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EXPERIENCING  
GOD'S LOVE

DEVOTIONAL

SANDRA BYRD



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*For my husband, Michael Byrd, MDiv.  
Thank you for halving my grief and doubling my joy  
for better than thirty years.*

“For we are co-workers in God’s service.”

I CORINTHIANS 3:9



# Introduction

Happy New Year!

January opens with breathtaking freshness, and opportunities beckon us forward. I can't wait—can you? Thank you, dear reader and fellow believer, for joining me for twelve months of deepening our understanding of what it means to experience the love of God.

When I reflect on the people I'm the closest to and the most intimate with, in whom I place the most trust, it's those people I spend a lot of time with. These are the people who are present in our lives for each up and down, the people we don't have to "catch up" with, because they are near-constant presences, the ones we're knit together with. I know them, and I sense when they are feeling blue or want to share some victory. They know me and understand my frailties and come alongside with a card, a hug, or an encouraging word.

No matter how close we are with other people though, they can't always be with us. A spouse may work or have other interests, and eventually he or she will pass away. Our closest friends have other interests and friends too. Our children grow up and move on to lives of their own. Small groups and Bible studies switch up over the seasons; we may change churches several times during our lives.

Only one person never changes and is always with us: our Lord. With God, we can be more intimate than with any other because he is omnipresent—always with us. "So do not fear, for I am with you," he pledges in Isaiah 41:10. "The LORD your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you," Deuteronomy 31:6 promises. I have long known that God loves me and loves you. But I long to experience it each and every day.

To experience something is to live it, to encounter it, to understand it, to explore it with our hearts, minds, and souls as well as with the five physical senses and our God-given spiritual ones. It means to join him in doing his



work and to be the recipient of it too. In every action we do with and for God, every good day and bad day when we walk hand in hand with God, we experience him.

Through these daily devotions (six days each week plus the opportunity to put new insights into practice in a hands-on way on the seventh), I pray that this year you will experience the love of God in powerful and deeply personal ways. “May you experience the love of Christ, though it is too great to understand fully. Then you will be made complete with all the fullness of life and power that comes from God” (Ephesians 3:19, NLT).

Ready? Let’s go!

*Sandra*



JANUARY



## The Payoff for Practice

My New Year's resolution: coax music out of the mahogany piano which sits, pretty but mute, in our living room. In fact, the only time the strings sound is in a reverberating response to my husband's infamously loud sneezes.

Beethoven would not approve.

As a girl, I never liked practicing, and that hasn't changed. Tackling a new piece, note by note, over and over, seems tiring and somewhat repetitive—unfulfilling, as it is often done alone. But that measure-by-measure practice is foundational to all the seamless, rewarding music that follows. In his book *Outliers*, Malcolm Gladwell says, "Practice isn't the thing you do once you're good. It's the thing you do that makes you good."

So often we want the reward, the pleasure, before putting in the time with drills. Practice, though, builds muscle memory, and muscle memory will kick in almost without thought when needed. For example, when stage fright threatens to wreck a piano performance, the oft-practiced piece will obey the rhythmic, expected motion of the hands till the fear settles down. The hands will automatically do what they have been trained to do even if the brain isn't consciously directing them.

January 1 is a good time to settle what *spiritual* practices you'd like to reestablish too. Trusting God for small things will trigger an automatic faith response when the larger challenge arrives. When a difficult circumstance arrives unannounced, we often don't have the presence of mind to tell us what to do to lean on God in that moment. If we've "practiced" the disciplines of prayer, dependence, and courage, they will kick in without conscious thought when we most need them to.

Additionally, in happier circumstances, being trained to sense the leading of God will allow your spiritual muscle memory to learn how to play the new songs he's created for your life, even when you're afraid. Inevitably, I find peace in prayer and direction in reading the Bible, even when I didn't feel like doing either at first. Habits enable us to do what is right and trust that supportive feelings will follow.

What spiritual discipline is the Holy Spirit leading you to practice this year, so you and he will make beautiful music together?

*Physical training is good, but training for godliness is much better, promising benefits in this life and in the life to come.*

1 TIMOTHY 4:8, NLT



## Beyond Expectation

*Come, thou long-expected Jesus,  
born to set thy people free;  
from our fears and sins release us,  
let us find our rest in thee.*

Charles Wesley wrote those words in 1744, and while they may provide comfort to the believer, they may also provide pain. The Jesus who is, is not always the Jesus we long for or expect.

Jesus is a healer, and we expect that he will heal. He often does, but many times he does not. If we have prayed for a fellow believer who has gone to be with the Lord, we can comfort ourselves with the fact that our loved one is out of pain and in his presence. Still, there is sometimes disappointment that the Jesus who heals did not do so here on earth when it mattered to us.

Jesus is a provider, but for those who struggle with unemployment or homelessness or hopelessness, it can be difficult to be content with the Jesus who holds their hand in the dark but does not immediately change the circumstances.

When the Lord first appeared on earth, the Jewish community had been expecting a Messiah that would free them from the political and physical oppression they suffered under the Romans. Jesus' priority, though, was the souls of people. He came to carry out the most important charge his Father had given him: to die for our redemption. The way he acts and does not act was, and still is, sometimes bewildering even to those who love and follow him. Even his cousin John, who had recognized Jesus by leaping while still in his mother Elizabeth's womb, had a moment of doubt while imprisoned. "Are you the one?" he asked of Jesus in Matthew 11:2-3 (ESV). "Or shall we look for another?"

The first-century Jewish community was expecting someone to solve their immediate problems, and when Jesus didn't do that, some grew disappointed in him. In time, though, Jesus promises he will make all things new and dry every tear. In your present circumstance, what kind of savior are you expecting? Can you find rest and release in Jesus as he truly is and does? He is righteous and good. You need look for no other.

*I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard  
what I have entrusted to him until that day.*

2 TIMOTHY 1:12



## Inspired

I sat in the family room, chick flick on in the background, inflating a floating mountain of balloons in preparation for a celebration.

I was also worrying about post-Christmas and health-care bills.

As the balloons expanded, I thought about how what filled them often defined the little orbs. Filled with water? Water balloons. Ready to soar skyward? Hot-air balloons. Huffing and puffing, I thought these would certainly be Sandra balloons—filled with air that had come from inside me. The balloons, though filled, drooped on the floor as if in confirmation of my weighed-down spirit. It put me in mind of Scripture.

Genesis tells us, “The LORD God formed the man from the dust of the ground. He breathed the breath of life into the man’s nostrils, and the man became a living person” (2:7, NLT). When we were filled with his breath of life, that was our defining moment as humans. We are filled with him, which is who we are meant to be.

That verse is directly where the word *inspiration* comes from. We are animated, filled, and defined by what is inside us.

The book of Acts shows Barnabas to be a good man, filled with faith and the Holy Spirit. After Saul had approved of the stoning of Stephen and the ravaging of the church, he left for Damascus to do more damage. Then Saul saw Christ in a vision and was saved. Barnabas found Saul and brought him back to Jerusalem. While many believers were understandably filled with fear at the sight of Saul, Barnabas was filled with faith. I imagine, like the other believers, he had that choice: be filled with fear or be filled with faith.

We, too, as modern-day disciples, have that same choice when faced with troublesome situations, large or small: faith or fear. What fills us, defines us? God tells us that he does not give us a spirit of fear but of himself—power, love, and self-control. Because he loves us, we each have the choice every day to be filled with the Spirit. Which do you choose? He wants to breathe peace and life into you today!

*God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control.*

2 TIMOTHY 1:7, ESV



## Minty Fresh

The first week of the year is a time when most of us hope to make a fresh start, a new beginning. It's a biblical concept—our Lord is a God of fresh starts and do-overs. The psalmist pleads, like we do, “Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me” (Psalm 51:10, ESV).

A dieting trick I picked up some years ago was to brush my teeth immediately after I'd finished a properly-sized portion or any time I was tempted to overindulge. Most of the time it worked, because it gave me two minutes to consider the commitment I'd made to my health.

In our Christian walk, it also feels good to be clean, and when we are spiritually shipshape, there's hesitation to mess that up. The price of “getting clean” spiritually is much costlier than a couple of minutes in front of the sink and a tube of toothpaste. It cost the Lord his very life.

I had a friend who refused to drive another friend's expensive convertible because she was afraid she'd wreck it. She had no trouble driving my old Toyota, though. First Corinthians exhorts us, “Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body” (6:19-20, ESV).

When I consider the cost to Christ for his relationship with me, I remember and experience his love for me in a fresh and energizing way. Recognizing anew the price Christ paid to purchase me, I'm compelled to consider my own devotion to being his disciple. When I sin, now, I not only ask for forgiveness and a fresh start, I prove my intentions by planning ahead, like that tooth brushing. When I sin, I pray, confess, repent, and text a friend and admit it. It's much harder than it seems, but it works, because who wants to do that multiple times a day and seem like a spiritual slacker? Not I. Being accountable and knowing how expensive this convertible was to my Savior lessens the desire to mess up.

Do you have a plan to avoid your temptations? You can succeed!

*Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.  
Come near to God and he will come near to you.*

JAMES 4:7-8



## The Gentle Cycle

I arrived at the gym in the late afternoon, just after school let out—a mistake. Half the pool was cordoned off for swimming lessons, which meant that all free swimmers would have to cram, like proverbial sardines, into the other half of the water. I looked out over the crowd. Many bathers did not have room to stretch their arms without whacking someone else, much less enjoy the water. The pool was over capacity.

I determined to come back another time, another day, but I mused on overcapacity all the way home. I wasn't sure my packed schedule allowed for another visit soon.

Sometimes I stuff too much into my washing machine in an attempt to get everything clean in one load. Only problem—nothing gets clean when the washer is over capacity. I'd recently read of a party on a college campus. Not only were there many revelers, but too many of them had also spilled out onto a tiny balcony designed for two plus a little grill, to tragic results. The balcony collapsed and took the students down with it.

Too many plugs in the socket leads to a blackout wherein nothing gets juice. So, too, when much is asked of anything or anyone, above and beyond their designed capacity, uselessness, poor performance, lack of joy, and even disaster may result.

We often think of self-control as stopping ourselves from participating in something harmful. But often, self-control means moderating the amount of good we take on. Self-control means saying no to two ministries so that we might do one well. Self-control means not taking on too many hours at work to the detriment of the body. Self-control means carving out time for rest, reflection, and pleasure in a society which often equates value with busyness. Things and people regularly running at overcapacity eventually break down, black out, or collapse. When I pack my life (or allow others to pack my life) with stuff to do, there is very little time to be: be Sandra, be still, be with Jesus and experience his presence and provision that day. Even the Lord withdrew from ministry, his work, to rest and recharge (see Luke 4:42; 5:16).

What might you trim back to do, be, and enjoy what remains? Your body and spirit deserve to be treated gently.

*Like a city whose walls are broken through is a person who lacks self-control.*

PROVERBS 25:28



## In Need of a Little Christian-ease

So often we Christians exhort others to “have faith.” Have faith that the situation will be resolved in the right way. Believe that all will end well, although current events seem to be careening out of control. Trust that shattered relationships will be restored, that God is bigger than any situation or circumstance that we face and can overcome for and with us. Our advice is true and biblical. After all, we walk by faith and not by sight, as 2 Corinthians informs us. We’re so used to saying “just have faith,” though, that it’s become *Christianese*, something we casually reference but don’t practically facilitate.

I’m here to tell you, it’s not “Christian-ease” to have faith in difficult times; it’s “Christian-hard.”

We rejoice and praise together when times are good, but we must persevere and lean into faith in both God and his faithful followers when times are tough. God has promised that he will never leave nor forsake us, but as a child once said, I sometimes wish I had Jesus with skin on him, right here and right now, in my house.

That little child’s prayer can be answered. The word *encourage* means to inspire courage or confidence in someone. People who need courage are facing a daunting, tiring, or worrisome situation. We are to help them be brave, to hold them up as it were, as they stand or fight. We experience the love of God in an unmatched, powerful way when we act as his agents, on his behalf, offering that love to others. To “go and do likewise” (Luke 10:37) to someone who is disheartened is a marching order from Jesus Christ to all who believe.

To whom, today or this week, can you bring a little “Christian-ease” by your loving, helping presence? Having a “Christian-hard” week, yourself? Be brave. Reach out to a loved one and ask for help and hugs.

*Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.*

HEBREWS 10:23-25



## Experiencing the Love of God

The amazing thing about giving to others is that it gives back to us, and almost immediately. “Give, and it will be given to you”—the mysterious economy of our wonderful God.

Today, right now, think of three or four people who could use a little lift and then reach out and encourage them. It works best if you target their particular need. Someone who is suffering from physical pain might benefit by your sharing a meal you prepare or buy, or rubbing their feet and hands. Someone who is discouraged might be encouraged by a funny card. In a day of e-mail, receiving an actual card in the mail shows care and concern. Or poke a plastic pink flamingo in their front lawn. Do you know parents who need an evening out? Send a gift card.

For the friend who needs prayer, offer to pray every day this week, and then set a calendar reminder and let them know once or twice after you’ve followed through.

Another friend might like a quick walk with you if weather allows. You can leave positive reviews online for your favorite authors, musicians, and even doctors and dentists.

Now—the harder part. Reach out and ask for help yourself. Text a friend when you need prayer. Admit your marriage is in trouble or your child is wandering, and get help. Ask on social media for a book recommendation that will lift your spirits. Join a Bible study—many new groups form at the start of the year. Lift others, and let them lift you, too.

We all experience God’s love when we’re holding hands.

The people I will reach out to, and how:

The people I’ll ask for help, and for what:

*Give, and you will receive. Your gift will return to you in full—pressed down, shaken together to make room for more, running over, and poured into your lap. The amount you give will determine the amount you get back.*

LUKE 6:38, NLT



## Only One Voice

I write for a living, which involves direction and suggestion from lots of people. Everyone from editors to friends to readers lets me know what I've done right—and wrong—and tells me what I should do next. My family even pitches in. When my young son read one of my books for tween girls, he told me exactly where I'd gone wrong. "No submarines," he said. "That's why they're not selling. You don't have any submarines in your books."

I'll bet your job is like that too, whether it be your career, your ministry, your mothering, or whatever else you undertake. Someone always knows how you should be doing it differently. Though there may be dozens of voices trying to direct me, I aim to satisfy primarily one person—my editor, my boss.

When he directs me, it is for our common goal. When he signs off on the project, he's saying, "Well done." No other voice ultimately matters.

Overall, most of us are tempted to be people pleasers. But Scripture is clear that we cannot have two masters. It's easy for the noisy one in the same room to win out over God's still, small voice.

When the Lord compares us to sheep, it is not exactly a compliment. Sheep are prone to "sheep pleasing." In fact, if one sheep panics and runs toward the edge of a cliff, the entire flock might thoughtlessly follow her; she'll lead them all to their deaths. A good shepherd will guide the sheep away from areas of danger, using his voice, his staff, and his dog to usher his flock to areas of good grazing and water so their wool can grow thick and rich. He does not allow strange animals or robbers to distract, waylay, or mislead his sheep. For this to be successful, though, the sheep must follow him and not one another or some other "boss."

I'm praying today that God will open my eyes to the places where I still want to please people, to look good in front of them, instead of listening to his quiet, leading voice. Will you join me?

*Am I now trying to win the approval of human beings, or of God? Or am I trying to please people? If I were still trying to please people, I would not be a servant of Christ.*

GALATIANS 1:10



## Three Points of Contact

Recently, we had our house painted. It's a tall house with a steep drop-off, and I watched in wonder as the painters confidently scrambled up what seemed to be shaky, thin ladders stabilized only by tiny metal feet.

I recalled the lesson my husband taught our kids when they were young and liked to climb rocks. "Three points of contact," he drilled into them. Two feet must be firmly planted, along with one hand gripping the point of contact, before the second hand could reach forward. Or, both hands held firmly to whatever was being climbed and one foot braced while the other took a step forward, backward, or down. In this way, a person could move forward, make progress, grasp, and reach. Those three points provided a stable and safe base.

The Christian has three points of constant contact in the Trinity. One of the beautiful mysteries of our faith is that, while we serve one God, he expresses himself in three unified persons. Each person of the Godhead reaches, teaches, and loves us in a unique manner, and we can hold on to all three at once.

God the Father, who calls us his children, so loved the world he created that he adopted us into his family. He called us and dearly loves us and receives our prayers. He made everything and made the way for everything. Even adults need a daddy, and in God the Father, we have that place of safety, protection, and refuge.

Jesus, the Son, is our savior, the mediator between us and the Father in salvation and in everything that comes after. He is our advocate still, our brother, friend, husband, and our model for life. "Follow me," he said.

Jesus told us that it would be a wonderful thing for us to receive the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity. The Spirit is a counselor to us at all times; he helps us recall Scripture and spiritual lessons. He convicts us of poor courses of action and affirms and urges us toward wise ones.

Are you excited to climb, walk, reach, and grasp the delightful life God has gifted you from your stable, safe base of love?

*May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.*

2 CORINTHIANS 13:14, NLT



## He's Made Us Fast

Among the most motivating movies for Christians to watch is *Chariots of Fire*. It tells the story of two world-class runners, including Eric Liddell, a Scottish man born to Christian missionaries in China.

Liddell was selected to run in the 1924 Olympics. When he was scheduled to run his race on Sunday, he declined, saying he would not run on the Sabbath, though he was pressured by many to ignore his convictions. It's been claimed that an American Olympic team masseur slipped a piece of paper into Liddell's hand with this quotation from 1 Samuel 2:30: "Those who honor me I will honor."

Liddell withdrew from the 100-meter race to avoid running on the Sabbath and instead ran the 400-meter event on another day. The 51st Highland Brigade played their pipes outside the stadium before Liddell ran, to give him courage and national pride. Liddell ran—and won the gold, setting an Olympic record. Liddell's fidelity to his Christian convictions made him famous at the time, and even better, put his faith and ours front and center.

So often we feel that our best ministries are those that are traditionally defined—pastor, preacher, missionary, Sunday school teacher. Mostly, though, our strongest testimonies come through when we decide, with a moment's notice, to live the faith we claim. Eric Liddell's family honored God as missionaries, and he himself returned to missionary work after the Olympics. What the family is best remembered for now is not that traditionally defined Christian ministry, but Liddell's spot decision to honor God with his life in the nonreligious details. He said, "I believe that God made me for a purpose. . . . But he also made me fast, and when I run, I feel his pleasure."

Where do you feel God's pleasure?

*Those who honor me I will honor.*

1 SAMUEL 2:30



## Abiding Love

I've spent the past couple of years losing weight, slowly but successfully, after not having been able to do that for some time. I've found a new way of eating that works for me and have incorporated the changes gradually, one by one. I'd heard the adage, "It took you X years to put this on; it's not going to come off overnight." But somehow, with the effort put forward, it seemed like things were moving too slowly.

Our world loves to promote successes: overnight financial successes, start-ups that make a billion dollars with no college required, houses flipped for instant profit, fifty pounds lost in fifty days. The hare always seems to come out as the media winner, and the tortoise, rarely even acknowledged. But as we know, the tortoise wins in the end because of perseverance.

I mentioned the slow progress to a mentor, who told me, "Plateaus are good for the health. They give us time to adjust at each level, each change in habit, before moving on to the next." They allow us to remain and to abide.

This, too, is true for our spiritual health. We read the Word, or listen to a speaker or a pastor, and glean a new and exciting insight that we immediately apply, and it changes us. Then, time goes by before the next epiphany. Our walk seems slow, routine, unexciting. These seem like spiritual plateaus; in fact, they are. But they allow us time to incorporate each new truth, each new insight given, into our daily life. We experience increased understanding of the Lord when we reach a new height in our spiritual lives, but we experience a new depth in his abiding love when we remain on plateaus. We are not designed to incorporate many new habits at once. When we try that, often none of them stick. Perseverance wins the day.

The human body, and the body of Christ, both grow toward health with steady forward progress. Is there somewhere you feel like you're not making progress quickly enough, but in truth, you're moving at just the right pace for permanent change?

*I have loved you even as the Father has loved me. Remain in my love.*

JOHN 15:9, NLT



## Lean on Me

Social media can be the fount of many ills, but it has also been a force for good. From the privacy of home, we meet new friends and brothers and sisters in Christ, people we may never have met while here on earth. One such friend, Robert Cook, underwent the most severe tragedy a parent can imagine. As he crept through that trial on his knees, he taught all of us, near and far, what it means to trust God.

Robert's son was undergoing some extreme difficulties, and when Robert was called to his son's hospital bedside, he went to social media and asked all of us who believe to pray. I knew Mr. Cook was a brother in Christ and a parent, and my heart went out to him as did many hundreds if not thousands of other hearts. We prayed for his son, and we prayed for Robert. Despite the best medical efforts and all those prayers, Robert's son passed away, into the arms of Jesus. Robert was crushed, and so were all of us who had come alongside him. He showed grace and dignity during the situation, and he also showed vulnerability in reaching out for help when he needed it—not putting on a stoic face but living an honest life of faith.

The moment in which I learned the most from Mr. Cook was after his son had been buried. Speaking of his Christian faith, his relationship with Jesus, Robert said, "I'm continuing my walk, just with a limp." He was willing to experience the love of God, both in his deep love for his son and in the crushing loss of his son. Who better than Jesus to lean on when our walk is unsteady?

Has there ever been a stronger, truer, more encouraging testimony? If we live long enough, each of us will take a bat to the shins, perhaps many times over. What does that do to our walk? Are we paralyzed? Do we turn away from Christ? Or do we keep walking, slowly, with the one who holds us up when we stumble?

Take his hand. Take mine. It's okay to limp. We all limp sometimes. Let's just keep walking.

*Brothers and sisters, we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death, so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope.*

1 THESSALONIANS 4:13



## Sense and Sensibility

Our son-in-law, a new believer at the time, had a big concern and voiced it to us. “How do I hear from God? I want to hear his voice, but I’m not sure how to understand what he’s telling me about everyday things.”

Many of us, no matter how long we’ve been Christians, would agree that we long to hear from the Lord, directly or indirectly. “If God would just tell me what to do, I’d do it,” has escaped my lips every year. With our son-in-law, we discussed reading Scripture and paying attention to the leading of the Holy Spirit—good teaching, covering all the basics. But one way the Lord speaks to us, every day, is often overlooked.

God has given us five senses, sensibility, and the Holy Spirit to help us discern. He’s asked us many times in Scripture to observe and then draw conclusions.

How do I know if someone is a safe person to be in a relationship with, learn from, befriend, or marry? Jesus says, “A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. . . . Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them” (Matthew 7:18, 20).

How do I know that you’ll care for me, Lord? “Consider the ravens: They do not sow or reap, they have no storeroom or barn; yet God feeds them. And how much more valuable you are than birds!” (Luke 12:24).

Do you see my needs, Lord? “Consider how the wild flowers grow. They do not labor or spin. . . . If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today, and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, how much more will he clothe you?” (Luke 12:27-28).

When I’m lonely, and he nudges someone to call me, I know he’s listening to my heart, and I “hear” from him in the voice of my friend. When I see someone who can’t provide a birthday party for her child, and he reminds me I’m good at baking cakes, he’s speaking to me and asking me to speak for him, through a cake. I love to read the Word and listen to it taught. But how sweet it is, indeed, to see and hear and taste and touch him at work all around us every day, when we have eyes to see!

*Ears that hear and eyes that see—the LORD has made them both.*

PROVERBS 20:12



## Experiencing the Love of God

Training our senses, both physical and spiritual, to sense and see God at work around us takes practice. But it can be done and is well worth the effort to communicate with him in this manner every day. When we learn to discern his hands at work and act as his hands at work, we experience his love—and our partnership with him—in a deeper, more meaningful way.

Scripture tells us that “whatever is good and perfect is a gift coming down to us from God our Father (see James 1:17, NLT), so that’s a great place to start. Got something good going on? Thank you, Lord!

Scripture also tells us that “for whom the LORD loves He chastens” (Hebrews 12:6, NKJV). Had a gentle (or not so gentle!) correction lately, one that sent you in the right direction? Thank you, Lord!

I have always had a thing with pennies, between God and me. When I see one I remember what is stamped on it, “In God We Trust.” It reminds me to trust him. When I’m feeling weak or worried, I often find a penny on the floor or on the ground, and I know he’s drawn my eye to it.

One day I was under a lot of stress, and I asked the Lord, “Please reassure me.” I walked into the dry cleaner, which is owned by Christians, and heard a lovely praise song. I just knew that was from God! And then, as I paid, my eyes were drawn to a huge cup FILLED with pennies. “Need one? Take one!” it said. My eyes filled with tears. That was from him too.

How do you see God’s work in your life in the natural world around you this week? Don’t skip past this. Stay here, prayerfully, until you can list at least five ways.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

*Whatever is good and perfect is a gift coming down to us from God our Father, who created all the lights in the heavens.*

JAMES 1:17, NLT



## Keep Humble and Hustle Hard

A nearby store was selling coffee growers that I knew my son would enjoy. The bottles were stamped with “Keep Humble and Hustle Hard.” My son is a tech entrepreneur, and among entrepreneurs, the need to hustle—to move quickly, effectively, and keep pushing forward—is a byword for success. After college, he told us he was going to bootstrap his new company; we heartily affirmed him but reminded him that we’d invested in his college, so it was his *own* bootstraps that needed to be used to pull himself up. He knew. Having skin in the game keeps you hungry and hustling.

His energy and commitment remind me of a story I watched about a woman starting her own flower business. She purchased a decommissioned food truck and traveled her small town in it, selling bouquets. An entrepreneurial friend told her that she should buy more flowers than she thought she could sell as a way to risk, push forward, look for creative techniques, and not rest on her laurels. Her flower business was a blooming success!

Investors lend seed money, or startup capital, as an indication of faith in the idea and anticipated return on investment. In the end, though, it is up to the entrepreneur to maneuver the company to success. In the same way, the Lord has “seeded” us with spiritual giftings which we are to use, in conjunction with him, for the benefit of other Christians. The ministry is handed to us, with our human skin in the game, in an indication of the faith God has in us and our ability to creatively and persistently work out that calling.

Like any investor, God can add or remove gifts depending on how they are stewarded. The parable of the talents in Matthew clearly shows that the Lord expects us to wisely invest the talents he’s given us for a good return. How do we do that? We fan those gifts into flame through an intentional blend of dependency, intention, and action. What has the Spirit gifted you with that you can invest in Kingdom work?

Stay humble and hustle hard!

*I am reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also. For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God.*

2 TIMOTHY 1:5-6

