

Our Rock Eternal

Trust in the LORD forever, for the LORD, the LORD himself, is the Rock eternal (Isaiah 26:4).

Scripture: Isaiah 26:1-11

Song: “Rock of Ages”

“Rock of Ages” has long been a favorite hymn for its succinct gospel message. It was written by a minister named Augustus Toplady (1740–1778) and first published in 1775. Toplady’s inspiration for the hymn is debated. One account says that, caught in a storm, he found shelter in the cleft of a rock. This account is memorialized with a plaque in Burrington Combe, a gorge in North Somerset, England. As the story goes, the protection of the cleft inspired the idea of Jesus being the rock who protects those who trust in Him.

Isaiah employs the image of God as “the Rock eternal” (Isaiah 26:4), a reminder of God’s attributes. The prophet bids God’s people to trust in the Lord forever and then backs up that call with the truth of God’s steadfastness and faithfulness. The Lord is our source of peace, the one for whom we yearn. His goodness inspires our praises!

We are often tempted to trust in our own abilities, when the only trustworthy author of salvation is Jesus. We cannot earn a place in Heaven, but we can forever trust the one who made a place for us.

Father, thank You that I can always find shelter in Jesus, the Rock of Ages, in whom salvation is found. In Jesus’ name, amen.

May 13–19. **Linda L. Kruschke** lives in Oregon with her husband of 36 years. She enjoys flower gardening, hiking, writing poetry, and having their adult son over for dinner.

Of Shepherds and Sheepdogs

He tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young (Isaiah 40:11).

Scripture: Isaiah 40:1-11

Song: “Leaning on the Everlasting Arms”

I served on the call committee when my church called our first permanent pastor. Because he was in North Dakota and we were in Oregon, we held his initial interview via Skype. Someone on our team made reference to us looking for the right shepherd for our small but growing flock. “I’m not a shepherd,” he replied. “I’m a sheepdog. Only Jesus is our shepherd.” When we welcomed Pastor Dave on his first Sunday with us, the celebration included a cake with a smiling sheepdog surrounded by a small flock of sheep. As our flock has experienced several changes in location, he has faithfully helped us follow Jesus.

The prophet Isaiah foretold the coming of Jesus, our good shepherd. Isaiah wrote his prophecy at a time when Israel was divided, and Ahaz, king of Judah, “did not do what was right in the eyes of the LORD his God” (2 Kings 16:2). God’s people were lost and without a shepherd.

Just as a shepherd uses a trusty sheepdog to help herd the sheep, Jesus uses ministers to help guide His people. But the sheepdog is not the shepherd, and a minister is not Jesus. A good sheepdog listens for the voice of the shepherd, and a good minister listens for the voice of Jesus.

Father, provide for Your people ministers who look only to You for direction. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Death Has No Sting

God raised [Jesus] from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him (Acts 2:24).

Scripture: Acts 2:1-4, 14, 16-24, 36

Song: “Christ the Lord Is Risen Today”

Preaching to huge arenas of people, evangelist Billy Graham (1918–2018) often asked, “Are you ready to die?” As he proclaimed the gospel message, he would quote Jesus’ words spoken to Thomas in John 14:6: “I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me” (*KJV*). Toward the end of his life, at the age of 95, Graham recorded a 28-minute TV special from the comfort of his own home, titled *Billy Graham: Are You Ready to Die?* There he reaffirmed the gospel message: that trusting Jesus Christ—believing in His work of atonement on the cross—is the only way to Heaven. Five years later, Billy Graham himself passed into eternity.

Jesus endured an agonizing death on the cross to save us from our sins, but that wasn’t the end of the story. As Jesus predicted, God raised Him from the dead to defeat death so that it would no longer have a hold over those who believe.

Because Jesus has risen from the grave, if we receive His gift of salvation, we will enter our Heavenly home when our mortal days come to an end. We need not fear death; Christ Jesus has defeated its power over us.

Father, help me as I point others to Your Son, the only way to eternal life. In Jesus’ name, amen.

The Praying Parent

[Peter said,] “The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call” (Acts 2:39).

Scripture: Acts 2:37-47

Song: “When the Roll Is Called Up Yonder”

By age 9, Ling was well-acquainted with suffering. She and her sister were forced to beg in the streets because their father was ill and unable to provide for the family. When their father died, things were as bad as Ling thought they could get. But then her mother remarried, and her cruel stepfather made the sisters work even harder. Despite the Christian faith of her mother and biological father, Ling concluded there was no God. But her mother never stopped praying for her, and God answered those prayers. Not only did Ling become a believer in Christ herself, but she also worked to spread the gospel across China.

Jesus promised salvation, eternal life, and the gift of the Holy Spirit for all who believe in Him. His promise is for me, for you, for our children and families—*all* who will believe. It is a promise that will never fail because He who promised is faithful and true (Hebrews 10:23).

Many parents worry about their children, especially adult children, who seem to have strayed from the path of faith. But God is faithful to continue working in the hearts and lives of our sons and daughters. We can call on the Lord, asking that He draw them to himself.

Father, rather than worry about my child or other loved ones, help me to pray and to trust in Your faithfulness. In Jesus' name, amen.

Restored Relationships

Esau ran to meet Jacob and embraced him; he threw his arms around his neck and kissed him. And they wept (Genesis 33:4).

Scripture: Genesis 33:1-15

Song: “If We Never Meet Again This Side of Heaven”

All families have differences from time to time. My Aunt Dot and Aunt Mimi—the last two of my dad’s four sisters—recently passed away. Sadly, they hadn’t spoken to each other in years. No one living knows the nature of the disagreement between them. Did they both hold some longstanding grudge, or was the feud one-sided? Did one or both simply refuse to forgive? We’ll probably never know, but I find a lesson for myself in their story. How important it is to not allow disagreements with family members to remain unresolved and festering!

Jacob and Esau certainly had some history that could have prevented them from reconciling. Jacob had bartered to gain Esau’s birthright and then, by stealth, had stolen from Esau the blessing of the firstborn, given by their father. Then after fleeing for his life, Jacob worked more than a decade for his father-in-law in Paddan Aram. When Jacob finally returned to the land of his father, Isaac, he feared Esau’s revenge. But God is sovereign. He worked in the lives and hearts of both brothers to fulfill His plan for Abraham’s descendants.

Each of us at times has to choose whether to forgive and reconcile or to hold a grudge. God calls us to forgive; it is always the right choice, the path of faith and peace.

Father, help me to be an instrument of reconciliation in my family relationships. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Seeing the Voice of God

The voice of the LORD strikes with flashes of lightning (Psalm 29:7).

Scripture: Psalm 29

Song: “Word of God, Speak”

We watched the amazing sunset from the top of Haleakala on the island of Maui. The beauty of the ocean and neighboring islands from our 10,000-foot vantage point was breathtaking. Once the glowing orb sunk below the horizon, we stayed to watch the stars come out. Before a single star peeked from its hiding place in the heavens, we witnessed a lightning storm all around us. Thunder rolled quickly as the lightning was only an island away. That night, God had a lot to say about the wonder of His creation.

The psalmist wrote that God’s voice “strikes with flashes of lightning” (Psalm 29:7). His voice came to Moses from a burning bush (Exodus 3). To Elijah, God spoke in “a gentle whisper” (1 Kings 19:12). To the apostle Paul, Jesus spoke after the flash of a blinding light (Acts 9:3-4). Throughout Scripture, God speaks to His people in various ways, sometimes loudly and sometimes quietly. Through these accounts recorded in His Word, God makes clear the wonder of His salvation. He is all-powerful, the creator of all things, and worthy of all glory, honor, and praise!

Not all our days reveal God’s splendor with a spectacular lightning show, but every day we can hear His voice by reading the Bible and by noticing the beauty of His creation around us.

Father, as I go through my day, I will look to Your written Word and marvel at Your creation. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Life in the Midst of Suffering

We . . . glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope (Romans 5:3-4).

Scripture: Romans 5:1-11

Song: “Standing on the Promises”

For many, suffering wears at their faith like sandpaper on a rose petal. But not for Mizhong Miao. He endured great suffering at the hands of the Communists in China during the 1960s. He preached the gospel, which was forbidden, and as a result was beaten and imprisoned. His wife divorced him. Then during an exceptionally cold winter, he was pronounced dead along with 1,050 of his fellow inmates. But Miao was not dead, and God revived him in the morgue. He was imprisoned for another 15 years, but his faith never wavered. His suffering, he said, brought him closer to Jesus.

Jesus endured suffering, as did His disciples, because of the message of salvation. The apostle Paul endured imprisonment, flogging, shipwrecks, stoning, and more (2 Corinthians 11:23-27). So when he calls us to “glory in our sufferings,” he writes from a place of experience. Throughout the Bible we read stories of men and women who suffered and remained faithful. Their stories challenge and stir our own faith.

It is impossible to live in this world and not experience suffering of one kind or another. Though we may not be beaten or imprisoned for our faith, we may experience mocking or discrimination that tries to wear it down. But in this suffering, we can identify with Jesus and draw closer to Him.

Father, in suffering, thank You for strength to persevere and hold fast to my hope in You. In Jesus' name, amen.