

Conquering Through Christ

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? . . . No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us (Romans 8:35, 37).

Scripture: Romans 8:29-39

Song: “Jesus Giveth Us the Victory”

Nearly two decades after a freak diving accident left a 41-year-old Chicago man a quadriplegic, he overcame his injury. Of people with that type of injury, 95 percent never walk again. But he did. Then he swam from Alcatraz to San Francisco, a treacherous mile-long struggle through rough waves and cold water. The prison sat behind him as a symbolic backdrop; being paralyzed had felt like being in prison.

As believers in Christ Jesus, we have been set free from an impossible prison of paralyzing sin and shame. Praise the Lord! In this life, however, we will still experience adversity and struggle, injury and pain. Thankfully, as God’s beloved children, we have everything we need in Christ to overcome our hardships. And in the process, we are being made more and more like our Lord. The progress may seem slow sometimes, but His love for us is unshakable.

Jesus is everything to a believer: savior, shepherd, best friend, bondage-breaker, and the lover of our souls. He saves us and strengthens us, and from within His love, He makes us more than conquerors.

Father, thank You for Your conquering love at work in my life. In Jesus’ name, amen.

September 9–15. **Melinda Eye Cooper** lives in Tennessee. She has three sons, two daughters-in-law, and four beautiful granddaughters.

Celebrating Eternal Life

It is written: “I believed; therefore I have spoken.” Since we have that same spirit of faith, we also believe and therefore speak, because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us with Jesus and present us with you to himself (2 Corinthians 4:13-14).

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 4:8-18

Song: “I Can Only Imagine”

My mom passed away in 2022 after a long illness. Many family members gathered to celebrate her life. Even though it was a sad occasion because she's no longer with us, it was also a celebration because she's finally home. As we remembered her life here, there were stories, songs, and lots of laughter. It was beautiful and bitter-sweet.

Today's passage reminds us that our hope for life beyond this one is based in the promise of God's Word. The apostle Paul assured the Corinthian church that the power of God that raised Christ from the dead is able to raise up believers and bring them into God's presence for all eternity.

As Christians, we have a celebration coming when we reach the end of our earthly lives. For us, physical death gives way to eternal life. Heaven will warmly welcome those who have received salvation by grace through faith in Christ Jesus. Our home will be with Him. We can only imagine that joyful celebration awaiting us!

Father, I'm so grateful that You sent Jesus to make a way for me to join You in Heaven for all eternity. All my days, I want to live to honor You. In Jesus' name, amen.

The Waiting Turtle

I am worn out calling for help; my throat is parched. My eyes fail, looking for my God. . . . Do not let the floodwaters engulf me or the depths swallow me up or the pit close its mouth over me (Psalm 69:3, 15).

Scripture: Psalm 69:1-15

Song: “While I’m Waiting”

In Canada, painted turtles are born in autumn but stay underground, frozen with no heartbeat. They barely have brain activity. The turtles wait patiently for the warmth of spring to thaw their frozen hearts. It takes six months. When the temperature rises, their hearts slowly begin to beat, bringing them back to life.

The hearts of Christians can seem frozen at times. We may be dealing with hard places in life while still growing up spiritually. We can easily become angry because God allowed something unfair to happen. We may retreat in our immaturity. But we still hope in God. We wait. We know He’ll work everything out for good in His perfect timing. Like the painted turtles wait for the warmth of the sun, we wait for the warmth of God’s Son. Jesus’ love is able to thaw our frozen hearts, reviving our faith and our joy in Him.

The wait may be painful, but hope is powerful. We don’t know what God will do, but today we can renew our confidence that He has our best interests at heart. We’ll eventually see His powerful work in our lives, making us more like Jesus. His purpose for our waiting is perfect for our growth.

Father, I will choose to trust You in the waiting times of life. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Restored with Gold

Scorn has broken my heart and has left me helpless; I looked for sympathy, but there was none, for comforters, but I found none. . . . But as for me, afflicted and in pain—may your salvation, God, protect me (Psalm 69:20, 29).

Scripture: Psalm 69:16-21, 29-36

Song: “Safe”

Kintsugi is a Japanese art form of repairing damaged ceramic. Instead of concealing the brokenness of a dish, it's sealed with lacquer that is mixed with a powder form of some metal, such as gold, platinum, or silver. The mended markings on the vessel—now filled with gold where cracks had been—are a beautiful reminder of its restoration. A broken dish becomes a unique piece of art.

When we have a deep flesh wound, there'll be a scar—a mark reminding us we were once badly injured but have experienced healing. It's like that spiritually with our hearts. God is close to the brokenhearted and saves those crushed in spirit (Psalm 34:18). He remains near when it seems everyone else has abandoned us. He binds the pieces of our broken hearts together again. When we're crushed, and we don't think we can hold it together, He holds us in His powerful hands. We may have a scar on our soul from the experience, but it reminds us of God's healing.

True healing for our deep wounds comes through the power of the Holy Spirit. He may guide us using others who are wise, but it is His powerful work in us that makes us whole.

Father, please bind together my broken places with Your mighty healing power. In Jesus' name, amen.

The Stress Test

The Lord is faithful, and he will strengthen you and protect you from the evil one. . . . May the Lord direct your hearts into God's love and Christ's perseverance (2 Thessalonians 3:3, 5).

Scripture: 2 Thessalonians 3:1-5

Song: "Be the Strength of My Life"

Heart trouble runs in my family, and most of us struggle with some sort of heart issue. Diagnosing a heart problem usually involves a stress test. My test was harder than I expected, and by the time I finished on the treadmill, I was exhausted and ready to go home. Thankfully, the test results revealed that my heart was generally in good condition.

In our spiritual lives, God may give us a spiritual stress test to help reveal the condition of our hearts. The source of the stress may come in the form of an illness, marriage struggles, job loss, financial distress, or some other issue, large or small. Over time, we might become weary of constant stress in a particular area of life. But the strain might be helping bring to light what we need, whether it's to develop perseverance or to make some kind of change. The irony, though, is that the stress test is not for God, the Great Physician, to be able to see the problem; He already knows. It's for us to see our *own* heart issues.

When we understand what is needed, we can seek God's grace to begin making changes. Thankfully, God knows our hearts and will help strengthen them as we look to Him.

Father, show me what the stress in my life reveals about my heart. In Jesus' name, amen.

Eyes that See Us

Hezekiah prayed to the LORD, “. . . Give ear, LORD, and hear; open your eyes, LORD, and see; listen to the words Sennacherib has sent to ridicule the living God” (2 Kings 19:15-16).

Scripture: 2 Kings 19:14-19

Song: “His Eye Is on the Sparrow”

At four weeks old and still covered in down, a peregrine falcon chick has giant eyes. Those big eyes can see prey a half mile away. When they're ready for flight, they'll reach speeds between 60 and 200 mph (100 to 320 kmph). Once nearly extinct, these endangered birds are tagged with loose-fitting metal bands and will be tracked for life.

In contrast to the peregrine falcon, our spiritual vision is limited. We cannot see our way forward on our own. At times, we may even experience complete helplessness like Hezekiah did in today's passage. At such times we're reminded how much we need God's wisdom, guidance, and intervention. We're suddenly aware that we have no idea what's ahead or how to navigate it. But God does. His sight is perfect because He's omniscient—He sees and knows everything. And He is able to do anything.

Like the baby falcons are tagged for tracking, God has marked us with His Holy Spirit. There's no way He can lose track of us, and no one can snatch us away from Him (John 10:28). He is able to guide us through this life all the way to eternity. We are precious in His sight (Psalm 116:15).

Father, thank You for seeing me and for caring about what concerns me today. In Jesus' name, amen.

Audacious Prayer

Then Isaiah son of Amoz sent a message to Hezekiah: “This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: I have heard your prayer concerning Sennacherib king of Assyria. This is the word that the LORD has spoken against him. . . . ‘Because you rage against me and because your insolence has reached my ears, I will put my hook in your nose and my bit in your mouth, and I will make you return by the way you came’” (2 Kings 19:20-21, 28).

Scripture: 2 Kings 19:20-31

Song: “Seek Ye First”

In the South, a certain form of audacious behavior is referred to as a “hissy fit.” An example of this would be a child acting out—screaming, stomping their feet, maybe even rolling around on the floor—because they didn’t get their way.

As God’s children, we don’t need to throw a temper tantrum to get God’s attention. Though at times it may seem He’s not listening—and we might grow frustrated waiting for Him to answer us—we don’t need to give up or act out. Instead we can continue audaciously asking for what we need, and He *will* answer us (Matthew 7:7-8).

Hezekiah brought his petition before the Lord, spreading out the letter full of audacious boasts and threats sent by the king of Assyria. God heard and answered Hezekiah’s prayer, delivering him and the kingdom of Judah from attack. God is faithful and good, and it is in seeking Him and waiting for Him that we learn to trust Him.

Father, please hear my prayers, but do what is best in Your sight. In Jesus’ name, amen.