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THE UPPER ROOM®

WHERE THE WORLD MEETS TO PRAY

Stephen D. Bryant, Publisher

35 LANGUAGES

Invitational	Interdenominational	International	
ARMENIAN	ESTONIAN	ITALIAN	PORTUGUESE
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COVER ART INTERPRETATION

Noah

**Artist: Frank Wesley
(India)**

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

Frank Wesley, a fifth-generation Christian, studied art in Japan and India. His depiction of the ark on the cover reflects the Asian design elements of a long-curved bow and a thatched roof. When Noah opens the window to release a dove (see Gen. 8:8-12), he is met by blue green waters and a rose-colored morning sky.

Noah had followed God's instructions for building the ark. He filled it with two of every kind of living creature, closed the door, and waited for the rain. At the point in the story depicted on this issue's cover, the rains have stopped, and the water is receding. Noah releases a dove — a ground-dwelling bird — to search for dry land. Unable to find any, the dove returns to Noah. Seven days later, Noah releases the dove a second time, and it returns with an olive leaf. In seven more days Noah releases the dove and this time it does not return — a sign of hope and God's faithfulness.

I am struck by the fact that God's faithfulness to Noah is revealed in a small olive leaf in the beak of an ordinary bird. God had not forgotten him. What a wonderful reminder that God often uses small and unassuming means to reveal God's presence. I invite us all to look for the small symbols of hope and God's faithfulness in our lives today.

Cover art courtesy of Mrs. Frank Wesley. © Frank Wesley. Prints of cover art are available from www.frankwesleyart.com.

Faithful Waiting

God remembered Noah, all those alive, and all the animals with him in the ark. God sent a wind over the earth so that the waters receded.

— Genesis 8:1 (CEB)

The story of Noah and the Flood is a familiar one. I often hear this story recounted as one of both God's anger with humanity and God's covenant with Noah. But it is also a story of faithful waiting. When Noah follows God's command to build an ark, there is no sign of rain. The people around him think he is crazy, but Noah persists, patiently following God's instructions. When the waters rise, Noah, his family, and all the creatures of the earth enter the ark. What must have been long and terrifying days and nights of waiting begin. Scripture does not tell us what Noah does or thinks while waiting for the storm to cease and the waters to recede, but we know that "Noah did everything the LORD commanded him" (Gen. 7:5). Noah followed God's leading, and God remembered Noah.

Waiting faithfully is always an act of hope and trust in God. Many writers in this issue describe experiences of waiting, seeking God's guidance, and faithfully holding on to the hope that God's power and love for us provide. These stories of faithful waiting encourage me and remind me that God sends others to support us in our waiting and, most important of all, that God remembers us and is with us as we wait. As you seek God's guidance and wait in the coming months, I pray that these stories will give you courage, hope, and an opportunity to draw closer to God.



— Lindsay L. Gray
Editorial Director

From the Archives

From 1949 through 1967, the September-October issues of *The Upper Room* contained only devotionals written by people from outside the United States of America. Today, each issue features a number of international voices. This practice of inviting and embracing Christian voices from around the world continues to shape our identity as God's global family. The note from the editor featured below was published in the July-August 1959 issue.

What a Fellowship!

This is written in Pakistan, where the Urdu edition of *The Upper Room* is published. Nine of us from the United States are here. . . . We are in a visitation evangelism mission. We shall also work in several parts of India, where *The Upper Room* has seven editions.

What a thrill it is to go into a remote village, as well as into a city, and find readers of *The Upper Room*! What a privilege it is to meet these people and get to know them! What a fellowship it is of kindred minds bound together by the ties of Christian faith, Christian hope, and Christian love!

We travel far from home and yet we find friends. These people are so friendly and lovable. They are proud of their country and bound together by a determination to build a great nation.

We walk the roads with the people. We visit the homes and enter into family devotions. We worship in the churches and preach to the people. We go into the schools and speak to the students. In fact, we live among the people. What a fellowship it is!

It is indicative of the world-wide fellowship of *The Upper Room*. We unite in the same Bible reading, the same meditation and prayer. We pray to the same Father. We know we are brothers, and we experience that brotherhood. We pray that more and more we may be the great brotherhood God would have us to be. We believe we shall be. God bless everyone.

— J. Manning Potts, Editor

Where the World Meets to Pray

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

- Hong Kong (Chinese, Chinese/English)
- Japan (Japanese, English)
- Korea (Korean, Korean/English, and Korean/English/Japanese)

KOREA

Last year *The Upper Room* celebrated 80 years of publishing in Korea! Publishing partners from all over Asia gathered in Seoul for a celebration and training event to commemorate the occasion.



Photos courtesy of the Rev. Thomas Kim, UMMS

COME NEAR

SUN
SEPT 1
2019

READ Psalm 113:1-9*

Come near to God, and he will come near to you.

— James 4:8 (CEB)

Recently my children and grandchildren from out of state spent a week at my house. I noticed that we each had habits and activities that we did throughout the day. Some of us checked our phones frequently. Some went outside for fresh air throughout the day. The grandkids kept getting out more toys. Some reached for snacks, and I spent more time than usual washing dishes.

Noticing these patterns made me think that if we were to read our Bible or pray as much as we do other things throughout the day, we could draw nearer and nearer to God. I decided that I would pray whenever I did the dishes. I suggested to my children and grandchildren that they say a quick prayer every time they reach for a snack, for their phone, for a toy, or when they step outside for a breath of fresh air. Scripture reminds us that when we pray continually and draw near to God, God will draw near to us.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Today I will make prayer a part of my routine.

Prayer: Dear God, help us to keep you in our thoughts throughout the day so that we may draw nearer to you. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Annie Gipson (Missouri, USA)

Prayer Focus: THOSE TRAVELING TO VISIT FAMILY

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

MON
SEPT 2
2019

ENTERTAINING ANGELS

READ Matthew 6:1-4

Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it.

— Hebrews 13:2 (NRSV)

When I was a young lawyer, one of the first visitors to my office was a woman in her mid-80s who arrived on a large tricycle. I eventually learned that her name was Blanche and that she was well known in the small community for traveling around town on her trike.

Every week Blanche came to my office. She often shared her visions of heaven with me, and although I thought this was a bit strange, I listened to her intently.

I lived in a house by myself 20 miles from my office. One day when I returned home, I found my house completely cleaned. I was a little concerned about someone coming into my house, but I was thankful that it was so clean. A couple of days later, Blanche came to my office and asked, "How'd you like it?" I quickly realized that she had ridden 20 miles to clean my house.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
Today I will remain alert for glimpses of God in others.

As I reflect on Blanche, I think about the verse quoted above about entertaining

angels. I believe that God places people on our path to give us glimpses of heaven. If we keep our eyes open, seeing and loving others, we will see the face of God.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank you for your presence with us. Bless those who teach us about your love. Amen.

Robin Wynne (Arkansas, USA)

Prayer Focus: SOMEONE WHO HAS SHOWN ME
UNEXPECTED KINDNESS

NEVER ALONE

READ Luke 11:5-13

Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.

— Luke 11:9-10 (NIV)

After my husband of more than 64 years died, I found myself living alone for the first time in my 80 plus years. It was truly an adjustment. I often caught myself saying something aloud and then answering myself. I was so starved for companionship that if I ever was with others, I would just chatter on — so glad that I was finally able to discuss daily events and activities. I was definitely seeking the "new normal" in my life.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
God's grace and Spirit are always with me.

I found consolation in my church, my friends, and my writing, but I still felt a void in my life. One day I began reading *The Upper Room* and soon discovered a kinship with others. The life experiences of the writers motivated me to draw closer to the Lord, my true friend and savior. I now know that I am not living alone, for God is with me at all times to talk to and to enrich and inspire my life with unconditional love.

Connection with God gives me the strength to get up each morning with the resolve to challenge myself in new ways, to ask myself: How can I fulfill God's purpose for me and help others to see that they are never alone? Hand in hand with the Lord, I'll find the answer.

Prayer: Dear Lord, thank you for wrapping us in your love. Help us to grow in faith so that others will see in us your abiding care. Amen.

Lois E. Wilson (Ohio, USA)

Prayer Focus: WIDOWS

WED
SEPT 4
2019

THANKS BE TO GOD

READ Romans 7:14-25

Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord!

— Romans 7:25 (NIV)

When my daughter wanted apple pie, I picked three perfect-looking green apples. However, after peeling and cutting one of the apples, I found it completely rotten inside.

At times I feel exactly like that: nice and presentable on the outside but a disaster inside. Despite my best efforts to be an excellent wife and a patient mother, the apostle Paul's words ring true: "I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do — this I keep on

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Although sin abounds, God's mercy overcomes.

doing." I have been a Christian for decades, and I delight in God's word. I admit that God's ways are better than my own. Still I often assume that what I want is most important, or that I deserve what my heart desires — right now.

I wonder, *Is it possible to escape this inner battle?* The Bible teaches that as long as we live, we will struggle with sin. But the apostle Paul also writes, "Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord!" Jesus always fights my battles with me. Whenever temptation presents itself, I know I can cry for help and try to imitate Jesus. He promised to deliver us, and we can count on his word!

Prayer: Dear God, help us to guard our hearts from evil. Thank you for delivering us through Jesus Christ, who helps us in our daily battles. Amen.

Marcela Nwanosike (England, United Kingdom)

A FORGOTTEN INSCRIPTION

READ Philippians 2:12-18

God said, "*There is no one who can deliver from my hand; I work and who can hinder it?*"

— Isaiah 43:13 (NRSV)

When I was young, my grandmother gave me a small, black Bible with this inscription: "Dear Greg: This little Bible is your very first one, so keep it nice. You are getting big so pretty soon you will be able to read it. I pray the dear Lord will keep you under His wing and help you to grow up to be a strong, healthy boy and that you will go often to the Bible for strength and courage as you go through life. — Gram, October 31, 1968."

I soon forgot the inscription, and as I grew I matured in my faith. Then that Bible was replaced with a larger one.

During a recent time of prayer, I saw my forgotten Bible on a shelf. I read the inscription, and I could hear my grandma's voice again. I was overcome with emotion. How could I tell her how God had faithfully answered her prayer and what a wonderful example of Christ she was to me?

Grandma's prayer and Christian witness continue

to be evident in my life. I go to the Bible for strength and courage, and God has never failed to provide. Today as we pray, each of us can thank God for the Christian influences in our lives.

Prayer: Dear God, thank you for providing for our needs and giving us Christian mentors in our lives. Help us to grow in our relationship with you. Amen.

Greg D. Romano (Indiana, USA)

THUR
SEPT 5
2019

FRI
SEPT 6
2019

DIRTY DISHES

READ 1 John 1:5-10

If we confess our sins, [God] is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

— 1 John 1:9 (NIV)

When a dish goes unwashed after a meal, it will likely remain in the sink overnight. Because the food dries firmly on the dish, it takes much longer to clean than a dish that is washed immediately.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
Because God has forgiven me,
I am free to forgive others.

The grime left behind on dishes makes me think about the things in our lives that need cleansing. Maybe we need to pray for forgive-

ness or for help forgiving others; maybe immorality, injustice, or other sins are harming our relationships with others and with God.

Much like washing dishes, the best thing for our lives is to acknowledge the grime immediately and not postpone action for the future; waiting only makes it more difficult to change. But even when we leave dirt in our lives long enough for it to stick, forgiveness is a powerful cleanser. God asks that we forgive others, and God forgives us — God cleanses us from sin through the power of Jesus' blood.

Prayer: Forgiving God, thank you for cleansing us from our sin. Help us to show your forgiveness to others even as you help us wash the dirt from our lives and our relationships. Amen.

Conny Hedengren (Jonkoping, Sweden)

ORDINARY HEROES

READ 1 Corinthians 1:26-31

God chose what the world considers low-class and low-life — what is considered to be nothing — to reduce what is considered to be something to nothing.

— 1 Corinthians 1:28 (CEB)

In popular literature, plays, and poetry, the common people often have unimportant roles while the exalted parts go to kings, princes, and princesses.

But the New Testament flips that perception. In God's story, the common people take center stage. It is not a king's eloquent decree that makes Jesus stop, but rather a blind beggar who desperately calls out his name. As others rushed by this man, Jesus saw his value. The widow who donated only two copper coins is a heroine. (See Mark 12:41-44.) Jesus did not ignore the common people or portray them as buffoons.

In the Gospels, we read about the nameless in "The Prodigal Son" and "A Paralytic Healed." What a contrast to other stories of kings and rulers! We like to read about celebrities and people who lead glamorous lives, but God often does the opposite of what we expect. God prefers to focus on ordinary people and how they become quiet heroes through loving acts of faith; God invites us to do the same.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
God exalts those who act with
faith.

Prayer: God of all people, help us to look beyond earthly success. Open our eyes to see the value of all people, just as you do. Amen.

Bob LaForge (New Jersey, USA)

CONTENTMENT

READ Zephaniah 3:14-20

[The LORD your God] will rejoice over you with singing.

— Zephaniah 3:17 (CEB)

I loved to rock my babies and grandbabies. My youngest daughter always enjoyed snuggling in my arms; with her many health concerns she often felt ill and needed comfort. I would wrap her in her favorite blanket, rock her, and softly sing “Jesus Loves Me.” She would settle down contentedly.

Years later I looked after my infant grandson, Nathaniel, one evening each week. After I changed him and prepared his evening bottle, I would wrap him in a blanket, rock him, feed him, and softly sing “Jesus Loves Me” to him.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

I can feel safe in God’s comforting embrace.

He would relax and snuggle contentedly, soothed by his grandma singing over him.

I think of these two generations of babies whenever

I read today’s quoted verse. God loves each one of us more than I could ever love my children and grandchildren. I feel overwhelmed when I realize how much the God of the universe delights in me. God sings over all of us and wants us to come, curl up, and find comfort.

Prayer: Dear God, thank you for loving us completely. Help us to remember how much you love and desire to comfort us. Amen.

Carol Harrison (Saskatchewan, Canada)

FULL ACCESS

READ Hebrews 4:12-16

Through faith in [Christ Jesus our Lord] we may approach God with freedom and confidence.

— Ephesians 3:12 (NIV)

Three days of heavy rain left our area saturated with overflowing streams, causing full drainage ditches, soggy yards, and flooded roads between the hills. Orange barrels and “Road Closed” signs blocked the streets, causing drivers to seek alternate routes.

When I tried to get to the main highway I found it barricaded, requiring that I turn around. The detour increased my frustration in getting where I needed to go.

Gripping the steering wheel, I realized I had a choice — to let the annoyance of the detour irritate me or to pray that God would calm my mind in spite of the road closure. Then I thought: *When I pray, nothing ever stands as an obstacle. I have full access to God at any time!*

Jesus Christ is the way to God (John 14:6), and through him, we can draw near to God with confidence. We have many ways to connect with God, such as through prayer, reading the Bible, worshiping with others, listening to Christian music, and serving God’s people. God never puts up a “Road Closed” sign. When we approach with sincere hearts, God will receive us.

Prayer: Dear Lord, thank you for reminders that you are always with us. Amen.

Nancy Kay Grace (Arkansas, USA)

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Through prayer, I can reach God at any time and from any place.

TUES
SEPT 10
2019

ABUNDANT PEACE

READ **Philippians 4:1-8**

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

— **Philippians 4:6** (NIV)

When our 4-year-old son was diagnosed with leukemia, my wife and I dropped everything and took up residence for a week in our son's room at the local children's hospital. We struggled to keep a brave outward appearance as we dealt with a barrage of tests and procedures and meetings with doctors, counselors, family, and chaplains. Inside, however, we were shell-shocked.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
In the midst of trouble, I am surrounded by God's peace.

One night, I awoke to a palpable feeling of reassurance and warmth that filled our son's hospital room. In place of all my worry and

fear lingered the most complete peace I have ever felt.

From that point on, every time we took our son to his monthly evaluation and chemo clinic, we read chapter four of **Philippians**. Admittedly, it was always a struggle not to worry, but still I felt God's presence. Throughout our son's three-and-a-half-year chemotherapy regimen, we continually made known our requests to God.

Our son is now 13 years old, and he does most of the things a normal 13-year-old boy does. Just as we did that night in the hospital, we continue to experience God's presence in every one of our annual survivor-clinic visits. God has been there for all of it offering us hope, lovingkindness, and abundant peace.

Prayer: Compassionate God, send peace to all those who worry over their health and the health of their loved ones. Fill us with peace that banishes our fears and anxieties. Amen.

Robert Harris (Georgia, USA)

Prayer Focus: FAMILIES COPING WITH CHILDHOOD
CANCER

LIFE IN COMMUNITY

READ **Acts 2:42-47**

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

— **Acts 2:42** (NIV)

As I rushed to the front door one Tuesday morning, my husband stopped me. "Have you seen this?" he asked, pointing to the television screen. I glanced over my shoulder and saw a plane crashing into the World Trade Center. "Oh, that's awful!" But because 15 women were waiting for me to lead Bible study, I didn't have time to think more about it and rushed out the door.

When I arrived, the group was discussing what they had heard or seen that morning about the attack. Our fears and concerns escalated with news that the Pentagon had also been hit. When I tried to start the lesson, no one could focus. So we went to the sanctuary to pray. We knew so little that it was hard to form the words, but it felt right to be kneeling at an altar, in community with other children of God on that day — September 11, 2001.

After Jesus was physically gone, the early church had only one another to rely on. Luke's joy is evident as he writes about their life in community. They ate, learned, and worshiped together. Our faith is strengthened by others as they encourage us, love us, and hold us accountable. The early church is a model of what God intended — that we travel through our journey of faith and life in community.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
My community strengthens my faith.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank you for placing faithful Christians in our lives to support and guide us on our journeys. Amen.

Marcy Farr (Texas, USA)

Prayer Focus: VICTIMS OF TERRORISM

CALLED TO OBEY

READ 1 Samuel 15:1-25

Samuel replied [to Saul]: “Does the LORD delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the LORD? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams.

— 1 Samuel 15:22 (NIV)

As I pushed my baby in his pram down the road, I prayed with each step. I was in the middle of another bout of anxiety and depression as a result of an illness I’d had for 11 years. While homebound and isolated from others for the previous

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Today, in small things and in great, I will look for the ways God is calling me to obey.

two years, I had tearfully prayed every night that I would make friends. Also, I had been agonizing over how I was going to give my new baby a happy

and active life. So when I felt God nudging me to go to my church’s morning fellowship time for the first time in nine years, I was filled with fear.

For others, this may seem like a small challenge, but the Lord knew how hard it was for me. Yet, this small step of obedience changed my life forever. As a result of going that day, I was introduced to a house church run by a lovely young couple with a young boy the same age as mine.

Now I have a wonderful community around me who support me and cheer me on and with whom I pray and worship God. And my little boy has a best friend to grow up with. What a lesson I’ve learned about being open to God’s leading!

Prayer: Dear Father, thank you for your word and for guiding us through our days. Help us to listen for your voice and to obey you even when we don’t understand why. Amen.

Hannah Blavins (England, United Kingdom)

Prayer Focus: YOUNG MOTHERS STRUGGLING WITH ILLNESS

FISHING FOR PEOPLE

READ Matthew 4:18-22

“Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will send you out to fish for people.”

— Matthew 4:19 (NIV)

Recently I took my five-year-old grandson Daylen on a fishing trip. He was very excited to possibly catch a fish even though he had no idea what he would do with it once he caught it. After I set up his fishing rod, Daylen was determined to bait his own hook and make the cast all by himself; but he still needed me to guide him.

His enthusiasm reminded me of how excited we are when we first accept Christ as our savior. We can’t wait to share the gospel and “fish for people.” Sometimes, like my grandson, we want to do everything all by ourselves because we think that we’ve got it all figured out. But our heavenly Father knows better and puts people in our lives to help us to grow and mature so that we can effectively serve.

After several casts and no fish, Daylen’s excitement waned and his focus turned to other things. This

reminded me of how it is with us as we serve God. Sometimes when things don’t work out exactly the way we thought they should, we can become distracted or frustrated. That’s when those God-appointed mentors can help us stay focused and on track. In so doing, we draw closer to them, closer to God, and closer to those we are serving in God’s name.

Prayer: God, our guide, thank you for watching over us and putting others in our lives to help us grow and mature in faith. Amen.

W. Leon McBride (Georgia, USA)

Prayer Focus: MY MENTOR IN THE FAITH

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

With God’s help, I can share my faith with others.

FREEDOM

READ Psalm 119:44-48

*I will always obey your law, for ever and ever.
I will walk about in freedom, for I have
sought out your precepts.*

— Psalm 119:44-45 (NIV)

When I walk our dog, Oliver, at the park off-leash, he loves to run ahead, sniffing the trees and chasing the squirrels. Allowing him the liberty to enjoy the park on his own makes me happy. However, I keep a lookout for other dog-walkers. When I see one in the distance, I call Oliver back to me to put him on his leash until we are alone again.

I am always struck by Oliver's quick and happy obedience when I call him back. He knows his freedom is going to be curtailed; yet he still comes eagerly to my feet. Only because

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Today, I will strive to cheerfully obey God's commands.

I know I can count on his quick obedience and I am able to allow him off-leash at all.

In Oliver's obedience I see a lesson for my relationship to my heavenly Father.

Just as my commands seem to limit Oliver's freedom, so God's commands sometimes feel restrictive. And yet, God's commands are for my good. Through them, I will be able to fully enjoy the life God has given me. Still, I have to ask myself: "Am I as quick and cheerful in my obedience to God as Oliver is to me? Or when God calls me to obedience, do I delay and sulk at having to be put on a leash?" I hope I can match Oliver's enthusiasm when God gives me a command.

Prayer: Dear God, help us today to trust you enough to obey you quickly and cheerfully in all that you ask. Help us to remember that obeying you gives us freedom. Amen.

Diana Allor (Michigan, USA)

SUN
SEPT 15
2019

WISE COUNSEL

READ James 1:2-6

Is not wisdom found among the aged? Does not long life bring understanding? To God belong wisdom and power; counsel and understanding are his.

— Job 12:12-13 (NIV)

Since I turned 70, I have become short-tempered. I feel worthless when God seems to ignore my desires to serve the kingdom. I also feel hopeless when social inequities such as nepotism, cronyism, favoritism, and other injustices spread over my country. From time to time I feel miserable and lonely. When these feelings arise, I wonder whether my relationship with God is still

vital and intimate. I forget the past and murmur about what God is doing for me now.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

God offers wise counsel in every season of my life.

In my youth, I felt that God loved my unique personality, honest prayers, and even my raw emotions. God rescued me when I narrowly missed being killed in combat. I survived two car accidents. After that, God surprised me with a new career that would sustain me for the rest of my working life. As I arduously sought after success, God sometimes slowed down my pace, which definitely worked for my good. After retirement, when I worried about my small income, God gave me peace and rest.

Remembering all this, I decided to focus on building up patience and endurance. As a result, I am once again giving thanks for the spiritual wisdom and understanding God has given me and for the peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. I now see that God has never stopped being faithful in my life.

Prayer: Gracious God, when we feel depressed, help us to count our blessings and seek your wisdom and counsel. Amen.

Young Chae Chung (Seoul, South Korea)

22 **Prayer Focus:** ELDERLY PEOPLE SUFFERING DEPRESSION

THE GIFT OF PEACE

MON
SEPT 16
2019

READ Psalm 16:5-11

I keep my eyes always on the LORD. With him at my right hand, I will not be shaken. Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will rest secure.

— Psalm 16:8-9 (NIV)

When I was seven years old, my life changed drastically and forever. Until then, I had been very close to my father. One night, suddenly and unexpectedly, he passed away — leaving me feeling lost and alone. After his death, things were very hard for my family, causing us to feel as if we were in a dark pit we could not get out of. As the years passed, I was constantly scared of the future and would choose fear over joy of any sort. When I realized that fear had become my closest friend, I knew I had a problem. One night, as I felt completely broken and afraid, I decided to ask the Lord for guidance in reading the Bible. By the grace of God, I immediately opened up to Psalm 16.

With tears of thankfulness, I gradually started to find peace in the comforting words encouraging us to rejoice because the God of the universe is at our right hand. I read that our souls dwell securely in a God who will never forsake us — even in our darkest hour.

The peace of God can conquer anything. Simply reading the Bible can change a heart of fear to a heart of joy, full of the most profound spiritual peace.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank you for loving us and giving us peace through the reading of your word. Help us never to grow weary in trusting you. Amen.

Lydia Masters (Texas, USA)

Prayer Focus: CHILDREN WHO HAVE LOST A PARENT 23

TUES
SEPT 17
2019

ANSWERED PRAYERS

READ Matthew 7:7-11

Jesus replied to the disciples, “If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer.”

— Matthew 21:22 (NIV)

After retiring as president and CEO of a public company, I missed my job’s challenges and activity. To help fill the vacuum, I turned to prayer — asking for guidance in serving God with my new abundance of free time. Then, during an Easter sermon, God inspired me to create bookmarks for

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

God always answers my prayers — sometimes in surprising ways.

as a concise summary of Christian beliefs. To date, 187,000 of those bookmarks have been distributed and well received in 343 prisons in all 50 states. Clearly, God has answered my prayer, although I had not expected to be led in this direction.

God does hear and answer our prayers. Sometimes, the answers may be exactly what we expected. Others are subtle and easily overlooked, as we focus solely on our own expectations. Some we recognize only when we look back after the passage of time. Some prayers may seem to remain unanswered altogether. In whatever situation, we can be assured that God wants the very best for us.

Prayer: Dear Lord, thank you for hearing and answering our prayers. Help us to acknowledge those answers, even when they don’t match our expectations. Amen.

Max Mardick (Colorado, USA)

GUIDED TO SERVE

READ 2 Corinthians 1:1-7

The God of all comfort . . . 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 1:3-4 (NIV)

When at the age of 26 I moved to a bustling new city far from friends and family, I was overcome with loneliness. I began to pray: “Father, it’s miserable being lonely, and I know I’m not the only one. Thank you that I can empathize a little better with people who are far from family and friends. But what can I do with this situation? Where can I go to make others less lonely?” Nursing homes popped into my mind, so I decided to see if my church had any ministries already going.

But when Sunday came and I scanned a room of mostly nameless faces, my resolve sank. I’ll ask about it next week, I decided, and deposited myself on a cushioned chair in the lobby. An elderly woman came and sat beside me. After we exchanged hellos, she told me that she and a group of others had just returned from visiting a nearby nursing home. I learned that they go every month so I decided to join them. I love seeing how much the old hymns mean to some of the residents and consider it a privilege to be welcomed as their visitor.

In the midst of my loneliness, God had brought out a willingness to help others. This led me to recognize the path that God had placed before me — one that took away not only my loneliness but also some of the lonely feelings of others.

Prayer: Dear Father, thank you for shepherding us so well. Amen.

Christine Duncan (Ontario, Canada)

THUR
SEPT 19
2019

GOD'S WONDERFUL CREATION

READ Genesis 1:26-31

*God saw all that he had made,
and it was very good.*

— Genesis 1:31 (NIV)

As an artist, I have to focus on details like light, shadow, and color. Often I find inspiration in the beauty of God's creation. Sunsets, mountains, and cascading waterfalls have been central to my work — until a few months ago.

Back in January, I began painting faces. What I noticed was just how much harder it is to capture the essence of a person in pencil and acrylics. Get one detail wrong — the nose just a little bit too big or the eyes off center — and the image is ruined.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

How do I show love for God's creation?

After each of the first five days of Creation, God looked at what had been created and saw that it was "good." On the sixth day of Creation, however, after making a human, God declared that creation was "very good." Too often we look around and see the beauty in sunsets, mountains, or cascading waterfalls but forget the beauty present in God's greatest, most complex creation — human beings. After all, God loves us enough to have sent Jesus Christ to live and die so that we could have abundant and eternal life.

Prayer: Dear God, help us see every human as a unique creation of your love. Amen.

Nathan Melia (Texas, USA)

THE GREATEST WITNESS

READ Romans 10:11-15

*Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone
who asks you to give the reason for the hope that
you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.*

— 1 Peter 3:15 (NIV)

When I became a Christian, I resolved never to miss an opportunity to share my faith with others. One day as my husband and I were admiring our newborn son in the hospital, another patient, Vi, was wheeled into the room with her newborn girl. I said a prayer for boldness to witness to her.

During the day Vi and I visited with family and friends; but in the evening after our babies were asleep, Vi talked about the difficult circumstances of her life. And I listened.

In my interactions with Vi, I learned much about witnessing. I know it's important to witness by talking to people about Jesus. However, this experience taught me that listening to the deepest heart-cry of another person is also important. In those times,

we may be a link in the chain that eventually connects that person with God.

After three days, Vi and I said goodbye, reluctant to break off our friendship. As the nurse wheeled our son and me down the hall, I thought, *I didn't outline the plan of salvation for Vi. I didn't pray with her or share a scripture.*

But the Lord reminded me that I had shown love. And that can be the greatest witness of all.

Prayer: Dear God, help us to take any opportunity we have to share the love of Christ in any way we can. Amen.

Jewell Johnson (Arizona, USA)

FRI
SEPT 20
2019

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Compassionate listening is
one way I can show
God's love.

SAT
SEPT 21
2019

EVEN ME

READ Matthew 6:25-33

God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

— John 3:16 (NIV)

I've always had to work really hard in school. I make many mistakes, and my dad has to point them out and explain them to me. I was so discouraged by my struggles with school that I began to feel that I didn't deserve any of the good things in my life.

When I expressed my feelings of unworthiness, my dad explained that God may give us challenging tasks but also will help us through them. Dad reminded me of this verse: "Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?" I thought, *How good those birds have it; they don't have to go to school and God still takes care of them!* Then Dad read John 3:16 to remind me how much God loves me.

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

Even when I mess up, God still gives me oxygen, sunshine, food, and many good things just because God loves each of us so very much. Now I do my work with more enthusiasm because I know that even when I make mistakes, God is with me and still loves me.

Prayer: Dear God, thank you for caring for us — even when we feel we don't deserve it. In the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

David Serdyukov (Moscow, Russia)

WHICH BOX?

READ Galatians 3:26-29

There is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him. For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.

— Romans 10:12-13 (KJV)

I never considered that the color of someone's skin was a big deal — until I was in third grade. My class was registering for state testing and the form we had to fill out asked the usual information: name, address, age. Those parts were easy to answer. However, the next question left me confused. I raised my hand and asked the teacher to help me. I pointed to the question labeled "RACE/ETHNICITY (choose one)." She told me to go by what my father was. I still wasn't sure what to choose because my dad had always told me he is American, even though he is half African-American and half Hispanic — while my mom is white.

As time went on I started to notice more and more that most people do not see my family as normal. I felt as if I did not fit into any particular group. However, my family has taught me that God created and cherishes each one of us. We are each special in our own way and should love one another, regardless of what we look like. No matter what box we check, we can know that we are all children of God.

Prayer: Dear God, thank you for creating everyone in your own special way. Guide us to see one another as equals and as your children. Amen.

Breyanna Parr (Texas, USA)

SUN
SEPT 22
2019

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
God's family includes every color of the rainbow.

THE OLD COIN

READ Psalm 8:3-9

You are no longer a slave but a child, and if a child then also an heir, through God.

— Galatians 4:7 (NRSV)

An old and somewhat rare coin fascinated me, so I bought it. The value of the coin was stamped on it: fifty cents. But to a collector or a hobbyist, that coin is worth far more than that. The coin has two values: the value that the government stamped on it and the value that a collector might pay for it.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
I am worth more to God than I can imagine.

It seems to me that it is the same way with people. We may feel that society gives us a value based on our social status, income level, or appear-

ance. But God values us as beloved children for whom Jesus Christ lived, died, and was raised again. God is the supreme collector who seeks to gather all of us into the kingdom of compassion, peace, and justice. When we accept and treat others as people of intrinsic worth who are endowed with dignity, the kingdom of God draws a bit closer. The lives of others are blessed and, by the grace of God, so is ours.

Prayer: Help us, Holy One, to see the worth and dignity in everyone we meet, remembering that we are all your beloved children. We pray in the name of Jesus Christ: “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.

Philip Rice (Michigan, USA)

OPPORTUNITY IN WAITING

READ 2 Peter 3:8-11

I watch in hope for the LORD, I wait for God my Savior; my God will hear me.

— Micah 7:7 (NIV)

When we got in line for one of my son’s favorite attractions at an amusement park, the wait time was over an hour and a half. I asked my son if he still wanted to wait, hoping he would pass on the opportunity. He assured me that the attraction was a must, so we began the hot, crowded wait. We anticipated the thrill of what was to come; before we knew it, we were on the loading dock. As soon as the ride began, the memories of the line were replaced by the joy of the attraction.

I don’t think anyone enjoys waiting. However, scripture reminds us that waiting is part of our life with God. Sometimes the wait seems uncomfortable or unbearable, but God promises to listen when we call out. When we spend our time waiting in anticipation of the fulfillment of God’s promises, the delay becomes an act of praise.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
Today I will draw closer to God during times of waiting.

The long line at the amusement park gave my son and me an opportunity to connect on a deeper level. Likewise, when we feel that God has not moved according to our preferred time frame, we can explore ways to use that time to grow into a stronger and more trusting relationship with God.

Prayer: Dear God, help us to find ways to use our times of waiting to grow closer to you. Amen.

Cortney Whiting (Georgia, USA)

WED
SEPT 25
2019

HOPE THROUGH TRIALS

READ Jeremiah 29:10-14

"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)

As I was growing up, my family didn't have much. At one time, four of us had to live in a tiny college dorm while my mom was finishing her degree. Later, when we moved to a bigger house, we couldn't afford it. As a result, our power and water would get shut off, and for weeks we'd have to "live like

the Pilgrims," as my mom would say. Even through these desperate times, my mother never let us forget that God was with us and watching over us. We would

always ask her, "How can you be so sure? We don't even have water to wash our clothes and barely any food in the kitchen!" Then, graciously, she would respond with Jeremiah 29:11.

This verse has carried me through many dark times in my adolescent and young-adult life. I felt assured that if God still had good plans for an exiled people who had continually rejected him, God would be faithful to me as well. Now my mother is working on her doctoral degree, and our current house overflows with prosperity and love. I have witnessed in my own life that God will never fail.

Prayer: Dear God, thank you being faithful and trustworthy in your promises. Amen.

Seth Stewart (Texas, USA)

HELPING HANDS

READ Mark 10:42-45

The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.

— Mark 10:45 (NIV)

Several years ago I slipped on some ice and landed hard on my dominant hand, badly spraining my wrist. Since I lived alone, I had to do everything with one hand for several days. The simplest of tasks, like buttering a bagel, were suddenly difficult. My daughter drove over an hour just to make me a sandwich and wash my dishes. I soon learned to use my elbows, knees, and even my mouth to assist my good hand to do things like cut a sandwich or open an envelope, a box of crackers, or a jar of pickles.

I came away from those days of frustration with a new appreciation not only for the gift of my own two hands but also for those who are "hands" in the body of Christ. I consider those who enjoy lending a hand where it's needed as having the spiritual gift of helping. (See 1 Cor. 12:28.)

Thank God for the beautiful hands of those who help with Communion, serve as ushers, work in the nursery, run errands, help in the office, mow the church lawn, and assist widows and elderly with daily tasks. I wonder if these Christian servants who come alongside others have any idea how much their acts of giving mean to those they help.

Prayer: Dear Lord, use our hands to serve in any way we can, and lift our hearts in gratitude for all those who are serving. Amen.

Ruth Brentner (Illinois, USA)

THUR
SEPT 26
2019

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
God never fails me.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
My hands are God's gift to
serve others.

FRI
SEPT 27
2019

NAVIGATING THROUGH LIFE

READ Deuteronomy 11:18-21

*Your word is a lamp before my feet
and a light for my journey.*

— Psalm 119:105 (CEB)

During my childhood, whenever my family took a vacation, my siblings and I would get to take turns sitting in the front seat of the car. When it was my turn, my dad would set the map on my lap so I could read it. I loved looking at the squiggly lines on the map and dreaming about where they would take us. I still find paper maps fascinating.

As Christians, the Bible is our map. It guides our lives, gives us direction, and reveals God to us. For many years, I wanted to read the Bible to learn more about God, but I didn't know where to start. Then my church provided Bible reading plans, and every year since then I've been using a plan to read through my study Bible.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

As we journey through life,
God's word is our road map.

The daily reading gives me
a fresh start to each day and
something new to discern
within God's word.

For many people,
printed maps have been replaced by GPS units and smart-phone apps, but I'm grateful that the Bible never becomes obsolete. It is an eternal source of wisdom — the map that guides us through life and to our heavenly destination.

Prayer: Dear God, increase our desire to read your word, seek your guidance, and follow you. Amen.

Jan Towne (Virginia, USA)

ONE DAY AT A TIME

READ Hebrews 13:1-6

*Do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow
will worry about itself. Each day has
enough trouble of its own.*

— Matthew 6:34 (NIV)

Recently, I had a minor auto accident, my second in less than a year. It made me realize that I was no longer a confident driver due to my macular degeneration. So after 70 years of driving, I gave away my car.

Then I began to imagine all sorts of difficulties that would follow my decision. *How will I get to the barber shop? My doctor's office is only about three blocks away, but I'm not strong enough to walk that far.* So I became full of worry and fear about my decision to give up driving.

A few days later, the Lord brought to my mind ways I could cope with this new life. I imagined friends that would offer rides. I thought of the services in our city for people like me. I could occasionally even take a taxi, using the money I had saved from giving up my car. God seemed to be telling me not to worry — that help would come as each challenge arose.

Don't be anxious about the rest of your life, Jesus tells us. Deal only with today. Each day has its own troubles, so don't take on the troubles that might possibly come up in the future.

Now, though I still have problems getting some places, I am no longer afraid. I know that God and my friends are there to see me through.

Prayer: Dear God, you help us in countless ways. Continue to remind us that you are with us, even in the major changes of our lives. Amen.

Ken Claar (Idaho, USA)

SAT
SEPT 28
2019

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
God knows my needs and in
time will provide.

BLURRED VISION

READ Colossians 3:12-17

Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves.

— Romans 12:10 (NIV)

Most mornings as I put my contacts in, I pray, “Thank you, God, for the gift of sight.” But one morning after a difficult night at church with teenagers, I used the time instead for a gripe session. “I’m done, God. I’m through volunteering with youth. They’re not appreciative. They’re disrespectful. They’re just a bunch of self-absorbed kids who can’t focus for even one minute on anything else.” All the while, I fought with my contacts. I fumbled one, flipped the other. Aloud, I half-heartedly asked God, “What are you trying to tell me — that I’m seeing this all wrong?”

With some thought, I realized that I had been the self-absorbed one. Instead of seeing the young person with recently separated parents, I saw misbehavior. Instead of someone with an underage drinking problem, I saw disrespect. Where I should have seen one struggling with a cutting problem, I saw anger. God reminded me that Jesus “took the children in his arms” (Mark 10:16). He loved them, cared for them, and was deeply concerned about their lives.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
Every day, I will see others the way God sees them.

And we are called to show the same compassion. I prayed — for the kids, for their issues, and for my blurred vision. And I vowed that rather than showing them my disapproval, I would show them my love. I think God just might want us to relate to everyone this way.

Prayer: Dear God, help us to love your children as Jesus does — with arms wide open and hands ready to bless. Amen.

Julie Lavender (Georgia, USA)

JOY ALWAYS

READ Romans 5:3-5

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)

My wife and I are retired and take care of our two young grandsons while our daughter and her husband are at work. Because we love our grandsons, we hate to see them crying or in distress. When they are sick or hungry, we joyfully supply what they need.

If we, as imperfect human beings, hate to see our children unhappy, why should we be surprised that God might feel the same?

But the sacrifice of God’s only son, Jesus Christ, far surpasses whatever we might have to endure. And Jesus also had to be willing to sacrifice himself on the cross and shed his blood for the salvation of the whole world. God wants us to have eternal life, to someday be free from all kinds of pain. In the meantime, Paul encouraged us to rejoice and even give thanks when we face times that call us to sacrifice: “Rejoice always, . . . give thanks in all circumstances.” These words assure us that our faithful obedience will bring us “wisdom and knowledge and joy” (Eccl. 2:26, CEB).

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
Like a good parent, God joyfully supplies what I need.

Prayer: Holy God, give us strength to remain joyous in all circumstances so that you may be glorified. Amen.

Stanley Solanki (Maharashtra, India)

TUES
OCT 1
2019

STRENGTH IN CHRIST

READ **Philippians 4:10-13**

My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.

— Psalm 73:26 (NRSV)

I am the oldest of seven children. During my senior year of high school, my family had only one car, so I would have to wake up at 5:50 every morning and take my mom to work. After that I would come home to make breakfast for my younger siblings and see that they all got to school or to the babysitter. After doing all that, I would finally get myself dressed for school.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
What may seem impossible for me is possible through Christ.

Some days I felt too tired to complete all these responsibilities, but I

tried never to complain. After one very hectic morning, I was simply overwhelmed. That's when I remembered the scripture, "I can do all things through [Christ] who strengthens me." I knew that I had to pray — to ask Christ for strength to continue.

Everyone has certain responsibilities, and sometimes those responsibilities become draining. In a world where everything moves so fast, we can easily feel overwhelmed. How important it is, then, to slow down and ask God to give us the strength to continue in the work that each day brings us!

Prayer: Heavenly Father, give us the strength we need each day to continue in our work, always aware of your purpose for our lives. Amen.

Gozeila Bilal (South Dakota, USA)

A LONG WAY FROM HOME

WED
OCT 2
2019

READ **Genesis 28:10-22**

The LORD will guide you continually, and satisfy your needs in parched places, and make your bones strong.

— Isaiah 58:11 (NRSV)

I was 31 years old and at a major crossroads in my life. For the previous four years I had been teaching on an island in the South Pacific, and my contract was coming to an end. My house was isolated from the village. I had no telephone and no church family. I was newly divorced and soon to be unemployed. Although I was thousands of miles from home, I felt close to God.

As I thought about my uncertain future, I walked up the dirt road with the blue sky overhead and sunshine on my face. I asked God for direction. *Should I go back to live with my parents in the United States? Should I return to college? Should I look for another job overseas? What should I do?*

The answer came soundlessly but clearly: "Do as you choose. Just remember that I am with you, and whatever you do, do it with me." Peace and reassurance flowed into me. I would find a direction for my future, and I would be fine.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
Whatever I do, God will be by my side.

Forty years have passed since that day. It is just as God said to Jacob, "I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go" (NIV). As I look back, I see God's loving presence in every step of my life's journey.

Prayer: Dear God, it is a great comfort to know that you are with us and will never leave us. Thank you for your faithfulness to us. Amen.

Karen Lewis (Florida, USA)

No Regrets

Several years ago I was walking to dinner in downtown Nashville, Tennessee, when a man approached me on the sidewalk. He said that he was hungry and asked me to buy him food. I told him that maybe I could help him on my way back. I continued on, ate my supper, paid the bill, and returned to my car by a different route so that I wouldn't encounter him again.

I am ashamed to say that I didn't give the man a second thought that night. But I have given him a second thought since. I have never forgotten the incident, and to this day it remains a painful memory. It was not one of my finer moments. Whenever the memory surfaces, I find myself wondering what happened to the man. Did anyone give him something to eat? I think about what I would do differently if I could do it over.

I would like to be able to say that this is the only time I have passed by someone in need; but it isn't. I have done the same since — kept on going when I could have helped, had the means to help, and had every reason in the world to help. I think about the apostle Paul, shipwrecked on the island of Malta. He says of the people he encountered there that they showed him “unusual kindness” (Acts 28:2, NIV). I find “unusual kindness” a striking turn of phrase. Their kindness to Paul was rare, unexpected, not required, perhaps inconvenient; but they still went out of their way to care for him. Unfortunately, the man whose need I ignored could not say the same of me.

I am reminded of times in my own life when others have shown me unusual kindness. Nine times out of ten, it is the smallest acts that have made the most difference — an encouraging word when I really needed it, an invitation to dinner when I was feeling lonely, and the list goes on. These actions have made a lasting impression on me and changed the way that I am attentive to and respond to the needs of others. I do my best not only to help when called on but to look for situations in which the need may be less obvious.

My mother is always saying that she wants to have no regrets when given the opportunity to show her faith through her actions. When she has the chance to offer help, show kindness, compassion, or gratitude, she takes it. “No regrets” has become a mantra for me.

Sometimes we have opportunities to display our faith in grand and spectacular ways. More often we can show it through small and simple acts of kindness, compassion, and service — visiting an elderly person in the nursing home, cutting the grass for our neighbor who is recovering from surgery, buying food for someone who is hungry. Now when I encounter an opportunity — big or small — to put my faith into action, I remind myself of the night I passed by someone in need. I remind myself that when it comes to helping others, I want to have no regrets.

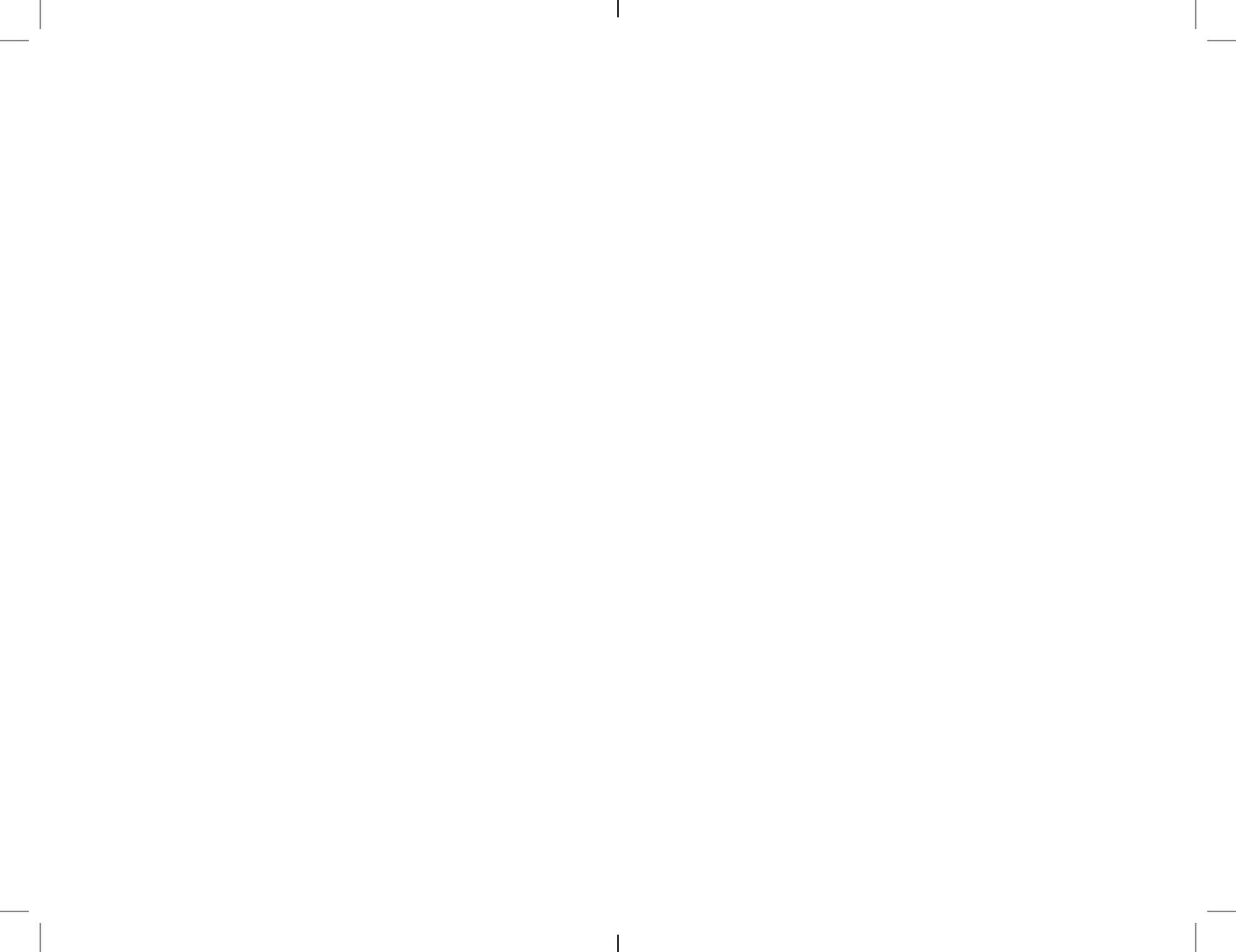
Several meditations in this issue address putting our faith into action. You may want to read again the meditations for September 2, 18, 26, 29 and October 5, 8, 12, 21, 25 before responding to the reflection questions below.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION:

1. When have you missed an opportunity to put your faith into action? What will you do differently the next time you have a similar opportunity?
2. Read Hebrews 13:2. Recall a time when you have seen this verse lived out in a real way. What did you observe? What did this experience teach you about how we are to help others?
3. How can you help others in small and simple ways in the coming week?



— Andrew Garland Breeden
Acquisitions Editor



THUR
OCT 3
2019

TRUE GRATITUDE

READ 1 Timothy 6:6-16

If we have food and clothing, we will be content with that.

— 1 Timothy 6:8 (NIV)

Recently I listened to a sermon about how we show gratitude by wanting what we have, not by getting what we want. As an inmate on death row, I am under many restrictions about what I can do and have, so I am constantly asking God for more. Recently, however, I have been praying to God to

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
Gratitude to God helps fuel contentment.

help me be more grateful for what I already have, instead of fixating on what I lack.

Later, I prepared a soup. While it cooked, I worked on finishing a writing

project. As I smelled the soup's delicious aroma, my stomach growled in anticipation. I was thankful that I had the soup to satisfy my hunger. At that moment joy flooded my soul, and I prayed, "Lord, thank you for the soup and for answering my prayer for gratitude." I could sense God's pleasure that I appreciated the gifts that I had been given. I then realized that God had given me all I need and always would. And I was content.

Prayer: Dear God, help us always to appreciate what you have given us. Amen.

George T. Wilkerson (North Carolina, USA)

PUSHING PAST OBSTACLES

READ Judges 7:1-8; 8:11-12

Jesus said, "If you have faith and do not doubt, . . . you can say to this mountain, 'Go, throw yourself into the sea,' and it will be done."

— Matthew 21:21 (NIV)

My husband, Kamlesh, had a dream of completing his college degree while working full-time. During his third year of school, his examinations were moved up by two months. My husband was tense since he had a lot less time to prepare. I encouraged him with God's words to Gideon in today's reading: "With the three hundred men . . . I will save you and give the Midianites into your hands" (v. 7). I told Kamlesh that if God could give Gideon the victory even when his forces had dropped from 10,000 men to only 300, then God could also give him success even though he had fewer days to study. God did indeed bless Kamlesh so that he passed his courses.

In God's plan, Gideon was not to receive success through thousands of warriors because then the people would think that they had won the battle through their strength alone. So God gave them victory with only 300 soldiers. In a similar way God gave my husband success despite obstacles such as hard courses, less time to study, and many responsibilities with his job and family. At first these obstacles piled up to become what seemed to be an unscalable mountain; but as we trusted God's scriptures, God helped us to arrive at the top. And we give the glory to God.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
Even through obstacles, God gives us victory.

Prayer: Dear God, thank you for helping us to persevere to reach our goals even through many trials and difficulties. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Sushma Kamlesh Macwan (Gujarat, India)

SAT
OCT 5
2019

FINDING KINDNESS

READ Galatians 5:16-25

The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

— Galatians 5:22-23 (NRSV)

On one of those days when there was too much to do and too little time to do it, I rushed to the fast-food counter and was greeted by an angry, “What do you want?” After placing my order, I realized that God was giving me an opportunity to grow. I gave the woman a half smile and asked, “Bad day?” Then came a flood of all the things that had gone wrong — french-fry machine broken, workers not showing up, and on and on. I said something like,

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Today, I will look for ways to show the fruit of the Spirit to those around me.

“Wow, that really is a bad day! Sure hope things get better. God bless.” As I was exiting, I glanced back to see a smile on the worker’s face. All it took to help make her day a little better was for a stranger to show some kindness. I’ve never forgotten that encounter because it was a moment when I felt that I was in step with the Spirit, living according to the example Jesus set for us.

Today’s reading describes qualities that Jesus modeled for us and challenges us to aspire to be more like Christ. When we pray to grow more Christlike in our actions, the Lord will give us opportunities to show just how we have grown — often in the most ordinary places.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, fill us with the fruit of your Spirit. Help us to seek opportunities to model each one. Amen.

Dave Caswell (Arkansas, USA)

BECOMING KNOWN

READ 1 John 1:1-4

As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another.

— Proverbs 27:17 (NIV)

For a few years, I have been attending a weekly home Bible study that expands my understanding of scripture and where we share a delicious meal. Many of us didn’t know one another well until the leader began asking people to describe how they came to claim Jesus as their savior. We heard stories of faith found, then abandoned, then reclaimed. We learned of the role of family in finding faith and listened in awe of events only God could orchestrate.

In some ways, our Bible study group resembles the early Christian house churches described in Acts 2:42. We share a meal, learn from scripture, and as we tell our stories, I imagine that we experience enthusiasm similar to the apostles and other followers as they talked about their personal encounters with Jesus and the world-changing events unfolding around them.

It is wonderful to experience Christians relating to each other as spiritual brothers and sisters, mothers and fathers, sons and daughters. A small group is the perfect setting for these relationships to form and grow as we open up our lives to others. When Christians take this opportunity, we honor God. And when we experience the support, wisdom, and unconditional love that are hallmarks of a spiritual family, we have even more reason to worship God and trust in the promises in the Bible.

Prayer: Dear God, help us to share our personal stories as we form bonds of faith that are not easily broken. Amen.

Kenneth Avon White (North Carolina, USA)

SUN
OCT 6
2019

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

“How good . . . it is when God’s people live together in unity!”
(Ps. 133:1).

MON
OCT 7
2019

HONEST WITH GOD

READ Romans 8:31-39

Nothing can separate us from God's love in Christ Jesus our Lord: not death or life, not angels or rulers, not present things or future things, not powers or height or depth, or any other thing that is created.

— Romans 8:38-39 (CEB)

I never really understood this verse until a few years ago when I was faced with the death of my oldest child. I went through myriad emotions and wondered if they were really valid. I was raised to believe that I should never be mad about

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
Even when I am angry, God is with me.

anything that God allowed to happen. However, when I read this verse again, God reminded me that I am human and God is God.

Nothing. That word really spoke to me. *Really, God? Nothing will separate us from you?* God assured me of this scriptural truth, but I realized that this passage did not say that nothing bad would ever happen. It says that nothing can separate us from God — not even the tragic and untimely death of a loved one.

When we realize that God is always with us, we can lay our true feelings at God's feet. Then we can begin to heal in the ways God has promised. And that healing brings us peace.

Prayer: Dear Lord, help us to realize that you are God, and that we can bring our hurts to you knowing that you care for us and hear our cries for help. Amen.

Jennifer Floyd (Florida, USA)

WHO IS MY NEIGHBOR?

READ Luke 10:25-37

Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth.

— 1 John 3:18 (NIV)

While I was driving out of a mall parking lot, a frantic young woman rapped on my car window. She pleaded, "Could you help me? I recently moved here and came for a job interview this morning. Now my car won't start, and I don't know what to do. I'm staying with my brother and have been trying to call him, but he's not answering." I asked where her brother lived and she replied, "It's about 20 minutes away. I don't have any money to pay for a taxi."

I had an appointment, but I felt that I couldn't leave her stranded. I offered to give her money for a taxi. She dabbed her eyes and accepted gratefully.

While driving away I prayed for that young woman and remembered Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan. The scribe's question was, "Who is my neighbor?" Most of us think of our neighbors as the people who live next door. According to Jesus, our neighbor is anyone we meet who is in need and whom we can help, no matter how dissimilar we are. As we show kindness to those in need, we demonstrate our love for God.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
I express my love for God when I show kindness to my neighbors.

Prayer: Gracious God, open our eyes and our hearts to our neighbors in need. May each act of kindness be an expression of our love for you. Amen.

Geraldine Nicholas (Alberta, Canada)

WED
OCT 9
2019

INVESTING

READ Micah 6:6-8

What does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.

— Micah 6:8 (NIV)

During my career, I invested in a retirement savings plan. I set aside some of our finances for long-term growth so that my wife and I would have enough money to sustain us for the rest of our lives. Before I retired, I had thought about investing only in the context of money. But afterward, I started

asking myself, “How can I invest in my Christianity and in leading a life of faith?”

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
What will I do today to invest in my relationship with God?

Now I daily set aside time for devotional reading

and prayer. Also, I try always to act justly and to love others. I believe that investing my actions in this way will help to sustain my relationship with God and my service to others.

Only God can evaluate our actions and judge the return on our investment. If we want to be like Christ, then we will invest in ways that serve others.

Prayer: Dear God, thank you for your presence in our lives. Give us the strength to do justice, love others, and walk humbly with you. As Jesus taught us, we pray, “Father, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us. And lead us not into temptation” (Luke 11:2-4, NIV). Amen.

Mike Wilt (West Virginia, USA)

PRODUCTIVE PRUNING

READ John 15:1-8

[God] 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 15:2 (NIV)

THUR
OCT 10
2019

Every year I had searched beneath prickly briars of my raspberry bushes for ripe berries with no success, and then I read an article about how to increase my yield. The writer pointed out that raspberries produce fruit on new growth. The article explained how to cut away old branches to expose new shoots to more sunlight, allow access to more nutrients from the soil, and provide extra space for growth.

Heeding advice from the article, I pruned old stems. When I finished, I felt sure the severe cutting would ruin the plants. Imagine my surprise the following spring when my bushes rewarded me with an abundant harvest!

In the Gospel of John, Jesus refers to God as the gardener who cuts off every branch that fails to bear fruit. God also prunes fruitful branches to produce greater yields. I considered how my spiritual life needed pruning to honor God more effectively. For example, simply repeating the same actions or words may stifle effective witnessing or hinder prayer life. Bible reading without meditating or seeking God’s guidance may become meaningless. Busyness may replace more urgent Christian service.

God prunes us in different ways to draw our attention back to our faith. When God lops off old habits and refreshes our commitment to prayer, Bible study, and service, we produce more abundant fruit for the kingdom.

Prayer: Father God, thank you for seasons of pruning that result in greater harvests of fruit for you. Amen.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
God’s pruning helps me produce more fruit for the kingdom.

Linda Ross Shoaf (Mississippi, USA)

FRI
OCT 11
2019

AN UNEXPECTED HOUR

READ Luke 10:38-42

Be still, and know that I am God!

— Psalm 46:10 (NRSV)

I anticipated a hectic day at work, juggling meetings and projects with deadlines. Even lunchtime was set aside for a working meeting. I decided to jot down a plan listing what tasks I would tackle in which hour. I could get everything done if I stuck to my agenda, but I had no time to spare.

At 11 o'clock, I was relieved that everything I needed to finish before my two-hour lunch meeting was complete. As I waited for others to arrive for the meeting, I realized that I had made a mistake. My lunch meeting did not actually begin until noon, and it was set for one hour, not two. The extra, unplanned hour was a gift. I considered using the time to continue working. Instead, I sat down and planted my feet on the ground. With one hand on my chest and the other on my

belly, I felt the rise and fall of each breath. I made each breath deeper, slower. With each inhale, I asked God to refresh and still my soul.

As I took advantage of

the unexpected pause in my day, I recalled the words Jesus spoke to Martha, whose name I share. "Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things. There is need of only one thing." I was reminded that even on the busiest of days, I can make room for God in the plan.

Prayer: Creator God, help us to balance the mundane tasks of our day and those things of lasting importance. Create in us clean hearts and renewed spirits. Amen.

Marti Williams-Martin (Tennessee, USA)

HIDING IN PLAIN SIGHT

READ Galatians 6:1-10

Each one should test their own actions. Then they can take pride in themselves alone, without comparing themselves to someone else.

— Galatians 6:4 (NIV)

While working at a large chain store as a vendor, I soon noticed something about one of the customers. He was in the store several times a day, walking around talking to people, but rarely did he buy anything. As the months went by, I would see him sitting in his vehicle for hours at a time with lots of clothes stored in the back. I thought, *He doesn't look homeless.* I spoke to the man a couple of times, and he told me of his many college degrees and his work history.

One day I felt a strong urge to approach the man and to offer help. Like many Christians, the fear of offending him entered my mind. I said a quick prayer for guidance and offered to help him. He refused the help, though later I learned he was in fact unemployed.

Stepping out of our comfort zone is not easy, but Jesus teaches us to help those in need. When God calls us to lend a hand to someone, it may not be in the most comfortable situation, and we risk being rejected. But isn't the risk worth it?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help us to pour out your love to people in need, knowing that our small acts of kindness may change the course of someone's day. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Joshua Berrier (North Carolina, USA)

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Today I will offer help to those whom God has placed in my path.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

When I set aside a time to rest with God, I can better serve the rest of the day.

SUN
OCT 13
2019

TURNING AROUND

READ *Jonah 1:1-3; 3:1-10*

When God saw what [the Ninevites] did and how they turned from their evil ways, he relented and did not bring on them the destruction he had threatened.

— *Jonah 3:10 (NIV)*

I used to think wrong turns in my life choices were irreversible. Growing up, I wasn't allowed to change my initial decisions. I thought that God dealt with us the same way. But scripture reveals that God not only allows second chances

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

When I need to change direction, God is there to help.

but urges us to correct our unwise choices even if it takes some time.

When Jonah received his assignment from God, he ran in the opposite direction and ended up

inside a great fish. (See *Jon. 1:15, 17.*) Even after he repented, he could not proclaim God's message immediately. First he had to escape the fish, and then he had to travel a long distance to Nineveh. But when he cried out for God's aid, he did receive it and helped save an entire city from destruction.

Anytime we need to change direction, God stands ready to help us. If we encounter hindrances in turning around, all we need to do is ask for divine assistance. It is never too late to say yes to the Lord's commands.

Prayer: Forgiving God, help us to overcome any obstacles that prevent us from heading in the right direction. Amen.

Diana Savage (Washington, USA)

SANCTUARY

READ *Psalm 31:19-22*

You have been a refuge for the poor, a refuge for the needy in their distress, a shelter from the storm and a shade from the heat.

— *Isaiah 25:4 (NIV)*

A violent hailstorm ripped through many parts of my city. Our church windows were not spared when the golf-ball sized hailstones punched through them. On Sunday morning, as I sat in a quiet space in a hall with broken windows, I wondered what good could come from this damage.

I was delighted to find that pigeons had found refuge from the storm in the holes in the windows. Their cooing brought the sound of real peace to a place where we pray for peace every Sunday. This brought to mind the vital role many churches played during the 1980s in the struggle to end apartheid. Places of worship became sanctuaries for those being hounded by the police. The house of God is a sanctuary — a place of healing and recovery for those who hurt, for those in need, for those who seek shelter from the storm.

Somehow out of the bad comes good. It depends on how we choose to view the storms of life. Yes, hail does bring damage, but it can also open new ways in which pigeons — and all of us — can find sanctuary in God's house.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

How can I help make my church a true sanctuary?

Prayer: Loving God, we pray for those who seek shelter from the storms of life. Amen.

Roland Rink (Gauteng, South Africa)

TUES
OCT 15
2019

A WAY OUT

READ 1 Corinthians 10:8-13

God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it.

— 1 Corinthians 10:13 (NIV)

Anxious to get home after a long day at work, I rushed through the grocery store and did not notice that the cashier had accidentally given me extra change. As I neared the exit, I caught the mistake, and thoughts started streaming in my mind: *Walk faster. No one will know.* Then another thought

followed: *This must be a test.* This last thought began to consume me because this had been the second such experience I'd had that day. Earlier, I had almost left a

public bus without paying for the fare; but then I felt that God was telling me that if I went on and didn't pay, I would be sinning. If instead I went back to pay, I would be growing and maturing for the glory of God. I paid my bus fare and ultimately gave back the extra change to the cashier as well.

Being short on money and yet having two challenges involving money in one day reminded me of the way temptations sometimes storm our lives and cloud our judgment to the extent that we start viewing things that are wrong as right. But God is faithful and knows us and never stops giving us instruction and reproof to help us endure temptation.

Prayer: Mighty God, thank you for delivering us from temptations today. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Vimbai Chizarura (Mashonaland East, Zimbabwe)

Prayer Focus: TO LISTEN FOR GOD IN TIMES OF TEMPTATION

INVISIBLE BARRIERS

READ Hebrews 12:1-3

The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?

— Jeremiah 17:9 (NIV)

A bee entered the passenger-side window of my car and headed straight for the clear windshield, searching for escape. For several minutes it bumped against the glass. When the bee approached my side of the car, I opened my door and it flew on to freedom.

As I thought of the bee's actions, I wondered how many invisible barriers in my life keep me from experiencing the full freedom and blessings that God wants me to enjoy. Are there buried resentments, hidden pride, fears, stale traditions, false beliefs, or passive rebellion that I haven't noticed?

Jeremiah 17:9 tells us that though we think we understand our hearts and minds, we can never fully understand ourselves or our motives.

Jeremiah went on to record, "I the LORD search the heart and examine the mind"

(17:10). Because only God can fully understand us, we

can pray along with David: "Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting" (Ps. 139:23-24). We can rely on God to help us recognize the invisible barriers that are keeping us from Christ's freedom and blessings.

Prayer: Dear Lord, reveal to us the hidden areas of our lives that prevent us from finding full freedom in Christ. Amen.

Steven Thompson (Iowa, USA)

Prayer Focus: FOR DEEPER SELF-AWARENESS

WED
OCT 16
2019

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
God can help me discover the invisible barriers that keep me from being free in Christ.

THUR
OCT 17
2019

GOD'S SALVATION

READ Ephesians 2:1-10

By grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God.

— Ephesians 2:8 (NRSV)

I live in a city where students are very competitive. I got used to the competition at a young age and became focused on staying at the top. Whenever a classmate performed better than I did, I would tell myself that I would do better than he next time. But even when I did, instead of feeling happy I felt filled with overwhelming pressure and fatigue.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
God loves me regardless of my achievements.

Following my second year at the university, I developed serious flu-like symptoms, and I started

losing weight. I managed to finish my final year of college, but I was apprehensive about my future. I wondered, *With such a poor physical condition, what can I possibly do after graduation?*

Scripture offered me great comfort during that time, and it continues to help me today. The Bible reminds me that we are saved by the grace of God. Our salvation is a gift. God does not require top grades, a certain status, or huge success. Loving grace is readily given to anyone who reaches out to God. Even during difficult periods, God continually restores us through scripture and love.

Prayer: Gracious God, thank you that our salvation does not depend on our achievements. Help us feel your presence in all the times of our lives. Amen.

Flo Au (Hong Kong, China)

Prayer Focus: THOSE WHO FEEL THEIR WORTH
DEPENDS ON ACHIEVING

GOD, OUR SHEPHERD

READ Psalm 55:1-8

Cast your cares on the LORD and he will sustain you.

— Psalm 55:22 (NIV)

The doctor told my sister and me that our dear mother only had months to live due to congestive heart failure. I went home to collect some personal items for Mother before returning to the hospital. When I got into the house, I dropped the keys on the floor, slumped into a chair, and began sobbing. My best friend, the person who started my life, would shortly be gone. I felt helpless and alone. I didn't know where to turn and didn't have anyone to guide me. What's more, I knew that my family would turn to me for support. All I could do was pray: "Oh, God, I don't know how to do this, and I don't know to whom or where to turn."

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
I can bring anything to God in prayer.

Still in tears, I returned to the hospital. The hospital's staff and support personnel cared for me from that moment through the last five months of my mother's life. During that time, I wanted for nothing; I experienced a peace that passed all understanding. When we are troubled, we can turn our situation over to God through prayer.

Prayer: Dear God, forgive us when we forget that you are ever-present in our lives. Help us to remember that even through difficult times, you care for us unconditionally. Amen.

John W. Brigman (Alabama, USA)

Prayer Focus: THOSE IN HOSPICE CARE

SAT
OCT 19
2019

SQUEEZE OUT FORGIVENESS

READ Matthew 18:21-35

Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

— Ephesians 4:31-32 (NIV)

Recently, I saw an old friend who had hurt me deeply. We smiled at each other and briefly spoke. But inside I still felt bitter. Since the betrayal had happened years ago, I thought I'd forgiven her, but obviously had not. And once again, the anger and pain felt fresh and overwhelming.

Then I felt the Holy Spirit bring today's scripture to my mind. And I recalled the purple sponge in my kitchen sink. You see, the sponge can't absorb bitter coffee and squeeze out sweet apple juice. So why do I believe I can hold on to bitterness and pour out compassion and forgiveness? As with the sponge, what I soak up is what will come out.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

I can show Christlike compassion by forgiving others.

Today's verse reminds us to "get rid of bitterness . . .

and . . . every form of malice," then encourages us to "be kind and compassionate . . . forgiving each other," just as God forgives us. Only when we make room for kindness, compassion, and forgiveness can we get rid of bitterness and malice. Today I'm going to begin by trusting God to empty out my bitterness as I pray regularly for my friend. If Christ can forgive me, then surely I can forgive my friend.

Prayer: Dear Father, thank you for loving and forgiving us. Help us to release bitterness and malice so that we may be filled with kindness and compassion. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Tammy C. Van Gils (Virginia, USA)

GOD IS ALWAYS WITH US

READ Psalm 25:1-7

The LORD your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you.

— Deuteronomy 31:6 (NIV)

In December 2009, I was diagnosed with nasopharynx cancer, commonly known as nose cancer, and began my two-month long treatment. God's words in Matthew 6:25 came to my wife almost instantly: "Do not worry." She immediately prayed to God asking for help. More than 7 years later, I am still free from cancer.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
In good times and in bad, God shows me love through the care of others.

Before my illness my wife and I had not attended church for many years. We were living our own way and going astray. We had no real purpose in life apart from working and taking care of the family. That scary medical diagnosis brought me and my family back to church.

Pastors and brothers and sisters in Christ prayed for us. We have become part of the church family, the body of Christ, and we have become closer to God. We thank God for the love, grace, mercy, and faithfulness shown toward our family. God has always kept the promise never to leave or forsake us. When I was wandering like a lost sheep, God found me and brought me back. No matter where we are or what we go through, God is with us. Praise God!

Prayer: Gracious God, thank you for your love and for always taking care of us. Bring us closer to you, and keep us with you. Amen.

Kong Peng Sun (Singapore)

MON
OCT 21
2019

SIMPLE TASKS

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)

I have served in many ways in my church. Some of those were complicated and required a lot of training; some have been noticed and praised by others. My latest task was simple. I pulled packages of diapers off the storage shelves, put them in two baskets, and carried the baskets up the stairs to a waiting van. The diapers would then be distributed to young parents who couldn't afford them. I felt an overwhelming sense of joy, knowing that, at least for one moment in time, a baby's cries would be hushed, some of the burdens of parents would be lifted, and God would be pleased.

I believe that when we reach out in love and concern to each other, we are actively living out the gospel message. When we commit our lives to following Christ, and to a life of

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
What can I do for God and others today?

service, it may at first seem daunting. *Will I be asked to do something beyond my abilities?* But if we're sincere in our commitment, we will discover countless ways that

God can use us to advance the cause of Christ. And we will also discover the real blessing of giving ourselves in service. Even our simplest acts of service can make God's love a reality in our world.

Prayer: Gracious God, lead us to all the small tasks we can do today to make the lives of others a little easier. Amen.

Robert Sorozan (Pennsylvania, USA)

IN GOD'S HANDS

READ Psalm 31:9-16

My times are in your hands.

— Psalm 31:15 (NIV)

I used to feel pressured by time constraints and would drive hurriedly, trying to beat traffic lights or pass other drivers. One day when things weren't going my way and everything seemed to frustrate my attempts to save time, a thought came to me: *Your time is in God's hands.* I relaxed and drove more slowly and considerately. Surprisingly, I arrived on time.

I have seen proof of my time being in God's hands in other ways as well. When I give my time to God in the morning by worshiping through devotions like *The Upper Room*, I find that God seems to stretch my time, and I get things done more easily and with less effort than on the days when I don't worship this way. Our time is truly in God's hands.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
Today I will trust God with my time.

Prayer: God of all times and places, receive our praise and gratitude as we see your work in our lives. We pray as Jesus taught us, saying, "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).

Carol S. Marti (Galicia, Spain)

WED
OCT 23
2019

WEARING OUR BADGE

READ John 18:25-27

Jesus said to his disciples, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me."

— Matthew 16:24 (NRSV)

I am both a police officer and police chaplain and wear a different badge for each role. Just as my head can accommodate only one hat at a time, my uniform can accommodate only one badge. Because the role of chaplain is an on-call position, sometimes I decline requests when they conflict with my main job as a police officer. Sometimes I say no to requests because

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
Every day I am called to reflect my faith through my words and actions.

I don't feel like getting up in front of hundreds of people and giving the benediction. I don't always feel like putting on the chaplain badge.

I have always struggled with wearing my Christian badge of faith as well. It was partly this struggle that motivated me to become a police chaplain because I thought that this role would make it impossible to hide my faith. And yet, although I have stepped up to fulfill countless chaplain duties, I can still deny that call.

Each believer has a badge of faith to wear, and Jesus encourages us to pin it on every morning and let it shine all day long through our words and deeds. However, we may back away from publicly living out our faith for fear of ridicule, rejection, or even persecution. And those times when we choose to hide our badge, we know that our merciful Lord is waiting to shine it back up, pin it back on, and send us back into the world to serve him.

Prayer: Dear Lord Jesus, restore us when we back away from declaring our faith. Give us strength to let it shine again. Amen.

Stephen Johnson (California, USA)

ASHES

READ Genesis 33:1-10

Jacob said to Esau, "To see your face is like seeing the face of God, now that you have received me favorably."

— Genesis 33:10 (NIV)

For the longest time my brother and I didn't get along. As a child, I idolized him and followed him everywhere — but he didn't want me around. He seemed to delight in making me cry or making me angry. Even as adults, we couldn't be in the same room together without quarreling. I longed to be friends with him, but my anger — left over from childhood — got in the way.

One day while praying I realized that he didn't know that I still hurt from the distant past, so I should stop waiting for him to apologize to me. I knew from my Bible reading that God wanted me to forgive my brother. But I wondered, *How can I forgive him and let him know I have forgiven him without making him feel bad, too?*

I wrote down all his past actions that still made me angry. After I read each action, I stopped and asked God to help me forgive my brother, to be released from anger and to truly forgive. Then, I burned the paper and sent my brother the ashes. In a note, I told him I no longer held anything against him. Although he never mentioned the note to me, our relationship changed. I have changed, too. It didn't happen overnight, but I am free from anger and we are now friends.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
I can repair a relationship by forgiving someone as God forgives me.

Prayer: Forgiving God, thank you for teaching us to forgive so we can be free to love you and each other. Amen.

Jane Reid (Oregon, USA)

THUR
OCT 24
2019

FRI
OCT 25
2019

KEEP SOWING SEEDS

READ 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10

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

— Ephesians 2:10 (NIV)

Last week a father came to thank me for teaching his son English for free. The man said he had nothing with which to repay my kindness — only thanks and a longing to help me if I needed his energy. He told me I had encouraged him to help others also without expecting any reward.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

One act of love today can have a powerful impact — now or later on.

Whatever our current employment and ministry, the Bible invites us to continue to give our best in the work that God entrusts to us. Maybe others consider

our work trivial. We may see it as a small job that produces little, and we may not often see the fruits of our work.

The good that we share in the world as followers of Christ has no doubt produced much fruit — even if we are unaware of it. One good deed that we do sincerely today can have an impact later on. Therefore, if we continue to sow the seeds of God's goodness, God will grow them and — in time — they will bear fruit in the lives of God's people.

Prayer: Dear God, help us to offer sincere and loving kindness to the people we meet today. Amen.

Linda Chandra (Banten, Indonesia)

PASSING IT ON

READ 2 Timothy 3:10-17

God's righteousness reaches to the grandchildren of those who keep his covenant and remember to keep his commands.

— Psalm 103:17-18 (CEB)

Our daughter is pregnant with our seventh grandchild. At a recent baby shower, as baby gifts were opened, I reflected on how much this baby is already loved. But I also realized that as mother and grandmother, my daughter and I will each have an influential role to play in the life of this little boy.

Paul's letter to Timothy credits his grandmother Lois and his mother Eunice with teaching Timothy the scriptures that brought him to faith. Paul challenged Timothy to continue on in what he had been taught from childhood. He had learned from the best. Lois and Eunice were great role models of continuing on in faithful living.

Like Lois, we all have a role to play in teaching the truths of God to the children in our lives. When we are intentional in passing on our faith to the next generation, then they, in turn, can teach their children.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

For whom will I be a role model of faith today?

Prayer: Father God, help us to continue on in the truth we have been taught. Amen.

Glenda Moore (Illinois, USA)

SUN
OCT 27
2019

NO LIMITS

READ Matthew 8:14-17

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

— Matthew 7:7 (NIV)

After my mother became debilitated with dementia, she came to live with me. Her doctor prescribed medications and supplements, but she continued to decline. Her behavior became increasingly hostile, and eventually she failed to recognize her family. I became exhausted and discouraged.

My constant prayer had been for strength and grace to care for Mom, or if that failed, wisdom in placing her in a nursing facility. But one night I read about how Jesus healed Peter’s mother-in-law. It had not occurred to me to ask God to heal my mom. After all, wasn’t this disease too hard to heal? Then I remembered that the Lord is not limited by any human problem. I gladly invited Christ to heal my mother.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
There are no limitations on what God can do.

There was no immediate change. We continued with daily routines and challenges, but gradually Mom became more cooperative, began to recall relationships, and was more at peace. When my cousin remarked on her mental clarity, I knew my prayer had been answered. Mom lived for two more years, praying faithfully for her family members by name.

Whether Mom was misdiagnosed, stabilized by medication, helped by routine, or miraculously healed is irrelevant to me. One thing I know: I asked and God answered.

Prayer: Dear Lord Jesus, thank you for your compassion and help. Give us the courage to ask you for what we need and want, not just what we think is possible. Amen.

Sharon Beaty (Alabama, USA)

68 *Prayer Focus:* THOSE SUFFERING FROM DEMENTIA

RETURN FOR DEPOSIT

READ 2 Corinthians 1:21-22

[God] put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.

— 2 Corinthians 1:22 (NIV)

During summer months when school was out, I often spent time with my grandparents. One of my favorite memories is grabbing soft drinks from their fridge. At home, we had the plastic 2-liter bottles, but my grandparents had the old-fashioned glass bottles. Having grown up at a time when almost everything was disposable, I usually just threw the empty bottles away. One time, my grandmother fished the bottle out of the trash and pointed to the label that said “Return for Deposit.” She explained that when she bought soft drinks in glass bottles, she had to pay a little extra; but when she returned the bottles, the store would return her deposit. That policy kept the bottles from ending up in landfills and also saved the beverage company money.

In a time when people as well as things seem disposable, it is good to remember the words of 2 Corinthians 1:22. Paul tells us that God has placed a deposit in our hearts. That deposit is the Holy Spirit — a guarantee of the good things to come. God will not toss us to the side or forget us. No matter how empty we might become, God’s Spirit fills us and points us to our future. We can be assured that while we can know God’s Spirit now, we will also live in God’s presence forever.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
God’s Spirit in my heart is a reminder of greater things to come.

Prayer: Dear God, help us see that you care for us so much that you placed your Spirit in us as a guarantee that we will be with you forever. Amen.

Zack Carden (Georgia, USA)

Prayer Focus: FOR TRUST IN THE HOLY SPIRIT 69

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GOD LISTENS

READ Ephesians 6:18-20

The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.

— James 5:16 (NIV)

In February 2016 I was sentenced to jail, a new and unexpected experience for me, after having served my country as a soldier and my community as a firefighter. In June 2017, I began sharing a cell with an older man who explained to me the message of the gospel. Seven days later, I accepted

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Every day, I pray for the Lord's will to be done.

Jesus as my savior. As my cellmate and I prayed and studied each day, I began to experience God's love in amazing ways.

My new friend gave me a Bible with James 5:16 highlighted. The next day he was told he would be transferred to another jail, so we both prayed fervently that he would not be moved. The day he was to leave, the transfer was canceled. But then, three weeks later, my friend was sent to another jail. Instead of being angry with God for separating us, I kept reading God's word and prayed constantly that it would be God's will to bring us back together again.

Twelve days later, he and I were both transferred — to the same jail — and we were cellmates once again. God truly answered our prayers in the way that we had hoped. Now we have a daily fellowship group with several other inmates. Every time our group is together, we pray for each other.

Prayer: Faithful God, whenever we are lost and depressed from our trials, give us strength. Amen.

Aaron Priest (New South Wales, Australia)

WE OF LITTLE FAITH

READ Mark 5:24-34

Paul wrote, *"My message and my preaching [were] presented . . . with a demonstration of the Spirit and of power . . . so that your faith might not depend on the wisdom of people but on the power of God."*

— 1 Corinthians 2:4-5 (CEB)

When my aunt was being tested for a life-threatening illness, I started praying desperately that if she had the illness she would be healed. I worried, though, that my faith needed to be rock solid for God to hear me, and I didn't believe my faith was that strong.

Then I remembered the story of the woman who had bled for years and reached out of the crowd to touch Jesus' clothes, believing she would be healed. Jesus commended her for her faith and then healed her. We often view this woman as having ultimate faith. However, over the 12 years before she came to Jesus, this woman had exhausted every other option. When she reached out, she was desperate. All she had left was her belief in Jesus' power to heal her.

The idea of a huge faith is intimidating. We wonder, *How can I possibly have faith big enough for this?*

But Jesus tells us, "If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you" (Matt. 17:20, NIV). This verse helps me to see that it is never about the size of our faith, but rather the size of God's power. In any situation Jesus will hear us when we cry out to him.

Prayer: Dear Lord, help us to reach out to you in any circumstance, knowing you will hear us. Amen.

Dorcus Buckley (Washington, USA)

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STEADFAST

READ Romans 12:9-13

Seek first [your heavenly Father's] kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

— Matthew 6:33 (NIV)

When I was younger, I played golf two or three times a week with friends in a company league. And I was fairly competitive. When I would have an especially good game, I would expect my next game to be even better. However, usually the next game would turn out to be one of my worst games of the year. I believe I focused on the good score I was going to achieve rather than giving my full attention to each shot I needed to make. Good golfers must constantly remind themselves to keep their eye on the ball to deliver each shot.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
Today I will remain focused on what God has called me to do.

In our service to the Lord, it is even more important to avoid becoming distracted. Daily demands can divert our attention from our relationship with God, and ambitions can distract us from our purpose. Throughout scripture we find reminders to keep our focus on God's purposes, as well as practices that can help us maintain our focus. In today's scripture reading Paul calls us to be steadfast in prayer, which will help us to keep our eye on fulfilling our commitment to God.

Prayer: Dear Lord, help us to persevere in prayer and service to you and to others. Amen.

Walter N. Maris (Missouri, USA)

72 *Prayer Focus:* THOSE OVERWHELMED BY DISTRACTIONS

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

SEPTEMBER 4: *Thanks Be to God*

1. Have you ever felt as if you were like the apple in today's meditation — lovely on the outside but not on the inside? What scriptures encourage you when you feel this way?
2. What does it mean that Jesus Christ fights our battles with us? Describe a time when you experienced temptation and felt Christ's presence alongside you.
3. Does your church encourage you to persevere in the struggle between the good you want to do and the evil you do not want to do? What does your church do if someone is struggling with temptation?

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4. What spiritual practices help you guard your heart from temptation?
5. Have you found that it gets easier to resist temptation and sin the longer you are a Christian? Or, like today's writer, do you find that no matter how long you've been a Christian you still struggle? Why do you think this is the case?

SEPTEMBER 11: *Life in Community*

1. When have you wanted to pray but couldn't find the right words? What did you do? How do you pray in times like these?
2. How do you experience community with other Christians? During a crisis, do you find comfort in being around others who share your faith? As Christians, how can we help one another during difficult times?
3. What scripture passages give you a clear sense of what the early church looked like? What do you appreciate most about the early church?
4. Do you remember where you were on the morning of September 11, 2001? What role did your church community play in how you processed that day and its aftermath? What did you pray for following this terrible event?
5. What similarities do you see between your church today and the early church? Where do you see differences? How does your church help you in your faith journey?

SEPTEMBER 18: *Guided to Serve*

1. Describe a time when you felt lonely. How did you respond to those feelings? What did you do to feel less lonely?
2. Have you ever felt called to serve but unsure of where to start? What did you do? Were there people in your life who helped you find ways to follow God's calling? How did they help you?
3. Does your church have outreach programs to serve those in your community? Do you participate in them? If so, how does serving in these programs enrich your life? If not, in what other ways do you serve your church and community?
4. When have you felt God's comfort? Did this encourage you to share that same comfort with others? What did you do?

5. Many biblical figures felt unsure of how to follow God's calling to serve. Which of these people do you most relate to? Why?

SEPTEMBER 25: *Hope through Trials*

1. Who in your life reminds you that God is with you in difficult times? How do they help you remember that God will always be with you?
2. Describe a time when you wondered if God was still watching over you. What was the outcome of the situation? How did you deal with your doubts?
3. Jeremiah 29:11 brought today's writer and his family great comfort during their trials. What verses comfort you during challenging situations?
4. What do you pray for when you are feeling hopeless? What spiritual practices strengthen your faith when you are going through trials?
5. Do you know someone who is going through a trial right now? How can you help and encourage this person? In what ways can you remind them that God still cares for them?

OCTOBER 2: *A Long Way from Home*

1. Describe a time when you asked God for guidance. Did God's response bring you comfort? If so, how? If not, why not?
2. When you look back at your life's journey, do you see God walking with you? Where have you seen God's presence and guidance most clearly?
3. How do you draw closer to God when you feel isolated? Do you find it easier to turn to God when you feel alone or when you are surrounded by others? When is your relationship with God strongest?
4. Have you ever received an answer to prayer that was similar to the one in today's meditation? Do you appreciate more direct guidance from God? If so, why? Would it comfort you to have reassurance that God will be with you whatever you choose?
5. How do you reach out to those who are isolated? Does your church provide opportunities for community? In what ways are you intentional about connecting with others?

OCTOBER 9: *Investing*

1. Do you think of investing primarily in financial terms, like today's writer used to, or in spiritual terms? What does it mean to you to think about investing in your spiritual life?
2. How do you invest in spending time with God? How do you invest in your relationships with and service to others? What can you do to strengthen these relationships?
3. Today's writer says, "Only God can evaluate our actions and judge the return on our investment." Do you ever find yourself feeling concerned with how others view your actions, rather than remembering that God's evaluation is most important? How do you deal with these feelings?
4. What things in your life distract you from focusing on God? What spiritual practices help you to prioritize your faith?
5. What does it look like to invest in your community? How can your church help you? How can you better serve others?

OCTOBER 16: *Invisible Barriers*

1. What barriers do you recognize in your life? Do you think you have other barriers that you are unaware of? What can you do to recognize these barriers?
2. What "full freedom and blessings" does God want us to enjoy? How do we miss out on these things because of the invisible barriers in our lives?
3. Describe a time when you thought that you knew your motives for something you did, only to realize later that you didn't fully understand them. What did this experience teach you about yourself? What did it teach you about the role God plays in your understanding of yourself?
4. Today's writer suggests that we pray as David did in Psalm 139. Name your favorite prayers from scripture. What spiritual practices help you to better understand your heart?
5. Where do you recognize invisible barriers in your church? In your community? In the world? What do you think we can do to help expose these barriers and tear them down?

OCTOBER 23: *Wearing Our Badge*

1. Do you have multiple roles that you fill? What roles do you not enjoy as much as others? What do you do when you don't feel like fulfilling one of your roles?
2. Do you struggle with wearing your faith outwardly every day? If not, what helps you avoid this struggle? If so, why? In what situations is it easiest for you to display your faith?
3. How can you better reflect your faith through your actions? What do you do when you feel that you are not reflecting your faith in the way you would like?
4. If you find yourself struggling to wear your faith proudly, how does your church community encourage you? What could you do to help another member of the congregation who is struggling in this way?
5. How do you ask God to restore your strength and help you display your faith to others? How does it encourage you to know that even if we hide our faith, God will help us show it through our actions?

OCTOBER 30: *We of Little Faith*

1. Describe a time when you felt your faith was not big enough or strong enough to do what you hoped. What encouraged you during this time? Is it OK not to have "huge" faith all the time? Why or why not?
2. Have you ever felt desperate for God to do something in your life or the life of someone you know? Did the situation turn out as you had hoped? What did this experience teach you about God's power and will for us?
3. Who in your life serves as an example of faith? What do you admire about this person's faith? Do you hope to serve as an example of faith for others? How will you do this?
4. What scripture passages bring you comfort when you feel your faith is not big enough?
5. Today's meditation talks about the bleeding woman from Mark 5. What other biblical figures come to mind when you think of a person's faith and God's power?

