

Dead at 22

We all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit (2 Corinthians 3:18).

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 3:12-18

Song: "Be Thou My Vision"

Early in the third century AD, the Roman emperor issued an edict to persecute Christians. Perpetua was a 22-year-old wife and mother of an infant son. As a Christian she was arrested and sentenced to death. Her father begged her to renounce her faith—if not for his sake, then for the sake of her child. Perpetua pointed to a water pot and asked her father whether it could be called anything other than a water pot. He said it could not. Perpetua said she could not call herself any other name than what she was: a Christian. In the North African city of Carthage, Perpetua and five other believers were killed by wild animals and gladiators in the arena.

Knowing Christ as our Savior gives us freedom and hope, and that makes us bold. We are being transformed into His image with ever-increasing glory, which leaves no doubt that we belong to Christ. The veil has been lifted: we understand God's plan for salvation, and we have nothing to hide. Remind yourself today that you belong to Jesus!

Father, please lift the veil from the hearts of those I love so they can have the same hope and freedom that I have in You. I love You. In Jesus' name, amen.

November 13–19. **Katie Robles** is an author, educator, and mother of four sons. She loves to hike, garden, and bake.

Fourth-Grade Mercy

Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom, because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment (James 2:12-13).

Scripture: James 2:8-13

Song: “O to Be like Thee!”

My son’s fourth-grade class has assigned seats in the school cafeteria. He complained for weeks that some of his classmates made inappropriate comments during lunch. He tried to ignore them, but their behavior was getting on his nerves. I told him that he should ask his teacher for a new assigned seat.

“You told them to stop, right?” I asked. “If you asked them nicely and they didn’t stop, it’s OK to tell your teacher.”

He thought for a moment and said, “Maybe they didn’t hear me. Or maybe they thought I was joking. I’ll ask them again tomorrow, and if they still don’t stop, I’ll tell my teacher.”

My son showed love to his classmates by judging them with mercy. It’s the way he would like them to show love to him. We humans are all lawbreakers. If we haven’t committed one sin, we’ve committed another, which makes us all guilty before God, our judge. James encourages us to show mercy to one another because Jesus has been merciful to us. Someone in your life will sin today. When they do, pray for them before you react. Ask God to help you judge with mercy and to love your neighbor as yourself.

Father, thank You that Your mercy to me through Jesus Christ has triumphed over judgment for my sin. In Jesus’ name, amen.

New Beginnings

Consecrate the fiftieth year and proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants (Leviticus 25:10).

Scripture: Leviticus 25:8-17

Song: “Days of Elijah”

Mary McLeod Bethune was born in 1875 in South Carolina, just 12 years after President Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation. Mary’s parents had been slaves and were consequently illiterate. But they raised their 17 children to love the Lord, and they proudly displayed a family Bible in their home. Even though no one in the family could read it, they lived in hope that one day a family member would. At age 14, Mary received a scholarship to a boarding school in North Carolina. She became a teacher and later was the first African-American woman to establish a four-year college in the United States. The day Mary left for boarding school, dozens of family and neighbors came to see her off. They recognized that this was a new beginning.

God established the Year of Jubilee to be a time of restoration for His people. If a family fell on hard times, they could live in hope of Jubilee when ancestral lands were returned, re-establishing a family’s inheritance and giving them a fresh start. The Israelites were to rely on God to supply their needs. Everything they had—food, land, freedom—came from Him.

Jesus released us from the debt of our sin and gave us an inheritance in Heaven. Every day is a fresh start for us to rely on Him to meet our needs and live in the freedom He gives us.

Father, thank You for blessing me. I will seek You today and rest in Your promises. In Jesus’ name, amen.

A Heart like Jesus'

[Jesus read,] “He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor” (Luke 4:18-19).

Scripture: Luke 4:14-22

Song: “Only Trust Him”

James W. C. Pennington was born into slavery in 1807 in Maryland. At age 20 he escaped to Pennsylvania, where he learned to read and write. James was able to read the Bible for the first time and worked hard to make up for a lifetime of lost education. Five years later he was a school teacher and then a preacher who advocated for ending slavery. His faith made him not only eager for the salvation of slaves but also concerned for the souls of slave owners.

His popular autobiography, *The Fugitive Blacksmith*, included a letter that he wrote to his former master. The second half of the letter urged the man, by then in his seventies, to repent and go to God with a clear conscience. Pennington reminded this man that he would face God’s judgment and needed to seek Christ’s forgiveness.

In today’s passage, the words Jesus read aloud from Isaiah reveal God’s heart for humanity. He desires to open our spiritual eyes, set us free from sin, and cheer our hearts with His good news. James Pennington had a heart like Jesus’. He wanted even his persecutors to be saved. When you pray for lost souls today, pray especially for those who seem farthest from God.

Father, thank You for sending Jesus to fulfill Scripture and save our souls. Give me Your heart for the lost. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Am I a Malcontent Sheep?

He refreshes my soul. He guides me along the right paths for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me (Psalm 23:3-4).

Scripture: Psalm 23

Song: "Because the Lord Is My Shepherd"

It's been a tough stretch of time for me at work. The pandemic's lingering effects prevented me from doing the job for which I was hired, and I spent six months filling in where needed. Every day was different. I was a "jack of all trades, master of none," and the constant changes wore me down emotionally. One day I complained to God, telling Him everything that was wrong with my place of employment. In the midst of my ranting, God brought Psalm 23 to my mind.

I recited it, and my attitude changed. God provides everything I need, both physically and spiritually. Yes, my job has been difficult, but I have a job. I have the health and skills to do my job well and several excellent co-workers alongside me. God's rod and staff protect and guide me, not allowing me to wallow in negative thoughts nor to wander onto the path of slander and bitterness. Rather, He leads me along the path of righteousness and thankfulness.

As I prayed through Psalm 23, joy and peace returned to me. Take time today to thank God for specific ways He blesses and cares for you.

Father, You bless, guide, protect, and provide. I praise You for being my loving shepherd. In Jesus' name, amen.

Imposter Syndrome

God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins
(Colossians 2:13).

Scripture: Colossians 2:6-15

Song: “In Christ Alone”

Imposter Syndrome runs rampant in the writing community. Imposter Syndrome is the belief that it's only a matter of time before your readers discover you're not a “real author.” Most writers, from beginners to best-sellers, experience this feeling at one time or another, perhaps because a standard measure of success for a writer's career doesn't really exist. When does a writer become a “real writer” and not an imposter? Is it when they finish writing their first article or their first book? Is it when their work is published? When they win an award or sell 10,000 books?

What defines success is different for each person and can change over time, which makes many writers feel they are lacking in some way. One speaker at a writer's conference gave a great truth cure for Imposter Syndrome. He said, “If you write, you are a writer. Period.”

The church at Colossae was being told that their salvation wasn't enough. They needed to be circumcised or observe Jewish festivals or abstain from certain foods. But the apostle Paul assured them that Jesus' work on the cross is complete. In Christ they have been brought to fullness. Their sins are forgiven, their debts paid, their hearts circumcised, and their souls raised from the dead. Paul affirmed that if they trust in Jesus, they are saved. Period.

Father, thank You that my salvation is complete in Christ. Help me to rest in Your grace and live my life in Christ. In Jesus' name, amen.

Apparent Wisdom

Since you died with Christ . . . why, as though you still belonged to the world, do you submit to its rules (Colossians 2:20).

Scripture: Colossians 2:16-23

Song: “As for Me and My House”

If you want to start an intense discussion among believers, bring up Halloween. At a women’s Bible study in October, many ladies spoke adamantly against any involvement in Halloween because of its pagan roots and because of its association with witches, demons, and evil in general. Another woman said someone in her neighborhood handed out gospel tracts along with candy. She was saved because of a tract that her kids brought home in their candy bucket. Her pastor puts a table in his yard with candy and hot cider and uses Halloween to get to know his neighbors and witnesses to them. Opinions expressed both for and against participating were heartfelt, but each woman had to decide for herself before God.

Christians can put a lot of pressure on each other about how to go about the particulars of life. The church at Colossae felt pressured to continue observing Jewish festivals and traditions. It wasn’t wrong for Jewish Christians to celebrate Passover or decline pork, but they were in danger of becoming ensnared in legalism. Paul reminds them that staying connected to Christ, the head of the Church, is the key to spiritual growth, discernment, and authentic life in His kingdom.

As you live to honor Christ today, remember that you belong to Him and answer to Him.

Father, help me stay connected with Christ and cause me to grow. Please give me Your wisdom. In Jesus’ name, amen.