



CREATED BY
THE AUSTIN STONE WORSHIP COLLECTIVE

Austin Stone
WORSHIP COLLECTIVE

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THE WHY & HOW OF THE EVERFLOW DEVOTIONAL

We are so glad you are starting this devotional that goes along with EVERFLOW, a collection of songs inspired by the book of 1 Peter. We pray it is a blessing to you as it stirs your heart toward worshiping Jesus.

When we gather in churches around the city, the country, and beyond, we have one aim—to make much of the name of Jesus Christ. We structure our worship services with prayerful intentionality to use every moment, every instrument, and every word to honor Jesus. The songs we sing at The Austin Stone Community Church are more than simple melodies and poetic lyrics. They are an expression for the church to use to bless and honor Jesus.

The purpose of the EVERFLOW Devotional is to encourage and equip you to worship the Lord in spirit and in truth (John 4:32). It is easy to fall into the trap of simply being moved by music while glossing over the meaning behind each word and phrase. But our hope is that you would deeply know the God you are singing to and understand the truths that are being proclaimed. God has given music the unique ability to marry emotion and thinking. When music is paired with theology, it is a beautiful tool to help transform the way we think, believe, and act.

The EVERFLOW Devotional explores the doctrinal theme of each song. The instrumental songs are accompanied by a poetic prayer inspired by the letter of 1 Peter. Our prayer is that as you read, study, process, and reflect on the truths of these songs, your trust in God and His Word will deepen.

This devotional can be used in many different ways. You can use it individually in your personal quiet times. You can also use it in a small group setting or with your worship band as you prepare to lead a new song at your church. Our intimacy and connection with God during corporate worship increases when we understand the words we are singing. When we have processed and prayed through what the lyrics mean, it changes our hearts when we sing them to God.

The Gospel of John says, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (John 1:1). The more we know the Word of God, the more we know Him. I pray this devotional will guide you to the riches of the Word of God. May it increase a realization of God’s ever-flowing love for you while compelling your heart with an ever-flowing love for Him.

Aaron Ivey
Austin Stone Worship



EVERFLOW

BLESSED MERCY!

The birth of the day, I take my first breath
How often, O Lord, how often I forget
This advent, this morning, the air in my lungs;
The very gifts of Your mercy that have woken me up!
Life giving, life sustaining—life in its fullness
Just to know You, my Lord, the fountain of goodness!

My life, a mere breath, yet blessed by the living God
Truly blessed, just a moment to see You with wonder
and awe!

Yet if only my heart be so resolved...
Oh to never leave—I know it is good to be near God!
But the passions of my heart, though strong, they
are fleeting
My devotion outweighed by Sin's to my failing
How little it takes to lose heart when I'm stumbling!
My God! My God! Have You gone? Have You
left me?

Foolish man that I am, though I detest this,
I yield to my flesh and drift into darkness.

I forget who I am, what He's done, and I flee
I hide in myself as I run to the sea
Cast off from the Truth into a barren abyss
My shame cries, "Wayward!"—echoing deep in the
darkness
I cry all the more as I mourn for the morning
How far from the joy of Your presence I've fallen!

Even here in the depths, Lord, who can I call to?
Oh my soul longs for no one, no one but You!

Suddenly, my tears are all dried and my soul has
been lifted
Upward I look to meet Your face in the distance
At once I realize this is no sea, but a wellspring!
Though I have forsaken Him, He has not forsaken
me!
I throw myself into Your glorious tempest—
Your jealous love that washes and cleanses!

Though this fearsome flood should righteously
crush me
You choose to carry me ashore to safety!
Oh faithful God, the expanse of Your mercy!
Oh faithful God, this undeserved, blessed mercy!

SINGING

IN THE

VICTORY

SINGING IN THE VICTORY

KEY OF C, 4/4 70BPM

Marcus Dawes, Brett Land, Aaron Ivey, Jaleesa McCreary, Logan Walter, Dietrich Schmidt
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INTRO:

C F x2

VERSE 1:

C F C F
I will not be anxious, Jesus you are near
Am F C G
The peace of God surrounding me casting out all fear
C F C F
The hand that holds the Heavens is the mighty hand that saves
Am F C G
The voice that calms the storming seas is calling me by name

CHORUS:

C C/E F
I'm singing in the vict'ry the vict'ry of the cross
G Am C G
Resting in the shadow of Your redeeming love
C C/E F
I'm standing on the promise, the promise of new life
G Am C G
'Cause I am Yours forever and Jesus You are mine, Jesus You are mine

TURN:

C // C/E F // G Am // G //

VERSE 2:

C F C F
When I have forgotten the fullness of Your grace
Am F C/E C G
Yes I remember Calvary when You took my place

_TO CHORUS

BRIDGE:

Am F C
There is no one like You God, love immeasurable and strong
Em Am F C
There is no one like You God, so lead this heart to sing in awe
Em Am F C
There is no one like You God, love immeasurable and strong
Em Am F C Em
There is no one like You God, so lead this heart to sing in awe

INSTRUMENTAL:

Am F C G

_TO CHORUS

SINGING IN THE VICTORY

I'm singing in the vict'ry, the vict'ry of the cross

Resting in the shadow of Your redeeming love

I'm standing on the promise, the promise of new life

'Cause I am Yours forever and Jesus You are mine, Jesus You are mine

God's Word speaks often about victory and defeat. Deuteronomy 20:4 says, " ... [T]he LORD your God is he who goes with you to fight for you against your enemies, to give you the victory." But how can we relate to an Old Testament passage about victory in battle? Weren't these verses written to a nation of former slaves who were at war with the nations around them? Yes. And yet the Bible says that "all Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching" (2 Timothy 3:16). It says that the Word of God is "living and active" (Hebrews 4:12). This means that when the Psalmist writes, "With God we shall do valiantly; it is he who will tread down our foes" (Psalm 60:12), we know that God will also tread down our own foes here in the present day. It means that we are just as desperate for God to stand beside us in our daily battles as King David and the Israelites were.

If there is any difference between us and the Psalmist, it is only that we know the name of the Messiah who has come to give us victory (1 Corinthians 15:57). When we fall prey to worry, doubt, pride, or fear, we can call on the name of Jesus and trust that He will "deliver us from the present evil age" (Galatians 1:4). If we are unaware of our need for His victory, our eyes are blind to the battle that rages around us. If we feel helpless in the midst of spiritual warfare, God wants to be the lifter of our heads. He wants our hearts to sing in accordance with 1 Corinthians 15:57: "But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

TRUSTING GOD WITH OUR ANXIETY

I will not be anxious, Jesus You are near

The peace of God surrounding me, casting out all fear

We are a culture of worriers. We worry about which school to attend, which career to pursue, and which person to marry. If the Lord blesses us with children, we begin to worry about which school our children will attend, which career they will pursue, and which person they will marry. The Bible is well aware of this struggle. In Matthew 6, Jesus says, " ... [D]o not be anxious ... " Why does He give us this command? Why does He

repeat this command several times in the New Testament? While being troubled or in a state of distress is not a sin, it becomes sin when we allow that distress to turn into anxiety and distrust God's promises. Left to ourselves, we simply do not trust that God will take care of us. We trust, instead, in a bank account, an education, or a job. Then, when these areas of our lives fail us, we become anxious. This is sin, and the Enemy wants to use this sin to cripple us, to destroy our faith in God, and to keep us from living as people who have been set free by the gospel. So instead, we must internalize what the Bible says about anxiety so that when trouble and distress strike, we can respond as Christ would respond. And when we do fail and our hearts and minds give in to anxious thoughts and emotions, praise be to Jesus Christ who paid for that sin, making a way for us to cast every anxiety on our heavenly Father, trusting again that He will lift us up in due time (1 Peter 5:6-7).

So what does the Bible tell us about anxiety? In the first book of the Bible, we learn that anxiety is common for God's people. It is not a rare emotion. It plagued Abraham's family tree.

Abraham was called a "friend of God" (James 2:23), yet he was constantly worried. He worried that the king of Gerar, Abimelech, would kill him to get to his beautiful wife, Sarah. So Abraham said to Sarah, "This is how you can show your love to me: Everywhere we go, say of me, 'He is my brother'" (Genesis 20:13 NIV). God appeared to Abimelech in a dream and delivered Abraham from Gerar, but despite this miraculous act of God's faithfulness, Abraham continued to feel anxious. He was especially worried about his lineage. How could he have a child when he and his wife, Sarah, were so old? In the midst of this doubt and anxiety, God gave Abraham a son, Isaac, just as He had promised (Genesis 21:1-3).

When Isaac had a wife of his own, Rebekah, the Lord led them to Gerar where Abimelech was still king. Genesis 26:7 says, "When the men of the place asked him about his wife, he said, 'She is my sister,' for he feared to say, 'My wife,' thinking, 'lest the men of the place should kill me because of Rebekah,' because she was attractive in appearance."

Like father, like son.

The generational anxiety did not stop there. Isaac and Rebekah had two sons: Esau and Jacob. Esau worried that he would die of hunger, so he sold his birthright to Jacob in exchange for food (Genesis 25:33). This created a strained relationship between the two brothers, so Jacob fled, worried that Esau would kill him (Genesis 32:7-8). For many years, Jacob was anxious about his relationship with his brother, but when Esau and Jacob finally reunited, "Esau ran to meet him and embraced him, threw his arms around his neck, and kissed him. And they both wept." (Genesis 33:4 NLT). God had proven Himself faithful once again.

Yet Jacob's struggle with anxiety continued.

Jacob, also known as Israel, had twelve sons. "Now Israel loved Joseph more than any other of his sons, because he was the son of his old age" (Genesis 37:3). So Joseph's brothers became jealous, and they sold Joseph into slavery. Then they lied to their father, Jacob, convincing him that Joseph had been eaten by an animal. Can you imagine how Jacob must have felt in that moment? It's no wonder that he became anxious about the well-being of his youngest son, Benjamin.

Years later, when Jacob's family was affected by a famine, he sent his sons to Egypt to buy grain. "But Jacob did not send Benjamin, Joseph's brother, with his brothers, for he feared that harm might happen to him" (Genesis 42:4). Even as an old man, Jacob was worried. And what did God do in response to Jacob's worry? God proved Himself faithful. Soon, Jacob heard that Joseph was not only alive, but he had risen to power in Egypt. As Jacob set out on his journey to be reunited with his son, God said to him, "Do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for there I will make you into a great nation" (Genesis 46:3). Even after God had proven Himself faithful time and time again, His first words to Jacob were, "Do not be afraid." God knows that His children struggle with worry and doubt and fear. We are not alone in our anxiety.

But what do we do when anxiety hits? How should we respond when we feel anxious? There is no better example of godliness in the midst of anxiety than the story of Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane. Praise God that we have a Savior who "has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin" (Hebrews 4:15 NIV). We know what the pressure of temptation feels like, and we know what it feels like to find release from that pressure as we cave to our earthly desires. Only Jesus knows what it feels like to experience the pressure of temptation as it builds and builds, without ever giving in to the temporary release of sin. Many of us have been tempted to distrust God about the future, but who can say that they sweated drops of blood as they resisted that temptation, refusing to let it become an offense to the Father? Let's look at how Jesus responded to anxiety.

On the night of the Passover, Jesus went to the garden of Gethsemane with one goal: to pray. The garden was simply a place to get away and spend time with the Father. We are told in Philippians 4:6, "... [D]o not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God." This is exactly what Jesus did in the garden. Matthew 26:39 says, "... [H]e fell on his face and prayed, saying, 'My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me ...'" Faced with the temptation to be anxious, Jesus prayed to be spared from imminent pain and death. He prayed that He would not have to drink the cup of the wrath of God. He prayed that His Father would not turn His face away from Him. In times of distress, God wants us to pray like this. That's why there are more than 60 prayers of lament in the Psalms. That's why Jesus quoted a Psalm of lament on the cross when He said, "My God, my God, why have

you forsaken me?” (Psalm 22:1). Jesus felt pain the same way we feel pain. He felt forsaken by His Father, much like we have felt forsaken by loved ones. He was fully God, yes, but He was also fully man. It’s the Son of Man, Jesus, who shows us that our first response to anxiety should be to pray.

Our second response should be to place our trust in the Lord. Jesus’s prayer does not end with the request to “let this cup pass.” He says in Matthew 26:42, “My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done.” Jesus puts His trust in the Father, regardless of the outcome. We see this trust in the Psalms of lament as well. Psalm 56:3 says, “When I am afraid, I put my trust in you.” Psalm 55 starts with this request: “Give ear to my prayer, O God, and hide not yourself from my plea for mercy!” It goes on to say, “My heart is in anguish within me; the terrors of death have fallen upon me” (Psalm 55:4). But it ends with the declaration, “I will trust in you.” Does our trust guarantee our safety? No, sometimes we trust God in spite of the danger. The cross is our proof. We are not promised comfort, but if we will pray and place our trust in the Lord, we are promised that “the peace of Christ, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:7).

PROCESSING QUESTIONS

1. What troubles and stress are you facing right now? In what ways are you tempted to be anxious?
2. How do you normally respond to the temptation to be anxious?
3. How can the Bible help you respond to the temptation to be anxious in the future?

VICTORY IN THE CROSS

When I have forgotten the fullness of Your grace

Yes I remember calvary when You took my place

We are commanded to turn and flee from all temptations, including anxiety and distrust, but the command does not stop there. If we simply fast from sin, we will eventually starve, and then we will turn back to our vices in an attempt to satisfy our spiritual hunger. Many think the message of Christianity is moral deism—nothing more than a distant God giving us more rules to obey. “Do not do this, abstain from this, say no to these things.” This is not the gospel, but rather a recipe for despair. The gospel is that Jesus takes away our sin while also filling us with something better. This is why we have been given the Lord’s Supper. The bread and the cup remind us that the desires of our hearts can only be satisfied by Christ’s work on the cross. What happens when we remember this truth? What happens when we forget?

Let’s start by looking at what happens when we fail to remember God’s promises. One of the most famous examples of this sin comes from Luke 22. It’s the story of Peter denying Jesus on the night of Christ’s arrest.

Ironically, it’s earlier in this same chapter that we find Jesus explaining the Lord’s Supper to His disciples. Peter, along with John, was one of two disciples Jesus had entrusted with preparing the Passover meal. As they reclined at the table that night, Jesus said, “I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer” (Luke 22:15). This is the first promise Jesus made that night. He promised that He would suffer.

This was not the first time that Jesus had spoken of His suffering. In Matthew 16, Jesus prophesied that He would “go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed ...” (Matthew 16:21). Peter was not a fan of this promise. In fact, he disliked this prophecy so much that he “took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, ‘Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you’” (Matthew 16:22). Peter was willing to accept God’s promises until it meant suffering for someone he loved.

This is the root of Peter’s denial. Peter failed to remember the entire scope of God’s promises. Perhaps Peter remembered Jesus’s promise to make the disciples “fishers of men,” or the promise that Peter would be called a “child of God” who would “bear much fruit” and “receive a righteous person’s reward” (Matthew 4:19; John 1:12; John 15:8; Matthew 10:41). He believed that “the last will be first” and that the disciples would “sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel” (Matthew 20:16; 19:28). Peter, of course, did not rebuke Jesus for these promises. But when Jesus was arrested and the disciples began to scatter, Peter failed to remember Christ’s promise to “suffer many things ... and be killed.” He must have also forgotten another promise that

Jesus made that evening. Jesus said, “Peter, the rooster will not crow this day, until you deny three times that you know me” (Luke 22:34).

Peter’s failure to remember this promise was, in itself, a sin. And the effects of this sin were felt immediately. When he had denied Jesus for the third time and he heard the rooster crow, Peter came to his senses. He remembered God’s promises. He remembered that Jesus is the One of whom it is written, “Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfill?” (Numbers 23:19 NIV). Once Peter realized what he had done, the Bible says, “And he went out and wept bitterly” (Luke 22:62).

This is what it looks like to forget God’s promises. It is bitter. In the end, it leads only to sadness and regret, and if there is no repentance, it leads to death. This is why Jesus is so insistent that we remember the cross, because His death and resurrection are the fulfillment of every promise God has made to us. This includes the promise that “in Christ shall all be made alive” (1 Corinthians 15:22), but it also includes the promise that “through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22). 2 Corinthians 1:20 says, “For no matter how many promises God has made, they are ‘Yes’ in Christ” (NIV). Therefore, we cannot pick and choose which promises to trust. Like Peter, we must learn to stand on every word Jesus has said. Let’s look back at the Lord’s Supper passage and the promises Jesus made that night.

In Luke 22:15, Jesus promised that he would suffer. Then the passage continues, “And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he said, ‘Take this, and divide it among yourselves. For I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes’” (Luke 22:17-18). This is the second promise that Jesus made at Passover. He promised that His suffering would not be the end of the story! The kingdom of God will come! If Peter had remembered correctly, he would have known that the coming kingdom was tied to the death of Christ. The promise that Jesus made in Matthew 16 was not just that He would suffer and be killed. The full promise was that He would “be killed, and on the third day be raised” (Luke 9:22). We must not forget the cross, but we must always remember the cross in light of the empty tomb. This is the fullness of God’s grace. The resurrection is the reason that Calvary’s cross is a symbol of victory!

Still, there is one more promise that Jesus made at the Last Supper. Luke 22:19-20 says, “And he took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, ‘This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.’ And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, ‘This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.’” This is the third and greatest promise that Christ made that night. There is a new covenant! Christ would not only die and rise again, but He would include us in His resurrection. It’s true that everything God does, He does for His name’s sake (see Psalm 23:3). One of the ways God glorifies His name is by sending His Son to die for His children. Think about what Christ said as He broke the bread.

Why did He give His body on the cross? He gave his body for you. Why was the cup of God's wrath poured out on Jesus? It was poured out for you. How could we forget this truth? How could we ever take this good news for granted? Why would we ever miss an opportunity to remember? And yet we are not called to take the Lord's Supper in remembrance of the gifts we receive from the cross. Instead, Jesus says, "Do this in remembrance of me" (Luke 22:19).

When we take the bread and the cup, we remember a person. We remember a person who took our place on a sinner's cross (1 Peter 3:18). We remember a person who demonstrated His love by laying down His life for us (John 15:13; Romans 5:8). We remember a person who offers new life to those who believe (John 3:16). We remember that Jesus is our Rock, and because of Him, we can stand on God's promises (1 Peter 2:6; 2 Corinthians 1:20).

PROCESSING QUESTIONS

1. What distracts you from remembering the gospel?
2. What helps you to remember the gospel?
3. Take Communion with a small group of people. As each person takes the bread and the cup, have someone remind each of you of the ways that Christ's promises specifically apply to you.

SINGING IN THE VICTORY

There is no one like You God, love immeasurable and strong

There is no one like You God, so lead this heart to sing in awe

Our freedom from anxiety and victory in Christ were never meant to terminate on us. Ultimately, we cast our anxieties on God and remember the cross so that we can give Jesus the glory He is due. When we rest in God's promises and we allow our hearts to be filled with His love, we can't help but express that love back to Him. This is what it means to be a Christian. It is not simply believing. It is both believing and confessing (Romans 10:9). This is what it means to pray. It is not only asking for blessings, interceding for others, and confessing our sin. It is also adoring God for who He is and what He's done (Psalm 29:2).

One of the ways we are called to adore God is through song. Throughout Scripture, we are given more than 50 commands to sing to God. It says four times in Psalm 47:6, "Sing praises to God, sing praises! Sing praises to our King, sing praises!" The Bible makes it clear that if we have been given a voice, God wants us to use that voice to worship Him through both adoration and song. Let's first look at the Biblical concept of "adoration."

The word "adore" is not often used in God's Word. In some translations, it can't be found at all. And yet we see this word in every hymnal, and we find it in every book ever written about prayer. Why is this? Church tradition tells us that there are four main components of prayer: adoration, confession, thanksgiving, and supplication. But where do we find these components in the Bible? And why is adoration typically listed first?

The answer is found in Matthew 6:5-15, which is known as "The Lord's Prayer." In this passage, Jesus teaches us how to address God, and His address begins with, "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name" (Matthew 6:9). No, we do not find the word "adore" in this passage, but there is no mistaking that Jesus begins His prayer with adoration. He tells the Father that His name is to be "hallowed." Most of us do not use the word "hallowed" in everyday conversation. We may use it to describe the "hallowed halls" of an old college or the "hallowed grounds" of a historic church. Maybe at one point in our lives, we asked our neighbors for candy on "Halloween," which traces its roots to the phrase "hallowed evening." But none of these uses are what Christ intended when He said, "Hallowed be your name."

The word "hallow" means "to honor as holy." So when Jesus says, "hallowed be your name," He is adoring the Father for His holiness. He is telling God that there is no one like Him. He is praising the Father for being set apart from everything and everyone else in all of creation. This is how God wants us to approach Him and address Him—He wants us to adore Him for His holiness. Even the angels in Isaiah 6 can't help but cry out,

“Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord of hosts ... ” (Isaiah 6:3). This is also the first prayer we find in the book of Revelation, “Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord God Almighty ... ” (Revelation 4:8). When we see God for who He is, we can’t help but praise Him for His holiness. We can’t help but adore Him.

Now, why must we express our adoration through song? Isn’t singing something that requires special skill? Is everyone required to sing?

God’s Word does not distinguish between those who are musically inclined and those who aren’t when it commands us to sing. It simply commands everyone to sing, over and over and over again. It’s the most reiterated command in the Bible. As one might expect, the more gifted singers are asked to lead the singing. 1 Chronicles 15:22 says, “Kenaniah the head Levite was in charge of the singing; that was his responsibility because he was skillful at it” (NIV). But who was Kenaniah leading? Earlier in this chapter, we read that King David had “assembled all Israel at Jerusalem” (1 Chronicles 15:3). At this time, there were over a million men in the Israelite army. This number did not include women, children, the elderly, or the tribes of Levi or Benjamin (1 Chronicles 21:5-6). In other words, when David assembled all Israel, he was assembling millions of people. All of God’s children were there.

The song that was sung that day can be found in 1 Chronicles 16. Here are some of the lyrics: “Sing to the Lord, all the earth; proclaim his salvation day after day. Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous deeds among all peoples” (1 Chronicles 16:23-24 NIV). Perhaps King David was the most gifted songwriter in Israel. Perhaps Kenaniah was the most skilled singer. But still, there were millions of people singing and shouting to God in that assembly. And as they sang, they proclaimed that God is worthy of more singers! “All the earth” should be singing to Him. His deeds should be declared in song by “all peoples,” not just singers, not just instrumentalists, not just the millions who were gathered that day. Everyone in all creation should sing to the Lord.

This is worth considering the next time we are tempted to sit in the back of the church and observe as the rest of the congregation sings. This should convict us when we casually approach God in the assembly, thinking more about our preferences than His holiness. This should encourage us when we find ourselves standing next to a skilled vocalist who is belting a beautiful harmony to the Lord. God wants all of us to sing! If your heart does not want to sing to Him, then ask God to align your desires with His desires. Ask Jesus to remind you of His immeasurable love demonstrated on the cross for you. Ask that He would lead your heart to sing in awe of Him.

We can “proclaim his salvation” because His mighty hand has reached down to save us (1 Chronicles 16:23). We can hallow His name, because He has called each one of us by name (John 10:3). We can stand on the promise of new life, because all of God’s promises find their “Yes” in Christ (2 Corinthians 1:20). We can sing, because we belong to Jesus and Jesus is victorious (1 Corinthians 15:57).

PROCESSING QUESTIONS

1. What does your prayer life look like right now? What do you normally say to God when you pray? How often do you adore God in prayer?
2. How do you feel about singing to God? Are you only willing to sing in certain settings? Other than a physical disability, what circumstances would keep you from singing to God?

REFLECTION

With a group, pray prayers of adoration out loud to God. This is not a time for requests or confessions. It is simply a time to adore Jesus. Then sing to Him, “Singing in the Victory.” Sing along with the recording, or sing it a cappella. Allow your heart to sing in the victory that is offered to you through the cross!

The gospel is good news. It is a captivating story. The story of Israel began with a family that was filled with anxiety. Abraham worried about Isaac, Isaac worried about Jacob, Jacob worried about Joseph, and still, God chose to bless them. The gospel is not that we, by our own resolve, are able to overcome anxiety. The gospel is that Jesus came to earth and resisted every temptation, even the temptation to allow anxiety to become sin, so that He could sacrifice His perfect life for all of God’s children.

This story is worth remembering. And more than that, the hero of this story is worth adoring. He is Holy. He is worthy of our song. And as we sing to Him, we must remember that the book of Psalms—the songbook of the Bible—does not exclude those who struggle with worry. The Psalms are proof that God meets us right where we are. He wants us to be honest with Him, even in seasons of lament. It’s an all-inclusive songbook, and we are all invited to participate. The final verse of the final Psalm says, “Let everything that has breath praise the Lord! Praise the Lord!” (Psalm 150:6).

THE

CENTER OF

IT ALL

THE CENTER OF IT ALL

KEY OF E, 4/4 137BPM

Dietrich Schmidt, Aaron Ivey, Jimmy McNeal, Brett Land, Marcus Dawes
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INTRO:

A C#m E E / / F#m
A C#m E E

VERSE 1:

A C#m E
I call to You in need of awakening
A C#m E F#m
Come breathe new life into my soul
A C#m E
You speak like fire Your word is reviving me
A C#m E
Come breathe new life into my soul

PRECHORUS:

A B
So I will stand, I will sing
C#m E
I will tell of Your perfect love for me
A
I will rise
B C#m
And lift high the name of Jesus

CHORUS:

A E
There's no greater name I know
B C#m
There's no stronger love to hold
A E B
And I know You are the center of it all
A E
You're my light and You're my truth
B C#m
Heaven and earth bend to You
A E B
And I know You are the center of it all
B
You're the center of it all

TURN:

E / / / E / B / C#m / / / C#m / A / x2

VERSE 2:

A C#m

My sin my shame

E

Your cross is the remedy

A C#m E F#m

You speak new life into my soul

A C#m

My life my days

E

Are Yours for eternity

A C#m E

You speak new life into my soul

_TO PRECHORUS

_TO CHORUS

_TO TURN

INSTRUMENTAL:

A B E/G# A

BRIDGE:

A

You are worthy You're worthy

B

You alone deserve the glory

E/G#

A

This is all for You all for You my God

A

You are worthy You're worthy

B

You alone deserve the glory

E/G#

A

This is all for You all for You my God

A

Your name is higher and stronger

B

You alone deserve the honor

E/G#

A

You are Jesus this is all for You my God

_TO DOWN CHORUS

_TO CHORUS

_TO TURN

THE CENTER OF IT ALL

“In the beginning, God ... “

What do we learn from the first four words of the Bible? If you look closely, these words tell us so much. For instance,

There is a God.

He was present at the beginning of everything.

He existed before time began.

Time has no bearing on Him.

God set everything into motion.

Because God exists, anything else that exists came after Him.

Because God exists, anything that exists or has ever existed was His idea.

If He created everything, then there is no one and nothing that has more power than God.

There is nothing greater than God.

Who knew four words could say so much? “In the beginning, God ... “ The Bible starts this way for a good reason. The central character in the story of everything is God. The Bible is not just a collection of rules and stories. The Bible is a story about God. It is a story about how He created everything from nothing. How He made the stars and galaxies, plants and animals, mountains and oceans. God must love the ocean, not only because of its unbound expanse, but also the unseen wonders it bears below the surface. He must love mountains because they rise to terrifying heights and give you the feeling of being so small when you stand at their base. He must love flowers because God made not just one kind, but an array of thousands, each exploding with color.

But out of everything He created, what He loved best in creation was people. With the creation of people, He pronounced His own image. God gave people everything they could ever need, and best of all, He gave them Himself. The eternal God created the universe and everything in it as a mighty display of His power and His glory. He told people to be fruitful and fill the earth with even more image bearers so that every place you would see this image, you would be reminded of the supreme worth and beauty of God. Not only did He create everything, but He holds it all together.

For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. (Colossians 1:16-18)

In this, Paul, the author of the book of Colossians, hints at the beginning of all things in Genesis 1, but he also dramatically expands the idea beyond just creation to include upholding. You and I breathe because the Creator allows it. You and I move because the Creator allows it. You and I fall in love, write stories, drive cars, buy homes, raise children, and go to job interviews because the Creator, in His goodness, allows it. Paul tells us that this God, the same One who made everything, also keeps everything going and keeps everything spinning. There is nothing that happens outside of His eye and nothing that moves outside of His hand.

“In the beginning, God ... ” The Bible starts this way because God is central, around whom everything else revolves and exists. For those who know this glorious truth, it is a precious truth. But the fact remains that not everyone acknowledges God and His supreme worth. When people see the image of God bearing in the lives of people, they do not see God. So what happened? What went wrong?

THE STAIN OF SIN

I call to You

In need of awakening

Come breathe new life into my soul

You speak like fire

Your word is reviving me

Come breathe new life into my soul

So I will stand, I will sing

I will tell of Your perfect love for me

I will rise

And lift high the name of Jesus

We were created to live close to God, but something went seriously wrong. People began to doubt God. God had given them no reason to doubt, but the smallest root of disbelief sprouted from the lie planted in the minds of God's prized possession: Did God really say that? Did He really say you couldn't eat from the tree? He doesn't want you to eat the fruit, because then you will become like Him. In the garden of Eden—God's perfect and ideal place for men and women to know and be close to Him—an enemy planted a seed of doubt that perhaps something else could be central in the universe. Perhaps God wasn't as big or as good as He claimed to be. In fact, maybe He was more tyrannical than kind. A small seed of doubt. Roots become shoots become trees become forests. God's treasured prize exchanged the truth of God's Word for a lie.

The story continued. God had every right to be furious, and He was. Not only had His image bearers conspired against Him, but the stain of their sin had spread like a disease to all of creation. Nothing went untouched by the stain of sin. The beauty of creation began to decay. Flourishing only happens when something operates as the designer intended it to, and in our sin, men and women short-circuited our intended design. We allowed ourselves to be enemies of God, insisting that the world revolves around us instead of Him, and as a result, we ceased flourishing and began decaying.

The stain of sin was soaked into the fabric of humanity, and a sin-soaked veil hung over the eyes of God's prized possession and they no longer saw God. No matter how hard people tried to remove the stain—and they did try—the stain was too deep. God was the Creator and sustainer of life. What hope, then, would people have if they were cut off from the source of life? How can flowers grow without the sun? Unfastened from the source of life, humanity fell into a lifeless, earth-wandering slumber.

But God had a plan that no one knew about. Man could not remove the stain of guilt, so God was going to do it. There was only One who could do it, but it was going to cost Him everything.

The story continued. We—all of God's image bearers—were dead in the trespasses and sins in which we walked. We followed the course of this world, and we followed the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—all of us were living in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind. We were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind (Ephesians 2:3).

But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. (Ephesians 2:4-10)

The paradox of it all was that God had used His own blood to remove the stain of our sin. His death brought us life. Jesus took our sin and gave us His sinlessness. The sin-soaked veil was torn when Christ proclaimed from the cross, "IT IS FINISHED." The light once hidden became clear on the day when God opened our eyes to see the glory of Christ.

But when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed. Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit. (2 Corinthians 3:16-18)

In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God ... For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. (2 Corinthians 4:4, 6)

What man could not do, God did. The same God who breathed creation into existence breathed life into dead, earth-wandering sleepers. God saved us back into a relationship with Him. We were created to live close to God, and now, because of Jesus, we can come close to God with no stains and no veil.

PROCESSING QUESTIONS

1. If God is the center of all creation, why can't some people see that?
2. What are a few common ways people try to remove the stain of their own sin?
3. What sacrifices do you try to bring to God when you feel guilty about a persistent sin in your life?

GOD, THE CENTER OF IT ALL

My sin, my shame

Your cross is the remedy

You speak new life into my soul

My life, my days

Are Yours for eternity

You speak new life into my soul

The earth and all of the planets orbit the great weight of the sun. The earth does not scorn the sun for being the center—the earth is only able to exist because the sun is at the center. But suppose the earth no longer wanted the rigid restraints of the sun. Suppose the earth could break free from the gravitational pull of the sun. The newfound autonomy from the sun's centrality may feel like freedom, but it would be short-lived. The earth would undergo a fundamental change with each mile it drifted further and further from the sun. The oceans would freeze, the mountains would crack, and all living things would quickly die. With no central weight to orbit, the earth would meet its end in either an asteroid field or neighboring planet.

Everything began with God and all of history centers around God. All things were made by Him and for Him, and when God is not at the center of our lives, things go painfully wrong.

For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things. Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen. (Romans 1:19-25)

In the garden, people exchanged the truth of God for a lie. The truth was that God had given them everything they could ever want and need to be eternally happy. The lie was that God could not be trusted. Adam and Eve knew God, and yet they questioned His Word. To question God's Word is to question God's right to be God. To disregard God as God is to deny the fundamental truth upon which the universe and everything in it was created—that is, God is God and what He says is true and good. In essence, when Adam and Eve went against

God's Word, their actions demonstrated a belief that God's Word is subject to personal interpretation—that the creature was more important than the Creator. That self-determination was more central than trusting God's plan. As Adam and Eve quickly found out, when God is not at the center of our lives, things go painfully wrong.

You would think that people would have learned from Adam and Eve's mistake in the garden, but they didn't. In fact, they tumbled even further into sin and rebellion from God's centrality. At one point, the Bible even asserts that "everyone did what was right in his own eyes" (Judges 21:25). There is no more telling phrase of our self-centeredness than allowing ourselves to be the authority on anything and everything. The Bible and all of history tell this recurring story of people asserting their self-determination and things going painfully wrong. We do this every day. Anytime we put something in place of God, things spin out of control.

Consider a time that you wrongfully chose your own self-centered desires over those things that Scripture directs us to. We have all faced situations that would call for us to sacrifice something that we just don't want to sacrifice. We see in Scripture that we are called to forgive as we have been forgiven, but our anger, resentment, and unforgiveness feels justified. We read that we are called to serve as Christ has served us, but it feels unfair that we would have to spend our very limited free time on something we don't want to do. We thought that choosing our own way would yield a better, more satisfying result than what the Word of God tells us, but instead, our choice to mistrust God as the center of all things simply revealed how broken we are.

Like the sun keeping planets in orbit, God is at the center of existence and our lives are meant to center on Him. The truth is that our lives often don't center on Him. Most of us go each day unaware of the unimaginable power of God. The story began with God and all of history centers around God. We constantly fail to center our lives on Him and go about our lives looking into mirrors and trying to bend the world to our needs.

Our view of ourselves is entirely out of proportion. People, by default, are self-centered. We peer through the window of our world to see everything in relation to us. We become our own reference point for interpreting everything else. Until the 1500's, movement in the sky of the sun, moon, and stars had tricked most people into a belief that the earth was at the center of the universe. We know now what Copernicus discovered—that the sun, not the earth, is the central force around which our solar system orbits. In the same way, we are often tricked into a belief that there is something other than God at the center of our significance. Even more common is a belief that each person determines their central significance and purpose in life.

But we know from the first pages of the Bible that everything began with God and all of history centers around God. When God is not at the center of our lives—when we exchange the Creator for something else—things go painfully wrong.

PROCESSING QUESTIONS

1. Think about your day-to-day life. What preferences, thoughts, and desires do you tend to center your day around?
2. Is there anything you feel frequently tempted to put in the place of God?

JOY IN CHRIST

**There's no greater name I know
There's no stronger love to hold
And I know You are the center of it all
You're my light and You're my truth
Heaven and earth bend to You
And I know You are the center of it all
You're the center of it all**

Luckily, the story does not end at our rebellion or our misguided attempts to divorce ourselves from the solid and sure orbit of the Creator. In His goodness, and as part of His central plan, God sent His own Son to our rescue. What a glorious, infinite, wise God that He would know our tendency to rebel from Him and still choose to save us! Consider His character and love to you, a creature: even when your choices derailed your life like a ship lost at sea and tossed in the white-capped waves, God did not allow you to sink. This would have been just and fair had He done this. It is what our actions warranted. Instead, He, like a great captain, righted the wayward vessel and steered back onto course. Jesus, the One who commands the waves to be still, is as sure and steady as God Himself. Indeed, He is God.

This is what the apostle Paul means when, in Romans 7:18-19, he says, “For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing.”

But then he remembers the boundless goodness and grace of God toward him. He remembers that God is central and has reclaimed this position in Paul's life through the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! (Romans 7:24-25a)

Because of Jesus, this Author and Perfecter of our faith, this strong captain, this Good Shepherd, we are reminded of God as the center of it all. God did not allow our sin and rebellion to be the last word. Even then, His centrality means nothing can separate us from Him.

To be centered on Christ means that you have been awakened to the supreme worth and beauty of Jesus. He is supreme in who He is, what He does, and what He says. Despite what you may have heard or even what our own skewed experience sometimes tells us, our God doesn't make us choose between obeying Him and being truly happy. In fact, what God commands in His Word is that we be supremely happy. He doesn't want us to settle for cheap pleasure, temporary happiness, and shallow significance. His Word tells us about a better happiness, a deeper well with water that cures our insatiable thirst. Look at the commands of our God and the promises He makes!

Seek the Lord and his strength; seek his presence continually! (1 Chronicles 16:11)

You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore. (Psalm 16:11)

Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life." (John 4:13-14)

On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'" (John 7:37-38)

As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full. (John 15:9-11)

Who doesn't want the fullness of joy, pleasures forevermore, hearts flowing with living water, and a joy that is full? Have you found anything in the world like that? No, God does not make us choose between obeying Him and being truly happy. He is inviting us into an eternally ever-increasing joy in Him. To be centered on Christ means that you have experienced a superior satisfaction in Christ Jesus above any other competing thing clawing to become the center of your life. To be centered on Christ means that you have been awakened to the supreme worth and beauty of Jesus.

PROCESSING QUESTIONS

1. How is the joy that Jesus offers a better joy than anything else?
2. Has there ever been a specific time in your life where you struggled to believe that?
3. What is an area of your life where you need to be encouraged that Jesus is the One holding all things together?

**You are worthy, You're worthy
You alone deserve the glory
This is all for You, all for You my God
You are worthy, You're worthy
You alone deserve the glory
This is all for You, all for You my God
Your name is higher and stronger
You alone deserve the honor
You are Jesus, this is all for You my God**

If you consider the way the Bible talks about Heaven and the future that awaits God's people, then you will see that we have not even begun to scratch the surface of the depths of the richness of the wisdom and knowledge of God. God is infinite, and it will require an infinite amount of time to behold the infinite glory of our God.

For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known. (1 Corinthians 13:12)

[He has] raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. (Ephesians 2:6-7)

Think about this: one million years from now, you will be more alive than you are, even at this very moment. You will walk with Jesus and see His face. You won't have to hide the parts of yourself that you feel ashamed of anymore. No more God-dishonoring, truth-exchanging sin. No more brokenness. No more death. The sorrows wrought in this life will only serve to contrast the great glory of our God. Even after one million years, we will still only be scratching the surface of the infinite glory and worth of our awesome God.

Jesus was the center of creation. He was there at the beginning. He created it all and it was all for Him—the ocean, the mountains, the flowers, and even people—all created by Him and for Him.

Jesus is the center of our redemption. When His prized possession rejected Him, Jesus had every right to let the world spin out of the orbit of His sun to meet its disastrous end. But He was rich in mercy. At great cost to Himself, Jesus absorbed every ounce of wrath that should have been poured out on you and me.

Jesus will forever be the center of all things. He is the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end. All of creation orbits the great weight of our glorious God. He is bigger, greater, more holy, more merciful, and more beautiful than we could possibly imagine. We have only begun to scratch the surface. It will take an eternity with Christ to search the great depths of the riches of our glorious God!

SELAH: THE DESERT

HE HAS ENDURED OUR SUFFERING

Behold the Lamb of God,
Afflicted, reviled, and slain.
Who suffered for our salvation,
So that we might live again.

Praise His holy name,
This mighty Man of Sorrows,
Who healed us with His wounds,
From death and our transgressions.

What then shall I do,
When suffering comes my way?
I shall not be surprised
As though it were something strange.

For in Him there is no chaos,
He has numbered all my days
Bringing good from seeming evil,
So I will delight in His grace.

Who sees me in my suffering?
The Lord Himself, He sees
Bringing comfort amidst affliction
My sympathetic High Priest.

There is nothing I can go through
That He has not endured.
Oh my soul, never forget
The goodness of my Lord.

J E S U S

L I F T E D

H I G H

JESUS LIFTED HIGH

Aaron Ivey, Marcus Dawes

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KEY OF B, 4/4 74BPM

CHORUS:

B G#m
I want to see Jesus lifted high,
E B
I want to see Jesus lifted high x4

TURN:

G#m / / E B / / / x2

VERSE 1:

G#m E B G#m E B
Though I may suffer for a while, I have a hope that's undefiled
G#m E B G#m E B
I see the part but not the whole, I know this world is not my home

_TO CHORUS

_TO TURN

VERSE 2:

G#m E B G#m E B
I only have one hope to hold, where sin is crushed and hearts unfold
G#m E B G#m E B
This King who died and took my place, He stood and walked out of the grave
G#m E B
He stood and walked out of the grave

_TO CHORUS

BRIDGE:

E G#m F#
You get the last word, You always do
E G#m F#
You know the best way, You always move
E G#m F#
You have the best heart, You always will
B
Be lifted high x2

CHORUS 2:

G#m B E B
I want to see Jesus lifted high, I want to see Jesus lifted high
B G#m E B F#/Bb
I want to see Jesus lifted high, I want to see Jesus lifted high
G#m B E B
I want to see Jesus lifted high, I want to see Jesus lifted high

_TO BRIDGE

JESUS LIFTED HIGH

Jesus is “the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross” (Colossians 1:15-20).

We worship a Savior who willingly left His throne to humble Himself and come to earth in human form. He upholds the universe by the word of His power and yet came to earth as a humble servant. One day every tongue will confess He is Lord, yet He calls us brothers and sisters in Christ! Everything begins and ends with Jesus. There is no one like Jesus. There is no higher name. There is no one else by whom we can be saved. It was through His perfect obedience that our sin is crushed and that God “has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Philippians 2:9-11).

When we sing, “I want to see Jesus lifted high,” we are simultaneously reminding ourselves who Jesus is and praying for our hearts to believe He is who He says He is. Again and again, we sing this phrase to remind our forgetful hearts that it is Jesus who is to be exalted—not us. It is Jesus who is perfect in wisdom, sovereign care, and mercy—not us. It is Jesus who is high and lifted up—not us. We pray that our hearts are righted and oriented to see and believe Jesus as the most preeminent of all persons. We sing this phrase to remind our hearts that it is Jesus who is worthy of our worship, the Cornerstone of our salvation, our hope, and our eternity. Jesus is our everything. He alone is worthy of our adoration, our praise, and our exaltation above all things.

Jesus is our hope undefiled, perfect in righteousness, merciful in salvation, and powerful in crushing sin and death. As saints, as brothers and sisters in Christ, we want to see Jesus lifted high. We want to trust Him through longsuffering, we want to trust His goodness when our circumstances reveal the doubt in our hearts, and we want to see Him lifted higher and higher.

JESUS, OUR HOPE IN SUFFERING

**Though I may suffer for a while, I have a hope that's undefiled
I see the part but not the whole, I know this world is not my home**

**I only have one hope to hold, where sin is crushed and hearts unfold
This King who died and took my place, He stood and walked out of the grave
He stood and walked out of the grave**

You don't have to be old and gray to understand how hard life is. To experience pain in this life is to live in this life. It's not a matter of if life will be hard—it's a matter of when life will be hard. Suffering doesn't discriminate against age, gender, sex, or socioeconomic status. Hardships show up during every season of the year and in every season of life. Cancer takes its toll on our bodies, hurricanes destroy neighborhoods, spouses leave, addictions take over, promises are broken, and lives sometimes seem to end far too soon for our understanding.

God's Word is clear that suffering is both inevitable and purposeful. We will all walk through some form of suffering. No one is immune. Suffering hits hard and tries to take us down with blow after blow. But God's Word promises us, as believers, that we do not suffer without hope. 1 Peter 1:6 says, "In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials ..." Peter wrote this letter to early believers who were living in a time of suffering and persecution. Throughout the entire letter, Peter encourages these fellow believers to keep pushing on and to remain steadfast in their faith.

What Peter knew then and what we know now is that although we will have hardships, God's Word reminds us that these struggles are momentary. In 2 Corinthians, Paul writes to the believers in the city of Corinth these words: "For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison ..." (2 Corinthians 4:17). Paul urges us to look at our pain, suffering, struggles, and hardships with the right perspective—that they are momentary, temporary, not eternal—so that we can look up and see the glory that lies ahead.

For not only is our suffering momentary and as Paul describes to the church in Corinth, "light," but the best news is that it is actually producing something in us. This light and momentary affliction, this suffering, and this worst time in your life is doing something. It is producing a glory that is not only eternal, but is beyond all comparison. The weight of this glory greatly outweighs our momentary afflictions.

What this means for us is that our suffering isn't pointless. Our suffering, whatever the scope, is bringing about glory. What is this glory? It is difficult to describe something that we have yet to see or experience fully. But although this glory is indescribable, we know there will be no more pain, no more fear, and no more suffering. We know it is better than any joy, any peace, or anything we have ever experienced, and we know it is when we will be with our Creator forever and ever. Your suffering may not feel "light" as Paul describes it, but when we compare it to the weight of the eternal glory that is awaiting us in Heaven, it can be nothing but light.

Recently, I watched a friend venture into one of the hardest seasons she will likely walk through in her lifetime. Her son needed a surgery on his heart, and after the surgery, he seemed to be doing well. Then things started to decline, and right before her eyes, her son entered into a coma and never returned. He never woke up on this side of Heaven. She held him tightly as his heart slowed to a stop and he breathed his last.

Watching from afar, I was baffled by her continual declaration to the world and all who were watching that she believed God to still be good. To many looking in, the immediate question in their minds was, how in the world can she believe this while her son is dying?

The hope we have in the midst of our momentary afflictions is built on Jesus and what He did for us at Calvary. Jesus is our hope that is undefiled and cannot be put to shame. He lived a perfect life and was the ultimate perfect sacrifice for us.

Jesus was beaten and killed on our behalf, but that's not where His story ends. We often look to the cross for our hope—and it is indeed!—but there's more to the story. You see, not only was Jesus sacrificed for us, but He did the unthinkable. He did the impossible. Jesus rose three days later, defeating the grave. Jesus defeated death, and because of that, we have hope in a King who died, took our place, and stood up and walked out of the grave. No one else can offer this hope to us, for no one else has defeated death and sin like our Jesus!

Our hope in the midst of suffering can only be found in Jesus because He defeated the grave on our behalf. What this means for us is that we have a Savior who took the final word away from death. No matter what comes at us in this life—death, disease, infertility, sickness, infidelity, addiction, fears—Jesus has the final word. He walked out of the grave. He conquered death, and the final word is always His.

This world will hurt us, beat us down, and cause us much pain. But we will not lose hope, because the world is not our home. Jonathan Edwards once prayed that God would stamp eternity on his eyeballs. He wanted to look at all of life through the lens of eternity. All of his successes, all of his failures, and all of his suffering—he wanted to see it all through the lens of eternity. We can do this, too. When we view every part of our lives

through the lens of eternity—through the eternal-weight-of-glory lens—songs lifting up the name of Jesus become the anthem of our lives.

The good news for all of us is that, as followers of Jesus Christ, we can indeed see Jesus lifted high in the midst of our suffering. It isn't impossible or far-fetched for this cry of our mouths to also be the cry of our hearts as we sing. Our only hope in this world is the gospel. The gospel is the reason we sing, "I want to see Jesus lifted high," no matter the circumstances that surround our lives.

PROCESSING QUESTIONS

1. Any suffering you endure is purposed to prepare for you an eternal weight of glory. How does this promise create hope during difficult seasons?

PROCESSING QUESTIONS (CONTINUED)

2. Jonathan Edwards prayed that God would stamp eternity on his eyeballs. In what areas of your life do you struggle to see through the lens of eternity? Spend some time praying that God would help you to see all of your life through the lens of the eternal work of Christ.

JESUS, OUR SHEPHERD

**You get the last word, You always do
You know the best way, You always move
You have the best heart, You always will
Be lifted high**

Seasons of suffering can feel dark, isolating, and devoid of goodness. As believers, our desire is to remember and believe that we are not forsaken by God when we get a bad report from the doctor or experience strife and

disunity in our marriages. We want to preach the truth to our hearts that we have a hope undefiled, that He hasn't left us alone in our suffering, and we can trust that it's all for a purpose. But what does it look like to walk in the hope we have in Jesus?

In the midst of a season of suffering, the shepherd, psalmist, and soon-to-be king of Israel wrote, "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me" (Psalm 23:4). David is known for his raw, gritty, and vulnerable prayers to God. He prayed the things that we sometimes struggle to pray, and he trusted God with every ounce of his pain, grief, unbelief, disappointments, fear, and sin. David didn't dress up his prayers to sound better than he felt. He described his current season as, "the valley of the shadow of death," otherwise translated as, "the valley of deep darkness." He was experiencing darkness that he compared to death. In other words, he expressed, "Even though I am feeling and experiencing a version of death, I will fear no evil because You are with me, You are guiding me, and You are comforting me." We are not exempt from suffering, but we do have the best Shepherd taking care of us through every dark and difficult moment.

You get the last word, You always do

When we experience difficulty in life, one of the first things that is tested is our trust in God's Word. When things don't turn out the way we expect them to, will we still believe that God's Word is best for us? Will we still obey when obedience comes at a cost? In the garden of Eden, Satan tempted Adam and Eve to question the veracity of God's Word. "He said to the woman, 'Did God actually say, "You shall not eat of any tree in the garden"?"' (Genesis 3:1b, emphasis added). He challenged the truth of God's words, causing Eve to question whether or not God really meant what He said.

Difficult circumstances tend to expose areas of weakness in our trust of God's Word. Sin and suffering reveal our doubt in God, but God gets the last word. God tells us who we are in Christ when we feel marked for life by our sin. God's faithfulness stands when ours wavers. God's promises are true when we feel betrayed by the world. God gets the last word. "The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever" (Isaiah 40:8). Jesus gets the last word over sin, shame, suffering, and death.

You know the best way, You always move

Sheep are notorious for not being the brightest of all God's creatures. Without the constant guidance of a shepherd, they are prone to get lost and isolated from the herd, making them susceptible to being picked off and devoured by a predator. They are great followers, but they will follow one another right off the edge of a

cliff. Left to their own devices, they are vulnerable to drowning, getting caught in wire fences, falling in holes, and predators.

We are much like these sheep—easily distracted by earthly wins, prone to wander straight into enemy territory, and susceptible to following the crowd straight to our death. We want to believe that God would never lead us astray, but when His ways are not our ways, doubt creeps in that God knows what's best for us. David prayed this prayer to encourage his heart: "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death ... " (Psalm 23:1-4a).

When we feel doubt creep in and shake our faith, we can encourage our hearts to remember that Jesus is our Shepherd who leads us, guides us, and protects us. Jesus is our perfect compass because He is leading us in the direction of righteousness. He will not fail to lead us in the best way, not only because He doesn't want us to get lost, not only because He wants us to experience righteousness, but because it is His name that is at stake. We can bank on God moving in our lives because it is in His character to shepherd us through.

You have the best heart, You always will

Be lifted high

In times of utter uncertainty, trusting that God knows what is best for us can be downright terrifying. We struggle to believe that God is good when we experience seasons of darkness. During a dark season, David encouraged his heart with this simple truth: "... for you are with me ..." (Psalm 23:4). God promises to never leave us or forsake us. He promises that whether we believe it in the moment or not, everything that God ordains and allows in our lives is purposed for our good.

In John 10, Jesus says,

I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay my life down for the sheep. (John 10:11-15)

In the greatest display of love and goodness, Jesus laid down His life for us. Jesus says He treats us the way a good shepherd treats his sheep. Unlike a hired hand, the good shepherd does all that he can to love, care

for, and protect his sheep. Jesus is our Good Shepherd. He did everything—even die for us—to show His love. Jesus has the best heart for us.

In Romans, we read, “If God is for us, who can be against us? ... neither death, nor life, nor angels nor rulers ... nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:31, 38-39). There is nothing in this world that can separate us from God’s love. His love for us does not cease. His love is not grander if our world is easier, and His love is not less if our world is tough.

In singing truths about God back to Him, we aren’t reassuring Him of His goodness—we are reassuring ourselves of His goodness toward us. He has the best heart. He has the best way. He gets the last word.

PROCESSING QUESTIONS

1. In what ways have you seen Jesus shepherd, guide, care for, and protect you during difficult seasons?
2. When you are in a season of suffering, what area of your faith does the enemy attack the most—your belief in God’s Word? Your trust of God’s sovereign plan for you? Your trust in God’s goodness? Spend some time reading, praying, and asking God to increase your faith in these areas.

JESUS LIFTED HIGH

I want to see Jesus lifted high, I want to see Jesus lifted high
I want to see Jesus lifted high, I want to see Jesus lifted high
I want to see Jesus lifted high, I want to see Jesus lifted high

The greatest commandment is to “love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might” (Deuteronomy 6:5). God demands that we love Him fully with all of our faculties and that we lift Him high above everything else—ourselves, our families, our careers, and our aspirations. To see Jesus lifted high means that in all areas of our lives, and at every moment in our lives, our one desire is to exalt His name and His name alone. As followers of Jesus, we want to lift high His name, but we struggle to do so. Our hearts are prone to wander, and in some moments, we would rather see our own names lifted high.

We are people bent on seeking our greatest joy. If the situation allows for it, we will make every decision based on what we think will give us the most fulfillment, the highest level of pleasure, and the longest-lasting joy. God created us to be people who have an insatiable desire for joy and satisfaction. This desire to be fulfilled is what makes Scriptures like these so encouraging to read: “Delight yourself in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart” (Psalm 37:4). “And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:19).

The problem is that we tend to skim over the parts of the verses that show us where and how our joy is ultimately found. Psalm 37:4 tells us to “delight yourself in the Lord,” but in our flesh, we attempt to delight ourselves in earthly treasures. We read the promise that God is going to supply all of our needs, but misunderstand what our greatest need is. We believe that if we had that one thing—a long-awaited spouse, a job that was more suited to our talents, a house in a different neighborhood, or the money in the bank to travel and see the world—we would be happier. We set up our lives to pursue these things, and when we don’t get them, disappointment sets in.

God created us with a ravenous appetite for joy because He wants us to seek for the greatest joy. God gives us earthly blessings in food, work, relationships, and sex, but they are blessings that are shadows of the greatest joy that is found in Jesus alone. We struggle to exalt and lift God higher than everything else because we struggle to believe that God will give us the greatest joy.

When we praise, honor, and exalt God for His glory, we experience our greatest joy. Dr. John Piper said it this way, “So from the very beginning, we see that God made his exaltation and our salvation one piece. You don’t have to choose between God’s glory and your joy, because the apex of your joy is praise, and the apex of his glory is grace.”

With our salvation comes a new heart that knows, believes, and beats for God’s glory alone. We become new creatures who are created and compelled to worship Him alone (2 Corinthians 5:17). But we still have our flesh to deal with. Our new heart knows that it no longer belongs to the world of darkness. It knows that it no longer

has to obey its passions, regardless of how strong they might feel (Romans 6:12). It believes that it is no longer a slave to sin (Romans 6:18). But our old self must be taught what it looks like to be free from sin and to be a servant of God. We must crucify our old self, denying the lusts of our flesh and allowing our new self to live freed from sin and as a servant of God.

The spirit that God puts within us wants to see His name lifted high above all things, but our flesh wants to see our name lifted high. We want to be significant, powerful, and famous. We want to be noticed for our charity and generosity, our skills and talents, and our brilliance. We are people who think mainly about ourselves. We look just like the Pharisees in our search for human praise and accolades. John 12:43 says, “... for they loved human praise more than praise from God” (NIV).

When we are more concerned with ourselves, we can't see how much we need Jesus, His saving work, and His sacrifice. The beauty of the gospel is that we are overcomers in all areas, even in our ability to praise His name, because of the Holy Spirit who lives in us. Although our own hearts may deceive us and keep us from exalting Jesus, God gave believers the Holy Spirit as a Guide and Helper in times of need. We can actually pray and beg God to help us lift His name high.

Not only do we have the Holy Spirit as a Helper and Guide in our desire and ability to exalt and lift high the name of Jesus, but we have the example of Jesus Himself. Throughout Jesus's ministry, He was exalting His name and giving glory to the Father who had sent Him to do good works.

Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Philippians 2:9-11)

God exalted Jesus so that all might believe and confess Him to be Lord and Savior. This is our example, as well. Jesus says, hours before His arrest, “Father, the hour has come. Glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you” (John 17:1). Jesus is our greatest example of what it looks like to glorify and lift high the name of God in all we do.

Although there may be times when our flesh desires to lift high our own name and not God's name, we know that we have the Holy Spirit within us to teach us, guide us, help us, and point us toward the Father. We also have the example of Jesus who emptied Himself by becoming a servant, humbled Himself to death, and for this reason, God highly exalted Him and gave Him the name above every name.

To Him be the glory. Amen.

PROCESSING QUESTIONS

1. God cares so very much about your joy. Do you find it difficult to believe that because God cares so deeply for your joy, He gave you Himself? Why or why not?
2. What are some areas of your life that you tend to lift higher or prioritize above Jesus?

Songs have a way of moving our hearts to glorify Jesus. They always have, and they always will. Proclaiming truths about God with our mouths solidifies them in our hearts. Continual singing trains our hearts to truly believe.

Singing about our hope that is undefiled causes our hearts to believe. Reminding ourselves about a home that awaits us causes our hearts to yearn for this eternal home. Worshiping Jesus with words about a King who defeated the grave points our hearts toward the truths that will sustain us when suffering enters our lives. These truths become our foundation, and as Jesus tells us in His Word, when the storms come, our house will not fall when it's built on the truth. This song reminds our hearts of what is true.

As disciples of Jesus Christ, lifting high the name of Jesus doesn't end with ourselves. We should long for this in our churches, and we should long for this among His people. Through every season of our lives, through every mountain high and valley low, our job is to lift high the name of Jesus in everything that we do.

ALL BECAUSE

OF CHRIST

ALL BECAUSE OF CHRIST

KEY OF E, 4/4, 138BPM

Aaron Ivey, Marcus Dawes, Brett Land, Jimmy McNeal, Logan Walter,
Logan Garza, Dietrich Schmidt

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TURN:

C#m A E B x2

VERSE 1:

C#m A E A E B
Who could stand amidst the wind and waves except the One who made them to obey
C#m A E A E B
Who could sing in the midst of suffering but those He has redeemed and called by name

CHORUS:

A E
If I stand and see it through
A E
If I stay the course and make it home
A E/G# B
If my heart is overwhelmed with peace in the storm
A B
It's all, it's all because of Christ

_TO TURN

VERSE 2:

C#m A E A E B
Only You would reach down to such an end to leave heaven and befriend the ones You made
C#m A E A E B
And only You will endure me through it all though the things of earth may fall You will remain

CHORUS 2:

A E
If I stand and see it through
A E
If I stay the course and make it home
A E/G# B
If my heart is overwhelmed with peace in the storm
A B E
It's all, it's all because of Christ
A E
So if I stand and see it through
A E
If I stay the course and make it home
A E/G# B
If my heart is overwhelmed with peace in the storm
F#m B C#m
It's all, it's all because of Christ
A B
Yes it's all, it's all because of Christ

INSTRUMENTAL:

A B C#m G#m x2

BRIDGE:

A B
Because of Christ I'm not forsaken
C#m7 G#m7
Because of Christ I'm not alone
A B
Because of Christ I have a confidence and hope
F#m B E
It's all, it's all because of Christ

A E/G#
Because of Christ I'm not forsaken
F#m B
Because of Christ I'm not alone
F#m E/G#
Because of Christ I have a confidence and hope
A B E
It's all, it's all because of Christ

CHORUS 3:

A E/G#
So I will stand and see it through
E A E/G#
I will stay the course and make it home
E A E/G# B
Oh my heart is overwhelmed with peace in the storm
F#m B E
It's all, it's all because of Christ
A E/G#
So I will stand and see it through
E A E/G#
I will stay the course and make it home
E A E/G# B
Oh my heart is overwhelmed with peace in the storm
F#m B C#m
It's all, it's all because of Christ
A B
It's all, it's all because of Christ

OUTRO:

C#m A E B
C#m E A E

ALL BECAUSE OF CHRIST

In early August, the days were bright in Houston, Texas. The sun was shining, and the skies were clear. Commuters were commuting—sipping their coffee and listening to their favorite podcasts. Runners were running with a pep in their step and strength in their legs. Parents were nearing the end of summer, exchanging high fives with each other for enduring a season of entertaining children and maintaining sanity. All of them were living their normal lives, and none were aware that there was a storm on the horizon—not just a typical Texas summer thunderstorm, but a storm that would change their lives forever.

Many of us watched Hurricane Harvey sweep in with a vengeance. It ravaged the homes and lives of many of our friends and family with very little warning. For thousands, it destroyed everything—their homes, their cars, their most precious possessions, and their security. All of those things had seemed safe and secure, but within days, it was clear that all of it was at the mercy of Harvey.

The same is true for our lives. There are days that are bright. We have money in our pockets, we feel valued, we have happy and healthy families, and it feels like Heaven is right there waiting for us.

And then a storm comes, most of the time with no warning. And everything that we thought was strong and secure suddenly feels insecure. We start to realize that we have misplaced our confidence in possessions, in good works, in our intelligence, and in our relationships. But the storm came—the doctor brought bad news, the job ended, a flood destroyed our newly renovated home—and forced us to face our weaknesses, our needs, our sin, and our inability to control our lives. We are forced to come face to face with the fact that we do not command our own destinies.

This song progressively preaches the truth to our hearts that everything in life rises and falls on the heart and will of God, not on us. It's all because of Christ. We begin singing with the timid, questioning hope, "If I stand and see it through, if I stay the course and make it home, if my heart is overwhelmed with peace in the storm, it's all, it's all because of Christ." By the time we reach the end of the song, we have reminded our hearts that we don't have to fear suffering, loneliness, or insignificance, but rather confidently proclaim that *if* we place our hope and boast in Christ alone, "*I will* stand and see it through, *I will* stay the course and make it home, oh my heart is overwhelmed with peace in the storm, it's all, it's all because of Christ."

STORMS OF SUFFERING

If the storms of suffering are not raging in your life today, they are either brewing or calming. How can we know for sure? Jesus promised that we will have suffering. In John 16:33, Jesus said, “In the world you will have tribulation.” Notice His language. He doesn’t say, “In the world you might have tribulation,” or, “In this life there is a chance of storms.” No. He says, “In the world you will have tribulation.”

We will have days when we feel like we can’t get out of bed, days when it feels impossible to take another step, days when just breathing feels like labor. We will have days when the wind gets knocked out of us, the phone call comes, or the news breaks. Those days are promised to us, because we live in a world that is subjected to futility (Romans 8:20). This world is not as it should be, so while we are here on this side of eternity, suffering will be a part of our lives.

And while suffering is guaranteed for us, we also have a promise that it is God who is holding all things together: “And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together” (Colossians 1:17).

He is holding all things together—the good things and the hard things, the big things and the little things. He is holding it all together. That means not one blade of grass grows or withers without God willing it to do so. Not one molecule in your body exists without the careful and perfect design of God. He is upholding the entire universe by the Word of His power (Hebrews 1).

And not one single storm comes into our lives without the careful planning and ordination of God. Only God is the One with the power to create and calm storms. Psalm 29:10 states, “The Lord sits enthroned over the flood ...” He is not surprised or panicked by the storms, because He is the One who created the winds and the waters. And He can calm them as easily as He can create them (Mark 4:35-41).

Because He is good and does everything on purpose (Romans 8:28), we can trust that every storm we experience is put into our lives to help us to persevere. There is not a single moment of suffering that we will experience that has not passed through the hands of a loving God.

So we can be confident that every storm in our lives is happening for us, not to us. Can you imagine how that truth might transform the way we endure suffering? What if we became a people that started viewing our lives—every moment, circumstance, and accident—as God’s best means to persevere us to the victorious end of our race? When we come face to face with the pain of sin and evil around us, when we learn of our spouse’s unfaithfulness or experience the pain of an absent parent, we can trust in the midst of our pain that God is good and He only does good, and that this pain, this devastation, is the best possible way to persevere us. God isn’t

in the business of wasting your time, and you're not an experiment for Him. He is not trying out circumstances to see how you will respond. Instead, He is carefully creating moments—both storms and clear skies—to sanctify you, to persevere you, and to glorify you.

For most of us, the promise of suffering is not very surprising. Suffering is not a foreign concept to us. Even though we don't believe we are exempt from suffering, that still doesn't make us feel good about it. Even though we may not be surprised by suffering, we still don't always know how to properly respond when it comes crashing into our lives. So we need to keep reading in the text of John 16:33. Jesus says we will have suffering, but then He says, "But take heart; I have overcome the world." To take heart means to be of good courage, to be filled with confidence. Can you imagine being on the edge of the worst storm of your life, watching it roll in, and being filled with courage and confidence?

If you are in Christ, that courage and confidence is available to you because of the promise of God that we will be triumphant. There is nothing in this life that will take us out. We can be confident that the children of God are more than conquerors (Romans 8:37).

Jesus says that we can take heart. We can have confidence and hope all because Christ has overcome the world. We can take heart—because of Christ. We are not forsaken—because of Christ. We are not alone—because of Christ.

When the storms of life come rolling in, remember that God promised the storms, and He is sovereign over every rain drop. He carefully plans all the events in our lives for our good. And He promises, all because of Christ, that we will be triumphant.

PROCESSING QUESTIONS

1. What is your current view of suffering? Think about the last time you endured a season of suffering—did it feel like it was happening for you or to you?
2. How does your love and trust of God change when you enter a stormy season? What would it look like to fight for a Romans 8:28-30 view of suffering?

IN NEED OF A SAVIOR

Even the most humble among us have a hard time realizing our depravity. Even on our best days, it's difficult to really believe what the Bible says about us, apart from Jesus. Throughout Scripture, we find evidence of our guilt, our sin nature, and our need for a Savior.

Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned ... Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous. (Romans 5:12, 18-19)

What the Scripture is saying here is that before we even have the opportunity to breathe our first breath, we are considered guilty because of Adam's sin. Not only that, but we receive a sin nature (Romans 5:19). Sin nature means that it's not just something we do, but it's who we are. Apart from Christ, we are sinners.

Romans 3 is not shy about its claims of us—calling none of us righteous, not even one. The Scriptures say that our throats are an open grave, we use our tongues to deceive, we are swift to shed blood, and that ruin and misery are in our paths (Romans 3:10-18).

As sinners, Ephesians 2 says that we are children deserving of the full wrath of God. Romans 3 says that the price required for our sin is death. How's that for a pep talk?

The reason we must start with our depravity is because it is only when we are in that place that we can feel how desperately we need a Savior. If we don't believe we have anything to be saved from, it makes our worship of a Savior weak and unnecessary.

The good news is that we do have a Savior, and not just one who swoops in to save the day, but One who took on our punishment and became a friend to sinners. 2 Corinthians 5:21 states, "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." Jesus came and put on flesh and took the punishment we deserved so that we might be able to become the righteousness of God and have a relationship with God. Do you realize how remarkable that is? The work of Jesus changed our identity from being sinners with no hope, to being made clean and transformed into His righteousness.

It's also helpful to understand the posture of Jesus toward us when we are walking through storms of suffering. Jesus isn't a standoffish Savior who is asking us to stick a Band-Aid on our pain and get over it. Instead, Jesus is

a Savior who gently takes our face in the palms of His hands and whispers, “Child, I weep with you. I understand your pain. Trust Me.” Jesus actually joins us in our pain. Hebrews 4:15 states, “For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.” There is not a single storm in your life that Jesus has not also experienced, so His posture toward us is one of patience, compassion, and understanding. Psalm 56:8 says, “You know how troubled I am; you have kept a record of my tears” (GNT). Your pain is not lost on your Savior. He knows and understands and weeps with you.

Not only that, Jesus counts us as friends. Most of us don’t typically make friends with people who want us to take on their debt. But Jesus is a different kind of friend than we are. He reached down from Heaven to be the friend to the ones who deserved no friends to the extent that it cost Him His life. John 15:13 says, “Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.” The friendship that we have in Jesus is unmatched. For some of us, this is a helpful reminder, because we don’t always feel like God likes us. God loving us is a concept we can wrap our brains around, but God liking us or enjoying us is a different idea that’s hard to believe, even on our best days. The truth is that we have a Savior who is not only powerful enough to bust out of the grave, but He has chosen to call us His friends.

And finally, we can worship because we have a Savior who is keeping us. When everything around us is falling apart, we have a Savior who is persevering us, holding us, and enduring us.

For these reasons, we can sing the lyrics with confidence, “Only You would reach down to such an end to leave Heaven and befriend the ones You made. And only You will endure me through it all. Though the things of earth may fall, You will remain.”

PROCESSING QUESTIONS

1. Read Romans 5:12, 18-19 again. What does this verse tell you about who you are apart from Christ? What does this verse tell you about who you are because of Christ?
2. What does it mean to you to know that Jesus counts you as His friend? How does this affect your worship of Jesus?

KEPT BY GOD

Most of us wake up in the morning without much on our minds besides where the coffee is and when we can get back into bed. We rarely consider that it is truly no less than a miracle that we wake up every day—that God saw fit for us to live one more day. We don't think about every tiny detail that had to work together perfectly for us to see another morning: the sun had to rise, our lungs had to breathe air, our hearts had to beat in perfect time. And the truth is, if God ceased to be God for even a millisecond, we would not exist.

When God called us, He started out on a mission. Romans 8:30 says that when He predestined us, He called us His children. And when He called us His children, He also justified us. That means that He caused us to be in right standing before God, freeing us up to have a relationship with Him. And when He justified us, He glorified us—meaning that when He called us into a relationship with Himself, He made it possible by justifying us, and then He promised to endure us until the end of our race in this life.

Paul says in Philippians 1:21, “For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.” What Paul understands is that when we are finally united face to face with Christ, it is only then that we will experience all the benefits of salvation. So Paul talks about his death and glorification as the prize at the end of his race. It's a prize that promises perfect bodies (Philippians 3:20-21), a reunion with all the saints of all time (Ephesians 5:25-27), and entering into our eternal home where only righteousness dwells, all secured for us because of Christ. Can you imagine that day? There is a day when we will stand before Jesus, complete and whole. It has been promised to us, and it has been promised to Jesus.

Have you ever considered that the day of our glorification has been promised to Jesus? Before the foundation of the world, God promised that He would present to Jesus a spotless and holy bride. Before the foundation of the earth, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit wrote names down in the Book of Life—names of people who God planned to be His own (Revelation 13:8). Then the triune God came into the world in human form so that He could die and purchase this people to be His pure and spotless bride. God the Father promised Jesus: If You do this, if You die the death Your bride should die, take on the penalty for her sin, and let her share in Your righteousness, if You will rise and conquer death that stings her, then one day, I will present this bride to You, perfect and holy and blameless. So Christ did.

“... Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish” (Ephesians 5:25-27). It is all because of Christ, because of the work He accomplished on the cross, because of the promise God the Father made to present Him with a perfect bride, that we, as called children of God, are promised a day of glorification.

It's easy to gloss over Romans 8:30 which says that when we were predestined and called His children, we were also glorified. Did you catch that tense? If we have been called by God, our glorification has already been secured. We do not yet experience it on this side of eternity, but it has been eternally secured for us, waiting for us. So Paul anticipates it, longing for it like it's his treasure, but he also believes that it has already been secured for him. After Paul was called by God, there was no plan of the enemy or no misstep of Paul that could thwart God's eternal security for him.

If it is true that when we were predestined to be His children before the foundation of the earth, we were also glorified, then we have to believe that it is only God who is doing the enduring. He secured our destiny before we even had breath in our lungs. Child of God, it is not you who is enduring. It is not how well you practice spiritual disciplines. It is not your ability to hold it together. It is not your ability to be long-suffering.

In this life, it often does feel like it is us. It feels like we are the ones doing the running. We feel fatigued and unsure, but we continue to take one step after another. Our legs are taking the steps, but it is God who is willing them to do so.

He is the One who is doing the enduring, the keeping, and the persevering. 1 Peter 1:5 says that we are children “who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.” It is only by God's power that we are being kept. It is only by His power that we have strength to make it through another day. It is only by His power that we have any desire to know Him and His Word. It is only by His power that we long to leave this world and see Him face to face. It is only by His power.

Whether intentional or not, when we take credit for our enduring, we are cheapening the work of Jesus. We are saying that the sacrifice Jesus made on our behalf was not enough to persevere us—that we need Jesus, but with a little side of our power, to be able to make it. Let us fall down at the feet of Jesus and repent for the ways we take credit for our race. And let us respond in worship. As this song reminds us over and over again, it is all because of Christ that we have confidence and hope that we will stay the course and make it home.

PROCESSING QUESTIONS

1. What are some acts or efforts you are tempted to trust in that you think will persevere you to the end?

PROCESSING QUESTIONS (CONTINUED)

2. It is all because of Christ that you are rescued, never forsaken, never alone, and able to make it home to Him. How does this truth create freedom and worship in you?

We begin singing this song by questioning: who could possibly stand when the storms are swirling around us, threatening us at every turn? Who could possibly sing in the midst of unimaginable pain and suffering? These are questions that guide us more than we know. We fear that trial, that test, that valley. We fear that the storm will take us out, that it will shut the door to our eternal home. When we know Satan is roaming around, ready to devour us, and sin is ceaselessly knocking at our door, the posture of a poor and contrite spirit is what Jesus called blessed. “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of God” (Matthew 5:2).

We cannot stand on our own. We have nothing to sing for. Our understanding and belief of this truth is what postures us before God with a broken and contrite spirit. When we realize that apart from Christ we are nothing and have nothing, God tells us that we will experience greater joy than we could ever imagine (Philippians 3:8). We will be blessed, because ours is the kingdom of God. By putting our faith in Christ alone, we have confidence and hope, we have eternal security, we are not forsaken, and we are never alone.

Our ability to transition from singing, “If I stand and see it through,” to boldly proclaiming, “I will stand and see it through,” is entirely contingent upon the will of God. It’s all because of Christ. Because of Christ, whatever course is put before us, whatever storms threaten our security, whatever pain, loss, and betrayal we experience, we can stand and sing.

SELAH: THE SEA

OUT OF DARKNESS, INTO HIS MARVELOUS LIGHT

Dead in the sin and transgressions that consume my life,
Blindly devouring every deceitful vice,
Carelessly drowning in the infinite sea of darkness,
Drifting amidst the waves, hopeless and heartless.

And though wretched, woeful, unholy, and vile,
Disguising my emptiness behind a deceptive smile,
Gripping to the world's vain desires—
Dreams and hopes I longed to aspire.

In the darkest depths of my own depravity,
With the weight of my sin clinging like gravity,
God showed Himself merciful, just, and kind,
Forever calling me His, and I called Him mine.

Out of darkness, into His marvelous light,
I had no worthiness for wrath-satisfying sacrifice.
This gravity that forced these blinded eyes to see,
Brought new life and loosed the chains in me.

Once enslaved and paralyzed,
By the boundless ocean of my own fears,
Now a shackleless bondservant,
To Him who gave life to these deaf ears.

Jesus Christ the one true God,
Flawlessly pursued this calloused heart,
Claiming forever me as His own,
This heart, now flesh, forever atoned.
Light of my salvation, whom shall I fear?
No longer far off, He draws me near.
No longer dead, but made alive,
He knows my name and stands by my side—
Leading me through this path of life.

YOUR

MERCY

YOUR MERCY

KEY OF D, 4/4, 138BPM

Jaleesa McCreary, Marcus Dawes, Brett Land, Aaron Ivey
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INTRO:

D /// D /// D /// D ///

VERSE 1:

Bm G D
I was alone I couldn't find my place
Bm G D
'til Heaven reached down, Your love it called my name
Bm G D
Out of my shame out of the dead of night
Bm G D
Into a hope, into Your marvelous light

PRE CHORUS:

D Em Bm
It's Your mercy I don't deserve Your mercy
G D Bm A
That You would reach down for me and keep me as Your own
D Em Bm
For Your glory I'm living for Your glory
G D Bm A
And I will tell the story of Your unfailing love

CHORUS:

D D/F#m G
Be glorified, be lifted high
D D/F#m G
In all my life, be glorified

VERSE 2:

Bm G D
Though I may run though I may fall apart
Bm G D
Chasing this world things that will break Your heart
Bm G D
But faithful and true sure as the rising sun
Bm G D
One thing is true one thing is sure to come

_TO PRECHORUS

CHORUS 2:

D D/F#m G
Be glorified, be lifted high
D D/F#m G
In all my life, be glorified
Bm D/F#m G
Be glorified, be lifted high
Bm D/F#m G /// D
In all my life, be glorified

BRIDGE:

D Em G A
I've tasted and seen that You are good You're walking with me just like You said You would
D Em G A
And all that You say every word is true, oh whom should I trust Jesus I trust in You
D/F# G Bm A
I've tasted and seen that You are good You're walking with me just like You said You would
D/F# G Bm A
And all that You say every word is true, oh whom should I trust Jesus I trust in You

_TO CHORUS 2

_TO PRECHORUS

YOUR MERCY

The mercy of God is the bedrock of our salvation. His mercy breathes life into our dead souls, awakening us and opening our eyes to see Him in all of His glory and holiness (1 Peter 1:3). It is “because of the tender mercy of our God, whereby the sunrise shall visit us from on high to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace” (Luke 1:78-79). God looks on us, seeing us dressed in shame and death, and is moved to compassion and tenderness. It is the warmth and lovingkindness of the light of God that shows us the way to peace.

Scripture describes mercy as abundant, consuming, never-ending, enough, and then some more (Exodus 34:6-7). We are swimming in an ocean of mercy that is simultaneously drowning our sin and rescuing us. God’s mercy flows on and on and on and rises with every new morning sun. God’s mercy surrounds us, saves us, and endures us until the day we will stand face to face with Him.

We don’t deserve this gift of mercy that rips down the curtain between us and God, making a way for us to experience life and reconciliation with God. It is a gift that we have no ability to repay. It is truly the most undeserved gift. Jesus came down from Heaven to make a way for us to become a part of the family of God. It is only through and because of this undeserving gift of mercy that we live a life that is set apart to the glory of our Father.

THE UNDESERVED MERCY OF GOD

**I was alone I couldn’t find my place
'til heaven reached down, Your love it called my name
Out of my shame out of the dead of night
Into a hope, into Your marvelous light
It’s Your mercy, I don’t deserve Your mercy
That You would reach down for me and keep me as Your own**

There are two foundational things that must exist for mercy to be enacted: the person offended and the offender. God—the holy, perfect Creator of the universe who holds all things in His hand, who is the essence of goodness, love, and truth—has been wronged by our sin, evil, and rebellion. Our offense against an infinite God deserves infinite death and an eternal separation from all that is good and holy (Romans 6:23). In full knowledge and awareness, we choose again and again to dishonor an honorable God, to worship and serve the things God has made instead of the Creator God Himself, and exchange truth for lies (Romans 1:24-25).

For this, we are without excuse (Romans 1:20). Our sin has incurred a rightful wrath from a holy God.

Mercy is the act of withholding justice when justice actually demands punishment. Our salvation is possible only through God giving us mercy when we deserved punitive justice. “But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus” (Ephesians 2:4-7).

This can be so hard for us to understand and swallow. Our hearts stiffen at the thought that we are not in control of our own salvation and eternity. We question God in His goodness when we read these words. It’s difficult for us to see ourselves as depraved sinners in dire need of saving and mercy. Our instinct is to belittle or downplay our sin. To a degree, we can admit that we are a mess, yet we look for ways to shift a portion of the blame of our wrongdoing onto someone else or our circumstances. When we don’t appeal to God for His infinite mercy to be poured out over lives, we are showing that we don’t fully understand the depths of our depravity.

When we don’t look to the mercy of God to save us from our sin, we believe we have something to offer God that will help Him save us. We think that if we could just be better, we could gain God’s favor and forgiveness. We promise God we will exercise more self-control and be less selfish. We promise to read our Bible more and go to more church functions. When we attempt to do something to acquire God’s forgiveness, we are saying that we believe that Jesus’s work on the cross wasn’t enough. When we attempt to achieve our own righteousness, we are no longer relying on the power of the cross.

With the sins of adultery and murder on his heels, David appealed to God with this prayer, “Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions” (Psalm 51:1). David appeals to God to act in accordance with His name and character to fully forgive his heinous actions. What David knows and believes about God is that His mercies are full to the overflowing and they are based upon His eternal character. God doesn’t create mercy as a response to our need. It is who He is.

David petitions God to act in accordance with His name to have mercy on him by blotting out his transgressions (Psalm 51:1). God’s mercy is secured for us through faith in the life, death, and resurrection of His Son. Jesus’s blood paid for our sin fully and completely, once for all (Hebrews 10:12). Because of Jesus’s perfect sacrifice, we can ask God to act justly in accordance with His name to not only forgive us our sins, but to forget that we

ever committed them. God vows, “I, I am he, who blots out your transgressions for my own sake, and I will not remember your sins” (Isaiah 43:25).

Charles Spurgeon said, “It is undeserved mercy, as indeed all true mercy must be, for deserved mercy is only a misnomer for justice. There was no right on the sinner’s part to the kind consideration of the Most High.” We don’t deserve such a gift, but God pours it out on us in abundance.

But faithful and true, sure as the rising sun

One thing is true, one thing is sure to come

God’s mercy is rooted in His unfailing, steadfast, and never-ending love for us. “The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning” (Lamentations 3:22-23). God is faithful and true, sure as the rising sun. In an act of God’s perfect justice, God pours His mercy over our sin through the blood of His Son. On the cross, Jesus made the great exchange of His perfect life and righteousness for our sin and unrighteousness. Jesus made a way for God’s gift of mercy to also be fully just. We don’t deserve God’s mercy, but He gives it to us in abundance. We are not entitled to it, but because of God’s grace, we can bank on it. God’s mercy is the foundation of our salvation, our hope, and our eternal life.

PROCESSING QUESTIONS

1. Do you find yourself struggling to believe that you need God’s mercy? Or do you believe that you are entitled to or deserving of God’s mercy?
2. In what ways do you see yourself attempting to earn mercy from God?

KEPT BY GOD'S MERCY

**It's Your mercy, I don't deserve Your mercy
That You would reach down for me and keep me as Your own**

**I've tasted and seen that You are good
You're walking with me just like You said You would
And all that You say, every word is true
Oh whom should I trust? Jesus I trust in You**

We all want to belong. The desire to be accepted and secured by at least one person is innate. Calling someone “my person” is a sign of endearment and ensured affection. We know that when it's time to celebrate life's little wins or time to weep and grieve, we will not be alone. We want to have someone in our corner who has our back, regardless of what life throws at us.

Marriage is a picture of a man and woman vowing before family and friends that, until death parts them, they will be each other's people. The husband gives his new wife his name, a ring, and a promise that he will forever be her person. The vows are repeated, sealed with a kiss, and the applause of the witnesses affirm this covenant. It's a beautiful picture of hope and love.

No one anticipates standing before their bride or groom with the expectation that they are going to be cheated on, mistreated, ignored, or abandoned. We don't enter into a marriage covenant thinking that person will break our hearts, our confidence, or use our vulnerabilities against us. We say “I do” in hope that the person we are uniting to for the rest of our days will hold up their end of the vows.

God uses the picture of a marriage between a prophet and a prostitute to illustrate what a covenant between unequal parties looks like. God instructs Hosea to take a wife who is entrenched in a lifestyle of debauchery. Gomer adorns herself in jewelry and shamelessly conducts herself as a harlot. God calls Hosea to remain faithful and unmoved regardless of the pain he experiences while watching his bride and the mother of his children choose anything and everything over her family—again and again.

God calls Hosea to the painful role of being a faithful husband to an unfaithful wife in order to show us what it looks like to be kept by mercy. Again and again, Gomer chases after other lovers and worships lesser gods. God uses Gomer to show Israel that this idol-chasing is what their hearts of faithlessness look like. When God told Hosea to name his child, “Not My People,” He was pronouncing to the children of Israel that “you are not

my people, and I am not your God” (Hosea 1:9-10). God was severing ties with a people who had forgotten Him, run from Him, rejected Him, and chosen to serve and worship other gods (Hosea 2:13).

The children of Israel chose to rebel against the God who created them, loved them, set them free from slavery, and abundantly provided for them. We do the same thing today. We run from God and devote our hearts to lesser things. We chase after idols of independence, significance, and pleasure. Out of fear, impatience, and greed, we enslave our hearts to temporal solutions. We see all that God is holding out to us—steadfast and unfailing love, freedom from sin, eternal hope and peace, perfect provision, mercy and grace in our time of need (Hebrews 4:16)—and still, we choose to abide in the mere shadows and imitations of God’s goodness.

God could respond in anger, but instead, He says, “Therefore, behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak tenderly to her” (Hosea 2:14). There are few things that will reveal the true state of our hearts more than “the wilderness.” When everything falls apart and it turns out that the things we are chasing are not satisfying us, we open ourselves to the idea that maybe we don’t know what we’re doing or that we don’t have it under control. We fear suffering means that God has forgotten us, is ignoring our prayers, or has given up on us because of our perpetual sin. But in sweet tenderness, He is alluring us away from the things our flesh desires so that we can hear His warm and loving words. It’s a picture of a husband cupping his wife’s face in his hands, drawing her eyes to his and his alone, and compelling her to give him her undivided attention. It’s His kindness that reveals our sin to us so that we can repent and be united with Him (Romans 2:4). It is God’s mercy that leads us into the wilderness so that our hearts can embrace His tender pursuit.

God is jealous over His children (2 Corinthians 11:2). He wants us to be His people so deeply that He sent His Son to pay the penalty for our sin. God promises that we will give up our idols and call Him, “My Husband” (Hosea 2:16). God is committing that there will be a day when we are no longer in slavery to the sin of worshipping lesser gods and will be in covenant with our true Husband. He vows, “I will betroth you to me forever. I will betroth you to me in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love and in mercy. I will betroth you to me in faithfulness. And you shall know the LORD” (Hosea 2:19-20).

God makes us His people through faith in the life, death, and resurrection of His Son. “Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy” (1 Peter 2:10). The gift of mercy means that we get to call God “Father.” He frees us from the spirit of slavery and gives us the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!” (Romans 8:14-15). We are not only freed from the bondage of sin, but we are made to be children of the Most High God.

Not only do we become sons and daughters of God—we become brothers and sisters with Jesus. We become co-heirs of the kingdom of God. “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God’s power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time” (1 Peter 1:3-6). Through the gift of God’s mercy, we now have an inheritance that is eternal, unfading, and perfectly holy.

We are no longer isolated or alone, questioning whose we are or where we belong. We are kept in the love and grace of the family of God. We are not being kept in the sense of rigid slavery, but kept by a Father who carefully protects His children so they can flourish. We are kept as God’s people. We belong to the majestic King.

We sing and pray, “God keep me as your own. Sustain and endure me through your unfailing love. Preserve me, for in you I take refuge. There is no good apart from you. God, keep me. Keep me. By your unfailing love and undeserved mercy, keep me.”

PROCESSING QUESTIONS

1. When you think about belonging to God, being kept by Him, do you feel like this is the greatest expression of love and freedom? Why or why not?
2. When you experience trials and suffering, do you struggle to believe that God is sovereignly caring for you through this circumstance? What would it look like to fight for a perspective that God is tenderly pursuing you rather than punishing you? Do you tend to view suffering as punishment or pursuit?

A LIFE MARKED BY MERCY

**I've tasted and seen that You are good
You're walking with me just like You said You would
And all that You say, every word is true
Oh whom should I trust? Jesus I trust in You**

**Be glorified, be lifted high
In all my life, be glorified
Be glorified, be lifted high
In all my life, be glorified**

We sing with desperation that we need God to pour out His mercy on our undeserving lives. We relate to the lyrics that say we chase after things that break God's heart. But then we get to the chorus—and the prayer gets more difficult. We want God to powerfully change our lives, we want to take refuge in a big and holy and loving King, but it's more difficult to pray, "God, be glorified in all my life. Be lifted high in all my life."

We say and sing this phrase often. We proclaim with gusto and with as much faith as we have in the moment, that we truly and sincerely do want God to be glorified in every part of our lives. We want God to be supreme and central in our hearts and minds and all that we do. We want to trust God when He feels untrustworthy, we want to believe that He is good when our hearts doubt, and we want to be obedient when we face the strongest temptations. But living this out, walking in obedience to this prayer, and submitting in the most stubborn sin struggles can feel more like taking one step forward and two steps back than a straight shot toward perfection and holiness.

Paul described this agonizing war of flesh and spirit like this: "For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate" (Romans 7:15). We want God to be glorified, but then we find ourselves saying "yes" to something we know is far from glorifying God. This battle that rages within is as old as time. We share company with Adam and Eve as they questioned the truthfulness of God's words, with David when he couldn't turn his eyes from the nakedness of another man's wife, and Peter when he swore he would never deny his master and then heard the denial tumble out of his mouth moments later. We are not alone in our struggle with sin and temptation.

Paul describes what a life marked by mercy looks like: "I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect” (Romans 12:1-2).

A life that is rooted in the mercies of God is a life of worship and humility. We are called to respond to God’s gift of mercy by willingly sacrificing our lives for Him. God is not asking for a portion of our hearts or even for our best attempts. When Jesus called His disciples, He said to them, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it” (Matthew 16:24-25). Jesus demands our all. The call to take up our cross is the call to be living sacrifices. Attempting to “save” our life could look like reserving some of our worship for temporal or passing things or refusing to repent of the sins that seem to serve us well here on earth. We hang on to the greed that stacks our savings account and provides a false sense of security, we refuse to give up the addictions that give us instant comfort, or we ignore the conviction of the pride that makes us feel significant and powerful. We offer God portions of our obedience, heart, and worship. Jesus tells us that when we try to give God less than our all, we are losing our eternal life.

Jesus commands us to be perfect as our Father in Heaven is perfect (Matthew 5:48). The impossibility of being perfect in all moral, ethical, philosophical, and spiritual areas is overwhelming. But before He calls us to perfection, He says, “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them” (Matthew 5:17). God demands perfection in holiness, righteousness, and obedience from a heart of faith (Romans 14:23). He demands our all. But then, in His tender mercy, He provides for us the perfect sacrifice in Jesus. Jesus lived perfectly, died perfectly, and rose again perfectly to purchase for us the only perfect righteousness that would appease God’s demands. Once and for all, Jesus paid the price that would cover all of our imperfections (Hebrews 10:14). When we put our faith in Jesus, God sees us as perfectly righteous.

God wants our all. He wants all of our heart, soul, and might (Deuteronomy 6:5). He wants every bit of us—as flawed and broken as we are. He wants us to lose our life to Him so that we can taste and see the very best, most magnificent, unending, and unfailing love. He desired this so fervently that, in His great mercy, He provided the one and only sacrifice that had the power and perfection to secure this covenant for us.

When we sing, “Be glorified, be lifted high, in all my life, be glorified,” these lyrics are a prayer for us to submit our lives fully to God. We recognize that He has poured out His mercies on our lives, and that means we are now a people marked by His great and undeserved mercy. We offer to God our lives as living sacrifices, asking Him to use every part of us to glorify Him.

PROCESSING QUESTIONS

1. What is that thing you are holding on to that keeps you from giving God your absolute all?
Why is that thing harder to submit to God?
2. What do you think it looks like for you to live a life marked by mercy, as a living sacrifice before God?

God *is* mercy. It is His very essence and character. Jesus is the mercy of God, given to us in human form. In Christ, God's lavish mercy is what makes us alive when we should be dead, what makes a seat for us next to the King of kings instead of an eternal place in hell, and what makes a never-ending supply of grace and kindness in His Son.

As the moon drops low and the sun rises, we are reminded that with this new day comes a new, fresh outpouring of the mercy of God. We didn't use up all of God's mercy in all of our sinning yesterday. We didn't exhaust God's faithfulness. We didn't sour the spring of God's mercy. We open our eyes to a brand new day of the steadfast love of the Lord with new, never-ending mercies (Lamentations 3:22-23). We can wake up and tell our soul, "The LORD is my portion, therefore, I will hope in him" (Lamentations 3:24).

We don't deserve God's mercy, but He continually pours it out on us. This undeserved, unearned, and unparalleled gift is what creates a way for us to belong to our Father God. We are a people marked by the mercies of God. Our lives are purposed to tell the story of a matchless King who rescued us with His bountiful mercy.

YOU CAN'T

BE PRAISED

ENOUGH

YOU CAN'T BE PRAISED ENOUGH

KEY OF E, 4/4, 152BPM

Aaron Ivey, Marcus Dawes, Brett Land

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INTRO:

E /// E /// C#m /// C#m ///

VERSE 1:

E Amaj7
When You open my eyes I can't look away
E Amaj7
I see strokes of Your brilliance no artist could paint

PRE CHORUS:

G#m7 A
I see how beautiful beautiful You are
B A
I know how wonderful wonderful You are

CHORUS:

E C#m
You can't be praised enough, You can't be praised enough
B A
For every song I've sung before, I will sing a thousand more
E
Still You can't be praised enough

TURN:

E C#m

VERSE 2:

E Amaj7
You have stretched out Your hand and stolen my grave
E Amaj7
Just one drop of Your blood is an ocean of grace

_TO PRE CHORUS

_TO CHORUS X2

BRIDGE:

 C#m A
From the beginning to our futures
 F#m E/G# A
You have and always have been You will and always will be
 E/G# A E/G#
The Faithful, the Great Redeemer
 F#m E/G# A
The only One who's able to perfectly untangle
 C#m A
What was broken and what was hopeless
 F#m E/G# A
You have and always have been You will and always will be
 E/G# A E/G#
My Mercy, oh my Jesus
 F#m B
The only One who's worthy of all praise

_TO CHORUS X3

YOU CAN'T BE PRAISED ENOUGH

Fold the laundry. Wash the dishes. Make the bed. Go to work. Sit in traffic. Check Facebook. Eat dinner. Wrangle the kiddos. Rinse. Repeat. Cycle Again. The monotony of our daily routines can sweep the glory of our Creator God far from our forgetful, distracted hearts. Culture snatches our attention, social media swallows our time, and suffering steals our gaze from what is truly beautiful and worthy of our adoration—the God who counts every hair on our heads while simultaneously ordaining every detail in history. God deserves every shred of our affection, because He showered us with the gift of salvation. The truth is, there is no way to repay the glorious kindness He has shown us through the life, death, and resurrection of our risen Christ Jesus.

However, our minds and hearts are prone to forgetting. How often do we breeze through life without pausing to recognize who He is and what He has done for us? If we are honest, thoughts of ourselves—our needs, our wants, our desires—are what enrapture our hearts and entangle our thoughts, not our brilliant Creator God. Our prideful hearts lie to us, telling us if we only had a better job, different friends, less sickness, or more money, then we would experience peace. If only we could better battle anxiety, feel less lonely, or contain our anger, then our lives would be smoother, and we could sing songs of praise to God and really mean it.

But the truth is, God is worthy of honor, glory, and praise no matter what our circumstances happen to be or what we believe God has done for us lately. In fact, He demands our full devotion. Deuteronomy 6:5 commands us, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.” Even Jesus issues what can seem like a harsh warning, “Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me” (Matthew 10:37). Why does Jesus deserve such admiration, requiring us to elevate our love for Him even above family? Because He is God and we are not. Our human minds can barely grasp the awesomeness of His power, and we can hardly comprehend how truly different He is. God is holy, unchanging, infinite, and self-sufficient, and He knows all things, speaks life into existence, and transcends space and time. As an angel commands in a loud voice in Revelation, we should fear God, worship Him, and give Him glory because He made Heaven and earth, the sea and the springs of water (Revelation 14:7).

When we hit pause on the bustle of our busy lives, the majesty of God's love for us shines brighter than any problem we face and any circumstance that feels unbearable. How can we not praise His unquenching love that drips on our dry souls, even when we don't know how truly thirsty we are?

JESUS IS BEYOND ENOUGH

**When You open my eyes I can't look away
I see strokes of Your brilliance no artist could paint**

**I see how beautiful, beautiful You are
I know how wonderful, wonderful You are**

The God of Heaven saw that we were far from Him, and in our sin, shame, rebellion, and fear, we had recoiled from the goodness of our Father. He had a plan before the foundation of the world to redeem us and give us an eternal inheritance. The Author of life chose us, predestined us, called us, and lavished His love on us (Ephesians 1:4-11). He appointed us to life, opened our eyes, gave our hearts faith to believe, and now we can't look away from His glory (Acts 13:48; 16:14).

On this side of such great grace, we often see ourselves living without a thought of praise to God for the miracle of being drawn close. Our pride clouds our vision so we are unable to see the brilliance of God that no artist could paint. Pride causes us to think about ourselves—not God. Pride causes us to exalt ourselves—not God. Pride puts us at the center of our own world and makes us believe we did something to gain God's grace, mercy, goodness, love, and favor. True worship requires humility. We must admit God is not like us. He possesses traits that make Him so much better than any man. He isn't just a friend or neighbor who tolerates us. He is a deep and thoughtful Father who knows the depths of our souls and beckons us to live an abundant life in submission to Him.

Still, living a life of genuine praise can prove difficult. We often fall into two camps of wrong thinking when approaching our worship of Jesus: that we are not good enough to worship Him or that He isn't good enough to be praised.

Jeremiah 17:9 says the heart is deceitful above all things, and it's often easier to follow our flesh instead of Christ's commands. We can recall moments when we have thought poorly of others or sowed seeds of disunity in our community through harsh speech. We can recount the times we have ignored the hurting and broken because it was uncomfortable or inconvenient for us. We have experienced solitary moments when the temptation of sin has seemed a much better antidote to the hardest of situations. It's a daily battle as the world screams for our affections.

We deceive ourselves into thinking that surely a people like this cannot come before a righteous and perfect God. But God wants our worship. In fact, He is jealous for us that our praise and love should not be given to the idols that loom large in our lives. “... I the Lord your God am a jealous God ...” (Exodus 20:5). “My glory I will not give to another” (Isaiah 48:11). The writer of Revelation describes the worship of 24 elders around the throne: “Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created” (Revelation 4:11).

Other times, we are deceived into thinking He doesn't deserve praise. There are days when God feels distant, disinterested, and even uncaring. Days when your voice is raw from crying out and seemingly receiving no answer. Times when life seems so unclear and lonely that you are certain you have been overlooked and forgotten, as if God has taken His hand off of the pen that He has been using to write your story. Time and time again, we are tempted to look at God's faithfulness to other people and wonder where He is in our own life. You see that guy get the promotion you have been wanting, that couple have the baby they have prayed for, and that girl being invited to every social engagement you have wanted to attend. Circumstances like these often lead our hearts to dark places: anger or bitterness that someone else has gotten what we feel we deserve, frustration and fear that perhaps our deepest desires will never become our reality, a depth of aching loneliness that leads to isolation or depression. We may see these things and wonder, *is God really good? Does He truly make plans for me to flourish and thrive (Jeremiah 29:11)? Does He really deserve my worship?*

When we take time to look at the character of God in Scripture, our wrong thinking is exposed. He is the beginning and the end (Revelation 1:8). In Him rests all we are and all that we will become. Our God is all-knowing and outside of time. He sees what has been, what will be, and works all of those things together for the good of His children and to bring glory to His name (Romans 8:28). In the peaks and valleys of our lives, God is near and offers a gracious outpouring of His spirit to a broken-hearted and confused people (Psalm 34:18; 1 Corinthians 14:33). In Christ we are declared innocent before God—blameless, secure, and spotless.

When we sing, “God, you can't be praised enough,” it may trigger in us feelings of discomfort. Even when our emotions don't line up with God's promises, we can rest, knowing that He is good, His steadfast love endures forever, and He deserves our thanks (Psalm 107:1). Worship of Jesus is not contingent upon your faithfulness to pray or get to your Missional Community on time. It is not contingent upon whether or not you feel like singing to God that day. No, it is much more beautiful and engaging than that.

Jesus looks at you with a heart that beats for you and longs to draw you close. He awaits the day you live in holiness and freedom. It is that heart which compels us to sing. We can come before Him in a posture of awe as people who have received mercy and grace to live with joy under the kind watch of a Good Shepherd.

We understand that even on our best days, our worship offering is small compared to the bigness of God and what He deserves. In our humanity, we will never be able to fully comprehend the depth of His affection for us and goodness toward us, and yet the great mystery of our Maker is that our worship—no matter how feeble or weak—is a delight to Him. God wants our praises (Job 11:7-9).

PROCESSING QUESTIONS

1. Where do you most often find yourself when you come to worship Jesus? Are you in a posture of feeling unworthy to offer worship or withholding your worship from God out of disappointment?
2. Do you see the hand of God in your life as one full of beauty or pain? Ask Him to let you see His goodness in His plans for you.
3. Pray and ask God to lead you to a place of worshiping Him out of an overflow of affection for Him!

JESUS, THE TRUE AND BETTER HERO

**You have stretched out Your hand and stolen my grave
Just one drop of Your blood is an ocean of grace**

As human beings, we are all looking for something to aspire to, someone to be like, someone to emulate. It's a condition of the human heart to look to our left and to our right, searching for who and what on this earth will teach us the way we should go and the paths we should walk. You may look around and wish you had the talent of a coworker or the passion of a spouse. There are countless well-known men and women in television, film,

podcasts, and books you might follow and aspire to be like. Even as children, we imitate, putting on our mom's shoes and our dad's jackets—making believe we are taller, stronger, and wiser.

The world is a beautiful place filled with incredibly gifted people created in the image of a mighty God (Genesis 1:27). But as we strive to help, improve, and grow, how can we be sure our hope is placed in the Creator rather than the created? In a world where heartbreak seemingly abounds, we are looking for a hope—for someone who can show us a better way.

Stories of people rescuing men and women from near-death situations, good Samaritans stepping in for the wounded, or writers and speakers using their voices to take a stand against injustice shine like beacons in a dark world. But what if these beacons were only a glimpse of goodness and hope? That talented coworker and passionate spouse display beautiful and admirable characteristics of God, but they ultimately, even unintentionally, let us down. The greatest acts of humanity are merely shadows pointing to a much greater final act of heroism. The Son of God came to earth in human form to pay for our sin, emptying Himself by taking the form of a servant and humbling Himself to the point of death on a cross (Philippians 2:5-9). For us to be a people who believe God can't be praised enough, we have to humble ourselves before Him. We have to admit our righteous deeds and best days are no more than dirty rags in the sight of God (Isaiah 64). Peter encourages us to clothe ourselves in humility toward one another, for "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." Peter goes on to say we need to cast our anxieties on God and humble ourselves under His mighty hand (1 Peter 5:6-7).

So what does that look like? A heart that yearns and loves to commune with God in worship acknowledges our weaknesses and His strengths. Genuine praise is not something we stir up in our own hearts. It is simply the response to understanding more deeply who God is and what He has done for us. Once and for all, Jesus Christ came to redeem and rescue those who were perishing and running in shame from the kindness and grace of the Father. Here, we no longer have to run or hide. The eyes of God see us, and as He looks upon us, He does so in love, seeing the sacrifice of Jesus at Calvary.

2 Corinthians 5:21 tells us that Christ knew no sin but was made sin so that we might have the righteousness of Christ. He stepped in and accepted God's wrath against sin—our sin—and because of His shed blood on the cross, we are now afforded His perfection. As we fight to be like our Savior, we often stumble and fall flat and experience setbacks that serve as reminders of our frailty and His deity. We desire perfection but find that we are imperfect. We strive for approval but often find rejection. We put efforts into gaining power but find that our power is limited. We strive and strive but ultimately find death waiting for us. This is where the gospel steps in and changes the orientation of our hearts. The Creator of Heaven and earth now looks upon you and no

longer sees the ways you fall short, but instead, He sees the beauty of Christ (Hebrews 10:14). This is grace—the unmerited favor of God—and it is ours because of Jesus.

Where our hearts were once oriented upon ourselves in the pursuit of the things we cannot fully obtain, they can now become prostrate in worship to the One who has authority over all things. He has obtained the deep desires of our hearts for us, and more directly, He is proclaiming that all our aspirations end in Him. He is worthy of all praise and glory and honor.

At times, we will find ourselves in sin and following pursuits outside of Christ. When this happens, be reminded that God knew you would fall short and still laid down His life on your behalf. Repent and run to Him in worship, for Christ has afforded you the unmerited favor of God.

PROCESSING QUESTIONS

1. In what ways are you currently pursuing things outside of Christ? How can you turn from those pursuits to worship?
2. Do you struggle to accept God's forgiveness for current or past sins?
3. How does God's grace demonstrated through Christ's sacrifice stir your affections in worship?

JESUS, FOREVER

**You can't be praised enough, You can't be praised enough
For every song I've sung before, I will sing a thousand more
Still You can't be praised enough**

The King who we sing about is not just sufficient for today. Jesus is not just a god of the here and now, He is the King of *all* of our days. Jesus is before all things, and in Him, all things hold together (Colossians 1:17). His glory goes before us, and in Him, we have an eternal security, an imperishable and unfading inheritance (1 Peter 1:4).

We sing that Jesus is worthy of all praise because we have seen His goodness to generations before us and to the church of today. That faithfulness leads us to trust that He will continue to come through in the future. He promises that He will.

Even for the believer, however, trust does not come easily. Our experiences may have taught us that God cannot be trusted or that He is unworthy of honor.

While we were created to delight in the fullness of who God is and what He has done for us, we are finite, weak, and forgetful. The days that stand between us and eternity when we will behold God in all His splendor are filled with distraction and doubt. We begin to find ourselves with hearts unprepared to sing or to receive the Word, often wishing there were one less song to sing or a shorter sermon to hear. We have become so disenchanted with the glory of God that we tend to want to rush through moments in His presence, and we are often uncomfortable when pressed to stay there.

We may just shrug these moments off and chalk it up to not feeling close to God or not in the mood to worship. The truth, however, is that we are called to worship God no matter our mood. We are called to look on Him in adoration and joy not just because He says so, but because He is worthy of it. When we come before Him in pride, believing we have better things to do, our focus is pulled into ourselves.

Pride causes us to think about and exalt ourselves above God. Pride causes us to make ourselves the center of our world and the worlds of others. When we think about ourselves so much that the good things about ourselves puff us up, and the bad things about ourselves tear us down, we make much of ourselves in a way that only belongs to God. We begin to bank on the world's standards of success and worth rather than what God has said about us—that we are chosen, accepted, and beloved sons and daughters (Romans 8:14-17) who have the deep affection and attention of a powerful and gracious Father. We catch ourselves choosing a thought life of fantasy about what could be instead of the reality God has given to us today. We notice a tendency to fill our

quiet moments with noise to avoid hearing from Him, or we lean toward finding rest and solace in television and the approval of man when we know true rest is found in the shadow of His wings (Psalm 57:1).

When we focus on ourselves, we focus on the temporal and broken, but God calls us to focus on what is eternal and to lift our eyes to see what is being redeemed by His power and for His glory (Colossians 1:20): our circumstances, our rest, and our identity.

In order to be a people who believe that God cannot be praised enough, we have to be a people surrendered to Him in humility.

Humility in our worship means we come to God, offering all that we are on our best days. On our worst days, we trust He can make beauty from our lives. Humility means we draw near to God and sing out loudly when we are not certain He will come through. It means we dive deep with God and sit in His presence and with His Word rather than choosing to stand in opposition to Him. Humility says God is the center of our lives. It says He is worthy and divine and all-powerful and that He can be trusted in the steadiest of waters and roughest of storms.

We need humility when we come before God because it leads us to see God for who He is—a merciful and tenderhearted Rescuer who wanted so badly for our sin to no longer separate us from Him that He sent His Son to die for us. It leads us to see ourselves as messy, imperfect people who were floundering in a disordered world in desperate need of a powerful Savior (Romans 5:8).

What we must understand when we approach worship is that our pride consumes awe. It absolutely swallows it up. Anything in us that is focused on ourselves leaves no room for God to receive the glory He deserves. Pride keeps us enslaved to our own desires and makes us the ultimate authority for our lives. Our pride says we deserve adoration and that our way is the best way. Jesus offers us a different way of living. In Christ's example of submission to God and endless obedience—even to the point of death—we see One, fully God and fully man, laying aside every weight of selfishness, fear, anxiety, and authority to give righteousness to those who had no hope (Hebrews 5:7-9).

How do we find our way in moments like these? On the days when we see our selfishness magnified and when our hearts feel more like hiding in the things of earth than in Christ, there is one response to lighten our burden: worship (Matthew 11:30).

When we encounter suffering and feel too weak to lift our eyes to Him or raise our voices to sing His name, we worship. We offer what we can to make much of His name because all glory and honor belong to Him.

We sing praises to God because He is infinite while we are finite. He is all-powerful while we are weak. He sees and knows all things while we only see a glimpse of what has been and what is to come. We worship, telling God He can have every part of us and begging Him to bring into submission the things in us that are still clinging to what will pass away.

PROCESSING QUESTIONS

1. Do you find yourself often rushing past moments with God? Why?
2. Do you have trouble lifting your eyes to things of Heaven?
3. Are you in the practice of taking your thoughts captive? Write down an earthly thing or person you are prone to cling to, and surrender that to God in prayer. Ask Him to replace it with faith that He can satisfy your heart.

The Gospel of John teaches us that our Father God is seeking those who will worship Him in spirit and truth (John 4:23). We worship with our mouths by praising His holy name, in our hearts as we admit our need for a Savior, and with our minds as we take every thought captive to obey Christ (2 Corinthians 10:5). God also asks us to reflect His goodness and glory in our day-to-day interactions and duties, a heartfelt tribute to all He has lavished on us. “Whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Corinthians 10:31).

**For every song I've sung before, I will sing a thousand more
Still You can't be praised enough**

As we sing our adoration, our hearts are shaped by the truths that can often feel like drudgery to live out. That is when we fall on the work of Jesus who, when we were far from God and wanted nothing to do with Him, came to earth wrapped in human flesh to bear the weight of our sin and shame on the cross (Romans 5:6-8). This is the most good and complete work of heroism ever committed. A sinless, guiltless Jesus, being both fully God and fully man, came and lived among wretched sinners and heartbreaking circumstances to bring us into a free and loving family through the shedding of His blood. This act, once and for all, was the perfect and only way to bring sinners into the family of God, removing our transgressions as far as the east is from the west (Psalm 103:12). How can we not spend a lifetime esteeming, praising, and loving Him back?

SELAH: THE AIR

TO GIFT YOUR GRACE

As dawn's first light peeks through my window,
specks of bright turn into rays,
as pinks and oranges waltz on my bedroom walls.
I stretch and yawn, I grin and sigh.
A new day is here,
and with it—Your grace.

Everything that will come my way is from You,
as nothing happens outside of Your will, Your power,
Your plan.
I need Your strength in the things I expect,
in the things I don't, and in all things in between.

Yesterday was trying and tiresome,
but Your grace abounded still.
And I didn't exhaust Your stores—
I didn't exhaust You—
I need only to ask, and there will always be more.

Today I will go and I will serve,
as my brothers serve alongside me,
each loving Your people with the gifts You bestowed,
uniquely and unmerited on each of Your children,
gifting us so that we may gift others—
joyful conduits of endless grace.

And though You afford us all of this and more—
daily, hourly, minute by minute—
You are never less, never lacking,
always full, and always flowing.
You shine forth with all Your radiance,
ablaze with righteousness and glory,
gifting us to glow as tiny lampstands,
shining brightly with Your grace,
needing to be lit anew every day,
begging You to turn those specks of light into rays,
to sustain our flames,
so that we may share Your light,
and gift Your grace.

EMMANUEL

GOD WITH US

EMMANUEL GOD WITH US

KEY OF A, 4/4 68BPM

Brett Land, Chris Collins, Aaron Ivey

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INTRO:

F#m / / D A / / Bm

F#m / / D E / / /

VERSE 1:

F#m D A E
From the mountain's edge to the valley low when the river's wild and the sea billows roll
F#m D A E
From Your perfect presence I cannot escape You're ever with me I trust Your name

_TO INTRO

VERSE 1:

F#m D A E
From the mountain's edge to the valley low when the river's wild and the sea billows roll
F#m D A E D
From Your perfect presence I cannot escape You're ever with me I trust Your name

CHORUS:

A E
Emmanuel, God with us
F#m D
In day or darkness, Lord You are here
A E
Emmanuel, God with us
F#m D
I need You Jesus so draw me near

_TO INTRO

VERSE 2:

F#m D A E
You're the purest joy in the shadows deep so my soul will sing when I find no melody
F#m D A/C# E D
From Your perfect presence I cannot escape You're ever with me I trust Your name

_TO CHORUS

TURN:

A E F#m D

BRIDGE:

A Bm

My heart and flesh may fail but God You never will

F#m D

You are my strength and shield my portion forever **x2**

INSTRUMENTAL:

A Bm F#m D

_TO BRIDGE

_TO CHORUS

_TO BRIDGE

_TO INSTRUMENTAL

EMMANUEL GOD WITH US

One of the deepest desires ingrained in us as created people is to know a divine and intimate closeness with the eternal God of the universe. Even before we have the knowledge and words to articulate that need, our spirits are already crying out for reconciliation to our Creator. We yearn to know our Father—the One who knit us together in our mother’s wombs with supernatural intentionality, the dad whose words and ways soothe our hurts and mend our wounds.

Emmanuel, “God with us,” is the promise we received through Jesus Christ—the way God reconciled us to Himself though we were His enemies. Once we believe and trust in Jesus with our lives, He promises to put His Spirit in us to live with us and walk with us every day of this life. God the Spirit now dwells and works in us each day, revealing truth to us, convicting us of sin, and reminding us that God is intimately close to each of His beloved children. He has promised to never leave us and to never forsake us.

And yet in moments when I am caught in the net of my sin, entangled in the lies born from my hard, apathetic, distant heart, it can be difficult to believe this is true. It can feel almost impossible to believe that God with me is enough to make any difference in my daily life. The lies feel more real than a God I cannot see with my eyes.

And over time, as that distance or apathy or hardness grows in my heart, all the numbing and running away from God becomes easier. The voice of the Spirit is drowned out by momentary pleasures of this world—entertainment, sex, praise at work, money, affirmation from people, nice things, exciting experiences. They all feel more real and more pleasurable than God. And my reliance slowly shifts from the One who gave me life to the things of this world that long to own me—the things that are slowly overtaking my soul as I give more and more attention and affection to them.

Then I turn to God, confused and hurt, blaming Him for being distant. I’m angry at Him for seeming to not care, and I feel like He has left me when He promised not to. I have a void and emptiness and coldness in my heart that tells me God lied. He doesn’t care and doesn’t really know me.

I feel wronged when the things I have put my time, money, and hope into don’t help me or save me or satisfy me. I am so wrapped up in myself that I have lost all perspective on who God is each day and for all eternity. I move through life with this warped worldview, desperately hoping it can somehow change back to what it used to be without me having to sacrifice all my carefully crafted and organized idols.

As humans, we all go through periods in life where we don't really understand or value what "Emmanuel, God with us" really means. When we don't feel close to God, we can fall into the trap of believing that God has moved far away from us—that He is done with us because we didn't meet some expectation.

Or maybe we still fight in faith to believe that He is close, even in the dark moments, but we don't esteem His closeness as vital in our lives as our real and living hope. We cling to the despair because it's all we can see right in front of us. It feels so real.

Part of Jesus saving us is the promise that He will never leave us or forsake us, but is that really true?

What about the times He seems distant or the times when sin feels like it is consuming us? Why doesn't He deliver us from painful or difficult things immediately when we cry out for help? Better yet, why doesn't He protect us from them in the first place?

What about the times we can achieve everything we need on our own? Is He still there? Do we really need His closeness when things are going well in our lives, or do we just feel the need for Him when we are suffering?

All of life's difficulties can make me believe that God is not powerful enough to overcome circumstances or that He just doesn't care. He has better things to do with His time. It can seem He has abandoned me in suffering when I cry out to Him but feel like I get silence in return. This can lead me to believe He is fickle and not a good God who really cares about me or who is really with me in a way that means something.

When I am despairing, when I don't know what else to do, I pick up God's Word. And I read that He is with me when day is bright and when the darkness of night covers me. But does that even matter if I can't feel His presence? Does that even matter if I still despair when the day is done? I know in my head those things are true. I believe them in a distant, clinical way. But I don't feel their realness in my life. I don't see those true things about God changing my circumstances or instantly drying my tears.

So what does it look like to both believe in faith that God is always with us, always drawing near to us as we draw near to Him, and to functionally live by faith in a way that proclaims the necessity and excellent joy of Emmanuel?

GOD WITH US

The God of the Bible, the God with whom we have been reconciled through Jesus, is unchanging. His character is constant—He is love, patience, justice, faithfulness, and perfect provision at all times. What we believe about one attribute of God impacts what we believe about all the other attributes that make up His character. We may see just one or two aspects of His character at any given time, but He is always all of those things.

A changing god is an untrustworthy god. If we had a god who changed according to his moods or what was happening around him, trusting him would be like standing on a street in the middle of an earthquake and hoping the ground beneath our feet didn't crack. We wouldn't be able to have sureness in our faith. We would just have to hope he wasn't too stressed out or anxious or busy to care about us. We would be left with a god who is as fickle and transitory as, well, us.

But our God is consistent, perfect, and loving at all times. And He sent us the Author and Perfecter of our faith, Jesus. His very name means Emmanuel, God with us. This is the hope I cling to when I have nothing else: the name of Jesus. When I can't see a way out or how to move forward, I cling to His name and hold on for dear life.

If the Bible is the foundation of our belief in and of God, then we can fully believe the words God speaks to us through it. We can trust that Emmanuel really is with us in every circumstance, every situation, and even when nothing about that feels like it's true.

When I am struggling to believe, I look back at stories of His faithfulness—how He provided for His people, even when they didn't realize it. Even when they remained in prison, were pursued by killers, or were penniless and destitute, we see God loving them and working for them in His goodness. Yet much like our stories, there were times when they couldn't see His goodness and His faithfulness. Although reading those stories in God's Word doesn't immediately change my circumstances or often even my feelings, I am encouraged in some small way. A sliver of light meets the darkness surrounding my soul, and I am able to take half a step forward in what seemed insurmountably difficult just seconds ago.

When we look at the full narrative of the Bible—God's story of redemption and salvation from Genesis to Revelation—we see evidence that He has walked closely with His people and always fulfilled His promises. He may not do things the same way we would, and we may not experience His presence with strong emotions all the time, but we can trust that He is always present, always near, and always faithful to do what is best.

I have to remind myself that He is not a God of empty words or placating feelings. He is a God of purpose and provision. So even when I want Him to just make me feel better, I can know that He has purpose in the difficulty.

He gives me love in the pain. He is meeting my most important needs in ways I am blind to see but can trust by faith. Again, the stories of God walking with His people and helping His people give me comfort, hope, and words to pray.

When God created the first people, Adam and Eve, He walked with them in the garden of Eden. He knew them and allowed Himself to be known. He actively cultivated closeness with them. He desired closeness and intimacy with His people, and there was joy in His presence (Genesis 1:31; 3:8).

When the Israelites were slaves in Egypt and begged God for a rescuer, He did not forsake His people (Exodus 2:23-25). He sent Moses to lead them out of Egypt. When the people of Israel proved fickle and ungrateful, grumbling when God provided manna and complaining when He did not meet their expectations, He continued to provide for them (Exodus 16:1-3, 12; 17:1-7). He continued to pursue them. In love, He disciplined them to mark them as true sons and daughters (Deuteronomy 4:32-40).

When Daniel sought the presence of God in a foreign and hostile Babylon and bowed in worship only to God, God was faithful to Daniel. God saved Daniel from lions and kings (Daniel 6:21-23). He sent Daniel to interpret dreams for the king and gave him such favor that even Nebuchadnezzar praised God (Daniel 3:26-29; 4:1-3). He was faithful to give Daniel interpretations of dreams and the boldness to tell the king things he wouldn't want to hear (Daniel 2:19, 47). God told Daniel of desolations to come and even showed him a vision of the coming Savior. God heard and answered Daniel's prayer for the people of Israel (Daniel 9:3-23). God was faithful, present, comforting, awesome, and powerful in and through Daniel.

When Daniel pleaded for his brothers and sisters, when he beseeched God for mercy, God heard His prayer.

Then I turned my face to the Lord God, seeking him by prayer and pleas for mercy with fasting and sackcloth and ashes. I prayed to the Lord my God and made confession, saying, "O Lord, the great and awesome God, who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, we have sinned and done wrong and acted wickedly and rebelled, turning aside from your commandments and rules." (Daniel 9:3-5)

And God answered Daniel's prayer through the angel, Gabriel.

He made me understand, speaking with me and saying, "O Daniel, I have now come out to give you insight and understanding. At the beginning of your pleas for mercy a word went out, and I have come to tell it to you, for you are greatly loved. Therefore consider the word and understand the vision." (Daniel 9:22-23)

God drew close to Daniel as Daniel sought God first. God reminded Daniel that He loved him and had not forsaken him even though Daniel spent every day in hostile circumstances where honoring God was dangerous.

We, too, may feel persecuted and forsaken like Daniel did. We may not have evil people or powerful kings trying to destroy us, and our physical lives may not be threatened in the same way as Daniel's, but we are likely to experience similar feelings to what we read in Daniel. Christ told us in the New Testament to expect persecution and mistreatment on this earth (John 15:18-27), so we should not be surprised when it comes. But we also need to know that God does not abandon us in those difficulties.

When believers are passed over for a promotion at work because the boss doesn't like what they believe, when unmarried believers feel like they are missing out because they are striving to date with Christlike wisdom and purity and not as the world dates, or when we are called out or made fun of at school for taking a stand for the things of Christ, we should not be surprised.

But God responds the same way to us as He did to Daniel. He gives us an answer for the faith we have—Jesus! He gives us peace in the storm and blessing where others seek to curse. He may not change our immediate circumstances, but He is right there with us in the furnace of our difficult circumstances. He is faithful and patient and loving and extends grace upon grace.

As believers in Christ, we can experience a greater closeness with God than even what Daniel had. Jesus is our Emmanuel, and He actually lives in us through the Holy Spirit. God promised that this Spirit is the same One who raised Jesus from the dead, so we have the magnificent, life-giving power of God inside of us!

Does that feel real to you today? Do you believe that kind of power is living and working in you?

The truth is, though we want it to feel real every day, it might not feel real to you today. It might not feel encouraging or important. It might not make a dent in the pain you're experiencing. But just because you don't feel the proximity and provision of God doesn't mean it's not there. It doesn't mean He isn't working. You can trust Him. He hasn't left you.

We see the nearness and provision of Jesus in the New Testament in an even more intimate way.

Jesus walked daily with His disciples, teaching them, admonishing them, serving them, and loving them. He was infinitely patient, never sinning in anger or using His divinity to wield power in self-serving way. He walked with them as a fully-human man, and yet He was God in flesh. He suffered for them. He wept for them. He rebuked them in love. He left them to labor for and serve His church.

That is real love. That is real sacrifice.

I am encouraged when I read of the striving and suffering and pain of those who have gone before us—how they truly suffered and how God was faithful. Their faith propels me, even through the darkness.

Jesus is our complete portion and provision and is the Author and Perfecter of our faith and of the story of God's faithful pursuit of His people throughout all of Scripture. We don't just serve a God who is with His people. We serve a God who wants to be with His people until the end of this age. Until we see Him face to face with unhindered joy. Until Jesus comes again.

Even in your pain, He is with you. Even when your heart rebels, He is for you. Even when darkness is all you can see and feel, He is there, working in you to mend your wounds with the closeness of a perfect Father who desperately loves His child.

PROCESSING QUESTIONS

1. Do you believe that God is always with you and that He is always good? What do you do when your feelings don't align with what Scripture says about God?
2. What does it feel like/mean for your heart and flesh to fail? What can you do in those moments to remind yourself that God is with you and for you?
3. Is it more difficult to trust God when circumstances aren't what you want? Do you find yourself going to Him more (in prayer, in His Word, etc.) or less in difficult times? What about in times when everything is going your way? What does how you approach God in varying circumstances testify to what you believe about Him?

GOD WITH US IN AND THROUGH OUR COMMUNITY

Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near. (Hebrews 10:23-25)

What we believe about God with us impacts how we interact with our community, both believers and unbelievers. It affects how we love, serve, celebrate with, and grieve with people in our spheres of influence. It defines the way we step in to engage, either as servants or as consumers.

Hebrews 10 tells us that we are called to stir one another up to love and good works and encourage one another until the day of Christ's return. What are some ways we can practically do that in our communities, living as servants of Christ and obeying His commands?

Another part of the same verse (Hebrews 10:25) gives us a simple way—meet together! We need to consistently be present, talking to and intentionally investing in other believers and receiving spiritual investment from them. Stirring up one another to love and good works also looks like working together to meet tangible needs among one another. It looks like practicing hospitality and inviting people into our homes to experience the welcoming hospitality of Christ. It includes reminding one another of Scripture and sharing stories about God's faithfulness. It also means reconciling quickly and completely when we have conflict and hurt one another. We live as Christ and for Christ for the good of one another.

When we believe that God is true and trustworthy and living in us, we are able to consider living in ways we would not or could not on our own. We can sacrificially love people, considering the cost of time, money, and energy worth it for the sake of Christ. We can celebrate with people in a way that shows the joy of Christ, even if the thing we celebrate is something we ourselves desperately want and don't have. We can slow down to grieve with those around us who grieve, being vessels of God's comfort in affliction and praying on behalf of the suffering.

We can know God hears those prayers and shouts of celebration and sees those sacrificial acts. He is pleased by them not because we're trying to earn favor or salvation that has already been paid for by Christ, but because we're being changed from the inside out, and that daily renewal bears the fruit of the Spirit in us.

It's important to seek God individually, but we're also called to seek Him communally—to come before Him together and to gather in His name. The church, both global and local, is called to help one another endure until

Christ comes. It can feel easy to engage in the church and with the church when things are going well—when we have a good job, a healthy relationship, and happy kids. But what about the times when our circumstances are difficult? When God feels distant? When His Word doesn't make sense? How can we engage with one another when we barely know how to move forward ourselves?

James 1:3-4 tells us that the testing of our faith produces steadfastness, and that steadfastness leads to maturity so we may be “perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.” It's a testing of our faith when our feelings don't match what we read in God's Word. It's a testing of our faith when we feel like the barrier removed by Jesus—who allowed us to gain unlimited and intimate access to God—has somehow been put back in place. We reach and reach and can't seem to grab hold of God's presence or His nearness. When our feelings can't confirm His proximity to us, we fear that He has abandoned us for someone who loves Him more, does better works, or is just a better son or daughter of the King.

But those feelings don't define who God is or how He acts. God is always who He says He is, and He does the things He promises. And so we pray and beseech Him to change our hearts and feel real to us again. We ask our friends, our family, and our community to pray for us and remind us that God really does love us, that He really cares about our lives. We endure one day at a time, trusting that our changing circumstances won't fix the problems we feel in our souls. We fight to get to the root of our unbelief, numbness, bitterness, or fear, and we trust God to show us the path forward, one step at a time.

And so when someone in our community is struggling to believe, struggling to fight for a failing marriage, or struggling for freedom from a sin that has ensnared them for years, we fight for them and with them. We trust the Spirit inside of us to work in us and them, and we trust that God's Word is true even though our hearts and flesh may fail. We trust Emmanuel, God with us, to be just that—with us.

And when circumstances inevitably change, we press into Emmanuel again to either strive to believe He is still good and still present, or to believe we actually need Him to live each day instead of grasping for control ourselves.

There is great joy in His presence in both good and difficult times, in celebration and suffering. We miss out when we don't acknowledge the constant grace of His presence. Our community misses out when we don't acknowledge or extend this grace.

We give poor counsel to others and miss opportunities to speak truth and life when we believe false things about God. The Enemy will try to speak lies into our ears and hope they will fall from our lips to the ears of others—*God has failed us, He isn't enough, He doesn't care, He moved on to someone better.*

But God's Word says He never fails us. He is more than enough. He cares so much that He loved us when we actively rebelled against Him, and He sent His Son to make a way for a real relationship. He never moves on from us because His measurement of our worth doesn't require us to be better (Romans 5:1-21).

And so when someone in our community is struggling, we listen, we empathize, and we give them the best we have—God's Word made alive in us through the gospel of Jesus Christ. We remind them of God's faithfulness. We remind them of God's love for them—an infinite, perfectly paternal love. We laugh and cry and pray with them because we are a family. We don't try to solve their problems when what they need is a loving, listening ear. They are not a project to check off our list. And we humble ourselves to ask for help when we need it. We seek prayer and support from our community. And together, we look ahead to eternity when we can fully know God in all His goodness and lavish provision and when we can enjoy Him as a family.

We can love and serve and celebrate and grieve with our community at all times because we have a God who has gone before us. We have a God who isn't swayed or manipulated by our feelings. We have a God who wants us to feel closeness with Him but isn't defined by our emotions.

God wants us to know He is with us always. He wants us to worship Him always, because that pleases Him and brings us joy, both as individual followers of God and as communities seeking Him together.

PROCESSING QUESTIONS

1. When someone in your family or community is struggling or experiencing painful/difficult circumstances, the words we speak to them (and the things we pray for them) often show what we most value. Do your words show that you value making them feel better or making sure they hear truth? We tend to err on one side or another, either communicating lots of grace to immediately *heal* hurt or communicating lots of truth to make sure they know what's *right*.
 - a. If you value speaking truth more than you value feelings, are you motivated by love? Do you communicate with love? Is your timing of communicating this truth wise and loving?

- b. If you find it easier to give grace, how can you communicate enduring truth while still providing comfort in suffering? How can you change your words or change the way you speak to give grace and truth that brings life and belief?
- 2. What are some specific ways God has provided for your community this year or reminded you that He is always with you? Take some time to thank Him together and celebrate what God has done in your midst. Don't be afraid to ask Him to do even more in the future!

GOD WITH US IS FOR OUR GOOD

Even if we believe that God is always with us, do we believe that Him being with us is for our good? Or do we fall prey to the Enemy's lies that God wants to control us, use us, or has some other motive that is not for our flourishing?

If we had a God like that, the kind of god that the Enemy often whispers about to us, what would that look like?

It would be a god who changes with circumstance, maybe using our suffering for his own ends. It would be a puppet-master god who plays with the puppets that are the most entertaining at the moment, leaving the rest to collect dust in a corner closet. Or maybe it would just be a powerless god, one that is so busy holding the world together that he couldn't be bothered to actually *do* anything in us or for us.

Praise God that He is not a changeable, powerless, fickle false god! His unchanging nature makes Him completely trustworthy. His kindness, love, severity, grace, justice, and mercy are not in question. They are absolute and real. And when a God like that—a perfectly trustworthy Emmanuel—draws near to us, we can trust Him completely. We can believe the words in the Bible that tell us God always works for our good, even when we can't see or understand the means or sometimes even the ends.

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose. (Romans 8:28)

God is working in every detail of every circumstance in a way that will ultimately lead to our growth and flourishing. We may not see the purpose of what He's doing or understand the *why* or even the *what* behind it, but we can trust that He is working for us in those things. He has called us into His family, and He loves us like family.

So no matter how we feel, no matter how far or how unengaged God feels in our lives, we can know and believe and *trust* He is not only with us but working for our good. He is a close, engaged, trustworthy God to each and every child.

Sometimes though, even when we believe true things about God—when we believe He's working for our good—we still live in a way that proclaims we know what is best for our lives. We treat God as the backup plan in case our Plan A fails. We know God is there, but He feels more like a safety net than someone on whom we must rely every moment of every day. It costs a lot to humble ourselves to seek God first and to trust His ways and thoughts above our own. And sometimes we are unwilling to pay that cost, lest it get us a life less than what we planned for ourselves.

So we are called to not just have head knowledge of God's Word but to hide it in our hearts in a way that changes our lives. We are called to actually live out the hard things, like daily laying down our lives. We are called to functionally believe Emmanuel and allow God to change us from idol worshipers to what we really are—free men and women in Christ no longer bound by chains of self and sin.

God is not calling us to first trust our flesh and then call on Him when it fails. He who always walks alongside us offers us the opportunity to work and live in His power and grace and unfailing love and provision from the very beginning. And even when that seems more difficult than our own way, it is better and produces more joy if we will only trust our good and gracious God.

He is not our backup. He is not the contingency plan for when we are not enough, though He is strength in our weakness and His grace is sufficient. We are called to seek Him first, always.

In good times, we can be tempted to replace the greatest joy of Him with the joy or pleasure we find in happy circumstances. But those won't last, and gifts are not greater than the Giver. Sometimes God's perfect provision and our greatest joy come when He withholds the things we want most. That doesn't feel true or right or fair. But when we are brought to the end of ourselves in suffering or seemingly unanswered prayer or years "without," we are left with the overwhelming humbling and merciful thought that our only object of worship is Jesus. It could only ever be Jesus. Nothing else in all creation can match the intimacy, glory, and joy of walking day by day with a Savior whose love for us would keep the earthly things our hearts long to worship far from us for our good, whether for a season or for a lifetime.

No one loves like our God. No one serves us like our God. His paternal love can never be called into question. He is for us as only the best Father can be!

PROCESSING QUESTIONS

1. What is one area of your life in which you are not trusting that God is with you *right now*? Why aren't you trusting? Is it lack of *feeling* His presence? Are circumstances so painful or difficult that you believe He has abandoned you? Do you believe He is withholding something that will bring you more joy than you have in this moment? Tell God what is difficult to believe in this moment and why. Then tell a trusted friend, spouse, or roommate. Ask that person to pray with and for you. Ask God for faith to believe He is with you right now and that He loves you deeply.
2. Are there any areas of sin in your life that keep you from believing God is with you? Has any root of bitterness grown from unmet expectations or desires? Confess and repent, trusting that the blood of Christ covers your sin and that God forgives you through Christ. Walk in freedom and joy, knowing that God walks with you.

So will we live by faith or by feeling? Do we choose to trust the God of the Bible for ourselves and our community, or do we choose to lament our circumstances and put our hope in the shifting sand of things bound to fail us?

It's OK to be sad. It's OK to feel grief in suffering and to be unsure about what the future may hold. It's OK to wrestle with God to believe true things about Him when those things feel anything but true. The Christian life and daily pursuit of God are not easy. But God has given us hope in Him, community to help us endure, and trustworthiness of character on which to depend and stake our lives.

If God is for us, who can be against us? If God is with us, what do we have to fear? He does not shift like our circumstances. He is the constant. When things are good, He is the same. When our world is upended, He is the same. We can trust Him with and in everything. He is always there with us, never-changing, never-failing, always steady, always true. He will never abandon us. He promises to be with us always.

We can find great comfort in believing that God's perfect presence is our greatest joy, and we can look forward to an eternity with a God beyond our wildest imagining. He is the One who sustains us and lifts us and carries us through the highs and lows of this life. He is with us now, and He will be with us in an even more personal, face-to-face way in eternity. He is Emmanuel—God with us now, God with us forever.

J E S U S I S B E T T E R

(S T U D I O V E R S I O N)

JESUS IS BETTER (STUDIO VERSION)

KEY OF G, 4/4 71BPM

Aaron Ivey, Brett Land

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TURN:

G

VERSE 1:

G Gsus

There is no other, so sure and steady

G Gsus

My hope is held in Your hand

G Gsus

When castles crumble, and breath is fleeting

G Gsus C G/B Am

Upon this Rock I will stand, upon this Rock I will stand

CHORUS:

C G D Em

Glory, glory, we have no other king

C G D

But Jesus Lord of all

C G D Em

We raise the anthem our loudest praises ring

C G/B D

We crown Him Lord of all

_TO TURN

VERSE 2:

G Gsus

Your kindly rule has shattered and broken

G Gsus

The curse of sin's tyranny

G Gsus

My life is hidden 'neath Heaven's shadow

G Gsus

Your crimson flood covers me

C G/B Am

Your crimson flood covers me

C G/B D

Your crimson flood covers me

_TO CHORUS

INSTRUMENTAL:

G G

BRIDGE:

G

In all my sorrows

C Em C

Jesus is better, make my heart believe

G

In every vict'ry

C Em C

Jesus is better, make my heart believe

G

Than any comfort

C Em C

Jesus is better, make my heart believe

G

More than all riches

C Em C

Jesus is better, make my heart believe

G G/B

Our souls declaring:

C D Em G/B C // D

Jesus is better, make my heart believe

G G/B

Our song eternal:

C D Em G/B C

Jesus is better, make my heart believe

HALF CHORUS:

C D G/B

Glory, glory, we have no other king

C D

But Jesus Lord of all

_TO CHORUS

_TO TURN

JESUS IS BETTER

A beautiful home, friends who care deeply about you, a fit body, a fulfilling job, and the respect of others are all aspects of this world that promise happiness in this life. But when their temporary importance looms too large in our hearts, they can quickly steal our affection from the person who truly deserves it—King Jesus. How do we know whether we are treasuring our comfort, the approval of others, or even power above the Savior who willingly died in our place, taking our sin so we could accept His forgiveness? How can our lives reflect a foundation built for eternity, not in bringing ourselves temporary pleasure?

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus compared the man who built his house on the sand with the man who built his house on the rock. The man who chose to build his home on the rock was called wise, while the man who built his home on the sand was called foolish. No home built on a shaky foundation could withstand the howling winds and pounding rains; it was guaranteed to be swept away by the impending flood waters. When we read this metaphor, the answer looks simple enough—build on the sturdiest foundation. But Jesus tells us this story to help us see that while we may know the answer—that Jesus is the better, steadier, stronger, and more eternal cornerstone on which we build our lives—it seems much easier, faster, and instantly pleasurable to build our lives on the earthly “now.”

The song, “Jesus Is Better,” is a cry for the believer to remember the work and the person of Jesus Christ, begging God to give them the desire for Jesus and the faith to live like He is better. As believers, we know we ought to want so desperately to act on our faith in Him.

Essentially, this is the aim of this song which has two distinct parts: the first section reminds us of who Jesus is and what He has done, and the second section is a crying out to the Holy Spirit to make our hearts believe what our heads already know.

It’s not enough to just say that you believe in Jesus and all His greatness and glory. To live a life filled with hope, peace, and joy is to live a life believing in Jesus and all His greatness and glory. When we survey our own personal obedience, our lives quickly reveal what our hearts truly believe about Him. “Jesus Is Better” affirms our knowledge of Jesus and all His glory and presses us into a crying out for our affections and our actions to reflect that knowledge. This song is a great truth to sing when we know what we should do but struggle to do it.

OUR KING

**There is no other, so sure and steady
My hope is held in Your hand
When castles crumble, and breath is fleeting
Upon this Rock I will stand, upon this Rock I will stand**

**Your kindly rule has shattered and broken
The curse of sin's tyranny
My life is hidden 'neath heaven's shadow
Your crimson flood covers me**

As westerners, we are not familiar with kings, kingdoms, and monarchical rule. We abide in the freedom and independence of a democratic nation. The United States hasn't experienced the rule of a monarchy for well over 200 years. Anyone who has lived under a king's dominion knows that the goodness of the king makes all the difference in his leadership. The king sets the tone of the kingdom, the laws of the land, and determines how much freedom the subjects will be allowed. The citizens are expected and commanded to serve and remain loyal to the king.

A tyrannical king rules with oppression and fear. He is cold-hearted and willing to sacrifice the good of his people for his own personal agenda. A good king leads his people toward prosperity in all areas. He fights for his people to feel safe and protected in his land.

Scripture teaches that when sin entered the world through Adam's sin, all of us fell under the rule of the darkest, most maniacal ruler—Satan (Romans 5:12). Our sin condemned us to death and set us in opposition to God. We became the enemy of the great King. "... [B]ut God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life (Romans 5:8-10). Jesus, the Son of God, comes down from Heaven to earth to usher in a new kingdom. Jesus is the embodiment of this kingdom, the King of this kingdom, and the way for us to be a part of this new kingdom.

Jesus is the better King of the better kingdom. Through faith in His life, death, and resurrection, our souls are transferred from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light. We were once in slavery to sin leading us straight to death, but because of Jesus, we are now free from sin and slaves to righteousness (Romans 6:16-18).

Through Jesus, “a better hope is introduced, through which we draw near to God” (Hebrews 7:19). Through our King Jesus, we belong to an eternal empire that He has secured with His blood. Jesus didn’t just overthrow the kingdom of darkness, He replaced it.

Jesus is our source of hope and the Rock on which we stand. “[Jesus] is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together” (Colossians 1:15-17). There is nothing that Jesus does not affect. God creates and sustains everything through His Son. He is the true King who is worthy of all our worship. We are reminded that His rule is one that breaks curses and that we are hidden in Him. We proclaim that He is the supreme King who holds our hope in His very big, capable, and perfect hands.

Glory, glory, we have no other king

But Jesus Lord of all

Raise the anthem, our loudest praises ring

We crown Him Lord of all

These words give the sense of being at a coronation ceremony for royalty. They exude undying loyalty and passion for the King of kings and Lord of lords! Give special attention to the last line of this chorus: “We crown Him Lord of all.”

For many believers, it’s easier to see Jesus as our Savior than to see Him as our Lord. Everyone wants to be pulled from the miry pit. It’s natural for humans to want to be saved from something horrible. That makes it easy to say, “Yes! Jesus is my Savior!”

To crown Jesus as Lord requires something of us. Submitting our hearts to Jesus requires that we lay down our agendas, wants, and desires. We belong to a culture that worships autonomy, power, status, and wealth. Jesus tells His disciples, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul?” (Matthew 16:24-26). The difficulty of this is that we so deeply desire to gain the whole world. We don’t want to give up the things that make us feel like we are winning at life. We find our identity in the blessings and gifts of God instead of God Himself. Jesus says something hard to hear: “If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple” (Luke 14:26).

Jesus is not inciting hatred among our families, but He is showing us what it looks like to make Him Lord of our lives. When Jesus is Lord, our love for anything other than Jesus looks small in comparison. When we crown Him Lord, our obedience reveals that He, not our plans or desires, rules our hearts and actions. When we submit our full authority to Him, our identities are no longer shaped by our culture but by the Word of God. Crowning Jesus “Lord of all” is putting action to the knowledge that we have of our Savior.

PROCESSING QUESTIONS

1. What are some ways that you see Jesus as your hope or rescue?
2. Do you ever struggle to see Jesus not just as your Savior, but also as Lord?
3. What things get in the way of you crowning Him Lord of all?

IN NEED OF A SAVIOR

The phrase, “Jesus is better,” can easily become a quick quip to give perspective when times get tough. We say this all the time—but do we believe it? Do we live like it’s true? In view of all the suffering this life presents, all the dead-end roads and false promises this world offers, we need this to be true. And so we cry out to God to make our hearts believe that He indeed is the better everything.

Mark 9 tells the story of a father who brought his sick son to Jesus to be healed. His son had a spirit that, when it took control of him, made him unable to speak and threw him down to the ground, leaving him foaming at the mouth and grinding his teeth. Since childhood, the father had been trying to protect his son from throwing himself into fire or water. The danger his son was in and his inability to do anything to help made him feel powerless.

The father brings His son to Jesus and begs, “But if you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us” (Mark 9:22). The man, in desperation, appeals to Jesus to have compassion on him and his son. He knows that Jesus is his only hope for his son to be rescued, but he struggles to believe that his life could look any different than it always has. He wants to believe that Jesus can help, but his lifetime experience has crippled his faith.

Jesus says to the man, “‘If you can!’ All things are possible for one who believes” (Mark 9:23). Jesus exposes the father’s lack of belief and reminds him what is true—that all things are possible if you believe. Filled with hope, the man cries out, “I believe; help my unbelief!” (Mark 9:24).

As followers of Christ, we want to believe. We want to trust in every word of Scripture. We want to bank on the gospel of Jesus Christ. But we are a forgetful, easily distracted, and discouraged group of people. When things are going well, it’s easy for us to forget that God is the One who made it good. When suffering hits, we begin to lose heart and forget that God is sovereignly using every light and momentary affliction to prepare for us an eternal weight of glory (2 Corinthians 4:17). Or we remember that God is sovereign, but we don’t like how He is writing our story.

This is when we prayerfully sing, “Make my heart believe!” In whatever situation we are in, we ask God to make our hearts believe that it is better for us to put all of our hope and trust in Him.

In all my sorrows

Jesus is better, make my heart believe

We want to feel better. We want the pain to stop immediately, but Jesus doesn’t promise to save us from the terrible feelings that come with suffering. Jesus promises us so much more than a temporary reprieve. He promises us that whatever suffering we encounter is under His authority and will be for our good and used to deliver us into an eternity absent of despair and sadness. Jesus promises to never leave us or forsake us. He is not just our Savior from suffering, He is King over it!

We ask God to make our hearts believe the truth that when we are in the midst of deep sorrow and anguish, Jesus is the better way, the better truth, and the better life. We ask Him to help us believe that every moment of this pain is not outside His control but rather under His authority and will be used for our good (Romans 8:28).

In every vict'ry

Jesus is better, make my heart believe

If there is one thing we are able to grasp when it comes to knowing Jesus, it is that He is definitely better than our sorrows. It is not a far-fetched idea that Jesus is better than our pain and suffering, but it gets trickier to believe that Jesus is better than our victories.

Think about the last time your world made “perfect” sense. When your heart was filled with contentment and you looked at your life and were thankful to be alive, thankful to have your wonderful family, and pleased at what you have accomplished, did Jesus still seem better?

We see this time and time again in Scripture, specifically in the Old Testament. Israel was enjoying victory after victory after victory. They felt strong and undefeatable. They were victors. In the first few battles, they remembered God, thanked Him, and gave Him the honor He was due. But over time, they would forget that it was God who gave them their victories. They dropped their eyes and focus from Him onto their own hearts. They begin to believe that they no longer needed God. When we are on top of the world, we can begin to believe that life is good because of us instead of Christ.

But no matter how good life gets, in and of ourselves, we cannot obtain the ultimate victory. Only in Jesus can true and eternal victory be found! For there is coming a day when “the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed” (1 Corinthians 14:52).

Than any comfort

Jesus is better, make my heart believe

The Bible doesn't promise that we will be comfortable. Jesus isn't tempting His followers with a life full of physical ease or a life free from pain or constraint. He calls us to take up our cross daily (Luke 9:23). But because nothing feels worse than denying ourselves things we want or need, we strive for comfort. We do everything we can to pack our days full of things to keep us comfortable. We keep our phones close by to ward off any slight feeling of being left out or forgotten. We pack our bank accounts with money, and we fill our schedules with entertainment. We do anything and everything to make sure we feel as comfortable as possible.

The danger is not in wanting to be comfortable. God created comfort. The danger is in seeking comfort in the empty promises of the temporal world that is not our home. The world will leave us lacking, and our desire for comfort will often lead us away from the very thing that we are chasing after—comfort itself. Jon Bloom writes,

“Jesus really does desire your comfort. He desires it more than you do. He so desires your ultimate comfort that He will make you very uncomfortable in order to give it to you.”

More than all riches

Jesus is better, make my heart believe

Solomon was the wealthiest king in all of Israel. He was also a man who knew that wealth did not guarantee happiness. At the end of his life, in despairing tones, he announced that “all was vanity and a striving after wind, and there was nothing to be gained under the sun” (Ecclesiastes 2:11).

Greed is a sneaky thing. It does not discriminate. It will set its claws in those who are the poorest of poor and the wealthiest of wealthy. The amount of money one has does not determine whether he or she is in danger of becoming greedy. Jesus talked about money and our love for it more than he talked about nearly anything else. Why? Why would Jesus spend so much time talking to a ragtag group of followers about money?

It is because Jesus knew this to be true: “No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money” (Matthew 6:24). We cannot crown Jesus as our Lord and King and serve money. Only in Jesus, the true and lasting treasure, can eternal life be found (Philippians 3:7-11).

In good times and bad, when we prosper or fail, our declaration and our song forever is “Jesus is better!” We know that we can’t achieve this level of faith on our own. We know that there will be times that we will choose money over Jesus, find our comfort in something other than the hand of the great Comforter, and will choose not to walk in the humility of Jesus but in the approval of man. The prayer here is that our knowledge of Him would become a faith that is proved by our actions. We know all these things to be true—may we live like we believe they are true!

PROCESSING QUESTIONS

1. Is there an area of your life that you want to surrender to God but you need to ask Him to help your unbelief? Take time right now to ask for God’s help.

PROCESSING QUESTIONS (CONTINUED)

2. Where do you turn to find comfort in the midst of suffering or even on a long day? How do these things pale in comparison to Christ?
3. Is it easier for you to acknowledge God's hand in all things in good times or bad? How can you put a rhythm into your life to remember to thank Him when everything is going smoothly?

MAKE MY HEART BELIEVE

Our culture thrives on self-sufficiency. We teach our children they can do anything they set their minds to. People are celebrated for being independent, accomplishing the impossible without help from anyone. However, in the kingdom of Christ, the world is flipped upside down. We must admit our weakness and ask God for His strength in all things. We must realize we are spiritually needy apart from our Savior, and we must call on the Holy Spirit who helps us in our weakness (Romans 8:26). For us to proclaim that Jesus is better than any circumstance requires us to crown Jesus as Lord. Due to our pride-filled, deceitful hearts (Jeremiah 17:9), this is one of the most difficult things for a believer to do. In fact, we are only able to do it by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Most believers are aware of the Holy Spirit, and most are even thankful for Him. But do believers see His true value and worth as much as Jesus does? Jesus taught His disciples that if they could understand what He was giving them in the Holy Spirit, they would be glad Jesus was returning to Heaven. He reassured them that having the Holy Spirit inside them would be far more wonderful than having Jesus beside them (John 16:7). The disciples undoubtedly struggled to understand what it could all mean. How could a holy, mighty God be willing to come so near sinners that the Holy Spirit could live inside us, drawing our hearts to worship? Paul teaches that the Holy Spirit gives us faith. "Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking in the Spirit of God ever says 'Jesus is accursed!' and no one can say 'Jesus is Lord' except in the Holy Spirit" (1 Corinthians 12:3). Dr. John Piper illustrates how faith and the Holy Spirit can work in tandem.

Picture yourself drinking ice water with a straw. The water is the Holy Spirit. The air in the straw is doubt and unbelief. Faith is the vacuum you create when you suck on the straw. And what happens when the vacuum of faith is created? The water of the Spirit comes in immediately. And if the straw is full of the vacuum of faith the straw will also be full of the water of the Spirit. —John Piper

The Holy Spirit can seem like a mystery until we press into God's Word for clarity. The Holy Spirit is a teacher who helps us to remember all that Jesus commanded (John 14:26), He convicts the world of sin (John 16:8), He dwells within us (John 14:16-17), He helps us walk in His fruit of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23), He guides us to truth (John 16:13), and He empowers us (Acts 1:8). So how do we harness all the Spirit offers and walk in faith?

Glory, glory, we have no other king

But Jesus Lord of all

When we sing, "Make my heart believe," we are asking for the Holy Spirit's help to overcome our propensity to want to exalt ourselves and instead turn to God who alone is worthy of our worship. We are asking God to give us faith to sing, "Jesus Lord of all," and believe it. Jesus said in John 14:16-17 that He would ask the Father to give us a Helper to be with us forever—the Holy Spirit.

The other way we can push pride out of our hearts to make room to acknowledge King Jesus as Lord of our life is to dive deep into His Word. In Psalm 119:105, King David reminds us that God's Word is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path. Immersing ourselves in the Word of God is something that can help activate the power of the Holy Spirit inside us. The two work in conjunction, never opposing or contradicting each other. Romans tells us faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the Word of Christ (Romans 10:17). When we store Scripture in our hearts (Psalm 119:11), truth takes over our thoughts, directs our actions, and infiltrates our words (Matthew 15:18). You can't have a fire without something to burn, and the Word of God is the firewood by which the Holy Spirit can fan obedience and a deeper love of Christ into flame. It gives us light to see things rightly in the midst of a cold, dark world and a heat to warm our affections for Jesus who is better than anything this world can offer.

And this Word is to be our delight. We can't just read it and memorize it like facts for a chemistry quiz. Delighting and believing in the Word of God is how we can know His power in our lives. Do you want to experience a revival in your spirit? Do you need wisdom to navigate a difficult season? Are you looking for joy and peace that surpasses understanding? Do you need the power of the Holy Spirit to endure through a season of long-suffering? In the midst of whatever you are going through, the power to make your heart believe comes by the work of

His Spirit through the power of His Word. The Psalmist says the law of the Lord is perfect. It can revive the soul. His right precepts cause the heart to rejoice. The rules of the Lord are true and are to be desired more than fine gold and are sweeter than honey (Psalm 19:7-10).

Not only do we have God's Word, but we also have access to the Father through prayer. How do we get the power of the Holy Spirit to make our hearts believe? Ask. Like any loving parent, when a child needs money for lunch at school, we give. When a toddler needs help getting a toy off of the top shelf, we help. The same is true of our heavenly Father. He wants us to ask Him for what we need. Jesus reminds us that even evil people know how to give good gifts to their children, so how much more will our Father in Heaven give good things to those who admit they need help? "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened" (Matthew 7:7-8). Paul writes on the same topic, " ... [D]o not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God" (Philippians 4:6-7).

When we recognize our self-reliance, admit our weakness, beg for the Spirit's help, and dig into His Word, we can boldly ask God to "make our hearts believe," just as Jesus reminded Peter that it was His Father in Heaven—not flesh and blood—who revealed to Peter that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the living God (Matthew 16). We rely on God to help us worship Him in spirit and truth (John 4:24). If we want to be able to crown Him Lord of all as the lyrics suggest, we must humble ourselves before our mighty God, asking for His help to know Him more and spend time hiding His Word in our hearts.

PROCESSING QUESTIONS

1. Do you regularly see evidence of the power of God's Word and the fruit of the Holy Spirit in your life? If not, why?
2. What is the greatest roadblock to you hiding His Word in your heart and asking for the Spirit to move?

PROCESSING QUESTIONS (CONTINUED)

3. Do you have trouble seeing God as a good Father who wants His children to ask for what they need? What areas of life are particularly difficult to talk to God about in prayer?

Everything in life is shifted when we put Jesus at the helm. When our hearts know Jesus is King, our lives will reflect that and everything will change. Asking God to make our hearts believe is no longer part of a checklist along with all of our other responsibilities, like buying groceries, paying the mortgage, and picking up kids from school. Trusting Jesus and spending time in His Word becomes a cherished life rhythm, not a to-do list. Our journey with Jesus grows stronger and more meaningful when we see it as a relationship—a lifelong process of asking, seeking, knocking, and believing (Matthew 7:7).

When we are willing to humble ourselves and admit our need for a Savior, we can entrust our lives to our Creator. We can turn from our old patterns of gratifying our selfish desires and seeking glory for our own names. To “crown Him Lord of all” and ask for His help in all things is a way of living that leads to deeper joy. “May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope” (Romans 15:13).

As we fight to lay down our selfish desires and draw closer to the Lord, we are like the man who asked Jesus to heal his possessed son. We tell our Father God, “We believe, help our unbelief” (Mark 9). This is a huge step for a believer to take, and it comes from spending time in God’s Word and asking the Holy Spirit for faith. So in our human weakness, through God’s strength, we are able to proclaim, “Jesus is better.”

B E N E D I C T I O N

A CALL TO HOLINESS

O God of holy delight
and Redeemer of all my wicked ways,
Remind me today of the eternity I have received,
And deliver me once again from the failings of my
truth-starved soul.

I have invited evil to my doorstep
And called it permissible.
I have set a place at my table for adulterous pride
And called it glorious ambition for the Kingdom.
The wanton desires of my flesh are not pacifists in
my daily wandering—
They are harbingers of deep truth I yearn to deny:
That I do not want You as much as I say
That I do not believe my salvation to be all-inclusive
and complete
And worth the pain of sacrificing self for cross.

And gently, so gently, Your Spirit reminds me
That You've already counted the cost
And considered the sacrifice
And chosen the means for our glorious end.

So Great God of Eternal Power,
To You, O Lord, I make my plea.
For it is You, O Lord, against whom I have waged
fruitless war,
Holding up chains long since broken open
By the precious blood of Jesus.

Empower me today to fight my flesh,
That sickly sweet festering of rotted fear,
Of corpulent arrogance that seeks to guide my way.
The delights of this world breed disease in my bones,
But Your Word is a salve to my Spirit,
And by Your suffering I am healed.
When sin rises up to consume me,

When I seek to numb inexplicable joy
With happiness quickly consumed by the pain of
unmet expectations,
Meet my eyes with Yours and draw me close.
Cast my eyes to Your broad net of grace
Before the temptation of waywardness
Settles in my frame
And traps me in the annihilating grief of a kingdom
no longer my own.

O God, help me to love the purity of holiness in You
More than the feast of lonely pleasures laid out by
my Enemy.
Entice me anew with the promises in Your Word,
And strengthen my shaking fingers and weak knees
To wage war on all that batters my soul.
Give me sober-minded strength,
The fruit of Your Spirit,
To fight the failings of my heart.

I know the God of the universe
Through denying myself
And picking up my cross.
And I am ravaged by the severe beauty of a life lived
For unfading, all-encompassing, sin-destroying
pleasures in You.

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