

THOMAS À KEMPIS

*The*  
Imitation  
*of* Christ

THE BEATITUDES  
EDITION

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THOMAS À KEMPIS

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For Christ-followers  
of all faiths,  
in every nation,  
who embrace the teachings of Christ  
and desire to imitate him.

May his words bless you.  
May your responses please him.

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## PREFACE

*The Imitation of Christ* is widely believed, after the Bible, to be the second best-selling book of all time. It continues to be one of the most popular of the Christian classics. Ageless in its message, *The Imitation of Christ* is as relevant today as in 1471 when it was first published. Its veneration has made it the granddaddy of devotionals, a remarkable treatise that often has the right word for a reader at the right time. The writing style of this Beatitudes version is clear, conversational, compelling. If you find it hard to understand the archaic language of vintage *Imitation*, this edition is for you.

Perhaps the most significant difference is the textual arrangement. The traditional sequence has no logical connection between chapters, and often not between sentences. Here the words of Thomas à Kempis merge with the New Testament Beatitudes to show readers in a systematic way who Jesus Christ is and how to live in a way that pleases him.

It begins with Christ's invitation to follow him. It ends with his mandate to those who want to do that, leading to a glimpse of what awaits us in this life and in the life to come.

Sandwiched between those two end-leaves are the Beatitudes. Here we are introduced to the pathos of soul poverty. That recognition leads to regret for wrongdoing, humbling us enough to begin our quest for a better way of being in the world.

The section entitled "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness" is the heart of *The Imitation of Christ*. It's the pinnacle where the reader who wants to imitate Christ should linger the longest. Here, as we learn to think and live like Christ, we become his ambassadors. Tender and loving, yet demanding, it prepares us to read in the following sections about the ups and downs of human relationships as Christ teaches us how to reflect mercy, live pure and transparent lives, and become peacemakers.

## SUGGESTIONS FOR READING

If you read *The Imitation* as you do most books, it will be overwhelming. Rather, approach it a little at a time, the way you usually read your Bible. Look up a few chapters first, much as someone not familiar with the Bible might gravitate toward Psalm 23 (the Shepherd's Psalm) or First Corinthians 13 (the Love Chapter). Some suggestions:

Chapter 1 – The Way

Chapter 14 – I Come

Chapter 51 – The Calvary Road

Chapter 69 – Above All

Chapter 92 – Love's Wonder

Next, scan briefly through the whole book to get a sense of how it progresses. Then return to chapter one. Read slowly, thoughtfully, until God speaks to you. You may read several paragraphs before a thought or even just a phrase “grabs” you. When it does, try to restate it in your own words to be sure you understand its meaning. How does it relate to you? For example, in chapter three the pilgrim prays, “From your hand, I accept the cross.” Stop there. What does it mean? Can you also pray that? If not, why?

# The Invitation

# 1

## The Way

The Christ speaks:

I am the Way. Follow me and you will never again need to stumble through darkness for my light will flood your path. With those words, I invite you to imitate my life. As you walk with me, you will begin to understand life's mysteries. I will be your guide if you make it a priority to observe the way I lived and then commit to following my example.

My teachings surpass the writings of all others from the beginning of time. As the Holy Spirit makes my words clear to you, you will learn many things you don't yet know. You will begin to see that embedded in my precepts are answers to your every dilemma.

Many people consider them foolish. They can't understand them because their sinful nature controls their minds. Without my Spirit, these people do not belong with me.

Others believe me, but they are as seeds scattered on top of the ground, struggling to grow roots in the soil of righteousness. When winds of trouble blow, Satan snatches away the seeds of reality that are truth.

There are those who understand my principles but don't always follow them. Having a resemblance of godliness but lacking the power, they wither in the heat of hard times.

Sometimes those who do follow me hold my teachings close but refuse to give up their dreams. They choose instead to carve out their own lifestyle. That squeezes out their desire to learn from me by walking in my footsteps. Then they wonder where they made the wrong turn.

If you want to understand my words, you must commit to imitating me, learn to think the way I think, conforming your life to mine—not to the world's culture.

What good would you accomplish if you became a distinguished theologian known for your insights but God was not pleased because you debated with a lofty heart? Profound theology doesn't make anyone righteous; what pleases me is an exemplary life. Regret for wrongdoing is better than knowing its definition.

Quoting the whole Bible by memory, along with all the writings of philosophers, wouldn't impress me if your love for me doesn't motivate you. Your efforts would be senseless. Everything is vain except loving and serving the Father God. The highest wisdom is this: forget your worries and seek the Kingdom of God. Look at the birds. They don't sow, reap, or store away their food. Yet my heavenly Father feeds them. You are more valuable than they are.

It's meaningless to bustle about to accumulate wealth, not knowing whether you will be able to protect it. In a moment, it could all disappear.

It's meaningless to pursue recognition and honor, pouring your energy into climbing a success ladder.

It's meaningless to allow selfishness to determine the way you live, craving what will lead to undesirable consequences.

It's meaningless to live a long life if you think only about yourself, and give no thought to caring about others.

To love what is temporary rather than to lay up treasure in heaven is foolish. It's far better to look ahead to blessings that will never come to an end.

Think about this proverb: Everything is wearisome. We are never satisfied with what we see. We are never content with what we hear.

Give little attention to what is visible. Try to focus on the invisible.

## 2

### The Truth

The Christ speaks:

I am the Truth. Those whom I teach are blessed. I speak clearly, spelling out life as it is unlike the thinking of humanity that is often faulty.

Why ponder mysteries beyond human understanding when I won't hold you accountable on Judgment Day for what you don't know? It's foolish to neglect edifying things to explore curious, perhaps dangerous, fantasies.

You have eyes to see, but do you perceive? Godly discernment isn't available to everyone.

Genera and species—what are they but philosophical terms? Those I mentor need not concern themselves with a multiplicity of ideologies. Before the foundations of the earth, I AM, the first and the last, the beginning and the end. I give life and light to everything I create. My light shines in the darkness and I never extinguish it.

Without me no one understands truth, so center your life on me. View circumstances from my perspective.

The pilgrim prays:

O Lord, you are the Truth. I want to follow you. It confuses me to hear and read so many conflicting opinions. You are the One I long for.

Let shallow thought be mute. Let everyone remain silent before you. In the stillness Lord, speak to me. I will listen.

Lord, focus my mind, my thoughts, on you. Help me understand the promises in your Holy Word. May your Word be a lamp to guide my feet, a light for my path. Amen.

The Christ speaks:

I will do what you have asked if you don't allow the grandstanding around you to distract you. Your sole desire should be the glory of God, not the praise of others.

Nothing will hinder you more than thinking only about yourself.

The godly make plans based on the Bible's truth. They don't allow the opinions of others to push and pull them in directions I don't intend for them to go. If you do that, chaos will cripple you. If you take on too much, your overcommitted schedules will become monsters that interfere with my agenda for you. Your goals should be to conquer egocentricity, become holy, and live triumphantly.

No one is perfect. The most godly and tranquil life has imperfections; all perspectives include some degree of human error. A realistic evaluation of who you are is a better way to God than a meticulous search for knowledge. Education is desirable, but you should pass everything through the grid of God's revealed truth. Approach your studies with humility, a clear conscience, discernment, and right living.

Those who invest more time and effort in educational and career excellence than in character development accomplish little of eternal value. They choose to pursue a moment of recognition, sometimes straying from the truth. In doing so, they determine their eternal destiny.

If my followers were more diligent in uprooting sin and pursuing righteousness rather than caring about their achievements, the world would be a better place. A transformed church would become alive, clearly declaring the whole counsel of biblical wisdom. When Judgment Day comes, I won't ask about the books you have read, the debates you have won, or the good you have done. I will be concerned only with how well you have represented me.

Think about esteemed teachers, mentors, and role models from the past whom you have known or read. Where are they now? Perhaps few of you ever think of them now as younger ones take their places. The world's memory fades quickly.

The truly great love much. The most learned abandon their aspirations to follow me. They don't think themselves important. Focused on learning my ways, they consider honors bestowed on them as trivial.

## 3

### The Life

The Christ speaks:

To tap into my resources, abdicate your ambitions with no reservations.

Follow me. I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

Without the Way, you will go in the wrong direction.

Without the Truth, you lack a foundation to discern reality.

Without the Life, there is no hope.

I am the Way you should follow, the Truth you should believe, the Life that is worth living.

I am the Way inviolable, the Truth infallible, the Life everlasting.

I am the Way that is safe, the Truth that is unerring, the Life that is authentic and joyful.

Follow me and you will know the truth. It will free you from human expectations and prepare you for eternal life.

To know truth, believe my words.

To be my disciple, forget your ambitions.

To be unencumbered, be willing to part with possessions.

To live joyfully, reject worldly values.

To be exalted in heaven, be humble here on earth.

To reign with me, carry the cross with me.

Those who are willing to do this will know peace and freedom.

The pilgrim prays:

Lord Jesus, you were rejected and ridiculed. Please grant me grace to follow you, to accept the world's contempt as you did. I know that a student is not above the teacher. A servant is not above the master.



May I reflect your humble spirit. Teach me. Counsel me as I daily search your Holy Word. It delights and refreshes me more than anything else I read. Amen.

The Christ speaks:

You know these things and you are reading the Scriptures. God will bless you if you obey them. Those who obey me love me, and because they love me, the Father loves them. Those who carry their cross will reign with me, just as I carried my cross and now sit in heaven at the right hand of God, my Father.

The pilgrim prays:

O Lord Jesus, as you have promised, I know it will be.

From your hand, I accept the cross, the bridge to glory. I accept the circumstances you allow. May I never slip backward or abandon your purpose.

I will join your followers to persevere and move forward with you as my Commander. As you go before me, you promise to help and fight battles on my behalf.

I will follow you bravely, fearlessly, prepared to die if I must.

You have given every disciple a cross; you have given me a cross. I will carry it willingly, considering it an honor. Amen.

## 4

# The Holy Scriptures

The Christ speaks:

Read the Holy Scriptures to learn truth, not for their eloquence. Read them in the same Spirit in which holy men, inspired by God, wrote them: to teach, guide, correct, train, encourage. The Bible is no ordinary book. God uses it to equip my disciples. Read it prayerfully, humbly, leisurely, until the Holy Spirit reveals fresh truth to you.

Everyone, including me, needs to live daily by the words of Scripture. Nature withers and people die, but God's words endure forever to feed the hungry soul.

When you need encouragement, read until you are affirmed. When perplexity confuses you, let the Bible shed light into your darkness.

It interferes with reading prayerfully if you try to understand everything you read. Instead of questioning, listen. God wants to speak to you. Relax and listen with your heart to what he wants to say.

The time to study other sources to help you understand seemingly contradictory statements comes later. If some theological concept isn't clear to you, research Bible commentaries and dictionaries, including books that help you grasp a fuller meaning of biblical truth.

Expand supplementary reading to include devotional writings, both contemporary and from centuries past. Those books are important to read. Don't be overly concerned about an author's credentials, such as having a Ph.D. If you do that, you will miss some rich gems.

God speaks in various ways through his servants. He has no favorites. Be motivated by the desire to become like me, listening always for God's voice to lead you more deeply into his ways.

## 5

### **The Restless Soul**

The Christ speaks:

A restless soul is like the agitated sea. Turbulent waves seldom wash up anything worthwhile. Those waters become dangerous. Apply the metaphor to yourself, because if temptation rolls in, knocking you down, hasty decisions are likely to follow. Even trifling frustrations will seem overwhelming as you attempt to soothe your restlessness.

It leads to anguish when a person or thing you desire isn't attainable to you. Let me warn you. When you covet something or someone, contentment is impossible.

God has designed you with a vacuum that friendships, social status, recognition, and wealth can never fill. Such things become slaves. If you get what you want, you may still be unhappy. What you wanted is not what you thought it would be. Guard against any inordinate desire; it will determine everything you do.

Your heavenly Father knows what you need. Leave the decision about what you should have to a loving God who delights in providing what is good at the right time. Be willing to accept that it might not be what you have in mind. Pray for humility and contentment—that combination guarantees a peace that surpasses understanding.

## 6

### **The Human Condition**

The Christ speaks:

Wherever you are, whatever you do, you will be restless until you turn to God.

Does it upset you when a day doesn't go according to your plan? Is there anyone who has everything for which one could wish? No, not one. Kings and popes are not exempt. Disappointment affects everyone. Doldrums corner even the most devout unless they are among the few who are able to endure hardship willingly without complaining.

Half-hearted believers find themselves in a disquieting place. They ask, "Why are other people happier than I am?" They look with envy at the rich, the famous, the influential, the powerful. Are the rich and famous happy? Not usually. Power seldom exists without the fear that intertwines with anxiety. The uncertainty of wealth and fame negates the expectation of happiness. King Solomon knew this and prayed, "O God, give me neither poverty nor riches, but just enough to meet my needs."

People everywhere live unaware of their impoverishment. They cling desperately to their miserable life because it's all they know, determined to avoid death as long as they can. Their income may not even provide for their necessities; still, they would rather live on this earth than anywhere else. Conversely, the well off who work hard to accumulate as much as they can, caring nothing about my Kingdom, are doomed to discover that what they loved and worked hard to accumulate will someday be worthless.

For those who live close to me, life is also weary at times. In Psalm 25, King David asked God to free him from his anguish because his troubles were multiplying. He was well aware of both his frailness and God's omnipotence. Mundane things like eating, drinking, sleeping, working, and

caring for daily necessities become tedious when pilgrims are attuned to the future when God will transform their tired, aching bodies into heavenly ones that will never be tired. They long for that day even more than those who dip their toes into a lukewarm spirituality.

I long for you to fix your thoughts on things eternal rather than temporary, to see beyond visible things to the invisible, to look ahead to your permanent homeland. Separate yourself from the values of those who love this world. Resolve to pursue a close relationship with God. It isn't too late. Why delay? Now is the time to change your thinking. Athletes suffer bruising pain for a fading trophy. Your goal should be an imperishable crown that will sparkle throughout eternity. Pursue it.

Expect to go through fire and flood before reaching the place of refreshment. There is no other way. You must go this way. Your fragile body will get tired. Count on God to give you the strength to do hard things. Though you would like to snap your fingers to exchange misery for happiness, you lost that privilege in the Garden of Eden.

Your tendency to give into what you don't want to do devastates you. So, you ask for forgiveness, then turn around and do the same thing again. The next time it's worse. One moment, you are determined to be more careful; an hour later, you have forgotten your resolution.

No one fully knows your heart but God. Not even you. His grace will never leave you stranded. So, take hold of his hand. He will lift you up and make you stronger than ever.

The human condition shows little sign of holiness. What would become of you eventually should you become lackadaisical and allow Satan to gain a foothold? The very thought makes one shudder. Don't let it happen. I've given you faith as a breastplate so Satan cannot defeat you and hope as a helmet so you need never despair.

Learn what you need to know to become righteous.

## 7

### The Contrast

The Christ speaks:

The relentless battle between good and evil won't end until I return to earth. The foxy Satan at times appears as the epitome of the evil that he embodies. Other times he appears as an angel of light to deceive even those who follow me. It takes the grace of God to recognize his shrewd tactics.

God gives everyone freedom to choose good or evil. Some choose to follow me, others choose to reject me, and then there are those who *pretend* to follow me. They honor me with words but not with their lifestyle. Even though they do good things, their hearts aren't in step with Kingdom ways. They are vulnerable because their choice to accommodate both right and wrong fragments their commitments. Those who aren't fully with me are against me. They become victims of Satan's wily ways.

Without God, human nature is crafty and seductive. It ensnares and deceives to achieve its goals. The grace of God enables fallen human nature to become like me, loving and blameless, doing what is right with pure motives.

Nature:

thinks only about itself,  
isn't willing to give up its own agenda,  
doesn't like to obey rules,  
refuses to recognize authority,  
won't accept discipline,  
seldom perseveres.

Grace:

is intent on living to please me,  
thinks about others,  
rejects self-indulgences,  
submits to authority,  
accepts discipline,  
hangs in there when life becomes tough,  
doesn't demand its own way,  
doesn't use people to get what it wants.

Nature:

is concerned with its own welfare,  
deviously calculates how to get what it wants from others.

Grace:

has a different perspective on relationships,  
commits to helping others whenever it can,  
reaches out to encourage even when bone-tired,  
refuses to do only what is easy.

Nature enthusiastically accepts honors and compliments. Grace defers all glory to God. Nature cringes when held in contempt. Grace willingly accepts ridicule. Nature enjoys a good time and loves to be lazy. Grace looks around for a need to fill, for opportunities to serve others.

Nature:

is obsessed with possessions,  
shops for rare and beautiful treasures,  
casually tosses away what it considers mediocre or out of date.

Grace:

stores up heavenly treasures,  
is content with humble, simple surroundings,  
thankfully accepts used items that may need repair,  
has no problem wearing clothes from resale shops.

Nature is interested in the here and now, cheering as its investment portfolio increases, and then agonizing over financial reversals. Grace chooses eternal investments without clinging to temporary possessions; it

easily accepts loss because its treasure is in heaven where thieves never break in and rust doesn't corrupt.

Nature:

prefers to receive, not give.  
likes to claim ownership without sharing.

Grace:

is kind and generous,  
isn't selfish,  
is more inclined to give than receive,  
is content with little,  
knows that greater blessings come to those who give.

Nature:

depends on people for well-being,  
is obsessed with physical appearance,  
gets involved in worthless scams,  
explores the latest plastic surgery techniques in its quest for youth and beauty.

Grace:

seeks righteousness more than beauty,  
has no need to impress people,  
refuses to fit into the world's mold,  
works quietly and productively,  
doesn't draw attention to its accomplishments,  
prefers the tranquility of home to public appearances,  
isn't concerned with its visibility.

Nature relishes consolation wherever it can find it and is enticed by activities that soothe and pamper. Grace, knowing the divine comfort that only God can give, finds delight in searching the Scriptures and savoring its riches.

Nature:

does little without compensation,  
expects in return for favors equal or better remuneration,



looks for effusive public praise,  
wants everyone to know the good deeds it does.

Grace:

asks no reward other than God's approval,  
is content with just enough to meet basic needs.

Nature:

looks for happiness from family and friends,  
is elated if the family tree uncovers status and wealth,  
fawns on the powerful,  
flatters the rich,  
applauds those who have questionable values.

Grace:

is able to love its enemies,  
prays for its persecutors,  
doesn't brag about its many friends,  
isn't impressed with lineage,  
is always available to encourage others to do their best,  
keeps its distance from deception.

Nature is quick to complain when in trouble or want. Grace responds to meager benefits with a calm and steady spirit. A critical word upsets Nature. Grace, focused on eternity, is more interested in how God views the situation.

Nature:

wants to be in the center of activity,  
pushes to keep attention revolving around itself.

Grace:

refers everything to God, who is the source of all,  
takes no credit for itself,  
doesn't have the arrogance to presume anything,  
doesn't contend with its antagonist,  
doesn't fight for its own viewpoint,  
submits to God's wisdom.

Nature:

listens to whispered secrets,  
sniffs out the latest gossip,  
is first to buy the latest electronic gadgets,  
wants people to envy its ingenuity.

Grace:

cares little about worldly celebrations,  
has no interest in gossip or busybodies,  
understands that nothing endures for long,  
restrains from knee-jerk impulses,  
shuns exhibitionism,  
pursues deeds of mercy in secret,  
esteems what is useful for the soul,  
works for the advancement of the Kingdom of God,  
and, reluctant to accept praise, insists on God alone receiving  
thanks and praise for the blessings he gives to those who honor  
him.

God's grace shines as a supernatural light. It's a special gift that identifies those who follow me. It's God's pledge of salvation and favor, elevating the human condition to a high level.

For all who learn to become like me, the transformation from sin to righteousness raises them above the infestation of sin around them.

For them, God's amazing grace abounds.

## 8

### The Source

The Christ speaks:

My blessings will enrich your days when your commitment to me is irrevocable. I must be your primary source of guidance for your motives to be pure, not twisted toward your own goals or beholden to what people think you should do. If you try to find your way by yourself, you will falter.

Refer all decisions to me. Talk to me about your options; I am the One who paves the way for you. Everything flows from me, and ultimately everything returns to me. From me, the commoner and the aristocrat, the poor and the rich, receive blessings that overflow with my favor. All who love me without reservation receive grace for grace, one blessing after another.

If you search for answers apart from me, however good your sources, you won't know joy. Instead, frustrating obstacles will sap your energy, disillusioning you.

Attribute nothing to your own efforts or to the mentors you have come to admire as role models. May you never have the audacity to boast. What do you have that God hasn't given you? If everything you have is from him, why boast as though it weren't a gift to you?

I bestow good things on those who come to me. Be thankful as you receive each of my gifts and use them for my glory. When you appreciate my blessings, envy and pride disappear. Neither will you be puffed up with egotistical leanings. Divine love overcomes those feelings and empowers the soul. When you trust in God alone, joy will come. No one is truly good except God. He is the only One worthy to receive honor and praise.

## 9

### **Just As I Am**

The pilgrim prays:

Lord, in prayer I come to you, I who am but dust and ashes. I need to be realistic about this, because it's important to me to see myself as you do. My sin tells me how arrogant I am. I can't deny it. I think I can plan my schedule and manage my days myself rather than admitting how wretched, miserable, poor, and blind I am. You are the infinite God; I can't even breathe except that you give me breath.

Is my faith real? Do I think more highly of myself than I should? If I do, please make this known to me. May others say of me that where sin abounded, grace did much more abound. Shine the light of your awesome holiness into the recesses of my subconscious thinking to expose pride and uppity confidence. I seldom think of eternity. How awesome it is that you graciously embrace me even though I repeatedly allow sin to knock me down.

Lead me to the valley of humility and reveal myself to me. Show me who I am, where I have come from, what I have been, what I can become. I haven't realized, though now I do, that all I am and have amounts to nothing without your enabling.

May your words enrich me, guiding me in all I do. You have promised to protect me from danger and the wayward path. Following my dreams, I would destroy myself in the quagmire. Give me strength, a new zest for life; teach me how to care with untarnished love. In the process, may I discover both the potential I have in you and your holy purity.

My Lord, my God, thank you for drawing me to yourself. I am undeserving of your mercy, yet your generosity to me continues. Draw this

pilgrim closer to you so I rejoice in you alone with praise and heartfelt thanks. Amen.

## 10

### The Essentials

The Christ speaks:

You are not going to live on a sin-infested globe forever. Sooner than you think, your short life will end. Today you are here; tomorrow you could be gone—and most likely forgotten. Wisdom realizes this and prepares for the reality of what is to come. Live today as if you were going to die this evening. It's careless not to plan for the inevitable. Become comfortable as you think about the end of your life. It won't be easier a year from now.

Few people believe it, but the day one dies is better than the day one is born. You have nothing to fear from death if your conscience is clear. Indeed, a long, healthy life isn't always good. Living for many years doesn't make you more godly; it may even work against you. For some, the longer they live, the more their guilt increases. How many perfect, sinless days have you lived? Has there ever been a day when you haven't sinned in thought, word, or deed? What about the time a friend needed a caring touch and you didn't provide it? If dying is frightening, living is at times more formidable.

Why anticipate a long life when tomorrow is not a certainty? Life ends unexpectedly, suddenly. People die in car accidents. Children drown in swimming pools. Teenagers plunge to their death from mountain trails. Roaring avalanches bury skiers alive. Sudden heart attacks propel thousands into eternity every day. Humanity blossoms like a flower and quickly withers. Like a passing shadow, life vanishes. You will, too.

The wise think ahead. The fool thinks only about the here and now. Have you begun to accumulate riches for your future in heaven? Why store them up on earth? Store your treasures in heaven. If they are there, your heart will be there also.

Spend each day as if you won't be alive to eat dinner. When evening comes, don't assume that you will see sunrise in the morning. Always be ready to leave this world. Death is sorrowful if you have been negligent. When you recognize you could die at any time, you will live with a different perspective.

What good is faith if it doesn't drive your activities? If you meet someone who doesn't have enough food or clothing, and you say, "Have a good day. Stay warm and eat well," but do nothing to give that person what they need, what good is that? When people are in need, help them. Share generously the resources that God has given you.

Do now what you can. You harvest what you plant. Become what you want to be like when your life ends. Fix your thoughts on what is true, good, and right. Think about things that are pure and lovely. Focus on the good in others. Choose for friends those who are mature in faith. Honor their example and learn from them. If they precede you to heaven, they will be waiting to welcome you.

When you send treasure ahead, you begin to think about death as the beginning of something far better, accepting its inevitable arrival with joy, not dread. Detach yourself from worldly concerns now, so that you enter heaven free from entanglements, righteous before God.

Do what you can while you are healthy. When health declines, you won't be able to do much. Never, ever forget that you are a temporary resident on this planet. Nurture your relationship with God. Send your thoughts heavenward frequently throughout the day.

When you die, and God welcomes you to the glories of heaven, what you see will astonish you.

# 11

## Listen Carefully

The Christ speaks:

Listen carefully to my words, tucking them into the recesses of your heart. The words I speak reach into your innermost being to meet your deepest needs. Listen to them quietly, thoughtfully, lovingly. Use them to encourage others, not to impress them with your knowledge of the Scriptures.

The pilgrim prays:

Lord, I thank you. You point me in the right direction, protecting me from bad decisions. In troubled times, you comfort me. When you discipline me, I know it's for my good.

The Christ speaks:

From the beginning of creation, I have spoken to my people through the prophets and I continue to speak to everyone, everywhere, even though so few listen. They prefer to follow cultural trends. They are more interested in what makes them feel good than in pleasing me. What I give is rich in eternal rewards, but those who opt for instant gratification aren't interested. How many do you know who serve and respond to me with the same commitment as those who serve the elite of this world? So many people are unwilling to exert even a small amount of energy for heavenly assets that exceed temporal awards, for glory that will never end. More willing to self-destruct than to enjoy eternal bliss, they prefer an extravagant lifestyle, rejecting my teachings. Giving little thought to their eternal destiny, they work day and night holding on to a vague dream that someday they will enjoy an easy retirement.



In heaven, I have reserved for those who follow me, holding nothing back, priceless inheritances that will never tarnish. The highest honors await them. What I promise, I give. What I say, I do. I honor those who are devoted to me. This world will someday be no more, but my words remain sure. I will reward all who work faithfully for my Kingdom until the very end.

Memorize my words. Meditate diligently on them. You need them when temptation beckons. What may be hard to understand now will someday become clear. I often teach in one of two ways. Using difficult situations, I rebuke and correct your weaknesses. Other times, I hold you close to my heart so that your heart beats along with mine as you increasingly become as I am, humble and holy.

The pilgrim prays:

Heavenly Father, how good you are. How tender you are. I feel unworthy to approach you. The prophet Isaiah thought he was doomed. Gideon protested that he was the least in his family. I often feel like that too.

You are omnipotent. You can do anything and no one can stop what you choose to do. Caring, just, holy, you are a God who wants to give me what I need. You promise to fill my hungry soul. Only the unrepentant sinner is sent away empty.

O Lord, I need your compassion and love. I cannot endure this life unless you grant me mercy and grace. I don't want to feel destitute. I ask you to teach me how to listen carefully.

Lord, you are my wisdom. You knew me before the world began. My longing for you is like a parched desert thirsting for rain. Show me how to walk steadily along your paths, obeying your every command. Amen.

## 12

### **Live Sincerely**

The Christ speaks:

You are seeking me with a sincere heart, and when you correctly understand truth, you will no longer need to worry. I promise you that my shield of faith will protect you from the devil's fiery arrows. Devious people won't lead you astray. Empty threats from slanderers who lack integrity will not concern you.

The pilgrim prays:

Lord, your promises encourage me. Teach me your truth; guard and preserve me to the end of my pilgrimage. May your truth keep me from wayward affections. May I walk with you daily, free from the shackles that hinder. Amen.

The Christ speaks:

I, who am Truth, will teach you what is right so you know what pleases me. I will equip you with all you need to do my will, producing in you attitudes that please me.

Reflect on your shortcomings with regret and tears. Never think yourself important because someone thinks well of you. In reality, you are a sinner, encumbered by selfish passions. Left to your own impulses, disaster awaits. Too easily you fail to do the right thing and you like to justify your reactions. Doing so clouds your ability to make good decisions.

I've already asked this question, but I am going to ask it again. It's important. What do you have that God hasn't given you? If everything you have is from him, why do you think you're so great? You have

accomplished nothing on your own, nothing great, nothing significant, nothing high, nothing commendable.

Professional credentials mean little. Do you think your qualifications are impressive? That kind of thinking is similar to the seed that expects to be a flower but turns out to be a weed. Only what has eternal significance counts.

Fear nothing, blame nothing, run away from nothing except your faults. Those you should fear. Diligently avoid situations where you fail to reflect my ways. It will be better for you to lose all your possessions than to damage your reputation. Allow my eternal truth to warm your heart. May your unworthiness of my grace sober you.

Treat God's disfavor with awe. He is both severe and kind—hard on those who disobey, but kind to those who do right. Assess your weaknesses. Do you offend family and friends? Then you have offended me. Are you insensitive to the feelings of others? Then you are insensitive to me. Have you done a good deed today? If you haven't, you have done nothing for me. Your actions reflect your inward attitudes.

Some individuals say they love me, they honor me with words, but their attitude says something different. Their worship is meaningless. They read devotional books, wear the cross as a pin or necklace, apply bumper stickers to their cars, but they don't have the right spirit.

They claim to follow me but their allegiance isn't sincere. Their god is their reputation. They are proud of themselves because they diligently study theology, trying to understand the mysteries of the Kingdom. They brag about heavenly things, but at the same time they are committed to enjoying the pleasures of this world. Close friendships with these people are precarious. Their arrogance may lead them into serious sin.

People who are responsive to the Holy Spirit's probing, who love me with a pure heart, hungering and thirsting after righteousness, don't focus on temporary gain. Their minds are on things above where their true citizenship is, not on things on earth.

# 13

## Accountability

The Christ speaks:

The day is coming when you will be personally accountable to Almighty God, the Creator of the universe, who knows you inside out and who accepts neither bribes nor excuses. Instead, he judges righteously. On that day, the devout will be glad; the wicked will weep.

Job asked, “What will I do when God confronts me? What will I answer when called to account?” Everyone who feels the weight of sin asks this question. How will the sinner feel on Judgment Day as God waits for a response?

All will be on their own when the all-knowing God reveals dark secrets. He doesn't allow defense lawyers to plead adverse circumstances. The opportunity to admit guilt, to regret wrongdoing, to ask for forgiveness and receive pardon, will have passed.

Those whom God has forgiven will remember and celebrate setbacks as stepping-stones. They will forget times of distress. Rough garments will become brilliant while silks and satins lose their sheen. The humble cottage will be more desirable than a palatial home. Patience will be more honorable than power. Obedience will count more than knowledge.

A pure conscience will give more satisfaction than profound philosophy. Prayer will bring more contentment than gourmet pleasures. Simple living will be more enriching than all the treasures of the world. Silence will be more exhilarating than empty chatter. An act of kindness will be more rewarding than flattery. A disciplined life with modest means will bring more enjoyment than an acclaimed performance.

No one can serve two masters. You will love one and hate the other; you will serve one devotedly and resent what the other asks of you. It's

impossible to mix heavenly values with worldly priorities. Divided loyalty produces wavering faith. If you have received honor and recognition not related to Kingdom activities, what good will it do you in heaven? Your accomplishments will then be worthless. All that matters is your love and service for God. Serve him with all your being so your love becomes increasingly perfect and you need not be afraid of death.

Let love strengthen you. Should you falter, may the awe of Judgment Day hold you steady. Run from evil things. Pursue righteousness: true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent, and worthy of praise. Fight for the faith. Persevere without wavering so no one can find fault with you from now until I come again.

Blessed are you  
who are poor in spirit.  
The Kingdom of Heaven  
belongs to you.

Matthew 5:3

# 14

## I Come

The Christ speaks:

Come to me when you are weary and carrying heavy burdens. I will give you rest.

The pilgrim prays:

Lord, your promises are comforting, welcoming. Imprint them on my subconscious so I automatically turn to you when I need encouragement. Make it impossible for me to forget your promises that are so tender and loving.

Your words draw me to you. Angels and archangels adore you; those who are righteous and holy revere you, and still you say to fallen humanity, “Come, follow me . . . everyone.” The heavens, even the highest heaven, cannot contain you and yet you say, “Come to me . . . everyone.” Without such a tender invitation, who would dare to approach you, Lord of all?

I want to come—I will come—but my failures hold me back. My sins frighten me. My tarnished conscience makes me hang my head in shame. I am a sinner, yet you invite me to approach you?

Noah, a righteous man, worked for years to build the ark that would save his family from drowning in the flood. You are the Maker of the world. I can come into your presence right now?

Moses, your great servant, built an ark of acacia wood, overlaying it with pure gold inside and outside, with a molding of gold around it to contain the Law. His work of art, meticulously crafted according to your specifications, reflected perfect workmanship. My faults leave me numb. You are the Creator of all that is. Dare I come into your presence?

King Solomon spent seven years building a magnificent temple as a place for worship. The celebration to dedicate the temple lasted seven days. I find it hard to spend even thirty minutes praying. Why?

King David danced before the Lord God with shouts and the sound of trumpets to celebrate God's blessings as the ark of the Lord approached the City of David. He designed musical instruments, wrote many Psalms, encouraged the people to sing them as he played the harp. He taught them to praise God each day with their entire being. Shouldn't I also be productive for your Kingdom? Why, then, doesn't it happen?

O Lord, how zealously your servants of old honored you. My zeal is small. I seldom spend time in your presence. I'm usually in a hurry. Not only that, I often allow interruptions. In your presence, reading your Word, praying, shouldn't it be that no distracting thoughts would enter my mind? Totally focused on you, aware of shortcomings—how can anyone, and that includes me—daydream about great accomplishments?

People travel around the world on pilgrimages to visit the surroundings of your servants, to stand in amazement at their devotion to you, awed by their stories and all they did in the early history of Christendom. They travel to the Holy Land to retrace your steps as you walked through the land God chose for his people. Yet, right here, right now, in this room you graciously draw me to you. It's beyond my understanding how your Spirit warms my heart as I sense you urging me to greater devotion and righteous living.

Some travelers, distracted by curiosity, become more interested in exploring new places, so the trip becomes a way to learn more about other cultures rather than deepening their relationship with you. They miss the blessings you want to rain down on them. How blind their eyes, how hard their hearts, for not recognizing the gifts you offer: conferring your favor on all who approach you, restoring sinners to grace, replacing sin's disfiguration with beauty. You transform toxic attitudes and strengthen fragile physical bodies. Here, when I am alone in my "prayer closet," you long to do that as I shut out distractions.

If, as in New Testament times, you were present in only one place, let's say in Jerusalem, wouldn't I long to go there to be with you? That isn't necessary today. You are everywhere. In all places. Your love and grace are available at any moment. Why am I not in touch with you at all times, on all levels of consciousness?



Centuries separated the time of the Ark of the Covenant and the days when you walked the hills of Galilee astounding the crowds with your teaching and miracles. Today, your followers are temples of your Holy Spirit living within them. The Holy Spirit who makes eternal truths come alive nudges us in the right direction, empowering each of us to use our abilities well. In every place, throughout the world, your ambassadors are representing you, speaking truth, modeling love, telling citizens in every nation about you.

Lord, forgive my halfhearted devotion to you, my only hope of salvation and righteousness. You are the One who revives me in my weariness, who invites me to come to you for rest. You are the joy of heaven, the preserver of the world. Forgive me for allowing myself to become indifferent to all you yearn to do for me.

Giver of eternal grace, my daily Shepherd, refresh my poor, needy spirit. Thank you for your invitation, "Come to me when you are weary and carrying heavy burdens. I will give you rest." Amen.

# 15

## Needy

The pilgrim prays:

Lord Jesus, you created me in your image. Grant me your grace—grace greater than my sinful nature and so necessary for my salvation. When I want to do the right thing, wickedness is right there. It's like fighting a war and becoming a prisoner of wrongdoing. I can't resist the lure of sin unless you infuse your holy grace into my soul. Spiritually needy, I need your grace, lots of it, to conquer the tendency for sin that I've had since childhood.

Yes, I am Adam's victim, twisted, weakened, corrupt.

The little bit of civility I'm able to squeeze out of my sinful nature is nothing more than a spark buried under ashes. That spark is a touch of reason, just enough to help me determine the difference between good and evil, to discern truth from error; yet the surrounding darkness does not enable me to discern the light of your truth or to comprehend your love for me fully.

You hate every false way; I don't want to be deceptive, misrepresenting, manipulative—although at times, I am. I want to please you, to reflect your good, loving, holy ways. Why do I want to do what's right, and then do the opposite? My heart's allegiance is to you but something compels me to do what I know you hate.

I make a wrong turn. I fall apart and give up. I know what I need to do, but my weaknesses drag me down.

O Lord, your grace is crucial. I need your help to start doing what I should. Without it, I can't persevere. Without you, my efforts fall flat; my skills are worthless. Talent, wealth, appearance, stamina, persuasion, these have no value at all unless your Spirit breathes redemptive life into them.

Everyone has some natural ability, some more than others do, but only your followers receive the infusion of divine grace needed to live up to your righteous standards.

Lord, you make the poor in spirit rich. That's how I feel right now, poor—overcome with fatigue and gloom. Come to me like early morning dew to encourage and energize me. Should I lose everything I own, will you not be enough for me? Hold my hand, and I won't be afraid when tested by adversity. Your grace, stronger than those who oppose me and wiser than the wise, will give me strength I desperately need.

Your grace, so loving:

- ◇ enlightens my mind,
- ◇ teaches me discipline,
- ◇ encourages devotion,
- ◇ produces cleansing tears,
- ◇ evicts fear,
- ◇ encourages me when I suffer,
- ◇ provides a refuge for me when I grieve.

Without your grace, I am dead wood, a branch useful only as fuel for the fire.

Lord, may your grace lead me resolutely forward. Protect me from the rear. Motivate me from within. Prepare me to serve you well. Amen.

## 16

### Not There Yet

The pilgrim prays:

Lord, who am I that you desire to mold me into your likeness? Or communicate with me? Why do you bestow your favor on me? I complain when, on a dreary day, I don't sense that you are with me.

I feel worthless. I don't have the personality or the talents that other people have. I waste time. Unless you motivate me, I'm listless and lazy.

When all goes well, I'm thankful to you from whom all good comes. But when I have a difficult day, I'm unstable and vulnerable. I find it hard to cope with problems. I'm insensitive, unable to think about others who also have problems. How can I feel good about who I am? Wrapped in misery, I forget you, robbing myself of your grace.

I don't please you if I wallow in distress. When I search for human praise, I miss out on your blessings. Joy comes when I focus on who you are. I need to think about you, not about what I want to achieve.

No one is able to guide me. I can't find a compatible friend to share my ideas with, forcing me to turn to you. There's no one. Don't let me down. My outlook improves when you mercifully extend your helping hand. Your love invites me to lean completely on you.

Lord, your Word assures me that you are always faithful. You are eternal. Impartial. Holy. Changeless. All you do is right, orderly, wise, fair. It's totally unlike my tendency to change with the seasons. I'm prone to slip backward rather than move forward.

Lord, may you be praised, not me. Let your power and control be recognized, not mine. You are the One I revere. You are my joy. Encourage me so I don't need human praise. I want to be as thankful as Habakkuk when he said, "Even though the fig trees have no blooms, and there are no

grapes, and though the olive crops fail, and the fields are empty; even though the sheep die in the fields, and the cattle barns are empty, yet I will rejoice in you.”

Let others seek the praise of their colleagues. I want to seek you alone. All affirmations, all temporary achievements, all worldly possessions become meaningless compared to your presence. O God of truth, God of mercy, my God, the blessed Trinity, to you alone be praise, honor, power, and glory throughout all ages. Amen.

## 17

### **Hungry**

The pilgrim prays:

Just as I am, I come to you. You know my weaknesses. You see my self-centered habits, the flaws with which I struggle. I ask you for cleansing. I come to you for healing. You know all things; you know my every thought. I stand before you poor and needy, pleading for grace and mercy. You know about my peaks and valleys as I alternate between temptations and victories, turmoil and peace, failure and success, depression and laughter. Don't send me away hungry and thirsty. You are the unquenchable fire. You are the love that purifies my motives and shapes my thinking. Keep me from loving what is worldly. Free me from my expectations. Motivate me, as you have many of your saints, to love you wholeheartedly.

Savior of all, to you I come because you are the only one who knows exactly what I need. Refresh me. Warm my coldness with the flames of your love. Lighten my darkness with the glow of your presence. Make worldly enticements bitter to me. Help me to endure hard times with patience. Sustain me with your truth and goodness. You are my meat and drink, my love and joy. Focus my thoughts heavenward so I no longer wander aimlessly, searching for answers where they are not to be found.

May your presence purify me and transform me into your likeness. Merge my spirit with yours, to love as you do, to hate what you hate.

To become like you, the One I love—nothing is more important to me. Amen.

## 18

### Thirsty

The pilgrim prays:

O Lord, my God, once again I humbly approach your throne with faith and hope in your mercy. Time spent interacting with you curbs my tendency to become absorbed with my dreams, getting off track, thinking about what I can accomplish rather than what you can do. You are the cure for my weaknesses. Your light exposes selfishness for the deception that it is.

I remember the times when, overwhelmed with the pressure of too much to do, my negative attitudes were crushing, and regret tormented me. I struggled to untangle a barrage of retaliatory thoughts. Getting even was an oppressive thorn. I felt very alone. No one knew how to lead me out of the maze. You were my only resource and you didn't let me down.

Please do it again.

Lord, is the day coming when honey will not satisfy my hunger, and you, the fountain of living waters, will not satisfy my thirst? The Scriptures tell me that hard times strengthen faith and reveal my hidden faults that need attention. Has that time arrived for me? If it has, in mercy give me at least a drop of water.

Jesus, holy Savior, you invite everyone, including me, weary and overwhelmed, to come. You encourage me. Your burdens are just right, not too heavy, not too light.

I'm becoming more sensitive to your grace although I'm not yet what I should be. Teach me how to respond to testy situations in healthy ways, with love instead of resentment. My determination to find your purpose for me is growing. As for my ability to love—well, I still have a long way to go. Will I ever be able to love the way you love me? I pray that your divine love will merge with my distorted responses to make my love pure with no

hidden agendas. May your reality glow brightly so that the darkness around me fades away.

My God, Protector of my soul, Strengthener of those who are weak, Source of wisdom, Giver of every blessing, when I meet with you in the early morning hours, my day is more tranquil. I handle the bumps better because I know you are there supporting me. You give me hope when I feel dejected, perspective when I'm prone to worry.

I change when I spend time with you. You are helping me to be more loving, more caring about others, more cheerful. My relationships are improving. It's happening because I'm learning from you how to react. Your example helps me to tune in to how people feel—and, for sure, I know I don't have all the answers.

It makes sense. When the beekeeper approaches the hive, he harvests the honeycomb with its sweet honey.

The one who stands by the blazing fire enjoys warmth.

For those who are thirsty, the fountain bubbles up with refreshing water.

You are the fountain that ever flows. You are the fire that never wanes. You are the honey that sweetens.

Grant me, Lord, the perception that I, an insecure pilgrim, require to encourage people fragmented by pain. This doesn't come easily to me; I need your intervention, your divine touch that transcends human wisdom. Reach down from heaven to purify my soul. How can I, a redeemed sinner with a body of dust and ashes, represent you? What a mystery. Emmanuel. God with us.

My Lord and my God, your blessings are new every morning. Keep my candle steadily burning. Let nothing extinguish it.

You came as the light to guide the nations. May I represent your light to those who wander in darkness. Amen.



## 19

### **In Need of Patience**

The Christ speaks:

I came down to earth from heaven to die for your sins, to show you how to live. I am standing by to help with your problems because I love you. My love will enable you to accept reality patiently, without complaining.

From the hour of my birth until those dark hours on the cross, I was never without emotional pain. I had few possessions. Everywhere I traveled, I heard people criticizing me. I endured humiliation and contempt humbly; in return, people treated me still more disrespectfully. I performed miracles and healed the diseases of many people, yet the response was often ingratitude.

The pilgrim prays:

Lord, if I want to follow you, I must learn to cope with hard times and be obedient to the Father's wishes. I am your follower, which means accepting the demands, as you did, of living patiently in a corrupt world. Your example, and the zeal of your saints through the centuries, encourages me and makes it bearable.

It's a privilege to live this day and in this generation. Your grace is much more evident now than during Old Testament days when the way to heaven seemed obscure. Few were interested in your Kingdom back then.

I am grateful to you for pointing me to the narrow way that leads to your righteousness, to the heavenly Kingdom. I will walk close beside you. Had you not come to earth to show the way, how would I know how to respond to situations patiently? Not only I, but also an endless line of

believers through the centuries will hear “Well done” in heaven because of your sacrifice.

I will continue to read and re-read about your miracles and your teachings. Where would I be without your light to guide me? Amen.

## Turmoil Everywhere

The pilgrim asks:

Lord God, I need patience. Sometimes it's a struggle to live. I try hard to make life peaceful, but I can't escape conflict and sadness.

The Christ speaks:

Life is as it is. You will never escape conflict. You need peace *in spite of* opposition. Welcome tough situations; they are not antagonists. They come to test your faith and teach you patience.

You say that this is too much. The Father God asked the prophet Jeremiah this question: "If you have raced with people on foot and they have worn you out, how can you compete with horses? If you stumble in safe country, how will you manage in the thickets?" I ask you the same question. I have promised to help you. Don't you believe that?

You say that non-believers never suffer, and if they do, it's not much. Ask those who appear to be happy if this is so and you will learn that they also have overwhelming problems. It's naïve to think they don't. They have so much, you say. They have everything they want. You may be right, but success isn't satisfying. The more people have, the more they want. How long do you think their delights will last? Soon they and all they enjoy will vanish.

With few exceptions, those who have everything they want don't enjoy their temporary pleasures without anxiety, fear, weariness, sadness. Solomon observed that God gives to some wealth, possessions, and honor. They lack nothing, but he doesn't let them enjoy what they have. All they possess is a vapor, a puff of wind. The perks that pamper them also bring

sorrow. Gratification is short-lived, distracting, excessive, indulgent. Too blind to see this, people who indulge in hedonistic activities scoff at things they don't understand. They jump on whatever appeals to them at the time and thus bring about their own destruction.

Stay away from selfish pursuits. Find your exuberance in godly principles and you will have your heart's desires. Savor my blessings. Forget worldly delights. My comfort is sweeter and stronger. Lean on me. Believe me, your blessings will increase.

At times, life with me may bring sadness and conflict. It isn't easy to change long-established habits. The key is to replace them with better habits. You need to persevere. Satan will try to sidetrack you; he stings and he irritates. Prayer is the right weapon to use to put him to flight. Be active in sharing my blessings with others and you won't even be aware of his mutterings as he retreats.

## 21

### Small Details

The Christ speaks:

When you bring me your concerns, I will take care of them at the proper time. It may not be right away. Wait patiently. You will find that my answers work out in your favor.

The pilgrim prays:

Lord, I will commit my days to you. My thinking is not always wise. I wish I didn't fret so much about what may or may not happen. When will I learn to turn things over to you, and even more important, to wait patiently?

The Christ speaks:

So often people pursue someone or something, and then when they get it, they realize it is not what they thought they wanted. Inclinations are fickle; one day you want this, the next day, you want that. It's important for you to consult me about even small details. You will feel secure when you leave all that worries you in my hands.

Satan opposes everything good and never stops his tempting tactics. All through the day and night, he continually plots dangerous strategies, lying in wait to snare the unwary with the net of deceit. Stay alert and pray, or temptation will overwhelm you.

## Lord, I'm Listening

The pilgrim prays:

Speak, Lord. Your servant is listening. Open my ears to hear what you are saying. May your loving voice settle on me like dew. As rain refreshes tender grass with gentle showers, please refresh my soul.

Long ago the Israelites said to Moses, "Don't let God speak directly to us or we will die!" They were afraid to hear you speak, but I'm not. Humbly and sincerely, I echo the words of young Samuel: "Speak, Lord. Your servant is listening."

Moses and the prophets teach me lessons from the past as you inspired and enlightened them. Speak to me now as specifically and forcefully as you did to them so that I become a role model of what a Christ-follower should be. Those prophets are examples to me today, helping me to discern your ways.

The prophets pave the way; you help me obey. Their words have no power until your Holy Spirit kindles my heart, unlocking truth so I can grasp it. The prophets point me to you; you give me the desire to respond. The prophets speak about the obvious; you search within my innermost being to reveal my true motives. The prophets sow the seed, but you water each thought until it takes root. The prophets cry out the words; you enable me understand them.

Lord, let me not simply read the words of your prophets. May they change the way I live. Speak to me, probe deep within, so I won't be ashamed because I read the Scriptures but didn't obey them. I don't want merely to believe you. I want to obey you. I want to represent your Kingdom well.

Teach me, Lord. I'm listening. You have the words of eternal life. Keep working on my imperfections until I reflect your glory. Amen.

## 23

### Friendship

The Christ speaks:

I am your friend, and I am going to make the difficult times easier for you. Without my help, everything seems complicated. With just one word, one touch, I am able to change your day.

Didn't Mary Magdalene stop weeping for her brother when Martha told her that I wanted to see her? I know how to wipe away tears and restore joy. Joy awaits everyone who delights in my Word, meditating on it day and night. Those who trust me are like trees planted along a river with roots that reach deep into the water. Unaffected by heat or long months of drought, their leaves never wither. It is like that for those who follow me. With their faith firmly grounded in the Word, my followers prosper in whatever I intend for them to do.

When people prefer human counsel to searching the Scriptures for wisdom, they discover that the need of their soul continues to linger. Where do they turn then? Can anyone provide the serenity of God's wisdom? Isn't it foolish to look elsewhere?

Without my presence, the days are often sad and lethargic. Everywhere humanity looks for relief from relentless worry and can't find it. They miss the blessings I yearn to give. Unlike those sturdy trees fed by life-giving water, those who lean on frail earthlings for strength resemble scrawny bushes in parched wastelands. They barely survive. Without me, the fountain of living waters, they are the poorest of the poor. I offer eternal riches, but so many won't accept them.

Owning the whole world is not an asset if you lose your soul. A life not aligned with its Creator is empty. With the Creator, it's a foretaste of heaven. Without the shield of faith, you have no protection from evil. With



me, everything that touches you is for your good. Without me, a constant search goes on for “something.” With me, you will enjoy a rich, rewarding friendship.

Such a treasured friendship requires spending time alone with me. A casual interlude when it’s convenient isn’t enough. Friendship doesn’t grow deeper in a few moments. It requires commitment and unhurried conversation. It takes effort to learn how to “pray without ceasing” as the Scriptures exhort you to do. As you detach yourself for a time from your obligations, I will teach you the secret of a tranquility you’ve never known.

Enjoy family and friends, loving them dearly, expecting nothing in return. Love even your enemies who also need to know that someone cares about them. Pray that each one will come to know and love me. Some need to listen for direction. Some need to learn to love. Some need to learn holy ways. Because of and for me, love them into the Kingdom of God.

Be careful about accepting praise or admiration. That belongs to God. Let your motive always be to point humankind to me. Teach them how to connect with me. You are the channel, not the source.

God’s grace gives strength to face every circumstance. Does this mean that discouraging days will never come? No. Adversity is part of life’s mosaic. You need to be still to observe the ways I help you. After winter, summer comes; after the darkness, light dawns; after a storm, calm arrives.

## 24

### Learning to Pray

The Christ speaks:

At all times, this is the way to pray: “If the desire I have honors you, Lord, let it be done in your name. If my dream is right for me, then grant that I use it for your glory. But if it harms me, and doesn’t help me spirituality, take it away from me.”

Not every desire you have is from the Holy Spirit, even though it may be good and seem to be the right thing at the time. It’s sometimes difficult to know if your desire is from God, or from yourself, or from Satan. It is common for people to think they are moving in the right direction only to discover that they have become victims of their own deception.

Pray with humility and reverence for my direction. Then, leave it all with me, saying, “Lord, you know best. Your will be done. Grant what you will, as much as you will, when you will. Use me in any way that pleases you and in a manner that honors you. Put me in the right place at the right time. I’m at your disposal—I’m your servant, ready to obey you. May I always serve you with all my being.”

The pilgrim prays:

Gracious Lord, I want you to direct my activities. I pray that your Holy Spirit within me will teach me your ways, nudge me to obey you, and help me to persevere. Grant that I will always want to do what is acceptable and pleasing to you. May my will harmonize with yours. May your desire be mine. Remove from me anything contrary to your purposes.

Give me grace to live with eternal values in mind. Replace my desire for recognition with humility. May I rest in you. May I live in peace. Amen.

Blessed are you  
who mourn.  
You will be comforted.

Matthew 5:4

## 25

# Repentance

The Christ Speaks:

Be thankful if a deeper depth of understanding grieves you because you have become more acutely aware of sin. At such times pray humbly to the Lord to give you a spirit of confession. Say with the Psalmist, “Restore me, O Lord God Almighty; please restore me.” He grants his mercy to all who renounce wrongdoing.

Sorrow refines. Repentance enriches. To ignore sin is to continue in soul poverty. So learn to recognize the perils surrounding you that endanger your well-being. You will progress spiritually when you respond to the nudges of the Holy Spirit who convicts you of sin. Foolish time-wasters should not crowd out times for devotion. Fill your hours with meaningful conversation and activities that nourish your soul.

People who live frivolously are often insensitive, giving little thought to how their shortcomings affect other people. They laugh when they ought to weep. They rebel when they need to submit. Live in awe of God’s holiness if you want to know the peacefulness of a good conscience.

I will bless you as you reject distracting hindrances to godliness, withdrawing at times from discretionary activities to search your soul. Be courageous. Determine to set aside unhealthy habits and God will draw close to you. He is merciful; he lifts up and encourages those who acknowledge their failings.

Don’t think about the faults of others. Weep because *your* failings keep you spiritually stunted, so entangled with life’s complexities that you seldom contemplate the things of heaven. What others do or fail to do isn’t the issue. Focus on your own soul. Deal with your problems before you try to correct the weaknesses of others. It shouldn’t bother you if people fail to

compliment you when you do well. It doesn't matter. What matters is that *you* are considerate of others, doing what is good and kind. Correct yourself, not someone else.

God's companionship is far better than surroundings that lead to decadent pleasures. He welcomes a broken and contrite disciple, so cleanse your soul of human foibles that hinder your journey with me. God's umbrage lasts only a moment; his favor lasts a lifetime. Weeping may remain for a night, but joy comes in the morning.

No one is perfect, and a sensitive follower will always find reasons for regret. To reflect on the human condition is to be sorrowful, whether for yourself or for someone else. The more you understand how I think, the more sorrow you will feel. You will relate to the world differently, sensing the ultimate desperation of those who have no time for God. It's hard to watch them self-destruct. I wept as I yearned to gather the lost masses of humanity in Jerusalem to me. The despair that drives people to unhealthy activities should bring tears to your eyes also. No one lives without pain.

Try thinking more about death than about how to prolong life. It has a purifying effect, eliciting a value system that honors God. Few do this; they would rather cling to what they enjoy and forget the consequences. Apathy is easier, so they stumble on complaining about the toilsome journey they have chosen for themselves.

## 26

### **The Approach**

The pilgrim asks:

When I think about your holiness and my sinfulness, Lord, I tremble. What shall I do, my Lord, my Helper, my Adviser in every circumstance? Teach me the right way to approach you. How should I prepare my heart?

## The Conscience

The Christ speaks:

Approach me with a spirit of humility and reverence, confession and repentance.

Examine your conscience. Acknowledge any festering sin the Holy Spirit reveals to you so that with no anxiety or guilt, you are free to approach a holy God. Let the recognition of sin grieve you, leading you to confession of your sins. In the privacy of your deepest longings, known only to me, confess to God all the miseries your failings have caused. Name them one by one. Be specific. Pay special attention to daily flaws that mar your relationships. Take the time to read slowly through the following list. Pause at each line. Is it true of you? If so, take note.

Grieve if you are:

tied to worldly concerns,  
full of roving lust,  
careless in guarding your affections,  
occupied with selfish ambitions,  
inclined to accumulate possessions,  
absorbed with negative attitudes,  
prone to laughter and decadent pursuits,  
given to foolish daydreams,  
insensitive to the sorrow and tears of others,  
envious of comfortable surroundings,  
cool to austerity and zeal,  
quick to welcome what is new,  
unhappy if not surrounded by beauty,  
slow to accept humiliation and rejection,

stingy in giving,  
inconsiderate in conversations,  
reluctant to seek silence,  
undisciplined in character,  
disorganized,  
ravenous in culinary treats,  
deaf to the Word of God,  
inclined to be lazy,  
slow to work,  
given to frivolous talk,  
sleepy in sacred vigils,  
eager to end a spiritual fast,  
wandering in private prayer,  
conforming in public prayer,  
lukewarm in celebrating your blessings,  
thankless in receiving,  
seldom fully engaged,  
frequently angry,  
likely to judge,  
severe in criticism,  
proud in prosperity,  
weak in adversity,  
often making, then discarding, resolutions,  
undependable in commitment.

As you confess these and other faults, make necessary amends, then determine with my help to replace the negatives with positives. When you recommit to honoring the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, you will walk worthily. Godliness follows true remorse.

Come to me often for mercy and pardon. You will be forgiven.



## 28

### Weak

The pilgrim prays:

Yes, Lord, I confess my weaknesses and will no longer deny my sinfulness—even the minor slipups that bother my family and friends. Despite my determination to do what is right, temptation makes me nervous. I'm aware that little compromises can lead to serious consequences. Even though I think I'm strong, it takes only a gentle push in the wrong direction to undo me.

Lord, my weaknesses! You know them all. In mercy, rescue me from the mire. Keep me from sinking. I'm ashamed that I'm unstable and unable to resist temptations. I ignore most of them, yet their relentless pursuit is scary. I'm tired of constant tension. I'm more aware than ever that improper imaginations crash into my thoughts; they subside way too slowly for my comfort.

All-powerful God, you say you love me. Look at my struggles. Feel my despair. Help me. Give me the courage to reject bad habits. Give me strength to persevere. My miserable nature falls far short of your standards. With every breath I take, my sinful nature wants to get the upper hand.

What is this? The Christian life? Why must emotional pain and struggle be everywhere? Why are enemies and snares lurking in every corner? Even while a present struggle still upsets me, another, then another, attacks me unexpectedly. How can I enjoy anything when there's this much turmoil, always a crisis brewing somewhere? Why is it called life when it's more like a sickly plague?

I look around; people everywhere seem to relish this existence. I hear people complain about the decline of values, empty relationships, gossipy conversations, but they don't walk away. Their need to fit in overrides their

sense of right and wrong. They love worldly ways, even as they hate them. The lust of the flesh, the desire of the eye, and the pride of life dominate, and they then face the consequences. Tired and weary of it all, in moments of vulnerability, they admit they hate the way they live. The irony is that they are so addicted to sinful pleasures that they almost enjoy sociopathic ways. They know little about the preciousness of your love or the soothing joy that comes with inward tranquility.

Lord, I refuse narcissistic thinking. I want to experience the blessings you promise as I renounce the world's value system. May I always see clearly the impact of Satan's deception. My Jesus, it's because of your great mercies that I am not crushed. Amen.

## 29

### Unworthy

The pilgrim prays:

Lord, I'm not worthy of the mercies you extend to me. Yet when I feel needy and lonely, you are right beside me, incognito, even though I'm not always aware of it.

If the tears I shed filled the ocean, I would still be convinced that when the time is right you will come alongside to wipe them away. I'm not what I should be. I disappoint you. I struggle with sin. I need more sanctifying graces before I come close to measuring up to your example. My light burns dimly.

O God of mercy and love, I know you don't enjoy watching my despair. I realize that your way of teaching me to love you prepares me to reflect your glory. You are the Potter; make out of this lump of clay a vessel for a noble purpose. It's not just your compassion that encourages me. Your discipline reassures me as well; it, too, is good and wise.

Your directions give me hope. All that you are and do comes together to aid me way beyond human ability. It's that powerful. Nothing compares with it; it's a heavenly visitation I cannot describe.

Gracious and forgiving Lord, I'm far too slow to change my ways. I'm not entitled to be one of your followers. Regret for my failures haunts me. Lord, have mercy! The cry of the sinner brings your forgiveness. I, too, cry.

Guilty and overcome with grief, I ask you to use my sorrows to humble me. Keep me conscious of my tendency to sin. Sometimes my sin is not what I do; it also describes what I don't do when I know I should.

I know that sorrow must precede forgiveness. I'm learning that contrition reconciles my troubled conscience and protects me from sin.

As I confess my sins, Lord, you have promised to purify me from unrighteousness—you will not reject a repentant sinner. You forgave the sinful woman who poured perfume on your feet. It is there, as I kneel at your feet, that you mend my brokenness and cleanse me from my sins. I thank you. Amen.

## 30

### **In Need of a Savior**

The pilgrim prays:

Confident of your goodness, Lord, I come. When sick, I come for healing. When hungry and thirsty, I come to drink from your fountain of life. When needy, I come to the King of heaven as a servant to the master. When sorrowing, I come for comfort.

Here I am, a lowly sinner, a helpless servant who dares to approach the Creator. Who am I that you should invite me to come? What am I, that for my sake you took on frail flesh to die? Why should you meet with me? You know my sins, each one. Without your cleansing forgiveness, my righteousness is nothing more than filthy rags.

I confess to you my unworthiness. I acknowledge your goodness, thankful for your tender mercy. How admirable are your works, Lord, how great your power, how infallible your truth. You spoke, and the world came into being at your command.

Savior of all humanity, true God and true man, how can I give you the honor you deserve? Eternity will be too short to praise you adequately. May my heart be uncluttered, my conscience at peace. Unhindered by sin, may my praise be acceptable to you. Amen.

The Christ speaks:

Start viewing life with a different outlook. Seriously reflect on all that had to happen so a holy God could forgive your sins. I was born in a manger, crucified on a cross. I suffered for you.

Don't let the gift of salvation grow stale. It should always be as fresh as the day you first realized that it was for you I died.

My love will never diminish. My mercies will be new each morning.  
My resurrection will never lose its purpose. It will always be as powerful as  
it was on the day I rose from the dead after conquering Satan and the deadly  
curse he brought to the human race.

## 31

### Commitment

The Christ speaks:

No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit to serve the Kingdom of God. You must give everything, keeping nothing back for yourself. Loving yourself to the extent that your own interests come first is harmful. To allow yourself to become dependent on anyone or anything puts you in bondage. When your love is pure, simple, and orderly, nothing will hold you captive. It grieves me when your commitment to me doesn't include everything you own and all your desires. When it's not total, you cling to things that entangle, depriving you of freedom.

Why do you yearn for what you shouldn't have? Why wear yourself out with worry? Commit to my will and nothing that is not for your good can touch you. You will never be content or free from restless moments if you constantly dream about living in this place or that place. Every part of the world has its defects; everywhere you go, there will be something to trouble you.

It slows down your journey with me to accumulate an excess of possessions. Root out the desire to acquire them.

Not only that, shun praise and honors. A prestigious position is meaningless without a strong faith. Tranquility won't last long unless you embed your roots in faith. It may be possible for you to manage your circumstances, but without the foundation of God's solid rock of truth, your dreams are prone to crumble and you will crumble with them. You will again face that from which you fled, perhaps something even more frightening.

The pilgrim prays:

Hold me steady, Lord. Create in me a pure heart, O God, filled with right desires. Restore your joy to me. Strengthen me in my inner being so anxiety fades away. Don't let a multitude of desires distract me, even if they're worthwhile. Let me never forget that my life is a transitory vapor.

Grant me wisdom to include you each day in what I do, to love you more than all else, to perceive circumstances as they are and not as they seem, to see every detail from your perspective.

I need discernment to overlook flattery and the patience to accept those who disappoint me. Then worldly perceptions and applause won't blow me here and there as I confidently walk together with you along the path you have chosen for me. Amen.



Blessed are you  
who are humble.  
You will inherit the earth.

Matthew 5:5

## Unanswerable Questions

The Christ speaks:

Lofty matters you will never understand. Why does someone receive a coveted honor while another, who equally deserves recognition, is overlooked? Why does a disabled person struggle to live independently while others enjoy excellent health? Why do some live in squalor while you have a comfortable bed to sleep in? Those questions are beyond human reasoning—no one can fathom the inscrutable plans of God.

When you try to figure it out, or when someone asks you about a tragedy, respond with the words of the ancient prophet: “The Lord is righteous. His judgments are fair.” Or you might say, “The decisions of the Lord are true and righteous.” My divine decisions are not for analysis; respect that they are incomprehensible.

Nor should you concern yourself with the merits of my followers who have carried my banner throughout the centuries. It isn't for you to discuss which one was holier or which one is greater in the Kingdom of Heaven. Such questions breed disagreements and controversies. Some think this one was better, while another favors someone else. It's useless to try to make those determinations. I am not a God of dispute and controversy, but of unity and peace.

Based on personal interest, it's natural for someone to be captivated by one or another of the great leaders of the church. It may be because of that person's homeland or the area of ministry I assigned—this is human preference; it isn't from me.

I am the One who put all the saints on earth; I gave them their assignments and I bestowed on them their talents. I know the merits of each one, inwardly and outwardly. I am the One who will reward them. Before

the foundations of the world, I knew them. I called them by my grace. They didn't choose me. I chose them. I appointed them to produce fruit. I drew them close to my side and led them safely through difficult situations. I poured into them the strength to persevere. I blessed them with patience.

I know who will be first and who will be last; regardless, I embrace each one with love. Be thankful for all whom I have chosen. Without minimizing their contribution, don't honor only the most accomplished because I have determined both small and great. Besides, to think less of any saint discriminates against not only me but also all who are part of the Kingdom of God.

In heaven, all are one in the bond of love. They think the same way, have the same goals, and live in perfect community with each other. What is more wonderful is that they love me more than themselves or their accomplishments. They rest in me, totally fulfilled. Nothing discourages them. Eternal truth fills their minds and unquenchable love warms their hearts.

Those who have gone before you are fully content. While on their pilgrimage, they didn't brag about themselves. They recognized that I gave them, out of my abundance, everything they possessed. Their love for me was so great, their joy so overflowing that they needed nothing else.

It's best to be silent and not discuss the status of others. To do so is apt to be based on flawed perceptions. Sometimes the wish for a role model draws people to one person or another. They don't understand the gap between the way I see people and the way imperfect human beings see them. People judge by appearance; I look at the heart.

Instead of becoming curious about situations beyond your ability to discern what is really going on, your concern should be rather that you yourself are maturing in the faith. Tune into God's assignment for *you* and be willing to be the least. Many have asked who is the greatest. The question they should ask is "Will I be counted worthy to be among the least?"

It will be wonderful, in heaven, to be the least in a place where all are great and all belong to God's family because, there, the least will become a thousand and the smallest group will become a mighty nation.

If you were to know who is the greatest in the Kingdom, what good would that information be to you? Far more acceptable to God is to confess that you are unworthy and still weak in heavenly virtues.

When my disciples argued about which one would be the greatest, I told them this: “The oldest should take the place of the youngest; the one who rules should be the one who serves.”

Judgment Day will be tough for those who refuse the way of humility. The low gate to the heavenly Kingdom will not allow them to enter. It will be hard for those who have made wealth their god, thinking they needed nothing else. The humble will enter while those who trust in riches stand by in despair.

The poor in spirit will exult. The humble will be great.

## 33

### **Know Yourself**

The Christ speaks:

The pursuit of knowledge is an important goal. God has designed it that way. But the most brilliant mind cannot reach its full potential without the wisdom of God. A humble chicken farmer who serves God is greater than the proud astronomer who spends a lifetime studying the expansion of the universe but sees no need to tap into my omniscience. Those who understand this don't care about the praise of colleagues. They know that knowledge of all things without love and humility won't count on Judgment Day when everyone must give an account to God.

That's why a love for learning should never take priority over spiritual growth. An extensive vocabulary or a clever use of words doesn't benefit the soul. Much information brings confusion and disillusion, so keep educational pursuits secondary to searching the Scriptures to understand yourself and to learn how to live a godly life that brings serenity of mind and thought. The well educated appear wise and often enjoy recognition, but how much of their knowledge enriches the soul? The more one knows, the greater the accountability to God. Don't be proud of your accomplishments. There's still much you do not comprehend. A better alternative is to seek to be unknown. Your left hand should not know what your right hand is doing.

Most important by far is to know who you are before God, measuring your assessment by biblical standards. Reject any tendency you have to think highly of yourself. You're on the right track when you focus on the goodness of others instead. If you see someone involved in wrongdoing, remember that except for the grace of God it could be you. Everyone is frail. That includes you.

## 34

# Humility

The Christ speaks:

The proud put confidence in people's opinions, relying on human perspectives. Depend on me, not on your wisdom or on the advice of another. Do what you can; I will do the rest. Put your confidence in God who helps the humble and opposes the haughty.

If you're above average in intelligence, put it aside if it keeps you from the true wisdom of heaven. What do you have that God hasn't given to you? If all you have is from him, why think you have accomplished something on your own?

Don't boast about your appearance, fitness level, or good health. Disease can change all that quickly. Since God is the One who has given you your DNA, be very cautious about drawing attention to your talents or skills.

If God has blessed you with wealth, don't show it off with high standards of living that strut your net worth. Glory in him alone who gives you the ability to become prosperous, and who wants even more to make you holy. If you are poor and own little, hold your head high. God has his ways of giving heavenly riches to those who must live frugally.

Whatever you think is good about yourself, believe that others are better. It keeps you humble. It harms you to think you are superior, flaunting your accomplishments.

The Scriptures say, "Let not the wise boast about their wisdom, or the powerful boast about their power, or the rich boast about their wealth. If you must boast, boast only about the Lord."

The humble live contentedly. The proud live with envy and resentment. What about you? Are you envious or contented?

## 35

### Surveillance

The Christ speaks:

It's better not to talk too freely about your relationship with me. In other words, don't try to impress people with your spirituality. Why should you risk thinking you are more devoted than you are? When you preface comments with "The Lord . . . this" and "The Lord . . . that," you may be trying to display godliness. Do good things privately. Talking about them to gain the admiration of others denies you a heavenly reward where the determining factor is love, not recognition.

Think more about how unworthy you are to receive God's grace. When you are enjoying his favor, remember what it feels like to be without it. A plethora of happy days is not the benchmark of holiness. God is more interested in:

- ◇ whether you are able, with humble acceptance, to live joyfully without his blessings,

- ◇ whether you pray consistently in both good times and bad times,

- ◇ whether you remain faithful to your responsibilities as best you can.

You need to prepare for the inevitable hurdles. You will be less likely to complain that God has forgotten you when you encounter rough territory if you are alert and disciplined when he favors you with blessings and all is well. It will help you live consistently without neglecting important matters because you feel lethargic. When blessings return, you will realize that you have learned more from discouragement than from circumstances more to your liking.

God knows what he is doing and you will again know his favor. The process of spiritual formation is humbling; it increases the awareness that

you need God to reveal your unknown faults. You also need to learn how to live patiently even when you don't sense my presence.

So many who pledge allegiance to me become impatient and give up when things don't go well. Don't be one of them. Your life is no longer yours to determine its course; you have turned it over to me. My heavenly Father gives his comfort when he wills, to whom he wills, and as much as he wills. You cannot make that determination.

Some people, not fully attuned to my ways, flounder to their detriment in their commitment to me when facing complicated decisions. Racing impatiently ahead, they follow their intuition, attempting to handle more than what is humanly possible. Ignoring sound biblical principles, they consider only their present situation, oblivious to how what they do fits into the scope of eternity.

Highs and lows are more common for people who dream of greater achievements for themselves than what God has assigned to them. Because of this, they forfeit the blessings God has for them. The Scriptures warn: "Your pride will sidetrack you should you say to yourself, 'I can accomplish anything I decide to do.' Though you soar like the eagle and make your nest in high places, I will bring you down." When people attempt to build their dream nests, God often uses failure to teach them that it doesn't work to fly with their own wings.

If you are new to faith, be aware that you can easily be deceived and led astray. Seek counsel from those who aren't afraid to tell it as it is. Feelings are unreliable guides. You need the firm foundation of eternal truth.

To assume you have it all figured out is a warning signal that you aren't humble enough to listen to God and to others. If you refuse to chisel away at arrogant attitudes, trouble lies ahead. You know very little if you claim to have all the answers.

I call few who think they are wise to follow me. Their pride gets in the way. To possess average intelligence and be humble about it is better than having a photographic memory with conceit. To have too little is better than too much if wealth makes you feel superior.

God measures maturity by humility and love, not knowledge of the Scriptures, popularity, or leadership skills. These are questions to ask yourself:

◇ Do I genuinely seek to honor God?



◇ Do I accept that God's warning to me about a character flaw is more essential than receiving an award of distinction?

◇ Am I increasingly replacing pretense with love and humility?

◇ Can I be joyful even when someone betrays me?

## 36

### Worldly Honors

The pilgrim prays:

Lord, I often feel like a victim. Help me to honor you no matter what happens. When I look at the facts objectively, I realize that no one has wronged me and I shouldn't complain. I am not yet what I should be. Sometimes I am difficult to work with. Thoughts of self-importance blind and mislead me.

Unless I'm prepared to follow your example, even though people may reject me, I realize I won't be at peace with myself. Nor will I respond as I should. Amen.

The Christ speaks:

What should you do when others receive recognitions and promotions while you are overlooked, even humiliated? Turn to me and learn how to react when you feel pushed aside. Then the way your associates view you won't matter.

## 37

# Authority

The Christ speaks:

It is important to respect authority, to submit willingly to the wishes of another. It's safer to obey directions than to give them. The one who follows orders is seldom blamed if something goes awry. It may not be your choice to yield, especially when you don't concur. It's much easier to complain. Until you are able to accept supervision when you don't agree with it, you will never work contentedly.

Neither will it necessarily help matters to move to another place of employment. No place is perfect; there will be problems there if you take the same attitudes and reactions with you, along with your desire to do as you wish. Peace and submission go together.

People like to do things their way. They enjoy working with those who agree with them. If you obey your employer, however, with the same allegiance as you obey me, I will be pleased and will reward you.

Is anyone wise enough to know everything? No, not one. Those who are wise listen to the ideas of others. Your ideas may be best, but at times it's expedient to lay it aside to implement someone else's plan. Don't be rigid. Refusing to cooperate reflects stubborn pride.

## 38

### Submission

The Christ speaks:

Submit! Some resent submission, yet God has instituted a chain of command that turns potential chaos to harmony. It requires submission, a virtue that asks you to put aside personal ambitions to support the ideas of another. Attempting to shrink from obedience to authority may deny you God's blessing. Likewise, to seek special treatment for yourself puts you in danger of losing advantages that you would normally receive.

A refusal to submit can be an indicator that you are determined to get what *you* want. When you rebel, it causes trouble. You are your own worst enemy when your spirit is not in harmony with my precepts, because the desire to control crushes humility. The inner self that drives you and interferes with your well-being is easier to harness when you acknowledge the conflicting struggles within your soul. I submitted to the authority of my Father; emulate my humility and submit as well.

God has set up his chain of command. For his sake, relinquish your will. Why should you not do this? Why shouldn't you do as I have done? I, who created the world out of nothing, subjected myself to the ruling authorities of my time. Learn from my example how to conquer pride. Learn to obey, you who are but dust. Learn to humble yourself. Forget about your perspective. If you must be angry, be angry that you so frequently allow egotistic pride to manipulate you.

What do you have to complain about? What is your defense to those who criticize your stubbornness? You have not only offended them; you have offended me as well.

Remember that I love you and you are precious to me. I want you to enjoy my love and blessings. Be thankful. Learn authentic humility and

patiently endure whatever people say or do.  
I am going to show you how.

## 39

# Mysteries

The Christ speaks:

The eternal God, incomprehensible and powerful, continually does great things both in heaven and on earth. He does things you know not—the glory of it all would overwhelm you. His ways are unsearchable, unexplainable by human reasoning.

There are secrets the Father God has not revealed. You must accept that. Job responded to a series of questions from the Almighty the only way he could: “I have been talking about things I cannot understand, things too wonderful for me to know.” He admitted that trying to understand the mind of God was preposterous. All that God can do and does, no one is capable of comprehending.

A search for truth is commendable for anyone who is ready to learn how to live righteously. The simplicity that clings to faith, letting go of speculative questionings to pursue my precepts clearly, is rewarding for the seeker to whom God reveals what is useful and needed for holiness.

What I require of you is obedience, not an understanding of the heights of glory or the depths of divine mysteries. To demand answers not for you to know weakens your faith. There’s no way for anyone to grasp the understanding of everyone who excels in a given field of study. So how can you possibly understand the mind of God?

Some believers are thrown into the depths of doubt, blown away by attacks from Satan who wants to sift them like wheat. Should you be among them, immerse yourself in the Scriptures. Draw close to me for the encouragement you need to resist the devil and send him on his way.

Satan leaves unbelievers and sinners alone because he already has them in his grip; he goes after believers who are faithful and devout. He has yet

to figure out that his strategies backfire on him and that is to your advantage. It should drive you to me daily, something the devil doesn't want.

I am the Way. Yet for the proud, as well as for the curious who keep to the fringes, the ways of God make little sense. Faith is an undeniable essential. An omniscient God has ordained that faith, operating in ways unknown to humanity, must be preeminent.

I am the Truth, and the truth does not deceive. I walk with those whose hearts are humble. I teach those who ask for direction, and I give insight to all who honor me as they search the Scriptures. I am the Life worth living, everlasting, authentic. I am humble, lowly in spirit.

Blessed are you  
who hunger and thirst  
for righteousness.  
You will be filled.

Matthew 5:6



## Yearning for God

The pilgrim prays:

Lord, how great is your goodness to all who love you. When I observe people who really know you, I'm ashamed of my fluttery faith. They are so devoted to you that they move peacefully through their days in an attitude of prayer that determines all they do and say.

Why am I so lukewarm? Why am I not more attuned to your way of thinking? Why do I not worship with the same intensity they do? Their love for you brings tears to their eyes. These pilgrims yearn for you as the deer pants for water. They hunger and thirst for righteousness. Their faith is solid. They sense your wonder. Their hearts thrill as you embrace them.

I wish it were that way with me, but it's not. I have yet to attain such devotion. Lord, have mercy on me, and grant just a drop of your grace to solidify my faith, to fan into flames a love for you that won't die down. May my faith become stronger, my hope more expectant. I want to be among the most devoted of pilgrims, worshiping you with heartfelt love. Amen.

## What Can I Rely On?

The pilgrim prays:

What can I rely on? Where can I find encouragement except from you, O Lord my God? Your mercy is plentiful, tender, and kind. Without you I'm lost. I would rather be poor and serve you than be rich without you. I would rather roam on this earth forever with you by my side than be in heaven without you. Where you are is heaven. Where you are not is hell.

You are the One I long for. That's why I come to you now. There is no one in whom I can fully confide, no one I can trust except you. You are my only hope. You comfort me in ways that people are not able to do.

Because of your faithfulness, Lord God, I have hope. I need to trust you when worry overwhelms me. Otherwise, I'm unsteady and feel very insecure.

Friends try to encourage me, but they don't. Even people known for their ability to help can't assist me. Trained counselors don't have answers; neither does it help to read books. Wealth is meaningless. Spiritual retreats and tranquil vacation spots help, but they are only bandages to restore my balance temporarily. None of those resources works unless you, Lord, strengthen, comfort, teach, and protect me. Many other things promise peace, but they don't deliver. They do little or nothing for me.

You are the source of everything that is good, the pinnacle of life, and the fullness of wisdom. My greatest comfort is to trust you. So I turn to you. Bless and touch my soul. May it be a worthy place for your Holy Spirit to dwell. May I say or do nothing to offend you.

You constantly watch everything that concerns me, every day, every moment. Even though you allow difficult circumstances, you know what you are doing, exactly why—and that the time is right. You have unique

ways to prepare your followers for their assignments; it's an honor to be one of them. I want to love you as much during times of adversity as when life is good.

Lord, you are merciful. Hear the prayer of this pilgrim who sojourns in exile through a region of shadow and death. Keep me from harm amid the dangers of this complicated world and, by your grace, lead me along peaceful paths. Amen.

## Custom Mentoring

The Christ speaks:

To everyone I teach basic truths that my followers need to know. I teach through both circumstances and symbolism. To some, I teach the way of the cross. For others, I go beyond the cross to teach deep truths. Then there are the few to whom I reveal my mysteries and secrets. When you learn from me, because I know your heart, I teach the truth you need. As I listen to you pray, I sort out your thoughts for you, gently nudging you in the right direction. I custom design my teaching individually for each person.

Don't let clever phrases and poetic words influence you. My Kingdom is not frivolous; it is righteous living enabled by the power of my Holy Spirit. My words kindle the heart and enlighten the mind; they move the sinner to repent; they comfort the weary.

Never read the Scriptures to appear learned or wise. Read to learn how to become like me. That will be more rewarding than knowing the answers to complicated questions. Beware of an emphasis on human knowledge that crowds out the desire to follow me. As you assimilate my teachings, keep this in mind: I know all human thought. My words give light and understanding that even children can grasp. No one will have a valid excuse.

Listen carefully as I remind you that I am the One who can give, in an instant, a better understanding of truth than ten years of rigorous study at an Ivy League university. I teach silently, at times without words. I teach clearly, without confusion. My teaching doesn't support pride and argumentation. I know the motives of everyone. When I return to earth for judgment, I will bring to light what now resides in darkness. Everyone will receive either praise or rebuke.

I am the One who teaches you to reject faulty perceptions, to ignore what is temporary, and to embrace the wisdom of heaven. I will teach you to forget worldly honors. I will teach you how to endure humiliation courageously. I ask you to trust me totally, to be content with what I give you, and to love me more than anyone or anything else.

Those who do, love me with a passion as they learn divine truths directly from me. They live triumphantly. They accomplish more by renunciation than by mastering the fine points of philosophy.

## 43

### Prerequisite for Grace

The Christ speaks:

My grace is precious. It's the undeserved blessing of God, but it won't mingle with self-interest. To avoid interruptions to my blessings, remove all obstacles that interfere with the grace I want to bestow on you.

During a time of withdrawing to a quiet place, forget your worries and responsibilities. Be still. Let nothing be more important to you than what God wants to say. Think of yourself as a pilgrim and sojourner, a foreigner who belongs to God, not to anyone or anything else. You aren't yet home; you haven't arrived at your final destination.

My followers are at peace when they are about to die if they have no attachments to this world. Spiritually immature believers don't understand this. Nor do unbelievers look forward to their time of death, when they must leave behind all they have known.

When I am your dearest friend, it will be easier for you to relinquish what you now cherish. Beware of yourself more than anything else. If you conquer yourself, you will be able to subdue all that is questionable. Determine your activities, not impulsively, but with godly reasoning that doesn't conflict with my precepts.

To rise to this degree of commitment, you must put the axe to the root of self-love; dig out and destroy it. From this one vice come all other vices and you must uproot it. Great peace and tranquility will follow.

Only a few take this step. Most believers choose to live tangled in a web of conflicting emotions and poor decision-making. They live without fully tapping into God's grace that enhances life with me.

## Relinquishment

The Christ speaks:

When you concede that managing your life the way you want it won't work, I will reveal the rich plan I have for you. Renounce your aspirations and you will know rich blessings if you don't backtrack.

The pilgrim asks:

Lord, to what extent do I need to give up my inclinations? What specifically do I need to relinquish? How do I go about this?

The Christ speaks:

Always and at all times—when you need to make minor decisions as well as major ones—forget any claim you have to your ambitious dreams. Unless you surrender to me, privately and publicly, how can you be mine? How can I be yours? The sooner you do this, the better off you will be.

People who follow me with reservations, refusing total devotedness and making their own decisions, never experience what my freedom is like. I have already told you this and I again repeat it: To be unencumbered, hold loosely all that is not eternal. Seek nothing in return. Without this commitment, our friendship will never be entirely satisfying. Take me seriously when I tell you that to renounce all things is to receive. Then you are ready to learn discipleship.

Love, joy, and peace will replace self-serving dreams, emotional conflicts, and superficial worries. When you allow me to guide you continually, I will satisfy your soul.

## 45

### Godly Wisdom

The Christ speaks:

I cannot stress this enough. You will never be free unless you put aside your self-centered aspirations. Pursuing your own interests confines you to a private prison, bound with chains too heavy to lift. People who do this have a curiosity that explores every inviting whim as long as the path is easy, with comfortable rest stations and breath-taking vistas. They wander in circles, looking around for something that interests them, giving no thought to the plans I have designed uniquely for them. They don't realize that devising their own strategies seldom works. They cannot grasp that eventually everything that is not of God perishes.

Ponder these words: *If you lose your life for me, you will find it.* When you let go of the ambitions you have carved out for yourself, you will understand the meaning of what I have just said.

The pilgrim responds:

Lord, what you are saying is not a day's work. Nor is it for sissies. This isn't going to be easy. It means going against my grain.

The Christ speaks:

Don't turn away. Don't be discouraged or shrug it off as unattainable. It is doable. You are going to learn about righteousness. Let its pursuit spur you on to a high standard of ethics.

When God begins to stir a longing within your soul, allow that yearning to propel you forward. Many describe the vacuum that God has given you as "something's missing in my life." That "something missing" is a close



relationship with the Triune God. I wish it were already so with you and that you were well on the way to maturity. I want your days to be peaceful, joyful. You, however, have much to give up.

I counsel you to learn godly wisdom; it's as precious as pure gold refined in fire, a rich wisdom that sets aside human philosophy. Shun cultural values. Put all that behind you. Heavenly wisdom appears demanding; in reality, it's pure and gentle, peace loving, and courteous. It considers the well-being of others, is merciful and responsive. It's the pearl of great price that very few possess.

## Take a Look at Yourself

The Christ speaks:

Many who try to make their own decisions are unaware of the limitations of their understanding. Now and then they catch a glimmer of light, only to extinguish it unintentionally. They don't realize they are spiritually blind, incapable of directing their affairs. They do something that isn't right and then make it worse by turning around and making excuses. They get angry about nothing and then justify it by claiming they care too much. Quick to criticize others for their faults, they overlook their own wrongdoing. Feeling sorry for themselves as they lick their wounds when someone hurts them with an unkind remark doesn't stop them from putting that person down. If they could observe themselves, they would be slower to jump on the criticism bandwagon.

You aren't like that. You are no longer content with a superficial spirituality. You want to go more deeply into the ways of God. It's now time to take a look at yourself. Doing so helps you to identify and amend your wrongdoing. It pleases me when you focus on your attitudes, not on what others do or think. You won't be so annoyed by what is going on around you if you pay attention to your own weaknesses.

Where are you when you aren't alone? Does it help to be involved in so many activities that you have no time for yourself? To attain peace of mind, put aside your busy schedule and evaluate your spiritual health. Let nothing come between you and me. Nothing should be more important to you than your relationship to the Father God and what he wants for you, no matter how great, how pleasing, how gratifying the activities you are now involved with.

God fills the earth and the heavens with his goodness. If you love him, why shouldn't you renounce everything that doesn't please him? He alone is the heart's true joy, the soul's enduring comfort.

## Prickly Temptations

The Christ speaks:

I need to point out that you will always be tempted to do what you know is wrong. All are born into a troubled world as surely as flames leap up from fire, so be diligent and prayerful. Watch out for the devil, your enemy, as he peers around the corner looking for someone to deceive. No one is so holy that the deceiver doesn't knock on the door. There is no family, no church, no place on earth where he is not lurking.

Although these prickly allurements are troublesome, they are beneficial as effective teachers for through them you are humbled and disciplined. As fire purifies iron, so temptation has a purifying effect on the repentant pilgrim. It reveals hidden sin.

Temptation's tug follows you around. Yield to it and it becomes more frequent, more enticing. To ignore it puts you at risk. Neither can you avoid its snares by running away. It requires admitting your vulnerability to sin, then persevering with determination to stand firm. Those who are tricked flounder about like a rudderless ship buffeted by the waves, and some shipwreck their faith on the rocks.

Be alert! Satan's lure begins with wavering doubt. As the ship tosses helplessly in the waves, so is the follower who doesn't allow me to be at the helm. Impulse after impulse pounds the questioning soul as the devil tries to blow the ship off course.

So, stay on guard at all times. Temptation is easier to reject at the first inkling. Give Mr. Devil one foothold and you're in danger. God has given you freedom to choose how to respond. It's your responsibility to refuse the thoughts the devil puts into your mind. When he appears, confront him immediately and tell him to leave.

It's hard to get pain under control when you wait too long to take medication. It will be harder to get rid of the devil if you muddle over in your mind whether you should or shouldn't listen to him.

This is how temptation develops:

1. A simple thought occurs to you.
2. Imagination embellishes it.
3. Embellishment makes it look attractive.
4. It becomes oh so desirable.
5. Suddenly, it's a powerful attraction.
6. So let's relish its apparent delight.

The longer it takes to implement the "leave remedy," the weaker you become as your enemy's grip tightens its hold.

The devil's provocation strikes everyone at different times in various ways. Some are under attack the moment they decide to become my disciples. Others face their toughest testing times in prayer. A few are afflicted throughout their entire lives. Toward the end of life, seniors sometimes revert backwards to thinking only about themselves as their physical strength declines. Some experience mild teasing; others struggle with severe compulsions. The wise heavenly Father who designed your DNA knows what attacks to allow. He knows your state of mind; he doesn't permit testing you aren't able to handle. When temptation hits, he offsets it by providing enough discipline to enable you to resist it.

You may never face a major test; you might stumble instead over little ones, like the gossip and exaggerations that pop up day after day. Barely noticeable and easily discarded as just a bad habit or minor flaw, such things are debilitating to Christian growth. Don't take them lightly even though in some circles they're commonplace enough to be considered acceptable. Resisting great temptations isn't a virtue if you are guilty of these so-called "minor" flaws.

How quickly you confront Satan is an indicator of spiritual maturity. Neither is it to your credit to be devout when all is well; it's submission to God's wisdom during adversity that counts. At such times, your godliness becomes evident to those around you. When you see others giving in to temptation, encourage them to be strong. Be supportive just as others support you.

## 48

### Godliness

The Christ speaks:

Pour your heart and soul into honoring me. Do you remember when you first began to align your being with mine. Didn't you do so because you wanted to follow me? The time is always right to pursue righteousness. When you do, I will rain down blessings from heaven on your parched soul.

My teachings aren't heavy. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me. I am gentle and lowly in heart. Be dependable and generous with your time and resources. I promise to support you faithfully, giving you strength for each new day. So grip faith tightly. Guard against well-ingrained misconceptions that aren't supported by the Bible's teachings.

A worried, rather depressed, pilgrim wavering between fear and hope about following me, prayed, "How can I be sure I will persevere to the end?" Immediately, the answer came from heaven, "If you were sure, what would you do? Do it now and all will be well." The pilgrim, encouraged, no longer anxious about the future, determined to understand God's ways.

The Holy Scriptures give the formula: Don't be conformed to the culture of this world, but let God transform you into a different person by changing the way you think. Then you will discover God's will for you, a good plan, both perfect and pleasing.

The Psalmist understood this and told people to trust and do good. Then they could live safely on the land and feed on its riches. Progress is slow for pilgrims who fear what I might ask them to do, what they might need to give up. Those who improve most in their quest for godliness believe that I will do what I promise. They commit to putting aside whatever interferes with their journey, jumping over all hurdles. I stay close by to give them the grace to persevere.

So, run your race to win. Make a clean break with everything that defiles your body or distracts your spirit. Holiness must be your top priority. Pull back and you will be weakened. Press onward in your pursuit of God. It's the way to experience firsthand that the path of the just does indeed shine more and more brightly.

It's harder than strenuous physical labor to eradicate faults and subdue unseemly affections. You must take care of unacceptable sins as I make you aware of them, or they will become ingrained habits that are formidable to break. Keep a close watch over your soul, exercise discipline, and remain focused no matter what is going on around you. Use the day well and you will enjoy the evening. Intentional commitment to these things precedes the inner transformation you yearn for. Not everyone faces the same obstacles; you may struggle to cope with a sin that is easy for another person to overcome. Difficulty of the hurdles has never prevented anyone from maturing spiritually because I delight in making my people righteous. It's a halfhearted pursuit of holiness that leads pilgrims to drop out because they want a carefree existence with few demands to complicate the day. Their goal is contentment but they aren't contented. Something always makes them unhappy.

Two basic steps are necessary:

1. rejection of sinful human inclinations
2. intentional focus on pursuing an impeccable character

Shun the kind of behavior that irritates you in other people. When someone annoys you, you probably are guilty of the same thing. Watch yourself carefully. Be alert for indicators that what I have just said is true. Don't do the same thing yourself. If you do, correct it. Others notice your failings as quickly as you notice theirs. Seize the opportunity to turn a negative into a positive. Conversely, if someone has an attitude you admire, emulate it.

You will have problem after problem when you try to sneak a bit of worldly philosophy in with heavenly manna. The godly should be the ones to lead the way, setting the example. I hate it when I see self-interests put ahead of someone else's well-being. Learn from my examples of mercy portrayed in the Gospels. Give, with no thought of receiving. Encourage people rather than tearing them down.

Disagreements happen when human perspectives are misguided. Expect limited understanding that sees only the surface if you do not tap into the

wisdom of the One who knows the hidden nuances of your soul. God knows the outcome of what you are planning. He's aware of the adjustments you need to make. Ask for help. Prayer will teach you everything you need to know.

Contemplate the power of Calvary and its impact on the world. Question whether you are a true believer if, after pondering my life and death, you aren't making progress in thinking the way I do. I died for you. Shouldn't you live for me? Righteously and faithfully? Let the example of the saints who have preceded you encourage you to stay the course toward righteous living. Read their biographies. What motivated them? With what results?

The Apostle Paul described one of his journeys like this: he was hungry and thirsty, without enough clothes to keep warm, living from place to place, working hard to earn a living. Yet Paul and his companions blessed those who cursed them. They were patient with those who persecuted them. When their antagonists falsely accused them, they replied quietly, if at all. Paul affirmed that it was worth any losses to tap into the power of my resurrection.

In the early days of the church, martyrs were subject to indescribable torture. They endured the torment of wild beasts ripping them apart. They attained such bravery that they didn't scream or even groan as they met their death. Mother Teresa lived contently with the barest of necessities. "Praying John Hyde" spent entire nights in prayer for the people of India. Everywhere throughout the world, people who belong to my Kingdom continue to rise early to pray. Do you? Or is a soft bed more to your liking?

If you didn't need to eat, drink, and sleep, would you feast instead at a spiritual banquet for the soul, looking to God alone so that you could enjoy him perfectly? Would you spend your days and nights serving the Kingdom? Would you commit your time, your resources to God who is all in all, whom his creation serves as he desires? I am concerned that you may waver.

You can never recover lost time so keep your eyes on the goal. Take care of minor flaws or little by little they will become greater ones. Trust me enough to be content with whatever circumstances you face. Then you will not wish for more than you need nor will you be discontent with little. You will be peaceful and your days will be brighter, all because of God's



grace. Be intentional about incorporating godly habits into your daily living. I promise to encourage you when you need it.

## 49

### Not Yet a True Follower

The Christ speaks:

You are not yet my true follower, not yet a courageous and wise disciple.

The pilgrim asks:

Why not, Lord? Where do I fall short?

The Christ speaks:

It's because everything stops when the slightest opposition comes your way. You think of nothing but the problem. You quickly turn to someone for sympathy. You pray that I take it away, giving no thought to whether or not the situation is something I intend to use to accomplish a purpose.

Courageous disciples stand unshaken when tough days arrive. When Satan manages to think up some persuasive tactic to inflict damage, that is not a problem for me. I will take the tragedy and make something good out of it.

Let's talk about those tough days. You seem happy only when life is going your way; when adversity hits, you crumble. I want you to be delighted with our relationship both in distress *and* in prosperity. Can't you turn to me? I love you dearly. Give me a chance to deepen your faith. Rejoice *in* the situation. What you do is panic, settling down only if I answer your prayer the way you want me to.

The Apostle Paul understood what I am talking about and told the believers in Philippi, "I am content with what I have. I know how to live on almost nothing or with everything. I know the secret of living joyfully, whether with a full stomach or empty, with plenty or little."

You know that life is not always smooth. Emotions are like that. Like the tide, they come and go. They rise and fall, and sometimes they crash. Fickle feelings are not good indicators of reality and they should not determine your reactions. At times, the intensity of your love for me and for others will vary. Your love for me is the result of my grace, a foretaste of your permanent home in heaven. You are maturing in faith when you no longer respond to the enticements of the devil the way he would like you to do.

Early on, before I began my public ministry, I told Satan, “Get out” when he told me he would give me all the kingdoms of the world. That was a blatant lie. The kingdoms of this world weren’t his to give. Good gifts come from God, not from the devil. The devil will do whatever he can to zap my purpose for you. He itches to turn you away from your allegiance to faith. He cringes at the thought of holiness. No way does he want you to acknowledge your sins. He’s determined to keep you too busy to read your Bible, too disorganized to spend time meditating on what you read. He doesn’t want my words to illuminate your thinking. He chafes when you pray. He slips in wandering thoughts. He frightens. Destroying harmony among believers is fun for him. He may make it difficult for you to find a church home.

Of course, he will tell you it’s okay to relax a bit. No one is perfect, so why should you even try? He would like you to think that sin isn’t so bad. The Bible has strong warnings about impure thoughts, but the devil wants to convince you that it’s healthy to indulge your fantasies. Then, without warning, you begin to struggle with improper imaginations.

When you do something you know is wrong, stand firm. Reject those inklings of wrongdoing. Yielding to temptation sidetracks you and leads you where you should not go.

Satan’s reasoning is a dangerous trap and he wants you to see everything from his point of view, not from my perspective. Confront him. Tell him to get out of your way lest he render you helpless. Say to him, “The Lord is my life and my salvation. I am not afraid of you. The Lord is my fortress. He protects me from danger.” Resist him and he will flee, coward that he is.

Fight like a warrior. Endure hardship as a good soldier. Before me, your persecutors will stumble. No one can defeat you unless you, yourself, allow

it to happen. If you slip, get back on track. Persevere. I will never stop loving you. With each testing, you will become stronger.

My grace is able to hold you steady. Be forewarned. Guard against complacency and self-confidence. Don't let pride convince you that you don't need my help.

## Only a Few

The Christ speaks:

I have many friends who love my heavenly Kingdom but few who will carry my cross. I have many who want comfort but few who welcome adversity. I have many who are willing to share my supper, but few who share my fasting.

Everyone wants to rejoice with me, but few are willing to suffer with me. Many follow me up to the breaking of bread, but few accept the bitter cup. Many gather to witness my miracles; few want to experience the shame of the cross. Many love me if no hardship touches them; they praise and bless me only when I console them. When I withdraw and leave them, even for a little while, they become depressed and complain. It's rare to find a follower who is totally stripped of self-interest.

If your goal is an easy journey, you are no different from those who think only about themselves. It reveals that you love yourself more than me, always thinking of what you can get rather than what you can give. Giving away your possessions means nothing. Grief for sin isn't enough. Understanding all mysteries won't make you righteous. Even if people acclaim your integrity and devotion, you still fall short.

Love me for who I am—not for my blessings. Love me as much in anguish as when I console you. If I give no comfort whatsoever, that is the time to praise. Pure love is powerful, it's untainted with self-interest, it seeks nothing for itself.

Be prepared to say “no” to comfort and prestige as you follow me. When you do that, say, “I have only done my duty.” Place little value on your accomplishments even when others laud them.

No one is richer, no one stronger, no one freer, than the one who happily chooses the lowest place.

## The Calvary Road

The Christ speaks:

Many people think my words are too demanding:

- ◇ Deny yourself.
- ◇ Take up your cross.
- ◇ If you try to manage your life, it will control you.
- ◇ Do you want to destroy your soul?

It will be more difficult to hear: “Depart from me you cursed ones into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his demons. I was hungry, and you didn’t give me food. I was thirsty, and you didn’t give me a drink. I was a stranger, and you didn’t invite me into your home. I was naked, and you didn’t give me anything to wear. In prison, I was sick, and you didn’t visit me.”

Those who welcome the cross will have no need to fear when I return for judgment. Those who have embraced the cross I gave them will welcome me while sinners wail frantically.

Because of my cross, I am able to protect you; in my cross *alone* is your salvation. The cross pours out peace, strength, and joy on believing saints. Integrity is in the cross; there I perfect holiness.

By carrying my cross to Golgatha to die for you, I set the example. You, too, must hang your life on your personal cross. Crucify selfishness. Put your egotistic plans to death. If you share my crucifixion, you will share my glory. If you die with me, you will live with me. If you willingly endure hardship here on earth, you will reign with me in heaven. If you don’t take up your cross, you aren’t worthy of me. The cross leads you to my Kingdom.

Eternal life is dependent on the cross; your legacy depends on you nailing your aspirations there. There's no way to true inner peace except the way of the cross and daily relinquishment of your desires. No matter where you walk, or what you desire—you will not find a more powerful or safer way than the Calvary Road.

If you plan and implement life according to your best judgment, you will encounter frustrating roadblocks and afflictions of the soul. Whether you wish it or not, the believer's cross will continually confront you.

Your cross is ready for you; everywhere it awaits you. You can't run away from it because wherever you go, you take yourself along. Look above, look down, look around, and look within. In every place, you will find the cross. Accept this reality.

Carry your cross willingly; it will empower you and lead you to a place where it becomes a joy. If you endure your cross grudgingly, it will be heavy, making your life difficult. Yet you won't be able to throw it away; if you do, another one will appear that is even heavier.

Do you think you can escape what no one has ever been able to avoid—not even me? I lived *every day* knowing that the Romans would crucify me and that my Father would abandon me. My entire life was a cross. It was martyrdom. And you expect ease and pleasure?

Your cross is likely to become heavier as you progress spiritually. No longer thinking and living the way other people do, you won't fit in with the status quo. Your consolation will be that as you share my alienation, relief will come to you when you need it. Every pang you feel will change into hope. My grace will be more than sufficient. Your spirit will become stronger as affliction increases.

God's grace helps you love what you would normally hate—and welcome what you would typically shun. You are not inclined:

- ◇ to carry and love the cross,
- ◇ to do what you don't want to do,
- ◇ to discipline yourself to resist temptation,
- ◇ to reject recognition and honor,
- ◇ to accept disrespect without resentment,
- ◇ to live humbly,
- ◇ to be content when overlooked,
- ◇ to endure loss and pain patiently,
- ◇ to live without prosperity.



Those are not the ways of humanity. It's my grace that enables. Try to do this by yourself and it will be impossible. Ask me, and I will send my angels to help you. Then, armed with faith and trust, you will be free from the desire for worldly possessions, relationships, and honors. Temptation will be less of an issue. The devil cannot defeat you when you are wearing an impenetrable armor of faith.

You are my follower. Take up your cross courageously. Be ready for problems. It will always be so, and the way to soften pain and sorrow is to receive them willingly. Resent them and you will be unhappy, even bitter, as the heartaches you want to escape follow you everywhere. Adjust your thinking to accept trouble calmly and trustingly.

Prepare to endure physical pain or emotional turmoil. At times, family, friends, or neighbors will upset you. There will be days when your greatest problem will be no one other than yourself, and you won't find a solution or comfort as long as I need to teach you important lessons. Walk with me as I show you how to handle disappointment. You will never know how much I suffered for you unless you also suffer. To be my friend and to share my glory, drink my cup willingly. Leave it to me to lift you up when you need it. What troubles you doesn't compare to the glory that is to come.

There *will* come a time when walking the Gethsemane road with me will be joyful. You will hardly be aware of the uneven terrain because suffering is redemptive. You will develop stamina, character, and hope. All will be well with your soul.

If, at this moment, your days flow easily, and I am blessing you with an abundance of love and resources, there is no guarantee that you will forever receive an exemption from pain. Distress may yet come your way to deepen our friendship. If it comes, remember that I have something good in store for you. The saints in heaven will rejoice as they watch me gently teach you the deeper secrets of the Kingdom.

On earth, people who persevere in their own pursuits often receive acclamation; it's far better to earn eternal honors. You will grasp heavenly mysteries when you embrace my ways. It requires bending lower, not rising higher, as you walk with me along the Calvary Road. Embrace the cross. Accept that the way to my Kingdom will twist and turn.

## 52

### Surrender

The Christ speaks:

With my arms outreached, I willingly died in agony on the cross, committing myself to the will of God the Father. I gave my life. Will you do the same? Will you give everything you are to me? Will you follow me with all your heart, soul, and mind? Will you withhold nothing, not even a tiny facet of time, abilities, or wealth? Will you abandon your self-serving dreams?

You will never be entirely content without me even though you may think you have everything you want. It won't satisfy me if you give me all you possess but not yourself. I am not interested in what you *do* for me. I am interested in what you can *be* for me.

I am yours; I want you to be mine. I want a friendship that keeps nothing back. Without that whole-hearted relationship, our friendship is imperfect. Few believers are perceptive; still fewer are unencumbered. It's because a total surrender of time and dreams is not something they are prepared to do.

My mandate is firm: *If you don't give up everything you have, you cannot be my disciple.*

God saves you from sin, but you must protect yourself from possessiveness. Are you willing to do that?

## Godly Habits

The Christ speaks:

My followers are to be real, wholesome, emotionally balanced—the same privately as publicly. My standards are high: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. These fruits of righteousness should be your trademarks.

People may appear to be like this, but when you spend time with them, you discover they aren't this at all, but that. Don't emulate them. Your thoughts and motives should match what you say and do. Your theology must drive your biography.

Search your soul. Is your faith genuine? Do you pass the test? Is it necessary for you to be selective in what you say publicly because what you're thinking doesn't honor me? You are well aware that God looks at the heart. He sees your motive. He knows the recesses of your subconscious. Nothing escapes him; he notes the unspoken thought, the most private longing. Shouldn't you consult me at all times, in every place, with no hidden agendas, no ulterior motives?

Every morning thank God for his kindness, every evening praise him for his faithfulness. Search my Word for direction. You're making good progress if joy and thankfulness are beginning to permeate your thinking.

Check in with me frequently throughout the day. Talk with me about your plans; I will make them successful if they are right for you. It isn't for you to take ownership. You can make your plans, but I am the One who determines outcomes.

Uphold godly standards. If you find yourself doing what you know you shouldn't do, or not doing what you should do, talk to me about your struggles, especially any flaws that mar your character. At times even my

most faithful saints stumble. What is likely to happen to you if you commit to me halfheartedly?

It's understandable when you need to delay, even skip, devotions to respond to someone who needs help. Beware, though, if you allow an overscheduled day to crowd out time with me—or if you are too tired or lazy. It sets you up to become a victim of Satan's attacks. If you haven't yet learned to keep in touch with me moment by moment, then at least plan certain times in the day to read the Scriptures and pray—in the early morning before daylight dawns, and sometime during the evening. Morning is the time to pinpoint your focus for the day. During the evening, evaluate how well you've done. Scrutinize the way you interacted with people: what you said, how you responded, and what your thoughts were as that day's events unfolded. Did you offend anyone? Did you disappoint me?

Control your love for food. It will make it easier to curb other unhealthy behaviors. Make good use of your time: read, write, pray, meditate, do something to encourage a friend or neighbor. Serve me and humanity and I will reward you for the good you do.

Don't plan your devotional times the way your friends do. What is right for them may not be right for you. The Holy Spirit deals with you differently than he does with other family members and friends, so adapt your personal devotional times to your own needs. Read your Bible slowly and prayerfully at the time of day that is best for you. It doesn't do much good to read when you're drowsy and not able to recall what you have read.

Vary the way you read to avoid falling into rote reading. One year, read your Bible in chronological order. In another year, focus on one Bible book and study it in depth. If you have more time on the weekends than during the week, plan for longer devotional times then. During Advent and Lenten seasons, zero in on readings related to Christmas and Easter. In times of grief, memorize verses that bring comfort to your soul. Sing when you're happy, be thankful when you're peaceful, and read for encouragement if you're feeling depressed.

Be an impeccable example of the believer. The discipline it takes to cultivate godly habits is minimal compared with the future that awaits faithful pilgrims in eternity.

## Kingdom Citizens

The Christ speaks:

You belong to the family of God. You are a citizen of the heavenly Kingdom. You are one of the chosen, a royal priest, my beloved follower. As such, you are also my ambassador. Prepare yourself well. Pursue holiness diligently. Think thoughts that are true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent, commendable. The Kingdom of Heaven is not what we eat, drink, wear, or do. It is goodness, peace, joy—a tranquility that the Holy Spirit gives. He is your Enabler; he makes it happen.

It is my delight to be with you to support you, giving you peace in this troubled world. It gives me joy to meet with each of my followers. Now the time has come for us to talk about spending time together, just you and me.

Much-loved pilgrim, I want time with you every day. If you love me, make time for me. The Father God loves you as much as I do; he will also be with us. Together, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, we will hold you close. Very few enjoy this endearing relationship. Some say that it isn't possible, ignoring my promise to supply every needed resource. They depend on friends for happiness, people who are fickle, changeable, and often disappointing. That doesn't happen with me. Like solid rock, I am at your side always, steady and strong. Never will I die and leave you alone. I have already conquered death. No one else can say that to you.

Organize your daily activities so you aren't too busy to connect with me. Refuse to let non-essentials clutter your day. Say no to anyone who tries to detract you. Lean on me; I'm close by. Allow me to be your mentor. I will always do what is best for you.

I remind you again that this present world is not your permanent home. There is a new world in your future. As a citizen of the heavenly Kingdom,

never let anticipation of a shining future in Paradise with your heavenly Father fade away. Earth and all that populates it are only a shadow when compared to what awaits you. Center your thoughts on God, the Most High, Maker of heaven and earth.

Never stop praying. You think it's impossible? Some people do. I assure you that I will never ask you to do something unless I also give you the ability to do it. Read my biography in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, John. Observe my lifestyle. Listen to my conversations. Join me on the mountain to pray. Walk the Gethsemane Road with me. Look up at the cross as I die. Rejoice as I reappear triumphant over the dark powers of the devil.

The Romans, powerful in the world during the time I lived on earth, despised me. The religious establishment persecuted me. During my weakest moment, writhing on the cross for acknowledging that I am the Son of God, family, friends, and ultimately even the Father God looked the other way, leaving me alone in physical, emotional, and spiritual agony. I endured this for *you*.

Do you complain when someone insults you? Do you expect that everyone will be your friend? Are you entitled to exemption from difficulties? Is the servant above the Master? The only way I can reward you for patience is to test it by adversity. Accept hardship patiently so you can reign with me. Be strong for me.

You will no longer care so much about conveniences or inconveniences when you comprehend even a little of my love for you. Divine love has a humbling effect that defuses insults so they no longer hurt. Love me, love truth, and you will be free, unencumbered by painful memories.

To see what is, not what seems to be, is possible with the wisdom and perceptiveness that God gives. As the Holy Spirit instructs you in the ways of righteousness, peace will increasingly emerge to grace your days. To respond to the gentle nudges of the Holy Spirit within you requires no special place to meditate, no specific time to pray. Always, everywhere, at all times, the soul is capable of communicating with God.

In this state, the deceptive ways of humanity shouldn't upset you. The unexpected doesn't disturb those who, accepting that all things work together for good, adjust to whatever happens. It's when you allow distractions and clutter to invade your being that unproductive days hinder your pursuit of holiness.

When all is well with your soul, God blends circumstances together for your good. If you are still absorbed with earthly matters, you aren't giving your concerns to me to handle. Nothing weakens our relationship more than your obsession with problems that you should turn over to me. Set your thoughts on heaven above, not on things of this world.

## Who May Worship Me?

The Christ speaks:

Who may worship me, the Giver of righteousness, the One who sanctifies the soul? Who may welcome my holy presence? I come to those who have pure hearts and clean hands. Prepare to worship. Shut out the world. Sit quietly like a bird alone on the rooftop.

Do you not spend time preparing the guest room when a loved one comes to visit? Do the same for me. Have a special place for our time together. On your own merit, you can't adequately prepare to receive me. The invitation to meet with me is like a wealthy philanthropist inviting a street beggar to an elaborate banquet who has nothing to give except humble thanks.

With reverence and love, prepare your heart to read and listen to the Scriptures until you receive a few crumbs of grace. You need me. I don't need you. You don't sanctify me; it is I, who sanctifies you. I come to make you holy, to supply your need.

Afterward, within your being, remain in my presence. Don't let daily activities keep you away from me. Stay close. Enjoy my companionship. Live in me, free from all your anxieties.



## Just the Two of Us

The pilgrim prays:

Lord, I am pondering your words. Once again, as I read the Scriptures, give me insight to receive the truths I need. Give me wisdom. I am a pilgrim here; I need direction, and your precepts are my guide.

From you comes the help I need. You are all I need and desire. You are my salvation, redemption, hope, strength, honor, and glory. Bend down to hear me whisper as I pray to you, baring my soul. Without you it's hard to exist, let alone live triumphantly. I ask you to revive me, strengthen me, keep me going. My soul longs for you and your presence. Could I even get through the day if you deprive me of that?

Merciful Jesus, once you refused to send away the crowd who gathered to listen to you without something to eat. No food was available to feed them, but you worked a miracle and they didn't go hungry. Feed me again, Lord. Give me the energy I need not to faint. Perform another miracle. Refresh my soul with your sustaining provisions.

So often weak, I disappoint you. Sometimes, I'm lukewarm; other times, I'm downright neglectful. Renew my spirit. Rekindle my devotion. Why do I let a full schedule squeeze out being with you? I allow the demands of my career to pull me away, and then I wonder why I feel fragmented, why trivial things bother me. The tranquility of your presence is no longer with me.

It saddens me to see people stumbling through life without your help. Then it grips me with an icy fear that if I'm not careful, I could be among them, inching along in darkness because I'm not with you enough to maintain a healthy balance.

I look forward to the joys of heaven. Meanwhile, still on pilgrimage, I dare not neglect quiet times of restoration. O Lord God, your mercy is wonderful. How well you understand my musings. Be light and power to my soul. Respond to my hunger and thirst for righteousness by giving me your joy.

How great a Savior you are. How beloved a Companion. How faithful a Friend. My love for you exceeds all others; my greatest desire is to be like you.

May all creation fall silent in your presence. The loveliness of the mountains, the trees, the snow, and innumerable other delights are gifts to your people. Though silent, they speak eloquently of your majesty. How can I keep from singing? Can I ever thank you enough? Amen.

## The Desert

The Christ speaks:

You will not always be on an emotional high. Nor will you always be in a state where your soul thirsts intensely for God. At times, you're happy. Other times, you're sad. Likewise, the longing for godliness is prone to varying degrees of intensity.

Continue to do the things you need to do. Refresh yourself doing good things for others while looking forward to the time when we once again will have special times together to talk without watching the clock. Meanwhile, bear any dryness of spirit patiently.

I will return with renewed blessings.

Then you will forget your weary moments. I will reveal to you anew the treasures of the Scriptures. With a more receptive heart, you will savor its delights. Fresh understanding will thrill you as you affirm the eighth chapter of Romans. Periods of dryness are insignificant compared to what lies ahead.

## Time Alone

The Christ speaks:

Every day, in devout times and dry times, find a place where you can be alone. Close the door, and spend time in prayer. Wait in silence, shifting your focus away from the day's schedule until you begin to sense my presence. Pray the way you talk with a close friend.

Here in this quiet place where you meet with the Source of grace and mercy, goodness and purity, you will learn to think more like I do. I will help you replace your ambitions and toxic habits with a spirituality that converges with my holiness. The restorative power of silence will calm your heart.

Satan, knowing about God's healing touch, will try to deter you. This is when some people meet Satan's most subtle attacks. He wants to weaken your faith, not allow it to become stronger. He wants to confuse you, to intimidate you with guilt because you have simplified your life in order to be with me. He wants you to listen to other people, not me. He wants to see you go down the broad way toward destruction, not be attracted to the narrow path of righteousness. He wants you in his grip, not in my loving arms.

The devil will urge you persistently to give up reading your Bible and spending time with me altogether, or failing that, to settle for a quick ten-minute read. He'll consider that a reasonable compromise because he knows that depth doesn't develop quickly. Ignore him. Refuse the thoughts he puts in your mind. He will distract you with phone calls, with indecisiveness about what to do that day. Recognize these attacks for what they are. Don't let him control you.

Neither should you spend time with me only when you need to prepare for your involvement in church activities. During the Advent and Lenten seasons, many people are more conscious of spirituality, but a spiritual tune-up by participating in church liturgy doesn't last very long. Convenient devotional times—that is, when you feel like it—won't nurture righteousness. Instead, they reinforce selfish prayer on your own terms.

Insecurities about understanding parts of the Bible could discourage you. You may be afraid that some secret sin you don't want to give up will confront you. Those fears hinder discovering the good, acceptable, and perfect will of your heavenly Father. When you become a victim of fear, you are bereft. Fear does not come from God; it comes from Satan.

Be sensitive to those you live with. Be a servant. Take care of your domestic duties. It's not good to keep your family waiting to eat breakfast together while you have personal devotions. It's wrong to irritate people because you rigorously put personal preferences ahead of your obligations. Whenever misunderstandings surface, confession is good for the soul. Spit out the poison. Don't let ill will fester. Ask forgiveness from everyone involved, including God. Keep your conscience pure so each day you're ready to ponder the treasures embedded in Scripture.

Should the sluggishness of unsettled emotions sap your vitality, daily snags are more apt to impair the discipline required to meet with me regularly. I grieve when you give in to listlessness. The devotion that raises your soul to a higher level dies down quickly unless you respond when God draws you. The Holy Spirit wants to work within you, but he will never force you. If apathy controls you, confess your lapses. I will motivate you if you ask for help.

It's not your fault if a major crisis or health issue keeps you from your private chapel. At such times, remember that anyone, anywhere, at any hour of the day or night can be in touch with me. Conversing with me continually is a habit you need to cultivate because it doesn't come naturally.

Although friendship with me varies—sometimes intense, sometimes relaxed, sometimes comforting, sometimes redirecting—I always interact with you in a way that is right for you. I know where you are now, and I know how to lead you to higher levels of spirituality. Follow me there.

## Silent Retreats

The Christ speaks:

Occasionally, take time out for extended personal reflection, especially during a period of spiritual dryness. Throughout church history, my greatest leaders have retreated from their daily routine for contrition, direction, and encouragement. You may need to cut back for a time on get-togethers with friends to open up time to refresh your soul. Seneca, questionable philosopher that he was, said, “When I return home from social functions, I am less than when I went.” He didn’t find those events uplifting. Early church fathers avoided celebrations whenever they could. Leave empty activities to empty people.

A day or a weekend of silence is more rewarding than too much socializing. Long conversations are often exhausting. For many, an evening of small talk at an open house, carefully saying the right thing at the right time, is more draining than a relaxing evening at home. The godly have no interest in attending every possible gathering because they consider it important to be visible or because they want to keep in touch with who is doing what.

The ones who function well in the public eye relish the tranquility of home. Those who speak words of wisdom prefer to be silent. True role models have no problem submitting to others. Leaders who direct with sensitivity would rather follow.

Has one of your family outings ended with emotional turmoil? Have you ever had a time when a forlorn morning followed a happy evening? Pleasure is like that. In the end, it can sting. The desire to keep on top of everything is draining. Why do so? What eternal significance does one

accomplish by wandering here and there trying to satisfy a craving to see, hear, smell, taste, and touch?

When you are outside, what do you see that will remain throughout eternity the way it is now? Everything under the sun is temporary. If you could be part of all the happenings of the entire world at any time, would that satisfy your longing soul?

There's little contentment in a whirl of activity. Take note of what happens out there: local gossip, power plays, upsetting world events, terror attacks. It's disquieting. Unpredictable. Painful. Disorderly.

Walk away from crowded places. Withdraw by yourself to lonely places as I did. I often slipped away alone for a night of prayer. For you, it may be an hour, a day, even a week. Find an oasis of quietness. I am waiting for you there.

Pilgrims who use their time well have an aura of peace about them. Untainted by entanglements with a self-serving culture, their security is in God; his favor enables them to enjoy a pure conscience free from hypocrisy. Even so, they need to be careful not to stumble and fall. Too much confidence is dangerous. The pseudo-security of self-confidence ends in delusion. A level of holiness that rises above human failings doesn't exist.

You should reserve time to savor thoughtful books that speak to your soul. Forget self-help books that do little more than entertain. Instead, read books that explore spiritual formation. Study. Listen. Ponder.

To withdraw from time to time to search your being is essential. There, alone with God, renewal takes place. In the silence, new insights from the Word are uncovered. Tears flow to cleanse the soul. Peace, often lost in the noisy clamor of a million things to do, is present. The only true peace is in me. Nowhere else. Look to me. Forget the world and its fascinations. I have something better for you.

## One With You

The pilgrim prays:

Lord, I love to be alone with you. I am able to open up to you as to no other. You are my soul mate, the desire of my heart, my confidante, always with me. When you are close beside me, I'm neither upset nor worried.

I pray and long to be with you, to know a bond that renders all human relationships secondary to my love for you. O Lord, when will that happen? When will I be so absorbed with you that I forget myself, so attuned to you that nothing else matters? You in me and I in you. May I always cling to you as a branch is attached to the vine that nourishes it. No one measures up to you. Sanctify my temperament to blend with your being; your presence in me, my will in you.

Lord, you are the Giver of tranquility within my soul. Thank you. Without you, I look around and see fatigue, misery, and sorrow everywhere. Here in secret you refresh me with heavenly blessings, giving me the ability to look at the world's sorrow from your perspective. You reveal yourself in surprising ways. You reserve your friendship for those who live simply. Your richest blessings are given to those who give you their whole heart.

Oh, what unspeakable grace you bestow. Oh, how endearing your presence. Oh, what boundless love you shower on me. What can I give you in return? Your sacrifice demands my all. I give it gladly. I want to be with you, to be like you. Amen.



## 61

### Friendships

The Christ speaks:

I will hold you in my arms; keep you safe. But, I need to talk to you about friendships. If your happiness is dependent on a friend whose company you enjoy, you will be restless and entangled. Friendships established on your needs aren't healthy. Base them on the mutual allegiance you share; without that common bond, something will always be missing in the relationship. With me in the circle, friendships are strong, even enduring for a lifetime. The quality of friendship has a lot to do with how you interact with me. Love your friends the way I love you—unconditionally, with no expectations.

Keep in close touch with me, so death or the end of a relationship won't render you helpless. Your friendships should be dispensable enough that it will not devastate you if they end. More than that, you should learn to be content without companionship. The closer you are to me, the more attuned you are to my love, the easier this will be.

Never look to friendships to give yourself a sense of identity. That's a typical delusion. Know who you are apart from your circle of friends. Live, move, and have your being first in me. In times of aloneness, God nourishes the heart. To put friendships ahead of me means you lose those blessings. When friendships are put in proper perspective, they become richer. You will care about them not only lovingly, but also loosely.

## Your Closest Friend

The Christ speaks:

I will bless you beyond your expectations when you understand what it really means to love me. It requires self-denial because you must love me more than anyone or anything else—more than you love your spouse, children, extended family, career, possessions. I allow no rivals. I alone must reign. Free yourself from dependency on others lest you discover with a deadening thud that your support system has collapsed.

I am your most dependable friend. Folks come and go, leaving you alone. Not me. I will always be by your side holding you steady even during your final moments of life when you can no longer communicate with anyone. That day will come, and when it does, there will be no option but to leave behind all you now hold dear. I will be there to hold you close.

People wither and fade away like dry grass, weak as a reed swayed by the wind. Their beauty disappears like wilting flowers. Friendship is often unpredictable, inconsistent, sometimes disloyal, falling short of expectations. Friends can never reach to the depths of your soul. They can go only so far. God has designed it that way.

Do you know what will happen tomorrow? Do your friends know? Do your mentors?

## Still Learning

The pilgrim prays:

Lord, you are so right. I need you more than friendships that come and go. I feel like the Psalmist: “Whom have I in heaven but you?” Many times I’ve turned to people only to be disappointed. You are the fortress to which I must flee when troubled.

I’m insecure. I often change my mind. I wish I could say I’m always firmly grounded in you. Then I wouldn’t fear anything, and criticism wouldn’t hurt me. Your love surrounds me and you relieve my distress. Your faithfulness reaches beyond the clouds. Who is there for me more than you are?

Forgive me for worrying, anticipating that something bad will happen. If I can’t shake off anticipated tragedies, how will I respond to the unexpected when I have no time to brace myself? Will turmoil wreak havoc with my faith when someone I love dearly dies or leaves me? Why do I resent the twists and turns? Why am I so quick to fret? People perceive me as strong but I am not. Lord, to whom can I go? You are my Refuge. You are the Truth who doesn’t deceive and who can’t be deceived.

You warn me to guard against those who would harm me, even saying that brother will betray brother and a father will betray his child. You’ve told me not to associate with greedy people and not to let anyone lead me astray with slick words. I’ve learned my lessons and it has been costly. Help me to be more cautious.

A friend once told me to keep some information to myself. I honored that trust and didn’t say a word. But, although I kept the situation confidential, others were hearing about it. Before disappearing, my informant implicated me. From persons like this, Lord, protect me. I refuse

to be like them. I want to change all that I don't like about myself, avoiding relationships that pull me down. I want to speak only what is true and helpful. What I am not willing to tolerate in others, I will not do myself.

I pledge to keep quiet about the wrongdoing of others, refusing to gossip about what I see and hear, confiding in only the few who have proven trustworthy. I won't allow convincing words to sway me. I will not look for compliments but diligently pursue our friendship as I continue to learn how to model my life after you.

Many become proud when people compliment them. Don't let that happen to me. May I be among the humble who do not talk about their accomplishments, desiring no recognition. May I become more like you as time goes on.

## 64

### All Alone?

The Christ speaks:

I say this gently. It may be difficult for you to comprehend.

It's not that hard to be without human support when you're conscious of God's presence. What isn't easy is living without both friends *and* God. In a barren desert, when you feel all alone, are you able to trust me without feeling sorry for yourself? Do you deserve credit for praising God when all is well? That isn't hard for you to do. Enjoying God's favor during smooth sailing days—no problems, no worries, no stresses—makes it easy to glide along without a care in the world. Without both friends and God, however, the picture looks very different.

St. Lawrence and his close friend, Pope Sixtus II, chose martyrdom rather than obeying the Roman emperor during the Valerian persecution of the church. Lawrence was hurting as the Romans led Sixtus to his death, yet his love for God surpassed the comfort of friendship. You too must part with close friends when they die. Death eventually ends all temporal friendships.

It's a struggle to redirect a learned dependency on people. Since birth, you have relied on parents and friends for assistance. Yet to follow me may involve giving up some relationships, choosing instead to pursue the ways of God. Transferring your dependency to me involves adjustments. Human nature seeks human consolation. Followers who truly love me pursue righteousness, not days of comfort. They accept draining circumstances. If you can do so gladly, God is well pleased. Are you willing? Are you able?

When you enjoy God's blessing, thank him for that, but don't take it for granted. Never assume you deserve special treatment or that you are more spiritual than someone else. Live life humbly, wisely, cautiously, knowing

that happy days may not last. If that happens, wait patiently for God to work his will. This interruption is not strange to those who understand the ways of God. The biographies of great saints are compelling. They well knew about the ongoing battle between good and evil.

David, the Psalmist, experienced interruptions of God's grace. When he was prosperous, he thought that nothing could stop him. When God withdrew his presence, David cried out, "You turned away from me and I was shattered." Yet he didn't give up hope as he begged the Lord for mercy. When God responded, he said, "You have turned my mourning into joyful dancing. You have taken away my clothes of mourning and clothed me with joy." If King David, a man after God's own heart, experienced cycles of blessings and despair, should you expect anything different? Sometimes you will be on the mountaintop, sometimes in the valley. God's favor comes and goes according to what you need.

In what can you hope? In whom should you trust? Where can you turn? You may have a supportive family, godly mentors, loyal friends, helpful books, sound doctrinal teaching, CDs with inspiring hymns and songs. But none of these can meet your soul's need when you feel abandoned. In such times, accept that God is preparing you to become a more committed disciple. No believer is exempt from difficulties and times of dryness. It's part of the training process. Take heart. Testing often precedes times of enlightenment. The wilderness leads to new and greater vistas. God's mercy is endless. He gives supernatural strength when you need it. The circumstances he allows have a purpose.

The devil doesn't sleep, and since you are still prone to want control over what happens, be alert to danger. Satan is your enemy and is constantly prowling. He attacks from the right and left. When you are vulnerable, he pounces. Even those who are completely devoted to me know what this is like.

## 65

### **Adversity**

The Christ speaks:

It is good for you to endure weary times for they are reminders of who you are and that you need to depend on me. Those trials and temptations are faith-testers. Interesting, isn't it? Satan thinks he can use temptation to weaken you. The only way he can do that is if you allow him to. God knows how to change into something good what Satan intends for evil. Your human response may be despair. But, God knows exactly what he is doing. As you endure difficulties, you become stronger. Consider temptation a wake-up call to do another personal checkup to see how you are progressing in your quest to become holy.

Disappointments slow down prideful tendencies. It's one way I teach you to lean on me. If people criticize you and do not think well of you, connect with me. Talk to me about your feelings; forget about seeking human consolation.

When you mean well, but still get frustrated when someone rejects your idea, or if your temper gets the upper hand, it shows you how much you need God's help. Be aware that you will not react to situations the way you should if unacceptable thoughts haunt you. Any of these scenarios can drain you, reminding you that you are not yet what you should be. Allow adversity to transfer your allegiance from what is temporary on earth to what is eternal in heaven as you learn to accept that perfect peace and security does not exist in this world.

## Where Is the Blessedness?

The pilgrim prays:

Lord, I know what adversity feels like. My situation right now is difficult. I can't figure it out. My friends shake their heads. They have no answers. I have no recourse but to ask you to get me through it. Can I endure it? I can't seem to function. I'm desperate. I'm asking why. Where is the blessedness I used to know?

I want you to vindicate me. I want you to help me. Quickly. But I know you have your reasons. I want to escape, and you know how that feels. You wanted to escape Calvary and pleaded with your Father to save you from that. You also prayed, "This is the very reason I came! Father, bring glory to your name. I want your will to be done, not mine." This is my opportunity to respond as you did when the leaders of your time persecuted you. I will wait patiently to see how you will help me. I refuse to fear the raging turmoil.

Lord, your will be done. My desire is to honor you. I will wait patiently without complaint until the storm subsides and calmness returns. You know how much I can take and you will take it away or lighten its fierce attack if needed. Blessed be your name, O Lord. Amen.



## Still Will I Praise You

The pilgrim prays:

Dear God, I praise you now and always will. As you will, so it must be. You are too good to be unkind.

I'm feeling sorrowful and looking to you for a sense of hope. What do I have that hasn't come from you? All that you have created, all that you have loaned to me, belongs to you.

I struggle. I grieve. I wake up in tears. I long for peace. Turn my valley of weeping into a well that refreshes me. Then I will be able to sing, praising you despite my circumstances. If you withdraw from me as I think you sometimes do, I'm prone to feel sorry for myself. I need your light to make it safely through the darkness. I long for the shadow of your wings to protect me during the testing times.

O Righteous Father, you tell me I must be willing to endure. You knew long ago what would happen. You knew I would feel this overwhelming despair. Your Word promises me that you are always with me, even though I'm not always aware of it. I'm facing ridicule and discipline, and my reputation is in ruins. Emotionally beaten up, I need to get back on my feet.

Gracious Lord, what you wisely plan, you execute. Your grace is always at work. In love, you permit me to suffer as necessary by whatever means you choose. Nothing happens without good reason, without your design and divine appointment. It's good for you to discipline me, so that I delve deeply into the Scriptures. I need more humility; it's time for pride to go. I am appreciating your wisdom more. Your justice and equality touch both the guilty and the innocent.

Thank you for pointing out my shortcomings to me. You may wound, but you also heal. You humble and you exalt. Your discipline corrects me,

your rod teaches. You are the healer of my broken heart. Beloved Father, I am in your hands. I submit to your correcting rod. Redirect my attitude. Make straight what is now twisted. Make me humble. Make me holy. I would rather have you discipline me than be a disappointment to you.

You know about everyone, everywhere. Everything is wide open to your all-seeing eyes. To you I must acknowledge what I have done because nothing escapes you. You also know the future before it happens. You know what I need to mature. You know the best way to help me become more transparent. Do what you need to do to teach me how to change my tendency to use people for selfish reasons. My motives need purification. Please replace my insensitivity with compassion.

I don't want to continue to criticize what appears to be obvious based on hearsay as I usually do. Things aren't necessarily what they seem. Give me discernment to come to right conclusions. May I embrace what has eternal significance, ignoring what doesn't, as I seek to do your will.

Is someone really better because people think so? Doesn't the deceiver deceive the deceitful? Isn't it true that the proud elevate the proud, the blind lead the blind, the weak hobble side by side with the weak? Those who think alike gather together to enforce their weaknesses, flattering each other with deceptive words.

Grant me, O Lord, to know what I should know, to love as I should love, to praise what pleases you, to honor what is precious to you, to reject what is unacceptable. May I always remember what St. Francis said: "We are only as great as you see us to be—no more and no less." Amen.

## Lead Me On

The pilgrim prays:

I know I should be looking forward to the joys of heaven, walking through this troubled world without worrying; sensitive to the needy, and as one who possesses peace of mind and heart, liberated from worldly attachments and ambitions. Am I in that place yet?

My Savior, free me from earthly cares so they don't entangle me. Spare me addictions to bodily needs and pleasure. May no obstacles hinder my quest for godliness. Deliver me from pursuits with no eternal significance, the pursuits of those who seek recognition. I have no desire to be absorbed with goals that destroy the soul.

O God, may your blessings fill my being. Turn sour every alluring activity that entices me away from focusing on eternity. May the narcissistic culture around me not force me into its mold. Please restrain the wily devil from plying me with tricks of short-lived glory. Give me courage to resist, patience to endure, and steadfastness to persevere. I seek, not my agenda, but to obey your precepts. I covet the anointing of your Holy Spirit, not glory.

Food, drink, clothing, and other life necessities are secondary to me. My spirit reaches out to you. Take from me any desire to have more than what I need. If I am too rich, I may become content without you. Give me just enough. If I'm too poor, I may manipulate or steal to get what I need. Again, Lord, lead me on; keep teaching me all I need to know. Amen.

## Above All

The pilgrim prays:

O Lord, my God, you are the Most High, powerful, complete, perfect. You are all I need, the only One able to satisfy the longings of my heart. You are the most loving, the most comforting, the most glorious, the most eminent; beside you other glory fades away into a void. In you exists the good, the perfect. It has always been so, and it always will be. Whatever you give me, whatever you reveal or promise me, is empty without your presence. O my Jesus, Lord of creation, give me the wings of a dove so I can fly to you for rest, leaving behind anything that hinders, free to discover in the depths of my being how endearing you are.

When will I become so completely absorbed with you, so in love with you, that I will be bound to you with a love that surpasses all emotions and pleasure known to human beings?

I still endure my restlessness with a heavy heart. Many things disappoint me and when I'm alone, my tears flow. When I'm upset and depressed, darkness settles in. It slows me down. I'm not focused. I'm not productive, nor do I sense your presence. I search for words, but I can't find them. May the Holy Spirit pray for me with groanings that cannot be expressed with words.

Let the cry of my heart and the despair I feel bring you to my side. You know how to nourish a weary pilgrim. Come to me, your needy servant, with joy. Stretch out your hand and lead me away from my distress. Come, oh come, for without you I am broken and bruised. I'm a prisoner, bound with chains, waiting for the light of your presence to restore peace to me.

Others may go their own way, seeking happiness in friendships and activities. For me, nothing delights me more than you do, my friend, my

God, my hope, my salvation. Silently, I wait for you to speak the words of love I long to hear. Amen.

The Christ speaks:

I am here beside you. I come, because you have asked me to do so. Your tears, your humility, your yearnings, have brought me to your side.

The pilgrim prays:

I have called for you because I treasure our friendship. You have drawn me to your side. You have shown me what mercy and goodness look like.

Acutely aware that you died for my sin, I can do nothing but bow at the foot of your cross. O Lord my God, no one can do what you do. Your precepts are righteous. With each new moment, you grant me another mercy, another breath. All that you do is wise as you watch over me. If I tried to list all you have done for me, I would never finish.

Grant to me, most loving Jesus, to lean on you alone. May I always depend on you:

above all health and beauty,  
above all glory and honor,  
above all power and dignity,  
above all knowledge and wisdom,  
above all wealth and creativity,  
above all joy and pleasure,  
above all fame and praise,  
above all comfort and tranquility,  
above all hope and promise,  
above all merit and desire,  
above all the gifts and favors that you bestow,  
and finally, above all angels and archangels,  
above all the mighty hosts of heaven,  
above all things visible and invisible,  
above all that is not who you are.

No one is like you, O Lord. No one is more powerful. You rule the universe and all that is beyond. May all who love you unite with me to praise you, King of kings and Lord of lords. Amen.

Blessed are you  
who are merciful.  
You will receive mercy.

Matthew 5:7

## 70

### Ready

The Christ speaks:

I have heard the longing of your heart. You are teachable. Let me do what I know is best for you. My assignments for you are good ones. They dovetail perfectly with the gifts I've given you. Too often you think and react in human ways, not fully comprehending that toxic people are a necessary component of your desire for holiness.

The pilgrim prays:

Lord, what you say is true. I know you care about me. You are well aware that I stagger as I try to walk on unknown terrain. Whatever you decide is good for me.

If it's best for me to be prosperous and happy, I won't forget to praise you. If it's best for me to endure difficult times, I will trust you. If you encourage me, I will thank you. If my health fails and the days are long, I will submit to your sovereignty. Amen.

The Christ speaks:

You have the right attitude. You need to be as ready to suffer as to rejoice, to welcome destitution and soul poverty as readily as you embrace wealth and abundance.

The pilgrim prays:

Yes, Lord, I will accept whatever you give me. From your hand I will receive the sweet or the bitter, the sorrowful or joyful. I need both to serve

you well.

When good times come, keep me close to you so I don't become selfish and indulgent. I pray for your encouragement during discouraging days. You've promised to take care of me, to monitor every move I make. May your Holy Spirit help me show to others the mercy you extend to me. Amen.



# 71

## Preparation

The Christ speaks:

You are aware that love must motivate all you do, that no temporary gain justifies selfish means. Keep away from any activity that is remotely questionable even though someone you admire thinks you should be involved. Always ask me to show you what's best for you.

Help others whenever you can and don't beg off because it's inconvenient. If you must renege on a commitment when someone needs immediate help, that's okay. What you would have done can be done later. You may be surprised to find that the delay worked out for the better. My timing often has unknown compensation. What feels like a frustration may be a blessing.

Do whatever you do with love.

To love much requires you to give much. But, remember that you gain nothing if you give reluctantly. I note the love that compels any action, not the magnitude of the gift. I view the smallest, most insignificant deed lovingly performed as magnificent.

Do whatever you do well. You are doing it for me.

Sometimes what looks like compassion is, in reality, self-serving. You are thinking only of yourself if you help someone in anticipation of a reward or out of a desire for people to view you as a caring person. Seek not praise for yourself. It doesn't count if you serve others because you need something to do. That motive is not acceptable.

Whatever you do, do it all for the Kingdom.

Love desires God's glory in everything; it envies no one, seeks no personal gratification, desires no recognition. Give credit to no one but

God. He's the Source of your joy, the One who enables you to love with a merciful heart.

Just a spark of divine love is enough for you to sense the emptiness of all earthly things.

## Godly Patience

The Christ speaks:

Patiently accept life's irritations. Allow them to sharpen endurance, character, and hope. Difficult relationships help to shape your character, so resign yourself to what you can't change in others. I don't intend tense relationships to weaken you; their purpose is to reveal yourself to you. Turn the negatives into positives.

Be patient with the shortcomings of others, just as family and friends need to put up with your flaws. Correct your own weaknesses before expecting others to change. A speck of sawdust in your friend's eye shouldn't concern you when you have a log in your own eye. Is it right for you to say, "Let me help you take the speck out of your eye," when you can't see the log in your own eye? Get rid of your log before you try to take the sawdust out of your friend's eye.

Don't expect anyone to change unless you're willing to make adjustments as well. Something doesn't add up if it bothers you to see what another person gets by with, yet you reserve the right to do the same thing. If you think those who err need correction, don't complain when you are disciplined. There should be no double standards.

If someone falls into sin, gently try to guide your friend in the right direction. But, after trying once or twice, if there is no change, don't criticize. Pray about the situation. God may have another way to bring good out of evil or order out of chaos.

Learn how to relate to another's struggles. No one is without faults. Everyone carries private burdens. Make allowances for one another by comforting, helping, and encouraging each other.

## 73

### Criticism

The Christ speaks:

I'm more pleased when you react patiently to conflict than when you thank me for enjoyable times. So when someone criticizes you, accept it. Even if it's a serious accusation, don't let it upset you. Let it pass. It's not the first time somebody has blasted you; neither will it be the last.

When it's a good day, you have no trouble being upbeat. You give good counsel to others and are an encouragement to many. When Mr. Trouble visits, it's a different story. You start asking "Why?" Apply to yourself what you tell others to do in their distress. Admit your vulnerability. You often crumble, even though you know that conflict strengthens resilience.

Accept criticism silently; if it has already knocked you down, why stay there? Get back up. If you can't endure it cheerfully, at least endure it patiently. If you can't do that, take a deep breath. Speak no angry words. Calm down and let the storm subside until grace returns to you. How did I respond to those who rejected me? Read the Gospels. Study my reactions.

Criticism presents an opportunity to show mercy and prepares you to cope with greater wrongs. Life hurts, and so do you. You are fragile, not divine. You are made of flesh and blood, not an angel. Don't expect to handle problems without blinking an eye. Both Lucifer and Adam failed. Ups and downs will come. I will comfort you when hurts come. I will restore you as you acknowledge your weaknesses.

The pilgrim prays:

O Lord, encourage me as you have promised. Spare me the debilitating feeling that I am sinking. Uphold me. What would I do unless you

strengthen me? Your promises are sweeter than honey. They are the joy of my heart—apples of gold in pitchers of silver. It doesn't matter what people say to me; it's your love that I embrace. Teach me patience. Make me a good example of your merciful ways. Amen.

## Harsh Words

The Christ speaks:

Remain calm and trust me when you receive a tongue-lashing. Words are only words; they fly through the air, but they can't hurt even a fly. Anger leaves no mark on a stone. If you're responsible for the tirade, change the error of your ways. If you aren't aware of any fault, silently endure the sharp words for my sake. A few harsh words shouldn't bother you. When invectives upset you, ask yourself if it's because you're too concerned about how people perceive you. If it's a problem for you when people belittle you, think through the reasons you feel like that:

- ◇ Why do you need people to like you?
- ◇ Why do you respond to outbursts defensively?
- ◇ Why are you hurt when someone puts you down?
- ◇ Why is it important to you to make a good impression?

If you shrink from those questions, you need more humility. Your pride is still alive and cringes when someone says something berating. Take your cue from how I reacted and you won't care if people say ten thousand words against you. What harm can malicious words do if you pay no attention to them? Put-downs are more likely to upset you when you aren't in touch with me. When you know you have my approval, you won't care about what people say.

I know why an exchange of angry words takes place. I know who causes the injury and who suffers because of it. I allow it to happen so that your thoughts come to the surface. I am the Arbitrator for both the guilty and the innocent.

People often deceive, but my judgment is true; it will stand and not be overthrown. It is never mistaken, even if those who aren't wise consider it

unfair. Trust me, and don't depend on your own understanding. Believers who are set apart from the world and its ways are not distressed no matter what happens. Nor do my mature followers gloat with vindication when someone who understands the situation affirms that they are blameless.

Never assess a situation by outward appearances or by human reasoning. That's why people are comfortable with behavior that I consider unacceptable. I search beneath the surface. I consider the motive.

The pilgrim prays:

O Lord, you are a God of justice who knows my weaknesses. Please be my strength and confidence. My conscience isn't enough to guide me. I can't trust it. You know me well enough to know what I have yet to learn. I know I need more humility when you point out my failings to me.

Forgive me for not reacting as I should, and give me the grace to respond calmly to future complaints that may be severe. Your approval is more important to me than defending my perception that I've done what is right. You are the One who judges me. O God, search me and know my heart. Cleanse me from all faults, especially the hidden ones I know nothing about. Amen.

## Different Perspectives

The Christ speaks:

It is time to teach you another aspect of mercy.

It accomplishes nothing to judge someone else's motives or actions. Conclusions are often erroneous if you presume to know the intentions of another. When you are inclined to judge, scrutinize your motives. Too frequently, you judge others because their actions aren't as you wish them to be. People tend to base their prejudices on personal likes and dislikes, not on the Bible's values. Keep your focus on me, and unexpected fallouts won't easily trouble you.

Different perspectives often cause misunderstandings among friends and co-workers; mentors and clergy are not exempt. Even here, some hidden motive deep within you or some situation you don't like may be responsible for your critical reaction. All is well as long as everything goes according to your wishes. When they don't, and you become upset, do a motivational double check.

Long-established habits are hard to break and assumptions don't change easily. Divine illumination will not come as long as you rely on your own logic. Listen to my teachings and to the nudges of the Holy Spirit. He will give you insight that transcends the limitations of human thinking.



## When the “Facts” Aren’t True

The Christ speaks:

I know how it feels when someone says something about you that isn’t true. The establishment said much about me that wasn’t accurate. You have it easy in comparison to many pilgrims now in heaven. When they were falsely accused, the crowd jeered and cut their backs open with whips. Yet they sang. Some died by stoning or were sawed in half; others were killed by the sword. Their suffering makes yours appear trivial. When you are misrepresented, whether it’s minor or major, accept it patiently, without complaint. If you take false accusations in stride, it defuses the wrong and you will be wiser because of it.

Do not say, “It’s not an antagonist who taunts me—then I could bear it. The one who insults me is not an adversary—then I could just say I can endure it. It’s my companion, my friend. This I cannot endure. I will not accept it. I’m crushed. I wouldn’t dream of what I have been accused of doing.” Such thinking is counterproductive. Turn to me in your pain. I know how to use everything that happens to develop your character, so don’t obsess about the one who originated the slur.

You need more patience if you can handle only what makes you happy. When your patience is well developed, it won’t matter that people are difficult, whether it’s your neighbor, boss, co-worker, or some other troublemaker. The issue isn’t whether that person is prone to perverse ways. Your assignment is to love everyone, accepting all that happens to you. Nothing you endure patiently goes without a positive outcome for you.

To enjoy the prize, be ready for the struggle. Athletes don’t win unless they follow the rules. Present yourself as one I’m able to approve, a pilgrim who has no need for shame. To be part of the heavenly celebration, endure

patiently. If you refuse to suffer, choosing instead to retaliate, you relinquish the crown. Where there is no conflict, there is no victory.

The pilgrim prays:

My Lord, my God, what is impossible for me, make possible by your grace. You know how much I can handle. Help me to love toxic people, enduring patiently whatever slander comes my way. Teach me how to show mercy. Amen.

## Fluctuating Emotions

The Christ speaks:

Under attack by his enemies, King David knew that God was on his side, yet he prayed, “O Lord, don’t turn away from me; don’t reject me; don’t abandon me. Don’t turn me over to evil men.” What is notable about David as he cried to God for mercy is that as he continued to pray, his despair subsided and he strongly asserted, “I am still confident of this: I will yet see the goodness of the Lord.” His faith was intact. He prayed earnestly and waited confidently.

When conflict comes and you feel inadequate, wait patiently because at the right time I will again shower down mercies. Unexpectedly, I will give what I at times withhold. For me to respond immediately as you would like would be detrimental. It doesn’t take much for human nature to become demanding. When I withhold comfort, I am nudging you toward holiness. Perhaps some foible needs to go. It may appear insignificant, but if it undermines your devotedness, it’s a hindrance. Submit to my wisdom, with no excuses, no manipulation, no bargaining. Peace comes as you respond to what the Holy Spirit reveals to you. Your commitment becomes solid.

Clean up your emotions. I grant my blessings to those who have room to receive them, so clear out the clutter of ingrained hurts. Free yourself from the baggage of human expectations to receive divine grace. Ask me for help, wait with anticipation, and thankfully receive my blessings when they come. Then, better equipped to represent me, live circumspectly, enriched, and prepared for unexpected wonder. Your eyes will sparkle and your heart will rejoice as you increasingly exchange the tainted goodness of this world for the righteousness of heaven.

When that happens, all you will care about is the honor and glory of God the Father.

## Disagreements

The Christ speaks:

So, someone doesn't agree with you. Keep your conscience clean and do what you know is right. Suffer silently if need be. I know just when and how to step in and change a situation if that is for the best. Give it all to me. It's my privilege to take care of your frustrations.

If the time comes when someone needs to talk to you about your faults and rebuke you, respond positively and ask for forgiveness. That softens your attitude, and the relationship remains intact. As you accept rebuke, responding with humility, I will give you grace. I will honor you. I will help you with the perplexities, and our relationship will be stronger. Peace will flood your soul. You will know you are progressing when you are able to accept the strengths and weaknesses of your fellow pilgrims.

## Impeccable Records

The Christ speaks:

Lean on me and don't fear human disapproval if you are blameless. Your responsibility is to respond to judgmental people in a godly manner.

As you trust me to direct your affairs, this won't be difficult. There is no way you can satisfy everyone. It's human nature to talk too much, rushing quickly to judgment before exploring the facts.

In one of his letters, the Apostle Paul said he tried to please everybody in every way. He wasn't seeking his own good but the good of many so that they might become believers. With all the energy and persuasiveness he possessed, Paul devoted his time to bringing people to salvation and then teaching them the ways of God. Some still disliked and judged him, yet he cared little about how they viewed him.

Paul committed every situation to God. As people accused him unjustly, considered him foolish, spread lies, and insulted him, he patiently attempted to set the facts straight privately—although on one occasion, he responded publicly to accusations so his accusers didn't interpret his silence as an admission of guilt.

Why do you allow people who are here today and gone tomorrow to intimidate you? Fear only God, your Maker, who determines everyone's eternal destiny. Give no one power over you. Those who speak angry words suffer the consequences. God keeps impeccable records and he is the ultimate judge. Ignore unkind barbs.

Lay aside every care even if the present moment seems bleak and unfair. I shelter the innocent from wrongdoing, rendering to all according to their words and deeds. Glory, honor, and peace await everyone who does well

with right motives and for right reasons, but those who do otherwise will have trouble and distress.

## Wondrous Grace

The Christ speaks:

Now that you have reached this point on your journey, let me encourage you. You know that I am a refuge for you in times of trouble. When you are weary, I give you rest. Often, you are slow to turn to me. Before you look my way, you seek counsel from others. Only after that fails do you remember that my help, my counsel, my remedy exceeds human insight.

When a storm is over and you have caught your breath, I will provide everything you need, not only what you had previously, but more. Is anything too hard for me? Do I change my mind? Do I promise and not deliver? I am close by. I will lift you out of the pit, out of the mud and mire, and set your feet on a rock, giving you a firm place to stand. I will give you a new song, a hymn of praise.

When fear grips you, refuse to worry. It doesn't change anything. Rather, it increases anxiety. Don't you have enough trouble today to cope with? It's useless to worry about future happenings that may never materialize.

The devil always varies his strategies, trying new tactics on people who imagine the worst. He won't hesitate to torture you with upsetting thoughts about the past, the present, or the future. He doesn't care whether your concerns are real or imagined; he wants to cripple you. Don't let your heart be troubled or afraid. Trust God's mercy. I won't leave you as an orphan; I will come to you. When you think I am farthest away, that is when I am nearest. When you think you have lost everything, your reward is nearby.

Don't step backward when reverses come or let those wobbly feelings determine your conclusions. I have it all under control. Nothing happens to you that I don't know about. The road we walk together still leads onward.



Trust me; it's better to endure adversity than to have everything you want. It sometimes helps you to be despondent. It's easy to become proud, thinking about how strong you are and how much you accomplish. So what I give you, I sometimes take away, and then perhaps give it back to you or it may be something better. My gifts are good and perfect, on loan to you to use for my Kingdom. They are not yours to possess permanently.

If trouble comes, don't be discouraged. When it's best for you, I will lift your spirits and turn your heartache to joy. When you view hardships from my perspective, you will count it a privilege that I trust you to endure.

I told my disciples, "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you." When I commissioned them as my representatives, I didn't send them out to search for joy, to look for honors, to seek leisure and rest. I sent them out to fight spiritual battles, to endure contempt, to recruit and teach those who respond to the Kingdom. So send I you.

## Reflections

The pilgrim prays:

Yours, O Lord, is greatness, power, glory, victory, and majesty. Everything in the heavens and on earth belongs to you. I adore you. May I increasingly become more like you—sensitive, loving, tender, reaching out to help those who struggle.

Lord, I confess the sins that drag me down. Consume them in the holy fire of your love. Wipe away every stain, cleanse every wrong thought, and restore to me your grace. When I dishonor you in the way I think or respond, what else can I do but humbly ask for mercy? Hear me as I pray. Restrain me from responding in ways that are unacceptable to you. Help me react as I should. Deal with me according to your goodness.

I commit to you all the good that happens as I serve you, although what I do seems insignificant and flawed. Help me correct any attitudes that grieve you so they are pleasing and acceptable to you. May I, a procrastinating and often undependable servant, become useful in your Kingdom.

I commit all my hopes to you; your plan far exceeds my dreams. I bring you the desires and needs of my extended family, my friends who are so dear, and those who encourage me. I commit to you those who have sought my help and asked me to pray for them and their families. May they know that you are always ready to help them. Comfort them, ease their pain, protect them from danger, keep them from error. May they, with joy, gratefully embrace you.

I pray for reconciliation with those who have hurt, grieved, or insulted me. I pray for those whom I have offended, troubled, upset, or scandalized,

by my words or deeds, knowingly or in ignorance. Grant us all forgiveness for our offenses against each other.

Take from my heart suspicion, irritation, anger, and contention, all that hinders love and lessens harmony. Have mercy on those who seek your mercy. Grant your grace to those who reflect your merciful ways. Amen.

Blessed are you  
whose thoughts are pure.  
You will see God.

Matthew 5:8

## A Purifying Scrutiny

The pilgrim prays:

O Lord, your scrutiny overwhelms me. I understand why Job trembled at the sound of your voice. If you charge your angels with error, why would you spare me? The stars in the sky will someday fall. If the heavens are not pure, what am I? What should you do with me then, a creature of dust? So many times I have seen the innocent fall. There is no righteousness anywhere if you withdraw your purifying presence. There's no wisdom if you don't guide. There's no courage if you don't defend. There's no purity if you don't protect it.

Left to myself, I sink and perish. In your mercy, you straighten me out when I need correction. You hold me steady when I'm unstable. You motivate me when I'm lukewarm. It humbles me to think of your justice, solid as the mountains. Your plans are as full of wisdom as the oceans with water. Your faithfulness reaches beyond the clouds. Your care is unlimited. Your love is greater than heaven's galaxies. O Lord, when I realize how pure you are, my self-confidence melts. Compared to you, the wisest of the wise is foolish, the strongest of the strong is weak, the purest of the pure is flawed.

Me? I am only dust until you breathe life into me.

Can the clay dispute with the one who shapes it? A pot cannot argue with the potter, nor can I bend you to my will. No one can brag in your presence. I submit to your scrutiny that replaces pride with humility. Don't let possessions satisfy me. Don't let praise inflate my ego. As for the opinions of others, the friends who affirm me will someday be silent in death. Amen.

## A Pure Conscience

The Christ speaks:

The delight of a godly pilgrim is a pure conscience. It enables those who follow me to smile during difficult times as a loving God bestows his blessings on those who honor him.

When the conscience is pure, peace and contentment reign—affected by neither praise nor blame. Praise adds nothing to it; blame takes nothing away, so ignore praise or blame. To rephrase St. Francis, you are as God commends you—no more and no less. Affirm who you are in God’s sight. Then it won’t matter what someone says about you. After all, God doesn’t see things the way people do. You have entrusted yourself to God. What should be meaningful to you is that you are doing the will of your Father in heaven.

Sinners have no idea what true joy is like. The guilty conscience is uneasy and fearful. There is no peace. They like to boast, “We have plenty of good things for many years to come. We’re going to take it easy: eat, drink, and be merry. No harm will come to us.” You know enough not to believe them. When their spirits depart this world, their lifeless bodies will return to the ground; on that day their plans come to nothing. The pseudo-honor that the wayward sinner receives is short-lived.

Live with eternity in view and you will no longer care about recognition. If you do, your value system is more closely aligned to an ill-fated culture than to me. The humble soul does the best it can without calling attention to accomplishments. Commendation counts only when God is pleased with you.

What does God require of you? He requires that you do right, love mercy, and walk humbly.

## Priorities

The pilgrim prays:

Lord Jesus, I need more grace to reach that place where nothing hinders my relationship with you. My priorities need to be shaken up. I still feel tethered to earth. Will it always be so? The Psalmist prayed, “Oh, if I only had the wings of a dove to fly away and be at rest.” What is more restful than looking heavenward to you? What is more pure than to have no yearnings, desiring nothing more than what you provide? When I focus on you, my sense of need evaporates.

So many believers live in a constant state of spiritual thirst. Nothing they know, nothing they possess, satisfies them because they are not willing to live above their culture’s norms.

What about me, Lord? Is my value system off-kilter? I’m interested in what people do and where they live. I evaluate them by outward characteristics. Good-looking? Friendly? Well-dressed? What have they accomplished? What are their gifts? Musical? Writing ability? Business acumen? What are their connections? Lord, what drives me? Am I pretentious?

I need to pay attention to my priorities. The world’s culture is corrupt; I am not an exemption. Can I pick grapes from a thorn bush? No. Do figs come from thistles? No. What lies within me comes out.

I confess that frequently I pray only briefly as I rush to get ready for the day’s agenda. I don’t always remember to commit my activities to your scrutiny. Your wisdom is far more perceptive than mine. To what am I still attached? On whom do I continue to depend? What sin lurks in my being that comes between us? What is most important to me? Are there still prickly ways in me?

I want to live a transparent life in private and in public. Negative attitudes reflect a damaged spirit. Ungodly behavior comes from inward weakness. Is that true of me? Do I have hidden agendas that I implement without realizing it?

My Lord, I desire no one more than you. Make my heart beat as one with yours. Make your priorities my priorities. Amen.



## A Sacred Responsibility

The Christ speaks:

Even if you had the purity of angels, you still wouldn't be worthy to serve a holy God. Merit doesn't give you the privilege of representing God's Kingdom. It's all grace. God has chosen you, and designated you as a priest to show the world his goodness. He has assigned to you tasks not granted to the angels. Your calling is high and your responsibility is great.

As a disciple priest, you are God's channel to use the Word of God according to his direction. The chief Author of the Word is the invisible God to whom all humanity is subject, and to whom everyone will someday bend the knee. Faithfully execute your God-given responsibility to do his will.

You have been set apart to represent God. See to it that you linger with him regularly and honestly. Keep a close watch on how you live and what you teach. Serve God with reverent wonderment. Bound to a strict discipline and to a high degree of purity, your attitude should be like mine, a servant. Be a light in a darkened world.

Keep the cross constantly in view to remind you of my Passion. Regret your wrongdoing. Mourn the sins of others. Plead for sinners. Be disciplined when weary in prayer and in your commitment to Kingdom work. You are my representative.

When you serve the Father God, you honor him, gladdening my heart and the hearts of angels. You encourage me as you lovingly aid the living and comfort the dying.

## Simplicity and Purity

The Christ speaks:

When life feels heavy, these two remedies relieve life's complexities: simplicity and purity. Simplicity seeks God. Purity enjoys him.

If you embrace simplicity, you will live intentionally. Your only concern will be that God's will be done. The Kingdom of God and the well-being of others will be your two most important priorities.

Pursue purity of mind and heart and you will enjoy God's goodness. As you are within, so will you interpret reality. Where there is joy, a pure heart will possess it. You will recognize that although everyone has flaws, something of God's goodness is evident—even in perceived enemies. You will understand both good and evil, joy and despair.

Conversely, those who are bent on evil see only discord. The guilty conscience is well aware of conflict.

As corroded iron, exposed to the fire, loses its rust and begins to shine, so those who turn to God, embracing simplicity and purity, will throw off sluggishness and begin to thrive. The alternative? A slushy mixture of lukewarm apathy and desperation.

## Obedience

The Christ speaks:

Let's think again about my followers who are examples of devotion to me. Are you doing very little, almost nothing in comparison? Through the centuries, these people have chosen to do Kingdom work: apostles, martyrs, missionaries, reformers, mystics, angels of mercy. They enabled the poor, held the dying in their arms, giving little thought to their own needs. Hungry and thirsty, in frigid northlands and in steamy jungles, they often worked until exhausted.

Some spent days and nights praying, studying the Scriptures by candlelight, enduring persecutions, even when facing death. They were faithful when the people they tried to help insulted them. Although their setbacks were many and severe, they persevered.

They represent the few who welcome tough situations. They were gracious as their enemies assaulted them. Their thoughts became prayer as they responded to the Holy Spirit's nudges. They longed to remedy their faults, working hard during the day, praying throughout the night, often fasting. Every hour spent in prayer and serving the Kingdom was too short.

Wealth, honors, friends, and family took second place. They were poor by earthly standards, but rich in grace and mercy. They were strangers to worldly ambition; those around them couldn't understand why. They were precious to God, living obediently with the pure love that delights the Father God. May their zeal inspire you onward to transparency. I want to be as pleased with you as I am with these forerunners of faith.

Too many are lukewarm and indifferent to Kingdom priorities. Don't be that way. Remember the devotion of those who have preceded you. Keep the flames of holiness burning. Be diligent.

## Prudence

The Christ speaks:

Gossip is everywhere. It's sometimes even disguised as concern in the form of a prayer request. Handle hearsay carefully and think twice before sharing it with another person.

Sad as it is, a failure is more tantalizing than a success. From childhood on, humanity's bent is to imagine perversions. Almost everyone is prone to embellish facts.

As my follower, you should not believe everything you hear, nor should you implement every suggestion that comes your way. The tongue runs wild, like a wanton killer. Full of deadly poison, it destroys reputations and turns harmony into chaos. Out of the same mouth come both compliments and curses. Surely, this isn't right. Those who are wise do not hastily pass on information. If what you hear or observe is a mixed message, ask for input from those who are knowledgeable. Verify that "facts" are correct.

Be prudent as you follow God's ways and you will be at peace.

## Discretion

The Christ speaks:

Total transparency isn't always wise, so don't open your heart to everyone. Be selective. Choose godly friends who revere the Scriptures and who are interested in discussing them with you. Love everyone, but don't form close friendships with those who are irresponsible and prone to anger lest you become like them. Flattering the wealthy isn't acceptable for my followers. Neither is a quest to connect with important people.

Many people who are well thought of appear to have integrity until you get to know them better and it becomes clear that you don't share their values. Conversely, you may think you are someone's good friend, but that person may not view you the same way and move on.

Spend your discretionary time with those who are humble and have no need to impress you. My followers who focus on being conformed to my image are the ones who will nurture your soul. Take care of your friendships, but always remember that I am your most important confidant.

## Faith's Glow

The pilgrim prays:

Fairest Lord Jesus, it's delightful to find a secluded place to sit at your feet, focus on your Word, listen to your whispers. The devotion exemplified by Mary Magdalene as she washed your feet with her tears and poured out perfume from her alabaster jar puts me to shame. Where are my tears? How real is my devotion?

Your presence would blind me if I could see you. I'm capable only of looking at your reflection in a hazy mirror. With faith, I adore you, thankful that you understand my frailty. I will live content in faith's glow until the imperfect drops away and perfection has come—until the shadows disappear and my faith becomes sight. When I see you face to face, my joy will be endless, my transformation complete. I will be holy as you are holy. Free from the shackles of time, endless love will burst through the confines of my earthly existence. Your comfort, necessary to me here on earth, will pale in comparison to heaven. O Lord, give me patience to live out my days here.

Your followers who now rejoice in heaven lived with patient faith, looking forward to being with you in glory. The truth they believed, I believe. What they hoped for, I hope for. They are with you and someday I will be among them. Meanwhile, captive in my frail body, the Scriptures encourage me.

You are my secure Anchor, tethering me to the Father. You honor me with an ambassadorship to represent the Kingdom of Heaven. I will tell everyone who will listen how you deliver me from darkness as your Word lightens my way. Lord, may I always serve you with a clear conscience and a pure heart. Amen.

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### Delight

The pilgrim prays:

My God, my All! What more could I want? Where could I find greater joy? Your words are precious. They are all I need. I never tire of memorizing and reciting them. It's sad that those who do not read the Scripture miss its treasures.

You are the delight of my life. You give me tranquility of heart, peace, joy. You make it possible for me to think positively. I'm so thankful when your presence seasons my day with grace.

It's hard to understand how anyone who doesn't know you finds life meaningful. Steeped in narcissistic thinking, seeking pleasure in unhealthy activities, many people can't understand the joy you bring to each day. What I believe is foolishness to them. They don't comprehend that their way leads to death and that those who follow you are wise to reject negative values.

O Light eternal, purify my spirit. Cleanse me, enlighten me, invigorate me so that my joy is complete. Lord, hasten that happy day when you are all in all to me and struggles are no more.

My selfish nature still continues to hamper me. Satan still wages war trying to dispel peace with disorder. You, Lord, who commanded the sea to be still, calm my restless heart. I need your help again and again. Scatter the nations who plot war; crush them with your power. Show the world your glory. There is no hope or refuge except in you, my Lord and my delight. Amen.

## Love's Wonder

The pilgrim prays:

Gracious Heavenly Father, you are merciful, tender, and faithful. You know how needy I am. Thank you for the way your presence refreshes me even when I don't deserve it. I will always praise and honor you, my Father; I will always praise Jesus Christ, my Redeemer; I will always praise the Holy Spirit, my Comforter, now and throughout eternity.

O Lord God, your love surrounds me; when you draw near to me, everything within me rejoices. You, O Lord, are my shield, my glory, the One who holds my head high. You are my hope and refuge when I'm in distress.

Because my love is weak at times and my integrity isn't yet what it should be, I need reassurance. May I daily be responsive to your guidance as I continue to learn more about your holy ways. Give me strength to resist wrong desires. Then, inwardly healthy and pure, I will be ready to love, strong in suffering, and steady in perseverance.

Your love is compelling, energetic, powerful. It diffuses difficult circumstances. It makes the bitter sweet. The heavy yoke is easier to bear; frustrations are tolerable.

Nothing is sweeter,  
nothing stronger,  
nothing higher,  
nothing wider,  
nothing more enjoyable  
or satisfying than your love.

Sincere, kind, delightful, strong, patient, faithful, prudent, wise, sensitive, unselfish, it knows no limit. Nothing is better. Nestled in its



warmth, I rest.

In your care for me, you neither slumber nor sleep. You sent your Son to earth to show me the way. Under pressure from those who sought to harm him, he wasn't distressed. Faced with alarming events, he was steady. Like a living flame—no, like a burning torch—he passed through the dark grave to the light of Resurrection Day.

Without your love, I am unable to rise above my circumstances or to respond quickly to help others. I want to minister freely, uninhibited by reclusive and negative attitudes. I need your love to revive my soul so I'm able to give repeatedly, reflecting the purity of your love.

Lord, you belong to me, and I belong to you. I hear your voice. I sense your love. Deepen my faith so that I soak up its wonder. I will turn my thoughts heavenward, forgetting all my cares. Propelled by love's energy, I won't accept discouragement, knowing you can make all things possible. I desire total devotedness to you, free from earthly attachments, unhindered by insensitivity. Accept my allegiance—all that I am, all that I own.

I will sing the song of love; let me follow you to the heights of glory. If I must grow weary, may I keep on praising you, rejoicing that I serve you. May my devotedness to you exceed my love for myself.

Propel me onward to love everyone. I want to care attentively and sensitively. I want to love with a pure heart and a gentle demeanor, aware of the tears of another pilgrim who is downhearted. Help me to comfort those who ache with grief or pain.

Keep my hope steady, my trust firm. Enable me to love without limit, to accept willingly anything difficult or caustic. Amen.

## **An Amazing Relationship**

The pilgrim prays:

Once again, I come to you in prayer. I cannot do otherwise. Thank you for the goodness you lavish on those who revere you. Oh, I wish I could find better words to express myself.

You created me and now you lovingly care for me. When I go astray, you pull me back and continue to teach me how to love you. I can't forget how merciful you are when I wander down the wrong path. You show me favor when I don't deserve it. You invite me to cast my every care upon you. The relationship I have with you is amazing.

You made the earth, the seas, and everything in them. The angels worship you. Your vast creation daily waits to do your bidding. How can I give anything to you when everything I have comes from you? All I can give you is what you have already given me.

The reality is that you serve me. You made this world for my enjoyment as well as for yours. Your angels stand by this very moment to protect me wherever I am. You know when I sit down or stand up. You watch me as I travel and when I stay home. You not only go before me; you follow behind heaping blessing upon blessing on me. Such kindness is too wonderful, too great for me to comprehend.

Precious Savior of all humanity, you alone are worthy to receive glory, honor, and eternal praise. For you created all that exists. Amen.

Blessed are you  
who are peacemakers.  
You will be called  
the children of God.

Matthew 5:9

## Peacemakers

The Christ speaks:

Godly peacemakers bring an extra dimension to conflict resolution that counselors who have no understanding of God's precepts aren't able to do. They look for the best in people, complimenting them on their strengths, encouraging them to change a negative into a positive, affirming rather than criticizing. Peacemakers are at peace with themselves and with others.

Discontented people are troubled; plagued by an inner restlessness they can't escape. Because of this, they create disorder wherever they go, viewing others as losers. Suspicious and unhappy, these troublemakers say what they shouldn't say. They demand that others keep their promises, but they don't apply the same expectations to themselves.

Peacemakers need to relate well to troublemakers before they can expect them to relate well to them in return. If you aspire to be a peacemaker, you must show them what peace is like before you attempt to explain it to them.

When you make a mistake, don't come up with excuses and then refuse to accept the excuses of others. Accept the excuses of others while taking responsibility for your own failings. Before asking anyone to forgive you, you must forgive first. Overlook the flaws of others if you don't want them to pay attention to yours. Be an example of the authentic humility that is impatient with yourself but not with others when things go awry.

It's not to your credit if you associate only with those who are peaceable. It's easy to get along with such persons. Everyone enjoys agreeable friends who are easy to please. But, to interact peacefully with people who are difficult and undisciplined takes grace. Be gentle and

patient, making allowances for their faults because you care about them. I will commend you.

Peacemakers don't allow imperfections to frustrate them. They humbly endure difficult relationships. They are in control of themselves and understanding of the world's trauma. They are my friends and heirs to my Kingdom.

## The Way of Peace

The Christ speaks:

I want to talk to you about peace and freedom.

The pilgrim responds:

Please do. Is peace deep within my soul possible?

The Christ speaks:

It is possible. With me, all things are possible.

- ◇ Do what pleases others, not yourself.
- ◇ Choose to do and have less rather than more.
- ◇ Be a servant; seek the lowest place.
- ◇ Pray to become all that God wants you to be.

The pilgrim prays:

My Lord, your words are brief, yet rich.

Help me to implement faithfully those four points. You can do all things and you care about me; please, probe my soul, nudging me to greater measure of grace. Lord, I need your help with negative reactions so that they no longer control how I think and feel. Amen.

The Christ speaks:

The Father says, "I will go before you and smooth out the rough places. I will break down gates of bronze and cut through bars of iron. I will give

you hidden treasures, riches stored in secret places.”

The pilgrim prays:

Do it, Lord. May all disturbing thoughts subside. I ask you to calm me down. I will confide in you, pour out my heart to you, and then quietly await your words to me.

Merciful God, precious Holy Spirit, shed your light into the recesses of my soul and take away my darkness. Give me power to repress wandering thoughts. Fight for me when Satan tries to steer me away from you. Surround me with your peace, and grant me a pure conscience. Command the swirling winds and crashing waves raging within me to subside. To the sea say, “Be still!” To the wind say, “Be calm!” Send out your light and truth to guide me. Pour down your grace from above; refresh me with heavenly dew.

Lift my spirits when they sag. With just a taste of your peace, I will be content. Bind me to you with strong chords of love. Without you all things are empty and trivial. Amen.

## The Wisdom of Peace

The Christ speaks:  
You still have much to learn.

The pilgrim asks:  
In what way, Lord?

The Christ speaks:  
Your days won't be peaceful until your longings merge into my plans. You need to stop thinking about your frustrations. Focus instead on imitating my ways. Simply ask me for wisdom when you need it and you will have it.

When yearning motivates you, even if it's to expand my Kingdom, do you pause to consider whether that is what I want you to do? What is your motive? Is it selfish? If you are doing it because it's my assignment, it will be rewarding. If not, it will be tiring for you.

Wisdom from heaven is peace loving, gentle, courteous. It listens to others, is willing to yield, and is full of mercy and good deeds. It is merciful, straightforward, sincere.

Be careful not to rely only on personal interests, failing to consult me. Why regret doing something that at first seems right but isn't what you thought it would be? Don't grab at every opportunity, even if it looks good. Nor should you reject every invitation that doesn't interest you. That invitation may be my choice for you.

Curb your impulses. Exercise discipline when decisions move along more slowly than you would like. Be content with little. Be patient with setbacks. Enjoy what is simple. Plant seeds of peace.



## Maturity

The Christ speaks:

I will give my peace to you. Don't be troubled or afraid. Everyone wants peace, but few pursue the humility and patience that cultivates it.

Let's review what you already know. Check up on yourself. Are you implementing what I've been telling you?

The pilgrim asks:

What do you mean, Lord?

The Christ speaks:

Be circumspect in everything you say and do. Be intentional about not only forgetting your own interests but also directing your activity toward pleasing me. Desire nothing that doesn't fit into my plans.

Be careful about judging the words and actions of others, and stay away from matters that shouldn't concern you. Gradually you will realize that you no longer get upset. That doesn't mean you will never be agitated. It doesn't mean an end to all your troubles. Don't expect to escape all irritations—not until you get to heaven.

When everything is going your way, and you are enjoying God's favor, be alert lest pride begins to creep into your thinking. A state of contentedness isn't the only indicator of spirituality.

The pilgrim asks:

Lord, what more do I need to know?

The Christ speaks:

True spirituality comes as you turn over every circumstance to my will, not seeking honors for yourself in anything. Weigh what you do against eternal values, and be thankful and serene in *both* times of peace and times of adversity.

Is your faith steady, with hope anchoring your soul even when I seem far away? Are you prepared to handle lessons that are more difficult? Can you endure tough times without complaining that you shouldn't have to go through such difficulties?

Accept that my plans for you are wise. Thank me for whatever has come or will come. This is the mature attitude you must have for peace to flood your soul.

## The Stress of Worry

The pilgrim prays:

O Lord, why is my world the way it is? I confess that I allow financial reversals to worry me and then I scramble to recover my losses. In the process, I give no thought to the damage this does to my inner tranquility. I'm spending too much time trying to cope with uncertainty, neglecting what is important. I am hearing you say that I must be more concerned about trusting you or the quagmire of worry will swallow me up.

The Christ speaks:

You are involved in too many areas that shouldn't concern you. You need to ignore contention, focusing instead on what brings peace.

Forget what upsets you, allowing those who think otherwise to rant about their opinions without your involvement. Each day, your first priority should be to nurture your relationship with me. Yield to my handling of your circumstances. Stand back and let me work things out. That will enable you to face life contently even when it *appears* that trouble is overcoming the good.

## The Clutter of a Busy Life

The Christ speaks:

You would be more peaceful if you didn't concern yourself with other people's business unless they ask you to do so. When you meddle in the affairs of others, you assume you know what is best for them, and that's not necessarily so. You have another tendency that destroys peace—rushing from one “must-do” to another, driven by a schedule that includes more than anyone could possibly accomplish.

The ones who live simply are content. They enjoy a peaceful tranquility.

Why are some of my followers so godly and tuned into contemplative prayer that doesn't ask God for anything, but only basks in his presence? It's because they refuse to allow the clutter of circumstances to control them. They focus on their spiritual well-being.

Prisoners of a busy schedule are seldom able to nurture heavenly ways. With no time to think about correcting detrimental indulgences, they can't progress spiritually; negligence in prayer pulls them away from a pursuit of God. Tethered to their agenda, they're frustrated as they rush about trying to do the impossible. If they did something about their entanglements, they would be able to respond to the work of grace I want to do in them. Otherwise, when problems confront them, they become discouraged and look to human comfort to feel better. Nothing changes.

Reinstate your commitment to me; I'm never too busy to support you. I'm always ready to teach you healthy alternatives as you spend time with me. When you look to human strategies instead of spending an evening with me, don't be surprised if ongoing discouragement causes you to give up.

Replace at least one negative habit a year with one that is positive. Two would be better. Three better yet. Your relationships will improve as you increasingly align your goals with righteous ways.

Every morning, thank God for his kindness. Every evening, praise him for his faithfulness. Devote time every day to contemplative prayer when you do very little talking and instead just listen for God to speak.

Do you remember when we first began to get acquainted? You were passionate for the Kingdom in those days. Along the way, other things began to take precedence, and stress is now part of your being.

It's tough to break long-established habits, harder still to change what is second nature to you. Even when the spirit is willing, the will is weak. If you can't conquer easy things now, how will you handle harder things? Go back and re-read chapter 20. Are the runners still tiring you out? Are you still stumbling?

Visualize the wonder of my peace that is available to you. That's not the only benefit. The radiance of peace in my followers is a joy to others.

## Responding to Criticism

The Christ speaks:

Who you are isn't contingent on what people say to or about you. Let it not disturb you when someone does not think well of you. Who you are in my sight is what matters. On judgment day, the flighty words of humanity will bear no weight. Keep silent as I did when the religious priests and elders wrongly accused me. Be careful not to look down on any antagonist. Although everyone has flaws, everyone has something to contribute. Forget what hurts you and learn to appreciate what is good. Pray for me to bless the one who criticizes you.

True peace comes from me, not from how people interpret who you are. There's no need for you to try to please or be fearful about displeasing them. As you honor me, I will honor you. Is that not enough?

## Resisting Curiosity

The Christ speaks:

Don't let curiosity get the upper hand or you will waste time invading people's lives. What does this or that have to do with you? Your mandate is to imitate me. What is your concern if someone is such and such or if another says this or that? You won't be asked to explain the behavior of someone else to God, but you will need to give an account of yourself. Why interfere in the affairs of others? I am well aware of what people are doing, what they think, what their motives are. Leave it all with me. Pay attention to your own.

I want you to enjoy peace that surpasses understanding. Let others dart here and there, if that's what they want to do. You have better things to occupy your time.

To have many friends isn't good if contact with them means a lot less time for me. Neither should you manipulate circumstances to get next to influential people. Be aware that close friendships with even a few takes up your discretionary time. Such relationship scenarios may appear harmless, but if they become distractions, the result will be a shriveled heart.

I continue to knock at your door. I yearn to talk with you, to reveal mysteries to you known only to a few. Will you invite me into your private space more frequently?

## Rejecting Small Talk

The Christ speaks:

As much as you can, keep away from small talk. There are other ways to get to know people. What good does empty chatter accomplish? Why talk about nothing? Trying to solve the problems of the world isn't helpful if you aren't able to do anything about them. Many like to unload their frustrations about someone who is disagreeable, wanting to complain or get sympathy. People like to talk about what they want, what they like, and what they don't like. Some people praise God and those same people also belittle those made in God's likeness. This shouldn't be. Trivial conversations accomplish little and often result in unsettled emotions.

Watch and pray. Think before you speak. Be gracious. Bring out the best in others. Godly conversations about spiritual truths should be the hallmark of those who love me. Peacemakers speak words that edify. Kind words are like honey, sweet to the soul and healthy for the body, revealing rich treasure within.



## Interpreting Hard Times

The Christ speaks:

Nothing in life is safe. As long as you live, you need the armor of God.

In a world bombarded by satanic warfare, peacemakers are vulnerable. Wear the whole armor of God to protect yourself: truth as your belt, righteousness your breastplate, salvation your helmet—and in your hand the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God. Faith is the shield that quenches every missile the enemy hurls. Be alert and persistent in praying at all times. Otherwise you will be wounded.

Remain in touch with me, so you hold up in tough situations. Endure them bravely opposing whatever causes conflict. I reward those who stand firm, but for cowards there will be misery. Don't look for an easy road in this life; instead aspire to patience. Peace will pervade heaven; until then, don't expect it among the nations on earth. The only place where true peace resides on earth is within the being of those who love me.

Because you love me, endure hard times cheerfully. Work, sorrow, temptation, trials, anxiety, poverty, weakness, injury, slander, rebuke, humiliations, confusion, discipline, contempt—all these appear undesirable, but my faithful followers use these situations to develop character. In exchange for times of difficulty, a reward awaits you in heaven.

When you're tired and yearn for easier times, look for me. I will come to your side. Be brave. Be courageous. I'm always nearby.

## Gentle Whispers

The pilgrim prays:

I'm listening carefully to all you say.

You will bless me as I respond to your reassurances. When I lie down at night, I will pray, "Speak, Lord. Your servant is listening." If I lie awake during the night, I will meditate on your whispers.

You will bless me as I spend time alone with you before the day begins.

You will bless me as I wait on the Holy Spirit to teach me your truth.

You will bless me as I listen to your whispers, so quiet and gentle, yet so powerful.

You will bless me as I shake off unnecessary distractions.

You will bless me as I look beyond what is obvious, ignoring a noisy world.

You are the source of peace and blessing. I will remember your promises. I will renounce transitory things that entice me with deceitful illusions. I will listen closely to your whispers.

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### At Home

The Christ speaks:

Peace and harmony in the home require each family member to think about what is best for everyone. To serve, not rule, is the lodestar. Living together day in and day out without complaining or criticizing isn't easy. It requires commitment and perseverance.

Children are on loan for a few years. They are temporary residents who will soon depart to establish their own lives. Prepare them well. Gently and lovingly, guide the children entrusted to you. Teach them early that you are a unique family, set apart for God who is the head of your Christian home.

A godly family controls meaningless activities, seldom chases the latest fads, and replaces gossip, slang, and senseless talk around the dinner table with sensitivity, affirmation, courtesy, and discipline.

A God-centered home, where parents model godly attitudes, is an amazing blessing. Pray each child into the Kingdom. Teach them not to compete with each other. Caring for others, not competition, nourishes a peaceful home. Above all, implement the most important commandment—love one another dearly.

# The Mandate

## Directives

The Christ speaks:

Be the director of all your thoughts and actions. They should be subject to you, not you to them. It's your responsibility to master your reactions and decision-making. Live beyond the day's happenings to contemplate the eternal. Look at present uncertainties with one eye; look forward to heavenly joys with the other eye.

Keep your leisure activities in perspective. Sports, music festivals, concerts, drama presentations—all are gifts from God. Find ways to use all that God gives you for your edification. He has given you everything you need. He has given you the whole world; life and even death are your servants. They should not determine your reactions to circumstances; be in charge by responding to them in healthy ways. You have the present and the future available to you. The past is gone, done, over with. The present remains. The future is ahead. All that each day brings is yours to use for good. When used as God intended, your days will be orderly. Your mandate is to work within the divine boundaries.

Look for eternal value in every occasion. Never interpret what you see or hear as it appears to be. Peel off the obvious to see what is underneath. Then consult with me to know what to do.

The Gibeonites deceived Joshua and the children of Israel because they did not consult the Lord God. They were quick to believe smooth talk and found themselves duped into believing things that were not what they seemed. On the other hand, when Moses had doubts to solve or questions to answer, he went into the tabernacle to pray. He wanted to ask God how he could avert calamity and avoid relationships with those who intend harm.

You, too, must go frequently to a quiet place for guidance.

## Perseverance

The Christ speaks:

The assignments I give you shouldn't wear you out. Always, let my promises strengthen and encourage you. I am able to reward you beyond measure and without limit.

In a little while, your limitations will be gone forever. Toil, trouble, and struggles with discouragement will cease when time is no more. Persevere for now.

Write, read, sing, shed tears, spend time alone, pray. Endure adversity with grace. The future that awaits you in heaven will make it all worthwhile. There is no darkness there. Heaven is unending light, brightness, and peace.

When that day comes for you, a day known only by the Father God, you will never again say, "Oh, what a miserable person I am! Who will free me from the domination of sin?" Your spirit will no longer cry out, "I'm tired of living!" Death will be unknown. There will be no anxiety, only joy and fellowship with God's family.

If you could see my followers, who have preceded you, delighting in the glories of heaven, perhaps viewed during their lifetime as contemptible and unworthy, you would quickly exchange your desire for recognition to one for obscurity. You would not long for happy days, but consider it a blessing to endure ridicule. Seize the future. Allow eternity to penetrate your thinking and you will find no reason to complain.

Those who are with me are secure and joyful, although, like you, they once endured conflict. They are now at rest and will be with me for all eternity in my Father's Kingdom.

## Rhythms

The Christ speaks:

You know you should not rely on your emotions for they are prone to change into something different. As long as you live, your feelings will change, even from one moment to the next. Transient they are—although you might wish otherwise so your days could be more predictable.

Today, peaceful; tomorrow, upset. Today, confident; tomorrow, uneasy. Some days motivated; other days lazy. Times to be serious; times to laugh. Right now, devout; a year from now, spiritually lukewarm. Recognize your feelings for what they are. If you are wise, you will never use them as a decision-making guide. A follower who knows the Scriptures well and focuses on my promises rises above emotional waves and pays little attention to feelings.

Even with rapidly changing cultural values, it's possible to remain steady. The more resolute your intention, the easier it is to remain unshaken as you wait out stormy circumstances. No one is free of the self-interest inherited at birth. There are times when your focus will blur. It's easy, then, to react hastily.

Ignore questionable influences. You, like many others, are not above the fray and could well compromise your integrity. Let nothing come between us.

## Appreciation

The Christ speaks:

God has given you a mission. He warns against too much leisure, so make the most of your time. God honors you with gifts to invest in Kingdom work and then wants you to give him the results with thanks for the privilege. Accept the weight of the cross you carry. My comfort exceeds all the world's delights. You err if you fail to appreciate God's mercy; his grace cannot flow into and through an ungrateful heart. Serve the Kingdom faithfully.

Who doesn't enjoy exhilarating moments? They are God-given joys. But no one experiences God's special favors continually, nor would that be good. Don't seek consolation if it removes the regret of sin. Do not seek so much bliss in contemplative prayer that you become presumptuous. Not all that is sublime is holy. Not all that is enjoyable is good. Not all that is desirable is pure. Neither is all that you cherish pleasing to God. It's better to pray for grace to bear distress if it keeps you humble, in awe of God, willing to renounce aspirations that I don't intend for you to have.

Take the lowest place for yourself; that is where the humble feel most at home. Let another escort you to the place of honor. My greatest followers consider themselves least. The humbler they are, the greater their status in the eyes of God. They please him as they acknowledge that he has given them their gifts. Their only desire is the applause of God, and that all believers everywhere praise him as Lord of lords and King of kings.

God, who gives seed to the farmer to plant, and later on, good crops to harvest and eat, wants to give you more and more seed to plant and will make it grow so that you can give away more and more fruit from your harvest. He gives you much so you can give away much, again with thanks



for his enabling. His grace will abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all you need, you prosper in good works. The one who has little and tenaciously clings to it will have it taken away. God gives to the humble what he withholds from the proud.

Appreciate whatever God gives you, and he will give you more. Receive the smallest gift as if it were the most desired. No gift from him is trivial or ordinary; the Divine Giver never gives an insignificant gift. He chooses from his storehouse the right gift for you at the right time.

Be patient if God withdraws his grace. Your ongoing usefulness to the Kingdom is important to him and he knows exactly how to keep you on target. Receive whatever he gives you, even if it's difficult. And if he teaches the value of grace by removing it as a reminder to you of human inadequacy, stripping away any tendency you might have to take credit for what is accomplished, accept that as well.

Ask God to show you his purpose in every happening. He may or may not do this, preferring instead to strengthen your faith. He *will* restore grace to you in his time, and when he does, be quick to express your appreciation as you again become the beneficiary of the blessings he delights to give.

## Anticipation

The Christ speaks:

Should you find yourself yearning for heaven, pray with heartfelt thanks to the Father for giving you the privilege of serving his heavenly Kingdom. He understands you. He will pour out his mercy on your weary body. He will encourage and sustain you so your cares don't crush you. Strength will come.

Divine grace has enabled you to learn what humility means. God designs your struggles to keep you close to me.

When a fire burns, flames reach upward, but smoke always rises from the flames. The desire to live eternally in my presence isn't totally free of the smoke of self-interest. When people pray to be with me, their motives aren't always pure; they pray for what they want without listening to my whispers. They may think they're sincere, but prayer tainted with self-interest is not pure.

You should not pray for your own comfort, but pray for what is best for you, for what honors me. My timing is far better than your wishes.

I know what you yearn for. I hear your sighs. You long for liberation from suffering. You long for your eternal home, but that time has not yet come. You must still go through a season of work, a season of sorrow. You long for perfection, but you can't have it yet. I am the ultimate fulfillment of your longing. Wait. At the appointed time, you will be in my presence.

Your mandate is to be courageous. Complete your assignment well. At times, you must do what you don't want to do—and what you do want, you must sometimes forego. In future days, it may be painful if:

◇ Other people's plans are successful; yours fail.

◇ When others speak, people will listen; when you speak, they don't take you seriously.

◇ Others ask and receive; you do without.

◇ Others receive praise; you are ignored.

◇ Others receive greater responsibilities; you are overlooked.

Bear it all in silence. I have designed each situation. Forget your perceived rights. If someone asks you to do something that is inconvenient, do it. If you are in a place where you must obey an employer's directive and your perspective is different and unwelcomed, remember that you are subject to God's chain of command, and you shouldn't oppose anyone who is in authority over you.

There will be future blessings. Your reward throughout eternity will be greater than you can imagine:

Then, your focus will be identical to mine.

Then, you will have all you desire.

Then, you will have no selfish thoughts.

Then, you will possess what is good without fear that it will end.

Then, no one will oppose you or complain about you.

Then, no one will hinder you or stand in your way.

Then, I will give you glory for any rejection you endured on earth.

Then, I will replace your sorrow with praise.

Then, you will enjoy the fruit of your obedience.

Then, you will be completely satisfied.

So for now respond humbly to the wishes of others. Cheerfully do what they ask of you when you can. Do it promptly.

Let one person seek this, and let another seek that. Let one find glory in one achievement, another in something else. Let others praise these people a thousand times. For you, don't seek great things. Let this alone be your desire: to glorify God while you live and when you die.

## Longing for the Day

The pilgrim prays:

O God, to know you is to know goodness and joy. Your promises thrill me. I can hardly wait to join the countless saints who reverently lived lives that honored you. When I think of those who have lived before me, I feel unworthy to join them.

But I know this: I love you as much as I can. I pray that you will enable me to love you with greater passion and purity as I continue to remedy anything not pleasing to you. I desire nothing for myself; all I have is yours.

O Lord, my Redeemer, I welcome you always with the awe that Mary felt when the angel Gabriel told her she would be your mother. She held those words close to her heart, knowing you were destined to become the Savior of the world. What emotion she must have felt as she responded, "I am the Lord's servant."

As John (later, the Baptist) leapt for joy in his mother's womb, and years afterward announced, "My work is to prepare the way for the Lord," so I want to point people to you.

O God, accept my availability. Accept my praise for your unequalled greatness. May I never cease to glorify you.

I long for the day when people of every nation will praise you, magnifying your name as we all gather at the Marriage Feast of the Lamb. Amen.

## In Your Presence

The pilgrim prays:

O blessed celestial city above! O bright day of eternity, a day that never darkens, where truth forever enlightens. O day that is always joyful, secure, unchanging. Oh, that this day would dawn soon so all cares come to an end! The saints above soak up its splendors, but for me, still on pilgrimage, it seems far off. I see it only through a dark glass.

The citizens of heaven know its joy, but we pilgrims mourn the drawn-out hours when we feel tired and weak. The days are difficult. Sorrow and misery permeates the earth. Here, sin taints us; people are captive to passions, enslaved by fears, surrounded by cares, distracted by inquisitiveness, entangled with pride, frustrated by misunderstandings, worn out by working long hours, oppressed by temptations, weakened by questionable pleasures, and tormented by wants.

When will all this end? When will there be peace, undisturbed and tranquil—not only your peace within me, around me, above me, beneath me, but also peace throughout the world?

Lord, am I absorbed with you alone? Or do I continue to be tethered to this world? Do I fully rejoice because you are who you are?

When will I love you with a pure heart? Oh, to be present with you right now—in your Kingdom. I'm like an exile in a hostile land that has conflict and misery everywhere.

I want to hold tightly to the hope of heaven, but the realities of this world are wearing me out. With my mind, I want to rise above this, but my weary body wants me to yield to its demands. I feel helpless as waves of pressure rush over me.

What I love, I eagerly talk about. Why don't I talk about you more?  
Lord, keep me looking your way. Dispel my negative thoughts.

Help me to reject every selfish dream. Eternal Truth, come to my aid.

Forgive me when my mind wanders during prayer. I am so prone to distractions. My thoughts carry me away to a fantasyland. Where my thoughts are, there I am, absorbed with what I'd like to have. Too often I daydream the time away. You have said, "Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." Why do I think so much about what I need to do? Why am I so concerned about the week ahead?

Loving Lord, I want to reject all that crowds you out of my day. To live a life of purity. To someday sing with the heavenly choir. Amen.

## Reassurance

The Christ speaks:

When you need comfort, think about your future in heaven. It will change your perspective so that a sense of eternity will assuage the tragedies of your short life. You know that I designed you to find joy in me. I created you for eternity, and only I can sweeten your heartache with a balm that exceeds earthly consolation. I will give you the calm promised in God's Holy Word.

Human sympathy is variable and limited. It doesn't last long. Soon you will again feel as bad as you did before. When grief is acute, human assistance isn't helpful. Family and friends try to give hope, but at best they are only slightly reassuring. Stay close to me in your despair. Keep your thoughts focused on heaven. If I have reasons to withdraw my blessings, confidence in my goodness will hold you steady.

When I sometimes withhold encouragement, note how I use despair to strengthen your faith. Job's story is not about suffering; it's about faith. I want a firm, unshakeable faith to be your story as well. After you have suffered a little while, I will personally pick you up, set you firmly in place, and make you stronger than ever.

Think about and be thankful for my past blessings, remembering that I am your source for *deep* joy. Your loneliness, your longing, is a symptom that you are homesick for me. People who try to diffuse emotional pain by pursuing activity and wealth will discover no contentment in achievements or possessions. Only God satisfies your human longings. When I do this for you, you will sense an inkling of heaven's serenity. You will be comforted.

## Prolific Blessings

The pilgrim prays:

Lord, I thank you for interacting with me, guiding my steps each day, and giving me understanding of what you want me to do. Help me to appreciate your blessings with awe and gratitude—both for the gifts you give to everyone and for the gifts you have given especially to me—so that my thanks for your goodness goes beyond the words I am able to express, however heartfelt and genuine they may be.

I know I can't fully appreciate all that you give me. I'm not sure I understand the magnificence of even the least of your gifts. I don't feel worthy of your constant love and faithfulness; I don't thank you enough.

All that I have—body, soul, spirit, natural abilities, supernatural gifts, inward peace, visible accomplishments—comes from you. Each gift reflects your generosity and your goodness, your love. It's humbling to think about.

I know that some people are more gifted than I am, but I also see many who aren't as privileged. We are all the work of your hands; without you, we would have nothing at all. You know what is best for each of us. I will not question your allotments. I won't be envious of those who have more; I won't look down on those who have less. We are equal in your sight. I will be thankful for what you have given me; may I use my bundle of gifts wisely and well.

You, O Lord, never show favoritism. You have chosen the poor and the uneducated to be your friends. Your disciples weren't from royalty. They lived without complaining, humbly and simply. They were happy to endure ridicule and embraced what the world they lived in rejected. They discovered that nothing is a greater source of joy than following you.



I'm thankful I'm realizing that as well. I will try to be as content when I do menial jobs as when I'm in a place of leadership. I can be joyful because of your affirmation. I need to be thankful that I don't have more, lest I become proud.

You give gifts wisely and freely. All do not receive the same gifts, and not to the same extent. If it's best not to give me much, I will be content knowing you honor those who gratefully receive little with other blessings: your presence, a strong faith, the expectancy of what is up ahead. Many a time you have enabled me to be joyful when I've been overlooked.

Doing your will, fulfilling the purpose for which you have made me, takes precedence over everything.

I will praise you in all things, at all times, in every circumstance.

You, Lord, are more precious to me than your blessings—yes, more precious than the blessings you will bestow on me in the future. Amen.

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