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Pressing into Truth, Pouring out His Grace

November 2026

Looking Unto Jesus

We all know that our Christian life is not a short sprint, but a long journey of faith, requiring patience, endurance, and perseverance. Along the way, we face difficulties, disappointments, unanswered prayers, and seasons when our strength seems almost gone. But the Word reminds us that we are not called to run this race in our own strength. Our hope is not in our circumstances, nor in our ability to overcome every obstacle. It is in Jesus, who began the work of faith in us and has promised to bring it to completion.

One of our greatest needs is simply to lift our eyes from ourselves and our difficulties and look again at our wonderful Savior, to consider who He is, what He has done, and the glory that awaits those who belong to Him. And as we do, our hearts are stirred to gratitude, worship, and praise. Even in the midst of trials, we can sing to the Lord. In this issue, we hope you will find encouragement to press on, to rest more fully in Jesus, and to renew your joy of knowing Him.

The Wine Press is a thoughtfully curated collection of articles from across the web, compiled to inspire, encourage, and deepen your walk with our King and Savior, Jesus Christ. All articles remain the property of their respective authors to whom we joyfully give full credit and our appreciation for sharing their wisdom and experiences with us. May these words uplift your spirit, strengthen your faith, and draw you into ever deeper communion with the God of all grace.

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The Rule of the Race

By Charles Spurgeon

Let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. — Hebrews 12:1–2 (KJV)

The Race Set Before Us

The apostle says, "Let us run." He has in mind the Olympic games, where the people of Greece gathered to watch athletes compete. Among their contests were footraces, and the apostle makes this race an illustration of the Christian life. We must run with patience along the appointed course if we would win the prize of our high calling.

He stands with us at the starting point and earnestly says, not "Run," but "Let us run." The apostle himself is at our side as a runner. The presence of such a companion is inspiring. Who would withdraw from a race in which so great a saint takes his place beside us?

Before we start, the apostle directs our attention to the spectators who surround the course. At the ancient games, the assembled crowd watched eagerly as the athletes struggled for victory. So we are surrounded by "so great a cloud of witnesses." Thousands who have run this race before us and have attained their crowns remind us that the race is worth running. Patriarchs and prophets, saints, martyrs, and apostles have gone before us. Let their example encourage us to press on.

But the apostle also points out the burdens that will hinder us: "Let us lay aside every weight." We cannot run well while carrying unnecessary loads. Even without them, the race will test all our strength. How much more difficult if we insist on bearing the weight of anxiety, fretfulness, ambition, anger, greed, and selfish desire! These have never been worth the trouble they have cost us. Now that we are runners, we must lay them down. Whether the weight is great or small, put it aside and press toward the mark.

Jesus, the Author of Our Faith

Our first instruction in the Christian life is "Look unto Jesus." We must fix our eyes on the beginner of our faith. If we do not begin with him, however quickly we hurry along, we run in vain.

We begin by trusting what he has done for us: "Who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame." Jesus endured the suffering and shame that were ours. We cannot begin the journey to heaven unless we look to him who bore our sins upon the tree. If we trust our own righteousness, we begin in the wrong direction. If we trust our moods and feelings, they may lead us into a fog where we lose the track. Look instead to Jesus, the suffering Savior. By bearing the cross he has removed our heaviest burden; by his death he has dealt with our entangling

sin. By his resurrection power he can renew our nature and free us from sin's dominion.

We look to Jesus not only because of what he has done for us, but because of what he has done in us. Those of you who have been running for many years, remember your first eager steps. Did you not begin by looking to Jesus? It was he who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. He awakened repentance, kindled hope, and gave you faith. By looking to him the great burden of guilt fell from your conscience. The sight of his thorn-crowned head softened your heart. You looked, and you were enlightened, made alive, turned against sin, and drawn in love to Jesus.

Do you remember when you first knew yourself accepted in the Beloved? You discovered that you loved him because he first loved you. Service became a joy; self-denial became possible; you were turned from living for yourself toward living for your Redeemer. The love of Jesus started you on a race you would never otherwise have chosen.

Thus Jesus is the beginner of our race of faith, both by what he has accomplished for us and by what he has worked within us. Start with him, and continue as you began: looking unto Jesus

Jesus, the Finisher of Our Faith

As Jesus is at the beginning of the course, so he is at its end. Those who would finish the great race must keep their eyes on him all the way to the winning post.

Jesus has sat down at the right hand of God because his work is complete. On earth he was despised; in heaven he is honored. Here he was bound and led away; there he reigns as King of kings and Lord of lords. Here we see him in poverty, in the manger, and upon the cross; there we behold him at the right hand of God. Think of your Saviour clothed with all power and authority. Surely this should stir you to press on without fainting. You began by looking to him as the Sufferer; persevere by looking to him as the Victor. "Be of good cheer," he said, "I have overcome the world." His triumph is the assurance of ours.

We are helped to finish not only by what Jesus has done for us, but also by what he is doing in us. You who are in the middle of the race, remember that Jesus sustains you. Every measure of strength you have for running comes from your Lord. Look to him for it.

Looking to Jesus gives courage to tired runners. When we behold him on the throne, our weak knees are strengthened and we move forward again. His eyes are to us what the stars are to the sailor. It is as though he says, "Come on; I am victorious, and so shall you be." A sight of our exalted Leader renews our zeal.

His presence also shows us the way. The runner who looks toward the finish is less likely to wander from the course. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, and you will not grow weary or lose your way.

As we run, we may picture Jesus at the finish, holding out the crown. The sight of him makes our present crosses lighter. When the race is over, he himself will welcome his people and say, "Well done, good and faithful servant." Let that hope put courage into your heart. Look away from difficulties, sufferings, temptations, and distractions; look also away from pleasures and honors that would turn you aside. Look to Jesus, who has won the race, who helps you now, and who awaits you at its end.

Jesus, the Goal of Our Faith

Lastly, Jesus is not only the One who begins and completes our faith, and the example we follow. He is the very goal toward which we run. Every faithful step

takes us nearer to him.

Look toward him as you run, and seek to know him more fully. Those who have seen most of Jesus have drawn only a cupful from the great ocean of his fullness. We live in a land of mist and cloud, where we sometimes glimpse the sun through a veil. In other places the sky is clear and the sunshine seems to brighten everything. So it is with believers. Some live beneath clouds of doubt and fear and catch only occasional glimpses of their Lord. How much better to live in the clearer light of his promises, growing in assurance and seeing him more distinctly!

Run toward Jesus that you may grow more like him. He has this wonderful power: those who look upon him are transformed into his image. As we behold Christ, he changes our character. If we spent more time contemplating his beauty, our lives would reflect more of his grace.

Run also that you may enjoy closer fellowship with him. Though we do not see him bodily, he is with us by his Spirit. There are blessed moments when his presence seems especially near, when we sit, as it were, at his feet and listen to his words. Do not be satisfied with yesterday's communion. Press on to know him more deeply today.

And keep looking and running until you are with him. How soon that day may come! We do not know how near we are to the end of the course. The sea fog may surround our vessel, yet the white cliffs of home may already be close at hand. Before another week has passed, some of us may see the King in his beauty. Then the weariness of the race will be over, and the joy of triumph will begin.

I would cheer you with the thought that you may be nearer the winning post than you imagine. And best of all, our Lord is there. Once crowned with thorns, he now wears the crown of glory. He will welcome his people to that blessed shore. Therefore do not lose heart. Lay aside the weights, resist the sin that entangles, and keep your eyes upon Jesus. He began the work, he supplies the strength, and he awaits us at the finish.

Let us run.

Original sermon: spurgeon.org/sermons/the-rule-of-the-race



Contentment When Your Circumstances Haven't Changed

By Adam Faithful Messenger

It's easy to be content after the prayer is answered. The harder question is what contentment looks like while you're still waiting.

Most of us carry a quiet assumption about contentment: that it arrives once things improve. When the debt is paid, when the job comes through, when the relationship is healed, when the diagnosis changes, then we'll finally be at peace. Contentment, in this way of thinking, is the reward for circumstances getting better.

Scripture flips this assumption on its head. The most famous passage on contentment in the entire Bible was not written by someone whose circumstances had finally improved. It was written by a man in chains.

Paul's Circumstances

Philippians 4:11-12 reads: "I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want."

The setting matters enormously. Paul wrote Philippians while imprisoned. In Philippians 1:13, he mentions that "it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ." He did not know whether he would be released or executed (Philippians 1:20-23). His circumstances had not changed. He was not writing about contentment from the far side of his trial. He was writing from the middle of it.

That's what makes his words so striking. Paul doesn't say his circumstances finally became tolerable. He says he learned the secret of contentment that holds regardless of what his circumstances do.

Contentment Is Learned, Not Felt

Notice the word Paul repeats twice: learned. "I have learned to be content." "I have learned the secret." Contentment wasn't Paul's natural temperament or a feeling that simply descended on him. It was something he acquired over time, through practice, often in hard places.

This is quietly freeing. If contentment were a personality trait, those of us who are naturally restless or anxious would be shut out of it. But if it's learned, then it's available to anyone willing to be taught, and the hard seasons themselves become the classroom.

The Puritan writer Jeremiah Burroughs, in his 1648 book "The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment", described it as "that sweet, inward, quiet, gracious frame of spirit, which freely submits to and delights in God's wise and fatherly

disposal in every condition." Every part of that definition points inward. Contentment is a frame of spirit, not a set of conditions.

What Contentment Is Not

Because contentment is so often misunderstood, it helps to name what it isn't.

It is not resignation. Resignation says, "Nothing will ever change, so I've stopped caring." Contentment still cares deeply, but it rests in God's character rather than in a guaranteed outcome. Resignation is hope given up. Contentment is hope relocated.

It is not pretending. Contentment doesn't require you to say a hard situation is fine when it isn't. The psalms are full of honest lament, and Paul himself speaks openly about being in need and in want. Contentment can coexist with honest grief.

It is not the absence of desire or prayer. Wanting circumstances to change is not a failure of contentment. Paul hoped to be released and to visit the Philippians again (Philippians 1:25-26, 2:24). Contentment doesn't stop you from asking God for change. It keeps your peace from depending on whether the change comes.

It is not complacency. Being content in your current job doesn't mean you can't pursue a better one. Being content in a hard season doesn't mean you stop working, praying, or seeking help. Contentment is about where your soul rests, not about whether you take wise action.

The Secret Paul Learned

So what is the secret? Paul answers immediately in the next verse: "I can do all this through him who gives me strength" (Philippians 4:13).

This is one of the most quoted and most misused verses in the Bible, often printed on athletic gear as though it were a promise of victory in any endeavor. In context, it means something far more grounded and far more powerful. The "all this" refers back to the previous verses: being hungry and being full, having plenty and being in need. Paul is saying that Christ's strength is what enables him to remain content in every one of those conditions.

The secret of contentment, then, is not a technique. It's a Person. Paul's peace did not depend on his circumstances because it was anchored in Christ, who did not change when his circumstances did.



Hebrews 13:5 makes the same connection explicit: "Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, 'Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.'" The reason for contentment is not that you have enough things. It's that you have God's unbreakable presence. Whatever else is missing, He is not.

Why Discontent Is So Persistent

If contentment is learned, discontent is also learned, and our culture is a very effective teacher.

Much of modern life is built to keep us slightly dissatisfied. Advertising works by convincing us we lack something. Social media shows us a constant stream of other people's highlights, inviting endless comparison. Even good things, like ambition and the desire to improve, can quietly shift into a belief that peace is always one more achievement away.

1 Timothy 6:6-8 offers a striking counterweight: "Godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that." Paul isn't romanticizing poverty. He's reminding Timothy that the deepest things in life were never things we could accumulate in the first place.

What Contentment Looks Like

It looks like gratitude for what is present, not just longing for what is absent. Discontent focuses almost entirely on what's missing. Contentment doesn't ignore what's missing, but it also notices what's already been given. Psalm 16:6 says, "The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places." Gratitude trains the eye to see those boundary lines.

It looks like living fully in the season you're actually in. When the people of Judah were exiled to Babylon, many wanted to put their lives on hold until they could go home. God's word through Jeremiah was surprising: "Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce... seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you" (Jeremiah 29:5-7). The exile would last seventy years. God told them not to waste those years waiting for different circumstances. Contentment refuses to treat the present as merely a waiting room.

It looks like stillness before God. Psalm 131:2 describes it beautifully: "I have calmed and quieted myself; I am like a weaned child with its mother." A weaned child is no longer crying to be fed. It simply rests in its mother's presence. That's contentment: not demanding, not anxious, simply near.

It looks like rejoicing in God when nothing else is going right. Habakkuk 3:17-18 might be the most radical expression of contentment in Scripture: "Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food... yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will be joyful in God my Savior." Nothing in Habakkuk's circumstances had improved. His joy was anchored somewhere else entirely.

Learning It Where You Are

If you are in a season where your circumstances haven't changed, the waiting itself may be exactly where contentment is being learned. That doesn't make the season easy, and it doesn't mean you have to pretend it's what you wanted. But it does mean the season isn't wasted.

Paul didn't learn contentment after his chains came off. He learned it in them. And the strength that held him there, the presence of Christ who will never leave or forsake His people, is the same strength available to you in whatever circumstance hasn't changed yet.

Your circumstances may stay the same for a while. Your soul doesn't have to wait for them.

https://x.com/Adam_FaithfulM/status/2109405042675536137

We Groan for Home

By Jon Bloom

I love Romans chapter 8. If you're a Christian, I imagine you love it too. What Paul so beautifully describes rings with a hope we recognize, a hope that resonates deep within our souls and stirs longing for our far-off homeland, our heavenly one.

In Romans 8, we catch glimpses of "the glory that is to be revealed to us" (Romans 8:18). I'm sure this is one reason John Piper says, "I think Romans is the greatest book in the Bible."

I think Romans 8 is the greatest chapter in the greatest book in the Bible. and I especially love the paragraph that spans verses 18–25. I've probably quoted from this paragraph in my writings more than from any other section of Romans 8.

In these verses, Paul gives a peerless description of our paradoxical experience of hope-filled groaning in a creation still in "bondage to corruption" (Romans 8:21). We wait for "the freedom of the glory" God has promised us as his children, but we do not yet see it (verse 25).

Which I'm sure is also one reason John Piper continues, "I won't argue that [verses 18–25] is the greatest paragraph in the greatest chapter in the greatest book in the Bible, but it comes close."

Yes, it does. And I want to draw your attention to two marvelous parts of this paragraph that make it one of the greatest in the Bible.

Uplifting Pattern

First, notice the peculiar pattern of humiliation followed by exaltation Paul uses. We see it in the following verses:

"The sufferings of this present time" are followed by "the glory that is to be revealed to us" (verse 18).

"The creation . . . subjected to futility" is followed by its obtaining "the freedom of the glory of the children of God" (verses 20–21).

The groaning of the whole creation — and we ourselves — is followed by the completion of our "adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies" (verses 22–23).

For anyone familiar with Scripture, this peculiar pattern isn't new. Humiliation followed by exaltation is laced all through the Bible.

We see it in Abraham, who "was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance" and ended up living "in the land of promise, as in a foreign land," which God later gave to his descendants, just as he had promised (Hebrews 11:8–9).

We see it in Moses, who lived for forty years as a fugitive shepherd in Midian before God called him to deliver his captive people from Egypt.

We see it in David, who was subjected to Saul's campaign of terror, pursued through the wilderness, before God gave him the kingship of Israel.

"We will not merely see the glory of God; we will be clothed with his glory."

We especially see it in Jesus, "who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name" (Philippians 2:6–9).

Why Humiliation Before Exaltation?

But why? Why has God ordained that humiliation should precede exaltation, that suffering should precede glory, that futility should precede freedom, that groaning should precede redemption?

Since God has innumerable purposes in everything he does, I'll venture just one reason — a very significant reason for fallen humans: faith. For without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him. (Hebrews 11:6)

The reason God subjected the human race and all of creation to futility is because of human pride. But he offers forgiveness, reconciliation, and eternal redemption to all who are willing to humble themselves under his mighty hand through repentance and faith (1 Peter 5:6)

But mere words of repentance and faith are cheap. True repentance and faith are proven by the fruit they bear (Matthew 3:8; Galatians 5:6). And nothing reveals the humbled, loving, faithful hearts of the redeemed children of God like the bewildering, disorienting, painful experiences of humiliation, suffering, futility, and groaning.

Those who have "the firstfruits of the Spirit" walk through these valleys and groan along with creation, yet they eagerly wait for their full adoption, showing themselves to be God's true sons and daughters (Romans 8:23). In other words, we are saved by God's grace alone through faith alone (Ephesians 2:8), but Christlike humility is necessary evidence that our faith is saving faith. Thus, humiliation must precede exaltation.

Free to Be Glorious

This brings us to the second marvelous part of this paragraph: the great promise that this age of groaning will end. Like all our forebears in the faith, those who compose the ever-growing cloud of witnesses (Hebrews 12:1), we greet these future promises "from afar," and in doing so "make it clear that [we] are seeking a homeland," desiring "a better country, that is, a heavenly one," and therefore God will not be ashamed to be called our God (Hebrews 11:13–16).

In other words, like our forebears, we groan in hope. "Though our outer self is wasting away," and "we groan, longing to put on our heavenly dwelling," "we do not lose heart" (2 Corinthians 4:16; 5:2). For God has made a promise to us, of which the Spirit bears witness: our bodies will be redeemed, and we will experience in full "the freedom of the glory of the children of God" (Romans 8:16, 21, 23).

Did you catch the wording of that last phrase? We are promised "the freedom of the glory of the children of God." We will not merely see the glory of God; we will be clothed with his glory! Our new

bodies will radiate his glory! We will experience something that, as C.S. Lewis put it, "can hardly be put into words — to be united with the beauty we see, to pass into it, to receive it into ourselves, to bathe in it, to become part of it" (The Weight of Glory, 42).

Just think of it: we will be free. Truly free. Not only will we be free from all the grievous effects of futility; we will be free from every vestige of pride, free from any temptation to be an idolatrous rival to God, free from all vainglorious impulses. We will be free to be glorious!

We will be free to bear and wear the glory of the children of God! And we will dance and sing and rejoice over how God answered Moses's prayer beyond all that he could ask or think "Make us glad for as many days as you have afflicted us, and for as many years as we have seen evil." (Psalm 90:15)

For the days of our glorious gladness will so outnumber the days of our affliction and the years we saw evil that they will be only distant and shadowy memories that enhance the gladness we experience. We will be free to be God's glad, glorious children!

This is the hope we have in all our present groaning, and it will be the great reward of our faith.

For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience. (Romans 8:24–25)

Yes, Lord, we believe and we will wait. But may this day come soon!

Read the article here:
https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/we-groan-for-home



God is Faithful

By Richard Phillips

And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. (Philippians 1:6)

Philippians 1:6 develops the theme of God's preserving grace—which ensures the perseverance of His own—in three points.

First, Paul reminds us that since God has begun our salvation, we can rely on Him to complete it: "he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion." God always finishes what He starts, especially the salvation of His people.

It is in this way that God's preserving grace fits with the other doctrines of grace. God the Father chose us in eternity past, and the Bible says that God's purpose in election must prevail (Rom. 9:11). God the Son offered an atoning sacrifice for these same elect people. Should they fall into condemnation, then His blood would have been shed for them in vain. But He insists that not one of them shall perish and none shall be plucked from His hand (John 10:28). Likewise, the Holy Spirit brought these same elect sheep to eternal life by the irresistible working of His grace. Should eternal life be lost, the Spirit's work would prove ineffective. Therefore, as faith is the gift of God's grace, the Christian's perseverance is the work of God's continuing grace.

Second, Paul says that God, having begun His work in our lives, "will bring it" to completion. This indicates that God not only guarantees the completion of our salvation, but is actively involved in the believer's life to bring this to pass. God works in our lives in the way a craftsman works to finish a product he has created. He smooths out the lines, sands the rough places, and puts its pieces together in proper proportion. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones writes:

"God does not merely initiate the work and then leave it, he continues with it; he leads us on, directing and manipulating our circumstances, restraining us at one time and urging us on at another. Paul's whole conception of the Church is that it is a place where God is working in the hearts of men and women."

God's work is manifested in His will playing out in our lives. This is what Paul says a bit later in Philippians: "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure" (Phil. 2:1213). Being a Christian is not easy. Persevering in faith requires warfare with sin, labor in

prayer, plowing in God's Word, and performing His will in the world. We are God's workmanship, Paul says, and this means we are called to "good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:10). God will see to it that His work for each of us is carried to completion. By His preserving grace, He will carry us to our destination in heaven. We are called to work this out, but, Paul insists, God is all the while working it in us (Phil. 2:13).

Third, we can see in Philippians 1:6 our certainty of successful "completion" if God's saving work truly has begun in us. Far from dreading the future, as we must if we look for signs of hope within ourselves, every believer possesses a hope that is certain for the most joyful, glorious, and holy destiny through faith in Jesus.

One of the reasons I love Bunyan's The Pilgrim's Progress is the portrait he paints of the eternity God has secured for every believer. Speaking of the believer's entry into heaven, he writes:

"I saw in my dream the two men enter the gate. As they did, they were transfigured. They had garments that shined like gold. Harps and crowns were given them. The harps for praise and the crowns for honor. Then I heard in my dream all the bells in the city rang again for joy. It was said to them, "Enter into the joy of your Lord."

This may be a fanciful rendering from the Bible's promises, but still it is our future history and not fantasy. For as Paul insists, God brings us to completion. One of the meanings of the Greek word translated as "bring to completion" is "bring to perfection." That is what God has promised to do for every sheep who hears Christ's voice and who shows the reality of his or her faith by following after Him through life.

Whatever hardships, disappointments, or failures await us in this world, a Christian can anticipate the certain fulfillment of David's exultant words in Psalm 16:11: "You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore." Terribly flawed though we all are now, God will bring our journey to completion and us to perfection, so that arrayed in perfect holiness we will live forever in His love.

https://learn.ligonier.org/articles/god-faithful-preserve-his-own



The Day My Quiet Time Died

By the Disciplemaker Team

I used to have dazzling quiet times. I sat on my bed, holding my four-part prayer notebook as if it were a cherished artifact. Pulling back the tab marked "adoration," I peered at a list of forty words that described God and picked three to praise God for. Moving on to the tab marked "confession," I mulled over another forty-word list of faults, especially those I'd underlined in red: laziness and grouchiness. Racing on to "thanksgiving," I skimmed a list of twenty items I felt thankful for, including friends, relatives, books, and—to be especially spiritual—God Himself.
At the bottom of the page, a stretching zinger challenged me: Thank God for one thing you've never thanked Him for before.

Finally, I had enough momentum to slide into home plate—a list of requests I had kept for ten years: former students, weight control, missionary friends. It took quite a while to do this portion of the notebook, but when I finished, I felt as if I'd covered the map with God.
In spite of my spiritual whiz-kid persona, I was crumbling and raging inside. I felt suffocated by the routine life of a stay-at-home mom and the dry ache of a vanishing marriage. I remember the day my quiet time died. After gathering all my devotional props, I settled into a terrible emptiness. I needed God as I had never needed Him before, but my regimented prayers were puny containers for my anguish. Hurling my prayer notebook across the room, I asked myself, How would I survive life without someone to love me? How could I connect with God so that no matter what happened to me, I would believe that God still loved me and valued me? What would replace these sterile lists so I could sink my teeth into a God who would satisfy my neediness?

As my ego props fell away I replaced my sterling quiet time with reading Glamour magazine. I found refuge in food and snacked all day. Appalled that my secret food compulsion was taking over, I slithered into a room with other "losers" like me—a support group for compulsive eaters. When I said I was "fine," they laughed and said, "Right! So how are you really doing?" My Christian facade, which I didn't know I had, cracked.

Over several years, these meetings schooled me in admitting the truth—that I demanded perfection from myself and everyone around me. I saw that I had behaved as a Pharisee, "the one who wants to get the right formula and do it right and fix everything and feel very wonderful."

But I found it difficult to forget about dazzling God and show Him my real self. Finally, as I meandered through the Psalms, I found comfort in their honest and gritty texture:

I sink in the miry depths, where there is no foothold. I have come into the deep waters; the floods engulf me. I am worn

out calling for help; my throat is parched. My eyes fail, looking for my God. (Psalm 69:2-3)

Were I as honest as the psalmist, I'd have to admit that I had been mad at God—why hadn't He fixed everything and put my life in order as I'd wanted it? Could I admit to God that I felt I was a disappointment to Him, and He was a disappointment to me? In a moment of terror I did, and the sky didn't fall.

I still felt broken, but somehow hopeful. It seemed as if God were wringing all that self-sufficiency out of me and asking me to seek Him in whatever way He led me. He wasn't going to fix my life quickly, but He was going to mold my character. At the time, I couldn't see it, but God was showing me that He did not want me to be a can-do go-getter but "one who becomes broken bread and poured out wine in the hands of Jesus Christ."

I began a journey that now looks as though it will take my entire life: to relish being God's much-loved child instead of trying to be wonderful. But in this new path of "being" instead of "doing," how was I going to relate to God in a way that wasn't so busy, so ordered, so perfect? Wasn't there a simpler way of praying that wasn't so structured and allowed me to express the contradictions of the heart?

I then read a small book that recorded the ideas of Brother Lawrence: The Practice of the Presence of God. Where he shares that the highest spiritual practice is maintaining a continuous, loving conversation and awareness of God in every moment—not just during formal prayer. Compared to my Olympic-style quiet time, this was so low-key I could never spiff it up into some ego-strutting routine.

As I experimented with unpretentious, plain-speaking conversation with God, the adventure began. At first, I was baffled about what to do. Then I'd remind myself: this isn't a method but a relationship.

As I read more of the devotional classics I came to understand that bullying and berating myself with "shoulds" and "oughts" hindered my awareness of God rather than helped it. I had to be patient. Day by day I began to develop a "familiar friendship with Jesus," in which I could trust Him with my secret flaws, deepest fears, and hidden dreams.

This kinder, gentler approach had an ordinariness about it exemplified by Brother Lawrence's non-hero status. An overweight bumbler and "a big clumsy guy who broke everything," Brother Lawrence worshiped more in the kitchen than in the cathedral. He wrote:

"For me, work time is no different than prayer time. Even in the noise and clatter of the kitchen, with different people calling for different things all at once, I still know God's presence with just as much real peace as if I were on my knees at communion."

I could imagine the sauce simmering and Brother Lawrence tripping over the monastery cat, yet still enjoying the companionship of God. This was the path to God I longed to travel.
I had complicated my spiritual life with my notebook and checklists and invented my own version of "spiritual correctness."

In truth, I needed only one thing—God. I didn't need a great quiet time, I needed a God-centered lifetime. I saw that my responsibility as a Christian was to seek God's company. For several years now, I've stood before God making no promises to achieve, only spending time enjoying His presence.

https://www.navpress.com/sites/thedisciplemaker/2017/06/the-day-my-quiet-time-died/

Singing to the Lord

By Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones

Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord. — Ephesians 5:19

The apostle is describing how Christian people, filled with the Spirit, meet together and find joy. He contrasts this with the world's conception of happiness: "Be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit." The contrast extends to what is sung, how it is sung, and, above all, the subject of the singing.

The world, in one form or another, sings about itself. It celebrates individuals, nations, and one another; it becomes a kind of mutual admiration society. But Christians have an entirely different theme. They sing and make melody in their hearts to the Lord. The supreme distinction is not merely the kind of music or the manner of performance, but the Person to whom it is directed.

By "the Lord," Paul means our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, God the Son. The next verse speaks of giving thanks to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Christian praise is distinctively centred upon Him. This is the point to which everything else must lead.

The Holy Spirit Glorifies the Son

This is precisely the special work of the Holy Spirit. Our Lord said concerning the Spirit, "He shall glorify me." The Son glorifies the Father, and the Spirit glorifies the Son. Therefore, those who are filled with the Spirit will inevitably praise, adore, and worship the Son.

Here is an important test of what we suppose to be the work of the Spirit. People sometimes judge spiritual experience by its excitement, by extraordinary powers, visions, ecstasies, healings, or other remarkable events. But these are dangerous tests. We are commanded to test the spirits. The final question is this: Does the experience lead us to glorify the Lord Jesus Christ more than ever before?

The Holy Spirit does not chiefly draw attention to Himself, nor to us, nor to the results we may have experienced. He glorifies the Son. If there is much talk about the Spirit and very little about the Son, we have reason to examine what is taking place. When people are truly filled with the Spirit, they sing and make melody to the Lord.

Indeed, our relationship to Jesus Christ is the decisive test of our Christian profession. Christianity is not merely belief in God in a general sense. Jesus Christ is central and essential. Without Him there is no Christianity. He is the Alpha and the Omega; and He Himself has said, "No man cometh unto the Father, but by me." The Christian is one who delights in the Lord and delights to

tell forth His praise.

Look at Him Before His Gifts

We can become absorbed in the mechanics of worship—psalms, hymns, spiritual songs, and the manner in which we sing—and never reach the great objective. All these things are intended to bring us face to face with Him.

There is another danger. We are so often occupied with what Christ has done for us and what He has given us. These are glorious themes, and we must certainly thank Him for them. But before we consider His benefits, we must consider Him as He is in Himself. Forget yourselves for the moment. Forget even the blessings of the Christian life. Look at Him. Consider Him. Praise Him for what He is.

This is the great theme of the Bible from beginning to end. When the prophets were given a glimpse of His coming, they could scarcely speak of it in ordinary prose. Think of Isaiah 40: "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people"; "Prepare ye the way of the Lord"; "Behold your God!" The prophet is stirred to the depths of his being. These men were not merely trying to produce magnificent literature. The Holy Spirit inspired them, and the glory of the coming Son filled their words with poetry and song.

We find the same anticipation in the words of Balaam, in the final declarations of Jacob, and in the words of Moses. Then, when the Lord actually came into the world, the angels celebrated His birth with praise. Those who are nearest to Him and see His glory break forth into thanksgiving and song. It is the natural response to the sight of Him.

Is There a Song in Our Hearts?

Our hymns bear witness to this. "How sweet the name of Jesus sounds in a believer's ear! It soothes his sorrows, heals his wounds, and drives away his fear." But does it? Does His name have that effect upon us? It has done so in the experience of those who have truly known Him.

"Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." As believers realize His presence, they pour out their hearts in melody and song. This brings us to a searching question: Do we do so? Do we even desire to do so?

Sometimes Christians give the impression that Christianity is a terrible burden and that a Christian must be more miserable than anyone else. We may say that we are conscious of sin and the solemnity of life. That is indeed one side of our experience, but it is not the whole of it. There is also this joy in the Lord.

Our fatal trouble is often subjectivity. We are forever looking at ourselves, taking our spiritual pulse, asking what has happened to us, and seeking some further blessing. Meanwhile, we fail to contemplate Him. We do not look at Him, and consequently we lack the joy that comes from knowing Him.

The Word Leads Us to Christ

How, then, are we to cultivate this melody in our hearts? The Spirit leads us to Christ, and one of His most frequent promptings is to send us to the Scriptures. Here we see Him. Here is the portrait; here are the pictures. The Spirit may visit us at other times, but He has given us His Word that we may behold the Lord in it.

We must not read mechanically. I believe in systematic Bible reading, but there is a danger in being anxious merely to complete the appointed portion for the day. We must stop and think about what we are reading. We must meditate. If we expect to meet Him there, we must not hurry past Him in order to get on with something else.

Read, pause, contemplate, and allow the

Spirit to direct your attention to the Person of the Son. As you behold Him, the inevitable result will be praise and melody in your heart.

The Eternal Glory of His Person

Consider first the majesty and glory of His Person. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." He is eternal, uncreated, only begotten, coequal and co-eternal with the Father. This is the One about whom we sing.

The Epistle to the Hebrews tells us that God, who spoke in times past through the prophets, has now spoken by His Son, "who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person." He is the effulgence of the everlasting God's glory.

Consider also His work in creation. By Him the worlds were made. John declares that all things were made by Him and that without Him nothing was made that was made. Look at the mountains and valleys, the rivers and streams, the flowers, the animals, and mankind. All these things were made through this blessed Lord, in the unity of the Father and the Spirit.

In His high-priestly prayer He spoke of the glory He had with the Father before the world was. He also prayed that His people might behold His glory. This is His desire for those who belong to Him: that they should see Him as He is. What a theme for meditation! His everlasting greatness and indescribable glory are enough to occupy us for eternity.

The Wonder of the Incarnation

Then think of the wonder of His incarnation. The apostle Paul could scarcely approach this theme without bursting into praise: "Great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory" (1 Timothy 3:16).

The same wonder moves him in Philippians 2. Though Christ was in the form of God, He made Himself of no reputation, took the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men. He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Therefore God has highly exalted Him and given Him the name above every name.

Is it not astonishing that we can repeat such truths so easily and remain unmoved? We are dealing with the eternal Son of God coming into this world, taking our nature, and dwelling among us. No wonder the church has sung of it through the centuries. Think of Charles Wesley's hymn: "Christ, by highest heaven adored; Christ, the everlasting Lord"; and again, "Veiled in flesh the Godhead see; hail the incarnate Deity." The very words invite us to adore Him.

His Earthly Life and His Words

Consider Him as He walked upon this earth. Think of His perfect human life, His purity, His compassion, His gentleness, and His majesty. Think of the way He looked upon men and women, the way He dealt with sinners, the way He received those whom others despised, and the way He manifested the glory of God in ordinary human circumstances.

Consider His teaching. The people marveled because He spoke with authority and not as the scribes. "Never man spake like this man." He did not speak of God at second hand, as a philosopher struggling toward the truth. He spoke as One who knew the Father. His words reveal the very mind and heart of God. These are things to ponder until they move us to praise.

He is the great Prophet, who has revealed God to us. And He is more than

a prophet. He is our great High Priest, who has offered Himself for us and now intercedes for His people. “If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.” He ever lives to make intercession for us. Are these not themes that should awaken melody in our hearts?

His Cross, Resurrection, and Kingship

Think of His sufferings and His death. The One who was eternally glorious humbled Himself even to the cross. He gave Himself for sinners. We can never exhaust the wonder of His love, His obedience, and His sacrifice. The cross is not merely something from which we derive benefits; it reveals the character and glory of the Lord Himself.

Then behold Him in His resurrection. Men placed Him in a tomb, rolled the stone across its entrance, and set a guard. But death could not hold Him. He rose triumphant, breaking the bonds of death. The grave could not retain the Lord of life.

He is also King. He is exalted at the right hand of God, and He reigns. He is not merely the babe of Bethlehem or the Man of sorrows. He is the King of kings and Lord of lords, and He will come again in glory. Think of His return, when His majesty will be revealed openly and every knee will bow before Him.

The world may be full of confusion, and the international situation may fill us with concern. But what could be more necessary than to remind ourselves who reigns? To contemplate Him is not to evade the troubles of the world. It is to see them in the light of His everlasting kingdom and sovereign glory.

The Song of Heaven

Finally, turn to the book of Revelation and listen to the singing of heaven. The redeemed praise the Lamb who was slain and who redeemed them to God out of every kindred, tongue, people, and nation. The heavenly hosts cry with a loud voice, “Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing.”

Then every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth joins in the praise of Him who sits upon the throne and of the Lamb. Here is the destiny of the people of God: an everlasting song of adoration to the Lord Jesus Christ.

The saints have sung of Him on earth, and they will sing of Him in glory. We are being invited, even now, to join that song. The more clearly we see Him, the more naturally our hearts will praise Him.

Even a Feeble Amen

Perhaps you say that you have no gift for singing. You may not have a fine voice or any musical ability. That is not the question. I ask only this: As you contemplate the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ, is there an Amen in your heart? Do you find yourself agreeing with the praise offered to Him? Is there, however feebly, a desire to adore Him?

If there is even a feeble Amen, thank God for it. Encourage it. Go to the Scriptures. Submit yourself to the leading of the Holy Spirit. Meditate upon the Son—His eternal glory, His incarnation, His life, His words, His priesthood, His cross, His resurrection, His reign, and His coming again.

As you see Him, you will praise Him. You will begin to sing that song which never ends.

https://www.mljtrust.org/sermon/singing-to-the-lord/

The Singing Universe

By John Lennox

Let's start at the beginning. “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.” God said, “Let there be light,” and He spoke the world into existence. “In the beginning was the Word,” and all things came into being through Him. This means that our universe is, at its very foundation, Word-based.

C. S. Lewis imaginatively described the creation of Narnia in his book “The Magician's Nephew”

“In the darkness something was happening at last. A voice had begun to sing… the most beautiful noise he had ever heard. It was so beautiful he could hardly bear it… Then two wonders happened at the same moment. One was that the voice was suddenly joined by other voices; more voices than you could possibly count. The second wonder was that the blackness overhead, all at once, was blazing with stars. And then the Singer Himself appeared—a magnificent Lion, standing in the light of the rising sun, His mouth wide open in song.”



The Singing Stars

God Himself spoke of singing stars when He addressed His servant Job, who had suffered the devastating loss of his family, possessions, and health:

“Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? ... On what were its bases sunk, or who laid its cornerstone, when the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy?” (Job 38:4–7).

And the stars of heaven still sing to us. Even in our suffering, they speak with a wordless voice, which the Bible itself puts into song:

“The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they reveal knowledge. They have no speech, they use no words; no sound is heard from them. Yet their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world” (Psalm 19:1–4).

The heavens proclaim God's glory without uttering a single audible word. The stars radiate His majesty, and the whole creation bears witness to its

Creator. But the stars were not made in God's image. **You were.**

You are part of God's artwork. "Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image.' ... So God created man in his own image" (Genesis 1:26–27).

The Praise of All Creation

The song of creation reaches its magnificent climax in the book of Revelation, where John hears every creature in heaven, on earth, under the earth, and in the sea joining in praise: "To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!" (Revelation 5:13).

What a picture! The whole creation, which declares God's glory even now, will one day be united in the praise of its Creator and Redeemer.

The Voice of the Son

But supremely, there is the voice of the Son and the voice of His Word.

"God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son" (Hebrews 1:1–2).

And there is the voice of the written Word. "All Scripture," says Paul, "is breathed out by God" (2 Timothy 3:16). Peter adds that men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:21).

God used human authors to give us an extraordinary library of writings in many different forms: poetry, song, history, narrative, parable, wisdom literature, prophecy, letters, and the laws and covenants of Scripture. Through all these varied voices, God has spoken.

If we are going to make an impact for God in this world, we must be people of the Book. There is a real battle in our culture to demote the Word of God and undermine its authority in our lives. We must hold fast to it, for it is through His Word that God reveals Himself to us.

Music, Scripture, and King David

The Bible is full of music. Martin Luther once wrote, "Next to the Word of God, the noble art of music is the greatest treasure in the world."

And, of course, the singer *par excellence* in Scripture was King David. He was a poet, a musician, and a maker of musical instruments.

David understood the power of music. He also recognized the importance of providing words worthy of the music—lyrics that would exalt God rather than merely manipulate human emotions.

David knew what it was to be overlooked and to wait upon God's timing. Yet the Lord heard his songs, and in time David became the great organizer of Israel's worship, leading the nation in praise to God.

On that wonderful day when the ark was brought to Jerusalem, David appointed Asaph and his brothers to offer thanksgiving to the Lord:

"Oh give thanks to the LORD; call upon his name; make known his deeds among the peoples! Sing to him, sing praises to him; tell of all his wondrous works!" (1 Chronicles 16:8–9).

And that is precisely what we do when we sing. We tell of His wondrous works.

Think of the magnificent hymns and psalms that have come down to us through the centuries. "The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want." David's words still speak to our hearts, calling us to trust in the Lord and to praise His name.

Why Does the World No Longer Hear the Song?

But here is a question: Why can the world no longer hear the song?

Why did Uncle Andrew, in Lewis's story, hear Aslan's beautiful song as nothing more than a meaningless roar?

Lewis writes:

"And the longer and more beautifully the Lion sang, the harder Uncle Andrew tried to make himself believe that he heard nothing but roaring. Now the trouble about trying to make yourself stupider than you really are is that you very often succeed. And Uncle Andrew did succeed. Eventually, he could hear nothing but roaring where others heard the glorious song of Aslan."

Is that not a picture of something happening in our world today? Why have truth, beauty, and moral values been reduced to mere illusions in a world increasingly concerned only with facts and material things?

One thinker posed the question: "How is it that the more able man becomes to manipulate the world to his advantage, the less he can perceive any meaning in it?"

How has the world come to be regarded as a meaningless collection of things? How is it that the more we discover about the extraordinary beauty and complexity of the universe, the more some people insist that it has no ultimate meaning?

We appear, as a society, to be in danger of committing intellectual and moral suicide. We need to return to being fully human. And that involves recovering the aesthetic sense God has given us—the capacity to recognize and delight in beauty. It involves singing, music, art, and all the gifts of creativity that reflect something of the nature of our Creator.

In our preoccupation with the material and measurable, we sometimes neglect this God-given capacity to recognize beauty and respond to it. We must recover the ability to hear the song.

From the Singing Stars to the Singing Lord

We began with the singing stars. Let us end with the singing Lord.

Just before Jesus went to the cross, He sang with His disciples. Matthew tells us, "And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives" (Matthew 26:30).

Think of that! The Lord Jesus Christ, knowing what lay before Him, joined His disciples in singing a hymn of praise to God.

C. S. Lewis imagined Aslan singing the universe into existence. Scripture reveals to us the Lord Jesus Christ, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, through whom all things were made is the One who sang a hymn with His disciples as He went out toward the cross.

He is the One whom Scripture portrays as singing praise in the midst of His people. And He is the One who will return in glory, when all creation will join in worship before the throne of God and of the Lamb.

What a glorious prospect!

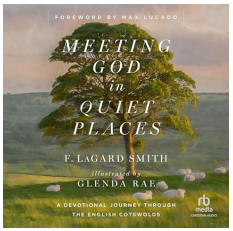
Let us, therefore, take a courageous and uncompromising stand upon the Word of God. And let us use all the gifts God has given us—our words, our songs, our music, our art, and our creativity—to make Christ known throughout the world. For the universe is not silent. It declares the glory of its Creator.

May we, who have been made in His image and redeemed by His Son, add our voices to that everlasting song of praise.

Watch the video here: https://youtu.be/n-ILWFy9lSw?si=P-ToTglSk7PY9Nnt

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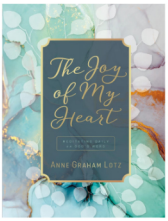
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Meeting God in the Quiet Places

By F. LaGard Smith

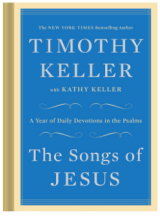
A collection of reflections inspired by the English countryside, finding spiritual lessons in nature, solitude, and everyday experiences. A beautiful invitation to slow down, reflect, and discover God's presence in the quiet moments of everyday life.



The Joy of My Heart

By Anne Graham Lotz

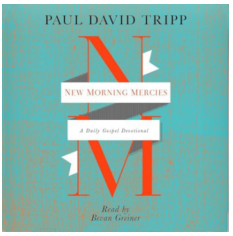
A year of short, Scripture-centered devotional readings that invite readers into a deeper relationship with Jesus. Warm, encouraging, and easy to read in a few minutes each day.



The Songs of Jesus

By Timothy and Kathy Keller

The Book of Psalms is known as the Bible's songbook—Jesus knew all 150 psalms intimately, and relied on them to face every situation, including his death. Two decades ago, Tim Keller began reading the entire Book of Psalms every month. The Songs of Jesus is based on his accumulated years of study, insight, and inspiration recorded in his prayer journals.



New Morning Mercies

By Paul David Tripp

365 engaging readings lead off with a compelling, gospel-centered thought, followed by an extended meditation for the day. This resource equips readers with the good news that they need to trust in God's goodness, rely on his grace, and live for his glory—day in and day out.

How Can I Keep from Singing

Performed by Keith & Kristyn Getty

My life flows on in endless song
Above earth's lamentation
I hear the sweet, though far-off hymn
That hails a new creation
Through all the tumult and the strife
I hear that music ringing
It finds an echo in my soul
How can I keep from singing?

While though my joys and comforts die
I know my Savior liveth
While though the darkness gather round
Songs in the night He giveth
No storm can shake my inmost calm
While to that refuge, clinging
Since Christ is Lord of Heaven and earth
How can I keep from singing?

I lift my eyes, the cloud grows thin
I see the blue above it
And, day by day, this pathway smooths
Since, first, I learned to love it
The peace of Christ makes fresh, my heart
A fountain ever springing
All things are mine, since I am His
How can I keep from singing?

The peace of Christ makes fresh, my heart
A fountain ever springing
All things are mine, since I am His
How can I keep from singing?