

## A Gospel-Centered Home

Paul dwelt two whole years in his own hired house, and received all that came in unto him, preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him (Acts 28:30-31, *KJV*).

**Scripture:** Acts 28:23-31

**Song:** “Make Me a Blessing”

*Welcome! Make yourself at home! Come on in and sit a spell!*

I’ve seen signs with messages such as these hanging in my friends’ homes. While it’s unlikely that Paul had any such wall décor as he awaited trial in Rome, such a sign would have been fitting, given his practice of welcoming people and talking with them about Jesus.

Homes have many purposes: they shelter us from weather, protect us from wildlife and other dangers, and provide a place for us to raise a family and welcome friends. Some houses—like drug houses—are instead used for harmful purposes. But how we use our homes is up to us.

Paul used his rented home as a place for people to gather to hear about Jesus. He used it as a place to share the gospel. What a great example he set for us!

**Father,** I want the place where I dwell to be more than mere shelter. Use my home as a place to welcome others and share Your love and truth. In Jesus’ name, amen.

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 June 3–9. **Harriet E. Michael** lives in Louisville, Kentucky. Married 44 years, she is a mother and grandmother who substitute teaches when not writing.

## Fearing God

**It came to pass on the third day in the morning, that there were thunders and lightnings, and a thick cloud upon the mount, and the voice of the trumpet exceeding loud; so that all the people that was in the camp trembled** (Exodus 19:16, *KJV*).

**Scripture:** Exodus 19:9-11, 16-25

**Song:** “How Great Thou Art”

On Independence Day many years ago, my husband and I took our two-year-old son to watch our neighborhood fireworks. We love fireworks and thought he would too. We couldn't have been more wrong! The loud explosions and bright flashes frightened him. He buried his face in my husband's chest and cried. We didn't stay long.

Today's Scripture passage tells of a time when God's presence descended on Mount Sinai, and it affected the people much like those fireworks affected my young son. They saw the lightning flashing, felt the mountain shaking, and heard the thunder and trumpet sounding. As the people trembled at this revelation of God's holiness and power, they recognized that God is to be feared—to be regarded with complete reverence.

As believers we have come to know God's abundant mercy through Christ's atoning work on the cross. Yet, we need to remember that God is still to be treated with reverence. He loves us, forgives us, and allows us to approach Him in prayer. But He is still a holy and awesome God who calls us to treat Him as holy and to walk before Him in holiness (1 Peter 1:15-16).

**Father,** help me treat You with reverence in my thoughts, words, and actions. In Jesus' name, amen.

## A Kingdom that Cannot Be Shaken

**Since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe** (Hebrews 12:28).

**Scripture:** Hebrews 12:18-29

**Song:** “On Christ the Solid Rock I Stand”

If you’ve ever vigorously shaken a can of soda pop and then opened or punctured it, you know what happens. The contents spew out, and the mini explosion makes a relatively innocuous mess. It’s a far more serious matter, however, when areas of planet Earth get shaken: items in homes fall and get broken, buildings crack and crumble, and people are sometimes injured or even killed. Few things in life get our attention like a big quake does.

In yesterday’s passage, we read about how God’s presence descended on Mount Sinai and shook the ground on which the people stood. Given how scary earthquakes can be, it’s no wonder they were frightened! In today’s passage we read about a different mountain—Mount Zion. And in this instance, the book of Hebrews is referring to an *eternal* mountain, one that cannot be shaken, “the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem” (12:22).

In the Old Testament, Jerusalem was originally a Jebusite fortress on Mount Zion. But when King David captured it, it also became known as the City of David (2 Samuel 5:6-7). The Mount Zion in today’s passage, however, is referring to a future, unshakable city where God himself will dwell forever among His people.

**Father,** thank You for the promise of Your unshakable kingdom! I want to worship You gratefully with reverence and awe, now and forever. In Jesus’ name, amen.

## Prayer: A Powerful Spiritual Weapon

**After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly (Acts 4:31).**

**Scripture:** Acts 4:23-31

**Song:** “Heaven Came Down and Glory Filled My Soul”

In a 1946 edition of her book *So This Is Africa*, Susan Anderson wrote, “I say it reverently, if God were to answer every prayer we made, I think we should have to stop praying or become much more wise [sic] than we are now. We should be about as safe on our knees as at the controls of one of our great bomber planes—loaded.”

I own a copy of this book, and although it is out of print now, I have always loved this quote. It’s a reminder that prayer has the potential to be powerful when we pray wisely. In today’s passage we can take note of the way the early Christians prayed. They raised their voices *together* (agreed in prayer). They addressed their prayers to God and praised Him. They recalled Scripture and declared how God had already worked. Then, finally, they offered their petitions to the Lord. We can learn much from this passage about praying effectively.

While Anderson was a World War II-era missionary to Nigeria, I agree with her still today: we need to be wise in our prayer lives! Like weapons in physical warfare, our prayers can be powerful weapons for God’s glory in each spiritual battle we face (Ephesians 6:10-20).

**Father**, teach me how to pray more effectively. Make me “more wise” in my prayers. In Jesus’ name, amen.

## Ultimate Beauty

**When Moses came down from Mount Sinai with the two tablets of the covenant law in his hands, he was not aware that his face was radiant** (Exodus 34:29).

**Scripture:** Exodus 34:28-35

**Song:** “Beautiful, Beautiful, Jesus Is Beautiful”

Botox, fillers, chemical peels, tanning gel, makeup. Some folks go to great lengths to try to get their faces to appear more beautiful. This is not a new pursuit. Back in Old Testament times, we read of Esther undergoing weeks of beauty treatments before she was presented to King Xerxes as a candidate to become his queen (Esther 2:1-12). In fact, beauty techniques can be found in cultures worldwide. As a child growing up in Africa, I used to hear advertisements for a specific brand of petroleum jelly, claiming that it can “make your face shine like a ripe papaya.”

In today’s passage, Moses’ face shone when he came down from Mount Sinai after meeting with God there. Moses wasn’t even trying to improve his looks or make his face shine. He was simply spending time with God, and that was its effect.

When we consistently spend time with God, we are changed too. We might not have faces that shine like Moses’ did, but our lives will radiate God’s love and His ways as we study and learn them. Time in God’s presence transforms us. It softens our hearts and focuses our minds on things that are good, pure, and eternal.

**Father,** thank You for drawing me near to You. As I seek You, grant me a heart that longs to be with You, and then use me to reflect Your heart and Your ways to others. In Jesus’ name, amen.

## On Being Courageous

[Moses said to the people,] “Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified . . . , for the LORD your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you” (Deuteronomy 31:6).

**Scripture:** Deuteronomy 31:1-8

**Song:** “So Send I You”

Dr. David Livingstone (1813–1873) was a Scottish physician and pioneer missionary to Africa. As he traveled and shared the gospel message, he encountered many hardships and obstacles—including being attacked by a lion! Not only did Dr. Livingstone tell the African people about Jesus and tend to their illnesses when he could, he also mapped portions of Africa that were, except for trade routes, unknown to the outside world.

One summer some years ago, I taught the children at my church about missions. There was no curriculum, so I wrote my own. We studied many missionaries, beginning with the apostle Paul. Perhaps the children’s favorite missionary that summer was Dr. Livingstone (although Lottie Moon of China came in a close second).

How could the apostle Paul, David Livingstone, Lottie Moon, and all of the other courageous missionaries take on the unknown, including the many hardships they endured in their efforts to share the gospel? They knew what Moses told God’s people in today’s passage: that God would never leave them nor forsake them. And this truth can still encourage us today to be brave as we bring the gospel message with us wherever we go.

**Father,** thank You for Your promise to always be with me. Let this truth spark new courage in my heart today. In Jesus’ name, amen.

## By God's Power

**Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God (2 Corinthians 3:5).**

**Scripture:** 2 Corinthians 3:5-18

**Song:** "There Is Power in the Blood"

The Yoruba people of Africa have an expression: *l'agbara Olorun*. It means "by the power of God." The backstory for this saying is contained in a short parable: A man announces that tomorrow he will fix his bridge, but the next day it rains, and so he can't. So again he says that tomorrow he will fix the bridge, but again something interferes. Finally, he says that tomorrow *l'agbara Olorun* he will fix his bridge, and the next day he fixes it.

I grew up among the Yoruba people and have heard this phrase all my life. My children know it too, since they have heard me say it many times. We have a similar expression in English that we sometimes use when we announce our plans and add, "Lord willing." In both cultures, we are acknowledging that, although we may have hopes and intentions, we are actually not the ones in control. God alone is in ultimate control.

The verse for today contains a similar acknowledgment, but the full passage says so much more. God has purpose in His power and control: He intends to raise us up, give us competence and hope, make us bold, and ultimately transform us into His glorious image.

**Father,** You are in control of this world and of my life, and You use the things You allow in my life to conform me more and more to Your image. Thank You! In Jesus' name, amen.