

Upright Woman



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The God of All Blessings

by: Kathy Pollard



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Some have a skewed perception of God. They picture Him as an indignant God, waiting for us to mess up so He can punish us. Some have a skewed perception of Christianity. They think it's a life of drudgery. Both perceptions are wrong. It only takes a brief look into God's Word to see that, from the very beginning, God has wanted nothing more than to bless His people. The words "blessing/ bless/ blessed" appear around 535 times in the Bible (depending on which version you use). The first occurrence is found in Genesis 1:22, "God blessed them..." In the Sermon on the Mount, the very first word out of Jesus' mouth was, "Blessed" (Matt. 5:3). Paul wrote that God "blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing" (Eph. 1:3), and then spent the rest of the letter mentioning several of those specific blessings. Ezekiel 34 is one of my favorite passages because it so beautifully illustrates the "showers of blessing" (v. 26) that God wants to rain on His people, even after they have wandered off. To get the most out of this study, print off Ezekiel 34:11-31 and be prepared to mark up the text as we go through it together. What can we learn from this remarkable chapter?

God Wants a Relationship with His People

There is 'shepherd and sheep' language all throughout this passage. Contrary to what you may have heard, sheep weren't silly little creatures. They were highly prized for the wool, meat, milk, and cheese they provided. Shepherds cared for them and protected them, even standing between their sheep and predators (v. 25). Circle all the possessive phrases in the text.

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God says “My sheep” (v. 11, 12, 31), “My flock” (v. 15, 17, 19, 22), “My people” (v. 30), and so on. He claims His people even though they were in exile due to their own rebelliousness. God wanted them to know that He was still their God and they were His people (v. 30-31). “We are His people; the sheep of His pasture” (Psalm 100:3).

God is Involved in the Lives of His People

Deism is the idea that God created the world, set things in motion, and then stepped back just to watch everything unfold. Perhaps this is why some people have the skewed perceptions of God and Christianity I mentioned earlier. This text is just one example of how God IS active in the lives of His people. He is not distant or detached. He is very involved. Underline the occurrences of “God will.” By my count there are 31 of them, and most of them are good ways He wants to bless His people! God Himself will “search for His sheep” (v. 11), “deliver them from the gloom” (v. 12), “feed them in good pasture” (v. 14), “lead them to rest” (v. 15), “bind up the broken” (v. 16), “make them a blessing” (v. 26), and so on.

God’s People Struggle on Their Own

The first part of Ezekiel 34 describes the unhappy state of Israel. “So they were scattered, because there was no shepherd, and they became food for all the wild beasts. My sheep were scattered; they wandered over all the mountains and on every high hill. My sheep were scattered over all the face of the earth, with none to search or seek for them” (v. 5-6). God is going to point out their sad condition in our text. Draw a square around the negative words that describe their situation. They were “scattered” (v. 12,16), “lost” (v. 16), “broken” (v. 16), “sick” (v. 16), “prey” (v. 22,28), “enslaved” (v. 27), “devoured” (v. 28), “victims” (v. 29), and “insulted” (v. 29). It was a dark time for them but it didn’t have to be!

God Wants His People Back to Bless Them

This is the remarkable part. God didn’t forsake His people. They left Him. They were suffering because of their own choices. And yet, He still longs to bring them back into His fold and care for them. He doesn’t like seeing them hurting. In a great contrast, He shows them a better picture of what their lives could be like with His help. Squiggly underline the words that describe their restored state. His people would be “rescued” (v. 12), “fed” (v. 13, 14, 15, 16, 23), “rested” (v. 15), “strengthened” (v. 16), “delivered” (v. 22, 27), “peaceful” (v. 25), “secure” (v. 25, 27, 28), “blessed” (v. 26), and “established” (v. 29).

The same contrast stands before each of us, doesn’t it? Without God, we are lost, broken, and the enemy’s prey. With Him, we are rescued, strengthened, and secure. He still longs to bless and protect you, even if you’ve already made a great big mess of your life. Next time you sing “Showers of Blessing,” thank God for the “mercy drops [that] round us are falling.” Remember how He demonstrated that to His people of old and keeps that same promise to us today!



Two Parts God

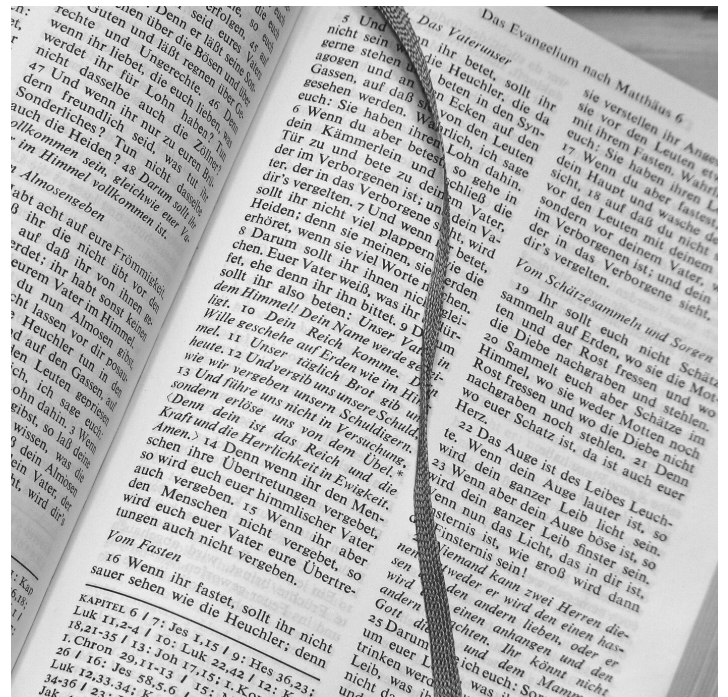
by: Evelyn Bonner

When I was a child, I prayed for long hair and long nails. How childish and how vain, right? As I got older and obeyed the gospel, at the age of twelve, I remember praying for wisdom—wisdom from above as mentioned in James 3:13-18. In hindsight, I realized my vain childish prayer for long hair and nails was somehow connected to my prayer for wisdom. They were connected through my desire for physical and spiritual confidence. Coming to an understanding of this took years of meditation and study. Over the course of those years, the section of scriptures that I often refer to as my favorite passages are Philippians 1:6-11. These inspired words from the apostle Paul continue to spark my childlike motivation for confidence every time I read them. Confidence in how I feel, confidence in how I think, and confidence in how I act.

Philippians 1:6 says “Being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ.” The verb phrase “being confident,” in the Greek, carries the idea of the state of being persuaded; fully persuaded (peitho). This action is on the doer, that is you and me, to carry out the responsibility to be fully persuaded by God. The prayer for long hair and nails came from a little girl’s desire to feel good about herself. The desire to be accepted by others as naturally beautiful, blessed by God, if you will. For a young girl these desires have an ability to persuade how she feels, thinks and acts. The next verb phrase, “has begun,” refers to the action of making a beginning (enarchomai). This action is all God. He made a beginning of a good work in the Christian, in the one who believes and obeys the gospel of Christ. The prayer for wisdom came from a young Christian’s desire to know what to feel about herself, what to think, and what to do. The desire to confidently do good and fulfill the will of God. The last verb phrase, “will complete,” or “will perform” is the action to fulfill completely, accomplish, or make perfect (epiteleo). This action of fact is in the future tense and is also God’s doing. Ladies, this two-to-one ratio (2:1) of two parts God and one part me is enough to fully persuade me, and I pray enough to fully persuade you, that we can confidently produce fruits of righteousness.

Matthew 4:4 says “...It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.’” There are powerful lessons to be learned from every inspired word of God. The lessons I have learned from Philippians 1:6-11 are: (1) How to be confident or fully persuaded, (2) How to judge between good and evil, and (3) How to be filled with the fruits of righteousness by Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God.

How to be confident or fully persuaded: “And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and in all discernment” (Phil. 1:9).



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God uses His inspired word to fully persuade the hearers and doers of His word through Paul's prayer encouraging our love to abound in knowledge and in all discernment. In other words, when our affection (agape) for precise and correct knowledge (epignosis) and for all perception and judgment (aisthesis) causes us to be better or excels then we can be confident or fully persuaded.

How to judge between good and evil: "...that you may approve the things that are excellent, that you may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ" (Phil. 1:10). The confidence or full persuasion stated in verse 9 should produce an ability to approve the things that are of more value (diaphero), to be tested as genuine (eilikrines), and to be faultless (aproskopos). Precise and correct knowledge does not originate from man. It originates from God. So we must learn God's judgment of what is good and what is evil as truth for us to be fully persuaded to accept the good and reject the evil.

How to be filled with the fruits of righteousness: "...being filled with the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God" (Phil. 1:11). Knowing the difference between good and evil produces or supplies liberally (pleroo) fruits which are seen in our works, our actions, and our deeds (karpos) of righteousness or specifically Christian justification (dikaiosyne), to the honor (doxa) and the commendation (epainos) of God.

While I am far from being that young child praying for long hair and nails, I am still a child of God desiring physical and spiritual confidence. Thankfully, today I am fully persuaded of this very thing, that my God who has begun a good work in me will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ! My confidence or full persuasion mentioned in verse 6 is supported by my love for knowledge and all discernment mentioned in verse 9. My trust in God's wisdom of what is excellent mentioned in verse 10 supplies liberally (pleroo) to my work, my actions, and my deeds (karpos) of justification (dikaiosyne), to the glory and praise of God mentioned in verse 11. I pray you are fully persuaded of this very thing too. God bless.



Anxiety in the Heart

by: Carlie Bond

"My favorite verse" is the writing assignment, oh what a task! How can I choose just one? There are verses to offer hope when I am discouraged, verses to guide me when I am unsure of the right steps to take, and verses to warn me when I am drifting. I often think that our favorites reveal something about our attitudes, needs, and especially our appetites. The verses that talk about our minds are always among my favorite. They speak to a problem I face and that is shared almost universally in all mankind: anxiety. My favorite verse is "Anxiety in the heart of man causes depression, but a good word makes it glad" (Prov. 12:25). This one short verse is so very powerful and helpful to me in my personal battle with anxiety. In this verse we have three important elements: (1) anxiety, (2) its consequences if left unchecked and (3) its ultimate cure.

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Biblically, anxiety is defined as fear, heaviness, and sorrow. It is not, in truth, a negative thing in its proper context. Were you or I hanging by a finger grip from the edge of a cliff, we would rightly feel quite anxious! Anxiety stimulates hormone production and allows for rapid responses in emergency situations. However, it is not healthy for us to maintain a state of high anxiety. The gift of anxiety can most definitely become a curse if we allow either imagined troubles or past troubles to rest in our hearts constantly. Just as fear is a gift to keep us from danger but a state of fearfulness is paralyzing and can even be damning (Rev. 21:8).

The Scriptures indicate to us a number of things to keep in our hearts and anxiety does not make the cut. Thou hast put gladness in my heart” (Ps. 4:7), the worthy citizen of Zion “speaks the truth in his heart” (Ps. 15:2), God’s word is to be hidden in our hearts (Ps. 119:11), and the fear of God is to remain in our hearts (Col. 3:22). The Parable of the Sower warns us that there are things that can distract us and choke the word. “Cares” can push God’s Word out of our hearts just as surely as riches and hedonistic pleasures. Anxiety, heaviness, and sorrow are to be experienced when circumstances evoke those feelings, however they are to be carried, not in our hearts and minds, but to the One Who cares for us (1 Pet. 5:7).

The terrible consequence of living in a persistent state of anxiety is the growth of depression in our minds. The process is slow and begins with a little worry over matters which are outside of our control. This worry becomes our meditation holding the place God’s Word is meant to have in our hearts and minds (Ps. 1). Soon we begin to add other concerns, what ifs, and fears to our list until our outlook has become shadowed, darkened, and so filled with pessimism that we can no longer imagine a scenario in which all goes well and life is good. Darkness prevails in the outlook of the depressed soul so much that the brightest rays of hope appear distant and unreachable. Uncontrolled anxiety is a prescription for progressively deepening depression.

There is a cure! “A good word” can restore gladness to the anxious mind and lighten the heavy heart. This good word is not simply a kind word, a passing nicety, or a complement. These things are certainly pleasant however, they can only provide a shallow moment of brightness. It is only the goodness of the Word of God that can truly banish anxieties and the depressive state they breed. The world can be a dark and hopeless place but God’s Word is a “light to our path” (Ps. 119:105). According to the Psalmist, God’s Word is capable of melting away our heaviness and strengthening our hearts (Ps. 119:28).

When it comes to favorite verses, mine seem to always be those that aid me in winning battles of the mind. David wrote, “If I say, ‘My foot slips,’ Your mercy, O Lord, will hold me up. In the multitude of my anxieties within me, Your comforts delight my soul” (Ps. 94:18-19). This is another of my favorite verses that is in keeping with the theme of finding rest from anxiety in the Lord. Tied up in this discussion is one final element, choice. We have a choice how we handle this challenge. Anxiety can be a hard habit to break and can be nearly as potent as any addiction. Much like overcoming an addiction, the first steps are to recognize the problem and decide that we will no longer participate in it (Ps. 119:59-60). The process is simple; however, it is not at all easy. I have found that even severe anxiety attacks can be overcome and the severity lessened by my own refusal to participate and give myself to them. Are my heart and mind racing? Yes.

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Is my head spinning. Yes! Do I feel as if there is an elephant sitting on my chest? YES! Is there a reason for this? No. In that case, I can refuse to participate in it and feed it. I can accept it with patience, carry it to the Lord and wait for it to pass. Simple, but not easy.

Peter assures us that God's power has given us "all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us..." (2 Pet. 1:3). True comfort, peace, lasting joy, and hope are found when we lay down our anxieties and the cares of life at the feet of our Savior finding shelter under his wings (Matt. 23:37).

Love. Guidance. Protection.

by: Lieh Brumback

Working with college students in academic success reminds me just how important it is to share the blessings we have in God's Word and his family. We are surrounded by His love, His guidance, and His protection. When I considered the consistent Christian influence I could have on them, I decided to attach the following verses to all my email closings: "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths" (Prov. 3:5-6). This selection was to encourage students to be consistent on their journey through college, to look outside of themselves for help, to seek God, and then to imitate Him always.

As a young adult, my initial thoughts centered on realization that God would take care of me. This is a great first impression for any young new Christian, and it provided just what I needed at the time. As I have matured, so has my understanding of these four direct statements. For those of us who like the straight truth and no gray areas, there is no misunderstanding the message found in Proverbs 3:5-6. Ideally, the depth of that understanding will increase as our experiences grow.

What is "trust"? Trust is "the firm belief in the reliability, truth, ability, or strength of someone or something." As children, we naturally trust our mother and father to provide for our basic needs. Hopefully, those who reared us also taught us how to evaluate someone or something as trustworthy. This skill is developed through experiences and training with proofs or evidence. As we mature, we may lose confidence in people, things, or even ourselves. When this happens, we may build up barriers and become self-reliant. We may say, "I can take care of myself," while thinking, "I don't want to be let down or hurt." The more painful the loss of trust, the harder it is to regain. No one likes the unpleasant feelings associated with being misdirected, let down, or hurt.

The writer tells us we should trust in the Lord, and God, knowing our need for examples, has provided proof of His reliability throughout the Bible, beginning with creation (Genesis 1:1). Later, God told Noah a flood was coming, and it occurred as He said (Gen. 6:17; 7:11-24). God told Abraham that the aged Sarah would have a son, and she did (Gen. 17:16; 21:1-3). What other examples can you recall where God foretold an event and it happened? Isaiah wrote of our Savior's suffering, a role and service Christ filled (Isa. 53; Matthew 27). Why is this last example the greatest?

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Because it represents the most significant expression of service in self-sacrifice (John 3:16). All these demonstrate that God is consistently trustworthy. We are also told how we should trust Him—with all our heart. When you decide to walk down the sidewalk, to the store, to work, or to school, your whole body goes with you. However, your body may go in one direction but your thoughts elsewhere. The writer did not say to trust the Lord with all your body, but rather, with all your heart. When we do something with all of our heart, it is an all-consuming commitment. What biblical examples can you think of that demonstrate a wholehearted trust in the Lord?

The only negative word in these verses, “not,” is used to guide someone away from relying on their “own understanding.” What does “own understanding” mean? It means depending on one’s own wisdom or knowledge. Human wisdom often introduces those murky, gray, unclear areas that do not come from God. Why would someone rely on their own understanding? Possibly they have never been taught about God. Perhaps someone is ignorant because their pride stops them from seeking God’s guidance. The Bible also provides examples of choices made by persons who used their “own understanding” and the unfortunate consequences which resulted (e.g., Cain, Lot, Nadab and Abihu).

If we are not to lean on our own understanding, there must be something we should do. God asks us to demonstrate our trust in Him by acknowledging Him and practicing the principles He teaches. Consider how self-wisdom may manifest itself in an everyday family situation: “Mom, can I spend the afternoon at my friend’s house after school?” In such a scenario, an acknowledgement of God’s wisdom might be to ask, “Are these persons Christians? What kind of influence will they have on each other? Are they and their parents trustworthy?” So a good response would be to take the time to thoughtfully contemplate the now familiar question, “What would Jesus do?” Remember, the Lord said, “Trust in the Lord with all your heart, lean not on your own understanding.”

Certainly, we should acknowledge God and His ways always. Keeping godly wisdom present should not be only on a fixed schedule, like Bible study or planned church activities, but a fluid moment-to-moment process. It should be a natural outgrowth of study and a life spent representing God in every facet of living.

Although I started this article thinking about college students, it applies to each of us. Any of us should consider how we can apply divine wisdom to our daily Christian walk as mothers, sisters, children, and friends. These powerful verses from Proverbs 3 remind all people to depend upon godly wisdom and then enjoy the peace that comes by following the Lord.

Perhaps we could summarize the content of these verses in this way—they tell us:
The What is trust, which brings comfort—help is here.
The Who is the Lord—our Creator.
The Why is His demonstrated guidance—reliable directions.
The How is full commitment—which brings consistency.
The Warning is trust not your own wisdom—ask for help!
The Where and When is always in all ways—manifested in self-management.



Trust in the Lord

by: Kyrie Pesina

"My Favorite Verse" from the perspective of a young lady (8).

In my family, we like to learn memory verses together. One of my favorite memory verses is Proverbs 3:5-7 which says "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding: In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths. Do not be wise in your own eyes: Fear the Lord and depart from evil." I picked this verse because it tells us how we can live a good life in three small lessons.

Lesson one is "trust in the Lord with all your heart". We trust in the Lord because, He is better than Satan. Satan will tempt us to do bad things, we shouldn't listen to him. We should listen to God and do good things. God loves us and wants us to be safe, Satan wants us to sin and do bad things. Sin separates us from God and we don't want that to happen. If all of our heart is not with God, then Satan still holds some of our heart. We have to protect our hearts from Satan.

Lesson two is "acknowledge God and He will direct your path". Acknowledging God means when we have a problem, we don't ask our friends what to do, instead we look in the Bible. When you are trying to decide what you should do you should look in the Bible because God tells us exactly what to do. He shows an example in the Bible how to handle all of life. Because God knows everything, he has given us all the answers in the Bible. All we have to do is read and study the Bible.

Our last lesson, lesson three, is "depart from evil". Depart means run away. We are running away from Satan and the bad things he tempts us to do. We have to run away from things that are even just a little bit evil because evil takes our minds off of God. When we run away from evil we are running toward God. We want to run towards God because we want to be with Him in heaven one day.

I hope this helps you to learn more about God and listen to God's word. Psalm 119:11 says "Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee." The only way to know God's word is when we read the Bible. When we listen to God's word and follow His plan as long as we live, we will one day die and go to heaven to be with God forever. While you read your bible, I hope that you will find your own favorite verses to memorize and keep in your heart.

About Upright Woman

The Upright Woman publication is intended to educate, promote, and encourage the women of the church to strive for righteousness in every aspect of life. It is the mission of this publication to provide women an opportunity to study the word and share articles about various issues and topics to encourage us to be upright women in an upside down world.

**"FOR THE LORD IS RIGHTEOUS; HE LOVES
RIGHTEOUS DEEDS; THE UPRIGHT SHALL
BEHOLD HIS FACE." PSALM 11:7**



We pray that, with every issue and with every article, all glory is given to God.