

The Pillowcase

“Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:10).

Scripture: Matthew 5:9-12

Song: “When Trials Come”

Hidden in a pillowcase in the prison was Adoniram Judson’s work: a yet unfinished Burmese translation of the Bible. A missionary to Burma in the early 1800s, Judson was accused of being a spy and was sent to a death prison. Judson did not let torture and imprisonment deter him from completing the translation. Due to his dedication to God’s work, millions of Christians today in Myanmar (formerly Burma) can trace their spiritual heritage to Adoniram Judson.

Though Judson suffered greatly throughout his life, he was blessed. He knew it didn’t come from enduring persecution and loss. He was blessed solely because he was a child of God. As a part of that blessedness, the kingdom of Heaven was his, and that gave him strength to complete his work.

As children of God, we are blessed—not because we have or endure, but because we are His. With our blessedness comes access to the resources of God’s kingdom: His strength, love, power, and wisdom. When we suffer, whether it’s due to persecution, mistreatment, pain, or loss, those resources are at our disposal to help us persevere through any situation we face. We too can complete our work.

Father, thank You that as Your blessed children, we can persevere because we are a part of Your kingdom. In Jesus’ name, amen.

July 19–23. **Tina Clark** is a children’s minister whose passion is to help followers of Jesus use their gifts and talents for God’s service.

Unwavering Dedication

I [Paul] eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death (Philippians 1:20).

Scripture: Philippians 1:12-20

Song: “With All I Am”

I called my camper’s name for what seemed like the hundredth time. Nearly all the campers had already made their way to the dining hall, eager to fill their stomachs after a busy day. But not my camper. Feet caked in mud and ignoring her hunger pangs, she had one goal: catch as many frogs as possible. Despite the bruises and scrapes she had received from slipping on the rocks by the stream, her goal remained the same—for the entire week. Her dedication to her goal never wavered.

Paul’s dedication to his goal was unwavering as well. No matter what happened to him, his singular focus was to bring glory to Jesus. Pain, persecution, and imprisonment didn’t distract him. Even from prison, he was only concerned with making sure the world knew Jesus’ salvation.

As we reflect on the circumstances of our own lives, we can take an inventory of what our greatest concerns are. If our minds are preoccupied with worries or our own needs, Paul’s example reminds us of our ultimate goal to bring glory to God. With His glory as our focus, those concerns won’t stand in our way of serving Him to the fullest.

Father, You deserve all our attention. When the concerns of life attempt to distract us, remind us of our purpose to bring You glory. In Jesus’ name, amen.

The Gift of Weakness

If I [Paul] must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness (2 Corinthians 11:30).

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 11:21b-30

Song: “You Are My All in All”

“No, you’re not!” the children exclaimed as I shared in children’s church how I am a shy person by nature. I was amused at their disbelief. Yet I understand why they were puzzled. They mostly see the energetic, exuberant, and enthusiastic side of me as I teach Bible lessons week after week. My inner struggle with fear is not visible to them.

If someone remarks that I’m good with children, I bring up my reserved nature more than my ministry qualifications. While that might not be a helpful strategy for promoting myself, it’s in line with Paul’s statement in 2 Corinthians 11:30. He had a lot he could have boasted about, but it was his weaknesses that glorified God the most. Similarly, my fear of speaking in front of other people showcases what God can do through me in children’s church.

When we showcase our weaknesses, we essentially tell the world to look at God instead of us. Our lives become a platform for others to see God’s power and exclaim, “Wow, look what God has done!” In this way, our weaknesses no longer have to be aspects of ourselves that we’re ashamed of. These weaknesses can be instruments to display God’s glory and power.

Father, instead of boasting about my strengths, I humbly give You my weaknesses. Please use them to Your glory and to expand Your kingdom through me. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Out of Food

In this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have? (Romans 8:24).

Scripture: Romans 8:18-25

Song: “Hope Has a Name”

Three hundred hungry children waited expectantly for breakfast. It was time to eat, but there was no food at the orphanage. George Müller (1805–1898), the orphanage director, had the children sit down in the dining room. With nothing for them to eat, Müller still thanked God for the food. As he waited, a knock came at the door. It was the baker with three batches of bread. Another knock followed. This time it was the milkman with enough milk for every child.

When Müller sat those children down in the dining room, it was with the hope that God would provide. He did not yet see the provision—there simply was none. He had not asked the baker or the milkman to show up. His hope rested in knowing that God would come through as He always had.

We throw around the word hope, using it interchangeably with wish. But hope in God is more powerful. It’s knowing that God will come through, even if the circumstances around you aren’t coming together. Don’t be discouraged if you can’t see what you’re hoping for. That’s what hope is all about. After all, if you could see it, you wouldn’t need to hope for it! Hold on to hope, and wait as God comes through on His promises.

Father, You always come through for us. When we feel like hope is lost, we will remember the truth: that You are our hope. In Jesus’ name, amen.

An Incredible Gift

The gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died by the trespass of [Adam], how much more did God’s grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many! (Romans 5:15).

Scripture: Romans 5:12-17

Song: “Grace Greater than Our Sin”

As a man stood before her with his arm outstretched, Corrie ten Boom was faced with a difficult choice: to withhold or extend forgiveness to her former captor. Arrested for hiding Jewish people in their home, Corrie and her sister Betsie were eventually sent to the Ravensbrück concentration camp, where Betsie would die. It was at this camp that the man had worked. Even so, Corrie took his hand and offered him her wholehearted forgiveness.

The story of this act of forgiveness quickly spread and inspired many others to forgive. The trespass the man had committed against her was grave, making the gift of forgiveness all the more incredible. Our trespass against God is grave as well—one sin brought death to us all. In spite of that, just as Corrie ten Boom’s gift of forgiveness brought hope to countless others, God’s gift of grace through Jesus brings life to many.

God’s grace overflowed from Jesus to all who have put their hope in Him. The more we appreciate His incredible gift, the more we become willing to extend the same forgiveness to those who have hurt us. When we do, God’s grace spreads all the more.

Father, You have forgiven me so much. I commit to extending the same grace to others. Help me. In Jesus’ name, amen.

A True Model of Grace

The law was brought in so that the trespass might increase. But where sin increased, grace increased all the more (Romans 5:20).

Romans 5:18-21

Song: “Living Hope”

The more I thought about my friend, the more conviction gnawed at my heart. I had hurt her with my actions, and I felt ashamed. Though I had tried to apologize, my shame kept me from truly reconnecting with her. Years went by until conviction finally won the battle. With my mind and body filled with anxiety, I wrote an apology letter from my heart.

Imagining that my actions toward her had destroyed our friendship forever, I was amazed at her response. My friend offered her genuine forgiveness. The grace she extended to me was as close to God’s grace as I have yet seen from another human being. Because of how deep the wound was and how long I let it sit before going to her, the grace she showed me was all the more powerful.

The worse the sin, the greater the grace. This doesn’t mean we sin more or wait to apologize longer so that we can get more grace. It does, however, deepen our appreciation for the unconditional grace God gives to us. A grace that’s undeserved, yet paid for by one amazing act of sacrifice. It’s more than we ever could have asked for or expected. As we reflect on how deeply we’ve been forgiven, our hearts will overflow all the more with gratitude.

Father, help me more fully realize the gravity of my sin and appreciate the magnitude of Your incredible grace. In Jesus’ name, amen.

No Longer at Odds

Since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand (Romans 5:1-2).

Scripture: Romans 5:1-11

Song: “Your Grace Amazes Me”

Tears of frustration streamed down my face as another staff member comforted me. It had been a tough day at camp. My girls and I were at odds. Every instruction I’d given them had been promptly disobeyed. I thought the next day would be impossible to handle—until I returned to the cabin that night.

Left on my bed were notes from my girls, notes containing their heartfelt apologies. When I greeted them the next morning, we were reconciled. We were able to enjoy the day together because we were no longer at odds, the troubles of yesterday no longer straining our relationship. Similarly, when we become reconciled with God through Jesus, we are no longer at odds with Him. Where we once had a broken relationship due to sin, we have a fulfilling relationship because of His grace.

It’s in this grace that we can have confidence. Sadly, we sometimes remind ourselves of our guilt even though our sin has already been forgiven. This can make us feel far from God. In these times, we can remember Romans 5:1-2: “Through faith, we have peace with God.” This is an assurance of salvation. Beyond mere feeling, we can know that we stand forgiven in His grace.

Father, thank You that I stand in Your grace. When I feel condemned, I will remember the truth: You are near. In Jesus’ name, amen.