



TIME WITH GOD

Words of hope for those in prison

Barbara J Parsons and John Phillips

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Preface

We have written *Time With God* because we know the immense power of God's Word to bring hope, encouragement, wisdom and guidance to those who are disciples of Jesus Christ and who strive to live godly lives.

We know, too, that it can be especially difficult for Christians to remain strong in their faith, and grow in their faith, while in prison. They may feel particularly isolated, being cut off from their church family, including perhaps those who have mentored them, as well as being separated from their own family. And those who become Christians in prison, or recommit their lives to Christ in prison, may not have any believers outside to offer support and encouragement.

We trust that *Time With God* will provide a measure of help as you face all the challenges of living a Christlike life in what is widely recognised as a dark place. As you live for Christ, you can be sure that there will be some around you who will be attracted to the One who is the Light of the World.

However it is important to study the Bible itself to learn how God wants us to live. *Time With God* is only intended to be a supplement to that basic diet of systematic reading and studying. We encourage you to make that part of your daily routine, ideally using published notes by recognised Bible teachers.

It is our prayer that, as you live as a disciple of Jesus in prison and upon release, the Lord will comfort, strengthen and sustain you

Acknowledgements

and nourish you by His Word. And as He does so, you can be confident that He will use you to bless and encourage others.

We hope that this book will also find its way into the hands of those who are not yet true followers of Jesus. If you are in that position, or if you are not sure what it really means to be a follower of Jesus, please read *The Narrow Way with Jesus* (page 36). Many people have false ideas about how we become a part of God's family: it is vitally important to understand what the Bible actually teaches.

Wherever you are on your journey of faith or if you have yet to begin the journey, we trust that *Time With God* will be a great help and encouragement to you.

Barbara Parsons

John Phillips

April 2020

We wish to acknowledge the debt that Christians owe to hymn writers. We have featured many hymns in the book, some of which were written more than two centuries ago. They are all grounded in the truth of God's Word and continue to strengthen believers in their faith and inspire them to worship God. We are sure that some will want to hold on to this book because of the words of the hymns.

We are grateful to the men and women who have contributed their own reflections on how God has used scriptures to encourage and sustain them during their time in prison. We are grateful to those chaplains who have provided practical help and encouragement.

Mel Dixey committed an enormous amount of time and energy to the design and typesetting of the book, as it expanded beyond our initial thinking. We have valued immensely her patience, perseverance and encouragement, alongside her considerable skills.

We wish to express our thanks, too, to Monica Farthing and Nicola Goddard for all their help in reviewing our drafts and in proofreading.

Above all others, we give thanks to God for sustaining us over many months. We believe that He has guided us in the writing of *Time With God* and it is our hope that it will bring Him glory.

Introduction



It is through the Bible that God has revealed Himself to us and shown us how we can get right with Him. And it is an instruction book for life for His children. It is a lamp for our feet, a light on our path.¹

But sometimes we read the Bible only as a duty, expecting to gain God's approval: read and tick – done! Sometimes we just search out promises which will make us feel better. But the real, life-changing, blessing comes when we use God's Word as He intended: to be read, to be noted and to be acted upon.

The Apostle James tells us that we deceive ourselves if we read the Bible without then acting upon it. His instruction is very clear: we must do what it says.

*Do not merely listen to the word,
and so deceive yourselves.*

Do what it says.

James 1:22

James then likens the Bible to a mirror (in verses 23-24). Before leaving the house, we will look in the mirror to check that we are not going to embarrass ourselves with toothpaste around our mouth or with our hair being a complete mess.

¹Psalms 119:105

The point is made that it is foolish to look in the mirror but then ignore the surplus toothpaste or the hair that needs combing.

Similarly, looking in the Bible is of little value if we do no more than simply read it.

As you use *Time With God*, ask God to speak to you through His Word and expect Him to do so. You may be comforted; you may be challenged; you may receive a word of assurance; you may be rebuked; you may be given a clear instruction to act.

*... ask God to speak to you through
His Word and expect Him to do so.*

So pray, read, note and then pray again in response to what you have read. For some of the days, we have suggested short prayers: use them if they are appropriate for you. And then act on what you have received from the reading.

For day seven of each week, there are verses from a psalm of praise to help you to worship God. As you do so, thank God for His specific blessings to you.

On that day you will also be encouraged to pray for your prison: a few specific areas of need are suggested. Please don't think that you cannot pray for your prison on any other day!

Finally, a suggestion: is there another Christian with whom you can meet to work through the readings together? You could meet once a week, but ideally more frequently, to share what you have each gained from the readings – and to pray for each other. Meeting with our brothers and sisters in Christ is so vital to our wellbeing as Christians – and makes us stronger to withstand Satan's attacks.

To God be the glory, great things he has done!
So loved he the world that he gave us his Son,
Who yielded his life an atonement for sin,
And opened the life-gate that all may go in.

*Praise the Lord, praise the Lord,
Let the earth hear his voice!
Praise the Lord, praise the Lord,
Let the people rejoice!*

*O come to the Father thro' Jesus the Son,
And give him the glory, great things he has done!*

O perfect redemption, the purchase of blood!
To ev'ry believer the promise of God;
The vilest offender who truly believes,
That moment from Jesus a pardon receives.

Great things he has taught us, great things he has done,
And great our rejoicing through Jesus the Son;
But purer and higher and greater will be
Our wonder, our rapture, when Jesus we see.

Fanny Crosby, 1820 -1915

On Eagles' Wings

*...but they who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength;
they shall mount up with wings like eagles;
they shall run and not be weary;
they shall walk and not faint.*

Isaiah 40:31 (ESV)

We usually think of strength in physical terms but we also need strength of character and moral courage. We need to be strong in faith and in resolve.

However, life's journey is long and often hard and even the strongest grow weak.

This wonderful verse reassures us. Tiredness is natural for us, but God is never weary. We all feel weak at times: God is almighty and all powerful and His strength and His might never diminish. We can feel weakened by

disappointment, and discouraged by failure. We get tired of life and its pressures and anxieties and sadness.

But when we wait on Him everything changes. The word 'wait' used here means to wait expectantly and in hope: to kneel before Him with our hands outstretched knowing that we will receive. We trust Him to restore, refresh and renew us.

This 'waiting' is not like waiting for a bus: a kind of wishful thinking! This is about waiting in

His presence, in a place and attitude of prayer with certain hope and with complete trust.

Our Father's timing is never wrong. And so, in His time, like an athlete running a marathon or a long distance hiker striding towards their destination, our strength too will be renewed.

So, let us learn to wait, in expectant prayer and unwavering trust, in the presence of the One who does not slumber or sleep. And in due time He will raise us up and you and I shall 'soar on wings like eagles'!

Lord Jesus Christ, we seek Thy face;
Within the veil we bow the knee;
O let Thy glory fill the place!
And bless us while we wait on Thee.

The brow that once with thorns was bound,
Thy hands, Thy side, we fain would see;
Draw near, Lord Jesus, glory crowned,
And bless us while we wait on Thee.

Alexander Stewart, 1843 - 1923

For personal notes and prayer

Temptation

Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. 'Couldn't you men keep watch with me for one hour?' he asked Peter. 'Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.'

Matthew 26:40-41

The disciples gave in to temptation and let Jesus down when He needed them most.

For Adam and Eve, temptation came disguised as a friendly serpent with a seemingly harmless question: *Did God really say...?*¹ They were persuaded and fell for the lie. And the innocence of the world that God made was destroyed for the rest of time.

We do not always recognise temptation for it usually comes with a mask. It strikes where our defence is weakest and often returns to the scene of its latest success. We may not recognise

temptation the first time it beckons, but once we fall, it takes off the mask and draws us like a magnet.

When Jesus was about to start His ministry, which He knew would lead to the Cross, He was severely tempted by Satan. He was weak from hunger, but He did not give in. So it is not a sin to be tempted, as Jesus was. But it is a sin to sin, which Jesus resisted.

We can learn from Jesus. He countered every lie of Satan with the truth of Scripture² and so can we. The Bible is called the 'sword of the Spirit':³ it is a weapon in

our hands and we need to learn how to wield it.

And we need to be alert or temptation will overpower us. Jesus was right when He said: *The*

spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak. So we must watch and pray, both before and when temptation comes or, just like His disciples, we will also let Jesus down.

Tempted and tried, I need a great Saviour,
One who can help my burdens to bear;
I must tell Jesus, I must tell Jesus;
He all my cares and sorrows will share.

O how the world to evil allures me!
O how my heart is tempted to sin!
I must tell Jesus, and He will help me
Over the world the vict'ry to win.

Elisha A. Hoffman, 1839 -1929

For personal notes and prayer

¹Genesis 3:1 ²Matthew 4:1-11 ³Ephesians 6:17

Worship Him: He Is Our Redeemer

*Praise the LORD, my soul,
and forget not all his benefits –
who forgives all your sins
and heals all your diseases,
who redeems your life from the pit
and crowns you with love and compassion,
who satisfies your desires with good things
so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.*

*The LORD works righteousness
and justice for all the oppressed.*

*He made known his ways to Moses,
his deeds to the people of Israel:
the LORD is compassionate and gracious,
slow to anger, abounding in love.*

*He will not always accuse,
nor will he harbour his anger for ever;
he does not treat us as our sins deserve
or repay us according to our iniquities.*

*For as high as the heavens are above the earth,
so great is his love for those who fear him;
as far as the east is from the west,
so far has he removed our transgressions from us.*

Psalm 103:2-12

For personal notes and prayer. Take time to worship the Lord using this psalm. And then reflect over the past week and thank the Lord for His goodness to you.

Pray for your prison

for those who

- are vulnerable to self-harming
- are disillusioned with life
- are often in 'segregation'
- have a long-term illness or disability
- are grieving the loss of a family member or friend.

O for a thousand tongues to sing
My great Redeemer's praise,
The glories of my God and King,
The triumphs of his grace!

My gracious Master and my God,
Assist me to proclaim,
To spread thro' all the earth abroad
The honours of your name.

Jesus! the name that charms our fears,
That bids our sorrows cease,
'Tis music in the sinner's ears,
'Tis life and health and peace.

He breaks the power of cancelled sin,
He sets the prisoner free;
His blood can make the foulest clean;
His blood availed for me.

To God all glory, praise, and love
Be now and ever given
By saints below and saints above,
The Church in earth and heaven.

Charles Wesley, 1707-1788

Thy Will Be Done

*This is what the Sovereign LORD, the Holy One of Israel, says:
'In repentance and rest is your salvation,
in quietness and trust is your strength,
but you would have none of it...'*

Isaiah 30:15

When Isaiah wrote these words, the Israelite nation was about to be taken into captivity. It was a harsh but righteous judgment because it was the only way that God could save them from themselves and thereby save us.

God had chosen Abraham's descendants to be His people so that, in time, salvation could come to this broken world through them.

But, like the surrounding nations, His people had also become rebellious and obstinate and they needed to be moved back into His purpose and His will.

Otherwise, the nations of earth would be lost.

There could have been salvation for them, but that salvation would only be in repentance and in rest. They could be strong, but strength would only come in quietness and trust of Him.

But they rejected God's ways. Their wilful disobedience meant that they were now destined for 70 years of captivity and judgment.

We all have an obstinate streak. We all go our own way and take comfort in our own sense of

rightness. We turn our back on God's will. Like the Israelites, we say: 'I will have none of it.'

To find rest and safety, we must repent of our obstinacy and surrender to His will for our life. And then, in quietness and trust, we will find strength.

In Gethsemane, although Jesus prayed to His Father that He might be spared the Cross, nevertheless He acknowledged that the Father's will had to be done.¹ That must also be our prayer.

Take my will and make it thine;
It shall be no longer mine.
Take my heart it is thine own;
It shall be thy royal throne.

Frances R. Havergal, 1836 -1879

For personal notes and prayer

¹Mark 14:36

Worship Him:

His Love Never Fails

*Sing joyfully to the LORD, you righteous;
it is fitting for the upright to praise him.*

*Praise the LORD with the harp;
make music to him on the ten-stringed lyre.*

*Sing to him a new song;
play skilfully, and shout for joy.*

*For the word of the LORD is right and true;
he is faithful in all he does.*

*The LORD loves righteousness and justice;
the earth is full of his unfailing love.*

*By the word of the LORD the heavens were made,
their starry host by the breath of his mouth.*

*He gathers the waters of the sea into jars;
he puts the deep into storehouses.*

*Let all the earth fear the LORD;
let all the people of the world revere him.*

*For he spoke, and it came to be;
he commanded, and it stood firm.*

Psalm 33:1-9

For personal notes and prayer. Take time to worship the Lord using this psalm. And then reflect over the past week and thank the Lord for His goodness to you.

Pray for your prison

for staff and officers:

- for those off sick as a result of stress or injury
- for all officers, and especially those on your landing
- for the governors
- for all healthcare staff.

The Narrow Way with Jesus

There are two ways to live: we can either live to please ourselves or live to please God who created us. We can either ignore God or be a part of His family, allowing Him to rule our lives.

Jesus Himself spoke of these two ways. One is entered by a wide gate and the other by a narrow gate.

We all start out life on the broad road. We are born with a sinful nature, inherited from Adam who disobeyed God in the Garden of Eden. And our sinful nature means that we rebel against God. God hates our sin and Jesus warns us that the broad road leads to destruction.

Those who choose the narrow way – and only a few do – have the promise that they will be safe with Jesus, in God’s Kingdom, forever.

Jesus said:

*Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate
and broad is the road that leads to destruction,
and many enter through it.
But small is the gate and narrow the road
that leads to life, and only a few find it.*

Matthew 7:13-14

Jesus Himself is the narrow gate: He is the only means of access to the narrow road. Once safely through the gate, we follow Him along the narrow road that leads to His Father.

Jesus said:

I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved.

John 10:9a

*I am the way and the truth and the life.
No one comes to the Father except through me.*

John 14:6

Jesus left heaven and came to earth in order to save us from our sinful nature. He came to rescue everyone who wants to get off the broad road. He made it possible by giving up His life. When He was crucified, He paid the dreadful penalty for our sin.

God welcomes all who believe that Jesus died for them and who repent of their sin. He then forgives their sin and declares them to be righteous in His sight – made right with Him.

One day Jesus will return from heaven and everyone who has ever lived will have to stand before Him. Those who have travelled on the broad road – the unrighteous – will face God’s wrath and will be condemned to everlasting punishment.

Those who have travelled the narrow way – who have received the righteousness of Jesus Christ – will be welcomed into His presence, safe forever.

The Bible tells us:

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

... but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.

John 3:16, 18b

And so we all have a choice to make. It is not, as some may think, a simple choice between enjoying this life and enjoying the next life. The narrow way will bring true fulfilment of purpose now, as well as securing the safety of heaven for eternity. And no one should treat lightly the warning that the broad road does lead to destruction.

Choosing the road we travel in life is the most crucial decision we face. If you are ready to commit to following Jesus on that narrow road, you can make that change now by praying this prayer.

Dear Father God,

I am very sorry for everything in my life that has not been right. I no longer want to live that way.

Thank You for sending Jesus to die in my place, for my sins, to rescue me from the broad road that leads to destruction.

Please forgive me and accept me as Your child. Please fill me with Your Holy Spirit to help me to follow Jesus on that narrow road and to make Him the centre of my life. Thank You.

Amen.

If you have prayed this prayer honestly and sincerely, God welcomes you into His family as His child. Tell someone of your decision – a chaplain or a friend who is a mature Christian – and ask them to help you to begin reading the Bible. Join a Bible study group if you can.

Most importantly, start meeting with others who are on the same journey, on the narrow road, that you have now started. You will be able to encourage each other in your life as a follower of Jesus.

From whence this fear and unbelief,
If God, my Father, put to grief
His spotless Son for me?
Can He, the righteous Judge of men,
Condemn me for that debt of sin
Which, Lord, was charged to Thee?

Complete atonement Thou hast made,
And to the utmost farthing paid
Whate'er Thy people owed;
How, then, can wrath on me take place,
If sheltered in God's righteousness,
And sprinkled by Thy blood?

If Thou hast my discharge procured,
And freely in my place endured
The whole of wrath divine;
Payment God will not twice demand,
First at my bleeding Surety's hand,
And then again at mine.

Turn then, my soul, unto thy rest;
The merits of thy great High Priest
Speak peace and liberty;
Trust in His efficacious blood,
Nor fear thy banishment from God,
Since Jesus died for thee.

Augustus Toplady, 1740 -1778

He Is Risen

In their fright the women bowed down with their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, 'Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; he has risen!...'

Luke 24:5-6a

The resurrection is at the very heart of the gospel: Jesus Christ, the sinless Son of the living God, surrendered His life to pay the penalty for our sins. Without the resurrection, the foundation of the gospel collapses.

There is overwhelming evidence that Jesus was raised from the dead. Knowing the unbelief of human nature, God has recorded for us the evidence of many witnesses. The Bible tells us that, on one occasion, more than five hundred people saw Jesus.¹

Had Jesus remained in the tomb, our sins would not have been paid for.² And there would be no guarantee that Jesus was able to overcome the devil who has the power of death.³

But Jesus' body did not remain in the tomb. The recorded evidence proves conclusively that Jesus did rise from the dead! And because He conquered death, all who are in Christ have been born again to a living hope.⁴ Death had no power over Him and has no power over those who have that living hope.

If you are not yet convinced that Jesus really did rise from the dead, why not meet with a Christian to share your doubts

and look together at the evidence for the resurrection? At the same time, ask God for the gift of faith.

Low in the grave he lay, Jesus my Saviour,
Waiting the coming day, Jesus my Lord!

*Up from the grave he arose;
with a mighty triumph o'er his foes;
he arose a victor from the dark domain,
and he lives forever, with his saints to reign.
He arose! He arose! Hallelujah! Christ arose!*

Robert Lowry, 1826-1899

A Prayer

Almighty God, when so many people have closed their mind to the evidence, thank You for revealing the truth to me – that Jesus did rise from the dead. Thank You that death has no hold on me because I belong to Jesus.

In Jesus' Name. Amen.

For personal notes and prayer

¹ 1 Corinthians 15:6 ² 1 Corinthians 15:17 ³ Hebrews 2:14 ⁴ 1 Peter 1:3

The Friend of God

And the scripture was fulfilled that says, 'Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness,' and he was called God's friend.

James 2:23

Abraham was a remarkable man with a remarkable faith. His early years were spent in Ur, a city of the Babylonian empire. In the Bible, Babylon is a picture of worldliness: the place where you create your own gods and worship them.

When God told Abraham to leave Babylon, he obeyed without knowing where God was leading him. When he finally arrived in the land that God promised to his descendants, Abraham believed God and put up his tent, even though he had no descendants at that point.

He never built a house; he never again lived in a city. He was not perfect, but he was obedient even when he didn't have all the answers. He trusted God completely.

Abraham lived in harmony with his Maker rather than putting his hope in the world. We are told:

For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God.¹

Abraham kept his eyes on heaven, but his faith was practical. He did not just believe *in* God: He *believed* God and proved it by his unquestioning obedience.

Of all the men in the world at that time, God chose Abraham to be the father of the nation into which His precious Son would come to save mankind.

Because Abraham trusted God completely, God was able to

have complete trust in him. That is real friendship. Centuries later, Jesus told His disciples: *You are my friends if you do what I command.²*

That is a promise for us today.

We are His friends when we trust and obey Him completely.

I've found a friend, O such a friend!

He bled, he died to save me;

And not alone the gift of life,

But His own self He gave me;

Naught that I have my own I call,

I hold it for the Giver;

My heart, my strength, my life, my all

Are His, and His forever.

James G. Small, 1817-1888

For personal notes and prayer

¹Hebrews 11:10 ²John 15:14

How Blessed We Are

*Blessed is the one
whose transgressions are forgiven,
whose sins are covered.*

Psalm 32:1

Conversations in your prison about being blessed are only likely to be heard within the chapel. Many people think of 'blessed' as a religious word, as when a priest confers a blessing on someone.

But others think of it as 'anything that makes you happy', such as good health; a comfortable home; an expensive car; the birth of a healthy child; a lottery win; an unexpected ROTL or, perhaps, being found not guilty of a crime that was committed!

Although it is right to thank God for some of these at least, the

blessings mentioned in the Bible are quite different.

In this psalm, the writer recognises the joy – the blessing – which comes from knowing that God has forgiven our sins.

In other psalms we are told that we are blessed if we: delight in the law of the LORD;¹ take refuge in the LORD;² trust in the LORD;³ are disciplined and taught by the LORD.⁴

Jesus spoke of those who were blessed as including those who: hunger and thirst for righteousness; are pure in heart; are peacemakers; are insulted,

persecuted and suffer false and evil accusations because of Him.⁵ (See Hated, Persecuted and Blessed, page 156)

How blessed we *are* as God's children, especially that our sins are forgiven and that we have an

inheritance that is being kept for us in heaven.⁶ And how blessed we *will be* when we receive that inheritance.

Think about how the Lord has blessed you and thank Him for His love and goodness to you.

O the deep, deep love of Jesus!
Love of ev'ry love the best:
'Tis an ocean vast of blessing,
'Tis a haven sweet of rest.
O the deep, deep love of Jesus!
'Tis a heav'n of heav'ns to me;
And it lifts me up to glory,
For it lifts me up to thee.

S. Trevor Francis, 1834 -1925

For personal notes and prayer

¹Psalm 1:2 ²Psalm 34:8 ³Psalm 84:12 ⁴Psalm 94:12 ⁵Matthew 5:3-12 ⁶Peter 1:4

Worship Him: He Is Enthroned on High

Praise the LORD.

*Praise the LORD, you his servants;
praise the name of the LORD.*

*Let the name of the LORD be praised,
both now and for evermore.*

*From the rising of the sun to the place where it sets,
the name of the LORD is to be praised.*

*The LORD is exalted over all the nations,
his glory above the heavens.*

*Who is like the LORD our God,
the One who sits enthroned on high,
who stoops down to look
on the heavens and the earth?*

Psalm 113:1-6

For personal notes. Take time to worship the Lord using this psalm. And then reflect over the past week and thank the Lord for His goodness to you.

Pray for your prison

for those who:

- are in prison for the first time and feeling anxious and insecure
- have been in prison for so long that they cannot find any security outside
- are suffering from a mental illness
- are striving to become free from addictions.

O soul, are you weary and troubled?
No light in the darkness you see?
There's light for a look at the Saviour,
And life more abundant and free!

*Turn your eyes upon Jesus,
Look full in His wonderful face,
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim,
In the light of His glory and grace.*

Through death into life everlasting
He passed, and we follow Him there;
O'er us sin no more hath dominion –
For more than conqu'rors we are!

His Word shall not fail you – He promised;
Believe Him, and all will be well:
Then go to a world that is dying,
His perfect salvation to tell!

Helen Howarth Lemmel, 1864-1961

A Beautiful Thing

'Leave her alone,' said Jesus.

'Why are you bothering her?

She has done a beautiful thing to me...'

Mark 14:6

Those words of Jesus, *'She has done a beautiful thing to me,'* would have remained with that woman for the rest of her life. The beautiful thing was the anointing of Jesus' head with the entire jar of a very expensive perfume.

To some of those present, that was a foolish thing: in their eyes, the money would have been better spent on providing for the poor. But the woman had only one desire – to express her love for Jesus. It was an extravagant act of devotion and Jesus commended her for it. She gave no thought to the cost. No one could put a price on what she did.

You will remember the words of Jesus, when He was teaching about showing kindness to those in need:

*'... whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.'*¹

So, why not ask God to lead you to someone today for whom you can do a beautiful thing?

Do not expect applause from others who may think you have been wasteful. But take delight in knowing that Jesus will always take pleasure in the beautiful things you do in His name.

The *most* beautiful thing is to pour out your heart to Jesus in worship, holding nothing back. And remember, too, how Mary

was commended by Jesus for making the better choice, sitting at His feet to listen to what He had to say.²

Take my love; my Lord, I pour
At thy feet its treasure store.

Take myself, and I will be
Ever, only, all for thee,
Ever, only, all for thee.

Frances R. Havergal, 1836-1879

For personal notes and prayer

¹ Matthew 25:40 ² Luke 10:38-42

Shipwrecked

'Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.'

*So we say with confidence, 'The Lord is my helper;
I will not be afraid. What can mere mortals do to me?'*

Hebrews 13:5b-6

There is an old lighthouse built on the edge of a high cliff. One night two hundred years ago, there was a violent storm and a ship was driven towards the cliff and foundered on the rocks beneath the lighthouse.

The crew managed to scramble onto a ledge at the bottom of the cliff. Some were injured but the storm made any rescue attempt impossible. They huddled there in the dark, in the cold, soaked through, afraid and wretched.

The younger of the two lighthouse keepers offered to be lowered on a rope down to the

men. It was a perilous descent but it was his compassion for their plight that drove him.

That did not change their situation: the storm still raged but the lighthouse keeper brought light and hope. He stayed with them until they could be brought to safety in the morning.

Our lives may seem shipwrecked at times and we feel lonely and afraid, hopeless and wretched.

God has promised that He will never leave us nor forsake us. No matter how desperate our situation, He will stand with us in

the storm, in the darkness and in the danger. And He always comes with a heart of compassion, bringing light and

hope and the promise of rescue. So don't lose heart and don't lose hope. He is with you and He will never abandon you.

The soul that on Jesus has leaned for repose,
I will not, I will not desert to his foes;
That soul, though all hell should endeavour to shake,
I'll never, no never, no never forsake.

Published by John Rippon, 1787

From Inside

I have held on to the promise of this verse from Hebrews through many struggles and times of great sadness. I have done many things I regret and the Lord has had to discipline me. But He has never abandoned me and He never will. Ultimately I will be with Him forever and this life is short compared with eternity.

Mark, HMP Wormwood Scrubs

For personal notes and prayer

Stand Firm

*... If you do not stand firm in your faith,
you will not stand at all.*

Isaiah 7:9b

Back in the days when soldiers fought battles face to face, each army would stand shoulder to shoulder opposite the enemy lines. Some would be bold, others would be terrified, but the order was 'keep the lines and stand firm'.

And even when the enemy drums began to beat, they still stood their ground waiting for the order to come from their commander.

The Bible often refers to Christians as soldiers in the army of the King. We have a deadly

enemy in Satan who, with his forces, would destroy us as he tried to destroy Jesus.

Our orders are to stand firm, come what may. Some are bold, others are terrified, but we hold the line because we fight for the conquering King who fought and won victory for us.

He equips us with everything we need to fight the enemy and to protect ourselves during the battle.¹

And we stand firm together, shoulder to shoulder, and we move forward together. Together

we are His Church. We fight beneath His banner and we move at His command. And victory is assured.

So stand firm in your faith. Do not waver. Take courage. And together, with Christ our King, we will win the day.

Stand up, stand up for Jesus,
Stand in his strength alone;
The arm of flesh will fail you,
Ye dare not trust your own:
Put on the gospel armour,
Each piece put on with pray'r;
Where duty calls, or danger,
Be never wanting there.

Stand up, stand up for Jesus,
The strife will not be long;
This day the noise of battle,
The next the victor's song:
To him that overcometh
A crown of life shall be;
He with the King of glory
Shall reign eternally.

George Duffield, 1818 -1888

For personal notes and prayer

¹Ephesians 6:10-18

Worship Him: His Love Endures For Ever

Shout for joy to the LORD, all the earth.

*Worship the LORD with gladness;
come before him with joyful songs.*

Know that the LORD is God.

*It is he who made us, and we are his,
we are his people, the sheep of his pasture.*

*Enter his gates with thanksgiving
and his courts with praise;*

give thanks to him and praise his name.

*For the LORD is good and his love endures for ever;
his faithfulness continues through all generations.*

Psalm 100:1-5

For personal notes. Take time to worship the Lord using this psalm. And then reflect over the past week and thank the Lord for His goodness to you.

Pray for your prison

for the Chaplaincy:

- for the chaplains and volunteers known to you
- for all who provide pastoral care
- for those who lead Bible study groups and courses such as Alpha and Christianity Explored
- for those who lead and teach at the services.

Reflections from Inside

We are grateful to the men and women
who have contributed these reflections.
The names have been changed.

God's Will, the Only Way

Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

I was in the holding cell after being sentenced and I was drawn to these verses when my New Testament fell open as I took it out of my pocket. I focused particularly on the phrase, 'for this is God's will for you ...'

When the Apostle Paul was in prison, he wrote in one of his letters, '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 ...'¹

Paul had realised his need to surrender his life to the will of God. We will never experience true peace, the peace that transcends all understanding, as long as we persist in trying to persuade God to accept our will ... what we want. It can only come from accepting God's will for us.

Although I had been a Christian since my teens, God needed to bring me to my knees before I finally learnt this lesson. Before I went into court to be sentenced, my wife and I prayed together. We did not pray that I would only get a short custodial sentence, or better still a suspended sentence. Instead we prayed that God's will would be done.

This was my first sentence and I should have been terrified but I no longer felt scared or even condemned. Instead I felt overwhelmingly blessed, thanks to the truly astonishing grace of our sovereign Lord.

Stewart, HMP Littlehey

¹Philippians 4:12

Discipline for Good

*My son, do not despise the LORD's discipline,
and do not resent his rebuke,
because the LORD disciplines those he loves,
as a father the son he delights in.*

Proverbs 3:11-12

We are told not to despise the Lord's discipline and not to resent his rebuke. I like the New Living Translation which says that we should not reject the Lord's discipline and not get upset when he corrects us.

Who does the Lord discipline or correct? It is those whom He loves, just as a father corrects a child out of love. When I first read this scripture the keyword for me was 'corrects'.

In America, prisons are called 'correctional facilities', so logic was telling me that I am in prison to be corrected and this scripture reminded me that I am not alone for my Heavenly Father is with me. I must trust Him as He teaches me.

Discipline means to teach and train. It is often viewed as negative as disciplinarians are not generally motivated by love. But God is the source of all love. He does not punish us because He enjoys inflicting pain but because He is deeply concerned about our development. He knows that in order to become morally strong and good we must learn the difference between right and wrong. That is why He disciplines us.

This scripture has helped me to realise that being in prison is but a 'blip' in God's plan for me. Understanding that has given me the strength and need to keep going, keep my faith, keep my head down and concentrate on my release and on rebuilding my life so that I can live to please God.

George, HMP Oakwood

The Lord is my Shepherd

*The LORD is my shepherd, I lack nothing.
He makes me lie down in green pastures,
he leads me beside quiet waters,
he refreshes my soul.
He guides me along the right paths
for his name's sake.
Even though I walk
through the darkest valley,
I will fear no evil,
for you are with me;
your rod and your staff,
they comfort me.
You prepare a table before me
in the presence of my enemies.
You anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.
Surely your goodness and love will follow me
all the days of my life,
and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.*

Psalm 23

This is my first time in prison. It never crossed my mind that I would ever end up in prison. When I arrived, I had no idea what the future might hold for me. It was so hard to cope with all the frustrations and anxieties.

I had always prayed but now, in prison, I began to realise that all my prayers were the result of my family traditions. I had never prayed from the heart and I had no personal connection with God.

It was here that I invited God to come into my life. I use Psalm 23 as a prayer. In times of darkness, doubts and despair (and I still experience those feelings), the psalm helps me to realise that God is present with me and that gives me peace and comfort. The psalm also assures me that the Lord will never abandon me.

I begin each day by reading this psalm and I also pray it during the night if I am unable to sleep.

Ms S.

Repaying the Debt

... Truly I tell you, you will not get out until you have paid the last penny.

Matthew 5:26

It was not right, Jesus said, to offer a sacrifice to God if you have an unresolved issue with a brother or sister. You must first resolve the matter and do so before it gets to court, to avoid the risk of being put into prison and then being forced to pay every penny you have.

God used this verse to speak to me although my situation was very different. I am a Lifer and Jesus' words made me realise that I had to accept full responsibility for what I had done. I had to repay my debt to society. Only then would I be able to move on – not just with my sentence but with my behaviour, my attitude and my outlook on life.

I had to fully accept my part in what happened, surrender to God and take full responsibility. I basically put my life in His hands and trusted His plans for my life. I thought I was incapable of love but I felt God's love just flooding into me. And being filled with His love has opened the door for me to love others.

Thomas, HMP Grampian

Why?

Why would a King with life in His hands,
give of that life to me?
Damaged and broken, a sight for sore eyes,
He saw past it all, how can this be?
There is many a man, whose life is intact:
Integrity, honour displayed.
Whose selfless acts have helped many a soul,
And God's word obeyed.

Why me? How can this be?
The King of all mercy, goodness and love,
Took on death with all of its shame,
And gathered this sinner into His arms.
Upon Him He took all my blame.

Why would a King with life in His hands,
give of that life to me?
A question repeated in my daily prayer,
For ever I won't understand.
But because of His love and the path that He took,
He'll never let go of my hand.

Thank you, Jesus.

JJ, HMP North Sea Camp

Belief that Saves

*For God so loved the world that he gave his
one and only Son, that whoever believes
in him shall not perish but have eternal life.*

John 3:16

*There is no better or greater truth than this.
I meditate on it continually and give thanks to
God for Jesus.*

Edward, HMP Wormwood Scrubs

In God's Strength

I can do all this through him who gives me strength.

Philippians 4:13

*This verse has encouraged me, on numerous
occasions throughout my life, when I lacked the
strength, or confidence, to tackle a task that I
thought was beyond me.*

Simon, HMP Wormwood Scrubs

I hear the Saviour say,
'Thy strength indeed is small,
Child of weakness, watch and pray,
Find in Me thine all in all.'

*Jesus paid it all,
All to Him I owe;
Sin had left a crimson stain,
He washed it white as snow.*

Lord, now indeed I find
Thy pow'r and Thine alone,
Can change the leper's spots
And melt the heart of stone.

For nothing good have I
Where-by Thy grace to claim;
I'll wash my garments white
In the blood of Calv'ry's Lamb.

And when, before the throne,
I stand in Him complete,
'Jesus died my soul to save,'
My lips shall still repeat.

Elvina M. Hall, 1820 -1889

The Guide

*Your word is a lamp for my feet,
a light on my path.*

Psalm 119:105

There is not a lot of help available as we navigate through life. Most of us tend to make it up as we go along, but our thinking is often influenced by the opinions of others.

We follow fashion, including fashionable thinking, because it can make us feel safe to be like those around us and to be accepted by them. We are influenced by the standards of the day: by what is communicated by the media.

The problem is that those we follow are as much in the dark

about the real meaning of life as we are. We are following the lost.

As believers, the Bible is our guide. What other guide can we trust? The Bible has stood the test of time. It is the written 'Word of God': we can trust no higher authority. And Jesus is the 'living Word of God'¹. By looking at His life and teachings, we see the Father and we hear Him speak.

The Bible is priceless. It is light in a dark place. If we read it and learn its truth and faithfully follow its teaching through life, we will not stumble. And we will not fall.

For the Journey

Some communications
Should be studied with the utmost care:

A map;
Battle orders;
A love letter.

Neglect to read a map
And you will lose your way;

Ignore battle orders
And you will suffer defeat;

Leave a love letter unread,
And you may never know
How greatly you are loved.

The Bible is God's communication to me.
Neglect it – I will lose my way.
Ignore it – I will be defeated.

Worst of all,
Unread,
I may never know
How greatly I am loved.

For personal notes and prayer

¹John 1:14

Filled with Compassion

But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms round him and kissed him.

Luke 15:20b

You will immediately recognise these words of Jesus – from what is probably the most well-known of all His parables.¹ The words describe the father's response when he spotted his 'prodigal' son in the distance, trudging, shamefully, home.

By demanding his share of the inheritance while his father was still alive, the younger son would have caused his father immense pain. He placed more value on his father's estate than on their relationship.

And so Jesus would have astounded His listeners when He

explained that the father was full of compassion, not anger and hatred; that he was actually looking out for his son, longing for him to return; and that he could not get to him quickly enough to welcome him back without any need to grovel.

In our society, hundreds of thousands of families are torn apart, and remain apart, because of anger and hatred and a refusal to show compassion to the person who has committed the wrong.

Perhaps you are grieving over a broken relationship within your

family, either as a son or daughter or as a parent. If so, is there anything which you can do to help to restore the relationship? Are you continuing to pray for God to intervene?

Of course, Jesus told the parable to give a picture of God, who is full of compassion towards those who have walked away from Him. He is longing for them to come back.

A Challenge

There are almost certainly 'prodigals' in your prison now. Do you know of anyone whom you can encourage to take that journey back to Father God to enjoy His 'welcome home'?

For personal notes and prayer

¹Luke 15:11-32

And can it be that I should gain
 An int'rest in the Saviour's blood?
 Died He for me, who caused His pain?
 For me, who Him to death pursued?
 Amazing love! how can it be
 That Thou, my God, should die for me?

*Amazing love! how can it be
 That Thou, my God, should die for me!*

He left His Father's throne above,
 So free, so infinite His grace;
 Emptied Himself of all but love,
 And bled for Adam's helpless race;
 'Tis mercy all, immense and free;
 For, O my God, it found out me.

Long my imprisoned spirit lay
 Fast bound in sin and nature's night;
 Thine eye diffused a quick'ning ray,
 I woke, the dungeon flamed with light;
 My chains fell off, my heart was free;
 I rose, went forth and followed Thee.

No condemnation now I dread;
 Jesus, and all in Him is mine!
 Alive in Him, my living Head,
 And clothed in righteousness divine,
 Bold I approach th' eternal throne,
 And claim the crown, through Christ my own.

(V2 omitted) Charles Wesley, 1707-1788

The Concealed Revealed

*Come, see a man who told me
everything I've ever done.*

John 4:39

The media are constantly looking to reveal what people in the public eye – celebrities, politicians, business leaders – want to conceal. Shame is often the reason for not wanting the private to become public.

The words quoted above are those of 'the woman at the well', speaking of Jesus. He had shocked her by revealing that He knew what she wanted kept hidden.

Jesus deals with her very gently, a Samaritan who would not expect a Jew to engage with anyone from Samaria, let alone a woman. By making reference to

her husband, Jesus opens up the one topic which she would almost certainly have wanted to remain closed. Doubtless her five marriages and her current adulterous relationship caused her much shame: she would have been uncomfortable speaking about her private life.

But Jesus was concerned for her. He had offered her 'living water,' which would become in her 'a spring of water welling up to eternal life' (verse 13). And He wanted to deal with her shame.

How foolish it is to pretend that we can keep something from the

Lord. If there is anything you have chosen not to confess, why not confess it to Him now? You will not be revealing anything that He does not already know and you will be assured that He has forgiven you – that your shame has been dealt with.

What a great promise this is:

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.¹

Jesus invites you to do this today.

I heard the voice of Jesus say,
"Behold, I freely give
The living water; thirsty one,
Stoop down and drink, and live."
I came to Jesus, and I drank
Of that life-giving stream;
My thirst was quenched, my soul revived,
And now I live in him.

Horatius Bonar, 1808 -1889

For personal notes and prayer

¹John 1:9

The Worst of Sinners

*...I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief.
The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly,
along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.*

*Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance:
Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners
– of whom I am the worst.*

1 Timothy 1:13b-15

Many people in prison cannot contemplate a personal relationship with God. They believe that their past has determined their future. They conclude that, if there is a God and if He rewards the good and punishes the bad, then there is nothing they can do to escape His punishment.

Even if they acknowledge that God is merciful, they refuse to accept that His mercy could possibly extend to them. They know that they do not deserve it. And that is true. That is the very

nature of mercy – we do not deserve it. And certainly no one *deserves* God's mercy.

But all who think like this need to read Paul's testimony. God had mercy upon him even while he was a blasphemer and was actively persecuting Christians. He (Saul, as he was then known) had given approval to the execution of Stephen and he set out to fulfil his mission to destroy the church. He had believers thrown into prison.¹ He was, in his own words, the worst of sinners.

Pray for all in your prison who need to know that they are not beyond God's mercy, whatever their crime and despite what others might say. That 'some crimes are unforgiveable' is Satan's lie.

Pray that the Lord will reveal His truth to them, as He did to Saul and as He has to countless millions since: Christ came into the world to save sinners, including the worst of sinners.

O teach me what it meaneth,
For I am full of sin,
And grace alone can reach me,
And love alone can win.
O teach me, for I need Thee,
I have no hope beside –
The chief of all the sinners
For whom the Saviour died!

Lucy A. Bennett, 1850 -1927

For personal notes and prayer

¹Acts 8:3

God's Power in Weak People

... My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.

2 Corinthians 12:9

God spoke these words to the Apostle Paul at a time when he was most conscious of his physical weakness.

In the gospels we read of the poor widow who threw her last two remaining coins into the temple offering.¹ She was the one that Jesus drew attention to and is remembered to this day, not because of how much she gave but because she gave all she had.

When 5,000 men and their families needed feeding, Jesus' disciples suggested that the people should be sent away. But there was a young boy, holding

out his lunch and Jesus used that to feed the multitude.²

Gideon is hiding from the enemy in a winepress, afraid, weak, and unimportant. The Lord tells him:

*Go in the strength you have and save Israel out of Midian's hand. Am I not sending you?*³

Full of doubt and fear, he finally went and routed the enemy hordes with just 300 of his men.

Do you see the pattern here? The world says we need wealth, power and influence if we are going to achieve anything. But those things can be the biggest hindrances to the work of God.

The Apostle Paul, the widow, the child and the reluctant Gideon achieved great things, despite their weakness, because God took their offering and added His glory. God's strength shows up best in weak people.

Like Gideon, we are called to go in the strength that we have. It may not be much, but add our poor strength to the mighty hand of God and who knows what could happen? The enemy is routed, needs are met, souls are saved.

I am trusting Thee for power;
Thine can never fail.

Words which Thou Thyself shalt give me
Must prevail.

Frances R. Havergal, 1836 -1879

A Prayer

Heavenly Father, please use me in whatever way You wish. I feel weak and unworthy but I know You will give me the strength I need.

In Jesus' Name. Amen

For personal notes and prayer

¹Luke 21:1-4 ²John 6:5-13 ³Judges 6:14

Worship Him: His Works Are Great

*It is good to praise the LORD
and make music to your name, O Most High,
proclaiming your love in the morning
and your faithfulness at night,
to the music of the ten-stringed lyre
and the melody of the harp.*

*For you make me glad by your deeds, LORD;
I sing for joy at what your hands have done.*

*How great are your works, LORD,
how profound your thoughts!
Senseless people do not know,
fools do not understand,
that though the wicked spring up like grass
and all evildoers flourish,
they will be destroyed for ever.*

But you, LORD, are for ever exalted.

Psalm 92:1-8

For personal notes. Take time to worship the Lord using this psalm. And then reflect over the past week and thank the Lord for His goodness to you.

Pray for your prison

for staff and officers:

- in administration, in catering and maintenance
- in education, workshops, rehabilitation and housing
- in other support functions.

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.

*On Christ, the solid rock, I stand;
All other ground is sinking sand,
All other ground is sinking sand.*

When darkness veils his lovely face,
I rest on his unchanging grace;
In ev'ry high and stormy gale
My anchor holds within the veil.

His oath, his covenant, his blood
Support me in the whelming flood;
When all around my soul gives way,
He then is all my hope and stay.

When he shall come with trumpet sound,
O may I then in him be found,
Dressed in his righteousness alone,
Faultless to stand before the throne.

Edward Mote, 1797-1874

Everlasting Love

For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Romans 8:38-39

There are times when we all feel unloved and unlovable. Human love comes and goes. Human love is often fickle or selfish and only lasts as long as there is some pay back. And sometimes it is our own actions or attitudes that have driven love away.

The pain of unrequited love, or love grown cold; or a love lost; or love betrayed is heart-breaking. But God's love is not like human love. The love of God is everlasting and nothing can separate us from it. Absolutely nothing.

The Apostle Paul was writing to Roman believers who were persecuted, hated and imprisoned for their faith. But the hatred of the world can never drive away the love that God has for His people. His love is steadfast and His love is certain.

In the book of Jeremiah, God says to His people:

I have loved you with an everlasting love.¹

This is a love that has no beginning and no ending. If you

are in Christ, then even your failure has not separated you

from His love, and neither can anything else.

Loved with everlasting love,
Led by grace, that Love to know.
Spirit, breathing from above,
Thou hast taught me it is so.
Oh this full and perfect peace
From His presence, all divine,
In a love that cannot cease
I am His and He is mine.

George Wade Robinson 1838 -1876

Reflect

Take a few moments to reflect on this wonderful truth, pouring out your praise and worship to the One whose love for you is everlasting.

For personal notes and prayer

¹Jeremiah 31:3

Forgiveness Has a Price

*In him we have redemption through his blood,
the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with
the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us.*

Ephesians 1:7-8a

Paul reminded the believers in Ephesus that it is through Jesus Christ that we have forgiveness for our sins. We know that, of course, but the reminder is appropriate. We must take care when talking about God's forgiveness being free. It was extraordinarily costly.

It is easy to fall into the trap of speaking only of God's love and mercy and His longing to forgive us. It is an appealing message to those who are deeply aware of their need of God's forgiveness –

and there are many in prison who are.

But the Cross must always be central to the message of forgiveness. There was a price to be paid – and what a price! We cannot possibly imagine the pain both Father and Son endured as Jesus suffered such a brutal death and carried upon Himself the guilt of us all.

That was the price that had to be paid for the atonement of our sins and it was only Jesus, the sinless Son of God, who was able

to pay the price. It is by His blood that we are forgiven.

And we must remember, too, that God's forgiveness has to be received and we can only receive

it once we have repented. Peter made this clear:

Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out ...¹

For nothing good have I
Whereby Thy grace to claim;
I'll wash my garments white
In the blood of Calv'ry's Lamb.

*Jesus paid it all,
All to Him I owe;
Sin had left a crimson stain,
He washed it white as snow.*

Elvina M. Hall, 1820 -1889

For personal notes and prayer

¹Acts 3:19

Who Is Your Helper?

*I lift up my eyes to the mountains –
where does my help come from?
My help comes from the LORD,
the Maker of heaven and earth.*

*He will not let your foot slip –
he who watches over you will not slumber;
indeed, he who watches over Israel
will neither slumber nor sleep.*

*The LORD watches over you –
the LORD is your shade at your right hand;
the sun will not harm you by day,
nor the moon by night.*

*The LORD will keep you from all harm –
he will watch over your life;
the LORD will watch over your coming and going
both now and for evermore.*

Psalm 121:1-8

Do you have a first port of call for help when you are troubled, anxious or facing a tough decision?

Is there anyone better able to help us than the One who created the heaven and earth – and created us? Is there anyone more wise, more powerful, more compassionate and loving than the Lord? He keeps every promise He has ever made – and the Bible is full of them. And He is always available.

Of course we can, and should, seek help from others (but avoiding those who will not offer godly advice). And as we do so, we should ask God to give them His wisdom. But do not let the Lord be our last port of call: He needs to be the first. It is an insult to Him when we choose to place more confidence in others.

Reflect on this psalm and take note of its promises.

A Prayer

Dear Lord, I am sorry for the times when I have not trusted You and have not called on You to help me. Thank You for reminding me that You watch over me 24/7, through all my struggles.

In Jesus' Name. Amen.

For personal notes and prayer

Anxiety

Do not be anxious about anything but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God which transcends all understanding will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Philippians 4:6-7

Anxiety and worry are almost always about the future: about things that may happen but have not yet happened. Anxiety robs us of our peace.

These verses are not talking about a blind optimism – as in ‘cheer up, it may never happen’, but give us practical advice about where to take our concerns and where to leave them.

We take them to our heavenly Father in prayer, speaking to Him and sharing our hearts with Him. And by petition, which is asking for His help.

We do this with thanksgiving because we are coming to a Father who loves and cares for us and for the things that we love and care about. Not only that, but He takes hold of whatever we lay at His feet and exchanges our anxiety for His peace.

As the hymn reminds us, we often choose anxiety over peace.

O what peace we often forfeit,
O what needless pain we bear,
All because we do not carry
Everything to God in prayer!¹

The peace He gives is beyond the world’s understanding but it guards and protects our thinking and our feelings. And even if the

worst should happen, we can trust Him to take us through and bring us to a place of safety.

Trust Him

If He can speak creation;
If He can part the raging sea;
If He can level Jericho with a shout;
Feed a multitude from a child’s lunchbox;
Raise the four-days dead,
And open eyes blind from birth,
Then there is nothing He cannot do.
Trust Him,
For it is faith not fear that moves mountains.

For personal notes and prayer

¹Joseph Scriven, 1819-1886

Worship Him: His Deeds Are Awesome

*Shout for joy to God, all the earth!
Sing the glory of his name;
make his praise glorious.*

Say to God, 'How awesome are your deeds!

*So great is your power
that your enemies cringe before you.
All the earth bows down to you;
they sing praise to you,
they sing the praises of your name.'*

*Come and see what God has done,
his awesome deeds for mankind!*

*He turned the sea into dry land,
they passed through the waters on foot –
come, let us rejoice in him.*

*He rules for ever by his power,
his eyes watch the nations –
let not the rebellious rise up against him.*

Psalm 66:1-7

For personal notes. Take time to worship the Lord using this psalm. And then reflect over the past week and thank the Lord for His goodness to you.

Pray for your prison

for those who will be released shortly, especially:

- for those who have no accommodation arranged
- for those vulnerable to re-offending
- for those without strong family support.

Reflections from Inside

We are grateful to the men and women
who have contributed these reflections.
The names have been changed.

Rejoicing in the Lord

*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,
though there are no sheep in the sheepfold
and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice
in the LORD, I will be joyful in God my Saviour.*

Habakkuk 3:17-18

'You may never know that Jesus is all you need until Jesus is all you have.' They were the words of Corrie ten Boom, who helped many Jews escape the Nazi Holocaust during World War II by hiding them in her home.

Before coming to prison it looked as though I had everything. I had retired from work after a successful career in London and I was travelling around the world. But I was not right with God.

I had been a Christian for most of my life but I had never fully surrendered my life to God. There was still a small part of me that refused to submit.

That all changed in a police cell following my arrest. I realised I needed God's help to turn my life around, and the cost had to be total submission to Him.

Now, from the perspective of the world it looks as though I have lost everything: there are no sheep in my sheepfold and no cattle in the stalls. But every day I rejoice in the Lord; every day I am joyful in God my Saviour.

With all the trappings of the material world torn away, I have been left with Christ and the realisation that a relationship with Him is the most precious possession of all. I do not focus on what has been lost but on what I have gained and so every day, even here in prison, I rejoice in the Lord.

Stewart, HMP Littlehey

The Heart Matters

*... The LORD does not look at the things people look at.
People look at the outward appearance,
but the LORD looks at the heart.*

1 Samuel 16:7

I was so full of guilt as I reflected on my life of destructive behaviour. I was scared of tomorrow. I was afraid of how other people saw me. I was able to imagine what they thought of me, for I knew what I thought about myself.

But then the Lord Jesus touched me. He, who died on the cross for me, broke me with His love. His love filled me and restored. He saw my heart and it longed for His. These verses reflect how I feel now.

One thing I ask from the Lord,
this only do I seek:
that I may dwell in the house of the Lord
all the days of my life,
to gaze on the beauty of the Lord
and to seek him in his temple.

My heart says of you, Seek his face!
Your face, Lord, I will seek.

Psalm 27: 4,8

Robert, HMP Rochester

A Light in the Darkness

*The people walking in darkness
have seen a great light;
on those living in the land of deep darkness
a light has dawned.*

Isaiah 9:2

This was the very first Scripture I learned by heart. I was only eight years old when I was chosen to read it at a Carol service in front of 1000 pupils.

I was reminded of this verse when I came into prison, which many think of as a place of darkness. But there is a great light here, Jesus the Messiah. That is a great encouragement to me.

Patrick, HMP Wormwood Scrubs

Under Grace

Do not offer any part of yourself to sin as an instrument of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer every part of yourself to him as an instrument of righteousness. For sin shall no longer be your master, because you are not under the law, but under grace.

Romans 6:13-14

I have been brought from death to life and belong to God and live by His grace. Sin has lost its control of me.

Leroy, HMP Wormwood Scrubs

My Mighty Fortress

Truly he is my rock and my salvation;
he is my fortress, I shall never be shaken.

Psalm 62:2

As you go through life as a Christian, you do not become immune to making stupid mistakes, such as I made nearly three years ago. I had been a Christian for 33 years.

My mistakes cost me everything in this world that was important to me. It felt like my life was an island that was sinking rapidly. I remember desperately calling out to God for mercy, pleading with Him to rescue me from the destruction I thought I was heading for.

I had a very vivid vision of a helicopter rescue mission and of God reaching down and lifting me up. He

snatched me from the chaos around me and placed me in a huge and mighty fortress, far above the crashing storm. This fortress was impenetrable and nothing could shake it. Inside was safety, peace and quiet. My Saviour was there covering me with His wings. I was safe.

This sense of safety and peace stayed with me while I was awaiting sentencing, throughout my time in prison and continues now that I am released. I have known His strong hand on my life and know that whatever difficulties come along (and there have been many and possibly will be more) that He has me secure and safe. I will never be shaken in Christ!

Of course, I have encountered much pain and loss as a result of my mistakes but, through God's grace, my faith has been strengthened and my love for Christ has deepened. I count it such a privilege that I am now part of a church and able to serve the body of Christ.

Charles, ex-HMP Stafford

The Hands that Won't Let Go

When I am weary, weak, and want to give up,
His hands just won't let go,
Holding me up and helping me forward.
When I lose grip and begin to fall,
He catches me, pulls me in close,
Bringing calm and making me feel safe.
These are hands that don't let go.

They guide me in my path when
I take the wrong turn.
They are strong hands, but soft,
gentle and re-assuring,
Putting me back on the narrow road.
When I weep, they gently wipe away my tears.
When I am alone, they let me know
they are still there.

When I sleep, knowing He is holding me
brings comfort.
When the enemy attacks, they become
jealously fierce, defending me.
When I have need, they are open hands,
generous and full.

Whose hands are these, so precious
and full of sacrifice?
They are Christ's hands.
They were spread on an evil cross,
broken by nails
for a crime He did not commit,
But even then, thinking of me.
He allowed these hands to hold on to the pain
and suffering with me in His mind.

He never let go then, and won't let go now.
But His hands are now my hands.
The journey now is to allow my hands
to be for His use.

JJ HMP North Sea Camp

My Hope Is in Him

*'The LORD is my portion,' says my soul,
'therefore I will hope in him.'*

Lamentations 3:24 (ESV)

Whilst I have lost my liberty now that I am serving a moderate sentence, I feel that I have found spiritual freedom with a hope within me.

During my time on bail, I only had one way to cope with the trauma of being arrested, losing my job, being charged and then awaiting trial - for something I had not done. God had to be the focus of my attention as I devoted myself to prayer, fasting and reading the Bible. It was an ongoing battle, as I would experience hope and

reassurance but then find myself falling into despair and having to face deep doubts. There were times when I got quite angry.

I persisted in praying - at times pleading with God - and He began to soften me. I found myself using the words of the Apostle Paul: My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.¹

As I handed over control of my situation to the Lord, I got rid of the fear and got what I did want - peace. I felt safe knowing that my life is precious in God's hands. I was reassured that, no matter the outcome of the trial, I would always remain His daughter.

I am saved for eternity because Jesus has paid the ultimate price for me. I can rest assured that my calling to suffer for a little is nothing compared to the salvation which I have through the Lord Jesus Christ. I find great strength from all the promises throughout the Bible.

Ms B.

¹2 Corinthians 12:9

How firm a foundation, you saints of the Lord,
Is laid for your faith in his excellent Word!
What more can he say than to you he has said,
To you who for refuge to Jesus have fled?

Fear not, I am with you, O be not dismayed;
For I am your God, and will still give you aid;
I'll strengthen you, help you, and cause you to stand,
Upheld by my righteous, omnipotent hand.

When through the deep waters I call you to go,
The rivers of sorrow shall not overflow;
For I will be with you, your troubles to bless,
And sanctify to you your deepest distress.

When through fiery trials your pathway shall lie,
My grace, all-sufficient, shall be your supply;
The flame shall not hurt you; I only design
Your dross to consume and your gold to refine.

The soul that on Jesus has leaned for repose,
I will not, I will not desert to his foes;
That soul, though all hell should endeavour to shake,
I'll never, no never, no never forsake.

Published by John Rippon, 1787 and
usually attributed to Robert Keen(e)

Proof of Identity

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

Galatians 5:22-23a

It is not sufficient to be aware of our identity by answering that question, Who Am I? (page 150). We have to offer proof of who we are. In our society today we are regularly required to provide evidence of our identity.

And because identity theft is so prevalent, it is no easy matter to prove your identity if your ID documents are lost or stolen. A friend of mine has spent more than two years trying to secure new documents.

What evidence do we have in order to show that we belong to Christ – that *He* is our identity?

Some might try to do so by boasting that they read their Bible every day or attend chapel every week. Others might try to impress people with their knowledge of the Bible by constantly quoting from it.

But if we were simply to do that, we would not convince anyone. And God would condemn us, just as He condemned the Jewish religious leaders for their acting. On one occasion He told the Pharisees:

Make a tree good and its fruit will be good, or make a tree bad and its fruit will be bad, for a tree

is recognised by its fruit. You brood of vipers, how can you who are evil say anything good? For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of...¹

We will be known by our fruit

and we will be judged by our fruit. The compelling evidence of our identity – that we are Jesus' disciples – is the fruit of the Holy Spirit who lives within everyone who has been born again.

A Prayer

Dear Father God, I confess that I struggle with some of those fruits of the Spirit, especially (... *name those which are not always evident in your life*). Please help me by Your Holy Spirit to display these characteristics consistently.

In Jesus' Name. Amen.

For personal notes and prayer

¹Matthew 12:33-34

Worship Him: His Name Is Majestic

*LORD, our Lord, how majestic
is your name in all the earth!*

*You have set your glory in the heavens.
Through the praise of children and infants
you have established a stronghold against your enemies,
to silence the foe and the avenger.
When I consider your heavens,
the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars,
which you have set in place,
what is mankind that you are mindful of them,
human beings that you care for them?*

*You have made them a little lower than the angels
and crowned them with glory and honour.
You made them rulers over the works of your hands;
you put everything under their feet:*

Psalm 8:1-6

For personal notes. Take time to worship the Lord using this psalm. And then reflect over the past week and thank the Lord for His goodness to you.

Pray for your prison

for the Christian witness in the prison:

- for all who teach and preach God's Word
- for courses such as Alpha and Christianity Explored, that many will attend
- that many will come to faith in Jesus Christ
- that many will gain strength and comfort from their faith and grow in obedience to Christ
- for those shortly to be released and wishing to establish, or re-establish, contact with a church.

The Persecuted Church

There is not one person in the UK who is serving a sentence for possessing a Bible, for distributing Christian literature or attending a church gathering. We still enjoy religious freedom, despite recent instances of people being prevented from exercising their freedom to preach in public places.

Every year Open Doors¹ produces a World Watch List, which identifies, and ranks, the 50 countries where Christians are at the greatest risk of persecution.

In publishing the 2020 List (based upon the twelve months ending 31st October 2019), Open Doors have reported that:

- 260 million Christians (one in eight of all Christians) live in those top 50 countries,
- the level of persecution has been designated as extreme, or very high, in 45 of the countries,
- 9,500 churches were attacked or closed by the authorities – 7,600 more than the previous year,
- 3,000 Christians were killed for their faith. Thankfully that is 1,300 less than the previous period but we can take no comfort from that.

Persecution takes various forms. In some countries, Christians do not have the same rights as other religious groups: they may be denied access to education and many job opportunities. Inevitably this leads to poverty and hardship.

Many also suffer violence from other communities, as well as the police and government agencies. And many are imprisoned – and some tortured – for any breach (or alleged breach) of a law which prohibits or restricts them from practising their faith.

Pray for our Christian brothers and sisters who are suffering or live with the risk of persecution, including those who:

- are mourning the loss of loved ones,
- are in prison – and for their families,
- are only able to meet together secretly,
- have converted to Christianity and have been rejected by their families and communities,
- live in constant fear of harassment and abuse,
- risk arrest for distributing Bibles and Christian literature.

Pray that the Lord will sustain them. Pray that, even in their suffering, they will experience the Lord's peace and will be able to rejoice in their salvation.

And pray for their persecutors, that they, like the Apostle Paul, will have an encounter with Jesus and will turn to follow Him.

We know that the Lord is building His church and we know that it is in those countries where the persecution is greatest that the church is growing more quickly and stronger.

¹Open Doors is an international ministry serving persecuted Christians and churches worldwide. Their address for further information is: PO Box 6, Witney, Oxon, OX29 6WG

Amazing grace! how sweet the sound,
That saved a wretch; like me!
I once was lost, but now am found,
Was blind, but now I see.

'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear,
And grace my fears relieved;
How precious did that grace appear
The hour I first believed!

The Lord hath promised good to me,
His word my hope secures;
He will my shield and portion be
As long as life endures.

When we've been there ten thousand years,
Bright shining as the sun,
We've no less days to sing God's praise
Than when we first begun.

John Newton, 1725 -1807

Authentic Believers

*This is how we know we are in him:
whoever claims to live in him
must live as Jesus did.*

1 John 2:5b-6

We have to be constantly on the alert to avoid being deceived. We can easily be deceived by counterfeit goods, forged documents, false claims in adverts, fraudulent investment opportunities and other scams. And we also have to contend with fake news.

Jesus, when speaking to His disciples about the future, warned them:

*Watch out that no one deceives you ... and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people...*¹

And, of course, the greatest deceiver is Satan who 'masquerades as an angel of light.'²

But the warning in this passage is that people can deceive themselves into thinking that they know Jesus. People who say that they know Jesus but fail to do what He commands are called liars. (v4)

Just as an art expert will produce a certificate of authenticity – that a painting is not a fake – so John tells us how we can be sure that a person's faith is genuine. Living like Jesus did is

the proof that a person is an authentic disciple.

That is a big challenge and we might be tempted to dismiss it as being impossible. But we cannot disregard what John has instructed and we must not forget that we have the Holy Spirit living in us. We need to give Him control of our lives.

If we belong to Jesus, our lives should imitate His. That must be our aim each day. We will continue to sin but, despite our failures, others will see that we are genuine believers if we truly seek to live as Jesus did. And we can trust that some will glorify our Father in heaven as a result.³

May the mind of Christ, my Saviour,
Live in me from day to day,
By his love and pow'r controlling
All I do and say.

Kate B. Wilkinson, 1859-1928

For personal notes and prayer

¹Matthew 24:4,11 ²2 Corinthians 11:14 ³Matthew 5:16

What's in a Name?

God said to Moses, 'I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: "I AM has sent me to you."'

Exodus 3:14

We are known by our names. The Hebrew word for name means 'renown' or reputation. Until God spoke to Moses, no one had been allowed to know the meaning of the Name of God: not Abraham nor Isaac nor Jacob – no one. But now the meaning of His Name is revealed to Moses, standing at the burning bush, where God has appointed him to lead His people out from 400 years of slavery.

God's Name is Yahweh (Jehovah in English) meaning, 'I Am who I Am'. He is the living God. All other gods are man-made or man-imagined.

Why is God telling Moses His Name now? Moses was raised in Pharaoh's palace where everyone worshipped the lifeless, powerless gods of Egypt. Moses' task is to lead God's people out of Egypt and through many other lands to their own Promised Land. All along the way the Israelites will turn from the living God to the idols worshipped by other nations.

But Moses their leader had met the living God. He knew His Name; he knew His renown and His power and for 40 years, he faithfully led God's people.

Jehovah is the same God that we worship today. We know Him because He has not forsaken us, even though the world has rejected Him to serve gods of their own making. He sent His beloved Son to live amongst us, to die for our waywardness and

live again to bring us back to Himself.

The Lord Jesus is the living Son of the living God: magnificent in holiness, mighty to save. If you know Jesus, you know God and your name is written in heaven.

The God of Abraham praise,
Who reigns enthroned above;
Ancient of Everlasting Days,
And God of Love;
Jehovah, great I AM!
By earth and heaven confessed;
I bow and bless the sacred name
Forever blest.

Thomas Olivers, 1725-1799

For personal notes and prayer

Humility

*'God opposes the proud
but shows favour to the humble.'*

*Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's
mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time.*

1 Peter 5:5b-6

Moses is one of the great Bible heroes. Born into a slave family and condemned to death in infancy, he was rescued by an Egyptian princess and grew up as a Prince of Egypt.

After he got into a fight and killed a man, he escaped to the desert, where he lived as a shepherd – until God spoke to him and chose him to lead His people out of slavery and into the Promised Land.

Of all the thousands of Israelites, Moses was the only man that God spoke to directly – making him spokesman to Pharaoh in his

palace and to the slaves he led out of captivity. Moses was a hero and He had every reason to be proud. But the Bible tells us that he was the most humble person on the earth.¹

Today's world mocks humility and celebrates fame and success. But the famous, and the 'wannabe-famous', need the adulation of the crowds and they will act to please them. And many of us compromise in order to be liked and accepted by others.

But humble people are not weak people: they are the people that God can use. The proud compare

themselves to others: the humble know how small they are in relation to the might of God. The humble kneel. And what an example Jesus gave us, kneeling to wash His disciples' feet: He is both humble and dignified.²

Let us do what the Apostle Peter says and humble ourselves. It will please God and that is so much better than all the applause we might get from the world.

O for a heart to praise my God,
A heart from sin set free;
A heart that's sprinkled with the blood
So freely shed for me:
A humble, lowly, contrite heart,
Believing, true, and clean,
Which neither life nor death can part
From him that dwells within:

Charles Wesley, 1707-1788

For personal notes and prayer

¹Numbers 12:3 ²John 13:1-17

Despised and Rejected

*He was despised and rejected by men,
a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief;
and as one from whom men hide their faces
he was despised, and we esteemed him not.*

*But he was pierced for our transgressions;
he was crushed for our iniquities;
upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace,
and with his wounds we are healed.*

Isaiah 53:3, 5 (ESV)

Jesus was despised. He knew that He would be and, yet, was still willing to come to earth humbly as a man and suffer an agonising death, just as Isaiah had prophesied 700 years earlier.

To despise someone is more than just hating them; you treat them with contempt as though they are worthless. Jesus was

despised. And His Name is still despised today, as are many who bear His Name as Christians.

What a day to look forward to when Jesus, a man of sorrows who was despised and rejected, will return to earth. All who have received Him as Saviour will then welcome, honour and worship Him as their glorious King.

Man of sorrows what a name
For the Son of God, who came
Ruined sinners to reclaim:
Hallelujah, what a Saviour!

Bearing shame and scoffing rude,
In my place condemned he stood,
Sealed my pardon with his blood:
Hallelujah, what a Saviour!

Guilty, helpless, lost were we;
Blameless Lamb of God was he,
Sacrificed to set us free:
Hallelujah, what a Saviour!

He was lifted up to die;
"It is finished" was his cry;
Now in heaven exalted high:
Hallelujah, what a Saviour!

When he comes, our glorious King,
All his ransomed home to bring,
Then anew this song we'll sing:
Hallelujah, what a Saviour!

Philip Paul Bliss, 1838 -1876

For personal notes and prayer

Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine!
O what a foretaste of glory divine!
Heir of salvation, purchase of God,
Born of his Spirit, washed in his blood.

*This is my story, this is my song,
Praising my Saviour, all the day long;
This is my story, this is my song,
Praising my Saviour all the day long.*

Perfect submission, perfect delight,
Visions of rapture now burst on my sight;
Angels descending, bring from above
Echoes of mercy, whispers of love.

Perfect submission, all is at rest,
I in my Saviour am happy and blest,
Watching and waiting, looking above,
Filled with his goodness, lost in his love.

Fanny Crosby, 1820 -1915

Sing for Joy and Shout Aloud

*Come, let us sing for joy to the LORD;
let us shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation.
Let us come before him with thanksgiving
and extol him with music and song.*

Psalm 95:1-2

In prison there is plenty of shouting, mostly in anger and frustration.

Paul and Silas had been thrown into a grim, first-century Greek prison.¹ They had been badly beaten up, put in chains and had their feet secured in the stocks. Their 'crime' was that they had rescued a slave girl. Her masters, who had been exploiting her for money, had had them both arrested.

So there they were, in jail, in pain and in chains. Then, with all the other prisoners listening in, they start to pray and to sing.

Suddenly, at midnight, there was a mighty earthquake; the foundations of the prison shook; the doors flew open and their chains fell off!

Despite everything, Paul and Silas had not stopped worshipping God. They understood that even though terrible things can happen to God's people, nothing can ever diminish God's power or Glory.

When we face difficulty or distress, often our first reaction is to complain and grumble and get angry. We are unlikely to sing for joy.

But, God is still God. He is still glorious. He is still worthy of our praise. And it is in worship and prayer that our souls find release from the darkness and rise to heaven – despite everything.

And your joy could have a life-changing impact on others – just

as it did for the jailer in charge of Paul and Silas. So sing for joy to the Rock of your salvation. It will not cause your prison to shake, but something in your spirit will begin to soar as your heart begins to sing.

Praise the Rock of our salvation!
Praise the mighty God above!
Come before His sacred presence
With a grateful song of love.

*Hallelujah! Hallelujah!
He is God, and He alone.
Wake the song of adoration –
Come with joy before His throne!*

Fanny Crosby, 1820-1915

For personal notes and prayer

¹Acts 16:16-40

The Repentant Are Welcomed

By faith the prostitute Rahab, because she welcomed the spies, was not killed with those who were disobedient.

Hebrews 11:31

Chapter 11 of Hebrews is well known for being the home of the 'hall of fame' or, rather, the 'hall of faith'. It lists many of the heroes of faith from the Old Testament: Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph and Moses, amongst others. No surprises there.

But who would have expected Rahab? Not only is she the only woman but she is the only person whose means of making a living gets a mention: she was a prostitute.

Julie¹ (HMP Low Newton) writes:

Rahab may have been a hooker but she believed in God and she

exercised faith. She risked her life to hide the Israelites who had come to Jericho to spy out the land.

I am sure that there are a lot of women in prison who can identify with Rahab. And there are many of us – men and women – living with things such as addictions. They may be self-inflicted or just a way of coping with our lives but it doesn't mean that we have to continue in this way.

We can all find God. Having Him in our lives surely makes a difference. God will always

forgive us no matter what we have done.

Think how Jesus treated the marginalised and the outcasts of society. He never avoided them. He was full of compassion for them. His message of repentance was for sinners, not for the righteous.²

On one occasion the religious leaders brought before Jesus a woman who was guilty of

adultery. They wanted to stone her, according to the Law of Moses. Although Jesus refused to condemn her, He told her to give up her life of sin.³

God is willing to forgive us whatever we have done but there are two conditions. We must *believe* that Jesus has paid the penalty for our sin and we must *repent*, which means that we must not continue in our sin.

O for the wonderful love he has promised,
Promised for you and for me!
Though we have sinned, he has mercy and pardon,
Pardon for you and for me.

*Come home, come home;
You who are weary come home;
Earnestly, tenderly, Jesus is calling,
Calling, O sinner, come home!*

Will L. Thompson, 1847-1909

For personal notes and prayer

¹Not her real name. ²Luke 5:31 ³John 8:1-11

Like Grasshoppers

*Surely the nations are like a drop in a bucket;
they are regarded as dust on the scales;
he weighs the islands as though they were fine dust.*

*He sits enthroned above the circle of the earth,
and its people are like grasshoppers.*

*He stretches out the heavens like a canopy,
and spreads them out like a tent to live in.*

Isaiah 40:15, 22

With so much turmoil and conflict in the world and with powerful leaders seeking to influence the affairs of other nations as well as controlling their own, Satan would love us to think that God has lost control of the world He created. He would want us to believe that God is powerless to intervene.

Isaiah wrote his prophecy at a time when Israel was fearful of the more powerful nations, Assyria, Egypt and Babylon. Isaiah reminded the people that it was a matter of perspective.

Yes, Israel was small in comparison but, to the Lord, nations are like a drop in a bucket.

God sits above the earth (which elsewhere is described as His footstool¹) and stretches out the heavens as though they were a curtain.

And how does God view the 7.8 billion of us who inhabit the earth? Isaiah tells us that we are like grasshoppers. To God, all our feverish activity, even the planning and scheming of the leaders of the world's

superpowers, are likened to the cheerful chirping and hopping of grasshoppers. But we are all very precious and dearly loved 'grasshoppers'!

So, remember: when we call to Almighty God, we are addressing the One who truly does have

absolute power and authority over all that He has created. And what an amazing privilege it is that we have access to Him. Do not entertain any thoughts from Satan that God is powerless to act. One day He will demonstrate His awesome power for all to see.

A Prayer

Almighty God, help me never to despair at the lawlessness and wickedness in this world. Please fill me with Your peace, knowing that You are sovereign and that all power and authority is in Your hands.

In Jesus' Name. Amen.

For personal notes and prayer

¹Isaiah 66:1

Only Branches

I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.

John 15:5

A new born baby clings to its mother. It is the natural thing to do. It is the only thing the baby can do. But, as it grows, it becomes less dependent upon its mother and takes steps – very tiny and faltering steps initially – to explore the world. Eventually the young child should become an independent adult.

But the Christian life is different. Christians do not mature by growing apart from Jesus, the One through whom they were born spiritually. Jesus’ instruction is very clear: we must remain in Him. The word ‘remain’ occurs eleven

times in this chapter and forty times in the whole of John’s Gospel.

Jesus likens us to a branch of a vine. We can only produce fruit so long as we remain attached to Him: He is the Vine. Separated from Him we can do nothing.

The crucial question is how do we remain (or ‘abide’, which is the word used in earlier versions of the Bible) in the Vine? We abide in the Vine when we trust and obey Him and look to Him alone for all that we need. We must allow Him to satisfy our every need.

And for that to happen, we must allow God’s Word to take root in our hearts and we must love it and live by it. As we do that, we

will be following the instruction which Paul gave to the believers in Philippi – to have the same mindset as Christ.¹

I need thee every hour,
Most gracious Lord;
No tender voice like thine
Can peace afford.

I need thee every hour,
In joy or pain;
Come quickly, and abide,
Or life is vain.

I need thee every hour;
Teach me thy will,
And thy rich promises
In me fulfill.

Annie S. Hawks, 1835 -1918

For personal notes and prayer

¹Philippians 2:5

The Victory

*But thanks be to God! He gives us the
victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.*

*Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters,
stand firm. Let nothing move you.*

*Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord,
because you know that your labour in the Lord is not in vain.*

1 Corinthians 15:57-58

A favourite story in the Bible is the story of David defeating Goliath.¹

The Philistines and Israelites are camped on either side of the valley. The 9 ft tall giant Goliath, fully armed and armoured, emerges from the camp to challenge the Israelites to send a champion to fight against him: one on one! Whoever loses will condemn his whole army to defeat and slavery.

His challenge, twice a day for forty days, brings no response. But then David, the young shepherd boy, visits the Israelites.

He is angry at Goliath's insult to the Name of God. He volunteers to confront Goliath and fells him with a single sling-shot.

The Israelite army hails David as their hero but the victory that he wins is theirs too. Even though only David had the courage to fight Goliath, all the soldiers still claim the victory as their own.

This is a great illustration of the victory that Jesus secured for us as He defeated sin and death on our behalf. We contributed nothing to secure that defeat, but His victory was for us and is therefore ours as well as His.

Jesus will never be defeated. That is why we can stand firm when we come under attack and why we can keep going in His service, even when we don't seem to be making any progress.

David confronted Goliath and triumphed for Israel.

Jesus confronted sin and death and defeated both – for us.

Crown him the Lord of life,
Who triumphed o'er the grave,
And rose victorious in the strife
For those he came to save;
His glories now we sing
Who died and rose on high,
Who died eternal life to bring,
And lives that death may die.

Matthew Bridges, 1800 -1894

For personal notes and prayer

¹ Samuel 17

Out of Darkness

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

1 Peter 2:9

Prison is often thought of as a dark place because of the evil committed by many who are serving sentences. And some plan to continue that same way of life in the future.

But don't be deceived into thinking that there is light on the outside. That is not true. As the Apostle Paul explained, the world is a dark place, populated by people whose minds have been blinded by the god of this world to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel.¹

And in the verse quoted above, the Apostle Peter reminds us that all who follow Jesus, the Light of the World, were themselves in darkness until God, by His mercy and grace, called them into His marvellous light. In Paul's words:

*For He (God) rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves...*²

So let us walk as children of light and have nothing to do with the unfruitful works of darkness.³

That may be a real challenge for you on your wing but pray for God's help to enable you to do that. And remember Jesus' instruction to His disciples:

*In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.*⁴

We cannot experience any greater joy than seeing others give glory to God as a result of our witness.

Take time to read the passages from which the verses quoted above have been taken. And if you have access to a concordance, why not look up other passages which speak of darkness and light?

I heard the voice of Jesus say,
'I am this dark world's light;
Look unto Me, your morn shall rise,
And all your days be bright':
I looked to Jesus and I found
In Him my star, my sun;
And in that light of life I'll walk
Till travelling days are done.

Horatio Bonar, 1808 -1889

For personal notes and prayer

¹2 Corinthians 4:4 ²Colossians 1:13 ³Ephesians 5:8-11 ⁴Matthew 5:16

Worship Him: He is Most Worthy of Praise

*I will exalt you, my God the King;
I will praise your name for ever and ever.
Every day I will praise you
and extol your name for ever and ever.*

*Great is the LORD and most worthy of praise;
his greatness no one can fathom.
One generation commends your works to another;
they tell of your mighty acts.
They speak of the glorious splendour of your majesty –
and I will meditate on your wonderful works.
They tell of the power of your awesome works –
and I will proclaim your great deeds.
They celebrate your abundant goodness
and joyfully sing of your righteousness.*

*The LORD is gracious and compassionate,
slow to anger and rich in love.*

Psalm 145:1-8

For personal notes. Take time to worship the Lord using this psalm. And then reflect over the past week and thank the Lord for His goodness to you.

Pray for your prison

for those who:

- long to restore relationships with their children (or with their parents),
- have lost, or been denied, contact with their children.

Pray for all the children who have a parent in the prison, and for those caring for them.

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A Final Word

We trust that you have found *Time With God* helpful. Please do get in touch if you would like to pass on any comments or if you would like to share with us any Bible verses which have been an encouragement to you, during your time in prison.

If you are not familiar with our other books (listed overleaf), please look out for them in the chaplaincy. If you find that copies are not available, please ask the chaplaincy to contact us for further supplies. Alternatively do contact us yourself.

May you draw great strength from the Lord and from His Word each day.

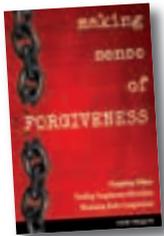
Barbara Parsons

John Phillips



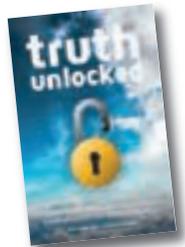
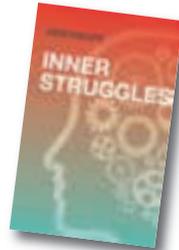
A straightforward and engaging way to learn how to explain the gospel clearly.

A collection of short prayers in plain language for those in prison, supplemented by appropriate Scripture passages.



This explains what it really means to forgive and, most importantly, how we can receive God's forgiveness.

Through reference to the Bible, this offers hope and comfort to those looking for God's help in their struggles.



A workbook of 16 essential Bible studies to help you unlock the truth of God's Word.

This A6 booklet explains the new life that Jesus offers. It is especially suitable for those living with guilt about their past.



Life can be tough for Christians who are serious about living a godly life in obedience to the Bible's teaching. Living as a committed follower of Jesus can be especially tough for those serving a prison sentence.

Time With God has been written specifically for Christians in prison. It uses the Bible to provide hope and encouragement to help believers to be sustained, and to grow, in their faith. It will also be helpful to those exploring what it means to be a follower of Jesus: they will find answers to many of their questions.

The books from BeaconLight have been an encouragement to countless men and women, providing support and inspiration at a challenging time in their life.

Susan Cuthbert, Anglican Chaplain, HMP Bullingdon

All the books from BeaconLight are an essential and popular resource for prison chaplaincies.

Stephen Hawkins, Operations Manager, Prison Fellowship

Time With God will be a source of strength to all who already have a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ and will help all who long to know God personally.

Rev'd Taiwo Olumuyiwa, Anglican Chaplain, HMP Oakwood

Barbara Parsons lives in Banstead, Surrey. She has a passion for teaching the Bible, through speaking and writing. Her work includes poetry, stories and Biblical drama.

John Phillips, having retired from a career in insurance, has been engaged in prison ministry for more than 20 years. He lives in Banstead and is a director of BeaconLight Trust.