

Lifetime Guarantee

You also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession (Ephesians 1:13-14).

Scripture: Ephesians 1:3-14

Song: "Blessed Assurance"

It's springtime as I write this, and my cruise countdown "personalizer" reads 92 days, 23 hours, and 48 minutes until my ship sails. The trip isn't paid in full yet, but the deposit's been made, so my place is secured. I am headed for Alaska in a few months!

I'm on my way to Heaven, too. I didn't pay that deposit, though. Jesus did by His sacrificial death on the cross. When I trusted in Him for salvation, I received the gift of the promised Holy Spirit. Today's Scripture passage teaches that the Spirit's presence in our lives is the deposit guaranteeing our heavenly inheritance—the assurance that we will receive all God's promises.

The seal of the Holy Spirit produces confidence and security in our hearts, testifying to us that we belong to God. Also, the Spirit's presence in our lives produces love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23). Best of all, He brings the assurance of a home in Heaven with the one who paid the price in full.

Father, thank You for filling me with Your Holy Spirit and for the guarantee of my inheritance. In Jesus' name, amen.

October 14–20. **Barbara Gordon** and her husband live in southwest Missouri. She is a retired schoolteacher whose favorite pastime is playing with grandkids.

Face to Face

Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy (1 Peter 1:8).

Scripture: 1 Peter 1:3-12

Song: “Rejoice in the Lord Always”

When I taught school, turning the calendar to August was exciting. I could hardly wait to see the bright new school clothes, smell the chalkboard dust, and hear the children’s laughter. Though I typically didn’t yet know the 20-some new students assigned to my class, I loved them even before I met them.

The believers in today’s passage had not seen Jesus during His earthly ministry. However, they believed what they had heard about His life, death, burial, and resurrection, and they loved Him. Our love for Christ is not based on seeing Him in flesh either. We have believed the Word of God and the testimony of faithful witnesses.

Our trust in and love for Jesus brings us joy too great to even express. While feelings of happiness may come and go with the ups and downs of life, our joy in Christ is God’s gift to us that remains, regardless of circumstances. Every day we see the evidence of His presence through His creation as well as in His protection and provision for us. Notice that Peter says we do not see Jesus *now*. Someday we will. I look forward to the day when I’ll see Him face to face (1 Corinthians 13:12).

Father, thank You for inexpressible joy that comes from trusting in and loving Your Son. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Unshakeable Prayer

When Daniel learned that the decree had been published, he went home to his upstairs room where the windows opened toward Jerusalem. Three times a day he got down on his knees and prayed, giving thanks to his God, just as he had done before (Daniel 6:10).

Scripture: Daniel 6:10-17

Song: “Sweet Hour of Prayer”

“It’s cancer.” I have a habit of praying, but my diagnosis sent me to my place of prayer with renewed frequency and urgency. My petitions took on revived focus and passion.

Daniel’s life was characterized by prayer; it was his recurring practice. Years before the lions’ den experience, Daniel saved his own life and the lives of all of King Nebuchadnezzar’s advisors by praying for wisdom to interpret the king’s dream (Daniel 2). Another time, Daniel earnestly prayed regarding a vision concerning God’s people (Daniel 10). Today’s text lies between those two prayer incidences. No matter what his circumstances, Daniel’s custom was to pray three times a day in his upstairs room, giving thanks to God while facing an open window toward Jerusalem. His habit continued even when doing so meant being thrown into a den of hungry lions.

Sometimes the responsibilities and threats we face in life are overwhelming, and we’re tempted to turn to the world for answers. Daniel’s example reminds us to go to our Heavenly Father with our praise and petitions. A consistent prayer habit provided Daniel with peace, and it can do the same for us.

Father, thank You for hearing my prayers. Help me develop an unshakeable and consistent prayer habit. In Jesus’ name, amen.

When Life Gives You Lions

Daniel answered, “May the king live forever! My God sent his angel, and he shut the mouths of the lions. They have not hurt me, because I was found innocent in his sight. Nor have I ever done any wrong before you, Your Majesty” (Daniel 6:21-22).

Scripture: Daniel 6:18-28

Song: “What a Mighty God We Serve”

“We got it all.” Just four words, but that short statement has ended sleepless nights for many who have undergone surgery for cancer.

The sound of five words from Daniel—“May the king live forever”—had a similar effect on King Darius. He’d spent a sleepless night, distressed over the plight of his faithful servant. Darius’s vanity had led him to agree to a bad idea—one that put his new edict at odds with Daniel’s devotion to God. Nevertheless, the king of Babylon learned that Daniel’s God not only can close the mouths of hungry lions but can also turn the heart of a king to honor Him. Daniel’s faith resulted in a very different executive directive, one that called for fear of and reverence for the one true God.

First Peter 5:8 describes the devil as a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. But the very next verse reminds us to apply Daniel’s plan—to resist the devil and stand firm—when assaults on our faith bombard us. We can also remember that, just as for Daniel, it all begins with prayer.

Father, strengthen me to follow Daniel’s example of steadfast faith and prayer that I may always honor You. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Song of Deliverance

[Deborah and Barak sang,] “Hear this, you kings! Listen, you rulers! I, even I, will sing to the LORD; I will praise the LORD, the God of Israel, in song” (Judges 5:3).

Scripture: Judges 5:1-5, 12-22

Song: “Victory in Jesus”

When I was a little girl, my family celebrated every event on the calendar. We ate black-eyed peas on New Year’s Day and corned beef and cabbage on St. Patrick’s Day. We hunted plastic eggs on Easter Sunday and set off fireworks on the Fourth of July. On May Day we assembled baskets of flowers for the neighbors, and of course, Thanksgiving and Christmas were big affairs.

Today’s reading is a poem by Deborah, recounting the Israelites’ victory at Mount Tabor. The song lyrics tell of celebration and deliverance, and they detail the events that led to triumph. Deborah sings the story of the oppression her people faced, the gathering of the tribes for battle, and the death of the enemy’s army commander, Sisera. She describes God’s mighty intervention on His people’s behalf, and she praises God, because without His help, deliverance surely would not have come.

Though our battles may not involve combat against an earthly king, our struggles against “the powers of this dark world” are real (Ephesians 6:12). And yet, like Deborah, we have reason to celebrate. Jesus’ death, burial, and resurrection have provided deliverance for us from our enemy, the devil. Every day, we have reason to praise God for our spiritual victories over temptation and sin.

Father, thank You for the victory You’ve provided through Your Son. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Saying Thank You

One of [the men with leprosy], when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice (Luke 17:15).

Scripture: Luke 17:11-18

Song: “Give Thanks with a Grateful Heart”

Parent: “What do you say?”

Child: “Tank you!”

A baby’s first “thank-you” warms a parent’s heart.

The 10 lepers in today’s reading had every reason to give thanks. Jesus had healed their leprosy and restored their lives. With their diseased bodies made whole, the isolation from family and friends was finally over. Maybe their amazement pushed gratefulness out of their minds. The overwhelming joy of being restored to community, being able to resume employment, and being allowed to participate in normal life was certainly a factor in the failure of nine to express gratitude. Jesus noticed the Samaritan who returned to thank Him. He also wondered at those who didn’t.

I have not experienced leprosy. I have, though, had a heart in need of a healing touch. God, through Jesus’ sacrifice, extended His grace and forgave my sin. I do not want to be indifferent to such an indescribable gift. Still, sometimes I get busy doing necessary things or become too focused on myself, and I forget. Today I want to be like the thankful leper and glorify God, not just with words but with a grateful heart for all He has done.

Father, thank You for all You’ve done for me. Help me to live gratefully before You. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Life's Storms

You have been a refuge for the poor, a refuge for the needy in their distress, a shelter from the storm and a shade from the heat (Isaiah 25:4).

Scripture: Isaiah 25:1-10a

Song: “What a Friend We Have in Jesus”

Joseph Scriven was born in Ireland in 1819 and died in Canada in 1886. Twice he was engaged to be married. His first fiancée drowned the evening before their wedding, and his second wife-to-be became ill and died. When his mother suffered illness, Joseph sent her a poem he had written. Today we recognize this poem in the lyrics of the hymn “What a Friend We Have in Jesus.” Even though the author lived through times of sadness, he knew the joy of friendship with Jesus.

Isaiah wrote during seasons of both captivity and deliverance of God's people. He lived in periods of extreme sorrow and times of great celebration. Today's reading is a song of praise for Israel's freedom from bondage. Isaiah worshipped God for being a refuge to the poor and needy and a shelter from the perils of life. The prophet looked forward to the time when God would end Israel's disgrace and swallow up death forever.

Our relationship with Jesus through His saving grace brings joy to our lives. Trials do come, though. Sometimes hard times are a result of our own bad choices, and other times they're simply the result of living in a sinful world. We, like Isaiah, can praise God for His shelter and shade in these storms.

Father, the storms of life are sometimes great, but You are greater still. In Jesus' name, amen.