

MARCH 2022

inspiration

M A G A Z I N E



Michael W. Smith on

The Heart of Worship

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YOUR 'SUDDENLY' MIRACLE!



The voice of God is **powerful**, and it only takes a word from Him to change **everything!** Sickness, despair, and debt are not God's desire for you. On **page 5**, David shows you from the Bible that God is both willing and able to provide the breakthrough you need.



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

(See page 28 for details.)

EDITOR'S CORNER



God created us to worship Him – but how often do we get too distracted to focus on the King of kings? Let's unite our hearts to worship the most High God by focusing on His power and glory. From Michael W. Smith to our Cuyler Black cartoon, this month's magazine aims to inspire a song in your heart about God's goodness!

The more my heart is tuned to worship, the greater my expectation for God's intervention on my behalf – and He never disappoints. I look forward to hearing about the ways God shows up in *your life* as you sing His praises this month.

10 **COVER STORY: The Heart of Worship**

Michael W. Smith has been leading the way to worship for nearly four decades, and his spirit still burns brightly. Let him inspire you as he shares his heart with Inspiration Ministries.

15 **Unlock the Glory in You**

By Ben Cerullo

God chose you to reveal His glory to the world. Join Ben as he explores the greatness God has entrusted to each one of His children.

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Creation proclaims the power and wisdom of Elohim. Take time to consider the power and might of God – ready to act on your behalf!

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Draw closer to God by spending time with Him each day.

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By Denise Winton

Has the trite phrase “God will never give you more than you can handle” ever left you feeling bitter and overwhelmed? Trade it in for these hope-filled words of truth.



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Inspiration Ministries · PO Box 7750 · Charlotte, NC 28241
Inspiration Ministries UK · Admail 3905 · London · W1A 1ZT

Partner Services US / CAN / CAR: +1 (803) 578-1899 UK / Intl: +44 (0) 84 5683 0580

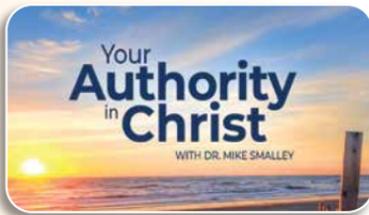
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February 14 – March 11

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March 14 = March 25

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One Word
from God Changes
Everything

"The voice of the LORD is powerful."
– Psalm 29:4



STRENGTHEN
your walk
with David Cerullo

If you have some long-standing problems in your life, you probably think it would take God quite a while to turn things around – if He's even *willing* to do so. However, there's an important story in Matthew 8:5-13 that shows why you may need a whole new perspective.

When Jesus entered the town of Capernaum one day, He was approached by a man desperate for a miracle: *"A centurion came to Him, pleading with Him, saying, 'Lord, my servant is lying at home paralyzed, dreadfully tormented'"* (vs. 5-6).

This man was a Roman. He hadn't grown up in the Jewish synagogues, so He didn't have any background with Old Testament Scriptures like Exodus 15:26, where the Lord promises to be our healer if we listen to and obey His voice. And it's very unlikely he had ever heard Psalm 107:20, where the psalmist says, *"He sent His word and healed them, and delivered them from their destructions."*

The centurion understood that one word from the Lord can change EVERYTHING.

Yet somehow this man recognized Jesus held the key to his servant's healing. And sure enough, the Lord told the centurion without a moment's hesitation, "*I will come and heal him*" (v. 7).

Although most people would have rejoiced in Jesus' willingness to come to the servant's sickbed and heal him, the centurion came up with an even *better* plan: "*Lord, I am not worthy that You should come under my roof. But **only speak a word**, and my servant will be healed*" (v. 8).

The centurion recognized there was no need for Jesus to come and lay hands on his servant. Nor was any lengthy prayer time needed. He realized Jesus only needed to "*speak a word*," and the miracle would happen.

You see, the centurion understood that one word from the Lord can change *everything*.

SPEAKING WITH AUTHORITY

How did the centurion have such a profound insight into the nature of faith, when many of the religious people of Jesus' day totally missed it? The next verses give us the answer:

*For I **also** am a man **under authority**, having soldiers under me. And I say to this one, "Go," and he goes; and to another, "Come," and he comes; and to my servant, "Do this," and he does it* (v. 9).

You see, the centurion understood the principle of delegated authority. And Jesus "*marveled*" at the centurion's insight on the true nature of faith.

*When Jesus heard it, He **marveled**, and said to those who followed, "Assuredly, I say to you, **I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel!**"* (v. 10).

Jesus told the centurion, "*As **you have believed**, so let it be done for you*" (v. 13). Friend,

I'm convinced He is making this same promise to you and me today, so let's be sure we're believing the truth of His Word, not the lies of the devil!

The centurion's story has a beautiful ending: "*And his servant was **healed that same hour***" (v. 13). Jesus could have told the man that his servant was going to die or would only get better after a lengthy illness, but instead the breakthrough came SUDDENLY.

When the Lord spoke, everything changed in a moment's time!

One word from Jesus changed everything for the centurion's servant, and He can reverse *your* negative circumstances in the same way. When you invite Him to speak into your difficult situation today, you can be released from...

- Poverty and debt
- Sickness and depression
- Loneliness and hopelessness
- Addiction and family strife
- And so much more!

WORSHIP THE LORD & GET READY!

One of the best ways to get ready for your breakthrough is to follow the example of Paul and Silas after they were beaten and thrown into a jail in Philippi (Acts 16:22-34). Instead of grumbling and complaining, they prayed and ***passionately worshiped the Lord***. The Bible says it was a "*midnight*" hour for these heroes of the faith, but everything was about to change for them:

Suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately **all the doors were opened and everyone's chains were loosed** (v. 26).

My friend, are there some doors you need God to open for you today? Are you being oppressed by chains of the enemy that you're desperate to break? Then worship the Lord, believe His

Instead of grumbling and complaining, Paul and Silas prayed and passionately worshiped the Lord.

promises, and get ready for a “*great earthquake*”!

When Paul and Silas prayed... gave thanks...and sang God’s praises, the Lord **suddenly** responded with an earthquake that totally transformed their circumstances! What a fantastic picture of the overwhelming victory God will give you and me as we worship and obey Him today. He is able to unleash a tidal wave of blessings to reverse every negative situation.

This is such good news. No matter what kind of difficult situation you may be facing today, your miracle breakthrough may be a lot closer than you think.

We are blessed to receive many letters from Inspiration partners who’ve been **SET FREE** from tormenting situations that have held them back from God’s best in their life. Some have been freed from some sickness or enemy strongholds. Others have miraculously

received open doors in a relationship, career, or ministry.

You may have waited for a long time, but your breakthrough can come **suddenly**, just as it did for the centurion’s servant, Paul, and Silas. Even when it seems like your “*midnight*” hour has come, God will turn around your circumstances when you trust Him and give Him praise!

God bless you,



P.S. I am so grateful to God for you. Just as Paul told his partners in Philippi, God will credit the amazing impact of this ministry to YOUR account in Heaven (Philippians 4:17). *Thank you!*



Turn to **page 28** to see the powerful THANK YOU GIFT we want to send you for your partnership this month.

Does YOUR Will Need a Checkup?

Your Will and Estate Plan doesn't need an annual visit to the doctor, but it should be regularly reviewed. Here's a helpful checklist to decide whether your Will needs an update:

1. Have there been family changes such as births, marriages, deaths, or divorces?
2. Have you moved to another state since creating the Will?
3. Does your Will carry on your legacy of love for the Lord?
4. Have there been changes in your property or income?
5. Have there been changes in tax laws that your Will doesn't reflect?

The Inspiration Ministries' Planned Giving team would be glad to share FREE information to help you with your Will and Estate Plan. Contact us today!



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The Heart of Worship



For nearly four decades, Michael W. Smith's passion for worship has been changing lives for Jesus.

Very few worship leaders today live a lifestyle of worship quite like Michael W. Smith. His heart-stirring music flows out of his personal relationship with God and envelops everything that he is and does.

Although he's been leading worship for over 35 years, Smith sees a clear distinction between worship and music. To him, worship is a lifestyle, not just the act of singing or playing – it is “how you treat God at the grocery store, around your lawyer, your doctor.” But he also says it's an act of surrender.

Inspiration Ministries' Craig Von Buseck recently sat down with the acclaimed Christian artist to talk about his incredible passion for worship and his desire to say yes to his living Savior.

“I feel like I've had the heart of worship my whole life,” said Smith. “I was leading worship at

Belmont Church on Music Road for 19 years before I ever did the first worship record. Then all through the eighties and nineties as I was making pop records and writing all these songs, I felt like I wanted to sing and try to reach the world through this message of hope, talking about God.

“I prayed about a worship album, and God kept waking me up saying, ‘For such a time as this, for such a time as this.’ I kept denying it, saying, ‘I’m not going to do that. I’m not jumping on the bandwagon.’ I was afraid of what people would think. But after the third time of being woken up at three o’clock in the morning, I said, ‘Okay, I’ll do it.’”

A TIME OF PRAISE

Smith’s fellow musicians helped shape that first worship album by asking him to open Gospel Music Week in Nashville. “People came to me and said, ‘Hey, we think we’ve lost our way with our egos. Can we just start off the week with a worship service? Would you do it?’ I said I’d do it if I could just have some creative control. I’d like to do something really unprecedented. I want to invite every artist to come be in the choir. And that’s all we did.”

Smith led the group into worship with the message, “Drop your ego. If you have an ego, just drop it at the door. We’re all good. We’ll do this together.” With selfish pride put aside, hearts were freed to pour out thanks and praise to God. And as Smith reported, “That night was off the charts.”

Smith’s prompting from God to produce a worship album “for such a time as this” became a prophetic calling – the release date was 9/11. “I didn’t know that was going to be a strategic and devastating day for our country. I thought it would be the least successful record of my career, and it ended up being the biggest. Who could have ever thought that?”

“I think it was a healing record for our country on some level. Then somehow it just found its way into these little villages, towns, and cities all across the world. I mean, I’d go to Zimbabwe, and I’d sing ‘Above All,’ or ‘The Heart of Worship,’ and it would just explode.”

MOVED BY THE SPIRIT

Smith, who is one of the biggest selling Christian artists of all time, says true worship has to bring you into the throne room of God. His sole focus when he writes and

sings is to experience the power of God's presence – allowing his heart to stay open to inspiration from the Holy Spirit.

One example of this is when he wrote his popular song “Emmanuel,” which he got from a poster he had on his apartment wall. “I was in my little duplex, and it was one of those ‘I Am’ posters – you know, ‘I Am the Root of David,’ ‘I Am the Bright and Morning Star,’ and all the titles of God. I was looking at it and said, ‘That’s kind of cool.’ And I started doing the beat to that song and writing, ‘Wonderful Counselor.’”

Another time at a large gathering in Washington, DC, Smith was so moved by the spirit of worship, his eyes filled with tears. “Something touched my heart, and I had a little meltdown. I have those all the time. You just get a sense of the fact that God really does love you. *God, you’re just so kind, and you’re patient.* All those things are just sort of overwhelming.

“It also might have been the very first time I heard ‘Let it Rain,’ which was at The Call. It was Pocket Full of Rocks who sang it. I remember leaving DC and thinking, ‘I’m going to record that

song.’ When we started planning to do the worship album I thought, ‘Why don’t we do “Let It Rain”?’ That’s one moment on that record that sort of explodes.

“Darren Whitehead got up and started reading Psalm 97, and that place just exploded. I’ll never forget it. Ever. It felt like it was kind of elevating, honestly. There was a moment after Darren read that Scripture that we went back into ‘Let it Rain,’ and it was like something broke. I’ll never forget it.”

LEADING HEARTS TO HEALING

While God's love and mercy drive Smith's music, he deeply longs to bring others into the powerful presence of God. Knowing who God is becomes key to their healing, and receiving His grace, a part of their transformation.

“I just feel like it’s what I’m supposed to do. God’s still in the business of miracles and changing people’s hearts and minds. If I could just miraculously paint the true picture of who God really is – *who He really is*. I think when people get that, it changes everything. It’s just like, ‘Oh my gosh, really?’ It’s like the light bulb goes off. I see it happen to people all

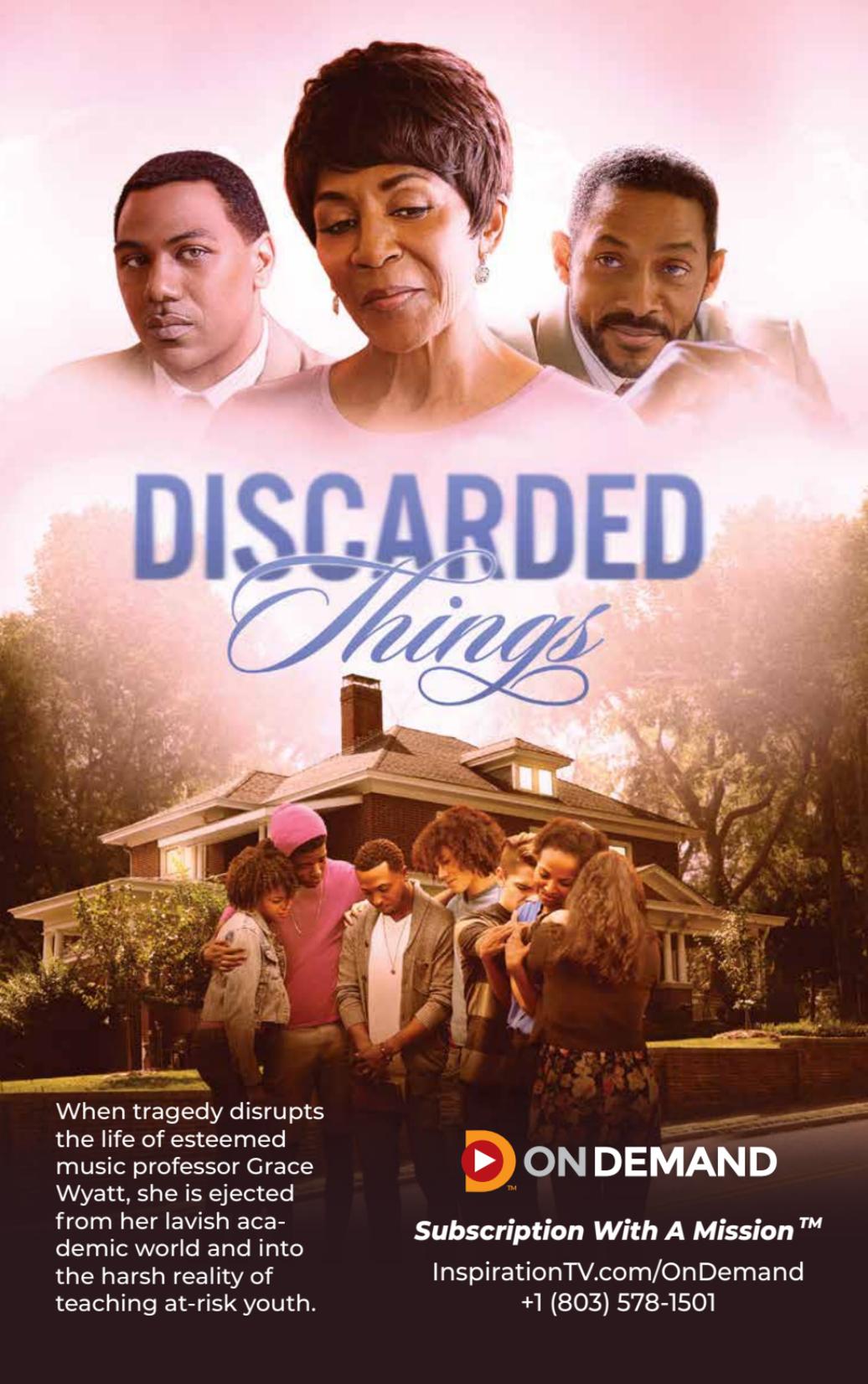
the time. And people can get set free from whatever abuse or hurt that they had once they come into that friendship with God.”

And that individual connection is what moves Smith the most in worship. When hearts find healing, anything becomes possible through Jesus' supernatural touch. Smith passionately uses the most powerful language on earth – music – to convey God's love to the unloved and call hearts to a new experience in unity and grace.

“I feel God moving through His church, and He is calling us together to be one voice and one heart. One bride. Every nation, every tribe, and every tongue. Every social class, every denomination. What if we bring Him the thing that pleases Him most – our unity,” implores Smith. **“We may each have different stories, and skin, and songs, but we all share His same Spirit.”**

Multi-platinum artist, best-selling author, and acclaimed actor **Michael W. Smith** releases new music regularly and performs around the world to sold-out crowds of loyal and inspired fans. The recipient of three Grammy Awards, 45 Dove Awards, and an American Music Award, Michael has sold more than 15 million albums and generously gives back to the global community through many avenues.





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Unlock the Glory in You

by Ben Cerullo

When is the last time you stared in awe at a newborn baby or marveled at the vibrant colors of a flower? I hope it was recently – because God reveals Himself through creation (Romans 1:20). When we pause our passionate pursuits to see Him...to treasure His creativity, power, and wisdom, we bring Him joy.

Did you know God's favorite vessel for revealing Himself is *you*? Humanity holds a special place in God's eyes. We are not highly evolved animals – He made us in His own image! Truly understanding that truth will change your world.

The all-powerful God who made Mount Everest and the Great Barrier Reef needed *a more magnificent creation* to reveal Himself. In a supreme demonstration of His character, God imprinted His own glory on frail and fallible men!

I'm awed and humbled that God chose *me* for this privilege. Mountains and sunsets proclaim His glory far more consistently than I do. All too often, I prefer

myself over God and do things that muddy up His image. But God never falters – He remains faithful to His plan to use me as His *imago Dei* – image bearer!

No matter how many times I fall short of His glory, His kindness draws me closer (Jeremiah 31:3). God keeps pursuing me, helping me learn more of who He is, changing my desires to His (Psalm 37:4), and transforming me more and more into His likeness (2 Corinthians 3:18). What an incredible life journey this creates.

Think with me about what God is like, and you'll celebrate, too! Just from Genesis, we learn that God is creative, spiritual, communicative, relational, and moral. Other Scriptures reveal Him to be kind, merciful, gracious, generous, loving, wise, and so much more than we can imagine or consider here.

Revealing His incredible glory is a destiny that deserves our whole-hearted attention! ❖



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No Greater Power

The works of Elohim reveal God's sovereignty

When you marvel over a stunning sunset or a magnificent mountain, your heart sees the essence of **Elohim**, the Hebrew term used in the Bible to identify our all-powerful, creator God. The word **elohim** appears over 2,500 times in Scripture – with a wide range of meanings (i.e., angels, false gods, human rulers, and Sovereign God). Where it appears as God in our Bibles, the original context points to God's transcendence – clarifying that He is above all other **elohims**.

Strength and might is the core concept of the prefix **El** (in **Elohim**). Often **El** is combined with other divine attributes to reveal more of God's nature (e.g., **El Roi** is the God who sees). Other times **el** appears in an individual's name to draw attention to the aspect of God that most influences their life (e.g., **Daniel** means **El** is my Judge). But only **Elohim** is omnipotent: all-powerful.

Nowhere is the power of **Elohim**, the Creator, seen more

clearly than in Genesis 1:1:

*In the beginning God (**Elohim**) created [by forming from nothing] the heavens and the earth (Amplified Bible).*

No greater power exists than creating something from nothing, and that's just what God did. He spoke, and His words became reality. With just a word, God created the world as we know it – and with just a word, He can transform your world. There's nothing you need that **Elohim** can't provide.

Elohim's power and creativity extend to a passion for unity and relationship. When **Elohim** spoke of man's creation in Genesis 1:26, He said, "**Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.**" God's multi-faceted nature exists in total unity, and **you** are made in **HIS image!** We are made to live in harmony – with Him, with ourselves, and with others. Imagine how different our world would be if we all lived in the security of God's power – and in our identity as God's image! ❖

How Much Is a Soul Worth?



Jesus asked His disciples a piercing question:

“What profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?” (Matthew 16:26).

Think about it: If you could stack every earthly pleasure or treasure on one side of a scale, it still wouldn't be an even exchange for the value of your *SOUL*.

But God loved *you* so much, He sent Jesus to pay the price for your soul! Our Inspiration Ministries Monthly Partners help us send the message of Jesus around the world 24/7. Last year, over **FOUR MILLION** souls entered the Kingdom of Heaven because of our faithful supporters.

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Unfulfilled Dreams

TODAY'S READING: PSALM 126

The instant ideas form, and we catch a vision for something inspiring is a great moment. We feel galvanized by a dream. We feel a special call from God.

But what happens when our dreams aren't fulfilled? Perhaps they have been abandoned. Perhaps delayed. Unfulfilled dreams can be frustrating. They haunt us. Plague us. Perplex us. They can linger in our thoughts.

Many people are like those Israelites who dreamed of a day when the Lord would bring back *"the captive ones of Zion."* They longed for this dream to be fulfilled, but it seemed *impossible*. They hoped for God's intervention, but that seemed impossible – just like a dream.

Then God performed a miracle. He brought back those captive ones. They no longer were just dreaming, but their mouths were *"filled with laughter and [their] tongues with joyful shouting."*

People all around could see that God had *"done great things for them."* He still could intervene and change circumstances. He could make what seemed impossible come true and fulfill their dreams.

Remember that He is the same God today. He still performs miracles and answers the prayers of those who reach out in faith.

The Bible reminds us that God does not want you to give up. Has He given you a vision? A dream? An idea? Stay faithful, and don't give up. Remember, He can do all things!

What are your hopes and dreams? Do you need to revive them again?

TUESDAY

March

1

When the LORD brought back the captives of Zion, we were like those who dream. Then our mouth was filled with laughter and our tongue with joyful shouting; then they said among the nations, "The LORD has done great things for them."

Psalms 126:1-2 NASB

PRAYER:

Father, I commit my hopes and dreams to You. Free me from false desires and distractions. Help me accomplish Your purposes. In Jesus' name, amen.

WEDNESDAY

March

2

Unless the LORD builds a house, they who build it labor in vain; unless the LORD guards a city, the watchman stays awake in vain.

Psalm 127:1 NASB

PRAYER:

Father, I depend upon You for everything in my life. I commit my time, talents, and treasures to You. Help me serve You. In Jesus' name, amen.

Who Builds the House?

TODAY'S READING: PSALM 127

In June 1787, the delegates to the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia were sharply divided. They were trying to write a new constitution for the thirteen colonies that recently had won independence from England. But they faced serious divisions. Many predicted the states would go their separate ways.

On June 28 amid this discouraging conflict, an elderly man rose to speak. He reminded them that they had been “groping as it were in the dark to find political truth.” He suggested a new strategy: *commit* themselves to *prayer*. He reminded them how God had answered prayer often in the nation's brief history. Citing the words of David from Psalm 127, he told them that their only hope was to trust God. He needed to build the house.

Who was this man? Benjamin Franklin – scientist, inventor, philosopher, writer – and known for being skeptical about religion. Yet here he declared openly that the key to success was faith in God. Despite doubts and questions, Franklin had come to realize that no nation could succeed without His blessings.

The principles Franklin talked about still are true. They are true for families and churches, nations, and businesses. They are true for our personal lives. All our efforts are in vain unless we depend upon God, and He is the foundation.

Today, make sure you are trusting God. Call on Him to meet your needs. And base your life on His Word.

How are you making the Lord your foundation for your home and life?

A Shepherd & His Sheep

TODAY'S READING: JOHN 10

Dr. Gary Burge tells the story about a ten-year-old shepherd whose family only had twelve sheep. As part of a military action, their sheep had been gathered in a pen with other sheep. His mother begged the soldiers to let her have her sheep, but this seemed impossible. How could she identify her twelve among so many?

Then her son began playing a simple tune on his flute. As soon as the boy started to walk away, their twelve sheep followed him. As Dr. Burge concludes, "This boy was a good shepherd. He knew his sheep, and his sheep knew him."

This story demonstrates the connection between shepherds and their sheep. This is the connection Jesus specified for His followers. He described Himself as "*the good shepherd*" (v. 11). He's so concerned about his sheep that He would give up His life for them.

He knows His sheep, and they know Him. He is their "*door*," providing the way to safety. All around are "*thieves and robbers*" who come "*to steal and kill and destroy*." But Jesus came to give *abundant life!* (vs. 8-10)

This is the kind of relationship Jesus wants with each of us. We can choose to go our own direction. Or we can surrender to the Good Shepherd.

Today, seek to develop a more intimate relationship with Jesus. Trust Him to provide for you and guide you. He is your Shepherd.

THURSDAY

March

3

My sheep listen to My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me.

John 10:27 NASB

PRAYER:

Dear Lord Jesus, thank You that You are my Shepherd. Help me to hear Your voice more clearly. I long for a more intimate relationship with You. In Your name, amen.

How is your current relationship with your Shepherd?

FRIDAY

March

4

The one who receives a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward; and he who receives a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward.

Matthew 10:41 NASB

PRAYER:

Father, thank You for all You have given me. I dedicate my time, talents, and treasures to You. Use me to change lives. In Jesus' name, amen.

Reward of the Prophet

TODAY'S READING: MATTHEW 10

Even though Prince Henry never went on a sea voyage, he became known as the Navigator. Born on this day in 1394, his parents were King John I and Queen Philippa of Portugal. As a young man, Henry was appointed governor of Ceuta (in northern Africa) and became interested in that continent.

He became passionate about expanding Portugal's trade and influence and hoped to find a source of gold. His skill in mathematics and astronomy helped him organize expeditions along the northwest African coast. In the mid 1420s, explorers sent by Henry reached the Madeira Islands, which became Portuguese colonies.

This was just the beginning. In total, Henry sent out more than fifty expeditions. Even though he *never* went on a voyage, Henry received *credit* for these pioneering efforts. Why? Because he *sponsored* them.

His example supports a biblical principle. Jesus taught His disciples that *everyone* who participates in the work of the Gospel will get a reward (v. 42). Thus, those who give financial support or pray receive the same reward as those who go.

You can help spread the Gospel. You can contribute in many ways. You can share your testimony and pray. You can give financially and dedicate your resources to God's kingdom. When you give, God notices. And He promises to reward you for your faithfulness.

How can you contribute to the efforts of sharing the Gospel?

Spiritual Weapons

TODAY'S READING: ISAIAH 54

SATURDAY

March

5

The arquebus changed history. Invented in Spain in the 15th century, this weapon enabled soldiers to fire at distances of more than 600 feet with deadly impact.

The arquebus had a major impact on warfare. Suddenly, the size of an army was less important than how soldiers were armed. Equipped with weapons like the arquebus, European nations were able to conquer native populations in the Americas and win battles against their European neighbors.

The arquebus symbolizes a major step in military technology. But it also illustrates basic spiritual principles, for we are in a spiritual war and face a ruthless enemy who wants us to cower in fear, feel outnumbered and intimidated, and expect defeat.

This is why we need to act with the authority God has given. Remember His promise that no weapon formed against us will prosper. Remember the words of Jesus, that He gave us *“authority over all the power of the enemy”* (Luke 10:19). Act in faith, and don't give in to doubt (Matthew 21:21). *“Stand firm in the Lord”* (1 Thessalonians 3:8).

But, as Paul warned, we still need to be prepared. *“Put on the full armor of God.”* Take up the shield of faith and the *“sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God”* (Ephesians 6:17).

Don't allow Satan to intimidate you. Use the authority God has given you. Remember, through Jesus you are more than a conqueror (Romans 8:37).

No weapon that is formed against you will succeed; and you will condemn every tongue that accuses you in judgment. This is the heritage of the servants of the LORD.

Isaiah 54:17 NASB

PRAYER:

Father, I declare victory in Jesus' name. I bind the power of Satan over me and my family in His name. In Jesus' name, amen.

Are you prepared for a spiritual battle and Satan's attacks?

SUNDAY

March

6

“This statement is very unpleasant” [...] Many of His disciples left, and would no longer walk with Him anymore. So Jesus said to the twelve, “You do not want to go away also, do you?” Simon Peter answered Him, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have words of eternal life.”

John 6:60, 66-67 NASB

PRAYER:

Dear Lord Jesus, I will follow You wherever You lead. You are my Lord. I surrender every area of my life to You. In Your name, amen.

Total Commitment

TODAY'S READING: JOHN 6

Hernán Cortés arrived in Mexico from Spain when he was only 19, soon gaining a prominent position in the Cuban government. When it became necessary to send Spanish forces to the mainland, the governor directed Cortés to form an expedition. In 1519, Cortés set sail with a fleet of eleven ships and several hundred soldiers and sailors.

Cortés proved to be a tough disciplinarian, and many men threatened mutiny. Cortés decided to do something unprecedented: He burned his ships. In his biography about Cortés, Buddy Levy describes how he wanted to *eliminate all options*. He wanted them to stake everything on their mission. He later reflected that they now had “nothing to rely on save their own hands – and the certainty that they must either win the land or die in the attempt.”

All of us face decisions about our careers or families, finances, or relationships. These crossroads present times to decide our direction.

Jesus' followers reached a point of decision when His words became “*difficult*.” At that moment, many decided not to follow Him any longer. But Peter, answering for the twelve, reaffirmed *their* commitment. Like the other disciples, he had responded to Jesus' call, to “*follow Me*” (Mark 1:17). Giving up everything to be His disciples. They would not turn back.

Don't be like those who walked away. Make a *total commitment* to follow Jesus *wherever* He leads. Make Him Lord of every area of your life.

How have you reacted when you've reached a crossroads in your life?

The Sweetest Name

TODAY'S READING: SONG OF SOLOMON 1

The Song of Solomon may more correctly be called the Song of Songs. Thinking about this as a book of songs gives us a unique perspective.

These songs are found in the Bible in part because they help us understand God's love, how we respond to that love. They help us understand how His love inspired Him to send Jesus into this world.

We see this theme in the first few verses. The love of Jesus is the story of many believers whose lives have been *changed* by the Savior and who are *grateful* for all that He has done. This is the story of many who have accomplished remarkable things for the Kingdom, but also those who are relatively unknown, such as Lela Long.

Little is known about Long, except that she loved Jesus. This is clear from "Jesus is the Sweetest Name I Know," a hymn she wrote in the early years of the twentieth century.

No name was as dear to her as "the precious, precious name of Jesus." His name was "the sweetest name I know." She found that Jesus Himself was "just the same as His lovely name, and that's the reason why I love Him so." She looked forward to seeing Him face to face when she could "thank and praise Him for His wondrous grace."

Can you say you're in love with Jesus? Remember, He loves *you*!

Write about your love for Jesus, your Savior.

MONDAY

March

7

Your love is better than wine; your anointing oils are fragrant; your name is oil poured out.

Song of Solomon 1:2-3 ESV

PRAYER:

Dear Lord Jesus, thank You for loving me. Thank You for dying that I might have eternal life. I love You! In Your name, amen.

TUESDAY

March

8

*I am the rose of Sharon,
the lily of the valleys.
Like a lily among the
thorns, so is my darling
among the maidens.*

Song of Solomon 2:1-2
NASB

PRAYER:

Father, thank You for loving me. I dedicate my life to serving You. I love You. In Jesus' name, amen.

Lilies

TODAY'S READING: SONG OF SOLOMON 2

Claude Monet was dazzled. Already one of the premier artists of his time, he was overwhelmed at an exposition in Paris in 1889 at the spectacularly colorful water lilies that had been crossbred by botanist Joseph Bory Latour-Marliac.

Monet decided to create a garden near his home to feature these lilies. One aspect was accessing the garden by taking an underground passage. Hundreds of visitors traveled this road, hoping to get a glimpse of the garden, called by one journalist, "the domain of the water lilies."

This garden became a focal point for Monet's creative energies for most of the last years of his life. Painting these lilies consumed and challenged him. This project captured his heart and mind, so dedicated he became to painting them and their environment.

Monet's lilies were different from the lilies described by Solomon. But the appeal must have been similar. To the man in this relationship, his woman was precious to him. He compared her to flowers – "*the rose of Sharon, the lily of the valleys.*" She stood out "*like a lily among the thorns*" (vs. 1-2).

This language provides a picture of the relationship between God and His people, between Jesus and His bride the church. He looks at us with *loving* eyes. He *cares* about us. He *treasures* His relationship with us. He loved us so much that He died for us.

How can we resist a love so great?

What aspect of creation dazzles and inspires you the most?

Commit to Excellence

TODAY'S READING: MATTHEW 7

The paintings seem serene – the reflection of light on calm waters, images caught at sunset, the sky and trees, boats and cathedrals, and his beloved garden. This is the legacy of Claude Monet. Born in Paris in 1840, he became known as an impressionist with a unique style of capturing *impressions*.

His paintings became popular in his lifetime and have remained so since his death in 1926. Yet in reality, these paintings often were the result of *struggle*. Monet was insecure and prone to frustration and despair.

He told a journalist, “Many people think I paint easily, but it is not an easy thing to be an artist. I often suffer tortures when I paint.” He experienced “great suffering.” But the results were *masterpieces* that have stood the test of time.

Other artists have comparable stories. They're not willing to accept the shallow or superficial but are dedicated to excellence and work hard until they are satisfied with the results.

In the spiritual realm, many are content with mediocrity, willing to go along with the crowd and do the minimum. But others feel God's call to go higher, probe deeper, not accept shortcuts but instead to follow God wherever He leads.

As Jesus taught, we are not to walk on the broad ways, but seek the narrow way. We are not to be satisfied until we have received His blessings and know we've been faithful and done our best.

WEDNESDAY

March

9

You can enter God's Kingdom only through the narrow gate...the gateway to life is very narrow and the road is difficult, and only a few ever find it.

Matthew 7:13-14 NLT

PRAYER:

Father, thank You for all You have given me. Show me how I can serve You with these gifts. In Jesus' name, amen.

How have your struggles produced beneficial results in your spiritual life?

LIVING FREE FROM COMPARISON
AND THE NEED TO PLEASE



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THURSDAY

March

10

Swear to me, you daughters of Jerusalem, if you find my beloved, as to what you will tell him: for I am lovesick.

Song of Solomon 5:8 NASB

PRAYER:

Father, thank You for loving me. Forgive me for allowing other things to separate me from You. Help me rekindle that relationship. In Jesus' name, amen.

Lovesick

TODAY'S READING: SONG OF SOLOMON 5

Solomon described a woman who felt “*lovesick*.” So deep was her affection for her beloved that she had a physical reaction to his absence. She realized the depth of her love when he departed from her presence. The only way she could be complete was to be with him.

Then she searched but did not find him. She called, but he did not answer. In her desperation, she even went to dangerous places. Yet the search was worth the effort.

Not just a picture of romantic love, this passage also describes the kind of love that God wants us to have for Him – so in love that we *crave* His presence. We should long to read His Word and fellowship with Him.

It's easy to keep from experiencing this love relationship. Other things and people can occupy our time and attention. Where does God fit in? Is He an afterthought? Do we long to be with Him?

When He was asked which was the greatest commandment, Jesus quoted Deuteronomy: “*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind*” (Matthew 22:37). This is the kind of love described in the Song of Solomon.

How deeply do you love God? Don't let anything block the flow of that love! Remember, He loves you and longs for fellowship with you. Seek to rekindle that relationship. Let that love consume you.

Write a love letter to God.

Selfless Love

TODAY'S READING: ESTHER 1

Ahasuerus ruled a vast kingdom. Eager to impress others, he gave a lavish banquet lasting 180 days! Then he wanted to show off the beauty of his wife Queen Vashti. But much to his frustration, she refused to honor his request. He became very angry. Although he could command an empire, he could not force his wife to come to a banquet.

How many relationships fall apart because one partner thinks of the other as property. Like Ahasuerus, they have selfish goals. Many families are torn apart by selfishness. Many marriages are broken when one of the parties thinks primarily of themselves.

The Bible tells us the importance of love for marriage and all relationships. This is a *selfless, sacrificial* love in which husbands “*love their own wives as their own bodies*” just as Christ showed His love for the church (Ephesians 5:28).

Paul’s insights help us see that Ahasuerus was being self-centered, not motivated by love. Paul explained that Christian love means being *patient* and *kind*, not jealous, bragging, or arrogant. Love “*does not seek its own, is not provoked.*” Love “*bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things*” (1 Corinthians 13:4-7 NKJV). This love cannot come from our flesh, for it is a fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23).

Today, ask God to let His selfless love flow through you. Allow His love to transform you and share that love with others.

How can you show love to those around you?

FRIDAY

March

11

Ahasuerus who reigned from India to Cush over 127 provinces... held a banquet for all his officials and attendants, the army officers of Persia and Media, the nobles and the officials of his provinces.

Esther 1:1-3 NASB

PRAYER:

Father, thank You for loving me. Forgive me for any selfishness. Help me to impact the world with Your love. In Jesus' name, amen.

SATURDAY

March

12

Mordecai had brought up Hadassah, that is, Esther, his uncle's daughter, for she had neither father nor mother... When the king's command and decree were heard... Esther also was taken to the king's palace.

Esther 2:7-8 NKJV

PRAYER:

Father, help me be faithful in everything I do. Help me be sensitive to Your leading and prepared to fulfill your plans. In Jesus' name, amen.

Faithful and Prepared

TODAY'S READING: ESTHER 2

On the surface, there is no evidence that Esther and her cousin Mordecai were special. There was no reason to expect that they might play a significant role in the history of their people. They just seemed like average Jewish exiles living in Persia.

But everything changed suddenly when the king rejected his queen and determined to find a new wife. Trained by Mordecai, Esther was a good student, *prepared* and *ready* for whatever opportunity might arise. When she was called upon, God granted her favor, and she became queen of the entire kingdom!

She was ready because she was a godly woman with godly attitudes. She was *humble* and *faithful* in all she did. She demonstrated loyalty and was sensitive to the times. She was ready to exercise faith and act when opportunities appeared.

Esther's success is a testimony to the impact of being *prepared* and *faithful*, always ready for more responsibilities and blessings. The Bible tells us that God honors people with this kind of commitment and who are faithful and trustworthy.

God looks to see what *you* do with *your* time, talents, and treasures. He wants to see if *you* are faithful and trustworthy to develop the gifts He has given you. Seek to be faithful and a good steward of the resources He gives you.

Humble yourself before Him. Demonstrate through what you do and say that Jesus has changed your life.

How are you preparing to fulfill your destiny?

Self-Exaltation

TODAY'S READING: ESTHER 3

Gaspar de Guzmán discovered the path to political power. Born in Rome in 1587, his father had been a counselor to Spain's King Philip IV. After Gaspar's older brother died, he inherited the title of the Count-Duke of Olivares.

After his father's death, he became Philip's chief strategist. On the surface, for twenty years he was the most powerful person in the Spanish court.

A master manipulator, he realized he could shape opinions by the way he was portrayed. To create the image he wanted, he sponsored artist Diego Rodríguez de Silva y Velázquez. In return for this sponsorship, Velázquez created portraits that pictured Olivares as a man of authority, a leader whom others would fear. Many have been like Olivares, driven to foster an image that served their personal agendas.

Many have been like Haman who *manipulated* his way to a powerful position in ancient Persia. He was so focused on himself that he once said, "Whom would the king desire to honor more than me?" (Esther 6:6). But Haman would be humbled one day soon.

People use various means to foster the image they desire, to build their reputation, to advance their careers, and to achieve power. But God reminds us that He knows the truth. Ultimately, He will humble all who exalt themselves, but exalt those who humble themselves (Matthew 23:12)

Trust God. Seek to be pleasing in His sight. Be humble. Serve Him.

How can you foster humility?

SUNDAY

March

13

After these events King Ahasuerus honored Haman...and established his authority over all the officials who were with him. All the king's servants who were at the king's gate bowed down and paid homage to Haman.

Esther 3:1-2 NASB

PRAYER:

Father, You know me better than I know myself. I submit everything to You and humble myself before You. May You receive glory. In Jesus' name, amen.

MONDAY

March

14

Go, gather all the Jews who are found in Susa, and fast for me...I and my attendants also will fast in the same way. And then I will go in to the king...and if I perish, I perish.

Esther 4:16 NASB

PRAYER:

Father, I commit these situations to You: _____. Take away my fears. Grant me favor and success. Thank You for your victory! In Jesus' name, amen.

Alone and Afraid

TODAY'S READING: ESTHER 4

Esther never anticipated this situation. Still a young queen chosen for her beauty, she had no experience in government affairs. But circumstances changed when Haman, the king's advisor, convinced the king to put to death all Jews in his kingdom.

When her cousin Mordecai told Esther what was happening, she felt powerless. She hadn't been summoned into the king's presence for thirty days, and death awaited anyone who entered without a summons. Asking other Jews to fast, she agreed to approach the king.

What thoughts filled her mind? How could she make a difference? The Greek text of this book tells us that Esther was "in deep agony." She humbled herself and turned to God with intense prayer. She admitted, "I am all alone, and I have no one to turn to but you. Help me!"

It was a dangerous situation. She knew she was risking her life. But she asked God to rescue them in this time of trouble. She prayed that God would give her courage and the right words to say to change the king's heart.

God granted her favor, and the Jews were saved. Yet we must not forget how alone Esther felt and the fear and uncertainty in her heart.

What do you do when you are afraid? Alone? Filled with doubt? Follow Esther's example. Turn to God. Humble yourself before Him. Seek His help and wisdom. Always know that He is with you.

Where do you most need favor currently?

Which Kingdom?

TODAY'S READING: MARK 12

Julius Caesar transformed Rome. A brilliant military commander, he led armies to conquests, extending the territory of Roman rule. But even when fighting in Gaul (modern-day France), he kept his eyes on political realities in Rome. Finally in January of 49 BC, violating tradition and precedent, he led his forces into Italian territory. As a result, he inaugurated a civil war.

After a campaign that included battles from Spain to Egypt, he became one of the rulers of the first triumvirate of Rome, ending the Roman republic. As he consolidated power, he began a series of reforms and planned additional campaigns to extend the empire.

However, on this day in 44 BC, he was assassinated in Rome's Senate House. Along his path to dominance, he had alienated too many people. In the end, even some of his closest friends joined in the conspiracy.

Historians, politicians, and military leaders have long debated the impact of Caesar's life. Were his efforts justified? Was his assassination justified?

Jesus had a unique perspective on people like Caesar. They may clamor for power on earth, but the Kingdom of God is even more important. Many will spend their lives pursuing the riches, powers, and pleasures of this world. But others will seek God's Kingdom and eternal rewards.

Dedicate yourself to seeking the Kingdom that will last. In eternity, nothing else will matter.

TUESDAY

March

15

Jesus said to them, "Pay to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." And they were utterly amazed at Him.

Mark 12:17 NASB

PRAYER:

Father, I seek first Your Kingdom. I dedicate my time, talents, and treasures to You. Use me to reach others for Christ. In Jesus' name, amen.

Which kingdom are you building with your efforts?

WEDNESDAY

March

16

The king asked him, "What shall be done for the man whom the king delights to honor?" Now Haman thought in his heart, "Whom would the king delight to honor more than me?"

Esther 6:6 NKJV

PRAYER:

Father, search my heart and deliver me from any pride. I humble myself before You. I declare that Jesus is Lord of my life. In His name, amen.

Humble Before God

TODAY'S READING: ESTHER 6

Mordecai alerted King Ahasuerus about a plot against him by two eunuchs (Esther 2:21-23). Later the king realized Mordecai had not been properly rewarded for his actions. When asked what reward might be appropriate for such an action, Haman, the king's advisor, thought only about himself.

Haman lived a self-centered life. He focused on furthering his own career. He hoarded praise and sought to receive credit for any successes. He resorted to anything to get his way. His pride and arrogance blinded him and led to his downfall.

Pride has ruined many lives. It can poison attitudes and distort our worldview. Pride even can block the blessings of God. The Bible says that God hates pride (Proverbs 8:13). Instead, He is moved by those who are *"of a contrite spirit"* and who *tremble* at His Word (Isaiah 66:2).

Many Christians are guilty of pride. They fail to humble themselves before God and place their own will above His. Their focus is on themselves and not on God. They never have surrendered their lives to Him.

Realize that God wants to bless you. He wants you to experience more of His miracle-working power. He wants to answer your prayers and give you a deeper walk. But your path to greater blessing comes when you humble yourself, surrender your life to the lordship of Jesus, and dedicate yourself to God and His kingdom. Make this your commitment right now.

What have been some negative effects of pride in your life?

Credibility

TODAY'S READING: ESTHER 7

The king asked Queen Vashti to show off her beauty at a banquet, but she wouldn't cooperate. Incensed, he removed her as queen. Through miraculous circumstances, Esther became the new queen. She knew what had happened to Vashti and seemed aware of her limits.

When Haman, the king's advisor, sought to eliminate the Jews, her cousin Mordecai urged Esther to use her position to save them. But Esther was reluctant. She had not been summoned to the king and knew the consequences of approaching him without a summons.

After much prayer, she approached the king, acting in faith. Her efforts were rewarded, and the Jews were able to defend themselves. Haman was eliminated. And Mordecai was elevated to a position of prominence. Instead of defeat, they celebrated victory!

This would have been impossible if Esther had not gained credibility with the king. She had proven to be trustworthy, a person of integrity. And he trusted her more than his primary advisor.

Esther's testimony demonstrates why our character and testimony are important. People watch us and evaluate how we live. That's why we need to obey God's Word, be faithful and trustworthy, and act with integrity.

Remember that you help demonstrate your faith and prove your character by the things you do and the words you speak. Make your life a testimony to the Gospel. Be a living witness to everyone of how Christ has changed your life.

What kind of testimony is your life to those around you?

THURSDAY

March

17

*Queen Esther replied,
"If I have found favor in
your sight, O king, and
if it pleases the king,
let my life be given me
as my petition, and my
people as my request."*

Esther 7:3 NASB

PRAYER:

Father, help me to live so others see Jesus in me. Use me to impact others with the Gospel. In Jesus' name, amen.

FRIDAY

March

18

The sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan also came among them... Then the LORD said to Satan, "Behold, all that he has is in your power, only do not reach out and put your hand on him."

Job 1:6, 12 NASB

PRAYER:

Father, I commit these situations to You:

_____. Show me how to respond. I trust my life to You. In Jesus' name, amen.

Tests and Trials

TODAY'S READING: JOB 1

The book of Job deals with a subject no one wants to think about – when we are tested or tried. Thinking about Job, we need to remember that God has declared the end from the beginning (Isaiah 41:26). He knows how everything will work out.

But we need to remember that God may remove His protective hand for a season. As a result, we may go through trials or tests, times of uncertainty, or circumstances we may not desire. As Job learned, He may allow Satan to interfere for a season. But he only can act to the degree God allows. And He provides the limits.

Like Job, we might wonder at times whether God has forsaken us, if we have done something wrong, or if we are being punished unfairly.

When we go through tests, we must remember that God remains on the throne. The Bible tells us to *"consider it all joy...when you encounter various trials."* When our faith is tested, we gain *endurance*. If we *persevere*, we will become *"complete, lacking in nothing"* (James 1:2-4). Job passed his test, and God brought him even greater blessings.

Are you going through tests or trials? Do you feel stretched? Remember, God looks at your heart to see how you respond. Stay *faithful* in every situation. Continue to trust Him! Be confident that God is on the throne. *Persevere!* He will strengthen and reward you.

How do you cultivate your trust in God when you're going through trials?

Absolute Surrender

TODAY'S READING: JOB 1

No one was like Job. Even God declared that he was blameless and upright, fearing God and turning away from evil. Nonetheless, God had removed a hedge that had been in place around Job and his household. As a result, he experienced economic devastation and personal tragedy (vs. 10-19).

Devastated by these heartbreaking events, Job reacted with expected acts of mourning, tearing his robe and shaving his head. But then Job did something unexpected. Instead of cursing God, becoming angry, complaining, or giving into bitterness, he *worshiped*.

Although filled with grief, he did not change his attitude toward God. No matter what happened, he determined that his life would still be dominated by worship and *nothing* would keep him from worshipping God!

This was more than an outward expression. He realized that at every stage of life, he owed *everything* to God. When he was born, he had nothing. He might have experienced temporary blessings throughout his life, but these blessings always belonged to God. All Job could do was bless His name for the time he had enjoyed God's blessings and be *thankful*.

Remember that you owe everything to God – every gift, every resource, every breath you breathe. Remember to be *grateful* for all the ways He has blessed you and the things he has given to you. Fill your life with praise and worship all the time.

Write a prayer of gratitude for all the blessings God's given you.

SATURDAY

March

19

“Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return. The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD.” In all this Job did not sin or charge God with wrong.

Job 1:21-22 ESV

PRAYER:

Father, thank You for all You have given me. May my life bring You glory. I worship You. In Jesus' name, amen.

SUNDAY

March

20

*His wife said to him,
“Do you still hold firm
your integrity? Curse
God and die!”*

Job 2:9 NASB

PRAYER:

Father, I will follow You and obey Your Word. I trust You. I commit my time, talents, and treasures to You. In Jesus' name, amen.

Holding on to Integrity

TODAY'S READING: JOB 2

To Job's wife, his situation seemed hopeless. Painful sores covered his body. He had lost his possessions, and his children had died. Facing devastation, he sat among ashes. But despite all he suffered, Job still clung to his “*integrity*.”

The Hebrew word here is a noun that means completeness. It's a word representing a worldview based on a belief in God and being guided by His principles.

Job didn't understand all he had endured, but he remained committed to his God-centered worldview. This resolution was difficult for his wife to understand. She urged him to give up. While Job was puzzled and frustrated, he refused to compromise his integrity or to stop believing.

We all may go through experiences that frustrate us. We may face problems we don't understand. There may be times life may not seem fair or when God may seem to be silent. In these situations, we can respond like Job's wife, giving up or no longer trusting God. Or we can respond like Job.

The world is filled with people who urge us to compromise and give in to temptation. Every day, we have the opportunity to demonstrate what we *really* think and show whether we *really* believe in God and His Word.

Today, renew your commitment to be a person of integrity. Don't give in to compromise, but stay committed to God and His Word. Do what's right in every situation.

How can you maintain your integrity during challenging times?

Spiritual Arrogance

TODAY'S READING: JOB 4

After hearing of Job's tragedies, three friends came to comfort him. When they saw him, they were shocked and began to weep. Overwhelmed, no one spoke for days.

Eliphaz was the first friend to speak. He initially might have been motivated by sympathy, but these feelings seem strangely absent from his words. His comments seem to have been spoken out of a spirit of *spiritual arrogance*.

Each friend confidently analyzed Job's condition, explaining *why* they thought he had suffered, why God had acted, how Job must have been *wrong*, and what he needed to do to be restored. To Eliphaz, the conclusion seemed obvious: Job must have sinned and was being punished.

Job was *puzzled, frustrated, and even angered* by their accusations. He described them as "*miserable comforters*" (Job 16:2). The Bible tells us that, despite their confidence, their conclusions were wrong. God was so displeased that His "*wrath [was] kindled against*" them (Job 42:7-8).

Job realized he had much to learn and how "*insignificant*" he was (Job 40:3-5). God had said things he "*did not understand*" (Job 42:3). He needed to stay humble before God.

Be on guard against spiritual arrogance. God hates *pride* (Proverbs 8:13). Seek to stay *humble* before Him. Be a person of prayer, constantly meditating on His Word. Be sensitive to His Spirit and seek His will.

MONDAY
March
21

Remember now, who ever perished being innocent? Or where were the upright destroyed? According to what I have seen, those who plow wrongdoing and those who sow trouble harvest it. By the breath of God they perish.

Job 4:7-9 NASB

PRAYER:

Father, I humble myself before You. I seek Your wisdom. Give me discernment. And forgive me for pride. In Jesus' name, amen.

Have you ever spoken arrogantly to someone going through trials?

TUESDAY

March

22

He stretches out the north over empty space; He hangs the earth on nothing. [...] He drew a circular horizon on the face of the waters, at the boundary of light and darkness. [...] By His Spirit He adorned the heavens.

Job 26:7, 10, 13 NKJV

PRAYER:

Father, I am amazed by creation, and praise You for Your awesome power! Deliver me from every fear. Help me trust You. In Jesus' name, amen.

God of All Creation

TODAY'S READING: JOB 26

Edmond Halley's father, a soap-maker, lost almost everything in the great fire of London in 1666. Yet the family still provided a private tutor for their young son.

Born in 1656, Halley made important observations about the movement of planets and stars even while a student. By the time he was a teenager, he had become an expert astronomer. When he was 20, he conducted extensive explorations during an 18-month stay on the island of St. Helena, cataloging 341 stars. He even discovered a star cluster.

Halley developed a fascination with comets. He spent 23 years writing a book that demonstrated that comets move in elliptical orbits around the sun. He accurately predicted that a comet (now known as Halley's Comet) would return in 1758. This validated his theory that comets are part of the solar system.

Halley was a brilliant scientist, but some said that Halley doubted the scientific correctness of the biblical story of the creation. He may have understood the mechanics of creation, but how well did he know the Creator?

Job may have not been scientifically advanced, but he, too, observed the skies. Job was less concerned about the mechanics of stars and planets and more amazed by the *miracle* of creation. To him, the heavens pointed toward God Himself.

Think about the mighty works of God. He created the heavens and the earth. Amazingly, He cares about you! You can trust in Him.

Reflect on the awesomeness of creation as reflected in the heavens above.

A Good Listener

TODAY'S READING: JOB 32

Job's young friend Elihu was frustrated. He felt he had something to say but did not feel that Job or his other friends would listen. Why? Simply because of his age.

Many people over time have shared a similar frustration, feeling others aren't really listening to them or that they aren't taken seriously. People make decisions based on superficial conditions – age or gender, past relationships, other factors.

Sometimes it can be hard just to pay attention to observations from others, particularly those who are younger. Legendary advertising executive David Ogilvy once wrote about the challenges that face the young. Regardless of their skills or knowledge, it could be difficult to gain credibility. He advised those who were young not to be discouraged but to be patient.

God can use anyone, even those who are young. There are many examples. He spoke to the high priest Eli through the young boy Samuel (1 Samuel 3:11-18). And Paul wrote Timothy about the valuable ministry that young people could provide: “Don't let anyone think less of you because you are young” (1 Timothy 4:12).

Realize that God can use anyone to speak to you. Ask Him to give you discernment and help you be a good listener to old and young, men and women. Be willing to share insights He gives you. Trust Him to give you the words to say.

WEDNESDAY

March

23

I am young and you are old, so I held back... I thought, “Those who are older should speak, for wisdom comes with age.” [...] Sometimes the elders are not wise. Sometimes the aged do not understand justice.

Job 32:6-7, 9 NLT

PRAYER:

Father, help me be a good listener. Give me discernment. Help me to be sensitive to show Your compassion and love. In Jesus' name, amen.

How can you gain credibility as a speaker of wise words?

THURSDAY

March

24

*The steps of a man
are established by
the LORD, and He
delights in his way.*

Psalms 37:23 NASB

PRAYER:

Father, I commit these needs to You: _____. Thank You for providing for my needs. Thank You for directing my path. I trust You. In Jesus' name, amen.

All the Way

TODAY'S READING: PSALM 37

Fanny Crosby was born in Putnam County, New York, on this day in 1820. When just six weeks old, she was blinded by improper medical treatment. Yet she dedicated her life to God and became a prolific hymn writer.

Kenneth Osbeck describes how, in 1875, Fanny “desperately needed five dollars” and did not know where to turn. But she committed this matter to prayer and “within a few minutes a stranger appeared at her door with just the right amount.” Realizing how God was leading her life, she authored a poem that has become a well-known hymn.

She asked, “Can I doubt His tender mercy, Who through life has been my Guide?” She knew that, trusting Him by faith, she would receive peace and comfort, and that He would meet every need. Whatever happened, “Jesus doeth all things well.”

She faced a constant stream of problems but realized that God was there on every “winding path I tread.” She did not have to worry because she was being fed “with the living Bread.”

At times she felt weary, but she knew God would provide a “spring of joy.” She experienced perfect rest and joy by trusting in “the fullness of His love.” She knew she would spend eternity with her Father when she could praise Him “through endless ages.”

Be sure you trust God. Have faith. You can be confident He will guide you and lead you all the way.

Have you had a prayer answered so exactly you know it could only be God?

Whirlwinds

TODAY'S READING: JOB 38

Both times God spoke to Job, He spoke out of the “*whirlwind*” (here and Job 40:6). The Hebrew word suggests a strong wind, like a *hurricane*. The whirlwind provides important insights about God. A physical force with overwhelming power, it can appear to be out of control, able to destroy anything in its path.

Whirlwinds also suggest *mystery*. We see violent motion but don't know where these storms are going or what they will impact.

Job certainly felt that a whirlwind hit his life. Everything had been uprooted. His mind spun with questions. But God made clear He was at the *center* of this whirlwind, perfectly in control.

The presence of the whirlwind helped Job realize how little he knew. Before God, we are helpless in awe of His power.

Jesus used a similar analogy when describing how we can hear the wind, “*but you do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit*” (John 3:8).

Whirlwinds also symbolize God's judgment, which is inevitable for those who displease or defy or violate His Word. Like a whirlwind, His power can sweep into their lives with sudden force.

Learn to depend on God. Have faith in Him. Look to Him for discernment and perspective. Remember, He speaks out of the midst of whirlwinds. He is awesome! Humble yourself before Him. Trust Him.

How can you look for God's presence during the whirlwinds of life?

FRIDAY

March

25

Then the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind.

Job 38:1 NASB

PRAYER:

Father, I trust You.
Thank You for giving
me peace amid life's
storms. I worship You.
In Jesus' name, amen.

SATURDAY

March

26

*Behold, Behemoth,
which I made as
well as you.*

Job 40:15 NASB

PRAYER:

Father, thank You for
Your awesome creation.
I trust my life to You.
Help me to be faithful
to Your call. In Jesus'
name, amen.

Trust in God

TODAY'S READING: JOB 40

Reflecting on his problems, Job wondered what had happened and why. He tried to make sense of events. Finally, he found clarity but only *after* a personal encounter with God, who reminded Job of his *limits* and how little he understood. God did this by describing the scope of creation, specifically the behemoth.

What is this creature? Some think it might be a hippopotamus or elephant. But one thing is certain: God knew everything about behemoths – what they eat, the source of their strength, where they hide, even how they are not frightened by turbulent rivers (vs. 15-23).

Through this description, God delivered a powerful message. If He knows so much about behemoths, does He not know about *every* detail of *our* lives? How can we doubt Him? How can we not *trust* Him? How can we *not* believe that He is working everything together for good (Romans 8:28)?

Jesus taught in Matthew 6:25-34 that we should not worry about *anything*. We should realize how the Father feeds the birds of the air, even though “*they do not sow, nor reap, nor gather crops into barns*” (v. 26). We can see how He clothes the lilies of the field. Therefore, we need to trust Him and “*seek first His kingdom*” (v. 33).

Don't give in to worry or doubt. Instead, think about all God has *promised* you. Be faithful to His call. Trust Him completely. He is *your* Creator!

Commit your worries to God and ask Him to care for you.

Make Me a Captive

TODAY'S READING: EPHESIANS 3

George Matheson spent a lifetime battling vision problems. Born on this day in Scotland in 1842, his sight deteriorated until he was almost totally blind. However, he was academically gifted, and his sisters learned Latin, Greek, and Hebrew to help him study. Later he became a pastor, serving in various churches for more than 30 years. Due to his ability to memorize sermons and entire sections of the Bible, parishioners often were unaware he was blind.

Matheson discovered a powerful truth that the key to real freedom was to serve God and surrender *everything* to Him. He expressed these principles in a hymn he wrote in 1890 called “Make Me a Captive.”

Drawing from Paul’s letter to the Ephesians, Matheson described how he had learned to depend on God. He prayed that God would make him a captive. He realized true freedom is only possible for those who have surrendered their lives to Him.

In ourselves, we may think we are strong, but Matheson realized that our hearts are “weak and poor” until we commit our lives wholly to Jesus. He prayed that God would enslave his heart with “Thy matchless love.”

Echoing the words of Jesus (Luke 22:26), he realized that his power was “faint and low” until he learned to serve.

Remember the lessons learned by George Matheson. Commit your life to Jesus. Make Him your Lord. Draw your strength and wisdom from Him.

How can you learn to rely on Jesus’ strengths to overcome your weaknesses?

SUNDAY

March

27

For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for you Gentiles... by revelation He made known to me... the mystery of Christ.

Ephesians 3:1-4 NKJV

PRAYER:

Father, I surrender my life to You. Help me please You and serve You. In Jesus’ name, amen.

MONDAY

March

28

How blessed is everyone who fears the LORD, who walks in His ways.

Psalm 128:1 NASB

PRAYER:

Father, forgive me for taking You for granted. I humble myself before You. I worship You. Help me to serve You. In Jesus' name, amen.

A Life of Blessing

TODAY'S READING: PSALM 128

Some may think that fearing the Lord is an archaic concept or not appropriate for modern times. But this fear – reverence – is *central* to a life of blessing.

In practical terms, what does it mean to fear the Lord? It means that we *revere* Him. We *worship* Him as God Almighty. We realize that He is our Creator, our Judge.

God is *perfect* and *holy*. We should not take Him for granted but be serious about our relationship with Him. Focus on Him. Be dedicated to knowing and obeying His Word. Seek to please Him. Submit everything to Him. Seek first His Kingdom.

This fear should be more than a command. It should be our *desire!* When we commit our lives to Him, He promises to pour out blessings and provide what we need. “*The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom*” (Psalm 111:10).

He also promises to make us *fruitful*, give us *productivity* in everything we do, reward us with joy and happiness, and enable us to be content and satisfied, not restless or troubled. We will see blessings flow out of our lives into those around us and into the work that we do.

Do you want God's blessings? Make sure you fear Him. Don't take Him for granted, but make Him the center of your life. Be serious about His Word. And seek first His Kingdom.

How have you been guilty of taking the Lord for granted lately?

Freedom!

TODAY'S READING: PSALM 129

The psalmist had faced many enemies. This opposition had left deep impressions. He was *marked* with the impact of painful experiences, “*as if a farmer had plowed long furrows*” on his back. The ungodly had *bound* him as they had wrapped him with unbreakable cords (v. 3).

This persecution was real. Yet he had discovered the right way to respond. He learned that, regardless of what others said or did, he could *trust* God. He is good. Looking back, he could rejoice because God had *set him free!* God had cut the cords and lifted the oppression. God had taken the burdens away.

Are there things that bind you? Unhealthy habits? Financial needs? Troubled relationships? Health problems? *Scars* from things that happened in your youth or from conflicts you faced?

The Bible promises that God can set you free (John 8:36). Jesus died, so you do not need to be bound by sin or guilt. God promised to provide for your needs according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:19). You do not need to be bound by poverty. God has sent His Spirit that you might be victorious. God has made His wisdom available to you, so you do not have to be filled with doubt.

Do not allow anything to bind you. Trust God. Declare His promises to be true in your life. Believe Him for freedom, peace, and joy.

TUESDAY

March

29

*From my earliest youth
my enemies have
persecuted me, but they
have never been able to
finish me off. [...] But
the LORD is good; he has
cut me free from the
ropes of the ungodly.*

Psalm 129:2, 4 NLT

PRAYER:

Father, these are problems that bind me: _____ . I commit them to You. Thank You for setting me free! In Jesus' name, amen.

What issues are troubling you from which you need to be set free?

WEDNESDAY

March

30

Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. [...] A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit.

Matthew 7:15-16, 18 NASB

PRAYER:

Father, help me to be aware of false prophets in sheep's clothing. Thank You for your discernment. In Jesus' name, amen.

Wolf in Sheep's Clothing

TODAY'S READING: MATTHEW 7

The Bible warns how easily we can be misled. Desiring to think the best of others, we can fail to recognize deception and find ourselves being deceived.

We see this pattern when we realize how many people were fooled into believing the lies spread by Adolf Hitler, a real *master* of deception. His actions should have been signs of warning about the horrors to come from the holocaust and the preparation that led to World War II. Yet despite his actions, many continued to believe his false promises and justifications.

In 1936, a newspaper wrote, "Hitler has torn up a treaty" and "broken all his promises." Yet, amazingly, the paper concluded, "We must take him at his word." After meeting with Hitler in September 1938, British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain recognized his "hardness and ruthlessness." Yet he concluded that Hitler "could be relied upon when he had given his word." How wrong they were! Hitler discovered how to deceive and manipulate, amazed how many people lacked discernment.

Jesus warned us to "*beware of the false prophets.*" Realize that people may *appear* innocent or have ideas that *seem* acceptable but mask their real motivation.

Be careful what *you* allow into your mind and what *you* believe. Remember, the devil and his demons constantly seek to attack you, spread confusion, and lure you into believing lies. Be on guard, and be careful what you allow to influence *you*.

Write a prayer for discernment in uncertain political and economic times.

Rich Toward God

TODAY'S READING: LUKE 12

James Hyde was just 22 when his father died in 1899. A recent graduate from Harvard, he inherited an investment fund of hundreds of millions of dollars, instantly becoming among the world's richest men. Unusually handsome, he attracted attention wherever he went.

In his youth, his father solved all his problems. He was confident he could fix anything. So after his father's death, Hyde proved incapable of fixing his own issues. Yet he continued to live in luxury.

He owned several houses, a private railroad car, and a 400-acre estate. Loving parties, he created a vast dining room. Informal dinners sometimes were held in his stables, where a staff of 80 attended the horses and carriage collection.

Later he admitted, "I got too much power when I was young." Gradually, his empire crumbled. Today he is just a footnote in history.

Jesus told the story of a similar man who spent his life pursuing short-term pleasures, unconcerned about eternity. As the man faced death, God called him a "fool" and asked him, "As for all that you have prepared, who will own it now?" Jesus warned that this is the fate of everyone who "stores up treasure for himself, and is not rich in relation to God" (v. 21).

As Jesus reminded us, don't store up "treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal" (Matthew 6:19). Invest in God's Kingdom instead.

THURSDAY

March

31

"You have many goods stored up for many years to come; relax, eat, drink and enjoy yourself." But God said to him, "You fool! This very night your soul is demanded of you; and as for all that you have prepared, who will own it now?"

Luke 12:19-20 NASB

PRAYER:

Father, I commit my life and all I have to You. I seek first Your Kingdom. Use me to make an eternal difference. In Jesus' name, amen.

How can you invest your treasures to make an eternal difference?

He's Strong Enough!

When we're at our weakest,
we can be confident that God is strong!

I am not strong.

I've been there – in the swirl and sorrow of the worst moments, in those heavy-laden trials that make you feel like you will not come out on the other side alive, the ones that make you long for Heaven. I've been beside others, too, when they almost need to be held up because of their grief. In the middle of these storms, some say, “God will never give you more than you can bear.” Instead of comfort, the grieving feel alone, like God doesn't know them – or how weak they are.

This oft-quoted and well-meaning platitude has been crafted from 1 Corinthians 10:13: “*God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able.*”

God is wonderfully promising that you will not be **TEMPTED** beyond what you are able because **HE** will provide a way out when you are **TEMPTED** which makes you able to endure the **TEMPTATION**.

Do you see it? The passage is all about temptation and not suffering! Friend, in your hard storms, please know that He is not promising that you are strong enough to endure every circumstance that comes your way. In fact, the apostle Paul says in his second letter to the Corinthians: “*We were burdened excessively, beyond our strength, so that we despaired even of life* (2 Corinthians 1:8 NASB).”

Paul says God gave them **more than they could bear**. So what **IS** the hope that we have? It's not

that we are strong enough to bear the burdens that come our way, but that HE IS! Paul finished his statement about his suffering, saying, *“Indeed, we had the sentence of death within ourselves so that we would not trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead”* (2 Corinthians 1:9).

Everyone who is struggling with an extremely sick child, a parent who has dementia, an alcoholic spouse, devastating grief, or other desperate circumstances knows in the honest moments that they are not strong enough. And those trusting in this commonly spoken platitude try to muster strength that is not there. They push through with, “I can do this because God says I can!” But it’s not true. And God never really said it.

I’ve been there... white knuckling my way through the hardship, feeling hollow and doubtful... hopeless. But on the glorious contrary side, I’ve learned that there IS hope! God DOES know us. He knows we are weak. He knows we cannot bear some hardships. And He doesn’t leave us there! He who

has the power to raise the dead lives in us. He is our strength, and He IS strong.

In my most recent hard struggle, my children, who are becoming amazingly encouraging adults, gave me some *better words* than the worn-out platitudes:

“For this I have Jesus.”

“He is enough.”

“He is strong when you’re not.”

“He is able.”

“You never know what God will do.”

These better words let me rest in Him instead of mustering my own strength that wasn’t there. They let me feel known in my weakness and strengthened. They are based on solid scripture. (See for yourself what else Paul says in 2 Corinthians 1 and many other passages.)

For this I have Jesus echoed in my head and heart after my daughter said it. I made a sign that I keep in my kitchen as a helpful reminder in any circumstance: I am not strong enough to get through. He never said I was. But He IS strong enough, and He is living in me. ❖



Denise Winton is a pastor’s wife and mom of four who loves discipling middle school girls, encouraging moms, and listening to good books while she restores the old family home.

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A Merry Heart...

does good, like medicine. – Proverbs 17:22

Taste Tester

My friend Michelle had covid last year and is still struggling with a lack of taste and smell. She loves to cook, and her family loves to eat what she makes. But having no sense of taste or smell makes seasoning a challenge.

Recently she asked her teenage daughter to taste the food she was preparing. "Does it need more seasoning?" she asked. With a non-committal shrug, her daughter encouraged Michelle to add more seasoning multiple times.

When they started to eat that evening, her husband took a bite and breathlessly said, "Wow! that's got some cayenne pepper in it!" Only Michelle was unaffected by the super spicy food.



The Story of Lot

A father was reading Bible stories to his young son. He read, "The man named Lot was warned to take his wife and flee out of the city, but his wife looked back and was turned to salt." His son asked...

"What happened to the flea?"

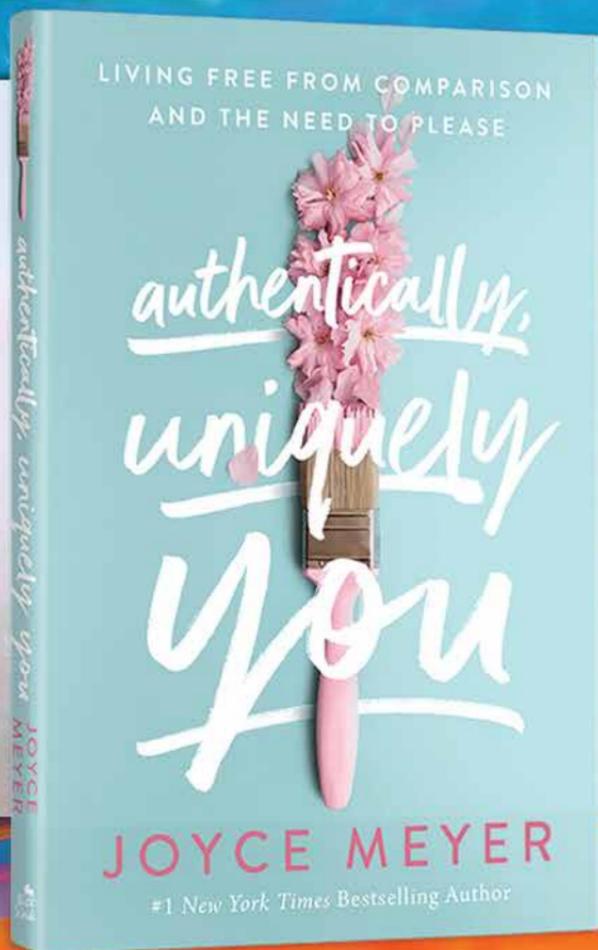


Got some clean, Christian humor you'd like to share?

Email it to: MerryHeart@inspiration.org

You Be You!

If you can easily tell others, “Jesus loves you” but struggle to feel His smile of approval for yourself, ***Authentically, Uniquely You*** by Joyce Meyer is a God-sent gift you need to read! Most of us have an inner critic whose words keep us from seeing and loving the divine design within us.



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Turn to **Page 28** for details on how to receive your **THANK YOU GIFT** this month – while supplies last!