

Devotional—day 8

"O, Bless the Lord, My Soul"

EPISOCPAL HYMN #293

O BLESS the Lord, my soul!
His grace to thee proclaim!
And all that is within me join
To bless his holy Name!

O bless the Lord, my soul!
His mercies bear in mind!
Forget not all his benefits!
The Lord to this is kind.

He will not always chide;
He will with patience wait;
His wrath is ever slow to rise,
An ready to abate.

He pardons all thy sins;
Prolongs thy feeble breath;
He healeth thine infirmities,
And ransoms thee from death.

He clothes thee with his love;
Upholds thee with his truth;
And like the eagle he renews
The vigor of thy youth.

Then bless his holy Name,
Whose grace hath made thee whole,
Whose loving-kindness crowns thy days!

O bless the Lord, my soul! Amen.
- *James Montgomery*, .1819

Psalm 103 (NIV)

A David psalm

1 O my soul, bless GOD.
From head to toe, I'll bless his holy name!

2 O my soul, bless GOD,
don't forget a single blessing!

3 He forgives your sins--every one.
He heals your diseases--every one.

4 He redeems you from hell--saves your life!
He crowns you with love and mercy--a paradise crown.

5 He wraps you in goodness--beauty eternal.
He renews your youth--you're always young in his presence.

6 GOD makes everything come out right;
he puts victims back on their feet.

7 He showed Moses how he went about his work,
opened up his plans to all Israel.

8 GOD is sheer mercy and grace;
not easily angered, he's rich in love.

9 He doesn't endlessly nag and scold,
nor hold grudges forever.

10 He doesn't treat us as our sins deserve,
nor pay us back in full for our wrongs.

11 As high as heaven is over the earth,
so strong is his love to those who fear him.

12 And as far as sunrise is from sunset,
he has separated us from our sins.

13 As parents feel for their children,
GOD feels for those who fear him.

14 He knows us inside and out,
keeps in mind that we're made of mud.

15 Men and women don't live very long;
like wildflowers they spring up and blossom,

16 But a storm snuffs them out just as quickly,
leaving nothing to show they were here.

17 GOD's love, though, is ever and always,
eternally present to all who fear him,
Making everything right for them and their children

18 as they follow his Covenant ways
and remember to do whatever he said.

19 GOD has set his throne in heaven;
he rules over us all. He's the King!

20 So bless GOD, you angels,
ready and able to fly at his bidding,
quick to hear and do what he says.

21 Bless GOD, all you armies of angels,
alert to respond to whatever he wills.

22 Bless GOD, all creatures, wherever you are--
everything and everyone made by GOD.

And you,
O my soul, bless GOD!

James Montgomery (1771-1854)

Born in Irvine, Ayrshire, Scotland, Montgomery's father was a minister in the Moravian Church. In 1783, his parents were sent off to the West Indies as missionaries leaving him at the Moravian settlement at Bracehill, County Antrim, Ireland where his education started. Not long after they had gone, his parents died.

At the age of seven, he was sent off to begin his seminary training in Yorkshire, and while there made a public profession of religion by uniting with the Moravian Church. At seminary, secular poetry and fiction were banned, but James nevertheless found means of borrowing and reading a good deal of poetry. It was at this time that he began to write his own poetry. Montgomery's scholastic record was insufficient and in 1787 he was apprenticed to a baker, work that did not suit him well.



A trip to London, hoping to find a publisher for his youthful poems, ended in failure. He supported himself precariously until 1792 when he became an assistant to Mr. Gales, auctioneer, bookseller, and printer of the Sheffield Register. In 1794, Gales left England to avoid political prosecution. Montgomery took the Sheffield Register in hand, changed its name to the Sheffield Iris, and continued to edit it for 32 years.

During his first two years as editor, he was imprisoned twice in the Castle of York. He was first imprisoned for six months for reporting on a riot in Sheffield and again for three months for commemorating the fall of the Bastille with a poem entitled "The Fall of the Bastille" (which he only published and did not write). In 1797 he published a volume of poems, *Prison Amusements*, so named because some were written during his prison stay. In 1825, he lost The Sheffield Iris and founded The Eclectic Review.

In his youth, Montgomery had strayed from the church, but at his own request he was readmitted into the Moravian congregation at 43 years of age. He expressed his feelings at the time in the following lines:

People of the living God,
I have sought the world around,
Paths of sin and sorrow trod,
Peace and comfort nowhere found.
Now to you my spirit turns--
Turns a fugitive unblest;
Brethren, where your altar burns,
O receive me into rest.

Thereafter he became an avid worker for missions and an active member of the Bible Society. About the same time, the English Church Missionary Society and the Baptist Mission Society had formed, evangelism in England was an idea whose time had come and it is apparent in Montgomery's hymns.

He wrote 400 hymns in his career; approximately 100 are still in use. In his later years, he occupied himself with the promotion of philanthropic and religious movements, earning the almost universal esteem of the citizens of Sheffield. He never married and died quietly in his sleep, a day after he had written his last hymn.

Montgomery's Moravian Church...

Moravians recognize the example of Christ's life and proclaim that Jesus Christ is Lord. Living the Christian life depends not only on our own effort, but upon God our Father, who in Jesus Christ accepts us as heirs of God and strengthens and sustains us. In baptism they are united with Christ in his death and resurrection, so they have died to sin and should walk in newness of life. They realize that their Christian faith must continually be nourished if it is to remain living and vital. Therefore, they desire to grow in their Christian lives through family devotions, personal prayer and study, and the opportunities for spiritual development offered by the Church.

They deem it a sacred responsibility and genuine opportunity to be faithful stewards of all God has entrusted to us: time, talents, and financial resources. They view all of life as a sacred trust to be used wisely.

Realizing that God has called them from many and varied backgrounds, they recognize the possibility of disagreements or differences. Often these differences enrich the Church, but sometimes they divide. They consider it to be their responsibility to demonstrate within the congregational life the unity and togetherness created by God who made them one. How well they accomplish this will be a witness to their community as to the validity of our faith.

Moravians support collegial experiences with children of God in other Christian churches, and carefully avoid all disputes, respecting opinions and ceremonies peculiar to one or another Church. They recognize that through the grace of Christ different denominations have received many gifts and that the Church of Christ may be enriched by these many and varied contributions. It is their desire that they may learn from one another and rejoice together in the riches of the love of Christ and the manifold wisdom of God. They welcome every step that brings them nearer the goal of unity in Him. In this fellowship they cooperate with other churches in the support of public charities or Christian enterprises, which have a just claim upon them as followers of the Lord Jesus Christ.

A BASIC MOTTO:

In its practice, the Moravian Church has always stood by its motto: *"In essentials, unity; in nonessentials, liberty; and in all things, love."*

Time for personal reflection (Day 8):

What does God provide to “those who fear Him”? Do I truly **fear** God?

“He knows us inside and out, keeps in mind that we’re made of mud.” How often do I forget that I am made of “mud” and can be snuffed out quickly? How humble before God (and others) does this phrase make me?

According to Psalms 103 & the Episcopal Hymn #293, why should I bless God?

What characteristics are given to the “armies-of-angels” in Psalms 103:20-21? Do I possess these characteristics?

“All that is within me join to bless His Holy Name!” - What does this feel like? Do I ever take the time to truly focus my entire being on blessing God? How can I attempt to do this?

The Moravian Church motto: “*In essentials, unity; in nonessentials, liberty; and in all things, love.*” could be used as a motto for the *Godspell* tour. In what ways could this motto be applied to our tour group, the churches we visit, and the families with which we stay?

Time for personal reflection

It is said of the Movarian Church...

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The *Godspell* cast and crew must consider it our responsibility to demonstrate within our “congregation” the unity and togetherness created by God because...