

## God Makes a Way

**When Peter was come to himself, he said, Now I know of a surety, that the LORD hath sent his angel, and hath delivered me out of the hand of Herod** (Acts 12:11, *KJV*).

**Scripture:** Acts 12:5-11

**Song:** “God Will Make a Way”

Standing up to a bully is easy—when an authority is standing close by. One day during my freshman year in high school, a bully started picking on me at lunch. The bully was huge, so I didn’t respond until I noticed a teacher entering the room. Seeing the authority figure gave me a sudden boldness, and I stood up and snapped, “Knock it off!” That was just before the teacher grabbed the bully by the shoulder and took him to the principal’s office. My unexpected confidence was a result of the authority’s presence.

God called Peter to preach, but Herod opposed him and cast him into prison. However, God changed Herod’s plans to execute Peter by sending an angel to miraculously deliver Peter so he could start preaching again. Herod’s bullying was no match for God’s authority.

Likewise, sharing the gospel or being a testimony for Christ can result in strong opposition. We are sometimes intimidated by difficult people and harsh circumstances. However, God is the greatest of authorities, and He always will make a way for us to do what He has called us to do.

**Dear Father**, help us to remember that You will make a way for us to do Your will. In Jesus’ name, amen.

## Helping Each Other

**If the Gentiles have been made partakers of [the Jerusalem saints'] spiritual things, their duty is also to minister unto them in carnal things** (Romans 15:27, *KJV*).

**Scripture:** Romans 15:22-33

**Song:** “The Family of God”

One good turn deserves another—especially when it concerns your mother. Debbie Gump had raised her son Dylan for 20 years, pouring her life and love into him. Sadly, Debbie had also been diagnosed with a failing liver, and she had waited patiently on an organ donor list for a transplant, but to no avail. When Debbie’s doctor suggested using a living patient for the transplant, Dylan immediately volunteered without being asked. Dylan wanted to give back to her. The transplant was successful, and both Debbie and Dylan have been reported to be in good health.

Writing to the Roman Christians, the apostle Paul announced his intention to bring a love offering to the saints at Jerusalem. This offering had been collected from the Gentile churches in Macedonia and Achaia (Romans 15:25-26). Paul pointed out that—because the Gentiles were the spiritual beneficiaries of the Jews—it was fitting that the Gentiles should give back to meet the Jews’ physical needs (v. 27).

In the same way, believers should give back to those who have been a spiritual blessing to them, such as pastors, evangelists, or other Christian workers. These servants of God often have financial needs that can be provided for by those to whom they have ministered. As part of God’s family, we can all help to meet each other’s needs.

**Dear Father,** help us to care for one another as fellow believers. In Jesus’ name, amen.

## Growing Up and Producing Fruit

**That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ** (Ephesians 3:17-19, *KJV*).

**Scripture:** Ephesians 3:14-21

**Song:** “Change My Heart, O God”

An apple a day is great—if the tree can produce one. When I was young, my dad planted two apple trees of the same variety in our backyard in hopes they would produce fruit. Unfortunately, years went by with the trees growing tall but never blossoming and bearing apples. We could not understand what was wrong and gave up hope. But then one year, our trees suddenly—and very unexpectedly—exploded in blossoms, which developed into countless apples that autumn. The growth of fruit let us know that all was well with our trees.

The apostle Paul desired that the Ephesian Christians would grow in their faith. Paul specifically prayed that they would grow stronger spiritually and be grounded in God’s love. Paul did not want the Ephesians to be fruitless.

Like Paul wanted for the Ephesians, God would have all believers grow in their faith. Accepting Christ is the first—but certainly not the last—step of a whole new life. The Holy Spirit will begin to produce fruit such as love, joy, and peace in the believer’s life as he or she yields to Him.

**Father**, help me to grow spiritually as I yield myself to You. In Jesus’ name, amen.

## The Pattern and Practice of Prayer

**After this manner therefore pray ye** (Matthew 6:9, *KJV*).

**Scripture:** Matthew 6:7-13

**Song:** “Sweet Hour of Prayer”

“When the going gets tough, the tough get going” was not just a saying to high school football player Brandon Burlsworth—it was his way of life. Although Burlsworth was offered scholarships to smaller colleges, he was determined to play for the SEC Arkansas Razorbacks, a team he was told he couldn’t make. However, Burlsworth was determined, and he worked out and practiced tirelessly as a walk-on until he made the team. His persistent work ethic led to his becoming team captain and earning All-American status. Burlsworth’s insistence on practicing until success, detailed in the film *Greater*, shows the power of persistent practice.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus gave His followers a model prayer to use. This prayer included praise, submission, petition, and confession. Since Jesus prefaced this prayer with a warning to avoid “vain repetitions” (Matthew 6:7; some versions say “babbling”), it is doubtful that He wanted people only to chant these words. Instead, the prayer outlines what are the most important aspects of prayer and serves as a guide for us to use in our daily prayer times.

Like those in the first century, today’s believers sometimes struggle to know how best to pray. Sometimes our prayers become only petitions and lack other important aspects. Sometimes the same phrases are repeated. In contrast, following Christ’s outline of prayer gives us guidance for our prayers and enriches our time with God.

**Dear Father**, thank You for giving us a model guide for prayer. In Jesus’ name, amen.

## Loving Our Enemies

**I say unto you which hear, Love your enemies, do good to them which hate you** (Luke 6:27, *KJV*).

**Scripture:** Luke 6:22-33

**Song:** “Love as I Loved”

It’s often been said that “father knows best,” but sometimes mothers do too. One day when I was a child in Sunday school, a visitor named Jason began picking on me, and I retaliated by calling him names. My mom, the Sunday school teacher, put an end to the conflict right away, insisting we were going to invite Jason over to our house to play. Surprisingly, Jason accepted the offer, and even more surprisingly, we both had a good time at my house. Mom’s insistence that I love my “enemy” with God’s love resulted in my making a friend.

Jesus admonished His followers to love others—but not just their friends. His command to love one’s enemies was quite revolutionary. Although quite natural for one to love friends, only the supernatural love of God could result in a person’s blessing someone cursing him, praying for someone mistreating him, and turning the cheek to someone’s hand that struck him. It is this love that transforms hearts and draws people to the cross.

It is still very easy to love friends and hate enemies. Yet as we strive to obey the command to love those who mistreat us, we will find our hearts becoming like Christ’s: full of compassion and mercy. And as this happens, our enemies may well be drawn to God and have their own hearts transformed.

**Dear Father,** help me to love with Your love. In Jesus’ name, amen.

## Taking the Hit

**[Jesus] kneeled down, and prayed, saying, Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done** (Luke 22:41-42, *KJV*).

**Scripture:** Luke 22:39-46

**Song:** “I Will Follow Jesus”

Ron Brown is a committed believer and an assistant coach for the Nebraska Cornhuskers football team. He knows that for a player to make a reception and advance the ball to the end zone, he must be willing to undergo the pain of being tackled. Likewise, to advance the cause of Christ believers must be willing to “take the hit” of criticism and even persecution from nonbelievers.

Christ’s agony in the garden of Gethsemane came as a result of knowing what lay ahead: the physical anguish of the cross and the spiritual anguish of bearing the sins of the world. However, despite the suffering that He was to endure, Jesus was willing to make the sacrifice to fulfill His calling as Savior of mankind. He gave His life because it would bring salvation to a lost and dying world.

The Lord’s example is an example, albeit a challenging one, for us as believers. Christ calls us to be willing to take the hit for Him, if necessary, when we have an opportunity to share our faith or to stand for what is right in a darkening culture. However, just as Jesus suffered for us, sacrificing himself to save us, so we too should be willing to sacrifice for Him in this world.

**Dear Father,** help me to sacrifice for You, keeping in mind how Jesus sacrificed himself for me. In His name, amen.

## Consecrated to Christ

**I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil. . . . Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth** (John 17:15, 17, *KJV*).

**Scripture:** John 17:13-24

**Song:** “I Have Decided to Follow Jesus”

Legend says that during the siege of the Alamo, Lieutenant Colonel William Travis gathered his men together and drew a line in the sand with his sword. The enemy had warned the Texans that, unless they surrendered, they would all be killed. Travis gave the men the option of leaving, but invited any willing to fight to the end to cross the line and join him. Every man but one crossed over the line and willingly sacrificed his life for liberty.

In His upper-room prayer, Jesus asked for His disciples to be consecrated to God. He prayed not that they would be taken out of the world or isolated, but that they would be distinct from the world as far as the way they lived; that is, set apart for the Lord’s work. The time was approaching when Jesus would ascend back to Heaven, and His disciples would need to be dedicated to God in order to effectively spread the gospel.

Similarly, believers today need to be consecrated to God in order to effectively serve Him. It is tempting to be fence-sitters in our culture, trying to please both God and the world. However, it is only when we are willing to cross the line and set ourselves apart to Christ that we can truly be used by Him in this world.

**Dear Father**, help me to be fully dedicated to You that I might serve You better. In Jesus’ name, amen.