

Speak Up!

I will sing of the LORD's great love forever; with my mouth I will make your faithfulness known through all generations (Psalm 89:1).

Scripture: Psalm 89:1-4, 27-37

Song: "I Will Sing of the Mercies of the Lord"

I once attended a worship event with some of North America's most popular Christian musicians. I laughed to myself when one of them said, "Don't worry if you can't sing; no one else will be able to hear except the person in front of you. Just sing anyway!"

The writer of Psalm 89 is full to overflowing with a song testifying to God's goodness. It's a reminder to us that our testimony is worth sharing even if it doesn't seem as dynamic as what God has done in someone else's life. Such comparisons put us at risk of being silenced from telling of God's goodness in our own lives. Let the truth be told: everyone has a testimony, and God can use each voice!

Every day we need to realize that there will be people in front of us who do not know God. Our response to a world that does not know Him is to raise our voices, to tell our stories. As we live our lives with thankful hearts, may many people come to know Jesus and begin sharing their own testimonies.

Father, give me courage to tell the world about what You've done for me. In Jesus' name, amen.

December 9–15. **Zach Schaar** lives in Canton, Ohio, with his wife, Gail, and two daughters, Emmylou and Magnolia. He holds a degree in biblical studies from a Christian university.

Don't Give Up

[Zechariah and Elizabeth] were childless because Elizabeth was not able to conceive, and they were both very old (Luke 1:7).

Scripture: Luke 1:5-17

Song: “Higher Ground”

Colonel Sanders (1890–1980) sold his first Kentucky Fried Chicken franchise in 1952, and so began his rise to fame and fortune in the fast-food industry. If you were to read his biography, however, you would learn of his interpersonal struggles, countless failed ventures, and dreams that never came to pass. Remarkably, he didn't lose hope over the years, and when his big break finally came, he was in his sixties.

In Bible times, having children was a sign of having obtained God's favor. Elizabeth, a descendant of Aaron's priestly line, had never been able to conceive. While others may have seen her as being outside of God's favor, God's plan was to bless her in her old age with a special son. From a human perspective, it looked as though her best years were behind her. Yet, in God's providence, she became the mother of John the Baptist, the forerunner who would prepare the way for the long-awaited Messiah.

God's grace manifests itself uniquely in each of our lives. The Lord's ways are not our ways, and His timing does not always line up with ours. However, that doesn't mean He is absent or overlooking us. He is always at work, moving things, lining them up, orchestrating them—working all things together for the good of those who love Him (Romans 8:28).

Father, give me the ability to persevere even when I can't see the blessing. In Jesus' name, amen.

No Doubt About It

[The angel Gabriel said to Zechariah,] “Now you will be silent and not able to speak until the day this happens, because you did not believe my words, which will come true at their appointed time” (Luke 1:20).

Scripture: Luke 1:18-23

Song: “Only Believe”

The effects of coffee beans are thought to have been discovered by an Ethiopian goat farmer. Apparently the farmer’s goats ate the beans and became highly energetic afterward. Later, when people began grinding the beans and preparing them as a drink, there were some who doubted it could be beneficial and even said it was evil. Today, however, despite past skeptics and naysayers, coffee helps many of us get the day started, delivering on its promise to provide a boost of energy.

Through the angel Gabriel, God promised the elderly Zechariah the blessing of a son. But to Zechariah, this promise seemed suspect, even impossible. Regardless of what things looked like to Zechariah, however, God was able to deliver on His promise. As a consequence of his doubt, Zechariah was unable to speak until the promise came to fruition. Yet even in Zechariah’s silence, the Lord was still present, working out His plan, fulfilling His promise.

The Bible says that all God’s promises are “Yes” in Christ (2 Corinthians 1:20). When He calls for something to come to pass, even if it’s in the distant future, we can trust fully in His good plan.

Father, when I’m tempted to doubt You, grant me renewed faith to trust that You’ll fulfill each promise, just as You have always done. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Made Strong in God's Presence

Blessed are those whose strength is in you, whose hearts are set on pilgrimage (Psalm 84:5).

Scripture: Psalm 84

Song: "You Are My All in All"

Recently the Lord began to bring to my mind people who are dealing with trials: threats of divorce, cancer, paralysis, and persistent anxiety to name a few. As I pondered how to respond to loved ones who are hurting, God seemed to lead me to Psalm 84.

Scripture records that at appointed times during the year, the Jewish people would make the trek to Jerusalem to worship at the temple. These travelers had trials and tragedies in their lives, just as we do. The writer of this psalm understood, though, that if God's people could just press on to God's house—to His temple—they would find peace in His presence. While some of them may have grown weak on the journey, they would soon become strong as they worshipped at the temple of their Holy God.

It's usually not helpful to tell someone who is hurting to find the strength to stand up and move on. But what I have come to understand is that the difference between a hurting person and a healing person is often found in a change of heart, a change of mind, and a change of perception regarding God's nearness. Thankfully, we do not have to make the journey to Jerusalem to experience the peace of God. We can call on Him at any time, and He will be with us, even in our pain.

Father, give me strength and hope when I'm struggling. In Jesus' name, amen.

The Way to Well-Being

[God said,] “You who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its rays. And you will go out and frolic like well-fed calves” (Malachi 4:2).

Scripture: Malachi 4

Song: “Trust and Obey”

I recently read an article by a farmer who raises dairy cows to produce organic milk. Weather permitting, he allows them to graze in the open pasture, where they are free to roam as they wish. He found that when cows are given the ability to graze without being confined, they are happier and healthier overall, and healthy cows produce better milk.

While the Israelites were God’s chosen people and God desired to grant them peace and freedom, they continued to stray from God’s ways, stumbling along in their sin. God knew that a happier, more productive quality of life would only be possible when Israel would trust in Him completely for fulfillment. Malachi’s plea was for the people of Israel to acknowledge and obey God and return to His paths of righteousness.

How we view God impacts how we respond to Him. Do we trust God’s Word when it says that no weapon formed against us will prosper (Isaiah 54:17)? Do we believe that He has given us everything we need to thrive spiritually (Ephesians 6:10-17)? God has good plans for us, and they all start with trusting His goodness and obeying His Word.

Father, I yield my heart today to walk in Your life-giving ways. Thank You that as You lead me in paths of righteousness, I will thrive! In Jesus’ name, amen.

Our Good God

[Elizabeth's] neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown her great mercy, and they shared her joy (Luke 1:58).

Scripture: Luke 1:57-66

Song: “Holy, Holy, Holy! Lord God Almighty!”

My wife and I desire to make God the center of our marriage. Recently the Lord seems to be bringing us into new territory as we've been coming alongside married couples who are struggling. One of these people commented about how different my wife and I are from many others our age—that we somehow have the capacity not to just manage our marriage but also to make time to serve God. This observation opened the doorway to sharing our testimony and rejoicing over all that God has done in our lives.

God's mercy, not our striving, is at the center of everything He gives us. For Zechariah and Elizabeth, what once seemed impossible was now a reality. In His mercy, God blessed this faithful couple with their son, John. For the remainder of their days, they would always have a story to tell others about what the Lord had done in their lives.

Walking with God has shown me that I am only the vessel into which He pours His mercy. As a Christian, I can boldly share my testimony to invite and encourage others to seek God in their own lives and to discover what He can do for, in, and through them.

Father, remind me of the mercy and goodness You have poured out in my life, and give me the opportunity to speak of it today. In Jesus' name, amen.

Bless Our Youth

Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied: “. . . You, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High; for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him” (Luke 1:67, 76).

Scripture: Luke 1:67-80

Song: “To God Be the Glory”

Last month my oldest daughter graduated from preschool. As a gift, teachers gave the students picture Bibles. Every night, my daughter and I flip through the pages of her Bible together until she finds an unfamiliar story and will ask me to read it to her. God has been working in her life, giving her the desire to know Him more deeply. This drives me to a posture of prayer as I thank the Lord and ask Him to use this little girl for something meaningful in His kingdom in the years to come.

Immediately after John’s birth, Zechariah spoke prophetically over him. These Holy Spirit-inspired words were a glimpse into this special baby’s future. Later, John would become known as John the Baptist and would usher in the ministry of Jesus the Messiah to a people awaiting His arrival.

As I think of the up-and-coming generations, I can’t help but pray for God’s wisdom, righteousness, strength, and love to fill their lives as they embark on the journey God has set out for them. It’s important that we spend time with our children and youth, speaking life-giving words of God’s truth and love to them, encouraging them to grow strong in the Lord.

Father, give me a heart to pray for young people that they might know You and make You known. In Jesus’ name, amen.