

## Trust God's Plan

**[Jesus] gave [the loaves] to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the people** (Matthew 14:19).

**Scripture:** Matthew 14:13-21

**Song:** "Trust and Obey"

In the movie *The Karate Kid*, car repairman and martial arts master Mr. Miyagi agrees to teach young Daniel karate. At his new instructor's direction, using very specific movements, Daniel spends four days waxing Miyagi's car and painting his fence. Daniel obeys, but he's ultimately frustrated by these chores. When Daniel accuses Miyagi of treating him like a personal servant, Miyagi comes at Daniel in slow motion, as if attacking him, calling out, "Wax on!" and "Wax off!" In response, Daniel makes the motions he's perfected while waxing Miyagi's car and is able to defend himself. Daniel's face lights up as he realizes that Miyagi has been teaching him karate all along!

The disciples didn't know what Jesus was going to do with the loaves and fish. Jesus didn't explain His plan ahead of time; He just told them to hand out lunch. Trusting their Lord, the disciples obeyed. And what happened next surpassed their wildest expectations.

Sometimes when we obey God, we don't see how it's going to make a difference. The path of obedience may seem too difficult or even insignificant to us. But God sees the big picture, and He cares about the attitude of our hearts toward Him. As we trust Him, we'll see the difference our obedience makes.

**Father**, I praise You for knowing what I don't know. I will choose to obey You and to trust You with the results. In Jesus' name, amen.

## Lifelong Lord

**You have been my hope, Sovereign LORD, my confidence since my youth. . . . My mouth is filled with your praise, declaring your splendor all day long** (Psalm 71:5, 8).

**Scripture:** Psalm 71:1-12

**Song:** “My Testimony”

I used to hate telling my salvation story because, to me, it seemed short and boring. I was raised in a Christian home, and I knew Jesus as my Savior from a young age. No dramatic turning points, no rock bottom . . . just a consistent relationship with Jesus. Then one day someone said something to me that changed my perspective. He said my testimony was exciting because my faith had stood the test of time. Jesus claimed me as His own when I was young, and He has been faithfully loving, leading, and teaching me for more than three decades. That *is* exciting! Now when I share my testimony, I do so gladly.

Psalm 71 celebrates God’s faithfulness throughout a lifetime. The writer declares that God was with him since birth and was his hope and confidence in his youth. And now in his older years, the psalmist still seeks God for refuge, safety, strength, and salvation.

It’s a great blessing and comfort to know the Lord’s goodness—His love and salvation that stand the test of time. No matter our testimony, we too can fill our mouths with God’s praise, declaring His great faithfulness all day long.

**Father,** I praise You because You have been faithful to me and will remain faithful. Thank You for being my refuge and my hope. I will run to You in times of trouble. In Jesus’ name, amen.

## Life-Giving Declarations

**My mouth will tell of your righteous deeds, of your saving acts all day long** (Psalm 71:15).

**Scripture:** Psalm 71:13-24

**Song:** “My Story”

When my children were little and I stayed home with them, the Wednesday morning ladies’ Bible study at my church was a spiritual lifeline. Week after week, year after year, we studied our way through half a dozen books of the Bible. I loved digging in to the passages and drawing connections to history and doctrine. But for me, the best part was when the women gave testimony from their own lives. They would tell how God had challenged and changed them. They would describe how faithful He had been to them during hard times—such as when children rebelled, when spouses died, when dreams were shattered. I learned important truths from their declarations of God’s faithfulness, and I am grateful they proclaimed His mighty acts and righteous deeds.

In 2 Corinthians 1:3-4 the apostle Paul explains that God comforts us in our troubles so that we can comfort others with the comfort we’ve received from Him. I experienced this kind of life-giving comfort from the women in that Bible study as they told what God had done for them.

In today’s passage, 11 times in 12 verses, the psalm writer mentions verbally praising God. When we praise the Lord out loud, in front of others—telling who He is and what He’s done in our lives—others are comforted, challenged, and encouraged. And through that we magnify the Lord together.

**Father,** I will proclaim Your righteous deeds and declare Your power in my life. You are worthy of praise! In Jesus’ name, amen.

## Death-Row Hope

**[Jesus said,] “I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents”** (Luke 15:10).

**Scripture:** Luke 15:1-10

**Song:** “Rejoice”

In 1983, *Time* magazine ran a cover story about the death penalty. It included vignettes of death-row inmates, including a young man named Mitch Rutledge. Rutledge had been a teenage drug dealer, had no real family, and was illiterate. At age 21, he killed a man. Even though Rutledge was sorry for his crime, *Time* called him “defective” and said he should be forgotten.

People across the country were upset by this assessment, and several wrote letters to Rutledge, telling him that he was not worthless, that God loved him, that he was not forgotten. Rutledge, who began teaching himself to read when a fellow prisoner introduced him to the Bible, wrote back. These pen-pal friendships grew, and eventually Rutledge became a Christian. He finished his education, and his death sentence was later commuted to life in prison. Today, despite being locked up, he speaks to young people about the importance of life choices. God is using Mitch Rutledge in life-giving ways!

In the eyes of some Pharisees, the sinners listening to Jesus’ message were defective and worthless. But the parables about the lost sheep and lost coin make it clear that God values lost lives and He seeks to redeem them. Every human soul is precious in God’s sight!

**Father,** help me to see those around me as You do—as precious and loved—and help me as I point them to You. Thank You that Heaven celebrates each one who is found. In Jesus’ name, amen.

## Little Lost Beach Boy

[The younger son's father said,] “‘This son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’ So they began to celebrate” (Luke 15:24).

**Scripture:** Luke 15:11-24

**Song:** “From Death to Life”

It was a beautiful day at the beach when my friends and I planted our towels close to the lifeguard tower. We had a dozen small children between the four of us, and we knew we were in for an afternoon of sun, sand, waves . . . and constantly counting 12 little heads. An hour later, one friend grabbed my arm. Her 4-year-old son was nowhere to be seen. We walked up and down the beach, scanning the crowds, the sand, the surf. We called his name, keeping panic at bay with constant prayer. As the minutes ticked by, our searching became more frantic. *Where is he?* Suddenly my friend's joyful voice called to me. She had found her son. Oblivious to our worry, he was playing in the shade beneath the boardwalk. In her great relief, my friend wasn't even angry.

At seeing his lost son approaching, the father in Jesus' parable must have felt something like my friend did that day. The son who had been so long in danger was suddenly safely home. There was no anger, no condemnation—only joy and gratitude.

When we confess and forsake our sin, Jesus' forgiveness is complete, unearned, and an occasion for gladness, like the welcome of the son in the parable. Believe that the Father is glad to see you when you come to Him in prayer today.

**Father,** thank You for Your glad welcome right now. In Jesus' name, amen.