ENGLISH PURITANS: THEIR HISTORY, THEOLOGY, PRACTICE, AND JOY

ENGLISH PURITAN DEVOTIONAL

JACQUELYN HUTCHINSON

HONORS COLLEGE THESIS
TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract .............................................................................................................................................. 3
Introduction ........................................................................................................................................ 4
Historical Research .......................................................................................................................... 6
Textual Analysis ................................................................................................................................ 18
Conclusion ......................................................................................................................................... 21
English Puritan Devotional ................................................................................................................ 24
ABSTRACT

This research focuses on the English Puritans' history, theology, religious practice, and joy. The historical context of the group is crucial to understanding their literature and culture. They lived in a time where they were persecuted for their strict beliefs, fighting for their idea of the purity of God's word. Their theology came out of the Reformation and continued to evolve as scholars and theologians expounded on texts of the Bible. The theology that they held dear bled into the practice of their religion that undoubtedly had joy. My textual analysis of The Valley of Vision shows the Puritans' hearts towards their God and the joy they found in him. The text supports the claim stated in the historical research that argues for their joy despite their strict practice. Following the historical research and textual analysis is an 8-week devotional based off of Puritan literature. Each week focuses on a different Puritan, containing a biography, excerpts from their work, my commentary, and a bible verse that applies to the text.
INTRODUCTION

I have studied the English Puritans for a variety of projects throughout my college career, but instead of simply writing another research paper on the English Puritans, I decided to take a more creative route. For my Honors Thesis, in addition to providing 15 pages of research and textual analysis, I have written an 8-week devotional, using passages from selected English Puritans to base the discussion. The research and the textual analysis provide a framework for readers to understand the context of the works in the devotional. The research, analysis, and devotional are all intended to show the reader how the Puritans understood themselves.

The research focuses on the English Puritans’ history, theology, religious practice, and joy. The historical context of the group is crucial to understanding their literature and culture. They lived in a time where they were persecuted for their strict beliefs, fighting for their idea of the purity of God’s word. Their theology came out of the Reformation and continued to evolve as scholars and theologians expounded on texts of the Bible. The theology that they held dear bled into the practice of their religion that undoubtedly had joy. My textual analysis of *The Valley of Vision* shows the Puritans’ hearts towards their God and the joy they found in him. The text supports the claim stated in the research that argues for their joy despite their strict practice.

For my 8-week devotional, I have accumulated an anthology of eight authors from the Puritan Era. Each week’s worth of devotionals will begin with a researched biography of the author and his influence on his time and ours. Following the biography will be 7 days of excerpted passages from one of his works to be read each day of the week. The excerpts from the Puritan authors are all primary source documents that I read and quoted from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. I have chosen some of the most influential works by each theologian to include in the anthology. I expound upon the passage for each day with thoughts, prayers, and/or
encouragements for the readers to better understand and apply the text. Also, if the authors do not use an explicit Bible verse for the passage I include, I found verses that pertain to the passage, keeping in mind the context of the verses.

All three elements of my project work to expound on the historical, theological, and religious aspects of the Puritans, giving readers a better understanding of how the Puritans saw themselves.

Despite the Puritans' desire to adhere to the Word of God, there were flaws in their practice. They were far from perfect. Their "overemphasis on work," was a strictly legalistic approach to spiritual work, occupation work, school work, and even recreational work (Ryken 199). They worked hard, and that often caused them to place their work above God, family, and others. This also prohibited them from enjoying recreational activities for the sake of enjoying them.

Recreational activities, such as sports, became a form of work as well. Their emphasis on work blended into their emphasis on holiness, which was often legalistic. This is best seen in their observation of the Sabbath. People were fined for breaking the Sabbath for as little as hanging clothes to dry or mending a shirt for the safety of the fire (Ryken 199). Puritans suffered a lot of guilt when they broke the Sabbath and disapproved of any sort of non-religious activity on God's Holy Day. Overall, the Puritans, though they found joy in many of God's gifts, struggled to
The Puritans. Their name alone brings preconceived notions of who they are and what they stand for. They were often regarded as prudish, hypocritical, or legalistic, and as any group, they have their moments of extremity. However, the Puritans were monumental for forging the landscape for modern, evangelical Protestantism and are “some of the most devoted, conscientious, theologically driven, and Christ-centered individuals the church has known” (Wellum 3). Puritans, despite oppression from other religious groups, persevered through the persecution and trials to publish books, sermons, novels, and poems that continue to be read today. In fact, the most famous Puritan work, John Bunyan’s *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, is still one of the most published books in the world. Puritan thought was radical for its time. They sought to live God-centered lives, focused on the Bible and its application, reading the Bible for themselves, and seeking to apply it to all aspects of their lives.

Despite the Puritans’ desire to adhere to the Word of God, there were flaws in their practice. They were far from perfect. Their “overemphasis on work” was a strictly legalistic - spiritual work, occupation work, school work, and even recreational work (Ryken 190). They worked hard, and that often caused them to exalt their work above God, family, and others. This also prohibited them from enjoying recreational activities for the sake of enjoying them. Recreational activities, such as sports, became a form of work as well. Their emphasis on work bled into their emphasis on holiness, which was often legalistic. This is best seen in their observation of the Sabbath. People were fined for breaking the Sabbath for as little as hanging clothes to dry or mending a shoe for the safety of the foot (Ryken 191). Puritans suffered a lot of guilt when they broke the Sabbath and disapproved of any sort of non-religious activity on God’s Holy Day. Overall, the Puritans, though they found joy in many of God’s gifts, struggled to
balance legalism and rules with grace for others and themselves. This aspect of their practice would creep into the joys of life and fill them with guilt.

This extremism carries into other aspects of their lives as well. Puritans also often lacked the ability to know when a topic had been exhausted. They were very wordy, hammering in their point beyond necessity with little to no room for conversation. This lead to them being intolerant of all things related to other religions, specifically Catholicism. The Puritans rejected all things that did not completely align with their beliefs. They sometimes took this to the extreme, wearing their hats in an Anglican church service to show disrespect or interrupting baptism because of a formality (Ryken 198). They believed that what they were doing glorified God but blindly did so to the detriment of loving others as the Bible commands. They were oriented towards serving others but often fell short of serving others by being humble, open, and respectful of other beliefs.

Their extremism also flowed into their marital relationships. Despite the progress of women’s rights as a result of the Reformation, Puritans still frequently viewed women as weak and men as superior (Ryken 196). Benjamin Wadsworth, a New England Puritan who shared in English Puritan thought, stated that a good husband should “strive more to be loved than feared, though neither is to be excluded” (Morgan 44). Extremism plagued the Puritans from sports to theological pride to strict marital hierarchy, but they strived to be more conformed to what the Bible teaches, oftentimes taking it too far.

There were English Puritans, Dutch Puritans, American Puritans, and many other groups of Puritans that generally followed the same beliefs, but this research focuses on the English Puritans. The English Puritans, as a group, ultimately came out of the Protestant Reformation, beginning in 1517 when Martin Luther nailed his 95 Theses to the Wittenberg Castle door. These
theses expressed his grievances against the practices and theology of the Catholic Church. At the
time, the Roman Catholic Church reigned, not only religiously, but also politically and socially.
Their autonomous control led to “many cases of undue enrichment, political manipulation, and
abuses of power” throughout the Papal authority (Mercadal 1). Not every action of the Catholic
Church was negative for the people. There were many movements around Luther’s time that
sought to reform the Catholic Church itself. Erasmus was one of the leaders of these internal
reformations, and he worked on translating the Latin Bible into the citizens’ vernacular. He was
not as progressive as Luther would have liked, however, and their differences lead to many years
of theological debates (MacPhail “Desiderius Erasmus”).

Luther was very familiar with Roman Catholic theology because he was previously a
Catholic monk, who devoted himself to the Catholic church, but he rebelled against their
doctrine because he believed much of it was incongruent with the Holy Scriptures, one specific
example is the use of indulgences to gain salvation. Among Luther’s 95 Theses, number 35
states that “those who believe that they can be certain of their salvation because they have
indulgence letters will be eternally damned, together with their teachers.” Clearly - Luther and
his followers were very passionate about the reformation of the Church, and John Calvin,
seeking to unify and clarify the seemingly new theology, wrote his Institutes of the Christian
Religion. John Calvin’s theology helped to inform the Protestant Reformation and greatly
influenced the English Reformation and Puritan Movement. The English Reformation gained
momentum when King Henry the VIII broke away from the Catholic Church to form the Church
of England in the year 1534.

Once England broke away, the country struggled to decide on the best church practices,
and this was a primary focus of the Puritans: to see further reformation within the Church of
England (Trueman 6). Despite this monumental change, Puritans were not able to publicly pronounce their beliefs until 1547 when Edward VI took the throne, over ten years after the break from the Catholic church (Trueman 5). Edward VI allowed for the revision of the *Book of Common Prayer*, a book that instructed the order and subject of Sunday worship, adjusting it in favor of the Protestants. He also created the Forty-Two Articles, which consisted of unifying statements related to the Protestant church. However, these items were not formulated until the end of Edward’s reign, so though they held some Reformed thought, particularly towards the Lord’s Supper, they “never achieved normative status” (5). King Edward died in 1553, and his sister, Mary, took over the throne. Mary was a devout Catholic and heavily persecuted the Protestants, which “meant exile for some and death for others” (Trueman 6). Queen Mary killed nearly 300 Protestants, giving her the nickname “Bloody Mary,” because of their heresy against the Catholic church (Duffy 27). During her reign the Protestant landscape was quiet because of the harsh persecution; those who were not killed were either in hiding or fled the country, usually to the Puritan colonies in Scotland or Holland.

Following Queen Mary’s death, her half-sister, Elizabeth gained the throne. She was tolerant of the Puritans, allowing them to come out of hiding, but she began persecuting the Catholics for not conforming to the State’s nationalized religion. In 1559 the Act of Supremacy re-established the separation of the Anglican Church from Rome “and established the monarch as its Supreme Governor” (Trueman 6). The Act of Uniformity declared the Book of Common Prayer “as the church’s official liturgy” and required a quota of church attendances from the people (6). Queen Elizabeth also passed The Thirty-Nine Articles, “a modification of the earlier Forty-Two Articles,” establishing “Reformed Protestant theology as the official position of
church and state” (6). For the Puritans, this seemed like a step in the right direction, but as the monarchy changed once again, the Puritan movement faced difficulty once more.

King James I took over after Queen Elizabeth and reinstituted many Catholic practices in the Church of England, such as kneeling at communion, permitting private baptisms, observing sacraments for the ill, confirmations by the bishop, and observing certain Holy days (Trueman 8). The Puritans disagreed with these changes, as did others who desired a more Scottish “structure and practice,” which was more reformed (8). King James I also passed the Declaration of Sports in 1617-1618, defining “which sports could be played on Sunday and other Holy Days” (8). This was an issue for the Puritans, who refused to play, support, or watch any kind of sport on Sunday. “Charles I reissued the book in 1633,” with a longer list of permissible sports, thus making Puritans more distinct in their observance of the Sabbath (8).

The Puritans counted the break from Catholicism as a victory, but the Church of England held its Catholic roots too tightly for the Puritans. They still sought further reformation in many aspects of church life and viewed the “Reformation as incomplete” (Davies 1). Theologians from mainland Europe were also dealing with varying levels of persecution, and many went to England for refuge. These men, including Peter Martyr Vermigli, Martin Bucer, and John Laski, greatly influenced England’s theological scene as they brought their intellectual, Reformed thought (Trueman 5).

Led by their understanding of the Bible, the Puritans began writing and preaching the new theology throughout England. Puritanism became increasingly popular as they sought to fight doctrine that they believed was false with the “truth of God’s word” (Beeke 22). Though many people participated in this movement, there was still persecution. This weight was overwhelming for some, causing a group of the Puritans to journey to the New World and the
Netherlands for religious freedom. Others found that the persecution fueled their writing, namely John Bunyan and John Foxe. Bunyan was frequently imprisoned for teaching against the Church of England which resulted in his famous Pilgrim’s Progress, and Foxe’s Book of Martyrs exists specifically because of persecution, detailing specific cases of Martyrs and victims of religious discrimination.

Puritans believed in Reformed Theology, which was highly controversial at the time. When taught or explained today, Reformed Theology is often condensed to the ‘Five Points of Calvinism’ because the theology comes from Calvin’s Institutes of the Christian Religion. However, the five points were not created by Calvin to summarize his theology but were a council’s response to five points posed against his theology. Arminians, formerly called ‘Belgic semi-Pelagians,’ created five points that attempted to clarify how people are saved, centering it on man’s ability. Their points contradicted the Puritans’ Calvinism, so the Synod of Dort, a council of early Calvinists, wrote the five points of Calvinism as a response, hoping to show that biblical salvation is from the Lord alone. Puritans believed that Calvinism is not only a theological stance but a worldview, “a theocentric way of thinking about all life under the direction and control of God’s own word” (Packer 4).

Though the ‘five points’ are not a holistic view of Calvin’s theology, they are all worth analyzing, especially when seeking to understand the English Puritans’ thought. The acronym ‘TULIP’ has been coined over the years to help people remember the process through which God saves souls: total depravity, unconditional election, limited atonement, irresistible grace, and perseverance of the saints. Different aspects of these five points are seen clearly through the Puritans’ work.
Total depravity is defined as mankind’s rebellion or hardness against God, meaning apart from God-given grace there is no possibility of delighting in the holiness of God, and there is no glad submission to His sovereign authority. This doctrine is supported by numerous scriptures: including James 2:10-11, Romans 3:10-18, Romans 3:23, 1 Kings 8:46, Romans 7:18, and Romans 8:5-9. Romans 3:23 is the most quoted of these: “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” Man’s depraved state is “total” in his senses: sin is present in all aspects of his humanity. Total depravity rests on the fact that humans are naturally at odds with God because of their inherent sin, even from birth. Sin was brought into the world by Adam and has been passed down, generation to generation. It is not something mankind has control over; without the grace of God, the human race is incapable of drawing near to God or even desiring Him. Despite the fact that Puritans dwelt on “the heinous nature of [their] sin against an infinite God,” there is joy in this disposition (Beeke 21). Richard Baxter, a famous Puritan pastor, writes, “So then, let DESERVED be written on the door of hell, but on the door of Heaven and life, THE FREE GIFT” (23). The “free gift” is where they found joy, but they could not appreciate it fully without understanding the “deserved.”

The second point of Calvinism, unconditional election, is the concept of predestination. It explains that before the foundations of the earth, God, “according to His eternal and immutable purpose” chose those who would believe and who would not (Piper “TULIP: Introduction”). Reformed Theology states that faith is a gift from God, and it is only by his divine providence that people come to believe the Gospel (Piper “TULIP: Introduction”). The doctrine of unconditional election states that those who do not believe have not been given the gift of faith. Scripture, in particular, Romans 9, reveals how God predestines some for eternal life and some
Hutchinson 13

... for destruction solely based on his sovereign will - it is not based on how ‘good’ or ‘bad’ they are:

For he says to Moses, “I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.” So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy. For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, “For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I might show my power in you, and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth.” So then he has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills. Romans 9:15-18

In response to the difficulty of this doctrine, Calvin says that it is unwise and unlawful to “pry into the secret things of God” when addressing predestination (568). Calvin believes that God has given his inerrant word that has everything believers need to know about him (568). This belief encourages a humble disposition towards God, who enables the believer to have faith. Puritans were “united in emphasizing personal conversion, they rejoiced in God’s sovereign grace in election, and as a result, their hearts’ desire was to live their lives to God’s glory” (Wellum 3).

The concept of limited atonement explains that Jesus’s blood only atones for the sins of those who would believe. Atonement is defined as Christ’s work on the cross that “by his obedience and death” he canceled the debt of sin, appeased God’s holy wrath, and won salvation for believers (Piper “TULIP: Introduction”). Jesus’s death fully satisfied the wrath humankind deserved, and if believers trust in him, his blood covers their sins to make them righteous before God (1 John 2.2). Before Jesus came there was no possibility for that to happen; humans could never be made right with God because of their sin. Animal sacrifices used in the old testament were not sufficient to atone believers to a holy God, so Jesus became the ultimate sacrifice. The
word ‘limited’ explains for whom Christ’s blood atones, yet does not limit the magnitude of the atonement. If His blood atoned for everyone, then everyone would be made right before God, meaning that salvation is universal with or without faith; that is simply not true according to Calvin’s theology or, Calvinists would argue, the Bible (Rom. 9. 22-23). Christ’s blood does not atone for all humans, only the elect (Piper “TULIP: Introduction”).

Irresistible grace, the fourth point, is a theological stance in which saving grace can be resisted until God desires to overcome human will (Piper “TULIP: Introduction”). God draws believers to Jesus and if He did not, humankind would not be able to come to Him even if they wanted to. And because of the doctrine of total depravity, they would not desire His presence because of their sinful nature. If the Lord intends to call someone to Himself, that person cannot resist His all-powerful grace; it is impossible. The apostle Paul presents the question, “For who can resist His will?” and the doctrine of irresistible grace would reply, “No one” because God is all powerful, easily being able to overcome man’s resistance (Rom. 9.19). This does not make God a forceful dictator, but the doctrine describes a grace so beautiful that it cannot be resisted. When it is revealed, the desire for God is irresistible.

R. C. Sproul, a well-known theologian, defines the fifth point of Calvinism, the perseverance of the saints, as being able to persevere in faith because believers are preserved by God (197). He uses the aphorism, “If we have it, we never lose it. If we lose it, we never had it” to give a quick definition (197). Salvation is permanent and has been for eternity past, present, and future: “Our salvation began in eternity, is realized in time, and looks forward to heaven” (198). However, believers must endure and persevere in this world by faith in Jesus Christ to obtain eternal salvation, meaning that “only those who endure in faith will be saved for eternity” (198). Unlike Catholicism and Semi-Pelagianism, Reformed theology states that one cannot
receive genuine faith and fall away, nor could one commit a sin that would remove them from saving faith. If someone did fall away, Calvinists argue, with 1 John 2:19, that they did not have saving faith to begin with: “They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us” (1 John 2.19). This doctrine states that whom God has chosen to believe “can neither totally nor finally fall away from the state of grace” (Piper “TULIP Introduction”). God will not allow those He has chosen to fall away, but “we must persevere in faith if we are to be finally saved” (Piper “TULIP Introduction”). Though God will not let true believers cease to be believers, they have the responsibility of living it out in faith, and generally, a true believer who has received the Holy Spirit will desire that task.

The Puritans cannot be confined to their theology alone, though it is extremely important to their way of life. They stood for reform, equality, education, unity, and authenticity. The Puritans believed that the Catholic church at the time was twisting much of Scripture by taking it out of context and even altering the text, and they were able to do that unknowingly to most because the Bible was not available to all people (Ryken 138). Only the clergy were able and allowed to read and interpret the Latin Bible, which was a major cause of concern with the Puritans. Between 1524 and 1526, William Tyndale worked on translating the Bible from the original Greek and Hebrew into vernacular English, something that had never been done. He was able to complete the New Testament and some of the Old Testament before being martyred for his work by Catholic authorities. A group of Puritans continued his work to finish the translation and created the Geneva Bible in 1560, complete with John Calvin’s commentary. This was the first Bible written in the citizen’s vernacular since Wycliffe translated the Latin Bible into...
Middle English 200 years previous. The Puritan Movement was sparked by citizens being able to read God’s word for themselves under less persecution than in previous years.

Puritans held onto Scripture as the ultimate authority for all aspects of their lives, believing “that if the Bible is binding on one issue, it is binding on all issues” (Davies 3). They believed that the Bible is inerrant and infallible and that it is relevant and up-to-date for them to use, study, and apply (Ryken 141). The Puritans “truly believed in the sufficiency of Scripture for life and godliness” (Beeke 21). The common belief of the time did not hold such a high view of Scripture but believed that “the Bible [was] for an age and not for all time” (Davies 5). The Puritans were often accused of worshiping the Bible, which they refuted, stating that they worshiped the Author of it alone. The Puritans applied the Bible as general principles to contemporary thought and situations, setting the precedent for the Protestant way of studying the Bible. They did not expect to “find specific rules that they could literally or directly follow” (Ryken 143) but held “a true spirituality grounded in Scripture, centered on Christ and all of his glorious cross work, and lived out by the power of the Holy Spirit” (Wellum 3). They primarily saw two major themes throughout the Bible, “a double theme, one negative and other positive”: the law and the gospel (Ryken 148).

According to Puritan belief, the law shows the brokenness of man and the need for a savior. It shows the inadequacy of mankind to make themselves right before God while the gospel gives a joyful and hopeful response. The gospel explains and describes the redemptive plan of God that he had from the beginning for his people. It shows Jesus, who paid the price mankind could never pay and lived the life they could never live. The gospel gives a solution to the brokenness of the law through Jesus. The Puritans see the Bible as communicating these two primary doctrines which fueled their application of God’s word. Luther began this theological
exploration and writes, “Distinguishing between the law and the gospel is the highest art in
Christendom, one who every person who values the name Christian ought to recognize, know,
and possess” (153).

The way the Puritans interpreted the Bible flows into their expression of faith. They were
committed to helping the poor, as the Bible commands. They viewed themselves as a community
which sought the common good for each other. They sought to live a life where service,
sacrifice, and selflessness ruled their daily routine. They were by no means perfect, but they tried
to live a life that exalted God. The Puritans clung to theology as they taught, read, and wrote
about the things above, and that would not have been possible without the Protestant
Reformation. The Puritans have shaped the Protestant world known today and show their
devotion to the Lord through their various kinds of literature.

Thou fairest, greatest, first of all objects,
My heart's abode, mine honor, mine ease.
For my little vessel is so full as it can be,
And I would pour out all that fulness before thee in ceaseless flow.

"Praise and Thanksgiving"

God for the Puritans is the "fairest" and "greatest" of all things imaginable (II. 2), worthy of
"endless" (I. 5) admiration and love (I. 5). Their "bounteous works" (II. 4) was praised for
his endless blessings. The Puritans praised him for three specific things:

I bless thee that thou hast made me capable
Of knowledge, true, the matter of all being,
Of resembling thee, the perfection of all excellency;
Of enjoying thee, the common of all happiness, "God Enjoyed"
TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

The English Puritans were very literarily expressive with their beliefs as seen in their sermons, books, pamphlets, and poems. *The Valley of Vision* is a compilation of Puritan poems, prayers, and meditations from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries that show how they interpreted their religion. The specific author of each work is unidentified, but the compiler, Arthur Bennett, did extensive work pulling from Puritan letters, journals, books, and sermon notes. These works show the Puritans’ joy, love, and desire for God; focus on the Gospel of Jesus Christ; and reveal their strong adherence to their theology.

These poems, prayers, and meditations give readers an inside look into the Puritans’ love for God. They revered God, worshiped him as the sole creator of the Universe who reached down to love them. They sought to focus their lives around God, finding ultimate joy in ultimate intimacy with him. One Puritan writes:

```
Thou fairest, greatest, first of all objects,
My heart admires, adores, loves thee,
For my little vessel is as full as it can be,
And I would pour out all that fullness before thee in ceaseless flow.
```

"Praise and Thanksgiving"

God for the Puritans is the “fairest” and “greatest” of all things imaginable (ll. 2), worthy of “ceaseless” (ll. 5) admiration and love that their “little” hearts could conjure (ll. 4). Puritans praised God for his endless blessings, but one Puritan poet praises him for three specific things:

```
I bless thee that thou hast made me capable
Of knowing thee, the author of all being,
Of resembling thee, the perfection of all excellency,
Of enjoying thee, the source of all happiness. "God Enjoyed"
```
God is their “source of all happiness” because he allows them to know him through the bible, resemble him through sanctification, and enjoy him eternally (ll. 19). They loved God and enjoyed him sincerely because of his goodness to them.

Puritans specifically praised God and found joy in him because of the work of Jesus Christ. The majority of the works included in The Valley of Vision relate back to Jesus’s redeeming work on the Cross. Some poems dwell on the suffering of Christ for the redemption of sinners, meditating on the fact that Christ suffered “anguish” to give believers “joy”; he was “cast off” for believers to be “brought in,” “trodden down as an enemy” to allow Christians to “be welcomed as a friend” (“Love Lustres at Calvary” ll. 11-13). Other poems focus on the aftermath of believing in his atoning work:

May I enter him as my refuge,
Build on him as my foundation,
Walk in him as my way,
Follow him as my guide,
Conform to him as my example,
Receive his instructions as my prophet,
Rely on his intercession as my high priest,
Obey him as my king. “The Savior”

Besides the explicit emphasis on the work of Jesus, many poems implicitly reference the sacrifice and accomplishments seen on the cross. One poet refers to how God “Multiplied thy promises, | Shown [them their] future happiness, | [and] Given [them] a living fountain” which fills them with joy (“Joy” ll. 5-7). In John 7:37 - 38, Jesus refers to himself as “living water” that fills believers, and the poet, knowing their Bible well, is explicitly referencing Jesus in their poem. The love of God and understanding of Christ’s work permeates through the majority of the poems included in this compilation.

The poems in The Valley of Vision also show readers the importance of the Puritans’ theology. One poem in particular emphasizes the Trinity:
Three in one, one in three, God of my salvation,
Heavenly Father, blessed Son, eternal Spirit,
I adore thee as one Being, one Essence,
one God in three distinct Persons,
For bringing sinners to thy knowledge and to thy kingdom. “The Trinity”
This poem shows the Puritans’ strong belief in the doctrine of the Trinity which is the foundation of their theology. Other poems exude doctrines of Calvinism, seeing faith as a gift from God: “I thank thee that in fullness of grace | thou hast given me to Jesus” (“The Trinity” ll. 16-17). They detail the total depravity of the sinner, “Thou knowest my great unfitness for service, | my present deadness | my inability to do anything for thy glory, | my distressing coldness of heart” (“Need of Grace” ll. 2-5). The poets also acknowledge that God preserves them: “Thou hast produced and sustained me, | supported and indulged me, | saved and kept me” (“Divine Support” ll. 5-7). The Puritan poets ultimately exalt God as all powerful, all loving, and all knowing. God is “known, but beyond knowledge, | revealed, but unrevealed,” meaning that God has made himself available, but he is still so vast that one cannot possibly know him fully (“God Enjoyed” ll. 2-3).

The Puritans were extremely God-centric in everything they attempted to do, and this exudes from these poems. Whether it be in observing the Sabbath, raising their children, or writing literature and poetry, the Puritans sought to put God at the center of all aspects of their lives. They often struggled to find a balance between joyful obedience and rule-based legalism, but their pursuit of holiness was unparalleled during their time. They wanted biblically based reform, not only in the Church of England but in themselves and their communities. The Puritans were persecuted for their radical beliefs, but they remained strong and continue to influence many Protestant thinkers to this day.
CONCLUSION

Moving forward, if I were to further this work, I would expand my research portion to contain more primary documents. In doing so, I would analyze the texts for the themes, subjects, and tone to better articulate the Puritans’ ideology. This would move my paper from a secondary source analysis to a textual analysis. I would then be able to integrate my textual analysis of *The Valley of Vision* into that extended portion to further expand on their thoughts about God, religion, society, and other subjects that the research lends itself to. Analyzing the primary documents would allow me to enter into the academic landscape, discussing the Puritans based on their words rather than the words of others. I enjoyed analyzing the poetry from *The Valley of Vision* and would enjoy doing that sort of research and analysis on more texts from the time period.

The devotional portion of my project was by far the most difficult aspect. I lean towards textual analysis and academic writing in my general studies, so switching to a less formal tone was difficult for me to achieve. Because of the difficulty, I do not foresee myself furthering this portion of the project. However, if I were to expand the devotional portion, I would create a year-long devotional containing works from both the English Puritan Era and the American Puritans of the same time period. I would love to find works by women, whether it be letters, poems, or books. Finding these sources may be difficult because of the social limitations on women at the time, preventing most from attaining a written education. I would also be interested in finding less traditional sources to excerpt, exposing readers to many aspects of the Puritan Era beyond theology.
Works Cited


TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction .................................................................................................................. 26

John Foxe .................................................................................................................. 27

Richard Sibbes ........................................................................................................ 31

Thomas Brooks ....................................................................................................... 35

John Owen ............................................................................................................... 39

John Bunyan ........................................................................................................... 43

John Flavel ............................................................................................................. 47

Isaac Watts ............................................................................................................. 51

Valley of Vision ..................................................................................................... 56

ENGLISH PURITAN DEVOTIONAL
TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction ................................................................................................................. 26

John Foxe ................................................................................................................... 27

Richard Sibbes .......................................................................................................... 31

Thomas Brooks .......................................................................................................... 35

John Owen ................................................................................................................ 39

John Bunyan .............................................................................................................. 43

John Flavel ................................................................................................................ 47

Isaac Watts ................................................................................................................. 51

Valley of Vision ......................................................................................................... 56
INTRODUCTION

The devotional is organized chronologically, by birth of the author, to provide a historical context for the works. Before each week’s content, I have provided a researched biography, giving a background for each of the authors. The top portion of the page provides the textual excerpts, while the middle portion provides my commentary and exhortation. At the bottom of each day’s devotion, I have inserted a bible verse that I found applicable. The devotional is meant to be read daily over the course of eight weeks.

All of my chosen authors in this devotional are theologians who align themselves with Reformed Theology; however, not all of the works included are dense theological texts. John Bunyan’s spiritual autobiography, *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*, tells his spiritual journey from sinner to believer. I have also included Isaac Watts, a popular hymn writer, in my English Puritan Devotional. Best known for “Silent Night,” Isaac Watts wrote many other hymns throughout his life. For my project, I used “When I Survey the Wondrous Cross,” taking each stanza for a daily devotional. I also include *Foxe’s Book of Martyrs* by John Foxe. This narrative collection of martyr stories was created by Foxe in the 16th century to record the lives of martyrs in his time and prior. Many of his accounts occur during the Puritan Era (1517 - 1680), which are included in the Devotional to align with the time period. *The Valley of Vision* is a series of collected poems from the Puritan era that captures the heart of the Puritans.
John Foxe

Born in 1516 in Lincolnshire, England, John Foxe was born into a faithful Catholic family. Despite this, he wrote his Book of Martyrs from a Reformed Protestant perspective, showing the persecution of Protestants usually performed by the Catholic authorities or the government.

Foxe’s passion for Reformed thought began while he was at his fellowship at Oxford. Throughout both Cambridge and Oxford, the Reformed doctrine penetrated the academic landscape, and Foxe was not immune. He spent hours each day studying the Scriptures, and he began to question the authority and doctrine of the Roman church. He found truth in Reformed theology, and when he confessed his new beliefs to the school, he was expelled.

Foxe worked as a tutor for many years, but had to keep himself hidden from the papal authorities because of his beliefs. During the reign of Queen Mary I, the persecution for Nonconformists increased, and Foxe and his family fled to France, then Germany, and settled in Switzerland among a group of English refugees. In Switzerland, Foxe began to compile stories of persecution from fellow refugees. Word spread about his book, and other persecuted Christians sent letters about persecution they experienced, heard of, or witnessed.

In 1558, when Queen Elizabeth I became queen, Foxe and his family returned to England where he finished his book and published the first English edition (1563). He continued to revise his work for the next seven years, checking facts and accuracy, then republished the newer edition. The Anglican Church adored his book and demanded that a copy be placed in every collegiate church in England.

Though the stories primarily describe persecution under the papal authority, Foxe supported peace, reconciliation, and tolerance between the different religious groups. He often tried convincing Queen Elizabeth I to stop executing people for differing religious beliefs, but found little success.

Day 1

On October 25, 1518, John Stilliccen was arrested, brought before the bishop of London, Richard Fitz-James, and condemned to be burned as a heretic. John had once before recanted his faith in Christ under fear of torture, but when he was chained to the stake at Smithfield before a large crowd, he declared that he was a follower of the teachings of Wycliffe, and though he had been weak enough before to recant his beliefs, he was now ready to die for the truth of God’s Word.

Peter denied Jesus three times yet went on to be one of the greatest church fathers. God used him though Peter openly denied Him. We may or may not have ever denied Jesus with our words, but we all have denied Jesus with our actions. Whether it is a cruel word, gossip, anger, lies, or ungodly passions, when we choose sin over God, we are denying him to an onlooking world. Thankfully, that does not ruin God’s plan for us or for the world. Our sin does not disqualify us from doing the work of God because every human has sinned (Rom. 3:23). God uses us, sinners, for his work, and that is such an honor because we are so weak and broken. He loves us and will never deny those who take up their crosses and follow Him.

Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints.

O Lord, I am your servant;
I am your servant, the son of your maidservant.
You have loosed my bonds.
Psalm 116:15-16
Day 2

[In 1535,] John Tewkesbury was arrested for reading Tyndale’s English translation of the New Testament, and thus committing an offense against the “holy Mother Church.” Faced with threats of torture and burning, he at first said that he did not believe anything he had read contradicted papist doctrines, but then repented and confessed that he believed the translated Scriptures were true and the papist doctrines were false. For this he was immediately taken before the bishop of London and condemned as an “obstinate heretic.” During the time he was in prison before his execution, he was tortured so severely that he was almost dead already when they took him to the stake at Smithfield. There he declared loudly the complete loathing of popery, and stated a strong belief that his cause was just in God’s sight.

The story of John Tewkesbury is difficult to read and could discourage us if we look at the tragedy of death, but when we look at his faithfulness and the faithfulness of other believers who stood strong through unimaginable events, we should be encouraged to follow Christ as they did. They died for Jesus, for the Truth. The authorities are not ruining God’s plan for these believers but affirming it. Jesus said that the world hated him and will hate those who believe in Him (John 15:18-25). Most of us do not live in a place where we will be killed for our faith, but many people do, and they see Jesus as worth it. Take a moment to pray for them to have strength and be encouraged by the promises of God.

Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. Philippians 3:8

Day 3

Ridley held up his right hand and said, “O heavenly Father, I give unto Thee most hearty thanks, for that Thou has called me to profess Thee, even unto death. I beseech Thee, Lord God, have mercy upon this land of England and deliver her from all her enemies.” ... When Ridley saw the fire flaming up toward him, he cried with a wonderful loud voice, “Lord, Lord, receive my spirit!”

What persecution do you receive for your faith in Christ? Maybe it’s rude looks or remarks for being pro-life. Maybe it’s being disowned by your family of a different religion. Whatever we may suffer for Jesus, it is worth it; He promises it is worth it. The people who persecute us, in whatever way, need the love of God just as much as we do. Jesus calls us to pray for them (Matt. 5:44). When we are hurt, praying for them is probably not our first response, but Jesus, as he was dying on the cross, prayed for those that hung him there (Luke 23:34). It’s a countercultural response to pray for those who make your life harder, but it makes a difference in how we suffer. When we love those who hurt us, we aren’t festering hate in our hearts but caring for their souls. Jesus tells us to be different, and this is one of the best ways to display his love to an onlooking world.

And as they were stoning Stephen, he called out, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” And falling to his knees he cried out with a loud voice, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them.” And when he had said this, he fell asleep. Acts 7:59-60
Day 4

At the place of burning, Thomas Cranmer knelt and prayed, then arose and removed his clothing to his undergarments, and stood quietly while an iron chain was tied around him and the stake. Kindling was laid around him and over those the faggots. Two friars who had been of those who had first convinced him to recant, tried to get him to do so again, but he was now steadfast and immovable in his faith in Christ and His Word. So they set fire to the wood.

Jesus did not fight back physically or verbally as he was beaten, scorned, and spit on. He did not resist the cross though it was in his power to remove himself from it. He willingly submitted to the will of the Father and knew that salvation for mankind was only possible through his sacrifice. Likewise, Cranmer submitted to the will of God and did not fight back. He accepted his lot and held tight to his God. Death by fire would not overpower his faith because he knew what was waiting on the other side: paradise with Jesus. When we look to eternity, this temporary life loses its weight. Nothing in this world can separate us from the love of God or from the eternity promised to those who live for Him (Rom. 8:31-39). There is pain and trial in this world for everyone, but we can look forward in hope to our eternal future that is far better than anything we can imagine.

Day 5

“I was then taken to a house and laid in a bed, with as weary and painful bones as ever had patient Job. I thank my Lord God for the rest. The Lord Chancellor then sent me word that if I would give up my opinion I would want nothing, but if I would not I would immediately be sent to Newgate, and soon be burned. I sent him word again that I would rather die than break my faith.” Anne Askew

Stories like this happen even now. There are many countries (such as China, Somalia, and Uzbekistan) where Christianity is illegal and people physically, socially, and psychologically suffer for their faith in Jesus. Some countries are more dangerous than others, but the work of the Lord is not hindered because of these conditions. The Church thrives under persecution and we can see that throughout history. Similarly, our faith deepens and widens when it is tested. Our roots in Christ sink deeper into the foundation of Truth when the winds and waves of life hit us. We don’t need to fear the world or fear man because nothing can separate us from the love of God (Rom. 8:38-39). Our eternal future is secure in Christ despite what the world may bring. Don’t grow weary in doing good for the Kingdom of God, but know that there is eternal reward in heaven for His children.

“For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. Romans 8:18

... and [God] will deliver us out of your hand, O king. But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up. Daniel 3:18
When they came within two miles of Hadley, Dr. Taylor asked if he could get off his horse, and when permission was given, he leaped down and danced around in great joy. “Why, master doctor,” the sheriff said, “what are you doing, are you all right?” Dr. Taylor answered, “Well, God be praised, good master sheriff, never better, for now I know I am almost home. I haven’t more than a few steps to go over, and I am right in my Father’s house. But, master sheriff, are we going through Hadley?” “Yes,” said the sheriff, “you shall go through Hadley.” Dr. Taylor said, “O Lord! I thank Thee that once more before I die I shall see my flock, whom Thou, Lord, know that I have most heartily loved and truly taught. Lord! Bless them, and keep them steadfast in Thy Word and Truth.”

We can see God’s graces to us more clearly when circumstances are not ideal. When we are brought to the end of ourselves, we see God working it out for us and that should bring great joy. He is all powerful even when we are weak. He is orchestrating our lives even through the hard things. When we encounter something difficult, we know the Lord is working in us to strengthen our faith in Him. We can trust his promise that he does all things for our good and rejoice (Rom. 8:28). Through the toughest of times, we can see the little gifts God gives us amidst the struggle, and we can have joy that we are not alone and will never have to be.

Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. James 1:2-4

Several times, Bonner, bishop of London, and others, visited Hooper and tried to persuade him to relent and become a member of their anti-Christian church. They used every means they could devise: twisting the Scriptures and ancient writings to wrong meanings, according to their usual ways; outward gentleness and friendship; many great offers of worldly goods and properties; strong threats; but nothing they said or did moved Hooper from his steadfast faith in Christ and the truth of God’s Word.

Bonner stood strong through the temptations to abandon his faith. Now as it was then, the world is tempting. From the apple that caused the fall of humanity to the little sin that you can’t seem to get rid of, temptations are real. However, the power of God is stronger than any sin or temptation. He defeated sin and death on the Cross for us and He is fighting for us to choose him and not sin. In our weakness we give in to sin, but that does not negate God’s power. It shows us our need for Him. Our inability to live a perfect life sends us to the Cross to find reconciliation and hope. The gain of Christ is worth any loss in this world. He is worth giving up worldly pleasures. He is worth being ridiculed for, and he is worth dying for. Staying strong in faith is challenging but completely and totally worth it as seen through martyr stories like Bonner’s.

Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain. 1 Corinthians 15:58
Richard Sibbes

Richard Sibbes, born in 1577 in Suffolk, England, became fascinated with literature at an early age. His father, a wheelwright, tried to dissuade him from books and encourage wheelwrighting, but Sibbes did not budge. He eventually attended St. John’s College, Cambridge for his undergraduate degree, fellowship, and Master of Arts. It was only after this education that he became a believer under the preaching of Paul Baynes at the Church of St. Andrews in Cambridge.

Within six years of becoming a Christian, Richard Sibbes became a college pastor for Cambridge and earned his second Bachelor’s degree, this time in biblical studies. He frequently taught and preached at Cambridge, the Holy Trinity Church in Cambridge, and Gray’s Inn, a large Inn for members of the Court. In 1626, he took over St. Catharine’s College, Cambridge and earned his Doctor of Divinity degree, also from Cambridge. King Charles I offered Sibbes authority over Holy Trinity Church, and he accepted another pastoral role.

Sibbes’ life is marked by his intellectual exposition of the Bible and his passion for making the Truth known to others. He never married, but had very meaningful friendships that encouraged him daily to do the work of the Lord. His words have moved many famous pastors and authors, namely John Cotton, Hugh Peters, Thomas Goodwin, and William Strong.

“The Bruised Reed,” one of his most famous works, is based off of Isaiah 42:3, “A bruised reed he will not break, and a faintly burning wick he will not quench; he will faithfully bring forth justice,” speaking of Jesus. The work discusses the tenderness of our Savior, and the love he has for those who have been called into his grace. Sibbes encourages the sinner to look up at Jesus rather than down at himself, and he comforts the downhearted with truths from Scripture.

What a support to our faith this is, that God the Father, the party offended by our sins, is so well pleased with the work of redemption! And what a comfort this is, that seeing God’s love rests on Christ as well pleased in him, we may conclude that he is well-pleased with us if we are in Christ! . . . Consider his very name Jesus, a Savior, which was given to him by God himself. Consider that his office corresponds to his name, which is that he should “bind up the broken hearted” (Isa. 61:1). At his baptism the Holy Ghost rested on him in the shape of a dove, to show that he should be dove-like, a gentle mediator.

The Father sent his Son to die for our sins, and the Holy Spirit secures us until we get to Heaven. They work together in perfect unity to bring about the salvation of sinners. Our sin offends our Father in heaven. Christ paid for our past, present, and future sins on the cross, making us right with the Father. We are given the Holy Spirit who is our Counselor and Comforter. Because of these things, we are given citizenship in heaven and are adopted by the Father as children. Christ’s work doesn’t begin and end at the Cross, but began before time existed and continues in and through us via the Holy Spirit. God’s work is continually being accomplished, but what Christ accomplished through his life, death, and resurrection is complete. Our redemption is complete.

For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. 2 Corinthians 5:21
Day 2

Let this support us when we feel ourselves are bruised. Christ’s way is first to wound, and then to heal. No sound, whole soul will ever enter into heaven. When in temptation, think “Christ was tempted for me; my graces and comforts will be according to my trials. If Christ is so merciful as not to break me, then I will not break myself by despair, nor will I yield myself to the roaring lion, Satan, to break me in pieces.”

Seeing our sin hurts, but praise God we are able to see it. Praise God that when we are burdened by our sin we can look to Christ who has saved us. The temptations will never go away. They may change, but they will never leave. While we are on this earth, we will always be faced with sin. We live in a sinful world and are sinful people, even as believers. When you are broken by your sin, praise God for the Holy Spirit dwelling within you, but resist the urge to condemn yourself. Christ died to save us from our sin, not leave us in despair. His grace is enough to cover our trials and temptations, but we have to lean on him, find our hope and rest in him, and trust him. If the perfect God of heaven didn’t condemn us but saved us, we should not condemn ourselves but look to Christ, the author of our salvation.

For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Hebrews 4:15

Day 3

Let us look at our imperfect beginning only to encourage further striving toward perfection, and to keep us in a low opinion of ourselves. Otherwise, in case of discouragement, we must consider ourselves as Christ does, who looks on us as those he intends to make fit for himself. Christ values us by what we shall be, and by what we are elect to. We call a little plant a tree because it is growing up to be so.

When we dwell on our imperfection to the point of discouragement, we miss the truth that Christ is making us perfect. If we were already perfect, there would have been no work for him, but we are sinners in need of a savior. Our worth is not found in how good or bad we are, but we are given worth from God out of love. We are all a work in progress, and we can rejoice because we are indeed IN PROGRESS. If we trust in Christ, we are actively moving closer to him until we are finally with him in heaven. He is working in us to bring us closer to himself because he loves us. When you get discouraged about life, think of what Jesus has done for you and what he is doing in you. God will never stop loving you because of something you do because he didn’t start loving you because of something you did. He loves you simply because he loves you, and will continue to love you by drawing you to himself.

I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. Galatians 2:20
Day 4

We see how our Savior Christ bore with Thomas in his doubting (John 20:27), and with the two disciples that went to Emmaus, who wavered as to whether he came to redeem Israel or not (Luke 24:21). He did not quench that little light in Peter which was smothered: Peter denied him, but he did not deny Peter (Luke 22:61). God often allows questions to arise to test our love, and to exercise our abilities. Nothing is so certain, as what is certain after having doubts. Shaking settles, and roots us. In a contentious age, it is a wise thing to be a Christian, and to know what to pitch our souls upon.

It is normal to have doubts about God. It is normal to question, debate, and search. However, we have a foundation that we can hold on to. The work of our salvation is secure even if we are not sure. Our doubting doesn't minimize the truth of the Gospel or the work of Jesus in us. God bears with us as we struggle with faith and that is very reassuring. He doesn't love us less when we doubt; he is patient and always will be. Then, when the doubts are answered or quieted, our faith is stronger and more sure. Our foundation doesn't change, but we can see it more clearly. Pray for a strengthening of faith in those times and do not be discouraged. He gives us the grace we need to continue in our walk with him. He won't give up on us and will always love us.

Therefore thus says the Lord God, “Behold, I am the one who has laid as a foundation in Zion, a stone, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone, of a sure foundation: ‘Whoever believes will not be in haste.’ Isaiah 28:16

Day 5

Some are loath to do good because they feel their hearts rebelling, and their duties turn out badly. We should not avoid good actions because of the infirmities which attend them. Christ looks more at the good in them which he means to cherish, than he does at all the ill in them which he means to abolish . . . No discouragements come from the Father, for he has bound himself in covenant to pity us, just as the father pities his children (Psa. 103:23), and to accept us, just as a father accepts our weak endeavors. When we lack strength of duty, he allows us to make up in his gracious indulgence.

We don't limit God's ability with our limitations, and we can't stifle his plan. Our weaknesses do not define God's power or limit his use of us. He often uses the weak to do the impossible and show his love and power. We don't need to shrink back from what God calls us to do though we feel unqualified because the truth is that you will likely always feel unqualified. God uses us when we feel inadequate to show that He is capable. Don't avoid doing good because you don't feel like you are good; do good and fight that sin with the power of Jesus. He has defeated all sinful power to free us from the bondage of sin and give us life eternally so that we can live for him. He knows your weaknesses and loves you and will use you for his glory nonetheless.

Therefore thus says the Lord God, “Behold, I am the one who has laid as a foundation in Zion, a stone, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone, of a sure foundation: ‘Whoever believes will not be in haste.’ Isaiah 28:16
Day 6

Sometimes a Christian has such confused thoughts that he can only cry out like a child, “O Father,” not able to express what he needs; he is like Moses at the Red Sea (Ex 14:15). These stirrings of our spirit touch the heart of God and melt them into compassion towards us when they come from the Spirit of adoption, and from striving to be better.

God hears and cares about us. Our thoughts may be jumbled and our words unclear, but when we cry to God, he hears us. We are his children, adopted by him through the blood of Christ. He is our father who gives good gifts and takes care of us. He has compassion when we are weak. Christ not only achieved for us salvation, but gained for us adoption. We are co-heirs with Christ of the Kingdom of Heaven. We have been adopted into God’s family with the full rights of a child, and God loves us as His children. Jesus paid the price for our adoption when he died for us on the cross, and it is eternally secure. The Father rejoices when we come to him and has given us full access to himself through prayer. What a great God and Father we have through Jesus!

See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. 1 John 3:1

Day 7

Suffering brings discouragement because of our impatience. “Alas!” we lament, “I shall never get through such a trial.” But if God brings us into the trial, he will be with us in the trial, and at length he will bring us out of it, more refined. Weaknesses do not break our covenant with God. If Christ were not merciful towards our weaknesses, he would not have a people to serve him.

There is a light at the end of the tunnel. Don’t give in to discouragement but rather be patient as you wait for your circumstances to change. God is patient with us even when we are not patient with him, ourselves, or our circumstances. God is concerned about our hearts and allows us to face trials to give us steadfast faith (James 1:1-2). This suffering and weakness doesn’t distort God’s love for us because he bears with us through all things (1 Cor. 13). He has compassion on us, knowing that we are often fragile and easily discouraged. If God has patience with us, we should have patience with ourselves and others. Patience lets us rejoice in trials knowing that God promises to be with us, so don’t be discouraged. Being patient with others helps us love them instead of getting frustrated. We can trust that God knows what we need when we need it, so we can be patient as we wait for his perfect timing to unveil.

Yet he, being compassionate, averted their iniquity and did not destroy them; he restrained his anger often and did not stir up all his wrath. He remembered that they were but flesh, a wind that passes and comes not again.

Psalm 78:38-39
Thomas Brooks was born in 1608, but there is not much known of upbringing. The majority of his history begins after leaving Emmanuel College in Cambridge without his degree because of his Puritan, or non-conformist, beliefs. Brooks became ordained as a preacher and chaplain in 1640. He served at sea for many years in the parliamentary fleet before becoming a minister at the church of St. Thomas the Apostle in London, where he often was called to preach to parliament. The Act of Uniformity in 1662 caused him to lose his job, but he continued to preach in London with little persecution. He stayed with his congregation unlike many other pastors affected by the Act.

He was a faithful pastor and an outstanding communicator. His works are filled with Christ-centered application for the Christian life. Precious Remedies Against Satan's Devices discusses the subtle ways Satan seeks to deter us from Jesus. The short work offers remedies to twelve of Satan's devices, along with eight devices specific to deterring believers from using the grace provided through Christ.

Brooks writes in his preface that “The strange opposition that I met with from Satan, in the study of the following discourse, hath put an edge upon my spirit, knowing that Satan strives mightily to keep these things from seeing the light that tend eminently to shake and break his kingdom of darkness, and to lift up the kingdom and glory of the Lord Jesus Christ, in the souls and lives of the children of men.” Brooks’ work exposes ways Satan tries to keep the children of God from Him, ways that Satan wishes to keep concealed. Brooks’ “remedies” are practical and applicable to believers of all ages and walks of life. His work was helpful in his day and is helpful in today’s age as well. Satan will always be seeking to draw us from God, but Believers have been equipped with the Holy Spirit and grace to cling to Him through trials and temptations.

Satan loves to sail with the wind, and to suit men’s temptations to their conditions and inclination. If they be in prosperity, he will tempt them to deny God (Proverbs 30:9); if they be in adversity, he will tempt them to distrust God; if their knowledge be weak, he will tempt them to have low thoughts of God; if their conscience be tender, he will tempt to scrupulosity; if large to carnal security; if bold-spirited, he will tempt to presumption; if timorous, to desperation; if flexible to inconstancy; if stiff, to impenitency.

The enemy will diligently try to keep us from God. He uses specific means for each of us to drive us away from God and towards ourselves and sin. He is crafty, the “prince of lies,” and full of deceit. His whole aim is to make little of God and pull people away from Jesus. When our guard is down, we are prime targets for the enemy’s schemes, so we must be attentive to God and ourselves. We can only fight the temptations that Satan throws our way by leaning on the Holy Spirit and crying out to Jesus to deliver us. Like Jesus when he was tempted, we can turn to the Word of God for refuge and words of encouragement. We do not serve a God who is unfamiliar with our trials, temptations, and suffering. He is very aware of all that we go through, and his love for his children enables us to deny sin and rely on Him.

For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Hebrews 4:15
It is my work as a Christian, but much more as I am a Watchman, to do my best to discover the fullness of Christ, the emptiness of the creature, and the snares of the great deceiver.

As Christians, we have been given unrestricted access to God. We have the ability to seek after God through prayer and reading. But often, though we have that ability and privilege, we let it go unused. We do not seek “to discover the fullness of Christ” because we are content with our lives. In these cases, Satan, the great deceiver, is winning in keeping us from Jesus. When we stop seeking to know more about God, the enemy is succeeding in deceiving us in trusting in ourselves or in our sin. When we think that we are content without God, we are not truly content. Our desire for sin will never be fulfilled, and we will never find eternal satisfaction in worldly pleasures. Seeking to discover the fullness of Christ through reading and prayer keeps us from relying on our empty selves and falling into the traps of the enemy. It also brings unsurmountable joy to our souls that carries over into the life to come.

One thing have I asked of the LORD, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD and to inquire in his temple. Psalm 27:4
Day 4

Remember, it is not hasty reading—but serious meditating upon holy and heavenly truths, that make them prove sweet and profitable to the soul. . . It is not he who reads most—but he who meditates most, who will prove the choicest, sweetest, wisest and strongest Christian.

Sometimes we forget that reading the Bible is not just a thing good Christians do. We forget that it is not just a checklist to complete every day. It is not just a reading plan to complete to feel accomplished. People can read the Bible, memorize it even, and not know Jesus as their Lord and Savior. Knowing about God does not mean the same as Knowing God. Do you know God or do you know about God? Are you reading the Bible to exalt Jesus or cross it off a to-do list? We must constantly assess our heart’s intentions as we seek the Lord.

Meditating on the Word, no matter how small the passage, is profitable to the soul. Seeking to dwell on the holy and heavenly truths provided in the Bible is sweet and soothing to us. Slow down to meditate on the Scriptures and don’t rush through such a thick, beautiful text.

For the word of God [is] quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. Hebrews 4:12

Day 5

Judas called Christ Lord, Lord; and yet betrayed him, and has gone to his place. Ah! How many Judases have we in these days, that kiss Christ, and yet betray Christ; that in their words profess him—but in their works deny him; that bow their knee to him, and yet in their hearts despise him; that call him Jesus, and yet will not obey him for their Lord.

Judas walked with Jesus for three years, saw the miracles, and listened to the teachings, yet betrayed him to his death. He chose his sin over Jesus. He heard first hand the Scriptures explained by God himself, but he did not believe the truths nor did he act on them. Many people claim Christ and deny him with their actions. One cannot claim to be a Christian, claiming to be someone who trusts in Jesus for the payment of their sins, and live in habitual sin. God and sin cannot mingle together in our hearts. We must choose one or the other, not a little of both. We should choose God over our sin. We should seek to obey the Lord out of love. This is by no means easy, but it is worth it. This life, a true Christian life, is full of joy and freedom, so rejoice in this truth. Rejoice that we are not bound to sin like Judas. Rejoice that Jesus died for us so that we could be made new, given a heart of flesh, and freed from sin.

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation. . . 2 Corinthians 5:17-18
Satan has snares for the wise and snares for the simple; snares for hypocrites, and snares for the upright; snares for generous souls, and snares for timorous souls; snares for the rich, and snares for the poor; snares for the aged, and snares for you. Happy are those souls that are not taken and held in the snares that he has laid!

Sin is sneaky. It attacks everyone no matter who they are or what they do. Sin affects the rich, the poor, the generous, the hypocrites - everyone, crafting different schemes for different people. As God is seen everywhere, so is sin. However, we should not be discouraged by that truth. Yes, it is sad that sin is so rampant in our world. But, Jesus has defeated sin, so we are free. He has lived the perfect life, without sin, that we could never live. He did that for us. He withstood the wrath of God that we deserve out of love to save us from the sin that binds us. His perfect life and death save us from sin. Even more so, his resurrection defeated the punishment for sin - death. He defeated death and secured a debt free eternity for us. He has conquered the grave, leaving us hope for the life to come. Though sin seeks to capture our souls, if we are found in Christ by trusting in his sacrifice, we are eternally saved. We are eternally secured with a life of hope and love.

The wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. Romans 6:23

Sin so bewitches the soul, that it makes the soul call evil good, and good evil; bitter sweet and sweet bitter, light darkness and darkness light; and a soul thus bewitched with sin will stand it out to the death, at the sword’s point with God . . .

Sin twists, distorts, and contorts our vision of reality. It fogs our view of ourselves, others, and God. It convinces us of lies that we know better than God or that sin will be fulfilling. Sin makes God small and self big. It exults worldly, temporary pleasures and minimizes the rewards for obedience. The more sin we let into our lives, the less we can see God, His truths, and His love. As we let temptation win, the lies of the enemy invade our heart, mind, and soul. We have the Holy Spirit to prevent this. The Holy Spirit reminds us of the truths of the Gospel. He reminds us of the goodness of God and wickedness of sin. He reminds us of the freedom only found in Christ. The Holy Spirit helps us see sin for what it is and God for who He is. Though the enemy wants us to fall away, we have the power of Christ that has defeated sin within us. We are not abandoned to sin but continually protected by God.

Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. Romans 8:34
John Owen

Owen was steeped in academia and religion from an early age. Being born in Stadham, England in 1616 to Puritan parents, he was taught Puritan beliefs as he aged. He attended Oxford for both his bachelor's and master's degree, but left Oxford when he was required to sign a statement of faith from Archbishop Laud. Owen adhered to the Puritan doctrine, not accepting the Catholic or Anglican theology. When he left Oxford he became a tutor, which allowed Owen many hours of study. He produced his first work in 1643, *A Display of Arminianism*, which critiques the Arminian theology using Calvin’s. This work exposites many aspects of Calvin’s theology which were controversial to the Arminians. This work focuses on predestination, original sin, human work in salvation, atonement, and irresistible grace - the five concepts of TULIP created by the Synod of Dort in 1616.

In his twenties, Owen began preaching, but he did not forfeit his gift in writing. He gained considerable press for his sermons and writing, so much so that he was asked to preach in front of Parliament. Oliver Cromwell was impressed and asked Owen to accompany him to Ireland with 12,000 Puritan soldiers. In Ireland, Owen reformed Trinity College and argued for peace from England. For his compassion towards the Irish, he was appointed the official preacher of Ireland. Owen eventually became dean of Christ Church College, Oxford. He promoted Reformed Theology through his lectures, sermons, and college reforms. He was fired from Oxford for holding Reformed meetings in his home, but escaped prison because of his political status. He retired preaching at an Independent church, assisting John Bunyan and Robert Asty.

Though Owen had considerable success as a writer and preacher, he wished he was more like John Bunyan, who was a master at preaching and speaking simply. Bunyan bore speedier fruit, but the labor of Owen was by no means in vain. His words continue to encourage and admonish Christians today.

We receive mortification as a part of the blessings we receive in Christ. All the blessings that we have in Christ are given to us by the Spirit of Christ. Without Christ we can do nothing. All the blessings and graces we experience in Him at the beginning, and our growth in Him, are sent by the Spirit.

Christ gives us many blessings, but one of the greatest is the power to extinguish our sins. Through his grace, mercy, and love he gives us his spirit to help us abstain from sin. The Holy Spirit is referred to as our ‘helper’ and ‘comforter’ in the Bible, and he is just that (John 14). The Holy Spirit helps us fight sin and comforts us by reminding us of the truth of the Gospel. The Holy Spirit dwells within believers for that very purpose. Apart from faith in Jesus and the indwelling Spirit, we cannot fight sin, make ourselves righteous, or earn salvation. It is only through Jesus and his Spirit that we can bear the fruit of repentance by shedding away sin bit by bit. It is not easy, but it is worth it. It takes time and patience to mortify the sin within us, but Christ assures us that it will happen. Christ’s sacrifice enables us to come boldly before his throne for help with sin, and he sends that help through the Holy Spirit.

* I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. John 15:5
Day 2

We need to continue to attack our lusts daily with the spiritual weapons that are most detrimental to it. This is the key to warfare. Even when we think that a lust is dead because it is quiet, we must labour to give it new wounds and new blows every day.

Fighting sin is a daily task. There is constant warfare occurring in our souls between the flesh and the spirit. It is ongoing and will be until we join Christ in Heaven. What do we use to fight? The Word of God and the Holy Spirit. When Jesus was tempted by Satan, he used Scripture to fight Satan’s offers. Three times he was tempted and three times he used Scripture. The Bible is our defense against sin. The Words of God penetrate our hearts and remind us of the goodness of God, turning us to him instead of sin. The Holy Spirit reminds us of God’s word and helps us understand and apply it to fight the sin that threatens our soul. It takes daily perseverance and diligence with the help of the Holy Spirit to kill sin.

Galatians 5:16-17

Day 3

The natural man is in a state of enmity with God and his law. In this state it is impossible to please Him. Man is only delivered from this condition by the Spirit of Christ... Our Union with Christ and the power of the Spirit enable us to mortify sin. All attempts at mortification without a true interest in Christ are vain!

Without God softening and giving life to our dead hearts, we would be lost in sin. Because of our natural state, we would not even be able to see that we are sinners in need of a Savior. Those outside of Christ are enemies of God, as we all once were. God cannot be with sin because of his infinite holiness, but Jesus made a way for sinners to come to God. His righteous blood covers our past, present, and future sins, allowing us to come before a holy God. It is only through Jesus that we can be made right with God. Trying to purify ourselves leads to self-condemnation because of the inability to be perfect. We can never make ourselves sinless. Trust in Jesus’s sacrifice on your behalf, for your sins. He is the only way to God.

John 14:6

Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”
Day 4

He who truly and thoroughly seeks to mortify any disquieting lust, must be equally diligent in all parts of obedience. We must see that every lust and every omission of duty is a burden to God. If we do not seek to obey in every area of our lives, our soul becomes weak.

Killing one sin, and focusing on that one, does not prevent all other sin from creeping up on our souls. We cannot deny the flesh in one area and indulge in it in another. Pretend you have a garden sectioned off into nine squares. Good gardeners pluck weeds from the whole garden regularly. You wouldn’t pluck weeds from only one section because the other eight would become unruly and infested. This makes your whole garden look uncared for, and the weeds will keep creeping into the one clean section until the other eight are equally taken care of. Our soul works the same way. If we only focus on fighting one area of disobedience, but willingly disobey in other areas, our whole soul is wrecked with disobedience. Our clean area gets harder and harder to clean as sin closes in around it. We must seek to obey God in all areas of our life, not just in the easy areas.

Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world. And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever. 1 John 2:15-17

Day 5

A person who seeks peace on any account and is content to live away from the love of God in this life, so long as it does not mean a final separation, shows that his love for sin exceeds his love for God.

Do you have ‘fire insurance’ or do you have a relationship with God? Are you relying on your good deeds to outweigh your mistakes, or are you trusting in Jesus to make you right with God? Are you living a good life to avoid hell, or are you seeking obedience to dwell with God for eternity? What are your motives? “Fire insurance” doesn’t work without a relationship with God. Our good deeds can never outweigh our mistakes that is why Jesus came. There are many more blessings to salvation than just avoiding Hell. Living for God and not ourselves is the most fulfilling and satisfying life to live. Loving God above all else is eternally gratifying. The peace, joy, love, and hope that comes with God in this life is everlasting and eternal. Denying sin is worth it. Having a deep relationship with God is worth it. Dwelling with God now and for eternity is completely worth it all.

And now, little children, abide in him, so that when he appears we may have confidence and not shrink from him in shame at his coming. 29 If you know that he is righteous, you may be sure that everyone who practices righteousness has been born of him. 1 John 2:28-29
Day 6

We should love and consider all the benefits we have under the gospel. As we cherish our redemption, justification and the like, certainly this will aggravate the guilt of the corruptions of our hearts.

When we dwell on the goodness of Jesus, we see our shortcomings. We see the greed that lies within. We see the impurity of our lives is shown more clearly. As Christians, we should long to be made more like Jesus. This only happens when sin is realized and fought against. The only way to see sin is to expose it to the light, the light of Christ’s righteousness. Dwelling on the goodness of Jesus causes us to cherish him more deeply, love him more dearly, and see him more clearly. These naturally draw us closer to him and away from sin. The closer we are to Christ, the more we seek to kill our sin that lies within. We see our brokenness so much clearer when compared to Jesus. This should cause us to run to him, clinging to him for the righteousness he won for us on the Cross.

Walk as children of light (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord. Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. For it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret. But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible, for anything that becomes visible is light. Ephesians 5:8-14

Day 7

Let a man seek as he will for healing and peace, let him go to the true Physician, let him seek in the right way and let him quiet his heart in the promises of the covenant. Yet when peace is spoken, if it is not attended with hatred and abhorrence of the sin which caused the wound and was the reason for all the trouble, then this is not God’s peace, but a peace of our own making.

When the peace within our souls does not stir us to kill the sin that caused the chaos, it is not from God but ourselves. True peace comes from Jesus, “the true Physician.” It comes from trusting the covenant where Jesus’s blood atones for our sin, making us right before a holy God. God-given peace comes from knowing that we are not left to make ourselves holy, but that through Jesus’s sacrifice we are made holy for eternity and being made holy in the present. Peace that justifies sin, justifies living for ourselves, is from sin and ourselves. Justifying our sin for ourselves means nothing in the scope of eternity. Only Christ’s justification matters. Where do you find your peace? Do you find peace in knowing that you are made right with God because of Jesus’s perfect sacrifice that covers all of your failures? Or, do you find peace in satisfying your desires as approved by the world? God’s peace surpasses all understanding, and it is worth forfeiting any worldly pleasure.

And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. . . What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you. Ephesians 4:4-9
John Bunyan

John Bunyan (1628-1688) was born in Bedford, England to a family of tinkers. During his time, tinkers were the lowest class of people, which meant that his family was very poor and lowly educated. Bunyan continued his family trade of tinkering until he took up preaching. When he married, he confesses in his autobiography that he was disrespectful of religion and dwelt in sin. He married a Christian woman who read to him The Plain Man’s Pathway to Heaven by Arthur Dent and The Practice of Piety by Lewis Bayly, and this transformed his life. He began to attend church and be attentive to his sin. His first wife died, leaving him with four children, one of whom was blind. He remarried several years later and had two more children. It was after his first wife died that he joined the “independent” Protestant congregation. He became a deacon and quickly began preaching and teaching his local congregation. Because of his ties with the Reformed Protestant church, he was not favored by the Anglican Church of England. In fact, many were being executed for doing no more than Bunyan was doing. The government gave him a choice: he could either stop preaching or go to prison. He was imprisoned twice because of his refusal to stop preaching, and during his imprisonment he wrote his most famous work, The Pilgrim’s Progress.

Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners is Bunyan’s spiritual autobiography, tracking his life before and after he began trusting in Christ. He writes of his struggles as a Christian man, struggles with sin, family, and self-condemnation. Readers can see his seasons of doubt and his seasons of fruit. Bunyan constantly labored over the scriptures, seeking to know God better and find peace in His words. His life was not easy, with a deaf child, imprisonment, and struggles with sin, but his writings give hope and encouragement to those suffering in a variety of ways. He is transparent and God-centered through his suffering, giving fellow Christians a great example to follow.

In this manner I continued for about a year. All the time our neighbors took me to be a very godly man, a new and religious man, and marveled much to see such great and famous alteration in my life and actions. Indeed so it was, though I did not know Christ, grace, faith, or hope. As I have well since seen, has I then died my state would have been most fearful.

Bunyan was visibly transforming his life. He was fighting sin on his own, but he says himself that he did not know Jesus. We can try to cleanse ourselves of sin. We can try to live moral lives and do no wrong. However, doing that outside of Christ doesn’t work. Cleaning ourselves up will never make us right with God. No matter how much we feel that we have improved, we are not good enough to come before a holy God. That is why we have Jesus. Jesus makes us right with God because we can never do it by ourselves. When we trust in works, we disregard what Christ has done for us. If we are trusting in works, we are not trusting in Christ. To the world, we may seem good, moral, and even godly, but outside of Christ it is all in vain. Good works will never gain us salvation, ever. Praise God for making salvation through faith alone.

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. Ephesians 2:8-9
Day 2

If I had a whole world, it would have all gone ten thousand times over for this, that my soul might have been in a converted state. How lovely now was everyone in my eyes who I thought to be a converted man or woman.

True believing, converted children of God should desire to be with fellow believers. Lives that are found in Christ are different from the lives found in the world. Lives found in Christ echo the life of Christ, but lives that are grounded in the world are unsatisfied and ever seeking. As Christ loved, we should love. As Christ showed patience, we should show patience. As Christ was joyfully living for God’s glory, so should we. When our lives echo Jesus’s, we find joy in dwelling with fellow believers. Like Bunyan, we see each other’s salvation as lovely and beautiful, constantly reminded of the love and mercy the Lord shows to those who believe. We should seek to live like Jesus and rejoice in our salvation found in Him. No part of the world can compare to the glorious salvation and life found through Jesus’s life, death, and resurrection.

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. 2 Corinthians 5:17-19

Day 3

He would bid us take special heed not to take any truth upon faith, from this source or that, or any other man or men, but rather we should cry mightily to God that He would convince us of the reality thereof and establish us therein by his own Spirit in the Holy Word.

Christianity is not a self-help religion. It is not a place to better yourself for the sake of your glory. Christianity is trusting that Christ has atoned for your sins. It is choosing God over sin. Christianity and salvation are not solely about saving you from the wrath of God, but it is about exalting a good God because of His love, grace, mercy, and faithfulness. The world will throw anything our way to deter us from God and towards ourselves or others. The only truth that we should take upon faith is the truth of Jesus Christ. We can hold onto the Bible, the Word of God, and should turn to Him to help us understand it. Turning outside of God to solve life’s problems does not fix the root of any issue. God’s word is stable. It is solid and will hold through fire and ice. Nothing else is needed.

For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. Hebrews 4:12
As I said, the guilt did help me much. Still, as that would come upon me, the blood of Christ did take it again and again, and that so sweetly, according to the Scriptures. Oh, friends, cry to God to reveal Jesus Christ unto you; there is no one who teaches like Him.

Bunyan found nothing or no one as satisfying as Christ. Christ takes away guilt and shame, replacing them with security and love. It is easy to see our downfalls; we are often our worst critic, but Jesus seeks to liberate us from the guilt, shame, and brokenness that comes from imperfection. He is perfection, lived perfection, and achieved perfection for us. Bunyan encourages us to cry out to God for faith is Jesus. When you doubt yourself, when you struggle with insecurities, when you condemn yourself, turn to Jesus, crying out to him. He is able to free you from all sin because of his sacrifice on the cross. He achieved what we could never accomplish. He has saved us from sin and death, giving us life eternally.

For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. John 3:17

I had my sin and the blood of Christ thus represented to me: that my sin, when compared to the blood of Christ, was no more to it than this little clod or stone before me is to this vast and wide field that here I see.

Nothing can separate us from the love of God when we are found in Christ. Our sin that we struggle with daily is no match for the power of Jesus Christ. The grace of Jesus is a mighty ocean that washes away our iniquity and clears our transgressions. How good it is to know that God will never give up on us! There is no sin so great that He will turn us away. No sin is unforgivable for God. He wants nothing more than to know us and have a relationship with us, and sin cripples that relationship. His love outweighs your transgressions tenfold, so we are made clean. Paul, a persecutor of Christians, was not outside of God’s reach, and neither are we. We are forgiven if we trust in the work of Christ on our behalf. We are washed clean for everything we have done and everything we will do.

For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Romans 8:39
Day 6

Oh, what love, what care, what kindness and mercy did I now see mixing itself with the most severe and dreadful of all God’s ways to His people. He would let David, Hezekiah, Solomon, Peter, and others fall, but He would not let them fall into the sin unpardonable, nor into hell for sin.

Though we may be found in Christ, that doesn’t make us less human. We still sin. We still choose ourselves over God. Why does God let that happen? That his glory, mercy, and grace would be displayed. We cannot live God-pleasing lives outside of Him, without the Holy Spirit. To fight against the life-stealing world, we must turn to the Lord and rely on His power to fight sin, not our own. It is sin that convinces us we can live good lives without God’s help. God may let us fall so that he can pick us up, and for those who trust in Jesus, he promises to always pick us up. He promises not to let us ruin our salvation. Believers are kept, by God, in safety for eternity. “What love, what care, and what kindness and mercy” our God gives to us, a fallen people, through Jesus Christ.

Day 7

So I concluded a little grace, a little love, a little of the true fear of God, is better than all gifts.

Think of the best gift someone could give you, the best birthday or Christmas present you can imagine. You undoubtedly would be thankful to the gifter. The gift would make you feel loved and appreciated. How much greater does the gift of salvation sound, eternal love and grace? These are much better than any worldly gift because they are eternal, everlasting, never failing. These are so good that even a little amount of them surpasses all worldly pleasures or gifts. A little of the best cake is better than a whole mediocre cake. Eternal gifts of love, grace, salvation, and fear of the Lord are far greater than temporary pleasures that the world offers. This world is temporary, fading away, as are we, but the life everlasting that Jesus won for us on the cross is eternally satisfying. It is the greatest gift of all.

I will extol you, my God and King, and bless your name forever and ever. Every day I will bless you and praise your name forever and ever. Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised, and his greatness is unsearchable. One generation shall commend your works to another, and shall declare your mighty acts. On the glorious splendor of your majesty, and on your wondrous works, I will meditate. Psalm 145:1-5

Jude 1:24

Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.
John Flavel

Born in 1628 in Bromsgrove, Worcestershire, John Flavel was raised in a Christian family. John was educated on the Christian life by his father, a Christian martyr, and attended University College, Oxford for his other studies. Flavel quickly became ordained as a minister and settled in Diptford, England to use his God-given gifts for ministry. Shortly after settling, he was offered to minister in Dartmouth, a busy seaport, and he took the position readily. In less than ten years, he was removed from the pulpit for nonconformity because of his Puritan teachings.

Flavel, determined to teach the Bible, would gather people in the woods or even wear disguises to teach his congregation. The Five Mile Act went into effect in 1665, and Flavel moved to Slapton and many in his congregation followed. He still had to preach secretly in the forest. King Charles II issued the Declaration of Indulgence, allowing Nonconformists freedom, and Flavel returned to Dartmouth to preach. The next year the Declaration was revoked and Flavel had to return to secret sermons on rocks, in forests, or in private homes. Eventually Flavel had to flee to London for safety because the authorities were closing in.

Even while in London, soldiers dispersed his congregation and he narrowly escaped imprisonment. He returned once again to Dartmouth and held church services in his home, which was shortly burned to the ground by a mob. In 1687, King James II issued another Indulgence allowing Flavel to teach publically once more. His health rapidly declined, but he still taught until his death in 1691.

His work, “The Mystery of Providence,” calls readers to meditate on the grace and security that the Lord keeps them in throughout all stages of their life. He begins by providing evidence of Providence in the lives of men, then moves readers to meditate on the providence of God. Flavel faced many years of persecution and loss, but he found peace and comfort in trusting the Lord’s Providence.

Crying unto God is an expression that denotes not only prayer, but intense and fervent prayer. To cry is to pray in a holy passion; and such are usually speeding prayers... The encouragements to this resolution are taken from the sovereignty of God... His providences proclaim Him to be a God who hears prayer.

When we are burdened by the weight of life, we can cry out to God with passion. We can pray with fervor, knowing that God hears and answers prayers. He may not always answer in the way we would like, but this does not mean that God loves us any less. In whatever way he answers our prayers, we can still know that he is faithful to give good gifts to his children (Matt. 7:11). He does all things for the good of those who love him (Room. 8:28). Think through all of the answered prayers that the Lord has fulfilled in your life. Isn’t it remarkable? He is such a good God who listens, cares, and acts on the behalf of his people. The mere ability to cry out to him and know he hears gives so much hope to the broken hearted. Jesus’s sacrifice made a way for us to be in relationship with God, and this is one privilege of the relationship: to cry out to him, who is in control of all things and loves us more than we can imagine.

If my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgiveness their sin and heal their land. 2 Chronicles 7:14
It is the duty of the saints, especially in times of straits, to reflect upon the performances of Providence for them in all the states and through all the stages of their lives... For it is certain, no ship at sea keeps more exactly by the compass which directs its course, than providence keeps by that promise which is its cynosure and pole-star.

The Lord is faithful to his promises. We can see that in Scripture and in our own lives. This doesn't mean that everything in this life is good. Bad things happen, but all of the events, trials, and people in our lives have been given to us for a specific reason. All of life is directed on the course of God's promises and providence. God is not a God of chance, but a God of precision and perfection. Whatever you have, have had, or will have in this life has been planned since before you were born. Everything happens out of love for you and your soul. It may be hard to see when life seems like a never ending mountain, but we can trust that God does things for our good and His glory. Everything is thought through. Everything is planned in your life and on God's planned course. We can trust His plan now and forever.

Psalm 77:11-12

I will remember the deeds of the Lord; yes, I will remember your wonders of old.
I will ponder all your work, and meditate on your mighty deeds.

Thus in the first planting of Christianity in the world, by what weak and improbable instruments was it done! Christ did not choose the eloquent orators, or men of authority in the courts of kings and emperors, but twelve poor artisans and fishermen; and these not sent together in a troop, but some to take one country to conquer it, and some another.

There are times when we feel that life is overwhelming. There are times that we think God has called us to something too big or lofty for someone like us. Well, we are not alone. The twelve disciples had no idea what they were getting themselves into when they dropped their careers to follow Jesus. They did not know that they would get to perform miracles and start churches, nor did they know that they would be beaten and many of them martyred. They simply followed Jesus. They were not the best of the best, but God decided they were the best for the job. They were not the best speakers or even the best Christians, but God used them in monumental ways. If their weaknesses limited God's power, God would not be the faithful, sovereign God of the Bible. God will use us in great ways, even though we are normal people, and when the task seems tough, we can trust that he will accomplish his plan despite our weakness.

But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. 1 Corinthians 1:27-29
Day 4

And thus every Christian may furnish himself out of his own stock of experience, if he will but reflect and consider the place where he is, the relations that he has, and the way by which he was lead into them. The instruments employed by Providence for you are of special consideration, and the finger of God is clearly seen by us when we pursue that meditation.

Take time to think through your life: where you were born, to whom you were born, your fifth birthday, middle school and high school, and whatever comes next. Where are you now and how did you get there? Can you see God working through your life to bring you to your current place? Whether you can or not, He had everything to do with who you are and where you are. Every little detail was planned and orchestrated by the God of the universe. We are loved and cherished though we seem so small. God loves us immensely, so much so that he died for us so that we could be with him for eternity. What events lead to your salvation? As we meditate on his hand through our lives, we can see his precision, love, and care since the day we were born.

Psalm 8:5-6
When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him?

Day 5

But such had been the special care of Providence towards us, that our turn to be brought upon the stage of this world was graciously reserved for better days, so that if we had had our own option, we could not have chosen for ourselves as Providence has done.

We did not choose to whom we were born, where we were born, or how we were born. None of us did. Our life, though we may desire something else, is exactly how God intended. It is perfect for us whether we think so or not. He knew, in his infinite wisdom, what would be best for us and his eternal plan. God is good and does everything for our good, including crafting our lives exactly the way they are. When we were five years old, there is no way that we could have imagined our lives being where they are. God is big and has crafted our lives according to his eternal plan for his glory. When we get to heaven, we will understand all things, but until then, we can trust that wherever we are in life and whatever life brings us is in God’s full, complete, and perfect control.

Isaiah 55:8-9
For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.
As Providence orders very stranger occasions to awaken and arouse souls at first, so it works no less wonderfully in carrying on the work to perfection. This is done in two ways . . . First, by quickening and reviving dying convictions and troubles for sin . . . Secondly, Providence gives great assistance to the work of the Spirit upon the soul, by ordering, supporting, relieving and cheering means, to prop up and comfort the soul when it is over-burdened and ready to sink in the depths of troubles.

God knows our troubles and our burdens, and he promises to always be there to take the weight. If God is in control of salvation, wouldn’t he be in control of what comes next? He draws us to himself, and once we accept Jesus and choose to live for him, our lives begin to change. Sins begin to lose their luster, and we begin to look more like Jesus. The Holy Spirit convicts us of sins that linger, and at the same time, He comforts and relieves us by reassuring our safety in the blood of Christ. This is sanctification. Our sin is made known to us which can be discouraging, but we are also encouraged and comforted that our debt has been paid in full. The Holy Spirit convicts and comforts us for the rest of our lives, conforming us more and more into the perfect image of Jesus. It is not up to us to clean up our lives to be presentable to God, but he graciously enables us to fight sin and live for him.

And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. Philippians 1:6

Labor to get as full and thorough a recognition as you are able of the provinces of God concerning you from first to last. O fill your hearts with the thoughts of Him and His ways. If a single act of Providence is so ravishing and transporting, what would many such be, if they were presented together to the view of the soul! If one star is so beautiful to behold, what is a constellation!

It is so easy to forget the goodness of God in our lives. We get caught up in work, school, and family and forget the One who gave us all things. It takes effort to slow down and see how God has been working in our lives, but when we do, we see His beauty, love, and faithfulness more clearly and more fully. His blessings are vast and numerous. Seeing what God has done, whether small or large, leads us to worship and praise His goodness. Seeing all the ways He has blessed us and all the things He lovingly kept us from makes us love him more. He is such a good God who is faithful to his promises and never-changing character. We easily forget that God is our friend and does things for our good, but we can clearly see his goodness to us when we take time to ponder.

Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits, who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy, who satisfies you with good so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's. Psalm 103:2-5
Isaac Watts

Isaac Watts, born in Southampton, England in 1674, was the oldest of nine children. His father was a school-master, and Isaac was studious and hardworking. However, he was frail from birth. He suffered from sickness for much of his life and struggled with depression. Being raised in a devout Puritan home and quickly becoming an adept studier of the Bible, he began preaching on his twenty-fourth birthday but had to eventually resign because of his poor health. He retired to a vacation home where he spent his time writing hymns, poems, and theology discourses. His first publication of hymns was in 1706, Watts being 32, but he was writing long before then. When he was eighteen, he commented to his father that the hymns in the church were too old and boring. His father recommended young Watts write new ones that would better suit him. He took up the challenge and before that Sunday’s evening service, Watts had written a new hymn for the congregation to sing. The Sundays following had new hymns each week.

Watts’ wrote over 750 hymns before his death in 1748, some of which are famous today. He is noted as “the true father of modern hymns.” Watts’ main goal in writing was to draw believers into a deeper worship of God, beholding him more clearly and desiring him more fervently. His works are Christ-centered, exulting him above all else. He based many of his hymns on specific Psalms. His hymns and poems were also refreshing with easily repeatable lines, and his verses could stand on their own in meaning. Watts became famous throughout England, but these characteristics made him especially popular amongst the American slave population. The African call and response patterns mixed nicely with Watts’ hymns, and the enslaved found his lines particularly relatable and comforting. His words are marked by his bodily and emotional suffering, and the slaves could see themselves through the emotion displayed in the hymns; he pled to God for similar reasons they would.

When I Survey the Wond’rous Cross

When I survey the wond’rous Cross
On which the Prince of Glory dy’d,
My richest Gain I count but Loss,
And pour Contempt on all my Pride.

Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast,
Save in the Death of Christ my God:
All the vain Things that charm me most,
I sacrifice them to his Blood.

See from his Head, his Hands, his Feet,
Sorrow and Love flow mingled down!
Did e’er such Love and Sorrow meet?
Or Thorns compose so rich a Crown?

His dying Crimson, like a Robe,
Spreads o’er his Body on the Tree;
Then am I dead to all the Globe,
And all the Globe is dead to me.

Were the whole Realm of Nature mine,
That were a Present far too small;
Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my Soul, my Life, my all.

And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, in order that as many as are called may gain Christ.

Philippians 3:8-9

1 Corinthians 1:30
Day 1

When I survey the wond'rous Cross
On which the Prince of Glory dy'd,
My richest Gain I count but Loss,
And pour Contempt on all my Pride.

The Cross, the tree that Christ was nailed to, is the most beautiful representation of love that we can see in our lives. The Prince of Glory, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, the Son of God came to Earth to live the perfect life we could not live and to die the death we that we deserve. No love can compare, and no material gain is better. No riches, no power, no life can be seen as equal or better than the loving sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ. We are unworthy of the eternal gift that he has won for us on the cross, and it is nothing of our doing. We are saved by his work alone “by grace through faith . . . not a result of works, so that no one may boast.” (Eph. 2:8-9). He has displayed his free, unfailing love for us on the cross.

“Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him . . .” Philippians 3:8-9

Day 2

Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast,
Save in the Death of Christ my God:

If the Lord is the source of all life, what credit do we get as the creation? What do we or can we offer God that he has not given to us already? He gives life, salvation, security, hope, and redemption. He takes care of us daily, telling us not to worry or be anxious because he promises to take care of us for our good and his glory. He gives us all things, so what do we have to take pride in? All talents, gifts, skills, and relationships are gifts given to us by him according to his all-knowing wisdom, so we have no room to boast. We can only praise him for all that we have, and exalt his name as we cherish Christ, who gained eternal salvation and righteousness for us by his sacrifice on the cross.

“And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, so that, as it is written, “Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.””

1 Corinthians 1:31
Day 3

All the vain Things that charm me most,
    I sacrifice them to his Blood.

The things that keep us from Christ, the things that charm us, distract us, tempt us, lure us, and otherwise deter us from Christ, are worth sacrificing to be closer to him. They are temporary compared to the eternal worth of intimacy with the living God. We cannot abide in the world and abide with God. There is a stark contrast in those two ways of living. Being friends with the world means being an enemy of God because being friends with the world means indulging in the sins of the flesh. God in his infinite holiness cannot dwell with sin, so we, as his children, cannot be with both. We must sacrifice the sins that cling so close to be in close communion with the intimate God of our salvation. Knowing God and abiding in him is far greater than any pleasure, satisfaction, or value found in this temporary world.

“Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world. And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.” 1 John 2:15-17

Day 4

See from his Head, his Hands, his Feet,
    Sorrow and Love flow mingled down!
Did e'er such Love and Sorrow meet?
Or Thorns compose so rich a Crown?

On the cross, Christ took the wrath that we deserved. The nails that pierced his hands and feet, the blood that ran down from his head, the lashes and gorging of his flesh came to an end in being separated from the Father on our behalf. He withstood the punishment that our sins. He took on the death we deserved. The best part of this? He rose again. He conquered death, the consequence of sin, so that we will not “perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16). Our sin was laid on him because of his love for us. It was that love for us that drove him to give it all in order to give us all. He laid down his life, showing the perfect picture of love, so that we may turn from sin and turn to him. He made a way, through his suffering, for us to be children of God, heirs with Christ for all of eternity.

“For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” 2 Corinthians 5:21
Christ’s suffering and death were part of the redemptive plan of God. God was not reacting by sending Christ, but had everything decided, accounted for, and layed out before the foundations of the world. His death was foretold from the beginning, and our reconciliation to God was planned before the fall. This should bring us great comfort! The Lord is not surprised by our sin; he already knew, already had a plan. Christ, being fully man and fully God, knew why he was sent to earth. He knew that he would reconcile people to God. He saw his suffering as worth it, worth it for the sake of people’s souls. Out of love, he endured the wrath of God for the sins of those who would believe.

“Yet it was the will of the Lord to crush him; he has put him to grief; when his soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days; the will of the Lord shall prosper in his hand. Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities.” Isaiah 53:10-11

Nothing compares to knowing Christ as your Lord and Savior, nothing. No sin is worth eternal separation from our good God. The world, what does it have to offer? What pleasures does it lure you with that seem lasting? What will you bring with you when you die? Faith offers much better answers. Faith gives us everlasting life with the true God, a life with no tears, pain, or sadness. We cannot take possessions with us when we die, but we do gain possessions in heaven for our faithful walk on earth. Faith gives us something to hold on to; we can hold on to God’s promises he makes throughout the Bible. The world offers nothing that compares with the goodness of Christ. The world is wasting away and will be destroyed, but the life that God promises to those who would believe provides joy forevermore.

“Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.” Romans 6:8-11
Were the whole Realm of Nature mine,  
That were a Present far too small;  
Love so amazing, so divine,  
Demands my Soul, my Life, my All.

Gaining the whole world but losing Christ is not a fair trade. When Christ was tempted by the Devil to forsake his soul for all the kingdoms, Christ refuses. He does not give in to the temptation of power or beauty but holds fast to the promise of God to give him the world for his obedience. In fact, Christ did obtain the world, making a way for a rebellious people to come before a holy God. He obtained salvation for the world, and he did it all out of love. “Love so amazing” that “demands” our soul, life, and all. The love that Christ demonstrated on the cross was the greatest love of all, and it is worth living for and dying for. The security he gained for us out of love gives us hope in the eternal life he has achieved. It gives us hope as we turn from sin and turn to God. It gives us hope that Jesus is in fact better than all power, beauty, or pleasure. He is the ultimate power, incomparable beauty, and eternal pleasure, and living for him is worth it all.

“Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.” John 15:13
The Valley of Vision

The Puritans were people committed to worship and serious devotion to God. They adhered to a strict theology and sought holiness, but they were joyous through the process. They recognized the freedom won through Jesus on the Cross and cherished it. Because of their fierce fight for holiness, denying a lot of the pleasures of this world, they were and still are regarded as harsh, joyless, and cold. Though they had their faults and imperfections, they aimed for their hearts to be full of praise, worship, joy, and love.

*The Valley of Vision* is a compilation of prayers, meditations, and poems from various, unnamed Puritans. These have been gathered from journals, letters, books, and keepsakes. The works focus on a variety of topics from sin and brokenness to joy and triumph. They show readers the artistic flow of worship that the Puritans shared and often show the hearts of the writers as humble, joyful, longing, and expectant. The salvation that they enjoyed was not a heavy, burdensome obligation, but a freeing, joyful privilege. These poems give us a glimpse into Puritans’ hearts and their love and desire for God.

Christ’s work of salvation is a common theme through all of the poems. They circle back to the freedom from sin, goodness of God, purity of Christ, and triumph in salvation. Christ opened the door for us to know God in an intimate way, tearing the veil of the temple between us and him. For the Puritans, Christ is the center of the bible and the center of life itself. These inward meditations make it clear that Jesus was a focus of their daily lives, showing their love and reverence for our Lord and Savior.

I bless thee that thou hast made me capable
Of knowing thee, the author of all being,
Of resembling thee, the perfection of all excellency,
Of enjoying thee, the source of all happiness.

Continue the gentleness of thy goodness towards me,
And whether I wake or sleep, let thy presence go with me,
Thy blessing attend me.

Not only has God allowed us to know and resemble him, but he has allowed us to enjoy him. He is the source of all happiness and joy, from a good grade to a grandchild’s laugh. He gives us all things and loves us dearly. He is the all powerful God of the universe, who crafted the planets and stars, but he is also the personal God, who knows our names and the number of hairs on our heads. We can find joy and happiness in the truth that God loves us, knows us, and has saved us from our sins. We can rejoice in the comforts of his grace, knowing that we are kept in his love by the power of Christ. We can and should enjoy God because he is so great, awe-inspiring, and his blessings are endless.

If you lay gold in the dust, and gold of Ophir among the stones of the torrent-bed, then the Almighty will be your gold and your precious silver. For then you will delight yourself in the Almighty and lift up your face to God. Job 22:24-26
Day 2

Christ was all anguish that I might be all joy,
Cast off that I might be brought in,
Trodden down as an enemy that I might be welcomed as a friend,
Surrendered to hell’s worst that I might attain heaven’s best,
Stripped that I might be clothed,
Wounded that I might be healed,
Athirst that I might drink,
Tormented that I might be comforted,
Made a shame that I might inherit glory,
Entered darkness that I might have eternal light.

These truths should bring us joy because he has won salvation for us, but they came at a cost. Christ gained us an endless amount of blessings when he suffered a tremendous amount of pain on our behalf. He emptied himself for us, that we would be whole. His sacrifice on the cross shows his unfailing love for us, sinners. He saved us from our sins, taking God’s wrath upon himself, and conquered death, the punishment for sin. He gives us peace, joy, and assurance in a world that seeks to steal it all. We are eternally secure because of his loving sacrifice. We are cherished and loved by him. Christ is the living water, all satisfying and never ending. He has healed us, comforted us, and adopted us into his family for all of eternity. He will never leave us and will always love us.

He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? Romans 8:31-32

Day 3

May I enter him as my refuge,
Build on him as my foundation,
Walk in him as my way,
Follow him as my guide,
Conform to him as my example,
Receive his instructions as my prophet,
Rely on his intercession as my high priest,
Obey him as my king.

Christ is our rock. He is all encompassing for our needs. He is our solid foundation that we can hold on to as life throws trials our way. He is our refuge for safety when we feel alone and vulnerable. He is our path to walk on and our guide on the way. He is the perfect example of a human, loving us at all times and never giving in to temptation. He gives us sound instruction and promises the eternal reward. He came to intercede on our behalf, making us right with God. He is our king, ruling over us and the world with power, mercy, love, and grace. We have so much freedom and joy when we cling to Christ and his work on the cross.

Therefore thus says the Lord God,
“Behold, I am the one who has laid as a foundation in Zion,
a stone, a tested stone,
a precious cornerstone, of a sure foundation:
‘Whoever believes will not be in haste.’
Isaiah 28:16
Day 4

I am loved with everlasting love,
Clothed in eternal righteousness,
My peace flowing like a river,
My comforts many and large,
My joy and triumph unutterable,
My soul lively with knowledge of salvation,
My sense of justification unclouded.

I have scarce anything to pray for;
Jesus smiles upon my soul as a ray of heaven
And my supplications are swallowed up in praise.

The benefits of salvation go further than saving us from a fiery hell. We are loved, made righteous, given peace and joy, and comforted daily, sometimes hourly. Being saved from hell is part of salvation, but it is not the entirety. God has adopted us into his family, called us his children. He has given us a hope for this life and assurance in the next. He loves us and cares for us and provides for us. Jesus didn’t walk away after dying on the cross, but came back to teach the disciples. Going to heaven is a wonderful gift, but salvation is much more than that. It means we can live for God instead of ourselves. We can serve with loving hearts. We can share the gospel with others and rejoice when someone is added to our family of believers. Praise God for his endless blessings in this life and the next!

Let them praise the name of the Lord,
for his name alone is exalted;
his majesty is above earth and heaven.
Psalm 148:13

Day 5

Fill me with peace, that no disquieting worldly gales
May ruffle the calm surface of my soul.
Thy cross was upraised to be my refuge,
Thy blood streamed forth to wash me clean,
Thy death occurred to give me surety,
Thy name is my property to save me,
By thee all heaven is poured into my heart,
But it is too narrow to comprehend thy love.

God’s love for us is so great that we cannot comprehend it. It is impossible to ponder all of the ways that God shows us his love, but we can definitely ponder a few. We are given peace in a chaotic world and refuge for safety. He made us clean himself, not requiring any works or actions on our part. He makes and keeps his many promises that we see throughout the bible. He is a faithful God, abounding in steadfast love, mercy, and grace. He has given you breath this morning and life eternally. If you feel unloved, uncared for, or unappreciated, know that the God of the universe, who crafted the stars, created you and loves you more than you could ever fathom.

For you formed my inward parts;
you knitted me together in my mother's womb.
I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.
Wonderful are your works;
my soul knows it very well.
Psalm 139:13-14
Day 6

All thy ways of mercy tend to and end in my delight.
Thou didst weak, sorrow, suffer that I might rejoice.
For my joy thou hast sent the Comforter,
  Multiplied thy promises,
  Shown me my future happiness,
  Given me a living fountain.
Thou art preparing joy for me and me for joy;

God wants us to be joyful. Paul says, “Rejoice always!” reminding believers to find joy in the life God has handed to us. It is not easy to constantly find joy in our circumstances. Bad things happen; life gets dreary; some seasons are really awful. But, despite all these things, despite the truth that life is not always happy, we can find joy in Christ, who doesn’t change or waiver in his love for us. This doesn’t mean we have to be happy in all circumstances to be good Christians; Christ himself had emotions and cried when his friend died, and he cried over the lost souls in Jerusalem. It does mean, however, that when life gets us down, we can look to Christ to pick us up. His love for us can bring us joy in the worst of times, and we can rely on him to always pick us up.

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.
Romans 15:13

Day 7

Thou hast led me singing to the cross
Where I fling down all my burdens and see them vanish,
Where my mountains of guilt are levelled to a plain
Where my sins disappear, though they are the greatest that exist,

Christ has defeated every sin we have ever committed and will ever commit. He has won victory over sin and even over death itself. He is all powerful, taking our burdens and our guilt and saying we are loved. He longs for us to take up our cross and follow him, whose “yoke is easy, and burden is light” (Matt. 11:30). What is your burden? God cares about it and wants to take it from you, freeing you from it. Lay it on him and find rest. We have no need for guilt because our freedom has already been won. When we repent and trust in Jesus’s sacrifice, he tells us we have been made clean and have no need for guilt because it has been paid for. He paid for our guilt out of love. Our sins are still serious and we should strive to avoid it, but when we fail, as we will, we can be assured that Christ has paid our ransom and we are made clean through his blood.

How much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God. Hebrews 9:14
Works Cited


