St Barnabas Cray

Shining Saints: United in Gifts & Love

Weekly Devotional Journey

Monday - You Are a Saint: Living From Who You Already Are

Morning Devotion

Today's Verse

As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received.
(Ephesians 4:1 NIV)

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Devotional Thought

There is a question that quietly shapes how we live every single day: who do you think you are? Not in the proud or dismissive sense, but in the deepest, most foundational sense. Do you see yourself primarily as a sinner trying to do better, or as a saint who sometimes stumbles? The answer matters enormously, because we tend to live from our identity rather than merely towards it.

Paul writes from prison — a man in chains — and yet his opening word is not despair but urgency. He urges his readers to live a life *worthy* of the calling they have received. Notice the order: the calling comes first. The life follows. You do not earn the calling by living well; you live well because the calling has already been given. This is the grammar of grace, and it changes everything.

The sermon put it beautifully and honestly: 'What we are in God's eyes matters more than even what we feel we are or see ourselves in ours.' There will be days — perhaps today is one — when you feel far more like a sinner than a saint. Days when your temper frayed, your faith felt thin, your love ran cold. But the light of Christ in you is not a flickering candle that goes out when you fail. When you chose to follow Jesus, you were not simply given permission to try harder. You were given a new identity. You became, in the truest sense, a saint.

This does not mean pretending we do not sin. Paul himself will go on to speak of confession, of bearing with one another, of speaking truth. But it does mean we stop defining ourselves primarily by our failures. The Christian life is not a performance to be assessed but a calling to be inhabited. You are not working your way towards sainthood; you are working *from* it.

Today, let this truth settle into you: before you do anything for God, you are already someone in God. That is the foundation from which all faithful living flows.

Reflection Question

When you think about your identity before God today, do you tend to see yourself primarily as a struggling sinner or as a called and beloved saint? How does that self-perception shape the way you live and relate to others?

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From Sunday's Sermon

"What we are in God's eyes matters more than even what we feel we are or see ourselves in ours. So the latter part — where you define yourself — is actually more integral to who you are rather than what you're going through in this season or done badly this week."

Today's Application

Begin this week by writing down, somewhere you will see it today, the words: 'I am a saint, called and equipped by God.' This is not arrogance — it is faithfulness to what Scripture declares. Then, as you move through your Monday, notice the moments when your sense of identity shifts — when failure, comparison, or criticism tempts you to shrink back into a smaller story about yourself. In those moments, return to the truth: your identity is not determined by your performance but by your calling.

Practically, consider one relationship or situation today where you have been holding back — perhaps in generosity, in honesty, in warmth — because you have not felt 'good enough' to offer anything. Ask yourself: if I truly believed I was a saint equipped by God, what would I do differently in this situation? Then, gently and without pressure, take one small step in that direction. Living worthy of the calling begins not with grand gestures but with small, faithful choices rooted in who God says you are.

Morning Prayer

Gracious Father, thank you that my identity does not rest on my performance but on your calling. Forgive me for the times I have shrunk back from living fully as your saint because I have been too focused on my failures. Today, help me to inhabit the identity you have given me — not with pride, but with gratitude and courage. May I live from the abundance of your grace rather than the poverty of my own efforts. Teach me to see myself as you see me, and let that vision shape every choice I make today. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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Evening Devotion

Resting in Who You Are

Evening Reflection

As this Monday draws to a close, take a moment to look back over the day — not to audit your performance, but to notice where the truth of your identity as a saint either took root or felt distant. There were probably moments of both. Perhaps you were generous or patient in a way that surprised you. Perhaps there were moments of frustration or self-doubt that made the morning's reflection feel very far away.

This is the ordinary rhythm of the Christian life — not a steady ascent into perfection, but a daily return to the truth of who we are in Christ. The light does not flicker out when we fail. The calling does not expire when we stumble. What matters is not that today was perfect, but that you are still here, still turning back towards Jesus, still willing to be shaped by his grace.

Paul wrote from prison, remember. Even in the most constrained and difficult of circumstances, the calling held. It holds for you tonight, too. Rest in it. You are a saint. Tomorrow, you get to live that again.

Evening Reflection

Where did you notice today the gap between who God says you are and how you were living? And where, perhaps unexpectedly, did you catch a glimpse of his grace working through you?

Evening Prayer

Lord, thank you for this day — for its grace and its gaps, its moments of faithfulness and its moments of falling short. I rest tonight not in my own goodness but in yours. You called me, and that calling stands. Renew me as I sleep, and let me wake tomorrow still yours. Amen.

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Tuesday - The Unity We Did Not Make: One Body, One Spirit

Morning Devotion

Today's Verse

Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. (Ephesians 4:3-6 NIV)

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Devotional Thought

One of the most liberating truths in the whole of Ephesians 4 is this: we do not have to make the church one. We are called to *keep* a unity that God has already established. This is a crucial distinction. If unity were something we had to manufacture — through perfect agreement, through never offending one another, through managing every conflict until it dissolved — then it would be an exhausting and ultimately hopeless task. But Paul says something far more wonderful: the Spirit has already bound us together. Our calling is to guard and tend what God has given, not to construct it from scratch.

Seven times in this passage Paul reaches for the word 'one.' One body. One Spirit. One hope. One Lord. One faith. One baptism. One God and Father of all. This is not a checklist of things we must achieve but a declaration of what already is. The oneness of the church is rooted in the oneness of God himself. It is a theological reality before it is a relational achievement.

And yet — and this is where honesty enters — Paul also says 'make every effort.' The unity is given, but it is also fragile in human hands. We know this. We have all experienced the pain of division within a church family, the slow erosion of trust, the way misunderstanding can calcify into bitterness if left unaddressed. The sermon was honest about this too, noting that we all know we need to keep working at bearing with one another in love.

The balance Paul strikes is important: we work hard at unity, but we work from a place of gift and abundance, not anxiety and scarcity. We are not holding a crumbling structure together by sheer willpower. We are tending a living body that Christ himself is building. That changes the emotional register of the whole endeavour. We can pursue peace not with clenched fists but with open hands, trusting that the one who called us together is also the one who sustains us.

Reflection Question

Is there a relationship within your church family or wider community where unity feels strained or fragile? What would it look like to tend that relationship from a place of 'gift and abundance' rather than anxiety or defensiveness?

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From Sunday's Sermon

"We don't have to make the church one by being absolutely perfect and always nicey-nicey — and we know we won't succeed — but that God has made us one through Jesus, and so we operate from that place of gift and abundance."

Today's Application

Today, choose one relationship within your church community that has felt difficult, distant, or strained. It need not be a dramatic conflict — sometimes it is simply someone you have drifted from, or a person whose manner or opinions grate on you. Rather than waiting for the relationship to feel easier before you invest in it, take one concrete step today from a place of grace.

This might mean sending a brief, warm message to someone you have not connected with recently. It might mean praying specifically and generously for someone who frustrates you — not a vague 'bless them' prayer, but a genuine, considered prayer for their flourishing. It might mean resisting the temptation to speak negatively about someone within the church family, even in a casual conversation.

Remember: you are not trying to manufacture unity. You are tending what God has already given. That means you can approach even difficult relationships without the crushing weight of having to fix everything. You are simply being faithful with the small, daily acts of love that keep the bond of peace alive. Begin there.

Morning Prayer

Lord of all unity, thank you that the oneness of your church rests on your shoulders, not mine. Forgive me for the times I have contributed to division — through careless words, through pride, through withdrawing from difficult relationships. Help me today to be a tender of unity, not a manufacturer of it. Give me the humility to bear with others in love, and the courage to take small steps of peace even when it does not come naturally. May your Spirit bind us together in ways that go deeper than our agreements and outlast our disagreements. Amen.

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Evening Devotion

The Bond That Holds

Evening Reflection

As Tuesday evening settles, reflect on the word 'bond' — the bond of peace that Paul describes. A bond is not a rigid chain but a living connection, something that holds things together while still allowing movement and growth. Think of the relationships that make up your church family. They are held together not by perfect compatibility or shared temperament, but by the Spirit of God who dwells in each believer.

Today you were invited to tend one of those bonds — to take a small, faithful step towards someone, or to resist the pull of division. Whether that felt easy or deeply costly, it was an act of faithfulness to the unity God has given. You were not doing it alone. The same Spirit who calls us into one body is the Spirit who empowers us to stay together.

Rest tonight in the knowledge that the church — your church, with all its imperfections and beautiful diversity — is held in the hands of the one who said 'I will build my church.' You are part of something that cannot ultimately be broken, because its foundation is not human goodwill but divine love.

Evening Reflection

Where did you notice the Spirit's work of unity today — perhaps in an unexpected moment of connection, patience, or grace extended between people?

Evening Prayer

Father, thank you that you are the one who holds us together. Thank you for the gift of community, even when it is costly. Bind us more deeply to one another tonight as we rest, and let us wake tomorrow more willing to bear with one another in love. Amen.

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Wednesday - Gifts in the Hands of the Giver: Every Part Has a Part

Morning Devotion

Today's Verse

But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it... So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up. (Ephesians 4:7, 11-12 NIV)

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Devotional Thought

There is something quietly radical about the way Paul frames spiritual gifts in Ephesians 4. He begins not with the famous list of roles — apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, teachers — but with the declaration that grace has been given to *each one of us*. Every single person. Not just the up-front, the gifted, the obvious, or the ordained. Every member of the body has received something from the ascended Christ, something that is meant to be given away in service.

The sermon offered a wonderfully ordinary image of this: a toolbox. Not a display cabinet of impressive instruments to be admired from a distance, but a working box of practical tools — spanners, screwdrivers, things that are useful precisely when they are in the hands of someone who puts them to work. The point was simple and searching: 'It's no good hiding them away... It's no good keeping them in a box. They have to be put to good use in the hands of people who can use things well.'

This is not a guilt-trip about doing more. It is an invitation into something richer: the discovery that you have been given something that the body of Christ actually needs. Not might need one day if you ever get good enough. Needs now. The gifts of the Spirit are not trophies for the spiritually advanced; they are working tools for the whole community.

And notice what the gifts are *for*: to equip God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up. The goal is not individual spiritual achievement but communal flourishing. When you use what you have been given — however modest it may seem — you are participating in something that Christ himself is building. That is not a small thing.

Perhaps today's question is not 'Am I gifted enough?' but rather 'What has been placed in my hands that I have been keeping in the box?'

Reflection Question

What gifts, abilities, or capacities do you sense God has given you — even ones that feel ordinary or small — that you have not yet fully offered to your church community or the people around you?

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From Sunday's Sermon

"It's no good being stuck in the box, just as any amount of giftings that we might have that could be useful for the church or for our world — it's no good hiding them away... They have to be put to good use in the hands of people who can use things well."

Today's Application

Take a few minutes this morning to make a simple, honest list of three things you are reasonably good at or genuinely enjoy — things that could conceivably serve others. Do not filter the list by whether they feel 'spiritual' enough. Welcoming people warmly, making good coffee, organising a rota, listening patiently, writing clearly, fixing things practically — all of these are tools in the box.

Then ask yourself honestly: which of these am I currently using in service of my church community or my neighbours? Which have I kept quietly to myself, perhaps out of busyness, self-doubt, or simply not being asked?

If there is one thing on that list that you sense could be offered — even tentatively — consider taking one concrete step today. That might mean speaking to a church leader and saying, 'I think I could help with this.' It might mean volunteering for something you have been hesitating over. It might mean simply telling a friend, 'I'd like to be more useful — what do you think I could offer?' The sermon reminded us: 'Sometimes you don't know if you're going to be using a spanner or screwdriver until you have a go.' Be willing to try.

Morning Prayer

Lord Jesus, you ascended on high and gave gifts to your people — and I am one of those people. Forgive me for the times I have minimised what you have placed in my hands, or kept it safely hidden rather than offering it in service. Today, open my eyes to what I have been given. Give me the courage to bring it out of the box and offer it generously, trusting that you will use even ordinary things for extraordinary purposes. May your body be built up through the small, faithful contributions of each of us. Amen.

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Evening Devotion

What Is Already in Your Hands

Evening Reflection

As Wednesday evening arrives, you may be tired — the middle of the week has a way of wearing us down. But this is also a good moment to reflect on what you have already given today. Perhaps it was something small: a kind word, a task completed with care, a moment of patience that cost you something. These are not insignificant. They are the ordinary currency of the kingdom.

The toolbox illustration is worth sitting with again tonight. The tools are only useful when they are in use. But there is also something to be said for knowing what is in the box — for taking stock of what God has entrusted to you before you rush to deploy it. Sometimes the most important thing is not to do more, but to become more aware of what you are already carrying.

As you rest tonight, ask God to help you see clearly what he has placed in your hands. Not with anxiety about whether you are doing enough, but with the quiet curiosity of someone who trusts that the Giver of gifts knows exactly what his body needs — and has already begun to provide it through you.

Evening Reflection

Looking back over today, where did you see yourself giving something — however small — that served another person? Can you receive that as a genuine expression of your gifting?

Evening Prayer

Thank you, Lord, for what you have placed in my hands. Help me to hold it lightly and offer it freely. As I rest tonight, remind me that I am not just a recipient of grace but a vessel of it. Use me, even in my ordinariness, for your extraordinary purposes. Amen.

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Thursday - Speaking the Truth in Love: The Courage of Honest Grace

Morning Devotion

Today's Verse

Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. (Ephesians 4:15 NIV)

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Devotional Thought

If there is a phrase in Ephesians 4 that functions as both a standard and a challenge, it is this one: speaking the truth in love. The sermon called it 'absolutely essential' and rightly so. It is one of those phrases that sounds simple until you try to live it, and then you discover it is one of the most demanding disciplines in the Christian life.

The difficulty is that most of us are better at one half of the phrase than the other. Some of us are natural truth-tellers — we can name what is wrong, call out what needs to change, speak plainly about difficult realities. But we can do so in ways that wound rather than heal, that prove a point rather than serve a person. Others of us are natural lovers — we are warm, generous, eager to encourage, reluctant to cause pain. But our love can become a kind of evasion, where we choose peace over truth and end up enabling problems we should have addressed.

Paul holds both together and will not let us separate them. Truth without love is harsh and ultimately unfruitful. Love without truth is sentimental and ultimately unfaithful. The Christian community is called to embody both — a place where honesty is safe because it is always wrapped in genuine care, and where care is real because it is willing to be honest.

The context Paul gives is important: this is how we grow up. Spiritual maturity is not the absence of conflict or difficulty; it is the capacity to navigate both with truth and love held together. The alternative is remaining as 'infants tossed back and forth by the waves' — blown about by every new idea, every cultural pressure, every wind of opinion. Maturity means being rooted enough in Christ to speak honestly and love genuinely, even when both are costly.

The sermon asked: 'How can we also speak of hope and faith and love of following Jesus in changing times?' That question matters deeply. In times of uncertainty and transition, the temptation is either to speak hard truths without compassion or to offer warm reassurance without honesty. The call is to do both, together, in the Spirit's power.

Reflection Question

In which direction do you tend to err — towards truth without sufficient love, or towards love that avoids difficult truth? What would it look like to grow in the area where you are weaker?

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From Sunday's Sermon

"Speaking the truth in love — as far as catchphrases go, it is absolutely essential. It's good to have people who speak honestly and call a spanner a spanner, or call things out that are not right — but how can we also speak of hope and faith and love of following Jesus in changing times?"

Today's Application

Identify one conversation you have been avoiding — one where truth needs to be spoken but you have held back, perhaps out of fear of causing hurt or disrupting peace. It might be a gentle challenge to a friend who is making a decision you are concerned about. It might be honest feedback you owe a colleague. It might be a confession or apology you need to make to someone you have wronged.

Before you have that conversation — today, or in the coming days — spend time in prayer asking God to fill your heart with genuine love for the person before you open your mouth. Ask yourself: am I speaking this truth for their good, or for my own relief? Am I willing to speak it in a way that leaves them feeling cared for, not condemned?

If the conversation is not possible today, write down what you want to say, and how you want to say it — with both honesty and warmth. Sometimes preparing our words prayerfully before we speak them is the difference between truth that wounds and truth that heals. Commit to having the conversation this week.

Morning Prayer

Lord, you are the God of both truth and love, and in Jesus we see them perfectly united. Forgive me for the times I have spoken truth harshly, or offered love dishonestly. Teach me to hold both together — to be honest enough to name what is real, and loving enough to do so in a way that serves rather than damages. Give me the courage to have the conversations I have been avoiding, and the wisdom to have them well. May my words today build up rather than tear down. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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Evening Devotion

Words That Build

Evening Reflection

As Thursday evening comes, reflect on the words you have spoken today. Not with harsh self-criticism, but with honest awareness. Were there moments when truth and love came together naturally — when you said something honest that was also clearly kind? Were there moments when you chose one at the expense of the other?

Speaking the truth in love is not a single skill to be mastered and then deployed automatically. It is a daily practice, shaped by prayer and attention and a growing knowledge of both God and the people around us. Some days we will get it more right than others. What matters is that we remain committed to both — that we do not settle for a version of Christian community where truth is sacrificed for comfort, or where love is merely a veneer over harshness.

The goal Paul describes is beautiful: a mature body, growing up into Christ in every respect. That maturity is built word by word, conversation by conversation, over years of faithful, loving honesty. You are part of that building project. Tonight, offer your words — the good ones and the clumsy ones — back to the Lord who redeems them all.

Evening Reflection

Was there a moment today when you had the opportunity to speak truth in love — whether you took it or not? What did you learn from that moment?

Evening Prayer

Father, thank you for the gift of words. Forgive me where mine fell short today — where I was too harsh, or too silent, or too vague. Redeem my conversations. And tomorrow, help me to speak more faithfully — with truth that serves and love that is real. Amen.

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Friday - Growing Up Together: Maturity, Change, and Faithful Faithfulness

Morning Devotion

Today's Verse

Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful schemes. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work. (Ephesians 4:14-16 NIV)

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Devotional Thought

We arrive at the end of this week's devotional journey with one of the most striking images in all of Paul's writing: the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, growing and building itself up in love as each part does its work. It is a picture of organic, interdependent, Spirit-empowered growth — and it is the vision Paul holds out for every local church.

But notice what this vision requires: maturity. Not the maturity of age or experience alone, but the maturity of people who are no longer tossed about by every wave — who are rooted enough in Christ to remain faithful when things change, when people leave, when uncertainty arrives, when the familiar shifts beneath their feet.

The sermon was honest and tender about the specific changes facing this particular church community — the loss of a gifted administrator, the need for others to step up, the invitation to discern what faithful response looks like in a season of transition. Change is rarely comfortable. The loss of people we treasure, and of the giftings they carried, is a real grief. But Paul's vision is not of a church that never changes; it is of a church that grows through change, because it is rooted in the one who does not change.

Spiritual maturity, it turns out, is not a destination but a direction. It is the daily choice to remain in Christ, to keep bearing with one another in love, to keep using the gifts we have been given, to keep speaking truth with warmth, to keep tending the unity that God has given. It is the decision, made again each morning, to live worthy of the calling.

As this week ends, the question is not whether you have arrived at maturity, but whether you are still moving in the right direction. Are you growing? Are you contributing? Are you willing to adapt, to try, to offer what you have, to stay rooted in Christ through whatever this season holds? That is the invitation — not to perfection, but to faithful, loving, courageous growth.

Reflection Question

As you look back over this week's reflections, what is the one thing God has been most clearly speaking to you about? And what is one specific, concrete response you are willing to make in the coming week?

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From Sunday's Sermon

"We're reminded really important things about growing up. Whatever our age is, spiritually we can always mature, we can always adapt and try new things... Is there a tool in the box that you've kept slightly hidden away, or that you could try and have a go at and see if you could be useful in a new place?"

Today's Application

As you close this week, take stock of what God has been stirring in you across these five days. You have reflected on your identity as a saint, on the gift of unity, on the tools God has placed in your hands, on speaking truth in love, and now on the call to mature faithfulness in changing times.

Choose one concrete response to carry into next week. It might be a conversation you will have. A gift you will offer. A relationship you will tend. A habit of prayer you will begin. A step of service you will take in your church community. Write it down. Tell someone about it — not for accountability in a pressuring sense, but because saying something aloud to another person makes it real and invites the support of community.

And then, on Monday morning, begin again. Not from scratch, but from where this week has brought you — a little more rooted, a little more aware of your calling, a little more willing to live as the saint God has already declared you to be. That is what it means to grow up together in Christ. It is enough. It is more than enough.

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Morning Prayer

Lord Jesus, thank you for this week — for the richness of your Word, for the community you have placed me in, and for the calling you have given me that I did not earn and cannot lose. As I move into the weekend and the week ahead, help me to carry what you have been teaching me. Where I have been holding back, give me courage. Where I have been striving in my own strength, give me rest. Where I have been avoiding difficult things, give me grace. Make me a person who lives worthy of the calling — not perfectly, but faithfully. And may the whole body, joined and held together, grow and build itself up in love, as each part — including me — does its work. In your name, Amen.

Evening Devotion

The Body That Builds Itself Up in Love

Evening Reflection

As Friday evening arrives and the week draws to a close, take a moment to let the whole sweep of this week's journey settle in you. You began on Monday with the truth of your identity as a saint — not earned, but given. You moved through the gift of unity, the calling to use what you have been given, the discipline of speaking truth in love, and today the vision of a whole body growing together in Christ.

These are not five separate ideas. They are one interconnected vision of what the church — and your life within it — is meant to look like. A community of saints, held together by the Spirit, each one contributing their gifts, speaking honestly and lovingly, growing up together into the fullness of Christ. It is a beautiful vision. And it is not a distant ideal; it is the daily, ordinary, sometimes messy, always grace-filled reality that God is building.

You are part of it. Not a spectator, not a passenger, but a ligament — one of those connecting, supporting, essential parts that helps the whole body function. Rest in that tonight. And tomorrow, and next week, be willing to do your part.

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Evening Reflection

What is one word or image from this week's devotions that you want to carry with you into the weekend and the week ahead?

Evening Prayer

Father, thank you for this week — for your Word, your Spirit, and the community of saints you have placed me in. I am yours. Help me to live like it. Build your church, Lord — and use me in the building. Amen.

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