

JANUARY - FEBRUARY 2019

GST #128363256

THE UPPER ROOM®

WHERE THE WORLD MEETS TO PRAY

Stephen D. Bryant, Publisher

34 LANGUAGES

Invitational

ARMENIAN
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CATALAN
CHINESE
DUTCH
ENGLISH
ESTONIAN
FRENCH

Interdenominational

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International

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COVER ART INTERPRETATION

Flight into Egypt

Artist: Eugene-Alexis Giradet
(France, 1853-1907)

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

French artist Eugene-Alexis Giradet's inspiration for the art on the cover comes from the second chapter of Matthew in which Mary and Joseph, out of fear for the life of their newborn son, flee to Egypt.

Perhaps the artist imagined Joseph, Mary, and the baby leaving Bethlehem in the darkness of night and traveling for some time on rough ground. In *Flight to Egypt*, Giradet captures the moment when the sun appears on the horizon after a difficult night's journey. Bright yellows touch the higher landscapes while the valleys and villages are barely visible in the still sleeping shades of pink and tan. The family, traveling on a high ridge, catches a glimpse of morning light. It shines through Mary's veil, illuminating her face and the infant Jesus. Long shadows fall along the feet and staff of Joseph, but he looks toward the dawning sky. I can almost feel Joseph's sense of relief in the warmth and hope that came with the morning sun.

While our eyes are drawn to Mary and her baby, I have to wonder about Joseph. We remember Joseph as a man of amazing faith and obedience to God. But what must his family and friends have thought of him? *He is taking Mary and their newborn son on an eighty-mile journey because of some dream he had? He just gets up in the middle of the night and takes off to Egypt? What is he thinking?*

For Joseph, it seems to be about obedience. Joseph trusted God and did what God asked him to do. What about us today? Are we the ones asking, *What is he thinking? What is she doing?* Or are we the Josephs in the story, doing what God asks us even when we don't understand it at the time? Like Joseph, we too can find reassurance in the dawning of God's light and direction.

Living Resolutions

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles.

— Acts 2:42-43 (NIV)

As a new year begins, I hear conversations about resolutions and goals. We make lists on social media of books we plan to read, places we want to travel, habits we hope to break or take up. Sometimes I wonder if we get too caught up in listing and talking about our hopes and goals. After all, *talking* about the fresh start offered by our New Year's resolutions is the easy part. *Living* those resolutions can be much more challenging.

In this issue of *The Upper Room*, many of our writers share stories about the challenge and importance of actions that reflect Christ's grace, love, and mercy to the world — standing up to bullies, serving others without recognition, attending to the small details of daily life. In Acts 2, the early Christian community broke bread together, spent time in fellowship with one another, gave to those in need, and praised God. These actions led others to explore the way of Christ and forged the community that became the church.

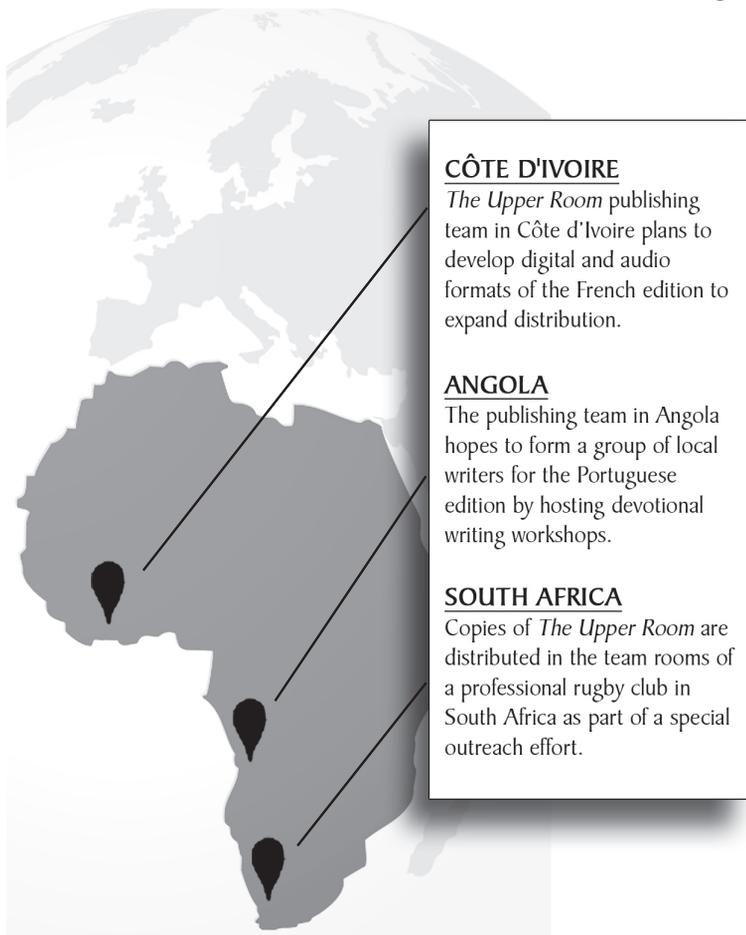
In my experience, the faithful actions and attitudes of others have helped me to see Christ in the world, inspiring me to live in more Christlike ways. I think of friends and family who have prayed for and supported me in times of grief and joy. I think of mentors who have listened deeply and given me the gift of presence when I needed guidance.

As you read, reflect, and pray, I hope you will consider these questions: Where do you see Christ at work in your life and in your community? How will you live a life that honors Christ this year? I hope that for all of us, 2019 will be a year filled with the joy of serving Christ through serving others.



— Lindsay Gray
Editorial Director

Where the World Meets to Pray



CÔTE D'IVOIRE

The *Upper Room* publishing team in Côte d'Ivoire plans to develop digital and audio formats of the French edition to expand distribution.

ANGOLA

The publishing team in Angola hopes to form a group of local writers for the Portuguese edition by hosting devotional writing workshops.

SOUTH AFRICA

Copies of *The Upper Room* are distributed in the team rooms of a professional rugby club in South Africa as part of a special outreach effort.

Gifts to the international editions of
The Upper Room help the World Meet to Pray.

www.upperroom.org/gift

NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTION

TUES
JAN 1
2019

READ Psalm 67:1-7*

*Truly my soul finds rest in God; my salvation
comes from him.*

— Psalm 62:1 (NIV)

It was New Year's Eve and while everyone else was busy preparing for the evening events, I was still thinking about what my New Year's resolution would be. Then it occurred to me that my family could probably suggest some good resolutions. After all, they know me better than anyone. I carefully considered all of the suggestions and decided on just being me. They probably suggested this

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
How do I want the Lord to help me be me in the coming year?

because I often worry about everyone else so much that I get lost in their problems, which leaves me no time to just be me. That night as I was getting into my pj's, I was thinking about what I could do to make this resolution work. Then it hit me: I didn't have to plan! All I needed was my salvation, my family, and my God.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, be with us all year long. Help us to focus on you in all that we do, and help us to trust that you are right by our side every day. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

Bristol E. DeSpain (Missouri)

Prayer Focus: YOUNG WRITERS

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

WED
JAN 2
2019

“WHERE IS THE NEW?”

READ 2 Corinthians 5:16-21

Whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable . . . think about these things.

— Philippians 4:8 (NRSV)

It was December 31, and three-year-old Julu was excited and happy, playing and singing repeatedly, “Tomorrow is the New Year. Everything will be new tomorrow!” After supper, with much expectation, Julu went off to sleep.

Early the next morning Julu got up, ran outside, then came back to the drawing room. In a loud disappointed voice he

asked, “Where is the new? Nothing is new outside; there is nothing new inside. Where is the New Year?”

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

How am I leading a Christ-centered life?

Then I wondered if sometimes I can’t see the

newness in my life. Suddenly Bible verses about newness came to mind. Second Corinthians 5:17 reminded me, “If anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come” (NIV). I asked myself, *Am I in Christ today?* What are the signs that I am a new creation? Philippians 4:8 gives a clue: Whatever is true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, praiseworthy is what I am to think about constantly. A second clue comes from Galatians 5:22-23. If I am a new creation, the fruit of the Spirit — “love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control” — will be evident in my life. Thank God for the chance to become a new creation in Christ!

Prayer: Dear God, give us wisdom to guide us in our life’s journey, and lead us to life eternal. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

Sriparna Mahanty (Odisha, India)

GOD’S TREE CLIMBERS

READ Luke 19:1-10

Jesus said to Zacchaeus, “Hurry and come down; for I must stay at your house today.”

— Luke 19:5 (NRSV)

Zacchaeus was a wealthy tax collector, who also happened to be short in stature. His wealth could buy him access to many things, but a front-row seat to see Jesus wasn’t one of them. Instead, Zacchaeus had to resort to climbing a tree in order to catch a glimpse of Jesus.

To me, even the thought of clambering up a tree trunk is more than a little scary. Yet Zacchaeus was willing to risk perhaps a futile climb and personal embarrassment for the chance to see Jesus.

Jesus asks us to come to him with the innocence of a child. (See Matt. 18:3.) No wonder that when

Jesus saw Zacchaeus in a tree, he immediately offered to pay him a visit. As a result, Zacchaeus’s life was changed: He gave to the poor, made restitution to those he had cheated, and, most importantly, received salvation.

Jesus came to seek and save the lost — and whether we are up a tree or lost in the woods, I take comfort in the fact that Jesus longs to rescue us. Whenever I feel unsure or embarrassed about the next step God is calling me to take, I remember Zacchaeus. If he was willing to take a risk just to see Jesus, how much more should I be willing to risk *following* the Master?

Prayer: Father God, grant us the courage and humility to seek your son, even when it seems risky to do so. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

Phillip Catterton (Kansas)

THUR
JAN 3
2019

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

It’s risky to walk with Jesus, but the rewards are eternal.

FRI
JAN 4
2019

COMFORT AFTER LOSS

READ Jeremiah 31:12-14

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

— Matthew 5:4 (NIV)

I always assumed that I would have children. A year after my husband and I married, we were ecstatic to learn that we were expecting our first child. But two weeks later, we lost the child to an early miscarriage, and we were left reeling in grief. It was incredible how attached we had already grown in just thirteen short days to that tiny life growing inside of me. Gleefully, we'd shared our news with many friends and family members, unable to hold back our excitement. Now, we had to mourn the child we would never get the chance to know.

I cried many tears over that lost baby, and every dream we lost along with it — the dream of holding our baby, of hearing his or her first word, of seeing our child grow and develop a unique personality. Having no idea

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
Mourning leads me to seek God's comfort.

whether a healthy pregnancy would be in our future was distressing and scary. Would we ever become parents?

Even in our grief and suffering we were blessed. Our church community, family, and friends surrounded us with love and compassion, listening and comforting us as we grieved. Through our shared grief, my husband and I came to understand and trust one another and God more deeply. In Christ, we found strength to move forward. Eventually we were able to have two healthy children; but God's presence during that time of grief assured us that no matter what had happened, God would still have been good.

Prayer: Dear God, thank you for comforting us when we mourn. Remind us that mourning is a blessing, for it draws us closer to you. Amen.

Kate Underwood (Illinois)

10 *Prayer Focus:* THOSE GRIEVING A MISCARRIAGE

GOOD-NEWS CARRIERS

READ Romans 10:12-18

How can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can anyone preach unless they are sent? As it is written: "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!"

— Romans 10:14-15 (NIV)

As a young person, I was a newspaper carrier. Every afternoon like clockwork, my trusty black and white bicycle and I could be found on the streets of my route. I persevered through all kinds of weather so that my customers could read in detail the happenings outside the confines of their homes. I felt privileged that so many trusted me to provide this benefit to their lives, and I took the responsibility seriously.

The apostles were called to spread a much greater news of their time, the news of Jesus — his life and message. Traveling the countryside, they spread the good news of God's love and the sacrifice of Jesus Christ so that the people's sins could be forgiven. And what a message! Jesus was sent to earth for all men and women of all races, whether rich or poor, powerful or not so powerful. Jesus is Lord, the Son of God.

The apostles faced many obstacles beyond extremes of weather. Rejection, prison, and even death stood in the path of these carriers of the gospel, yet they persevered. We too can follow the apostles' example and find opportunities each day to spread the good news.

Prayer: Dear Lord, may we always be ready to share your word when we have opportunity. Amen.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
Every day I will look for opportunities to share the gospel.

Michael J. M. Hotchkiss (Texas)

Prayer Focus: POSTAL WORKERS

11

SUN
JAN 6
2019

GOD OF RESTORATION

READ **Philippians 4:10-13**

The LORD restored the fortunes of Job when he had prayed for his friends; and the LORD gave Job twice as much as he had before.

— Job 42:10 (NRSV)

In January 1995 our family went through a very difficult time. While we were away on holiday, an early morning knock at the door brought news that our car had been vandalized and our house burned almost entirely to the ground. What we had in our suitcases and what we were wearing were now all that we owned.

Throughout this crisis, God's helping hand was immediate. We were able to stay in the church manse which was vacant at the time. It was a comfortable accommodation and was offered free of charge for six months. Then a Christian friend organized a fund-raiser for us, which we accepted with gratitude. Another friend gave us a Bible, which I still cherish.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

I am assured of God's love, even in the most difficult circumstances.

While we lost many precious items, our lives were safe — and we experienced love that we will never forget.

We now live on two and a half acres of land in the

country; God's blessings have continued daily, and we have learned that no loss is too big for God to restore.

Prayer: We thank you, God, for always watching over us — especially in our struggles. Amen.

Margaret Young (New South Wales, Australia)

THE NEW IS HERE!

READ **Isaiah 43:18-21**

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

— 2 Corinthians 5:17 (NIV)

Each New Year is another chance to achieve what we have not yet achieved. This year I want to be a hard-working student and athlete. However, I sometimes worry that my past failures will affect my future. Second Corinthians 5 tells us that God does not count our failures and sins against us as long as we are living in Christ. Being afraid that we cannot accomplish our dreams because of our past affects our successes in the future.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

I will not let the past take my focus away from God's purpose for me.

Scripture tells us not to worry; we are a new creation. Relying on God's word, I try to keep on track with my studies through continual review and listening closely to my teachers' directions. In the same way, I keep up with my running through practice and mental discipline.

I cannot realize these goals, however, apart from my focus on God. Doing what God wants is our main focus; our love for God motivates us to work hard to achieve our goals. Our purpose in everything we do is to glorify God. As we move into the future, we can rely on God no matter what happens in any New Year.

Prayer: God of new beginnings, be with us during this New Year. Let our past failures drift away. Help us to enjoy new days in your presence. Amen.

Robert Ganzert (North Carolina)

TUES
JAN 8
2019

THE PROMISE OF FORGIVENESS

READ Matthew 6:9-15

If you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.

— Matthew 6:14 (NIV)

Years ago I found myself sitting on the front steps of my house while the person sitting beside me was breaking my heart. In tears and anger, I pushed the hurt deep down inside and thought, *I'll get back at him one day.* I wish I had said,

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
In gratitude for God's forgiveness, I will forgive others.

"I forgive you." It took me a long time to learn that holding on to anger and refusing to forgive someone doesn't take the pain away. It only makes it linger.

Scripture reminds us that in order to be forgiven, we must forgive. I don't know anyone who doesn't want or need forgiveness from time to time. Yet sometimes we hold on to bitterness and lose the very thing that could set us free — the act of forgiving.

Choosing to forgive doesn't mean that the other person gets off without any consequences. It means that we give up our right to take matters into our own hands and instead trust God to do what only God can do. If we ask with a repentant heart, God is willing to forgive. As children of God, we can choose to be just as willing to forgive others.

Prayer: Dear Lord, help us to forgive those who have wronged us, just as you forgive us. Amen.

Christine Baker (Louisiana)

LOOK AROUND

WED
JAN 9
2019

READ Jeremiah 2:4-8

The LORD says: What wrong did your ancestors find in me that made them wander so far? They pursued what was worthless and became worthless.

— Jeremiah 2:5 (CEB)

I have a double stroller for my twin daughters. Its rigid canopy normally stays over their heads like an umbrella, but it can be pulled down so that it covers their faces. The last time we took them to the zoo, for some reason known only to four-year-olds, they were determined to keep the canopy pulled down across their eyes for the entire visit. I would pull up the canopy and proclaim with great enthusiasm, "Look at the size of those giraffes!" But then, four little hands would immediately reach up and pull the canopy back down. Amazing sights were all around them, but they missed everything. It was a frustrating three hours.

But who am I to complain? How many times has God said, "Look at the comfort of my promises," but I refuse to look by not studying the Bible? God says, "Talk to me; I have so much to give you," but I daydream instead. God tells me, "You can do things that will not only bless you now but will store up treasures in heaven," but I go and waste my time doing other things. How many times have I reached up and pulled the blinders back down over my eyes?

God has surrounded us with many assurances and blessings. If we will only reach out in faith and grab hold of them, then we will be able to proclaim, "Look at the size of those blessings!"

Prayer: Dear Lord, may our eyes always be open to your abundant blessings. Amen.

Bob LaForge (New Jersey)

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
Every day I will look around to see God's great blessings.

THUR
JAN 10
2019

RESTORE WITH LOVE

READ Colossians 3:12-14

Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.

— Ephesians 4:2 (NIV)

I recently read an article about a tribe in northern Natal in South Africa. According to tribal custom, when someone does something wrong or detrimental to others, the members of the tribe take the offender to the center of the village and surround him or her. During two days, the tribe members tell

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
Surrounding people with love can bring healing and restore community.

the offender the good things he or she has accomplished. The purpose of the ritual is to restore the person and to affirm that he or she is essentially a good person.

I think that too often our tendency is to treat others unkindly, especially when they have made a mistake. We make sure to remind them continuously of their errors. Even in raising our children, we tend to emphasize the negative rather than the positive.

However, the Bible teaches love. In Matthew 22:39, Jesus says, “Love your neighbor as yourself.” Galatians 6:1 reminds us, “If someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently.” Let us treat others the way we want to be treated. In doing so, we’ll follow the example of Jesus, who loves us, even though we do not merit it.

Prayer: Loving God, we confess that we are not perfect. Forgive us and teach us to follow your example of mercy. Amen.

Narda Vargas (Dominican Republic)

THE AROMA OF CHRIST

READ 2 Corinthians 2:14-17

Thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads in every place the fragrance that comes from knowing him.

— 2 Corinthians 2:14 (NRSV)

Walking on our northern Utah trails gives me a great appreciation of God’s majesty. My eyes delight in the beauty of the snow-covered Wasatch peaks and the sunlight sparkling on the Great Salt Lake. My senses awaken to the lowing of the cows and the chatter of the magpies. As the brisk breeze sweeps over my face, my soul cannot help but praise the Maker of it all.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
Every day I will seek to spread the fragrance of Christ.

As beautiful as these surroundings are, along my favorite trail the odor of skunk — rank, strong, and often lasting for days — is common. As I passed through a “skunky patch” recently, I wondered about the fragrance that I leave behind in my daily interactions with others. Paul reminded us that we are “the aroma of Christ” and through us God spreads this fragrance everywhere.

As my nose winced at the smell of the skunk, I had to wonder about times when my “fragrance” has been more of a stench — times when I might have hung on to anger and bitterness or wallowed in self-centeredness. Have I caused others to turn up their noses at Christianity because of my spiritual stink? That is not the witness I desire! But as I spend time seeking God’s presence in the Bible and in prayer, God’s power purifies me. The fragrance I share with the world then becomes the aroma of Christ’s love, grace, and truth.

Prayer: Dear Jesus, thank you for transforming us — equip us to carry your fragrance of life and love to the world. Amen.

Andrea Nelson (Utah)

SAT
JAN 12
2019

ANSWERING OUR CRIES

READ Matthew 7:7-11

The LORD's eyes watch the righteous, his ears listen to their cries for help.

— Psalm 34:15 (CEB)

During the week, my wife cares for two of our grandsons. At two years old, the younger one, Colton, still struggles with his vocabulary so that even when he can find a word to use, he also cries out. He especially loves his toy trains and cries if he can't find them. Whatever the cry, we respond because we love him.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
Whatever my need, God hears my cries.

In that respect, God is no different. God watches over us and answers our cries for help. God can hear my cries along with millions of others

at the same time. Some days, Colton is needier than usual and wears out his grandmother. But God is more powerful than my wife. Our cries for help never wear out God.

Some of my cries may be insignificant, but God doesn't restrict our access to times of utter crisis or emergency. We are invited to come to God any time, as a little child would, and that's what I do. As the parent, God listens to our small concerns and heavy issues alike. God's answers to my cries are always in my best interest, whether I think so or not. Like any good parent, God loves to give good gifts to us.

Prayer: Dear Father, thank you for hearing and answering our cries for help. Amen.

Martin Wiles (South Carolina)

WELCOMING ALL

READ James 2:1-9

[The LORD declares], "I will show my love to the one I called 'Not my loved one.' I will say to those called 'Not my people,' 'You are my people'; and they will say, 'You are my God.'"

— Hosea 2:23 (NIV)

At each Sunday service, a man at my church sits in the last pew and greets everyone who enters. It doesn't matter who wanders into the church: stranger, newcomer, or homeless person. If he doesn't know the visitor, he introduces himself and asks for his or her name. At the sharing of the peace, he walks down to where that new person sits and shakes his or her hand.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
God loves me and knows me by name.

I love this man's spirit. It is the spirit of Jesus, for Jesus stands ready to welcome each and every one of us regardless of our circumstances. Our Lord calls us by name and takes our hand. Jesus loved and welcomed all to his teachings and promise of life eternal. I pray that I may always follow this example — not only on Sunday but on each day of the week.

Prayer: Gracious God, thank you for sending your son Jesus Christ to show us the way to live. Help us always to follow his example and show kindness to everyone. Amen.

Monica A. Andermann (New York)

MON
JAN 14
2019

IN THE SAME BOAT

READ Matthew 8:23-27

[Jesus] replied, "You of little faith, why are you so afraid?" Then he got up and rebuked the winds and the waves, and it was completely calm.

— Matthew 8:26 (NIV)

I had just finished my primary education and by God's grace had passed and been the best in my region. Everyone was happy for me, and I remember that my friends kept telling me that God was good to me; but I was troubled. My mind was not at peace, and sleep eluded me. I was worried that although I had passed and been called to a national school, my family would not be able to afford to send me. My faith assured me

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Today I will remember that Jesus is in the boat with me.

that God, who had been with me this far, would see me through. But my family was in financial crisis.

I thought of the time when Jesus and his disciples were crossing over to the other side of the lake. Even though the disciples knew that Jesus was in the boat with them, they were still troubled. We do the same. Jesus is in the boat with us, but when trouble comes we forget that we can depend on someone greater than the trouble we are going through. In fact, Jesus was asleep all along because he knew there was no reason to panic. When they woke him, Jesus said, "You of little faith, why are you so afraid?" Then he rebuked the wind and it was calm.

I eventually received a scholarship that took me through my four years in school. When we remember that Jesus is in the boat with us, we can trust him to calm the storms.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help us to remember who you are and that you are with us, even in times of trouble. Amen.

Mary Nyokabi Penparadise (Kiambu, Kenya)

Prayer Focus: THOSE STRUGGLING TO PAY FOR EDUCATION

THE GIFT OF ANOTHER YEAR

TUES
JAN 15
2019

READ Psalm 139:1-18

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

— Psalm 90:12 (NIV)

At the retirement home where I live, I host the birthday dinners. Each month I share with the guests the verse quoted above. A birthday celebration can be a time to take stock of life. How have we grown in God's grace? Have we learned to love our neighbors as God has loved us? Are we able to confess our shortcomings and to seek God's guidance so that our lives are more pleasing to the Lord?

Sometimes I also read Psalm 139 at the birthday celebration. It is a very personal recognition of God's place in our lives. The psalmist knew God deeply and felt the redeeming presence of his Maker, no matter what he did, where he traveled, or even if he was seeking to escape God's call in this life.

Whether we are young or old, we can seek the Lord's presence and commit our time to serve God and our fellow human beings.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Each year of life is an opportunity to grow in the knowledge of God.

Prayer: Gracious God, help us to say yes to your guiding Spirit and to commit ourselves to faithful living in the days and years to come. 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.

Elmer A. Dickson (Florida)

Prayer Focus: THOSE WITH BIRTHDAYS THIS MONTH 23

WED
JAN 16
2019

BUSY DAYS

READ Colossians 2:6-10

Just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.

— Colossians 2:6-7 (NIV)

One day at school, I had two tests, neither of which I had studied for. A friend was having a really bad morning, and she also had a test that day. I felt bad for her, but I told myself there was nothing I could do. I had to study for my tests; I needed to get good grades on them. Later in the day I realized

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
In the midst of a busy world,
I will walk in the footsteps
of Jesus.

that dismissing my friend had been wrong. Good grades are important, but so is being a good friend — especially when someone is having a tough day.

Often the busyness of everyday life makes it a challenge to live up to our Christian values, and we forget to walk in the steps of Jesus. Life is not just about school work, material possessions, or all the activities that bring us pleasure. Life is also about doing good for others and shining the light of Christ into the lives of people around us.

By walking in Jesus' footsteps we can help our world to become kinder and more compassionate. No matter how busy our lives may be, as Christians our true mission is to notice those in dark places and to shine God's light of love on them.

Prayer: Dear God, help us not to be so consumed by busy lives that we fail to find time to share your love with others. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Jenny Iruela (North Carolina)

HOUSE OF GOD

READ Ephesians 2:11-22

In [Christ] the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

— Ephesians 2:21-22 (NIV)

I was standing near a large building that was about to be demolished. The building had offered office space for many businesses and organizations. My church used to rent a worship area in it. While standing there I thought about the day I first attended a Sunday service in that building. I received a warm welcome and found my spiritual home — a life-changing experience for me.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
My church is much more
than a building.

I learned to know Jesus and God's word. I met many wonderful people who became my brothers and sisters in faith. They are faithful and trustworthy friends, who are always there when I need them. My heart is filled with gratitude for these people and the building where I first encountered them.

That old building was demolished to give way to a supermarket. Today we worship in a building that is owned by our church. It suits our needs well and is located not far from the old building.

Even though I have fond memories of that building, the apostle Paul's words in Ephesians remind me that the building is not the church; Christians make up the church. Paul writes that together we "become a holy temple in the Lord." How wonderful it is when we find our spiritual home among fellow Christians!

Prayer: Dear God, thank you for the gift of fellowship with other Christians. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Riho Pors (Estonia)

FRI
JAN 18
2019

GOD'S ASSURANCE

READ Matthew 28:1-10, 16-20

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

— Isaiah 41:10 (NIV)

Lightning zipped across the sky with thunder roaring on its heels, as we drove from downtown Seattle to Duvall, Washington. From the back seat my nine-year-old great-niece cried out in fear. Twisting around, I saw her small body shaking and tears streaming down her cheeks. I felt helpless because I couldn't reach her from the front seat. Suddenly her cries began to fade. I turned again and saw my grandson, Palmer, rubbing his cousin's arm softly and saying, "It's okay, Kayla. Think of something fun. Remember how we beat the other cousins today in a race at the park?" She giggled and nodded. The lightning and thunder increased and lasted for the entire hour's drive, but with no more cries from Kayla because Palmer kept his arms around her, soothing her with his words.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
When fears and doubts arise, I can rely on God's promises.

I smiled, proud of Palmer as I remembered how often God calms my fears. As a child of God, I know that in times of

crisis or challenge, God encircles me and calms my fears. I remember how God gave reassurance to the Israelites: "Do not fear, for I am with you." And Jesus reaffirmed the promise: "And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age" (NRSV). Like Kayla, I am calmed by the loving arms of Jesus. And his promise of protection and comfort assures me that everything will work out.

Prayer: God of all comfort, thank you for your constant presence with us and for your word that assures us of protection and comfort. Amen.

Arlene Rains Graber (Kansas)

GOD CAN

READ Acts 3:1-10

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

— Luke 11:9 (NIV)

When my children were preschoolers, I would ask them to do something like pick up toys in their rooms or make their beds. Sometimes they responded, "I'm too little!" even when they were big enough to perform the task. They were just not ready to accept responsibility for having that ability yet.

As children we might have said "I'm too little." As adults we tend to say "I can't." But sometimes when we say we can't do something, we are closing all possibilities without even trying. All too often, we say we *can't*, when in fact we should more honestly be saying that we *won't* — for a variety of reasons.

When Peter told the lame man to stand up and walk, thank goodness the man didn't respond by saying "I can't." He had faith that the power of God had healed him, and he stood up, walking and leaping and praising God! I don't want to limit the possibilities that God has for me — shutting things down by saying "I can't" without even trying. With God, all things are possible. (See Matt. 19:26.)

Prayer: Dear Lord, open our eyes to the things that seem impossible to us, but which can happen through you. Amen.

David McCain (Louisiana)

SAT
JAN 19
2019

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
What is God inviting me to do today, to which I will say "I can"?

SUN
JAN 20
2019

ONE DAY AT A TIME

READ Luke 12:22-31

Jesus said, *“Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.”*

— Matthew 11:29 (NIV)

Struggling with the grief of widowhood, I’ve had days where even the touch of my clothes seems uncomfortable, and I wonder how I can carry on by myself. When I feel this way, I remember Jesus’ words, “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest” (Matt. 11:28). I remember thinking that I just needed to keep pressing on, listening for God’s guidance. It was too easy to get ahead of myself and worry about my future. I wondered how long I would be able to maintain my house and survive on my own.

After a while I discovered the secret to my getting through. It is just by living — at times minute by minute, hour by hour, or day by day. All these days added together are two and a half years; while I still struggle, I know I am stronger and that further healing is coming. I know that if I continue to trust and remain obedient, God will lead me — one day at a time.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, release us from our worries about the future, and help us to trust you for all our days. Amen.

Lenore Warton (New South Wales, Australia)

UNBURDENED

READ Matthew 11:28-30

Cast your burden on the LORD, and he will sustain you; he will never permit the righteous to be moved.

— Psalm 55:22 (NRSV)

The members of our youth group were weighed down by heavy burdens and many worries. When the time came for our monthly hike, the leaders saw a great opportunity to help the teens to trust the Lord with their concerns. Each youth received a backpack and water bottle for the short hike. Many of them wondered what the backpacks contained since they were so heavy.

Halfway up the hill, the youth were directed to open their backpacks where they found several bricks. Many of them complained about carrying needless weight, but others figured out the object lesson right away. We instructed each to take out the bricks and write on them their burdens, worries, and cares. “School stress,” “finances,” “parents divorcing,” “broken friendships,” and “my future” were some of the concerns. When we arrived at the top of the hill, the students knelt down to lay their bricks at a large cross and offer their personal prayers to God to share these specific burdens.

At the end, all of us rose and prayed around the cross — standing upon the very burdens that once were on our backs. The return trip was much easier and joyful as each person recalled God’s care.

Prayer: Compassionate God, thank you for lifting us up and sustaining us. Amen.

Michael Medeiros (California)

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
I can be free from the weight of worry when I lay down my burdens at the cross.

TUES
JAN 22
2019

ADOPTED

READ Romans 8:12-17

To all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.

— John 1:12 (NIV)

My parents took me into their home when I was three months old. After that, every detail of their lives was scrutinized before they could adopt me. In court, their friends testified as character references. Social workers made many unannounced visits to see what kind of care I was receiving. My parents finally were able to legally adopt me when I was 11 months old. Knowing all that my parents went through to adopt me helps me appreciate how much they wanted me as part of their family. Kids at school would tease me about being adopted, but nothing they said could convince me that I am not special to my parents. I know I am special because my parents chose me to be in their family. They had to prove that they wanted me and would take good care of me.

Every one of us is even more special to God. After all, God became human in Jesus Christ, who died for us so that we could be adopted as God's children. God has chosen us and has called everyone to join the family of God by trusting in Jesus.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank you for giving us your son so that we can be adopted into your family. Help us to show our love to you by following you in faith, word, and deed. Amen.

Mary Ann Baker (Pennsylvania)

RICH IN FAITH

READ James 1:12-16

Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him.

— James 1:12 (NIV)

With rent, utilities, medicine, food, and anything else required for day-to-day living, my wife and I often find ourselves struggling to live on our small, fixed income. We try to plan ahead to buy only what we need — to make a shopping list and stick to it. This way we know that we will have both enough to live on and enough left for the unexpected. This system works well with one major exception. Sticking to a list is hard when so much outside that list looks so good, things we really want but can't afford. Fighting the temptation to buy on impulse is never easy; it requires discipline.

As Christians we also try to live our lives with discipline. We read the Bible each day, focus on what we need, and give thanks for what we have rather than worrying over what we don't have. Like balancing a monthly budget, practicing disciplined faith gets easier. We have learned that it's not what we want that really matters, but what we have. Being rich in faith is priceless.

Prayer: Dear Lord, help us to avoid the temptations of this world and instead to store up treasure in you. Amen.

Mark A. Carter (Oregon)

WED
JAN 23
2019

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Every person is special to God.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Material things come and go, but spiritual wealth lasts forever.

THUR
JAN 24
2019

SUSTAINED

READ Psalm 62:5-7

God says, *“Cry out to me whenever you are in trouble; I will deliver you.”*

— Psalm 50:15 (CEB)

“So this time will be your hat trick,” the surgeon said with a grin. His words shocked me, given my medical history. My oncologist had spotted a nodule in my MRI scan and declared that to treat this I had to undergo what would be my third surgery in three consecutive years. Sitting in the clinic with my husband and sister, I could find no words. My voice became weak as if all energy and life had been drained out of

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
God is my shield.

me. Gathering myself up, I managed to say, “Doctor, my son is only five.” Then I started crying helplessly.

A short time later, I was praying and meditating

when I heard a voice speaking to me, saying, “I did not forsake you earlier; I will not forsake you now. I am with you.” Just as God had sustained me through five months of chemotherapy and two surgeries, God would sustain me through this one. My third operation was a success, and the biopsy was all clear.

I thanked God for this amazing grace and faithfulness. Having traveled a road of many miracles, I am a true witness to the power of Christ my Lord and my Savior, with many testimonies to share. Praise be to God!

Prayer: Thank you, gracious God, for your love and mercy. Help us to trust you, and strengthen us so that we can be your true witnesses. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

Anoshi Naeem (Punjab, Pakistan)

LOST AND FOUND

READ Luke 15:11-24

The father said to his servants, *“This son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.” So they began to celebrate.*

— Luke 15:24 (NIV)

Recently, our house cat, Charlie, managed to sneak outside and disappear. For two weeks our family searched the neighborhood, prayed, and even passed out fliers with her picture; but sadly we couldn’t find her. As hope began to fade, God answered our prayers and Charlie returned home safe and sound.

This experience reminded me of the parable of the prodigal son. Like the younger son in this parable, I sometimes stray from

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
I can always turn to God for safety and direction.

God’s home and choose my own path. Perhaps I don’t always stray far, but little choices such as neglecting my scripture reading to watch TV, skipping a prayer before a meal, or not offering help to someone in need lead me away from God.

Although paths leading away from our spiritual home may seem tempting, Christ’s death and resurrection promise us a greater reward in God’s house for eternity. When we are tempted to leave the safety and security of God’s home, we can always turn to God for direction through prayer and meditation. If we do go astray, God is always waiting for us to return. The joy and celebration when the lost return to God’s home is unfathomable. (See Luke 15:7, 10.) God’s arms are always open and waiting for the lost to return.

Prayer: Dear God, thank you for your abundant grace. If we lose our way, help us to find the path back to your love and forgiveness. Amen.

Chad Zeleny (Iowa)

SAT
JAN 26
2019

WHERE THE WATER BEGINS

READ John 7:37-39

The LORD will guide you always; he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land and will strengthen your frame. You will be like a well-watered garden, like a spring whose waters never fail.

— Isaiah 58:11 (NIV)

I love to sit and watch the creek flowing through our backyard. Sometimes, during dry spells, it slows; but it keeps moving. Streams, creeks, and rivers flow continually all around the area where I live. I've often sat beside a fast-moving mountain stream and wondered, *Where is all that water coming from? What keeps the water flowing? Where does it begin?*

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

God's love is a stream that never runs dry.

When I watch the water rippling in the creek, I honestly don't know where it begins. However, I do know the source for the spiritual water in my life. Isaiah says that God will make us to be like springs whose waters never fail. God promises to satisfy our needs and to strengthen us, to continually send us blessings and work in us. God's grace and love continue to flow through me — just like water cascading down falls, rolling over rocks, and endlessly moving.

Prayer: Source of life, thank you for your love and strength that never fails. Flow through us as we seek to love and serve others. Amen.

Trina Stamey (North Carolina)

SIGHT VERSUS INSIGHT

READ James 1:2-5

Encourage one another and build each other up.

— 1 Thessalonians 5:11 (NIV)

As I stood to preach one morning, I suddenly lost the sight in my left eye. I couldn't see the faces of people in the congregation or the notes I had prepared for my sermon. After two surgeries and weekly visits to the ophthalmologist, my vision is almost back to normal.

Reflecting on this experience, I began thinking about spiritual blindness. Because I had not been comfortable reading during the months after I lost sight in my eye, my devotional life suffered. I spent much less time with my Lord. I began to wonder, *Is my faith so shallow that I could get so easily side-tracked?* When I was at this low ebb, God allowed me to see in a different way.

I saw kindness, caring, and prayerful concern and support from many people — especially my wife, Joan, our family, and church community. I was prayed for and encouraged by phone calls and emails. The support I received reminded me of today's reading and scripture quote. This experience tested my faith, but God used the time to prompt me to introspection and help me really see myself. I had thought that I was in control of my life when all along God had been in charge. During this experience and ever since, God has been training me in humility and patience.

Prayer: Dear God, thank you for all of our many blessings. Help us to grow closer to you each day — especially in times of trial. Amen.

John Bredenkamp (KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa)

SUN
JAN 27
2019

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

How can I exercise my spiritual muscles today?

WHAT'S MY MESSAGE?

READ Ephesians 6:10-20

Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly.

— Colossians 3:16 (NIV)

While visiting Athens, Greece, I came across a street fair with a live band and a variety of booths. At one booth, a woman offered me a free shirt, hat, and pin. As a budget backpaker, I gladly accepted. The next day, I wore the free T-shirt; but as I set out to explore the city, I quickly became self-conscious. I had no idea the meaning of the Greek writing scrawled across the front of my shirt. But all the locals would know. What if I was wearing a message I didn't support? Toward the end of the day, I ended up chatting with a shopkeeper and cashier.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
What attitudes and actions do I need to “wear” to reflect my life in Christ?

One of them told me, “I like your shirt.” I replied that I didn't know what the words on the shirt meant.

The cashier translated the message as, “There are a lot of adventures to be had in life. Drugs shouldn't be one of them.” Reassured that my shirt's message was one I supported, I spent the rest of the day feeling bold instead of self-conscious.

This experience made me think about how often I wear a message without realizing it. Though not as obvious as writing on a shirt, the way I treat others, the words I say — and even my facial expressions — send messages to others. I want that message to reflect that Christ lives in me.

Prayer: Dear Lord, help us to choose our words and actions carefully so that they will bring glory to you and lovingly spread your message to the world. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Jessica Lippe (Oregon)

FRIENDS INDEED

READ Job 2:11-13

Many Jews had come to comfort Martha and Mary after their brother's death.

— John 11:19 (CEB)

I will never forget what five of my friends did for me when my wife died. Lisa died in her sleep on a Sunday morning in February after an eighteen-year battle with multiple sclerosis. Her death was sudden and unexpected. Over the next few days we planned times of public worship, celebration, and mourning at four different sites spread over 240 miles of eastern Texas. Phylis and Keith sat and talked with me at the visitation the night before the funeral.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
For whom will I be God's hands and feet today?

Glen came to the funeral and stayed with me during the meal afterward. The next day, Bob met us at the cemetery for Lisa's graveside service. And then on Sunday afternoon, Steve attended the memorial service at our home church.

When we read the later chapters of the book of Job, it's easy for us to forget the beginning — how for seven days and seven nights Job's three friends came and cried with him and sat with him without speaking. Words cannot express my gratitude for my friends' presence with me during the hardest week of my life. I know why each of them was willing to drive more than 200 miles to be with me for an hour or two: because words could not express what they wanted to communicate to me. In the same way, God loves us more than words can say. So God came in person to show us.

Prayer: Loving God, thank you for the gift of one another's presence, through which you empower us to receive and to give. Amen.

Michael L. Fraley (Texas)

WED
JAN 30
2019

LOOMING MOUNTAINS

READ Psalm 61:1-8

I raise my eyes toward the mountains. Where will my help come from? My help comes from the LORD, the maker of heaven and earth.

— Psalm 121:1-2 (CEB)

When my first-grade teacher helped us memorize Psalm 121, I had no idea how big mountains could be. There aren't any mountains where I grew up in central Canada, and I didn't travel much until I was an adult. The psalmist's words

meant more to me when I first saw the Canadian Rockies.

Standing next to bare, black rock, I could see nothing but the mountain.

I raised my head but could not tell if the distant jagged peaks were the summit of the massive rock formation. I was too close to see the whole mountain.

Similarly, sometimes I am so close to a problem that I cannot see any possible solution. All I can do is cry for help. I wonder if the psalmist felt this way when he wrote, "I raise my eyes toward the mountains. Where will my help come from? My help comes from the LORD, the maker of heaven and earth."

When faced with a problem that seems insurmountable, I remember Psalm 121. When I look at the mountains, I realize God, the maker of mountains, is greater than creation. No trouble I face is a problem for God.

Prayer: Creator God, help us always to trust in your strength. With your help, we can overcome any challenge. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Pat Gerbrandt (Manitoba, Canada)

HANDS AND FEET

READ James 2:14-17

Jesus replied, "Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head."

— Luke 9:58 (NIV)

During our annual winter visit to California this year, the weather was unseasonably cold and rainy. There were many storms resulting in flooding and mudslides in several areas. At the church we attend when we visit each winter, we learned about The Warming Center, which is open from January 1 until March 31 on nights when the temperature drops below 35 degrees or there is heavy rain. Here people who are homeless can receive a hot meal, sleep indoors, and receive a bag lunch when they leave the next morning.

My husband and I, like many others, donate food and money to our local food banks and shelters, but this was an opportunity to actually be the hands and feet of Jesus. Setting up the fellowship hall, serving meals, getting to know the guests, and helping with kitchen cleanup helped us form relationships with people we might not have met otherwise. We are now able to greet them on the street by name and to pray for them. Jesus charged us to clothe, feed, visit, and care for our brothers and sisters. As Jesus said, "Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me" (Matt. 25:40).

Prayer: Dear Lord, help us to meet the needs of those around us today. Remind us that everything we do for others we do for you. Amen.

Carolyn Lee Purdy (Virginia)

THUR
JAN 31
2019

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
Whatever good I do for
someone today,
I do for God.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
No problem is too big for God.

PRAYER WORKSHOP

It's That Time of Year

I am not one to make New Year's resolutions. I'm not opposed to them; it's just that when I think of a new habit or practice I want to start, I tend to do it when I think of it, whether it's January or June. But this year might be different.

On Christmas Day after we'd opened our presents and had our dinner, we all went to the living room to watch old home movies that my father had made on a VHS shoulder-mount camcorder thirty years ago. Those old movies contained nothing particularly exciting — a panorama of our backyard, my mother sitting in a lawn chair on the patio holding my sister, my father's new propane grill, a long segment of me in my sandbox eating the sand. Skip ahead several scenes to my grandmother's dining room where two of my great-grandparents, now deceased, are among those seated around the table.

It startled me to see them in the movie and to realize how quickly three decades can pass. It's one thing to look at photographs of family members who have died; it's an altogether ethereal experience to see them move and hear them speak. When the movie ended, I sat in my chair trying not to cry.

I have spent many Christmas Days going back and forth between the excitement of the season and hanging on the verge of tears. I blame my Christmas blues on the fact that the day marks time for me in a way unlike birthdays, the New Year, or any other anniversary. It cuts me down to the quick.

Christmas is the one time of year that I am with all my family, and I catch myself thinking about loved ones who are no longer here and wondering who might not be here next year. Absence fills the house with as much force as the loud chatter in the living room, the smell of food coming from the kitchen, and all the other signs of life around me. I am more aware than ever that time is moving on, and it's moving faster than I'd like.

The old home movie helped me to see in a new way the truth of what James says: "Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes" (4:14, NIV). What

sobering news. *I am a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes.*

As I reflect on the past year with its successes and failures, gains and losses, I remember the moments of pain and also the ones filled with joy. I think about the many good people in my community who died, those who lost their jobs, and everyone else for whom life dealt a harsh hand. At the same time, I delight in the memory of a long walk alone on the beach one evening last fall and spending time in the company of family and close friends. As I look back over the year, I also look to the one to come and try to imagine what it might bring.

I have decided that were I to make a resolution this year, I would resolve to let life's fleetingness guide my motives, actions, and decisions — to be kinder, more eager to give, quicker to help, more patient with others, and to spend more time with those I love. And instead of letting the rapid passing of time be an occasion for sorrow, let it be one of joy.

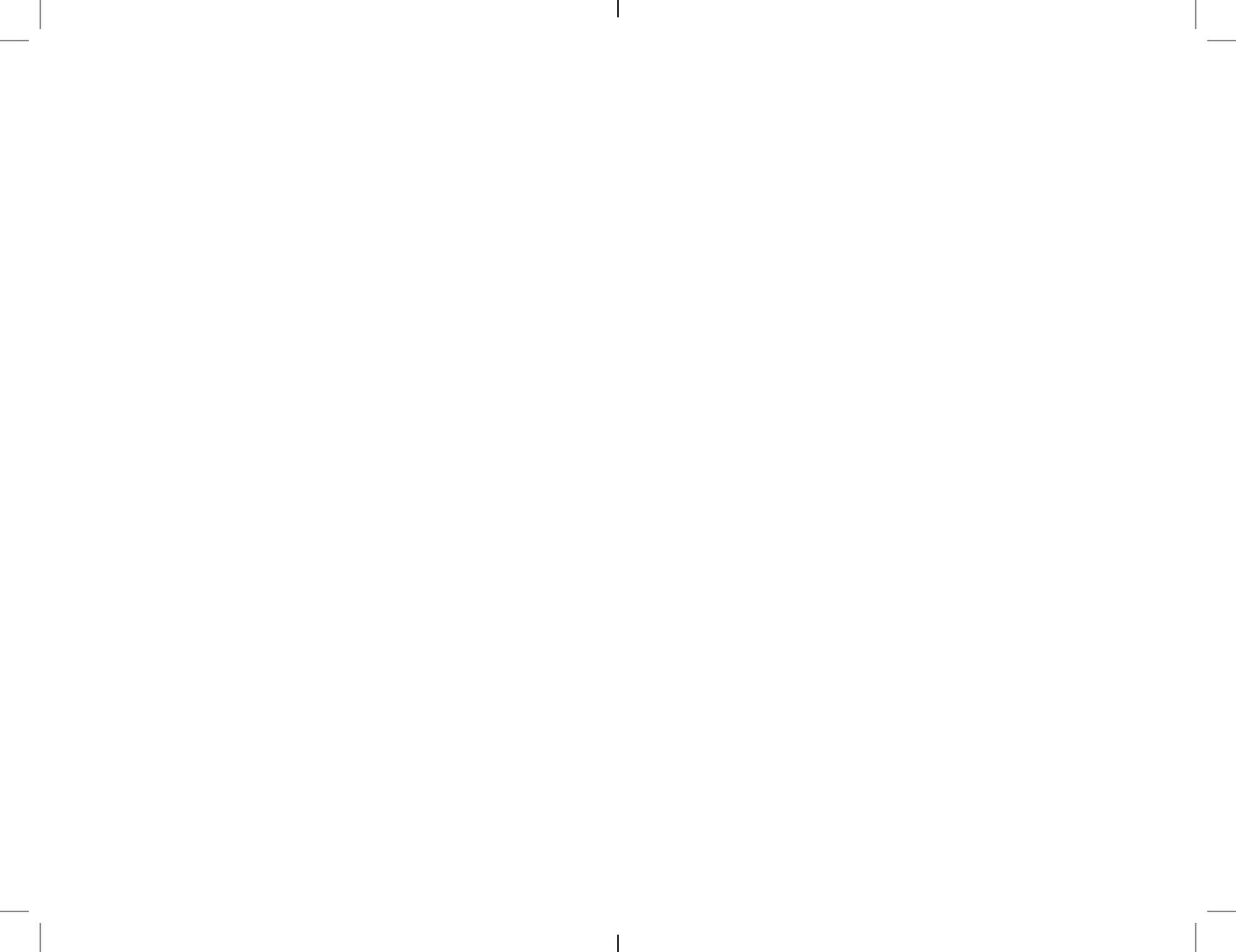
What if I welcomed the knowledge that I am only here for a short while? Instead of leaving me hollow and empty, what if it left me more eager to love and show compassion, more willing to help when called on? What if it left me joyful — joyful in gratitude to God for every moment I am given, no matter how many or how few; joyful in love for my family; joyful in the hope of life beyond this one; joyful in faith that I haven't seen the last of my great-grandparents and all the others who have gone on?

This year, my hope for you and for me is that we find joy in all the sweet moments and the strength to endure the bitter ones. Here's to the time we've been given, to old memories and to the new ones we will make, and to getting on well in the year to come. Here's to the opportunity for a fresh start, a wiser mind, and a lighter heart.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION:

1. What resolutions and plans do you have for the coming year? How will you include God in your plans?
2. Recall your favorite Christmas memory. Why is this memory your favorite?

— Andrew Garland Breedon
Acquisitions Editor



FRI
FEB 1
2019

A SECOND CHANCE

READ Proverbs 3:5-6

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)

I was playing tennis with my friend John when I suddenly collapsed. My heart had stopped. John rushed for help and in a few minutes a woman arrived and began CPR. She was able to restore my heartbeat until the paramedics arrived. On the way to the hospital my heart stopped again, but the

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

I will pray daily and seek God's purpose for my life.

EMTs restarted my heart for a second time. The doctors determined I needed surgery. After hours in the operating room, doctors implanted a pacemaker

to regulate my heart. Within a few days, I was able to return home and eventually made a complete recovery.

Since my near-death experience I have often questioned and tried to understand why God spared me. I may never know the answer, but I now realize that God's ways are often not the same as mine.

When the unexpected happens or anytime we face troubles or hardships we can't control, we can rely on our faith and remember that God is always here to comfort and guide us. Through trials and dangers such as these, we can grow in our faith and draw closer to God.

Prayer: Thank you, God, for loving us. Help us not to rely on our own understanding but always to trust in you to lead us in the way we should go. Amen.

Joseph Carpenter (Tennessee)

EVER-PRESENT LIGHT

READ Psalm 36:5-9

[God's] lamp shone over my head, and by his light I walked through darkness.

— Job 29:3 (NRSV)

Where I live, we have frequent blackouts, so it's usually wise to carry a flashlight when it's dark just in case the power goes out.

Early one morning I was going to the bathroom and forgot to take my flashlight with me. But I remembered that my mother saw me leave the room and knew where I was; I had nothing to worry about. I was confident she would bring me a flashlight if there was a power outage. That's what a mother does — protects her children.

Yes, there was a blackout that morning; but just as my eyes were beginning to adjust to the darkness, I saw a light. It was my mom standing right in front of me with that flashlight. I had absolutely nothing to worry about!

In our scripture verse, Job is recalling a time in his life when by the light of God he walked through darkness. Just as I trusted my mom to bring me a flashlight, I can trust God to light up any darkness in my life and to direct my path. (See Prov. 3:6.)

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Today I will trust God's light to lead me.

Prayer: Dear Lord, help us to trust you endlessly, no matter the hurt, no matter the pain, no matter the depth of darkness we may experience. Amen.

Uyo Jummai Ani (Kiev, Ukraine)

SUN
FEB 3
2019

MAKING A DIFFERENCE

READ Matthew 5:13-16

Let your light shine before people, so they can see the good things you do and praise your Father who is in heaven.

— Matthew 5:16 (CEB)

My energetic 70-year-old friend Mary Ann broke her leg and had to be wheelchair bound and then on crutches for quite a while. During that time, I saw a post on Facebook from one of the women of our church, seeking help decorating for a father-daughter ball. Mary Ann's comment in response was, "If you have something I can do sitting down, I will be glad to help." Now that is a servant spirit. Mary Ann

has mastered the way to make the world a brighter place for anyone whose life she touches.

So many times we fail to see our potential because

we allow our limitations to discourage us. But every day we are given opportunities to reach out to serve God, to love others, and to make a difference. Whether by a phone call, a handwritten note, or just a smile, we all have the means to make our world a better place.

Prayer: Father God, help us to see beyond our limitations to the potential we all have to serve you each day. Amen.

Belinda Jo Mathias (Mississippi)

Prayer Focus: THOSE OVERWHELMED BY
THEIR LIMITATIONS

GOD'S LOVE

READ 1 John 4:7-12

Paul wrote, "I am convinced that neither death nor life . . . nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

— Romans 8:38-39 (NIV)

"They give you a steak dinner when you come and sandwiches when you leave," remarked the physician seated next to me. We were attending a farewell luncheon for a physician who was leaving for a job with a different institution. The doctor's wry remark highlighted the fickle nature of human interaction and how our value in the eyes of others and organizations can vary depending on our usefulness to them at a particular moment in time.

Fortunately our value to God never changes. We are always beloved in God's eyes, and God is always there for us no matter what challenges or difficulties we face. God does not love us more when things are going well and we are obedient to God's direction; God doesn't love us less when times are hard and we stray from God's teachings. As today's reading says, "This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him" (1 John 4:9).

We can be assured that we are eternally loved by God. It doesn't matter if we are moving, changing jobs, or going through stressful times. God loves us, and nothing "will be able to separate us from the love of God."

Prayer: Dear God, thank you for loving us unconditionally. May we show the same love to others that you show to us. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Mark Karpinski (North Carolina)

Prayer Focus: SOMEONE CHANGING JOBS

MON
FEB 4
2019

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
Nothing can separate me
from God's love.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
I can't do everything to serve
God, but I can always do
something.

TUES
FEB 5
2019

SERVING GOD

READ Luke 2:36-38

*Come, my heart says, seek God's face.
LORD, I do seek your face!*

— Psalm 27:8 (CEB)

On November 16, 2016, at Amigas del Señor Methodist Monastery, I was consecrated to be a nun for the rest of my life. Like Anna in the Gospel of Luke, I have the great privilege of living in the house of God night and day. Anna's dedication to God through prayer and fasting opened her to recognize the Messiah when he arrived. Who would have guessed that the savior of the world would come as a vulnerable child? Yet Anna saw God in the infant Jesus.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
God is present all around us.

I expect that the simple life of prayer I have chosen will allow me to see and know God in creation and in other people. In fact, I believe that through regular spiritual practices such as prayer, meditation, reading the Bible, communal worship, and serving those in need, we all can become more open to recognizing God's work in the world around us.

Prayer: Loving God, help us, through your grace, to be open to your presence in our lives. We pray in the name of Jesus who taught us to 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).

Sister Confianza del Señor (Honduras)

"FOLLOW ME"

READ John 1:35-42

*Jesus said, "All who want to come after me must . . .
take up their cross, and follow me."*

— Matthew 16:24 (CEB)

Jesus invites us to follow him. But I would much rather *believe* than *follow*; it's easier. I can sit in the comfort of my study and believe all sorts of things: the Virgin Birth, walking on water, feeding the 5,000, the Crucifixion and Resurrection. No problem! I have no trouble believing while I sit safely behind my desk.

But, Jesus says, "Follow me." I don't want to follow because following requires getting up. It requires leaving — leaving comfort, perhaps family, friends, job, and hobbies. Followers in the Bible left all those things behind. Following can be costly. It can hurt. Still, Jesus says to follow.

But I don't know if I'll like where he leads me. He has a reputation for hanging out with a scandalous crowd: lepers, prostitutes, thieves. His crowd could hurt my reputation. Following might be dangerous. Again, Jesus says, "Drop everything. Take up your cross. Follow me."

So I've followed when Jesus has called me out of my comfortable place — to a developing country to install water filters, to a meal with homeless neighbors, to a career in ministry rather than medicine. And I've discovered that though the risks of acting on my faith are often high, so is the reward of living as Jesus would have us to live.

Prayer: Dear Jesus, give us strength and courage to follow you — wherever you lead us. Amen.

Kevin Thomas (Alabama)

WED
FEB 6
2019

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
How do my actions
show others that I am
following Christ?

THUR
FEB 7
2019

FAITHFUL SERVICE

READ Psalm 96:1-9

*Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart,
as working for the Lord . . . It is the
Lord Christ you are serving.*

— Colossians 3:23-24 (NIV)

As a new social worker, I quickly realized that counseling teens through trauma, anxiety, depression, and conflict can be draining and overwhelming. I began to feel discontent with the job I had dedicated years of education to and was discouraged by the problems that never seemed to be solved in the lives of my clients.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Today I will work for
the glory of God.

When I started attending a new church, I wondered about their logo — a series of arrows pointing upward. The pastor talked about the

idea of “vertical living”: doing everything for the glory of God. It took time for this radical idea to sink in. Going to church, reading the Bible, praying, donating to those in need — these aren’t the only ways to bring glory to God. When my view of doing everything for the glory of God expanded to include the mundane details of my life — cleaning the house, taking care of my family, showing love to my friends, and even going to work every day — the burden of being unable to solve all of my clients’ problems lifted. I realized that my role was not to solve every problem but to be the light of Christ in their lives, to bring God the glory through my faithful service. That has brought new meaning to my life’s work, no matter how mundane at times — eternal meaning that surpasses any earthly satisfaction. To God be the glory!

Prayer: Dear Lord, help us to commit every moment of each day to you. Walk with us, and guide our words and actions so that we show your love to all. Amen.

Heather Artushin (Michigan)

ANCIENT LIGHT

READ John 1:1-18

*The true light that gives light to everyone
was coming into the world.*

— John 1:9 (NIV)

We spent three nights in a small, remote Cape coastal village. Due to the absence of light pollution, the night sky was ablaze with stars, planets, and all manner of twinkling light. The Milky Way and the rest of the cosmos was vividly on display. As I gazed in awe at the magnificence, I was struck by the fact that the light I was seeing was ancient light. Some of the stars might already have expired, but their light was still traveling to earth due to the immense distance.

Jesus said, “I am the light of the world.” Thousands of years later, this message is still true. His light has not expired in the lives of countless people. Jesus lived in such a way that his light continues to shine through the passage of time.

What about us? Few of us will have the opportunity to shine such a bright light, but we all can shine a light that makes a difference. If we take the teachings of Jesus seriously and reflect the light of Christ in all the places we go and in the lives of those we encounter, we can make a difference in the world.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

No matter where I go, I will
let Christ’s light shine
through me.

Prayer: Dear God, by your Holy Spirit we will let your light shine through us each day. Amen.

Roland Rink (Gauteng, South Africa)

SAT
FEB 9
2019

JESUS PAID IT ALL

READ Ephesians 2:1-10

Because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions — it is by grace you have been saved.

— Ephesians 2:4-5 (NIV)

I work in an Alzheimer’s unit at an assisted-living facility. When I tell residents that it’s lunchtime, it’s not uncommon for them to tell me they have no money to pay for their meals. Sometimes even though they may be hungry, they won’t go to the table if they think that they owe the facility money. I find

great joy in telling them, “Your meal has been paid for.” Surprised, they often look at me and ask who paid for it. I tell them that a loved one did, and they seem

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Jesus paid the ultimate price for my sins.

happy and relieved. Some residents will still act as if they don’t believe me when I say it’s been paid for. So, once again, I reassure them that they don’t owe anything.

Every time I tell them, “Your meal has been paid for,” I think of the song, “Jesus Paid It All”* because certainly, “All to him I owe.” Many of us don’t like to have a bill or owe anyone. We strive to pay off our debts until we owe nothing. The truth is that we may owe God everything, but we can never repay God for all we have received. Certainly, we aren’t worthy of Jesus’ dying on the cross for us. God loves us that much. When I doubt my worthiness, I know that God is saying to me, “Jesus paid it all. Your sins are forgiven; your debt is gone.”

*Elvina M. Hall (1865)

Prayer: Dear God, help us to rejoice in knowing that our sins were paid for by your son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Jenny McBride (Alabama)

52 **Prayer Focus:** THOSE LIVING WITH ALZHEIMER’S DISEASE

SOARING

READ Isaiah 40:28-31

Those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles.

— Isaiah 40:31 (NIV)

One beautiful autumn day, I took the day off to go for a hike in the mountains along the ridge near the Delaware Water Gap where the raptor migration was at its height. With binoculars at the ready, I began to scan the sky above the ridgeline to the northeast. Soon in the distance I spied a red-tailed hawk circling slowly in an updraft. Higher and higher it soared until it was almost out of sight. Then turning to the southeast, it folded back its wings and began a long, rapid descent along the ridgeline. Down and down it came, picking up speed as it passed overhead — barely above the tree tops. Finding another updraft, it repeated the cycle until it glided out of sight.

Over time I have come to realize that with the Lord’s help, I can be like that hawk. God constantly provides me moments full of the spiritual lift that I need to get through another week. Sunday worship or time each day with *The Upper Room* or praying with my wife in the mornings are for me like the updrafts that enable the migrating hawk to fly to its destination. Each day, we can claim the promise that “those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles.”

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Today, I will watch for the special moments that God is giving me to soar.

Prayer: Gracious Lord, when we are tired or discouraged, bring us into your presence and raise us up so that we may continue to worship and serve you. Amen.

Harlan M. Baxter (Minnesota)

Prayer Focus: SPIRITUAL RENEWAL AND ENCOURAGEMENT 53

“IT’S NOT FAIR!”

READ 1 Corinthians 13:11-13

Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not rely on your own insight.

— Proverbs 3:5 (NRSV)

When I was eight years old, my father built a new house for us to live in. One afternoon while working on the house, he was also looking after my younger siblings and me. At one point, my four-year-old sister climbed up the ladder to be on the roof with my father. My brother and I also began to climb up to join them. But my father refused to allow it. Our immediate reaction was, “It’s not fair!” But Dad was adamant. We were to stay on the ground.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
God knows best.

At the time, I didn’t understand that my father was concerned for our safety. One child on the roof may not have been a problem.

But allowing three bored, argumentative children on the roof together would have been courting disaster.

I am now a parent and a grandparent, and I would probably make a decision similar to my dad’s. As a child, I saw the situation as my father’s favoring my little sister — again! I failed to recognize my dad’s sound judgment and the love that fueled his decision.

As an adult, when I think something is unfair, I may be failing to understand God’s deep love for me and for those around me. Then, I remember this and other similar lessons from my childhood. Gradually, I am learning to trust more deeply in the wisdom and judgment of our loving God.

Prayer: Loving Father, help us to trust you more than our own understanding. Thank you for your love, which is at the heart of all of life. Amen.

Meg Mangan (New South Wales, Australia)

LET THE LIGHT SHINE

READ Matthew 6:19-21

“When I sit in darkness, the LORD will be a light to me.”

— Micah 7:8 (NRSV)

Now that I’m retired, I look forward to my trips to a nearby park to walk through the woods. Often as I walk, the sunlight filters through the trees and shines down on me. I sometimes find myself pausing to pray saying, “Lord, where is your light in my life today?” As I continue walking, clarity often comes, and I begin to recognize those treasures that moth and rust cannot destroy.

One treasured light is the friend who is always there to listen. Other light comes from those at church who, with hearts of compassion, visit the sick and the elderly. I see God’s light in my wife, as she shows love and cares for our children and grandchildren. Or God’s light shines brightly in the smiles of those who thank us as they receive food from the food pantry where I volunteer.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
God can be a constant source of light in my life — often where I least expect it.

Sometimes the many things we fill our lives with can block out the light that is our true treasure. They can even keep us from seeing our Lord’s goodness when it’s there in front of us. When this happens, it’s usually time to stop, slow down a bit, and focus on seeing the Lord’s presence as much as we can in all the everyday places we pass by each day. I thank our Lord for the times I’m able to recognize the treasures God places right before my eyes.

Prayer: Dear Lord, help us to see you each day in those around us, and help us to be a light to others. Amen.

William M. Mazmanian (Michigan)

WED
FEB 13
2019

THE LITTLE THINGS

READ Luke 16:10-15

Whoever is faithful in a very little is faithful also in much; and whoever is dishonest in a very little is dishonest also in much.

— Luke 16:10 (NRSV)

Both bread bakers, my husband and I may follow the same recipes, but we approach the task of baking differently. He's meticulous, determining water temperature with a thermometer and measuring flour volume with a scale, while I am admittedly sloppy — gauging temperature with my hand and volume by my eye. His loaves usually turn out better because these little acts of effort make a difference.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Am I faithful to the gospel in the small things?

And what is true in bread baking is also true in areas of much greater consequence, like work ethic and

integrity. Having integrity involves hundreds of little actions over the course of time: the choice to admit a mistake when I could easily pretend that it was someone else's fault; the willingness to stay an extra hour at work to ensure that the job I set out to do is of the utmost quality; or the decision not to check personal email while on the clock at work.

In today's quoted verse, Jesus tells his disciples that how we treat the little things is a good indicator of how we will treat the big things. My inferior bread doesn't bother me, but my style of baking calls me to examine the approach I take to other tasks in my life. What does the sum total of my actions say about the person I am and the person I am becoming?

Prayer: O God, you see all, know all, and are with us in all. Help us to make good choices in all circumstances. Amen.

Teresa Coda (Rhode Island)

HAVE FAITH

READ Mark 2:1-12

The prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise them up. If they have sinned, they will be forgiven.

— James 5:15 (NIV)

I serve a small church in Estonia. One Sunday morning before the service began, the phone rang and a desperate mother said to me, "Our son Romet has been diagnosed with an incurable disease. Doctors give us no hope, and he does not have much time left. We have heard that God can help in such situations."

"Yes," I replied, "God can help, and we will pray for your son." The woman

responded, "We will come right now to your service!" I hesitated, thinking, *What if we fail? Can we really help this family?*

When I arrived at the church, the family was already waiting for me. We changed the order of service and took time to pray for Romet. We relied on God's promises. Some months later the family returned. The boy's mother said, "Romet has been healed! His doctors are amazed, and we give praise to God!"

This story reminds me of when Jesus healed the paralyzed man in today's reading. Because of the faith of the man's friends, Jesus healed him and forgave his sins. Though Jesus may not heal each of us in the same way, he can do miraculous things in our lives.

Prayer: Dear Lord, help us to trust that our faithful prayers make a difference. Amen.

Rando Metsamaa (Estonia)

THUR
FEB 14
2019

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Prayer is powerful.

FRI
FEB 15
2019

SHARING GOD'S WORD

READ Ephesians 4:7-16

Jesus said, "Where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them."

— Matthew 18:20 (NIV)

When I was a child, my grandma taught me to memorize Bible verses. She told me that when she had trouble sleeping, she would try to recall all of the passages she had committed to memory and that doing this comforted her and helped her to be at peace. Now that I am 95 years old and spend more time at home alone, I especially appreciate that comfort and peace. The Bible can be a companion for those who are alone, but it also draws us together for worship and study.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

I can find comfort and peace in studying the Bible.

For most of my life, I have been blessed to worship and study in communion with others. Even as I have moved to new communities frequently, I have always considered it such a blessing to be able to form lifelong friendships with the many pastors and fellow members. I recently joined a Bible study with a group of women whose average age was around a third of mine. I worried I could not keep up with them, and that worry increased when I suffered a slight stroke that left me hospitalized. To be honest, the group wasn't on my mind when Tuesday morning rolled around for us to have our last Bible study class. What a surprise — and a joy — it was when into my small, antiseptic hospital room walked the women of my study group, ready to share with me the week's lesson! Whether alone or in fellowship, the Bible is our lifelong companion.

Prayer: Thank you, God, for guiding us to a peaceful path of fellowship with others as we study your word. Amen.

Dolly Doss (Texas)

DIVINE ADOPTION

SAT
FEB 16
2019

READ John 14:15-21

You didn't receive a spirit of slavery to lead you back again into fear, but you received a Spirit that shows you are adopted as [God's] children. With this Spirit, we cry, "Abba, Father."

— Romans 8:15 (CEB)

As I drove home from my mother's funeral, I was struck by the deeply sad thought that with both of my parents dead, I had become an orphan. I was feeling sorry for myself — utterly alone and dejected.

In the depths of my despair, the Spirit reminded me that Jesus assured us that we are not orphans because he came to redeem us so that we could be adopted as children of God. (See Gal. 4:5.) Jesus taught us that we have a family — the family of God — that loves us, wants the best for us, and is always there for us.

At times, we may feel alone and dejected, especially when our parents die. But beyond our momentary feelings, we can trust that we have a Father who will always love us and never leave us.

Prayer: Dear Father, help us to grow into the image of your son and our brother, Jesus Christ. Thank you for always being with us and reassuring us when we feel alone. Amen.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

I am loved as a member of God's family.

James R. Hayes (Tennessee)

Prayer Focus: SOMEONE MOURNING THE DEATH OF A PARENT

SUN
FEB 17
2019

SHOW-AND-TELL

READ 1 Thessalonians 2:1-12

Because we loved you so much, we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well.

— 1 Thessalonians 2:8 (NIV)

I love inviting my friends to join me at prayer meeting, but they often refuse my invitation. One day a friend told me, “Before you invite people to come in, you yourself must exhibit a life changed by Christ.”

Paul and his partners in Christ, Silas and Timothy, realized that people would not believe their gospel message if their own lives did not show the love of Christ.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

How do people see Christ in me?

The passage from 1 Thessalonians reminds me of the saying, “Actions speak louder than words.”

Preaching and teaching God’s word are important, but we can also reflect Christ in our lives through our actions. The first believers decided to follow Christ not only because they had heard the gospel through preaching and teaching but because of the kindness they received. (See Acts 2:42-47.)

None of us is perfect. But we can try to imitate the life of Jesus. Our lives and the lives of others may not change instantly; but if we continue to imitate Christ day by day, God will make us a new creation that can bless even more people. If our actions match our words, we will become more effective in inviting people to a relationship with God by following Jesus Christ.

Prayer: Beloved God, we believe that with your love and strength our lives will be changed to become more like Jesus. Help us to be salt and light for the world. Amen.

Linawati Santoso (East Java, Indonesia)

THROUGH THE WATERS

MON
FEB 18
2019

READ Psalm 46:1-5

The LORD says, “When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you.”

— Isaiah 43:2 (NIV)

In August 2016, south Louisiana experienced major flooding, causing widespread devastation. Many homes and businesses suffered major damage and people lost virtually all their possessions. The situation was stressful and depressing.

Yet all around us we also saw reminders of God’s Spirit. It was common for people to pray together in driveways as they prepared for the difficult work ahead. Friends — and even people we didn’t know — brought meals. We received relief packages from all over the country. Churches and relief organizations provided clothing and other essentials. People came from near and far to help. A group from Los Angeles worked all day on my friend’s house and gave her a new Bible. They then invited us to dinner at the church where they were lodging. These acts of kindness lifted our spirits and strengthened us.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

God always walks with me.

Recovery is a long, slow process. But God worked through the actions of friends and strangers to sustain us materially and spiritually. It is hard to imagine that any of us could fully recover without the active work of God’s Spirit. God brought many from far and wide to rescue us from the flood.

Prayer: Thank you, loving God, for lifting us up when life is difficult. Amen.

Glen Graham (Louisiana)

TUES
FEB 19
2019

FAITH IN ACTION

READ Romans 12:9-17

Love each other like the members of your family. Be the best at showing honor to each other.

— Romans 12:10 (CEB)

While at a local restaurant, I saw the group at the next table praying before their meal. What made this so profound is what happened next. The server dropped a plate of food in the lap of one of the neatly dressed women; but instead of becoming angry or calling for the manager, she assured the chagrined server that she was fine. I wondered at this for several days. This group had displayed their beliefs by praying at their dinner table. But, more importantly, the

woman's compassion toward the server clearly demonstrated her faith. This person's kindness was witnessed by dozens of diners.

Often I think about that day and how essential practicing kindness and compassion is to the Christian life. However, knowing this is easier than doing it. Our jobs, children, social obligations, and extended family can so fill our minds that we can forget to show these qualities. I pray that others see Christ in me just as I saw Christ in that group at the restaurant.

Prayer: Gracious Lord, may we be beacons of your light each day. Amen.

Sheila Hester (North Carolina)

SYMBOLS OF VICTORY

WED
FEB 20
2019

READ Revelation 21:1-7

The one who is victorious will, like them, be dressed in white. I will never blot out the name of that person from the book of life.

— Revelation 3:5 (NIV)

I have always followed stories of Olympic athletes with enthusiasm, but the stories of doping and accusations of unfair judges and manipulated results have made me look for other examples of victory.

Today I prefer to contemplate the small but significant victories that often go unnoticed. I am struck by the effort of a mother who awakens at dawn, uses precarious public transportation, and takes long journeys to support her children. I admire the effort of a person who has lived with addiction for many years to start life anew. I'm inspired by the life of a bricklayer in the hinterlands of São Paulo who had both legs amputated and was abandoned by his wife as I learn how he has resumed his profession, remarried, and finds his work in high demand.

Whether in sports or in life, I enjoy stories of overcoming challenges through dedication and courage. Perhaps that is why the author of Revelation uses some of the symbols of victory of his day — robes, crowns, etc. — to encourage persecuted Christians to persevere and find victory through faith. When we look to God, we can persevere and find victory over any obstacle.

Prayer: Dear God, encourage us when we face challenges. Help us to persevere so that we may find victory in you. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

José Aparecido (Minas Gerais, Brazil)

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
Obstacles are an invitation to persevere in faith.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
What can I do today to shine the light of Christ to the world?

THUR
FEB 21
2019

HELP IS NEAR

READ **Philippians 4:4-7**

Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.

— Philippians 4:6 (NRSV)

The phone rang loudly one summer night. It was 10:30 p.m. The caller ID said it was the health center where my husband was a resident. Once again he was being taken to the emergency room for a short treatment. Suddenly, I was faced with a tough decision and felt very alone. *Should I get dressed and drive the 40 minutes to the hospital? What if the treatment doesn't help?*

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
Each day God will give me strength for my journey.

*My children live far away.
Whom can I call so late at night to come with me?*

As thoughts raced through my mind, the nurse said not to worry, that my husband would return to the nursing home in a few hours. I did not need to come. Her words of comfort reminded me of the verse quoted above. After I hung up the phone, I asked God to be with my husband and to give me strength. My husband returned to the nursing home feeling better, and I was thankful.

Through the fear and uncertainty of this experience I saw that God truly walks with me and that I am not alone. God's loving faithfulness is always available. Through prayer, we can put our trust in God every day for strength, guidance, and wisdom that can sustain us as we face the uncertainties of daily life. We only need to ask.

Prayer: Faithful God, thank you for offering us your love and strength when we are afraid. Help us to trust you. Amen.

Melinda Lazor (Connecticut)

LEND A HAND

READ **Matthew 25:31-40**

The King will reply, "Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me."

— Matthew 25:40 (NIV)

A few years ago during my summer vacation, I went on a mission trip to Roanoke, Virginia. A group from my church, along with 600 other students and teachers, served throughout the community. My group's assignment was to remodel the basement of a local free clinic. Our job included painting the room, cleaning the floors, building and installing shelving units, and painting a mural along the wall.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
With God's help, I can make a difference in someone's life today.

The work was hard, especially when the air conditioning failed. However, we made good progress, and the final result of our labor made us all proud. We had transformed a dingy, dirty basement into a functioning medical storage area for the clinic — work that the custodian would not have been able to do on his own. While we had not directly worked with the clinic's patients, we had made the jobs of the employees easier and helped them to better serve the community.

Working on that basement was one of the most spiritually rewarding and rejuvenating experiences of my life. Through this experience, it has become easier for me to see how any kind of work can be a means of serving others in the way that Jesus spoke about in Matthew 25.

Prayer: Dear God, forgive us when we put our needs above those of others, and guide us as we look for ways to serve you. Amen.

Brendan Chase (North Carolina)

SAT
FEB 23
2019

FROM GRUMBLING TO FORGIVENESS

READ James 5:7-12

Do not grumble against one another.

— James 5:9 (NRSV)

One night I woke up suddenly with a pounding heart and a dry throat. In a bad dream I had been arguing with my husband over a family issue. Some time back I had been deeply hurt by one of our family members. Over time I thought I had forgotten the experience and had forgiven the one who had caused me such mental and emotional anguish. But in my subconscious I was still resentful of what had happened and harboring a grudge — so deeply that I was continually grumbling about it to my husband.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
God can help me move beyond
grumbling to forgiveness.

This particular morning, through this bad dream, God spoke to me in the words from James above. As

I pondered these words, I began to experience the cleansing spirit of love, which flowed into my mind and heart, bringing with it God's peace.

Prayer: Our God and Father, we need your healing touch in our lives. Help us to remember your countless blessings so that we will do less grumbling and complaining and more loving and forgiving. Amen.

N. Vijaya Vani (Hyderabad, India)

WEEPING WITH US

READ John 11:30-45

Jesus wept.

— John 11:35 (KJV)

One Sunday when I was young, we were challenged to memorize a Bible verse. I searched through my Bible looking for the shortest verse I could find. Bingo! I found John 11:35 which contained only two words! Even I could remember this!

Now that I'm older and have stood beside the caskets of family members and loved ones, now that I have wept as they have been lowered into the grave, I think of this verse in a different light. Oh, the love Jesus had for this family! Standing at the burial tomb of Lazarus, tears running down his face, "Jesus wept." Oh, the love Jesus has for each of us! Even in the most trying times, even when darkness surrounds us, even when death is knocking at our door, there stands Jesus, loving us and weeping with us.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
When I weep, Jesus
weeps with me.

Prayer: Dear God, thank you for your love and compassion and your constant presence with us. As Jesus taught us, we pray, "Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, as in heaven, so in earth. Give us day by day our daily bread. And forgive us our sins; for we also forgive every one that is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil" (Luke 11:2-4, KJV). Amen.

Jeffrey A. Lambert (Kentucky)

MON
FEB 25
2019

ALL ARE INVITED

READ Galatians 3:26-29

There is no Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all.

Colossians 3:11 (NIV)

I grew up very poor, the son of sharecroppers. One day, I heard about an upcoming birthday party for one of the neighborhood children that we played with. All week I was excited about getting to go to the party and play with the other kids, eat cake and ice cream, and share in all of the fun. But there was just one problem — I wasn't invited. I was devastated. I

had never been so hurt nor felt so rejected. It all had to do with social standing; my family was just too poor.

Thankfully I never

have to worry about being

excluded from the body of Christ. In my church, all who love Christ, who earnestly repent of their sin and seek to live in peace with one another, are invited to the Communion table. Our Lord does not judge us according to wealth or social standing but invites everyone to be a part of his feast.

Why would we want to exclude anyone from what is offered to us through God's amazing grace? After all, we are all sinners. Following Christ's example, we can invite others into the joy of Christian community.

Prayer: Dear Lord, help us always to be sensitive to the needs of others and invite them to our churches and to the Lord's Table. Amen.

Gary Lee Griffin (Georgia)

TO SEE GOD MORE CLEARLY

TUES
FEB 26
2019

READ 2 Corinthians 4:16-18

We live by faith, not by sight.

— 2 Corinthians 5:7 (NIV)

After three years of severe medical challenges, my eyes seemed to have reached a point of stability. Thinking it was time to get a new prescription for glasses, I booked an appointment. During my exam, the optometrist told me, "Your current prescription is correct. However, your macular degeneration has progressed over the past year."

Sadness swept over me. *My vision will never be better than it is right now, and new glasses won't help*, I thought.

I voiced my anguish to friends who had prayed for me before. Several people shared scripture and thoughts with me, but the most meaningful was a line from the musical *Godspell*: "Day by day, oh dear Lord, three things I pray: To see thee more clearly, love thee more dearly, follow thee more nearly, day by day." *Yes! I need to fix my eyes on God — to see God more clearly*, I thought.

I now have these words posted above my desk at work, and I think about them every day.

Of course we don't see God with our physical eyes, but we "see" God when we pray, read the Bible, and share in fellowship with other Christians. Through these faith practices we can draw closer to God, who is always close to us.

Prayer: Dear God, teach us to focus on you and draw closer to you each day. Amen.

Janet Seever (Alberta, Canada)

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
With Christ, I am
never rejected.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
When I focus on God, my
vision is always 20/20.

WED
FEB 27
2019

QUIET SERVICE

READ Matthew 23:1-12

The greatest among you will be your servant.

— Matthew 23:11 (NIV)

When my mom entered a nursing home, I got the chance to observe the many people who care for those who reside there. I remember the first time that I saw Manny. He looked like a tough guy but proved to be quite the opposite. Each

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

If God is the only one to see my works, that is enough.

day, Manny helps his mother with lunch. He gently and carefully feeds her, one tiny spoonful at a time. I believe that his patience and compassion

sustains her more than anything on the lunch plate. Also, I observe aides who work for little money yet show love and concern to patients who are too weak to care for themselves. Some residents cannot even acknowledge their help.

The local news sometimes features heroes who perform great service and deserve to be recognized. However, many other people quietly serve those around them day after day in obscurity. They will never make the evening news. I'm sure that they would hardly consider themselves great; yet in their actions, I see people serving as Christ taught us to serve. Their faithful and steadfast service truly make them what Jesus called "the greatest among you."

Prayer: Open our eyes, Lord, to those who serve with patience and grace. Help us to learn from their example so that we may humbly serve those we meet. Amen.

Andrea Woronick (Connecticut)

FOLLOWING GOD'S LEAD

THUR
FEB 28
2019

READ Judges 7:4-15

Unless the LORD builds the house, the builders labor in vain.

— Psalm 127:1 (NIV)

For months, we on the board of campus ministry were focused on our fundraising auction. As chair of the board, I met frequently with a young woman who had offered to lead our efforts. Then, a month before the event, she said she just couldn't handle the responsibility and bowed out. After that, the volunteer we had depended upon to manage the decorations had a family emergency and was not able to help after all. My mother went into hospice care, and I became distracted. The week of the event, the auctioneer backed out.

As I began to panic, I recalled the story of Gideon. God instructed Gideon to reduce his army in order to show the Israelites that God was delivering the people. Gideon followed God's instruction and overcame the Midianites.

At the board meeting, we realized that God was speaking through our situation. We did not need an army; we needed to refocus on the purpose of the event and depend on God. So we prayed for God to take control. Even though our reservation numbers were bleak, we remained certain that God would provide. Our attendance was much lower than the previous year, yet our income more than doubled. When we listen in prayer and follow God's lead, God will sustain us.

Prayer: Remind us, O God, that our plans mean nothing if you are not in them. Amen.

Bobbie Smith Bryant (Kentucky)

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

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

JANUARY 2: *Where Is the New?*

1. Have there been times when, like Julu, you have struggled to see the newness of your life? What kept you from noticing or feeling that newness?
2. What changes have you seen in your life that indicate the new life you have found in Christ? What does becoming a new creation in Christ look like?
3. What spiritual practices help you to renew your spirit? What new practice would you like to try in the coming week?
4. Are there scriptures that help you feel rejuvenated in your

spiritual life? What about these scriptures in particular speaks to you?

5. What rituals or practices does your church have to acknowledge or celebrate new life in Christ? Are these meaningful to you? Why or why not?

JANUARY 9: *Look Around*

1. Recall a time when you "pulled the blinders over your eyes," only to realize later that God was trying to tell you something. Why did you behave that way? What helped you to remove the blinders and see God's blessings?
2. Who in your life helps you to recognize and celebrate God's blessings? What can you learn from this person?
3. Describe a time when you chose to be open to God and to fully trust God's promises. What was your experience?
4. Name some promises God makes in scripture. Which of these promises are most comforting to you? Which are most challenging or confusing?
5. Do you find it easier to rely on yourself sometimes, rather than turn to God? Why or why not?

JANUARY 16: *Busy Days*

1. Have you ever dismissed others because you didn't feel you had time for them? What did you do to rectify the situation?
2. What helps you to step away from the busyness of your life in order to focus on showing Christ's love to others?
3. What does it look like to live like Jesus, walking in his footsteps? Name some specific ways you show Christ's love to others.
4. Do you find it more difficult to live like Christ when life gets busy? What scriptures or spiritual practices help you to follow Christ's example?
5. How does your church model Christ's love to the people in your community? In what new ways could you or others in your church shine the light of Christ beyond the church walls?

JANUARY 23: *Rich in Faith*

1. Describe a time when you worried that you did not have enough — enough money, enough food, enough energy, etc. What helped you to get through that experience?
2. What does a life rich in faith look like for you? What blessings do you find in spiritual wealth?
3. Are there times you struggle to live a life of Christian discipline? When you find yourself focusing more on earthly concerns or if you notice you are not making as much time for your faith as you would like, what do you do to refocus?
4. Do you find it difficult at times to focus on what you *have* rather than what you *want*? What are some scriptures or practices that help you to be mindful of the blessings in your life and to give thanks?
5. How does your church talk about money and wealth? What responsibility do we have as Christians when it comes to money?

JANUARY 30: *Looming Mountains*

1. Have you ever had an experience like Pat's, where you became overwhelmed by the majesty of God's creation? Describe your experience.
2. Think of a time when you were too close to a problem you faced and found it hard to see a solution. Did you ask God for help? What happened?
3. Do you have a specific prayer to ask God for strength when you encounter challenges? What practices help you to remember God's presence and strength in difficult times?
4. Have you memorized psalm 121, or any other scriptures? What other scripture passage would you want to memorize so that it will come to mind in difficult moments?
5. When has your church or community faced a problem that seemed too big to be solved? How did God help you overcome that problem? What did you learn from this experience?

FEBRUARY 6: *"Follow Me"*

1. Have you ever felt, like Kevin, that it would be easier to simply believe rather than to follow in Jesus' footsteps? Is there a difference for you between believing and following? Give some examples to support your answer.
2. Describe a time when you pushed yourself out of your comfortable place in order to follow Jesus. Where did you go? What did you do? Did you find joy and contentment through your choice?
3. Think of a historical figure who followed Jesus in a courageous way. What do you admire about this person? Why is this example of courage inspiring to you? How would you like this inspiration to shape your life of faith?
4. What scriptures give you courage and strength when you decide to follow Jesus? What passages help you to discern whether you are following Jesus?
5. How does your church follow Jesus? What ministries or programs invite you and others to put faith into action? Are there ways this could be done better?

FEBRUARY 13: *The Little Things*

1. Besides bread baking, what activities can you think of where small details make a big difference in the final product? Name some of the details that make a big difference.
2. When you find yourself neglecting or not appreciating small actions, what practices do you use to remind yourself to be faithful to the gospel in the small things, as well as the big ones?
3. Who has taught you the most about appreciating and paying attention to the small actions and details of daily life? How has this person helped to shape your faith?
4. Are you intentional about considering the sum of your actions and what that sum says about you? Do you find that the level of attention you dedicate to your actions impacts the way you act?
5. What choices do you make in your life that help maintain your integrity? Do you find it easy to make those choices or is it sometimes more difficult? What scriptures give you strength and help you make those more difficult choices?

FEBRUARY 20: *Symbols of Victory*

1. Share a story of victory, big or small, that has impacted you in some way. How are you encouraged by that story?
2. In what ways do you think the symbols used by the author of Revelation provided encouragement to persecuted Christians in that time? What symbols provide encouragement and hope to you during challenging times?
3. When you're met with an obstacle, how do you overcome it? What spiritual practices bring you the strength and comfort to persevere?
4. Have you met with an obstacle that made you want to give up? How did your faith allow you to persevere in spite of adversity?
5. How does your church encourage people to persevere in faithful living? How do people in your community support one another during times of struggle? How could your church be more encouraging or supportive?

FEBRUARY 27: *Quiet Service*

1. Tell about a time you witnessed an act of service performed quietly, with nothing given in return to the person serving. How did seeing quiet service impact you?
2. Do you ever find it frustrating that some people get praise for their actions while others often get no acknowledgment for their service? What spiritual practice reminds you that serving like Jesus often means serving without personal gain?
3. Name some ways you already serve others. Whom else would you like to be able to serve? What other ways would you like to begin using your gifts to serve your community?
4. What stories in scripture show you the importance of serving others faithfully? What passages encourage you to serve, even if God is the only one who sees your service?
5. What needs are weighing on your heart today? What are your prayers for the world? For your church? For your family and friends? For yourself?

IN TIMES OF/FOR HELP WITH . . .

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| Assurance: Jan. 25; Feb. 4, 9 | Guidance: Jan. 20; Feb. 2 |
| Bible reading: Jan. 11; Feb. 15 | Healing/Illness: Jan. 24, 27; Feb. 1, 3, 21 |
| Celebration: Jan. 15 | Hope: Jan. 19, 30 |
| Change: Jan. 17, 20 | Hospitality: Jan. 13; Feb. 25, 27 |
| Christian community: Jan. 6, 10, 17, 27; Feb. 14, 15, 18, 25 | Living our faith: Jan. 2, 11, 13, 16, 28; Feb. 5, 6, 8, 12, 13, 17, 19 |
| Compassion: Jan. 16 | Loneliness: Feb. 16 |
| Courage/Risk: Jan. 3; Feb. 6, 14, 20 | Materialism: Jan. 23 |
| Creation/Nature's beauty: Feb. 8 | Mission/Outreach: Jan. 5, 31; Feb. 17, 22 |
| Death/Grief: Jan. 4, 20, 29; Feb. 16, 24 | New beginnings: Jan. 1, 2, 7 |
| Encouragement: Jan. 10; Feb. 20 | Parenting: Feb. 11 |
| Family: Jan. 12, 18, 22; Feb. 23 | Patience: Jan. 27 |
| Fear: Jan. 18 | Prayer: Jan. 12; Feb. 14, 21, 28 |
| Financial Concerns: Jan. 14, 23; Feb. 25 | Renewal: Jan. 21, 26; Feb. 7, 10 |
| Forgiveness: Jan. 8, 10; Feb. 9, 23 | Repentance: Jan. 8, 25 |
| Friendship: Jan. 16, 29 | Serving: Jan. 15, 31; Feb. 3, 18, 22, 27 |
| Freedom: Feb. 9 | Speaking about faith: Jan. 5 |
| Generosity/giving: Jan. 6 | Spiritual gifts: Feb. 3, 22 |
| God's goodness/love: Jan. 9, 22, 25, 29; Feb. 4, 11 | Spiritual practices: Jan. 9, 21, 28; Feb. 5, 7, 12, 15, 19, 26 |
| God's presence: Jan. 4, 18, 24; Feb. 1, 16, 24, 26 | Stewardship: Jan. 23; Feb. 28 |
| God's provision: Jan. 12, 19, 26, 30; Feb. 10, 18 | Stress: Feb. 7 |
| Gratitude: Jan. 17 | Tragedy: Jan. 6; Feb. 18 |
| Growth: Jan. 1, 7; Feb. 1, 13 | Trust: Jan. 7, 14, 19; Feb. 2, 11, 28 |
| | Worry: Jan. 3, 21, 30; Feb. 21, 28 |

