

May 24

When We Disappoint God

“This is what the LORD says: Do what is just and right”
(Jeremiah 22:3).

Scripture: Jeremiah 22:1-10

Song: “There’s a Wideness in God’s Mercy”

In my adult life, people have disappointed me. Friends have made promises that went unfulfilled, my children lied and disobeyed me, coworkers failed to follow through on important assignments . . . Not that I am faultless. I am sure that I too have disappointed others. And I have disappointed God.

Throughout the Old Testament, God’s people disregarded their relationship with Him. God would send prophets to remind them to repent, but most would not listen. At first glance at today’s reading, I assume that God exacts a final and lasting retribution upon those who would dare to disobey Him. In His justice, He would bring destruction and ruination. If the king and the people failed to obey, they would experience calamity. Nothing but rubble would remain of the kingdom. But to dwell here overlooks an essential part of the Christian gospel—the cross of Christ.

Indeed, I am grateful to God for Christ and the cross that show me God’s great love for the world. When I know that I have stumbled, erred, and sinned—when I have turned my eye from the violence, failed to hear the cries of the alien, lacked compassion for the widow—God has chastened me. But when I follow His way, God is pleased and the world is a better place.

Merciful and loving Lord, help me never to get so concerned with the things of this world that I neglect to listen to You and do Your will. Amen.

A Godly Heritage

“I am the LORD, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac. I will give you and your descendants the land on which you are lying” (Genesis 28:13).

Scripture: Genesis 28:10-17

Song: “Find Us Faithful”

Pat is a great-great-grandmother who rejoices in God’s work in her life in spite of crippling rheumatoid arthritis. She loves her family and wants them to love Jesus too. She wrote out her life story to share. The results have been thought-provoking for her family. They have seen through Pat’s narrative how God always guides.

Jacob had a godly heritage through his grandfather Abraham and father, Isaac, who had been blessed by their faith in God. Jacob no doubt heard from them many instances of God’s provision. In spite of his heritage, Jacob sometimes depended on himself instead of God. While Jacob was fleeing his angry brother Esau, God reached out to Jacob and promised him many descendants who would live on the land.

Often our families are hardest to reach for Christ, because they know all our flaws. But like Pat, we can share our journey of faith through writing or recording. God can use this witness to strengthen us and draw our descendants closer to himself.

Holy Father, thank You for reaching out to us so we can be part of Your family. Help us to be witnesses of what You have done for us. In Jesus’ name, amen.

May 26

God's Powerful Grace

“We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved” (Acts 15:11).

Scripture: Acts 15:10-17

Song: “Wonderful Grace of Jesus”

Martin longed for a personal relationship with God. He confessed his sin—over and over. His prayers seemed unanswered. Sermons did not help. When he studied God's Word, he finally understood that he could not do anything to gain salvation; it was a gift from God. Then reformer Martin Luther accepted God's free gift and became a dedicated follower of Christ.

Most of the early Christians came out of Judaism. Because of their Old Testament law background, they found it hard to understand that God would accept a person solely because of His grace. They thought that there must be more to it than simple faith in Jesus Christ as their Savior. Many people today think the same way. But as Martin Luther found, accepting God's grace is exactly what God requires.

The only way to receive God's favor is to accept Jesus Christ as our Savior. Many have not yet taken this all-important step of faith. Others may have prayed for His salvation, but do not feel as if they know Him well. Wherever we are on our spiritual journey, God stands ready to accept us when we repent of our sin. He wants us to know Him better. We can learn to love Him more in prayer, reading His Word, and worshipping Him.

Thank You, Lord Jesus, for dying on the cross for our sin. Thank You for Your grace in accepting sinners who come to You in faith. In Your name, amen.

Blessed to Be a Blessing

Blessings will come on you and accompany you if you obey the LORD your God (Deuteronomy 28:2).

Scripture: Deuteronomy 28:1-6, 15-19

Song: “Trust and Obey”

At the age of 50, AJ suffered a stroke while driving on a busy expressway. It was only by God’s grace that she safely steered over to the side. While recuperating, AJ promised the Lord she would wholeheartedly work for Him until He called her to Heaven. And having been given many additional years, she strives to be salt and light by serving on several professional boards and committees, as well as volunteering one day per week at a hospital. She joyfully blesses others by encouraging them.

Moses spoke God’s words plainly to the children of Israel while they wandered in the wilderness. God promised to bless the people if they obeyed Him. His blessings would be numerous: peace from enemies, prosperity, abundant crops, and many children. However, if they chose to disobey, they would be cursed by God. They would experience many troubles as a nation and individual families.

Being blessed by God comes from following what He says. Obeying Him does not guarantee a trouble-free life. However, God has promised to bless us especially through difficult times. When we live His way, He guides and keeps us. He has promised never to leave or forget us. Even when we go our own way, He forgives us if we repent and turn back to Him. Then we can tell others about His blessings.

Lord, please forgive us when we go our own way. Help us to tell others how You have blessed us. In Christ’s name, amen.

May 28

Fears in the Dark

[Joseph] got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt (Matthew 2:14).

Scripture: Matthew 2:13-15

Song: “Like a River Glorious”

Dad was supposed to pick me up after a school band concert. Where was he? Only 10 years old, I worried that something had happened. The school was closed and darkness came quickly. There were no cell phones back then, and no outdoor pay phones. I was afraid someone might hurt me. I knew God was there, so I prayed—a lot. Finally, Dad drove up, so apologetic. He had dozed off in his recliner after work. I thanked God I was safe.

God chose Joseph to be Jesus’ earthly father. God’s angel had spoken to him about marrying Mary. Several months after Jesus’ birth, an angel visited Joseph at night to tell him to flee to Egypt for his family’s protection. King Herod had commanded that boys under 2 years old be killed. Despite any fear, Joseph immediately obeyed.

Many of us experience fear about a present situation or the future. We fret and worry that something bad will happen. But we need to remember that God knows our circumstances and has promised to always be with His children. Writing down Bible examples of God’s help can be comforting. Prayer is another big weapon. God is always there to listen to His children. He cherishes each one and wants us to understand His love for us.

O God, help us remember that You are always available to calm our fears. Thank You for this reassuring promise. In Your holy name, amen.

God's Discipline—Our Growth

“I led them with cords of human kindness, with ties of love. To them I was like one who lifts a little child to the cheek, and I bent down to feed them” (Hosea 11:4).

Scripture: Hosea 11:3-6

Song: “Have Thine Own Way, Lord”

Training a dog is somewhat similar to being a parent. The frisky puppy learns to obey commands, given in a firm but kind voice. The trainer uses treats and encouraging words when the dog obeys. The result should be a trained dog that willingly obeys commands because he loves and respects his trainer.

God disciplined Israel because they followed false gods. He allowed them to be taken captive. Captivity sounds harsh, but He led them lovingly and kindly. He did not forget them, but took care of them each day. God disciplines His children so they can become more like Jesus. Without the Holy Spirit in our lives, this goal is impossible. We will never reach perfection until we are in Heaven. But discipline helps us mature in our faith.

We can thank the Lord for those who have helped discipline us, spurring us on to grow as Christians. Our parents may have been our first teachers about the ways of the Lord. Sunday school teachers and ministers imparted God's truth to us during our childhood or young adulthood. Even if these instructors are now gone to the Lord, we can honor them by thanking the Lord for them. And we can step up to reach out to new believers to help them grow, too.

Thank You, Lord, for the people who helped discipline us in our faith. Guide us to become trainers of younger Christians, too. In Jesus' name, amen.

May 30

Useful for God

Formerly [Onesimus] was useless to you, but now he has become useful both to you and to me (Philemon 11).

Scripture: Philemon 8-21

Song: “Make Me a Blessing”

Charles Colson performed any politically motivated act he was asked to do—legal or not. Christian friends tried to help Colson see his need of Jesus as Savior. Finally, he accepted Christ and totally changed. But because of his crimes, Colson went to prison. There he shared the gospel with other convicts. That was the beginning of Prison Fellowship, an organization that has helped lead thousands to Christ. Formerly “useless” for God, Colson became useful for God.

Paul wrote to his fellow Christian, Philemon, whose slave Onesimus had run away. When Paul shared the gospel with him, Onesimus accepted Christ. Paul appealed to Philemon to welcome his returning slave as a brother in Christ. He knew the slave had been useless to his master. Now Onesimus was ready to be useful by serving God in his work.

Sometimes we wonder whether we are useful for God. We see no result after witnessing to a friend or relative for years. We may be afflicted or bedridden. Or perhaps our sin makes us feel useless. But God knows our hearts. He wants us to desire to be used of Him. It may be behind the scenes. God may want us to have a listening ear or give a hug to a friend. He may give us an opportunity to share our testimony with a stranger on a flight. We don’t know what an impact we can make with even a small action. But God knows.

Lord, please give us wisdom to know how we can be useful for You today—and give us the courage to do it. In Your name, amen.

Love and Justice

You must return to your God; maintain love and justice, and wait for your God always (Hosea 12:6).

Scripture: Hosea 11:1, 2, 7-10; 12:1, 2, 6-14

Song: “Amazing Grace”

William Wilberforce was a short, sickly man who faced giants in England in the early 1800s. A Christian member of Parliament, William worked for 20 years to abolish England’s African slave trade. He was encouraged by John Newton, who knew slavery’s evils firsthand. A former slave-ship captain, Newton found the Lord, who turned his life completely around. Newton was the author of the autobiographical hymn “Amazing Grace.” Both men saw the abolition of slavery as vital for justice.

Israel in Hosea’s time had become enslaved to sin. They had not lived up to God’s standards, but worshipped idols. They oppressed their poor. God had been faithful to His promises, but the people had been unfaithful to Him. They deserved punishment.

Perhaps we think God should have been either loving or just to His errant people. We may picture God as an old loving uncle who ignores bad things we do. Or we see Him as the stern judge who has no room for reprieve. But our Father is both loving and just. He sees us for what we are—sinners in need of a Savior. And He exacts firm justice—death—as any righteous judge would. But Jesus as our mediator advocates for us, having taken our place when He died on the cross for our sins.

Lord Jesus, thank You for being our mediator before the Father. Thank You that God is both loving and just to each of us. In Your name, amen.