

The Task-Filled Life



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THE TASK-FILLED LIFE BIBLE STUDY SERIES

— BY JAN BRUNETTE —



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The Great I Am



Widowed. Four children ages twelve and under. Teaching full time. Groceries to buy. Ten loads of laundry to do. Sports activities to attend. Fun parties with the teachers. Laughter. Tears. Grief. Joy in the classroom. Devotions at 7:00 a.m. Chores assigned to the kids. Cleaning the remainder of the house. Sons flying off the roof. Daughters missing their dad. Strep throat. Helping with homework. Checking school lunchboxes. Fixing evening meals. Emptiness in my heart. Sleepless nights. Fear! And all this happens in one week. Father, there is so much to do in my seven-day period, and I'm doing it all alone. This task-filled life is overwhelming me. I'm not sure I can do it much longer. I need a superhero to carry me away — away — away — away!

Prayer: Dear Father in heaven, open my heart and my mind to the wonders of Who you are — the Great I AM. Prepare me for the pleasures that are yet to come and the grace with which I will be blessed. In Jesus' name I ask this. Amen.

Then Moses said to God, "If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?" God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM." And he said, "Say this to the people of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you'" (Exodus 3:13-14).

It all begins here — the search for the Great I AM — the One who said to Moses, "*I AM WHO I AM.*" *And he said, "Say to the people of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you"*" (Exodus 3:14). The Sovereign One, the God only wise, the immortal One, the servant example, my Hiding Place, and my Deliverer is the true I AM that I yearn for. He is the One who is all I need, holds my everything together, is resplendent in glory, and yet loves me enough to humble Himself to death, even death on a cross (Philippians 2:5-8).

And He did it all for me — and you — His beloved. Our precious Lord and Savior is the superhero we need, but not to take us away from it all. Rather He chooses to guide us through the maze called life, whether as a single parent, in a safe and secure marriage, or in a troubled marriage. On even our busiest of days, this Great I AM, the King of kings, the Lord of lords, desires to be our light, salvation, stronghold, shield, and shelter. He has not only given us His Word to sustain our hidden lives but also provides His Holy Spirit to open our hearts to the love of God that pierces our hearts with truth, comfort, and forgiveness. The Great I AM is a God who stretches through time and space, a God who enables us to view Him not only as a God of the past, but also of the here and now. He lives and loves to care for us, supplies our spiritual needs, and provides strength for our multi-faceted, task-filled lives.

IT'S HARD TO SAY

IT'S HARD TO SAY — I'M VALUABLE.

Overwhelmed we often cry out with the need to be appreciated, loved, and valued by others based on all the work we do. When we don't receive it, we wonder where we can turn as our emotions hit the fan or we feel empty inside. Where is the Great I AM when we need Him?

Blessed is the man [whose] ... delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers (Psalm 1:1-3).

God's Word is the means to discover the greatest love we need. Meditating and delighting in God's love letter, we discover that we are compared to a tree that yields its seasonal fruit and is continually in bloom. As the love, wisdom, and power of "I AM" exposes Himself through the Holy Spirit, we blossom for Him. When things are going well, we blossom. When disappointments come, we blossom. When life changes course, we blossom. When struggles seem to swallow us up, we blossom. And it's not because of anything we have done but because of the blossoming spiritual sap of Christ that runs in and through us. We don't see it or feel it, for it is the continuing nourishment within that is received through His Spirit as we remain in the Word. From it grow the flowers of grace, mercy, and truth as it is received in and through Christ.

We are loved beyond comprehension. Read Ephesians 3:14-19 and 1 John 4:9-10 as God's Word reveals this love. In your group, share your thoughts regarding how Christ's love can enable you to feel

more appreciated, loved, and valued. Remember, it's not about you but about what He has already done for you.

IT'S HARD TO SAY — I NEED HIM.

O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory above the heavens (Psalm 8:1).

Pride steps in when we need to ask God for help as it means we have to humble ourselves. Viewing His awesome majesty, we assume He is too busy to listen to our concerns or to find time to help us with our daily struggles. Besides, we know we can handle life on our own. We have done it before and we can do it again. Those daily mundane tasks are ours to accomplish and we assume there are no limits to our own personal power and energy. Right? Wrong!

Paul states in 1 Corinthians 10:13 that God will not let us be tempted beyond our ability to withstand and will provide a way of escape. He will use that way of escape to enable us to endure it with His strength and guidance. However, we need to remember that it is often a great temptation to assume that we can manage our hectic, over-crowded lives without God's help.

God lovingly reminds us in His Word that He desires for us to seek Him first, to spend time with Him in prayer, and to cease from worrying (Matthew 6:33-34). Yet we continue to let pride and personal ego prevent us from heeding the path to a calmer rest in Him. Time in our task-filled lives is often a challenge, so spending time in the presence of the "Great I AM" often remains as last on our agenda. Getting up an extra hour earlier in the



morning is not an option as we assume we will only become more stressed and more tired. We forget it is when we are in His presence that spiritual rest and renewal takes place. It is through the Word and the Spirit that we are strengthened, encouraged, and guided. Our spirits are revived, and our hearts become more receptive to His love and generosity.

Read Psalm 8 together and pray the Holy Spirit open your hearts and minds to view not only the majesty of I AM but also His love for mankind. List examples of God's generous mercy toward man and how God's majesty and glory can impact the privileges He grants us.

One thing have I asked of the Lord, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to inquire in his temple. For he will hide me in his shelter in the day of trouble; he will conceal me under the cover of his tent; he will lift me high upon a rock (Psalm 27:4-5).

IT'S HARD TO SAY — WORDS OF PRAISE WHEN MY TASK-FILLED LIFE IS HECTIC.

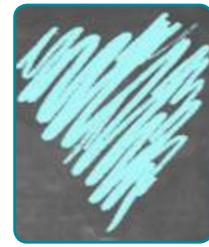
God desires that we acknowledge and praise Him for who He is, no matter the schedules pressing in on us at the time.

You have multiplied, O Lord my God, your wondrous deeds and your thoughts toward us; none can compare with you! I will proclaim and tell of them, yet they are more than can be told...But may all who seek you rejoice and be glad in you; may those who love your salvation say continually, "Great is the Lord" (Psalm 40:5, -16)!

Our view of God can become clouded when the storms of life roll in. Whether complicating our roles as children, parents, or employees, praising God in the midst of our storms of life is not unlike the disciples who became terrified when the gigantic waves began filling the small fishing boat on the Sea of Galilee. Because they couldn't believe the obvious scene that was happening, they wondered why the sleeping Jesus wasn't fixing things, and so they cried out in absolute fear.

Before we judge their actions, we need to realize that the Sea of Galilee is subject to sudden storms and that the waves can reach up to ten feet high. Knowing that, read Luke 8:23-25 to discover the disciples' fear and how Jesus reacted to that fear. Share any moments in your task-filled lives when you wondered if Jesus was asleep and how His reaction with the disciples might bring strength and encouragement to you now.

As His children of faith, we grow in our trust of Him as a result of His promises, provision, peace, and yes, problems. To the very core of our being, the Holy Spirit strengthens our spirits as we choose to praise the "Great I AM". Even in the midst of our struggles, it is His Spirit that sanctifies and awakens us daily with renewal and regeneration. He enables the Word to make us receptive to who He is and who He desires us to be. Enlivened with a passion that only He can create, we move forward in loving service for Him, regardless of our hectic lives.



STUDY TIME FOR THIS WEEK

In this week's lesson, we learned how God revealed Himself to Moses. We will now go on a deeper journey of faith with Moses and discover more about this "Great I AM" and how He is all we need in this life and throughout eternity. We will learn of a great God of all gods and King of all kings. Just like Moses, excuses may appear to keep us from the Lord's chosen tasks, but God's Word can develop and enlarge our love and trust for Him as a result.

Over the next five days, you are going to review the five excuses of Moses when faced with an enormous challenge. **Read Exodus, Chapters 3 and 4.** As you do so, mark or record the excuses that Moses gave and God's responses to each excuse.

Prayer: To the "Great I AM", awaken in my heart and soul a desire to know You more clearly and love You more dearly. Help me treasure each precious moment because You are truly divine and holy. Amen.

*Hark the voice of Jesus crying,
"Who will go and work today?*

*Fields are white and harvests waiting
"Who will bear the sheaves away?"*

*Loud and long the Master calleth;
Rich reward He offers thee.*

*Who will answer, gladly saying,
"Here am I, send me, send me"?*

LSB #826, v. 1

The Great I Am



But Moses said to God, “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the children of Israel out of Egypt” (Exodus 3:11)?

Basically I can hear Moses saying, “Okay, God, what are You thinking? You want me to do what? Lead over a million people out of Egypt into a land unknown? How is Pharaoh ever going to say yes to that?”

Today we may view this scenario as crazy and certainly not relevant personally. Yet how often have we ever heard someone making these comments?

“I’m just a housewife.”

“I have no college education.”

“I work many hours at my job and don’t have time.”

“I’m getting too old.”

When a challenge lays before us, whether speaking to a friend about our love and trust in God or, if required, to care for another individual, do we hesitate? Do we try to find excuses?

Now listen to what God says to Moses: *[I AM] said, “But I will be with you, and this shall be the sign for you, that I have sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God on this mountain” (Exodus 3:12).*

The key words from this verse for us today are: *I will be with you and you shall serve God.* The challenges facing us in today’s world are not about the choices we will make, but about revealing Christ in us as He holds our hearts and minds on Him. It’s accepting that we will not take one step without Him as we live our lives in service to Him and for Him. No visible sign is needed, for we already have the Holy Spirit’s presence and power within us. We only need to trust Him.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT:

Now, ask yourself: *As you walk through this day filled with challenges, how would this knowledge keep you moving forward for Him?*

Prayer: Dear Father in heaven, give me the boldness I need to trust that You will be with me wherever I go. Amen.

The Great I Am



Then Moses said to God, “If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ what shall I say to them” (Exodus 3:13)?

For each of us personally, the phrasing of this question may sound more like, “I don’t know Scripture well enough to speak on His behalf. It’s hard for me to remember the right verses at the right time, and I don’t want to seem preachy.”

Herein lay God’s response to the announcement Moses is to make to the Israelites.

God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM.” And he said, “Say this to the people of Israel, ‘I AM sent me to you” (Exodus 3:14).

For God, His response should have ended with an exclamation point for nothing more needed to be said. The “Great I AM”, Yahweh, should have been the only proof Moses needed. It was the name in which the children of Israel believed — in all circumstances, for all times. Moses should have relied on that fact. In addition, God also said to Moses, “This is my name forever, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations” (Exodus 3:15b).

Can we rely on the Great I AM? Can His name be trusted by us today? The Yahweh that was relevant for Moses and for the children of Israel is

still relevant for us today. Even if we perceive the miracles granted to the children of Israel as unrealistic in our eyes, we can still rely on Him as we march through our wilderness journeys today. With laundry needing to be done, meals to prepare, sick family members to care for, and school schedules that keep us in the car on a regular basis, we wonder how the two stories can be related. Yet God’s grace is not defined as large or small, significant or minute. His grace is defined by goodness, and His goodness knows no measure. Miracles occur every day and we have only to open our eyes to them.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT:

Embrace God’s goodness as truth. Believe the Living Christ, who is Yahweh, is still relevant for you — in the here and now! ***List some ways in which you would personally desire to trust Him more.***

Prayer: I AM, give me the courage to acknowledge that Your Name is powerful, and at the sound of Your Name all will someday fall on their knees before You. Give me such a faith as this to believe this is true for me today. In Jesus’ name I ask this. Amen.

The Great I Am



Then Moses answered, “But behold, they will not believe me or listen to my voice, for they will say, ‘The Lord did not appear to you’” (Exodus 4:1).

Here comes the motivation for most excuses — the fear of naysayers. They won't believe. They won't listen. Fearing the possibility of not being accepted, Moses preferred to say nothing at all. His weakened heart needed proof that He wouldn't be a laughing stock to the Israelites.

God, at this point, gives Moses physical proof of what He can do to stand behind His name. He offers three visible signs of His power in verses 2–9.

- ***Changing Moses' staff to a snake and then reversing it***
- ***Creating, and then restoring, leprosy to Moses' hand***
- ***Turning water from the Nile into blood as it was poured on the ground***

To appease Moses, God offered signs. However, we soon will discover that even signs did not stop Moses' excuses. We will learn that it wasn't the signs with which God wanted to motivate Moses; it was faith.

Fear is often used by Satan to block us from serving the Lord in our chosen path. The fear of acceptance, of being ridiculed for our faith, or maybe

even being persecuted may loom before us as a large wall extremely difficult to climb.

Yet we need to be reminded of 1 Corinthians 1:22–24 — *For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.*

FOOD FOR THOUGHT:

Faith and trust provided by the Great I AM should have been enough for Moses, and it can be enough for us. Step forward in faith as you receive His strength at the most unexpected times. *What is the greatest challenge that lays before you today? How can you face it more courageously?*

Prayer: Dear Jesus, give me the faith to believe that You are enough to cover me through all my challenges in life! Your strength and courage will be mine. Amen.

The Great I Am



Now The Feeling Of Inadequacy Surfaces:

But Moses said to the Lord, “Oh, my Lord, I am not eloquent, either in the past or since you have spoken to your servant, but I am slow of speech and of tongue” (Exodus 4:10).

In the past we may have thought or heard someone say,

**“Don’t ask me to do that.
I am not qualified. I am not
a good speaker. I am not
strong enough to handle that.”**

Listen now to God’s response for He just wasn’t going to let excuses stand in the way of Moses’ calling.

Then the Lord said to him, “Who has made man’s mouth?...Now therefore go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall speak” (Exodus 4:11-12).

Is this believable? God was actually going to speak through the mouth of Moses. We would think that this would be all Moses needed to finally stop arguing and be willing to accept the task at hand. But we will see on Day 5 that this is not the case.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT:

Have you ever tried to argue with God when challenges arose? *Name those challenges and list any excuses used.*

Did you move forward in faith anyway or, like Moses, were you the one who had another excuse to make? Only you can determine whether the excuses are based in fear or on the uncertainty of God’s call. But when you are assured of His calling, move forward with His guidance, for Christ’s presence and power will be yours.

Prayer: *To the “Great I AM”, one of my excuses is that I am not feeling qualified for the task you desire of me. Give me the strength to remember that You will make me qualified, no matter Your call to service. Help me remember that Your grace received through Christ will guide and lead me. Amen.*

The Great I Am



We have one last excuse — or should I say, one last plea for a release from the assignment!

But [Moses] said, “O, my Lord, please send someone else” (Exodus 4:11).

After all that God has revealed, my human reaction to this would be to clinch my teeth and fists and say,

“Really? Moses, what are you thinking? God assured you that He would be with you as you serve Him; He revealed His divinity as the “Great I AM”. Signs and wonders poured from His hand, and then He promised to speak in and through you. How much proof do you need that He will be your strength, wisdom, and guide?”

PERSONAL THOUGHTS:

Was your reaction the same, or could you see yourself using this excuse? *If so, name the circumstances you encountered that motivated it. Then reveal how God responded.*

Then the anger of the Lord was kindled against Moses and he said, “Is there not Aaron, your brother, the Levite? I know that he can speak well ... You will speak to him and put the words in his mouth, and I will be with your mouth and with his mouth and will teach you both what to do” (Exodus 4:14-15).

FOOD FOR THOUGHT:

How large or small is your calling? ***What are its challenges?***

Amazing! There was NO excuse God would accept. It all rested in His hands, and it was a mission too important to give to someone else. Leading millions to the “promised land” was Moses’s calling. God designed it. God planned it. He would see Moses through to the end.

God didn’t give up on Moses in spite of his many excuses. “I AM” had an incredible job for him to do and knew he was the “man of the hour.” Although angry with Moses for his lack of faith, God nonetheless offered a solution for this last excuse. By doing so, He enabled Moses to finally yield to the position of service laid out for him. Acceptance and knowledge of Moses’ frailty didn’t stop God from pursuing — and forgiving — Moses, and God does not fail to forgive us and pursue us. As His called and chosen, He can and will continue to lead and guide us. The field is white; the harvest is waiting. We need to heed the burdens of our hearts and trust the doors will open — in His time and way. It may be days down the road, or perhaps, even years (after all, it took Moses 40 years to be prepared for his calling). As we believe, His calling will become evident and His power will be ours.

Christ is larger than all of them and His Word reveals it. Through the Holy Spirit, you can conquer your fears, get rid of excuses, and learn to trust. The journey ahead may not be leading a nation but rather leading little children. Whatever your calling, believe that through the journeying process you will learn to love, cherish, and adore the great “I AM”!

May it be so, sweet Jesus. May it be so!

The God Of All Hope



Climbing the two steps toward the horse, I made my first attempt to sit in the saddle. With the desire to learn to ride a horse as a target on my bucket list, I was nonetheless terrified of this huge beast after hearing the trainer warn me of all the possible, frightening choices this horse could make. Yet yearning to proudly say I was able to cross this item off my list, I was determined. Once sitting high astride this big monster, I began to wonder if I had bitten off more than I could chew. With the feeling of sitting atop a mountain that could throw me at any time, I knew it was too late to change my mind and decided to make the best of it. My greatest hope was to make it through the experience without having a major catastrophe. As my horse trainer gently led me — and the horse — through the steps of using the reins and my legs to nudge and guide her through our one-hour experience, I still felt insecure, yet proud of myself for the attempt.

It wasn't until it was time to dismount that I realized my most challenging obstacle lay ahead. Needing to hoist my right leg over the back of the horse, I soon discovered that this 73-year-old lady's leg simply couldn't stretch far enough to lift that leg, and being a tall person, there was a lot of leg to lift. Fortunately, after numerous tries, my attempts proved successful and I thought, "Maybe next time my hope of easily riding this horse will come to fruition." Although I knew I hadn't truly learned to

guide the horse around the arena on my own, my hope of doing so did not fade. However, I was painfully aware that some personal stretching and additional trust in the trainer would be absolutely necessary.

My experience on the horse reminded me of the words in Psalm 147:10–11:

“His delight is not in the strength of the horse, nor his pleasure in the legs of a man, but the Lord takes pleasure in those who fear him, in those who hope in his steadfast love.”

Yes, the horse was strong and beautiful, and yes, the legs of this woman were not. But I realized my greatest accomplishment was not in the completion of something I did on my bucket list. While it was truly an experience I will never forget, yet even more amazing is my relationship with my best friend, Jesus Christ. His ultimate presence far surpasses anything I could accomplish on my bucket



list. The training I would have encountered on the horse will never come close to the successful training I receive in Christ through the study of His Word. Because of that, the Living Word adventure will remain the number one item on my bucket list. All else is temporary and will fade when this life ends.

Prayer: Dear Father in heaven, the need for hope is crucial, as many people die emotionally or give up on life without it. Scripture tells us that if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience (Romans 8:25). Give us that patience as we learn more of the hope that can only come through You. In Jesus' name and for His sake we ask this. Amen.

MY HOPE RESTS IN YOU, LORD

The task filled life often overwhelms us. Though technology has greatly simplified how we do things, the extra freedom we have may cause many to fill the time with even more activity. Before we know it, a mountain of responsibility looms large and we wonder if we will ever be able to cross over to the other side where rest and relaxation are possible. With brains focused on work, business obligations, the children's activities, and our own personal agendas, we decrease the time in the Lord's house or in His Word. It is only when a crisis occurs or exhaustion takes over that we realize we need strength to dismount, or cross over from, the temporary to the eternal.

God's solution for all circumstances is possible — a solution that includes a Rock of safety, a Rock that equips us to reach the heights and beyond.

How can knowing of God's security give us hope during those times when the tasks to be done in this life seem insurmountable? Although we may not be learning to ride a horse or physically climbing



a mountain, be assured that hope in the renewing and reviving love of Jesus is always ours.

HOPE MAY REQUIRE STRETCHING

When there is a mountain of responsibility or challenges looming before us, blocking our way forward, we have four choices. We can:

Pray that God moves the mountain, which takes faith. Maybe it isn't a physical mountain that needs to be moved but rather confidence in what He can do as we face the challenges. [See Matthew 17:20](#).

Take the cumbersome, tedious trek up the mountain to get to the top or other side. Perhaps we are already moving forward in faith and we simply need strength to take one step at a time. No matter our circumstances, we can pray for a new perspective. [Read Habakkuk 3:17–19](#) to discover an attitude that is possible to attain.

Remain where you are, while waiting for God's wisdom and guidance in taking another step or finding a way through. Sometimes the wait is excruciating, but it may be the vessel that God chooses to strengthen us and embolden us to perceive Christ's sacrifice and His own grace in the process. It is one of the best ways to learn trust, no matter how painful the wait. [See Psalm 27:14 and James 1:5–6](#) to learn of encouragement during this difficult time.

Make the choice of so many others to sit and whine about the challenge and do nothing.

The first three require a trust in God. The fourth admits defeat and relies on self. Any option is possible. Our prayer is that the fourth option may be overcome, for when we choose this option we begin to lose hope. Remember that true hope rests in the person of Jesus Christ, not in what we do or the selection we make. It is in the process of climbing the mountain or dismounting the horse that we





stretch and grow. It is viewing Christ as the true Rock on which our hope remains. It is there that we can shout, “My hope rests in You, Lord,” and it is through the stretching process that we have learned to view His glory in the climb.

Find encouragement in the following words as your group reads these words together:

For you, O Lord, are my hope, my trust, O Lord, from my youth. Upon you I have leaned from before my birth; you are he who took me from my mother's womb. My praise is continually of you... O God, from my youth you have taught me, and I still proclaim your wondrous deeds. So even to old age and gray hairs, O God, do not forsake me, until I proclaim your might to another generation, your power to all those to come. Your righteousness, O God, reaches the high heavens. You who have done great things, O God, who is like you?... My lips will shout for joy, when I sing praises to you; my soul also, which you have redeemed. And my tongue will talk of your righteous help all the day long (Psalm 71:5-6, 17-19, 23-24a).

Read Romans 5:1–5, 8. Note how many times the word “hope” is used. Also record the progression of how hope is acquired. Verse 5 in the ESV states: *God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.*

Share what the significance of that verse means in your personal lives. Conclude with verse 8, which grants us the confirmation of where our true source of hope rests.

Other verses that may strengthen our hope in the Rock, Jesus Christ, are:

- **Ephesians 1:17–18**
- **Colossians 1:27**
- **Hebrews 10:23**

The power and love of Jesus Christ is beyond our comprehension. The sacrifice He made for us far exceeds any pain or emotional turmoil we are required to endure. Like mounting a horse for the first time at the age of 73, we may be filled with fear because of viewing the heights below, yet Christ is our example of courage and strength. He never faltered to give His very life for us. It is His very own hope for us that He wishes to share with us. He is the Living Rock on whom we stand, even when crushed under the weight of our task-filled lives. When answers are long in coming and there appear to be no answers, Christ Jesus is the answer. When all seems hopeless, it is then that we can shout,

**“My praise is continually
of you... I will hope con-
tinually and will praise
you yet more and more.
My mouth will tell of your
righteous acts, of your
deeds of salvation all the
day, for their number
is past my knowledge”**
(Psalm 17:6b, 13–15).

STUDY TIME FOR THIS WEEK

In our daily studies for the week, we will use **Psalm 71** to focus on how hope plays a part in our entire lives, from before conception to the time we

reach our heavenly home. As you walk through this journey in life, remember the following:

*We wait in hope for the Lord; he is
our help and our shield. In him our
hearts rejoice, for we trust in his holy
name. May your unfailing love rest
upon us, O Lord, even as we put our
hope in you (Psalm 33:18-22 NIV).*

Prayer: Thank you, Jesus, that You are my hope and my solid rock on which to stand, even when climbing the most difficult mountain experiences of my life. May Your strength be mine in the journey. Amen.

The God Of All Hope



For you, O Lord, are my hope, my trust, O Lord, from my youth. Upon you I have leaned from before my birth; you are he who took me from my mother's womb. My praise is continually of you (Psalm 71:5-6).

It was all predetermined — from the color of my hair and eyes to the gifts and talents I was to possess. God's foreknowledge planned the family into which I would be born, the homes I would live within, and the multiple states in which I would reside. He knew the friends I would have, the colleges I would attend, and the marriages I would experience. Even more astounding, God not only beautifully designed the godly parents I would have, but also knew of the commitment to His Word and ministry I would eventually possess. Washed in the redeeming blood and righteousness of Christ, He would also know of my mistakes, my selfishness, and my feelings of inadequacy and fear. Yet Christ, like Solomon to his bride, marveled and said of me, *"You are altogether beautiful, my love; there is no flaw in you"* (Song of Solomon 4:7). He said this because He knew that when the fullness of time had come, He Himself would redeem me, restore me, and receive me as His own (Galatians 4:5-6).

Psalm 139:13-14, 16 — *For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made...Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there were none of them.*

Christ saw the beauty in us, even with our faults, flaws, and inconsistencies. From eternity, He allowed, permitted, and prepared the way for us in advance — warts, mistakes, and all. His Spirit would be our constant guide. Through our Baptism into His kingdom, we became His child, His friend, His bride. Even if life seems overwhelming at times, nothing was ever desired other than our best — His best. The bad that happens, He uses for good. The doors that open for ministry and sharing are His to lead and guide. The closed doors are used for the purpose of protection or for lessons in trust through waiting. All is accomplished in love, to draw us closer to Him and to develop an understanding of His cross.

Ephesians 2:10 — *For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.*

When you were born, imagine Jesus saying to the Father, *“How beautiful she is for she is one-of-a-kind, destined to love and serve You through the power of Your Spirit. She is My chosen bride, precious and honored in My sight, and I love her”* (Isaiah 43:4). No greater gift can be given than knowing of this beautiful, loving plan for our lives.

Prayer: Dear Jesus, thank You for revealing to me the greatest love known to mankind. May Your praise forever be on my tongue. Amen.

The God Of All Hope



O God, from my youth you have taught me, and I still proclaim your wondrous deeds (Psalm 71:17).

In our days of social media and the internet, many are driven by what is posted, viewed, and experienced on our iPhones, laptops, and iPads. Small children are addicted to checking on it every day; young people are committing suicide because of bullying; and adults scan programs and practices not fit for any child of God to see. Yet its use is rampant and acceptable today. Children have tantrums when the devices are taken away; young people would rather spend hours on them rather than have personal one-on-one conversations; and adults are more committed to working on the internet than having family time at dinner or on special outings without the devices. When does it end? How can the family connection return and be restored?

Teach me your way, O Lord, and I will walk in your truth; give me an undivided heart, that I many fear your name. I will praise you, O Lord my God, with all my heart; I will glorify your name forever (Psalm 86:11-12 NIV).

Social media is incredible for connecting with family and friends or when desiring to share exciting news. The internet is extremely helpful for doing research and sharing the gospel for Christ. In fact, this is one of the chosen avenues through which Bible studies, such as this one, are being sent. As with almost anything in our lives, the newly invented means of communicating can be powerful

tools of encouragement and the strengthening of our resolve to live better, healthier lives. Yet, like a bridge over rapidly flowing, sometimes-muddy waters, we need to pray that God will give us wisdom to use the bridge wisely and not fall into the flow beneath, getting caught up in its movement. Otherwise, before long that flow may pull us under and our resolve to use these blessings wisely may drown us in a lifestyle we never would have chosen. It is then that we can cry out to God and say:

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

Even in our hectic, fast-paced, task-filled lives, Christ daily beckons us to remain close to Him first. In and through His powerful Word, hope today remains secure. His wisdom and guidance become ours. His truths remain strong as His Spirit becomes our bridge to truth – the truth of Christ. As each day begins, honor Him with praise and the determination to learn of Him first. Whether on our iPhones, the internet, our iPads, or a hard-bound Bible, let us make it our goal to seek Him first and always.

Prayer: Dear Father in heaven, prepare my heart today to use the blessings of technology to better serve You and also to always be aware of its lure for things not of You. May Your Spirit forever be my guide and guardian. For Jesus' sake I ask this.

Amen.

The God Of All Hope



So even to old age and gray hairs, O God, do not forsake me, until I proclaim your might to another generation, your power to all those to come
(Psalm 71:18).

One of the greatest privileges of life is when we become grandparents. Even if we don't inherit natural grandchildren, there are so many other children in our lives that can bring us joy and laughter. As reminders of our younger years, we recall the innocence and carefree attitudes they personally possess. However, we also struggle with the need to share with them how the failures they experience in life today will only lay the groundwork for God's work and vision for them in the future.

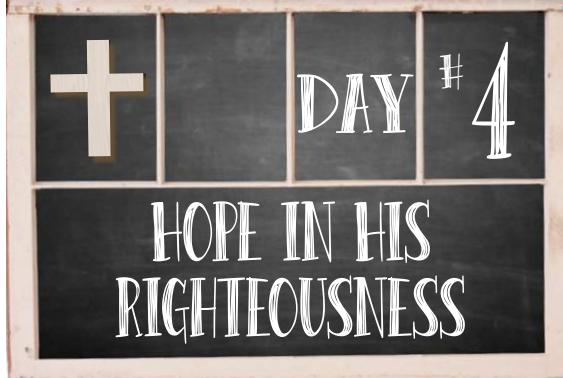
Needing to help paint their current world with the colors of God's grace and mercy, we can open new ideas of why struggles occur and how it will eventually become a beautiful portrait of who they will become. Hopeful that the carefree moments we spend in their presence will encourage them, we pray for the ability to reveal a Savior who abides in them and loves them beyond all measure – in spite of what might be going on in their world. Simple messages sent in texts, birthday cards, and Face-time with them may alter the craziness in their own personal task-filled lives. With grades that make or break their day, expectations of others, or disappointments of goals unfulfilled, our responses often lay groundwork for who they will become and the attitudes developed regarding these circumstances.

We will not hide them from their children, but tell to the coming generation the glorious deeds of the Lord, and his might, and the wonders that he has done (Psalm 78:4).

Turning old and gray need not be a time when we believe life is ending. Rather it can be viewed as a time when God's work is beginning in a new way. While some may have free time, others may be swallowed up with physical ailments and concerns. Regardless of our activity level or our health, God's work for our families and for others never ceases. What we choose to do in a given day reflects Christ's divine love. Our family members watch us. Our sisters and brothers in Christ observe how we cope with the aging process. As the Holy Spirit uses us, so His grace and mercy becomes evident, His glorious deeds shared, and His might and wonders observed. It is a special time to know that God is near and to reveal His grace and mercy to all to whom we are sent. What a privilege and a beautiful way to end our days on this earth!

Prayer: Dear Father, be with me in my aging years. Help me to realize that the time is short to share Your love with my family and friends. Prepare the way and give me the strength to do all You have still called me to do. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

The God Of All Hope



Your righteousness, O God, reaches the high heavens. You who have done great things, O God, who is like you (Psalm 71:19)?

Your love, O Lord, reaches to the heavens, your faithfulness to the skies. Your righteousness is like the mighty mountains, your justice like the great deep. O Lord, you preserve both man and beast. How priceless is your unfailing love! Both high and low among men find refuge in the shadow of your wings (Psalm 36:5-7 NIV).

No one could say it any better than that! God's amazing love and faithfulness is beyond comprehension. The spiritual blessings He awards us in our Baptism are insurmountable. His Word reveals His righteousness, His justice, and His unfailing love. Christ revealed it on the cross; we acknowledge it through faith — a faith He grants us on a daily basis. The more power and grace we experience in our active, relentless lives, the more we know of His presence. Whether pounding the pavement, sitting at a desk job, or caring for our growing children at home, there is no limit to God's righteousness.

Even when these blessings appear hidden because of doubts, cares, and concerns, His righteousness is there. When clouded by illness, guilt, and even depression, His righteousness covers us. It reaches the high heavens, the very throne of God, where it is covered by the blood of Jesus and already atoned for. Having experienced every weakness we may encounter and endured every

temptation known to man, He conquered it all, and because He is in us, we, too, are conquerors. (Hebrews 4:14-16)

Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful (Hebrews 10:23).

The God of all hope is with us daily. Through His Word, His righteousness reveals how the cross justified us, for it is "just as if I" had never done it. He paid the price, and He brought us into a safe place through His suffering, death, and resurrection. We are His, washed and redeemed for eternity, and someday we will see Him face to face, exposing the full truth of His redemption — for me and for you.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you (1 Peter 1:3-4).

Prayer: My hope is built on nothing less Than Jesus' blood and righteousness;

No merit of my own I claim But wholly lean on Jesus' name. On Christ, the solid rock, I stand;

***All other ground is sinking sand.
(LSB #575, verse 1)***

The God Of All Hope



My lips will shout for joy, when I sing praises to you; my soul also, which you have redeemed. And my tongue will talk of your righteous help all the day long (Psalm 71: 23-24a).

Waiting for test results may seem like an eternity. Waiting for the birth of a baby feels like an eternity, especially if there are extended labor pains. Watching an elderly parent slowly fade and die through the process of Alzheimer's, Parkinson's, or ALS can redefine our perception of eternity. Yet no matter our earthly definition of eternity, they are all far from God's planned eternity for us. In Him, the hope of eternal life far surpasses our greatest imaginations. We view life in days, months, and years. For God, they all roll into one.

But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day (2 Peter 3:8).

An eternity of being with Jesus is hard for us to fathom. Seeing His beautiful face, observing the glory of His kingdom, and experiencing His incredible love in its fullness far exceeds any love felt or imagined here on earth. Yet is it? Eternal life is ours today. We received it in our Baptism and now it resides in us, for *whoever believes in the Son has eternal life (John 3:36).*

This is all possible because of all the Father has given us through the Son. *But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in*

righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life (Titus 3:4-7).

In and through Christ, we have inherited the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22), the fullness of Christ Himself (Colossians 2:9), the wisdom and knowledge of God (Colossians 2:2-3), and even the deep things of God (1 Corinthians 2:9-12). These we receive, not of our own doing, but through His. These are all part of our eternal life today.

Yet, the most amazing hope of eternal life will be that of spending an eternity with the Almighty God and the Savior of our souls, Jesus, and so today, we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal (2 Corinthians 4:16-18).

Prayer: Father, help me embrace today as a gift, knowing that in my final eternal home, I will be with Christ Jesus. Thank You for the gift of salvation enabling me to spend eternal life with You forever. Amen.

The God Of Delays



*Wait for the Lord; be strong,
and let your heart take courage;
wait for the Lord (Psalm 27:14)!*

Lying flat in the bottom of a rocking rowboat, I wondered what would happen if the boat and its five passengers began to sink into the Tyrrhenian Sea. In addition, this small rowboat's entrance into a tiny opening of a cave was dependent on the motion of the waves, with the guide pulling us through using only a single chain. Much to my surprise, the view — and the fears — changed dramatically upon entering the cave. While the sparkling waters outside the cave were beyond description at Capri, Italy, the view inside the cave was even more striking. The crystal clear waters radiated the small amount of brilliant white light spilling in from the mouth of the cave. As red colors of light were filtered out by the water, the remaining waters and the roof in the cave glowed with blue light, leaving one in awe.

The experience at the Blue Grotto Cave boldly reminds me of our Baptism as we allow the power of an awesome God to pull us into an incredible, abundant picture of His grace and mercy. Through the Word and Sacraments, the Holy Spirit opens our eyes to His truths and enables us to receive the full of view Christ through the eyes of faith. Our delays

and challenges in life often cause us to depend on others, but God's greatest desire is that we fully depend on Him to see the view on the other side.

Even though beauty surrounds us daily, it can often be hidden by the obstacles that block the beauty. One of the most confusing and difficult obstacles is that of dealing with delays. We set our agendas and schedules. We make goals, hoping to meet them in a timely manner. The hopes and dreams for our children are planned in our heads, and we are devastated when they change course. The jobs we desired upon receiving the college degree, the return of a loved one from military duty, or the dream of purchasing a home fall into the category of desires that can frustrate and initiate stress when delayed. Crying out to God, we may ask, "What are You thinking?" We forget that our future plans in life do not always depend on us and our intricate design. Rather, the God who orchestrated the universe desires to beautifully and masterfully design His own direction. His eternal plan is not that we discover things in the created world, but rather cherish treasures even more beautiful and memorable inside our inner being.

Prayer: Lord, I hate to wait. Help me to learn that in Your waiting process, there remains a blessing for it is how I will learn to trust. Thank You. Amen.

IT ALL DEPENDS ON...

A preschool song was once taught in public schools called “I am Me and I am Enough.” A huge highway billboard revealed these words, “It’s all about you.” TV and social media encourage us to believe that our future depends only on us. To many, our goals and agendas are summed up in this quote: “If it’s going to get done, it all depends on me”.

*But does it,
even though
that is
the worldly
mindset?*

There is nothing wrong with agendas, schedules, goals, and dreams. Even our service to the Lord includes important planning. However, God desires that we make plans with His guidance and, when completed, promises to bless them.

Refer to the following:

Psalm 20:4–5

Psalm 145:16–19

In this lesson, we will not only learn the misconception of assuming it all depends on us but also discover how true dependence on God and His wisdom can lead to a peaceful, unforgettable outcome, even in the midst of delays.

It All Depends On... Faith In And Through Baptism

For the Christian, hope in the midst of delays is sealed in our Baptism and our dependency in faith is granted through the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit. When the challenges of our task-filled lives cause doubt and confusion, God’s presence, wisdom, and guidance are offered, as we fix our eyes on Him and trust His leading in the steps we take.

Our hope, our salvation, and our honor depend on God, who is our solid rock on which to stand. As we pour out our hearts to Him, we discover that He is our refuge and strength in the planning process (Psalm 62:7–8). And delays are often part of that process. Although inevitable, the Christian’s faith is shielded during these difficult times because of the grace and mercy He offers.

What are the benefits of Baptism to us in our world of busy schedules and occasional delays? Refer to the following and determine how Christ’s death, resurrection, and abiding presence within us are the foundation of how we perceive what’s happening and where we can receive strength to endure.

Read Romans 6:3–11. Write down the many results of Baptism in this section.

What other blessings are ours in Baptism?

Galatians 2:20 _____

Galatians 3:27 _____

1 Peter 1:3–5 _____

1 Peter 3:21–22 _____



What is our reaction toward Him and others for this amazing gift?

John 15:12

2 Corinthians 5:14–15

What Jesus did for us through His death and resurrection, no man can take away. It becomes part of us when we are baptized, for we also receive His Spirit and the forgiveness of sins. His Spirit reveals it to us in the Word and opens our hearts and minds to understand it, for it all depends on Him! See 1 Corinthians 2:9–12.

Read also:

John 1:12–13

Acts 2:38–39

It All Depends On ... Christ's Hold On Us

Hectic schedules can often make us feel drained, encountering feelings of hopelessness. Errors in judgment, delays in answers to concerns, and misguided opinions challenge our perspective of God and often weigh us down with negative thoughts and emotions. It is then that we need encouragement from Scripture and peace in the struggle. Peter is an excellent example of how the redemption

of Christ brought him strength and comfort to serve the Lord with gladness. A favorite way to remember him is: Peter caved; Jesus saved.

Jesus knew it was coming. He even predicted it in Luke 22:32 and 34 — *“Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers...I tell you, Peter, the rooster will not crow this day, until you deny three times that you know me.”* Of course, Peter’s over-confident response to this was, *“Even if I must die with you, I will not deny you”* (Matthew 26:35)!

Has over-confidence in our abilities been a roadblock to achieving God’s creative design for us and the lives of others? Have we yielded to ego rather than to God’s love and guidance? Have delays tightened the grip of fears and caused us to make errors in judgment? It did for Peter when he caved and denied Christ. Yet we receive the confirmation that before and after, Jesus declared His loving forgiveness and renewed Peter’s faith in several ways. First, He prayed for him in advance. Second, His death and resurrection proved it. Third, Jesus’ words after the resurrection confirmed it when they were at the lake (John 21:15–17). And fourth, the Holy Spirit empowered him for mighty acts after Pentecost, fulfilling Christ’s prediction in Luke 22 (Acts 2:14–41). Peter, who made a huge error in judgment, was restored to even greater works of service, not because it depended on him but because of the powerful hold Christ Jesus had on him. So even though Peter caved and Jesus truly saved, the miracle Peter discovered within him far surpassed the shame encountered without Him!

And so it is, and will be, with us!



It All Depends On ... God's Plan For Something Better

Like my entry into the cave at the Isle of Capri, God has something more amazing and more beautiful in His planning that we can ever imagine. We see only the small opening of the cave, but He sees the beauty of the big picture, offering us a trusting relationship with Him. Delays play a part in the results, for we also discover our desires in Him also change. We no longer view the delays, the challenges, or even our personal goals as the main event. Rather we say with Isaiah,

*“The path of the righteous is level;
O upright One, you make the way of the righteous smooth.
Yes, Lord, walking in the way of your laws, we wait for you; your name and renown are the desire of our hearts”*
(Isaiah 26:7–8 NIV).

Like the radiant blue light that flows into caves, 2 Corinthians 4:6–7 reveals the light of the knowledge of God in the face of Christ. Rather than relying on ourselves to understand God's delays, we focus on Him and His brilliant path that leads to beautiful revelations never experienced before. We discover that focusing on ourselves leads to despair, while focusing on God leads to hope. God always has a divine purpose for every delay and will use it to prepare us for the work yet to be done here on earth.



Prayer: Dear Father in heaven, You have much to teach me through my delays in life. Give me the courage and strength to maintain a trusting faith in You. In Jesus name and for His sake I ask this. Amen.



The God Of Delays



*How precious to me are your thoughts, O God!
How vast is the sum of them! If I would count
them, they are more than the sand. I awake, and
I am still with you (Psalm 139:17-18).*

“You are never too old.”

**“There is work
yet to be done.”**

**“The time is short,
so don’t delay.”**

**“Tell the good
news to your kids
and grandkids.”**

**“Encourage and
strengthen others
for the walk that
lays ahead for them.”**

These are incredible thoughts the Holy Spirit laid on my heart as the aging years crept up on me. When noticing the signs that indicate I was not as spry and youthful as I used to be, I returned to Scripture for hope. Opening my eyes to truths I had forgotten, I rejoiced in these aging years, for

the time to do the Lord’s work was getting shorter. Many stories are yet to be told and many works of kindness are still to be accomplished. Turning seventy wasn’t a death sentence; it was a precious gift.

What was God’s response of love to me? New ministries were given that I thought would have been accomplished many years before. Writing and speaking opportunities were placed in my path, a path I had desired twenty years earlier. I never dreamed God’s delays for service to Him would be of greater benefit at the age of seventy than at the age of fifty. God knew best and it revealed a love far beyond comprehension.

It is not unusual for God to present delays having a divine purpose that far exceeds ours. In Genesis 18 and 21, God reveals that the impossible is to become possible. At God’s appointed time, the aging couple Abraham and Sarah gave birth to a son who would not only be one of the fathers of the nation of Israel but of Jesus Himself (Matthew 1).

After the Ark of the Covenant was brought to Jerusalem by King David, he passionately wanted to build a temple for the Lord. However, the building of the temple was not to be built by David but was to be delayed and built by his son Solomon. David, though desiring to do this mighty act for God, rejoiced that another would receive that joy and blessing (1 Chronicles 15 and 17).

“For you, my God, have revealed to your servant that you will build a house for him. Therefore, your servant has found courage to pray before you. And now, O Lord, you are God, and you have promised this good thing to your servant”
(1 Chronicles 17:25–26).

God's delays, even in the latter portion of our lives, do not disavow God's faithfulness to us. Rather it is in those delays that many others may be reached for Him — whether through us or through those with whom we share our dreams and visions. There are yet people to reach, lives to restore, and the kingdom's work to be done. While God's timing for those may not be ours, His grace is. Resting all those hopes and dreams at the foot of the cross grants us the comfort to know that in all things He knows the eternal, divine picture and will use it to His glory. We remember that the plans of the Lord always stand firm (Psalm 33:11).

Prayer: Dear Jesus, while delays are difficult, I want to trust Your heavenly plan for all things accomplished — or not accomplished — in my life. Give me the strength to do what I can and to find grace when Your chosen delay is needed. In Jesus' name and for His sake I ask this. Amen.

The God Of Delays



For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you — that is, that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith, both yours and mine (Romans 1:11-12).

Fear gripped me. Sleepless nights exhausted me. Unexpected guilt pounced on me. I was a Christian. How could this be happening to me? Aren't Christians supposed to be strong and resilient? Aren't we supposed to be able to bear up under anything in life with a smile on our faces and no thoughts of fear? Yet I was in a pit — a pit that seemed to be getting deeper. Where was God?

What I didn't realize was that my precious Jesus was sitting in the pit with me. He was covering me with His wings and holding me in His everlasting arms. The walk with despair and loneliness seemed endless, yet the result after years of searching, pleading, and praying, led me straight into those arms. Through Scripture and the prayers of friends and family, I discovered not only Who He was but Who He IS. And the delay in revealing that, exposed a trust and confidence that could only have been created through His Holy Spirit for He was on this walk with me from the first day until now.

Through the Bible, I was reminded that even the Apostle Paul experienced pits in his life that caused confusion for he was afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed (2 Corinthians 4:8–9). And that was only the beginning, for he also shared that during his journeys for the Lord, he received thirty-nine lashes five times, was beaten with rods three times, and was stoned. In addition, he was shipwrecked, adrift at sea, and in constant danger from robbers, his own countrymen, and from the Gentiles (2 Corinthians 11:24–26). In all this, he could still say,

“Who is weak, and I do not feel weak? Who is led into sin, and I do not inwardly burn? If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness...I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, and in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong” (2 Corinthians 11:29–30 and 12:10 NIV).



In all these, Paul clung to the cross of Christ for redemption, mercy, and the power to move onward. He knew that God's planning was his to perform and God's new intended direction would be revealed. In his letter to the Romans, Paul shares how God's delays were only used to increase his own personal witness to the Gentiles.

For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you — that is, that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith, both yours and mine. I want you to know, brothers, that I have often intended to come to you (but thus have been prevented), in order that I may reap some harvest among you as well as among the rest of the Gentiles
(Romans 1:11-13).

We can be assured that not a single situation or circumstance in the lives of those who love Him will go without the promise to use it for good (Romans 8:28).

Whether experiencing personal tragedies, national catastrophes, or worldwide calamities, God will use them for the good of His believing children and reveal His glory in the process. We may never see those results in our lifetimes, but He is faithful to His promises and will expose it in His chosen time.

Prayer: Dear Father in heaven, I thank You that Your wisdom knows what is best for me and all believers. Give me the faith to believe this, no matter how difficult the delays and circumstances are in my life. In Jesus' name I ask this. Amen.

The God Of Delays



I can do all things through him who strengthens me (Philippians 4:13).

Contentment is a difficult lesson to learn. In America, achieving prosperity and indulging in “stuff-it’s” is an illness sought after and strongly desired. With garbage cans full of wasted food, bins filled with stored belongings, and houses overflowing from material gain, we purchase more, store up more, and crave more. Living large is expected and hoarding is permissible, all the while creating empty hearts and empty pockets.

Many Christians in other nations live very differently. Ostracized and even persecuted for their faith, they may have all their belongings confiscated, have loved ones killed, and/or be forced to live in refugee camps to escape the terror and horror in their homeland. Living their faith has become impossible and living a life as a refugee is eminent.

The Apostle Paul understood their plight. He, himself, endured more hardship than most today will ever understand or endure. Yet Philippians 4:11–14 gives us a picture of the faith and grateful heart he revealed, even when persecuted. While in prison, Paul rejoiced in the Lord (v.10), learned to be content with God’s purposes in all circumstances (v. 11), and was confident of God’s care and strength (v. 13). He knew his contentment, even in these difficult conditions, didn’t depend on him or his lengthy period of delays, but rather on the risen Christ on whom his dependence rested.

You see, before Paul became the powerful, purpose-filled pursuer for Christ, he was a prestigious man in the Jewish nation. He was circumcised on the eighth day, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews, a Pharisee, and, as to righteousness under the law, was blameless (Philippians 3:4–6). Yet once encountering Christ, He considered all that as loss for the sake of Christ, only wanting the surpassing worth of truly knowing Christ, understanding the power of His resurrection, and sharing in the fellowship of His suffering (Philippians 3:7–10). No matter his prolonged delay in prison, his goal was always focused on Christ and the incredible strength, wisdom, and power he could receive.

With that knowledge, no matter his imprisonment or his delay into freedom again, he states, *“I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own...One thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus”* (Philippians 3:12–14).

Contentment is available in Christ even in the delays. His grace and mercy provide spiritual progress through the Holy Spirit and, like Paul, reflect an attitude that is impossible without the Spirit of Christ. As a result, we, too, learn to rely on Him.

Prayer: Dear Jesus, thank You for providing the example of Paul as one who relied on Your purpose in delays, even in the most difficult of situations. Through Your Spirit, give me such a faith as this. In Your name I ask this. Amen.

The God Of Delays



Wait for the Lord; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the Lord (Psalm 27:14)!

Some delays in our lives can be excruciating. The painful delays of long-term illnesses leave us hanging by a thread, often making us feel as if we are experiencing a funeral day after day. The emotions experienced leave us drained and even, at times, angry when watching the slow progression our loved one faces.

Having a family member or spouse in dangerous locations through military duty or the separations due to divorce or death can swallow our minds in despair and loneliness. Fear often overwhelms us and the lingering wait creates an ever-growing canyon of hurt and pain that provides no apparent relief.

It is in the waiting process that the mightiest inner work of the Holy Spirit is often accomplished. It is through the agonizing minutes, hours, and days that we learn to rely heavily on God's Word to strengthen and support us as our apparent canyon grows larger. It is at this point that we often face the temptation to fall into despair. It is in Scripture that we are assured of His promises in the lingering waiting process.

They who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint (Isaiah 40:31).

I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in his word I hope; my soul waits for the Lord more than watchmen for the morning, more than watchmen for the morning. O Israel, hope in the Lord! For with the Lord there is steadfast love, and with him is plentiful redemption (Psalm 130:5-7).

Because of our Baptism, Christ's Holy Spirit resides in us. His power, His grace, and His mercy are available day in and day out, offered one day at a time. When decisions are to be made, He guides us. When heartbreak overtakes us because of the lingering delay, He promises to be with us. Allow His Spirit to give you Christ's strength, for He understands your need and endured it all before you (Hebrews 2:17-18).

Praise God that our strength is not dependent upon us, for we would fail and fall. It is dependent on the forgiveness and restoration of the Spirit in us. God honors every tiny step we take toward trusting Him in the process of waiting as we grow and lean on Him. Remember, when eyes look to Him, He is never disappointed, but rather He will rejoice over us with singing and quiet us with His love (Zephaniah 3:17).

Prayer — Dear Father in heaven, I do not always understand the lingering wait that I occasionally endure. As I seek You in the Word, reveal the love of Your Son who willingly suffered all for me and understands completely. May Your Spirit be my Comforter and Source of courage and strength as You use the circumstances to grow in my love for You. Amen.

The God Of Delays



Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end (John 13:1).

Time and again Christ revealed a need for delay. He delayed in visiting Jairus' ailing daughter only to raise her from the dead (Luke 8:41–56). He delayed in responding to the heartbreaking plea of His dear friends Mary and Martha when their beloved brother was dying, only to reveal the glory of God by raising him from the dead (John 11:17–44). He also knew that His need to turn the world upside down would be delayed, awaiting the Father's timing. Specifically organized for the salvation of the world, His details needed to fall into place (John 7:6, 8, 30), and when the time was right for His suffering and death, Jesus did not flinch in moving forward.

But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption of sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father” (Galatians 4:4)!

The eternal King came into “our time” to become known by us through “His time” spent on earth — to suffer, to die, and to rise again into eternity. All time, His and ours, has an eternal outcome: that we might glorify the Father even in the delays of our lives. All delays, even Christ’s delays, can bring us comfort and strength as we rest in Him knowing that His desire and purpose is to enable us to grow in the realization that He is all we need and He is enough.

At just the right time, Jesus lifted up his eyes to heaven and said, Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you, since you have given him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given to him. And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent” (John 17:1–3).

Closing Prayer: Dear Father, I am continually with you; you hold my right hand. You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will receive me to glory...But for me it is good to be near God; I have made the Lord God my refuge, that I may tell of all your works (Psalm 73:23–24, 28). Amen and Amen.



God's Faithfulness



God's Faithfulness

Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and your dominion endures throughout all generations.

[The Lord is faithful to all his words and kind in all his works] (Psalm 145:13).

The bridge I needed to cross loomed before me. The narrow handrails and roped sides revealed the possible dangers below. As I started across I could see the solid rock beneath the bridge gradually sloping downward. Continuing, the secure base suddenly dropped off to reveal a deep gorge, one that would bring sudden death if the bridge collapsed or if I slid between the ropes. I knew I needed to cross in order to observe the scenic beauty, but I could feel my stomach churn and my legs weaken. Suddenly a strong wind swept through the narrow

gorge and the bridge began to sway. Within moments, the legs that once felt weak began to shake. In an instant, I fell to my knees in fear. My mind raced as I tried to figure out my next move. There was no turning back for the bridge was too narrow for two people to pass. I had to keep moving even if it meant doing so in a slow crawl. Hoping for a decrease in the wind, I continued on. Knowing the fear of danger would eventually cripple me, I looked up as best I could. Gaining the courage to grab the side ropes, I forced myself to my feet, and slowly inched forward one step at a time. Failing to do so would block others who were also trying their best to cross the bridge as well. Upon reaching the other side, I understood the reason why many were willing to cross the bridge, for the panorama beyond surpassed my wildest imagination.

When faced with weak legs and churning stomachs it can be extremely difficult to hold life together on our own. We eventually discover the best place to be is on our knees, searching for the One who can hold us together. Looking up rather than at the circumstances, we discover a God who is faithful to listen and love us even in our weakened state.

In the process, we see Him as the only One able to assist us as we cross our swinging bridges and the One who is waiting on the other side with joys and blessings unimaginable.

FAITHFULNESS KNOWN

Prayer: Dear Father, no matter my role in life today, there are always challenges. Some issues may seem small; others are overwhelming. Give me Your Spirit's wisdom to view You through eyes of faith and to cherish You as the One who will strengthen and support me as I cross this unstable life with You. Amen.

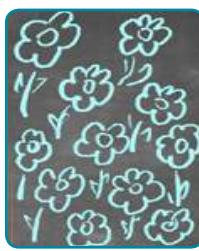
From the time we are born up to the age we now find ourselves, life sends us obstacles that need to be crossed in order to reach our current destination in life. Some challenges, especially when we are younger, provide caregivers who hold our hands, like parents, teachers, or friends. At other times we struggle alone, trying to figure out how we can get to the other side without collapsing under the weight of what is happening. Once reaching our destination, we cannot help but wonder how we managed to achieve what we did and how we gained so much wisdom in the process.

Read Psalm 89:1–2, 6–8 together and discuss the significance of God's faithfulness in your personal life today.

I will sing of the steadfast love of the Lord, forever; with my mouth I will make known your faithfulness to all generations. For I said, “Steadfast love will be built up forever; in the heavens you will establish your faithfulness.” ... For who in the skies can be compared to the Lord? Who among the heavenly beings is like the Lord, a God greatly to be feared in the council of the holy ones, and awesome above all who are around him? O Lord God of hosts, who is mighty as you are, O Lord, with your faithfulness all around you?

In Scripture we learn of the God who remains ever faithful. As a mother, as a single, or as one who is aging all too quickly, God's faithfulness is sure. When encountering illness, with challenges on the job, raising children at home, or facing painful emotions and memories from childhood, God's

faithfulness is secure. His love knows no bounds. His own personal bridge of support is always there even when our knees buckle under us and the view seems bottomless. The wind may blow fiercely and, while God can calm the wind, He may rather choose to give us the strength to crawl and eventually stand, enabling us to view the incredible picture of Him on the other side.



Go on the journey of God's faithfulness through His Word this week. Whether you are already on the mountaintop or are viewing the deep gorge below on a swinging bridge, believe that God's path of faithfulness is secure and He is to be trusted.

For who is God, but the Lord? And who is a rock, except our God? — the God who equipped me with strength and made my way blameless. He made my feet like the feet of a deer and set me secure on the heights (Psalm 18:31–33).

Read Psalm 145:13–19. When reading this section, make note of the incredible blessings, or “views”, of God's faithfulness to us. Take time to share what each blessing means to you during the tasks that lay before you today.

Note that in the ESV Bible the word all is used ten times. As you read it again, share what all is referring to in each phrase. Now go back over this section again and list the action words that describe what God does on our behalf (ex. open and satisfy in verse 16). **In what ways can this confirm or alter your view of who God is and what He does?**



God's Faithfulness To Abraham

In Genesis 18:14 God asks Abraham, “*Is anything too hard for the Lord?*” Abraham and Sarah were well past the age of childbearing. Although God had promised them a son, an heir, it had to have been nearly impossible to believe the promise could still be fulfilled. God surprised them through the delay revealing that they would not only have the promised son, but would also discover it to be at a time when it was seemingly impossible. God chose just the right time to reveal His faithfulness to them and it would be the result of a miracle. His faithfulness would be revealed through two very aging people (Genesis 18:1–15; 21:1–7).

Many of us can relate to times in our lives when the tasks at hand seemed like that deep gorge into which we would fall. Worn out and exhausted, we collapsed under the weight. It is during these times that, in God’s Word, we are reminded of God’s faithfulness which is higher than the highest heavens and deeper than the deepest gorge.

God's Faithfulness Revealed

Your steadfast love, O Lord, extends to the heavens, your faithfulness to the clouds. Your righteousness is like the mountains of God; your judgments are like the great deep; man and beast you save, O Lord (Psalm 36:5–6).

God does all this at just the right time — no matter our roles in life, our ages, or our professions. Just as He was faithful to Abraham and Sarah, so He will be faithful to us — at just the right time. His greatest proof is revealed in Romans 5:6–8: For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person — though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die — but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

It is because of Christ’s redeeming blood and through our Baptism that we are no longer under the curse of the law but rather under His grace. Now when the Father views us He no longer sees our sins, for they have been forgiven through Christ. He sees only the Savior. There can be no greater proof of His faithfulness.

PERSONAL ASSIGNMENT:

To better remember God's faithfulness, read Psalm 100 and memorize as much as possible. Take special time to dwell on verse 5 and take note of its meaning and value for you personally.

☞ ☜

Prayer:

*Let me be Thine forever,
My faithful God and Lord;*

*Let me forsake Thee never
Nor wander from Thy Word*

*Lord, do not let me waver,
But give me steadfastness,*

*And for such grace forever
Thy holy name I'll bless.*

LSB 689, v. 1

☞ ☜

God's Faithfulness



Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path (Psalm 119:105).

Life can sometimes wreak havoc on our hearts and minds. Decisions to be made are often unbearable, especially when they involve other individuals. We flip through the pages of Scripture, hoping to find an answer — that “yes” or “no” that we need. We wonder why God isn’t pointing to the solution for our problems. We wish we could randomly point to the right verse. In vain, we shout, “Where are You, God? Why aren’t you helping me out here?”

Solutions for problems or decisions are never easy, but the source of strength, courage, and patience remains. God’s Word was not meant to be a book of immediate solutions. Rather, it is a living book, ready to touch the heart in ways that no man can. Fresh from the heart of God, the Word remains true and faithful in its effect. Though written many years ago, the Holy Spirit uses it to spiritually polish us, refine us, and reform us — and not because it is just another book written in history, but because of God’s promise that His Word will be exactly what we need, when we need it.

For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart (Hebrews 4:12).

When searching for an end to the rambling mind and the endless inner chatter, God desires that we not seek solutions but the Savior. The purpose for the precious Word of God is that we might grow in our love of the perfect Word, Jesus Christ. From the words *In the beginning* in Genesis 1:1 to the fullness of those words in John 1:1, *our eyes are opened to the truth God wanted us to see*, namely that Jesus Christ was the hope of the past and that He is still the hope for us today.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God ... And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth (John 1:1, 14).

Christ is the same today and tomorrow and forever. He lived our lives of sin when on the cross and knows our weaknesses and our doubts. He offers us His very own comfort and strength. His love knows no comparison. In His time and way, we will see His glory, a glory that is full of grace and truth.

Prayer: Dear Father, my decisions today leave me with endless questions. Help me to first seek Christ in Your Word. You will guide me to the solutions in Your time and way. Amen.

“She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins” (Matthew 1:21).

God's Faithfulness



Right after 9/11, it was necessary to fly halfway across the United States. A professor of comparative religions sat next to me and observed that I was reading a Christian book. Because of the nature of his profession, he began to question me on my belief in the Bible. For two hours, he tried to convince me that all religions have a similar basis for truth. His arguments were flying as high as the plane, and the rationale of his thinking bounced everywhere like the turbulence of a plane. Resting in the Lord, I chose to listen rather than talk, believing I would share the centrality of my faith at the proper times. He strongly believed that all gods are the same and that all people would live eternally, whether as a drop of water in the universe or in a specific place. His logic fell apart, however, when he began to speak about the god in whom the Muslims believe — a god who expects good works in order to achieve a place in paradise. At that point I asked, “So you believe that at the twin towers, the god to whom these young Muslim men gave their lives is the same God as my Jesus, who freely gave His very life for me and through whom I receive eternal life?” The conversation ended abruptly and a hush fell among the people on the plane. A rebuttal was a dangerous place for him to be. God made His point. Nothing more needed to be said.

Not to us, O Lord, not to us, but to your name give glory, for the sake of your steadfast love and your faithfulness (Psalm 115:1).

The name of Jesus is powerful. His name can silence many foes and change the hearts and minds of people. His is a name that frees us from sins and announces redemption. It is the same Jesus who offered Himself for our salvation and who now sits at His Father's right hand, pleading for us at the throne of grace.

But we often ask, “When my life is filled with turmoil, too many activities, illnesses, and one-hundred other challenges, how can I receive answers simply by praying His name?” In faith we are reminded that calling on the name of Jesus is creating a trust relationship with Him, even when the challenges make no sense or take forever to be answered. It’s knowing that, in Him, there is no one and nothing that is able to separate us from His agonizing love revealed on the cross (Romans 8:35). In the name of Jesus, God’s faithfulness is revealed — one task at a time, one day at a time.

Prayer: Dear Jesus, thank You for the promise of Your faithfulness through your powerful name. May that name forever be exalted by me. Amen.

God's Faithfulness



In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight (Ephesians 1:7–8).

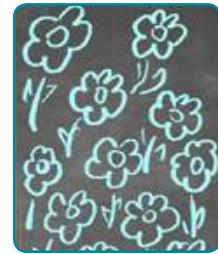
My heart sank into my stomach when I realized that my three-year-old daughter was missing. We had just moved to Springfield and were attending a picnic for the new seminary students. Thinking Trina was with her father, I approached him when I saw she wasn't. After questioning him and others, I realized she had disappeared. Terrified, my husband and I began searching the campus but saw no sight of her. As a last resort, I decided to see if she might have returned to the one thing with which she was familiar — our car. Words cannot express the joy that exploded within me when I saw her standing next to the car, ready for our journey home.

In the sea of people existing today, there are many who remain lost, looking for something that will make them feel safe. Whether straying from their havens of truth or still searching for it, they want someone or someplace where they can feel at "home." All are born with a void that can only be filled in the presence of Jesus Christ. Jesus Himself, as the Good Shepherd, will search for those who are lost. Doing whatever it takes to bring the called and redeemed into His fold, desiring that none be lost, He will search high and low until that child is found and in His loving arms (Luke 15:3–7).

Jesus' greatest example of redeeming love is the cross. We may try to run from it. We may deny it. We can try to hide from its truth. We can even try to mask it with our busy schedules and accomplishments, but nothing will ever replace that love. In all our searching, we will never find fulfillment in any other, for it is the power of God unto salvation for everyone who believes (Acts 4:12).

But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption (Hebrews 9:11–12).

Prayer: Thank You, Father, that my eternal redemption is secure and that, because of it, You will sustain me in my daily walk with You. Amen.



God's Faithfulness



By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God (1 John 4:13-15).

“Nancy’s nephew was four when she was pregnant with her first child. She allowed him to place his hand on her belly and feel the baby kick. His little face scrunches and said, ‘How does the baby get out of there?’

She wanted to keep it simple so she said, ‘The doctor will help.’

His eyes widened in amazement as he exclaimed, ‘You’ve got a doctor in there, too?’” (www.gcf.net)

Feeling the activity of the Holy Spirit within us is not something we can experience noticeably, like having a physical doctor within. In fact, basing our decisions on feelings can be deceiving. However, one aspect of God’s presence is the peace that is a constant in our daily walk with Him. Even in troubled times, His perfect peace reigns and His faithfulness is understood.

You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you, because he trusts in you. Trust in the Lord forever, for the Lord God is an everlasting rock (Isaiah 26:3).

God’s presence provides peace. Because He is faithful to His Word, His Name, and His redeemed, true peace is a gift that only He can grant. It isn’t acquired through our jobs, our positions, or as a result of creating our perfect families. It is received and available through the Lord’s presence within us, granted upon our Baptism. Inner peace is His work, no matter the daily “work” we perform every day — that of a homemaker, a nurse, a teacher, an executive, or a factory worker. Because He is faithful to Himself, He will remain faithful to us and the result is His inner peace.

The saying is trustworthy, for:

If we have died with him, we will also live with him; if we endure, we will also reign with him; if we deny him, he also will deny us; if we are faithless, he remains faithful — for he cannot deny himself (2 Timothy 2:11-12).

Dear Father in heaven, I know through Your Word that You abide in me and will remain faithful to Your presence. For that I am truly grateful. Amen.

God's Faithfulness



There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death (Romans 8:1-2).

When young men and women play basketball for their college each hopes for victory. At the Olympics, competitors and teams alike train and play hard in the hope of winning the victory gold. When two rivals compete in a wrestling match — physical or mental, each hopes to be victorious. Victory is the prize that makes every day of training and each physical endurance test worth the struggle. Seeking the victory — and winning — makes it all worth the effort.

In 1 Corinthians 9:24–25, Paul reminds us that when we run our races in a competition, only one receives the victory. No matter how hard the struggle or how dedicated we are to winning, there can only be one winner. All the others will be disappointed and decide whether to strive again to win a perishable prize. They will have to determine whether the effort is worth the result.

Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable (I Corinthians 9:24–25).

Winning is admirable and teaches wonderful disciplines. Yet there is a prize for which all can win eternally and for which we never have to compete. It is a victory that Jesus has already won for us. It is not something we seek to win on our own merit. Whatever our seeming competition in life, this victory is Christ's to give and He gives it freely. The rewards are not a gold medal or a special banner. Rather it is the crown of life that remains ours into eternity. Through this victory won on the cross, we are made alive with Christ, raised up with Him, and seated with Him in the heavenly places. That is His victory and He is our reward.

But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ — by grace you have been saved — and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus (Ephesians 2:4-7).

Prayer: Dear Jesus, thank You for Your faithfulness in granting me Your victory. May I cherish that victory now and into eternity. Amen.

Abundant Spiritual Treasures



Abundant Spiritual Treasures

“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Matthew 6:19–21).

Many people today want to live in a world of fantasy. Millions of dollars are spent on vacations taking them away from the realities of life. Resorts and theme parks overflow with people from all over the world hoping to embrace a day of laughter and relaxation, providing a respite from one's present world. Even when residing at home, the masses watch movies and TV reality shows as a means of viewing the lives of others, hoping that entertainment will offer more colorful pictures than experienced in their own real lives. These worlds of “happily ever after” or “stranger than strange” offer a different perspective and give a glimpse of how life could be outside the confines of their own boring, unpredictable four walls.

All these kingdoms can be good, enjoyable, and refreshing. Having a vacation or watching uplifting movies can be acceptable and valuable. Yet it is when lives are in turmoil, when lingering crises occur, or we find ourselves swallowed up in heartbreak, that these kingdoms prove to be only a temporary fix. They end up simply being a Band-Aid placed on an open wound. When this occurs, they not only pre-

vent healthy scarring but may enlarge the wound even more as the reality of own truth sets in. In addition, when we rely on the kingdoms of this world, we may run the risk of missing the narrow way that leads to rest and peace in God's kingdom.

Jesus Himself warned of this mindset: “Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few” (Matthew 7:13–14).

Prayer: Dear Father in heaven, reveal Your will and way as I study Your Word. Open my eyes to Your truths and Your glory as I grow to understand the incredible spiritual treasures of serving You in the kingdom. In Jesus' name I ask this. Amen.

In Christ's kingdom, each day can be valued as a day spent in His presence, even while living in the reality of our personal lives. Each day covered with His love remains secure and reveals open hearts to His teachings. The narrow way with Jesus far surpasses the wider world of TV, movies, and fantasy kingdoms. The narrow way is to be desired first and foremost. The kingdom of God changes our view of the other kingdoms and keeps our lives in better balance. In the kingdom of God resides the Lover of our souls, the Friend who shares our woes, and the Savior who understands our goals. Rest in Him as we discover this kingdom and the blessing of knowing this Lord and Savior in whom we reside.



The Kingdom Of God

“But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you” (Matthew 6:33).

Where is this heavenly kingdom of which Jesus spoke — a kingdom not of this world (John 18:36)?

The kingdom of which the disciples were aware, and from which they thought Jesus would rescue them, was in direct contrast to the kingdom to which Jesus referred. His kingdom would, in fact, flip their world upside down. Rather than escape, aggression, and possession, His love ruled and was the power to be used by the believers in His kingdom.

The beatitudes are a classic example of Christ’s interpretation of a world of new thoughts, revealing a new approach to life. **Read Matthew 5:3–11** to discover this upside-down world. Take note of the contrasts and how the “earthly worlds” differ from the love displayed in the kingdom of heaven.

Christ’s kingdom is also reflected in the following:

Matthew 13:44–46

Matthew 25:34

Luke 17:20–21

Hebrews 12:28

And now we ask, “Who receives this kingdom?”



Christ’s kingdom resides in His presence.

Through faith we became His own and received His Holy Spirit as a guarantee of our inheritance into that kingdom (John 3:3–8). As a result, we possess the kingdom of God, always available to us in our hectic, spinning, task-filled lives.

Refer to:

John 7:38–39

Ephesians 1:13–14

1 Corinthians 6:19–20

2 Corinthians 5:5

Because the kingdom of God is heavenly, not earthly, the joys and privileges of that inheritance become ours upon receiving Christ through Baptism. **Look up the following passages** to discover what Scripture has to say about the incredible kingdom of God.

Psalm 145:10–13

Romans 14:17

1 Corinthians 4:20

One of the greatest joys of belonging to Christ’s kingdom is stated in Psalm 16:11 — *You have made known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand* (NIV). Those eternal pleasures are ours to implore by seeking, asking, and knocking (Matthew 7:7–8).

Through Scripture, the kingdom of God explodes with the knowledge of all the abundant treasures offered by the eternal and loving Savior. Continue this walk, relying on the Holy Spirit to reveal the abundant grace and mercy offered, as we, Christ’s baptized children, reside in Him and He in us.





Spiritual Treasures In God's Word

Psalm 19:7–10

Psalm 119:72, 105, 127

Proverbs 8:10–11

Colossians 3:16–17

(On your own, **read the entire chapter of Psalm 119**, for it is a treasure trove of God's revelation regarding the value of His Word. Let Hebrews 4:12–13 serve as a reminder of the impact God's Word can have upon us as we read and study it.)

Our Faith Is Shielded By God's Power

Psalm 18:30, 35

Galatians 2:20

1 Peter 1:3–9

We Are Living Stones

Read the following to confirm our relationship to God as a living stone:

Ephesians 2:18–19

1 Peter 2:4–5, 9–10

We are special people, unique in many ways, yet always in need of the Chief Cornerstone. Out of sheer joy and gratitude, we desire to declare His praises and proclaim the excellencies of him who called us out of darkness into his marvelous light. (1 Peter 2:10)

Christ's Place In Our Lives As The Chief Cornerstone

1 Peter 2:6 (Isaiah 28:16)

Ephesians 2:19–22

Colossians 1:19–20

2 Corinthians 5:21

Salvation by Christ alone is the narrow way. Because we believe it many would call us "narrow-minded", and in truth we are, for it is the narrow way that leads to eternal life.

Concluding this study of the abundant treasures of God's spiritual kingdom, we can rejoice that there is so much more to learn. The amazing love discovered through Christ's sacrificial death, the power revealed in us through His resurrection, and the comfort of knowing that He is ever with us are truths in which we believe. They are the groundwork of our faith. Even upon our death, we will discover it to be, not a day of sorrow, but rather a day of rejoicing for we will be truly alive in Him. We will be in Christ forever and will be joined with our loved ones in the clouds upon His return (1 Thessalonians 4:16–17). What a party that will be!

Prayer: Loving heavenly Father, You have stored up for me abundant treasures both now and into eternity. Open my eyes to the incredible spiritual blessings You desire to give me every day. May Your strength and mercy be mine as I walk the narrow path with You in my busy, task-filled life. In Jesus' name and for His sake I ask this. Amen.

Abundant Spiritual Treasures



For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord
(Isaiah 55:9).

Go with gusto! Do everything you ever dreamed of, no matter how many you have to step over to get it. Acquire wealth and you will be happy. You can have it all. Don't let anything stop you.

These are all thoughts that the world shouts at us today. Encouraged to win it all, desire it all, and fight for it all, we assume the power rests in us as we do our best to be on top in everything we do. In the process we become stressed out, bottled up, and pulled in to endless accomplishments and desires that only bring temporary peace and joy. After years of striving, we soon dry up and wonder why we bothered doing any of it. Perhaps we have forgotten a key element: It's not what we do for ourselves that brings satisfaction but what we do for others.

Christ opens the eyes of believers to a different world — a world of opposites and contrasts. In His Word, God reveals to us that [He] chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; [He] chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; [He] chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. And because of him you are in

Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, so that, as it was written,

***“Let the one who boasts,
boast in the Lord”***
(1 Corinthians 1:27–29).

The Beatitudes themselves explore even more fully these contrasts. The poor in spirit will inherit the kingdom of heaven. Those who mourn will be comforted. The meek will inherit the earth. Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness will be satisfied. The merciful will receive mercy. The pure in heart will see God. The peacemakers will be called sons of God. (Matthew 5:3–9)

Jesus flipped the world upside down — in thought, in power, and in understanding. Rather than listening to the way of the world, we are encouraged to view it through the eyes, ears, and heart of Christ. He noted that in order to be the greatest, we need to be a servant. To be first, we must willingly serve others, for He Himself “came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45). (See also Mark 10:43–45)



His believers were to see things differently, to hear the truth through His Word, and to listen to the Spirit as He uses the means of grace to instruct us. For as it is written, *“What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him” — these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God...Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God* (1 Corinthians 2:9-10,12).

Prayer: Dear Jesus, as a beloved follower, I desire to seek Your wisdom above all things, for Your wisdom is powerful beyond all words. By seeking You, I will discover that You are the power of God and the wisdom of God and know that the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men (1 Corinthians 1:24-25).

(In your quiet time, **read Proverbs 2:1-11** for it reveals true wisdom and its benefits.)

Abundant Spiritual Treasures



He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins (Colossians 1:13-14).

When enjoying a cold winter night outside, I love to wrap myself in a soft, warm blanket and sit in front of a fire. There is an amazing sense of coziness and freedom from the cold air closing in around me. The fire itself serves as reminder that no matter the freezing temperatures, I am shielded by the glowing light near me and in the warmth of my snuggly blanket.

This picture can be brought home to us as we consider the life we live in Christ as His baptized children. When insurmountable pressures pile high around us, creating lives that seem to keep us frozen in time, we need a love that will wrap us up tightly. We want to rely on the confidence and knowledge that His power, grace, and mercy are always ours in which to snuggle.

God promises in Scripture that there is such a blanket, a covering from the outside world that provides inner peace. Because of our Baptism, we live in freedom, confirming a love beyond comprehension. Our inadequacies and insecurities become secondary as we grow in the knowledge that, in Him, we are raised to a new life – a life that is victorious and filled with His joy (Romans 6:1-5).

All this is a result of the transference God made within us – not because of anything we have done, but because of His mercy. We now live in the kingdom of God which is an eternal, spiritual possession received only through Christ Himself. It is a kingdom that the Father was pleased to give us (Luke 12:29-32).

May you be strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy, giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins (Colossians 1:11-14).

Let us wrap ourselves in that power, that might, that inheritance. We have been freed from darkness and live in the inherited joy only His Spirit provides.

How great is the love the Father lavished on us, that we should be called the children of God! And that is what we are (1 John 3:1 NIV)!

Prayer: Dear Father, thank You for lavishing Your love on me as Your baptized child, for I am now truly Yours. Enable me to live freely in the kingdom of Your Son, Jesus Christ, honoring You in all that I do. For His sake I ask this. Amen.

Abundant Spiritual Treasures



Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Philippians 2:9-11).

There is a mindset by many today that all religions lead to the same god and the same eternal end. Therefore we should acknowledge each belief as true and acceptable. While this thought may be enticing in order to appease them, these other paths cannot and will not take us to the path of eternal life with Christ. Jesus states in John 14:6, *“I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”*

After Pentecost, Peter had the strength and courage to profess this fact boldly as he spoke to the rulers and elders in Jerusalem. Filled with the Holy Spirit, he said to them, *“And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved”* (Acts 4:12).

No matter the beliefs of others, the way of the cross and resurrection through Jesus Christ is ours to proclaim and share in a loving way, whenever He opens that door. We know also that in His time, all people of the world will profess that Jesus is the Christ and will see His kingdom revealed.

So what is our personal priority in the kingdom of God, whether in the workplace, raising children, or settled in a retirement community? Where is our greatest treasure found? Are we all to be like Peter, boldly standing before ruling officials, giving testimony of our faith? Are we teachers in a classroom, or a speaker professing our beliefs among the multitudes? The likely answer from most of us is, “No. Not even close.” Yet if our greatest treasure rests in the loving hands of Jesus, our hearts will seek His will as well as the desire to speak of His kingdom, no matter where He places us. Because Christ first loved us, we will choose to love others, even the seemingly unlovable. Love will rule and love will reign.

This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us (1 John 4:10–12 NIV).



The greatest treasure and priority of our lives is to know the full measure of His love. Pray that God *may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith — that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God* (Ephesians 3:16-19).

Prayer: Christ, give me such a faith as this that I may grow in Your love. Reveal Your priorities for me as I walk through this day, filled with Your fullness. Amen.



Abundant Spiritual Treasures



“But those that were sown on the good soil are the ones who hear the word and accept it and bear fruit, thirtyfold, and sixtyfold and a hundredfold” (Mark 4:20).

The fruit on that tree enticed her. Evil thoughts were put into her head, leading her to believe amazing wisdom would be hers if she ate it. Although given permission by God to eat of every tree in the garden except that one, Eve saw the beautiful fruit and desired to taste of its juicy contents. And the bonus: she would be wise like God. How could she refuse? Yielding to temptation, she ate of it and then offered it to Adam, her husband. He also ate of it. The bite they took changed their lives, and ours. Inherited sin now dwells within all mankind and remains as a constant struggle for everyone, even God’s chosen children. (Genesis 3:1–7)

Would our choice have been any different? Would we have refused to eat the fruit? We will never know, but it is likely that Satan would have done His best to entice each and every one of us, just as he did with Adam and Eve. Yet in spite of their sin, they received a promise that a Savior would come. We, too, live on the promise that our sins are covered for we are restored and redeemed children of the Father. As a result of the empowering Holy Spirit within us and the means of grace (Word and Sacraments), we can trust daily in the living spiritual fruit.

Jesus once said,

**“Abide in me, and I in you
As the branch cannot bear
fruit by itself, unless it
abides in the vine, neither
can you, unless you abide
in me. I am the vine; you
are the branches. Whoever
abides in me and I in him,
he it is that bears much
fruit, for apart from me
you can do nothing”**

(John 15:4–5).

The fruit available to us today is the work of the Holy Spirit. It is nothing like the fruit that tempted Adam and Eve in the garden, but rather a fruit that feeds us in our inner being. When loving our neighbor is challenging, His love spills out as streams of living waters. When circumstances steal our hap-



piness, joy can be discovered from the fruit that only Christ can provide in His fullness. As patience wanes away and we cry out for a way to get the answers more quickly, the Holy Spirit provides the peace that surpasses understanding as we wait. Bothered by irritable family members or fellow workers, rather than getting angry and rude, we trust the Spirit to grant us His kindness, goodness, and self-control. Worn out from the daily grind, we cry out to Him, believing that faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control will flow from within. All are available in His fruit. All are given as needed and will reveal a Source totally uncommon to those around us as they witness a life solidly grounded in Christ (Galatians 5:22).

We can rejoice that we live in His kingdom and have His Spirit available daily. Covered by His blood, we can fall on our knees and believe that our inadequacies are used and empowered by the Lord's very special fruit — a fruit promised and provided with love.

Prayer: Dear Father, I thank You that Your love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control are mine. Give me the ability to trust in your steadfast love and to rejoice in your salvation. Amen.



Abundant Spiritual Treasures



But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin
(I John 1:7).

The darkness seemed to swallow me. Nausea crept into my very being as not even a sliver of light could be seen. Afraid that I might pass out from panic, I turned on my phone and held it against my chest. Although told not to turn on any light, I knew I had to or risk passing out. Standing in the bosom of a solitary confinement cell at the former Missouri State Prison in Jefferson City, I wondered how those who had been assigned there could remain sane. Yet some prisoners had been placed there for not only a few seconds but for months and even years.

Standing in the darkness of that cold room without even a hint of light served as a mental picture of the darkness thousands of people feel every day. Wandering aimlessly, floundering to find their spiritual identity, and wanting to believe that light can be found within themselves, they seek and search for a way to remove the light through addictions, false religions, money, fame, and achievements. Yet all leave them in darkness, a darkness that can only be removed by the true Light, Jesus Christ.

The Apostle John shared in his gospel the treasured light, Jesus Christ, who was sent as a light to remove the darkness of sin. *In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it* (John 1:4-5).

Jesus Himself stated, *"I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life"* (John 8:12) and *"I have come into the world as light, so that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness"* (John 12:46).

But the light doesn't end there, for the very words of Jesus reveal that we also are the light of the world (Matthew 5:14-16). Because He, the true Light, resides in us, we light up the room when we enter it. It doesn't matter if we may feel cracked and broken, worn out, or frustrated as a result of our daily jobs and schedules. The treasure of His Light shines through those cracks as we reveal the Father's glory through Christ.

Prayer: Dear sweet Jesus, enable me by Your grace to be a vessel through which Your amazing light can shine to others. Although I may feel cracked at times, may I know that Your light shines the brightest when my cracks are the greatest. Amen.

The Fullness Of Christ



I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge — that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God (Ephesians 3:16-19 NIV).

As teenagers, life appears hopeful and filled with wonderful ideas — most of the time. As a young adult, we look forward to exciting new adventures, both in the workplace and in family life — most of the time. When middle-aged, we embrace watching our children move on into their teen and young adult years, so full of hope and challenges — most of the time. Upon retirement, excitement is generated as we think about those trips we always wanted to take and the freedoms we will enjoy serving the community, the church, and our grandchildren — most of the time. “Most of the time” is often interrupted by life — the life we didn’t anticipate. The challenges, the unexpected, and the uncontrolled often splatter our plans with colors on a canvas that were neither desired nor explained. We wonder of its purpose. We wonder why God’s plans have to be so different than ours. We may even wonder if at times God is really an ever-present help for us.

As Christians, we want to believe that the plans, the wondering, and the unexpected things all center in the love and grace of Jesus Christ — that is, in His fullness. We desire to cling to the assurance in Jesus’ words to His disciples in John 16:33: *“I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulations. But take heart; I have overcome the world.”* Yet the depth of His love, which is beyond all comprehension, may seem difficult to grasp in the midst of trials and tribulation.

Prayer: Dear sweet Jesus, You promised Your fullness through the power of the Holy Spirit and for that I am truly grateful. Restore to me the joy of Your salvation as I learn more of Your fullness in the study of Scripture, especially when tests and trials add unexpected color into my life. In Your name I ask this. Amen.

Life without Christ as its center does not make sense. In fact, it can appear hopeless. The opening reference in Ephesians 3:16–19 confirms that love — His love — is revealed in all our confusing, devastating, and even debilitating times. His victory over sin, death, and the devil is assured, and exposure to His fullness in us will expand and explode in each and every circumstance we encounter. In fact, it is beyond our imagination.



Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all that we ask or imagine, according to His power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen
(Ephesians 3:20–21 NIV).

May the Holy Spirit open the windows of our hearts through His Word as we discover who we are in Christ and how, as a result, we possess His fullness.

The Fullness In Christ — The Receiving Of His Love

*Lord, Thee I love with all my heart;
I pray Thee, ne'er from me depart,
With tender mercy cheer me.

Earth has no pleasure I would share.
Yea, heav'n itself wert void and bare
If Thou, Lord, were not near me.

And should my heart for sorrow break,
My trust in Thee can nothing shake.
Thou art the portion I have sought;

Thy precious blood my soul has brought.
Lord Jesus Christ, my God and Lord,
My God and Lord, Forsake me not!

I trust Thy Word.*

LSB 708, v 1

In the fullness of Christ, the greatest blessing He bestows on us is the desire to love. His love in us overpowers the selfishness and egos, the greed and pride. His love requires commitment, determination, and hard work. His fullness of love views us as we can become. He doesn't see us as we are in the center of our heartbreak, broken dreams, and misshaped lives. Rather the Father views us as ones who have been washed in the blood of the Lamb and who have received His amazing love. That love, Christ's love, continues to cover our daily, heavily-burdened lives with His redeeming grace and tender mercy.

Refer to:

Galatians 3:26–27

Ephesians 2:6–9

Titus 3:4–7

The love of Christ that flows into and through us is not of our own doing. However, it is revealed in our hands — those that touch the untouchable, reach out to the homeless broken men and women on our streets, listen to the grieving heart, and serve when serving is the last thing we want to do. It is an impossible love that reaches across the chasm of prejudice and preconceived ideas of humanity. It is a love that understands we don't love because we have it bottled up in us naturally, but rather is a love that can only come from another Source — from the fullness Jesus provides to us as His restored, baptized children.

Read 1 John 4:10–19 and take note of this incredible, undying love that is given to us through Christ.



Then **read Colossians 1:19–20** to see how, in Christ, this all came to pass.

The Fullness In Christ — Made Alive In Christ

We are not the same as we were ten years ago, twenty years ago, or even more. Our attitudes have changed, our desires are different, and our direction in life focuses on serving others in ways altered from when we were younger. As a result, our former sometimes-draining tasks now rest on the back burner as insignificant when viewed in the whole scheme of things.

The same is true for our spiritual lives as we continue to ask, seek, and knock for Christ's wisdom and understanding. Because we better understand what it means to be made alive in Christ, our heart beats truer to His guidance and grace offered one day at a time, no matter who we are or what we still plan to achieve.

But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ — by grace you have been saved (Ephesians 2:4–5).

In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him (1 John 4:9).

A faith-filled life with Christ abounds in the realization of His wonders and finds joy in His presence. That doesn't mean our circumstances

will be easy or even tolerable. But it does mean that when we are on our knees weeping and sobbing in despair, He is still carrying the heaviest part of the load and we are covered by His everlasting arms. (See Matthew 11:29–30 and Deuteronomy 33:27.)

Refer to the following verses to discover the joys and wonders of being alive in Christ.

Colossians 2:6, 13

Romans 6:23

1 John 5:11–13, 20

Living in Christ, in His fullness, means that we inherit eternal life today but only because He is in us. While its full reality will not be inherited until the moment of our death, He provides eternal blessings of His kingdom now.

“And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent” (John 17:3).

Now because of being made alive in Christ, we can be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God (Colossians 1:9–10).





The Fullness Of Christ — A New Creation

Sometimes I can't help but wonder if a mirror is our greatest enemy. As we gaze into it, we see not the beauty God created, but the flaws and undesirable conditions that contradict the TV version of what beauty is. Our value is determined by what others see and how that translates into worthiness. Yet some of the most beautiful people I've seen have never won a beauty contest nor have they had their pictures mounted on the walls of cosmetic offices. Their beauty comes from within and brings about an unexplained radiance and peace. They are filled with a grace that flows from a heart received from Christ Himself, for He has clothed them with all His goodness and supplied them with His fullness. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, they have been able to make choices that reveal the resurrected life. **Refer to Ephesians 4:22–24 and 2 Corinthians 5:17–21.**

Upon our Baptism, we became a new creation in Christ. Supplied with the Holy Spirit, we are provided with spiritual rivers of living water (John 7:38–39). Created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness, we are privileged to do the joyous work of being Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making His appeal through us. We not only have received the fullness of Christ, but have been clothed with Christ Himself. (See Galatians 3:26–27 and Colossians 2:9–14.)

With that thought in mind, review Philippians 4:8–9 and Colossians 3:12–15 and list the qualities that can be developed through living a sanctified life in and through the Holy Spirit.

The Fullness Of Christ — Compelled By His Love To Love Others

Sometimes a spiritual "spanking" is in order as we continue to move through our lives of sanctification. It is that of knowing it is not about us, but about Christ Jesus in us. It is about a desire to do the Father's will in our daily task-filled lives.

Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God...for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children as light (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord (Ephesians 5:1–2, 8–10).

As a result of that light, that love, that fullness, we can reach out to others with unexpected results as we remember some very important truths.

Romans 12:1–3, 9–16

Romans 14:7–8

2 Corinthians 5:14–15

For now, we have come full circle:

from God's love for us

to His presence in us

to A new creation

to His love compels us to love others

to love for Him.

**All of this is because
we are in Christ through our Baptism.**

As a result of His redemptive sacrifice on the cross and the resurrection, we receive freedom to live our lives for Him, filled with the measure of faith He grants to us.





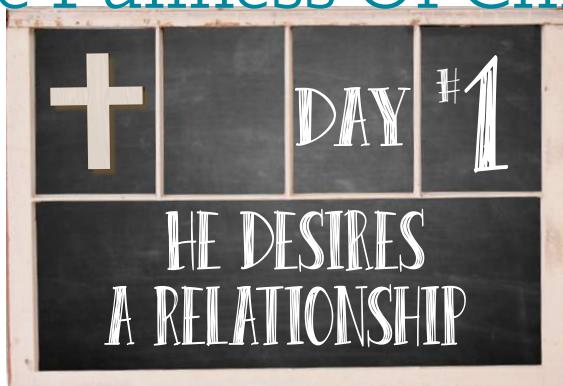
When we are mopping the kitchen floor, we are in Christ. As we transport our children to and from school and school activities, we are in Christ. Sitting at an office desk, overseeing an ailing or dying spouse or parent, we are in Christ. No matter the tasks, the trials, or the tests, we are in Christ and He is in us, and because He is in us, so also abide His love, His fruit, and His powerful presence — daily, hourly, in all places, and at all times. His forgiveness is secure when we fail. His power is granted in our weakness. His amazing love never leaves us, even though we may feel more unlovable than ever. His grace captures us in our task-filled lives and assures us that all is understood and redeemed. For love, Jesus died! For love, He allowed all our sins to be nailed to the cross and our punishment to be paid in full. That fullness is ours, for our

sins were buried with Him when He was buried. Then united with Him in our Baptism, we live free, resurrected lives as we live to serve Him and others out of love.

Prayer: Dear Father in heaven, thank You for the fullness that I possess as a result of my Baptism. As I study Your Word, open my eyes daily to the incredible joy, peace, and power available because You are in me every day. In Jesus' name and for His sake I ask this. Amen.



The Fullness Of Christ



I heard the voice of Jesus say,

“Come unto Me and rest;

*Lay down, thou weary one,
lay down Thy head upon My breast.”*

*I came to Jesus as I was,
so weary, worn, and sad;*

*I found in Him a resting place,
And He has made me glad.*

LSB 699, v. 1

Jesus desires our presence. He loves us so much that He opens the doors of heaven, welcoming us to listen to His Spirit through the Word every day. He promises to be our rest as we remain still before Him and know that He is God – no matter our stresses, our joys, or our doubts. He invites us to come to Him as our Bread of Life and to daily feed on His amazing love, grace, and mercy (John 6:35, 48). He calls to us in our crazy, hectic lives and says,

“If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water’” (John 7:37-38).

For those who call on Him in prayer, in meditation, and in fellowship with Him in the Word, He promises to heed our coming and to be near us (Psalm 145:18 and Isaiah 55:6). Devoting ourselves to prayer is our way of communicating with God. It reflects a relationship, a relationship which He desires. It is not simply something we do; it is part of who we are. It is more than making requests; it is honoring Him with our praise, our thankful hearts, and our trust. Whether begging for the healing of a sick child, the eternal rest of a parent, or the daily mundane and boring tasks that lay before us, prayer is the bridge of communication with One whom we love. Developing a relationship with anyone takes time and effort, and that is true also of our relationship with our King of kings and Lord of lords.

I often hear people say, “I don’t believe I should bother God with the small, seemingly insignificant things in my life.” My response: “Maybe if we did so daily, the larger things would be easier to handle.” The love that Jesus has for us, the love He died for, is beyond measure.



Jeremiah 33:3 has often been called “God’s telephone number.” *Call to me and I will answer you, and will tell you great and hidden things that you have not known.* If it’s difficult to memorize, we can put it in our phones which are usually kept with us all the time. The most incredible thing about God and this number: it is available no matter where we are, what we are doing, or how difficult our concerns and problems are. It surpasses time and space. We are never put on hold. He listens every time and answers in His time and way.

Prayer:



*I heard the voice of Jesus say,
“Behold, I freely give*

*The living water; thirsty one,
Stoop down and drink and live.”*

*I came to Jesus, and I drank
Of that life-giving stream;*

*My thirst was quenched, my soul revived,
And now I live in Him.*

LSB #699, v. 2



THAT'S A RELATIONSHIP!



The Fullness Of Christ



The heavens proclaim his righteousness, and all the peoples see his glory (Psalm 97:6).

One of the most amazing ways to appreciate our fullness in Christ is to enjoy the wonders of God in the Psalms. It is in the Psalms that the grieving find comfort, the joyful offer praise, and the confused learn of hope. This devotion explores five areas of wisdom revealed in Psalm 19 as David sings his praise and honor to the Lord. Enjoy the journey!

The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork (v. 1). Even on our gray and dismal days, one can view the sunrises and sunsets in awe. The birds that soar in the heavens and the rains that drench our soil with moisture are reminders of God's continuous care and provision. The brilliant blue skies that fade into the ocean horizon reveal the vastness of His grace and mercy. They truly declare the glory of God.

Day to day pours out speech and night to night reveals knowledge. There is no speech, nor are there words, whose voice is not heard. Their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world. In them he has set a tent for the sun, which comes out like a bridegroom leaving his chamber, and, like a strong man, runs its course with joy. Its rising is from the end of the heavens, and its circuit to the end of them, and there is nothing hidden from its heat (vv. 2–6). Even when we are led to believe that God is not listening, the wonders of nature still serve as reminders of His goodness. From the small hummingbird that sucks nectar from beautiful flowers to the softness of a baby's cheek, God's wonders can be experienced.

What are not visible to the human eye can be sensed in the aroma of lilacs that filter through the air. His voice in nature can be experienced in and through all our God-given senses.

The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple; the precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes; the fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever; the rules of the Lord are true, and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb. Moreover, by them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward (vv. 7–11). The law (the Word) reveals who God is. As we seek Him daily, we discover that we are not disappointed in Him and in His fullness.

Who can discern his errors? Declare me innocent from hidden faults. Keep back your servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me! Then I shall be blameless, and innocent of great transgression (vv. 12–13). Herein reveals our own protection of grace! As David's knowledge of God's love was expressed, we now have it revealed to us in Scripture through his heir, Jesus Christ. We rest in the assurance that in Christ, we are blameless and innocent of any transgression.

And the finale comes in verse 14, for it is our response to the Lord: *Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer.*

Amen and Amen.

The Fullness Of Christ



Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit (2 Corinthians 3:18 NIV).

Jesus loved to reach the untouchable. He transformed people, both physically and spiritually. He sought out the beggar, the leper, the adulterer, and the thief. No one was too low or too high in his eyes. The centurion's servant was worthy of healing. The demon-possessed was released from his bondage. The thief on the cross entered paradise upon his death with Christ's words of forgiveness. Jesus even honored the love and faith revealed by individuals who lowered their friend through a roof, only to discover this friend gained both physical and spiritual healing.

One truly beautiful example of Christ's love was revealed in His reaction to the woman with prolonged menstrual bleeding whom He freed from her stigma of shame by a single touch of faith. Jesus said, "Someone touched me, for I perceive that power has gone out from me" (Luke 8:46).

The woman standing near Him tried to hide but could not. Trembling, she fell down before Jesus and declared before everyone that she had done the unthinkable. Because of her long-term discharge of blood, she was considered unclean. Risking that any man, let alone a rabbi, be touched by her impurity was risky. The Levitical law laid out strict guidelines for this woman's condition (Leviticus 15:25–27). Yet that touch, that awesome touch on His garment transformed her from a stricken outcast to one who experienced immediate healing. Rather than scold her, Jesus honored her by saying, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace" (Luke 8:47–48). This woman's transformation moved her from shame to ecstasy, from outcast to one of the redeemed.

At some point in our lives, we may have been faced with the feeling of being an outcast. We may not be a beggar, a leper, or a prostitute, but we may have faced the embarrassment of bullying, of shattered dreams from a broken marriage, or the unwholesome touch of a sexual offender. All are devastating. All are worthy of the transformation and healing from Christ who granted us His fullness. In the life of a believer, Jesus uses the tragedies in life, no matter how huge or cruel, to draw us to Him and His grace and then says, "How are you going to help others who are going through similar circumstances?" He uses those events to transform us into His likeness and to grant us His freedom — a freedom from our past and into His future, filled with peace and grace.



We are not here by mistake *for he [God] made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, that they should seek God, in the hope that they might feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us* (Acts 17:26–27).

We are not here simply for ourselves, no matter where our pasts and our current tasks may lead us. We are here for the Risen Christ, who takes the twists and turns of the world and molds them into a beautiful sculpture for Him in the heavens.



Prayer: Jesus, use my broken, transformed heart to bring others to You, even if it means I have to lower them through a roof to do so. In Your name I pray. Amen.



The Fullness Of Christ



For those who have remained with this study from the beginning, this is a reminder of the verse in Exodus 3:14: God said to Moses,

***“I AM WHO I AM.” And he said,
“Say this to the people of Israel,
‘I AM sent me to you.”***

Over these past few weeks, we wondered why it's hard to say we're valuable. We delved into the prideful steps of admitting that we need Him. We pondered on the idea of wanting to praise when our task-filled lives are pounded with too much work, too much anxiety, and too many schedules. Through this journey of faith, we learned that it is not about our task-filled lives, our workload, our anxieties, or our busy schedules. It's about discovering the power and love of the Savior of our world. It's about exposing the truth in the hidden corners of our lives. Being vibrantly strengthened through our Baptism, we choose to remain in His Word and rejoice with His Presence in our lives. Most miraculously we learned that Christ endured the pinnacle of extremes to bring us back into His fold and to restore us into His loving heavenly kingdom. He not only revealed love through His suffering, death, and resurrection, but He also claims us as His own for He is the Great I AM.

As the Bread of Life, Jesus is the true bread from heaven who gave His life to the world. Our spiritual hunger will be filled in and through Him (John 6:32–35).

As the Light of the world, He frees us from the darkness of sin and makes His light shine within us, enabling us to become His shining light to others (John 8:12).

As the Door [Gate], through whom we entered in our Baptism, He restores and redeems us through His shed blood on the cross (John 10:7–9).

As the Good Shepherd, He laid down His life for us and now carries us close to His heart (Isaiah 40:11 and John 10:11–15).

As the Resurrection and the Life, we can know with certainty that our future rests in His hands and in His presence. There is eternal life after death and in Him is Life (John 11:25–26).

As the Way, the Truth, and the Life, we understand it is only through faith in Him that we can know the One who opened the way into heaven. In addition, we embrace the knowledge that He is truth as it is revealed in His Word and are assured that we can live in the joys of eternal life today (John 14:6).



As the true Vine, Jesus refreshes us with His sap, His heavenly sustenance, throughout our lives, as we receive His abiding presence on a daily basis (John 15:1–5).

As the Giver of Living Water, He provides the power of the Holy Spirit to refresh us continually through His Word, which springs up into an amazing love and trust in Him (John 4:13–14 and 7:37–39).

All the I AM's of God were fulfilled in Christ. He is all we need now and into eternity. We are in Him now and will remain in Him even after the Lord calls us home. On the Last Day, this Great I AM will raise us into a new life in heaven with Him (1 Thessalonians 4:14–17) so we will be with the Lord forever. *Therefore encourage one another with these words (1 Thessalonians 4:18).*

Prayer: Dear Jesus, You are truly the Great I AM. Grant me Your Spirit that I may understand and acknowledge that You are all I need and You are enough. Amen.



The Fullness Of Christ



For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain

(Philippians 1:21).

My heart is filled with awe and wonder for the still untold stories of God's grace and mercy. What final words can I give today that have not already been said? My mind is full of the goodness of the Lord in my life, and I will never cease sharing it. Yet there are days when crazy things pop up into my very hectic, task-filled life, and I have had to remind myself of the mercies from the past. It is on those days that He has opened the truths in Scripture I desperately needed, at just the right moment in time. It is then I knew Christ remained faithful as He brought me closer into His fold and transformed me in attitude and desire.

Often times when I questioned Him, I used the following verses as reminders of the hope I have in Him:

You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you, because he trusts in you. Trust in the Lord forever, for the Lord God is the everlasting rock (Isaiah 26:3-4).

With the perfect peace of Christ abiding in me, I take comfort in the fact that I am assured of His tender love. I would not want anyone to walk away with any other knowledge than that of Christ and Christ alone as a result of these devotions. Christ is for all, in all, and through all. He is everything we need. The overseeing eyes of the Lord are continually on us as we walk through this valley here on

earth. No matter our mistakes and our occasional bumbles along the way, we are still His ambassadors as though God were making His appeal through us (**2 Corinthians 5:18–20**). He loves us as we are! Nothing will ever change that. The Father will continue to mold and make us into His Son's likeness even when our task-filled lives are difficult. Rejoice in them, for they are the tools God uses to shape us.

To conclude I want to give you the following verses which I hope will encourage and uplift you in your on-going journey through life:

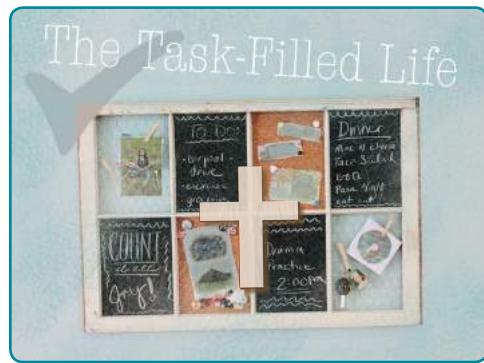
I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me (Galatians 2:20).

"Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13), and THAT He did for us! YOU are His friend, His bride, His baptized child. Live and walk in His grace – living, loving, and serving others for Him.

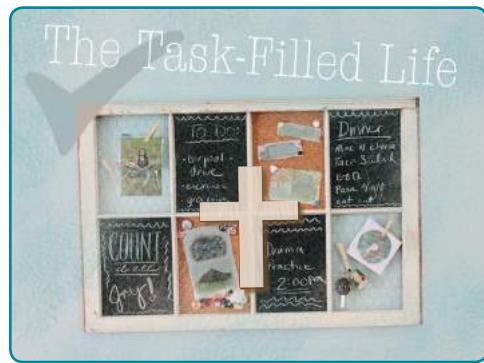
Have you ever experienced such exciting news that you wanted to shout it from the rooftops? More importantly, have you ever felt that way about your love for Jesus? Hopefully, YES!

Dear Jesus, words cannot express the gratitude I feel not only for Your sacrifice but also for granting me Your perfect peace. May I live for You today and always. Amen.

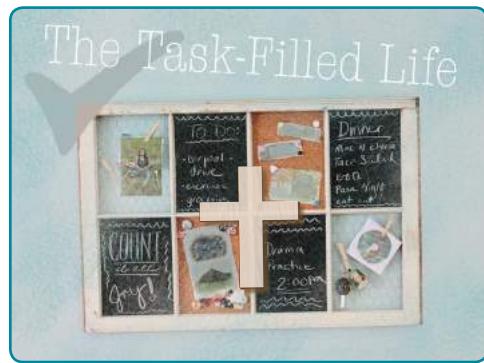
THE TASK-FILLED LIFE – NOTES



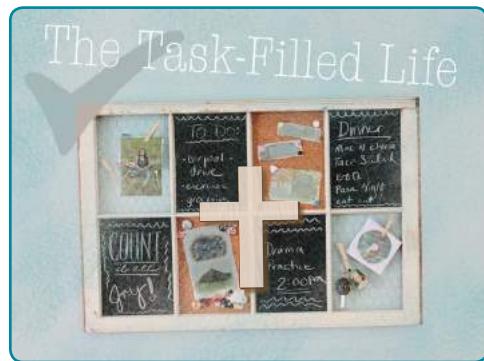
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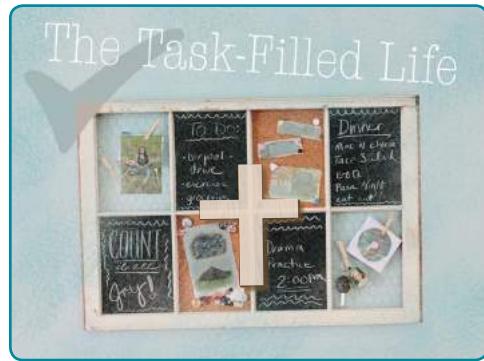
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