

## Our Slate Wiped Clean by Christ

**The LORD hath taken away thy judgments, he hath cast out thine enemy: the king of Israel, even the LORD, is in the midst of thee: thou shalt not see evil any more** (Zephaniah 3:15, KJV).

**Scripture:** Zephaniah 3:14-20

**Song:** “Jesus Paid It All”

Juvenile criminal records may be removed when the youth reaches adulthood. In many states the juvenile records are either sealed from public view or destroyed altogether. The young adults get a clean record, and past offenses cannot be held against them as they seek employment, schooling, or other opportunities. This is not based on merit; it is entirely an action taken by the state. Individuals can begin a new life without past crimes haunting them.

How much greater is the grace and restoration offered to us by God! Instead of our facing the judgment required by our sin, God has taken it away in Christ. In addition, He has offered us permanent protection from the accuser who would desire to steal back our lives. God provides this for all who have given their lives to Christ. This is nothing we have done; this is entirely the work of God.

We do not need to live in fear or threat of judgment. We can experience true peace with God in Christ now, and our future destiny will be in God’s love. This is a cause for continual celebration and gratitude as we walk in eternal fellowship with God.

**O God in Heaven,** You cleaned our slates and removed our sin. You redeemed us and made us righteous in Christ. Guide us in every step with You. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

May 4

## Blessing Others

**“I will bless those who bless you, . . . and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you”** (Genesis 12:3).

**Scripture:** Genesis 12:1-8

**Song:** “Mission’s Flame”

A St. John’s University professor and I were talking about ideas similar to the Golden Rule (Luke 6:31). She told me: “Centuries ago, people were taught to care for anyone within a distance of 30 minutes. That was understood as the 200 houses closest to yours. Now a jet can travel 250, 350, even 450 miles in that time. What’s more, mobile phones have swept across the world. We now can reach people almost anywhere on earth. Do you know what I think? It’s time to change our thinking again.”

Like the patriarch Abraham, we of faith are called by God to bless all peoples. It all starts by hearing God’s call on our lives and saying yes to Him. Once we receive the Lord’s rich blessings, then it’s our privilege to bless others.

We can bless others in a plethora of ways. Those ways include our smiles, our greetings, our friendliness, our friendships, our listening ears, and our empathetic hearts. More ways include winsomely sharing Scripture verses, loving and living by biblical principles, and speaking gracious words of truth. My favorite? Sharing a page from my devotional reading that day.

**Dear Lord,** thank You for the many ways we can bless others. Today please make me a blessing to those I know and meet. In Jesus’ name, amen.

## God Forgives and Forgets

**“I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more”** (Jeremiah 31:34).

**Scripture:** Jeremiah 31:31-34

**Song:** “Mighty to Save”

My longtime mentor and good friend, evangelist Luis Palau, had just finished speaking in Chicago when a retired university professor, age 77, slowly shuffled up to him. Luis asked him, “Do you have eternal life, or are you still searching?”

The professor said he’d lost his faith in college. Then he added, “God will never take me back. He can’t. I am so unworthy.”

It was Holy Week, so Luis talked about Good Friday and Resurrection Sunday. Then he said, “Professor, God can take away your guilt. Listen to what God says in the Bible: ‘Their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more’” (Hebrews 10:17, paraphrasing Jeremiah 31:34).

The professor said, “That’s beautiful.”

Luis replied, “Are you ready to be received back by God?” He was, so Luis put his arm around this distinguished elderly gentleman and prayed with him. Afterward, the professor couldn’t stop talking about his joy and relief.

We sometimes forget the life-transforming power of the gospel. It’s truly good news for people of all ages. If you are ready to believe God forgives and forgets, then it’s time to pray.

**Dear Lord,** thank You so much for the reality that You forgive all our sins and remember them no more. Thank You that Jesus paid it all. May I experience the joy of Your salvation again today. Amen.

May 6

## Experiencing True Freedom

**“I will save them from all their sinful backsliding, and I will cleanse them”** (Ezekiel 37:23).

**Scripture:** Ezekiel 37:15-23

**Song:** “Where the Spirit of the Lord Is”

As a 12-year-old, Jean-Paul Sartre decided to become an atheist so that he could live the rest of his days as he pleased. To seal his decision, Jean-Paul stood before a mirror, stared at his reflection, and then cursed God. Sartre went on to make a name for himself, of course. His political exploits are legendary, and his writings are definitive of mid-twentieth-century atheistic existentialism.

Shortly before his death, however, Sartre relented. The *Nouvel Observateur* records his words: “I do not feel that I am the product of chance, a speck of dust in the universe, but someone who was expected, prepared, prefigured. In short, a being whom only a Creator could put here; and this idea of a creating hand refers to God.” This amazing statement by Sartre later appeared in *National Review*.

I’ve talked with hundreds of people across the US and Canada. I find that many wish, in their heart of hearts, they could believe that God hasn’t given up on them after all. How good, how very good, that the Lord will do whatever is needed to free us from the eternal consequences of the choices in our past! Thanks to His death on the cross, Jesus saves and cleanses us from all sin. As a result, we can experience true freedom, and then start sharing the gospel with others.

**Dear Lord,** thank You that You don’t want anyone to perish, but want all to come to repentance. Even Sartre. Even me. What good news indeed! In Jesus’ name, amen.

## Living at Peace with Others

**If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone** (Romans 12:18).

**Scripture:** Romans 12:9-21

**Song:** “Broken Vessels (Amazing Grace)”

At the request of a major Christian publisher, I served as the executive editor for a study Bible. More than 140 people worked on that project. One day three team members called me, one after another. Each one told me, in so many words, “I’m so angry with you that I won’t speak with you ever again.” Click.

I was baffled. I lined up a mediator, and the three individuals agreed to meet with me in a certain city. That morning the mediator called to say he couldn’t come after all. I panicked. *This could be the worst day of my life*, I thought. I listened to them intently all morning. Before noon, God had bridged the gap and all three reconciled with me. Then we went out to lunch to celebrate. That day we became friends.

What gap do you want God to bridge in your own relationships? It could be to a family member, a neighbor, or a friend. Whoever it is, there is hope. So talk it over with God. Step out in faith and invite the other person to meet with you. Ask for permission to invite a mutual friend to join the two of you. Listen. And don’t forget to celebrate your reconciliation.

**Dear Lord,** thank You for encouraging me to do my best to reconcile with others. You know who I have in mind. Please give me courage to step out in faith today. In Jesus’ name, amen.

May 8

## Sharing God's Goodness with Others

**Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus** (1 Thessalonians 5:18).

**Scripture:** 1 Thessalonians 5:12-22

**Song:** "Good, Good Father"

Sometimes life is hard. Very hard. I should know. Within a six-week period I was hit with a rapid-fire series of crises. My love for God, joy for life, and peace were shattered. In my despair, I doubted God's character. Finally the day came when I couldn't read the Bible anymore. I couldn't pray, even over a meal. Experientially, I had lost my faith. I had let the circumstances of life temporarily overshadow what I knew to be true.

I'm so glad God began renewing my faith when I started taking several small, simple steps of obedience. I forced myself to open my Bible, read a verse, and honestly answer the question, "Do I believe it?" To my surprise, I said yes. It wasn't a big YES! But it was enough to prompt me to feel thankful and hopeful, so I read another verse, and then another. At long last, I felt God speaking through His Word to me again. I started praying to Him, as well. In time, my faith was renewed in a remarkable way.

Since then I've talked with many about my experience. Not because it's dramatic, but because it's true to life. After all, every Christian is tempted, at one time or another, to experientially lose his or her faith. Thankfully, God isn't caught off guard. He isn't shocked or surprised. Instead, He is ready to rebuild our faith. Often it becomes more robust than ever.

**Dear Lord,** thank You that we have the ability to be thankful to You. What a gift! In Your name, amen.

## Don't Live for God Solo

**“The inhabitants of one city will go to another and say, ‘Let us go at once to entreat the LORD and seek the LORD Almighty. I myself am going” (Zechariah 8:21).**

**Scripture:** Zechariah 8:18-23

**Song:** “Build My Life”

A few months before his death at age 90, best-selling author and Christian statesman Dr. Ted W. Engstrom invited me to fly to Pasadena, California, to spend a day together, just the two of us. His eyesight was gone, but his mind was still sharp. For hours he told me about the things closest to his heart.

Among other things, Dr. Engstrom told me about a pact that he, Billy Graham, and Bill Bright had made decades earlier, before they became famous. “We promised each other that we would finish well,” Dr. Engstrom told me. “And just think—Bill Bright did just that! Billy Graham assures me he’s going to be faithful to the end. And I fully intend to do the same!”

I’ll never forget his smile. Although he had made that promise long ago, keeping it wasn’t a burden. Instead, it seemed to be the secret of his enthusiasm and vitality. I’ve seen athletes flash that same smile after winning a major victory. To see it radiate from someone near the end of life is even more moving.

It’s not enough to have private good intentions. It’s best to make important lifelong decisions together, as a team, with close friends. I’m not just talking about wedding vows, of course. I’m talking about promising to live for God your whole life. Together you can do it!

**Dear Lord,** please give me friends willing to go the distance with me. In Jesus’ name, amen.