

The Source of Life

“Fruit trees of all kinds will grow on both banks of the river. Their leaves will not wither, nor will their fruit fail. Every month they will bear fruit, because the water from the sanctuary flows to them” (Ezekiel 47:12).

Scripture: Ezekiel 47:1-13

Song: “Better Is One Day”

The smell was impossible to ignore. As my friend and I approached the pond, we held our breath at the smell of decay. The problem soon became obvious. A line of belly-up fish floated near the shore line. Apparently something had poisoned the water.

By contrast, the river’s water in Ezekiel 47 was brimming with life, bringing healing wherever it flowed. It’s a beautiful picture of the redemption God can bring to broken and lifeless things. Even more important, this passage highlights the significance of God’s presence. The river brings life and healing because of its source: the temple, where God dwells (v. 1).

The fish and trees described in today’s passage flourished because their source was God, the Creator of all life. If we look to anything other than God as our source of life, our spirits will wither and we will bear little or no fruit. But when our source is the Lord and we abide in Him, we bear fruit that brings sustenance and healing to others (John 15:4-5).

Father, I want to always look to You and abide in You as my source of life. In Jesus’ name, amen.

June 5–11. **Ruth Anne Burrell** lives in the Kansas City area, where she enjoys finding new coffee shops, trying out new recipes, and dreaming up new stories to tell.

Joy After Pain

[Jesus said,] “A woman giving birth to a child has pain because her time has come; but when her baby is born she forgets the anguish because of her joy” (John 16:21).

Scripture: John 16:20-33

Song: “Be Still, My Soul”

The artist Michelangelo (1475–1564) struggled all his life with joint pain in his hands. Today’s scholars believe this may have been a form of arthritis. Regardless of his pain, he continued creating works of art until his death, and to this day we enjoy his masterpieces—*David*, *The Pietà*, and the Sistine Chapel ceiling, to name a few.

Jesus was brutally honest about the pain and anguish His disciples would suffer. Yet He also gave them hope. Like a woman who has a baby, their agony would turn to joy. Knowing what God’s Word says about the fall of humanity (Genesis 3) gives us an acute awareness of how sin and evil have introduced suffering to our lives and to the world around us. Yet in God’s redemptive plan, all our grief and pain ultimately will be redeemed because of the new birth we have in Christ.

Even though this world is full of reminders that things are not the way they ought to be, Jesus tenderly promises that our pain is not without purpose and our grief will come to an end. Although we may be suffering today, He promises we will one day rejoice in such a way that our pain will be forgotten (Revelation 19:6-7; 21:4).

Father, today I will trust You—regardless of my suffering—as Your redemptive plan unfolds. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Humble Wisdom

Wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere (James 3:17).

Scripture: James 3:13-18

Song: “Be Thou My Vision”

By the time I became a middle-school volunteer in Miss Valera’s Sunday school class, she had been a teacher for 40-plus years. She cared deeply for the children in her classroom and had a sharp sense of what they may not yet understand. Often as she taught, she would go on a brief tangent to ask what a particular word or phrase meant. She was gentle and didn’t mind being the one to ask an obvious or seemingly silly question if it helped the kids grow in their understanding of Jesus.

We may tend to think about wisdom only in terms of age, experience, and right answers, but James reminds us that godly wisdom demonstrates humility. This kind of wisdom doesn’t feel the need to prove or exalt itself. Rather, as today’s verse describes, it is pure, peace-loving, considerate, submissive, impartial, sincere, and full of mercy and good fruit.

When we care deeply about a belief or conviction, we naturally want others to understand and even share our perspective. But if we are not walking in humility, our attempts to teach or give wise counsel may end up coming across as condescending, self-righteous, condemning, or perhaps even angry. Christ’s example shows us how to exercise wisdom with humility, seeking the good of others in a way that demonstrates love and respect for them.

Father, please lead me in the wisdom of humility as I serve others. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Always Heard

Answer me when I call to you, my righteous God. Give me relief from my distress; have mercy on me and hear my prayer (Psalm 4:1).

Scripture: Psalm 4

Song: “O God of Mercy, Hear Our Plea”

When my dad was young, he and his family went camping in Colorado every summer with his grandparents. While he and his brothers hiked up a nearby mountain, his grandmother would stay behind at the camp to prepare dinner. Halfway up the mountain, my dad and his brothers would holler, “Hello!” The acoustics of the mountains carried their voices down to their grandma, and when the boys arrived back at camp, she would affirm she had heard them.

David opens Psalm 4 with a cry for God to hear him. In his call—“Answer me!”—some underlying questions seem to echo: *Will You answer me? Do You hear me, God? Are You there?* A couple of verses later, however, the psalmist reminds himself of the truth: the Lord does hear when he calls. David continues by affirming his trust in the Lord and His ability to keep David safe.

This psalm offers a helpful, two-sided reminder. First, doubt and questioning are normal. There is no shame in crying out to God with our questions and fears. But second, we don’t need to remain in that place of doubt. Like David, we can remind ourselves of the truth: God hears us when we cry to Him. And in that truth, we can safely rest.

Father, thank You for always hearing me. Help me to trust You even in seasons of doubt. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Stillness in the Storm

“Be still, and know that I am God” (Psalm 46:10).

Scripture: Psalm 46

Song: “In the Garden”

A “whispering gallery” is created by a combination of acoustics and architectural design that allows a whisper spoken on one side of a room to be distinctly heard on the other side. The size of the room and whatever else might be going on in the space between don’t prevent the phenomenon. Grand Central Station in New York has a whispering gallery, as do the United States Capitol Building and St. Paul’s Cathedral in London. Many others can be found throughout the world, places where a friend’s whisper can be clearly heard from far away . . . if you’re listening.

Psalm 46 describes a cacophony of chaos and noise: the earth is crumbling, waves roar, and mountains fall into the sea. The noise continues as nations are in upheaval and kingdoms totter. Then in verse 10, God brings everything to a halt: “Be still.” He is strong, a constant in the chaos. He’s a refuge, an ever-present help. But perceiving this requires us to stop, to be still, to pay attention.

Sometimes we can be so frantic in our attempts to deal with the chaos of our lives that it takes a strong reminder from God for us to “Be still!” It’s when we finally slow down and listen that He whispers from His Word, reminding us of His steady presence and readiness to help us.

Father, I will be still right now, acknowledging that You are mighty and in control, my refuge in every storm. In Jesus’ name, amen.

A Path to Peace

His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility (Ephesians 2:15-16).

Scripture: Ephesians 2:11-22

Song: “Lord, Make Us Instruments of Your Peace”

In the 1850s, a decade-long, brutal conflict over whether Kansas should enter the Union as a slave or a free state became known as “Bleeding Kansas.” Pro-slavery “border ruffians” burned and looted homes as anti-slavery “Free-Soilers” killed in retaliation. An all-out brawl broke out on the floor of the US House of Representatives over the issue. Kansas entered the Union as a free state, but peace was not forged until after the Civil War.

When Jesus came, Jews and Gentiles were similarly—seemingly hopelessly—divided. More than that, *everyone* was separated from God because of sin. The reconciliation that was needed for peace would require bloodshed. But it was Christ who took upon himself the price of our peace, paying with His own life. By His death, burial, and resurrection, He blazed a path to peace.

Jesus’ sacrifice allows us to be reconciled to God. It also brings us into the fellowship of His family of the redeemed from every tongue, tribe, and nation. With such a tremendous provision, let’s walk gratefully in this reconciliation and make it known to others.

Father, thank You for all You did to bring me close to You and to other believers through Jesus. Help me to love others the way that You have loved all of us. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Full Restoration

[God said,] “See, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind” (Isaiah 65:17).

Scripture: Isaiah 65:17-25

Song: “What a Day That Will Be”

When the pine tree blew over in the storm, my family thought it was done for. Its trunk had cracked almost in half. But my great-grandpa hauled it upright with a tractor and strapped it back in place. Within a season, the broken parts had grown back together, and now 15 years later, it still stands, healthy and growing.

In Isaiah 65, God promises a renewal—a wonderful redemption of creation from every part of the curse that resulted from Adam’s and Eve’s fall into sin. There will be no more fruitless labor, no more enmity between animals, no more premature deaths, no more sorrow, and no more separation from God. The restoration will be so complete that the former things—pain, sorrow, death—will no longer even come to mind.

In seasons of difficulty, it can be hard to imagine this. But God’s Word is true and trustworthy. He will bring about every ounce of restoration that He promises. In the meantime, through flowers that bloom again each spring, forests that grow back stronger after a fire, and a broken tree that heals after a storm, He offers us glimpses of what will be. Let’s take note of these reminders and wait in hope for the restoration yet to come.

Father, please help me notice Your redemptive work in the present as I wait patiently for Your future restoration. In Jesus’ name, amen.