

Follow Wholeheartedly

My soul followeth hard after thee: thy right hand upholdeth me (Psalm 63:8, *KJV*).

Scripture: Psalm 63

Song: “Jesus Is All the World to Me”

Beau was a white and orange Brittany spaniel with the energy of four dogs, the curiosity of two dogs, and half the brains of a puppy. One Christmas, when Beau spotted a rare desert squirrel, he took off like a shot, overjoyed at the prospect of his first quarry. He was gaining ground on the critter when suddenly it slowed. The spaniel saw his chance and . . . *chomp!* But instead of grabbing a snack, the poor dog bit into what the wily rodent had skillfully avoided: a prickly pear cactus.

Some of us may have come to believe that God is like that squirrel and that if we pursue Him wholeheartedly, somehow we’ll end up with a soul full of pain and disappointment. So we measure out what we’re willing to risk and keep a backup plan, just in case.

The truth is that God is not playing games with us nor luring us into a trap. He is the source of everything we need, and He is the only way to the life we crave. While our fears tell us to hold back from following all-out after Jesus, if we listen to those fears, they will cheat us out of enjoying God’s goodness. You see, come what may, those who choose to follow Christ are forever upheld by His mighty hand.

Father, give me a heart to follow after You with all my heart. In Jesus’ name, amen.

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August 15–21. **Alisha Plummer** is an emergency department physician assistant in New Mexico.

Waters of Hope

Living waters shall go out from Jerusalem; half of them toward the former sea, and half of them toward the hinder sea: in summer and in winter shall it be (Zechariah 14:8, *KJV*).

Scripture: Zechariah 14:6-11

Song: “Fill My Cup, Lord”

The Rio Grande River is sometimes so brown that you can hardly distinguish it from the sand. It is often so shallow, you can't hear it over the sound of the wind in the cottonwoods. And occasionally, wading in it feels like just a muddy version of the hot air around it. What makes the Rio Grande grand, though, is that summer or winter, it always has water. For 1,900 miles it sustains a green ribbon of vegetation. And in the desert, that's what a river needs to do to be considered grand.

Travel as far as you like to the east. Sail as far as you can to the west. Our world is a spiritual desert. The nations thirst for God, yet they do not recognize Him as God. Zechariah wrote of a supremely grand river of living waters that will flow “out from Jerusalem.” His words bring to mind what Jesus said in John 4:10-14: that He would provide living water to anyone who asks, water that would spring up to eternal life.

The hope of Jesus our Savior flows continuously, even when it is hard to see or hear or feel. This river reaches to the ends of the earth. No land is too remote, no language too obscure, no person too hopeless.

Father, help me treasure the gift of Your salvation and share it with others who thirst just like me. In Jesus' name, amen.

Redeemed

There cometh a woman of Samaria to draw water (John 4:7, *KJV*).

Scripture: John 4:4-14

Song: “There Is a Fountain”

A dragon lives in my backyard. His wings are sculpted out of rusted horseshoes, and his claws are railroad spikes. An old shock forms his body, and his neck is part of an ancient motor. But his face is the best. His jaws, made of garden shovels, are open wide as if to breathe fire as he stalks his prey. No doubt the farmer thought those decaying horseshoes were worthless, just like the spikes. The mechanic was probably happy to be rid of those old car parts, and the gardener ready to forget about the shovels. But the artist saw an opportunity to redeem those tired, worn-out pieces for new purposes.

When Jesus encountered the Samaritan woman, he didn't deny or gloss over the choices that had messed up her life. He didn't pretend everything was OK. He saw the wrecked pieces of her existence, and yet He wanted to renew her, make her beautiful again and useful for God. He saw her as redeemable.

Many of us have piles of “junk metal” in our lives in the form of sinful decisions, past and present, mixed in with our faithless refusal to come to God because we think, *My sins are unredeemable*. But God wants to redeem us and give us a fresh start, and He is able!

Father, I need You to reach me in these places where I am broken and feel hopeless! I confess the truth about myself and gratefully receive Your redeeming love today. In Jesus' name, amen.

The Test of Worship

True worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth (John 4:23, *KJV*).

Scripture: John 4:15-26

Song: “We Give Thee but Thine Own”

The National Cathedral in Washington, DC, is the sixth largest cathedral in the world. One story about its construction is that someone asked one of the sculptors why he worked so meticulously on a figure that would not be in view, he answered, “God will see it—it’s to His glory.”

Seeking to honor and glorify God is the essence of true worship. Of course we know that worship is more than a set of songs we sing on Sunday morning. Most of us could agree that worship includes honoring God in our thoughts and intentions, in our conversations, and through how we invest our time and talents. But our human tendency is to *say* that something we are doing is in worship to God; then we often end up using it for our own glory. While we soak up the praise, God is really just an afterthought. Would we be as enthusiastic as the stone carver if others weren’t looking on?

That is why perhaps the truest worship is in the moment-to-moment outpouring of a life dedicated to the glory of Jesus Christ. It is the ongoing attitude of a son or daughter of God, living to honor their Savior. As we examine our hearts, a helpful test might be to consider how well our Sunday living agrees with what we’re like on Monday morning or Saturday night.

Father, wash away what is false in me that I might worship You in truth. In Jesus’ name, amen.

No Time Limit

In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink (John 7:37, *KJV*).

Scripture: John 7:37-40

Song: “Speak, O Lord”

As a five-year-old with blue and red ribbons bobbing above my braids, I was on my way to my very first Super Bowl party. I knew we lived near Buffalo and that the Bills were playing. But I didn't understand how special this game was. All I knew was that, as the day progressed, the only “person” I had to play with was the poodle. All I could think about was doing something *else*, something *fun*.

I confess that as an adult, a “What's next?” attitude still drives me. Anticipating that last song at church, feeling anxious for spring to arrive, or thinking that Christmas Eve means Christmas is basically over, I often miss the joy of the “finish line” because I'm busy looking for the next “starting gun.” Yet it was the last day of the feast when Jesus stood to speak. The finale was at hand, the festivities were passing quickly, and perhaps the pressures of tomorrow were creeping back in. But God was not finished there, not yet.

God is not limited to our timeline. The end of a thing provides as much opportunity for Him to work as does the beginning. He is willing to instruct us as long as we are willing to lay aside our preoccupation with what comes next.

Father, please quiet my racing thoughts and concerns right now. I want to be fully attentive to Your Word in this moment. In Jesus' name, amen.

Better than My Boss

I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground: I will pour my spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring (Isaiah 44:3, *KJV*).

Scripture: Isaiah 44:1-8

Song: “Like a River Glorious”

“You want me to do *what?*” I asked. I thought my boss had just asked me to go buy pants for him. He had.

“Just take the Lexus. Here’s my size. I need them for tonight’s game.” He was gone, and I was left holding \$20 and the keys to a car that was worth every dime I had ever made, and then some!

It was a stressful shopping trip. However, my boss had provided everything I needed to accomplish the task, and I returned with the clothing . . . and the Lexus, without a scratch.

When it comes to providing what we need to do His will, the Lord is even better than my boss: He pours His Spirit into our lives along with everything we need, including peace.

Sometimes following Him may feel as daunting as facing a den of lions (Daniel 6) or as senseless as dipping seven times into a muddy river (2 Kings 5). But regardless of where the Lord leads, He is always with us. As we obey, the Lord himself provides strength and grace that we may be confident in whatever good work He has given us to do.

Father, You are here in this moment and in every one to come. You are equipping me to live this day and this life for Your glory. I rest in You. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Light of His Glory

His servants . . . shall see his face (Revelation 22:3-4, *KJV*).

Scripture: Revelation 22:1-9

Song: “Threshold of Glory”

The term *Shekinah glory*, though nowhere found in Scripture, is a rabbinic expression used when speaking of the reality of God’s very presence. It’s related to the Hebrew word *shakan*, which means “to dwell” or “to reside” within a community.

During the time of the exodus, a pillar of cloud by day and column of fire at night revealed God’s presence with His people. In the tabernacle, and later the temple, God’s presence was palpable within the Holy of Holies. Later, God’s presence and glory were revealed in the person of Jesus Christ. And today the Lord is present with and within His followers by His Holy Spirit.

Throughout both the Old and New Testaments, the Lord’s presence is not revealed by means of mystic ritual or tradition, but rather He reveals himself by being present with and working within and through His people. Even to this day, though, we do not yet see Him in His full glory (1 Corinthians 13:12).

In Heaven, however, the glory of His presence will no longer need to be veiled. We shall be made perfect and able to see Him as He is (1 John 3:2). Darkness will be fully displaced. Sin will be completely purged. Suffering and tears will cease to exist (Revelation 21:4). Then we as His servants will see the full beauty and splendor of God’s unveiled glory.

Father, thank You for Your Spirit in my life. Please let Your glory shine through in all my choices, thoughts, and attitudes. In Jesus’ name, amen.