

## Dealing with Disobedience

**It is the Sovereign LORD who helps me** (Isaiah 50:9).

**Scripture:** Isaiah 50:4-9

**Song:** “I Have Decided to Follow Jesus”

I became a Christian as a young teen. Not long after my decision to follow Christ, I did things I knew were wrong. I was disappointed with myself and felt God must be disappointed too. I still had much to learn about my relationship with God.

Before God sent Jesus to earth, He sent prophets, such as Isaiah, who warned of woes and judgment regarding sin; these messengers even confronted kings! Through these servants God warned His people about what would happen if they continued down the wrong path. But if they would turn from their sin, God would forgive and restore them.

Similarly, my youthful disobedience interfered with the joy of my relationship with God and His blessing in my life, but I would learn that God was willing to forgive my sin and help me walk in His ways. Satan wanted me to think that my disobedience was fatal and disqualified me from being loved, valued, and used by God.

Thankfully, God didn't leave me mired in guilt. He corrected me. Just as obedience was not always easy for the prophets or for Jesus, it can be difficult for me too. But the Sovereign Lord is available to help me.

**Father,** I am sorry for disobeying You. I need Your help to stop doing wrong and, instead, do what pleases You. In Jesus' name, amen.

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## Waiting

**Those the LORD has rescued will return. . . . Gladness and joy will overtake them, and sorrow and sighing will flee away** (Isaiah 51:11).

**Scripture:** Isaiah 51:9-16

**Song:** “My Chains Are Gone”

In October 1967, Lieutenant Commander John McCain’s plane was shot down over Vietnam, and he was captured. He suffered torture, malnourishment, and solitary confinement during his five-and-a-half-year stay at the “Hanoi Hilton” prison. The POWs desperately wanted to be rescued and tried not to lose hope. In 1973, thanks to Operation Homecoming, McCain and hundreds of other POWs were set free. Imagine his first embrace with family members and his first night home.

God’s people were held captive in Babylon for decades. They pleaded with the Lord Almighty to show His power—the same miraculous power used to create the heavens and earth, to part the Red Sea, to destroy their enemy—to deliver them. God wanted them not just to crave His power but also to desire His presence. They wanted to return home to Israel; God wanted them to return to *Him*. He comforted them and told them “soon.”

If you are feeling trapped, even by a mess you created, God is there to comfort you and give you hope. He is still the one who walks with you through difficult times and still the one who is able to deliver. It is reassuring to know that God did not give up on His people in Babylon, and He will not give up on you or me.

**Father**, thank You for always being with me. Help me seek You as I wait for You. In Jesus’ name, amen.

## Warnings, Wrath, and Redemption

**“I have taken out of your hand the cup that made you stagger . . . the goblet of my wrath” (Isaiah 51:22).**

**Scripture:** Isaiah 51:17-23

**Song:** “Forever Reign”

As an adult I finally read the *entire* story of Jonah. God had told Jonah to go to Nineveh, the capital city of Assyria, enemy of Israel. Jonah was to preach against Nineveh’s wickedness, but the prophet didn’t like his assignment. That’s how he landed in the belly of the fish. When Jonah finally obeyed God and warned Nineveh, the people and their king turned from their evil ways. In His mercy, God did not bring the destruction He’d planned.

By contrast, many years later, the people of Judah did not heed God’s warnings. Consequently, they experienced His wrath—His righteous indignation toward their wrongdoing and injustice. Like strong drink or a powerful blow, God’s punishment made them stagger.

Sin must be addressed. On the cross, Jesus dealt with all sin—past, present, and future—by drinking the full cup of God’s wrath (Romans 5:9). Though He was innocent, He bore the penalty of our guilt (1 Peter 2:24). That’s why when we place our trust in Him for salvation, we are fully forgiven. In His love for us, God will still warn and correct us if we sin, but because of Jesus’ sacrifice, He hears our confession and forgives and cleanses us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9).

**Father,** thank You for rescuing me from the wrath I deserve. Help me be quick to confess my sin and mend our relationship when I fail to heed Your warnings. In Jesus’ name, amen.

## Trouble and Trust

**We do not want you to be uninformed . . . about the troubles we experienced. . . . This happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God** (2 Corinthians 1:8-9).

**Scripture:** 2 Corinthians 1:7-14

**Song:** “Made a Way”

An elderly Russian woman suffered from multiple sclerosis. Her right index finger was one of her few body parts still working. And work it she did! Once she was positioned on the sofa with the help of her husband, she spent long days using a typewriter to translate the Bible, stroke by stroke and book by book. Normally, the secret police would watch, report, and persecute Christians; but because she was sickly, authorities never bothered to surveil her home. The woman's weakness provided an opportunity to display God's great power (2 Corinthians 12:9).

Paul also suffered. He described it as so dire, it felt like a death sentence. He admitted it was beyond his ability to endure. Additionally, false accusations about his leadership caused the Corinthian Christians to doubt his character and question his authority. But Paul was confident that just as God helped him, God would also help the Corinthians in their struggles.

As believers, if we always pretend everything is fine, we may mislead other believers into thinking the Christian life is trouble free. Serving Christ, even if it's at home, is not easy. There will be struggles but also a matching measure of comfort and joy from the Lord.

**Father**, when I'm in trouble, help me to rely on You. Then open opportunities for me to tell others how You've made a way. In Jesus name, amen.

## Faith Showing and Growing

**The Lord's message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia—your faith in God has become known everywhere** (1 Thessalonians 1:8).

**Scripture:** 1 Thessalonians 1:6-10

**Song:** “Do Something”

Gladys Aylward, just five feet tall, had a big heart for the people of China. Her missionary life was filled with adventure and opposition. Even as she spread the gospel message, she served as Inspector of Feet to stop the harmful binding of girls' feet. Once she was called to a prison riot, after which she reported inmate concerns to the warden and helped bring about improvements. She cared for orphans, adopting several. During the 1940 Japanese invasion, she led 100 children to safety on a 27-day journey. Many came to trust Christ through her witness.

On one of his missionary journeys, the apostle Paul worked among the new believers in Thessalonica. Reading about the Thessalonians, we see evidence of their salvation—turning from idols to serve God—and of their growing faith. Full of the Holy Spirit, they imitated Jesus in both joy and opposition. From a seaport along the Egnatian Way, they spread the aroma of Christ everywhere (2 Corinthians 2:15).

Whether we're new believers (like the Thessalonians) or longtime ones (like Gladys Aylward and the apostle Paul), we can be the fragrance of Christ and make Him known as we proclaim the gospel and serve those around us.

**Father,** I want to be intentional in making You known today. Please guide and help me. In Jesus' name, amen.

## Battles

**You, LORD, are a shield around me, my glory, the One who lifts my head high** (Psalm 3:3).

**Scripture:** Psalm 3

**Song:** “Surrounded”

Scotty—husband, father, and educator—fought a battle with an incurable cancer. He endured biopsies, rounds of toxic chemo, and stem cell transplants. The treatments lowered his immune system and caused extreme fatigue. He experienced the highs and lows of falling in and out of remission.

King David fought a battle of a different kind. His own son, Absalom, conspired to usurp the throne (2 Samuel 15–17). Fearing for his life, David and his household fled the palace. In his distress, he shouted the prayer of Psalm 3. It was not the first time he needed God to quickly rise up and come to his rescue. As a young shepherd, David needed God’s help to protect the sheep from lions and bears and later to slay the Philistine giant, Goliath. He needed help fleeing the envious King Saul, who was attempting to kill him. Past deliverances fostered David’s confidence in God. This time, assistance came by way of loyal informants, frustrated counsel given to Absalom, a generous supply of provisions, and an army of mighty men. The coup was thwarted, and King David returned to his throne in Jerusalem.

Whether we face a battle from within or without, we can call out to God. He hears! When we are stressed, weary, and fearful, He can give us rest. He protects, strengthens, and encourages.

**Father,** I am confident that You can pluck me out of this situation or walk me through it, but I urgently need Your help. In Jesus’ name, amen.

## Rescue

**“My salvation is on the way. . . . My salvation will last forever, my righteousness will never fail”** (Isaiah 51:5-6).

**Scripture:** Isaiah 51:1-8

**Song:** “Reckless Love”

In Thailand, a boys’ soccer team biked with their coach to a cave they had been to before. They planned to go in for only an hour. But once inside, recent rains caused water to rise, forcing the group to move farther into the cave. Trapped with no food, they had to conserve strength and oxygen. After 10 long days, divers found them alive and were able to get aid to them, but extracting them was complicated. Passageways were narrow and the chilly, muddy water created a strong current and near-zero visibility. Rescuers tried pumping, drilling, and drones. Finally, after the soccer team had spent two weeks in the cave, all were rescued!

As wonderful as this story of rescued lives is, God’s rescue plan is even greater. You see, Jesus saves for eternity! Isaiah saw what was near: God’s people rescued from Babylonian exile. The prophet also saw a greater future deliverance: salvation through Jesus Christ . . . and even beyond, when Jesus would take His rightful place to rule and reign, ushering in “a new heaven and a new earth (Revelation 21:1).

The Thai boys couldn’t save themselves, and neither can we save ourselves from the penalty of our sin. “Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness” (Romans 4:3). When we believe God, God gives us the only acceptable righteousness there is, the righteousness of Jesus, by grace through faith in Him.

**Father**, thank You for the righteousness of Your Son and for providing the rescue I need. In Jesus’ name, amen.