

From Darkness to Light

During the past few years, the church has been abuzz with intense conversations around *eschatology*, a word theologians use to mean “last things” or “end-time events.” It’s a topic that believers have been interested in and excited about since Christ’s ascension (Acts 1:11). Since there are varying perspectives and understandings around these things, I’m not going to wade into those deep waters here. But this renewed interest in end-time prophecy reminds me that, as believers, our attention continually needs to be drawn back to and attuned to things of ultimate importance. So here’s what I’ve been asking myself, and maybe you’d like to soul-search a little too:

- Am I living as though I believe life is short and that what I do matters for eternity?
- Am I living fully in the light of my profession of faith?
- Am I ready to refuse to deny Christ at *any* cost? (Many believers around the world already live in this reality. Am *I* prepared for that?)
- Does my life reflect that I truly believe what’s been written in the Scriptures?

We have been saved by God’s grace through faith. We’ve been called out of the darkness—out of the tyranny of our self-gratifying desires, out of the allure of the world’s pleasures and baubles, and out of our deception by the devil’s schemes. What a relief! In Christ we have been brought into the light of God’s kingdom—a kingdom of righteousness and peace. What a tremendous reality!

But this calling is not a passive, “someday in Heaven” prospect. It’s here! It’s now! Consider Paul’s words to the church in Ephesus: “You were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live

as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) and find out what pleases the Lord” (Ephesians 5:8-10).

And we find instruction in Peter’s second letter that gives us a place to start: “His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. . . . For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, mutual affection; and to mutual affection, love. For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But whoever does not have them is nearsighted and blind, forgetting that they have been cleansed from their past sins” (2 Peter 1:3, 5-9).

We are not guaranteed tomorrow. Time is always short. So as God’s people, let’s shake off any cobwebs that may have formed around our commitment to Christ. For in Him, we do not belong to the darkness; we *are* children of the light (1 Thessalonians 5:5).

Peace to your heart!

Christine Dallman, Editor

The hour has already come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light.

Romans 13:11-12

Benefits of Forgiveness

Praise the LORD, my soul, and forget not all his benefits—who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases (Psalm 103:2-3).

Scripture: Psalm 103:1-12

Song: “Forgiveness”

Did you know that you can help improve your health—including getting better sleep, lowering blood pressure and cholesterol, and even reducing risk of heart attack—by something other than physical exercise? It’s not a new diet craze or a miracle pill. It’s the act of forgiveness, the decision to forgive. According to an article on the Johns Hopkins Medicine website, studies have shown a strong connection between forgiveness and improved health.

Throughout the Bible, God models forgiveness for us. In Psalm 103, David’s excitement and joy are palpable as he recounts all the benefits flowing from God’s love and compassion. Chief among them are His forgiveness of sin, His care for the oppressed, and His compassionate heart that is slow to anger.

When we struggle to forgive a wrong done to us, it’s an opportunity for us to pause and remember all that God has done for us. Then we can, in turn, extend grace by forgiving others as God has forgiven us. Our acts of forgiveness not only provide health benefits, but more importantly, they honor God’s goodness to us.

Father, I praise Your name and remember how You have redeemed my life. Help me to forgive others so that I might honor Your gifts of compassion and forgiveness. In Jesus’ name, amen.

December 1–4. **Toni Campbell** is passionate about showing the love of Christ to hurting people through practical acts of service. She serves as the benevolence ministry leader at her church.

Perfect, Everlasting Love

As a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him (Psalm 103:13).

Scripture: Psalm 103:13-22

Song: “How Deep Is the Father’s Love for Us”

If you’re a parent, you know your children better than anyone else does. You’ve weathered all their moods, rejoiced over all their achievements, and used their shortcomings as teachable moments to encourage them to do better next time. Some days the children seem to test your patience by the minute. But you know how they are wired, and despite their flaws, you will love them with all your heart until you draw your final breath.

David reminds us that God has a father’s kind compassion toward those who fear Him. Our heavenly Father knows how we are wired and knows how limited and frail we are. He understands all about us—after all, He created us! But because God has an even greater capacity to love than we can imagine, it goes beyond the finite edges of our life span. “From everlasting to everlasting the LORD’s love is with those who fear him” (Psalm 103:17). God’s love—like everything else about Him—is beyond our full comprehension.

Although we—limited and imperfect as we are—may not fully grasp the entirety of God’s love for us, we can certainly join David in praising Him for this wonderful, undeserved gift.

Father, it is so good to know that no matter how we may fall and fail, Your love never fails. Thank You for bandaging our wounds and wiping our tears when we come to You with trust-filled hearts. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Persistent Prayer

The angel said to him: “Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to call him John” (Luke 1:13).

Scripture: Luke 1:5-17

Song: “What Faith Can Do”

It hadn't occurred to me that starting a family in my 20s might be difficult. Nothing appeared to be out of the ordinary physically, but it still took a year before I conceived my daughter. It was 12 months of waiting and praying that *felt* like an eternity.

As Luke's narrative introduces us to the future parents of John the Baptist, we understand what a miracle *his* conception was—a twofold miracle, in fact. The passage clearly says Elizabeth had been unable to conceive *and* that she and her husband, Zechariah, “were both very old” (Luke 1:7). While the Bible doesn't specify their ages, it's generally believed that Elizabeth was over 60 and Zechariah was older still. This godly couple could have been praying for a child for 40 years or more! When all hope had likely been lost that they would be granted their desire, God sent an angel to tell Zechariah the astounding good news.

The miracle of conception and birth by parents of advanced years is plain, but dig deeper and see the miracle of faith two people possessed to pray for an exceedingly long time. If you've been praying a long time for someone or something, don't lose heart. God works in impossible circumstances, and His timing is always perfect.

Father, grant us Your strength to be patient but persistent while waiting on Your will and perfect timing. In Jesus' name, amen.

Speechless

The angel said to [Zechariah], “. . . You will be silent and not able to speak until the day this happens, because you did not believe my words, which will come true at their appointed time” (Luke 1:19-20).

Scripture: Luke 1:18-25

Song: “He Still Does Miracles”

Speechless is a word people use to describe times when they’re shocked by something unexpected, good or bad. Typically we use the term as an exaggeration. However, if ever we were to find ourselves in the presence of a holy angel, I’m sure there would be at least a few moments of literal stunned silence.

Such was Zechariah’s initial (and understandable) response when the angel Gabriel appeared to him. After telling Zechariah not to fear, Gabriel laid out God’s plan in detail from the birth and naming of the child to how he should be reared and what his purpose would be. Yet with all this information provided by God’s messenger, Zechariah’s response—when he finally found his voice—was to point out all the reasons it couldn’t take place and to ask for proof otherwise. His refusal to believe God’s message caused him to be struck dumb for nine months.

God’s plan for our lives isn’t usually spelled out to us in detail, but when we earnestly pray for His guidance and pay attention to His Word, we can take the next step in faith. Rather than telling God what is and isn’t possible, we can move forward, trusting His kind intentions toward us, despite how impossible the circumstances may seem.

Father, I know I can trust You as I take this next step to follow You. In Jesus’ name, amen.