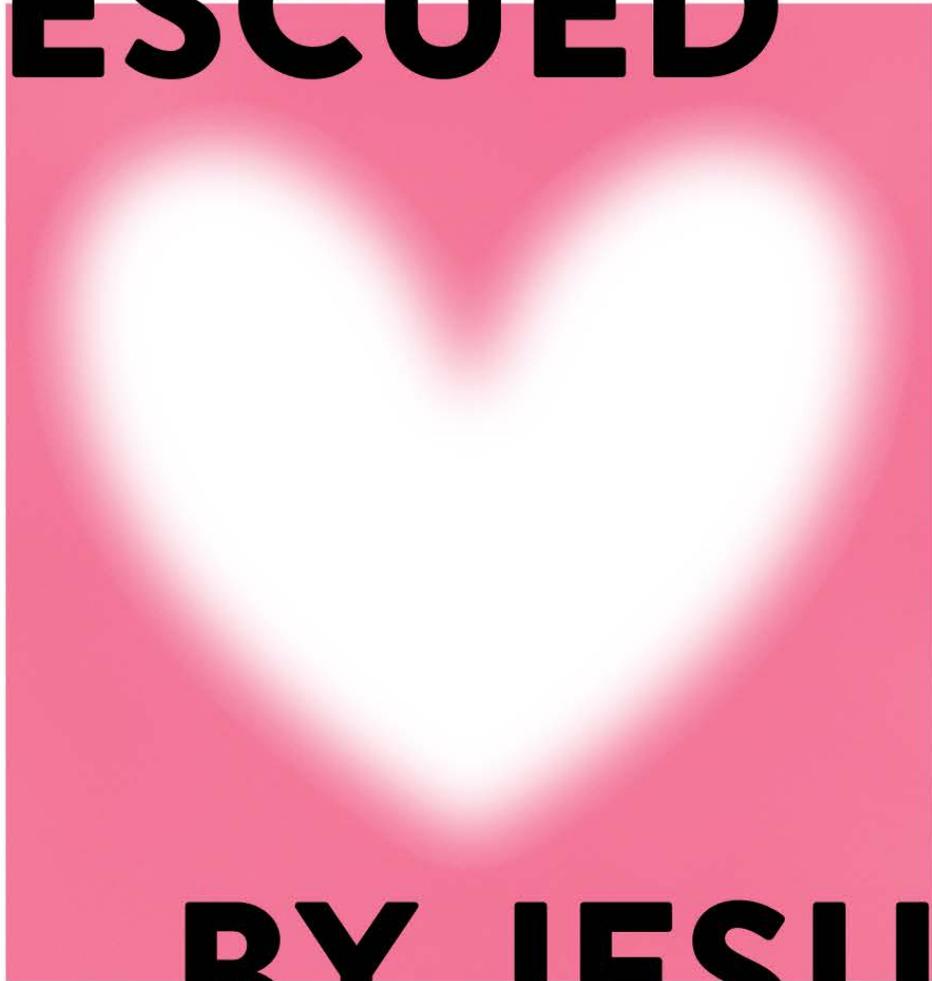


DEVOTIONAL INSIGHTS

RESCUED



BY JESUS

LOVE EDITION

kerusso®

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INTRODUCTION

Have you ever felt trapped, or like life was spinning out of control?

As much as we like to believe we've got it together, there are few things we really control, and sometimes circumstances arise that are simply too much for us to handle. Often, in fact.

The life and death of Jesus Christ may seem like a faded page out of history at times, but His sacrifice on the cross, and God's willingness to give His only Son to buy our forgiveness, is the greatest rescue mission ever undertaken.

The Good News of Jesus' actions are as relevant today as ever.

The price of our sins has been paid, and we are rescued from death and have eternity in Heaven alongside our Creator to look forward to, because Jesus was willing to give His life for us.

The rescue mission doesn't stop there. Whatever you face, whether your trials involve relationship struggles, health challenges, career concerns, financial pitfalls, or whatever else life can throw at you, the Lord is waiting to breathe peace into your life, to guide your footsteps, to provide solutions, and to keep you safe.

God is holding you in the palm of His mighty hand, and when you feel you are facing more than you can handle, just let go.

The 20 devotions in this eBook will help you dig deeper into biblical truths of God's saving grace, and strengthen ties with your Lord and Savior, the ultimate source of faith, hope, love — and rescue.

RESCUED BY JESUS

DEVOTIONAL INSIGHTS

WHERE DOES MY HELP COME FROM?

For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

— Colossians 1:13-14

Whether you were a child or an adult, if you were a television-watcher in the 1990's, you are probably familiar with "Rescue 9-1-1," a show featuring the reenactment of real life emergencies.

Maybe you were transfixed by the fast-paced action as families were pulled from the wreckage of devastating car crashes, or people and pets were led to safety out of burning homes.

Do you love the adrenaline rush of stories like this, or do you simply feel

your anxiety level rising, in the midst of the chaos onscreen?

When we're hit with the realities of life, it would be nice to have a Life Emergency Line to call, wouldn't it? Experts could arrive via helicopter to coach you through relationship or career disasters, to facilitate healthier habits that would help us live longer, or to whip our finances into shape.

9-1-1 doesn't work that way, but God does.

When we accept Jesus into our heart and life, we are given the gift of redemption through His death on the cross. Christian faith doesn't guarantee a smooth road or easy passage in this life, but it does mean we are rescued for all eternity, and we can carry on in the midst of life's most challenging circumstances, knowing there is so much more than this.

Questions to Ponder

- Have you ever been involved in a natural disaster, house fire, car crash, or other emergency? What was that like?
- If you could call in a team of Life Emergency Experts, what would you want them to fix first?
- Make a list of circumstances that are bothering you, or even feel like an emergency right now. Are you willing to hand these things to God in prayer?

THE QUEEN

Mordecai had a cousin named Hadassah, whom he had brought up because she had neither father nor mother. This young woman, who was also known as Esther, had a lovely figure and was beautiful. Mordecai had taken her as his own daughter when her father and mother died.

—Esther 2:7

Can you name the one book in the Bible that does not mention God? Most people aren't aware of this trivia!

In fact, the Old Testament Book of Esther is the answer. While this account of Jews living in ancient Persia (modern Iran) does not explicitly mention God, it is clear that He was there and acting on behalf of His people.

This is a story of God rescuing innocents, and the story is so dramatic, it is still remembered every year by Jews worldwide during the Festival of Purim.

It seems that after the Israelites had been taken captive by the Babylonians

in the sixth century B.C. that their well-being passed to the conquering Persians. King Xerxes ruled a vast empire and he doesn't appear to be as ruthless as many dictators of the day. In fact, he was especially fond of a young Jewish woman, Esther, and it was in this relationship that we learn of a miraculous deliverance of her people.

One of the king's advisors, a wicked man named Haman, devised a plan to murder all the Jews in the kingdom. But Esther and her cousin, Mordecai, countered his plan and eventually her favor with the king saved them all.

If you read the book, you will be struck by this "absence of God" in the plot, but then you'll see clearly that He was there all the time and in fact orchestrated the salvation of His people.

Your life is much like that. At low points, when you see no way out, a deliverer arrives. Maybe it's a financial gift after you've lost your job. Perhaps it's physical protection from someone that wants to harm you. Whatever your situation, know that God is watching and waiting for just the right time to deliver you!

Questions to Ponder

- Do you recall a time when the "unseen hand of God" impacted your life?
- Do you feel right now that God is far away from your troubles?
- Who is your Esther, that person willing to risk all for your good?

IN WHOM CAN WE TRUST?

He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust.

—Psalm 91:2

Do you find it hard to trust someone? Anyone? Our society is full to the brim of people who have been hurt, wounded, devastated. Some of us build walls of protection around our hearts, living behind those walls in silence, and in fear.

After the fall of Saddam Hussein in Iraq, the people of that captive country were free for the first time to tell their stories. One woman said that she had been driven nearly insane by the dictator's torture chambers, but when he was

gone, someone shared the love of Christ with her. Her mind and spirit were restored.

She said that for the first time in her life, she could now trust. It opened her heart to beauty, and friendship, and love. Most of all, she now loves her Savior with her whole, healed heart.

Tear down those walls! Don't live in shame or fear because of the broken places in your heart. Those bruises and

fractures are an opportunity for the light to seep in, and for God to heal you — mind, body, and soul. It is our brokenness that leaves us open to His love, and our imperfections that reach out for the beauty of His grace, and His salvation.

Your situation might not be as extreme as our Iraqi sister, but if you have trust issues, take them to Jesus and tell Him with your whole hurting heart that You need Him. He will meet you where you are!

Questions to Ponder

- God is so incredibly good — but not all people are. Do you have a hard time trusting others? What experiences have led you here?
- Who do you let in, to see and know the real you? Are you missing out on the benefit of supportive friendships, or deeper family relationships, because of fear or mistrust?
- God loves you exactly where you are, broken pieces and all. How can your faith in the Lord help you break down your walls, and learn to trust again?

VALLEY OF ANGELS

He unleashed against them his hot anger, his wrath, indignation and hostility— a band of destroying angels.

—Psalm 78:49

The 1973 Mideast War, known also as The Yom Kippur War, erupted as Arab armies sought revenge for their losses in the Six Day War a few years earlier. A joint alliance between Syria and Egypt launched a surprise attack against the Israelis, on the eve of their holiest day, Yom Kippur, which stands for atonement.

As Egyptian troops moved into the Sinai Peninsula (oddly enough, the same territory where Moses and the Israelites had wandered many years before), Syrian tanks smashed through defenses in the Golan Heights, a mountain range in the north of Israel, just above the Sea of Galilee. It was here that the war was

almost won by the attackers within the first 48 hours.

A young officer named Gershom rushed to an area to confront the Syrians. In the fierce battle, he was knocked off his feet, wounded to the point of death. In fact, he saw a multitude of Syrian soldiers advancing on his position; he thought he was “going to God.”

Just before he lost consciousness, he saw the frightened looks on the faces of his enemies. They fled in terror. Later in the hospital, he learned what had happened. It seems that captured Syrian soldiers told of seeing countless angelic beings

all around Gershom and his trapped men. The Syrians thought that surely their God was fighting them and so they ran away!

Within three weeks, Israel through a series of miraculous events, survived the war and ironically, the ferocious war brought all the sides together to discuss peace, which culminated a few years later in a peace with Egypt that still endures!

Sometimes, when you think all is lost, God sends his angels to rescue you. Don't doubt it for a second!

Questions to Ponder

- Do you remember a time when God sent you a specific blessing?
- Do you believe in miracles?
- Are there people in your life who would benefit from hearing about your miracle?

GOD RESCUES JONAH FROM HIMSELF

Now the Lord provided a huge fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.

— **Jonah 1:17**

For some reason, people sometimes tell big lies when it comes to fishing. You know — what was really a small fry becomes a man-eating shark in the retelling of the story.

But that's nothing compared to the incredible story of Jonah.

God called upon Jonah to travel to the city of Nineveh to prophesy disaster because of the city's wickedness, and he really didn't want to go. Maybe he wasn't in the mood for travel. Maybe it

was just a little too #awkward showing up in a sizeable city to announce God's impending doom. Whatever the reason for his hesitance, Jonah set sail in the other direction, thinking he could hide from God and do his own thing.

He forgot that God controls the sea and everything in it, and Jonah found himself tossed overboard, and then swallowed by a monstrous fish.

Three days isn't a long time, but time probably passes a little more slowly in

the maw of a giant whale, floating in the midst of whatever else the creature has eaten recently. It was dark. It was wet. The smell was something else...

Eventually the whale vomited Jonah onto the shore, and He knew he'd been delivered by the grace of god, despite his disobedience.

God asks us to obey, and when we fight His good plan for us, He is faithful to guide our footsteps and show us the way.

Questions to Ponder

- Have you ever felt the Holy Spirit tug on your heart to go one direction, but you went the opposite direction instead? How did that turn out?
- Jonah was literally swallowed by a whale for disobeying God's order to go to Nineveh. What 'whales' have you faced in your life?
- Many of us are excellent at praying for what we need or want, but neglect to pray that our hearts will bend to God's will for our lives. Are you willing to ask God to bless you with an obedient spirit?

MIDNIGHT FIGHT

So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God.

—Isaiah 41:10

Tally woke unexpectedly in the night to discover the bedroom she shared with her husband seemed hazy. She thought she was dreaming, until her eye landed on their two cats writhing in the corner, frantically bathing themselves. Then she noticed the smell...ammonia.

She shook her husband awake, and together they hurriedly donned winter coats over their pajamas and headed for the car. The cats would have to stay. Something was seriously wrong, and the couple couldn't risk frightened felines in the car as they fled for their lives.

It was January 17, 2002, and married college students Tally and Nate lived just a few miles from a US Air Force Base in a Northern college town. They weren't sure what was happening, but they knew the pervasive fog filling the air wasn't safe to breathe.

September 11, 2001 was fresh in their minds, and they worried a terror attack had taken place on the nearby Air Base.

The couple drove as quickly as they dared out of the river valley they lived in, and into the countryside. Home was two and a half hours away, and they were determined to make it there, despite the dangerous situation and icy roads.

A few miles outside of town on an unfamiliar gravel road, their tiny car hit a patch of ice and spun off the road into a barbed wire fence. Both Tally and Nate were grateful to be out of the fog and safe, but now they faced treacherous roads, their nerves were shot, and they didn't know what was going on.

They stopped to pray and catch their breath.

Lord, we aren't sure what's happening, and we don't know what will happen to everyone else in town, but we need you. Please see us safely home, and protect everyone who is in the midst of this situation. We trust you, and we love you.
Amen

The drive home was anxious, and they were grateful to be taken in by Nate's parents upon arrival at their home, and grateful to be safe.

They learned the next day that a train had derailed on the edge of the city at 1:37 that morning. Five cars of liquified anhydrous ammonia ruptured, spilling a deadly vaporous chemical cloud across a widespread area. One man was killed, and hundreds were affected by the fumes, which are known to cause breathing difficulty and even suffocation, airway damage, freezer burns, and damage to the eyes.

This unexpected disaster left its mark on the couple, and on the town, for years to come; the events of that night also served as a reminder that the first call to make in an emergency (after 9-1-1), is to God in prayer.

Questions to Ponder

- Have you ever been in a dangerous situation? How did you react? In hindsight, what would you do differently?
- Who is the first person you call or reach out to, when something bad happens?
- When you or someone you know is facing a difficult challenge, or even an emergency, do you turn to God in prayer? Why or why not?

SOMETHING FOR JOEY

Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the Lord your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you.

—Deuteronomy 31:6

John Cappelletti was big, crushing running back for Penn St. in 1973. So good was the Philadelphia native that he won the Heisman Trophy his senior year, then continued his career in the NFL for a decade.

His Heisman acceptance speech is perhaps the most memorable, and almost certainly the most poignant. His younger brother, Joey, was battling leukemia. Looking out over the New York City audience, Cappelletti took the spotlight off himself:

“The youngest member of our family, my brother Joseph, is ill. . . . He has leukemia.

If I could dedicate this trophy to him, if it could buy him one day of happiness, it would all be worthwhile. People say that I’m brave. But my bravery is only in the fall, and it’s only the football field. Joey lives with pain all the time. His courage is round the clock. I want him to have this trophy. It’s more his than it is mine. Because he’s always been such an inspiration to me.”

Not a dry eye in the house.

Joey Cappelletti did not win his fight with cancer. He died in 1976. But the family’s faith tells them they will see him again.

Jesus’s sacrifice on the cross was the ultimate brave act. Everything else pales in comparison. His resurrection three days later is the greatest moment in all of history, because it ensures that those who believe on Him will live forever, in paradise. There, pain and sickness and suffering and depression will not exist!

In the life to come, God’s people will run and never tire.

Who wouldn’t want that greatest of all gifts?

Questions to Ponder

- Do you lie awake at night thinking about your own mortality, or are you secure in Christ?
- Does the promise of eternal life cause you to live differently in the here and now?
- Have you shared Christ with anyone today?

HUNDREDS OF UNIVERSES

But Jesus said, "Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me: for of such is the kingdom of heaven."

—Matthew 19:14

Right in the middle of the horrors of World War 2, there were certain righteous people that risked their own lives to save Jews from the Nazis. Nowhere was this more heartfelt than when it came to children.

In 1943, there were 140,000 Dutch Jews, but even while he was prosecuting a war on two fronts, Hitler's madness drove him to murder innocents wherever he found them. People were rounded up quickly and roughly, to be deported to death camps.

Johan van Hulst, a principal at a teacher's college in Amsterdam, watched as children were separated from their parents. He didn't just watch.

A lush hedge divided the college from a Jewish orphanage and at great personal risk, Hulst organized the passing of children through that hedge and on to freedom in the countryside. In all, he helped save 600 innocent lives.

His extraordinary act was never forgotten.

On the occasion of Dr. van Hulst's 100th birthday, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu asked to meet him. Reminding the compassionate educator that the Jewish sages say that when one saves a single life, he saves a universe, Netanyahu leaned in and said, "You saved hundreds of universes."

Johan van Hulst's love for Christ compelled him to risk literally everything. He said many years later than his only regret was that he couldn't save more children.

Jesus risked everything for us. Surrounded by evil on the cross, He went through with it all, refusing to stay safe. Because of that, His victory over death has provided eternal life for untold numbers of people who otherwise would have gone to their deaths.

The Creator of the Universe did that for us.

Questions to Ponder

- How do you think you'd react if someone's life depended on you?
- Does Christ's sacrifice impact your life today?
- Do you want your life to count for something great?

RAHAB HIDES THE SPIES

So the men said to her, 'Our life for yours if you do not tell this business of ours; and it shall come about when the Lord gives us the land that we will deal kindly and faithfully with you.'

— Joshua 2:14

God looks not at the outer picture, or even our circumstances. This story beautifully expresses God's love for all people, including a young prostitute named Rahab.

Rahab lived in the Canaanite town of Jericho, which was near the border of the Promised Land God had promised to His people, who had been wandering for years in search of a home after slavery in Egypt.

Because the Canaanites were powerful, Joshua sent a scouting party into the

land, to see what they were up against. The men sent ahead were hidden from harm by Rahab, because she had heard of the power that followed the Israelites.

God's power and protection for His people struck fear into the hearts of the people of Jericho. When she spoke with the men Joshua sent, she showed remarkable understanding that their God was in fact the true God. She made a bargain with them.

When the king of Jericho sent a message seeking the men seen entering her

home, she put them off the trail and hid the spies safely on her roof. In the end, as the Israelites took possession of the Promised Land, Rahab's family was spared death.

In this way, we see how God's inclusive love for all is worked out in practical ways that lead to life.

Remember Rahab when you think you are beyond God's protection!

Questions to Ponder

- Rahab chose God's people over her own countrymen. Have you ever had to choose God's will (or your faith) over the will of your peers, parents, or someone in power of you at work or school?
- God chose a prostitute to provide safety for His spies in Jericho. What does this tell you about God's love, and who He can use for the greater good?
- Rahab wasn't one of God's chosen people — yet she believed in Him and chose to follow her heart. What can you do in your everyday life, big or small, to choose Jesus every day?

FREE WILLIE

Our days may come to seventy years, or eighty, if our strength endures; yet the best of them are but trouble and sorrow, for they quickly pass, and we fly away.

—Psalm 90:10

If anyone has ever had a harder job, please let us know.

Abraham Lincoln was hated in his own party, members of his family suffered from emotional problems, his Southern-born wife was accused of being a Confederate spy, the country was deep into a very bloody civil war, and the great man himself was given to bouts of “melancholy”—known today as clinical depression.

By 1862, his generals dithered and the war looked lost. At that precise moment, a cruelty unfathomable set upon the Lincoln's.

Eleven-year-old William Wallace “Wille” Lincoln died. His devastated parents

weren't sure they could go on. The President groaned, “My poor boy. He was too good for this earth. God has called him home. I know that he is much better off in heaven, but then we loved him so much. It is hard, hard to have him die!”

Child loss is a fiend. Nothing ever quite takes away the sting. But it is in those times we remember Scripture, the promise of a blessed hope and eternity in paradise with Jesus Christ, who saved us.

Those around Abraham Lincoln after 1862 noticed a change in him...for the better. He seemed to rely on God all the more. The year after his beloved's son's death, Lincoln found the right general to lead his troops, the aptly named U.S.

Grant. He also found the moral courage to confront a stain on our history, slavery, with his epic speech at Gettysburg.

We can say with some surety that Abraham Lincoln was also comforted by the Lord and realized that his own dear son, taken from him way too soon, had gone to be with his Creator, and that his parents would see him again one day.

Only three years later, the father was reunited with his son. As the Civil War came to its conclusion, the father's and son's war was over as well. They were both free and alive forevermore.

Questions to Ponder

- Have you or a friend or family member been touched by child loss?
- Do you need to spend quiet time with the Lord in order to move past a tragedy in your life?
- Have you stopped to tell Jesus that you're hurting and need His touch?

AT THE MERCY OF LIONS

Daniel answered, 'May the king live forever! My God sent his angel, and he shut the mouths of the lions. They have not hurt me, because I was found innocent in his sight. Nor have I ever done any wrong before you, Your Majesty.'

—Daniel 6:21-22

The story of Daniel in the lion's den teaches us about the promises and faithfulness of God, even if we feel like everything has been lost.

Daniel, God's man in exile in Babylon, insisted on worshipping the Lord, and not a human king. King Darius was ruler over Babylon and had appointment several men to help him govern and lead. Daniel, the leader of advisors, believed in God and followed the Lord's commands.

The other men did not like Daniel, and didn't want him in charge — so they devised a way to get rid of him. They urged King Darius to enact a law that any man caught praying to anyone besides the king would be thrown into the lion's den, where the starving lions would surely kill him.

When those who were jealous overheard Daniels daily prayers to God and reported him to the king, the prophet was thrown into a lion's den overnight.

And that was that. Or was it?

The next morning, King Darius was so anxious about Daniel that he ran to the den and called out to him, to see if he was still alive.

Questions to Ponder

- Have you ever felt as if you were trapped in a 'lions' den' of sorts? What was that situation like?
- Do you believe God can rescue you from any situation? Why or why not?
- A variety of leaders, influencers, and voices in our lives call for our attention. Do you put Jesus first, on your personal priority list? What can you start doing (or stop doing) to realign your priorities with your faith?

TAKE THE WHEEL, JESUS

Give all your worries and cares to God, for he cares about you.

—1 Peter 5:7

Carl loved working on his farm. He loved the solitude and sense of accomplishment. He was a capable man, and took pride in the work he accomplished.

One day though, working alone, he was injured severely. In fact, if he didn't get to the hospital, he would likely die.

So he banged the door of his old pickup shut and took off. He pulled into the hospital parking lot and lost what little consciousness he had.

Waking up 24 hours later after surgery, he realized he remembered nothing of his injury, or even getting to the hospital. In effect, the God he loved and trusted had driven him to town.

No matter how capable we are, how much knowledge we possess, or how much practice we've had at living — we can never save ourselves. It is in our time of greatest need that God proves Himself to us, and carries us to safety.

Questions to Ponder

- Do you truly believe you need God? Why or why not?
- When is the last time you felt out of control? What did you do to move past that feeling?
- What would it look like to surrender control to God, and hand Him the wheel for your relationships, work, and life?

MERRY MARY

God is our shelter and strength, always ready to help in times of trouble. So we will not be afraid, even if the earth is shaken and mountains fall into the ocean depths.

—Matthew 1:18, 19

We hear a lot about shaming today. Although it can be overdone, it is also true that human beings do not deserve to be bullied.

This cruelty can be seen in a myriad of circumstances, but perhaps no more so than in the shadow of an unplanned pregnancy. Nothing bears the image of our Creator more than a precious infant!

Mary, the young woman from Galilee, grew up in the 1st century, during the Roman occupation of Judea. One day, an angel appeared to her and announced that she would become the earthly mother of the Messiah! At once, this

exciting news must have been tempered with the knowledge that an unmarried pregnant girl is not looked on so fondly by family and friends.

It is here in the story we see a marvelous act of love. Mary's fiancée, the carpenter Joseph, first decided to quietly dissolve the marriage very quietly, because as the book of Matthew tells us, he did not want to expose her to public disgrace.

But those angels! Joseph was also visited and told to be courageous and marry her, anyway. It was then that the young couple was fully aware of the Good News Mary would bring into the world.

Generations since have wished they had been the ones to raise Jesus, for God's great gift to humanity was also a tremendous honor for a woman of God. For the remainder of her life, Mary carried with her the knowledge that the son she loved so much was indeed the Savior of the world. They shared a special bond that is truly unique.

She also knew years later, when He finished His transcendent work on Earth, that she would see Him again one day, and live forever in joy in His presence!

Questions to Ponder

- Have you ever judged someone, only later to discover a deeper meaning behind her circumstances?
- What do you think would have happened to Mary if Joseph had gone ahead with his plans for divorce?
- Do you tend to trust God when He reveals His will for you?

SHIPWRECKED!

Now I urge you to take some food. You need it to survive. Not one of you will lose a single hair from his head.

—Acts 27:34

We all have a particular fear of dying. For some, it's falling from a great height. Others, drowning, or in a car wreck.

The Apostle Paul's life was threatened in several ways for much of his ministry, beginning in the years just after the resurrection of Jesus. Paul, who had at one time persecuted Christians, became one! The remaining decades of his life were spent sharing the Good News with many people spread over many cultures.

One time, on a ship bound for Rome, Paul found himself at a dangerous moment on the often unpredictable Adriatic Sea. They were about to capsize the ship that carried Paul and several other passengers.

Approaching a bay they didn't recognize, the passengers had to skillfully navigate the treacherous water by lightening their load, then cutting loose the stone anchors. At one point though, they feared they might all be lost—276 souls.

The ship was caught in the pounding waves and broke apart. Those who could swim quickly made their way to shore and incredibly, the rest followed, clinging to the shattered pieces of the ship. God had performed a miracle, and the fact wasn't lost on yet another "captive audience" for Paul.

They had reached Malta. Paul was able to continue on with his ministry.

How many times have we been bashed and bloodied by life? Sometimes, let's be honest, the churning sea of life seems determined to drown us.

But Jesus sees all. He sees us. He actually, literally sees us.

That is why good will always triumph over evil. When the enemy wants us dead, Jesus arrives to tell us that because He lives, we will live forevermore. And he carries us to safety, a safe shore where we can warm ourselves over a fire and continue on our way.

You may feel your life shipwrecked, but hang on and cling to Jesus!

Questions to Ponder

- Do you feel like you're drowning right now?
- Have you ever been rescued in a miraculous way that could only have come from God?
- Have you looked for opportunities to share your experiences with those that need to hear them?

GIMME SHELTER

God is our shelter and strength, always ready to help in times of trouble. So we will not be afraid, even if the earth is shaken and mountains fall into the ocean depths.

—Psalm 46:1-2

Rae — a single mother of 4, needed a new place to live. The house she'd been renting for two years was going on the market in less than a month, and she would not be able to renew her lease. She didn't qualify to purchase the house, and with only a few weeks to secure another home for her family, she hit the pavement with the youngest in tow to find somewhere else to live while her older children were in school.

Finding a suitable home she could afford for 5 people, plus the family pets, proved challenging.

The roomy apartment on Maple Avenue was perfect...except for the price tag. The charming house on 3rd Street would work, but the school district didn't have

a great reputation, and she wanted the best for her oldest son, whose learning disability meant he needed extra help. The townhouse off Canyon Drive ticked almost every box — but the property didn't allow pets, and their furry family members meant everything to the children.

Time was growing short, and Rae was starting to feel the pressure of finding somewhere to live. It was hard not to feel frustrated and alone as she searched in vain for her family's next home.

On the verge of tears after another long day of rental research, Rae pulled the car over on a quiet street, turned off the engine, and prayed while the baby snored softly in her car seat.

Lord, I keep knocking on doors that just won't open, and I need you by my side. Please provide for my family, and send me in the right direction. I trust you, and I believe you will take care of us. Amen

That evening, Rae received an email from her landlord, the owner of the house she was renting. They wouldn't be putting the house on the market after all, and if she was interested, she could sign a two year lease at the same rate she was currently paying.

Sometimes, God opens doors — and sometimes, He keeps them closed because He has something else in mind.

Questions to Ponder

- Do you ever worry about where you will live, whether your job is secure, or how you will take care of your family?
- Who do you talk to about your worries?
- God's Word promises that He cares for and shelters even the insignificant sparrow, and cares so much more for you and I. How would it feel to turn your concerns over to God in prayer, rather than doing all the worrying on your own?

DOUBTING DOUBTING THOMAS

Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

—John 20:29

Have you ever felt just a little teensy tiny bit better than someone else? Or five bagazillion tons better (if we're being honest here!)

It happens to the best of us!

Sadly, this happens a lot in religious communities. You know, "we" have all the answers and if "you" don't get onboard, well, you're on the outside looking in. It's not a fun place to be. Not only are you trying to figure out who God is—or even if He exists—but you are also looked down upon by friends and family. Frankly, this scenario is not the best moment of some believers.

Scripture tells us that even people who saw God doubted their own faith. This is staggering, but seriously, it's comforting to those of us who have had doubts,

wrestled with doubt, or worst of all, had our doubts broadcast for others to hear.

But humans do doubt. It's what we do. Sure, sometimes we are lock-sure in our faith. On those sunny days, it's all easy.

But then come dark days.

Thomas, an apostle of Christ, was having one of those days just after his friend and rabbi had been executed by the Romans. Like most of his bandmates, Thomas was a common man. Now, his hopes for the future had been dashed and all of a sudden, his sure faith at the right elbow of Jesus wasn't so sure. He wondered where to go now.

Then Jesus appeared to all of them! He had been resurrected just as the scriptures had predicted.

Thomas wasn't so sure. In perhaps the most famous moment of doubt in history, he was standing in front of the Lord, a week after His appearance (Thomas had not been present for that). So he told his friends that unless he saw the nailprints on Jesus's body, he would not believe.

When Jesus appeared to Thomas, He invited his doubting friend to touch his wounds. When the common man did, he cried out in an uncommon voice, "My Lord and my God!"

When your doubts come, know that He hasn't condemned you. Others might, but never Jesus.

Questions to Ponder

- Are you afraid to express doubts about your faith?
- Is there someone in your life you can confide in?
- Do you realize even those who claim to never doubt actually do?

A LOT OF HELP

And he blessed Abram, saying, "Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth. And praise be to God Most High, who delivered your enemies into your hand."

—Genesis 14:19,20

In our broken world, mean people exist.

That's an obvious statement, but sometimes simplicity has to be our starting point. When facing huge problems (and we see no way out), we have to start at the beginning.

Abraham was, by all accounts, a decent man. The biblical patriarch tended to his family, to his flocks, and dealt fairly with all men.

But he was no pushover. He knew his God, and knew that the One would always be there for him. Such a time came not long after Abraham found his way to the Promised Land, Canaan, which was then ruled by disagreeable people.

The Man from Ur had settled in a bountiful land. Along with those who

worked for him, he managed alongside his nephew, Lot. So generous was the uncle that one day, as they sat on the peak of a mountain range, Abraham told Lot to look over all the land and choose for himself the choicest parts.

So Lot did!

Not long after, four warlords led their bands of outlaws against the inhabitants of the fertile valley. Among other things, they kidnapped Lot and his family and took their possessions, including livestock.

Abraham, not trained in warfare at that time that we know of, wasn't going to take that lying down. He relied on his God, who gave him courage.

The gentle herder gathered his own band of warriors and took off after

them. With the 318 men, he followed the thieves to the north, and there he confronted them. Using battle tactics that were ahead of his time, Abraham divided his forces and so confused the enemy, they fled! He brought Lot and his family back home safe and sound. It was there he was greeted by a man many scholars believe was the pre-incarnate Christ, the priest Melchizedek, then-king of Salem (ancient Jerusalem).

The eternal Christ had delivered Abraham's people from their oppressors, not the last time He would do so!

Questions to Ponder

- Do you believe the Bible accounts are true and therefore trustworthy for us today?
- Was Abraham brash in his pursuit? Should he have waited and tried diplomacy?
- Do you remember a time in your life when Jesus saved you from an enemy that wanted to take everything from you?

TRADING PLACES

Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.

—John 15:13

Charles Dickens created some of the greatest literature of all time. He had keen insights into life that came from his faith in Christ.

In his classic *A Tale of Two Cities*, Dickens describes in gritty detail the horrors of the French Revolution, especially the period known as the Reign of Terror. Almost 17,000 people were executed during this time, with their heads being displayed on wooden poles.

Sydney Carton and Charles Darnay find themselves in the other's life, as Carton the attorney defends the Frenchman on charges of treason.

They are in love with the same woman, but incredibly, Carton realizes his love for Lucie is not returned. Although he is a flawed man, Carton recognizes later that he has a unique opportunity to do something magnanimous.

His self-sacrifice would be remembered forever.

As time went on, Darnay found himself in trouble again, due to the chaos of the age, during this Reign of Terror. He was imprisoned solely because he was an aristocrat. This sets the stage for Carton's selfless act.

The two resembled each other in an uncanny way. As Darnay's attorney, Carton is able to visit him in prison. There, he drugs Darnay and has him carried away to Lucie, and to safety. The barrister, now alone, awaits his execution.

In rare cases, a person will give up his life for another. It happens in war, when a soldier will cover a grenade with his body, thus sparing his fellow soldiers. Or a nurse will expose herself to disease, in order to bring relief to many.

But only once in history has a man traded his life for everyone.

Jesus Christ, the great and unrivaled King, willingly took our place in taking on the sins of humanity. His death on a Roman cross paid the penalty and justified us to His Father God, for all time.

That is Good News for us, this ultimate trading places with the condemned.

Questions to Ponder

- Have you taken it upon yourself to share the Good News with someone else?
- Has anyone ever taken your punishment, out of love?
- Do you think you could willingly lay down your life for someone else?

A SOLID FOUNDATION

Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock.

—Matthew 7:24-25

Ever have that dream where you're falling? Maybe you walk to the edge of a cliff and step right over the edge. Maybe the ground below you simply crumbles away. There's nothing beneath you, and you flail as you tumble through the air, gasping for breath as you prepare to hit the ground.

This nightmare is a common one, and a symbol of the uncertainty we sometimes face in our waking lives.

Every one of us needs something solid to hold us up. Jesus Christ Himself is our

rock and our salvation. He has proven Himself over and over again, and we can stand firm in the faith that His love never fails.

Lasting security doesn't come from a high paying job, valuable possessions, or strong personal relationships. It doesn't come from a 'perfect' family life, or even from attending a certain church.

The safety and security we crave comes in the form of salvation — God's gift of His own Son, Jesus Christ, to pay for our sins on the cross at Calvary, that we

might be forgiven our sins and spend eternity in Heaven alongside our Creator.

So whether you feel like you're going off a cliff, or you need something firm to believe in, just call on Him today!

Only then will you find the peace you seek.

Questions to Ponder

- Are you ever troubled by nightmares? What connection do you think these bad dreams have to your waking life?
- What aspects of your life make you feel secure? Is it your bank balance, the home you live in, or the state of your marriage?
- What would it look like for you to build the foundation of your life on the solid rock that is Jesus Christ? What steps can you take today, to view the strength of your relationship with the Lord, as your true sense of security?

JESUS SAVES

If you declare with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved.

—Romans 10:9-10

In all the world, there are almost countless ways people try to find God. Some people are drawn to the mystical, while others chase after the practical. Some pour themselves into doing good works, others faithfully attend church, and still others devote themselves to the study of God's Word, the Bible.

So what really works? How do we connect with our Creator?

God knew we would all look to fill the void in our spirits — the one put there when man first sinned. He also already knew what our escape route would be, the path back to Him, despite our sinful nature.

The so-called "Roman Road" is in reality a face-to-face with the Living God. Jesus Christ Himself is our aim, and our benefactor. He loved us so much that He offered Himself as a sacrifice for sin.

Our path to God is simple, really. God accepted the sacrifice and raised His precious Son from the dead. Now the saving grace of Jesus Christ is there waiting for us to accept this great and priceless gift — and all we have to do is invite Him into our heart, and into our life.

PRAYERS

Lord, we complicate things sometimes, but your salvation is a simple choice, and it is free. Blessed be your name forever and forever! Amen.

The Sinner's Prayer

Dear Lord Jesus, I know that I am a sinner, and I ask for Your forgiveness. I believe You died for my sins and rose from the dead. I turn from my sins and invite You to come into my heart and life. I want to trust and follow You as my Lord and Savior. Amen

Questions to Ponder

- Do you sometimes feel like your relationship with God is...complicated? Why or why not?
- What do you think it would feel like to live your life, knowing someone innocent had died for you? Someone did: Jesus Christ.
- Forgiveness, and eternity, has been purchased on your behalf by the very blood of God's own Son, Jesus. How does it make you want to live differently, to know about this miracle? Who can you share this Good News with?

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