

JULY-AUGUST 2021

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WHERE THE WORLD MEETS TO PRAY



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JULY - AUGUST 2021

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THE UPPER ROOM®

WHERE THE WORLD MEETS TO PRAY

Kimberly Orr, World Editor and Publisher

37 LANGUAGES

Invitational

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BATAK
BRITISH SIGN
LANGUAGE
BULGARIAN
BURMESE
CATALAN
CHINESE
ENGLISH

Interdenominational

ESTONIAN
FRENCH
GREEK
GUJARATI
HINDI
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IBAN
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COVER ART INTERPRETATION



Stones and Glass Houses

Artist: Kevin Costley
(USA, Contemporary)

Interpreter: Erin Pearce

This striking cover image by artist Kevin Costley depicts Jesus crouching while the legal experts and Pharisees gather in the background, rocks in hand. (See John 8:1-11.) Jesus is at the temple teaching when the legal experts and Pharisees approach to test him. Jesus, however, does not condemn the woman who committed adultery, nor does he contradict the law of Moses. Instead, Jesus does something he is known to do — he creates a new, third way. He says, “Whoever hasn’t sinned should throw the first stone” (John 8:7, CEB).

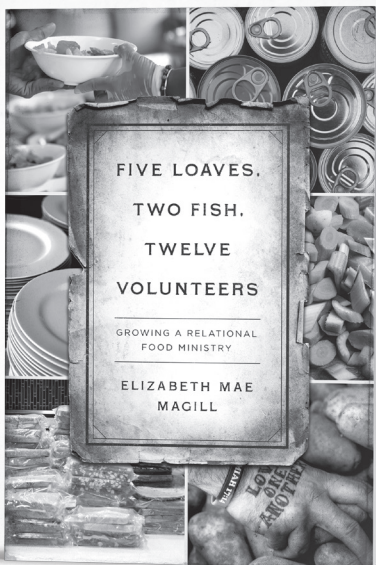
Imagine the unnamed woman standing off to the side and what she must have felt. Her accusers stand close by, saying that she must pay for her mistake with her life. She might have felt regret. Perhaps she felt shame. Surely she was afraid.

But Jesus pointed out that no one is without sin; nor should anyone judge others for their mistakes. The artist clothes Jesus in green, signifying the new life he offers to us all. Though he crouches down in a humble posture, modeling the humility that is necessary to follow him, his facial expression reflects how serious this lesson truly is.

This painting invites the viewer to consider a new perspective on judgment. Are there times when we judge without taking into account the ways we ourselves fall short? This story is a good reminder that no matter what mistakes we or those around us have made, Jesus offers forgiveness and new life.

Cover art courtesy of Kevin Costley. © Kevin Costley. Prints of cover art available from klcostley@yahoo.com

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Offer expires September 30, 2021.

The Difference Prayer Makes

*The prayer of the righteous person is powerful
in what it can achieve.*

— James 5:16 (CEB)

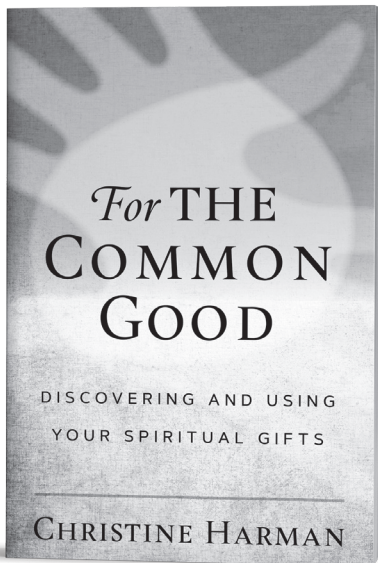
I probably think too much about prayer. I don't mean that I spend all of my time pondering prayer or that I have profound ideas about the nature of prayer. I mean that I often find myself overthinking it: *What are the right words? Is my prayer worthy? When will it be answered? Is there something better to pray for? Did I forget to pray about something? Do I pray enough?* Getting wrapped up in this kind of thinking leads me away from what my heart, mind, body, and soul actually know and feel about prayer: Prayer makes a difference — whatever form it takes, whenever and however it happens.

The meditations in this issue are a beautiful reminder of all the shapes, sizes, and purposes of prayer. Prayer grounds us in our faith and connects us to our Creator. Prayer is a short phrase or a weekend of solitude. Prayer is an expression of care and hope for loved ones and for our communities. Prayer is an antidote for worry and a way to remember God's goodness and faithfulness. Prayer encourages inward reflection and honesty with ourselves and with God. Prayer shapes our vision of what can be, what God wills for the world, and how we can bring that vision to life. For the readers of *The Upper Room* around the world, prayer is a daily connection to a global community. For all these reasons and more, prayer makes a difference. Whatever form your prayers take, I am always grateful to be praying with you.



— Lindsay L. Gray
Editorial Director

WHAT IS YOUR
spiritual gift?



The apostle Paul taught that God, through the Holy Spirit, gives each believer at least one spiritual gift to be used for the common good. *For the Common Good* offers ways to identify your spiritual gifts and use them to help and strengthen others, including the church.

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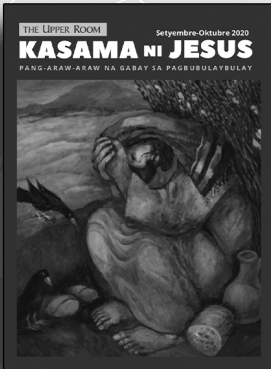
Where the World Meets to Pray

PHILIPPINES

The Upper Room daily devotional guide is now available in the Tagalog language! This edition is published by The United Methodist Church in the Philippines.

Editions of *The Upper Room* daily devotional guide are printed in:

- Australia
- Indonesia
- Malaysia
- Myanmar
- The Philippines
- Thailand



A TETHER OF LOVE

THUR
JULY 1
2021

READ John 10:11-15*

Jesus said, *“I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father.”*

— John 10:14-15 (NRSV)

Living on a farm can be a dangerous place for a three-year-old boy. When my mother was working outdoors, she would clip the strap of my overalls to the clothesline so I wouldn't wander off. She showed her love by devising this contraption for my protection. I could jump and run up and down the line and still be safe from the deep waters of the nearby irrigation ditch.

This and similar memories of my childhood always remind me of God's love.

Unlike my mother's clothesline tether, God gives us overflowing love by allowing us free will. We can choose to stay close to God or walk in our own direction. At times, we all have chosen our own way and suffered inevitable consequences. Yet God is still there, loving us back into relationship.

Each of us can step into this day filled with trust in God's promise of protective love. God will never leave us or abandon us; and if we are willing to listen, God will direct our steps.

Prayer: Dear God, help us each day to seek and follow the guidance we find in your word. Amen.

John Archer (Florida, USA)

Prayer Focus: PARENTS OF TODDLERS

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

FRI
JULY 2
2021

JOY IN THE PRESENT

READ Psalm 139:13-18

Do not say, "Why were the old days better than these?" For it is not wise to ask such questions.

— Ecclesiastes 7:10 (NIV)

I found myself longing for "the good old days." My radio was regularly tuned to an oldies station, I watched old rerun episodes on TV, and I frequently griped about the large chain stores sprouting up in my neighborhood. When my usual market was replaced by a chain store, I stopped in to shop.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

"This is the day that the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it" (Ps. 118:24, NRSV).

Once inside, I discovered the joys of its increased selection and wider aisles. This pleasant discovery led me to try some different radio and TV stations, only

to find I enjoyed many of their programs as well. Oh, what I had been missing by trying to live in the past!

It's easy to cling to the comfort and familiarity of the past, but in doing so we can lose our enthusiasm for the present and hope for the future. In today's reading, the psalmist assures us that God wrote our days before they existed. God knows our past and present, and God will be by our side in the future. When we avoid moving forward, we may miss the blessings God has in store for us.

Following God's will for me to live fully in the present has expanded my joy and made me a better instrument of God's love. Daily I ask, "What new experiences can I embrace today?"

Prayer: Heavenly Father, we trust you with all our days — past, present, and future. May we live each day in joyful service to you. Amen.

Monica A. Andermann (New York, USA)

CHRIST IS OUR STRENGTH

SAT
JULY 3
2021

READ **Philippians 4:4-13**

*I can do all this through [the Lord]
who gives me strength.*

— **Philippians 4:13 (NIV)**

My grandfather was the only father figure in our home and the main provider. He owned a butcher shop, and I remember that we always had the best choice of meats for our meals. We always had our uniforms, shoes, and supplies for the school year. Though we were not wealthy, we never lacked for anything.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
Our troubles are no match for
the strength of Christ.

Everything was going well until my grandfather suffered a heart attack and died before we could get him to the hospital. His death was painful for all the family. We had no one to care for us or for the business that we did not know how to manage. Over time, we lost the business because of mounting debt. Where once we enjoyed a comfortable life, we now experienced deprivation.

In one of the Bible studies in which I participated with the church youth group, we studied Paul's letter to the Philippians. Paul, a servant of God, endured much adversity, yet he remained firm in giving thanks and praise to God.

And so, by placing our trust and faith in Christ's strength, our family turned the corner; we survived! We knew that God would provide what we needed and would help us overcome our adversity.

Prayer: Merciful God, thank you for helping us overcome our troubles and for giving us family and loved ones. We pray in the name of Jesus. Amen.

Ysanny Luciano Guzmán (Dominican Republic) — See back cover.

Prayer Focus: FAMILIES WHO HAVE LOST THEIR
PRIMARY PROVIDER

SUN
JULY 4
2021

LIVING PROOF

READ Psalm 42:1-11

Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment.

— Matthew 22:37-38 (KJV)

It only takes a few minutes on social media to notice that many people present a picture of their lives as filled with only happiness and fun. But our relationship with God requires honesty about our disappointment and pain as well as our joy.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
Being honest with God leads to healing and wholeness.

For me, there is no greater disappointment than my disability. Most people would say that I have adapted well to not being able to walk; but inside I am

still sad. Through much prayer, the Holy Spirit revealed to me that I had hidden my resentment so deep within my heart that I didn't even realize it was there. Letting God into that dark place meant having to admit that I was angry at God for this happening to me in the first place. Coming to grips with that truth was the key to my healing.

Through the light of God's love, the Holy Spirit gradually changed my perspective. I began to see how blessed I am to be able to walk on crutches! My new mission is to use my body, just as it is, for God's glory.

It's scary to reveal your whole heart to God. But if you take that leap, God can magnify the good and heal the hurt. I promise. I am living proof.

Prayer: Dear God, help us to love you with our whole heart and to share everything we feel and experience with you. Amen.

Brian Valdez (Pennsylvania, USA) — See p. 21.

BEYOND THE LABEL

MON
JULY 5
2021

READ 1 Samuel 16:1-13

The LORD said to Samuel, *“The LORD does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.”*

— 1 Samuel 16:7 (NIV)

While traveling, I stopped at a roadside produce stand. After checking out the usual fare — tomatoes, melons, etc. — I turned to read the labels on the glass jars displayed on the shelves. I saw pickled vegetables, jellies, and F.R.O.G. jam. Frog jam? The name discouraged me from checking into the glass container’s brown contents. Later I searched the internet and discovered that F.R.O.G. stands for “Figs, Raspberries, Oranges, and Ginger.” Friends told me that F.R.O.G. jam is delicious.

I had missed out on a treat because I didn’t go beyond the superficial, the label on the jar.

Sadly, I have missed out on interesting conversations and sweet fellowship opportunities with others because of similar superficial judgments. I was put off by people’s grooming habits, attire, or age — all of which can easily become labels — “unkempt,” “unfashionable,” “elderly.” Jesus cares about the heart and soul of each one, regardless of the more visible exterior.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

What have I missed by focusing on the packaging and not the contents of God’s children?

Prayer: Dear Lord, help us to view others as you do. May we not be distracted by outward appearances but instead look for value on the inside. Amen.

Alice H. Murray (Florida, USA)

TUES
JULY 6

2021

ANCHOR OF HOPE

READ Acts 27:13-26

*Fearing that we would be dashed against the rocks,
they dropped four anchors from the stern and
prayed for daylight.*

— Acts 27:29 (NIV)

The apostle Paul had been arrested and was sailing to Rome, accompanied by nearly three hundred people, when they ended up in a horrible storm. They were helpless and fearful, and disaster was waiting beyond the next wave.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
Jesus is my anchor of hope.

In the middle of their struggles, an angel of the Lord appeared to Paul and promised that all of them would be saved. Those words gave Paul hope

and became an anchor for his soul, even stronger than the anchors of the ship. As we read in Hebrews 6:19, “We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure.”

God is trustworthy in all situations. None of us can avoid storms in life. When we encounter difficulties, we may try to find our anchor in money, good health, or a secure job. But we always have an invisible anchor available: Jesus Christ. He went through an unimaginable storm on the cross and rose again to be with us. Let us learn to rest in Christ, the anchor of our souls.

Prayer: Dear God, thank you for your faithfulness. Help us to trust in the anchor your hope provides 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.

Esa-Pekka Mattila (Finland) — See back cover.

ON THE TRAIN

WED
JULY 7
2021

READ Psalm 86:8-10

*How good and pleasant it is when God's
people live together in unity!*

— Psalm 133:1 (NIV)

The train whistle blew as we headed out of the metro station toward the city. I looked out the window until I could no longer see the platform. Then I opened my Bible and began reading for my 20-minute ride to work.

Many commuters prefer a certain car, so it isn't unusual to see the same people every day. After several days, I noticed more and more people reading their Bibles. After a few weeks, our car came alive with soft chatter and laughter and discussions about church, sermons, and scripture.

One day a young man in traditional Jewish dress boarded the train. He continued to stand even though the seat next to me was empty. The next day he seemed reluctant but sat down beside me and began to scroll through his cell phone. When we stopped, he hurried off the train. On the third day, despite other empty seats, he sat down beside me. I smiled and then went back to my reading. Out of the corner of my eye I saw him pull out his cell phone, and as he slowly scrolled he began praying out loud in Hebrew. Since then, he has sat beside me every day. He prays out loud while I read my Bible.

As Christians, we are called to be witnesses of Christ's love for the world. In just a short month our car had transformed from a somber space into a vibrant place of worship.

Prayer: God of Abraham, as we go about our daily routines, help us to remember that you can use any situation to show your love for others. Amen.

Susan Cospers (Maryland, USA)

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
My daily actions can invite
others into worship.

THUR
JULY 8
2021

BEYOND RELUCTANCE

READ Colossians 2:1-7

Live your lives in [Christ], rooted and built up in him and established in the faith.

— Colossians 2:6-7 (NRSV)

When I was a freshman in high school, my dad lost his job. He had survived a stroke, but his employer thought he wasn't up to the task anymore. We were going through hard times as my parents' savings account kept dwindling the longer my father was out of work.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
When I feel reluctant, God is still at work in me.

My church knew our situation and encouraged me to go to summer camp, offering to pay two-thirds of the cost. But I was a

city guy, not enamored with spending a week in the woods. Besides, I wasn't interested in reading the Bible and other activities associated with church. But my church and my parents finally convinced me to give camp a try.

When I arrived at camp, my counselor introduced me to several other guys, and immediately we started getting to know one another. It didn't take but a few hours for my reluctance to be turned into something significant. I learned about Christian community and the importance of having my life built around Jesus. We had fun hiking, swimming, and singing. Camp was a turning point in my life.

I am grateful for a church who cared for me and for a ministry that provided a safe and fun experience where the love of God and the God of love could take root in my heart.

Prayer: Dear God, help us to find our rootedness in you through following your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Douglas Ruffle (Tennessee, USA)

WHICH PATH?

FRI
JULY 9
2021

READ Psalm 119:1-8

*Direct me in the path of your commands,
for there I find delight.*

— Psalm 119:35 (NIV)

We consulted maps and considered terrain and distance before our group of ten family members embarked on a moderate hike to a mountain lookout. A few meters from the trailhead the path branched off in different directions. We turned left. The hike became more and more difficult. None of the expected trail markers appeared. We reasoned that the wide path did not need markers, so we kept climbing. At the top of a long climb the path branched again with no markers. Our rising doubts peaked. Did we take the correct path? Two people went ahead to survey the area and discovered that the path to our right matched our expectations with a gentle climb and level areas.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
With God's guidance I can
always find my way.

We had chosen the wrong path, which had led us to a challenging and potentially dangerous climb. But when we changed course, we returned to the correct path.

In today's scripture reading, the psalmist uses God's law, words, and instructions as a road map to life. Repeatedly the psalmist writes of how God guides his steps and makes his path level. Without God's law my steps slip and my days become a struggle. Thankfully, we are not doomed to the wrong path forever. God makes a way for us to return to the path that leads us where God would have us go.

Prayer: Dear God, give us wisdom each day to follow your way. Amen.

Lorilee Guenter (Saskatchewan, Canada)

SAT
JULY 10
2021

CRUMBLING EMPIRES

READ Matthew 6:19-24

The LORD proclaims: Cursed are those who trust in mere humans, who depend on human strength and turn their hearts from the LORD. . . . Happy are those who trust in the LORD, who rely on the LORD.

— Jeremiah 17:5, 7 (CEB)

Standing in the marketplace of ancient Megiddo in Israel, I closed my eyes and imagined the swirl of activity occurring on this spot three thousand years earlier. Once considered the jewel of northern Israel, the location hosted Solomon's stables and Ahab's winter palace. Merchants would have been hawking their wares, politicians debating hot topics, children playing among the booths. I opened my eyes to scan the ruins of what had been a great cultural center. I surveyed the crumbling pillars and piles of rock, awestruck by the contrast of then and now. The greatest treasures earth offers will someday crumble, including any "empires" I attempt to build.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Trusting in God brings security that the world can never give.

In today's quoted scripture, the prophet declares that relying on what is temporal results in disaster. When we seek security in our wealth, career, or intel-

ligence, we will fail. However, trusting in God promises an enriching life of blessing, delivering us from misguided dependence on current culture. Nothing our world offers will last — not power, prosperity, or popularity. Everything, everyone, is destined to wither and fade. When we look to this world for fulfillment, we live with uncertainty; but we can always rely on God. Knowing and loving God by loving others — these "things" will continue through eternity and never crumble.

Prayer: Dear God, empower us to focus our hearts on you, not on the "crumbling empires" around us. Amen.

Barney Cargile III (California, USA) — See p. 21.

DISTRACTIONS

SUN
JULY 11
2021

READ Matthew 14:13-23

When [Jesus] sent [the crowds] away, he went up onto a mountain by himself to pray. Evening came and he was alone.

— Matthew 14:23 (CEB)

I once tried making bread. It had just four ingredients: flour, water, salt, and yeast. I thought, *How hard could it be?* I mixed the ingredients to form a sticky dough, covered it with a damp cloth and plastic bag, and set it by the stove to rise for an hour. But then I got distracted, and before I knew it, 90 minutes had passed. The yeast had multiplied so much that the dough had overrun its bowl. I moved it to the oven anyway, and I ended up with a loaf that was golden on the outside — but hollow in the middle.

My distractedness caused my dough to rise too much that day. Distraction also sometimes negatively affects my spiritual life. As a parent who works full-time, I can get so caught up in life's everyday demands — demands of my job, staying on top of my email inbox, or planning loads of laundry around who has the fewest clean socks — that my soul feels as hollow as that bread. When I prioritize reading scripture, praying, and spending time with God in solitude, I make room in my life to better serve the kingdom of heaven.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
How will I prioritize my faith today?

Prayer: Dear Lord, help us to care for ourselves as we also care for others. Nurture our faith so that your love and mercy can rise within us. Amen.

Stacey Elza (West Virginia, USA)

MON
JULY 12
2021

COMFORT FOR OTHERS

READ 2 Corinthians 1:3-7

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God.

— 2 Corinthians 1:3-4 (NIV)

I had just finished high school when my father died. I felt my world collapsing as I stood by his body and reflected on all the promises he had made to me: to care for me and support my education to any level I desired.

I cried and could not be consoled. But then I felt as if God whispered to me, “Your father is dead, but your heavenly Father is alive and will see you through.” Those words sank deep into my heart and strengthened me. I have since gone

to university and finished my first and second degrees with the help of God.

The comfort God gave me enables me to console others going through the

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
I will share the comfort God has given me with others today.

same pain. In the years since my father died, I’ve had many friends who have lost loved ones and felt overwhelmed with grief. But each time I shared the soothing words that God gave me and how God saw me through my greatest ordeal.

God does not abandon us in hard times, and our experiences can help us bless others. We can take solace in God in difficult times and find the courage to help others who suffer the same. Whatever pain we feel today, God’s comfort will sustain us and help us care for others.

Prayer: Dear Lord, help us to understand how the comfort you give us in trouble can console others in despair. Amen.

Olaiya Muiyiwa Benralph (Federal Capital Territory, Nigeria)

18 **Prayer Focus:** FOR HELP AND COMFORT IN HARD TIMES

A SMALL THING

TUES
JULY 13
2021

READ Matthew 10:29-31

Even the very hairs of your head are all numbered.

— Matthew 10:30 (NIV)

I heard a beautiful song on the radio years ago that I immediately loved. I only heard it once, but it has stuck with me. Many times since I heard it, I've wished I knew its name so I could buy it and listen to it often. I even spent an hour or two searching the internet for what I thought were key phrases from the song — all to no avail.

This morning on my daily walk, I was listening to a music streaming service, which allows you to choose a song or artist that you like, then also plays similar songs. As one of my favorite songs was playing, a fleeting thought of that nameless song entered my mind. Then about 15 minutes later, the song for which I had been searching almost five years started playing! It was a very small thing, but in that moment I felt God's presence and was reminded how much God cares about us and about what we care about, however small it may be.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
Ordinary moments can be
the best reminders of
God's presence.

At times I have felt utterly alone, as if God had completely forgotten me. And then something like this happens, which reminds me in a tangible way of how personal God is. And God is not just our heavenly Father; God is our friend too. It's little moments like this that remind me that my friend, my Father God, is so very faithful, loving, and trustworthy.

Prayer: Father God, help us to remember just how much you love and care about us. Help us to notice your mighty, merciful hand in the midst of daily life. Amen.

Anna R. Johnson (Virginia, USA) — See p. 21.

Prayer Focus: GRATITUDE FOR GOD'S PRESENCE 19

WED
JULY 14
2021

PATIENT IN PRAYER

READ 1 Thessalonians 5:16-24

The prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective.

— James 5:16 (NRSV)

When I was young, we lived two thousand miles from my paternal grandparents. I was able to see them only a couple of times in their lifetimes. They had little money, but every year my grandmother sent me a small present for Christmas and my birthday.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

It may take time, but God will answer my prayers.

The “worst” present she ever sent me was a cloth bookmark with a tassel on the bottom. It had an embroidered picture of Jesus

wearing a crown of thorns, along with stylized flowers and the words *May heaven's blessings be with you*. For some reason I kept it, even though my parents and I were not Christians.

I found out later that my grandmother had prayed for me every day of my life. That made the bookmark one of my prized possessions. What patience, love, and strong faith she had — to pray every day for a little boy thousands of miles away whom she hardly ever saw.

I believe it was her prayers and those of my grandfather that brought me to Christ. And her example convinced me of the value of patient prayer. It is easy to get tired of praying for a particular person or situation, and sometimes it doesn't seem to do any good. But God hears and will always answer with divine wisdom.

Prayer: Thank you, Lord, for those who faithfully and patiently pray for us. Grant us patience to pray persistently for others. Amen.

Ken Claar (Idaho, USA)

Real people. Real stories. Real faith.



Matthew L. Harper (p. 45) is retired from the U.S. Air Force and an industrial engineer.



Anna R. Johnson (p. 19) is a naturopathic doctor and nutritionist who has published two cookbooks.



Brian Valdez (p. 10) is a lawyer and advocate for individuals with disabilities.



Norma Sarian (p. 56) is a speech therapist. She loves traveling, taking pictures, and writing poems.



Sultana Butt (p. 50) is a journalist who grew up in a Muslim Indian family. She became a Christian in 1980.



Barney Cargile III (p. 16) is an associate pastor who loves teaching, traveling, writing, and working on his small organic farm.



Amy Lynn Taylor (p. 24) taught elementary school for 11 years before stopping to focus on her writing.



Zafar Iqbal (p. 53) is an accountant who loves serving Christian organizations with his abilities.

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

THUR
JULY 15
2021

GIVE THE BEST

READ Hebrews 11:1-6

Without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.

— Hebrews 11:6 (NIV)

When I was interviewed by someone from a TV channel after resigning from my job, a reporter asked me if I felt a sense of loss at leaving my position in a prestigious company and giving up a large income to be a mother. I replied, “Not at all! In fact, I’m grateful to be a mother so that I can teach my children to love God and others, to glorify God, and to give their best to God whatever their profession in the future.”

The examples of Abel and Enoch in today’s reading encourage me to give my best — whatever my profession — and to live in a way that pleases God. God is pleased by those who earnestly seek to trust, give their best, and live in obedience to God. We are called to follow God even when, according to the world, we are giving up something good in order to do it. But God always wants what is best for us and will lead us to what is good.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
God wants what is best for me.

Prayer: Loving God, thank you for all the opportunities you put before us. Give us the courage to follow where you lead. Amen.

Linda Chandra (Banten, Indonesia)

LOST AND FOUND

FRI
JULY 16
2021

READ Luke 15:3-7

*I have strayed like a lost sheep. Seek your servant,
for I have not forgotten your commands.*

— Psalm 119:176 (NIV)

A few years ago, my grandparents' dog, Lady, went missing. They looked everywhere for her, from the fields to the forest to the town and even to the town down the road.

A week later, Lady was still missing; we had almost lost hope. My dad went out for one final search of the countryside. After about an hour he came back. As he opened the front door, Lady appeared and ran straight for my grandparents. Everyone rejoiced, happy that Lady had been found.

Sometimes we get lost in the distractions of the world around us. We have more to do than we have time for. School, work, taking care of children, taking care of parents, extracurricular activities, and much more fill our time. We may almost seem to lose track of ourselves. However, when we recount the story from Luke, we find comfort knowing God is searching for us just as the shepherd searched for the one sheep that had wandered away. When we slow our lives down enough to focus on God's presence, we find a celebration of a renewed life — ours!

Through our experience with Lady, I have renewed faith that God searches, finds, and brings us back with joyous celebration. Just as we did for Lady. Just as the Shepherd does for the sheep.

Prayer: Loving God, when we feel lost and troubled, remind us that you are always nearby, ready to guide us back home to you. Amen.

Josey McChesney (Missouri, USA)

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
No matter how lost I feel, God
will always find me.

SAT
JULY 17
2021

GRATITUDE

READ Isaiah 41:8-14

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

— Philippians 4:6 (NIV)

I'm terrified of drowning, so I've avoided water most of my life. Before I turned 40, however, I decided to face my fears and take swimming lessons. My coach knew I was nervous and had me do an exercise each week before he started his instruction. I gripped the side of the pool and bobbed up and down, dunking my head under water and coming back up for air. I did this one hundred times before the fear left my body. Then I was relaxed enough to learn.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Rather than focusing on my fears, I can focus on giving thanks.

God knows that we are prone to worry. Scripture repeatedly tells us not to be afraid, not to fear, not to be anxious. Besides wanting better for us than a life of fear, like my wise swim coach God knows we cannot receive instruction if worried thoughts distract us. So God gives us an exercise to help: pray about every situation with thanksgiving.

Anxious thoughts and gratitude cannot occupy our minds at the same time. When troubles increase, we may find it difficult to name even one reason to be thankful. But we can start by saying, "Thank you, God, for allowing me to come to you with my requests." God will take our prayer of thanksgiving and help us to give thanks in all circumstances.

Prayer: Dear God, thank you for your promise to strengthen us and help us. Open our eyes to your many blessings. We want to have thankful hearts. Amen.

Amy Lynn Taylor (Colorado, USA) — See p. 21.

GOD NEVER FORSAKES US

SUN
JULY 18
2021

READ 1 Kings 8:54-61

May the LORD our God be with us as he was with our ancestors; may he never leave us nor forsake us.

— 1 Kings 8:57 (NIV)

In 2001, a family in our neighborhood suffered a terrible loss. One day a fire broke out in their house. Nobody was at home, but the house was completely destroyed. All the family had left were the clothes they had worn that day. They had no savings, and the house was not insured.

After the fire, the family started to receive help from members of the church where the father served as a pastor. One woman offered her apartment for the family to live in free of charge. Friends started to raise funds for construction of a new house. God blessed and provided the necessary means at every stage of the process, and now the family has a new home.

I have seen God's grace at work in the middle of disaster. God never forsakes

us, and God prompts us to open our hearts and help those in trouble. The apostle Paul reminds us in Philippians 4:14, "It was good of you to share in my troubles." The experience of my neighbors taught me how important it is to remember our brothers and sisters in hard times. Let us do our best to love and support one another.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

No matter what, God will never forsake me.

Prayer: Dear God of grace, we thank you for your great love, mercy, and help in all our hardships. May your name be blessed. Amen.

Oleg Tservonoi (Tallinn, Estonia)

MON
JULY 19
2021

BEYOND THE GALAXIES

READ Ephesians 3:14-21

When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established; what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them?

— Psalm 8:3-4 (NRSV)

Have you ever gazed at the endless expanse of stars and felt small? It is hard to grasp the size of our own solar system, much less the Milky Way galaxy. Scientists estimate the existence of two trillion galaxies in the observable universe. The mind-boggling size of the universe can leave us feeling quite insignificant, especially when we remember that our God simply spoke everything into existence. (See Gen. 1.)

When we try to comprehend the size of our physical universe, we realize that we are less than a speck of dust compared to the vastness of creation. It seems that we should be easily lost or forgotten. I ponder as the psalmist did, “What are human beings that you are mindful of them?” Why would God make the universe so big?

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Despite the vastness of the universe, God’s love for me is greater still.

Why would God care about us compared to all of creation? Perhaps God designed the vast expanse of creation to illustrate the magnitude — the “breadth and length and height and depth” — of God’s love for us (see Eph. 3:18). For if the same God who spoke it all into existence would send his own Son to die on our behalf, that love must extend beyond creation itself. And that is truly mind-boggling!

Prayer: Dear God, help us to understand the breadth of your love for us so that we can learn to love you and your creation better. Amen.

Trudy Chun (Texas, USA)

READ Psalm 23:1-6

If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord; so then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's.

— Romans 14:8 (NRSV)

I am originally from Gujarat, India. One of my greatest blessings is that all my children received good educations and now have settled in Australia and the U.S. I have been interested in mission work since I was a child, and now I have been able to share the gospel in various cities in Australia and the U.S.

For a time I returned to Gujarat to serve the Lord by helping those in need. While I was there, doctors found tumors in two places in my brain. At the same time, I was suffering from severe problems with diabetes. The doctors warned me that I had a short time to live. But I was not afraid of this news because I believe death will take me to the joyful presence of the Lord. My doctors were surprised by my joyful attitude. In spite of this serious health condition, I have been joyfully involved in serving the Lord by helping people in need. I do not worry about my health. I am more concerned about serving the Lord than I am afraid of death. It gives me great joy to be involved in the Lord's service.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
Living a life in service to God
brings joy.

Prayer: O Father, accept the ways we help others in service to you. By our example, allow others to find it in their hearts to serve you as well. Amen.

Ishwarbhai Hirabhai Dabhi (New Jersey, USA)

WED
JULY 21
2021

BRINGING OUT THE BEST

READ Matthew 5:13-16

You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything, but is thrown out and trampled under foot.

— Matthew 5:13 (NRSV)

As I was quickly making lunch, the delicious scent of pumpkin soup filled my nose. I had added chicken, seasonings, and some vegetables. But when I uncovered the pot and took a taste, I gagged. In my rush, I had forgotten the salt.

As I carefully measured and added two teaspoons of sea salt, I couldn't help but wonder, *What is it about these small, white crystals?* Without salt, even the best meal may not turn out right. Salt dissolves and brings out the best in the ingredients around it.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

I can use my faith to bring out the best in others.

I think this function of salt represents what God has called the church to be:

a people who influence and add to those around them for the better. What a shame if in the busyness of life I should forget to be salt. As just one grain, I can do only so much; but together, as siblings in Christ, we add to and transform the flavor of life all around the world.

Prayer: Dear Lord, help us to be like salt wherever we go. May your presence in us influence and improve the world around us. Amen.

Amorelle Browne (Grenada)

SHIFTING SHADOWS

THUR
JULY 22
2021

READ Psalm 27:1-5

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

— James 1:17 (NIV)

The warmth of the sun lured me to the window. I noticed long shadows stretching across the snow-covered ground from barren trees blocking the light. A breeze rustled the branches and shifted the patches of darkness. As I observed the contrast, it dawned on me that shadows only occur in the presence of light. I may feel overshadowed by darkness, but the light is still there.

I was reminded of how my diagnosis of ovarian cancer cast shadows of doubt, fear, and anxiety across my horizon. I had more questions than answers: Would I survive? What side effects of chemotherapy would I experience? What about my future?

Amid my surgery and chemotherapy, slivers of light pierced the darkness. I recalled God's goodness and faithfulness in the past, and truths from God's word shined the light of hope, faith, and peace into my heart.

The circumstances of my life had changed, but God never changes. God is the light that shines in darkness. Even though I encountered shadows in that season, they were fleeting. God's light penetrated the darkness and offered me the hope and courage I needed to face my challenges.

Prayer: God of light, when we are overwhelmed by fear and anxiety, help us to remember your love. Amen.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Even when I feel overcome by shadows, I can find slivers of God's light.

Joanie Shawhan (Wisconsin, USA) — See back cover.

FRI
JULY 23
2021

INTENTIONAL FARMERS

READ Matthew 13:1-8, 18-23

As for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty.

— Matthew 13:23 (NRSV)

When I read today's parable, I find myself wondering, *How can I spread the seeds of faith everywhere I go?* We can spread the seeds of faith on any soil and leave the rest to God, but having grown up in a farming community I can't help but think of farmers when I read the parable. Every farmer I know prepares the soil, clears out rocks and weeds, and lays down fertilizer before planting seeds. The farmer then tends the crops to give them the best chance of thriving.

Thinking about planting from this perspective reminds me that while it is important to share my faith widely, I should not be disheartened if some seeds do not take root. I can leave those to God and focus on nurturing the budding faith of those ready for a deeper relationship with God. Jesus spread his message everywhere he went and excluded no one. But

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

How will I be intentional in the way I spread the gospel?

like a farmer preparing land for planting, Jesus also invested much time in the first disciples and those closest to him.

The parable of the sower invites us to consider how we are planting seeds of faith each day. And the example of the careful farmer invites us to go further: *How am I investing in specific people and helping them to grow in faith?* We can follow Jesus' example and share our faith with the wider world but also take time to nurture the faith of those around us.

Prayer: Dear Lord, help us to be intentional in the ways we use our gifts to share our faith with others. Amen.

Paul Cillo (Pennsylvania, USA)

THE POWER OF SOLITUDE

SAT
JULY 24
2021

READ Mark 1:35-38

Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.

— Luke 5:16 (NIV)

Most humans yearn for group interaction, so it can be considered odd to delight in solitude. But the “odd” people stand out. They break away from the herd by doing something different.

Many of us desire to always be part of some conversation or part of the collective in some way. We can't stand to be alone.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
Solitude can reenergize my faith.

We may not know what to do with ourselves, or we just have FOMO (fear of missing out). Maybe we are afraid of being alone with our thoughts. But why should we fear being alone?

Jesus regularly withdrew from his disciples to pray and be alone with God. If even Jesus, who was the son of God, found it necessary to have periods of solitude, how much more do we need it with all the digital noise constantly around us?

Following Jesus' example by making time to be alone to think or pray or simply be still can reenergize us and help us live life fully.

Prayer: Dear God, help us to find periods of solitude and to use that time to grow nearer to you. We pray as Jesus taught us, “Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, 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.

Thando Meck (Harare, Zimbabwe)

SUN
JULY 25
2021

MY STORY ISN'T OVER

READ 1 Kings 19:1-9

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

— Isaiah 41:10 (NIV)

It was too hard. I had tried everything, and nothing was working. I was stuck, and nothing was going to change. I was at work, so I excused myself from the office and found a quiet room alone. As I sat curled up against the cold wall, I closed my eyes and prayed that God would take my life.

My mental health had been deteriorating for months. I was getting help, but if life was going to be like this, I didn't think I wanted to live it. Thankfully, God's plans were different from my own.

As I was reading the Bible, God reminded me of Elijah. We often remember Elijah as incredibly strong. Yet, Elijah was human, and he cried the same prayer I did: "I have had enough, LORD. . . . Take my life."

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

I will seek God's strength in my times of need.

In answer to Elijah's prayer, God sent him sustenance for the next part of his journey. His story wasn't over yet. Neither is mine, and neither is yours. When we feel like we don't have strength, or we feel like we have nothing more to give, God beckons us to keep going. We are never alone; God walks with us every step of the way.

Prayer: Dear Lord, you know what is best for us. Thank you for giving us strength for the day, even when we feel that we have nothing left to give. Amen.

Tina Clark (Massachusetts, USA)

STEEP HILLS

MON
JULY 26
2021

READ Isaiah 40:28-31

The Lord said to Paul, “My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness.”

— 2 Corinthians 12:9 (KJV)

Growing old is for the birds, they say, and I would most wholeheartedly agree! But I sure wouldn't trade the wisdom that has come with age for my younger years. So in these latter years of graying hair, one morning my husband and I decided it would be good to begin walking for exercise. Each day we start by going down our street, then turning the corner to a nice long, flat stretch. But to make it back home, we have to climb a steep hill. That's when I say to my husband, “I'd like to grab your arm to help me up!”

Our morning walk has become a great time for us to pray once we come to that hill — I just can't talk and walk it at the same time. It seems to be God's way of giving us a perfect time to be still — a perfect prayer time.

I've come across some “steep hills” in life that make me feel pretty weak. That's when I grab hold of the

promise that God's strength is made perfect in our weakness. Actually, I try to remember to rely on God every day — not just when steep hills confront me. But when they do, God's grace and strength prove sufficient every time.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
No hill is too steep when God walks with me.

Prayer: Dear Lord, strengthen our faith. Help us to remember that your strength never wavers and that you are ready to help us when we call out to you. Amen.

Dara H. Gunnell (North Carolina, USA)

Prayer Focus: SOMEONE BEGINNING A NEW
PRAYER PRACTICE

TUES
JULY 27
2021

THE ROYAL LAW

READ Mark 12:28-34

*If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture,
“Love your neighbor as yourself,” you
are doing right.*

— James 2:8 (NIV)

Not long after we got married, my wife and I went to a sandwich shop. We were about to eat when a man in ragged clothes gazed at us and asked for food. At first, I tried to pretend that I didn't notice him, but my wife looked at him. She gave her sandwich to that man. I pouted and thought,

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

How will I love someone as myself today?

How impractical! It is easier to get rid of this beggar by giving him a few coins than buying him such costly food.

After we went home, I pondered the incident. I felt ashamed of my attitude toward that man. I had been selfish. I thought about my many blessings. Those blessings are God's grace — not my own achievements. And God wants me to share those blessings with everyone.

When I had the opportunity to share at least one of those blessings, I wanted to share only the leftover part by giving the man a few coins. I failed to practice the royal law of love in today's quoted verse. Because I gave more importance to my pleasure than his need, I was not loving him “as myself.” God has shown us how to love our neighbors as ourselves through Jesus, who not only taught us the royal law of love but lived it out by giving up his life on the cross.

Prayer: Dear Lord, fill our hearts with compassion so that we can love others as ourselves. Amen.

Hitesh J. Solanki (Gujarat, India) — See back cover.

DON'T LOOK BACK

WED
JULY 28
2021

READ Genesis 19:15-26

*Lot's wife looked back, and she became
a pillar of salt.*

— Genesis 19:26 (NIV)

I remember the first time I heard my dad read the story of Lot's wife. As a child, I didn't understand why Lot's wife looked back. I wanted to yell, "Don't look back!" But she did, and her life ended. Now, as an adult, I understand why she might have looked back. She was leaving the familiar. She may have loved someone she left behind or even the town itself.

At times in my life, I've had a hard time moving forward without grieving over what I've left behind. When we moved to a different state, far away from family, it was hard to leave the familiar and those I loved. I ended up making a list of the reasons we moved. When I struggled with letting go of the past, I would read the list and remember God's direction.

We can trust God when God says it's time to move forward and not look back. One consequence for looking back is that moving forward becomes more difficult than it needs to be. Our fate may not be as drastic as Lot's wife, but no doubt we suffer when we disobey God's call to move forward and refuse to leave the past behind.

So when God says to go, we can follow in confidence, knowing that God will lead us to the best place for our growth and joy.

Prayer: Father God, help us to look forward to what you are doing in our lives and never to look back in regret. Amen.

Melinda Eye Cooper (Tennessee, USA)

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
With God I can go forward
confidently.

THUR
JULY 29
2021

GOD'S VOICE

READ John 10:22-30

My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me.

— John 10:27 (NIV)

“I can’t hear you! Speak louder!” These requests, directed to my wife, were becoming more frequent. Eventually, I had to admit that I was hard of hearing. Hearing aids have helped, but in social settings I struggle to distinguish the voice of the person in front of me from others in the room. Fortunately, my hearing aids are equipped with a setting that allows me

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Today I will listen for God’s voice.

to tune out the surrounding sounds so I can focus on the person I want to hear.

Similarly, the noise of voices both internal and external that vie for our

attention can distract us from hearing God’s voice. It is easy to rush through our Bible reading without taking the time to still our restlessness and ponder the truth of the message. Despite the voices that compete for our attention, if we quiet ourselves and listen, we will hear God speaking.

Today’s quoted verse reminds us to listen to Jesus, who is the good shepherd. Jesus knows and loves us and wants us to hear what he has to say. Are we listening? When we step back from the noise and activity of our busy lives, we can listen humbly and quietly for God’s guidance.

Prayer: Dear Lord, you are the shepherd of our lives. Help us to find quiet in our lives so that we can better listen for your voice. Amen.

Wayne Greenawalt (Illinois, USA)

READ 1 Peter 4:7-11

Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others.

— 1 Peter 4:10 (NIV)

When I was eight years old, I told God that I wanted to be a missionary. I thought this type of service was the only way to show God my full commitment.

As I grew older, I tried to pursue my dream of mission service; but the doors always closed. I didn't understand why God wouldn't use me.

Eventually, God led me to the role of wife, mom, and small-business owner. It wasn't what I expected, and at times I felt disillusioned. But what God began to show me was that my call was to be faithful in using what God had entrusted me with. God's plan for me was not full-time mission work in a far country; it was here in my ordinary life that God wanted me to serve.

Whatever our vocation, we have people around us who need God's love. God may call us to be servants right where we

are. When a neighbor is going through a hard time, a card, a visit, or a home-cooked meal could be the answer to God's call. Similarly, if an elderly acquaintance needs a ride to the doctor's office we can be ready. When we become the hands and feet of Christ to those in our sphere of influence, we are indeed missionaries!

Prayer: Heavenly Father, we want to serve you now. Show us the opportunities you have already put in front of us right where we are. Amen.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
God will present opportunities for me to serve every day.

Naomi Fata (New York, USA)

SAT
JULY 31
2021

A CAREGIVER'S TESTIMONY

READ 2 Corinthians 4:6-10

Surely God is my salvation; I will trust and not be afraid. The LORD, the LORD himself, is my strength and my defense.

— Isaiah 12:2 (NIV)

My husband and I have been married for more than 55 years. For the last nine years I have been my husband's full-time caregiver. He depends on me for his every need because he lives with both Alzheimer's and Parkinson's disease. At the end of each day I am exhausted but not shattered.

My family and friends are my support system. They remain in contact with us by visiting or calling. They sustain us with their prayers and words of encouragement.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
God's strength will see me through.

I am grateful, and I thank God for each one of them.

I find my greatest source of comfort and strength

in God's word referenced in Isaiah 41:10: "Do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand." Because God renews my strength each day, I fully trust that no matter how challenging the circumstances, I will not face the new day alone. Thanks be to God.

Prayer: Loving God, we look to you each day for your unfailing strength, love, and grace. In all circumstances, your presence is our blessing, your strength our salvation. Thank you, Lord. Amen.

Digna Lebrón Silva (Puerto Rico)

THE COMPLETE REGIMEN

SUN
AUG 1
2021

READ James 2:14-24

Just as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is also dead.

— James 2:26 (NRSV)

My doctor suggested that I lose weight, and he gave me a new diet plan which I began to follow. However, despite my efforts I was losing very little weight. At my next appointment, I asked my doctor what I was doing wrong. He asked me what exercise I was doing, and for how long. I told him that exercising was too time-consuming and that I figured the right diet should be enough. But he told me it takes exercise to make any diet complete — one without the other will not lead to success.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
Putting my faith into action is my daily work.

Sure enough, when I did start mixing the two together on a daily basis, I was able to lose weight. And even though I didn't think I had the time for it, after a while exercise began to fit easily into my schedule.

When I first came to the Lord, I learned a similar lesson. In the beginning, daily Bible reading and prayer made me feel better about myself, but I didn't really feel God's Spirit until I began doing volunteer work, both for my church and in my community. That work made the message of Jesus come alive in me. Like my physical body, my spiritual body needs exercise to keep it healthy. Whatever time it takes from my schedule, the reward is always worth the effort.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help us to care for our bodies and our spirits so that we may live abundantly with you. Amen.

Mark A. Carter (Oregon, USA)

Prayer Focus: SOMEONE BEGINNING A NEW
HEALTH REGIMEN

Sisyphus

Sisyphus, a character from Greek mythology, cunningly cheats death twice. As punishment, Zeus condemns him to push a large, heavy rock up a hill. When Sisyphus and his rock reach the top, the rock rolls to the bottom, and Sisyphus must begin his task again — for all eternity. I can only imagine how Sisyphus must have felt each time he stood on the mountaintop, thinking for a moment that maybe this time the rock would stay put. How frustrated and disappointed he must have been as he watched it roll to the bottom yet again!

The story of a man by the pool of Bethesda reminds me of Sisyphus. In Jerusalem, Jesus encounters a man by the pool of Bethesda where people would go in search of healing. The first person to enter the pool after an angel caused the water to move would be healed. (See John 5:1-9, KJV.) Scripture says that the man “had been ill for thirty-eight years” and that when Jesus asked him if he wanted to be healed, the man said, “Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up; and while I am making my way, someone else steps down ahead of me” (vv. 5, 7, NRSV). John does not say how long the man had been waiting by the pool, only that “he had been there a long time” (v. 6).

How exceedingly frustrating it must have been for the man! Each time the water moved he had his chance, only to have someone make it to the water before him. I wonder how many times the man considered giving up. What kept him waiting by the pool? How did he deal with the fear that he might never make it to the water before someone else?

Too often it is easier to imagine that our lives bear more resemblance to Sisyphus than to the man by the pool — easier to imagine that our persistence will never pay off, that we are condemned to struggle forever against the burden of whatever challenge we are facing. What sets the man by the pool apart from the myth is not only the obvious miracle in the text but a second one that I see: the man remained by the pool. Against the odds, knowing he might never enter the water, he remained determined to try. We have the luxury of knowing

how his story ends, but I wouldn't fault the man for doubting that things would ever change for him. I can only imagine how easy it would have been for him to lose faith. Knowing that he kept trying makes the story all the more miraculous to me.

Sometimes I feel like Sisyphus, pushing endlessly against stress, uncertainty, or exhaustion. When I stand on the mountaintop and watch my rock roll to the bottom, I remind myself of the stories from scripture that give me every reason to believe that things could be different. Jesus, speaking to the man by the pool, said, "Stand up, take your mat and walk." At once the man . . . took up his mat and began to walk" (v. 8). Although my life might not change as suddenly and I might not get the miracle I want or expect, I hold on to hope that tomorrow could be better than today. When I am at my lowest point and ready to quit, my faith gives me the strength and fortitude to keep going. And that in itself is often a miracle.

Several meditations in this issue address persistence and moving forward with faith. You may want to read again the meditations for July 4, 12, 20, 22, 25, 28, 31 and August 1, 2, 3, 7, 12, 21, and 27 before responding to the reflection questions below.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. When have you struggled with a task or life event that felt repetitive and futile? What did you learn from this experience?
2. Recall another miracle in scripture in which the character persists against the odds. What are some similarities between this miracle and the one found in John 5:1-9? What are some differences?
3. If you could ask the man whom Jesus healed one question, what would it be?



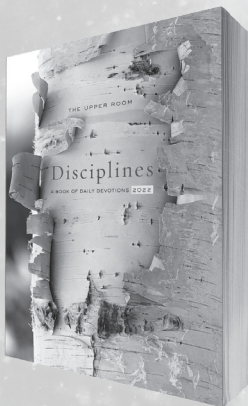
— Andrew Garland Breeden
Acquisitions Editor

THE UPPER ROOM
Disciplines

A BOOK OF DAILY DEVOTIONS **2022**

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WORTH THE WAIT

MON
AUG 2
2021

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)

When I became a homeowner, I found mowing the lawn stressful. Getting my mower started was a feat in itself, not to mention the hour and a half it took to get the job done. As I've grown accustomed to mowing, however, I've actually begun to enjoy it. I find satisfaction in seeing weeds disappear as I work, and I love to admire the beauty of my lawn when I've finished.

This experience has caused me to wish that more of life was this way. In most of my other efforts, I don't see immediate results the way I do when mowing my lawn: The friend who seemed excited to come to church with me once doesn't come again. After I have taught them for months, my students still make the same mistakes they made before. Temptations I thought I had conquered get the best of me yet again.

Today's quoted verse reminds us not to give up on our efforts to do good. We may see the results of our efforts in this life, but not always. God's timetable is different than ours. And even when we may not see it, God is working to mold us into the image of Christ. God promises that if we don't give up, we are sure to reap a harvest worth the wait.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Even when I do not see results, God is at work in my life.

Prayer: Dear Lord, help us to persevere in our efforts to do good. Amen.

Jody Williams (Illinois, USA)

TUES
AUG 3

2021

STANDING FIRM

READ Romans 1:8-17

As for me and my household, we will serve the LORD.

— Joshua 24:15 (NIV)

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

God's strength and power
help me to live faithfully.

hard but always received lower grades than others. When students began to be recruited for an atheist youth organization, eight of us from Christian families

refused to join. As a result we were locked in a classroom for several hours. A teacher yelled at us and ordered us to sign applications, but we did not bend.

After graduation, I wanted to attend university and passed the entrance exams twice. Because of my faith, my name was deleted from the admissions list both times. Despite our persecution, the examples of our parents and grandparents gave us the courage to stand firm in our faith, and they never ceased to pray for us.

Years later when things had changed in our country, my sister and I were walking in town and met the teacher who had humiliated us the most. We were astonished when he said, "Please forgive me, if you can! I always admired your strong faith but was too afraid to take your side." I understood then that our lives had given witness to God's mercy and protection. God's power made us strong and enabled us to face our trials.

Prayer: Dear God, thank you for never forsaking your children, even in the most difficult situations. Amen.

Mariya Lohinova (Ukraine)

A BIG LITTLE PRAYER

WED
AUG 4
2021

READ Proverbs 3:1-6

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

— Proverbs 3:5-6 (NIV)

When I was five or six years old, my granddaddy said, “I’m going to teach you a big little prayer and this is it: ‘Help me, Lord.’” I remember asking to hear the rest of the prayer, and Granddaddy said that was all of it. He told me that if ever I am in danger, have a problem, am afraid, or have to make a decision, I can call on the Lord.

I did not understand then how a prayer could be both big and little, but I believed Granddaddy knew everything so I knew it must have been true. I have always kept that big little prayer close to my heart, and it has served me well many times. I am thankful for this seed of faith that my granddaddy sowed in my life when I was a child. In recent years I began to share this prayer with members of the Bible studies and Sunday school classes that I teach.

When I recite this little prayer, I am trusting God to provide me with God’s understanding, just as Proverbs 3:5-6 instructs. God is faithful and will guide our thoughts, words, and deeds. We can always call out, “Help me, Lord.”

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Small prayers can create strong connections to God.

Prayer: Thank you, Lord, for always being with us, guiding and protecting us. Amen.

Matthew L. Harper (Georgia, USA) — See p. 21.

THUR
AUG 5
2021

IMITATORS

READ Ephesians 5:1-2

Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is — his good, pleasing and perfect will.

— Romans 12:2 (NIV)

The alarm of a nearby water system woke me up. After several minutes, I heard a mockingbird copying the beeping sound. I smiled at the bird who was copying not another bird's song but a noise from a machine made by humans.

Then I thought about what I copy. How often do I, as a child of God, imitate humanity's way rather than God's way? My amusement faded as I realized that just that week, I had imitated the habits of the world more than once. I was quick to judge a woman's character based on her clothing. I held a conversation questioning the motives behind someone's acts of service. My TV shows, reading, and music that week had not portrayed godly values.

In today's reading, Paul encourages us to imitate God's love. But too often, rather than looking on others with the kind of love

God shows me, I think and act out of habits and judgments that I have learned from the world around me.

Maybe that is why Paul says that we should follow Christ's example of a life filled with sacrificial love. As we seek to imitate Christ, God can transform our attitudes so that we can grow and act in ways that match God's will for us.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank you for the example of Christ's sacrificial love. Help us to imitate his love in our attitudes and actions. Amen.

Montra C. Weaver (Texas, USA)

ENOUGH

FRI
AUG 6
2021

READ John 6:1-14

When they had all had enough to eat, he said to his disciples, "Gather the pieces that are left over. Let nothing be wasted."

— John 6:12 (NIV)

I recently participated in a workshop on listening to God. During the session, we were led in an exercise where we were invited to imagine ourselves as part of the feeding of the five thousand. As I immersed myself in the events, I became part of the crowd. I was at the back being jostled by those who wanted a better view of Jesus as he preached. He spoke well, but I had my eye on the food! I was hungry after a long day. I sensed a genuine panic within me, concerned whether there would be enough for me by the time everyone else had helped themselves.

Later, I reflected on how I often feel that I am last in the queue for God's blessings.

Is there really enough for me? I feel this way particularly in tough times while others appear content along life's way.

But then I looked at all those overflowing baskets of leftovers! There was more than enough. There was plenty for all. No one went hungry that day. Everyone was satisfied. I finally knew in my heart that God has more than enough to meet our deepest needs. God cherishes us and will nourish us. We all are invited to receive God's nourishment and to know God's love and care.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

God can meet any need.

(See Phil. 4:19.)

Prayer: Thank you, God, that there is grace enough and love enough for each of us today and every day. Amen.

Hilary Allen (England, United Kingdom)

SAT
AUG 7
2021

LEARNING ABOUT HOPE

READ Romans 5:1-5

Suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope.

— Romans 5:3-4 (NRSV)

At the age of 40 I had a freak sporting accident that caused a near fatal stroke. It led to extensive damage to my health that would haunt me for many years. Basic abilities I had previously taken for granted — standing without help, walking without tripping, dressing without assistance, drinking without choking, and speaking without slurring — were no longer natural. My senses of taste and smell were diminished.

Gradually, through prayer, support, and hard work, I was able to rebuild my life. I found myself clinging to God more and more. Today's reading inspired me to keep on hoping. Slowly, I returned to my career as a professional counselor and worked full-time for another 25 years. A friend recently asked me what I learned about myself during recovery. I told him that I came to like the "me" that emerged after the stroke. In my suffering, God taught me to nurture and maintain hope.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

In my suffering, God can lead me to hope.

The apostle Paul, a man who knew suffering well, explains in today's quoted verse how suffering can lead to hope. I've experienced the truth that God can help us create something very good out of something very bad. When we face any difficult situation, the truth of God's presence with us enables us to have hope.

Prayer: Dear God, help us to feel your presence with us in difficult times. Guide us as we seek to nurture and maintain hope in you. Amen.

Ralph Thompson (Ohio, USA)

COMPLETELY CALM

SUN
AUG 8
2021

READ **Matthew 8:23-27**

Suddenly a furious storm came up on the lake, so that the waves swept over the boat. But Jesus was sleeping.

— Matthew 8:24 (NIV)

The storm came out of nowhere. The water had been calm when they boarded the boat, but now the boat was rocking violently against the waves.

They were terrified and quickly went over to the One who could help. But Jesus was sleeping. In a panic they woke him. “Save us!”

they shouted. “We’re going to drown!” As the waves were crashing, putting the boat and the disciples in peril, Jesus was napping, seemingly oblivious to it all.

In my life I sometimes feel like Jesus is taking a nap. Scared and overwhelmed, I don’t see help coming any time soon. I want to scream for Jesus to wake up. “Save me! I’m not going to make it this time!”

But down deep in my soul I know better. I know that a hundred other times I have called, and Jesus has been there — though sometimes later than I would have preferred.

In this story from Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus told the waves what to do, and they calmed completely. Jesus can do that in our lives too. Sometimes, when there’s no relief in sight, Jesus sends an answer. Sometimes it’s by completely calming the circumstances; other times, it’s by completely calming us.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Whatever I am going through, Jesus knows and cares about it.

Prayer: Dear Jesus, thank you for never leaving us in our time of need. Help us to fully trust you and your timing. Amen.

Jen Chapman (West Virginia, USA)

MON
AUG 9
2021

GOD'S WAY, NOT MINE

READ Romans 12:9-21

Do not repay anyone evil for evil.

— Romans 12:17 (NIV)

The atmosphere in my office was tense. My boss had scolded me, and I was hurt. Later, when I was alone, temptation overcame me as I brooded over his allegations, some of which were baseless. My anger got the better of me, and I shot off a scathing email to him.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

When I feel hurt, I can remember what scripture has taught me.

I instantly regretted my deed. I had caused hurt and misunderstanding in my workplace. Later,

this Bible verse came to mind: “Do not repay anyone evil for evil.” Just because I had been hurt didn’t justify my reaction. Scripture repeatedly urges us to forgive those who hurt us. In Romans 12, Paul wrote about blessing those who persecute us, even if it is our boss or a colleague. He wrote, “Live at peace with everyone.”

Forgiveness is difficult. When we are hurt, it’s hard to forget. Paul went on to write that we ought to “overcome evil with good.” In order to do so we will need to humble ourselves before God and not take matters into our own hands. Surely our relationship with those at work and others in our lives will be stronger when we live in obedience to God’s teaching from the apostle Paul.

Prayer: O God, help us learn to forgive when we feel hurt by others so that reconciliation may come. Amen.

Sultana Butt (Karnataka, India) — See p. 21.

MOVING MOUNTAINS

TUES
AUG 10
2021

READ Matthew 17:14-20

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

— Matthew 17:20 (NRSV)

When I moved from the city back to my small hometown and to the little church where I had grown up, I assumed that the church was too small to be of much significance. *Surely*, I thought, *its light could not shine as bright as that of the large urban church I had attended in the city.* My assumptions were wrong.

Almost immediately, I learned that what the church lacked in numbers and resources was offset by the dedication of its members as they filled hundreds of buckets with cleaning supplies for flood victims and went out into the community to repair and maintain homes for residents. This little church moves mountains for the communities it helps and for the members who come together to serve.

People in Jesus' time thought of him in much the same way I once thought about my church. Most didn't think Jesus, born to poor parents from a small town, was the Messiah. He worked as a carpenter. He spent time with fishermen. How could a common man make any mark whatsoever on the world, much less be a savior and redeemer?

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
I can accomplish great things through faith in Jesus Christ.

When we question the significance of our service, we can remember that the first disciples of Jesus were only 12 people. Though small in number, they revealed God's greatness to an entire world — and so can we.

Prayer: Dear Father, no matter how small or insignificant we might feel, grant us the faith to serve others. Amen.

John Grube (Texas, USA) — See back cover.

WED
AUG 11
2021

IN THE SILENCE

READ 2 Timothy 1:5-10

May the God of peace . . . equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him.

— Hebrews 13:20-21 (NIV)

“I’m sorry; there was nothing we could do,” the ER doctor said to the bereaved family. “I’ll leave you with the chaplain now.” The elderly woman and her son huddled together, weeping and glancing awkwardly at me. I panicked. Until then my shifts as a student chaplain had been routine. Uncomfortable and uncertain about how to proceed, I silently prayed for wisdom.

That night I discovered that I don’t have to have the right words or experience or even be the right age to join God in bringing comfort; I just have to be present and willing. God faithfully equipped me in that moment to help strangers in crisis.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
Sometimes God speaks most powerfully through silence.

Moving beyond our comfort zone forces us to rely on God to equip us for whatever confronts us. It might be serving at a

homeless shelter, helping a single mother or elderly neighbor, or drawing near a stranger or friend in crisis. It can be uncomfortable, and we may feel tempted to withdraw in fear of saying or doing the wrong thing. But when we are willing simply to be present, we join God who is already at work. We leave the situation more connected to God and more connected to one another from our shared experience.

Prayer: Dear God, strengthen us to be your loving presence to those who are hurting or in crisis. If we are led to speak, speak through us. Amen.

Sherry Graf (Colorado, USA) — See back cover.

SUPPORTING HAND

THUR
AUG 12
2021

READ Psalm 139:1-12

If I take the wings of the morning and settle at the farthest limits of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me fast.

— Psalm 139:9-10 (NRSV)

In 2014 my family and I migrated from Pakistan to Canada. Although we had many comforts and blessings in Pakistan, some domestic situations led us to make the tough decision to move. I was quite concerned about moving and adjusting to a different part of the world. We prayed a lot about this concern.

Early in the morning on the day of our departure, as we were waiting at the airport terminal, I looked toward the wings of the plane we would board.

Amid my mixed feelings, my thoughts moved to the above scripture verses. I felt with strong conviction that God's supporting hand would continue to be upon us. It was then that God's peace replaced my worries.

During the first few years, we faced many challenges and struggles. However God's guidance, provision, strength, and support remained visible to us through our generous and supportive church friends. Ultimately my wife and I got good jobs in our professions, and our sons settled well into their studies.

Even in chaotic situations, as we keep on trusting God we can feel God's hand on us — leading, guiding, encouraging, providing for, and protecting us.

Prayer: Dear God, thank you for your guidance, strength, and support no matter where we go. Amen.

Zafar Iqbal (Ontario, Canada) — See p. 21.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
God's love and care for me
has no borders.

FRI
AUG 13
2021

PROVIDED FOR

READ Luke 12:22-34

The LORD said, “If you follow my statutes and keep my commandments and observe them faithfully, I will give you your rains in their season, and the land shall yield its produce.”

— Leviticus 26:3-4 (NRSV)

My husband grew up working in his family garden and still enjoys growing his own vegetables. One year, we had an abundance of heavy rain. Roads closed, bridges were washed out, and large trees toppled over. When time to prepare the garden came, my husband was worried. The storms continued for days at a time. I often saw him stare at the puddles from the window and shake his head.

On a day it didn't rain, my husband walked to the edge of the plot to see if the sun had dried the soil enough to start tilling. From a distance he noticed small sprouts popping up from the ground. Since he hadn't planted anything, he strolled up for a closer look. He recognized the tiny vines immediately. Squash, cantaloupe, and watermelon from the previous year had reseeded and started to grow back.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Relying on God opens me to new possibilities.

As we gathered and ate our fresh harvest that year, Jesus' lesson in today's reading came to mind. For months my husband was concerned about starting

his garden without realizing that God was steps ahead. Just as our Lord reminded the disciples not to worry, my husband and I have learned to trust that God knows what we need and will always provide for us.

Prayer: Dear Father in heaven, thank you for your constant love. Strengthen our faith so that we may grow closer to you. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Kelly Desclos-Estes (Virginia, USA)

A SON'S WISH TO SERVE

SAT
AUG 14
2021

READ Acts 20:32-35

The Lord Jesus himself said: "It is more blessed to give than to receive."

— Acts 20:35 (NIV)

When my son began to have severe back pain seven years ago, nothing helped. After dealing with the pain for several years, he confided in me that the pain was becoming so debilitating that he would one day no longer be able to work in his job providing social services for teens. "Dad," he said through tears of pain, "I want to serve in this world, not be served."

A few months later, doctors discovered he had a massive tumor. He had stage 4 sarcoma. None of

this, however, kept him from putting others first. He accepted his diagnosis and calmly asked his doctor how long he had to live. Four months later, as he was dying in the hospital, he consistently turned his focus on others. Whenever a nurse, doctor, or visitor asked, "How are you?" he always answered, "I'm hanging in there. How are you?" I stood in awe of his courage and love for others.

In today's quoted verse, Paul shared Jesus' words with the early Christians: "It is more blessed to give than to receive." God calls us to serve one another, and my son did just that until the day he died. His last words were the Lord's Prayer we prayed together in his hospital room. His faithfulness has brought comfort and peace to my soul and has strengthened me in my faith.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help us to develop hearts that want to serve others as we follow you. Amen.

Steven Lee (Illinois, USA)

Prayer Focus: SOMEONE WHO HAS LOST A
CHILD TO CANCER

SUN
AUG 15
2021

ALWAYS THERE

READ John 14:15-31

Jesus said to [Thomas], "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe."

— John 20:29 (NRSV)

I live in a two-story house. When we do laundry, my mother irons our clothes downstairs, and I have to climb steep stairs carrying piles of clothes with both hands. As I climb the stairs blindly with the clothes obstructing my view, I remember God. Because although I cannot see the step in front of me, I feel safe and supported knowing it is there.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
Prayer and Bible reading help me to feel God's presence.

My faith is very much like this at times. I believe even though I do not see God, and I pray because I know God is there.

However, in the same way that I feel a certain fear of making a misstep on the stairs, there are moments when I have doubts about my faith and think, *Can I trust God completely?* Sometimes my faith becomes weaker due to life challenges.

With care, we can reach the top of steep stairs, and we can look to God through prayer, Bible reading, and the events of our lives for guidance. Although it is not easy to walk in faith, God knows this and helps us with infinite mercy.

Prayer: Dear God, thank you for helping us when we are uncertain. Thank you for always being near when we pray. Amen.

Norma Sarian (São Paulo, Brazil) — See p. 21.

GRABBING ON TO GOD

MON
AUG 16
2021

READ Mark 5:21-34

Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.

— Psalm 23:4 (NIV)

A short time after I had knee surgery, my wife had grab bars installed to help me get around our house. They were an incredible aid. Whenever I thought that my legs were going to give out, I could hold on to a grab bar.

Weak and tired knees aren't the only things that make us reach out for support. When life hands us one problem after another, we reach out for whatever help we can find. Perhaps it seems impious to speak of "grabbing" on to God, but many of us have done that very thing. Often in times of distress, we don't meditate, we don't study the Bible, we don't pray anything more than "help!" We just glom on to the Holy One.

In today's reading, a woman touched Jesus' garment and received healing. But sometimes we don't want to merely touch Jesus' garment; we want to grab it with both hands! God, and our faith in God, is the ultimate support. Whether we deal with bad knees, financial woes, personal problems, or the loss of a loved one, God can support us as nothing and no one else can. God offers the patience, wisdom, strength, and insight — and sometimes sense of humor — that we need to deal with our problems. It is good to know that God is at hand to offer support that will last throughout our lives and beyond.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

No matter how I reach out,
God is ready to support me.

Prayer: Thank you, Holy One, for always being near, our ever-present help in times of need. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Philip A. Rice (Michigan, USA)

TUES
AUG 17
2021

MY NEIGHBORS

READ Luke 10:25-37

Jesus asked, *“Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?” The expert in the law replied, “The one who had mercy on him.” Jesus told him, “Go and do likewise.”*

— Luke 10:36-37 (NIV)

I had called the help line to fix a computer problem and was placed on hold. The music began to play while I was waiting. Not being a person who wastes time, I decided to read one of my devotionals for the day. The story was about a woman who realized her prayer life was focused too much on herself and her needs. She prayed to be able to broaden her prayer focus. While she was out for a walk, she began to pray for neighbors she did not know well and even strangers.

As I continued to wait, I took her idea and began to pray for the man who was helping me. I'm sure he often has to

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Everyone I meet is
my neighbor.

deal with people on the phone who are displeased and difficult to satisfy. I prayed he would come to know God if he didn't already. When our call con-

cluded, I thanked him for his professionalism and wished him a good day. Even though I didn't know him personally, God considers him my neighbor. God desires to hear our concerns and prayers every day and wants to guide us, heal us, and forgive us. Our prayers can extend beyond our family or community and include everyone in the whole world. They are all our neighbors.

Prayer: Dear Lord, help us extend our prayers to include people and situations we don't know well so that we can learn to embrace all people as our neighbors. Amen.

Lori Hulvey (Illinois, USA)

THE BEST PATH

WED
AUG 18
2021

READ Psalm 25:1-6

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

— Psalm 25:4 (NIV)

One day, my colleague brought her four-year-old son, Jorge, to the office for a visit. After chatting with us for a bit, he was ready to leave. His mother was holding his hand firmly, but he was squirming to get free, trying to open the door to make his exit. He gave the impression that he knew which exit door to use and that he did not need his mother's guidance. I smiled and thought: *How is it possible that this four-year-old is so independent and full of confidence?*

Later I reflected on how we, the children of God, often act the same way.

Many times we exhibit

Jorge's streak of independence and confidence. We firmly believe we know the best path to take, while God lovingly holds us by the hand to guide our steps. But still we squirm to be free, wanting to move ahead on our own wisdom and strength. However, God knows the best path for us. We can discover God's paths through prayer, studying God's word in the Bible, and consulting spiritual mentors.

God will not lead us astray. On that we can depend.

Prayer: O God, we praise you for your presence with us. Help us to trust in your guidance for our lives. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

Jairon Otoniel Santana Suárez (Dominican Republic)

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
My confidence rests in God,
who leads me in right paths.

THUR
AUG 19
2021

LIVING FAITH

READ James 5:13-16

In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

— James 2:17 (NIV)

As I walked down a hall in our church, I heard cheerful voices from a nearby room. Looking in, I saw the women of our church's prayer-quilt ministry gathered around tables and an ironing board. They form an assembly line to produce several quilts at once. Their efforts result in beautiful lap quilts that will withstand years of wear.

When each quilt is finished, the quilters gather around and pray over it. A yarn bow is sewn into each intersection of fabric blocks, and a sign is attached to the quilt stating the need of the recipient. This way, when church members pray over the quilt, they can untie a bow and tie a knot to indicate that they offered a prayer. The hanging yarn strands represent spoken threads of prayer. The quilts are then sent to the recipients.

James reminds us in today's quoted scripture that in addition to praying, we should act on our faith. Each beautiful quilt is a handcrafted demonstration of the quilters' faith.

Prayer: Dear Lord, thank you for those who take the time to demonstrate their faith in a way that blesses others. Help us to be open to opportunities to do the same. Amen.

Mary Hunt Webb (New Mexico, USA)

BROKEN BEAUTY

FRI
AUG 20
2021

READ 2 Corinthians 12:1-10

I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well.

— Psalm 139:14 (NIV)

As I walked into the 800-year-old cathedral in Ireland, the stained glass windows took my breath away. Everywhere I looked were stunning depictions of the life of Jesus. One window, near the front of the cathedral, caught my eye. It was of Jesus surrounded by people sitting at his feet to listen and learn from him. The closer I walked toward this magnificent piece of art, the more I became aware of the countless pieces of broken glass that made up each person who sat at the feet of Jesus.

Each figure was strikingly different. Yet each was looking for the same hope, peace, and joy that comes from knowing Jesus as savior. At times we may feel like we have been broken into a million pieces — by the death of a loved one, by a devastating illness, or by bad choices we have made. We can feel as if there is no hope of healing from our brokenness.

Jesus can take our broken pieces and, like those stained glass windows, form beautiful works of art. As today's quoted verse reminds us, we are wonderfully made by God. We can have faith that God can see the bigger picture and how each of us, as magnificent pieces of God's workmanship, can be used for God's glory.

Prayer: Dear God, thank you for your limitless love and for meeting us in our brokenness. Continue to make us into beautiful works that bring glory to you. Amen.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
God can heal my brokenness
and give me purpose.

Mendy Creswell Huskey (Tennessee, USA)

SAT
AUG 21
2021

AN IMPORTANT REMINDER

READ Lamentations 3:25-33

No one is cast off by the Lord forever. . . . he will show compassion, so great is his unfailing love.

— Lamentations 3:31-32 (NIV)

It had rained throughout the night, and the morning felt gloomy and miserable to me. Dirt roads, black with mud, sloshed as I walked to work. My spirit was low.

Then I received news from a friend. My mom had died. She had been seriously ill for some time, but I had not expected her passing. I knew I should pray, but I could not

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
Even in my grief, God is near.

muster a word of prayer. I was even unable to cry, but I was certain that the One who created the universe was with me.

Today what I miss most is something my mom said to me when I left for boarding school at age 12 — and every year after that. Each time I returned home, she would hug me and say, “David, I hope you still go to church.” Each time I would answer that I could never forget church.

I was crushed as I worked through my mother’s burial arrangements, and I labored through an ensuing depression for three years. But though she was physically absent, the faith that she encouraged in me helped me through my devastation. Now, more than 10 years later, whenever I read scripture, I find encouragement from God for the day’s challenges.

Prayer: Dear God, help us to remember that you will never abandon us, no matter the circumstances. Give us strength to persevere in our faith even as we mourn. Amen.

David Angango (Nairobi, Kenya)

LOVING GOD

SUN
AUG 22
2021

READ Matthew 22:34-40

Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable — if anything is excellent or praiseworthy — think about such things.

— Philippians 4:8 (NIV)

In today's reading, Jesus said that the greatest commandment is to love the Lord with all our heart, all our soul, and all our mind. Throughout my Christian walk, I learned to love God with all my heart and soul, but my mind had a mind of its own. Training my mind to love God became the answer to a huge problem I had with my thoughts.

Every morning I read scripture and pray to start my day. But by the time the day turns to evening, I have experienced many negative and unkind thoughts. The idea of loving God with all my mind has changed my thinking. I want to be more aware of my thoughts during the day and learn to replace them with healthier, more godly thoughts. For example, if I think an unkind thought about someone, I may follow the thought even further and eventually gossip about that person. Instead, I'm learning to confess the thought to God immediately and forgive myself. Then I think about what is admirable, excellent, or praiseworthy. I want to love God with my mind, and over time I am learning to do that.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
Today I will turn my thoughts to God.

Prayer: Dear Father, forgive us for our careless thoughts that do not honor you. Thank you for the scriptures that redirect our thoughts. Amen.

Nancy Brow (California, USA)

MON
AUG 23
2021

WATCHFUL PARENT

READ Psalm 46:1-11

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

— Psalm 46:1 (NIV)

Several months each year, our community becomes home to a pair of bald eagles who return to a sturdy group of tall pine trees located directly across from our church. They nest, lay eggs, and nurture their eaglets until their offspring fledge and learn to hunt and care for themselves.

Often large groups of onlookers gather to observe the eagles' comings and goings. Everyone seems amazed and in

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

God is forever my watchful parent.

awe at the sight of one of the majestic eagle parents poised on a branch nearby the gigantic nest, guarding its young.

Each time I see crowds gathered to admire these protective birds and their devotion to their young, I think of our own protective Parent's constant devotion to all of us. The presence of eagles may be rare, but God's presence isn't. And like the eagle parent, God is always poised nearby to guard us. God never leaves us, even when we think we can care for ourselves.

May we always be amazed and in awe of God's constant presence, and may we look to God with admiration, giving thanks that God is forever our watchful parent.

Prayer: Creator of all, help us to keep our gaze fixed on you and to give you all glory, honor, and praise for all that you do. Amen.

Teresa L. Seaburg (Texas, USA)

LIFE TOGETHER

READ Hebrews 10:19-25

TUES
AUG 24
2021

Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together . . . but encouraging one another — and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

— Hebrews 10:24-25 (NIV)

None of us is perfect. I have tried to be a better person and to establish a better relationship with God by making a personal commitment to spending time alone, studying the Bible, and worshiping God on my own. I have learned that I need some time alone with God, but that is not enough. I also need a community of faith where I can be in fellowship with others.

Sometimes God speaks to us through others, so we need fellowship and communion. Since I began participating in my church choir and a young-adult group, I have learned a lot. I have improved myself in ways that would not be possible alone. Christian communities are precious gifts from God. We can encourage and build up one another in ways more amazing than we could ever imagine. God can speak to us through one another when we gather in love to work together in service to God.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

How does my Christian community strengthen my faith?

Prayer: Loving God, thank you for the gift of Christian community. Continue to reveal yourself to us as we fellowship with one another. 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. 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.

Mavula Sabbath Kefas (Baden-Württemberg, Germany)

Prayer Focus: MY FAITH COMMUNITY

WED
AUG 25
2021

GIVING BACK

READ 2 Corinthians 9:6-15

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

— 2 Corinthians 9:7 (NIV)

One New Year's Eve when I was a young adult, I went to bed sobbing as I reflected on all that had gone wrong over the past year. I desperately prayed to God that the next year would be better.

A year later, I was back on my feet again. I felt overwhelmed by God's grace, and I wanted to do something to thank God.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
What will I give back to God today?

At the time, I was not going to church consistently. I had just moved into a new area and was still trying to choose a church.

I am also visually impaired and can't drive, so I had to ask others for rides.

I had not tithed since I started living on my own. So I added up my assets and gross income and sent a check worth 10 percent of the total to a local church, even though I wasn't a member. I also sent a note that read, "Use this to God's glory."

I didn't want to be thanked. It was my way of giving back to God a portion of all that God had given me. It doesn't seem like much considering the blessings God pours out in abundance.

Prayer: Gracious God, thank you for all the blessings you have given us. May our gifts reflect our gratitude for all that you have done. Amen.

Christine Adhikari (Georgia, USA)

ONLY TRYING TO HELP

THUR
AUG 26
2021

READ Romans 8:28-39

If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all — how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?

— Romans 8:31-32 (NIV)

On a recent stay at my sister-in-law's house in Nebraska, I noticed a baby robin that had fallen into a basement window well. The well was too deep for the bird to free itself, and I soon realized that I would have to rescue it. I moved quickly to scoop the bird from the window well. But when I stooped down beside it, it began to chirp wildly in fear. Soon, I was bombarded by the baby robin's family, who had been watching from a nearby tree.

After rescuing the robin, I realized that the small bird had perceived my best intentions as a desire to harm it. Perhaps if the robin had known I was trying to help, it would not have so vehemently resisted.

Sometimes, we are like that baby bird. We find ourselves in some predicament, often of our own making, but we don't recognize God's power to rescue us.

May our faith remind us that God is for us, not against us, and that God cares for us far more deeply than we can imagine. When we cry out to God in prayer, God can rescue us from our deepest fear and despair.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank you for loving and caring for us. Forgive us when we resist your help. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
God is for me, not against me.

Chuck Kralik (Missouri, USA)

FRI
AUG 27
2021

GOD STILL LOVES US

READ John 11:1-16

Though Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, after having heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was.

— John 11:5-6 (NRSV)

Martha and Mary were dealing with a painful experience: their brother was ill, and they needed help. When they sent for Jesus, they must have hoped that he would come to them immediately, but he did not come for two more days.

Martha and Mary felt they needed an immediate response because their brother was deathly ill. But Jesus responded to their request in his timing, not theirs. During that time

Lazarus died. We may wonder, as the sisters must have, *If Jesus really loved them, why would he not set aside whatever he was doing and help them?*

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Even when my prayers seem unanswered, God still loves me.

We often pray expecting immediate answers, but we don't always receive them. In those times, we may ask, *Where are you, Lord? If you love me, why am I still in this situation?* But when we don't get immediate answers to our prayers, it does not mean that God does not love us. Though God may not come to our aid immediately, God is mindful of us and will come in time. And in God's timing, God's wisdom and love will shine through to us.

Prayer: Dear Lord, help us to remember that you love us always, even when things don't go the way we hope. Amen.

Enid Adah Nyinomujuni (Dar es Salaam, Tanzania)

Prayer Focus: THOSE WITH LOVED ONES IN
HOSPICE CARE

GOD-GIVEN GIFTS

SAT
AUG 28
2021

READ 1 Corinthians 12:4-11

You created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. . . . Your eyes saw my unformed body; all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.

— Psalm 139:13, 16 (NIV)

“I have my own church!” I shouted when I called to tell my parents that I had received an opportunity to play piano for a church full time. It was something I had not thought possible.

My mother began teaching me how to play the piano at a young age. As a child, I played in many recitals; but after high school, I stopped playing. It wasn't until I joined the church I am a member of now that I began playing again. Time stood

still as I played. One day, someone heard me playing and asked if I would play a song during the worship service. I agreed. After the service, several people

thanked me for playing and for sharing my talent. *My talent?*

When I read the scriptures for today, I am reminded that before we are fully formed, God knows our talents. Our God-given gifts are meant to be used to serve one another and to glorify God. Through the gift of music, I am able to praise God and share my faith with others. Thanks be to God for our gifts!

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help us to recognize our gifts and talents so that we may use them to serve one another and glorify your name. Amen.

Janet Pierce (Tennessee, USA)

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

SUN
AUG 29
2021

THE PERFECT CROSS

READ John 19:17-30

Jesus said, *“Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me.”*

— Luke 9:23 (NIV)

Sitting in jail, I have learned to occupy my time with things I normally would not do, such as creative writing and drawing. With my newfound Christian walk, I decided to draw a cross as a visual reminder of what Jesus did for me. I am a bit of a perfectionist; and since the jail allows only a pen

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

God loves me more than I could ever imagine.

(no pencils) and paper, the task was more difficult than I expected. Rulers are not allowed either, so using the notepad for a straightedge made it hard to measure

the lines for exact length and width. I also tried to use proper shading to make the wood appear to have age rings and knots, as if it had come from the lumberyard.

But as I struggled to draw the perfect cross, I realized that the cross Jesus carried probably wasn't perfect. It might have been weathered, with splits and edges that weren't perfectly straight. After hours of drawing, trying to get all the details perfect, I realized there were only two things perfect about Jesus' cross — Jesus himself and the fact that he died for the sins of us all. Thanks to Jesus' willingness to die, God has forgiven my imperfections. Every day, I can carry my cross in service to God, accepting God's love and grace.

Prayer: Dear God, thank you for loving us, especially when we do not feel lovable. Thank you for your forgiveness and grace. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Steven Paul Simmons (Texas, USA)

Prayer Focus: THOSE WHO FEEL PRESSURE
TO BE PERFECT

REDEMPTION

MON
AUG 30
2021

READ Psalm 31:19-24

*Praise be to the LORD, for he showed me
the wonders of his love.*

— Psalm 31:21 (NIV)

It happened in Soviet Ukraine in 1978. I worked in the glass factory and lived in the workers' dormitory. One day I was injured at work and was recovering in my room. Suddenly the door was thrown open, and I was surrounded by militia officers. They started asking questions about my next-door neighbor, Nikolaj. It turned out that he had distributed anti-Soviet leaflets and then committed suicide in front of the railway station.

Nikolaj was a quiet and friendly man, and the news shocked me deeply. His death led me to think about

the meaning of my life, and after a while I sank into a spiritual crisis. Knowing my anguish, God sent to our factory a young man who shared openly his faith in Christ. He helped me to find a church, where I decided to become a follower of Jesus.

That experience happened many years ago. Now I am happily married, and our children have found the same faith in Christ. I still remember my good neighbor, Nikolaj, who could not see any hope for his life in this world. And I still remember the young man who shared his faith with me and offered hope that changed my life. Through the grace of God, let's commit our lives to offering that same hope to our friends and neighbors.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
I can be a reminder of God's
grace for others.

Prayer: Dear God, lead us into your light, love, and eternal life. Amen.

Serhiy Lohinov (Ukraine)

TUES
AUG 31
2021

NATURE'S HEALING

READ Job 12:7-10

Light is sweet, and it pleases the eyes to see the sun.

— Ecclesiastes 11:7 (NIV)

A while ago, I suffered quite a few losses in a short period of time. Days were filled with sadness as sorrow after sorrow came my way. Every day seemed gray.

I would spend time in the early morning just outside my back door. I don't know what led me there, but I suspect it was God's loving provision. At the earliest hint of light, I went

to the patio and bathed myself in the sights, the sounds, the smells of nature. For an hour or more, I let God's creation soothe my melancholy.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

When I am hurting, God offers healing in unexpected ways.

As the sun crept slowly through the huge river birch, sometimes a breeze stirred the leaves. Always, the birds sang. The call of the Eurasian collared doves sounded like "Praise Je-sus! Praise Je-sus!" Some days the sky was blue and clear or had puffy white clouds floating about. Other days, the sky was streaked with orange and pink. Whatever the design of the day, it was beautiful and calming. The wonder of God's creation lifted my sadness and helped me through.

God cares when we hurt and sometimes provides healing in unexpected ways. As we keep ourselves open with expectation, God will give us the perfect balm for our sorrow. It could even be something like the early morning sky that has been there for us all along.

Prayer: Creator God, thank you for the wonder of your creation through which you mend our hurting hearts. Amen.

Pat Luffman Rowland (Tennessee, 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

JULY 7: *On the Train*

1. If you commute, how do you use that time? If you do not commute, what part of your daily routine would allow you to spend time in worship?
2. When have you found a community of worship in an unexpected place? How did you find that community? How did it enrich your life?
3. Have you ever had the opportunity to worship alongside someone who holds beliefs unlike your own? If so, what was that experience like? What can we learn from worshiping alongside people who hold beliefs different from our own?

4. How do you strive to be a witness of Christ's love to the world? How do your actions invite others to worship?
5. What do you find beautiful about interfaith community? What do you find difficult about it? In what ways would you like to see more diversity in your faith community? How might you take steps toward that end?

JULY 14: *Patient in Prayer*

1. Have you ever lived far from family, only seeing them occasionally? If so, what did you learn about family and connection from that circumstance? If not, what has being near your relatives taught you about family and connection?
2. Recall the "worst" present you ever received. What was it? When have you received a present that you only began to appreciate over time?
3. When you tire of praying for a certain person or situation, what scripture passages encourage you to persist? What spiritual practices help you to remain hopeful when you feel like your prayers aren't doing any good?
4. Today's writer changed his perspective on the bookmark after learning more about his grandmother's faith. Why does gaining deeper understanding often change our perspective? What biblical characters serve as examples of this for you?
5. When you pray for others, do you often see results right away? How do you remain patient in prayer? How are you and your faith affected when you pray for others?

JULY 21: *Bringing Out the Best*

1. Recall a time when missing only a small amount of something made a big difference. What can that situation teach you about both community and faith?
2. What scripture passages remind you of the importance of "adding" to those around you? In what ways do these passages help you? How do you apply them to your daily life?
3. What does it mean to you to be salt? How do you strive to be salt each day? In what ways do you find assurance that you are being salt to others?

4. When has someone used their faith to help bring out the best in you? What was your response? How did the experience change you? How can you strive to use your faith to help others in similar ways?
5. Name some ways you can join together with your siblings in faith to transform the flavor of life around the world.

JULY 28: *Don't Look Back*

1. When you read the story of Lot's wife, what do you think about her decision to look back? Do you understand why she might have done so? What do you think you would have done had you been in her place?
2. Recall a time when you struggled to move forward because you weren't able to grieve what you were leaving behind. What did you do to help yourself move forward? What role did your faith play in the situation?
3. What consequences have you experienced when you couldn't let go of the past and move forward? How does God comfort you in such times?
4. What scripture verses encourage you to have confidence in God's path for you? What verses remind you most of God's desire for our good? How do these verses equip us to deal with change?
5. Who in your life helps you keep your eyes focused on God's will for you? How does your faith community support you when you are trying to let go of something? How can you encourage others who are working to move forward?

AUGUST 4: *A Big Little Prayer*

1. Who has been a spiritual mentor for you? Name the most memorable lesson that they taught you. How has that lesson served you in your faith journey?
2. What do you think makes the prayer in today's meditation a "big little prayer"? What is your big little prayer? When do you pray it? How does it help you?
3. Do you ever feel the need to pray long prayers or to say certain things in your prayers? Why or why not? Is there a time

and place for different kinds of prayer? Do certain prayers help you more than others? Explain.

4. What scripture passages remind you of the importance of prayer and trusting God? Which biblical prayers stand out to you as examples of faithful prayer? What can you learn from them and apply to your prayer life?
5. What seeds of faith have you sowed recently? Name ways you have been intentional about sharing your faith with others. What role does prayer play when you are sharing your faith with others?

AUGUST 11: *In the Silence*

1. When have you needed to comfort someone but felt unsure of how to do so? How did you handle the situation? What was the outcome? What did you learn?
2. When you see someone in crisis, what is your response? Do you feel an instinct to shy away? How do you draw near and remain present with them? In what ways do you offer them God's love and comfort? In what ways is your response different depending on how well you know the person?
3. Are you encouraged to know that you can join God in bringing comfort to others, without having certain words or acting a certain way? How have you found this to be true in your life? Where in scripture do we see examples of this?
4. Do you agree that God often speaks most powerfully through silence? How do you hear God in silence? In what ways do you hear God speaking through others? How do you hope God speaks through you?
5. When do you feel most connected to God? When do you feel most connected to others? What shared experiences draw you closer to other people? What draws you closer to people outside your immediate community?

AUGUST 18: *The Best Path*

1. Recall a time when you felt that you knew the right thing to do and tried to force your way. Did you get your way? Was the outcome what you hoped for? What did you learn?

2. Do you think it is good to be independent and confident? Do you feel that you can be too independent and confident? How do you know when to be independent and confident and when to ask God for guidance? Are these mutually exclusive?
3. Does God's loving guidance ever frustrate you? How do you react when God guides you in a direction you were not hoping to go? What prayers, Bible passages, or spiritual practices help you to accept God's direction in your life?
4. Who in your life helps you to remember God's presence and to follow God's paths? Name some biblical characters who are good examples of following God's guidance. In what ways do you strive to help others who may be struggling to accept God's guidance?
5. How does your church discern and follow God's guidance? How does your church community encourage you to follow God's guidance? In what ways could it be more encouraging?

AUGUST 25: *Giving Back*

1. When you are going through difficult times, what are your prayers like? When you cry out to God, how does God respond?
2. What obstacles do you face when trying to find Christian community? How do you overcome those obstacles to find community? In what ways is your faith enriched by fellowship with other Christians?
3. Do you find tithing difficult? Do you think that it is important that we tithe? Why or why not? Are there ways to tithe other than giving money? Explain.
4. How do you give back to God? In what ways do you express your gratitude for God's blessings and grace? What Bible passages remind you of the importance of giving back to God joyfully and willingly?
5. To whom can you extend God's love and grace today? How can you give to others from what God has given you? In what ways can you better use your blessings to God's glory?

July 2021

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

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

August 2021

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

<i>SUN</i> 1	<i>MON</i> 2	<i>TUES</i> 3	<i>WED</i> 4	<i>THUR</i> 5	<i>FRI</i> 6	<i>SAT</i> 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				

*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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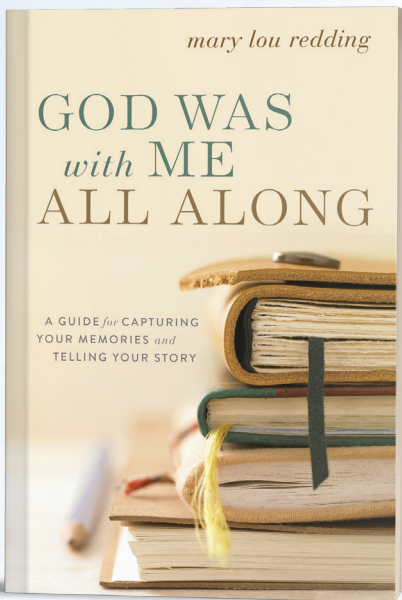
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MEET SOME OF OUR WRITERS

(Here and on p. 21.)



John Grube (p. 51) is a semi-retired attorney. He suffered a stroke in 2020 and is writing a book about the experience.



Ysanny Luciano Guzmán (p. 9) is a college student and wants to be a lawyer and a preacher.



Hitesh J. Solanki (p. 34) is a high school teacher. He and his wife have one young son.



Joanie Shawhan (p. 29) is an RN and ovarian cancer survivor who enjoys swimming, knitting, and time with friends.



Esa-Pekka Mattila (p. 12) enjoys walking, cycling, and skiing in nature with his wife. They have four grown children.



Sherry Graf (p. 52) is an author, missionary, and homeschool educator. She loves exploring outdoors in Colorado where she lives with her husband and three sons.

