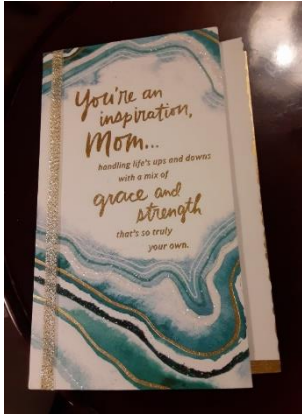


For my birthday this year I was blessed with words of encouragement and wisdom from many dear friends. I am very grateful and want to frame my life according to these words. In fact, in thinking about these words, it occurred to me that they are God's desire for each of us. They provide a vision and hope for the future. In the ongoing battle with the ramifications of Covid and in the US with the accusations and battle over the election results, hope and vision needs bolstering. So here are six blessings we can ask God for one another.



1. I will start with the opening words to the birthday card from Bruce and Becky. ..."handling life's ups and downs with a mix of grace and strength that's so truly your own."

Grace and strength. What a wonderful combination that honors the Lord because only God can bring it about. It is certainly not our own. Inside, the card adds "Whatever comes, you just keep moving forward (two words Bruce underlined☺) and proving time and again that strength is beautiful, especially on you."

Think about it, beloved. Grace and strength is what we all need. And the graphic depicts those words in the midst of waves or valleys that challenge our peace and equilibrium. Only the Lord can give us His perspective in these hard times; only God has give us His peace and faith as we wait for calmer waters; only God can give us His Presence so we don't go under, but can live in His all-sufficient power and goodness; only the Lord has resurrection strength that is more than sufficient to cover our weakness. Only the Lord, the giver of amazing grace. And He gives multiplied grace and strength freely when we ask. As God says, "Open your mouth wide, and I will fill it" (Ps.81:10). Amen!

2. The importance of God's light radiating through us. One greeting said: "May it be an especially beautiful day with the warmth of God's presence wrapping around you." (John and Mary)

Another added: May His light shine brightly...In your world, On your way, In your heart! (Amy)

Several dear ones I know are going through a dark time. One told me: "There is no light. There are no answers. God seems far away. It is very dark." But God hasn't left any of His followers. What is needed for each of us is to experience "the warmth of God's presence wrapping around us" and God's light shining in our hearts and on our way as God brings us out of the tunnel.

3. The power of the Spirit. Carol prayed: "May God grant you a fruitful and wonderful year as you walk in the power of the Spirit." A needed blessing for all of us. 2020 has been a very difficult year for most people in the world. We all hope 2021 will be better, but either way we will only be fruitful and have a sense of praise as we live in the power of the Spirit. It is the Spirit's work to fill us with God's hope so Benita's verse for me is right on for us all: Rom.15:13 "Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you believe in him so that you may abound in hope by the Holy Spirit." That's life in the power of the Spirit.

4. The confidence of our place in God's heart. God has made each person on earth in His image and treasures each one. Gail reminded me of that in her words: "I celebrate the day God put you on the earth and He said this baby is a wonderful work I have created...I want to thank you for faithfully persevering through many dangers, toils, and snares to seek God's will for your life. You are a unique

image-bearer...I celebrate you today for running fast after the Beloved. Please celebrate God with me for your life and your legacy. Much Love. Gail.” I do want to run fast after the Beloved – always keeping Jesus as the center of my focus and vision. And this is God’s intent for every believer. Knowing we are precious to Him, knowing His will and power can sustain us through the dangers, toils and snares, and knowing He empowers each of us to build a legacy for those who follow behind us so they can live out His good, pleasing and perfect will” (Rom.12:2) for God’s glory.

5. Ned and Sharon’s ecard was a series of the words “Happy Birthday” in many languages around the world, with the images of each location – in English, in Japanese, in Greek, in Italian, in Dutch, in French etc. The words were “To the world you might just be one person but to one person, you might just be the world.” All these sayings on the cards may seem to some to be sappy Hallmarkisms and fantasies, but I really believe each one is capturing a precious truth from the Bible – about grace and strength, about God’s presence bringing light out of darkness, about being God’s image bearer, about living in the power of the Spirit, about someone in the world being vital in the life of another person in the world.

6. And that brings us to the capstone of all these blessings. The gift of love. God wants each of His followers to receive His continual blessing because the Holy Spirit is continually pouring God’s love into our hearts (Rom.5:5). From there He can pour that love out of us for others. Keith’s card epitomized this for me. It is a special card in light of his Alzheimer’s. Many reports of Alzheimer patients document their descent into anger and a lashing out at family. But because of so much prayer for Keith, his disease has increased his expressions of love and affirmation. He will say he loves me many times a day, so he is living out every word on this card. And, praise God, he was able to get his card knowingly affirming its every word:

I love you today. I’ll love you tomorrow. I’ll love you the day after that.  
I’ll love you no matter where life’s journey takes us. I’ll love you wherever we’re at.  
I love you with all of the strength that I’ve got, with a love that will always be true.  
Whenever, wherever, whatever, forever – I’ll never stop loving you.

This is the kind of love we all search for, beloved – the kind of love God demonstrates each day for us. And the kind of love we all need to express consciously to one another.

Sometimes just in emojis. So many texts I received expressed love that joyously spilled over in multiple hearts, birthday cakes, fireworks, wrapped gifts, flowers, whistle blowers, ice cream cones in triplicate!!! Emojis that make your heart smile. But throughout the normal days of regular months.

Therefore, beloved, as a lifestyle, I encourage each of us to take the time, as so many did for me, to express our love for each other. Sarah’s words brought joy to my heart: “You are on my heart and my mind often. I am so grateful for you!!!! I am praying for your health and peace and hope and protection. I love you.” As did Rachel’s: “Happy birthday, Dr. Mary Lou. We love you and are so grateful for you.” Who needs to hear similar words of encouragement and affirmation from you today?

Thank you, dear friends. Now my prayer is that the blessings I received from the Lord through you, you can pass on to others so we can all live in these blessings day by day.

Godspell song: Day by day, day by day, O dear Lord, three things I pray:

To see thee more clearly, love thee more dearly, follow thee more nearly, day by day.  
Actually the Christmas song O Holy Night has words that bring home this message of love. So in anticipation of this upcoming joyous season, and in praise for the God of love who thought it up:

O Holy Night.

O Holy night, the stars are brightly shining, it is the night of the dear Savior's birth.

Long lay the world in sin and error pining, till he appeared and the soul felt its worth.

A thrill of hope the weary world rejoices, for yonder breaks a new and glorious morn!

Fall on your knees! O hear the angel voices! O night divine! O night when Christ was born.

O night divine. O holy night.

Truly he taught us to love one another for God is love and his gospel is peace.

Chains shall he break for the slave is our brother and in his name all oppression shall cease.

Sweet hymns of joy in grateful chorus raising, let all within us praise his holy name.

Christ is the Lord! O praise his name forever. His power and glory evermore proclaim.

His power and glory evermore proclaim!

Amen. Dr. Mary Lou Codman-Wilson, pastor

11/6/20