A Greater Power

"Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit," says the Lord Almighty. (Zechariah 4:6)

Scripture: Zechariah 4:1–7
Song: "In Christ Alone"

"Me do it!" shouted my toddler as her chubby fingers worked to buckle her car seatbelt. Despite red-faced concentration and straining muscles, she couldn't quite get the buckle fastened. As I watched my daughter struggle while continuing to refuse my help, I longed to reach over and pop the buckle into the slot for her. My little one was experiencing needless frustration and unnecessary effort when she could trust me to secure her safely and efficiently in her seat.

I imagine this is how my heavenly Father feels when I stubbornly struggle to accomplish tasks without His help. There must be many times when my goals would be best achieved by relying on God's wisdom, timing, and strength. Instead, my sheer will, tensed muscles, and worried obsessions cause me needless irritation, and they delay the desired outcome.

When I am frustrated and exhausted from my efforts, God is beside me. In such times, I need only turn to Him and trust in His perfect plan. Releasing my desire to control every situation allows me to experience God's comfort and peace as I rely on His wisdom and lean on His strength.

Father, like a stubborn child, I often insist on doing things my way. Please help me remember to trust in You and Your power rather than fruitlessly taking on burdens that are not mine to carry. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

December 22–28. **Kristen Grossman** treasures faith and family. Kristen resides in sunny Arizona with her dear husband and their elderly dachshund.

A Beautiful Harmony

Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. (1 Corinthians 12:12)

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 12:1–13
Song: "The Family of God"

My daughter's high school choir was honored with an invitation to perform at Carnegie Hall in New York City. One of their songs began with a single soprano voice. As the song progressed, other sections of the choir joined in. The harmonies of the altos and tenors mingled with the deep rumble of the basses to add richness to the soprano melody. While a solo voice is lovely, it does not carry the fullness and texture of a choir. Likewise, a choir composed only of altos or only of basses would lose the artistry of a full array of voices.

Just as a choir contains many vocal parts, the body of Christ is composed of many members. The spiritual gifts given to each person in the family of God combine to create beautiful chords of love, service, and ministry. The contribution of each member is enhanced by and lends support to the talents of the others.

It can be tempting to focus on our differences or to envy another's spiritual gifts. However, each ability or talent is necessary and vital to God's family. When we embrace and develop the individual gifts we have been given, we make essential contributions to the whole body.

Father, thank You for the unique gifts You have entrusted to me. Please help me use these gifts, alongside my brothers and sisters, to bring You glory and honor. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

Kingdom of Peace

The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them. (Isaiah 11:6)

Scripture: Isaiah 11:1–9
Song: "All Creatures of Our God and King"

Flipping through my childhood photo album, my children exclaimed in amazement as they came to a picture of four-year-old me petting a bear cub. My family had been at a petting zoo, and while I remember hoping that the cub would not steal my shoe, I felt as safe as if I had been feeding a lamb from a bottle. A petting zoo is one thing, but I would not feel so safe if I came across a baby bear out in the woods! We live in a world where animals must hunt other creatures for their next meal and ferocious mama bears are compelled to protect their young.

The danger in our world is a result of sin. However, the Bible tells us the day will come when God defeats evil, Jesus reigns in power and love, and humans and animals will safely dwell together.

When discouraged by the dangers we see around us, we can rejoice in knowing that evil will not win. Our loving heavenly Father is present with us in the scary moments of this temporary earth, and He prepares a place where fear and danger will be no more.

Father, thank You for the knowledge that the physical world around me is not the whole story. I rejoice in the reminder that I will dwell in peace, love, and safety in Your eternal Kingdom. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

The Most Precious Gift

"What is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins." (Matthew 1:20–21)

Scripture: Matthew 1:18–25
Song: "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel"

One of my favorite Christmas memories occurred the year my daughter, Elizabeth, was born. Our third child, although due on December 25th, delighted us by arriving two weeks early. This meant our family could enjoy the Christmas Eve service with our brand-new baby in our arms. Sitting in the candlelit sanctuary, singing the familiar carols and gazing into the face of my infant, I couldn't help but reflect on Mary and her newborn son.

The gift of our precious baby girl brought joy to our family and much anticipation for her future. As I remember the awe and wonder of contemplating her tiny face, I can only imagine the emotions Mary experienced as she held baby Jesus. Mary's baby, conceived by the Holy Spirit, was destined to save the world from their sins.

At Christmas, it is easy to become caught up in the distractions of gift-giving, meal-preparing, and entertaining. Today, as we celebrate the birth of our Savior, may our hearts be filled with reverence and awe for God's wondrous gift to us. May we pause to take in His beautiful gift of salvation through Jesus Christ.

Father, sometimes I take Christmas for granted. This day, please help me still my heart and focus in gratitude on the beautiful gift of Jesus. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

Faith Becomes Sight

Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. (Acts 7:55)

Scripture: Acts 7:51–60
Song: "Open Our Eyes"

Four-month-old Leo pursed his lips to cry at the unfamiliar feeling of glasses slipping over his head. Then he opened his eyes and found himself gazing into his mother's face, seeing her clearly for the very first time. Immediately, Leo grinned as he waved his hands in delight. Leo had always sensed his mother was caring for him. But this was the very first time he had seen her smile and witnessed the love in her eyes.

Baby Leo was amazed to see his mama that day. He hadn't known his eyesight was impaired. However, like Stephen in the Bible, we do know that our current vision is obscured. What a thrill to realize that as followers of Christ, we will one day see the glory of God, who has been beside us all along.

It can be easy to forget that what we see today is only part of the picture. The world around us clamors and tries to distract us from the presence of the Holy Spirit. When we feel discouraged by what our human eyes behold, let us focus our minds and hearts on God's presence. One glorious day, we will see Him face to face.

Father, I know You have sent Your Holy Spirit to be with me. Help me keep the eyes of my heart focused on You. Thank You for the precious gift of sight I will one day obtain in heaven. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

Created by the Master

May the glory of the LORD endure forever; may the LORD rejoice in his works—he who looks at the earth, and it trembles, who touches the mountains, and they smoke. (Psalm 104:31–32)

Scripture: Psalm 104:24, 29–35
Song: "For the Beauty of the Earth"

Breathtaking sunsets are one of the perks of my family's recent move to Arizona. In the evenings, azure skies melt into vivid oranges and yellows before giving way to deep pinks and purples. This magnificent scene is painted over a backdrop of rugged mountains and quiet desert. In our new community, an ordinary evening drive home from a mundane task suddenly becomes an adventure of awe and wonder at the works of our Creator.

Our imaginative God's creativity is evident in color-drenched sunsets, flower-filled meadows, and the intricate pattern of a newborn's fingerprints. Furthermore, even in crashing seas, spinning tornados, and earth-shattering quakes, we see His artistry and power. All around us are signs of God's authority, craftsmanship, and might.

When daily tasks or worries consume my mind, I am grateful for the gentle nudges that remind me to praise my heavenly Father. The same God who paints glorious sunsets and calms the surging waves also created and loves me. He is my refuge, and I can trust Him to triumph over darkness as I rejoice in the demonstrations of His power and majesty.

Father, signs of Your love and power are all around me. I praise You, for You are worthy of all praise. Thank You for the reminders of Your supreme power. Please help me keep my focus on You and Your righteousness. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

Our Hearts' Desire

We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. (Romans 8:26)

Scripture: Romans 8:12–17, 26–27
Song: "Surrounded (Fight My Battles)"

Sorting through old paperwork, I encountered a relic from a long-ago holiday season. Labeled "Christmas List," the slanting scrawl detailed my young children's hopeful requests for toys, books, and games. In those simpler times, my children's heartfelt wants could be found within the pages of a Christmas catalog.

My children are grown now, and the desires of their hearts are undoubtedly more complex. In my own adulthood, a trip to the store rarely satisfies my deepest longings. Furthermore, I often don't know how to voice my requests to my heavenly Father. I have learned that He frequently meets my needs in ways I hadn't known to pray for.

When we bow our heads to pray and find ourselves at a loss for words, we can be confident that the Holy Spirit intercedes with God on our behalf. Scripture tells us that when we bring our pain and disappointment to the Lord, we don't have to rely on our own feeble words. The Holy Spirit beseeches our Lord alongside us. Best of all, we can be sure that while we might not know what to ask for, the Holy Spirit always knows what we need.

Father, thank You for the gift of the Holy Spirit. I am so grateful You see my needs even when I don't know how to present them to You. Thank You for working all things together for Your glory. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.