

“I Give Up”

[Jesus said,] “This, then, is how you should pray: ‘Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name’” (Matthew 6:9).

Scripture: Matthew 6:9-15

Song: “Only a Holy God”

Money and prosperity were Mr. Yamaguchi’s goals when he came to California from Japan. He quickly made connections with people and easily found work. Eventually, he began his own lucrative business. However, when he attended a special event and heard plainly about Jesus Christ, he became distressed. His career was flourishing, but his actions weren’t always ethical. After the meeting, he talked with the minister, but he resisted becoming a Christian because he feared losing his posh lifestyle.

For a year Yamaguchi wrestled in his spirit until he met the same preacher again. Hearing the gospel a second time, Yamaguchi finally confessed, “Oh, God, . . . one whole year I fight You. . . . Oh, God, I give up.” Though materially successful, the businessman had been spiritually empty until at last his desire to receive God’s gift of salvation surmounted his fear of losing his wealth.

In today’s passage, we see that Jesus begins His prayer with a profession of God’s holiness and submission to God’s reign. As we yield our will to God’s, our souls will find peace instead of conflict with Him. May we daily acknowledge that our Heavenly Father is the one we worship as King and submit to as Lord.

Father, You are worthy of my full submission to Your rule in my life. In Jesus’ name, amen.

July 1–7. **Sara Schaffer** lives in Colorado with her husband and two daughters. She enjoys studying God’s Word, blogging, podcasting, building puzzles, and hanging out with her family.

Symbols vs. Substance

[Nebuzaradan, commander of Nebuchadnezzar's imperial guard] set fire to the temple of the LORD (Jeremiah 52:13).

Scripture: Jeremiah 52:1-15

Song: "In Christ Alone"

As she walked to school or church, Maggie dreamed of having a car. Cold and bundled up against the chilly Midwest winter, the young girl wistfully watched vehicles drive by. What a luxury it would be to sit warm and comfortable in an automobile! Her dream eventually came true. As an adult, Maggie loved to drive and felt richly blessed in her car, but eventually, she had to start walking again. Her health needed improvement, and the doctor ordered her to walk as much as possible.

Maggie saw her car as a symbol of prosperity, but as she aged, she completely gave up driving. On her daily walks she smiled to herself at the irony. For her to do well in life, she needed her health, not a luxury vehicle. In a similar way, perhaps, God's people in today's passage needed to lose their glorious temple. It was a point of pride in their religious heritage, but the people's hearts had wandered far from God. When finally God took it away and the people went into captivity, their focus returned to Him.

Have we made some *thing* our god and decided it's where our status and security lie? God is willing to remove our idols so that we might find our wholeness in Him. How much better it would be, instead, for us to turn to Him with humble hearts.

Father, I choose today to worship You alone and not cling to any other thing I'm fond of. In Jesus' name, amen.

“I Get Him Multiplied”

The Babylonians . . . carried all the bronze to Babylon (Jeremiah 52:17).

Scripture: Jeremiah 52:16-30

Song: “Trusting Jesus”

After enduring 26 surgeries, Kathy had learned to manage and live with physical pain. She was used to being unwell. However, when an illness afflicted her mind, she faced new challenges. Despite having a master’s degree in English, she could no longer spell. She struggled to recall her name at times, and simple math felt like advanced calculus. At first she was frustrated with herself, but through the love of family, she started to accept her limitations. More than that, she began to see the opportunity to know God in deeper ways.

Kathy had learned to love the Lord with her whole strength and mind. Now she saw the opportunity to worship Him with all her heart and soul. “To every degree I go backwards, I get Him multiplied,” she told a friend with a smile. Unlike Kathy, the Jews had been physically thriving, but they were spiritually weak. God allowed their place of worship to be destroyed so they would return to *Him*.

King Nebuchadnezzar’s soldiers removed all the bronze, gold, and silver from the temple, completely removing every beautiful adornment. Even so, no amount of physical demolition could destroy God himself. When we are faced with losing everything in some way—financially, physically, relationally, etc.—let’s consider all we could gain spiritually by seeking God wholeheartedly. Let us worship our Lord with all that we have so we may receive all that He is.

Father, when I’m faced with loss, may I clearly see all I have in You. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Conviction and Confidence

Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us (Hebrews 4:16).

Scripture: Hebrews 4:12-16

Song: "By Grace and Grace Alone"

For several evenings, the minister noticed the same young man attending the special services. When the minister finally talked with him, the man confessed he was agnostic. The minister drew his attention to Isaiah 53. They discussed how these words, which so accurately describe Jesus' crucifixion, were written centuries beforehand. Visibly moved, the man took the Bible offered to him and left.

A few nights later the man returned, no longer looking troubled. During the service, he shared with the congregation how he had worked in Jerusalem and had stood atop the hill that is thought to be the place where Jesus died. He admitted that in his agitated unbelief, he'd cursed and refused to believe in God. But now, through Isaiah 53, he understood that Jesus died for sinners like himself. He believed the reality of the cross and received God's forgiveness.

We may wonder when we share God's Word whether it has an impact, but today's passage assures us that it cuts deeply and precisely. Just as the man felt convicted as he read Isaiah, the Scripture also gave him confidence. Hebrews tells us that because of Jesus, we will find mercy in our time of need. What great news for the young man at the service, and what joy for us who believe!

Father, Thank You for the conviction and confidence I receive from Your Word. In Jesus' name, amen.

A Promise with Power

[God said,] “I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more” (Hebrews 8:12).

Scripture: Hebrews 8:6-13

Song: “I Greet Thee, Who My Sure Redeemer Art”

Feeling the beads she'd placed on the string, Helen realized she'd made a mistake in the pattern. At first she felt perplexed, unable to figure out her exact error. Then her teacher, Anne Sullivan, touched Helen's temple and emphatically spelled T-H-I-N-K into her hand. Like a flash, Helen experienced her first abstract idea—the idea of thinking! The breakthrough led her to consider other ideas, and soon Helen came to understand the word *love*. The concept transformed her.

Before her teacher arrived, Helen Keller described her life as dark and separated from reason. What joy she had as she started to grasp ideas such as love. Miss Sullivan arrived with both the knowledge of how to unlock Helen from her lonely situation and the patience and willingness to do so. Similarly, when God set out to make a new covenant with His people, He provided everything needed. God's new covenant would be established through His Word and the obedience of His Son. This time, those trapped in darkness would be set free by God himself.

God both thought of and became the solution for our dark and lost spiritual condition. If we've been trying to gain God's approval through our own efforts, it's time to remember that our acceptance is only through Christ. Then, clothed in the gift of His righteousness, we walk on in the power of His Spirit.

Father, thank You for providing a new way I could never attain on my own. In Jesus' name, amen.

“Thank You, Lord”

You turned my wailing into dancing (Psalm 30:11).

Scripture: Psalm 30

Song: “Mourning into Dancing”

When Bill Bright (1921–2003), one of the founders of Campus Crusade for Christ, heard his doctor tell him that he would lose his life to a painful illness, Bright’s quiet, faith-filled response was, “Thank You, Lord.” Concerned and a little shocked by his patient’s reply, the doctor tried to further explain the situation: the condition would eventually end in choking to death. Bright said he understood but that he was obeying God’s command to give thanks in *all* things (1 Thessalonians 5:18).

For Bright, being faced with terminal disease clarified what mattered in life. He was convinced that, after God, the most important things in life are our health and the confidence that we are going to Heaven when we die. He and his wife sought treatments for his illness, prayed for his healing, and prepared for his death. He started looking forward to his last breath on earth being followed by his first breath in Heaven.

In today’s Scripture passage, we see the psalmist declaring the hope we have in the face of death. Because Jesus was raised from the grave, we too have hopeful assurance that our mourning will be turned into everlasting joy. Bright’s response to his diagnosis reminds us today that the suffering God allows in our lives can lead us to praise. For we know that there *will* be dancing and newness of life for all who entrust themselves to Christ.

Father, grant me courage to thank You even in the darkness, knowing that a new day will soon be dawning. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Homeless but Not Hopeless

I say to myself, “The LORD is my portion; therefore I will wait for him” (Lamentations 3:24).

Scripture: Lamentations 3:16-24

Song: “Close to Thee”

After an evangelistic event, the itinerant minister, H. A. “Harry” Ironside (1876–1951) made an unplanned stop in Fresno, California. With little money and no contacts, he found cheap accommodations. All week he prayed for God to provide purpose and money for his situation, but God seemed silent. Despite Ironside’s frugality, he found himself sleeping outdoors one night, thankfully hidden under a weeping willow tree. The next day, a revival meeting started in Fresno, and Ironside decided to attend. Just after he sat down, the people at the front asked him to step forward and be the speaker for the evening!

He received many donations and an offer to stay with one of the event planners. Though he’d spent one night homeless, he later reflected that God *had* provided exactly what he’d needed: a situation where he was desperate for the Lord.

While Ironside didn’t suffer like Jeremiah, he did turn to God like the prophet did, waiting on Him in his time of need. We might easily say the Lord is our portion. However, when circumstances challenge us and we come to the end of all earthly provision, we too will have an opportunity to respond. Will we shake our fist at God in anger? Or will we truly trust Him? Whatever our circumstances, may we keep our hearts and eyes open to His divine provision.

Father, You truly are my portion in abundance and in little. Either way, I rely on You. In Jesus’ name, amen.