

Prophecy: Toward Restoration

“Instead of your shame you will receive a double portion, and instead of disgrace you will rejoice in your inheritance.”

(Isaiah 61:7a)

Scripture: Isaiah 61:4–9

Song: “Trading My Sorrows”

One day I took a rare lunch break. Not even halfway through my meal, my phone rang, summoning me to a meeting with the human resources representative. My job had been eliminated. The work that I had done and the contributions I had made to the organization flashed through my thoughts. I had even worked in an additional role for 10 months without being paid!

There are times when life doesn't seem fair. There have been times when I have questioned, “Why is this happening to me?” It is in those moments that I strive to reflect on how good God has been to me and on His promises to continue doing so. I remind myself that He has never failed to bring me through, and I find the strength to endure, trusting in His grace and restoration.

While I was without a job, every need was met. Within four weeks, I received a job offer with a national company. The shame I had felt was turned to thanksgiving and rejoicing according to God's timing.

Father, when life threatens my faith, help me to remember what You have already done for me and all You will bring me through. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

June 22–28. **Apollo Stevens** is a wife, mother, grandmother, and nursing professional. She lives in Virginia with her husband and their miniature poodle, Zeke.

A Shepherd Rejoices

“And when he finds [the sheep], he joyfully puts it on his shoulders and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, ‘Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.’” (Luke 15:5–6)

Scripture: Luke 15:1–7

Song: “Softly and Tenderly Jesus Is Calling”

Sunday school was a requirement in my grandmother’s house. My aunt would walk me to First Baptist Church, and I was in my little chair at 9:00 a.m. sharp. I loved listening to the Bible stories, and I would tell my grandmother what I had learned when I got home. The lessons came to life in my mind and ignited a spark in my heart that grew with each passing week. By the age of 10, I was reading the Bible regularly.

Even as a child, I knew I needed more than what I was experiencing. Jesus drew me to Him through my Sunday school teacher. I later gave my heart to Jesus and was baptized. I have made some mistakes along the way, but Jesus has used many people over the years to teach me His way. I am who I am today because of His unfailing love for me.

I can picture Jesus lifting a lost lamb, putting it on His shoulders, and taking it home rejoicing. In fact, I was that lamb . . . sitting in my little chair, enthralled by the Bible stories. I am abiding in Jesus now and feel very much at home.

Father, thank You for every person who crossed my path and testified of You. May I be that person in the lives of others. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.

Prophecy: The Day of the Lord

“It will be as though a man fled from a lion only to meet a bear, as though he entered his house and rested his hand on the wall only to have a snake bite him.” (Amos 5:19)

Scripture: Amos 5:16–20

Song: “My Soul Has Been Anchored in the Lord”

Our annual termite inspection had been completed, and the technician called my husband and I into the garage. There were no termites. However, we had mice in the attic, and the technician was holding in his hand a snakeskin he had found. He explained that the colder than usual winter weather had driven mice into many people’s homes, and the snake was probably seeking food. Mice can chew through electrical wiring, and poisonous snakes are in our area. I thought we were secure in our home, but danger had been right overhead.

The prophet Amos describes a man who thought that because he had escaped one danger, he was safe. But in fact, danger was where he least expected it to be! The Bible warns us to not be spiritually complacent or to be lulled into a false sense of security. The apostle Paul’s letter to Timothy echoes Amos: “But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days” (2 Timothy 3:1). Even today we can see Scripture being fulfilled on the news and in our local communities.

God never fails. Days are coming that will be exceedingly challenging. But our Father will give us the courage and strength to endure until the day of the Lord arrives.

Father, when hard times come, help me to trust You for everything that I need. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.

Prophecy: Let Justice Roll

“Even though you bring me burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them.” (Amos 5:22a)

Scripture: Amos 5:21–27

Song: “Create in Me a Clean Heart”

I attended a memorial service for someone who was well-known in the community. A great number of people were in attendance, and we were ushered into an overflow area with a remote projection screen. For the next 40 minutes I listened to the accolades of all the good work the individual had done. Several times it was said that the person was in heaven because of all the good they had done, and attendees were encouraged to pattern their lives after the individual.

At no time should the sole pattern for my life be the good work of another person. As described in today’s text, God doesn’t want (or need) our works merely for the sake of works. He wants our belief in Jesus, true repentance for our sins, and that we desire and pursue a genuine relationship with Christ. Without these, God is content to “let justice roll.”

Jesus’ presence in my heart is the reason I can do good. My hope of heaven is grounded Jesus’ words on the mount: “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God” (Matthew 5:8). My actions and good works are nothing without Christ.

Father, remind me that my works will never be enough. When someone praises me for something I have done, may I in turn give You praise. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.

Know the Shepherd's Voice

“When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice.” (John 10:4)

Scripture: John 10:1–9

Song: “Anywhere He Leads Me”

I have experienced two remarkable pastors in my lifetime. Both held firm to biblical truth, and they initiated and established individual relationships with all members of the congregation. They could hold meaningful conversations with adults and with children. Barbecues and Bible studies were held at the pastors' homes, and the hospitality was genuine. Through good times and bad, these pastors and church members held fast their commitment to each other.

Jesus is the ultimate role model of the responsibility—and the connectedness—that a true shepherd has to the flock. As Jesus and His disciples journeyed together, they forged strong relationships. Through His teaching and His actions, Jesus showed them how to love the way God does, to forgive others who have caused hurt, and to share resources. His voice drowned out all others.

Jesus wants us to be so in tune with Him that we know and follow His voice no matter the noise around us. This kind of connection comes by spending time with Him, by following Him each day, and by allowing ourselves to be known by Him.

Father, please help me to know You more and to be more open to Your voice. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

The Good Shepherd

“I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd.” (John 10:16)

Scripture: John 10:10–18

Song: “When We All Get to Heaven”

As I got out of my car, I looked around the parking lot. I was visiting a church I had never been to and was not certain where to go. Others were arriving, so I followed them to the front door. While waiting for worship to begin, I glanced around the room. Believers of various ethnic backgrounds were greeting each other. When the musicians started playing the opening song, everyone stood to their feet, and hands of every color lifted in praise to God. My heart was deeply moved.

At the time of Jesus’ ministry, the religious leaders believed that when the Messiah came, a Jewish kingdom would be established that would rule all nations. Jesus’ teaching addressed that belief and voiced the true purpose for His coming. He did not come to overthrow nations; He came to save them. The plan of salvation is for everyone who repents of their sins and accepts Jesus as Savior. Revelation 7:9 says it this way: “a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation . . . standing before the throne and before the Lamb.”

Heaven is going to look like the church I visited, as all are called to follow the Good Shepherd. People from every nation will be focused on what matters most: praising the Lamb of God. I can’t wait.

Father, open my eyes to the beauty that You have placed in all my brothers and sisters in Christ. Thank You for being our Good Shepherd. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.

A Prophet: Chosen

“But the LORD took me from tending the flock and said to me, ‘Go, prophesy to my people Israel.’” (Amos 7:15)

Scripture: Amos 7:10–15

Song: “Standing on the Promises”

I grew up on a small farm. We raised almost everything we ate and supplemented our food sources with such delicacies as groundhog, wild rabbit, and dandelion greens. I helped with “slopping the hogs,” gardening, canning, and cleaning the bluegills caught in the creek. My life is very different now. I earned a doctorate in nursing and have had responsibility for teams of professionals with multi-million-dollar budgets. Like Amos, I came from humble beginnings, but God had another plan for my life.

Amaziah made the mistake of thinking that Amos had taken it upon himself to speak judgment at Bethel. He attempted to throw Amos out of the city with harsh words, invoking the authority of the king. Amos immediately made it clear that yes, he used to be a shepherd and gardener, but it was God who called him to be a prophet. Therefore, he was committed to speak what God commanded.

As believers, we have been chosen, commissioned by the authority of Jesus to spread the gospel (Matthew 28:18–20). We do not need to be afraid. Like Amos, we can stand firm and declare God’s goodness in every situation.

Father, keep me steadfast in my commitment to testify of You, even when I face opposition. You chose me! And I choose You. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.