

"Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

MATTHEW 6:9-10 NKJV

Father, you are above all, know all, and see all. Yet you hear me as if I am your only creation.

May I not view you as a distant father but as one who has come to earth and understands the challenges and temptations of my life. Be near me today and whisper reminders that you are close and holding me as your child.

My friends need you today as they make difficult decisions in their workplaces and within their families. Would you show them that you are closer than even their earthly fathers?

Thank you for hearing me and listening to my pleas.

It's in Jesus' name I pray this, amen.

Pocket Prayers

The Greenhouse of the Heart

People harvest only what they plant.

GALATIANS 6:7

Think for a moment of your heart as a greenhouse. And your heart, like a greenhouse, has to be managed.

Consider for a moment your thoughts as seed. Some thoughts become flowers. Others become weeds. Sow seeds of hope and enjoy optimism. Sow seeds of doubt and expect insecurity.

The proof is everywhere you look. Ever wonder why some people have the Teflon capacity to resist negativism and remain patient, optimistic, and forgiving? Could it be that they have diligently sown seeds of goodness and are enjoying the harvest?

Ever wonder why others have such a sour outlook? Such a gloomy attitude? You would, too, if your heart were a greenhouse of weeds and thorns.

Just Like Jesus

Holiness Among Us

"Shout and be glad, Jerusalem. I am coming, and I will live among you," says the LORD.

ZECARIAH 2:10

God became a baby. He entered a world . . . of problems and heartaches.

"The Word became human and lived here on earth among us. He was full of unfailing love and faithfulness" (John 1:14 NLT).

The operative word of the verse is *among*. He lived *among* us. He donned the costliest of robes: a human body. He made a throne out of a manger and a royal court out of some cows. He took a common name—Jesus—and made it holy. He took common people and made them the same. He could have lived over us or away from us. But he didn't. He lived *among* us.

He became a friend of the sinner and brother of the poor.

When Christ Comes

Your Day Is Coming

"Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown."

REVELATION 3:11 NIV

Some of you have never won a prize in your life. Oh, maybe you were quartermaster in your Boy Scout troop or in charge of sodas at the homeroom Christmas party, but that's about it. You've never won much. You've watched the Mark McGwires of this world carry home the trophies and walk away with the ribbons. All you have are "almosts" and "what-ifs."

If that hits home, then you'll cherish this promise: "And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away" (1 Pet. 5:4 NIV).

Your day is coming. What the world has overlooked, your Father has remembered, and sooner than you can imagine, you will be blessed by him.

When Christ Comes

God's Help Is Near

*The LORD is close to everyone who prays to him,
to all who truly pray to him.*

PSALM 145:18

Healing begins when we do something. Healing begins when we reach out. Healing starts when we take a step.

God's help is near and always available, but it is only given to those who seek it. Nothing results from apathy.

God honors radical, risk-taking faith.

When arks are built, lives are saved. When soldiers march, Jerichos tumble. When staffs are raised, seas still open. When a lunch is shared, thousands are fed. And when a garment is touched—whether by the hand of an anemic woman in Galilee or by the prayers of a beggar in Bangladesh—Jesus stops. He stops and responds.

He Still Moves Stones

God of Purpose

*"He came to serve others and to give his
life as a ransom for many people."*

MATTHEW 20:28

Jesus refused to be guided by anything other than his high call. His heart was purposeful. Most lives aim at nothing in particular and achieve it. Jesus aimed at one goal—to save humanity from its sin. He could summarize his life with one sentence: "The Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost" (Luke 19:10 rsv). Jesus was so focused on his task that he knew when to say, "It is finished" (John 19:30). But he was not so focused on his goal that he was unpleasant.

Quite the contrary. How pleasant were his thoughts! Children couldn't resist Jesus. He could find beauty in lilies, joy in worship, and possibilities in problems. He would spend days with multitudes of sick people and still feel sorry for them. He spent over three decades wading through the muck and mire of our sin yet still saw enough beauty in us to die for our mistakes.

Just Like Jesus

God Always Gives Grace

"For God all things are possible."

MARK 10:27

Our questions betray our lack of understanding:
How can God be everywhere at one time?
(Who says God is bound by a body?)

How can God hear all the prayers which come
to him? (Perhaps his ears are different from yours.)

How can God be the Father, the Son, and the
Holy Spirit? (Could it be that heaven has a different
set of physics than earth?)

If people down here won't forgive me, how
much more am I guilty before a holy God? (Oh,
just the opposite. God is always able to give grace
when we humans can't—he invented it.)

The Great House of God

A Home for Your Heart

*LORD, I love the Temple where you live,
where your glory is.*

PSALM 26:8

When it comes to resting your soul, there is no
place like the Great House of God. "I'm asking
Yahweh for one thing," [David] wrote, "only
one thing: to live with him in his house my whole
life long. I'll contemplate his beauty, I'll study at
his feet. That's the only quiet secure place in a
noisy world" (Ps. 27:4–5 MSG).

If you could ask God for one thing, what would
you request? David tells us what he would ask. He
longs to *live* in the house of God. I emphasize the
word *live* because it deserves to be emphasized.
David doesn't want to chat. He doesn't desire a
cup of coffee on the back porch. He doesn't ask for
a meal or to spend an evening in God's house. He
wants to move in with him . . . forever. He's asking
for his own room . . . permanently. He doesn't
want to be stationed in God's house, he longs to
retire there. He doesn't seek a temporary assign-
ment but rather lifelong residence.

The Great House of God

Jesus Understands

*He took our suffering on him
and felt our pain for us.*

ISAIAH 53:4

Jesus knows how you feel. You're under the gun at work? Jesus knows how you feel. You've got more to do than is humanly possible? So did he. People take more from you than they give? Jesus understands. Your teenagers won't listen? Your students won't try? Jesus knows how you feel.

You are precious to him. So precious that he became like you so that you would come to him.

When you struggle, he listens. When you yearn, he responds. When you question, he hears. He has been there.

In the Eye of the Storm

A Letter of Joy

*Rejoice in the Lord always.
Again I will say, rejoice!*

PHILIPPIANS 4:4

Go with me back in history a couple thousand years. Let's go to Rome . . . to a rather drab little room, surrounded by high walls. Inside we see a man seated on the floor. He's an older fellow, shoulders stooped and balding. Chains are on his hands and feet.

It is the apostle Paul. The apostle who was bound only by the will of God is now in chains—stuck in a dingy house—attached to a Roman officer.

He is writing a letter. No doubt it is a complaint letter to God. No doubt it is a list of grievances. He has every reason to be bitter and complain. But he doesn't. Instead, he writes a letter that two thousand years later is still known as the treatise on joy—Philippians.

Why don't you spend some time with it?

The Inspirational Study Bible

Preparing the Heart

*As far as the east is from the west,
so far has He removed our transgressions from us.*

PSALM 103:12 NKJV

Confession does for the soul what preparing the land does for the field. Before the farmer sows the seed he works the acreage, removing the rocks and pulling the stumps. He knows that seed grows better if the land is prepared. Confession is the act of inviting God to walk the acreage of our hearts. "There is a rock of greed over here, Father. I can't budge it. And that tree of guilt near the fence? Its roots are long and deep. And may I show you some dry soil, too crusty for seed?" God's seed grows better if the soil of the heart is cleared.

And so the Father and the Son walk the field together, digging and pulling, preparing the heart for fruit. Confession invites the Father to work the soil of the soul.

In the Grip of Grace

A Morsel of Kindness

*Suppose someone has enough to live
and sees a brother or sister in need,
but does not help. Then God's love
is not living in that person.*

1 JOHN 3:17

Leo Tolstoy, the great Russian writer, tells of the time he was walking down the street and passed a beggar. Tolstoy reached into his pocket to give the beggar some money, but his pocket was empty. Tolstoy turned to the man and said, "I'm sorry, my brother, but I have nothing to give."

The beggar brightened and said, "You have given me more than I asked for—you have called me brother."

To the loved, a word of affection is a morsel, but to the love-starved, a word of affection can be a feast.

He Still Moves Stones

See What God Has Done!

The heavens tell the glory of God.

PSALM 19:1

How vital that we pray, armed with the knowledge that God is in heaven. Pray with any lesser conviction and your prayers are timid, shallow, and hollow. But spend some time walking in the workshop of the heavens, seeing what God has done, and watch how your prayers are energized.

Behold the sun! Every square yard of the sun is constantly emitting 130,000 horsepower, or the equivalent of 450 eight-cylinder automobile engines. And yet our sun, as powerful as it is, is but one minor star in the 100 billion orbs which make up our Milky Way Galaxy. Hold a dime in your fingers and extend it arm's length toward the sky, allowing it to eclipse your vision, and you will block out fifteen million stars from your view. By showing us the heavens, Jesus is showing us his Father's workshop. He taps us on the shoulder and says, "Your Father can handle that for you."

The Great House of God

The Voice of Adventure

"Those who try to keep their lives will lose them. But those who give up their lives will save them."

LUKE 17:33

There is a rawness and a wonder to life. Pursue it. Hunt for it. Sell out to get it. Don't listen to the whines of those who have settled for a second-rate life and want you to do the same so they won't feel guilty. Your goal is not to live long; it's to live.

Jesus says the options are clear. On one side there is the voice of safety. You can build a fire in the hearth, stay inside, and stay warm and dry and safe.

Or you can hear the voice of adventure—God's adventure. Instead of building a fire in your hearth, build a fire in your heart. Follow God's impulses. Adopt the child. Move overseas. Teach the class. Change careers. Run for office. Make a difference. Sure it isn't safe, but what is?

He Still Moves Stones

Your Personal Blessing

God will praise each one of them.

1 CORINTHIANS 4:5

What an incredible sentence. *God will praise each one of them.* Not “the best of them” nor “a few of them” nor “the achievers among them,” but “God will praise each one of them.”

You won't be left out. God will see to that. In fact, God himself will give the praise. When it comes to giving recognition, God does not delegate the job. Michael doesn't hand out the crowns. Gabriel doesn't speak on behalf of the throne. God himself does the honors. God himself will praise his children.

And what's more, the praise is personal! Awards aren't given a nation at a time, a church at a time, or a generation at a time. The crowns are given one at a time. God himself will look you in the eye and bless you with the words, “Well done, good and faithful servant!” (Matt. 25:23 NIV).

When Christ Comes

The Heart of Jesus

“The Son does whatever the Father does.”

JOHN 5:19

The crowning attribute of Christ was this: his heart was spiritual. His thoughts reflected his intimate relationship with the Father. “I am in the Father and the Father is in me,” he stated (John 14:11).

Jesus took his instructions from God. It was his habit to go to worship (Luke 4:16). It was his practice to memorize Scripture (Luke 4:4). Luke says Jesus “often slipped away to be alone so he could pray” (Luke 5:16). His times of prayer guided him. He once returned from prayer and announced it was time to move to another city (Mark 1:38). Another time of prayer resulted in the selection of the disciples (Luke 6:12–13). Jesus was led by an unseen hand.

The heart of Jesus was spiritual.

Just Like Jesus

Sacred Delight

"Those people who know they have great spiritual needs are happy, because the kingdom of heaven belongs to them."

MATTHEW 5:3

God promises [sacred delight]. And he promises it to an unlikely crowd:

- "The poor in spirit." Beggars in God's soup kitchen.
- "Those who mourn." Sinners Anonymous bound together by the truth of their introduction: "Hi, I am me. I'm a sinner."
- "The merciful." Winners of the million-dollar lottery who share the prize with their enemies.
- "The pure in heart." Physicians who love lepers and escape infection.
- "The persecuted." Those who manage to keep an eye on heaven while walking through hell on earth.

It is to this band of pilgrims that God promises a special blessing. A heavenly joy. A sacred delight.

The Applause of Heaven

The Sum of Christianity

"I did this as an example so that you should do as I have done for you."

JOHN 13:15

Mark it down. We are what we see. If we see only ourselves, our tombstones will have the same epitaph Paul used to describe enemies of Christ: "Their god is their own appetite, they glory in their shame, and this world is the limit of their horizon" (Phil. 3:19).

Humans were never meant to dwell in the stale fog of the lowlands with no vision of their Creator.

Seeing Jesus is what Christianity is all about. Christian service, in its purest form, is nothing more than imitating him whom we see. To see his majesty and to imitate him, that is the sum of Christianity.

God Came Near

God Cares About You

"Look at the birds in the air. They don't plant or harvest or store food in barns, but your heavenly Father feeds them."

MATTHEW 6:26

Consider the earth! Our globe's weight has been estimated at six sextillion tons (a six with twenty-one zeroes). Yet it is precisely tilted at twenty-three degrees; any more or any less and our seasons would be lost in a melted polar flood. Though our globe revolves at the rate of one thousand miles per hour or twenty-five thousand miles per day, none of us tumbles into orbit.

As you stand . . . observing God's workshop, let me pose a few questions. If he is able to place the stars in their sockets and suspend the sky like a curtain, do you think it is remotely possible that God is able to guide your life? If your God is mighty enough to ignite the sun, could it be that he is mighty enough to light your path? If he cares enough about the planet Saturn to give it rings or Venus to make it sparkle, is there an outside chance that he cares enough about you to meet your needs?

The Great House of God

Good Habits

So let us go on to grown-up teaching. Let us not go back over the beginning lessons we learned about Christ.

HEBREWS 6:1

I like the story of the little boy who fell out of bed. When his mom asked him what happened, he answered, "I don't know. I guess I stayed too close to where I got in."

Easy to do the same with our faith. It's tempting just to stay where we got in and never move.

Pick a time in the not-too-distant past. A year or two ago. Now ask yourself a few questions. How does your prayer life today compare with then? How about your giving? Have both the amount and the joy increased? What about your church loyalty? Can you tell you've grown? And Bible study? Are you learning to learn?

Don't make the mistake of the little boy. Don't stay too close to where you got in. It's risky resting on the edge.

When God Whispers Your Name