

## **“Because Of His Love”**

“I am poured out like water, And all my bones are out of joint; my heart is like wax; it has melted within me. **(Psalm 22:14)**

This scripture refers to Jesus when He was dying. Jesus was willing to go to the cross for our sins. Death on the cross was the most painful and brutal death sentence that could be given. The suffering and agony of the pain could last hours before death came. Jesus was whipped 39 times. He was bruised and bleeding from the beating. Picture Jesus hanging with nails driven through His hands, His skin raw and bleeding and with His dying breath Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they don’t know what they are doing.” **(Luke 23”24a)** Did you ever ask the question: why did Jesus have to die? Isaiah the prophet answered the question centuries before the death of Jesus “But it was the Lord’s good plan to crush Him and cause Him grief. Yet when His life is made an offering for sin, He will have many descendants...” **(Isaiah 53:10 NLT)** Why did Jesus have to suffer with so much pain? Again, Isaiah the prophet tells us why. “When He sees all that is accomplished by His anguish, He will be satisfied. And because of His experience, My righteous servant will make it possible for many to be counted righteous, for He will bear all their sins.” **(Isaiah 53:11 NLT)** Only the death of Jesus could satisfy the wrath of God toward sinful man. And so, Jesus was nailed to a cross. Precious Jesus was beaten beyond recognition. He was willing to take the punishment we all deserved. . . God in His mercy sent His son to die in our place. Jesus paid for our sin with His own blood. Jesus went to the cross and “...Because of the joy awaiting Him, He endured the cross.” **(Hebrews 12:2b NLT)** The bible tells us we have all sinned. But, because of His love, we can have a new identity in Christ by asking for forgiveness of our sins and asking Jesus to be our Lord and Savior.

**Prayer:** Jesus, thank You for Your sacrifice on the cross, for Your love that saved me, and for the grace that sets me free. I am forever grateful. Amen.

## The Cost of Comfort

We love comfort! Comfort food. Easy streaming and binge-watching. And all the latest gadgets and gizmos that make our lives easier and more comfortable.

While there's nothing inherently wrong with any of these comforts, we must be aware that our focus and dependency on comfort can become a distraction and even lead to sin. When we start chasing the wrong things, our priorities can get all messed up. And even though we don't mean to, we can begin worshipping idols (our comforts) rather than our one true God.

Nowhere in the Bible does it tell us that our number one purpose on this earth is to be pampered and comfortable. In fact, Jesus tells us that in this world we will have trouble, but He has overcome the world and in Him, we can have peace. **John 16:33** And Paul reminds us to set our minds on things above and not on earthly things. **Colossians 3:2**

Jesus also tells us to be generous to the poor **Luke 11:41**, to share the Gospel to all creation **Mark 16:15**, that we must love one another **John 13:34** and that we must forgive people who sin against us, or our Heavenly Father won't forgive us **Matthew 6:14-15**.

None of the things Jesus asked us to do fall under the worldly "comfort" category. In fact, they are impossible to do without God's help. But they are the very reason we are here. The way Jesus lived on earth is the way we should be living.

We don't have to get rid of all our comforts, but we need to be aware of how we prioritize them. When our focus is on the things that offer us worldly comfort rather than on the Giver of true comfort and peace, that's when we can fall into the trap of spiritual complacency.

### Prayer Points:

- Give praise and glory to God first – above all worldly comforts.
- Ask Holy Spirit to convict you when your comforts become your priority so you can ask for God's forgiveness and get back on track.
- Seek the Lord's will in your life and ask for His help as you continue to fulfill His purpose.

## Fit Just Right

My family enjoys jigsaw puzzles; the more pieces, the greater the challenge. It takes concentration, time and dedication to complete the more detailed puzzles, but the feeling of placing that very last piece and seeing the whole picture come together is quite gratifying.

The church can be like that. It's made of many different individuals and ministries, and although there may be similarities among many of those pieces, each has a distinct place – a place where it fits *just right* to make a complete picture. One piece disconnected and off by itself can't represent the whole body because it needs to be working together with all the rest of the "pieces" by interlocking with them. **(Ephesians 4:16)**

When they're all connected, we see the "big picture" clearly. The pieces help hold each other together. Pray that as the body of Christ we would all seek to find where we fit best and would contribute to the whole, finding fulfillment in our part of the big picture. No individual piece is more important than another – they just fit together in different places.

**Prayer:** Father, thank You that each of us is each fearfully and wonderfully made to be a part of Your beautiful design. Help us to seek Your perfect plan for our lives and to find joy in the special contribution You have created for each of us to complete Your masterpiece.

## Humbly Listening

Have there ever been times when you thought you *may* have heard the Lord speaking to you, but you weren't really sure? That uncertainty typically leads to a lack of action for us. Don't despair; you're not alone. When the prophet Samuel was initially called by God, it was at a time when word from the Lord was rare. It would seem that this was at least in part due to the lack of reverence for Him that had crept into his contemporary culture. **(1 Samuel 3:1-2, 10)**

We are living in a time where the ever-increasing momentum is to muffle out, replace, or totally and actively reject the voice of God. As a result, we also may not truly recognize His still small voice when He speaks to us. But if we adopt the posture of humbly listening, as His young servant Samuel did, we will be exactly where we need to be to hear and receive His plan for us; and the Spirit of truth will guide us into *all* the truth there is, and He'll help us make sense out of what's happening. **(John 16:13)**

**Prayer:** Lord, we humbly and expectantly ask You to speak, for Your servant is listening.

## **“Be Still”**

**“This is the day the Lord has made; we will rejoice and be glad in it.” (Psalm 118:24)**

What a blessing to know that God is watching over us, and He is there even though He may seem distant at times, and we don't feel like we hear Him. That is the perfect time to follow the direction of Psalm 46:10a “Be still, and know that I am God.... Let your mind just settle on the stillness and know that God is there. He never leaves us. Let the stillness saturate your soul and reflect on “knowing.” Knowing what? That He is God and God alone. He is sovereign. He is majestic. He knows the end from the beginning. He is for you and not against you. He has good plans for you. His love is everlasting. When your mind is still you are free from all your “to do lists”. In the stillness you sense the goodness of God. Seeking the Lord in stillness brings about a wonderful sense of His nearness. The stillness opens the door to allow His presence to flood your soul. When you don't feel like it's a good day or a day to rejoice, find a quiet place and “Be still” ... and you will find peace from anxious thoughts in His presence.

**Prayer:** Lord, this is the day You have made; I choose to rejoice and be glad in it. Fill my heart with gratitude and my steps with joy. Amen.

**Psalm 91:1, Deuteronomy 31:8, Colossians 1:16, 1 Chronicles 29:11, Isaiah 46:10, Romans 8:31, Jeremiah 29:11, Jeremiah 31:3**

## A God-Focused Mindset

We all encounter emotional peaks and valleys. Some days are filled with joy and ease, and we feel God's presence all around us. Then there are times when we struggle with anxiety, confusion, doubt and other troubling thoughts. In the darkness, it's not unusual to question God. Where are You? Do You still hear me?

Rest assured, He's still there, and yes, He hears us. We have a Savior who understands us. He knows everything about us, and He loves us. We can rest in that truth as we keep our eyes fixed on Him.

You may be thinking that you already know this. But there's knowing...and then there's doing. So, what should we be doing at times like these?

**Pray:** Do not conform to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. **Romans 12:2**

**Be Aware:** We need to be aware of the spiritual battle so we can fight the enemy with God's power and with Biblical truth. **Ephesians 6:10-18**

**Replace:** Every time a self-defeating or troubling thought arises, identify it, ask God to take it captive and make it obedient to Him. **2 Corinthians 10:5**

**Know:** Remember that NOTHING can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. **Romans 8:39**

Lean on God to help you train your brain to focus on things that are true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable and praiseworthy. These thoughts, based on Scriptural truth, will help you achieve a God-focused mindset because they are what God is. **Philippians 4:8**

### Prayer Points:

- Give thanks to God that you can rest in the truth that He understands you and NOTHING can separate you from His love!
- Ask Holy Spirit to keep your mind firmly set where He wants it to be focused.
- Cast all your anxieties and fears on Christ because He cares for you.

## **“What If”**

“Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends.” **(John 15:13)**

Jesus, the son of God, came to earth to save us from our sin. Our sin was the reason Jesus was nailed to a cross to fulfill the will of the Father. God’s wrath was poured out on the spotless lamb of God, Jesus the Son. He was led to the cross just like an innocent lamb is led to slaughter. Jesus is the one who died to save us from our sin and God’s anger. Jesus took the punishment we deserved. Now, just for a moment ask yourself what if Jesus had not died in our place? Where would we be? Alone, to face the wrath of God and to be banned from His presence? Life would have no meaning and there would be no hope for the future. We would be lost forever. “But God showed His great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners.” (Romans 5:8 NLT) “...WHILE WE WERE STILL SINNERS.” Isn’t that truly amazing? God is not distant. He is as near as a whisper. He sent Jesus to die for us so we could have a deep and meaningful relationship with Him. Open your heart and ask for more of Jesus.

**Prayer:** Father, without Jesus I am lost. Thank you for sending Jesus to die for me. Forgive me of my sins. I ask for Jesus to be my Lord and Savior. I glorify Your name. Amen.

**Matthew 1:21, Romans 5:9, Isaiah 53:7, Romans 3:25, John 3:16**

## Biblical Boundaries

How far should we go to help people in need? Paul tells us to carry each other's burdens and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. (**Galatians 6:2**)

Does this mean it's our duty to rush in and take responsibility for fixing the problems of everyone who is in need, hurting or troubled? As a Christian, is this how we fulfill the law of Christ?

The Bible makes a clear distinction about what's our responsibility and what's not our responsibility. In verse 5, Paul writes, "for each one should carry their own load." This means the person in need should take responsibility for their own situation. At first glance, it seems contradictory. Initially, Paul says we are supposed to carry their burdens and then he says they should carry their own load. What's the difference between us carrying their burden and them carrying their own load?

The Greek translation of the word "load" in **Galatians 6:5** is phortion which refers to an individual burden that's not transferable. This means we alone are all responsible for our own burdens, and we shouldn't expect someone to handle them for us. We answer directly to God for our own actions. No one else can do that for us.

When we see someone hurting or struggling, it's our duty to walk alongside them. We should empathize, listen, and pray with them. Ultimately, the way they deal with their burden remains their responsibility. We fulfill the law of Christ when we bear their burdens by empathizing with them but we aren't supposed to carry their load by fixing their problems for them. We are all responsible for dealing with our own stuff while empathizing with those in need.

### Prayer Points:

- Ask God to reveal if you are overstepping by trying to carry someone else's load.
- Invite Holy Spirit to guide you as you listen, empathize and pray with those in need.
- Thank God for providing healthy and clear boundaries to protect us from burn-out or meddling.

## Live For Him – Live For Me?

If you're into social media jargon, you know that YOLO stands for "You only live once." The implication is to go for the gusto; carpe diem; eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we may die. Of course, the underlying force of this is justification for doing something we know isn't probably the wisest or in our best interest. It's not some radical new idea. In fact, you may have recognized a portion of Scripture from **Ecclesiastes 8:15**, but if you read further you'll discover that wise King Solomon's conclusion was that it was all pointless.

You see, we *really do* only get one chance in this life, and we are expected to make the most of it - just not in the pursuit of feeding our cravings. Rather, we are here to bring glory to His name and to proclaim it to the world. The enemy would have us believe that our goal is comfort, and he will use all kinds of deceptions to lure us into being self-serving. If He tried it on Jesus, don't be foolish enough to believe he'll leave you alone. Our true aim should be a life of godliness, which will not only satisfy our needs for the present but also for the life to come. "And this world is fading away, along with everything that people crave. But anyone who does what pleases God will live forever." **(1 John 2:17 NLT)**

**Prayer:** Lord, forgive us for the times when we have been self-serving and distracted by things that would take our eyes off You. Thank You for not only life itself, but for all the blessings we experience every day. Thank You that by Your grace, Your mercies are new every morning. Thank You for the promise of a life beyond this one that will be spent with You in glory.



## **“He Is Not Here”**

Jesus said to them “Thus it is written and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day.” **(Luke 24:46)**

So, Jesus willingly suffered a painful death for the sins of everyone. He received the punishment we all deserved for sin... His death by crucifixion. Before His death, He had told His disciples, “The Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of men, and they will kill Him. And after He is killed, He will rise the third day.” **(Mark 9:31)** He said He would rise again, and He did. After His death, those who went to His tomb, found it empty and instead saw two angels who spoke to them and said, “He is not here, but is risen, as He said, Come, see the place where the Lord lay.” **(Matthew 28:6)** I love what Jesus said in **Revelation 1:18** “I am He who lives and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore, Amen: and have the keys of hell and of death. (KJV) Doesn’t that just make you want to shout for joy! He’s alive! He wants to live in your heart. He died so we could live. God’s love for us knows no bounds and the cross surely is proof of God’s love because He sent Jesus to die in our place. The cross sets us free from our sins when we ask for God to forgive us and cleanse us with the blood of Christ. Jesus said, “I am the resurrection and the life. Anyone who believes in me will live, even after dying. **(John 11:25 NLT)**

**Prayer:** Thank you, Father, that your son went to the cross for me. He was willing to die for me and he was raised on the third day and is alive forever. Show me how to live a life that pleases you. Amen.

**John 3:16, Ephesians 1:17**