

Focused on Jesus

We must pay the most careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away (Hebrews 2:1).

Scripture: Hebrews 2:1-9

Song: “Turn Your Eyes upon Jesus”

While teaching my teenager to drive a car, I realized the tremendous concentration and effort necessary for inexperienced drivers. I also discovered ways my own driving habits had become relaxed. Rolling stops at stop signs and failing to check mirrors before switching lanes are actions that result in a failed driving test. Yet, as my daughter frequently points out, many seasoned drivers make these errors regularly. Losing focus can cause our driving to become mindless, sloppy, and even dangerous.

In our spiritual lives it is possible to let our attention drift from Jesus. Instead, we may “zone out,” slip into old habits, or succumb to ungodly influences around us. However, forgetting that Jesus paid the price to give us salvation and failing to walk in His ways can have devastating consequences, just as losing control of a car can have.

Jesus fulfilled the law by becoming human and giving His life to save us from our sins. Focusing on Him means reflecting on this precious gift. We can deepen our relationship with Him through prayer and by studying His Word. Focusing on Christ keeps our attention on life-giving truth, allowing us to navigate life safely and with joy.

Father, may my faith never become just a habit. Keep my eyes fixed firmly on You and the beauty of Your gift of salvation through Jesus Christ. In Jesus' name, amen.

A Friend Alongside Us

[Jesus] had to be made like them, fully human in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people (Hebrews 2:17).

Scripture: Hebrews 2:10-18

Song: “Abide with Me”

Rusty, our aging dachshund, doesn't like being alone. Now that he is elderly, he lets out loud, mournful howls when he finds himself alone in a room. Recently, when we returned from a weekend away, our dog sitter mentioned the sorrowful cries Rusty would send out from his kennel. In response, the sitter had crawled into the kennel to sit beside Rusty, calming and settling him with his presence.

Rusty isn't soothed by logical explanations, assuring words, or promises of companionship tomorrow. Our little dog responds to the comfort of someone coming alongside him, being with him where he is, and joining him in his circumstances. Similarly, in His wisdom, God sent Jesus to take on human flesh, walk among us, and meet us right where we are, in all our humanity.

When we feel forlorn, abandoned, or tempted beyond what we can bear, we need only remember Jesus. Our loving Savior has not only experienced the challenges and pain of human life, but He has also paid the price to free us from the fear of death and provide us with eternal comfort.

Father, thank You for coming alongside and walking with me. Help me turn to You in times of need, recognizing the depth of Your understanding and love. In Jesus' name, amen.

Life-Giving Streams

[The godly] person is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither (Psalm 1:3).

Scripture: Psalm 1

Song: “I Shall Not Be Moved”

My husband has started taking flying lessons. He loves describing the view from the airplane as he soars above familiar towns, roads, and landmarks. Northern California suffers from drought conditions, and much of the landscape is dry and brown. However, as Bill peers down from his little plane, he sees ribbons of vibrant greenery edging rivers and streams among the golden-brown hills. Trees that grow along the riverbanks are not dependent on the whims of the weather. Instead, their roots draw water directly from the source.

Left to our own devices, we become as rootless and wind-tossed as withered tumbleweeds. But when we, like trees planted by the water, delight ourselves in Jesus and root ourselves in Him, we are not subject to the influence of the world around us. Instead, our souls receive refreshment and life directly from our heavenly Father.

At times, we may feel weary, discouraged, and distant from God. The world distracts us from the blessings He offers us. Yet, our loving Father patiently waits for us to seek His thirst-quenching goodness and love. By reading God’s Word, spending time in prayer, and enjoying community with other believers, we are planting ourselves by the life-giving streams of His love. Here, our souls will prosper.

Father, thank You for the living water You offer me. I will seek to draw from it daily to remain rooted in Your righteousness. In Jesus’ name, amen.

The Seal of a King

When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit (Ephesians 1:13).

Scripture: Ephesians 1:3-14

Song: “Blessed Assurance”

In 2015, archaeologists sifted through the rubble near Jerusalem’s ancient royal quarter. There they discovered the imprint of a royal seal. No bigger than a fingertip, this imprint displays a winged sun and bears King Hezekiah’s name. Around 2,700 years before the discovery, this king of Judah had placed his unique seal upon scrolls to signify their royal source and to prove the words contained within were his. This seal authenticated documents as official, special, and of royal origin.

Just as those official documents were set apart by an imprinted seal, so God has set apart His children with a seal showing that we belong to Him. When we receive God’s gift of salvation, we are adopted into His family and benefit from belonging to the King of kings. Infinitely better than an ancient seal found buried amid the rubble of a ruined palace, God’s seal is His own Spirit. God’s Spirit is our counselor and comforter—the indwelling presence of God!

By the applied sacrifice of Jesus to our lives and with the seal of the Holy Spirit, God claims us as members of His family. By receiving God’s gracious gift and relying on the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we can live as God’s treasured sons and daughters. We have been sealed with the mark of the King.

Father, my place in Your royal family is a gift You’ve freely given. Today I want to delight in You as You delight in me. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Eyes Open to Goodness

I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance (Ephesians 1:18).

Scripture: Ephesians 1:15-23

Song: “Open the Eyes of My Heart”

Nestled in a rocking chair, I stared into my newborn daughter’s tiny face. My little one had no idea of the dreams her dad and I had for her. She did not notice the freshly decorated nursery, stacks of tiny outfits, or cuddly toys lovingly prepared for her arrival. All she knew was that she could cry out when she was hungry, cold, or wet, and her needs would be met. Only as she grew would she see the wonders around her and realize her parents’ desire to provide good things for her.

Parents cannot guarantee their children an easy, delightful, or pain-free life. However, our heavenly Father has every power to promise His children “the riches of his glorious inheritance.” Whether we realize it or not, God longs to shower us with the riches of grace, peace, and spiritual abundance.

It is easy to become weighed down by the dreariness and trials of daily life. However, in such times, it’s essential to remember that our mighty God has so much more in store for us than what we currently understand or see. By opening our Bibles and mining the treasures found within, we can come to know the good things He has lovingly prepared.

Father, thank You for the richness of Your promises. Enlighten the eyes of my heart to know the hope of my inheritance. In Jesus’ name, amen.

When We Mess Up

Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by believing what you heard? (Galatians 3:2).

Scripture: Galatians 3:1-5

Song: “Jesus, I Believe”

Excitedly I attempted to follow the instructions for creating the delicate Swedish cookies my grandmother used to make. I carefully studied the directions. Next, I dipped the metal rosette molds into the batter before frying the treats in oil. However, no matter how hard I tried to follow the instructions, each cookie resulted in an unappealing burned, broken, or caked-on mess.

Similarly, despite my good intentions, my humanness often gets in the way when I set out to follow God’s commands. Sadly, at times I may act in anger, speak untruthfully, or behave selfishly. If eternity with the Lord depended solely on my actions, I would not be able to experience God’s goodness. Fortunately, Jesus Christ has provided the way for flawed humans like me to receive salvation and His indwelling Spirit.

When we fail to keep in step with God’s Spirit, we can take heart, remembering that we do not achieve eternal life by perfectly following a set of rules. It would be impossible for us to live up to such a requirement. Instead, we gain eternal life simply by believing in the precious gift of redemption God has provided through His Son. Our salvation comes from an outpouring of God’s grace, received through faith. Then we can begin again, upheld and led by His Holy Spirit.

Father, thank You for being merciful toward my human frailties and for bestowing Your grace on me through faith. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Redeemed by Another

He redeemed us in order that the blessing . . . might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit (Galatians 3:14).

Scripture: Galatians 3:6-18

Song: “Nothing but the Blood of Jesus”

The young father sobbed. Nazi guards had selected him for death in retaliation for another prisoner’s escape from Auschwitz. As he cried for his family, a fellow captive stepped forward. Identifying himself as a priest, this second man stated that he did not have a family who depended on him. Then he asked to take the younger man’s place. The guards complied, and that is how Maximilian Kolbe gave his life so that a stranger, Franciszek Gajowniczek, could go on to live to the age of 94.

Gajowniczek knew he had not survived the Nazi concentration camp on his own. His survival had come through another man’s sacrifice. During his life, Gajowniczek told the story of Kolbe’s heroism throughout Europe and the United States. He recognized that it would have been impossible for him to have saved his own life. Similarly, as Christians, our redemption comes not by our own efforts but, instead, through Christ’s loving sacrifice.

God has rich blessings in store for us. To claim these benefits we need only, through faith, receive the gift of salvation that He offers us. We can stop striving to achieve God’s favor or deserve His love. Instead, we can joyfully allow His love to flow through us as we serve Him.

Father, eternal life is a precious gift from You. Thank You that Jesus took my place so I could live. In Jesus’ name, amen.