

Legacy of Love

Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away (1 Corinthians 13:8, *New International Version*).

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 13:8-13

Song: "Unfailing Love"

Mom died a few years ago. On that day, the hardest morning of my life, I not only lost my last surviving parent, I lost my best friend. The sorrow still overwhelms me.

I had watched helplessly as her health declined. After she fell and shattered her leg and hip, she needed to use a walker for support. A pinched nerve in her back complicated matters and limited her to short trips. Next, the veins in her retinas ruptured, and she became legally blind. Then came heart failure.

Mom always had such energy as she tirelessly took care of her family; nothing seemed to slow her down. So it broke my heart to see her slip away, month after month. One thing in her life, however, never failed: her love.

The Bible tells us that most things in life will cease, be stilled, or simply pass away. That is not so with love. Love never weakens, nor does it ever fail. It continues forever. Just as Jesus did at the cross, my mom gave the greatest and most precious thing of all: a legacy of love.

Dear God, one day I hope to leave the same unfailing legacy of love to my own children. Prepare me in the present day for that day. In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, I pray. Amen.

July 31

Don't Wait to Forgive

Forgive us our sins, just as we have forgiven those who have sinned against us (Matthew 6:12, *The Living Bible*).

Scripture: Matthew 6:9-15

Song: "Whiter Than Snow"

As a child living in the North, I loved the new-fallen snow: white, fresh, clean, and beautiful. But after a short time it collected dirt and was no longer white and beautiful. We called it slush, a dirty brown mess.

Our lives, just like the snow, collect a dirt we call sin. We do things we know we shouldn't do, and we need to ask forgiveness and make a fresh start. God gave us the Lord's Prayer to help us prepare for that fresh start. (For example, try praying verse 12 at the beginning of each new morning. What a great way to head into the day!)

Perhaps you know God well enough to know that He forgives your sins, freely, through the work of Christ. But do you tie that blessed forgiveness to your willingness to forgive others? Whether or not there is a direct cause-and-effect relationship—we can leave that to the theologians—there is obviously some kind of tie-in between forgiving and being forgiven. So why take a chance on holding a grudge? Why wait around while keeping your neighbor on the hook? Do the right thing. Forgive!

Heavenly Father, please give me the grace to forgive others as You have forgiven my own faults and failures. Thank You in Christ's name. Amen.

July 31. **Mary Shaw** is an Army veteran of World War II now living in Orlando, Florida. She has three great-granddaughters.

August 1

Mercy for Every Slave

Should you not also have had mercy on your fellow-slave, even as I had mercy on you? (Matthew 18:33, *New American Standard Bible*).

Scripture: Matthew 18:21-35

Song: "Amazing Grace"

The mother of a little boy named John taught him to pray and filled his mind with Scripture. But when John was about 7, his mother died, and John's life became a disaster. At age 11 he joined his evil sea captain father and got involved with the African slave trade.

Eventually, a close brush with death brought John the remembrance of his mother's teachings. He repented, felt called to preach, and began writing hymns. In fact, John Newton wrote the beloved hymn "Amazing Grace," which is his life's testimony.

John never forgot God's goodness to him. Shortly before his death, he said, "My memory is nearly gone, but I remember two things: I am a great sinner, and God is a great Savior." Knowing the boundless, infinite grace of God makes forgiving others 490 times seem much less daunting, doesn't it? We can do it. We *must* do it.

Dear Heavenly Father, when I think of all You have forgiven in my life, my heart reaches out to those who seek my mercy. In light of Your love, how could I refuse them? I pray this prayer in the name of Jesus, my merciful Savior and Lord. Amen.

August 1-6. **Mary Shaw** is an Army veteran of World War II now living in Orlando, Florida. She has three great-granddaughters.

There You Have It!

I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours (Mark 11:24, *New International Version*).

Scripture: Mark 11:20-25

Song: "Teach Me to Pray"

What is your definition of *prayer*? Is it simply talking to God? I've found it to be much more: it means learning to listen, too, and developing a love relationship with one who will become your best friend.

The disciples asked Jesus to teach them to pray. They wanted to know how to pray with power, how to pray so that they would be ushered into the throne room of God. When Jesus went back to Heaven, He gave us a teacher to help us to pray in the same way—God the Holy Spirit.

What a privilege! I spent 26 years in a ministry founded on prayer. Everything in the day's activities was surrounded with prayer; however, as I continue studying the Bible, I discover I still have much to learn. I am thankful the Spirit is a good teacher and always there to nudge me and teach me, for He knows God's will and wants me to know it as well.

When I am walking close to the Lord, talking and listening, developing the relationship, then my askings grow closer and closer to what God has always wanted for me. Of course, then, whatever I ask is already mine.

Almighty God, keep me close to Your will by keeping me ever close to Your heart. Through Christ I pray. Amen.

August 3

Perfect Peace

Let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be thankful (Colossians 3:15).

Scripture: Colossians 3:12-17

Song: "Sweet Peace, the Gift of God's Love"

Our family consisted of Mother and Dad, plus seven boys and two girls. This meant many school and work lunch pails to pack each day. One of my responsibilities was to bake a cake for those lunch pails. I loved reading the cookbooks to see if I had all the necessary ingredients. It always amazed me to see that I could follow the instructions and end up with a beautiful, tasty dessert.

Now that I'm older, I think life is like finding a recipe and making a wonderful cake. It takes a lot of different ingredients, but when Bible instructions are followed, a beautiful life comes to pass. These are some of the necessary ingredients: a tender heart, mercy and kindness, a forgiving spirit, acts of love, and a thankful heart.

Today peace is the heart cry heard around the world. Somehow, the necessary ingredients have been forgotten, misplaced, hidden from view. Yet Christ is our prince of peace. And while we may or may not see that translated into peace among the nations on earth, we ought to see it in His body, the church. That will happen when each of us invites Him to rule in our hearts. That is the recipe for unity and fruitfulness among us in the body of Christ.

Dear God, thank You for the peace that rules in my heart. I pray for peace in the body of Christ and in a troubled world as well. In Jesus' name, amen.

Not So Easy: Reconciling

A further reason for forgiveness is to keep from being outsmarted by Satan; for we know what he is trying to do (2 Corinthians 2:11, *The Living Bible*).

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 2:5-11

Song: "O, for a Thousand Tongues to Sing"

How would you describe the tongue? I would say it is a fleshy muscle in the mouth that helps you form words. It is little, boneless and weak, but it can crush and kill the spirit. It can be slow to speak or swift as a deer. It is small but powerful and can sing praises to God or utter all forms of profanity. The Bible compares the tongue to a raging forest fire.

The mouth and that little tongue can cause a lot of trouble—trouble that can quickly spread to many people before it gets stopped. Perhaps that's the reason the tongue is one of Satan's favorite tools. He can use it to cause misunderstandings and quarrels, spreading guilt and blame on the winds. Then he stands in the way of true forgiveness and the freedom it brings.

Most scholars identify the situation Paul addresses in this text with the issue in 1 Corinthians 5. Still, Paul could say of the offender: "Forgive him, comfort him, and . . . confirm your love towards him." If Paul could offer reconciliation in Corinth, then surely I can seek forgiveness and reconciliation for those who have offended me with thoughtless or unkind remarks.

Holy Father, help me to remember Your example of forgiving and forgetting. Fill my heart with love, I pray, in Jesus' name. Amen.

August 5

Letters of Encouragement

I have great confidence in you; I take great pride in you. I am greatly encouraged; in all our troubles my joy knows no bounds (2 Corinthians 7:4, *New International Version*).

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 7:2-7

Song: "Rejoice, Ye Pure in Heart"

I met Pat on one of my many trips from Missouri to New Jersey. Pat became my mentor and later my prayer partner even though we lived miles apart and had only recently met. We agreed we would pray for each other every evening at 7 o'clock, which established a special bond between us. We also corresponded regularly, and she always wrote about someone we both knew, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Pat had a physical disability: she had only one lung. Every breath and every step she took were painful. Yet she never complained. She lived by herself, took care of her everyday needs, and spent much time in prayer along with writing letters of encouragement.

Her letters were a great inspiration—and challenge—to me, just as Paul's letter to his friends at Corinth must have been. Most Bible students believe Paul had some kind of disability too. This, coupled with my experience of Pat, tells me that God will use anyone who is open to spreading His love, joy, and encouragement.

I'd like to be one of those persons.

Father, thanks for Your gift of joy. And may my joy be contagious, spreading encouragement to each person I meet today. In Jesus' name, amen.