

## Only One

**“Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”** (John 1:29).

**Scripture:** John 1:29-36

**Song:** “Lamb of God”

For 17 years, House Sergeant at Arms Wilson “Bill” Livingood announced the arrival of the president of the United States for the State of the Union Address. A humble and behind-the-scenes man, Livingood never thought he’d be promoted to such an honor. In his first two years of making the announcement, he practiced at home, in the car, even wrote the eight simple words—“Mr. Speaker, the president of the United States”—on a piece of paper and stored it in his pocket for easy reference.

Just as Livingood understood his role, so John the Baptist knew his. John pointed people to Jesus, the one sent by God as the perfect and complete sacrifice to take away our sin. John announced the coming of Christ and then humbly got out of the way so Jesus could take center stage.

When we receive Christ as Savior, we too play a role in pointing others to the only one who can provide forgiveness and freedom. Through our words we can boldly testify that Jesus is indeed the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!

**Father,** thank You for providing Jesus Christ, Your perfect Lamb, to free me from my sin. Today help me point others to Him. In Jesus’ name, amen.

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April 11–17. **Eileen Rife** and her husband live in Virginia, where they host a respite center for their three missionary children and nine grandchildren whenever the families are on furlough. They also travel internationally to assist missionaries.

## Out of Love

**[Jesus] fell with his face to the ground and prayed, “My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will” (Matthew 26:39).**

**Scripture:** Matthew 26:36-46

**Song:** “His Life for Mine”

A mother refused cancer treatment to carry her baby to term, knowing that to do so would cost her life. Shortly after she gave birth, she died. Out of love, she had sacrificed her life for her little girl because she believed it was the right thing to do.

In great agony, Jesus sorrowed over His impending crucifixion, but out of love He chose to die to bring life to humanity, His creation. He felt the weight of sin that He would bear on the cross and groaned under the intense pressure of carrying out the Father’s will. Three times He prayed that if there was no other way to redeem the world, He was willing to drink the bitter cup of the cross to fulfill God’s plan.

Jesus understands the load of sin and sorrow we carry, the tug-of-war between the flesh and the spirit as we wrestle to lay our burden at the foot of the cross. Yet we can be confident that, out of love, He bore that burden by dying in our place so we can live fully forgiven and free to love.

**Father,** thank You for Your great sacrificial love that frees me from my burden of sin and empowers me to live according to Your Word. Help me love You today by loving others. In Jesus’ name, amen.

## Rescue Refused

**“Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels? But how then would the Scriptures be fulfilled that say it must happen in this way?”** (Matthew 26:53-54).

**Scripture:** Matthew 26:47-56

**Song:** “He Could Have Called Ten Thousand Angels”

After an iceberg struck the *Titanic*, John Harper, an English minister, refused to step into a lifeboat. While his niece and 6-year-old daughter rowed to safety, Harper chose to go down with the sinking ship to share the gospel with other passengers. Even in the freezing Atlantic, while holding on to a piece of wreckage, he witnessed to another man. At last he lost his grip and sank beneath the dark waters. The man Harper spoke to survived and years later testified that he was converted to Christ that night as a result of Harper's sacrifice.

Jesus could have called on His Father to rescue Him from His captors, but He chose to give himself willingly to accomplish our salvation, regardless of the cost. He kept His eyes on the prophetic plan rather than shrink from the present circumstances.

By God's grace, so can we. Though we rarely see God's big picture during pain and suffering, we can confidently embrace an eternal perspective, choosing to trust that He will accomplish His plan in our lives. With courage, we can then do the next thing God shows us.

**Father,** thank You that Jesus refused rescue that He might save me. Today help me trust that You are working out Your plan in my life, even amid difficult circumstances. In Jesus' name, amen.

## Never Forsaken

**“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”** (Matthew 27:46).

**Scripture:** Matthew 27:35-43, 45-50

**Song:** “Never Alone”

During a personal crisis of faith, Nik Ripken traveled the world to ask persecuted Christians how they maintained their faith in Jesus. What he discovered were believers, though seemingly forsaken by God, who cried out to Him, then chose to share in the sufferings of Christ rather than renounce their faith. Even in prison they sang hymns and scribbled Scripture on scraps of paper. As they did so, they received God’s strength to endure. Their testimony during difficult circumstances revived Ripken’s own faith and also led others to Christ.

To accomplish God’s redemptive plan, Jesus endured rejection from those around Him, including God as He poured out His holy wrath on His Son. In His human frailty, Jesus cried out in anguish. In His deity, He revealed what was necessary to satisfy God’s righteous requirement as payment for our sin. Briefly God had to forsake His Son because He could not look on sin. Yet Christ’s cry to His Father, a prophetic fulfillment (Psalm 22:1), indicated a deeply personal relationship within the Godhead.

We too can cry out to our personal God, our Father, when we undergo trials, temptations, and persecution for our faith. In our deepest pain, we may feel forsaken by God, but we can rest assured that because we are His children, He will never leave us.

**Father,** thank You that because of Jesus, You will never forsake me. Help me faithfully endure hardship for Your sake so others might see Christ and turn to Him. In Jesus’ name, amen.

## A Faithful Father

**In you our ancestors put their trust; they trusted and you delivered them. To you they cried out and were saved; in you they trusted and were not put to shame** (Psalm 22:4-5).

**Scripture:** Psalm 22:1-9, 14-19

**Song:** “Find Us Faithful”

When I was a child, an attack of appendicitis sent me into emergency surgery and sent my daddy, who served full-time in Christian camping ministry, to his knees in prayer. Not only was he concerned for his daughter; he was also concerned about how he would pay for the unexpected expense. When my father arrived at the hospital a week later to take me home, the surgeon surprised him with God’s answer. Since Daddy was a full-time Christian worker, the doctor was waiving the financial cost.

David turned to God during his deepest need. In fact, David’s cry in Psalm 22 foreshadows Christ’s own suffering (Matthew 27:46). In his prayer, David appealed to God based on His faithfulness to the Israelite fathers. The holy one who had delivered them in the past would be faithful to deliver David as well. In prophetic fulfillment—and despite the jeers of onlookers—Christ also trusted God, who would raise Him from the dead and exalt Him.

The faith of Christian fathers—whether biological or spiritual, whether Old Testament patriarchs or contemporary believers—and the example of Christ help us trust God too. We can confidently bring our problems to our faithful Father and know He will deliver us in His time and in His way.

**Father,** thank You for the example of other believers who remind me to trust You, especially during difficult times. In Jesus’ name, amen.

## Through Freedom's Gate

**Open for me the gates of the righteous; I will enter and give thanks to the LORD (Psalm 118:19).**

**Scripture:** Psalm 118:14-17, 19-29

**Song:** "Just as I Am"

Near the end of the Korean War, despite continued hostility between America and North Korea, the United Nations worked out a prisoner exchange. What a joyful reception American POWs received when they moved through the Freedom Gate in Munsan, Korea. Some hobbled on crutches and others were carried on stretchers, but all who passed through the gate were now free.

In similar fashion the Israelites, weary and worn, returned home from their bitter exile. Finally free again, they were ready to submit to God and trust in Him alone. What rejoicing ensued when the temple was finally rebuilt and their worship was restored according to God's covenant (Ezra 6:16-22). "The gates of the righteous" were open once again to them.

When we enter through gates of repentance and faith in Christ's righteousness alone, we experience spiritual freedom. Like the Israelites, we may hobble through, broken before God, as we accept His perfect sacrifice on our behalf. We come to Him just as we are, and He welcomes us into the eternal freedom Christ has secured through His death, burial, and resurrection. We rejoice with other delivered prisoners, fellow believers, who help us heal and live holy lives in relationship with Christ.

**Father,** thank You for welcoming me home to Your heart through repentance and faith in Your Son. I am so grateful You've redeemed me. Help me live out Christ's righteousness through my words and actions today. In Jesus' name, amen.

## From Despair to Joy

**Suddenly Jesus met them. “Greetings,” he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshiped him** (Matthew 28:9).

**Scripture:** Matthew 28:1-10

**Song:** “Because He Lives”

After the 9/11 terrorist attacks in New York City, all Joe Dittmer wanted was to make it home to his wife and four kids, who thought he’d died during the assault on the South Tower. When he returned to his hometown and stepped into the back of the church where hundreds of mourners had met for worship, his wife dashed to him through the crowd and smothered him with hugs and kisses.

Jesus *had* died during the crucifixion. This the women mourners knew with certainty when they came to the tomb early that Sunday morning. In love for their Lord, they desired to show their continued kindness and allegiance to Him. What they didn’t expect was to find an angel sent by God to announce that Jesus was now alive—risen according to His promise! Despair turned to joy and led to grateful worship when they met Jesus on their way to tell His disciples the good news.

When, by faith, we reach out to our resurrected Lord in worship, we can’t help but share with others the joyful freedom we’ve discovered in Christ. Though we may come to Jesus fearful, even despairing, we can leave filled with His joy and ready to testify of His resurrection power.

**Father,** I am so grateful for Christ’s resurrection power that turned my despair into joy. Help me share with someone else today what You have done for me. In Jesus’ name, amen.