

Sharing Hope

Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect. (1 Peter 3:15b)

Scripture: 1 Peter 3:8–17

Song: “Blest Be the Tie That Binds”

A colleague of mine was struggling with a big project, and I offered to help. As we talked about the project, she described how she was unable to focus at work each day. Personal trials had dimmed her hope. A stack of devotionals in the corner of my office caught my eye, and I felt like God was urging me to give her one. I hesitated because I didn't know if she was a Christian. But she thanked me for the gift and later told me the daily meditations were helpful.

God calls us to “be compassionate and humble” (1 Peter 3:8). We can be ready to share the hope of Jesus when people ask. Sometimes they don't ask directly, but their need for hope is evident in the stories they share. Hearing their need requires compassion and humility that comes by listening to the Holy Spirit.

It can be scary to share Jesus when we don't know how it will be received. But we can trust God to use our faithfulness to His glory.

Father, as I encounter others, let me share hope where You are needed most. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

November 10–16. **Linda L. Kruschke** lives in Oregon with her husband of 38 years. She enjoys flower gardening, cooking, writing poetry, and having their adult son over for dinner.

Set Free Indeed

After being made alive, he went and made proclamation to the imprisoned spirits. (1 Peter 3:19)

Scripture: 1 Peter 3:18–22

Song: “Alive in Christ”

Houmayoun lived in Iran with his wife and two children when he became addicted to drugs. He was one of many hopeless people stuck in this vicious cycle. Then one night, Houmayoun had a dream that Jesus came to talk with him. When he awoke, his desire to take drugs was completely gone. He was amazed and decided to follow Jesus, the one who had healed him. Houmayoun didn't keep his new-found faith to himself. Instead, he ministered to other addicts, showing them how Jesus could heal them too. As a result, he was arrested and imprisoned for his faith. But even then he continued to share the gospel.

Those who have never met Jesus are like imprisoned spirits, dead in their sins. But because Jesus died for our sins and rose to new life, all people can be set free and made alive again. No one—not the disobedient in Noah's day nor the Iranian drug addict nor any who fear they have sinned too greatly—is beyond saving by the powerful name of Jesus, the hope and grace of God.

Some days it can feel like there is no hope. But our God is in the business of providing hope to the hopeless and new life to those on the brink of death.

Father, never let me forget to share how You changed my life. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

Understanding God's Judgment

Come, my children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the LORD. (Psalm 34:11)

Scripture: Psalm 34:6–19

Song: “Tell Me the Story of Jesus”

My fourth-grade students and I were studying the Book of Revelation. One girl repeatedly objected to God's judgments, seeing His actions as unfair. I understood how she felt. It's hard for us to see the big picture that God sees, especially when things seem scary or uncomfortable. But it's like a puzzle—once every piece falls into place, we'll be able to see a beautiful picture. We just can't see the picture right now.

Psalm 34 reminds us that we are called to teach the more challenging parts of the Bible, in hopes that our children gain a deep and abiding understanding of all God's attributes—not just His love, but also His holiness. He deserves reverence and respect, and He alone can be trusted as fair.

We sometimes think that the hard truths about God are too difficult for children. But God knows each child's heart and will honor our desire to make Him known.

Father, help me show the children in my life Your love, mercy, and holiness so they may know You personally. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

Seeing Jesus

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.
(Matthew 5:8)

Scripture: Matthew 5:3–12

Song: “In the Garden”

My Aunt Blanche was asked by her church choir director to sketch a picture of Jesus walking in a garden. The catch was that he wanted her to do it in front of the congregation while the choir sang “In the Garden.” She was honored by the opportunity, and she wanted to make sure her sketch perfectly represented Jesus as she envisioned Him. She practiced for weeks while listening to the hymn. Because of her pure heart and dedication to her Lord, the congregation clearly glimpsed Jesus as she sketched.

In the Beatitudes, Jesus proclaims blessing and spiritual favor for those who follow Him. But the characteristics that bring blessing—being meek, merciful, pure in heart, peacemakers—are not formed of our own power. The indwelling Holy Spirit molds the willing follower of Jesus to exhibit His glory. God Himself makes a heart pure and opens the eyes of the pure in heart to see Him.

Our God is faithful to answer prayers for blessing far beyond what we imagine. When we long to see Him in our daily lives, whether while walking in a beautiful garden or while we work, He will fulfill this desire of our heart.

Father, create in me a pure heart so I can see You. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.

Called to Share the Gospel

“Go now to your people in exile and speak to them. Say to them, ‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says,’ whether they listen or fail to listen.” (Ezekiel 3:11)

Scripture: Ezekiel 3:4–11

Song: “Go, Tell It on the Mountain”

John Wesley Work, Jr., born in Nashville, Tennessee, was the son of a choir director. He graduated from the historically Black Fisk University and later became a professor there, teaching Latin and history. But his true passion was music. He helped preserve numerous African-American spirituals handed down by oral tradition, including “Go, Tell It on the Mountain.” He devoted his life to keeping alive the rich faith heritage born of the struggles and oppression of slavery. His courage helped him proclaim this important history, regardless of whether others wanted to hear it.

God called Ezekiel to give the Israelites a message about their rebellious history that many of them did not want to hear. God commanded Ezekiel not to concern himself with whether the people listened to his message. Similarly, Jesus sent out His disciples with a message of the coming kingdom of God, but He did not burden them with the responsibility of making sure people listened or believed (Matthew 10:14).

In the same way, Christians are not called to force others to believe. We are called to share the gospel, to show the love and holiness of God to others. Whether they accept and believe the message we tell is not our responsibility.

Father, give me courage and wisdom to share the gospel message through my words and my actions. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.

Persevering in the Faith

Therefore, among God's churches we boast about your perseverance and faith in all the persecutions and trials you are enduring. (2 Thessalonians 1:4)

Scripture: 2 Thessalonians 1:1–4

Song: “It Is Well with My Soul”

Adel, Methu, and their two children lived simple, happy lives in an Indonesian island paradise—until persecution, torture, and loss came knocking at their door because of their faith in Jesus. Adel was separated from her husband and daughter, and she watched as their son was murdered. She was held captive, beaten, and forced to marry and bear the child of her captor. After 18 months, Adel escaped with the baby. Then Methu rescued their daughter. Throughout the ordeal, Adel persevered in her faith, refusing to renounce Jesus. She should have died several times, but God protected her.

Persecution and trials have always been a part of the life of faith in Jesus. Paul (the author of the epistles to the Thessalonian church) experienced great suffering, as did the believers in Thessalonica. But the trials they endured did not defeat them. Rather, their faith was strengthened because they experienced the grace and peace of God in the midst of these trials. Their love for one another grew because of their mutual concern.

On our most difficult days, we can know that Jesus will never leave us when we put our trust in Him. He is our source of courage, peace, and grace.

Father, help me remember in prayer Your persecuted church throughout the world. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

A Life That Points to Jesus

So you will be a sign to them, and they will know that I am the LORD. (Ezekiel 24:27b)

Scripture: Ezekiel 24:15–27

Song: “There Will Be a Day”

An 18-year-old girl in my church died on the Saturday between Good Friday and Easter Sunday. It was, as you can imagine, a tragedy. Yet her whole life—every single moment of it—was a sign to others that Jesus was Lord. She wanted everyone to know Him like she did. At her memorial service, held in a public high school auditorium with standing room only, the minister preached the gospel using words she had underlined in her favorite Bible. Her father shared that doctors did not expect her to survive her birth, let alone live 18 wonderful years. Tears of gratitude and trust flowed from my eyes.

Ezekiel experienced a similar tragedy: the death of his beloved wife. Yet the Lord instructed him not to weep and mourn. Ezekiel was to be a sign pointing to the sovereignty of God. In obedience, Ezekiel did just as he was commanded by God. He warned the Israelites about what the Lord would do because of their rebellion against His law. God had been patient, but He would not allow evil to continue forever.

We will all experience tragedy, but because of our hope in Jesus, our sovereign redeemer, we can respond in a way that points others to Him.

Father, teach me Your ways and let me be a witness that You are Lord. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.