

The Best Is Yet to Come

The master of the banquet . . . called the bridegroom aside and said, “Everyone brings out the choice wine first . . . but you have saved the best till now” (John 2:9-10).

Scripture: John 2:1-11

Song: “Home”

I checked my credit card statement and felt self-reprimand rise up. Once again I’d fallen for something companies often tout as a convenience but which I detest: an automatic recurring subscription. I’d enjoyed the first year of the magazine at the introductory price. But when I forgot to call and cancel or renegotiate the price, the company charged more than double for the second year!

In this world when we’re presented with “special offers,” we are wise to be careful. Otherwise we might become victims of “fine print” or bait-and-switch tactics. Thankfully, God does not deal with us that way. Jesus warned His followers up front that they would have trials in this earthly life (John 16:33). But He often referred to our glorious inheritance stored up in Heaven (14:2).

No matter how hard life gets, we have a wonderful promise that is guaranteed. In Heaven we will leave behind conflict, sorrow, pain, and sin. We, the church, will gather with the bridegroom as He brings out His best for us to enjoy for eternity.

Father, in the midst of earthly struggles and sorrows, help me remember that You have a beautiful future planned for me. In Jesus’ name, amen.

July 4–10. **Dianne Neal Matthews** lives in Louisiana with her husband of 48 years. She enjoys traveling to visit their children and grandchildren, cooking, DIY projects, and serving her local church.

Help Wanted

Turn, LORD, and deliver me; save me because of your unfailing love (Psalm 6:4).

Scripture: Psalm 6

Song: “We Cry Out”

Growing up, I often heard my mom tell the story of how as a toddler, I wandered off one day while she worked in the backyard. Her eyes scanned the pasture frantically until she heard sounds of crying coming from a ditch. More than 65 years later, Mom still has a vivid recollection of my tear-filled eyes looking up at her as I sat helplessly in the mud.

As a young child, I had no problem crying out for help when I needed it. But when I grew older, sometimes I felt as though I had no right to ask. If a difficult situation resulted from my own mistakes or foolishness, I reasoned that maybe I did not deserve help. At times, in fact, I still struggle with this in my spiritual life.

It's important for us to remember that, as God's children, when we get into trouble—even trouble caused by our disobedience or blatant sin—God will never ignore our pleas for help. The key is to approach Him with humility. We don't expect His help based on our own goodness, wisdom, or strength. Rather, we call out to Him on the basis of His mercy, grace, and unconditional love. We may still face some consequences from our actions, and He will bring any correction needed. But God's faithfulness to us, His children, will never fail in our time of need.

Father, thank You for the comforting assurance that I can call on You when I need help. In Jesus' name, amen.

The Power of Words

The centurion replied, “Lord, I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. But just say the word, and my servant will be healed” (Matthew 8:8).

Scripture: Matthew 8:5-13

Song: “Ancient Words”

A few words can contain great power and meaning when they're backed by authority: “Paid in Full” printed on a document from a bank's loan officer; “Charges Dismissed” stamped by a judge in traffic court; “No malignant cells present” typed on a patient's chart in an oncologist's office. Such words impact a life not just because of their content, but primarily because of the authoritative source giving them weight.

During His earthly ministry, Jesus spoke words that offered hope to the hurting by helping them understand God's great love for them. He taught truth that opened the way for people to live a life filled with joy and meaning. His words rebuked Satan; He cured physical, spiritual, and mental illnesses; and He even raised the dead! Those who did not understand the source of His power and authority reacted with surprise and sometimes with suspicion. Those who did trust Him responded with gratitude.

The most powerful words are found in the Bible. Its pages speak words that can comfort, guide, strengthen, encourage, and heal . . . as well as convict and correct. The Bible holds words that can touch a heart, change a mind, and transform a life. The best part is that every single word on every page is backed by God's ultimate authority.

Father, I trust Your Word as my source of absolute truth and as the foundation for my life. In Jesus' name, amen.

Choosing Hope

When Jesus saw [the disabled man] lying there and learned that he had been in this condition for a long time, he asked him, “Do you want to get well?” (John 5:6).

Scripture: John 5:1-9

Song: “Overcomer”

“Give-Upitis” isn’t technically a medical diagnosis, but studies show that a person who loses the will to live can die without any organic cause. Dr. John Leach, a researcher at the University of Portsmouth, has identified the stages of this condition, also called psychogenic death. Patients progress from social withdrawal and apathy to an increasing lack of motivation and the absence of pain response. Dr. Leach notes that the process can be reversed at any point through intervention.

Even if we haven’t despaired of life, many of us have given up on something. It might be healing from a physical condition, restoration of a broken relationship, or simply the hope of living in victory over the sin that dogs us. After years of trying and trusting that things will get better, hopelessness can settle into a person’s spirit and paralyze the will.

Life can make us feel defeated, but God wants to intervene during those times. We live with the promise of His unconditional love and mercy; we can always go to Him in time of need. Although bad things will happen and sometimes even persist, God strengthens us to live meaningfully, even joyfully, despite our pain. Because we belong to Him, we always have a reason to choose hope.

Father, when my circumstances tempt me to give in to discouragement and despair, renew my trust and restore my soul. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Displaying His Glory

“Neither this man nor his parents sinned,” said Jesus, “but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him” (John 9:3).

Scripture: John 9:1-7

Song: “It Is Well with My Soul”

A diving accident in 1967 left teenager Joni Eareckson Tada with quadriplegia. Today she is an internationally recognized radio host, author, and advocate for the disabled. Her ministry reaches untold numbers of people with the gospel and offers hope and encouragement in the midst of suffering. Although Joni initially sought physical healing, she now regards her injury as a blessing that deepened her relationship with Christ. In her memoir, *The God I Love*, she wrote, “Sometimes God allows what He hates, to accomplish what He loves.”

It’s only natural to desire miraculous healing when we or a loved one suffers. But God may choose to display His glory in other ways; He may heal us in ways other than physically. God can use both everyday trials and tragic events to draw us into closer fellowship with Him or to equip us to serve Him in ways we never dreamed possible.

Life may deal us a blow that makes it seem as though we’ll never find contentment, joy, and peace again. But God will refill us with those blessings and more as we learn to trust His purposes and His intentions toward us. The weaker we are, the more we know our need to lean on the one who always heals one way or another—during our time on earth, and fully in eternity.

Father, redeem even my suffering that it might serve to bring You praise. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Jesus Never Disappoints

Even my close friend, someone I trusted, one who shared my bread, has turned against me (Psalm 41:9).

Scripture: Psalm 41

Song: “You Are Faithful”

I once had an elderly friend whose husband never attended church with her. Early in their marriage, a conflict with another church member had left him hurt and embittered. Rather than work toward reconciliation, he vowed he would never again set foot in any church. When the husband became seriously ill, our pastor regularly visited and helped him make his peace with God. Still, the man’s joy during his final months was mixed with regret for all he’d missed because of his stubbornness.

No matter how hard we try to be like Christ, human nature is fallible. There will be times when we disappoint or hurt someone; others will do the same to us. If we allow bitterness to seep into our souls, it will poison every area of our lives, including our relationship with God. We’ll miss out on much more than friendship. Bitterness will gradually steal away our peace and joy.

Jesus knew what it was like to be misunderstood, maligned, and even betrayed by those closest to Him. But He did not let that change His love for others or hinder the work God had assigned Him. When someone hurts us, we can choose forgiveness over resentment by focusing on and following Jesus’ example. We can also remember that Jesus can be trusted above every earthly relationship. He will never harm us, never betray us, and never abandon us.

Father, keep my heart open to forgive and seek reconciliation during times of conflict. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Reading the Signs

“Unless you people see signs and wonders,” Jesus told him, “you will never believe” (John 4:48).

Scripture: John 4:46-54

Song: “God of Wonders”

Our scattered-far-and-wide family planned to meet at a remote mountain cabin, but I didn’t know it would be so hard to find. It was after nightfall when the GPS stopped functioning a few miles from our destination. Thankfully, our daughter had already arrived and called us with directions. We studied the roads branching off the highway; the last one seemed right but had no sign like the others. As we passed that road, our daughter phoned and told us to look up. We’d been so intent looking for a little road sign that we’d missed seeing our grandkids waving from the cabin’s balcony.

Some people search for supernatural signs to know whether God is real, while missing the obvious display all around them. God explained that He made His presence and character plain to everyone through His creation (Romans 1:19-20). Others long for spine-tin-gling experiences but neglect to study His written Word, where He has detailed His character, His plans, and so much more.

At times we may wish God would send a series of clear-cut messages to guide our steps. Instead, He has given us His Word and His Holy Spirit living inside us. Our faith calls us to dig deep into the Scriptures and to pray, staying tuned to His truth moment by moment. When we do so, He’ll lead us right where we need to be.

Father, today I will look to the truth of Your Word and trust Your Holy Spirit to lead me. In Jesus’ name, amen.