

# A GUIDE TO PRAYER

for The United Methodist Church General Conference

Prepared by  
THE UPPER ROOM®



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## How to Use this Resource

**Before you begin:** Sit quietly for 30 seconds or so to settle your spirit. Take a few deep breaths and get comfortable.

**Read:** Open your Bible and read the portion of scripture suggested below the title. After you read, pause to think about the passage. What comes to mind? What in it got your attention?

**Quoted verse:** The quoted verse relates to the central point of the devotional. Read it slowly and think about its meaning for you. Once or twice a week you might memorize a quoted verse.

**“Story”:** These devotionals are written by people from around the world. After you read the main part of the page, ask yourself, “How do this person’s words connect with my life?”

**Prayer:** To end your quiet time, pray the prayer at the bottom of the page. You may want to add to it, mentioning people or situations that come to mind during your reflection.

**Thought for the Day:** This element invites you to respond or sums up an idea from the day’s reading. Repeat the thought a few times and recall it throughout the day to remind yourself of what you heard from God.

**Prayer Focus:** This suggests a subject for continuing prayer after your devotional time, joining with believers around the world in doing so.

**With a group:** Use the steps outlined above with a group. Ask someone to read aloud the devotional for the day and the reflection question. Give each person the opportunity to respond. Discuss how everyone thinks differently, and try to hear what God may be saying to you.

The theme of this General Conference is “ . . . and know that I am God.” To prepare you for the journey, we offer this devotional guide as a path to enrich your knowledge of God.

How can we ever really know God? It starts with being in relationship with God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit. We gain knowledge of God in many ways — through persons, circumstances, the natural world, worship, music, and prayer — to name a few. The content of this guide is written by persons from all over the world who have found God’s presence in ordinary moments in their lives. Their experiences offer us new perspectives on how God is at work in the world. We hope that this devotional guide will lead you into a calm, open mindset as we gather to do the work of the church. Let us remember it is not about our agendas but about what God and the Holy Spirit can do in and through us for the betterment of the whole church at this General Conference.

No matter where we come from, prayer can connect all of us in our shared United Methodist mission of doing no harm, doing good, and staying in love with God (General Rules of The UMC). Regardless of our language, physical stance, or the manner in which we pray, we raise our voices in hopeful prayers of unity, mission, and ministry through Jesus Christ for our church.

You may already be familiar with *The Upper Room* daily devotional guide, but we pray that using this content in a new way to prepare for General Conference will give you the opportunity to know God more deeply. We are grateful to the staff of The Upper Room for providing this guide for our enrichment.

We are all God’s children and precious in God’s sight. Each person attending General Conference is an essential member of Christ’s body, the church. May we honor and respect one another as we journey together in prayer and preparation.

— Kim Simpson  
Chair of the Commission  
on the General Conference

## PICTURE PERFECT

SUN  
APR 7  
2024

READ Psalm 139:13-18

*You [LORD] created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well.*

— Psalm 139:13-14 (NIV)

I am in the process of publishing my first book. It's about my experiences of being bullied as a child because I stutter. A picture of myself and my bio will be on the back cover. A handful of questions buzz around in my head. How should I style my hair? Should I smile or look slightly serious? What should I wear? What should I say about myself? All these questions will be answered in due time. But one thing is for sure: No matter how much I doll myself up, I will still be me — Rachel. Rachel the curious, Rachel the impulsive, and Rachel the child of God.

When God looks at me, God doesn't see all my imperfections but sees someone created with intricate talents and abilities.

**THOUGHT FOR THE DAY**  
All that God creates is worthy of my praise.

Psalm 139:13-14 says, "You created my inmost being, you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made." God thinks we are beautiful no matter what others may think.

When we look in the mirror, we can remember that we are seeing God's picture-perfect work of art.

**Prayer:** Dear God, remind us that we are your works of art, and forgive us when we fail to see the unique beauty in ourselves and others. Amen.

Rachel E. Dancy (Michigan, USA)

**Prayer Focus:** THOSE WITH A NEGATIVE SELF-IMAGE

**Reflection Question:** Who or what reminds you that you are God's beloved creation? As you prepare for and attend General Conference how will you help others remember that they are also precious to God?

MON  
APR 8  
2024

## IN THE STORM

READ Matthew 8:23-27

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

— Isaiah 41:10 (NRSVUE)

I was only a year old when my family migrated from East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) to West Bengal, India. As refugees, we lived in a tent provided by the government for over seven years. I remember one hot summer evening a heavy storm was developing. We were playing in an open field, and my older sister became worried and brought us back to our tent for safety.

### THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Jesus is with me in every storm.

As soon as we got back, the wind was so forceful that we worried we would lose

our tent and all our belongings. Imagining what it would be like to lose our tent and be without a place to live, I started praying but felt that my prayer was not working. Then I started pleading with Jesus: *We don't have another tent. If this one is gone, where shall we live?* I was at the corner of our tent holding the rope when I cried, "Help me, Jesus!" To my amazement, the wind gradually weakened and finally disappeared.

This experience has had a lasting impact on my life. God hears us when we call out for help. Truly Jesus is with us in every storm.

**Prayer:** Dear God, thank you for being with us even when we go through difficult times in life. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Subodh C. Mondal (Delhi, India)

**Prayer Focus:** REFUGEES

**Reflection Question:** When your prayers seem to go unanswered, what encourages you to keep praying?

## TEN PEOPLE PRAYED

TUES  
APR 9  
2024

READ 1 Corinthians 12:12-20

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

— Acts 2:42 (NIV)

A few years ago, I felt like something was missing from my life. My days lacked meaning and purpose. However, instead of bringing my concern to God, I looked for fulfillment in lots of wrong places — which only left me feeling emptier. I struggled to change my ways and turn to God.

My church group was focusing on spiritual health and encouraged members to share their struggles. At first I was hesitant to discuss my emptiness. Most people value strength, independence, and success, not fragility or need. But I finally opened up to the group and asked for help.

After that meeting, ten people started praying for me. Soon after, I sensed God's presence and power in the circumstances around me, steering me away from distractions. Sermons, devotionals, and Bible verses reminded me of God's provision. Together, these factors helped me find new life in God.

**THOUGHT FOR THE DAY**  
When I need help, I can find  
God's strength in others.

Being vulnerable wasn't easy. But when I asked, I found that others were glad to help. Group members checked in on me regularly and offered encouragement. Their prayers and God's responses gave me hope that God would give me new purpose and supply what was missing from my life.

**Prayer:** Thank you, God, for responding to the prayers of our church family. Help us to ask for support when we need it. Amen.

Jennifer Kirsch (Ohio, USA)

**Prayer Focus:** CHURCH STUDY GROUPS

**Reflection Question:** Recall a time when prayer made a significant difference in your life. How will you incorporate prayer in your time at General Conference?

WED  
APR 10  
2024

## ARE YOU SURE, LORD?

READ John 4:4-24

*God is in that city. It will never crumble. God will help it when morning dawns.*

— Psalm 46:5 (CEB)

I can remember the phone call from my district church leaders like it was yesterday. My house was a disaster with laundry everywhere and dishes to put away. One of my daughters was angry with me and had just hung up the phone abruptly. Even the dog was unhappy with me that day. I was feeling like a failure.

**THOUGHT FOR THE DAY**  
God knows me and loves me  
anyway.

When the district church leaders asked if I would be willing to serve as the regional lay leader for the next four years, my response

was, “Are you sure you want *me* to do this?” In that moment, I didn’t feel successful at my own life, much less worthy to serve on that level. How powerful it was for me to know that, as messy as I was, they saw God at work in my life! I thought of the woman at the well and how so many would not have wanted her to be the poster child for Christ. Yet, she perfectly represents those of us who follow Christ.

If we want to grow the church and bring hearts to Christ, we need to believe that all hearts are worthy. We need to believe that our own hearts are worthy of sharing the hope of his love with others. One year into my service, I don’t try to hide my messy and imperfect life. I openly share it with others. I want others who are struggling to know that they are not alone. We are in this together with Christ.

**Prayer:** Gracious and loving God, help us to follow where you lead with humility and honesty so that others will know faith is a journey for us all. Amen.

Kimberly Rice Smith (North Carolina, USA)

**Prayer Focus:** THOSE WHO FEEL UNWORTHY

**Reflection Question:** Where do you see God at work in The United Methodist Church? How are you being called to serve God in this season?



## SMALL GIFTS

THUR  
APR 11  
2024

READ Luke 11:1-13

*Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.*

— James 1:17 (NIV)

When I retired four years ago, I was given a small, round, handsewn cushion. I kept it on a chair, mainly for ornamental reasons. However, recently the cushion has become useful for me every day.

For the past two months I've been recovering from spinal decompression surgery. Sleep has been difficult due to the uncomfortable surgical wound in my lower back. When I was urged by my physiotherapist to place a pillow or cushion between my knees while sleeping, I suddenly remembered the gift of the small cushion and began using it as prescribed. Imagine my delight to find that the cushion helped me sleep virtually pain-free!

Our loving God gives us gifts each day — gifts we often don't even recognize, let alone use. But the Bible is filled with accounts of

our caring God providing gifts to so many people — the best example being the gift of God's Son, Jesus Christ! The gift of a small cushion has reawakened my discovery of the big and small gifts God gives us each and every day.

**THOUGHT FOR THE DAY**  
What gifts has God provided me today?

**Prayer:** Loving God, thank you for the gift of Jesus Christ and the many gifts you provide each day. Amen.

**Roland Rink (Gauteng, South Africa)**

**Prayer Focus:** THOSE RECOVERING FROM SURGERY

**Reflection Question:** How do you express gratitude for the gifts God has given you?

FRI  
APR 12  
2024

## HANDS AND FEET

READ Matthew 25:31-40

*Jesus said, "Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me."*

— Matthew 25:40 (NIV)

Today's scripture reading means the world to me. This passage helped me to realize that Jesus wants us to be his hands and feet.

I have found different ways to honor Christ through acts of service. Some years back, I began visiting a 94-year-old woman in a local nursing home every Wednesday. I found joy in hearing her talk about cooking on a wood-burning stove and other memories from her

### THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Today I will allow Christ to love someone through me.

younger days. She went to be with Jesus at age 96. Now I help with our church's food ministry. We give food to those in need and also make coffee at the church on Sunday mornings. I enjoy smiling, hugging people, and simply saying, "Good morning!"

There is always a need that can be met. You might volunteer at the hospital, drive someone to a doctor's appointment, or send a birthday card to a church member. Even holding a door open for someone can be a way to serve Christ. We bless others with each act of service, and we are blessed as well when we honor Jesus with our hands and feet.

**Prayer:** Dear God, thank you for allowing us to be your hands and feet. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

Roxie Ewing (Alabama, USA)

**Prayer Focus:** THOSE WHO ARE HUNGRY IN MY COMMUNITY

**Reflection Question:** What does it mean to you to be the hands and feet of Christ? Who has been Christ's hands and feet for you?

# ACCEPTANCE

SAT  
APR 13  
2024

READ John 8:1-11

*Jesus straightened up and asked her, “Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?” “No one, sir,” she said. “Then neither do I condemn you,” Jesus declared. “Go now and leave your life of sin.”*

— John 8:10-11 (NIV)

Jesus’ ministry challenges us to accept people in spite of their flaws and imperfections. When Jesus began his ministry, he encountered different kinds of people. Many liked and loved him and his teachings, but some did not accept him or his teachings.

When a woman caught in adultery was brought before him, Jesus did not judge or condemn her. He did not avoid her or look down on her. He did not hate her. Jesus did something unexpected. He accepted the woman — in spite of her sin.

**THOUGHT FOR THE DAY**  
I follow Jesus’ example when I reflect God’s love to others.

Regardless of our mistakes and sins, acceptance is what we all need. Jesus shows us that acceptance is possible even when people are different from one another or hold different points of view. We can give the gift of acceptance to others because God has accepted us.

**Prayer:** Father God, thank you for accepting us as we are. Help us to show others that you accept them too. Amen.

**Golda Dilema (Cavite, Philippines)**

**Prayer Focus:** SOMEONE I HAVE EXCLUDED

**Reflection Question:** When have you received the gift of acceptance from someone? What difference did this make in your life?

SUN  
APR 14  
2024

## AN ARMY OF HELPERS

READ 1 John 3:16-18

*Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.*

— Galatians 6:2 (NIV)

Several years ago, a close family friend and brother in Christ was diagnosed with stage-four colon cancer. Along with the diagnosis came a multitude of concerns. Our friend was the principal breadwinner, so how long could he work to support his family? It was a frightening time.

The apostle Paul admonished the church in Galatia to bear one another's burdens. Through our friend's long struggle with cancer, God taught me and others the true meaning of Paul's words. To carry another's burden, we must sacrifice something, whether time, energy, or money. Some families

### THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

I show God's love by bearing others' burdens.

combined resources to pay our friend's rent and bills. Some gave gift cards for groceries. Some volunteered to drive him back and forth to chemotherapy appointments. A veritable army of helpers stepped up to bear this family's burdens. Above all, we were in constant prayer for our friend's healing.

We also learned that when God calls us to bear one another's burdens, it doesn't mean that we must carry all of it alone; we only need to carry the piece we are given. My piece might not look like your piece. But if we each carry our part, then it lessens the overall load. In carrying others' burdens, we fulfill the law of Christ — to love one another as God has loved us.

**Prayer:** Dear Jesus, teach us how to love others as you love us. Help us to bear the burdens of others with compassion. Amen.

Daphne Goodman (Maryland, USA)

**Prayer Focus:** THOSE RECENTLY DIAGNOSED WITH CANCER

**Reflection Question:** What would it look like to bear one another's burdens during General Conference? What help can you offer to others in the coming weeks?

## A SAFE PLACE

MON  
APR 15  
2024

READ Psalm 138:1-8

*When they call to me, I will answer them; I will be  
with them in trouble; I will rescue  
them and honor them.*

— Psalm 91:15 (NRSVUE)

In the 1950s I attended a boarding school for boys. It was run in a military style with strict discipline and punishments that were often issued in an abusive manner. Bullying at the school was rampant and persistent. Needless to say, I suffered at the school and learned how to avoid any confrontation, disappearing into anonymity when required.

One place in my school that nobody went during the day was the chapel. There I found my retreat where solace and support awaited me. I found that I was not alone. I felt God's reassuring presence, and I enjoyed that calming influence and support. This was the beginning of my lifelong journey with God.

I still give thanks to God for coming into my life. I cannot give thanks for the experience of being bullied, but I am grateful that during that time I found God. What might my life have become without that sacred introduction?

### THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

In God, I can find peace,  
reassurance, and protection.

**Prayer:** Loving God, cleanse the hearts and minds of those who abuse others. Be with those facing persecution, and grant us lives of harmony and peace. Amen.

Johannes von Buch (United Kingdom)

**Prayer Focus:** VICTIMS AND PERPETRATORS OF BULLYING

**Reflection Question:** Where do you go to meet God? How will you connect with God for solace and support during General Conference?

**TUES**  
**APR 16**  
2024

## A GRANDDAUGHTER'S GIFT

**READ Matthew 28:18-20**

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

— Matthew 28:20 (NIV)

My granddaughter surprised me with a special Christmas present, an embroidered picture titled, "I Am with You Always, Matthew 28:20." She didn't realize the significance that Bible verse had held for me many years before.

When I came to the United States 66 years ago, I spoke limited English. I joined a youth group at my church, led by a young student minister. He soon noticed that I was quite withdrawn. But after a few kind words from him I opened up and told him I was worried about my

### **THOUGHT FOR THE DAY**

How do my words and actions reflect my trust in God?

grades and that I had difficulty keeping up with my classes. He then quoted Matthew 28:20. He told me that Jesus was talking to me personally and that he was always with me in every situation. I suddenly felt uplifted and my faith soared. From that day on I smiled more and opened up to friends at school. When I prepared for a test or a project, I knew I did not have to do it alone — Jesus would be with me.

After reflecting on these memories, I called my granddaughter and told her about the impact her embroidered verse had on my life many years ago. More importantly, I was able to share with her the difference Jesus' promise makes in my life to this day.

**Prayer:** Dear Father, thank you for your gift of Jesus. Show us opportunities to minister to our friends and family and to tell them of your special gift of love and grace. Amen.

Elli Morawietz (Florida, USA)

**Prayer Focus:** GRANDPARENTS AND GRANDCHILDREN

**Reflection Question:** How does Jesus' presence with you give you courage and strength for the weeks ahead?

# ANCHORED

WED  
APR 17  
2024

READ Psalm 46:1-11

*We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure.*

— Hebrews 6:19 (NIV)

My husband, Mike, and I were visiting a nearby town for our routine eye examinations. As we looked at the array of new frames, Mike suddenly fainted, hitting his head on the floor. Although he came around fairly quickly, he was clearly shaken and had a huge bump on his head. We called an ambulance and made our way to the hospital.

As we waited in a crowded corridor, I found myself wondering where God was. *Why had this happened? What damage had been done?* If only I could feel God's peace instead of feeling stressed.

Then something came to mind from the devotional I had read that morning. To be honest, I couldn't remember many details;

**THOUGHT FOR THE DAY**  
I am anchored in God's love.

but I knew it was something about anchors: how St. Paul was tossed around in a ship at sea and how God holds us secure in the storms of life. How appropriate!

I felt that God was saying to me, "I am holding you. You are anchored." I kept repeating this to myself through the time of anxious waiting at the hospital. I didn't feel a warm glow of peace, but I knew that we were in God's hands. We were anchored.

Mike was and is okay. I give thanks for God's faithfulness and for God's word that still speaks to us today.

**Prayer:** Thank you, faithful God, that when the storms of life shake our security, you hold us and never let us go. Amen.

April McIntyre (England, United Kingdom)

**Prayer Focus:** SOMEONE RECOVERING FROM A FALL

**Reflection Question:** What scripture or spiritual practices help you remain anchored in God in stressful or challenging times?

THUR  
APR 18  
2024

## WAVING AT THE WINDOW

READ Revelation 3:14-21

*Here I am! I stand at the door and knock.*

— Revelation 3:20 (NIV)

I always had the duty of dropping our kids off at daycare, which is more emotionally difficult than my husband's duty of picking them up. My children didn't like being left, and many mornings were filled with tears. It also didn't help that our daycare was across town from where I worked, so I was inevitably always in a rush.

**THOUGHT FOR THE DAY**  
I will look for glimpses of  
God's love for me today.

One morning, I was hurrying out of the daycare to my car, when something caught my eye. In a window facing the parking lot stood

my two-year-old son waving excitedly at me. It was a sweet gesture and just what I needed. I told everyone at work how sweet my son was.

The next morning, when dropping my son off, I mentioned to the teacher how my son had made me smile the day before. She kindly told me that he does that every morning and had been doing so for months. My heart sank. I never missed his wave after that.

This experience made me wonder how many times I have missed signs of God's love because I was too rushed to notice. Praise the Lord, we are loved by a God who is patient and whose love never ends.

**Prayer:** Dear God, forgive us when we don't notice all the ways you love us. Thank you for patiently waiting on us and for loving us unconditionally. Amen.

Rebekah L. Callen (Texas, USA)

**Prayer Focus:** GRATITUDE FOR GOD'S LOVE

**Reflection Question:** How will you take time to pause and look for signs of God's love during General Conference?



# LISTENING TO GOD

FRI  
APR 19  
2024

## READ 1 Peter 5:1-10

*Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.*

— 1 Peter 5:6-7 (NIV)

I had a good job, a family, and a house in the suburbs. Then I got divorced and everything changed. Living in my car on a noisy city street, sleeping with a blanket over my head to keep out the cold and the city lights, and eating alone on a bench in the park forced me to reflect and listen to God.

I was welcomed by others in the homeless community, and their acceptance helped me see that God is in every person, maybe especially in the homeless one. Homelessness was humbling, but Jesus humbled himself for us. We are called to walk humbly with God, just as Jesus did on his way to the Cross. God eventually lifted me up, teaching me to cast away my worries, to see God in nature, to value every person, and to leave my life in God's hands.

God directed me to a church community that has helped me grow in faith, where I work on out-

reach missions, including with those who are homeless. The support of the people in this community has made it easier to follow God's way. God calls us to feed the hungry, visit the sick, welcome the stranger, and care for the homeless . . . listen.

**Prayer:** Open our eyes and hearts, O God, to the needs of those around us. Open our ears to listen to your promptings. Amen.

Brian Rogers (Massachusetts, USA)

**Prayer Focus:** THOSE WITHOUT HOUSING

**Reflection Question:** What does it mean to you to walk humbly with God? How are you practicing this in your daily life?

SAT  
APR 20  
2024

## THE POWER OF SALT

READ Colossians 4:2-6

*Let your conversation be always full of grace,  
seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to  
answer everyone.*

— Colossians 4:6 (NIV)

Families from our church who live in the neighborhood are part of the neighborhood fellowship group. We meet every month for Bible study, prayer, and to catch up on our families' welfare. It is a time of fellowship and community building. We always bring food to share. On one occasion I

### THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Jesus calls me to bring God's love and light to the world.

made some chicken curry for the dinner. I expected to receive some compliments for it, but no one said anything. Finally, I asked if they liked the dish. They looked

at each other without responding to me. Wondering what the matter was, I took a spoonful of it to taste. To my horror I found it to be tasteless. I had forgotten to add salt!

I was reminded of Jesus' words in Matthew 5:13, "You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot." As the salt of the earth, we work to preserve all that is good and just in the world by being peacemakers and peacekeepers. Just as salt adds flavor to food, as Christians we can bring love, kindness, and grace to those around us in partnership with God, reflecting God's love and light in the world.

**Prayer:** Loving God, we long to serve you. Help us to build a just and peaceful society where we reflect your love and compassion to those around us. Amen.

Navamani Peter (Karnataka, India)

**Prayer Focus:** MY NEIGHBORS

**Reflection Question:** Jesus said, "You are the salt of the earth." How would you like to see The United Methodist Church living this out?

## PRAYING BOLDLY

SUN  
APR 21  
2024

READ Matthew 18:1-5

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

— Matthew 18:3 (NIV)

Our young daughter was tucked into bed, covers up to her chin. After a song, I asked her the same question we pose every evening: “What do you want to pray about?”

She paused, lips pursed together, forehead furrowed in thought. Her sweet toddler voice responded, “I want to ask God to make unicorns real.”

In the hardships of daily life, it’s not difficult to lose our joyful, trusting, wide-eyed faith. But as for children, why wouldn’t they ask God for anything? If God can heal the sick, raise the dead, and create the planets in outer space, surely God can make unicorns real! And if my daughter has faith enough to pray for that, I want a childlike faith to ask God for big, bold things too.

We all experience times when our faith feels small, when we haven’t dared to hope that God can bring healing or reconciliation or fulfillment. Even then, God is still the God of the impossible. So let’s take a page from the children among us and start asking God for the big, seemingly impossible things.

**THOUGHT FOR THE DAY**  
Today I will pray boldly.

**Prayer:** Dear God, inspire our doubting hearts to believe and trust you with childlike faith. Give us audacity to pray boldly. In the name of Jesus. Amen!

Gretchen Schloesser (Arizona, USA)

**Reflection Question:** What big, bold prayer will you dare to pray for General Conference?

MON  
APR 22  
2024

## STARRY WONDER

READ Psalm 19:1-4

*The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies  
proclaim the work of his hands.*

— Psalm 19:1 (NIV)

Several years ago, my wife and I stayed in a rented cabin in the Rocky Mountains. I will never forget that night. The sky was filled with millions of beautiful stars. They seemed so close that we could almost reach up and touch them. We stared at them for some time, praising and worshiping our great God for the wonder of creation.

### THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

The beauty of God's creation  
is all around me.

The words of Psalm 19:1-4 became clear to us that evening: "The heavens declare the glory of God; the

skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they reveal knowledge. They have no speech, they use no words; no sound is heard from them. Yet their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world."

All creation speaks powerfully of God — God's infinite wisdom, majesty, and creative power. No matter where we live, we can look around and see the wonder and beauty of God's creation.

**Prayer:** Awesome God, open our eyes to see the wonder and glory of your creation. Amen.

Hank DeGraaff (Michigan, USA)

**Prayer Focus:** PRAISE FOR THE BEAUTY OF CREATION

**Reflection Question:** How will you take time to witness the glory of God's creation in the coming weeks?

# DESPITE, NOT BECAUSE

TUES  
APR 23  
2024

**READ 1** Thessalonians 5:12-16

*Give thanks in all circumstances.*

— 1 Thessalonians 5:18 (NIV)

I have often heard it said that “God will never give us more than we can handle.” Yet, there are times in our lives when this is simply not true, and such statements ring hollow. Perhaps the biblical passages that are used to promote this idea have been misinterpreted. For example, 1 Corinthians 10:13 is a verse commonly cited, but it is about temptation rather than suffering.

Passages like 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 and James 1:2 tell us to rejoice always. But being told to rejoice when we have lost a loved one or are facing a life-altering health diagnosis can seem cruel. The command to rejoice in our suffering, however, is about rejoicing in Jesus *despite* our circumstances, not *because of* our circumstances. What a difference that understanding can make when trials come! It is much easier to rejoice in Jesus and what he has done for us than to rejoice in the difficulties we face.

**THOUGHT FOR THE DAY**  
Is my gaze focused on God or my circumstances?

Understanding these passages better has helped me lift my gaze from very difficult circumstances to God, who is with us every step of the way, offering hope, joy, and encouragement in the midst of life’s most troublesome times.

**Prayer:** Heavenly Father, thank you for being with us in our suffering. Help us to rejoice in you *despite* our circumstances, not *because of* them. In the name of Jesus we pray. Amen.

**Bronwyn Ashton Winch (Queensland, Australia)**

**Prayer Focus:** THOSE IN HEARTBREAKING CIRCUMSTANCES

**Reflection Question:** When conflict arises, what helps you to rejoice and look to God for hope and encouragement?

## Benediction

My earnest prayer is that the readings, reflections, and prayers that have brought us to this day have offered a path of preparation for the holy conferencing that lies ahead. As we commence our time together among our United Methodist siblings, I am filled with a profound sense of gratitude and hope. May our gathering be a testament to the resilience of our diverse and vibrant tapestry of faith.

In the spirit of John Wesley — who championed unity in diversity — may we intently listen to one another's stories, share our joys and sorrows with compassion, and find common ground in our shared mission of spreading God's love and grace as we work creatively to make disciples for the transformation of the world.

Our gathering is a reminder that although we come from various cultures, speak different languages, and may have divergent perspectives, we all belong to one body in Christ Jesus. This unity, however, is not uniformity; it is a unity that celebrates and respects our differences, knowing that together we are stronger and more reflective of the kin-dom of God.

As we form sacred space together through the power of the Holy Spirit who bears witness among us, let us continue to seek understanding and healing where there is division, to offer grace where there is hurt, and to embody the love of Christ in all our interactions. As a means of demonstrating our desire to hold space for one another, The Upper Room is providing a prayer room (Rm. E222) in the conference hall throughout General Conference. Our team is there to offer space for quiet reflection and prayer-filled support for your written or spoken prayers.

May God's peace be with us, may holy love surround us, and may Divine wisdom guide us here at General Conference. Amen.

— Kimberly Orr  
Publisher  
The Upper Room

## How to write for The Upper Room

The devotionals in each issue of *The Upper Room* are written by people just like you. Here are some guidelines to help you:

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

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

### **Submit devotionals:**

Email: [ureditorial@upperroom.org](mailto:ureditorial@upperroom.org) or

Online: [Submissions.UpperRoom.org](https://www.upperroom.org/submissions)

Devotionals submitted without contact information will not be considered for publication.

## About The Upper Room

The Upper Room® is a global ministry dedicated to supporting the spiritual life of Christians seeking to know and experience God more fully. From its beginnings as a daily devotional guide, The Upper Room has grown to include publications, programs, prayer support, and other resources to help believers of all ages and denominations move to a deeper level of faith and service. The persistent and profound work of spiritual formation continues with new vitality at The Upper Room as we invite people to create daily life with God.

Since 1935, The Upper Room has been self-sustaining through resource sales, participants' fees, and donor gifts. Learn more at [UpperRoom.org](https://UpperRoom.org).

## Additional Resources for Prayer & Preparation

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