
BACK TO BASICS

PSALM 8

Remember Who You Are

*What are humans that you are mindful of them,
mortals that you care for them?*

Psalm 8:4

Many of us are old enough to remember actress Sally Field's now-famous Oscar acceptance speech, in which she is reported to have said: "You like me. You really, really like me." Actually, she said, "I can't deny the fact that you like me. Right now, you like me!"* There's something amazing in someone who has achieved that level of fame and success being surprised by recognition and appreciation from peers.

The psalmist expresses a similar surprise in relationship to God. Who are you, God, that you should care for us? Or more specifically, who are we that you should care for us? I suspect many of us, deep down, don't feel worthy of that care. Indeed, we might want to say to God, "If you knew me, you wouldn't want to care for me." In that moment, despite feeling unworthy, we remember that God really, really does care.



*Loving God, remind me again and again of the depth
of your love for me. Amen.*

John-Peter Smit, Belleville, Ontario

* Sally Field, 57th Academy Awards acceptance speech for Actress in a Leading Role, Dorothy Chandler Pavillion, March 25, 1985, Los Angeles, California.

THURSDAY, MAY 28, 2026

BACK TO BASICS

2 CORINTHIANS 13:11–13

A New Commandment I Give to You

Finally, brothers and sisters, farewell. Be restored; listen to my appeal; agree with one another; live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you.

2 Corinthians 13:11

Each time I read Scripture, I see something new. In this case, I notice the words “be restored” in Paul’s benediction. Given the fractious nature of the Corinthian church, I’m sure this refers to the restoration of community. Paul further instructs them to agree with one another and live in peace. In this fractured age, these instructions seem impossible. How can we agree? How can we live in peace?

When my wife and I walked the Camino de Santiago, it actually took us two attempts. The first time, trying to walk too far too soon, we were stopped by foot injuries. So the second time, starting with short distances, we worked our way up. It’s similar with the work of restoration. Small acts build our experience and ability to undertake larger efforts.



God of mercy, you call us to restoration. Help us, in small ways, to live in peace. Amen.

John-Peter Smit, Belleville, Ontario

FRIDAY, MAY 29, 2026

BACK TO BASICS
2 CORINTHIANS 13:11–13

You Are Blessed

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you.

2 Corinthians 13:13

A preacher never knows what part of worship will resonate with listeners. Recently I performed a wedding for a couple of another faith tradition, officiating because they couldn't get married in their own church. Afterward, a guest approached me crying and told me how significant it was to witness the marriage being blessed. She never thought her friends could be united "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."

Paul's benediction isn't those exact words, but the blessing is the same. Although, as a child of the church, I've heard them numerous times, the tears of this woman reminded me anew of the unbelievable significance of these words. How amazing it is to know that we literally live in the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit.



*O Lord, remind me daily of the grace you give.
Amen.*

John-Peter Smit, Belleville, Ontario

SATURDAY, MAY 30, 2026

BACK TO BASICS
MATTHEW 28:16–20

Abide in My Love

“And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

Matthew 28:20b

There’s a joke about a newly ordained minister who called a seminary professor asking, “what should I do if Jesus comes again?” The professor responds: “Look busy!”

It’s a corny joke but also a reminder that while we preach grace, we typically lean to works. Many Christians would identify more as Martha than Mary. It’s easy to see even the Great Commission as more work to do. Yes, the call to evangelism is important, but even more significant is the assurance of Christ’s perpetual presence.

A few years ago, I attended the funeral of an uncle, a man of deep and visible faith. During the sermon, his pastor shared how my uncle, at ninety-two years of age, had become unsure of his salvation, thinking he had not done enough. I was saddened that he hadn’t learned that God’s love is unconditional, even to the end of the age.



Loving God, remind us that you cannot love us more than you love us right now. Amen.

John-Peter Smit, Belleville, Ontario

GOD'S CALL
GENESIS 12:1–9

Called to Courage

Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you."

Genesis 12:1

I appreciate this story because we have all experienced some version of it: a call to any one of many new beginnings. As a reminder, discernment should happen in community. A colleague once cited this passage, sharing that God had told him to leave everything—and so he did. To say that it did not go well would be a vast understatement. With this reminder that discernment is important, the point remains simple: life is full of moments where we are asked to move, not knowing how the story will end. As I wonder how I might apply Abram's circumstance to my own, I am reminded that God was leading and that Abram was called to faithfully follow. He did not travel alone; he had God's presence to guide him, as do we.



Holy Spirit, be present with us as we follow where you lead. Amen.

John-Peter Smit, Belleville, Ontario

MONDAY, JUNE 1, 2026

GOD'S CALL
PSALM 33:1–12

Called to Rejoice

*Rejoice in the LORD, O you righteous.
Praise befits the upright.*

Psalm 33:1

Many recall the Y2K anxiety and fear around the coming of the new millennium on New Year's Eve of 1999. Would everything stop working? Would the world end? We quickly learned that everything would, and did, turn out fine. Still, the memory I cherish is that, in the face of fear and anxiety, the world held the biggest New Year's party ever! That moment, and this psalm, remind me that, at our core, God's people are a people of joy.

Rejoice in the Lord! This passage, and many more, declare that in the midst of a troubling world and an uncertain future, joy and praise are appropriate responses. The psalmist points out that praise befits the upright. If indeed "the joy of the LORD is your strength" (Neh. 8:10), then perhaps joy is a more appropriate life perspective than fear, anger, or frustration.



*God of praise, help us live lives of joy and celebration
at your goodness and love. Amen.*

John-Peter Smit, Belleville, Ontario

GOD'S CALL

HOSEA 5:15–6:6; PSALM 50:7–15

A Call to Thanksgiving and Love

*For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice,
the knowledge of God rather than burnt
offerings.*

Hosea 6:6

Typically, the prophets are far more interested in what we do than what we believe. Nowhere is this more evident than in their response to sacrifices. In today's text, the prophet Hosea condemns sacrifices, even though they were a crucial part of the Deuteronomic code, realizing that ritual alone is meaningless without authenticity and changed behavior.

Reading the Hebrew Scriptures helps us understand why Jesus was so dismissive of the empty rituals of Pharisees and teachers of the law. Still, before getting smug, we must remember that we're just as susceptible to hollow worship as they were.

Another of today's readings, Psalm 50, entreats us to "offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving (v. 14a). With a posture of gratitude, we can call on the Lord and we will be delivered.



*Merciful God, call us to lives of gratitude and
thanksgiving and let this be our offering to you.
Amen.*

John-Peter Smit, Belleville, Ontario

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 3, 2026

GOD'S CALL
ROMANS 4:13–25

A Call to Patience

No distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, being fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised.

Romans 4:20–21

This passage is part of a larger narrative concerning whether Abraham was in heaven because he had died before Christ came. Paul's answer is, of course, yes! Abraham was saved through faith, and as an example of this faith, Paul recalls God's promise that Abraham would be "the father of many nations" (v. 17), even though he and Sarah were well past child-rearing age. While I suspect it wasn't quite that simple, in truth, Abraham was "fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised."

God has made us promises as well, in Scripture and in our lives. Sometimes the fulfillment of these promises spans many years. How can we maintain the hope and conviction that God will do what God has promised?



Lord, give me the patience and conviction that your promises do come true. Amen.

John-Peter Smit, Belleville, Ontario

GOD'S CALL

MATTHEW 9:9–13, 18–26

A Call to Follow Jesus

As Jesus was walking along, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax-collection station, and he said to him, "Follow me." And he got up and followed him.

Matthew 9:9

There are many things in the Bible requiring explanation or historical context. Disdain for tax collectors is not one of them. Somehow this transcends time.

To make this scorn clear, later in the story, Jesus is criticized for eating with tax collectors and sinners. He responds by reminding them that "those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick" (v. 12). Then he says, "go and learn what this means, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice'" (v. 13). It's fascinating how often we think the words of Jesus apply first and foremost to somebody else. The simple truth is that we are all sinners in need of Christ's mercy. Still, though we're sinners, we're also the ones to whom Jesus says: "Follow me."



*Forgiving God, we have all sinned and fallen short,
but you love and call us anyway. Amen.*

John-Peter Smit, Belleville, Ontario

FRIDAY, JUNE 5, 2026

GOD'S CALL
MATTHEW 9:9–13, 18–26

A Call to Trust

While he was saying these things to them, suddenly a leader came in and knelt before him, saying, "My daughter has just died, but come and lay your hand on her, and she will live."

Matthew 9:18

In the Gospel of Luke, this nameless leader is identified as Jairus, a synagogue ruler. Most of the time the leaders of the synagogue are at odds with Jesus, either trying to condemn him or receiving Jesus's harshest criticisms. Here we see a man with nothing left to lose, a man who has exhausted every medical avenue and now humbles himself before Jesus to save his daughter. Reputation, standing, office: none of these matter in the face of his need.

It's worth noting that Jesus does not receive Jairus's request with derision or contempt. We wouldn't expect him to; he is Jesus, after all. This model of graciousness, even with those we are at odds with, is one of the hallmarks of our faith.



Gracious God, may we turn to you before you are our last resort. Amen.

John-Peter Smit, Belleville, Ontario

SATURDAY, JUNE 6, 2026

GOD'S CALL
MATTHEW 9:9–13, 18–26

A Call to Be Bold

Then suddenly a woman who had been suffering from a flow of blood for twelve years came up behind him and touched the fringe of his cloak . . . saying . . . “If I only touch his cloak, I will be made well.”

Matthew 9:20–21

Like the leader just a few verses earlier, this unnamed woman, who had been bleeding for twelve years, had nothing to lose. Her determination to be healed by Jesus, anonymously, by touching the hem of his cloak, is remarkable. Of course, Jesus knew when she touched him and, as she did, proclaimed, “Your faith has made you well” (v. 22).

This is a story of faith when hope is gone. It is a story of faith as a literal last resort. I wonder how often we try to solve things ourselves, only to realize we can't do it, that we have to turn to Jesus.



Gracious God, we are grateful that by trusting you, our faith can be our first choice and not our last resort. Amen.

John-Peter Smit, Belleville, Ontario

SUNDAY, JUNE 7, 2026

IN AND OUT OF CONTROL

GENESIS 18:1–15

Waiting

The LORD appeared to Abraham by the oaks of Mamre, as he sat at the entrance of his tent in the heat of the day.

Genesis 18:1

Abraham was seventy-five years old when we first learn of his interactions with God. He was told to go, so he loaded up and went. He and his wife, Sarah, were motivated by the promise that they would become a great nation, even though they had no children.

More than twenty years passed, and they were, once again, promised that God would make them exceedingly fruitful, although they were still childless. The years were ticking on, the rationality of the promise diminishing by the day, and no one would have faulted them for giving up hope. But day in and day out, they waited. Abraham sat by the door, as if his blessing might arrive in a brown shipping box. Against all odds, Abraham and Sarah remained hopeful because they believed the promise.



Merciful God, help us to trust, even when everything around us gives us reason to doubt. Amen.

Andy Blackwelder, Greeneville, Tennessee

