

NOVEMBER-DECEMBER 2021

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NOVEMBER - DECEMBER 2021

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# THE UPPER ROOM®

WHERE THE WORLD MEETS TO PRAY

*Kimberly Orr, World Editor and Publisher*

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BATAK  
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## COVER ART INTERPRETATION



### *No Room at the Inn*

**Artist:** Margaret W. Tarrant (England)

**Interpreter:** Erin Pearce

The scene on this issue's cover depicts a moment packed with action and emotion. Mary and Joseph are in Bethlehem for a census. Luke's Gospel says, "While they were there, the time came for Mary to have her baby" (Luke 2:6, CEB). Artist Margaret Tarrant draws our attention to Mary. She clothes her in a white cloak, a symbol of her purity. Mary gazes down, and her posture suggests she is exhausted. She has traveled a long way, is weary, and is close to giving birth. She needs a dry, warm, safe room in which to deliver God's Son, foretold by the angel (see Luke 1:26-38).

Joseph pleads with the innkeeper for a room. His face looks hopeful but stern and determined. Even the donkey seems tired, as if it understands that this is not the place they will rest for the night. The innkeeper blocks the doorway with his body, denying them entrance. He appears to interrupt Joseph, adamant that there is no room for them.

Tarrant's painting invites us to participate in the scene. Are you Joseph, begging for shelter or other necessities for your family? Are you Mary, exhausted, afraid, and in need of help? Are you the innkeeper, frustrated and unable to meet the need of someone requesting help? Are you one of the bystanders in the background, watching the scene and contemplating if or how to intervene? Imagine yourself in each of these roles, and reflect on the thoughts and feelings you would experience as you picture the scene from the perspective of each person in it.



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# Let's Celebrate!

*Seven days you shall keep the festival to the LORD your God at the place that the LORD will choose; for the LORD your God will bless you in all your produce and in all your undertakings, and you shall surely celebrate.*

— Deuteronomy 16:15 (NRSV)

As the year draws to a close and we move into the holiday season, I am reminded that God calls us into celebration. In the scripture above, the LORD commands the people to “surely celebrate.” In Hebrew, the word translated as “celebrate” is *sameach* (sah-MAY-och). This term includes connotations of happiness, joy, and childlike, unbridled glee that are made possible by the presence and provision of our loving, parenting God.

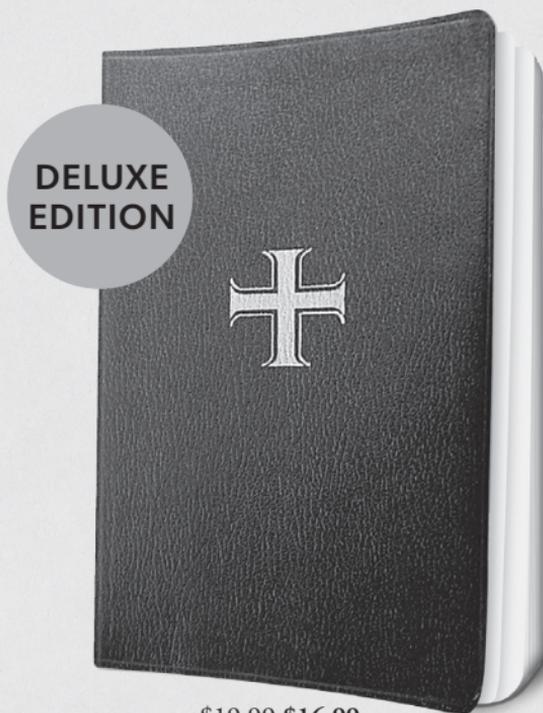
When I was a child I loved to play in the mud. I would spend hours using my imagination to construct pies, roads, and castles from the mire and muck. Of course, as a result of my creative efforts I would arrive home covered in dirt. My mother would greet me at the door with her hands on her hips and a scowl on her face. Although she may have been upset by the state of my clothes, she was secretly proud of me for expressing my creativity. Beneath my mother's scowl, I always knew her heart was filled with love for me and that she enjoyed the fact that I was happy building and creating my muddy worlds.

May we always be able to trace the smile on God's face as we find ways to creatively celebrate the arrival of Immanuel, God with us. And may we make room in our daily routines to experience the gift of childlike joy in the Lord's presence.



— **Rev. Kimberly Orr**  
World Editor and Publisher

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## BRAZIL

The Portuguese-Brazil edition publishing team welcomed a new editor last year.

## MÉXICO

The distributor of *El Aposento Alto* in México is expanding their readership through digital media. They now publish the devotional guide locally as an e-book and audio version, which are available via Google Play, in addition to their print editions.

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# A GUIDING HAND

MON  
NOV 1  
2021

READ Psalm 28:1-9\*

*The LORD is my strength and my shield; my heart trusts in him, and he helps me.*

— Psalm 28:7 (NIV)

Twice a week I wait for a morning bus at the top of a small hill. While I wait, I watch as primary-school children ride bikes to school with their parents. The children often struggle to get up the hill on their bikes, but their loving parents give a word of encouragement or lean down from their own bikes to gently guide their child up the hill. Watching these parents makes me think of the guiding hand of God in my life.

In my early twenties after completing my master's degree, I went to training college in Auckland, New Zealand, with the intention of becoming a high school teacher. While there I was unexpectedly offered a lecturing job at an Australian university. I prayed for guidance in this dilemma.

On the Sunday before I was to give my answer, I was teaching a Bible class at church when God's guidance came to me clearly. This was where I should be — teaching teenagers, not working in a university. Like a good parent, God helped me recognize my strengths, and I went on to have a rewarding career as a teacher. Confiding in God in prayer, seeking guidance, and receiving answers have been mainstays in my life. Looking back, I can see that God has always been with me.

**THOUGHT FOR THE DAY**  
God will help me recognize my strengths.

**Prayer:** Loving God, thank you for always being with us. Grant us the faith to trust in your guidance, and help us to recognize your hand at work in our lives. Amen.

Margaret Martin (Australian Capital Territory, Australia)

**Prayer Focus:** TEACHERS

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

TUES  
NOV 2  
2021

## SPRING FLOWERS

READ Song of Songs 2:10-13

*Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland.*

— Isaiah 43:18-19 (NIV)

One spring day many years ago, I went to church to have a talk with Jesus. Getting out of my car, I passed a flower bed overcome with weeds. This sight made me angry. I did a lot of work for my church, and I couldn't believe that others would ignore the weeds and just assume that I would take care of them.

### THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

When I get frustrated by the weeds of life, I will look for God's flowers.

I went into the building and got sidetracked. As I came out, I passed the weeds and got angry again. This reminded me of the whole purpose of my visit. I had forgotten to talk with Jesus! Going back in, I spent time with my Lord at the altar. Coming back out, I no longer noticed the weeds but the beautiful purple violets.

This made me think about how many times I overlook God's handiwork. It happens so easily. Spending time with God despite my anger and troubles reminded me of how Jesus is like the spring. Just as we see flowers and trees and other vegetation flourishing in the sunlight, our relationship with Jesus can help us to bloom. When we are fed by him, the world looks more beautiful.

**Prayer:** Dear Lord Jesus, open up our eyes and hearts to the newness we can experience as we walk with you. Amen.

Jerrie Green (West Virginia, USA) — See back cover.

# A CHANGE IN PATTERN

WED  
NOV 3  
2021

READ Psalm 103:1-5

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

— 2 Corinthians 10:5 (NIV)

One day as I washed dishes, I agonized over things I had said in an earlier conversation. I combed over my words. *Why did I say that? I should have thought more carefully before I spoke.* I pictured myself reliving the conversation and saying different words.

Then God spoke to my heart. I stopped berating myself and started to focus on worshipping God: *Praise you, God, for you are my Creator. Praise you, for you are my Savior. Praise you, for you are my Sustainer.*

When I finished my prayer of praise, I paused to contemplate what had happened. Earlier, when I was focusing on my shortcomings, I felt overwhelmed and exhausted. But when I switched my thoughts to praising God, I felt exhilarated and energetic.

This practice of redirecting my thoughts from beating myself down to praising God taught me that our Creator gives us the ability to change our thinking. We can change the pattern of our thoughts from focusing on ourselves to focusing on the Almighty. With this mindset we can live faithfully.

**THOUGHT FOR THE DAY**  
Praising God can renew my spirit and give me strength.

**Prayer:** Dear God, thank you for showing us the ways you want us to live — in our thoughts, our words, and our deeds. Amen.

Delores Kight (Florida, USA)

**Prayer Focus:** THOSE STRUGGLING WITH  
NEGATIVE SELF-TALK

THUR  
NOV 4  
2021

## NAVIGATION

READ Psalm 119:105-112

*I will never forget your precepts, for by them you have preserved my life.*

— Psalm 119:93 (NIV)

I will never forget my first experience using a car navigation system more than 15 years ago. My daughter's wedding was to be held in a big city about two hundred miles away. I had never been to that city, and I decided to install a vehicle navigation system for the drive. As my wife and I traveled, the landscape changed, and gradually the scenery became unfamiliar. I checked the monitor often and followed the system's directions. Then at last, the destination appeared on the screen, and to my surprise we had arrived.

### THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

God's guidance is always trustworthy.

This amazing experience reminds me of our Christian life. Our final destination has been set to God's kingdom, and we are now in the midst of driving on the road of life, looking to the Bible for guidance as we go. It is inevitable that we will face difficulties, hardships, and temptations. However, if we carefully follow God's guidance in scripture, our final destination will be guaranteed.

**Prayer:** Help us, O God, to study scripture carefully so that we can remain on the road that leads to you. We pray as Jesus taught us, "Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen" (Matt. 6:9-13, KJV). Amen.

Kazuo Ishikawa (Akita, Japan) — See back cover.

# OFFERING HELP

FRI  
NOV 5  
2021

READ Matthew 5:38-42

*Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.*

— Matthew 5:42 (NIV)

My boyfriend and I were approached in a grocery store parking lot by a man we assumed to be homeless. He asked politely if we had a dollar to spare, as he wanted to buy tacos from a nearby fast-food restaurant. My boyfriend quickly got out his wallet and gave the man \$20. The man initially refused, but my boyfriend explained, “I know it’s a rough world out here; anything can help.” When the man finally accepted and gave us permission to pray with him, we prayed for his protection and Christ’s continued care for him. We watched the man cross the street and enter the restaurant. Once in the car, I asked my boyfriend what compelled him to be so generous. He said simply, “I felt God tugging at my heart to help him.”

Charity is one of the many virtues that Christ asks us to practice daily. Any act, whether giving to someone in need or just

spending time with a lonely person, glorifies Christ and is an outward expression of his love. When we trust and act on the “heart tugs,” we can change the outcome of someone’s day. We don’t know the impact we may have on others.

**THOUGHT FOR THE DAY**  
Even one generous act can inspire change in our world.

**Prayer:** Loving God, grant us the courage to help others in any way we can. May we glorify you and show your love through acts of charity. Amen.

Becca Stiegelmar (Texas, USA)

## INHERITANCE

READ Psalm 145:1-13

*One generation commends your works to another;  
they tell of your mighty acts.*

— Psalm 145:4 (NIV)

My mother's book of family history depicted how her parents survived the Russian Revolution of 1917. Then religious persecution forced them and many other Christians to flee across Europe. They were often hungry, exhausted, cold, and afraid. Grief seemed to follow Grandma and Grandpa: six of their 13 children died very young; many relatives were imprisoned in Siberia; Grandpa died in his fifties; and Grandma watched my mother walk away from her faith. But Grandma never lost her faith. Even when she did not get to witness the impact of her devo-

### THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

My faithful living can make  
a difference for future  
generations.

tion, she trusted God. In one handwritten page in the family record book, Grandma begged her children and grandchildren to love God and follow Christ.

During devastating trials, King David experienced God's steadfast love and faithfulness. Psalm 145 reflects his love, trust, and reverence for God. His words encourage future generations to remain hopeful.

Grandma's faith through suffering reflected her trust in an all-powerful God. She left a legacy of hope that I have turned to in my own battles with grief, fear, and exhaustion. Through this inheritance from my grandmother, God has increased my faith.

**Prayer:** Dear Lord, thank you for those who have left faithful legacies. Help us to live faithfully for the sake of future generations. Amen.

Candice Lucey (British Columbia, Canada)

# AMBASSADORS FOR CHRIST

SUN  
NOV 7  
2021

READ 2 Corinthians 5:16-21

*We are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.*

— 2 Corinthians 5:20 (NRSV)

Ambassadors appointed by their governments are stationed in countries all across the world as representatives of their nations. As spokespeople and envoys to other governments, ambassadors carry influence and communicate the policies of their countries.

Christ calls his followers to be ambassadors — to represent him before all people. As ambassadors of Christ, we are to reflect Christ's

love, mercy, grace, compassion, joy, and generosity. What an awesome responsibility it is to represent Christ!

As ambassadors of Christ, we are charged with bearing the likeness of Christ to the world. What we say and do, and how we respond to others will be a strong witness to the kingdom of God that Christ revealed.

The apostle Paul tells us that we have been appointed and confirmed by Christ to be his ambassadors. We can fulfill this calling when we center our lives on Christ's love and forgiveness.

**Prayer:** Dear God, forgive us when we fail to represent you well, and strengthen us with your never-ending love and grace to renew our commitment to you. Amen.

**THOUGHT FOR THE DAY**  
I represent Christ when I live out his love.

Todd Diedrich (Wisconsin, USA)

MON  
NOV 8  
2021

## A CHANGE OF FOCUS

READ Acts 1:4-8

Jesus said, *“Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”*

— Matthew 28:19 (NIV)

While I was in medical school, I attended church regularly; but my roommate did not know much about God. However, she became interested in the Bible I kept by my bedside table. When I would spend time deeply focused on my coursework, she would ask me about Jesus and the Christian way of life.

**THOUGHT FOR THE DAY**  
How is God shifting the focus of my life?

It annoyed me to have to stop what I was doing and respond to her, but the interruptions compelled me to more actively share my faith.

Then I read Luke 24:46-47, where Jesus said as he was about to leave the earth: “The Messiah will suffer and rise . . . and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations.” I realized then that I had not understood God’s full purpose for my life. Studying medicine was not my only goal. As a follower of Christ I was also called to preach and share the good news of the gospel.

After further reflection, I began to speak with my roommate about Jesus Christ and his teachings. After a while she became a faithful disciple of Jesus. Encouraged by Christ’s teachings in scripture, I am glad I listened and accepted God’s prompting “to go and make disciples.”

**Prayer:** Interrupt us, O God, when our focus needs to shift. Inspire us to be ready to share your good news. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

Lillian Saldaña Campos (La Habana, Cuba)

# FOLLOWING THE CALL

TUES  
NOV 9  
2021

READ John 10:25-29

Jesus said, “*My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me.*”

— John 10:27 (NIV)

Wood ducks build their nests in hollow, rotted tree cavities, which are sometimes up to 60 feet above the ground. Within a day of hatching, the ducklings climb out of their nests. Following their mother’s beckoning call, they leap from the safety and comfort of the nest and fall to the ground below before making their way to water where their mother awaits. The ducklings do not hesitate to follow the voice they know and trust. They make this jump before they have learned to fly; yet they trust the call to come.

After discovering the fascinating beginnings of a wood duck’s life, I began to wonder how much I trust the voice of the One who cares for me.

*Am I willing to leave all that is safe and familiar and follow the Shepherd’s call, even if that means leaping into the great unknown?*

**THOUGHT FOR THE DAY**  
I can always trust the voice of my Shepherd.

The ducklings’ obedience is natural and instinctive. They show no fear — only trust. What a strong reminder to focus on the Shepherd’s voice with full assurance of his loving guidance!

**Prayer:** Dear Lord, help us to follow you, trusting in your care for us. Amen.

Jessica E. Dutton (Maine, USA)

WED  
NOV 10  
2021

## OFFERING WHAT WE HAVE

READ Psalm 118:21-25

*The stone that the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone.*

— Psalm 118:22 (NRSV)

My old wheelbarrow had rusted out, and both handles had been broken, repaired, and re-broken. I was about to throw it in a dumpster with no regret. But then a person next to me said, “Your wheelbarrow has a good wheel. Can I have it?” He had brought his wheelbarrow to the dump because its wheel had broken, but with my good wheel he could repair his wheelbarrow. I was delighted that someone could benefit from this object I was about to throw away.

### THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

What I reject, God may use for good.

Sometimes we see no value left in something we choose to discard. It is a happy surprise when someone tells us that what we have is just what they need. Similarly, we can look at our lives and think we have nothing useful left to give, especially when our bodies and minds stop working like they used to. But we may discover new ways to help a person in need or make someone’s day with kind words. What we believe holds no value may be what matters most to someone else. When I am discouraged by my mistakes, I try to remember that sometimes by offering the things we may overlook or devalue we can become blessings to others. God can use what we reject to change the world.

**Prayer:** Gracious God, may your Spirit flow through those parts of us that we have given up on. Help us to look for the blessings in others that they may not see. Amen.

Jonathan Scott (Connecticut, USA) — See back cover.

# GOD LIFTS US

THUR  
NOV 11  
2021

READ Esther 10:1-3

*[The LORD our God] raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth the needy out of the dunghill; That he may set him with princes, even with the princes of his people.*

— Psalm 113:7-8 (KJV)

As I was reading Esther, I found a detail that I previously hadn't noticed. In addition to being praised around the kingdom at the end of the book, Mordecai became King Xerxes' second-in-command. And he used his position of power to speak up for the Jewish population, who were exiles and often disenfranchised in Xerxes' kingdom. Mordecai was once a powerless man that sat at the gate of the palace, but God lifted him up to become the king's deputy. What a promotion!

The Bible teaches me that God wants the best for me. When I encounter struggles, it is not always something I've earned or deserve. Sometimes, my pain is just a process that I am going through. I try to remember this, especially when life is hard or I feel ashamed. God sees me and will give me everlasting joy in place of shame (Isa. 61:7). With God, we can trust that our weeping and shame is not forever. Our Creator will lift us out of any dunghill and set us among princes.

## THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

My pain is a process that God is helping me through.

**Prayer:** Dear Lord, you see our pain and our shame. Teach us to have confidence in you to lift us up regardless of our present situation. Amen.

Oluwasola Jegede (Lagos, Nigeria)

FRI  
NOV 12  
2021

## NO MATTER THE DISTANCE

READ Matthew 8:5-13

*The centurion replied, "Lord, I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. But just say the word, and my servant will be healed."*

— Matthew 8:8 (NIV)

The phone rang, and it was too early for good news. Still half-asleep, I answered the call from my parents. My sister Mary had been in a car accident, and they were en route to the hospital. She had suffered a traumatic brain injury and was in a coma. They said they would know more if she survived the first 24 hours.

For the rest of the day, I prayed and wept and screamed in my bedroom. Because I was overseas at the time, it was true agony to be so far away and know my sister was on the verge of death. Eventually, in an attempt to find some comfort, I read today's scripture.

The centurion was not physically near to his suffering servant. Yet, Jesus made the servant well. I took comfort in that story, knowing that distance is irrelevant to God.

### THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

No distance can separate me  
from God.

My sister lived, but she still suffers the effects of her injuries and resides at home with my parents. I still live far away and cannot be there as much as I would

like. But I take heart knowing that our faith overcomes earthly separation. Geographic distance cannot isolate us from our loved ones in need, nor the love, healing, and protection of our Lord Jesus Christ.

**Prayer:** Dear heavenly Father, help us to have the faith to know that you hear our prayers, no matter the time or distance. Watch over our loved ones who are suffering. Amen.

Johnny Nelson (Texas, USA) — See back cover.

# UNCONDITIONAL LOVE

SAT  
NOV 13  
2021

## READ Hosea 11:1-8

*When Israel was a child, I loved him . . . How can  
I give you up, Ephraim? How can  
I hand you over, Israel?*

— Hosea 11:1, 8 (NIV)

My husband and I have five children. Raising them brought quite a few challenges. One son in particular went through a very difficult period from the age of 15 into adulthood. We experienced many sleepless nights, tears, anger, and just plain weariness during those years.

Israel, too, constantly tried God's patience by worshiping false gods and turning their backs on God.

Hosea writes that Israel's unfaithfulness resulted in foreign powers conquering their government and exiling their people into distant lands. However, God never stopped loving them: they were children of the Almighty.

Through God's grace, we also never gave up on our son. We loved him and prayed for him through his many angry years. Today he is a hardworking young man and the father of three delightful children of his own.

As Israel's parent, God offered them all-encompassing love and compassion. And just as God never gave up on the people of Israel, the Lord never gives up on us.

**THOUGHT FOR THE DAY**  
Because God faithfully loves me, I will faithfully love others.

**Prayer:** Dear Father, thank you for your unconditional love that spills over into our lives and hearts. Give us the courage to love others even when it is difficult. Amen.

Dianne Fegan (Queensland, Australia)

SUN  
NOV 14  
2021

## GOD HEALED MY HEART

READ Matthew 9:18-22

*The righteous cry out, and the LORD hears them; he delivers them from all their troubles. The LORD is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.*

— Psalm 34:17-18 (NIV)

My left knee throbbed, the spot between my shoulder blades ached, and my thumb joints screamed at me. Arthritis and fibromyalgia were causing me great pain. For a while I was angry because I could no longer embroider, something

I had enjoyed for years.

My hands would ache if I quilted or sewed by hand for any length of time.

As all these changes to my body were taking place,

my heart broke. I cried out to God with the typical question, “Why?” I felt sorry for myself. But then I felt the Holy Spirit’s nudge to pray for healing. The healing wasn’t for my body; it was for my attitude. So I prayed and asked God for comfort and peace with my situation. Without hesitation, God poured grace over me.

I still struggle sometimes. When I do, I bow my head and seek my Father, who loves me. God continues to heal my crushed spirit, and I praise God for being with me always.

**Prayer:** Dear God, heal those who are broken, both physically and spiritually. Give us all new days and new ways to find the joy in our lives. Amen.

Penny Frost McGinnis (Ohio, USA) — See p. 21.

# Real people. Real stories. Real faith.



Hazel Thompson (p. 62) is a retired teacher who has two sons and two grandchildren.



Travis Teague (p. 27) has led student trips to Italy, France, Venezuela, and the Olympic Games in Beijing.



Jennifer Kingsley (p. 72) is a doctor whose parents are both pastors in India. She enjoys drawing and painting.



Jason Koon (p. 31) is a minister who enjoys hiking, playing guitar, and eating sushi and burritos.



Steve Hopkins (p. 58) is a pastor who loves being outdoors, cycling, and weightlifting. He has two daughters and three large dogs.



Amy Culwell (p. 33) is a mother and physical therapist who enjoys cooking, traveling, and watching college football.



Patrick Baumer (p. 60) is a retired elementary school teacher and volunteer firefighter.



Penny Frost McGinnis (p. 20) is a published author and blogger who is working on her second novel.

## ***Share YOUR story today!***

The people pictured on this page did.

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Submit online: [submissions.upperroom.org](http://submissions.upperroom.org)

MON  
NOV 15  
2021

## GREATER LOVE

READ Genesis 1:26-31

*If you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, "Move from here to there," and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you.*

— Matthew 17:20 (NRSV)

In the summer of 2018, I spent a week backpacking in Colorado with my discipleship group. We hiked over 40 miles to reach a mountain that we would summit the final day. On the morning of the summit, we woke up at 5:30 a.m. to see the sunrise. We climbed for what seemed like hours, and as

### THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

God is greater than  
my struggles.

I climbed over the last bit of rock, I looked out over the horizon. All around me were mountains and valleys. As I looked at the vast landscape, I couldn't help but

feel small. All my problems and struggles felt small too.

At that moment I thought, *How often do I let my struggles hold me down even when I know God is there?* Sadly, more often than I would like to admit. So when I feel like I can't get away from my problems, I remember the feeling of being on top of a mountain, surrounded by God's grace. If God is capable of creating mountains and valleys, we have nothing to fear. No problem is too big for God.

**Prayer:** Dear God, thank you for your love and compassion. Help us to remember that you are greater than all our struggles. We pray the prayer Jesus taught us, "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.

Reece Martin (Texas, USA)

## READ 1 Peter 5:6-11

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

— 1 Peter 5:7 (NIV)

When a women's retreat committee asked me to speak to them, God urged me to share my struggle with depression and how God brought people into my life in answer to my prayers. I did not want to be so vulnerable, but I trusted God's promise to give me the words and to take away my fear. It turned out that one young woman in particular needed to hear those words to know that she was not alone.

"I can't do it. I'm not as good as . . ." This type of thinking often comes into my mind and makes me anxious. When God wanted me to share the truth of God's word with others, I responded in fear with, "Me? I can't." But God helped me overcome my fear.

God knows our needs, fears, and even our lack of faith. We can go to God, hand over our cares and fears, and then let God

guide us in what to do. I might not have the same abilities as my friends. "I can't" is often still my first response. I am still learning how to give my fears, cares, and anxieties to God. But I also know that just as God helped me speak about depression, God can help us all to do anything God asks of us.

**THOUGHT FOR THE DAY**

God will guide me in whatever God has asked me to do.

**Prayer:** Dear God, thank you for helping us to move past our fears. Help us to trust that you will equip us for the tasks you ask of us. Amen.

Carol Harrison (Saskatchewan, Canada)

WED  
NOV 17  
2021

## OUR NOISY WORLD

READ 1 Kings 19:9-12

*Be still, and know that I am God.*

— Psalm 46:10 (NIV)

From the time we wake up until the time we go to sleep, we're bombarded with noise. The alarm clock begins the cacophony, giving way to the morning news, the honking traffic, and the blaring radio. Computers and cell phones chirp, beep, and ring — constantly demanding our attention.

**THOUGHT FOR THE DAY**  
In the quiet I can hear God's  
voice.

Noise fills our ears and distracts our minds. "I can't even hear myself think!" I often exclaim in frustration.

Sadly, the relentless noise doesn't just drown out my thoughts; it also drowns out God's voice. Psalm 46:10 reminds us that if we want to experience a firm confidence that God is in control, we must quiet ourselves in spite of the world around us.

This might be as simple as refusing to turn on the TV, radio, or computer on a given day until after we've read our Bible. Or it might mean praying on the way to work instead of listening to music or the radio. Taking a few moments for quiet reflection gives us the opportunity to listen for God's voice. Sometimes we can hear God shouting to get our attention; but more often, God speaks in the still, small voice of the Holy Spirit. And that's a sound we never want to miss.

**Prayer:** Gracious God, help us to quiet ourselves amid the chaos around us so that we can hear your voice more clearly. Amen.

Lori Hatcher (South Carolina, USA) — See back cover.

# STRENGTH AND PEACE

THUR  
NOV 18  
2021

## READ 2 Corinthians 12:2-10

*Paul wrote, “[The Lord] said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me.”*

— 2 Corinthians 12:9 (NIV)

On Friday, July 28, 2017, my wife Lisa and I were shocked to hear my physician say, “I think you have ALS.” I don’t remember much after those words except for the moment I looked at Lisa’s face and knew that our lives would change forever.

Further testing confirmed the diagnosis: amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, a fatal disease with no known cure. On average, patients survive only 2-5 years after diagnosis.

It took weeks for the reality of our unknown future to set in. However, there was one thing I was certain about: God was with me and would continue working through me! After sharing our news with family, close friends, and our church, we received an outpouring of love through encouraging words, hugs, cards, and visits.

**THOUGHT FOR THE DAY**  
God loves me and is present  
in every situation.

In addition to receiving love, it has been my hope to share “a peace that surpasses all understanding” with others (Phil. 4:6-7). In line with Paul’s words from today’s reading, I try to give my weaknesses to God so that the Lord can use them. When friends and family tell me that they are praying for me and our family, I simply reply, “Thank you” and add, “God loves hearing your prayers!”

**Prayer:** Heavenly Father, when we face trials that seem insurmountable, thank you for your love, mercy, and grace that provide us strength, hope, and unexplained peace. Amen.

John Wesley “Wes” Sexton (South Carolina, USA)

FRI  
NOV 19  
2021

## TRUSTING GOD

READ Exodus 17:1-7

*Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not rely on your own insight. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.*

— Proverbs 3:5-6 (NRSV)

I had applied for a professional course at my university, but my name wasn't on the first provisional list of candidates chosen. When I saw this, I became anxious and blamed myself for foolishly not applying to other universities. Finally when I felt there was no way I would be accepted, I fasted and prayed. To my surprise, God heard my prayers on the very first day of my fast. I was selected in the second provisional

### THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

God sees my need and will always answer.

list. I felt sheepish that I had been complaining for no reason. This was a miracle God was already about to perform!

The Israelites had a similar experience when God brought them to Rephidim. Instead of enjoying their new freedom, they complained about the lack of water. They started grumbling and complaining to Moses, rather than trusting that God who had led them out of Egypt would sustain them. As a result of the complaining, Moses named the place “testing” and “complaining.” Maybe had they waited patiently and trusted God, they would still have enjoyed the miracle of water gushing from the rock at Horeb. Then the place could instead have been named “trusting” and “rejoicing.” In difficult situations, instead of putting God to the test, we can trust that God will care for us.

**Prayer:** Help us, Lord, to trust you always. Amen.

Carol Macwan (Gujarat, India) — See back cover.

# A SENSE OF URGENCY

SAT  
NOV 20  
2021

READ Luke 15:8-10

*Look to the LORD and his strength;  
seek his face always.*

— Psalm 105:4 (NIV)

Recently, my wife and I pulled into a restaurant parking lot and noticed that a vehicle backing out had something on the rear bumper. As we got closer, I could see it was a wallet. I jumped out, grabbed the wallet, and went to the driver's door. The driver had a surprised look on her face, not quite sure what I was doing. But as soon as I held the wallet up, her eyes brightened with relief and thankfulness.

Today's scripture story shows how Jesus used our feeling of urgency when we've lost something to illustrate a point about salvation. Jesus, the Good Shepherd, searches intently for us; but sometimes I wonder how hard we search for Jesus. Do we have that same sense of urgency when it comes to following him and sharing the good news? Sometimes we may find that we've left Jesus on the rear bumper of our lives. We focus too much on our wants and needs and distance ourselves from Jesus — not realizing we've left our most valuable possession behind.

We can always ask God to rekindle our urgency to seek and to share the love of

Jesus. No matter how far we may have traveled, God is always there, ready to forgive and welcome us back.

## THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Today I will search for Jesus as urgently as he seeks me.

**Prayer:** Dear God, forgive us when we forget to prioritize our faith, and help us to pursue your wisdom as we journey day by day. Amen.

Travis Teague (North Carolina, USA) — See p. 21.

**Prayer Focus:** FOR OPPORTUNITIES TO SHARE MY FAITH 27

SUN  
NOV 21  
2021

## WAITING FOR GOD

READ Psalm 27:1-14

*Wait for the LORD; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the LORD!*

— Psalm 27:14 (NRSV)

My grandchildren live a continent away. When we are planning a visit, waiting to be reunited can seem to take an eternity for all of us. My daughter helps the children by marking off the number of sleeps left until they run down the airport ramp into my arms. Meanwhile, she calls their attention to the present by having them draw pictures, pack backpacks, and buy gifts. They are learning to trust that the big day will come in good time.

### THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

When we wait in faith, we will see the goodness of God.

In Psalm 27, David assented to the goodness of God while waiting for vindication. He sought God, wanting the Lord to teach him and remain close to him. David maintained a sense of living in the present while looking toward a hopeful future. Scripture teaches that waiting is a time of expectation, drawing near to God, and gaining strength in the process.

The next time we find ourselves waiting with worry or impatience, we might ask: Where is God in this moment? What are the needs of those around me? What am I trying to control that is better left in God's hands?

**Prayer:** Dear Lord, thank you for your patience with us when we wait with worry and frustration. Help us to draw strength and courage from you as we wait on your word. Amen.

Mary Wisner (Michigan, USA)

# THE NARROW PATH

MON  
NOV 22  
2021

READ Luke 13:22-30

Jesus said, “*Make every effort to enter through the narrow door.*”

— Luke 13:24 (NIV)

Our village is crisscrossed by winding paths between the houses. Walls seven feet high protect the paths. I enjoy turning from the road through the narrow entrance onto the path because the wind drops, the sun shines a little warmer, and the gardens look brighter. I am amazed by the huge flowers of the dinner-plate hibiscus, and I look for the shining black king skink moving away into the abundant ground cover. Out of the wind and extreme temperatures, the path is a sanctuary for me.

Similarly, we need the focus of a narrow door to fully appreciate the sanctuary of our life in Christ. The world offers us many competing treasures, but the only way we can be certain of lasting treasure is to follow Jesus through that narrow door where we join him on the path. This does not mean that we reject all the good things of the world. Instead, with Christ on the path with us, we are sufficiently focused so that we can appreciate their true value. Our relationships take on greater joy when we treat others with the love and care Christ shows us. Our perception of the world will be clearer when we remember the Creator who brings it into being.

The narrow way is not primarily a restraint on our lives. Rather, it opens our lives to possibilities of living more fully with Christ.

**Prayer:** Lead us, Lord, through the narrow door onto the narrow path where we may better recognize and appreciate your gifts to us. Amen.

**THOUGHT FOR THE DAY**  
Following Christ through the narrow door allows me to live abundantly.

Ted Witham (Western Australia, Australia)

**Prayer Focus:** THOSE WHO FEEL SEPARATED FROM GOD 29

TUES  
NOV 23  
2021

## THE PERSON IN FRONT OF YOU

READ John 8:1-11

*The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.*

— 2 Peter 3:9 (NIV)

After moving to a suburb of a large metropolitan area, I felt discouraged and frightened by news stories of nearby criminal activity. It was hard to read about an armed robbery at a convenience store, a hit-and-run accident that injured a child, or a group following a delivery truck to steal packages. My

first response was to pray for the victims of these crimes.

I could identify with the fear, grief, and anger they must have felt. However,

the more I let my prayers be

guided by the news stories, the more concern I developed for the perpetrators. I asked myself, "What circumstances would lead my neighbor to these kinds of actions?"

Second Peter 3 reminds me that God has been patient with my failings and deeply desires for all people to repent. I now feel called to pray not only for the victims but also for those who have committed crimes in my community.

I am also challenged to consider how I offer God's love and forgiveness to the people I encounter daily. My church encourages its members to "love the person in front of you." This means accepting people as they are instead of judging them. I try to remember these challenging words when I encounter people whose actions I do not understand. Then I ask Jesus to help me love them as he already does.

**Prayer:** Forgiving Christ, help us to love and pray for people whose actions we cannot comprehend. Amen.

Beverly Marshall-Goodell (Georgia, USA)

# OPPORTUNITIES TO OBEY

WED  
NOV 24  
2021

READ Luke 9:57-62

*Jesus replied, “No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God.”*

— Luke 9:62 (NIV)

Several years ago, I worked in sales. My sales partner was an energetic young man fresh out of college. After a few months, he started to become frustrated. “I don’t know how to make a dent in our market,” he would say.

One day after hearing his frustrations, I told him that since markets are made up of individual accounts we should try to focus on individual customers. We tried this approach and found success.

As Christians, we are also tempted to think in general terms. “Give Jesus your life,” we rightly encourage one another. However, what does that mean? How do we actually do that?

Just like a market is made up of individual accounts, our lives are made up of individual moments. In these verses from Luke

9, Jesus challenges us to follow him, even in the midst of the gritty, mundane reality of daily existence. Every moment, every circumstance is an opportunity for obedience.

Focusing on these daily opportunities allows us to break down our commitment to Christ into smaller, more manageable pieces. As we surrender each moment, we find our whole life conforming to God’s plan.

**Prayer:** Dear Lord, help us to see you in the ordinary moments of daily existence. Show us ways to submit our lives to you and to learn obedience. Amen.

**THOUGHT FOR THE DAY**  
What small moments can I submit to Christ today?

Jason Koon (North Carolina, USA) — See p. 21.

THUR  
NOV 25  
2021

## GRATEFUL AND GENEROUS

READ 2 Corinthians 9:10-15

*You will be enriched in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.*

— 2 Corinthians 9:11 (NIV)

My brother, Martín, lives in New York. In the apartment building where he lives, several cats come around every evening. My brother tells me that he always purchases food for them, spending about \$10 daily. Knowing he has limited resources, his friends scold him and question why he bothers with the cats. My brother's response is: "It is a way to express gratitude for God's immense goodness. I am almost 70 years old, and God has granted me a good life — without pain, filled with energy, and the ability to work and live without limitations. Caring for God's creatures is a small way to demonstrate my gratitude to God."

### THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Today I will show gratitude to God by giving generously.

As I reflected on his story, I realized that if we all expressed such gratitude to God, it would create in us a generous spirit; we would have a much more loving and caring world. I am grateful for my brother, for his example, and for his inspiration to follow the biblical teaching to "be generous on every occasion." May we all work at developing more grateful and generous hearts so that God's will may more fully be realized.

**Prayer:** Generous God, thank you for your loving-kindness and the blessings we receive each day. Inspire us to be generous with everyone we can, in whatever ways we can. In the name of the One who gave his life for us. Amen.

Yesenia Rosado (Dominican Republic)

# UNEXPECTED PLACES

FRI  
NOV 26  
2021

READ Psalm 145:17-21

*The LORD is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth. He fulfills the desires of those who fear him; he hears their cry and saves them.*

— Psalm 145:18-19 (NIV)

About a week after I returned from maternity leave, my job was unexpectedly eliminated. I was shocked, hurt, and anxious about how my husband and I would make ends meet. We were *just* learning how to be parents of a new baby. How were we supposed to handle this?

I went grocery shopping the next day with a heavy heart, still wondering about the future. I saw a woman about my age who looked familiar. Asking her name, I realized that she was the nurse who helped me through the toughest part of my recent labor. She was a kind and patient caregiver, and I had wanted her to meet my daughter. But her shift ended before she had the chance. This had always made me a little sad. Three months later — in the middle of a grocery store — they finally had the chance to meet.

## THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

God loves and cares  
for me always.

This was the sweetest moment that the Lord could have given me that day. I was scared, and God had felt far away. In that moment, I realized that God heard my prayers and listened closely. Our Creator is always present and always lovingly cares for us, even when our situation feels troubled. Sometimes God speaks to us when we least expect it.

**Prayer:** Dear Lord, help us to remember your goodness and faithfulness always. May we lean on you in times of distress, knowing that you hear our cries. Amen.

Amy Culwell (Alabama, USA) — See p. 21.

## AN OPEN MIND

READ Isaiah 49:13-18

*See, I have inscribed you on the palms of my hands.*

— Isaiah 49:16 (NRSV)

I knew no other students in my new sixth-grade class. I cried every day after school, and I felt alone, scared, and empty. I begged my mom not to make me go and even asked her to homeschool me. I was afraid of being alone all day.

One day I was determined that I was not going to school.

After my mom dropped me off at school, I ran away. I planned to go sit outside my house all day since no one would be home. As I walked home, my mom found me.

### THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

God's presence in my life means I am never truly alone.

She asked me what was wrong. When I told her everything, she told me that I really was not alone. She explained that God was with me, and had a plan for me. I decided to go to school with a mind open to God's plan, and I ended up making two friends who remain my closest friends to this day.

Even when we feel the most alone, God is with us. It is impossible for us to be alone if God is in our hearts. When we feel scared and alone, we can choose to focus on God's presence and plan for us. We can take refuge in Christ and let him be our guide.

**Prayer:** Loving God, help us always to trust in you and be open to your plans for us. Remind us of your presence and guidance when we are lonely. Amen.

Jesse Cantu (Texas, USA)

# 1<sup>ST</sup> SUNDAY OF ADVENT

SUN  
NOV 28  
2021

READ John 8:12-20

*Jesus spoke to them, saying, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life."*

— John 8:12 (NRSV)

One time when our daughters were young, a big blizzard caused our power to go out. At first our daughters were afraid of the darkness. When my husband, Jim, and I lit our emergency candles, our girls enjoyed the bright, dancing flames. The light filled the darkness while we ate dinner and read bedtime stories.

There is something comforting about light when everything is dark and uncertain. Light gives us perspective, vision, and hope. Jesus is the "Light of the World" no matter what kind of darkness our world is experiencing.

Jesus promised that if we follow him we will never walk in darkness because his light shows us the way and gives abundant life. The light of Christ shines through us when we follow him faithfully. As we enter the season of Advent, we can let Christ's light shine through us and illuminate the darkness in our world.

**THOUGHT FOR THE DAY**  
I will let Christ's light shine through me today.

**Prayer:** O Christ, thank you for your light of life. Help us to remain focused on you in this season and always. Amen.

Laurel Balyeat Morrison (California, USA)

MON  
NOV 29  
2021

## WORRIES INTO PRAYERS

READ **Philippians 4:4-9**

*Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.*

— Philippians 4:6 (NRSV)

Worry is a natural, human response to challenging situations. Years ago I contracted life-threatening malaria and typhoid fever, and I worried I would die.

Then one day I felt God saying, “Be still and know that I am God.” From that time on, I converted my worries and anx-

### THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Today I will worry less and pray more.

ieties into prayers, and my faith in God grew. I studied more of God’s word as I made my requests known to God. The apostle Paul told the Philippians not to

be anxious about anything; rather, in whatever situation they found themselves, they should take all their petitions to God with thanksgiving.

God answers prayers. Dwelling on worries and doubts does no good; but when we bring our petitions to God with thanksgiving, praying with faith in our hearts, our prayers will be answered.

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, give us faith to release our worries and pray more. Help us always to be thankful for what you’ve done and what you will do. Amen.

Ubong E. A. Zeal (Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria)

# A MASTERPIECE

TUES  
NOV 30  
2021

READ Psalm 8:1-9

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

— Ephesians 2:10 (NIV)

For the past few years, I have been studying how to paint with oils. At first, the technique was overwhelming. However, I am beginning to feel more comfortable with each new painting.

To begin any new work of art, I need an idea, brushes, oils, and a blank canvas. Lately, I start by tracing a photograph and painting the background colors. Little by little, the artwork comes alive — and hopefully resembles the photo too.

It takes time and patience to create a finished product. This process helps me to understand the attention and care our Lord has taken to create each of us. God is the master artist. Scripture says that we are God's handiwork — not a duplicate but an individual masterpiece. We are fearfully and wonderfully made and remade by our faithful Creator, who knows our innermost being. With God as our painter, we are called to rejoice at the beauty within ourselves and others.

**THOUGHT FOR THE DAY**  
Instead of judging myself and others, I will admire God's creations.

**Prayer:** Dear God, you are the Master Creator with an eye for detail. Help us to see each individual and ourselves with your eyes. Amen.

Denise L. Armstrong (Ohio, USA)

WED  
DEC 1  
2021

## NO NEED TO FEAR

READ Deuteronomy 31:1-6

*[The LORD] will never leave you nor forsake you.*

— Deuteronomy 31:6 (NIV)

I work in Kansas, which is a long way from my home in south-central Pennsylvania. After spending a wonderful week at home over Christmas with family and friends, I couldn't sleep the night before I was to return to Kansas. I felt anxious about leaving my family and being alone again in Kansas,

**THOUGHT FOR THE DAY**  
God will comfort me during any time of uncertainty.

as well as what the flight back would be like. As I lay awake in bed worrying, I decided to take comfort in God's word by reading that day's devotional in *The*

*Upper Room*. The quoted scripture was from Deuteronomy: "Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the LORD your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you." Those words spoke directly to my soul. I felt better knowing that no matter what the plane ride or future held for me, God would always be with me.

I know I will miss being with my wife and family when I am not physically with them. But I can take comfort in knowing that God is always with me, will never forsake me, and will give me the strength I need to make it through until I can be home again.

**Prayer:** Loving God, we thank you for your promise always to be with us. In our times of anxiety, help us to reach out to you and receive your peace. Amen.

Eric Gamber (Pennsylvania, USA)

# FULLY CHARGED

THUR  
DEC 2  
2021

READ Psalm 62:1-12

*Yes, my soul, find rest in God;  
my hope comes from him.*

— Psalm 62:5 (NIV)

I was listening to some music on my portable CD player one day when suddenly the music sounded distorted and muffled. It was all jumbled, and it hardly sounded like music at all. I soon realized that the batteries were low, so I replaced them. Then the music was restored to its original clarity and beauty.

**THOUGHT FOR THE DAY**  
What will I do to recharge my spiritual batteries this week?

How like our walk with God! We can become so focused on how we are serving God that sometimes we do not pay attention to our spiritual health and fail to realize when our spiritual batteries run low. We think we can keep going and still hear God just as clearly. We forget that we need to spend regular time with God in prayer and worship to recharge our spirits so that we can better understand what God is saying to us. When we spend time with God, we can remain fully charged and have enough energy to complete the work God has for us to do.

**Prayer:** Dear God, help us always to make time for you so that we can keep our spirits fully alive and ready to respond to your call. Amen.

Carol Parker (England, United Kingdom)

## *Advent Worship Liturgies*

My wife and I love to travel. Last year we went to Europe for a riverboat cruise on the Danube. For months we were overcome with anticipation. We didn't know quite what to expect, but we knew something good awaited us on the other side of our journey.

This Advent, I invite you on a journey where I hope we can discover new insights and become a community united by God's love for us. Hope, peace, joy, and love will guide us. I pray that by the end of our Advent journey we will have experienced some awe-inspiring moments and noticed all the beauty along the way. I am confident that something good awaits us on the other side.

Invite family and friends to join you in lighting the candles and reading the liturgies. Take time to discuss the scriptures and reflections, knowing that these acts of devotion invite the presence of the Promised One into your life.

### *First Sunday of Advent: Hope*

**Speak:** "Make me to know your ways, O Lord; teach me your paths. Lead me in your truth, and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation; for you I wait all day long" (Ps. 25:4-5, NRSV).

*Light the first candle of the Advent wreath, the candle of hope.*

**Read:** Jeremiah 33:14-15 and 1 Thessalonians 3:11-13

**Reflect:** In the midst of uncertainty, Jeremiah directed Israel's attention to an anticipated time when God would set things right. Paul prayed for the Thessalonian church, both day and night, to fulfill a longing to see and support them so that they would "increase and abound in love for one another and for all."

**Engage:** Read or sing the words of verse 1 of the hymn, "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel." Sometimes we must wait for the fulfillment of a promise. What are you anticipating this season? What promises are you waiting to have fulfilled?

**Pray:** All-Present One, may we find a sense of hope and anticipation in the midst of our current realities. May we

not lose faith. In this season of Advent encourage and strengthen our faith, and give us eyes to see you! Amen.

### ***Second Sunday of Advent: Peace***

**Speak:** “I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ” (Phil. 1:6).

*Light the second candle of the Advent wreath, the candle of peace.*

**Read:** Malachi 3:1-4 and Luke 1:76-79

**Reflect:** Malachi spoke of a messenger coming to prepare a path of change and restoration. Zechariah offers a prophecy after the circumcision of John the Baptist. John’s destiny was to give light and witness to the path of peace.

**Engage:** Where can you shine light on those who sit in darkness? This week, take notice of places where you hear messages of peace.

**Pray:** Emanating Light, show us your path of peace. Still our hearts long enough to hear your promise of fulfillment. Amen.

### ***Third Sunday of Advent: Joy***

**Speak:** “Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near” (Phil. 4:4-5).

*Light the third candle of the Advent wreath, the candle of joy.*

**Read:** Isaiah 12:2-6 and Luke 3:7-18

**Reflect:** Praise is acknowledging and celebrating the nature of God. Worship is our response to God through our actions and witness. Joy comes when we live out our faith in tangible ways.

**Engage:** What words, phrases, or images from these scriptures resonate with you? What good work do you feel called to do?

**Pray:** O God, may we praise and worship you not only in words but in deeds. Amen.

### ***Fourth Sunday of Advent: Love***

**Speak:** “Restore us, O God; let your face shine, that we may be saved” (Ps. 80:3).

*Light the fourth candle of the Advent wreath, the candle of love.*

**Read:** Luke 1:39-55

**Reflect:** Mary and Elizabeth prepared themselves for the miracle of God’s gift of love. Elizabeth exclaims her joy and Mary sings with exuberance. Both trusted God’s hope-filled promise.

**Engage:** What song fills your heart as you contemplate God’s great love? What captures your imagination in Mary’s song (Luke 1:46-55)?

**Pray:** O God of hosts, shine your love on us. Give us a song to sing that declares your love for all creation, and use us to do your work in the world! Amen.

### ***Christmas Eve/Christmas Day***

**Speak:** “Sing to the LORD a new song; sing to the LORD, all the earth. Sing to the LORD, bless his name; tell of his salvation from day to day” (Ps. 96:1-2).

*Light the Christ candle.*

**Read:** Luke 2:1-20

**Reflect:** The birth of the child lying in the manger brought great joy to his parents and the angels. The shepherds praised and glorified God for the Messiah’s birth.

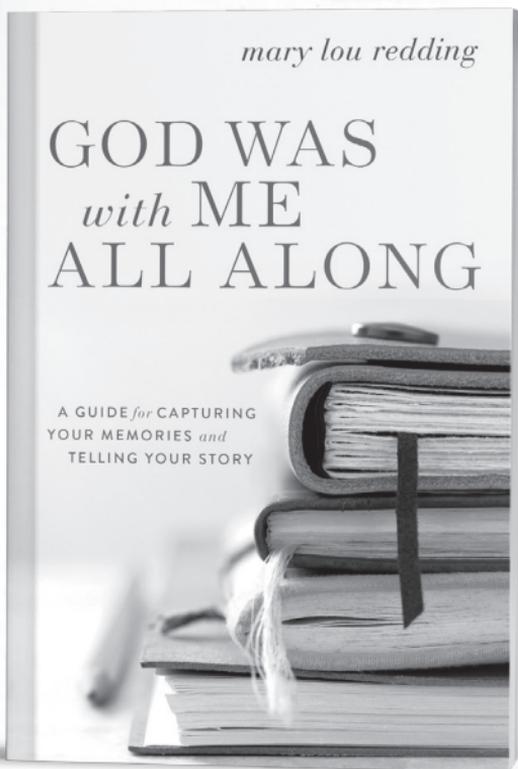
**Engage:** Imagine yourself in Bethlehem on the night of Jesus’ birth. What do you see and feel? For what do you give God praise?



**Pray:** Holy and loving God, as you invited the shepherds to share in the moment, so invite us. May we join the heavenly hosts in shouts of praise! Amen.

— **Evan Young**  
Executive Director, Stakeholder Relations  
Discipleship Ministries, United Methodist Church

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## FINDING GOD

READ Isaiah 40:28-31

*[Paul and Silas] answered, "Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household."*

— Acts 16:31 (NRSV)

When I was a senior in high school, one of my friends decided to start a weekly Bible study for the school and invited everyone to come and worship.

I was hesitant to go since I knew that my best friends were all followers of Christ, and I wasn't sure where I stood on religion. However, I decided I would go to support my friend and see what it was like. I instantly felt out of place. But then they started singing, and I remember that the first song

### THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

When Christ calls,  
I will follow.

they sang was "Thank You, Jesus." Being surrounded by all of that made me feel something that I had never felt before.

I began attending the Bible study regularly and eventually started praying every night, asking God to draw me closer in any way possible. My new relationship with God opened doors for me to attend a Christian university. Knowing I can trust and lean on God throughout my life gives me confidence. Now I look to God through the good times and the bad.

**Prayer:** Dear God, guide us and open our hearts and hands to you. Amen.

Alondra Olmos (Texas, USA)

# RECONCILING LOVE

SAT  
DEC 4  
2021

READ Genesis 33:1-10

*Esau ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck and kissed him, and they wept.*

— Genesis 33:4 (NRSV)

If ever anyone had reason to hold on to resentment, it was Esau. His younger brother Jacob stole his birthright by trickery and deceit. (See Genesis 27:1-41.) And yet, Esau forgave Jacob in an act of true brotherly love.

Jesus' parable of the prodigal son also speaks of forgiveness — a father's incredible affection for his son reunited a family. (See Luke 15:11-32.) In both stories, forgiveness and love combine in reconciliation.

One time at an airport, I saw the crowds greeting one another with embraces, kisses, smiles, and a few tears. I wondered if any of these people were there to greet a prodigal or a Jacob. There are countless broken relationships in the world. In light of that pain, God's gift of reconciliation stands out starkly.

**THOUGHT FOR THE DAY**  
What relationships in my life need reconciliation?

God models reconciling love through these Bible stories and also through Jesus Christ. As Paul explained, God reconciled us to God's self and each other through Jesus Christ. (See 2 Corinthians 5:18.)

Because of God's love and through the Holy Spirit, we all can be like Esau and the father of the prodigal son. We are able to say "I'm sorry" or "I forgive you" because we have first known the love of our Creator through Jesus Christ.

**Prayer:** Heavenly Father, teach us to love as you love. Bless us with a spirit of reconciliation so that we can apologize and forgive freely. Amen.

Anthony Lang (New South Wales, Australia)

SUN  
DEC 5  
2021

## 2<sup>ND</sup> SUNDAY OF ADVENT

READ John 1:10-18

*The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.*

— John 1:14 (NIV)

My third grandchild, Tinlie, arrived in the midst of my chemotherapy treatments for breast cancer. Discovering that an aggressive form of the disease was invading my body, I was devastated. Yet as I cradled my new granddaughter in my arms, I knew her birth had given me a renewed sense of purpose and much-needed hope. I was able to look beyond myself to God's gift of a new life.

How much more should the birth of our Savior give us hope and a reason to share the good news with those around us? Scripture tells us that Jesus came to rescue us from our sin and to offer us eternity with him. What a reason for hope! From the wonder of his conception by the Holy Spirit, to

### THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

The birth of Christ Jesus  
renews my hope.

his birth in a stable, to his sinless life on earth, to his death and resurrection, Jesus' life gives us an abundance of hope!

Today, God's gift of Jesus continues to offer new life to all who feel they are without hope. God means for us to share this gift of love and hope with others.

**Prayer:** Dear Father, thank you for the gift of Jesus and all that his birth means for us. Shine your light into the world so that everyone can experience the hope of new and eternal life through him. Amen.

Teresa Todt (Illinois, USA)

# GODLY INTERRUPTIONS

MON  
DEC 6  
2021

READ Matthew 25:31-46

*“Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?”*

— Matthew 25:44 (NIV)

Recently my wife, Gwen, and I were on vacation in San Juan. Because there was no coffee available at our hotel, I took an early-morning stroll and found a fast-food restaurant nearby. The place was almost empty; but as I headed toward the counter, a man approached me and asked, “Sir, would you buy me breakfast? I’m hungry but don’t have any money.” I politely declined and continued toward the counter. *Just another pan-handler*, I thought.

**THOUGHT FOR THE DAY**  
Every day I will watch for  
Godly interruptions.

My response had been a selfish reaction to an interruption, and I instantly regretted it. This man hadn’t asked for money; he just wanted breakfast. If I had offered to pay for his meal, it could have been an opportunity to show God’s love to someone. I quickly went back out to the street to look for him, but he was nowhere in sight.

As I write this, I still feel deep remorse. God has forgiven me, but nonetheless I grieve as I reflect on my reaction to what I feel was a Godly interruption. God presents us with daily opportunities to grow and serve in the least likely places — and often at inconvenient times. When we stop focusing only on ourselves, we can be ready to respond when opportunities to show God’s love arise.

**Prayer:** Loving God, help us to be alert to each person you put in our path today. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

Tom Smith (Utah, USA)

**Prayer Focus:** TO BE OPEN TO PROMPTINGS FROM GOD 47

TUES  
DEC 7  
2021

## TRUST IN THE LORD

READ Luke 5:17-26

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

— Psalm 118:24 (NRSV)

Our family recently lost my daughter-in-law Evelyn, and she will be deeply missed. Joy, the youngest of her 11 grandchildren, loved to run to her, wrap her arms around her legs, and tell her she'd never let her go. Much like the friends of the paralytic in our reading from Luke, my son Mike worked with

hospital staff for weeks to fight the illness that enveloped Evelyn. In the end, her heart and kidneys couldn't go on.

### THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

In the face of pain and loss, I will put my trust in the Lord.

We are not always ready to let go of our loved ones. However, if we follow God's word and trust God, the burden is lighter. Because I have been blessed with a very long life, I have had to endure many losses. I remember my mom, too, grieving that she was one of the last of her generation. But every day she would write in her journal, "This is the day that the LORD has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it."

We are meant to cherish our days with gratitude for God's presence in our lives. Yet we understand that we are mortal and trust that our loved ones will keep us alive in their hearts. Joy may have to be reminded of her grandmother's big laugh, but we hope she will remember the love she and her grandmother shared.

**Prayer:** Dear God, we rejoice in the gift of family. Even as we pray for miracles in the face of illness and pain, we hold on to the hope of your promise of eternal life. Amen.

Dolly Doss (Texas, USA)

# NO LONGER AFRAID

WED  
DEC 8  
2021

READ John 1:1-9

*The people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and for those who sat in the region and shadow of death light has dawned.*

— Matthew 4:16 (NRSV)

When I was young, I had a great fear of darkness. One night the electricity went off. Darkness quickly enveloped my room, and I felt something bad was closing in on me. I screamed until my mother rushed to my rescue. As soon as the light from her lantern shone in the room, the darkness disappeared!

Thinking about that night years later reminds me of how the whole world lay in darkness until God spoke the sun into being. I think also of how the coming of Jesus Christ as the true Light dispelled the darkness in the world and illuminated the path for humankind. (See John 1:9.) Finally, thinking of that night reminds me of a cold manger in Bethlehem where the Holy Child was born. That night marks the point at which God shined a divine light into the world and dispelled the power of evil.

Remembering my experience with darkness as a child helps me understand Christmas better. Christmas is the time when God's light through Christ breaks the hold of sin in the world. I no longer celebrate Christmas blindly but with a deep understanding of what God did by sending Jesus as the Light of the world.

**Prayer:** God of light, fill our hearts with the joy of Christmas so that the light of the gospel can shine anew in the world. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Olaiya Muyiwa Benralph (Federal Capital Territory, Nigeria)

**THOUGHT FOR THE DAY**  
Christmas is the celebration of Jesus, the Light of the World.

THUR  
DEC 9  
2021

## LOVING FIRST

READ 1 John 4:19-21

*We love because God first loved us.*

— 1 John 4:19 (CEB)

Our hearts were broken. A few months earlier, we had lost our beloved dog. One day my husband and I felt it was time to visit the local animal shelter and look for a pet who might fill the hole in our hearts. And we found him! He was in a small cage with his head down and his tail between his legs. We thought, *He needs us and we need him!* Now, only weeks after bringing him home, he runs to greet us, holds his tail up high, chases his ball nonstop, and is the happiest dog.

### THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Today I will look for opportunities to surprise others with acts of love.

If the love my husband and I gave to that little dog can completely change him in such a wonderful way, how much more can the love of God change all of

us? First John 4:19 says, “We love because God first loved us.” And because God loved us first, we are able to do things that we couldn’t possibly do otherwise. We can replace anger with forgiveness, we can replace prejudice with acceptance, and we can work toward peace in our families, neighborhoods, and the world. We can love!

**Prayer:** Dear God, help us not to wait for others to show love to us, but give us courage to love them first. Amen.

Carola Spreacker (New Mexico, USA)

## READ Psalm 23:1-6

*Let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith.*

— Hebrews 12:1-2 (NIV)

When I was first learning to drive, I had the habit of looking directly at the ground in front of the car. Every rock, stick, and pothole prompted me to react. I would steer first in one direction, then another, trying to avoid the slightest obstacle. My instructor finally asked me to pull over and offered some life-saving wisdom. He wanted me to focus my eyes on the horizon and to drive straight toward it. He explained that by lifting my gaze and locking in on a focal point in the distance, I would be able to steer more smoothly to my destination yet still be aware of my surroundings.

That advice not only improved my driving technique but also provided me a powerful spiritual insight. Our paths in life are frequently filled with hazards and tempting distractions. But it is important for us to keep our sight trained on the horizon that is Jesus, who will help us navigate through anything we face. Jesus is master of both the calm and the storm and can guide us safely.

The spiritual disciplines of praying, meditating on scripture, and participating in Christian fellowship can help us increase our focus on Jesus and lead us to our fullest lives.

**Prayer:** Dear God, help us keep our eyes fixed on your ways. Guide our paths daily as we walk both with you and toward you. Amen.

**THOUGHT FOR THE DAY**

Today I will focus my thoughts on Jesus.

James Stewart (Illinois, USA)

## WELCOMING OTHERS

READ Joshua 2:8-15, 21

*God does not have favorites.*

— Romans 2:11 (CEB)

“She’s not like us,” the woman said as we cleaned the church kitchen. Smiling, I turned to her and said, “And isn’t that great?” Unmoved, she walked away without replying.

When we truly open the doors of our churches and our hearts, we need to be ready for people who are “not like us.” If

we greet them with acceptance, not just tolerance, we open ourselves to a variety of experiences. New people, different people, can lead to diversity in music, in dress,

and maybe even in the menu for church luncheons.

As my sister in Christ expressed her discomfort with someone who wasn’t like her, I wonder if that was how the women of Israel discussed Rahab when she joined them. Did they consider her unworthy of divine purpose because her life was so very different than theirs? Did they feel more worthy than she to be used for God’s plan?

The timeless beauty communicated in Rahab’s story is that the outsider is loved and welcomed into the loving heart of God. As the people of God, Christians are called to carry out this hospitality on earth.

Today, let’s look at each person we pass with open and loving eyes. Let’s step beyond tolerance into acceptance and learn to love others for their place in God’s plan.

**Prayer:** Dear God, give us open hearts, minds, and eyes to see how beautiful our differences can be. Help us to trust your creativity. Amen.

Kimberly Rice Smith (North Carolina, USA)

# 3<sup>RD</sup> SUNDAY OF ADVENT

SUN  
DEC 12  
2021

READ Matthew 1:18-23

*“Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel,” which means, “God is with us.”*

— Matthew 1:23 (NRSV)

Just 14 days before Christmas, our father died. Christmas for our family will never be the same again. While everyone is celebrating, having reunions, and exchanging gifts, I don't know how Christmas is going to be joyful for my family and me. As I gaze at the twinkling lights on our Christmas tree, my eyes well up with tears. Papa's passing was a shock to us. No words can describe our sadness. My memories of Papa are clear in my mind, but sometimes memories aren't enough to soothe the pain. When my friends and colleagues ask me how I am doing, I can't really say I'm okay; all I can say is that I'm still holding firmly to God.

But even as I grieve, I will still celebrate Christmas.

After all, the name

Emmanuel means “God is with us.” Jesus has felt the

pain that we feel; I believe that's why his presence gives me peace during my grieving. And while grieving lasts a long time, I know I'm not alone because God holds on to me even tighter. Though I lost my loving earthly father, my heavenly Father will carry me — this Christmas and each day of my life.

**THOUGHT FOR THE DAY**  
When we are most in need,  
God is closer than ever.

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, thank you for the peace that you give us and the assurance that you are with us in our painful moments. Comfort all who grieve during this Christmas season. Amen.

Karen Tarine (National Capital Region, Philippines)

MON  
DEC 13  
2021

## FOLLOW THE LEADER

READ 1 Corinthians 10:31–11:1

Paul wrote, *“Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.”*

— 1 Corinthians 11:1 (NIV)

“Follow the Leader” was a favorite childhood game which I played with my sister and cousin. One of us would serve as the leader, while the other two were to mimic the leader’s movements. It could be a simple act like touching our toes, or a more challenging one such as throwing a ball through a hoop. The one who could not duplicate the leader’s actions

would be out. Eventually, we were each eliminated and a new person would serve as leader for the next round.

**THOUGHT FOR THE DAY**  
How am I leading others to Christ?

Following and leading are what servants of Christ are called to do. The apostle Paul sought to faithfully follow Christ. In doing so, he served as an example for others to follow. Jesus Christ calls each one of us to follow him as well. But like the apostle Paul, our aim is not only to follow our Lord faithfully but to lead others to follow him too. As we move through our daily routine at work, at school, or at home, our actions are being viewed and evaluated by others. By living a life that models the life of Christ, we are directing others to an abundant life — a life that has eternal meaning and purpose. So as we “Follow the Leader” we can lead others to follow in the way of discipleship.

**Prayer:** Heavenly Father, help us to be models of faithful discipleship for all to see. In the name of the Christ whom we follow. Amen.

Wayne Greenawalt (Illinois, USA)

# GOD'S WILL?

TUES  
DEC 14  
2021

READ Romans 8:35-39

*God is our refuge and strength, a help always near  
in times of great trouble.*

— Psalm 46:1 (CEB)

On December 14, 2012, a man forced his way into Sandy Hook School in Connecticut, shooting and killing 20 first-graders and six adults. I survived that massacre, but I saw and heard things that day that no one should ever have to experience.

At church, friends would ask me, "How can I help?" I would answer, "Please pray for me because I can't." I was angry with God, wondering, *How could it be God's will for these children to be killed? Why was I spared at age 60?* It made no sense. My faith was tested, and I struggled greatly.

**THOUGHT FOR THE DAY**  
Even in my darkest hour, God  
will never abandon me.

A year later, my husband and I participated in a book study at church. The discussion focused on understanding God's will and trusting God's ways. The study brought me great clarity because it helped me to realize that it *wasn't* God's will for 26 people to die. Rather, our loving God has given us all free will, and sin often prevails. I no longer blamed God. I understood that pure evil entered the school that day.

I couldn't have come this far in my trauma journey without my family, my friends, and my faith in our loving God. Since that horrific day, I have learned how resilient God has made us. I have also learned never to take life for granted.

**Prayer:** Dear God, help us to be kinder, gentler, more connected to one another. Surround us with your love. Amen.

Becky Virgalla (Connecticut, USA)

WED  
DEC 15  
2021

## “TRAPPED” IN THE AIRPORT

READ Romans 12:9-16

*The LORD says, “Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you.”*

— Jeremiah 29:7 (NRSV)

“We’re calling because we need your prayers, Pastor. We are trapped between flights in Chicago because of the snow-storm.” Our pastor asked, “Are you inside where it is dry and climate controlled?” “Yes,” I replied. “Do you have access to water and food?” Again, I said, “Yes.” Then he asked, “Are you sick?” I answered, “No.” He said to me, “Then you aren’t really trapped, are you? I’ll pray for you to be of service to the Lord where you are.” We prayed together, and my attitude changed almost immediately.

I bought children’s books at an airport store and offered them to families with children. My wife struck up a conversation with an older man wearing a Korean War veteran’s hat. Later we offered to wait in the food line for others. It became easy for us to approach others, knowing we were

all in the same situation. Additionally, several worried-looking, stranded passengers accepted our offer to pray with them.

The 16 hours in the terminal went rather quickly when we made ourselves available to others. We were not trapped. We were in the right place at the right time to reflect the love of God.

**Prayer:** Dear Lord, when we feel trapped, show us how to be a witness to your loving presence. Amen.

Leland P. Gamson (Indiana, USA)

# THE WORK OF THE SPIRIT

THUR  
DEC 16  
2021

READ John 14:15-26

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)

When I enrolled in the Bible academy, I had the feeling that along the way I would forget what I had been taught. I had this same feeling when I attended small study groups or listened to sermons that had special meaning for me. I prayed that God would allow me to treasure and remember what I had learned.

Later on I took part in another study group based on the characteristics of a Christian disciple. That study helped me to under-

stand that it is not necessary to overburden our minds with copious information we have heard or studied. It is not solely by our own efforts that God’s word takes root and bears fruit in our lives but through the work of the Holy Spirit.

In today’s scripture reading we learn that the Holy Spirit is with each of us and will remind us of what we need to know. How gratifying it is to know that we are not alone! Through the work of the Holy Spirit we can count on God’s wisdom and love to guide us every day.

**Prayer:** We are grateful, God, for the Holy Spirit, who inspires us to open our minds, our eyes, and our hearts to follow where you lead. Amen.

**THOUGHT FOR THE DAY**  
The Holy Spirit helps me bear the fruit of God’s word.

Mayerling Moreno Valdiris (Miranda, Venezuela)

FRI  
DEC 17  
2021

## PRAYERS NEVER DIE

READ Revelation 5:1-8

*When [the Lamb] had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell before the Lamb, each holding a harp and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints.*

— Revelation 5:8 (NRSV)

Years after Jesus' death, John of Patmos received an incredible vision. He saw the heavenly throne room, the

### THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Today, I will confidently trust God for all that I need.

Lamb of God, the great communion of saints, and something that I tend to overlook: There, in the throne room of God, in the hands of the elders, were

golden bowls full of prayers. Rising up like incense before the throne of God are the prayers of God's people.

Every petition, every longing and deep desire, every intercession, every cry, every prayer ever offered is floating like incense before God's throne. Whenever I feel discouraged, as though something is amiss in my life, I remember this image from Revelation and imagine my prayer in the throne room of God. God deeply and intimately cares for us and wants us to live full and abundant lives. And even though we may not always see God working, we can trust that our prayers rise before God and that they will be answered in God's way and God's timing — for our good and God's glory.

**Prayer:** Dear Father, thank you for the eternal life that you offer us through your Son, Jesus. Help us to keep an eternal perspective as we walk through each day. Amen.

Stephen Hopkins (Tennessee, USA) — See p. 21.

**Prayer Focus:** SOMEONE LONGING FOR AN ANSWER TO PRAYER

# SURRENDERING WORRY

SAT  
DEC 18  
2021

READ 2 Corinthians 4:16-18

*Jesus said, "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."*

— John 16:33 (NIV)

In Melbourne, Australia, you can experience four seasons in one day. And everyone has an opinion about which one is the best. Sometimes I feel like my life is like the weather. There are good seasons and bad seasons, good days and bad days. On some bad days, all I can do is think about the terrible things that could happen or how my life will never change.

God, however, invites me to think and live differently. Jesus tells us in Matthew 6:34 that we are not designed to know what the future holds. All we can do is deal with today's problems and trust God with tomorrow.

If we worry about bad times to come, we can miss out on the good in our lives. Worrying is as futile as staying inside on a beautiful day because the forecast may include thunderstorms. No! Good times are like vitamin D for the soul and sustain us through the tough times.

## THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

I will take time to name my pain and joy and surrender it all to God.

Jesus said we will have troubles, but he also said in the same breath to take heart, to be confident and of good cheer, undaunted, and filled with joy because he has overcome it all.

**Prayer:** Dear Lord, give us the wisdom to see what actions we can take today to find and offer joy as we surrender our future to you. Amen.

Shelley Marolla (Victoria, Australia)

SUN  
DEC 19  
2021

## 4<sup>TH</sup> SUNDAY OF ADVENT

READ Matthew 5:14-16

*[God's] word is a lamp for my feet,  
a light on my path.*

— Psalm 119:105 (NIV)

My wife and I, along with the help of our children and grandchildren, have the tradition of picking out a live Christmas tree each year. My wife and grandkids are in charge of decorating the tree, and they do an awesome job.

### THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

I can be God's light for someone whose world seems dark.

But before the first ornament is hung, it's my job to string the lights.

Last Christmas the corner where we placed the tree was rather dark

and gloomy. As I added each strand of lights, the tree slowly began to brighten. By the time I added the star at the top, the entire tree was illuminated.

When I saw how each light lit up its section of the tree, it reminded me of how as followers of Christ we are called to shine brightly in our own corner of the world. God does not call any single person to "light" the whole world — just to shine for those we come into contact with each day. We can treat others with compassion instead of harshness; we can compliment instead of complain. When we do this, others will see Jesus in us, and God's light and love will shine in every corner of the earth.

**Prayer:** Heavenly Father, help us to brighten someone's day with your love through an encouraging word, an act of kindness, or simply a smile. Amen.

Patrick Baumer (Indiana, USA) — See p. 21.

# WONDERFULLY MADE

MON  
DEC 20  
2021

READ Psalm 139:7-18

*I praise you because I am fearfully  
and wonderfully made.*

— Psalm 139:14 (NIV)

I always had problems with my appearance. I compared myself to other girls and had thoughts like, *Wow, if I had her hair, or her eyes, or her body. . . .* This led to depression and suicidal thoughts. In the summer of 2018 I decided I didn't want to continue with this sadness anymore, and I grabbed some pills. I stood at the end of my bed completely heartbroken. That night a war was going on in my head. Thoughts swirled in my mind: *Do it. You are worthless. No one is going to miss you.* But I also heard, *Your family loves you. It isn't your time; I brought you into this world for a purpose. Hang in there; it will get better.* I knew God was with me as I struggled with these thoughts.

Psalm 139 reminds me that I am uniquely made by a God who gazes upon me with loving eyes. Song of Songs 4:7 says, "You are altogether beautiful, my darling; there is no flaw in you." Each of us is beautiful and loved, and we are perfect in God's eyes. When we stop comparing ourselves to others, we can value ourselves for who we are. We are the children of God, and God loves us all unconditionally. We are fearfully and wonderfully made.

## THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

I am one of God's  
masterpieces.

**Prayer:** Dear God, teach us to value and love ourselves. Help us not to compare ourselves to others and instead to walk with confidence as the unique people you made us. Amen.

Perla Yaneth (Texas, USA)

**Prayer Focus:** PEOPLE STRUGGLING WITH  
SUICIDAL THOUGHTS

**TUES  
DEC 21  
2021**

## ROOTED IN LOVE

**READ Ephesians 3:14-21**

*I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power . . . to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ.*

— Ephesians 3:17-19 (NIV)

I have moved to a different part of the country a total of 11 times. As I write this I am about to move again to be near one of my sons and his family some distance away from my present home. I am in my eighties and have lived here almost 17 years, which is the longest time I've spent in the same house and town. Every move means leaving behind good friends and sometimes family members, then adjusting and

settling in to a new home, new church, new surroundings, new job or stage of retirement, and making new friends.

### **THOUGHT FOR THE DAY**

When I am rooted in Christ's love, I can feel at home anywhere.

However, the Lord has always given me a relevant text to confirm God's guidance and strength for each of my moves. This time it was the reassurance the Lord gave to Moses in Exodus 33:14, "My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest."

What matters most is how we are rooted before and after a move. Paul's prayer for the Christians in Ephesus underlines that being firmly rooted in faith in Christ is the surest way to be resilient, to grow, and to produce fruit where we have been planted. If we are rooted in the love of Christ, we have nothing to fear because we know that God will be with us.

**Prayer:** Thank you, Lord, that we can step into the future confidently because we know you are with us. Amen.

Hazel V. Thompson (England, United Kingdom) — See p. 21.

# DIFFERENT KIND OF MIRACLE

WED  
DEC 22  
2021

READ Isaiah 41:1-10

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

— Isaiah 41:10 (NIV)

Years ago a friend of mine was in a car accident. Doctors found she had permanent damage to her spine and was paralyzed from the rib cage down. When I went to see her, she assured me that her condition was not permanent because God would not leave her like this and would perform a miracle.

**THOUGHT FOR THE DAY**  
Today I will look for God's unexpected miracles.

As time went on, she did her therapy and coped with her circumstances — waiting for her miracle. Her faith never faltered even as her house was remodeled to accommodate her needs. She had a small store set up on her porch where she sold crafts and other personal items. One day I went to visit her at her “store.” As I was browsing, I saw her stylish high heels lined up in a row — for sale. I began to cry; I knew she had accepted her fate.

Though the miracle she had hoped and prayed for hadn't come, I wondered whether another miracle of acceptance and faith had occurred. Her faith in God remained strong even in these circumstances. No matter what happens, God does not leave us alone. Sometimes that's the miracle.

**Prayer:** Heavenly Father, thank you for your presence in our lives and for the knowledge that we are never alone. Thank you for the miracles you perform and for the assurance of your love and acceptance. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Grace Epperson (Michigan, USA)

THUR  
DEC 23  
2021

## MAKING SPACE

READ Ephesians 4:25-32

*Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you.*

— Ephesians 4:32 (NRSV)

Our kitchen sink was not draining. We tried several clog removers, but nothing seemed to work. With no other option, I got out my tools and took apart the pipes. It was simultaneously amazing and disgusting. After I physically pulled smelly debris from the blocked pipes, water once again flowed freely.

Forgiveness is a lot like that process of breaking down and cleaning those pipes. Bitterness, anger, and resentment clog up our lives. Often, we just want to ignore the problem or find an easy fix. While those may seem to work for a bit, eventually the pain and rancor build up once again.

**THOUGHT FOR THE DAY**  
Forgiving is hard, but God's grace makes it possible.

True forgiveness takes effort. It requires us to take

out our tools and remove the debris that builds up in our hearts and makes it difficult to have compassion for others. We can do this only because God has forgiven us first. Once we offer that grace to others and release them completely from their debt, our own lives can open back up.

Forgiveness makes space in our lives for the good things — God's grace, love, and kindness — to flow freely. When that happens, it is better for us and better for everyone around us.

**Prayer:** Dear God, give us the desire and power to forgive others. Clear our lives of resentment and anger so we can forgive and make space for love. Amen.

Bob LaForge (New Jersey, USA)

# CHRISTMAS EVE

FRI  
DEC 24  
2021

READ Luke 1:26-37

*Faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.*

— Hebrews 11:1 (NIV)

I live in a two-season tropical country where churches have large windows and vents to keep us cool in the summer. During one Christmas service, wind and rain came into the church during the candle-lighting procession, making it hard for the congregation to keep their candles burning. A few times I had to ask the person sitting next to me to relight my candle.

**THOUGHT FOR THE DAY**  
Amid the uncertainty in the world I can look to scripture to keep my faith strong.

The birth of Jesus is a symbol of hope following the long wait for the Savior as our peacemaker. For me, the candlelight procession on that Christmas Eve symbolizes my efforts to keep my hope and faith alive in a world full of uncertainty and chaos.

It is hard to hold on to faith and hope when prayers seem unanswered and reality does not match our expectations. In times like this, through reading the Bible and asking our fellow Christians to pray for our faith to be strengthened, we can keep the flame of hope alive.

**Prayer:** God Almighty, thank you for giving us Jesus Christ. Help us to keep his peace and hope alive in our hearts. We pray as Jesus taught us, “Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, as in heaven, so in earth. Give us day by day our daily bread. And forgive us our sins; for we also forgive every one that is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil” (Luke 11:2-4, KJV). Amen.

Juita Kartini (Jakarta, Indonesia)

SAT  
DEC 25  
2021

## CHRISTMAS DAY

READ Luke 2:4-7

*Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.*

— 2 Corinthians 9:7 (NIV)

I sometimes feel sorry for the poor Bethlehem innkeeper in all our modern Christmas stories and plays. He is usually depicted as a mean man who somehow should have been able to manufacture a room for Joseph and the pregnant Mary. Instead, he sent them out into the cruel dark night. But the innkeeper had no space. He may have already had people

### THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Regardless of the circumstance, I can always do my part to serve God.

sleeping in the halls and on the kitchen floor because of the huge crowds that had come for the census.

So, perhaps we can see the innkeeper in a different

light. He offered what he had. He could have just told them to go away, but he figured out what he had left that might help and let them use his barn. I'm sure Mary and Joseph were very glad to get out of the elements and to have a sheltered birthing place.

When a ministry needs a large amount of money for a mission, or a friend needs many hands to help, we can't give them everything they need or do all the work by ourselves. But we can pray, and, as the innkeeper did, give what we have. When we give our best in God's name, it is good for us to remember what God gave — his Son.

**Prayer:** Loving God, you have given us our talents and our lives; help us to use them for your purposes today. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Ken Claar (Idaho, USA)

# NEVER ALONE

READ Proverbs 23:22-25

SUN  
DEC 26  
2021

*Each of you must respect your mother and father,  
and you must observe my Sabbaths.  
I am the LORD your God.*

— Leviticus 19:3 (NIV)

My dad passed away a few years ago. I often remember him, particularly when I am in an emotional downturn. I miss his support. I remember his goodness. He would always cook for us and leave us the best food. He carried heavy items for us. He was a fighter, undergoing many surgeries and invasive medical checkups. He would do all of this with courage and independence.

Yet, he was not perfect. We often had arguments because he was stubborn and didn't listen to others. He struggled to understand what my sister and I felt and thought. He rarely cared about what we studied at school or how we spent our days at work.

My father had good and bad characteristics. However, in our family, my father's biggest legacy was leading us to God. He can no longer cook for us. Nor can he walk next to us and carry our shopping bags. But because of him, we met God and we believe in the Lord.

So, I am not an orphan. I am not alone. I know both God and my father cheer my family on to finish our race.

**Prayer:** Dear God, thank you for parents and all their successes and failures. Thank you for being our perfect heavenly parent. Amen.

Flo Au (Hong Kong, China)

**THOUGHT FOR THE DAY**  
God is my perfect parent.

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

MON  
DEC 27  
2021

## SIGNS

READ John 2:1-12

*The steward called the bridegroom and said to him, "Everyone serves the good wine first, and then the inferior wine after the guests have become drunk. But you have kept the good wine until now."*

— John 2:9-10 (NRSV)

While hiking deep in the woods of Yosemite National Park we had become lost, and with dusk approaching we had no clue how to get back to our tent. We would have asked for directions, but we hadn't seen any other hikers. This told us that we must be pretty far off any regularly used path. We were feeling frustrated and fearful when finally we saw a wooden sign with an arrow that read, "Yosemite Valley, 2.4 miles." With a surge of energy and relief, we raced back to our campsite in the valley.

Signs and signals are everywhere in life: directional signs on trails, caution signs on the roads, alerts on our phones, or indicator lights in our cars. The purpose of any sign is to alert us to something beyond the sign itself. In John's Gospel, Jesus' miracles are called signs, and the first is in Cana at a

wedding. The party has run out of wine, but Jesus turns large vats of water into the best wine.

When we saw the wooden sign on our hike

we felt joy, not because of the sign itself but because we now knew how to get back to our campsite. When Jesus changes water into wine, the best part of this story is not the miracle itself; it's what the sign points to — salvation through Christ. And we don't have to hike miles to get to Christ. When we call out in faith, he will answer.

**Prayer:** Dear God, thank you for the signs that point the way to you. Help us to follow you faithfully. Amen.

Adam Benson (North Carolina, USA)

# RESTING IN GOD'S WILL

TUES  
DEC 28  
2021

READ Matthew 11:28-30

Jesus said, *“Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”*

— Matthew 11:28 (KJV)

I had retired from my job of over 20 years, and my children were all grown with families of their own. My once- hectic schedule of being a working mom seemed to come to a screeching halt. I should have been relishing this newfound slower pace. After all, wasn't this what I had looked forward to during those busy, exhausting years? Yet I found myself slightly depressed and feeling a sense of failure. I felt guilty that I was not accomplishing more in my life. I felt restless and like a fish out of water.

**THOUGHT FOR THE DAY**  
God has a special purpose for every season in our lives.

Finally, I did something I wish I had done earlier: I prayed about these feelings. The Lord began to remind me gently of things I was accomplishing. God also reminded me that I didn't need to keep up the former breakneck speed of my schedule. This was a different season of my life, and the pace could be slower.

I felt God's encouragement all through my spirit. I realized that those whispers of guilt and discouragement were not what God wanted for me. I began to view my schedule through a different lens. I felt hope, relief, and a new energy. I was where I should be and was able to rest in that comforting truth.

**Prayer:** Thank you, Father God, for guiding our lives. Help us to trust in your perfect will. Amen.

Belle Todd (Texas, USA)

WED  
DEC 29  
2021

## CHANGE THE WORLD

READ Luke 6:37-49

*Why do you call me “Lord, Lord,” and do not do what I tell you?*

— Luke 6:46 (NRSV)

My friend Adam and I were camping, celebrating my decision to follow Christ. As I sat by the campfire, wrestling with the responsibility of my new faith, I felt a firm encouraging hand on my shoulder. I knew it was Jesus — Emmanuel, God with us.

### THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

With Christ’s help, I can change the world.

I once would not have appreciated God’s presence with me. When I was young, there was a Christian television ad which claimed that

“God might not change your circumstances, but he certainly changes you.” Back then I didn’t want to be changed; I just wanted God to fix things with miracles like those in the Bible.

Only after my fireside encounter with Christ, as I read the whole Bible for myself, did I see beyond the miracles. Jesus expected his followers to live out his teachings by doing for others and choosing God over power. I discovered that discipleship means being transformed so that we can help change the world rather than sitting back and waiting for God to change it for us.

Being a Christian means not just saying “Lord, Lord” but doing what Jesus said. Following Christ’s teachings is scary sometimes, uncomfortable at others. It can cost us money, jobs, friends, family, even our lives. But God promises to be with us as we walk the way of Christ, being changed ourselves so that we can change the world together.

**Prayer:** Dear God, as we walk with you, help us continue to change to become more like Christ so that with you we can change the world. Amen.

Jason John (New South Wales, Australia)

**Prayer Focus:** FOR COURAGE TO FOLLOW CHRIST’S  
TEACHING

# OVERCOMING SADNESS

THUR  
DEC 30  
2021

READ Psalm 30:1-12

*You turned my wailing into dancing; you removed my sackcloth and clothed me with joy.*

— Psalm 30:11 (NIV)

Every once in a while I'm overwhelmed by fears that my cancer will return. The fear often catches me off guard and leads me to despair. I don't relish the sad days, but I know it's okay to have them. On the hard days, however, I know that God still loves me. As I endure the melancholy and tears, I know the pain will eventually pass.

Recently, on the evening of a sad day, a group of my son's friends came for dinner. They come every week and fill my house with laughter while they eat my mediocre cooking. My sadness almost caused me to cancel the gathering, but something happened as they all happily crammed around our dining table. My sadness lifted and was replaced with joy. Those boys will likely never know it, but God used their happiness to bring me peace.

**THOUGHT FOR THE DAY**  
Sadness will come, but God's gift of joy will follow.

Much in life can bring deep sadness. But God is good and a giver of good things. Life itself is a gift. My sons are a gift. Their friends are a gift. My time on this earth is a gift — every sad second and every joy-filled moment.

**Prayer:** Dear God, thank you that you are always with us — even in our deep sadness. Thank you for the beautiful ways that you show up to bring us joy. Amen.

Kim Harms (Iowa, USA)

FRI  
DEC 31  
2021

## STILL ON THE BOAT

READ Mark 4:35-41

*When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you.*

— Isaiah 43:2 (NIV)

I was preparing for an entrance exam. I had failed the exam the previous year, and I was very stressed. I was not sure what to do. My mom called me one day and realized I was scared. She reminded me of the story in our reading today. She said, “Jenny, Jesus may have appeared to be sleeping, but he was still on the boat!” With Jesus on the boat with his disciples, there was no chance that they would have drowned! That reminded me that whatever I may be facing, I am never alone. Christ is with me and will see me through.

### THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Rather than focusing on the storm, I will focus on Jesus, who is always with me.

I have often felt unsure of what to do in fearful situations. Sometimes it feels like Jesus is sleeping when I am in a storm. But I have learned that he is still on the boat with me even if he is silent in the moment. It may seem like I am going to drown, but Jesus is with me. Since coming to this realization, I have failed more exams and passed others; I have taken a few risks and second-guessed myself a million times. But through it all I have never forgotten that Jesus is still on the boat with me.

**Prayer:** Dear Lord, sometimes our storms are so frightening that we forget you are with us. Help us to trust you to take us safely to the other shore. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

Jennifer Prince Kingsley (Alabama, USA) — See p. 21.

# 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](http://www.upperroom.org/resources/a-guide-for-small-groups)

## NOVEMBER 3: *A Change in Pattern*

1. How often do you berate yourself for something you have said or done? Do you find it easy to let go of mistakes? What mistake has been most challenging for you to move beyond?
2. Describe a time when God spoke to your heart and changed your mindset. What changes occurred? What did you learn about God from this experience?
3. Why do you think negative thoughts can easily exhaust us? In what ways can praising God energize us? When have you noticed praise changing your attitude and energy level the most?

4. What helps you to keep your heart and thoughts focused on God? Name the scripture passages, spiritual practices, and activities that best help you stay focused on the Almighty.
5. How does having a God-focused mindset allow you to live faithfully and serve others?

### NOVEMBER 10: *Offering What We Have*

1. Have you ever been about to discard something, only to have someone tell you it is exactly what they need? What do experiences like these teach us about the value of what is around us? What do they teach us about ourselves?
2. Where do you look for reminders of your value when you are feeling overlooked or unimportant? How does your faith community remind you of your value to God?
3. Name something about yourself that you tend to devalue, but that has great value to God and to those around you. Why do you devalue it? How does God remind you of its value?
4. Who in the Bible seemed unimportant outwardly, yet God said otherwise? How does this person's story remind you of God's ability to use what we reject in order to change the world? How does this story encourage you in your daily life?
5. In what ways do you actively look for the blessings others have to offer? How do you help them see the value and make the most of those blessings?

### NOVEMBER 17: *Our Noisy World*

1. When does the noise of the world frustrate or distract you? When is it hardest for you to hear God amid the distractions?
2. Where do you find peace from distractions? How often do you set aside quiet time for yourself? In what ways does quiet feel comfortable, and in what ways does it challenge you?
3. Do you make space for spiritual reflection in your daily routine? If so, how do daily pauses strengthen your relationship with God? If not, would you consider making this a practice?
4. Name a biblical character who listened for and heard God's voice. What can we learn from them about the importance of

listening for God? How does their experience hearing God's voice differ from your experience? How is it similar?

5. How are you intentional about listening for God speaking to you? How do you know when God is speaking to you? How do you avoid missing God's voice?

### NOVEMBER 24: *Opportunities to Obey*

1. Do you find it less overwhelming to accomplish a large task when you break it into smaller steps? Why or why not? Have you ever applied the same strategy to your faith journey?
2. Describe a time when you observed small parts making a difference to the whole. What can this teach us about the importance of each moment and choice we make?
3. What does the phrase "Give your life to Jesus" mean to you? Do you find it helpful, or do you prefer more specific examples of how you might better follow Christ?
4. How do you take advantage of the small opportunities to obey God each day? In what ways are the small chances to obey as important as the big ones?
5. Who in your life encourages you to follow God in big ways and small ways? How do they encourage you? How can you encourage others in a similar way?

### DECEMBER 1: *No Need to Fear*

1. Recall a time when you felt anxious or unable to sleep before an event. What did you do? How did you find peace?
2. Which scripture passages encourage you the most when you are worried or anxious?
3. In what ways do you reach out to God in times of anxiety? How do your prayers, devotional times, and spiritual disciplines in times of uncertainty differ from these practices in times of peace?
4. Think of someone in your life who is going through a time of uncertainty. How can you encourage them? Name some ways you can show them friendship and God's love and care.
5. When have you come across a Bible passage that gave you

exactly what you needed during a difficult time? What did this teach you about God's presence and provision?

### DECEMBER 8: *No Longer Afraid*

1. Why do you think we sometimes feel afraid in the dark but safe in the light? Where do you turn for comfort and safety when you are afraid?
2. Imagine the world without literal light. Now imagine the world without spiritual light. Which one is more frightening to you? What do these images teach you about the importance of light in the world?
3. How does the story of Jesus' birth encourage you during frightening times? What other stories of God's power and light encourage you when you are afraid?
4. What prayers and spiritual practices help you to remember and appreciate God's light throughout the Christmas season? What scripture passages are your favorites this time of year?
5. Name some specific ways that you can spread God's light of love this week. In what ways will you be intentional about shining brightly in the lives of others?

### DECEMBER 15: *"Trapped" in the Airport*

1. When have you been upset about a situation, only to have your perspective changed by someone? How did your new attitude change how you felt about your situation?
2. When you feel stressed, do you find it difficult to remain focused on God? What brings your focus back to God?
3. Name some scripture passages that speak about the importance of remaining open to serving God in all circumstances. Which of these passages is most encouraging for you?
4. When have you found an unexpected opportunity to serve God and others? What was your experience? How was your faith enriched by your service?
5. How do your spiritual mentors help you to find ways to serve God? How does your church community encourage you to serve?

## DECEMBER 22: *Different Kind of Miracle*

1. What helps you to remain positive and joyful about what God is doing in your life when you do not receive the outcome that you had hoped for? What scripture passages give you the most encouragement about God's plan for your life?
2. When have you waited for a miracle that did not come? How did this affect your trust and faith in God? What encouraging words would you offer someone waiting for a miracle?
3. What miracle of acceptance and faith can you thank God for today? What would help you to take more notice of God's miracles each day?
4. How are you encouraged to know that God will never leave you? How does this knowledge strengthen your faith?
5. As you and your faith community pray for miracles, how can you also encourage acceptance and faith regardless of the outcomes? How will you remind one another of the unexpected and daily miracles you encounter?

## DECEMBER 29: *Change the World*

1. Recall a time when you felt the presence of God in a new and different way. How did that experience change your relationship with God? How did the experience change you?
2. Have you ever wished that God would simply fix your problems rather than change you? Why? What helps you to accept and appreciate the ways God changes you, even if God does not miraculously change your circumstances?
3. When is it easiest for you to follow Christ's teachings? When is it hardest? Where do you find strength to follow Christ even when it is difficult?
4. What does it mean to you to be transformed by God? How does transformation allow us to better serve God and others? For what transformations in your life are you most grateful?
5. What changes do you think we would see in the world if we all became more Christlike? How can you participate in making this a reality? Name some specific steps you will take to become more Christlike today.

## November 2021

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

<i>SUN</i>	<i>MON</i> <b>1</b>	<i>TUES</i> <b>2</b>	<i>WED</i> <b>3</b>	<i>THUR</i> <b>4</b>	<i>FRI</i> <b>5</b>	<i>SAT</i> <b>6</b>
<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>14</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>21</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>28</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>30</b>				

## December 2021

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

<i>SUN</i>	<i>MON</i>	<i>TUES</i>	<i>WED</i> <i>1</i>	<i>THUR</i> <i>2</i>	<i>FRI</i> <i>3</i>	<i>SAT</i> <i>4</i>
<i>5</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>7</i>	<i>8</i>	<i>9</i>	<i>10</i>	<i>11</i>
<i>12</i>	<i>13</i>	<i>14</i>	<i>15</i>	<i>16</i>	<i>17</i>	<i>18</i>
<i>19</i>	<i>20</i>	<i>21</i>	<i>22</i>	<i>23</i>	<i>24</i>	<i>25</i>
<i>26</i>	<i>27</i>	<i>28</i>	<i>29</i>	<i>30</i>	<i>31</i>	

*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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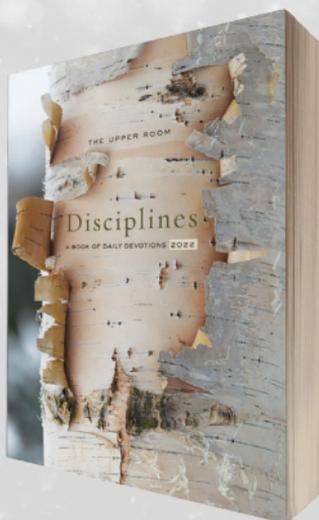
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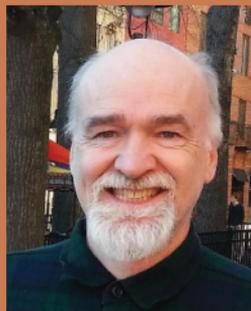


# MEET SOME OF OUR WRITERS

(Here and on p. 21.)



Jerrie Green (p. 8) is a mother, grandmother, and retired pastor who loves fishing and camping.



Jonathan Scott (p. 16) is a hospital and hospice chaplain. He enjoys hiking and traveling to visit family and friends.



Carol Macwan (p. 26) holds an M.A. in English literature and loves writing poetry, short stories, and songs.



Kazuo Ishikawa (p. 10) is an ENT specialist and professor emeritus. He enjoys taking photos of flowers.



Lori Hatcher (p. 24) once delivered newspapers on foot during a blizzard. She is the author of three books.



Johnny Nelson (p. 18) teaches American history at the college level. He enjoys hiking, birdwatching, and fishing.

