

# Devotions for Life



Devotions for Life:  
New Ideas from Old Ways

By

Bruce C. Swaffield

**CAMBRIDGE  
SCHOLARS**

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P U B L I S H I N G

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by Bruce C. Swaffield

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Dedicated to my wife, children, and grandchildren.



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## FOREWORD

Every Christian wants (and needs) to begin each day with a devotional, and for years I had searched without notable success for quality offerings.

Part of the problem may well have rested with me. For 28 years I was an editor at Reader's Digest, and that experience had left me with writing standards that are quite high. I can spot preacher fiction a mile away—and few things are more irritating than made up stories even if they are offered in the name of God. Disjoined thoughts that are not connected to the teachings of Jesus or the eternal stories of the Old Testament are likewise useless. Maybe all this was an excuse, but it fully justified (to me) my failure to find books of devotions to begin the day.

A couple of years ago I was thrown together on a project with Regent University Professor Bruce Swaffield, and without knowing of my fruitless search he began emailing me daily the devotional he long had been writing for colleagues and friends.

Much to my surprise, I turned on my computer each morning looking forward to Bruce's daily offering. Soon I developed my own forwarding list. I had a son recently dispatched to rural Afghanistan, and he came to be on the receiving end of Bruce's daily missiles though, in truth, my son's mother and father may have needed these teachings every bit as much as he did. Another son was in a high-stress job, and he was added to appropriate offerings. So too were other friends.

I am not sure I can claim credit for the publication of this extraordinary collection of daily devotionals, but soon I was relaying emails to Bruce on what these devotions were meaning to me and my family and friends.

Some days Bruce was hitting me between the eyes with what I took (surely mistakenly) as admonitions of my failure to love others and pray for those whom I perceived did not wish me well! Always, the essays were linked to the teachings of Christ and his disciples. Always, too, Bruce's teachings were brief even as they inspired religious thoughts from within me.

But as I continued to let Bruce know how much these devotionals had come to mean to us all, I figure I was reinforcing to him the importance of getting this collection of daily teachings in a book so they could enrich the religious lives of others.

This he has done—and I urge those who read these words to let others know of the power and significance of Bruce’s inspired work. Believe me, my experience illustrates these devotionals do not need a hard sell. We need only get them into the hands of others for them to do the job.

Kenneth Y. Tomlinson  
Former Editor-in-Chief  
Reader’s Digest

## PREFACE

As a young boy of only 11 years old, I attended a special exhibition of paintings by Vincent Van Gogh at the Cleveland Museum of Art. I am not sure why I went other than to spend time with my Aunt Ruth and Uncle Don, but it was an experience that has stayed with me for the past five decades.

From the moment I walked into the gallery, I was immediately struck by the feelings and emotions that seemed to spring forth from each painting. The scenes were vivid and alive, from vast fields of sunflowers to clumps of wild irises to blazing stars in a night sky. Thick brush strokes in contours of blue, purple, red, and yellow exploded with an energy I had never felt before. Though I knew little about art at the time, I could tell this man was wholly devoted to painting and he was passionate about his work.

This collection of devotions, I hope, will inspire you in much the same way as I was moved by Van Gogh's art back in 1961. Words do not always have the same impact as a visual image, but perhaps you will view things in a different way as you read through the many chapters. Maybe, too, you will relate to the examples presented and be encouraged to see that the scriptures can help us tremendously in our daily lives. All we need to do is to open the Bible and be willing to listen to the stories. The simple, but profound, message in God's word has the power to change our lives in remarkable ways.

Bruce C. Swaffield  
August 3, 2012

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This book began more than eight years ago when a colleague, whom I did not know at the time, lost his job as a writer. He is one of the best in the business and I have always admired his work. I began writing and emailing a daily devotion to encourage him during this difficult time. I, too, had experienced the tragedy of having to leave a place and position I loved. I hoped my earlier journey could be of some help to him. Most of all, I wanted him to know that he would make it through this crisis and come out better on the other side. In “A Farewell to Arms,” Ernest Hemingway wrote that, “The world breaks everyone and afterward many are strong at the broken places.” My friend is now stronger than ever and he embraces the future knowing God will continue to guide him.

I would like to thank my wife, Jeannine, for all of her help and support throughout the past 40 years. She has believed in me, and stood by me, even when I gave up on myself. I also am grateful to my children (BethAnn and Brendon) and grandchildren (Ellie, Lexi, and Dom) for showing me how to truly enjoy the precious life we have been given. My appreciation, too, to all those who have read my devotions online each day and offered me constant feedback.

Finally, I want to acknowledge the excellent work of Padmakshi “Paddy” Parkhe. She devoted countless hours to reading and copyediting each one of these devotions, not once but many times. Her advice and suggestions were invaluable.

# CHAPTER ONE

## NEEDING PEACE, STRENGTH, AND PROTECTION

### **Being set free**

Most of us live as prisoners. We go through life not realizing that we have already been set free. We keep ourselves in bondage to our own will: desires, emotions, schedules, attitudes, feelings, and thoughts. All the while we believe we have been liberated from the chains of the world.

What we fail to understand is that we imprison ourselves each time we try to control our lives. Too often, we allow ourselves to be incarcerated by what we want or think. Rather than release ourselves by turning control of our lives over to God, we sentence ourselves to life in prison. We are easily led by the dictates of the present moment and want to satisfy only our physical cravings.

Jesus came so we could be set free to enjoy a more abundant life. What he offers us, though, is spiritual freedom. Too many people waste precious time and money seeking earthly freedom. But once we realize the divine source and unlimited potential of our freedom, we can truly comprehend how Paul and Silas were able to sing hymns and praise the Lord when they were in jail with their feet in stocks.

When we are living as God's chosen children, nothing can make us prisoners. The world might try to keep us in shackles, but God's power is higher and greater than anything on earth. He frees our mind and soul. The world frees only the body.

### **Words for life**

Being successful as Christians involves learning how to be less physical and more spiritual. The situations we encounter most often, the real stumbling blocks in our journey through life, are all consequences of the physical world. Almost daily we come across anger, hate, jealousy, strife, pride, or envy. We see the tangible realities of what these emotions

can do to people as well as the personal effect they have upon us. Such feelings cause tension, stress, and even illness.

God calls us out of this physical realm, with all of its pain and suffering, to live a life that is full. Jesus tells us in John 6:63 that, “The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life.” What are these words of life? Forgiveness. Love. Peace. Compassion. We need to recognize that every word of life has a counterpart in the physical world. Appropriately, these dark antonyms might be called the words of death: anger, hate, jealousy, etc.

God calls us to live a spiritual life, not a physical one—to be in the world but not of the world. We can find the peace we are so desperately seeking if we learn to live by the ways, and words, that impart true and eternal life.

## **A higher strength**

Life is an extremely difficult path for us to follow at times, but the Lord always has a plan and purpose.

One of the hardest things I have had to do is watch my mother die. She was 85 and her body was wearing down. The doctors explained there was little more they could do to help her. She had to make a choice: to continue treatment for the diseases and keep fighting or to be made comfortable for her remaining days. During the previous two months, she had been in and out of the hospital three times. She was tired and had reached the point where all she wanted was to rest.

The next four days were her last. Our family stayed with her hour after hour. All too soon, on a serene Saturday afternoon, she let out a final, soft breath. She gently closed her mouth and her life transcended into the next world.

At that moment, a powerful stillness filled the room. It was both comforting and familiar—a presence of complete peace that words alone cannot describe. Even in that moment of grief I felt a surreal strength envelope me. I experienced first-hand what St. Paul must have meant when he wrote, “For when I am weak, then I am strong” (2 Corinthians 12:10). The Lord made me able to cope, through his power, at a time when I was completely unable to accept my mother’s death on my own.

## **Faith over fear**

Peace can be hard to find in an often busy and noisy life. With meetings, phone calls and emails, work and obligations, shopping and

preparing meals, there is little time left for rest and relaxation. But peace can be found if we know where to look for it.

The peace that God gives us truly passes all understanding. What words, for example, can explain why a person dying of cancer is happy and full of joy? How do we comprehend why those who have almost nothing in life are glad? Why is someone who is out of work full of faith and hope? There are no logical reasons, at least none that the world can see.

The sort of serenity that comes from God is a stillness of the Spirit—a knowing and believing God can and will take care of everything. Such faith produces tranquility in the middle of a crisis. Everything can be raging around us, yet we can be content and composed inside, much like Jesus at rest in the back of the boat during a furious storm.

At times, however, we act like the terrified disciples described in Mark 4:38 who cried out, “Teacher, don’t you care if we drown!” With confidence and authority, Jesus rebukes the wind and waves. “Why are you so afraid,” he asks the very ones who are supposed to believe in him. “Do you still have no faith?” What would be our answer today to this same question about our faith?

## **The secret of satisfaction**

You and I must never give up trying to be content (satisfied) with the content (substance) of our lives. Usually, there is something small that spoils the rest of the package. Everything seems perfect except for one or two things: maybe it has to do with a job, where we live, certain people we have to deal with, the car we drive, having a little more money each month, or even the way we look.

Worrying about what we would like to change will not help. In fact, it will only change our attitude and behavior because we are more concerned about what we do not have rather than what we do have.

Most of the reason why the apostle Paul could claim to be content in all situations was due to his perspective. He treasured all that God had given him rather than thinking about what he desired to make his life better. Paul had enough trust and faith to let God determine what was best.

Too often, we try to tell God how to make our lives better. We pray for what we want and then expect God to deliver. But we must go all of the way in our prayers and hopes. When we ask, we must be willing to accept God’s decision over our own. If we can do this, then we can be content (satisfied) with the content (substance) of our lives. He knows what we need to be happy even when we think we need something else.

## **A broken heart**

Has someone or something broken your heart recently? Maybe it was a dear friend or a spouse who hurt you. Perhaps it was a situation you heard about or even experienced: a divorce, the death of a little child, an abandoned pet that has been abused, an elderly person who was neglected in a nursing home, or some of the many other sad incidents that occur daily all around us.

All of these tear us apart quite literally. We grieve and wonder why such things have to happen to us personally and in our society in general. Pain and suffering are nothing new. People throughout the ages have felt the same kinds of hurts as we feel today.

We are not alone in our distress. God also aches because of the troubles here on earth. He notices each and every thing that happens to the billions of people past and present. Imagine his sorrow at what he sees. Psalm 34:18 reminds us that, “The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.”

Your heart may be broken right now. It may seem as though you will never heal or be whole again. You will get through the anguish that you feel at this moment because of God’s help. Try to put all of your hope in him, knowing that he is close to you and that he promises to save all “those who are crushed in spirit.”

## **Centering on God**

The Christian life can be like swimming upstream at times. The harder we try, the more circumstances push against us. We may feel as though we are fighting a losing battle and that we are no match for the powerful forces all around. But God’s strength is limitless. Nothing in the universe can outdo the one who created everything. If we draw close to him during difficulty, we will be kept out of the whirlwind.

In the middle of a hurricane, for example, there is an eye: a place of complete calm and quiet. You and I can experience peace when trials and tribulations come because God is at the center of our lives. As we go to him, the pressures of today no longer disturb us.

Jesus grew in strength by getting away from the multitudes and being with the Father. Moses kept his peace in the midst of a complaining people by staying close to God. Paul remained faithful during each of his three missionary journeys by living each day with the Lord.



We can always find safety during the storms of daily life by going to God. In him there is a divine stillness in spite of the chaos and confusion that surrounds us.

### **Winning by giving up**

God says he will take care of us as we go through life. Often, however, we try to provide for ourselves until we face problems that we cannot handle. Then, almost out of desperation, we look to him for help.

How much easier our lives would be if we took God at his word. If we let him control each and every situation, we would find the peace that always seems to be just beyond our reach. Trusting God means we would not have to worry about anything that is going to happen today. We could release all of our cares into his hands, from our finances to our relationships to our health.

Giving complete control of our lives to God is not easy. We are stubborn creatures, no matter how old we become. We want to do everything ourselves. Many times we act like children who want to dress themselves or prepare their own breakfast. We strive to be independent, almost as if we have to prove to the world that we know what we are doing, that we are strong, and we do not need anyone to help us.

When we refuse God's help, even with small everyday events, we make our own lives difficult. God wants to free us from anything that threatens to prevent us from enjoying the life he gave to us. He is much more than our creator; he also is our sustainer. He can and will provide everything we need, but only if we are willing to surrender our will to his. Giving control to God is not giving up, it is giving in to a more meaningful and peaceful life.

### **Uncovering your beauty**

The great Renaissance artist Michelangelo was known to be quite modest about his numerous accomplishments as a painter, sculptor, architect, and poet. Despite the breadth and diversity of his skills, though, Michelangelo always considered himself first and foremost to be a sculptor. On numerous occasions, he said the marvelous works he created out of marble were there in the rock; he could see them. He explained he was merely uncovering the figures, removing fragments and pieces of the white stone, so that the rest of the world could see them, too.

As we go through life, God sees in us the person he created. He is constantly at work chipping away, removing those pieces of our attitude

and personality that hide our true beauty. God wants the rest of the world to see what he sees in us.

Like the hardness of the cold marble, we also resist the change. We want to stay the way we are, in our natural state. We do not want to lose the part of us that dislikes those who have hurt us; we do not want to give up the shards of anger that we have toward an oppressive boss or co-worker; we do not want the pieces of a bitter past to be taken away.

But in the end, it should not matter what we want. God is the creator, the artist, of our lives. He is trying to show the world our magnificence and radiance; he can only do so if we are willing to let him be the sculptor. We need to remember that God's sole purpose is to let the world see his glory in us.

## **Peace or understanding?**

We want peace in our lives, but we also want understanding. When things go wrong, we want to know why. Or when we are not able to do something which is important to us, we look up at God and wonder why. Why don't his plans and thoughts line up with ours?

As rational beings, we believe there is a cause and effect for every situation: we get sick because we caught a virus from someone; we are having a difficult time at work because a co-worker is talking about us; we can't buy a new car because the bank will not give us a loan; we are not able to take a much-needed trip because we lack money. All of these things make sense to us, even though we have trouble accepting them.

Do we feel better when we are able to explain events and situations? Maybe so. But what would give us complete satisfaction is to have peace without any necessary understanding—a peace that passes understanding, not a peace that comes from understanding. The two are very different.

God gives us a chance to go beyond our human capabilities. He allows us to experience a divine tranquility that does not depend on earthly logic. But we need to get quiet and get down on our knees in prayer. When we are silent before him, we will have the stillness that only he can give—the serenity that exceeds anything we can think or feel on our own. In his presence, nothing else should matter.

## **Renewing our strength**

Sometimes we become tired and weary, worn down by the struggles of life. We may feel as though our energy is gone—that it will take all of the

remaining strength we possess to make it through today. What has happened? What has taken away our enthusiasm and joy?

Chances are we have become too involved in the world. We have allowed ourselves to get caught up in petty disagreements, the judgments of others, and the demands of our own schedule. Rather than looking at the world from a Christian perspective, we examine everything from a secular viewpoint. We see people and situations only from our earthly perception.

What often remains invisible to us are God's many blessings: the protection, the love, and the guidance that he provides. We also are blind to the possibilities and challenges that await us. We do not notice, either, the miracles that have brought us to this time and day; we conveniently forget the past when we forget our purpose for being here.

You and I have good reason to be joyous today. Whatever your circumstance, hold on to what you know about God. He is the creator of all things and he controls all of creation. "Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the Lord our God" (Psalm 20:7). In the Lord's name we can conquer any situation because his power is spiritual. He is not limited in the least by the world's might.

## **He does all things**

Christianity is not for the faint-hearted. No, it is for those who are willing to battle and fight daily for what is right—for what is the truth. The key is that the Christian need not possess the strength of God, only the pure desire to be used by him. Our hearts must be firm on him and in him. Nothing else matters, including our human strength.

You and I are weak. On our own, we can accomplish almost nothing. Sure, we may be able to provide for ourselves and our families. But not even these things are possible without the blessing that God provides each moment as he cares for all of us.

"I can do all things," Paul wrote to the Philippians (4:13), "through Christ who strengthens me." What he is talking about is not some supernatural power that turns us into super humans. We do not suddenly become Samson-like creatures capable of conquering anyone and anything. Just the opposite!

The way Christ makes us stronger is by giving us patience, wisdom, faith, and trust. He grants us the might to let him handle the situation and to do battle for us. When we rely on his ability, all we need to do is to keep from getting involved. He will fight for us, if we resist the temptation to fight for ourselves. May we let Christ strengthen us today so he can really do all things through us!

## **Tried and true**

We stand. We fall. We rise and fall again, many times each week. Our lives ebb and flow like waves in the ocean. One moment we are strong. The next we are weak. The cycle goes on and on.

Through it all, the good and the bad, God stands with us. He loves us the same whether we are happy, sad, or somewhere in between. God went all of the way with Jesus from tiny Bethlehem to Nazareth to the Sea of Galilee to Golgotha. He does the same for us today. From our birth, through childhood, and on into our adult years, God walks next to us.

As we endure illnesses, loss of jobs, the deaths of family members, our own loneliness and depression, God keeps us in his care. He is with us, too, in the happy and joyous moments: birthday parties, graduation from school, our first car and house, into marriage, and the birth of our own children. All the while, God is watching and guiding us—gently moving us along on the path he has carved out for us.

God created us for the journey he planned. He realized there would be twists and turns, but he wanted to make us stronger and more able. He also knew trials and difficulties were the only way for us to learn patience and persistence. Most of all, he plans for us to become mature in our faith and confidence in him. God gave us the opportunity to be tried for two reasons. First, so it would give him a chance to show how much he loves us. Second, so we would realize his power and grace.

Without tribulation in our lives, we would not be where we are today. We never could have come this far.

## **Take a second**

Most children put everything they have into everything they do. Whether they are riding skateboards, coloring, or playing a game, they devote their entire thought and energy to it. They seldom think about being tired or hungry or hot or cold. In fact, they usually do not even think about time when they are involved in something they love.

We, as adults, can sometimes lose our zest and zeal for life. The routine of everyday living can wear us down to the point where we dread each little thing long before we have to do it. I have to admit that I sometimes wake up in the morning with dozens of errands coming at me like a stampede of chores. Not only do I have all of my regular tasks to perform, but I also may have a couple of meetings, a doctor's appointment, a stop at the store and the gas station, and to fix something in the house that

has broken. Before I finish my first cup of coffee, I am tired and ready to go back to bed.

We would be much better off if we faced each day with expectancy, looking forward to the opportunities that are in front of us rather than the obstacles that are trying to trip us up from behind. You and I should focus on the new things God will do in our lives this day as opposed to what we have to do. The problem with us is we spend too much time dwelling on ourselves, and how all of these things will impact us. Instead, we need to become caught up in what the Lord has given us to do.

Let us become so lost in cleaning the house, helping a neighbor, and shopping at the store that we forget all about time or how we feel. After all, the minutes and hours we have this day are given to us by God. We need to enjoy living for once and appreciate this precious gift.

## **What you need**

The truly amazing thing about God is how he is able to love and care for each one of us in a special way. Because we are his children, he knows us intimately. He knows when we hurt, when we are sad, when we are weak, and when we are troubled. As our Father, he understands what we need at certain times in our lives.

To some of us he grants peace during difficulty. To others, he offers comfort, understanding, encouragement, strength, or hope. For many individuals, God is standing quietly at their side to take away the loneliness and pain.

No matter what we might require today, God will be there. To realize his help and presence, though, we must know ourselves and our need. We should not seek favor when we need confidence, and we should not look for tranquility when we need companionship.

The point is this: God will give us precisely what we need, not what we desire. Often, what we want is not good or right for us anyway, like the crippled beggar at the temple gate who asked Peter and John for money. Rather than gold or silver, they gave him complete healing.

God does the same for us. He offers what is best, even though we might want something else. Accepting his gift, no matter what it is, can do more for us than we realize. God knows us far better than we know ourselves.

## **Gold through fire**

The problem for most of us is that we want to be stronger in our faith, but none of us wants to be tested or tried. We want to be more trusting without doing anything to increase our belief in God. What we are seeking can happen only through hardship. The more we encounter, and overcome through the Lord, the stronger our faith will become.

An athlete does not become better merely by desire. The process involves hard work and an occasional injury. A scholar does not become wiser without years of study and research. Nor does a person become a writer by wanting to publish a novel one day.

There is always a vast difference between what we want and what we are willing to do to achieve our goal. We know that nothing will happen in our lives unless we push ourselves beyond ourselves. We have to be more committed to what we are doing than how we are feeling. Time after time, the great examples of our faith were tested. Peter, Paul, Stephen, and others experienced adversity; they became strong through suffering. In their personal weakness they learned that they could depend on God.

We can do all things through him who strengthens us. Today we will have many obstacles to overcome; the greatest may well be ourselves and our will. May we remember, in each trial, that God is building us up. He is not beating us down.

## **24/7**

The disciples were constantly reminded of God because Jesus was with them every day. They saw him in the morning, in the afternoon, and at night. He was always there talking with them and teaching them about the kingdom of heaven. They also were with him as he healed the sick and drove out demons. They could not help but remember what their lives, and his, were all about.

We have the same opportunity today to see God at work everywhere we go. The problem is that often we forget to look at what he is doing. We have our plans, our schedules, and our agenda. We rush from one thing to another without acknowledging God or asking him what he would have us do.

In our haste to accomplish more and more each day, we need to pause frequently and go before the Lord in humility and thanksgiving. He is the source for all we need. He can refresh us when we are tired and weary. He can restore us when we are afraid and lost. He can renew us even when we want to give up and give in.

God is with us at all times. He is walking with us, talking with us, and teaching us, just as Jesus did with the disciples. If we do not notice his presence, we are not looking hard enough. “Seek and you shall find,” Jesus said (Matthew 7:7). He knew what he was talking about. The real question is: Do we trust him enough to believe what he said?

## **Divine protection**

Psalm 23 overflows with lovely, poetic references of God’s love, mercy, and protection. In all the scriptures, there is no better demonstration of how God watches over his people. We see that he gives us everything we require: rest in lush meadows beside quiet streams, strength to praise him continuously, courage to walk through dark valleys, and hope for life in eternity with him.

But there is more. God also blesses us with nourishment and honor. Verse five says, “You prepare a banquet for me, where all my enemies can see me; you welcome me as an honored guest and fill my cup to the brim.” Through this life and the next, in body and in soul, God promises to fill all our needs.

In his commentary on the Bible, theologian Adam Clarke puts it this way: “A magnificent banquet is provided by a most liberal and benevolent host; who has not only the bounty to feed me, but power to protect me; and, though surrounded by enemies, I sit down to this table with confidence, knowing that I shall feast in perfect security.”

We do not have to wait until eternity for part of this meal. The feast of life is spread before us right now, and the Lord keeps constant watch so that our enemies will not take it away. May you partake of this banquet and satisfy your soul with all the good things God has put at the table before you.

## **Believing without seeing**

Knowing God is with us in the confusion and chaos of life is essential to our being. Yet, we often deny ourselves the very thing that we need most. As circumstances swirl out of control all around us, we suddenly forget about the presence of God. We need to believe that God never leaves us alone. He is always there.

His supernatural presence is with us even when our lives seem the darkest. When we feel abandoned by the world, God is there. When we suffer because of the faults of others, God is there. When we have nowhere to turn, God is there. When we have lost our way, God is there.

We have his promise, his own personal covenant, that he will never leave us, even when our hope fades and grows dim. During such times, we have to learn to trust—not with our sight but with our soul. We must resist the temptation to be convinced only by his physical presence. We should not need to see the wounds in his hands before we believe he is with us.

What can help us most of all is to understand that God does not need to show himself in order to be present in our lives. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, God can do all he needs to do. It should not matter to us whether we can see him at work or not. We should place all of our hope in the power of his actions rather than in the physical presence of his appearance. If we truly believe in God's divine power, seeing him next to us will not give us any more than we already possess through him.

## **Complete calm**

The major storms in our personal lives often produce anxiety, fear, worry, and anger. They cause us to lose our perspective and our hope. During such times of difficulty, the slightest irritation or inconvenience can make us more upset. No one wants to feel lost or confused; all we desire is a moment of peace.

Peter knew the peace that we are seeking. He was able to remain calm even when he was put in jail by King Herod, the grandson of Herod the Great. Herod imprisoned Peter right after he ordered the death of James, the brother of John. Certainly, Peter knew what awaited him the day after his trial. Despite his fear of imminent death, Peter slept soundly as he was chained between two guards. In fact, Peter was in such a deep sleep that an angel of the Lord “struck Peter on the side and woke him up” (Acts 12:7).

How many of us would be as calm and composed, even if we knew an angel was going to set us free? Peter's ability to find peaceful sleep came from the Lord. He knew the Lord was with him in the cell, and he knew that God would be with him the next morning.

Peter believed God would take care of him, no matter what. Are we willing to have the same kind of trust in God? Our peace depends on it.

## **God working through us**

Sometimes when we feel defeated by the world, we think God can no longer use us. Nothing could be further from the truth. Just look at what the Lord did through Samson even after Samson's enemies had triumphed over him.



Samson was endowed with superhuman strength. Through a series of unfortunate events, Samson was finally captured and put away by those who, for more than 20 years, had been jealous and afraid of his power. In all this time, they never once gave up trying to destroy Sampson. Eventually, they learned his secret and cut off his hair. As a result, Samson was helpless to defend himself.

When he was taken captive, Samson was put in bronze shackles and chained to a grinding wheel in prison. To make sure he would no longer be a threat to anyone, the Philistines even gouged out his eyes. Blind and weak, Samson was sentenced to a useless future, or so his enemies thought. They mocked Sampson and even used him for entertainment during a feast to their pagan god Dagon. Hundreds of people laughed at Samson and shouted, “Our god has delivered our enemy into our hands” (Judges 16:24).

As he stood there in front of them, Samson seemed helpless and alone. He was exactly what they wanted him to be: a man without power. They had defeated him. But God was not done with Samson. With all the remaining strength he had in his aging and feeble body, Samson allowed the Lord to use him one final time. He pushed against the two pillars of the temple where he was chained and the entire structure collapsed, killing everyone.

God wants to use us, especially when it seems everyone and everything is coming against us. When we are weak, then we are strong. God wants us to rely on his strength and not our own.

## **Learning to be silent**

The difficulty with prayer is that we do not realize what it means to be silent before the Lord. We have never been taught ways to shut out all the things going on in our lives. All too often we cannot focus on God because we are too focused on ourselves. Until we learn the secret of being still before God, we will never be able to experience full peace and comfort.

Many times we have the wrong approach to prayer: we bring a long list of concerns to God, asking for his help, his guidance, and his wisdom. We are full of our needs and problems. Certainly, there is nothing wrong with seeking God during times of difficulty or adversity, but prayer is much more. We miss the inner joy our Father can give us if we fill the entire time with our petitions. Discovering the beauty of just being with God comes when we are able to keep quiet in his presence.

All of our lives we have been told what to do as we pray: “Be still and know that I am God” (Psalm 46:10). Even after 30, 40, 50, or 60 years we

still have not reached the point where we can turn off the things of this world as we seek the things of heaven. We must get into the habit of being silent. It is not easy at first. We need to push ourselves each day to turn off our busy minds. Eventually, we will be able to hear God and feel his presence all around us.

As we abandon our own cares and begin to accept the stillness of God, the distracting noises of this world suddenly fade away. Only then will we have the chance to really know God and the tranquility of his holy presence.

## **Standing still**

The more faithful we try to be to God, the more trials we face! It has always been this way, ever since the beginning of the world. From the time of Adam and Eve, Satan has tried over and over again to pull us away and to separate us from our Father. He will do everything within his power, limited though it might be, to come between us and God.

His most effective weapon is our own mind. He fills our heads with doubt about God's goodness. At every opportunity, he preys on our pain and weakness. "If God truly loves you," he asks, "where is he right now? How can he let you suffer this way? There must be a reason why he isn't helping you."

And that reason is the key to remaining faithful to God, in spite of intense distress and misery. Remember that there is indeed a purpose why God is not removing the hurt, at least not right away. God is always working for our greater good—to turn our pain into prosperity and our suffering into success. The change will come and it will come in a divine and prophetic time.

All Satan needs to win the battle is for us to give up. He counts on our impatience, our frustration, our emotions. We should not be defeated so easily. There may be times in our lives when all we can do is to stand, as St. Paul says in Ephesians 6:13. But that is enough for God. He will hold us up until he is ready to help us move forward. The worst thing we can do is to listen to Satan and go it alone. God is by our side no matter what the enemy claims.

## **Being content**

Paul said he had learned how to be content in every situation. He did not mean that he agreed with each circumstance he faced. Despite difficulty, Paul was content in knowing that God was with him every

moment; he accepted God's direction and protection more than he believed in his own limited understanding.

The world is full of people who lean on their own knowledge; many even depend on what they think they know to get through life. They try to make things happen despite all odds. They simply refuse to acknowledge their state of affairs; instead, they fight relentlessly until a change occurs or they are too worn out to do anything at all.

Being content is being happy with what is. It is being pleased with what we have, not desiring something more or different. It is being satisfied with our situation. We can be peaceful and calm at all times because we know everything is proceeding in accordance with God's will.

Following our desires can make us act with contention, while pursuing God's design leaves us content.

## **Made in heaven**

We can easily forget who we are. Because we live in a world that is run by human beings, we often allow people to define our worth and usefulness. When we let others put labels on us, then we have a tendency to forget who we are in God.

Each morning, we should remind ourselves that we are made in the image of God and that he loves us unconditionally. God does not judge us as the world does; rather, God is there to encourage us, strengthen us, guide us, and protect us. We are much more than the world says we are.

As children of God, we belong to a loving and great Father. His kingdom is our kingdom because we are his heirs. Even the least of us in eternity will be a thousand times greater than the most powerful human living in the world today. Let us go through every day on this earth knowing, with confidence and boldness, who we are in God.

With that knowledge and assurance, you and I can stand tall against anything the world might do or say to us. People do not realize that when they criticize us, they also are criticizing our Father.

## **Just one hour**

At the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus asked his disciples to sit while he prayed. He confessed he was overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. All he wanted them to do was to be vigilant for a brief time. He told them to watch and pray so they would not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, Jesus warned, but the body is weak (Matthew 26:41).

His words were not for the moment only. Little did the disciples realize Jesus was referring to what he was about to endure as well as everything they, and we, would encounter in life. The spirit is always eager, but the body is not. Often, there is tremendous personal anguish. Sometimes the agony is so great that we want to back away. We are tempted to ask for the cup of suffering to be taken from us.

During such times, we must remember the example of our Lord. Despite the torment, despite the fear, despite the torture, Jesus accepted the Father's will even when he wanted to escape death. He went to Calvary through trust in God, not through hope in himself.

The difficult things we are called to do in life are too much for the body. But through the Holy Spirit, we are able to go beyond physical limitations and temptations. We can even bear enormous affliction, like Jesus did on the cross, when we place ourselves completely in God's care. He alone gives us the amazing grace and ability to rise above the pain so we will not give up or give in to any temptation.

## **Our daily companion**

God is in charge of all that happens both to us and around us. He controls all circumstances, events, details, and situations. Nothing will occur this day without his knowledge or without his authority. He is over all things.

As Christians, we can celebrate even before the hours of this day begin. Long before we leave the house, we can be confident that God will guide us, protect us, strengthen us, and encourage us. His love will be upon us as we do his will at home, at work, at school, and at play. We will be able to do whatever is necessary because he is there. His very presence assures us peace and prosperity.

Even if we encounter adversity and heartache, we know that God has gone before us. He will be with us in the midst of any trial no matter how large or small. We may be upset or shaken by what occurs, but God is not. He knows what we are going through.

Gently, tenderly, and affectionately he says, "I know the plans I have for you. Plans to prosper you and not to harm you. Plans to give you hope and a future" (Jeremiah 29:11). We have his promise. He will not let us fail or fall. As long as we are willing to place our life in his hands today, we know that nothing and no one will hurt us.

## **Embracing our meekness**

In the minds of most people in ancient Judea, Jesus might have seemed weak and timid. He went about the towns and villages preaching forgiveness, forbearance, self-control, restraint, and patience. “Love your enemies,” he said, “and pray for those who persecute you.” His message of peace and reconciliation no doubt gave him the appearance of one who lacked strength and courage. Nothing could have been further from the truth.

Humility and meekness are often misunderstood. My father, for example, was a quiet man. He never raised his voice, lost his temper, swore at anyone, or spoke out in anger. Most people thought he was a faint-hearted man, afraid of his own shadow. In truth, he was one of the strongest persons I have known. How much prudence, patience, and control it must have taken at times for him to remain silent when he was attacked, maligned, or blamed.

Most of us have a distorted image of strength and power. The qualities of greatness have nothing to do with might and force, but everything to do with being humble, meek, and mild. Jesus could have fought off his enemies; he could have punished those who mocked him; and he could have come down from the cross. But he was more committed to following God’s will than in giving in to human temptations. We can only imagine the courage he possessed to accept such suffering and rejection.

Like Christ, we too need to clothe ourselves with the virtues of heaven: humility and modesty. The world may see us as weak, but God will know us as meek. We will be strong in his eyes because we are willing to submit to his will more than anything else in the world.

## **Pray as you ought**

We often forget the real reason why we pray. We can lose perspective and think we are praying to tell God what we want or what is in our heart. But God realizes our needs even before we come to him. He knows what we will ask before we bow our heads.

We have to remember that prayer is for our benefit, not God’s. He allows us to commune with him in order to change our lives. When we pray, we talk with God as our Father. We look up to him and believe that he will take care of us, that he will protect us, that he will help us in all things. We have confidence that our loving Father will keep us safe and not allow anything to harm us. As we pray, we also remind ourselves that

God is the creator of all things. He is in control of everything. Not a single event happens, even the smallest, without his knowledge.

He knows the very hairs on our head and each time a sparrow falls from the sky. Going to God in prayer reassures us of his power and authority so we can experience his peace. We draw on his strength as we face difficult situations. We can rest without worry or anxiety, trusting he knows what is going on in our lives.

As we turn to God each day, we begin with the words “Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name” (Matthew 6:9). In an instant, we set our hearts and minds in motion in the right direction. We acknowledge the sovereignty, strength, and supremacy of our Lord. He is above all, in all, and through all. When we place all we are and have in him, he will meet all of our needs.

### **In him and through him**

One particular morning, as I awoke and realized I had an illness, I was forced to face myself. I had to decide who I was and whether I could attend to everything on my schedule. I suddenly realized that I am, at times, two different persons. Sometimes I am myself and other times I allow myself to be who I am in Christ.

In Christ, I am far greater than when I am in myself. I possess neither the energy nor the will to work through pain, disease, and disappointment. I easily give up and lose hope. But, in Christ, I am able to push through the difficulty because I rely on his power.

Through him I am more than able. In myself, I am less than capable. All of the great followers of the faith have experienced the supernatural might of Christ. Even we, as feeble and weak as we feel at times, have seen God accomplish incredible feats through us. The time when tragedy struck us, we walked through it because of God’s strength. When suffering came without warning, so did God’s grace. As we were betrayed by those who seemed to care for us, God loved us. Where we had no place to turn, God offered us shelter and protection.

In his name and by his authority, we are more than conquerors over anything and everything that we face each day: sickness, depression, rejection, and oppression. We can gain the will to overcome all things because that is his will, not ours. In him we have our being, and being in him we have his authority.