

MARCH-APRIL 2021

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COVER ART INTERPRETATION

Road to Emmaus

Artist: Gloria Ssali
(Uganda, Contemporary)

Interpreter: Erin Pearce



The story of the Road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-35) is beautiful in what I would call its ordinary miraculous-ness. Jesus — having recently suffered, died, and risen from the dead — met two disciples on their way to Emmaus. But they didn't recognize him. In fact, they were shocked that he had not heard the news of all that had recently taken place. They explained that the man in whom they had placed all their hope to redeem Israel had been crucified and buried, but his body was no longer in the tomb. In response, Jesus said, "Wasn't it necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and then enter into his glory?" (Luke 24:26, CEB).

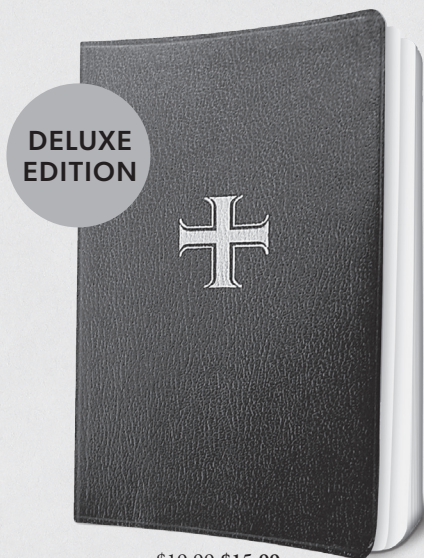
This is the scene into which artist Gloria Ssali invites us with her painting, *Road to Emmaus*. Gloria says, "I love to tell joyful, as well as poignant, moving stories to reveal the heart. I am an artistic wanderer (as well as a true nomad moving with my family when young from Uganda to the UK)."* *Road to Emmaus* depicts Jesus with his pierced hands resting on the disciples as they walk. The risen Jesus, the Messiah and Redeemer, meets the disciples on the road and walks with them. He meets them where they are, listens to them, and continues to teach them.

As you reflect on the cover art for this issue, I invite you to consider how you encounter the risen Christ in your daily life. When has Jesus appeared to you unexpectedly? Recall moments in your journey when Jesus walked alongside you. What did you learn from these miraculous, ordinary moments?

* <https://fineartamerica.com/profiles/gloria-ssali?tab=about>

Cover image courtesy of Gloria Ssali ©2017 Gloria Ssali. Prints of cover art are available from <https://fineartamerica.com/featured/1-road-to-emmaus-gloria-ssali.html>

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Wait and Hope

The angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; he has risen.”

— Matthew 28:5-6 (NIV)

As I write this, our world is facing a pandemic. Uncertainty about the immediate future is spreading nearly as fast as the disease, alternately taking root as panic or denial. Vast numbers of people are quarantined to help slow the spread of the virus. Right now the future is unclear, and we are newly aware of the fragile nature of life.

While the themes of uncertainty and the fragility of life have greater weight at this moment than at other times, they are not new. Many writers in this issue speak about seeking God’s guidance as they make life-altering decisions or receive a fearsome diagnosis. Some recall wondering as young people what shape their lives would take. Others write about being surprised when they faced roadblocks along the path that they had chosen or had to change course entirely. Through it all, however, each writer tells of God’s unfailing presence.

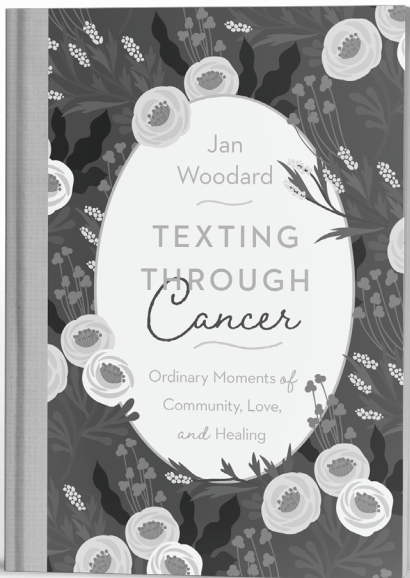
How fitting, then, that we have entered the season of Lent. In the days leading up to Jesus’ death, the disciples surely experienced confusion, fear, and denial as they followed Jesus into an uncertain future. As we walk with Jesus and the disciples toward Jerusalem and toward the Cross, we experience their confusion and fear. Where are we going? What will happen?

How will we go on without our Beloved Teacher? But when the questions become too numerous or the fears threaten to overwhelm us, the gospel reminds us that hope waits beyond the Cross. Death is not the final word. This moment is not the only moment. There is hope of new life ahead. And in each moment, our loving God walks with us.



— Lindsay L. Gray
Editorial Director

Hope for today when uncertainty
overshadows tomorrow



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ITALY

In an effort to streamline printing and distribution, the Italian edition of *The Upper Room* is now published quarterly, rather than bimonthly.

POLAND

Each year, the local publishing team leads a devotional writing workshop during the "Days of Renewal" event hosted by the UMC in Poland to encourage others to share their faith stories.



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FAITH NOT FEAR

MON
MAR 1
2021

READ Jeremiah 29:10-14*

Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go.

— Joshua 1:9 (NIV)

Making decisions can be tough — especially life-altering ones. When I chose my college, I made the safest decision possible. Friends, finances, and proximity to family were my considerations, all of which were designed to help me play things safe. Twenty years later, when I was choosing a seminary, those same concerns emerged. Then, I heard this question: *What decision will require you to trust God the most?*

Walking by faith and not by sight is seldom easy. Security seems to be one of our most basic priorities. If only we understood that we can never secure our lives and futures on our own! Imagine what would happen if we trusted God's words from Jeremiah 29:11: "I know the plans I have for you . . . plans to give you hope and a future."

God's love for us is truly greater than our fears and insecurities. Every day we get new opportunities to make decisions not rooted in our fears but grounded in God's love.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Today I will decide by
faith, not by fear.

Prayer: Dear Lord, you know the plans you have for us. We ask you to move us toward them in faithful confidence. Amen.

Eleanor L. Colvin (Texas, USA) — See p. 21.

Prayer Focus: PEOPLE FACED WITH HARD DECISIONS

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

TUES
MAR 2
2021

CARRIED

READ Psalm 46:1-7

The LORD himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged.

— Deuteronomy 31:8 (NIV)

When I was eight years old, I fell on a broken bottle; the glass cut my knee to the bone. The doctors stitched up my wound and wrapped my leg from my hip to below my knee. Every night my dad had to carry me up the stairs to bed. The first morning when he carried me back down, I looked at the bottom of the stairs and grabbed his neck tightly. Dad said,

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Through all the ups and downs of my life, God says, "I've got you."

"I've got you." The fear let go, and so did I. I don't remember the trips up or down for the next six weeks.

Before I accepted Christ into my life, I was living with

the same sense of panic I felt that first time my dad carried me down the stairs. I was wounded and figuratively immobile. There seemed no way for me to simply rest — no place to be at peace. But when God called to me, "Do not be afraid," my sense of relief was profound. I let go, and God has carried me ever since.

Prayer: Loving God, thank you for carrying and holding us. When we have fallen, when we are broken, when we can no longer move, you call, "Do not be afraid." In every situation of our lives help us to rest in you. Amen.

Steven Scheid (Tennessee, USA) — See p. 21.

SOMETHING NEW

WED
MAR 3
2021

READ John 15:9-17

Jesus said, *“As the Father loved me, I too have loved you. Remain in my love.”*

— John 15:9 (CEB)

When I was in primary school, I remember several children talking about having to give up candy for Lent — and not being at all happy about it. But we don’t just have to give up things we enjoy for Lent. We can also give up bad habits like putting ourselves down, thinking badly of others, gossiping, or having unrealistic expectations of ourselves. These habits restrict love, rather than help it grow. And who knows, when we give up negative thoughts, words, or behaviors for Lent, we may find that we enjoy it so much that we wish to give them up forever!

But Lent is not just for letting go of things; it can also be about taking something up. After all, Jesus took up his cross. Perhaps

we could take up reading more about Christ during Lent, try new ways of praying, or take more time to enjoy simply being in God’s presence. Maybe we could choose to reach out to someone we don’t know well.

God can lead us in all sorts of ways. Instead of feeling resentful about giving something up for Lent, we may find ourselves looking forward with anticipation to the new experiences God is calling us to in this season.

Prayer: Living Lord, guide and challenge us during Lent. Help us to discover anew your grace and love in this season. Amen.

Meg Mangan (New South Wales, Australia)

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
Letting go of bad habits can free me to experience God’s love.

THUR
MAR 4
2021

THE BLESSING OF TEARS

READ Revelation 21:1-4

The psalmist said, *“You have kept count of my tossings; put my tears in your bottle. Are they not in your record?”*

— Psalm 56:8 (NRSV)

When I think of God’s blessings, I think of family, friends, sunshine, or even my morning cup of coffee. Until recently, I never considered tears a blessing. For the past three years I have struggled with one son’s cancer, another son’s diminishing eyesight, and, finally, the loss of my husband of 58

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

God can renew my spirit
through my tears.

years. Through it all I found I was unable to cry. I kept everything within me — like a heavy weight attached to my ribs. I had always been private with my tears,

but now I couldn’t cry at all. Finally, after the death of my husband, I have begun to cry. It happens unexpectedly, at odd moments; sometimes just a trickle, sometimes seemingly endless sobs. But whether my tears flow like a stream or a waterfall, they leave me refreshed, with the weight in my chest becoming lighter and my spirit cleansed.

As we walk through life, we often miss blessings hidden in calamities. But while tears can blur our vision, they can also clarify our sight to reveal new truths. Perhaps we can see our way to reach out to someone in pain. I believe that when we have walked through pain and grief, we may be the only ones able to see clearly another person walking the same path — and there our tears can meet. Truly, tears can be God’s blessing for this life.

Prayer: Dear Jesus, because you also wept, you understand our tears. Thank you. Amen.

Eleanor Cowles (Oregon, USA)

CHOOSING COMMUNITY

FRI
MAR 5
2021

READ Proverbs 13:16-21

Whoever walks with the wise becomes wise, but the companion of fools suffers harm.

— Proverbs 13:20 (NRSV)

When I was in high school, I tried to spend time with people from different friend groups and backgrounds. I spent time with my friends from my church youth group. But I was the captain of my cross-country team and spent a lot of time with my teammates too. When I was around my cross-country friends, I would sometimes catch myself acting differently than I would when I was with my friends from church. My behavior got to a really bad point during my junior year. In my senior year, the Lord opened my eyes to see that I was not modeling Christlike behavior.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
Christian community can help me grow in my faith.

We need to pay close attention to the people we spend the most time with. When I was spending time with certain people, I was moving away from the Lord. Today's verse says that if we surround ourselves with like-minded believers, then they will support us as we grow toward the Lord.

I know that I cannot go through my Christian walk alone. The book of Acts reminds me that we are called to be in community with other believers. Our lives of faith are richer when we surround ourselves with faithful companions.

Prayer: Dear God, thank you for friends who draw us closer to you. Amen.

Austin Shumake (Texas, USA)

SAT
MAR 6
2021

MY HOPE

READ Psalm 25:4-15

*Guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are
God my Savior, and my hope is in you.*

— Psalm 25:5 (NIV)

The loneliest Christmas I ever spent was when my spouse had to work outside the city, leaving me alone with our baby who was sick at the time. So when my neighbor asked me to watch her 12-year-old daughter because she wanted to go to the hospital, I agreed.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
Even when I feel alone, God is
my hope.

After putting my baby to bed, the girl and I read the story of Jesus' birth. She had never heard about Jesus, but she was interested, so I gave

her the book. Her mom picked her up the next day, and I lost touch with them because we moved away.

David also experienced loneliness. But in David's loneliness, he said, "My hope, LORD, is in you" (Ps. 25:21). As God did for David and for me, God can change loneliness into something valuable.

Seven years later, I met the girl on the train. She told me that she and her mom had since become Christians. After that night when she stayed at my house, her heart wanted to know more about Jesus — she still keeps the book I gave to her. She is now taking theology classes and feels called to be an evangelist. As she spoke, I cried tears of happiness. My heart rejoices because God is in me, and God is my hope.

Prayer: Dear Father, give us hope when we feel lonely. Show us your ways, O Lord, and teach us to follow you. Amen.

Linda Chandra (Banten, Indonesia)

THE ANCIENT PATHS

SUN
MAR 7
2021

READ Micah 6:6-8

The LORD proclaims: Stop at the crossroads and look around; ask for the ancient paths. Where is the good way? Then walk in it and find a resting place for yourselves.

— Jeremiah 6:16 (CEB)

English ivy climbed the exterior walls of our house and spilled out over a small garden beside our garage. The ivy added character to our home and ground cover to our garden, but I knew it was time to trim it back. After gathering my tools, I knelt in the cool grass to dig up some of the roots, weeds, and grass that had crept into the garden. It wasn't long before I hit something hard. Scraping through the black soil, I discovered it was a red brick. I kept scraping and found another and another until I had unearthed a brick walkway lining the garden. I wondered how long that old brick pathway had lain hidden by neglect and overgrowth.

As I scraped soil from the bricks, I thought of Jeremiah. The prophet's people were turning away from God and following their own paths. In response, Jeremiah warned them to stop and seek "the ancient paths" long hidden by their rebellion against God's ways. Jeremiah called them back to God's ancient paths of justice and faithful devotion.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Though God's paths are ancient, they are also timeless.

God's ways may be ancient, but they hold meaning for us today. Those red bricks reminded me that I had been neglecting God's timeless paths. I vowed to walk them again, knowing they would lead me into eternal life with God.

Prayer: Holy Spirit, call us back to you when we stray from your path. Help us to walk faithfully with you. Amen.

David R. Schultz (Illinois, USA)

MON
MAR 8
2021

WHAT NOW?

READ Isaiah 40:26-31

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

— Isaiah 40:31 (NRSV)

A few years ago I retired from ministry after about 40 years, and then four months later my husband died after a long illness. He had also been in ministry over 40 years. My grief continues to be monumental. As time goes by I ask myself, *What now?* Day by day I wait for the Lord to lead me. Volunteer opportunities abound, but at this point in my life, my scoliosis limits my physical activities.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

I can find renewed strength as I wait for the Lord.

One day recently it came to my mind that I have written sermons and articles for years; what about

trying to write devotionals? So here I am writing devotionals, hoping to continue a new way of ministry.

Isaiah asks, “Have you not known? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth” (Is. 40:28, NIV). Those who faint and grow weary are given power and strength regardless of our age. The prophet reminds us, “Those who wait for the LORD, shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.”

Prayer: Dear God, our Creator, nourish us as we wait for your leading. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

Mary Alice Potter (North Carolina, USA)

Prayer Focus: SOMEONE BEGINNING A NEW
SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

READ 2 Timothy 1:3-7

*Blessed are those who fear the LORD, who
find great delight in his commands.*

— Psalm 112:1 (NIV)

One warm summer day, my mother took my brother and me by the hand and led us into the “clean room.” In Hungary, until the last century, the clean room was a special part of the home, particularly in village houses. It was considered the nicest room and used only for special occasions or for hosting guests.

That day, we knelt together and prayed in the pleasant coolness of the

room. First we listened as Mother prayed. She poured out her fears for our sick father while weaving in the events and feelings of our everyday lives with thanksgiving. Then my brother and I spoke our own prayers.

The clean room in our house showed traces of our faith. We prayed together so much in this room that there were marks in the carpet showing where we knelt. I remember the comfort, peace, and good feelings from these times of prayer. The way my mother lived out her deep faith left a strong impression on me; it led me to a loving and caring relationship with Jesus Christ.

In today’s scripture reading, the apostle Paul recalls the sincere faith that Timothy’s grandmother and mother had passed on. Timothy bore the traces of his family’s faith. How good it is to be people of faith and to express our questions and fears with thanksgiving in prayer!

Prayer: Dear God, thank you for listening to all the thoughts, desires, and joys of our hearts. Amen.

Anna Kerekrétiné Szili (Budapest, Hungary) — See p. 21.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

What traces of faith do
I leave behind?

WED
MAR 10
2021

HEALING TOUCH

READ Mark 1:40-45

Moved with pity, Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him.

— Mark 1:41 (NRSV)

My mind was reeling over our daughter's premature birth, her birth defects, and then having to leave my wife in another hospital. At the neonatal intensive care unit there, I stood watching my baby. She looked so tiny and fragile. Then a nurse said, "Touch her. She needs your touch." I hesitated, but the nurse insisted. The notion that the awkward touch of a dazed father could contribute to her healing surprised me.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Our loving actions can be God's presence to others.

While I gently touched her, I thought of how she needed God's healing touch just the way all of us do at times.

When in profound grief, I have felt God's love in a friend's hand on my shoulder. When other Christians have laid their hands on me in prayer, I have experienced a divine joy and peace I never knew before. Their hands were God's hands for me.

Although we cannot physically feel God's hand as my tiny daughter felt mine, we can experience God's presence as we are healed, comforted, blessed, calmed, and transformed through the actions of those who love us.

Prayer: O God, thank you for surrounding us with your healing love. Amen.

Sam Wright (Florida, USA) — See back cover.

READ Psalm 139:1-18

I am fearfully and wonderfully made.

— Psalm 139:14 (NIV)

Psalm 139 has always been my favorite part of the Bible. When I was a child, it taught me that I was special. I felt that I had a unique purpose in life, that there was something only I could do. As I grew up, I didn't think as much about my unique purpose as other things took over.

One day I was in the grocery store with a full cart headed for the checkout line. Another woman with

an equally full cart got there first. I was annoyed. Couldn't she see I was in a hurry? Then I heard a voice in my head: "She is also fearfully and wonderfully made." Immediately, I was humbled and realized that was true. Then I heard, "Pray for her." *What?* I was still struggling to let go of my irritation, but I said a simple prayer for her.

I have no idea how the rest of her day went, but I noticed a change in myself. After I prayed, I was no longer angry. I felt genuine love for the woman. I realized that God wanted me to pray not just for her but for myself as well.

Prayer transforms us from within. What a wonderful world it would be if we all prayed for one another and allowed our praying to transform our thoughts and actions.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help us to remember that each of us is made in your image. Remind us to treat others as your beloved children. Amen.

Melody Baggech (Oklahoma, USA)

FRI
MAR 12
2021

A FOREVER LOVE

READ Romans 8:35-39

Who will separate us from Christ's love?

— Romans 8:35 (CEB)

I once read a newspaper article that said a significant number of young people want to find a love that will last forever. However, finding a love that lasts can be a challenge.

The hymn writer George Matheson (1842-1906) was rapidly going blind at age 19. He had fallen in love with a girl at school, and they planned to marry. When he told her about his condition, he asked if she would still marry him. She said no.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

God's love will never
let me go.

On the evening of his sister's wedding, recalling his own pain and lost relationship, Matheson wrote his famous hymn "O Love That Wilt Not Let Me Go." In it he wrote, "I give thee back the life I owe, that in thine ocean depths its flow may richer, fuller be." The words of the hymn refer not to human love but the immense love of God, from which nothing can separate us. Some loves are reciprocated; others are not. But we can always count on the enduring love of God, a love that will never let us go.

Prayer: Eternal God, thank you for first loving us. Create in us loving hearts and spirits as we pray, "Father, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us. And lead us not into temptation" (Luke 11:2-4, NIV). Amen.

Hugo N. Urcola (Buenos Aires, Argentina) — See p. 21.

ONLY A PINCH

SAT
MAR 13
2021

READ Luke 13:18-21

To what should I compare the kingdom of God? It is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened.

— Luke 13:20-21 (NRSV)

The last time my two grandsons and I made pizzas, I tried a new recipe for the dough. I watched as a tiny packet of yeast, activated by a little warm water and a bit of sugar, helped to create a bowl of rapidly expanding dough.

The power of that yeast is like that of the tiny clove of garlic I added to my pizza sauce. It was a small amount in proportion to the large can of tomato sauce; but as the pizza warmed in the oven, the flavorful aroma of that tiny clove of garlic began to fill the room.

Scripture tells us that the kingdom of God is like a mustard seed — or a small pinch of yeast or a clove of garlic. The impact our faith has on others may start out small, but it can grow into something significant. Just as a seed or yeast dough or the aroma of garlic grow to their full potential under the right conditions, the kingdom of God grows by every tiny contribution of faith and trust.

When we worry that others have more to offer God or that we have nothing of significance to offer, we can remember the tiny pinch of yeast or a mustard seed. God can create the right conditions for our faith to have a positive influence on those around us.

Prayer: Compassionate God, help us remember that even our small acts of faith and service to you will grow under the right conditions. Amen.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
God can use my small acts of faith to have a big impact.

Beverly Marshall-Goodell (Georgia, USA)

SUN
MAR 14
2021

GOD DELIVERS US

READ Psalm 27:1-14

The LORD is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid? Though an host should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear: though war should rise against me, in this will I be confident.

— Psalm 27:1, 3 (KJV)

El Salvador had been in a civil war for nearly a decade when in November of 1989, those who sought to overthrow the government brought the fight to the capital city, San Salvador, where I lived. For a few days, my family and I were trapped in our house, hiding from gunfire from airplanes,

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

God is powerful enough to deliver me from danger.

helicopters, and the armies fighting right outside.

I was only nine years old at the time, and I knew nothing of the politics and the violent events that esca-

lated into this awful conflict. But I was afraid and felt that all hope was lost. I began to cry. My mother came to me and asked me, "Why are you crying?" I said, "We are going to die." I'll never forget her response: "Where is your faith? Trust the Lord." Her words brought me confidence, and I felt better. It was a few days before we could safely escape our home. The night after we left the city, I saw formations of helicopters hovering and firing red flares over the area where we had lived.

It is not easy to have faith when your life is in danger or you can see no solution. Nevertheless, the Bible tells of many people who trusted God to deliver them from danger. God has not changed. Every time I remember this event from my childhood, I thank God for delivering me and my family so that I could grow in faith and share my faith with others.

Prayer: Dear God, deliver us from danger and from those who would do us harm, for you are our refuge and our savior. We trust in you. Amen.

Marcelo Carcach (Maryland, USA)

Real people. Real stories. Real faith.



Eleanor Colvin (p. 7) loves encountering God in nature, the arts, and other people.



Jim Bell (p. 55) is a pastor living in North Carolina.



Julie Sipe (p. 52) is a high school math teacher and mother of two boys.



Steven Scheid (p. 8) was an engineer before finding his calling as a pastor and leader of scouting ministries.



Brennan Hurley (p. 38) is a pastor whose most formative faith experiences came from camping ministries.



Anna Kerekrtiné Szili (p. 15) has worked for the UMC Hungary Superintendent Office for about 20 years.



Hugo Urcola (p. 18) is a retired pastor and the editor of *The Upper Room* in Argentina.



Aruna Sagar (p. 67) moved to the U.S. from India in 2005 to teach science. She enjoys cooking, reading, and writing poetry.

Share YOUR story today!

The people pictured on this page did.

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

MON
MAR 15
2021

KEEP THE FAITH

READ John 18:33-38

Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.

— Matthew 5:4 (KJV)

I was raised in a Christian family, but I did not cultivate the habits of daily prayer or church attendance during my childhood.

After age 20, I began to embrace habits like praying, reading the Bible and other religious books, and reflecting with others on the Christian life. At that time I also learned the importance of serving, tithing, and contributing to church work. As I deepened my reading of scripture, I strengthened my faith, became closer to God, and improved my character.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

I can endure difficulties because of my unshakable faith in God.

However, I have been unable to advance my career. I feel I have been repeatedly passed over for promotions and misunderstood. But in spite of this, I have not lost my faith or the habits of praying, doing good to others, and fulfilling God's will. Thanks to these practices, I have been able to endure all these difficulties. When we face challenges, we can be strengthened by the love and mercy of our faithful God.

Prayer: Dear God, help us to endure tribulations and keep our faith firm in you. We pray in the name of Jesus. Amen.

Anabela Couto de Castro Valente (Luanda, Angola)

STRENGTH

TUES
MAR 16
2021

READ Psalm 61:1-3

Hear my cry, O God; attend unto my prayer.

— Psalm 61:1 (KJV)

One day while I was getting ready to go to work, my dad called. He told me that my mom had passed away in her sleep. My heart sank. I called my boss and told him I would not be in that day. Then I made the five-minute drive down to the beach. When I got there it was so foggy that I could see only about 25 or 30 feet into the ocean. I thought to myself, *This is exactly how I feel right now. What is next? What do I do? What do I pray? I can't do this.*

I had no answers. As I looked out into the fog, I dropped to my knees and tearfully called out the first three verses of Psalm 61. Suddenly I heard a seagull squawk. When I looked up, I still could not see anything but fog; but somehow I finally felt peace begin to wash over me. I got up, walked back to my truck, and drove home repeating Psalm 61:1-3.

It has not been easy learning to live without my mom. I still miss her every day. My wife, dad, sisters, and church family are all around me; they have helped carry me through. Most important, God has given me the strength I need. And when I don't know what to pray, I pray the Psalms.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
God can give me strength
when I need it most.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank you for being with us in all circumstances. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

George Hilliard (Virginia, USA)

Prayer Focus: THOSE GRIEVING THE DEATH OF
A LOVED ONE

WED
MAR 17
2021

GOD CAN RELATE

READ Matthew 4:1-11

The devil left [Jesus], and angels came and took care of him.

— Matthew 4:11 (CEB)

For several years I taught third grade in the same classroom where I had attended third grade. On the first day of school each year, I would pass around my third-grade class picture and inform my students that I had once sat at one of the small desks, drunk from the little classroom water fountain, and gained knowledge from things written on the old chalkboard. I found it especially helpful when attempting to put students new to our school at ease. I let them know that I could relate to their feelings of anxiety, apprehension, and excitement because I had been “the new kid” in the same classroom.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

I will look for opportunities to show empathy and compassion today.

As Christians, we

worship a Savior who can relate to our needs and emotions. I find great comfort in knowing that Jesus understands the human joys and trials we experience.

God sent Jesus to live among us and to set an example for our lives. By reading and studying the Bible, we know Jesus has firsthand knowledge of temptation, hunger, loneliness, disappointment, grief, rejection, and physical pain as well as love, peace, joy, kindness, and contentment. We serve an awesome God full of compassion for us.

Prayer: Dear Lord, how wonderful it is to know that you not only recognize but can relate to our human needs! Help us to convey your empathy and compassion to others. Amen.

Sally Hassler (Indiana, USA)

WHAT'S THE PLAN?

THUR
MAR 18
2021

READ Exodus 13:17-22

By day the LORD went ahead of them in a pillar of cloud to guide them on their way and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so that they could travel by day or night.

— Exodus 13:21 (NIV)

After graduating from high school I had plenty of choices and different ideas about the shape my life could take, but I had no clear vision for my future. I had to find answers to many questions.

We are sometimes tempted to make our own plans and set goals for the future without considering God's plans for our lives. So I decided to continue my studies by attending seminary and to search for God's guidance.

In Exodus, God ordered Moses to lead the people out of Egypt. Moses had no clear map, development plan, or carefully designed strategy for the journey to the Promised Land. All he could do was to trust in God.

As we search for God's plans for our lives, we can trust that God will fulfill those plans. Even in the most difficult situations when our human perspectives offer no good solutions, we can rely on God to show us the way.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
I can trust that God knows
my situation.

Prayer: Dear God, help us to trust in you and to have faith that the best plans are the ones you lay before us each step of our life's journey. Amen.

Naatan Hollman (Tallinn, Estonia)

FRI
MAR 19
2021

TREASURES

READ Matthew 6:19-21

Store up for yourselves treasures in heaven.

— Matthew 6:20 (NIV)

My family and I emigrated from India to the United States in the early 1980s. Just like that, bags were packed and good-byes were said as my parents, two sisters, and I headed to our new country. Being from a faithful Christian family, we knew it was essential that we pack the family Bible to take with us.

During those first months in our tiny Brooklyn apartment, I remember our nightly custom of my father reading from

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

The Bible is the living word of God.

the Gujarati Bible and then praying together as a family.

Recently I came across the family Bible, and I noticed that it had fallen apart. The leather cover had

peeled off, and the dried-up binding could not hold the pages together. The physical book did not withstand the test of time, but the living word of God is eternal. Physical things, objects, and humans deteriorate with time. In the timeless words of the Bible, God gives us renewal and freshness and promises us the gift of eternal life. If we keep God's words in our heart, they will never fade. Therein lies the true treasure.

Prayer: Eternal God, thank you for showing us that while treasures on earth fade with time, treasures in heaven will last an eternity. Amen.

Shital Sherri Macwan (New York, USA) — See back cover.

LETTING GO

SAT
MAR 20
2021

READ Ephesians 4:29-32

Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice.

— Ephesians 4:31 (NIV)

When I was 13 years old, I entered my pet Charolais calf in the local county fair. I had raised the calf from the time he was born. He was so white and fluffy I had named him Cotton.

When it was time to show Cotton, I led him into the arena. Halfway into the show ring something startled him, and he bolted. I held on to the lead strap, and he dragged me across the sawdust floor. The show ring helpers were yelling, "Let go! Let go!" When I finally did let go, I had some scrapes and a bruised ego.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
What attitudes or feelings is God inviting me to let go of?

Too often we hang on to negative attitudes, feelings, and behaviors which can cause harm to ourselves and to others. Bitterness, rage, and anger are just some of the feelings that cause damage as we focus only on ourselves. If we act on these feelings, they can hurt others as well. Most important, negative behaviors can hinder our Christian witness. Such harmful attitudes hold us back from being loving, forgiving persons.

When we become angry or hurt, we can listen as the Holy Spirit urges us to "Let go!" Then with the Spirit's help we can rid ourselves of the attitudes, feelings, and behaviors so harmful to ourselves and others and become who God calls us to be.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help us to listen to the Holy Spirit telling us to let go of harmful attitudes and behaviors so that our speech and actions may be pleasing to you. Amen.

Sandi Ann Lumpkin (Indiana, USA)

SUN
MAR 21
2021

READ THE MANUAL

READ Psalm 119:89-104

*Your word is a lamp to my feet and
a light to my path.*

— Psalm 119:105 (NRSV)

The grouting should not have been a difficult job, but the result was not satisfactory. I realized I'd made my usual mistake: I hadn't read the instructions.

I'm the same with everything. When I assemble furniture, I survey the finished items and find they are not perfect.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

The Bible is the most important book I will ever read.

There are pieces back to front or upside down, or the drawers stick. I'm especially prone to not reading the manual for my car. I fumble for the instructions at the

side of the road when I need the fog lights, wonder how to adjust the side mirrors, or need to change the clock twice a year. The answers are all in the book that I forget to study.

The most important manual I've ever read and then forgotten to apply is the Bible. God has given us a book that can help us figure out how to live. While it does not offer direct help for every situation, the Bible includes guidelines that can equip us for living a God-filled life.

If stuck on the bookcase shelf and ignored, the Bible is about as useful as my neglected car manual. In every situation, the Bible can guide us.

Prayer: Dear Lord, thank you for the Bible. Encourage us as we read it, and guide us as we apply it to our lives. Amen.

Carol Purves (England, United Kingdom)

THE MASTER ARCHITECT

MON
MAR 22
2021

READ Matthew 7:24-27

*In their hearts humans plan their course,
but the LORD establishes their steps.*

— Proverbs 16:9 (NIV)

When I was growing up, I longed to know how my life would play out. Maybe I would be a professional soccer player or a successful business owner. But during my mid-teens, my life took a drastic turn, and I was sent to prison. I thought my life was ruined, and I felt hopeless. Sitting in my cell, I replayed my life as if it were a movie. I looked at every scene from every angle. After much evaluation, I came to understand that everything I had chased after was meaningless.

One day in that lonely cell God called to me. From that moment on, my life

took a turn for the better. I felt that God was building my life on a solid foundation. Even now, God is continuing to create something new in me. And when I think of the years past, I can see God, the Master Architect, at work. God has been building my new life, one step at a time.

When our lives seem aimless and purposeless, we can learn to trust God, the Creator and Sustainer of life. When we trust God's directions, we can be assured that God will lead us to a life of goodness and purpose.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

God is the foundation
of my life.

Prayer: Dear God, guide our steps so that we can build your kingdom. Amen.

Antonio Delapaz (Texas, USA)

TUES
MAR 23
2021

MOSAIC

READ 2 Corinthians 4:7-12

We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

— Romans 8:28 (NIV)

While driving home from a trip, I encountered a spectacular scene at a rest area. From the outside, the building looked like any other plain brick structure. However, when I opened the door, I saw a beautiful mosaic celebrating the state of Missouri that filled an entire wall. I gasped in awe as

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

I can trust God with the broken pieces of my life.

I saw ornate scenes of butterflies landing on brilliantly colored flowers, steamboats on the swirling river, and images of people who made an impact in the state.

When I stepped closer to try to get a better view, I saw the broken pieces of pottery and glass that were carefully placed in cement to create this beautiful picture.

The mosaic reminded me that God can use the broken pieces of our lives to create a beautiful story. When I give God my broken pieces — heartache from losing a job, pain from a failed relationship, suffering from a serious illness — God can mold me to become more like Christ. I can trust God to work for me even when I do not see how the brokenness in my life will turn out for good.

As the broken pieces of pottery created a beautiful story, God can use our brokenness to give others hope. Together we can tell a beautiful story of God's restorative love.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, we give you the broken pieces of ourselves. Help us to trust that you will restore us and create something beautiful from our brokenness. Amen.

Heather Hagstrom (Kansas, USA)

LIKE NEVER BEFORE

READ Acts 3:1-10

WED
MAR 24
2021

Taking [the lame man] by the right hand, [Peter] helped him up, and instantly the man's feet and ankles became strong. He jumped to his feet and began to walk.

— Acts 3:7-8 (NIV)

I often think my family's situation will never change. We will never have our own home, our brother will never recover from mental illness, and we will never be free from our financial difficulties. One day a friend said to me, "Lina, you should pray like never before." I thought, *What does he mean "like never before"? Should I begin praying with my eyes open rather than shut? Should I pray standing rather than sitting?* Later I came to understand that "like never before" means I should pray with full trust in God. Rather than looking at my family situation as something that will never change, I should look to God, who has the power to change everything.

"Like never before" reminded me of the lame man at the temple gate, thinking he would never

be able to walk, much less jump. Then one day he met Peter and John. Instead of giving the man money, Peter said, "In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk." Immediately the man "jumped to his feet and began to walk."

The power of God and the faith and witness of Christ-followers like Peter and John can assure me that when I face a situation that I think will never change, I can pray "like never before" and put full faith in God, whose power can change everything.

Prayer: Almighty God, in difficult situations help us to trust that you can do miracles like we have never seen or heard of before. Amen.

Linawati Santoso (East Java, Indonesia)

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Today I will put my trust in God's power.

THUR
MAR 25
2021

ACTS OF KINDNESS

READ Galatians 6:7-10

Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.

— Galatians 6:9 (NIV)

My wife enjoys working in her colorful flower garden which adds beauty to our yard. But she also works full time, spends many hours with a local charity, is a Girl Scout troop leader, and takes care of our family. With so much going on, her flower garden needed some work. She came home one

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Someone will need an act of kindness from me today.

day and said that she was going to give up her flowers; she didn't have the time to maintain them properly.

I don't have a green thumb, but I woke up early

the next morning, grabbed my gloves and portable radio, and went to work on the flower garden. As I cleared out the weeds, I listened to praise music and thanked God that I had the health, ability, and opportunity to do the work. I also praised God for my wife who does so much for our family and others. My gardening took only a few hours, and it didn't really feel like work. That one act of kindness brought happiness to two people.

We all want to know we are loved. A few moments out of our day can make a huge impact on others, and it usually benefits the giver too.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank you for all you do for us. Help us not to grow weary in passing your love and kindness on to others. Amen.

Doug Brady (Alabama, USA)

HAPPILY EVER AFTER

FRI
MAR 26
2021

READ Psalm 119:105-112

*[O LORD], you are good, and what you do is good;
teach me your decrees.*

— Psalm 119:68 (NIV)

I sighed when I read another devotion where a life was at risk, people prayed, and the life was miraculously restored. Of course I'm glad for them, but I wondered, *Where are the voices of those who trust God despite unanswered prayers?*

My husband and I prayed for our children even before they were born. We dedicated them to God, took them to church, taught them scripture, and sacrificed so they could have Christian educations. Our family served God with joy. But we still suffered.

Our oldest son drowned as a teenager. After ten years of marriage, our oldest daughter's husband left her. Our youngest son was diagnosed with schizophrenia. It's been three years since our youngest daughter has spoken to us.

Life is hard. Loved ones might die despite our faith and prayer. We may get divorced even when we trust. Diseases can be incurable or fatal. We may pray, live faithfully, and trust God, yet still face unthinkable tragedies.

But even knowing this, we can continue to pray and live for God — to believe that God is good, right, and lovely, and that God's ways are peace. Even when things go wrong, God is still by our side in the struggle. And we can find joy in knowing we are never alone.

Prayer: Dear God, thank you for your presence with us. Help us to remain faithful to you, no matter our circumstances. Amen.

DeVonna R. Allison (Florida, USA)

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
I can always rely on God's
presence in my life.

PERSEVERANCE

READ Luke 10:38-42

*You shall love the LORD your God with all
your heart, and with all your soul,
and with all your might.*

— Deuteronomy 6:5 (NRSV)

Sometimes I don't feel like going to worship services. My most frequent excuse is that I did not prepare the right clothes. But then a friend asked me, "Would you use the same excuse if you didn't feel like going to work?" When it comes to my job, I do everything in my power to find the right clothing and avoid being absent. My friend's question made me pause. So on the next worship day I got ready and went to the service.

In Luke chapter 10, Mary took time away from her daily chores to listen to God. It seems to me that we can often be willing to make sacrifices to please ourselves and others. But our love for God should always bring us back to the altar

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Even when it feels
inconvenient, I will
worship God.

because God first loved us
(see 1 John 4:19).

Worshiping God is an
act of perseverance and
gratitude for what God does
in our lives. As the psalmist

says, "He who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep. The LORD is your keeper; the LORD is your shade at your right hand" (Ps. 121:4-5).

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

Tomás Adão Calomba (Luanda, Angola)

UNEXPECTED LOVE

SUN
MAR 28
2021

READ Psalm 119:73-80

The human mind may devise many plans, but it is the purpose of the LORD that will be established.

— Proverbs 19:21 (NRSV)

When my husband and I celebrated our fortieth wedding anniversary, we retraced some of our memories with a trip to New York City, where we were married. We stayed at the same hotel, attended the church where we had met and gotten married, and took a carriage ride through Central Park. But one of the most memorable experiences, totally unplanned and spontaneous, was meeting the 99-year-old pianist who still played the piano regularly at the hotel's restaurant. He came over to our table during our meal and said that he wanted to write us a song for our anniversary. And so he did, and he also played "Anniversary Waltz." It has become a new cherished memory that we have added to all our others.

Like that musician, God has a way of surprising us with unplanned and even unimaginable things: the people who came out

to greet Jesus as he entered Jerusalem, the disciples who expected the same Passover supper, and those who plotted to kill Jesus because he disagreed with them. But God surprised all of them with an unexpected end to the story of Jesus. God gave them and us a new experience, a new outlook, and a new and eternal life.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
God's love often shows up in unexpected ways.

Prayer: Dear Lord, help us always to be open and ready for your unexpected plans for us. Amen.

Xavia Arndt Sheffield (Pennsylvania, USA)

MON
MAR 29
2021

A GREAT DAY

READ Mark 1:29-39

Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed.

— Mark 1:35 (NIV)

“I’m overwhelmed,” I confessed to my boss. I had fallen behind on a number of projects at home and at work. Each day seemed to bring a new high-priority issue to my email inbox, my desk at work, or my front door; and I had gotten off track. After listening for a few minutes, my boss replied,

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Spending time with God is the most important thing today.

“Every morning, I get up early and decide on the *one* thing that I have to do today in order to have a great day.” He realized he was late for another meeting, so he

abruptly ended his time with me. I stayed behind pondering his words and wondering which of the many emails, appointments, meetings, tasks from home, or verbal requests was my “one thing” for the day.

In today’s scripture, Jesus got up early — before the disciples stirred or the crowds appeared. In those early hours, he spent time with God. As I read this verse, I felt God showing me once more that “the *one* thing that I have to do today in order to have a great day” is to start my day letting God love me and loving God in return.

Starting my day with God’s word and God’s love has made all the difference. Instead of being anxious and overwhelmed, I have a great day when I begin it with God.

Prayer: Father God, when life’s demands distract us, help us to remember the importance of spending regular time in your presence. Amen.

Cassius Rhue (South Carolina, USA) — See back cover.

EVERYTHING I DO

TUES
MAR 30
2021

READ Matthew 5:1-12

Jesus said, "Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account."

— Matthew 5:11 (NRSV)

I became a Christian in my senior year of high school, and my Christian youth leader encouraged me to share my faith with the student body. I was scared, but I knew I should do it, and I wanted to do it. The day came, and in a trembling voice I told the students of Christ's love. I did not think I had much impact; I was just happy it was over.

But then as I walked home a few days later, I saw a student from my school standing on her porch with an older relative. As I passed, she shouted an insult at me, and they both laughed. It took a while before I realized that her words were mocking my testimony of faith. My knees knocked together, and I continued home meekly, filled with despair. I had never been ridiculed like that.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
Even when I face ridicule and persecution, God is with me.

The next day I read Matthew 5:11. I could not believe my eyes when I saw a description of what I had experienced. Immediately, I was filled with joy. All my sadness left, and I thanked God for being faithful and reminding me that God sees everything I do.

Prayer: Faithful God, help us to share your word, and strengthen us so that we will not fear ridicule. Amen.

Jacqueline London (Trinidad and Tobago) — See back cover.

Prayer Focus: THOSE WHO ARE PERSECUTED
FOR THEIR FAITH

WED
MAR 31
2021

GRACEFUL GREETINGS

READ **Philippians 4:4-9**

*Grace to you and peace from God our
Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*

— Ephesians 1:2 (NRSV)

Unfortunately, the week before Easter I had a disagreement with a parishioner, whom I'll call Steve. When he showed up to worship the next week, I found myself standing in the pulpit at the beginning of worship with my mind flooded with worry about him and about our church, rather than focused on the good news of the Resurrection. What a terrible way to start worship on Easter!

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

When I disagree with someone, I will first reach out in Christian love.

On that day I truly understood why in the first few verses of all his letters, Paul starts with something along the lines of today's

quoted scripture. He doesn't start with condemnation or correction. He doesn't get to the point of the letter until he has first reached out to them in Christian love, no matter what the situation. So that Easter, during the "passing of the peace," I made it a point to walk straight from the pulpit toward Steve, shake his hand, and say, "Steve, grace and peace to you in the name of Jesus Christ." Since that day, I've come to the conclusion that Paul had it right. We will have disagreements with one another, but we can't properly worship God and have true Christian relationships unless we first reach out in love.

When we intentionally make peace, grace, and love the priorities in our relationships, our lives begin to look more and more like the life of Jesus.

Prayer: Loving God, help us to show your love to everyone before we do anything else. Amen.

Brennan Hurley (North Carolina, USA) — See p. 21.

FINDING GOD IN LOSS

THUR
APR 1
2021

READ **John 14:25-27**

Jesus said, “Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.”

— John 14:27 (NIV)

Jesus comforted his disciples after their last supper together, telling them how he must leave for a while and assuring them they would not be alone. After my husband's suicide, I saw more clearly how the disciples must have felt when faced with the reality of their loss. I could imagine how they waited through interminable moments of the night, hearts quaking with uncertainty and fear as they tried to understand what was to come.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
When I am broken, God will help me rebuild.

As I drove to and from my assignments for the local newspaper, mourning the loss of my husband, I did not see how I could survive. Drying my eyes to do interviews and take pictures, I recorded the lives of others even as my own seemed to be ending. I questioned and cried out to God, who had been there for everything else in my life. In time, I felt God helping me rebuild my life by sending me other people who had experienced traumatic loss.

Now I can write about the long journey toward healing I have experienced and the blessings I continue to receive. A sense of peace, my grandsons, the support of family and churches, and a connection with others who have lost loved ones to suicide are some of the gifts that have turned my life's greatest tragedy into something powerful and good.

Prayer: Redeeming God, thank you for turning our mourning into joy. Your love is our most precious gift. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

Jan McDaniel (Georgia, USA)

Job

A year will have passed between the time that I write this and when you read it. We work on each issue of the magazine far in advance to allow time for translation and distribution around the world. This poses a unique challenge in responding to current or recent events because by the time the issue goes to press those events will be neither current nor particularly recent. So I tend to avoid references to events that are occurring as I am writing. However, given the past couple of weeks, both in my own community and in the world, I feel deeply compelled to break with this tradition.

On the night of March 2 and early morning hours of March 3, 2020, tornadoes killed several people and destroyed even more homes and businesses in Middle Tennessee. As we have struggled with the tragedy and loss caused by the storms, we are also dealing with the uncertainty and anxiety of the COVID-19 pandemic and mourn the havoc that it is wreaking at home and across the globe. I feel the weariness of my neighbors; and I feel my own.

As I try to make sense of it all, my mind keeps turning to Job and his story. Job is likely not the first person to whom we would think to look when reaching for a word of hope. Job offers, however, one of the finest examples we have of what it looks like to persevere in the face of seemingly insurmountable adversity. In the first two chapters of the book, Job faces unimaginable loss — his property, his family, even his character is called into question. How could anyone in Job's position carry on?

We often attribute patience to Job as the primary virtue that distinguishes him from other characters in scripture, but were you to ask me, I would say that higher on that list are his persistence and tenacity in questioning God and God's presence in his circumstances. Chapter after chapter Job argues with God and demands answers concerning his plight.

I see more of myself in Job than anyone else in the Bible. Not so much the side of Job that was resilient and somehow remained steady in the face of unthinkable tragedy and loss,

but the part of Job that was relentless in his questions and need to understand. Job wanted to know how God could allow everything that had happened to him and wondered where God was in the aftermath. And I don't blame him. I am with Job on that. "Today . . . my complaint is bitter," Job says. "Oh, that I knew where I might find [God]!" (Job 23:2-3, NRSV).

Job's story reminds me that there is something deep within human nature that searches out meaning and understanding in our suffering and loss. But like the events of the past few days, Job's story ultimately leaves me with more questions than it does answers. God says to Job, "Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation? . . . while the morning stars sang together and all the angels shouted for joy?" (Job 38:4, 7, NIV). God seems to be saying to Job that even were God to explain it, Job couldn't possibly understand. In one sense, I have never found this response all that satisfactory or helpful. But in another, I find it inexplicably beautiful. Maybe it's the image of the stars singing or angels shouting with joy. I can almost let myself hear it as God's way of saying to Job that there might not be as much to understand or as much meaning to be found in hard times as we would want. Sometimes it is just bad — plain and simple. But God is still God.

If there is a word of hope in Job, it is not in how the story ends. Hope comes long before God restores Job's life. "I know that my redeemer lives," Job says, "and that in the end he will stand on the earth" (19:25). Here Job recognizes that God is in the business of redemption and can bring good from the bleakest circumstances. I am always struck that Job doesn't speak these words after his struggle is over — he utters them in the middle of it! That in itself is enough to give me the persistence and hope to imagine that while there are hard days ahead and though life might not have completely returned to normal by the time you read this, evidence of God's work of redemption in our lives and the lives of those we love will most certainly surround us.



— Andrew Garland Breeden
Acquisitions Editor

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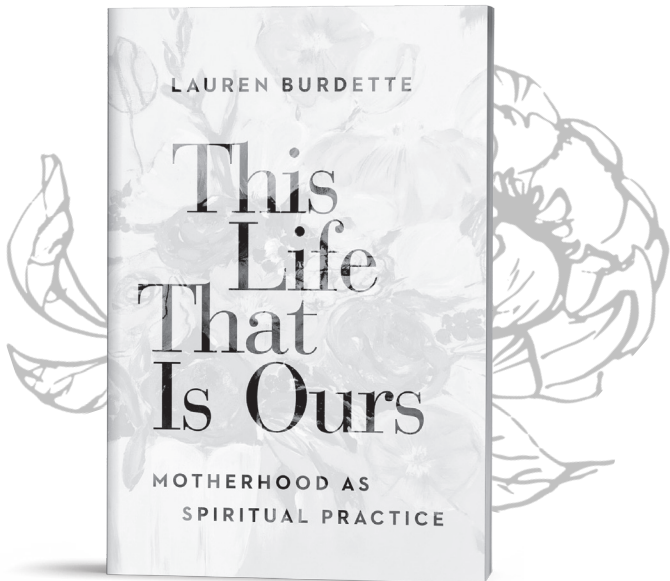
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FRI
APR 2
2021

PROMISE OF SPRING

READ Luke 23:39-43

Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with me in paradise.

— Luke 23:43 (KJV)

When I was hiking in the woods one early spring day, the sky was overcast. The scenery was full of bleak, leafless trees. As I climbed a hill, a gust of wind turned my thoughts to sadness and melancholy. God seemed far away from me at that moment.

But suddenly I saw an unexpected sight: a tiny blue wildflower peeking up at me from a pile of dead leaves. At once my melancholy and loneliness left my heart. Spring was already on its way, and God was sending me a message even as I had felt far from God.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Even in times of sadness,
God sends messages of
hope and joy.

Even when God's blessings seem distant, the

promises of God — like the promise of spring — will be fulfilled. When we remember these promises while waiting on God, they can become more evident. We can give thanks to God and remember Jesus' promise to the man next to him as they were both dying at Golgotha: Paradise is coming!

Prayer: Dear Lord, help us keep our eyes on your brightness and glory when the world seems dark. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Gary E. Crum (Virginia, USA)

Prayer Focus: SOMEONE STRUGGLING TO SEE
GOD'S BEAUTY

READ Ecclesiastes 3:1-14

[God] has made everything beautiful in its time.

— Ecclesiastes 3:11 (NIV)

For years, I struggled to reconcile my ambitions and notions of success with God's timing and plan for my life. As a musician and songwriter, comparing myself to others in my field and what they were achieving was a perpetual snare.

Then during an extended maternity leave following the birth of my second son, I wrestled with the financial and physical constraints of raising two small children

in a single-income home. Laying aside my career ambitions in order to care for my kids was painful. I was living my long-awaited dream of being at home with my children full time, but I struggled with a real sense of loss. I feared I was letting my life waste away while accomplishing nothing. It took a long time for me to begin seeing things differently.

The writer of Ecclesiastes described something profound about the nature of God's timing. God fulfills each beautiful promise to God's children in its time. Some flowers bloom earlier and others bloom later, but they all have their moment of beauty and glory. In the same way, God's timing is never a punishment but a distinguishing mark of our unique purpose.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help us to see your timing as a gift rather than a punishment. Strengthen us so that we can participate with you in your timing. Amen.

Katie Overbeek (Ontario, Canada)

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

I will measure my success according to God's word.

SUN
APR 4
2021

HE LIVES

READ 1 Peter 1:3-9

Since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.

— 1 Corinthians 15:21-22 (NIV)

My wife showed me an obituary that a friend had sent to her. It was shockingly brief; it simply gave the man's name, where he lived, and then: "He died." Two words summed up a life of 65 years.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
For all who believe in Christ,
death is not the last word.

My initial reaction was that an obituary so short showed a lack of compassion. But perhaps there were other factors involved

— no money to pay for a longer summary, or no close family survivors with details. And then I thought about Jesus' death over 2,000 years ago. Jesus Christ was arrested and tried as a criminal. He was found guilty, tortured, and then suffered humiliating crucifixion. Perhaps in the days following Good Friday, if someone asked what happened to Jesus, the response may have simply been: "He died."

Until Jesus, death was the last chapter of life, the end of the story. But Jesus changed everything when he rose from the dead on the third day following his death on the cross. As Paul writes in Romans, "Through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death" (Rom. 8:2). In the case of Christ, the summary is, "He lives." Because he lives, he offers eternal life to all who believe and follow him.

Prayer: Dear Father, thank you for the gift of your Son, Jesus Christ. Help us to prepare for eternal life by serving others and bringing glory to your name. Amen.

John D. Bown (Minnesota, USA)

Prayer Focus: SOMEONE WITH FEW CLOSE FAMILY MEMBERS

TIME WELL SPENT

MON
APR 5
2021

READ 1 Kings 19:9-12

After the earthquake a fire; but the LORD was not in the fire: and after the fire a still small voice.

— 1 Kings 19:12 (KJV)

While brushing my teeth one morning, instead of pondering what I needed to accomplish that day I began mentally reciting a scripture I had memorized. God used that moment to show me something in a Bible verse that I had never noticed, enhancing my understanding and filling me with gratitude.

I marvel that God would teach me during such a mundane task. How wondrously God created our minds, to be able to perform routine chores without thinking about them so that we can focus our thoughts on other matters! I usually fill everyday activities with my own plans for the day, instead of quietly seeking God's wisdom and direction. How often do I miss God's still small voice because of my planning?

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
Everyday tasks can be time spent in God's presence.

I no longer dread daily tasks I once thought boring or unimportant. Instead, I have come to see them as opportunities to quiet my thoughts and focus on God in prayer and meditation. God can use those times to draw me closer, teaching me, inspiring me, and strengthening my life of discipleship.

Prayer: Dear God, forgive us when we crowd you out of our daily routines. Help us to use even the mundane tasks of each day to focus on you and your wisdom. Amen.

Judy Ransom (Florida, USA) — See back cover.

TUES
APR 6
2021

GOD RESTORES

READ Psalm 51:13-17

The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.

— Psalm 51:17 (KJV)

Today's reading is from a psalm of David, the king of Israel. It reflects his thoughts after he has realized the gravity and implications of conspiracy against Uriah the Hittite and his adultery with Bathsheba, Uriah's wife. His actions result in a baby boy, and God rebukes David through the prophet Nathan. (See 2 Sam. 11-12.)

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

God's love can restore anyone.

In the psalm, David's broken heart is obvious. He has realized that he has sinned against God, whom he loves. He fears being

separated from God because of his actions. Despite the consequences he suffered, God restored David's life.

In 2007, when I was 21 years old, my heart felt burdened with sin. I decided to go to church the next Sunday to seek redemption. I was broken inside and felt hopeless. But every word the pastor preached spoke directly to my heart. That moment marked my life forever. The joy and the love for God I felt were indescribable. David's story reassures me that no matter how broken we are, God can restore us all.

Prayer: Father in heaven, thank you for your mercy and the way you restore our lives. Amen.

Albert Dob (Bucharest, Romania)

COMMITMENT

WED
APR 7
2021

READ Matthew 22:34-39

Jesus said, *“Surely I am with you always.”*

— Matthew 28:20 (NIV)

Years ago, a church-planting friend advised me that the key to growing a successful church is to remain focused on Jesus’ command to love God and one another and his instruction to make disciples. As we prepared to launch our new church, we wanted to stay focused on these principles. The journey has been anything but easy, but Jesus reminds us daily, “I am with you always.”

At our church, we try to think about reaching one person, one family, at a time. So every day our church is intentional about meeting new people — sharing our story and, more importantly, listening to theirs. We go regularly to schools, movie theaters, restaurants, bars, parks, and community outings — listening. And as we listen, loving connections are formed.

Our commitment to loving God and neighbor and to making disciples has helped us to grow a strong church.

Prayer: Dear God, give us the strength daily to share your story of love with another person. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
In what small way can I show love to a neighbor today?

Teddy Rollins (Georgia, USA)

THUR
APR 8
2021

GATHER YOUR ELEPHANTS

READ 1 Peter 5:1-11

Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.

— 1 Peter 5:8 (NIV)

Newborn elephants are susceptible to attacks from predators like lions and hyenas. As a mother elephant gives birth, the herd gathers to protect her and the newborn.

My daughter's family is going through a difficult time. For us, gathered elephants symbolize the protection her community gives her by their prayers. A small wooden elephant sits by my kitchen sink. My daughter's friend gave her two small elephant figurines when she moved away, knowing that

the days ahead could leave my daughter vulnerable. The elephants serve as a reminder that she is not alone. When she feels overwhelmed by her situation,

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
Today I will support a friend through prayer.

the elephants remind her of the community that will support her with prayer whatever comes her way.

When a hard day hits, my daughter gathers her community by texting me, her sisters, and her friends who immediately surround her with prayer.

Scripture tells us to be alert because evil prowls like a roaring lion. But God has not left us defenseless in our times of vulnerability and pain. In those times, we can ask others to gather around us and pray for God's powerful presence to bring relief.

Prayer: Dear Lord, help us to share our struggles with those who surround and encourage us through prayer. Amen.

Glenda Moore (Illinois, USA)

SPIRITUAL FOOD

FRI
APR 9
2021

READ Psalm 1:1-3

Do not . . . take your Holy Spirit from me.

— Psalm 51:11 (NIV)

I've always considered reading to be spiritual food and a daily treat. Early in my life it became not only a treat but a tool to build up my inner strength. I nurtured my soul by starting my day reading the wisdom of great artists and thinkers. It was a way to steel myself for my everyday challenges. I'd leave for school with deep calmness; but then as the day progressed and challenges arose, it was difficult to implement the lessons of my daily reading.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

I can find wisdom and strength in God's word.

At the time I didn't realize that I could not find answers to "how" questions — like how to live, how to endure, and how to act — with wisdom, philosophy, tradition, art, and science alone. I needed the comfort that faith brings.

When I got to know the living God as a young adult, I finally understood. Before, I had regarded the Bible as an excellent collection of writings. But through faith in God, it opened up before me. I have made daily Bible reading a practice for about 30 years now with joy every morning. The word of God, which helps us find real answers to the "how" questions and gives real strength, is our daily spiritual food.

Prayer: Holy Spirit, come into our hearts and nurture us with wisdom and strength. Amen.

Zoltán Szügyi (Budapest, Hungary)

SUNFLOWERS

READ Matthew 8:18-22

[Jesus] said, "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 (NIV)

When I take a morning run in the summer, I pass a field with row after row of sunflowers. It is a breathtaking sight. One overcast morning, I noticed that every sunflower was facing downward toward the ground. This led me to do some research, and I learned that sunflowers likely earned their

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

God's light will guide me,
come rain or shine.

name for two reasons. First, their physical appearance resembles the sun. And second, the faces of young sunflowers follow the sun as it moves throughout the day,

something called heliotropism. The sun wasn't shining that day, so the sunflowers were not keeping their heads up.

How many times in our spiritual lives are we like the sunflowers? It is easy to look to God when we see God's wonders around us. But when life gets messy, it can be difficult to see God working. We may hang our heads and let our hearts turn away from God. Trusting in God and waiting patiently for God's answer can be the hardest things that we face on our spiritual journey. However, we can keep our eyes fixed on God and follow where God leads, even on cloudy days.

Prayer: Dear Lord, thank you for the light and guidance that you provide for us. Help us to keep our eyes and hearts fixed on you. Amen.

Julie Sipe (Pennsylvania, USA) — See p. 21.

WITHOUT ENVY

SUN
APR 11
2021

READ 1 Samuel 18:6-16

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud.

— 1 Corinthians 13:4 (NIV)

My friend Emily suffers from cystic fibrosis, a degenerative lung disease. She often wheezes and has labored breathing, and she periodically sees a specialist to determine if she is a candidate for a lung transplant.

One day I told Emily about a cystic fibrosis patient who had markers that qualified him for a new, promising medication. Unfortunately, Emily does not have the same markers, so the treatment wouldn't be effective for her. But she was overjoyed for him. She didn't ask, "Why not me?" or display any envy. I'm not sure I would be so gracious in her position.

When the people started to love David more than Saul, King Saul was consumed with envy and tried to murder him. In contrast, John the Baptist knew his ministry and followers would diminish when Jesus appeared, yet he delighted in the Messiah's coming.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
God can transform my heart and replace envy with love.

I want to be like John rather than like Saul. When I feel envious, I want to remember that God's love, power, and forgiveness abound. Someone else being blessed does not diminish God's ability or willingness to bless me. God's goodness and mercy are unlimited and always available.

Prayer: Merciful God, forgive us when we envy. Reveal to us any envy in our hearts, and change our thoughts and hearts to love more like you. Amen.

Lin Daniels (Massachusetts, USA)

MON
APR 12
2021

FAMILY TIME

READ Mark 3:31-35

Looking at those who sat around him, [Jesus] said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother."

— Mark 3:34-35 (NRSV)

In Mark chapter 3, Jesus' family members were looking for him when he was among the people, teaching them the word of God. When Jesus heard that his family members were searching for him, he responded by saying that his mother and brothers were seated around him and listening

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Spending time with my spiritual family renews my faith.

to him. Jesus did not allow his family members to draw him away from his spiritual family because he saw the necessity of giving his time to both of his families. He

had dedicated this time to his spiritual family.

I love the time I spend around my own family, but I also realize the need to spend time with my church family. When I have the opportunity to spend time with my spiritual family, I do not allow others to distract me. And however busy I may be, I make time for my spiritual family. Through fellowship with them, I receive encouragement and nourishment as we share the word of God. Through Jesus Christ, we are members of God's family and in that family we experience joy.

Prayer: Dear Lord, remind us of our need to spend time with our spiritual family. Help us to make spiritual fellowship a priority. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Enid Adah Nyinomujuni (Dar es Salaam, Tanzania)

ENTHUSIASTIC RESPONSE

TUES
APR 13
2021

READ Romans 12:9-13

Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord.

— Romans 12:11 (NIV)

A young family walked to the chancel for an infant baptism as our congregation waited expectantly. Two parents, their infant son, and their four-year-old daughter, Sydney, gathered around the baptismal font. I asked the parents numerous questions of commitment during the baptismal vows. Each time they replied, “We do.” After every response, Sydney exclaimed, “Me too!”

The congregation was surprised and delighted by her eagerness. Sydney’s obvious enthusiasm and desire to be a part of this

significant occasion caused me to reflect later: *How do I demonstrate my zeal for following Christ? How do I convey the joy and excitement that a relationship with God brings me?*

In today’s reading, Paul encourages the Romans to maintain their spiritual fervor and to serve the Lord. God invites us to experience the adventure of living for Christ every day. May we respond with gratitude, dedication, and zeal.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

When my zeal is lacking,
God can use others to
encourage me.

Prayer: Dear God, thank you for those who enthusiastically show their devotion to you. We pray as 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. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one” (Matt. 6:9-13, NIV). Amen.

Jim Bell (North Carolina, USA) — See p. 21.

WED
APR 14
2021

LOVE AND PROTECTION

READ Psalm 4:4-8

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

— Psalm 118:24 (NRSV)

In 2016, my husband and I took our two teenage granddaughters on a trip to Alaska. As we settled into our seats for the first leg of our flight there, I handed out small notebooks to use as personal journals during the trip. On the first page of each notebook, I had written two Bible verses: today's

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

When I wake and when I sleep, I will be mindful of God's care.

quoted verse from Psalm 118 and a verse from today's reading: "In peace I will lie down and sleep, for you alone, LORD, make me dwell in safety" (NIV).

Each morning we recited Psalm 118:24. It set the tone for our days filled with opportunities to enjoy the scenery and creatures of Alaska. Each evening as we settled down to sleep, we would recite Psalm 4:8. It was a calming practice as we relaxed in the knowledge that God was with us and would protect us as we slept.

Since that memorable trip, I have continued to repeat these Bible verses each morning and night. I find that reciting Psalm 4:8 focuses my mind on God's presence and peace. Despite the worries of the day, God is with me. The cares of the world slip away, and my sleep comes more quickly. These two verses have become the bookends for my days, and my life is all the sweeter for this daily practice.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank you for the opportunity to rejoice and be glad for the wonderful world you have given us and for the peace of knowing your love and protection are with us even as we sleep. Amen.

Carol Shaw Johnston (Tennessee, USA)

GOD'S FAITHFULNESS

THUR
APR 15
2021

READ Matthew 9:18-26

Jesus replied, "Didn't I tell you that if you believe, you will see God's glory?"

— John 11:40 (CEB)

I remember the indescribable emotion I felt the first time I heard the heartbeat of my soon-to-be-born daughter. The next day, I accompanied my wife to the doctor's office for a checkup. The exhilaration of the day before suddenly turned into fear: The doctor said that our daughter's life was at risk. I was stunned, my faith shaken. Many fearful thoughts crossed my mind.

But that moment passed quickly when I remembered that God had always sustained me in my life's journey. I knew that if I remained rooted in my belief that God is constantly with me, I could face whatever came. In today's reading, the synagogue leader's faith was strong in spite of the death of his daughter. His faith led him to believe in the power of Jesus to restore her to life.

We will face doubts and difficult situations. But God wants only the best for us — full lives following the path Jesus Christ has set. We can be certain that in all circumstances God will sustain us and remain faithfully by our side.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
God's faithfulness to me is
unwavering.

Prayer: O God, thank you for your steadfast faithfulness in good times and in times of adversity. Amen.

Jairón Otoniel Santana Suárez (Dominican Republic)

FRI
APR 16
2021

NOBLE WORK

READ Genesis 4:7-22

*Whatever you do, you should do
it all for God's glory.*

— 1 Corinthians 10:31 (CEB)

Recently some local high school students were returning home from a math competition when the brakes went out on their bus. The driver took her foot off the accelerator and slowly made her way to the shoulder of the road, eventually stopping just a few feet from a ditch. Then she called for

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Whatever my work, I can
do it for God.

help and kept an eye on the students until help arrived. This experienced driver was praised for staying calm in a dangerous situation and for acting on her training.

I thought about how bus drivers don't usually receive accolades for their work, even though they have an extremely important job. Many of our daily tasks seem mundane, and it's only during events like these that we learn to appreciate the people who carry them out.

Genesis 4:19-22 speaks of the descendants of Cain and the talents God gave them. Among these gifts were raising live-stock, playing instruments, and working with metal. These gifts don't seem like holy callings in themselves, but any task done for the Lord becomes a noble one. Paul teaches us, "Whatever you do, you should do it all for God's glory." When we heed these words, we invite God to use us to draw others to our Creator, even when our work seems mundane.

Prayer: Dear Lord, help us always to remember to use our talents for your glory. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Jody Williams (Illinois, USA)

GRACE AND COMFORT

SAT
APR 17
2021

READ Matthew 6:25-34

Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear.

Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes?

— Matthew 6:25 (NIV)

I remember the day in 2008 when my dad lost his company to bankruptcy. All I could hear was the frustration in my dad's voice, but eight-year-old me didn't really understand what was happening. I always wanted to be just like my dad, but I found myself lost and confused.

As days passed, my dad searched for a new job. Each day I would ask with hope in my voice, "Did you get the job?" But every time, the answer was no. As his search continued, I started to lose hope; I wondered why God was putting my family through these hardships. Through the weeks my dad started to notice the change in my tone of voice when he would come back from an interview. When he noticed my hope fading, he told me, "Brayan, I know what we are going through is different and hard, but you need to know that God will always provide for us — somehow, some way."

I learned that even when we struggle, God gives love, relief, and opportunities throughout life. I have

had much and I have had little, but the amount of grace and comfort that God has provided for me has never changed.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Today I will look for God's blessings in my life.

Prayer: Dear God, thank you for all that you provide for us. Help us to recognize your blessings in tough times. Amen.

Brayan Orellana (Texas, USA)

SUN
APR 18
2021

LET IT HAPPEN

READ Acts 16:6-15

May the God of peace himself cause you to be completely dedicated to him. . . . The one who is calling you is faithful and will do this.

— 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24 (CEB)

I was excited to attend a conference in California. While praying about the trip, I sensed God preparing me to share the gospel with a passenger on my flight.

My seatmate was a woman named Nadia who had been on a nine-month solo world tour. California was her last stop before she returned home to Australia. As we chatted over lunch, our conversation flowed naturally from one subject to

another, and somehow the topic of faith arose. I didn't push; she didn't resist. It simply happened.

I talked about Jesus and how important he is to me.

And like a rose unfolding its petals, Nadia opened her heart to him. We joined hands and prayed.

At the luggage carousel, the friends I was traveling with welcomed Nadia into God's family. Nadia and I hugged, and I encouraged her to read the Bible and find a church back home.

It's in my nature to fuss over how events might unfold. But that day I learned that I don't have to push doors open; I can let God open them gently.

Prayer: Dear Lord, when we worry about how we can share the good news with others, help us trust you to prepare the way. Amen.

Rose McCormick Brandon (Ontario, Canada)

U-TURNS ALLOWED

MON
APR 19
2021

READ Deuteronomy 31:1-8

Show me your ways, LORD, teach me your paths.

— Psalm 25:4 (NIV)

At the sound of screeching tires, we checked the rearview mirror and saw our 90-year-old uncle making a U-turn on a crowded Milwaukee street. He continued to tail our car despite the congested traffic, and he used hand gestures to tell us where to go. Ten minutes earlier, my sister Marianne and I had waved goodbye after a visit with him and our aunt. Our uncle had given us directions around the construction, but the city was unfamiliar to us and we had forgotten his instructions. We were shocked to find he was following us to ensure we made it safely past the roadblocks!

His actions reminded me of the way God never abandons us. God stays with us and guides us on right paths. We may encounter roadblocks like marital difficulties, money problems, or addictions, but God provides guidance to help us navigate even the bumpiest of circumstances.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
Following God's guidance can
turn my life around.

Praying, applying scripture to our situations, and praising God before we see results are like making a U-turn. They make space for God to move our lives in the direction God desires for us.

Prayer: Precious Lord, thank you for giving us new opportunities and fresh starts. Help us to follow your paths instead of our own. Amen.

Jeanie Jacobson (Nebraska, USA)

TUES
APR 20
2021

OUR ALL

READ Colossians 3:23-25

Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters.

— Colossians 3:23 (NIV)

When I entered high school, it seemed like everyone already knew one another. I felt alone and insecure. At lunch and in classes, I watched and studied the way other students talked and how they treated one another. Hearing talk of sex, drugs, and violence disappointed me and made me worry.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

In whatever work God calls me to do, I will give my all.

Each day I prayed for my high school and asked God to use me. After a week of praying, God prompted me to start a prayer circle. I was nervous and scared I would

be judged, but I trusted God. I began to pray every morning in the front lobby. Some days people would pray with me, and other days I would stand by myself. As I continued to pray, I felt God speaking to me again: I was only following God's guidance within my comfort zone; I wasn't giving my all to what God had called me to do. So I put up fliers throughout the school and posted the information about the prayer circle on social media. I asked other students to help spread the word. By the end of that year, more than 30 of us prayed together almost every day.

When God calls us, we often do the bare minimum and then blame God when things don't work out. But God asks us to give all of ourselves to our work. No matter what we do for God, we can give it our all — just as God does for us.

Prayer: Dear God, give us the strength and motivation we need to work for your kingdom. Amen.

Joey Ortiz (Texas, USA)

PRAY CONTINUALLY

WED
APR 21
2021

READ Romans 8:26-28

Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

— 1 Thessalonians 5:18 (NRSV)

I was going through a difficult situation. The thought of recent events made me so scared that I could barely sleep. Every morning I woke up feeling weak and fearful just thinking of my problem. For a while I pretended that everything was all right, but that hurt me even more. I was desperate for a shoulder to lean on so I could cry out my fears and seek guidance. That's when I realized that I could pray to God.

So each day I knelt down to pray. Each time I would immediately start crying because the situation was too overwhelming for me to speak of. I did this for many days, and I started to feel better. Eventually I was able to tell God what had happened and how I felt. Though my pain didn't completely go away, I realized that the fear didn't rule over me anymore.

Today I realize that every problem I have encountered has made me trust and rely on God more. By praying continually, I found relief from my fears. No matter how bad life gets, we can always pray to God, "the author and finisher of our faith" (Heb. 12:2, KJV).

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Even when my prayers have no words, God is listening.

Prayer: Dear God, help us remember to pray and to trust you no matter how bad life gets for us. Amen.

Keren Philips (Karnataka, India)

THUR
APR 22
2021

THE LABYRINTH

READ Psalm 16:5-11

Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding.

— Proverbs 3:5 (NIV)

I've always loved to walk a prayer labyrinth. The calming repetitiveness of the various switchbacks and turns of the path lulls me into a meditative state. Over the years my affection for the prayer walk or labyrinth has remained. When you walk a labyrinth, it is not always clear how or when you will reach the center; but you trust the path will lead you there. If you step out of the path or don't follow the turns, however,

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

God provides us a path to follow and trusts us to follow it.

you may not reach the center at all. You have to be mindful of following the track and trusting it to lead you to the end.

Proverbs 3:5 tells us to trust and rely on the Lord rather than on ourselves. Life is much like a labyrinth in this way. God counts on us to follow the path without cutting corners and making careless mistakes. Sometimes we do not know where God is leading us or how we will get there, but we can trust that God will lead us along the right path to the right end.

Prayer: Dear God, thank you for leading us on the path of life. Help us to remain on it faithfully. Amen.

Abigail Mills (Arizona, USA)

RENEWED LIFE

FRI
APR 23
2021

READ Colossians 3:12-17

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God — what is good and acceptable and perfect.

— Romans 12:2 (NRSV)

When I learned about the metamorphosis of butterflies, I was amazed. I find caterpillars to be unpleasant — especially those that sting when you touch them. But it is through the caterpillar that we get the gentle and beautiful butterfly. The transformation is a miracle. And once the metamorphosis has happened, we don't remember the caterpillar; we simply enjoy the beauty of the butterfly.

It's the same in my life. I think I have "caterpillars" in me that sting others and make them dislike being close to me. It is difficult to get rid of negative feelings and behaviors, but as a follower of Christ, I must be willing to change. With the help of the Holy Spirit, I can cast off feelings of inferiority, anger, and selfishness. It takes time, and the process is not easy; but in doing so I can follow Paul's advice: "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds."

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
When I am willing to change,
God can transform my life.

Prayer: Dear God, help us to let go of negative feelings and behaviors. By your power transform our lives into things of beauty. Amen.

Merry Gultom (West Java, Indonesia)

Prayer Focus: FOR HELP LETTING GO OF
NEGATIVE BEHAVIORS

SAT
APR 24
2021

ABUNDANT BLESSINGS

READ **Philippians 4:10-20**

God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.

— 2 Corinthians 9:8 (NIV)

I keep a memo on my cell phone where I note the date and situation whenever I sense God's presence and guidance. I began this practice a little over two years ago, and I now have thousands of entries. Sometimes, in the busyness of life, we neglect to see God's work in the minutiae. Even if we feel

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Today I will notice God's work
in the smallest blessings
of my life.

God's presence in the large events, recognizing that God leads us and helps us in the smallest ways can sometimes mean the most.

Scrolling back through my list, I remember that God has been there for me every second of every day, and I should live accordingly in my actions and words. No action is too small for us to feel God's influence. If we take the time to acknowledge it, we will recognize God's involvement in every aspect of our lives.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help us not to lose sight of the blessings you have given us. Remind us that the greatest gifts can come in the smallest ways. Help us to focus on your influence in our lives. Amen.

Andrew Sulgit (West Virginia, USA) — See back cover.

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

GOD OF THE FUTURE

SUN
APR 25
2021

READ Isaiah 49:14-16

“I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”

— Jeremiah 29:11 (NIV)

In 2017 our son graduated from college and our daughter from high school. Though we were excited, my husband and I were wondering, *What next?* My work visa did not qualify them for any scholarships. I had taken out a loan for my son when he enrolled in college, and I didn't want to take out another one. My son was no longer on my visa and would have to return to India if he did not gain admission into a graduate school.

My thoughts were anxious. *Have I gone against God's plan in coming to this country? After 14 years of living in South Carolina, how will my son cope going back to India?*

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
Because God holds the future,
I can face tomorrow.

I had no answers, and with restless nights came fervent prayers. I remembered the Lord's promise in Jeremiah 29:11. I made a copy of it and stuck it on the microwave. Every morning I declared it loudly to remind myself and the Lord of this promise. Every time I had an anxious moment about the future, I would declare the promise aloud.

My son got into a PhD program in chemistry, and my daughter is completing her degree in nursing with a loan from our church denomination. No matter our fears, the Lord is faithful and holds our future.

Prayer: Lord of our future, help us to remember that you will never leave us or forsake us. Comfort us and strengthen our faith in your promises. Amen.

Aruna Sagar (South Carolina, USA) — See p. 21.

MON
APR 26
2021

CALL ON GOD

READ Psalm 126:1-6

Jesus began to weep.

— John 11:35 (NRSV)

When we said goodbye to my sister at the airport, we had no idea the difficulties she would face. She was young and had chosen a medical course at a boarding school. And it is never easy to live far from family and friends.

She often called our mother to cry, saying that she wanted

to quit the course. But our mother and I gave her what strength and encouragement we could. I had also attended boarding school, so I knew how difficult it can

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Prayer can lighten my burdens
and bring me peace.

be to cry and not have a shoulder to lean on.

After more than eight years, I was glad to see my sister dressed in her graduation gown and our mother dancing and singing songs of jubilation. I thought back to the many times our mother wept from seeing her daughter almost undernourished because of her study schedule.

Sometimes as we go through difficulties we feel that our whole life will be hard. But just as my sister called us to cry over her fears, I have learned that we can also call on God. Through prayer we can share our struggles with God and find relief from any situation. Regardless of the difficulties we face, God always holds our hand.

Prayer: Dear God, thank you for listening to our prayers in times of difficulty. In your Son's name we pray. Amen.

Hélder Moisés Mangumo (Maputo, Mozambique)

CHOOSING GOD

TUES
APR 27
2021

READ Isaiah 48:17-19

*If only you had paid attention to my commands,
your peace would have been like a river, your
well-being like the waves of the sea.*

— Isaiah 48:18 (NIV)

My family and I live close to the Gulf of Mexico. I love to walk along the beautiful beaches of white sands and emerald green water. When I see and hear the waves of the ocean crashing on the sand, I feel incredible peace and joy at being so close to nature and to God. I often say to my husband, “We should come here every day.” But despite the beach’s proximity, we rarely go. The responsibilities of work, home, and family take up most of our time. We forgo the natural beauty of the shoreline to walk around our neighborhood, often following the same path each day. While our neighborhood is lovely, it does not compare to the seashore or to the peace that I find there.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
I can renew my mind when
I spend time with God
each day.

My spiritual life is similar. Like the ocean, God is always nearby. God is only a prayer away regardless of my location, yet I often forget to read the Bible or visit with God. When I don’t make spending time with God a priority, I miss out on the peace and wisdom that comes from daily Bible study.

Fortunately, each day brings a new opportunity to choose the peace and well-being God offers through praying and reading the Bible. The gift of God’s power and peace comes when we choose to devote ourselves to time with God ahead of everything else.

Prayer: Dear God, teach us what is best for us, and direct us in the way we should go. Amen.

Cathy Lee Taylor (Florida, USA)

WED
APR 28
2021

REPRESENTING CHRIST

READ 2 Timothy 2:3-5, 22-23

We are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us.

— 2 Corinthians 5:20 (NRSV)

We were halfway through army basic training at Fort Knox. Before being dismissed for our first 24-hour town leave, our drill instructor reminded us: “Remember, each of you represents the U.S. Army to whomever you meet and in whatever you do. If you are caught in a compromising position that reflects poorly on our army, we will hear about it. You have to answer to me.” As demanding as our drill instructor was,

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

How will I represent
Christ today?

we knew he had our best interest at heart. We didn’t want to disappoint him or tarnish the army’s image of disciplined soldiers.

In a similar way, we represent Jesus after we accept him as our Lord and Savior. Whenever we interact with anyone — at a store, where we work, when eating out, or when we answer the phone — we represent Christ. Do we treat store clerks and service workers with respect and try to make them feel appreciated and valued? Do we represent Christ well every day and in every way? After all, Jesus loves everyone because we are all God’s children.

Prayer: Dear Lord, help us remember that we represent you wherever we are and to everyone we meet. Amen.

Leland P. Gamson (Arizona, USA)

NEW UNDERSTANDING

READ John 3:14-21

THUR
APR 29
2021

Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.

— John 3:18 (NIV)

I grew up without going to church or learning about God. As an adult, when I was expecting my third child, I found my dad's Bible among his things after his death.

After finding his Bible, I looked at the verses he had underlined hoping to know him better. John 3:16 was one of the underlined verses. I read today's quoted verse too and learned that if I did not believe in the name of Jesus Christ I was under judgment. But then I wondered, *Why should I believe?* When I once asked God for something, I got no answer.

The word *judgment* was often in my thoughts after that. I could not remember all that I had read from the verses, but that word stood out. I started to dwell on it. I began to worry about terrible things happening to me as a result of God's judgment, like dying in childbirth or losing my son. I dreamed about it at night. For months, these thoughts brought me misery.

But then my child was born healthy. When I came home from the hospital, I read John 3 again and came upon verse 16: "For God so loved the world. . . ." It was as if I had missed those words before! For several months, I had been afraid of something I had misunderstood. Now when I read the Bible and do not understand something, I bring it before God in prayer.

Prayer: Loving God, as I read the Bible, help me to understand your word. Amen.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Today I will seek new understanding from familiar scriptures.

Pál Tünde (Pest, Hungary)

FRI
APR 30
2021

WHY ARE WE SURPRISED?

READ Mark 11:22-25

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

— Mark 11:24 (NIV)

On a family vacation to the Black Hills of South Dakota, we were on a winding road that was popular with tourists because of the wild burros that often graze on the forested hillsides. We had talked about seeing the burros for days, and our five-year-old son was anxiously anticipating this experience. After driving for over an hour around the burro area marked on a tourist map, I told our son that we would have

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Faith is the cornerstone
of my prayers.

to give up on our search. From the back seat I heard this quiet prayer: “Please, God, help my daddy find the donkeys.”

My heart sank. How could I tell a five-year-old that God does not always answer prayer the way that we expect? As I was beginning a shaky explanation, we rounded a curve and saw a dozen burros dotting the hillside. The white-muzzled creatures began nibbling the dried grass on the shoulder of the road. Squeals of delight erupted from the back seat. Just as I was limiting God’s power, our son’s prayer was answered. Did I even stop to think that God might respond to our son’s prayer? Certainly I was not expecting to see the burros. In today’s verse, Jesus assures us, “Whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.” Why are we surprised when our prayers are answered?

Prayer: Loving God, when we pray for guidance and help, fill us with trust as we seek your answer. Amen.

David Knisely (Michigan, USA)

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

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

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

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

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

MARCH 3: *Something New*

1. When have you been unhappy about giving up something for Lent? How do you combat those feelings during this season?
2. If you have given up a bad habit for Lent, how was that experience different from giving up something you enjoy? If you have not, how do you think doing so might affect your life?
3. The writer describes a few things we might take up during Lent, rather than giving anything up. In what ways does that idea differ from the ways in which you typically think of Lent? How is it familiar? What could you take up for Lent?

4. How are you looking for new experiences that God might be guiding you to this Lenten season? In what ways do you think you might be better able to experience God's grace and love by trying a new Lenten practice?
5. How does God challenge you? How does scripture or your faith community challenge you? How do you challenge yourself? In what ways do you find growth and blessings in those challenges?

MARCH 10: *Healing Touch*

1. What does "God's healing touch" mean to you? When have you needed God's healing touch? Where did you find it?
2. Describe a situation where you clearly felt God's love. Why do you think God's love felt so close and powerful in that situation? How were you comforted and encouraged by it?
3. How can you help someone who is hurting? With what loving actions will you remind someone of God's love today?
4. When do you feel surrounded by God's healing love? Who in your life helps you to feel God's presence and love? How do you feel God's love when you are alone?
5. What biblical stories best reflect the power of God's healing love for you? Why? How do those stories encourage you when you are feeling overwhelmed and discouraged?

MARCH 17: *God Can Relate*

1. How does knowing that others can relate to your feelings and experiences encourage you? How do you find community with people who share your feelings and experiences?
2. In what ways are you comforted by knowing that Jesus understands your human experience and your human needs? How does that knowledge strengthen your faith and your connection with Jesus and God?
3. Which scripture passages do you feel best capture Jesus' humanity? Why?
4. Name ways in which you can show compassion and empathy to those around you today. In what ways are you intentional

- about showing compassion to others every day?
5. Where in your life do you most often struggle to express empathy and compassion? What prayers, scripture verses, spiritual practices, or interactions help you in those areas?

MARCH 24: *Like Never Before*

1. What gives you hope when you feel like your situation will never change? Where do you find encouragement?
2. Is it easy for you to pray with full trust in God? How are your prayers different when you are praying with full trust? How does praying this way change your heart?
3. Today's writer was encouraged in her prayer life by her friend. What role have friends played in your faith? How do you encourage your friends in their faith?
4. Who in the Bible trusted like never before? What was the outcome? How does their story inspire you to do the same?
5. Do you believe in God's ability to do miracles? How do you continue to trust in God, even if you don't receive the miracles you hoped for?

MARCH 31: *Graceful Greetings*

1. When you are in church, do you ever find your mind flooded with worries instead of focused on worship? What helps you to focus on the present moment?
2. Describe a time when someone reached out to you in Christian love before doing anything else. How did that make you feel? What did you learn from that experience?
3. Today's prayer focus is "Someone I disagree with." How might praying for someone you disagree with help your situation? What kinds of things might you pray for?
4. What does it mean to you to have a life that looks like the life of Jesus? What do you do each day to try to live like Jesus lived? How does Jesus' example change the way you interact with those around you?
5. When you disagree with other Christians, what do you do to resolve those disagreements? When members of your church

family have disagreements, how are those disagreements handled? In what ways does Christian love help in finding a resolution?

APRIL 7: *Commitment*

1. In what ways does Jesus' command to love one another and his instruction to make disciples affect your daily life? How do you make an effort to follow Jesus' instructions?
2. How does today's quoted scripture encourage you? When over the past few days have you felt Jesus' presence?
3. Do you find it easy to reach out to others and share your faith with them? How does God help you and give you the strength to do so?
4. Today's writer describes the importance of following Jesus' instructions to love one another and to make disciples. What do you think grows a strong church and a strong faith?
5. In what ways is your church community intentional about meeting new people and forming loving connections with them? In what ways are you intentional about this?

APRIL 14: *Love and Protection*

1. Have you ever used a similar practice of reciting a verse in the morning and a different one in the evening? If so, what was your experience? If not, in what ways might it benefit you?
2. Today's writer finds great comfort in Psalms 4:8 and 118:24. What Bible verses bring you comfort and focus your mind on God's presence? How do you interact with those verses daily?
3. What spiritual practices make your life sweeter? How do you decide what will become a daily practice versus an occasional practice?
4. In what ways is your life enriched when you focus on God's blessings? What differences do you notice in yourself when you are not as mindful of God's love and blessings?
5. How can you encourage those around you to rejoice in the blessings of God's world? Who in your life has blessed you today? What can you do to bless someone else today?

APRIL 21: *Pray Continually*

1. When you are going through a difficult time, how important is it for you to have someone to lean on? Where do you find comfort and guidance?
2. Today's writer describes her initial prayers as simply kneeling and crying to God. Have you ever prayed to God through your tears? Do you feel the need to speak when you pray, or are you comfortable praying without words?
3. Is it easy for you to trust God in hard times? When has a problem made you trust and rely on God more? Does that bring you closer in your relationship with God?
4. Has there been a time in your life when you didn't want to trust or pray to God? How did you find comfort in that time? How did you come to trust and pray to God again?
5. How important is it to you to use words when speaking to God? When do you feel like it is okay to speak to God through silence? How does it encourage you to know that God will listen to our prayers even when we have no words?

APRIL 28: *Representing Christ*

1. Knowing that your actions reflect back on your faith, how do you try to leave a good impression wherever you go? List some of the intentional choices that you make.
2. Have you ever acted in a way that did not accurately represent your faith? How did you feel about that situation? Were you able to rectify it? What did you learn from that experience?
3. Do you find it easy or difficult to love everyone? How do you remind yourself to love everyone, even when you may be busy or around people you find hard to love? What prayers or spiritual practices encourage you to love everyone?
4. Do you ever feel pressure knowing that you are an ambassador for Christ? Do you enjoy the responsibility? How do you stay mindful of your calling to be an ambassador for Christ?
5. How do you put your best foot forward to represent Christ every day? How do you think your church represents Christ to others? Are there areas you wish that you or your church could improve in representing Christ?

MARCH 2021

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

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

APRIL 2021

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4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	

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

Romans 15:13 (CEB)

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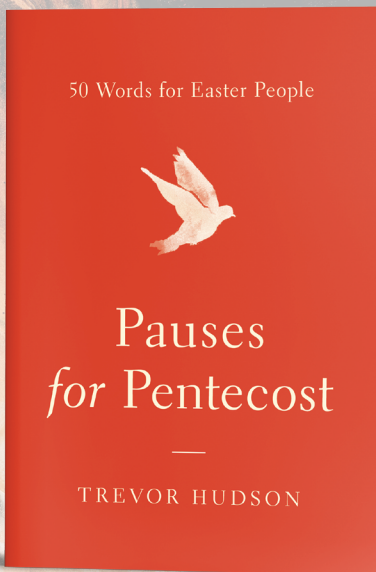
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MEET SOME OF OUR WRITERS

(Here and on p. 21.)



Andrew Sulgit (p. 66) is a college administrator. He enjoys motorcycles, being outdoors, gaming, puzzles, and movies.



Jacqueline London (p. 37) is a retired elementary and high school teacher. She is also a published author.



Cassius Rhue (p. 36) and his wife are the proud parents of six children.



Judy Ransom (p. 47) and her husband own a cleaning and restoration business. She enjoys hiking, camping, and boating.



Sam Wright (p. 16) lived in Israel while working on his PhD.



Shital Sherri Macwan (p. 26) was born in Gujarat, India, and is now a teacher living in New York with her husband, Santosh, and their daughter, Grace.

