

Awakened

“Lord, . . . you restored me [Hezekiah] to health and let me live” (Isaiah 38:16).

Scripture: Isaiah 38:16-20

Song: “Bless the Lord, Oh My Soul”

I entered the hospital feeling broken and afraid. But during the 15 days in bed, my soul awakened to God. I began to pray more and look for His goodness. The day I was released, I was overwhelmed with gratitude! Before going in, life was mostly about me. After, it was more about God.

God can use difficult times to re-direct us to what matters most, such as our relationships with family and friends, and especially with God. This was the case for King Hezekiah. After Hezekiah was healed, he clearly acknowledged that it was God who spared his life and answered his prayers. Then he refocused on praising and serving God. What a wonderful example to follow!

God gives us life and health so we might live our days to the praise of His glory. It is important that we recognize this and respond. Bless the Lord with your time, talents, treasures, and devotion. Remember the good things He has done for you, and even how He is at work in you now.

Father, in sickness and in health, awaken my soul to Your goodness, love, power, and marvelous blessings. I want to live each day in gratitude and praise to You. In Jesus' name, amen.

June 21–27. **Leila Grandemange** lives in Virginia with her husband and several adorable dogs. She loves simple things in life, such as time with God, family dinners, walks in nature, and tea with friends.

No Matter the Cost

John [the Baptist] had been saying to [Herod]: “It is not lawful for you to have her [his brother’s wife]” (Matthew 14:4).

Scripture: Matthew 14:1-12

Song: “Onward, Christian Soldiers”

Countless soldiers, past and present, have stood against injustice and have sacrificed to serve their country. Some costs they knew ahead of time, other costs they might not have known, and some they never could have imagined.

God brought John the Baptist into the world to serve God’s kingdom. He was faithful to his mission to call people to recognize their sin and come to repentance (see Luke 1:17). Some people ignored John and did nothing. Others paid attention and responded well. And a few listened and responded with hatred, as did Herod and Herodias (Matthew 14:3, 5, 8). John spoke out against their sinful marriage because of God’s law in Leviticus 18:16. That ultimately cost John’s life.

Jesus came “to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for” all who receive His salvation and follow Him (Matthew 20:28). Those who follow Jesus by speaking truth may experience hatred from the world and from Satan, the enemy of our souls. We can’t specifically know what the cost will be for each of us. But we know that keeping our eyes on Jesus and the glory awaiting us helps us have strength to remain faithful and speak the truth clearly, no matter the cost.

Father, empower me daily to walk in Your calling and to trust and obey You, even when I know it will be hard. In Jesus’ name, amen.

When Hard Times Come

When Jesus heard what had happened [to John], he withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place (Matthew 14:13).

Scripture: Matthew 14:13-21

Song: “Draw Near”

During my teen years, I once attempted to deal with strife at home and my own troubles by running away from home. Thankfully, my parents found me. A few years later, I gained the help I needed in God’s redeeming love. I gave my heart to Jesus and discovered that I didn’t need to run away to find comfort and consolation. I ran to Jesus.

When hard times come, we have many ways to respond. Jesus responded to the news of John the Baptist’s death by retreating alone to a quiet place. He may have wanted to grieve alone or talk to the Father. Often, Jesus went away from people to pray (Luke 5:16). After hearing hard news, there was no one else Jesus would rather be with than His Father.

Jesus is a model for us to follow. Hard times are never easy, but we are not without hope. The psalmist says it best: “God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble” (Psalm 46:1). Solitude with God helps us to distance ourselves from the world in order to draw closer to God, one-on-one. Quiet helps us receive the refreshing, clarity, and strength God offers us. He is the one who helps us endure hardship through His presence, goodness, and love.

Father, help me to seek moments alone with You, that I might know You more and live in Your power when life is hard. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Our Deepest Longing

“You are looking for me, not because you saw the signs I performed but because you ate the loaves and had your fill”
(John 6:26).

Scripture: John 6:22-29

Song: “Seek Ye First”

When I was a little girl, my parents gifted me with a precious springer spaniel puppy. He became my truest of friends and soothed my growing pains. But he was not able to fill the deepest longing of my heart. Years later, I found someone who could: Jesus Christ.

In today’s passage, Jesus had just blessed the crowds with a meal and a miracle. They followed Him, yearning for more. Knowing their hearts, Jesus pointed out their greater need for spiritual truth.

Each of us has a deep and profound ache within us (even if we’re not aware of it yet) that we try to fill. That longing was created by God and can only be filled by God, through a personal relationship with Jesus Christ—the “bread of life” (John 6:35). God loves us and provides for our physical needs. But He also offers so much more—the abundant spiritual life that comes when we put our faith in Him and love and pursue Him above all else. The physical blessings of life are wonderful things, and we can certainly ask God to provide for us. But the blessings we seek and enjoy are not meant to become gods we serve. Our aim in life ought to be to pursue the gift giver above the gift, and to turn our blessings back into praise.

Father, please feed my soul and satisfy the deepest longings of my heart in You. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Taste, See, and Tell

When the men of that place recognized Jesus, they sent word to all the surrounding country (Matthew 14:35).

Scripture: Matthew 14:34-36

Song: “Go Tell Everyone”

Right before Christmas, I was grocery shopping and came across the most delicious treat—Pecan Pumpkin Spiced Date Rolls! After tasting one, I bought eight more boxes as gifts for friends and family. They were simply too good not to share.

The psalmist writes, “Taste and see that the LORD is good” (Psalm 34:8). Wherever Jesus went, He was doing good. The men of Genesaret recognized that the miracle-working Jesus had stepped onto their shore. And so they spread the word. All around us there are people who need the healing touch of Jesus, in body and soul. If we truly recognize Jesus to be the Son of God, and believe that apart from Him there is no hope for men and women broken by sin, then we will feel compelled to tell others about Him. Jesus is gentle and humble in heart. He is compassionate and kind and abounding in love. He offers rest for the soul and so much more. He’s simply too good not to share! As children of God, we’ve been given the incredible privilege to taste and see God’s goodness. Now it’s up to us, as Christ’s ambassadors, to send out the good news of God’s redeeming love into our homes and communities, and wherever He has placed us.

Father, You’ve been so good to me. Please help me to taste and see Your goodness daily so that I will be compelled to tell others. In Jesus’ name, amen.

On Guard

“You must be on your guard” (Mark 13:9).

Scripture: Mark 13:9-12

Song: “I Can Hear Your Voice”

Government statistics indicate that 2,841 people in the United States died during 2018 in traffic accidents involving distracted drivers. Reports identify the diversions as talking or texting on a phone, eating and drinking, talking to people in the vehicle, and operating radios or other devices. Just a five-second diversion at 55 mph is like driving the length of a football field with your eyes closed, they say. That’s dangerous in traffic. We have to watch out!

Jesus told us to stay alert because our times are dangerous. We sometimes seem to be traveling at breakneck speeds while navigating the challenges of deceptive religious teachers, national conflicts, and natural disasters. These are signs of the beginning of the end (Mark 13:5-8). And while dealing with these challenges, we are to give witness for the gospel to all sorts of people, even some who are angry at us for what we believe and for speaking the truth (vv. 9-11). To navigate all this well requires that we be alert.

It is no wonder that Jesus tells us to be on guard. The good news is that we have the Spirit to counsel and guide us. Our part is to draw close to God daily and be aware of His presence in and around us. Let your time in the Word and prayer help you stay connected to God each day.

Father, help me go through this day on guard and ready for Your work in and through me for the gospel. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Never Alone!

When [Peter] saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, “Lord, save me!” (Matthew 14:30).

Scripture: Matthew 14:22-33

Song: “Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus”

My heart ached, my feelings went numb, and I didn’t know what to do. I was in a dark place called depression. During that season, what kept me from sinking into the depths of despair was Jesus. As long as I believed that He loved me and was with me, I knew there was hope.

Fear is a strong emotion. It can cause us to spiral downward and lose sight of God’s goodness and loving presence. Peter actually walked on water toward Jesus. But when he focused on the wind instead of on Jesus, he let fear in and began to sink.

The storms of life come in all shapes and sizes, but one thing they have in common is the ability to strike fear in our hearts. Thankfully, we can cry out to God in our weakness, as Peter did, and trust Him to save us. What incredible comfort to know that God is with us and ready to help us in our time of need. As we pray, read God’s Word, and fix our eyes on His faithful promises, we can experience His power and presence and find hope in the midst of despair. Sometimes God will still our storm; other times He will carry us through it. Either way, we are never alone! Jesus said, “Surely I am with you always” (Matthew 28:20).

Father, when storms come, help me to trust You and keep my eyes on You, not on my circumstances. In Jesus’ name, amen.