

God's Children

The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation (Colossians 1:15).

Scripture: Colossians 1:9-22

Song: “The Family of God”

The word *firstborn* makes me think of family. My husband, Steve, is an only child, while I am the middle child among seven siblings. Steve's dad often teared up when telling stories about raising his son, and he was endlessly concerned about Steve's welfare. By contrast, once during my childhood, my normally attentive parents accidentally left me behind at a gas station! (Ten minutes down the road, they realized I was missing and returned to pick me up.) Steve attended a prestigious Christian university, fully funded by his devoted father. I paid my way through Bible college, working multiple jobs. My husband is a sole heir to an estate, while my mother and father left me their wonderful legacy of hard work, kindness, and love for God.

As believers, regardless of our upbringing, Jesus calls us His brothers and sisters (Hebrews 2:11). Our heavenly Father makes us part of His enormous, joyful, active, and close-knit family. Yet every child is fully known and personally cared for, and each receives a full inheritance in God's kingdom.

Our natural families influence our lives and shape how we see ourselves. But we each find our true identity as a member of God's eternal family.

Father, reveal to me the full measure of what it means to be Your child. In Jesus' name, amen.

February 20–26. **Donna Y. Gurr** lives in Oregon and serves in the leadership of her local church. She enjoys swimming and walking the beach.

The Baton of Faith

Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made your good confession in the presence of many witnesses (1 Timothy 6:12).

Scripture: 1 Timothy 6:11-16

Song: “Running”

The runners step up to the start line. The prompt comes: “On your mark!” They crouch, position their feet against the blocks, and extend their hands to the ground. “Get set!” They ready themselves and wait motionless. At the pistol’s *crack*, they explode out of their blocks. It’s the first leg of a 4x100 relay. The race is close until one competitor surges to a lead and hands off his baton. The anchor receives the final handoff and accelerates. He’s relentless, and with a finishing kick he leans in to break the ribbon with his chest. Victory!

The apostle Paul and Timothy shared a special relationship—that of father and son in the faith, mentor and protégé (1 Timothy 1:2, 18; 2 Timothy 4:1-5). Preparing to finish his spiritual race, Paul worked to equip Timothy for ministry so Timothy might take the baton from his mentor and run with strength and excellence.

Those who have gone before us in Christ have finished their part of the race. Their handoff to us is complete, and now we carry the baton of faith through our leg of the relay. Let’s run this extraordinary race well! And may we faithfully mentor the next generation, passing the baton to them in a way that provides a strong advantage in this race to victory!

Father, we renew our commitment to run our race well and to prepare those who will carry on after us. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Our Light in Darkness

“I [God] will lead the blind by ways they have not known, along unfamiliar paths I will guide them; I will turn the darkness into light before them and make the rough places smooth. . . . I will not forsake them” (Isaiah 42:16).

Scripture: Isaiah 42:8-17

Song: “I Know Who Holds Tomorrow”

She was at the top of her career and raising three teenagers with her husband when she was diagnosed with an irreversible eye disease. Twelve days later she was blind. Staring into the blackness, feeling vulnerable and broken, depression enveloped her.

In the months that followed, she and her family adapted to a new way of life. They connected with a company that provided employment, rehabilitation, and training for the visually impaired. She felt new purpose in helping others with blindness, and success came when the company promoted her to manager. Through specialized training and a multitude of aids, the visually impaired today can live rich, full, independent lives.

We who have good eyesight can sometimes relate to the visually impaired when we can't “see” the road ahead. But God promises, through His Holy Spirit, to illuminate our path and guide us through uncharted territory. He provides safe passage as we traverse the parts of life that are difficult and frightening. In every situation, whether or not we see the way ahead, we can walk with confidence because God goes before us and prepares the path for us.

Father, we're thankful You are with us in every season of our lives. Through the good and through the difficult, You are our source of sight and safety. In Jesus' name, amen.

The Phenomenon

My eyes fail, looking for your salvation, looking for your righteous promise (Psalm 119:123).

Scripture: Psalm 119:121-136

Song: “Your Promises”

As I drove home one chilly March evening, light flickered through the trees and between buildings. Here on the Oregon Coast, beautiful sunsets are common, but this was different. *What on earth?* I wondered. I needed a better view. Weaving through the streets, I made my way to a familiar bluff. Out on the horizon was the most astonishing natural phenomenon I’d ever seen. Where the sun converged on the sea, a beam of light ascended skyward like a torch. What appeared to be flames shimmered in vibrant hues—pink, yellow, violet, and orange. That night, social media identified it as a “sun pillar”—a visual wonder created at sunset or sunrise when tiny ice crystals slowly fall through the air, reflecting the sun’s rays.

Sometimes seeing God’s promises can be like that phenomenon. While our perspective is often obscured by the cares of life, when we pause to peer intently into God’s Word, we may find ourselves unexpectedly struck by one of His promises. It may even seem as if we’re seeing its extraordinary light for the first time.

Sometimes it takes a little effort to get to the place where we have a good vantage point from which to peer into the Scriptures. We can trust God, however, to provide opportunities that give us the best vistas. From there He puts His marvelous promises on display and astounds us with the assurance of His goodness and power.

Father, You are amazing! I praise You for Your beautiful and extraordinary promises. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Stay Awake!

Let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be awake and sober . . . putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet (1 Thessalonians 5:6, 8).

Scripture: 1 Thessalonians 5:1-10

Song: “Awake, My Soul!”

Your heart rate decreases, your body temperature drops, and your brain activity slows down. You’ve entered the sleep state. Now you’re vulnerable, but you’ve locked all your doors, and your home security system is activated. Even in nature, animals take precautions at night. Some birds snooze with one eye open while only part of the brain sleeps. Other animals spend their nights in burrows or caves or find protection by sleeping in trees or in groups. But most sleep lightly enough to flee in an instant.

In today’s passage, the apostle Paul uses the familiar habit of sleep to illustrate a spiritual principle. He warns of a kind of sleep that leaves the slumbering with a false sense of security, vulnerable to disastrous consequences. Those who remain in this kind of spiritual oblivion will awake only when it’s too late—as swift, inescapable calamity is upon them.

God warns His people to remain vigilant and circumspect, not succumbing to the world’s enticements that would put us into a spiritual sleep state. Taking up the armor of God (1 Thessalonians 5:8; Ephesians 6:10-18), we are to be those who faithfully watch for our King’s imminent return.

Father, we want to rid our lives of anything that threatens our spiritual wakefulness. As we remain vigilant, show us how best to stir friends who are asleep. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Freedom in Sacrifice

Like living stones, [you] are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ (1 Peter 2:5).

Scripture: 1 Peter 2:1-12

Song: “I Surrender All”

A great friend and ministry leader asked me to speak at a three-day conference. Though I spent weeks preparing, my knees shook a little as I delivered a series of messages and invited the women to partake in God’s banquet of love, peace, and rest. *I did it!* I spoke at the retreat and it went well. But on the long drive home, a cloud of self-doubt encroached upon my joy. *Were my messages meaningless?* Once inside my house, I crumpled to my knees. As I prayed, I surrendered the weekend’s ministry, as if to flames, as a sacrifice to the Lord.

Recalling 1 Peter 2:5, I glimpsed the meaning of Peter’s words for the first time. As I envisioned my work as an offering, disappearing in a puff of smoke, at once I was free. Never again did I revisit feelings of insecurity regarding that weekend; the flames of surrender prevailed and left nothing in my hands. Yet I believe it was all dear to God’s heart.

Our loving heavenly Father saw the source of my pain and showed me the path to freedom. When tempted to place our identity in our work for God, we can return to the place of surrender and leave it with Him, right where it belongs.

Father, help us serve You fully and hold nothing back for ourselves. In Jesus’ name, amen.

A Life of Consequence

If you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps (1 Peter 2:20-21).

Scripture: 1 Peter 2:13-25

Song: “Come and Follow Me”

They threw shoes at him when he prayed, called him lazy and a weak link within the battalion. Their harassment grew from insults to abuse to threats. Even his commanding officer tried to get him transferred out of the unit. Desmond Doss served as a medic in World War II, but he was no ordinary medic. He was the first conscientious objector in military history to receive the Congressional Medal of Honor.

Doss served on the front lines, but he refused to carry arms or kill another human being. Yet in one battle he single-handedly saved the lives of somewhere between 50 and 100 men, including those who once hated and threatened him. For 12 hours, under heavy fire, Doss rescued members of his troop. Tired and afraid, he prayed for strength and then returned to the field of combat again and again until he was severely injured himself.

If Doss had offered only empty words about his convictions, he would have been forgotten long ago. But his obedience to God and his self-sacrificing actions left a lasting legacy. Our lives carry the greatest impact when we adhere to God’s values in both word and deed.

Father, Your Son showed us the way of obedience. Strengthen us to follow in His footsteps, no matter the cost. In Jesus’ name, amen.