

Live to the LORD on earth † in heaven

In the Name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, dear family of God:

Have you ever felt slighted, overlooked, passed by, unappreciated? About the time you think you have this licked, you're somewhere like a class reunion. From my small Alma Mater several classes were reminiscing about a musical senior year. I tried out for the bar tender, but was cast as Wild Bill Hickok, opposite the lead female *Calamity Jane*. During one scene she missed her cue and walked on stage too early. The audience gasped. A shocked Calamity blurted out, "I'm not supposed to be here!" Everyone laughed as she exited. The problem? That's all anyone remembers. No one recalls that those of us left on stage had to ad lib and save the play. Who cares? Exactly.

Something inside this sinful nature is so petty, so small. You work hard; someone else gets the credit. Lost promotion, missing salary, zero recognition – our hurt feelings oppose God's glory. He says, **Live to the LORD.** *Merciful Lord, replace my initials with "S.D.G." that I may Live to the Lord.*

Each week this entire summer we've heard our Second Lesson from Paul's letter to the Romans. So many awesome Scriptures and now this! ***"One man considers one day more sacred than another; another man considers every day alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. He who regards one day as special, does so to the Lord. He who eats meat, eats to the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who abstains, does so to the Lord and gives thanks to God."***

If you may grew up with no meat on Fridays, you know how gut wrenching this was for early Christians. Many had lived as Jews under dietary rules mandated by God in Moses' Law. But non-Jews, Gentile members, ate whatever they wanted. Earlier Paul had written, ***"Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes."*** (10:4 NIV84) God made it clear that what you eat does not matter as long as it's ***"to the Lord."*** You can thank God by eating or thank God by denying yourself. The Apostle Paul was also inspired to write to Corinth: ***"So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God."*** (1 Corinthians 10:31 NIV84)

When our sinful hearts hurt for lack of recognition, whose name are we wanting to glorify? ***"For none of us lives to himself alone and none of us dies to himself alone. If we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord. For this very reason, Christ died and returned to life so that he might be the Lord of both the dead and the living."***

Lord Jesus, you are the perfect substitute for sinners like me! You lived a perfect, holy life to the glory of God in my place. In holy innocence you hung on the cross in my place. In life and in death you had one goal: to give glory to God alone. God's greatest glory is to save sinners. How awesome!

As a former persecutor of Christians, Paul knew the awesome wonder of God's glorious grace. Once Jesus saved him, Paul only wanted to **Live to the Lord.** After much suffering for the Gospel the end of Paul's letter to the Romans spells out his desire to visit them on the way to a mission trip in Spain. First, he had to go to Jerusalem with the collection for famine victims there. The book of Acts ends with Paul arrested in the temple and falsely accused by rioting Jews. Over two years in prison and a couple unjust Roman judges left Paul little choice but to appeal to Caesar. His trip to trial in Rome almost ended in death after one of the most detailed shipwrecks ever recorded. Paul got to Rome all right, and finally was set free. Paul's whole life was wrapped up in "S.D.G."

Maybe only a few music majors would know what “S.D.G.” stands for. You’ll get a clue in one of Heidi’s recessional pieces at the close of this service. “Prelude in C” was written by one of the greatest composers of all time, Johann Sebastian Bach. Do you know why he signed his music, “S.D.G.”? You’ll have another clue if you remember the *Refrain* from “Angels We Have Heard on High.” What do those Latin words mean, “Gloria in excelsis Deo”? (CW 63)

As the shepherd heard the angels sing, “Gloria in excelsis Deo,” they raced to Bethlehem to see that Jesus the Savior was born. They told everyone they could the Good News because Christ gave them one goal: **Live to the Lord**. Jesus would grow up loving God with all His heart and soul and mind, loving His neighbor as Himself. He never wanted recognition from others. He only wanted to glorify His heavenly Father by fulfilling the mission of mercy to save sinners. Now God says, “**Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves.**” (Philippians 2:3 NIV84) Bury your petty pride at the foot of the cross. **Live to the Lord**. You belong to Him.

The Lord bought you twice. First, you belong to the Lord because He created you. Junk science evolution calls humanity descendants of slime. But the Creator proves you’re precious in His sight. When we rebelled with Adam, our heavenly Father sent His Son Jesus to buy us back again. Christ shed His own blood to pay that ransom price. Now the Holy Spirit keeps coming in Word and sacrament to name souls for God in Baptism and flood them with forgiveness in Holy Communion.

Some of the best examples to illustrate **Live to the Lord** are at the bottom of the page in *Christian Worship Supplement* for 760. Three names appear there. You may remember the sad news about composer Philip P. Bliss. In a blinding Christmas snowstorm, 1876, the train carrying Philip Bliss with his entire family crossed a deep ravine. The wooden trestle collapsed as packed rail cars plunged 75 feet into the icy river and caught fire. 100 perished. Phillip Bliss died trying to save his wife. He was only 38.

A few years earlier the name of the author, Horatio G. Spafford, was in the news. The Great Chicago Fire had destroyed everything for this successful lawyer. While the city was being rebuilt, he put his wife and four daughters on a luxury liner sailing for France. Nervous, he moved them to a forward cabin closer to the bow. A few weeks later in the early morning on strangely smooth seas their ship collided with an iron sailing vessel and sank in two hours. Daughters Maggie, Tanetta, Annie and Bessie all went down with the ship. Nine days later Mrs. Spafford cabled her husband: “Saved Alone.” He sailed to join her. On a cold December night his captain called him aside, “I believe we are now passing over where the ship went down.” Alone in his cabin, Spafford said, “It is well; the will of God be done.”¹

Only those who know the secret of “S.D.G.” understand that. And you do as you find comfort in stanza 2: *My sin – oh, the bliss of this glorious thought – My sin, not in part, but the whole, Is nailed to the cross, and I bear it no more: Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul!* Spafford wrote the words. Bliss wrote the tune – and named it VILLE DU HAVRE, after the ship that sank with Spafford’s daughters.

This Good News of sins forgiven gave Horatio and Anna Spafford the will to **Live to the LORD**. They founded a society in Israel for victims of tragedy. They began mission work there among the Muslims. Years later Anna recalled how the freshly painted life boats had been stuck to the deck. When they were finally freed, everyone wanted in. She let the others go and waited with her four daughters. Several ships masts collapsed and killed the ones in the life boats. One daughter finally stopped screaming and said calmly, “God will take care of us.” According to God’s own Word (Luke 16:22), the angels came and carried them home to heaven.

Yes, the angels always live in total “S.D.G.” Someday soon we will too. Great initials for your life: “S.D.G.” – *Soli Deo Gloria – Glory to God alone*. Amen.

¹ Morgan, Robert J. *On This Day*. Copyright © 1997 by Robert J. Morgan. (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson, Inc.) Used by Permission. All Rights Reserved. DailyReader Copyright © 1999-2001. Wheeler, Rairdin. www.laridian.com
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