

Birthday Letdown

This is what the Sovereign LORD says: “See, I lay a stone in Zion, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone for a sure foundation; the one who relies on it will never be stricken with panic” (Isaiah 28:16).

Scripture: Isaiah 28:14–22

Song: “Cornerstone”

During my daughter’s elementary-school years, the annual father-daughter dance was an event we never missed. In her fifth-grade year, the date for the dance landed on her birthday. Near the beginning of the evening, I secretly asked the DJ to announce that it was my daughter’s eleventh birthday. Not only did he announce it, but he also had everyone there sing “Happy Birthday” to her. Instead of feeling appreciated though, my daughter felt embarrassed and upset. I forgot that, weeks earlier, she had asked me not to do that when I hinted that I might. I immediately apologized.

We all know what it feels like to be let down by someone important to us, someone we believe in. It shakes the foundations of our trust, leaving us hurt and disappointed. But today’s Scripture assures us that we can rely on Jesus. He is “a sure foundation.”

Jesus doesn’t make mistakes, and He doesn’t forget His promises. We have nothing to fear when we build our lives on the “precious cornerstone” of His faithful love.

Father, there is no other foundation like You. Thank You for always keeping Your promises. In Jesus’ name, amen.

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August 25–31. **Jake Follis** is a minister living in Oklahoma with his wife and daughter. He is an award-winning storyteller who enjoys reading and writing.

Pilgrimage to Worship

I rejoiced with those who said to me, “Let us go to the house of the LORD” (Psalm 122:1).

Scripture: Psalm 122

Song: “I Was Glad”

For corndog lovers, the Cozy Dog Drive-In in Springfield, Illinois, is an iconic restaurant. Considered by many to be the birthplace of the corndog, the Cozy Dog has served its namesake food since 1949. I’ve been told that corndog aficionados will make pilgrimages to the restaurant in order to partake of the signature menu items. I’ll go on record and say that I’ve never had a better corndog!

Many of us make pilgrimages to our favorite places or to places we’ve wanted to visit. We’re willing to invest extra time, effort, and money to make these journeys, and when we arrive at our destination, we feel excitement, awe, or perhaps reverence. In Psalm 122 David’s response was to rejoice at the invitation to make the journey to God’s house. He loved that destination, and going there was an important pilgrimage he was eager to make.

Whether we’re making our way to a weekly service, attending a special music event, or gathering with a few friends to play instruments and sing, our own pilgrimages to worship can be as much a joy and priority for us as David’s were for him. Even early in the week, it’s never too soon to begin preparing our hearts for the next opportunity to go worship our amazing God.

Father, fill my heart with joy when I have the opportunity to gather with others for worship. Refresh my perspective and reset my priorities. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Listen to This!

The Mighty One, God, the LORD, speaks and summons the earth from the rising of the sun to where it sets (Psalm 50:1).

Scripture: Psalm 50:1–15

Song: “The Law of the Lord”

One of the most frequent comments that teachers used to write on my report card when I was in elementary school was, “Talks too much and does not pay attention in class.” Looking back, I feel bad for behaving that way. They were all good teachers, and I imagine it was frustrating for them to speak and not be heard by certain students, including myself.

We all know how difficult it can be sometimes to get and keep the attention of people to whom we are speaking. We might try to summon the attention of students, coworkers, or our own children, only to find that they did not hear us. Some of us may be better than others at holding the attention of specific groups of people, but ultimately, none of us will be heard every time we speak.

On the other hand, God’s Word tells us that when God speaks, all of creation hears. It’s amazing to think about the fact that God can speak with such authority that the earth itself is summoned! When God’s Word speaks to us, we are wise to listen and do what He says. And for those who will listen, His message is loud and clear.

Father, thank You that Your Word speaks clearly to me about walking in Your ways. I want to honor You by listening to and doing what You say. In Jesus’ name, amen.

What Brand Are You Wearing?

In Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ (Galatians 3:26–27).

Scripture: Galatians 3:23–29

Song: “The Lord Our Righteousness”

When I was in college in the 1990s, some of my friends had jobs at popular men’s clothing stores in the local mall. While on the clock, my friends were required to wear the same clothes that were for sale in the store. Even while off the clock, though, my friends still chose to dress in their favorite name-brand items from these stores. Why not? They loved the stores, and they loved the clothes.

Those who are children of God through faith in Jesus have been clothed with Christ. There should be specific characteristics, attitudes, and behaviors that followers of Jesus wear. This spiritual apparel will be noticeable to others—not to bring attention to ourselves, but to bring attention to Jesus, whom we represent.

Do we wear God’s brand of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control—the fruit of being filled with God’s Spirit? Or are we sometimes dressing like those who represent the world and its brand? There is a noticeable difference between those who are truly clothed with Christ and those who are not. Let’s represent Him well and be spiritually dressed as ones who belong to Him.

Father, I want my attitudes, words, and actions to reflect Christ no matter where I go or who I’m with. As I’m clothed in His righteousness, may You be glorified. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Shipwrecked

We will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming (Ephesians 4:14).

Scripture: Ephesians 4:4–16

Song: “My Lighthouse”

If you ever visit Portland Head Light in Portland, Maine, you will notice something interesting painted on the large rocks in the water close to the lighthouse. Giant white hand-painted letters on a black background read, “ANNIE C. MAGUIRE SHIPWRECKED HERE CHRISTMAS EVE 1886.” There is some uncertainty as to why the *Annie C. Maguire*, a British sailing vessel, struck those rocks on that holiday evening so long ago. But it’s speculated that a combination of wind, rough seas, and snow flurries shrouding the light may have been contributing factors. There may also have been inattention on the part of the cold and hungry crew members.

As followers of Jesus, we can be tossed around and blown off course in our journey as well. When our attention drifts from Jesus to something else, we are in danger of facing a shipwreck in our lives. As we mature in our faith, though, we learn to stay focused on Jesus and to ignore deceptions and distractions.

Whether we’re new believers or “old salts” in the faith, turning our eyes back to the light of Jesus and His promises will help guide us safely on our way home. We don’t need to look elsewhere.

Father, protect me from the deception of false teaching and the allure of distractions. Help me to remain faithful to Your Word as I trust You to guide me. In Jesus’ name, amen.

No Need to Fear

[God said,] “I, even I, am he who comforts you. Who are you that you fear mere mortals?” (Isaiah 51:12).

Scripture: Isaiah 51:9–16

Song: “When Peace, Like a River”

I’ve always had a fear of dentists. I know they are mere mortals, but they do have the ability to inflict pain and discomfort. One time, as an adult, I decided to try a different dentist than the one I had previously been seeing. I’d heard that this new dentist catered to those of us who have a lot of anxiety about appointments and procedures. When the front-desk worker asked me why I had decided to switch offices, I told her that I did not like going to the dentist and I hoped this dentist would be comforting. I watched as she wrote the word *FEAR* in all capitals across the front of my file.

We can come up with a lot of reasons why mere mortals seem dangerous and frightening to us, but when our fear overpowers our trust in God, we need help. Even if our fear comes from painful past experiences, we can begin healing by learning to trust God and recognizing that the people we fear are not greater than God, who promises to comfort and care for us.

As we shift our focus toward perceiving God’s power and love, our fear can begin to give way to faith. The word *fear* does not have to be a permanent part of our file.

Father, help me to perceive Your power and love and to receive Your comfort. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Write What You Know

Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us (1 Peter 2:12).

Scripture: 1 Peter 2:1–12

Song: “This Little Light of Mine”

Under the pen name John le Carré, British author David John Moore Cornwell (1931–2020) was credited with writing one of the best-ever fiction novels about espionage. *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold*, published in 1963, was an international bestseller. But why was Carré so good at writing fictional spy novels? Well, it could have something to do with his own experience in the 1950s and 1960s, when he actually *was* a spy!

Carré wrote his amazing spy novels because he had a close relationship with the world of espionage. It seems certain that his novels would not have been nearly as compelling had he not known the work so intimately. Similarly, for us as followers of Christ to live the kind of good lives that Peter talks about in today’s passage, we need to maintain a close relationship with Jesus.

The good news is that in His relationship with His Father, Jesus modeled the kind of relationship we need with Him. Jesus frequently spent time alone with His Father in prayer. He learned the Scriptures and hid them in His heart. He did whatever He saw His Father doing. Jesus was an obedient Son, and His life is an example we can follow.

Father, may my life point others toward a relationship with You. In Jesus’ name, amen.