

Words of Hope

Christ Changes Everything

Bob Roane

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace
as you trust in Him, so that you may overflow with hope
by the power of the Holy Spirit.
(Romans 15:13)

Words of Hope: Christ Changes Everything

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I have received help from many sources over the years and have done my best to acknowledge all the ones I can remember.

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Strength for today
And bright hope for tomorrow
Blessings all mine
With ten thousand beside

(Thomas Obadiah Chisholm)

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Introduction

Pastor Peter Jeffery (1937-2017) noted that many Christian writers seem unable to put the “cookies” (precious truths from the Bible) where everyone can reach them. He said it seems we’ve forgotten that we’re feeding Christ’s lambs and sheep, not giraffes.¹ I hope that the “cookies” in this booklet will be accessible to all readers, both Christians and those who are not yet followers of Jesus. As Jerome of Stridon (347-420) put it, “The Scriptures are shallow enough for a child to come to drink without fear of drowning, and deep enough for theologians to swim in without ever reaching the bottom.”

I often use the following prayer as I study the Bible myself. You may wish to use it, too.

Thanks be to You, my Lord Jesus,
for all the benefits You have given me,
for all the pains and insults You have borne for me.
O most merciful Redeemer, Friend, and Brother,
of You three things I pray:
To see You more clearly, love You more dearly,
follow You more nearly, day by day.²

The chapters in this book appeared as separate blog posts on the Words of Hope website (WOHBM.org). They are excerpts from teaching for churches and other groups, as well as pastoral counseling. I am sharing this booklet with people in prison and outside, and I hope many others do the same. A digital version is available for free on our website. The chapters may be read in any order. Footnotes are included for those who want to dig deeper into God’s Word.

Special thanks are due to all the friends, prayer partners, encouragers, and supporters who have made my ministry possible since 1980. They have truly been co-laborers in the gospel with me, and I am grateful to God for each of them.

Laura Arrazolo served as my editor for this project. She wisely provided tons of constructive feedback to improve my content. Felix Arrazolo formatted the manuscript into book and e-book formats and made many valuable suggestions along the way. Thanks, Laura and Felix! You're the best!

Most of all, praise to the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To Him who loves us, has freed us from our sins by His blood, and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve His God and Father—to Him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen.³

Notes 1 See John 21:15-17. 2 Adapted from Richard of Chichester (1197–1253), an English pastor. His dying prayer was adapted for the song “Day by Day” in the musical *Godspell* in 1971. 3 Rev 1:5-6.

In your hearts revere Christ as Lord.
Always be prepared to give an answer
to everyone who asks you
to give the reason for the hope that you have.
But do this with gentleness and respect.

(1 Peter 3:15)

Christ Changes Everything

Jesus is the unique Son of God.

He did not come merely to give bread. Christ declared,
“I am the Bread of life. Whoever comes to Me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in Me will never be thirsty.”

Jesus did not come merely to shed light. He said,
“I am the Light of the world. Whoever follows Me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life.”

Christ did not come merely to show us the door to God.

He said, “I am the Door.

Whoever enters through Me will be saved.

They will come in and go out and find pasture.”

Jesus did not come merely to talk about
shepherding us through life. He said,

“I am the Good Shepherd
who lays down His life for His sheep.”

Christ did not come merely to point the way to Truth. He said,

“I am the Way and the Truth and the Life.

No one comes to the Father except through Me.”

(See John 6:35, 8:12, 10:9, 10:11, 14:6.)

1

The God Who Hung on the Cross

Jesus said, “The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected. He must be killed and on the third day be raised to life... No one takes My life from Me, but I lay it down of My own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again.” (Luke 9:22; John 10:18)

A Village in Danger

In *The God Who Hung on the Cross*, journalist Ellen Vaughn retells the true, amazing story of how Jesus’ salvation came to a village in northern Cambodia. In 1999, Pastor Seng (not his real name) traveled to an isolated area where most people trusted in Buddhism, demonism, or praying to the dead.

When Seng came to one small town, however, the villagers warmly welcomed him. He was shocked by their desire to learn about Christ. Why were these people different? God the Holy Spirit had already been at work! Seng asked about their eagerness, and an old woman (we’ll call her Chan) shuffled forward to answer. Chan said, “We’ve been waiting for you for twenty years!” Then she told about how the God she loved, the One who once hung on the cross, had already saved her life.

From 1975 to 1979, the Khmer Rouge, a brutal regime, ravaged Cambodia, killing two million people. When soldiers attacked Chan’s little village, they rounded up everyone and forced each

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one to dig their own grave. Once the villagers finished digging, they prepared to be slaughtered. Some screamed to Buddha. Others prayed to demon spirits or departed ancestors.

Christ shall have dominion over land and sea
Earth's remotest regions shall His empire be
They that wilds inhabit shall their worship bring
Kings shall render tribute, nations serve our King

When the needy seek Him, Christ will mercy show
Yes, the weak and helpless shall His pity know
He will surely save them from oppression's might
For their lives are precious in His holy sight¹

God Takes Action

Drawing on childhood memory, Chan cried out for help from the God who had once hung on the cross. Her mother had told her about Jesus, but Chan couldn't remember His name. Still, she prayed to this crucified and resurrected Lord, thinking that if He had experienced suffering Himself, He could have compassion on her in this hopeless moment. Soon Chan's neighbors joined her prayers, begging the Lord to save them.

As everyone stared into their freshly dug graves, they felt a strange silence fill the muggy jungle air. Slowly, they turned to face their executioners – but all the soldiers had vanished!²

Hallelujah! You have won the victory
Hallelujah! You have won it all for me
Death could not hold You down
Seated in Majesty, You are the risen king³

Jesus is on the Move

In Bible times, Christ delivered His people from Egypt, saved Daniel from the lion's den, and rescued apostles from prison. Now the Risen Jesus is still doing similar things all around the globe! Christ is not in the manger now, not on the cross, and not in the grave anymore. He is alive and reigning and still rescuing desperate people!

King David said, "Pushed to the wall, I called to God and He answered. God's now at my side, and I'm not afraid. Who would dare lay a hand on me? Hemmed in and with no way out, God's my strong champion. I flick off my enemies like flies. God's my strength, my song, and my salvation. Hear the shouts, hear the triumph songs? The hand of God has turned the tide and is raised in victory!"⁴

Chan told Pastor Seng that for 20 years, villagers had been praying and longing for someone to come tell them more about their loving, mighty Savior. He had hung on the cross, was now powerfully alive, and had saved their entire village!

The Only True God

God the Holy Trinity (Father, Son, and Spirit) has existed forever, before His creation of the heavens and the earth. He is the one and only, true and living God. The Trinitarian Lord is a spirit being— infinite, eternal, and unchangeable in His wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, love, and truth.

Jesus is God the Son who pre-existed with the Father and the Spirit before He became a man and walked upon the earth. Christ lived the completely obedient, faithful, loving life we

failed to live. He also came to die the wages-of-sin death we deserved and to rise from the grave for our salvation.⁵ That's the part of Christ's story that Chan remembered.

When the set time had fully come, God sent Christ His Son to be born of a woman, to buy freedom for us, so that God could adopt us as His very own children.

The Lord also sent the Holy Spirit into our hearts, prompting us to call on God as our Father with warmth, confidence, and delight. (Galatians 4:4-6)

Christ's humble First Advent is the greatest miracle of all! Now the Bible also tells us to prepare for the Son of God's majestic Second Advent. The best way to do this is to "live holy and godly lives as we look forward to the day of God."⁶

Jesus is Alive

Chan prayed to the living Lord and Savior and He answered! In between Jesus' First and Second Comings, He is alive and reigning. Forty days after Christ's resurrection, He ascended into Heaven with both His divine and human natures in His resurrected body. He is the Risen King of His creation.

- God the Father knows what we need before we ask Him.
- God the Son (Christ) prays for us in Heaven.
- On Earth, God the Holy Spirit prays for His believers.

This is the Holy Trinity who rescued Chan and her neighbors. I love it that Christ intervened for the believers in Cambodia who didn't even know His name. God the Trinity perfectly loves and cares for *all* of Jesus' followers, every single one of us. God's character is unchanging. He doesn't always *act* in the same way in Bible times or now, but He does promise to *help* us.

What Are We Waiting For?

Chan and her villagers had to wait for a missionary to come tell them about Jesus. But many of us own a complete Bible in our own language containing both Old and New Testaments, or we can easily get one. From beginning to end, the Bible reveals Jesus. He is the fulfillment of the Old Testament, and His life ties together all the prophecies. All of the New Testament books tell about Christ also— what He said and did, how He transformed the lives of His followers, and how *we* can follow Him, too. We don't have to wait to hear about the God who hung on the cross. We can know Him today by asking the Holy Spirit to speak to us as we read the Holy Scriptures.⁷

Jesus is Still at Work in His World

Do you know Jesus' story? Do you rejoice in Him and call on Him for help? Do you tell others what Christ did for all of us and what He has personally done for *you*? Scripture states that Jesus is able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, because He always lives to intercede and pray for them. He says, "I am the LORD, the God of all humankind. Is anything too hard for Me?" Christ is still doing miracles of grace in the most unlikely places. And He can do them right where we live! Nothing is impossible with God.⁸

We have heard the joyful sound
Jesus saves! Jesus saves!
Spread the tidings all around
Jesus saves! Jesus saves!
Bear the news to every land
Climb the steeps and cross the waves
Onward! It's our Lord's command
Jesus saves! Jesus saves!⁹

Prayer

Lord Jesus, we praise You that You were and are the God who hung on a cross for us and the living Savior who hears and sees us. Save us as we call on You for the first time or the millionth time. You *have* delivered us, You *are* delivering us, and You *will continue* to deliver us. Make us bold for You because our time on Earth is short. Help us to tell everyone we know about Your glory, honor, and power.¹⁰ Amen.

Notes 1 “Christ Shall Have Dominion,” 1871 (Ps 72). 2 Rosser and Vaughn, *The God Who Hung on the Cross*, 2003, 35-37. 3 Hunt, Seeley, and Webber, “The Anthem,” 2012. 4 Eugene Peterson, *The Message*. Ps 118:5-16. 5 Rom 3:23, 6:23. 6 2 Pet 3:11-12. 7 John 14:25-26; 2 Tim 3:15-17. See special note below. 8 Heb 7:25; Jer 32:27; Luke 1:37 NKJV. 9 Priscilla Owens, “Jesus Saves,” 1882. 10 See 2 Cor 1:10; Rev 4:11.

Jesus’ Second Coming is mentioned 318 times in the 260 chapters of the New Testament. That is 1 in every 25 verses! Of the many Old Testament prophecies about Christ, about a third were fulfilled in His First Coming, leaving the other two thirds to be fulfilled when He returns.

In the Four Gospels, Jesus said *more than 50 times* to be ready for Him to come back. Dr. Alexander MacLaren pointed out, “The early church thought more about the coming of Christ than about death or Heaven.” (*Christianity Today*, Jan 17, 1964)

So “we wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ.” (Titus 2:11-15)

2

Lord at Eye Level

In the beginning was the Word (the Son of God), and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us. He came from the Father, full of grace and truth... No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son... has revealed Him.

(John 1-18, excerpts)

We're the Same

One dad, call him Bill, fondly recalls a special season with his son. “Daniel is an adult now, but when he was 5 years old, he loved for us to dress alike. At a Philadelphia Phillies baseball game, we got matching red hats, and Daniel noticed, ‘Look! We’re the same!’ When I play-wrestled with him, Daniel didn’t want me to stand because I towered over him. He liked it when I knelt and he stood. When I was down at his eye-level, Daniel would put his hand on my shoulder and say, ‘Now, Dad—we’re the same.’ One time, I scraped my elbow doing plumbing repairs. Later that week, Daniel scraped his elbow playing. He pointed at my scab, then showed me his, and remarked, ‘Hey, we’re the same again!’ He liked those everyday connections.”¹

Young Daniel’s desire to connect with his dad reminds us of human beings’ longing for the Lord Jesus. Blaise Pascal (1623-1662) wrote that there is a God-shaped hole in the heart of

every person which cannot be filled by any created thing, but only by our Creator God.²

If I find in myself a desire which nothing in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world. (C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*)

Jesus' In-flesh-ing

God the Holy Trinity, one God in three persons, is the one and only true and living God. He created and upholds everything that exists. The three members of the Trinity have loved, enjoyed, and had fellowship with one another since before the beginning of time. The Trinity is the original Holy Family.

But God the Son didn't stay in the luxury of Heaven. The Bible tells us in detail that 2,000 years ago, the Lord went the second mile to demonstrate that He is not distant or detached from our pains and problems. Just as Bill knelt down next to Daniel, God the Son got down at eye-level with us when Christ was born, and He stayed at our level His entire time on Earth.

Jesus didn't pretend to be human. *He truly became one of us*, His brothers and sisters. Living a completely human life, yet without sin, enabled Christ to understand our ways and weaknesses because He faced all the same troubles we do.³ Over His 33 years on Earth, Christ experienced firsthand living in a poor family, going hungry, feeling exhausted, being tempted, feeling disappointed, feeling lonely and misunderstood, being abandoned, hearing people lie about Him, and even being physically and emotionally abused. Whatever we're going through – Jesus has been there!

Christ's Name is Immanuel

700 years before Jesus was born, the Lord's prophet Isaiah foretold that Messiah would be named Immanuel, meaning "God is with us." The New Testament tells how Christ came to fulfill this prophecy by being born to a human mother.⁴

But the Lord did not just come to *live* at our level. He was born to rescue us by His *death*, like a soldier jumping on a live grenade to save his friends. In the ultimate act of devotion, Jesus took our place on the cross, absorbing our punishment for sin upon Himself. That's how much He loves us!

There is a fountain filled with blood
Drawn from Immanuel's veins
And sinners plunged beneath that flood
Lose all our guilty stains⁵

In addition to Jesus' once-and-for-all sacrifice for us, He is *now* risen and *now* present with us, His followers, in life-giving ways. Here are two of those ways.

Christ Carries Us

God (Father, Son, and Spirit) was faithful to the Hebrews. He emancipated them from Egypt and led them into the Promised Land. Deuteronomy 1:31 says, "The Lord your God carried you, as a father carries his child, all the way you went until you reached this place." Likewise, Jesus rescued us, His followers, by His cross and resurrection. But He doesn't stop there. He promises, "I will never leave you or forsake you." He carries us through every trial by His Spirit. So no matter what comes, we can say, "The Lord is my helper. I will not be afraid."⁶ Christ is never absent from us for a minute.

Jesus Treasures Us

Deuteronomy 32:11 says, “The Lord shields and cares for us. He guards us as the apple of His eye.” *Apple* in this verse means the pupil of the eye. Jesus watches over, shelters, and protects us just as we care for and defend the delicate centers of our precious eyes. See how valuable we are to Him! Psalm 136 says 26 times, “His love endures forever.” Christ’s lovingkindness, graciousness, mercy, and compassion for us are unshakeable and unbreakable. The Lord says, “I have swept away your offenses like a cloud, your sins like the morning mist. Return to Me, for I have redeemed you.”⁷ *Redeemed* means we are purchased, or ransomed, by God with the blood of His priceless Son. This is why He cherishes us so much.

Elisabeth Elliot said, “Restlessness and impatience change nothing except our peace and joy. Peace does not dwell in outward things, but in the heart prepared to wait trustfully and quietly on God, who has all things safely in His hands.”⁸ That’s our foremost need, dear ones: to cast all our anxiety, fear, and worry on Jesus, who adores us.⁹

Tempted to Doubt

In hard times, we may feel, “Lord, You don’t understand what we’re going through. You have no idea how badly we’re hurting.” Christ responds, “Yes, I do.” He points to our wounds – in our hearts, minds, and bodies – and then to His own wounds in His hands, feet, and side. Jesus says, “Look, we’re the same. Me, too. I entered your world and lived there. I know how you feel, and I will never forget it. I have been there, and I am with you now by My Holy Spirit. I treasure you and will carry you, *so turn to Me for help.*”

A Long-Distance Surprise

Some gifts are unforgettable. Billy Joel is an American singer-songwriter. On his daughter Alexa's 12th birthday, she was in New York City, and Billy was far away in Los Angeles. The musician phoned his daughter, apologized for his absence, and told her to expect a large package from him to arrive later that day. Alexa answered the doorbell to find a seven-foot-tall, brightly wrapped box. She tore it open, and out stepped her dad, who had flown across the country just to be with her. Imagine her surprise and delight!¹⁰

God's Better Gift

God the Father's greatest present to us, His Son, came in the flesh, too! Christ came down from Heaven to be with us forever. The God Most High became the God Most Nigh (near). The greatest gift the Lord gives is the present of His presence.¹¹ Jesus Himself fills the God-shaped hole in our hearts.

By Christ's sacrifice, He opened a way for us to be close to God. By His Scriptures, the Lord reveals Himself to us. Through His Spirit, Christ pours His love into our hearts. In Heaven, we will experience Immanuel completely and permanently. We will be His people, and Christ will be visibly present with us. The Lord will wipe every tear from our eyes with His own finger.¹²

Christ came from Heaven to Earth to show the way
From the earth to the cross, my debt to pay
From the cross to the grave, from the grave to the sky
Lord, I lift Your name on high ¹³

Prayer

Lord Jesus, You understand our every hurt and struggle. You brought Yourself low to die in our place and raise us up to God. We put our trust in You. Thank You that You will walk through every moment of life with us, and one day we will see You face to face and be with You forever. What a day that will be! What a wonderful Savior You are! We are overwhelmed by Your love and goodness. Help us to pour out our gratitude in service to You.¹⁴ Amen.

Notes 1 Bill's true story adapted from Matt Proctor, "Carols for Any Season of Suffering." 2 Blaise Pascal, *Pensees*, 1670. 3 Heb 2:17-18, 4:15. 4 Isa 7:14; Matt 1:23. 5 William Cowper, "There is a Fountain Filled with Blood," 1772. 6 Heb 13:6. See also Deut 31:6,8; Josh 1:5. 7 Isa 44:22. 8 *Elisabeth Elliot Newsletter*, July/August 1994. 9 1 Pet 5:7. 10 Max Lucado, *Next Door Savior*, 2006. 11 Mike Duran, "God Most Nigh," 2005. 12 Rom 5:5; Rev 21:4. 13 Rick Founds, "Lord, I Lift Your Name On High," 1989. 14 See 1 Cor 13:12; 1 John 3:1-3; Rev 22:4-5; Rom 12:1.

God's love is one of the great realities of the universe,
a pillar upon which the hope of the world rests.

But it is a personal, intimate thing, too.

God loves His people with an everlasting love
and draws us with His unfailing kindness.

(A.W. Tozer)

3

Jesus, the Triple Cure

The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of Heaven and Earth. He does not live in temples built by humans. He gives everyone life and breath. From one man (Adam), God made all the nations, and He marked out their appointed times in history. God did this so that people would seek Him and perhaps reach out for Him and find Him, though the Lord is not far from any of us. For in Him we live and move and have our being... Now this is eternal life: that they know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom You have sent.
(Acts 17:24-28 excerpts; John 17:3)

Chesterton's Famous Three Words

Gilbert Keith “G.K.” Chesterton (1874-1936) was an English writer and philosopher. Before he came to faith in Christ, he was an agnostic who dabbled with the occult and suffered from spiritual darkness and depression. But as he studied the Scriptures, God the Holy Spirit made Jesus attractive to him.

Chesterton met and married Frances Blogg (1869–1938), another author. He admired her Christian faith and how she lived it out. She trusted and obeyed the Bible, she taught Sunday school, and she cared for sick and elderly people. Frances was the first person G.K. had known whose faith in

Jesus was woven into every aspect of her life. She led him to Christ as the Liberator of his soul.

Chesterton once responded to a newspaper's question, "What is wrong with the world?" Chesterton avoided all the usual complaints: breakdown of the family, flawed education, greed, injustice, or violence. Instead, he gave a famous answer:

In the eternal sense, the answer to the question, "What is wrong?" is, or should be, "*I am wrong.*"¹

Beautiful... and Broken

God created humankind, male and female, in His own image and likeness. Humans are unique among all God's creatures, higher than animals and a little lower than angels. The Lord made us to imitate Him in knowledge, righteousness, and holiness.² What a splendid start! Adam and Eve lived in loving harmony with their Creator and each other until they followed Satan's rebellious ways.

Our first parents, by their own free choice, distrusted and disobeyed God. Even in paradise, they fell from their beautiful beginning, dragging us all down with them. Now *our* thinking, being, and doing are bent away from God. Now *everyone* does whatever seems right in their own eyes.³ Even secular thinkers recognize that we are a mess.⁴

So Chesterton's three-word answer is right. Each of us is a rebel who fails to love the Lord with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. And we fail to love our neighbors.⁵ Most problems on our planet flow from these two failures.

But there's good news! As Pastor Jack Miller (1928–1996) said, "Cheer up! We are worse sinners than we ever dared imagine. And we are more loved by God than we ever dared hope."

God Restores Us

Praise the Lord, He is loving, gracious, and merciful. He did not reject or abandon the human race. The Lord's *image in us was defaced, but it can't be erased*. God decided to reclaim all that we had lost and make it better! From Genesis 3:15 onward, the whole Bible shows us God's rescue mission, fulfilled in Jesus.

The Lord says, "I will put My law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be My people... They will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest. For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more." (Jeremiah 31:33-34)⁶

To bring His Old Testament people back to Himself, the Lord used prophets (like Moses), priests (like Aaron), and kings (like David) as mediators. These leaders were only human beings, sometimes faithful to God, sometimes not. But each of them pointed ahead to Jesus. Over 300 prophecies in Scripture foretold Christ. Only Jesus (which means "God saves") is qualified to deliver us from our sin and bring us back to God.⁷

"Christ" is not Jesus' last name. It's a title meaning *the Anointed One*, the Messiah, the One God sent to crush Satan and all evil. Over 2,000 years ago, God's reclamation project came to its pinnacle when Jesus came into this world, into history. Unlike all other flawed mediators, Christ (the God-man) is our *perfect* Prophet, Priest, and King. He is the Lord's "Triple Cure" for all that ails us.

Christ our Prophet

In our heads (our knowing), we don't respect God and His ways rightly. We are suckers for following the crowd and the devil's lies. So Jesus is the long-awaited Prophet who reveals God to us fully and finally.⁸ Christ is the Master Teacher of all time because no teacher ever loved his students as Jesus loves us. Christ's first hearers exclaimed, "No one ever spoke the way this man does!" Everyone was impressed with the Lord and amazed by His gracious words. They were open-mouthed at Jesus' teaching because He taught with real authority, unlike other religious leaders.⁹ Christ said, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me."¹⁰ So we ought to follow Jesus gladly.

Christ our Priest

In our hearts (our being), we are guilty of not acting justly, loving mercy, or walking humbly with God.¹¹ And the Lord is completely holy and just, so He hates and must punish sin. We are sinning against God's loving rule when we do wrong as He defines it and neglect the good He commands.

The idea of sacrifice seems primitive to modern people, but God says that we cannot be pardoned and purified unless there is blood shed from a death.¹² Christ must be punished for our sins or else *we* must be punished. Deep down we know this is true. Jesus is the Priest who offered Himself up once and for all to satisfy God's justice and to reconcile us to His Father.

Whoever conceals their sins does not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them receives God's mercy...
Blessed are those whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. (Proverbs 28:13; Psalm 32:1)

Christ our King

In our lives (our doing), we are weak, worried, wandering, and wild without God's loving leadership. So Jesus comes as the King of kings and Lord of lords to rule and defend us. He restrains and conquers all of His and our enemies. Our Shepherd-King also guides us in paths of righteousness in our everyday stuff.¹³ So we must bend our hearts, minds, and lives to Him forever. And what a loving, gracious Ruler He is!

Christ's kingship unfolds in stages. God is fulfilling all His plans and giving people more time to turn back to Him.

- From all eternity, He was, is, and ever will be King of His Creation.
- All through the Old Testament, Jesus ruled history and saved people from sin and danger.
- At Christ's First Coming, He accomplished a mighty salvation for us and decisively defeated Satan.
- Between His First and Second Comings, Jesus is hallowing God's name, advancing His Kingdom, and causing His will to be done on Earth as it is in Heaven.
- When Christ returns, He will consummate our salvation, destroy His enemies, and bring us into a new heaven and new earth, filled with God's righteousness.¹⁴

Receiving Jesus' sacrifice as our Savior and surrendering to Him as our Lord is what makes us Christians. Have you done that? If not, ask God to save and rule you.

If you declare with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved and never be put to shame.

(Romans 10:9-11)

Prayer

Lord Jesus, You have done everything for us as our Prophet, Priest, and King. We know and believe that You are the eternal Son of God. Now help us to taste and see Your infinite goodness. You came to seek and to save the least and the lost, including us. Your love is so amazing, so divine, it demands our souls, our lives, our all. Help us to follow You forever!¹⁵

Dying, You destroyed our death.
Rising, You restored our life.
Lord Jesus, come in glory! Amen.¹⁶

Notes 1 *London Daily News*, Aug 16, 1905. 2 Gen 1:27-28; Ps 8:5; Col 3:10; Eph 4:24. 3 Judg 17:6, 21:25. 4 See Ferdinand Lundberg, *The Natural Depravity of Mankind: Observations on the Human Condition*, 1994. Lundberg defines depravity as individuals putting their personal interests ahead of the law and the common good. 5 Mark 12:29-31 (quoting Deut 6:4-5; Lev 19:18). 6 See also Ezek 36:24-29. 7 Matt 1:21; Rom 3:21-26; 1 Tim 2:5; Rev 5:9. 8 See Deut 18:15; Acts 3:22, 7:37. 9 John 7:46; Matt 7:28-29; Luke 4:22. 10 John 14:6. 11 Micah 6:8. 12 Heb 9:22. 13 Ps 23:3. See also 1 Cor 15:25; Col 2:15; Rev 17:14. 14 See 2 Pet 3:13; Isa 65:17, 66:22; Rom 8:21. 15 Prayer based on the Nicene Creed; 1 John 5:20; Ps 34:8; Luke 19:10; Isaac Watts, “When I Survey the Wondrous Cross,” 1707. 16 “Dying, You Destroyed our Death,” Presbyterian Hymn #567.

4

Christ the Solid Rock: A Song of Hope

Hear my cry, O God. Listen to my prayer. From the ends of the earth I call to You, I call as my heart grows faint. Lead me to the rock that is higher than I... Find rest, O my soul, in God alone. My hope comes from Him. He alone is my rock and my salvation... I will not be shaken.
(Psalm 61:1-2, 62:5-6)

More Solid than El Capitan

Years ago in Yosemite National Park, there was a series of earthquakes. Houses were overturned, and people were thrown out of bed! Loose rocks from the mountains tumbled down into the valley. People fled in panic. But one man camped near “El Capitan,” a mammoth rock in the park. El Capitan is 3,000 feet tall along its tallest face. It has a massive base of three miles. The survivor reasoned that if this giant rock ever moved, the whole world would be ending.¹ El Capitan kept him safe.

The Lord (Father, Son, and Spirit) often speaks of Himself as the *Rock* who gives security and safety to His people. God the Sovereign Father promised, “See, I lay a stone in Zion, a precious cornerstone for a sure foundation. Whoever relies on Christ will never be stricken with panic... Jesus is the Rock. His deeds are perfect. Everything He does is just and fair. He is a faithful God who does no wrong. How righteous and true!”²

Christians don't just "hang in there." We hang onto Christ our solid Rock, knowing that He protects and stabilizes us.

Elisabeth Elliot tells us how to cling to the Lord: "Faith, prayer, and obedience are our requirements. We are not offered immunity and exemption from the world's woes. The blessings we are offered in Christ come from another world."³

Life with Christ is an endless hope.
Life without Christ is a hopeless end.
(John Blanchard)

Powerful Hymn, Humble Beginning

Hymnwriter Edward Mote (1797-1874) was not raised in a Christian home. His parents were poor, and young Eddie spent his Sundays playing in the streets of London. He wrote, "I was so ignorant that I did not know that there was a God."

His school did not allow the Bible to be taught. But the Lord opened Edward's heart to call on Jesus when he was 16. Mote heard and responded to a sermon based on Isaiah 53: "We all, like sheep, have gone astray. Each of us has turned to our own way, and the Lord has laid on Jesus the iniquity of us all."

Edward served Christ as a cabinetmaker for the next 37 years, working heartily as for the Lord and not just for people. At the age of 55, he became pastor of a Baptist church, where he labored for 21 years.

Mote wrote the lyrics below one day in 1834 on his way to work. Soon after, he visited a dying woman, Mrs. King. He read Scripture and prayed for her. Then he took his song from his

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pocket, and they sang together.⁴ The message of Mote's hymn is that our assurance of salvation rests on Jesus' saving work and God's unchanging grace.

Mote's chorus refers to the Lord's parable of The Wise and Foolish Builders.

Jesus says, "Everyone who hears My words and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the floods rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house. Yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock." (Matt 7:24-25)

Let's look at the hymn's four stanzas with related Scriptures.

Stanza #1: Atonement

My hope is built on nothing less
than Jesus' blood and righteousness
I dare not trust the sweetest frame
but wholly lean on Jesus' name

Scripture: At just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since we have now been justified by Jesus' blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through Him!⁵

Christ not only paid the penalty for His people's sins on the cross. He also obeyed all of God's commandments during His life so that believers are counted as righteous in God's sight. Now Christians lean alone on what Christ has done for us, not on our own efforts. That's the greatest news of all eternity!

Stanza #2: Solid and Ongoing Help

When darkness veils Christ's lovely face
I rest on His unchanging grace
In every rough and stormy gale
My anchor holds within the veil

Scripture: We have this hope in Jesus as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. Christ, our Forerunner, entered Heaven's throne room on our behalf... So let us draw near to God with sincere hearts and with the full assurance that faith brings.⁶

The storms of life may threaten to crash our ships (our lives), but our anchor is firmly fixed on Christ. A boat's anchor sinks to the bottom of the sea. It's even more secure if it hooks onto a solid rock deep down. Our confidence in Christ is even better! Our anchor of hope is solidly attached *upward* to Jesus Himself and His throne in Heaven!

True Christians may feel insecure in dark or dangerous times, and our emotions are fickle and unstable. So...

- We look *back* to Jesus' finished work—His death, resurrection, ascension, and pouring out of the Spirit.
- We look *up* and remember that Christ continually advocates, intercedes, and prays for us. Because Christ stands ready to help us, we can run right into His headquarters to talk to Him.
- And we look *forward* to Christ returning in blazing fire with His powerful angels. He will give relief to those of us who are suffering and troubled. Jesus will punish with everlasting destruction those who will not repent and do not obey His gospel.⁷

Stanza #3: Guaranteed Salvation

His oath, His covenant, His blood
support me in the whelming flood
When all around my soul gives way
Christ then is all my hope and stay

Scripture: On the night before the cross, Jesus celebrated the Last Supper with His disciples, which became the Lord's Supper for us. Christ said, "This cup is the new covenant between God and His people—an agreement confirmed with My blood, which is poured out as a sacrifice for you."⁸

Jesus' covenant is His oath-sworn promise, binding Himself to us forever. John Blanchard says, "Christ's followers may fall, but because of His covenant, we will not fall from grace. God has never torn up a Christian's birth certificate. Heaven is more certain for us than the grave."

Stanza #4: Second Coming

When Christ shall come with trumpet sound
O may I then in Him be found
Dressed in His righteousness alone
Faultless to stand before God's throne

Scripture: For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive... in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. The trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed... I delight greatly in the Lord. My soul rejoices in my God. For He has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of His righteousness.⁹

Jesus' return for His followers is more certain than tomorrow's sunrise. Christ has died! Christ is risen! Christ will come again!

Let us live joyfully today, following Jesus out of love for Him who first loved us. Pastor John Piper says that we can prepare for the Lord's return in these ways:

- Pursue Christlikeness now.
- Endure hardships for Jesus' sake.
- Work faithfully for Christ.¹⁰

To Him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you before His glorious presence without fault and with great joy—to the only God our Savior—be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen. (Jude 24-25)

Prayer

Heavenly Father, we praise You that in times of trouble, You are our Rock, our Refuge, and our Rescuer, always ready to help. You are our immovable foundation, our guarantee, and our solid place of safety. Guard us from trouble and temptation wherever we go. Keep evil and the evil one far from us. Help us not to be afraid because You are the Lord our God who fights for us. Thank You that Your goodness and mercy are following us, and we will dwell in Your house forever! Hear us and help us until You bring us home. Amen.¹¹

On Christ the solid Rock I stand
All other ground is sinking sand

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Notes 1 Story from Rev. Theodore Cuyler, Lafayette Avenue Presbyterian Church, Brooklyn, NY. 2 Isa 28:16; Deut 32:4. See also 1 Cor 10:1-5; 1 Pet 2:1-10. 3 Elisabeth Elliot, *These Strange Ashes: Is God Still in Charge?* 2004. 4 “The Story Behind: The Solid Rock.” *hymncharts.com*, Apr 8, 2024. 5 Rom 5:6-9. 6 Heb 6:19-20, 10:22 (paraphrase). 7 2 Thes 1:5-10. 8 Luke 22:20 NLT. 9 1 Cor 15:22, 52; Isaiah 61:10. 10 John Piper, “How Do We Prepare for the Second Coming?” *desiringgod.org*, Oct 21, 2021. 11 Prayer builds on Ps 18:2; Matt 6:13; Exod 14:14; Ps 23.

Do you not know?
Have you not heard?
The Lord is the everlasting God,
the Creator of the ends of the earth.
He will not grow tired or weary,
and His understanding no one can fathom.
He gives strength to the weary
and increases the power of the weak.
Even youths grow tired and weary,
and young men stumble and fall,
but those who hope in the Lord
will renew their strength.
They will soar on wings like eagles.
They will run and not grow weary.
They will walk and not be faint.
(Isaiah 40:28-31)

5

God's Pattern for Growth

God says: Though your beginning was small, your latter days will be very great... The righteous will flourish like a palm tree. They will grow like a cedar of Lebanon. Planted in the LORD's house, they will flourish... They will still bear fruit in old age. They will stay fresh and green... Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

(Job 8:7; Psalm 92:12-14; 2 Peter 3:18)

The Growth Chart

Jennifer Benson Schuldt prizes a certain piece of her house. "If my family ever moves from our current house, I want to unhinge the pantry door and take it with me! That special door shows how my children have grown over the years. Every few months, my husband and I place our children against it and pencil a mark just above their heads."¹

I didn't mark the door in our home, but I like to look at family pictures and see how much our adult children and teenage grandchildren have changed. It seems like yesterday that they were small, and I was blessed to be watching their development. Seeing this growth is precious. The Lord also loves to see His children improve and mature in Christ! Jesus and the Bible writers prayed for growth, and we should too.²

Christ's Four-Part Pattern

Our Lord was and still is 100% God and 100% human in one person. Luke 2:52 describes how Christ matured over time: "Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and people." This verse describes Christ's life from age 12 to His baptism at age 30. One verse summarizes 18 years!

In many ways, Jesus' development appeared ordinary. He respected His parents, did His chores, and matured as a person. God the Father, as well as Jesus' family and neighbors, watched Him advance to become the man God planned Him to be. Christ was and is unique. He is also the supreme Example who calls us to follow Him.³ This means that *we* are to grow mentally, physically, spiritually, and relationally.

I often feel discouraged by my slow progress, and maybe you do, too. Let's ask the Holy Spirit to show us the areas where we need to become more like Jesus in our character and conduct. Thank God, He promises that since *He* began *His* work of grace in us, *He* will continue growing us!⁴

May God Himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul, and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The God who calls you is faithful, and He will do it. (1 Thessalonians 5:23-24)

In earlier chapters, we looked at who Jesus is and how He saves us. Now let's look at an overview of Christ's personal journey that sets the pattern for us to imitate.

Growing in Wisdom

J. I. Packer wrote, “Wisdom is the power to see and the inclination to *choose the best and highest goal* (as God defines it), together with the surest means of attaining it.”⁵ As the Son of God, Jesus was eternally all-knowing, but as the God-man, our Lord learned wisdom gradually.

- He was raised in a godly family who taught Him.
- He attended worship services regularly.
- He discussed questions with Bible teachers.
- He memorized the Scriptures.
- He got alone with God and prayed about everything.

We can’t change the family we were born into, but we *can* choose *how* we spend our time and *whom* we spend it with.

Proverbs 13:20 says, “Walk with the wise and become wise, for a companion of fools suffers harm.” We can’t live the Christian life alone. So let’s hang out with friends who do good, seek justice, and help the oppressed, orphans, and widows as Jesus did.⁶ Let’s seek out church members, co-workers, and neighbors who help us move forward in following the Lord because we were made and saved to grow! Let’s also stay away from people who tempt us to slide backward.⁷

Prayer for Wisdom

Lord, without Your help, we sin and go astray. Instruct us by Your Holy Spirit and Holy Word. Teach us also through nature, history, literature, and everyday events. Make us wise like You, and send us godly people who help us imitate Christ. Amen.⁸

Growing in Health

When the Son of God came to Earth, He subtracted nothing from His divine nature but added on a human body and soul. Jesus advanced in age and height, progressing through the ordinary stages of infancy, childhood, adolescence, and adulthood. Jesus' adoptive father Joseph was a carpenter, so Jesus developed a strong work ethic and skills by working with him. Christ walked everywhere, which required stamina and endurance. He took good care of His body.

Physical energy helps us do spiritual work. God calls us to preserve our own lives and love Him with all our strength.⁹ This requires sleep, nutrition, exercise, and medical care.

A Christian's body is a temple of the Holy Spirit,
a valuable vessel for honoring God.¹⁰

If we neglect our bodies, it's hard to fulfill the callings God has given us in our family, friendships, work, and community. If we have pain or limitations, it's good and right to pray for God's healing, to accept the problems He doesn't remove, and to do the best we can with what we have. God can be glorified in both strength and weakness.¹¹

Prayer for Healing and Strength

Lord, thank You that we are wonderfully made by You. Heal us in all the ways we need healing because You are our Great Physician. Help us to protect and care for our bodies, not to be foolish or reckless with them. Make us physically healthy to serve You cheerfully all our days. Amen.¹²

Growing in Pleasing God

As God the Son, Christ enjoyed perfect fellowship with the Father and the Spirit long before Creation. As the God-man, Jesus was anointed with the Spirit to do the work which the Trinity assigned. Christ said, “I have come down from Heaven not to do My will but to do the will of the Father who sent Me... I always do what pleases Him.”¹³ Even though Jesus was God, He learned obedience as a man from the things He suffered.¹⁴

For us, sinners saved by God’s grace, godliness doesn’t come instantly. We slowly learn to care more about pleasing the Lord than anyone else. The Psalmist says, “I will run in the way of Your commandments when You enlarge my heart!”¹⁵

Prayer to Please God

Change my heart, O God. Make it ever true.
Change my heart, O God. May I be like You.
You are the Potter. I am the clay.
Mold me and make me. This is what I pray.¹⁶

Growing in Active Love

Peter had an up-front view of Christ in action. He said, “God anointed Jesus with the Holy Spirit and power, and He went around doing good and healing...because God was with Him.”¹⁷ Christ committed Himself to helping *all kinds of people*, especially disadvantaged ones. As Philip Yancey pointed out, “Though the world may be tilted toward the rich and powerful, Jesus tilted toward the underdogs.”¹⁸

Christ told the well-known parable of The Good Samaritan to illustrate how to love our neighbors as ourselves.¹⁹ The ancient Samaritans and Jews hated each other for centuries. In Jesus’

parable, a traveling Jew was attacked, robbed, beaten, and left to die. Two religious professionals passed near the man on the roadside but stayed away for selfish reasons.

Jesus made the hated Samaritan the surprising hero in the story. This man put his plans on hold, took a risk, and got involved in a messy situation to save an enemy's life!

Notice that the Samaritan didn't wait for his feelings to kick in. He followed God's command to love his neighbor and enemy because it was the right thing to do.

Christ is like that Good Samaritan. Jesus left His comfort zone in Heaven and came down to save us from our sins and their consequences. He heals the wounds we suffer from all kinds of injuries. He wants *us* to get our hands dirty, not to walk on by. Love that humbly puts others first, even across boundaries, even when it's inconvenient, is the mark of true Christians.

Prayer for Loving like Christ

Savior, help us go out of our way to love our neighbors, even and especially the unlikeable ones. Give us God-pleasing lips and lives so we don't cause others to stumble. Guide us to:

- walk in wisdom
- care for our bodies
- pursue what pleases You
- and demonstrate compassion.

Lord Jesus, transform us into men and women who think, feel, act, and look more like You! Help us to be humble and patient, bearing with one another in love. Make us trustworthy and true, so that we show You off in everyday ways. Amen. ²⁰

Notes 1 *Our Daily Bread*, July 5, 2014. 2 Ps 51:10; John 17:16-18; Eph 1:14-19. 3 Jesus makes a big deal about following Him. See Matt 4:19, 8:22, 9:9, 10:38, 16:24, 19:21; John 1:43, 8:12, 21:19, and more. 4 Phil 1:6. 5 J.I. Packer, *Knowing God*, 2011, Chapter 9. 6 Isa 1:17 NLT. 7 See Ps 1:1-2; 2 Tim 3:1-5. 8 Prayer based on Ps 119:176, 143:1, 51:6; Phil 3:17. 9 See Mark 12:29-31; 3 John 2. See also *Westminster Larger Catechism* #135-136 and *Westminster Shorter Catechism* #68-69. I use the Modern English Version adopted by the Evangelical Presbyterian Church in 2009. 10 1 Cor 6:19-20. 11 2 Cor 12:9. 12 Prayer adapted from Ps 139:14; Jer 33:6; Mark 2:15-17; Prov 3:7-8; 1 Cor 10:31. 13 John 6:38, 8:29; see also Matt 26:36-46; John 4:34. 14 Heb 5:8 NLT. 15 Ps 119:32. 16 Eddie Espinosa, "Change My Heart, O God," 1982, based on Ps 51:10; Isa 45:9, 64:8; Jer 18:1-4. 17 Acts 10:38. 18 Adapted from Philip Yancey, *The Jesus I Never Knew*, 1995. See also *The Word in Life Study Bible*, "The Underclass," p. 236-237. 19 Luke 10:25-37. 20 Prayer builds on Rom 13:8; Matt 5:43-48; Prov 10:21; Matt 18:6-7; Eph 4:1-2; 2 Pet 1:3-9; Titus 2:10.

Our righteousness is found in Jesus Christ,
and our hope depends not upon anything good in *us*,
but upon the fullness of grace and love in *Him*,
and upon His obedience unto death.

(John Newton)

6

Jesus' Grace for Stumblers

We all stumble in many ways... Whoever conceals their sins does not prosper, but the one who confesses and renounces them finds mercy... Jesus said, "I have not come to call those who think they are righteous, but those who know they are sinners and need to repent."
(James 3:2; Proverbs 28:13; Luke 5:32)

The Freedom of Honesty

Howard Schultz is an American businessman who was the chief executive officer of Starbucks from 1986 to 2000. When he resigned, the coffee chain was very successful. Eight years later, Starbucks was stumbling due to a bad economy and intense competition. Schultz was called back as CEO to lead a turnaround. But before his team could move forward, they had to deal with their past.

Schultz said, "First, we leaders had to stand up in front of the entire company and make a confession. We had failed the 180,000 Starbucks people and their families. We had to admit to ourselves and to the people of this company that we owned the mistakes we had made. Once we admitted our wrongs, it was a powerful turning point. We confessed our secret, let it out, and it felt like a burden was removed from our shoulders."¹

Business, political, and church leaders often fail the folks who depend on us. Ordinary people make mistakes, too. We often hurt those we love most, family members and close friends. On top of that, all of us fail to truly love and obey God, our Creator and Caretaker. When we are honest and real, God helps us.

God is light. In Him there is no darkness at all.
If we claim to have fellowship with Him and yet walk
in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth.
But if we walk in the light, as He is in the light,
we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of
Jesus, His Son, purifies us from all sin. (1 John 1:5-7)

God Knows We All Stumble

The Apostle James was only human. He was Jesus' younger half-brother, the son of Mary and Joseph. James grew up in Nazareth with Jesus, but James didn't believe in Christ as Lord until after Jesus' resurrection.² Once his eyes were opened, he became a follower of Christ and a leader in the early Church.

In James' letter to fellow Christians, he writes, "We all stumble in many ways."³ Although he had several claims to fame, James honestly admitted that he was still just a sinner saved by God's grace. The Greek verb for stumble is *ptaió*, and it means *to err, fall, trip, make a mistake, or sin against*.

In the same verse, James zeroes in on a key sin area: "If we could control our tongues, we would be perfect and could also control ourselves in every other way."⁴ Many of our sins involve hurting people with our words. As author Amanda Flowers wrote, "Many things have been opened by mistake, but none as often as our mouths."⁵

Christians *want* to keep Christ's commands and do what pleases Him, but we still fail frequently. That's our reality in this life. So, all along the way to Heaven, Christians keep praying, "God, be merciful to me, for I am a sinner."⁶

Jesus is our Advocate

If we confess our sins, the Lord is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. God does not want His dear children to sin. But if anybody does sin, we have an Advocate with the Father—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world. (1 John 1:9, 2:1-2)

Coming Back to the Lord

God calls us to *repent*. That's not a negative word. It means coming home to life with Christ! Jesus said to a woman caught in the act of a scandalous wrong, "I do not condemn you. Go now and leave your life of sin."⁷ He says the same to us.

Repentance is the Lord's gracious gift worked out in us by the Holy Spirit. God:

- Alerts us to our sinfulness so we can turn from it
- Amazes us with the matchless mercy of Christ
- Moves us to grieve for and hate our sins
- Empowers us to turn away from our wrong desires and doings and back to Jesus
- Transforms us to desire grateful, loving obedience to Him.⁸

Our part in the process of repentance is to submit to the Lord as He renews our hearts, minds, and lives and teaches us how to turn around and walk in the opposite direction of our sin.

Humble Reliance on the Holy Spirit

James has a lot to teach us about our words and actions in his short, powerful letter. Go read it! James shows us that obeying Jesus is impossible without dependence upon the Spirit indwelling our hearts.⁹ The Holy Spirit helps us to:

- Submit to God
- Resist the devil
- Stay near to God
- Humble ourselves before the Lord

As we follow Jesus in this way, He promises to lift us up.¹⁰

Spiritual Muscles

Believers may fall seven times, but with the Lord's help we will get up again. For God is working in us, giving us the desire and the power to do what pleases Him. (Proverbs 24:16; Philippians 2:13)

Christ's believers are not saved by our work (*what we do*), but we are declared righteous because of *Christ's finished work (what He did) for us*. That's our permanent status with God and He will not revoke it. Now because we are saved by God's grace, *we can and must exercise our spiritual muscles to get back up when we fail*.

All Christians will battle sin as long as we live in this world.¹¹ But by God's grace, our failure is never fatal or final. Youth leader Mike Yaconelli explains, "Accepting the reality of our broken, flawed lives is the beginning of healthy spirituality. We let go of perfectionism and, instead, seek God who is present to help us in the tangledness of our lives."¹²

Figure skater Scott Hamilton was an Olympic gold medalist and is a committed follower of Christ. Scott is honest about his mistakes. He said in an interview, "I calculated how many times I fell during my skating career: 41,600 times! But here's the funny thing: I got up 41,600 times. That's the muscle we have to build in our soul—the one that reminds us to *just get up*."¹³

The Lord Upholds Us

King David said, "My soul follows close behind the Lord. His right hand supports and sustains me."¹⁴ What a way to describe God's uplifting faithfulness! The whole Bible teaches that true believers are *preserved* by God (the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) so that we can *persevere*.

Jesus reminds us that when we stay close to Him, we will live fruitful lives. Relying on His strength, we are more than conquerors through Jesus Who loved us.¹⁵ Knowing that God is lifting up and empowering us by His Holy Spirit enables us to overcome and keep on following Christ, even though we stumble and fall many times along God's path.

We Must Forgive

We need mercy from the Lord and others every day. So we need to be merciful to others who wrong us, also. Christ says, "If you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive

you.”¹⁶ Soon we may be the offending ones, instead of the offended. As Pastor Thomas Adams puts it, whoever cannot forgive others breaks the bridge over which they need to cross.

Jesus says, “Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.” (Matthew 5:7)

Prayer

Lord, only You are able to keep us from stumbling. Only You can present us before Your glorious presence without fault and with great joy. We repent right now of every sin You are showing us. Save us by Your mercy. We praise You, God our Savior, for Your glory, majesty, power, and authority. We are Your sons and daughters. We praise You, Christ our Lord. We praise You, Holy Spirit. Keep on rescuing us, no matter how often or how badly we stumble. You are the strength of our hearts and our Portion forever. Amen.¹⁷

Notes 1 “We Had to Own the Mistakes,” *Harvard Bus. Review*, Jul-Aug 2010, p. 109. 2 See 1 Cor 15:1-8. 3 James 3:2a NIV. 4 James 3:2b NLT. 5 Maurice Switzer also said, “It is better to remain silent, at the risk of being thought a fool, than to talk and remove all doubt of it.” 6 Luke 18:13. 7 John 8:11. 8 Adapted from Westminster Shorter Catechism #87. 9 See Rom 8:1-17; Susan Simon, “Why Is It So Hard to Follow Jesus?” *Medium*, Aug 13, 2018. 10 See James 4:6-10. 11 See Rom 7:14-25; Gal 5:13-26. 12 Mike Yaconelli, *Messy Spirituality: God's Annoying Love for Imperfect People*, 2015. 13 Juliet Macur, *New York Times*, Feb 18, 2018. 14 Ps 63:8. 15 John 15:5; Rom 8:37. 16 Matt 6:14-15. 17 Prayer builds on Jude 24-25; Ps 139:23-24; Eph 1:12-14, 4:30; Ps 34:17, 73:26.

7

Christ, our Strength and Shield

The LORD is my strength and my shield.
My heart trusts in Him, and I am helped.
My heart leaps for joy, and I give thanks to Him in song.
(Psalm 28:7)

A 9/11 Miracle

Genelle Guzman-McMillan was in the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001, during the terrorist bombing attacks. With God's help, she stayed alive for 27 hours, trapped in a collapsed building of twisted steel and smoking debris.

Her head was pinned by two pieces of concrete. Her legs and right hand were sandwiched between pieces of a stairway. Raised a Roman Catholic in Trinidad, Genelle had fallen away from the Lord. Now in the rubble, she called on Him. She prayed, "God, please save me. Give me a second chance. I promise I will change my life and follow You." Genelle was the last person rescued from the World Trade Center.¹

A Powerful Verse

Deep down, we all know that turning to the Lord and surrendering to Him is the only remedy for disaster. Psalm 28:7 is a single verse with 6 big ideas in it. It is a window into many Bible truths. Meditating on this one sentence can train and

transform us. God the Holy Spirit works through His Holy Word to save and renew us. That's our deepest need.

The Lord is My Strength

The name “LORD” (all capitals in our English Bibles) translates God's most personal Old Testament name (YHWH in Hebrew). When God promised to rescue His people after 400 years of slavery, He reminded Moses of this name, the LORD.² It means that God is the Creator and Upholder of the universe, the Promise Keeper, and the All-Powerful One on our side.³

“The LORD will march out like a champion-warrior. With a shout He will raise the battle cry and will triumph over His enemies.” (Isaiah 42:13)

Jesus says, “In this world you will have trouble (tribulation). But take heart! I have overcome the world.” (John 16:33)

The LORD reveals His character by many different names in Scripture so that we may know Him and call on Him.⁴ Christ empowers us to overcome internal struggles like discouragement, fear, doubt, envy, bitterness, and ungodly desires. He also wards off external attacks from Satan and human enemies.

You hear me when I call. You are my morning song.
Though darkness fills the night, it cannot hide the light.

Whom shall I fear?

My strength is in Your name, for You alone can save.

You will deliver me. Yours is the victory!

I know Who goes before me; I know Who stands behind.

The One who reigns forever, He is a friend of mine.

The God of Angel Armies is always by my side!⁵

The Lord Is My Shield

A shield in Bible times was a soldier's defensive weapon, the difference between life and death. Sometimes that shield was large enough to protect the entire body. It was made of wood overlaid with canvas and leather, and when soaked in water, a shield could snuff out flaming arrows.

King David prayed, "Have mercy on me, my God, have mercy on me, for in You I take refuge. I will take refuge in the shadow of Your wings until the disaster has passed."⁶

God keeps telling us in His Word that when we belong to Him, He will protect us. He is our Shield, Fortress, Shelter, and Hiding Place.⁷ When we call on Christ and follow Him, He covers us spiritually and helps us to resist the devil's schemes.

Prayer: Lord, when we are weak or weary, give us some of Your almighty strength, and surround us with Your loving presence like a shield. Do not lead us into temptation but deliver us from evil and the evil one. Yours is the Kingdom, the power, and the glory forever! Amen.⁸

My Heart Trusts in Him

Trusting God involves our entire personality—mind, heart, and action. We must embrace Christ, the whole Person, with our whole self.

- In our mind, we believe what the Lord reveals about Himself in the Bible. We know the Christ we are following. We understand the facts of Jesus' sinless life, death, resurrection, and promised return.

Christ Changes Everything

- In our heart, we have inner conviction that *we* are sinners who need the Savior. We are moved that Jesus loves us unconditionally, brings us into His family, and rescues us as often as we need it.⁹
- In our will (the freedom and responsibility to make moral choices), we commit and daily decide to trust and obey Christ as our Redeemer-King.

Trusting Christ means leaning and resting on His everlasting arms. He is so good and loving that He *wants* the best for us. He's so wise that He *knows* the best for us. He is so strong that He *does* the best for us even when we don't see that.

Hidden in the hollow of His blessed hand
Never foe can follow, never traitor stand
Not a surge of worry, not a shade of care
Not a blast of hurry can touch the spirit there
Stayed upon Lord Jesus, hearts are fully blessed
Finding, as He promised, perfect peace and rest¹⁰

I am Helped

As we recognize who Christ is and trust Him, He befriends and boosts us, heals and helps us, sanctifies and sustains us.

A soldier in wartime wrote to his captain:
"I knew that wherever I was, that you thought of me,
and if I got in a tight place, you would come."¹¹

Christ is the Friend who sticks closer than a brother. He gives mercy and grace to help us in our times of need.¹²

Jesus says, “So do not fear, for I am with you. Do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you. I will uphold you with My righteous right hand.”¹³

Prayer: Lord, our help comes from You, the Maker and Master of Heaven and Earth. Your ways bring us great reward.¹⁴ If we try our own way first and only turn to You as a last resort, that dishonors You and hurts us. Help us to not be foolish, but to always run to You and follow Your commands. Amen.

My Heart Leaps for Joy

Praise the Lord, O my soul. All my inmost being,
praise His holy name and forget not all His benefits.
He forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases.

He redeems your life from the pit
and crowns you with love and compassion.
He satisfies your desires with good things. (Psalm 103:1-5)

Chaplain Lloyd Ogilvie (1930–2019) told how he suffered the worst year of his life. His wife had five major surgeries plus radiation and chemotherapy, several of his staff members quit, and he was drained and depleted. But in the midst of these disasters, he found “artesian joy” in Jesus, like water springing up from an underground river.

Although Ogilvie felt beaten down, God gave him the assurance of being deeply loved and the certainty that nothing could separate him from Christ. It was not gushy or jolly happiness, but a refreshing flow of the Spirit in him, fueling his soul.

Jesus said, “I have taught you so that My joy may be in you and that your joy may be full, complete, and overflowing.” (John 15:11)

Prayer: I will praise You, LORD, with all my heart. I will tell of all Your wonders. I will be glad and rejoice in You. I will sing praises to Your name, Most High. You are a Refuge for the oppressed, a Stronghold in times of trouble. We know Your name and trust in You, for You, LORD, have never forsaken those who seek You. Help us to seek You all our days. Amen.¹⁵

I Give Thanks to Him in Song

Edward Davis’s traumatic life would have crushed many people. He has spent most of his 62 years in institutions (orphanages, psychiatric hospitals, and prisons. Yet in a recent worship service, he came to the microphone and sang:

I love Your voice—You have led me through the fire
In darkest night, You are close like no other
I've known You as a Father, I've known You as a Friend
And I have lived in the goodness of God
'Cause all my life You have been faithful
And all my life You have been so, so good
With every breath that I am able
Oh, I will sing of the goodness of God¹⁶

Edward reminded us that instead of getting stuck on “woe is me,” we can learn to say, “Look what God *has done* for me!” Both Scripture and science tell us that gratitude is healing and powerful. Let’s ask God to give us eyes of faith to see His goodness in the middle of our hardest times.

Christ, our Strength and Shield

Let us praise the Lord for His great love and for the wonderful things He has done for us. For He satisfies the thirsty and fills the hungry with good things.
(Psalm 107)

Prayer: Lord Jesus, You are our Strength and our Song. You are our Salvation. You turn our mourning into dancing, remove our heavy sadness, and clothe us with joy. Help our hearts sing to You and not be silent. O LORD our God, let us shine Your beauty to those who do not yet know or obey You. Amen.¹⁷

The LORD is my strength and my shield.
My heart trusts in Him, and I am helped.
My heart leaps for joy, and I give thanks to Him in song.

We just studied each part of Psalm 28:7! When we do this with any portion of Scripture, the Word of God comes alive to us, and our souls are nourished. Christ truly changes everything.

Notes 1 Genelle Guzman-McMillan, *Angel in the Rubble*, 2014. 2 Ex 3:13-14. 3 Heb 1:1-4; 2 Cor 1:20; Rom 8:31-34. 4 Many lists of God's names in Scripture exist. See for example "The Names of God," Love Worth Finding, lwf.org/names-of-god, 2025. 5 Tomlin, et al, "Whom Shall I Fear," 2012. For song Scriptures see thebereantest.com/chris-tomlin-whom-shall-i-fear-god-of-angel-armies. 6 Psalm 57:1. 7 See Prov 18:10; Ps 27:1, 31:20, 32:7, 46:1, 62:7-8, 91:2. 8 See Matt 6:13. 9 Col 1:13-14; Eph 1:4-8. 10 Frances Ridley Havergal, "Like a River Glorious," 1876. 11 Letter from William Tecumseh Sherman to Ulysses S. Grant in the American Civil War. 12 Prov 17:17, 18:24; Heb 4:16. 13 Isa 41:10. 14 See Ps 121:2, 19:7-11. 15 See Ps 9:1-2, 9-10. 16 Johnson, et al, "Goodness of God," 2019; recorded by CeCe Winans, 2021. 17 Prayer based on Ps 118:14 ESV, Ps 30:11-12; Isa 61:3; Phil 2:15.

About Words of Hope

For everything that was written in the Scriptures was given to teach us and to give us endurance, encouragement, and hope.
(Romans 15:4)

Bob Roane

Bob has served in pastoral ministry since 1980, some of the time overlapping seminary studies and work as a Certified Public Accountant. He is a Minister in the Evangelical Presbyterian Church (EPC) and worships at Christ Presbyterian Church (PCA) in Houston, Texas. He was brought to saving faith in Christ in 1976 through Bible reading and Christian radio. Out of his love for the Lord and His Scriptures, Bob is eager to help others follow Jesus so that they love God and their neighbors. At this stage of life and ministry, Bob has nothing to prove and everything to share.

Along with the rest of Christ's people, in humble reliance upon the Holy Spirit, Bob seeks to:

- Help people know Jesus as Lord and make Him known
- Bring Christ's unchanging Word to an ever-changing world
- Take Jesus' whole Gospel to whole persons
- Equip people to serve Christ in every area of life

Spending his life near the big cities of New York, Philadelphia, and Houston has helped Bob to love, appreciate, and respect people from diverse social, cultural, political, and religious backgrounds. He has a burden for and experience working with people from all economic and educational levels.

Bob's current focus is on teaching, pastoral care and counseling, deeds of compassion, and evangelism. He goes

wherever he is needed to meet people where they are. He has taught at Belhaven University, Star of Hope, River Pointe, Windsor Village United Methodist, Veritas Christian Academy chapel, Work Faith Connection, and several bilingual churches. He has served as a chaplain for the Houston Police Department and volunteers as a Teacher/ Mentor at the Jester III and Carol Vance prison units.

Bob and his wife Marilyn have been married since 1979 and have three adult children, three grandchildren, and a rescued Australian Shepherd.

Our Ministry

Words of Hope began in 1989 as a teaching and radio ministry in New Hope, Pennsylvania to make and equip followers of Jesus Christ. In 1995, our radio program came to Houston, where it ran for some time. In 2007, we became a not-for-profit organization.

In 2018, we launched a website. We have over 400 free articles on Christian faith and life. The address is WOHBM.org. Please visit us!

We reach out in Jesus' name to unloved, untaught, unsaved, and unchurched people who fall through the cracks and bring them Christ's hope through word and deed to:

Rescue the perishing, care for the dying,
Snatch them in pity from sin and the grave,
Weep over the erring ones, lift up the fallen,
Tell them of Jesus, mighty to save.

In Christ alone my hope is found
He is my Light, my Strength, my Song
This Cornerstone, this solid ground
Firm through the fiercest drought and storm
What heights of love, what depths of peace
When fears are stilled, when strivings cease
My Comforter, my All in All
Here in the love of Christ I stand
No guilt in life, no fear in death
This is the power of Christ in me
From life's first cry to final breath
Jesus commands my destiny
No power of hell, no scheme of man
Can ever pluck me from His hand
Till He returns or calls me home
Here in the power of Christ I'll stand

(Getty and Townend, "In Christ Alone," 2001)

We wait in hope for the Lord.
He is our help and our shield.
In Him our hearts rejoice,
for we trust in His holy name.
May Your unfailing love be with us, Lord,
even as we put our hope in You.

(Psalm 33:20-22)