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# THE UPPER ROOM®

WHERE THE WORLD MEETS TO PRAY

*Stephen D. Bryant, Publisher*

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## COVER ART INTERPRETATION



### *Hannah and Samuel*

**Artist:** Cody F. Miller  
(USA, Contemporary)

**Interpreter:** Kathryn A. Kimball  
**Curator, The Upper Room Chapel/  
Christian Art Museum**

Hannah and her son are outside for a pleasant walk. A yellow sun surrounds them, and geometric clouds fingerprint the sky. The beginning of Hannah's

story was not as bright and happy as this moment. For years Hannah was deeply saddened that she was not able to conceive. At her annual pilgrimage to Shiloh, Hannah fervently prayed for a son. She promised that if the Lord said yes, she would return her son to serve in the Lord's house. The answer to her prayer came in the birth of Samuel.

A city lies in the distance, perhaps the place where Hannah promised her son to God. Samuel is young, but soon it will be time to honor her promise. For now, Hannah holds Samuel close. Something has caught Samuel's attention. Is he hearing God's call and looking toward his future home and service? Hannah's expression appears somewhat sad and apprehensive. Is she hearing the same voice, reminding her of her promise?

The artist's use of magazine clippings creates a distinct separation in the clothing of Hannah and Samuel while also creating a common bond in the layered style of dress. Artist Cody F. Miller writes, "With these materials I am showing the layers of God's grace through individuals who dared to trust Him. . . . I convey it not necessarily in a bright way, but rather in a way which shows the quiet fingerprint of God saying, 'I was here all along.'" ([www.codyfmiller.com/artists-statement/](http://www.codyfmiller.com/artists-statement/)).

The story of Hannah and Samuel is a wonderful reminder that God hears our prayers and remains faithful to us. As the artist suggests, it is a story of hope and all that God can accomplish through us when we are open to God's call.

## Living as Easter People

*This Jesus, God raised up. We are all witnesses to that fact.*

— Acts 2:32 (CEB)

In the season following Easter, it seems that Jesus' death and resurrection should have utterly transformed the world. Jesus is risen! He has appeared to his disciples, and the Holy Spirit dwells within us. And yet, the world still suffers violence and unrest. People still become ill and face persecution. For Jesus' first followers it might have seemed easier to reflect on the incredible events and life of Jesus Christ with gratitude and awe but then move in a less challenging direction than the one to which Christ called them.

At times, it is tempting to give up, to turn away from a confusing calling or challenging ministry or the exhausting good work God has called us to. But as many of the writers in this issue remind us, the difficult times often give us the opportunity to experience God's presence anew and reclaim our identities as God's beloved children. They remind us that following Christ is not without difficulties, but it is worth it in the end. When we hold on to the promise of new life in Christ and remain persistent in prayer and steadfast in faithful living, we claim the hope of resurrection that the season of Easter embodies.

Living as Easter people amidst the challenges of daily life is not easy, but together — as the body of Christ — we can remind one another of the hope and joy that God offers to us all. As we travel this season together, I pray that the honest words of struggle and encouragement in this issue will give you strength to persevere when life is not easy and that the stories of joy will help you to celebrate the good life made possible through Jesus Christ.



— Lindsay L. Gray  
Editorial Director

## From the Archives

*In 1945 in the April/May/June issue, the following notice about the Chaplains' Ministry appeared in The Upper Room.*

One million copies of THE UPPER ROOM go out annually for free distribution among men and women in the service. They go to the battle fronts of the world, to ships at sea, to air and submarine bases, and to camps and training stations. One thousand six hundred and twenty-eight chaplains receive regular shipments, ranging in number from 25 copies to 1,000 or more. One chaplain at a Port of Embarkation receives 10,000 copies regularly. This contribution to the war effort is made possible through The Upper Room Chaplains' Fund, supported chiefly by gifts from individuals and churches.

### *Somewhere in Europe*

"For some time you have sent me 50 copies of *The Upper Room*. They are being used and greatly appreciated. I have to ration them out to the men. I hold many services. At each place I put out about four copies, and the first men that come get them. They ask for more, but I never have enough to go around." — C.A. Arrington, Chaplain

### *U.S. Naval Advanced Amphibious Base, Care Fleet P. O. New York*

"Please enter my order for 200 copies of *The Upper Room* to distribute free to the Navy men in the two units that I serve. Many men know about *The Upper Room* and are most grateful for it." — F. Roy Doland, Chaplain USNR

### *In the Pacific Area*

"Please send me each time 200 of your booklet, *The Upper Room*, as these men have been hounding me for copies. Send statement, and we will be glad to pay for them from our Chaplain's Fund." — Barrett Taylor, Chaplain

### *Somewhere in England*

"While chaplain at McCloskey's General Hospital, Temple, Texas, I distributed many copies of *The Upper Room*. Over here I am in another hospital, where the men would appreciate even more *The Upper Room*. Kindly send us 200 copies at your earliest convenience." — Charles M. Bacon, Chaplain

The Chaplains' Ministry continues to this day, providing copies of *The Upper Room* to military and prison chaplains. If you would like to contribute to this ministry, go to [upperroom.org/donate](http://upperroom.org/donate).

# Where the World Meets to Pray

## HINDI

The Council of Communication, Literature, and Publication and the Lucknow Publishing House organized an *Upper Room* writing workshop in Lucknow, India. Thirty-three people submitted meditations for publishing consideration as a result!

## ODIA

The Odia edition team is partnering with Christian youth organizations and local pastors to host small groups for fellowship and to share *The Upper Room* with young people.

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## VISITING WILLY

READ **John 6:43-48\***

WED  
MAY 1  
2019

*I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut. I know that you have little strength, yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name.*

— Revelation 3:8 (NIV)

I remember the sound of the gravel under my tires as I drove up the lane to visit my friend Willy. I can still see him waving from his porch — one arm extended and the other leaning on his cane. “What took you so long?” he’d ask.

“I stopped to ask a deer for directions.” This joke always made him laugh. We’d sit and talk about nature, his kids, and how the stroke had made him angry and less motivated. I mostly listened. He just needed to be heard. Willy had a long history of drug abuse, alcoholism, wrong turns, and pain that he carried deep inside.

I visited Willy for about a year and watched him grow weaker over time. He wouldn’t talk about God. “That isn’t for me. I am good where I’m at,” he’d say. One rainy afternoon, as I pulled into Willy’s drive, he walked unsteadily toward me through the tall grass to welcome me. “I did it!” he exclaimed.

“Did what?” I asked.

“You know — went down to the ol’ church and got right.” I smiled and shook my head with an awesome feeling of fulfillment. We chuckled and walked back to his porch. In the last months of Willy’s life, the Holy Spirit had called him to walk through the church doors and forever be with God.

**Prayer:** Heavenly Father, thank you for opportunities to share your love and grace with others. Amen.

**Matt Simmons (Kentucky, USA)**

**Prayer Focus:** SOMEONE WHO NEEDS MY LISTENING EAR

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

THUR  
MAY 2  
2019

## I CAN DO IT

READ Exodus 4:1-12

Paul wrote, “[*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)

Although I had joined a Christian fellowship group almost two years before, I had never taken a prominent role in the

**THOUGHT FOR THE DAY**  
“I can do all things through [Christ] who strengthens me”  
(Phil. 4:13, NRSV).

ministry. One day I got a message from our leader that said, “Meli, you have a lot of extraordinary experiences, so I want you to give the sermon the last week

of this month.” Feeling inadequate, I refused and told him that I had a fear of public speaking. The leader replied that I needed to start speaking in front of people so I could become more comfortable with it.

Then I remembered that when God first called Moses to lead the Israelites out of Egypt, Moses refused several times, saying that he was not an eloquent speaker (Exod. 4:10). But in spite of Moses’ weaknesses, God still used him to lead a great nation, Israel, out of Egypt toward the Promised Land.

We all have weaknesses, but we don’t have to let those become an excuse to refuse the work God calls us to do. God doesn’t rely on our weaknesses but our willingness to trust in God’s strength. This can give us full confidence to aim our best efforts toward doing great things to the glory of God.

**Prayer:** Dear God, we have many weaknesses, but we know that we can do anything because you are our strength. Amen.

Meliana Santoso (East Java, Indonesia)

8 *Prayer Focus:* SOMEONE WHO FEARS SPEAKING IN PUBLIC

## STEADFAST LOVE

READ Romans 8:35-39

*Give thanks to the God of heaven.  
His love endures forever.*

— Psalm 136:26 (NIV)

Several years ago I joined a devotional challenge where participants choose a word for the year. I chose the word *love*, initially focusing on examining my love for God. To reinforce my commitment, I posted a photo in my office of a heart drawn in the sand on the beach with waves crashing nearby. Inside the heart was another heart saying, “Love God.” One morning a co-worker noticed that image and said, “Wouldn’t it be cool if after the waves crash over it, the words *Love God* were still there?” He smiled and walked away, saying, “Not likely is it?”

His remark made me reflect again on what it means to love God. Just how steadfast is my love for God? Is my love for God “written in the sand” only in good times? When things get tough, is my love for God still readily spoken, tangible, visible? How likely am I to boldly declare that I love God after a storm has come and the waves of loss, grief, disappointment, rejection, and fear have crashed over me?

The questions I asked myself still remain. But after reading Psalm 136, I was thankful knowing that God’s love for me will always stand.

**THOUGHT FOR THE DAY**  
God’s love is steadfast.  
Is mine?

**Prayer:** O God, help us to remember that your love for us is infinite and everlasting. May we remain steadfast in our love for you in every situation. Amen.

Cassius Rhue (South Carolina, USA)

*Prayer Focus:* THOSE WHO DOUBT GOD’S LOVE

9

SAT  
MAY 4  
2019

## FACING CHANGE

READ Isaiah 33:2-6

*[The LORD] will be the sure foundation for your times, a rich store of salvation and wisdom and knowledge; the fear of the LORD is the key to this treasure.*

— Isaiah 33:6 (NIV)

The day was hot, but inside my heart felt cold and fragile. Tears streaked down my face as my twin boys headed off

to college. My day-to-day mothering came to a screeching halt that morning, leaving me to face an empty nest.

**THOUGHT FOR THE DAY**  
God will help me adapt to each new season of life.

Later that week, a pair of doves built a nest on my

trellis. When their babies hatched, the nest hummed with activity. The parents worked constantly to feed the hungry chicks. The babies grew quickly, and soon the nest became too crowded. One morning, I noticed that the nest was empty. The doves — not just the chicks, but the parents as well — had moved on.

The birds taught me that God designed our lives to have changing roles and seasons. As I watched the birds, God prompted me to seek a new role for my new season — in this case, a second career as a writer.

As we face the changing seasons of our lives, we can go to God for stability, wisdom, and knowledge. Thankfully, God weaves blessings into each season of life.

**Prayer:** Dear Lord, help us to face each change with faith. Provide stability, wisdom, and strength so that we may adapt to new roles and seasons well. Amen.

May Patterson (Alabama, USA)

## LIKE A CHILD

READ Mark 10:46-52

*Whoever becomes humble like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.*

— Matthew 18:4 (NRSV)

A pastor friend of mine was recruiting volunteers to portray biblical characters at her district's confirmation retreat. Knowing that I enjoyed portraying biblical characters, she asked me to play Bartimaeus, the blind beggar who called out to get Jesus' attention. As the children rotated through several Bible scenes in groups of four or five, I sat cross-legged, with my eyes closed tight, calling out, "Jesus, have mercy on me!" With each group, the teacher would read the story from the Bible, and then the group would move on to the next scene. To my surprise, after one group moved on, one child turned back. I was about to open my eyes when I heard her footsteps and felt her small hands on my head. "Jesus loves you," she said, "and he has given you back your sight!"

I was deeply touched that this child had not been content to leave the blind beggar alone and still wanting to meet Jesus.

I wondered, *How often have I avoided reaching out to a hurting person? When could I have shared words of hope with someone in need?* This child's faith has inspired me to take the time to talk with others about Jesus' love.

**THOUGHT FOR THE DAY**  
I will trust Jesus with a child-like faith as I reach out to those in need.

**Prayer:** God of love and mercy, help us to have the faith of children, and may we live out that faith in how we interact with others. Amen.

Jim Harris (Virginia, USA)

MON  
MAY 6  
2019

## LEARNING FROM BEES

READ 1 Corinthians 12:4-13

*The body is not made up of one part but of many.*

— 1 Corinthians 12:14 (NIV)

In February 2017 the government evacuated my family, neighbors, and friends in the La Barquita community in Santo

Domingo, Dominican Republic. We were all relocated to a new community with better living conditions. A week after I moved into my new house, a swarm of bees

arrived. I was unsure what to do. I did not want to harm them, but I also did not want to share living quarters with them.

I hoped that through prayer I would be able to determine what God was trying to teach me with the bees, so I asked my church family to pray with me. I then turned to the Bible. When I read 1 Corinthians 12:12-13, I recalled that bee colonies are united in their work to produce honey and keep the colony running smoothly.

We can follow the example of unity we see in bee colonies by working toward God's purpose in harmony as a family, congregation, and community. When we come together for the greater goal of furthering God's kingdom, we can be as unified and effective as a bee colony, working as one body.

**Prayer:** Almighty God, help us to work for your kingdom united through Christ. Amen.

Andrea Ramírez Zabala (Puerto Rico)

## FINDING THE FOOD

READ Matthew 28:16-20

*Jesus replied, “. . . People won't live only by bread, but by every word spoken by God.”*

— Matthew 4:4 (CEB)

When I was a young boy in the 1950s, my family would visit my mother's parents in Ohio. Their house backed up to some busy railroad tracks. The rear entrance to their house had a porch — and more often than not after playing with my cousins I would find a homeless man sitting on the porch eating a sandwich with a glass of milk our grandmother had prepared for him.

I asked Grandpa why the men always came to their house instead of any of the others in the row by the tracks. He took me down to the tracks and showed me how some of the railroad ties directly behind his house had paint or chalk markings on them. He said, “This is how they tell one another where to find the food.” They used whatever they could find to mark these ties.

That lesson from my grandfather is one reason I participate in prison ministry — to help others find food for their souls. As Christ-followers we are to tell others where to find the real nourishment for life: God's word. Jesus didn't tell us to go build churches and invite our friends and neighbors. He told us to go tell others where to “find the food!”

**Prayer:** Dear God, guide us in our efforts to show and tell others your life-giving word. Amen.

Martyn Haynes (California, USA)

TUES  
MAY 7  
2019

### THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

I am one of many members  
of the body of Christ.

### THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

God wants us to show others  
how to find the food of life.

WED  
MAY 8  
2019

## A TALENT TO SHARE

READ Exodus 23:6-9

*Don't take advantage of poor or needy workers, whether they are fellow Israelites or immigrants who live in your land.*

— Deuteronomy 24:14 (CEB)

As a volunteer with new refugees coming into my state, I am heartbroken when I hear so many stories of unscrupulous

### THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Every day I can depend on God to show me someone in need.

people taking advantage of them. I wonder how I can help them, even if my energy and time are limited. I met Aung Lin and his daughters last fall and then

visited him over Christmas. He had stepped on a land mine in a refugee camp in Thailand, losing one foot, both hands, and his eyesight. Then his wife died. When he came to Nebraska with his four daughters, a couple from his ethnic group in Burma agreed to take them into their apartment. I hoped that in some small way I could help this family. When I visit Aung Lin, I hope that along with the rice, fruit, and money I bring, I also brighten his day by showing God's love to him.

God has given talents and skills to each of us for helping others. Those who love to sew are helping these refugees to learn this skill. A craft group has been organized to help earn money for the refugee families. A retired teacher helps the new students with their homework. My 81-year-old friend Sunny helps the refugees learn about the customs and culture of our area. Whether with a refugee or lonely senior or someone at church with an ongoing illness — each of us has a talent that can be shared to the glory of God.

**Prayer:** Dear God, open our minds and hearts to ways that we can be of help and encouragement to others. Amen.

Nancy R. Meyer (Nebraska, USA)

## JOYFUL PRAYER

READ Luke 11:5-13

*Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.*

— Philippians 4:6 (NIV)

When I returned home from the market with my groceries, my three-year-old son, Alan, spotted the biscuits. He exclaimed loudly, "Papa, biscuits!" Then suddenly he began to cry as he kept asking for them. Alan's behavior made me a little sad. I thought, *Why doesn't he ask with a smile? Doesn't he trust me?*

I began to think about the way I ask something of God. Often, like Alan, instead of asking God trustingly, I burst into tears and keep crying for the same thing again and again. God is pleased to hear our requests, but the apostle Paul says we are not to be anxious as we pray. I know that I sometimes forget Jesus' promise: "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you" (Matt. 7:7).

God knows what we need before we even ask but wants us to ask with faith and thanksgiving. God wants to fill our lives with love and joy, and God will do so. That's why God sent Jesus — to bring us abundant life. (See John 10:10.)

### THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

I will approach God today with trust and thanksgiving.

**Prayer:** Loving God, give us hearts full of faith so that we may receive in abundance. Amen.

Hiteshkumar Jashvantbhai Solanki (Gujarat, India)

FRI  
MAY 10  
2019

## HOPE OUT OF DESPAIR

READ Zephaniah 3:14-20

*The LORD, your God, is in your midst . . . ; he will rejoice over you with gladness, he will renew you in his love; he will exult over you with loud singing.*

— Zephaniah 3:17 (NRSV)

As a sophomore in college, I found myself floundering, depressed, and unsure of myself. No major event had triggered it; I couldn't explain why I felt so alone. While I still believed in God, I began to doubt that my life was worth anything to God. It was a struggle just to get out of bed every morning and go through the motions of each day.

### THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

When I'm hurting,  
God is near.

Though that year was painful, I did learn one crucial lesson: God is never nearer to me than when I

am suffering. And that suffering was not a punishment from God; rather, it forced me to stop relying on my own strength and abilities as the sources for my worth. I learned to lean on God and the powerful truths of the Bible, not on my own unpredictable emotions. God loved me. God had good plans for my life. God would not hold my sins against me. Those truths anchored my soul amid the storm-tossed waves.

As I navigated the sadness and sorrow of depression, my prayer life grew and deepened. My heart clung to the truths in the Bible. Gradually, through the help of many who reached out to me, prayed with me, encouraged me, and counseled me, I found my way out of despair. Then I realized that I had not been abandoned; instead, God had filled me with hope.

**Prayer:** Dear God, when we're tempted to despair, teach us to put our hope in you. Amen.

Kate Underwood (Illinois, USA)

## TRANSFORMED

READ Romans 12:1-3

*Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God — what is good and acceptable and perfect.*

— Romans 12:2 (NRSV)

I was approaching my senior years when God let me know in no uncertain terms that my many years of prodigal-son-type bad behavior — excessive drinking and gambling, for instance — needed to come to an end. After crashing my truck into a tree during one of my drunken stupors, I finally saw a clear choice: I could allow God to rule the rest of my life, or I could choose the world. I made the decision to let God's love, grace, and forgiveness convert me into a fruitful Christian, which began with repentance and breaking away from the wasteful life I had led for 55 years.

Abstaining from that lifestyle of reckless behavior changed my life to one worth living — fasting from my worldly ways in order to feast on God's word. I now try to serve others and give back in gratitude for all God has given me. I will always be a Christian who is under construction, attempting to refrain from the bad habits that plagued me for so many years. But now I have a savior who has transformed me into a wiser, loving, and more caring person.

### THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

I will serve God by  
serving others.

**Prayer:** Dear God, guide us each day so that we may come to love you more and do your will. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

John Groves (Maryland, USA)

## A MOTHER'S FAITH

READ Matthew 7:13-14

Jesus said, "Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to."

— Luke 13:24 (NIV)

A devout follower of Jesus Christ, my mom has emailed a "Weekly Inspiration" to her children, friends, and co-workers for over five years. Each of these emails contains an insightful and empowering message that has served as a guide for me on how to live out the week ahead through

### THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Today I will find new ways to inspire others to share the good news of Christ.

believing and having faith in God. My mom's relationship with God always serves as an example for me of what Jesus meant when he said, "Make every effort to enter through the narrow door."

Mom has always made her best effort in her own journey toward salvation, and is constantly finding new ways to spread the word of Christ and lead others to him. From her weekly inspirations, to distributing *The Upper Room*, to being an active church member, my mom inspires me to be a better person and to make sure I am putting forth my best effort for God's kingdom.

**Prayer:** Dear God, each day give us the courage and strength to live out our lives according to your will. Amen.

Clint Bowman (North Carolina, USA)

## BEFORE WE EVEN SPEAK

READ Luke 7:11-17

The LORD says, "Before they call I will answer."

— Isaiah 65:24 (NIV)

One day while driving to work, I was troubled about a task that God had laid out for me. I was late for work, caught in traffic, so I decided to listen to the radio. During the program someone gave a testimony that provided strength and clarity for my own struggle. I knew then that I had experienced God's promise: even before we pray the Lord will answer.

This reminded me of the story of the funeral of a widow's son in a town called Nain, as recorded in Luke's Gospel. As the procession was leaving the town gates, it happened upon Jesus. Before the widow even opened her mouth, Jesus raised her son from death. Jesus saw her heart — and in love and great empathy gave the son back to his mother alive!

God is truly our ever-present help in times of need. When we are living with sorrow or confusion, we can remember that God sees our hearts and will answer us — often before we even speak.

### THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

God knows my pain even before I give voice to it.

**Prayer:** Dear Lord, help us in the midst of pain and confusion not to forget your presence. May we at all times be sensitive to your voice as 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). Amen.

Neliswa Chigudu (Johannesburg, South Africa)

TUES  
MAY 14  
2019

## ENCOURAGEMENT

READ Acts 15:30-35

*Judas and Silas, who themselves were prophets, said much to encourage and strengthen the believers.*

— Acts 15:32 (NIV)

Life was difficult for Christians in the first century because the culture they lived in was not attuned to the ways of Christ.

### THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

God can use me to encourage others.

When people persecuted them for their beliefs, they became discouraged. Judas and Silas are two whom God sent to encourage other believers, to help their faith become

stronger. In fact the words *encourage* and *encouragement* are used countless times in the New Testament. Throughout the centuries, receiving encouragement has been important to all Christians as they grow and mature in their faith.

One morning as I was attending a conference and praying about something special I could do that day, God nudged me to focus on encouraging others. That day God sent several people my way who needed encouragement. As far as I could tell, I did not make a huge difference in anyone's life. It could be that someone's life was changed and I didn't know about it. But that day I did learn that people appreciate and are strengthened by words of encouragement. I also learned that each of us is encouraged as we encourage others.

**Prayer:** Dear God, lead us to people who need encouragement, and give us the words to strengthen their faith. Amen.

Tom Kennedy (Texas, USA)

WED  
MAY 15  
2019

## NOT AFRAID

READ Psalm 112:6-8

*[The righteous] will have no fear of bad news; their hearts are steadfast, trusting in the LORD.*

— Psalm 112:7 (NIV)

Recently, my doctor told me that I have a rare tumor called dermatofibrosarcoma. When I heard the news, two choices came to my mind: *I can succumb to fear, or I can have faith*

### THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

The Lord's faithfulness is greater than my problems.

*in Jesus, my Lord.* When I found the wonderful verse above, it helped me not to panic or worry about the bad news I had heard from my doctor.

The Lord assured me that I did not need to fear bad news. Like the righteous ones in Psalm 112, I could stand steadfast and be encouraged, confidently relying on the Lord. Yes, the news is bad. My family depends on me to take care of their daily needs, and I do worry about them. But I trust in the Lord who promised to be a great help in times of trouble and always to be present with us. (See Ps. 46.)

We all face difficulties, but trusting the Lord can relieve us of the weight of worry. It is easy to let fear control our minds when we hear bad news, but fear will not control us when we put our trust in the Lord.

**Prayer:** Dear Lord, in times of trouble give us the courage to face each day knowing that you are greater than all our worry and fear. Amen.

Ismelalem Woldegiorgis (British Columbia, Canada)

## A WAY THROUGH

READ Isaiah 43:1-7

*No testing has overtaken you that is not common to everyone. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tested beyond your strength, but . . . will also provide the way out so that you may be able to endure it.*

— 1 Corinthians 10:13 (NRSV)

Many people who are trying to comfort someone experiencing tragedy say, "God never gives us more than we can handle." But this can backfire, making the sufferer feel worse. They may say: "If God is sending me these crises because I'm so strong, then I don't want to be strong."

This modern saying is a paraphrase of part of 1 Corinthians 10:13, but the full verse actually says something quite different and far deeper. The full verse points out that life — not God — sends adversity to us all. Our trials are a common experience, and knowing this is in itself reassuring. Empathy and shared struggles can work miracles. The text also points out that sometimes we are tested beyond our resources and strength. Sometimes we are overwhelmed by life's trials, and sometimes it is more than we can handle.

But understanding this, God gives us something to enable us to endure. The apostle Paul assures us that when we are tested beyond our strength, God will provide a way through until, free on the other side, we can walk forward into the light of a new day.

### THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

When life is too hard, God will provide a way through.

**Prayer:** Dear God, give us eyes to see the way through that you offer us in times of adversity and the faith to trust your promise. Amen.

Hope Harle-Mould (New York, USA)

FRI  
MAY 17  
2019

## GOD'S LOVE SONG

READ Romans 8:14-21

*How beautiful your sandaled feet, O prince's daughter!*

— Song of Songs 7:1 (NIV)

When my husband and I were living in Nicaragua as missionaries, I struggled with the relentless heat. Getting through the day and doing a few basic chores were often all I could

manage. I suffered from migraines and frequently wondered what I was doing there. I wasn't sure I would ever acclimate enough to be able to do anything useful.

**THOUGHT FOR THE DAY**  
I don't have to earn God's love.

I wrote today's quoted scripture in my journal after arriving in Nicaragua. It came to mind one morning as I sat looking at my feet. "How beautiful your sandaled feet, O prince's daughter!" Reading this verse, I was overwhelmed when I remembered that I am the daughter of the King: precious, loved, cherished, and honored. I know God's delight in me and love for me. Whenever I doubted what I was doing in Nicaragua, I could look at my sandaled feet and remember who I am. It didn't matter if I was able to accomplish great things while in Nicaragua; I was precious to God no matter what.

We are beautiful, not because of what we do or achieve but because we belong to God. May this knowledge comfort and encourage us, reminding us of our purpose regardless of what we do or do not accomplish.

**Prayer:** Loving God, help us to walk through today covered in the knowledge of your love for us. Help us to remember our purpose in you. Amen.

Jodie Dennis (Northamptonshire, United Kingdom)

## OUR PATIENT GOD

READ Isaiah 40:27-31

*Those who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength.*

— Isaiah 40:31 (NRSV)

When I was about five years old I had a heart disease called endocarditis. In those days this disease was very serious, and my life was threatened for almost a year. My family members were not Christians; but because we lived in a small town, the Sunday school in the local church heard about me and sent a teacher and a small group of kids called "The Sunshine Club" to visit me.

I don't remember much about the visit, but I recall that they gave me a small shiny plaque with a picture of Jesus holding a lamb. It said that Jesus is the good shepherd. They wrote some kind messages on the back of it, in pencil. Somehow, through all our family's moves and the many moves my wife and I made during our marriage, I managed to keep that little plaque. The pencil inscriptions have faded but are still readable.

Later in my Christian life, the plaque became one of my prized possessions. It reminded me that God is faithful and patient with us, waiting and being available when we finally realize our need for him. As the verse above says, "They who wait for the LORD will renew their strength." I gained spiritual strength and physical healing, and I am still going strong at 85 years old. God is faithful and true, and the sooner we come to God, the longer we can honor God and walk with Jesus Christ.

**Prayer:** Dear Lord, bless all who have been touched by your care, and bring them to a true faith in Jesus our savior. Amen.

**THOUGHT FOR THE DAY**  
I will follow as God leads me to help others start their journey to faith.

Ken Claar (Idaho, USA)

SUN  
MAY 19  
2019

## LEARNING TO FORGIVE

READ Matthew 5:43-48

*Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing."*

— Luke 23:34 (NIV)

Many years ago when I was seven and my brother was three, I witnessed a group of adults bullying my mother because she was of Japanese heritage. Even though I was too young to understand why this was happening, I was angry and felt hatred. I knew that if my dad had been home, instead of serving in the military overseas, these people would not have dared to do what they did. I saw my mother cry many times while my dad was away. It was difficult for me to understand why we, as a family, all had to suffer.

It took some time for me to understand that as Christians, we are called to forgive those who hurt us or our loved ones. I think one of the hardest things God asks us to do is: "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you," (Matt. 5:44) as Jesus did on the cross. Though I have never forgotten, I have forgiven those people for the evil they did. For me, it is like a painful wound that has healed, but the scar remains as a constant reminder of what happened. The words of Jesus and his example have taught me a great deal about forgiveness.

**Prayer:** Dear Father, thank you for forgiving our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Amen.

Eileen Thrift (Florida, USA)

## GOD WILL MAKE A WAY

READ Luke 12:22-34

*You will keep in perfect peace those whose minds are steadfast, because they trust in you.*

— Isaiah 26:3 (NIV)

I am a banker and a pastor. Recently, I was faced with the possibility of dismissal from my job. My first reaction was fear and concern for my wife and our young son. I was also upset because I felt like my possible dismissal meant that my work for the past four years at the organization had not been sufficient. I tried to act as if all were well when I was at work, but I was deeply troubled by my situation.

Before I went to sleep one night, I took my concerns to the Lord in prayer. When I woke up the following morning, a word from the Lord came to remind me of God's ability to feed the birds of the air and to clothe the lilies of the fields so they never have to worry (Luke 12:22-34). This reminder of God's blessings relieved the heaviness in my heart and reminded me of the possibilities and provisions of the Lord. This insight continues to sustain my belief that God will provide for my needs even if I lose my job.

When we are faced with scary possibilities, it can be easy to worry and feel as if we are alone. During times of worry and uncertainty, we can cast our cares on God. The Lord opens pathways for us when we don't see a way on our own.

**Prayer:** Dear Lord, thank you for making a way for us. Help us remember to trust you when we begin to worry or fear for our future. Amen.

Hassan A. Bello (Kaduna, Nigeria)

**THOUGHT FOR THE DAY**  
When I forgive, God heals me.

**THOUGHT FOR THE DAY**  
Each new day brings reassurance from God.

TUES  
MAY 21  
2019

## TASTE AND SEE

READ Psalm 96:1-9

*Taste and see that the LORD is good; blessed is the one who takes refuge in him.*

— Psalm 34:8 (NIV)

“What is your son’s name?” I asked the mother next to me as we decorated the table for our children’s class party. She

replied, and we made small talk for a while before our conversation shifted to the Lord. As she spoke, I thought, *I wish I could talk about the Lord as freely as she does, but I can’t.*

### THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

The better I know God, the more I want to share my faith with others.

Then a verse I had read that morning came to mind. “Taste and see that the Lord is good.” I looked at the array of sweets on the table and realized that when I find a new dessert recipe, I call a friend to say, “You’ve got to try this!” Because I’ve tasted it and discovered that it is delicious, I want to share it. As if the Lord whispered it in my ear, a question rose in my heart. *Are you quicker to share a brownie recipe than you are to share me?* Conviction filled my heart as I knew my answer. The truth was, I hadn’t been tasting God enough to be very excited.

The more we taste God’s goodness, the more we crave and become excited about God. When we read scripture, commune with God daily, and taste God’s blessings, we see how wonderful God truly is. Once we know of God’s sweetness, we can pray for the courage to boldly share our faith with others.

**Prayer:** Dear God, help us to desire you in deeper ways day by day. May we share your sweetness as we pour your love onto others. Amen.

Callie Daruk (Tennessee, USA)

## KEEP WATCH

READ Matthew 26:31-46

*[Jesus] said to them, “My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me.”*

— Matthew 26:38 (NIV)

As Jesus approached the moment of his betrayal, he was fully aware of the dreadful task ahead. He desired to draw near to God and took his closest disciples with him. When Jesus wanted to approach his Father in prayer, he told his disciples to wait and keep watch with him. Although they could not do anything about his sorrow or the task ahead, he desired their companionship.

Jesus’ request of his disciples reminds me of when I was younger and playing school sports. We were taught that even if we weren’t playing, we should always be excited and engaged in the game. We were told to cheer for our teammates, pay attention to what was going on, and stay ready just in case we were called on to play.

Unfortunately, when we are not on the front lines, sometimes we disengage; we stop being available and fall asleep on the work of God altogether. God desires our excitement and readiness for ministry. A part of communing with God is supporting the faithful work of others and staying alert for the time when God will call us into action.

### THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

When God calls, I will be ready.

**Prayer:** Dear Lord, even when we don’t seem to have an active part, help us remain engaged with and excited for the work you are doing. Amen.

Gordon Rowe (Indiana, USA)

THUR  
MAY 23  
2019

## REFUGE FROM THE STORM

READ Psalm 46:1-11

*The LORD is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer; my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.*

— Psalm 18:2 (NIV)

When Hurricane María hit Puerto Rico, my husband and I were terrified. We felt helpless when faced with the fury of the hurricane assaulting our lovely island. We spent those frightening moments deep in prayer, asking God to be our refuge during the storm.

**THOUGHT FOR THE DAY**  
God is my refuge.

I was exhausted and felt as if I didn't have the energy to carry on. While feeling intense anxiety, I remembered the psalmist's words: "God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble" (Ps. 46:1). I held fast to God's promise and was able to experience God's presence.

During that storm, I learned not to depend on my own strength but to trust in God. I experienced unconditional love while God's presence sustained me during that dark, terrifying night, and I have continued to trust in God's divine protection. Even during powerful storms, may we all remember that the almighty God is our refuge.

**Prayer:** Guardian of our lives, thank you for your constant care and concern for us when we face adversity. Be our refuge when we are weak, and support us with your strength. Amen.

Nereida Reyes Santos (Puerto Rico)

30 *Prayer Focus:* THOSE RECOVERING FROM HURRICANES

## A JOB WE CAN DO

READ Luke 8:32-39

*Jesus said, "Return home and tell how much God has done for you." So the man went away and told all over town how much Jesus had done for him.*

— Luke 8:39 (NIV)

I used to be afraid that I couldn't do what God expected of me. I had read about the work of the saints since the time of Jesus and knew that I couldn't live up to their accomplishments. So I decided to take a closer look at Jesus' expectations of the people he encountered.

When Jesus healed people, he gave them a variety of instructions. To the paralyzed man whose friends had lowered him down through the roof, he said, "Get up, take your mat and go home" (Luke 5:24). He told a man who had been possessed to "return home and tell how much God has done for you." Jesus told the ten lepers, "Go, show yourselves to the priests" (Luke 17:14). Jesus told his disciples to take up a cross and follow him and to "go and make disciples of all nations" (Matt. 28:19).

At some point I realized that while Jesus calls all of us to take up our cross and follow him and to make disciples, we are not all called to do that in the same way. Perhaps I can start by simply helping and encouraging other people whenever the opportunity arises. Our call to serve God will not look like someone else's call. We can be glad that we can serve people in their times of need. God will help each of us to do the job that we are called to do.

**Prayer:** Dear Father, bless those who are serving you this day. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Thad H. Carter (Texas, USA)

*Prayer Focus:* TO FIND OPPORTUNITIES TO SERVE 31

FRI  
MAY 24  
2019

**THOUGHT FOR THE DAY**  
God loves us all and calls us to different tasks.

SAT  
MAY 25  
2019

## PERFECT TRUST

READ Psalm 34:1-8

*This poor soul cried, and was heard by the LORD,  
and was saved from every trouble.*

— Psalm 34:6 (NRSV)

My five-year-old daughter was eager to help me bake a fruitcake, fetching the flour and the sultanas from the pantry as I read out the ingredients in turn. “Eggs,”

### THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

When I can’t see a way forward, God can.

I said, and she opened the fridge. I briefly turned away to retrieve the egg beater from the drawer and crash! The whole

box of eggs splattered on the kitchen floor. I couldn’t hide my dismay. Money was short for us, and now we had no eggs. My daughter looked up at me unperturbed. “Don’t worry, Mummy,” she said, “Daddy can mend them.”

My little girl’s faith in her beloved father was the perfect reminder to me of the faith we can have in our heavenly Father’s ability to repair the damage in our lives. While my daughter’s father could not put broken eggs back together, nothing is impossible for our heavenly Father, who cares for us and waits only to be asked for help. Even if we think our lives are broken beyond repair, our Father can mend them when we entrust our struggles to him.

**Prayer:** Loving Father, we bring to you what is broken in our lives. We place the pieces in your loving hands as we ask for and accept your help. Amen.

Dorothy O’Neill (South Australia, Australia)

## EXTRAVAGANT LOVE

READ John 13:1-17

*Jesus said, “Now that I, your Lord and Teacher,  
have washed your feet, you also should  
wash one another’s feet.”*

— John 13:14 (NIV)

For my birthday my sister had given me a very expensive gift. It was not unusual for her to show such generosity. Ever since she became a believer and servant of Jesus Christ in the sixth grade, my life and the lives of many others have been changed forever by her extravagant love. She shares all she has: food from her bountiful garden, medical knowledge and life wisdom, baked goods, and hours of service. Many people in our community remember her for her years of service as a youth leader, and many more have shared in a community meal served each month at our church.

The radical, humble, and extravagant love Jesus showed to his disciples as he washed their feet was hard for them to accept; but that act taught us that we are to serve God by loving and humbly serving others. James 1:22 reminds us, “Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.” When we accept that love of Jesus, we become vessels that show love to others.

### THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Today I will look for opportunities to show Christ’s love.

**Prayer:** God of love, thank you for the love you poured out on us through your Son. Fill us to overflowing so that we may share your love with others. Amen.

Kay Hawk (Ohio, USA)

## LOVING OUR NEIGHBORS

READ Matthew 2:7-12

*No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends.*

— John 15:13 (NRSV)

While serving in Iraq in 2007, I awoke early one morning with an overwhelming feeling of dread. I prayed desperately that God would protect me and shield my family from the pain they would experience if I didn't return home. I wrote a letter to my wife and children and asked my operations officer to ensure my family received it if something happened to me.

**THOUGHT FOR THE DAY**  
God calls me to show kindness to everyone I meet.

Despite fear that made me sick to my stomach, we set out on our mission. On the outskirts of Baghdad, we were halted by the frantic Muslim chief of police with whom I had been working for over a year. He insisted we go no further because the road ahead was arrayed with roadside bombs. After further investigation we found that we had been set up for an attack, and our deaths had been averted by this unexpected messenger.

I still struggle with thoughts of that day, but I take comfort in the friendship that God placed in my path through that devoted and honest man. It would have been easy for him to let us drive past or for me to ignore his warning. My unlikely friend taught me a lesson about love and kindness that day. Our neighbors are often very different from us. God calls us to seek friendship, kindness, and understanding even from those who appear different. Loving all our neighbors opens us up to great blessings.

**Prayer:** Heavenly Father, teach us to show kindness to strangers. Help us to treat others the way we want to be treated and to embrace all people as your children. Amen.

Chad B. McRee (Texas, USA)

## OPPORTUNITY FROM GOD

READ Galatians 6:1-10

*Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others.*

— Philippians 2:4 (NRSV)

My grandma died when I was a senior in high school. Before Grandma died, she was unable to walk and often called my name to ask for help. At the time, I grumbled at her requests for my help. I thought, "Why does Grandma always call me, not my brother or sister?" Soon after, Grandma died — and I wept.

When Grandma was alive, my aunt helped care for her, since my aunt is unmarried and lives with my family. Recently, my aunt was also unable to walk. Unlike Grandma, my aunt rarely called for my help. But her condition reminded me of how I reacted to Grandma. I wondered, *Is God giving me a second chance to be selfless and care for my family?*

In Galatians 6, Paul encourages the Galatians to carry each other's burdens. This passage reminds me of the importance of helping others with their physical needs as well as their spiritual needs. Helping others is not an obligation but an opportunity from God. Knowing this, when God asks us to do something for another, we can complete the task with joy.

**THOUGHT FOR THE DAY**  
I can bless others by responding joyfully when God calls me to help.

**Prayer:** Dear Lord, help us to use the opportunities you provide to care for others. Guide us to help others in the ways they need us most. Amen.

Linawati Santoso (East Java, Indonesia)

WED  
MAY 29  
2019

## BE STILL

READ Exodus 14:10-18

*The LORD will fight for you, and you have only to keep still.*

— Exodus 14:14 (NRSV)

### THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Because I trust God,  
I can remain calm in  
the midst of crisis.

My friend went white-water rafting with a small group, and after going over a class IV rapid, she was tossed out of the raft and into a turbulent part of the river called a *weir*. Her natural instinct was to fight against the current and try to swim to the top, but she had been coached by her rafting instructor beforehand that the way to survive a fall into a weir is to be still. In this very tense moment, she remembered her instructor's words; she remained still, and the current spit her out.

What a reminder of Moses' words to the Israelites after God had led them safely to the other side of the Red Sea: "The Lord will fight for you, and you have only to keep still." Sometimes, when I'm experiencing turbulent waters in my own life, I find being still to be one of the most difficult things in the world. When Pharaoh's army was within sight and the Israelites felt that their lives were about to end, Moses' word to them was, "Be still." When we're confronted with life's challenges, our impulse is often to fight back or maybe to give up. But being still shows our trust that God is bigger than our challenges and that even when we are uncertain, God is faithful to us.

**Prayer:** Dear God, in times of trial and doubt when we feel helpless, teach us to trust you. Amen.

Adam Benson (North Carolina, USA)

## FLEDGLING CHRISTIANS

READ 1 Peter 2:1-6

*Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation.*

— 1 Peter 2:2 (NIV)

THUR  
MAY 30  
2019

Over a period of time, I watched a pair of robins build a nest, hatch their eggs, and feed their young. What a busy pair! Once the babies arrived, the parents hopped around the lawn, gathering worms to drop into hungry beaks. Without constant nurturing, those little fluff balls would not have survived.

As Christians, we can take a few lessons from those birds about nurturing new believers. Just as the birds provided a safe nest, congregations provide a safe place for new believers to ask questions and express doubts. Through worship, sermons, and Bible studies, we feed new believers what they need to understand and practice their faith. Through one-on-one conversations and friendships, mature Christians are role models who show new believers how to live out their faith. And just as the parent robins worked as a team, so members of a congregation show teamwork as they exercise their spiritual gifts — giving, teaching, encouraging.

New believers need the church, and the church needs new believers to carry on its mission. What a privilege and joy to hold new believers close to our hearts, to feed them God's word, and to protect them until they're ready to fly on their own. Someday, they — in turn — will nurture other new believers.

### THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Whose faith will  
I nurture today?

**Prayer:** Dear Lord, open our eyes to the needs of those new in the faith. Amen.

Shirley G. Brosius (Pennsylvania, USA)

FRI  
MAY 31  
2019

## WINGS OF A DOVE

READ 1 Timothy 6:17-19

*I wish I had wings like a dove! I'd fly away and rest.*

— Psalm 55:6 (CEB)

At the institute where I teach, I gave a special assignment to the first-year students. I asked them to write a prose-poem on the topic, "If I were given two wings." Some students started writing right away, while others hesitated. With some persuasion on my part all of them finished within the allotted

### THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Our divine calling is to be a blessing for others.

time. They presented their poems to the class with a sense of achievement.

Among all the good pieces, Salmaan's stood apart. It read, "Oh, were I blessed

with two wings! With them I would fly afar to become wings of those who have no wings."

Those lines still linger in my mind. With this noble vision Salmaan now teaches at a primary school in Kerala. God gives him opportunities every day to become wings of love and knowledge to many children.

God calls us to surrender ourselves completely, reaching out to others and becoming a source of love, knowledge, and healing. The psalmist sought to fly above life-threatening situations to find solace in God's presence. God empowers us to reach others and to become a source of love and compassion.

**Prayer:** Heavenly Father, empower us to become wings of love so that we may reach out to those who are in need. Amen.

Shaji George Kanothra (Kerala, India)

## WHO ARE YOU?

READ Galatians 3:23-29

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

— 1 John 3:1 (NIV)

The summer before my sophomore year of college, I was working at a camp 900 miles from home. Being away from my home church and the Christian community at my college left me longing for people who shared my faith. When the opportunity arose for me to walk to church one morning, I was thrilled. My second Sunday at the church, I was less than thrilled; I was uncomfortable. No one could understand my southern accent, and my walking to church led people to believe I wasn't yet old enough to drive. My embarrassment only grew when the pastor announced from the pulpit that *Kathleen* from *Texas* had returned for the service again.

As I sat in my pew, planning my escape route to avoid talking to anyone after the service, I remembered something important. I am not just 19-year-old Katlyn from Tennessee; I am a child of God. I am loved beyond comprehension, forgiven without reason, given peace that surpasses all understanding. I can laugh without fear of the future. While I love my earthly identity, it comes in second to my so-much-more-valuable identity in Christ.

### THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

My identity is rooted in God's deep love for me.

**Prayer:** Dear God, you change, transform, restore, and renew. Thank you for being our Father and giving us a new life in you. Amen.

Katlyn Council (Tennessee, USA)

## Church at Its Best

For my undergraduate study, I went to a Christian university that required students to attend chapel each day. Often chapel services felt like an obligation and an interruption — time that could be spent doing something else. I attended to have my ticket punched, and when it was over I would quickly move on with my day. I had my doubts about whether I belonged in the community at all and sometimes wondered if I wouldn't be better off somewhere else.

Then one morning, the family members of a teacher who had died attended our chapel service. As a gesture of our encouragement and support, we sang to the family. In my church tradition, singing “psalms and hymns and spiritual songs” (Eph. 5:19, NRSV) is a significant aspect of the worship service, and we do it well. I love to sing, and I love much of the music that is part of my church tradition. It was a good moment for me and a good one for my faith community. It is still difficult to describe what happened in that moment, but something sacred and powerful occurred that still sustains me today.

Were someone to ask me what keeps me active and involved in my church community, what keeps me a faithful church-goer in moments of doubt, what encourages me and gives me strength when I fail, I would tell them about that morning in chapel when I was a college student. My church community came together to show love and support for people who were experiencing a great tragedy and all the grief and pain such an event brings. To me that moment was church at its best.

I admit that in the years since, in church on Sunday mornings I have sometimes had the same doubts that I had when I was a student: *Do I belong here? Would I be better off somewhere else?* I have moments when I am frustrated with church, and I want to throw my hands in the air and give up. I become so focused on everything that is going wrong that I lose sight of everything that is going right. Sometimes it's hard for me to see beyond the ways we treat one another — the words we speak without thinking or the needs of others we overlook because we have become bogged down in minutiae.

When I grow weary with my church community, I go back to

that moment in chapel when I was a college student. It reminds me of all that is good about church and that we are at our best when we are caring for one another and loving, supporting, and encouraging each other along the way. As the writer of the letter to the Hebrews says, “Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another — and all the more as you see the Day approaching” (10:24-25, NIV). I remain grateful to my fellow Christians who have helped me along the way, especially in my moments of weakness, frustration, or doubt. I remain grateful for that moment in chapel and how it has kept me going.

Our church communities don't always get it right. This has been the case for a long time, as we see when we read Paul's letters. But much of the time church communities do get it right; and at those times, I believe that we get it *very* right. The times when we are most like Christ in our thoughts and actions are what nourish me the most. I think this is true for all of us. Though we mess up sometimes — individually and collectively — this doesn't have to discourage us from trying to be more Christlike each day. So let us love, support, and encourage one another along the way. Let us not give up when frustrations and doubts creep in, but show love and compassion to others every chance we get. We never know what difference it could make.

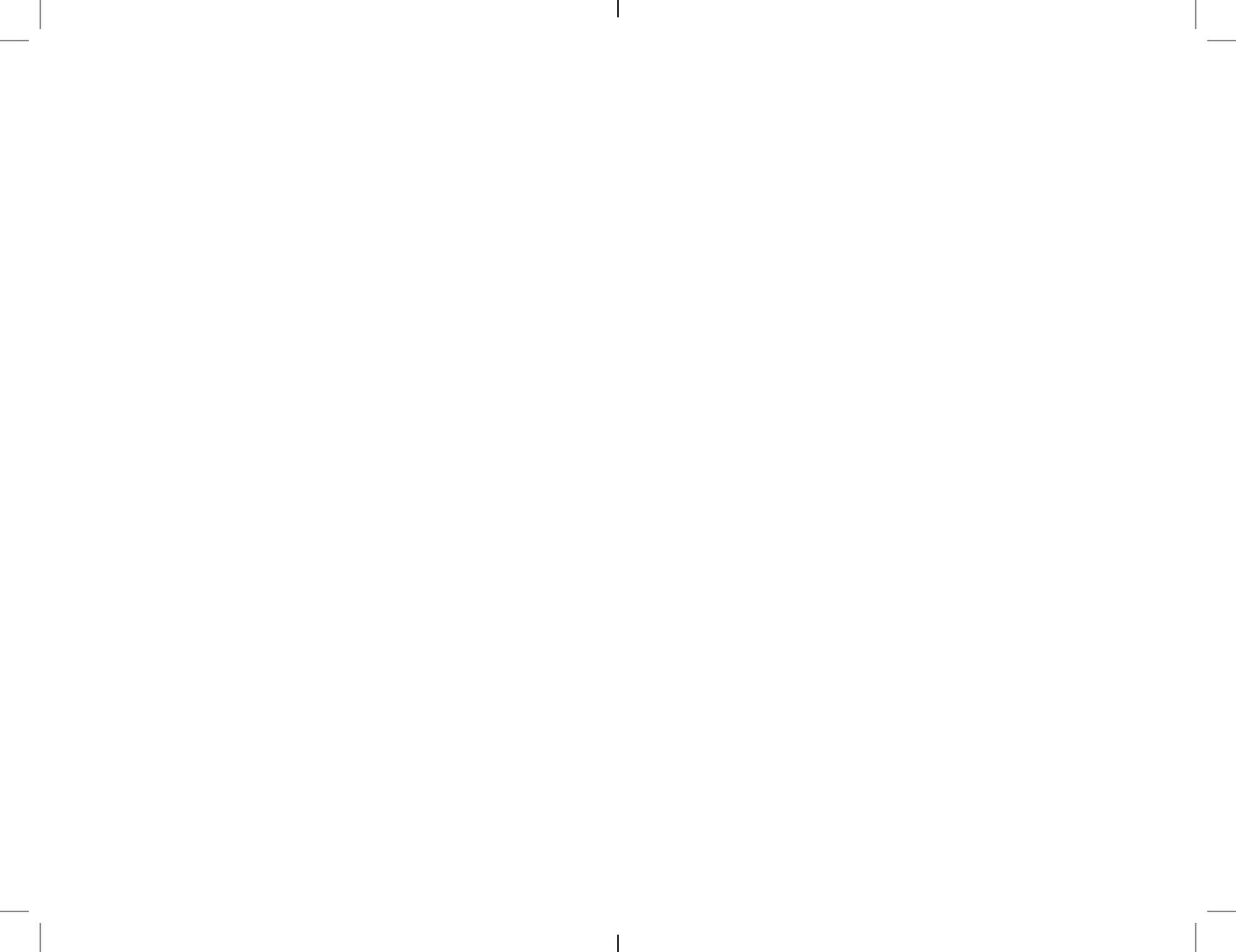
Several meditations in this issue address Christian community. You may want to read again the meditations for May 2, 18, 22, 26, 30 and June 5, 9, 10, 19, 23, 30 before responding to the reflection questions below.

### QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION:

1. When have you experienced frustration or doubt in your church community? How did you deal with your frustration or doubt?
2. Give an example from your own church community that shows Christian love, support, and encouragement at its best.



— Andrew Garland Breeden  
Acquisitions Editor



SUN  
JUNE 2  
2019

## THE GOSPEL THROUGH DEEDS

READ 1 Corinthians 3:5-9

*Let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.*

— Matthew 5:16 (NIV)

When I studied abroad at the Human Rights Institute in Strasbourg, France, I befriended students from Algeria and Tunisia. Since the program focused on religious rights, we discussed religious freedom in our countries. We also talked about our personal religious beliefs. I used this opportunity to share my testimony: I was raised as an atheist in the USSR, but after the Perestroika I accepted Jesus as my personal Savior.

### THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

My actions show my faith in God.

I also showed my faith through my deeds. The Bible teaches, “Faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead” (Jas. 2:17, NRSV). I assisted my new friends in their studies, shared my notes with them, and helped them cook dinner. I treated them with respect, and our fellowship was cordial. I also prayed that Jesus’ light would shine through me.

The apostle Paul wrote, “I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow” (1 Cor. 3:6). We can each do our part in sharing the good news — and trust the Lord to do the rest.

**Prayer:** Dear Lord, help us to be doers of the word and not hearers only. (See Jas. 1:22.) In Jesus’ name. Amen.

Tatiana Claudy (Indiana, USA)

## “DO YOU NOT CARE?”

READ Matthew 8:23-27

*What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him!*

— Matthew 8:27 (KJV)

Prior to elections in Kenya in 2017, we heard numerous appeals for a peaceful voting experience. Even as the appeals for peace were being made, the fear of violence simmered deep within the voting citizens. Those fears were well-founded as our country had experienced unprecedented electoral violence just a decade earlier.

As I thought of the fear we were experiencing, I remembered the disciples in the boat with Jesus, who were consumed with the fear of drowning in the sea. In the middle of a storm, they came to him, woke him up from sleep, and said, “Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?” Jesus woke up, rebuked the storm, and restored the disciples’ peace. Jesus’ actions reminded them and us that when we trust in Jesus, he will be with us through any circumstances. All we are required to do as children of the Most High God is to trust in God and God’s word and live in obedience to it. “For with God nothing shall be impossible” (Luke 1:37).

### THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Christ is the source of all peace.

**Prayer:** Dear Lord, thank you for the peace you bring today. We look to you for help always. In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit we pray. Amen.

Philip Polo (Nairobi, Kenya)

TUES  
JUNE 4  
2019

## AN UNKINDNESS OF RAVENS

READ Psalm 94:17-19

*When my anxieties multiply, your  
comforting calms me down.*

— Psalm 94:19 (CEB)

We were camping in Yellowstone National Park in Raven's Roost Campground. When we were rudely awakened before

dawn by a riotous chorus of caws, we learned why one term for a flock of ravens is an "unkindness."

I'm reminded of those ravens as I read the verse

quoted above. It seems that worry invades like a raucous unkindness of ravens cawing, "You are doomed." The disquieting mental noise of anxiety is almost impossible to ignore.

The psalmist says that God restores the peace and quiet: "Your comforting calms me down." God's word is full of promises that we can meditate on to bring comfort and peace to our minds. I love Zephaniah 3:17: "The LORD your God is with you, the Mighty Warrior who saves. He will take great delight in you; in his love he will no longer rebuke you, but will rejoice over you with singing" (NIV). In place of the word *you*, I insert my name or the name of someone I am praying for. I celebrate the victory that God sees for my friend and me even when circumstances shout otherwise. When we delight in these promises, God restores peace to our souls.

**Prayer:** God of peace, thank you for your powerful and comforting promises that chase away the ravens of worry. Amen.

Mark Weinrich (Nevada, USA)

46 *Prayer Focus:* SOMEONE OVERCOME BY WORRY

## A WALKING TESTIMONY

READ 1 Peter 3:13-17

*Let no one despise your youth, but set the  
believers an example in speech and  
conduct, in love, in faith, in purity.*

— 1 Timothy 4:12 (NRSV)

As I watched Lainie, my 15-year-old granddaughter, walk out of Central High School, I noticed that she was wearing a cross necklace and had John 3:16 printed on her shirt. On the way to drop off her friend Jeannie, I listened to the girls chat about an after-school Christian meeting and Lainie's church youth group. Then, Lainie reminded Jeannie to be ready for a ride to church Sunday morning.

I compared Lainie's actions with my own at this same high school years before. Although a Christian, I had been too worried about embarrassment or criticism to share my faith. And I hadn't done so in the years since. But that day, I resolved to follow Lainie's example. I prayed for help to overcome my fears. Soon, my simple acts — such as wearing a shirt with a Christian message, offering to pray with someone, or comforting a hurting friend — prompted conversations about God's love. I found ways to encourage new worshipers, invite others to church, and help with my church's many mission projects.

The more I risked, the more opportunities I had to witness to others. God calls each of us to spread

the gospel, even if it means facing rejection or criticism. No matter our age or situation, God will lead us to serve others by showing them the way to Christ.

**Prayer:** Dear God, give us courage and guidance to show others your love and grace. Amen.

Nancy Lewis Shelton (Missouri, USA)

*Prayer Focus:* THOSE HESITANT TO SHARE THEIR FAITH 47

WED  
JUNE 5  
2019

### THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Trusting in God is my  
answer to worry.

### THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Today I will find ways to  
share God's word.

THUR  
JUNE 6  
2019

## ALWAYS A WINNER

READ **Philippians 1:20-24**

*If we live, we live for the Lord; and if we die, we die for the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord.*

— Romans 14:8 (NIV)

As my friend Charles approached serious heart surgery, he had great peace. He explained: “Whatever way it turns out, I’m a winner.” A few years later, he faced another heart procedure with the same peace and the same words.

**THOUGHT FOR THE DAY**  
No matter what I face today,  
Jesus is always with me.

When the apostle Paul wrote to the Christians

in Rome, he told them that whether they lived or died they would always be with Jesus, and Jesus would always be with them. Eventually, Charles did pass from this world and went to be with the Lord. The truth of Charles’s words provide comfort and a faithful example for me. Whenever any of us faces a trial, because of our faith in Christ, we can say: “Whatever way it turns out, I’m a winner.”

**Prayer:** Thank you, Lord, that whether in life or in death, you are always with us. We pray as Jesus taught us saying, “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.

Ted De Hass (Iowa, USA)

## LOSING FOCUS

READ **Matthew 14:22-33**

*Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, “Lord, save me!”*

— Matthew 14:29-30 (NIV)

One afternoon, I was standing on my paddle board, looking into the clear water below. Suddenly, I saw a large, ominous shadow approaching. I strained to see what it was and began to slowly turn toward it. As I worried about the scary unknown, I lost my concentration on my paddle boarding technique and found myself submerged in deep water with my board flipped upside-down. Worse yet, I no longer knew where the shadow was. Fearing a shark would sense my distress and attack, I tightly gripped the board as panic overcame me. I prayed, “Help me, God!” Deciding to trust in God’s protection, I returned to shore unharmed.

Sometimes when I’m gliding across the Gulf on my paddle board I wonder what it was like for Peter to walk on the stormy sea. While focusing on Jesus, he was “gliding” across the water as I do on my board. Then, when he focused on the threat, he lost sight of Jesus.

We all will face many challenges throughout our lives — death, disease, or job loss. These challenges can be scary, especially if we try to face them alone. Instead, we can confront them head-on through prayer, Bible study, or by seeking help from fellow Christians. I am always amazed at the peace God can provide during these trying times.

**Prayer:** Dear God, our Protector, help us to keep our focus on you so we won’t sink into treacherous waters. Thank you for being with us. Amen.

Ron Lazenby (Alabama, USA)

FRI  
JUNE 7  
2019

**THOUGHT FOR THE DAY**  
God hears me when I call  
for help and delivers me  
safely to the shore.

SAT  
JUNE 8  
2019

## A GOOD SAMARITAN

READ Luke 10:25-37

*[The lawyer] answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself."*

— Luke 10:27 (NRSV)

When I was a child I enjoyed spending time in my father's tailor shop, listening to him tell stories from his childhood while he worked. My father was happy growing up in Armenia until war broke out in 1915. He was forced to flee his home; he stayed on the move — walking by day, hiding among the trees by night.

### THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Whom is God calling me to help today?

One day while he was walking down a road, he saw a group of boys heading his way, intent on harming him because he was Armenian and Christian. My father scrambled into a ditch, raised his arms and cried, "Dear God, save me!" In desperation, he waved down a passing car. The driver stopped, told him to get into the car and asked, "Where are you going?" My father stammered, "Anywhere."

The man took him to an inn and gave him fresh clothes. That night my father bathed, ate a good meal, and slept at the inn. The following day my father wanted to thank the man, but he was gone. He had paid for the night's stay and left some money for my father. Who was this man? My father never found out.

This stranger lived out the parable of the good Samaritan, caring for my father even though he was a stranger. We can all learn from the kindness this man showed and remember that we have the ability to show love and mercy to others as well.

**Prayer:** Merciful God, thank you for watching over us in unexpected ways and through the people you send into our lives. Amen.

Rebeca Boyadjian (Montevideo, Uruguay)

50 *Prayer Focus:* THOSE SUFFERING PERSECUTION

## UNITY AND HARMONY

READ Acts 2:1-11

*How good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity!*

— Psalm 133:1 (NIV)

In our prison we have two choirs. One sings in English and the other in Spanish. I am in the English choir. On the months that have a fifth Sunday, we celebrate what we call "Super Sunday." On Super Sundays, the English and Spanish choirs join together to sing every song in both languages.

Our first Super Sunday became a powerful experience when we all sang together in harmony. During the altar call, both choirs surrounded the congregation while singing "We Give You All" or "Recibe." Those who felt called to pray did so. I got down on my knees, put my face to the ground, and felt the Holy Spirit surround me as I prayed. When I finished praying, I stood and looked across the congregation. What I saw amazed me. As I looked from person to person, I knew Jesus was smiling and loving his church.

In the scripture quoted above, the psalmist says it is good and pleasant when God's people live in unity. When believers come together in love to worship, the connection and unity that occur are powerful. Jesus' love unifies believers and creates harmony. Whether we are at church, work, home, or even in prison, we can be encouraged by the power of worshipping as one.

**Prayer:** Dear God, help us to live and worship together in harmony today and every day. Amen.

Steven Paul Simmons (Texas, USA)

*Prayer Focus:* CHURCH CHOIRS

SUN  
JUNE 9  
2019

### THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

The Holy Spirit brings us together in harmony.

51

MON  
JUNE 10  
2019

## NEVER IN VAIN

READ Romans 1:8-17

*Let us not become weary in doing good,  
for at the proper time we will reap a  
harvest if we do not give up.*

— Galatians 6:9 (NIV)

“Hi. It’s Bonnie,” said the voice on the phone. “I just wanted you to know that I’ve come back to the Lord.” The ring of excitement in her voice when she said these words identified her as the Bonnie who once attended a Bible study I’d taught. Bonnie asked to come over to my house to tell me more.

**THOUGHT FOR THE DAY**  
My efforts for the Lord are never in vain.

That afternoon, her voice rang with joy as she told me of her ministry with people new to Canada. “And you won’t believe this, but I’m helping with a ladies’ Bible study.” Women from many countries now gather in Bonnie’s living room to study God’s word.

Bonnie’s story warmed my heart and reminded me that the time and energy I had spent in our Bible study mattered. When things or people don’t turn out as we’d hoped, we may feel as if our work has been in vain. We may even become discouraged and give up. But that day, I learned that nothing we do in the name of Jesus is meaningless. If we do not lose heart and give up, then someday when we’ve forgotten our efforts or written them off as a loss, our “reward” may just ring the doorbell and tell us stories of grace that will fill our hearts with praise.

**Prayer:** Dear Lord, help us to stay faithful in the work you’ve given us, always remembering its eternal value. Amen.

Rose McCormick Brandon (Ontario, Canada)

## A NEW CREATION

READ Psalm 127:1-5

*“See, I am making all things new.”*

— Revelation 21:5 (NRSV)

My two guides and translators, Kaarel and Taavet, made my visit to Tallinn, Estonia comfortable and convenient. One day our tour included a great open-air theater where music festivals are held, a drive past the presidential residence, and a visit to the museum. As we concluded our tour, Kaarel said, “We are near a house built in the early 1930s that my brother is restoring. Why don’t we drive by and see how things are going?”

As we drove down the tree-lined avenue, I noticed the roof line of a very interesting house. In fact it was the house we were to visit. I was enthralled by its condition — so sturdy and well built. I thought of the words of Jesus, “See, I am making all things new.” The owner was stripping away all that was useless and beginning with new window treatments, a new heating system, and plans to create a totally new house. I remarked how thrilling it will be to see the completed project.

Then I thought how Jesus Christ had transformed my own life. I am not all I can be, but Christ is changing me into a new creation. I will never be the same.

**Prayer:** Dear Lord Jesus, help us to know that we are still under construction. Give us patience and courage to embrace the new life you offer. Amen.

W. David Lewis (Tennessee, USA)

TUES  
JUNE 11  
2019

**THOUGHT FOR THE DAY**  
My Creator is not yet finished making me.

WED  
JUNE 12  
2019

## A SNAKE, A BIBLE, AND ME

READ Lamentations 3:22-26

The psalmist wrote, “Your word is a lamp  
for my feet, a light on my path.”

— Psalm 119:105 (NIV)

Every morning that summer it was just me, my Bible, and a snake. I had flown 750 miles across the country to work at a summer camp. While it was a remarkable place, I couldn't shake the feeling of loneliness. On the outside, I was the typical camp counselor — hair smelling of chlorine, legs glistening in the 105-degree heat, wearing a smile from sunup to sundown. But the truth was, I had never wanted so badly to go home.

### THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

God is good to me —  
all the time.

And yet, when I felt emptiest, God blessed me through a piece of paper someone gave me shortly before I arrived: a list of 100 verses of scripture to memorize.

Every dawn I would wake up before the campers, carefully avoid the armadillo as I hopped off the porch, and find the same spot at the edge of the lake. I would unfold the list, welcome the snake who had moseyed to the rock opposite me, and open my Bible. Never have I had a more peaceful, life-lifting time with God.

Often since then those verses have popped into my mind — relieving me from anxiety, holding me back from temptation, guiding me toward a solution, reminding me to pray. Recalling those hours with God has been a constant reminder of the peace only God can provide.

**Prayer:** Dear God, thank you for meeting us today and every day. We need you more than the bread we eat and the air we breathe. Amen.

Melissa Ferguson (Tennessee, USA)

## GOD CARES FOR ALL OF US

READ Matthew 7:7-12

Give us today our daily bread.

— Matthew 6:11 (NIV)

Our daughter-in-law and four-year-old granddaughter were traveling from Mexico to Tokyo during the approach of Hurricane Harvey. They were scheduled to take a connecting flight out of Houston, Texas, but due to the bad weather, the airport closed shortly after their arrival in Houston. Stranded, they took a taxi to seek shelter at a hotel.

Thankfully, their hotel did not suffer as much damage as others in the area, but because of the emergency status, food supplies were scarce. My wife and I were deeply concerned for them. Each time we ate a meal, we prayed for God to provide for the needs of our daughter-in-law and granddaughter. God did provide sustenance for them, using other people to care for them. Finally, after 10 days, they were able to continue their journey, healthy and safe.

When we ask God to give us today our daily bread, we recognize that God is our provider. May we trust that God will supply what we need.

Especially when our situation feels hopeless, we can put our faith in God.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY  
I will trust God to provide for  
me today and every day.

**Prayer:** Loving God, we give thanks for the blessings you provide for us, and we pray for those who are facing difficult times. We trust your providence. Amen.

José Vergara (Puebla, Mexico)

FRI  
JUNE 14  
2019

## RESTORE POINT

READ 2 Corinthians 5:15-21

*If anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!*

— 2 Corinthians 5:17 (NIV)

This morning, my computer was not working properly. It's old so I'm patient with it, but the screen saver was suddenly different, and all of my emails had disappeared. I remembered that our son had showed me how to create a "restore point," a technique to restore settings on a computer to a prior

time. So I did that, and my screen saver was restored to the current version — and the emails reappeared!

**THOUGHT FOR THE DAY**  
God's grace is always available to help me make a fresh start.

I sometimes wish for a "restore point" in my personal

life. Relationships that once were good can go sour with a single negative encounter that leads to bitterness, resentment, and division. I long to go back to when that relationship was positive and good and satisfying.

God does that for us. Through his death and resurrection, Christ reconciled us, bringing us into communion with God. When I foul things up with a negative word or act or thought, ugliness builds like a darkening sky on a stormy day. But God's grace is always there, able to restore my spirit to a place of peace and hope and love. I can choose to confess my wrongdoing to the other person and to God, then ask for forgiveness and for God's help to see the good in the person I am at odds with. Often for me, this is a daily process to restore communion with others and with God. Thanks to God's grace, I can choose to be restored.

**Prayer:** Dear Lord, help us to keep our hearts pure and clean toward you and toward others. Amen.

Susan Parr (Indiana, USA)

## CONFIDENCE IN GOD

READ Joshua 1:1-9

*The prophet wrote, "The Sovereign LORD is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer, he enables me to tread on the heights."*

— Habakkuk 3:19 (NIV)

A few years ago, I volunteered with a disaster-relief organization. Even though my background was in social work, part of my job would be to get supplies from local hardware stores for the construction sites. During orientation I was dropped off at a hardware store with a two-page list of items to find. I had no clue what some of these items were, so my first response was fear. I saw three ways to respond. One was to let self-pity and doubt overwhelm me. *I should have never taken this position. I don't know what I am doing. I will look like a fool doing it.* The second response could be in anger: *Why is this organization making me do this? They should know I don't know what these items are.* Or third, I could respond with a confident attitude

— confidence not in myself but in God. I had no clue what I was doing but God did. After all, the Lord said, "I will lead the blind by ways

they have not known, along unfamiliar paths I will guide them . . . I will not forsake them" (Isa. 42:16). I knew that God had called me to do this work, so I chose the third response.

Whenever challenges come our way, we can choose to trust God. On our own we may be lost, but with the Lord we can handle any problem. God is always faithful.

**Prayer:** Dear Lord, thank you for your wisdom and guidance. Amen.

Melissa Wilson (Pennsylvania, USA)

SAT  
JUNE 15  
2019

**THOUGHT FOR THE DAY**  
Because God is with me,  
I can be confident.

SUN  
JUNE 16  
2019

## OUR FATHER'S BUSINESS

READ Luke 2:41-52

*[Jesus] said unto them, How is it that ye sought me? [know] ye not that I must be about my Father's business?*

— Luke 2:49 (KJV)

My father taught his children many valuable lessons — the foremost being that we were to revere the name of God at all

### THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Every day I can deliver God's love and grace to a weary world.

times and to honor the love and unity of our family.

From the time I was very young, my father seemed to place a great amount of trust in me. In the safe and

secure environment of our little town, he would send me to the bank to deposit sums of cash from the sales generated at his place of business. Within two months after my sixteenth birthday, having received my driver's license, my father allowed me to drive 120 miles to an out-of-state city to pick up supplies from the headquarters of his company. It felt good to "be about my father's business," to represent him in what I thought to be important affairs.

For years now, I have also represented my heavenly Father's business — the most important in the world. It amazes me that God entrusts the affairs and cares of the human soul to us disciples. Though for years I preached sermons with words from the pulpits of churches, today I preach with my daily words and actions.

**Prayer:** Father God, teach us to be trustworthy in serving you by serving others. Amen.

Wil I. Jackson (North Carolina, USA)

## OPPORTUNITY

READ John 14:23-27

Jesus said, "Peace I leave with you."

— John 14:27 (NIV)

"Grandma, we've got a problem!" That's my grandson Cesare's favorite phrase. At this point I remind him that we have an opportunity for God to find a solution. Problems do indeed arise, seemingly every day. But the choice of how we handle them is ours. We can either allow fear to well up on the inside, or we can take our problems to the Lord. The sooner we turn them over to God, the sooner we'll feel God's peace.

In John 14, Jesus said that he came to give us peace. He knew the imperfections in our world, and he knew that we could never handle them on our own. He also knew that every day each one of us will face something that will require his help. That's why Jesus said that the peace he gives us is not like what the world tries to give. The world's peace is superficial. Although it may suppress our problems for the moment, it's not lasting.

So today the choice is ours. What will we do the next time a problem arises? Will we dwell on the problem? Or will we make a conscious choice to turn it over to God?

### THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

With God's help I can view challenges as opportunities.

**Prayer:** Dear God, help us remember to call on you for the problems and fears we face. In the name of the Prince of Peace, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Del Bates (Florida, USA)

TUES  
JUNE 18  
2019

## SOWING GOD'S WORD

READ Romans 11:33-36

*Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God!*

— Romans 11:33 (NIV)

In my retirement I have taken on the challenge of distributing New Testaments to people I meet. One day, I visited

### THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

We can give no greater gift than the word of God.

a friend who wanted me to read to him from the Bible. After I left, I met three teenage boys. I offered one of them a New Testament, but he refused. "I don't need that stuff!" he said. This was my first effort in giving away one of the New Testaments I had brought with me, so I was disappointed. Some minutes later I met another boy of about the same age. He received my gift with a broad smile and said, "Thank you!" He even gave me a hug.

Later in the afternoon I met two young women from Lithuania, who happened to know my Norwegian language. They were each happy to get a copy of the New Testament.

These experiences have made me think about the words from Ecclesiastes 11:6: "Sow your seed in the morning, and at evening let your hands not be idle, for you do not know which will succeed, whether this or that, or whether both will do equally well."

There is always time and opportunity for us to sow the seed of the gospel. We may have disappointments, but we also will receive great blessings.

**Prayer:** Dear Lord, thank you for giving us different ways to serve you. Help us to follow where you lead us. Amen.

Anne-Lise Aure (Sunnmøre, Norway)

## NOW IS THE TIME

READ Luke 18:1-8

*Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be courageous; be strong. Do everything in love.*

— 1 Corinthians 16:13-14 (NIV)

The person who co-teaches a Bible class with me is always proclaiming what a great era we are living in. Some people readily agree, but a few roll their eyes as if to say, "Doesn't he read the papers that daily cover the turmoil we live in?" We are surrounded by reports of wars, political unrest, identity thefts, disease, abuse, drugs, and persecution of Christians in certain parts of the world. This could lead us to believe that the world is falling apart.

When the world sees uncertainty and chaos, isn't it possible for the church and individual Christians to see opportunity? What better time to proclaim to the world a God we can depend on? We need only to read scripture and know that God is in control. Jesus explains in Luke 18:6-8 that those who cry out to God will get justice, and then, wanting to spur the listeners to greater faith, he asks, "When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?" Just imagine how much we can do! Now is the time for Christians to live their faith.

### THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

No matter what is going on around me, I will stand steadfast for Christ.

**Prayer:** God of justice, help us to be more like your Son and to stand firm in sharing the gospel with the world. Amen.

Walter N. Maris (Missouri, USA)

THUR  
JUNE 20  
2019

## ACTIVE PARTICIPATION

READ Revelation 3:15-22

*Because you are lukewarm — neither hot nor cold  
— I am about to spit you out of my mouth.*

— Revelation 3:16 (NIV)

As I entered my fitness center in January, I noticed many new faces — people armed with their New Year's resolutions

### THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

God wants our active participation.

to get fit. But as I did my usual circuit, I noticed that some of these new people were just sitting on the weight machines looking at their phones rather than

actively moving — as if just spending time in a fitness center would make them more physically fit.

Don't we sometimes approach our spiritual walk with God in the same way? We may own a nice Bible but not read it. We may join a ministry but not take on any tasks to contribute. We may go to church every Sunday but just sit there expecting the choir, liturgists, and pastor to put in all the effort for us. Scripture tells us that we are not to be lukewarm in our faith.

Our walk with God is an active process and requires time, attention, and full participation. Others cannot do the work for us. Rather than being lukewarm we need to be fully invested in our quest to be more like Jesus. The rewards are immense — and eternal.

*Prayer:* Dear Lord, stir up our desire to be closer to you and to actively work toward growing in our relationship with you. Amen.

Margaret Anderson (Kansas, USA)

## FINDING REST

READ Psalm 77:1-12

*The psalmist wrote, "I remembered  
my songs in the night."*

— Psalm 77:6 (NIV)

My wife, Mercy, lay on the hospital bed, struggling with severe pain as cancer cells spread through her body. Even then she enjoyed hearing and singing Christian songs. She rested her head on the table near the bed as she listened to her music. She also prayed for her fellow patients.

Mercy particularly liked to sing one song, which invites us to come to Jesus when we are weary and lean on Jesus to rest. She told me that she found great comfort leaning on Jesus — just as the song said. On September 17, 2005, she placed her head in my hands. Her breathing slowed as she entered her heavenly home for eternal rest.

Even though her death created a void for me and my dear ones, I thank God for Mercy's witness. She could remain calm and sing even when she passed through her deepest darkness. Such a faithful witness was the result of her experience of leaning on Jesus. Her life and death continue to give hope to all who knew her.

### THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

When we are weary we can lean on Jesus.

*Prayer:* Dear Lord Jesus, we pray for all who suffer from deadly diseases. Be with them as they pass through the valley of deepest darkness. Enable them to lean on you and find rest. Amen.

T. G. Johnson (Kerala, India)

SAT  
JUNE 22  
2019

## MORE THAN SKIN DEEP

READ Proverbs 31:10-30

*Charm is deceptive, and beauty is fleeting; but a woman who fears the LORD is to be praised.*

— Proverbs 31:30 (NIV)

Lately when I look in the mirror, I notice the inevitable signs of aging. It is hard to accept in a culture where we are

### THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

God is more interested  
in what's in my heart  
than how I look.

bombarded by commercials for pricey skin care products that promise we will be “ageless” if we use them. Celebrities who spend vast amounts

of money and time to look younger are offered as ideals of beauty. It's no wonder many of us feel bad about how we look on the outside.

But we serve a God who loves us for what's on the inside and who wants us to love ourselves as well. And when we focus on what God loves in us, we will find true joy. God tells us just the opposite of what the world says, that our spiritual selves are more important than what's on the outside.

No one is truly ageless. In fact, all of us will perish one day. But what's on the inside will shine before others as we share Christ with them; and that same spirit will carry us into eternal life.

**Prayer:** Dear Lord, help us to remember that the way we reflect the image of Christ can influence everyone around us. Help us to reflect your love to others as we pray, “Father, hal-  
lowed be your name, your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive every-  
one who sins against us. And lead us not into temptation”  
(Luke 11:2-4, NIV). Amen.

Jenny McBride (Alabama, USA)

## ENCOUNTERING GOD

READ Isaiah 6:1-8

*I saw the Lord, high and exalted, seated on a throne; and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him were seraphim, each with six wings.*

— Isaiah 6:1-2 (NIV)

More than 30 years ago, I was working at a faith-based human-services agency. On a dangerously cold night, we kept our building open so that three men could come in off the streets to stay warm. We all spent a fairly restless night.

As I was leaving the next morning, the phone rang, and a scratchy voice asked for a delivery of water since her pipes had frozen during the night. Reluctantly, I took two gallons of water nearby to a large house in a state of dilapidation. Facing me at the door was a woman swathed in blankets and coats which made her seem twice as large as she actually was. Once inside, I found that she had received no visitors for over a year.

With her Bible open, she proceeded to regale me with pas-  
sages about kindness and service. Over her shoulder, I saw a picture of Jesus. As I sat there, the two images — my hostess and the Sunday school Jesus — fused into one. Up until then, when I imagined God's call, I thought of the Isaiah passage above. This was nothing like that. However, I realized that in this unlikely place, I had been given a vision of holiness unlike anything I had ever experienced before. I felt a call from God which I have never forgotten.

### THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

I can encounter God's holiness  
in the most unlikely places.

**Prayer:** O God, help us always to be open to your presence and leading in our lives. Amen.

Robert S. Boggs (South Carolina, USA)

MON  
JUNE 24  
2019

## LIMITED VISION

READ Psalm 78:9-16

*I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you with my loving eye on you.*

— Psalm 32:8 (NIV)

After breakfast, my husband, daughter, and I hurried to the observation car of the train eager to see the way ahead.

### THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

God knows the way and will lead me forward.

The side and back windows were all clear, allowing us to watch the steep rock faces, lakes, or forests — and even passing trains. We could also see the track behind us.

But the iced-over front window kept us from seeing the way ahead.

In my disappointment I thought about the twists and turns of life that prevent me from seeing where I am headed. It reminded me of the Israelites when they left Egypt, heading for the Promised Land (Exod. 12-14). They did not know the way. What's more, at one point the Red Sea blocked the path before them, and the Egyptians closed in behind them. Yet God never left them alone — parting the sea and then leading them with a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. (See Exod. 13:22.)

God had a plan for the people and asked for their trust in being led safely to the Promised Land. On that train trip, I needed to trust that the engineer had a clear view through his window so that we would arrive at our destination. In life, our vision is limited, which can make our way seem treacherous; but we can trust our God who knows the way.

**Prayer:** Dear God, when the path ahead is not clear, help us trust you to lead us safely to our destination. Amen.

Carol Harrison (Saskatchewan, Canada)

## LIKE FLOWERS IN THE FIELD

READ Matthew 6:25-34

*The desert and the parched land will be glad; the wilderness will rejoice and blossom. Like the crocus, it will burst into bloom; it will rejoice greatly and shout for joy. . . . they will see the glory of the LORD, the splendor of our God.*

— Isaiah 35:1-2 (NIV)

As I was walking with my mother this morning, we noticed lilies growing among the overgrown grass and weeds in a lot that has sat abandoned since Hurricane Katrina in 2005. It was both striking and touching to see an example of such beauty in the midst of such ugliness. It brought to my mind the words of Jesus telling us not to worry about what we shall wear or eat because God knows what we need and will provide it for us.

In the same way that my mother and I could not see the bulb underground being nourished to eventually become a beautiful flower, we may not notice when God is hard at work in our lives. But much like a flower in bloom, the beauty and splendor of the end result will be visible to all.

### THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Though I may not see it, God is always at work in my life.

**Prayer:** Dear God, thank you for being a steadfast presence of love in our lives. Help us to trust that you are at work even when we cannot see it. In the name of Jesus, we pray. Amen.

Patrick Castleberry (Mississippi, USA)

Prayer Focus: THOSE STRUGGLING TO FEEL GOD'S PRESENCE

WED  
JUNE 26  
2019

## SHOWING HONOR

READ Ephesians 4:29-32

*Love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor.*

— Romans 12:10 (NRSV)

“You’re a good man, Bert.” My husband looked at me in surprise. After the morning we’d had, he didn’t expect to hear these words — at least not until he’d spent more time in the doghouse. Even though I wasn’t feeling a lot of love and admiration for my husband at that moment, I knew he loved me; and I didn’t want my unforgiving attitude to damage our relationship.

**THOUGHT FOR THE DAY**  
Following God’s charge to honor others changes the course of my day.

It was incredible how quickly our day improved once I changed my attitude. Every time I choose to honor Bert rather than chiding him about something or giving him the silent treatment, I feel better about him, myself, and our marriage. I’m sure he feels the same way when he responds kindly after I’ve been unkind to him. From what I’ve heard from others, I know we’re not the only people who could benefit from today’s quoted verse. I especially love the part, “outdo one another in showing honor.”

Rather than keeping score with our spouse, sibling, co-worker, or friend, we can instead ask God to show us new ways to love and honor those around us — especially on the days when they need affection and respect the most.

**Prayer:** Dear Lord, help us to affirm and to show honor to those around us today. Amen.

Sheryl H. Boldt (Florida, USA)

## GOD DOES THE REST

READ 1 Peter 4:10-11

*Do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.*

— Isaiah 41:10 (NIV)

My good friend Fred has taught me a lot about serving the Lord. Fred started his career as a high school teacher but was troubled by seeing hurting students making poor life choices. He felt a calling to do something to help. After much prayer with his wife, Dorothy, Fred resigned from teaching and started a ministry to help at-risk youth find a life with Jesus Christ. That leap of faith 38 years ago has helped thousands of at-risk teens, and the ministry still thrives today.

After ensuring successful leadership transition, Fred “retired” from the youth ministry; but he wasn’t finished serving. In 2004 he started a second ministry to help ex-felons make the challenging transition back into society. Like the youth ministry, the focus is on a personal relationship with Christ, and the ministry is still going strong today.

I once asked Fred what motivated Dorothy and him to be such faithful servants for the Lord. He humbly replied, “We just said yes. God did the rest.” What a great reminder that God doesn’t require us to be special or talented. We just need to say yes, and God can do the rest.

**THOUGHT FOR THE DAY**  
When I say yes, God will do the rest.

**Prayer:** Dear God, thank you for never leaving us no matter what we encounter. Help us to be humble servants for your kingdom, always trusting in you. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

John D. Bown (Minnesota, USA)

FRI  
JUNE 28  
2019

## DON'T BE AFRAID

READ 2 Kings 6:8-23

*[Elisha] replied, "Do not be afraid, for there are more with us than there are with them."*

— 2 Kings 6:16 (NRSV)

We opened a learning center for children in a mountain village. One day, a group of people came to our house, wanting to close the center. One of our children ran up and said, "Mom, there are a lot of people coming to our house, shouting. What should we do, Mom? Call the police!" But then our youngest child said, "Let us pray, Mom." We joined hands in prayer to the Lord Jesus.

### THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

When I am afraid, I will pray and trust God.

Soon a rain storm began. The area in front of our house flooded, but the flood did not come into our yard. Most of the people in front of the house disbanded and ran away. Only three of their leaders remained in front of our house.

Our youngest child's response reminds me of Elisha when he was surrounded by his enemies. While Elisha's servant responded with fear, Elisha prayed for God's help. Remembering what Elisha did, we invited the three chilled leaders into our house. We gave them a change of clothes and provided hot tea and food for them. One of them asked, "Why do you treat us so well?" I replied, "Because God loves you and wants us to do all this for you." After the rain stopped, the people apologized and left our house. May we remember that God is greater than anyone and can free us from fear.

**Prayer:** Dear God, thank you for your protection of us each day. Help us trust you and give our fears to you. Amen.

Linda Chandra (Banten, Indonesia)

## FROM WORRY TO JOY

READ Psalm 40:1-3

*Jesus said, "I've said these things to you so that you will have peace in me. In the world you have distress. But be encouraged! I have conquered the world."*

— John 16:33 (CEB)

During my afternoon walks, I enjoy listening to the birds sing, watching the trees sway, and hearing the buzz of activity. However, on this afternoon, the rain poured and my eyes were focused downward on the road. I had never noticed the cracks in the road or the occasional pothole. I felt I needed to watch my every step for fear of stumbling. Then my neighbor Mark drove up and rolled down his window. With just a few words from my neighbor, I no longer thought about the obstacles in my path. Instead, my thoughts were of Mark's kindness.

Sometimes stress and the troubles of life are like the rain, keeping us from looking up and seeing God's blessings. Instead we only focus on our problems.

Maybe today we can share a kind word and help someone look up from their difficulties to find joy and peace in God.

**Prayer:** Dear God, when we are burdened with the stress of this world, help us to realize that you are the great Comforter. Amen.

Randy Jennings (Virginia, USA)

### THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

When I share a kind word, I show the love of Christ.

SUN  
JUNE 30  
2019

## LIKE A FOREST

READ Romans 15:1-7

*Accept one another . . . just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.*

— Romans 15:7 (NIV)

As my husband and I drove through the forest to our campsite, I studied the trees along the road. One had some dead branches, another a broken top; still others had bent limbs or odd shapes. In fact every tree seemed to have some imperfection — yet together they formed a vibrant, green forest full of life. They provided shade for ferns and orchids and homes for any number of animals — from tiger swallowtail butterflies to white-tailed deer. And they gave us a peaceful place to camp and enjoy nature. Even the dead trees had a specific purpose; they were rotting into compost to nourish younger plants.

**THOUGHT FOR THE DAY**  
Though we are scarred and imperfect, God builds the church with us.

That forest reminded me of the people who make up God's church. We all have scars and imperfections. We make mistakes. Yet together we can form something beautiful. We can bring forgiveness to the broken, strengthen the tempted, and pick up the fallen so that they — in turn — can do the same for us. Instead of condemning those who make mistakes, we can offer a listening ear and a helping hand. Together we can become a community that serves God and helps those in need while strengthening one another.

**Prayer:** Dear God, help us to accept others and love them as you do, despite their imperfections — and despite our own. Amen.

Susan Thogerson Maas (Oregon, USA)

## 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](http://www.upperroom.org/resources/a-guide-for-small-groups)

### MAY 1: *"Visiting Willy"*

1. Describe a time when your small actions made a big difference for someone. How did this experience encourage you?
2. Who in your life, like Willy, simply needs to be heard? How will you make sure this person knows that you hear and love them?
3. Do you have loved ones who have suffered a stroke or some other debilitating health issue? In what ways do you show them Christ's love? In what ways do you encourage them?
4. Today's writer witnesses through his actions, rather than always talking about God. Is it always beneficial to witness primarily through actions or does it depend on the situation?

5. Willy said, “That isn’t for me. I am good where I’m at.” Have there been times in your life when you’ve felt a similar way about God? What caused you to feel this way, and what brought you back to God?

#### MAY 8: *“A Talent to Share”*

1. Today’s writer helped Aung Lin by bringing him food and money and by showing God’s love to him. What does showing God’s love to others look like to you?
2. What talents do you possess that you can use to help others and glorify God? If you have talents that you don’t share with others, what is holding you back?
3. Does your church or your community have an organized effort to help refugees and others in need? If so, describe it. If not, what are some ways you could help on your own and encourage others to join you?
4. Is it difficult for you to find the time and energy to serve others? Like the author, do you wonder if you can make a difference in other people’s lives? How do you combat these doubts and difficulties?
5. Recall a time when God led you to someone in need. How did you respond? How do you make sure that your heart and mind are open to those who need your help?

#### MAY 15: *“Not Afraid”*

1. Have you or a loved one been given a scary diagnosis? How did you overcome the fear you felt? What scripture passages comforted you during that time?
2. Describe an experience that reminded you that God was bigger than your problems. How does that experience encourage you now?
3. Recall a time when you relied on God to help you overcome fear. Did you experience relief from the weight of worry? What did that look like for you?
4. What can you do to encourage someone who is dealing with health issues? How can your church community show them love and help them through this challenging time?

5. When in your life have you had the choice to trust God or give in to fear? What did you choose? What scripture passages and spiritual practices helped you make your decision?

#### MAY 22: *“Keep Watch”*

1. Describe a situation when you were not on the front lines of God’s work. Did you remain engaged in the situation or did you remove yourself from it? Why?
2. What does it look like to keep watch and remain engaged in the work of God? What spiritual practices help to keep you excited about God’s work in the world?
3. What opportunities does your church offer that allow you to engage in the work of God? Do you participate on the front lines? If so, describe your experience. If not, how do you support and engage with those opportunities from the sidelines?
4. Have you ever had a friend who was going through trials and needed you to keep watch with them, as Jesus asked of his disciples? How were you able to remain engaged and provide support and companionship for this person?
5. How do you know when you are being called to work on the front lines or to cheer from the sidelines? Have there been times when you did not like what God was calling you to do? Describe those times and explain how you responded.

#### MAY 29: *“Be Still”*

1. When you’re experiencing a crisis, do you find it difficult to be still? Why? What can you do to encourage yourself to lean in and trust God during such times?
2. Recall a time when you did not remain calm during a crisis. Recall a time when you did. What affected your responses in each situation?
3. What scripture passages help you to find peace during times of struggle? Do you find comfort in fellowship with other believers during these times or do you prefer solitary worship? Why?
4. Have you ever felt like God was not helping you out of a crisis in the way you would have liked? How did you keep trusting in God to resolve the situation even if it was not the resolution you would have chosen?

5. What advice would you give to a friend or loved one who is struggling to remain still during a difficult time? How would you encourage them to find peace?

#### JUNE 5: *“A Walking Testimony”*

1. How do you outwardly express your faith? Do you find it difficult or easy to openly share your faith with others? Why?
2. Who in your life serves as a role model for you in their faith expression, like Lainie does for the writer? Do you think it is important to have faith role models? Why or why not?
3. Have you experienced rejection or anger from others after sharing your faith with them? If not, why do you think you have only had positive experiences? If you have experienced anger or rejection, describe your experience. What was your reaction?
4. Have you ever felt embarrassed to share your faith with others? If so, how did you overcome your embarrassment?
5. How does your church community encourage you to participate in outward expressions of faith? In what ways do you share God with others through your church?

#### JUNE 12: *“A Snake, a Bible, and Me”*

1. Today’s writer describes her spiritual practice of memorizing scripture verses. Do you memorize scripture as a part of your spiritual practice? If so, how does this help your faith journey? What other spiritual practices do you participate in that strengthen your relationship with God?
2. When you’re feeling lonely and homesick, how do you find peace and comfort? How does your faith help you through these times?
3. The writer enjoyed communing with God by the lake. Do you enjoy spending time with God in nature as well? If so, what do you appreciate most about it? If not, what is your preferred location for spending time with God and why?
4. Someone encouraged the writer by giving her a list of Bible verses to memorize while she was away from home. Who in your community is far from home right now? How can you

encourage them and show them God’s love?

5. When have you felt God’s peace during a difficult time? How did feeling God’s peace change your experience?

#### JUNE 19: *“Now Is the Time”*

1. Would you agree that we are living in a great era? Why or why not? How does your faith affect your answer?
2. What does it mean to live your faith during difficult times? How will you use the opportunities you have to proclaim the gospel to an uncertain world?
3. What do you think is the most effective way your church reaches out to the community? Why do you think it is the most effective?
4. What scripture passages encourage you when you feel overwhelmed by the negative events in the world? Why do they bring you such comfort?
5. Do you find it difficult to remain steadfast for Christ when you see pain in the world? How do you keep your faith strong despite trials and suffering? What advice would you give a loved one who is struggling to remain steadfast in their faith?

#### JUNE 26: *“Showing Honor”*

1. Describe a time when you experienced tension in a relationship and how you responded. Did you embrace a new attitude and change the situation, or did you remain in tension? How does your mind-set affect your interactions with others?
2. In what ways do you honor those around you? How have you been honored by others? What does it mean to you to “outdo one another in showing honor”?
3. Whom in your life have you had tension with lately? How can you turn that situation into one of love and respect?
4. How do you avoid keeping score with those around you? What practices help you to love and honor those who offend you or wrong you?
5. When members of your church or community have disagreements, how do they resolve them? What does this teach you about how you would like to respond to conflict in your life?



