

More Than You Can Handle

To you, LORD, I called; to the Lord I cried for mercy (Psalm 30:8).

Scripture: Psalm 30

Song: “You Are My All in All”

At the end of a long harvest week, my farmer-husband made a misstep off of a grain cart. He fell eight feet to the ground and landed with his entire weight on one leg. It made for a nasty break. The good news was that he didn't hit his head or get buried by corn. But he had to go through intensive surgery, six weeks without bearing weight on his leg, and a significant change in harvest plans. It was more than we could handle.

How do we respond when we receive more than we can handle? Maybe we panic or pace, get anxious or angry, or become frustrated and fearful, doubling down on our efforts to fix the situation. When David experienced more than he could handle, he cried out to the Lord for mercy. God answered as only He can: lifting David out of the depths of his difficulty, healing him, favoring him, and turning his grief into dancing.

Our hardships and heartaches may be more than we can handle at times, but they are never too big for our mighty and merciful God. In all things, God can and will provide all we need.

Father, I call to You and cry out for mercy. From the abundance of Your love, help me. In Jesus' name, amen.

May 12–18. **Lenae Bulthuis** lives with her husband, Mike, on a Minnesota grain and livestock farm. She enjoys her family, strong coffee, and long conversations about Jesus and His grace.

What to Wear

As God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience (Colossians 3:12).

Scripture: Colossians 3:12–17

Song: “Take My Life and Let It Be”

I looked ridiculous, and not just because I was an awkward middle-school girl. It was the size of my blue jeans. They were two sizes too big, but I wore them anyway, double-cuffing them and tightening my belt as much as possible. After I begged my mom for these expensive jeans, we compromised. She agreed to the purchase as long as the jeans had plenty of room for me to grow—which this pair definitely did!

As God's children, we know that we are to clothe ourselves with garments of grace and mercy—not that these attitudes toward others are an easy fit for us. It can feel ridiculous to show compassion to a cranky neighbor. It doesn't seem fitting to show kindness to an inconsiderate coworker or to be patient with a family member who's always running late. And when we've been blindsided by betrayal, putting on forgiveness can feel at *least* two sizes too big.

Only Jesus wore these clothes perfectly, and He did so for us. We don't wear what God wants us to wear to earn His love. We already belong to Him! We wear what He wants us to wear so that we might reflect our identity as His children. But when these spiritual garments feel too awkward, it's OK. He's given us plenty of grace and room to grow.

Father, be glorified as I grow more and more into these spiritual garments that reflect Your grace and mercy. In Jesus' name, amen.

Orange-Tag Days

[God] has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us again. On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us, as you help us by your prayers (2 Corinthians 1:10–11).

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 1:2–14

Song: “My Help”

Weary travelers crowded around the airport carousel. My tattered gray suitcase dropped from the conveyor belt with a *thud*. The airline had attached an orange tag to its handle that read: “Heavy! Get help to lift.” As I heaved my luggage to the floor, I deemed it an orange-tag day because even heavier than my luggage was the weight of worry I carried within my heart.

The apostle Paul understood days like my orange-tag day. In 2 Corinthians 1, he wrote about the troubles he and his team had experienced. They were under great pressure. Utterly burdened beyond their ability to bear, they didn’t think they were going to make it. Life was heavy, and they needed help. Paul welcomed the help from God and the help of the Corinthians, through their prayerfulness.

No one is exempt from orange-tag days. Whether it’s because of a burden of debt, a broken relationship, or an overwhelming fear of never being healthy again, life can feel heavy. Worries are weighty, and we are not meant to carry them alone. When your load is too much, get help to lift it. Tell a friend, and ask for their prayers. Turn to God, our greatest helper. When we cry, “Help!” it’s a one-word prayer God hears.

Father, I need You! You are my greatest helper. Please carry me through. In Jesus’ name, amen.

The Never-Ending Invitation

Come, let us sing for joy to the LORD; let us shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation (Psalm 95:1).

Scripture: Psalm 95

Song: “Come, Now Is the Time to Worship”

My parents regularly invite people into their home with hospitality and a dash of humor. They have a small sign, inconspicuously hung above a doorframe that reads, “All our visitors bring us happiness, some by coming and some by going.” The visitors who linger long enough to see it are left laughing and wondering which brings the greatest amount of happiness to their hosts, their coming or their going!

In Psalm 95, we are invited, not into a *place*, but into a *posture* of worship. The psalmist never says where to come, but three times in 11 verses, the psalmist gives an invitation. We’re invited to come to the Lord, to sing and shout with joy, to offer thanksgiving and worship. It’s a never-ending invitation to praise the Rock of our salvation, the great King above all gods, the Lord our Maker.

Unlike any other invitation, we can’t overstay our welcome in God’s presence, nor is the invitation to worship limited to a church service. Instead, it’s an ongoing call to come and worship God for who He is and what He has done, to praise and thank Him day and night and wherever we go. Now is always a good time to come and worship God.

Father, I come to worship You. Thank You for this forever invitation to lift up my praises in Your presence. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Is It Worth It?

I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ (Philippians 3:8).

Scripture: Philippians 3:1–14

Song: “I Have Decided to Follow Jesus”

Minutes before boarding his first flight, Landon, my 8-year-old grandson, was white-knuckling the handle of his luggage. His thoughts tugged him back and forth. Though he wanted to step onto the plane and soar into a fun-filled trip, a recent newscast about a catastrophic airplane crash had grounded him with fear. He looked at his boarding pass and asked me again, “Nana, is it worth it?”

Is it worth it? It’s a question about following Jesus that Paul answers in today’s passage. After Paul understood who Jesus was and what He had done for him, other things Paul used to value and rely upon became worthless to him. Nothing else mattered, including his freedom. Paul penned Philippians from a prison cell, writing with unwavering conviction that Jesus is always worth it.

Is it worth it? This weighty question is an important one for everyone who decides to follow Jesus. And it’s only when we see the priceless value of knowing Him that we will consider all else to be as garbage in comparison. When we’re misunderstood by family and friends, Jesus is worth it. When we’re ostracized at school or work, Jesus is worth it. Nothing compares to Jesus. He alone is worth it all.

Father, thank You for Your Son. He is of surpassing worth to me. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Only God Can Move Hearts

In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, in order to fulfill the word of the LORD spoken by Jeremiah, the LORD moved the heart of Cyrus (Ezra 1:1).

Scripture: Ezra 1

Song: “Change My Heart, O God”

A water leak had caused damage in the basement, but cleanup and repairs could ensue only after everything was moved out of the affected space. It would take a team of strong people to move boxes, bed frames, and bookshelves. But thanks to the diligence of a motivated crew, the big job was accomplished. There are some things, however, that cannot be budged by even the strongest moving crew. The inclination of a person’s heart is one of them. Only God can do that.

In Ezra we see God moving His exiled people back to Judah. What seemed improbable and impossible, God was able to accomplish. God moved in the heart of a pagan king, prompting him to release exiles to return to Jerusalem to rebuild. God moved in the hearts of family heads to become part of the building crew, and He worked in the hearts of their non-believing neighbors to contribute to the work.

Have you faced someone with a stubborn heart? Maybe someone is resistant to the gospel, or your church is complacent about prayer, or your own heart refuses to let go of something. No matter what we do or say, we can’t make hearts budge. God alone sees the heart. So ask Him to do what only He can do in setting hearts free to respond in life-giving ways to Him.

Father, move in my heart, and make it wholly Yours. In Jesus’ name, amen.

First Things First

[The priests and leaders of Israel] began to build the altar of the God of Israel to sacrifice burnt offerings on it, in accordance with what is written in the Law of Moses the man of God (Ezra 3:2).

Scripture: Ezra 3:1–6, 10–13

Song: “Lord, I Need You”

It wasn't the first time I had been completely overwhelmed by my to-do list. Looking at the meetings, appointments, and project deadlines that were filling the week, I took a deep breath to slow my heart rate. I didn't know what to do second, but I knew what to do first. Years ago, I learned to put first things first, which means first I pray.

The Jewish exiles got that. After 70 years in exile, they returned to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple. If every person standing in the rubble of the temple that the Babylonians destroyed had voiced their opinion on the rebuilding project, there could have been thousands of suggestions. There was plenty to do, but only one place to start. Putting first things first, the leaders built an altar to God in accordance with His Word, and they prayed.

Our focus matters. When we look to God in prayer, everything else falls into its right perspective and proper order. Whether we're knee-deep in a rubble of trouble or at the threshold of building something new, first things first. When we choose to pray, God will meet us where we are, as we are, and will provide all that we need.

Father, teach me to make prayer my first priority instead of an afterthought. I need You in every circumstance. In Jesus' name, amen.