

Triumph Through Suffering

Thanks be to God, who always leads us . . . in Christ's triumphal procession (2 Corinthians 2:14).

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 2:12-17

Song: "All Hail the Mighty Conqueror"

David Wisnia (1926–2021) lost his entire family during the Holocaust. The Nazis kept him alive at Auschwitz because of his remarkable singing voice. He escaped while on a death march and found refuge with the U.S. Army's 101st Airborne Division. In 2017, the 90-year-old Wisnia marched again, this time as the grand marshal for a Fourth of July parade. He sang the U.S. national anthem and spoke a message about the power of hope and life that triumph over hate and death.

In first-century Rome, generals returning from conquest would lead victory parades, marching through the city with their troops following behind them. Paul likened this kind of parade to the triumphant spread of the gospel. Christ is like the victorious general leading the parade. Because of Paul's ministry, the knowledge of Christ was spreading. Even when the apostle suffered hardship, the gospel continued to advance, and so he rejoiced.

God never promised that our lives would be easy. But He did promise that if we remain faithful to Him and trust Him, we will one day, in victory, enter the city that God has prepared for His people (Revelation 21:2-3, 7).

Father, help me to remember that each day, no matter what happens, You want to use me to display Your hope to the world. In Jesus' name, amen.

Knowing Where to Turn

They cried out to the LORD in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress (Psalm 107:6).

Scripture: Psalm 107:1-9

Song: “Cry Out to Jesus”

An animal-rescue organization in India responded to a call regarding a puppy lying in a gutter and crying out in pain. When the workers found the dog, they discovered he had deep wounds in his leg. They promptly took him to their animal clinic, treated him, bound up his wounds, and named him Felix. Two weeks later, Felix was transformed into a happy, healthy “love bug.”

As an animal lover, I am moved by stories of stray animals being rescued. In their helplessness, they cry out, and someone steps in to save them. Psalm 107 describes those who, wandering in the desert, suffered hunger and thirst and were on the brink of death. Much like Felix, all they could do was cry for help. But most importantly, they knew to *whom* they could cry.

Often it is not until we reach the point of knowing we cannot save ourselves that we turn to our Savior. Though we would rather not experience fear or pain, those things serve to remind us that we ultimately rely on Him for all things. As we are rescued, we rediscover the depth of God’s love and care for us, and we are transformed into thankful, joyful people.

Father, thank You for Your grace and mercy. I even thank You for the desperate times because they teach me dependence on You, and in them, You demonstrate Your great love for me. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Forgiven and Free

[God] brought them out of darkness, the utter darkness, and broke away their chains (Psalm 107:14).

Scripture: Psalm 107:10-22

Song: “The Kingdom Is Coming”

Barbara Mangi suffered the tragic loss of her daughter in 2007. She never considered forgiving her daughter’s murderer until one day in court when, tearful and broken, the man gave a heartfelt apology. Knowing he could never change the past, he committed to praying for Mangi and her family for the rest of his life. That moment of remorseful confession sparked in her a journey of healing, leading ultimately to forgiveness. That forgiveness didn’t set the man free from his physical prison, but it did break his emotional chains, as well as Mangi’s.

Today’s passage speaks of those who rebel against God and suffer the consequences. When they cry out in their distress, God is faithful to save them. His salvation reaches far enough to save even those who were once His greatest enemies.

Any time we decide to go our own way, ignoring God’s instructions and departing from His paths, we open ourselves up to danger and heartache. We all have rebelled against God’s ways or His counsel and have at some point suffered the fallout from our choices. But when we cry out to God from a heart of sincere repentance, His great light shines into the darkness of our hearts, and His forgiveness sets us free.

Father, thank You for Your forgiveness, for setting me free when I cry out to You from a repentant heart. Where there is sin in my heart, I will seek to return to You today. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Growing in Grace

The gospel is bearing fruit and growing throughout the whole world (Colossians 1:6).

Scripture: Colossians 1:3-12

Song: “What Shall the Harvest Be?”

A number of years ago, my brother-in-law and his family moved to a house on five acres of land. One of their earliest projects was planting fruit trees, which take years to produce fruit and require careful maintenance to survive. After six years of patient tending and waiting, their efforts led to bumper crops of fruit year after year.

Every harvest begins with the planting of a seed or a seedling. For the Colossians, the seed of the gospel was planted by a man named Epaphras. Once planted, that life-changing truth grew and prospered, and the believers became part of the harvest of God’s kingdom that is still taking place all over the world. The prayers of Paul, Timothy, and others invited God’s grace to nourish the new believers’ faith like the sunlight and water that cause plants and trees to grow strong and produce life-giving fruit.

The seed of the gospel is potent, and it readily takes root and produces salvation in receptive hearts. When the message of grace through Jesus Christ is planted in someone’s heart and faithfully cultivated, it produces an abundant harvest. As much as we appreciate a harvest that nourishes our physical lives, how much more grateful we can be for the harvest of souls for eternal life!

Father, thank You for planting the seed of the gospel in my life. Help me to grow in that grace and to share Your abundant life with others. In Jesus’ name, amen.

A Mystery Revealed

In [Jesus] and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence (Ephesians 3:12).

Scripture: Ephesians 3:1-13

Song: “The Mystery of God”

Hiram Bingham (1875–1956), a real-life Indiana Jones, was a lecturer on early twentieth-century history at Yale and an explorer in South America. He became especially famous for locating Machu Picchu, an ancient Incan city in Peru, which before 1911 was considered mere lore. Since then, much has been learned about this mysterious city, including the discovery of a secret access bridge. The bridge spans a dizzying drop and appears to have been constructed so that pieces could be removed to prevent unwanted visitors from crossing.

The uncovering of an ancient city brings its hidden history and culture to light. Similarly, the coming of Jesus Christ unveiled the mystery of God—that is, His plan of salvation from the beginning of time. The mystery of God’s redemptive plan was finally and perfectly unveiled through Jesus’ earthly ministry—His sinless life and His death, burial, and resurrection. Though God carried out this plan through the Jewish people, the gift of salvation is for everyone. And the testimony of His saving grace is carried on in the life of His people, the church, worldwide.

Jesus was God’s secret bridge, so to speak, that brought the message of God’s grace to all people. To recognize and receive God’s gift of salvation through Christ is the greatest discovery of all time. Through Jesus we have access to God the Father, allowing us to approach Him with freedom and confidence.

Father, thank You for Your plan to save us and for sending Your Son to show us the way. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Refuge Assured

Be my rock of refuge, to which I can always go (Psalm 71:3).

Scripture: Psalm 71:1-11

Song: “God Is the Refuge of His Saints”

Movies about tornadoes in the Midwest often depict families running to their storm cellars, hurrying inside, and shutting double doors overhead as the sky turns eerily dark. But storm cellars aren't always available when twisters strike. An 11-year-old boy survived a storm in Iowa by hiding in a clothes dryer as a tornado ripped through his family's home. One Kentucky woman didn't fare as well but still survived when she was thrown from the bathtub she was hiding in. An elderly, bedridden man in Texas turned to prayer and amazingly survived, though his home was destroyed.

We all want to have the peace of mind that when storms arise, we have a ready, steady place of refuge. Rather than waiting until the time comes to scramble and panic as we seek safety, it is much better to have a plan already in place and to be assured we will be protected.

Our life storms may include people who hurt us or situations that lead to fear. It is impossible for us to control all the circumstances that threaten our security. But it *is* possible—and necessary—to know where we can go when difficulties arise. God has promised to be our rock of refuge in all situations, at all times.

Father, I'm so thankful that You never change and never leave me. I trust You and know that I can run to You for refuge in any circumstance. In Jesus' name, amen.

Ongoing Message of Hope

Even when I am old and gray, do not forsake me, my God, till I declare your power to the next generation (Psalm 71:18).

Scripture: Psalm 71:12-21

Song: “Lord, Through All the Generations”

When Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. gave his 1968 speech “I’ve Been to the Mountaintop,” he had seen many struggles in his own life and in his generation. Yet he expressed gratitude that God had allowed him to see that things were changing. Just as Moses was able to see the promised land from atop Mount Nebo, so Dr. King was sure he could see the promise of things to come. This was the last speech he ever gave, but it was full of instruction for the following generations to continue the work.

The psalmist, likewise, though he had been attacked on all sides, knew that better times were coming. He had the experience of knowing God from his youth, and he declared that truth throughout his lifetime. He wanted, by God’s enabling, to continue doing that until his dying day, passing on the knowledge of God’s power and salvation to future generations.

As believers, we can have great peace in knowing that God is in control and will one day restore all that is broken. No matter what we face, in every stage of life we carry that hope and can declare it to others. May our desire be the same as the psalmist’s: to see that hope planted in generations to come.

Father, thank You for Your faithfulness and the hope You offer every generation. Help me to always declare it. In Jesus’ name, amen.