

Look and See!

When you see this, your heart will rejoice and you will flourish like grass; the hand of the LORD will be made known to his servants (Isaiah 66:14).

Scripture: Isaiah 66:6-14

Song: “A Thousand More”

Bubble-gum-pink clouds dotted the azure sky while shades of fire announced the winter sunrise. As on many mornings, I thought about hopping into my car and driving a mile to view dawn in its full glory near Mount Rainier. But I was eager to spend time with Jesus, so I shuffled into the kitchen, brewed a cup of coffee, and hunkered down in my home office.

That afternoon I scrolled through posts on social media and saw that a friend had shared a picture of daybreak in Oregon: “Another beautiful sunrise this morning. Are the sunrises more beautiful in the winter, or is it just that I’m still in bed when the sun rises in the summer? Perhaps a reminder of how much beauty is in the world if we are awake to see it.”

We live in the kingdom of God, though not in its fullness or as it will be one day. But if we take time to stop and look, we can see the evidence all around—reminders of what He has done, what He is doing, and what He will do.

Father, thank You for giving us glimpses of Your kingdom to come. In Jesus’ name, amen.

August 8–14. **Rebecca Stuhlmiller** helps people take practical steps to grow deeper in their relationship with Jesus and wider in loving service to family, church, community, and the world in His name. She and her husband, Jeff, live in Federal Way, Washington.

Am I a Missionary?

I will send some . . . to the nations . . . to the distant islands that have not heard of my fame or seen my glory (Isaiah 66:19).

Scripture: Isaiah 66:18-22

Song: “We’ve a Story to Tell to the Nations”

“Raise your hand if you’re a missionary!” The minister scanned the congregation and was pleased to see many hands shoot up. But he also noticed that some were hesitant, only slipping up a hand after looking around the sanctuary to see how others were responding. A permanent sign above the exit door was always there to remind everyone, “You are now entering the mission field.” *So why are some people still missing the message?* he wondered.

Perhaps for some of us there is confusion about the words *missionary* and *mission*. In previous generations a missionary was understood to be someone who traveled to a foreign land on assignment to preach the gospel and see souls come to Christ, helping them become established, mature believers. In recent years the term has broadened and can refer to anyone involved locally or globally in good works done in Christ’s name—such as orphan care, medical ministry, education, church planting, and discipleship.

But whether or not we leave our home country and move overseas, we all are commissioned to partner in reaching the world with the gospel of Christ, one way or another: by praying, mobilizing, or giving. A talk with your local church leaders can help you discover opportunities for missions.

Father, help me fulfill my role in proclaiming the good news of the gospel. In Jesus’ name, amen.

The Ultimate Destination

You have not come to a mountain that can be touched and that is burning with fire; to darkness, gloom and storm. . . . You have come . . . to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant (Hebrews 12:18, 23-24).

Scripture: Hebrews 12:18-29

Song: “Evidence”

When my daughter Elizabeth was assigned to rebrand a country in her Design for the Web college course, she chose New Zealand because it's a place she'd like to visit. She created an attractive ad campaign, including a logo, postage stamp, billboard, postcard, souvenirs, and a travel video. I'd never thought about going to New Zealand before; but when I saw her presentation, I wanted to go right away!

Elizabeth's project made me reflect on how I advertise my relationship with Jesus. Do people see me experiencing freedom and celebration and displaying the appealing fruit of God's Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23)? Does my relationship with Him create curiosity and a desire in others to discover God for themselves? Or do I more often complain, criticize, worry, or vent, reflecting a faith that is unappealing to those who might be wondering about Christ and Christianity?

When I daydream about traveling, I don't imagine going to a land ravaged by flood, fire, or famine. Who would buy a plane ticket and create an itinerary for such a trip? An inviting vacation promises rest, recreation, and restoration. Similarly, a believer who is walking in the love, joy, and peace of God's Spirit makes the destination of God's kingdom an inviting one.

Father, help me display life-giving fellowship with You so that others want to discover You for who You really are. In Jesus' name, amen.

Spiritual Health Inspection

Walk about Zion, go around her, count her towers, consider well her ramparts, view her citadels, that you may tell of them to the next generation (Psalm 48:12-13).

Scripture: Psalm 48

Song: “Build Your Kingdom Here”

The Inner Ward and Outer Ward of Conwy Castle in North Wales have four towers each: the Bakehouse Tower, Stockhouse Tower, Chapel Tower, King’s Tower, Prison Tower, Kitchen Tower, northwest tower, and southwest tower. By their names we get an idea of the purposes they served for the king and his courtiers. But after three centuries of use, the fortress fell into disrepair due to weak construction and poor maintenance. The iron and lead exteriors were stripped and sold, leaving the castle an admired relic instead of the stronghold it was created to be.

As God’s people our lives are a dwelling place for our Lord (Corinthians 6:19-20). Without regular “maintenance,” however, we can grow weak and become ineffective in our service to Him. To help guard against neglect, I’ve named six “towers” in my life and take a monthly inspection of each: God Life (relationship with Him), Home Life, Ministry Life, Physical Life, Recreational Life, and Social Life (relationship with others). Prayerfully, I present each area to God, examining each in light of His Word, asking where there’s work to be done.

This practice helps me evaluate my spiritual life, but you can easily use it as a blueprint for examining your own life’s “towers.”

Father, I ask Your help in any areas of my life that need spiritual repair right now. I want to serve You well and bring You glory. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Never Outdated

This is what the LORD Almighty says. . . . This is what the LORD says. . . . This is what the LORD Almighty says. . . . This is what the LORD Almighty says. . . . This is what the LORD Almighty says. (Zechariah 8:2-4, 6-7).

Scripture: Zechariah 8:1-8

Song: “Every Promise of Your Word”

My heart warms when I watch my 4-year-old grandson, Henry, scrutinize the ingredients on a cereal box. I grin as he studies the instruction booklet that comes with flat-pack furniture. As a child I had my own quirky favorite pastime: examining a stack of *World Book Encyclopedias*. They towered beside my bed, making it handy to thumb through a volume before drifting off to sleep. I was fascinated by the pictures I saw and what I learned. I never questioned the content because, as a kid, I figured facts were facts and experts were experts.

When the prophet Zechariah declared the blessings of obedience to God’s people, they had recently returned to Jerusalem from their time of exile in Babylon. Zechariah made certain that the words he delivered would not be mistaken for the words of a mere man who might change his mind and the message. As Zechariah delivered God’s message, he reminded the people over and over again that the promises were coming from the all-powerful, omnipotent, and unchanging God.

Encyclopedias are updated as new discoveries are made. However, the Word of God, inspired by God and written thousands of years ago, is valid, reliable, and unchanging—relevant today and forever.

Father, thank You for giving us Your timeless Word. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Conflict Happens

Fight the good fight of the faith . . . until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, which God will bring about in his own time (1 Timothy 6:12, 14-15).

Scripture: 1 Timothy 6:11-16

Song: “Good Fight”

When my husband and I were preparing to go into missions, we spent a month in training at the sending agency’s home office. One morning after our staff devotional, a woman approached me and said, “You might want to take a conflict management class.” *What?* Not a “Hello” or “How’s it going?” Boy, was I offended! Was she implying that I would be fighting with people when I got on the field?

We were planning to share Jesus’ love and our faith in a gentle way, not engage in disputes. Conflict was something I avoided. If I felt I had no choice, though, I knew how to stand my ground. But I was naïve and didn’t understand there were good ways and bad ways to contend for our faith. It wasn’t long before I realized I should have listened to what she’d said instead of focusing on how abruptly she had said it.

As an experienced church leader, Paul knew it was important to remind young Timothy that his kingdom-building life would include conflict and contending for the faith. And as followers of Jesus, it’s crucial for us to remember that our work won’t always be easy. From my experience, I now know that sound training in this area is a good idea.

Father, please help me keep learning how to fight for my faith in a wise and gracious way—in Your way. In Jesus’ name, amen.

A Brilliant Display

He . . . showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God. It shone with the glory of God, and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel (Revelation 21:10-11).

Scripture: Revelation 21:10-21

Song: “How Glorious the Splendor”

The market town of Wattens, near Innsbruck, Austria, is home to the Swarovski crystal glass company. Each year over 500,000 tourists flock to the corporation’s museum, Swarovski Crystal Worlds, to learn about the company and admire a dazzling display of lead-crystal jewelry, glass animals, and accessories. At the end of the museum’s tour, visitors are directed to the gift shop to buy a memento.

As one such tourist, I found it challenging to choose just one souvenir. How could I settle on a single cut? Or how could I limit myself to one color when there were so many to choose from? Overwhelmed, I finally settled on a variety box of loose crystals, discounted because they were slightly flawed.

Swarovski is famous for its use of fine materials and a complicated manufacturing process that can mimic precious gemstones, but their products are really only akin to high-end rhinestones. How awesome that God has designed the Holy City to be made of only what is real and flawless, a place where we can delight in all the colors and cuts. It will be as 1 Corinthians 2:9 says: “‘What no eye has seen . . . and what no human mind has conceived’—the things God has prepared for those who love him.”

Father, I want to live in gratitude today for what You have yet to reveal to me in glory. In Jesus’ name, amen.