

Seek the Lord

“Let the wicked forsake their ways and the unrighteous their thoughts. Let them turn to the LORD, and he will have mercy on them, and to our God, for he will freely pardon.”
(Isaiah 55:7)

Scripture: Isaiah 55:6–11

Song: “There’s a Wideness in God’s Mercy”

The doorbell rang. When fifth-grade me opened the door, there before me was my soccer teammate, head hung low, his father standing a few feet behind him. He had come to apologize for making fun of me at soccer practice earlier that day. I forgave him, thanked him for his apology, and he left. For the rest of the season, we got along well.

When my teammate’s father discovered what his son had done, he knew that the *best* thing for him would be to admit his fault, confess that it was wrong, and seek forgiveness. He wanted his son to be freed from the guilt he was carrying and have his relationship with me restored. Would it be uncomfortable and a bit embarrassing? Undoubtedly. But it would ultimately be for his son’s good.

The prophet Isaiah shows us that it’s the same with our heavenly Father. When we have sinned, we can be tempted to brush it under the rug. But if we do, the shame remains deep within our hearts. Instead, God lovingly invites us to seek Him, to confess our sins to Him, and to receive the overwhelming mercy and full pardon that He gives freely and joyfully.

Father, I humbly confess the ways I have sinned against You. Thank You for the blood of Jesus that covers all my sins. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.

July 27–August 2. **Nate Carter** is a pastor and musician in central Wisconsin. He and his wife and two daughters love hobby farming, travel, and being outdoors.

Wait for Christ's Mercy

Be merciful to those who doubt; save others by snatching them from the fire; to others show mercy, mixed with fear—hating even the clothing stained by corrupted flesh.
(Jude 22–23)

Scripture: Jude 20–25

Song: “Send Me Out”

A good friend of mine is a lifelong atheist. Although a regular church attender and married to a devout Christian, he has emphatically communicated that he will never change his mind. While I long for him to cross the line into faith, I can't drag him across that line! So, I relate gently—mercifully—to him, maintaining a natural friendship, and on occasion allowing my faith to drip into our conversations.

At the end of one of the shortest books of the Bible, Jude writes a beautiful summary of how to live out our Christian lives in relationship to others. First of all, live mercifully to all, even to those who doubt the faith. Secondly, whenever possible, offer the message of salvation to those with ears to hear. Lastly, keep our guard up against those whose sinful lives might lure us into temptation.

As emissaries of Jesus, we are challenged to “[make] the most of every opportunity” (Ephesians 5:16). That means praying for those far from Christ, engaging them with the message of the gospel as the Spirit prompts, but doing so while remaining cautious not to be drawn into their sinful lifestyles and vices.

Father, use me in the lives of those in my spheres of influence who don't know You. Empower me with the right words at the right moment. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

Jesus Is the Way

Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” (John 14:6)

Scripture: John 14:1–7

Song: “Amazing Grace”

It was my first out-of-town date with my girlfriend. I was taking her to a nice restaurant and a concert in the big city, about an hour from our college campus. To my horror, about 45 minutes into the drive, I came to the sinking realization that I was lost. In a moment of great humility that we still laugh about to this day, my girlfriend (now wife) pulled out the map, figured out the route, and navigated us the rest of the way.

To get to a destination, we often need a map. To get to heaven, Jesus *is* the map. In today’s passage, we catch the disciples in the middle of a conversation, one where they’re anxious about how to get to heaven. Jesus sets their hearts at ease. He promises to go ahead of them, get everything ready, and then come back and meet them. All they’ll need to do is follow the map by putting their trust in Him as Savior and Lord.

At times we may find ourselves anxious about our salvation. Jesus doesn’t want any of us to be lost on the road to heaven. He reminds us that He is the way and that by putting our faith in Him, we’ll spend eternity in His presence.

Father, thank You for finding me when I was lost and leading me along the pathway to eternal life with You. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.

Call on the Lord

I have no need of a bull from your stall or of goats from your pens. (Psalm 50:9)

Scripture: Psalm 50:7–15

Song: “What He’s Done”

When I was in my early twenties, an elderly friend took me out to lunch and shared something I’ll never forget. He said, “The difference between Christianity and every other religion can be summed up like this. All other religions can be spelled *D-O*, because they’re built around what people must *do* to earn their salvation. Christianity is spelled *D-O-N-E*, because it’s built around what Jesus has *done* to purchase salvation for us.”

How easy it is to slip into the mindset that our salvation depends on us. That’s what the Israelites got wrong, thinking that God somehow needed their sacrifices. But the truth is that there is no amount of money we can give, good works we can accomplish, or sacrifices we can offer that would secure our relationship with God. It’s all about the work *Jesus* did on the cross and the sacrifice *He* made for our sins that makes us right with Him.

What does God ask in return? Three things: a heart of gratitude for all God has done for and given to us; a willingness to follow His ways; and the humility to call on Him in our hour of need, trusting in faith that He will deliver us in His perfect timing.

Father, thank You for Your work of salvation done through Jesus’ death on the cross. Remind me to live a life of gratitude, obedience, and reliance on You. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.

God Is Merciful

“When you are in distress and all these things have happened to you, then in later days you will return to the LORD your God and obey him.” (Deuteronomy 4:30)

Scripture: Deuteronomy 4:27–31

Song: “Run to the Father”

As the son of a pastor, I grew up in the faith, never questioning my Christian upbringing. After graduating from high school, I made the ill-advised decision to abandon my faith and try to find fulfillment in the things the world had to offer. It was a time of experimentation, foolishness, and abject selfishness. I had intentionally removed Jesus from the throne of my life and replaced Him with myself.

It didn't take long to notice the emptiness that had crept into my soul. The short-lived pleasures lacked any long-term joy or meaning, and I realized the false gods I was pursuing were a far cry from the true God. I eventually found myself on my knees, confessing my waywardness and recommitting myself to the Lord. He graciously welcomed me back, and I have never again left the faith.

In Deuteronomy 4, God is fully aware that the Israelites will worship the idols of the foreign nations. Likewise, He knows that we too are prone to wander. But being a God of mercy, He stands like the father of the prodigal son, ready to forgive our sinfulness and welcome us back into His loving arms (Luke 15). All it takes is an honest confession and a commitment to follow Him again.

Father, thank You for Your grace that is greater than all my sin, and for welcoming me back every time I wander. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

Jesus Appears to the Disciples

Again Jesus said, “Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.” (John 20:21)

Scripture: John 20:19–23

Song: “It Is Well with My Soul”

In a quiet corner of the hospital waiting room, we gathered for prayer. My friend was preparing to have heart surgery, something he was terrified to undergo but knew he desperately needed. As we prayed and read Scripture together, I could tell that even though he was anxious, he had discovered a deep-seeded peace, knowing that no matter what happened, he would be safe in the hands of his God.

There are times when we have to take a risky step, enter into a difficult conversation, or make a life-altering decision. Even though we know the right move to make, we still experience deep fear and anxiety. But even in the midst of fear, we can allow God’s peace to rule (Colossians 3:15), giving us courage to move forward.

The disciples were experiencing this reality. Even though they had walked with Jesus for years, hearing His teaching and witnessing His miracles, they still are fearful and hunkered down in a locked room. When Jesus shows up, He doesn’t scold them for their fear but instead gives them what they need: His peace. Immediately afterward, the disciples are sent out to spread the gospel, undoubtedly still fearful but confident in the peace and power of their God. May we experience this same powerful peace, even in the midst of our fear.

Father, help me to allow Your peace to rule in my heart, even (or especially) when I’m anxious or afraid. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.

Jesus Appears to Thomas

So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord!” But he said to them, “Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe.” (John 20:25)

Scripture: John 20:24–29

Song: “Faithful Now”

Madeleine’s chronic pain began in her thirties and steadily worsened for years. She exhausted all avenues of medical intervention, but the doctors were baffled and offered no solutions. Throughout her battle with pain, she prayed fervently for relief. Her faith that God was fully capable of healing her remained strong, but as the years went by, she began to doubt whether He would actually do so. It took five years and a series of circumstances only God could orchestrate before Madeleine was given the opportunity to see a highly revered specialist who got her on the road to recovery.

It’s easy to think that doubt and faith cannot coexist. But throughout Scripture we see numerous examples of faith-filled believers who experienced periods of profound doubt, most notably Thomas the disciple. In John 11:16 Thomas is portrayed as a man of great faith, willing to follow Jesus even to his own death. But nine short chapters later, we find a man doubting Jesus’ resurrection.

Doubt often sets in when our faith is challenged, but it doesn’t have to undermine our faith. Instead, doubt can propel us to pursue God, seek Him, and choose to trust Him even in the midst of trying circumstances.

Father, I choose to trust Your goodness and purposes for me, even when I doubt. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.