

Praising God in the Storm

Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God (Psalm 43:5).

Scripture: Psalm 43

Song: “10,000 Reasons (Bless the Lord)”

Discouraged, I buried my head in my hands and cried. We’d been friends for years, but everything had changed. My trust and my heart were broken. All that was left were painful memories.

A false accusation or betrayal from a friend can leave us discouraged. When the winds of adversity beat down our door, Scripture reminds us to encourage our souls by directing our energy to praising God. We praise God not to get something; we praise Him because He is our Savior and God. And we’ve already received so much. “Praise the LORD, my soul, and forget not all his benefits” (Psalm 103:2).

If you’re feeling down, take shelter in God. Offer Him your questions and doubts. Mostly, offer Him your thanksgiving and praise, even if your heart is not there yet. Singing songs of worship helps our thoughts come in line with truth. The truth is, God is good—all the time. The cross of Christ reminds us just how good He is, and how dearly He loves us. This is why we can sing God’s praise and put our confident hope in Him, even while weathering a storm.

Father, when I’m feeling down, help me to sing Your praise. You are my hope, my strength, and my redeemer. In Jesus’ name, amen.

September 21–27. **Leila Grandemange** lives in Virginia with her husband and several adorable dogs. She loves simple things like family dinner, walks in nature, and tea with friends.

Honesty Matters

“You must return the silver that was put back into the mouths of your sacks” (Genesis 43:12).

Scripture: Genesis 43:1-15

Song: “Blessings of Obedience”

Walking out of the store, I noticed that my bill was much less than expected. Apparently the cashier forgot to charge me for the large bag of dog food. I was tempted to drive off, but didn't. They thanked me for being honest and gave me the bag for free!

We can find ourselves in situations that test our integrity. When something comes to us by mistake, or even by our own fault, honesty obliges us to restore it to the rightful owner. Keeping it would be deceit. Dishonesty is enticing because it often brings financial gain or other worldly pleasures. But those are temporary and eventually come at a cost, some sort of consequences. We must maintain integrity in all situations, and with all people, even with people we do not necessarily depend on or need to impress.

God delights in those who walk uprightly. No worldly gain is worth breaking our fellowship with God. We must always choose to follow God's precepts, even when it's uncomfortable. This is how we shine like stars in the night, bringing glory to our Father. God's Word also indicates that obedience brings blessing. We have the blessing of a clear conscience, other blessings we may not recognize, and the deep satisfaction of knowing we made God smile. God's blessings to those who please Him add up to way more than a free bag of dog food.

Father, when my integrity is tested, help me to choose honesty—even when it's hard. In Jesus' name, amen.

From Sorrow to Joy

The cup was found in Benjamin's sack. At this, they tore their clothes (Genesis 44:12-13).

Scripture: Genesis 44:1-13

Song: "Joy Comes in the Morning"

In Bible times tearing one's clothes was a dramatic expression of sorrow, often displayed at the passing of a loved one. The action helped anyone nearby visualize the pain felt by those who mourned. It also signified a distance that seemed beyond repair.

Joseph's brothers tore their clothes, fearing for Benjamin's life. Similarly, when we fear for a loved one's life, our hearts may rip in two. We might learn of a cancer diagnosis or a cherished friend who passed away. But in the midst of such deep sorrow, God remains sovereign. He is the hope we cling to as we walk through the valley of despair.

The good news for the child of God is eternity in God's glorious presence. In light of such a great truth, we can, after a period of mourning, replace our "torn and tattered clothes" with "garments of praise." The psalmist writes, "Weeping may stay for the night, but rejoicing comes in the morning" (Psalm 30:5). Our hope is that the dramatic picture of devastating sorrow will, by God's grace, be replaced by the image of hands raised to worship, voices lifted in praise, and instruments playing as God moves us from sorrow to joy.

Father, when my heart is overwhelmed by grief, lead me to the Rock that is higher than I. Help me to trust You until the day You turn my sorrow to joy. In Jesus' name, amen.

Uncovered

“God has uncovered your servants’ guilt” (Genesis 44:16).

Scripture: Genesis 44:14-17

Song: “Thousand Tongues”

For over a decade I chased a dream rather than chasing God, thinking recognition would bring me happiness. But as difficult, confusing, and heartbreaking circumstances came up—like walls on every side—I found myself humbled before God, facing my guilt.

When God uncovers our guilt, we might feel ashamed or unworthy, as if standing naked before an all-knowing God. But God uncovers our guilt not to condemn or shame us, but in order to show us what we have done wrong in order that we can do something about our guilt. Of course, we must first listen to the Holy Spirit so we see our guilt. And then we must respond. There are many ways to respond, and Judah and his brothers do get this part right, by acknowledging their guilt.

It may feel daunting to face our guilt. But we need not fear, because our Father is merciful and kind. We are fully known, yet fully loved. This motivates us to keep a very short thread between sin and confession. A wise way to end each day is to ask the Holy Spirit to shine His light in our hearts so we can see our wrongs, acknowledge guilt, and be freely forgiven. (Remember, Jesus already paid the price.) Having been forgiven, we can then have peace with God. Where once we stood naked and ashamed, we are now clothed by His grace, and freed from the guilt of our shame.

Father, show me the things in my heart that displease You, that I might acknowledge my guilt and be restored. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Come Boldly

“Let me [Judah] speak a word to my lord [Joseph]. Do not be angry, though you are equal to Pharaoh” (Genesis 44:18).

Scripture: Genesis 44:18-26

Song: “Come to Jesus”

I inadvertently pulled in to park in a “no parking zone” but quickly realized it. I was just starting to leave when a cop stopped me. He had the authority to give me a ticket, but I quickly spoke up in defense of myself.

Judah understood he was in the presence of great authority, but he still spoke up—though cautiously. Similarly, we pray to the greatest authority, but we might hesitate to truly open our hearts before God to share the good, the bad, and even the ugly. Yet God’s Word invites us to “come boldly unto the throne of grace” (Hebrews 4:16, *KJV*). This implies speaking straightforwardly with confidence. We should never be irreverent, but neither should we be timid or ashamed to bare our hearts honestly before God and make our requests.

It’s not always easy to speak frankly with God, especially if we feel angry, ashamed, or filled with doubt. Yet God’s Word encourages us to do just that, because God dearly loves us. What a privilege and joy (and also a responsibility) to know that we can come boldly before our heavenly Father and tell Him exactly what’s on our minds, without fear of rebuke. Keep in mind that God welcomes you not only to come, but to come boldly.

Father, thank You for inviting me to speak all that is on my heart, without fear that You will be mad. In Jesus’ name, amen.

A Change of Heart

“Please let your servant remain here as my lord’s slave in the place of the boy” (Genesis 44:33).

Scripture: Genesis 44:27-34

Song: “Change My Heart, Oh God”

Nicky Cruz was the warlord of a notorious Brooklyn street gang. No authority figure could reach him . . . until he met a skinny preacher named David Wilkerson. After being confronted with God’s love, Nicky repented of his sins, did a complete turnaround, and dedicated his life to reaching urban communities with the gospel.

Deep, authentic sorrow is rooted in sincere recognition of our sin and in the awareness that we are helpless to do anything about our sin—except confess to God. It’s this kind of sorrow that leads to humility and to a mature repentance of sin. Judah demonstrates this kind of sorrow when he makes the magnanimous offer to sacrifice his own life as Benjamin’s ransom. This reveals that Judah is no longer the man who was filled with hatred and jealousy when he sold Joseph into slavery.

God wants us to be truly sorry for our sins, so much so that we seek a new course of action. In other words, authentic sorrow ought to produce authentic change—in our thoughts, will, emotions, and ways. Sometimes God may allow difficult circumstances in order to produce in us a broken and contrite heart, which helps lead to authentic sorrow and repentance. During those times, we mustn’t despair. For if God loves us enough to break us, He also loves us enough to remake us. It may take time, but God is faithful.

Father, create in me true sorrow for my sin, that I might be truly changed. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Surprised by Love

And [Joseph] kissed all his brothers and wept over them (Genesis 45:15).

Scripture: Genesis 45:1-15

Song: “Your Love Never Fails”

Broken by the effects of sin and difficulties during my teen years, I ran away from home. As I was walking down a road, a police car pulled up next to me, and the officer told me to get in. My parents were in the back seat. I was expecting harsh words, but was surprised to get only their love.

When Joseph revealed his identity, his brothers feared punishment. After all, they (minus Benjamin and Reuben; Genesis 37:29) had mercilessly sold him into slavery and brought incredible pain onto their father through Joseph’s supposed death. Yet now they were surprised by love! Joseph called kindly to them all: “Come close” (45:4).

Our Lord Jesus, being like Joseph, also encourages us to draw near with sincere repentance. After true repentance comes true reconciliation, followed by intimate communion with our heavenly Father. We see this illustrated as Joseph wept over and kissed his brothers.

Sometimes we think God is angry or deeply disappointed in us for our failures and faults. Yet the truth is that God loves us without measure, limit, or condition. Rather than living in fear of punishment, we can rest in God’s perfect love by placing our faith in Christ. Each time we draw near to God with authentic sorrow, we can discover God’s mercy and grace—and be surprised by His unfailing love. Although we really shouldn’t be surprised. He is so good!

Father, help me to live with the awareness that You are merciful and kind, slow to anger, and abounding in love. In Jesus’ name, amen.