

## Recalling God's Assurances

**Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst** (1 Timothy 1:15).

**Scripture:** 1 Timothy 1:1-4, 12-17

**Song:** “There Is a Balm in Gilead”

Believers who have been imprisoned because of the gospel have often testified that their faith was sustained by dwelling on Scripture they had committed to memory. How important for us as Christians to hide the assurances from God's Word in our hearts!

The apostle Paul wrote to Timothy, “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners” (1 Timothy 1:15). What a blessed assurance of God's merciful heart! The other part of the verse—“of whom I am the worst”—refers to Paul's past, when he had violently opposed and persecuted the church. Yet God in His mercy forgave Paul and used him as a vehicle to share God's grace with others. Paul was letting Timothy know, “If God was willing to save someone like me, then no one is out of the reach of His saving grace.”

There are so many wonderful assurances in Scripture that support our faith. What are some passages you might memorize that would help when you are distressed or when your faith is under fire?

**Father,** Your Word provides abundant assurance of Your grace and goodness. I will hide Your Word in my heart so that in all circumstances I will stand strong (Psalm 119:11). In Jesus' name, amen.

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November 14–20. **John K. Luoma** lives in Florida with his wife. He is a retired teacher and pastor and is active in prayer and spiritual renewal ministries.

## Faithful Citizens

**I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people—for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness (1 Timothy 2:1-2).**

**Scripture:** 1 Timothy 2:1-8

**Song:** “Lord of All Nations, Grant Me Grace”

It’s often been said that there are two topics to avoid in polite conversation: one is religion and the other, politics. It’s not hard to understand the conventional wisdom in this advice. Such topics often generate more heat than light.

As Christians, though, our first priority will always be God’s kingdom and His righteousness. That means we must always be ready to talk about our faith, but we are to do so with gentleness and respect (1 Peter 3:15). And where politics are concerned, the apostle Paul prescribed prayer. Among Jesus’ disciples there was a tax collector, a Zealot, some fishermen, and others—a wide array of perspectives and interests. But their unity around Jesus illustrates that politics will never be more important than our devotion to Christ, our love for one another as believers, and our mission to proclaim the gospel.

God wants all people to be reconciled to Him. Paul called for prayer for our government leaders, that peace may prevail in our society and we may carry on our work for God’s kingdom. Are we praying regularly for our government and its officials?

**Father,** we pray for our government leaders and ask that we might enjoy a peaceful, orderly, and just society in which we may share the message of salvation with others. In Jesus’ name, amen.

## Serving Well

**Those who have served well gain an excellent standing and great assurance in their faith in Christ Jesus** (1 Timothy 3:13).

**Scripture:** 1 Timothy 3:1-13

**Song:** “O Master, Let Me Walk with You”

For anyone who has ever gone job hunting, it doesn't take long to discover that there's a lot of work involved in finding work! After identifying a potential job, we check out the job description—what skills, knowledge, experience, and abilities we need—and also the personal qualities the employer is looking for. Understanding these two things helps us know whether or not we're qualified for the job.

The apostle Paul has little to say about the job description (as far as tasks) for an overseer or a deacon, probably because these were understood. Paul *does* have a lot to say, however, about the character qualities of a person who would serve in either of these capacities. We may wonder, *How could anyone possibly fulfill them?* These expectations seem almost superhuman!

The truth is that every calling in the church is characterized by high expectations, and each of us has some calling by which we can advance the gospel. God expects much of us, but God promises to provide the strength we need in order to do the job. More than that, God will bless us by strengthening our faith and making it apparent to others that He blesses those who serve Him.

**Father**, thank You for the high calling that You give us, the promise that You will empower us as we trust You, and the excellent standing You will give to those who serve well. In Jesus' name, amen.

## Blessed to Be a Blessing

**He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. . . . To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God (Micah 6:8).**

**Scripture:** Micah 6:1-8

**Song:** “Praise to You, O God of Mercy”

Long ago I began the practice of keeping a gratitude file. In it I place all the notes and letters of appreciation I have received over the years, and from time to time I return to it and review it. I do that because sometimes it's easy to forget about others and center my life on myself. It reminds me of how much God has blessed me, and that I am called to be a blessing to others.

Micah writes of a critical moment in Israel's life with God, detailing a great controversy God is having with His people. The prophet pictures God as a prosecutor who summons His people to court. What are the charges? For centuries the Lord has showered them with blessings: He led them out of slavery in Egypt, He sent leaders to guide them in their journey, He protected them from people who desired to destroy them. And how have they responded? With ingratitude! Then God reminds them of what gratitude looks like: exercising justice, kindness, and humility.

Likewise, God calls us to account when we stray. By His loving discipline He reminds us of the blessings we have received and calls us back to himself and back to being a blessing to others.

**Father,** enable us to live as grateful people by remembering the blessings You show-er on us. In Jesus' name, amen.

## When the Evil Prosper

**Do not fret when people succeed in their ways, when they carry out their wicked schemes** (Psalm 37:7).

**Scripture:** Psalm 37:1-9, 37-40

**Song:** “On Eagle’s Wings”

One of the best-selling religious books of our day was Harold S. Kushner’s *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*. I think someone could write an equally interesting book with the title *When Good Things Happen to Bad People*. Such a book would center on the questions: How can one explain or deal with the obvious reality that evil people sometimes seem to prosper? And how are we to respond to that?

The author of Psalm 37 provides the answer: “Do not fret” (v. 7). In other words, do not worry, do not be anxious. Instead of fretting, engage in God-honoring activities: do good, delight in the Lord, work for justice, be still before God. It may seem like the evil prosper, but they will wither. They will be cut off. They will be destroyed. And God will vindicate those who entrust themselves to Him.

Yes, it can be anxiety-producing when those who practice evil seem to prosper. Nevertheless, we can trust God, who will not forsake us. We hold to a beautiful promise in Christ: “We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose” (Romans 8:28).

**Father,** thank You for Your promise that You will prevail against evil. Thank You for the gift of Your grace that enables us to overcome our fretting and fear. In Jesus’ name, amen.

## Called to Service

**Samuel did not yet know the LORD: The word of the LORD had not yet been revealed to him** (1 Samuel 3:7).

**Scripture:** 1 Samuel 3:1-10

**Song:** “I, the Lord of Sea and Sky”

I remember the day vividly. My confirmation class was in the sanctuary, awaiting the start of our practice for Sunday’s service. The minister had not yet arrived, which meant students began talking and wandering about. I climbed into the elevated pulpit. As I looked out over the sanctuary, the minister entered. I expected to be scolded, but instead he looked up and said, “Maybe that is where you will be someday.” I have come to regard that experience as the beginning of my call to ministry.

Though Samuel was serving in the tabernacle, he still didn’t have a clear sense of his calling. He needed someone to help him discern what God wanted him to do. He needed the elderly priest, Eli, to advise him how to respond to the Lord’s voice.

Each of us has a calling to serve in God’s kingdom. As we prayerfully seek to follow Him, He will open up opportunities for us to minister His truth and love within the church, as well as to those who have yet to be saved. And it may be that He will use someone else—as He did Eli the priest or the minister who encouraged me—to encourage you along your way.

**Father,** thank You for the various ways You call and equip us to serve in Your church. Be with us as we encourage each other to pursue that call. In Jesus’ name, amen.

## God's Prevailing Mercy

**Because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved** (Ephesians 2:4-5).

**Scripture:** Ephesians 2:1-10

**Song:** “Blessed Assurance”

I like to end my day by reviewing it prayerfully and preparing my heart for the next day. I recall the day's moments of gratitude and give thanks for those graces. I confess when I've strayed from God, receiving His forgiveness and asking for renewed strength to walk uprightly. Then I pray over the events of the next day and ask God to guide and bless.

I think one reason the above practice is effective is that it is grounded in the grace of God, which the apostle Paul so joyfully expressed in today's passage. In all circumstances we can give thanks for the mercy of God in Christ. There is continual struggle with sin and Satan, but those powers are overcome through the grace of God at work in our lives. As we present our plans to God, we can be confident that God, through Christ, will bring about His plan and purpose for His glory.

How important it is for us to review our life with God! (Lamentations 3:40; 1 Corinthians 11:28). Doing so reminds us to seek His mercy, His forgiveness, and His grace for each new day.

**Father,** thank You for making me alive in Christ and for Your abundant grace that blesses, forgives, and empowers me to live each day for Your glory. In Jesus' name, amen.