

**The World's Greatest
Rescuer**

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*“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord,
“plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you
hope and a future.”*
Jeremiah 29:11

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Introduction

God is the world's greatest rescuer because He can restore us and sustain us to life everlasting in heaven with Him. At times in our life we can struggle with sin that takes our focus away from God and what He would want for our lives. In these times we can remember that God never leaves us. He has a plan for us and wants us to live our lives in the grips of His grace.

God is our rescuer because without Him, all humans would be lost to sin, death, and the devil. A rescuer saves someone from a dangerous situation or prevents someone from failing. God is the greatest rescuer ever because thanks to Jesus' death on the cross and glorious resurrection three days later the debt of our sins has been paid! Because of this we have the free gift of eternal life in heaven! As a result of God's love we are motivated to live lives to the glory of God.

All of us are sinful and in need of rescue that Jesus as our Lord and Savior freely gives. This book is focused more though for those who are struggling with a particular sin or sins. Often this would involve things in our lives that could be considered idols. An idol is anything more important to

you than God, anything you seek to give you what only God can give you. At times people can look for worldly things for happiness. This could include money, possessions, power, drugs, lust, bad habits, and other sins that cause us to lose sight of God. In general, idols cause us to not use our time, talents, and treasures to glorify God.

The parable of the prodigal son is a fitting example for how Christians can experience times in their lives when they stray from God. Prodigal means spending money or resources recklessly and wastefully. The following is the parable as told by Jesus in Luke 15:11-32. Different aspects of this parable will be revisited in the chapters in this book.

There was a man who had two sons. The younger one said to his father, "Father, give my share of the estate." So he divided his property between them.

Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living. After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed

pigs. He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything.

When he came to his senses, he said, "How many of my father's hired servants have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: "Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants." So he got up and went to his father.

But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him. The son said to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son."

But the father said to his servants, "Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found." So they began to celebrate.

Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on. “Your brother has come,” he replied, “and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.”

“The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him. But he answered his father, “Look! All these years I’ve been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!”

“My son,” the father said, “you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.”

This is a powerful parable told by Jesus. The ending of each chapter in this book will focus on the father and the younger son in the parable. In the parable the loving and

forgiving father represents God. The younger son represents those who get caught up in sin and pursue idols for fulfillment. The younger son was wasteful with his money, time, and talents that he was given.

God has given us freedom for how we choose to live our lives. Pastor and author, Billy Graham, states this. “Freedom to choose or to reject, freedom to obey God’s commands or to go contrary to them, freedom to make himself happy or miserable. For it is not the mere possession of freedom that makes life satisfying—it is what we choose to do with our freedom that determines whether or not we shall find peace with God and with ourselves.”¹

God knows what is best for us and longs for us to seek His will. The more time we spend getting to know God and His Word, the more we will experience hope and peace in our current lives. We will also understand that our time on earth is short in comparison to eternal life in heaven.

Author Calvin Miller states it this way, “Earth’s heartaches are healed by the promises of God. When we are home at last, the homesickness will be over. We shall praise the King who knew how to cut eternal doorways in mere

holes cut in sod. Joy belongs to all those who understand that earth is but a rehearsal for heaven. On dim evenings, if you squint at sunsets, you can all but see the promise. In our Father's house there really are many mansions-and one of them is ours."²

With this in mind, you can strive to make your days count and to glorify God with your thoughts, words, and actions. God has a plan for your life. God desires for you to trust in Him and know Him as your Savior. As it states in 1 Timothy 2:4, *God wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.*

Around the time I was thinking about writing this book I noticed that there were several Christian songs being played on the radio that touched on the theme of rescue and moving past difficulties in life. One of those songs was, "Rescue," by Lauren Daigle. A few of the lyrics from this song are below.

You are not hidden. There's never been a moment you were forgotten. You are not hopeless; though you have been broken.

*Your innocence stolen.*³

You may have noticed that the song lyrics are exactly what the prodigal son needed to remember and hear in the parable. God never forgets about us and in fact knows everything about us. He wants us to live a better life and longs to heal our brokenness with His love.

In talking about this song, Daigle notes that this song is for those who are struggling and who need God's message of hope. "Rescue is probably one of the most personal songs on the record. It was written for someone close to me who was going through a difficult time. I want people to listen to this song and leave feeling that while they may be struggling, there are better times ahead." When we remember our Father's love and turn to Him, we can receive comfort and help. It is not always easy to break away from sin, but we can trust that nothing is impossible with God.

Based on Lauren Daigle's song, "Rescue," the chapters are organized by the following truths that we can hold on to in the midst of the difficulties of life: (a) You are not hidden, (b) You are not hopeless, (c) God hears you, (d) God will work to bring you closer to Him, (e) Nothing is impossible with God, and (f) God will rescue you.

We can trust that as we build our relationship with God and rely on the support of other Christians, we will be able to lean on God's strength to help us live a life to glorify God. Jeremiah 17:7-8 states, *But blessed is the one who trusts in the Lord, whose confidence is in him. They will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream. It does not fear when heat comes; its leaves are always green. It has no worries in a year of drought and never fails to bear fruit.*

For all times of our life, we can trust in God and His strength. We may feel heat from the pressures of this fallen, sinful world, but we need not be afraid because we are not alone. God has chosen us and called us to people of faith. He has a specific purpose and plan for our lives. He will equip us and grow us so that we can stand strong against any evil or sinful temptations in this life.

Pastor Warren Wiersebe further states how God will guide us and lead us when we keep His Word at the forefront of our lives. "Believers who spend time daily in the Word and prayer gradually develop a spiritual radar, a practical wisdom from the Holy Spirit that gives us direction when we need it. Sometimes that direction comes from a

promise or warning in Scripture, sometimes from God's providential working in circumstances, and sometimes from the Spirit's witness in our hearts. Even a chance remark by a friend can be used by God to guide us if our minds and hearts are prepared and we're willing to obey God's leading."⁴

If you are reading this and are struggling with sin, then keep in mind the following words from Pastor and author, Max Lucado. "Somewhere, sometime, somehow you got tangled up in garbage, and you've been avoiding God. You've allowed a veil of guilt to come between you and your Father. You wonder if you could ever feel close to God again. God welcomes you. God is not avoiding you. God is not resisting you. The door is open, and God invites you in."⁵

Chapter 1: You are not hidden

People can feel hidden when they get the impression they do not matter, others do not notice them, or that they lack something that is of value to society. These are all lies that we should not believe. God sees us as valued, important, and specially made with a purpose that God wants us to live out in our life.

Author and athlete, Tim Tebow, describes how we need to avoid thinking negatively about ourselves and instead focus on how God views us. “No matter how many stupid things we’ve done, He doesn’t look at us as stupid. No matter how many times we’ve failed, He doesn’t look at us as failures. No matter how many foolish things we’ve done, He doesn’t look at us as fools. When we are willing to let God shape our identity, He will take whatever we have to offer and multiply it in ways and for a purpose that we cannot even begin to imagine. Sometimes we get stuck in this purpose thing because of our baggage. Many of us carry our guilt, our pain, and our mistakes around for years. Because we can’t even begin to think of ourselves in a good way, we don’t believe that God can. We think if we can’t

forgive ourselves that God never will. We think if we can't see a different, better future for ourselves than what's staring us in the face. What we have to realize is that God's ability to love and forgive and restore is not the same as ours."¹ As we focus on God's love and forgiveness we will be strengthened to live better lives.

It is vital to recognize times when we are more likely to be tempted by sin and taken down the wrong path. These times often occur when we are tired, lonely, bored or around people that are negative influences. Being tired can be the result of having too much to do. It may seem like we do not have the support that we need and so we can look for things that will make us temporarily feel better. Being tired can also be the result of not taking care of ourselves. We need to remember that our bodies our temples of God and that the Holy Spirit dwells within us (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). Our bodies are great gifts from God and we should take care of them.

Loneliness is a prevalent problem in society today. Through technology we have more ways to stay connected with others, but loneliness remains a problem. A recent

survey found that nearly half of Americans reported sometimes or always feeling alone. Forty-three percent of Americans felt they were isolated from others and forty-seven percent felt they did not have meaningful in-person social interactions on a daily basis.² When people feel lonely, this can lead to seeking the wrong things to cope with loneliness.

Boredom can be another problem that can make people feel hidden. If we do not have enough to do during the day, it can make us feel unmotivated and in turn lead to bad decisions. Boredom can also be caused by not having enough meaningful relationships in our life. We can feel that we are lacking in some area that would make others not want to talk to us or spend time with us. This is not true as God has given us all abilities that we can use to serve Him and help others.

If we spend most of our time around people that are negative influences, it is also harder to focus on God's will for our lives. We can start to rationalize bad choices and spend less time in God's word. We need to keep God's

promises and wisdom at the forefront of our lives. This will provide peace, joy, and hope.

If you are currently feeling hidden and are struggling with sin in your life then turn to God and listen to the truths He wants you to hold on to. God knows everything about you. God knows what you are going through. God never forgets you.

God knows everything about you

The all-powerful creator of the universe knows you, cares about you, and loves you! Read through that sentence again and take some time to think about what this means. There is no one more important than God. There is no one more knowledgeable than God. There is no one more powerful than God. God has existed for all time and will continue to exist for eternity. God cares for you and loves you!

King David marveled that God would know him individually. *You have searched me, Lord, and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down; you are*

familiar with all my ways. Before a word is on my tongue you, Lord, know it completely. Psalm 139:1-4.

God knows each one of us personally as well. He knows all of our thoughts and our struggles. God knows that we are sinful and in need of a Savior. There is good news. You're actually worse than you think you are. The previous two sentences may seem odd together and there is more to explain. Pastor and author, Timothy Keller, explains, "We are more sinful and flawed in ourselves than we ever dared believe, yet at the very same time we are more loved and accepted in Jesus Christ than we ever dared hope."³ The Good News is not that we are sinners but that we are freely forgiven and loved.

God loves you at this moment as much as He ever has and as much as He ever will. That is love that is self-sacrificing and unending. We are sinful people but God knows that through His power we can live better lives in seeking to serve and glorify Him.

God knows what you are going through

Having others understand us and show empathy to us can make a large difference in our lives. When we feel

that we are understood it can bring feelings of hope and encouragement. Empathy also helps people feel valued and important.

Christians should strive to understand one another and show empathy. In 1 Peter 3:8 we read, *Finally, all of you, be like-minded, be sympathetic, love one another, be compassionate and humble.* Being like-minded means to focus on Jesus for an example of how to live our lives. Jesus is the ultimate example for empathy, love, compassion, and humility.

One of the greatest examples of Jesus' empathy and compassion is found in John 11. Mary and Martha come to Jesus to let him know that Lazarus, Mary's brother, is sick. Jesus already knows what is going to occur. Lazarus will die but Jesus will raise Lazarus back to life. Through this, God's power will be on display and He will be glorified. Because of this Jesus stays where He is for two days before going to Lazarus.

When Jesus arrives in Bethany, Lazarus has been dead for four days and in a tomb. Mary and the others gathered there are weeping. This affects Jesus. *When Jesus*

saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. John 11:33.

It is worth repeating that Jesus knew He was going to raise Lazarus from the dead. He knew that in a matter of minutes their tears would turn to joy. Jesus saw that people were hurting though, and it made Him hurt too. He empathized so strongly with those who were mourning that He wept. *Jesus wept.* John 11:35.

This verse in John is the shortest verse in the Bible, but it is a powerful verse for the compassion and love that Jesus has for His people. God does not want to see you hurting and suffering. He wants you to feel loved and encouraged. God wants you to know that He knows what you are going through and the details of your life matter to Him.

There is another important lesson to be gleaned from these verses in the Bible. Do not put limits on God. Mary does not question that Jesus is the Messiah and believes in the resurrection of the dead for those who die with faith as Jesus as their Lord. The disciples, Mary, Martha, and the friends of Lazarus do not fully understand the power of God

though. Even though Jesus had stated that Lazarus would be okay, they did not believe he could be raised back to life. Jesus does indeed raise Lazarus from the dead!

Jesus experienced life as a human and knows that this life is not easy. God has a deep understanding of who we are and will strengthen us to live lives that give glory to Him. God cares for you. He knows who you are, what you think, how you feel, and why you feel that way. Trust that you are not hidden because God loves you and works to help you.

God never forgets you

When it seems like there is only sadness and hurt in this world, you can feel hidden. It is when you have these feelings that you need to remember God's love and promises for your life. God has promised to be with you forever (Matthew 28:20) and His love for you does not end (1 Corinthians 13:7). It is also important to remember that your current feelings do not affect the love that God has for you. You may feel that you are not worthy of God's love. God does not stop loving you. The more you stay in God's

Word, the more you will focus on truth and have encouragement and hope.

We can forget at times what God has done in the past, what He is currently doing, and also what He has promised for the future. God will sustain us and care for us. *Whatever God does, it shall be forever.* Ecclesiastes 3:14. Pastor, Max Lucado, further describes how God never forgets about us. "Though God's people often forgot their God, God didn't forget them. He kept His word. The land became theirs. When Joseph was dropped into a pit by his own brothers, God didn't give up. When Moses said, 'Here I am, send Aaron;' God didn't give up...When Peter worshiped Him at the supper and cursed Him at the fire, He didn't give up. God never gives up."⁴

In the English Standard version of the Bible, the word "charcoal" is used twice in the New Testament. The first time is when Peter is standing next to a charcoal fire when he denies knowing Jesus three times. The second time is after Jesus' resurrection when Jesus is on the beach cooking fish over a charcoal fire for the disciples (John 21). On the beach, Jesus asks Peter three times if he loves Him.

Three times Peter tells Jesus that he loves Him. It seems that Jesus is letting Peter know He forgives him for denying Him three times and that He will not give up on Peter.

After Peter denied Jesus three times, he was overcome with sorrow and shame as he wept bitterly. (John 22:62). You may be struggling with something. Like burning charcoal, something might be burning you up on the inside for things that you have done or failed to do. Know that Jesus forgives you, He is still with you, and He loves you.

Jesus does not forget us and in His Word He provides promises and hope for the struggles and temptations in our lives. He knows what it feels like to be tempted and to feel weak. He experienced what we experienced. *For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weakness, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin.* Hebrews 4:15.

God has promised us that when we feel tempted, He will provide us strength and a way to resist temptation. *No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what*

you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it. 1 Corinthians 10:13. In times of temptation we need to look to God and draw on His strength.

This becomes more natural when we spend time in God's Word and have it on our heart and mind. Spending time with other Christians will also provide strength and good advice we can remember. In times of temptation, we will be more likely to remember God's Word to guide us in our decisions and actions. *I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.* Psalm 119:11.

In the parable of the prodigal son, the son decides to ask for his inheritance while his father is in good health. In those times, it would have been an insulting request to the father. It would have been essentially stating that the son was anxious for his father to die. It was a request that would have brought shame to the family. The selfish request by the son is made with intentions that do not lead to good decisions. The prodigal son wastes what he has been given and he ends up in a pig sty. He feels hidden because he believes that no one notices him or cares for him.

If your decisions have led you down the wrong path, it is not too late to turn towards God. He knows you and wants to help you. He offers forgiveness and a better life. A life lived in the sure knowledge of His grace. A life where you can live out His love to others and receive peace.

Remember you are never forgotten and you are not hidden. In Christ we have what matters most. We are not alone because God is always with us. We do not have to worry about getting too tired because God has promised to renew our strength. If we feel unmotivated, we can seek to serve God by helping and encouraging others. We can also fellowship with other Christians. *Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn.* Romans 12:15. You matter. God made you for a purpose. God knows you and loves you!

Chapter 2: You are not hopeless

When feelings of hopelessness come it seems that our circumstances will not improve, that we should stop trying, and that we might as well give up. Know that God does not give up on you. Feelings of hopelessness are not based on the promises that God has for your life. Psalm 139:13-14 states that God wonderfully made you for a purpose. *For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful.* God has given us each abilities that we can develop and places us in situations where He can be glorified through our actions.

When feelings of hopelessness come, we need to shift our thinking and realize that through God we can draw strength. Author, Anne Graham Lotz, describes what we should focus on. "Have you become so overwhelmed with your own weakness and failure and sin and inability to live a life that is pleasing to God that you have begun to doubt your salvation? Then look up! Take a good, long look at the cross and remember that God *remembers*. He loves you, He has forgiven you, He is eternally committed to you, and you

are saved! Forever! Praise God! His covenant is unconditional!"¹

With God in our lives there is always hope. When we look to Him, we will receive strength for the day to continue to work towards improvement. *So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.*

Isaiah 41:10. If your situation in life or the decisions you have made make you think that there is no hope, remember three things: (a) Don't give up, (b) Focus on what matters, and (c) God has a purpose for you.

Don't give up

God never gives up on you and you should never give up on yourself. God has promised to be with us and provide us strength for the day. *But those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength.* Isaiah 40:31. Keep your mind fixed on positive and encouraging thoughts. Know that life is not always easy, but with God in our lives we can persevere.

If you are feeling weighed down by past sins and mistakes, know that God offers forgiveness. God does not view us by our past sins, because they have been wiped

clean. Pastor and author, Max Lucado, notes the blessing of God's forgiveness. "The blood of Christ does not cover your sins, conceal your sins, postpone your sins, or diminish your sins. It takes away your sins, once and for all time. Jesus allows your mistakes to be lost in His perfection."²

If things have gone wrong in the past, trust that Christians always have the Holy Spirit within us to guide us. Author, Anne Graham Lotz, provides reassurance of this promise from God. Parakletos means advocate or helper and refers to the Holy Spirit. "In the race of life, God our heavenly Father has come alongside us through the Person of the Holy Spirit. And when we think we can't go one more step, when our hearts feel heavy, when our minds become dull, when our spirits are burned out, we have the *parakletos*, who comes alongside us, puts His everlasting arms around us, and gently walks with us to the finish."³

There is an inspiring poem by an unknown author that describes the importance of not giving up. With God's help we can continue to persevere in this life to life everlasting in heaven. God's love and His promise of

salvation are true. With this as motivation, we can strive to give God glory in all we do.

When things go wrong, as they sometimes will,
When the road you're trudging seems all uphill,
When funds are low and the debts are high,
And you want to smile, but you have to sigh,
When care is pressing you down a bit,
Rest if you must, but don't you quit.

Success is failure turned inside out –
The silver tint of the clouds of doubt,
And you never can tell how close you are –
It may be near when it seems afar;
So stick to the fight when you're hardest hit –
It's when things seem worst that you mustn't quit.
Author Unknown

Focus on what matters

When you are feeling hopeless, what you think about can have a big impact. If we focus on negative things and the mistakes we have made, we will be more likely to continue on a bad path. We can focus on asking for forgiveness of our sins and receiving the forgiveness that God has promised. *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.* 1 John 1:9.

For the Good Friday service at my church, there is a special part of the service that drives home the point about the impact of God's forgiveness in our lives. At the front of

the sanctuary is a wooden cross along with pieces of paper, nails, and hammers. Everyone has a chance to write down a sin or sins in their life on a piece of paper, fold it, and nail it to the cross.

At the end of the service the pastor states Jesus' words on the cross, "It is finished." The paper, which is special flash paper, is then lit, burns up, and disappears. It is a great visual and reminder that Jesus paid the price for all of our sins. Jesus' death on the cross and glorious resurrection three days later has washed us completely clean. There is no record of our wrongs. Jesus took the debt of our sins and the guilt and shame upon Himself. That sacrifice is motivated by His unending love for us. Jesus does not view us as hopeless but as redeemed and loved children of God! When we focus who we are in light of God's love, it can change our outlook by looking up at the cross. We can then approach each day with gratitude and be motivated with God's love.

With a renewed spirit, we can submit our lives to serving and praising God with our thoughts and actions. *Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee*

from you. James 4:7. Christian singer Zach Williams has a song called, "Slave to Nothing", where he describes the impact of God's forgiveness and a renewed life focused on God's love.

You can tell me what I did
You can show me who I was before
Where I fell short
Hang it over my head
But I'm not the same anymore
One thing for sure

The shackles have fallen
So I'm showing shame to the door
Make no mistake I'm a
Slave, to nothing
So let me tell you where I stand
Guilty is not who I am
No dirt on these hands
Nothing left for me to hide
Delivered, set free, justified

Free from my chains, from my shame and addiction
Free from my fears and the walls of this prison
I've been redeemed, sanctified, and forgiven
Freedom's my name
Make no mistake
I'm a Slave, to nothing.⁴

In discussing where his songs originate from, Zach notes that he draws on his own life experiences. "Growing up in church and knowing who Jesus was. Running away from that for years of my life and finding myself in these

dark places where I felt like God wasn't around or maybe God did not love me. There was a lot of things in my past that I struggled with and one of those was just understanding that there is a God out there who did love me for who I was...I think the realization for me was that in my darkest and loneliness places that God was there with His hands stretched out and waiting for me to come home.”⁵

There is a saying in Norway that there is no bad weather, only bad clothing. If we clothe ourselves with Christ, we will be prepared for any storms or trouble in this life. We will be more likely to resist temptation and sustain our hope through any difficulties in life. Romans 13:14 reinforces that we should focus on God's Word in our life. *Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh.*

There are a number of ways to do this in our lives. The ideas below can provide us with energy and encouragement to stay committed to God's will for our lives.

Christian music-the songs that lift you up.
Positive thoughts-the ideas that motivate you.
Experiences- the activities that rejuvenate you.
Friends- the people who encourage you.
Exercise-taking care of your body that can invigorate you.

Soul food-the spiritual exercises that strengthen you.
Hopes-the dreams that inspire you.
Home- the family members who care for you.
Gifts—the talents or passions that activate you.
Memories- the recollections that make you smile.
Books- the messages that inspire and change you.

God has a purpose for you

If you are feeling hopeless, know that God has a purpose and a plan for your life. The well-known Bible verse, Jeremiah 29:11, reinforces this. *For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you a hope and a future.* What an incredible promise! A question that follows from this verse is how do I know what God's plan is for my life? If we read further in Jeremiah 29, we are provided more insight. *Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.* Jeremiah 29:12-13.

God knows the plan He has for us and when we seek Him with all of our heart, that plan will continue to be revealed to us. Prayer and meditation is an integral part of seeking God with all of our heart. If we have quiet time each

day focusing on God's Word and communicating with God it can provide us perspective and encouragement.

Several years ago I was driving home and the following words came to me. I wrote the words down when I got home and named this short poem, "Sweet hour of prayer."

Sweet hour of prayer
In darkest night
In brightest light
God is always near
So have no fear
Be of good cheer
Your hope is real

When we spend time daily in prayer, we can be reassured that in our good and bad times, God is always with us. He has a purpose for our lives. Do not be discouraged if you think the plan you have for your life is not working out. Seek God with all your heart, and listen to how He will guide your path.

If you have a desire to lead a better life and seek God's will for your life, consider the following prayer before you spend time meditating on God's Word.

God,

I understand and believe that I have failed to love You by going my own way in life. I've missed the mark. I have done and thought wrong things. I want to change. I know that the result of sin should be death. But thanks to Your great love, You sent Your son, Jesus, to pay the price for my sins on the cross. Because of Jesus sacrifice, You freely give me the gift of eternal life in heaven. I desire to know your will for my life better and to serve you with all my heart, soul, and mind.

Amen.

Things may have been tough lately. Every day feels like more of the same and you are wondering when you can get out of this downward spiral. Take it day by day and trust in God's power. God has a plan for you.

In the parable of the prodigal son, the son felt hopeless. He had made many bad decisions and lived a life that went against the way his father had raised him. The son had no money or possessions left and thought that no one cared for him. He then shifted his thinking and remembered the love of his father. He knew that his father cared and took care of all of those he knew.

God our Father's love is not dependent on our decisions we make. God desires for us to live a life that is based on His Word. When we seek this, we will see the plan

God has for our life. We will then move from being hopeless
to being hopeful!

Chapter 3: God hears you

When there are difficulties or struggles in life, we may think that God is not near us. God is always near us and longs to hear from us. God desires us to turn from our sinful ways and to look forward to better days. Prayers that are offered to better follow God's Word in our lives are prayers that God welcomes. *This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us.* 1 John 5:14.

A desire to show God's love to others and to encourage others for God's glory is aligned with God's will. There may not always be a quick answer to prayers, but we can trust that God is at work in our lives. God is good. God is loving. The more we surrender ourselves to God's will for our lives, the more manageable and hopeful life will become. There are three main things to remember when thinking about if God hears you: (a) Keep praying, (b) God's not done with you, and (c) Trust God's wisdom.

Keep praying

There is an old mnemonic for praying that uses the word, "PUSH": Pray Until Something Happens. God desires

us to pray daily and in fact to *pray continually*. 1 Thessalonians 5:17. By being in continual communication with God, we are more likely to have confidence in our decisions and actions.

Matthew 7:7-8 reinforces the importance of prayer and also the importance of seeking to know God better. *“Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.”*

When our prayers are focused on doing God’s will in our lives, we do not need to worry about if God hears us. *For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their prayer.* 1 Peter 3:12. There is more to prayer though than just the quantity of time that we spend praying. Prayer is not just one way communication with us talking to God. God will also speak to us. We should pray not until God hears us, but until we listen to God. Then we will seek and find answers.

There is a story that drives home this point. Before refrigerators, people used icehouses to preserve their food.

Icehouses had thick walls, no windows, and a tightly fitted door. Large blocks of ice were put in the icehouses and covered with sawdust. Often the ice would last well into the summer.

There was a man who lost a valuable watch while working in an icehouse. He searched for it diligently. Meticulously, he looked through the sawdust, but could not find it. His friends also looked, but their efforts too proved futile. A young boy who heard about the missing watch slipped into the icehouse during the noon hour and soon emerged with the watch. Amazed, the man asked him how he found it. "I closed the door," the boy replied, "lay down in the sawdust, and kept very still. Soon I heard the watch ticking."¹

Often the question is not whether God is speaking to us, but whether we are still enough and quiet enough to hear. Reflection and meditation on God's Word and listening to what He is trying to communicate to us through other Christians is vital. We can be still and know that God is an ever-present help in trouble.

When we pray, God can communicate to us different responses. If a request is wrong, God says, “No” or “Grow.” This could be that the request goes against God’s Word. We can look to the words of Romans 12:2 as we refocus our thoughts and requests. *Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.* We can work to ensure our desires are aligned with God’s Word.

God may want us to grow in our faith and teach us more about Him and His will. If our prayers have selfish motives, God desires us to look to help others with our time and resources. *When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.* James 4:3.

God wants us to examine our life so that we are aware of any sin in our life that is unresolved and ongoing. *But your iniquities have separated you from God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear.* Isaiah 59:2. If we ask for forgiveness, God promises to forgive our sins. By discussing and reading God’s Word, we will be better

attuned to any of our thoughts, actions, or words that are sinful.

The next response can be the most difficult. If the timing is wrong, God says, "Slow." The request can be aligned with God's Word, but God will grant the request at some point in the future. If this occurs we can trust that God has a plan and there is good that will come. *Wait for the Lord; be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord.* Psalm 27:14. This does not mean that we should give up or be inactive while waiting. Instead we should have continued focus on God.

If you are struggling with sin in your life and wonder when it will end, do not despair if there is not a quick recovery. Continue to trust God and know that if you focus on His love, He hears you and is working to help you. Life is not always easy, but God is with us always. Author, Annie Johnson Flint, has a wonderful poem that can help us remember God's promises for our life.

WHAT GOD HATH PROMISED

God hath not promised skies always blue,
Flower-strewn pathways all our lives through;
God hath not promised sun without rain,
Joy without sorrow, peace without pain.
But God hath promised strength for the day,

Rest for the labor, light for the way,
Grace for the trials, help from above,
Unfailing sympathy, undying love.
-Annie Johnson Flint-

We can continue to offer humble prayers with a contrite heart and seek to listen intently for God's response.

Avoid thinking that God will never answer your prayers. The challenge of waiting on God is to keep your focus sustained on His love and purpose for your life. God has an awesome plan for you and a purpose that is perfectly suited for you that will give meaning to your life. The only *never* you should focus on is that God will *never* leave you. When the request and the timing is right God will grant your requests.

God's not done with you

God hears your prayers to live a better life in His service. God wants you to know that He's not done with you. He forgives you and will provide strength. Pastor and author Steven Furtick notes that is quite common for people to doubt themselves and whether they can be useful. "I think we all secretly fight feelings of inadequacy, insufficiency, and incompetence. We wonder whether we

really measure up. We fear we are not 'enough'—whatever that means in our particular situations.”³

If we look to the great men and women in the Bible, we will find a common denominator. They were all unqualified. Any good things they accomplished were through God's power. God's strength is shown as He works through us. We are sinful and flawed but God can use us to accomplish His purpose.

Do not believe the lie that God won't hear your prayers because you have sinned. We have all sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). We are forgiven and restored through God's grace and mercy.

There was a man who was attending a support group for an addiction he was struggling with. He was sorry for the wrong decisions he had made and desired to change. As he was leaving the meeting he thought to himself, "I am going home and I am not going to sleep until Jesus forgives my sins. If I have to stay up all night and pray. I'll do it." The man had a good distance to walk, and as he was on his way home he thought, "Why can't I pray now as I go along, instead of waiting till I get home?"

He was unsure of what to pray because it had been a long time. He then remembered a short prayer his mother had taught him. The man prayed, "God be merciful to me a poor sinner." He instantly felt that God had heard him and had forgiven his sins.

When we repent of our sins, God forgives them and forgets them. *As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.* Psalm 103:12. God views us as holy and forgiven and that is how we should think of ourselves as well. We can bring our concerns and requests to God. *Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.* Hebrews 4:16.

If you are not sure of what to pray, do not worry about having the exact right words. Say what is on your heart; expressing your desire to live a life based on the love God has shown you. If you go to God with humility and a repentant heart, no matter what you have done, God will hear your prayer. God will remind you of His faithfulness and loving kindness.

Christian singer, Tauren Wells, has a great song that provides reassurance that God's not done with you.

God's not done with you.

Even with your broken heart
and your wounds and your scars.

God's not done with you.

Even when you're lost
and it's hard and you're falling apart.

God's not done with you.³

There is an old saying to never put a comma where God puts a period and never put a period where God puts a comma. God has a purpose for you. At times we lose our way in life, but God is not done with us.

Anne Graham Lotz beautifully describes how God is the God of second chances. He does not give up on you! "No means of measure can define God's limitless love. No barrier can hinder Him from pouring out His blessings. He forgives and He forgets. He creates and He cleanses. He restores and He rebuilds. He comforts and He carries. He lifts and He loves. He is the God of the second chance."⁴

Trust God's wisdom

God knows you and what is best for you. The more we seek God's wisdom in our life the more we will have peace and contentment on the direction of our life. We can continue to cast on our cares on God and trust that God knows what is best.

Pastor Craig Groeschel notes how the more we seek God's wisdom the greater peace we will have with uncertainty in our lives. "I believe that God is much more committed to our eternal joy, our spiritual growth, and the condition of our hearts than our immediate happiness. This means that we need to grow out of spiritual infancy into a richer, ever-maturing belief in a God who is infinitely wiser than we are. We need to learn to trust him even when we can't feel him, believe in him even when he doesn't make sense, and follow him even though we're not sure where he's leading us."⁵

As we turn from our sinful ways, there are things that often need to be changed or given up. God knows that what really brings fulfillment is His trustworthy love and grace in our lives. As we seek to serve others by showing

God's love to others our lives will have meaning. What we have in Christ is greater than anything we have or don't have in this life.

As we seek to know God and His love better, we can keep the words of Pastor Groeschel at the forefront of our minds.

“Even though I'm upset, angry, confused, frustrated, disappointed, and impatient, I will remember who God is.

The Lord is still in charge.

And he is good.

He is righteous.

He is true.

He is faithful.

He is all-knowing, all-powerful, and ever present.

The world may seem upside down,

but the Lord is still there.

He is sovereign, and he has a plan—a much bigger plan that

I can see right now.

I have to respect that he is God and I am not.

His timing is not my timing.

His ways are higher than I'll ever understand.

He is supreme in all wisdom, and he knows the end from

the beginning.

I'm just a person, his creation.

He has everything under control.”

People often want to take advice and guidance from those with more experience and those who seem to handle well all that life brings. God has the most knowledge, knows everyone's thoughts, and what everyone has been through. Max Lucado summarizes well whose wisdom and strength

we should look to. “Don’t we need someone to trust who is bigger than we are? Aren’t we tired of trusting the people of this earth for understanding? Aren’t we weary of trusting the things of this earth for strength? A drowning sailor doesn’t call on another drowning sailor for help. A pauper knows better than to beg from another pauper. He knows he needs someone who is stronger than he is. Jesus’ message is this: I am that person. Trust Me.”⁶

In the parable of the prodigal son, the son gets caught thinking that no one hears or knows about his pain. His bad decisions had led to a situation where he felt hopeless. On his own, he knew that he did not have the strength or power to fix his situation. He realized that someone did care for him, would listen to him, and would help him. The prodigal son came to his senses and sought out someone who was wiser than him and he could trust; his father.

In our lives, we can do the same. God hears you. He knows you. He wants to help you. Trust His love and work to know His wisdom for your life. Keep praying! Keep listening! God is not done with you!

Chapter 4: God will work to bring you closer to Him

Even when we do not stick with God, God always sticks with us. God is always near us. We can feel distant from God when we look to other things for fulfillment in life. When this occurs God seeks to bring us back into His Word. As we discuss, read, and meditate on His Word in our lives we will realize what is most important. Our thoughts, words, and actions will become more aligned with how God would want us to live our lives.

Psalm 145:18 states, *The Lord is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth.* When we seek God and His will in our lives, God will be there. He has never left. We have just turned toward sin and tried to ignore God in our lives.

God desires that we mourn over our sins and repent of our sins. We do not have to stay in a period of mourning though as we are assured of God's forgiveness and help. *Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Grieve, mourn and wail...Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.* James 4: 8-10.

Life lived with God is greater than anything the world has to offer. When we strive to have God at the forefront of all aspects of our life we will have more inner joy and peace and receive greater fulfillment than we can imagine!

God has promised to always be with us and wants us to know this through our whole lives. If you ever feel beaten down by this world or your own inability to follow God's will, take heart that God does not leave you. He is working to help you. *The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.* Psalm 34:18. This chapter will explore this promise through three main points: God never stops working, there is more going on than what you see, and yield yourself to God's will.

God never stops working

People love heroes who refuse to give up the fight no matter what the odds are. Right now in the world we are starving for heroes. We are no longer surprised when people we once admired and respected commit crimes, lie, or make immoral decisions or statements. If we only rely on people for guidance and truth we have the potential to be let down

and mislead. We instead should seek the truth that comes from God and look to His strength.

There is no limit to what God can do. He will continue to fight for us no matter what we have done or where we end up. *Surely the arm of the Lord is not too short to save, nor his ear too dull to hear.* Isaiah 59:1. When we trust in God, He will provide us with what we need for this life to life everlasting in heaven. *God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus.* Philippians 4:19.

God has blessed us all with abilities that we can use to glorify Him. The problem is that sometimes we squander this potential again and again through foolish decisions. Through God's Word we can draw strength for the day. This can help us be corrected and directed to keep strong in the faith.

When we realize that all humans are weak and in need of God's strength, it can help us stay focused on Him. Non-Christians can see God as a crutch for the weak, but that is the whole idea. All humans are weak. We all need God and His strength. When we pursue other things than

God in life for fulfillment we are becoming weaker. God loves to make weak people strong.

It is what He strives to remind us of everyday. His Word has power for us. Christian friends and family can provide strength for us by conveying the Word. Music can uplift us to stay strong in the faith. The Holy Spirit within us can guide us to good decisions. There are many things in life that God uses to continue to work to let us know Him better. If we are careful with what we read, think, see, and talk about we can have strength to live lives in the grips of God's love.

One of the most important lessons in the Bible is found in Isaiah 64:4. *Since ancient times no one has heard, no ear has perceived, no eye has seen any God besides you, who acts on behalf of those who wait for him.* The last part of this verse is especially vital to remember and understand. God acts on behalf of those who wait for Him. God is a God of action. He does act. He works. He is all knowing with a sense of direction and purpose in mind. This is not only for a universal purpose, but for individuals as well. God is in

control of all things and He knows all things. God has a desire to work in our lives.

He does this in several ways. First, he reveals His will to us through His Word. Second, He give us clear direction when we need it. Third, He guides us to make wise choices in our lives. All through our life, He's encouraging us along the way. He protects us as well. He shields us from situations and circumstances we're not even aware of. He also provides unfailing strength in order to handle any difficulties in life. He comforts us and teaches us. He also answers our prayers. God works for us! When we have a sustained focus on Him, we begin to see all of the ways He is working.

God will give us the encouragement to keep going when we make poor decisions in life. He will reassure us of His blessed promise of forgiveness and grace. The Christian group, Tenth Avenue North, has a great song called, "Greater Than All My Regrets," that reinforces that God will always work to help us and encourage us with truth.

When the past it comes to haunt me
It tells me what I've done
It reminds me what's gone wrong

When my sins are laid before me
My Lord, You take them on
Yes, my Lord, You take them on

Father, I know I break Your heart
When I choose my way
When I doubt Your love
But You take me as I am, a child
Yeah, You whisper in my ear
Let's get up and try again
So if I fall and if I fail
I will trust Your mercy is
Greater than all of this
And if I bend and if I break
I'll trust the hands that hold me are
Greater than all my regrets.'

Poor decisions that we make can lead to regrets. We can begin to believe lies that God is not with us and that we will continue to experience difficulties. We should always seek God and His love in our lives. We can be assured that He is always working to help us and is near us.

There is more going on than what you see

God is at work in ways that we cannot see. When we stay strong in the faith, we can be more aware of the potential for good in our lives. It does not matter what decisions we have made in the past. God is at work to bring us closer to Him and to know His love.

In Hebrews 11, it is discussed how great actions were taken through faith in God. For example, *By faith Noah, when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear built an ark to save his family.* Hebrews 11: 7. A number of well-known people from the Old Testament are mentioned that were known for their faith and closeness with God: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, and Moses.

Then in verse 31 another name is mentioned. *By faith the prostitute Rahab, because she welcomed the spies, was not killed with those who were disobedient.* Hebrews 11:31. The spies were Israelites who were scouting out the land of Jericho. The spies realized that the king of Jericho knew they were there and looked for a place to hide. They were in trouble. What the two spies did not know at this time was that God was working on their behalf by working on the heart of Rahab. The bravery of Rahab in hiding the spies and also sharing her faith in God is so significant that it ends up in Hebrews chapter 11 as one of the shining examples of faith!

Rahab and the people in Jericho had heard about what God was doing to rescue the Israelites. It caused some

in the land to be fearful, but for Rahab it brought her to faith. God used her words to reassure the Israelites that God would provide them victory. *Before the spies lay down for the night, she went up on the roof and said to them, "I know that the LORD has given you this land and that a great fear of you has fallen on us, so that all who live in this country are melting in fear because of you. We have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea for you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to Sihon and Og, the two kings of the Amorites east of the Jordan, whom you completely destroyed. When we heard of it, our hearts melted in fear and everyone's courage failed because of you, for the LORD your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below. Joshua 2:8-11.*

The work of God on Israel's behalf was striking fear in the hearts of Israel's enemies. The mighty acts of deliverance God used to save the Israelites had been sending shock waves into those who opposed God. God was at work on Israel's behalf in ways they did not know.

It is interesting to see that the Israelite spies that had seen God's miracles and work firsthand were in fear, while Rahab, the prostitute, was responding in faith. She had only

heard of what God was doing and had no doubts about the one true God. Because of Rahab's word the spies returned and reported good news to Joshua, the leader of the Israelites. *They said to Joshua, "The Lord has surely given the whole land into our hands; all the people are melting in fear because of us."* Joshua 2: 24.

At times, God works in visible, dramatic, undeniable ways. Later in the book of Joshua, such an occurrence is shown when the walls of the city Jericho miraculously fall. These kinds of stories appear in different places in the Bible to demonstrate that nothing is impossible with God. There are also stretches of time in the Bible when for weeks, months, or even years God's work is not so clearly visible. God is not inactive during these times. He is working in unseen ways to bring more people to faith. He is working for more people to realize that God is near to them and wants them to know Him.

In your own life, you may not see what God is up to, but he is working for good for you. He wants to be able to use your life for His glory. When you hear about the power and great works of God, fear does not have to be your

response. Instead, respond in faith the way Rahab did. She had made poor choices in the past but realized that God loved her and this caused her to respond with faith.

There is a powerful song by Nigerian Gospel singer, Sinach, that emphasizes that God is always at work.

Way maker, miracle worker, promise keeper
Light in the darkness, my God
That is who You are

You are here, turning lives around
I worship You
I worship You
You are here, mending every heart
I worship You
I worship You

Even when I don't see it, You're working
Even when I don't feel it, You're working
You never stop, You never stop working
You never stop, You never stop working.²

Some people think that life should be easy and problem free. God has never promised that this would be the case. Sometimes going through difficulties and the trials of life can lead people to realize the power of God's love and grace. What you see isn't all that is going on. God is at work for you! Never forget that! Learn to trust in God's unseen but unstoppable work on your behalf!

Yield yourself to God's will

As God works in our lives, we can open our hearts to serving God and letting ourselves be guided by His will. As we realize more about the love of God and what faith in Christ offers, our thoughts and desires will start to move toward Christ-centered ideas.

Celebrate Recovery is a Christ-centered, 12 step recovery program for anyone struggling with hurt, pain or addiction of any kind. The program has helped many people gain freedom from the issues that are controlling their lives. One of the eight principles of the program is directly connected to yielding oneself to God's will. "Principle 5: Voluntarily submit to any and all changes God wants to make in my life and humbly ask Him to remove my character defects."³

True happiness comes when our greatest desire is to do God's will. What is God's will for our lives? God's will has several important points that can guide our lives. It is God's will that you are saved. *This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.* 1 Timothy 2:3-4. God desires all people

to come to the saving faith in Him and to spend eternity in heaven.

God's will for you is to focus on the fruits of the Spirit. *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.*

Galatians 5:22-23a. God desires us to focus on His love that leads to positive actions. The more that we do this, the better we will be able to identify sin in our lives and how to avoid it.

God's will for you is to live a life of service that gives glory to Him. *Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms.* 1 Peter 4:10. God continues to show us His love. This love motivates us to learn more about God and how we should live. This in turn leads us to serve and love others because of the love we have been shown.

Yielding ourselves to God's will can be accomplished through sustained focus on God's Word. It has been found that by focusing on changing just one habit, a keystone habit, a person can affect the other routines in their life as well. For example, exercising more can lead to eating better,

getting better sleep, and feeling better. Forty percent of the actions we perform each day are not actually decisions but habits or routine.⁴

When we keep our minds on God's Word throughout the day, this keystone habit, can change all aspects of our life as well. It will help us to feel better and have more joy and inner peace. Pastor and professor, Reinhold Niebuhr, wrote a prayer that is well known that describes what yielding ourselves to God's will leads to.

Prayer for Serenity

God, grant me the serenity
to accept the things I cannot change,
the courage to change the things I can,
and the wisdom to know the difference.
Living one day at a time,
enjoying one moment at a time;
accepting hardship as a pathway to peace;
taking, as Jesus did,
this sinful world as it is,
not as I would have it;
trusting that You will make all things right
if I surrender to Your will;
so that I may be reasonably happy in this life
and supremely happy with You forever in the next.
Amen.

In the parable of the prodigal son, God is at work for the prodigal son in ways that He might not have realized. When the prodigal son is in the slop with the pigs and

feeling despondent he remembers the love of His father.

When helpful and loving thoughts come into our mind, this is the work of the Holy Spirit within us. The Holy Spirit is guiding us to remember God's love in our lives and what this means for our future.

The prodigal son was willing to yield himself to his father. The son decided to let his father know that he was willing to do anything, as long as he could be back with him under his protection and loving care.

Similarly, in our lives when we come to God and let Him know that we surrender our lives to His will, then we will have inner peace, comfort, hope, and joy! The prodigal son no longer felt despondent but instead was filled with hope.

God is always working for you. He wants you to know the love He has for you. This is a self-sacrificing and unending love. If you strive to live out God's will in your life, He hears and you and will help you. Know that if you are praying to live a more God pleasing life, God is working on it!

Chapter 5: Nothing is impossible with God

With God all things are possible. God has no limits because He is all-powerful and created the entire universe. We cannot begin to understand the power and knowledge of God. Job 11:7-8 states this well. *Can you fathom the mysteries of God? Can you probe the limits of the Almighty? They are higher than the heavens above—what can you do? They are deeper than the depths below—what can you know?*

God's power is beyond our understanding. The sun is one of hundreds of billions of stars in our galaxy, which is one of at least hundreds of billions of galaxies in the universe. The scope of God's creation is awe-inspiring. In terms of size, we are a small spec in the vast universe God created. God loves each of us though as if we were the only thing He created.

If you have gotten comfortable with the sin in your life or have started to think that you cannot overcome it, know that God has not given up on you. The God that created the universe and everything in it continues to work on you. God changes lives every day. He provides strength and resiliency to overcome sin and temptation. God created

everything and knows His creation intimately. He desires you to have an earthly life with the blessed assurance of heaven and the comfort of His presence. Trust God's knowledge, power, and that He knows what you need.

God is all-knowing

God knows everything and His knowledge is beyond our understanding. The first verse of the Bible describes how God has been here since the beginning of all time and the start of the earth. *In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.* Genesis 1:1. The last verse of the Bible reassures us that God will be with us our whole lives to eternity in heaven thanks to His marvelous free gift of grace! *The grace of the Lord Jesus be with God's people. Amen.* Revelation 22:21. There is no need for any doubt. God is always near and in control since the beginning of time and for eternity. *Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom.* Isaiah 40:28.

When there are difficulties in life, we can trust God and that He has a plan for us. Pastor and author, Oswald Chambers, describes it this way. "Sometimes it looks like

God is missing the mark, because we're too short sighted to see what He's aiming for."

During WWII a U.S. fighter pilot ended up in a bad situation but kept His faith in God. The pilot was on a bombing run over Japan when his plane was hit. He knew that if he landed in Japan the Japanese would execute him. His only hope was to get back over water. He managed to get back over water and ejected from the plane. In the water he was able to swim to a life boat, but was still in danger as the Japanese ships closed in on him. The other U.S. planes provided fire on the Japanese ships to keep the pilot safe. After four hours in the water, a U.S. submarine was able to rescue him. When the pilot was rescued he stated, "I don't know why I was saved. God must have plans for me." The fighter pilot ended up becoming the forty-first president of the United States, George Bush.

In your life you may think you are stuck in a bad situation and there is little hope. You might be struggling with an addiction, bad choices, anger, sinful desires, or feelings of despair. You may think that there is no way out. Look to God and trust that He can help you. There is

nothing that God cannot do. As you follow God's will for your life, you may be surprised at what God has in store for you.

In first Corinthians 2:9 the apostle Paul states how we can have hope for the future. *No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love Him.* Authors, Brent Curtis and John Eldredge, provide further insight on this verse. "Paul simply means we cannot outdream God. What is at the end of our personal journeys? Something beyond our wildest imagination."¹ Heaven will be simply amazing as there will be no sin or suffering. We will worship, praise God, and be joy-filled. When we look to God for strength, we can also anticipate with hope what our earthly futures will have in store. We can take the approach to do our best and trust God to do the rest.

God's promises for our life are true. *For no word from God will ever fail.* Luke 1:37. God promises to provide strength for the day, guidance, unending love, saving grace, and many more blessings. Take it to heart that God will accomplish what He has promised!

God is all-powerful

When we feel weak, God can rejuvenate us. God has the power to transform us with determination, energy, and resolve to follow His Word in our lives. *The Lord is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust.* Psalm 18:2. God is powerful and strong. He is a resource that cannot be exhausted. Whenever you feel absolutely weak and defeated, vulnerable to sin or depression or failure, draw on His strength. In these times we can turn to prayer and promises from God's Word. The wonderful blessing of the Christian faith is that our relationship with God depends on God and not on us. Our faith is God's saving act of grace in our lives. He can help us persevere to stay strong in our faith throughout our life.

Christian singer, Riley Clemmons, has a beautiful song that we can remember anytime that we are feeling weak. God's power is unlimited and He is fighting for us. We can be encouraged and uplifted by His life-saving love.

I need the kind of love that can outlast the night.
I need the kind of love that is willing to fight.

When the going gets tough
And my strengths not enough

I see you showing up like never before.
This battle for my heart
You took on from the start.
You are the peace when my mind's at war.

You will never stop fighting for me
When I can't fight for myself.
Every word is a promise You keep
Cause You love me like nobody else.
You stand up for me in the darkest night.
When my faith is weak You're still by my side.

You will never stop fighting for me.
You will never stop fighting for me.

In the perfect timing You make all things right.
You paint a silver lining in this heart of mine.
Your love is winning me over.
Your heart is pulling me closer.²

God has the power to give us a new life in the grips of His grace. As our faith in God grows, we will begin to see the different ways that God is working in our life and in the lives of others. God can change us, from the inside out to dispel any fears and alleviate any of our doubts. God can change us from the outside in, till we no longer desire to commit sin.

As we seek to know and trust the power of God at work in our lives we can pray the prayer of Thomas á Kempis. No matter what life will bring, God's powerful love

can be our hope that with God there is nothing that is impossible.

Write Your blessed Name, O Lord, upon my heart, there to remain so indelibly engraved, that no prosperity, no adversity shall ever move me from your love. Be to me a strong tower of defense, a comforter in tribulation, a deliverer in distress, a very present help in trouble, and a guide to heaven through the many temptations and dangers of this life. Amen.

God knows you

There is nothing that is impossible with God in our lives. This is because God knows us. He knows what we need and He knows our struggles. God promises that He will provide what we need. *And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus.*

Philippians 4:19.

As our Creator, God knows our thoughts and He knows our desires. We want to know that we have value and that we are loved. We want to know that our lives matter and that our lives make a difference. God wants our

lives to matter too. He desires for us to be profoundly effective. That longing in us to contribute and to do something worthwhile, is not for our own recognition but to give glory to God. If we follow and seek God in our lives that's what we can expect from life.

God has a plan for our lives based on past experiences. Out of brokenness, we can be made whole and bring healing to others. To live out God's love to others, all we have to do is strive to show this love to others wherever we are, with whatever we have, day by day. We do not know what God knows. We know that He has a plan and purpose for us. No matter where we are, God's grace is enough.

When we seek God, we will get glimpses of His glory in our life. The glory of God is His qualities or attributes displayed in a visible way. It is impossible to fully understand God's glory, but we can trust that God is all we need in this life. As we better understand that our purpose is to serve God through showing love to others our desire to know God and His will for our lives will increase. Poet,

Deborah Ann Belka, has a wonderful poem that illustrates this further.

The Glory of God

The glory of God is everywhere,
It twinkles and shines all about.
It sparkles in the lives of those,
Who whole-heartedly seek Him out.

You can find it in all His goodness,
In the way He cares for you and me.
You can find it in His incredible blessing,
In the way He came to set us free.

You can find it in His tender mercy,
In the way He forgives and pardons all.
You can find it in His amazing love,
In the way He won't let His sparrow fall.

You can find it in His warm compassion,
In the way He knows each and every soul.
You can find it in His passionate kindness,
In the way He makes us complete and whole.

So, seek Him with all your heart and mind,
Let His presence shine on your face.
Experience daily His incredible glory,
And you will find His loving amazing grace.³

Permanent, deep, full satisfaction of your very being is only found in a right relationship with God. Our very existence is created for God as well as what we do. We were created to serve God. The prodigal son realized this when he began the journey to return to his father's home. He knew

that he had made mistakes but wanted to return so that he could be back in the loving protection of his father. He had no desires of prosperity or wealth but to simply be a servant. He wanted his life to matter and to help.

The prodigal son had insulted his father and family by asking for his inheritance. He had lived foolishly and wasted all that he had been given. If this were to happen today, many would think that the father would be wise to not let the son back into the house. The father should be angry and talk sternly to his son.

We know that with God all things are possible and the miracle in the story is that the father is waiting with hope that his son will return. The father wants to welcome him home with joy. The father had no judgement and no anger. He just wanted to rejoice that his son had come home.

The same is true for our heavenly father. He is ready with forgiveness. He wants to rejoice that we have come back to Him. He knows that failure is never final with Him. God can change the path of our lives for the better. Cory Asbury has a powerful song called, "The Father's House", that is based on the parable of the prodigal son. Our story is

never over when we are in the comfort of our Father's house!

Sometimes on this journey
I get lost in my mistakes
What looks to me like weakness
Is a canvas for your strength

And my story isn't over
My story's just begun
And failure won't define me
Cause that's what my Father does
Yeah, failure won't define me
Cause that's what my Father does

Ooh, lay your burdens down
Ooh, here in the Father's house
Check your shame at the door
Cause it ain't welcome anymore
Ooh, you're in the Father's house.

When it seems like we cannot go on, God will pick us up and carry us home. You cannot make it on your own. But God has the strength you do not have. He is willing and able to help you in your time of need.

Chapter 6: God will rescue you

God is the world's greatest rescuer. He keeps us from falling and strengthens us. Without God we would be lost to our sins, which lead to death. But thanks be to God He has rescued us from the punishment of sin! Through Jesus' death and glorious resurrection three days later the price of our sins have been paid. We are given the free gift of eternal life in heaven!

If you are currently feeling trapped in sin and that you have lost your way in this life, look to God. In Luke 19:10 Jesus states, *The Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.* Know that God is seeking you out to come back to Him and to know His love. *"For this is what the Sovereign Lord says: I myself will search for my sheep and look after them. As a shepherd looks after his scattered flock when he is with them, so will I look after my sheep. I will rescue them from all the places where they were scattered on a day of clouds and darkness."* Ezekiel 34:11-12.

Sin can creep into our life and cause us to experience darkness, gloom, and shame. When we turn to sin, we are looking for someone or something to give us what only God

can provide. Sin will never lead to lasting fulfillment. It only causes hurt and pain.

Think about the time we spend undoing the damage of yesterday's sin. Fighting bad habits. Regretting poor choices. Fixing damaged relationships. How much energy do we expend repairing yesterday's decisions?

How much simpler would your life be if you never sinned? Never disobeyed God. All the fights, binges, addictions, arguments, impure thoughts, and regrets from life would be gone. Now imagine how different our world would be if no one ever sinned. No conflict, pain, suffering, judgement, or temptation. We wouldn't beat ourselves up for stumbling yesterday because in a sinless society we didn't sin yesterday and won't stumble tomorrow. This would certainly simplify life.

This is what God has for store for us in heaven. A sinless existence where we will praise God and experience peace, joy, and contentment. There will be no more struggle, no more shame, no more tension between people, and no more death.

God rescues us for life everlasting in heaven but also rescues us for a better earthly life. God works to bring us back to the comfort of His warm embrace so that we can experience peace and joy on earth. God has great dreams for you now! He offers hope for this life and perfection in the next! Simplify today by letting Jesus forgive the sins of yesterday and help you live a better live today. *Let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles.* Hebrews 12:1.

Set your heart on God and let Him guide your life. God will lead you. *He makes me lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters.* Psalm 23:2. Notice the important phrases here: He makes me and He leads me. The shepherd is in charge. The shepherd selects the trail and prepares the pasture. The sheep's job, our job, is to watch the Shepherd.

If you have strayed from the path, God wants you to return and will continue to bring you back to the right path. Pastor and author, Max Lucado, describes God's passion and love for you. "God will do what it takes—whatever it takes—to bring His children home. He is the shepherd in

search of His lamb. His legs are scratched, His feet are sore, and His eyes are burning. He scales the cliffs and traverses the fields. He explores the caves. He cups His hands to His mouth and calls into the canyon. And the name He calls is yours.”¹ God knows what is best for you and wants to remove the pain of sin from your life. Stick with God in your life and keep focused on His Word.

God has been with us in the past, is with us now in the present, and will be with us in the future. The Christian group, Hillsong United, has a song called, “Another in the Fire,”² that has an important message about the permanence of God. The first chorus of the song says, “there *was* another in the fire.” The second chorus says, “there *is* another in the fire.” The last chorus says, “there’ll *be* another in the fire.” When life becomes difficult or we are struggling with the weight of sin, we can trust God to sustain and protect us. God has been, is, and will be with us no matter what. Even if we feel like He’s far away, He’ll always be there ready to help us!

Author and pastor, Kyle Idleman, tells the story of an elderly man who could no longer take care of himself. His

family made the difficult decision to put him in a nursing home. Every Sunday afternoon the man's daughter and her husband and their children would go see him. Every Sunday this elderly man would wait for his daughter and her family to come visit. He looked forward to it all week and was always out in the lobby waiting for them.

As the years passed, his mind grew weaker, and he soon had a hard time remembering his children's names. He would sometimes have a hard time getting back to his room. But no matter what happened, on Sunday afternoon, he was always there waiting for his daughter and her family.

One day the daughter asked her father, "Daddy, do you know what day of the week it is?" The father couldn't tell her what day of the week it was. So the daughter said to her dad, "Well, daddy, how did you know to wait for us today?" The father replied, "Oh, honey, I wait for you every day."

God is a loving Father who longs for His children to come home. On the day you finally come home, you will find Him waiting for you. You might wonder, "How did He

know to wait for me on this day? How did He know I was coming today?" He has been waiting for you every day. In the parable of the prodigal son, the father is waiting for his son to return. We know this because, Luke 15:20 states, *"But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.* The father was waiting and watching for his son and runs to him. The father has a feast prepared for his lost son is now found. Similarly, there is great rejoicing in heaven for every sinner that is saved.

The father did not judge the prodigal son and tell him to get his life back together first. He simply welcomed him home. In our lives God does not say clean up first and come in. Instead He tells us to come in and I'll clean you up. God is ready and near to us to help. Do you long to trust and know God as your Lord and Savior? I've got great news! In an even greater way—greater than you could ever imagine—He longs to be gracious to you. He knows what you need in life and what will give you satisfaction and fulfillment! The table is ready, and He has prepared a feast

of blessings with you in mind: grace, love, hope, purpose, direction, joy, comfort, encouragement, and more!

The Christian band, Rend Collective, has an uplifting song called, “Rescuer”, that speaks of God’s powerful work in our lives.

He’s our rescuer
He’s our rescuer
We are free from sin forever more
Oh how sweet the sound
Oh how grace abounds
We will praise the Lord our rescuer

He is beauty for the blind man
Riches for the poor
He is friendship for the one the world ignores
He is pasture for the weary
Rest for those who strive
For the Good Lord is the way the truth the life
Yes the Good Lord is the way the truth the life

Come and be chainless
Come and be fearless
Come to the foot of Calvary
There is redemption for every affliction
Here at the foot of Calvary.⁴

Trust God’s grace and love in your live and look to Him for strength. God is more than capable to do what He has promised. He is our rescuer from sin, death, and the devil. Let Him bring peace and purpose to your life. Grow in your understanding of His Word and promises and be

prepared to be amazed at the change He can bring in your life! At the cross, Jesus paid the price for your sins. Not so that you could continue in sin but to be freed to live a better life. He rescued us from the debt of our sins. This love of God in our lives changes everything. There is Good News! God has come to seek and save us! God is the greatest rescuer because He restores us and sustains us to life everlasting in heaven with Him!

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