

DAILY DEVOTIONS

Monday, April 19 – Caring Enough to Carry

The stranger who dwells among you shall be to you as [a]one born among you, and you shall love him as yourself; for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: Leviticus 19:34

Karen, a middle school teacher, created an activity to teach her students how to better understand one another. In “The Baggage Activity” students wrote down some of the emotional weights they were carrying. The notes were shared anonymously, giving the students insight into each other’s hardships, often with a tearful response from their peers. The classroom has since been filled with a deeper sense of mutual respect among the young teens, who now have a greater sense of empathy for one another.

Throughout the Bible, God has nudged His people to treat one another with dignity and show empathy in their interaction with others (Romans 12:15). As early in the history of Israel as the book of Leviticus, God pointed the Israelites toward empathy—especially in their dealings with foreigners. He said to “*love them as themselves*” because they too had been foreigners in Egypt and knew that hardship intimately (Leviticus 19:34).

Sometimes the burdens we carry make us feel like foreigners—alone and misunderstood—even among our peers. We don’t always have a similar experience to draw on as the Israelites did with the foreigners among them. Yet we can always treat those God puts in our paths with the respect and understanding that we, ourselves, desire. Whether a modern-day middle schooler, an Israelite, or anything in between, we honor God when we do.

PRAYER:

Father, You know the weight in my heart and You graciously unburden me as I put my trust in You. Help me to offer care and compassion toward those in my life.

Tuesday, April 20 – Joy In Praise

Yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation. Habakkuk 3:18

When the famous British writer C. S. Lewis first gave his life to Jesus, he initially resisted praising God. In fact, he called it “a stumbling block.” His struggle was “in the suggestion that God Himself demanded it.” Yet Lewis finally realized “it is in the process of being worshipped that God communicates His presence” to His people. Then we, “in perfect love with God,” find joy in Him no more separable “than the brightness a mirror receives” from the “brightness it sheds.”

The prophet Habakkuk arrived at this conclusion centuries earlier. After complaining to God about evils aimed at the people of Judah, Habakkuk came to see that praising Him leads to joy—not in what God does, but in who He is. Thus, even in a national or world crisis, God is still great. As the prophet declared: “*Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord*” (Habakkuk 3:17–18). “I will be joyful in God my Savior,” he added.

As C. S. Lewis realized, “The whole world rings with praise.” Habakkuk, likewise, surrendered to praising God always, finding rich joy in the One who “*marches on forever*” (v. 6).

PRAYER:

Father, even during hard times, stir in my heart—and on my lips—the rich spirit of joyful praise to You. Amen.

Wednesday, April 21 – God At Work

So when the centurion and those with him, who were guarding Jesus, saw the earthquake and the things that had happened, they feared greatly, saying, “Truly this was the Son of God!” Matthew 27:54

“God is crying.” Those were the words whispered by Bill Haley’s ten-year-old daughter as she stood in the rain with a group of multiethnic believers in Jesus. They had come to Virginia’s Shenandoah Valley to seek God and make sense of the legacy of racial discord in America. As they stood on the grounds where former slaves were buried, they joined hands in prayer. Then suddenly the wind began to blow, and it started to rain. As the leader called out for racial healing, the rain began to fall even harder. Those gathered believed that God was at work to bring reconciliation and forgiveness.

And so was it at Calvary—God was at work. After the crucified Jesus breathed His last, *“The earth shook, the rocks split and the tombs broke open”* (Matthew 27:51-52). Though some had denied who Jesus was, a centurion assigned to guard Him had come to a different conclusion: *“When the centurion and those with him . . . saw the earthquake and all that had happened, they were terrified, and exclaimed, ‘Surely he was the Son of God!’ ”* (v. 54).

In the death of Jesus, God was at work providing forgiveness of sin for all who believe in Him. *“God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people’s sins against them”* (2 Corinthians 5:19). And what better way to demonstrate that we’ve been forgiven by God than to extend forgiveness to each other.

PRAYER:

Father, thank You for loving the world so much that You sent Jesus so I can be forgiven. Help me to demonstrate forgiveness toward others by the way I live. Amen.

Thursday, April 22– Mercy

If your brother or sister sins against you, rebuke them; and if they repent, forgive them. Luke 17:13

Reflecting on how she forgave Manasseh, the man who killed her husband and some of her children in the Rwandan genocide, Beata said, “My forgiving is based on what Jesus did. He took the punishment for every evil act throughout all time. His cross is the place we find victory—the only place!” Manasseh had written to Beata from prison more than once, begging her—and God—for forgiveness as he detailed the regular nightmares that confronted him. At first she could extend no mercy, saying she hated him for killing her family. But then “Jesus began to deal with her in her thoughts,” and with God’s help, some two years later, she forgave him.

By forgiving, Beata followed Jesus’ instruction to His disciples to forgive those who repent. He said that even if they “*sin against you seven times in a day and seven times come back to you saying ‘I repent,’ you must forgive them*” (Luke 17:4). But to forgive can be extremely difficult, as we see by the disciples’ reaction: “Increase our faith!” (v. 5).

Beata’s faith increased as she wrestled in prayer over her inability to forgive. If, like her, we’re struggling to forgive, we can ask God through His Holy Spirit to help us to do so. As our faith increases, He helps us to forgive.

PRAYER:

Jesus, thank You for releasing me from the consequences of my sin through Your death on the cross. I give You the glory! Amen.

Friday, April 23 – Windows

You will go out in joy and be led forth in peace.

Isaiah 55:12

Near the foothills of the Himalayas, a visitor noticed a row of houses without windows. His guide explained that some of the villagers feared that demons might sneak into their homes while they slept, so they built impermeable walls. You could tell when a homeowner began to follow Jesus because he put in windows to let in the light.

A similar dynamic may take place in us, though we might not see it quite that way. We live in scary, polarizing times. Satan and his demons instigate angry divisions that split families and friends. I often feel like hiding behind my walls. But Jesus wants me to cut in a window.

Israel sought refuge in higher walls, but God said their security lay with Him. He reigns from heaven, and His word governs all (Isaiah 55:10–11). If Israel would return to Him, God would “*have mercy on them*” (v. 7) and restore them as His people to bless the world (Genesis 12:1–3). He would lift them up, ultimately leading them in a triumphal parade. Their celebration “*will be for the Lord’s renown, for an everlasting sign, that will endure forever*” (Isaiah 55:13).

Sometimes walls are necessary. Walls with windows are best. They show the world that we trust God for the future. Our fears are real. Our God is greater. Windows open us to Jesus—“*the light of the world*” (John 8:12)—and to others who need Him.

Would you say your life is a wall or windows?

PRAYER:

Father, flood my heart with the confidence of Your love. Allow the walls of my life to fall down. And in the meantime as we learn to trust you without wavering Faith, give us the strength to at least add windows. Amen.

Saturday, April 24 – Peace And Calm

For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.

Philippians 1:21

It was C. D. Martin who once said this: “No matter what may be the test, God will take care of you.”

On the night before Nicholas Ridley's execution in 1555, just hours before he was to become a martyr for his faith, his brother offered to remain with him in the prison chamber to help comfort him. But Nicholas declined the offer and replied that he intended to go to bed and sleep the same as he would on any other night of his life. Even his accusers were amazed at his peace and calm.

Ridley was undoubtedly well versed on the life of Paul. The man who took Christianity to the world wrote a letter to the Philippian church that became known as the "epistle of joy"—even though it was written from a prison cell, as he was en route to Rome to face his death.

Our lives may not be threatened for the faith we hold dear, but we are still promised a supernatural peace when we lay down our heads at night, resting in the everlasting arms of God.

PRAYER:

Father, Your gifts of grace amaze me. Help me to steep myself so deeply in the knowledge of Your promises and goodness that nothing disturbs my peace. I love You, Lord. In Jesus Name, I pray, Amen.

Sunday, April 25 – Put It In His Hands

For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.

Matthew 11:30

God tells us that He will bear our burdens, making our yoke easy. It is a promise to His children. But in order to experience His rest, we must first give our burdens over to Him. We do that through prayer, confessing that we cannot carry the weight of life without Him. He wants to bear our burdens for us and make our load light - but only with our permission.

There will be many people in our lives who will offer to carry our burdens. And while they can share in our pain and suffering - and while God often uses others as a means of His grace - people really cannot carry our heaviest burdens for us. They can help, but only Christ can lift the load.

Are you carrying a burden today that is best placed in God's hands?

PRAYER:

Father, what a blessing it is to know that Your love for me is so great that You have promised not only to lighten my load, but to lift it, bearing it for me. Thank You for Your grace and compassion. In Jesus Name, I pray, Amen.