

Spiritual Heritage

I took your father Abraham from the land beyond the Euphrates . . . and gave him many descendants (Joshua 24:3).

Scripture: Joshua 24:1-14

Song: “O God, Our Help in Ages Past”

In the early 1900s my grandparents sailed from Hungary for a new life. As a first-generation American, my father was proud of his heritage. He often said, “You kids have the blood of Hungarian kings coursing through your veins!” After Grandma’s death, Dad embarked on a quest to find his ancestors. He traveled to my grandmother’s village in Hungary. He found her living relatives and heard their firsthand stories. Online he discovered the manifest for the ship on which my grandmother sailed to the United States. Then he found both my grandparents’ naturalization papers. All of these discoveries increased my father’s already strong connection to his heritage.

In today’s passage, Joshua recounted Israel’s history, including firsthand stories of all that God had done for His people. This helped strengthen the connection to their identity as God’s covenant people. Then Joshua called the people to rededicate themselves to serving God.

God intends for us, as spiritual descendants of Abraham (Galatians 3:7), to know our spiritual history (Romans 15:4). As we do, our hearts will be strengthened and encouraged to hope in God.

Father, as we read Israel’s history, help us discern the principles of faith You have for us there and be inspired to serve You fully. In Jesus’ name, amen.

November 20–26. **Donna Y. Gurr** serves the body of Christ through missions, speaking, and writing. She lives with her husband, Steve, in Oregon. She enjoys swimming and road trips in her RV.

Yield Your Heart

[Joshua said,] “Yield your hearts to the LORD, the God of Israel.” And the people said to Joshua, “We will serve the LORD our God and obey him” (Joshua 24:23-24).

Scripture: Joshua 24:15-24

Song: “Yield My Heart”

In 1950, a state trooper named Clinton Riggs sought to address the problem of traffic accidents at a dangerous corner in Tulsa, Oklahoma. According to a new law, drivers were required to slow down and respect the right-of-way of other drivers. Riggs concluded that drivers needed a sign to remind them of the law and how it worked. One year after the city installed a yield sign at that corner, vehicle crashes dropped significantly. This led to widespread use of yield signs throughout the country. If you’re a driver, you know that yielding is one of the many rules of the road that, when not obeyed, may result in a ticket—or worse. Wise drivers slow down and give the right-of-way.

When Joshua told the Israelites to yield their *hearts* to the Lord, he was speaking in *relationship* terms. However, the people’s response seemed to reveal that they related to the Lord more out of duty than from love. They promised to serve and obey God, but it’s as though they didn’t quite understand what Joshua meant by yielding their hearts.

Although dutifully obeying the letter of the law may help keep others and oneself from harm, God’s desire is that we obey from our hearts—a yielding to Him based in love (John 14:15; 1 John 5:3).

Father, I want my obedience to be an overflow of my deep love for You. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Radical Obedience

Peter and the other apostles replied: “We must obey God rather than human beings!” (Acts 5:29).

Scripture: Acts 5:27-32

Song: “Take My Life, and Let It Be”

Of all the disciples, Peter seems to have been the most impulsive and to have taken the most risks. He was the only disciple to have walked on water (Matthew 14:29). Peter openly pledged his allegiance to Jesus, even unto death (Matthew 26:35). At Jesus’ arrest, Peter drew his sword to defend Jesus (John 18:10). However, he abandoned Christ and ran from the garden to save his own life (Matthew 26:56). Then he denied even knowing Jesus three times in a row (John 18:17, 25-27). Though Scripture doesn’t tell us, tradition holds that, in the end, Peter died a martyr’s death.

Peter’s story is a beautiful example of the power of the Holy Spirit at work in the life of an imperfect man. After his failures and faltering, Peter found God’s acceptance, compassion, and forgiveness . . . and was profoundly transformed. In today’s passage, Peter faced steep opposition and the threat of death, yet he boldly obeyed the Lord.

Have you ever wondered what would happen if you radically obeyed God’s Word—if in the heat of the moment, when you knew it meant great risk, you said, “Yes, Lord”? As with Peter, this kind of obedience doesn’t happen without transformation, and it often follows many failures and seasons of uncertainty.

Father, in my own strength I am not able to risk greatly for You. Lead and transform me by Your Spirit that I might be ready to risk anything and everything for You. In Jesus’ name, amen.

The Perfect Mirror

Whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues in it—not forgetting what they have heard, but doing it—they will be blessed in what they do (James 1:25).

Scripture: James 1:19-27

Song: “You Are Loved”

Born with severe near-sightedness, he saw only shapes and colors in the world around him. Because of his disability, other kids yelled insults and beat him up. His parents never spoke a kind word to him. Life was painful. However, at the age of 45, a surgery became available to correct his vision. One day, soon after surgery, he walked into a coffee shop that had a large mirror on the wall. Waiting in line, he looked toward a man who stood near him. Then it hit him: *Hold on a minute. Is that me? Do I look like that?* He had no frame of reference regarding his appearance. He had no sense of identity outside of what he'd been told all his life. As he stared into the mirror, the lies he had believed crumbled.

For many of us, the unkind words and actions of others have distorted our identity. But God's Word is our perfect mirror! Though we may not recognize ourselves at first, if we keep looking intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, the lies we have believed will break.

God's Word tells us we are God's children, created in His image (Genesis 1:27). We are coheirs with Christ (Romans 8:17), profoundly loved (Ephesians 3:17-19), and much more!

Father, help me look intently into Your Word and remember who I really am in You. In Jesus' name, amen.

Eddie and Milo

My comfort in my suffering is this: Your promise preserves my life (Psalm 119:50).

Scripture: Psalm 119:41-56

Song: “Standing on the Promises”

A scene in a popular kids’ movie has an ostrich doing away with one of the main characters named Eddie. Eddie’s long-time friend, Milo, then calls out in distress, “Eddie! Eddie! Where is Eddie?” As I watched this scene, it hit me. I knew exactly how Milo felt. I had been enduring a season where the only response to my tears and prayers was silence. It seemed my Friend was gone.

In my Christian experience, Jesus had been a constant, abiding presence. Now, however, I was in unfamiliar territory. Yet, I kept recalling a pivotal moment when I believed God was saying, “I am stretching your faith.” Those words set the stage for what was to come. There is a great opportunity for us when God seems silent. Turning to the Scriptures, I began holding onto the Word of God in a new way. Daily, I had to push back difficult emotions and thoughts and weigh them against what God said in His Word. Simply repeating verses out loud, allowing them to roll over and over in my head, gave me strength and comfort. Eventually, I found a solid foundation on which to walk.

Eddie, in the movie, miraculously drops from the sky and re-enters the story. *My* best Friend, however, never actually left my side. He was just quiet for a while.

Father, thank You for each valley that serves as a sacred training ground in my life to establish my faith in Your Word.

Unmistakably Loved

Whoever loves God is known by God (1 Corinthians 8:3).

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 8

Song: “He Knows My Name”

Emperor penguins have the uncanny ability to filter out all the unfamiliar voices and to home in on their mate’s unique call. When returning to the colony after a morning spent eating fish, these penguins will encounter tens of thousands of boisterous other penguins assembled on the ice, all of them decked out in identical tuxedos! Besides this, emperor penguins don’t build nests. This leaves them without a visual guide of any kind in the chaos. But they need only one clue to find their partner on the ice: the unique and familiar call of their mate.

In today’s verse the Greek word *known* means “to recognize, to perceive, especially through personal experience, to understand.” Like a mated penguin listens for a particular voice calling to it, God is attentive to the voices of those who love Him (Psalm 116:1-2).

God is always listening for your voice. It is a melody He cherishes (Song of Solomon 2:14). No one else has ever sounded like you nor ever will. God easily finds you among the throng of humanity and draws near to where you are. He is your maker. He knows you. He hears you when you call, and He is eager to commune with you.

Father, I love You! Help me to remember that You know me fully and desire to be with me. As I call out to You, I trust that You hear me and will meet me where I am. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Build with Love

“I have the right to do anything,” you say—but not everything is beneficial. . . . Not everything is constructive (1 Corinthians 10:23).

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 10:23–11:1

Song: “I Surrender All”

In 1978, shortly after the Manhattan skyscraper’s completion, an architectural student questioned whether 601 Lexington could withstand quartering winds—winds that hit it at its corners. She called the building’s architectural firm and voiced her concerns. As a result of that conversation, the firm discovered that rather than a full weld at each steel joint (as the original plans called for), joints had been bolted, making the structure susceptible to blowing over. At the time of construction, the change was legal, so permits had been issued, but the chief structural engineer was never informed. Fortunately, emergency repairs were made, and the building still stands as a recognizable silhouette in the city skyline.

It’s interesting to note that the alteration to the building plan was *legal*, even though it was not in the best interests of occupants. Because it was not a sound construction practice, it placed many lives in grave danger.

In today’s passage, Paul calls us to place the best interests of others ahead of our personal freedoms. When we represent the gospel of Christ in this way, we are constructive for the kingdom of God. In making wise choices as we interact with others, we leave behind an enduring legacy of God’s love.

Father, it’s sobering to consider that my life can have an eternal impact on those around me. By Your grace, I want to live in a manner that draws them to You. In Jesus’ name, amen.