

God's Preparations

Oh, praise the greatness of our God! (Deuteronomy 32:3).

Scripture: Deuteronomy 32:1-6

Song: "My Shepherd Will Supply My Need"

I went on a mission trip to a country where the people are kind, the weather is hot, and toilet paper is not predictably available. Most of our team traveled light, but one of our teammates carried a huge, red backpack with her everywhere. It bulged with extra water, a first-aid kit, tissues, snacks, and more. We teased her about it, but there were many times when her backpack came to the rescue. She had guessed what we would need, and she had prepared.

The Israelites were finally ready to enter the promised land. God didn't need to guess what His people would need. He knew, and He had everything prepared for them. God even gave Moses a song to teach the people before his death. God knew they were going to rebel against Him and worship idols, and yet God loved His people so much that He prepared a song to help bring them back to Him even before they went astray.

We can praise God today because He knows our needs, struggles, weaknesses, and failures. And in His love, He is prepared to provide whatever we may need along our way: guidance, strength, help, correction, and even a way back to Him.

Father, You know what I need even before I do, and You are willing and eager to provide. May I learn to trust in and depend on You more each day. In Jesus' name, amen.

August 12–18. **Katherine Robles** is a Christian author and special education teacher living in Delaware.

Not Your Own

You were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God. “I have the right to do anything,” you say—but not everything is beneficial. “I have the right to do anything”—but I will not be mastered by anything (1 Corinthians 6:11-12).

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 6:9-20

Song: “Sanctuary”

I gained 60 pounds over four pregnancies. When I started my weight-loss journey, I posted 1 Corinthians 6:12 on the refrigerator for inspiration. I wanted to be committed to putting food in my mouth that was beneficial to my health and to my goal, and I didn't want food to master me. It helped me to know that I had the freedom to eat whatever I wanted, but I was choosing to honor my body by reaching a healthy weight.

Today's passage is about sexual immorality, not weight loss, but the point Paul is making is that those who belong to Christ are the temple of God's indwelling Spirit. Therefore what believers in Christ do with their physical bodies matters, and that is why they are to flee sexual immorality.

Jesus died for *all* our sins. And just like the Corinthian believers to whom Paul wrote, we have been washed, sanctified, and justified in Christ's name and by His Spirit. We too are called to commit ourselves to honoring God with our bodies.

Father, thank You for the indwelling presence of Your Holy Spirit. I want to honor You with my body and my actions as I serve You. In Jesus' name, amen.

Resisting Revenge

Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord (Romans 12:19).

Scripture: Romans 12:9-21

Song: "The Savior Can Solve Every Problem"

Bill and Margaret were planning to sell a rental property when the 2020 pandemic hit. One of their tenants struggled during quarantine but paid what rent she could, and when restrictions lifted, she moved out. Another tenant, however, refused to leave. He had a job but told his landlords that as long as the emergency ban on evictions was in effect, he was neither budging nor paying. Bill and Margaret were angry and frustrated, but legally there was nothing they could do. Finally when the ban lifted and the day of eviction came, the tenant still hadn't moved his belongings out, leaving it for his landlords to do.

Bill and Margaret could have taken some measure of revenge on the belligerent tenant. They had opportunity when they discovered he had left important personal documents behind at the property. But even though he had cost them thousands of dollars, they allowed him to retrieve these items.

There are selfish and spiteful people in this world. It's comforting to know that God sees, and He knows how to bring perfect justice. Our part is to follow faithfully in Christ's steps—in prayer, humility, service, and blessing. That kind of love isn't always easy, but it honors God, leaving room for Him to work.

Father, I praise You because You are good. Help me cling to You and leave room for You to work. In Jesus' name, amen.

Timely Words of Wisdom

Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed. A person finds joy in giving an apt reply—and how good is a timely word! (Proverbs 15:22-23).

Scripture: Proverbs 15:20-25

Song: “The Perfect Wisdom of Our God”

After 16 years of writing, I finally received a contract to have three novels published. I was thrilled, but when I first saw the books’ covers, I balked. The cover models looked nothing like the characters I’d envisioned in my head. I also wondered whether the font was legible enough. Would readers like my books? Was my dream going to crash and burn once the books were released? The reality of publication set in, and doubts flooded my mind.

Thankfully my sister was in town. She reminded me that by the time the novels are in the hands of readers, they’ve been refined by the counsel of beta readers, editors, and the creative team at the publishing house. I could trust that the publisher knew what it was doing. As my sister and I talked, my doubts fizzled.

I’m blessed to have people in my life who give me wise counsel. God seems to send them to me exactly when I need a timely word. Just as a good novel needs input from others, so our lives benefit from others’ godly wisdom. When we apply that wisdom, it brings joy and leads us on a straight course.

Father, You are wise. Help me to listen humbly when You send wisdom to guide me, and thank You for those who encourage me along my way. In Jesus’ name, amen.

The Righteous Exalted

He will exalt you to inherit the land; when the wicked are destroyed, you will see it (Psalm 37:34).

Scripture: Psalm 37:27-40

Song: “Haven’t Seen It Yet”

In a predominantly Muslim area of Ethiopia, a sheikh led an attack on a Christian community, killing two evangelists and burning down 22 homes. Instead of leaving, the Christians rebuilt and painted their new homes in bright colors so that the rebuilding would be visible. Less than two years later, this same sheikh became a believer in Christ. After his conversion, his family was forced to flee into the jungle when those who opposed his conversion burned down his house. He later returned to his village and built a church between two mosques. This church has grown steadily, and eventually the leader of the attack on the sheikh’s home also became a believer, even sharing his testimony with the same Christians whose homes he had destroyed.

Psalm 37 provides an eternal perspective for God’s people. They have an inheritance and God’s faithful assistance despite hard times. The psalmist paints a picture of two kinds of people and the futures they can expect: peace and provision for the righteous and punishment for the wicked.

Sometimes we witness the fulfillment of those promises, as with the Ethiopian Christian villagers returning to live in peace. And while sometimes the wicked repent, more often they seem to prosper as they carry out their evil purposes. God’s Word reminds us, however, that those who persist in evil will perish. Yet our future in Christ is secure.

Father, I praise You because You are merciful *and* just. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Repentance of a Serial Killer

You, LORD my God, brought my life up from the pit (Jonah 2:6).

Scripture: Jonah 2:1-9

Song: “At Calvary”

Velma Barfield first took antidepressants and tranquilizers after surgery. When her husband became an alcoholic, she started taking extra doses to numb her emotions. Her addiction grew to 20 pills a day. She lived life in a medicated fog. After her husband died in a house fire, she married a man with poor health. The stress of caring for him grew, and she felt trapped, so she murdered him with ant poison. She took out loans against her mother’s house to support her drug habit. When her mother caught on to her deception, Velma poisoned her. Over the next few years, Velma murdered again and again, six victims in all.

While in jail, overwhelmed with guilt and planning to commit suicide, Velma heard an evangelist on the radio. She surrendered her life to Christ, who transformed her. No longer feeling alone and worthless, Velma sought to point others to Christ. During her six years in prison, she testified to fellow inmates, prayed for them in their darkest times, and shared with them the good news of Jesus. In 1984, at the age of 43, she received the death penalty.

Jonah fled from God’s command to preach in Nineveh by running the other direction, and Velma fled emotional pain by numbing herself with drugs. Jonah’s prayer was filled with repentance, and he praised God for saving him from death. Velma was dying spiritually and emotionally until she repented in her jail cell. She praised God for hearing her and saving her soul.

Father, no one is beyond Your grace—including me. Thank You for hearing me when I repent. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Context of Our Hope

[God’s grace] teaches us to say “No” to ungodliness and worldly passions . . . while we wait for the blessed hope—the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ (Titus 2:12-13).

Scripture: Titus 1:1-3; 2:11-15

Song: “Build My Life”

My coworker leaned close and whispered, “Look at him!” My eyes found our student at the cafeteria table. The little boy lifted an orange slice to his nose and sniffed. He gingerly stuck out the tip of his tongue and touched it to the orange. I grinned and gripped my coworker’s arm in excitement. She bounced on her toes. Then our student put the slice to his lips and bit. “I can’t believe it!” I squealed.

Out of context, it seems strange to get so excited about a five-year-old eating an orange. But that particular student had special needs and would only eat baby food and liquid nutritional supplements. That day in the cafeteria was the first time we’d observed him eating solid food. It was a big deal.

The context for today’s passage is Christ’s return to rule the earth and give us eternal life with Him. Eternity has been the plan “before the beginning of time” (Titus 1:2). However, without the context of that blessed hope, saying “no” to ungodliness and living self-controlled, upright lives might seem pointless to us, even strange. But because we know the truth and look forward to Christ’s return, we walk uprightly in hope and joy.

Father, thank You that You are coming again. As I anticipate Your return, I will seek to honor and please You by the way I live. In Jesus’ name, amen.