

Regarding Others Rightly

The voice spoke to [Peter] a second time, “Do not call anything impure that God has made clean” (Acts 10:15).

Scripture: Acts 10:1-15

Song: “The Love of God”

One beautiful, crisp fall Sunday morning, my husband and I decided to don our riding gear and head to church on our motorcycle. We stopped at restaurant for some breakfast before the service, and as we made our way to a table, we received some icy looks from other patrons. When our food arrived, we bowed our heads to give thanks. After praying, we noticed stares that seemed to communicate that leather chaps and praying don't go together. From that experience, I learned what it's like to feel judged.

In today's passage, when God told Peter to go to a Gentile's house and share the gospel, it shook Peter's sense of how things were supposed to be. However, God provided a special vision to help Peter understand that the way he had been regarding the Gentiles needed to change. God's plan is to give the gift of salvation to anyone who will receive it by faith.

Scripture tells us to love other people (Mark 12:31). Even when it's challenging, we're to demonstrate God's kindness and compassion. Jesus encountered many who judged Him unfairly (John 10:20), but He still loved them, and He wants us to do the same.

Father, thank You that even when I don't know how to relate to someone, I can still love them and point them to You. In Jesus' name, amen.

April 8–14. **Barbara Latta** is a wife, mom, and grandmother who loves to garden and ride motorcycles with her husband.

The Faith of One

[God said,] “I will keep you and will make you to be . . . a light for the Gentiles” (Isaiah 42:6).

Scripture: Isaiah 42:1-12

Song: “All Hail the Power of Jesus’ Name”

Robert J. Thomas (1839–1866), a Welsh missionary to China, wanted to take the gospel to Korea as well. In September 1865, he reached the coast of the Korean peninsula, but the only tracts and New Testaments he had were written in Chinese. He used what he had and then returned to China. In 1866, after his wife’s death, he traveled back to Korea on a U.S. trading boat, offering his interpreting skills in exchange for his passage and the opportunity to bring the gospel inland. When Korean officials ordered the boat to leave, the traders refused to comply, and conflict ensued. Everyone aboard was killed, including Thomas. However, according to one record of his death, the man who executed him was deeply impacted by the missionary’s beaming countenance, and he decided to keep one of Thomas’s Bibles. In time, a church came into being because of people reading that Bible.

As individuals, we may think we don’t have much influence in the world. But when we serve God full-heartedly, we never know what the impact might be. The faith of Robert Thomas opened the door to the gospel in Korea because he used what he had. We can use whatever we have to shine the light of Christ in the darkness around us.

Father, I want to be committed to being ready to share the gospel in every place with every person who is willing to hear it. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Offerings to Honor Him

“In every place incense and pure offerings will be brought to me, because my name will be great among the nations,” says the LORD Almighty (Malachi 1:11).

Scripture: Malachi 1:10-14

Song: “Great Is Thy Faithfulness”

Several years ago, my husband was laid off from his job. I was a homeschooling mom at that time, so I did not have an income. My husband immediately started looking for more work, and he was able to get unemployment benefits, but it was not enough to meet our monthly bills. Although I found a part-time job in the afternoons, we still struggled.

During that time, we recognized that we hadn't been faithful to give from our income in the way that would best honor God, so we decided to commit a portion of our income to Him. We weren't able to give much at first, but it was a start. One day as we still struggled, there was an envelope in the mail with no return address. Inside was a cashier's check from an anonymous donor. What a kind provision from God! It wasn't long before God provided another job for my husband, and over time we were able to increase our giving.

God doesn't call His people to bring offerings because He needs them. He wants us to demonstrate that we trust Him. Pure offerings flow from grateful, faith-filled hearts—hearts that rejoice in His faithful provision and seek to honor Him.

Father, thank You that as I trust You, honoring You first in my life, Your faithfulness provides everything I need in every situation. In Jesus' name, amen.

The Beauty of New Life

Put to death . . . whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry (Colossians 3:5).

Scripture: Colossians 3:1-11

Song: “Victory in Jesus”

The Texas Mountain Laurel is a tough shrub that thrives in North America’s desert Southwest. The unsightly seedpods for this bush don’t seem capable of producing the striking, aromatic blooms that they do. The seeds themselves are an attractive color—albeit poisonous to humans and animals—but the outer pods have been referred to as some of the ugliest in the plant world. Once in the ground, however, the seedpods perish along with their former appearance and purpose. From them, new sprouts push through the ground. And with the nourishment of sunshine and the proper moisture, a fabulous show of petals emerges.

Without Christ, the works of our fallen, sinful nature—our flesh—dominate our actions. And just as the consequence of ingesting poisonous seeds is physical death, so feasting on the deeds of our flesh will produce spiritual death. But when we place our trust in Christ for salvation—believing the truth about His death, burial, and resurrection—a beautiful new life emerges. Sustained by His Spirit and nourished by His love, our fleshly ways can no longer remain part of our transformed hearts and minds. In Christ we have been made completely new and have become part of God’s fragrant bouquet of redeemed lives, bringing glory to His name.

Father, I thank You for sending Jesus to die for me so that I can have new life and be transformed into the beautiful, sweet image of Your Son. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Worship Whenever, Wherever

[God said,] “Many peoples and powerful nations will come to Jerusalem to seek the LORD Almighty and to entreat him” (Zechariah 8:22).

Scripture: Zechariah 8:18-23

Song: “The Holy City”

When pandemic restrictions were lifted in 2022, multitudes gathered in Israel to celebrate Sukkot. The ancient land of biblical renown was once again filled with joyful feasting, dancing, and singing. This seven-day festival—sometimes called Festival of Booths or Feast of Tabernacles—recalls the Exodus during which God’s people lived in temporary dwellings. It also celebrates the ingathering of the harvest during which harvesters also built temporary shelters.

Worshippers from the Christian tradition similarly flock to Jerusalem during Holy Week to remember Christ’s sacrificial death and to celebrate His glorious resurrection. Visitors may traverse what some believe to be the footsteps of Christ as He made His way to Calvary. Or they may spend time in prayer and worship at various traditional sites that represent locations mentioned in the Gospels.

Certainly to celebrate Jesus’ resurrection “on location” can be a powerful experience. But as meaningful as it might be to do so, we don’t *need* to travel to Jerusalem to properly worship our God or to seek His blessing. Every day can be a celebration of His redeeming love. And as we seek Him with our whole hearts, we can know that wherever and whenever we pray, He hears us.

Father, I want to worship You with a pure heart as I celebrate the blessings You have poured out in my life through the gift of Your Son. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Obstacles to Salvation Removed

Every valley shall be filled in, every mountain and hill made low. The crooked roads shall become straight, the rough ways smooth (Luke 3:5).

Scripture: Luke 3:1-14

Song: “Blessed Assurance”

Before my mother passed away, I often traveled from my home to hers to visit and help care for her. My drive required passing through three states, and I frequently encountered road construction. Pavement repairs, new roadways, detours—sometimes coupled with bad weather—cluttered my trip with obstacles. Not only did the constant barriers slow me down on the way to my mom’s, but the experience was repeated on my way home. However, once construction was completed at each site, the work produced a smooth surface and a straight path, and I was grateful to be able to move toward my destination with one less hindrance.

The message John the Baptist preached gave people hope that the obstacles to relationship with God would be removed. This passionate desert preacher poured refreshment upon the ears of those who sought salvation. Jesus came to make the rough ways smooth not only for those who lived in biblical days, but also for all who would have faith in Him in the years to come.

We can follow John’s example and share the message of salvation with those around us. Our lives and our testimony can show others the straight way to find Jesus.

Father, thank You that Jesus removed all obstacles to approaching You. Grant me boldness to tell others about Your gift of salvation. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Jesus' Authority

[The centurion said through his messenger,] “I myself am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. I tell this one, ‘Go,’ and he goes; and that one, ‘Come,’ and he comes. I say to my servant, ‘Do this,’ and he does it” (Luke 7:8).

Scripture: Luke 7:1-10

Song: “Shout to the Lord”

In the southern United States, where my husband I and live, springtime always brings the threat of tornado weather. One particular April, the weather service issued tornado watches faster than we could monitor them. One nearby tornado watch turned into a warning—meaning a tornado was imminent—and our apprehensions heightened as we peered through windows at the darkened atmosphere with its eerie, greenish-gray sky. My fear mounted as we had no place to go except a hallway in our house.

During this ordeal, I thought about the story of the Roman centurion’s faith in Jesus’ authority. I prayed, “Jesus, if a man could be healed by the authority of Your name, we can stay safe the same way.” We sat in the center of our house, listening as the windows rattled and torrential rain descended.

The next day we discovered that a tornado destroyed property 12 miles from us, but the swirling monster lifted before reaching our neighborhood. We thanked the Lord for our safety as we also prayed for those who experienced damage. Whatever we may face in this life, we can trust that the authority of Jesus’ name is greater still!

Father, thank You for the examples in Your Word that assure me of Your authority to see me through every earthly threat and hardship. In Jesus’ name, amen.