

So Much to Celebrate

Then the people of Israel—the priests, the Levites and the rest of the exiles—celebrated the dedication of the house of God with joy (Ezra 6:16).

Scripture: Ezra 6:14–22

Song: “Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee”

My daughter had just gotten married and was beginning life with her new husband. Every week, she would call me to gush over the newest items she’d purchased to decorate their apartment: a bookcase, a rug, baskets, pictures. Her enthusiasm was endearing. She was celebrating the joy of making their first place a happy, loving, and comfortable home.

The newly returned residents of Judah celebrated the completion of their temple for God. They were excited to restore a permanent place of worship—a location for all the special furniture and accessories for carrying out God’s prescribed sacrifices and ceremonies. It was a joyful time, and their enthusiasm could not be contained.

As God’s people, we have so much to celebrate! In His unconditional love for us, God provided the gift of eternal life through His Son’s atoning death and victorious resurrection. We also have the special privilege of coming together to worship Him each week. Celebrating the Lord’s Day is one way we can express our gratitude and appreciation to God for His continued goodness and steadfast love toward us.

Father, I delight in celebrating You because of who You are and all You have done on my behalf. Thank You! In Jesus’ name, amen.

May 5–11. **Denise Kohlmeier** is a freelance writer who lives outside Chicago, Illinois, with her husband. She loves to read, write, and do stippled art.

Don't Hesitate to Cry Out

In my distress I called to the LORD; I cried to my God for help. From his temple he heard my voice; my cry came before him, into his ears (Psalm 18:6).

Scripture: Psalm 18:1–12

Song: “Reach Out to Jesus”

I lay praying on the living room floor, the carpet absorbing my tears. I was terrified of an upcoming medical test. I wondered, *What will it reveal? What if I have something wrong with me, something devastating?* I was scared and anxious, and I poured out my heart to God.

Any number of things in our personal lives amidst a chaotic world can seem to threaten our sense of safety and security. In today's Bible text, it's clear that David knew God to be his rock, fortress, refuge, and deliverer in times of trouble. And David knew to turn to God and cry out to Him when he needed help.

Like David, we can bring our distresses—whatever they may be—directly to our Heavenly Father in prayer. He cares for us, and He graciously invites us to bring all our anxieties to Him (1 Peter 5:7). We can rest assured He is with us, come what may, and He promises to comfort us and give us His peace (see Psalm 23:4; John 14:27; Hebrews 13:5).

Father, whenever I'm in the midst of a trial, remind me that I can call out to You any time, and You will hear my prayer. Like David, I will put my trust in You even now and receive the promise of Your peace. In Jesus' name, amen.

Jealous Rivals

[Stephen said,] “Because the patriarchs were jealous of Joseph, they sold him as a slave into Egypt. But God was with him and rescued him from all his troubles” (Acts 7:9–10).

Scripture: Acts 7:2–16

Song: “I Am Trusting Thee, Lord Jesus”

Immediately after the infamous January 6, 1994, attack on Olympic figure-skater Nancy Kerrigan, cameras caught the aftermath as she cried out in pain and bewilderment. An unidentified man had clubbed her on her right leg. Authorities soon learned that Tonya Harding’s ex-husband had arranged the attack. Apparently Harding, Kerrigan’s skating rival, didn’t want to risk being outperformed in the US Figure Skating Championships and upcoming Olympic Games.

Allowing jealousy to fester is dangerous. It can incite a person to do harmful things to others. Joseph’s brothers were jealous of their younger sibling, so they sold him to traders who took him to Egypt as a slave. While this course of action by Joseph’s brothers was ill-intended, God had a greater plan—one that would work out for the good of Joseph, his family, and all of Egypt.

There may be times when we experience harm at the hands of a jealous person. We may fear that their attacks will bring ruin, perhaps to our character, career, relationships, or something else. But no matter how jealousy may impact us, we can trust God with the outcome. In His sovereignty, He will always work to bring about His good plan for our lives. We belong to Him, and He will see us through.

Father, I don’t always understand it when others come against me, but I will trust You to take care of me. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Reverence in His Presence

[Stephen said,] “When [Moses] saw [the burning bush], he was amazed at the sight. . . . Then the Lord said to him, ‘Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground’” (Acts 7:31, 33).

Scripture: Acts 7:30–41

Song: “Be Still and Know That I Am God”

In the Japanese culture, cleanliness is of utmost importance. Upon entering a home or temple, you will notice a tatami mat in the entryway. This mat indicates that, before proceeding further, people are to remove their shoes to avoid tracking in dirt and debris. To refuse to do so is to show disregard for the cleanliness of the establishment or even disrespect for the owner.

When Moses wanted to get a closer look at the burning bush in the desert, there was no tatami mat prompting him to remove his shoes. God instructed him directly to do so. God made it clear that Moses’ approach must be done with respect, for God is holy.

Perhaps we may forget to enter God’s presence with reverence, whether in our devotions, our prayers, or our weekly worship at church. While we are invited to approach God’s throne of grace with boldness (Hebrews 4:16), we might be guilty of entering into His presence with careless indifference, or maybe even arrogance. It’s important to remember that our approach to God should be with respect and reverence from a humble heart—comparable to Moses removing his shoes in God’s holy presence.

Father, please forgive the times I have approached You irreverently. You deserve my respect and humility. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Consult the Creator, Not the Creation

[Stephen said,] “God turned away from [the Israelites] and gave them over to the worship of the sun, moon and stars” (Acts 7:42).

Scripture: Acts 7:42–50

Song: “God Will Make a Way”

At one point during World War II, Italy’s leader, Benito Mussolini, went into hiding. According to historical reports, Nazi official Heinrich Himmler, in his efforts to locate Mussolini, consulted with a group of trusted astrologers. When Mussolini was finally found, Himmler did not give credit where credit was due. Instead of congratulating those who had cracked the radio codes that made it possible to learn Mussolini’s whereabouts, Himmler attributed the mission’s success to his team of soothsayers. In fact, he and many other high-ranking Nazis were known to consult with astrologers regarding important political decisions, sometimes with disastrous results.

Many people today still rely on the stars and planets, believing they have mystical powers to guide and direct their lives and decisions. However, the only reliable and trustworthy guide for our lives and decisions is God, our creator.

God alone makes our paths straight and leads us in the everlasting way (Psalm 139:24). He alone gives us wise counsel, strength, courage, and hope to navigate our days and make upright decisions. As we follow our creator—rather than His creation—we will never be led astray or put to shame.

Father, thank You for being my wonderful counselor. I’m so grateful for the lamp of Your Word and for Your Spirit, who gives me insight and understanding. I trust You alone to see me through each day of my life. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Our Great Promise-Keeper

[King Solomon] said: “LORD, the God of Israel, there is no God like you in heaven or on earth—you who keep your covenant of love with your servants who continue wholeheartedly in your way. You have kept your promise to your servant David my father; with your mouth you have promised and with your hand you have fulfilled it—as it is today” (2 Chronicles 6:14–15).

Scripture: 2 Chronicles 6:12, 14–27.

Song: “Standing on the Promises”

In 2006, my dad passed away. The next day, my siblings and I discovered that we had been written out of his will. As the promise of an inheritance faded away, this unexpected change was confusing. We were crestfallen, wondering why our own father would disinherit us, his children, and go back on a past promise.

Thankfully God, our Heavenly Father, keeps His word. As Solomon reminds us, God’s promises are solid and certain. They can be trusted. We know this to be the case, since we have seen many of His promises fulfilled: the arrival of God’s own Son, mercy through the forgiveness of sins, and hope in a restored relationship with God.

Even though some of God’s promises will arrive in the future—for instance, at Jesus’ return to bring justice to the living and the dead—we know God won’t renege on those promises either. We can trust Him because He has a proven track record of *always* keeping His promises.

Father, I praise You that You are trustworthy and faithful. I’m grateful for Your promise of an eternal inheritance kept in heaven for all who put their trust in You. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Joyful Giving

King Solomon offered a sacrifice of twenty-two thousand head of cattle and a hundred and twenty thousand sheep and goats (2 Chronicles 7:5).

Scripture: 2 Chronicles 7:1–7, 11

Song: “We Bring the Sacrifice of Praise”

I know someone who lives on a fixed income, sometimes paycheck to paycheck. He doesn't always have money to spare at the end of each month. Yet, as a Christ-follower, he loves God and wants to honor Him with what he has. He wants to be obedient and to give cheerfully to support the church. He wishes he could give more, but he just can't. But whatever he does give is more than enough because he offers it to God from a grateful heart.

King Solomon was able to give out of the bounty of his royal property. He could afford to be extravagant while expressing his overwhelming joy and gratitude to God for the completion of the temple, where God would reside among His people.

Of course, not everyone can offer such extravagant gifts as King Solomon's. But that is not the point of our bringing gifts to God. The point is that we are called to give cheerfully, whatever we can, and no amount is too small when it is offered from a heart of joy and gratitude (2 Corinthians 9:7). Ultimately, the greatest and most valuable sacrifice we can offer God is a life wholly devoted to serving Him (Romans 12:1).

Father, I love You, and I want my heart, life, and gifts to express to You how glad I am to belong to You. In Jesus' name, amen.