

Love-Centered Service

“I hold this against you: You have forsaken the love you had at first” (Revelation 2:4).

Scripture: Revelation 2:1-7

Song: “Worker God, Who Planned Creation”

Phil Vischer, who cofounded Big Idea Productions, hoped to share his love for God through making Bible-themed videos for children. The videos gained popularity, but the company fell on difficulties and eventually declared bankruptcy. Reflecting on his time as Big Idea’s CEO, Vischer wrote about how the company’s collapse helped him realize his heart had turned away from God in favor of the work he was supposed to be doing for God.

God warned the Ephesian church that they had fallen into a similarly dangerous state of heart. Though they were accomplishing many good deeds and standing against the wickedness around them, they were no longer doing it out of an overflow of love for God. Caught up in their mission, they had abandoned their love for the one who had sent them.

It is God’s desire that we live out of a genuine love for Him (Mark 12:29-30). He wants our worship and obedience to Him to be heartfelt and fulfilling, not an empty cycle of just going through the motions. If we today reflect on our acts of service and discover they are not motivated by sincere love for Christ, we can be encouraged that He will meet our repentance with His grace.

Father, I want to stay fully devoted to You. Help me reevaluate my motives today. In Jesus’ name, amen.

November 21–27. **Megan L. Anderson** can be found covered in muddy paw prints, courtesy of the canine guests at her dog day care and boarding business.

God's Chosen Messengers

This grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the boundless riches of Christ, and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery (Ephesians 3:8-9).

Scripture: Ephesians 3:1-13

Song: “Anywhere with Jesus”

During the American Civil War, special personnel were assigned to mail wagons that served as traveling post offices. These special carriers transported news between the front lines and the soldiers' loved ones who waited back home. These postal workers often put themselves at risk as they delivered letters between the lonely, suffering soldiers and their concerned families. Receiving word from home was a vital part of keeping morale up, so being chosen as a post carrier was a great honor. The nation was depending on them to keep the lines of communication open.

Much like those mail carriers who delivered vital news, the apostle Paul was entrusted with God's message of grace. Delivering the gospel meant Paul had to put himself in some difficult and dangerous situations, but he recognized the great honor it was to carry God's Word to a world in need of salvation (Romans 1:16).

Today we have the Bible—God's “love letter” (John 20:30-31) and “instruction manual” (2 Timothy 3:16-17)—more readily available to us than ever. What a privilege to be entrusted with its priceless words of encouragement and direction! And what an honor to share in the work of delivering the message of God's saving grace to a suffering world!

Father, thank You for the amazing gift of Your Word. Embolden me to share its message today. In Jesus' name, amen.

Spiritually Maturing Together

Christ himself . . . [equips] his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ (Ephesians 4:11-13).

Scripture: Ephesians 4:1-8, 11-16

Song: “The Family of God”

A popular newspaper column tells the stories of individuals with mysterious illnesses. Readers from around the world are encouraged to respond with their ideas of what the underlying conditions could be and share their stories of similar experiences. Patients hope the collective wisdom of the crowd will help them find an accurate diagnosis and treatment. But in addition to that, it connects the featured patients with a supportive community that reassures them they are not alone.

When we come to saving faith in Jesus, we join the body of Christ, a community of individuals whose diverse gifts, insights, and experiences can help us along our way. As we grow toward spiritual maturity, we are able to serve and encourage one another, fostering spiritual health and well-being.

What an extraordinary grace—that God unites us as a body of believers who can encourage, empathize, and walk with one another! In this way we are reminded that we’re never alone on this journey of faith.

Father, I want to keep moving toward maturity in Christ. Thank You for equipping Your people to support one another as we grow in unity, faith, and knowledge of Your Son. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Freedom Through God's Word

[The Gentiles] are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts (Ephesians 4:18).

Scripture: Ephesians 4:17-27

Song: “Wonderful Words of Life”

Until the mid-1860s it was illegal in the United States to teach a slave to read or write. Fortunately, 12-year-old Frederick Douglass was able to learn the alphabet before the master's wife was required to stop teaching him. And with that foundational knowledge, Douglass achieved literacy. Understanding the written word opened access to new information and ideas previously denied him. In his memoirs, he described how he realized that reading could be his pathway to freedom. Douglass indeed used this knowledge to escape slavery and gained international influence as an abolitionist.

Satan would like nothing better than to keep us ignorant of the truth so that we remain “slaves to sin” (Romans 6:17-18). But God has given us His Word. And as we read the Scriptures, we come to understand how destructive our life of sin is . . . and we realize who God is and all the good He holds out to us. His Word explains the way to spiritual freedom!

When we come into that freedom by grace through faith in Christ, it's our privilege to lead others to the one who has abolished sin and death and who offers everlasting life. Let's proclaim His Word to everyone who will listen!

Father, thank You for opening my understanding to the truth of Your Word. As I boldly proclaim the gospel, may others find freedom in You. In Jesus' name, amen.

Refuge in the Storm

“Because he loves me,” says the Lord, . . . “he will call on me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble” (Psalm 91:14-15).

Scripture: Psalm 91

Song: “My Faith Has Found a Resting Place”

In 2005, after leaving the Mexican coast for a days-long fishing expedition, Salvador Ordonez’s boat lost its heavy tackle and then ran out of fuel. The vessel was then caught in a current that dragged it nearly 5,000 miles out to sea. With no means of communication, the five fishermen on board were stranded adrift. Through starvation and storms, the survivors spent much of their time praying and reading the Bible that Ordonez had brought. After being rescued by a Taiwanese trawler nine months later, Ordonez and the others credited God for His help through their long hardship.

We too may face times when we feel adrift and battered by the storms of life. Through even the direst circumstances, the encouragement of God’s Word and His Holy Spirit within us are always there to offer us refuge.

As believers, we have God’s assurance that when we call on His name, He will answer us and draw near. Loving and trusting God does not guarantee that our lives will be easy and free from suffering, but we can trust in His promise that evil will not ultimately prevail over us. We can rest in the sanctuary of His presence and experience hope and joy through anything we face.

Father, thank You for the hope and comfort Your Holy Spirit ministers to us in our times of trial. In Jesus’ name, amen.

God's Unshakable Faithfulness

“Though the mountains be shaken and the hills be removed, yet my unfailing love for you will not be shaken nor my covenant of peace be removed,” says the LORD, who has compassion on you (Isaiah 54:10).

Scripture: Isaiah 54:6-17

Song: “O God, Our Help in Ages Past”

Just before Mount St. Helens erupted, its northern flank collapsed, causing the largest landslide in US history. As the volcano's force gathered, the earth quaked, ash spewed, and falling debris triggered mudflows that caused widespread damage to infrastructure. Surrounding land, roughly 230 square miles, was devastated. Yet signs of life sprang up within days. Gophers sheltering in their deep burrows emerged and tilled the soil, where new plants began growing. These plants attracted insects, which attracted birds and eventually larger wildlife. Despite the catastrophe of the Mount St. Helens eruption, the area now teems with new life.

Similarly, times of intense pressure and devastation in our lives are often followed by seasons of transformative renewal. This applies to our relationship with God too. Difficult circumstances may shake our world and challenge our faith, but God's unfailing love and compassion give us hope for a more peaceful and fruitful life ahead.

God is not rocked by the forces of this world or the seemingly catastrophic concerns we face. Even when we anxiously look around for help and comfort apart from Him, His compassion for us remains steady. He is always true to His covenant with us, and there is no greater comfort than that.

Father, Thank You for the comfort and hope Your unfailing love and compassion bring to me in times of distress. In Jesus' name, amen.

Standing Against the Flames

Put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand (Ephesians 6:13).

Scripture: Ephesians 6:10-24

Song: “Stand Up, Stand Up for Jesus”

To become a smoke jumper, Deanne Shulman knew she needed more training than the 600 hours required for becoming a regular firefighter. Smoke jumpers fight wildfires by parachuting into remote areas and must be prepared to handle the unpredictable nature of the fires as well as the uncontrollable elements into which they are dropped. Having mastered the skill she needed to jump from airplanes into blazing infernos while carrying over 100 pounds of equipment, Shulman became the first female smoke jumper in US history.

Paul urges us to be prepared to withstand the enemy’s flaming arrows. Just as smoke jumpers have specially designed jumpsuits to protect them during falls and firefighting, believers have the armor of God to protect against the spiritual forces of evil.

While God’s Word (the sword of the Spirit) is the most important weapon we have in this battle, the Lord also equips us with salvation, righteousness, truth, the gospel of peace, and faith. The Holy Spirit prepares us, teaching us to use these provisions to fight against the devil’s destructive schemes. And as we suit up in God’s armor each day, we are prepared not only to face the forces working against us, but also to stand successfully against them.

Father, thank You for providing all the tools we need—not just to survive evil, but to be victorious over it. In Jesus’ name, amen.