

Caught in Action

“Do not defraud or rob your neighbor” (Leviticus 19:13).

Scripture: Leviticus 19:13-18

Song: “It Is Well with My Soul”

Our electricity bill had steadily risen for a couple of months without explanation. Then one hot summer evening, the electricity unexpectedly shut off. After the crew from the utilities company arrived, they discovered the problem: new neighbors in an adjacent apartment building had somehow rigged their building to tap into our home’s power lines. No wonder our bills were so high!

Theirs was an extreme case of robbing one’s neighbors, but it illustrates just how far some people will go to do so. I don’t remember whether the company refunded my parents’ money for overcharges. I do remember how my mom and dad responded to our neighbors’ abhorrent actions: initially angry about the situation, they eventually forgave our neighbors, then befriended them.

It’s not always easy living in community. And robbers and cheaters complicate matters by destroying a community’s tranquility. They put people on edge, shattering peace of mind and sowing discord among neighbors. People can’t thrive in such situations, ever.

As believers, we know we’re supposed to treat others like we want to be treated. That means, as today’s verse reminds us, not defrauding or robbing anyone—in any way. Imagine how peaceful our communities would be if everyone took the verse to heart!

Heavenly Father, help us to live honorably among those we come in contact with daily. In Jesus’ name, amen.

August 3–9. **Lisa A. Crayton** is an author, freelance writer, conference speaker, and writing mentor living in Maryland. She loves writing material that helps others grow in Christ.

People Are Watching

Among God's churches we boast about your perseverance and faith in all the persecutions and trials you are enduring (2 Thessalonians 1:4).

Scripture: 2 Thessalonians 1:3-5, 11, 12

Song: "It Ain't Over"

We don't usually sign up for trouble, but it finds us anyway. And when it does, we encounter a dilemma: Will we face trials from a godly or from a worldly perspective? Some believers opt for the latter. They rely on the popular idea of "Fake it till you make it." That saying is often related to pretending success before it shows up, especially when dealing with thorny issues outside of our control.

The problem? "Fake it till you make it" spirituality is pretty weak. It can't help us weather spiritual storms, real-life affliction caused by sickness, financial crises, or family troubles. Plus, it can't power our prayer or inspire others during their troubles. What can? Faith and love. That's one lesson gleaned from today's reading.

The apostle Paul commended the Thessalonian church members' faith and love. He admits boasting to other believers about their perseverance and faith.

Trouble knocks on everyone's door. And most of us are keenly aware that people are watching how we handle it. What we often don't know, however, is how many are inspired by our examples of authentic spirituality in action. Let's commit to leaving room for that inspiration by shucking "Fake it till you make it" spirituality and trusting God as the Thessalonian believers did.

Heavenly Father, help me make wise, boast-worthy choices when trouble strikes, so that people watching me see a beacon of hope. In Jesus' name, amen.

Ready to Laugh

Blessed are ye that weep now: for ye shall laugh
(Luke 6:21, *KJV*).

Scripture: Luke 6:20-23

Song: “Trading My Sorrows”

A couple of days after my father’s funeral, some relatives and I decided to go to the movies. We sought a break from all of the visitors. And we wanted to relax and laugh. We selected a comedy movie with great reviews. Unfortunately, during the movie’s opening scene grief overtook me. I unexpectedly burst into tears, fled the theater, and hurried home. I cried myself to sleep that night.

Fast-forward a year later: My mother hosted a barbecue in celebration of my late father’s birthday. At the barbecue featuring some of my father’s favorite foods, relatives and friends shared fond memories of him; and we laughed ourselves to tears. That evening, some of us went to the movies. I had a blast, chuckling uncontrollably during some scenes. The difference? I still missed my dad—a lot—but the overwhelming grief I’d initially experienced had lifted.

When a loved one dies, it hurts. The resulting grief can be crushing at times. Other heartbreaking situations also may be equally difficult to bear. And it may be nearly impossible to stop crying and muster up a smile, let alone laugh.

Today’s verse is a lifeline at such times. It assures us that despite the floodgates of tears we shed, we will laugh again. That may seem unlikely if crying is your constant companion today, but know that God fulfills His promises. You will laugh again.

Heavenly Father, thank You for the promise and gift of laughter. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Wired for Good Deeds

Even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed
(1 Peter 3:14).

Scripture: 1 Peter 3:13-19

Song: “We’re Blessed”

“No good deed goes unpunished.” The first time I heard that adage was at work. A colleague had volunteered for a task and became embroiled in unnecessary conflict. He explained how the issue resolved, and sort of jokingly said he might never volunteer again. But there was still some conviction in his words. Why bother volunteering if the only rewards are headaches and conflict?

I’ve asked myself that when I have encountered challenges while trying to do good deeds, and especially when I’ve spoken up for others. Why do I bother? God’s wisdom compels me to try. Plus, I’m just wired to champion the underdog, the person most likely to be picked on, overlooked, or ignored. And truthfully, I love helping in a pinch. Besides, it’s hard for me to know that I have the ability or skill to assist and to just walk away without providing either.

Whatever the cause of the resistance to my efforts, I try to persevere. As I do, 1 Peter 3:14 gives me hope and courage.

Perhaps you have faced opposition and feel you’ve been unfairly targeted while helping others. If so, embrace today’s verse. Know that we are wired for good deeds—and blessed despite the challenges we face. So rather than run away from God’s invitation to maintain good deeds, embrace it, knowing He sees and applauds your efforts.

Holy Spirit, please help me persevere under pressure, and give me wisdom as I encounter resistance to doing what’s right. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Think About That

Brothers and sisters, think of what you were when you were called (1 Corinthians 1:26).

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 1:26-31

Song: “I Won’t Go Back”

By all accounts, God used a ragtag team of believers to spread the gospel from nation to nation. The apostle Paul makes that abundantly clear in today’s passage as he runs down the list of things the believers were not before they became Christians. By all accounts they had nothing much to offer, yet God still used them for His glory.

The apostle invites the Corinthian believers to think back to who and what they were before becoming Christians. Sometimes it’s a good exercise for us to follow their example because we too had nothing to offer but God still accepted us—and uses us. Thinking back helps us to remember how little we knew about God and spiritual things. It helps us remember how much we’ve changed to conform to our Savior’s image and to bear the fruit of the Spirit. And it keeps us humble, acknowledging that we can do nothing for God without His empowering Spirit.

Thinking back and recognizing the change God has brought in us can help us better serve God and others. For example, we can have more patience with those who flounder after their initial calls to follow Jesus. And as we succeed in God-given tasks, remembering will enable us to give God all the credit for everything. Have you forgotten who and what you were? What do you think: Is it time for you to take a trip down memory lane?

Father God, I give You glory for all You have done, and are doing, in my life. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Don't Play Favorites

My brothers and sisters, believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ must not show favoritism (James 2:1).

Scripture: James 2:1-7

Song: "I Surrender All"

One Sunday morning at church I entered the pew, put my bag down, and started singing along with the congregation. Within minutes, a gentleman plopped down next to me. I glanced sideways . . . and paused. He was dirty and disheveled. Throughout the service, I had opportunity to interact with the congregants, but each time I treated that gentleman differently. My coolness screamed favoritism. I repented but have not forgotten my behavior, which was akin to that in the illustration in today's Scripture passage.

Favoritism is pervasive. It occurs at church. It rears its head in families. And it shows up on job sites when supervisors talk up one employee's work while totally ignoring contributions from others.

Favoritism also stinks—unless you're on the receiving end of its benefits. But even then, from God's perspective, it is not welcome in the kingdom of God. It can have eternal consequences, causing people not to hear the good news because believers overlooked them while showing favoritism to someone else. God forbid!

Growing as a believer means being willing to admit one's shortcomings. Favoritism has been mine in the past. What about you? If you've struggled in this area, let's commit to ongoing change. Embracing today's verse, let's commit to giving equal treatment that draws people to the almighty God who never plays favorites!

Holy Spirit, help us. We don't want to show favoritism. Please strengthen us daily to model Christlike, impartial behavior. To Your glory, amen.

Watch Your Mouth!

Those who consider themselves religious and yet do not keep a tight rein on their tongues deceive themselves, and their religion is worthless (James 1:26).

Scripture: James 1:19-27

Song: “In Control”

Today’s Scripture passage is one of the very first I learned as a new Christian. Friends who had encouraged me to faith suggested I needed it. *Ouch*. They were right. Having grown up in a family known for quick, sarcastic wit and sometimes funny barbs, I was known for my “smart mouth” that could equally make a person wince or cry—a skill not needed or welcome in the kingdom of God.

Acting on my friends’ counsel, I painstakingly read and memorized Scriptures regarding the tongue and how to wield it as a vessel of blessing, not cursing. Still, I struggled with achieving that goal. I needed to change. I wanted to change. But I was relying on myself to become something God’s Word said I should become. Realizing the error, I switched tactics. I prayed about my wayward tongue, inviting others to pray in agreement with me. It took months before I could easily speak without being rude or sarcastic, my former version of trying to be funny.

Many people admit that they don’t want to become believers because they don’t want to change. What they fail to realize is that change can be a good thing. It can make us a better version of ourselves—one we never imagined. That happens when we give the reins of our lives—including our tongues—to God.

Heavenly Father, help me use my tongue in God-honoring ways. To Your glory I pray. Amen.