



# Bless the Lord, O My Soul

365 DEVOTIONS *for* PRAYER & WORSHIP

Our Daily Bread

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Our Daily Bread  
Publishing™

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## Introduction

“Heads up” is a funny little term when you think about it. If you are at sports event and someone yells, “Heads up!” that could be a problem. Perhaps an errant ball is coming your way, and the best thing for you to do is to duck and cover, not look up and risk getting smacked in the face.

But if we understand that the term is not to be taken literally but that it means to be alert, it makes sense to be “heads up” about things. To be aware of what is going on around us and to be engaged in our situation.

Can we say as well that it’s important to be “heads up” about matters of faith? In other words, should we be alert and active mentally and spiritually? Of course we should, and what is the best way to do that? Well, by looking up.

If we are truly “heads up” about our relationship with God, we will engage in God-directed activities such as praying to our Father, who is “up” in heaven. We will lift our hearts up to God and worship Him. We will raise our praises to God in honor of His greatness and His great gift of salvation to us through Jesus.

Our complicated world seems intent on putting roadblocks in the way of our dedication to our faith. If we begin to listen to the many voices around us that distract us from godliness and our day-to-day relationship with the Lord, we will find ourselves mired in a worldview that will keep us from looking to Jesus—from looking up, as it were.

That’s one reason this new volume of devotionals from Our Daily Bread Publishing can be so vital. It can help us to lift our eyes above this world—to be “heads up” in our daily walk. Imagine the joy of

continually *praying* (1 Thessalonians 15:17) and of living in a way that keeps us *worshiping* God (Psalm 96:9).

We hope the selections in this book, gleaned from both the classic *Our Daily Bread* writers of days past (Henry Bosch, Herb Vander Lugt, Paul Van Gorder, Richard DeHaan, and others) and from the writers of today (James Banks, Anne Cetas, Bill Crowder, Xochitl Dixon, and others) will lift your hearts—will help you keep “heads up”—as you daily find ways to say, “Bless the Lord, O my soul.”

*Dave Branon*  
*Compiler*

JANUARY 1

## New Year, New Priorities

Read Ecclesiastes 9:4–12

Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might.

*Ecclesiastes 9:10*

I've always wanted to learn how to play the cello. But I've never found the time to enroll in a class. Or, perhaps more accurately, I haven't made the time for it. I had thought that in heaven I could probably master that instrument anyway. In the meantime, I wanted to focus on using my time in the particular ways God has called me to serve Him now.

Life is short, and we often feel the pressure to make the most of our time on Earth before it slips away. But what does that really mean?

As King Solomon contemplated the meaning of life, he offered two recommendations. First, we're to live in the most meaningful way we can, which includes fully enjoying the good things God allows us to experience in life, such as food and drink (Ecclesiastes 9:7), clothing and perfume (v. 8 nlt), marriage (v. 9), and all of God's good gifts, which might include learning how to play the cello!

His second recommendation was diligent work (v. 10). Life is full of opportunities, and there is always more work to be done. We're to take advantage of the opportunities God gives us, seeking His wisdom on how to prioritize work and play in a way that uses our gifting to serve Him.

Life is a wonderful gift from the Lord. We honor Him when we take pleasure both in His daily blessings and in meaningful service.

*Poh Fang Chia*

We can both enjoy God's blessings and be a blessing to others.

JANUARY 2

# From Nothing

Read Genesis 1:1–13

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. *Genesis 1:1*

Nothing. Absolutely nothing. No light. No sky. No land. It's incomprehensible to our finite thinking—the barren nothingness that existed before Genesis 1:1.

Then suddenly, through the work of the Almighty, God supplanted nothingness with “the heavens and the earth.” The divine hand reached through the void and produced a place, a world, a universe. Through the magnificent convergence of the workings of the Godhead—with the Son enacting the will of the Father as the Agent of creation, and the Holy Spirit as the hovering Presence—nothing became something. History began its long march toward today.

The first verse of Genesis provides us with sufficient concepts to contemplate for a lifetime. That introductory statement speaks of enough glory, enough majesty, enough awe to leave us speechless before God. Just as today we would have no life, no breath, no existence without His sustaining action, neither would we have the cosmos without His mighty act at the moment of creation.

In awe we wonder what went on before “the beginning.” With breathless praise we marvel at the words “God created the heavens and the earth.” We read—and we stand in adoration. “Nothing” has never been so fascinating!

*Dave Branon*

Nature is but a name for an effect whose cause is God.

JANUARY 3

## Why Pray?

Read Nehemiah 1:4–11; 2:1–8

Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up. *Luke 18:1*

A new Christian asked me why the Bible places so much emphasis on prayer. He said that if God knows our feelings and needs, why does He want us to express our gratitude and make requests?

In answering this question, let's begin by recognizing the fact that God does place great value on prayer. The Bible repeatedly exhorts us to seek the Lord's face in supplication and intercession. You see, God is our heavenly Father, and He takes delight in our coming to Him just as parents rejoice when their children feel free to talk to them. Then too, we read that Jesus and His disciples prayed often. In the Old Testament, Nehemiah called upon God at stated times.

The Scriptures teach us that God is honored when His people pray. Since He knew all about our petitions before time began, He worked them into the fabric of the universe just as He did when He foresaw our sins and mistakes and overruled them for our good. I've never stopped my car on a railroad track in front of a speeding train just because I figured I wouldn't die until my time. But that would be about as sensible as saying, "I won't pray because what's to be will be."

As we make prayer an important part of our lives, we'll see the Lord work, and we'll never again ask the question, "Why pray?"

*Herb Vander Lugt*

Prayer does not change God's purpose, it releases it.

JANUARY 4

## Eating as Worship

Read Genesis 2:8–17

If you find honey, eat just enough. *Proverbs 25:16*

When you walk into the bookstore and see a table filled with books on dieting, you know it must be January. After several weeks of overeating all kinds of holiday foods, people in many cultures turn their attention to not eating.

Food plays an important role in Scripture. God uses it not only to bless us but also to teach us. Our misuse of food keeps us from knowing God in ways He wants to be known.

In the Old Testament, God gave instructions to Adam as to what to eat and what not to eat (Genesis 2:16–17). Later He gave the Israelites manna to convince them that He was God and to test them to find out if they believed Him (Exodus 16:12; Deuteronomy 8:16). In the New Testament, the apostle Paul stated the proper attitude for everything we do, including eating: “Whether you eat or drink, . . . do it all for the glory of God” (1 Corinthians 10:31).

When we think of food as a friend that comforts us or an enemy that makes us fat, we miss the wonder of receiving with gratitude a splendid gift from God. Obsessive eating or not eating indicates that we are focused on the gift rather than on the Giver, which is a form of idolatry.

When eating becomes a true act of worship, we will no longer worship food.

*Julie Ackerman Link*

When food becomes our god,  
our appetite for the Bread of Life is diminished.

JANUARY 5

## Just Like My Father

Read 1 Peter 5:8–12

It is written: “Be holy, because I am holy.” *1 Peter 1:16*

My father’s dusty, heeled-over, cowboy boots rest on the floor of my study, daily reminders of the kind of man he was.

Among other things, he raised and trained cutting horses—equine athletes that move like quicksilver. I loved to watch him at work, marveling that he could stay astride.

As a boy, growing up, I wanted to be just like him. I’m in my eighties, and his boots are still too large for me to fill.

My father’s in heaven now, but I have another Father to emulate. I want to be just like Him—filled with His goodness, fragrant with His love. I’m not there and never will be in this life; His boots are much too large for me to fill.

But the apostle Peter said this: “The God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ . . . will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast” (1 Peter 5:10). He has the wisdom and power to do that, you know (v. 11).

Our lack of likeness to our heavenly Father will not last forever. God has called us to share the beauty of character that is His. In this life we reflect Him poorly, but in heaven our sin and sorrow will be no more and we’ll reflect Him more fully! This is the “true grace of God” (v. 12).

*David Roper*

Through the cross, believers are made perfect in His sight.

JANUARY 6

## Who Gets the Thanks?

Read 1 Chronicles 29:1–20

Everything comes from you. *1 Chronicles 29:14*

According to *USA Today*, a Costa Mesa, California, resident found on her doorstep a package that contained a car key and a note. The note quoted Bible verses and ended with the words, “This is a gift for you because I love you.” It was signed, “An angel of the Lord.” In her driveway the woman found a newer model Ford. It was just what she needed to replace her unreliable, twenty-year-old car. A neighbor child asked, “Did God just drop the car down from heaven?” The woman’s answer was not reported, but she did hang a poster on her garage that said, “THANK YOU, GOD.” Putting up that sign didn’t mean the woman actually thought the car had fallen out of the sky without touching human hands. But notice that her sign did not say, “THANK YOU, MY ANONYMOUS FRIEND.” She was acknowledging that all things ultimately come from God.

David recognized this truth as he and his people celebrated the enormous offering that had been given for the construction of the temple. They could have merely congratulated one another. They could have slapped one another on the back and exchanged mutual praise for the other’s generosity. But they didn’t. David showed his wisdom and maturity as Israel’s leader by thanking the Lord for all blessings.

He recognized that every time a gift comes from human hands, it’s the Lord who deserves the praise.

*Mart DeHaan*

Don’t let the abundance of God’s gifts cause you to forget the Giver.

JANUARY 7

## A Forever Service

Read Revelation 22:1–7

He who was seated on the throne said, “I am making everything new! Then he said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.” *Revelation 21:5*

Two young brothers sat on the front row in church every Sunday, observing their dad as he led the worship service. One night after sending the boys to bed, the dad overheard one of his boys crying. He asked him what was wrong, but the boy was hesitant to answer. Finally, he confessed, “Daddy, the Bible says we’re going to worship God in heaven forever. That’s an awfully long time!” Because he pictured heaven as one long worship time with his dad up front leading, heaven sounded pretty boring to him!

While I sometimes wish we had more information about what heaven will be like, we know this for sure: *boring* can’t possibly be the right word to describe it. We will see beauty like we’ve never seen before, including “a pure “river of the water of life, as clear as crystal” (Revelation 22:1). We will experience “the glory of God,” which will illuminate heaven (21:23; 22:5). And we will enjoy a life without pain or sorrow (21:4).

Yes, we will definitely worship in heaven. People “from every tribe and language and people and nation” (5:9) will rejoice in praising Jesus, the worthy Lamb who died for us and rose again (5:12).

We will bask in the glory of the Lord’s presence—forever. But not for one second will we be bored!

*Anne Cetas*

The pleasures of earth cannot be compared to the joys of heaven.

JANUARY 8

## Gates of Worship

Read Psalm 100

Sing to the LORD a new song. *Psalm 98:1*

When you enter some of the greatest cities in the world, you can encounter famous gates such as the Brandenburg Gate (Berlin), the Jaffa Gate (Jerusalem), and the gates at Downing Street (London). Whether the gates were built for defensive or ceremonial purposes, they all represent the difference between being outside or inside certain areas of the city. Some are open; some are closed to all but a few.

The gates into the presence of God are always open. The familiar song of Psalm 100 is an invitation for the Israelites to enter into the presence of God through the temple gates. They were told to “shout for joy” and “come before him with joyful songs” (vv. 1–2). Shouting for joy was an appropriate expression when greeting a monarch in the ancient world. All the earth was to sing joyfully about God! The reason for this joyful noise was that God had given them their identity (v. 3). They entered the gates with praise and thanksgiving because of God’s goodness and His steadfast and enduring love which continues through all generations (vv. 4–5). Even when they forgot their identity and wandered away from Him, God remained faithful and still invited them to enter His presence.

The gates into God’s presence are still open, inviting us to come and worship.

*Marvin Williams*

The gates into the presence of God are always open.

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