

JULY - AUGUST 2019

GST #128363256

THE UPPER ROOM®

WHERE THE WORLD MEETS TO PRAY

Stephen D. Bryant, Publisher

35 LANGUAGES

| Invitational | Interdenominational | International | |
|-----------------------|---------------------|---------------|------------|
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| BULGARIAN | GREEK | KANNADA | SINHALA |
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COVER ART INTERPRETATION

Jesus Heals the Blind Man

**Artist: Ann Lukesh
(USA, Contemporary)**

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

The Gospels are replete with Jesus' miracles — turning water into wine, feeding the masses, healing the sick, and giving sight to the blind. In John 9:1-12, Jesus gives sight to a man blind from birth — the story behind this issue's cover art. The painting shows one detail of the story from John 9:6: "[Jesus] spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man's eyes" (NRSV).

The artist places us so close to the story that it seems we are watching the events along with the disciples. We can see Jesus' gentle expression as he cradles the man's face, thumbs touching the man's eyelids. One eyelid is open, although the man doesn't appear to be able to see anyone. But he appears at ease and seems to trust Jesus.

At the beginning of the story, the disciples ask Jesus who is to blame for the man's blindness (John 9:2). But Jesus reminds them that the point of this occasion is for Jesus to show someone miraculous healing. Jesus says to the disciples, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned . . . but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him. As long as it is day, we must do the works of him who sent me" (John 9:3-4, NIV).

I wonder how often we are like the disciples. This painting, along with the story it depicts, reveals a choice for the disciples, and it presents a choice for us today. Do we look so closely at one detail that we miss the larger story? How will we seek to trust Jesus, work hard to serve God, and strive to see all the wonders of God's power around us?

Cover art courtesy of Ann Lukesh. © 2014 Ann Lukesh. Prints of cover art are available from fineartamerica.com/artists/ann+lukesh

Prayerful Trust

Jesus prayed, “*Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.*”

— Matthew 6:10 (NIV)

We don’t assign themes to our issues; nor do we have any theme in mind when we select a group of devotionals for publication. We simply look for the stories, perspectives, and insights that we feel will best help readers connect with God and deepen their lives of faith. And yet, without fail, as I read each issue, I find a common thread woven through many of the writers’ stories that points us to a word from God that goes beyond any one devotion. In this issue, that theme is *prayerful trust*.

Throughout this issue, writers share their experiences of illness, grief, natural disaster, uncertainty, or following a sense of calling. So many of their stories describe prayer as the means by which the writer learns to continually connect to God, to listen for God’s guidance, to depend on the care of people around them, and to find peace in difficult circumstances. Each writer calls out to God, trusting that God will answer.

It is often tempting to think of prayer as transactional: If I faithfully ask for _____, God will give it to me. And though sometimes we do experience a quick and direct answer to prayer, often that is not the case. But praying as Jesus taught us, for God’s will to be done, connects us to God and heightens our awareness of God’s work in our lives. When we are open to receiving a word from God, we are more likely to notice the opportunities and blessings God gives us every day. As you read this issue, I hope and pray that you will find new courage to pray and through prayer to trust that God is at work in your life and in the world.



— Lindsay Gray
Editorial Director

From the Archives

In 1955, the 20th anniversary edition of The Upper Room reprinted these four reader-submitted prayers that appeared in earlier issues of the magazine. We publish them again here as a reminder that prayer binds us together in Christian community.

Prayer for a Spirit of Gratitude

(From the 1st Issue of *The Upper Room*)

Our Father, we want to learn how sincerely and genuinely to say, “Thank you!” Save us from the hardness of heart which is always the result of ingratitude. May we so constantly think of the gift of Jesus Christ that our appreciation will become spontaneous. Amen.

— G. Ray Jordan (Georgia)

For Grace at the Table

(From the 5th Anniversary volume of *The Upper Room*)

Our heavenly Father, we humbly beseech Thee to bless this food and our fellowship and to enable us to rejoice in the presence of the divine unseen Guest whose coming to earth has filled all life with new meaning and beauty. Amen.

— Charles C. Selecman (Texas)

Prayer for Increase in Faith

(From the 10th Anniversary volume of *The Upper Room*)

Our heavenly Father, we thank Thee that Thou art our refuge and ever-present help against our spiritual enemies. Thy right hand hath wrought wonders. Increase our faith, and help us to realize that without Thee we can do nothing. In Christ’s name. Amen.

— Cl. Gutiérrez Marin (Mexico)

Table Grace

(From the 15th Anniversary volume of *The Upper Room*)

For what we have received of Thy bounty, O God, we render Thee our devout thankfulness. Bless, we beseech Thee, the food prepared for our use and our fellowship together. Grant that as we live by Thy providence we may live to Thy praise. In the name of our Lord and Redeemer we pray. Amen.

— Ben Glover (British Columbia)

Where the World Meets to Pray

NOT ONLY ME

MON
JULY 1
2019

PHILIPPINES

The Ilokano edition publishing team is coordinating with Young People's Ministries of the United Methodist Church to host devotional writing workshops for youth and young adults around the Philippines.

SINGAPORE

Copies of *The Upper Room* are distributed to principals, teachers, and chaplains at several Methodist schools in Singapore.

Editions of *The Upper Room* daily devotional guide are printed in:

- Australia
- Indonesia
- Malaysia
- Myanmar
- The Philippines
- Singapore
- Thailand

READ Exodus 17:9-13*

When Moses' hands grew tired . . . Aaron and Hur held his hands up — one on one side, one on the other — so that his hands remained steady till sunset.

— Exodus 17:12 (NIV)

During my senior year of high school, I coordinated the worship bands for our junior-high, high-school, and homeless ministries. I gave guitar lessons to children and played bass for another church on Wednesday nights. And when our high-school ministry was without a pastor for several months, I saw the pain of my friends and decided to do whatever it took to keep that ministry going. But like Moses, my arms were getting tired.

I had become caught in the illusion that all of this was my responsibility alone. Too many times through the years I've thought that God

wanted me to hold things up all on my own. But I was forgetting that though God can use me, God will never use only me. Even Moses needed Aaron and Hur to help him hold up the staff; I was trying to hold up too many ministries all on my own.

I wanted to be the one who did everything for God, but that wasn't possible for me or what God expected of me. No single one of us can sustain God's work; instead we are blessed with our community of faith. If we can learn to lean on the Lord and the church, together we can accomplish truly amazing things.

Prayer: Dear Lord, open us to accept the help of others to do the good work that you have called us to do. Amen.

Cameron Catanzano (California, USA)

Prayer Focus: THE MINISTRIES OF MY CHURCH

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

TUES
JULY 2
2019

SEEDS OF COMPASSION

READ Colossians 3:1-12

As God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.

— Colossians 3:12 (NIV)

As I sat in the waiting area of the emergency room, my thoughts were fixed on my asthma-related breathing issues. I had not planned to spend time at the hospital that day. Nearby sat a five-year-old boy named Dominic, sporting a small bandage on his head. The nurse confided that he was quite frightened. I edged over to the open seat adjoining Dominic and his mother and asked him if he would like to see

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

God's love and kindness can shine through me to others who are suffering.

some animal photos on my cell phone. As my attention shifted from myself to the boy, I quickly had a new friend.

Soon Dominic noticed an elderly woman quietly crying on the opposite side of the waiting room. "Would you like to come with me to check on her?" I asked. As I expressed Dominic's concern to her, she introduced herself and shook his hand. Before long, she and Dominic were looking at pictures of her pet dogs and grandchildren. I smiled as the kindness in both their hearts overtook their immediate worries.

My interaction with Dominic helped me to realize that we can allow God's kindness to travel with us wherever we go. As we plant seeds of compassion, they are multiplied exponentially. And in each action and word — to God be the glory!

Prayer: God of all, thank you for your daily compassion. May we seek opportunities to extend your love and grace to those around us. Amen.

Lin Daniels (Massachusetts, USA)

TAKING A RISK

READ Matthew 5:11-16

Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.

— Matthew 5:16 (KJV)

At the age of 19 I felt God gently nudging me to join a mission organization where I would attend a full-time discipleship training school. I was at a point of desperation to truly discover the God I had said I knew for the previous ten years, and this seemed just the ticket. I was ready to give up everything for this opportunity, but no one else in my life agreed with me. They said, "How do you know it is God nudging you?" and "You have a great job!" and "What will you do after that?" Everyone had questions that seemed to imply they thought I had lost my mind.

But I had a peace in my heart about this idea, and I knew it had come from God. That was all I needed to hold on to when nothing else seemed to make sense. Following God's guidance leaves me happier and more fulfilled. When I'm at peace with my choices and I'm following God's will, my light shines. Other people see it and ask what I'm doing right.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Even if others question me, I will be ready to answer God's call.

Sometimes to make ourselves available to God, we have to take risks. Sometimes those risks take us out of our comfort zone. But it's in the dimness of the uncomfortable unknown that our lights shine best!

Prayer: Dear God, help us to be ready to go where you call us and to trust your guidance so that our lights will shine before others. Amen.

Amorelle Reneisha Browne (Grenada)

THUR
JULY 4
2019

REJOICE, PRAY, GIVE THANKS

READ 1 Thessalonians 5:12-24

Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

— 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 (NIV)

I have been a Christian for over 40 years and have studied and meditated on 1 Thessalonians several times. As many times as I have slowed down and considered every phrase of the verse quoted above, it wasn't until my youngest son was

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

I will rejoice with prayerful thanksgiving today and always.

deployed overseas that I began to truly comprehend the depth and breadth of Paul's words.

When a loved one is in harm's way, you find your-

self praying while brushing your hair, while driving, during lunchtime. Finding myself in a constant state of prayer was a new stage in my relationship with Christ. He is always there, but how often do we take the opportunity to reach to him in prayer? Now that my son has returned safely — though he is headed back again next year — I realize anew that although we have done our part in raising him, he belongs to the Lord. Meanwhile I will take advantage of the countless opportunities to go to my Lord and Savior in prayer.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, we praise you for hearing and answering our prayers. Help us to continue steadfast prayer throughout each day. Amen.

Ted Whitford (California, USA)

Prayer Focus: THOSE WITH LOVED ONES IN THE MILITARY

CREATED TO CREATE

READ Genesis 1:20-27

God created humanity in God's own image.

— Genesis 1:27 (CEB)

At the Honolulu Zoo, my husband and I laughed at gray birds with pink faces that made them look as if they were blushing. We marveled at red, green, and yellow parrots that squawked from the trees. When I saw a blue bird with a crest that looked like a fancy hat, I thought about the way that humans were created in God's own image.

We create clothing as colorful as God made birds' feathers. We use the trees God made to create tables and houses. Pictures of God's beautiful world adorn our walls. When I watch TV or scroll through social media sites, I usually come away feeling unsatisfied.

But when I create a delicious dinner for my family or paint a picture, I feel fulfilled.

Our creative God made us to be creative beings.

When we create something — plant a garden, sing a song, or make a hat — we're happier because we're fulfilling God's purpose for us. The possibilities for creativity are as big as the world that God created for us to enjoy.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

God made me a creative being.

Prayer: Dear God, give us ideas and confidence to use the creativity you gave us to make our lives and the lives of others more interesting and joyful. Amen.

Janet Asbridge (Washington, USA)

Prayer Focus: TO REFLECT GOD'S CREATIVITY

SAT
JULY 6
2019

TRUE LIGHT

READ Psalm 34:1-8

[God] comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God.

— 2 Corinthians 1:4 (NIV)

While seeking medical treatment, I suffered a severe bout of depression. After the crisis, I centered my thoughts on my heavenly Father whose care and presence were steadfast during those difficult days. I thanked God for my family who helped me by demonstrating unconditional love and strength. I gave thanks for the physicians, medications, and the people who prayed for my healing and recuperation. Most of all, I thanked God for sustaining me when I was incapable of sustaining myself.

Throughout this experience, I have been reassured by my capacity to guide and encourage other people in their own times of crisis in my work as a college chaplain. What a privilege it is to serve God! What a great responsibility it is to guide others to Jesus! Motivated by the Holy Spirit to proclaim the good news of salvation, I am humbled to know that in the midst of a crisis we can still be channels of blessing to others.

Prayer: Great God of Comfort, thank you for shining your light and guiding us out of the depths of distress. Your love is our sustaining life source. Amen.

Luciria Aguirre Naranjo (Cali, Colombia)

TIME REMAINING

READ Ephesians 5:15-17

Teach us to count our days that we may gain a wise heart.

— Psalm 90:12 (NRSV)

In my youth, summer seemed to last forever. As I push past the age of 65, that's not the case anymore. I'm particularly aware of the way time passes each time I ride a stationary bicycle at my local gym. A monitor on the bike gives me all kinds of information. But I'm focused on two categories: time elapsed and time remaining.

Today's reading from Ephesians reminds me to live wisely, "making the most of the time" (v. 16). When I think about the time elapsed in my life, I know I haven't been very wise. Perhaps that is why I want to focus my remaining time in life on the things God needs me to do in the future.

How do I accomplish this? For starters, I must fully comprehend that time is a blink in the whirlwind of life. God will send me opportunities. But if I make excuses, then I will miss the chance to help people in need. Time is ticking. From now on, instead of hesitating, I will listen to God and get busy.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help us to be wise in using our time for your good. Amen.

William Avery Pike, Jr. (Virginia, USA)

SUN
JULY 7
2019

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

God can transform a crisis into an opportunity to serve.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

I will make the most of the time God has given me.

MON
JULY 8
2019

COMFORT

READ Jeremiah 29:1-14

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

— Jeremiah 29:11 (NIV)

Today’s quoted verse is one of the most popular scripture verses to memorize. And it should be. It’s a lovely, encouraging verse. But a lot of people don’t realize that this verse is part of a letter to exiles — the Israelites, who still have 70 years of captivity ahead of them. God isn’t saying those words to

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

No matter my situation,
God speaks words of
comfort to me.

happy, comfortable people in their comfortable homes with their comfortable families. God is speaking to people going through some tough stuff.

It’s easy to take comfort in that verse without the context. But with the context, it is even more meaningful. I found that especially true in my case as I battled cancer. My cancer wasn’t a punishment the way the Israelites’ exile was, but it was the toughest season of my life. Some moments I was a little scared of what lay ahead for me, and some moments I was very scared. But in many moments I had more peace than a 40-year-old wife and mother with breast cancer might be expected to have.

That peace came from God, who has plans to prosper me and not to harm me. I’m so thankful that the same words that gave the Israelites comfort thousands of years ago can still be a comfort to us today.

Prayer: Dear Lord, thank you for bringing us comfort in hard times. Help us to sense your presence, even when circumstances make it hard. Amen.

Kim Harms (Iowa, USA)

EVERY DETAIL MATTERS

READ Psalm 104:10-24

Many, LORD my God, are the wonders you have done, the things you planned for us. None can compare with you; were I to speak and tell of your deeds, they would be too many to declare.

— Psalm 40:5 (NIV)

On a hot April afternoon, I went to pick up my five-year-old from school. We had to walk because we couldn’t afford the transport fare. I was in a hurry, sweating profusely and wishing I had a car.

On the way home, a hen crossed our path. With innocent amazement, my daughter asked, “Mummy, why is the hen’s thumb at the back of its leg?” I laughed before answering, “Without the thumb, the hen wouldn’t be able to balance itself well.”

I was slightly embarrassed as I answered her question. I realized that while I was dwelling on the difficulty of our current situation, my little girl was taking in the wonderful works of God’s creation. For weeks, I had been so engrossed in our family’s problems that I had failed to recognize and appreciate the little things. When I focused on God’s perfect creation and the vital details God designed, I realized that every detail of my life matters to God as well.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

God cares for every part
of my life.

Prayer: Thank you, Lord, for caring for even the smallest details of our lives. Help us to remember that everything works together to bring glory and praise to you. Amen.

Catherine Kwao (Accra, Ghana)

WED
JULY 10
2019

A SIMPLE MINISTRY

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)

One day while we were waiting for the bus, my mother talked to the attendant about his need for Christ. I noticed he listened carefully and that her witness made an impression on him. My mother loved people and was always eager to share her faith.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
Wherever I am today I can be a witness for Christ.

When I was preparing for ministry I listened to lectures like, "How to Be a Witness." But when I share my faith today, I remember

Mom's witness for Jesus. Her desire to share Christ was based on a real concern for others, not an exercise based on a step-by-step method taught in a classroom.

Mom's actions impressed upon me that her faith was real and that she wanted everyone she met to know about Christ's saving power. My mother did not consider herself a minister. Yet she fed people, prayed with those who needed prayer, and encouraged those who were discouraged. She simply did what needed to be done to help others and to share her faith.

I learned from my mother's example that sharing our faith doesn't have to be complicated or follow a particular method. It's something any of us can do every day — wherever we are.

Prayer: Dear God, help us as we share your love and the story of salvation with others. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Thad H. Carter (Texas, USA)

Prayer Focus: SOMEONE WHO HAS MODELED FAITH FOR ME

SACRED RELATIONSHIPS

READ Romans 5:1-6

Bear one another's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.

— Galatians 6:2 (NRSV)

In 2014, I learned that I had a brain tumor. After five hours of surgery, doctors determined the tumor to be inoperable. Instead, I had to undergo radiation to shrink the tumor in an effort to prevent further damage and growth.

This was a devastating blow. At age 80, I had lived a full, healthy, and independent life. Now I was forced to make adjustments because of permanent damage to my eyesight, and to my pituitary, adrenal, and other systems. I could no longer drive, which altered my formerly active lifestyle — especially in my church and community activities. But shortly after my return home from the radiation treatments, some women from my church volunteered to drive me anywhere I needed to go. They have done this for more than three years, and in the process we have become close friends — enriching one another's lives.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
In any experience, God offers me opportunities to learn.

Through my struggle and the way my community has cared for me, God has taught me the valuable lesson from Galatians 6:2 about the need for interdependence in Christian community. Now I more fully appreciate the sacredness of relationships. I have realized that life is short and that I should make haste to love, be quick to show kindness, and be eager to help others.

Prayer: O God, help us to be open to your will for us in every circumstance of our lives. Amen.

Luleen S. Anderson (North Carolina, USA)

Prayer Focus: RADIOLOGISTS

FRI
JULY 12
2019

MAX

READ John 10:1-14

[The gatekeeper] calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.

— John 10:3 (NRSV)

My cat, Max, isn't very smart, but he is very affectionate and loves people. Every day at breakfast, he puts his paws on my leg for his morning head scratch. When I get up and go into the bathroom, he comes running upstairs and meows with panic because he can't see me anymore and doesn't

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
When I am lost, God calls me by name.

know where I am. Then, every time, I open the door and call to him, "It'll be okay, Max," and he calms down.

Sometimes my relationship with God is like that. God is always there — close to me every day — but sometimes I lose focus and forget. When I lose my sense of God's presence I feel disconnected and troubled. But if I cry out, God calls me by name and reassures me. Sometimes I don't feel very smart, but — out of an abundance of love and grace — God is always patient with me.

Prayer: Dear God, by your grace, help us to listen for and follow your voice. As Jesus taught us, we pray, "Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen" (Matt. 6:9-13, KJV). Amen.

Raymond Lockley (California, USA)

CHILDREN KNOW BETTER

READ Matthew 18:1-5

Jesus [replied], "Have you never read, 'From the lips of children and infants you, Lord, have called forth your praise'?"

— Matthew 21:16 (NIV)

One day as we were preparing for an outing, my four-year-old son said that we should pray before we left. When asked what he would like to pray for, he said, "Let's thank God for Jesus."

When we help our children to grow in their faith, they in turn can give us an entirely different perspective. I have prayed throughout my life, giving thanks for all the blessings that I receive on a daily basis. Sometimes too many of my blessings go unnoticed. But my son reminded me that we are surrounded by blessings every day. One of the greatest blessings we have received is Jesus, God's son, through whom grace is made available to each of us. My four-year-old son reminded me of this fact that day.

No one knows the kingdom of God better than children. And that is why Jesus tells us to be like them in our faith.

Prayer: Dear Lord, we thank you for Jesus and for the abundant grace that you have made available through him. Amen.

Deepika Emmanuel Sagar (Rajasthan, India)

SAT
JULY 13
2019

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
Today I will thank God for the gift of grace through Jesus Christ.

SUN
JULY 14
2019

PEACE IN THE STORM

READ Psalm 46:1-3

The psalmist wrote, *“If your Instruction hadn’t been my delight, I would have died because of my suffering.”*

— Psalm 119:92 (CEB)

For the first time in all the years I had lived in Florida, a hurricane threatened our home. I had seen the destruction that is created in the wake of a devastating storm, but never before had it been so personal. As we anxiously watched the reports of the pummeling of islands in its path, we prepared our home as best we could and sought safer ground on which to wait it out.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

In every trial, I can lean
on the Lord.

The waiting was filled with fear, uncertainty, and stress. We had no way of

knowing exactly where the storm would hit and what its aftermath would be. We worried not only for ourselves but for our friends and family. And we prayed.

Through it all, one constant brought me peace. I knew that God was with us and would see us through, no matter what the hurricane left in its wake. When the winds had died down and we began the trip home, I was at peace knowing that — no matter what awaited us — we would get through it with God by our side.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help us to remember that no storm in life is too devastating for you to handle. Amen.

Trish Krider (Florida, USA)

Prayer Focus: THOSE DEALING WITH
NATURAL DISASTERS

MON
JULY 15
2019

NEW PURPOSE

READ 1 Samuel 3:1-10

In all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

— Romans 8:28 (NIV)

Many years ago, an auto accident resulted in the traumatic amputation of my left leg and compression fractures of five vertebrae in my back. I was in the army at the time and at the top of my pay grade. This injury resulted in my medical retirement from the service. For months in the hospital I questioned why God had allowed this to happen. I sometimes cursed God for the pain I was having and for taking me

away from a job I loved. For many months I suffered from depression.

Then, while attending my high school reunion, I renewed my friendship with

a classmate; and in a very short time we married. A former medical social worker, Joan applied to volunteer at a hospital and later volunteered me to perform magic tricks for children who were receiving treatment. In a short time this mission of performing expanded to three other hospitals, and for 18 years we brought smiles and joy to those children.

Soon after beginning our mission, parents whom we had seen in the pediatric wards began to thank us for bringing joy to their children. Only after we decided to retire from our hospital work did I fully realize how God had been at work, even in that traumatic time after my accident, to prepare me to bring happiness to others.

Prayer: Dear God, help us to see the new purpose that you have built into every dead end we encounter. Amen.

John McClenahan (Nevada, USA)

I CHOOSE YOU

READ 1 Timothy 1:12-16

Jesus said to [the Pharisees], "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."

— Mark 2:17 (NIV)

I was in the prison yard reading my Bible when another inmate approached me and began to tell me about some issues he was dealing with. I talked to him for about 20 minutes before I needed to leave to attend the worship service in the chapel. "Can I come with you?" he asked. Without hesitating, I said yes. After the service concluded, he asked me to wait for him while he spoke to the chaplain. After they had talked for a while, they came over to me.

The chaplain said to me, "I hear you know a thing or two about the word." He went on to ask me if I would be interested in teaching a Bible study class. I tried to explain to him that I didn't think I could, and he asked me if it was because of something I had done in my past. I nodded. He said, "God doesn't use the ones who are ready; God gets ready the ones God wants to use." I went on to teach the Bible study class.

From this, I learned the valuable lesson that God can use any of us, no matter the circumstances of our lives.

Prayer: Dear God, help us to bring others closer to you by ministering to them wherever we are. Amen.

K. Smith (Ohio, USA)

TUES
JULY 16
2019

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
Regardless of my past,
God can still use me.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

I can examine today's loss to find tomorrow's service for God.

THE POWER OF FAITH

READ Psalm 18:1-6

The psalmist wrote, *“In my distress I called to the LORD; I cried to my God for help. From his temple he heard my voice; my cry came before him, into his ears.”*

— Psalm 18:6 (NIV)

I was born into a Christian home and from a young age participated in the children’s activities in my church. As an adult, I worked as a children’s teacher and later as a counselor for teens. Still, I never imagined the magnitude of the impact that God would have on my life.

It started one afternoon when my world collapsed. The doctor informed me that I had a large cyst on an ovary and needed surgery. The pains were becoming more and more intense and unbearable, my fear and anguish increasing daily.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

When I am attuned to God’s power, I am amazed at what God can do.

Every day I pleaded with God to have mercy on me and to remove that cyst from my body.

On the day of the next medical examina-

tion, I prayed, asking God for strength and courage to face and accept the final result. While I was on the stretcher, I observed the face of the doctor looking for the cyst. Puzzled, he said in a low voice, “I cannot find anything; the cyst is not there.” When I heard that, my heart filled with joy. The beats of my heart were intense. I had no doubt that the power of God had manifested itself. I left the hospital glorifying God for the results. I am sure that we can trust in God because God is able to do all things.

Prayer: Almighty God, thank you for listening to our prayers and sustaining us. Help us to accept the outcome of our struggles, knowing you are always with us. Amen.

Ruth R. Mancilla Casalez (Estado de Mexico, Mexico)

LORD, HOLD MY HAND

READ Romans 8:38-39

I am the LORD your God who takes hold of your right hand and says to you, Do not fear; I will help you.

— Isaiah 41:13 (NIV)

“Hold my hand as we cross this road, son,” I said to my then five-year-old. “No, Mama. You hold my hand,” he responded. As we rushed across the road, I wondered about his request; so later I asked him what he meant when he asked me to hold his hand.

“Well, my hand is small and I might lose your hand, but your hand is stronger than mine. If you hold my hand I know you won’t let go of me.” His trust in me warmed my heart.

We often have the idea that we must hang on to God with all our might lest we get separated from God and lose our way. I’m so glad to know that God promises to take hold of my hand, because God’s hand is much stronger than mine and I know that God will never let go of me.

I say along with Paul that nothing is able to separate us from the love of God. God is holding on to us, and nothing will ever come between God’s hand and ours.

Prayer: Holy Father, on those days when we are afraid and feel all alone, help us to feel the warmth of your hand holding ours. Amen.

Dorcas Andrews (Alabama, USA)

FRI
JULY 19
2019

CALMED BY PRAYER

READ **Philippians 4:4-7**

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

— **Philippians 4:6 (NIV)**

At barely 16 I was the youngest lineman on the varsity football team, but my performance in summer practices had landed me the position of the starting right guard, replacing a graduate who was at one time the Offensive Lineman of the Year. Under the weight of everyone's expectations, I felt overwhelming anxiety.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
Through prayer, I can find peace and understanding.

When game day finally came, I couldn't even eat because I was so nervous. Right after I finished putting on my pads, I listened to my

music and then began to pray — asking God to help me to perform my best and not to get injured. I then begged God to give me peace during this time of worry. At that point, I heard a voice in my mind saying, "I'm here to help."

During that amazing moment, an overwhelming peace came upon me, and I was in awe that God was with me and would help. From that moment on, every time that I pray about an issue in my life I feel an indescribable and overwhelming peace. I am amazed that Almighty God, the Creator of everything, wants to hear our requests and needs.

Prayer: Dear God, thank you for listening to our prayers every time we have a request or need. Help us to remember to always trust in you to help. Amen.

Preston Burke (Texas, USA)

REAL LIFE GOOD SAMARITANS

SAT
JULY 20
2019

READ **Luke 10:25-37**

A Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him.

— **Luke 10:33 (NIV)**

A good friend of mine was mugged one evening after getting off a city bus. Unfortunately, at first no one came to his aid. Then two young men arrived on the scene. They chased the mugger away, called 911, and then sat with my friend until the ambulance arrived. As they waited, my friend discovered that these two young men were immigrant Muslims. While no one else would stop to help, it was two strangers who showed him true kindness.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
When I look through Jesus' eyes, I can see value in every person.

In Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan, the people who might have been expected to stop and help did not, while the unlikely candidate did. Perhaps we could all benefit from examining the way we view others. When we look through Jesus' eyes, we don't see their background or the color of their skin; we see each person as Jesus sees them — made in the image of the Creator.

Prayer: Thank you, Lord, for using unlikely heroes to help those in need. Help us to see each person through your eyes and to value every person as your beloved creation. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Tracy Krauss (British Columbia, Canada)

Prayer Focus: THOSE WHO RISK THEIR SAFETY FOR OTHERS

SUN
JULY 21
2019

GOD'S SPECIAL CREATION

READ Psalm 139:13-18

You created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made.

— Psalm 139:13-14 (NIV)

At one point in my life, I struggled with depression and a low sense of self-worth. *Is life really worth living when I'll always be so mediocre?* I asked myself. I had been going to church only sporadically, so my mother insisted I start going regularly. Early on, I heard a sermon about how we were all

created in God's image and are pleasing to God. After the service, I attended a small group where people talked openly about issues they were dealing with.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
God designed me with special gifts to use in service.

When I shared my depression and feelings of worthlessness, I was surprised to discover that many people were dealing with the same issues.

God seemed to be speaking through me as I told them that I would always be there for any of them who needed me. Every week since then, I have been helping the people in the group. I think maybe I've discovered my special gift, which is helping others. Now I'm pursuing a doctorate in psychology. I've learned that — at just the right time — God will show each of us our particular gift of service.

Prayer: Thank you, almighty God, for sending your son to die for our sins and for creating us individually and uniquely. Help us to use wisely whatever gift you've given us. Amen.

Kevin Alch (Texas, USA)

"I GOT YOU!"

READ Isaiah 41:1-10

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

— Isaiah 41:10 (NIV)

My first summer ministry as an intern was to accompany the youth pastor on a number of wilderness ventures in the White Mountains of New Hampshire. Each adventure ended with a rock-climbing activity. I am not fond of heights but agreed to take part, thinking, *How tall could a cliff be in New England?* But at the bottom of a 300-foot cliff, my fear kicked in. Our expert guide was secured at the top of the cliff and waited for his assistant to tie me into the harness. I slowly began my clumsy ascent. At 20 feet, I almost froze with fear, but I heard the voice of the guide above me: "I got you!" As long as I kept a tight hold on the rope, I felt sure that he was there and guiding me. His encouragement and instructions helped me to make the climb. By following his voice, I eventually made it to the top.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
God is my ever-present help in times of trouble. (See Ps. 46:1.)

Jesus promised that he would always be with us and that he would uphold us through anything we might encounter. When we feel as if we are hanging off a tall cliff with no help in sight, we can recall the promises of God to be with us through it all. God will hold us tightly and instruct us in the way we should go. If we listen, we will hear the encouraging words of the Lord: "I got you!"

Prayer: Wonderful Lord, thank you for reassuring us that you are greater than anything we may face. Amen.

James Baumberger (Connecticut, USA)

TUES
JULY 23
2019

THE WAY

READ John 14:1-7

Jesus said to [Thomas], “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”

— John 14:6 (NRSV)

In the last few years, I have done a lot of traveling. I often don't give a second thought to exploring a new place without a proper guide. As a result, I am frequently uncertain if I have the correct address or if the directions I've been given are complete. At times, I'm having to

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
I can be confident in God's guidance.

search for street names where there aren't any. Other times the directions I've been given use points of reference that are unfamiliar to me.

While some of my travel situations can be frustrating, they remind me of what's important in my faith journey. I know that we are all travelers, but not all of us are going in the right direction. It is good to have, receive, and give the directions that lead to eternal life. We can be confident in the directions we find through scripture because Jesus is clear that he is the way that leads to eternal life.

Prayer: Merciful God, continue to guide us on the path that leads to eternal life. In the name of Jesus who taught us to pray, 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.

Priscilla E. Chaves (Alajuela, Costa Rica)

WHEREVER I AM

READ Isaiah 55:10-12

My word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.

— Isaiah 55:11 (NIV)

I had spent over ten years as a minister, and then one day I found myself without a church. Much of my identity had come from being a pastor. What identity did I have as an unemployed pastor? With a daughter to feed, I needed a job quickly. Then, through a strange series of events, I received an offer to drive a taxi. Running out of options, I accepted.

I wasn't the most enthusiastic cab driver — at least in the beginning. Perhaps I was arrogant and thought it beneath me. God wasn't going to let me get away with that, though.

One day I was driving a woman who had a meth addiction home from the hospital after her close call with death. We had a sincere conversation, and when she got out of the cab she said, “Thank you for that moment of peace and for listening.” Though brief, ours was a true connection. Later that evening I was blessed to see a spectacular sunset of golden pink hues from the taxi, and peace about my vocation washed over me. Suddenly I knew that God would use me for ministry no matter where I landed — whether in a pulpit or a cab.

Our God is so expansive that God was able to pitch a tent for the sun. (See Ps. 19:4.) Every day God gives us fresh revelations; we only have to pay attention. Thanks be to God!

Prayer: Dear God, help us not to miss new insights about how to serve you. Amen.

Jessica Zolondek (USA)

WED
JULY 24
2019

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
Ministry can happen anywhere.

THUR
JULY 25
2019

OUR DWELLING PLACE

READ Psalm 27:1-14

The psalmist wrote, “*The LORD is my light and my salvation — whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life — of whom shall I be afraid?*”

— Psalm 27:1 (NIV)

When our girls were young, the older ones would play “I’m gonna getcha” with whoever was the youngest at the time. Invariably, the youngest would run to me or her mother and attempt to hide behind our legs. She knew that she was safe as long as we were around.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
God’s constant presence gives me confidence to face my fears.

This reminds me of the way that King David knew he was safe as long as he remained in the presence of God. Today’s reading shows

David’s total reliance upon God when he called the Lord his light, salvation, and stronghold and expressed his longing to remain in the house of the Lord all the days of his life. He was not talking about bricks and mortar. God was David’s dwelling place. Living daily in the presence of the Lord brought David comfort and gave him confidence over his enemies.

As I meditated on this psalm, a sobering question pushed its way to the front of my thinking: *When do I run to the Lord? Is it only when I am already afraid? Is it only when I have a need?* My honest answers humbled me. I often seek God in times of want or times of fear. But when things are going well I sometimes forget to feel delight that God is always with me. Like my girls are with me, I am happy to know that God is my hiding place in times of trouble. But like David, we can be overjoyed that God is our dwelling place.

Prayer: Dear Lord, help us to bask in your presence at all times. Amen.

Alonza Jones (Alabama, USA)

A GRANDFATHER’S LOVE

FRI
JULY 26
2019

READ Ephesians 1:3-14

Paul wrote, “*As a prisoner for the Lord, . . . I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received.*”

— Ephesians 4:1 (NIV)

I cannot imagine the intense grief my biological grandfather must have felt when my new adopted family picked me up. He knew that it would be the last time he would see me. At just six years old, I was “Grandpa’s girl,” the one he would balance on his hands, the one who would grab his big cowboy hat and put it on her own head. Giving me up for adoption broke my grandfather’s heart. But out of his great love for me, he wanted something better for my life than what he could provide.

When I think of everything that my grandfather gave up for me, I remember God’s heart-wrenching sacrifice in offering up Jesus.

Like my grandfather, God wanted something better for us, a life not separated from him because of sin. So God sacrificed God’s only Son as an atonement for our sins so we could be adopted and become heirs to God’s kingdom.

Every day, I am determined to live a life that my grandfather would be proud of. Even more so, when I think what God, through Jesus, did for me, I am humbled to live a life worthy of my calling.

Prayer: Loving Father, thank you for adopting us as your children. Give us the courage to confess our sins and release them to you. Amen.

Anne M. Hayton (Indiana, USA)

Prayer Focus: SOMEONE WHO HAS GIVEN UP
A CHILD FOR ADOPTION

SAT
JULY 27
2019

NEVER FORSAKEN

READ Deuteronomy 31:5-8

The psalmist wrote, “*Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me.*”

— Psalm 23:4 (KJV)

A couple of years ago, I was diagnosed with an enlarged prostate. This stressful time was followed by a series of hospital visits, examinations, and tests. Daily, my family and I prayed and trusted in God to heal me. When further tests

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
God is faithful in all circumstances.

revealed prostate cancer, my family was devastated. However, throughout surgery to remove the cancerous cells — with its attendant side-effects,

health challenges, and physical limitations — we had a sense of confidence that all would be well. Along with the psalmist, I could say, “Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me.”

In our reading for today, Joshua must have felt such a sense of anxiety and trouble in being appointed to lead God’s people into the Promised Land that he needed firm assurance from God through Moses: “Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the LORD your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you.”

As God’s children, we all abide in this assurance. Though our situations and circumstances may be difficult or our health may fail, God is present to go through it with us. One year later, I could once again testify with the psalmist: “Good and upright is the LORD” (Ps. 25:8, NIV).

Prayer: Thank you, Lord, for your comfort and healing power over us all. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

Mike Anwana (Ad Dawhah, Qatar)

“ARE YOU THE ONE?”

SUN
JULY 28
2019

READ Matthew 11:1-6

Jesus said, “*Blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me.*”

— Matthew 11:6 (NRSV)

In today’s reading, we find that John the Baptist was imprisoned because of his preaching. While in prison, John heard about the works of Jesus and sent two of his disciples to ask, “Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?” (NIV). John’s question puzzled me. Hadn’t John preached about Jesus and even baptized him? (See Matt. 3:11-17.) Was John hoping for Jesus to come and rescue him?

Like John, as a follower of Christ, I sometimes have doubts. Even though I know in my heart that God is real and trustworthy, at times I still wrestle with questions like, “Lord, are you there? Do you really care that I’m going through these difficulties?” I recall once praying earnestly, but the answer I sought did not come. I felt as if God had let me down. I was upset and bewildered, and asked, “Why, Lord?” After calming down, I felt as if God were asking me, “Do you still love me? Do you still believe in me?”

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
Even when my prayers seem unanswered, God still loves me.

I can remember and identify with Jesus’ reply to John’s question: “Blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me.” Even when I don’t understand why the answers to my prayers are slow in coming or come in different ways than expected, I still believe that God is faithful and loves me.

Prayer: Dear Lord, when disappointments come our way, please help our faith and love for you to remain strong. Amen.

Victoria P. Creel (Alabama, USA)

MON
JULY 29
2019

ETERNAL LOVE

READ 2 Corinthians 5:1-10

We who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage one another with these words.

— 1 Thessalonians 4:17-18 (NIV)

My son Ted died in a car wreck in March of 1978. It has been a long time, and though some folks say you get over it, you don't; you just learn to live with it. I remember the night he died. I said to my wife, "I want to know where he went."

I went in search, and that journey led me to college, then seminary, and eventually full-time ministry. I learned that my son came into the presence of the Lord. My son had faith in Jesus Christ who loved him so much that

he died on a cross some two thousand years ago. Because of his faith, Ted is in the presence of the Lord, full of vigor and happiness.

You never get over the death of anyone you love as much as I love my son, and you don't want to. That is the kind of love that is in our hearts and in God's heart when Jesus said: "That day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you" (John 14:20, NRSV). I miss my son, but I am at peace because he is in the presence of God.

Prayer: Dear God, help us to know that we can never be separated from your love because of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Jon C. Goeringer (Maryland, USA)

AMAZING WORLD

READ Psalm 147:1-11

[The LORD] covers the heavens with clouds, prepares rain for the earth, makes grass grow on the hills.

— Psalm 147:8 (NRSV)

I'm fascinated by the wonders of the natural world: the delicate structure of a leaf, a rainstorm with loud claps of thunder and flashes of lightning, the way thousands of ants march single file across the yard to an unknown destination. I enjoy listening to the variety of sounds made by a variety of birds and insects: humming, chirping, squeaking, twittering, and singing melodiously to one another. When I pause a moment to notice all of the life around me, I am awed by God's creative powers.

One afternoon, years ago, I looked up at the sky and saw a spectrum — part of a rainbow, visible on a cloud — and I pointed it out to my friend. I'd never seen such a phenomenon before. He said, "I'm sure God can do better than that."

I felt hurt by his comment. Of course God can do great things, but the little things are also demonstrations of God's presence, love, and wisdom. I thank God for the many ways — large and small — that the presence of God is revealed in my life and in the world.

Prayer: Thank you, God, for this amazing world you have created. Help us to recognize all the ways you are present with us. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Sister Confianza del Señor (Colón, Honduras)

TUES
JULY 30
2019

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

How can I inspire others to seek a relationship with God?

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

God is present all around me.

WED
JULY 31
2019

COVER TO COVER

READ 2 Timothy 3:14-17

All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness.

— 2 Timothy 3:16 (NRSV)

Nearly 20 years ago, I set upon the task of reading the Bible from beginning to end. I'm pleased to say that I did it; I'm not pleased to say that it usually felt like a chore and that often I was distracted or zoned out when reading it. My desire to know scripture more deeply had backfired as I found myself

wishing I could read some previous passages that had spoken to me rather than the three chapters I had assigned myself for the day.

Ultimately, I learned

an important lesson. God's word does not have to be approached in any order or systematic fashion. Rather, scriptures come to our minds in all sorts of unique ways and times. For everything there is a season, and I've grown to feel that way about Bible passages: some verses that speak to me now may not speak to me the same way much later in life. In turn, others may mean little to me until suddenly they profoundly impact my current situation.

God is revealed to us every day. We need not impose an order to those revelations. Through prayer, devotions, and other forms of worship, we each walk a Christian path that may not follow a direct line from Genesis to Revelation.

Prayer: Dear God, thank you for revealing yourself to us in unique ways that help us on our Christian paths. Amen.

Andrew Billings (Alabama, USA)

Prayer Focus: SOMEONE READING THE BIBLE FOR THE FIRST TIME

SEEKING GUIDANCE

READ Proverbs 3:5-12

In all your ways acknowledge [the LORD], and he will make straight your paths.

— Proverbs 3:6 (NRSV)

Throughout my life I have faced situations where I was uncertain of what to do and was afraid of making choices on my own. Before I truly entrusted my life to God, I believed that every aspect of my life had a 50 percent chance of success; if I made the wrong choice, I would fail. Unfortunately, I often doubted my decisions and would spend hours regretting the things I did.

After a few years, I grew to understand Christ's power and faithfulness more clearly. My problems became less stressful and I began to rely fully on the Lord to guide me, trusting that God would lead me to good things.

I regularly remind myself of the motto "God is good all the time." It is easy to forget it during times of distress. When we remember that God is always by our side, we can stop focusing on smaller issues and find great

comfort. When we seek God's will, we can live in confidence knowing that God is always working for good.

Prayer: Dear Lord, we thank you for the lives you have given us. Help us find comfort in you and trust that you are guiding us toward the good. Amen.

Ed Romero (Texas, USA)

Prayer Focus: SOMEONE PARALYZED BY INDECISION 39

THUR
AUG 1
2019

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
Because God is faithful, I
can live confidently.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
What scripture verse can I find
new meaning in today?

Using *The Upper Room* to Start New Faith Communities

My family began worshipping together when a new church was formed in our town. We had never belonged to or attended a church previously, but my father was drawn into the excitement of a new faith community. I went to Sunday school in the basement of the home where the pastor and his family lived. The adults met in their living room upstairs. Seeing how enthused my parents were, my siblings and I were also happy to be part of the new church.

Through these small groups, this church — located in Long Island, New York — eventually formed a full congregation, and later established a church building. I often wondered what resources they used to start that church.

Ten years ago, a good friend helped to start a new faith community in Buenos Aires, Argentina, out of the ashes of a broken and divided church. Today it is a vibrant and healthy church. They started with a small-group meeting in the home of one of the families, much like the meetings my mother and father attended in Long Island. *The Upper Room* proved to be the glue that kept this brokenhearted community together.

Using the Spanish language edition of *The Upper Room*, *El Aposento Alto*, the community in Buenos Aires found the daily devotions — written by everyday Christians from around the world — relatable. Each issue of the devotional guide includes “An Easy Plan to Use *The Upper Room* in Small Groups.” Using the devotions for Wednesdays, regardless of which day of the week they met, the small groups followed the prompting questions to guide their meetings. They added songs, intercessory prayers, and a time for refreshments. Soon the first group outgrew the home’s capacity. Instead of finding a larger venue, they started a second home group. Within a year they had formed eight house groups — all using *The Upper Room*. They decided to bring all the groups together for worship on Saturday nights at a church that opened its doors to them. Now, 10 years later, Cristo Rey has their own worship center and a tight-knit community of all ages. And they still use *El*

Aposento Alto for small-group study.

New faith communities begun in Honduras share many characteristics with that of Buenos Aires. Families host groups in their homes for prayer, Bible study, song, and refreshments. These groups, located in Río Lindo, Honduras, formed a new faith community also using *El Aposento Alto*. The questions in the back of the magazine guide their conversation. Participants deepen bonds with others as they share stories of their own faith journey, their doubts, their questions, their challenges, and their yearnings to discover a pathway that leads to a meaningful life for themselves and their families.

My father eventually became a Sunday school teacher in the new church that my family and I attended. He equipped young children in their own budding faith formation. Later, the community helped my family when my father suffered a stroke and lost his job. As a teenager, I remember overhearing my parents praying together before going to sleep. The small groups they attended and the new church they joined helped form a solid foundation of faith that sustained them through times of adversity.

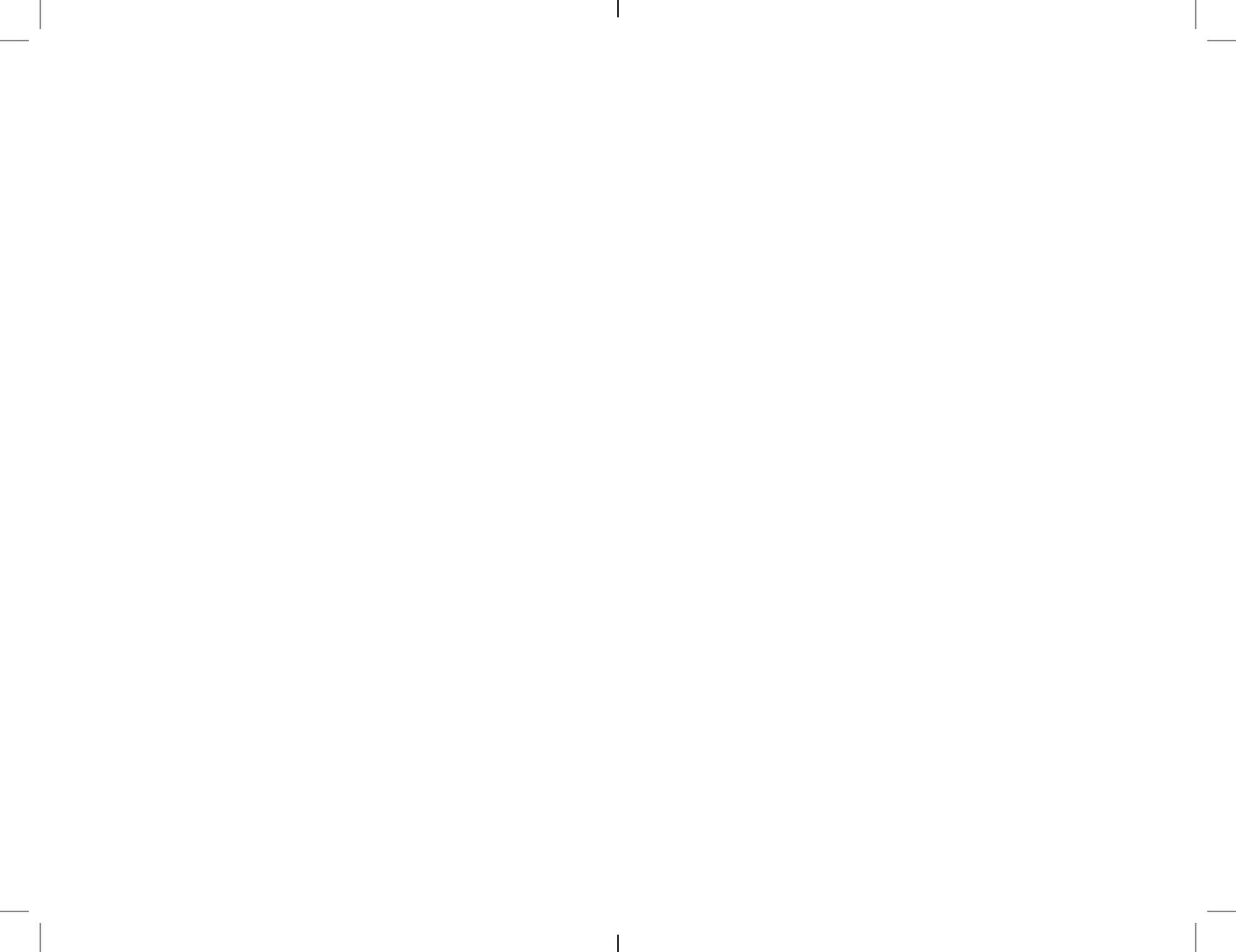
Both the English and Spanish editions of *The Upper Room* include the “Easy Plan” found in the back of the magazine. We encourage its use to create faith-formation groups, which in turn can be the building blocks for a new faith community.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION:

1. How did your family become involved in the life of a faith community? Who helped lead the way in your family’s faith journey?
2. How might the use of *The Upper Room* and its “Easy Plan” (see p. 74), help establish a faith formation group in your area? What might you do to lead such a small group?
3. Whom would you invite to join in a home-based meeting that uses *The Upper Room*?

— Doug Ruffle
General Editor
Wesleyan Church Planting Resources





FRI
AUG 2
2019

AN HOUR WELL SPENT

READ Isaiah 46:3-9

The LORD says, “I am he who will sustain you.”

— Isaiah 46:4 (NIV)

One of the most vivid memories from my childhood is seeing Mom retreat to the living room each day at three o'clock for an hour of prayer. This was her special time, and we knew not to interrupt her unless it was something important. Even after I left home, if I called my parents in the afternoon, Dad would gently remind me that it was Mom's prayer time.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
Time spent with God in prayer is never wasted.

This kind of sacred time revealed her loving, trusting relationship with God.

Mom spent that hour with her best friend, not only sharing what was on her mind but spending quiet time listening with her heart.

Many years have passed, and now my mom resides in a nursing home. Mom is no longer able to pray as she once did, but I am confident that her relationship with God is as strong as ever. I see in her a certain peacefulness and acceptance that I believe is the fruit of her many years of prayer.

My mom is a living reminder of God's promise, clearly spoken by the prophet Isaiah. I am certain that God will never abandon my mom — or any of us.

Prayer: O God, help us to remember to set apart time each day to spend with you in prayer. Amen.

Andrea Woronick (Connecticut, USA)

THE COURAGE-GIVING FATHER

SAT
AUG 3
2019

READ Joshua 1:1-9

Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go.

— Joshua 1:9 (NIV)

When I was seven years old, my younger brother and I were playing near our family's garment shop. Then a bully came up to us and started slapping me and hitting me in the head. I was terrified. I ran to my parents, but it was the peak hour of business and they sent me away. Humiliated and in pain, I sat in a corner and cried.

That evening my dad noticed that I was acting differently. He asked me what was wrong, and I told him what had happened. My father comforted me and told me that if the bully came near me again, I had to face him with courage and warn him that my father would come to my aid if I asked. My fears left me, and I felt I had received the strength of a lion. I waited for the bully the next evening. When I stood my ground and warned him about my father, the bully ran away.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
With God, I can face challenges with courage.

I am now a father myself, and my children come to me for help. When I meet adversity, I find courage in my heavenly Father. God promises always to be with us and to protect us. These promises give us strength in knowing that we can turn to our heavenly Father for courage and comfort.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank you for being by our side and comforting us when we face adversity. Lead us with courage and divine strength. Amen.

T. David Livingston (Bangalore, India)

SUN
AUG 4
2019

SADNESS TO JOY

READ Psalm 30:1-5

Jesus said, *“Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me.”*

— Matthew 18:5 (NIV)

One day at church I was very sad over the death of someone in my family. When worship was over, I stepped outside to the church playground. One of the two swings was broken, and the girl who was swinging told her friend that she could have her turn next. Even so, the second little girl went

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

When I show God’s love to others, my sadness turns to joy.

away crying. I went over to her and asked her if she would like to play a game with me that I had played when I was a little girl. We introduced ourselves and

began to play. Soon she was laughing. She took my hand and held it until her mom came to take her home.

At that moment, my sadness turned to joy. I think the Lord showed love to me through this little girl. She and I helped each other move from sadness to joy. Now my friend and I share a big hug when we see each other at church on Sundays.

God wants every one of us to feel loved. God sent Jesus to show us God’s love — a love that not only dries our tears but lets us know that our Father is always with us.

Prayer: Dear God, thank you for comforting us in times of sadness. Help us bring joy to those around us. Amen.

Shirley Prince (Alabama, USA)

RUNNING AGROUND

READ Acts 27:21-26

Paul said, *“Keep up your courage . . . for I have faith in God that it will be exactly as I have been told. But we will have to run aground on some island.”*

— Acts 27:25-26 (NRSV)

On my first day of a new job, I found myself sitting in the office feeling terrified. For 13 years I had enjoyed working in a comfortable youth-ministry job for a couple of churches. During that time, I felt God calling me into something else but didn’t really know what. I interviewed for an insurance agency job and found myself in a new field, and the thought of all the contingencies and what-ifs made me fearful.

As I was trying to keep my head above water during the first few weeks on the job, God reminded me of the story about Paul’s voyage to Rome. During Paul’s trip a violent storm pummeled the vessel for a number of days, causing the crew to throw cargo off the ship and eventually leaving them without food. I imagine that the whole ordeal led them through the gamut of emotions, eventually climaxing with acceptance of imminent death. That’s what panic can do. The wind and waves of our difficult situations often lead us to the logical conclusion that the end is near and God is absent.

Paul comforted and reassured the crew, stating that he had faith in what God had told him. In the midst of our storms we too can have courage that even when our lives “run aground,” God is still with us.

Prayer: Dear Father, when we experience challenges, thank you for reassuring us of your care. Amen.

Robbie Mackenzie (Tennessee, USA)

MON
AUG 5
2019

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Today I will trust that God is with me.

TUES
AUG 6
2019

LETTER FOR GOD

READ Psalm 28:6-9

*Praise be to the LORD, for he has heard
my cry for mercy.*

— Psalm 28:6 (NIV)

I can't remember the exact date when my sister made a paper bag and named it "God's Bag," but it is still hanging in our bedroom. She said, "If you ask something of God, you can write your request on a piece of paper, fold it, and put it into

God's Bag."

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

No matter how I pray,
God is listening.

Even though her method made me laugh, I realized that I also have a unique way of relating to God. Once, when I was

particularly sad, I wrote all my feelings on a piece of paper and named it "Letter for God." In that letter, I told God all my requests. I didn't put it into God's Bag but saved it in my wardrobe under my clothes. A few months later, when I opened the letter, I smiled. The situation that had made me so sad was no more. Also, some of my requests had been fulfilled. In fact, I found that God had replaced my unfulfilled requests with something better.

Regardless of how we pray, God hears us. In Psalm 28:6, David says that God heard him when he called. God will do the same for us. We just have to remember to call.

Prayer: Thank you, Lord, for always hearing us. We know nothing can separate us from your love. Sustain us as we put our trust in you. Amen.

Linawati Santoso (East Java, Indonesia)

WHAT A CHANGE!

READ 1 Corinthians 15:42-49

*[The body is] weak when it's put into the ground,
but it's raised in power.*

— 1 Corinthians 15:43 (CEB)

I live and garden in the desert year-round. Among the things I grow are sugar snap peas. From the time I plant them, the peas will thrive for eight months and produce for more than five months. The plants climb on trellises to a height of more than eight feet. Sometimes it's hard to believe such an abundant plant can grow from a small, wrinkled pea seed. But I have been planting pea seed for years, so I can see the future plant in that seed. If I can see that kind of future in a pea seed, what does that mean when I have trusted Christ as my resurrection and my life?

The astonishing growth that God has hidden within my peas gives me great confidence that I will have even greater life eternally with

God. When I look at a wrinkled pea, it reminds me of how I often feel. But then I find joy in knowing the kind of transformation a pea goes through before and after it is sown. Before I plant my peas, I soak them in water overnight; by morning they look brand new! Likewise, my body will be raised through the power of Jesus' resurrected life. When I meditate on the marvelous transformation of those wrinkled peas, I am overwhelmed with the thought of eternal life with Christ.

Prayer: Creator God, thank you for the transformation hidden in a seed and for the wonder of what that transformation means to us — new life with you. Amen.

Mark Weinrich (Nevada, USA)

WED
AUG 7
2019

THUR
AUG 8
2019

STRENGTHEN OUR HANDS

READ Nehemiah 6:1-15

All of them were trying to make us afraid, saying, "They will be discouraged, and the work won't get finished." But now, God, strengthen me!

— Nehemiah 6:9 (CEB)

In December 2003 I was a missions worker in Liberia during the United Nations disarmament process following a 14-year civil war. Upset and fearful, the child soldiers were refusing to turn in their arms.

At the seminary where I worked, gunshots from AK-47s could be heard right outside our office windows. Throughout the day my staff would jump under the tables at each sound of gunfire that seemed never to stop.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Even in the gravest situations, God will give me courage.

I began to pray as Nehemiah did. He refused

to give in to the fear that was causing discouragement. Nehemiah shifted his focus away from those who were trying to frighten him and toward God. When we pray, God answers, and the Lord gave Nehemiah spiritual discernment.

Fear is humanity's most deadly enemy. Fear can enslave us. During that time in Liberia, the Lord strengthened our minds, spirits, and hands to continue the work of sharing the gospel. On any day we can follow Nehemiah's example and dispel fear by turning our thoughts and confidence to God.

Prayer: God of all strength, when we are afraid, help us to trust you and to know that you will help us to complete any task you give us. Amen.

Hattie L. Carlis (Indiana, USA)

NEVER ALONE

READ Psalm 1:1-6

Keep straight the path of your feet, and all your ways will be sure.

— Proverbs 4:26 (NRSV)

At the beginning of the 8th grade, I played sports, had friends and a girlfriend, and made good grades. However, toward the end of the school year, my friends began venturing into behaviors that made me uncomfortable. Because of their new interests, I began spending less time with them. I went straight home after practice and stopped seeing them on weekends. Even though they had been my closest friends, I had no desire to join them. I was hurt by the loss of my friendships and until the end of my 9th grade year my days were lonely. I went to school and to sports practice, studied, and slept.

I had gone to church my whole life, but I had never yearned to know God more than I did during those two years. God was revealed to me more each day. In the evenings, I loved going to church events where I learned about God and made new friends. I stopped hating my old friends and began praying for them.

In those two years, God showed me that I was never alone. I didn't have to conform to the world to find community; I just needed to open my eyes and surrender to God.

Prayer: Dear God, we thank you for your mercy, love, and understanding. Thank you for comforting us in every circumstance. Amen.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Today I will pray for an old friend.

Peyton Sherlin (Texas, USA)

SAT
AUG 10
2019

EXPRESSIONS OF LOVE

READ 1 John 4:7-19

Jesus said, “I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.”

— John 13:34 (NRSV)

Each morning one of my co-workers goes to each office or cubicle and greets each person with a smile and asks, “How are you? How are things going with you?” If someone is absent, he inquires about them. I consider this friendly habit an expression of love. Our fast-paced, anxious society can minimize the importance of expressing love in our inter-

personal relationships. It can be easy to forget the impact of simple actions like a warm greeting or a smile expressing care for someone.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

I follow Jesus’ example when I love others.

As Christians, we are called to live by the fruit of the Spirit and to love one another. Jesus modeled the love we should show one another in practical, simple, and daily ways: he shared meals with the disciples and with people on the margins of society; he addressed the needs of women and lepers when no one else would. Jesus then showed us the ultimate expression of love by dying on the cross. Imitating such an example is a challenge, but even small actions can make a difference.

Prayer: God of everlasting love, thank you for loving us completely. Teach us to love others like Jesus did. Amen.

Julianis Báez de Pichardo (Dominican Republic)

A CONSTANT COMPANION

READ Psalm 73:23-28

Come near to God and [God] will come near to you.

— James 4:8 (NIV)

Recently, one of my preschool students and I were alone outside. Out of the blue, he asked me, “Why do I have to believe in God?” I answered, “Well, you don’t have to believe in God; but I sure do. I can’t imagine my life without God.” We had a short discussion about some of the things God made before moving on to another subject.

My student’s question challenged me to think about why I believe in God. As I told my student, I can’t imagine my life without my solid relationship with our Creator. God is my constant companion, my savior, and my best friend. I can talk to God about anything and everything. In the early-morning silence, I spend time alone with God as I drink my coffee. I tell God what’s on my mind and ask for guidance.

Throughout the day I pray, “Help me, Lord!” Or “Please, Lord.” Or “What do you think, Lord?” Lately I find myself offering confession at bedtime and saying, “I’m sorry, Lord.” It is comforting to know that God loves me, hears me, answers me, and forgives me.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

God stays close to me, and I will stay close to God.

Prayer: Thank you, God, for being a constant presence in our lives. We need you in all the circumstances of our day-by-day living. Amen.

Beth DeLong (Hawaii, USA)

MON
AUG 12
2019

WHAT REALLY MATTERS

READ Luke 6:47-49

Strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

— Matthew 6:33 (NRSV)

My 92-year-old uncle lives by himself in Sarasota, Florida. As Hurricane Irma was about to hit southern Florida, he really didn't want to leave his house, but his kids convinced him that it was time to go. He packed everything that meant something to him in two suitcases and left.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
During life's storms, Jesus is my foundation.

How simple things become during a storm! When it came down to choosing what to take in my uncle's case, 92 years of life fit into two suitcases. News

coverage is full of stories of people who prepared for, evacuated from, and returned after record hurricane events. Some quotes we hear are: "Our house can be replaced, but family can't" and "The damage is awful, but we're so glad everyone is okay." Repeatedly during storms we see that material things lose their importance, and things that really matter come to the forefront.

In today's scripture passage, we see that both men go through a storm. Their outcomes are different only because their foundations are different. This parable illustrates that the Christian life isn't about escaping the storms that come our way but about being able to weather the storms because of our foundation in Jesus Christ.

Prayer: Dear God, as we weather life's storms, help us to build our lives on the firm foundation of your Son so the world can see the source of our strength. Amen.

Dennis Denby (Illinois, USA)

STILL USEFUL TO GOD

READ Psalm 92:12-15

[The righteous] will still bear fruit in old age.

— Psalm 92:14 (NIV)

As one of her contributions to our family, my grandmother would rip up old clothes into strips, sew the strips together, and roll them into balls. She then used a large wooden hook to crochet the rags into colorful rugs. They were sometimes long, like a hall runner, or sometimes small to lay beside a bed. When we got out of bed in the mornings, it was a comfort not to feel that cold floor in an unheated bedroom but instead to set our feet onto a soft rug. Those old clothes were no longer good for their original purpose but were now useful in a different way.

As we grow older, we may sometimes feel that we have outlived our usefulness. But God always has a purpose for our lives. We may not be able to do tasks that were easy for us when we were younger, but along the way we have gained knowledge and insight that we can share with others. Even into our senior years we can seek new ways to glorify God and serve others.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
With God's help I can bear fruit in any stage of life.

Prayer: Gracious God, help us not to focus on what we cannot do but instead on what we can do to be useful in your service. Amen.

Mary Louise Stetser (New Jersey, USA)

WED
AUG 14
2019

GOD'S MYSTERIOUS WAYS

READ Isaiah 40:28-31

Blessed is the one who trusts in the LORD, whose confidence is in him.

— Jeremiah 17:7 (NIV)

When I started off on my morning walk, it was a bright and sunny day with no hint of rain. I walked through the hills and valleys enjoying the beauty around me — the wind whipping up a wonderful dance of leaves and the crescendo of crickets chirping. Then, without warning, the weather changed,

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
Unexpected encounters can give me insights from God.

bringing a heavy rush of showers. Disappointed that the rain had disrupted my walk, I ran to take shelter in a small building by the wayside. As the rain contin-

ued, an elderly man joined me to escape the rain. We began to talk about the town where we lived. As a longtime resident of the town, he recounted many interesting stories of how it had changed over the years. When the rain stopped, we parted. While walking home I realized that just as the rain had come unannounced, new perspectives about life can arrive in unexpected ways.

Life is unpredictable, bringing difficulties to each of us. At first problems seem a burden, and we might want to curse our circumstances or blame God. Sometimes roadblocks lead to small miracles — or at least insights — that can shape our understanding, helping us to know God in a new way and to trust God more fully.

Prayer: Dear Lord, help us to see that hindrances to our plans can bring us closer to you. Amen.

Palakunnathu A. Mathew (Kerala, India)

REDEEMING LOVE

READ 1 Corinthians 1:18-31

Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.

— 1 Corinthians 1:31 (NRSV)

In 2003, I was hospitalized for depression. My image as a pastor's wife who had it all together was shattered. I spent two weeks alongside drug addicts, schizophrenics, and alcoholics. By society's standards, we were failures and outcasts: weak, broken, and ashamed.

As we each shared our stories, I watched the others give comfort and encouragement. They offered kind words, a touch, or silent acceptance of "you're not alone" and "me too." No one gave advice; no one condemned. No one judged or acted better than anyone else. After all, as hospital patients we could not pretend that we were well.

Romans 3:23-24 tells us that no distinctions exist among us since all "fall short of the glory of God . . . [but] are now justified by [God's] grace as a gift."

In today's reading, Paul reminded the Corinthian church that value does not lie in worldly wisdom, wealth, or power; rather, it is our identity in Christ. In our weaknesses, Christ unites us and gives us his wisdom, wealth, and power.

I no longer need to depend on my image as a pastor's wife for acceptance. Instead, in my brokenness, I reveal Christ and will boast in him.

Prayer: Redeeming God, forgive us for wanting to look good before others. Remind us that it's only in you that we are made whole. Amen.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
God loves and accepts me as I am.

Jodi Harris (California, USA)

FRI
AUG 16
2019

HEART OF GRATITUDE

READ Mark 10:13-16

Jesus said, “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.”

— Mark 10:14 (NIV)

My son has a severe form of dyslexia that makes school-work very difficult for him. I recently met with his teacher to design an education plan specifically for him.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Beginning today I will more readily give thanks to God.

After our long meeting, the teacher told me that my son comes to her at the end of each school day and thanks her for teaching him. I was deeply moved. I

had no idea he did that! I know how much he dislikes school because it is so difficult for him. Yet he shows gratitude to his teacher in her efforts to help him.

I decided that I would do well to follow my son’s example and try always to have such an attitude of gratitude, especially when it comes to my relationship with God. In today’s passage from Mark’s Gospel, Jesus directs us to follow the example of a child. Even though some days are not pleasant or easy, having a heart of gratitude toward God reaps a heavenly reward.

Prayer: Thank you, God, for all that you do and have done for us. Give us hearts of gratitude, purity, and humility. In the name of Jesus we pray. Amen.

Karen Woodard (North Carolina, USA)

GOD’S WONDERFUL WORD

SAT
AUG 17
2019

READ John 1:1-5

Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of the prophecy, and blessed are those who hear and who keep what is written in it.

— Revelation 1:3 (NRSV)

I bought an electronic tablet to gain access to my emails. However, I quickly found out that the tablet contains many more applications. Soon I was exploring my new device in detail and deriving great pleasure from it.

In many ways, my response to the Bible is similar. My parents gave me my first Bible. When I was a boy in Sunday school, our teacher would announce a passage, and we would look it up. Sometimes we were asked to memorize a particular verse, which required that I look up the verse in my Bible at home. As the years passed and I began to read parts of the Bible on my own, I became more interested and — in the fullness of time — I gave my life to Christ.

That was only the beginning. The more I read the Bible, the more I wanted to read it. Later, as a Sunday school teacher and Bible class leader, I shared my knowledge of scripture with others.

Although I no longer teach the Bible, I still read the Bible on my own or with a Bible study group. In addition, I refer to the Bible for guidance and often read it for relaxation. The more I explore God’s word, the more I derive pleasure from it.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

God’s word can be my constant companion.

Prayer: Dear Father, lead us day by day as we explore your word. Amen.

William Findlay (Scotland, United Kingdom)

SUN
AUG 18
2019

CHILD OF GOD

READ Luke 5:12-16

Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.

— Romans 12:16 (NIV)

My husband and I make it a practice to give physical goods rather than cash to someone in need. So when Jack rolled down my car window and asked me to hand money to the shivering woman on the sidewalk, I sensed the Holy

Spirit was behind his request. I opened the car door, handed the bill to the woman, and talked with her about her situation. Then I took her hands and prayed

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Today I will reach out to a struggling child of God.

with her. After we prayed, she wrapped me in a bear hug.

In that moment of touch I realized she was more than a shivering body behind a cardboard placard. Jesus touched those who were blind, demon-possessed, or crippled, proclaiming that they were human beings worthy of concern and respect. The way they were regarded by their society did not minimize their worth.

I don't know what happened to her after that day, but I was forever changed by my encounter with that woman. I understood in a new way that I am no more deserving of God's healing touch than anyone else. We are equal in the eyes of God who knows all and cares for all.

Prayer: Open our eyes, O God, to see the needs around us and to hear the human hearts in need of your love. Amen.

Karen Wingate (Illinois, USA)

ALWAYS IN THE STANDS

READ Psalm 68:4-10

A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in his holy dwelling.

— Psalm 68:5 (NIV)

When I was in school my father attended all of my activities — football games, basketball games, wrestling tournaments. For a long time I thought it was only because of our close relationship. However, his support of student athletes continued until he was well into his sixties. Only at my father's funeral did I learn from my brother the true reason our father spent so much time at these events. My father had told him: "When I was in school, my parents never came to anything because they were always drunk or at the bar. I go to all these activities for the kids whose parents don't show up. They can count on me to be in the stands. I am always there so they have support from someone."

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Like the best earthly fathers, God is always there for me.

Though my father wasn't religious, his example reminds me of the way our Lord shows us love and hope by never leaving us alone. Much as my father was always in the stands for the kids, when Jesus ascended into heaven, he left the Holy Spirit to comfort us. We can place total faith and hope in that truth.

Prayer: Dear Father, continue to show us through others that you are always watching over and guiding us along life's path. Amen.

Jason Robinson (Wisconsin, USA)

TUES
AUG 20
2019

THE POWER OF PRAYER

READ Ephesians 3:14-21

Whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.

— Mark 11:24 (NIV)

I was born into a Christian family and we attended church every Sunday. But when my parents separated during my adolescence, I went through a crisis of faith. For many years, I asked: *Does God exist? Why does God allow such suffering in my family?* I concentrated on my studies, continued my

education, and became a nurse. Then I got a job in a children’s hospital.

I was one of the nurses on call in the emergency unit when a 12-year-old

girl named Alejandra was brought in. She was in a coma suffering from meningitis. The other nurse told me: “Stay with Alejandra. I will manage the other patients in the unit.” I don’t know why, but I started to pray. I prayed with faith throughout the night, trusting that the child would not die, that God would intercede. At 5:45 the next morning, just before my shift ended, Alejandra opened her eyes, took my hand and said, “Beatriz.”

After this experience, I have maintained the discipline of prayer because I now understand that God is with us every moment and in every situation. God never abandons us.

Prayer: Giver of all good things, you have plans for each of us. You know when our faith is vulnerable, and you respond to renew our hope. We thank you in Jesus’ name. Amen.

Beatriz Nasso (Uruguay)

FOCUS

READ Genesis 1:1-5

The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands.

— Psalm 19:1 (NIV)

On August 21, 2017, people across the United States from Oregon to South Carolina were able to witness and experience a total solar eclipse, where the moon passed between the earth and the sun, blocking the sun’s rays for several minutes. It was an amazing event that brought many people together around the world.

As I watched others gazing at this celestial sight, wearing protective solar glasses, I realized we were all focused on something much greater than ourselves. It also occurred to me that all our differences and opposing points of view had been laid aside; all our problems and concerns had been temporarily forgotten. We were united and joyful as we watched this stellar wonder of creation together.

I wonder what our lives and this world might look like if we tried to keep our hearts and minds just as focused on the wonderful, loving Creator of the universe.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank you for the wonders of creation. Help us to remain focused on you so that we can reflect your light and love in all that we say and do. Amen.

Laura Andrews (Tennessee, USA)

WED
AUG 21
2019

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
How do I focus my life on God?

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
Whom will I pray for today?

THUR
AUG 22
2019

GOD'S CARE

READ Matthew 7:7-11

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

— Philippians 4:19 (NRSV)

I grew up the son of a sharecropper in the late 1930s. Each evening we would sit down at the table, and Dad would read scripture to us five children and talk a little bit about what it meant. Then Mom would lead us in singing an old hymn

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

God's power is strongest when I am at my weakest.
(See 2 Cor. 12:9-10.)

before Dad said a prayer of thanks and blessed the food. On many evenings after Mom and Dad read scripture, sang, and prayed we would get up and leave the table because Mom had

no food to prepare our evening meal. At those times, Dad would always say, "Don't worry; God will see to it that we do not starve." The next morning we would get up to find on our back porch several baskets and sacks of food. None of us knew where they came from, but we did come to trust that the words in the scripture above were true.

I was only four when all this started happening, but I still remember those times of need and what God did for us. I am a witness that when we trusted and prayed, asking for help, God took care of us. Philippians 4:6 encourages us not to worry about anything, but to pray about everything.

Prayer: Father God, thank you for being such a loving, caring God. Watch over all the people in the world who are hungry today. Amen.

John Cramer (Oklahoma, USA)

BACK TO SAFETY

READ Ezekiel 34:11-15

Thus says the Lord God: I myself will search for my sheep, and will seek them out.

— Ezekiel 34:11 (NRSV)

On my way to work, I drive past a sheep farm with lush pasture. One day I noticed a young lamb outside the fence near the road. Grazing on the newly found grass, it appeared unaware of potential danger from passing cars. Despite desperate calls from its mother on the other side of the fence, the lamb continued grazing.

I parked nearby to consider the best way to help the lamb. Depending upon my approach, it might head in the wrong direction, risking injury or worse. I ran to the nearby house and found a worker outside. Although short of breath, I was able to tell him about my discovery. After expressing his gratitude, he followed me to the location and lifted the lamb over the fence. A sense of peace came over me as I watched the animal reunite with its mother.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Like a shepherd leads his sheep, God will lead me to shelter.

Then I began to think about the times I have wandered away from God. For a short time, the new experience would bring happiness. After realizing my error, I asked for forgiveness and strength to avoid making the same mistake again. When we focus on God's directions in the Bible, we are better able to walk along the right path. We can feel comfort and rest in knowing that when we stray, God guides us back to safety.

Prayer: Dear God, thank you for your guidance and protection. Amen.

Nancy Frantel (Virginia, USA)

SAT
AUG 24
2019

GOD IS GREAT

READ Psalm 121:1-8

*Look! The LORD does not lack the power to save,
nor are his ears too dull to hear.*

— Isaiah 59:1 (CEB)

July 17, 2015, was like an earthquake for me and my family. On that day, doctors discovered that I had a 6.2 cm tumor, and I was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer. My wife, children, and I

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

In all situations I will put
my faith in God.

decided to inform the pastor of our church so that church members, along with our family and friends, could be praying for me.

My treatment began with six rounds of chemotherapy. After those treatments, doctors performed another scan to check my progress. The results showed that the tumor had disappeared and that the cancer markers in my bloodstream were drastically reduced. I knew that God had performed a great miracle.

When I was first diagnosed, the doctor had informed my wife and brother that I might not live to see the year 2016. But by God's grace, I did. I am grateful for my doctors, 12 rounds of chemo, and the miraculous power of our great God, who heard the prayers that everyone in my church said for me. In gratitude for this miracle of life, I have begun serving in my church as a committee member, and God is using my gifts and services. I am reminded that no matter what challenge we are facing, our God is great. God hears our prayers and will see us through.

Prayer: O God, we give you glory, praise, and honor for hearing our prayers and healing our diseases. Amen.

Robinbhai P. Christian (Gujarat, India)

THE PELICAN

READ Matthew 6:25-34

Jesus said, "Don't worry about your life . . . Look at the birds in the sky. They don't sow seed or harvest grain or gather crops into barns. Yet your heavenly Father feeds them."

— Matthew 6:25-26 (CEB)

I love pelicans, not for their beauty but for their grace. Watching them glide through the sky calms my soul. Lately, my soul has needed calming. I have been diligently searching for work, but I have met rejection at every turn. Despite my constant pleading prayers, God has remained silent.

One day I was sitting on the beach praying as I watched the turquoise waves roll onto the shore. I saw a pelican soaring through the sky, and as I watched it searching the waves for fish, I pleaded with God again to show me what I should do with my life. As the bird soared above the water keeping watch for its next meal, it spotted a fish and immediately dove in to catch it. Then the pelican emerged from the water and floated atop the gentle waves as it enjoyed its dinner.

As I watched the pelican, my heart recognized God's message: *Trust me. I am taking care of you.* It was a balm for my weary soul. As God provides for the pelican, so God provides for me.

Prayer: Source of all that we have and are, help us to trust that you will provide for us and to be courageous enough to dive in when new opportunities come along. Amen.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

I will trust God to provide
for me today.

Pamela Hutto (Florida, USA)

A 1962 HUDSON

READ James 2:14-18

Faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.

— James 2:17 (NRSV)

Buford was a fifteen-year-old who lived deep in the backwoods of Handshoe, Kentucky. He suffered from an external brain tumor that parted his scalp and extended partially over his right eye, causing blindness. I was his teacher, in a one-room schoolhouse.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

When the Holy Spirit enters my heart, I will be moved to act in love.

Once a month his father, John, would make the long trip to Prestonsburg to buy the medicine that kept Buford alive. He'd awaken

long before dawn, walk the steep creek bed, and continue down the dirt road until he reached the highway to catch the local Greyhound bus. The errand took all day.

When the school year ended, I thought of my 1962 Hudson. I had had visions of my car growing old with me until I thought about Buford. I then knew what I wanted to do. I gave my car keys to his father and said, "It's yours; buy Buford medicine."

As Luke's Gospel reminds us, "Give, and it will be given to you. . . . For the measure you give will be the measure you get back" (6:38). All that we have belongs to the Lord. Whether it's an automobile, a coin tossed into a cup, a love offering placed in the collection plate, we all have something that we can share with others.

Prayer: Guide us, Lord, to your service. May we reach toward the "least of these" with grace-filled arms of love. Amen.

Richard Benson (Florida, USA)

GOD CARES

READ John 11:1-15

Jesus said, "Did I not tell you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?"

— John 11:40 (NIV)

I had been crying out to God asking for a particular door to open for me, and when the door did not open I grew depressed and doubtful. I began to feel that God did not care about me.

I wonder if Mary and Martha felt the same way in today's reading. Mary, Martha, and Lazarus were all friends of Jesus, and John 11 makes it clear that Jesus loved them. Yet when Lazarus was sick and they sent for Jesus, he didn't come immediately and Lazarus died. However, as soon as Jesus got the message that Lazarus was sick, he already had a plan for good, even though things seemed to be getting worse.

This passage of scripture reminds me that God also loves me, hears me when I call out, and is ready with an answer. God is able to fulfill the purpose for my life in God's own time. All I am required to do is to keep believing.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Even when a door has closed, God is with me.

Prayer: Dear God, thank you for working all things to your glory. When life seems out of control, help us to trust you. We pray as Jesus taught us, saying, "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.

Tola Babalola (Lagos, Nigeria)

WED
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2019

A HEART FULL OF PRAISE

READ Psalm 92:1-5

Be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord.

— Ephesians 5:18-19 (NIV)

I am not a trained or talented musician, but as a youth I always enjoyed singing in school choirs and singing praises to the Lord in church. A few years ago a viral infection attacked my vocal cords and left me with a condition called vocal-cord paralysis. Because of this, I have difficulty speaking loudly

or for long periods of time. My vocal cords become fatigued, and I may sound hoarse or have to take extra breaths. Singing, reading aloud to my grandchildren,

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

The Lord hears what is in my heart.

and public speaking have become challenging.

Initially it saddened and embarrassed me when, after singing a song or two during worship services, I would have to stop completely. Not only was I giving up something I delighted in, but I was also giving up something that I know pleases God. However, lately I have decided to simply enjoy the music others are making. And I've discovered that when I am reading the words as I listen to them, I am better able to focus on the meaning of the hymns and praise songs.

I no longer feel robbed of the ability to praise the Lord with singing. Instead, I feel blessed to worship with new appreciation and understanding. My heart is full of praise.

Prayer: O Lord, help us live in a way that pleases you. May our actions as well as our words be a song of praise to you. Amen.

Jennifer B. Jones (New York, USA)

BEAUTIFULLY DIVERSE

READ Romans 12:3-13

You are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.

— 1 Corinthians 12:27 (NIV)

For my birthday, my wife surprised me with a trip to a bird park in our state. We saw birds from all over the world in many colors and sizes. Some were iridescent and bright, showing off an array of colors, while others wore earth tones of brown, green, and gray. As I marveled at the beautiful diversity of these creatures, I thought of another wonderful part of God's creation — humanity. We are also beautifully diverse — varying in culture, language, and appearance.

We each have different experiences, gifts, and stories to share. Even within our own communities, no two of us are exactly alike. Yet, like the birds, we are united by one Creator — our loving God who fashioned each of us uniquely with love and purpose.

This truth leads us to celebrate one another with respect, humility, and compassion, for we are all made in the image of God. Our diversity is a wonderful display of God's creativity. Though different, each voice is important. We each have something to teach, and we all have much to learn. In a world so often divided, may we as Christ's followers model what it means to be diverse and yet united as we honor and cherish one another.

Prayer: God of creation, thank you for the diversity in our world. Help us to be respectful and compassionate toward others as we celebrate your goodness and creativity. Amen.

Tyler Wood (North Carolina, USA)

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THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

I will honor each person I encounter today as someone created in God's image.

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RUNNING A GOOD RACE

READ 2 Timothy 4:6-8

Paul wrote, *“I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.”*

— 2 Timothy 4:7 (NIV)

My husband, Kurt, and I used to walk a mile each day on the indoor track at the YMCA. Besides getting exercise, we enjoyed lively conversation and simply being together. But after Kurt passed away, I stopped taking walks. It simply wasn't enjoyable walking alone. When I finally convinced myself that I needed to exercise for my health, I returned to the track.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

I may feel lonely, but in Christ I'm never alone.

As Christians, we are to run the good race. While I know this verse from 2 Timothy isn't literally about running, it reminds me to push on with my life even though Kurt is gone. Walking alone gives me the opportunity to pray or quietly sing songs of praise to God.

Throughout his battle with cancer, Kurt fought the good fight. He finished his race, never wavering in his faith. Yes, I'm lonely. But with Christ's help, I can run the good race, too. We are never truly alone when Jesus is running with us.

Prayer: Lord God, thank you for sending Jesus to walk through life with us so that we are never truly alone. Help us to keep our faith strong until the very end. Amen.

Sue Carloni (Wisconsin, USA)

FLOURISH AGAIN

READ John 15:1-8

Jesus said, *“I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful.”*

— John 15:1-2 (NIV)

Fire destroyed the Bible camp's main building, which housed the chapel, dining hall, and kitchen. One year later, I looked at the trees that had been in close proximity to the fire. Green leaves fluttered in stark contrast to scorched bark and dead, blackened branches. I could still see life in the trees, but I wondered whether they would survive. Experts advised cutting off all the dead branches to allow the trees to heal, grow, and flourish once again.

The trees reminded me of today's reading. Even healthy trees need pruning — cutting away anything that prevents them from producing the best fruit. Jesus tells us that we are like branches that only survive if we remain in him — the true Vine. We all make decisions and have attitudes — fear, disobedience, despair — that hinder us from living into the fullness that God wants for us. But when we ask, God will prune away the old habits and replace them with life-giving ones.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

What habits or attitudes will I ask God to prune from my life?

Prayer: Dear God, help us to remain in you so that we may have abundant life. Amen.

Carol Harrison (Saskatchewan, Canada)

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

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

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

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

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

JULY 3: *Taking a Risk*

1. When have you decided to take a risk that others did not understand or tried to discourage you from taking? Did their concerns make you think differently about your decision? Did you take the risk after all?
2. Can you relate to the writer's experience of feeling called by God to a particular place or kind of work? How do you listen for God's guidance? What practices help you to determine God's will for your life?
3. When you encounter opposition or disagreement from others about your beliefs or actions, how do you respond? What have

you learned from these experiences?

4. Do you think others can see your faith in your actions and decisions you make? If so, how? If not, how can you help others see that your faith informs your daily decisions?
5. Today's writer says that we sometimes need to take risks to make ourselves available to God. When has this been true in your experience?

JULY 10: *A Simple Ministry*

1. If you know someone like Thad's mother for whom it is natural and easy to talk to strangers about faith, what do you admire about that person? Is this kind of witness easy or difficult for you? Why?
2. Whom do you look up to as a model for sharing your faith? Give some examples of how this person has shared his or her faith with you and why it was meaningful or memorable to you.
3. Do you believe there is a right way to share your faith with others? If so, describe it and explain why this way is best. If not, explain why.
4. Name some ways people share their faith in the Bible. Which of these people do you relate to most? Which person do you want to be more like? Explain.
5. How does your church share its faith with your community? How could it be better at sharing faith? What examples would you offer to other churches as good ways to witness to people outside the church walls?

JULY 17: *The Power of Faith*

1. As a child, did you go to church and participate in church activities? What role did faith play in your family life? In what way has your faith changed over time? In what ways has it remained the same?
2. How do you respond when you hear about someone's life-changing encounter with God? Can you relate to these kinds of stories? Is it difficult for you to understand?
3. When you experience a crisis, how do you pray? What do you pray for? How have your prayers been answered?

4. What helps you to feel assured of God's power and presence in your life? Describe the practices, prayers, scriptures, or people that help you feel connected to God.
5. How does your church community pray for one another? How do people request prayer? Have you experienced the prayers of others to be meaningful in your times of struggle? How could your church better pray for one another and for people around the world?

JULY 24: *Wherever I Am*

1. How do you identify yourself? By your job? Your relationships? How do you spend your free time? What would make you feel as if you had lost your identity?
2. When have you taken a job or offered to help with a task that you were unenthusiastic about? Did your perspective about the work change after you completed the task? Explain.
3. In what setting would you be most surprised to find yourself ministering to others? Why would it surprise you?
4. Recall a time when a conversation with someone you just met made a lasting impression on you. Describe the conversation. What about that conversation was meaningful to you?
5. Name some Bible stories where someone begins a new life or ministry. Which of these do you most identify with? What do the stories you named have in common with each other and with today's meditation?

JULY 31: *Cover to Cover*

1. Have you ever read the Bible from beginning to end? If so, describe your experience. If not, why?
2. How often do you read the Bible? What tools and resources help you to connect with God through scripture?
3. How does your church use the Bible in worship and teaching? What other times or ways would you like to see your church community engage with scripture?
4. When you read the Bible, what books, verses, or stories are most meaningful to you? Which parts of the Bible are difficult for you to read? Which parts of scripture are you least familiar with?

5. Name a Bible passage that has held a different message or importance for you at different times in your life. Why do you think this is the case? What has this taught you about God's word?

AUGUST 7: *What a Change!*

1. Have you ever grown a garden or cultivated plants? If so, what was your favorite part of that work? What was challenging about it? What did you learn from tending plants?
2. In what areas of your life have you seen God's transforming work? In what areas of your life do you hope for God's transforming work?
3. Today's writer can see the future of a pea plant from a tiny seed. What examples from nature or your own life help you to see or have hope for the future?
4. What does the Resurrection mean to you? How does your faith in Christ's redeeming love shape the way you think and act?
5. How does your church help people to understand and embrace the transformation that is possible through faith in Christ? In what ways could you imagine this important message being shared more clearly and more widely?

AUGUST 14: *God's Mysterious Ways*

1. When were you most recently disappointed? What disappointed you? How did you deal with your feelings?
2. Have you ever encountered someone in an unexpected place and then become friends with that person? What do you remember about your first conversation with this person?
3. How did you first encounter God? Who or what helped you to experience the presence of God for the first time? How did this encounter shape the way you understand God?
4. What small miracle or insight from God have you witnessed or received recently? Describe the circumstances. How did the miracle or insight affect how you felt about the situation?
5. How does your church encourage people experiencing difficulties? How does your church help people to know God in new ways and to trust God more fully?

AUGUST 21: *Focus*

1. If you witnessed the solar eclipse, describe your experience. If you did not witness the eclipse, describe an experience where you observed a diverse group of people moving beyond their differences toward unity.
2. How do you remain focused on God? When you realize that you have lost your focus on God, what practices or people help you to regain focus?
3. In what ways does your church community encourage you to look beyond the differences you have with others? In what ways do you think your church community could become more unified?
4. Describe a time when you felt wonder at God's creation. Did your experience change the way you feel about the world and those around you? Why or why not?
5. What scripture passages remind you of the greatness of God's creation? What scripture passages encourage you to reflect God's love to others, regardless of your differences?

AUGUST 28: *A Heart Full of Praise*

1. The writer finds a new appreciation for the words of hymns when she does not sing. Have you ever listened to others singing in worship instead of joining in? How is your worship experience different when you simply listen to the songs?
2. Do you ever feel embarrassed or self-conscious during worship? What makes you feel that way? What might help you avoid feeling embarrassed during worship?
3. Is singing a significant part of worship in your church? What other aspects of worship are prominent in your church services? What do you wish your church would emphasize more during worship? Why?
4. Describe a time when you were unable to worship in the way you prefer. What did you learn about yourself or about worship from that experience? What other forms of worship could you practice during those times?
5. How can you make your actions and words be a song of praise to God? What does it look like to live your life praising God?

