

All Day Long

You are my God; have mercy on me, Lord, for I call to you all day long (Psalm 86:2–3).

Scripture: Psalm 86:1–7, 10–17

Song: “What a Friend We Have in Jesus”

Sometimes when young children finally begin to speak, the words come in a torrent: “Watch me!” “Hold me!” “I’m hungry!” No longer does a 2-year-old have to suffer a wet diaper or a dry throat in silence. At times, the demands may seem endless. More than one exhausted parent has confessed to me that they occasionally long for the peaceful days before their child discovered words.

I’ve wondered whether God ever feels that way about me. Like the psalmist, I call on God all day long: “I need a parking space, Lord!” “Would You provide a quick cure for this cold?” “Could we have a nice day for the picnic?” On a given day, I have any number of requests for divine assistance. From my human perspective, I imagine God covering His ears in fatigue, but that’s not who God is.

God hears our prayers and responds with abundant love. He is pleased, not frustrated, when we turn to Him. In answer to our prayers, God showers us with His mercy and deliverance. Will God always give us everything we ask for? Of course not; but like a loving parent, God hears us and gives us what He knows is best for us.

Father, I thank You for faithfully hearing my prayers today and for abundantly blessing me along my way. In Jesus’ name, amen.

April 28–May 4. **Michael Brewer** lives in Kentucky, where he spoils his granddaughters, preaches frequently, and nurtures a butterfly garden.

Unfading Glory

When the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away (1 Peter 5:4).

Scripture: 1 Peter 5

Song: “There Is a Crown for Me”

When I received a necklace of flowers at the airport in Hawaii, I wore the exotic blossoms draped around my neck throughout the day. By the next morning, however, the blooms were limp and lifeless. Too fragile to serve as a keepsake, the lei's short-lived beauty lingered only as a sweet memory.

In a similar vein, ancient athletes competed for a wreath given in recognition of their victorious efforts. These leafy crowns were woven from branches of olive or myrtle. Such a crown was a fleeting honor, a glory that soon shriveled. The rewards and accolades we receive in this world will wither away. Ribbons fray, trophies tarnish, certificates yellow, bouquets wilt. We are passing through this life, and our proud awards will scarcely outlive us. By contrast, Christ offers us an unfading crown of glory. In today's passage, the crown mentioned is specifically promised to congregational leaders, but 2 Timothy 4:8 assures us that Christ will crown “all who have longed for his appearing.”

Society scarcely notices goodness and decency, but our Lord values every loving deed and sacrificial gift. We are certainly not saved by our works, but I like to imagine that the quiet, unrewarded kindnesses of life are as the gold from which Christ will shape our crowns.

Father, as I live this day, help me aspire not to the momentary praise of this world, but to the eternal crown that You have promised. In Jesus' name, amen.

Finding Our Focus

This I call to mind and therefore I have hope (Lamentations 3:21).

Scripture: Lamentations 3:21–36

Song: “Count Your Blessings”

I had a sore back recently. Whether in my car or in my recliner, my thoughts circled around the pain. *How long will this last? What medication might help? Should I see a doctor?* Thankfully, a few days with aspirin and a heating pad brought relief. But as I look back, I realize how absorbed I became in my discomfort, as if my sore back was all I could think about.

Lamentations is a heartbroken cry over the destruction of Jerusalem. In a time of immeasurable suffering, God’s people surveyed their world and saw only devastation. How striking it is when the poet shifts his focus to God’s mercy and salvation! In the midst of misery, the lament suddenly veers toward divine love and faithfulness. The pain doesn’t vanish, but now it is by tempered by hope. Perhaps we can learn from this passage.

Many of us make a habit of focusing on our problems instead of our blessings. In my case, I had movies to enjoy, a comfy chair, and time to rest. But rather than giving thanks, I preferred feeling sorry for myself. I don’t want to belittle our pain—neither physical nor emotional—but maybe life is better when we take time to look up from our problems to give thanks for God’s good gifts. By focusing on God’s present goodness, we can hope for a future on the other side of pain.

Father, through my ups and downs, help me not to lose sight of Your goodness to me. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Reminders

Dear friends, this is now my second letter to you. I have written both of them as reminders to stimulate you to wholesome thinking (2 Peter 3:1).

Scripture: 2 Peter 3:1–10

Song: “Just a Closer Walk with Thee”

Many years ago, I had a neighbor who always called after her children as they dashed for the school bus. Her message never varied: “Remember, I love you!” Depending on the day, the kids’ response might be a warm smile, a quick wave, or even a dismissive eye roll. But no matter what, they never left without their mother’s reminder.

I believe reminders are important. So did the apostle Peter. In today’s passage he indicates that this is the second letter being sent as a reminder—a review of Christian values and convictions. Reminders point our thoughts toward things that matter. Reminders strengthen and comfort us in a changing world. I’d like to believe that my faith is so firm and focused that I’ll never grow forgetful, but I know better.

Studying the Bible and memorizing psalms provide reminders for me. Other people I know tune in to Christian music, go on periodic retreats, spend time serving children or seniors, or minister to the homeless in Christ’s name. Other great ways to turn our thoughts toward God include spending prayerful time in nature and gathering with other believers for worship. Our preferred reminders might vary to some degree, but we all must be reminded that we belong to Christ and are called to walk closely with Him.

Father, when I am distracted, remind me of Your nearness, Your redeeming love, and Your claim on my life. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Spotless

Make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him (2 Peter 3:14).

Scripture: 2 Peter 3:11–18

Song: “There Is a Fountain”

I don't think of myself as a slob, but I have a knack for attracting stains. Ink marks or dribbles of coffee constantly find their way onto my clothing. I couldn't count how many times I've arrived for worship services flecked and specked with the morning's mishaps. Even if I make it to church unstained, in our congregation full of huggers, I'm likely to leave with a smudge of makeup on my shoulder. I guess I'm one of those people who shouldn't wear white.

I shudder when Peter urges us to be spotless. *Me? Spotless?* Of course, Peter's talking about our conduct, not our wardrobe. Even so, I'm also inclined to sin's smudges, such as a surge of envy or judgment or blame. While my goal is to keep in step with God's Spirit, when I fail to do so, my own ways of doing things lead to stains and streaks.

If I bore the whole responsibility for becoming unblemished, I'd give up. Thankfully, Christ is at work in me. He can remove the impurities in my heart and plant His righteousness in their place. Jesus can accomplish a cleansing beyond all my aspirations. Yes, sometimes I'm a mess, both inside and out, but God's grace is the ultimate stain remover.

Father, I want to live a life that pleases You, but when I fall short, I look to You to wash me in the purifying grace of Christ. In Jesus' name, amen.

Putting Our Trust Where It Belongs

David said to God, “I have sinned greatly by doing this”
(1 Chronicles 21:8).

Scripture: 1 Chronicles 21:1–13

Song: “Only Trust Him”

I sat with a friend while her husband underwent risky surgery. After a long wait, the surgeon finally appeared with good news. In an outburst of relief, my friend blurted out to the doctor, “Oh, thank you! And thank God!” Offering a wry smile, the surgeon replied, “Not in that order, I hope.”

In today’s passage, David’s head count was intended to clarify the size of the king’s army. Now that David had become securely enthroned as king over Israel, it seems that in his success, he was slipping into a sense of self-sufficiency. Like the kings around him, David was taking stock of his military strength rather than fully trusting God. When David proceeded with the census despite the objections of his advisers, the results of David’s misplaced trust were catastrophic.

We might think of trust at two levels: limited and unlimited. In daily life we trust neighbors, teachers, mechanics, and countless others in limited ways (since even the finest people and the best human resources will fall short). Sometimes firefighters cannot save the house or the physician cannot cure the cancer. This is why our unlimited trust belongs to God alone. Only God is always sufficient. Yes, we can trust one another *and* we trust the Lord, but let’s keep these in the right order.

Father, I’m not afraid to lean on others, but I trust You to be my unshakeable rock and my sure salvation. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Costly Gifts

[King David said,] “I will not . . . sacrifice a burnt offering that costs me nothing” (1 Chronicles 21:24).

Scripture: 1 Chronicles 21:14–30

Song: “Is Your All on the Altar?”

Every year after Christmas, I gather with friends for a tongue-in-cheek gift exchange. We each bring a holiday gift we received but don't want to keep. There's generally an assortment of “loud” ties, unlikely books, and surplus calendars. One friend who has gluten sensitivities always brings a fruitcake. Once we're all there, we each draw a number to distribute the gifts. Maybe I'll end up with something I like or maybe not, but either way, I've traded some present that cost me nothing.

When David negotiated for land on which he would build an altar to the Lord, he refused to accept the plot for free. David would not bring to the Lord an offering at someone else's expense. It's not that every gift to God must carry a price tag, but gifts from the heart nearly always cost us something—time, effort, or personal commitment. The gift that pleases God is the gift of us, and such a gift is never cheap.

Although my friends and I swap gifts we don't really need, God knows exactly what gift I need. God sent a Savior, and His gift cost Him dearly. Having received so much from God, how could I bring an offering to Him that costs me nothing? When God has given me His best, how can I withhold mine?

Father, help me live this day as an offering to You: my gifts in Your service and my heart for Your glory. In Jesus' name, amen.