

Blessed Assurance

Your dead will live, LORD; their bodies will rise—let those who dwell in the dust wake up and shout for joy (Isaiah 26:19).

Scripture: Isaiah 26:12-19

Song: “I’ll Fly Away”

I walked into my mother’s hospital room for a friendly visit, but the doctor pulled me aside and told me she was dying. My world caved in as I watched her gasp for air under her oxygen mask. Once they stabilized her, my mother said, “I have peace, Sarah, because I know where I’m going.” I hugged her. Then she looked ahead and smiled. My mother was almost home. The pain I felt was unbearable, but I had peace knowing I’d see her again.

Losing a loved one is one of the most painful events we’ll endure. The separation feels like a great chasm. The Israelites felt a similar agony when God sent them into captivity and allowed them to be oppressed by other rulers (Isaiah 26:13). But Isaiah reassured them that God would restore them to life again.

Sometimes we may wish we could trade in our aging bodies for newer models; the aging process certainly has a way of reminding us that our end is inevitable. But thanks to Christ’s redemptive work in our lives, we will one day have bodies that never decay. As we look forward to spending eternity with Him, we can rejoice that those who have died in Him will be there to meet us.

Father, Your promise that we will live again is our secure hope. In Jesus’ name, amen.

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July 18–24. **Sarah Cole** lives in Minneapolis with her dog, Gigi. She enjoys reading and traveling.

True or False?

If Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead (1 Corinthians 15:14-15).

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 15:12-19

Song: “Voice of Truth”

When I was a student at a Christian university, I wrote for our newspaper, *The Clarion*. Each fall we abandoned our journalistic integrity to plan our fake news issue, *The Carrion*. For weeks we brainstormed over our Diet Cokes and Domino’s pizza to plan fictional stories that poked fun at faculty and students. But except for fooling the incoming freshman class, we weren’t fooling anyone. Readers enjoyed the joke and responded accordingly.

Sometimes, though, it’s more difficult for us to separate fact from fiction. In Paul’s day some Greeks struggled to accept the truth of Jesus’ bodily resurrection. Greeks believed that God only resurrects the soul. Paul effectively argued that if Jesus has not been physically raised from the dead, then there is no gospel message and no salvation—and that his preaching and their faith were all in vain.

We can’t let preconceived notions become the lens through which we see the truth. As we grow in our knowledge of the Word, we develop discernment, and it becomes easier to distinguish truth from error. It’s OK to think critically and ask honest questions. But ultimately we need a firm foundation in Scripture so that when life’s storms threaten, false teaching won’t deceive us.

Father, thank You for Your Word. Help me treasure its truths today so I will stand firm in my faith. In Jesus’ name, amen.

A Foretaste of Heaven

Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the first-fruits of those who have fallen asleep (1 Corinthians 15:20).

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 15:20-28

Song: “Lord of the Harvest”

Each year from August to October, wine enthusiasts descend on Napa Valley, California, to experience the sights, tastes, and smells of the grape harvest. Behind the scenes, it is the moment vineyards have been waiting for all year; crews hustle around the clock to pick the first crop of plump, juicy grapes at their peak of perfection.

Similarly, in the fullness of time, Jesus came to earth and lived a sinless life (Galatians 4:4; 1 John 3:5). Then “at just the right time” once again (Romans 5:6), Jesus died, was buried, and then raised to life again. In doing so, He became the first fruits among those who will be resurrected to eternal life through Him. And it promises to be a *plentiful* harvest as Romans 8:29 tells us that Jesus is “the firstborn among *many* brothers and sisters” (italics added).

Christ’s followers are called to join in the work of the harvest: to plant and water and pray for increase (John 4:35-37; 1 Corinthians 3:5-9). When we don’t see fruit right away, it’s easy to become discouraged; but Jesus promises that as we are faithful to Him, the true vine, we will bear much fruit both now and for eternity (John 15:1, 5). As partakers in His harvest, our labor in and through Him will be worth the wait.

Father, help me be patient today as I grow in my faith and help tend the fruit of Your kingdom. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Heaven's Rewards

Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever (Daniel 12:3).

Scripture: Daniel 12:1-4

Song: "Crowns"

The most famous zip code in America, Hollywood, finds many ways to honor celebrities. Its Walk of Fame features more than 2,400 terrazzo stars embedded in sidewalks along the 18-block stretch of Hollywood Boulevard and Vine Street. Some of those celebrities are still remembered today, while the fame of others has faded into obscurity.

If we're not careful, we can be captivated by what society applauds and lose sight of God's calling on our lives. In his end-time vision, Daniel predicted that amid unprecedented suffering, the wise will shine as examples in their faithfulness to God and God will deliver them because their names are in the book (Daniel 12:1). When we face trying times, it's important to remember that our true riches are in Heaven and that, as we remain faithful despite trials, God will reward our commitment to Him.

Americans consider beauty and fame the gold standard of success, but these things are fleeting and not what God values. When we seek His kingdom, we become lights in this dark world. And once we finish our race, the crown Christ awards will put all human awards to shame, and we will spend eternity outshining what has passed away on earth.

Father, I want to value and pursue what is truly worthwhile. Keep my heart and mind focused on Your eternal rewards awaiting me in Heaven. In Jesus' name, amen.

Words Matter

“I tell you, a time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live” (John 5:25).

Scripture: John 5:25-29

Song: “Word of God, Speak”

My father loved doing impressions. His repertoire included W. C. Fields, Humphrey Bogart, Ronald Reagan, and Clint Eastwood. From day to day, I never knew which voice to expect. One summer we sat at our campsite around a crackling fire, and he began mooing like a cow. His voice carried, and the next thing we knew, a woman yelled, “Honey, there’s a cow in the campground!” Memories of my father and his voice bring me joy.

Our voices—the words we choose to speak—offer life or death to those around us (Proverbs 18:21). Jesus’ words did both. When He spoke, it was with the authority the Father gave Him as the Son of God. He promised that those who heard His voice and responded in faith would receive eternal life (John 5:25). Yet judgment awaited whoever rebelled against Him and did evil (v. 29).

In today’s media-driven culture, many voices compete for our attention; but in the end, only one matters. The same voice that calmed the raging storm on the Sea of Galilee and called Lazarus from the tomb still speaks to us today through His Word. As we seek Him, Jesus’ words convict, encourage, teach, and comfort us. Let’s follow His example and choose our words carefully.

Father, thank You for Your Son, Jesus. Help me speak His words of truth to someone else today. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Divine Delays

Jesus said, “This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God’s glory so that God’s Son may be glorified through it” (John 11:4).

Scripture: John 11:1, 3-16

Song: “While I Wait”

For three years, my life felt like the movie *Groundhog Day*. Like clockwork, I got a concussion each September, and my life changed overnight into a series of painful months that kept me from living a normal life. On the surface, it seemed like a cruel joke, and I asked God why He didn’t put an end to my suffering. But I realized that underneath it all, He was making me more like Christ—and His glory was more important than my comfort.

When we experience God’s delays, it’s easy to question His timing. Mary and Martha had good reason to expect Jesus to be punctual. They’d witnessed His miracles and knew how much He loved Lazarus. Yet Jesus wasn’t in a hurry. He didn’t answer to anyone but the Father, and He waited two days to return to Bethany. While Jesus’ delay made Him too late to prevent Lazarus’s death, He had another plan—to triumph over it.

If you’re in a tough season and are waiting for a breakthrough, remember: it’s not a surprise to God. We see our version of our story and how we think it should play out, yet God sees the bigger picture. So don’t give up! Rest in His sovereignty. His plans for you are good, and He promises to meet all your needs in His perfect timing.

Father, when circumstances test my patience, help me remember that You’re in control. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Unexpected Miracles

Jesus said, “Did I not tell you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?” (John 11:40).

Scripture: John 11:20-27, 38-44

Song: “I Need a Miracle”

For years Tristen’s vestibular migraines kept her from living a normal life. She asked for prayer countless times; yet vertigo, nausea, and pain continued to plague her. Bedridden, lonely, and discouraged, she cried out to God and asked why He allowed her to suffer. One Sunday her husband insisted she go to a healing service at their church. In agony, Tristen sat there weeping. But then, as she received prayer and was anointed with oil, she felt God’s overwhelming peace, and suddenly her symptoms vanished.

When we face a severe illness or setback, it’s easy to misunderstand God when He doesn’t act on our timetable. Mary and Martha experienced this. When Lazarus died, it seemed too late for a miracle, so they questioned why Jesus didn’t act sooner. But it was all part of God’s plan. Jesus knew that raising Lazarus from the dead would reveal His power and glory and that, as a result, many would place their trust in Him.

The next time you need a miracle and it appears God isn’t acting soon enough, don’t despair. Remember that He is never late, and His plans for you are perfect. What seems like an impossible situation to you is part of God’s plan to grow your trust and bring Him glory. He sees the future and He sees you.

Father, thank You that when trials overtake me, I can trust You to sustain me and to act at just the right time. In Jesus’ name, amen.