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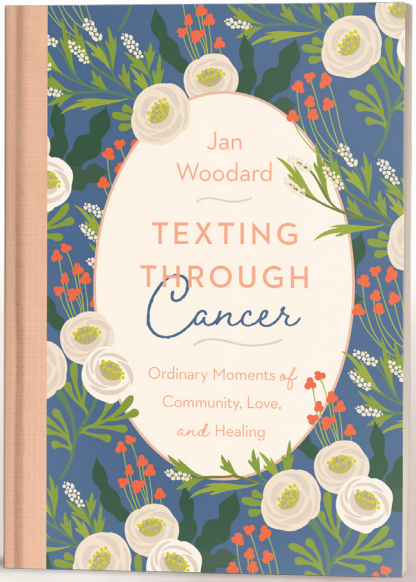

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COVER ART INTERPRETATION

Elijah and Elisha

Artist: Judy Racz
(Australia, Contemporary)

Interpreter: Erin Pearce

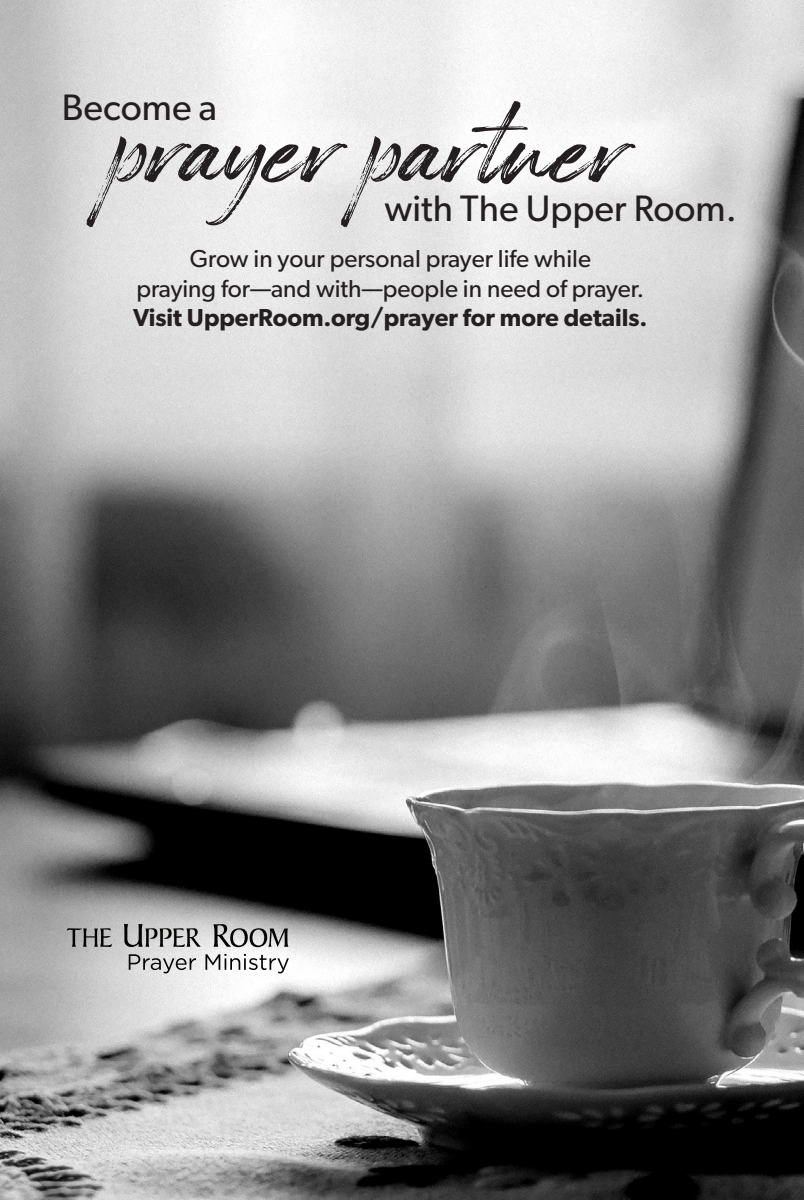
Three times in 2 Kings, chapter two, Elisha said to Elijah, "As the LORD lives and as you live, I won't leave you" (CEB). Knowing Elijah would be taken into heaven soon, Elisha was a loyal disciple and stayed by Elijah's side. Eventually "a fiery chariot and fiery horses appeared and separated the two of them. Then Elijah went to heaven in a windstorm" (v. 11).

This is the scene that artist Judy Racz has beautifully depicted in her painting named for the two prophets. Her striking use of color highlights the magnitude of the moment when Elijah was taken up in a fiery chariot. The cool blues and greens contrast with the warm, vibrant orange. Indeed, this must have been a stunning moment for Elisha.

Before this point in the story, Elijah asked Elisha, "What do you want me to do for you before I'm taken away from you?" (v. 9). Elisha replied, "Let me have twice your spirit." The Hebrew word that he used for spirit is *ruach*, which is translated "spirit," "breath," or "wind" in different places throughout scripture. Elisha received Elijah's spirit and went on to work wonders.

"As the LORD lives and as you live, I won't leave you," said Elisha. Are we as committed as Elisha in our own discipleship? When the road is long and treacherous and the path is unclear, how well do we stay the course? Just as Elisha received the *ruach*, it can also empower us to remain focused in our lives of discipleship and accomplish more than we ever thought possible.

Cover image courtesy of Judy Racz. © Judy Racz. Prints of cover art are available from judyracz1@gmail.com.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Always Worthwhile

Jesus said, *"The Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you."*

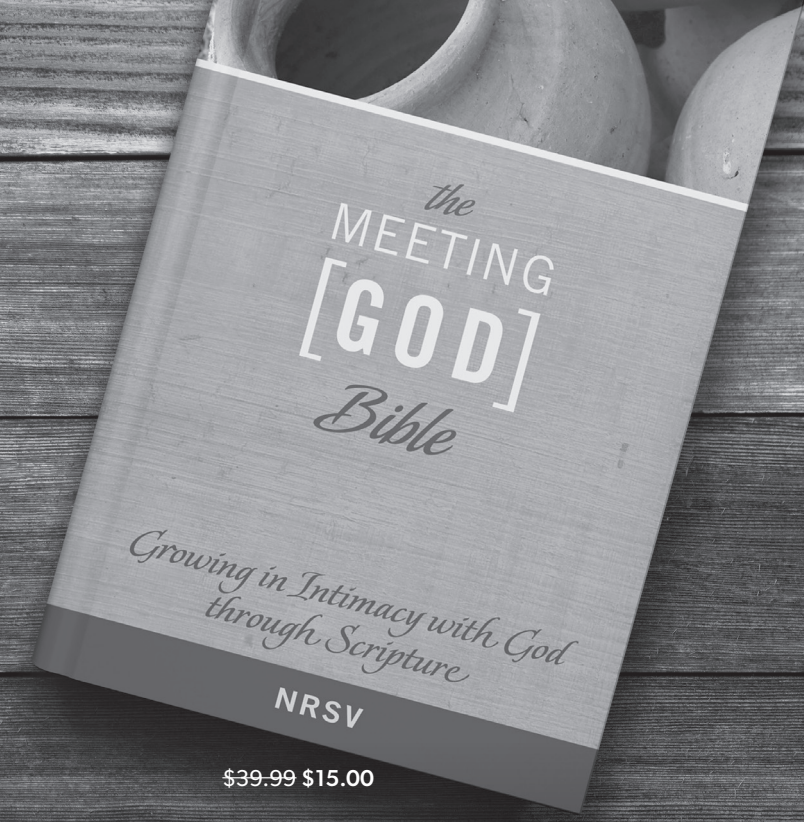
— John 14:26 (NIV)

As a mother, wife, and full-time editor, I nearly always feel as if I have too much to do and not enough time or energy to do all of it as well as I would like. Nearly everyone I know feels this way at some time or another. In facing daily challenges and especially in facing the injustice and suffering in the world, perhaps it is human nature to wonder: *What if I can't give enough? What if the best I can do is not good enough? Should I even try?* The writers in this issue share stories of faithful courage and perseverance that offer a resounding and encouraging response: Yes! Efforts toward love and justice — even seemingly insignificant ones — are always worthwhile.

On the Day of Pentecost, God sent the Holy Spirit to dwell among us so that we would never have to depend solely on our own strength. Even when we think that what we can do or give is not enough, it is still worth doing what is right, giving what we have, and being who we are for the good of the world. The Holy Spirit — our advocate and comforter — rekindles the message of Christ in our hearts and sends us out into the world to love our neighbors.

Thankfully, God does not ask for perfection, only our faithful participation. Our loving God continually calls us back to rest and renewal, then sends us out with the strength and power of the Holy Spirit to love and serve God's world once again.

— Lindsay L. Gray
Editorial Director



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It is a goal of the Gujarati edition team to develop a mobile application to make the devotional guide more accessible and to expand distribution.

ODIA

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KIND WORDS

SAT MAY 1 2021

Read Luke 6:20-31*

Do to others as you would have them do to you.

— Luke 6:31 (NIV)

My apartment is close to a large shopping center, and I often visit the grocery store there. Even though there are many checkout counters at the exit of the grocery store, I usually push my shopping cart to one familiar cashier who has always been very friendly and efficient.

One day she looked tired and sad, which was unusual. I wanted to cheer her up, so I told her how much I like her friendly attitude in serving customers. She looked at me and her eyes were filled with tears. She said, "Thank you for your kind words. My husband died yesterday in the hospital, and you have consoled me."

I believe that God's Spirit prompted me to start that conversation. How often do we notice the needs of our neighbors? How often do we respond to God's prompting to speak a word of kindness? If we are willing to listen, we may hear God's voice guiding us to speak a word that someone needs to hear.

Thought for the Day
Today I will look for an opportunity to speak God's peace to someone.

Prayer: Loving God, help us to listen for your prompting, and help us to speak words of kindness and peace to those around us. Amen.

Maire Simm (Tallinn, Estonia)

Prayer Focus: **CASHIERS**

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

SUN
MAY 2
2021

"WHY, GOD?"

READ Judges 6:11-20

"Pardon me, my lord," Gideon replied, "but if the LORD is with us, why has all this happened to us?"

— Judges 6:13 (NIV)

As I write, the COVID-19 quarantine is in place, and my husband, who is in a skilled-nursing facility, is close to death. Thankfully, I was allowed in to see him one last time. Needless to say, life seems very difficult right now. Further, once he passes on, I know it will be too risky to even consider having friends and family gather to comfort and support me. I will be alone — and yet not alone. God is with me, though I must admit I occasionally share Gideon's sentiments. When I came upon that scripture during my daily quiet time, I laughed out loud.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
God understands my frailty and my fears.

I suspect I'm not the only believer who has asked this question in times of trial. Reassuringly, God didn't condemn Gideon but continually worked with him, increasing and building Gideon's faith. Gideon, to his credit, also went forward trusting God despite his doubts and thereby triumphed.

In times of doubt, we can feel free to be honest with God, knowing God understands. However, we can also bravely follow where God leads, trusting in spite of our fears.

Prayer: Dear Father, sustain us when we question you and have doubts about situations we do not understand. Give us the faith and courage to follow you anyway. Amen.

Sandra Still (North Carolina, USA)

Prayer Focus: **FAMILIES UNABLE TO GATHER IN TIMES OF GRIEF**

THE SCARY BALLOON

MON MAY 3 2021

READ Isaiah 43:1-7

The LORD says, *"Do not fear, for I am with you."*

— Isaiah 43:5 (NRSV)

One day I was in the kitchen when suddenly I heard my young dog barking in another room. When I went to see what was going on, I found him staring at a "Happy Birthday" balloon attached to a vase of flowers on a table. The balloon was moving only slightly but enough to distress him. Something that I knew to be quite harmless had created much anxiety in him.

So it often is with situations that we do not fully understand. When I was a teenager, my father's heart attack loomed before me, filling me with the fear that he might die. Many years later my own heart attack filled me with similar apprehension about the future. Was I going to live? Would I be able to continue to work? What about my family?

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
God's presence helps us live with peace and confidence.

I found great reassurance in my faith and in God's word and presence. In today's scripture reading a message of comfort and reassurance comes to the beleaguered Jewish exiles in Babylon. God assured them that he was with them still and working out all things for their ultimate good.

It is good to know that whatever our fearful situations — illness, loss of a job, financial struggles — all are opportunities to remember God's love for us and to receive God's grace and courage to move forward in faith.

Prayer: Help us, heavenly Father, to release fear and reclaim faith in the face of trouble, trusting that you will see us through. Amen.

J. Leland Collins (Virginia, USA)

TUES
MAY 4
2021

SPIRITUAL CONNECTION

READ 2 Peter 1:3-8

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

— 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 (NIV)

The older I get, the more I try to maintain a healthy body by eating well and getting regular physical exercise. However, there are days when grabbing a fast-food meal is more appetizing and easier than cooking a healthy meal at home, and the thought of sitting on my sofa catching up on one of my favorite shows is more appealing than changing my clothes and driving to the path where I take my 40-minute after-dinner walk. I know that in the long run I will feel better and be happier with myself if I put in the extra effort, but it takes discipline to get those rewards.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
I can improve my spiritual health by reading God's word and praying daily.

The same can be said about my spiritual health. It takes discipline to make the extra effort to maintain a close relationship with God. There are so many distractions in our world, and sometimes it takes diligence to turn away from things like checking emails and social media and to settle into prayer and Bible reading. Today's quoted scripture reminds us that God wants us to rejoice, pray, and give thanks. If we make the effort to set aside time to do this daily, our reward can be a healthy spiritual connection with God.

Prayer: Dear Lord, help us to quiet the distractions so that we can spend precious time with you. Amen.

Linda L. White (Illinois, USA)

ALWAYS READY

WED MAY 5 2021

Read Acts 17:16-34

Preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage — with great patience and careful instruction.

— 2 Timothy 4:2 (NIV)

My mother was not a Christian, and I never tried to force my faith on her when we talked. Then one day my mother said she wanted to go to church and know the Jesus that I know.

I have similar experiences with some of the sellers in the traditional market where I like to shop. I do not criticize those who have different beliefs. I praise those who are diligent in worship, and I do not hesitate to express my faith.

One day a seller in the market was curious about what makes me so joyful, so I told her about Jesus — the source of my joy. She did not immediately accept Jesus, but after several years she told me that she wanted to know Jesus and be joyful too.

Thought for the Day
I can share the love of Jesus at any time.

This seller reminds me of Damaris and Dionysius from today's reading, who believed Paul's teaching about Jesus even though others did not. In today's quoted scripture, Paul encouraged Timothy to preach and to be prepared both in and out of season. We can learn from Paul to express our faith to others anywhere and at any time and leave the rest up to God.

Prayer: Dear Lord, let our lives be to your glory. Help us to share the joy of your word with others. Amen.

Linda Chandra (Banten, Indonesia)

THUR
MAY 6
2021

FREE FROM ANXIETY

Read Psalm 121:1-8

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

— Philippians 4:6 (NIV)

When I was in middle school, I went through a three-year period when I was injured several times. While playing basketball, I suffered a concussion, broke my wrist, and sprained my ankle. Every time I healed, I got hurt again. I became anxious even stepping on the court because I was scared something bad was going to happen.

Thought for the Day
In times of anxiety, I will look to God for guidance and comfort.

Finally I decided to ask God for help, and God renewed my strength and courage. I also realized how much I had gained from my experiences. Not being able to play for long periods of time helped me to see how much I loved basketball. I also learned how to play the game more safely, which will allow me to be active for a long time to come.

Our struggles and the anxiety they can cause are part of life, but we don't have to go through them alone. When we pray and trust God for help, God will see us through our toughest situations. Most of the time after what I am worrying about has passed, I realize that I don't need to worry because God is looking out for me all the time.

Prayer: O God, bring peace to all who are suffering and courage to all who are afraid. Amen.

Adam Pitman (North Carolina, USA)

TRUE WEALTH

FRI MAY 7 2021

Read 1 Peter 4:8-11

God loves a cheerful giver.

— 2 Corinthians 9:7 (CEB)

It always gives my heart a lift in the morning to put out some crumbs for the squirrels and birds in the yard outside my apartment. I enjoy watching them come and busily feast on their find. Although I know it's our heavenly Father who ultimately provides for all creatures (see Matt. 6:26), I love that I get to be an instrument in that process.

I love the fact that God's care can flow through me to those in need. But I don't have much money, and I often feel frustrated that I can't do more. Yet I give whatever I can and feel blessed to be able to do so.

Then I remind myself that true wealth is having something — anything — to give away. Such wealth means sharing something of myself. It means being able to alleviate suffering or just enrich another's life. In addition to whatever financial resources I have, my spirit rejoices when I can offer a kind word, a listening ear, a home-cooked meal, godly advice, an encouraging smile, a thoughtful gesture, or simply my time.

Thought for the Day
My smallest gift can be a huge blessing.

Even if all I have to give are crumbs, I am indeed rich when I give to others with love.

Prayer: Dear Father, help us always to give cheerfully, as you so faithfully give to us. In Christ's name we ask this. Amen.

Victoria Walsh (Montana, USA)

Prayer Focus: **THOSE WHO DO NOT FEEL EQUIPPED TO DO GOD'S WORK**

SAT
MAY 8
2021

BY GOD'S GRACE

Read Ephesians 2:1-10

It is by grace you have been saved.

— Ephesians 2:5 (NIV)

Two years ago I visited a well-known pottery factory in Northern Ireland. The pottery made there — vases, figurines, bowls, and dinnerware — is crafted to very high standards. I took advantage of my visit to join a group being guided through the production process.

Thought for the Day
God does not discard me;
God redeems me.

The final stage — quality control — especially drew my attention. Each item was individually inspected. If an article was found to be blemished in any way, it was smashed into pieces and discarded. Many of the items set aside for destruction had faults so minor I had trouble finding them.

As I watched the destruction of the imperfect pieces, I thought how crucially significant it is that God does not treat us that way. Ephesians 2:5 says, "It is by grace you have been saved." By the grace of God, our salvation does not depend on what we have done, but on God's grace through Christ — who Christ is and what he has done for us at the Cross.

We don't deserve salvation, and we cannot earn it; but God gives it to us anyway. So when we respond to God's call, God will never reject us.

Prayer: Loving God, help us to remember that it is only by your grace that we receive your salvation. We are grateful for the assurance and joy it brings. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Awlwyn Balnave (British Columbia, Canada)

LIVING WORD

SUN MAY 9 2021

READ 2 Peter 1:12-19

All who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God.

— Romans 8:14 (NRSV)

Every morning before school and work, our family spends time together reading from *The Upper Room*. We have done this since our son, now 10, started kindergarten. It gives us a positive way to start our day, and it helps us turn our focus toward Jesus.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
I can help make God's word come alive for others.

We use the online edition of *The Upper Room*, so there have been a few times when we have experienced a glitch where our screen displays only part of the day's devotional. When this occurs, my son and I will guess the rest of that day's message and what happened to the writer. My son generally paints an uplifting picture of how he believes Jesus had a positive effect on the writer's life.

As Christians we have clues to help us interpret God's messages for us. The Bible is our compass, explaining God's gift of eternal life and salvation. And our church family, Bible study groups, and fellow believers are key witnesses to God's grace.

As a parent and as a Christian, it is my duty to make sure that God's message is not merely a story or words on paper by reflecting my faith through my actions. While each day has its challenges, the Holy Spirit has guided our family to become more like Jesus — obeying, forgiving, and loving together.

Prayer: Dear Lord, guide us to use your living word as a testimony for others who are coming to know Christ. Amen.

Melissa Yamaguchi (Hawaii, USA) — See back cover.

MON
MAY 10
2021

FOLLOWING GOD'S CALL

READ Exodus 4:10-17

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

— Proverbs 3:5 (NRSV)

Years ago, in responding to God's call to pastoral ministry, I had a choice: I could continue working at my full-time job and serve as a part-time pastor, or I could give up my job and be a full-time pastor. Both are valid ways to serve God. I felt a pull toward full-time ministry, but I was uncertain if I could support my family on a pastor's salary. I kept anxiously trying to calculate my expenses against that income, and it did not look promising. I trusted that if it was God's call, it would work out; but still I was uncertain. Finally I said, "Okay, God, if you open the door to a full-time church position, I will walk through that door." Then I felt peace and certainty about God's call.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
God's call for me can become clearer when I trust God to provide.

When we are trying to arrange life on our own terms, we cannot be fully attentive to God's call, whatever that may be. I have served as a full-time pastor for more than 25 years now and have never regretted that decision. If we begin to entrust the future to God, we can find peace and clarity.

Prayer: Gracious and loving God, help us to truly listen and respond to your call for our lives. Help us always to trust you. Amen.

Gene Lankford (Alabama, USA) — See p. 21.

IN THE STORM

TUES MAY 11 2021

Read Mark 4:35-41

[Jesus] woke up and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, "Peace! Be still!" Then the wind ceased, and there was a dead calm.

— Mark 4:39 (NRSV)

Due to a decline in my health, I was forced to give up my career as a primary school teacher. The job had enabled me to support my husband and myself while he finished his university degree. This time of financial difficulty has been debilitating for us. God is good and has provided us with the means to pay our rent and other bills and to buy food through government benefits. However, we have no money left over for other necessities.

As I'm writing this, my benefits will be cut in two months. I wonder how we will pay rent and cover our needs. My husband started a new job, but we're just scraping by. I try to focus on Jesus' calming presence, but the threat of homelessness strikes constant fear in me.

Thought for the Day
Even when I face troubles,
God will not forsake me.

This afternoon I was in the kitchen when the sky suddenly turned dark. A storm blew in with strong wind and hail. Then, as quickly as it came, the squall ceased and the sun came out. As I stood on the balcony and soaked in the sunlight, my faith was renewed as I realized that my husband and I are not going through this trial alone. God is with us in the storm, caring for and protecting us. And in time, God will bring us to the other side of the storm where the sun will shine again.

Prayer: Loving Father, thank you for your presence during our trials. When we face troubles, help us always to find you in the midst of the storm. Amen.

Madeline Twooney (North Rhine-Westphalia, Germany)

WED
MAY 12
2021

LISTEN AND ACT

READ Isaiah 20:1-6

At that time the LORD spoke through Isaiah son of Amoz.

— Isaiah 20:2 (NIV)

In today's reading, God tells the prophet Isaiah to remove his clothes and his sandals and walk around naked for three years. It was a drastic and visual message to Israel of the shame they would experience if they didn't listen to God's direction. Isaiah listened to God and took action.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
Today I will listen for and obey God's guidance.

While usually not as dramatic, the Lord continues to speak today, and when I hear God's call I try to take action. Early in the morning as I begin my workday, I often take a few moments to think about my friends and colleagues. *Do I need to reach out to someone today with a phone call or an email?* God's still, small voice often brings to my mind neighbors or co-workers or relatives. Sometimes the person is surprising — someone I have not connected with in months.

I make a list of the people who come to mind and reach out to them during the day. I write a short email to some people. I call others and speak with them for a few minutes or leave them a personal message. Often when I speak with someone, they will tell me, "I was just thinking about you today. I'm so glad you called." When this happens I smile and am assured that I am following the directions of a loving God.

Prayer: Loving God, help me to listen to your still, small voice and to obey your leading. Amen.

W. Terry Whalin (Colorado, USA)

THE FRAGRANCE OF LOVE

THUR MAY 13 2021

Read 2 Corinthians 2:14-17

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

— 2 Corinthians 2:14 (NRSV)

"Raise your hand when you can smell it," I told my science students at the beginning of an activity to help them experience the concept of diffusion. I stood at the front of the classroom and sprayed floral-scented air freshener into the air. Hands of the students at the nearest lab table shot up immediately. Then, by watching the pattern of raised hands, we were able to see how the scent diffused into the air from the front of the room to the back. Eventually all students indicated that they smelled the fragrance.

Today's scripture reading reminds us that we are called to be the fragrance of Christ's love for others, as "persons sent from God and standing in his presence."

Thought for the Day
Opportunities to spread God's love are all around me.

Just as the scent of the air freshener diffused away from where I sprayed it, the aroma of God's love spreads outward each time we serve others in the name of Jesus Christ. Offering a word of encouragement, providing a listening ear, or spending time with someone in need of support are just a few of the ways we can offer God's love to others and inspire them to spread that love in their corner of the world.

Today let's look for ways to be the fragrance of Christ in a world that needs to know and experience God's love!

Prayer: O God, because we are blessed by your love, we want to share it with everyone we meet today. Strengthen us in our work for you. Amen.

Jill Allen Maisch (Maryland, USA)

Prayer Focus: **SCIENCE TEACHERS**

FRI
MAY 14
2021

IDENTITY IN CHRIST

Read Galatians 3:23-29

In Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith.

— Galatians 3:26 (NIV)

During a recent job interview, I was asked to draw an identity wheel — a pie chart depicting the importance I place on my social identities. After I completed the wheel, I looked at how my gender, race, socioeconomic status, education, religion, country of origin, age, family structure, and physical ability shape and define who I consider myself to be. I realized how much I conduct my life according to these identities. Then I asked myself, *Where does Christ fit in? What if I leave no space for Christ to fill?*

Thought for the Day
How will I show my identity as a child of God today?

I don't think we need to renounce our social identities. After all, Paul didn't deny the reality of being Jew or Gentile, male or female. He simply said that we should act as God's children all the time, under all circumstances, no matter what our social identities are. We can clothe ourselves with Christ through the presence and guidance of the Holy Spirit, so that our way of living, our thoughts, our decisions, and our actions demonstrate our identity as children of God.

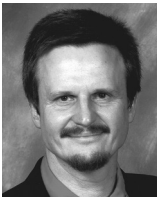
Prayer: Dear God, help us always to show through our actions that we are your children. Amen.

Luis David Arias (Bogotá, Colombia) — See back cover.

Real people. Real stories. Real faith.

Mike Starry (p. 47) volunteers in his church, for the National Park Service, and serves on the board for a history museum.

Sahana Mathias (p. 52) is a technical writer from India who works for a multinational company.



Gene Lankford (p. 16) is a pastor who enjoys traveling, theater, kayaking, and dabbling in genealogy.

Kim Sisk (p. 48) is a retired elementary school guidance counselor. She and her husband raise cattle and bees and make wine.

Jackie Johnson (p. 28) enjoys scenic hikes with her husband. She loves reading, writing, and spending time with her grandchildren.

Kevin McPoyle (p. 53) is a veteran, husband, father of four, grandfather to three, lousy golfer, and worse fly-fisherman.

Danielle Ripley-Burgess (p. 66) is a two-time colon cancer survivor, a communications professional, and an author.

Pierce VanDunk (p. 44) is a chaplain in a county correctional facility. He enjoys reading and hiking.

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The people pictured on this page did.

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

SAT
MAY 15
2021

MANGOES FOR EVERYONE

Read Psalm 107:4-9

[The Lord] satisfies the thirsty and fills the hungry with good things.

— Psalm 107:9 (NIV)

Every summer, the mango trees in my neighborhood produce an abundant harvest. Any fruit that falls over a tree-owner's fence are free to the first taker. Hundreds of beautiful, sweet mangoes fall to the ground when the wind blows, and each year I harvest the fallen fruit and freeze it to last the entire year.

Thought for the Day
How will I share God's merciful bounty with others?

When our city was hit by Hurricane Irma, we lost power for several days. All the mangoes I had recently preserved were ruined. I felt devastated. When mango season came the next year, I noticed many strangers looking for mangoes. People came on bikes, in cars, and on foot. I searched daily and found none. I felt defeated.

Finally, a few blocks away, I discovered two giant bags of mangoes lying by the side of the road for anyone to take. I praised God for the discovery, yet I felt a sense of guilt. I had blamed others for taking fruit that had never belonged to me, and suddenly a gift of mangoes was given to me.

That day I learned that God will provide for all God's creatures. Our hunger will be filled. Now when I collect mangoes, I leave some of the fruit at the edge of my yard as my kind neighbors have taught me to do.

Prayer: Dear Lord, thank you for all that you provide for us. Help us remember to share this bounty with one another in your holy name. Amen.

Gretchen Nelson (Florida, USA)

OUR PRAYER

SUN MAY 16 2021

Read Matthew 6:7-13

Be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is — his good, pleasing and perfect will.

— Romans 12:2 (NIV)

During my prayer time each day, I close my supplications to God with Jesus' prayer: "Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven." Were this powerful prayer to be answered in our time, I believe we would have peace in our world, and love would prevail over hatred. Justice would be achieved; the intrinsic worth of everyone would be fully recognized; there would be an end to all that causes conflict and division. God's creation would be cherished by all.

I believe that the power of the Lord's Prayer is that in the act of praying it, we are called to seek and live out God's will each day, relying on the Holy Spirit for guidance. We can share God's love with our neighbors. We can work for justice in our communities and nations. We can seek to eradicate prejudice when we see it. We can help to preserve the gifts of God's creation for future generations.

Thought for the Day
The Lord's Prayer is my call to action.

I pray that our lives will ever be inspired by our Lord's prayer as we seek to live fully as God's servants, wherever the Holy Spirit leads us.

Prayer: Dear Lord, let your prayer be on our lips and guide our actions each day. Your will be done. Amen.

Donald Huffman (North Carolina, USA)

MON
MAY 17
2021

FIRM BELIEF

Read Psalm 30:1-4

To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul. O my God, in you I trust; do not let me be put to shame; do not let my enemies exult over me.

— Psalm 25:1-2 (NRSV)

When my parents died, my younger brother and I lived together. Our financial situation was difficult. He drove a bus, and I was a schoolteacher. Then I was diagnosed with a brain tumor in addition to the lung problems that make breathing difficult for me.

Thought for the Day
God will help me and never leave me alone.

When my brother became engaged, it was my responsibility as the older sibling to plan the wedding. As the wedding date was set, I knelt down and prayed: "O my Lord, help us to fulfill all the necessary arrangements for the wedding."

God answered my prayer. Our friends and family offered their help and support. By the grace of God, all the wedding preparations went smoothly without any hindrance. My heart was filled with joy.

This experience strengthened my firm belief in God and in prayer. God listens to our prayers and fulfills our needs and requests when we pray with trust, faith, hope, and confidence.

Prayer: God of all comfort, help us to trust that you are with us in all situations, especially in times of trouble. As Jesus taught us, we pray, "Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, as in heaven, so in earth. Give us day by day our daily bread. And forgive us our sins; for we also forgive every one that is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil" (Luke 11:2-4, KJV). Amen.

Kausar Amen (Punjab, Pakistan)

HOPE OF RENEWAL

TUES MAY 18 2021

READ Isaiah 40:27-31

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)

Last week I watched what seemed to be a lizard party in my backyard. Lizards were everywhere — climbing on the fence, skittering from rock to rock, dodging behind flowers, perching on leaves, and gliding across chairs and concrete. They seemed so full of joy and life that I wondered if they knew that most of them were missing their tails. When I told my nine-year-old son the missing-tail saga, he told me not to worry. He said, "Lizards are amazing! They grow new tails!"

We may lose parts of ourselves — to chronic illness, grief, job loss, conflict, or some other event. Ironically, we may seem to lose all we want to keep and gain only new sorrow. We may even lose hope.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
With God's help, I can live in joy every day.

In all our loss, it is easy to think we will never be renewed or made whole. It's easy to think we will never find joy again, that we will never laugh or see the beauty in the world. However, today's verse tells us the Lord's promise: Those who trust in God will renew their strength.

We may never regain exactly what we have lost, but we can find joy in the certainty that God is with us and will renew us day by day.

Prayer: Dear God, remind us of your promise of renewed life. Help us to live each day with joy and hope in you. Amen.

Kadine Christie (Florida, USA)

WED
MAY 19
2021

TREASURED WORDS

READ Psalm 119:129-136

The unfolding of your words gives light; it gives understanding to the simple.

— Psalm 119:130 (NIV)

Granddad was a quiet man. But in the evenings when he settled on the sofa, poetry flowed from him. I loved to lean against his chest, my cheek on his worn, flannel shirt, and listen to the rumble and rhythm of the words as he spoke. He often recited Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's poem about the village blacksmith under the spreading chestnut tree. Knowing just when to pause or raise his voice, he transported me to another time and place. I was spellbound.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
Today and every day I will treasure God's word.

Granddad taught me that we learn from words when we treasure them. The verse from Psalm 119 above invites us to do the same with the words of God. As the source of all knowledge, God has much to teach us through the Bible. But the psalmist tells us that we'll miss the lesson if we skim over the words; rather, they're meant to be unfolded. Layer by layer, word by word, we open the divine gift. We read God's words until they're stamped in our memory and the light of understanding enters our hearts. Then those words can teach us wisdom, direct our steps, wrap us in comfort and peace, show us mercy and love, and bring us closer to God.

Prayer: Thank you, God, for your word. Help us to unfold it like a treasured gift so that it fills our lives and our hearts. Amen.

Cindy Tanquary Peavy (Alabama, USA)

HOLY SIGNS

THUR
MAY 20
2021

Read Acts 5:12-16

The apostles performed many signs and wonders among the people.

— Acts 5:12 (NIV)

God has given us many signs to show us how to know and follow our Creator. If we look up into the sky at night, we can see what astronomers tell us are millions of galaxies, each with more stars than the number of grains of sand on the earth — a sign of God's greatness (see Gen. 1:16). Yet another sign is God's rainbow as a promise that never again will God flood the earth (see Gen. 7:4; Gen. 9:11-16). The clearest and most powerful sign our Creator has given us is the Cross, which demonstrates how much God loves us (see John 3:16).

What signs can we leave for others? Maybe we can help build a new school or orphanage, either by joining a team or financially supporting and praying for such a venture. Other signs could be the food we leave at a food bank or clothes we donate to the homeless. Maybe the best sign we can leave is the encouragement, time, or prayer we invest to help point others in the direction of Christ Jesus.

Thought for the Day
What signs of God's goodness can I leave for others today?

Prayer: Dear God, thank you for the signs you have given us. Most of all we thank you for your great love for us. In the name of Jesus, who came to show us the way to you. Amen.

William Elliott (Northern Ireland, United Kingdom)

FRI
MAY 21
2021

EQUALLY BEAUTIFUL

READ 1 Corinthians 12:14-25

God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be.

— 1 Corinthians 12:18 (NIV)

A few years ago, my husband and I took a trip to the beachside city of Destin, Florida. I grew up in Colorado and had never seen the ocean up close. One morning, as I watched the sunrise and listened to the waves, I was overwhelmed. I thought, *God is amazing!* I pondered how different the coast is from the mountains in Colorado. Then I realized: in one part of the country the ocean displays the glorious and awesome power of God, and in another the mountains serve the same purpose. God also sets us each in different places — the place that will best display God's power and glory.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
I can display God's beauty where I am today.

Sometimes I've compared my life to others, thinking, *Surely I should be further along than this. Surely I should have discovered some gift or talent in myself by now*. But when I compare my life to someone else's, I miss the beauty God wants to display through me.

We all have different purposes, and no purpose is better than another — just different. The mountains and the ocean are equally beautiful and both display God's glory. So it is with us. We each have our own beauty, gifts, and talents — all meant to bring glory to God.

Prayer: Dear God, thank you for creating our beautiful world. Help us to glorify you wherever we are. Amen.

Jackie Johnson (Colorado, USA) — See p. 21.

A GOOD LIFE

SAT
MAY 22
2021

Read Revelation 21:1-5

This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.

— Psalm 118:24 (NRSV)

On May 1, 2018, the meditation in *The Upper Room* was about a young boy who sat on the stairs putting pebbles in his mouth. His mother took the rocks out, but he resisted going to the dining room where dessert awaited. Finally, when he saw a chocolate cake on the table, he stopped screaming and his eyes widened with joy. I wonder if I might be like that boy.

I am in my nineties and have enjoyed a good life, including 40 years as a minister. My wife, Jackie, and I have been happily married more than 70 years. As we grow older, I am increasingly reluctant for our lives on earth to end. Together we rejoice in each day God gives us, and we want to stay here as long as we can.

Thought for the Day
The gifts God offers me do not end with this life.

Easter assures us that eternal life awaits us in heaven. Old Testament prophets and the book of Revelation describe heaven glowingly, but we are not ready yet. We want to continue enjoying each other, our loved ones, and the joys and beauties of earth. But the boy in the meditation may be a good reminder for us. Maybe all the joys and beauties of earth will pale in comparison to what awaits us in heaven.

Prayer: Thank you, God, for our eternal life in Christ. Help us to await heaven with joy. Amen.

Gus Browning (Texas, USA)

SUN
MAY 23
2021

HOMETOWN MISSION FIELD

Read Mark 16:9-20

You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.

— Acts 1:8 (CEB)

I have often thought about what excitement and adventure international missionaries must experience as they follow the instructions given by Jesus in the Great Commission (Matt. 28:19-20 and Mark 16:15). Despite my interest, my husband and I have not yet felt called to serve in this way.

Thought for the Day
Offering to pray with my neighbors is a simple way to demonstrate God's love.

Recently, several churches in our small town joined together in teams to knock on doors and invite people to a series of revival meetings and to ask if they had any prayer concerns. I was surprised by how many people readily asked us to pray about a family need. This time of prayer opened the door to conversations about God's love and the life and teachings of Jesus. One person asked me if I was a "street minister." At that moment it occurred to me that I was on a mission trip — just two miles from my home.

Prior to his ascension, Jesus told his apostles they would receive the power of the Holy Spirit to be his witnesses in Jerusalem and to the ends of the earth. Although the gospel of Jesus would eventually be preached throughout the world, the good news would first spread from home to home in Jerusalem. In the same way, we can follow Jesus' command by serving as his witnesses, starting in our own hometowns.

Prayer: Thank you, God, for sending our helper, the Holy Spirit, so that we may serve as witnesses for Jesus wherever we are. Amen.

Nikki Dyess (Alabama, USA)

A HOPEFUL FUTURE

MON MAY 24 2021

Read Jeremiah 29:1-13

"I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."

— Jeremiah 29:11-13 (NIV)

Today's scripture came to me at a time when I felt hopeless. I was very poor, my son had committed suicide, and less than a year later my grandson died of cancer. It felt as if the bottom of my world had fallen out.

At first I was angry — angry at God for allowing this and angry at my son and the medical profession. Slowly but surely I came to realize that bad things happen to good people and that God has never promised us a life without pain and hardship. What God did promise, though, was love enough to wipe away our tears and to hold on to us when we do not have the courage to go on.

Thought for the Day
Through good and bad, God holds on to me.

It has taken a lot of time, and I am still recovering. But one thing I have learned is that in spite of all the bad circumstances, in spite of the pain, God is a good God who understands our pain and will never leave us or forsake us — even when it feels otherwise. All we need to do is to trust God's promises, cry out to our loving Father, and persevere. When we do, we can rest in the assurance that we will one day be reunited with our loved ones. God will do the rest.

Prayer: Father of light, we pray for all who have lost loved ones. Bring them peace and comfort. Amen.

Amanda Thompson (Gauteng, South Africa)

TUES
MAY 25
2021

GOD'S WINGS

Read Psalm 119:103-105

[God] will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you will find refuge.

— Psalm 91:4 (NIV)

In August of 1999, while working at my job as a kindergarten teacher, I received a life-changing phone call. The doctor's receptionist said, "Jan, the doctor needs to talk with you today, and you should bring your husband with you." Later that day the doctor explained that I had a walnut-sized tumor growing on the lining of my brain, and it would need to be surgically removed. I was in shock, disbelief, and I was scared. But we received tremendous support as well as prayers from all around the world.

Thought for the Day
What image of God brings me comfort?

All my adult life I have read *The Upper Room* every morning. One day during the weeks before my surgery, I read a devotion based on Psalm 91:4. The image of God's wings spreading over me like a mother eagle was powerful. I carried this image with me as I prepared for surgery. As we left our home at 4:30 in the morning to head to the hospital, I pictured God's wings over me. My surgery was successful, and the tumor was benign. Six weeks later I gratefully returned to my kindergarten students.

I learned from this experience that the Bible is not just a book filled with stories and sayings. It is God's word of compassion, love, and grace to guide us to abundant life.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank you for your word, which speaks to each of us. Help us as we study it to find a message of love from you. Amen.

Jan Leighton (Maine, USA)

MERCY

WED MAY 26 2021

Read Obadiah vv. 10-15

You should not gloat over your brother in the day of his misfortune, nor rejoice over the people of Judah in the day of their destruction, nor boast so much in the day of their trouble.

— Obadiah v. 12 (NIV)

Have you ever disliked someone so much that you delighted in their troubles? I have. I am ashamed to admit that my "enemy" and I are both missionaries. She runs a school through which I had hoped to obtain a visa. Her school hired me, but she and I did not get along; she fired me after six weeks. My hopes for a visa were dashed. My disappointment led to anger. Others tried to console me, but I wanted vindication, not peace.

Later, I heard that her school was having difficulties. And while I found satisfaction in her struggles, I had no peace.

Finally I remembered Obadiah's message, and I knew I needed to change. I began praying for her and her school. Slowly, as I prayed, my anger turned to mercy, and my disappointment turned to peace. As I prayed for God to bless her, God changed me so that I could genuinely rejoice in her success when her school began to prosper.

Thought for the Day
When I pray sincerely for an enemy, God can change my heart.

We experience God's love most fully when we pray for others to be blessed. True joy is found in God's mercy.

Prayer: Dear God, enable us by your love to bless those who have disappointed us and to pray sincerely for our enemies. Amen.

Andrew Michael Ardoin (Louisiana, USA)

THUR
MAY 27
2021

TIME IS PRECIOUS

Read Psalm 18:1-19

[The Lord] brought me out into a spacious place; he rescued me because he delighted in me.

— Psalm 18:19 (NIV)

As my grandchildren grow up, I see less and less of them. They are busy with school, friends, work, and social obligations. Several weeks ago, we visited our daughter on a Sunday afternoon. Usually we catch a peek of the grandchildren as they hustle about, caught up in their activities. We always get a smile and a warm hug as they race out the door to the next thing. But this Sunday was different. They stayed home and turned off their electronic devices for the afternoon. What a blessing to spend uninterrupted time with them!

Thought for the Day
Today I will set aside distractions to spend time with God.

On my way home, I reflected on how I spend time with God. Sometimes I am so busy with my own life that I rush through my prayers, anxious to get on with my next activity. Sometimes I get caught up in the latest book or TV show, which cuts into the time I could spend being with God. My busyness gets in the way of experiencing God's abiding love.

I decided then to spend time with God as my grandchildren spent time with me that Sunday afternoon, just enjoying God's presence with no interruptions and no expectations. These precious visits have become the highlight of my day.

Prayer: Dear God, thank you for always being present, even when we are too busy to notice. Help us to realize the joy of spending time in your presence. Amen.

Jane Rager (Virginia, USA)

FAITHFUL WITNESS

FRI
MAY 28
2021

Read Isaiah 46:3-9

Even to your old age and gray hairs . . . I will sustain you.

— Isaiah 46:4 (NIV)

Even though Dad had retired, he still received frequent invitations from local churches to preach on Sundays. But when he was 89 years old, he told me that he would be preaching for the last time the following Sunday. I began making plans for the seven-hour journey to hear his final sermon.

It was an emotional service for both of us. He knew his career as a minister was ending; I knew the torch was being passed. After the call to worship and opening hymn, Dad opened his well-worn Bible. And as he did, a remarkable change took place: his voice became stronger and the words came easier. Sixty-five years of sharing God's word gave him confidence to deliver that final message; he didn't need to read the scriptures he quoted because they were written on his heart. And while his words came a bit slower and he peered at his notes a bit longer to bring them into focus, the Holy Spirit still shone through his words.

Thought for the Day
No matter my age,
I can serve God.

As the service ended, I knew that Dad had preached two sermons that morning: one with words and a second with his long years of faithful witness.

Prayer: Dear God, thank you for people whose faithful lives show us how to share your good news. Amen.

JudyAnn Krell Morse (Iowa, USA) — See back cover.

SAT
MAY 29
2021

RAVENS AND ANGELS

Read Matthew 25:31-40

The ravens brought him bread and meat in the morning and bread and meat in the evening, and he drank from the brook.

— 1 Kings 17:6 (NIV)

I find Elijah to be one of the most interesting figures in the Bible. He suffered loneliness, persecution, humiliation, and hunger in grim desert places. But God never abandoned him. God heard Elijah's pleas, saw his tears, and sent ravens and angels to provide for his needs.

Thought for the Day
I will help another person today as God has helped me.

I can relate to Elijah's story. Recently, I was accepted into the doctoral program at a school of theology in Colombia. The school provided a scholarship for half of my tuition. The challenge for me was to pay the remaining half as well as housing and food costs.

God, with unfailing grace, sent "ravens and angels," warm and gentle people, to provide meals for me. Just as people provide such care for us, we are called to be "ravens" for others. Without a doubt, wherever we are, God counts on us to live out an authentic expression of our faith to help supply the needs of God's people.

Prayer: Merciful God, raise our awareness of those who do not have daily bread. Multiply our efforts to help as much as we can, wherever we can, whenever we can, as we pray, "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one" (Matt. 6:9-13, NIV). Amen.

J. Joel Sobalvarro Nieto (Francisco Morazan, Honduras)

THE LIGHT

SUN MAY 30 2021

Read John 8:12-19

The Lord is my light and my salvation.

— Psalm 27:1 (NIV)

When the hurricane slammed into our coastal town, our family was prepared. We had stockpiled water, food, flashlights, and batteries. Our children gathered in a large downstairs closet with their blankets and pillows, munching on snacks. We monitored the television coverage of the storm, hoping for the best. Although our backyard fence fell over and the wind tore at our windows, we were calm because we knew the storm would eventually pass.

Then the lights went out. The children started to cry, the television went off, and the roaring of the wind seemed louder than before. In total darkness, we turned on flashlights and lit some candles. Instantly everything seemed better, our fears subsided, and we were soon talking and laughing together.

Thought for the Day
God is my light.

That night as I looked at my family's faces in the candlelight, I remembered how often the Bible speaks of light. The book of Genesis tells us that God created light (see Gen. 1:3). The Psalms describe the Lord as "my light and my salvation" (Ps. 27:1). In the Gospels we hear Jesus proclaim, "I am the light of the world" (John 8:12). The lights went out in our house during the storm, but God's light will never go out in our lives. If we follow Christ, we will never walk in darkness.

Prayer: Dear God, thank you for filling our lives with your light. Amen.

Kathleen Harder (Texas, USA)

MON
MAY 31
2021

CONNECTED BY PRAYER

Read Philippians 1:3-8

Paul wrote, ***"I thank my God every time I mention you in my prayers."***

— Philippians 1:3 (CEB)

As a child brought up in a military family, I usually lived thousands of miles away from "home," which was my grandfather's dairy farm in rural Minnesota. One of my most cherished memories of my visits there as a child is that of my grandfather leading family prayer. Each day after he came in from milking, he would sit at the head of the table with his well-used Bible and his copy of *The Upper Room*. At the end he would pray for his family members by name.

Thought for the Day
Prayer connects us together in the bonds of love.

What touched me so deeply as a child was that he remembered me and prayed for me by name. We were often far from home, and I was often lonely — especially in a new place. I found a special comfort in the fact that at a farmhouse table every morning my grandfather prayed for me.

I am now the age my grandfather was then. I carry on his family tradition and pray for my family members by name. It helps me bring those who are dear to me closer, no matter how far away they are. Regardless of the distance between us, we are still held close as a family by prayer and the presence of God.

Prayer: O God, who calls us family, be with those we love this day, and hold us together in your heart. Amen.

Michael Johnson (Pennsylvania, USA)

Prayer Focus: **THOSE FEELING ALONE AND FAR FROM HOME**

A BROKEN WORLD

TUES JUNE 1 2021

Read Psalm 119:1-16

I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.

— Psalm 119:11 (NIV)

"It's broken!" Tears streamed down my child's face as water poured out of his snow globe, and the world inside was destroyed. This small toy, which had brought him so much joy, could not be fixed and now was a source of sorrow. I think that this is probably a bit of how God feels seeing the brokenness of our world. But unlike my son's snow globe, our world isn't being thrown away. God has a plan to redeem it, one that's already been put in motion through the birth, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

My son's broken snow globe was edged with glass and too dangerous to be kept. Likewise, our world is filled with sin, which brings danger with it. But God does not abandon us. Today's verse makes it sound simple: learn God's word and avoid sin. But while it may be simple, it's not easy. Although it's not always easy to get up early each morning to spend time with God, every time I do my day is better for it. God's word helps us grow in faith and reassures us that God is redeeming the brokenness in this world.

Thought for the Day
Reading God's word reminds me that God loves the world.

Prayer: Dear God, thank you for the gift of your word. Help us to grow in our relationship with you. Amen.

T. L. Valluy (Île-de-France, France)

Prayer Focus: **SOMEONE BEGINNING TO READ THE BIBLE DAILY**

Ministry Spotlight

Editor's note: Inspired by the meditation for June 2 — found on page 44 — we asked our colleagues in the development office to write a short message about the work of The Upper Room Chaplains' Ministry. For more information on this important program, visit: upperroom.org/donor/chaplains-ministry. Some people do not know that our work at The Upper Room extends beyond publishing the devotional guide to include many other programs and ministries. For more information on our various program and ministry offerings, visit: upperroom.org.

The Upper Room Chaplains' Ministry

Surely there is a future, and your hope will not be cut off.
— Proverbs 23:18 (NRSV)

Through The Upper Room Chaplains' Ministry many people behind bars find strength and comfort in the daily devotional guide as a reminder of God's love and presence. Richard Sievers, a prison chaplain for 23 years, says that *The Upper Room* helps to "plant the word of God in [inmates'] lives." The practice of spending time with God each day in the pages of *The Upper Room* is something that men and women who are incarcerated can take with them as they return to society.

Richard Sievers,
Prison Chaplain

Rich in history and connection, the Chaplains' Ministry began in the wake of World War II when staff worked with chaplains to provide copies of *The Upper Room* to U.S. military personnel. Due to the generosity of donors, the ministry has grown over the years.

Each year, The Upper Room Chaplains' Ministry distributes 270,000 copies of *The Upper Room* daily devotional

guide to chaplains across the United States. Military, Veterans Administration hospital, and prison chaplains who use *The Upper Room* in their ministries are able to give the men and women in their care a tangible reminder of God's presence in their time of need — a wonderful gift of hope.

If you would like to support The Upper Room Chaplains' Ministry and give the gift of hope, please visit upperroom.org/chaplains or call 877-899-7212, ext. 7530, or 615-340-7212. This ministry depends solely on the generosity of donors to send copies of the daily devotional free-of-charge to chaplains. For $42 a year, you can provide one chaplain with 10 copies of *The Upper Room* per issue. Your gift of any size will make a difference, and we value your partnership and dedication to this long-standing ministry.

—Nicole Corlew Curtis
Communications Manager

—Amy Skerratt
Donor Relations Manager

THURSDAY, MAY 31

"To the glory of God through us." II Cor. 1:20. (Basic English Translation.) (Read Heb. 13:20, 21.)

A RECENT writer in a book on prayer gives us a measuring stick for all prayer. He says that if we can say truthfully after we pray, "For Thy glory," we can be sure it is a prayer that God will hear and answer.

When we studied chemistry, we used to filter everything in order to insure its purity. What a wonderful filter that phrase, "For God's glory" makes for our desires and actions! We could not well give way to fits of anger or moments of discontent and doubt, we could not utter words of gossip or commit selfish deeds, if we always said: "For Thy glory, O God." Such a filter would cleanse the mind of thoughts that bear the fruit of sin; it would purify our will of desires, which when fulfilled we wish we had never sought.

Paul advised the early Christians to filter life that way—"Whatsoever you do, do all for the glory of God." What a difference that makes! It is then, and then only, that life becomes beautiful and takes on the quality of the divine. Today let us accept the challenge and the glory in all that we do.

PRAYER

Grant us the presence of O Lord, that we may live that will glorify Thee, sake. Amen.

FRIDAY, JUNE 1

"And he shewed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb." Rev. 22:1. (Read Rev. 22:1-7.)

IN the Yosemite Valley there is a beautiful river called the Merced, or River of Mercy. Stand upon its shores and look into its clear water and your face is reflected as if in a marvelous mirror. As one climbs up the steeps, rapids and rushing waters roar past. Beyond, one finds the Great Falls, which give the impression that the flood is leaping from the sky.

It is a striking reminder of the pure river of the Gospel, flowing from Genesis to Revelation with God's mercy leaping and rushing in full abundance from His throne. And let it not be forgotten that the leaves of the trees beside the river were for the healing of the nations.

The Gospel river first deals with the individual bringing him back to God, and giving him a clean heart and love for his fellow men. By the waters of this river society is cleansed and purified, until wars cease, and prejudice, hatred, anger, all sin is swept away. What a wonderful

The Upper Room

Vol. XI No. 2

THE UPPER ROOM

Daily Devotions for Family and Individual Use

Pocket Edition

JULY, AUGUST, SEPTEMBER 1944

July August September 1944

WARTIME EMERGENCY EDITION

Because of the wartime paper shortage, it has become necessary for us to reduce the number of pages in *The Upper Room* for this quarter. We are sure our friends will appreciate the situation and co-operate with us in meeting Government regulations. As soon as the emergency is over, we will return to our regular format.

Grover Carlton Emmons
Managing Editor

During World War II, *The Upper Room* conserved paper by printing two devotionals to a page for several issues. A pocket edition was also created during this period.

Now I Lay Me Down to Sleep (Prayer)

Hearing my grandmother pray aloud at bedtime when I was spending the night with her as a teenager surprised me. I didn't know that she ever prayed. But from the attitude of familiarity in her words, I concluded that Grandma and God were on friendly terms. And when she began praying for her "loved ones," I was even more surprised. She was a stern, reserved woman who never expressed affection. It would never have occurred to me that she would refer to people in our family as "loved ones." She loved us? Who knew?

My Story

What is your first memory of prayer? Who was the person praying? When and where did this experience take place?

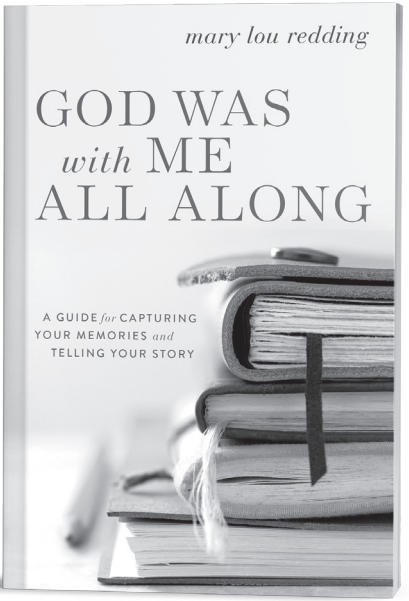
What setting always moves you to want to speak to God? Being outside in nature? Seeing the stars at night?

Looking at Connections

Where do you see God's hand at work in what you have written about in this section? What else do you want to say about prayer and your life?

WILL YOUR LOVED ONES KNOW YOUR

family stories?



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with the help of Mary Lou Redding,
retired editorial director, *The Upper Room*

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WED
JUNE 2
2021

COMPASSIONATE LISTENING

READ Hebrews 13:1-6

Continue to remember those in prison as if you were together with them in prison, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering.

— Hebrews 13:3 (NIV)

Less than one month into my first job as a prison chaplain, a man caught my attention as I was walking by. He looked young, and his smile seemed forced. As we sat at cold metal tables, this young man told me of the devastating life circumstances that had led him to addiction and criminal behavior. As I told him of God's extravagant forgiveness, I watched his tired smile turn to tears of joyful repentance. He received Christ into his heart that day.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
How can I share God's love with someone in prison?

God calls us to give ear to the plight of those in prison. Separated from loved ones, and removed from home and community, those in prison can feel isolated and forgotten. Rather than ignore or condemn those who are incarcerated, we are called to have compassion and offer a listening ear. We can share with them the hope we find through our faith by being involved in prison pen pal programs or by volunteering in local prison ministries.

There are countless people behind bars, both literal and figurative, who need the listening ears and tender hearts of Christians. As we remember to love those in prison, God will set their souls free.

Prayer: Dear God, help us to have compassion for those who are incarcerated and to share with them the hope of the gospel. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Pierce VanDunk (Massachusetts, USA) — See p. 21.

BEYOND ALL UNDERSTANDING

THUR
JUNE 3
2021

Read Philippians 4:4-7

The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

— Philippians 4:7 (NRSV)

As a recent college graduate, I was anxious about my future. I was uncertain about how best to teach my dance students, worried about family members' health issues, and overwhelmed by chores. I was in a bad mood.

On the drive to a nice lunch with my mom and brother, with hope that some nourishment might put me in a better frame of mind, I prayed repeatedly for God's peace. But I got frustrated when I couldn't seem to gain a feeling of inner tranquility.

Thought for the Day
When I am anxious, God offers me peace.

Our definition of peace generally means complete contentedness along with the absence of troubles. It is how I feel at the beach, lying on the soft sand without a care in the world while the sun warms my body and a breeze gently cools it.

But then I remembered that God's peace is more than a feeling. As today's verse reminds us, God's peace goes beyond all human understanding. Even amid restlessness and anxiety about our lives and responsibilities, our faith promises God's presence, help, and grace. God's peace is not confined to feelings. God extends peace to us even when — and especially when — we can't seem to find tranquility.

Prayer: Dear God, help us to remember that your peace is present amid our anxieties and uncertainties, waiting for us to take hold of it. Amen.

Mikaela Horvath (California, USA) — See back cover.

FRI
JUNE 4
2021

REMINDERS OF GOD

READ Psalm 19:1-9

Give thanks to the God of heaven — God's faithful love lasts forever!

— Psalm 136:26 (CEB)

Like many families, we have photos scattered throughout our home. Most of the time they become an unnoticed part of the background. But every now and then I stop to appreciate them. They remind me of happy times and of the life stages that our children and grandchildren have passed through. Some of the photos are of special occasions like weddings or a first day of school; some were posed, and others were taken on the go. Each one is special.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
Where have I seen reminders of God today?

Photos can stir memories and be appreciated again and again, and they can even be shared with friends who visit. Our photos remind me of the smiles, mannerisms, special qualities, and kindness of family members who no longer live nearby or who have died. It is a joy to remember those loved ones when I see my photos.

Like the photos around my house, reminders of God are scattered around me too, though I often fail to notice. I can see God's beauty and bounty when I wander around my garden. I can catch glimpses of God's love when I am with friends. And the Bible tells me how much God loves me and wants me to love God in return. May we always appreciate the nearness and love of God and share that love with others.

Prayer: Loving Father, thank you for the many glimpses of you that we can find every day. Help us to share your love with others. Amen.

Meg Mangan (New South Wales, Australia)

NURTURING LOVE

SAT JUNE 5 2021

Read 1 Corinthians 2:9-13

"What no eye has seen, what no ear has heard, and what no human mind has conceived" — [these] things God has prepared for those who love him.

— 1 Corinthians 2:9 (NIV)

Six months after I lost my wife of 43 years to cancer, I was still grieving. Heartbreak and depression lingered with me daily. My church family was supportive and my pastor had counseled and consoled me. Then Pastor Tom asked if I would talk about my experience of loss during a Sunday worship service.

When I saw Pastor Tom a few days later, I told him I didn't feel worthy to share my story with the congregation. Without hesitation, he offered a warm, knowing smile and said, "Mike, you may not be worthy, but God is and Jesus Christ is!" That moment was an awakening. I had been looking for relief and healing in myself, my job, and other worldly distractions. In just one simple sentence, Pastor Tom reminded me that I could let God's love and healing power lead me.

Thought for the Day
In our grief we can find healing by sharing God's love.

God sent Jesus Christ to give me a new life, so I can be assured, confident, and let others know the Good News. This simple truth has helped me transition from the grief and sadness of my loss to positive spiritual growth. I participate in activities with my church family, I pray daily, I study my faith in Bible classes, and I acknowledge the blessings of the Lord at work in my life every day. My strength has grown, and life has become more meaningful. I am a testament to God's nurturing love.

Prayer: Father God, show us the way. Teach us to set aside our self-centered ways and to focus on you. Amen.

Mike Starry (Virginia, USA) — See p. 21.

SUN
JUNE 6
2021

THE LANDSCAPE OF LIFE

READ Deuteronomy 11:8-15

Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.

— 1 John 4:7 (NRSV)

Walking through the pasture on an early spring day, I noticed all the tender new sprouts pushing their way through the rich soil. At my feet were hundreds of tiny flowers in shades of yellow, white, and lavender. Some could have been considered weeds, while others held the promise of lush green grass. Across the expanse, a blanket of color spread out before me. All the rainbow colors of the field fit together to paint a beautiful landscape.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
Each person I encounter is a precious child of God.

God is the painter of the landscape around me — flowers, trees, hills. God has also placed before me a landscape of people of many colors and backgrounds, each as tender as the sprouts of spring. But how easily we fail to delight in this landscape as much as we do in the rich array of colors in the pastures or on the hillsides! If, however, we recognize each person as a child of God and show each one God's grace, we can be in awe of the variety of God's creation visible in humankind.

Jesus taught us to love one another, including those who annoy, aggravate, and disagree with us. Many problems of our world can be solved if we find ways to love our neighbors as ourselves.

Prayer: God of creation, thank you for the beauty of the earth and of your people. Help us love one another as you have loved us. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Kim Sisk (Oklahoma, USA) — See p. 21.

A GREEN RIBBON

MON JUNE 7 2021

Read Psalm 133:1-3

Glorify the Lord with me; let us exalt his name together.

— Psalm 34:3 (NIV)

After one of my meditations appeared in *Csendes Percek*, the Hungarian edition of *The Upper Room*, I received a letter. It was from an 86-year-old woman who had read my meditation, noticed that we lived nearby, and wanted to connect. Since then, we've met in person and have kept in contact over the phone and through letters.

One day, another of my meditations appeared in the magazine. It was about a Bible camp where campers donned different colored ribbons — children wore orange ribbons, adults wore green. I wrote about how we're always growing spiritually, and I wondered what color ribbon would represent my level of spiritual maturity. Would it be green to indicate a mature faith that is still growing? That day I got a call from my letter-writing friend. With enthusiasm, she said, "I understood the message about the ribbon, and I wanted to let you know that I'm doing my chores with a green ribbon on my wrist." What a wonderful affirmation! I put on my green ribbon as encouragement for my spiritual journey. I believe God rejoices when we share our testimonies. Witnessing for God strengthens our faith and encourages others in theirs.

Thought for the Day
Who needs to hear my testimony today?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank you for our spiritual brothers and sisters. Help us not to miss opportunities to share your love with others. Amen.

Pál Tünde (Pest, Hungary)

TUES
JUNE 8
2021

THE WOODPECKER

READ Romans 15:1-13

Whatever was written in the past was written for our instruction so that we could have hope through endurance and through the encouragement of the scriptures.

— Romans 15:4 (CEB)

I heard it again. I woke up to the same sound that I had heard every morning for the previous three weeks: *da, da, da, da, da* in rapid succession. When I first heard it, I had a suspicion that I knew the source of the noise. When I ventured outside to confirm my suspicion, I found that a woodpecker, with its characteristic red stripe, had discovered a power pole that must have been full of insects. The woodpecker would stay there the entire day, driving its beak into the wood again and again feeding on the bugs.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
I can go deeper into God's word by pondering each verse.

Reflecting on the woodpecker's behavior, I had to ask myself a question: *Do I linger in God's word with the same kind of dedication and focus as the woodpecker does on this power pole?* The wooden pole houses rich nutrients for this bird, and I know that the Bible grants me spiritual wisdom. Surely I need to be as consistent in pursuing God's gift of abundant life found in scripture.

A centuries-old practice called *lectio divina* helps me explore God's word more deeply. Reading each Bible verse or story four times, interspersed with pausing and reflecting, prompts me to discern and savor God's message in truly profound ways. And whenever I hear the woodpecker, I thank him for this reminder.

Prayer: Dear Lord, we need you. Help us to discern the wisdom of your word by reading it daily and savoring it. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Mark de Roo (Michigan, USA)

NOW AND ALWAYS

WED JUNE 9 2021

READ Matthew 4:1-11

[Jesus] answered, "It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"

— Matthew 4:4 (NRSV)

The COVID-19 pandemic filled me with anxiety. The waiting and disruption of normal life made me think of the time when my friend Jane, a hairstylist, injured both hands and became unable to work. In addition to not earning money, Jane couldn't cook or clean or do much of anything else. Her sons helped around the house, but Jane's doctors told her she would have to wait and see if her hands would heal. Jane didn't know what to do, so she started spending hours each day praying and reading scripture. After about two years, her hands did heal and she was able to return to work.

Jane didn't know how long she would have to wait for healing. Similarly, as I write this, we don't know how long it will be before our lives can return to "normal." And as we ponder Jesus' wilderness experience, it occurs to me that the Bible doesn't say whether Jesus knew how long he would have to endure his time of temptation. Did he also experience the anxiety of the unknown?

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
Talking with God and reading the Bible help me get through the day.

The one thing we do know is that God is with us — now and always. And like Jane, we can pray and read scripture. My prayers may be as much complaint and lament as gratitude and joy, but communicating with God and meditating on God's word always give me hope.

Prayer: Dear God, thank you for being with us in the wilderness. Help us to keep in touch with you and to share your love with others. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Marilyn Dorn (Virginia, USA)

THUR
JUNE 10
2021

UNIQUE

Read 1 Samuel 16:1-13

I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; that I know very well.

— Psalm 139:14 (NRSV)

As a five-foot-tall teenager with a poor complexion, I was always on the receiving end of jokes. My so-called friends called me by nicknames that referenced my height, and my well-meaning relatives recommended creams for my skin and exercises to help me grow taller. All this depressed me to no end. Then I went to a new city for school, and people started recognizing me for my academic abilities. It was a turning point for me.

Because I was focused on my strengths and abilities, I was no longer bothered by what I did not have. I was able to laugh along with people who made fun of my height. Ever since, I have made it a point to counsel people, especially kids who are bullied for their appearance. God has used me and blessed me wonderfully.

Thought for the Day
I am special because God made me.

As we read in 1 Samuel 16, while we see outward appearances, the Lord looks at the heart. There are many instances in the Bible where God used a variety of different people for God's glory — Moses, Samson, Mary, Zacchaeus. It's easy to concentrate on what we do not have, but let us praise God for the wonderful life we have been given and use it to God's glory.

Prayer: Dear God, thank you for the unique talents that you have given each of us. Use us to bring you glory. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Sahana Mathias (Karnataka, India) — See p. 21.

ALWAYS WITH US

FRI
JUNE 11
2021

READ Psalm 62:1-8

The LORD your God is in your midst . . . He will create calm with his love; he will rejoice over you with singing.

— Zephaniah 3:17 (CEB)

When my wife and I babysit our granddaughter, she doesn't always cooperate when it is time for her to go to bed. She cries as we put her in her crib in unfamiliar surroundings. I sit next to her crib in the dark, patting her back and soothing her until she settles and her cries diminish. From time to time, not fully asleep, she'll glance up to see if I'm still there, watching her, protecting her, ready to soothe and comfort her. Eventually she goes to sleep, content and relaxed.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
Even in my darkest moments, I can find rest in God's presence.

The way she peeks to see if I'm still there reminds me of God's constant presence in our lives. Sometimes we are uncertain of God's presence and try to get a glimpse of God. When we're in the dark and desperate for soothing and support, God is there. In whatever circumstances we find ourselves — no matter how dark — we can trust in God's promise to be with us.

Prayer: Dear Father, thank you for your presence with us, even in the toughest times. Amen.

Kevin McPoyle (Pennsylvania, USA) — See p. 21.

SAT
JUNE 12
2021

BEYOND WORDS

Read Romans 8:26-28

The Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words.

— Romans 8:26 (NRSV)

One morning during the winter of 2011, I woke unable to speak. I panicked because I worked as a professional singer and voice-over artist. Little did I know it would be four months before I would be able to speak again, let alone sing. What was eventually diagnosed as a perfect storm of viral laryngitis, acid reflux, and muscle tension ended my singing career and threatened my very sense of self. Who was I and what was my purpose if God could no longer use me to sing and speak to others?

Thought for the Day
There are many ways for me to serve God.

One afternoon I came across Paul's words to the Romans describing how the Holy Spirit helps us when we feel weak. I was overcome by the realization that God is able to work in and through us all, regardless of our human limitations.

My voice eventually returned, but I no longer feel dependent upon it to do God's work. I have been inspired by the many circumstances in which people serve God. As Paul writes, "All things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose." Perhaps we can all learn that God can use all things in our lives for good and that we will always have purpose.

Prayer: Dear God, thank you for being able to use everything for good — even our weaknesses and trials. May we allow the Holy Spirit to work through us to do your work. Amen.

Jennifer McCluskey (Virginia, USA)

CALLED TO SERVE

SUN JUNE 13 2021

Read Matthew 9:37-38

Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.

— Galatians 6:9-10 (NIV)

After attending a meeting that included a presentation on mission work in the Dominican Republic, I began to pray for those involved. A few years later, I vacationed in the Dominican Republic. A pastor friend of mine traveled four hours to my hotel to take me to his local church to preach. As we walked through the community, I was shocked to see the material and spiritual poverty. My spirit was troubled. I could sense the Holy Spirit admonishing me for staying in a luxury hotel, wasting money while people nearby lived lives of poverty and hopelessness.

After that day I became actively involved in mission work. With God's help, our teams have shared the love and hope of Jesus Christ with hundreds of people in the Dominican Republic, Haiti, and Guatemala. My constant prayer is to seek God's guidance and to continue to serve. As I serve the Lord, I am grateful for the blessing of God's love and forgiveness.

Thought for the Day
The abundance God has given me is meant to be shared.

Prayer: God of all, inspire us in ordinary and extraordinary ways. Help us to heed your call to live out the good news of Jesus Christ by caring for all those in need. Amen.

Ariel Rivera García (Puerto Rico)

MON
JUNE 14
2021

NOT FEAR BUT LOVE

Read 2 Timothy 1:3-7

God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.

— 2 Timothy 1:7 (KJV)

For 45 years I have been friends with a woman from Turkey who is Muslim. Her husband came to the U.S. for medical school, and they now live in Istanbul. My friend Berrin and I have prayed for each other and our families for many years. We have visited them in Turkey, and they have come to Nebraska to visit us several times.

Recently, Berrin was told she has cancer. I wish I could be with her to help. Because of my own health issues, I can't travel that far anymore. At times my fears for her are overwhelming.

Thought for the Day
When I give my fears to God, I can find peace.

In my prayer time, I have read and reread the words from 2 Timothy above. When I meditate on these words, I like to picture placing my prayer requests at the feet of Jesus. This practice helps me calm my fears and keep my trust in Jesus. I write several of my favorite verses on a card. Then I tuck them into my Bible so that I read them first. In so doing I am able to begin my Bible reading and prayer in a more peaceful and trusting way.

I love my dear friend Berrin. I know God loves her too. I can rest assured that she is in God's healing arms, and so I am at peace. We can all find calm amidst our fears when we put our trust in God.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help us to place our fears at your feet as we face illness. Help us to entrust those we love to your care. Amen.

Nancy R. Meyer (Nebraska, USA)

FLOURISHING AGAIN

TUES JUNE 15 2021

Read Psalm 63:1-11

Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified. . . for the Lord your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you.

— Deuteronomy 31:6 (NIV)

Every winter, I spend four months living in Mexico City and working at two refugee centers. In May, before returning home, I spend a week on Mexico's southwest beach coast.

May is the end of a nearly six-month dry season, and almost all of the trees are stripped of their leaves. The landscape is gray, and the soil is hard and dry. If they could, the trees might ask, "Where are you, God?" However, one tree, the Cuachalalate, starts producing small white flowers. In the harsh dryness that dominates the area in May, this tree begins to thrive.

Thought for the Day
No matter the circumstances, God's love enables me to flourish.

Every year I marvel at this new life and am reminded that we all experience seasons of spiritual dryness. I know that shortly after I leave Mexico, the rains will begin and the parched countryside will flourish once again. I also know that if I wait patiently and listen for God's still small voice, God's love will always lead me home.

Even if it feels like we are alone, God never leaves us, just as God never leaves that arid Mexican countryside. As Deuteronomy 31:6 promises, "[The Lord] will never leave you nor forsake you."

Prayer: Gracious God, may we never forget that you are always present. Thank you for your love that guides us. Amen.

Daniel Ladue (New York, USA)

WED
JUNE 16
2021

LOAVES AND FISHES

READ John 6:5-13

Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many?

— John 6:9 (NIV)

I noticed a need at my new church: a choir to lead congregational hymn singing. Although I've been part of church choirs since my childhood, the idea of directing an adult choir scared me. Yet when I mentioned the need to the elders, they asked me to organize and lead a choir. If I said yes, I risked failing in front of the whole church.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
God can multiply my small offering to meet the needs of many.

In today's reading, a few fish and small barley loaves, offered by a young boy, looked foolish and inadequate compared to a hungry multitude. However, in the hands of Jesus, everyone had enough to eat. When I offered my limited musical skill, God made it enough to form a choir. Our congregation that used to stumble through hymns without a choir to lead us now sings with confidence.

We encounter different needs every day. Sometimes we might think, *Somebody should do something about that.* Maybe we are that somebody. Are we willing to risk failure by stepping into a task that seems impossible? The Bible is full of people who risked looking foolish and failing. Noah, Gideon, Esther, and David all did impossible things with God's help. And we can too.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, the need is great, and we are small. But with your help, all things are possible. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

Jane Reid (Oregon, USA)

SLEEPING SOUNDLY

THUR
JUNE 17
2021

READ Psalm 3:1-8

I lie down and sleep; I wake again, because the LORD sustains me. I will not fear though tens of thousands assail me on every side.

— Psalm 3:5-6 (NIV)

Some time ago, I had trouble sleeping for several nights. After sleeping only one or two hours, I kept waking up. I remembered a friend once said, "If someone wakes up several times in the night, maybe they are stressed." It was true that during that time I had many problems, but I didn't think too much of them. One afternoon when I was alone in the upper room of my house, I felt a longing in my heart to worship God. Immediately I raised my voice in praise. That night, I slept soundly.

I might have felt like I was not thinking about my problems, but actually my soul was miserable. By praising and worshiping God, my soul was strengthened. It was as if my dry soul had been watered, and like David I could say, "I lie down and sleep . . . because the LORD sustains me." Our worries may not disappear when we worship God, but they lose their power when we arrive in God's presence.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
When I praise and worship God, I can find strength to face any problem.

Prayer: Loving God, even in the midst of our problems, help us to sing songs of praise to you. We pray as Jesus taught us, "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.

Linawati Santoso (East Java, Indonesia)

FRI
JUNE 18
2021

FINDING OUR WAY HOME

READ Matthew 11:25-30

Jesus said, ***"Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."***
— Matthew 11:29-30 (NIV)

Living in southern Arizona gives me the opportunity to enjoy summer hiking on cool mountain trails and winter hiking on warm desert paths. One fall day I was hiking alone, following a mountain stream. Even though I was carrying a heavy backpack, I was caught up in the beauty of the colorful autumn leaves of the oak, ash, and cottonwood trees.

While exploring this beauty, I left the path and became disoriented. I began to feel a sense of panic, and my pack now seemed much heavier. How quickly I had gone from the euphoria of a beautiful day to the shock and exhaustion of being lost. Because of my outdoor training I calmed myself, pulled out my compass, reoriented myself, and got back on the right path. Somehow my heavy backpack seemed lighter again, and I felt refreshed as I safely returned home.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
Reading the Bible daily guides me on life's path.

The correct path was safe and beautiful, but I ran into trouble as soon as I decided to find my own way. My experience reminded me that when I spend time daily, reading scripture and building my relationship with the living Lord, I am refreshed and always able to find my way home.

Prayer: Gracious God, thank you for your beautiful creation and for the divine guidance you have shared with us through the Bible. Thank you for showing us the way home through your risen son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Doug Wingert (Arizona, USA)

FINISHING WELL

SAT JUNE 19 2021

READ Romans 5:1-8

"I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith."

— 2 Timothy 4:7 (NIV)

At the 1968 Olympic Games in Mexico City, John Stephen Akhwari was a marathon runner for Tanzania. During the race he fell, dislocated his knee, and injured his shoulder. In spite of his injuries he finished the race, although he was an hour behind the winner. When later he was asked by the press why he didn't give up, he replied, "My country did not send me 5,000 miles to start the race; they sent me 5,000 miles to finish the race."

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
Faithful living allows me to finish life's race well.

My motto at school was a Latin phrase that means "The end crowns the work." I understood it this way: "If you work to the end, you will win the crown." Those words have encouraged me all my life.

Finishing well with perseverance was one of the themes of the apostle Paul, who wrote, "We know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope." Then at the end of his life, Paul was able to write these words in his second letter to Timothy: "I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness" (4:7-8).

We don't need to be marathon runners or the apostle Paul to finish this life well. By keeping our eyes on Jesus, we can hear him say, "Well done . . . good and faithful servant" (Matt. 25:21, KJV).

Prayer: O Lord, we pray that we may finish well and win the crown of life with you. Amen.

Carol Purves (England, United Kingdom)

SUN
JUNE 20
2021

WAVES OF TROUBLE

READ Psalm 46:1-6

God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble.

— Psalm 46:1 (NIV)

One day at the beach, not long after I placed my chair at the edge of the water, a father and his young son ventured into the ocean. The boy frolicked in the gentle lapping waves. Because the tide was coming in, the waves soon became much larger. One wave caught the young boy off guard, and he lost his balance. His dad sprang into action and helped him regain composure. As quickly as the wave had appeared, it diminished into the shoreline and the boy ran from his dad's protection with newfound confidence. It was not long until a similarly threatening wave appeared; however, the boy had learned from his experience. He ran to his dad, wrapped his small arms around one of his dad's legs, and rode out the crashing wave in safety. The boy knew where to turn for help.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
In times of trouble, I will hold on to God.

This cycle repeated itself several times, and I realized that our lives are threatened by any number of powerful waves. Some of the waves are easy to withstand, but some of them knock us off balance. Whom do we turn to when a wave hits? Do we try to brave the rough waters alone? God is watching us and waiting to offer protection and comfort. We can hold on to God as the waves crash around us.

Prayer: Dear God, thank you for always being here for us. Help us to turn quickly to you in times of trouble. Thank you that we need not try to keep our balance on our own. Amen.

Michelle T. Johnson (North Carolina, USA)

SENT TO ENCOURAGE

MON JUNE 21 2021

Read Luke 2:8-15

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

— Hebrews 13:2 (NRSV)

I had just completed four hours of medication infusion to treat my lymphoma. Like every treatment, it had left me fatigued. My wife and I drove to a nearby restaurant to await the 4:00 p.m. opening time.

Two women were already sitting on the long bench outside and graciously welcomed us to join them. As we waited to enter the restaurant, one of the women asked, "Are you all from this area?" With my weakened voice I replied, "No, we come from the east coast for my cancer treatments here." She identified herself as a Christian and said that she would like to pray for me. She took my hand, raised it up with hers, and interceded fervently to God for help, hope, and healing for me.

Thought for the Day
Today I will look for someone who needs my prayers.

After four or five minutes of ardent praying, she concluded, "In Jesus' great name!" Then she said, "My name is Angel; what's yours?" I replied, "Bill, and like you I am a Christian. I pray the Lord's special blessing on you — because this day you have met and ministered to me unexpectedly." I never saw that woman again, but I know that God sent her to encourage me.

Prayer: O God, help us not only to receive strangers but also to respond with humility and thanksgiving when you send them to minister to us unexpectedly. Amen.

Bill Weimer (Florida, USA) — See back cover.

Prayer Focus: **CANCER PATIENTS WHO MUST TRAVEL FAR FOR TREATMENT**

TUES
JUNE 22
2021

PROVIDED FOR

READ 2 Corinthians 9:6-15

Whoever is kind to the poor lends to the LORD, and will be repaid in full.

— Proverbs 19:17 (NRSV)

I first met Mzee in a hotel. His eyes were sunken, his back was bent, and he was walking with the support of a stick. I was moved with compassion as I watched him order a cup of tea. Later on, I inquired as to who he was and where he lived. A young man took me to Mzee's home, and I could not believe what I saw. He was sitting alone in front of his house. The roof and the walls were made of grass, and the walls had holes large enough for a person to fit through. I learned that his wife and relatives had deserted him, leaving him to struggle to provide for himself in his old age. Around his house, I could see the small gardens he cultivated. I decided to offer him food each week, even though I don't have much myself.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
I can help provide for others as God provides for me.

The seed I have been sowing may seem small, but it is helping Mzee. For this I am glad, and recently I have seen God providing for me in a similar way. When a friend came to stay for two weeks, she gave me money to buy groceries and helped me pay for other things as well. Before she left, she asked if she could continue to send me money for groceries. Just as God prompted me to help Mzee, I believe that through my friend, God is helping me.

Prayer: Dear God, help us to be willing to share what you have given us with those who have less. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Enid Adah Nyinomujuni (Dar es Salaam, Tanzania)

FAITH LIKE A CHILD

WED
JUNE 23
2021

Read Matthew 18:1-5

Jesus said, ***"Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven."***

— Matthew 18:3 (NIV)

It is easy to forget what it was like to have the faith of a child. When I look back at my life, I tend to remember what my life was like after I decided to follow Jesus when I was 17 — no longer a child.

Thought for the Day
I can learn much from the faith of children around me.

It was not until I began working in a Christian school that I began to understand what it means to have faith like a child. Being around children ages 3 to 14 has opened my eyes to Jesus' teaching in Matthew. Whenever I pray with my students, they always pray for other people and their needs. On one of my first days at the school, a seven-year-old prayed for his pet that had fleas. These kids trust that God is close and listening. They don't get caught up in picking the right or best words, sounding eloquent, or what others think of their prayer. Instead they are sincere and present in the moment in a way that I envy.

It is easy for me to get lost in worry about the future, to pray only for my needs without seeking a real encounter with God. When we think back on what it was like to be a child and look at the children around us, we can learn much from those expressions of faith.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help us to be truly your children, trusting in you and your care for us today and always. Amen.

Paul Cillo (Pennsylvania, USA)

THUR
JUNE 24
2021

PURPOSE

READ Psalm 57:1-5

I cry to God Most High, to God who fulfills his purpose for me.

— Psalm 57:2 (NRSV)

When I was diagnosed with cancer at age 17, it came as a total shock. My friends were taking placement tests and applying for college scholarships while I was fighting for my life. Although cancer was scary, I felt a quiet confidence that I would survive. As I counted down the days until my final treatment, I began to dream about my future and wonder how God would use my sickness for good.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
God has a purpose for my life.

Several years later, a national cancer nonprofit offered me a job connecting and supporting other cancer survivors across the country. When I shared my personal story, it gave other survivors hope. I'd often reflect on how God steered me in a direction where I could use my experience fighting cancer to encourage others. I found purpose despite all the pain.

In today's reading, King David has experienced a disaster — his life was also at stake. Yet as he struggled, he took refuge in God; and by doing so he remembered that God had a purpose for his life.

When we find ourselves facing disaster, we may be tempted to lose trust in the promise that God has good plans for us. But scripture reminds us that God can work through our struggles to bring our purpose to light.

Prayer: Father God, help us to take refuge in you and remember that our lives have purpose when we live them following your truth. Amen.

Danielle Ripley-Burgess (Missouri, USA) — See p. 21.

NEVER ALONE

FRI JUNE 25 2021

Read Joshua 1:1-9

The Lord said to Joshua, ***"Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go."***
— Joshua 1:9 (NIV)

My daily commute to work consists of a 25-minute drive, one way, on a rural two-lane road. Even though most days are trouble-free, problems such as wildlife crossing the road, downed trees, and flooded roadways are always possible. The biggest challenge is when winter brings a mess of snow, ice, and wind. On those days I drive well under the speed limit as I carefully make my way up and down the snow-covered hills.

One day it occurred to me that my winter drive is similar to life. The icy roads and snowy hills are comparable to life's troubles — the death of a family member, the loss of a job, a devastating health diagnosis. Just as I don't know what lies ahead on my journey, as we travel through life we don't know what awaits us either.

Thought for the Day
I can take heart because Jesus is with me on my journey.

One thing we know for sure is this promise from Jesus: "In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). Jesus didn't promise us an easy life; but he told us not to worry because no matter how hard our journey is, he has already won the fight. So when we find ourselves sliding along life's roadway, worrying about the future, we can find comfort and peace in knowing that Jesus is with us on the journey.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help us to remember that no matter how troubling life gets, you are always with us. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Jordan S. Hiquet (Pennsylvania, USA)

Prayer Focus: **THOSE WHO TRAVEL DANGEROUS ROADS TO WORK**

SAT
JUNE 26
2021

OUR SHEPHERD

READ Psalm 23:1-6

The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want.

— Psalm 23:1 (NRSV)

On a recent bicycle ride I spotted a flock of sheep. They were quite calm and appeared to be resting. None seemed nervous. *This image*, I thought, *can be an example for us as children of God*.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
Today I will place my trust in God, our Shepherd.

In reality, sometimes our circumstances infringe upon our peace and rob us of tranquility. For many reasons, worries and fears may overwhelm us in different situations. Uncertainty can weigh heavily on us and keep us from enjoying the calm and peace that I saw in that flock of sheep.

But the picture of God described by the psalmist in Psalm 23 remains true for us today: God will care for us, offer us rest, protect us from harm, and supply our needs. We can be sure that when we place our trust in the Lord as our shepherd, we will lack for nothing.

Prayer: Dear Lord, help us to place our complete trust in you and find rest in your promises. In the name of Jesus, we pray. Amen.

Lilia Roberts (Chubut, Argentina)

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

ONENESS IN CHRIST

SUN JUNE 27 2021

READ Romans 12:1-8

In Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.

— Romans 12:5 (NIV)

I am from a culture in which people do not readily share their deeper concerns or joys. Out of fear of having their "business on the streets," persons endure silently. And out of fear of not respecting another's difficulties, they hesitate to celebrate their joys. This situation deprives the community of the most joyful as well as the saddest life-changing events.

Some months ago when our daughter was diagnosed with a heart condition, we shared with and invited prayers from members of our ministry community around the world. On the day of the surgery, phone calls and text messages brought us words of assurance and reminders of prayerful support from friends everywhere. We knew that a community of believers surrounded us and that they were channeling God's grace to our family and to the medical team. It made a huge difference, and we were at peace.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
My community is a gift from God.

Today's reading from Romans 12 reminds me of the wholeness we find in community. With all our imperfections, we are each a very special gift to one another. Offering our deepest concerns and joys to our community can be challenging, but it is part of God's call on our life. We draw closer to God as we develop and work through our relationships with others.

Prayer: Liberating God, set us free to trust that as we share our joys and sorrows with others, we will all be brought closer to you in community. Amen.

Stephane Brooks (Tennessee, USA) — See back cover.

MON
JUNE 28
2021

NEVER ALONE

READ Matthew 28:16-20

Jesus said to the disciples, *"Remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."*

— Matthew 28:20 (NRSV)

When I took my two-year-old grandson Samuel to a preschool playgroup for the first time, he loved it! Samuel was enjoying himself until he suddenly realized he could not see me. He ran to the center of the room with a look of panic on his face as he scanned the room, searching. I called to him, but in the busyness of the room, he couldn't find me. Anxiously, Samuel called out, "Grandma!" Immediately I went up and hugged him, reassuring him that I hadn't left him. Comforted, Samuel was soon off playing happily again.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
The Lord is with me, today and every day.

Later as I reflected on Samuel's moment of panic, I realized that I also get overwhelmed at times. I can be too distracted by circumstances to recognize God's presence. In those moments I look around wondering where God is, when in reality God is right there with me. When Jesus gave the disciples the Great Commission, he also reassured them saying, "Remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age." That promise holds true for us today. What a comfort it is to know that no matter what happens or how bleak life may seem, we are safe under the Lord's care.

Prayer: Thank you, Lord, for never leaving us alone. Help us to remember that you are always with us, especially when life feels scary. Amen.

DeVonna R. Allison (Florida, USA)

IN GOD'S PRESENCE

TUES JUNE 29 2021

READ 1 Kings 19:6-18

After the wind there was an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake came a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper.

— 1 Kings 19:11-12 (NIV)

Tonight I watched the sunset from the middle of the lake in a red canoe. Behind me the sky was a hazy purple; in front of me bright orange and peach. Stillness enveloped me, with only the sounds of the wild echoing around me. It was as if the Lord were inviting me to be still. In the silence I felt God speak to my heart, saying, "Trust me. Surrender to me." The weight of all my burdens lifted as I sat with God.

I was reminded of Elijah's encounter with God in 1 Kings 19. Elijah did not find the Lord in the mighty wind, in the earthquake, or in the fire. Elijah's encounter with God came in the gentle whisper, in the stillness. Often I look for God in the big things, but perhaps God is best found when I quiet my thoughts and humble my heart before God. I think being in the Lord's presence is one of the greatest treasures we will ever know.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
How often do I accept God's invitation to sit and to be still?

Prayer: Dear Lord, teach us to be still before you and to humble our hearts so that we may rest in your presence. Amen.

Tina Claxton (Ontario, Canada)

WED
JUNE 30
2021

I AM. I WILL.

Read Isaiah 41:1-14

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

— Isaiah 41:10 (NIV)

Alone in the hospital room, I awaited word from the nurse about how my mother's surgery was going. Her life, as well as ours, was undergoing major change. Before she came home we would need to build a ramp, move furniture, buy a wheelchair, and schedule therapy appointments. She would have to learn to walk again. The list seemed endless, and I felt helpless.

Thought for the Day
Even when the Bible isn't in my hand, God's word can be in my heart.

I walked back and forth repeating the words above from Isaiah. Turning to these "I am" and "I will" statements from Isaiah reminded me that I could rely on God. I did not need to be anxious about the outcome. I did not have to know how it would all work out. God would give me the strength and help I needed. God's righteous hand would hold us all up.

Though many years have passed since that day, these words often come to me in times of distress. Those repetitions over and over in a hospital room have forever etched on my heart God's truth: "I am. I will." God's word is true and powerful. When we study and memorize scripture, it will always be present to help us remember — and then find peace in — God's promise to be present with us, especially in times of crisis.

Prayer: Dear God, thank you for your strength and your promise to be with us. Amen.

Rebecca Ruth Whisnant (Alabama, USA)

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

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

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

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

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

MAY 5: ***Always Ready***

1. Describe a time when you have seen someone coming to Christ after spending time around Christian examples. How did you see God working in the situation? What did you learn from it?
2. How do you express your faith to others? In what ways do you share Jesus' love if you are not specifically talking about it?
3. Have you ever felt discouraged when someone didn't believe in Jesus after you witnessed to them? How did you respond? What helps you to remain patient in times like this?
4. How does your church encourage you to share your faith with

others? Whose example has been most helpful to you as you prepare to share your faith? What situations make you hesitant or uncomfortable sharing your faith?

5. Besides Damaris and Dionysius, what other biblical figures come to mind when you read today's meditation about sharing Christ's love? Why? What can we learn from their stories?

MAY 12: *Listen and Act*

1. How do you feel when someone you haven't spoken to in a while reaches out to you? When do you reach out to someone to whom you haven't spoken in a while? In what ways can you use your interactions with others to share God's love?
2. When you experience God communicating with you, is it dramatic like Isaiah's experience, or is it more subtle like today's writer describes? What has God communicated to you recently?
3. How do you make time to listen for God's still small voice? How is your day changed when you take time to listen to God's voice?
4. When you are unsure of what God is guiding you to do, what spiritual practices help you find clarity? What scripture passages help you?
5. In what ways does your faith community encourage you to listen to God? How has your faith community helped you to act on God's guidance?

MAY 19: *Treasured Words*

1. What are some of your most treasured books, stories, or poems from childhood? How were you introduced to them? Why are they important to you?
2. What scripture passage has held meaning for you over a long period of time? How has your understanding of it changed over time?
3. Name some ways scripture has been a gift in your life. How does scripture draw you closer to God? What brings you back to scripture when you haven't read the Bible in a while?

4. Which scripture passages would you like to spend more time studying? What practices will you use to help you unfold the words as the psalmist suggests?
5. Who or what helps you to find meaning and beauty in God's words? How does your church help you find meaning in scripture?

MAY 26: ***Mercy***

1. Have you ever disagreed with someone so strongly that you would consider them an "enemy"? Did you want peace or vindication? How did the situation resolve?
2. When have you felt satisfied by an outcome but you were not at peace about it? What role does your faith play in finding both satisfaction and peace in life?
3. Do you find it hard to pray for those whom you disagree with? What scripture verses or spiritual practices help you? If it is not difficult for you, why do you find it easy to pray for those you disagree with?
4. When have you observed that your prayers for others brought a change in you? How do you think prayer can transform us?
5. How do you find unity with other Christians? Who in your life serves as an example of loving others? How do you strive to show mercy and love to everyone around you?

JUNE 2: ***Compassionate Listening***

1. Describe a time when having someone listen compassionately made a difference for you. What did this experience teach you about how to listen to others?
2. How can you tell when someone needs your attention and compassion? How do you respond? Is it easy or difficult for you to share God's mercy and love in these situations?
3. Do you feel sympathetic toward those who are incarcerated? Why or why not? What prayers and other spiritual practices could make you more sympathetic?
4. What scripture passages encourage you when you feel isolated? What biblical figures remind you of the importance of

being sympathetic to the struggles of other people? How do you apply what you learn from these stories to your life?

5. Do you feel called to participate in a pen pal or other prison ministry program? In what other ways could you minister to those who are incarcerated? In what ways could you minster to people who are figuratively imprisoned?

JUNE 9: *Now and Always*

1. How did the COVID-19 pandemic affect you and those you love? How did you respond to your feelings of anxiety during that time? Where did you find the most peace and joy?
2. Today's writer was encouraged by her friend's example of praying and reading scripture. Who encourages you in your faith? In what ways do they encourage you?
3. When you experience anxiety over the unknown, what are your prayers like? How are your prayers during such times different than when you feel more secure?
4. Which scripture verses bring you the most comfort during anxious times? Why? Which Bible stories best remind you of God's presence in our lives?
5. How can you support someone experiencing anxiety or fear? If you are feeling anxious or fearing the unknown right now, how can you lean on God and on others in your faith community?

JUNE 16: *Loaves and Fishes*

1. If you see a need in your community, are you eager to fill it or do you hope someone else will? Why?
2. When you are afraid to risk failing at something, what do you do? How do you trust in God's help when you try to do something that scares you?
3. Describe a time when God has magnified something small to fit a need in your life. How did that experience give you hope?
4. What spiritual practices give you courage to risk failing? What scripture passages remind you that anything is possible with God?

5. What needs do you see in your church today? What needs do you see in your community? How can you help fill those needs?

JUNE 23: *Faith Like a Child*

1. Do you remember what it was like to be a child and to see the world as a child does? What do you think it means to have faith like a child?
2. Today's writer says that the children in his class pray for the needs of others and trust that God is listening. Why do you think this is so? What can we learn from these children?
3. What distracts you when you pray? Do you worry about saying the right things, about daily stresses, or about more "urgent" needs? What helps you regain focus when you pray so that you can have a real encounter with God?
4. Besides expressing prayers honestly and trustingly, what can you learn from the children around you? How can you implement those lessons in your faith and in your life?
5. Who and what is on your prayer list today? What Bible verses strengthen your trust that God will hear your prayer?

JUNE 30: *I Am. I Will.*

1. Recall a time when your life was undergoing a major change. How did you feel during that time? What role did your faith play in how you responded to the change?
2. When you are facing a time of crisis, what scripture passages bring you the most comfort? Do you repeat them like today's writer, or do you interact with the verses in another way? Explain how you use scripture during such times.
3. In what ways does memorizing Bible verses help you? How do you go about memorizing a new scripture? What verse would you like to memorize next? Why?
4. What do the "I am" and "I will" statements from Isaiah mean to you? How do they bring you peace?
5. In times of crisis, what spiritual practices, prayers, activities, or people comfort you the most? How can you share God's comfort with others who are going through a crisis?

MAY 2021

Include *The Upper Room* as part of your daily routine.

Sun	*Mon*	*Tues*	*Wed*	*Thur*	*Fri*	*Sat*
						1
2	*3*	*4*	*5*	*6*	*7*	*8*
9	*10*	*11*	*12*	*13*	*14*	*15*
16	*17*	*18*	*19*	*20*	*21*	*22*
23	*24*	*25*	*26*	*27*	*28*	*29*
30	*31*					

JUNE 2021

Include *The Upper Room* as part of your daily routine.

Sun	*Mon*	*Tues*	*Wed*	*Thur*	*Fri*	*Sat*
		1	*2*	*3*	*4*	*5*
6	*7*	*8*	*9*	*10*	*11*	*12*
13	*14*	*15*	*16*	*17*	*18*	*19*
20	*21*	*22*	*23*	*24*	*25*	*26*
27	*28*	*29*	*30*			

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in faith so that you overflow with hope.

Romans 15:13 (CEB)

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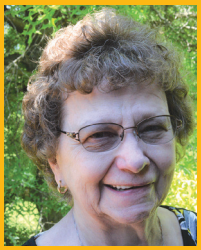
MEET SOME OF OUR WRITERS

(Here and on p. 21.)

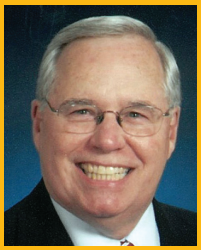
Stephane Brooks (p. 69) is a spiritual director who grew up in the Caribbean. He speaks English, French, and Spanish.

Mikaela Horvath (p. 45) enjoys blogging, social-media marketing, and sharing her love of dance with kids.

Luis David Arias (p. 20) is a political scientist who recently started teaching in a public school in Colombia.



JudyAnn Krell Morse (p. 35) is a pastor. She has 8 children and step-children, 8 grandchildren, and 4 great-grandchildren.



Bill Weimer (p. 63) is a retired US Navy Chaplain who loves research and writing.

Melissa Yamaguchi (p. 15) was born and raised in Hawaii and enjoys sports photography. Melissa's son, Brennan, is 12.

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