

God Protects

The LORD protects the unwary; when I was brought low, he saved me (Psalm 116:6).

Scripture: Psalm 116:1-15

Song: “He’s Watching Me”

When a truck coming from the opposite direction veered across the center line toward my PT Cruiser, I moved as close as possible to the edge of the road. I heard a crunch as my vehicle was struck, but barely felt the collision. However, when I attempted to open the car door, it wouldn’t budge. I released my seat belt and crawled through the passenger side. No wonder I couldn’t get out: the driver’s side was caved in! Yet I had escaped injury, as had the pregnant driver of the truck. “Thank You, Lord,” I whispered.

As the psalmist thanked and praised God for His mercy, he wanted to know what he could do in return for the Lord’s faithfulness to him. Although God’s mercy is free to us all, the writer longed to do something to show his appreciation.

The Lord has protected each one of us on more occasions than we can count—and undoubtedly more often than we realize. We can never repay Him for all He’s done for us. What we can give back, though, is our loyalty, our obedience, and our thankfulness. Each one of us can honor God and show a thankful heart by serving Him faithfully with the gifts He’s given us.

Father, help me demonstrate my gratitude for Your goodness to me by serving You faithfully. In Jesus’ name, amen.

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April 4–10. **Diana Walters** lives in Tennessee with her husband. Together they develop devotional books that help people with dementia remember their faith.

A Giving God

“Each of you must bring a gift in proportion to the way the LORD your God has blessed you” (Deuteronomy 16:17).

Scripture: Deuteronomy 16:1-8, 15-17

Song: “Oh, Live Thy Life in Me”

I didn't grow up in a Christian household, so I had no understanding of the concept of tithing. In fact, when my new husband wanted to tithe, I objected. We could use that money to fix up our home or go on vacation. I considered \$10 a week in the offering plate to be good enough.

Through Moses, God gave His people instructions about observing Passover and Pentecost, which included three festivals (or feasts): (1) the Festival of Unleavened Bread; (2) the Festival of Weeks; and (3) the Festival of Tabernacles. People were not to appear before the Lord empty-handed. However, there was no set “entrance fee.” They were to give according to what they'd been given by God. Some had more; some had less.

I began to realize that merely giving “good enough” was not in proportion to what the Lord had bestowed on my husband and me. We had good jobs and a comfortable home. We had enough to eat and nice clothes to wear. I realized we should be giving to God a more generous portion of what was His to begin with. And I realized it wasn't only money I was to give but also abilities in proportion to what He had given me. I decided my writing should be dedicated to serving the Lord too.

Father, help each of us realize what gifts You have bestowed on us that we can use for Your glory. In Jesus' name, amen.

Sacrificial Love

A woman came to him with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume, which she poured on his head as he was reclining at the table (Matthew 26:7).

Scripture: Matthew: 26:1-2, 6-16

Song: “She Loved Much”

I give my unwanted clothes to charity. I put change in the Salvation Army bucket at Christmas. And sometimes I give money to coworkers who are going through hardships. But I tend to give out of plenty, not sacrificially or extravagantly.

However, Mary—the sister of Martha and Lazarus (John 12:3)—worshipped Jesus with the sacrifice of a jar of perfume worth almost a year’s wages. Why would she do something so extravagant? Because her love for Jesus was extravagant. She gave a most precious possession to honor Him, to demonstrate her devotion to Him.

We may not have such an expensive gift to give to the Lord, but we can still give extravagantly, sacrificially, worshipfully to honor Him. Our acts of service—offered in His name—can be done with extravagant love and sincerity. Emergency personnel risk their lives to save lives. Good teachers work tirelessly to inspire students. Missionaries leave their homeland to take the gospel around the world. And even when we take time out of our busy day to talk with a troubled person or to comfort a grieving heart, that, too, can be an extravagant gift—with more impact than we know. We can’t “out give” Jesus, but what we do wholeheartedly to demonstrate our love to Him is precious in His sight.

Father, I want to dedicate all I have and all I am to honor You today. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Sharing God's Gifts

I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you (1 Corinthians 11:23).

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 11:23-26

Song: “Tell Me of Jesus”

While growing up, one of my siblings would sometimes bring a friend home to Thanksgiving dinner. I resented the intrusion. I considered holiday meals a family affair and thought strangers should never be included. Later I would read accounts of people who lived selflessly—ones who fed hungry neighbors, gave all they could to help the poor and disenfranchised, and even sacrificed their own lives to shelter persecuted populations. In retrospect, I'm ashamed of my youthful selfishness.

Some ancient Corinthians felt like I once did. Those who had plenty didn't want to share with people who weren't part of their family (1 Corinthians 11:17-22). But the fellowship of believers in Christ became an equalizer where the haves and have-nots alike were invited to participate in the Lord's Supper. In his letters to the Corinthians, Paul shared spiritual food with all who wished to partake. He told them about the Lord's Supper and its meaning and passed on the sacred tradition to their congregation: “Whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes” (11:26).

With age, I have developed a desire to share what I have with others—physical food as well as spiritual food. Paul passed on his love of Jesus, and the Lord would have us to do the same.

Father, today I'll be looking for ways to share what I have with others, especially the love of Your dear Son. In Jesus' name, amen.

His Unconditional Love

“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another” (John 13:34).

Scripture: John 13:31-35

Song: “Blest Be the Tie That Binds”

When we're starry-eyed, in the throes of new love, we see only perfection in the other person. And we try to hide our own imperfections, fearing that if this person really knew us, we might not be accepted.

Jesus knows us inside and out, yet He loves us. He commanded the disciples to love one another as He loved them. This commandment is for all believers. We're to love that neighbor whose dog barks all night, the coworker who gossips about us, and the grouchy clerk at the grocery store. We're even supposed to love people who have hurt us grievously. How can we possibly love those people? Jesus demonstrates how by loving us in spite of our sin and selfishness. His love is forgiving, redeeming, and perfect.

Over time, the spark of love often dies in relationships—sometimes because of serious problems like abuse, but more often simply because when we *really* get to know others, we see their faults. A petty grievance may, in time, become a monumental obstacle to love. But when we seek to emulate Christ's love, we will become increasingly patient and forgiving, just as God has commanded. We won't reach perfection in this life, but with the Lord's help, we can learn to look on that coworker, clerk, or spouse with loving eyes instead of critical ones.

Father, help me love as You have loved me, putting others' welfare ahead of my own. In Jesus' name, amen.

Freedom from Fear

The LORD is with me; I will not be afraid. What can mere mortals do to me? (Psalm 118:6).

Scripture: Psalm 118:1-9

Song: “Just When I Need Him”

When I was a child, I was afraid of the dark. Although I was not raised in a Christian home, somewhere I'd heard the general idea of Psalm 23, “The Lord is my shepherd. I shall not fear.” At night when I needed to descend the darkened stairs to our only bathroom, I repeated those words. They gave me courage. Although I didn't yet understand who Jesus was, I believe God provided His comfort in this way to help me through childish fears . . . and later through adult fears.

The psalmist embraced the truth of God's presence with him. He knew he did not need to fear his enemies. With God on his side, there was nothing to fear from mere mortals. History tells us of men and women throughout the ages who have trusted God for support, provision, deliverance, and victory. No doubt you have your own list of heroes of the faith who inspire and encourage you to trust God when circumstances tempt you to fear.

While most of us will likely never be called on to lead soldiers into battle or face the spiritual battles our personal faith heroes have seen, we can find comfort in remembering that the Lord is with us—always. He goes with us into every trial and leads us to safety.

Father, let me never forget to call on You when fears threaten my sense of well-being. In Jesus' name, amen.

Because of Love

“The Son of Man will go just as it is written about him” (Matthew 26:24).

Scripture: Matthew 26:17-30

Song: “O the Deep, Deep Love of Jesus”

When facing stress or fear, I’ve been known to drop out of classes, jobs, even relationships. In fact when I went into labor with my first child, as I was leaving the doctor’s office in a wheelchair to go to the hospital delivery room, I said to the nurse, “I’ve changed my mind. I don’t want to do this.” I was only half joking, but I was 19 years old, and I was scared. If I’d been able to get out of the pain of delivery, I would have backed out right then!

Jesus knew ahead of time what was going to happen to Him. He knew who would betray Him, and He knew He would suffer. He also knew that the Passover meal would be His last with the disciples before He was taken away to be crucified. He had the option of changing His mind about what came next. But He didn’t. Why? Because of love—love for all humanity, even for Judas, whose betrayal must have grieved His heart. Jesus loved both the faithful and the unfaithful.

Even when we turn our backs on Jesus, He loves us. It must hurt Him, but when we turn back to Him, He welcomes us with open arms, like the father who welcomed back the prodigal son (Luke 15). The Lord loved us enough to go to the cross on our behalf.

Father, thank You for redeeming us. Help us always to remember Your sacrifice. In Jesus’ name, amen.