



*Beverly L. Buckingham*

Since last writing for *The Fruit of the Vine* I have returned to serve the Lord at Center Friends Church (CFC Worship Center) located in West Milton, Ohio. After thirty years at Center and twelve years among the Grace Brethren, I feel like I've come home.

The adventure of writing my first book, *Hope for the Hurting*, published by Infinity Publishing, has stretched me in new ways: book signings, speaking engagements, record keeping, and taxes, to name a few.

I keep busy teaching a Bible study at Englewood Square, writing quarterly for *The Hope-Line Devotional*, doing activities with my large family, and participating in ministry opportunities at my church and Grace Brethren Village where I live. The picture above was taken at a family Christmas party.

This week's devotions from Psalm 103 developed while asking myself the question: What does it mean to bless the Lord with all my soul, remembering all his benefits? I pray that God will touch each one at their point of need. May his name be glorified!

*BIBLE READING: Psalm 103:1; Matthew 26:6-12*

What does it mean to bless the Lord? In the Amplified Bible Psalm 103:1 reads: “Bless (AFFECTIONATELY, gratefully praise) the Lord, O my soul; and all that is [deepest] within me, bless His holy name!”

Pondering the word “affectionately” I remember my need for relationship with the One I am praising. The apostle Paul speaks of this relationship in Romans 10:9-10: “That if you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.” Let’s praise him for our salvation.

Praising God with all that is deepest within me brings to mind the woman spoken of in Matthew 26:6-12. She comes to Jesus with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume and pours it on his head. Willing to give to Christ her best, her all, she does not care about the thoughts and opinions of others. Jesus quickly rebukes her critics, asking, “Why are you bothering this woman? She has done a beautiful thing to me.” Then He adds that her actions will be remembered wherever the gospel is preached.

Are we able to affectionately praise the Lord today? Does all that is deep within us bless his holy name? He longs for us to offer ourselves completely to him so that we might be his sweet fragrance to a lost and hurting world

*SONG: I Will Praise Him*

*PRAAYER SUGGESTION: Teach me, Lord, to affectionately bless your name. Strengthen me to fulfill your purpose in my life, regardless of the thoughts of others. I long to worship you with all that is deep within me.*

—Beverly L. Buckingham

*BIBLE READING: Psalm 103:2; Luke 17:11-19*

Can you think of a time when you did something special for someone, and yet they didn't seem grateful or offer thanks? Such an experience can stir up questions: "Did they receive the gift?" "Did I offend them when I only meant to help them?" "Are they ill or away?" This gives us the opportunity to ask questions of ourselves: How grateful are we for the benefits of God? Do we take time to thank him and others who help us?

In today's Scripture reading Jesus heals ten men with the dreaded disease of leprosy who were calling out to him for mercy. "When he saw them, he said, 'Go, show yourselves to the priests.' And as they went, they were cleansed" (v. 14). All ten could have returned to thank him, and yet only one came back praising God. He fell at the feet of Jesus thanking him. Jesus asked, "Where are the other nine?" They never bothered to show up. But Jesus said to the Samaritan who had returned, "Rise and go; your faith has made you well" (v. 19). His leprosy and his sin had been cleansed.

The Bible uses leprosy as symbolic of sin. Leprosy could not be cured by humankind in those days just as we cannot cure ourselves from sin. Jesus is our cure! "But now he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself" (Hebrews 9:26b).

What benefits can we thank and praise God for today? Begin to list your blessings. You'll probably be amazed at its length! Praising and thanking Christ for who he is gives us a wonderful place to begin. Let's not forget all God's benefits.

*SONG: Count Your Blessings*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Forgive my ingratitude, Father. Enlarge my heart to become more aware of your benefits. May I thank you daily.*

—Beverly L. Buckingham

*BIBLE READING: Psalm 103:3, 10-14*

Today's Scripture speaks of God's mercy. God used these special verses with me in February 1986. My late husband and I were in route to the home of my 79-year-old Dad. My mother died when I was seven years old, and since then, my father and I hadn't been close. Over many years I worked through painful emotions, not only from her death, but also from his alcohol problem. As we parked the car, I breathed a prayer of hope that the visit wouldn't leave me feeling conflicted.

A few minutes into our visit Dad blurted out, "Would you like to see Pop's Bible?" I followed him into the bedroom where he handed me the Bible of his deceased father who had been a pastor/evangelist. I leafed through the pages, asking, "Do you ever read it?" "No," he answered. "You could try," I said, recalling my grandparents' prayers for my father's soul.

As we left the bedroom, I noticed tears in his eyes. Soon he was sobbing, crying out: "Do you think God will forgive me? Will he ever forgive me for what I did to you kids?"

We went to the kitchen table with Pop's Bible in hand. We cried, talked, prayed, and read God's Word. After a while the Holy Spirit broke through Dad's guilt and shame. Psalm 103:1-14, especially verse 10, moved him: "He does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities." My father began to confess his sins, soon after inviting the Lord Jesus into his life. In that moment Dad received and experienced the truth: God forgives all our sins! Have you received this truth? When have you shared the wonderful news with others?

*SONG: Grace Greater Than Our Sin*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Thank you, God, for your marvelous mercy and amazing grace. I praise your name for removing my sin as far as the east is from the west.*

—Beverly L. Buckingham

*BIBLE READING: Psalm 103:3, 15-16*

Jehovah Rophi, “the Lord your healer,” can heal every disease of mankind. His power to heal has no limits: he can bring restoration over a period of time or miraculously in a second. And yet we know that numerous people die daily from disease. In such times we need to consider the whole of Scripture, weighing the verse “He heals all your diseases” with his word in Hebrews 9:27: “Man is destined to die once and after that to face judgment.”

Years ago I took notes at a seminar about healing. The speaker explained: “There is an illness for God’s glory, an illness for discipline, and an illness unto death.” While on earth Jesus healed many people for the glory of God. One woman had been crippled for eighteen years. Jesus saw her, calling her to come to him. “Then he put his hands on her, and immediately she straightened up and praised God” (Luke 13:13). Many of us could share similar stories of people who have been miraculously healed.

At other times God allows people to experience illness and problems because he’s training us (Hebrews 12:11). God is conforming us into his image (Romans 8:28-29). Some Christians have a thorn in the flesh to bear like the apostle Paul (2 Corinthians 12:7-10). We also read in these verses that God’s grace is sufficient. In Psalm 103:15-16, we learn our days are like grass: we flourish like a flower which the wind blows away. “Illness unto death” is the final healing for every Christian—the healing that ushers us into heaven.

*SONG: The Great Physician*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Jesus, my healer, I trust you with all my diseases and infirmities. I find rest in you, assured that you know what is best for me until I receive my final healing in glory.*

—Beverly L. Buckingham

*BIBLE READING: Psalm 103:4; Psalm 40:1-3*

I accepted Christ at a young age, but I spent many of the following years running from him. I felt hopeless: I had failed him so often. On Good Friday in 1964, I remember being a 28-year-old mother who eagerly anticipated taking the children to church in their new Easter clothes. Unfortunately we all had sore throats, so off to the doctor we went. The label on my medication instructed to take one tablet every four hours. I took three rounds that day, feeling sure I would be better by morning.

I couldn't sleep. In my frustration I got up and boiled eggs to be colored for the Easter festivities. Extremely jittery and full of energy I looked at the mirror at 5:00 a.m., noticing my bulging eyes and protruding veins. I lay down on the living room couch, feeling weak and faint. Was I dying?

Even in my dazed state I recognized my rebellion and sin that kept me separated from God. God's Word says, "All have sinned and come short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). I cried out to God for forgiveness.

When I finally saw my doctor, I learned that he'd given me another patient's medication by mistake. Soon after my near-death experience I came to trust completely in Jesus who says, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6).

Has your life been redeemed from the pit of destruction? If not, act with haste: "Now is the day of salvation" (2 Corinthians 6:2b). If so, share your life story with another. Many search for redemption in all the wrong places.

*SONG: Redeemed*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Thank you, Lord Jesus, for redeeming me. Grant me boldness with wisdom to share your truth with others.*

*—Beverly L. Buckingham*

*BIBLE READING: Psalm 103:4b-5a*

Once God redeems us, we enter into a unique love relationship, one incomprehensible to the world. The world defines love as happiness and pleasure. The self gets what the self wants; if it feels good, do it. In reality love without God leads to disappointment, depression, devastation, and eventually destruction of our soul for all eternity.

God's love is eternal, unconditional, and personal. He has written precious love notes to us in his Word, such as: "Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you! I have engraved you on the palms of my hands" (Isaiah 49:15-16). "I have loved you with an everlasting love" (Jeremiah 31:3). "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you" (Hebrews 13:5b).

God not only loves us, but he brings us satisfaction. In the Amplified Bible, Psalm 103:5a reads: "Who satisfies your mouth [your necessity and desire at your personal age and situation] with good."

Does this mean that Christians never experience bad things in their lives? No. Sometimes the good God sees conflicts with what we would choose. We do not enjoy pain and suffering, but our heavenly Father desires to use all of our circumstance of our life to mature us spiritually and to prepare us for heaven. Paul says, "I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us" (Romans 8:18). Are we allowing God's love to satisfy our hearts at all times? If not, today would be a great time to begin.

*SONG: Love Lifted Me*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Father, I desire to live in your love and satisfaction each day. Teach me your ways.*

*—Beverly L. Buckingham*

*BIBLE READING: Psalm 103:5b; Isaiah 40:28-31*

These days we are bombarded with good things for our health and protection: ways to keep in shape, get adequate sleep, have healthy relationships, install security systems, and more. Yet, many people we know have some dreaded disease, and the evening news is filled with stories of crime and violence. And ultimately, age takes a toll on each one of us.

The Psalmist tells us that our youth is being renewed like an eagle's. What does he mean? The writer is referring to our inward person, the aspect of us that lives eternally. We read in 2 Corinthians 4:16 that "Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day."

Even when we are weary and weak, our God is tireless and full of strength. What a powerful reassurance! When we hope in God, we will be strengthened and renewed, lifted up and held close to our God. We will soar on wings like an eagle. Eagles spread their wings to soar high above the earth and all its storms. Their eyesight is keen, and their strength is mighty.

What do you need to soar above today? In all situations we can hope in God. The world offers ways to strengthen us physically, but our God works on the inside. He dwells within us, giving us strength for every task or test. Our God is sufficient for every need. He will renew our youth, and we'll soar safely above life's storms.

*SONG: Under His Wings*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Oh Lord, keep my eyes fixed on you that my faith will remain firm to the end. May my youth be renewed as that of the eagle.*

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