

A Promise with Backbone

“As a shepherd looks after his scattered flock when he is with them, so will I look after my sheep” (Ezekiel 34:12).

Scripture: Ezekiel 34:11-16

Song: “The Lord’s My Shepherd”

Hurricanes cause a crisis through destruction to lives, property, and neighborhoods. People sometimes lose their jobs or can’t attend school because buildings are decimated. Possessions get washed away, people are injured, and lives are lost. Workers who are trained to give comfort to people in such times sometimes find it difficult to convince victims that life will ever return to normal. But people are not really able to guarantee normalcy anyway.

God’s people were in a crisis of exile, scattered from their homeland. God sent Ezekiel with a word of comfort that He would care for them as their shepherd and bring them back into His goodness in their homeland (Ezekiel 34:13). The promise was meaningful because it was God’s, and He would lead the people into His promise (v. 15). God’s promises have backbone.

Our health can slip away. Wealth can be lost. Possessions can be stolen or destroyed. Loved ones become sick and die. But in all circumstances we can hold on to God’s promise of His love and care. He has the power to keep His promises. His promises have backbone.

Father, thank You for caring for us with the power to keep Your promises and restore us in Your love. In Jesus’ name, amen.

June 1–6. **Wanda B. Pelfrey**, a retired preschool teacher, lives in Georgia and writes inspirational mysteries with her husband, Danny, a retired former minister.

The Good Gift of Gardenias

Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment (1 Timothy 6:17).

Scripture: 1 Timothy 6:17-19

Song: “God of the Earth, the Sky, the Sea”

On a morning walk I came to a large gardenia bush in full bloom and stopped to enjoy the fragrance. I have loved gardenias since my childhood and appreciated that bush as if it were God’s gift to me that day. But that bush was also a gift from the people who planted and cared for it. Without those people and their work, it most likely would not have been there to enjoy.

God created everything good, and we are to receive it all with thanksgiving and for our good pleasure (1 Timothy 4:4). We use our ability to nurture creation—for us and others to enjoy, whether it be in our yards or a flowerpot on our doorsteps. Paul also tells us that our financial resources are gifts that we can enjoy but also share to enrich the lives of others (1 Timothy 6:18).

Everything we have is a gift that we can use for our good and to help others know God and the hope we have in His goodness to all people.

Father, thank You for Your gifts to me. Help me recognize Your goodness and share it in ways that will lead others into Your blessing. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Going to the Top

When [Jesus and the disciples] came to the crowd, a man approached Jesus and knelt before him (Matthew 17:14).

Scripture: Matthew 17:14-20

Song: “He Leadeth Me”

While in college, I worked in customer service at a large department store in Atlanta. Other than taking layaway payments, my job pretty much consisted of handling complaints from customers who were dissatisfied with a product or service. Several times a day I heard the words, “Let me speak with your manager.” Even when the problem was something I easily could have dealt with, and I had been my most charming self, a customer would want to bypass me and go straight to the top.

The desperate dad in today’s Scripture had dealt, without satisfaction, with Jesus’ disciples while Jesus was on the mount of transfiguration. Upon Jesus’ return, that dad went straight to the top. He went to Jesus, knelt down, and pleaded his case. Immediately the problem was solved. His son was healed.

Often I realize that I have been trying to solve problems myself, and/or seeking help from good people, when I should have gone to the top first. I know my first line of defense, in any situation, should be prayer to my Heavenly Father. He may guide me to do something. He may lead me to good Christian friends for support or counsel. My first step, in any case, should be to go to Him.

Father, thank You for the gift of prayer and Your promise to meet us in every trial. In Jesus’ name, amen.

A Glad Giver

“Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom” (Luke 12:32).

Scripture: Luke 12:22-34

Song: “Doxology”

Like many quilters, when asked how much I would charge to make someone a quilt, I reply something like, “Way too much. I only make them for love.” Now that does not mean I have notions of grandeur about my quilting ability. Quite the opposite is true. But I know how much time and expense go into a quilt. No one would be willing to pay what I would have to charge; however, I love to make quilts as gifts. In fact, if a quilt has been made for a special occasion, it is hard for me to wait for the occasion to present it. The making and the giving bring me joy.

In today’s familiar Scripture, Jesus tells His followers to not worry about their needs. He knew they had left all to follow Him, and He used lessons from nature to remind them of God’s provision. But then He extended what the Father had given by saying, “Your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom.” He has not given just food and clothes, but also the kingdom. All this is not because He had to but because He was pleased to do so. God not only can and will provide for our needs, earthly and eternally, but it gives Him joy to do so.

Father, thank You for giving us the freedom to approach You confidently with our needs, knowing it gives You joy to provide for us. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Clearer Vision

“The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are healthy, your whole body will be full of light” (Matthew 6:22).

Scripture: Matthew 6:19-24

Song: “Be Thou My Vision”

During my last eye exam, I was told I am a candidate for cataract surgery when I “feel the need.” So far, I have not felt the need, even though folks who have had the same surgery tell me the world will look much clearer once it is done. I really do not notice a need now, but I am sure I will notice a difference after the fact.

In today’s Scripture, Jesus seems to jump rather quickly from the topic of treasure to vision. Upon closer inspection, however, the jump does not seem so abrupt. Perhaps worldliness can cloud our spiritual vision, and if the “cataracts” of carnality are removed from our eyes, we will be able to see what has true value. Perhaps we need to examine our earthly treasures and see what heavenly value they have.

I have a home; I can use it to extend hospitality. I have a modest bank account; I can use it to do God’s work. I have a car; I can use it to spread the gospel and to serve others. Looking for heavenly meaning in earthly treasures can clear and strengthen our spiritual vision.

Father, giver of all good and perfect gifts, please help us see the gifts You have given us in the light of the eternal good they can do. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Reflecting

“Do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own”
(Matthew 6:34).

Scripture: Matthew 6:25-34

Song: “Simply Trusting Every Day”

One of the greatest blessings of growing older in the Lord is the long history of answered prayers and experiences of God’s care from which I can draw when hard times come. I know God can handle uncertainty, loss, heartache, and many other types of crises because I have experienced His doing so in my life multiple times. I have witnessed God’s care and comfort in the lives of many others too.

Today’s Scripture is yet another example of Jesus referring to God’s feeding of birds and clothing the grass of the fields to remind those listening that God cares about and can handle even the small, everyday needs we face. Jesus also acknowledges that we will face challenges in this life. Then He counsels that we should face them one at a time, day by day, confident that God is there to help us through. Young, old, or in-between, all of us can benefit from reflecting on the times God has brought us through difficult situations. Keeping a record of such times can strengthen our witness and give us the ability to help others who may be encountering like trials. It is a blessing to be able to say, “I know something of what you’re going through. This is how God saw me through a similar situation.”

Father, thank You for the assurance we have of Your presence when we face trials of any type. In Jesus’ name, amen.