

God Supplies All That We Need

[The man said to Ezekiel,] “Fruit trees of all kinds will grow on both banks of the river. Their leaves will not wither, nor will their fruit fail. Every month they will bear fruit, because the water from the sanctuary flows to them” (Ezekiel 47:12).

Scripture: Ezekiel 47

Song: “He Shall Reign”

A few years ago, after moving into a new home, I borrowed a rototiller, tilled up an area of our backyard, and planted a garden for my wife. Unfortunately, it was a terrible spot with bad soil, too much water, and not enough sunlight. Eventually everything I had planted died. Of course, a good gardener—which I am not—knows the right mix of nutrient-rich soil, sunlight, and water that it takes to grow healthy produce.

The same is true of our spiritual lives. We need to be nourished by God’s Word, filled with His Spirit, and have a healthy mix of worship, prayer, and service if our lives are to bear fruit to God’s glory.

We can thank God for the way He has supplied all these things for us as believers. And we can trust in Him to continue supplying our every need for life and growth as we look to Him and abide in Him (John 15).

Father, thank You for giving me everything I need in Christ to know You and to experience spiritual health and growth as I follow You. In Jesus’ name, amen.

July 28–August 3. **Jim Jacobson** is a pastor and author and has a weekly radio program. He and his wife, Lori, live in the Pacific Northwest.

Keeping an Open Heart

I speak as to my children—open wide your hearts also (2 Corinthians 6:13).

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 6

Song: “Your Grace Is Enough”

“Well,” I declared to my friend, “I guess I just need to get thick skin.” This was my conclusion after relating the details of an emotionally painful relational trial. And I will never forget the concerned expression on his face and the surprise I felt at his reply: “No, it’s *supposed* to hurt.” My wise friend then went on to explain that loving others in a fallen world means we’ll feel pain at times.

Over the course of our lives, we might learn to insulate ourselves from relational pain by closing our hearts to others, forgetting God’s Word, which commands us to love even our enemies. In today’s passage, Paul encouraged the Corinthian believers to open their hearts wide to him as his heart was open to them. Of course, loving wholeheartedly can feel like a risk, but love is also life’s greatest balm.

When we consider Jesus, who endured unimaginable hostility from those He loved, we see that He never stopped loving even those who betrayed Him. As believers, we can follow His example by seeking God’s grace and strength as we bring our difficult situations to Him in prayer. The good news is that God promises to help us to love beyond our own capacity as we draw strength from Him, walking in love just as Jesus did (Ephesians 5:2).

Father, thank You that Your grace is sufficient, even when my heart gets hurt. Please increase my capacity to love like You do. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Kingdom Responsibility

[Jesus said to Peter,] “I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven” (Matthew 16:19).

Scripture: Matthew 16:13–20

Song: “Above All”

One day shortly after reporting to work at my retail management job, I was summoned to the store director’s office. “Jim,” my boss began, “when I arrived today, I found the front door unlocked.” I felt a warm flush come over my face as I heard these words, realizing what a grave mistake I had made. In my rush to close the store and go home the previous night, I had left the store unsecured. Fortunately for me, no one had entered during the night, but it was a great reminder of the responsibility that came with my position and with the keys to the business.

When Jesus declared that His disciples would be given the keys of the kingdom, He was telling them that they would be granted authority as His representatives on earth. Similarly, the apostle Paul declared that all believers are Christ’s ambassadors, representing heaven on earth (2 Corinthians 5:20).

What an incredible honor and privilege it is to be vested with the responsibility and authority of heaven—to declare the words of the King and His good news to others. As Jesus’ disciples, we must be careful to represent Him well.

Father, thank You for the honor of representing You in the world. By Your indwelling Spirit, please give me the strength and wisdom to serve You well. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Undeserved Blessing

[The righteous] will receive blessing from the LORD and vindication from God their Savior (Psalm 24:5).

Scripture: Psalm 24

Song: “Kyrie Eleison”

With my thirteenth birthday party approaching, I had a difficult decision to make. There was one person in particular I thought was cool but who might not come unless I also invited his friend, someone I didn't think much of at the time. Reluctantly, I made the strategic decision to invite them both. Of all the gifts I received in my childhood birthdays, only one has stayed in my mind, or had any lasting impact on my life. This unexpected gift—a calligraphy set—was from the person I really did not want to invite. It was an undeserved blessing—a humbling experience, and it taught me a valuable lesson about the essence of friendship.

Like my undeserved birthday gift, God's unexpected gift is given to us when we trust in Him, even though we do not deserve it. In Christ, God looks past what we deserve (punishment) and gives us a righteousness not our own, which allows us—as the psalmist says—to “stand in his holy place” (Psalm 24:3). What a joy it is to know that no matter what our past sins are or what our present circumstances might be, Christ offers forgiveness that vindicates us of all our transgressions. This is the wonder of the gospel of grace. May we receive it with humility and share it freely.

Father, thank You for the gift of righteousness given to me on behalf of Jesus' work on the cross. Please make me an ambassador of Your grace. In Jesus' name, amen.

A Cry for Help When in Need

You, God, are my God, earnestly I seek you; I thirst for you, my whole being longs for you, in a dry and parched land where there is no water (Psalm 63:1).

Scripture: Psalm 63

Song: “Step by Step”

A few years ago while on a ministry trip to India, I participated in an outdoor conference where temperatures exceeded 100 degrees Fahrenheit. As one who lives in the Pacific Northwest of the US, I was not used to this kind of extreme heat. My body was not handling it well. Though I was drinking lots of water, I remember feeling like I was going to pass out. All I could think about was finding a way to cool down.

David, the great king and psalmist of Israel, often experienced extreme trials that consumed his thoughts and even kept him awake at night. It was during these times that we hear him crying out to God for relief and assistance. I have always loved his determination to pursue God earnestly, and I'm encouraged to know that God brought him through every challenging situation.

When we walk through our own seasons of trial, we can likewise determine to draw near to God and trust in Him for the relief our souls need. Just as David's life was rescued again and again, God will not fail to help us and provide the respite we need.

Father, thank You that just as You heard David's cry for help, You hear mine as well, and in due time You will provide relief. In Jesus' name, amen.

The Faithful Farmer

I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow (1 Corinthians 3:6).

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 3:1–9

Song: “Never Once”

During my high school years, I was one of those students who regularly caused trouble in class. I know that I caused a great deal of grief for one instructor who was a believer in Jesus. He was patient with me, though, and faithfully demonstrated Christian love and virtue. After I became a Christian some years later, I could not wait to visit him and share the impact that he'd had on me and how his enduring witness had borne fruit. When I spoke with him, I was moved to tears hearing about how he had prayed for me.

We don't always see the immediate results of our Christian work and witness. Our efforts may seem like a seed buried in the ground, or like water poured out without purpose. Yet, by God's miraculous design, those planted and watered seeds eventually sprout and bear fruit.

Be encouraged! This is *God's* work, and we have the great privilege of participating in it. Whether we're sowing or watering, through active witness or prayer, we can trust that God will cause the growth in due time. We just need to be faithful and patient like a farmer, and we'll eventually see the harvest and rejoice!

Father, thank You for inviting me into the work of Your kingdom. Help me by Your Holy Spirit to be both faithful and patient as You cause growth in others and in me. In Jesus' name, amen.

Keeping on Stable Ground

No one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 3:11).

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 3:10–23

Song: “In Christ Alone”

“Jimmy!” my friend shouted. “Step back this way!” With the snowy, white-out conditions beginning to let up, he could now see that we had veered off the high mountain trail onto a dangerous and deceptive shelf of snow and ice. The perilous ground I was walking on could give way at any moment, sending me sliding down the mountain, hundreds of feet to the valley below. Thankfully, my friend, who was more experienced than I, saw this and called me out of danger.

Hiking on unstable ground is dangerous, even for experts. If we want to make safe progress in our daily walk with the Lord, the path we walk spiritually must have a strong and stable foundation. The Bible warns us that we need to be vigilant about philosophies and practices that would cause us to drift off the path of following Jesus: “See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the elemental spiritual forces of this world rather than on Christ” (Colossians 2:8).

Faith in Christ and careful study of and obedience to the Scriptures will keep us on God’s stable ground and ensure our progress.

Father, thank You for giving me this foundation of faith in Jesus and for providing the instruction of Your Word, keeping me safe on the path of life. In Jesus’ name, amen.