

Devotional Guide

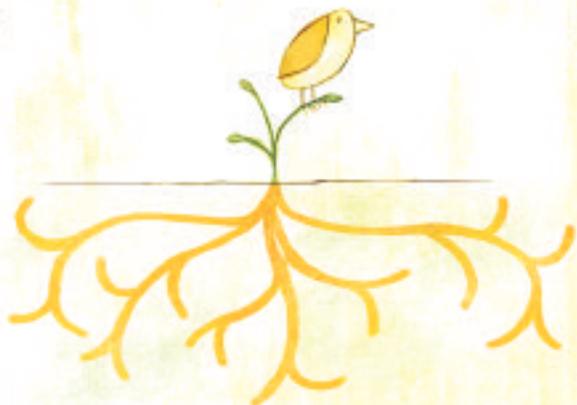
Spring 2005

YOUTH
PASTOR PERKS

PLUS



JARS OF CLAY
REDEMPTION SONGS



2005

SPRING 2005

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JARS OF CLAY



Worship is always formative – it has power to shape and mold us, and thus, what we sing really matters. Christians through the centuries have found great comfort and challenge in the rich hymns of the church, and now through this project, many modern worshippers will be able to better connect with this incredible reservoir. These hymns will expand our ideas about the Christian life and what it feels like, as well as stretch our views of God and the gospel. They are a wonderful combination of rich experience and solid doctrine, and are an opportunity for us to learn from those who have gone before us in the faith. Singing the hymns of a woman like Anne Steele, who lived in England in the 1700s, and finding that her life of suffering resonates with our experience, gives us encouragement that the kingdom of God is bigger than just our friends – it transcends the centuries. Christianity is not a fad, but God is the same yesterday, today and tomorrow. The devotions that follow were written by campus ministers with a college ministry known as RUF – Reformed University Fellowship (www.ruf.org). This is fitting because a number of the hymns in this collection are hymns that we have been using for years. As a pastor to students, I can encourage you that we have found few things as powerful in getting the gospel into the heads and hearts of our students as these hymns, and I pray you will find this CD and the devotions a helpful resource in your ministry and in your walk with Jesus.

A fellow pilgrim,

Rev. Kevin Twit, Belmont University



1

TRACK 1: "GOD BE MERCIFUL TO ME"

MAIN THEME

Because God loves to show mercy, we can and should confess our sins to him, holding nothing back.

BIBLE REFERENCE

Psalm 51:1,2,7 and 17

Generous in love – God, give grace! Huge in Mercy – Wipe out my bad record Scrub away my guilt; soak away my sins in your laundry.
God, make a fresh start in me, shape a Genesis week from the chaos of my life.
Don't throw me out with the trash, or fail to breathe holiness in me.
I learned God-Worship when my pride was shattered
Heart shattered lives ready for love don't for a moment escape God's notice.

FOCUS LYRICS

God be merciful to me
on thy grace I rest my plea
Plenteous in compassion now
Blot out my transgressions now

Wash me make me pure within
cleanse Oh, cleanse me from my sin

Gracious God my heart renew
Make my spirit right and true
Thou salvations joy impart
Steadfast make thy willing heart
Steadfast make thy willing heart

Broken humbled to the dust
By thy wrath and judgment just
Let my contrite heart rejoice
And in gladness hear thy voice

INTRODUCTION

Ask your students to share stories from times they were caught red-handed doing or saying something wrong. Get them to describe the feeling, the knots in the stomach, the desire to crawl and hide, and the desperate prayers that everything would go away. Then ask them if they have ever felt that way before God. What do they say when they stand before God, caught, guilty with no excuse?

MAIN POINT

When you stand guilty before God, the last thing in the world you want to do is in fact the only thing you can do. You confess that you are wrong and beg for mercy. Surprisingly and sweetly, when we do the last thing we want, we receive the last thing we expect: we receive his mercy.

Notice the basis of our request. When we confess, we ask God to be merciful, because he is merciful. David, who wrote the Psalm, could have asked for grace because of all the great things he had done. Be merciful to me because I killed Goliath, brought the Ark back to Jerusalem, defeated your enemies and protected your people. But he knows if he begins to compare his successes with his sins, he will lose woefully. Instead, he simply appeals to God's mercy: God be merciful to me on thy grace I rest my plea.

Next, see that our confession does not only focus on the external acts. We must realize that we have done bad things because we are bad people. I am evil born in sin. As desperately as we want to find an excuse, we have none. Once we realize that we are the problem, then we stop asking for one more chance and begin to ask for a new heart, to be remade completely and to be held up from future failure: Gracious God my heart renew, Make my spirit right and true.

Finally, what does God require of us before he answers this prayer? The only requirement of God is a broken heart: "I learned God-Worship when my pride was shattered. Heart shattered lives ready for love don't for a moment escape God's notice." (vs. 17) As long as we hold on to our own works, intentions, and high opinions of ourselves, God's mercy has no place in our lives. But, when we give up on ourselves, then we find God pleased to shower upon us forgiveness and restore our joy.

CONCLUSION

Our minds can not understand and respond to God's Grace all at once. As we recognize our sin, we begin to see how much we need a savior. Then, as we confess and throw ourselves upon God's grace, we begin to see the depth and width of His love for us in Christ.



2

TRACK 2: “I NEED THEE EVERY HOUR”

MAIN THEME

Instead of independence, we should pursue dependence on God.

BIBLE REFERENCE

Philippians 4:19 (ESV)

And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.

John 14-16

Apart from me you can do nothing...

FOCUS LYRICS

I need thee every hour, most gracious Lord
No tender voice like thine can peace afford
I need thee every hour, stay thou nearby
Temptations lose their power, when thou art nigh
I need thee, I need thee, I need thee every hour

INTRODUCTION

Ask your students what they think they need. Have them list their needs.

Ask them what they do when they don't have what they need. Do they ask for help? When was a time when they asked for help or when they helped someone who needed it?

MAIN POINT

The United States of America was founded based on a document we call the Declaration of Independence. We are often taught to become independent, and this perceived independence becomes a big thing in our lives. My children often say “I can do it myself.” Learning to do things “myself” – tying shoes, getting dressed, driving to school – these all become a part of who we are. And that's great.

But the Bible talks more often about dependence, that we need God in order to do anything, and that we aren't nearly as independent as we think. What might a personal or group Declaration of Dependence on God look like?

If we can agree that we must depend on God, what needs might he be able to meet for us? Often when we read Philippians 4:19, we think of physical needs and pray that way – a test tomorrow, a relationship problem, a new car. We can pray for those things, but we also should think of other needs we have. Peace with God, wholeness, forgiveness, to be loved, understood and accepted. Only God can fully and truly meet these needs. He supplies these needs for us through Jesus Christ and his perfect life and atoning sacrifice for us.

CONCLUSION

We need things we forget about. We don't need a new computer game, but we do need to be reconciled with God. We don't need a boyfriend or girlfriend, but we do need forgiveness. Only Jesus can provide our true needs for us, and we get distracted from these. Our independent mindset gets in the way of trusting in and relying on Christ alone for the provision of our right relationship with God.

As C.H. Spurgeon once said, “I have a great need for God. I have a great God for my need.”

Devotional by Rev. Doug Serven, University of Oklahoma



3

TRACK 3: "GOD WILL LIFT UP YOUR HEAD"

MAIN THEME

God sympathizes with our distress in hardship, so we can trust his control of our afflictions.

BIBLE REFERENCE

Psalm 56:8

You've kept track of my every toss and turn
through the sleepless nights,
Each tear entered in your ledger,
each ache written in your book.

Romans 8:22-28

22 All around us we observe a pregnant creation. The difficult times of pain throughout the world are simply birth pangs. But it's not only around us; it's within us. The Spirit of God is arousing us within. We're also feeling the birth pangs. 23 These sterile and barren bodies of ours are yearning for full deliverance. 24 That is why waiting does not diminish us, any more than waiting diminishes a pregnant mother. We are enlarged in the waiting. We, of course, don't see what is enlarging us. 25 But the longer we wait, the larger we become, and the more joyful our expectancy.

26 Meanwhile, the moment we get tired in the waiting, God's Spirit is right alongside helping us along. If we don't know how or what to pray, it doesn't matter. He does our praying in and for us, making prayer out of our wordless sighs, our aching groans. 27 He knows us far better than we know ourselves, knows our pregnant condition, and keeps us present before God. 28 That's why we can be so sure that every detail in our lives of love for God is worked into something good.

FOCUS LYRICS:

God "hears your sighs and counts your tears." He controls everything "to choose and to command" all events in your life His sympathy and sovereignty add up to this:

"He gently clears the way" through your hardships. God cares and controls everything, so a suffering believer can confidently sing "God will lift up your head."

INTRODUCTION

Guide the kids in imagining three things: 1) you are a 21 year old woman 2) you know nothing about pregnancy and the birth of children, 3) over about three weeks you begin to feel nauseous every morning, and then for seven months your abdomen swells till for weeks you can't sleep well.

Then have the group answer three questions: 1) What would you think during those 8 months? 2) What would you expect in coming months? 3) If someone said, "don't worry, God is in control," what would you say?

MAIN POINT

The hardships in our life are like being pregnant—they can swell to dominating discomfort that seems to promise only a horrible outcome. BUT, because God controls all things and will not waver from achieving the perfection that Jesus bought for believers, we have good reason to wait (and wait, and wait, and wait) for him to bring about absolutely new and perfect life from our present distress.

God knows that the waiting is very hard. Psalm 56:8 gives a glimpse of our reason for confidence: God cares about every tear. Romans 8 deepens our confidence. The reason "we can be so sure that every detail in our lives of love for God is worked into something good" is the unceasing work of the Holy Spirit for believers. He prays for us—but not just 'pious prayers' as if our suffering doesn't matter. The Holy Spirit prays for us with the same groans and longing that fill our hearts. He thinks our distress is RIGHT, and he prays for God to use that distress to give birth to our being like Jesus and rejoicing like Jesus in the presence of God.

CONCLUSION

What are the "swelling" hardships in your life? What is the Spirit groaning about and praying to achieve in your life? What will you do if you are convinced that this problem isn't a terminal illness but actually God's way of bringing new life into your heart? Why should you take confidence from the Spirit's praying for you?

Background information on Paul Gerhardt (the author of this hymn text)

Gerhardt was a Lutheran pastor who lived in Germany in the 1600s (dying in 1676). He suffered greatly during his life, at one point being barred by the government from preaching because he refused to compromise his convictions about what the Bible taught. During this period the government even forbade him from teaching private Bible studies in his house, and then his wife and one of his sons died during the same time of affliction – three other sons had already died and thus he was left with only one 6 year old son. He said at this time, "This is only a small affliction, but I am also willing and ready to seal with my blood the evangelical truth, and, like my namesake, St. Paul, to offer my neck to the sword." Finally, in 1669 he was allowed to pastor a church again where he ministered faithfully until his death in 1676.

This hymn (and many of his other hymns) was greatly loved by the Moravians (a German Christian group from the 1700s famous for their missionary zeal). John Wesley translated the hymn into English and there is a great story about how he came to know the Moravians. Before Wesley was even converted, and during the period in his life when he was trying to do religious things to earn God's love (as he himself later conceded), he and Charles were appointed to minister in Georgia.

In those days (the mid 1700s), sea travel was a dangerous thing and the ship was caught in a hurricane off the coast of Georgia. The masts were shattered and even the experienced sailors were screaming in terror, but the Moravians were completely calm and spent the time singing hymns to God. Wesley was struck by their faith – and convicted by his own lack of faith and set himself to learning German to be able to learn from the Moravians. It was later (back in London) that God used the Moravians to bring both John and Charles Wesley to faith in Christ. The Moravians (who were famous for doing things like getting themselves intentionally sold into slavery to preach the gospel to the slaves) found Gerhardt's hymns of trusting God in the midst of suffering a great encouragement.



4

TRACK 4: "I'LL FLY AWAY"

MAIN THEME

Nothing can compare to the glories that God is preparing for His people in heaven.

BIBLE REFERENCE

2 Corinthians 4:16-5:5 (Focus is on verses in bold)

So we're not giving up. How could we! Even though on the outside it often looks like things are falling apart on us, on the inside, where God is making new life, not a day goes by without his unfolding grace. These hard times are small potatoes compared to the coming good times, the lavish celebration prepared for us. There's far more here than meets the eye. The things we see now are here today, gone tomorrow. But the things we can't see now will last forever.

For instance, we know that when these bodies of ours are taken down like tents and folded away, they will be replaced by resurrection bodies in heaven - God-made, not handmade - and we'll never have to relocate our "tents" again. Sometimes we can hardly wait to move - and so we cry out in frustration. Compared to what's coming, living conditions around here seem like a stopover in an unfurnished shack, and we're tired of it! We've been given a glimpse of the real thing, our true home, our resurrection bodies! The Spirit of God whets our appetite by giving us a taste of what's ahead. He puts a little of heaven in our hearts so that we'll never settle for less.

FOCUS LYRICS

Just a few more weary days and then, I'll fly away
To a land where joy will never end, I'll fly away
I'll fly away oh glory, I'll fly away
When I die hallelujah by and by
I'll fly away

INTRODUCTION

What is your favorite thing in this life? Why? What is your least favorite thing in life? Why? What if you found out you were losing these things? Would you be happy? Sad? Why? The point is to set the stage to describe that what God has in store for his people is both a hope in the midst of great sorrow and a joy that surpasses even our greatest delight.

THE MAIN POINT

There are times in our lives when things happen to wake us up to the painfulness of reality, to knife through our numbness and unplug us from our consumer culture. Sometimes our loved ones get sick or die. Sometimes tragedy strikes an innocent friend. Sometimes we're extraordinarily convicted of our own dark sinfulness. Sometimes we are depressed and overwhelmed by the drudgery of relationships, work, school or life in general. In the face of such trial, we could collapse in despair or fear.

But the Apostle Paul would have us look past the world's temporary trials (and pleasures) to see clearly the meaning of its true nature. It is temporary, transient, fragile, shallow, and broken compared to the glorious world that God is preparing for His people. Rather than be consumed by this world, Paul saw it as a reminder of the greater joy of heaven's glory. Here, we have a sense that something isn't quite right. There, God will restore all that has gone wrong. He will reverse the pain of sin and death. He will make all things new. This present world is boring by comparison.

Picking cotton under the blazing hot sun in 1929, Albert Brumley started "dreaming of flying away from that cotton field" to something far better and wrote "I'll Fly Away." Like Paul, he knew only one place where "joy will never end," where not even death can enter in—and this world wasn't it. Brumley prompts us, like Paul, to face all of life – both its pleasures and brokenness – with the certain reminder that God is preparing to take us to a far better land. The greatest hardship or trial—even the grave itself—cannot keep us from reaching our glorious inheritance. Though this world may feel like a prison with "cold shackles" on our feet, the souls of believers will not rot in the grave. They will, when our mortal flesh collapses, fly like lightning to be united with our great God and King in "a land where joy will never end!"

How can we be so certain? Glory is God-made, not handmade. He does the work; He cleanses our souls; He makes it possible. This world is not our home; our home is with Christ. May we never settle for less.

CONCLUSION

Take some time to contemplate the mystery of eternity with Christ. Make a list of the five things you love most about your life. Glory is far better, far more exciting, far more fulfilling. Do you believe it could be true? If it is, how will what you do now change? Should even your list change? Make a list of the five things you hate most about your life. God is at work redeeming even these things. Do you believe it could be true? If it is, how will that hope change your present life?



5

TRACK 5: "NOTHING BUT THE BLOOD"

MAIN THEME

Jesus' blood pays the price for our sin.

BIBLE REFERENCE

Hebrews 9:19-22 (The Message)

19 After Moses had read out all the terms of the plan of the law--God's "will"--he took the blood of sacrificed animals and, in a solemn ritual, sprinkled the document and the people who were its beneficiaries. 20 And then he attested its validity with the words, "This is the blood of the covenant commanded by God." 21 He did the same thing with the place of worship and its furniture. 22 Moses said to the people, "This is the blood of the covenant God has established with you." Practically everything in a will hinges on a death. That's why blood, the evidence of death, is used so much in our tradition, especially regarding forgiveness of sins.

FOCUS ON LYRICS

What can wash away my sin?
Nothing can for sin atone
Not of good that I have done
This is all my hope and peace
This is all my righteousness
Nothing but the blood of Jesus

OPENING QUESTION

How do you respond to failure? What action(s) do you take after you have failed at something? (Many people exercise, some call a friend, others clean up the house, etc., in an attempt to 'wash away sin/guilt'.)

INTRODUCTION

How would you answer the question, "what can wash away my sin?" This is obviously not a question that we ask each other very often. Instead, we may ask the question, "did your team win the game?" or "what grade did you make on the test?" Through our actions we often think that we can eliminate our guilt and faults by success. Our culture is driven by results and success, so we are treated with more love and respect when we are successful. This causes us to strive to attain success in order to be loved. However, Jesus' blood is shed for us; therefore we are loved by God, regardless of our accomplishments.

MAIN POINTS

If we are successful in life, can we wash away our sin? No, we cannot wash away our own sin under any circumstances. "Our spiritual problem is not only failing to obey God, but also relying on our obedience to make us fully acceptable to God, ourselves, and others...to be our own 'savior' through our performance and achievement." This hymn also expresses that sin cannot be paid for by our good works: "Nothing can for sin atone, not of good that I have done." So we need help.

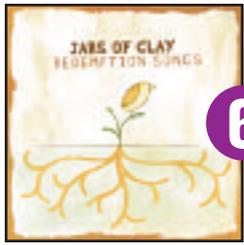
The book of Hebrews helps us understand what can wash away our sin: 19After Moses had read out all the terms of the plan of the law--God's "will"--he took the blood of sacrificed animals and, in a solemn ritual, sprinkled the document and the people who were its beneficiaries. 20And then he attested its validity with the words, "This is the blood of the covenant commanded by God." 21He did the same thing with the place of worship and its furniture.

Why did Moses sprinkle blood on everything? Moses even used blood to purify the articles used for worship so they would be pleasing to the Lord. He also sprinkled the people with blood so they would also be acceptable to God. The blood cleansed what man's sin had made impure, as verse 22 goes on to say in a different translation, "under the law almost everything is purified with blood" (NIV).

Blood was used by the priests in the Old Testament to purify, because it represented the blood of the 'lamb' of God, the Messiah to come (Lev. 14:25, Isaiah 53:7). Moses knew that God was going to send a 'sacrificial lamb' to take away the sin of the people and to redeem all things, even worship. Just as we believe that Jesus has already come, in the Old Testament they believed that the Messiah, promised by God, preached by the prophets, was going to come and redeem all things, even articles used in worship. This is what the blood of Jesus does, it purifies, as stated in verse 22: "...that's why blood, the evidence of death, is used so much in our tradition, especially regarding forgiveness of sins."

CONCLUSION

Now through Jesus shedding his blood for His people, there is complete forgiveness. God's children have been covered by the blood of Jesus and are no longer guilty for sin before the Father. Jesus said to his disciples on the night he was going to die, "This is my blood, God's new covenant poured out for many people for the forgiveness of sins." Jesus' blood was shed in order to forgive us and purify us from our sin, so that we can have peace with God. We do not have to pay for our sins, Jesus paid for all of them, past, present, and future. We are forgiven because of His work and success. What can wash away your sin? Nothing but the blood of Jesus!



6

TRACK 6: “LET US LOVE AND SING AND WONDER”

MAIN THEME

Because God is holy and awesome, his wondrous love for us is all the more amazing. We're supposed to pay attention to this.

BIBLE REFERENCE

Exodus 19:14-20

On the third day at daybreak, there were loud claps of thunder, flashes of lightning, a thick cloud covering the mountain, and an ear-splitting trumpet blast. Everyone in the camp shuddered in fear.

Moses led the people out of the camp to meet God. They stood at attention at the base of the mountain.

Mount Sinai was all smoke because God had come down on it as fire. Smoke poured from it like smoke from a furnace. The whole mountain shuddered in huge spasms. The trumpet blasts grew louder and louder. Moses spoke and God answered in thunder. God descended to the peak of Mount Sinai. God called Moses up to the peak and Moses climbed up.

FOCUS LYRICS

Let us love and sing and wonder. Let us praise the Savior's name.

He has hushed the law's loud thunder. He has quenched Mt. Sinai's flame.

Let us love the Lord who bought us, pitied us when enemies.

Caught us by his grace and bought us, gave us ears and gave us eyes.

He has washed us with his blood. He presents our souls to God.

INTRODUCTION

Ask your students to share stories about things they've heard or seen that are “awesome.” Try to vary the responses. For instance, you might recall those old Powerade commercials where the lady jumps over a fifteen foot gap, or a woman catches a ball in the stands and throws a strike to home plate, or LeBron James makes jump shots from across the court. Share some from your own life (seeing Mark McGwire hit home run #62, a baby being delivered, etc.). What makes things awesome?

You may also ask them to reflect on their feelings about the 10 Commandments. Are these good laws? Why do we have them? Why don't people want to follow them? What authority do they have in our life? Did Jesus obey these?

MAIN POINT

God has delivered his people out of the bondage of slavery in Egypt. Read Exodus 20:1-2. He is about to give them the law, the way to live in love because of this relationship to their redemptive God (Exodus 20:3-17). At the end of this passage, there are more thunder, lightning and trumpets, and the people are afraid.

What is going on here? What would your response be if you were there?

God is saying, “Pay Attention! This is the Bible I'm giving to you. I'm so much more alive and powerful than you think. I could destroy any of you in a second.” That sort of display of power and awesome might should get our attention. Why does He not unleash it upon us? Because He poured it out on our representative.

Jesus got all of the wrath that we deserve. Read Matthew 27:51-54. He has hushed the law's loud thunder; he has quenched Mt. Sinai's flame. Jesus fulfilled all of these laws and then died on the cross when he hadn't done anything wrong. Christians break these laws and get to live even though we deserve to die. This switch is what we call “Double Imputation.” My life to him. His life to me.

CONCLUSION

That is awesome. God's wrath was poured out on Jesus, allowing me the freedom to love God. Instead of obeying the law in order to earn God's favor, I am now able to obey the law because I love God and want to please him. Mt. Sinai's flames cannot consume me, because Jesus Christ already took all the heat due to me. So now I can love him with all my heart, soul, mind and strength and love my neighbor as myself – after all, that's what the 10 Commandments are all about.

Devotional by Doug Serven, University of Oklahoma



TRACK 7: “OH, COME AND MOURN WITH ME AWHILE (OUR LORD IS CRUCIFIED)”

MAIN THEME

In the Cross of Christ we see that we have participated in the greatest injustice ever, and yet, in that we see the greatest measure of God's love and mercy.

BIBLE REFERENCE

Luke 23:34

Jesus prayed, " Father, forgive them; they don't know what they're doing."

Matthew 27:45-46

From noon to three, the whole earth was dark. Around mid-afternoon Jesus groaned out of the depths, crying loudly, "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?" which means, "My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?"

John 19:30

After he took the wine, Jesus said, "It's done . . . complete." Bowing his head, he offered up his spirit.

FOCUS LYRICS

Oh come and mourn with me awhile
Oh come near to the saviors side
Oh come together let us mourn
Jesus our Lord is crucified

Seven times He spoke
Seven words of love
And all three hours His silence cried
For mercy on the souls of men
Jesus our Lord is crucified

Oh love of God, Oh sin of man
In this dread act your strength is tried
And victory remains with love
Jesus our Lord is crucified

INTRODUCTION

Ask your students to share stories from times they were treated unfairly. You won't have to wait long! Ask them to describe how they felt. Did it make them angry? Next ask about when they treated others unfairly. Response will be slower. Did they feel bad about that? For how long? Get them to see that anger and remorse are correct responses to injustice.

MAIN POINT

Injustice is all around us. We see people and organizations get away with all manner of evil. Yet we see others suffer for no reason. We are right to be upset about that. When we ourselves take part in treating others unfairly we are right to feel bad about that.

In this hymn Frederick Faber has beautifully captured a part of Christian experience that is often ignored – that we should mourn over the greatest injustice ever: Jesus Christ, who knew no sin, shamefully tortured and executed because of the sin of man – yes, even our sin!

Yet in the midst of the greatest injustice, we also see the greatest demonstration of love. Jesus endures the suffering and shame "for mercy on the souls of men." Faber is leading us to see the love and mercy of God through a vale of tears and feelings of real anger and remorse for the injustice of it all. To overlook this is to tread dangerously near a casual, flippant view of the gospel.

Faber makes reference to the last seven sayings of Jesus: "Seven times He spoke seven words of love." These can be found in the Gospels (Luke 23:34, Luke 23:43, John 19:26-27, Mark 15:34, John 19:28, John 19:30, Luke 23:46) and they each reflect what Faber writes: "Oh love of God, Oh sin of man, in this dread act your strength is tried."

They are each descriptions of suffering and love for those who put him on the cross. The realization of this absolute injustice is found as we conclude the hymn: "And victory remains with love, Jesus our Lord is crucified."

CONCLUSION

The reality of the gospel leads us to respond in many good and proper ways: love, gratitude, joy, relief and contentment among them. Among those responses should also be real sorrow and mourning for the great injustice of the Cross that we participated in, which leads us to a deeper understanding of the love of God.



8

TRACK 8: "HIDING PLACE"

MAIN THEME

While the experience of remaining sin might burden the souls of Christians, faith calls the believer to hide under the shelter of Christ's grace.

BIBLE REFERENCE

Romans 7:21-25

It happens so regularly that it's predictable. The moment I decide to do good, sin is there to trip me up. I truly delight in God's commands, but it's pretty obvious that not all of me joins in that delight. Parts of me covertly rebel, and just when I least expect it, they take charge. I've tried everything and nothing helps. I'm at the end of my rope. Is there no one who can do anything for me? Isn't that the real question? The answer, thank God, is that Jesus Christ can and does.

2 Corinthians 12:7-9

Because of the extravagance of those revelations, and so I wouldn't get a big head, I was given the gift of a handicap to keep me in constant touch with my limitations. Satan's angel did his best to get me down; what he in fact did was push me to my knees. No danger then of walking around high and mighty! At first, I didn't think of it as a gift, and begged God to remove it. Three times I did that, and then he told me, 'My grace is enough; it's all you need. My strength comes into its own in your weakness.'

FOCUS LYRICS

Amidst the sorrows of the way
Lord Jesus teach my soul to pray
Let me taste thy special grace
And run to Christ, my hiding place

INTRODUCTION

Depending on what sort of natural disasters your region might be prone, ask your students what they would do in a hurricane, tornado, or earthquake. The storm will bring great destruction to property and even to one's own life. What do they do? Most would seek a shelter, but what sort of shelter? Describe it. The point is for them to express their desire for a hiding place that will protect them. Such is the Gospel's function in the Christian's struggle against sin.

THE MAIN POINT

Trusting in the Gospel of Jesus Christ is not simply a one-time act, but a life-long exercise of faith. Both the Bible and Christian experience testify that even the most faithful believers struggle mightily against lingering sin. Writing to the early church, the apostle Paul describes well his own wrestling against sin. To the Romans, he describes sin as "there to trip me up"; to the Corinthians, he says, "Satan's angel did his best to get me down."

Yet despite his struggles, in his next breath Paul clings to his faith in the Gospel of grace. "Is there no one who can do anything for me?" he writes to the Romans. The answer, thank God, is that Jesus Christ can and does, and likewise to the Corinthians he rests confidently in the Lord's promise to him: "My grace is enough; it's all you need." Through these passages we see that faith calls the Christian to believe the hope of the Gospel and to trust that Jesus is the believer's righteous hiding place in the struggle against sin.

Certainly the 19th century hymn writer, Daniel Herbert, could relate to the apostle's own struggle. When he confesses, "So prone to act the rebel's part" and "Sometimes I take the tempter's part", in his own voice he is confessing precisely Paul's frustrations. Still, like the apostle, through faith Herbert rests confidently in the Gospel, saying, "Let me taste thy special grace, and run to Christ, my hiding place." As Christians, along with Herbert, may we so plead for such pardoning grace, finding in Jesus a hiding place of righteousness for repentant sinners.

CONCLUSION

"Even as a Christian, why do I still sin?" It's the sort of question that nags every Christian at one time or another. Consider the question as a group. Allow Romans 7, 2 Corinthians 12, as well as passages like Psalm 51, to point the discussion in a direction that is biblically informed.

Devotional by JR Foster, Virginia Tech



9

TRACK 9: "JESUS I LIFT MY EYES"

MAIN THEME

God's Word is trustworthy and it opens our eyes to see our sin and our Savior.

BIBLE REFERENCE

Hebrews 4:12 - 16

God means what he says. What he says goes. His powerful Word is sharp as a surgeon's scalpel, cutting through everything, whether doubt or defense, laying us open to listen and obey. 13 Nothing and no one is impervious to God's Word. We can't get away from it - no matter what. 14 Now that we know what we have - Jesus, this great High Priest with ready access to God - let's not let it slip through our fingers. 15 We don't have a priest who is out of touch with our reality. He's been through weakness and testing, experienced it all - all but the sin. 16 So let's walk right up to him and get what he is so ready to give. Take the mercy, accept the help.

FOCUS LYRICS

When sins and fears prevailing rise, And fainting hope almost expires
Jesus to thee I lift my eyes, To thee I breathe my soul's desires

Are you not mine, my living Lord, And can my hope my comfort die?
Fixed on the everlasting word, That word which built the earth and sky

Jesus, I lift my eyes, To thee I breathe my soul's desires
Jesus, I lift my eyes, To thee I lift my eyes

INTRODUCTION

Ask the students to share about when they were going through a hard time and had someone come alongside and comfort them. Ask them what it was about the person that enabled them to be of help. Ask, "Why is it important to have someone who can relate to what we are going through when we are suffering?" And then ask, "Is Jesus someone who can relate to our suffering? Why or why not?"

MAIN POINT

Jesus is One who can relate to our suffering. He is not "out of touch with our reality." Why do we resist His help? Sometimes we don't want help because it makes us feel weak - we would rather complain than run to Jesus. Most people that try to help us when we are going through a tough time fall into one of two categories. Many are feelers, the kind of people who can weep with those who weep. But often these people have a hard time speaking the truth in love that we need to hear. Other people tend to be more thinkers. They can speak truth that we need but often without the sensitivity required for us to accept it. But for true comfort we need both - tears and truth!

And in Jesus we have both! Jesus is One who weeps with us and who has felt the sorrows we feel. But He is One who does more than empathize - He dealt with our sin and guilt by dying in our place. When we are suffering, one thing that can make the suffering even worse is to wonder if it is a result of God's anger toward us. But if we are Christians, we can be confident that God is not angry with us because we have Jesus, our Merciful High Priest who lived and died in our place! While we may wonder why we are suffering, we can be confident that it is not because we are being punished for our sin - Jesus took all the punishment our sin deserved. Whatever God sends into our lives is an expression of His Fatherly love (see Hebrews 12.)

CONCLUSION

Anne Steele, the 18th century writer of this hymn text, was one who learned this difficult lesson. When she was 18, on the day before her wedding, her fiancé drowned. She never did marry, but soon fell ill and lived 50 years as an invalid. But what sustained her in the midst of this suffering was the confidence that Jesus had lived and died in her place and thus would never forsake her. In fact, this confidence is what gives her the freedom to really cry out to God in her suffering and confusion. The God Anne knew is the God we all have. We can learn from her about the faithfulness of Jesus and use her words to utter our own cries to Him.

Devotional by Kevin Twit, Belmont University



10

TRACK 10: "IT IS WELL WELL WITH MY SOUL"

MAIN THEME

Even in all our troubles, the Christian can have this confidence, that nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.

BIBLE REFERENCE

Romans 8:29-39

God knew what he was doing from the very beginning. He decided from the outset to shape the lives of those who love him along the same lines as the life of his Son. The Son stands first in the line of humanity he restored. We see the original and intended shape of our lives there in him. After God made that decision of what his children should be like, He followed it up by calling people by name. After he called them by name, he set them on a solid basis with himself. And then, after getting them established, he stayed with them to the end, gloriously completing what he had begun.

So, what do you think? With God on our side like this, how can we lose? If God didn't hesitate to put everything on the line for us, embracing our condition and exposing himself to the worst by sending his own Son, is there anything else he wouldn't gladly and freely do for us? Do you think anyone is going to be able to drive a wedge between us and Christ's love for us? There is no way! Not trouble, not hard times, not hatred, not hunger, not homelessness, not bullying threats, not backstabbing, not even the worst sins listed in Scripture. None of this fazes us because Jesus loves us.

I'm absolutely convinced that nothing - nothing living or dead, angelic or demonic, today or tomorrow, high or low, thinkable or unthinkable - absolutely nothing can get between us and God's love because of the way that Jesus our Master has embraced us.

FOCUS LYRICS

Though the devil will ruin Though trials may come Let this blessed assurance control That Christ has regarded my helpless estate
And He shed His own blood for my soul My sin, O the bliss, of this glorious thought! My sin not in part but in whole
Is nailed to the cross and I bare it no more Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, o my soul! And Lord haste the day when my faith shall be sight
And the clouds be rolled back as a scroll The trump shall resound and the Lord shall descend
Even so, it is well with my soul

INTRODUCTION

Ask the students if they think that believers who face afflictions and sufferings in this life are not Christians and that God is against them. For some people, trouble is God's reminder that He is against them. But for the Christian, God's promise is that He is for us and not against us. That doesn't mean we don't face trials. Those who teach that the Christian life is all triumph, all harmony of circumstance, all health and ease, without difficulty and affliction preach a false gospel message. There are real troubles and sorrows we face, and belonging to Jesus does not take them all way - not yet! What we have from God that helps us along are his promises.

What are some of the kinds of problems Christians have in this life? Tell the story of the author of this hymn, Horatio Spafford. Spafford was a successful lawyer in Chicago who had many investments in real estate. In 1871, the famous Chicago fire swept most of his investments away. Needing rest, he planned a trip to Jerusalem for his whole family, but at the last minute had to remain behind to clear up a business deal. He put his wife and four small girls on a ship in New York bound for Europe, and planned to join them soon. The ship was struck by another, sunk in twelve minutes, and only his wife survived. She sent a telegram from Europe with the words, "Saved alone." Broken hearted, Spafford sailed to meet his wife. As his ship passed the location of the sunken ship where his daughters perished, the captain pointed this out to him. In response, he wrote this hymn on that voyage: "Though sorrows like sea billows roll, whatever my lot, you have taught me to say, it is well, it is well, with my soul."

Ask the students to be thinking about examples of trials they know of in their own lives or lives of others. Tell your own story of trials and troubles you have endured, and be sure to point out how God has used them in your Christian growth.

MAIN POINT

It can be well with my soul, even when all is not well with my world. Everything can be crashing in on me, and yet I can have peace. Why? Because I know that God is so supremely in charge of the world that all the things that happen to Christians are ordered in such a way that they serve our good. Why do we know that? Because of God's promises. What promises? Look at what Paul says.

Promise #1: God works all things together for good, for those who love God. Now I don't know about you, but I tend to think what is good for me is what brings me the most pleasure, comfort, happiness, and ease. But what God thinks is my good is what makes me more like Jesus. And that's His goal with me, to make me like His Son. Trials shape me.

Promise #2: God has proved his love for me in the death of His Son. Christ has regarded my helpless estate and has shed his own blood for my soul. Jesus loves me. And my Father does too. He did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all. Jesus didn't win the Father's love for me, Jesus came because of the Father's love for me. That Jesus faced the worst trial, for me, in my place, proves God's love to me.

Promise #3: Because Jesus has taken all my sin away, God is for me and not against me. That means my trials are not His judicial punishment for my sin, since Jesus has already been punished for them. God is for me, for my transformation, in sending trials my way.

Promise #4: Nothing in my future can separate me from the love of God. Heaven is coming, Jesus is returning, and my body will rise from the grave, immortal, never again to experience pain or decay. I will see Jesus face to face and be made like him in perfection forever. And I look forward to this with the anticipation that all my sufferings will end. And that between here and there, no trial, suffering, affliction, persecution, or poverty can get in the way.

CONCLUSION

Paul ends by saying that no one and nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus, because of the way Jesus has already embraced us who believe. In these Gospel promises, God has given us hope in affliction. He has guaranteed our destiny beyond affliction. And on these promises we must prepare ourselves before we face affliction.



11

TRACK 11: “ON JORDAN’S STORMY BANKS”

MAIN THEME

The gospel does two things for every one who comes to Jesus in repentance and faith – it pulls God’s people together to receive grace and it propels them outwards to be bearers of grace in the midst of an ungracious, unjust world. Jesus sends his disciples out not only as those to whom he is deeply committed but also as those whom he has loved dearly by washing their feet from the posture of a servant. We must address and relieve the effects of the sin in the world around us, or our “religion” becomes self-serving and irrelevant in eyes of the watching world.

BIBLE REFERENCE

James 1: 26-27; John 13: 34-35; Matthew 18: 21-35

FOCUS LYRICS

We will work with each other we will work side by side
We will work with each other we will work side by side
And we’ll guard each man’s dignity and save each man’s pride
And they’ll know we are Christians by our love, by our love
Yeah, they’ll know we are Christians by our love.

INTRODUCTION

Have your students complete this sentence: “I knew that she was a Christian because . . .” This can open up a discussion of what the distinctive and distinguishing marks of Christians are. Is it their power in politics (control and might)? Is it their profession (lip service, t-shirts, musical tastes, church attendance)? Is it their peacefulness (seem happy and positive)? Is it their pleasure (we can have as much fun as non-Christians in our subculture)? Is it their persuasion (superior arguments, logic, theology)? How do you really know if someone is a Christian? Is it just his words? Is it just his deeds? Is it a proportionate mixture of the two? Is it always conjecture and speculation?

MAIN POINT

James writes to those who fashion themselves to be Christians, “Anyone who sets himself up as “religious” by talking a good game is self-deceived. This kind of religion is hot air and only hot air. Real religion, the kind that passes muster before God the Father is this: Reach out to the homeless and loveless in their plight, and guard against corruption from the godless world.”

The watching world will “know that we are Christians by our love, by our love, they will know that we are Christians by our love.” Love is a fuzzy word and often slippery in application. We so easily confuse it with sentimental, sappy, subjective feelings that are either trumped up or just an involuntary response to people or circumstances.

How do you get beyond the fuzziness and slippery quality of love? How does the Bible get beyond the fuzziness of love? It defines love primarily as an action with feelings that follow. In Ephesians 5, Paul describes Jesus as loving the church, his bride, not because she is his type, not because she is attractive and alluring, but to make her attractive and alluring. Jesus loves the church in action to make her beautiful and able to love the world with the same sort of concrete, intentional, and sacrificial actions.

Our response, as those who claim to be religious, is to engage the brokenness and injustice of the world with love (real words and real deeds). As we get our hands dirty in the messiness of people’s lives who are bruised and broken by sin and injustice, we will see our own deep woundedness and need of grace all the more clearly. We will never outgrow our need of grace and never overdraw Christ’s supply. Therefore, we can move out into the world around us with confidence that God is at work in us and through us to restore this world from the effects of sin as far as the curse is found.

For an authentic example of folks taking religion seriously according to James’ insight and responding to God’s grace operative in their lives, find out more about the Bloodwater Mission (www.bloodwatermission.org) – a relief agency founded by Jars of Clay to put hands and feet and faces to their faith and address the dire need for clean blood and clean water in the country of Africa.

CONCLUSION

Matthew 18: 21-35 shows us that mercy received always translates into mercy given away – or as James tells us – it is just self-deception and hot air.

How can you as a person and your church as a whole move beyond self-deception and hot air? What are the real needs in your family, church, school, and town? What are particular ways in which, as a response to and empowered by God’s grace, you can “reach out to the homeless and loveless in their plight” and thereby “guard each man’s dignity and save each man’s pride”?



12

TRACK 12: “THOU LOVELY SOURCE OF TRUE DELIGHT”

MAIN THEME

Having our heart captured by Christ's beauty is the key to spiritual transformation and growth.

BIBLE REFERENCE

2 Corinthians 3:18b

And so we are transfigured much like the Messiah, our lives gradually becoming brighter and more beautiful as God enters our lives and we become like him.

1 Corinthians 2:1-2

You'll remember, friends, that when I first came to you to let you in on God's master stroke, I didn't try to impress you with polished speeches and the latest philosophy. I deliberately kept it plain and simple: first Jesus and who he is; then Jesus and what he did - Jesus crucified.

FOCUS LYRICS

Thou lovely source of true delight whom I unseen adore
Unveil thy beauties to thy sight that I might love thee more
Oh that I might love thee more

Thy glory o're creation shines yet in thy sacred word
I read in fairer brighter lines my bleeding dying Lord
Oh my bleeding, dying Lord

INTRODUCTION

When our hearts are set on something we find beautiful or desirable, it changes who we are. Try to get the students to see how this principle has already been at work in their lives and the lives of their friends. Ask questions like, “Have you or a friend ever become a different person because you had a crush on someone? How did it change you or your friend? Have you seen this in your own family with a parent perhaps? Have you ever had a crush on someone and then been on the rebound? Do you ever really get over one love without a new love coming along to replace the first one? What does this tell us about our hearts?”

MAIN POINTS

Our hearts are drawn to what we find beautiful, whether it be someone of the opposite sex, a desired goal, or Jesus. In

2 Corinthians 3, Paul says that our transformation as Christians happens bit by bit, and The Message paraphrase underscores how we are becoming more beautiful as God enters our lives and this beauty is defined as becoming like Jesus. In the Greek there is also the point that this transformation happens as we gaze upon Jesus and His beauty (see the NIV footnote for this translation if you like).

The point is, Christians grow as their hearts are captured by Jesus and His beauty, not just by reforming our external behavior! And the best way to be set free from the idols that we tend to run after is to see more clearly the beauty of Jesus. When we look at 1 Corinthians, we find Paul reminding this church of the focus of his message when he was with them. He says that he focused on proclaiming Jesus and in particular Jesus as crucified. When we put these two passages together, we see that the way we are transformed is to gaze upon Jesus and His beauty, and His beauty is most clearly seen at the cross! Thus our goal in worship, Bible study, fellowship and prayer is to get clearer and clearer sights by faith of Jesus and Him crucified. We must strive for Jesus to become more beautiful and believable to us! Even a superficial survey of scripture will reveal that God never gives bare commands, but His commands are always linked to remind us of what Jesus is like! (See Ephesians 5:1-2 for example.)

Anne Steele captures this wonderfully in her hymn. This hymn is a prayer for God to open her eyes to see his beauty, a confession that often she loses sight of this, and her recognition that His glory is most clearly seen in the picture of Him as a bleeding dying Lord. How do we see Him – through His Word – “I read in clearer brighter lines.”

CONCLUSION

How can this idea transform your idea of worship, Bible study, and prayer? How would this affect the kinds of songs you sing in worship and the way you pray? Our sin that we struggle with is always connected to something that we are finding more beautiful than Jesus. Can you think of some examples in your life? How have you lost sight of Jesus in this sin? And, most importantly, what aspect of Jesus and His death can help draw your heart away from the idol? If you have time, focus on Isaiah 44 and see how God pours scorn on the idols and reveals Himself as faithful in order to break Israel's love affair with the idols. God is still working this way!

1 Keller, Tim. Paul's Letter to the Galatians: Living in line with the truth of the gospel. Redeemer Presbyterian Church, 2002.



13

TRACK 13: “THEY’LL KNOW WE ARE CHRISTIANS BY OUR LOVE”

MAIN THEME

The gospel does two things for every one who comes to Jesus in repentance and faith – it pulls God’s people together to receive grace and it propels them outwards to be bearers of grace in the midst of an ungracious, unjust world. Jesus sends his disciples out not only as those to whom he is deeply committed but also as those whom he has loved dearly by washing their feet from the posture of a servant. We must address and relieve the effects of the sin in the world around us, or our “religion” becomes self-serving and irrelevant in eyes of the watching world.

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