

MAY-JUNE 2020

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THE UPPER ROOM®

WHERE THE WORLD MEETS TO PRAY

Stephen D. Bryant, Publisher

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COVER ART INTERPRETATION



Ruth and Naomi

Artist: Nalini Marcia Jayasuriya
(Indonesia)

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

Nalini Jayasuriya was a Christian artist born in Sri Lanka. Believing that people “need protection from fear and a hope for blessing,”* she painted

biblical life stories in ways that focus on the wonderful moments within each story that create hope.

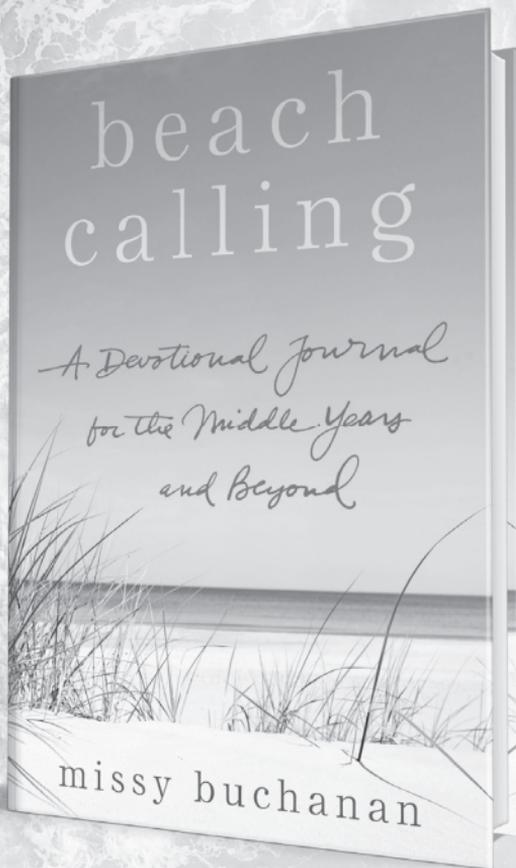
In the book of Ruth, we read the story of the death of Naomi’s husband and sons. With no male heirs, the future looked bleak for Naomi and her daughters-in-law, so Naomi encouraged the young women to return to their homeland where they could remarry. Jayasuriya’s painting focuses on Ruth 4:13-17, where Ruth gives her son to Naomi — a gift of hope for their future and for ours.

In the center, Naomi and Ruth gently cradle a white dove. Swirls of red and blue surround the dove in a protective womb-like shield. Golden reddish-browns spread out from the dove, breaking through the edges of the painting. Feet extending from her dress, Naomi looks up and beyond Ruth’s face, perhaps envisioning the promise of her new future. Ruth kneels before Naomi, gazing at the beautiful white dove cradled in their hands. In art a bird often symbolizes hope. In this story, it represents the gift of Obed — an ancestor of Jesus.

Ruth and Naomi each offer a gift to the other with their open hands. Naomi offers Ruth freedom. Ruth cradles the dove and presents it to Naomi as a gift of hope. The dove sits freely within their embrace. This act of love and promise between Ruth and Naomi secures their future and the gift of hope for all Christians through the birth of Jesus.

**A Time for My Singing: Witness of a Life*, OMSC Publications, 2004

Cover image courtesy of OMSC. © Nalini Marcia Jayasuriya and OMSC, New Haven, CT. No prints of cover art available from Upper Room Ministries®.



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The Most Powerful Witness

Utterly amazed, [those in the crowd] asked: “Aren’t all these who are speaking Galileans? Then how is it that each of us hears them in our native language? . . . we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!”

— Acts 2:7-8, 11 (NIV)

I grew up in a town where nearly everyone I knew was Christian. Our Christian faith was an undercurrent, a shared set of values that my friends and I rarely spoke about. When we did, I discovered that many of my friends were more insistent and vocal about their beliefs than I. As a child, I often wondered whether my faith was lacking because I wasn’t more outspoken about my belief in Christ.

As I have grown in my faith over the years — through personal practice, church membership, and academic study — I have come to realize that there is no single right way to share the good news of Christ. The story of Pentecost shows us how God relates to us and how we can relate to others. It reminds us that the Holy Spirit speaks to each one of us in a way that we can understand — in a way that is familiar. Likewise, God can work through each of us in a manner well suited to our unique talents, personalities, and capabilities — providing myriad opportunities for us to share our faith with others. Pentecost not only acknowledges but celebrates the many ways we can authentically share our faith. And when we tell others about where we have seen God at work in the world, that is the most powerful witness of all.

In this issue, people from around the globe write about the creative ways they have been talking about or living their faith. From phone calls to intercessory prayer to giving a meal to a stranger to asking a question in a classroom, these writers are sharing with the world their own unique experience of God’s love. I hope their stories will encourage you to do the same.



—Lindsay L. Gray
Editorial Director

From the Archives

From its beginning, The Upper Room has been a resource used by churches and individuals for Christian education, small-group study, personal reflection, and outreach. In the May-June 1959 issue, one pastor had this to say about the impact The Upper Room had on his congregation.

The Upper Room Deepens Church's Spiritual Life
by George Albert Fallon, Minister, Lakewood, Ohio

Five years ago the Lakewood Methodist Church ordered only 500 copies of *The Upper Room*. Today, because Methodist Men have made the distribution of *The Upper Room* their major project, the order is 2,800.

The Upper Room is distributed to every home, sent to all members of the church in the armed forces, mailed to all students at college, and delivered to two hospitals and several motels. Many letters attest to the help the sick have received and the travelers have found through *The Upper Room*.

It is very evident that *The Upper Room*

- Has increased family worship and deepened the spiritual life of families.
- Has helped to make possible a strengthening of family work and worship in the church.
- Has increased financial giving of the church members.
- Has aided . . . by promptly supplying new members with continual devotional help.
- Has increased prayer experience in the whole church. Two new prayer cells began during the last year.
- Has broadened our vision of the world and aided greatly in making our church world-minded.

The Upper Room is now such a powerful and useful force in the total life of the church that no one would seriously entertain the idea of curtailing it. Those who are active in its distribution say that we must order more. Nowhere else can we get so much for so little.

Where the World Meets to Pray

KANNADA

The publishing team of *Dhyana Deepa*, the Kannada edition of *The Upper Room*, leads small-group meetings and workshops at local churches to encourage daily devotional reading as a spiritual practice and way to grow closer to God.

MALAYALAM

It is a goal of the Malayalam edition team to coordinate a devotional writing workshop especially for youth. They ask for prayers for their mission and ministry among young people.

Editions of *The Upper Room* are printed in:

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- Nepal
- Pakistan
- Sri Lanka
 - English
 - Sinhala
 - Tamil



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MORE THAN WE ASKED

FRI
MAY 1
2020

READ Romans 8:12-17*

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

— Romans 8:15 (CEB)

Prostate cancer had metastasized to the bones throughout my husband's body. The next morning, my first thought was, *Earle is dying, and nothing is ever going to be all right again.* Decades of dealing with my own diagnosis of bipolar disorder had left me helpless in the world of computers, banking, investments, home and car maintenance, and lawn care. Earle had dealt with all of these as well as doing most of the driving. Since I had concentrated all my efforts on fighting my way out of the pit of mental illness, I had no self-confidence. I fell to my knees and asked for the help that only God can give.

God gave me strength as I started to learn all the responsibilities that I might soon have to deal with on my own — banking, making appointments, driving Earle and myself, downsizing as we moved into a smaller home. Then, after God was faithful in getting rid of my fears and giving me the ability to cope, Earle began to respond well to the cancer treatments. Though not in remission, Earle's cancer is controlled.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
Jesus offers me abundant life.

Now able to do many things that had seemed beyond my capabilities before, I am sharing with Earle the abundant life Jesus promised to us if we would trust in him.

Prayer: Faithful God, we rejoice in your goodness. Thank you for physical healing and for the spiritual healing only you can provide. Amen.

Darlene Forgues (Alberta, Canada)

Prayer Focus: SOMEONE LEARNING TO LIVE ON THEIR OWN

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

SAT
MAY 2
2020

NEVER TOO LATE

READ Luke 15:11-32

You were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

— 1 Corinthians 6:11 (NIV)

As part of my pastoral responsibilities at a local hospital, I was called to the bedside of an elderly woman. I found her shouting out in anguish to Jesus and then to me. She had been diagnosed with a brain hemorrhage and was afraid she would die and not go to heaven. When I asked the reason for her fear, she explained that her sins were just too great.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

It is never too late to seek God's forgiveness.

I reminded her of the parable of the prodigal son and how our Father in heaven will welcome us

back with open arms. She told me she was afraid it was too late. I assured her that if Jesus could forgive the thief on the cross next to him, the same is true of all of us. We then prayed together, and a great peace seemed to come over her. When I saw her again the next morning, she took my hand and said that she knew she was forgiven and welcomed back by God.

No matter what sins we may have committed, whether we are coming to Christ for the first time or returning to God like the prodigal son, we don't have to be afraid that our sins are too great. Instead, we can reach out to our Father and remember that God forgives and welcomes us with open arms.

Prayer: Dear Father, remind us that it is never too late to turn to you. Help us to be open to receive your love and forgiveness. Amen.

Scott Martin (New Jersey, USA) — See p. 21.

RESTING ON A ROCK

SUN
MAY 3
2020

READ Mark 1:35-39

Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.

— Luke 5:16 (NIV)

Once or twice a year, my husband's uncle would drive from his Indiana home to a northwestern desert. He said he needed to get away from everything and spend some time just sitting on a rock. He usually combined his trips with mission work, meeting various needs in the area. First, however, he withdrew to his rock to clear his mind and calm his spirit from the stresses of life.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
Where do I spend one-on-one time with God?

Whether he intentionally followed Jesus' example or simply recognized his personal need for solitude, he never said. Either way, his actions demonstrated the pattern Jesus set during his time on earth. Jesus' life was certainly full. He ministered to hurting crowds through healing, feeding, and teaching. He offered unconditional love. He touched lepers. He ate with outcasts. He challenged the status quo. But even with all that interaction, Jesus regularly withdrew from everyone and everything for time alone with his Father.

Don't we need the same renewal? If we go nonstop, we deplete all our energy and become no good to ourselves or anyone else. Personal time with God, who is our Rock, restores our energy and prepares us for another day of loving obedience to our Father.

Prayer: Thank you, Father, for meeting us in solitude and giving us strength when we turn to you. Amen.

Diana C. Derringer (Kentucky, USA)

MON
MAY 4
2020

SMALL ACTS

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)

As I left the restaurant carrying my box of leftovers, I saw a person lying in my path. As I approached, I leaned over and asked, "Would you like something to eat?" He responded with "Yes!" As I set the food down, four or five people walking behind me leaned over and put money in his hat. As I got

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

"It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35).

into my car, I began thinking about how giving to others leaves me feeling joyful.

I then thought about all the easy ways that I can give to others every day. I

can buy extra food at the market and make extra portions of dinner to give to people in need. I can carry bottles of water in my car to hand out to people who are homeless. I can stop and talk with people I meet, sharing time with them. Even while driving, I can be courteous to other drivers. When I'm waiting in a line I can allow someone who looks rushed and harried to go ahead of me. Through these and other small acts of mercy we can share God's love with the world and fill our own hearts with joy.

Prayer: Dear God, every day show us those who need what we can give as 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.

Dean T. Skoglund (Minnesota, USA) — See back cover.

READ **Philippians 4:6-9**

The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.

— James 5:16 (NIV)

One evening as I was preparing supper for the family, a saucepan full of boiling milk poured out onto my right leg — from my knee down to my foot. I cried out and ran to put my pain-wracked leg under running water. When I remembered that I was scheduled to speak the very next day at church in my village and then three days later at a church in another town, negative and fearful thoughts and questions began to surface. *How will I walk to speak at church tomorrow? Should I send a message to the town church and tell them I cannot come?* These thoughts were joined by mental images of being in the hospital with a suspended leg. I was even thinking I might need to wear stockings all the time because of the big scar.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
Praying solves more problems
than worrying does.

Then suddenly I realized that I was not listening to the Lord. So I switched to reading Bible verses that talk about healing and started to pray. At this point, I could feel the pain even deep inside the leg, and it was excruciating. Yet, by the time I finished praying, all the pain was gone and no scar was left on my leg.

When we face difficult situations, worry and fear quickly grip us. But they do not solve any problems. What peace and comfort prayer and faith in God provide!

Prayer: Dear Lord, when we get into trouble, help us to look to you in faith and prayer instead of worrying. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Charity M. Kiregyera (Kampala, Uganda) — See back cover.

Prayer Focus: SOMEONE INJURED IN A
HOUSEHOLD ACCIDENT

WED
MAY 6
2020

A LENTEN CHALLENGE

READ **Philemon vv. 4-7**

*Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due,
when it is in your power to act.*

— Proverbs 3:27 (NIV)

During Lent our pastor challenged the congregation to step out of our comfort zone by faithfully tithing 10 percent, sharing the gospel with others, and helping our community through acts of service. I accepted the challenge. My first payday during Lent was the biggest paycheck I had ever

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

I can follow God's word
no matter my budget
or schedule.

received. Although it was just a few mouse clicks on my computer, sending 10 percent of that paycheck to the church was tough. Next, I posted on social media

about my faith and included an open invitation for questions and for anyone to join me at church. The positive outpouring of Christian love was amazing.

Finally I asked around until I discovered that a group from church served a meal at a homeless shelter once a month. Now I look forward to the fourth Saturday of every month and make every effort to participate.

I used to think that money was too tight and that I was too busy for any of these ministries. Now I know through faith that we are all capable of doing what God's word calls us to do. I remain busy with family and work obligations, but I try my best to fit into my schedule the opportunities that arise for me to show God's love through works of faith.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, we give you thanks for all you have done for us and all you allow us to do in your name. Keep showing us the joys of serving you. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Bryan Young (Texas, USA)

QUEST FOR THE QUEEN

THUR
MAY 7
2020

READ 2 Corinthians 5:6-9

*Heaven is declaring God's glory; the sky is
proclaiming his handiwork.*

— Psalm 19:1 (CEB)

A queen bee nestled in her hive can be quite elusive. I'm pretty good at finding hidden objects in a picture game on a page; but as a new beekeeper, I worried about finding our queen. My husband, Joe, and I spent several months studying about the care of bees before purchasing a hive from a local beekeeper. Our "starter pack" of bees derived from a larger colony came with five frames containing comb and larvae to put in our hive along with the worker bees and a queen. "What if we don't see the queen?" I asked Joe as we left with our boxed bees.

"Don't worry," he said. "You don't have to see the queen. If you see her eggs and developing larvae, you know she's there." About

a week later, curiosity moved me to look in our hive. I saw newly laid eggs and growing larvae in different stages of development. Joe was right. I never saw the queen, but I saw her handiwork.

Our search for God can be much like my quest for the queen bee. We long to see God; but because God is invisible, we get discouraged. Yet, if we take time to look, we see signs of God's presence around us. Just as I haven't seen my queen bee, I haven't seen God face-to-face. But I have seen God's handiwork, so I know God is near.

Prayer: Dear Lord, give us eyes to see you and faith to believe. Amen.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
Every day I can see God
revealed in all creation.

Suzanne Montgomery (Indiana, USA)

Prayer Focus: BEEKEEPERS

13

FRI
MAY 8
2020

CHOSEN

READ 1 Peter 2:1-10

You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

— 1 Peter 2:9 (NIV)

I hurried to the park near my house, excited to try out for the Little League team. After doing drills for a while, we gathered to hear who was chosen to be part of the team. I was expectant, but unfortunately I was not chosen. Dejected, I slowly walked home.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
God will always choose me.

Most people can probably identify with this experience — whether not selected to be part of a team, not accepted into

the college of their choice, or not chosen to receive a desired job. When we aren't included or chosen, we can become discouraged. But even when others find us unsuitable, we have been chosen to be members of God's family. What a privilege! Furthermore, we have been chosen to "declare the praises" of God who called us out of darkness into God's light. When we feel insignificant and unwanted, we can remember our family and our high calling. We are God's ambassadors, proclaiming the message of reconciliation to the world.

Prayer: Dear God, thank you for choosing us. Help us to remember that we have an honorable calling. Amen.

Wayne Greenawalt (Illinois, USA)

GRATEFUL EXPECTATION

SAT
MAY 9
2020

READ Colossians 1:1-14

We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will . . . being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience.

— Colossians 1:9, 11 (NIV)

For a few years, I have had to wait for God to heal my son. Some days my faith has been strong, and I have felt fired up. On others, I have let fear creep in and cause me to doubt and then have slipped into deep sorrow. I continued with this cycle of highs and lows until I found the scripture above from Colossians.

In this passage, Paul prayed that the believers in Colossae would be strengthened with patience and joyful longsuffering. The word *patience* refers to being able to accept or tolerate delay without getting angry or upset. It can also mean cheerful or hopeful endurance. Paul was acknowledging that at times heaven will be silent and we will have to wait.

As difficult as it may sound, God wants us to wait with an attitude of joy. The scripture suggests to me that while we wait for an erring child to come back home, we can rejoice. While we pray for our spouse to show up, we can rejoice. While we wait for a baby to be conceived, we can rejoice and give thanks to God who has already given us far greater blessings than what we desire for the future. And while we wait, God is right beside us.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
I will choose to praise God in all situations.

Prayer: Dear Father, strengthen us so we can wait patiently with a sense of grateful expectation. Amen.

Lilian Nwanze Akobo (Meath, Ireland)

SUN
MAY 10
2020

A ROOM FULLY PREPARED

READ John 14:1-4

Jesus said, "My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you?"

— John 14:2 (NIV)

Three days before Thanksgiving I was feeling the full effects of my chemotherapy treatments. My mother called, full of excitement that my husband and I were coming home for the holiday. I told her how awful I felt, but she told me she would prepare my room for me and give me the best

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

God's love for me
will never die.

medicine in the world — a mother's love. Two days later my brother called to tell me that Mother had died in her sleep. When I arrived at my parents'

house, I found my room fully prepared just as my mother had promised. In the kitchen the ingredients were set out to make my favorite pies. My mother's last acts on earth were finding ways to comfort me as I endured my battle with cancer.

In today's reading, as Jesus was about to face a horrible death, he reassured his followers that he would prepare a room for them. Our parents' love for us can be a reminder of the loving sacrifice Jesus made for us. I know that Jesus has a room prepared for me, and I know that my mother is there waiting for me. As I celebrate Mother's Day this year, I will worship my Savior and remember my mother and her great love for me. I will also remember that Jesus has prepared a room for us all.

Prayer: O God, thank you for human families and the love we can share. Most of all, thank you for your son, Jesus Christ, who taught us how to love. Amen.

Karan Young (Texas, USA)

IRON SHARPENS IRON

MON
MAY 11
2020

READ 2 Timothy 2:14-19

Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved by him, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly explaining the word of truth.

— 2 Timothy 2:15 (NRSV)

During this past school year, a colleague and friend approached me and suggested I start a Bible study for teachers. After some thought and prayer, I decided to send an email to teachers and other staff inviting them to my classroom for Bible study before school began on Tuesdays and Fridays. I had no idea what to expect. But on Tuesdays we studied the book of James and on Fridays the book of Philippians.

In Proverbs, we are told that “as iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another” (27:17, NIV). It took a couple of meetings for trust to build, but we discovered that as we studied together we grew as friends. We became more willing to share our struggles with one another. We listened to one another. We prayed with one another. We encouraged one another — even checking on those who missed a meeting. God truly worked in our midst, encouraging us through scripture and through fellowship. Most of all, God helped each of us learn to rely more upon the working of the Holy Spirit in all our relationships with one another, our students, and with God.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
Bible study helps me grow in my relationship with God and with others.

Prayer: Dear Father, thank you for the Bible. Help us to grow as we read it, and lead us to find others who will faithfully study with us. Amen.

Michael W. Martin (North Carolina, USA)

**TUES
MAY 12
2020**

GOD PROVIDES

READ 2 Corinthians 9:10-15

Cast all your anxiety on [God] because he cares for you.

— 1 Peter 5:7 (NIV)

Following the birth of my first child, I had postpartum depression, and my husband was facing unemployment. It became clear that a career change was on the horizon for him, which added to the uncertainty we felt about the future. My husband and I both felt anxious about what was next for our family; we even thought we might need to move to another state.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
God will provide for me.

One morning my son was crying to be fed. As I prepared a bottle for him,

I said, “Calm down, Sweetie. When have I ever not given you what you need?” As I said this, I realized that I had been crying out to God in fear about how and when my family’s needs would be met. I saw myself as a scared child, in need of something that I could not provide for myself. As I looked at my son, I knew that in a short while the sustenance he was waiting for would be provided — he would be full, content, and happy.

What a picture of how God cares for us! In all my worry, God was near, inviting me to cast my fear, anxiety, doubt, and anger on him. Like a loving parent, God can and will provide for our needs.

Prayer: Loving God, when we can’t see the way forward, help us to trust that you can. Amen.

Courtney Boulware (Ohio, USA)

Prayer Focus: THOSE SUFFERING FROM POSTPARTUM DEPRESSION

TRUST THROUGH PRAYER

WED
MAY 13
2020

READ Mark 11:19-24

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

— Mark 11:24 (NIV)

As my wife and I finished dinner one evening, we got a phone call from my sister-in-law. She told us that her husband had been in an accident and had suffered a serious head injury. Shocked, my wife and I immediately left to meet her relatives at the hospital. The doctor told me that my brother-in-law had only a one percent chance of survival. He soon underwent an operation, fell into a coma, and was put on a ventilator. The doctors gave us no hope that he would survive due to the large amount of blood he had lost.

Because I have witnessed the way that prayer can save lives, my wife and I started praying despite our fears. Two days later, my brother-in-law came out of his coma. To say the least, the doctors and our family were surprised that he had survived.

My faith in God is now stronger because I witnessed the immense power of prayer. When we trust God, our faith can grow stronger than our fears.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

I express my trust in God
when I pray.

Prayer: Dear God, help us to feel your presence during difficult times. Amen.

Rajeev Ranjan Pandey (Uttar Pradesh, India)

THUR
MAY 14
2020

ALWAYS READY

READ 1 Peter 3:13-17

Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.

— 1 Peter 3:15 (NIV)

As a bird lover, I was delighted to see that the lake where my husband and I built our house was a great habitat for a variety of birds. Anticipating opportunities to photograph them, I upgraded to a better camera. About the time I was experimenting with it, a pair of snow geese paid a visit. I was

able to take photos of those beautiful birds. It was a good thing, because they were gone the next day.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
How will I express my hope in Christ today?

Birds don't willingly pose, so if I want photos of

them, I have to be prepared — to have my camera with me and wait for my chance. Even then, I may not be successful in getting a good photograph. But the opportunities will continue to come; if I don't leave my camera on the shelf, I won't regret the great photographs that could have been.

We don't always know when a chance to witness to the hope we have in Christ will come. But by being open to the urging of the Holy Spirit and willing to share our story, we stay in a posture of readiness. And who knows? Maybe someone will cross our path who needs to experience the hope found only in our Savior. How ready will we be to share God's story?

Prayer: O Lord, may the hope you give us be so evident that others will want to hear about it. Help us to be ready for opportunities to witness to your love and salvation. Amen.

Lori Herold (Illinois, USA)

Real people. Real stories. Real faith.



Scott Martin (p. 8) divides his time between lay preaching, writing, counseling, and volunteering at retirement homes.



Angela Peabody (p. 49) is a professional writer and speaker who teaches Sunday school and vacation Bible school at her church.



Gordon Rose (p. 50) is a retired computer technician who mows lawns to stay in shape during summer months.



Jenny Young (p. 55) enjoys crafts, camping in God's great outdoors, and encouraging other Christians through her blog.



Oluwasola Jegede (p. 37) is a medical laboratory scientist and the founder of a faith-based NGO. She advocates for teenagers on issues of social health.



Keith Hailey (p. 67) is a retired handyman whose favorite pastime is singing old gospel songs for residents of the local nursing home.



Bev Varnado (p. 63) and her spouse have three adult children, two grandchildren, a chocolate lab and several cats.



Leland Collins (p. 62) is a retired minister and hospital chaplain. He and his Cavalier King Charles spaniel volunteer at the local medical center.

Share YOUR story today!

The people pictured on this page did.

See devotional.upperroom.org/guidelines for writers guidelines or send a stamped, self-addressed envelope to the editorial office address (p. 1).
Submit online: submissions.upperroom.org

FRI
MAY 15
2020

MOVING WITH GOD

READ Psalm 143:5-10

The psalmist wrote, *“Teach me to do what pleases you, because you are my God. Guide me by your good spirit into good land.”*

— Psalm 143:10 (CEB)

Even though my husband and I have relocated 21 times, I still find change difficult — it tends to bring out all my insecurities and worries. One move was especially hard for me. I loved the place where we lived. We were a part of a great church and would be leaving many friends. I worked at a large center helping women in crisis and felt that my job was also my ministry.

Only later did I realize God’s purpose for the move. It enabled me to work in a similar organization that was struggling — where God used my experience to help them grow. I began to look back on other moves and could see that God was at work in each move.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

I can trust God to show me the best way to serve.

Through all my family’s relocations, I have learned that I can trust God to lead me in the right direction.

When faced with an opportunity that requires change, we can ask God to guide us. Because God loves us and wants us to lead lives of significance and meaningful service, God will answer our prayers for direction — not only through scripture but also through the wisdom of Christian friends and mentors. God’s answer may not always be what we prefer to do, but we can know that following God’s direction is always best.

Prayer: Dear God, help us to trust that you will show us the ways and places where we can continue to find joy in serving you. Amen.

Myrna Conrad (Florida, USA)

WHEN LIFE HURTS

SAT
MAY 16
2020

READ Matthew 5:1-12

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

— Matthew 5:4 (NRSV)

In July 2012, my wife Joyce died suddenly within 48 hours after shepherding me back home to Oklahoma after emergency surgery in Florida to save my leg. I was bereft. Not only was Joyce my best friend, my wife of 35 years, and the mother of our two children; she was my partner in ministry and a multitalented musician and university teacher with a radiant personality.

Two blessings were critical for me in her loss. First, a conviction that Jesus knew what he was talking about when he said, “Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.” There were many days — especially in the first two years — when I would weep and scream in the pain of that loss. The scream was not “Why?” just “It hurts.”

The second blessing came the day after Joyce’s death as I heard the Holy Spirit ask me this question: “If you could swap your years with Joyce and not have this pain, would you do it?” My immediate answer was, “Absolutely not.”

Now the pain has dulled and is far less frequent. Every day I have continued to give thanks for Joyce — the life and love we shared and the family God entrusted to us.

Prayer: Thank you, Jesus, for your presence and guidance through scripture and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
Even in my grief, God
blesses me.

Torrey Curtis (Oklahoma, USA) — See back cover.

SUN
MAY 17
2020

HILLS OF LIFE

READ 2 Corinthians 4:7-18

This slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure.

— 2 Corinthians 4:17 (NRSV)

When I was in high school, we had “hills day.” A group of us jogged to a hill that overlooks a lake, and the coach called out, “Ten times, up and down.” The first two laps were invigorating because the group tackled the hill together. But by lap nine, I was alone, my sides ached, and I gasped for breath; I

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

How does my outlook change when I focus on Christ?

wanted to give up. Though only creeping forward, I forced one foot in front of the other, determined to finish. When I reached the top of the hill for the tenth

time, I looked out across the expanse of the lake. It stretched so far that it made me — and the hill — seem small.

Years later I saw how much the hill was similar to life. Sometimes life is fun, like the jog from the school to the hill. At other times putting one foot in front of the other is grueling. When we do face the hills of life, we can focus on Christ, who climbed a hill and carried a cross for us, giving us the hope of eternity. As we do, our trials look smaller.

Prayer: Dear Father, help us to lift our eyes to you in challenging times. Remind us that our earthly troubles will seem small when we stand in the presence of your glory. Amen.

C. Jennings (Ontario, Canada)

READ John 15:1-10

Jesus said, “*My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples.*”

— John 15:8 (NRSV)

On the island of Trinidad where I grew up, some of the agricultural crops include pumpkin, watermelon, passion fruit, and tomatoes. All these fruits grow on vines.

In John 15, Jesus spoke about a vineyard. The purpose of the vine is to provide support and to send food and water to the branches. As long as the branches are connected to the vine, they will bear fruit. Occasionally the gardener must prune the branches. This process is important because it maintains the health of the branches, strengthens them, and encourages the branches to produce more fruit.

Jesus is our vine and we are his branches. As long as we are connected to Jesus, we will be provided with the nourishment, support, and love that we need to live as

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
How do I stay connected to
Jesus?

true followers of Christ. Staying connected to Jesus involves studying the Bible, prayer, and fellowship with other believers. The Holy Spirit works within us to bear fruit. Our fruit consists of godly actions such as forgiveness and compassion. Our obedience to Jesus' commands brings glory to God.

Prayer: Thank you, Jesus, for giving us your strength and support. Help us to remain connected to you so that we may bear much good fruit. Amen.

Renaë Aberdeen (Indiana, USA)

**TUES
MAY 19
2020**

THE POWER OF PRESENCE

READ Luke 10:38-42

Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her.

— Luke 10:42 (NRSV)

I remember having long talks with Melissa discussing the day's activities, future plans, our goals, our future married life. Then there were the long pauses, maybe lasting as much as ten minutes when no one spoke. Yet we were connected, and somehow that was important. On long drives, walks in the park, or just sitting at the house, that same silence continues to be a part of our relationship. Sometimes just being

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

I will set aside time
for Christ today.

present with one another is enough. I realize that truth even more fully when we are absent from each other. Presence matters.

In today's reading, we see that Mary understood the value of presence. She didn't have to join in the conversation. She didn't have to be the center of attention. Just to be present at Jesus' feet was enough. For her presence, Jesus rewarded her: "Mary has chosen the better part, which shall not be taken away from her." What praise from the Master for simply being present with him!

God still seeks our presence. In the hustle and bustle of each busy day, may we find time to sit quietly in God's presence. In those precious moments of solitude may we discover intimacy beyond words; for when we draw near to God, God will draw near to us. (See Jas. 4:8.)

Prayer: O God, teach us to recognize your presence, and help us to stay connected with you throughout this day. Amen.

Kevin Thomas (Alabama, USA)

ON ASSIGNMENT

WED
MAY 20
2020

READ John 5:19-24

Jesus said, *“I can do nothing on my own. As I hear, I judge; and my judgment is just, because I seek to do not my own will but the will of him who sent me.”*

— John 5:30 (NRSV)

After I received several requests to participate in ministries and projects that I felt were not in keeping with what God had called me to do, my friend Ann encouraged me to write a mission statement. I thought mission statements were only for corporations, but with Ann’s encouragement I wrote three points that I felt were key to the work God has called me to do. Now when people urge me to get involved with their projects, I am able to use my mission statement to help me decide whether they fit God’s assignment for me.

Similarly, Jesus had a mission. Jesus said, “I can do nothing on my own. . . . I seek to do not my own will but the will of him who sent me.” Although few people understood Jesus’ mission, he remained focused on the work God gave him.

Like Jesus, we are all on assignment. If we don’t know our assignment, we can ask, and God will guide us. When we know our assignment, we can remain focused on our mission.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
What is my mission statement?

Prayer: Dear Lord, thank you for entrusting us with assignments while we are here on earth. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

Mary E. Webb (New Mexico, USA)

THUR
MAY 21
2020

EVERYONE'S GIFT MATTERS

READ 1 Corinthians 12:14-26

If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it.

— 1 Corinthians 12:26 (NRSV)

After having surgery on one of my big toes, I required a walker for support and weeks of recovery. My entire daily life seemed to revolve around that toe and its healing. I had never said to a friend, "Let me show you my wonderful toe! It helps me so much every day!" But after this experience I felt a new appreciation for its importance.

The way I undervalued my toe made me think about the parts of the body of Christ — the church. Some people have roles to play that often go unnoticed, yet they serve important functions in God's

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Today I will show my gratitude for the contributions of others to God's work.

work. I think of the editors who make a writer's work clearer, the people who quietly pray for others, and the custodians who

keep church facilities clean and ready for study and worship each week. The list goes on. How often do we take the time to acknowledge and encourage others? Paul reminds us that when any member suffers, we all suffer; and when any member is honored, we rejoice together. When members of our Christian family are hurting in some way, we can support and encourage one another, renewing our strength for the tasks God has assigned us. When we care for and value one another, it is cause for rejoicing.

Prayer: Dear God, help us to see the value of other Christians and to commend them for their work. Amen.

Linda Neff (Ontario, Canada)

BOLD ENCOURAGEMENT

FRI
MAY 22
2020

READ Ecclesiastes 4:9-12

Encourage one another and build each other up.

— 1 Thessalonians 5:11 (NIV)

The swimming competition we were attending was crowded with preteen kids, including our two grandsons. Slade, the older of the two, had completed competition in his age group and was now at the side of the pool, rooting for his younger brother, Grant. Even over the noise of the crowd, we heard Slade calling, "Come on, Grant, keep going. You can make it!" As I watched him, I thought, *He doesn't care at all about what the crowd thinks of him and his jumping up and down and yelling. He's more concerned that his brother finish the race.*

When later I thought about the unashamed way my grandson encouraged his brother, I asked myself, "Am I as zealous as Slade in

my encouragement for my brothers and sisters in Christ?" I'm ashamed that the answer is no. Unlike my young grandson, I am often inhibited by my fear of what others will think. Slade inspired me to ask God for forgiveness and also for boldness to encourage others.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

To whom will I speak an encouraging word in Christ's name today?

Prayer: Dear Lord Jesus, help us to reflect your nature in our actions toward others each day. We pray as you taught us, "Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, as in heaven, so in earth. Give us day by day our daily bread. And forgive us our sins; for we also forgive every one that is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil" (Luke 11:2-4, KJV). Amen.

George Childree (Alabama, USA)

SAT
MAY 23
2020

FEAR-CONQUERING LOVE

READ Matthew 6:25-34

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

— Matthew 6:34 (NIV)

Once again, I felt paralyzed and completely helpless. As the darkness of my bedroom closed in on me, panic rose in my chest. All too often, fear seemed to rule my life. Questions about my future, my career, my financial situation, my rocky relationship with my significant other, my ill family members — the list never ended — gnawed at my mind.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Because of God's love for me, fear and worry do not have to rule my life.

As I lay on my back staring at the ceiling, I remembered the words of Matthew 6:34 quoted above. I realized how much this never-ending cycle of fear

with its tossing and turning at night and worrying was hurting my spiritual life as it controlled my thoughts and actions. However, I knew that Jesus loves me and died to save me and that he is sovereign over all.

As the apostle John wrote, fear cannot exist where love is in complete control; if I fear, I am not made perfect in love. (See 1 John 4:18.) I mentally recited all the ways in which God had provided for me time and time again. As I reflected, I realized that through every trial, Jesus was present and had never failed to give me what I needed. Taking a deep breath, I prayed, telling God about all my worries and fears and praying for peace as I drifted off to sleep.

Prayer: Dear God, give us a deeper understanding of your love so that fear no longer rules our lives. Amen.

Laura Rothhaar (Ohio, USA)

I BELONG!

SUN
MAY 24
2020

READ 1 John 3:1-2

Now if we are children, then we are heirs — heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.

— Romans 8:17 (NIV)

Nearly everyone wants to feel they belong — that they are part of a group, have a cultural identity, and are accepted. Though this need is often associated with teenage years, we all have it. Despite having the same surname, some people do not experience the joy of belonging to a family, of being part of a joint history. Many people have no one with whom they can share their joy and hope, or their sorrow and fear.

In my ministry, I meet many people who come to church alone and become part of a new family — the family of God. In Christ, we became co-heirs of the kingdom of God. The family of faith can create space for new beginnings, renewed hopes for living this life, and new hope in life eternal.

It is God's wish that we become part of his family. Jesus taught this when he instructed the disciples

to begin their prayer by saying, "Our Father." Jesus shared the glory of the Father with his disciples and with all of us. Everyone is welcome in the family of faith because our heavenly Father loves us.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

I belong to Christ's family of faith.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, thank you for making us a part of your family of faith. Help us to invite others to find in you a real sense of being a family! Amen.

Marcos Antonio Garcia (São Paulo, Brazil)

MON
MAY 25
2020

RUNNING AWAY

READ Psalm 139:1-12

The LORD will keep you from all harm — he will watch over your life.

— Psalm 121:7 (NIV)

When I was young, I often ran away. I thought you had to actually run to run away, so off I would go. I wouldn't get far before my brother would catch up and bring me home. I always knew he would come and get me.

My brother joined the Army in 1946, on his 17th birthday. He had been my confidant, adviser, and protector, and I missed him terribly. While away, he wrote me letters filled with wise advice and promises that he would keep me safe. I still have those letters. He visited

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
How can I help bring others back to God?

home after several months, and when it was time for him to leave again, I cried and begged him to stay. I even refused to go to the train station to see him off. I didn't know that the next time I'd see him would be three months later, when his coffin would arrive at that same train station. He died of pneumonia as a complication of kidney disease.

I never physically ran away after that, but I ran in other ways. This time, God came after me. God brought me to a church where people took me in and showed me the love of Christ. I am eternally grateful for the church that set me on the path that changed my life. Although from time to time I have strayed from that path, God has always brought me back.

Prayer: Redeeming God, thank you for bringing us back when we run away. Thank you for the people you have placed in our lives who love us, watch over us, and protect us. Amen.

Grace Epperson (Michigan, USA)

CONTENT WHERE I AM

TUES
MAY 26
2020

READ 2 Samuel 7:18-29

Then King David went in and sat before the LORD, and he said: "Who am I, Sovereign LORD, and what is my family, that you have brought me this far?"

— 2 Samuel 7:18 (NIV)

I'm thankful for the lovely part of the world I live in. Lakes, rivers, ocean beaches, and mountains are all just a short drive away. I often go out to photograph wildlife like sea lions, bald eagles, and white-tailed deer.

But one morning, I struggled with envy of others who've traveled to exotic places that I haven't been to. I decided to spend extra time reading my Bible because I knew God would encourage me to be content with my corner of the world. I brushed aside my craving for places I have not been, and I opened the word of God instead.

As I was reading David's prayer about being humbled that his family would be remembered by the Lord forever, I realized my foolishness in coveting anything earthly. Just like David, all those who trust in the Lord will be established for eternity in God's kingdom. I was reminded of how much more important heaven is compared to earthly things. Heaven's shores will forever be more breathtaking than all the exotic places the world has to offer.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

When I'm feeling discontented, I can turn to scripture for encouragement.

Prayer: Dear God, thank you for the beauty of the world we live in. Help us to remember that heaven's joys will far surpass earthly ones. Amen.

Wendy L. Macdonald (British Columbia, Canada)

WED
MAY 27
2020

A CHANGE OF HEART

READ 1 Corinthians 9:20-23

There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

— Galatians 3:28 (NIV)

At our farewell luncheon celebrating my first five years of ministry in the United States, the group was surprised when George spoke. He was a retired businessman who had always sat quietly with his wife in the very last pew of the church building. That day, in a shaky voice, George said something that touched every heart there: “Pastor Koo, in five years you have made us cry twice. The first time was five years ago,

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Every day, God strengthens me for ministry to others.

when we received news that we were getting a Korean pastor. The second time is today, the day that you and your family leave us. The first were tears of worry

and disappointment about getting our first cross-cultural/cross-racial pastor; now they are tears of love and sadness as we see you and your family go.” Not long after we left, George passed away.

His words became great motivation and encouragement for me in my ministry. As is written in today’s quoted verse from Galatians — despite our prejudice, differences, and anxiety, we are all one in Christ Jesus. Still today, George reminds me that God’s ministry is not fulfilled by words but rather when we meet heart to heart in Christ’s love.

Prayer: Dear Father, remind us that through your power we can overcome all worldly hurdles to minister to others. Amen.

KyungMo Koo (Maryland, USA)

GOD'S LOVE ENDURES

THUR
MAY 28
2020

READ Romans 5:1-11

Suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us.

— Romans 5:3-5 (NRSV)

It started with a twinge of pain in my leg, but the little twinges soon became greater and steadily intensified. Two years later, while I was sitting in my seventh-grade math class, I was told to go to the front office. I could feel my heart pounding as I walked toward the office and felt it sink when I saw my parents sitting with the principal. They told me that my doctor had diagnosed me with chronic osteomyelitis and said they needed to take me to the hospital for an emergency biopsy. I was filled with fear. I didn't understand why this was happening to me or why God allowed so much pain to enter my life. However, five years later, I know that without this experience I would not have become the person I am today.

Although the pain still takes over at times, I look to God to fill my spirit with hope and endurance. I know there is suffering in the world that far surpasses anything I will ever experience, and I continue to pray for those who are afflicted. Jesus suffered on the cross, and he understands our pain. Regardless of our earthly suffering, we can trust that God's love will outlast it all.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
God fills me with hope and helps me endure.

Prayer: Dear God, comfort us when we face illness and pain. Give us a renewed sense of hope and faith in your love. Amen.

Candyce Sturgeon (North Carolina, USA)

FRI
MAY 29
2020

DISTRACTING PRIDE

READ **Philippians 4:10-19**

Paul wrote, *“My God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus.”*

— **Philippians 4:19 (NIV)**

During my first backpacking trip, I wasn't far into the trek up the mountain before I realized that I had grossly overpacked. As I struggled, I saw a member from our group, whom I had yet to meet, coming back down the path toward me. “Please, Lord, just let him wave and pass by.” Nope.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Today I will set down my burdens so I can welcome God's strength.

He stopped dead in front of me with his hand outstretched, saying, “Hello, I'm Jay. Would you like me to carry your pack?” My mind screamed yes, but my

lips uttered, “No, thanks. I've got this.” My pride was totally opposed to accepting help. He turned, and we climbed together. When Jay continued to ask if he could carry my load, I finally relented.

I had prayed for strength, but God had something else in mind. Sometimes receiving God's provision requires a sacrifice on our part like giving up our pride in self-reliance. This sacrifice is not for God's benefit but for our own. When we are no longer distracted, burdened with guilt, or full of pride, our ears and hearts are more open to God. Then we are free to sense God's message in the words of a song, see God's plan in the order of nature, or feel an unexplained peace deep within us during a crisis.

Prayer: Dear God, help us to release our pride so that we may trust in your provision rather than our own. Amen.

A. Mattingly (Texas, USA)

READ Hebrews 12:4-11

Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as his children. For what children are not disciplined by their father?

— Hebrews 12:7 (NIV)

Drinking soft drinks or juice in my young nephew's presence will likely cause him to cry because he wants the drink and is not allowed to consume too much sugar. One day as he was crying for juice, it occurred to me that while children may cry for something that will harm them, adults who know better will allow them to cry rather than to satisfy them with what is harmful.

God called my attention to the same thing about myself. At times when I would ask God for something and not get it within my time frame, I would start crying. Still, my tears didn't make God give me what I cried for. Eventually I realized the truth of Hebrews 12:7: As a good father, God will discipline me so that I can grow. God was not denying me love by withholding certain things from me. By not giving me what I wanted, God may have been protecting me or helping me to grow and mature.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
God sees beyond what I want
to what is best for me.

When our desires and tears are for what isn't the best, God will help us not to destroy ourselves with these misguided desires but instead to make better choices. God loves us and wants only the very best for us.

Prayer: Dear Father, when we cry for unnecessary or harmful things, teach us to understand your discipline and embrace a love for your correction. Amen.

Oluwasola Jegede (Lagos, Nigeria) — See p. 21.

SUN
MAY 31
2020

OURSELVES OR OTHERS?

READ Luke 10:29-37

You do well if you really fulfill the royal law according to the scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

— James 2:8 (NRSV)

I was teaching English as a Second Language to college-age students who were preparing to enter a university in the U.S. One day the class was learning to use the reflexive pronouns (myself, yourself, himself, etc.), and students were practicing by filling in the blanks in sentences in their workbook.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

To whom is God calling me to be a neighbor today?

The sentence "God helps those who help _____" confused one of my students. When he came up after class to ask me for the answer, I told him that this

saying is common in the U.S. and that the correct answer is "themselves." God helps those who help "themselves." "Oh," he said. "I thought God helps those who help others."

He was right. Jesus gave us two commandments that are the most important — to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength and to love our neighbors as ourselves (see Mark 12:28-31). The parable in today's reading also reminds us that our neighbor is anyone we meet whom we have the ability to help.

My student's response was closer to the biblical teaching than that popular saying. Even if our material resources are limited, we can offer a smile, a word of encouragement, or a listening ear to those we come in contact with today. And in doing so, we also will be blessed.

Prayer: Dear God, help us to honor you by helping someone who needs what we can give. Amen.

Frances K. Griffin (Oklahoma, USA)

“I AM STILL HERE”

MON
JUNE 1
2020

READ Psalm 145:1-8

So shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose.

— Isaiah 55:11 (NRSV)

My husband and I needed some work done on our home, so we selected a repairman to do the job. When the man came to the house, he proved to be very professional. His bid was reasonable, and we liked that he was soft-spoken and kind.

As he was leaving, he said, “I’ll get back to you in a few days. I’m moving kind of slow; I have cancer.” I was speechless.

“Actually,” he said, “four years ago when they found the cancer, the doctor said I

was a dead man; he gave me 30 days to live. I said, ‘I can’t go yet. I have things I have to do.’ So I am still here.”

“Four years!” I exclaimed. “Well,” he said with a smile, “I am a child of God. I have people praying for me. My tumor had completely disappeared. But now it’s back.” And he shrugged.

“We will keep you in our thoughts and prayers!” I said, and I took his hand as he turned to leave.

Months later, long after he had finished the work, his testimony stayed with me: “I am a child of God.” How easily he shared his faith! With only a few words he witnessed to me, and he has inspired me to do the same with others.

Prayer: Dear God, help us to share the good news of Christ, knowing that even simple words of witness can make a difference in the lives of people we meet. Amen.

Ann Vernon (Missouri, USA)

Prayer Focus: SOMEONE LIVING WITH A LIFE-
THREATENING DISEASE

Silent Loss

Since I got married later in life, I knew it might be difficult for my husband and me to have a child. But when I became pregnant right away, we were ecstatic — only to be crushed by the loss of our child through a miscarriage. When I became pregnant again, our joy was short-lived as we lost this child through a miscarriage too. I was devastated; we were devastated.

The emotional and spiritual pain took its toll on me, and I went through a crisis of faith. I felt as if God had left me during the time when I needed God the most. I felt hopelessly alone. Not many of our family members and friends knew the pain we were suffering. As a missionary, I experienced feelings of guilt. I was supposed to bring people to faith or encourage them in their faith. How could I do this if I was struggling to believe in the God of love that I advocated?

One afternoon, I just couldn't take it anymore; I was too angry with God. I went back to my room and started writing, spilling out in words my pain and brokenness. Holding nothing back, I was brutally honest with God. I can't say that I felt anything miraculous or groundbreaking that afternoon, but it did mark the start of my healing and of my restoration of faith.

As life went on, I started reading First Samuel 1 over and over. I was drawn to the story of Hannah as it appears in *The Message*, especially verse 19: "God began making the necessary arrangements in response to what she had asked." Taking comfort in Hannah's story, I still had no idea what would happen to us in the future, but I trusted God to be with us.

My husband and I eventually went on to have not one child but two — happy twin girls. Our despair was turned into joy, and we are grateful to God beyond measure. But I know that this is not the case for many couples who desperately desire to have a child. Perhaps this is you, and you are wondering where God is in your pain. God may appear to be silent and aloof, but God has not abandoned you; God is weeping with you.

For many women, Mother's Day is a dreaded occasion. The celebration of motherhood can be deeply painful for women

who desperately want a child and cannot have one, women who have given a child up for adoption, women whose children are estranged from them, or women who have lost a child. I was one of those women.

I hope my story will encourage other parents who have suffered the loss of a child to open up about their experiences. As the body of Christ, we can find healing and hope in knowing that we are not alone in our pain, that others have been there and have gotten through with God's grace.

To all women: I wish you the happiest of Mother's Days. Regardless of whether you have a child of your own, if you have played a role in a child's life — I celebrate you on Mother's Day. May the day also remind us of God's love that surpasses that of any mother or father on earth.

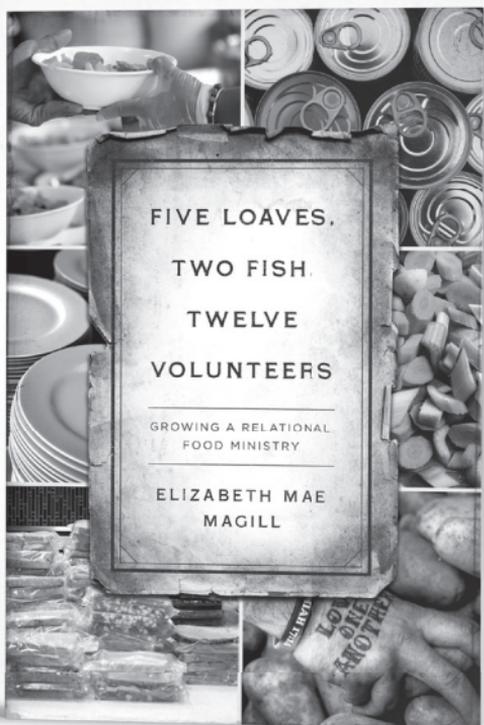
QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION:

1. When have you felt abandoned by God? In what unlikely place did you see a reminder of God's love?
2. Whom can you confide in during times of trouble? How does that relationship bring you peace?
3. Are you holding on to anger toward God? What steps can you take to release this anger? Find a way to be honest with God. Write or paint out your anger, yell, or find another creative way to express your feelings. God loves you and can take your anger. God already knows your pain, but often being honest with God is the gateway to healing.



Nicole Corlew Curtis is the Communications Manager for The Upper Room and is the mother of Sarah Grace and Anna Elizabeth, who are named after those three extraordinary women in the Bible and God's all-encompassing grace.

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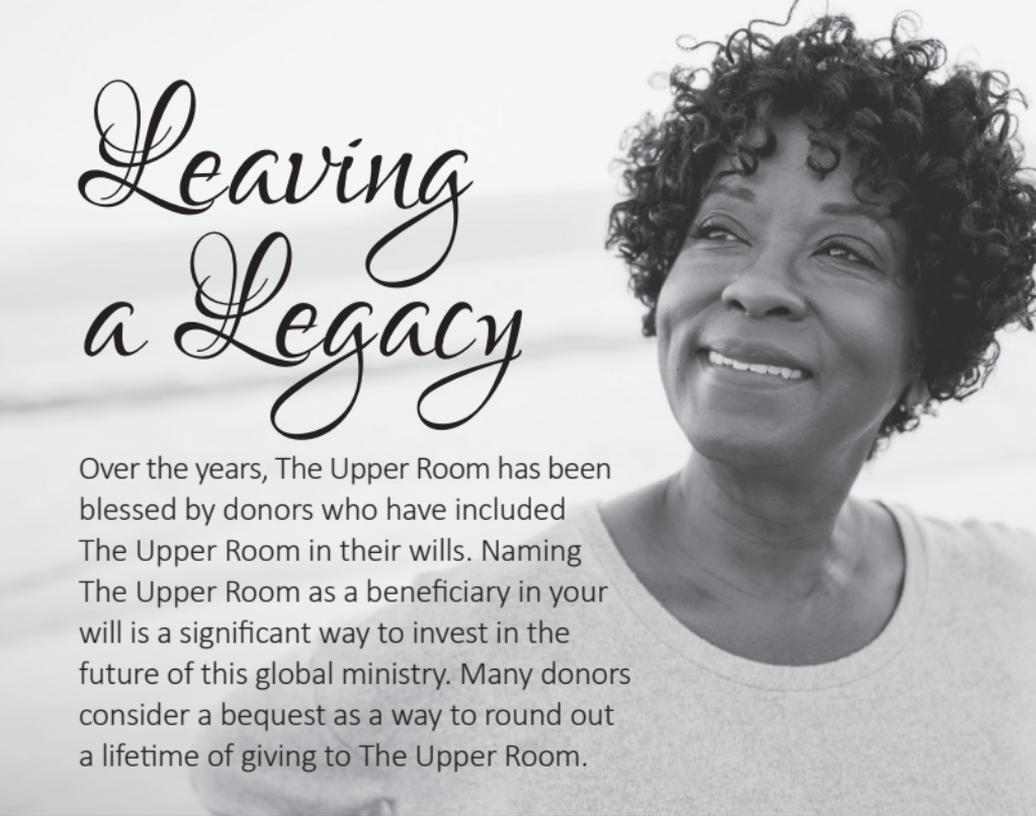


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**TUES
JUNE 2
2020**

HEAVY COST

READ John 3:1-21

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)

Recently my son required corrective surgery for which the surgeon had to break his jaw in seven places. We knew the surgery was needed, but that only slightly reduced the stress. In a quiet corner of the surgical floor, we prayed.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Jesus endured separation from God to separate me from my sin.

“Are you scared, Son?” I asked him. “Yes,” he replied, weeping. “I am too,” I said.

I hugged him and prayed aloud as we turned it over to God — and to the hands of

the doctors. I felt helpless and wished I could have prevented the drastic and painful procedure, but I knew that something beneficial would result from this suffering.

I couldn't help but think what it must have been like for God to watch as people purposely harmed Jesus. Certainly, God knew that the separation and suffering that Jesus endured was for the greater good. But it was not without a heavy cost.

When we look at the Crucifixion, we recognize Christ's torture and death; but how often do we sense the great chasm of separation between the Son and the Father because of our sin? Seeing just that small glimpse into the Father's experience on the day of my son's surgery helped me to feel even more strongly the love God has for me.

Prayer: Dear God, help us never to forget the sacrifice that you and Jesus made for our salvation. Amen.

Dave Trouten (New Brunswick, Canada)

Prayer Focus: SOMEONE WHO FEELS SEPARATED FROM GOD

READ 1 Thessalonians 1:2-10

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

— 1 Thessalonians 2:8 (NIV)

When I married Bill, classical was not on my list of musical genres I wanted to listen to. But it was Bill's favorite. When a classical radio station began broadcasting in our area, we tuned our alarm radio to it and awoke to classical music every weekday morning. We attended concerts and recitals, even operas, especially after our daughter became a singer. Reflecting on 48 years of marriage, I realize that Bill never insisted that I listen to classical music or argued that it was better than any other kind of music. He just listened to the music he loved, and I came to love it too.

That insight brought this thought: Instead of debating about faith or insisting that others live up to my Christian values, I should live my faith trying to be kind and loving like Jesus, treating people with respect and dignity. In this way, when I do have the opportunity to tell someone,

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

How does the way I treat others encourage them to believe that God loves them?

“God loves you,” they can believe me because they have seen the truth of it in my words and actions. I will be sharing the God I love the way Jesus did.

Prayer: Holy God, help us to treat everyone as Jesus would treat them so they will know through our words and actions that you love them. Amen.

Lin Tranter (Ohio, USA)

THUR
JUNE 4
2020

LETTING GO

READ 1 Samuel 1:1-28

Hannah said, *“I prayed for this child, and the LORD has granted me what I asked of him. So now I give him to the LORD.”*

— 1 Samuel 1:27-28 (NIV)

Shortly after I was born, my mother fell ill. Her doctor prescribed potent medication that severely impaired Mom’s ability to focus. But this didn’t stop her from sharing Christ with me, encouraging me in my studies, and cheering me on in sports. In spite of her pain and debilitating condition, she reached out to me with a love that nourished me spiritually, physically, and emotionally. When the time came for me to leave home, it was difficult for Mom. But she trusted that God would guide me in the way I should go.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

I can entrust those
I love to God.

Of all the mothers in the Bible, Hannah is perhaps the best example of reaching out and then letting go. After she cried out to the Lord, God blessed her with a baby boy, Samuel. In gratitude, Hannah kept her commitment to devote her son to the service of the Lord. Though she loved Samuel, she was willing to step aside and let the boy grow with God.

Hannah showed her devoted and sacrificial love both in her strong desire to have a child and in her willingness to give the child to the Lord’s work. Hannah is an example to us of a love that supports and also lets go.

Prayer: Faithful God, help us to support those we love in their service to you. Amen.

Tony Roberts (Indiana, USA)

THE RIGHT ROAD

FRI
JUNE 5
2020

READ Psalm 25:4-10

The Lord has said, *“I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go.”*

— Psalm 32:8 (NIV)

I was alone in my car driving home at night when suddenly I wound up in a location I did not recognize. I had taken the wrong road and was in an area totally unfamiliar to me. My uncertainty and anxiety at that moment were disconcerting to say the least. At last, I spotted a building I recognized, and it served as a point of reference. I got my bearings and found the road that would lead me home.

This experience reminds me of those who have taken the wrong road spiritually and simply wander aimlessly through life. Many of us have taken a wrong road, but those roads do not lead to a joyful destination because they lead away from God. As we travel such alluring roads, it may appear as though we know where we are headed. But our lives are often burdened with uncertainty and anxiety because we are disoriented — not even aware of our final destination.

Jesus is “the way and the truth and the life” (John 14:6). With his help we can find the right road and help others do the same.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

I will never be lost when I follow God’s way.

Prayer: Guardian of us all, forgive our wandering ways. We lean on you to show us the path that leads to joyful obedience and to eternal life in Jesus Christ. Amen.

Nelly R. Reina (Córdoba, Argentina)

SAT
JUNE 6
2020

TRUSTING GOD

READ James 1:2-12

*Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters,
whenever you face trials of many kinds.*

— James 1:2 (NIV)

During my teenage years, my greatest suffering was loneliness. Year after year, I prayed for deep Christian friendships. But year after year, God answered, “Not yet,” and I wondered why. Hadn’t I put effort into finding friendships? Wouldn’t godly friendships help me grow in my relationship with God?

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Even in my suffering I can persevere in trusting God.

Wasn’t strong Christian fellowship a part of God’s plan?

The book of James tells us to consider sufferings as joy because suffer-

ing strengthens and matures us into who God calls us to be. While I was alone during my teenage years, I learned to depend on God and to empathize with and reach out to those who were unpopular. I learned to value and strengthen the relationships I already had, especially with my siblings. Lastly, being alone — reading and thinking — moved me to put those thoughts on paper and gave me the courage to share my writing with others.

God does not tell us that suffering is joyful. Suffering is suffering, and the loneliness I experienced was not in itself a good thing. Still, God tells us to “consider it pure joy.” Now, I can consider that loneliness as joy because of what God has brought about through it.

Prayer: Dear Lord, through whatever we are suffering today, help us to find joy in trusting you so that we may learn to persevere and become more like Jesus. Amen.

Tim Pietz (Wisconsin, USA) — See back cover.

FAITH IN GOD'S WORD

SUN
JUNE 7
2020

READ Psalm 23:1-6

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.

— Psalm 23:4 (KJV)

In April of 1980 my family was caught in a deadly military overthrow of the government. As we took cover from the rapid fire of machine guns on our Liberian home, we recited Psalm 23 repeatedly. I recall reciting today's verse countless times as the gunfire drowned out our voices. The soldiers shot at the house nonstop for 25 minutes. I knew that my family and I might perish, but I remained focused on my faith.

The soldiers shot the back door down, and I heard the

thud of their boots as they entered the house. They finally found us on the floor in the bedroom. I prayed quietly and asked God to save us. My prayer was

formed out of the definition of faith in Hebrews 11:1. "Faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see" (NIV). God did not speak to me personally that day, but my faith was all I had. When it was all over, I knew how powerful faith in God and God's word can be.

Thirty-eight years later, I continue to reference this psalm to my children, my grandchildren, and the women whom I counsel in my work. Whenever I find myself facing a crisis, I turn to the fourth verse of Psalm 23. No matter how grave our problem, the Lord will keep us close and give us comfort.

Prayer: Dear Father in heaven, teach us to stay close to you and to strengthen our faith in your presence. Amen.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
When danger is present, the power of God's word prevails.

Angela Peabody (Virginia, USA) — See p. 21.

MON
JUNE 8
2020

WHATEVER WE DO

READ Colossians 3:15-17

Whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

— Colossians 3:17 (NIV)

In January of 1959 I was a relatively new Christian and was checking in at my new assignment at Osan Air Force Base in Korea. As an Airman Second Class I had two stripes on my sleeve. The Tech Sergeant who was also checking in had five, showing he outranked me. When he used some profanity within earshot of the Korean woman who was handling our

paperwork, I quietly asked him to be careful of his language. I could tell he did not take my suggestion very well. When we got outside, the sergeant angrily lashed

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

I will follow Christ no matter the circumstances.

out at me and said that if he became my boss I would be in big trouble. When he became the sergeant over me, he made good on his threat by assigning me a severely damaged plane.

I was determined that no matter how he treated me or how frustrating my assignment, I would repair that plane “as unto Christ.” (See Eph. 6:5, KJV.) My faith helped me to do everything the sergeant asked me to do without complaining and with a positive attitude. After weeks of hard work, the plane I had repaired passed a test flight with no problems. That August, because the sergeant had been so impressed by my work, he nominated me to be Airman of the Month.

It is always best when we put Christ first in any situation and trust the outcome to God.

Prayer: Dear Lord, help us not to be intimidated by others so that we can live out our Christian faith wherever we are. Amen.

Gordon B. Rose (Indiana, USA) — See p. 21.

Prayer Focus: THOSE AROUND ME WHO DO NOT KNOW CHRIST

“I TRUST YOU”

READ Psalm 29:1-11

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?

— Matthew 6:26 (NIV)

TUES
JUNE 9
2020

When my concussion symptoms dragged on, I wasn't able to care for my young son or maintain a conversation with my husband for quite some time. I felt useless around the house; I couldn't go to church; I wasn't able to read my Bible. Even praying was difficult. Although God surrounded me with many wonderful people who helped immensely during this time, I still felt cut off from the world and very much alone.

I will never forget one beautiful spring day when I was sitting on a rock at the back of our property. Suddenly I could feel God all around me — in the warmth of the sunshine, in the gentle breeze, and through the singing of the birds. When I heard them, the verse above came to me. It seemed as if God were saying, “Give up all your fears, tears, and anxieties and just trust me.” It still took another three months before I could read my Bible or have a somewhat normal conversation. But every time I broke down crying or felt as if I couldn't handle the stress anymore, I would stop myself and say aloud, “I trust you, God!”

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
Today and every day I will tell God, “I trust you!”

Life has many battles, some larger than others, but God is with us. We can acknowledge that God's ways are greater than ours. Surrendering our lives to the Lord our God, we can say, “I trust you!”

Prayer: Dear God, forgive us when we try to do it all on our own. Help us to turn to you for guidance, wisdom, and strength. Amen.

Ashley Swartzentruber (Ontario, Canada)

WED
JUNE 10
2020

SEE THE FACE OF GOD

READ Genesis 33:1-11

Jacob said, *“If I have found favor in your eyes, accept this gift from me. For to see your face is like seeing the face of God.”*

— Genesis 33:10 (NIV)

Growing up, I was no saint — any more than Esau. My younger brother was not a devil — any more than Jacob. Like all siblings, we competed for time, affection, and family resources. For a while in high school, almost every day when we arrived home I would so frustrate my younger brother that

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

When I ask for forgiveness, I have a chance to see the face of God.

he would start fights with me. Looking back, I realize that if the shoe had been on the other foot, I’d probably have done just as my brother did.

When my brother recently wrote me for perhaps the third time expressing regret for his behavior in our younger years, I was finally mature enough to see what he had long needed from me. He needed the face of God looking back at him saying, “Forget about it. It’s done; it’s over.” Neither of us was an angel, so certainly he isn’t the only one who needed to apologize.

As if scales had fallen from my eyes, I realized I needed to assure my brother that he is forgiven and that his reaching out to me helped me to move on. After all, he had done all the heavy lifting. Until we’ve asked for forgiveness from another, we can’t imagine the sense of God’s glory that comes when we extend ourselves this way in love.

Prayer: Dear God, thank you for showing us how to forgive and for allowing us to see your glory when we do. Amen.

Jack Stanley (Florida, USA)

COMPASSION AND MERCY

THUR
JUNE 11
2020

READ Hebrews 13:1-3

Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy.

— Proverbs 31:9 (NIV)

My twelve-year-old son, Mike, yelled for me to pull over in the parking lot. His voice was urgent. Tears formed as his voice broke at the sight of a homeless man holding a sign that read: “Will work for food.” Mike rolled down the window, handed the man a bag of snacks and some change he had left over from a recent purchase. He then apologized to the man, explaining that was all he had to give him. The man thanked my son several times, and I could hear the emotion in his voice.

Once we were on our way again, Mike asked me if what he had done was

okay. *Okay?* My mamma’s heart was bursting with pride — and perhaps some remorse as well. I hadn’t even noticed the man. To be honest, sometimes I not only pretend that I don’t see persons on the side of the road, but I judge and condemn them without caring to know their story.

And yet, Jesus made it clear that his mission on earth was to those in need, those who were downtrodden or sick. He didn’t look the other way. He didn’t run from them. He ran *toward* them. We are called to be Christlike, full of compassion and mercy. It’s not our place to judge, but it is our place to care.

Prayer: Dear Lord, help us to see others the way you see them, and may this perspective lead us to action. Amen.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

I will choose to see others through the eyes of Christ.

Lollie Hofer (Nebraska, USA)

FRI
JUNE 12
2020

SEEING PAST THE OBSTACLES

READ Proverbs 3:5-6

We live by faith, not by sight.

— 2 Corinthians 5:7 (NIV)

Early one evening my friend Sherry phoned, telling me to go outside and look at the sunset. She described how beautiful the colors were and how the sky was a brilliant pink surrounding the setting sun. I eagerly went outside to look, but to my disappointment, my view was totally blocked by the trees. However, even though I couldn't see it, from my

friend's vivid description and my past experiences of enjoying beautiful sunsets I could imagine how brilliant the sky looked.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Even when I cannot see God's presence, God is working in my life.

So often it is the same for me as I try to live faithfully each day. When I am going through trials, it can be hard to see God at work in the situation. My eyes can be so focused on my need that I do not see an answer or the way through my struggles. But reading God's promises in scripture and my past experiences of seeing God's work in my life reassure me that God is present, even though I cannot see past the obstructions that are blocking my view. As we recall God's blessings and answers to our prayers in the past, we can trust and envision that God is at work in our lives right now.

Prayer: Creator God, help us to remember your answers to prayers and trust that you are at work in our lives. Amen.

Monabeth Milliron (Louisiana, USA)

LOVED SO MUCH

SAT
JUNE 13
2020

READ Romans 8:31-39

There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love. We love because [God] first loved us.

— 1 John 4:18-19 (NIV)

Almost seven years ago, our first grandson, Zachary, was born on the other side of the world. He suffered brain damage at birth and could barely breathe on his own. Zachary's parents spent every moment they could with him during his 12-hour life, and we were all devastated when he died.

I asked myself, *What did this baby do to deserve all this love? Was he good*

or clever? Did he help others? But Zachary did none of these things. Zachary's parents loved him so much and always will because he was their son. They would have moved heaven and earth to save him and to keep him with them if they could.

In those difficult days, I realized that God loves me not for anything I have done or can do but just because I am God's child. God did move heaven and earth by sending Jesus so that we can be with God forever.

I have always struggled to believe in my heart that God loves me. Zachary helped me understand.

Prayer: Dear God, help us to rest in your love and to know that we don't have to earn it. Thank you for loving us as your children. Amen.

Jenny Young (Gauteng, South Africa) — See p. 21.

Prayer Focus: PARENTS GRIEVING THE DEATH
OF A CHILD

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
God loves me and wants to be
near me forever.

SUN
JUNE 14
2020

THE FIRST PLACE

READ Psalm 34:4-7

[The Lord] refreshes my soul.

— Psalm 23:3 (NIV)

When I was eight years old, I remember helping my father search for his lost keys. As his frustration mounted, he asked, “Why is it that whenever you lose something, it’s always in the last place you look?” With a sly grin, he added, “Because once you find it, you stop looking.” I thought this was a hilarious observation. From that moment forward, finding lost items became a game for me. My goal was to have the first place I looked be the last.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

For life’s biggest problems,
I will first look to God for
answers.

This approach is fine for trivial items such as shoes, sunglasses, or the remote control. But where do we look when we lose courage,

hope, or direction? Where do we look when we lose ourselves? In times of need, it’s far too common to look for answers in all the wrong places. Seeking relief, we may turn to alcohol, drugs, or other unhealthy behaviors, which never help us find anything good.

Scripture reminds us that in our most trying times, we can look to God first for help and solace. As our provider, God can restore, renew, and replenish us. Prayer allows us to seek God’s counsel, and scripture allows us to rediscover God’s endless love which can rebuild our broken spirits. At some point in life, we all experience significant loss. It’s comforting to know exactly where to look to regain our strength and stability.

Prayer: Dear Lord, thank you for being an ever-present force in our lives. Help us to remember that we can always seek you in times of need. Amen.

Webb Smith (Georgia, USA)

EVERYDAY OPPORTUNITIES

MON
JUNE 15
2020

READ Acts 26:12-18

[Jesus] said to them, "Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation."

— Mark 16:15 (NRSV)

Despite placing our phone number on a "do not call" list, my husband and I still receive multiple telemarketing calls each day. One day, my husband said, "What if we turned these calls into a stage to reach out to those who don't know Jesus?" After praying about it, we decided to tell solicitors that we'd listen to their spiel but that we wanted to say something to them first.

We ask the callers whether they have a relationship with Jesus, and we discuss God's saving grace and the gift of salvation.

Sometimes we ask the caller whether there is something we can pray for on their behalf. Occasionally we are met with coldness, but we more often have genuine conversations with people across the world. We then patiently listen to the reason for their call and thank them for the opportunity to talk to them.

Through these conversations we know we've planted the seed of God's love, and we pray that the Holy Spirit will guide them forward. It's amazing how God turned our annoyance into a way to share the good news with others all over the world!

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help us to be open to opportunities to share your love. May your Holy Spirit cause the seeds we sow to grow and multiply so that others may find eternal life. Amen.

Carolyn Strickland (Florida, USA)

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
Unexpected encounters can be opportunities to show God's love.

TUES
JUNE 16
2020

ONE BY ONE

READ John 1:35-50

Day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

— Acts 2:47 (NRSV)

Since my early mathematics classes, I have been intrigued by the number *one*. By itself, it is weak and powerless. Even when it is multiplied by itself, it retains the same value. But in its relationship with other numbers, it becomes powerful. Even the greatest number increases when this small number

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

In God's kingdom,
I am never alone.

is added to it, and when a critical decision has to be voted on, one vote can make all the difference.

I find this to be an important comment on

Christian life and the growth of the church. When I look at the first church, I notice that its growth is not spoken of as multiplication but rather addition. The Gospels tell how Jesus called his disciples personally, one by one, and their number grew as each responded to Jesus' invitation to follow him. When each of us follows Jesus, we are given the grace to contribute to the growth of God's kingdom.

Prayer: Dear God, thank you for adding each of us to your kingdom so that we may live in fellowship with you and with all your people. As Jesus taught us, we pray, "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.

Colin D. Harbach (England, United Kingdom)

GUIDE MY PRAYERS

WED
JUNE 17
2020

READ Romans 8:25-28

The Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans.

— Romans 8:26 (NIV)

“This one’s a firecracker!” the pediatrician said when my husband and I took our first child for her one-year physical. Extroverted and confident, Madison has lived up to that description ever since. Her little sister, Anna, is different. If someone outside our immediate family talked to Anna when she was younger, she would lower her gaze and bury her face in my neck. Concerned about Anna’s shyness, I asked my Bible study group to pray for her to come out of her shell. Some wise, experienced mothers counseled that Anna would eventually find her way in the world on her own terms.

Then I realized that I had been praying for the wrong thing — focusing on what would make me comfortable instead of what made Anna comfortable. Rather than praying for God to change Anna, I should have been praying for God to change me.

When I changed my prayers, my stress over Anna’s shyness lifted. At the age of nine, Anna surprised everyone when she began acting and singing and continued these activities through high school. God had worked through the Holy Spirit — and my wise friends — to guide my prayers to help me let Anna be Anna.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
When I listen for the Holy Spirit, my prayers can more fully follow God’s will.

Prayer: Dear Lord, help us to listen for the Holy Spirit’s guidance to put our prayers on the right track. Amen.

Marcy Farr (Texas, USA)

Prayer Focus: PARENTS CHALLENGED BY A
CHILD’S UNIQUENESS

THUR
JUNE 18
2020

A LOVING EMBRACE

READ Psalm 103:13-18

These three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.

— 1 Corinthians 13:13 (NIV)

When I was 14 years old, my father was in a serious car accident and suffered a traumatic brain injury. Some days he could barely walk because he was in severe pain. His recovery took 10 years. This was a difficult time for my family, since our primary provider could no longer work. Life changed for all of us.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

What sign of love is God prompting me to show?

One night when I was 16, my dad was in his room alone. For some reason, I thought that he could use an act of love. I believe now

that God directed me. I walked into his room, told him that I loved him, and embraced him. I held my father for several minutes, and tears rolled down his cheeks. At the time, I didn't know what I had done for him. I didn't know the pain and depression he was going through, the worthlessness he felt, or that he was feeling tempted by thoughts of suicide. To this day, my dad cherishes that embrace and thanks me for it.

Over the years, my dad and I have told many others about that special moment. We may never know the full impact of that one embrace. God showed me that even the smallest act of love can change a life forever.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank you for loving us as your children. Guide us to show love to those who need it. Amen.

David Smith (USA)

Prayer Focus: FAMILIES WHO HAVE LOST THEIR
PRIMARY PROVIDER

READ Isaiah 46:3-4

The LORD has said, “Even to your old age and gray hairs I am he, I am he who will sustain you. I have made you and I will carry you; I will sustain you and I will rescue you.”

— Isaiah 46:4 (NIV)

A few years ago, a plant sprouted near the porch of our house. We didn't know what kind of plant it was, but as it grew higher it looked as if it were going to be a tree. My father planned to cut it down because he didn't want a tree to block sunlight to the house. However, when he learned I liked the plant, he let it grow.

A few weeks later, I noticed that the stem of the plant had cracked. Strong winds must have damaged it during the night. I called my sister and told her how sad I was. To my surprise, she took a rope and tied the stem of the plant to a nail on the wall. After some time the plant has grown into a fairly tall tree.

In life, like the stem of that plant, we often find ourselves “cracked.” Heavy burdens such as financial problems, health issues,

and other concerns are like the strong winds that damaged my plant. But God can sustain us like the rope supported the tree. In Isaiah 46:4, God promises to sustain us, even to our old age and gray hairs. With that promise, we can live in the peace and joy that trusting God can bring.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

When I feel weak, I can rely on God's strength to sustain me.

Prayer: Almighty God, in every problem help us to trust that your strength will sustain us. Amen.

Linawati Santoso (East Java, Indonesia)

SAT
JUNE 20
2020

BY OUR SIDE

READ John 11:32-44

Jesus began to weep.

— John 11:35 (NRSV)

As I wrote this devotional, it was exactly 34 years ago on Father's Day that my mother and I stood by my father's hospital bed to say our final goodbyes. Even after all these years I still miss him. Although I was feeling my own personal pain, it was my privilege as an only child to stand by my mother's side in her deep grief over losing her husband of 43 years. As

much as I wanted to, I could not take away her sadness; it was something that she had to work through in her own way.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
God is with me in my joys and
in my sorrows.

At times like these, nothing we say can make all the pain go away. Sometimes just being present — as hard as that may be — is enough. I learned this over the 25 years that I was a critical-care chaplain serving grieving families by offering my presence, my comfort, and my prayers. But the sense of God's presence with us really makes all the difference. Today's quoted verse opens us to the sacred heart of our Lord. God is touched by the pain we feel and is present to comfort us. Jesus' presence made all the difference for Mary and Martha. Still today, when we stand with one another in grief, it can make all the difference for us as well.

Prayer: Living God, give us the courage and love to be present with those who are grieving and to be channels of your comfort to those who are hurting. Amen.

J. Leland Collins Jr. (Virginia, USA)

LIKE THAT TREE

SUN
JUNE 21
2020

READ Psalm 1:1-6

That person is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither — whatever they do prospers.

— Psalm 1:3 (NIV)

My father gave our family a Bradford pear tree one spring many years ago. It hardly rained the summer following, and even though I was eight months pregnant, I went out every day and watered the tiny tree — trying to help it make it through the simmering Georgia heat. The tree has now survived for two decades.

In the days after my father's recent death, I have struggled to find peace and comfort. But I have often found solace while sitting under the tree he gave us. I'm so glad I made the effort to keep the tree alive all those years ago because when I'm under its spreading shade, God comforts me as I remember my dad's influence on my life. It's an even greater comfort to realize that I am still sitting under that influence as well.

Dad was a Bible teacher for many years; though he is not physically with me, his counsel and help are. I cherish all the wisdom and compassion he poured into me through the years.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
Whose positive influence has nurtured my spiritual life?

Like my dad, I pray I may also leave a lasting legacy for those to come. I want my life to be like his tree — providing shelter and help for the generations who follow me.

Prayer: Dear Lord, thank you for the influence and teaching of those who have come before us. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Beverly Varnado (Georgia, USA) — See p. 21.

MON
JUNE 22
2020

COMPASSION

READ Luke 7:11-16

As for you, brothers and sisters, never tire of doing what is good.

— 2 Thessalonians 3:13 (NIV)

Every so often a certain young man would arrive at my workplace to ask for money or for other assistance. Sometimes I willingly gave him money. Other times I did so grudgingly because though he always insisted he was going to change his ways, he didn't. His addiction had destroyed his health.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
God's radical grace calls me to give and expect nothing in return.

The last time I saw him and gave him money, his health had deteriorated

greatly. But I was caught by surprise when he raised his arms toward heaven and said a prayer of thanks to God for my life and what I had done for him.

A year went by without my seeing him. One day a woman whom I did not know came to my place of work. She was the young man's mother, and she had come to bring me a message. Her son had told her on his deathbed to seek me out and thank me for all I had done for him.

The apostle Paul's message is a clear reminder for me to "never tire of doing what is good." And our reading from Luke about the widow from Nain is but one example of Jesus' compassion. Today when cynicism toward the suffering of others is so prevalent, Jesus calls us to show compassion — period.

Prayer: God of grace, help us to show compassion to our sisters and brothers, even when we think they don't deserve it. We pray in the name of the One who shows compassion to us. Amen.

Francis Jorge Valera (Dominican Republic)

Prayer Focus: PARENTS OF THOSE STRUGGLING WITH ADDICTION

RESTING IN PRAYER

TUES
JUNE 23
2020

READ James 5:13-18

Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God . . . will guard your hearts and your minds.

— Philipians 4:6-7 (NIV)

As someone who wrestles with anxiety, I know what it means to live every day with persistent worry. Instead of anticipating positive outcomes for situations in my life, I frequently fear the worst. I worry that I will never have the strength to overcome sins that I struggle with or that the dreams I have for my life will never come to pass. The list goes on.

When fear and worry threaten to consume me, I have a mighty, spiritual weapon to help me: prayer. As the writer of James tells us: “The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.” I am not righteous on my own; but as a Christian, I am made righteous through Christ. Scripture encourages me to take every concern I have to God in prayer.

When I cry out and give God all of my worries, my prayers take on a power far beyond my own. By faith and prayer, I can experience freedom from worry and receive God’s transcendent peace in my mind and heart. Instead of constantly living in fear of what could go wrong, I can rest in prayer, knowing that God hears my prayers and blesses me with peace.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

When I am afraid, I can turn to God.

Prayer: Dear heavenly Father, thank you for inviting us to come to you with our worries. Help us to trust you. Amen.

Missy Saiki (Hawaii, USA) — See back cover.

WED
JUNE 24
2020

GOD'S CALL

READ Exodus 4:10-13

Moses said, "Please, my Lord, just send someone else."

— Exodus 4:13 (CEB)

Several years ago, at the request of our small church, our minister led us through a Bible study that offered insight into energizing and growing our congregation and helping members to take on new leadership roles. However, at the end of the study, no volunteers stepped up to accept new or expanded responsibilities.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Even when I feel uncertain,
God will equip me to
serve others.

With every meeting and discussion that followed, I was more convinced that we needed more people to take on leadership roles. One

thing I knew for sure: I would not be one of the volunteers. As a very shy person, my comfort zone is the back row. My face flushes and my heart races at the thought of leading a Bible study or even a planning meeting.

Though my challenge was not nearly as great as the one Moses faced in today's reading, I could still identify with him. My different approaches to God's gentle nudges included ignoring them, suggesting other people who were much better qualified, and finally begging, "Please, Lord, not me."

In the end, I led the intentional faith development team for six years with a superb group of people who made the work much easier than I'd anticipated. When we follow God's lead and give thanks for opportunities to grow in faith, God can use us in ways we never expected.

Prayer: Dear Lord, open our hearts and minds to serve wherever you need us. Amen.

Janice Hagood LeMaster (Alabama, USA)

OUR TALENTS

THUR
JUNE 25
2020

READ Matthew 25:14-30

Take . . . the talent from him [which had received the one talent], and give it unto him which hath ten talents.

— Matthew 25:28 (KJV)

Despite being raised by loving Christian parents, I began drinking at age 16. Soon after, I added drugs to the mix and spent the next 26 years in a stupor. When I received a court order to attend recovery meetings, I finally got sober. During one such gathering, I started reading sections of the Bible and letting God speak to me through the reading.

One day I started reading about the man with one talent. The master was displeased because the man did nothing with it. I knew then that it was time to start using the “talent” that God had given me — my wonderful singing voice. For over 20 years now, I have been singing God’s praises regularly at church and the local nursing home. Each time I sing, God blesses me anew. The joy I get from singing far outweighs any that alcohol or drugs could produce.

These last two years, being able to sing during health problems has kept me looking forward to better days. God saved me from myself by helping me to use my talent in God’s service. I am thankful for the opportunities to sing praises to God’s name.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
The talent God has given me
is a blessing to me
and to others.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, show us how to use the talents we have been given to bless others as you have blessed us. We ask this in Jesus’ name. Amen.

Keith Hailey (Kansas, USA) — See p. 21.

FRI
JUNE 26
2020

LONGING FOR ORDINARY

READ Hebrews 10:19-25

Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds.

— Hebrews 10:24 (NIV)

I've always wanted to do great things for God — to change the world and to live a life that mattered. I didn't want to have any regrets at the end of my life. Maybe it's age; hopefully it's wisdom — but now I long for the ordinary in life.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

God can use my words of encouragement to make an extraordinary difference.

A simple phone call showed me the importance of “ordinary.” It was from a student I had taught during my first year of teaching when I had done my best but

failed often. This student was diagnosed with severe ADHD. A local gang was also trying to recruit him. I spent that year encouraging him. He called that day to tell me he had become a Christian while in my class and that his family had become Christians as well. He said that I had made a difference in their lives and that now he was preparing to become a youth minister. He showed me that the ordinary, daily encouragement we give to people can change everything.

God was able to use my words to change that family, and who knows how many people God has changed through this young man's ministry? In God's hands, the ordinary becomes extraordinary. Who knows what God will do with the seemingly ordinary words of encouragement and love we offer?

Prayer: Dear Lord, help us to seize the opportunities you give us each day to encourage, help, and love others. Amen.

Terrie Hellard-Brown (California, USA)

HOPE

SAT
JUNE 27
2020

READ Psalm 103:1-12

I will rejoice in the LORD, I will be joyful in God my Savior.

— Habakkuk 3:18 (NIV)

In 2001, my husband was diagnosed with cancer, my uncle died, and my mother's congestive heart failure took a turn for the worse. A few months later my husband began cancer treatments, his father passed away unexpectedly, and my mother died.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
Today and every day, I will be joyful in God.

Memories of the traumatic events of that year make it easy to overlook the positive things that happened. During those painful times, grief was a natural response. But I had to choose whether to remain bitter, angry, and discouraged or, like the prophet Habakkuk, to say, "Yet I will rejoice in the LORD."

We all experience circumstances that leave us reeling, wondering which way to turn and if we will survive. Tough times are often beyond our control, but we can still choose how we react to the events. Psalm 103 reminds us to praise God because God is gracious, forgiving, compassionate, and abounding in love. Even when we do not understand how any good can possibly come from our present circumstances, we can choose whether we will focus on the negative or the blessings God has given us.

Prayer: Dear God, help us to choose to praise you every day, no matter our circumstances. Amen.

Carol Elaine Harrison (Saskatchewan, Canada)

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

SUN
JUNE 28
2020

WOULD I DO THE SAME?

READ Mark 5:1-20

Those who had actually seen what had happened to the demon-possessed man told the others about the pigs. Then they pleaded with Jesus to leave their region.

— Mark 5:16-17 (CEB)

Each time I read today's verse I find myself in stunned disbelief. Despite another wonderful and amazing miracle, the crowd still didn't want to accept Jesus and emphatically asked him to leave. In the past, reading these verses often led me to wonder, *Why would they want Jesus to leave when he had*

healed a demon-possessed man and cast out a legion of evil spirits? Why would they reject the presence of Christ?

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Every day, I will seek ways to draw near to God.

Recently as I read these verses, I had a different

question. This time I asked myself, *Would I ever do the same thing?* I realized that at times I too am asking Jesus to leave me. When I choose anger and hateful speech, choose my ways over God's commands, choose to misrepresent the truth, or choose to stand quiet when I should speak out, I'm rejecting Jesus.

The people may have rejected Jesus, but the demon-possessed man, now fully rational, was the one who got it right. He knew that Jesus was someone to follow and stay near. May we learn not to send Christ away but instead to steadfastly follow him.

Prayer: Dear Lord, forgive us when we choose paths that separate us from you. Instead, help us choose paths of grace and love. Amen.

Cassius Rhue (South Carolina, USA)

LIVING COVER LETTER

MON
JUNE 29
2020

READ 2 Corinthians 3:1-6

You show that you are a letter from Christ, the result of our ministry, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.

— 2 Corinthians 3:3 (NIV)

I struggled to write a cover letter to accompany an article I was submitting to a magazine. The editor required the letter as a way of introducing myself. But, did listing facts such as my educational background, job experiences, and previous publications allow the editor to really know me? He would know *about* me from reading my letter, but knowing about me is not the same as knowing *me*. Only by spending time with me, listening to my words and observing my actions, would the editor really know who I am.

Christians are living cover letters for Christ. Every day we write a letter for those around us to read. We can tell others about Christ by listing various facts: he was a great teacher, he healed the sick, and he was crucified and raised to new life. But knowing things

about Christ does not mean that we know who he is. As living cover letters, Christians convey who

Christ is. Then others may

come to know Christ by spending time with us and observing our earthly reflection of our heavenly Savior. Will those we encounter come to know Christ by our living letter?

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
How can I be a living cover letter for Christ today?

Prayer: Living Lord, help us to reflect you in our words and actions each day so that others may desire to fully know and serve you. Amen.

Alice H. Murray (Florida, USA)

**TUES
JUNE 30
2020**

A CRY FOR HELP

READ Psalm 91:1-16

I cried unto the LORD with my voice, and he heard me out of his holy hill.

— Psalm 3:4 (KJV)

I had been driving to a town almost 200 miles away for an annual professional conference. I had set out expecting the drive to be a fun adventure, but then my vehicle broke down. With no emergency roadside help available, I called some colleagues who were attending the same conference. Somehow, they passed by me and had to turn back to find me. It was getting dark; the situation was looking bleak, and I was getting scared. I uttered a desperate prayer, "Help me, Lord!" My colleagues finally found me, and the story ended well.

So many times we find ourselves in bad situations, jumping into things without careful consideration or proper planning. We hope that everything will sort itself out. Often, by the time we realize our errors, we have already gotten to the point of no return.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

No situation is so dark that God cannot find and help me.

Thankfully God does not care for us according to our faithfulness or intelligence but according to God's unconditional love and tender mercies. No matter how bleak the situation, God is only a prayer away. The eloquence of our prayers does not matter; a desperate cry from a needy heart is enough to catch God's attention.

Prayer: Dear Lord, remind us of your promise never to leave us or forsake us. Help us to turn to you — especially in threatening circumstances. Amen.

Demi Oyinloye (Ogun, Nigeria) — See back cover.

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

MAY 6: *A Lenten Challenge*

1. Have you ever been given a challenge to express your faith like today's writer was? If so, how did your experience change the way you think about your faith? If not, would you ever consider participating in something like this?
2. How do you express your faith? How do those expressions of faith enrich your life and the lives of those around you?
3. Have you ever felt as if you were unable to follow God because you didn't have the time or the money? When you are distracted by the busyness of life, who or what helps you to regain your focus on serving God?

4. What outreach ministries does your church offer, and how do you participate? What new ministries do you think your church should start?
5. Do you try to maintain your Lenten disciplines all year, or is it good to have certain practices for certain seasons? Why?

MAY 13: *Trust Through Prayer*

1. Describe a time when you have witnessed the power of prayer. How did that experience affect your faith? If the situation had resolved differently, would your faith have been affected in a different way? Why or why not?
2. What scripture passages remind you of the importance of prayer? How do those verses encourage you as you pray?
3. Do you always trust in God when you pray? Do you ever pray without fully trusting? What helps strengthen your trust in God?
4. Describe a time when you prayed and received a seemingly impossible result or a time when you prayed and did not receive the answer you were hoping for. How did you feel? How did you maintain your faith during this time?
5. In what ways can you support someone who has received an unwanted outcome to prayer? What encouragement can you offer to someone who is currently struggling to pray?

MAY 20: *On Assignment*

1. Have you ever thought, like today's writer, that mission statements are only for corporations? What do you think of the idea that you can write a personal mission statement? What would your mission statement be?
2. Do you ever struggle with staying focused spiritually? If not, how do you avoid distractions? If so, do you think a mission statement would help you? What other practices might be beneficial?
3. What spiritual practices help you to listen to God? If you already know what assignment God has given you, how did you discern it? How does having an assignment change the way you live out your faith?

4. Name some biblical characters who had a clear mission and remained focused. Which biblical characters did not remain true to their mission?
5. How does your church encourage you to find your spiritual mission? In what ways can you encourage others to do the same?

MAY 27: *A Change of Heart*

1. When have you had a change of heart? Describe the situation and how it affected you. Did you share your change of heart with others? How did they respond?
2. Share your thoughts about cross-cultural churches or communities. In what ways can you work to be more open to leaders and community members who are different from you?
3. Today's writer is encouraged by remembering that we fulfill God's ministry when we meet others "heart to heart in Christ's love." What does this mean to you? In what ways can you be more intentional about connecting with others?
4. When have you been in a situation in which you felt unable to minister to others? What obstacles prevented you from ministering to them? What prayers, scripture passages, spiritual practices, or people helped you find strength in the situation?
5. Where do you see cultural differences in your church, community, and the world? Name some examples of stories or people who have embraced differences and strengthened their community by doing so. What hope or inspiration do you draw from these examples?

JUNE 3: *Words and Actions*

1. Describe a time when you learned more from someone's actions than you did from their words. How can you apply what you learned in that situation to other relationships?
2. The writer of today's meditation appears to have accepted her husband's musical preference willingly. What if you try to reach out to someone and they reject your efforts? How could you remain encouraged in such a situation?
3. Do you think it is more important to minister to others through words or through actions? Why?

4. Which biblical characters demonstrated their faith through their words and actions? How does their example encourage you? In what ways can you follow their example?
5. What does it mean to you to live your faith? Who serves as an example of faith to you? How can you show them how much their example means to you?

JUNE 10: *See the Face of God*

1. Have you ever reconciled with someone with whom you had a difficult relationship? If so, describe how that reconciliation affected you and changed the relationship.
2. The writer's brother reached out to the writer multiple times trying to make amends. What do you do when you apologize to someone, but they don't respond in the way you had hoped? What do you do when someone apologizes to you, but you don't want to forgive them?
3. Have you ever thought about forgiveness as a chance to see the face of God? If so, what does that mean to you? If not, does that idea change the way you think about forgiveness?
4. What spiritual practices and prayers help you to let go of bitterness? What biblical passages remind you of the importance of forgiveness? In what ways do these help you?
5. How does your church help members who have disagreements? In what ways could your church better help its members to reconcile after a conflict? How can you encourage those changes in your church?

JUNE 17: *Guide My Prayers*

1. Have you ever prayed that someone would change their personality traits? Do you think this is a good thing to pray for? Discuss why or why not.
2. Describe a time when you realized that you had been praying for the wrong thing. How did you realize it? In what ways did you change your prayers? What was the outcome?

3. The writer's friends helped her decide to change her prayers. How have your friends helped you grow in your faith? What biblical friends serve as models for you in your own friendships? Why?
4. How do you remind yourself to be accepting and understanding of your differences with others? What encouragement can you offer to those who are challenged in accepting someone's differences?
5. When have you experienced the Holy Spirit guiding your prayers? How did that change your perspective? How do you know when your prayers are getting off track? What do you do to refocus your prayers?

JUNE 24: *God's Call*

1. Describe a time when you felt unsure of your ability to fulfill a need. How did you respond, and what was the outcome of the situation? What did this experience teach you about yourself and your abilities?
2. Before volunteering at her church, today's writer identified with Moses. What biblical character do you most identify with right now? Why? What can you learn from that character?
3. When you see a need, are you eager to step up and fulfill it? Or, like today's writer, do you stay quiet and hope that others will volunteer? Would you like to change the way you respond? If so, what practical steps can you take to do so?
4. When you feel God nudging you out of your comfort zone, how do you react? What prayers bring you peace when you are apprehensive about taking a new path? How do those around you encourage you to do things that intimidate you?
5. What needs do you currently see in your church? In your community? In the world? What can you do to help meet those needs? What can you encourage those around you to do?

WITNESS FROM A READER

Some of my earliest and fondest memories of my grandmother and my mother are of them reading and sharing devotions from *The Upper Room*. Several years ago, my mother began gifting subscriptions to all my siblings and their families.

Over the years, Mother expanded her list to include grandchildren, great-grandchildren, and several dear friends. She was truly blessed by knowing that her loved ones read and shared the daily meditations and discussed what the message meant.

When I teach our youth Sunday school class, I often begin by reading from *The Upper Room*. I believe the students now expect this to be part of our time together. After reading the day's devotion in a recent class, I told the students that following my mother's death I have continued her tradition of gift *prescriptions* to *The Upper Room*. I unintentionally said *prescription* instead of *subscription*. We all laughed. However, I quickly recovered by saying that prescription may indeed be an appropriate word to use. *The Upper Room* has provided instruction and remedies many times in my life. What could be a better prescription and remedy for living a healthy spiritual life than reading scripture and sharing words from the greatest Healer of all?

Thank you, Upper Room, for providing a publication that contributes to the spiritual health of so many.

— Jean Price Gay (North Carolina, USA)

If you would like to give the gift of *The Upper Room* to a friend or family member, please use the order form on the next page.

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with all joy and peace in faith so
that you overflow with hope.*

Romans 15:13 (CEB)

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- Make only one point.
- Include details about what you heard, saw, felt, or said.
- Tell about your own experience and the spiritual truth you learned from it.
- Include a suggested Bible reading, scripture verse, and prayer.

We work a year in advance. If we choose to publish your work, we will notify you.

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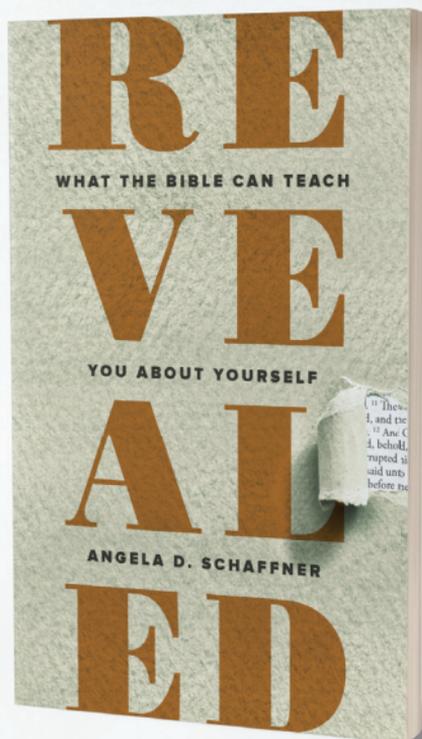
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MEET SOME OF OUR WRITERS

(Here and on p. 21.)



Dean Skoglund (p. 10) has traveled in 48 countries and spends his time hosting Bible study groups.



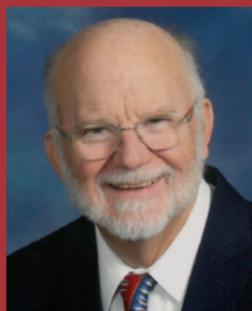
Demi Oyinloye (p. 72) works as the facilities management director at a denominational university in Nigeria.



Tim Pietz (p. 48) is studying professional writing and intends to pursue a career in publishing.



Missy Saiki (p. 65) worked in healthcare administration and now enjoys traveling and serving in prayer ministry.



Torrey Curtis (p. 23) is a retired pastor who has swum over 2,000 miles since October 2012.



Charity Kiregyera (p. 11) worked as a personal secretary for 9 years and later graduated from theological school and became a minister.

