

Living Stones

Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good (1 Peter 2:2–3).

Scripture: 1 Peter 2:1–5

Song: “Goodness of God”

When my children were younger, they had little plastic building blocks all over the house. The process of building something new took time and was always an imaginative effort. I can easily recall the pride and joy on their faces whenever they asked me to look at one of their new creations.

As God’s children, we are being built into a beautiful spiritual house, pleasing and precious to God. Part of our cooperation in that work is to be intentional about rooting out sin in our lives. We might read the strong admonition in today’s passage and anxiously wonder, *How do I get rid of sin?* Verse 3 holds the key: it becomes immeasurably easier to choose God’s ways once we have known His goodness.

When God instructs us to do something, He always provides the strength and grace to do it. If you’re feeling discouraged, lean into God’s goodness. Receive it; let *it* fuel your life—not self-imposed expectations or anxious efforts. You are God’s workmanship, a creation in which He takes great joy (Ephesians 2:10). Look to Him for what you need today.

Father, I praise You for Your goodness. As I look to You, may sin be rooted out and Your ways be established in my life. In Jesus’ name, amen.

March 17–23. **Jane Keller** lives in Colorado, where her passions are her family, gathering around the table, and writing.

A Sacrifice of Praise

May my prayer be set before you like incense; may the lifting up of my hands be like the evening sacrifice (Psalm 141:2).

Scripture: Psalm 141

Song: “Lift Up Holy Hands”

As I sat in church that day, I once again asked God to heal me. I was in so much pain and had been for quite a while. That morning, a woman shared her testimony of how she had been healed. *Father*, I prayed, *please take my pain away*. Nothing happened. As our worship leader called us to stand and praise God, I fought back tears of disappointment.

At the beginning of Psalm 141, David cries out for God to hear his prayer. He is asking the Lord that his prayer remain before Him like incense. And David requests that his act of worship—the lifting of his hands to God—be like the evening sacrifice offered in the temple.

There are times when coming before our Heavenly Father is a sacrifice of worship. We have all likely experienced times when we’ve desperately sought God in prayer. Maybe it’s been a prayer for healing, salvation for a loved one, peace in our home, or financial provision, and all we seem to get back from God is silence. In verse 8 David says, “But my eyes are fixed on you.” Throughout the Psalms, we see in David a heart that says, *Lord, no matter what happens or what my enemies do to me, I will praise You*.

Father, I will seek to follow David’s example and praise You, even when it feels like a sacrifice.

You Smell So Good!

We are to God the pleasing aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing (2 Corinthians 2:15).

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 2:12–17

Song: “May the Fragrance”

Have you ever walked by someone and caught a whiff of how good they smell or passed a bakery and been drawn inside by the tantalizing aromas? While I was growing up, my dad smoked a pipe, and every night after dinner, he would blow smoke rings to my siblings’ and my delight. Forty years later, the smell of pipe tobacco still gives me a feeling of nostalgia. Smells can evoke powerful feelings in us.

Verse 14 of today’s passage tells us that God always “leads us . . . to spread the aroma of the knowledge of him everywhere.” To some, this is a comforting spiritual aroma that brings peace; for others it’s a scent that repels. Either way, by the very nature of Christ in us, we will have an impact on those around us.

Not everyone will enjoy the smell of someone else’s perfume or certain foods or pipe tobacco. But it is not the fault of those things that they smell as they do. It is what they are. The same is true for us: we belong to Christ and are being used by the Holy Spirit to bring His aroma wherever we go and to everyone we meet. It is who we are.

Father, I want people around me be drawn to You by the aroma of Your grace and truth at work in my life. Thank You for the privilege of being Yours. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Hope of Restoration

On that day they will say to Jerusalem, “Do not fear, Zion; do not let your hands hang limp. The LORD your God is with you, the Mighty Warrior who saves. He will take great delight in you; in his love he will no longer rebuke you, but will rejoice over you with singing” (Zephaniah 3:17).

Scripture: Zephaniah 3:14–20

Song: “He Has Made Me Glad”

When we know we’ve done something we shouldn’t, the prospect of consequences may hang over us like a dark, foreboding cloud. We may suffer sleeplessness, anxiety, loss of appetite. We may be unable to enjoy interactions with others and lose interest in our favorite pastimes. It’s miserable to be awaiting punishment. But, oh, the relief when we’re met with mercy instead!

Today’s passage is a beautiful picture of God’s promise of mercy and hope for His people. While the Israelites had rebelled against God and deserved God’s judgment, Zephaniah does not speak of complete destruction or annihilation but of God’s plan to refine and restore His people, providing peace and protection, rescue and righteousness.

God’s character is such that He longs to be merciful to His people. Those who put their trust in God receive, not punishment, but His grace and goodness in abundance. Even when God disciplines us as His children, He has our good in view (Hebrews 12:4–11). When it comes to dealing with His children, God ever and always acts in perfect love.

Father, thank You for reminding me that Your heart is to heal and restore my life and to bring me near to You in love. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Transformed, Not Conformed

Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will (Romans 12:2).

Scripture: Romans 12:1–8

Song: “Take My Life”

Recently, my husband and I were listing technological changes that have happened in our lifetime. We remember when answering machines seemed like the height of convenience. Now look at where we are! Nearly all of us carry phones in our pockets or wear them on our wrists. I'm all for technology, but having quick-and-easy access to so much information is often distracting and, at times, overwhelming.

Avoiding conformity to the world's pattern doesn't mean we stop engaging with the world around us, but it does mean that we don't live according to any ungodly ways or mindsets. It means we don't just embrace what the world says is good, if Scripture says it isn't. Instead of conforming, we are called to live as people who are being transformed, having our minds renewed by the Holy Spirit, who brings our thinking in line with the truth.

Pursuing a renewed mind while living in this noisy world can be a challenge. Living as people who seek God's wisdom and ways requires our focused attention. We can open ourselves up to the work of transformation by regularly spending time with our Heavenly Father and prayerfully taking in His Word.

Father, thank for Your work of transformation in my life. Please renew my mind even now and fill me with Your wisdom and discernment as I make my way through the day ahead.

Overcome with Good

Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good (Romans 12:21).

Scripture: Romans 12:9–21

Song: “Surrounded”

Janice was surprised when suddenly her coworker went from warm and friendly to distant and cold for no apparent reason. In an attempt to understand, Janice tried talking with her but to no avail. Then the coworker sent a scathing email with some vague accusations. Not long after this, the woman left the company. Sometime later, Janice ran into her former colleague at a conference. When she saw the woman, it seemed as though the Lord was prompting, *Go hug her*. With this conviction in her heart, Janice walked right up to her and gave her a hug. The woman, stiff and confused at first, melted into her arms.

Paul gives us two directives: don't be overcome by evil, and overcome evil with good. In the preceding verses, Paul gives an extensive list of how to do this. Interestingly enough, it all boils down to the second greatest commandment: love your neighbor as yourself.

It takes a great deal of strength to put aside selfish tendencies so as not to be overcome by evil. I have felt self-righteousness rising up in me, compelling me to “set the record straight,” and I have struggled to swallow my pride so as to honor someone above myself. When we give in to ego, we are being overcome by evil; but when we choose to love others above ourselves, we are overcoming evil with good.

Father, give me the courage and humility to not be overcome by evil but to overcome evil with Your goodness. In Jesus' name, amen.

Just Ask

[God told Moses to tell the people,] “It is a burnt offering, a food offering, an aroma pleasing to the LORD” (Leviticus 1:17).

Scripture: Leviticus 1:3–17

Song: “Living Sacrifice”

I am not a meticulous person, so I’m in awe of people who are. Even trying to do a jigsaw puzzle stresses me out. Not too long ago on social media, I saw a woman who was trying to lose weight. Her method was to weigh everything she ate. It worked for her. She had great success. But to be honest, as soon as I saw the weigh-your-food part of the protocol, I quickly scrolled to the next post.

As I read about the intricacies of the atonement sacrifice in Leviticus, words like *tedious* and *laborious* come to mind. Thankfully, these types of sacrifices are no longer required because of what Jesus did for us on the cross. Jesus took sin, shame, and death on himself so that we could be free from them.

Sometimes, though, I struggle to fully rest in this freedom. At times I’m tempted to try doing more to gain God’s acceptance. There’s part of me that feels like if I could do something to earn it, then I would deserve it. Sort of like those puzzles I mentioned: if I would actually complete one, I know I would take great pride in it. But that’s just the thing: we can’t add anything that we can be proud of to the sacrifice Jesus made. We can only humbly receive His saving grace.

Father, thank You that for me to receive Your forgiveness, I need only ask You. In Jesus’ name, amen.