



GOOD
NEWS
FOR YOU

Good News for You!

Peace Devotions

Devotions that focus on what Jesus has done for you so you can be with Him forever in heaven.

Taken from PeaceDevotions.com

(Compiled and edited for print by the Evangelical Lutheran Synod's Board for Home Outreach.)



PeaceDevotions.com

2020

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First Printing: 2020

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How to Use This Book...

The Good News (Gospel) found in this book is the most important message that anyone will ever hear. This message is Good News meant for YOU! It does not matter what mistakes you've made in the past. It does not matter what guilt you bear. It does not matter what problems you face in your life. In His Good News God explains that He desires to draw near and help those who cannot help themselves. This includes YOU! God wants you to know that He is a God of forgiveness and mercy. He wants you to know of the great love He has for you. There is no need to be afraid of Him. Instead, come to Him and trust in Him!

This book points its reader to the saving work that Jesus Christ carried out so that you might have peace with God. Jesus lived *for you*. He died *for you*. He rose from the dead *for you*. By His selfless love, you now have God's promise of forgiveness, salvation, and eternal life! This book invites you to see that God desires to have a close relationship with you—and seeks to help you build that relationship.

You can use this book for daily devotions, reading one or two devotions a day. Maybe thumbing through the pages, you will find a devotion that applies specifically to you or to your situation. If you are looking for comfort in a specific circumstance, or want to help a friend or loved one in a difficult situation, you may want to use these devotions or one of the many prayers found in the back. If you know someone who could use the precious Good News shared in these devotions, please pass them along!

For more short, Gospel-centered devotions that you can view and share, please visit **PeaceDevotions.com**. The devotions found in this book are taken from the devotional videos produced by pastors and members of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS) that have been released on this website.

To hear more about this “Good News for You!” we especially invite you to find a church of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS) or of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS). The pastors and members of these churches will welcome you and be happy to continue sharing God’s Good News, the Gospel message, with you!

To find the nearest ELS church, go here: els.org/find-a-lutheran-church/



**Part 1: What It's All About:
Good News!**

~1. You Are a Welcome Guest!

When guests are coming to visit, people make sure the guest room is ready. Clean sheets are put on the bed. Clean towels are laid out for them. Hosts want their guests to know that they are welcome and wanted.

Jesus told His disciples that He was going away to prepare a place for them. In John chapter 14, He said:

“In my Father’s house are many mansions. If it were not so, I would have told you. I am going to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and take you to be with me, so that you may also be where I am.” (John 14:2-3)

Jesus has ascended into heaven to carry out a special task for you. He has gone to get your room ready! He wants you to be there with Him forever. Just think about what Jesus did so that could happen. He was the eternal Son of God, yet He came down from heaven to become a man. He lived a perfect life and died an innocent death in your place. He willingly suffered for your sins. And Jesus proved that He paid for them all by rising from the dead on the third day.



Jesus was willing to pay the necessary price so that you could live in God the Father’s house. He has not gone to heaven and forgotten about you. He is busy getting a place ready.

He is getting your room ready in heaven. So trust Him, trust His Word which declares this truth, and one day you will see heaven with your own eyes. You are a welcome guest in heaven!

Thank you, Lord Jesus, for preparing heaven for me! Amen.

~2. Christ Has Done Everything

One day, before leaving for work, a father told his son that he wanted him to mow the lawn. After the dad was gone, the son thought to himself, "I'm not going to mow the lawn. I'm going to play baseball and have fun!" So he headed out into the backyard with his bat and ball. After a few swings and misses, the boy smacked a hard line drive that broke the kitchen window! The boy fell on his knees in tears, wondering what he was going to do. His dad had told him to mow the lawn, and now the window was broken!

*Christ has paid
for what we
have broken.*

The next-door neighbor saw all of this and felt pity for the boy. He came and asked what was wrong, and the boy told him the entire story. The neighbor told the boy that he felt bad and he was willing to pay for the window and even fix it! However, even after the window was fixed, do you think that boy's father would be happy with him?

No. The boy had not done what his dad had required of him: mowing the lawn. Thankfully, the neighbor helped with that. He quickly took care of it with his riding lawnmower just before the dad got home from work.

This story serves as an illustration of what Christ has done for us. Christ has paid for what we have broken. He did that on the cross for us. He paid the punishment and price for our sins. In addition to this, He has also fulfilled what God required of every one of us: to follow His commandments perfectly, to love God, and to love our neighbors as ourselves.

The Apostle Paul wrote:

"For just as through the disobedience of one man the many became sinners, so also through the obedience of one man the many will become righteous." (Romans 5:19)

Because of Jesus' obedience throughout His life and because He gave up His life on the cross, we are now made right with God!

Thank You, Lord Jesus, for doing everything necessary for me and for my salvation. Amen.

~3. God Cares About You

A pastor once visited an elderly woman who was grappling with the thought, "God is up in heaven and busy with everything else. He surely does not have time for little old me!"

Many people think this way. They wonder, "Does God really care about me? Does He care about the intimate details of my life? Is He concerned about me?"

Jesus assures us that God is concerned about you:

"Are not two sparrows sold for a small coin? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground without the knowledge and consent of your Father. And even the hairs of your head are all numbered. So do not be afraid." (Matthew 10:29-31)



It is true God is in heaven and He is ruling all of creation. We might think that in the big picture we are small and insignificant. We might also wonder why He should be concerned about us at all. After all, we've sinned against Him! But in these verses, Jesus tells us that even all the hairs on our heads are numbered by God!

The last time you ran your hands through your hair, did you think about any of the hairs that would fall out? God did. The last time the breeze rustled your hair, did you worry about any of those hairs that may have blown away? God did.

God cares so much about you that He knows every hair on your head! But His care and concern for you is far greater than that. He sent Jesus to live and die for you.

You are worth more than many sparrows. You are worth so much that God the Son was willing to suffer and die to pay for all your sins. As you go ahead with your day and week, be assured that God cares. He loves you. We know this because of our Savior, Jesus.

*Thank You, God, for the care and love that You have for me!
Amen.*

~4. What Do You Deserve?

It seems like advertisers are telling people what they deserve all the time. “You deserve a vacation.” “You deserve luxury.” “You deserve the best.” Advertisers are constantly trying to tap into your inner self, to make you think: “That’s right! I have worked hard.” “Yes, I am a special person.” “I shouldn’t worry about spending extra money on nice things for myself.” In doing so, clients might then be more inclined to buy their products.

But what do I truly deserve? When it comes to spiritual things, we sometimes think in the way

those advertisers try to get us to think: “Yes! I have been a good person.” “Yes! I am special, so God should declare me to be His child.” “God should prosper me and bless me in so many ways.” “God should give me heaven because I’ve been faithful.” “I go to church every Sunday.” “I give a full 10% of my income to the Lord and His work, so I deserve it.”

But God tells us in His Word what we really deserve:

“The wages of sin is death.” (Romans 6:23)

We so often focus on the good things we think we do, but how often do we really do them? God expects us to do good

things in thought, word, and deed all the time, not just on occasion. When we use this as our standard, we see we have fallen far short. We have to admit that what we deserve is really judgment and punishment. We deserve these things because we have sinned, been disobedient, and have failed to be perfect.

Thanks be to God, however, that He doesn't give us what we deserve. In Psalm 103, we hear:

"He does not treat us as our sins deserve.

He does not repay us according to our guilty deeds."

(Psalm 103:10)

Instead of giving us the punishment we deserve, God has placed that punishment on Jesus. In Jesus, we have forgiveness. In Jesus, God gives us only the best: eternal life forever in heaven. Thanks be to God for not giving us what we deserve, but by His grace, He give to each of us an eternal inheritance simply through faith in Him.

Thank You, Lord, for Your grace, for giving me far better than I deserve. Amen.

~5. A Perfect Score

What would a perfect score in golf be? Wouldn't it be an eighteen? There are eighteen holes and if you got a hole-in-one on every shot, that would give you a perfect score.

But a hole-in-one is a rare feat! Out of the world's best golfers, Jack Nicklaus, has had a career total of twenty holes-in-one; Arnold Palmer had nineteen; and Tiger Woods trails them both at eighteen. According to the Guinness Book of World Records, the best golf score ever recorded is a fifty-five. That is an incredibly low golf score, but it is still nothing compared to eighteen! A fifty-five is far from perfection.

Quite often, we think of God's standard for His Law—what He requires of us—is simply trying our best, doing our

hardest, being good enough. But is that actually God's standard? Jesus says:

*"So then, be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect."
(Matthew 5:48)*

God's standard is not to just "do your best" or "try your hardest," but to get a perfect score. A hole-in-one every time. Be perfect and holy just as He is perfect and holy. "But isn't this impossible? How can God hold us to such a high standard? Doesn't he realize we're human beings, after all?"

*God views us as
perfect because
of His Son.*

God holds us to this standard because He Himself is perfect and holy in every way. This is why we need Jesus. Jesus did the impossible. In every thought, word, and deed, He never sinned once. He perfectly loved God and perfectly loved His neighbor as Himself. Yet God tells us something wonderful concerning His Son, Jesus:

"God made him, who did not know sin, to become sin for us, so that we might become the righteousness of God in him." (2 Corinthians 5:21)

This describes a great exchange. Jesus, who is perfect and holy in every way, took our sins and was punished for them. In exchange, He gave us His holiness, His righteousness, and His perfection. This exchange occurred as He died upon the cross, and the benefits of that exchange become our own by faith in Him.

Will you ever get a hole-in-one in golf? Maybe not. Definitely not a perfect eighteen. But we can be sure that God views us as perfect and holy in His sight because of His Son, Jesus Christ, and what He has done for us.

Thank You, God, for putting my sins on Jesus and His perfection on me! Amen.

~6. John 3:16

What is the most well-known Bible verse? Without a doubt, it is John 3:16. You might see it printed on a billboard or on a sign that a person is holding at some sporting event. It's one of the first passages that Christian parents teach their children. But why is it the most popular and well-known?

It is because it says everything we need to know.

“For God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.” (John 3:16)

This verse teaches us that God doesn't love just a select few. He loves the entire world. That means He loves you! That means this verse applies to you!

He sent His Son, Jesus, into this world to offer Himself as a sacrifice so your sins could be forgiven. Now, maybe you look at your life and think, “I've been such a terrible person, there's no way God could love me.” Notice the verse says “whoever believes in Him.” This means if you simply trust that Jesus lived and died for you, you will not perish.

Those who believe in Jesus have their sins forgiven. They will have eternal life in heaven. This is a great verse, not just because it is the most well-known and popular, but because of what it teaches us: that God loves us and one day we will be in heaven.

This is a verse that God wants you also to know well!

Thank You, God, for assuring me that You love me and have saved me through Your Son, Jesus. Amen.

~7. What We Really Need

Have you ever gone to a restaurant hungry, ready to eat, but you are just not sure what to order? After all, there are so many things to choose from! Suddenly, you hear what one of your friends is going to order and you think, “That’s exactly what I want, too. I’m going to order that!” You recognize that someone else saw what you really needed.

A paralyzed man had some friends who thought they knew what he needed: to be able to walk. They brought him to Jesus, even going to the extra effort of pulling back the tiles on the roof and lowering him down on a mat directly in front of Jesus. When Jesus saw that man, He looked down at him and said:

*“Your sins have been forgiven.”
(Luke 5:20b)*

It was pretty obvious to Jesus what that man wanted. He and his friends wanted Jesus to say “Arise and walk,” but Jesus looked at him and saw his greatest need. He saw what he really wanted: the forgiveness of sins.



Some of the people there questioned Jesus’ power and authority to forgive sins. “Who can forgive sins except God alone?” they correctly thought. So Jesus asked them, “Which is easier: to say, ‘Your sins have been forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Get up and walk?’” Then Jesus said, “But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins... I tell you, get up, take your stretcher, and go home.”

The man who had been paralyzed then got up and began to walk! Jesus performed that miracle for the paralyzed to prove that He also has the power to forgive sins.

That was the greatest need of the paralyzed man. It is also our greatest need. That is why the Son of God came to this earth: so we might have the forgiveness of sins. He is the Savior and He has come to take your sins away. As Jesus looks at you, He sees your needs with a compassionate heart, but most importantly, He sees your greatest need and says to you, "Your sins are forgiven!"

Thank You, Jesus, for giving me what I need most of all: the forgiveness of my sins! Amen.

~8. Are You a Good Person?

I was once putting in my contact lenses. I washed and dried my hands and put the contact lens into my eye. Suddenly, my eye hurt! The pain was terrible. I had tears coming out of my eyes.

I quickly took it out again and looked at it. It seemed clean at first. Only after I leaned in close to the bright bathroom light could I see what the problem was. There were tiny fibers on the lens. I had dried my hands with new towels, and the lint from those towels then got on my lens. I couldn't see it when I was standing in the darker area. It was only when I went into the light that I could see the problem. Otherwise, it looked just fine.

*Your dark deeds
are covered by
Jesus.*

Many people today feel that from a moral perspective, they are just fine. Many people will say, "I'm a good person." And in the darkness of the world, that is easy to say. But as we stand in the light of Scripture, we see the truth. The Law in God's Word shows us our sins. It reveals our dark deeds. It points out our guilt.

Because of these things, many people try to avoid God. They avoid His Word. They try to deny Him. But like that lens, we can feel something is wrong. Denying the truth won't make

the pain stop. The problem won't go away on its own. Instead, it's important to see the problem and address it. Similarly, we need to see and address the fact that we are sinful people with many problems.

But God's Word also reveals to us our Savior in the Gospel message. Jesus once said:

"I am the Light of the World." (John 8:12b)

Yes, Jesus knows all of our sins, but He didn't come into the world only to condemn sin. Instead, He came into the world to cleanse us from sin.

And that's exactly what He has done for you. By shedding His holy, innocent blood on the cross, He has washed you clean of all your sins. Through faith in Christ Jesus, you are now found perfectly clean before God. Your sins, your dark deeds, your guilt has been completely covered by Jesus! This is what we see as we stand in the light of Christ—who is the Light of the World.

Heavenly Father, help me to always see that in Jesus I have forgiveness and peace with You. Amen.



~9. The Holy Spirit's Name Badge

Have you noticed that when you go into a store, the workers often are wearing a name badge? Have you ever noticed that often the name badge also tells their position? They not only tell you who they are, they tell you what they do. God has done something similar for us today with His Holy Spirit.

Jesus named the person and also the work of the Holy Spirit as He taught His disciples shortly before He died:

“When the Counselor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father—the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father—he will testify about me.” (John 15:26)

God the Holy Spirit has the work of testifying about Jesus. Jesus is the Savior. He has won salvation. He suffered and died to pay for the sins of the whole world—including your sins. The Holy Spirit has the job of pointing people to Jesus.

Without the Holy Spirit, it is impossible for a person to believe in Jesus. He comes to us through His Word, Baptism, and the Lord's Supper, pointing us to the cross and the empty tomb. He directs us to what Jesus has already done to save us. He's not interested in drawing attention to Himself. He wants to point everyone to Jesus. That also includes you!

Jesus lived a perfect life for you as your substitute. He went to the cross with your sins and died for you. He rose from the dead to prove He won the victory over sin and death. And so that you, today, might believe in these things, He sends you His Holy Spirit, who brings to you everything Jesus accomplished, making it your own! This means that because of the work of the Holy Spirit, you have peace with God!

Dear God, thank You for sending Your Holy Spirit to me. Continue always to send Him to me that I might always believe in the salvation Jesus has won. Amen.

~10. A Change of Heart

A man had two sons. He went to the first and said, "Son, go work today in my vineyard." He answered, "I will not," but later he changed his mind and went. He came to the second and said the same thing. The second son answered, "I will go, sir," but he did not go. Which of the two did the will of his father?" (Matthew 21:28–31)



Jesus used this parable, or story, to show the leaders of the people their error. They were critical of Jesus for welcoming sinful people to Himself. They were critical because they thought they were better than those sinners. The leaders thought Jesus should be welcoming them while rejecting those sinful people. After all, the leaders were “good people”—they were “better than those others.” Jesus responded to this kind of mindset by saying:

“Amen I tell you: The tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you.” (Matthew 21:31)

How could this be? How could terrible sinners be welcomed by this one who claimed to be the Son of God? It is because of what happened in the hearts and minds of the tax collectors and prostitutes. They had a change of heart and mind. They were turning from their sins, recognizing their wrongs and heading in a different direction. They were headed toward Jesus.

This is what God wants you to do when you see your sins. When you see that you have replied, “I will not,” to the Father, He wants you to change your mind.

Jesus welcomed sinners. He continues to welcome sinners who have a change of heart and mind. He welcomes people just like you. Do not stay away from Him! Instead, come to Him and receive His love and forgiveness.

Thank You, Lord Jesus, for coming into this world to save sinners like me! Amen.

~11. Have You Wasted Your Life?

A man had two sons. The younger one came to him one day and said, “Father, give me my share of your estate.” So the father divided up his estate and gave the younger son his share. The son, a few days later, packed up all he had been given and set off to a distant land. There he wasted all that his father had given him.

When a famine came, this young man found himself without money or food. He was feeding pigs and actually wanted to eat the food that the pigs were eating. In his hardship, he realized what he had done. He realized he had wasted what his father had given him and he would be better off going back and asking to become a slave, working for his father. So he headed back toward his home.

*God wants
you to return
to Him.*

When the father saw his son coming back home, he ran out and embraced him. The prodigal son was received and welcomed back into his father’s home!

This story is a picture of us and God. As you look at your life, you might recognize things that you have wasted—the opportunities, the possessions, the love of those around you. You can see how you have not lived the way your heavenly Father would have you live. Recognizing this might hurt. It might make you feel guilty. It might make you feel sad. Maybe God has also used hardships you have experienced to wake you up just like the son in the story.

God wants you to return to Him. He is waiting for you. He is watching. He wants to run and embrace you. So leave your life of sin behind and come back to your heavenly Father.

Change your mind about how you were living and seek His love. He has love for you. He has proven that love by sending His Son, Jesus, to live and die in your place so you could be forgiven. Everything you have wasted and every sin you have ever committed has been taken away in Jesus. Because of Jesus, God the Father has the same desire as the father in the story. He wants to embrace you and share His love with you.

Heavenly Father, I thank You that even after I have sinned, You forgive me and love me. Amen.

~12. "Am I a Christian?"

Have you ever wondered whether or not you are a Christian?

Perhaps there have been times in your life when you felt close to God, when you might have felt as if He was literally at work in your heart. Maybe it was as you heard a meaningful hymn or song that was sung. Maybe it was while you heard a specific message that gave you comfort or revealed a truth you hadn't considered before.

On the other hand, there may have been other times when you haven't felt close to God. Perhaps it was after you had made some terrible mistake. Maybe you fell into a terrible sin and thought God wouldn't want to have anything to do with you! Maybe you've wondered, "Am I a Christian? How could I be after what I've done?"

One thing about Christianity that makes it different from every other religion is that it is all about what God does for us. It is about God's grace for us in Christ. He's the one who does all the work.

The same is true even in becoming a Christian, in conversion. The Apostle Paul explains:

*“You were dead in your trespasses and sins.”
(Ephesians 2:1)*

And in another place Paul writes:

“And no one can say, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ except by the Holy Spirit.” (1 Corinthians 12:3)

God clearly says that no one can choose to be a Christian. No one can choose to follow Christ. In fact, all of us were born “dead in our trespasses and sins.” It is only by the power of the Holy Spirit that anyone can say and believe that Jesus is Lord.

This is incredibly comforting to us, especially in times of doubt when we might not feel that God is very close to us. God didn’t say, “I’ll do 99.9% of the work for you on the cross through Jesus. Now you have to do your part, your 0.1%, in choosing Me—in coming to Me.” No. He has done it all!

God does all of the work. This means He even does all the work in our hearts to convert us to be Christians: 100% of what makes you a Christian, so that you have faith in Jesus as your Lord, is done by God. This is a good thing. It takes any doubt out of the equation, because it does not depend on us. It depends on God and on His work and ability. What a solid comfort this is to us so we can be reassured:

“Yes, I am a Christian because God was at work through His Word and in Baptism. He is the one who brought me to faith. Yes, I know I am a child of God and an heir of eternal life.”

Thank You, God, for doing everything for my salvation. Help me to always put my full trust in You. Amen.

~13. Can You Believe Jesus?

If someone told you that he could leap over a building or a skyscraper, in a single bound, that he could run a marathon in under two and a half hours, or that he could do 200 push-ups in a row, you would probably have good reason to be skeptical of that person's claims. These aren't things people can normally do! But if that person then took you to a building and leaped over it in a single bound, you'd probably say, "Wow! Okay. You don't have to do the marathon or the push-ups. I believe you because you are able to do that one thing."

The resurrection of our Lord Jesus at Easter is the one thing that proves to us Jesus is the Son of God. And if He is the Son of God, you can also believe what He says. Jesus once said:

"Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up again." (John 2:19)



The temple He was talking about was not the temple made with stones in Jerusalem. The temple was His own body. And on that first Easter Sunday morning when Jesus was not found dead and buried in the tomb, but alive—risen from the dead—He demonstrated that His Word is true. He fulfilled what He said. For that reason, you can believe all of the other incredible claims Jesus made.

This means you can also trust God's Word when Jesus says your biggest problem is sin. It's not your finances or your personal relationships; rather, it is that you have broken God's Law. But you can also believe and rejoice in Jesus' other promises to you, such as when He says, "I have forgiven all of your sins. I paid for them all on the cross!" You can believe

His words when He says, “One day I am going to send my angels to lift you up and bring you to be with Me in heaven.”

Thank You, Lord Jesus, for rising from the dead, for proving that I can put my trust in You, my Savior. Amen.

~14. Are You Going to Heaven?

“If you were to die today, would you go to heaven?” How would you respond to this question? Even the most seasoned Christian, the one who goes to church every week, might find themselves answering, “Maybe? I hope so?”

Is that really the most confidence we can have as Christians concerning eternal life? “Maybe? I hope so?”

I would like to share something with you today: I know I’m going to heaven. Some might be surprised at how forward and confidently I say that. Someone might say, “That sounds completely arrogant. What makes you so good or so special that you know you’re going to heaven?”

I know I’m going to heaven because my salvation doesn’t depend on how good I’ve been or how good I try to be; instead, it depends entirely on my Savior, Jesus Christ. Paul and Silas told the jailer at Philippi:

*“Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved.”
(Acts 16:31)*

That is a promise we can count on. God’s Word assures us that by trusting in Jesus Christ we should have confidence in knowing we will be in heaven when we die. We hear God’s Word explain:

“I have written these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life.” (1 John 5:13)

Did you catch what it says there? It doesn’t say that he writes these things so you “might hope” or you “might think”

or “maybe” you will have eternal life, but “that you may *know* that you have eternal life.”

*Christ has
won heaven
for you.*

There is no “maybe.” It’s not an unlikely wish you are making. Instead, you can have confidence in your own salvation. Know that Christ has won heaven for you. Know that you are going to heaven because of Jesus.

Thank You, Lord Jesus, for the confidence You give me in knowing that heaven belongs to me! Amen.

~15. What Is Hope?

“I hope I get a raise.” “I hope I get married.” “I hope my team wins the Super Bowl.” “I hope I go to heaven.”

When we use the word “hope,” there is often a lot of uncertainty attached to it. Sometimes we use the word “hope” as if it’s a wish or a dream, sometimes even an impossibility. “I hope.” However, when the Bible uses the word “hope,” it uses it in a very different way. “Hope” in the Bible is sure and certain. It is sure and certain because it is based on an event that has already happened.

The Apostle Peter explains:

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he gave us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, into an inheritance that is undying, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you.” (1 Peter 1:3-4)

“Hope” in this sense is not uncertain because Christ is risen. Because of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection, we now have a sure and certain hope in Him.

So of what does Jesus’ resurrection make us certain? Peter points to our life in heaven. We should not look at life in heaven as some sort of “wish.” Our eternal life in heaven is a

certainty. It is not a certainty because of how we have lived or anything we have done, but because God sent Jesus to live, die, and rise again for our salvation. Jesus has earned it all. He shares it with those who believe. This means the “hope” of heaven is yours.

Thank You, Jesus, for the sure and certain hope of heaven that You have given to me! Amen.

~16. Was Jesus’ Death Essential?

I have to admit that sometimes I’ve wondered if Jesus’ death on the cross was essential. Couldn’t God, the Almighty God, the all-wise God, have come up with another way to save sinful man?

On the night He was arrested as He prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus asked the Father if it was at all possible the impending suffering could be taken from Him. Jesus was



asking if there was another way so He wouldn’t have to die. God’s answer was “No, My Son. You must die.” Paul explains why:

“Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us. As it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree.’” (Galatians 3:13)

There is a curse to the Law and it is this: If you break it, you die. We have broken God’s Law. We have not lived in the way God has commanded. Because of this, we deserve to die. The only way Jesus could save us was if He took the punishment we deserved upon Himself.

Because of His love for you, Jesus died. He willingly gave His life on the cross so you can live. With faith in Him, you live here in this world, able to persevere through trial and

hardship, and through faith you possess God's promise that you will live forever in heaven.

There was no other way. Jesus dying on the cross was the only way for you to be able to have eternal life.

Thank You, Jesus, for dying so I can live. Amen.

~17. How Can Someone Be Ready to Die?

“Pastor, I don’t know if I’m ready to die.” More than a few people, usually elderly, have said this to their pastor as they are on their deathbed. Maybe it is a hospice bed or perhaps in a hospital.

What gives people such uncertainty that they are not sure they are ready to die? For many it is the thing behind dying. It is the sin and the guilt, the mistakes they know from their own life, that terrorize the conscience and heart of the person who knows death is near.

Even when it is a loved one nearing death, there is an internal struggle we often face. We know that the same sin that is bringing death to that person’s body has us in its crosshairs too!

How can one know if they are ready to die? By having the forgiveness of sins! The taking away of the power behind death—that’s what makes a person ready.

Shortly after Jesus was born, Mary and Joseph brought Him to the Temple. There, the aged Simeon took Jesus up in his arms. He saw in this child the One who would take his sins away. This gave Simeon comfort and the ability to know he was ready to die. He said:

“Lord, you now dismiss your servant in peace, because my eyes have seen your salvation.” (Luke 2:29–30)

Simeon proclaimed that death could come at any moment. It didn’t matter to him. He was now able to face death in peace. He had this peace because in that little Child was the Savior,

the One who had come to win God's forgiveness and salvation for us.

You, too, can depart in peace. You, too, are ready for that unknown day and time because you know your sins are forgiven through faith in Jesus.

Thank You, Lord Jesus, for letting me see Your salvation in Jesus. Help me always have this peace. Amen.

LORD,
now lettest thou
THY SERVANT
depart in peace, according to
THY WORD

Part 2: Comfort for You!
Psalm 23

~18. I Lack Nothing—Psalm 23:1

A few weeks after Easter, many churches celebrate something known as “Good Shepherd Sunday.” When we think of the Good Shepherd, we often think of the most famous psalm in the Bible, Psalm 23, which begins by saying, “The Lord is my shepherd.” Over the course of the next six devotions, we will focus on the words of this comforting psalm, which describes how God serves us as our Good Shepherd.

That very famous Psalm begins:



*“The Lord is my shepherd.
I lack nothing.” (Psalm 23:1)*

Those are powerful words. They tell us that with God as our Shepherd, we don’t need anything else. He provides everything we need. This is what a shepherd does for his sheep. The shepherd provides for the sheep. He feeds them. He also protects them from harm and danger. He cares for them, even risking his own comfort and safety.

Like a shepherd, God provides for us. Yet aren’t there times when we look at our own lives and think of things we might lack? In the Psalm, it says, “I lack nothing,” but we might say, “I think there are a lot of things I lack.”

“I wish I were more popular.” “I wish I had more friends.” “I wish I had more money.” “I wish my relationships were better.” Or “I wish I had better health.” There may be many other things we think we lack in our lives, but the truth is, with God we lack nothing. Though not always providing what we “wish for” or “want,” God does provide what we *need*. This includes our daily physical needs. He gives us the necessities of life, such as food and clothing, but more importantly, He provides for our spiritual needs.

In fact, He took on the greatest evils for us: sin, death, and the devil. He put them so far away from us that we should have no fear of them. He abolished them through Jesus Christ, who is our Good Shepherd, the One who laid down His life for the sheep. With God at our side and with what He has done for us, there is nothing more we need.

Thank You, Lord, for being my Good Shepherd and for providing all my needs. Amen.

~19. He Restores Me—Psalm 23:2–3

Have you ever thought to yourself, “I need a vacation from my vacation”? Many people live by the motto “Work hard. Play hard.” Such people often plan trips filled with stress as they feel the need to “Go, go, go! See everything! Do everything!”

This kind of mentality goes against what a vacation is supposed to be. It should be relaxing, refreshing, rejuvenating. This is a picture of what we see in Psalm 23:2, which says:

*“He causes me to lie down in green pastures.
He leads me beside quiet waters.” (Psalm 23:2)*

That is a perfect picture of vacation: a relaxing scene of reclining in green grass near completely still water. For a sheep, this would be the ideal vacation. For a sheep, it would be a feast. Grass as far as the eye can see. As much water as it can drink. Everything it needs! Then what does it say at the beginning of the very next verse?

“He restores my soul.” (Psalm 23:3)

A vacation. Rejuvenation. God intends for His people to have these little breaks, to have vacation time.

In the Old Testament, He instructed His people to take one day a week off and do no work. Instead, they were to spend time in His Word, be refreshed by it. He instructs us to do a similar thing even today: To make sure we take a day off—to

have time with God’s Word—so we might be refreshed by it. Rejuvenated by the Good News that it has for us.

How is this possible? When we come to church, God brings us His Word. This Word reminds us of our sins, but more importantly, it points us to our Savior, Jesus, who has forgiven our sins, who has wiped away our guilt, who has accomplished everything necessary for us. There is nothing more we need to do or be stressed about. It’s all done in Christ. He feeds us also with Himself as He shares His Supper—Holy Communion—with us. Through these things, we are refreshed, restored, rejuvenated.

Do you need refreshment from the stresses and challenges of life? Take a vacation every week as you take time to connect with God. Be fed by God, receive His Word, and there find true refreshment.

Thank You, heavenly Father, for refreshing me as You point me to my Savior, Jesus. Amen.

~20. He Guides Me—Psalm 23:3b

What do you think about tour guides? Many people might say tour guides are a waste of time and money. “I can find my own way through the woods.” “I can find my own way climbing up that steep mountain.” “I can find my own way through that historical site. I don’t need to spend the money or take the time for a guide.”

But guides can be very important. Guides can add additional details about the place we’re touring or show us things we might never have discovered on our own. Guides can also help us find our way back home. They ensure we don’t get lost. Guides can be critically important.

Psalm 23:3 tells us that our Good Shepherd is a guide:

“He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name’s sake.” (Psalm 23:3b)

Our Good Shepherd guides us. What does he guide us along? The “paths of righteousness.” When we think of “paths of righteousness,” perhaps the first thing that comes to mind is following the right way, following the rules, following God’s Law.

Certainly God does guide us by His commandments, showing us right from wrong, but it is also important to know that the word “righteous” often is a reference to God’s people in Scriptures. Believers. We are righteous in God’s sight because of what Christ has done for us. This means the “paths of righteousness” could refer to the path of a believer. And what is that path? Jesus says of Himself:

“I am the Way and the Truth and the Life. No one comes to the Father, except through me.” (John 14:6)

Jesus says He is the path. By placing our trust in Him, we know we will get to our destination of eternal life. But as we trust in our Good Shepherd, we also know He guides us now in this life. And how does He guide us? Psalm 119 says:

“Your words are a lamp for my feet and a light for my path.” (Psalm 119:105)

Our Shepherd guides us today through His Word—the Word that reminds us of our sin, but also points us back to our guide, our Savior Jesus, our Good Shepherd who willingly lays down His life for His sheep. And in Him, we have a guide who will bring us safely home to heaven.

Thank You, Lord Jesus, for guiding me in my life and for guiding me to the eternal life You have in store for me. Amen.

*Our Good
Shepherd
willingly lays
down his life for
His sheep.*

~21. I Have Nothing to Fear— Psalm 23:4

An older pastor was once explaining to a new, young pastor, “Be extremely careful when using Psalm 23 in a hospital. Many people associate this psalm with death and dying. Sometimes when you share this psalm the patient might think you are telling them they are dying—even if they aren’t! This is a psalm that is best to use when someone is on their deathbed.”

Why is this? Why do we associate Psalm 23 with death and dying? Perhaps this idea comes from verse 4, which says:

*“Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil, for you are with me.
Your rod and your staff, they comfort me.” (Psalm 23:4)*

In Israel is a place known as the Wadi Qelt. It’s a deep, dark valley running from Jerusalem down to Jericho. It is thought to be the scene for one of Jesus’ most famous parables, that of the Good Samaritan. It may also be the scene for this verse of Psalm 23. Perhaps King David was thinking about the Wadi Qelt when he wrote these words.

In that deep valley, massive shadows are cast over the path. There is an incredible amount of darkness even in the middle of the day, and with all the twists and turns, there are many places bandits and thieves could hide. Those who traveled this route by themselves would have reason to fear. And yet what does David say? “Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil.” And why? Because God is with him. And this remains true still—God is with us!

Think about those times, even as we come close to death, where there is really no reason to be afraid. There is no evil that we need to fear. Why? Because God has taken care of our greatest evil already through Jesus. He has taken care of it through His suffering and death on the cross. He has taken

care of the power of the devil and of our sin and even death itself.

With Jesus as our Shepherd, we have comfort and peace, both in the midst of our life and even as we are on our deathbed. We know that He is with us through it all and will bring us home to be with Him forever in heaven.

Lord Jesus, protect us from all evil. Remind us that with You as our Good Shepherd, we have nothing to fear. Amen.

~22. He Provides Blessings—Psalm 23:5

Psalm 23 is full of imagery of shepherds and sheep. However, in verse five, the picture changes to that of a man who is provided for by God.

*“You set a table for me in the presence of my foes.
You drench my head with oil.
My cup is overflowing.” (Psalm 23:5)*

Imagine a great feast, spread out on a massive table, and the guest of honor is invited to come, sit, and eat. He is honored and served as his enemies are forced to watch. Wishing they could ruin it and get at him, they are unable to act or do anything as he enjoys the feast. They have to sit and watch. As he is honored, they are humiliated.



This verse from Psalm 23 reminds Christians of the feast that God feeds His people in the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper. As we receive these Sacraments, we are served by God and are assured we are His guests of honor. Meanwhile, as God serves us, our enemies cannot touch us!

The banquet table pictured here reminds us of the Lord's Supper. The overflowing cup reminds us that God's mercy and grace overflow to us as He gives us bread and wine in the Lord's Supper, but also with it, the true body and blood of Christ. As we eat and drink the Lord's Supper, we receive the forgiveness of all our sins.

What about having your head drenched—or anointed—with oil? This image reminds us of Baptism. Even Jesus' own Baptism was referred to as “an anointing.” Think about what happened at Jesus' Baptism: the Holy Spirit descended upon Him and the Father spoke of Him:

“This is my Son, whom I love. I am well pleased with him.” (Matthew 3:17)

As we think about the blessings given to us in Baptism, we can be reassured that we belong to God. We are His own beloved children. When we are baptized, we receive the forgiveness of sins while the scoffers and enemies of God, of His Word, and of the church look on—powerless to touch us.

Many look at the Sacraments and say they are nothing more than bread, wine, and water. They scoff at them and consider them to be weak and powerless. But as we trust God's Word and what it says, we know that God provides abundant blessings through those things—the greatest blessing being the forgiveness of our sins.

Lord, I trust in You to provide all I need. Continue to feed me with Your Word and Sacraments. Amen.

~23. For Time and Eternity—Psalm 23:6

The final verse of Psalm 23 is perhaps the most comforting in the whole psalm. In this verse, we see comfort for both life and death. As discussed earlier, it is true that Psalm 23 is sometimes associated with death and dying, but there is much to consider within it for life as well.

King David writes in this final verse:

“Surely goodness and mercy will pursue me all the days of my life, and I will live in the house of the Lord forever.” (Psalm 23:6)

What incredibly comforting words! However, there may be times when we might not feel this way about our lives. There are times when our lives are filled with sorrow, suffering, and pain. We might think to ourselves that we deserve better than what we have. We might think: “Why don’t I have goodness and mercy pursuing me today?”

But what do we truly deserve from God? We really deserve only His wrath and punishment for our sins. Yet God provides His

goodness and mercy. They pursue us all the days of our life. In fact, God even provides for the physical needs of the wicked—even for those who don’t care about Him.

And how much more so for us—those who trust in Him as His dear children! He pours out His blessings of mercy upon us, not giving us what we deserve for our sins, but instead bestowing upon us grace through His Son, Jesus Christ. He reminds us again and again, reassuring us that we have an eternal home awaiting us in heaven.

Yes, this Psalm is comforting not just at the time of death, but also throughout life. What comfort we have knowing that the Lord is our Shepherd!

Thank You, Lord, for being our Good Shepherd, for providing all that we need now and forevermore. Amen.

*We have an
eternal home
awaiting us in
heaven.*

Part 3: When You Face the Challenges of Life

~24. Dealing with Guilt

Do you ever feel terrible for something you've done? Maybe you gossiped and later realized how hurtful your words were. Maybe you lied and later thought, "How could I be that person? How could I have said those things?" Maybe there is something else affecting your conscience.

Did you know there's a good way and a bad way for us to deal with sorrow over our sin? The Apostle Paul wrote:

"In fact, godly sorrow produces repentance, which leads to salvation, leaving no regret. On the other hand, worldly sorrow produces death." (2 Corinthians 7:10)

During Jesus' passion, there were two disciples who wronged Him: Judas, who betrayed Him, and Peter, who denied Him.

Both were incredibly sorry for their sins, and yet we see two completely different outcomes for these men.

In Jesus, guilty consciences find peace and hope.

Judas, overwhelmed by the guilt of what he had done, didn't turn back to Jesus for His forgiveness and love. He was overcome with despair, thinking that God couldn't possibly forgive his sin. He felt it was just too great. Sadly, Judas went out and took his own life.

Peter, on the other hand, also felt terrible for denying his Lord, yet held out hope that Jesus would forgive him and restore him. What great joy must have filled Peter's heart when he saw Jesus risen from the dead! He approached Jesus, who invited, "Come, follow Me," restoring Peter as His disciple.

God wants us to feel sorry for our sins—to be grieved over them. But He doesn't want us to remain there. He wants us to turn to Him, to trust Him, to find forgiveness for all the sins we've committed, and to find His love for us through His Son, Jesus Christ. In Him, guilty consciences find peace and hope.

Lord, forgive me all my sins and assure me always that I am at peace with You. Amen.

~25. Why Does the Devil Tempt Me?

Why is the Devil always after us? Why is he always tormenting and tempting us?

Pure and simple, the Devil does not like you. And it actually goes even deeper: Satan has a hatred for our God. Since creation, Satan has always rebelled and fought the desires of God, which carries over to us. The Apostle Paul explained:

“[God] wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.” (1 Timothy 2:4)

Of course, Satan wants the exact opposite. He does not want you to know the truth. He does not want you to be saved. He wants you to be destroyed so that God does not get what He desires. Satan is out to get us because we are precious to God. He wants to pull us away from God because he wants to hurt God.

Sadly, we often play right into Satan’s plans. We allow ourselves to live in opposition to God’s Word, and we foolishly think it will not affect our relationship with Him. We have sins in our lives we have become comfortable with. Instead of struggling with them, we might even enjoy them. We become blind to how harmful they are to our souls. When we do this, Satan is getting just what he wants because he knows every sin harms our faith. It separates us from God and threatens the salvation He wants for us.

But know also that God’s will is not so easily silenced. He sent His only Son, Jesus, to be our Savior. Jesus faced all the temptations and the attacks of Satan as well, but unlike us, He did not fail. Not even one time. He remained perfect and went to the cross to erase all sins from our record. When we turn to God, sorry for our sins and putting our trust in Jesus,

our sins find full forgiveness, and we have confidence that we have peace with God. When this happens, it is Satan who doesn't get what he wants!

Satan will continue to attack, seeking to destroy you, but God's will continues to work as well. God gave us His Word in the Bible, where He includes the "knowledge of the truth," which the Holy Spirit works in our hearts as He works repentance and a saving faith. This faith is what makes us God's

children whom He loves and protects, whom He forgives, and to whom He promises eternal salvation.

Satan will keep attacking because he does not like you. But fear not; God loves you! He is the Almighty and He wants you to be with Him forever in the kingdom of heaven.

Lord God, keep us and preserve us always from Satan's traps. Keep us always standing in Your truth—those who have Your salvation. Amen.



~26. Can You Resist Temptation?

How good are you at resisting temptation? If you see a cookie on the counter, do you pick it up and eat it? If you see a questionable image on your screen, do you go ahead and click it?

If we are honest, we have to admit there may be some things we can resist, but others that we are terrible at resisting. We may not gossip about others, but we may struggle with lustful thoughts. We may keep our anger in check, but we might lie without thinking. We are terrible at resisting temptation.

Thanks be to God that He sent Jesus to overcome Satan and sin—He has prevailed over them for us. In the book of Hebrews, we read:

“For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are, yet was without sin. So let us approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.” (Hebrews 4:15–16)

God sent Jesus to overcome temptation for us. Jesus was not simply showing us how to get it done. Jesus didn’t come to be an example we must copy in order to save ourselves. He was overcoming temptation for us!

*Victory does not
depend upon
us—Jesus has
won it!*

We give in to temptation. Jesus did not. We follow temptation and sin. Jesus resisted temptation and lived a holy and pure life. He did it for us.

When we put our faith and trust in Jesus, we are credited with His perfect life. God does not look at you and see how you have failed to resist temptations. He does not see your weaknesses and shortcomings. All of your sins have been covered by Jesus! Now we are welcome to approach His throne of grace and receive mercy in any time of need. And as we approach His throne asking for His help in times of temptation, God promises to help us. He gives us the Holy Spirit to fight against Satan and sin. Yet we rest assured that the victory does not depend upon us. Jesus has won it already—for us!

Lord, for Jesus’ sake, forgive me for the times I’ve given in to temptations. Help me as I face temptations every day. Amen.

~27. When God Says No

Have you ever prayed for something that you really wanted: to be healed from sickness, for financial concerns to

be relieved, or for peace in a conflict you faced? Maybe you thought your prayer was answered, but the conflict or the trouble happened again. Perhaps you then wondered, “Did God answer my prayer?”

In 2 Corinthians, we hear about the Apostle Paul, who tells us he had “a thorn in his flesh.” We are not told exactly what this was. It appears to be a physical condition, whether a recurring disease, some chronic pain, a specific temptation he struggled with, or a problem with his eyesight or speech. Whatever this thorn was, we hear that Paul prayed repeatedly for God to take this thorn in the flesh away from him. And do you know what God’s answer was? It was a big, bold, “No.”

In fact, God told Paul:

“My grace is sufficient for you, because my power is made perfect in weakness.” (2 Corinthians 12:9)

“My grace is sufficient for you.” It may be very difficult for us to accept this as a response to prayer—especially when we are struggling. It is a challenge! Yet we are encouraged by Paul. He accepted that answer from God in his own life and even rejoiced in his trouble and affliction because he trusted that God was working through it for his good! This is the trust we, too, should have, even in those times when God might say “No” to our prayers. We, too, can rejoice in spite of our struggles because we, too, have God’s grace. And that should be enough for us!

It is enough for us to know that God has paid for all our sins. He has done everything necessary for us to be right with Him. This means that we know where we are going when we die. In those times when God chooses to answer our prayers with a “No,” we should turn and commit ourselves to His grace—to His undeserved love for us. Because of this, we can continue to trust in Him in spite of anything we face.

*O God, help us to always put our trust in You and in Your grace.
Amen.*

~28. I Am Having a Rough Day

“I am having a rough day!” All people have these. Have you felt this way lately?

The kids are up too late. Dogs are barking when they should not be. You are far behind on the projects you have. Stress is keeping you awake. We certainly face days and times like these. It may even become overwhelming for us! Sometimes we feel as if it is going to be impossible to make it through the day.

God does not leave us without hope on our rough days. In Paul’s letter to the Romans, he says:

“We know that all things work together for the good of those who love God, for those who are called according to his purpose.” (Romans 8:28)

God promised us He will work so that even our rough days end up being for our good! This can be hard to see when we are experiencing a rough patch, but in such times, we need to remember what God was willing to do so eternity would work out for our good. He sent Jesus to live, die, and rise for us so our sins would be forgiven and we could be with Him in heaven forever.

God was able and willing to take a terrible tragedy—“a rough day,” like the day Jesus died on the cross—and work things out for the greatest good: for our salvation. Knowing this, we can be certain that He will see us through the rough days we face until we join Him in heaven.

Help us, O Lord, to remember that You are with us and will see us through even the roughest days. Amen.

~29. Am I Sinning If I Am Sad?

Sometimes Christians get the impression they are supposed to feel and act happy all the time. In fact, we might wonder if we are sinning when we do not feel and act this way.

Are we sinning when we grieve too long over the loss of a loved one? Or when we have feelings of melancholy or depression?

The prophet Jeremiah expresses such feelings and emotions in the book of Lamentations. He does this especially on account of the children of Israel because God has allowed great suffering and even destruction on account of their sin. Even though Jeremiah himself is not being punished by God, he is filled with great grief:

*“You deprived my soul of peace. I have forgotten what well-being is.
I said, ‘My endurance has vanished, along with my hope from the Lord.’” (Lamentations 3:17–18)*

In this verse, Jeremiah is expressing true human emotion—grief over terrible things that have occurred. So, is it wrong for us to feel sad sometimes? Is it wrong for us to experience grief and sadness, melancholy, and even of depression at times?

*God’s mercies
are continually
flowing; new
every morning.*

We know that Jesus Himself expressed sorrow over the death of His friend Lazarus. Jesus Himself actually wept at the death of his friend. Yet we also know where to find comfort during such times. Jeremiah continues on a few verses later:

*“Nevertheless, I keep this in my heart. This is the reason I have hope:
By the mercies of the Lord we are not consumed, for his compassions do not fail.
They are new every morning. Great is your faithfulness.”
(Lamentations 3:21–23)*

Jeremiah recalls God’s Word and its promise of love. There, in that Word, Jeremiah has hope. It reminds him that God’s mercies are continually flowing; they are new every morning. So it is okay to feel sad, to have great sorrow or feelings of melancholy. But we also need to know the place where we can

find comfort. We find it in God's love and compassion for us, as shown in the saving work of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Lord, help us remember where to go to find relief in times of sadness. Point us to Your Word and to Your Gospel promises that Your mercies are new every morning. Amen.

~30. Are You Anxious?

Are there things that keep you up late at night, tossing and turning and having cold sweats? Do you have things that gnaw at your stomach? What are you anxious about? Is it relationships? Health? School? Finances? What are we to do with anxiety?

St. Paul shares God's encouragement with us about our anxieties:

“Do not worry about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God.” (Philippians 4:6)

If you are anxious, God wants you to come to Him in prayer. Lay these things before Him! Let Him take care of them.

Is there any problem God cannot handle? God is Almighty. He can handle anything. Is there anything so small God does not care about it? God tells us He has numbered the hairs on our heads! Clearly, He cares about even the small things in our lives. So, whether you have big problems or small, God is there to take your anxiety away.

Some people realize that God has the power to handle their problems, but they wonder if He is willing. They wonder if He will deal with their problems and answer their prayers.

God has given a wonderful guarantee assuring us He is willing. That guarantee is Jesus. Jesus was willing to handle our greatest problem, the problem of sin, which should condemn us. This is what should cause us the greatest

anxiety! But God came in the flesh to deal with that problem. He took the guilt and punishment of our sins away—we are forgiven before God. Our sins need not cause us anxiety anymore. God has washed them away.



So are you anxious about something? Your gracious God invites you to come to Him with all your anxieties and lay them at His feet. He guarantees us, in Christ, that He is able and willing to help!

Help me, Lord, to lay all my anxieties before You and to trust in the love You have for me. Amen.

~31. The Cure for Spiritual Depression

Recent research has revealed that 1.5% (3.3 million) of the people in the United States are diagnosed with depression each year. Thirteen percent of the population is on some form of antidepressant medication.

Obviously, depression is a real problem people are facing. Depression is not just feeling blue or having a bad day. It can feel as if one is overwhelmed by hopelessness and despair. There are many causes for depression. Some people deal with depression brought on by stress and time pressures at work or while dealing with the busyness of life. Sometimes depression is caused by hormonal and physiological issues.

What are people supposed to do when they are faced with depression? For some, professional help and even medication are necessary and helpful, but there is an often-overlooked tool for dealing with depression. We hear in Psalm 43:

“Why are you so depressed, O my soul?

Why so disturbed within me?

*Hope in God, for I will again praise him for my salvation
from the face of my God.” (Psalm 43:5)*

“Put your hope in God.” Life does not have to be hopeless, because we have a God who watches over us and dearly loves us. He is not just a God ruling from heaven, removed from our daily lives. This verse calls Him our “Savior.” He came into our world to live and die so we can live with Him forever in heaven, and He promises that He will be with us every day until then.

Trust Him. Trust that He will pick you up and carry you through the difficulties you face. Know that you have hope! He has forgiven all your sins long ago at the cross! He has risen to give us solid hope! You have an eternal hope! Trust that He will bring you through the doors of heaven, where depression will never touch you again.

Lord, help me see the sure hope I have in You, my Savior. Hold this hope before all who struggle with depression. Amen.

~32. God Intended It for Good

Have you ever read the story of Joseph? It is a rather long story spanning the last 14 chapters of Genesis, but it is exciting. In fact, it has everything you could want in a story: unpredictable twists and turns, tragedy and struggle, and of course, the happy ending. The basic storyline is this: Joseph is mistreated by many different people in his life despite having done nothing against them. He suffers much, and yet God remains with him. God sees to it that Joseph is eventually placed into a position of authority, where he prepares for a coming famine. Through his work, Joseph preserves the lives of many people.

Near the end of Genesis, we hear that when Joseph’s father died, his brothers began to worry that maybe Joseph would use his power and authority to take revenge against them. But Joseph said this to his brothers:

*“You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good.”
(Genesis 50:20)*

As Joseph looked back on his life, he saw all the suffering he went through, yet he also saw God's good plan and purpose. God was using Joseph's suffering for his good. Certainly there must have been times in Joseph's life when he wondered, "Why is this happening to me? What have I done wrong? Is God punishing me?" God was not punishing him. Rather, God was turning evil upside down, bringing good out of it! God was using the evil intentions of many people to carry out His purpose of saving many people.

*Trust that
God is
working for
your good.*

God did not simply allow Joseph to suffer so he might become rich and famous later in life. He wasn't bringing this about so Joseph could get even with all those who had done him wrong. No, God elevated him to this position in order to save people during the famine, preserving the line from which the Messiah would come to save the whole world.

God does not always tell us *why* we suffer in our lives, but He does ask us to trust He is working for our good. Paul explained:

"We know that all things work together for the good of those who love God, for those who are called according to his purpose." (Romans 8:28)

We need look no further than the cross to see the truth of this passage. In the midst of evil, of suffering, and of death, in spite of the greatest injustice that ever took place—the holy Son of God was murdered—God was at work for good! Our good! God turned evil upside down, bringing about His good purpose of eternal salvation for you!

Trust that God is working for your good. Even in the midst of suffering and hardship, God is working for the good of those who love Him.

O God, be with me in my troubles and hardships. Work through these things for my good. Amen.

~33. Forgive as the Lord Forgave You

In the Bible, Jesus tells us a story about a servant who owed his master a huge debt, millions of dollars by today's standards. It was an amount the man could not possibly repay. The master called his servant and told him to pay now or he and his family would be thrown into debtors' prison. The servant pleaded with the master to have mercy and give him time. He assured the master that he would somehow repay the debt. The master was moved by this man's plea, had compassion on him, and actually chose to cancel that tremendous debt. He forgave what the man owed to him!

Later that day, the same servant went out and found one of his fellow servants, who owed him a much smaller amount of money. It was equivalent to roughly one thousand dollars by today's standards. He demanded that his fellow servant pay, and pay now, or else he would throw him into debtors' prison. This other servant pleaded for mercy as well, but the first servant refused and had him arrested and hauled away to prison.

The master heard about this incident and called in the servant whose debt he had cancelled. He said to him:

"You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt when you begged me to. Should you not have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had mercy on you?"
(Matthew 18:32b-33)

Jesus' words remind us of the forgiveness that He desires us to show our fellow man. We can often be filled with anger and resentment. In such times, we do not want to forgive one another. Maybe we feel as if we have been wronged one too many times. Maybe we have a loved one who has been hurt by the other person. But God reminds us in this lesson of the incredible debt He has forgiven us. The debt of our sins was a debt we could never possibly repay. Yet, for Jesus' sake, God has forgiven our debt. Our sins have been deleted from the ledger!

How joyful and happy this should make us! It is also inspirational. It motivates us to have a similar attitude of compassion toward one another. As we are encouraged in Colossians:

“Forgive, just as Christ forgave you.” (Colossians 3:13b)

The next time someone has wronged or hurt you or a loved one, remember God’s forgiveness and mercy that He has showered upon you. He has not punished you as you deserve. He has not just forgiven a debt of one day’s sins, but by Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection, a lifetime—millions upon millions of sins—are forgiven and canceled completely. Your debt has been wiped completely clean by Christ and what He has done.



O Lord, help me see the forgiveness You have given me. Help me to forgive those who sin against me. Amen.

~34. Prayer Life

Have you ever wished your prayer life was more fluent? That it came about more easily? That it came naturally? It is a natural thing for a Christian to want such a thing, to be more fluent or efficient in prayer.

How do little children become fluent in talking? If you’ve ever witnessed a child growing up, you realize it is something that takes much time, practice, and repeated effort. And perhaps the child’s ears are the most vital thing of all. They use their ears and listen for weeks and months, even more than a year, before any actual words come out of their mouths.

Hearing and speaking go hand in hand. If someone loses the ability to hear, it very much impacts their ability to speak as well.

When you and I desire to be more fluent and natural in our prayers, praise, and thanksgiving, what is most helpful is for our ears to be filled with what God says to us. The psalm writer says it this way:

“May my lips overflow with praise, because you teach me your statutes.” (Psalm 119:171)

When the Lord fills our ears with His words and His ways; when He tells us who He is as our Creator and our Preserver; when He reminds us of what He has done for us in the work of His Son, redeeming us by His blood; and when He speaks to us through the Holy Spirit and comforts our afflicted consciences with His work for us, then our lips will fluently, naturally open and pour forth prayers, praise, and thanksgiving to God.

So improve your prayer life by letting your ears be filled with God’s Good News for you. Hear how you have peace with God because of Jesus. Then your lips will pour forth with praise.

O Lord, let me always hear about the love You have given me in Jesus. Let this move me to lead a strong prayer life. Amen.

~35. Why Are We So Busy?

Sometimes our schedules can get crazy. For example, think about parents. Think about all the things a parent has to do: pick up the kids from school, drop them off at practice, rush home for supper, make sure homework gets done, and then get everyone to bed. Then they have to wake up the next day and repeat a schedule that is just as busy as the one before. Do you ever feel like this? As if you are caught in a vicious cycle of busyness?

Why do rational, well-meaning people do this to themselves and to their kids? Well, aren't we trying to build them up? To encourage them to find their talents and abilities? To help them grow into well-rounded adults? Aren't parents doing these things because they are trying to do what is best for their children?

*We want the
Lord to be
building up
our homes.*

In Psalm 127, King Solomon says these words:

*“If the Lord does not build the house,
it is useless for the builders to work hard over it.
If the Lord does not watch over the city,
it is useless for the watchman to stand guard.
It is useless for you to get up early and to work late,
worrying about bread to eat, because God grants sleep
to the one he loves.” (Psalm 127:1–2)*

It can become easy for us to spend too much time on those other, peripheral things in life, which can then lead us to lose focus on what is most important. Certainly every parent wants what is best for their children. Solomon, however, points us to what is most important. He says if a house is not built by the Lord, its builders labor in vain.

If our focus lies on everything else—on different worldly concerns—it can be easy for us to forget what is most important: God and His Word.

A house that is not built on God and His Word can stand for a time, but when the storms of trouble and difficulty arise in our lives, such a house will quickly fall apart. A home that is founded on God and His Word is prepared to withstand those storms we face in life. It is a house that relies on God's forgiveness and love to keep it from crashing apart.

It is so important to have God and His Word as our foundation. We don't want our house to be built in vain. Instead, we want the Lord to be the one building up our homes and to do so through His Word. When He is the one

responsible for building our house, we receive many blessings. After all, He is our Savior-God for eternity! As the psalm explains, God's work produces peace, rest, and sleep for those He loves.

O Lord, help us to remember, in the midst of a busy life, where we can find calm. Build us up in Your Word. Help us find peace and rest. Amen.



Part 4: How Does God Connect with You?

~36. Healed by Jesus

In the Bible, we hear of a time when Jesus healed a man who was demon-possessed. In fact, when asked his name, the man replied “Legion” because many demons had gone into him. Jesus drove out the demons and radically transformed the man’s life. Jesus brought peace to that previously afflicted man. Luke writes:

“People went out to see what had happened. They came to Jesus and found the man from whom the demons had gone out, sitting at Jesus’ feet. He was clothed and in his right mind, and the people were afraid.” (Luke 8:35)

They saw the radical transformation that Jesus had produced in this man. Think of what this man could now do. He could return to his family and friends. He could eat a decent meal. He could get a job. He could return to a normal lifestyle, and yet where is this man found? He was “sitting at Jesus’ feet.”

This is a key phrase. It is often used in the New Testament to refer to somebody who is a student of Jesus. Jesus, as the teacher, is instructing them. This was a priority for this man even though he had all of these other opportunities ahead of him.

You and I may have experienced having a broken life in the past, but now we know how wonderful it is being healed by Jesus. Jesus probably hasn’t removed a demon from us, but He has removed the burden of guilt and sin from our shoulders. Through Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection, we are freed from the deadly consequences of our sins. Having freedom—having new life through our Baptism—think of all the things we could now go and do with this new life!

But here we learn that one of our greatest priorities should be to sit at Jesus’ feet. The best place to do this is in church on Sunday. As we gather together in church, the Gospel message is applied to us—there we hear His Word and receive

Baptism and the Lord's Supper. There, Jesus gives us comfort as He speaks to us the words of eternal life.

Lord, give me a heart that happily seeks to sit at Your feet. Speak to us and comfort us as we gather around Your Word. Amen.

~37. Why Go to Church?

“You just think you're better than everyone else!” These were words that a man barked back to his neighbor when that neighbor invited the man to church. But is this really the case? If Christianity teaches that a person gets to heaven by being good and if going to church is good, certainly Christians must feel as if they are better than everyone else. Right?

*God shows
you your sin,
but more
importantly
shows you
your Savior.*

Is that why Christians go to church? Because they think they are better than other people? No. Christians go to church to hear God's Word, and in that Word, God teaches us that we are *not* better. In fact, God informs us that we are just as sinful as everyone else.

In Romans chapter 3, He teaches us:

“In fact, there is no difference, because all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” (Romans 3:22b–23)

It does not matter who you are. You have broken God's commandments. You have failed to live the way God wants you to live. You have fallen short. You are a sinner, the same as everyone else. That is what Christianity teaches. But God has something else to say. He continues in the same section:

“... and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.” (Romans 3:24)

Yes, all have sinned, but Jesus has also paid for the sins of all. The Christian gets to heaven not by being good, but because Jesus was good! He was better than everyone else! Jesus lived a perfect life of righteousness. He suffered and died an innocent death. He rose from the dead, proving His victory. He has redeemed us all! So it does not matter what your sins are. Jesus has forgiven you.

That is why Christians go to church. They go to hear about Jesus, their Savior. They go to be assured that God loves them and gives them full and free forgiveness of their sins.

So, come with your fellow Christians to worship. Come and sit at the feet of this God who shows you your sin, but more importantly, shows you your Savior. Then you will learn that He loves and forgives sinners just like you.

Heavenly Father, help us to always see that You have won forgiveness for us through Your Son, our Lord Jesus. Amen.

~38. What Do You Look for in a Church?

Is it a particular worship style or music? Is it the children's programs the church offers? Is it the great food served at the potlucks? Is it the pastor's personality? What is far more important than all of these things? What is most important? To find a church that correctly teaches God's Word.

Jesus said:

"If you remain in my word, you are really my disciples. You will also know the truth, and the truth will set you free." (John 8:31b-32)

This should be our top priority in choosing a church.

It may be tempting to think, "But don't all Christian churches teach God's Word? That's not a big deal." Sadly, this is not true.

Some pastors have no intention of straying from God's Word, but social issues or political causes distract them.

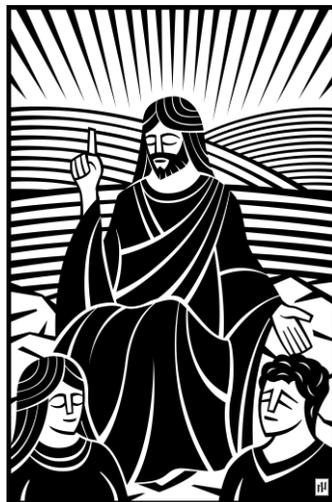
Before long, God's Word becomes secondary to an earthly concern. In such places, the Word is only used where it fits in with their own message and agenda instead of letting that Word shape and form their message and agenda.

The Apostle Peter also warned:

"... there will be false teachers among you..." (2 Peter 2:1)

There will be those who will try to exploit naïve Christians. They use God's Word and twist it to suit their own purposes. Do not be naïve. Find a church that teaches the true Word of God as its top priority. "The truth that sets you free" from your sin is the most important thing.

Our good works cannot set us free. Only Jesus Christ can, and He did. Jesus lived a sin-free life. Jesus died as the sin-bearer upon the cross. Jesus also came alive again, showing He has conquered sin and death. All who believe in Him are set free from their sins and will live forever. Why would we want to choose anything else over this most important truth?



O God, help us seek out and find those churches that properly share Your Word. Amen.

~39. Do I Have to Go to Church to Be a Christian?

It seems as if an increasing number of people are asking these questions: "Do you have to go to church be a Christian? Is it really necessary to go every week?"

There is a saying: "Going to church does not make you a Christian any more than standing in a garage makes you a car." Christians do not go to church in order to be Christians.

Christians go because they know they are broken people who have sinned against God countless times.

But at church, we hear of the hope we have. We hear how Jesus lived the perfect life we have not lived and that He did so for us as our substitute. We hear that Jesus suffered and died upon the cross as the sacrifice and payment for our sins. We hear how He rose again to show His payment for us has been accepted by God. These words of life are proclaimed throughout the church service. Knowing and appreciating that Jesus is our Savior from sin, how can we not take every opportunity to hear those comforting words?

*Around the
Word and
Sacraments, we
find comfort and
peace with God.*

As the Apostle Peter says in John 6:

“Lord, to whom will we go? You have the words of eternal life.” (John 6:68)

Not only that, but as we gather together, we are reminded of the hope we have as baptized Christians. We are reminded of all the promises God attaches to Baptism. And we have the opportunity to receive Christ’s body and blood in the Lord’s Supper—receiving for ourselves, as our own, that which paid for our redemption.

Consider what we hear in the letter to the Hebrews:

“Let us not neglect meeting together, as some have the habit of doing. Rather, let us encourage each other, and all the more as you see the Day approaching.” (Hebrews 10:25)

As we gather together around the Word and Sacraments, we have the opportunity to encourage one another and to be encouraged. What a blessing to have these weekly opportunities to gather around the Word and Sacraments where we find comfort and peace with God, where we are

encouraged and strengthened in faith, and where we can offer our praise to the God of our salvation!

Lord God, help us appreciate the great blessings You give as we gather together around Your Word and Sacraments. Amen.

~40. What Is Baptism?

What is Baptism all about? Is it something we do for God? Are we making a pledge to God—a promise to be faithful to Him and to His Word for the rest of our lives? Or is it different—about something else?

Christianity is different from every other religion. It is not about the things we do for God; instead, it is all about what God does for us. The same is true in Baptism.

In 1 Peter, it says this:

“Baptism now saves you—not the removal of dirt from the body but the guarantee of a good conscience before God through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.”
(1 Peter 3:21)

Peter makes it plain that Baptism does something. It saves you.

But how? He also mentions in the same verse that it is a guarantee of a clear conscience toward God. Could this guarantee or pledge possibly be our promise or our guarantee to God to be faithful to Him? If that were so, then that would mean we are doing something to get salvation.

We trust what the Bible says: that we are saved not by what we do, but by what God has done for us by His grace. This guarantee can't possibly be something we make to God, but rather something God makes to us. It is His assurance—His promise to us—that we have the forgiveness of sins for the sake of Jesus and therefore have peace with Him.

What a precious treasure Baptism is! It is something God gives us to reassure us that we have the forgiveness of sins.

And where there is the forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation.

Lord, help us to always treasure our Baptism. Amen.

~41. Should I Have My Children Baptized?

This is a common question. God shares His answer with us through Peter’s Pentecost sermon in the book of Acts:

“Peter answered them, ‘Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far away, as many as the Lord our God will call.’” (Acts 2:38–39)

Now you may be asking, “When are my children sinful? How are even infants sinful?” Psalm 51 reminds us that we are sinful from the start. Even at the moment of conception, we have a problem with sin.

*“Certainly, I was guilty when I was born.
I was sinful when my mother conceived me.” (Psalm 51:5)*

Therefore, all people, regardless of age, need the forgiveness of sins—which is what we receive in Baptism. At Baptism, the Holy Spirit brings the forgiveness of sins from the cross, which Christ won for all people—even for children and infants—to the person being baptized.



And what about faith? Can even a little baby have faith? When Peter describes “the gift of the Holy Spirit,” he is talking about faith. It isn’t something the baby does. It is something God does in the child—creating faith. It is a gift that is given. The child is given faith, a faith that receives forgiveness, salvation, and eternal life.

So, should we have our children baptized? Yes. God desires people, regardless of their age, to receive His gracious promises in Baptism.

So, if the question of Baptism is weighing on your heart, and if you are wondering whether you should have your child baptized, you can say, “Yes, I should have my child baptized because God promises us that through Baptism my child will be brought into His holy family and is saved through Jesus Christ.”

O Lord, thank You for the wonderful gift of Baptism. Amen.

~42. What Are We Getting in the Lord’s Supper?

What is the Lord’s Supper all about? Is it something that we do for God? Is it a way to show our faithfulness to God? Or is it a way to simply remember or reflect on Him and on what He did? After all, didn’t Jesus say, “Do this in remembrance of me”?

Unlike other religions, Christianity is entirely focused on what God does for us, and the same is true of the Lord’s Supper. Matthew says this:

“While they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to the disciples. He said, ‘Take, eat, this is my body.’ Then he took the cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, ‘Drink from it all of you, for this is my blood of the new testament, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.’” (Matthew 26:26–28)

Jesus says we receive some amazing gifts in this holy Supper. He is saying we receive His body and His blood.

But how can that be? All we see are the bread and wine.

The person who speaks these words is the same person who changed water into wine, walked on water, calmed storms, and raised people from the dead. It is Jesus, who has

all authority in heaven and on earth. He who does not speak any untruth or lie is the one who says to us, “This is my body. This is my blood.” And we take what He says at face value—even if we can’t explain *how* it can be. We understand this to be a miracle He performs even now, in our midst.

More importantly, Jesus wants us to understand the greater miracle taking place. As He gives us His true body and blood, He also gives us the precious gift of the forgiveness of our sins—and with forgiveness comes salvation and eternal life.

Christians should gladly receive the Lord’s Supper, not because they feel obligated, because they want to show their faithfulness to God, or to help them remember Jesus’ sacrifice. Christians should gladly receive the Lord’s Supper, His own true body and blood, to receive the forgiveness of sins that Jesus won and that He desires to share with us.

Lord Jesus, give us faith to trust in Your words even when we cannot comprehend them. Amen.

~43. Jesus Strengthens You in the Lord’s Supper

In ancient Rome, government officials who were sent out on missions would receive a supply of food and money to take care of their needs during their often difficult and dangerous journeys. These provisions were called *viaticum*, which means “with you on the way.” Even today, employers will supply a *per diem* (“per day”) to provide for the various needs of traveling employees.

From ancient Rome to today, such workers have two things in common: First, they are sent out on a mission in the name of their employer. And second, the employer provides for the daily needs of the worker during that mission. This is also true for Christians.

Christians are sent out into their lives with the command from Jesus to love and serve the people around them—to let their light of faith shine in a sin-darkened world. Yet this can prove to be challenging at times.

*God shares
strength with us
in this Supper
He has given!*

Thankfully, our Lord does not abandon us to struggle through our difficult journey all on our own. He gives us “food for the way” in the Lord’s Supper, assuring us that He is truly present with us at all times in life. This Supper is not only bread and wine for us to eat and drink, but also Jesus’ own true body and blood. As Paul explained:

“The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a communion of the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a communion of the body of Christ?” (1 Corinthians 10:16).

As the Christian journeys through life, the Lord’s Supper provides continued reassurance and strengthening of faith. As we share in this holy meal, God declares us to be forgiven of our sins and right with Him. And as God’s people receive it, they are also joined with each other as “one body” in Christ. This is comforting for us! We are not alone in the struggles of this life. Christ Himself is with us and so, too, are our fellow Christians! As Paul also wrote:

“Because there is one bread, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.” (1 Corinthians 10:17)

What great strength God desires to share with us in this Supper that He has given us!

O God, thank You for the strength and reassurance You share with us in the Lord’s Supper. Amen.

~44. How Do I Rightly Receive the Lord's Supper?

When prescribing a new medication, a good doctor doesn't just send the patient away without any explanation. Instead, a good doctor gives instructions for how much of the medicine to take and how often to take it. If such instructions aren't given, the patient will take the medication in the wrong way, and the medicine that's intended to heal will instead cause harm and damage.

One prescription that our Great Physician writes for us and wants us to receive is the Lord's Supper. This sacred meal was instituted by Jesus to bring His healing forgiveness, won for us on the cross, directly to us. And just as an earthly doctor provides instructions for how to take physical medication, in His Word, our Great Physician has given us clear directions to receive the medicine of the Lord's Supper to our benefit, not to our harm.

The apostle Paul shares these directions in 1 Corinthians 11:

"Therefore whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the Lord's body and blood. Instead, let a person examine himself and after doing so, let him eat of the bread and drink from the cup. For if anyone eats and drinks in an unworthy way because he does not recognize the Lord's body, he eats and drinks judgment on himself." (1 Corinthians 11:27-29)

First of all, if we eat and drink in an "unworthy manner," we are "sinning against the Lord's body and blood." This means we should take this eating and drinking seriously! We should also recognize what Jesus Himself said we are receiving in the Lord's Supper: "My body. ... My blood" (Matthew 26:26-27). Do we have faith in Jesus and in what He says? If so, we recognize that as we take the Lord's Supper,

we are participating in a miracle—receiving the true body and blood of Jesus in, with, and under the bread and the wine.

Paul also explains that in order to participate rightly, people are to “examine” themselves. This means we need to be aware of certain truths regarding our sins and Christ’s forgiveness. That is: Do we have the proper attitude toward our sin? Do we share God’s attitude toward sin? Do we find our offenses against God awful and regrettable? Are there any sins we plan or hope to keep committing? Or do we wish to change our thoughts, words, and actions so that they are God-pleasing?

When we believe we are receiving Jesus’ own body and blood in the Lord’s Supper and we receive that body and blood with hearts that are sorry for our sins, we then become prepared participants in a great miracle. As we eat and drink the Lord’s Supper, we receive it “for the forgiveness of sins.” This means we can walk away from the altar with confidence that God has removed our sins from us! That taste in your mouth is the powerful personal prescription Jesus has given that takes your sins away. Nothing more is needed from us. We receive it all as Jesus shares this miraculous meal with us. What comfort and peace this offers us!

Thank You, Lord Jesus, for giving us Your Body and Blood in the Lord’s Supper and with it, the forgiveness of my sins! Amen.

THIS IS MY
BODY
THIS IS MY
BLOOD



Part 5: That's a Good Question!

~45. What Is True?

Is butter good for you or bad? Is chocolate good for you or bad? Is red meat good for you or bad? In some areas of our lives, there are so many different opinions that it is almost impossible for us to know what the truth is. Many people feel the same way about religion. There are so many different opinions out there, how can a person possibly know what is true?

On the night He was betrayed, Jesus prayed this prayer recorded in John chapter 17:

*“Sanctify them by the truth. Your word is truth.”
(John 17:17)*

God’s Word, the Bible, is true.
How can you be sure of that?

The Bible is not made up of random thoughts rained down from heaven. It is full of eyewitness accounts. It consists of the records

of those who saw these things happen firsthand. This is especially important in connection with Jesus. Jesus is a real person. Jesus really died. Jesus really rose from the dead. The people that saw Him witnessed His miracles. They touched Him and heard Him, and they recorded their experiences for us so we can know what really happened.

Because this is real human history, it is the truth. Since Jesus really did die and rise again, it changes everything. He prayed, “Sanctify us by the truth.” Since Jesus died for our sins and rose again, that means in Him, God has made you holy. God has taken away the guilt and punishment of your sins because of Jesus, and He loves you. You can know this is true because it really happened.

You may debate what is healthy for you and have different opinions about such things, but the Bible is something that you can depend upon and trust, because it is the truth God

*The Bible is
something you
can depend
upon and trust.*

wants you to know. And it proclaims the greatest truth: that He loves you in Jesus.

These are Your words, heavenly Father. Sanctify us in the truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

~46. Hasn't God's Word Changed?

Many products in our world today change all the time. Many cell phone companies, for example, will exchange your favorite model for the new one, which seems to come out every year. Other products, though, never change. Coca-Cola has not changed their formula in one hundred years. They attempted to change it in the 1980s, but it was an utter

God's Law does not change, but neither does His Gospel.

failure. Customers were angry that the company had changed the flavor of their most precious soft drink.

In some ways, God's Word is like Coca-Cola. "You cannot mess with perfection." God's Word is perfect in every way because it is given to us by the perfect and holy God. And yet there are many times and places where we would like to change God's Word. We would like it to say something different. Maybe it just seems too old-fashioned and we are tempted to think it no longer applies to the 21st century. Maybe we would like it to say something different about marriage or sexuality. Maybe we do not like what it has to say about creation or right-to-life issues. The problem is, if we change God's Word, it is no longer God's Word. It becomes our own word.

In Numbers chapter 23, God says this:

"God is not a man, that he should lie, nor a son of man, that he changes his mind. Does he say something, and then not carry it out? Does he speak, and then not bring it about?" (Numbers 23:19)

God does not change His mind, nor does He change His Word or His Law. That might terrify us. What God said three thousand years ago concerning His moral law still applies to us even today! But there is also comfort in the fact that God's Word does not change.

In Hebrews chapter 13 it says this:

“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.” (Hebrews 13:8)

Yes, God's Law does not change, but neither does His Gospel. Jesus Christ still forgives sins. He forgives all who come to Him, repenting, turning to Him in faith. He eagerly offers full and free forgiveness. Now and always. What a blessing it is to know God's Word does not change. What a comfort for us!

Thank You, Lord, for giving us Your Word that does not change. Because of this, we can have confidence in Your love. Amen.

~47. How Can You Know God Exists?

Many people wonder and ask: How can you know there even is a God? There are several things pointing us to the existence of God.

First of all, we can know there is a God from nature. We call this our “natural knowledge.” When we see the world around us and how wonderfully and fearfully it is made, we know there must be someone who created it all. Could this universe really have come about from nothing—all its complexity by pure chance? Or does this creation point us to a Creator?

Second, we have a “natural knowledge of God” from our conscience. Everyone has a voice of right and wrong inside them, telling them that what they are about to do or have already done was wrong. Or, on the opposite end, sometimes that voice assures us we have done the right thing. Who has given us this understanding? Who has determined there is

right and wrong? This could not come about by chance. Our consciences also stand as evidence that there is a Creator who has established right and wrong.

The “natural knowledge” we have is also evidence there is a God, but it cannot tell us who that God is. Creation shows us God is powerful and a God of order, but little more. Our conscience tells us we have sinned against Him, that we stand liable to Him, but it cannot tell us how to be reconciled to Him. That is why we need the “revealed knowledge” of God. In John chapter 20, we read:

“But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.” (John 20:31)



God does not want you to be ignorant about who He is or what He has done to save you. Therefore, He had the Bible written for you so you can know who He is and especially know what He has done for you in Jesus. He wants you to know not only that He exists, but that He loves you. He loves you so

much, He sent His own Son to live and die in your place and also rise again. This is why your conscience can be at peace, and you can know your relationship with your Creator is restored. God wants you to know that one day you will be with Him in heaven.

If you start wondering about God’s existence, pick up your Bible and read it. Learn about God and what He has done to save you.

Dear God, thank You for revealing who You really are and for the love You have for us—proclaimed to us in Your Word. Amen.

~48. Why Do Bad Things Happen to Christians?

Why do bad things happen to good people? How can bad things happen to Christians who know and trust in Jesus as their Savior? Hasn't He already been punished for their sins on the cross?

The book of Job undertakes this very serious question: "Why do bad things happen to Christians?" Job's friends thought they knew the answer, that their friend was being punished because he had done something wrong. They thought it was because of some secret sin Job would not reveal to them. However, Job knew that while he was a sinner, he had not done anything to cause God to bring this incredible suffering upon him.

So he asked, "Why?" God reveals the answer in Scripture as He shows us that all the horrible things that happened to Job—losing his house, losing his family, his property, his health—all of this was testing his faith. It revealed that Job's faith was not a fair-weather faith. God did not bless him because he was faithful. Rather Job demonstrates his trust in God as the God of his salvation.

The most striking thing about the book of Job is that he never finds out why all of these bad things happened to him. God never reveals to him that his faith was being tested. God simply appears before Job and tells him to trust Him because He is the almighty, perfectly good, and just God. He simply tells Job to place his faith in Him as he always has.

God does not always tell us specifically why a particular suffering occurs in our lives. Could it be a test of our faith? Could it be that God is working through some struggle to bring about a greater blessing? What could God be up to?

In such times, God directs us simply to trust in Him and to know His will for us is good. So even in the face of suffering, with Job, we can say:

*“I know that my Redeemer lives,
and that at the end of time he will stand over the dust.
Then, even after my skin has been destroyed,
nevertheless, in my own flesh I will see God.
I myself will see him.
My own eyes will see him, and not as a stranger.”
(Job 19:25–27)*

*Dear God, help me to trust in You and in the loving goodwill You have for me—even when bad things are happening to me.
Amen.*

~49. Why Doesn't God Do Something?

Have you ever watched the news and seen a crime so terrible, so bad, that it makes you burn with anger? Perhaps it is the murder of innocent people. Perhaps it is a corrupt politician who uses his power to exploit others. Perhaps rape, human trafficking, or child abuse.

*At the cross
God's love and
justice come
together.*

Many people respond to these horrible events with the questions, “Where is God? Why does He allow these things to happen? Why doesn't He do something?”

Christians need to be very careful with this line of thinking. If God's response to all evil was to instantly destroy it, where would that leave human beings?

God's standard for evil is much higher than our standard. God can look into the heart. While the world can see murder as an evil, God is able to see the evil, hateful thoughts someone has toward another. Because He is holy and perfect, any offense against His commandments is an offense against God.

Rather than criticize God, we should be thankful for God's patience. He is slow to anger and abounding in love. Romans chapter 3 says:

“God publicly displayed [Jesus] as the atonement seat through faith in his blood. God did this to demonstrate his justice, since, in his divine restraint, he had left the sins that were committed earlier unpunished.”
(Romans 3:25)

God was very patient. He did not carry out the full penalty for sin according to the Old Covenant. Rather, He waited until the right time to take out His vengeance. That time was when His Son was on the cross, placing upon Him all of our evil. At that time, the Father unleashed all His anger, all His punishment. Our guilt and sin were laid upon His own Son. As Jesus died on the cross He paid for evil fully and completely. Because of Him, your own sin and evil are forgiven. At the cross, God's love and His justice come together.

The fact is, God has done something! He has paid for injustice and evil so we might stand before Him forgiven. That is good news that gives us peace!

Dear God, thank You for showing us Your patience and not giving us what our sins deserve. Amen.

~50. When Will People Learn to Stop Hurting Each Other?

These days, it seems you can hardly turn on the news without hearing about another shooting or some other tragic event where people are hurting each other. When will people learn? When will it stop?

Sadly, it will not stop because all human hearts are corrupt. Jesus said in Matthew chapter 15:

“To be sure, out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, sexual sins, thefts, false testimonies, and blasphemies.” (Matthew 15:19)

When will people learn? They will not because by nature, all human beings are sinful to the very core. In our heart of hearts, we are selfish and only care about ourselves.

That is why the prayer King David prayed in Psalm 51 is so important. After being confronted in his sin and the corruption of his heart, this is what he prayed:

*“Create in me a pure heart, O God.
Renew an unwavering spirit within me.
Do not cast me from your presence.
Do not take your Holy Spirit from me.
Restore to me the joy of your salvation.
Sustain me with a willing spirit.” (Psalm 51:10–12)*

“Create in me a pure heart.” God does this when He places faith inside us. He put something new in our hearts, something different from what is there by nature. Through



faith, He washes us in the blood of Jesus and purifies us from all corruption and sin. That faith is also eager to love God and love one another. Through faith, God changes us so that we think differently about ourselves and about the people around us. God, through that faith, empowers us to be kind and compassionate to one another.

So, when tragedies like shootings occur, our hearts certainly go out to the victims, but to find the cause, one need not look too far. We know what our natural hearts are like and so we pray with David, “O Lord, create in me a pure heart!”

May God continue to purify our hearts through faith in Jesus. May He continue to change the way we think so we may view Him and our neighbor properly.

Heavenly Father, give us new hearts that are like Your heart, full of compassion and love for others. Amen.

~51. How Can a Loving God Punish People?

“God is love; therefore, He accepts you just the way you are.”

Such statements are usually made to justify the way people are living their sinful lives. They are saying, “It is okay to live in these ways—God still loves you. God still forgives and accepts you as His child.” But is this true?

1 John 4:8 tells us, “*God is love.*” This is true. God is love. But is it true that God does not care whether a person sins or not? Many places in the Bible, including Isaiah 30:18, tell us, “*The Lord is a God of justice.*” So which is it? How can He be a “God of justice” and a “God of love”?

Imagine a courtroom scene. A case has been brought forward concerning a murder. All the evidence is out and the accused is sitting before the judge. There were eyewitness accounts. There was fingerprint evidence, DNA evidence, even video footage, all showing that the accused had committed the murder. Imagine, though, that the judge said, “I know all of the evidence points to this man and he is in fact guilty. But this was very out of character and outside of having committed this crime, he is otherwise a very good citizen, so I am choosing to let him go.”

What would the reaction from the courtroom be? Many would say that justice had not been served and that the judge was unjust. Imagine what the family members of the victim would say. Wouldn't they accuse him of being an evil judge for not carrying out justice? For not sentencing the guilty and punishing him?

This is also true of God. God would be an evil judge if He did not punish sin. Would God, like an elderly grandfather overlooking the misdeeds of his grandson, ever say, “Boys will be boys” as He lets someone get away with murder? No. God must punish sin to be a good and just judge, but He is also a God of love. How?

God does in fact punish our sin, but He punishes it in His own Son. He placed the weight and burden of our sin, the punishment that we sinners deserve, on Christ. In this, God is both just and loving. He is just because He carries out His sentence as promised. He is loving because He provides the sacrifice for us, giving us one who is punished in our place—Christ Jesus.

May we treasure this truth that God is a God of justice, but also a God of love. We see this clearly in how He sent His Son Jesus to die for us. This is what motivates us to live differently, to repent of our sins, and turn to Him always as the God of our salvation.

Dear God, help us to always see the love that moved You to send a Savior to us. Amen.

~52. What’s Different About the Other World Religions?

Is there a difference among the various religions of the world?

We recognize that the various world religions have different customs, holy days, and sets of rules. Yet we also recognize they all seemingly try to achieve the same thing: some sort of higher state of being, whether in this life or the next. As these religions seek this, we see something else they have in common. The various world religions are teaching that, in

Eternal life is not earned on our own. It is a free gift from God!

order to do this, one must “do your best, try your hardest, follow the rules and commandments, and then heaven will be yours.”

How does Christianity differ from all other religions? Simple. By not promising heaven to those who do well or try their hardest, but rather by teaching that heaven is a free gift, that is undeserved.

God, in His mercy and love, decided He Himself would pay the price for our heaven, our eternal life, and He does it through His Son Jesus Christ. The apostle Paul explains it like this in Romans 6:

“... but the undeserved gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Romans 6:23b)

God gives eternal life in heaven freely. It is not something we could ever merit or earn on our own. It is a free gift from Him.

What a refreshing difference! Christianity is drastically different from the other religions of the world. It is not all about what *we* do for God, but rather what *God* has done for us through His Son, Jesus Christ.

Thank You, Lord, for showing me the true religion that comes freely through Your Son, Jesus. Amen.

RETURN
~ to the ~
LORD
~ your ~
GOD
+

Prayers for You to Use:

A Personal Confession of Sin:

Dear Father in heaven, my heart is plagued and weighed down with sins I have committed in my thoughts, words, and actions. I bare my soul to You and confess my sins as King David prayed, *“For I admit my rebellious acts. My sin is always in front of me. Against you, you only, have I sinned, and I have done this evil in your eyes. So you are justified when you sentence me. You are blameless when you judge. Certainly, I was guilty when I was born. I was sinful when my mother conceived me. Since you desire truth on the inside, in my hidden heart you teach me wisdom. Remove my sin with hyssop, and I will be clean. Wash me, and I will be whiter than snow. Let me hear joy and gladness. Let the bones you have crushed celebrate. Hide your face from my sins. Erase all my guilty deeds. Create in me a pure heart, O God. Renew an unwavering spirit within me. Do not cast me from your presence. Do not take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation. Sustain me with a willing spirit”* (Psalm 51:3-12). Amen.

When I’m Feeling Guilty:

Heavenly Father, my heart and mind are heavy and burdened with guilt, guilt for the wrongs I have done and guilt for the things I should have done, but did not. No amount of sorrow, no attempts to do more good than bad, no self-reasoning, nothing works to lift the burdens. It is obvious that I can do nothing to find relief on my own, within me, or through my actions. Please help me, dear Lord. Show me the way. Help me to find relief. Help me to find peace of mind. Place my Savior Jesus always before me that I may see the forgiveness that comes through Him. Show me the truth of Your Word. Pour out Your Holy Spirit upon me. Lead and guide me with Your great love and wisdom. Amen.

For a Repentant Heart:

Heavenly Father, there are many evils in this world that the Devil uses to distract us from those things You would have us believe and do. As a result, my prayer life suffers and I do not always repent as You have taught us. Through Your Word and Sacraments, give me the strength to heed my Savior's call to "*Repent, and believe in the Gospel*" (Mark 1:15). Teach me to have the repentant heart You desire for Jesus' sake. Amen.

For Forgiveness:

Dear Lord God, heavenly Father, in Your great love for the world, You sent Your Son, Jesus, to shed His precious blood as He hung on the cross dying for all sins. I am a sinful being and am in need of Your forgiveness every day. Dear God, for Jesus' sake, please forgive me of my sins. Guide me by Your Holy Spirit to stand up to the temptations and evil thoughts I face every day. Help me to go forward with thankfulness in my heart, assured that Your great love and forgiveness belongs to me. In Jesus' name. Amen.

For God's Love:

Lord God, heavenly Father, Your love for us is great. You shower us with Your love daily as You provide all that we need in this life. You especially display Your love for us through the forgiveness of sins and the hope of eternal salvation, and we are thankful. Still, there are times that the evils of this world and my own sinful flesh cause me to feel as if I am lost in a great darkness, leaving me with lonely feelings of sadness. Dear God, through the work of the Holy Spirit, pour an extra portion of Your love upon me. Always keep me mindful that You are here for me and that Your love exceeds all the evil and darkness in this world. In Jesus' name. Amen.

For Peace:

Lord God, heavenly Father, there is much turmoil and bloodshed in the world today. Many families will not see their loved ones again as their lives are taken from them in acts of violence. We pray that You would put an end to the bloodshed and that peace may be restored. Bless those governments and powers at odds with one another with wise counsel that they might find peaceful resolutions to their differences. Lead Christians everywhere to pray for the families that have lost loved ones, for the hurt, for those displaced from their homes, and for those in power that peace may prevail. Lord, show the leaders of nations and armies the love of Your Son, Jesus Christ, that His love might rule in their hearts and help them to strive for peace. In Jesus' name, we ask for these blessings. Amen.

For Wisdom:

Lord God, heavenly Father, there are countless decisions and choices to make every day. Our enemies Satan, this evil world, and my own sinful flesh strive to disrupt my life, my faith, and my family with thoughts and actions that are not pleasing in Your sight. They seek to lead me only to harm. Pour out Your Holy Spirit upon me. Have Him lead me in all of the decisions and choices that I make in this life. Let them be a reflection of my faith and Your eternal love. In Jesus' name. Amen.

For Courage:

Gracious heavenly Father, You are my rock and my strength; without You, I am helpless. I rely on You for the courage I need to make my way through all that I face in this life, especially in the darkest of times. Through Your Word, send the Holy Spirit to help me stand strong and to be still and know that You are my God. Reassure me that I am in Your loving care no matter what befalls me. Please continue to be with me. Be my beacon of hope and my inner peace, now and throughout all the days of my life. I ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

For Willingness to Serve Others/For Loving My Neighbor:

Dear Father in heaven, all that I have in this life—my body and mind, my strength and intellect, and all my worldly possessions—comes to me as a loving and gracious gift from You. Teach me to use these gifts not in selfishness, but in service and love to the people around me. Teach me to follow the example of Jesus as He walked the earth, showing compassion to all in need, healing the sick, and feeding the hungry. Create in me a heart like this, dear Lord. Amen.

For Greater Joy in my Baptism:

Dear Lord, You washed away my sin in the waters of Baptism. As a forgiven child of God, all the benefits and joys of heaven are mine, both now and into eternity. Thank You for such a great and powerful gift. Lord, help me to put off the distractions of this world. Help me to continually rejoice in my Baptism. Allow that joy to be seen by others as a reflection of Your love that they may glorify Your holy name and seek You. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

For Greater Joy in the Lord's Supper:

Dear Father in heaven, You displayed Your great love for all mankind when You sent Your only Son into the world to save us from our sins. Through His life, death, and resurrection, we now have the forgiveness of sins and life eternal. Before His crucifixion, Jesus blessed us with the celebration of the Lord's Supper. Each time we celebrate this Holy Communion we have the privilege of partaking in that which Jesus gave in payment for our sins as He hung on the cross: His own body and blood. With them, our sins are forgiven and our faith is strengthened. We pray that through them, You would keep the joy of forgiveness and eternal life burning brightly in our hearts. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

For Our Country:

Dear Creator of all things, You laid the foundation of the world and created mankind. As mankind's population grew, You established nations and governments to watch over Your people and to keep them safe. Sadly, the stain of sin is constantly working against our nation, creating corruption and divisions. We pray that You would continue to protect us from our enemies, both outside and in, that would destroy us. Keep us strong and equip us not only to care for ourselves, but to be a role model and a help to other nations. In Jesus' name. Amen.

For Our Enemies:

Lord God, heavenly Father, Your beloved Son, Jesus, has commanded us to love our enemies, to do good to those who hate us, to bless those who curse us, and to pray for those who mistreat us (Luke 6:27–28). We are only able to do so through the love and kindness that You continually pour out upon us. Give us servants' hearts. Help us to put aside our anger, our biases, our misunderstandings. Lead us to let Your love be reflected in our dealings with others. Enable our love to shine so our enemies can see You in our actions. We pray that they may turn and come to know Your love and the love of our Savior, Jesus Christ. In His name. Amen.

For Our Political Leaders:

Dear Lord of all things, You know the struggles and the evils our nation's leaders face every day. They are truly burdened with a heavy responsibility. We pray that You would bless them with wisdom and understanding as they strive to do the work You have called them to do. Help them to keep our nation free so we can continue to spread Your holy Word to the lost and straying and to gather together, conducting our worship services without fear of persecution. For Jesus' sake. Amen.

Who is Jesus? What has He done for me?
Does God care about me? How do I know?

Where can I find Peace for my life?

People search for peace. In His Word, the Bible, God wants you to know that you have peace with Him. This peace is available to all through Jesus Christ. Because of Jesus' work you are given free forgiveness of your guilt and sin. You are at peace with Him! You have God's peace not only here in this life — He has promised all who trust in Jesus Christ eternal peace in Heaven.

This is Good News for You! You have Peace with God!

Learn more about the peace
you have in Jesus from short
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