

SEPTEMBER - OCTOBER 2017

GST #128363256

THE UPPER ROOM®

WHERE THE WORLD MEETS TO PRAY

33 LANGUAGES

Invitational Interdenominational International

ARMENIAN	GUJARATI	KOREAN	SPANISH
BULGARIAN	HINDI	MALAYALAM	SWEDISH
BURMESE	HUNGARIAN	NEPALI	TAMIL
CHINESE	IBAN/ENGLISH	NORWEGIAN	TELUGU
DUTCH	ILOKANO	ODIA	THAI
ENGLISH	INDONESIAN	POLISH	URDU
ESTONIAN	ITALIAN	PORTUGUESE	
FRENCH	JAPANESE	RUSSIAN	
GREEK	KANNADA	SINHALA	

For further information about the international editions of
The Upper Room, see international.upperroom.org.

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COVER ART INTERPRETATION

The Rescue of Baby Moses

Artist: Amram Ebgi
(Israel, Contemporary)

Interpreter: Mona Bagasao-Cave

Printmaker Amram Ebgi is known for symbolically rich creations based in his Jewish heritage. The cover art for this issue is a wonderful example. The wealth surrounding the Nile is in full array: beautifully constructed buildings, lush growth along the river, an active fleet in the background, a sky teeming with fowl ready to provide meat to a population that included Hebrew slaves. Into this abundance floats a baby, the son of a Hebrew woman. He is received and welcomed by Pharaoh's daughter.

The Bible tells us that she claimed him as her own son — naming him *Moses*, meaning “I pulled him out of the water” — and raised him in Pharaoh's house. Ironically, he was the child of one of the many people held in captivity by the Pharaoh in whose house he was reared. He will later stand before a new Pharaoh and demand that the Israelites — Moses' ancestors — be released from their captivity.

Who does this man think he is? Pharaoh must have wondered. Ebgi answers this question by placing a foil stamp in the center of his work. Egypt's primary god was Ra, often represented by a disc. Embossed on Ebgi's disc is Moses' Hebrew name. Was Moses the god Ra? No, he was a servant of the one true God, the God who told him, “I've made you like God to Pharaoh” (Exod. 7:1, CEB). What better way to show the superiority and sovereignty of Moses' God than to emblazon his name on the Ra's disc? In this subtle and intriguing work, Amram Ebgi, a descendant of the very people Moses was about to lead from Egypt, beautifully proclaims the authority of our God.

Cover photo courtesy of Rachel Ebgi. © 1985 Amram Ebgi. Prints of cover art are available from anat@anatebgi.com.

Building Together

You also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

— 1 Peter 2:5 (NIV)

Among the programs offered by Upper Room Ministries is The Walk to Emmaus, an experience of Christian spiritual renewal and formation that seeks to develop servant-leadership and encourages participants to live discipleship in community. (For more information, visit emmaus.upperroom.org/about.)

In September 2016, the first Asian Emmaus Ministries Leadership Development Event was held in Seoul, South Korea. It brought together Emmaus community leaders from Russia, the Philippines, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Taiwan, Singapore, and South Korea to create spaces in which participants could both experience God's grace and continue to grow in it. As part of the event, our team also led a workshop to teach people how to write for *The Upper Room* magazine.

Strangers came together to grow in knowledge and faith. Time spent in worship, table discussions, and at meals gave these leaders opportunities to encourage and pray for one another, to exchange ideas, and to learn about the cultures of fellow participants. God used this opportunity to break down barriers and build bridges. Those who participated in the gathering promised that together they will contribute to the building of God's kingdom in Asia.

With a similar aim, we come together here each day through the pages of *The Upper Room* — where the world meets to pray. God uses the opportunity of our gathering together as readers to break down barriers, build bridges, and draw us closer together. I can think of no greater joy than to see people come together to grow in knowledge of God and one another, bringing to life God's kingdom here on earth.



Stephane Brooks
Director, Emmaus Ministries

Where the World Meets to Pray



LOOK FOR THE PLATYPUS

READ Isaiah 42:9-16

FRI
SEPT 1
2017

The LORD says, “See, the former things have taken place, and new things I declare; before they spring into being I announce them to you.”

— Isaiah 42:9 (NIV)

Scientists once thought that all mammals give live birth, that no mammal lays eggs. Then they explored Australian waterways and discovered the duck-billed platypus. The platypus not only astounded zoologists with its beaver-like tail and duck bill, but it also became the only known warm-blooded, fur-covered mammal that lays eggs. We read about similar discoveries in the Old Testament. Time and again the Israelites saw things they had never seen before: parting seas, pillars of fire, water from rocks, and manna from heaven. God was preparing them for a new chapter.

Preparing for anything new is uncomfortable and can be scary. New relationships, locations, jobs, even forgiveness and trust — all require courage and faith. If we are watchful, we might begin to see ways that God is working in our lives that we previously never dreamed of. New things may become visible. They may even threaten the very core of what we know or believe.

Whenever we find ourselves thinking, *Everything is going according to plan; there is no “platypus” in my life*, we can see this as a sign to be full of courage and look for the unexpected. Before we know it, we may have an opportunity to step out and watch for the new discoveries God wants to reveal to us.

Prayer: Dear God, give us the courage to step out and trust you. Amen.

Tez Brooks (Florida)

Prayer Focus: SOMEONE MOVING INTO A NEW PHASE OF LIFE

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

SAT
SEPT 2
2017

ANXIOUS NO MORE

READ **Philippians 4:6-7**

Do not be anxious about anything.

— **Philippians 4:6 (NIV)**

I sat on my sofa reading. My left hand was gently stroking the fur of my 9-year-old pet rabbit, Alice. Suddenly, she sat upright, her long ears focused on some threatening sound that I could not hear. There were no predators in our home to cause her harm, but I thought she might jump from the couch and bolt under the bed as she often does when startled. I spoke softly to her and continued to pet her, and she began to relax into a peaceful state.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
Today I will allow God's peace to fill my heart and mind.

At that moment it occurred to me: How often do I feel anxious about insignificant things even when I know God is there? Alice's threat felt real to her. I knew she would be fine, but she had to trust that I would take care of her.

God encourages us not to be anxious about anything and to turn our anxieties into prayer. Yet so often, like Alice, we allow our fears to control us. How much more peaceful would our lives be if we trusted the passage from today's reading: "The peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds"? I find that each time I trust in those words, I can experience peace and rest with God.

Prayer: Father God, help us to remember each day that you are bigger than our worries and that you can always grant us peace. Amen.

Michele C. Baker (Alabama)

8 *Prayer Focus:* SOMEONE WHO FEELS ANXIOUS

UNDERSTANDING GOD'S WORD

READ **Acts 8:26-40**

Philip asked the Ethiopian eunuch, "*Do you understand what you are reading?*"

— **Acts 8:30 (NIV)**

In 1965, I was in a special reading class to develop my comprehension skills. When I walked into the class on the first day, my immediate thought was, *I'm stupid*, because I would be sitting at a table with other people my peers had called "stupid."

Acts 8:30-31 reminds me of this reading class. An Ethiopian eunuch was reading aloud a passage from Isaiah when Philip asked him, "Do you understand what you are reading?" The eunuch replied, "How can I . . . unless someone explains it to me?" When Philip explained how Jesus fulfilled Isaiah's prophecy, the eunuch became a Christian whose witness could then help spread the gospel.

My special reading class taught me skills that enabled me to graduate from college. But like the eunuch, I still need help understanding scripture. I attend a weekly Bible study, where we study God's word and its meaning for our lives. Through our study of scripture we deepen our relationship with God and are able, like the Ethiopian eunuch, to proclaim the gospel message.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
Wisdom is a fountain of life to one who has it (Prov. 16:22, NRSV).

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help us to understand scripture so that we can proclaim the gospel. Amen.

Debra Pierce (Massachusetts)

Prayer Focus: SOMEONE LEARNING TO READ 9

GOD'S HELPING HAND

READ 1 Corinthians 12:4-11

We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us.

— Romans 12:6 (NIV)

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

God can use me, if only I am willing.

A few years back I was shopping with my wife. All of a sudden, I got the urge to go to the frozen food section and look at ice cream. I didn't really want any ice cream; I just had a strong desire to go look. When I turned the corner, I saw a small, elderly man standing in front of a freezer door. He seemed very happy to see me and asked, "Can you reach up there and get me that box, please?" I replied, "Sure." I was about halfway back to where my wife was when I stopped dead in my tracks. I felt a strange, yet exhilarating feeling. *That had to have been God using me to help somebody*, I thought.

I had been struggling with guilt, feeling as if I didn't have any worthwhile talents for serving the Lord. Then I remembered that the Bible says we all have different gifts for ministry. Maybe one of my gifts is my willingness to help out in small ways — serving meals, setting up tables, or grabbing something on a shelf too high for someone else to reach. I believe that God knew that man wanted something he couldn't get himself and, knowing I was willing to help, sent me. We all have abilities with which to serve God; we just don't always know it.

Prayer: Dear Lord, we are your servants. Use us as you see fit for the glory of your kingdom. Amen.

Tyrel Williams (Missouri)

MEMORIES

READ Psalm 103:1-5

The psalmist wrote, "Praise the LORD, my soul, and forget not all his benefits."

— Psalm 103:2 (NIV)

My oldest granddaughter loves to hear my stories about "the good old days" when I was her age and about the different milestones in my life. I am happy to oblige, especially since I can see that it makes her happy. I had a difficult childhood because of my health issues that gave my parents little respite. Today, I understand that particular part of my childhood as having a purpose in God's plan for my life, and the memory of the pain I endured diminishes in comparison.

Today I reflect on the influence or the weight of memories. Memories of difficult events can easily become burdens we carry for the rest of our lives. But memories can also be beautiful gifts, and experiences shared with loved ones can bring great happiness.

The psalmist wrote in our quoted scripture, "Forget not all [the LORD's] benefits." Remembering our past and who we are is essential in recognizing God's mercy toward us and the many blessings God has showered on us.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

"The LORD remembers us and will bless us" (Ps. 115:12).

Prayer: Compassionate God, help us to retain good memories, and help us to move forward and not forget all your loving care. Amen.

Rosi de Crabbi (Valle del Cauca, Colombia)

WED
SEPT 6
2017

HIGHER WAYS

READ Mark 10:46-52

The LORD says, “As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.”

— Isaiah 55:9 (NIV)

Getting things done gives me a sense of satisfaction, making me feel productive and complete. But interruptions

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

What is God inviting me to leave undone today?

often throw my plans off track: a family member needing help, a clerk wanting to chat, or someone’s email seeking last-minute volunteers.

When I’m focused on crossing items off my list, these disruptions frustrate me.

In contrast, scripture records many times when Jesus chose to stop to heal people such as Bartimaeus in today’s reading. So, lately, when faced with interruptions, I’ve also tried to stop and lend a hand or a sympathetic ear. In these situations, God has helped to change my perspective, showing me that these interruptions are often more important than my to-do list. At other times, when I can’t make sense of the circumstances, God gives me the faith to trust in those higher ways and thoughts.

For years I have prayed each morning, “Help me, God, to do what you want me to do today.” Now I also pray for help leaving undone the things God wants left undone, to trust in God’s plans rather than mine. Instead of clinging to my to-do list, I ask God to fill me with the sense of completeness I crave.

Prayer: Help us respond to your call to serve, Lord, and remind us that interruptions can bring us closer to you. Give us faith to trust in your plans and provision. Amen.

Jennifer Kirsch (Ohio)

Prayer Focus: THOSE OVERWHELMED WITH RESPONSIBILITIES

STAYING WITHIN THE ROPES

READ Colossians 2:6-12

Be rooted and built up in [Christ Jesus], be established in faith, and overflow with thanksgiving just as you were taught.

— Colossians 2:7 (CEB)

My twin eight-year-old daughters take swim lessons at the YMCA. The pool is long, and the lanes are separated by ropes and buoys. The youngest children in the class look like they are swatting flies when they swim. They zigzag into the lane ropes, then have to stop and untangle themselves. However, they still make it to the other end. The swimmers in the middle age group are more coordinated, but they too swim into the ropes. The oldest and most experienced swimmers slice through the water, staying in their lanes the entire time.

Our Christian walk can be like this swim class. As new Christians, we may be excited and full of energy but need someone more mature in the faith to mentor and guide us. Otherwise, we might keep swerving out of bounds.

Swimming straighter does not come simply with age; neither does living the spiritual life. Improvement comes with experience and obedience. The better swimmers listen to their instructors, learn from their guidance, and practice.

Mature Christians study the Bible and seek the counsel of other believers to better serve God. No matter what our experience, we might still swerve into the ropes. But by persevering and growing in faith, we will make it to the other end.

Prayer: Dear God, teach us faith that is strong and straight. Thank you for other Christians who mentor and guide us. Amen.

Bob La Forge (New Jersey)

Prayer Focus: CHILDREN LEARNING TO SWIM

THUR
SEPT 7
2017

FRI
SEPT 8
2017

RESTORED

READ 1 Thessalonians 5:12-23

May the God of peace himself sanctify you entirely.

— 1 Thessalonians 5:23 (NRSV)

My husband and I decided to buy a charming home built in 1911. Leaded-glass windows, built-in cabinets, a secret staircase, and the sunroom exceeded our expectations. One day a friend mentioned to my husband that the low ceilings in the living and dining rooms were unusual for this era. They

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

God's sanctifying work can restore me.

drilled a tiny hole through the drywall but could not see inside, so they made a space big enough for their heads to fit through.

As my husband and his friend peered through the hole, they were amazed at what they found and eagerly tore down the rest of the drywall ceiling. Hidden for years beneath old, dusty plaster were magnificent, ornate crossbeams and crown moldings that encircled the entire room. The space was quickly transformed into something grand. We wondered why someone had covered up such beauty.

I realized that we can allow something similar to happen in our lives. We may let sin cover up the people God has designed us to be. But when we work with God to carefully remove the junk from our lives, we can once again see God's beauty and handiwork. Then we cannot help but praise our Creator and Builder.

Prayer: Thank you, God, for never giving up on us. Continue to remove the things that entangle us so that we may fully enjoy the beauty of our relationship with you. Amen.

Sharon Setzer (Washington)

REMAIN STANDING

READ Ephesians 6:10-18

O LORD, be gracious to us; we wait for you. Be our arm every morning, our salvation in the time of trouble.

— Isaiah 33:2 (NRSV)

Two years ago, after two days of almost cyclone-force winds, I traveled to an activity at one of our churches. While going through a pine forest, I came upon a section where many of the trees were bent over at forty-five-degree angles or had completely fallen. Only a few remained upright. I assumed that given the quality of the land and the weakness of the roots, the trees could not withstand the strong winds. My explanation, although logical, was wrong. I later found out that the wind had not been blowing from its usual direction, and the trees could not resist the force.

Then I thought of my Christian life. I have found myself in a similar situation several times, surprised by the wind's direction and unprepared to face the storm. Growing in faith and in our relationship with God means becoming aware of our frailty and our need for Jesus Christ's saving grace. Christ helps us remain standing even in unexpected situations.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

In my weakness, Christ is my strength.

Prayer: Gracious God, give us awareness of our frailty and certainty of your providence through Jesus Christ. Amen.

Eduardo Conde (Aveiro, Portugal)

A CLOSER WALK

READ Luke 10:38-42

The Lord answered, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things. One thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the better part. It won't be taken away from her."

— Luke 10:41-42 (CEB)

A Bible study reflection question caught my attention: What three things in your life keep you from a closer relationship with God? Instantly,

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
I will make time for God today.

the word *busyness* came to mind, followed by the words *worry* and *fear*.

When I retired, I envisioned days filled with

reading, studying, writing, and indulging in the hobbies I enjoy. Instead I find myself engulfed in a schedule that seems as frantic as earlier days when I raised children, held a job, and maintained a household.

I began to consider, *What does God want from me?* While I believe that God wants me to care for my family, church, and community, I also believe God wants my time and attention. God desires that I have more balance in my life. Do I rush from one activity to the next, or do I take time to build a stronger relationship with God? Today, I dropped my busyness and went for a long walk in the crisp air and sunshine on the mountain close to my home. My mind was totally focused on the magnificence and beauty of God's creation. I had no room for worry or fear.

When we take time out from the demands of our daily lives, we can find a peaceful path, closer to God.

Prayer: Dear Lord, thank you for the beauty of the world you created. Help us to make time for you today and every day as we focus on a closer walk with you. Amen.

Janice Hagood LeMaster (Alabama)

GOD LOVES ALL TYPES

READ James 2:1-9

Peter began to speak: "I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right."

— Acts 10:34-35 (NIV)

One day, our four-year-old daughter came up to my wife and me and said, "Daddy, Mommy, two people with different-colored eyes can be friends." She paused and ended with an emphatic, "Really, they can!" My wife and I laughed. What made it so funny was not only our daughter's enthusiasm but the thought, *Of course they can be friends! After all, who would be shallow enough to turn down a friend because of their eye color?*

This made me think about how shallow humans can often be. We treat others poorly or kindly based on things like skin color or nationality or other superficial qualities such as income, material success — or lack of it.

But we know that God doesn't cast anyone aside. In fact, God loves variety. God doesn't pick one skin color, body type, or success level and ignore the rest.

Scripture shows just the opposite. God's children come from every conceivable group, skin color, and economic level.

Whenever we feel judged by the world, we can turn to God and what the Bible teaches about God's view of us instead. In God, we find a love so deep that we can never hit bottom.

Prayer: Dear Father, thank you for loving the uniqueness you have created in each of us. Help us to love others in the same way. Amen.

Neal Eckert (Michigan)

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
God does not cast anyone aside.

TUES
SEPT 12
2017

HEAVENLY GUARDIAN

READ Psalm 34:1-7

*On every side, the LORD's messenger
protects those who honor God.*

— Psalm 34:7 (CEB)

Some time ago while driving on the main highway in the eastern zone of my country, I noticed a car in the right lane traveling at a very low speed with its hazard lights on. I immediately thought the car was having mechanical difficulties. But as it turned out, it was an escort vehicle for a cyclist in training. The vehicle remained behind the cyclist, prepared to help with any mechanical problems and safeguarding the athlete against any physical danger from other cars.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

I can rely on God's steadfast love and faithfulness.

As I reflected on this image I thought of today's reading. Just as the Lord's messenger watches over us, God is vigilant in other situations in our lives. God's watchfulness does not mean that we are exempt from life's ups and downs, but we can be certain that God is present. God will watch over us and surround us with goodness and mercy to sustain us.

Prayer: Merciful God, thank you for your loving care and faithfulness. 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. And 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.

Agueda Suarez (Dominican Republic)

MAKING THE CALL

READ Ephesians 6:1-4

Those who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.

— Isaiah 40:31 (NRSV)

Throughout my childhood I knew little more of my father than his name. One night I began to ask God for direction. As I prayed, I began to think of forgiveness and the importance of honoring my parents. I realized that my fear of rejection had robbed me of the opportunity to experience the joy of a healthy father-daughter relationship. My inability to forgive, fueled by negative perceptions, was preventing reconciliation.

I picked up the phone many times but never made the call. I continued to wonder whether it was the right time and worried that I would be judged for not reaching out sooner. So much time had passed, and we had both missed out on important milestones in each other's lives. Yet, I couldn't help but wonder how it would feel if one of us passed on and never got the chance to say "I love you." With that in mind, I called him. After 34 years of separation, I finally got to reconnect with my father.

Over time our relationship has improved. We communicate nearly every day. My father and I are both grateful for the opportunity to witness the power of God in our lives. This new chapter has helped me to know that God has the power to make all things new.

Prayer: Dear God, help us to trust that you are working in our lives even when there seems to be no progress. Amen.

Scoie Green (Texas)

Prayer Focus: ADULTS RECONNECTING WITH
THEIR PARENTS

WED
SEPT 13
2017

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

I want to watch God do a new thing in my life.

THUR
SEPT 14
2017

CHANGING COURSE

READ 1 Thessalonians 4:1-12

Brothers and sisters, we ask and encourage you in the Lord Jesus to keep living the way you already are and even do better.

— 1 Thessalonians 4:1 (CEB)

The Cávado River is a small river that follows a linear course through Portugal. Its presence provided sustenance to an old settlement for thousands of years. The river has always been important to the life and livelihood of the people around it. In the 1960s, a large dam was built that changed everything around the river. The regional microclimate changed. The presence of large amounts of water in the reservoir reduced the area's extreme temperatures. It created an efficient source of power. With the electricity came refrigerators, radio, telephone, TV, and Internet — radically changing people's lives.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Today I will follow God in the service of others.

So it is when our lives are changed by Christ's presence. We can direct our potential as God's children to the service of others. Those who accept Christ can change everything around them. Like the dam, Christ changes the courses of our lives for the better. Rather than being lost, each person's potential is put to a new use, a new flow, a new path that transforms us and those around us.

Prayer: Creator and Sustainer of all life, help us to grow in the image of Christ so that we can be a blessing for those around us. Amen.

Emanuel Dinis (Portugal)

FRI
SEPT 15
2017

GOD'S TEAM

READ James 1:1-12

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

— James 1:12 (NIV)

My wife and I enjoy college sports. The traditions and strong loyalties appeal to us. In all honesty, when our team is winning, being a loyal fan is easy. Nevertheless, we have lived through the prosperous years and the lean years with our team, as any true fan does.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

On God's team, the victory is ours.

In the same manner, for people of faith, being hopeful during the perfect times in our lives is easy. During the times of difficulty, our faith can be tested. We might become negative and less hopeful when our lives don't appear to be going our way.

Being in the middle of a financial or health crisis makes life look bleak. But God is with us to help us through the tough patches. God is the source of our strength to overcome and to win the final victory. God will never abandon us, so we need to continue to walk our life's path with the Lord. Through faith and prayer, we will overcome.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, give us strength that will see us through hard times. Remind us that you are with us and that with you, we cannot lose. Amen.

Don Kamps (Iowa)

TAKE COURAGE!

READ Haggai 1:7-9; 2:4-5

Jesus immediately said to them: "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid."

— Matthew 14:27 (NIV)

Twenty years after I had written my last term paper, I sat looking at a blank sheet of paper and wondered, *Am I too old to be in graduate school? Can I really do this?* Then I remembered my strong conviction that God had led me to take this class. Deep in my soul, I knew that God would give me the strength and ability to complete this assignment, just as God had given the Israelites the courage and strength to rebuild the temple in Judah. My part was to trust God, take a deep breath of courage, and begin the work.

One word led to another, sentences to paragraphs, and paragraphs to pages. When I completed the assignment, I gave thanks and credit to God. I completed that class, and then many more. Years later, with deep gratitude, I walked across a stage to accept my theological degree.

Whenever God asks us to do something that seems insurmountable, we can take a deep breath of courage, trust God, and begin to work. God will help us to complete whatever we have been called to do.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

I can courageously do the work God has called me to do.

Prayer: Dear God, help us to listen to you and your call to serve in your kingdom. Give us courage and strength to complete these tasks for your glory. Amen.

Linda A. Goulooze (Arizona)

Prayer Focus: SOMEONE RETURNING TO SCHOOL 23

ARM OF PROTECTION

READ Deuteronomy 31:6-8

*The LORD your God . . . goes with you;
he will not fail you or forsake you.*

— Deuteronomy 31:6 (NRSV)

My grandson, Keagan, thrashed his arms and legs in the pool as he tried to swim. But he made little headway, even with my arm keeping him from sinking. The lifeguard watched my attempt to teach Keagan to swim and made a helpful suggestion, “Get him to swim with his face in the water, only lifting it to catch his breath. With the head up, the hips sink, making it harder to swim.”

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Jesus goes with me
into the unknown.

Keagan definitely didn’t want to put his face in the water. But he was finally brave enough to try it. Only then did he begin to swim. Within days he could swim the width of the pool with me walking beside him. When his face was in the water, I gently touched his tummy with just one finger, not to support him but to assure him I was still there.

Later, I savored that grandma-grandson experience and realized it’s what Jesus does for me. He walks beside me — protecting me from sinking, expecting me to do my part, but never leaving me.

Many times in life I’ve been required to plunge my face into the waters of new, unknown, scary challenges. I rarely want to; the familiar is much more comfortable. But when we act with faithful obedience, we can rest assured that Jesus is with us.

Prayer: Thank you, Jesus, for never leaving us or forsaking us. Amen.

Donna Scales (Oregon)

ALIVE AGAIN

READ Matthew 11:28-30

*Jesus said, “In this world you will have trouble.
But take heart! I have overcome the world.”*

— John 16:33 (NIV)

My life was in shambles. Working three jobs, I still couldn’t support my family. I felt like a failure. At home, my sons had drifted into destructive pursuits. My wife and I barely spoke. I felt isolated and alone. At night I would pray to die and awaken disappointed to still be alive.

Finally, in despair, I walked into the garage, intending to end my life. Instead, I fell to my knees and prayed, “Jesus, I do not want to die. But, I don’t want to go on living like this either. Take this burden away. Jesus, please save my life!” In a flash, Jesus showed me the difference between his humility and my pride, his meekness and my anger, his faithfulness and my selfishness and deceit. Repenting of my sins, I asked Jesus to transform me — to come into my heart and make me clean. Immediately, rays of hope entered me, and I felt alive again.

After that day, my relationship with my family changed. We cried and prayed together. We forgave each other. We studied the Bible and, with the help of other Christians, my wife and I reconciled. Finally, one Sunday, my family and I stood together before hundreds of witnesses and professed Jesus as Lord.

Although none of us is perfect, our Savior is. We can know that whatever happens, Jesus will never leave us; and knowing this can give us peace.

Prayer: Dear Lord Jesus, thank you for loving and rescuing us when we cry out to you. Amen.

Stephen Smith (Texas)

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

When we draw near to God,
God will draw near to us.
(See Jas. 4:8.)

TUES
SEPT 19
2017

HANDWRITTEN ENCOURAGEMENT

READ 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

Paul wrote, “Encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.”

— 1 Thessalonians 5:11 (NIV)

One day I received a letter from someone who was unknown to me. As I read through it, I found it was regarding an article I wrote that was published in a Christian magazine. Handwritten and four pages long, the letter was from one of my readers. He was 93 years old and said that he appreciated my article and encouraged me to continue using my spiritual gift of writing for God’s glory. After I had gone through the letter, I wondered: *Why did this stranger take so much pain, at his age, to send me a handwritten letter?*

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Whom is God nudging me to encourage today?

Scripture says that we should encourage one another. I was encouraged by a person whom I did not even know, but he obeyed God’s word to uplift my efforts for the kingdom’s sake. I still remember a line from that handwritten letter: “Encouragement is like strength to bones.”

It’s a blessing to build up fellow believers through words of appreciation. Encouragement can make us zealous to yield even more fruit and can move us forward in fulfilling God’s purpose for us.

Prayer: Dear Lord, help us to encourage others as they seek to grow in faith and know you more fully. Amen.

Deepika Emmanuel Sagar (Rajasthan, India)

26 *Prayer Focus:* A FRIEND WHO NEEDS ENCOURAGEMENT

DIFFERING ROLES

READ 1 Corinthians 12:12-20

As it is, there are many parts, but one body.

— 1 Corinthians 12:20 (NIV)

Our four grandchildren are blessed to have their other grandparents living close by. They pick them up from school, take them to ball games, and watch them when their parents go out on dates. Since my husband and I live several hours away, we are more the pop-in, pop-out type of grandparents. This has been difficult for me. I cannot participate in my grandchildren’s lives as often as I would like.

Only recently have I realized that our role is no less important even though it is different. In many ways, the body of Christ is the same; we all have different roles. Some of us are out front leading music, preaching, and chairing committees. Others serve more behind the scenes, cooking meals, working in the nursery, and decorating the sanctuary. One position is not more important than another.

God has called each of us to different roles in our families and in the body of Christ. When we embrace what God has called us to, we can move beyond comparisons to find abundant joy.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Today I will embrace God’s unique calling for my life.

Prayer: Thank you, Lord, for the variety of roles in the body of Christ. Help us to support each other as we serve you. In Christ’s name. Amen.

Nancy C. Todd (Kentucky)

Prayer Focus: THOSE SEARCHING FOR THEIR CALLING 27

THUR
SEPT 21
2017

TRUE TO YOURSELF

READ Romans 12:1-8

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds.

— Romans 12:2 (NRSV)

I have spent countless hours wondering if I should act, talk, or fix my hair like certain individuals. I see that they are popular, and I think that if I do what they do I will be popular. However, I shortchange myself by not being true to the person God created me to be.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

I will strive to be true to the person God created me to be.

My mom hangs inspiring quotes on our wall where we can all see them. The quotes encourage us to be ourselves and be happy about who we have become or are becoming. I realize now that unless I include God in my life, things are not going to work out very well for me. I have begun to realize that I do not need to copy someone's hairstyle, clothes, or lifestyle. I need to accept who I am, love who I am, and be proud of who I am. This is who God wants me to be.

With so many outside influences, it's easy to forget who we are. We can pretend to be someone we are not instead of following the path God made for us. When that happens, we need to call on God to help us be true to who God created us to be.

Prayer: Dear God, help us to discover a focus for our lives so that we may serve you more faithfully. Amen.

Amanda Brechko (North Carolina)

28 *Prayer Focus:* THOSE STRUGGLING WITH PEER PRESSURE

CHOICES

READ 1 Kings 17:8-24

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)

When I see a person on the side of the road asking for food or money, it is easy to find an excuse not to stop. *It might not be safe to stop. I don't know if I can spare the money. What if this person is part of a scam?* It's far easier and safer, we think, to say a prayer in these situations. But sometimes we fail even to do that.

Today's reading describes a widow who had only enough flour and oil to make a last meal for herself and her son. From out of nowhere came a man who asked her to make a small loaf of bread for him. The widow did as he asked. How many of us would do the same? I'm sure we'd like to think we would, but we should ask ourselves, How many times a week am I asked to do something much easier, and I decline?

The woman was blessed immeasurably for her generosity; she was kept alive by God in a time of famine. Later, the man repaid her by asking God to restore her son's life, which God did. God gives us choices every day. May we choose wisely.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

When I help others, I am helping Christ.

Prayer: Dear God, give us eyes to see those in need and the courage to help them. In the name of the compassionate Christ. Amen.

Jim Weems (Mississippi)

Prayer Focus: THOSE WHO ASK ME FOR FOOD OR MONEY 29

SAT
SEPT 23
2017

WONDERFULLY MADE

READ Psalm 139:13-18

The Lord said to Paul, “*My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness.*”

— 2 Corinthians 12:9 (NRSV)

Although I’ve never been formally diagnosed, I look back over my childhood and recognize the symptoms of a learn-

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
I can find my value in the loving grace of God.

ing disability now called dyslexia. A good memory helped me in school; but insecurity, doubt, and low self-esteem made me question my value. As I

struggled to overcome obstacles, hurts, and disappointments, my perception of God became distorted. I began to question God’s love for me. What people thought about me mattered more than God’s opinion. I set unrealistic goals for myself and often thought, *If other people can do this, why am I having such a hard time?*

When I became a wife and mother, I admitted that if I couldn’t accept myself the way I had been created, I wasn’t trusting God. In the beginning, getting rid of negative thinking and replacing it with the word of God was a slow, daily, and sometimes painful process. Then I began to believe that God took great delight in me and that I played a necessary and significant role in God’s work on earth. Now my goal is to please God, reminding myself that I have been promised, “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness.”

Prayer: Thank you, God, for never giving up on us. Help us remember that we are “fearfully and wonderfully made.” Amen.

Ramona Furst (Ontario, Canada)

Prayer Focus: THOSE STRUGGLING WITH
LEARNING DISORDERS

A FINE LINE

READ Psalm 73:23-28

The psalmist wrote, “*My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.*”

— Psalm 73:26 (NIV)

I watched my mother’s independence fade each year as she aged. As her hearing became worse, she lost the ability to listen to the radio and the TV. A stroke compromised her vision, and the joy she experienced sewing soon disappeared. She stopped reading and writing. A broken hip, difficulty breathing, heart failure — her independence slipped away day by day. I fervently tried to fix it all, to manage, to make things better, to buy this or that to help. For me, it was a desperate fight. But in the end, my efforts made little difference.

I needed God’s help to see the fine line between caregiving and attempting to stop the inevitable. Over time, I recognized my mother’s losses as part of her journey. As hard as it was, I realized I had to let go of trying to control her situation and trust that her devotion to God would see her through. And it did. The psalmist says, “Even when I am old and gray, do not forsake me, my God” (Ps. 71:18). My mom trusted God through each devastating loss; and I tried, though imperfectly, to accept her losses and to trust God as well.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
God will see me through.

Prayer: Dear God, give us wisdom to let go and entrust those we love to you. Amen.

Beverly Taylor (Colorado)

Prayer Focus: CAREGIVERS

MON
SEPT 25
2017

THE BEST FOR LAST

READ John 2:1-11

Paul wrote, *“I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.”*

— Philippians 3:14 (NIV)

One Sunday my pastor preached a sermon entitled “Saving the Best for Last.” His message was based on John’s account of Jesus’ turning water into wine. The master of the banquet tasted the wine that Jesus had converted and declared, “Everyone brings out the choice wine

first and then the cheaper wine after the guests have had too much to drink; but you have saved the best till now.”

As I was reflecting on the sermon, it occurred to me that this is also true for those who follow Christ — the best comes at the end. We all encounter difficulties and hardships: illness, broken relationships, loss of loved ones, conflicts, stress, and many other challenges. Sometimes we may feel overwhelmed and discouraged. But as Christians, we can look forward with hope. Because of Christ’s death and resurrection, we can live with the assurance that the best is yet to come. We can look forward to an eternal life of joy and peace with our Lord and Savior.

Prayer: Dear God, help us to trust you to give us strength during the challenges we face. Amen.

John D. Bown (Minnesota)

Prayer Focus: SOMEONE PREPARING TO
PREACH THIS WEEK

GOD’S GIFTS

READ Philippians 4:10-19

Paul wrote, *“My God will meet your every need out of his riches in the glory that is found in Christ Jesus.”*

— Philippians 4:19 (CEB)

I once received some luxurious skin products as a gift. I was grateful to receive them as they were something I had wanted but could not afford myself. For some time they sat on my cupboard where I could admire them. They were beautifully packaged and seemed too precious to open and use. Then I realized that it was foolish not to use what I had been so generously given. So I opened and enjoyed them.

Valuable gifts like this are a bit like the gifts God so graciously gives us. God’s gifts are freely given. One of these gifts is God’s son, Jesus, and the forgiveness and eternal life he offers us. Unless we accept and follow Jesus, we cannot experience the freedom this gift from God brings. God also gives us spiritual gifts to use as we serve God’s kingdom. Unused, they do not benefit us or others. But as we accept them and open them, we can use them we glorify God and serve others.

Prayer: Loving Father, thank you for giving us good gifts to use to help build up your church. We pray as Jesus taught us, saying, “Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, as in heaven, so in earth. Give us day by day our daily bread. And forgive us our sins; for we also forgive every one that is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil” (Luke 11:2-4, KJV). Amen.

Ann Stewart (South Australia, Australia)

Prayer Focus: TO RECOGNIZE GOD’S GIFTS

TUES
SEPT 26
2017

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
I can use the gifts God has
given me to serve others.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
No matter what I face
today, God offers hope for
a better tomorrow.

WED
SEPT 27
2017

PRAYER CHANGED ME

READ Psalm 145:8-21

*The LORD is near to all who call on him,
to all who call on him in truth.*

— Psalm 145:18 (NRSV)

The caption read, “Even your eggs are happy when you start your day with prayer.” The picture showed a carton of eggs with happy, smiling faces. It caught my attention and made me realize how prayer changes us.

Too often when I pray, I give God a to-do list. Or I rush

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
Prayer deepens our relationship with God.

through my prayer time with empty words. Genuine prayer comes from the heart, with words that show our love, respect, and praise for our savior. Prayer involves both speaking

and listening. As we learn to listen to God, we gain a clearer understanding of scripture. Prayer can deepen our relationship with God in many ways.

My prayer today may not change my immediate painful circumstances, but it can change my outlook, in much the same way that “suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope” (Rom. 5:3-4). Beginning each day with God can bring spiritual change to our lives and be so refreshing that it puts a smile on our face.

Prayer: Dear God, may your joy fill our lives today. Amen.

Kenn Edwards (New Mexico)

RIVER LAUNDRY

READ James 2:14-18

*Faith by itself, if it is not
accompanied by action, is dead.*

— James 2:17 (NIV)

While riding through a large city in a developing country, I saw a mother and three children standing knee-deep in a muddy, green river. “Those people are washing clothes,” our driver explained. That family washing clothes amid the polluted canal’s floating debris remains, for me, a poignant scene.

Certainly, such moments make me grateful for the conveniences I have, including a washing machine. However, if the memory of that moment only makes me grateful for my own blessings, that would not be enough.

Although I may not be able to lead a campaign for ending poverty or improving access to plumbing in another country, I can offer compassion and help to those around me. Maybe a grandmother’s lawn needs mowing, a neighbor feels desperate to find a job, or a student could use a math tutor. From picking up trash to giving away groceries, the needs are endless. As Jesus reminded his disciples, “The poor you will always have with you” (Mark 14:7). In this hurting world, we can reflect Jesus’ love by acting to meet one need at a time.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
When I see someone in need, God calls me to act with compassion.

Prayer: Dear Lord, show us those who need compassionate words or actions. Give us the will and the strength to serve them. Amen.

Paula M. Miller (California)

FRI
SEPT 29
2017

UNDAUNTED FAITH

READ Psalm 27:1-3, 13-14

Be strong and take heart and wait for the LORD.

— Psalm 27:14 (NIV)

Despite living a tumultuous life, King David did not waver when it came to his hope in the righteousness of God. He described his undaunted faith in Psalm 27:13, declaring, “I have sure faith that I will experience the LORD’s goodness in

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
Hope is having faith in God no matter the situation.

the land of the living” (CEB). David had faith in God’s supremacy no matter the situation.

Psalm 27 took on fresh significance for me when

on February 7, 2014, I was diagnosed with a spinal condition called spondylolisthesis. As an athletically active seventeen-year-old, I found the diagnosis difficult to cope with. My impatience toward God steadily grew as month after month of praying passed with no miracle. My focus was solely on attaining healing from my chronic back pain, and my relationship with God became shaped by my difficult circumstances.

But God spoke to me through my situation. With the prodding of the Holy Spirit, I eventually learned to trust God based on who God *is* rather than what God *gives*. While I’ve experienced no healing miracle yet, I have seen God working through my darkest season to draw me closer. God continues to be faithful and gracious, and that’s a living hope I can cling to.

Prayer: Merciful God, help us learn to trust you in all the seasons of our lives, knowing that you want the best for us. Amen.

Kevin Cochrane (Pennsylvania)

UP CLOSE AND PERSONAL

READ Luke 7:11-15

When the Lord saw her, he had compassion for her and said to her, “Do not weep.”

— Luke 7:13 (NRSV)

“A Mother’s Love” was the caption above a calendar photo of a Ugandan woman as she sat comforting her sick child in a hospital bed. The tenderness in her face as she gently held his hand pulled at my heartstrings.

I had also just read the newsletter of a different charity that told the story of the director of a small school for the deaf in a South American country. For the first time in seven years he had begun the new school year with enough food in the cupboard to feed his pupils for a month. Imagine the struggle he had month after month, year after year, to provide necessities for the children placed in his care.

Personal stories like these make a powerful impact on us because we can empathize with real people. Too often we think about these issues in terms of statistics, which can leave us overwhelmed and untouched by their impersonal presentation. Jesus didn’t focus on statistics; he cared about people as individuals, as we see in his compassion for the grieving widow he met on this occasion.

Christ continues to call us today to have active compassion for the hungry, the suffering, the abandoned — by focusing on one child, one family, one lonely person who needs our love and help right now.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
My giving, prayers, and love can reflect Christ’s love for every person God has made.

Prayer: Dear Lord Jesus, open our hearts wider to show your compassion for suffering people by our loving concern and action. Amen.

Hazel V. Thompson (Somerset, England)

SUN
OCT 1
2017

CHRIST'S TABLE

READ Matthew 22:1-14

The psalmist wrote, “*You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.*”

— Psalm 23:5 (NIV)

Who of us is willing to invite total strangers to a meal? Usually, we surround ourselves with friends — people who see the world like we do. Yet Psalm 23:5 puts us in the uncomfortable position of table fellowship with our enemies.

Today's quoted verse reminds us that it's not our party.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

God calls me to see people through the eyes of Christ.

Christ is our host; he decides who gets a seat at his table. Christ invites people who don't look like us, sound like us, or even believe exactly the way we do. Seated around Christ's

table are the poor and the rich, people of every political persuasion, men and women of different skin colors and different languages.

So, Christ has offered us this seat at a table filled with both friends and foes. Each of us must decide either to hold on to animosity, or, out of love for our Host, to seek reconciliation with the guests we wouldn't have invited! As we share the meal, we learn to love those whom Christ loves.

This World Communion Sunday, may we learn to live in peace with all God's people as we celebrate the mystery of Christ's presence with us at the table.

Prayer: Dear Lord Jesus, teach us to love the way you do so that we may help to invite people to your table. Amen.

Kevin L. Thomas (Alabama)

LIVING BY FAITH

READ Hebrews 11:1-16

Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.

— Hebrews 11:1 (NIV)

Recently, I used the guidance system in my car to travel to an unfamiliar location. As I drove through morning traffic, I wondered, *What if I get there, and it's not the right place? Should I have consulted a map?* My only assurance was that the guidance system had successfully directed me to other places in the past.

I thought of a difficult family situation about which I had been praying. I had been tempted to quit praying about it until I realized that the promises of scripture were like my guidance system. God would guide me to a place where God's promises would be fulfilled.

Jesus often talked to his disciples about faith, praising those who had confidence in him. He said, “Everything is possible for one who believes” (Mark 9:23). Faith, according to Jesus, was a prerequisite to answered prayer.

Finally, the voice in my guidance system said, “You have arrived at your destination.” If I had given up on the system's directions, I would not have found the place I was looking for. Likewise, if I give up on God's promises, I may never see them fulfilled. Even as I was driving my car by faith, I saw that I had to live by faith in God's promises.

Prayer: Dear God, thank you for being faithful to your promises. Help us to receive them by faith so that we will be able to see them in reality. Amen.

Zoe M. Hicks (Georgia)

PRAYER WORKSHOP

Unexpected Encounters

In fall 2016, I was asked to write and deliver the eulogy of a friend. As I reflected on my friend's life and the part of it that intersected my own, it occurred to me how full my life is with people I would never have expected to encounter and how many relationships I have forged with unlikely characters. These relationships have meant much to me, have changed me as a person, and have influenced the direction of my life.

The circumstances and backgrounds of my friend and me were completely opposite. He was in his late eighties; I am in my early thirties. He was talkative and outgoing; I am quiet and reserved. He was from a rural Kentucky town; I am from a town some three-and-a-half hours southwest in Tennessee. There was no reason our paths should have ever crossed or that we would grow as close as we did.

We never know who might enter our lives or when. I've heard it called "providence" or "good fortune" or "our life's path." I am not sure what I would call it. But the older I become, the more I see the beauty and grace in the unexpected twists and turns life takes, and the more I see God's hand in it all. The little turning points are the best — the ones we hardly notice until, distanced from that moment in our lives, we look back and think, *What if that hadn't happened? Where would I be? Who would I be?*

The lives of many characters in scripture met at unexpected and unpredictable moments — often setting the stage for God to act in mighty and wondrous ways: Elijah and the angel, Joshua and Rahab, Ruth and Boaz, Jesus and the first disciples, Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch, and, as the cover art for this issue depicts, Pharaoh's daughter and Moses.

No one knows the shape his or her life will take. We do not know what the journey from any one point in life to another will look like, whom we will encounter along the way, or what unanticipated events will occur. A baby rescued from the bulrushes by Pharaoh's daughter led the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt. Who could have imagined it?

I run into trouble when I try too hard to control the outcome of every situation and wear myself out trying to make things happen the way I think they should. Sometimes I wonder about the opportunities that I have missed or think that I have missed. But I look back and see all the wonderful deeds God has done in my life, most of which I had not planned nor set out to do. I couldn't have planned them or made them happen had I tried. This should tell me something.

As I was driving home from my friend's funeral, I reflected on all the unforeseen joy, wonder, and wisdom that he had brought me and which continue to guide my decisions and actions. Then I resolved in the days to come to do my best to live a life marked not by control but by trust — trust in God and trust that God knows what God is doing in my life and in the lives of those around me. If the pattern of my life and the lives described in scripture are any indication, I can know that even when the road gets tough, God is working something wonderful within me. I will encounter it around the next corner, seemingly out of nowhere.

Several meditations in this issue address relinquishing control to God — especially in unexpected and trying circumstances. You may want to read again the meditations for September 1, 2, 9, 13, 16, 17, 19, 23, 24, 25, and 29, and October 4, 5, 6, 8, 14, 16, 24, 25, and 26 before responding to the reflection questions below.

Questions for Reflection:

1. Name one person in your life who has played an important role in your Christian journey. How and when did you and this person meet? In what ways has he or she influenced and shaped your life?
2. Recall an unexpected "twist" or "turn" you have taken. What was occurring in your life at the time? In what ways did this event affect the direction of your life?



— Andrew Garland Breeden
Associate/Acquisitions Editor

TUES
OCT 3
2017

KEEPING FAITH

READ Romans 4:13-25

[Abraham] grew strong in faith and gave glory to God. He was fully convinced that God was able to do what he promised.

— Romans 4:20-21 (CEB)

As I entered high school, I decided that I wanted to be on the school's wrestling team. When practices started in late October, I realized that the sport would be much harder than I had originally thought. Then, when the official matches began, every time I stepped on the mat, I lost. Daily, I thought about quitting the team. I was tired of putting in so much work and effort only to lose.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
Faith in God requires practice and commitment.

When the season ended, I had only five wins and a whopping twenty-seven

losses. However, I decided to forget about that season and to work hard the next year. I trained and practiced. When my sophomore season of wrestling came, I was a much better wrestler. I climbed to the number four spot in the state rankings.

Practicing our faith requires a similar commitment. Sometimes, I start to lose faith in God and in myself. I now realize that instead of losing faith, we can become more committed and grow stronger in our faith through prayer, reading the Bible, and worshipping with other Christians. God will give us the strength to keep moving forward.

Prayer: Dear God, help us to stay true and committed to our faith. Amen.

Jared Russell (North Carolina)

LEADING BY EXAMPLE

READ Romans 16:1-16

Tell the older women . . . they are to teach what is good, so that they may encourage the young women.

— Titus 2:3-4 (NRSV)

When my husband and I were in our twenties, we had each started a small business in a new town. Also, we had started going to a new church with our two young children. Members of this church family surrounded us with love, gave us responsibilities in the church, and offered us many meals in their homes. I became comfortable with the older women — one in particular — who helped me in my bookstore.

At the age of 62, this woman was preparing to go to the mission field. Before she left, I gave her a recording of hymns from our store. One hymn was "I Come to the Garden Alone." At the time, I did not know that this was her favorite hymn. She hugged me and blessed me for ministering to her. I never forgot that moment because all along I thought she was ministering to me.

When I became pregnant again and decided to sell the bookstore, she found a buyer for my bookstore because she, a businesswoman herself, knew more people in town than I did. Her encouragement during that season of my life was a beautiful example of the women described in Titus 2:3. Leading by example, teaching by kindness and help, she has been an example for my own life.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
I can minister to someone through my example.

Prayer: Thank you, Lord, for giving us the privilege of serving you by serving others. Amen.

Doreen Frick (Nebraska)

THUR
OCT 5
2017

THE STARS

READ Psalm 19:1-6

The psalmist wrote, “*When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is mankind that you are mindful of them, human beings that you care for them?*”

— Psalm 8:3-4 (NIV)

One night I was sitting in my room thinking about my problems when my father called me out to the porch. He

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
Today I'll be on the lookout for God's unexpected blessings.

said, “Look at the sky; there are so many stars. What a beautiful night!” I had never stopped to consider the beauty of the night sky. His statement made me

forget about my problems for a little while. As I looked up, I answered, “Yes, they are beautiful.”

Sometimes we are so busy thinking about our trials that we forget that God always gives us something good to enjoy, even in the midst of our difficulties. It may be our loving family, or even a beautiful flower, the fresh air, the singing of the birds, or the beauty of the stars.

That night as I looked up to the sky and enjoyed the stars, my problems had not yet been resolved. But I realized that just as the stars keep shining even when I do not notice, God blesses us in all circumstances because God's love for us is unconditional.

Prayer: Thank you, God, for the beautiful things you have given us to enjoy even in the midst of our troubles. As Jesus taught us, we pray: “Father, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us. And lead us not into temptation” (Luke 11:2-4, NIV). Amen.

Meliana Santoso (East Java, Indonesia)

THE ULTIMATE DO-OVER

READ 2 Corinthians 5:17-21

FRI
OCT 6
2017

[God] has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation.

— Colossians 1:22 (NIV)

“I want a do-over!” my eight-year-old grandson cried out. He did not like the consequences of the choice he had made in a game he and some other children were playing. He wanted a second chance — to undo what he had done.

Many of us are held hostage by the past, living with regret and fear, burdened by shame, or bowed down by guilt. Thoughts like these condemn us: *if only I could unsay my harsh words; if only the wrongs I did could be righted; if only I had taken a path different from the one I took. If only I could have a “do-over.”*

The good news for us is that God is the God of new beginnings! God loves us and does not want us to remain stuck in the past. No matter what we have done, God can and will forgive us. Through the sacrifice of Jesus, God carried all our guilt and shame to the cross. God is willing and able to create in us clean hearts, to forgive our failures, and to remember them no more.

The apostle Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians, “If anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!” That's the ultimate “do-over!”

Prayer: Holy Father, help us to put our past wrongs behind us. Create in us clean hearts and begin new life in us. Amen.

Karen H. Perez (Georgia)

SAT
OCT 7
2017

INVESTING OURSELVES

READ Mark 6:35-44

The disciples said, “Send the people away so they can go to the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat.” But [Jesus] answered, “You give them something to eat.”

— Mark 6:36-37 (NIV)

The meeting with the eighth-grade boys was getting nowhere. They seemed more interested in making jokes and distracting one another than in deciding what to do on their service day. Finally, the leader sitting next to me had had enough. “Guys, stop!” he began. “You’re in eighth grade now. You’re the leaders of this junior-high ministry. Those in the

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
God can do miraculous things through me.

lower grades and the friends you bring are going to look to you as examples. We need you all to be invested.”

Sometimes we adults in the church need to hear

the same admonition. We might think that we can just show up but not actually participate. I used to make the mistake of thinking that my witness of the gospel to others consisted solely of telling them about Jesus and bringing them to church. Then the rest of the work would be done by the Holy Spirit and the ministry staff.

That’s not the picture that our reading in Mark gives us. The disciples told Jesus to send the people to buy food. But Jesus answered, “You give them something to eat.” Jesus wanted the disciples to be part of his work. Despite our faults and limited resources, God can do miraculous things when, like the disciples, we invest ourselves in God’s work.

Prayer: Dear God, thank you for inviting us to participate in your ministry despite our faults and limitations. Amen.

Keith Osmun (Ohio)

LISTENING TO GOD

READ 1 Samuel 3:1-10

Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight.

— Proverbs 3:5-6 (NIV)

One Sunday as I walked to my car after worship, I heard the chimes of the church ringing out a beautiful hymn. I felt as if God were sending me on my way!

During the week the chimes still ring out; however, I don’t very often hear them. When I do, they are usually mixed in with the noise of the day. I may be driving or shopping or talking to someone — only vaguely aware of the sound of the chimes; I don’t actually stop to listen.

Isn’t that like my relationship with God? I attend worship and leave with a strong feeling of God’s presence. During the following days of the week, however, I get caught up in the routine of life. Then when a need arises, I call on God in prayer, trying to fit my faith into my busy schedule.

Like the church chimes, God is always communicating with us. But we must still the voices around us, slow down the pace of our life, and not just talk to God but listen. God’s voice of love and compassion is what we need to carry us through the week. God is speaking — how well are we listening?

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
How am I listening for God’s voice today?

Prayer: Loving God, teach us to make time for you in our lives. You are our hope and salvation, and nothing is more important than being with you in prayer. Amen.

Gary Dowdy (Tennessee)

MON
OCT 9
2017

GOD'S STEADFAST LOVE

READ Psalm 25:8-12

All the paths of the LORD are steadfast love and faithfulness, for those who keep his covenant and his decrees.

— Psalm 25:10 (NRSV)

I was diagnosed with breast cancer in 1999 and decided to have surgery to remove the tumor and keep the cancer from spreading. Each of my many chemotherapy treatments produced debilitating side effects. My body changed; my hands, feet, and nails turned dark; my hair fell out.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
Life is a blessing from God.

I suffered physically and mentally, but my faith in God helped me to stand strong and stable. When I found out that I had cancer and would undergo treatment, I spent time in prayer, read the Bible, asked for mercy, and asked other believers to pray together that God would hear my cry. The Bible encouraged me, helping me remember that God has the answers I seek.

During that time 18 years ago, God gave me a life work: preaching the gospel. Now I see life as a blessing from God. Even when we are troubled in body and mind, we can rely on God's grace and receive God's mercy with humility. As the psalmist wrote, "Good and upright is the LORD."

Prayer: Thank you, God, for your healing, kindness, justice, and steadfast love. Amen.

Nitraporn Laddakornbhand (Chiang Mai, Thailand)

GOD'S SHOULDERS

READ Psalm 112:6-8

Their hearts are steady, they will not be afraid.

— Psalm 112:8 (NRSV)

While my family and I were serving as full-time missionaries in Haiti, we went to stay in the Dominican Republic for a month. We were on a tight budget so we had to walk for miles to see the sites and visit the beaches. Eventually, the walking became too much for my three-year-old son. On those long walks, he would cry, "Go shoulders! Go shoulders!" so that I would lift him to my shoulders for the rest of the trek.

One day I said, "Son, I'm tired too," to which he replied, "You can't be tired. You're my daddy!" Human fathers can be tired, even too tired to carry their children or their burdens. Our heavenly Father, on the other hand, never tires or grows weary. God's back never hurts too much to carry our burdens, and God is always available for us when we surrender and cry out for help.

Everyday life can be hard enough, but having to deal with severe trials can overwhelm us. We may try to carry burdens ourselves, but sooner or later we realize that we can't do it alone. When danger, disease, or darkness pushes us over the edge, God waits to catch us as we surrender our burdens to our heavenly Father.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
I can see beyond my trials to God's love.

Prayer: Holy God, help us never to forget that while you are holy, you are also close to each of us. Teach us to trust in your strength. Amen.

Chris Surber (Virginia)

WED
OCT 11
2017

WHO AM I?

READ Matthew 16:13-20

Jesus said, “I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church.”

— Matthew 16:18 (NRSV)

Now that I am between careers, I find it challenging when I first meet people. In the past, when asked what I do for a living, I have loved being able to say, “I am a student” or “I am a teacher.” In a few short words, these descriptions summarized aspects of my identity that I was proud to claim. For instance, implicit in the statement, “I am a teacher,” is the understanding that I love to learn, that I work hard, and that I care about children.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

No matter what, I am a child of God.

While having an identity rooted in a particular title was comforting, unemployment has given me the opportunity to pause and think: *Who am I, really?* What I do professionally might reflect some of my priorities and my hopes, but it doesn’t reveal who I am at my core.

In today’s quoted scripture, Jesus doesn’t tell Simon that he is a prophet or a disciple or a teacher. Instead, Jesus calls him by name: *Peter, rock*. And this identity has not come from Simon Peter’s work or his actions but from his faith — his declaration that Jesus is the Messiah, the son of the living God. So it is with me. My primary identity comes from my faith, from being a child of God.

Prayer: O God, thank you for loving us and valuing us, no matter what job we have or do not have. Amen.

Teresa Coda (Rhode Island)

THE AJO LILY

READ Isaiah 35:1-2

Why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet . . . even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these.

— Matthew 6:28-29 (NRSV)

When we visited Ajo, Arizona, we went on a tour of the desert south of the city. There we spotted the Ajo lily, or desert lily. It has a beautiful flower, like a smaller version of the Easter lily. It only grows in the deserts of the American Southwest and in northern Mexico. The Spanish called it the Ajo lily because the native people prepared food with its bulbs, which tasted like *ajo* (the Spanish word for *garlic*).

When I saw this beautiful plant thriving in such an arid, sandy environment, I was amazed at how God creates beauty in even the most desolate places.

God brings beauty into our lives in the same way. Even in our deserts of hurt, loneliness, and despair, God reminds us that we can thrive where we are planted and share the beauty of our faith with our neighbors. When we dedicate our lives to God, we can look past the ugliness we may see in ourselves to see God’s beauty in our lives and in the world.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

God can make love bloom anywhere in my life.

Prayer: Dear Lord, remind us that where we see ugliness you see beauty; where we see fear, you see hope. Amen.

Ken Claar (Idaho)

FRI
OCT 13
2017

NEVER TOO OLD

READ Psalm 92:1-15

[The righteous] will still bear fruit in old age, they will stay fresh and green.

— Psalm 92:14 (NIV)

Several months ago, another pianist joined our church choir, making four of us. I felt discouraged, useless, and humiliated. I asked God, “Am I supposed to retire at age 61?” Then, when my sister needed help after surgery, I decided to attend another church that had earlier hours for worship.

After only a month, I was told that this small congregation planned to start a choir. Immediately, I knew that God was calling me. I offered to be the pianist, and I have enjoyed participating in this choir ever since.

This change has not only helped me to understand the sermons better, since the language is my mother tongue, but I have enjoyed making new friends while also keeping in touch with friends at my old church.

From this experience, I have come to understand that as long as we are willing, God will guide us and prepare a way for us. No matter our age, if we listen to God’s calling, we can joyfully serve.

Prayer: Dear God, thank you for guiding us when we feel lost. Help us to remember that we can always serve — if we are willing. Amen.

Doris Yeung (Samut Prakan, Thailand)

PERSEVERING

READ Hebrews 10:19-25

Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who has promised is faithful.

— Hebrews 10:23 (NRSV)

I began to doubt my choice of an English instructor when I struggled to get a grade better than a C in his class. Then I got another C, but there was only one correction on my paper. He had deleted words I had inserted for dramatic effect. When I questioned the teacher about my grade, he told me that I could be artistic when I got paid for my writing, but not in his class. That near-miss grade helped me to persevere and to end the class with an A.

We often see the rewards of perseverance through the stories in scripture, including the story of Bartimaeus. Jesus was walking toward Jerusalem when Bartimaeus, a man who was blind, called out to him. (See Mark 10:46-52.) As the crowd tried to quiet Bartimaeus, he could have given up; but he cried out all the louder, asking Jesus to heal him. Jesus did heal him, and Bartimaeus followed Jesus, glorifying God. Surely Bartimaeus was glad he hadn’t given up.

When we find ourselves in circumstances beyond our control and see no possibility of a good outcome, we may become discouraged. But even when we think nobody cares, we can persevere and continue doing right because God is faithful. At times our lives may seem dark, but God helps us to live in hope.

Prayer: Dear God, encourage us, and help our hope to exceed what our eyes see. Amen.

Charles J. Huff (Illinois)

SAT
OCT 14
2017

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
God gives me strength to persevere.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
As long as I am willing, God can find ways for me to serve.

SUN
OCT 15
2017

JOY!

READ Psalm 105:1-7

Give praise to the LORD, proclaim his name; make known among the nations what he has done. . . . sing praise to him; tell of all his wonderful acts.

— Psalm 105:1-2 (NIV)

Sixteen members of my family piled into an army bus and drove for miles on a freezing winter night, bound for the airplane hangar where we would await the return of my son from Afghanistan. New babies were waiting to meet their daddies. Young wives were dressed up to greet their husbands, and excited children were running around. Parents like me were thrilled that the Lord had given us another chance to hug our children. Joy, peace, and praise filled the room.

When it was announced that the plane had been sighted, we cheered and waved flags. As the soldiers marched into the hangar, I scanned each face, looking for my son. When I finally saw him, I praised God for my son's safe return. At that moment, everything was perfect.

Many moments can bring us great joy — watching a bird in flight, the glory of a sunrise, the birth of a child, or falling in love. In all of them we can stop and praise God for allowing us to feel such joy. We can resolve not to miss these moments of joy which are God's daily gifts to us. And our gifts in return are gratitude, praise, and service. Today we can give thanks to the Lord, call on God's name, sing praises to God, and make known among the nations all of God's wonderful acts.

Prayer: Dear Lord, make us truly thankful for all your gifts of big and small moments of joy. Amen.

Lisa Ward (Alabama)

CATCH THAT THOUGHT

READ Isaiah 43:1-3

We take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.

— 2 Corinthians 10:5 (NIV)

My husband and I often played boules with our children on holidays. The object of the game is to roll larger, heavy balls across the ground toward a smaller target ball. Part of the game's challenge comes from the way the ball interacts with uneven ground. It is frustrating when my ball lands near the target, but then rolls farther and farther away!

My thoughts are sometimes like the ball. The ground of my life might be relatively flat, with no particular problems I am aware of. Yet sometimes a fearful thought springs up, and before I know it, my imagination has supplied a whole string of fears, leaving me a long way from where I was aiming.

When fear pulls me away from Jesus, I refocus my heart and mind on him through prayer, praise, and Bible reading. I want Jesus to be the center of my life. I turn to the Lord for forgiveness and cleansing, knowing that he has already died for me. Fearfulness seems to be part of who I am, but I am learning to trust in the Lord. Rather than be filled with fear, I can choose to put my faith in Christ every day.

Prayer: Help us, Lord, to know your presence and to bring all our thoughts back to you as our center. Amen.

Claire Bell (South Australia, Australia)

MON
OCT 16
2017

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Today I will praise God for all the joys in my life.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Jesus is always with me. I will choose to trust him.

TUES
OCT 17
2017

STICKS AND STONES

READ James 3:2-12

*With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father. . . .
Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing.*

— James 3:9-10 (NIV)

Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me. That saying is meant to guard us from the harsh-

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

I will speak words of
God's grace and peace
to someone today.

ness of words. In reality, however, we all know that words do hurt, and they can harm someone easily. A thousand words spoken in kindness can be

undermined by one word spoken in anger. A moment's worth of criticism can overshadow a day's worth of praise and appreciation. As much as I'd like to think that I am the perpetual victim in the war of words, I realize that I am also the culprit. The words of others may wound me, but I also wound others with my words.

James warned us about the destructive potential of our words. May our prayer be that we speak words that bring life and joy, not death and despair. May our hope be that the words we speak will build people up, not tear them down. We can encourage, praise, and lift people up. Words can wound, but Jesus has redeemed our words. May we speak life and grace to all and ceaselessly praise his name.

Prayer: Thank you, Jesus, for redeeming us. May we continually reflect your grace in all that we say. Use our words to bring life, joy, and encouragement to others. Amen.

Chuck Kralik (Missouri)

STEPPING OVER

READ 1 Timothy 6:17-19

The angel answered [Cornelius], "Your prayers and gifts to the poor have come up as a memorial offering before God."

— Acts 10:4 (NIV)

Over 200 steep steps lead to the Sacre Coeur Basilica in Paris, France. My daughter Caroline and I climbed those steps to visit the church, located on a bluff overlooking Paris. When we finally made it to the top, we stood on quivering legs and beheld the beautiful panorama.

Leaving the church, we saw a woman lying across the doorstep, directly in our path. She wore a threadbare orange coat and a green scarf. She seemed cold, dirty, and helpless. I had to step over her to get out of the church. As I did, I thought to myself, *Do church members step over people like her too?* Both Caroline and I felt God nudging us to help the woman. Caroline turned back and knelt down. She pressed a few Euros into the woman's hand and said, "God loves you." The woman's face brightened with a smile.

Our encounter with that woman made me realize that I often "step over" people in need. It can be easy to go through our days without noticing the needs of others around us. Though we may not be able to help everyone, we can give as the Spirit leads us. Showing love to others is showing love to God.

Prayer: Dear Father, lead us to people we can help today. May our generosity be motivated by our love for you. Amen.

May Patterson (Alabama)

WED
OCT 18
2017

THUR
OCT 19
2017

COFFEE WITH GOD

READ Psalm 34:8-14

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

— Psalm 34:8 (NIV)

I love to sip a cup of coffee while I read *The Upper Room* and spend time in quiet prayer. As I reflect on this daily ritual, I realize that since I've been having "coffee breaks" with God, my devotional time has become more special to me. I am truly coming to know God in a more intimate way; and as I

grow in my relationship with God, I am coming to love the Lord more and more.

The wonderful taste of God's goodness, grace, and unconditional love far surpasses the delicious taste

of my favorite caffeinated beverage. I am experiencing the goodness of the Lord through my quiet times; and I am learning, day by day, how awesome God is. Daily rituals can help us enjoy and look forward to quality time spent with God in prayer and devotion each day. In this way we can truly "taste and see that the LORD is good."

Prayer: Dear Lord, thank you for helping us to know your goodness and love. We pray as Jesus taught us, saying, "Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen" (Matt. 6:9-13, KJV).

Tina L. Chaves (New Jersey)

RATTLING FEED BUCKETS

READ 1 John 3:1-3

Thus says the LORD, he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine.

— Isaiah 43:1 (NRSV)

My father worked most of his life at a racing-horse farm in upstate New York. An exercise rider and jack-of-all-trades, he had a special affinity with the horses he worked with every day. He had nicknames for them all and was always the first one into the training barn each morning. After turning on the light, he would call out the nicknames of the horses. They would whinny, snort, and rattle their feed buckets as they recognized my father's voice.

As Christians, we can take a lesson from those horses. Do we discern God calling out our names, or are we too involved in our own pursuits to hear God's voice? God is calling us to respond faithfully in everything we do — even in the mundane tasks.

We cannot rattle our feed buckets like the horses did for my dad. But we can respond to our call by doing God's work in the world.

Prayer: Creator God, may we hear your call and respond by following you every day. Amen.

James C. Seymour, Jr. (New York)

FRI
OCT 20
2017

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
Today I will faithfully
do God's work.

SAT
OCT 21
2017

A SONG IN THE NIGHT

READ Acts 16:22-31

Elihu said, “*Where is God my Maker,
who gives songs in the night?*”
— Job 35:10 (NIV)

As a child, I was often frightened at the setting of the sun. Whether we had electric power or not, when I looked through

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
In times of distress, I will ask
God to give me a song.

the window at the
disappearing sun, the
darkness staring back
at me brought terrible
dreams every night.

When I grew older, I
learned to sing some of

the hymns we sang in church whenever I was afraid. Those songs had a way of comforting me in times of darkness.

Now, more often than not, I face the fear of academic failure and the concern over whether or not I will be able to keep up financially with the costs of school. At such times, God gives me a song that soothes me and brightens my day. Songs that have been written and sung in nights of distress are powerful indeed. Paul and Silas knew that. They ignored the darkness of their prison and sang all the same. Their singing — and their faith — brought salvation to their jailer.

When we surround ourselves with the songs of our faith, God can bring songs to our hearts and minds — songs that will comfort and sustain us in times of distress.

Prayer: Dear Lord, brighten our nights with songs that can strengthen us and give us hope. Amen.

Ogwiji Ehi-kowochio Blessing (Oyo, Nigeria)

EIGHT ACRES OF ENCOURAGEMENT

READ Acts 4:32-37

*Let us consider how we may spur one another
on toward love and good deeds.*
— Hebrews 10:24 (NIV)

Several years ago my church wrestled with the prospect of building a new facility. Our location on a corner lot downtown prohibited expansion, and parking was limited. Our congregation could not grow at this location. But the task of raising funds to design and build a new facility seemed daunting. Then there was the question of a new building site. Where would we relocate? After much prayer and deliberation, the congregation voted to move ahead.

At the outset of the campaign a friend of the congregation, a builder, contributed a major gift. He donated eight acres of prime property to serve as the new building site. Not only did this generous gift encourage us, it motivated members of the church to make generous gifts as well. The church reached its financial goals, and we have been worshiping in our new facility for the past five years.

The builder's gift of property was just what our congregation needed to take the next step in growing our church. Our gifts, great or small, can be the encouragement someone needs to answer God's call.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
How can I encourage the
faith of others through
acts of generosity?

Prayer: Dear Lord, help us to look for ways to encourage others. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Wayne Greenawalt, Jr. (Illinois)

MON
OCT 23
2017

A MOVING EXPERIENCE

READ Psalm 121:1-8

The psalmist wrote, “My help comes from the LORD, who made heaven and earth.”

— Psalm 121:2 (NRSV)

Because of a job change, my husband and I uprooted our family. We moved from our beloved home in Missouri to

Houston, Texas. We knew that we would miss not only our family, church, and friends but also living in the beautiful rolling hills of the Ozarks. The most

difficult part of this decision was that two of our five children would be separated from us, one in college and the other in high school. My heart felt as if it were breaking in two.

Before our relocation, a friend gave me several scriptures to read for comfort. One was Psalm 121:1: “I lift up my eyes to the hills — from where will my help come?” I wondered, *How can I look to my beautiful hills when they are 800 miles away?*

As I spent much time in prayer, I realized that the hills in the psalm were only symbolic, that I could look to God, my Creator, and receive comfort, strength, joy, and peace. It was time to trust that God would take care of our children back in Missouri. Soon we found a church, made new friends, and have come to know that God has blessed us right here in this place. We may not have hills, but we are content. As long as we have God, we are always home.

Prayer: Creator God, we thank you for your comfort during times of upheaval and for the assurance that no matter how far we travel, you are always there. Amen.

Adora (Jenny) Calvert (Texas)

CLOTHED IN THE SPIRIT

READ Acts 2:1-12

Jesus said, “I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.”

— Luke 24:49 (NIV)

My friend invited me to be one of four groomsmen in his wedding. After arriving in America, I was taken to a shop where all the groomsmen were fitted for our tuxedos. Even after a long journey from Europe, I could relax — not having to worry about all the details of the role my friend had entrusted to me.

In a similar way, our Lord prepared his disciples. He was aware of their inadequate understanding of how to follow God’s will daily. God sent the Holy Spirit to give them wisdom and strength: “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

The apostle Peter tells us that we all can be clothed with the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38). What a wonderful prospect! We don’t need to worry about buying or making that attire ourselves. The groom had prepared everything I needed for his wedding. How much more can we trust our lives in the hands of God, who fills us with the Holy Spirit and empowers us every day to serve our Bridegroom!

Prayer: Dear God, thank you for constantly being within us through the gift of your Holy Spirit. Amen.

Taavi Hollman (Estonia)

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
God is my home.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
God will equip me for the role I am to play in the kingdom.

WED
OCT 25
2017

STONES IN OUR PATH

READ Nehemiah 2:1-8

Paul wrote, "[I am] confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus."

— Philippians 1:6 (NIV)

Our land is called "Rock Hill Farm" because of its never-ending supply of large stones. These stones have proven to be a nuisance over the years, but they have also given our structures and land great strength. We always have a need for them.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
God can use the "stones" in my life to do great things.

Reflecting back over the past 34 years, I have identified other heavy "stones" in my path: hurtful words, rejection, fear of failure, iso-

lation, illness. I have spent many years collecting these stones — piling them up and sulking over them in despair.

Nehemiah may have felt such despair when he heard that the walls of Jerusalem had been broken down and the gates burned. But he set out to rebuild the city walls and ultimately bring restoration to Jerusalem. Nehemiah's path wasn't easy, but he was able to take the stones of hate, pain, and despair, pile them up, and rebuild a great wall — which gave his people hope.

We might look at life and see many stones that have caused us great hurt and sadness, but we also have a choice: we can use them to build a tower of misery in our lives, or we can let God build great foundations of joyful lives that can give lasting hope to others.

Prayer: Loving Father, when we are hurting, help us to seek your comfort, healing, and direction. Amen.

Samantha Parsons (West Virginia)

THE PERFECT GIFT

READ 2 Corinthians 9:6-16

Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights.

— James 1:17 (NIV)

In 2014, one of the world's most popular music groups teamed up with one of the world's largest computer companies to give a free copy of the band's latest music to anyone who was registered with the company's music service. While many people were delighted with this gift, others complained that they were given something they did not ask for or want. Complaints were so numerous that the company had to devise a way for those who did not want this gift of music to remove it from their computer devices. Essentially, this allowed customers to give back the gift.

This caused me to reflect upon the many gifts and blessings God has given me. Do I appreciate and thank God for the gifts I have received, or am I upset because my gifts are not ones I would have chosen or wanted? Am I envious of the gifts and talents others have? Do I feel my gifts are too small or insignificant to use in God's service? First Corinthians 12:6 reminds me of the different kinds of gifts, service, and activities and that "in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work." Most important, we can accept God's greatest gift: "eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 6:23).

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
The gifts God has given me are priceless.

Prayer: Dear God, thank you for the many gifts you have given us, especially the gift of eternal life through your son, Jesus. Amen.

Mark Karpinski (North Carolina)

FRI
OCT 27
2017

SURROUNDED BY PRAYER

READ Luke 5:17-26

Some men came, carrying a paralyzed man on a bed . . . finding no way to bring him in because of the crowd they went up on the roof and let him down . . . into the middle of the crowd in front of Jesus.

— Luke 5:18-19 (NRSV)

Several sisters in our church have organized a women’s prayer ministry. After worship, when the rest of the church

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

I can help to meet the needs of my brothers and sisters through prayer.

members go home, we gather in a small room for prayer. In worship our congregation prays for needs and concerns of the community. But often people have

problems they feel they cannot tell the whole church about; so they will ask our women’s group to pray for them. How encouraging it is for people to know that someone is praying for them personally and helping them to carry their burdens of unresolved problems or unforgiven hurts!

When tragedy came to my home, my dear sisters reached out to me. At our prayer meeting all I could do was cry; but without asking any questions, they silently stroked my shoulders and head. Two sisters promised to fast for me. Just as the friends of the paralyzed man in Luke’s Gospel carried him to Jesus, so my sisters laid me before Jesus through their loving hands and hearts. Galatians 6:2 tells us to “bear one another’s burdens.” When we weep with those who are weeping and rejoice with those who are rejoicing (see Rom. 12:15), we are offering prayers to the Lord, who sees our compassion and works to lighten the burdens of those for whom we pray.

Prayer: Dear Lord Jesus, thank you for the help we receive through prayer. We want to be your hands and your feet on this earth. Amen.

Lilya Teplyuk (St. Petersburg, Russia)

BEAUTY IN CREATION

READ Psalm 29:1-11

The God of glory thunders, the LORD thunders over the mighty waters.

— Psalm 29:3 (NIV)

My husband, Gary, and I visited Niagara Falls, Ontario, eager to see the famous waterfall. As we walked down the street, neon signs and bright banners advertised food and souvenirs. Loud music blared from tourist attractions. Laughter filled the air.

As we passed the amusement area and crossed the street to view the falls, the sound of rushing water filled my ears. Sunlight frosted the water as it cascaded over the cliff. I stared in awe. I thought, *Only God could create such power and beauty!* I forgot about the loud street behind me as I praised God for such a magnificent wonder.

Seeing Niagara Falls reminded me that true fulfillment has only one source. Fleeting distractions — an arcade, a fancy car, or the latest smartphone — can entice us. But when we see God’s power in nature, these distractions lose their appeal. Experiencing God through creation, praise, prayer, and reading the Bible can fill us with true joy — joy that will never end.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Today I will focus on the things of God.

Prayer: Thank you, Lord, for the beauty you have created and the love that makes everything else fade in comparison. Help us always to focus on you. Amen.

Susan Thogerson Maas (Oregon)

SUN
OCT 29
2017

A FOREST OF FAITH

READ Matthew 13:31-35

Though [the mustard seed] is the smallest of all seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants.

— Matthew 13:32 (NIV)

In the 1940s, Floyd Smith ordered a small packet of bamboo shoots in the mail and planted them on his property in Prattville, Alabama.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
God can grow small seeds of faith into a forest.

Today, his land is preserved as a county park, and visitors can enjoy what is now a thick bamboo forest with plants standing over sixty feet tall.

Jesus compared God's kingdom to small things that grow big. In today's passage he likened the kingdom to a tiny mustard seed that grows into a very large plant and to yeast that spreads through the entire dough. The work of Jesus began with a small group of humble followers in Galilee, but his message soon spread across the globe.

Our efforts, though they may seem small, over time may be used by God to accomplish great kingdom building. Like the small packet of bamboo shoots that grew into a forest, as we continue to grow in our relationship with Jesus Christ and sow seeds of faith in the lives around us, God can use our lives to grow a forest of faith in others. We may think that our part in God's kingdom is small; but God can turn our little into much.

Prayer: O God, show us how to plant seeds of faith in the lives of those around us so that your kingdom will continue to grow in all of us. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Amelia Rhodes (Michigan)

"DO YOU WANT TO GET WELL?"

MON
OCT 30
2017

READ John 5:1-15

[Jesus] asked him, "Do you want to get well?"

— John 5:6 (NIV)

A few years ago fallen power lines sparked a wildfire that devastated more than 5,000 acres of pristine bushveld (savanna). The fire made the veld look like a lunar landscape. A vast stretch of land was reduced to black and gray ashes with many burnt tree stumps protruding from the ground.

On a recent visit to the area, I could still see evidence of the fire. But on closer inspection, I could see evidence of healing. At the base of almost every burnt tree stump, I could see the supple green shoots of a small new tree. The veld is definitely in a slow process of healing. The evidence of the new trees gave me reason for optimism and renewed hope.

Our lives can resemble that burnt landscape — especially when devastating, unexpected events occur.

With time, however, if we look closely, we may find that healing is on its way. Tragedy and disasters can overwhelm us, but we

as people of hope can call out to God seeking new growth and new life. When our lives are uncertain and in need of renewal, Jesus asks us, "Do you want to get well?" Are we willing to risk answering, "Yes"?

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
What new way is God showing me today?

Prayer: Dear Lord, help us turn to you for healing when we feel devastated by the circumstances of our lives. Amen.

Roland Rink (South Africa)

TUES
OCT 31
2017

MY SECRET FEAR

READ Isaiah 41:9-10

The LORD said, “Do not fear, for I am with you.”

— Isaiah 41:10 (NIV)

For many years I carried a secret fear that people would find out that my family and I had once been homeless. The rejection

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
Faith in God can
overcome all fear.

I had felt when I was homeless was very painful, and I did not want to feel that pain again. My children would beg for their school friends to come over and play. But I

would refuse, explaining to them that one of the parents might have seen us while we were living in the car or remember my standing outside holding a sign that asked for food.

Fear crippled me, rendering me helpless. I wanted a normal life and friendships with other people, but I was too fearful that my secret would come out. One day in church, as I sat in the last row so I could get in and out fast and not have to talk to anyone, a man went forward to tell his story about abusing alcohol and other drugs. He told the congregation that Jesus had saved him and turned his life around.

I realized that it must have been scary for this man to tell his story, but with Jesus by his side he had the courage to do it. As I listened to him say, “I am not here alone; Jesus is with me,” my own fear seemed to melt away. Two weeks later, I told my own story to the congregation. Instead of being rejected or seeing people turn away from me, I found the love and acceptance of God’s family.

Prayer: Dear Father, thank you for always being with us, for giving us a faith stronger than any fears. Amen.

Judy Ann Eichstedt (Oklahoma)

AN EASY PLAN TO USE

The Upper Room

IN SMALL GROUPS

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

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

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

For a more detailed meeting guide, see
www.upperroom.org/devotional/smallgroup.asp.

SEPTEMBER 6: *Higher Ways*

1. How do you relate to the writer’s need to get things done in order to feel productive and complete? How important is it to you that you accomplish daily tasks on your to-do list? In what ways do you respond to interruptions in your daily plans?
2. How do you think Jesus felt when he was interrupted by requests to heal people? What does the life and example of Jesus teach us about interruptions?
3. Recall a time when God interrupted your plans. What was the situation? How did you feel about the interruption? What did you learn from this experience?

4. What characters in scripture had their plans interrupted by God? With which of these characters do you most closely relate? Why?
5. The writer of today's meditation speaks about leaving undone the things God wants us to leave undone. What does God want you to leave undone today?

SEPTEMBER 13: *Making the Call*

1. Recall a time when you needed to forgive someone and it was challenging to do so. What was the situation? Why was it hard to forgive the person? Were you able to fully forgive the person? What is your relationship with this person like today?
2. When have you needed forgiveness for something you have done to another person? Did the person forgive you? What was this experience like for you?
3. When a person asks for forgiveness for something they have said or done, how can we tell whether he or she is being sincere? Is it even important that we can tell? Why or why not?
4. Does God require us to forgive someone who has not asked for forgiveness, who has not repented?
5. This meditation speaks about God's power to make all things new. When have you experienced God making something new in your life? What would you like to ask God to make new in your life today?
6. Can you imagine a situation when forgiveness would not be the best choice? Describe that circumstance.

SEPTEMBER 20: *Differing Roles*

1. First Corinthians 12:20 is the quoted verse for today's meditation. Name some other scripture verses that speak to the idea that we each have unique gifts to offer God.
2. Why do you think it is that people sometimes attribute more importance to serving one role in church over another? Are there certain roles that are more important than others? Why or why not?

3. Has there ever been a time in your life when you have resisted God's call to take on a certain task or help in a situation? What was God calling you to do? How did you answer God's call? What was the outcome?
4. Name some of the gifts and different roles in which people serve within your faith community. In what ways are each of these contributions important? What is your gift and how do you use it to serve?
5. If you could serve God in any one role in which you do not currently serve, what would it be and why?

SEPTEMBER 27: *Prayer Changed Me*

1. Do you think God hears the prayers of everyone in the world at once? If so, how? Are some prayers more important to God than others? Why or why not?
2. Name a time when prayer changed you or altered a situation in your life. Were you the one praying or were prayers being offered for you or both? How did prayer change your situation?
3. How often do you pray? Do you have a favorite place to pray? Are there certain times of day in which you like to pray?
4. Think of a time when prayer did not change the result of a situation but did change your outlook on the situation. Describe the experience. What did it teach you about prayer?
5. In what ways has prayer changed your relationship with God over time? In what ways would you like prayer to change your relationship with God in the future?

OCTOBER 4: *Leading by Example*

1. Name some people who have been an example to you on your faith journey. In what ways were they an example? Is there a memory that stands out when you think of people who have taught you by example?
2. Whom in scripture do you rely on as an example for your life? Why do you rely on them?
3. In what ways can you be an example to others on their

journey of faith? What have you learned while on your walk with God that you would like to teach others?

4. Name two specific ways in which you can minister to another person in the coming week. What do you hope to show this person through your actions?
5. If you could write a note of gratitude to someone who has had a deep and abiding influence on your life but who is now deceased, what would the note say? What would you want this person to know about his or her effect on your personal and spiritual growth?

OCTOBER 11: *Who Am I?*

1. Have you ever had an experience like the writer of today's meditation in which it has been difficult to describe who you are as a person? Why was it difficult? What did this experience teach you about yourself?
2. How do you define your identity? How do you think God wants us to define our identity as God's children? Are these two the same for you? Why or why not?
3. The title of this meditation is "Who Am I?" How would you answer this question in two sentences or less? Given your answer, is there anything that you would like to change about yourself? If so, what?
4. Do you think other people see you as you see yourself? Explain.
5. In what ways does your church community play a role in shaping your identity and the way you understand yourself? Would your answer to the question "Who am I?" be different if you were not part of a church community?

OCTOBER 18: *Stepping Over*

1. When have you "stepped over" someone in need of help? Do you regret not offering to help the person? What will you do differently the next time you pass someone in need?
2. The writer of today's meditation says, "Showing love to others is showing love to God." Describe a time in which

you have shown love to God by showing love to another person. What did you do for this person? How did he or she respond?

3. Should we give to everyone who asks us for help? Is there ever a time when it is okay not to help someone in need?
4. Have you ever had to ask someone for food or money? In what ways did this change your attitude toward those who ask you for help?
5. Do you think most people naturally want to help others? What does scripture say about showing compassion to others? How did Jesus model compassion in his life and ministry?

OCTOBER 25: *Stones in Our Path*

1. What "stones" have caused you hurt and sadness? How did these "stones" affect your life? How did you cope with them?
2. Recall a time when you endured difficult circumstances that would ultimately lay the foundation for something good to happen to you. What was the difficult situation? What good came from it? Should we expect good to come from every difficult situation we experience?
3. Has someone ever said to you, "Everything happens for a reason"? Do you believe this statement to be true? Why or why not? Is this a helpful thing to say to someone suffering pain, anguish, or grief?
4. Can you think of an obstacle that a family member or friend is facing today? In what way — big or small — could you help this person? What is your prayer for him or her?
5. What "stones" do you carry with you today for which you would like the prayers of your faith community?

IN TIMES OF/ FOR HELP WITH . . .

- Assurance: Sept. 25; Oct. 2, 23
 Bible reading/study: Sept. 3, 7, 10, 11, 18; Oct. 2, 3, 9, 16, 28
 Change: Sept. 1, 5, 6, 19, 27; Oct. 3, 22, 23
 Christian community: Sept. 7, 10, 26; Oct. 4, 7, 8, 21, 22, 31
 Christian example: Sept. 3; Oct. 4, 7, 19, 20, 24
 Compassion: Sept. 28, 30; Oct. 8, 27
 Encouragement: Sept. 2, 12, 14, 18, 19, 21, 27; Oct. 1, 4, 8, 9, 14, 16, 17, 19, 21, 22, 27
 Evangelism: Sept. 3; Oct. 7, 9, 12, 29
 Family relationships: Sept. 13, 17, 18, 20
 Fear: Sept. 1, 2, 10, 13, 18, 22; Oct. 6, 12, 16, 25, 31
 Giving: Sept. 22, 26; Oct. 18, 22
 God's call: Sept. 4, 6, 16, 20, 21; Oct. 13, 20, 22
 God's love/forgiveness: Sept. 2, 11, 12, 23, 26; Oct. 5, 6, 9, 15
 God's guidance: Sept. 14, 21, 25; Oct. 2, 13
 God's presence: Sept. 12, 14, 17, 18; Oct. 1, 5, 8, 16, 19, 23
 God's provision/strength: Sept. 9, 12, 13, 15, 16, 24, 25; Oct. 3, 10, 14, 21, 23, 24
 Gratitude/Praise: Sept. 5, 7, 8, 10, 16, 23, 26, 27; Oct. 5, 15, 16, 17, 24, 26, 28
 Healing/Illness: Sept. 24; Oct. 9, 20
 Joy: Sept. 20, 25, 27; Oct. 13, 15, 23, 25, 28
 Materialism/Earthly distractions: Sept. 6, 8, 10; Oct. 28
 Mission/Outreach/Serving: Sept. 4, 14, 19, 22, 26, 28, 30; Oct. 4, 7, 13, 18, 21, 22, 29
 Obeying/listening to God: Sept. 1, 6, 7, 16, 17, 27; Oct. 8, 13, 23, 24, 31
 Peace: Sept. 2, 10
 Perseverance: Sept. 7, 15; Oct. 14
 Insecurity: Sept. 3; Oct. 2, 25
 Prayer: Sept. 2, 6, 27; Oct. 27
 Relationship with God/Christ: Sept. 8, 10; Oct. 17
 Reconciliation: Sept. 13; Oct. 1
 Salvation: Sept. 25, 26; Oct. 6, 16, 17
 Spiritual gifts: Sept. 4, 19, 20, 21, 26; Oct. 1, 15, 26
 Spiritual growth through hard times: Sept. 5, 9, 15, 18, 24, 25; Oct. 3, 9, 10, 13, 14, 25
 Transformation/New beginnings: Sept. 8, 14, 27; Oct. 6
 Transitions: Sept. 1, 5, 19; Oct. 3, 4, 22, 23
 Trusting God: Sept. 1, 6, 16, 23; Oct. 2, 8, 23, 24, 31
 Working life/profession: Sept. 10, 18; Oct. 9, 11, 20, 23
 Worry: Sept. 2, 10; Oct. 12, 24

