help me use the gifts you've placed in me to your glory and for the benefit of your kingdom. ...

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DECEMBER, WEEK 2

Authority

[Jesus,] being in very nature God,...made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, . . . he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!

Philippians 2:6–8

Those who have served in the military well remember basic training. Boot camp is designed to mold the heart of a recruit to create dutiful submission to authority. To serve the country well, each service member must take orders and must trust those who carry superior rank. Lives ultimately depend on it.

We all need to know who's boss, who's in charge. In our country, elected officials govern. In the corporate world, a business's owners make decisions on behalf of the company. In our families, parents exercise authority.

Despite the need for authority, submitting to authority is hard. Our rebellious hearts want to take control over our lives. The Bible makes it clear that rebellion against the earthly authorities God has established is rebellion against God himself (Romans 13:1–2).

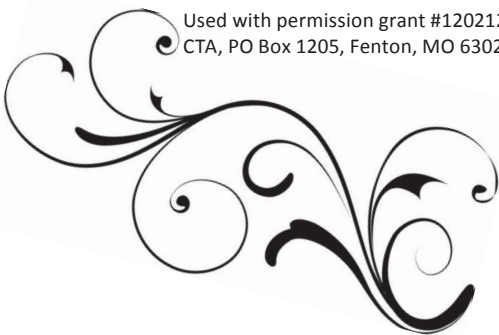
In light of this, consider that Jesus submitted to the Father's will, becoming a human being, obeying the will of God on our behalf, and then dying on a cross, absorbing into himself the punishment for our rebellion. The humility of our Savior is remarkable. His submission to authority, almost inconceivable—even more so when we remember that everything Jesus did, he did for us. Recalling that love makes submission to our Lord's authority—and to the authorities he appoints—easier. We bow in true respect to the one who has so loved us.

Prayer: Lord, I pray for those in authority over me...I ask for your help in respecting them...I thank you for your obedience on my behalf....

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DECEMBER, WEEK 3



Tranquility

The LORD your God is with you, he is mighty to save. He will take great delight in you, he will quiet you with his love, he will rejoice over you with singing.

Zephaniah 3:17

It had been another busy week at camp. Each morning, the children had gotten up, dressed, and eaten. The camp nurse had treated dozens of bug bites and splinters. Everyone had had a chance to swim, find a place on a team, play, and make craft after craft. Now, the week was ending. Finally, when the last child had boarded, the bus drove off in a cloud of dust and amidst the lingering shouts of the children inside.

Immediately a blanket of stillness fell upon the campground. All was calm. Only the periodic sound of a bird twittering or a squirrel dashing up a tree interrupted the peace of evening, now descending.

Do you long for a sense of peace like that? You can have it! Schedule in an early morning hour or a late morning break or an evening time of respite and spend it with Jesus. Lay aside your agenda, open your Bible, and allow him to guide you.

Jesus will bring a quiet calmness to your heart!

He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he restores my soul. Psalm 23:2-3

Prayer: Lord Jesus, I've come to enjoy the peaceful tranquility that only you can give....

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DECEMBER, WEEK 4

Sensitivity

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God.

2 Corinthians 1:3–4

Sensitive to the concerns of those around him, Jesus cared for their physical, emotional, and spiritual needs. He fed, healed, freed, and loved the hungry, blind, sick, and enslaved.

In 2 Corinthians 1:3–4, Paul describes a process of growth in compassion, in sensitivity to the needs and emotions of others. As God comforts us, he equips us to comfort others. But this process carries with it significant risks. Every time we choose to care the way Christ cared, to love the way Christ loved, we make it possible for others to hurt us.

So then, knowing this, why would anyone take that risk? Because as God's redeemed children, we have experienced our Savior's compassion in our own lives. We know what it's like to experience his forgiveness, his peace, and the joy he gives. We want others to know these things too. As we share them, we know that disappointments, troubles, and sorrows may come our way, but along with them will come our Lord's comfort. Comforted in our Savior's arms, we can comfort others when trouble comes to them.

Prayer: Today, Lord, open my eyes and show me someone who needs comfort. Then, let me bring your comfort to that person.

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FIFTH WEEK



No Lie!

. . . a faith and knowledge resting on the hope of eternal life, which God, who does not lie, promised before the beginning of time.

Titus 1:2

As the apostle Paul begins his letter to the young pastor Titus, he strikes a note of encouragement, reminding Titus of the eternal life God has promised his people. Paul includes this little phrase to describe the faithful One who makes and keeps his promises: “God, who does not lie.”

Scripture makes it clear. God is true to his word, especially his promise to save us by his grace through faith in Christ the crucified.

The verse from Titus contains another golden nugget to underscore this. Reread it now, paying particular attention to the timing of the promise. When did God make it?

Interesting. God made this promise, “before the beginning of time”—when neither you nor I were around. No human being was. So, to whom did God make the promise to rescue his people from sin and death, the promise to give us eternal life? Who but himself?! This further reinforces the certainty of that promise.

We may at times be faithless. We may at times reject the knowledge of God to pursue the trivialities and trinkets this world offers. But our Savior-God is faithful. He will always forgive his repentant children for the sake of Jesus. He will always heal and restore.

Prayer: Father, you kept your promise to open the way to eternal life, and you will keep every other promise, too. I’m so often faithless. Father, forgive! Then work...

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FIFTH WEEK

Pure, Perfect, Holy

Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God.

2 Corinthians 7:1

Really? “Perfecting holiness”? Yes. And the verse tells us how in two steps.

Step 1—We have “these promises” to cheer us on. Everything God has done for us and promises to continue doing encourages us to keep on going. His promise to forgive our failures stands at the top of the list. Knowing the sacrifice our Savior made for us on his own cross, we respond in joyful obedience.

Step 2—We have “reverence for God” to strengthen our resolve. This holy fear, planted by the Holy Spirit himself, leads us to hate our sins more and more. And it strengthens us for the fight against temptation.

This side of the finish line, perfect holiness will elude us. Day by day, moment by moment, we rely on our Father’s faithful love and forgiveness. But he will complete his work in us as we snap the tape and cross into eternity. What a promise! What a Savior!

Prayer: Lord, your promises cheer me on! Continue to work in me . . .

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FIFTH WEEK



Shaped to Smile at God

The wilderness will rejoice and blossom.

Isaiah 35:1

My grandmother loved her garden. She grew vegetables out of necessity, but the flowers? She grew flowers for the sheer delight of it. She spoke about her flowers as if they were her own little children—dearly loved and tenderly cared for. Grandma always displayed a sure confidence about her flowers—expecting glorious blooms without question, even long before small buds began to peek through the green foliage.

My grandmother did not have an easy life. She raised nine children during the hard, bleak years following the Great Depression. She lost her parents and dear husband at an early age, and found strength to manage three farms for decades following their deaths. Where did that strength come from? A discussion one day in her garden, among her flowers, helped me discover the answer.

I was young and curious. Always asking questions, I wondered aloud about her flowers. “Do all plants bloom? Why do they bloom, Grandma?”

Bending over a riotous clump of sunshine-colored daisies, she poked at a particularly tall, bright blossom and said, “Plants bloom because that’s what God made them to do. Just look at the flowers! See how their faces look up to the sky? They are smiling at God! They smile every day, thanking him for life and thanking him for his blessings of sunshine and rain.”

Smiling at God. That’s how Grandma lived. Much like her flowers, her soul smiled through the days bright with promise, as well as challenging days filled with hardship and grief. She did it because that’s what God created her to do. It’s what God enabled her to do. For Grandma, living a life of praise did not depend upon her circumstances, but upon her God.

Prayer: Lord, help me smile at you with childlike trust, no matter what comes my way today. May I face everything with faith-filled certainty in your care, love, and forgiveness for me in Christ my Savior. Amen.

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FIFTH WEEK

Living in Light

For everyone who has will be given more, and he will have an abundance.

Matthew 25:29

What a bouquet of blessings—talents, skills, abilities, insights, and wisdom—God has given you! To all of this, he adds the blessing of healthy humility. Still, he intends that you honor, develop, and use your gifts to enhance your own life and the lives of others. The sunshine of godly confidence helps you to overcome fear and reach out to others in helpful and productive ways. The wholesome glow of gratitude praises God, the giver of every good gift, for all the blessings he has chosen to give to you.

When you use the blessings God has given you in the Sonshine of your church, family, or community, expect your Lord to shower down an even bigger bunch of blessings tomorrow ... and the next day ... and the next.

Prayer: Lord, help me use my gifts with confidence and godly humility for the good of others. Then grow those gifts, equipping me to honor you by helping those around me more and more and more. Amen.

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