

Don't Take God for Granted

“What more could have been done for my vineyard than I have done for it? When I looked for good grapes, why did it yield only bad?” (Isaiah 5:4).

Scripture: Isaiah 5:1-7

Song: “Great Is Thy Faithfulness”

It took only about a week of having my firstborn son at home to realize how I had taken my own parents for granted. (Everyone had told me this would happen, but I didn't believe them.) When I thought of the sacrifices by my parents, I wondered if they received the appreciation and honor they deserved?

God looked at His vineyard, Israel, and asked two rhetorical questions. The point is clear. He had done everything for them and yet they had taken Him for granted. God's faithfulness should have led the people to bear good fruit in their lives, but they responded in wicked and evil ways and had produced only stinky, wild grapes.

We might think God is withholding good things from us, but that is a lie. What has God done for us? “He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?” (Romans 8:32). His love has given us more than we could ever deserve or need.

Dear Heavenly Father, thank You for Your sacrifice for us. Help us to be faithful in return. In Jesus' name, amen.

November 2–8. **Kyle Bjerga** lives in a Chicago suburb with his wife and three boys. He is a pastor and loves spending time with his family, working out, reading, and cheering for the Chicago Cubs.

God the Gardener

In that day—“Sing about a fruitful vineyard: I, the LORD, watch over it; I water it continually. I guard it day and night so that no one may harm it” (Isaiah 27:2-3).

Scripture: Isaiah 27:2-6

Song: “God Will Take Care of You”

If you were to come to my house, you would notice that there are no plants in the house and the landscaping outside is nothing spectacular. The reason is that I am not the gardening type. I’ve been known to neglect plants until they died.

Thankfully, God is not like I am when it comes to His garden. And it’s a good thing because His garden is much more valuable: His garden is His people. He tends the garden, doing what needs to be done—giving it the nourishment it needs to be healthy and protecting it from harm. He works to produce fruit, which is precisely what Jesus says in John 15:1-2: “I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful.”

This is a great encouragement for Christians when we are facing adversity. We mustn’t forget that God, the gardener, continues to work for the good of His children. If God is the one watching over us, then there is nothing to fear, because we know that He is making all things new.

Heavenly Father, thank You for caring for Your people. In Jesus’ name, amen.

In My Name

“Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father” (John 14:12).

Scripture: John 14:8-14

Song: “Spirit of the Living God”

As a child growing up, I often heard things from my parents that I didn’t quite understand or believe. They would quickly follow up by explaining that when I was married, had a job, or had kids of my own, I would understand.

Jesus, in a similar way, told His disciples something they were not prepared for and probably didn’t believe. He said that they would do greater works than He had done because He was about to return to Heaven. I’m sure the disciples were thinking, *Jesus, You can’t leave us. How in the world can You say we will do greater works than You?—works that included raising the dead!*

Later in the book of John, Jesus also told His disciples, “Very truly I tell you, it is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you” (16:7). We can participate in these greater works as we continue the work the disciples did through the power of the Holy Spirit. The greater works are not more amazing, but instead, they are greater in scope. Let’s join Jesus in the work He is doing to reach the world through the gospel.

Heavenly Father, continue to do great works in and through Your people. In Jesus’ name, amen.

He Knows Your Name

“I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me. . . . I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. . . . They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd” (John 10:14, 16).

Scripture: John 10:11-18

Song: “He Knows My Name”

I remind my kids to know where I am and to stay close. On a busy summer day at our local zoo, my son was a little more adventurous, straying farther and farther away. I never lost sight of him, but among all the people he got turned around and wasn't looking toward me. When he finally turned to look back in my direction, I saw the look of terror on his face—until I called his name.

Children gain comfort, peace, and strength when they hear their father's voice. That's what it is like for those who follow the good shepherd, Jesus. When He calls, we feel His comfort, peace, and strength. It's the same voice that Mary Magdalene heard outside the tomb after the resurrection. As she wept in distress, Jesus merely called, “Mary.” She turned toward Him, and her sadness turned to joy (20:15-16).

Today, know that if you are in Christ Jesus, then He has called you into His flock. He knows you, He cares for you, and He has made you a son or daughter of the living God!

Father, thank You for giving Jesus as our good shepherd and for the privilege we have of being His flock. In Jesus' name, amen.

Stand with Jesus

“If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you” (John 15:19).

Scripture: John 15:18-25

Song: “I Need Thee Every Hour”

Each sport has some storied rivalries that go back into history. Sometimes these rivalries spark heated arguments or physical fights between fans. A few years ago, I witnessed a man who was verbally abused and threatened by fans at a baseball game because he was wearing the hat of the rival team. He was hated simply for supporting the visiting team.

Jesus warns the disciples that they will be hated simply because of their association with Him. This is not an easy truth, but one all disciples of Jesus need to prepare for in this life. We must not be surprised when we experience hatred, rejection, or even outright persecution for following Jesus. When Jesus’ disciples saw Him arrested, tried, and killed on the cross, they were witnessing the kind of hatred they also could later expect.

Our encouragement and hope come from the truth that God has chosen us out of the world and walks with us. As followers of Jesus, when we experience persecution for standing with Jesus, we remember His words, “In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world” (16:33). With this promise, we know our salvation is secure in the Father’s hands.

Father, even if the world hates, rejects, or persecutes me, I will stand in Your strength. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Bear Fruit

“I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful” (John 15:1-2).

Scripture: John 15:1-3

Song: “You Are the Vine”

My family and I visited a local garden that has a bonsai tree exhibit. Bonsai trees are a fascinating form of art and very pleasing to the eye. One of the necessary techniques in this art form is pruning away parts of the tree so it grows in a beautiful way that satisfies the artist.

Pruning cuts away branches not only to shape a tree or bush but also to help the plant be healthy and produce more fruit. Thankfully, the Bible lets us know what the fruit is that God wants to grow in our lives, while at the same time letting us understand God’s role in the process. The fruit that all Christians should aspire to display—and which reveals our connection to the vine, Jesus Christ—is “love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control” (Galatians 5:22-23).

This fruit that comes from our connection to Jesus is the work done by the Holy Spirit. God is with us, and we are connected to Jesus. This means that as we attempt to grow in obedience to Him, we can welcome the trials and challenges in life because we know that God is doing a pruning work so that we will be even more fruitful and—shall we say?—more pleasing to the eye of the artist who is working on us.

Father, continue to prune me so that I bear more and more fruit for the good of others and Your glory. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Love Motivates Love

“My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you” (John 15:12).

Scripture: John 15:4-17

Song: “Amazing Love”

It is easy for parents to command their children to do their chores, clean up, and brush their teeth. Other commands are more complex, such as share with others, be kind, and confess wrong choices. These commands can be harder for children to comprehend because they're still learning how to do them. The ups and downs of this learning process can frustrate children and parents alike.

We also experience a learning process to follow the commands of Jesus Christ. Jesus gave commands that involve loving our enemies and praying for people who persecute us (Matthew 5:44), denying ourselves (16:24), and loving each other. These commands can be overwhelming and seemingly unattainable. However, Jesus' words “as I have loved you” point us to our help.

Jesus did not just tell us to love and then leave us on our own to figure out how. He showed us what love looks like. It is selfless and sacrificial, like the love that led Jesus to wash the dirty feet of His disciples. Little did the disciples know that this example of love would soon be trumped by the ultimate sacrifice of Jesus' life for ours on the cross. When we hear Jesus' command to love, we also know to look to Him for help in knowing what loving others will require of us in this life as we grow to become more like the perfect example of love.

Father, thank You for loving us and for giving Jesus as our example of how to love. In Jesus' name, amen.