

“God Promises a Wonderful Future!”
Ephesians 1:15-23, 3:14-21 & Colossians 1:18-20
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Prayer for Understanding Almighty God you are pure in every way and the source of everything right. Purify us now with your word, which is sharper than a two-edged sword. Send you Holy Spirit so that your word will be for us a fortress of truth, a wellspring of wisdom and a fountain of life. Amen.

Life is messy. We only perceive a snippet of reality. God perceives all. God is love and will get everyone to glorious everlasting life. God promises a wonderful future grander than all the good dreams and hopes of the cosmos.

On the dairy farm, we had clean, safe, cozy, climate-controlled birthing pens for our cows. After each birth, the pen was disinfected, lime was put on the floor for sure footing for the fatigued cow and wobbly newborn calf, and soft straw covered the lime. We were trained in calf birthing. If more help was needed, we had a veterinarian on call 24/7 who typically arrived in minutes. We hand-delivered food for the cow and assisted, if needed, the calf in nursing.

A primal instinct often urged expectant cows to flee and hide. An escaped cow typically hid in the swamp. The farm had a section of land three quarters of a mile long and two tenths of a mile wide that was ideal for hiding but dangerous. This section of land had a meandering creek, bogs, cattails and thick brush. The mosquitos were thick and the leaches hungry. There were places where there was no firm bottom. We once had a cow get stuck in the muck and drown. Most of the area was thick with poison sumac and scratchy dense brush that grew ten feet high. A couple of times the coyotes made a meal out of the newborn calf.

One summer day, an expectant cow, unaware of the safety of the birthing pen, choose the chaos of the swamp. We called family and friends to help with the search. Our search identified where we thought the cow entered the swamp. I geared up, long pants and shirt duct taped at the ankles and wrists to keep the leaches out and protect from the scratching brush, cutgrass, ripgut, and poisonous plants. I had an extendable flag. Shortly after entering the brush, the tracks were covered by water and floating bogs. It was a miserable search. At times, I was squeezing through thick brush; other times, I had to swim. Worst of all was the chest deep quicksand like muck. I knew the cow would seek the rare spot where there was an oasis of firm ground. It is scary how quickly one becomes disoriented in thick brush when you need to travel in swirling patterns to avoid inaccessible areas. Since my dad once got lost in the swamp, we had a system. I would extend the flag and wave it back and forth, then my mom would drive as close as possible with a four-wheel drive tractor, being careful not to get too close because the swamp could swallow a tractor, my mom would stop and stand atop the tractor where she could see all the terrain and yell directions to me. When I found the cow, I raised the flag and held it still. This was the signal for people to get in position on each side. Together, we herded the cow toward the dry land. This was challenging as the cow kept trying to go sideways into dense areas of the swamp. I had several of these successful cow rescues. The key to our success was the person on top of the tractor who was able to see the bigger picture and give directions.

Soren Kierkegaard said: “It is good once in a while to feel oneself in the hands of God, rather than always and eternally slinking around the familiar nooks and corners of a town where one always knows a way out.”

The Apostle Paul invites us to imagine the big picture. Life is messy and God is cleaning it all up. There is hate and love will reign supreme. We experience turmoil and the peace that surpasses all understanding will invigorate us forever. Fear distracts us and hope will fulfill every good dream. Damaged relationships are everywhere and grace will forgive, heal, and make every relationship synergistic. Grief crushes us and all will be recovered, every person will be resurrected, everyone will live in harmony forever. Sadness holds us down and joy will free us to soar with eagles. God will accomplish infinitely more than everyone’s grandest good dreams and hopes. The Apostle Paul prays that our hearts will be flooded with light so that we can glimpse the wonderful future God has promised, to realize what a glorious inheritance God has prepared for us.

The Apostle Paul wrote: **Ephesians 1:15-23, 3:14-21 “Ever since I first heard of your strong faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for God’s people everywhere, I have not stopped thanking God for you. I**

pray for you constantly, asking God, the glorious Parent of our Lord Jesus Christ, to give you spiritual wisdom and insight so that you might grow in your knowledge of God. I pray that your hearts will be flooded with light so that you can understand the wonderful future God has promised to those God has called. I want you to realize what a rich and glorious inheritance God has given to God's people. I also pray that you will understand the incredible greatness of God's power for us who believe God. This is the same mighty power that raised Christ from the dead and seated Jesus in the place of honor at God's right hand in the heavenly realms. Now Jesus is far above any ruler or authority or power or leader or anything else, not only in this world but also in the world to come. God has put all things under the authority of Christ and has made Jesus head over all things for the benefit of the church. And the church is God's body; the church is made full and complete by Christ, who fills all things everywhere with God. I pray that from God's glorious, unlimited resources God will empower you with inner strength through the Holy Spirit. Then Christ will make God's home in your hearts as you trust in God. Your roots will grow down into God's love and keep you strong. And may you have the power to understand, as all God's people should, how wide, how long, how high, and how deep God's love is. May you experience the love of Christ, though God's love is too great to understand fully. Then you will be made complete with all the fullness of life and power that comes from God. All glory to God, who is able, through God's mighty power at work within us, to accomplish infinitely more than we might ask or think. Glory to God in the church and in Christ Jesus through all generations forever and ever! Amen.

Anne Lamott wrote: "Things are not perfect, because life is not a TV show and we are real people with scarred, worried hearts. But life is amazing a lot of the time. I remind myself all the time of what the priest told Bill Wilson in 1935, when he was trying to get AA off the ground. He said, "Bill, sometimes I think that heaven is just a new pair of glasses." I often wake up fixated on how scary the world is, how ruined everything seems, and then I remember the priest's words. And I figuratively put on a better pair of glasses and I look all around me for love, beauty, innocence and life-giving laughter. Like my husband Neal says, you can see everything true and beautiful on any ten-minute walk. I can go outside and see litter and dog poo. Or, when I have put on a better pair of glasses, I can see that a few paper-whites have bloomed in the freezing cold, that the woman we thought was dying last year has gotten a puppy, peace signs in people's yards and just regular old ordinary kindness. I will put on better glasses and head out now!"

David Brooks wrote: "One morning I was in a crowded subway car underneath 33rd Street and Eighth Avenue in New York (truly one of the ugliest spots on this good green earth). I looked around the car, and I had this shimmering awareness that all the people in it had souls. Each of them had some piece of themselves that had no size, color, weight or shape but that gave them infinite value. The souls around me that day seemed not inert but yearning, some soaring, some suffering, some sleeping; some were downtrodden and some crying out. These thoughts helped me think more deeply about my job. I had approached journalism with the vague sense that the people we cover have a basic dignity by virtue of being human. But seeing them as creatures with souls, as animals with a spark of the divine, helps me see people in all their majesty. Seeing them simultaneously as fallen and broken creatures both prepared me for their depravities and made me feel more tender toward our eternal human tendency to screw things up. I hope I see each person at greater height and depth. Once you accept that there is a spiritual element in each person and there is a spiritual element to the universe as a whole a new perspective emerges."

You are the pilot of flight 232 on July 19, 1989, the aircraft's tail-mounted engine explodes destroying all hydraulic systems leaving you with almost no control over the plane. What do you do? Most of the lives were saved because the pilot got a more complete perspective from the air traffic control tower. From the cockpit, the pilot could see only the shaking instrument panel, feel the unstable descent, and imagine their terrifying ending. From the control tower, others could see the entire unfolding situation, where the aircraft was headed, and landing options. The tower had access to an abundance of resources and communicated solutions. The tower coordinate resources beyond the pilots' perception. Airspace was cleared. Emergency vehicles summoned. Firefighters deployed. Ambulances waited in formation. Hospitals prepared for the injured. The plane still crashed, however the guidance and resources of the tower assisting the pilot enabled most of the passengers to survive. Aviation experts studied that crash and determined the factor that saved lives was the coordination between pilot and the control tower. The air traffic control, seeing the whole picture was able to guide the pilot. This distinction, between what you can see from the cockpit and what can be seen from

the tower, matters far beyond aviation. Each of us is the pilot of our lives restricted by circumstances. We see what is immediately in front of us, the problems that demand attention, the decisions that feel urgent, the pressures that seem overwhelming. Our perspective is close, narrow, distorted, and incomplete. And when circumstances begin to spiral beyond our control, it is easy to believe that everything depends on our own ability to manage the chaos.

The Apostle Paul prays for us to consider another vantage point. God perceives all. Communicating with God gives us insights on how to navigate life. God promises a wonderful future grander than all the good dreams and hopes of the cosmos.

The Apostle Paul wrote in a time of oppression, widespread violence, and corruption. Paul endured shipwrecks, beatings, prison, inner conflict, and chaos. Paul does not offer specific solutions, no survival manual, no tactical strategy, and no promise of smooth skies ahead. Instead, Paul offers a prayer, a plea, that you will see reality through a different lens. Paul's prayer jolts our attention away from the cockpit toward the tower, away from our circumstances toward God. Mostly we navigate life with the senses of our fragile, deteriorating clay vessel, made from dust and that aspect of us will return to dust. Our earthly bodies provide partial information. We react to alarms, pain, grief, violence, loss, making decisions with limited perception, often convinced that the fate of our life depends on our skill alone. Our circumstances can change quickly. One season feels stable and predictable, and the next feels turbulent and uncertain. Financial markets rise and fall. Political landscapes shift. Social tensions intensify. News cycles deliver fresh concerns every minute. In the cockpit of life, warning lights flash with exhausting frequency. Psychologists who study crisis response often note that stress narrows perception. Under pressure, we focus intensely on immediate threats while losing awareness of the broader context. This phenomenon, sometimes called tunnel vision, can be useful in short bursts, enabling rapid reaction. However sustained tunnel vision leads to fatigue, anxiety and a sense that the future is perpetually at risk.

Paul does not criticize the cockpit perspective. Paul understands that daily life unfolds in the midst of uncertainty and struggle. And Paul knows living exclusively from the cockpit produces exhaustion. When everything depends on what we can see, fear becomes inevitable. When outcomes hinge solely on one's skills the future appears fragile.

Paul prays that we seek a fuller perspective that comes from God. Each of us has an eternal soul that is capable of knowing that all will be well with our soul. The soul is a conduit that assures us of the promises of God that each of us will have a wonderful future, that the entire cosmos has a wonderful future. Our soul provides peace that surpasses understanding. Scripture explains it as the peace Jesus provided the disciples, who were imprisoned by fear after Jesus' crucifixion, which enabled them to perceive resurrection which helped them live their lives. Our soul gives us glimpses of God's perspective. Earth perspective, loss is permanent and death final. Soul perspective, every loss will be enjoyed again and resurrection life will be enjoyed by everyone. Earth perspective, relationships are messy, hurts permanent, failure final. Soul perspective, all relationships will be loving, every tear wiped away by Jesus and every good dream achieved. Earth perspective, life is hard, fatigue, anxiety, and disappointment. Soul perspective, life is abundant, soaring, comforting, and glorious. You fill in your own situation. For you, earth perspective is what? Now perceive with your soul what is the inverse glory that God has in store for you?

Paul is making an audacious claim about reality, moving steadily upward, like a camera pulling back to reveal a wider horizon. Paul prays for us to receive a spirit of wisdom and revelation that the eyes of our hearts be enlightened. Vision is more than physical sight. God provides a way of seeing that goes beyond immediate appearances to see our wonderful future and glorious inheritance.

Physical sight sees structures dominating daily life, health, political, economic, and military. Spirit sight sees redemption, restoration, reconciliation, and resurrection. Back to the cockpit. Without the perspective of the tower, the cockpit becomes a place of anxiety. Every threat feels decisive. Every crisis appears final. Every uncertainty feels like the end of the story. From God's perspective, we glimpse the larger narrative, good is emerging from every struggle, every brokenness is being made whole, every form of death resurrected, love expanding and all becoming glorious. Paul prays for us to journey with both our physical and spiritual sight. God loves the cosmos with transforming resurrection, the superior force that even in the face of apparent defeat and catastrophic endings God will always provide victory, universal flourishing, and life out of death. God reigns above every power that threatens us.

From the cross, it looked like the end, everything appeared lost, love failed, Jesus executed, hope had collapsed under the weight of imperial power. There was no visible physical sight that anything could be salvaged. From Easter resurrection one perceives that all is being made glorious and everyone will enjoy a wonderful future forever. God is a control tower of grace, mercy, love, joy, and peace. In the control tower is the risen Jesus far above all rule and authority and power and dominion reigning, guiding, and holding everything together. The Apostle Paul wrote: **Colossians 1:18-20 MSG “Jesus was supreme in the beginning and leading the resurrection parade Jesus is supreme in the end. From beginning to end Jesus is there, towering far above everything, everyone. So spacious is Jesus, so roomy, that everything of God finds its proper place in Jesus. All the broken and dislocated pieces of the universe, people and things, animals and atoms, get properly fixed and fit together in vibrant harmonies.”**

Life is turbulent. It may seem like everything depends on you. God is with you. God is mobilizing teams of angels, activating the resurrection designed into every element of the cosmos, and loving all into glory. God promises a wonderful future grandeur than all the good dreams and hopes of the cosmos. Amen