

Grace to Rebuild

All the people gave a great shout of praise to the LORD, because the foundation of the house of the LORD was laid (Ezra 3:11).

Scripture: Ezra 3:8-13

Song: “This Is a Day of New Beginnings”

Fires nearly leveled the entire town of Paradise, California. When the smoke cleared, rebuilding began, but it was bittersweet. The community would never look the same; and expensive, newly proposed fire-prevention codes made some owners question whether they could afford to return. Yet during a community tree-lighting ceremony that year, families realized that Paradise was its people, not its structures. Amid grief and uncertainty, they knew that was the foundation on which they could rebuild.

Due to its rebellion, the kingdom of Judah was reduced to a pile of rubble, and the people were exiled to Babylon. Years later God brought back a remnant of the people. As the foundation for a new temple was being laid, those who remembered the former glory of Solomon’s temple wept. Others rejoiced in a new beginning. But all were touched by the grace of the Lord, who would always be their sure foundation.

When we encounter tragedy, whatever the cause, God’s mercy is always near. He is faithful to forgive, transform, and provide what is necessary to rebuild our lives on the foundation of grace that Christ alone provides.

Father, when disaster comes, help me look to You for the grace I need to start again. Thank You for Your faithfulness. In Jesus’ name, amen.

March 7–13. **Tricia Kline** lives in central Pennsylvania. A journalist, author, and Bible student, she loves animals, reading, teaching, and spending time with family.

Focused on the Mission

“You have no part with us. . . . We alone will build it for the LORD, the God of Israel” (Ezra 4:3).

Scripture: Ezra 4:1-5

Song: “An Undivided Heart”

A bold squirrel scurried along our wooden fence and descended into the yard, where our dog, Max, had been watching the rodent’s every move. Max quickly chased after it. No amount of yelling on my part deterred him in the least from his instinctual mission. Even after the squirrel safely jumped onto the branches of an adjacent tree, Max watched from below—undistracted, kicking the grass, and staring up at the squirrel as it angrily chattered back at him.

After returning to Jerusalem from Babylonian exile, the remnant of God’s people had a similar laser focus on their commission to rebuild the temple. They were encompassed by idolatrous people who were now trying to lead them into a tempting partnership. But these true worshippers recognized the danger of colluding with those who were not devoted to God. God’s people refused the offer and continued the work God had called them alone to do.

God still calls His people today to build His kingdom, to declare the gospel of Jesus Christ. There may be voices and circumstances that threaten to distract us. But if we keep this clear calling always before us and seek God’s strength alone to fulfill it, we will see the blessings He has promised to those who remain faithful.

Father, give me wisdom to recognize and overcome distractions from the mission I’ve been given to follow You wholeheartedly. In Jesus’ name, amen.

The One Who Can

“Do not weep! See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed. He is able to open the scroll and its seven seals” (Revelation 5:5).

Scripture: Revelation 5

Song: “Jesus Is the Answer”

I studied vigorously all week for the final statistics exam. I have never been a math whiz, so I was overwhelmed. Probabilities, variabilities . . . to me, they were impossibilities! The harder I tried, the more I struggled. The night before the exam, I decided to lay my concerns before the Lord. He created math, after all. When I reviewed my notes the next morning, everything immediately clicked. I scored a 100 percent on the test that day. Most of us can recall times when we have faced situations that felt overwhelming and impossible. And maybe, like the apostle John, we have even bowed our heads and wept in frustration, disappointment, sorrow, or despair.

When we face uncertainty, tribulation, even tragedy—when it seems there is no solution, no way forward—there is one who can intervene and provide exactly what we need to carry on in faith and hope. He is Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, who has triumphed over the greatest of enemies: sin and death. We can trust that He is present with us and that He will ultimately prevail over all our concerns and provide us with rest and strength. Our hope and future are secure in Him.

Father, help me not to be overcome by problems of this life but to trust in the one who has overcome them all. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Ever-Present Protection

Though I walk in the midst of trouble, you preserve my life (Psalm 138:7).

Scripture: Psalm 138

Song: “Lord, I Need You”

Years ago when my mom was delivering newspapers, she would walk each day past a house where a large German shepherd dog barked ferociously at her from his backyard enclosure. On one particular day, however, the dog wasn't in his pen. He had broken loose and was roaming the neighborhood. He followed her for several blocks. She walked carefully and prayerfully all the way home. Once she reached her house, she quickly went inside and closed the door behind her. Suddenly the dog, now on the other side of the glass, began attacking the door. It seemed evident to her that something, or *someone*, had been protecting her until she got to safety.

Dangers of this life come in all shapes and sizes. Even the most mundane daily tasks, like driving our vehicles, entail risk. Economic security always hangs on a delicate balance. The status of our health can change as quickly as the weather.

No matter where we are, or what we may be doing from day to day, we depend on God's protection more than we may realize. And whether we are enjoying good times or desperately hanging on amid danger and difficulty, we can rest in the Lord's promise to walk with us through it all.

Father, I praise You for Your love and faithfulness in protecting and preserving in this life and for the promise of life to come. Thank You that I never walk alone. In Jesus' name, amen.

First Things First

The whole remnant of the people obeyed the voice of the LORD their God. (Haggai 1:12).

Scripture: Haggai 1

Song: “Seek Ye First”

In medieval times, the construction of a bell tower in Italy seemed to start off right, but by the time the builders reached the third floor, it became clear that the foundation was not secure. The base of the tower had been constructed only three meters deep on a dense clay mixture that was not strong enough to keep the structure upright. Over the next few centuries, more construction and more miscalculations led to more leaning. Today that famous building is known as the Leaning Tower of Pisa.

When the remnant of Israel returned from exile in Babylon, they neglected the foundation of their existence and identity: worshiping the Lord their God. While living in nicely furnished homes, the temple remained unbuilt. In a similar way, we can become so consumed with our own comfort, work, and interests that distract us from prioritizing the work and interests of God. And we soon find that we are never truly satisfied until we stop and center our thoughts, and lives, on Him and His Word.

Building on anything other than our redeemer will lead to struggle and pain. But when we put Him first, He establishes and steadies us. He is our firm foundation, the one on which we can continue to build without fear of the future.

Father, please keep me from even small miscalculations that add up and take me further from You, my steady foundation. In Jesus' name, amen.

Greater Things Are Coming

“The glory of this present house will be greater than the glory of the former house” (Haggai 2:9).

Scripture: Haggai 2:1-9, 15-19

Song: “Greater Things Have Yet to Come”

In a popular sleight-of-hand trick, an illusionist takes a \$1 bill from a volunteer. He folds it up, shakes it slightly, and the audience watches in amazement as he proceeds to unfold what is now a \$100 bill. Skillfully, out of the audience’s sight, the performer has made it appear as though he has turned something of little value into something of much greater value.

Of course, God doesn’t need sleight of hand to do what seems unlikely or even impossible, but He does often work out of sight, as He orchestrates blessing and beauty in our lives for His glory. We may fear that what we have to offer is too small for God to use. But He is not limited by our lack. Time and again, He has shown that He can take what might seem insignificant and then unfold something marvelous before our eyes.

During times when it seems God is absent or when His power in our lives is not evident, we can be assured that He is still at work, behind the scenes, working out His purpose to save and redeem. One day we will see the culmination of His plan in the unparalleled glory of eternity.

Father, make me ever aware of Your presence with me, and help me trust that You are doing a great work in my life and in Your kingdom, even when I can’t see it. In Jesus’ name, amen.

You Can't Stop God's Work

Do not interfere with the work on this temple of God (Ezra 6:7).

Scripture: Ezra 6:1-12

Song: "He Who Began a Good Work in You"

Students and parents gathered in the local middle school's parking lot. Many held signs and were chanting, "Save our pool!" In the district's attempt to save money, the beloved swimming pool was due to be closed. The public responded by standing up to the threat. They appealed to district officials with pleas, ideas, and a list of benefits the pool provided for the community. Their efforts paid off when the school board agreed to keep the pool open.

When the exiled people of Judah returned to their land to rebuild from the ruins, rulers from neighboring regions wanted to shut them down. Threats and intimidation made life difficult for God's people, but God made sure His plan would prevail. As we serve in God's kingdom, there may be times when serious opposition arises, testing our perseverance and commitment to the work He has called us to. While we always strive to live at peace with those around us (Romans 12:18), there may be times when we need to stand up and declare as Peter did, "We must obey God rather than human beings!" (Acts 5:29).

The work of the Lord will always be completed. Joining Him in that work, remaining faithful and obedient to His call, we can be assured that nothing and no one will be able to stop what God is doing.

Father, thank You that You will complete Your unfailing plan. Help me persevere even when I face opposition. In Jesus' name, amen.