

Living Humbly

And this was [John's] message: "After me comes the one more powerful than I, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie." (Mark 1:7)

Scripture: Mark 1:1–8

Song: "Be Thou My Vision"

John Ryland (1753–1825) published his first book at age 12, along with numerous essays and poems as a teenager. He was on his way to joining theologians like John Wesley as a household name. Not surprisingly, his pride grew along with his fame. Then a letter from John Newton, author of "Amazing Grace," changed his perspective—and his life. The letter said: "I hope you are less and less in your own eyes and that your heart is more and more impressed with a sense of the glory and grace of our Lord." Ryland determined to change. From then on, he was best known for his humility, integrity, and love for family.

John the Baptist is the greatest of anyone born of women, according to Jesus. Yet his life's message was: "After me comes the one more powerful than I." John knew the importance of becoming lesser so that the One who came after him would shine out clearly.

In this world of pursuing platforms and power, it's easy to make our lives all about us. Instead, let's seek to glorify Jesus first and foremost.

Father, forgive me for letting pride rule me. Help me to honor You with my life. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

September 1–7. **Ruth Anne Burrell** lives in the Kansas City area, where she enjoys finding new coffee shops, trying out new recipes, and dreaming up new stories to tell.

Putting Fears in Perspective

“Be careful, keep calm and don’t be afraid. Do not lose heart.” (Isaiah 7:4)

Scripture: Isaiah 7:1–7

Song: “Eye of the Storm”

I was an intern at a local publishing house when a wildfire struck Colorado Springs. I remember watching from a conference room as the fire leapt down the mountain toward town. That night, I lay in bed wondering whether I would be evacuated and how long it would take to pack my belongings. I didn’t even live in the area, so the risk I faced was quite low compared to residents who faced potential loss of their homes, but the fear I felt was still real and visceral.

As Ahaz and the people of Judah faced attack from two powerful enemies, their hearts were shaken. Yet through Isaiah the Lord declared that their fears were unnecessary. The destruction they dreaded would not take place. The word of the Lord put their fears into perspective, and the truth of God’s power shone through.

Messages of fear are prominent in our society. Whether our fears are cultivated by a marketing firm to sell a product or driven by threats of war, illness, or natural disaster, it’s easy to let them shake us. But God’s Word puts these fears into perspective. The powers of this world will not have the ultimate victory, so we can set our hearts at rest in His presence.

Father, thank You for putting my fears into perspective. Help me trust Your care for me. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.

When God's Commands Don't Make Sense

“Take off the sackcloth from your body and the sandals from your feet.” And he did so, going around stripped and barefoot. (Isaiah 20:2b)

Scripture: Isaiah 20:1–6

Song: “Have Thine Own Way, Lord”

In 1876, Mary Slessor set off as a 28-year-old missionary from Scotland to Nigeria. She was a single woman with minimal training, and many people must have questioned her decision. Her dedication resulted in her turning down a marriage proposal and suffering through many bouts of illness. But her certainty in what God had called her to do allowed her to spend almost 40 years serving the Nigerian people, becoming the vice consul of the region for the British and eventually adopting nine children.

Today's passage in Isaiah is tough to understand. Why would God ask Isaiah to go stripped and barefoot for three years—something that was certainly just as humiliating (if not more so) for a Jewish man as for anyone in our culture today? Yet Isaiah did it. Scripture doesn't record even a single protest. Isaiah was obedient, even when it meant his own embarrassment and, quite likely, rejection by his people.

God's commands may not make sense to us. They may leave us feeling confused, stripped bare, vulnerable. Yet ultimately, His Word promises that His commands are for our good and the good of those around us. We can trust Him to lead us in the way we should go.

Father, thank You for passages like this one that challenge me toward deeper faith and obedience. Help me to trust You, even when I don't understand. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

Remembering the Works of Jesus

Jesus replied, “Go back and report to John what you hear and see: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor.” (Matthew 11:4–5)

Scripture: Matthew 11:1–6

Song: “I Stand Amazed”

Michelangelo’s *David* is perhaps the most famous statue in the world. Before visiting Florence and seeing the statue in person, I had seen photos of it many times. But as I walked through the gallery toward the six-ton, 17-foot-tall masterpiece, it became obvious why people travel from around the globe to see it. From the veins in his hands and neck to the muscles in his arms and legs, every detail is precise and lifelike. It is clearly the work of a master artist.

Just as *David* confirmed Michelangelo’s identity as a master artist, Jesus’ miracles confirmed His identity as Messiah. But for John, alone and afraid in prison, Jesus’ works did even more than that—they provided a balm for John’s suffering soul. *Yes*, was Jesus’ gentle answer to John’s question about who He is. *See my works? I am the One who is to come.*

When we are suffering and wracked with doubts, remembering the works of Jesus can bring powerful comfort to our souls. Let’s recall what He has done for us and use these stories to encourage each other when times are hard.

Father, thank You for the comfort I can receive through the miracles of Jesus. Help me to remember how You have worked in my life in the past. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.

Defying Definition

“What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed swayed by the wind? . . . A man dressed in fine clothes? . . . A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet.”
(Matthew 11:7b–9)

Scripture: Matthew 11:7–15

Song: “You Say”

The animal world is full of enigmas that almost defy definition. From the hoatzin, or “stinkbird,” nicknamed for the foul odor caused by food fermenting in its digestive system; to the hagfish, capable of secreting 400 times its volume in slime; to the pink fairy armadillo that looks like a cross between a fuzzy caterpillar and a lobster, unusual animals may provoke laughter, amazement, and confusion all at the same time.

John the Baptist was given many labels in his time. Some people thought he was crazy; some hated him; and some believed he was a prophet. But Jesus said John was more than a prophet—he was “the Elijah who was to come,” the one who proclaimed the arrival of God’s Messiah.

Following Jesus may mean we’re a mystery to those around us. The world may be confused about us, surprised by us, or angry at us, depending on the day or situation. But the words of the world matter far less than the words of Jesus. Our true worth and identity come from Him.

Father, help me to care first and foremost about what *You* say about me. Thank You that I can always find my true identity in You. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.

Celebrating the Goodness of God

I will meditate on your wonderful works. They tell of the power of your awesome works—and I will proclaim your great deeds. They celebrate your abundant goodness and joyfully sing of your righteousness. (Psalm 145:5b–7)

Scripture: Psalm 145:1–12

Song: “Goodness of God”

A few years ago, I was in an emotional slump. All I could think about were things that were still missing from my life. But then one day, I read a book that prompted me to start recording the good things God was doing in my life. I challenged myself to think about how He was providing in ways I didn't recognize. I started writing down one good thing He did every day, and within a few weeks, my attitude transformed. My situation hadn't changed, but I could see His goodness in a hard season.

In Psalm 145, David praises God for His many great deeds and talks about the importance of each generation sharing God's goodness with the next. In this way, the glory of God's kingdom spreads throughout the earth from generation to generation.

How has God shown up in your life? Do others know about His goodness to you? Consider how to share His works with those around you, so that His glory and the good news of the gospel spread around the world and to future generations.

Father, thank You for all Your goodness to me. Please remind me of ways You have provided for me and help me to share Your goodness with others. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

A Life of Faithful Service

Then [Isaiah] heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?” And I said, “Here am I. Send me!” (Isaiah 6:8)

Scripture: Isaiah 6:1–8; 38:1–5

Song: “My Life Is in Your Hands”

When my grandpa passed away, condolences flooded in to our family. One woman shared about how her son had asked her to name Christians who had been faithful to God throughout their lives. She said my grandpa had been a shining example of faith through his lifelong commitment to Christ.

Chapters 6 and 38 of Isaiah are like bookends to his prophetic ministry, which stretched through the reigns of four kings. King Uzziah was mostly faithful, until pride overtook him. King Jotham served God faithfully but didn’t stop the people’s corrupt practices. King Ahaz was incredibly evil, sacrificing his own children to foreign gods. King Hezekiah purified the temple and turned the people’s hearts back to God—but he too suffered the consequences of pride in his later life. Through it all, Isaiah was there, providing the same message: “This is what the Lord says.”

Sometimes I long to have a life of great impact like one of the kings of Judah. But the life of Isaiah and the story about my grandpa remind me that a life of faithful service to God is just as valuable—and perhaps even more difficult. Let’s let go of any desires for fame, fortune, or power and strive for simple obedience and faithfulness.

Father, help me to be faithfully obedient to You. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.