

SINGING IN THE VICTORY

I'm singing in the vict'ry, the vict'ry of the cross

Resting in the shadow of Your redeeming love

I'm standing on the promise, the promise of new life

'Cause I am Yours forever and Jesus You are mine, Jesus You are mine

God's Word speaks often about victory and defeat. Deuteronomy 20:4 says, " ... [T]he LORD your God is he who goes with you to fight for you against your enemies, to give you the victory." But how can we relate to an Old Testament passage about victory in battle? Weren't these verses written to a nation of former slaves who were at war with the nations around them? Yes. And yet the Bible says that "all Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching" (2 Timothy 3:16). It says that the Word of God is "living and active" (Hebrews 4:12). This means that when the Psalmist writes, "With God we shall do valiantly; it is he who will tread down our foes" (Psalm 60:12), we know that God will also tread down our own foes here in the present day. It means that we are just as desperate for God to stand beside us in our daily battles as King David and the Israelites were.

If there is any difference between us and the Psalmist, it is only that we know the name of the Messiah who has come to give us victory (1 Corinthians 15:57). When we fall prey to worry, doubt, pride, or fear, we can call on the name of Jesus and trust that He will "deliver us from the present evil age" (Galatians 1:4). If we are unaware of our need for His victory, our eyes are blind to the battle that rages around us. If we feel helpless in the midst of spiritual warfare, God wants to be the lifter of our heads. He wants our hearts to sing in accordance with 1 Corinthians 15:57: "But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

TRUSTING GOD WITH OUR ANXIETY

I will not be anxious, Jesus You are near

The peace of God surrounding me, casting out all fear

We are a culture of worriers. We worry about which school to attend, which career to pursue, and which person to marry. If the Lord blesses us with children, we begin to worry about which school our children will attend, which career they will pursue, and which person they will marry. The Bible is well aware of this struggle. In Matthew 6, Jesus says, " ... [D]o not be anxious ... " Why does He give us this command? Why does He

repeat this command several times in the New Testament? While being troubled or in a state of distress is not a sin, it becomes sin when we allow that distress to turn into anxiety and distrust God's promises. Left to ourselves, we simply do not trust that God will take care of us. We trust, instead, in a bank account, an education, or a job. Then, when these areas of our lives fail us, we become anxious. This is sin, and the Enemy wants to use this sin to cripple us, to destroy our faith in God, and to keep us from living as people who have been set free by the gospel. So instead, we must internalize what the Bible says about anxiety so that when trouble and distress strike, we can respond as Christ would respond. And when we do fail and our hearts and minds give in to anxious thoughts and emotions, praise be to Jesus Christ who paid for that sin, making a way for us to cast every anxiety on our heavenly Father, trusting again that He will lift us up in due time (1 Peter 5:6-7).

So what does the Bible tell us about anxiety? In the first book of the Bible, we learn that anxiety is common for God's people. It is not a rare emotion. It plagued Abraham's family tree.

Abraham was called a "friend of God" (James 2:23), yet he was constantly worried. He worried that the king of Gerar, Abimelech, would kill him to get to his beautiful wife, Sarah. So Abraham said to Sarah, "This is how you can show your love to me: Everywhere we go, say of me, 'He is my brother'" (Genesis 20:13 NIV). God appeared to Abimelech in a dream and delivered Abraham from Gerar, but despite this miraculous act of God's faithfulness, Abraham continued to feel anxious. He was especially worried about his lineage. How could he have a child when he and his wife, Sarah, were so old? In the midst of this doubt and anxiety, God gave Abraham a son, Isaac, just as He had promised (Genesis 21:1-3).

When Isaac had a wife of his own, Rebekah, the Lord led them to Gerar where Abimelech was still king. Genesis 26:7 says, "When the men of the place asked him about his wife, he said, 'She is my sister,' for he feared to say, 'My wife,' thinking, 'lest the men of the place should kill me because of Rebekah,' because she was attractive in appearance."

Like father, like son.

The generational anxiety did not stop there. Isaac and Rebekah had two sons: Esau and Jacob. Esau worried that he would die of hunger, so he sold his birthright to Jacob in exchange for food (Genesis 25:33). This created a strained relationship between the two brothers, so Jacob fled, worried that Esau would kill him (Genesis 32:7-8). For many years, Jacob was anxious about his relationship with his brother, but when Esau and Jacob finally reunited, "Esau ran to meet him and embraced him, threw his arms around his neck, and kissed him. And they both wept." (Genesis 33:4 NLT). God had proven Himself faithful once again.

Yet Jacob's struggle with anxiety continued.

Jacob, also known as Israel, had twelve sons. "Now Israel loved Joseph more than any other of his sons, because he was the son of his old age" (Genesis 37:3). So Joseph's brothers became jealous, and they sold Joseph into slavery. Then they lied to their father, Jacob, convincing him that Joseph had been eaten by an animal. Can you imagine how Jacob must have felt in that moment? It's no wonder that he became anxious about the well-being of his youngest son, Benjamin.

Years later, when Jacob's family was affected by a famine, he sent his sons to Egypt to buy grain. "But Jacob did not send Benjamin, Joseph's brother, with his brothers, for he feared that harm might happen to him" (Genesis 42:4). Even as an old man, Jacob was worried. And what did God do in response to Jacob's worry? God proved Himself faithful. Soon, Jacob heard that Joseph was not only alive, but he had risen to power in Egypt. As Jacob set out on his journey to be reunited with his son, God said to him, "Do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for there I will make you into a great nation" (Genesis 46:3). Even after God had proven Himself faithful time and time again, His first words to Jacob were, "Do not be afraid." God knows that His children struggle with worry and doubt and fear. We are not alone in our anxiety.

But what do we do when anxiety hits? How should we respond when we feel anxious? There is no better example of godliness in the midst of anxiety than the story of Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane. Praise God that we have a Savior who "has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin" (Hebrews 4:15 NIV). We know what the pressure of temptation feels like, and we know what it feels like to find release from that pressure as we cave to our earthly desires. Only Jesus knows what it feels like to experience the pressure of temptation as it builds and builds, without ever giving in to the temporary release of sin. Many of us have been tempted to distrust God about the future, but who can say that they sweated drops of blood as they resisted that temptation, refusing to let it become an offense to the Father? Let's look at how Jesus responded to anxiety.

On the night of the Passover, Jesus went to the garden of Gethsemane with one goal: to pray. The garden was simply a place to get away and spend time with the Father. We are told in Philippians 4:6, "... [D]o not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God." This is exactly what Jesus did in the garden. Matthew 26:39 says, "... [H]e fell on his face and prayed, saying, 'My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me ...'" Faced with the temptation to be anxious, Jesus prayed to be spared from imminent pain and death. He prayed that He would not have to drink the cup of the wrath of God. He prayed that His Father would not turn His face away from Him. In times of distress, God wants us to pray like this. That's why there are more than 60 prayers of lament in the Psalms. That's why Jesus quoted a Psalm of lament on the cross when He said, "My God, my God, why have

you forsaken me?” (Psalm 22:1). Jesus felt pain the same way we feel pain. He felt forsaken by His Father, much like we have felt forsaken by loved ones. He was fully God, yes, but He was also fully man. It’s the Son of Man, Jesus, who shows us that our first response to anxiety should be to pray.

Our second response should be to place our trust in the Lord. Jesus’s prayer does not end with the request to “let this cup pass.” He says in Matthew 26:42, “My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done.” Jesus puts His trust in the Father, regardless of the outcome. We see this trust in the Psalms of lament as well. Psalm 56:3 says, “When I am afraid, I put my trust in you.” Psalm 55 starts with this request: “Give ear to my prayer, O God, and hide not yourself from my plea for mercy!” It goes on to say, “My heart is in anguish within me; the terrors of death have fallen upon me” (Psalm 55:4). But it ends with the declaration, “I will trust in you.” Does our trust guarantee our safety? No, sometimes we trust God in spite of the danger. The cross is our proof. We are not promised comfort, but if we will pray and place our trust in the Lord, we are promised that “the peace of Christ, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:7).

PROCESSING QUESTIONS

1. What troubles and stress are you facing right now? In what ways are you tempted to be anxious?
2. How do you normally respond to the temptation to be anxious?
3. How can the Bible help you respond to the temptation to be anxious in the future?

VICTORY IN THE CROSS

When I have forgotten the fullness of Your grace

Yes I remember calvary when You took my place

We are commanded to turn and flee from all temptations, including anxiety and distrust, but the command does not stop there. If we simply fast from sin, we will eventually starve, and then we will turn back to our vices in an attempt to satisfy our spiritual hunger. Many think the message of Christianity is moral deism—nothing more than a distant God giving us more rules to obey. “Do not do this, abstain from this, say no to these things.” This is not the gospel, but rather a recipe for despair. The gospel is that Jesus takes away our sin while also filling us with something better. This is why we have been given the Lord’s Supper. The bread and the cup remind us that the desires of our hearts can only be satisfied by Christ’s work on the cross. What happens when we remember this truth? What happens when we forget?

Let’s start by looking at what happens when we fail to remember God’s promises. One of the most famous examples of this sin comes from Luke 22. It’s the story of Peter denying Jesus on the night of Christ’s arrest.

Ironically, it’s earlier in this same chapter that we find Jesus explaining the Lord’s Supper to His disciples. Peter, along with John, was one of two disciples Jesus had entrusted with preparing the Passover meal. As they reclined at the table that night, Jesus said, “I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer” (Luke 22:15). This is the first promise Jesus made that night. He promised that He would suffer.

This was not the first time that Jesus had spoken of His suffering. In Matthew 16, Jesus prophesied that He would “go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed ...” (Matthew 16:21). Peter was not a fan of this promise. In fact, he disliked this prophecy so much that he “took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, ‘Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you’” (Matthew 16:22). Peter was willing to accept God’s promises until it meant suffering for someone he loved.

This is the root of Peter’s denial. Peter failed to remember the entire scope of God’s promises. Perhaps Peter remembered Jesus’s promise to make the disciples “fishers of men,” or the promise that Peter would be called a “child of God” who would “bear much fruit” and “receive a righteous person’s reward” (Matthew 4:19; John 1:12; John 15:8; Matthew 10:41). He believed that “the last will be first” and that the disciples would “sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel” (Matthew 20:16; 19:28). Peter, of course, did not rebuke Jesus for these promises. But when Jesus was arrested and the disciples began to scatter, Peter failed to remember Christ’s promise to “suffer many things ... and be killed.” He must have also forgotten another promise that

Jesus made that evening. Jesus said, “Peter, the rooster will not crow this day, until you deny three times that you know me” (Luke 22:34).

Peter’s failure to remember this promise was, in itself, a sin. And the effects of this sin were felt immediately. When he had denied Jesus for the third time and he heard the rooster crow, Peter came to his senses. He remembered God’s promises. He remembered that Jesus is the One of whom it is written, “Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfill?” (Numbers 23:19 NIV). Once Peter realized what he had done, the Bible says, “And he went out and wept bitterly” (Luke 22:62).

This is what it looks like to forget God’s promises. It is bitter. In the end, it leads only to sadness and regret, and if there is no repentance, it leads to death. This is why Jesus is so insistent that we remember the cross, because His death and resurrection are the fulfillment of every promise God has made to us. This includes the promise that “in Christ shall all be made alive” (1 Corinthians 15:22), but it also includes the promise that “through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22). 2 Corinthians 1:20 says, “For no matter how many promises God has made, they are ‘Yes’ in Christ” (NIV). Therefore, we cannot pick and choose which promises to trust. Like Peter, we must learn to stand on every word Jesus has said. Let’s look back at the Lord’s Supper passage and the promises Jesus made that night.

In Luke 22:15, Jesus promised that he would suffer. Then the passage continues, “And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he said, ‘Take this, and divide it among yourselves. For I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes’” (Luke 22:17-18). This is the second promise that Jesus made at Passover. He promised that His suffering would not be the end of the story! The kingdom of God will come! If Peter had remembered correctly, he would have known that the coming kingdom was tied to the death of Christ. The promise that Jesus made in Matthew 16 was not just that He would suffer and be killed. The full promise was that He would “be killed, and on the third day be raised” (Luke 9:22). We must not forget the cross, but we must always remember the cross in light of the empty tomb. This is the fullness of God’s grace. The resurrection is the reason that Calvary’s cross is a symbol of victory!

Still, there is one more promise that Jesus made at the Last Supper. Luke 22:19-20 says, “And he took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, ‘This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.’ And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, ‘This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.’” This is the third and greatest promise that Christ made that night. There is a new covenant! Christ would not only die and rise again, but He would include us in His resurrection. It’s true that everything God does, He does for His name’s sake (see Psalm 23:3). One of the ways God glorifies His name is by sending His Son to die for His children. Think about what Christ said as He broke the bread.

Why did He give His body on the cross? He gave his body for you. Why was the cup of God's wrath poured out on Jesus? It was poured out for you. How could we forget this truth? How could we ever take this good news for granted? Why would we ever miss an opportunity to remember? And yet we are not called to take the Lord's Supper in remembrance of the gifts we receive from the cross. Instead, Jesus says, "Do this in remembrance of me" (Luke 22:19).

When we take the bread and the cup, we remember a person. We remember a person who took our place on a sinner's cross (1 Peter 3:18). We remember a person who demonstrated His love by laying down His life for us (John 15:13; Romans 5:8). We remember a person who offers new life to those who believe (John 3:16). We remember that Jesus is our Rock, and because of Him, we can stand on God's promises (1 Peter 2:6; 2 Corinthians 1:20).

PROCESSING QUESTIONS

1. What distracts you from remembering the gospel?
2. What helps you to remember the gospel?
3. Take Communion with a small group of people. As each person takes the bread and the cup, have someone remind each of you of the ways that Christ's promises specifically apply to you.

SINGING IN THE VICTORY

There is no one like You God, love immeasurable and strong

There is no one like You God, so lead this heart to sing in awe

Our freedom from anxiety and victory in Christ were never meant to terminate on us. Ultimately, we cast our anxieties on God and remember the cross so that we can give Jesus the glory He is due. When we rest in God's promises and we allow our hearts to be filled with His love, we can't help but express that love back to Him. This is what it means to be a Christian. It is not simply believing. It is both believing and confessing (Romans 10:9). This is what it means to pray. It is not only asking for blessings, interceding for others, and confessing our sin. It is also adoring God for who He is and what He's done (Psalm 29:2).

One of the ways we are called to adore God is through song. Throughout Scripture, we are given more than 50 commands to sing to God. It says four times in Psalm 47:6, "Sing praises to God, sing praises! Sing praises to our King, sing praises!" The Bible makes it clear that if we have been given a voice, God wants us to use that voice to worship Him through both adoration and song. Let's first look at the Biblical concept of "adoration."

The word "adore" is not often used in God's Word. In some translations, it can't be found at all. And yet we see this word in every hymnal, and we find it in every book ever written about prayer. Why is this? Church tradition tells us that there are four main components of prayer: adoration, confession, thanksgiving, and supplication. But where do we find these components in the Bible? And why is adoration typically listed first?

The answer is found in Matthew 6:5-15, which is known as "The Lord's Prayer." In this passage, Jesus teaches us how to address God, and His address begins with, "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name" (Matthew 6:9). No, we do not find the word "adore" in this passage, but there is no mistaking that Jesus begins His prayer with adoration. He tells the Father that His name is to be "hallowed." Most of us do not use the word "hallowed" in everyday conversation. We may use it to describe the "hallowed halls" of an old college or the "hallowed grounds" of a historic church. Maybe at one point in our lives, we asked our neighbors for candy on "Halloween," which traces its roots to the phrase "hallowed evening." But none of these uses are what Christ intended when He said, "Hallowed be your name."

The word "hallow" means "to honor as holy." So when Jesus says, "hallowed be your name," He is adoring the Father for His holiness. He is telling God that there is no one like Him. He is praising the Father for being set apart from everything and everyone else in all of creation. This is how God wants us to approach Him and address Him—He wants us to adore Him for His holiness. Even the angels in Isaiah 6 can't help but cry out,

“Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord of hosts ... ” (Isaiah 6:3). This is also the first prayer we find in the book of Revelation, “Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord God Almighty ... ” (Revelation 4:8). When we see God for who He is, we can’t help but praise Him for His holiness. We can’t help but adore Him.

Now, why must we express our adoration through song? Isn’t singing something that requires special skill? Is everyone required to sing?

God’s Word does not distinguish between those who are musically inclined and those who aren’t when it commands us to sing. It simply commands everyone to sing, over and over and over again. It’s the most reiterated command in the Bible. As one might expect, the more gifted singers are asked to lead the singing. 1 Chronicles 15:22 says, “Kenaniah the head Levite was in charge of the singing; that was his responsibility because he was skillful at it” (NIV). But who was Kenaniah leading? Earlier in this chapter, we read that King David had “assembled all Israel at Jerusalem” (1 Chronicles 15:3). At this time, there were over a million men in the Israelite army. This number did not include women, children, the elderly, or the tribes of Levi or Benjamin (1 Chronicles 21:5-6). In other words, when David assembled all Israel, he was assembling millions of people. All of God’s children were there.

The song that was sung that day can be found in 1 Chronicles 16. Here are some of the lyrics: “Sing to the Lord, all the earth; proclaim his salvation day after day. Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous deeds among all peoples” (1 Chronicles 16:23-24 NIV). Perhaps King David was the most gifted songwriter in Israel. Perhaps Kenaniah was the most skilled singer. But still, there were millions of people singing and shouting to God in that assembly. And as they sang, they proclaimed that God is worthy of more singers! “All the earth” should be singing to Him. His deeds should be declared in song by “all peoples,” not just singers, not just instrumentalists, not just the millions who were gathered that day. Everyone in all creation should sing to the Lord.

This is worth considering the next time we are tempted to sit in the back of the church and observe as the rest of the congregation sings. This should convict us when we casually approach God in the assembly, thinking more about our preferences than His holiness. This should encourage us when we find ourselves standing next to a skilled vocalist who is belting a beautiful harmony to the Lord. God wants all of us to sing! If your heart does not want to sing to Him, then ask God to align your desires with His desires. Ask Jesus to remind you of His immeasurable love demonstrated on the cross for you. Ask that He would lead your heart to sing in awe of Him.

We can “proclaim his salvation” because His mighty hand has reached down to save us (1 Chronicles 16:23). We can hallow His name, because He has called each one of us by name (John 10:3). We can stand on the promise of new life, because all of God’s promises find their “Yes” in Christ (2 Corinthians 1:20). We can sing, because we belong to Jesus and Jesus is victorious (1 Corinthians 15:57).

PROCESSING QUESTIONS

1. What does your prayer life look like right now? What do you normally say to God when you pray? How often do you adore God in prayer?
2. How do you feel about singing to God? Are you only willing to sing in certain settings? Other than a physical disability, what circumstances would keep you from singing to God?

REFLECTION

With a group, pray prayers of adoration out loud to God. This is not a time for requests or confessions. It is simply a time to adore Jesus. Then sing to Him, “Singing in the Victory.” Sing along with the recording, or sing it a cappella. Allow your heart to sing in the victory that is offered to you through the cross!

The gospel is good news. It is a captivating story. The story of Israel began with a family that was filled with anxiety. Abraham worried about Isaac, Isaac worried about Jacob, Jacob worried about Joseph, and still, God chose to bless them. The gospel is not that we, by our own resolve, are able to overcome anxiety. The gospel is that Jesus came to earth and resisted every temptation, even the temptation to allow anxiety to become sin, so that He could sacrifice His perfect life for all of God’s children.

This story is worth remembering. And more than that, the hero of this story is worth adoring. He is Holy. He is worthy of our song. And as we sing to Him, we must remember that the book of Psalms—the songbook of the Bible—does not exclude those who struggle with worry. The Psalms are proof that God meets us right where we are. He wants us to be honest with Him, even in seasons of lament. It’s an all-inclusive songbook, and we are all invited to participate. The final verse of the final Psalm says, “Let everything that has breath praise the Lord! Praise the Lord!” (Psalm 150:6).