

An Everlasting Name

[God says,] “I will give within my temple and its walls a memorial and a name better than sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name that will endure forever” (Isaiah 56:5).

Scripture: Isaiah 56

Song: “A New Name in Glory”

The World Holocaust Memorial Center, Yad Vashem, is located in Jerusalem. In this museum, thousands of names are recorded to remember and honor those who suffered and died in the World War II holocaust. Monuments like this one try to ensure that victims are never forgotten.

The foreigners and eunuchs described in Isaiah probably felt hopeless and forgotten, since they were excluded from temple worship. The eunuchs’ inability to have children to carry on their names may have brought feelings of despair. But God shares the hope with those who, though lacking social status, are faithful to Him. He promises to give them an enduring name and memorial.

We can be thankful that God’s offer is still available today. Whether we feel lost, forgotten, or insignificant; if we belong to Jesus, our name will last forever. Romans 10:9 gives us assurance that, if we say “Jesus is Lord” and “believe . . . that that God raised Him from the dead,” we will be saved. No matter how damaged or small we may feel, God’s blessing of salvation is ours, and His promise is forever.

Father, when I feel rejected by this world, I choose to believe Your promise. In Jesus’ name, amen.

July 14–20. **Barbara Gordon** is a retired school teacher who lives with her husband in Missouri. Her favorite pastime is playing with her grandchildren.

Praying for All People

I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people (1 Timothy 2:1).

Scripture: 1 Timothy 2:1–8

Song: “Jesus Loves the Little Children”

“Jesus loves the little children / All the children of the world.” When I sang the song as a child, I wondered how Jesus could love all the children. *Some, maybe*, I thought, *but all?* My young mind couldn’t comprehend God’s ability to know all children and to love each one.

As an adult, I continue to wonder about that word, *all*, as when today’s passage instructs us to pray for all people. It’s easy for me to pray for my family and friends. I can usually even pray for those with whom I disagree. Those groups, though, are a small part of the whole of humanity. What about the rest? Who else? Paul provides some clarity as he mentions praying for those in authority and for those who need to know the truth of salvation. Every person on earth needs to understand our sinful condition and our need for Jesus’ saving grace.

Paul’s words encourage me to be more intentional in prayer. It’s a privilege to be praying for those I know as well as for those around the world who need to come to a knowledge of the truth. Everyone needs prayer. Whether I know them or not, I can pray for all people to be drawn to God for salvation.

Father, thank You for the privilege of prayer. I pray for faithful witnesses to share Your message of salvation to all people. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Let Your Words Be Few

Do not be quick with your mouth, do not be hasty in your heart to utter anything before God. God is in heaven and you are on earth, so let your words be few (Ecclesiastes 5:2).

Scripture: Ecclesiastes 5:1–7

Song: “Let My Words Be Few”

Many of my friends are quiet people, but being quiet doesn't come naturally for me. I tend to have lots of words, and sometimes I'm so busy thinking about what I want to say next that I hardly hear what others are saying. I'm sure that must be annoying, and I'm working to overcome the habit. I think I might be guilty of doing the same thing when I approach God in prayer. Solomon's words challenge me to check this tendency in myself.

Sometimes we come to God in prayer with a long list of things we want, with our minds already made up as to what believe we need and what should happen. Solomon reminds us that God's perspective from Heaven is far wiser than our earthly mindset. He instructs us to approach God with reverence.

I am glad God is patient and kind with my learning curve. He continues to love and teach me as I work on practicing wise restraint and respect in my prayer life. He already knows my thoughts, needs, and desires. I gain wisdom when I bring my simple petitions and can trust His guidance and good plan for my life.

Father, when my words are many, remind me that I can trust You to know what's best. In Jesus' name, amen.

He Is Not Far

God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us (Acts 17:27).

Scripture: Acts 17:22–34

Song: “Never Alone”

In high school I had to pass a US Constitution test as a requirement for graduation. I studied the many facts from my study guide and marveled at the number of details. It appeared that each was equally important, and it was hard to know which to commit to memory for the test.

In today’s passage, Paul was seeking an opportunity to explain many important truths about God to the people of Athens. Where should he begin? Using their altar to unknown god as a springboard for his message, Paul declares the true God’s nature and actions. He describes many wonderful attributes of God and His superiority to humans. Then Paul makes a profoundly intimate statement about God: “he is not far from any of us” (Acts 17:27). In this city saturated by idolatry, Paul tells them that the God they do not yet know is near. Even for those unaware, God is not far from them.

I need that reminder. Sometimes I do not feel God’s presence, but feelings are not facts. On days that God feels distant, I will choose to believe His Word and not my emotions. Paul preached good news to the people of Athens, and I need to remember it too: God is near.

Father, thank You for the indescribable gift of Your presence in my life. When I forget, please point me again to the truth of Your Word. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Warning Signs

This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says: Reform your ways and your actions, and I will let you live in this place (Jeremiah 7:3).

Scripture: Jeremiah 7:1–15

Song: “My Eyes Are Dry”

The sugary smell of the cherry pie in my oven was heavenly. Ten minutes later, though, the kitchen filled with smoke. The syrupy red filling had overflowed to the bottom of the oven, triggering a shrill *beep, beep, beep* from the smoke detector. The sound was annoying, but it provided a potentially life-saving warning.

God sent the prophet Jeremiah with an important warning to the people of Judah. In order to receive God’s continued blessings and not go into captivity, the people needed to amend their ways. Through Jeremiah’s potentially life-saving warning God cautioned His people. They needed to know that continuing in their sin would have dire consequences. Though God’s warning may appear harsh, even heartless, to us, it was God’s loving attempt to bring His idolatrous people back into a right relationship with Him.

I am grateful that when I begin to drift away from Him, God provides warnings for me as well. When I fail to listen to Him and walk in His ways, God’s Word or the words of a loving Christian friend come to caution me of the consequences of disobedience. Without God’s warning, I’m in danger of missing out on the healing that repentance brings and forfeiting His blessings of peace that come from righteousness.

Father, please grant me the grace and humility I need to heed Your warnings and return to Your ways. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Our Never-Changing God

“I the LORD do not change. So you, the descendants of Jacob, are not destroyed” (Malachi 3:6).

Scripture: Malachi 3:1–6

Song: “Great Is Thy Faithfulness”

When I returned to teaching after 10 years at home with my own children, I was overwhelmed with the technological changes that had happened. I barely knew how to turn on a computer, let alone use one for recording grades or drafting a class newsletter. I became extremely frustrated and grumbled about the beast that had replaced my trusty typewriter.

Malachi prophesied to a nation full of unsatisfied people. Though they were specifically chosen by God, the people of Judah had turned away from worshipping Him authentically. Then they grumbled about the absence of the blessings they expected, and they questioned God’s love. Through Malachi, God told them that they needed to take responsibility for their actions and change their ways. In His great patience God was unwilling to cast them aside, despite their persistent rebellion. The descendants of Jacob were not destroyed, because God keeps His promises and does not change.

I find security and stability knowing I’m a child of the same unchanging God who spoke through the prophet Malachi. My world is sometimes shaken by challenges of profound grief, relationship strains, unethical politics, and confusing technology. When life is unpredictable or difficult and I grumble or rebel, God’s words still ring true: “I the LORD do not change.”

Father, Your unchanging character comforts me. Thank You for the security You bring to my life even when everything else seems out of control. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Cleanse My Heart

[Jesus'] disciples remembered that it is written: "Zeal for your house will consume me" (John 2:17).

Scripture: John 2:13–25

Song: "Cleanse Me"

I'm passionate about scrapbooking, and the disarray in my basement proves it. Fashioning pages with pictures, colored paper, stamps, and other materials sparks my creativity. I've gone to scrapbooking classes, joined social media groups, and purchased many supplies, and I'm always eager to talk to other enthusiasts.

Today's passage gives us a glimpse into what Jesus was passionate about: the purity of the temple. Passover was an important event, a yearly memorial prescribed by God as a time of sacrifice and worship. When Jesus arrived in the temple courts at Passover time, they looked more like a marketplace than a house of worship. Jesus' astonishing actions were for the purpose of restoring the temple to its rightful purpose as a place of prayer. Zeal for His Father's house consumed Jesus, and the place where God's people were to meet with Him was not to be turned into anything else for any other purpose.

While my messy basement attests to my zeal for scrapbooking, I want my real passion to be keeping the temple of my heart clean as the dwelling place of God's Spirit and the seat of worship and prayer in my life. Thankfully, the cleansing process for us is a gentle one: when we confess our sin to God, He purifies and cleanses us from all our unrighteousness (1 John 1:9).

Father, I want my heart to be set apart for You. I confess my sin to You and gratefully receive Your cleansing. In Jesus' name, amen.