

Overcome with Love

You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world (1 John 4:4).

Scripture: 1 John 4:1-8

Song: “Shine, Jesus, Shine!”

My daughter needed to get signed up for classes, so she and I had an appointment at the registrar’s office. When we arrived, the woman there met us with overt hostility and rudeness. I was confused by her attitude, and my immediate inclination was to respond in kind. But thankfully, I sat there and began to pray silently for God to bring His peace into that space. Within a matter of a few minutes, the woman’s attitude drastically changed toward us. And by the time our meeting was over, she actually walked us to our car. On the way home, my daughter looked at me and said, “What just happened?”

We may live in a physical world, but there is more to it than what we can see with our physical eyes. Spiritual darkness is all around us. However, Christ has established His kingdom in the hearts of His children; and this is all we need to live in His love and overcome the darkness.

Let’s live as God’s dear children today so that those we encounter can experience Christ’s light and love through us.

Father, fill us with Your love so that it will dispel the darkness that is all around us. In Jesus’ name, amen.

January 23–29. **Jane Keller** lives in Colorado with her husband. She loves sharing the table with her friends and family.

A Loving Father

There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love (1 John 4:18).

Scripture: 1 John 4:9-21

Song: “O Perfect Love”

Once when I was about 5 years old, I thought it would be a great idea to surprise my dad by drawing a picture for him . . . on the wall. So I took my crayons and got busy. I was so excited to show him my artwork. When I took him to the wall for the big reveal, he bent down to tell me what a pretty picture it was and, at the same time, told me I could never draw on the wall again. He was kind and gentle, loving in his response, but I knew I had done something wrong.

What overwhelming comfort to know there is nothing we can do that can separate us from God’s love (Romans 8:31-39). We often forget this though. Perhaps it’s because we see our heavenly Father as angry and ready to punish, rather than seeing Him as always loving, even when He must be firm. Fear has to do with punishment, but Jesus has already received the punishment for our sins (Isaiah 53:4-6). So if we are in Him, we have nothing to fear.

Fear is stepping into the darkness of who we were before Christ. Let’s instead live in the light of our forgiveness.

Father, thank You that we have no reason to fear when we belong to You by grace through faith in Your Son. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Our Testimony

This is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son (1 John 5:11).

Scripture: 1 John 5:10-21

Song: “There Is a Redeemer”

I recently heard someone say, “That shirt you’re wearing is giving me so much life right now.” “Giving me life” has become slang for “I really like it.” If you have teenagers or watch any amount of reality television, you’ve probably heard it. I personally like the expression. I guess you could say that it gives me life! I think the reason I like it is because it so clearly communicates the idea of joy.

God has gifted us with this life for the purpose of enjoying Him and bringing Him glory when we live our lives in a way that is honoring to Him. He has also provided many good things here on earth for us to enjoy. Conflict arises in us when we begin to give those things an equal or even higher priority than God himself. This is the essence of idolatry: allowing something else to rival God’s rightful place in our lives, displacing our full devotion to Him alone.

As much as I may like the saying “giving me life,” nothing can actually give us true life or abundant life—and definitely not *eternal* life—except Jesus Christ. Our very life is in Him.

Father, thank You for giving us eternal life through Your Son, Jesus. Thank You that You have given us life to enjoy and live to the fullest. May our lives always bring You glory. In Jesus’ name, amen.

The Divine Exchange

The LORD replied [to Moses], “My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest” (Exodus 33:14).

Scripture: Exodus 33:12-23

Song: “Near to the Heart of God”

I read an article on the importance and benefits of rest. It listed things I expected, such as more energy, heightened creativity, better health, and even weight management. But I was surprised to learn that rest is also proven to reduce stress. It reminded me of my college psychology professor who regularly encouraged students to take naps if we were feeling depressed or anxious.

To say that Moses was in a stressful situation is a huge understatement. In the middle of a literal wilderness, he was surrounded by a fearful horde of people—people he was supposed to lead into the promised land. And now God was telling him that He wouldn't be going with them (Exodus 33:3). Moses did not want to accept God's answer and pleaded with Him to remain with them. In His mercy God relented and promised Moses that He would give them not only His presence but also rest (vv. 15-17).

God created us and knows what each of us needs—what each mind, spirit, and body needs. It is no small blessing to be able to receive the gift of God's presence and rest when we are in the midst of difficult and dark times. Jesus invites us as His followers to come to Him and exchange our heavy yoke for His light one, to lay down our burdens and receive His rest (Matthew 11:28-30).

Father, thank You for Your abiding presence. Please lead me into the rest You provide today. In Jesus' name, amen.

The Ultimate Name-Drop

The LORD came down in the cloud and stood there with [Moses] and proclaimed his name, the LORD (Exodus 34:5).

Scripture: Exodus 34:5-17

Song: “Name Above All Names”

A friend of mine worked with a man who was connected to a professional sports team. It seemed as though this man could not have a conversation without mentioning the famous athletes he knew. He would find a way to name-drop at every opportunity. His habit was amusing to those listening. But let’s admit that most of us have done our fair share of mentioning our notable associations at opportune times. Typically we do so because it makes us feel important or more significant to be connected, however loosely, to someone who is popular or well-known.

Other than a momentary feeling of self-worth, however, this name-dropping does nothing for us. But when God declares His name—His holy name—it carries eternal weight, ultimate significance, and unrivaled might.

When God proclaimed His name to Moses, all Moses could do was fall on his face and worship the Lord. It reminds us of what Paul wrote of God’s Son in Philippians 2:9-11: “God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow . . . and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

Father, Your name is the name above all names, and all we need for life can be found in You. We seek no other name for our joy, peace, help, and fulfillment. In Jesus’ name, amen.

He Is Still There

To you, LORD, I call, for fire has devoured the pastures in the wilderness and flames have burned up all the trees of the field (Joel 1:19).

Scripture: Joel 1:1-4, 14-20

Song: “My Redeemer Is Faithful and True”

During the summer of 2020, the western regions of North America were hit hard by wildfires. In Colorado, where I live, thick smoke made it seem as if we lived on a weird, orange, Mars-like planet. The situation was hard on our lungs . . . and on our spirits. Coming on the heels of so much pandemic stress, it was a bitter disappointment. I had to keep reminding myself that the mountains were still there, though I could not see them.

Spiritually speaking, there may be times in our lives when it seems as if we are moving about in thick smoke. In the absence of being able to feel or see evidence of God’s nearness, we may begin wondering if He is still there. Such times of desperation can be important opportunities for our faith to grow, for us to trust God not because of what we can sense or see but because of what is true about Him. These can also be times of repentance and renewal as we wait on God’s timing for relief.

What pure joy it was later that December in Colorado to get an early snow! The skies cleared and turned blue again, and fresh air filled my lungs. What a relief to breathe freely and see the mountains again. They were, indeed, still there.

Father, uphold me when my circumstances challenge my trust in You. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Abundant Showers

Be glad, people of Zion, rejoice in the LORD your God, . . . because he is faithful. He sends you abundant showers, both autumn and spring rains, as before (Joel 2:23).

Scripture: Joel 2:18-31

Song: “Ho, Everyone That Is Thirsty”

The Dust Bowl was a period of severe dust storms and drought that ravaged the North American prairies in the 1930s. I’ve been studying what life was like for those who lived through it. It’s almost unbearable to read the real-life accounts of the sickness, poverty, hopelessness, and devastation that era caused for so many. Imagine living for a decade in dry, dusty, dirty conditions—and then imagine feeling rain on your face for the first time after those long years of drought.

The prophet Joel describes a similar restoration that had finally come to God’s people. At last the Lord has taken pity on them and healed their land. But God promised not only to pour out physical rain on the dry earth but also pour out His Spirit on parched hearts. He promised that everyone who calls on His name will be saved. Just as water is necessary to end a drought, so the outpouring of God’s Spirit is necessary for ending spiritual drought. Only by God’s Spirit can our barren souls be renewed and revived.

Once the ground opens up to receive the rain, new life begins growing again. Similarly, as we receive God’s gift of salvation by grace through faith, His Spirit brings us new life.

Father, how we need Your Spirit to bring about the new life of salvation and also refreshing during times of spiritual drought! In Jesus’ name, amen.