

FEBRUARY 2022

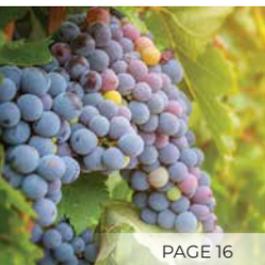
inspiration

M A G A Z I N E



**POWERED
BY HIS LOVE**

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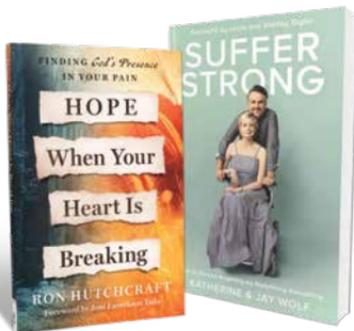


PAGE 52

David's Focus This Month Is . . . Empty but Overflowing!



David Cerullo's article on **page 5** shows you how to become a true vessel for God's love and power. Even in times of doubt, you can be confident that He WILL bless you with His supernatural favor when you've humbled your heart and surrendered everything into His hands.



**Our THANK YOU GIFTS
for your partnership!**

(See page 28 for details.)

EDITOR'S CORNER



In this issue of *INSPIRATION*, you'll meet many ordinary people who have extraordinary stories about how God's love gave them strength! Our cover story on **page 12** shows how God's power brought one family from a pit of despair to His fulfilling purpose.

Do you believe God can bring good from your heartache? I do. When Jesus walked on the dusty roads of Galilee, a single word from Him brought instant transformation. He has not changed. God has a word for YOU in this magazine. My prayer is for the Spirit of God to plant the word you need deep in your heart – to produce a bountiful harvest in your life!

12 **COVER STORY: Powered by His Love**

By Katherine and Jay Wolf

Katherine's catastrophic stroke changed the lives of their entire family, but they refused to let it rob them of laughter and confidence in God's good purposes. Their courage will inspire you.

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By Mattie Seleckman

Mattie, a young newly-wed, struggled to understand why God would allow the heartbreak of widowhood in her life. God met her in her grief with some answers that may help you too.

19 **Your February Devotions**

Fill up on the loving goodness of God by spending time with Him each day.

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By Ben Cerullo

When the love of God fills the weak and broken parts of your life, your joy will be greater than anything you've ever known.

52 **Fill Up on the Spirit of God**

By Mario Murillo

Mario Murillo, a passionate evangelist, is proclaiming the power and love of God to our nation.



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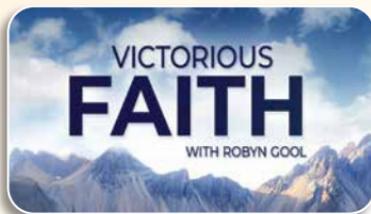
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Take Charge of Your Life



This month's *Strengthen Your Walk*™ series put you in the driver's seat.

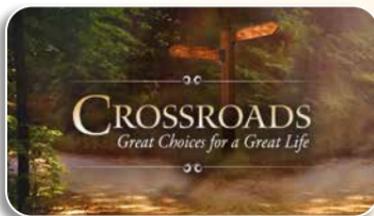


January 31 – February 11

Gain biblical wisdom on the keys to navigating through life's pitfalls. Pastor Robyn Gool will lead you to *Victorious Faith*.

February 14 – March 11

Join David Cerullo for the *Crossroads* series, and learn to make choices God can and will bless!



Sign up to receive these power-packed teachings daily straight to your inbox, and *Strengthen Your Walk*™ in Him!

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Empty but Overflowing!



STRENGTHEN
your walk
with David Cerullo

What would you say if I told you that God wants to do something miraculous in your life today? I could name dozens of examples from the Bible of this very thing, but the story of Elisha and the poor widow in the Old Testament is a great place to start.

In 2 Kings, a widow was facing a mountain of debt, so she asked Elisha for help to keep her creditors from selling her two sons into slavery (4:1-7). Elisha had great compassion for the widow and asked her if she had anything of value in her house. She replied, *“Your maidservant has nothing in the house but a jar of oil.”*

Elisha said, *“Go, borrow vessels from everywhere, from all your neighbors – empty vessels; do not gather just a few. And when you have come in, you shall shut the door behind you and your sons; then pour it into all those vessels, and set aside the full ones.”*

Upon hearing Elisha’s instruction, the widow gathered as many vessels as she could and began



doing everything that the prophet told her to do. She went home with her sons, closed the door, and began filling each vessel with oil.

And that's when her faith ignited her breakthrough! God began multiplying her oil, and the flow of oil did not stop until she ran out of jars. She was then able to sell the oil, pay her debts and live off the proceeds...hallelujah! What an incredible story of faith!

The widow's obedience led to amazing blessings and breakthroughs for her family. But notice it was up to her to gather the empty jars and BELIEVE for her miracle. God was pouring out supernatural blessings into her life, but He required empty vessels to POUR INTO...otherwise, the breakthrough couldn't have occurred!

EMPTYING THE JARS

Do you see how powerful this message is for you and me? Like the widow, we're being called to great things...supernatural things...things much bigger than we could ever accomplish without His miracle-working touch.

God wants to use us in a mighty way, but He wants us to be emptied of everything first. He only uses the jars of clay that He can fill Himself. So it's up to us to submit ourselves to Him, obey His Word, and humble our hearts.

Of course, this is never easy. And we may become discouraged if we think it's a quick or simple thing to do. But it's worth the sacrifice if we desire His intimacy and blessings above all else. Like Paul, we can experience the revelation of what it means to be one with Christ and empowered by His Spirit. As we are reminded in Galatians 2:20:

I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by

The widow's obedience led to amazing blessings.

faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.

What this says to us as believers is we have to die to ourselves in order to remain alive in Jesus. We have to surrender everything before we can be complete in Him. He alone gives us our value and meaning in life. And only He can create within us what we lack in ourselves: our sense of who we are and what our true purpose is.

Luke 9:46-48 (NIV) talks about the time Jesus' disciples were arguing about which one of them was His greatest follower. These men had the wrong idea about what it meant to be great in God's Kingdom, and the Lord challenged them on this:

Jesus, knowing their thoughts, took a little child and had him stand beside him. Then he said to them, "Whoever welcomes this little child in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. For it is the one who is least among you all who is the greatest."

You see, the path to God's blessings does not lie in exalting yourself and trying to get ahead of others. On the contrary, true greatness means humbling yourself before God and becoming an *empty vessel*.

Paul describes this true humility and servant-hood reflected in Christ:

Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross (Philippians 2:5-8).

**True greatness
means humbling
yourself
before God and
becoming an
empty vessel.**

Can you think of a better example of true servanthood? Jesus voluntarily humbled Himself and became “*of no reputation.*” Although He was the Lord of Glory, He allowed Himself to become an empty vessel for God so that He could pour Himself out as a living sacrifice for many.

If you’re wondering whether it’s possible to experience a complete transformation of your mind and heart...to escape the bondage of worry and fear...please be encouraged. God can do miraculous work in you as long as you stand in faith for your breakthrough. He is faithful to complete everything He’s started in you and will transform your heart and mind if you surrender everything to Him.

The key to it all is becoming an empty vessel and letting Him fill

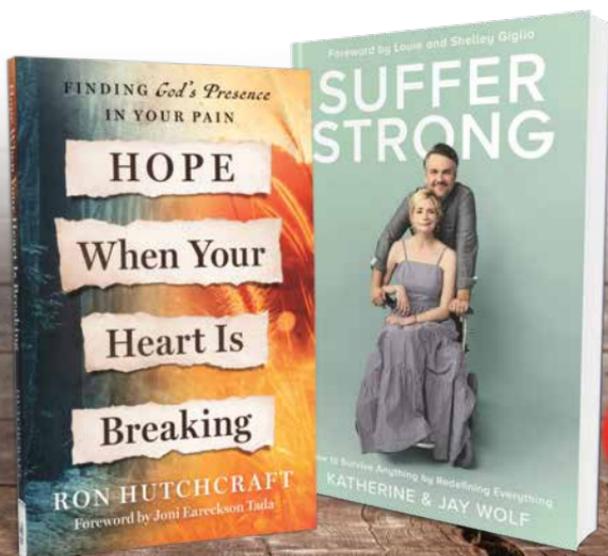
you completely with His power and love. If you learn to humble your heart and submit your life to Him, then God can use you powerfully – for His plans and purposes.

You’ll know you’ve been changed when you have a true revelation of God’s peace and joy in your life. His strength will empower you to be an overcomer. And His Spirit will work in you and through you...to be an out-flow of His love and grace on others.

Your friend and partner,

David

P.S. Turn to **page 28** to see the life-changing THANK YOU GIFTS I will send you this month in appreciation for your faithful partnership.





“This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you” (John 15:12).

Love is big business! Last year, Valentine’s Day generated over \$22 BILLION in sales! But only one love never fails (1 Corinthians 13:8), and it’s found in God Himself (1 John 4).

Sharing God’s love around the world is the heart-beat of our ministry, but it only happens because of committed, compassionate people like **you** and our Inspiration Ministries Monthly Partners.

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For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body...
(1 Corinthians 12:13 NIV).



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POWERED by His Love

After an unimaginable tragedy, the Wolf family chose a life of laughter and purpose.

Editor's Note: We've all been given a lot in life – but what if that lot includes crushed dreams and heartache along with God's blessings. Can that be the abundant life Jesus promised?

Newlyweds Jay and Katherine moved to LA to pursue their career dreams in law school and entertainment. In their new church, they volunteered to lead the young married group and immersed themselves in learning and sharing biblical truths about marriage. Soon, however, they would face a tremendous test of their vows of commitment to one another *in sickness and in health*.

Just six months after the birth of their first child, Katherine suffered a catastrophic brainstem stroke. In a 16-hour brain surgery to save her life, doctors removed half of her cerebellum – and offered little hope for the future. Miraculously, Katherine could follow simple commands after the surgery, but her body remained horrifically broken.

Weeks in ICU, a year in rehab, multiple operations,

and heart-wrenching realities plagued the young couple. Too weak to hold up her head, Katherine was unable to swallow and had to be confined to a wheelchair. Even life's simplest joys – eating, communicating, laughing, playing with her child – were no longer possible. Katherine repeatedly used the letter board to remind herself and everyone else, "I'm still the same on the inside!" Together with her husband, they pressed on through the deep, dark valley.

Sustained by faith, the Wolfs found strength for their challenges. The journey has been difficult, but today their life overflows with joy and purpose. Their trial underscores the message that God's blessings can come in many different forms. If we trust Him... He will provide the seed of hope for our difficulties. He is good and His love is real.

Be encouraged by this excerpt from their amazing book ***Suffer Strong***. We're also excited to offer their book as part of this month's gift. See page 28 for details.



Katherine and Jay Wolf are a living testimony of committed love. They are also the proud parents of two energetic boys. In addition to their speaking ministry and best-selling books, they nurture a thriving online community and hold Hope Heals Camps for families affected by a disability.

Excerpted from *Suffer Strong: How to Survive Anything by Redefining Everything* by Katherine and Jay Wolf.
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We each have something unique to offer the world. We are called to spend more time tending what God has given us and less time craning our necks at our neighbors. Paul wrote to the Galatians that we are each responsible to do our best with our lives (Galatians 6:4-5).

In our search for calling, the best place to look is right in front of us. As we've discussed, limitations don't have to be losses; they can be the avenues to our flourishing.

This is particularly true if we stay focused and creative within their boundaries, if we care for and cherish what's inside them. I cry every time I think of this quote Jay wrote at the end of our book *Hope Heals*:

“One day, the arc of our stories will all make perfect sense. One day, we will trace the lines of our scars and find them to have fallen in the most pleasant of places, to see in them our great inheritance.

One day, we won't need to hope, nor will we need to be healed because we will be face-to-face with the source of both, the source of everything...Jesus.”

Nothing to add there, right?

I suppose if “building your house on the rock instead of on sand” is a fitting enough metaphor for our wedding and marriage, then lot lines must be a great metaphor for our assignments in life.

When God's people entered the Promised Land, they were each to be given a lot (Numbers 33). Some would be big, and some would be small, and the size would have nothing to do with anything they could control. Yet the lots would be their very own piece of God's promise for them to live and love and flourish on.

In Psalm 16:6, David sings the praises of his personal property survey: “*The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant*



places; surely I have a delightful inheritance" (NIV).

David is not posting these words next to a picture of an over-the-top mansion with an even more over-the-top car parked in front of it, with an over-the-top diamond-draped supermodel sitting nonchalantly on the hood. No, David's lot was a bit more rustic for sure, but so much more valuable and a whole heck of a lot more BLESSED.

This psalm likely was written during a time of great trouble for David, as it opens with a straightforward *"Keep me safe, my God"* (v. 1 NIV). David is acknowledging that through his struggles against his enemies and betrayals by his friends, he had been called into a unique lot by God and for God and with God. The same God who had given him victory over Goliath and an anointing as king had also given him this lot, so he could trust that it was good. Yet David's lot would eventually also include adultery, murder, shame, rebellious children, incestuous children, rape, more murder, conspiracy, and loss. (And I thought a wheelchair and some garden-variety dysfunction in my own lot was a bummer!)

David probably didn't see all that coming when he described his lot as a pleasant place, the same

word is used later in the psalm to describe the pleasures found only in close proximity to God (v. 11). I can only imagine that when this deeply flawed man after God's own heart found his lot filled with such great pain, he also found it filled with a deeper experience of those pleasures in God. Embracing the lot we've been given is about embracing the God who gives it. Our experience of purpose in life is not based on the size of the gift, but on the size of the Giver.

A decade ago, I wrestled with the deepest despair of my life, wondering why God would have left me on this earth after my stroke. I was broken in body, brain, and spirit, unable to do anything or be anything other than a source of pain for everyone I loved. God had obviously made a mistake. But over time, I was able to hear God's words in my heart: "You are not a mistake because I don't make mistakes. There is purpose – just wait, you'll see."

If we have a pulse, we have a purpose. We are not still on earth by accident. We are here today because we've been called by God to this unique place and circumstance, to this moment in time and history. We're here because there's more life for us to experience and more work for us to do and more love for us to give. ❖



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Strength *from the* Storm!

Abundant fruit comes from deeply rooted plants

Grape growing is agriculture... and science shows that the highest-quality fruit comes from the sites of greatest struggle – steep, hillside vineyard blocks whose soil holds less nutrients and water than other fertile, or “comfortable,” sites. These sites put just enough stress on the vine to strain the fruit and, most often, yield grapes of physiological superiority and strength. The key ingredients?

1. Deep, sturdy roots that reach below the stripped topsoil into the life-giving earth below. A hungry and thirsty foundation that grasps desperately for sustenance when all around it is barren.
2. Pruning, or cutting back parts of the branches in order to eliminate weak fruit and excessive foliage that can block necessary sunlight.

This has been my experience through grief: rocky soil, desperate roots, and painfully pruning branches. This is also the picture of endurance that Jesus himself painted for us in John 15.

In seasons of depletion and brokenness, endurance comes not through what the branches can do for themselves, but through the solidly rooted vine to which the branches are grafted and careful branch pruning done by the vintner.

It's hard to tell how sturdy roots are until a storm comes, until lightning strikes and winds howl and trunks that otherwise looked solid and secure start to bend. I know this because I grew up with pretty traditional, Christian roots. Sunday school, prayers at dinner and before bedtime, even a church camp now and then, which, if we're honest, was more about the social than the spiritual. I spent kindergarten through twelfth grade – thirteen years – at a Christian school. Sounds like I had some awfully solid roots, right? Not as solid you may think.

I am nothing but thankful that my parents laid this foundation for me, and I would not be the woman I am today without them, my teachers, and my friends fostering in me a heart to love Jesus. But the baby roots that brought me to faith at twelve could never have withstood the storm that struck me at twenty-eight. Even though I grew up in Christian culture, it took experiencing real hardship for those weak, surface-level roots to reach deep and grow secure.

No matter how you were raised,

how long you've been in the faith, or whether you're still grappling with what you believe, God is ready and able to strengthen your roots. Like He did with me, He might start working on them before hardship comes your way, or He might meet you right in the middle of a storm you never saw coming and start building your faith from there. We serve a God who isn't afraid to let us struggle or be stressed because He knows that's how we grow into the richest version of ourselves. He knows that as our roots grow, we not only gain spiritual strength but also get to know Him, the Vinedresser, even more intimately.

I love how the apostle Peter put it: *"In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith – more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire – may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ"* (1 Peter 1:6-7 ESV).

Trials build deep roots. Trials test our faith. Trials strain us and refine us. ❖



Mattie Jackson Selecman experienced the deep grief of losing her husband of less than a year and now dedicates herself to helping others move forward in life.

Excerpted from *Lemons on Friday: Trusting God Through My Greatest Heartbreak*
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What do you need?

God is ready, able, and willing to provide it!

We all understand the importance a mother plays in the life of her baby. No one knows and anticipates the needs of her little one quite like she does. The love and care she provides for her child is exactly what the name ***Jehovah Jireh*** conveys about God. He sees our needs and has the perfect solution for us.

Many times, we only focus on the provision aspect of this name, but the full message of ***Jehovah Jireh*** is that God reveals Himself to be attentive and responsive to our needs. What a beautiful reminder when the month extends beyond our money, fear threatens to swallow our life, or grief snatches our breath away. As the saying goes, God planted the sycamore tree long before Zacchaeus climbed it to see Jesus. God wants us to trust Him as our attentive, loving provider.

The title ***Jehovah Jireh*** is found only in Genesis 22 when Abraham

proves his faith in God by climbing Mount Moriah to offer his son of promise back to God. Every step Abraham and Isaac took up that mountain was matched by the steps of a ram God sent up the other side. We never need to fear when we remember that God keeps His eye on us, loves us perfectly, and knows how to provide the best outcome!

While ***Jehovah Jireh*** is used only once in the Bible, the theme of prepared provision flows from beginning to end. Creation existed before Adam was formed (Genesis 1). The Redeemer's victory in place before man left the Garden (Genesis 3). Don't forget – Jonah's large fish, over 5,000 fed by a child's lunch (Luke 9), and a coin-carrying fish (Matthew 17). God's ways are diverse, but His character is unchanging. He longs for you to trust Him to see, care, and provide for all you need. ❖

What Seems Impossible

TODAY'S BIBLE READING: EZRA 1

Persia was the most powerful nation in the world. Among their conquests, they had dismantled the kingdom of Judah, destroying its buildings, removing its treasures, and exiling its leaders. In addition to being a superpower, Persia also had its own religion. It made no sense for Persia to further the religion of Judah or encourage the worship of their God.

Yet that is exactly what this announcement confirmed: The ruler of the world's greatest empire announced he would build a temple in a far-off land for a recently defeated country! Further, this temple was being built because of the *command* of the Lord.

How unbelievable this must have seemed! Yet it was true! And the temple was rebuilt, just as Cyrus ordered. No development could have been more shocking and unexpected to the people of that time!

How would we have faced a situation like this? Would we have had faith that God could do something this miraculous? Each of us constantly faces various challenges, problems that seem insurmountable, and situations that seem hopeless. Facing such problems, it is easy to give up.

These are moments to remember the miracle He performed for Israel at the time of Cyrus. If God could arrange events to direct this king of Persia to build a temple for Him, is there anything too hard for Him? Remember, He truly is the God of the impossible!

TUESDAY

February

1

Thus says Cyrus king of Persia: "All the kingdoms of the earth the LORD God of heaven has given me. And He has commanded me to build Him a house at Jerusalem which is in Judah."

Ezra 1:2 NKJV

PRAYER:

I commit these issues to You: _____. I know nothing is too hard for You. You can do anything. I have faith in You. In Jesus' name, amen.

Recount a time when God did something for you that seemed miraculous.

WEDNESDAY

February

2

The people of the land tried to discourage the people of Judah. They troubled them in building, and hired counselors against them to frustrate their purposes...they wrote an accusation.

Ezra 4:4-6 NKJV

PRAYER:

Father, give me boldness and faith. Give me discernment to recognize deception and distractions. Help me to accomplish Your purposes. In Jesus' name, amen.

Conquer Defeat

TODAY'S BIBLE READING: EZRA 4

We can imagine the excitement! After years in exile, these Jews were returning to their homeland! Their efforts had been blessed by Cyrus, the Persian king. What could go wrong?

Yet after their arrival, they experienced waves of problems. The foreign people living in Israel made life difficult, charging these returning exiles with rebellion. They spread gossip about them and made false accusations. Faced with this opposition, it would have been easy for these Jews to become discouraged or give up. But they persisted and eventually gained victory.

The world still is filled with people who resist the Kingdom of God and His work. This opposition takes on many forms. They may taunt and ridicule believers. They may attempt to distract or discredit us and keep us from living for Christ or spreading the Gospel. And they may seek to incite fear and doubt.

How do we respond to such opposition? We, too, can become discouraged or feel defeated. Instead, we need to focus on God and always move forward in *faith*. Stay committed to His Kingdom. Be sensitive to His Spirit, constantly obeying His Word. Trust Him to guide and protect us and bring us victory.

In every situation, seek to stay faithful and keep on rejoicing. Remember your eternal destiny (1 Peter 4:12-13). Don't let anything distract you, and don't be intimidated. Trust in God. Move forward in faith!

Write some encouragement to help in difficult situations.

Elijah

TODAY'S BIBLE READING: 1 KINGS 18

Felix Mendelssohn has been called history's most brilliant prodigy. Born on this day in 1809, he excelled as a composer, pianist, organist, and conductor. He also brought light to neglected composers such as Johann Sebastian Bach.

Perhaps his crowning achievement was composing the oratorio *Elijah*. Premiering in 1846, this oratorio tells the story of the prophet Elijah. Mendelssohn provides listeners with the whole story of the prophet – the miracles, his determination to serve God, his boldness in the face of opposition, God comforting those who follow his commandments.

The opening aria sets the tone for the work. We hear God's stern warning that He will send a drought as punishment for Israel's idolatry. The tone enhances Mendelssohn's dramatic overture that underscores the impact of drought.

The drama intensifies when a chariot drawn by fiery horses appears in a whirlwind and takes Elijah into the heavens. Mendelssohn drew his text from Malachi and Isaiah, including, "*Then shall your light break forth*" (Isaiah 58:8), which anticipates the coming of the Messiah.

As Mendelssohn learned, this biblical story of Elijah has a dramatic impact. It still speaks to people of our time with a profound message that God is the Supreme Judge. He is more powerful than any other force. He blesses and protects those who serve Him. We can trust Him.

THURSDAY

February

3

Elijah the prophet came near and said, "LORD God...let it be known this day that You are God in Israel and I am Your servant, and that I have done all these things at Your word."

1 Kings 18:36 NKJV

PRAYER:

Father, thank You for the timeless message found in Your Word. Give me insight and understanding. In Jesus' name, amen.

How are you inspired by Elijah's ministry (1 Kings 17-19; 2 Kings 1-2)?

FRIDAY

February

4

When the prophets, Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo, prophesied to the Jews...[the Jews] rose up and began to rebuild the house of God...the prophets of God were with them supporting them.

Ezra 5:1-2 NASB

PRAYER:

Father, give me greater boldness. Help me to stand on Your Word. I seek Your wisdom and discernment. Fill me with Your Spirit. In Jesus' name, amen.

Guided by Prophecy

TODAY'S BIBLE READING: EZRA 5

Determined to prevent the Jews from rebuilding the temple, the governor appealed to Artaxerxes, king of Persia. As a result, the work stopped. *Nothing* happened until God spoke through two prophets.

Haggai declared that the people were not building because they focused on their own needs. They were *weak* and *afraid*. He said it was time to act and begin the work (Haggai 1:1-15).

The second prophet, Zechariah, reminded them that God was “*exceedingly jealous for Zion*.” He was with them, but they needed to act and not be timid: “*Let your hands be strong...that the temple might be built*” (Zechariah 8:1, 9).

Hearing these prophets, the Jews began rebuilding the temple. At first, the authorities were angry. The governor appealed to the new Persian king, Darius. But he not only confirmed that the Jews had his approval to rebuild the temple, but he also ordered that the Persian Empire pay for the entire effort.

All of this was possible because brave prophets were willing to speak words they received from God.

Today, some seek to silence God's people to prevent the spread of the Gospel. It takes courage to step out in faith, trust God, and declare we believe His Word regardless of what others say. But God rewards this kind of faith. Make sure you trust God and His Word. Don't be afraid, but stand boldly. Seek first His Kingdom. Be ready to step out in faith.

Write a prayer for boldness to share your faith with others in your circle.

Freedom from Fear

TODAY'S BIBLE READING: PSALM 118

The psalmist had every reason to be afraid. Surrounded by enemies, he felt like they were swarming around him. He felt vulnerable as if he was trapped with no possible escape.

But, in this midst of these dire circumstances, he cried to the Lord and took refuge in Him. Then his attitude completely changed. He realized he did not have to fear any person or organization as long as he trusted in God. He answered him and set him free.

Do you ever feel surrounded? Do you feel vulnerable, outnumbered, and unsure of what to do? You can cry out to God and take *refuge* in Him. Remember the promises in His Word. Declare them to be true for you. As you trust Him, He promises to free you from fear.

The Bible is filled with promises of God's protection. Paul wrote that He is faithful and "*will strengthen and protect you from the evil one*" (2 Thessalonians 3:3). We can know that He is "*our refuge and strength*" (Psalm 46:1). We can turn to Him for help when we are in trouble. Because of this trust, we have no reason to be afraid even if "*the mountains slip into the heart of the sea*" (Psalm 46:2).

No matter what you face, don't be afraid. Instead, start declaring the promises of God. He is your rock, your salvation, your deliverer, your shield, and your strong tower. Trust in Him.

SATURDAY

February

5

The LORD answered me and set me in an open place. The LORD is for me; I will not fear; what can man do to me?...It is better to take refuge in the LORD than to trust in man. It is better to take refuge in the LORD than to trust in noblemen.

Psalm 118:5-9 NASB

PRAYER:

Father, I depend on You. Thank You for giving me freedom from every fear. In Jesus' name, amen.

How has God rescued you from enemies or circumstances?

SUNDAY

February

6

Praise be to the LORD... who has put it into the king's heart to bring honor to the house of the LORD in Jerusalem in this way... Because the hand of the LORD my God was on me, I took courage.

Ezra 7:27-28 NIV

PRAYER:

Father, I seek first Your kingdom. Forgive me when I seek my own will. Thank You for freeing me from fear, doubt, and worry. In Jesus' name, amen.

Selfless Motivation

TODAY'S BIBLE READING: EZRA 7

Ezra had been sent on a critical assignment: to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem. It was a directive issued by King Cyrus himself (Ezra 1:1-3). The Persian empire was to fund the project.

As he carried out this assignment, Ezra might have been tempted to use this opportunity for personal advancement, to see this as a career move, a way he could gain prestige or status.

But Ezra did not focus on himself or show favoritism. Throughout this assignment, he focused on serving God and being sure He was pleased with his work.

This focus freed him from fear and anxiety. He wasn't distracted by criticism and didn't pay attention to gossip or other opinions. He had courage because "the hand of the Lord" was on him. He knew he was obeying God's will.

It can be hard to have this kind of focus. We easily can find ourselves distracted or concerned with our reputation. We think about who gets credit when things go right or the blame for problems.

Ezra provides a good model for freedom from stress, worry, and fear. In everything you do, focus on God. Pray and commit every project to Him. Seek to serve Him *selflessly*. Ask Him to help you *purify* your motives. Seek His kingdom, not your own. Allow His peace to flood your life. He will give you joy, courage, and fulfillment that can only come from serving Him.

When you're tempted by your own desires, how can you refocus on God?

Fasting and Prayer

TODAY'S BIBLE READING: EZRA 8

Ezra was called to travel to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple. The journey was long and dangerous. Ezra knew that, if necessary, he could request armed protection. But he was determined to demonstrate that God would protect and provide for them. He didn't want to take God's blessings for granted. Ezra committed their journey to Him.

So Ezra gathered his traveling companions and proclaimed a fast. His first goal was to *humble himself* before God. He knew from Israel's history how often pride and a haughty spirit had led to ruin. They needed to demonstrate that they were *depending* on God. They also fasted to seek "*a safe journey*." God listened and answered. And they arrived safely in Jerusalem.

Jesus taught a similar lesson when the disciples could not drive out a demon. He told them, "*this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting*" (Matthew 17:21 NKJV). They needed the spiritual power and sensitivity that comes from prayer and fasting.

When you face serious problems, remember the benefits of prayer and fasting. Pray and fast when you don't know what to do, when you face challenges and opposition, and when you want to be sure you know God's will and have His blessing, anointing, and favor.

The Bible provides assurance that God is by your side, ready to hear you, bless and protect you, guide and provide for you. Call on His name. Pray and fast.

Write a prayer for help with a sticky situation you're facing.

FRIDAY

February

7

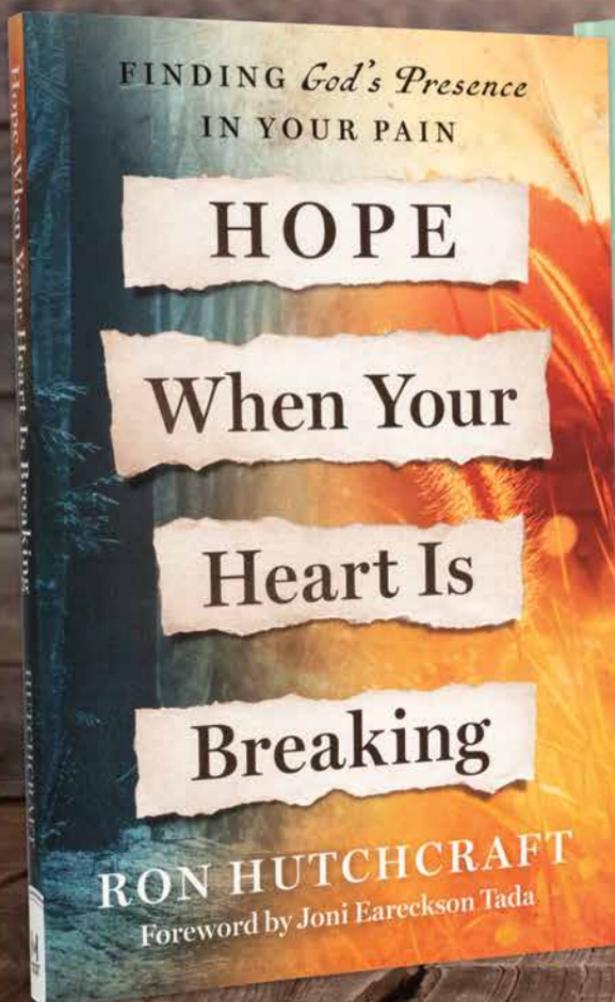
Then I proclaimed a fast...to humble ourselves before our God, to seek from Him a safe journey for us, our little ones, and all our possessions.

Ezra 8:21 NASB

PRAYER:

Father, I commit these needs to You: _____.
Demonstrate Your power in my life that You might receive glory.
In Jesus' name, amen.

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TUESDAY

February

8

They chatter on and on. No one really knows what is going to happen; no one can predict the future.

Ecclesiastes 10:14 NLT

PRAYER:

Father, I seek Your wisdom. Guide my thoughts and plans. I trust in You. In Jesus' name, amen.

The Future

TODAY'S BIBLE READING: ECCLESIASTES 10

Jules Verne is one of the early writers of science fiction. Born on this day in 1828, he wrote some of history's most widely read books. His father hoped he would follow in his footsteps and become an attorney, but Verne fell in love with literature and the theatre and decided to write full time.

When his father pressured him to join his law practice, Verne responded, "Am I not right to follow my own instincts? I realize what I can be one day." He dreamed of a new kind of literature that would combine science with adventure. He called this approach novels of science, hoping to take readers along on "extraordinary journeys."

His works challenged the imagination with ideas that seemed far-fetched to some. Describing his novels, he wrote, "My object has been to depict the earth...and the universe."

Verne's works seem prophetic in some ways. He wrote about a future that, in many ways, developed as he predicted. He wrote about space, air, and underwater travel before airplanes and submarines were invented, and before there was any space travel. At the same time, many of his predictions proved unrealistic.

We are reminded that even the most insightful human beings have a *limited* grasp on the future. No one has a perfect understanding, even brilliant thinkers like Jules Verne.

Today, remember to place your trust in God. Seek Him about the issues you face today. And commit your future to Him.

Compose a prayer asking for God's insights into your Bible reading today.

Faithfulness

TODAY'S BIBLE READING: EZRA 9

As Ezra returned from exile in Babylon, he demonstrated how he had resolved to serve God and determined to live according to the standards in His Word. But when he entered Jerusalem, he was shocked to learn how many of his fellow Israelites had given in to *compromise*. They even were defying God's Word.

Ezra was *different*. He was dedicated to God. To Ezra, nothing was more important than seeking and pleasing Him. The actions of these Israelites were not justifiable. They were being *unfaithful*.

So he called everyone to return to a pure faith and reject compromise, even, if necessary, putting aside the foreign wives and children of mixed marriages. Ezra knew that if a compromise was tolerated, the people inevitably would continue in sin and turn further away from God.

All of us can be pressured to compromise. When facing the weight of popular opinion, we can conform to the world around us and justify any action. Unless we make a firm commitment to God, we easily can yield to sin and compromise our standards.

Ask God to search your heart and open your eyes that you may see ways you may have allowed the world to shape your thoughts. Rededicate your life to obey and please Him. Read and study His Word. Make it your standard. Don't tolerate compromise. Serve Him with a whole heart and a faith of total commitment.

Write about a time you felt pressured to compromise your convictions.

WEDNESDAY

February

9

The people of Israel and the priests and the Levites have not separated themselves from the peoples of the lands...I tore my garment and my robe, and pulled some of the hair...and sat appalled until the evening offering.

Ezra 9:1-4 NASB

PRAYER:

Father, purge me of sin. Search my heart and reveal any compromises I have made with the world. I dedicate my life to You. In Jesus' name, amen.

THURSDAY

February

10

All the men of Judah and Benjamin assembled at Jerusalem within the three days... All the people sat in the public square before the house of God, trembling because of this matter and the heavy rain.

Ezra 10:9 NASB

PRAYER:

Father, give me a renewed sensitivity to Your Word. Keep me from compromising with the world. Help me to stay faithful to You. In Jesus' name, amen.

Trembling Before God

TODAY'S BIBLE READING: EZRA 10

These men *trembled* as they sat in heavy rain. It was a sobering moment.

They had been confronted with the Word of God. They had seen Ezra weeping and prostrating himself, impacted by this Word. They heard Ezra pray and make confessions. They knew he had returned to Jerusalem to restore biblical worship. He had been devastated by the sin in the land.

Ezra called on everyone who trembled at the words of the God of Israel to gather. Sitting in the rain, these men had the opportunity to ponder the past and think about the sins in their own lives and how their ancestors had been taken into exile because they had been unfaithful, worshipped idols, and abandoned God.

How would they respond? Return to their corrupt ways? Or commit their lives to God? They chose to serve Him, humble themselves, obey Him, and turn away from their mistakes.

All of us can make the same kinds of mistakes. We can yield to excuses and justifications. We can compromise with the world. We can allow sin to corrupt our lives and separate us from God.

Today, come before God. Sit at His feet. Ponder His Word. Don't take Him for granted but ask Him to penetrate your heart and convict you of sin. As He leads, be ready to repent. Commit to obeying His Word. Worship Him in awe.

Search your heart and write a prayer of confession and repentance.

A Cupbearer for Jesus

TODAY'S BIBLE READING: NEHEMIAH 1

Nehemiah was a cupbearer. This may sound like a menial job, but these men often were given significant authority and responsibility. Perhaps their most sensitive assignment was to taste the foods given to the king to be sure that they were not poisoned.

Nehemiah must have been an outstanding cupbearer. He was respected by King Artaxerxes, who knew he could trust Nehemiah's word. He had proven himself to be loyal and faithful.

Nehemiah demonstrated biblical principles. In contrast, many people think first about themselves, their careers, and their advancement. They are eager to be the *first* to get the praise and credit.

Jesus said it doesn't work that way in God's kingdom where *"the last shall be first, and the first, last"* (Matthew 20:16). We become great in His Kingdom by serving others. The *greatest* is the one who is the best at serving (Luke 22:26). The Bible tells us that God looks for men and women who are like Nehemiah and willing to serve. God wants people who keep their word and can be counted on to complete their assignments.

Ask God to help you clarify the assignments you've been given. Dedicate yourself to accomplishing these tasks. Seek to have the attitude of a servant toward God and other people, and to have a good testimony. Dedicate your life and resources to God and His Kingdom. And be faithful in whatever God calls you to do.

How can you serve God and glorify Him right where you are now?

FRIDAY

February

11

"Please, LORD, may Your ear be attentive to the prayer of Your servant and the prayer of Your servants...please make Your servant successful today and grant him mercy before this man." Now I was the cupbearer to the king.

Nehemiah 1:11 NASB

PRAYER:

Father, thank You for the assignments You have given me. Show me how I can serve You. Use me for Your Kingdom. In Jesus' name, amen.

SATURDAY

February

12

I said to the king, "If it pleases the king, and if your servant has found favor before you, I request that you send me to Judah, to the city of my fathers' tombs, that I may rebuild it."

Nehemiah 2:4-5 NASB

PRAYER:

Father, I commit these situations to You: _____ . I seek Your wisdom and guidance. Show me what to do. In Jesus' name, amen.

A Lifestyle of Prayer

TODAY'S BIBLE READING: NEHEMIAH 2

Nehemiah heard reports about the broken walls of Jerusalem but did not know what to do. Entering the presence of the king, he could not hide the depth of his concerns. Sensing that Nehemiah was troubled, the king asked, "What would you request?" (v. 4).

Nehemiah previously had prayed about this issue. But in this sensitive moment, standing before the king and queen, Nehemiah silently stopped to *pray again*. He responded to the king only *after* this prayer, sure that God had given him the words to speak.

Throughout every moment of every day, we can respond like Nehemiah. Realize that God is with us, and we can turn to Him *any time*, confident in His help.

The Bible reminds us that we can seek Him on *any* subject. He is available to hear our prayers, whether we pray aloud or silently. He can give us His peace, take away our fears, and guide us. And He can give us favor and success, just as He did with Nehemiah.

We also can be certain that His Spirit is with us. As Jesus taught, we can be confident that the Spirit can give us the right words to say (Mark 13:11). This requires discernment and spiritual sensitivity as well as a willingness to listen carefully and to trust the Spirit.

Throughout this day, take time to pray. You can pray about *anything*, big or small. God is listening.

What's troubling you today? Write your worries as a prayer for peace.

Doing Your Part

TODAY'S BIBLE READING: NEHEMIAH 3

Rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem was an enormous project. Most Jews understood the importance and gave time and energy to the project. This included the people of Tekoa, a town located about 10 miles south of Jerusalem, who were assigned to help build the Fish Gate. But for some reason, their nobles would not do their part.

Perhaps they felt this was work for common people, or they had better things to do. Perhaps they simply were not willing. But through their lack of commitment, they were poor examples and poor leaders. They hindered the work of God through their lack of effort and bad attitudes.

In contrast, as a man appointed by the king, Nehemiah could have enjoyed special status. But he understood the biblical principle that *everyone* has a role to play in God's Kingdom. *Everyone* needs to contribute.

Paul reminded the Corinthians that we all are part of the body of Christ. While the body is one, there are "*many members*." Each of us has a unique role. We have been given unique gifts and responsibilities. But we all need each other, and the contribution of every person is important (1 Corinthians 12:12-26).

Remember that God has special assignments just for *you*. You are important to Him and the body of Christ. Dedicate your life to serving Him, to fulfilling His calling. Offer your life as a "*living sacrifice*" (Romans 12:1). Focus on doing your part.

How can you glorify God while performing menial tasks?

SUNDAY

February

13

*Next to them the
Tekoites made repairs;
but their nobles did not
put their shoulders to
the work of their LORD.*

Nehemiah 3:5 NKJV

PRAYER:

Father, thank You for Your call on my life. I dedicate my life to You. Use me to impact lives for Your Kingdom. In Jesus' name, amen.

MONDAY

February

14

For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.

Galatians 5:1 ESV

PRAYER:

Father, here are people I know who need salvation: _____. Set them free! Thank You for setting me free! In Jesus' name, amen.

Gospel Freedom

TODAY'S BIBLE READING: GALATIANS 5

Richard Allen was born to slave parents in Philadelphia and sold with his family to a plantation in Delaware. As a young man, Richard's master permitted him to attend religious meetings where he learned to read.

Born on this day in 1760, Allen invited a minister to share the Gospel with his master. After hearing that God would judge slaveholders, he repented and eventually allowed Allen to purchase his freedom.

In his autobiography, Allen described how, through this exposure to the Gospel, he "was awakened and brought to see myself poor, wretched, and undone." Without God's mercy, he knew he would be lost. Dramatically impacted, he bowed his head for days, burdened by his sins. He prayed constantly, seeking relief. Realizing he was just a "poor sinner," he cried to the Lord. Suddenly, he realized that Jesus had set him free! He had been saved!

He determined to dedicate his life to bringing that message of salvation to others, particularly current and former slaves. Allen set out in 1783 to preach in Delaware, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Maryland. He walked so much that his feet became severely blistered. In 1816, Allen helped form the first African-American denomination organized in the United States.

Today, millions are slaves to sin. They need the same message that changed the life of Richard Allen. Pray for souls to be saved. Commit yourself to bring spiritual freedom to those bound with sin.

What is your plan for sharing the freedom of the Gospel?

Keys to Victory

TODAY'S BIBLE READING: NEHEMIAH 4

Nehemiah had returned to Jerusalem with a mandate to rebuild the city walls. But this was not an easy task. He faced strong, united opposition to this effort. Yet in the end, Nehemiah and his fellow Jews were able to accomplish this overwhelming task. Why were they successful?

They had every reason to be afraid, but instead, they *trusted* in God. Confident in Him, they did not allow their adversaries to *intimidate* them. They remembered that the Lord was “*great and awesome*.” Instead of worrying about their opponents, they put their faith in Him.

They *demonstrated unwavering determination* to complete their assignment. They were not passive but stood firmly and boldly. They were so focused on God that they did not allow anyone or anything to *distract* them. And they continued to *be persistent*. They had stepped out in faith, and they continued to move forward to do God's work with confidence.

The same keys that helped Nehemiah can help bring victory in our lives. If we find ourselves trapped or paralyzed, we need to turn to God. Facing challenges, we should never be afraid or intimidated, but we should instead *pray* with a sense of urgency. We can be paralyzed by the size of our adversaries or the ways they threaten us. Instead, we should stand on the promises in God's Word.

Remember these principles in the situations you face. Don't be afraid or intimidated. Trust in God.

TUESDAY

February

15

“Do not be afraid of them. Remember the LORD, who is great and awesome”...When our enemies heard that it was known to us and that God had frustrated their plan, we all returned to the wall, each to his work.

Nehemiah 4:14-15 ESV

PRAYER:

Father, give me greater boldness to step out in faith. I seek first Your Kingdom. Use me to impact lives. In Jesus' name, amen.

Have you ever faced a huge task that could only be done with God's help?

WEDNESDAY

February

16

*So we are made right
with God through
faith and not by
obeying the law.*

Romans 3:28 NLT

PRAYER:

Father, I believe Jesus died for my sins. I declare He is my Lord. Thank You for saving me. Help me walk by faith. In Jesus' name, amen.

Faith

TODAY'S BIBLE READING: ROMANS 3

He was born in Switzerland as Philip Schwartzerd on this day in 1497. Orphaned when just ten, he was raised by his great uncle. His lifelong love of learning led Philip to change his name to Melancthon, the Greek equivalent of Schwartzerd, which means black earth.

When just twenty-one, he was appointed professor of Greek at the University of Wittenberg. Martin Luther objected to this appointment but later became impressed with Melancthon's ideas. The two became friends, united in ministry.

Luther once said, "I am rough, boisterous, stormy, and altogether warlike...but Master Philip comes along softly and gently sowing and watering with joy." Luther became a public lightning rod, but Melancthon provided scholarly support for the reformation as a teacher and writer. He urged believers to realize that the Bible declares that *salvation must be by faith* rather than by works.

Melancthon was *compassionate* toward those with whom he disagreed, developing the "Augsburg Confession" as an attempt to bring healing. Showing his motivation, he once said, "If I could purchase union by my own death, I would gladly sacrifice my life."

Melancthon's life reminds us that we are to walk by *faith* (2 Corinthians 5:7). We are saved by faith, not *anything* we do. As Paul wrote, "*God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God*" (Ephesians 2:8). Trust God. Walk by faith!

How can you work with others to balance your gifts in ministry?

Higher Standards

TODAY'S BIBLE READING: NEHEMIAH 5

Nehemiah was angry. Why? Some leaders had taken advantage of their Jewish brothers, using their influence for their own benefit. These actions, to Nehemiah, were *intolerable*.

When confronted, these men “*were silent and could not find a word to say*” (v. 8). Nehemiah instructed them to stop charging interest and restore anything that had been taken wrongly. He reminded them that they needed to be conscious of their impact on others. They represented God; others were watching what they were doing.

He urged these leaders to examine their lives in the light of God's eternal principles, and not be dominated by personal gains. Their priority should be obeying and pleasing God.

These principles still apply. We need to walk every day “*in the fear of our God,*” not governed by the flesh or dominated by material gain. We should not take advantage of others for our own advantage. Instead, we should base our lives on God's Word and seek first His kingdom. Remember that we are His representatives.

Today, think about *your* impact on others. People all around are looking at you, how you spend your money, what you do with your time, what you say. Do they see a person who lives for God? Are you filled with compassion for others, or motivated by possessions, power, and pleasure?

Seek first God's Kingdom. Don't compromise His principles. You are His child. You have higher standards.

How are your standards different from those who live in the world?

THURSDAY

February

17

The thing which you are doing is not good; should you not walk in the fear of our God because of the reproach of the nations, our enemies?

Nehemiah 5:9 NASB

PRAYER:

Father, I commit my life to You. Forgive my sins. I humble myself before You. Help me live according to Your standards. In Jesus' name, amen.

FRIDAY

February

18

Sanballat and Geshem sent a message to me, saying, "Come, let us meet together"...But they were planning to harm me..."I am doing a great work and I cannot come down. Why should the work stop?"

Nehemiah 6:2-3 NASB

PRAYER:

Father, show me clearly your call on my life. Help me to stay focused and not distracted by the things of this world. In Jesus' name, amen.

Stay Focused

TODAY'S BIBLE READING: NEHEMIAH 6

God's call to Nehemiah was clear: He was to rebuild the walls in Jerusalem. But powerful people opposed his assignment and tried to disrupt Nehemiah in any way they could.

They sent him many messages asking for a meeting. Their intentions sounded innocent, but he knew their *real* motives. Nehemiah and his colleagues were accused of planning to rebel. And Nehemiah was accused of plotting to gain power for himself.

But he told them that there was no truth to their accusations. He knew they were lying, and "*just trying to intimidate us, imagining that they could break our resolve and stop the work.*" He knew he simply was obeying God. They wanted him to stop but he stayed focused and refused to be distracted. He "*continued the work with even greater determination*" (v. 9 NLT).

Because of his determination, Nehemiah completed God's assigned task. Despite the distractions and opposition, the wall was built.

All of us know what it is like to experience interruptions and other distractions. They happen every day. Many are important but some simply keep us from accomplishing God's assignments.

Today, think about the distractions you face. Are any of these keeping you from accomplishing God's work? Ask Him to give you a clear sense of His calling and His priorities for you. Then be alert to distractions and don't allow them to disrupt your mission. Remain faithful and stay focused on His call.

What distractions are you facing? How can you keep doing God's work?

Faithful, Fearing God

TODAY'S BIBLE READING: NEHEMIAH 7

Backed with authority from Persia's ruler, Nehemiah seemed fully equipped to rebuild the wall in Jerusalem. Nonetheless, he encountered strong opposition from men who resisted this project. Many mocked the Jews and spread confusion and discouragement.

To accomplish this assignment, Nehemiah needed people who could share his commitment – spiritually mature people with organizational and building skills, men willing to *persevere* in the face of opposition who could be trusted and lead by example. Hanani and Hananiah were two of these men.

Hanani had a *passion* for God. His testimony about conditions in Jerusalem inspired Nehemiah to tackle this wall-building project. Hananiah demonstrated that he was *faithful* and *trustworthy*. After the wall was rebuilt, these men were rewarded for their faithfulness by being appointed to leadership in Jerusalem.

How does your life measure up to these standards? Ask God to help you be faithful and trustworthy. Fear Him and have a passion to serve Him. Take *your* commitments seriously.

Demonstrate that *you* can be trusted. If you face obstacles, don't be discouraged but stay focused. Ask God to give you boldness and discernment. And seek to be a good example to others.

SATURDAY

February

19

I put Hanani my brother, and Hananiah the commander of the citadel, in charge of Jerusalem, for he was a faithful man and feared God more than many.

Nehemiah 7:2 NASB

PRAYER:

Father, help me to be faithful. I seek first Your Kingdom. Give me greater boldness. Use me to impact lives for the Gospel. In Jesus' name, amen.

How does your life show faithfulness to God and His calling?

SUNDAY

February

20

The people went away to eat and drink at a festive meal, to share gifts of food, and to celebrate with great joy because they had heard God's words and understood them.

Nehemiah 8:12 NLT

PRAYER:

Father, help me to have a greater understanding of Your Word. I hunger to know more of Your Word. Thank You for joy. In Jesus' name, amen.

Insight Brings Joy

TODAY'S BIBLE READING: NEHEMIAH 8

The Jews had a life-changing experience after they returned from exile in Babylon. What happened? They *focused on God's Word*.

As they heard the Word being read to them, His words came alive for them as never before. As they listened, they were given greater *insight*. They were encouraged and their burdens were lifted. Filled with understanding, they were able to "*celebrate with great joy!*"

God's Word has this kind of impact. It can change us and transform our lives. Even when we face situations that seem hopeless, the Word gives us hope and even joy.

But it is not enough just to know *about* the Word or read it occasionally. The Word is like a hidden treasure with riches for those who dig, seek, demonstrate initiative, hunger and thirst for the Word, listen, and study.

When we truly understand the Word, our lives will be impacted in countless ways. Our attitudes will change. We will think with greater clarity and receive more of God's wisdom. We will have more discernment and be able to act more prudently.

Today, commit to seeking God's Word as never before. Read it. Study it. Ask God to give you new revelations and reveal greater depths of His truth, so you might impact others for His Kingdom. Ask Him to grant you deeper levels of understanding and an outpouring of joy.

How can you remind yourself to meditate on God's Word daily?

Bless the Lord

TODAY'S BIBLE READING: NEHEMIAH 9

An orphan himself, James Montgomery had a strong compassion for children. Born in 1771, he expressed his concerns in many of the 400 hymns he composed, including a hymn written for a Sunday School in Sheffield, England.

For the title of this hymn, Montgomery selected the call to the people of Israel in Nehemiah's time to "Stand Up and Bless the Lord." Montgomery realized that in every era it was important to make that unmistakable commitment. It was a call for children and adults to unite their hearts and proclaim their faith.

Those Israelites in Nehemiah's time had humbled themselves before God, confessing their sins. Having heard His Word, they joined together to worship Him. As we follow their example, Montgomery reminds us that we all should bless Him "with heart, and soul, and voice." Remember that He is great and glorious. We should magnify Him forever.

Thinking of all He has done, we realize that He can impact our lives in supernatural ways. It changes our lives to know He is near. We remember He is "our strength and song," and He delivers and saves us.

During day-to-day distractions, be sure that you have the right priorities. James Montgomery (and the Jews of Nehemiah's time) would remind you why you need to *take a stand*: to be sure everyone knows that you serve the living God. Don't compromise.

MONDAY

February

21

Jeshua...cried out with a loud voice to the LORD [his] God. And the Levites...said: "Stand up and bless the LORD your God forever and ever! Blessed be Your glorious name, which is exalted above all blessing and praise!"

Nehemiah 9:4-5 NKJV

PRAYER:

Father, I praise Your name. Help me to testify about Your greatness. Thank You for all You have done for me. In Jesus' name, amen.

What area of your life do you need to stake a godly stand in currently?

TUESDAY

February

22

*Open my eyes, that I
may behold wonderful
things from Your Law.*

Psalms 119:18 NASB

PRAYER:

Father, give me a spirit of boldness. Help me recognize the moments when I should go forward, or hold back. Thank You for discernment. In Jesus' name, amen.

Open Eyes

TODAY'S BIBLE READING: PSALM 119:9-24

Bjarni Herjólfsson sailed throughout the known world, including frequent voyages to Greenland, the faraway island where many Norwegians (including his parents) had settled.

During one voyage (around 986 AD), his ship was blown off course. They became completely lost. As the winds calmed down, Herjólfsson was able to see land but did not recognize any features. His crew begged him to go ashore to learn more about this new world. But Herjólfsson just wanted to go home. Lacking initiative, he lost this opportunity for a place in history.

Without knowing it, he and his crew had crossed the Atlantic and discovered the North American continent, becoming the first Europeans to *see* the New World. He *could* have been the first to set foot on this land. But, as the Norse sagas commented, Herjólfsson “lacked curiosity.” He just headed back out to sea.

Years afterward, he told this story to a friend, who decided to retrace the course. That friend was Leif Erikson, who *did* have boldness. Willing to step out into the unknown, Erikson became the first to discover the land Herjólfsson just saw.

History is full of people like Herjólfsson who have opportunities but were afraid to step out in faith. How about you? Are you afraid or bold? What opportunities has God brought into your life? Ask Him to open your eyes to see the world as He sees it. Be ready to step out in faith.

How is God calling you to step out boldly in faith today?

Worn Down by Deceit

TODAY'S BIBLE READING: PSALM 120

The psalmist was frustrated. Facing troubles, he found people who *seemed* ready to help – people who made promises, seemed knowledgeable, and seemed to care about the issues. But in the end, he discovered they were being *deceptive* and had just made *empty* promises.

What bothered him was that much of what they said *sounded* believable. They gave the *appearance* of being sincere. But they were being deceitful. He wanted peace, but these people, regardless of what they said, wanted war; they *hated* peace.

Have you ever encountered people whom you learn are deceitful? They say one thing but do another. They give the appearance of being for peace and harmony, but in their hearts want war. They *sound* sincere, but just want to *manipulate* you to get you to do what they want.

The world is filled with people like this. They can be persuasive. They may fool some people with their promises and smooth talk. They might even try to fool you.

Be careful about whom you trust and believe. Be on the alert for those trying to trick you. You can find them all around you, trying to sell you products to support their causes.

Ask God for discernment about people and products. Stay sensitive to His Spirit. Don't believe everything you hear. And remember, you can trust in God and believe His Word.

WEDNESDAY

February

23

I cried to the LORD in my trouble, and He answered me. Rescue my soul, O LORD, from lying lips, from a deceitful tongue... Too long has my soul had its dwelling with those who hate peace. I am for peace, but when I speak, they are for war.

Psalms 120:1, 6-7 NASB

PRAYER:

Father, give me discernment. Show me whom I can trust. In Jesus' name, amen.

How can you cultivate discernment, so you can be aware of lies?

THURSDAY

February

24

I lift up my eyes to the mountains... My help comes from the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth. He will not let your foot slip – he who watches over you will not slumber.

Psalm 121:1-3 NIV

PRAYER:

Father, I am grateful that You never slumber or sleep. Thank You for watching over me, at night or during the day. In Jesus' name, amen.

Help from God

TODAY'S BIBLE READING: PSALM 121

Mountains have inspired people throughout history. They particularly have been associated with religion. Reflecting this perspective, American composer Alan Hovhaness once wrote, "Mountains are symbols, like pyramids, of man's attempt to know God. Mountains are symbolic meeting places between the mundane and spiritual worlds."

Many ancient cultures worshiped mountains or made them a focus of worship. Hindus often built temples on hills because they represent the importance of spirituality. Animists believe that hills are spiritual beings.

In the Bible, hills were places of idol worship. Ahaz was just one of the kings of Israel who "sacrificed and burnt incense in the high places, and on the hills" (2 Kings 16:4 NKJV). But mountains also were places where God spoke to His people. For example, God revealed Himself to the Israelites on Mount Sinai and there gave Moses the Ten Commandments.

Those who lift their eyes to the hills see magnificent creations that can inspire awe and wonder. But we err if we place our hope in these mountains (or any other created thing) or look to them for help. God wants us to focus on Him. He is the One who created the mountains, as well as all Heaven and earth.

Today, do not place your hope in mountains or armies, nations or kingdoms, or other people. Trust in the Lord. He watches over you day and night no matter where you go or what you do.

Write your own psalm of gratitude to the Lord for His care.

The Peace of Jerusalem

TODAY'S BIBLE READING: PSALM 122

Some look at events in the Middle East with uncertainty. But the Bible reminds us that God is not worried. He has a plan, and that plan has not changed.

From a biblical perspective, we are reminded that conflicts in that region are not about oil or politics but ultimately about God. Just as when the Bible was written, He looks for men and women who trust Him and seek first His kingdom.

The psalmist recognized that God was the focal point of his life and that the most important thing was being in fellowship with Him. What brought him joy? *"I was glad when they said to me, 'Let's go to the house of the LORD'"* (v. 1). He could not wait to be in God's presence!

He was filled with joy when he stood in Jerusalem's gates where God's people gathered to praise and thank Him. Then the psalmist commanded, *"Pray for the peace of Jerusalem."* This prayer demonstrated a love for God. A heart in tune with His Spirit. It was so important that He *promised peace and prosperity* for those praying this prayer.

If you want God's perspective on current events, read His Word. If you want His wisdom, cry out for it. If you want peace and joy, spend time in His presence in a spirit of worship and praise. And in all circumstances pray for the peace of Jerusalem.

FRIDAY

February

25

Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: May they prosper who love you. May peace be within your walls, and prosperity within your palaces.

Psalms 122:6-7 NASB

PRAYER:

Father, I pray for the peace of Jerusalem. May Your kingdom come, and Your will be done on earth as it is in Heaven. In Jesus' name, amen.

Do you need to adjust your attitude about attending church?

SATURDAY

February

26

To You I have raised my eyes...Behold, as the eyes of servants look to the hand of their master...so our eyes look to the LORD our God, until He is gracious to us.

Psalms 123:1-2 NASB

PRAYER:

Father, I commit these situations to You: _____ . Help me have the attitude of a servant. I commit my time, talents, and treasures to You. In Jesus' name, amen.

The Eyes of a Servant

TODAY'S BIBLE READING: PSALM 123

This psalm was written by a man who understood the importance of having a right relationship with God. He knew that we all need to know God *personally* and *depend* on Him. We need to remember that He is God Almighty, our Creator, the One who reigns over the universe.

The psalmist also understood the importance of *waiting* on God. To help us understand this attitude, he pictured the way good servants wait upon and desire to please their masters. They trust them to do the right thing at the right time.

This, he knew, provided a perfect picture of the attitude we are to have toward God. He wants us to depend on Him, confident He will care for us and guide us. We should be so committed to serving Him that we will be always ready to respond, always listening.

If we depend on our human understanding, we can find ourselves rushing to do what makes sense to us. But the Bible reminds us of our limits and God's sovereignty and omnipotence. We need to wait on Him in *every* situation. Even if we face challenges, we must trust Him completely, confident that His timing is perfect.

Commit every situation to God. Be sensitive to His leading. Look to Him and depend on Him. Seek to serve Him with the attitude of a servant. Trust in Him. Remember, He is faithful. And He loves you.

What talents and time and treasures can you commit to God this week?

God Is on Your Side

TODAY'S BIBLE READING: PSALM 124

David experienced many difficulties. At times, torrents of problems swept over him, threatening to overwhelm him like a raging flood. He faced giants and hostile armies. Fleeing for his life, he had to seek refuge among people who had been his enemies. His family doubted and even rejected him at times. And the king whom he served faithfully turned against him and sought to kill him.

God allowed him to go through these situations. However, He *always* was with him. Without Him, David would have drowned in the waters and been torn apart by his adversaries. He would have been trapped just like a bird in the snare of the trapper. But because of God, the snare was broken, and he escaped (v. 7).

Sometimes when we experience problems, we can feel discouraged, defeated, or overwhelmed. Like David, we need to realize that we are not immune from problems just because we serve God. But in every situation, we can know that He *always* is with us. He will bring us through difficulties and give us the strength we need. He is our Help and Deliverer.

Remember that God is with you in every situation you face. Look to Him to bring you through, protect and shield you, guide and provide for you. Call on Him for the things you need. Trust Him. Be at peace. He is on your side.

SUNDAY

February

27

Had it not been the LORD who was on our side...they would have swallowed us alive... the waters would have flooded over us, the stream would have swept over our souls.

Psalm 124:1, 3-4 NASB

PRAYER:

Father, I commit these situations to You: _____ . Thank You that You are by my side. I believe You for victory. In Jesus' name, amen.

Journal about a difficult time you faced when you felt the Lord's presence.

MONDAY

February

28

Those who trust in the LORD are as secure as Mount Zion; they will not be defeated but will endure forever. Just as the mountains surround Jerusalem, so the LORD surrounds his people, both now and forever.

Psalms 125:1-2 NLT

PRAYER:

Father, I commit these issues to You: _____. Thank You for taking away my fears. I trust in You. In Jesus' name, amen.

Safe and Secure

TODAY'S BIBLE READING: PSALM 125

Anna Laetitia Waring was known to be shy and reserved. But she found an outlet through poetry, through which she communicated the concerns of her heart. Many of these became hymns.

Born in Wales in 1823, she became a passionate student of the Bible. She learned Hebrew in order to study the Old Testament in its original language. She was moved by the needs around her. In particular, she demonstrated compassion by visiting prisoners. She continued to show concern by supporting a ministry to prisoners after they had been discharged.

We gain insight into Waring's faith through one of her best-loved hymns, "In Heavenly Love Abiding." Apparently inspired in part by Psalm 125, she declared that we are safe in God's love. Because of His love, we can be freed from fear. Storms may roar, but God is with us, so how can we be dismayed? We can be confident because He is our Shepherd and always is prepared to guide us. He stands beside us and never sleeps.

At times Waring was plagued by "darkest clouds," but thanks to Jesus, she experienced freedom. She wrote, "My Savior has my treasure, and he will walk with me." Like the psalmist, she learned to trust God, to find security in Him.

When you experience dark clouds, remember that God is with You in every situation. With Him, you are safe and secure. Turn to Him. Trust Him.

How can you learn to trust that Jesus will always be with you?

leg·a·cy

[leg-uh-see] *noun*

“something handed down or received from an ancestor or predecessor”

The Bible is a story of legacies – some leave a trail of blessings, some magnify sin.

It all started with Adam and Eve, whose choice to reject God's instructions opened the way to sin, sickness, and death. Thankfully, God's love met them in their rebellion and made a way to reverse that legacy. He sent His perfect Son, Jesus, to die on the cross, pay the penalty for sin, and cancel the curse of rebellion (Galatians 3:13-14).

Each of us must choose which legacy we will leave: rebellious independence or a life of full surrender to God.

Hebrews 9:16-17 presents Jesus'

legacy – to give life to all who follow Him. You see, legacies don't end with our earthly lives. God's desire is for you to live a life of blessing (Genesis 12:2) and pass it on to future generations. Good stewardship means we're purposeful in our giving and impacting others.

The Inspiration Ministries' Planned Giving Team wants to help you navigate the process of establishing a Will and Estate Plan to extend your legacy into the future. Call today and let us show you how you can save on taxes, provide for your loved ones, and continue winning souls for God's Kingdom after you've gone on to your reward!

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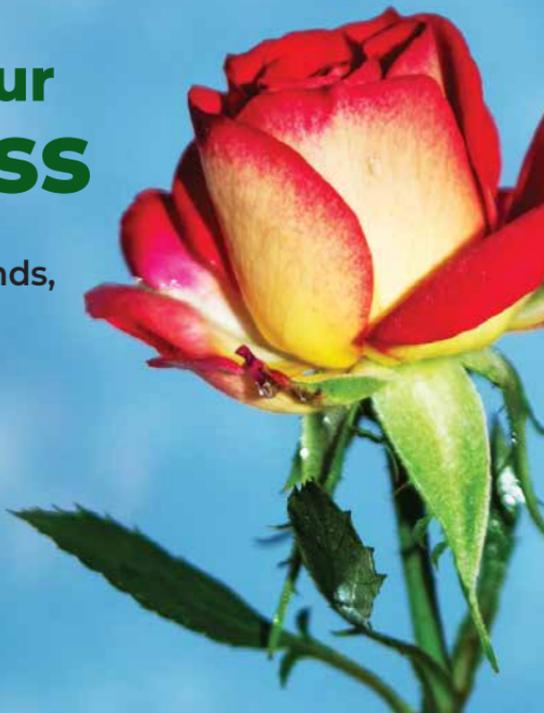


Celebrate Your Weakness

Where your strength ends,
GOD's begins.



by Ben Cerullo



The Christian life is never dull. In fact, my advice is to expect the unexpected! That's not because God is fickle or inconsistent – He never contradicts Himself or wavers in His commitment to His promises. But misunderstanding God and forgetting His ways is your nature – and mine.

The principles of God's Kingdom are upside down from the ways of the world. The fallen state of man perverts the ways of God and distorts our vision. You are unlikely to hear a motivational speaker proclaiming the blessings of humility or celebrating their dependence on anything. As a Christian, you must choose to intentionally feast on the Word of God daily and renew your mind.

Without a determination to draw closer to God, you will move farther away from Him. Decay and deterioration are part of the natural world. But He created you to be in a relationship with Him. You cannot reach your potential without being connected to God. He continually works out life circumstances to bring you closer to Him. Often, He uses the harsh realities of life to reveal His beauty and necessity.

THORNY BLESSINGS

In his second letter to the Corinthian Christians, the apostle Paul shared an intense struggle that helped him grow to understand this concept. Plagued by what Paul called “a messenger of

Satan” (12:7 NLT), he shared with them how he had begged God to remove an ongoing difficulty. But God replied:

My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness (12:9).

Paul grew to understand the blessing in this “*thorn in the flesh*” (12:7) – although Satan sent it, God put it to work in Paul’s life to lift him to his maximum potential. The compassionate heart of God went to the place of pain in Paul’s life and filled it with Himself! Paul’s inspiring response to the presence and power of God was this:

For Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong (12:10 NIV).

I am challenged by Paul’s words – I don’t often delight in the difficult things, but I recognize the wisdom of doing so. Our world is growing darker. Christians face increasing persecution, and we need to grow stronger. Paul tells us to embrace our weaknesses so we can receive God’s strength!

No one enjoys feeling weak and powerless. We prefer the illusion of

strength that comes with being seen as wise, valuable, and in control. But our preference for being self-sufficient causes us to fall short of God’s plans for us. Let’s avoid the trap of trusting in ourselves and learn to see the blessing in our thorns.

PREFER GOD’S OPINION

It’s pride that elevates our own thoughts above God’s Word – and separates us from God. Choose to love what God loves and hate what God hates. Pride is the first thing Solomon mentions that God hates (Proverbs 6:16-17), and it is another deadly trap we must avoid.

Don’t think you are better than you really are. Be honest in your evaluation of yourselves, measuring yourselves by the faith God has given us (Romans 12:3 NLT).

Do you see it? Faith, a **gift received from God** – and nothing we create or accomplish – is the measure of success. God’s purposes for our lives **far exceed** our ability. Embracing our weakness helps us to walk humbly and receive the gift of faith that leads us to victory. ❖

“We have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.” - 2 Corinthians 4:7

FILL UP

on the SPIRIT of GOD



Before a great awakening, there must be a rude awakening. Two things would shock us to our core: if we knew our true condition before God, and if we knew how close America is to destruction.

We need a Godsend. What does a Godsend look like? A Godsend is disruptive. It exposes falsehood. It speaks truth to power. It does not negotiate its demands. It is supernatural in its origin and execution.

A perfect clue is John the Baptist. *“There was a man sent from God, whose name was John”* (John 1:6). The Bible even calls him a Godsend!

He is not comfortable or charming. Not a soothing voice or gracious speaker. He is a wrecking ball. His looks, his message, and his demands are radical and offensive to all except *“those who hunger and thirst for righteousness”* (Matthew 5:6). He upends religion and points to a new order. Despite all this, vast crowds march to the wilderness to be baptized and hear of the coming Messiah. A Godsend carries a message few would consider a winning message.

God is saying, “Tell the American church it is time to get back on the offensive.” God is commanding the church to ignore every outward sign of resistance and limitation. He is ordering

the church to get back on the attack. It is time to attack Satan's stranglehold on America.

Remember, America is a land of covenants. There are old wells of revival. Deep spiritual history. God is rolling up His sleeves. He is fiercely warring to restore what America was before the poison of "wokeness" entered her veins.

It is time to look back and realize what those freedom fighters faced. That group of people who crossed an ocean on pieces of wood that you and I wouldn't dare step onto – let alone sail over an ocean – in order to have freedom to worship Christ. We need to rediscover the people who carved a nation out of the wilderness. The same kind of spirit and courage they had has to get back into us!

The American church desperately needs a mass renewal of the inner man and eyes focused on the eternal unseen (2 Corinthians 4:16-18). We cannot dwell on the impossibility of restoring America. God is for us. God is upon us. The money, influence, open doors, gifts of power and strategies are here now – not at

some distant date in the future. No devil and no perversion can stand before the body of Christ. Not when the body shakes itself from division, confusion, and lack of memory.

Remember, David's sling was his second weapon. His first weapon was his memory of what God had done in the past. He looked at Saul and said, "You want to know why that nine-and-a-half-foot tall man is going to die? It is because your servant has killed a lion and a bear."

American history is being banned, not because of racism, but because the devil knows the testimony of God that runs through it. The Bible says, "*Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits*" (Psalm 103:2). The list of benefits to America that have come from God is endless!

Church, we have been here before. We've been in worse spots than this. We have won in the past, and we can win again. And we are going to win, by the power of God. God just needs to turn on the fire and stir that fire again in our souls. ❖



Mario Murillo speaks to the hurts of society from the heart of God, clearly declaring the life-transforming power of Jesus. He says, "Come and see. Christ has the power to end addiction, racism, violence, and disease."

Excerpted with permission from "Tonight, God is Ordering the American Church to Get Back on the Offensive," originally published on mariomurillo.org.



Has God Changed Your Life?

We want you to share your story!

Every time you see the hand of God working in your life, you're witnessing the glory of God. Sharing those glimpses of glory strengthens you and others!

Revelation 12 tells of the victorious saints in Heaven who overcame the accuser, Satan, by the blood of the Lamb and the word of their testimony. Your victories come the same way!



We created this list of prompts to help you tell your unique stories – and create more overcomers!

- What was happening in your life before God stepped in?
- How long had you tried to solve the problem on your own?
- What ways did you try to solve the problem – did you go to God?
- What did God do for you?
- What did God use to help you (e.g., pastor, website, Inspiration TV, prayer)?
- How did your connection to Jesus change?
- How is your life different since God stepped in?

Your story can help someone know more about Jesus Christ and understand how His work on the cross offers hope to them today!

3 Easy Ways to Share Your Story:



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A Merry Heart...

does good, like medicine. – Proverbs 17:22

God's Valentine Gift

God's Valentine gift of love to us
Was not a bunch of flowers;
It wasn't candy, or a book
To while away the hours.

His gift was to become a man,
So He could freely give
His sacrificial love for us,
So you and I could live.

He gave us sweet salvation, and
Instruction, good and true –
To love our friends and enemies
And love our Savior, too.

So as we give our Valentines,
Let's thank our Lord and King;
The reason we have love to give
Is that He gave everything.

By Joanna Fuchs
www.poemsource.com



www.CuylerBlack.com



Got some clean, Christian
humor you'd like to share?

Email it to: MerryHeart@inspiration.org

What do you call two
birds in love?

Tweethearts

What did the rabbit say
to his Valentine?

Somebunny loves you!

What did the paper clip say
to the magnet?

*I find you very
attractive.*

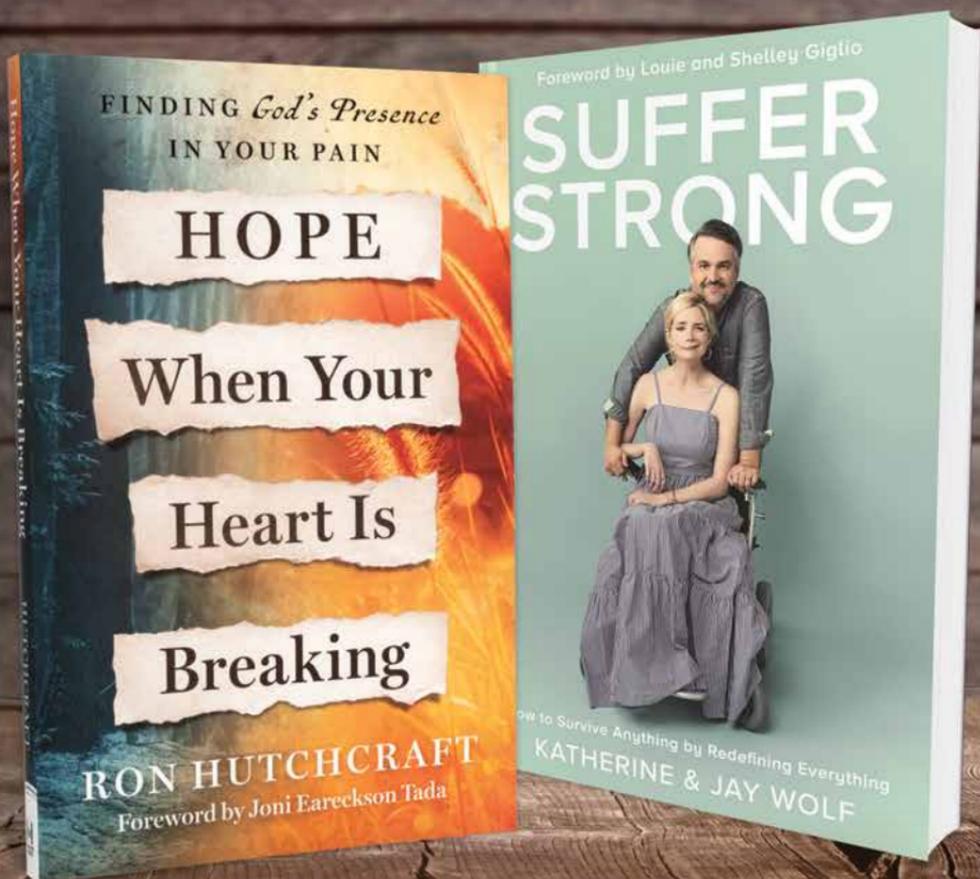
How can you tell when a
squirrel is in love?

It goes nuts!

Hope for Your Heartache

Ron Hutchcraft's new book ***Hope When Your Heart Is Breaking: Finding God's Presence in Your Pain*** is a resource every Christian needs. His gentle wisdom deftly guides hurting hearts through the crushing pains life sometimes delivers.

PLUS, get the expanded version of our feature story (page 12) with Katherine and Jay Wolf's book ***Suffer Strong: How to Survive Anything by Redefining Everything***. The full account of their triumph over tragedy beautifully displays how to live out God's eternal truths.



Turn to **Page 28** for details on how you can receive these vitally important **THANK YOU GIFTS** (act now – supplies are limited).