**2020 Words of Hope Compilation**

**Words of Hope – Fear Not**

**Promise of the day:**

* Be strong and of a good courage, fear not, nor be afraid of them: for the LORD thy God, he *it is* that doth go with thee; he will not fail thee, nor forsake thee. – Deu. 31:6

**Think about it:**

There are some things that are contagious—like laughter and smiles; and also like despair and fear. Some things should be passed on to others, but some should be stopped before they ever get out the door. Here is a great way one man helped to extinguish fear and replace it with a sense of amusement.

While flying aboard a large plane, a man was sitting next to a nine-year-old boy. An extremely strong wind and rainstorm began tossing the plane violently. This was the boy’s first experience in the air. He felt very uneasy and didn’t know what to make of it. He looked over and asked the man beside him, “Are you afraid?” The man wisely chose a reaction to the unnerving turbulence that would benefit the both of them and replied, “No, this is real fun!”

The fear and tension left the boy’s face immediately. He was introduced to a new point of view; a different side to the situation. And sure enough, they had fun! They could laugh, they could smile while being—as it then appeared—humorously tossed and bumped about. I bet, down on the ground the boy would have paid to have a simulated ride of that kind. Life has lots of “rides”. Perhaps if we see the amusing and intriguing side more, we’d give place less to fear, stress, tension, and overly-seriousness that tends to take the wind of fun out of things; things that could instead leave us breathless, with a sense of wonder.

**Praise of the day:**

* I will Bless the LORD at all times: his praise *shall* continually *be* in my mouth. – Psa.34:1

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**Words of Hope – God’s Protection**

**Promise of the day:**

* He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust: his truth shall be thy shield and buckler. -- Psa 91:4

**Think about it:**

One fine day, my wife and I took Kristen, our 13-month-old daughter, to the beach. It was perfect, beautiful weather. As we strolled down the sand, each holding a little hand, she excitedly smiled and chattered in that special encrypted language of hers.

As we got to the water and the first little wave rolled over her feet, her expression suddenly changed. The water was considerably more frigid than the sand, and unsure of what to do, she stood absolutely still until the sand eroded under her and she fell on her bottom with a thud.

We picked her up with a laugh and a hug, then waited for the next wave. Now she started anticipating and would turn to run when the water began to close in. Here I noticed something interesting. Kristen would turn and run to one of us, in spite of the fact that she had to get through more water to reach us than just running straight back to shore. Even when she had to struggle through what to her was knee-high water, she would choose running to us over what seemed like immediate relief.

And we would meet her halfway, making sure she stayed safe. What would entice a little girl to brave more of the very thing that scared her, rather than take the “quick and easy” way out? I think it is simple *trust*. She trusted that we would take care of her, and that being with us in the midst of cold water was better than trying to get to shore alone.

Often when a problem hits me, my first reaction is panic. I stand absolutely still as my mind sifts through options, and I end up falling and failing. Then, the next time I see a problem coming, I’m tempted to run as fast as I can out of the situation. But as you know, situations have a way of catching up and still sweeping us off our feet. So what’s the solution? I need to follow my daughter’s example and face the problem boldly. That doesn’t mean facing it alone. Beside me stands my strong, capable Savior, and He can hold me up despite any “wave.” I just need to quit trying on my own and run to Him!

When I am weak, I can be strong through His strength. (See 2 Corinthians 12:10.) Jesus is still the master of the winds, the waves, and any other elements that besiege our lives. (See Luke 8:25.) So let’s go to Him right away when we see the tide coming in. He won’t let us be overwhelmed. (See Matthew 14:30–31.) -- By Chris Mizrany

**Praise of the day:**

* But let all those that put their trust in thee rejoice: let them ever shout for joy, because thou defendest them: let them also that love thy name be joyful in thee. – Psa 5:11

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**Words of Hope – God’s Care**

**Promise for the day:**

* But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus. -- Php. 4:19

**Think about it:**

I’d venture a guess that the Old Testament prophet Habakkuk isn’t very well known nowadays, but he sure knew what it meant to trust in God no matter how badly things were going. Here is what he said during hard times when he had lost everything:

“Even though the fig trees have no blossoms, and there are no grapes on the vines; even though the olive crop fails, and the fields lie empty and barren; even though the flocks die in the fields, and the cattle barns are empty, yet I will rejoice in the Lord! I will be joyful in the God of my salvation!” (Habakkuk 3:17–18 NLT.)

I was curious about what might have been going on in Habakkuk’s life and times to inspire him to pen such a beautiful statement of faith, so I read the entire book. It’s a short book, only three chapters long, and it turns out this passage comes at the very end, as a conclusion to Habakkuk’s dialogue with God. The book offers very little detail about Habakkuk’s personal life, but it’s evident that he lived at a difficult time in the history of God’s people, and he starts off by openly questioning God’s wisdom.

Habakkuk tells God that he sees nothing around him but injustice and violence and destruction by invading armies, and he asks the same question God often gets asked by all of us—usually, with much less justification than he had: Why does God not make things right, and why does He allow evil to seemingly triumph? God’s patient replies eventually bring Habakkuk back to a position of trust in God and His promises that enables him to put everything in his loving Father’s hands.

We can choose to rejoice in God and in our salvation even in the midst of life’s most trying experiences, “because God has said, ‘Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.’” (Hebrews 13:5 NIV.) We can trust in His timeless promises to bring us through each and every one of life’s storms.

**Praise of the day:**

* Let us praise like Habakkuk did: Even though… [everything is going wrong], yet I will rejoice in the Lord! I will be joyful in the God of my salvation! – Adapted Habakkuk 3:17–18 NLT

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**Words of Hope – God’s Presence**

**Promise of the day:**

* And he said, My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest. – Exo. 33:14

**Think about it:**

Sir Ernest Henry Shackleton (1874–1922) was an Irish explorer who is best remembered for his Antarctic expedition of 1914–1915 in the ship *Endurance*, described in his book *South*. Less known is that Shackleton had an unseen source of strength to draw from—his faith.

The journey over the frozen deep was fraught with danger. The *Endurance* became trapped in pack ice and was ultimately destroyed by it. The crew had to abandon ship. After trekking over the ice, dragging three of the ship’s lifeboats they had salvaged from the wreck, they managed to get to Elephant Island. From there, Shackleton and four other men set out to summon help. In the largest of the three boats, they journeyed 750 miles (1,200 km) through rough seas to the southern Atlantic Ocean island of South Georgia, where Shackleton and two others crossed glaciers and razorback ridges to reach a whaling station.

Of that epic journey, Shackleton wrote: “When I look back on those days I have no doubt that Providence guided us. I know that during that [final] long and racking march of thirty-six hours over the unnamed mountains and glaciers of South Georgia, it seemed to me often that we were four, and not three. I said nothing to my companions on the point, but afterward Worsley said to me, ‘Boss, I had a curious feeling on that march that there was another Person with us.’ Crean confessed to the same idea. One feels ‘the dearth of human words, the roughness of human speech’ in trying to describe things intangible, but a record of our journeys would not be complete without a reference to a subject so very near to our hearts.”

**Praise of the day:**

* Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou *art* there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou *art there.* *If* I take the wings of the morning, *and* dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; Even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me. -- Psa 139:7-10

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**Easter Is the Reason**

**Verse for the day:**

* But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. -- Isa 53:5

**Think about it:**

Like the majority of people (I actually have no stats on this, just assuming), I like Christmas: the warmth, family, love, great food, the amazing story and images behind it all. I have much preferred it over the years to Easter. Not sure why.

Maybe it’s because in spite of the danger and violence found in the Christmas story (Jesus/Joseph/Mary being hunted like terrorists, Herod killing all the children under two, etc.), Christmas is magical with all its imagery, the blending of facts with the mystical, etc. It’s just a great story, which has definitely been embellished over the centuries. I don’t necessarily mean in a bad way, but in the sense that the two years or so that the whole story took place have been reduced to one night, or maybe a weekend, with all the amazing effects—star, birth, shepherds, wise men, fleeing to Egypt—and what a night or weekend at that!!

Of course, that miniaturization makes sense, like a whole adventure of someone’s life or even a portion of history being condensed into a 90- to 120-minute movie; we do that, highlighting the important points, bringing out essential lessons, and we’re OK with that. It’s how we learn, especially when we don’t want to study volumes on a given subject.

I have come to realize that I haven’t really appreciated Easter and its significance nearly as much as I should have over the years, nor given it its proper place of importance in my thoughts and musings. I mean, the whole purpose behind the story of Christmas is that Jesus came down to earth (God born as man) in order to first of all live as we live, give His message and example to all humanity, announce His Father’s kingdom, and then die for us—and saddest of all, to die at the very hands of the beings God had created in His love. Not a pretty picture of humanity; we don’t look good in this scenario. There’s a twinge of that in the Christmas story, but the Easter story really exposes fallen humankind as the villains… Sure, evil was there in the devil as well, but by whose hand was this perfect man tortured and killed? By the very beings created in His own image.

We don’t come out looking very good in this whole thing, and perhaps that’s why the Easter story is mostly celebrated by the Christian world, while the Christmas story is something the entire world for the most part enjoys—albeit in many cases with them removing the hero and main character of the story and replacing Him with the fictitious Santa Claus.

May you have a wonderful Easter, taking time to reflect on it all, and appreciate what Jesus has done for us. -- By Jerry Paladino

**Praise for the day:**

* The LORD is my strength and song, and he is become my salvation: he is my God,.. -- Exo15:2
* Sing unto the LORD, all the earth; shew forth from day to day his salvation. -- 1Ch.16:23

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**Word’s of Hope – God’s Benefits**

**Verse of the day:**

* What shall I render unto the LORD *for* all his benefits toward me? -- Psa.116:12

**Think about it**:

A skillful surgeon recently undertook the responsibility of performing a serious operation on the eyes of an Eastern monarch which proved highly successful. After the king's recovery the problem of presenting his account puzzled the doctor, for he was dubious as to what figure would correctly estimate the value of the result achieved; as in Eastern countries it is a serious wrong to charge the king more or less than the actual value. Taking a blank billhead the doctor wrote across it: "The king can do no wrong," and respectfully submitted it to the monarch. His answer was a letter enclosing a sum far beyond his highest hopes.

This is a great story and put me to shame for I know that I have not always trusted in the Lord’s best knowing that it would far surpass my wildest dreams. However, when we trust in our Heavenly King Who “can do no wrong” to repay our labors of love for Him He is more than generous.

**Praise of the day:**

* Blessed *be* the Lord, *who* daily loadeth us *with benefits, even* the God of our salvation. Selah. – Psa. 68:19

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**Words of Hope -- God’s Care**

**Verse of the day:**

* Be not ye therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him. – Mat.6:8

**Think about it:**

Have you ever come across a construction site where the men were laboriously laying a tile floor, one of those mosaic floors with thousands of tiny tiles that create a picture when finished? While it’s being put in place, the picture isn’t clearly visible, because as they work, the men use a cement mortar to fill the area between the tiles, and the grout often leaves a gray film over the whole masterpiece that hides the beauty of all that’s been done. At the end, it is finally cleaned off to reveal the picture in its full beauty.

That’s so much like the way the Lord works in our lives. In His all-knowing wisdom and love, He understands exactly what we need and He goes to great lengths, with so much intricate detail, to provide things for us—sometimes even before we realize how important they’re going to be to us.

Often He uses the struggles of life—like economic difficulties, or personal struggles and lacks and mistakes—to work in ways we aren’t expecting. We don’t always realize how He’s preparing us, or understand why He has allowed something “gray” into our lives, like the mosaic as it’s being developed. But that only makes the final revelation of His loving and attentive care to our every need all the more profound and beautiful.

**Praise of the day:**

* How excellent is thy lovingkindness, O God! therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of thy wings. Psa.36:7

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**Words of Hope – Value**

**Verse of the day:**

* For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believes Him should not die but should have everlasting life. – Jn. 3:16

**Think about it:**

I know that it is after Easter but I wanted to share something one of my friend’s daughter wrote and posted on her FB page for Easter. I couldn’t have said it better as it capsulated my sentiments exactly.

"Today I celebrate my Love, my Champion, my conquering Hero (Jesus)! Who set Himself like steel, and with the greatest power stared down death, faced down the cruelest brutality and beating without flinching, to reach down into the very gates of hell to rescue every single soul, from the grasp of the devil's perverted, sickening and twisted death; Satan thought this could stop my conquering Hero! ...Not so fast...my Champion pulled out the mightiest hand of all when thru His death He redeemed all souls back into grace! Out of the clutches of sin; back to eternal redemption!

“I'm pretty crazy about Him! Happy Easter! He live loved. The cross does not expose sin, it exposes value. My God somehow thought we were valuable enough to sacrifice Himself to reunite our souls back to Him forever! No greater love hath any man then the one who lays down his own life, that others may live!... (End of post.)

**Praise of the day:**

* That I may show forth all thy praise …: I will rejoice in thy salvation. Psa\_9:14

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**Words of Hope – A Heart Check**

**Verse of the day:**

* Search me, O God, and know my heart.—Psa.139:23

**Think about it:**

I have found it healthy to do a regular “heart check” to be sure that I am open to what the Holy Spirit might want to show me. So let me ask you: Are you ready to ignite your life, brighten your days and leave a deeper legacy than you ever thought possible? The Greek philosopher Socrates said, “An unexamined life is not worth living.” So it is good to stop sometimes and reflect on where we are and where we want to be.

This is a healthy attitude. Why am I here? What is my mission? What am I uniquely formed to accomplish for God? What is my deepest purpose? What legacy was I destined to leave behind? Whose lives must I impact? What actions should I plan to take?

Proverbs 14:23 says: *All hard work brings a profit, but mere talk only leads to poverty.* We need to roll up our sleeves! The Psalmist cried out to God in Psalm 139:23–24: *Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.* I think he is saying to God: “Check me out. I want to live for you. Look deep within me. I want to improve!”—David Macfarlane

**Praise of the day:**

* I will praise *thee,* O LORD, with my whole heart; I will shew forth all thy marvellous works.—Psa.9:1

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**Words of Hope – Faith in God’s Word**

**Promise of the day:**

* As you have believed, so let it be done for you. -- Matthew 8:13

**Think about it:**

A friend of mine asked the manager of a supermarket if he had ever cashed a bad check for a stranger. “No, I never did,” he said, “because I never look at the check—I look at the man. If I can trust the man, I take his check.” What a lesson in faith! In Hebrews 10:23 we find these words: “He who promised is faithful.” Who makes the promises in God’s Word?—God does. Look at the Maker of the promises, and then there can be no question as to their absolute validity.

God’s Word says, “Now acquaint yourself with Him, and be at peace; thereby good will come to you.” (See Job 22:21.) To know God is to be sure that He keeps every promise He has made. Abraham knew God and “did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith … being fully convinced that what He had promised He was also able to perform.” (See Romans 4:20–21.)

Some people think of faith as something very mysterious and far beyond their reach. Others think of faith as a gift assigned at birth—some have it to a great degree, while others don’t. Both of those are misconceptions.

God has dealt to each person a measure of faith,( See Romans 12:3.) but many people don’t use their faith. If you don’t use your faith, it becomes flabby, just like muscles when you don’t use them. For faith to grow, you’ve got to keep exercising it.

Faith operates in an entirely different realm from our five senses, but some of the same principles apply. Faith conveys to us evidence of spiritual truths, just as our five senses convey evidence of physical things.

Just as we accept what our five senses tell us, we must accept as evidence what our faith tells us. When we do, our faith brings that thing to pass and makes it real.

Take God at His word. When the troubles and trials come, instead of letting them grow and grow, open your Bible, find a promise, and claim it in Jesus’ name. Here’s one that’s surely too big for me to comprehend, but I often claim it: “Whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.”(See John 14:13.) And here’s another one: “Call to Me, and I will answer you, and show you great and mighty things, which you do not know.” (See Jeremiah 33:3.) No wonder the Bible calls these promises exceedingly great and precious and tells us that through them we can “participate in the divine nature.” (2 Peter 1:4 NIV.) – By Virginia Brandt Berg (1886–1968)

**Praise of the day:**

* I praise You Lord most high. Remember the word unto thy servant, upon which thou hast caused me to hope. This *is* my comfort in my affliction: for thy word hath quickened me. -- Psa 119:49-50

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**Words of Hope – Through the Pandemic**

When a pandemic enters our lives, when all around us morphs into a state of uncertainty and chaos, it is natural to succumb to fear, anxiety, and worry. Even though all of us are affected in one way or another, some suffer more severe situations, face isolation, loneliness, financial difficulties, sickness, and even death. Such circumstances are hard to cope with, and a cloud of negative emotions—such as despair, hopelessness, and fear of the future—can settle like a dark cloak over us.

Questions batter our minds. How long will it be before we are released from this uncertainty? What will tomorrow bring? How will we survive? News headlines engender fear and worry of infection, and losing loved ones can augment the feeling of helplessness. The threat of losing our jobs can be all too real, and we can find ourselves in the midst of turmoil that threatens to overcome us. We’re all human, so it makes sense that our hearts hurt and our faith wavers when observing the impact that COVID-19 is bringing in its wake. We ask ourselves what we can do in response to the alarming circumstances that unfold around us, how we can react when trying to stay positive just isn’t enough. Here are some words of hope.

**Keep praying**: Then they cried unto the LORD in their trouble, and he delivered them out of their distresses. – Psalm 107: 6. As believers, we look up. We seek God through prayer and trust in His sovereignty. Scripture tells us that prayer is one of our most powerful resources. When you are at a loss for words, or when you feel like you’re beating down God’s door with the same prayer day after day, ask God’s Holy Spirit to help you. The Bible tells us the Holy Spirit is an intercessor for us and cries out to God on our behalf. (Romans 8:26)

**Immerse yourself in God’s Word**: God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble, therefore we will not fear. —Psalm 46:1-2. When you feel as if your very soul hurts from news reports of disaster, spread of disease, and death, you can find a place of refuge in God’s Word.

**The gift of hope**: … hope in the Lord: for with the Lord there is mercy, and with him is plenteous redemption. – Psalm 130:7. God will not only fulfill His promises in His time, but He will also sustain us. This was the same hope that God’s people had as they waited for Him to complete His plan, to deliver them from their enemies, wipe away their tears, and remove their disgrace. (Isaiah 25:12) In the meantime, God gave His people refuge and shelter as they waited. He comforted them in their ordeals, gave them strength to endure, and gave them assurance that He was there with them. This is the promise we have of His protection, comfort, strength, and shelter throughout our lives.

**Guard your heart:** Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life.—Proverb 4:23. Even though it’s important to stay informed about the latest developments, especially in time of crisis, nevertheless information overload and repeated scenes of graphic images from tragic events on TV or social media can have a negative influence. It’s important to recognize that this input can leave lasting impressions that affect us physically, emotionally, and spiritually.

**Care for others**: Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.—Galatians 6:2. You can support others who experience loss or who may be going through a personal crisis by lending a helping hand—make that phone call, write that email, help shop for someone who is unable to, be a listening ear. Look around for ways to be a blessing. Even a smile, a friendly comment, a small deed of kindness, or showing some form of camaraderie can go a long way toward cheering a lonely soul.

**Share of what you have**: Your abundance may be a supply for their want, that their abundance also may be a supply for your want.—2 Corinthians 8:14. When everyone rushes to buy supplies and stock up on needed items, one can refrain from grabbing the last needed item off a shelf in the supermarket and letting the next guy have it. While sharing with others might be the last on a list of to-dos during a crisis, it’s often through an act of unselfish giving or sharing that we find ourselves blessed in some way.

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**Words of Hope—Purifying Fires**

**Promise of the day:**

* And he shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver: and he shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver. -- Mal.3:3

**Think about it:**

In medieval times, the goldsmiths had a unique method to determine when the refining fire had purged away all extraneous matter from the precious metal. They would stand patiently and peer intently into the seething, molten mass, meantime making the fire hotter and hotter. At last, a smile of satisfaction would lighten up the perspiring face of the goldsmith. He could see his face reflected in the molten mass of gold. Seeing his face mirrored there, he knew that the refining fire had wrought its purifying purpose.

Of the heavenly Father, the Bible says: "And he shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver: and he shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver" (Mal.3:3a).

Peter admonished: "Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you" (1Pet.4:12a).

When God sees the image of His dear Son reflected in our lives, He knows that His purifying fires have wrought their intended purpose.

**Praise for the day:**

* Psa.98:4  Make a joyful noise unto the Lord, all the earth: make a loud noise, and rejoice, and sing praise.

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**Words of Hope – God Knows Best**

**Promise of the day:**

* This poor man cried, and the LORD heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles. – Psalm 34:6

**Think about it:**

Have you ever seen crushed limestone? It looks like dusty gravel, but when it is spread over a dirt road, something amazing happens. The rains don’t wash it away. Instead, the limestone reacts to the water by becoming a very hard surface, similar to cement, that turns the rut-prone dirt into a road that is highly resistant to water and erosion.

That’s like the transformation God can bring about in our life. When we refuse to let our troubles defeat us and choose to bring them to Him, He can show us how to turn them into determination and greater faith.

**Praise of the day:**

* I will praise the LORD according to his righteousness: and will sing praise to the name of the LORD most high. – Psalm 7:17

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**Words of Hope – God’s Deliverance**

**Promise of the day:**

* Psalm 32:7— Thou art my hiding place; thou shalt preserve me from trouble; thou shalt compass me about with songs of deliverance.

**Think about it:**

What made the foreman tell his team of men to wait before removing a tree they were commissioned to? These hardy workers noticed a robin’s nest in it, with the mother sitting on her eggs, and something inside them was touched.

I think somewhere at the bottom of the nest was the clue—the clue card to answer that question. This mother bird, in collecting bits and pieces to line her nest with had picked up a Sunday school card with the words on it, “We trust in the Lord our God.” Indeed their Creator had kept an eye on them, for when the baby birds hatched and were being fed by their mother, still the workmen waited. When the nest was empty, and the birds had all flown away, then and only then, was the instruction given to remove the tree, so that the road could be widened. It was then that the card was discovered in the nest.

If the birds are cared for, and in their own way can trust in the God that made them, so can we, who Jesus said, are of much greater value to Him.

**Praise of the day:**

* Psa.9:2 I will be glad and rejoice in thee: I will sing praise to thy name, O thou most High.

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**Words of Hope – God’s forgiveness**

**Promise for today:**

* Psa. 86:5  For thou, Lord, *art* good, and ready to forgive; and plenteous in mercy unto all them that call upon thee.

**Think about it:**

The pains in my husband’s chest and heart seemed to reach a peak one night while away from home, sleeping on a foldout couch of relatives. What was it? Why had this been going on, in some way or another, for a couple of years? Doctors had no answers. Was it a heart attack, this time? A real one?

It seemed one of the triggers was the weight of condemnation that laid heavily on his heart, for troubles in the past resulting in consequences beyond his control. Yet still he blamed himself. He knew all the scriptures in the Bible on God’s forgiveness, but for some reason just couldn’t let go of it. Something or someone was holding him in torment. As I laid my hands on his chest I could nearly feel the presence of the “accuser of the saints” as God’s enemy is called. He was plaguing my husband with these feelings of unnecessary remorse, resulting in terrible physical pains. I’d had enough of this nonsense.

I had tried to encourage changes in healthy living, and he was doing his best to improve things with diet and exercise and all. But what was harming him from the unseen realm, we needed the help of Jesus Christ, Who not only heals, but forgives all, and defeats the spiritual enemy every time. I commanded, repeatedly, aloud in prayer that this condemnation would leave, immediately, and have no part on my dear one’s heart.

I rebuked the evil force trying to hold him captive against God’s will. I was not going to put up with this treatment. And it happened! At wonderful, long last! At that moment my husband had this wonderful experience of feeling Jesus so near and forgiving him for all, and lifting the weight that had been on his heart. A heavenly sensation came over him, and all pain stopped. It vanished completely, as he rested in peace for the rest of the night.

**Praise of the day:**

* I will praise the Lord because “He heals the broken in heart, and binds up their wounds.” —Psalms 147:3

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**Words of Hope –Trust God**

**Promise for the day:**

* Psalm115:9  …trust in the Lord:: he *is* your help and your shield.

**Think about it:**

What does the word “believe” mean? In Greek it means to “drink in”. Perhaps each language and culture has a slightly different way of expressing the idea. John G. Paton was translating the Bible into a language that seemed to have no equivalent for that word.

One day at last it came to him. As he was working, a native entered the room very tired and sat exhausted in one chair and rested his feet on another. The man expressed how good it felt to “lean his whole weight” on the chair. That was it! Dr. Paton noted the word used for “lean his whole weight”. He knew then what to use as the word for “believe”.

When we believe in Jesus, and trust Him with our life and all, we are putting our full weight on Him. We can trust Him to uphold us, take the weight off our shoulders, and give us peace in our soul.

**Praise for the day:**

* Psalm 33:21 Our heart shall rejoice in him, because we have trusted in his holy name.

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**Words of Hope – Sleep**

**Promise for the day:**

* Psa. 121:2-4  My help *cometh* from the LORD, which made heaven and earth. He will not suffer thy foot to be moved: he that keepeth thee will not slumber. Behold, he that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep.

**Think about it**:

When Bishop Bashford was on one of his Episcopal tours in China, he was in need of a place to sleep. Being unable to stay in the hotel, left him the only remaining option to sleep outside under a tree. He had been warned of the danger of doing so, for troublesome folks with evil intent were often on the prowl at night in that area.

As Bishop Bashford attempted to get rest, he found himself instead very wakeful, trying to be alert, aware and watchful should any danger be approaching. At last he was reminded of the words King David wrote in the book of Psalms, how God is awake all the time and watching over us. He then said to the Lord, "There is no use both of us being awake,” and peacefully went to sleep, and indeed was safe all night.

Whatever situation you are in you too can claim that promise and sleep peacefully while the Lord watches over you.

**Praise for the day:**

* I will praise God because: 2 Samuel 22:31 says — As for God, his way is perfect; the word of the Lord is tried: he is a buckler to all them that trust in him.

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**Words of Hope – God’s Word**

**Promise of the day:**

* Luke 12:24— Consider the ravens: for they neither sow nor reap; which neither have storehouse nor barn; and God feedeth them: how much more are ye better than the fowls?

**Think about it:**

A grandmother’s old unused grindstone came in handy one day. Sometimes it was a mystery just where food was going to come from—for her and her granddaughter. But she knew the Bible and trusted the Lord to provide.

The Bible tells of one time when Jesus was being taunted by the tempter to satisfy His personal hunger by using His power from God to turn stones into bread. Jesus rebuked the evil one and said that it is primarily God’s Word that gives life, not food alone.

On one morning, when the lady and little girl had nothing to eat, the table was set anyway, and then they prayed for God to supply the food. There was a knock just then at the door. A man wanted to buy an old grindstone! So he did, and with that money, food was purchased and set out for breakfast!

God, in His special way, chose to turn “a stone into bread” for these ones that loved His Word. And He can do the same for you.

**Praise of the day:**

* Psalms 144:15— Happy is that people, that is in such a case: yea, happy is that people, whose God is the Lord.

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**Words of Hope – It Pays to Obey**

**Promise of the day:**

* Deu. 28:2  And all these blessings shall come on thee, and overtake thee, if thou shalt hearken unto the voice of the Lord thy God.

**Think about it:**

“Pull over at the next gas station!” The firm voice came to the driver’s mind. He argued mentally with the instruction God was suddenly giving, saying how tired he was, and how he didn’t need gas anyway. However, the voice was insistent; he must do it, no matter how he felt.

Thankfully, the driver turned at the very next opportunity and not a second too late. What he heard and saw as soon as he stepped out of his VW van at the gas station, showed the utter importance of following what God said to do. A twelve-car smash-up happened, right at the place, right at the time he would have been driving. There was screeching, metal crushing, flames, and terrible injury and life loss.

The driver describes the feeling and his thoughts: “I stood mouth agape, my senses reeling under the impact of what had happened. As the numbness gradually subsided, I was struck by a thought that sent shock waves through my system so strong that they caused me to jump off the ground. “If I had not stopped, I would be right in the middle of that carnage!”

It pays to listen and obey God’s still small voice.

**Praise of the day:**

* Psa.109:30 I will greatly praise the Lord with my mouth; yea, I will praise him among the multitude.

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**Words of Hope – God sees and will reward**

**Promise of the day:**

* … Do not your giving before men, to be seen of them: [so that]  … your Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you openly.-- Matthew 6:1, 4

**Think about it:**

While rushing to an appointment, I passed a scruffy beggar with a baby in her arms. It’s a common sight in Caracas, Venezuela, where this took place.

*Give her something.* I recognized that inner voice as Jesus’. *But she looks like she would spend it on drugs,* I protested as I kept walking. *Well then, buy her some food.* Just then I came to a hot dog stand. *Okay, I’ll do it for You.*

I hurriedly ordered a hot dog and took it back to her. As I handed it to her, I told her that Jesus loved her and offered to pray for her. She accepted, and we bowed our heads and prayed right there on the street.

Several days later I stopped for a hot dog for myself at the same stand, but the vendor wouldn’t let me pay for it. “I saw what you did the other day,” he said. “You not only bought a hot dog for that homeless woman, but you also prayed with her. I’ve been on this spot for 15 years. Thousands of people pass my stand every day, but I had never seen that! You never have to pay to eat here again.”

Like that hot dog vendor, God is always watching, and “your Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you openly.” (Matthew 6:4)

**Praise of the day:**

* Psalm 135:3  Praise the LORD; for the LORD *is* good: sing praises unto his name; for *it is* pleasant.

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**Words of Hope – The Peacemaker**

**Verse of the day:**

* Blessed are the peacemakers.–Matthew 5:9

**Think about it:**

When Jesus preached the Sermon on the Mount, (Matthew 5–7.) one of the most quoted orations of all time, He said, “Blessed are the peacemakers.” So what is a peace*maker*? A peacemaker is someone who comes into a situation that is stressful, angry, or disturbed and creates peace. This is hard and requires courage.

In Jesus’ day, the Jewish people were suffering under Roman rule, and peace was superficial and tenuous at best. It took very little to create an uprising or a disturbance. That’s much like today, where it seems each news cycle hails a social media war fought by angry people with ever-polarizing opinions.

I used to think of “peacemaker” as a negotiator, with the objective being to convince both sides to compromise and come to an agreement. As a parent, I know what this kind of “peace” looks like. It’s a situation where one is only giving to get, and good will isn’t part of the equation. It’s the kind of peace that’s held together by rules and enforcers, and disintegrates as soon as it appears one side has failed to comply. As peacemakers, our most important job isn’t to change someone’s mind. Jesus didn’t say “Blessed are the mind-changers or argument-winners.”

Gregory Boyle, a Catholic priest who has dedicated his life to the gang community in Los Angeles, said something that I think is quite fitting: “Moral outrage is the opposite of God; it only divides and separates what God wants for us, which is to be united in kinship. Moral outrage doesn’t lead us to solutions—it keeps us from them. It keeps us from moving forward toward a fuller, more compassionate response to members of our community who belong to us, no matter what they’ve done.”

Spoken like a true peacemaker, one who has stepped out of the boundaries of merely keeping peace and into the hard work of crafting peace, and has inspired me to see, within my own world, opportunities to create peace by loving others into good will. – By Marie Alvero

**Praise of the day:**

* Psalm 117:2  For his merciful kindness is great toward us: and the truth of the Lord *endureth* for ever. Praise ye the Lord.

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**Words of Hope – The Earth**

**Verse of the day:**

* The Lord God took the man, and put him in the garden of Eden to dress it and keep it. -- Genesis 2:15

**Think about it:**

When it comes to the environment and climate change, it’s easy to mentally block out the topic entirely and decide that there’s nothing we can do about it—or foist the responsibility on someone else, relieving ourselves of the obligation. But God gave us the responsibility to take care of His creation, not just out of duty, but out of love for Him and His creatures.

“The Lord God took the man, and put him in the garden of Eden to dress it and keep it.” (Genesis 2:15 KJV) That’s the main factor that has motivated me to be more ecologically mindful.

Looking at our world and the damage the environment has sustained can lead to feelings of sadness, discouragement, and even fear. It’s also human nature to say: “Send my brother” or “Let the government or big corporations do it. They have the means and the money. It’s their responsibility.”

But there are many ways to make a difference. Consider Olivia Bouler. When she was 11, she started drawing birds and auctioning some of her drawings to help recovery efforts after an oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico. Positive action is potent, and contagious. Neighbors can band together to clean a park, kids can organize a cleaning crew to pick up trash from a beach. All of us can join tree-planting groups. Even small actions like turning off lights, not letting the faucet run, or taking shorter showers can make a difference and a better world for us and our children and future generations.

Actions speak louder than words, and change begins at home. Environmental sermons can make people uncomfortable and defensive, but environmental-friendly action can encourage others to make positive changes of their own. In Chile, like in many other countries, there are no colored bins for each kind of trash. But that doesn’t stop Hans, my German neighbor, from collecting all the cans and bottles from the nearby houses and taking them to a recycling plant himself.

And let’s not forget that taking care of the environment is also being kind to the people around us. An encouraging word to the man that tends to the municipal green areas and flowerbeds, a hearty thank-you to the lady that has to graciously handle the difficult personalities in a public hospital line, a kind greeting to the man cleaning the public bathroom of a mall. Let’s be the change we want to see. – By Gabriel García

**Praise of the day:**

* Psalm 124:8  Our help *is* in the name of the LORD, blessed *be* the LORD God who made heaven and earth.

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**Words of Hope – God is with us**

**Promise of the day**:

* … and, lo, I am with you alway, *even* unto the end of the world. --- Matthew 28:20

**Think about it:**

I heard a story about a young boy who was paralyzed and unable to move, except for his head. Clearly, it was hopeless for him to try to do anything “sporty.” But he didn’t resign himself. When he heard of a 5 km run behing hosted as a fundraiser for a friend who also had become paralyzed through a tragic accident, he had a bold idea. With the assistance of technology that enables him to type messages using his eyes and head, he told his father, “I want to run in that race.”

Instead of pointing out the impossibility of the plan, his father made a cart that his son could lie in and pulled it the entire 5 km. At the end of the race, his son typed another message: “This is the first time I don’t feel handicapped.” And so they did it again. And again. And again!

To date, this father has competed with his son in over 300 races—including marathons and triathlons. He runs, swims, and cycles, pulling, pushing, and carrying his son every single step of the way. Why? Simply because he loves his son and wants him to be happy. The son didn’t do anything particular to deserve such love. He’s the son, and that’s all that matters.

We’re the sons and daughters of our heavenly Father, which means we don’t have to push on alone when we’re weary. We can fall into His arms, and He will carry us. That’s what “I will never leave you nor forsake you” (Hebrews 13:5) means. No matter the mess we’re in, or the troubles we face, His love towards us never wavers. He is always there, ready to help us reach each goal, and one day, we’ll cross the ultimate finish line together. – by Chris Mizrany

**Praise of the day**:

* Psalm 146:1 Praise ye the LORD. Praise the LORD, O my soul.

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**Words of Hope – Giving**

**Verse of the day:**

* Let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver. – 2 Corinthians 9:7

**Think about it:**

Unselfishness isn’t just about giving money. Sometimes it’s easier to give money than to give of ourselves. To give our time, attention, sympathy, understanding, and prayers to someone else, we have to be the “real deal.” We have to reach out, to understand, to feel compassion, and to do something about it. Often it’s those sacrifices of time that really count—such as when we give up our day off to participate in a local charity’s work or to visit someone who is sick. It’s not just about money. It’s about what we give from our hearts, out of love.

There’s a great story about a missionary who was teaching in Africa. Before Christmas he had been telling his native students how Christians, as an expression of their joy, gave each other presents on Christ’s birthday.

On Christmas morning one of the natives brought the missionary a seashell of lustrous beauty. When asked where he had discovered such an extraordinary shell, the native said he had walked many miles to a bay, the only spot where such shells could be found.

“I think it was wonderful of you to travel so far to get this lovely gift for me,” the teacher exclaimed.

His eyes brightening, the native answered, “Long walk, part of gift.”

We each have many opportunities to help others. The Bible says: “Let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver.” Let’s look for ways to give to those around us. Let’s make it a habit. Let’s make giving unselfishly of our time, service, and finances part of our personal code of ethics, and we’ll find we will not lack, as God will give back to us in abundance, and our life of unselfishness will be a blessed life.

You’ll never regret giving, both in this life and in the life to come. When your Christian love moves from just being a sermon to being a living example of Jesus’ generosity, care, and sympathy, it’s like you’ve just dressed your love in work clothes and set about to build something beautiful. That’s the kind of practical everyday love that makes people stand up and take notice, as it’s a living example of the unconditional love of Jesus.

**Praise of the day:**

* Psalm 148:13  Let them praise the name of the LORD: for his name alone is excellent; his glory *is* above the earth and heaven.

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**Words of Hope – Encouragement**

**Verse of the day:**

* The entrance of Your words gives light; it gives understanding unto the simple. – Psalm 119:30

**Think about it:**

Shortly after Jesus healed “great multitudes” and fed 4,000 people from seven loaves and a few fish, He asked His disciples what people were saying about Him. They reported that some believed He was John the Baptist, others that He was Elijah or Jeremiah or one of the other prophets of old come back from the dead. These answers indicated that most people held Jesus in high regard and thought of Him as a great prophet, but they were still way short of the mark!

Jesus then asked them, “Who do you say that I am?” We can imagine the scene—the disciples lowering their heads or glancing at one another, unsure of what to answer. Then Simon Peter, apparently the most outspoken of the apostles, plucked up his courage and correctly identified Jesus’ true identity and purpose: “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

Throughout the Bible, Jesus is portrayed as many things—amongst others, the Light of the World, the Good Shepherd, the living God, our friend, and our Savior. No matter how Jesus is described, what’s truly wonderful is that we can each experience Him in our own way. Jesus takes us where we’re at, and He does often manifest Himself to each of us in the ways that we need or will best relate to as individuals.

My hope is the posts this month help you grow in your own relationship with the One who will always love you and seek the best for you.

**Praise of the day:**

* Psalm 103:22  Bless the LORD, all his works in all places of his dominion: bless the LORD, O my soul.

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**Words of Hope – God’s Generosity**

**Promise of the day:**

* Give, and it will be given to you. Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For with the measure you use it will be measured back to you. – Luke 6:38

**Think about it:**

Here’s a true story which expresses the beauty of generosity:

Many years ago, two young men were working their way through Stanford University. At one point their money was almost gone, so they decided to engage the great pianist Paderewski for a concert and use the profits for their board and tuition. Paderewski’s manager asked for a guarantee of $2,000.

The students worked hard to promote the concert, but they came up $400 short. After the performance, they went to the musician, gave him all the money they had raised, and promised to pay the $400 as soon as they could. It appeared that their college days were over.

“No, boys, that won't do,” said the pianist. “Take out of this $1,600 all your expenses, and keep 10 percent of the balance for each of you for your work. Let me have the rest.”

Years passed. Paderewski became premier of Poland following World War I. Thousands of his countrymen were starving. Only one man could help, the head of the U. S. Food and Relief Bureau. Paderewski's appeal to him brought thousands of tons of food.

Later he met the American statesman to thank him. “That's all right,” replied Herbert Hoover. “Besides, you don't remember, but you helped me once when I was a student in college.”

“The liberal soul shall be made fat: and he that watereth shall be watered also himself” (Proverbs 11:25 KJV). The principle of liberality set forth in that Scripture finds its origin in God. He is overflowing in His goodness, lavish in His mercy, and abounding in His grace. … Remember, liberality is part of God’s way of taking care of us.

“Liberality” as used in the above paragraph is not a common word these days. Some synonyms for it are big heartedness, generosity, and unselfishness.

**Praise of the day:**

* Psalm 104:1  Bless the LORD, O my soul. O LORD my God, thou art very great; thou art clothed with honour and majesty.

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**Words of Hope – God’s Love**

**Verse of the day:**

* Love covers a multitude of sins. --- 1 Peter 4:8

**Think about it:**

It’s easy to get our feelings hurt when we perceive someone has wronged us. Whether or not we have cause to be offended, when we take offense, our relationships can suffer. It’s as if we develop relational blind spots.

As hard as it is to admit, sometimes I’m easily offended. It’s easy to blame others when we get hurt, but the truth is, we have control over our emotions. And I can choose whether to feel offended.

I’ve learned to consider honestly whether I’m easily offended by asking the following questions:

* Do you find that your feelings are frequently hurt?
* Have people told you they feel as if they have to walk on eggshells around you?
* Are you constantly feeling annoyed?
* Do you frequently expect someone to apologize?
* Are you constantly repeating the words, “You hurt my feelings”?

Much like forgiveness is a choice, not being easily offended is also a choice. There was a time when I had to make this choice at work. I was looking forward to a new hire coming on board. Unfortunately, from day one, she made comments toward me that left me feeling … well, offended.

As a result of both her actions and my response, we frequently butted heads, causing our team to be less cohesive than it could have been. One day, I learned that this woman had recently been injured. In that moment, I had to make a decision. Was I willing to extend grace to her despite how she had treated me? The choice was clear.

So, a colleague and I scrambled to take care of some things for her, and we picked up the slack during her recovery. A short while later, my boss asked me why I had helped this woman, despite the way she had treated me.

“Because love covers a multitude of sins,” I replied. This answer comes from 1 Peter 4:8. The Amplified Bible explains that this means love forgives and disregards the offenses of others.

While I had every reason to be offended, the Lord impressed upon my heart that I had an opportunity to be kind. As a result, the relationship improved so that it was more professional. I extended grace to her, treating her as I would want to be treated. I worked hard to let go of the offenses and integrate the words of 1 Peter 4:8 into my life. And it worked!

Jesus’ love through the cross has covered a multitude of our sins. Allow His grace to overflow out of that excess to those in your life who offend you.—By Laurel Shaler

**Praise of the day:**

* Psalm 149:1  Praise ye the LORD. Sing unto the LORD a new song, *and* his praise in the congregation of saints.

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**Words of Hope – Turning the Page**

**Promise of the day:**

* … and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen. -- Matthew 28:20

**Think about it:**

One fact of life that can be difficult to accept is that in order for us to fully embrace the future, we must leave behind not only the distant past, but even the recent past. This can be especially hard in times of major transition, such as moving on from a relationship, or changing from one job or house to another. For me, it’s helpful to remember that life is like a book with pages to be turned. It’s impossible to read an entire book without turning its pages, which naturally means that every chapter must close in order for a new one to begin.

Since I’m blind, I read printed books with an app that takes a picture of each page as I hold the camera over it and it reads the page with a digital voice. Just like a sighted reader, whenever I reach the end of a page, I have to turn to the next one in order to continue with the story.

Throughout my life, I’ve experienced many page turning changes. Having been active in missions for most of my 36 years, I moved around a lot with my family. Many of these moves involved leaving behind a ministry I was personally vested in, as well as deep friendships, to start over in a new, unknown territory. I always felt hesitant at the beginning, and there were always mixed feelings. But each time, I managed to turn the page and move on with my life’s story. In the end, I was always glad to have made new friends and reached new goals, which wouldn’t have come about if I’d not been willing to turn the page.

The Bible is full of people who had to do some major page-turning in order to fulfill God’s calling for them, from Abraham right on to Jesus.

Do you find yourself at the close of a page or chapter in your life? I hope this encourages you to turn the page in faith and start the new chapter with confidence, knowing that the One who authors the book of your life has been with you up to this point, and will remain with you till the end.( Matthew 28:20.) -- By Steve Hearts

**Praise of the day:**

* Psalm 135:1  Praise ye the Lord. Praise ye the name of the Lord; praise *him,* O ye servants of the Lord.

**\*\***

**Words of Hope – Changes**

**Verse of the day:**

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

**Think about it:**

This is a big life lesson. There is a time for everything. There are seasons. Regardless of what season of life you are currently living through, you can probably expect a change at some point, because, as we know, seasons come and go.

For example, if you are currently struggling and times are very difficult, you can be confident that the season will change. When Solomon wrote the preceding scripture, he gave a lot of examples of the seasons and ways our lives can change:

A time to be born and a time to die

A time to plant and a time to uproot

A time to kill and a time to heal

A time to tear down and a time to build

A time to weep and a time to laugh

A time to mourn and a time to dance

A time to scatter stones and a time to gather them

A time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing

A time to search and a time to give up

A time to keep and a time to throw away

A time to tear and a time to mend

A time to be silent and a time to speak

A time to love and a time to hate

A time for war and a time for peace.

—Ecclesiastes 3:2–8

We were all born and we will all surely die. There are times when we will laugh and times when we will cry. There are times to hold on and times to let go. Times to succeed and times to fail.

One of the most beautiful promises in the Bible is given in this same chapter: “He has made everything beautiful in its time.” (Ecc. 3:11a) Whether you’re in a good or a difficult season, you can be sure that it’s all part of it becoming beautiful within God’s time. “He has also set eternity in the human heart; yet no one can fathom what God has done from beginning to end.” (Ecc. 3:11b)

I like the part that says, “no one can fathom.” When I was younger I had so many plans, ideas of what I wanted my life to look like. Most of the ideas I had for my life were good, or at least I thought so. I wanted to be able to rush to anywhere in the world that needed help. I wanted to help orphans and wipe out poverty. But God had a plan for me that I did not fathom.

I’m still watching that plan develop, but I’ve learned enough to know that God’s design is more far-reaching than anything I could fathom. I’ve learned that God is present in both times of sowing and times of reaping. And something else I’ve come to realize is that both seasons are repeating.

A farmer plants his crops every spring and harvests them every fall. Each year. He doesn’t get upset that he’s planting again another year. He doesn’t scream out in frustration, “I just did this last year!” The farmer knows the cycle will repeat every year, and he’s okay with that.

In that way, we should all make peace with the season in our lives. There is a time to laugh, and a time to cry, a time to sow, a time to reap, a time to give, and a time to receive. When the sad times come, sometimes it’s hard to remember that there’s usually a lot of happiness. When things disappoint, it’s easy to forget about all the things that have worked out wonderfully.

To God, one season isn’t more precious than another. He can use each season in our lives to bring about His design. Sometimes I think that God is smiling on me when things are going great, and that a trial or misfortune means I have fallen out of His favor. But experience has taught me that this is not so. A great artist will use lovely, bright colors—reds, yellows, purples, and blues—to convey their inspiration, but not without the contrasts of black, the muting of the grays, and the blurring of the whites.

You have to trust the Artist. His work speaks for itself, and time and again, He has proven that He does indeed make everything beautiful in His time. Your life is no exception to the high and low seasons. And neither is it an exception to the promise that it will be beautiful in His time.—Mara Hodler

**Praise of the day:**

* I praise the Lord because: “He has made everything beautiful in its time.” -- Ecclesiastes. 3:11a

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**Words of Hope -- As in a dream**

**Promise of the day**:

* … Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.  – Matthew 25:40

**Think about it:**

As in a dream, I faced my Maker. I knelt before the Lord, along with all the other souls. Before each of us lay our lives like the squares of a quilt in many piles. An angel sat before each of us, sewing our quilt squares together into a tapestry that represented our life. But as my angel took each piece of cloth off the pile, I noticed how ragged and empty each of my squares was. They were filled with giant holes.

Each square was labeled with a part of my life that had been difficult, the challenges and temptations I was faced with in everyday life. I saw hardships that I endured, which were the largest holes of all. I glanced around me. Nobody else had such squares. Other than a tiny hole here and there, the other tapestries were filled with rich color and the bright hues of worldly fortune. I gazed upon my own life and was disheartened.

My angel was sewing the ragged pieces of cloth together, threadbare and empty, like binding air. Finally the time came when each life was to be displayed, held up to the light, the scrutiny of truth. The others rose, each in turn, holding up their tapestries. So filled their lives had been.

My angel looked upon me, and nodded for me to rise. My gaze dropped to the ground in shame. I hadn’t had earthly fortune. I had love in my life, and laughter. But there had also been trials of illness, and death, and false accusations that took from me my world, as I knew it. I had to start over many times. I often struggled with the temptation to quit, only to somehow muster the strength to pick up and begin again.

I spent many nights on my knees in prayer, asking for help and guidance in my life. I had often been held up to ridicule, which I endured painfully, each time offering it up to the Lord in hopes that I would not melt beneath the judgmental gaze of those who unfairly judged me. And now, I had to face the truth. My life was what it was, and I had to accept it for what it was.

I rose and slowly lifted the combined squares of my life to the light. An awe-filled gasp filled the air. I gazed around at the others, who stared at me with wide eyes. Then, I looked upon the tapestry before me. Light flooded the many holes, creating an image, the face of Christ. Then the Lord stood before me, with warmth and love in His eyes

He said, “Every time you gave over your life to Me, it became My life, My hardships, and My struggles. Each point of light in your life is when you stepped aside and let Me shine through, until there was more of Me than there was of you.”

May all our quilts be threadbare and worn, allowing Christ to shine through.— By Margaret Marie Marsala

**Praise of the day:**

* Isaiah 12:4  And in that day shall ye say, Praise the LORD, call upon his name, declare his doings among the people, make mention that his name is exalted.

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**Words of Hope – Give God Your Worries**

**Verse of the day**:

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

**Think about it:**

Before you can help others, you need to let God deal with your worry. You know this, but I want to remind you: *Worry won’t help you.*

**Give Jesus control over every area of your life**.

Worry is a warning light that you have an area you haven’t fully given over to God. When God isn’t number one, you’ll worry in that area. When you love something more than God, it becomes a source of stress and anxiety in your life. Even good things—like our marriages, our children, and our ministries—can become sources of worry if we give them first place in our lives. When anything becomes an idol in our lives, it creates insecurity and worry.

**Relax and give God your worries in prayer.**

I’ve always told the people to count their blessings. In times like these, you must continually remind yourself of all God has done in your life. But I also think it’s important to count your worries. Often, we just have a general sense of anxiety, but we don’t know what’s causing it. Before you can give God your worries, you need to have a clear idea of what they are. Once you’ve written them down, you can hand them over to God in prayer.

**Trust God for one day at a time.**

Don’t steal your whole future by bringing its worries into today. Jesus said it this way, *“Don’t worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring its own worries. Today’s trouble is enough for today”*(Matthew 6:34 NLT). You have enough on your plate today. Don’t add anything else.

It’s okay to plan for tomorrow. Right now, we’re going through one of the most unique experiences in history. You need to make plans for what you’ll do in the days, weeks, and months to come. You can plan for tomorrow without living in tomorrow. You can only live in today.

God is constantly testing how much we trust him. God wants us to decide whether he really holds first place in our lives. This unique period of history is one of the biggest tests we’ll ever face when it comes to trusting God. God has promised to care for us. He will meet our needs. Will we trust him?

**Praise of the day:**

* Psalm 150:6  Let every thing that hath breath praise the LORD. Praise ye the LORD.

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**Words of Hope – Thoughts on Complaining**

**Verse of the day:**

* I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. – Philippians 4:11

**Think about it:**

When you’re going through a rough time, it helps to put your troubles in perspective by considering what some others have gone through. Take the apostle Paul, for example. He suffered plenty. “Five times I received forty stripes minus one,” he writes. “Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren.” (2 Corinthians 11:24-26.)

Having gone through all that, you’d think that of all people he’d have reason to complain or feel that God had maybe forsaken him. But to the contrary, he continued to trust God despite his troubles, saying: “I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need.” (Philippians 4:11-12) What was his secret to overcoming the obstacles? It’s found in the next verse: “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” (Philippians 4:13) He leaned on Jesus, and Jesus gave him strength. And through this, Paul became a great man of God and an inspiration to millions ever since.

It reminds me of a story about Maya Angelou a famed American poet and author. From the age of three to seven she was raised by her grandmother, a period of calm and stability in what would be a very traumatic childhood.

Grandma ran a general store, and one thing that riled her was people complaining. They’d complain about the heat, the cold, and a myriad of other issues that Maya’s grandmother thought trivial. Whenever that occurred Maya’s grandmother would wait until the complainer left the store, call Maya over to her and say, “Did you hear what Brother So-and-So or Sister Much-to-Do complained about? There are people who went to sleep all over the world last night, poor and rich and white and black, but they will never wake again. And those dead folks would give anything, anything at all for just five minutes of this weather that that person was grumbling about.

“So you watch yourself about complaining. What you’re supposed to do when you don’t like a thing is change it. If you can’t change it, change the way you think about it. Don’t complain.”

**Praise of the day:**

* Thank you Lord, “You have made known to me the path of life; You will fill me with joy in Your presence.”—Acts 2:28

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**Words of Hope -- Overcome Difficulties**

**Verse of the day:**

* Many are the afflictions of the righteous: but the LORD delivers him out of them all. -- Psalm 34:19

**Think about it:**

Here’s an excerpt of a book called Developing the Leader within You by John C. Maxwell.

Many of the Psalms were born in difficulty. Most of the Epistles were written in prison. Most of the greatest thoughts of the greatest thinkers of all time had to pass through the fire. Bunyan wrote Pilgrim’s Progress from jail. Florence Nightingale, too ill to move from her bed, reorganized the hospitals of England. Semi-paralyzed and under constant menace of apoplexy, Pasteur was tireless in his attack on disease. During the greater part of his life, American historian Francis Parkman suffered so acutely that he could not work for more than five minutes at a time. His eyesight was so wretched that he could scrawl only a few gigantic words on a manuscript, but he wrote twenty magnificent volumes of history.

Bury a person in the snows of Valley Forge, and you have a George Washington. Raise him in abject poverty, and you have an Abraham Lincoln. Strike him down with infantile paralysis, and he becomes a Franklin D. Roosevelt. Burn him so severely that the doctors say he will never walk again, and you have a Glenn Cunningham, who set the world’s one-mile record in 1934. Have him or her born in a society filled with racial discrimination, and you have a Booker T. Washington, a George Washington Carver, or a Martin Luther King Jr. Call him a slow learner and retarded—writing him off as uneducable—and you have an Albert Einstein.

A study of 300 highly successful people, people like Franklin D. Roosevelt, Helen Keller, Winston Churchill, Albert Schweitzer, Mahatma Gandhi, and Albert Einstein, reveals that one-fourth had handicaps, such as blindness, deafness, or crippled limbs. Three-fourths had either been born in poverty, came from broken homes, or at least came from exceedingly tense or disturbed situations.

Why did the achievers overcome problems while thousands are overwhelmed by theirs? They refused to hold on to the common excuses for failure. They turned their stumbling blocks into stepping stones. They realized they could not determine every circumstance in life, but they could determine their choice of attitude toward every circumstance.

**Praise of the day:**

* Psalm 140:12 I will praise the Lord for: I know that the LORD will maintain the cause of the afflicted, and the right of the poor.

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**Words of Hope – Losing Everything**

**Verse of the day:**

* And [Job] said, Naked came I out of my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return thither: the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord. -- Job 1:21:

**Think about it:**

Christopher was a 17-year-old student who had just entered university. Being alone in a big city and living away from his family for the first time in his life was a difficult experience. Because of his limited income, he could not afford to live on campus with his classmates, but instead had rented a small, sparsely furnished room about a 20-minute walk from the university.

One evening, after a long day of attending lectures, researching material for his thesis and studying in the library, he packed his books and personal items into his backpack and began his walk home. About halfway into his walk, he was assaulted. Two young men grabbed him from behind, while another cornered him from the front, and threatened to hurt him if he didn’t hand over his wallet.

The thugs proceeded to seize anything of value they could find. They searched and emptied Christopher’s pockets, snatching his wallet and phone, tearing off his heavy backpack, and even taking his jacket, before they disappeared down the darkened streets.

Shaken and scared, Christopher eventually got up and cautiously returned to his apartment, where he collapsed on his bed in exhaustion. The next day, reality struck. The thieves had taken everything: his phone, money, textbooks, school ID, ATM card, papers, and even one of his important project assignments which he had almost completed!

How would he go about informing the police of the incident? Would they ever be able to recover the stolen items? How was he going to go to school if he didn’t have his school ID to show at the entrance? How was he going to get his school ID if he didn’t have his papers to prove who he was? How would he ask his parents for help if he didn’t have his phone?

After several minutes of frantic thoughts like this, he finally begged one of his neighbors to let him borrow their phone to call his parents and tell them what had happened. His father answered the phone and Christopher proceeded to tell him everything that transpired the night before. After confirming that he was all right, he went on to tell him about his dilemma.

“Dad, they took everything: my textbooks, my money, my school ID, my papers, my phone. I lost all my contacts. I lost everything! What am I going to do now?!” Instead of just offering his son sympathy or giving advice on what to do next, the father calmly replied, “Well, son, remember this, I have lost a whole lot more in my lifetime than you have.” He then told him this story:

“When I was younger, before I met your mom, I was traveling from my hometown to a city on the coast some distance away. I was traveling there in the hopes of applying for a teaching job. The journey would take about four hours by open boat. Together with the other passengers, I loaded all my belongings into the boat, and we set off. I placed my backpack by my feet, and was carrying some important papers on my lap, as I didn’t want to lose or misplace them.

“The journey was going smoothly. But then, towards the end of the voyage, as dusk was approaching, the boat’s engine suddenly died out. People began panicking and looking around, wondering what was going on. Within minutes, we could feel water seeping in on our feet. We were sinking! In those days, they didn’t have life jackets available on those boats. I knew how to swim, but most of my fellow passengers didn’t.

“Looking out, I could barely see the shoreline several kilometers away in the distance. I had never swum a distance like that before. By now, the water had risen and my backpack, papers, and all my belongings were completely submerged. With the sound of my fellow passengers still crying and screaming, I tore off my shoes, stood up, and took the leap overboard into the murky water. Not long after, the boat sank.

“I swam to get away from it. I swam and swam until my legs and arms were aching. Darkness was falling and there was still quite a distance to swim. I was so tired. I didn’t know how long I would be able to continue swimming.

“Then, coming from my right side, I saw the light of an approaching tugboat. As it drew nearer, I started screaming, yelling, and splashing around. Thankfully, the beam of its light illuminated me in the water and one of the crew members saw me and alerted the captain. They rescued me, wrapped me up in a blanket, and ushered me below deck, where I fell asleep exhausted. I later learned that they rescued a few of the other passengers who had managed to escape the sinking boat.

“Son, I was carrying most of my belongings with me at the time. All those things I had taken with me disappeared beneath the surface of the water, when the boat sank. I lost everything I owned then, son, but I didn’t lose my life, and because I hadn’t lost my life, I hadn’t really lost everything. All those things that seemed so valuable and important at the time (most of which I don’t even remember what they were), I have either gotten back or didn’t need since then.

“When I arrived in the new city, I had to start from scratch with just the clothes on my back. Yes, it was very difficult to begin with, but I kept going. As far as I understand it now, God wanted me to go through that dramatic experience so that I would have a completely new start in my life. I lost everything I was relying on: my savings, my CV, my best suit that I was planning to wear for the interview. But in losing those things, I learned that I could only rely on the Lord and His help. He pulled me through that tough time and got me to where I am today. And I know He will do the same for you, too.”

**Praise of the day:**

* I will praise You because You said , “I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”—Jeremiah 29:11 NIV

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**Words of Hope – Gift of Joy**

**Verse of the day:**

* Happy is that people, … whose God is the LORD.  -- Psalm 144:15

**Think about it:**

Here’s a great verse: “The people of Judah and Israel were as numerous as the sand on the seashore; they ate, they drank and they were happy.” (1 Kings 4:20)

I have years of Bible study and learning under my belt, but I’m not sure I’ve heard this verse before. At least, its meaning has always slipped past me. The verse is talking about a period of Israel’s history, during the reign of King Solomon, when there was peace in the land and great prosperity. And what did the people do? They feasted, partied, and were merry!

Sadly, this is a new concept for me. I’m the girl who’s always waiting for the inevitable. When things are good, my instinct is not to enjoy it. Rather, I start to worry, wondering around which corner my next struggle-slash-tragedy-slash-suffering is lurking. I used to think I was preparing myself, but what if I was forfeiting opportunities for joy?

Obviously, we experience sadness, suffering and even prolonged seasons of hardship. But the more I learn about the nature of God, the more I understand how vested He is in our happiness. Abundant joy is a blessing from His hand: “This is the day the Lord has made; we will rejoice and be glad in it!” (Psalm 118:24)

In the hard times and the struggles, which are guaranteed parts of life, I’ll continue to depend on God’s grace, joy, and peace. But in the good times, when there are happy kids, good friends, blue skies, and a good man loving me, I’m going to celebrate life and be happy! I’m going to recognize how wonderful life is, and I hope you will too! --by Marie Alvero

**Praise of the day:**

* Isa 12:2-4  Behold, God *is* my salvation; I will trust, and not be afraid: for the LORD JEHOVAH *is* my strength and *my* song; he also is become my salvation. Therefore with joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation. And in that day shall ye say, Praise the LORD, call upon his name, declare his doings among the people, make mention that his name is exalted.

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**Words of Hope – Think on the Good**

**Verse of the day**:

* Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.—Philippians 4:8

**Think about it:**

Thank the Lord for all the good things! “Whatsoever things are good, think on these things.” Don’t dwell on the mistakes and the errors, or what you think may be errors. A lot of people do that with the Bible—they dwell on all its supposed mistakes and contradictions and errors.

I suppose the Lord allows some of those things, just like He says He permitted Jesus to be a cornerstone to some people, but a stumbling block to others. There are even things that Paul couldn’t understand! “For we know in part, but when that which is perfect is come, that which is in part will be done away.” (1Cor. 3:9-10)

Apparently, the Lord has allowed a few unknowns, or even mistakes or mistranslations over which people can stumble if they choose to, but the vast majority of the millions and millions of Christians have been saved and served the Lord and gone home to glory without stumbling over those things.

We don’t chuck out the whole world because a few things seem bad. We don’t commit suicide because we have difficulties and cast away our whole life just because we have problems and make mistakes. When you find one little brown spot on an apple, you don’t throw away the whole apple. You just cut out the little brown spot; you correct it.

For God’s sake, we ought to think on the good things and thank the Lord for all the right things. Someday we’ll understand and we’ll know—even as we’re known. Meanwhile, let’s thank God for all we do know and for all the good! Amen?

**Praise of the day:**

* Psalm 115:18 But we will bless the LORD from this time forth and for evermore. Praise the LORD.

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**Words of Hope – We are God’s VIPs**

**Verse of the day:**

* Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and *that* your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you. – John 15:16

**Think about it:**

There are times in life when we each feel like an anonymous unknown. It’s a discouraging realization. You’re a statistic—a woman or a man, over forty or under forty, single or married, able-bodied or disabled.

Every so often, you put your vote in the ballot box and wonder if it makes a difference. If you didn’t show up to work today, you wonder if anyone (apart from the payroll department) would even notice).

Not many achieve the type of fame that would make us stand out in the mass of humanity. And even if we do, fame is lean comfort in difficult times, and usually transitory. The reality is that few of us feel like Very Important Persons (VIPs), much less are viewed that way by the world at large.

Perhaps this was how Nathanael felt, living in first-century Palestine under the shadow of a brutal military occupation. We’re not told why he was sitting alone under a fig tree—maybe he was reflecting on his powerlessness to change anything; maybe he was in prayer. At any rate, his friend Philip finds him and shares some good news—they have found the Messiah. Nathanael agrees to come and meet Jesus.

The conversation bears repeating: *As they approached, Jesus said, “Now here is a genuine son of Israel—a man of complete integrity.” “How do you know about me?” Nathanael asked. Jesus replied, “I could see you under the fig tree before Philip found you.”*

Nathanael is astonished to find out that God has been watching him. It is the realization that God knows him that inspires him to proclaim that Jesus is the Son of God and become an enthusiastic follower. Even when nobody else seems to be thinking about us, God certainly is! He’s been watching over us our entire lives, even before we were born, and will continue all the way through. Job reflected on this while in the midst of his troubles: “He keeps a close watch on everything I do.”

God not only thinks about us, He admires us: “There will be recognition for each person from God,” and “God will rejoice because of you.” We are not unknown to God. He knows you and me by name. Not mere statistics, but valued. You and me. We are God’s VIPs. -- Abi May

**Praise of the day:**

* I will rejoice because: “He will bless them that fear the LORD, both small and great.” – Psalm 115:13

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**Words of Hope –God Declares His Handiwork**

**Verses of the day:**

* The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims His handiwork. -- Psalm 19:1

**Think about it:**

This is one of the clearest biblical statements that nature itself is meant to show the greatness of God. These words are in the present tense. That is, the heavens “are declaring,” and the sky “is proclaiming” the creative work of God. It’s a continual display. What we see in nature is meant to constantly show us that God exists and tell us how amazing a Creator He truly is.

Paul Brand is a brilliant medical doctor who did pioneering work in the treatment of leprosy. He has received the Albert Lasker Award, been made a Commander of the Order of the British Empire by the Queen, served as the only Westerner on the Mahatma Gandhi foundation, and had medical procedures named after him.

Brand grew up in India, where his parents were missionaries. At the age of nine he was sent to boarding school in England. Five years later, while a 14-year-old student there, he received a telegram informing him that his beloved father had died of Blackwater Fever. Brand cherished fond memories of his father, a man who had a great love for people and a great love for the natural world around him.

A short time after he received news of his father’s death, Paul Brand received a letter from his father. It had been posted prior to his father’s death but took some time to reach Brand, as it came by ship. Its words impacted deeply upon the young son.

Paul’s father described the hills around their home and then finished with these words: “God means us to delight in his world. It isn’t necessary to know botany or zoology or biology in order to enjoy the manifold life of nature. Just observe. And remember. And compare. And be always looking to God with thankfulness and worship for having placed you in such a delightful corner of the universe as the planet Earth.”

The more we know about the world around us, the more glory we give to God. The more we discover, the more evidence we have that He is the one responsible for nature and its laws. A person needs the Bible and personal faith in Christ in order to have a proper relationship with God. However, a person needs only to look honestly at the world around him in order to realize that God exists.

Does God love you? You can see it and feel it in the beautiful world He’s given you to live in. Just look around. A quiet spot in nature is best, but if that’s not possible, a view of a tree, a few plants, or even a patch of sky will do. Switch off your phone. Forget your work. Forget the mess. Put all other thoughts aside, and give God your full attention. Concentrate on something that God made—a flower, a tree, a bird, a butterfly, a cloud, a pond or stream, the breeze. Imagine the love and care that God put into creating that single thing. Then multiply that by all the others like it in the world. What does that tell you about God’s love and care for you? Doesn’t that give you a sense of peace and well-being? Take a few long, deep breaths. Relax, soak in God’s love, take in the view, and listen, as God reveals more of His truths.

**Praise of the day:**

* I will praise the Lord because, “The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge. *There is* no speech nor language, *where* their voice is not heard. Their line is gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world. In them hath he set a tabernacle for the sun, Which *is* as a bridegroom coming out of his chamber, *and* rejoiceth as a strong man to run a race. His going forth *is* from the end of the heaven, and his circuit unto the ends of it: and there is nothing hid from the heat thereof.”  – Psalm 19:1-6

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**Words of Hope – Like Being with God**

**Verse of the day:**

* God, thou art my God; early will I seek thee: my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is; -- Psalm 63:1

**Think about it:**

There she was at the door, jumping up and down for joy, barking and wagging her tail, as if to say: “He’s back!” After a long and tiring day, I received the most wonderful welcome from our black Labrador retriever. It made me feel good. I smiled and gave her the attention she wanted. After all, a dog is man’s best friend. But then a funny thought struck me: *Am I just as excited when I meet with Jesus?*

I’ll be honest: I have a way to go. I treasure prayer, and I enjoy studying my Bible, but compared to my dog’s sincere outburst of joy, I realize my enthusiasm could be greater. Why *is* my dog so happy to see me? I suppose the answer is as simple as it is deep. It’s because she treasures being with me. She isn’t only happy because she knows I feed her and take her on long walks through the fields. She’s happy because *she wants to be with me*.

When I read about the heroes of faith, I notice they had the same attitude. These men and women of God *liked* to pray. They *liked* to read God’s Word. They looked forward to the moment they could spend time with their Lord. They loved being with Him early in the morning, late at night … and almost constantly throughout the day.

Is that enthusiasm reserved for the great heroes of faith? What about average people like me? For a while, I thought I had that excitement in my relationship with God, but after seeing my dog today, I’m looking at it a bit differently. Sometimes my time with God feels flat, because I’ve got my priorities wrong. I’m not seeking God because I like to be with Him, but because I have selfish reasons of my own. I’m sad, or lonely, or sick, or struggling to pay the bills, or all of these things. In short, I need something

from Him.

It’s not wrong to pray for needs. Jesus wants us to do that. But in our relationship with God, we should want to be with Him because we *like* it. Oswald Chambers said: “The goal of prayer is that we get closer to God. It’s not that our prayers are answered.”

I’m going to take that lesson to heart. Funny that I had to learn it from my dog. – By Koos Stenger

**Praise of the day:**

* Psalm 63:3-4  Because thy lovingkindness *is* better than life, my lips shall praise thee. Thus will I bless thee while I live: I will lift up my hands in thy name.

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**Words of Hope -- Jesus and My Blue Suede Shoes**

**Verse of the day:**

* Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. -- Philippians 2:4:

**Think about it:**

I had a vivid dream last night that set my wheels in motion. I like how dreams are so unexpected and take you to new places—a bit like driving down the highway and seeing an attraction and then taking the time to see it, like we did one day on the way home from the airport when we stopped to see the Luray Caverns in Virginia. It was an amazing experience that we would have missed if we had just kept driving.

In the dream, I was at a restaurant and Elvis Presley was there. One of the customers was shouting that the waiter had accidentally stepped on his shoes. Upon hearing the man yelling, Elvis jumped up and started to sing “Don’t Step on My Blue Suede Shoes.” I usually don’t remember my dreams, so when I do, I take the time to go “exploring” to see if there might be some spiritual takeaway for me.

A quick search, and the fascinating origin of the song was found. A series of people made the song popular, starting with Johnny Cash back in 1955. He was on a country music tour with Elvis and some other musicians when he struck up a conversation with musician Carl Perkins. Johnny told him a story about his sergeant, from the time when he was stationed in Germany in the U.S. Air Force. This sergeant had just gotten a three-day pass and was getting dressed up for a night on the town. He pointed down at his military-issued black suede shoes and said, “Tonight, these shoes are blue!” Meaning that the ordinary would become extraordinary, and he was going to have a great time.

Johnny told Carl, “You should write a song about that.” Carl blew off the advice, saying, “I don’t know anything about shoes. How can I write a song about shoes?”

Carl put the idea aside until a few days later when he was playing at a dance. He noticed a guy in the audience telling everyone around him, “Don’t step on my suedes.” For those of you who may not know much about suede, it is very hard to clean. At the time of this song they were somewhat of a luxury shoe line. What stood out to Carl was that this guy was more worried about his blue suede shoes than appreciating the lovely girl he was dancing with. He wondered, “Could it be that Johnny was on to something?”

Carl went home and tried to put the idea into song, trying various nursery rhymes until he hit upon “One for the money, two for the show, three to get ready, now go man, go.” He got his brothers to play backup with him and recorded it in 1955. It soon became number one on the charts and the top seller for 16 weeks, selling over a million copies. It seemed that he had made it to the big time until a terrible car accident left him and his brothers severely injured. “I was a poor farm boy, and with ‘Shoes’ I felt I had a chance, but suddenly there I was in the hospital.”

When Presley heard about the accident, he wanted to help Carl in some way, and recorded his version of the song in Carl’s honor. Elvis’s lead guitar player Moore said, “Elvis wasn’t really thinking at that time that it was going to make money for Carl; he was doing it as more of a tribute type thing. Of course, Carl was glad he did. It really helped, as his record sales had started going down.”

One takeaway from this story for me was that the bus of new opportunities may be waiting for us to board, but it won’t wait forever. We have to seize that moment like Carl did. We also need to be sensitive and aware of what is happening around us to find the ways in which God may be leading us to embark on a new adventure. He often uses other people to get us started. We need to be good listeners.

Johnny Cash cared enough about Carl to share his idea with him instead of hoarding it for himself. We should be aware of ways we can help others. As it says in Philippians 2:4: “Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others.”

Carl’s sense of feeling incapable brought to my mind what most of the great Bible heroes experienced. Some thought they were too young, like Jeremiah, or too old, like Abraham and Zacharias. Some thought they were underqualified, like the shepherd boy David. Some thought they were poor speakers, like Moses, or too sinful, like Peter and Paul. We all feel unqualified at times, but it is God that works in us to do His great pleasure. It is His power in us that brings His plan to fruition.

Another thing is that when we start on our journey of faith, it takes effort and working together with others to start something new. It is rarely a one-man show. One idea may have been the result of a whole chain of events before it came into being, which can be seen in the inventions which were the result of different inventors building on what others had done.

The lyrics to the song make us think about what we value in life. What are our “blue suede shoes”? What is it that we want to protect and treasure? More than things, it is our faith and trust in the Lord to work out His good purpose in our lives that we hold sacred.

On our faith journey this year, we may face severe setbacks like Carl did with his car accident, but with the help of our friends, we can get through it—Jesus being our best friend ever.

Lastly, though we may not realize it, our influence lives on through others. Carl Perkins’s song was considered one of the first rockabilly (rock and roll + hillbilly or bluegrass) records, drawing from elements of blues, country, and pop music of the time, which would inspire many sub-styles and genres of music to come.

Paul McCartney claimed that “if there were no Carl Perkins, there would be no Beatles.” The same could be said of us: If there were no … (put your name here), there would be no … (the name of someone you have influenced).

Is Jesus says to you, “Go, man, go!”? -- By Curtis Peter van Gorder

**Praise of the day:**

* Psalm 68:4  Sing unto God, sing praises to His name: extol Him that rides upon the heavens and rejoice before Him.

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**Words of Hope – God’s Take on the Poor**

**Verse of the day:**

* Blessed is he who considers the poor; the Lord will deliver him in time of trouble.*—*Psalm 41:1

**Think about it:**

Two thousand one hundred! That’s not a date but a number. Bono, the lead singer of rock band U2, known for his anti-poverty campaigns, notes that this is how many mentions of poverty there are in the Scriptures: “That’s a lot of airtime.”

In the introduction to the *Poverty and Justice Bible*, the Bible Society adds, “A concern for the poor and an emphasis on just and fair behaviour flows through the Bible like a river. It underpins the laws of the Old Testament and resounds through the words of the prophets; it forms a core part of all that Jesus said and did and shapes the activities of those who followed him.”

The poor come to all of us in many forms. Let us be sure that we never turn our backs on them, wherever we may find them. For when we turn our backs on the poor, we turn [our backs] on Jesus Christ.*—*Mother Teresa

Many of the world’s current problems of inequality and poverty have their origins in a loss of empathy. Author and psychologist Daniel Goleman observed, “When we focus on ourselves, our world contracts as our problems and preoccupations loom large. But when we focus on others, our world expands. Our own problems drift to the periphery of the mind and so seem smaller, and we increase our capacity for connection—or compassionate action.”

The good-hearted understand what it’s like to be poor; the hardhearted haven’t the faintest idea.*—*Proverbs 29:7 MSG When the Bible talks about “the poor,” it’s not only referring to those who are destitute but also the downtrodden, oppressed, defenseless, and unrepresented. There is a clear connection in its pages between poverty and injustice, while justice is linked to honesty and fairness.

The Bible offers practical instructions. Here are just a couple of examples: giving a fair wage to employees (Deuteronomy 24:14–15.) sharing part of our income( Leviticus 23:22.) and Jesus also suggested making friends with those who are less fortunate than ourselves. (Luke 14:12–14.) Study the Word and see if you can find more.--By Chris Hunt

**Praise of the day:**

* Psalm 147:7  Sing unto the LORD with thanksgiving; sing praise upon the harp unto our God:

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**Words of Hope -- Over Coming Evil**

**Verse of the day:**

* Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good. —Romans 12:20-21

**Think about it**:

Justin groped for the doorknob. His eyes were clinched tightly shut. "Eric threw dirt in my face," he sobbed as Mother hurried to let him in. "I can't see! I can't see!" While she talked calmly, Mother washed the dirt from his eyes. Finally the last speck was out. "I'll get even with Eric if it's the last thing I do," Justin threatened. Mother frowned.

"Eric was wrong, but getting even won't accomplish anything." "It'll teach him not to throw dirt in people's eyes," Justin argued. At bedtime when Dad read Romans 12:17-21, Justin scowled. "Does that mean I'm supposed to be good to Eric to make him ashamed of the way he treated me? Is that how I get even?"

Mother shook her head. "You're not supposed to try to get even. The 19th verse says, "Never avenge yourselves. Leave that to God. For it is written, ‘I will take vengeance, I will repay those who deserve it,' says the Lord.'"

"How's the Lord going to repay Eric for what he did?" Justin wanted to know. "Maybe he knows Eric has already suffered enough," Dad replied.

"I'm the one who got hurt!" remarked Justin.

"Yes, but Eric has a load of guilt and worry to carry," Dad explained. "He's probably one really scared fellow, wondering how badly you were hurt."

"But the Bible says to heap coals of fire on our enemy's head," Justin pointed out. "Isn't that getting even?"

"That was written before people had matches. If their fire went out, they had to borrow live coals from a neighbor, and they carried these in a pot on their heads," Dad explained. "So this verse is telling you to help your enemy. Don't get revenge. Overcome his evil with your good."

"That sounds hard," Justin grumbled.

"Not nearly as hard as it would be to keep fighting with him," Mother reasoned. "Wouldn't you really prefer to have Eric for a friend than an enemy? Justin grinned. "I guess you're right about that."

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**Words of Hope – Forgiving Others**

**Verse of the day:**

* “Forgive us the wrongs we have done, as we forgive the wrongs that others have done to us.” --Matthew 6:12

**Think about it:**

The first time I heard that Bible verse, my heart hurt, and I felt so ashamed. Why? Because I knew there were people I hadn’t forgiven. Yet I really wanted God to forgive me for the things that I had done that hurt someone else.

I didn’t want God to forgive me the way *I* forgave others, because I knew I hadn’t forgiven others! But I wanted God to forgive me, because *He* is merciful, because I really needed it, and because I was sorry for what I’d done. But I felt *others weren’t* sorry for what they’d done to *me*. So that wasn’t fair! Or so I thought.

Squirming in my seat, and in my heart, I told God in prayer that I didn’t feel that was fair. Then He spoke to my heart and said, *It wasn’t fair what they did to Me either,* referring to His death on the cross.

*I’m so sorry about that*, I replied*. But You’re God and You can do the impossible. I’m just a weak woman who does stupid things sometimes. Well, I made you in My image and likeness, didn’t I? So you have what it takes to do what you need to do. I know, because I gave it to you. Oh … right. Well, then, You’ll have to be the One within me to forgive them, because I don’t feel strong enough. You’re my strength, Lord. So please help me to forgive them, by Your grace.*

And He’s helped me every time since! Forgiveness isn’t easy, yet it *is* possible with His help.

I have discovered that forgiveness is an ongoing process, and in His love and mercy, God has given me a few tools to help make it easier along the way. Some of the tools are funny, some are profound, and some are just good sense—like looking at things a different way, perhaps the way God sees things.

One funny tool is a sense of humor. The Bible says, “A happy heart is good medicine and a cheerful mind works healing.” (Proverbs 17:22 AMP.) Just like the right medicine can help soothe our aches and pains, and speed up our healing from injuries or sickness, so a happy heart—a good sense of humor—can be very helpful to comfort and soothe our hearts and

minds when others have hurt us, whether intentionally or unintentionally.

One time when I was working alongside some new coworkers, I just couldn’t seem to do things the way they liked. I was feeling angry at them and sorry for myself. Alone in prayer, I started to tell God, *Well, if they don’t like me …* Before I could finish my sentence, a still small voice said to my heart, *I’ll eat their French fries!* What?!

That made me laugh! Because out of the blue, it reminded me of an inside joke my late husband and I shared. Years ago, when he was first learning Spanish, he and some friends were having lunch together. As they were finishing, he said to someone in broken Spanish, “If you don’t like me, I’ll eat your French fries!” The friends were shocked! Then they laughed, because what he meant to say was, “If you don’t like them, I’ll eat your French fries.” Anyway, that good laugh helped me lighten up, so I could forgive my new coworkers and stop taking myself so seriously.

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**Words of Hope -- There’s Room For Us All**

**Verse of the day:**

* He saved us, not because of righteous things we have done, but because of his mercy.—Titus 3:5 NIV

**Think about it:**

Throughout my life, I’ve received my share of (well-deserved) consequences for wrongdoing. But more than once, I *didn’t* get what I deserved. Instead, I received mercy.

One day when I was around 12, my family was at the mall. I was supposed to keep an eye on my younger brother while my parents stood in line, but I got distracted, and he wandered away and almost reached the parking lot outside before we found him. Did my parents give me a stern lecture? You bet, but it was tempered with so much love and mercy. I got grace that day, undeserved but never forgotten.

When I was a little older, I once took something that wasn’t mine. When my mom confronted me, I felt blood thundering in my ears as I thought *Why did I do this? Life will never be the same!* But Mom took me in her arms and said she knew I could be a better man—and to start, I would return the item immediately. And it turned out I was right (however, not in the way I expected)—my life *has* never been the same since this poignant lesson.

Then came the nasty fights, pointless arguments, and snide comebacks of my teen years and young adulthood. I would behave badly to a friend, sibling, or parent, and then feel ashamed, knowing I had earned exclusion, rejection, or some other consequence. Sometimes, I got it. But often, I found that others had bigger souls and hearts than I imagined, and time and again, I was forgiven.

Now I strive to be both a loving husband to my amazing wife and a kind father to my two little girls. Most days, I do okay. Some days, not so much. There have been times when I’ve behaved badly and it was hard to face not only them, but also myself. But incredibly, when my head has been bowed in shame, their love lifted it and blessed me with their kindness and reassurance. All this has shown me that life is one long learning process.

Jesus forgave those who hated, beat, and killed Him. He had patience with His disciples when they struggled to understand His teachings. He welcomed back those who had denied Him and friends who had hurt Him deeply. He touched the doubters and outcasts and gently lifted their heads, blessing them with unrestrained love. He affirms to us daily that there’s room in His kingdom for all of us lost and lonely sinners when we come to Him. -- Chris Mizrany

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**Words of Hole -- Forgive Completely**

**Verse of the day:**

* Mat 18:21-22 Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times? Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven.

**Think about it:**

Maybe Peter thought he was going to stump Jesus when he asked the question “Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me?” He wanted a number, some quantification of when enough was enough and forgiveness was spent. Peter throws out a number, “Seven times?” “No, not seven times,” Jesus responds, “but seventy times seven!”

Some quick multiplication tells us that 490 seems to be the magic number—a much larger number than Peter was suggesting. But it’s not a random number. As always, Jesus’ words were precise and targeted. In Hebrew numerology, each letter has a numeric value, and words that have the same numeric value are often connected in meaning. “Tamim,” the Hebrew word for “complete” or “perfect,” has a numeric value of 490.

In other words, you forgive fully. You don’t set a limit on your forgiveness. Let me state the obvious here: this is hard! Sometimes forgiveness is not deserved, or even sought out. Sometimes there’s no repentance. But still, the choice to forgive is already made. I know I will forgive because that is what Jesus has asked of me, and what’s more, it is what He has done for me. He has forgiven me for all my sins, past, present and future.

So I will strive to forgive in the same way. One of the biggest things I’ve learned about forgiveness is that it’s a continuous process. I can make the choice to forgive someone for something, and be genuine in my desire to forgive, but down the road, I may again find myself angry at the person for the exact same offense.

Maybe that’s another way the 490 comes in? Continually forgiving for the same event until the memory doesn’t make me angry, vengeful, or distraught. Sometimes, forgiving takes more strength and love than I feel capable of. Thankfully, forgiveness isn’t an emotion. It’s a choice and an action. Because we are saved through Jesus, we have the grace to make the choice to forgive others.--Marie Alvero

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**Words of Hope – What’s Your Headline**

A friend just sent me a short story by an unknown author that resonated with me. I think many of us can relate to it at this time. It went like this…

Sometimes I just want it to stop—all the talk of COVID-19, protests, looting, and brutality. I lose my way and become convinced that this “new normal” is real life. But then I met an 87-year-old who talked of living through polio, diphtheria, Vietnam, and protests, yet he was still enchanted with life. He seemed surprised when I said that 2020 must be especially challenging for him.

“No,” he said, slowly looking me straight in the eyes, “I learned a long time ago to not see the world through the printed headlines. I see the world through the people that surround me. I see the world with the realization that we love big. “Therefore, I choose to write my own headlines:

* *“Husband loves wife today.*
* *“Family drops everything to come to Grandma’s bedside.”*
* He patted my hand. “*Old man makes new friend.*”

His words collided with my worries, freeing them from the tether I had been holding tight. They floated away, and my spirit felt renewed. My headline now reads, *Woman overwhelmed by the spirit of kindness and the reminder that our capacity to love is never-ending.*

I’d also felt down by the news that this COVID-19 situation might last a lot longer than I thought it would. I was starting to lose my way in feeling that recent events are going to be our “new normal.” I did not meet that 87-year-old man in the story my friend sent me, but after reading it I was able to rewrite my headline to: *Woman renewed by the reminder that showing a little love goes a long way.*

How wonderful that by focusing on the beauty around us and practicing kindness, we not only can rewrite our own headlines, but we enable others to rewrite theirs as well. What will *your* headline be today?

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**Words of Hope – On Fire**

**Verse of the day:**

* “That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ.” (1 Peter 4:12–13)

**Think about it:**

I began thinking about God’s perspective on fire after hearing a short story that tells of a man who was the only survivor of a shipwreck and who found refuge on a small island. He daily prayed to be rescued and diligently searched the horizon for some sign of help, but none came. Finally, tired of waiting, he built a small cabin as a means of shelter for himself and his few possessions.

One day he went looking for food on the island, and returned to find his cabin in flames. He could do nothing to save it, and what little he had was totally lost. Angry and confused, he lay down in the sand, looked toward the sky, and shouted at God: “How could You do this to me? Why have You allowed so much tragedy in my life?” It was in such a state that he drifted off to sleep.

He awoke early the next morning to the sound of an approaching boat. At long last, help had come! When he saw his rescuers, he asked them how they knew of his plight. They replied, “We saw your smoke signal.”

This anecdote illustrates God’s comforting promise in Isaiah 61:3: “To give unto them beauty for ashes.” It points out that God’s hand is upon us, regardless of what may befall us in this life. Happenings that might initially seem like great loss or tragedy can be used by God to bring about an even greater good.

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**Words of Hope – Construction Site**

The bold red letters glared at us as we crawled along in bumper-to-bumper traffic, maneuvering between potholes and gravelly ditches that had turned what was once smooth pavement into an obstacle course. “UNDER CONSTRUCTION!” Noise, dirt, sweat soaked workers, and clogged roads had been part of our lives since the city began a road-expansion project several months earlier. Traffic had always been notoriously bad in this part of sprawling Bangkok, but it was worse now.

Barricades had gone up, squeezing three-lane traffic into a single lane. The diggers came next, tearing up the asphalt and clunking and shuddering as they worked around the clock. Construction dust covered everything. Our hour long commutes into town took twice as long, while we stalled and chafed in exhaust fumes and dust.

“Why do they have to do construction here?” I routinely complained to my dad on our weekly trips to give English lessons at an orphanage near the center of town. “It makes life so inconvenient and confusing for everyone!”

Dad, having long ago outgrown the notion that the world existed to cater to him, would glance sympathetically in my direction and say nothing. Eventually I became accustomed to the noise and inconvenience, and Dad and I discovered that the car was a great place to catch up on little bits of each other’s lives that we had missed in the bustle of our busy days. The day finally came when the constant jackhammering stopped, the large yellow machines were hauled away one by one, and the barricades with their redlettered signs and flashing orange lights were carted off to the next construction site.

The next week we made our usual trip to the orphanage, and as usual I braced myself for the long ride. A minute or two later Dad maneuvered our pickup onto an entry ramp and suddenly we were racing above the snarl of city traffic below. The newly constructed flyover, with its smooth surface and intersection-free lanes, took us to the orphanage in a record time of fifteen minutes.

On the way home, as we once again sped above the clogged streets and honking cars, Dad broke the silence. “Do you still wish they hadn’t done construction here?”

 “Of course not!” I replied, suddenly realizing that the temporary inconvenience we had lived through was nothing compared to the benefits that would now be enjoyed for years.

“Life is full of ‘construction sites,’” Dad said. “Learn to be thankful for them and be patient. God is in the process of turning each one into something better.”

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**Words of Hope -- Defining Moments**

Few events capture the world’s attention like the World Cup does every four years. The 2006 final attracted an estimated television audience of 715 million, and the entire process, including qualifying and elimination rounds, a total of over 26 billion—the equivalent of nearly four views for every person in the world. Even those who normally pay little or no attention to sports are drawn in when Cup results are front-page news.

For us spectators, depending on how closely we follow football (soccer) and how well our team does, the buildup may last a year, the final match a couple of hours, and the celebration a few days. Then we return to our normal lives. But for players, coaches, and others involved at the highest level, the World Cup is a defining moment, the culmination of years of dreaming, planning, sacrificing, and hard work.

It’s a defining moment, but it’s not the be-all and end-all of their lives, as it must have seemed when they were entirely focused on making it to the World Cup and doing well there. It’s really just a milestone, a new beginning. The real tests start after the game. How will the losers take defeat? Will they give up, or press on and possibly win next time? What opportunities will open for the winners, and how will they handle success? Will they use it to further their football fortunes, or to secure other careers after football, or to promote causes that are important to them? In the months and years to come, we’ll find out who those big names really are.

And it’s much the same for us. We may not be athletes in the world spotlight, but every day is another chance to examine who we really are and decide what we want to be known and remembered for. Every day can be a defining moment, if we choose to make it so.—Keith Phillips

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**Word of Hope – Eternity**

The expression “forever and a day,” the infinity symbol ∞, and the Mobius strip have always fascinated me. The word “eternity” has been popularized by an amazing guy who passed away in 1967, named Arthur Stace. His life story has been remembered in a book, an opera, and a film. Tribute was paid to him in a fireworks display at the end of the 2000 Sydney Olympic Games Opening Ceremony and the Sydney Harbor New Year Celebration.

Raised in an abusive and alcoholic family, involved in petty crime, for the first 45 years of his life, Arthur was a “drunken, good-for-nothing derelict,” as described many years later by his biographer. All of that changed the day he heard a sermon from Isaiah 57:15: For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth Eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.

John Ridley’s words from that sermon were, “Eternity, Eternity, I wish that I could sound or shout that word to everyone in the streets of Sydney. You’ve got to meet it, where will you spend Eternity?”

Stace later said, “Eternity went ringing through my brain, and suddenly I began crying and felt a powerful call from the Lord to write the word ‘Eternity.’” He put his hands in his pockets and felt a piece of chalk. It was then that he got the calling to write that word everywhere he could. Though he was illiterate and could hardly write his own name, he said when he first wrote it, “the word ‘Eternity’ came out smoothly, in a beautiful copperplate script. I couldn’t understand it, and I still can’t.”

For the next 28 years, several times a week, he left his house at 5:00 a.m. to write it in public places, to remind people who saw it of what really matters in life. He said that God gave him specific directions of where to go each day. He wrote “Eternity” in chalk, and later with a crayon—as it would last longer—at least 50 times a day. In the end, he had written this magical and thought-provoking word half a million times all over the city. Besides this, Arthur also helped alcoholics to kick the habit and start a new life.

Arthur’s story inspires us to use what we have, no matter how little it may seem—though it be as small as a piece of chalk—to be a force for good in the world.

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**Words of Hope – Getting it Right**

Recently, I decided to attend some free knitting and crocheting classes offered at a local community center. The idea of learning new things is more appealing to me at 63 than I think it has been for quite some time; additionally, I was hopeful that it would be beneficial in combating stress, something my doctor recently warned was affecting my health.

Of course, one begins as a beginner, and I haven’t truly progressed beyond that, to be honest. Still, I have completed a few simple projects, and it is a pleasure to behold the cute, albeit imperfect, results of my work.

When I told my daughter that I wanted to crochet a beanie for her son, she suggested I fashion it after one worn by a character in one of his favorite movies. It looked doable, so I purchased the bright red yarn and got to work.

Halfway through the project, I realized that I had made a small mistake toward the beginning that had gone unnoticed at first, but had gotten bigger as I had continued. It was necessary to undo what I had started and begin again. As I unknotted the knots, I thought, “This hat has to be perfect—well, not perfect, maybe—but right!” Somehow, the doing and undoing of my crocheting seemed to mar the yarn texture to a certain degree. I thought it would probably be noticeable on close inspection. Still, I wanted the actual crochet work and finished project to be done right, even if the material itself had some flaws.

Upon reflection, I felt the Lord was reminding me, through this object lesson, of my own life, with all its imperfections, some barely noticeable and others ginormous and glaring. And then the sound bite, “not perfect, but right,” spoke to my heart. Jesus reminded me that my life has been right, that of a person made righteous by Him, regardless of the material He has to work with, marred by my flaws, poor judgment, sins, and what I often perceive as horrific failures.

Then, too, there’s the whole process of making things right once one has made mistakes or blunders, or committed even what one or others may actually perceive as iniquities, that can be so messy and downright convoluted, and requires so much effort and even pain to disentangle. Thankfully, I feel secure in Jesus’ unconditional love and acceptance. Going to Him in a spirit of repentance is humbling, yes, but I always feel safe because of His unconditional love and grace.

However, going to others, be they family, friends, acquaintances—acknowledging my mistakes, and often not even being able to verbalize how or why I did such and such a thing—that is where the fabric of life seems to get rubbed and marred even more. I am tempted to not even begin to try to make amends, because it is almost always a dolorous, complicated process. Yet it yields a peaceable fruit of righteousness in God’s perfect time. The finished product is better, even with what may seem to be imperfections to the casual observer.

I am righteous because I am forgiven and justified by Him. This humbles me (making me more useful, I would think—or at least it’s a good starting point to getting there), at the same time that it thrills my soul and brings a supernatural peace to my heart, knowing that it is okay to be imperfect, even as very, very imperfect as I am. We are made right in Christ, according to His mercy and grace and divine design—and that is what matters, really, at the end of the day.-- By Diana Motolinia

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**Words of Hope – God Hears**

One or two things going wrong in my week aren’t the end of the world. I can handle a few bad things. I know that every week has its allotment of issues, and I’m used to dealing with that. I can generally stay quite cheerful and look on the bright side.

But last week was an exception. It seemed like something went wrong every day. I’m not talking about little nuisances, but some pretty big things. Every day held a surprise, and they weren’t happy ones. We had a couple of accidents—not major ones, thank God, but the kind that are hassles and result in extra expenses. We had some health issues, extra doctor’s appointments and concerns. We worried, as storm after storm lashed different parts of the world where we have friends and loved ones.

Every day, something new came up. It made me wonder if God was going to get tired of me calling out to Him yet again about some new challenge. Does He run out of sympathy after a while and decide not to answer the phone when He sees it’s me, yet again, on caller ID?

What I realized from this difficult week of calling out to God is that He hears. He never gets tired of listening. He never stops picking up the phone when I call. He’s always there to listen, to offer advice and direction. He’s there to calm my heart rate and pick me up when I don’t feel like moving forward. He’s there to comfort me and restore the joy of the Lord. And He works things out.

If I had any doubt about God’s care and protection, I saw it in person last week. I saw His hand move and heal us when we needed healing. I saw Him protect us when scary things happened. I saw Him take care of loved ones and help them through potentially dangerous situations. I saw Him work a few quiet miracles. I saw Him stop and listen every time I called out to Him, and answer every time I cried.

The result of my very bad week is that I’m reminded that with God’s help I can handle anything that comes my way. At the end of the week, my faith is secure, and I’m confident that whatever problems or challenges I face, He will work them out. There may be storms or accidents or mistakes or problems, but ultimately, I can trust God to help me through. And with Him, I can look forward to next week and whatever it brings.– by Joyce Suttin

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**Words of Hope – Love, Actually**

Every year, at Christmastime, my husband has to endure my private tradition of watching *Love, Actually*. The movie weaves together several stories in an entirely predictable, mushy way. But each time I watch it I am touched by a different part of the story. I try to get my husband excited about this, but he is not having it! I know this makes me a bit sappy, but I just don’t get how someone can’t be drawn in by this display of love, tenderness and warmth.

Probably my favorite thing about the movie is the way that it demonstrates all different kinds of love: familial love, grieving love, romantic love, unrequited love, sacrificial love, friendship love, new love and old love. It shows the ways we all connect in our human experience, and how love is all around us, if we are willing to look for it.

One of my favorite lines is in the introduction, when a voiceover says: “It seems to me that love is everywhere. Often, it’s not particularly dignified or newsworthy, but it’s always there—fathers and sons, mothers and daughters, husbands and wives, boyfriends, girlfriends, old friends.” Sometimes it takes a minute to notice it. Not just because life is busy, but also because it often appears ugly.

It’s easy to feel calloused, to think of humanity as a whole as hardened and cruel. But that’s simply not true. Love, in the form of kindness, friendship, compassion, affection, service, and sacrifice, is all around us. It seeps through the cracks of indifference, hatred, loneliness, prejudice, pain, and connects us.

The Bible says “Everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.” Our ability to love is God’s imprint on each of our hearts, even for those who do not call themselves followers of Jesus. All the different ways humans are capable of loving are manifestations of our Creator. In many ways, I think that our response to love is a response to God.

Maybe you aren’t into sappy movies, but I hope you take a minute to notice the love around you, and I hope it makes you happy. -- By Marie Alvero

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