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JANUARY - FEBRUARY 2022

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Kimberly Orr, World Editor and Publisher

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COVER ART INTERPRETATION



The Call

Artist: Jorge Cocco Santángelo
(Argentina, Contemporary)

Interpreter: Erin Pearce

Artist Jorge Cocco Santángelo depicts a familiar biblical scene from Matthew 4 — Jesus calling the first disciples. According to verses 18-20, “As Jesus walked alongside the Galilee Sea, he saw two brothers, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew, throwing fishing nets into the sea . . . ‘Come, follow me,’ he said . . . Right away, they left their nets and followed him” (CEB). Perhaps they had heard John speak about Jesus or had heard stories of his baptism. But even if they had some idea of who Jesus was, surely they did not fully understand how much their response would change the course of their lives. One thing, however, is sure: they heard the call and responded faithfully. Later in the story, Jesus comes upon two brothers, James and John. Matthew 4:22 says Jesus called them and “immediately they left the boat . . . and followed him.”

Cocco Santángelo uses a new artistic style of his own creation called sacrocubism. Cocco Santángelo says that sacrocubism “portrays sacred and religious events in a style of painting with features of the post-cubist art movement.”* The brightest spot in the painting is located just above Jesus’ head, drawing the viewer’s focus toward him. A beam of light shines down on him, perhaps conveying the message that if we respond faithfully to Christ’s light, it will lead us along the right path.

As you contemplate Cocco Santángelo’s beautiful work, consider how and to what God might be calling you. Is the call obvious or subtle? Are you hesitant to trust or ready to follow? How might following God’s call shape your journey of faith?

*<https://jorgecocco.com/bio/>

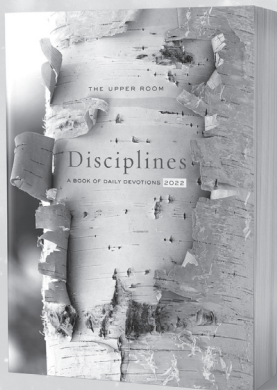
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Lifting Up Jesus

Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, in the same way the son of man must be lifted up, so that everyone who believes in him may share in the life of God's new age. This, you see, is how much God loved the world: enough to give his only, special son, so that everyone who believes in him should not be lost but should share in the life of God's new age.

— John 3:14-16 (NTE)

As we begin a new year it can be helpful to pause and refresh ourselves on the basics of our Christian faith. At its core, the good news of Jesus is that he is the new Moses who leads us out of exile into the “life of God’s new age.” Jesus is also the “once for all” sacrifice (Heb. 10:10), suffering servant (Isa. 52:13), and lamb that has been lifted up and is now seated in the throne of God (Rev. 7:17). Jesus is the living embodiment of hope and healing for the broken human family.

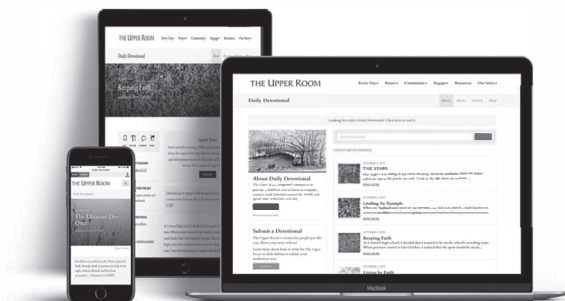
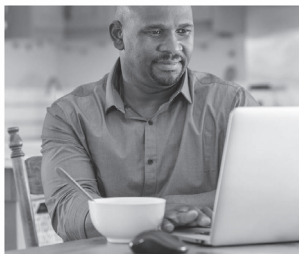
In a world that needs tangible reminders of God’s love, let us be bold in demonstrating the love modeled by Jesus, who was willing to be lifted up, broken, and poured out for the restoration of the world. Remember, he even gave his life for those who betrayed him. The hardest commands of Jesus to put into practice are those that call us to love our neighbor, to love our enemies, and to love ourselves (Lk. 10:27). This year, may we call upon the Holy Spirit to give us eyes to see others and ourselves as God sees us: worthy of transformational grace and love because of Jesus’ ongoing, shepherding intercession for us.



— **Rev. Kimberly Orr**
World Editor & Publisher

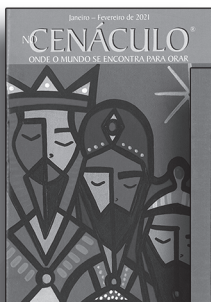
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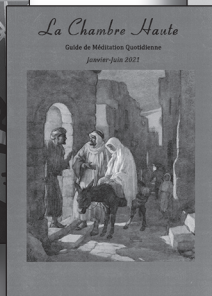


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Writers featured in this issue of *The Upper Room*:

- Olaiya Muyiwa Benralph (Nigeria)
 - Valerie Clark (South Africa)
- Raphael Ufuoma Williams (South Africa)
 - Vimbai Chizarura (Zimbabwe)

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COUNTING THE DAYS

SAT
JAN 1
2022

READ Psalm 90:1-12*

Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.

— Psalm 90:12 (NIV)

This year I resolved not to forget what day it is. I know it sounds a bit absurd to forget what day it is, but sometimes it happens. In high school we were instructed to write the date on each page in our notebook. At university, this practice was not required, making it easier to lose track of the days.

Today's reading reminds us to think about how we spend our days. Do we pass our time not even knowing what day it is? Or do we strive to live life to the fullest according to God's will, gaining insight and praising God? Today is a good day to begin to live a purpose-filled

life guided by the Holy Spirit. Now, using a pocket calendar, I have found a tool that helps me set and remember my agenda for

the day. Each day we live for God is significant; it offers a new opportunity to bless the Lord and bless others. Each day we can ask God to "teach us to number our days" and to increase our knowledge.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

My agenda today is to be grateful for God's blessings.

Prayer: Giver of life, each day is a gift from you. Help us to acknowledge that gift as we work to do your will and praise your name. Amen.

Frine Paola Cedano Berroa (Dominican Republic)

Prayer Focus: GRATITUDE FOR THE START OF A NEW YEAR

* The Bible readings are selected with great care, and we urge you to include the suggested reading in your devotional time.

SUN
JAN 2
2022

RECOGNITION

READ John 13:31-35

Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.

— John 13:34-35 (NRSV)

When I was much younger, my grandparents adopted me after my mother died. My grandmother was my biggest fan and supported me in school and in my extracurricular activities. She truly loved me. We were always together, so people would always associate me with her and her with me.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Does my relationship with Jesus show through my actions?

When we were apart, people would always ask about the other person.

Since then, I have made poor choices and am now in prison. My grandmother

passed away a couple of years ago. Since I don't get visits, I have a job as the visitation park photographer. Now when families come for visits, I recognize them and associate them with the person they are visiting. Sometimes, even when I have not met someone's family before, I recognize similar features and end up seeing that person in them.

I wonder if people recognize us as always being with God. When they see us, do they also see God and recognize Christ in us? Scripture reminds us that others will see Christ in us when we love one another.

Prayer: Dear Jesus, help us to reflect you in all that we do. May others see you in us today and every day. Amen.

Nicholas Patterson (Florida, USA)

A HEART OF LOVE

MON
JAN 3
2022

READ Ephesians 3:14-21

I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power . . . to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge — that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

— Ephesians 3:17-19 (NIV)

One morning the Holy Spirit taught me a lesson about the love of Christ through my son Melvin. Melvin has autism. He is 44 years old now, and what a journey we have had!

Two weeks ago Melvin said to me, “I would like to talk with my dad before he dies.” Stunned by his request, I didn’t know how to reply. His dad had never accepted him, and in his disappointment had withdrawn himself from Melvin. Though Melvin has not seen his dad for many years, he loves him. His heart remembers his dad, and he wants to see him.

Others may turn their backs on us, but Christ turns toward us with love. We may forget Christ, but Christ remembers us. When we are lost, Christ finds us. When we are in trouble, Christ rescues us.

This steadfast love is what the apostle Paul, in the verse quoted above, prayed for us to know — a love that can fill us with all the fullness of God!

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
Christ’s love for me knows
no bounds.

Prayer: Dear loving Father, teach our hearts to know the unconditional love of Christ Jesus and to let that love overflow toward others. Amen.

Bernadette Butler (Ohio, USA) — See p. 21.

TUES
JAN 4
2022

HOLDING ON TO GOD

READ Job 1:13-22

In all this, Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing.

— Job 1:22 (NIV)

This year I have suffered heavily from anxiety and depression. I never knew how debilitating mental illness could be. My brain and body seemed to stop functioning. I had ceased my regular morning prayer routine and suffered from a sense of God's absence.

Part of living is undergoing such trying times. We don't want them, but they hit us at the most unexpected moments.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
Because God loves me, I can
hold on.

It can be easy to respond like Job's friends and try to explain them away.

Like Job, we wrestle with these experiences and wonder why this is happening to us. I have concluded that they just *are*. They are not the revenge of God or punishment for our sinfulness or random attacks of a meaningless universe. They are dark nights that show up on bright days. And somehow we find that God was always there in the midst of them.

When we experience difficulties, we can remember Job, who discovered that no matter what, God *is*. God is beyond all time, the Creator and loving Sustainer of all of life. So when we experience the darkness of illness — mental or otherwise — we can sit with two truths: challenges just *are*, and God *is*. That knowledge can give us hope to hold on.

Prayer: Loving God, hold us in your embrace when we are struggling to hold on to you and to a joyful life. Amen.

Ted Witham (Western Australia, Australia)

PRAISE PRAYERS

WED
JAN 5
2022

READ Psalm 33:1-9

Sing to the LORD a new song! Sing his praise from the ends of the earth!

— Isaiah 42:10 (CEB)

One day I began my usual morning prayers. I prayed for my children's needs, my needs, and the needs of friends and family. Suddenly, a vivid image of a gumball machine popped into my head. As a child, I enjoyed putting a coin in the slot, turning the handle, and having a colorful gumball fall into my hand. I realized I had been praying as if I were inserting coins into a gumball machine. Almost all of my prayers were petitions, and I was acting as though I expected God's answers to drop into my life like gumballs into my hand. While God is compassionate and willing to help us when we ask, I realized I was taking for granted the wonders of creation, God's generous gifts, and the sacrifice Christ made for us.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
I will balance my prayerful petitions with praise for what God has done.

Now when I pray, I begin with praise. Instead of immediately thinking of what may be lacking in my life and the lives of my loved ones, I find joy in first recognizing the amazing love and generosity of God. And I find that when my "praise prayers" remind me of all that God has done, my "please prayers" come from a trusting, thankful heart.

Prayer: Dear Lord God, help us not to wait until we need something but to stay close to you at all times, expressing praise and trust. Amen.

Valerie Bryant Bennett (Tennessee, USA)

THUR
JAN 6
2022

DAY OF THE KINGS

READ Matthew 2:1-12

On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him.

— Matthew 2:11 (NIV)

On January 6th of each year, many of my neighbors across the border in Mexico celebrate “Día de los Reyes,” or “Day of the Kings.” This holiday is a celebration of the faithfulness of

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Today I will be bold in seeking Christ Jesus.

the magi and of the generous gifts they brought to the Christ child.

But who were these magi who were searching for the King of the Jews? Were they really kings or royalty from other kingdoms? Were they astrologers or nomads? Were there only three? Did they travel with a caravan for safety? And why is it that Matthew is the only one of the Gospels to tell this story of faith and hope?

What is clear to me is the deep faith of the magi, who were willing to leave their homes and travel far, believing the truth of a prophecy and following a moving star. When the star finally led them to Bethlehem, they humbly presented their gifts and worshiped the child, the promised Messiah.

So whether we celebrate January 6th as the ending of the 12 days of Christmas, or in recognition of the journey of the magi, or as Epiphany — the revealing of Christ’s birth to the world — it is a special time to celebrate faith, love, and hope in the promises of God.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank you for the gift the magi gave to us — their story of faith. Strengthen our faith so that we also are willing to journey into the unknown to seek our Savior. In his name we pray. Amen.

Douglas Wingert (Arizona, USA)

NOT ALONE

FRI
JAN 7
2022

READ 1 Kings 19:9-18

Jesus said, “I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”

— John 16:33 (NIV)

For followers of Christ, it can be lonely in the workplace, school playground, university campus, neighborhood group, or even in our family. When conversations feel unedifying or ungodly and we don't want to laugh at rude jokes or join in gossip, we may feel like outsiders who don't belong.

We see throughout the Bible that declaring our faith can lead to persecution or ridicule. For instance, Elijah felt this way when he stood against the wicked prophets of Baal. Once he defeated them, he was threatened by Queen Jezebel and fled into the wilderness. There, Elijah confessed to God that he felt alone in his stand for what was right. God reminded him that there were others who were loyal believers. He was not alone.

Jesus also told his followers that they would have times of loneliness, but he promised that he would

never leave or forsake them. The same is true for us. We may have trouble in this world, but we can take courage because Jesus has overcome the world. Christ is with us whatever our circumstances.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
I can have courage because
God is with me.

Prayer: Dear Lord, help us to remember your presence when we feel alone. We pray the prayer Jesus taught us, “Father, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us. And lead us not into temptation” (Luke 11:2-4, NIV). Amen.

Valerie Clark (KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa) — See back cover.

Prayer Focus: SOMEONE WHO FEELS LIKE AN OUTSIDER 13

BEHIND THE SCENES

READ John 6:5-13

Andrew said, “Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many?”

— John 6:9 (NIV)

The account of the boy who gave up his lunch to feed the multitudes is a familiar one. But I often wonder about the one who prepared the boy's lunch.

When he saw the great crowd waiting for him, Jesus tested Philip by asking where they were to find food for the people to eat. Philip said it would take more than eight months' wages

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Even humble efforts can
change lives.

to buy food for five thousand men, not to mention the women and children.

Andrew found a boy who had a lunch of five loaves of bread and two fish. But

he asked, “How far will they go among so many?” Yet, in the hands of Jesus, those five small loaves and two small fish fed the multitudes, with twelve baskets left over.

I imagine the boy's mother making his lunch at home, lovingly shaping and baking the small loaves, and placing the fish into a small sack. I imagine her faithfully preparing her son for the day, not knowing he would be a part of an encounter with the miracle-working Savior.

When I wonder if what I do for Jesus has value, I think of the people who provided the raw materials for a miracle that day. My behind-the-scenes faithfulness can be part of creative miracles in the hands of Jesus.

Prayer: Dear Lord, magnify our small, faithful efforts so that we may join you in blessing others today. Amen.

Inger J. Logelin (Washington, USA) — See p. 21.

CONTINUED GROWTH

SUN
JAN 9
2022

READ Ephesians 4:25-32

Be kind, compassionate, and forgiving to each other, in the same way God forgave you in Christ.

— Ephesians 4:32 (CEB)

My little farming homestead is nestled in a suburban, woodsy neighborhood. In the late afternoon, I love to walk through the trees behind the house as the light dances among the leaves. Sometimes, I lie down on the ground and look up in awe at the formidable old oaks and tulip poplars. If I catch the light just right, however, I can also see scars or bumps on the outside of a tree — a place where the bark is clearly not unified with the rest of the trunk. Yet the tree continues to grow past the scars and live a healthy life.

In our scripture today, we learn that the same can be said about the process of forgiveness. Forgiveness is not just about letting go; it's also about moving forward — not holding someone else or ourselves captive to the hurts of the past. It's about being actively compassionate and offering words and acts of grace, just as God has done for us through Jesus Christ.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
Compassionate forgiveness is a part of my journey toward wholeness.

Like the trees, we have wounds; but we do not have to become stunted by them. Through lives of prayer and acts of forgiveness, we allow God to heal our scars, create new life, and guide us in our continued growth.

Prayer: Gracious Creator, despite our sadness and pain, help us dare to live with compassion. Heal our wounds so that we may embrace new life. Amen.

Cameron Kempson (North Carolina, USA)

GOD'S BELOVED

READ Psalm 139:13-18

Jesus said, “How can you believe since you accept glory from one another but do not seek the glory that comes from the only God?”

— John 5:44 (NIV)

My family and I are serving as missionaries in Tanzania, Africa. I accompany my daughter Olivia to school in a bajaji (a three-wheeled tut-tut taxi). Most days, the drivers are quiet or make small talk. But one day a driver berated Olivia for having substandard Swahili. He barked at me for not having taught her better.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

I am God's beloved — that is what defines me.

We dropped Olivia off at school. Later, I told her, “I’m sorry that the driver was so mean to you.” She looked at me in confusion. Mean to

her? She hadn’t even noticed. I was amazed. Perhaps she felt safe enough in my presence that any criticism or accusation did not affect her.

Oh, how I want that assurance! I want to walk through life confident that my divine parent is in charge and knowing that criticism won’t matter because I rest in God’s truths.

In John 5:44 Jesus gets to the heart of the issue. It is our Creator who determines our identity, not our critics. So, we can allow God’s words to matter more than accusations from our critics. We obtain our worth from our heavenly parent who loves us.

Prayer: Dear God, help us to root our identity in you rather than what others say. Amen.

Michelle Laura Heed (New York, USA)

GETTING TO KNOW GOD

TUES
JAN 11
2022

READ Matthew 7:7-12

Jesus said, “Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.”

— Matthew 7:7 (NIV)

Over 30 years ago, I experienced early-onset menopause. I was a mother and working full-time at a bank while my husband had just changed his career path. Fearing an increased risk of breast cancer, I did not take hormone therapy treatment. As a result, I suffered from many disturbing symptoms.

When I turned to my sister for advice, she suggested that I pray for God's help. I hesitated. Why would God listen to my prayer? I was not even a churchgoer. But she encouraged me to pray with all my heart, not worrying about what God would do. By God's mercy, I gained strength in dealing with my situation after praying faithfully every day. As I found peace amidst my challenging symptoms, I began to understand how much God loves me. I started attending Sunday services and studying the Bible with fellowship friends, and I joined our church choir.

All these years God has answered many of my prayers. Looking back, those answers are truly miracles in my life, and my sister was a loving angel sent to me by God. How wonderful it is, getting to know God starting with only a faithful prayer!

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
When I face challenges, I will
turn to God in prayer.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank you for people who guide us closer to you. Thank you for always opening the door when we knock. Amen.

Shelley C. Wu (California, USA)

WED
JAN 12
2022

A NEW NAME

READ Isaiah 62:1-5

The nations shall see your vindication, and all the kings your glory; and you shall be called by a new name that the mouth of the LORD will give.

— Isaiah 62:2 (NRSV)

I got into a lot of trouble in school, and my report cards always included comments about my bad behavior. Because of my actions, those comments described me in ways that were not positive, though they were frequently deserved.

Surprisingly, one teacher thought I was redeemable. She named other traits in her comments and in person that revealed my positive attributes. Naturally, my self-esteem increased. In time, others began to see these positive traits in me as well. This one teacher gave me the confidence to live

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

My identity as God's child is stronger than any label others can give me.

a new way and cast the old identity aside. This wasn't merely a change of perspective but a transformation from God.

The prophet Isaiah documented a similar situation with Israel. They had sinned but God was gracious, welcoming them back and providing hope. God gave them a new name. "Forsaken" was changed to "My Delight Is in Her" (see Isa. 62:4).

Israel's righteousness was only possible because God saves and redeems. We are described by God's grace rather than the labels of our own sinful condition. Just as my teacher gave me a new identity, God also restores us so we can reveal God's amazing attributes!

Prayer: Dear God, thank you for naming us and calling us your own. Help us to live in a way that brings you glory. Amen.

Mike Medeiros (California, USA) — See p. 21.

READ Deuteronomy 6:1-9

Start children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old they will not turn from it.

— Proverbs 22:6 (NIV)

When I was about seven years old, my mother became bedridden with tuberculosis, making it impossible for her to take care of my two brothers and me. But still she invested in our spiritual growth. Although she had to rely on others to provide us with physical nutrition, she made sure we received spiritual nutrition. She would write down the Lord's Prayer, the Ten Commandments, and Psalm 23 for us to learn. She would give us Bible verses to memorize every day, and I still remember her face beaming with joy when we spoke those verses aloud for her. She passed on her habit of reading *The Upper Room* devotional every day, and it was through her that we grew in faith.

My mother's commitment to our spiritual growth became one of her most important legacies. After she died, we held on to our faith and grew into an even stronger relationship with God. This closeness to God has helped us through times of grief and other challenges of life.

Even though our mother was with us for only a short period of time, I am grateful that she taught us how to praise and serve God. Just as my mother encouraged us in our faith, we can be mentors to others as they grow in faith.

Prayer: Loving Father, thank you for the gift of those who love and care for us physically and spiritually. In Jesus' name. Amen.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

How will I offer spiritual nourishment to someone today?

Neeta Nayna Macwan (Gujarat, India)

HOW TO WRITE FOR THE UPPER ROOM

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Real people. Real stories. Real faith.



Bernadette Butler (p. 9) works with dementia patients in a life enrichment program.



Luis Pastén (p. 46) worked his entire life as a baker and is the oldest volunteer firefighter in his city.



Beverly Taylor (p. 59) is a retired educator who worked in public schools and with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.



Mike Medeiros (p. 18) is a pastor and an adjunct professor. He loves being outdoors, playing sports, and cooking.



Don Greeley (p. 71) is a Pulmonary physician, medical school teacher, husband, and grandfather.



Josey McChesney (p. 32) is a high school student who enjoys reading, learning, and helping others.



Larry Dowell (p. 31) is a retired IT professional whose hobby is collecting and restoring radios.



Inger Logelin (p. 14) directed a wilderness island Bible camp for First Nations children and teens in British Columbia.

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The people pictured on this page did.

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FRI
JAN 14
2022

THE LOOK

READ Luke 22:54-62

Peter replied, “Man, I don’t know what you’re talking about!” Just as he was speaking, the rooster crowed. The Lord turned and looked straight at Peter.

— Luke 22:60-61 (NIV)

I was bullied in middle school. I was nerdy, I didn’t wear cool clothes, and I was hopeless at sports. I took solace in my friendship with Tarik, an exchange student from India. Like me, he just didn’t seem to fit in. But we had a connection

through our common pain.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

God is looking at me today with eyes of forgiving love.

One day as I walked to school, three football players actually talked to me. I was ecstatic! As we approached the school, I saw Tarik by the

doorway. Instantly the football players began to tease him. My desire to be popular was overwhelming, and I’m ashamed to admit I joined them in teasing my friend. I will never forget the look Tarik gave me at that moment. He didn’t say a word, but I could see the sense of betrayal and sadness in his eyes.

Peter must have felt deep shame when Jesus looked at him after Peter denied knowing Jesus. But Jesus didn’t condemn Peter. Rather, I believe Jesus looked deep into Peter’s soul and saw the bold man of God Peter would become. When we feel shame for our mistakes, forgiveness is a prayer away. Jesus always looks upon us with unconditional love.

Prayer: Loving Savior, help us to remember that your boundless love and sacrifice cover all our sins. May we look at others the way you do. Amen.

Tom Smith (Utah, USA)

READ John 20:24-29

*Be like-minded, be sympathetic, love one another,
be compassionate and humble.*

— 1 Peter 3:8 (NIV)

As our instructor talked on and on, I saw a classmate squirm in his seat. During a break, he explained, “Sitting and listening is so difficult for me. I prefer doing, touching, seeing, smelling, and even tasting. I’m an experiential learner.”

While reading today’s scripture passage, I recalled that conversation and thought that Thomas must have been an experiential learner. Although traditionally he has been called “Doubting Thomas,” I think maybe Thomas processed information best by receiving it through a combination of senses. Perhaps the report from the other disciples didn’t involve enough of his senses for him to process that information easily. Only by hearing, seeing, and touching could Thomas accept Jesus’ resurrection.

That same hesitance to accept the gospel sometimes hinders us today. We may regard sermons as boring because words alone exclude the other senses. For some, Communion fills that void through touch and taste. Others enjoy children’s sermons that often involve multiple senses.

When we are understanding of those who receive the gospel in different ways, we fulfill the charge in today’s quoted scripture. We may need their understanding of our differences too.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
Using all my senses can open
me to God’s presence.

Prayer: Precious Lord, help us to be understanding of the unique ways each person receives your good news. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

Mary Hunt Webb (New Mexico, USA)

SUN
JAN 16
2022

PROMPTING

READ Haggai 1:2-5, 12-13

Then Haggai, the LORD's messenger, gave this message of the LORD to the people: "I am with you," declares the LORD.

— Haggai 1:13 (NIV)

I had no reason to dislike this person — I called him “that Christian” in my head — but we also didn’t have anything in common. I was 20 years older. He was a student. I was a maintenance worker. I’d seen thousands of university students come and go. Very few ever spoke to me. But he did,

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Today I will look for God’s promptings in my conversations with others.

several times. He even remembered my name. He told me about Jesus and encouraged me to return to church.

“I need to get my life right before I go back to church,” I told him. “I’ll do it later.” I don’t know if he believed me. I didn’t believe myself.

He must have graduated because I eventually stopped seeing him around campus. That was 30 years ago, but I never forgot his encouragement. In time, I did return to church, and I’m glad I did. But I continued to wonder, *What blessings did I miss because my faith was a low priority?*

I remind myself that religion is not a transaction. Even when we ignore God’s presence, God loves us regardless. But a relationship with God does require our response. When the Israelites answered, God affirmed, “I am with you.” Now, through Christ, God is always with us.

Prayer: Dear Lord, thank you for your unconditional love. Empower us to respond by growing in relationship with you. Amen.

Andrew Michael Ardoin (Louisiana, USA)

STARGAZING

MON
JAN 17
2022

READ Genesis 1:14-28

Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever.

— Daniel 12:3 (NIV)

I live in a rural area, and it's relaxing to step outside and gaze at the stars twinkling at night. When a meteor shower is predicted in my area, I stand on my back deck with my head tilted back to look for these "falling stars." While standing on the deck with the house behind me, I can see only half of the night sky. There may be meteors in parts of the sky that I'm not able to see.

Thankfully, God sees the whole picture. God created us and knows of our past failures and triumphs. God knows what the future can hold for us. "I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future" (Jer. 29:11, NIV). God's hand is upon us every day — loving, guiding, protecting, and forgiving us.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
Knowing that God sees the whole picture brings me comfort.

God created the heavens and earth, and all plants and animals, including us. We can give thanks that God can see everything as a whole and that each one of us is important to our Creator.

Prayer: Creator God, thank you for having your loving hand upon us each day. Help us focus on you so that we will make choices that bring you honor and glory. Amen.

Lori Hulvey (Illinois, USA)

OBEDIENCE

READ Psalm 111:1-10

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom: a good understanding have all they that do his commandments: his praise endureth for ever.

— Psalm 111:10 (KJV)

One of my daughters plays on a soccer team. At her first-ever practice, the coach told her to kick the ball with the side of her foot rather than her toe. My daughter insisted that it was better to use her toe because she could kick the ball harder and faster, and she had always done it that way. They went back and forth for a while until the coach finally told my daughter to try it just once.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Even if it is not what I am used to, I will follow God's ways.

Reluctantly, she gave it a try and found that she had more control and could still kick the ball far. She was convinced once she tried it.

God's commandments can be like that. We think that we have been doing fine on our own, and often God tells us to do something that is not easy or that does not make sense. We may squirm and try our best to rationalize why that does not apply to us because our circumstances are different. We may forget that God's desire is always for our good. God tells us that understanding comes from obedience. When we follow God's commands, even reluctantly, we experience the blessings that come with obedience.

Prayer: Dear God, may we always be quick to obey you. Help us remember that your ways are always for our good. Amen.

Bob LaForge (New Jersey, USA)

GENEROSITY

WED
JAN 19
2022

READ Luke 6:37-42

Your eye is the lamp of your body. If your eye is healthy, your whole body is full of light; but if it is not healthy, your body is full of darkness. Therefore consider whether the light in you is not darkness.

— Luke 11:34-35 (NRSV)

It was Christmas morning. I got up, went to the bathroom, and found a ring of shaving foam in the sink. *I hate it when he doesn't rinse the basin*, I thought. Once I was washed and dressed, I went to the top of the stairs and noticed the curtains hooked up on the window sill. *I hate it when he doesn't straighten the curtains after drawing them back*, I thought. Downstairs and in the kitchen, I began to prepare breakfast and found the dishcloth had been left balled up in the sink rather than spread out to dry. *I hate it when . . .* I stopped mid-thought.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
When I am frustrated with others, I will focus on God's love for them.

This was the day I was supposed to be celebrating the greatest gift of love the world will ever know, and I could barely contain my irritation at the trivial differences in the way my husband and I do things. I was not looking at my husband with a generous heart.

I determined to change my attitude. Day by day I am seeking Christ's grace and love so that I can attend to my own faults and be more patient with others.

Prayer: Dear Lord Jesus, help us to learn from you how to be tolerant, forgiving, and loving to all whom we meet. Amen.

Helen Pain (England, United Kingdom)

THUR
JAN 20
2022

TEMPEST

READ Psalm 91:9-16

*Do not fear, for I am with you; do not
be dismayed, for I am your God.*

— Isaiah 41:10 (NIV)

My wife and I stood on the balcony facing the Atlantic Ocean as the roaring wind rattled the palm fronds and large foamy waves crashed on the sand. We had to brace ourselves to keep our balance. We quickly went indoors, our eyes burning from the wind and our skin chilled from the driving

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

God is with me through
tempests and struggle,
offering peace.

rain. The next morning, bright azure skies greeted a glorious sunrise. Small waves lapped at the beach, palm trees fluttered, and all was peaceful.

Life can be much the same way. The tempests of serious illness, anxiety, job changes, marital difficulties, relationship challenges, business setbacks, and other storms of life threaten our sense of well-being. Our faith may even falter. But throughout the turmoil, God is always with us as promised in Isaiah. And our hearts and minds can find rest and peace once more.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, be with us this day, in tempests and in calm. Comfort us with the knowledge that you are always near. Amen.

John R. Robinson (Georgia, USA)

TO LOVE AND TO LAUGH

READ John 4:4-26

FRI
JAN 21
2022

Jesus answered her, “If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water.”

— John 4:10 (NIV)

When I was in my early twenties, a neighbor invited me to a church service. The pastor talked about the birth of Jesus, his death and resurrection, and how God wants a relationship with us. As part of the service, the ushers distributed slips of paper for the congregation to write down their prayer requests. I clearly remember mine: to love and to laugh.

Loneliness and guilt had filled me with a crushing sense of unworthiness. Like the Samaritan woman in today’s reading, I had made choices that isolated me from my family and friends. And like her, I couldn’t imagine why Jesus would want to have anything to do with me.

Yet much to the surprise of the Samaritan woman, Jesus talked to her. Though they were strangers, he displayed intimate knowledge of her life and didn’t reject her. He offered her a most amazing gift — living water. Bursting with joy, she left her water jar at the well and hurried into town to share her good news. Her testimony was compelling because her spirit had been completely transformed.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
God can transform my life.

In time, God transformed my life as well and led me to faith in Jesus Christ. And then, because God hears and answers prayer, God filled my life with love and laughter.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank you for the good gifts you give us. Thank you especially for the gift of salvation through your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Elizabeth Erlandson (Nebraska, USA)

SAT
JAN 22
2022

GOD'S GRACE IS SUFFICIENT

READ 2 Corinthians 12:1-10

[The Lord] said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses so that Christ's power may rest on me.

— 2 Corinthians 12:9 (NIV)

I was in the waiting area being prepared for another surgery. Three other patients were brought in with me. As the nurse was preparing a patient named Raúl, he began to express to the nurse his anxiety about the procedure and the discomfort he had experienced the night before.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
God's grace is with us today
and always.

As I overheard this short exchange, the words of the apostle Paul above came to my mind. While the nurse prepared my intra-

venous drip, I was able to chat with Raúl, sharing what I had learned through previous surgeries. I also shared some suggestions he might consider during his recuperation, adding that in spite of our suffering God offers hope. After talking for a couple more minutes, we prayed together. As Raúl was wheeled into surgery, he appeared much more serene.

I was also comforted, knowing that God was by my side and that what I had learned as a result of my previous surgeries opened the door to offer some help, perhaps even a blessing, to someone else. When we place our full trust in Christ, we are called by the Spirit to be open to help others wherever we are. We can live out our faith, confident in the knowledge that our Creator knows our every need and that God's grace is sufficient.

Prayer: God of mercy, even in our weakness we remain confident that your grace is sufficient for us and we, in turn, can be attentive to the needs of others. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Nelly García Gallardo (Mexico City, Mexico)

GIVING FROM THE HEART

SUN
JAN 23
2022

READ Matthew 18:1-5

Whoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

— Matthew 18:4 (KJV)

While attending a book fair at my oldest grandson's elementary school, I witnessed an act of kindness that warmed my heart. Andrew, my grandson, had earned money to spend at the book fair by helping his mother at home. He chose a couple of books and made his purchase. He had money left over, but one of his friends didn't have any money.

His young companion had picked up a couple of books and was about to put them back. Andrew made eye contact with me and I could tell he was seeking my approval. He wanted to purchase the books for his friend. I told Andrew he had earned the money so it was his to spend, but yes, it would be nice to share. And he did.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
How do those around me
teach me about Jesus?

When I witness acts of kindness, especially from children, it renews my faith in the Lord and assures me that God is at work in the world. Praise be to God for acts of kindness that reveal God's presence.

Prayer: Dear Lord, thank you for the children in our lives who teach us about your unselfish, genuine love. Help us to become more like them. Amen.

Larry Dowell (North Carolina, USA) — See p. 21.

MON
JAN 24
2022

A PLACE FOR US

READ Ephesians 2:14-22

*See what great love the Father has lavished on us,
that we should be called children of God!*

— 1 John 3:1 (NIV)

For most of my life, I have struggled with anxiety. I pile up stresses for myself, and I think of life like I'm running a race with a goal of winning something — good grades, athletic achievement, or being the best at my favorite activities.

In high school, one such goal was to fit in. This goal turned out to be unachievable for several reasons. My limited finances, transportation, and dislike of texting conversations made me unfit to join the group I wanted to be a part of.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

I always fit in because I am part of God's loving family.

At the time I didn't recognize that even though I struggled to fit in in high school, I was already included in an even more important group: God's family. This family did not have earthly requirements like the group in high school. This family only needed my love, faith, and belief in the greatest good of all. It does not matter to God where we are from, how much money we have, or if our life is perfect in the world's eyes. God cares and has a place for every one of us. This promise gives me comfort and a new appreciation for my wonderfully unique and diverse family.

Prayer: Dear God, help us to realize that we are your family and that is what matters most. Amen.

Josey McChesney (Missouri, USA) — See p. 21.

A DEEP SEARCH

TUES
JAN 25
2022

READ Psalm 139:1-12

*Search me, God, and know my heart; test me
and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any
offensive way in me, and lead me in the way
everlasting.*

— Psalm 139:23-24 (NIV)

One day my husband asked me if I had seen his notepad. I suggested that he check under the cushion of his favorite chair, where things often slide out of sight. He assured me that he had already looked there, but I decided to check again in case the notebook had slipped too deep for his larger hands to reach. I pulled off the seat cushion and found a few crumbs. I put my hand deeper into the chair and pulled out an empty bag, a few old wrappers, some wadded up tissue, several old magazines, and finally a fork — but no notebook.

My search in the chair reminded me of the importance of searching my heart and life. The chair looked clean at first glance. It took a deep search to find the hidden items lurking in the depths. Similarly, others may take a superficial glance at me and not see the crumbs of sinful acts and emotions that hide below the surface.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
God's light can illumine even
the darkest corners of my life.

The psalmist begged God to search him and know his heart and anxious thoughts. I need to allow God's light to shine into the corners of my heart too. God will help me to clean up whatever is there.

Prayer: Dear God, thank you for your steadfast love. Search our hearts and lives and help us always to be obedient to you. Amen.

Carol Harrison (Saskatchewan, Canada)

WED
JAN 26
2022

PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE

READ Acts 12:6-17

Jesus said, “Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.”

— Mark 11:24 (NIV)

When my wife was hospitalized after a stroke, a church group gave her a blanket embroidered with her name and Mark 11:24. When I looked up the verse, it gave me hope. Along with our friends and our church, I was fervently praying for my wife’s complete recovery. When she died seven weeks later, I was grief-stricken. Not only did I lose my wife, but our prayers had not been granted. I felt like I had failed. Surely if I had been more faithful, God would have healed my wife.

For years I have wrestled with this verse. The mix of past and future tenses is puzzling. I believe prayer changes things, but this passage teaches me that our prayers are never *just* about the future. Praying conforms us to God’s will in the present. We are comforted in this transformation by looking to God’s faithfulness in the past. Further, like the disciples in Acts 12, sometimes we don’t immediately recognize the answer to our prayers.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

How has God acted
in my past?

I’m still mourning the loss of my wife, but slowly I

am beginning to appreciate the profound ways God answers my prayers — ways so amazing that I don’t always understand them. I have come to accept that God doesn’t require my understanding, just my steadfast, faithful confidence in God’s love for me.

Prayer: Dear Lord, help us to see the ways you have guided us in the past, and grant us faith to trust our futures to you, no matter what is happening in the present. Amen.

Bill Kirklin (Indiana, USA)

LEARNING TO TRUST

THUR
JAN 27
2022

READ Psalm 94:16-19

*When anxiety was great within me, your
consolation brought me joy.*

— Psalm 94:19 (NIV)

Many times I have stressed over things beyond my control. I began to ask myself, *Why? Do I doubt God?* Then my friend suggested that when I felt stressed and worried over something, I should write it down, put it in a “God Box,” and stop fretting about it.

One day when I was stressing over things I could not control, I tried it. I wrote my worry on a piece of scrap paper, prayed, cried, and put it in the box. I may have prayed a few more times, but eventually I forgot it. Whenever a new issue came up, I put it in the box. And when I eventually decided to empty the God Box, I couldn’t remember a single thing I had written!

Over the years, I have grown in my faith and no longer need a physical God Box. I am better able to surrender my worries to God

and trust that God cares for my concerns. I realize now that the answer to my earlier question is that I wasn’t trusting God. But God has always cared for me. I have learned to trust more and doubt less with renewed hope and joy.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

I can grow in my faith by
trusting God with my
concerns.

Prayer: Dear God, in our times of need, open our eyes to your love and faithfulness. Help us to grow in our faith by surrendering our struggles to you. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

Doreen Alvarez (Florida, USA)

FRI
JAN 28
2022

THE POWER OF WORDS

READ James 3:9-18

*Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of
my heart be acceptable to you, O LORD,
my rock and my redeemer.*

— Psalm 19:14 (NRSV)

Words are powerful. Some words are a balm to our soul, while other words cut like a sharp knife. In an environment where God's Spirit does not abound, hurtful or destructive words often prevail.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Today I will speak words of hope by sharing the good news of Jesus Christ.

Followers of Christ are called to reflect our faith in word and deed. Our teacher, Jesus, spoke words of comfort where there was

loss, forgiveness where there was fault, solution where there was conflict, life where there was death, peace and hope where there was fear and anxiety. On several occasions Jesus spoke with compassion that changed lives forever.

Today, someone we know may need to hear words of hope, faith, and life. We can follow Jesus' example and use the power of words to share the good news.

Prayer: Fine-tune our words, O God, so that others will know that we are followers of Christ. We pray as Jesus taught us, "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one" (Matt. 6:9-13, NIV). Amen.

Julianis Báez de Pichardo (Dominican Republic)

GOD'S TIMING

SAT
JAN 29
2022

READ Ecclesiastes 3:9-13

Many are the plans in a person's heart, but it is the LORD's purpose that prevails.

— Proverbs 19:21 (NIV)

Earlier in my career as a speech-language pathologist, I received yearly contracts to work in a particular school district. One year, when July rolled around, I had no contract. Reluctantly, I took work at a nursing facility. I was deeply unsatisfied, but my wife told me repeatedly, "It's only a season."

In March of that year, my wife discovered a lump in her breast. Over the next 10 months, we went to dozens of doctors' appointments and treatments. We prayed constantly. Eventually, my wife's initial treatment was complete. She was cancer-free!

I missed only two of her medical appointments during those months.

Working at the nursing facility made that possible

because my schedule was flexible. Had I worked at a school, I wouldn't have been able to be with my wife when she needed me most. I believe that by putting me in the nursing facility, the Lord was nurturing us long before we even realized we needed it. Sometimes when I don't understand what God is doing, I think about that experience. I remember that God can use the pieces of my life to help me end up exactly where I need to be.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Even when I don't fully understand, I will trust God.

Prayer: O Lord, help us to remember that you are forever faithful, even when we can't see the bigger picture. In Jesus' name. Amen.

R. G. Wood (Ohio, USA)

SUN
JAN 30
2022

I CAN HEAR YOU, LORD

READ Psalm 25:1-7

We are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

— Ephesians 2:10 (NIV)

I remember sitting in church as a child and wondering if I would ever hear God's voice. I couldn't recall a time when I knew God was talking to me. As the years passed, I stopped listening, and I didn't talk to God much.

Then in my twenties as a mom of two, I started praying more often. I talked to God every night at bedtime and throughout each day, asking for patience and guidance. Soon I started hearing God's replies. I noticed that the more I talked to God, the more I sensed God talking to me — sometimes in answers to prayer, sometimes through small signs of

God's presence, and sometimes by showing me things God wanted me to do.

I heard God urging me to take a cake to a church lunch or to drop off a plate

of goodies for a grieving loved one. I recognized that God was urging me to use my gifts to do God's work. After spending so many years thinking that I would never hear God's voice, hearing God in these ways encouraged me and strengthened my relationship with God. I began to talk to God more — thanking God for small blessings and asking for strength, patience, or forgiveness when I fell short of the mom, wife, and Christian that I desire to be.

Prayer: Dear God, help us to hear you, to do your work, and to talk to you more each day. Amen.

Megan Vollmer (Wisconsin, USA)

A HEART FILLED WITH JOY

READ Hebrews 12:1-3

MON
JAN 31
2022

Let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross.

— Hebrews 12:1-2 (NRSV)

I have recently enjoyed watching a show where a consultant helps people declutter and tidy up their homes. The consultant's method is to have items in the home that only spark joy. Clients go through every item they own. If the item sparks joy, they keep it, and if it doesn't, they get rid of it. It is satisfying to see the joy people feel afterward, when they no longer have clutter in their homes.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Today I will let go of the clutter in my heart so that I can better serve God.

This got me thinking about the clutter we all have — not in our homes, but in our hearts. Perhaps it's a comment someone made years ago that we keep replaying in our minds, or the disappointment we felt when we weren't given an opportunity, or resentment toward someone for a wrong they did. But I believe God wants to declutter our hearts. What if we refuse to dwell on or be hindered by the memories, behaviors, or thoughts that don't spark joy in our lives?

As Hebrews 12:1-3 tells us, we can do this by looking to Jesus as our example. Jesus was betrayed and tortured. Yet the Bible tells us that because of the joy before him, he endured. Joy gives us the endurance we need to run our race and to get through the tough times.

Prayer: Dear Lord, show us the things in our hearts that don't spark joy, and help us release them to you. Help us to run our race with joy and endurance. Amen.

Shelley Marolla (Victoria, Australia)

Prayer Focus: TO LET GO OF PAST GRIEVANCES

39

Signs of God's Faithfulness

I have an odd collection of objects that are very special to me — an empty aluminum package that once contained ground coffee, a small white rock, three golf tees, an inexpensive digital wristwatch that is scratched and discolored. One might think that my collection is stuff that needs to be discarded, but each object holds memories for me of significant moments or time spent with people I love.

Many of these objects reside in a piece of pottery in my home. Often in passing I will pause, select one, and hold it in my hand for a few seconds. I take a moment to dwell in the memory associated with the object before putting it back in its place. My collection contains some of my most valued possessions, not because they are worth much monetarily but because they are so closely tied with rich memories and people who are important to me.

When I look through my collection, I am reminded of a story in which Samuel constructed a memorial after God saved the Israelites from the Philistines: “Samuel took a stone and set it up between Mizpah and Shen. He named it Ebenezer, saying, ‘Thus far the LORD has helped us’” (1 Sam. 7:12, NIV). The purpose of the memorial was to remind the Israelites of God’s help and faithfulness. I have come to think of each object in my collection as a kind of Ebenezer, a reminder of one of the many ways that God has been faithful to me — the gift of a good friend, time spent with family, or time spent in solitude in nature, to name only a few.

This story from Samuel reminds me of the importance of recalling God’s faithfulness in the past because those memories can shape the present. When I remember God’s help in the past, I am encouraged and sustained here and now, especially when God feels distant or silent.

I now have a regular discipline of keeping a running mental list of all the Ebenezers in my life. This has been particularly helpful in challenging times or when I’m just feeling burned out, bored, or irritable. I take a moment to pause and recite all the things for which I am grateful — people in

my life, fun and memorable experiences, whatever comes to mind. I spend time dwelling in this mental collection in much the same way I do with the objects in my piece of pottery.

Often the beginning of a new year is a time to look forward, to set goals and make plans. But this year instead of only looking forward, I am going to be intentional about also looking back and reflecting on all the ways God has been faithful to me over the past year. I invite you to take some time to do the same. Whether you start a physical list or keep a mental one or begin your own collection of objects, my hope for you is that your life is replete with signs of God's faithfulness. I hope too that what has been true for me is also true for you — that the more you look for those signs, the more you are able to find.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. What practices or disciplines remind you of and help you reflect on God's faithfulness to you?
2. Why is it important that we remember the ways that God has been faithful to us? Name a time when remembering God's faithfulness has changed your attitude about a situation.
3. What other examples in scripture can you think of where a person or group made a memorial as a reminder of God's help?

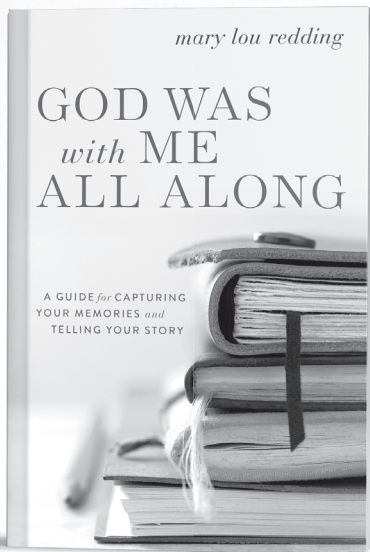


— **Andrew Garland Breeden**
Acquisitions Editor

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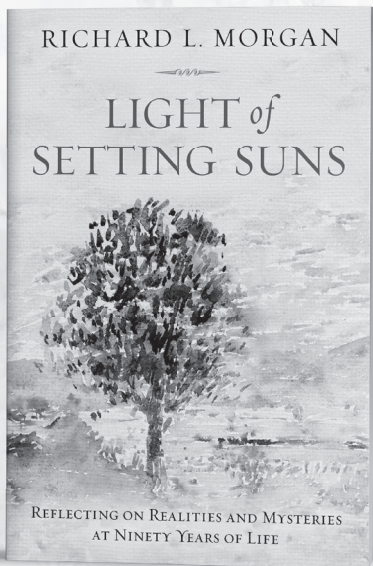
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TUES
FEB 1
2022

THROUGH THE FOG

READ 1 Samuel 3:2-11

The LORD came and stood there, calling as at the other times, "Samuel! Samuel!" Then Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant is listening."

— 1 Samuel 3:10-11 (NIV)

Traveling through a thick fog, I was listening to a devotional program based on the calling of Samuel. The speaker gave an invitation simply to pray Samuel's prayer, "Speak [LORD], for your servant is listening." Then we were to be silent and listen.

The road on which I was traveling was crooked, and the thick fog created even more danger. I passed fields and thickets of trees from which deer could easily veer into my path. I cautiously navigated the road ahead and prayed, "Speak [LORD], for your servant is listening."

God spoke by revealing how that moment was a great analogy for how to live by faith. I thought about how often it feels as if we are living in a fog, enveloped in the cares of our world while doing our best to follow the path before us. Then

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

How do I take time to listen
for God's voice?

God reminded me that though the road ahead can be dark and winding, the light of Christ is always with us, leading us to where we need to be.

I realized in that moment that if I trust the guiding light of God's care, I will ultimately be okay. I did make it safely to my destination, with the words of Samuel still echoing in my mind: "Speak [LORD], for your servant is listening."

Prayer: O God, be forever the light before us and the voice that calls us. Help us to listen and respond. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Tim Tate (Virginia, USA) — See back cover.

SINGING PRAISES

WED
FEB 2
2022

READ Psalm 100:1-5

*Sing to the LORD with thanks; sing praises to our
God with a lyre!*

— Psalm 147:7 (CEB)

As the new board chair of a campus ministry, I was excited to work alongside the eager student-led worship team. We met one Saturday a month to plan weekly services. I was amazed and encouraged by the dedication of the students who were willing to share their faith with their peers.

Each meeting opened with songs of worship. As I'm not musically inclined,

I thought these sessions were entirely too long. I felt that the songs took up too much time that could be better spent in planning and training.

After a few months of these gatherings, my attitude began to shift. I found that the music moved me in a way that sermons and Bible studies often did not. The music I had once considered a traditional formality became a form of deep and meaningful worship for me. The Lord opened my heart during my years of service with this group, and I felt God's love on a deeper level than I'd ever experienced.

Now whenever the choir or worship band begins their praise music, I recall the scriptures that teach us to sing out our thanks and praises to God. Even with my limited musical talents, I happily make a joyful noise to the Lord.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Today I will worship God with
joy and thanksgiving.

Prayer: Holy Father, help us to hear your voice during our times of worship. Amen.

Bobbie Smith Bryant (Kentucky, USA)

THUR
FEB 3
2022

WHO IS MY NEIGHBOR?

READ Luke 10:25-37

*Wanting to justify himself, [the lawyer] asked Jesus,
“And who is my neighbor?”*

— Luke 10:29 (NRSV)

In response to the lawyer's question in today's scripture reading, Jesus offers a parable which encourages us to show solidarity and compassion for fellow human beings, regardless of the circumstances. This mandate is similar to the mission that firefighters in Chile have always followed. In Chile, all who serve as firefighters are volunteers and take to

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Today I will follow Jesus' commandment to love my neighbor.

heart the mission to “love your neighbor.” Those who volunteer as firefighters are willing to give their lives for others if necessary.

Having served as a firefighter for more than 65 years, I have witnessed many tragedies where families have lost homes, belongings, and family members to fires. Tragedy is everywhere, though. People all over the world have experienced earthquakes, tsunamis, devastating storms, and the COVID-19 pandemic that has ravaged the world. Firefighters and other dedicated personnel, especially in the field of health services, continue to struggle to help our neighbors. All of us can remain committed to loving our neighbors because the call to love God and neighbor is Jesus' greatest commandment.

Prayer: Your words are written on our hearts, O God. Embolden our resolve to show our love for you by helping our neighbors. Amen.

Luis Pastén Pastén (Antofagasta, Chile) — See p. 21.

A DIFFERENT PLAN

FRI
FEB 4
2022

READ Proverbs 3:5-6

"I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."

— Jeremiah 29:11 (NIV)

As a junior in college, I daydreamed about my senior year: basketball games, random road trips, late nights watching reality TV. It would be perfect. But things took a turn as I struggled in my chosen field of study and realized most of my close friends would graduate in May. I tried to stay positive, but things only got worse as my last good friend told me she wasn't coming back to school in the fall. My plans and expectations for senior year were completely crushed.

As fall semester began, I was overwhelmingly lonely, stressed, and jealous of others. I felt like a failure, and that made me angry at God. *Why am I being punished?* I didn't know what I had done wrong. However, as I reflected and read scriptures like Jeremiah 29:11, I realized that I had forgotten something important: God's ways are not my own.

As I've surrendered to God's plan, I've gained a new outlook at school. I've even made some new friends, maybe ones I wouldn't have gotten to know if I had lived out my own plan. God was and still is leading me through this journey toward a better me.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
God's ways are not my ways.

Prayer: Dear God, help us not to hold too tightly to our own expectations and hopes so that we may align our desires with yours. Amen.

Siyhani Jones (Illinois, USA)

IMMEASURABLE GOD

READ Psalm 147:1-11

Great is our Lord, and abundant in power; his understanding is beyond measure.

— Psalm 147:5 (NRSV)

While talking with my wife at dinner, I asked her about the value of π (π) — the number that starts out 3.14159. It is used for calculating the circumference and area of a circle. My wife, a middle school math teacher, affirmed that π is an “irrational number,” meaning that it goes on and on. While no mathematician can fully write out the endless series of digits

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Though I cannot fully comprehend God, I trust God’s power and love.

that comprise π , it is nonetheless vitally important for calculations made by engineers, inventors, artists, and even chefs.

Like π , God is also immeasurable in that we cannot fathom the fullness of who God is. Yet knowing God helps us to make sense of life. We may spend a lifetime calculating the infinite “digits” of God, each one of which brings new wonder, surprise, and perspective to our search to know God. But knowing that God is immeasurable can bring us comfort because the God who holds infinite knowledge in one hand also holds endless love in the other.

Today we can rejoice, knowing that while God spans far beyond human understanding, God gives us enough “digits” to know abundant beauty and profound love.

Prayer: Immeasurable God, thank you for allowing us to see a glimpse of who you are. Help us to trust you far beyond our own understanding. Amen.

Luke Ecklund Heberle (Ohio, USA)

EMBRACING UNCERTAINTY

SUN
FEB 6
2022

READ Matthew 6:25-34

Faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.

— Hebrews 11:1 (NIV)

One day I began to feel disturbed by thoughts of what my future might look like. I wondered if I had made a wrong choice, and I felt confused and overwhelmed with fear. I asked God to speak to me and help me, but I felt the same. I tried to recall a scripture verse that would help me, but I could not remember one. I began to lose hope.

Later I saw a post on social media that contained the word *uncertainty* and a reference to Hebrews 11:1. I quickly turned to the verse and read it again and again. I learned that by embracing my uncertainty with faith, my fears lessened.

I still question what my future will look like, and I worry about choices I have made regarding my career or education. But scripture reminds me that faith will enable me to let go of my fear and trust God.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
I trust that God has a good plan for my future.

Hebrews 11 reminds us that whenever we feel disturbed and stressed about the future or our choices, we can put our faith in God, who holds our future and wants the best for us. With this assurance we can embrace uncertainty with faith and encourage others to do the same.

Prayer: Dear Lord, please help us to have faith in you and to let go of fear as we entrust the future to you. Amen.

Keren Philips (Karnataka, India)

MON
FEB 7
2022

REDEMPTION

READ Isaiah 55:6-9

There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens.

— Ecclesiastes 3:1 (NIV)

I was in high school when my mother died after a long battle with cancer. I was not only sad; I was angry with God. I couldn't see any purpose in what had happened, and I questioned God's wisdom and even God's existence. Though my grief subsided, the question, "Why?" still remained deep inside me. Whenever others mentioned their mothers, my hurt resurfaced.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

My experiences equip me to show God's comfort to others.

After graduation from college, I became a high school chemistry teacher — a job I loved. I had been teaching for about 20 years when a student returned to class after missing a week of school because of the death of a parent. What was to be an hour of helping her catch up became an opportunity to empathize with her. I told her I had been about her age when my mother died, and I shared with her the hurt I had felt when other kids mentioned their mothers. She looked at me with tears in her eyes and said, "Thank you, Mr. B. No one else seems to understand." Because of my own experience, I was able to offer her comfort and support. At that moment I finally found something redeeming in the grief I had felt at my mother's death and for the decades since. And I understood that when we grieve, God grieves with us.

Prayer: Father God, thank you for being with us as we grieve. Teach us patience as we learn to trust you in all things. Amen.

Brad Butler (North Carolina, USA)

LOOKING CLOSELY

TUES
FEB 8
2022

READ Proverbs 2:1-8

Happy are those who find wisdom and those who gain understanding.

— Proverbs 3:13 (CEB)

Having low vision sometimes hinders me, but it also forces me to look more closely at things. Since I can't always trust my depth perception, I occasionally rely on touch to navigate. One evening at a church prayer meeting, I was making my way along the wall behind the altar. The wall has a large cross painted on it, and the cross was right beside me. Out of the corner of my eye, I noticed a tiny line of delicate gold script hidden along the dark brown vertical edge of the cross. Upon further investigation, I found that it was inscribed, "Jesus Christ is forever Lord of lords and King of kings." I pointed out my discovery to the others at the prayer meeting, and each of them admitted that they had never noticed the inscription. We concluded that the phrase was put there by an artist who understood that like many of God's marvelous truths, it would only be discovered by a close examination.

Following that experience, I decided that I needed to become much more diligent in my study of God's word and in my prayer life. Wisdom and understanding are available to all, but those who look closely will find deeper beauty.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Today I will take time to look for God's beauty and truth.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank you for giving us scripture. As we read it, help us to slow down and look for the beauty and truth in every verse. Amen.

Geo Pickell (North Dakota, USA)

WED
FEB 9
2022

SHARING BLESSINGS

READ 1 Corinthians 9:19-23

Paul wrote, “*I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.*”

— 1 Corinthians 9:23 (NIV)

I began visiting a young woman who lived in a poor, run-down part of town. She had been ill and in bed for days, and she did not have anyone to take care of her. Every time I visited, she asked me to sing a song and read the Bible to her.

On each visit, she listened quietly and never spoke. Then one day she whispered to me, “Thank you for treating me like a human being. I can feel the love of Jesus this week. Please ask him to receive me as his daughter. I trust that Jesus is my

savior, and I want to receive him before I go home.

Please ask Jesus to bring me to my eternal home in heaven.”

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

By humbling myself to serve others, I can be God’s blessing to many.

Not long after praying, she went home to her Father in heaven. The apostle Paul wrote that he wanted to make himself a slave to everyone even though he was free. He did this for the sake of the gospel and so shared in its blessings. Jesus wants us to use our great potential as a blessing for many people, not for our own sake but for the sake of the gospel.

Prayer: Dear Jesus, thank you for opportunities to serve you and to show your love to others. Amen.

Linda Chandra (Banten, Indonesia)

GOD'S LIGHT IN ME

THUR
FEB 10
2022

READ John 1:1-14

*The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness
has not overcome it.*

— John 1:5 (NIV)

For several years I lived in a place where electricity could not be depended on. Most days we had electricity for three or four hours in the evening, but when the electricity abruptly went off there was total darkness. On clear nights the stars of the Milky Way and the moon provided light, but on cloudy nights the darkness was complete. I often woke up in the night, heard the howls of packs of dogs or wolves, and felt suffocated by the darkness.

On one of these cold, dark nights I woke up in paralyzing fear. Then some words of scripture came to my mind reminding me that God is light and is the source of all light. I realized that because I belong to God and God's light is in me, I always carry that light even when I may not be able to physically see it. I went back to sleep that night, feeling comforted.

I have carried this lesson with me, and God is my constant light within. I am tempted to fear when I see the evil in the world, but scripture again reminds me that God's light dwells in me. I can find peace in God's light and shine it so that others can find peace when darkness seems to be closing in.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
God's light is always in me
because I belong to God.

Prayer: Thank you, Father, for the gift of light you have given us through your Son. Amen.

Jerry White (Florida, USA)

SEND ME!

READ Isaiah 6:1-8

I heard the voice of the LORD saying, "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?" And I said, "Here am I. Send me!"

— Isaiah 6:8 (NIV)

My husband and I had served as youth helpers for two years when our pastor approached us about the need for a youth pastor at a small church across the state. My initial response was, "No way!" I had no formal education or training, and I had left that area after a tumultuous childhood. I

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

When I say yes, God can do great things through me.

had no desire to return to a place where I had felt judged and isolated, yet my heart desired to live for Jesus and I felt him calling. So we answered the call. Of

course when we said, "Send us," ours was more like a frightened mumble than a shout, but we said yes.

Though it proved challenging, I'll never regret our response. God moved in mighty ways through us. We were able to launch a youth group and brought teens from different denominations together for camps, offering them a sense of belonging. Through outreach efforts, we also saw significant transformation in the lives of many imprisoned youth. I'm still amazed at the powerful ways God used us, with all our imperfections. From that time in my life, I learned that God doesn't need the smartest or most talented people to transform the world. God simply needs someone willing to say, "Send me."

Prayer: Dear God, help each of us to be willing to say yes to you. Give us the strength to serve you in whatever ways we can. Amen.

Katie J. Trent (Arizona, USA) — See back cover.

NEW SHOOTS

SAT
FEB 12
2022

READ John 11:38-44

Jesus said to [Martha], “I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?”

— John 11:25-26 (NRSV)

Beautiful Queen of the Night flowers grew in our yard. My family loved to stay up late and enjoy their pleasant fragrance. However, during last year’s dry season, a fire destroyed every plant around our house. We did not expect to be able to enjoy those flowers again, but as the rains started falling this year, new and beautiful shoots of this wonderful plant surprisingly sprouted in the yard.

The shoots had died in the fire, but the roots remained safe in the ground until the rains brought them

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

I trust that God can always bring new life.

new life. This made me think about how God, through Christ, renews us. When we are overcome by troubles or despair, we can trust God and patiently wait like the roots of our Queen of the Night flower. When we miss opportunities for growth, experience delays, or our prayers are not answered as we expect, we always have the hope of new life when we remain rooted in Christ.

Prayer: Dear Lord, help us to trust in you even when we don’t see your presence. Grant us patience, for we know you can bring new life out of every situation. As Jesus taught us, we pray, “Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen” (Matt. 6:9-13, KJV).

Olaiya Muiyiwa Benralph (Federal Capital Territory, Nigeria)

Prayer Focus: THOSE WHO ARE STRUGGLING TO HOPE 55

SUN
FEB 13
2022

PERFECT PEACE

READ Psalm 23:1-6

Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee.

— Isaiah 26:3 (KJV)

Roughly two years ago, my doctors discovered I had breast cancer, and I spent the following year fighting the disease. During that time, I suffered. I asked everyone to pray and then kept to myself, turning inward. I wrestled with the unknown and felt sick from the chemotherapy. My husband supported me completely, fielding calls from loved ones and friends when I was feeling too tired or sad. For months I've

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

When troubles overwhelm me,
God will ease my burden.

now been enjoying relatively good health. That changed several weeks ago when I was diagnosed with metastatic breast cancer.

I want it to be different this time, but metastatic cancer is not something that can be cured. Even if I enter remission, the cancer will eventually return. I'm only 66, and I really thought I had this beat. My days and nights alternate between relative calm and complete anguish. *How will I tell my loved ones? What will my husband do without me? What do I do about my beloved cats and dog?*

Trusting in the Holy Spirit, I know one thing: God has been and will be with me every step of the way. And I know I will be with my Creator in eternal life. When my worries become overwhelming, God is there to share my burden.

Prayer: Merciful God, we surrender our lives to you. May we live for your glory. And when it is time to die, may we die in faith. Amen.

Belinda Voigtmann* (Missouri, USA)

*The author passed away before the publication of this issue.

56 **Prayer Focus:** THOSE LIVING WITH A TERMINAL ILLNESS

LOVING GOD

MON
FEB 14
2022

READ 1 John 4:16-19

We love because [God] first loved us.

— 1 John 4:19 (NRSV)

One February morning, I walked into the church's daycare center and found the room filled with valentines — red hearts, pink hearts, hearts adorned with paper doilies, hearts cut from magazines. They hung from the ceiling; they were posted on bulletin boards and taped to windows; they were scattered on tables. I commented to the director about the delightful display. "Oh," she explained, "these are valentines that the children made for God." What a wonderful idea!

Every February, my wife and I send Valentine's Day cards to our grandchildren to let them know that we love them. But too often I fail to express my love to God. My love for God is a response to God's divine love for me. We can express our love for God by spending time in God's presence, enjoying God's nearness, reading God's word, and daily seeking to know God better. We also show our love for God in the way we talk, what we do, and how we use our talents.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

I will be intentional about
showing my love for
God today.

Every day is made up of hundreds of little moments that are opportunities to love God, and every opportunity matters. I try to include in my morning prayers some verbal "valentine" and, in my daily activities, demonstrations to God that are a simple "I love you" to the One who first loved me.

Prayer: Loving God, we want to know you and be known by you. May your love radiate from us so that others will know your love. Amen.

Drexel C. Rankin (Kentucky, USA) — See back cover.

TUES
FEB 15
2022

A GENTLE HEART

READ Matthew 11:28-30

*Let your gentleness be evident to all.
The Lord is near.*

— Philippians 4:5 (NIV)

I am a driven person. I thrive on achieving new things and checking items off my daily to-do list. I was competitive early in my childhood, even over simple games like musical chairs. As I grew older, I began to believe the message that we must always bring our best to everything we do, and even that we must always *be* the best.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

When I am weighed down by self-criticism, I will remember to be gentle like Jesus.

In many ways I have been rewarded for my drive throughout my life. But what few people know is how hard I am on myself. I

can be my own worst critic, examining everything I say and do for flaws. I scrutinize my performance at work, at home, in ministry, and in my relationships. And I expect more from myself than anyone else ever does.

Lately God has been showing me another way. Jesus had a difficult mission to accomplish, but his approach made all the difference. Jesus had a calm and gentle spirit, and from this wellspring of divine love flowed acts of kindness, healing, and restoration. I think God wants us to pursue worthy goals and plans. But first, God wants to show us that how we go about pursuing them is just as important.

Prayer: Dear God, as we pursue goals in life, teach us to be gentle with ourselves and others. Amen.

Piyumi Kapugeekiyana (Western Province, Sri Lanka)

LONELINESS

WED
FEB 16
2022

READ Matthew 22:34-40

Jesus said, “*You shall love your neighbor as yourself.*”

— Matthew 22:39 (NRSV)

Social media has captivated our world. The Internet and wireless communications have created unprecedented global interaction. But in spite of this connection, our society is experiencing a surge of loneliness.

In response to this loneliness, there are now programs in large metropolitan areas to encourage socializing. The U.K. even has a “Minister for Loneliness” to combat social isolation and reduce associated health risks. These are new public strategies to battle loneliness, but what is my personal strategy as a Christian?

The obvious one is to love my neighbor as myself. Jesus told us that the greatest commandments

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
Today I will show God’s love by greeting people I meet.

are to love God and love others. But this law of love often illuminates my shortcomings. In stores, doctors’ offices, my neighborhood, or other public places, I can easily become self-absorbed and oblivious to those around me — sometimes while on my cell phone. Instead of connecting with those who physically cross my path, I become captivated by virtual connections. I now pray for help to be present in the moment and attentively greet the people around me. Our individual efforts to live Jesus’ commandment and ease loneliness in our world can feel insignificant. But when Christians truly seek to love God and love others, we can make a real difference.

Prayer: Dear Jesus, help us to live your commandment to love you and to love others. Amen.

Beverly Taylor (Arizona, USA) — See p. 21.

THUR
FEB 17
2022

I WILL FORGIVE

READ John 8:2-11

“Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?” ‘No one, sir,’ she said. ‘Then neither do I condemn you,’ Jesus declared. ‘Go now and leave your life of sin.’”

— John 8:10-11 (NIV)

I recently found my university residence hall completely trashed. Chairs were strewn all over; broken eggs were splattered on everything; toilet paper coated most surfaces. I was livid.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

I will follow Christ's teaching and forgive my enemies today.

I told anyone who would listen how mad I was,

and I wanted to get back at the people who had done this. Thankfully, the time it took to clean up cleared my head, and I was reminded of the story from John 8.

Though the woman had sinned, Jesus implicated the Pharisees saying that “any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone” (John 8:7). Jesus called attention to the fact that we are all sinners and chose to forgive the woman instead of shaming or punishing her. That is love, that is forgiveness, and that is the God we follow.

The pranksters did something wrong, but it is not my place to condemn them. If I want to become like Christ, then I need to forgive people, even when they have wronged me. I must forgive because Jesus first forgave me.

Prayer: Dear God, help us be faithful to you in our forgiveness. Help us find it in our hearts to forgive those who have wronged us. Amen.

Matthew Holden (Indiana, USA)

THERE IS HOPE

FRI
FEB 18
2022

READ Psalm 63:1-8

Because you are my help, I sing in the shadow of your wings.

— Psalm 63:7 (NIV)

“One, two, three, four. . .” As the test administrator counted aloud my incorrect answers, I knew that I had failed the provisional driver’s license exam. I had done so much in preparation for the exam. I had thoroughly studied the learner’s license handbook. I had taken pictures to go on my license, and I had paid for the exam. *Where did I go wrong?* I kept asking myself.

I dragged my feet on the way to tell my parents. I decided that I was so hurt that I would not retake the test any time soon. It took me a year before I decided to try again. During that time I came across this verse: “For there is hope of a tree, if it be cut down, that it will sprout again, and that the tender branch thereof will not cease” (Job 14:7, KJV). I realized there was hope. I had not passed before, but I could try again. I retook the exam, and by the grace of God, I passed!

We all face situations or seasons that make us lose hope. Sometimes we try our best, and it is not enough. But God is forever ready to help us keep going. When we want to give up, let us surrender our situation to God with hope that God will see us through.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
When I fail, I will look to God for help and try again.

Prayer: God of hope, we call upon your name and your help in our times of need. When we want to give up, help us to keep going. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

Vimbai Chizarura (Mashonaland East, Zimbabwe)

SAT
FEB 19
2022

THE GIFT OF ONE ANOTHER

READ 1 Thessalonians 2:9-13

Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith.

— Hebrews 13:7 (NIV)

My son is barely four years old, but everything about him — from the clothes he wears to his brand new “big-boy haircut” — reminds me of myself. On Sundays after morning worship, he confidently strides onto the stage to join me and bang on my drums. You can see clearly that he wants to be just like his dad.

We sometimes can be hesitant to emulate another person too closely. Maybe we’re nervous about idolizing another person, or we’re terrified at the thought that someone may be looking up to us! However, we may be missing out on one of the greatest gifts God has given us for our spiritual growth — the gift of one another.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Who is my role model in following Christ?

In 1 Thessalonians, Paul commends the church for imitating more mature believers, who put their trust

in God’s word. Mature believers imitate God, and by emulating mature believers we can mature in faith as well.

As we walk the path of faith together, we need not be afraid to find someone we can look up to just as my son looks up to me. We need not be afraid to follow the example of the faithful role models God gives us — the ones who imitate Christ. As we walk arm-in-arm with other believers, together we learn to become like Jesus.

Prayer: Dear Lord, surround us with people who can help us grow closer to you. Then help us to lead others in the way that leads to mature faith. Amen.

Jason Koon (North Carolina, USA)

FOLLOWING IN FAITH

SUN
FEB 20
2022

READ Luke 1:46-55

Mary said, "With all my heart I glorify the Lord! In the depths of who I am I rejoice in God my savior."

— Luke 1:46-47 (CEB)

Several months after our wedding, my husband felt called into ministry. Pursuing this vocation required a huge shift in our finances and priorities. Every step we took was one of total faith, and it was one of the scariest things that I have ever done.

When I met my husband, neither of us knew what God's plan was for us. In many ways, we still do not know entirely where God will send us. And as someone who loves to plan, trusting in God's design and accepting that it may not align with mine is scary.

I have found great comfort in Mary's prayer after she learned from the angel Gabriel that she would be the mother of Christ. She glorifies God and accepts without hesitation the future that has been presented to her. What a great example for us today!

Glorifying God in uncertainty and following in obedience into an unknown future becomes easier when I remember Jesus Christ is always with me. Philippians 4:13 reminds me that I can do all things through Christ. Trusting his promises helps me take those steps of faith.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

With God, I can walk confidently into the unknown.

Prayer: Dear Lord, thank you for loving us. Please help us to remember Mary's trust and follow you in faith. Amen.

Bethany M-L Verrett (Virginia, USA)

MON
FEB 21
2022

DIVINE PROVISION

READ Philippians 4:4-14

God will fully satisfy every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.

— Philippians 4:19 (NRSV)

We had been traveling all night in a bus. As we drove along, I sang a popular gospel song. Then, surprisingly, others joined in, singing in harmony. As we sang, we could see the trees on the sides of the road swaying left and right, as though clapping their hands in praise to God!

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

I can trust that God
knows my needs.

After more than 600 kilometers we arrived at Ikot Ekpene, a Nigerian town on the border of Cameroon, at 7 p.m. As we got off the bus, suddenly I realized

that I had no place to stay that night. However, before I could think of what to do next, a stranger walked up to me and said, “Hello, man of God; you may come and spend the night in my home. I know God will bless me for that.” I sighed with relief. That night I was treated to a warm meal and a cozy room. Then I left for Cameroon the next day where I preached a sermon as part of an evangelism mission.

When God calls us to serve, we can trust God to provide for us along our journey. Our gracious God will never leave us or forsake us.

Prayer: Eternal God, help us to obey you today, and grant us faith to see your provision. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

Raphael Ufuoma Williams (South Africa) — See back cover.

SOARING HOPE

TUES
FEB 22
2022

READ Isaiah 40:27-31

Those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.

— Isaiah 40:31 (NIV)

An overnight bag sat in the backseat as the car engine hummed. I was about to begin my long drive for another trip to care for a family member. Before pulling out of my driveway, I laid my head on the steering wheel and closed my eyes, silently asking God to sustain me through the coming days.

Challenged emotionally and physically, I had been encouraged when God brought Isaiah 40:31 to my attention in my scripture study. I kept a handwritten note on my living room table — a visual reminder that I could look to, meditate on, and memorize. The verse assured me that I would receive strength by placing my hope in God.

A few miles into my journey, I caught a glimpse of something white in the blue sky. When I looked, I recognized the white tail feathers of a bald eagle. It had soared directly over my car as I traveled down the highway. I began to cry as I remembered God's promise in my memorized verse.

I had not been looking for a physical sign of God's promise, but oh, how welcome it was! God was

with me and gave me the stamina I needed. And God will continue to strengthen me as I place my hope and trust in God's power.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

When I trust God, my strength is renewed.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank you for giving us strength when we are weak and weary. Help us to rely on you instead of our own limited power and ability. Amen.

Kelli K. Walker (Missouri, USA)

Prayer Focus: CAREGIVERS

WED
FEB 23
2022

THE WAITING ROOM

READ 1 John 4:7-15

Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God.

— 1 John 4:7 (NIV)

I was in the doctor's waiting room when a young man came in. After being greeted by the receptionist, he sat by me. His clothing, a factory uniform, was dirty, and he smelled of hard work. I smiled but wished he had sat somewhere else. After a moment, I recognized something familiar in his

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

I will take the time to see
each person I meet as
a child of God.

scent. It was the odor my father had when he came home from work at a similar factory.

My father was a faithful Christian. Perhaps this young man was a Christian. Maybe he loved to hug and kiss his children like my father did me. I was ashamed for judging my seatmate negatively. I had forgotten the teachings of the Good News: "Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God."

God loves us all and shares life with us all. Jesus Christ was crucified and resurrected because God sent his Son into the world in the ultimate act of love. In Christ, no matter who we are or what we do, we are to care for and love one another as we love God and are loved by God.

Prayer: Dear God, help us try to love everyone we meet as you love us. Amen.

Gordon Talk (Kentucky, USA)

EYES ON JESUS

THUR
FEB 24
2022

READ Matthew 14:22-33

[The LORD] reached down from on high and took hold of me; he drew me out of deep waters.

— Psalm 18:16 (NIV)

My mother died when I was in my twenties, so she never got to see and enjoy my five children. She was a doting grandmother (she already had 22 grandchildren), and she used to spend time with each of her daughters and daughters-in-law when they had their babies. She also knitted beautiful clothes for each one. She was always there for them.

I missed her particularly when we started our family, and I blamed God for taking her away when I needed her the most. For a while I focused more on the demands of parenting and my own constant weariness than I did on Jesus and his desire to walk with me through this season of doubt and grief.

In today's scripture reading, Peter took his eyes off Jesus too. He focused more on the storm around him than on the One who could calm the storm. Peter nearly drowned; but when he called out, Jesus saved him.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Do I focus on the storm, or the One who can calm the storm?

Storms in our lives can overwhelm us and may threaten to drown us in despair. But in those moments we can call out to Jesus, the One who can save us. Jesus cares more about the daily challenges of our lives than we may believe. We simply need to reach out to him in faith.

Prayer: Thank you, Jesus, that you always hear our cries for help, no matter the time of day or night. Amen.

Dianne Fegan (Queensland, Australia)

FRI
FEB 25
2022

TRUE SOURCE

READ Colossians 1:9-14

I can do all things through [Christ] who strengthens me.

— Philippians 4:13 (NRSV)

I took my mischievous Sheltie puppy, Misty, to obedience school to learn good manners. The dog trainer produced an astonishing change. The trainer's calm, kind demeanor

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

God can use my ordinary actions of love to bring compassion to the world.

impressed me, although I did not immediately understand why.

Sometime later while I was in the hospital for shoulder surgery, I called

the trainer and asked him to board Misty. When he brought Misty home, he told me he had visited my neighbors to ask if they would be willing to help me and had collected their contact information. Before he left, he gave me a copy of *The Upper Room*, explaining that his family read the devotional every day. I asked for his favorite Bible verse. Without hesitation, he said, "I can do all things through him who strengthens me." Suddenly I understood that faith was the source of his compassion.

The kindness of this dog trainer touched me deeply. His example of holiness is within reach of all of us. Wherever we are, we can bear witness to God's loving-kindness and reveal God's good news through small gestures done with great love.

Prayer: Loving Father, make us aware of your presence so that we may bear witness to your love in all that we do. Amen.

Janice Davin (North Carolina, USA)

A CHILD OF GOD

SAT
FEB 26
2022

READ Matthew 25:35-40

The king will answer them, "Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me."

— Matthew 25:40 (NRSV)

My wife, my grandson, and I had been shopping and were about to leave for home. Nearby, an older man was waving a sign that read, "Navy Vet. Will dance for food." I intended to ignore him and drive on, but my 16-year-old grandson stopped me. He said, "Papa, that man is hungry, and we need to buy him lunch."

I sometimes disregard people holding similar signs because I question their sincerity. At my grandson's statement, I remembered

the reading above from Matthew. It did not matter if the man was a veteran, or willing to dance, or even if his need was sincere. He was a child of God who was hungry. We purchased lunch for the man who blessed us as he received the food. As I received his blessing, I knew that I had learned a valuable lesson.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
When I feed the hungry, I am
feeding Jesus.

Prayer: O God, forgive us when we dismiss the needs of others. Thank you for the people who remind us to offer what we can to help those in need. Amen.

Harold Lemley (Georgia, USA)

Check for the March-April issue of *The Upper Room* in your church. Or subscribe and free your copy for a visitor or new reader. (See p. 1.)

SUN
FEB 27
2022

MY UNIQUE ROLE

READ 1 Corinthians 12:12-20

*I praise you [LORD] because I am fearfully
and wonderfully made.*

— Psalm 139:14 (NIV)

I enjoy walking around the block and taking in the many colors of the plants and flowers. It amazes me how effortlessly the flowers seem to blossom, each bringing their own uniqueness, splendor, and contribution to the garden. Together the plants form a majestic oasis amid the pavement.

In taking time to notice the intricate details of God's creation, I realized that we all can learn from these wonderful plants. They come in different shapes, sizes, colors, and

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

When I embrace who God created me to be, I can better serve God and others.

fragrances, yet they don't compare or compete. They seem effortlessly content with how God has made them. I believe God intends for us to be this way as well.

God made each of us unique. When we embrace the way God made us and continues to shape us, we can stand with confidence, knowing that there will never be anyone exactly like us. Just as a garden needs many varieties of plants, the body of Christ needs many different members. We may not be perfect, but we are certainly precious. The more fully we believe that, the more God can use us as gifts and blessings to others.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help us to see our beauty and to avoid comparisons. Remind us to embrace our unique role in the world so that we may bless others. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Gursimran Chhatwal (Haryana, India) — See back cover.

REACHING OUT

MON
FEB 28
2022

READ Luke 19:1-10

When Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, hurry and come down; for I must stay at your house today."

— Luke 19:5 (NRSV)

A few years ago my family and I were at Cambridge University in England around the time of the annual examinations. As we walked, I saw a student sitting alone on a bench with his head in his hands. I thought about going over to comfort him, but I hesitated, conflicted. Then I walked on by. Could I have made a difference by quietly supporting him in what appeared to be a moment of crisis? I will never know, but I regret to this day not going over to sit beside him.

There have been times in my life when I longed for someone to reach out to me. A few weeks after the death of my mother, I was in morning worship feeling sad. I yearned for someone to ask me if I was doing okay because at that moment I was not. I guess my game face fooled everyone because no one asked.

Sometimes we hesitate to reach out to someone for fear of offending them. But by not doing so we also miss the chance to offer comfort and support to those who really want and need it. Time and again Jesus reached out to others, offering healing and acceptance. Reaching out to a hurting person is not easy for me, but I try, inspired by Jesus' brave examples. I believe that the power of personal connection outweighs any risk.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Offering God's love and comfort to others is worth the risk.

Prayer: Dear Jesus, encourage us when we hesitate to reach out to those around us who are hurting or alone. Amen.

Donald Greeley (Illinois, USA) — See p. 21.

AN EASY PLAN TO USE *The Upper Room* IN SMALL GROUPS

Christ is among us in fresh ways when we gather together, listening to God and to each other.

Once a week, gather with other believers to share a longer devotional time of about an hour. You may meet any time during the week and replace that day's reading with Wednesday's reading.

- Begin by reading the Bible passage on the Read line and the day's meditation, allowing silence for at least a minute afterward. Then ask members to turn to the questions for that date listed below or on one of the following pages.
- Ask someone to read aloud the questions one by one, giving each group member the opportunity to answer after each question. If anyone prefers not to answer a particular question, move on to the next person.
- Discuss how everyone thinks differently, and try to hear what the Holy Spirit may be saying to you in all this.
- Decide what you will do with God during the week.
- Be quiet and pray together.

For a more detailed meeting guide, see
www.upperroom.org/resources/a-guide-for-small-groups

JANUARY 5: *Praise Prayers*

1. How do you begin your prayers? Do you pray differently when you have a particular need? Why or why not?
2. When do you expect an immediate answer to your prayers? How do you avoid transactional prayer? What helps you to accept God's timing and appreciate the blessings you have right now?
3. Is it easier for you to thank God for what you have or to ask God for things? Why? What helps you remain grateful and content with what God has already given you?

4. When you or a loved one has an urgent need, how do you stay mindful of God's goodness and generosity? When answers do not come as you hoped or within the time frame that you hoped, what spiritual practices help you to remain at peace?
5. What would happen if you began expressing gratitude first and asking for something last in situations or relationships in your life? In what ways could it make a positive difference?

JANUARY 12: *A New Name*

1. What labels have you been given? Do you find yourself living into the labels others give you, or do labels not affect you much? Why?
2. Who sees the potential in you? How does their perspective of you change the way you view yourself? How does it change the way others view you?
3. Describe a time you have experienced or witnessed a transformation from God. What positive changes occurred? How do you know the transformation came from God?
4. What does it mean to you that you are called and redeemed by God? How does knowing you are a child of God change the way you think about yourself?
5. How can you be more intentional about seeing good in others? In what ways can you encourage others to embrace their identity in Christ and to see their potential?

JANUARY 19: *Generosity*

1. When you find yourself frustrated with others, what helps you remember to look at them with patience and love? How do you avoid dwelling on your frustration?
2. Do you ever find yourself becoming irritated when people do things differently from the way you would do them? What scriptures and prayers help you to manage your irritation in such situations?
3. How does your outlook change when you focus on God's love for us all? Who or what helps you to remain focused on God's

- love and forgiveness? In what ways do you actively seek to extend God's love and forgiveness to others?
4. What does it mean to you to have a generous heart toward others? Who in scripture best exemplifies having a generous heart?
 5. Why is it sometimes easier to focus on the speck in another person's eye instead of the plank in our own? When have you seen a wonderful example of love and forgiveness? What makes it so memorable?

JANUARY 26: *Past, Present, and Future*

1. What scripture passages encourage you when you are living through painful situations? What comfort do these passages give you?
2. Name a time when you prayed fervently for healing but did not receive the answer you wanted. Why do you think you received a different answer? Describe what effect, if any, this had on your relationship with God.
3. How have you found yourself changed and comforted by prayer? In what ways does it encourage you to think about prayer as not just about the future but as something that can change you in the present?
4. What scripture passages do you wrestle with? Why? How does your understanding of the passages change the more you dwell on them? How is it beneficial to study scripture this way?
5. How does reminding yourself of God's past faithfulness help you to accept your current experiences? What spiritual practices encourage you to place your confidence in God's love?

FEBRUARY 2: *Singing Praises*

1. Are you musically inclined? Do you enjoy singing as a form of worship, or do you prefer other forms of worship? Why?
2. What part of worship tends to feel like a traditional formality? What can you do at your next worship service to enjoy that part of worship more fully?

3. Who in scripture worshiped God with joy and thanksgiving? What scripture verses best remind you of the importance of joyful worship?
4. Describe a time when you heard God's voice or felt God open your heart during worship. What was the experience like? How did it change the way you worship?
5. Who in your life has encouraged you to worship in new and different ways? How have you been blessed by these new ways of worshipping God?

FEBRUARY 9: *Sharing Blessings*

1. When have you helped someone who did not have anyone else to help them? Why did you choose to offer help? How did they respond?
2. Do you find it easy or difficult to serve others? Why? What prayers help you to humbly serve those around you?
3. Who in your community needs help today? How can you serve them? How can you show them God's love and care?
4. When has someone's act of service toward you changed the way you serve others? What is the most powerful act of service that you have witnessed or received?
5. What service opportunities does your church offer? Are you active in these ministries? How does your church help you find opportunities to show God's love to others?

FEBRUARY 16: *Loneliness*

1. Do social media and other forms of technology make you feel more connected to others or more isolated from them? When have you experienced loneliness in recent years? What possible connections do you see between social media and loneliness?
2. When you experience loneliness, what helps you to deal with it?
3. Do you feel that God's law of love illuminates your shortcomings? If so, in what ways? How do you strive to live out this law of love each day?

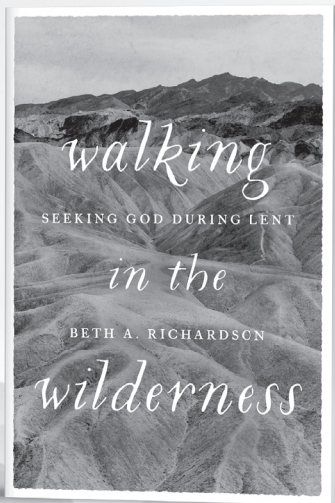
4. How easy is it for you to become captivated by virtual connections? Why do you think those kinds of connections are so appealing to us? How do you actively seek to give more time and attention to those who are near to you physically?
5. How does it encourage you to know that when you work together with the broader Christian community, your individual efforts go further? When have you seen Christians come together to make a more significant difference as a group than they would have individually?

FEBRUARY 23: *The Waiting Room*

1. When have you judged someone negatively based on their appearance? What did you do when you realized you had judged them negatively?
2. How does focusing on the humanity and depth of a person help you to love them? When have you changed your opinion about someone by thinking of them in this way?
3. Are you encouraged to know that Christ died for you and loves you no matter who you are? How does that knowledge change the way you think and act?
4. How do you strive to emulate Jesus' example of loving everyone we meet? Name specific ways you will show love to others today.
5. How would your church look different if every member loved others as freely as Jesus did? How would your community look different if everyone loved others in this way? How would the world look different?

We are living in a time of wilderness and exile.

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|------------|------------|-------------|------------|-------------|------------|------------------------|
| <i>2</i> | <i>3</i> | <i>4</i> | <i>5</i> | <i>6</i> | <i>7</i> | <i>8</i> |
| <i>9</i> | <i>10</i> | <i>11</i> | <i>12</i> | <i>13</i> | <i>14</i> | <i>15</i> |
| <i>16</i> | <i>17</i> | <i>18</i> | <i>19</i> | <i>20</i> | <i>21</i> | <i>22</i> |
| <i>23</i> | <i>24</i> | <i>25</i> | <i>26</i> | <i>27</i> | <i>28</i> | <i>29</i> |
| <i>30</i> | <i>31</i> | | | | | |

February 2022

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| <i>SUN</i> | <i>MON</i> | <i>TUES</i> <i>1</i> | <i>WED</i> <i>2</i> | <i>THUR</i> <i>3</i> | <i>FRI</i> <i>4</i> | <i>SAT</i> <i>5</i> |
|------------|------------|---|------------------------|-------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|
| <i>6</i> | <i>7</i> | <i>8</i> | <i>9</i> | <i>10</i> | <i>11</i> | <i>12</i> |
| <i>13</i> | <i>14</i> | <i>15</i> | <i>16</i> | <i>17</i> | <i>18</i> | <i>19</i> |
| <i>20</i> | <i>21</i> | <i>22</i> | <i>23</i> | <i>24</i> | <i>25</i> | <i>26</i> |
| <i>27</i> | <i>28</i> | <p>We have included this calendar for marking favorite scripture passages, favorite meditations, reminders, prayer lists, and other notes. However you choose to use it, we hope that it enriches the time you spend with God each day.</p> | | | | |

*May the God of hope fill you
with all joy and peace in faith so
that you overflow with hope.*

Romans 15:13 (CEB)

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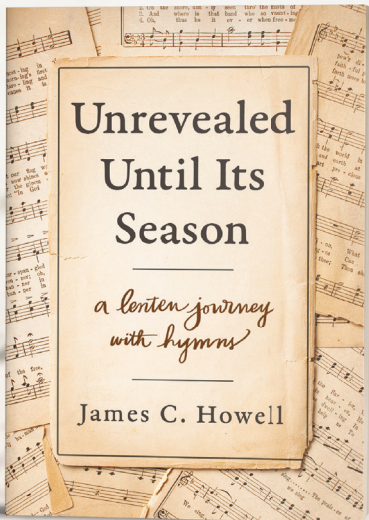
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MEET SOME OF OUR WRITERS

(Here and on p. 21.)



Katie Trent (p. 54) is a mother and a leader in the Christian homeschool community.



Raphael Ufuoma Williams (p. 64) is a pastor, missionary, and fine art educator. He has written over 100 songs.



Gursimran Chhatwal (p. 70) is an author and blogger who believes that when we live God's truth, we are changed.



Drexel Rankin (p. 57) served as an ordained minister for more than 35 years in Indiana, Alabama, and Kentucky.



Valerie Clark (p. 13) served in fulltime ministry for many years. She loves to sing and play piano to bring joy to others.



Tim Tate (p. 44) is a sixth generation United Methodist pastor who roasts his own coffee, runs 15 miles a week, and loves his three kids and his amazing wife.

