

Love, Live, Obey

The LORD your God will make you most prosperous . . . if you obey the LORD your God and keep his commands and decrees that are written in this Book of the Law and turn to the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul (Deuteronomy 30:9-10).

Scripture: Deuteronomy 30:6-14

Song: “Thy Will”

Two sisters played in the pool. They didn't know how to swim very well, so their mother cautioned them to stay in the shallow end. They did that for quite a while, but as they were tossing the ball, the youngest missed it and it floated into the deep end. Without thinking, she went after it. In no time she was struggling to stay above the water. Her brother had been watching. Immediately his strong arms grabbed her and pulled her to the side of the pool. The deep end is dangerous if you can't swim. Obeying matters.

Obeying matters to Christians too. God addressed His people before they entered the promised land, reminding them that obedience leads to blessing. What is God calling you to do today? Is there someone with whom you can share His love, peace, or joy? Maybe there's someone who needs to hear His story and yours. Do you need to “be still before the LORD and wait patiently” (Psalm 37:7)? Whatever it might be, just do it. Obedience leads to blessing.

Father, thank You for loving me and being there for me. Help me to obey You always. In Jesus' name, amen.

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July 26–August 1. **Bill Thomas** is a professor at a Christian college and lives in Washington, Missouri.

All Is Well

How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, “Your God reigns!” (Isaiah 52:7).

Scripture: Isaiah 52:1-10

Song: “Our God Reigns”

On June 14, 1814, Francis Scott Key wrote a poem that would later be set to music and become America’s national anthem. The poem was titled “Defence of Fort McHenry.” Key wrote it after witnessing the British bombarding that fort during the War of 1812. His inspiration? A lone US flag still flying over the fort at daybreak. Seeing it inspired the words “And the rocket’s red glare, the bombs bursting in air, gave proof through the night that our flag was still there.” There’s something comforting about a reminder that all is well.

All is well. That’s a good sentence, isn’t it? In Isaiah 52, God reminds His people that He reigns. He will deliver and restore them. They need only see the messengers of His good news to be

inspired. What was true for God’s people then is true today. All is well. God is still working for His people. Through Jesus Christ we have been delivered from sin and restored. The message of hope stands high above all the turmoil, chaos, and strife that might bring you down. This message of God’s salvation is available to all who come to Him. This is the good news.

Father, thank You for Your presence that strengthens me and gives me courage and confidence to stand and to share Your good news, even when things are hard. In Jesus’ name, amen.

His Name

“Everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved; for on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there will be deliverance, as the LORD has said, even among the survivors whom the LORD calls” (Joel 2:32).

Scripture: Joel 2:28-32

Song: “There’s Something about That Name”

Gael Salcedo was on his way to college when his Jeep hit an icy patch on the road. He lost control of his car and then plummeted into the Winnebago River. He knew he was in danger, but he couldn’t find his phone. Even so, he still called out, “Siri, call 911.” In moments, the Mason City Fire Department was on the scene, and Salcedo was rescued.

Siri or any other voice activated assistant, can be helpful at times. But for our salvation and eternal destiny there is only one name to call out to. Joel reminds us of an important fact: only those who call on the name of the Lord will be saved. There is salvation only in Jesus’ name. Acts 4:12 underscores this: “Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.” There are all kinds of things that can erode our confidence and stir up doubt and fear. May we, in a world where uncertainty is certain, place our hope and trust in the powerful name of Jesus.

Father, thank You for the salvation I have in Jesus Christ. Help me to live in such a way that others see Jesus in me. In Jesus’ name, amen.

The Blessings of Faith

Those who rely on faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith (Galatians 3:9).

Scripture: Galatians 3:6-14

Song: “Walk by Faith”

Chloe was born in a poverty-stricken village of Ethiopia and, while still an infant, was brought to an orphanage because her mother couldn't care for her. Her future seemed grim. But friends adopted the little girl, and her future changed because she became part of her new family. Today she is a bright-eyed little girl who loves to talk, laugh, and play with her friends. She has a sister, two brothers, and a wonderful future. Adoption into her new family makes a lot of difference for Chloe.

Becoming part of God's family makes a lot of difference for us. Jesus redeemed us to be part of His family so we can experience the blessings that come through faith in Him. When we pledge our lives to Him in faith, we become His people, sons and daughters in His eternal family just as Abraham and his descendants are. This is why we are considered descendants of Abraham, the father of our faith (Romans 4:16; Galatians 3:7). God redeems us into His family because He loves us and wants us to be with Him now and forever. That's a cause for celebration and a reason for joy! God offers us life, hope, meaning, and purpose when we put our faith and trust in Him.

Father, thank You for choosing me and bringing me into Your family and giving me meaningful life because of my faith in You. Help me to trust You more, with every part of my life. In Jesus' name, amen.

Right Standing

Christ is the culmination of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes (Romans 10:4).

Scripture: Romans 10:1-4

Song: “Cornerstone”

When I was in second grade, my class was told to do a reindeer coloring sheet. I was more interested in drawing tanks and army men. I haphazardly colored the reindeer, and then turned the paper over and drew a military arsenal beyond belief. Then I drew more soldiers with weapons around the reindeer on the front. Then I remembered something important: the teacher had told us she would put our pictures on the wall! I knew I had messed up by drawing a battle scene around the reindeer. I awkwardly asked for another sheet, and it felt good to be given one.

To misunderstand something can be awkward. Spiritually, it can be dangerous when our misunderstanding sends us off on a mistaken pursuit that will fail us. Like people in Paul’s audience, we must not misunderstand how we become righteous: it is only by faith in Jesus. We are not able to earn God’s favor. We can’t be a good enough person or ever give enough to pay our way into Heaven. Any “right standing before God” that we think we might have earned by what we do will not be good enough. Our righteousness is based on our faith in Jesus and has everything to do with what Jesus did for us.

Father, help me remember that I don’t earn righteousness but have it because of my faith in Jesus. Thank You for the gift of righteousness. In Jesus’ name, amen.

You Can Still Come

Concerning Israel [God said through Isaiah], “All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and obstinate people” (Romans 10:21).

Scripture: Romans 10:18-21

Song: “Lord, I’m Coming Home”

A national public bus company offers teenagers who have run away from home a free ticket from any origin to their hometown in the United States. Anyone ages 12 to 21 named on a runaway report can contact the National Runaway Safeline and receive a ticket to be reunited with family or legal guardians. In recent years, hundreds of youth have chosen to stop running away and turn around to accept help to return home.

The nation of Israel spiritually ran away from God—repeatedly. And we also sometimes drift from God, and some choose to keep heading away. God offered the “runaway” Israelites a way back to Him. He holds out His hands to everyone, first offering us a free way into His eternal family and then inviting any runaways to stop running away, turn around, and recommit to their places in God’s family. God’s arms are wide open to all the prodigals who’ve spent time in the land of disobedience and despair. The journey back home begins with renewed faith in Jesus and then calling out to Him in confession of our sin, and repentance in our lives. All of us have known the pain of messing up. It’s good to know we can still go home.

Father, thank You for continuing to love me and want me even when I do the wrong thing. Forgive me and help me to live for You. In Jesus’ name, amen.

The Gift That Comes by Faith

“Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved” (Romans 10:13).

Scripture: Romans 10:5-17

Song: “Your Grace Is Enough”

Like a lot of vehicles today, my car has several different warning systems. If the road is wet, an icon appears on the dash to warn me. If I’m close to running out of gas, the computer flashes a message reminding me that the fuel is low. I regret to say that there have been times when I ignored a message, thinking I knew better. It didn’t work out so well.

It’s important to pay attention to authoritative messages that are given to us. It’s true with cars and even more important in our spiritual lives. The message in today’s passage was already known to the people to whom Paul wrote (Romans 10:8), and it’s a message we may have seen before: faith in Jesus Christ saves. The profession “Jesus is Lord” (Romans 10:9) is so much more than words. It’s our way of life. Others hear our profession in the way we live, so making it stronger is important too. Hearing those who faithfully preach God’s Word to us brings us nearer to Him, increases our faith, and enhances our witness. Immersing ourselves in the Bible, hiding His Word in our hearts, shapes our character and supports our story. “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news” (v. 15). The joy of salvation is offered to us. What an incredible gift!

Father, thank You for the salvation and all the blessings You give me through Jesus. Help me to share Him with others. In Jesus’ name, amen.