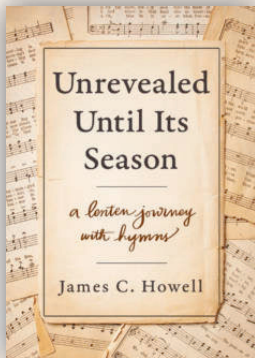


MARCH – APRIL 2023

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JAMES C. HOWELL

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MARCH – APRIL 2023

VOL. 89 NO. 1 ISSN 0042-0735

GST. #128363256

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## DAILY DEVOTIONAL GUIDE



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# THE UPPER ROOM®

## DAILY DEVOTIONAL GUIDE

MARCH – APRIL 2023

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**World Editor and Publisher:** Kimberly Orr

The Upper Room (ISSN 0042-0735) is published every second month and copyrighted 2022 by The Upper Room.

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Editorial offices: 873 Tiptol Street, Silverton, 0127.

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One-year subscription SA: R120

See page 77 for bulk purchases

For information please call 072 200 2741

Distribution: Africa Upper Room Ministries,

P O Box 376, Silverton, 0127 S.A.

**Note:** Australia-English (2): Regular Print, Large Print; Chinese (2): Traditional Chinese Regular Print, Website; Chinese/English (2): Hong Kong (Traditional Chinese), Malaysia (Simplified Chinese); English-United States (6): Regular Print, Large Print, Website, Electronic Mail, Braille, Cassette Tapes; Estonian (3): Regular Print, Website, Electronic Mail; French (3): Regular Print, Website, Radio; Hungarian (2): Regular Print, Website; Indonesian (2): Regular Print, Large Print; Japanese (2): Regular Print, Electronic Mail; Kiswahili (2): One-year Print, Radio; Korean/English (2): CLSK printing, CLMK printing; Polish (2): Regular Print, Website; Portuguese-Brazil (3): Regular Print, Large Print, Website; Spanish-Mexico (2): Regular Print, Large Print; Spanish-United States (2): Regular Print, Website; Thai (2): Regular Print, Website

## Who's to Blame?

*[Jesus'] disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Jesus answered, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him." – John 9:2-3 (NRSV)*

During this Lenten and Easter season, my prayer is that Christians will clearly hear God's desire for relationship and restoration among us. The disciples' question in the text above is still heard today, and all too often blame is assigned to those who suffer.

In both John 9 and Luke 13, Jesus decisively disconnects sinfulness from suffering. Jesus came to bring life and re-created hope to the world and to put back in order those things that had become out of order. His words and actions are examples for us today. We, as his followers, are given the gracious, Holy Spirit-enabled task of extending Jesus' ministry of restoration to the world around us.

In the story of the man born blind in John 9, Jesus demonstrates a redemptive disposition toward the people in the story. Truly it is God's intention that none should perish (see 2 Peter 3:9), and God always has in mind for us a future with a fully restored heaven and earth. As followers of Christ's example, we are therefore called to play an important role in this divine renovation project. As we continue to grow in grace during this holy season, may our first response to suffering be less about evaluating what went wrong and more about how we can help to make things right.

– *Kimberly Orr*

*World Editor and Publisher, The Upper Room*

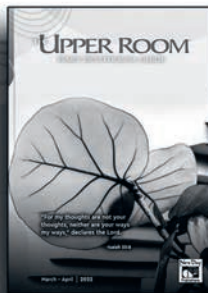
# Where the World Meets to Pray



Ilokano  
edition



Indonesian  
edition



Philippines-English  
edition

## Writers featured in this issue of *The Upper Room*:

- Linda Chandra (Indonesia) • Ayub Simanjuntak (Indonesia)
- Waspati Ken Wardani (Indonesia) • Renaldo Yosua (Indonesia)
  - Dave Zyronn A. Escalona (The Philippines)
- Kong Peng Sun (Singapore) • Agnes Wee (Singapore)

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*The Upper Room* help the World Meet to Pray.  
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## Freedom in Sacrifice

*Therefore will I divide Him a portion with the great [kings and rulers], and He shall divide the spoil with the mighty, because He poured out His life unto death, and [He let Himself] be regarded as a criminal and be numbered with the transgressors; yet He bore [and took away] the sin of many and made intercession for the transgressors (the rebellious).*

*Isaiah 53:12 – (AMPC)*

Many Christians are reminded throughout Lent of Jesus' tremendous act of selflessness and love that enabled him to free us all from sin. Similar to this, many people give up particular things in honour of this season as a gesture of sacrifice and to test their self-control.

Despite the fact that it is not required, many people observe Lent by giving something up because they find it to be a positive practice. Whatever way you choose to mark this time, remember that Jesus paid the price for our freedom, which continues to be our greatest reward as we demonstrate selflessness (2 Corinthians 3:17).

May we likewise be reminded throughout this Lent and Easter season that Jesus' sacrifice also sets us free from our shame. All of us have engaged in behaviour that we regret. We have been set free. As we work out our salvation, may we let go of the past and renounce behaviours that keep us in servitude (Philippians 2:12). According to Romans 8:1 (ESV) "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."

Ntombifuthi Mnisi  
Africa Editor (English)

## Cover Art Interpretation

### Tree of Life

**Artist:** John DeFrancesco (USA, Contemporary)

John DeFrancesco, the artist of this issue's cover, says, "As a painter, I have succeeded if I have completed a work through which someone may sense the fragrances, feel the warmth of the sun, hear the sounds of creatures or the rush of the water, and watch the colors reflecting one upon another in a dancing symphony of delight."\* Indeed, in his painting "Tree of Life" DeFrancesco has done exactly that. The shifting greens and browns of a tree in full foliage evoke the warm wind of a summer day and bring to life the sunbeams that highlight an almost human figure with arms outstretched. This image of Christ crucified reminds us that the abundant life God offers is made possible through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Through Jesus Christ, death no longer has the final word.

DeFrancesco's work not only offers assurance of eternal life through Christ but also reminds us that Christ's love "gives us hope for a better life right now for those in need."\*\* We are called to be Christ's hands and feet in the world, to share the good news and care for those in need. By distributing prints of this painting along with text that shares Christ's love, DeFrancesco has offered the hope of new life in Christ to people in prison and people experiencing homelessness. How will you offer hope to others in the coming weeks?

\* <https://www.johndefrancesco.com/biography/>

\*\* <https://www.johndefrancesco.com/tree-of-life/>

*Cover image courtesy of John DeFrancesco ©2018 John DeFrancesco. Prints of cover art are available from [jdefrancesco522@comcast.net](mailto:jdefrancesco522@comcast.net).*



# AFRICA UPPER ROOM MINISTRIES – HERE TO SERVE

## Our Mission

Offering every soul the opportunity to grow holistically through spending time with God every day.

*"So, faith comes from listening, but it's listening by means of Christ's message."  
Romans 10:17 (CEB)*






The Africa Upper Room Ministries team is excited to tell you about changes in 2023 intended to serve you better:

- Devotionals distribution will be reduced from six issues to four issues in 2023 and three issues in 2024.
- 2023 issues will be as follows:
  - Jan/Feb 2023
  - Mar/Apr 2023
  - May/June – Jul/Aug 2023
  - Sep/Oct – Nov/Dec 2023
- 2024 issues will be as follows:
  - Jan/Feb – Mar/Apr 2024
  - May/Jun – Jul/Aug 2024
  - Sep/Oct – Nov/Dec 2024
- Subscription fee will however remain the same at R120 per annum and R10 per month.
- Courier costs will increase to R100.
- From May/June – Jul/Aug 2023, bulk subscribers have the option of paying one full payment or paying over two months.
- Please update your email, contact details, and delivery address to [mraadt@aurm.co.za](mailto:mraadt@aurm.co.za), irrespective of whether they have changed or not by 28 February 2023.

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WEDNESDAY, MARCH 1, 2023

## Incredible Faithfulness

**READ: Philippians 4:4-7**

*This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. – 1 John 5:14 (NIV)*

When I receive a new issue of *The Upper Room*, I turn to the first page and draw a large T, like an accountant would use for debits and credits. On the left side, I write down the list of prayers and petitions that I want to present to God. They often include such things as an elderly aunt in a nursing home; a family member starting a new job or school; or the tendonitis affecting my right elbow.

On the right side, I write some things I am thankful for. They may include recent prayers which have been answered: “Thank you for a healthy newborn grandchild,” or “Thank you for healing my wife’s sprained ankle.” I also like to incorporate some long-standing blessings I have received from God through the years: “Thank you for protecting our home and our family,” or “Thank you for loving, Christian parents who raised me.”

Each morning, after reading the meditation for the day, I review my list and follow Paul’s admonition to present my prayers and petitions to God with thanksgiving. By the time I receive my next issue, I am often amazed at how many of my prayers and petitions have been moved to the thanksgiving side of the ledger. Tracking my prayers in this way has revealed to me the incredible faithfulness of God.

*Prayer: Thank you, Lord, for always hearing and answering our prayers, and for the many blessings you have given us. Amen.*

### Thought for the Day

Today, I will turn over my fears and troubles to God.

*(Mr.) Douglas L. McWhorter (Alabama, USA)*

**PRAYER FOCUS: THOSE SUFFERING FROM ANXIETY**

THURSDAY, MARCH 2, 2023

## Renewed in Christ

**READ: 2 Corinthians 4:7-18**

*We do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day.*

*– 2 Corinthians 4:16 (NIV)*

**M**y brother, a congressman and devoted public servant, suffered from Lewy body dementia (causes a progressive decline in mental abilities). It was painful to watch the disease take my brother from me as his body and mind deteriorated year by year, month by month, and sometimes day by day. Some days he could no longer remember who he had married or how old he was.

During this time, my brother was in a Bible study with two close friends who observed his decline. Near the end of his life, he had glimpses of heaven; he would talk to his deceased parents and grandparents and see light. In his final days, he assured his family that everything would be all right. As his body and mind approached their earthly end, my brother seemed to be at peace – a peace that surpassed understanding (Philippians 4:7).

Today's scripture reading comforted me. Although my brother had been wasting away for a long time, in Christ, his spirit was being made new each day. What a hopeful message for us all! As we age and our bodies begin to decline, the Bible assures us that "we are being renewed, day by day." until it is time for us to go home to our Lord and Saviour.

*Prayer: Loving God, even as our bodies fail us, comfort us with the knowledge that we are being renewed in spirit through the love of Christ. Amen.*

### Thought for the Day

Even as my body declines, my spirit is made new in Christ.

*(Ms.) Sheryl Ramstad (Minnesota, USA)*

**PRAYER FOCUS: PEOPLE SUFFERING FROM PHYSICAL PAIN**

**FRIDAY, MARCH 3, 2023**

## *Our Comforter*

**READ: John 14:15-21**

*I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever. – John 14:16 (KJV)*

I sat waiting to take my entrance exams for a second time. I had recently started seeking God's guidance again after many disappointments, and I felt excited because I knew I could ask God anything. I asked that the Holy Spirit would sit beside me, and immediately I knew that the Spirit was there helping me. That was the first step in refreshing my relationship with God.

God has given us the Holy Spirit as our comforter. But if we fail to recognise the Spirit dwelling with us and in us, we miss out on the comfort and company we have on our journey. In today's reading from John, Jesus explains that we can know and have a relationship with the Spirit. We do this through recognition of the Spirit's presence, along with consistent communication and fellowship. When we maintain our connection to the Spirit, we are better able to follow the Spirit's leading and power in our lives. It is a great joy to know the One who dwells within us.

*Prayer: Dear God, thank you for your presence in our lives through the Spirit. Help us to maintain our relationship with you no matter how busy we become. In Jesus' name. Amen.*

### Thought for the Day

The Spirit of God comforts me and dwells within me.

*(Mrs.) Maudlyn O. Adeleke (Federal Capital Territory, Nigeria)*

**PRAYER FOCUS: SOMEONE TAKING AN EXAM**

**SATURDAY, MARCH 4, 2023**

## God Waits Patiently

**READ: 1 Corinthians 13:4-7**

*The LORD is waiting to be merciful to you, and will rise up to show you compassion. The LORD is a God of justice; happy are all who wait for him. – Isaiah 30:18 (CEB)*

**M**y two-year-old pet dog loves to play fetch. Over and over again she brings me the ball, or the frisbee, or the bone, or even the sock to throw for her. If I am busy, she patiently waits to get my attention. As soon as I put a book down, or a commercial comes on TV, she pops back up, dropping a toy at my feet for me to throw. She never grows tired of it.

This morning I am enjoying coffee in my study and trying to read my Bible as she yet again brings me the ball to throw down the hall. I tell her to leave me alone and return to my reading, which, ironically, is about God's patience – for which I am so grateful. It occurs to me that people continually bring all of their problems and worries to God who never, ever grows weary of us.

Even when we don't make the time, God is always present, lovingly waiting for our attention. God is great indeed!

*Prayer: Dear God, thank you for being patient with us, even when we are impatient with you. We pray as your Son taught us, "Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen." (Matthew 6:9-13, KJV).*

### Thought for the Day

God is patient with me, and I will be patient with others.

*(Mr.) Jim Weems (Mississippi, USA)*

**PRAYER FOCUS: FOR PATIENCE**

**SUNDAY, MARCH 5, 2023**

## 2nd Sunday in Lent

**READ: Romans 12:9-18**

*Love each other like the members of your family. Be the best at showing honor to each other. – Romans 12:10 (CEB)*

When my husband was diagnosed with cancer last October, I was suddenly more aware of life's finite timeline. My husband's next breath wasn't guaranteed. But, then again, neither was mine.

Over the years, I have heard countless stories from friends and family who wished their last words with a loved one had been different. Some parted in disagreement, frustration, or silence. Others spent a lifetime waiting to hear "I love you." from a mother, father, grandparent, or sibling.

With my husband's cancer diagnosis, I felt compelled to start saying "I love you." not only to my family but also to my friends. Now I'm that friend who moves in first for the hug. I say, "I love you." as I embrace them. I yell it across parking lots. I say it on the phone. I type it in texts. I never want my family and friends to wonder how I feel. Every chance I get I say, "I love you."

More important, I tell my friends and family that God loves them. I speak of God's mercy and grace. I give my testimony. I remind them that God is always good and that God is the reason that I end my conversations with "I love you."

*Prayer: Dear God, thank you for loving us and teaching us the importance of loving others. Amen.*

### Thought for the Day

Because God loves me, I will never miss an opportunity to tell others I love them.

*(Mrs.) Christy Bass Adams (Florida, USA)*

**PRAYER FOCUS: MY FRIENDS AND FAMILY**

MONDAY, MARCH 6, 2023

## Filled Up

**READ: John 4:7-14**

*Jesus said, "Whoever drinks from the water that I will give will never be thirsty again. The water that I give will become in those who drink it a spring of water that bubbles up into eternal life."*

*– John 4:14 (CEB)*

Before I knew God, I thought I could fill the void within me through my achievements. I was sure that getting good grades in school, having wonderful friends, travelling, having a boyfriend, or getting a job would finally solve everything. It was painful as each of these hopes failed to fill the emptiness I felt.

Eventually I accepted that it was irrational and cruel to expect humans to fulfill something that only God can. Accepting that we all have limitations is liberating and allows God's love to fill those spaces. Where our capabilities end, God's love stretches out to carry us.

Thankfully, God's love has filled the void that I felt. Now my joy and fulfillment are with me in the present rather than in the future, and I don't depend solely on my achievements, circumstances, or loved ones. I can no longer imagine my life without God in it. And as I have grown in my faith, I have come to recognise God's presence throughout my life. God has always been faithful, even when I was not. Christ offers the water that will quench our thirst. And when we go to God with humble hearts, God will welcome us.

*Prayer: Faithful God, remind us that your love can fill the empty spaces in our lives. Amen.*

### Thought for the Day

When I feel a void in my life, I will seek God's abundant love to fill it.

*(Miss) Rincy Mathew (Chhattisgarh, India)*

**PRAYER FOCUS: SOMEONE WHO PUTS THEIR VALUE IN ACHIEVEMENTS**

TUESDAY, MARCH 7, 2023

## First Steps

**READ: Acts 3:1-10**

*Jumping up, he began to walk around. He entered the temple with them, walking, leaping, and praising God. – Acts 3:8 (CEB)*

Waking up in the early hours of the morning is hard for me. However, waking up in those early hours of the morning with a worshiping soul and a heart of praise is even harder. As a tertiary student who is often up late, upon waking, I usually think, *It is way too early for my day to begin.* That mindset made the mornings miserable. However, when I set my focus on God before I roll out of bed, those first steps of the day become more joyful.

The first steps of the man healed in Acts 3 were full of worship. Later in Acts 4:22, we see that the man was more than 40 years old. He had never taken a step in 40 years! He was healed by a miracle, and he praised Jesus as he began to walk.

Waking up every morning is a miracle in itself, and that's worth celebrating. Each new day is a gift from our gracious God.

*Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank you for the gift of your grace and for the gift of each new day. Help us to worship you and reflect your love with each step we take. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.*

### Thought for the Day

How will I give thanks to God for each new day?

*(Mr.) Truman Culp (Texas, USA)*

**PRAYER FOCUS: TERTIARY STUDENTS**



WEDNESDAY, MARCH 8, 2023

## Important Roles

**READ: Romans 16:1-15**

*Paul wrote, "I ask you also, my loyal companion, help these women, for they have struggled beside me in the work of the gospel, together with Clement and the rest of my coworkers, whose names are in the book of life." – Philippians 4:3 (NRSV)*

Are you familiar with the names Jochebed, Shiphrah, and Puah? I didn't readily recognise these names, but they were key players in Moses' birth story in Exodus 1. Jochebed was Moses' birth mother. Shiphrah and Puah were the midwives believed to have attended to his birth, also known to have defied the Pharaoh's order regarding newborn boys. Yet the names of these courageous women of God are not widely repeated or familiar. In today's scripture, the apostle Paul expressed his thanks to the church's faithful workers – many of them women whose names may not be familiar to us.

Likewise, we may not know the names of all the women who make our daily lives a bit easier. Today, on International Women's Day, let us take a moment to recognise the women who are there for us each day such as customer service representatives, retail assistants, bus drivers, postal workers, traffic pointsmen, police officers, and other first responders. They all play important roles in our lives and communities. Let us give them a heartfelt "thank you" or a silent prayer of gratitude. We may not know their names, but let's never forget how important they are.

*Prayer: God of courage, thank you for all your workers here on earth. May we never take anyone for granted. Remind us to remain grateful, as Paul did, for the contributions of those around us. Amen.*

### Thought for the Day

Every person is important to God.

*(Mrs.) Monica A. Andermann (New York, USA)*

**PRAYER FOCUS: WOMEN WHO MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN MY LIFE**

**THURSDAY, MARCH 9, 2023**

## “So Help Me, God”

**READ: Joshua 1:1-9**

*I call on you, my God, for you will answer me; turn your ear to me and hear my prayer. – Psalm 17:6 (NIV)*

I have noticed a tradition in the United States where newly elected public servants swear an oath ending with the words, “So help me, God.” How relevant those words are! These people are saying that they cannot carry out the tasks of their office without God’s help.

I have followed the spirit of those words ever since I came to know I am a child of God. Every time I embark on a task which looks difficult and daunting, I speak those words to God, and then proceed with the task confidently, knowing that God will help me to accomplish it. Joshua 1:9 says it clearly: “Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go.” God encouraged Joshua to lead his people into the Promised Land. It was no easy task, but Joshua accomplished it with God’s presence and power.

Whatever task we have before us – in our family, at work, in the community, or at church – we can be assured that God is with us and will guide us. Psalm 17:6 says, “I call on you, my God, for you will answer me.” When we pray and place our tasks into God’s hands, we can complete our work trusting in God’s help.

*Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank you for your constant presence with us. Help us look to you for help at all times. In Jesus’ name, we pray. Amen.*

### Thought for the Day

I will begin every task with prayer.

*(Mr.) Kong Peng Sun (Singapore)*

**PRAYER FOCUS: NEWLY ELECTED PUBLIC SERVANTS**

**FRIDAY, MARCH 10, 2023**

## *The Faith of Children*

**READ: Matthew 19:13-15**

*Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these."*

*– Matthew 19:14 (NIV)*

When I was young, my mother and I went to church only to attend the funerals of loved ones. I had very little knowledge of Jesus. But that changed when I was five years old and Mama remarried. It was 1943, and my new dad was a soldier. We moved into an apartment near his military base, and things began to change for the better.

When our landlady invited us to her church, I wasn't thrilled. But I was in for a surprise when we visited for the first time. The people were warm and welcoming, and I loved the music. The songs about Jesus excited me. I soaked it all up and fell in love with Jesus.

The next day I found a pencil and paper and asked Mama how to spell "Jesus." I carefully wrote his name down and put the paper in my pocket. Every day I would turn the paper over in my hands, and I felt warmed and comforted. It eventually dissolved, worn out by those loving caresses.

I am now 83 years old and have seen many things dissolve. But I've learned that some things, like the love and comfort I still receive from Jesus, never go away.

*Prayer: Dear God, thank you for the people who have taught us about you and your son, Jesus. Remind us that no matter what we face, your love and presence remain steadfast. Amen.*

### Thought for the Day

Though I will watch many things dissolve in life, Jesus will be with me always.

*(Ms.) Jo Ann Johnson (Texas, USA)*

**PRAYER FOCUS: PEOPLE ATTENDING CHURCH FOR THE FIRST TIME**

**SATURDAY, MARCH 11, 2023**

## Message of Peace

**READ: 2 Corinthians 1:3-7**

*Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares. – Hebrews 13:2 (KJV)*

**M**y wife and I drove to the promenade in Ocean City, New Jersey, knowing that my sister would soon succumb to cancer at the age of 44. The constant sound of the waves has always comforted me, and Ocean City was one of my sister's favourite places. As we sat on the bench, sunset turned the sky magnificent shades of pink and blue.

For some reason I felt all would be well. Turning toward the rock jetty protruding from the shoreline, I saw a man dressed in traditional Scottish attire. He began to play "Amazing Grace" on the bagpipes. I could not believe what I was seeing and hearing – my favourite hymn, played with such feeling and emotion! I came to believe that this man must have been an angel sent by God as a message of peace and comfort to me.

As he finished and headed down the beach, I watched him intently, wondering if he would disappear into thin air. Hebrews 13:2 says, "Be not forgetful to entertain strangers; for thereby some have entertained angels unawares." I believe we all have opportunities to bring God's comfort and peace to others by volunteering, making a dinner, giving a gift, sending a card, or making a call in a time of need. In these ways we may help someone receive the peace and comfort only God can give.

*Prayer: Dear Lord, thank you for always knowing our hearts and sending your love to us in the way we most need it. Amen.*

### Thought for the Day

God knows my needs and will comfort me.

*(Mr.) Sam Siligato (New Jersey, USA)*

**PRAYER FOCUS: THOSE NEEDING STRENGTH IN A TIME OF SORROW**

**SUNDAY, MARCH 12, 2023**

## 3rd Sunday in Lent

**READ: Joshua 3:7-17**

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

*– Joshua 1:9 (NIV)*

I stood staring at the far side of the 184 kilometers long swinging pedestrian bridge that spanned a wide river far below. My fear of heights kept me rooted in place, unable to enjoy an adventure. My daughter promised not to make the bridge swing too much and encouraged me to face my fears by taking a few steps out onto the bridge. I hesitated a few minutes longer. The bridge appeared sturdy with thick, metal handrails. I watched someone stride across without pause or concern. The bridge swayed less than I expected.

One step at a time I began to move toward the other side. I paused in the middle to survey the wonderful view only visible from this new perspective. Then I completed my journey to the other side – one step at a time.

In Joshua 3, God commanded the Israelites to cross the Jordan River so they could enter the Promised Land. God instructed the priests to step into the river. They obeyed God's command to stand still in the raging flood waters before God miraculously stopped the river's flow and the people crossed on dry ground. We face many frightening moments, most of them beyond our control. Placing our trust in God helps us to conquer those fears and move forward.

*Prayer: Dear God, give us courage to face our fears and to trust that with your help, we can move forward – one step at a time. Amen.*

### Thought for the Day

What fears do I need God to help me conquer today?

*(Mrs.) Carol Harrison (Saskatchewan, Canada)*

**PRAYER FOCUS: FOR COURAGE TO FACE MY FEARS**

**MONDAY, MARCH 13, 2023**

## *How Much Is Enough?*

**READ: Matthew 14:15-21**

*A generous person will prosper; whoever refreshes others will be refreshed. – Proverbs 11:25 (NIV)*

When my husband, Joe, and I were in our late twenties with a two-year-old daughter and a son on the way, Joe was fishing in a tournament. He noticed his right eye clouding, and he realised he needed medical attention. The diagnosis was a torn retina, and, under the care of a wonderful physician, Joe underwent many surgeries over the next two years. Ultimately his retina could not be repaired, and the vision in one eye was lost.

To thank the physician for his excellent care, we wanted to share some of our fish. I took a few packages from the freezer and placed them in a cooler. Later I was prompted to put in another package. The prompting continued until I said, “OK, Lord, I hear you. These are your fish; we were just lucky enough to catch them. If you want all the fish, nothing would please us more.” After all the fish were packed, a peace came over me and I knew the Lord was pleased.

How many fish were enough? By my standards, a few packages. By God’s standards, the whole catch. In our relationships, family time, projects serving our community, and church, God asks us to give “the whole catch” in everything we do.

*Prayer: Generous God, thank you for continuing to teach us to give as you have given to us. Amen.*

### Thought for the Day

When I think I have given enough, I still can give more.

*(Mrs.) Sandy Hall (Missouri, USA)*

**PRAYER FOCUS: PEOPLE WITH VISION LOSS**

TUESDAY, MARCH 14, 2023

## Our Promise

**READ: Romans 8:31-39**

*Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?  
– Romans 8:35 (NIV)*

I was eager to speak with my family in Mexico by phone. I am currently in prison and have limited phone privileges. My wife was not available at the time of the call, but I talked with my parents, then my son, and finally my daughter.

As I was talking to her, I detected something different in her tone of voice. Suddenly she started to cry and struggled to tell me that the fish I had given her for her birthday had died. I tried to console her and explain why that might have happened, but she didn't want to talk anymore. She simply said, "Bye, Daddy. God take care of you."

After the call, I returned to my cell. I was overcome with sadness because I love my daughter, and it broke my heart to hear her cry. As I started to read my Bible, I realised how fragile we all are. But at the same time, I am ever grateful for the promise referenced in Romans 8:38-39 that nothing can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ. We know God will always care for us – God's unconditional love is our bond and our promise.

*Prayer: Merciful God, when we cry out to you, reassure us of your promise that nothing will separate us from your incredible love. Amen.*

### Thought for the Day

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“See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God!” (1 John 3:1).

*(Mr.) Camacho De La Luz Armando (Florida, USA)*

**PRAYER FOCUS: THOSE IN PRISON AND THEIR FAMILIES**

**WEDNESDAY, MARCH 15, 2023**

## Support One Another

**READ: 1 John 3:16-24**

*Serve one another humbly in love. – Galatians 5:13 (NIV)*

At our church in Lagos, Laity Week is a time for every parishioner to visit with the sick and suffering. We go in groups to spend time in hospitals, elder-care homes, hospices, prisons, orphanages, and charitable organisations. We witness a sea of suffering humanity. We give our support by giving our time and collecting our resources to help each person who is suffering. What consolation it gives a lonely person to have the cheerful company of believers who bring the message of Christ's love in words and action!

Lent is the time to redouble our efforts to support one another. We devote extra time and effort to our families. We welcome new neighbours. We soothe those who are anxious. Putting more love into our work, we try to be more understanding of our coworkers.

During Lent we contemplate the face of Jesus in every face we see. We see Jesus in those who are heartbroken, despised, sorrowful, or rejected. We offer our support and allow the Christ to work through us. As we open our hearts, we receive the grace to stand with our brothers and sisters and share their burdens – not just during Lent, but every day of our lives.

*Prayer: Merciful Father, fill our hearts with your love so that we can share it with all who are suffering. Amen.*

### Thought for the Day

I will seek the face of Jesus in every person I meet today.

*(Mrs.) Nenye Andy-Eke (Lagos, Nigeria)*

**PRAYER FOCUS: PEOPLE RECEIVING HOSPICE CARE**



THURSDAY, MARCH 16, 2023

## By God's Grace

**READ: Ephesians 1:3-10**

*[God] destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will. – Ephesians 1:5 (NRSV)*

Our family embraced adoption several years ago, not as a second-best solution but as God's plan for forming our family. Whether children have come into our homes through biological birth or adoption, love is what makes a family.

Our son, now 17 years old, came to our family on 9 September, 2006. I became his father the first day I laid eyes on his little face in a picture. It is always such a joy to hear from my son's lips the words, "Dad, I love you." a vivid reminder of God's love for me.

One of my greatest fears as an adult was becoming a father since I was a fatherless child myself. What kind of example or guidance would I give a child? It turned out that the shared experience of not having a biological father present in our lives created a stronger connection between my son and me. I can relate to so many of his questions and concerns.

God provided what I needed, and little by little all my fears melted away through love and patience. Being a father is an ongoing process of learning from new experiences and challenges, and I am not perfect. Every day I pray for God to help me be the best father I can be for my son so that he will have the tools and the assurance that God is there for him too.

*Prayer: O Lord, be with children who are waiting for a loving home and with families waiting for a child to call their own. Amen.*

### Thought for the Day

I am blessed to be part of God's family.

*(Mr.) Migdiel E. Pérez (Tennessee, USA)*

**PRAYER FOCUS: FAMILIES IN THE PROCESS OF ADOPTION**

FRIDAY, MARCH 17, 2023

## God's Surprises

**READ: Matthew 6:8-15**

*Your Father knows what you need before you ask him.*

*– Matthew 6:8 (NIV)*

I studied Greek in my tertiary years to fulfill a language requirement. I chose a biblical language because it would help me in understanding scripture. I enjoyed the classes as well as the chance to practice Greek with my classmates.

Years later, after an unsuccessful marriage and with five young children to support, I was looking for a job where I could work from home. Working from home was not common at that time. My mother was a medical transcriptionist, and I was good at typing. So I set out to learn medical terminology in order to establish a career. As I began, I was delighted to see that I already knew a lot of the terminology because the Greek roots were familiar to me. What a joy! In a time of insecurity, it felt like an affirmation from God when I realised I had been preparing for this new role without knowing it.

Now, as I walk through life's many twists and turns, I can trust God's purposes more easily. I trust that challenging times are part of a bigger, perhaps divine plan. Looking for God's surprises makes life's journey richer.

*Prayer: O God, help us remember the ways you have worked in our lives, and give us vision and wisdom to see what you are doing now. Amen.*

### Thought for the Day

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God is at work in all things.

*(Ms.) Becky Sutherland (South Carolina, USA)*

**PRAYER FOCUS: SOMEONE LEARNING A NEW LANGUAGE**

**SATURDAY, MARCH 18, 2023**

## God Who Saves

**READ: Luke 19:1-10**

*The Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost. – Luke 19:10 (NIV)*

In my work as a nurse, I was caring for an elderly, dying patient. He was a grumpy man who would curse those caring for him. One day we were by his bedside as his doctor came in. I had told the doctor about our patient's unhappiness, so he offered the man some medication to improve his mood. But he angrily refused to take it.

At mealtime I went back to feed him and said to him, "Something is bothering you. Would you like to talk about it?" He replied, "No! No use!" Then I found the courage to ask, "May I pray for you?" His reply was even angrier: "No!" I continued feeding him in silence. However, in my spirit I felt that the man regretted his abrupt reply.

The next morning, I returned to work and had to medicate him right away. He was deteriorating quickly, and he cried out, "Help me." I asked him, "How can I help you?" He replied, "Pray for me!"

I don't remember what I prayed. It felt a bit clumsy, but I trust God worked through that prayer. I never had another opportunity to pray with the man again. Later he slipped into unconsciousness and died.

I have continued to pray for my patients and to trust God to care for them too.

*Prayer: Thank you, God, for your amazing love and your gift of grace for us all. In Jesus' name. Amen.*

### Thought for the Day

God loves to care for God's children.

*(Ms.) Johanna (Finland)*

**PRAYER FOCUS: NURSES**

**SUNDAY, MARCH 19, 2023**

## 4th Sunday in Lent

**READ: Acts 16:1-5**

*Paul wrote to Timothy, "You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus." – 2 Timothy 2:1 (NIV)*

The life of the apostle Paul was a remarkable one – his dramatic conversion from a Pharisee who persecuted Christians to a leader of the early church; his many letters; his courage in the face of opposition; and most of all, his incredible faith in Jesus Christ. As he wrote in Philippians, "To live is Christ, to die is gain." (Philippians 1:21).

I was part of a recent Bible study on Paul's letters to Timothy that revealed another attribute of his amazing life. From our discussion I gained a new appreciation for how Paul mentored his young companion. We can imagine all that Paul taught Timothy as they travelled together on several missionary trips. Then as Paul approached the end of his life, he put aside his own needs and took time to write letters of encouragement to Timothy, urging him to remain true to the gospel message that Paul lived to the fullest.

The story of Paul and Timothy is a good lesson for all of us. We all know younger people whom we can reach out to and mentor in the walk of faith. Paul's life is a great reminder to be more intentional about this opportunity, doing our part to encourage and equip others as they follow Christ.

*Prayer: Dear Father, thank you for the gift of your son, Jesus Christ. Help us to share this gift with others and to encourage them on their faith journey. Amen.*

### Thought for the Day

Whom can I encourage in the walk of faith today?

*(Mr.) John D. Bown (Minnesota, USA)*

**PRAYER FOCUS: YOUNG PEOPLE IN MY COMMUNITY**

**MONDAY, MARCH 20, 2023**

## God Gave Me Strength

**READ: Psalm 28:6-9**

*The LORD is my strength and my shield; my heart trusts in him, and he helps me. – Psalm 28:7 (NIV)*

I was in my final year of university and about to present my thesis. I did not have a family member present because my grandfather, whom I had lived with for four years, was in poor health and several of my family members were caring for him.

While I was waiting among my schoolmates and their family members, my sister called and told me that our grandfather had died. I began to sob. Grief and worry for my family flooded my mind, and I was so overwhelmed that I collapsed and was taken to the sickbay.

My father called to tell me that if I chose not to present my thesis, he would support my decision. However, this would mean that the past academic year would have been wasted. The words of Philippians 4:13 came to me: “I can do all this through him who gives me strength.” I centred my thoughts and asked God to help me. I was filled with a peace that I can’t explain, and I decided to present my thesis.

Throughout the experience, I felt a deep connection to God, who provided the strength I needed. My friends, family, and professors were astonished. I could only say: “God gave me the strength.”

*Prayer: Eternal God, thank you for your abiding presence and for your word that reminds us to take heart and rely on you. Help us to seek you at all times and in all situations. In the name of Jesus. Amen.*

### Thought for the Day

God is the true source of my strength.

*(Mrs.) Pilar González (Coquimbo, Chile)*

**PRAYER FOCUS: STUDENTS ABOUT TO GRADUATE**

TUESDAY, MARCH 21, 2023

## Draw Near

**READ: James 4:1-10**

*Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you.  
– James 4:8 (NRSV)*

When I was a child I noticed that my parents and family members embraced, praised, and sought after God only on major holidays or when hard times arose. We would go to church a couple of times each month, but there was a clear line between church life and home life; we rarely mixed the two.

As I got older, this practice didn't make sense to me. How could we treat the God who gives us life with such disregard that we come to him only on holidays or when we're in some kind of trouble?

As I have grown in my faith, I have learned an important lesson. The more time we give to God, the closer to God we become. God is worthy of all our attention, not just on certain days. The book of James says, "Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you." We don't need to wait until something goes wrong to seek God's presence. We can embrace God's presence in the good times and bad. True peace comes to us when we commit to staying near to God and God's way.

*Prayer: Dear Lord, in a world of distractions, keep our eyes open to find the true peace and security that come from you. Amen.*

### Thought for the Day

In both good and bad times I will draw close to God.

*(Mr.) Zach Schaar (Ohio, USA)*

**PRAYER FOCUS: FOR COMMITMENT TO DAILY PRAYER**

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 22, 2023

## Resilience and Brokenness

**READ: Ecclesiastes 3:1-8**

*There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens. – Ecclesiastes 3:1 (NIV)*

In the winter I often walk through the woods with my dog. To make paths for us, sometimes I break off branches that are in the way. Most of them snap and easily break off, but some are so resilient that no matter what I do, they bend but don't break.

I used to think that I too should never break. I thought I should be so grounded in and sustained by my faith that in any circumstance, I could bend without breaking. But then in the spring, I witnessed the broken branches beautifully sprouting new growth. I realised that being resilient is worthwhile, but allowing myself to be broken could have its advantages too. Being pushed into new growth expands my perspective, possibilities, and potential. When I let go of old patterns that no longer serve me, new patterns can take their place.

This has been a challenging year. While I have maintained an underlying resilience, I have also experienced moments of great brokenness. Being faithful doesn't always come with clear answers. Maybe there is a time to be resilient and a time to be broken. Perhaps we can embody both resilience and brokenness at the same time. Our spiritual journey just might require both.

*Prayer: Dear God, help us to welcome both resilience and brokenness. Create new growth in us so that we may reach our highest potential. Amen.*

### Thought for the Day

Brokenness allows for new and beautiful growth.

*(Ms.) Sue Konkel (Wisconsin, USA)*

**PRAYER FOCUS: TO SEEK NEW GROWTH**

THURSDAY, MARCH 23, 2023

## Called to Write

**READ: Revelation 1:9-20**

*I heard behind me a loud voice that sounded like a trumpet. It said, "Write down on a scroll whatever you see."  
– Revelation 1:10-11 (CEB)*

One afternoon I was feeling exhausted after the work of teaching primary school online from home during the pandemic. Suddenly, today's scripture verse echoed in my mind: *Write whatever you see.*

I didn't consider myself a writer, so I was particularly struck by this thought. I kept pondering the meaning of this verse, and deep inside, I felt that God was calling me to do something, but I didn't know what.

As I prayed and asked the Holy Spirit for guidance, I felt reassured. I shared my experience with my wife, and she encouraged me to obey God's call. So I did. I started by writing down my experience of following Jesus in a country where Christians are in the minority and shared my writing on my blog and with other publications. To my surprise, people started to read my words and told me they had been blessed by my writing.

From this experience, I have learned that the Holy Spirit can work in any situation. God will always find a way to spread the good news of Christ.

*Prayer: Dear Jesus, thank you for speaking to us and guiding us in the way we should go. Open our ears to hear your voice. Amen.*

### Thought for the Day

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What new ministry is God calling me to?

*(Mr.) Ayub Simanjuntak (West Java, Indonesia)*

**PRAYER FOCUS: WRITERS**



**FRIDAY, MARCH 24, 2023**

## God's Good Guidance

**READ: Isaiah 55:6-13**

*Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path.  
– Psalm 119:105 (NIV)*

As an attorney, my job often involves arguing my client's case before a judge. This requires a lot of time, preparation, thought, and research. Sometimes the judge rules in my client's favour, but not always. It is disappointing when things don't go our way, but generally we must accept the judge's ruling.

I think it is easy for us to approach prayer like an argument before a judge. When we pray, we may try to give God reasons and explanations for why our prayers should be answered a certain way. But no matter how convincing we think our arguments are, if our desires don't line up with God's will, we are not likely to get the result that we want. While this may be discouraging for a time, we can trust that God's ways are higher than our ways. God has all the facts – many of which we may not be aware of. We can be assured that God's answers are always for our good. And when we trust God's direction, we will always find the right path.

*Prayer: Dear God, thank you for your guidance. Help us trust you to lead us to the path you have prepared for us. Amen.*

### Thought for the Day

I can trust that God's answers to my prayers will lead me on the right path.

*(Mrs.) Valerie Hays (Oklahoma, USA)*

**PRAYER FOCUS: ATTORNEYS AND JUDGES**

**SATURDAY, MARCH 25, 2023**

## *Finding Encouragement*

**READ: Jeremiah 18:1-5**

*The vessel he was making of clay was spoiled in the potter's hand, and he reworked it into another vessel, as seemed good to him.*

*– Jeremiah 18:4 (NRSV)*

I was brought up in a Jewish home, but on Easter Sunday when I was 50 years old, I was baptised. The Holy Spirit entered my life, and I became a new Christian.

One day I went to my favourite café and found *The Upper Room* on the table. I read every story for the next month. I knew the Lord intended for me to find it, and it encouraged my new walk with Christ and my thirst for understanding.

Eleven years later, a friend and I were walking around a nearby university campus and found a small chapel. *The Upper Room* was on a table inside. I instantly remembered it and told my friend about my first copy. I took one home. As I read the real-life stories from people around the world who have a special relationship with Jesus, I was united with the writers.

Over time, I came to realise that I do not have to give up my Jewish traditions to have a relationship with Christ. Walking side by side with Christ has helped me find inner peace and also peace in my relationships. And the Lord brought the stories in *The Upper Room* into my life at just the right moment.

*Prayer: Dear Lord, thank you for the people and stories that encourage our faith. Help us to follow the path toward love that you have laid out for us. Amen.*

### Thought for the Day

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Every day I will look for the miracles that the Lord sends my way.

*(Ms.) Claudia Merle Hochberg (Texas, USA)*

**PRAYER FOCUS: READERS OF THE UPPER ROOM**

**SUNDAY, MARCH 26, 2023**

## 5th Sunday in Lent

**READ: Colossians 3:1-4**

*We fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.*

*– 2 Corinthians 4:18 (NIV)*

Our deck was damaged in 2020 by the strongest typhoon on record at that time. After the storm, I tried to use a hammer and nails to repair it. But I wasn't strong enough and the nails still stuck out from the boards. My dad took over and drove the nails all the way in. As I watched him work, I asked why it was so important to ensure the nails were completely hammered in. He reminded me of how the second most powerful typhoon in the world had blown through seven years before. This stressed the importance of securely fastening the boards since more storms would likely come our way.

When Paul said to fix our eyes not on what is seen but on what is unseen, he understood how easily we can shift our focus to the temporal distractions around us. When we become distracted, we are like loose boards, unable to withstand the storm. When we firmly fix our eyes on the Lord, as securely as a nailed-down board, we do not need to fear any storm. In the Lord, we are secure.

*Prayer: Dear Lord, help us not to place our focus on what is temporary, but rather to fix our eyes and hearts firmly on you. Amen.*

### Thought for the Day

No matter what I face, I am made stronger when I focus on God.

*(Mr.) Dave Zyronn A. Escalona (Batangas, Philippines)*

**PRAYER FOCUS: THE PEOPLE OF THE PHILIPPINES**

**MONDAY, MARCH 27, 2023**

## *Giving Thanks*

**READ: 1 Corinthians 12:12-26**

*Give us this day our daily bread. – Matthew 6:11 (NRSV)*

Eating breakfast one morning, I thought of these words from the Lord's Prayer: "Give us this day our daily bread." I suddenly became aware of my gratitude for the many people who were responsible for my cereal and milk, my banana, and my cup of coffee. I was humbled as I imagined the many hands labouring to secure my meal.

I thanked God for the provision of food and for all the people who had been involved. In gratitude, I prayed for the farmers who grew and harvested the grains, fruit, and coffee and for those who raised and milked the cows. And I prayed for all the people – factory workers, truckers, grocers, and many more – whose work made it possible for me to receive these gifts.

We are interdependent, as God created us to be. We are blessed every day by many people we will never know. Being aware of that connection, my food was sweeter that morning, and my heart was full of praise.

*Prayer: Thank you, God, for our daily bread and for the people responsible for bringing it to our tables. Amen.*

### Thought for the Day

Each day I am blessed by many people I will never know.

*(Ms.) Sybil Austin Skakle (North Carolina, USA)*

**PRAYER FOCUS: FARMERS**

**TUESDAY, MARCH 28, 2023**

## *I Can Do All Things*

**READ: Philippians 4:10-13**

*I can do all things through [Christ] who strengthens me.  
– Philippians 4:13 (NRSV)*

**I**n the last week of my dad’s life, he didn’t complain as he lay in the ICU. Instead, he wanted to be sure that I was getting enough rest at night and that I understood how to handle the affairs of his home. Some days he asked to hear scripture read aloud. He loved Philippians 4:13, “I can do all things through [Christ] who strengthens me.” He repeated those words with a calm confidence that his Good Shepherd would lead him along the last stretch of his path on earth.

The apostle Paul had experienced a series of unusual circumstances. He recalled his successes and failures, the times when his cupboard was bare and the times friends provided him home-cooked meals. Yet despite everything he faced, Paul shows us that when we learn to trust in Christ we find contentment.

In whatever we face today God is always at work – both in us and in our circumstances. With God’s help, we all will be able to say, “It really is true! I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me!”

*Prayer: God of strength, open our hearts so that we may learn contentment. Help us always to trust in you and your Son, who strengthens us. Amen.*

### Thought for the Day

No matter my circumstances, I will trust Christ to give me strength.

*(Mr.) Peter Caligiuri (Florida, USA)*

**PRAYER FOCUS: PATIENTS IN THE INTENSIVE CARE UNIT**

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 29, 2023

## Lost but Found

**READ: Luke 15:3-7**

*If a man owns a hundred sheep, and one of them wanders away, will he not leave the ninety-nine on the hills and go to look for the one that wandered off? – Matthew 18:12 (NIV)*

It was our practice in high school to look for one another's lost items (pens, rulers, pencils, etc.). Whenever a lost item was found, the class prefect would stand in front of the class and shout, "Lost but found!" The announcement enabled the owners to identify and reclaim their lost items. Motivated by the accolades awarded to finders, everybody was actively involved in the search. Whatever was lost within the school would certainly be found.

In today's scripture reading, Jesus told the parable of the lost sheep, where a shepherd went out to search for one lost sheep. "I am the good shepherd," Jesus said (John 10:11, NRSV). As Christians, we should not lose hope over anyone who leaves the faith. The Good Shepherd can find any sheep that has wandered off and lost its way. For Jesus said, "I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand." (John 10:28, NRSV). We can trust the Good Shepherd to bring the lost sheep home. "Lost but found." he will announce. And whoever we thought was lost will be lovingly restored to the fold.

*Prayer: Dear God, thank you for caring for each one of us as the shepherd cares for each sheep in the flock. No matter how far we may wander, you always guide us back home. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.*

### Thought for the Day

When I am lost, Jesus wants to lead me back home.

*(Mr.) Olaiya Muyiwa Benralph (Federal Capital Territory, Nigeria)*

**PRAYER FOCUS: SOMEONE WHO HAS LOST SOMETHING VALUABLE**

THURSDAY, MARCH 30, 2023

## Dream. Grow. Fly.

**READ: Ephesians 1:11-14**

*We are called to be an honor to God's glory. – Ephesians 1:12 (CEB)*

One morning as my husband and I enjoyed breakfast outside, a juvenile egret [*Ardea alba*] wandered from the pond until he was nearly within our reach. Totally oblivious to us, he looked upward to the trees and rooftops. Craning his long neck this way and that, he yearned to take flight but couldn't because he was too young.

Every day, our determined young egret kept flapping frantically for the rooftops. We marveled at his perseverance and his single-minded focus. Then one glorious day we spotted him high in a palm tree, preening his feathers and squawking gleefully. God put the dream of flight in this young bird, who instinctively knew what he was created to do.

Ephesians 1:11 says, "We were destined by the plan of God, who accomplishes everything according to his design." God powerfully confirmed the words from Ephesians to me through that young egret, renewing my faith that the big dreams in my heart do indeed come from God: dreams to live boldly and joyfully, even when it feels uncomfortable; dreams to keep trying and keep growing, even when it's exhausting; dreams to fulfill God's plan for my life, even when it seems impossible.

*Prayer: Dear God, thank you for renewing our faith in your purpose for our lives. In Jesus' name. Amen.*

### Thought for the Day

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God will fulfill a divine calling for my life.

*(Mrs.) R. J. Scherba (Florida, USA)*

**PRAYER FOCUS: SOMEONE NEEDING MY ENCOURAGEMENT**

FRIDAY, MARCH 31, 2023

## “Who Are You?”

**READ: John 1:19-28**

*John replied in the words of Isaiah the prophet, “I am the voice of one calling in the wilderness, ‘Make straight the way for the Lord.’”*  
– John 1:23 (NIV)

At church one Sunday I learned of a woman in the community whose husband had just died. They had four children. At God’s urging, I attended the funeral to lend my support. I did not talk much. I just sat beside her, listened to her story, and helped when needed. After the funeral ceremony was over and all her relatives went home, she asked, “Who are you? Are you one of my relatives that I have never met? Why did you sit with me until it was over?”

I replied, “I’m not your relative. I just want to sit with you, listen to your story, and offer help to you if you need it.” Then she said, “Thank you for being with me. My relatives give me a lot of advice, but you don’t talk much; you only hear my sad stories. Why?” I said to her, “Because the God I know is always with me, even the saddest times in my life.”

I have learned from today’s scripture reading that when someone asks, “Who are you?” I should tell that person more about God who saved me than about myself. In such an answer, God becomes greater as I become smaller. For as John the Baptist tells the Jewish priests, I am not the Messiah or a prophet; I am only “the voice of one calling in the wilderness.” To God be all glory.

*Prayer: Dear God, may we glorify you in our actions and in our words. Make us humble so that we can magnify your name. Amen.*

### Thought for the Day

When I am smaller, God is greater.

*(Mrs.) Linda Chandra (Banten, Indonesia)*

**PRAYER FOCUS: THOSE RECENTLY WIDOWED**



## Prayer Workshop

### Caring for Creation

During the summer of 2020, I went on a hiking trip in a national park near my home. One of the most memorable parts of that trip was a 9 kilometer trek to a high and exposed rock outcropping that overlooks a valley. It was a wild, wet, and windy day, and the valley below was filled with fog. As I stood along the edge of the rockface, I could see the tops of the massive trees that filled the valley. It was magnificent. And in that moment, I had the deepest sense of the mystery and wonder of God's creation.

After this experience I returned home determined to take more notice of the wonder of creation around me. At the same time I started to notice the litter that often lines the highways and streets near my home. It began to bother me in a new way. Not only was it an eyesore – it demonstrated a disregard for our earth, the same earth that had left me overwhelmed with gratitude and awe on my hike. So, to show my care and appreciation for one of God's most amazing gifts, I started picking up the litter, a practice that I have continued. Not only is it a way to make my community healthier and more attractive, but I've started thinking of it as a spiritual discipline. Anytime I am out along the roadside with my trash bag, my mind always goes back to when I was standing on the rock outcropping, and that memory turns what is often a mundane and dirty task into one of joy. It is an opportunity to help care for what God has entrusted to me. Before I start to sound too preachy and self-righteous, however, please know that for many years, I did nothing about the litter. I ignored it and left it for someone else to deal with.

Recently, I was part of a small covenant group, and during one of our weekly meetings we engaged in a *lectio divina* exercise on the creation story from Genesis 1. (For more information on *lectio divina*, visit [www.upperroom.org/resources/lectio-divina-praying-the-scriptures](http://www.upperroom.org/resources/lectio-divina-praying-the-scriptures).) As I listened to this familiar passage of

scripture, I was struck first by the magnitude of God's creative acts and then that God gives it all to us for our stewardship and care (see Genesis 1:26-31). I have tremendous love and respect for the earth – its beauty and abundance. This love and respect has only grown over time. I am beginning to understand how important it is for me to take good care of God's creation as a gift.

While any day is a perfect day to do something good for the earth, April 22 is Earth Day in many countries – a day on which people around the world show their support for environmental stewardship. What better time to begin a new endeavour that shows our appreciation for Creation! Perhaps plant a community garden, organise a litter pick-up day, or start a recycling programme at your church. If you want to explore other ideas, take a look at this article: “Create a Green Team” ([www.upperroom.org/resources/create-a-green-team](http://www.upperroom.org/resources/create-a-green-team)).

Caring for the earth responsibly is a wonderful way to give thanks to God for the amazing gift we've been given. I invite us to reflect on all the ways that we and our communities are being good stewards of creation. I also invite us to think about how we could be even better stewards of the earth and all that God has entrusted to our care.

### **Questions for Reflection**

1. When have you experienced a deep sense of gratitude for some aspect of God's creation? How did you express your gratitude to God?
2. What responsibility do you think we have to care for the gift of God's creation? Name one way that we can be better stewards of the earth.
3. What activities and programmes does your church have that support environmental stewardship and sustainability? What ideas for new activities and programmes would you suggest?

– Andrew Garland Breeden, Acquisitions Editor

**SATURDAY, APRIL 1, 2023**

## Living Signs

**READ: Matthew 5:14-16**

*God said, "Let there be lights in the dome of the sky to separate the day from the night; and let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and years." – Genesis 1:14 (NRSV)*

When I think of signs that keep people safe or offer guidance, I first think of traffic lights, lighthouses, and billboards. But we often forget how much more valuable we are as signs that have the potential to show others the hope, joy, and direction God can give to them. In a world where there is so much despair and hopelessness, living, practical signs and beacons of hope are important for us all to hold on to.

While God is invisible, God has shown us through Jesus Christ how to make God visible for others. We are to be living signs of God's light of love, drawing people from darkness into the light of life. Sharing a loving word and performing acts of kindness serve as openings to God's kingdom for those who have lost hope. And in this way we make the world a bit brighter.

*Prayer: O Lord, teach us to be beacons of hope, living signs of your transforming power, and active witnesses to your salvation. In the name of Jesus who taught us to pray, "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one" (Matthew 6:9-13, NIV). Amen.*

### Thought for the Day

My actions and words can lead someone closer to Christ.

*(Mr.) Benjamin Ankrab (Ashanti Region, Ghana)*

**PRAYER FOCUS: FOR COURAGE TO SHINE THE LIGHT OF LOVE**

**SUNDAY, APRIL 2, 2023**

## *Palm Sunday*

**READ: Colossians 1:7-12**

*It is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure. – Philippians 2:13 (NRSV)*

I enjoy needlework. I begin with a blank piece of material, and I start placing the colorful stitches according to the pattern. It doesn't look like much at first, but as I continue to work, a picture emerges. Sometimes I put stitches in the wrong place. Then I have to take them out and try again. I keep going until I have a completed work of art.

When we embark on our journey with Christ, we have no idea what to expect. We are like that blank piece of material waiting for a beautiful picture to take shape. As we continue our journey, the purpose God has for each of us is gradually revealed. We begin to see the work of art we are to become.

Discerning God's will is not always easy. Some of us might get a glimmer of it early in our journey and begin pursuing it. Others of us may need to take a few steps back or rethink our direction before we understand God's plans.

God has a purpose for each of us. We can trust that God's plan will take shape throughout our lives as our relationship with Christ grows. We can all be confident that God is working in us.

*Prayer: Dear God, help us to be hopeful and patient as we seek your plan for us. In Jesus' name. Amen.*

### Thought for the Day

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God has a plan for me.

*(Ms.) Lorraine Baldus (Michigan, USA)*

**PRAYER FOCUS: SOMEONE WHO IS STARTING OVER**

MONDAY, APRIL 3, 2023

## Choose to Rejoice

**READ: 1 Thessalonians 5:16-24**

*Though the fig tree doesn't bloom, and there's no produce on the vine; though the olive crop withers, and the fields don't provide food . . . I will rejoice in the LORD. I will rejoice in the God of my deliverance. – Habakkuk 3:17-18 (CEB)*

When I moved to Lucknow, I was longing for a good job and had many interviews. When I couldn't find a job, I became so frustrated that I decided to give up and move back to my hometown. While I was packing my bags, I received a call from a renowned institution informing me of my selection for a position. Then I realised that many times in my life when everything seemed to be falling apart, I simply gave in to my adversities or refused to be led by God. But thankfully, God never left me alone.

Sometimes even when we are praying continuously, we still feel stuck in our problems. It is easy to assume God is not listening and to stop praying and reading our Bible. But that makes us more vulnerable to the chaos of life.

Instead of giving up, we can choose to rejoice, just like Habakkuk. God loves us too much to ever leave us alone. After all, God gave his Son for us. Jesus is the ultimate proof of God's love and faithfulness. God is with us as our trusted companion and will never walk away or let us down.

*Prayer: Thank you, God, for the assurance that you are always with us. Help us to open our hearts to your loving presence. Amen.*

### Thought for the Day

Even when I doubt, God never gives up on me.

*(Ms.) Akanksha Singh (Uttar Pradesh, India)*

**PRAYER FOCUS: SOMEONE MOVING TO A NEW TOWN**

**TUESDAY, APRIL 4, 2023**

## *Ears to Hear*

**READ: Romans 10:16-21**

*Whoever has ears, let them hear. – Matthew 11:15 (NIV)*

**D**ue to a sinus infection, one of my ears became filled with fluid. I could hear clearly out of my good ear, but the other only registered muffled sounds. I became frustrated by my inability to hear sounds I had taken for granted before. I had to ask people to repeat themselves in conversation. Sound distortion threw me off key during praise team rehearsal, and I couldn't hear important details when the team leader gave instructions. For a time, I literally did not have ears to hear.

How often do we suffer from the same affliction in our spiritual lives? Worldly distractions, fear, stubbornness, pride, apathy, selfishness, and sin can build up in our hearts and keep us from hearing God's voice. Our pastor preaches a message, but we may catch only part of it because we're distracted. We ask God for guidance, but we might fail to study scripture and miss God's answers. God is always speaking, but sometimes a blockage distorts our hearing.

When my doctor drained the fluid from my ear canal, my full hearing returned. The Great Physician will clear out our spiritual blockages too. We just need to acknowledge our lack of spiritual hearing and turn our hearts toward God.

*Prayer: Father God, please remove the blockages that prevent us from hearing your voice clearly so that we may have ears to hear when you speak. In Jesus' name. Amen.*

### Thought for the Day

When I turn my heart toward God, I can better hear God's voice.

*(Mrs.) Pat Banta Kreml (Florida, USA)*

**PRAYER FOCUS: GRATITUDE FOR WHAT I TAKE FOR GRANTED**

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 5, 2023

## *In Your Hands*

**READ: Psalm 116:1-7**

*Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding. – Proverbs 3:5 (NIV)*

When my wife was diagnosed with an aggressive form of dementia, we were devastated. I watched helplessly as our 27 years of marriage slowly disappeared from her memory. I struggled to make sense of the deep sorrow, frustration, and anger I felt. I wanted to know *why*.

I laid my heart bare to God. I prayed honestly, openly, and sometimes angrily as I expressed my frustration and my desire for answers. I prayed through tears, pleading with God to heal my beloved wife and to remove my burden of being a full-time caregiver while working a full-time job.

One morning, when it felt like my prayers were going nowhere, I was able to slow down and quiet my mind enough to hear God's message. I needed to pray not for understanding but for faith. I needed to look not for answers but for the courage to trust in God. I began to pray for God's presence in my life and in my heart, and I have grown closer to God than I have ever been.

I know God is working for good (see Romans 8:28). Sometimes I can't see the good, but I know God is faithful and will guide me through this. I don't have the answers, but I have been richly blessed by God's presence, which gives me the strength to cope with the tragedy of my wife's illness.

*Prayer: Loving God, give us the courage to place all things into your hands, to submit our will to yours, with an abundant faith in your promises. Amen.*

### Thought for the Day

I can trust God even when I don't have full understanding.

*(Mr.) Michael Albanese (New York, USA)*

**PRAYER FOCUS: SPOUSES OF PEOPLE WITH DEMENTIA**

THURSDAY, APRIL 6, 2023

## Maundy Thursday

**READ: John 13:31-35**

*Jesus said, “As I have loved you, so you must love one another.”  
– John 13:34 (NIV)*

I remember my first Maundy Thursday worship service. I didn't know what to expect; to be honest, I didn't know what *Maundy* meant! *Maundy*, I learned, was a shortened form of the Latin word *mandatum*, which means “command.” As we see in our verse from John today, Jesus gave his disciples and us a new commandment on that first Maundy Thursday: “You must love one another.” That night Jesus humbled himself by washing the disciples' feet as he shared a meal with them for the last time before his death. The next day Jesus paid the ultimate price by giving his life for our sins.

The first Maundy Thursday service I attended brought the worshipers to a point of self-reflection. Then the pastor asked for our personal prayer concerns, prayed for us individually, and ended the service with Communion.

When the service was over, I was in tears thinking of the love Christ has for us. His command to us was not just to love someone when it's easy or convenient but to love even when it's hard – like when we are busy or when someone is difficult to love. Some days and some situations are challenging. But we can each pray that we will love one another so that we can show the world what it means to follow Christ.

*Prayer: Father God, thank you for your gift of love. Help us to humble ourselves to love others as Christ has loved us. Amen.*

### Thought for the Day

Loving like Christ begins with humility.

*(Miss) Kathleen Brewer (New Brunswick, Canada)*

**PRAYER FOCUS: FOR STRENGTH TO LOVE LIKE CHRIST**



FRIDAY, APRIL 7, 2023

## Good Friday

**READ: Matthew 26:36-46**

*Going a little farther, [Jesus] threw himself on the ground and prayed, “My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not what I want but what you want.” – Matthew 26:39 (NRSV)*

Good Friday reminds me of a time when I found it difficult to do the will of God. I was serving God in another country, and I felt lonely and wished I could be back home with my people. But then I thought of how Jesus surrendered himself to God’s will even when he did not want to.

As Jesus was about to face crucifixion, he recoiled at the thought of death. Although he prayed that God would let the cup of death pass from him, he also asked that God’s will be done. Jesus knew that although God’s will looked bitter at the time, the end result would be good.

Thinking of Jesus’ readiness to follow God’s will, I was encouraged to continue serving where I was as long as God wanted me there. I knew that in the end, good would come from it.

We won’t always feel like sacrificing ourselves – our time or our efforts – to do the things God wants us to do. But on this Good Friday, let us respond as Jesus did, saying, “Not what I want but what you want.”

*Prayer: Dear God, help us to do your will in all situations. Give us strength to persevere when we feel discouraged. In Jesus’ name. Amen.*

### Thought for the Day

Even when it is difficult, I will do what God has called me to do.

*(Miss) Enid Adah Nyinomujuni (Dar es Salaam, Tanzania)*

**PRAYER FOCUS: SOMEONE FAR FROM HOME**

**SATURDAY, APRIL 8, 2023**

## *Trust in God*

**READ: Matthew 27:38-46**

*He trusts in God. Let God rescue him now. – Matthew 27:43 (NIV)*

For years, I prayed for a baby. I longed to look into the eyes of my newborn and hear the little sounds that a newborn makes. Through all the waiting, fertility screenings, and treatments, I prayed and waited.

During my years of waiting, I was hesitant to declare my trust in God, especially to those who weren't believers. I was afraid that they would think, *If her God is so trustworthy, why haven't her prayers been answered?*

As we read in today's quoted verse, Jesus was mocked for his faith as he hung on the cross. To onlookers, it appeared that God had abandoned Jesus, and Jesus even poured his heart out to God asking why he had been forsaken. God didn't rescue Jesus from the cross as his followers had hoped because God had a much bigger plan that would make redemption possible.

We often cannot see God's plan. We think, *If only God would intervene and fix my problem.* But if we continue to trust in God, we are in good company. Even if others mock our trust, God is trustworthy. We have every reason to declare boldly our trust in God.

*Prayer: Dear God, help us to trust you when our prayers seem unanswered. Give us courage to declare our trust in you. Amen.*

### Thought for the Day

God is always worthy of my trust.

*(Ms.) Susan Kerrigan (Washington, USA)*

**PRAYER FOCUS: SOMEONE WHO IS LONGING FOR A CHILD**

**SUNDAY, APRIL 9, 2023**

## *Easter Sunday*

**READ: John 20:1-9**

*Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance. – John 20:1 (NIV)*

One Easter Sunday, my pastor preached on the account of the Resurrection in John chapter 20. I don't even recall what the main point of her message was because the phrase "while it was still dark" captured my attention.

My wife and I had been going through a very difficult time regarding destructive choices that our teenage son was making. We had lost control, and we knew it. Our situation seemed hopeless, and it felt like it would go on forever.

But though the scripture reading began with "while it was still dark," as it continued it became clear that God had already been at work! Not only had the stone been rolled away but our Lord Jesus Christ had risen! In a time of perpetual sadness and despair, the Holy Spirit whispered to my heart that although my outward circumstances had not changed, the God of resurrection was at work in our son's life. Hope and faith were kindled in my wife and me that Easter morning. How wonderful that our loving God speaks to us at our lowest moments, giving us the hope of resurrection and new life to come!

*Prayer: Dear Father, thank you for the stories of hope we find in scripture, especially that of your Son's resurrection. Help us to trust in that living hope. Amen.*

### Thought for the Day

Even when we don't perceive it, our loving God is at work.

*(Mr.) Jeff Evans (Texas, USA)*

**PRAYER FOCUS: PARENTS WHO ARE WORRIED ABOUT THEIR CHILDREN**

MONDAY, APRIL 10, 2023

## Valuable to God

**READ: Matthew 13:44-46**

*The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field. – Matthew 13:44 (NIV)*

I used to think that I was not valuable to God. I would think to myself, *I am not as good-looking as that person. I do not have any important skills. I'm not good enough.* Sometimes these thoughts started with something as simple as not being invited to an event and feeling rejected. Other times, I found myself brooding over painful words said to me or things done to me.

Meditating on today's verse from Matthew helped me to see how the King of kings and God of the universe feels about me. In God's eyes I am a treasure who brings delight and joy. God believes we are worth giving up everything. So, as I think about Christ being born and dying on the cross, I now understand that sacrifice in light of this parable.

We understand how much something is worth by the price that has been paid. Jesus gave it all for me on the cross. Therefore, I can no longer go on living another day feeling like I do not count. I am learning to look at myself and say out loud, "I am valuable!"

*Prayer: Father, thank you for loving me and embracing me. Thank you for giving your all for me. Amen.*

### Thought for the Day

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I am special to God.

*(Miss) Selina Machado (Blantyre, Malawi)*

**PRAYER FOCUS: SOMEONE WITH LOW SELF-ESTEEM**

TUESDAY, APRIL 11, 2023

## Forgiveness Is Essential

**READ: Psalm 130:1-8**

*If you, LORD, kept a record of sins, Lord, who could stand? But with you there is forgiveness, so that we can, with reverence, serve you. – Psalm 130:3-4 (NIV)*

I recently left a company I had been instrumental in building over the past decade. I was in a leadership role, so the choice to leave was difficult. I could not explain exactly what was wrong, but I knew things were changing. When I shared my concerns about where the company was headed, colleagues I once trusted turned their backs on me. I walked away, feeling broken and defeated.

The traditional stages of grief include denial, anger, and depression, followed by eventual acceptance. In Psalm 130, God makes it clear that forgiveness is also essential. Although time eased the pain of loss and betrayal, without the extra step of forgiveness I was consumed by a desire for retribution. Wanting bad things to happen to the people who hurt me was not healthy, and it kept me focused on their failings instead of acknowledging my own. As I stewed over the injustice of my situation, I was unable to see that God could use this painful experience to strengthen my faith.

We cannot move forward with God if our energy is spent nursing old wounds or hoping for another's misfortune. Instead, we can seek God's wisdom and comfort as we work through the pain, remaining open to what God has in store for us.

*Prayer: Dear heavenly Father, help us to forgive so that we can let go of the past and grow closer to you. Amen.*

### Thought for the Day

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By forgiving those who hurt me, I can better serve God.

*(Ms.) Reese Delaney (Georgia, USA)*

**PRAYER FOCUS: SOMEONE I NEED TO FORGIVE**

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 12, 2023

## Enough

**READ: 1 Kings 17:8-16**

*The jar of meal was not emptied, neither did the jug of oil fail.  
– 1 Kings 17:16 (NRSV)*

Our family often welcomes foster children into our home. Earlier this year, our social worker asked if we could host a five-year-old boy. He had cerebral palsy, a seizure disorder, and spoke a different language than our family. We have five other children, and life already felt busy. I told the social worker we would let her know soon – fully expecting to say no.

My Bible reading that day was the story of the widow of Zarephath. Because of a drought, she had only a handful of flour and a little bit of oil left when Elijah asked her for bread. It was difficult, but she gave him all she had. Then, God gave her a miracle – day after day, she used the flour and oil, and the supply did not run out.

As I read about the widow, I felt the Holy Spirit's nudge to say yes to the placement request. It would be easier to say no; but if I did, I knew I would miss this chance to experience God's provision.

We took this young boy into our home. At times it was difficult, but like the widow's flour and oil, our time and love did not run out. As with the widow of Zarephath, God provided all we needed. When God calls us, it is a blessing to say yes.

*Prayer: Generous God, help us to trust that you will provide all we need as we serve others. Amen.*

### Thought for the Day

It is a blessing to say yes to God's call.

*(Mrs.) Kate Rietema (Michigan, USA)*

**PRAYER FOCUS: CHILDREN IN FOSTER CARE**

THURSDAY, APRIL 13, 2023

## Light Load

**READ: Matthew 11:28-30**

*Jesus said, "Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest." – Matthew 11:28 (NRSV)*

My life seemed fine as I grew from a child into an adult. When I went to school to get my bachelor's degree, everything went well. Even though I wasn't the smartest in class, I finished my education. After that, I began working at a company. I have been fortunate to earn enough income to fulfill my needs.

Then one day a doctor said that I had cancer. My world turned upside down. I cried. I never expected to receive this news. Because of the cancer I now tire quickly and will have to take medicine for the rest of my life.

Every day I go to chapel. After my diagnosis, I began praying and asking, "Lord, why do I have to go through this? Can I afford it?" One day, I felt as if God were taking my hand and whispering, "Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest." I opened my Bible and looked for the verse. I read it over and over again until I finally felt calm. With this verse to accompany me, I slowly started to enjoy my days. I know that God is always with me. I don't know how long I will live, but my burden feels light.

*Prayer: O God, help us to remember that you are always present for us. Thank you for sharing our burdens so that they become light. Amen.*

### Thought for the Day

I don't know what my future holds, but I know God is with me.

*(Mr.) Waspati Ken Wardani (Jakarta, Indonesia)*

**PRAYER FOCUS: THOSE WITH A RECENT CANCER DIAGNOSIS**

FRIDAY, APRIL 14, 2023

## God's Plans for Me

**READ: Ephesians 2:1-10**

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

*– Ephesians 2:10 (NIV)*

I had a plan for the next few hours: take a walk with my husband, eat lunch, and attend an online Bible study. The timing would be tight, but I would be able to do it all.

When my husband and I started our walk, I spotted our neighbour. I felt led to talk to her, and I got to know her on a deeper level. Then near the end of our walk, we stopped to talk with another neighbour. She told us she was experiencing a major struggle, and we promised to pray for her.

Only 30 minutes before Bible study, my sister called with exciting news. I had not yet eaten lunch and feared I would be late. But then I saw an email from the study leader asking me to offer the opening prayer, so I quickly ate my lunch and joined the meeting on time.

In the past, a day like this would have stressed me out. But since studying Ephesians 2:10 with my Bible study group, I have begun praying that God will open my eyes and heart to God's plans for me. God often calls me to listen, share, and do good works. I strive to be willing and joyful as I fulfill God's purpose for me.

*Prayer: Heavenly Father, grant us the wisdom, grace, and courage to accomplish the works you call us to do. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.*

### Thought for the Day

I will open my heart so that I can discover what God has in store for me.

*(Mrs.) Terry J. Burns (Florida, USA)*

**PRAYER FOCUS: TO REMAIN OPEN TO GOD'S CALL**



**SATURDAY, APRIL 15, 2023**

## Everlasting Love

**READ: Matthew 9:9-13**

*The Lord says, "I have loved you with an everlasting love."  
– Jeremiah 31:3 (NIV)*

**B**inky was our Yorkshire terrier pet dog. He wasn't the typical tiny, silky, barking creature you might imagine. He had been the largest of his litter. His tail had not been removed; his ears flopped. Despite his pedigree, according to breed standards he was a failure. To us, however, he was a real character: barking at the mail carrier with a big dog bark, chasing cats from the garden, and always ready for another walk. And sometimes he would glare and show his teeth at us. Nevertheless, he was part of the family, and we loved him.

We all need to love and be loved. But even if we have been Christians for years, we can struggle to believe that God really loves us. In our Gospel passage today, Jesus shows the nature of God's everlasting love when he seeks out those who have been rejected by society. Jesus spends quality time with them and calls them to follow him.

When we allow Jesus to lead us to God, God accepts us, however imperfect or "different" we may be. God patiently heals our deepest hurts and hang-ups because we are all part of God's beloved family.

*Prayer: Dear God, we come to you today with all our hurts and failures. Help us to know that you accept us and love us always. Amen.*

### Thought for the Day

God doesn't see me as imperfect, just one of the family.

*(Mrs.) April McIntyre (England, United Kingdom)*

**PRAYER FOCUS: THOSE WHO FEEL UNWORTHY OF GOD'S LOVE**

**SUNDAY, APRIL 16, 2023**

## Road to Emmaus

**READ: Luke 24:13-35**

*When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they recognised him, and he disappeared from their sight.*

*– Luke 24:30-31 (NIV)*

Over 55 years ago a friend gave my wife and me a picture that portrays Jesus walking with the disciples on the road to Emmaus. No matter where we live, this picture hangs in a prominent place, and I see it every day. One day I saw it in a new way and realised that parts of my own spiritual journey are much like the disciples' experience on the road to Emmaus.

The disciples had learned to trust and rely on Jesus as they listened to his teaching, committed themselves to follow him, and witnessed his miraculous power to transform lives. With Jesus' death, that trust was broken, replaced by doubt and fear. But Jesus joined them on the road, encouraged them through the words of scripture, and performed an act he knew would cause them to recognise him – demonstrating that he would always be with them.

When I have experienced confusion and despair, Jesus has revealed himself to me and assured me of his continual presence. Just as Jesus was with those early disciples on their walk to Emmaus, he comes and meets us along our way and helps us understand the meaning of God's word within our own circumstances, assuring us that we are never alone.

*Prayer: Eternal God, we give thanks that no matter what happens, we can rely on your presence to guide and strengthen us. Restore our hope as we continue on this journey. In Jesus' name. Amen.*

### Thought for the Day

Jesus is with me even when I am not aware of it.

*(Mr.) Robert M. Terhune (Oregon, USA)*

**PRAYER FOCUS: THOSE UNAWARE OF JESUS' PRESENCE**

**MONDAY, APRIL 17, 2023**

## *Making a Difference*

**READ: Ephesians 4:11-16**

*You are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.  
– 1 Corinthians 12:27 (NIV)*

The year 2020 may have come to an end, but it will not be easily forgotten. It was a year that brought horrific pain, loss, and change in the lives of many.

But the pandemic also brought positive change. Working from home helped some people realise that they have missed spending time with family and friends. Many who used to spend hours working late have started to appreciate a better balance between work and home life. The pandemic has also highlighted the importance of mental health, so often neglected in a highly competitive society.

Seeing so many people suffering from the effects of the pandemic, I have strongly felt the call to join mental health volunteers to help others overcome their adversity. Sometimes, a listening ear or an encouraging word can make a positive difference in someone's life. In Ephesians 4:11-16, God calls on different people to come together to provide works of service so that the body of Christ may be built up, as each part does its work in love.

God can turn ashes into beauty through people from all walks of life banding together in love to make a difference in the lives of others.

*Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank you for the different talents you have given to each of us and for opportunities to use them to make a difference. Amen.*

### Thought for the Day

God can turn ashes to beauty through my willingness to care for others.

*(Ms.) Agnes Wee (Singapore)*

**PRAYER FOCUS: MENTAL-HEALTH VOLUNTEERS**

TUESDAY, APRIL 18, 2023

## Great Plans

**READ: 1 Kings 19:1-15**

*Elijah was a human being like us. – James 5:17 (NRSV)*

Years ago, I ran a large community outreach event for our church. Thousands of people came, and it went well. But at the end, one person made a critical remark, and I went home thinking only about what they had said. Because of that one complaint, I felt like the entire event had failed.

In 1 Kings 19, we read how Elijah experienced something similar. He had recently performed two of his greatest miracles: defeating the prophets of Baal and ending the drought with his prayer. Elijah was doing great things with God: helping vulnerable people, destroying false gods, and saving a region from disaster. But then Jezebel threatened him. After all his great work, Elijah lost his confidence, went off by himself, and wanted to die. That one negative experience outweighed everything else.

Elijah's loss of confidence is all too familiar. After all, James 5:17 tells us that Elijah was just like us. But when God brought Elijah food for strength and gave him a task, he realised that God still had good plans for him. And he accomplished more great things through God's power and grace. Just as God still had great plans for Elijah, God also has great plans for us.

*Prayer: Dear God, show us opportunities to grow through criticism and help us accomplish even more for you. Amen.*

### Thought for the Day

I can turn criticism into an opportunity to seek God's guidance and grace.

*(Mr.) Bob LaForge (New Jersey, USA)*

**PRAYER FOCUS: SOMEONE I HAVE HURT WITH MY CRITICISM**

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 19, 2023

## Safe Place

**READ: Psalm 36:5-9**

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

– Psalm 46:1 (NIV)

My daughter works at a school for students with special needs, their needs cannot be met in a traditional public school setting. Since my retirement, I have occasionally worked as a substitute teacher at the school. In each room there is a designated “safe place” where students can go for a break when they are feeling overwhelmed or fearful about a situation. The safe place is located in a quiet part of the room, and the creative use of materials and furniture enhances the illusion of isolation by providing a barrier between the occupants of the space and other students in the room.

We all need a safe place sometimes. I believe that Christians have access to this safe place through Christ: “In Christ we have bold and confident access to God through faith in him” (Ephesians 3:12, CEB). Today’s scripture reading reassures me whenever I am scared or overwhelmed. I know that in the quietness of my heart, I can take refuge under God’s wings where I find comfort, peace, and joy.

The Bible tells us many times that God desires to be “our refuge and strength.” In the safe place God provides, we can find courage and hope.

*Prayer: Dear God, thank you for your presence and for your desire to protect us. Help us trust that you will never fail or forsake us. Amen.*

### Thought for the Day

When I am afraid, I can take refuge in Christ.

(Mrs.) Cathy Fooshee (Kansas, USA)

**PRAYER FOCUS: TEACHERS**

THURSDAY, APRIL 20, 2023

## Growing in Gratitude

**READ: Ephesians 3:14-19**

*Be rooted and built up in [Christ Jesus], be established in faith, and overflow with thanksgiving just as you were taught.*

– Colossians 2:7 (CEB)

In the book of Colossians, Paul poured out his heart as he urged Christians to build their lives on Jesus. “Be rooted and built up in him,” Paul wrote. Any tree that is firm and solid has roots extended down into the ground, and its deep roots prevent the tree from being knocked over. As believers, we are like these trees. We can root ourselves in the truth of God’s word, which keeps us from being moved or shaken – no matter how turbulent the circumstance. Rooted in Christ, our faith can withstand thoughts and emotions that try to stir up turmoil inside us. As a result, our hearts will begin to overflow with gratitude.

A thankful heart is victorious. It resists fear and creates a contagious atmosphere of joyful hope and peace around us. So, the next time negativity tries to rush in and pour out of our mouths, we can stop it with a word of thankfulness. Gratitude can neutralise toxic thoughts, fill our hearts and minds with the powerful force of faith, and positively affect everyone around us.

*Prayer: Dear God, help us stay rooted in your love, grounded in your word, and ever-growing in gratitude and grace. Amen.*

### Thought for the Day

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When I am rooted in God’s word, my faith grows strong.

(Mr.) Nelson Nwosu (Anambra, Nigeria)

**PRAYER FOCUS: FOR A GRATEFUL HEART**

**FRIDAY, APRIL 21, 2023**

## *A Good Listener*

**READ: James 1:19-27**

*Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry. – James 1:19 (NIV)*

**M**y husband was in the hospital recovering from emergency open-heart surgery. I had spent several days sitting by his side, first keeping vigil, then keeping him company. One afternoon, desperately in need of respite, I drove to a nearby mall and wandered through the shops.

When I went into my favourite clothing store, the store assistant who helped me was new. We were strangers, but within minutes I was sharing my story. She listened intently and with great empathy. When I left the store, I felt better. Since then, I have often stopped by the store to say hello and visit for a few minutes.

We live in a hurried world where listening with compassion and understanding is rare. James 1:19 reminds us to be quick to listen and slow to anger. Listening well is a difficult discipline to cultivate, but it is worth the effort. In a noisy and distracted world, finding someone who cares enough to pause and acknowledge our feelings is priceless. Perhaps by becoming good listeners we will encourage others to come back and hear what God says to them through us.

*Prayer: Dear God, open our ears so that we may hear your voice. Teach us by your Spirit to truly listen to others. Amen.*

### Thought for the Day

Today I will listen to others with patience and empathy.

*(Mrs.) Elizabeth Erlandson (Nebraska, USA)*

**PRAYER FOCUS: RETAIL WORKERS**

**SATURDAY, APRIL 22, 2023**

## Pick Up and Pray

**READ: Romans 12:1-8**

*Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful.*

*– Colossians 4:2 (NIV)*

My husband and I like to go on daily walks along the roadways of our rural town. Several years ago, we decided to pick up the trash that litters the ditches along the streets where we walk. It is rewarding both to get exercise and fresh air and to help beautify God's earth. But it can be frustrating also. We find that after cleaning up an area, more trash accumulates within a few days. At one point, I became angry at the repeat offenders, but then I changed my way of thinking and started praying. With every piece of trash I pick up, I pray for the person who threw it there. Almost immediately God changed my anger and frustration into forgiveness and empathy.

We can reshape our thoughts and attitudes with prayer. Prayer can turn hate into love, fear into trust, anger into forgiveness, and despair into joy. As we remind ourselves to pray when confronted by negative thoughts such as fear and anger, we can reshape our thoughts to conform to the thoughts and ways of Jesus. God's gift of prayer has awesome power!

*Prayer: Dear God, thank you for giving us the privilege of prayer. As we pray, reshape our minds to conform to your will. Amen.*

### Thought for the Day

Prayer can change my mind and my life.

*(Mrs.) Jan Towne (Virginia, USA)*

**PRAYER FOCUS: MY NEIGHBOURHOOD**



**SUNDAY, APRIL 23, 2023**

## *A Close Relationship*

**READ: Luke 10:38-42**

*Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her. – Luke 10:42 (NRSV)*

**A**lmost every Saturday and Sunday I am busy serving at my church, which is one of the ways I respond to God's call and give thanks for Jesus' sacrifice on the cross. However, I am often worn out on the weekends, because I also have a job that requires a long daily commute during the week.

When we get tired physically, our enthusiasm to worship may decrease. However, in today's quoted scripture we are reminded that the best part of worship – sitting at the feet of God – can never be taken away from us. Sitting at God's feet not only involves prayer but also building a close personal relationship with God by reading scripture and listening to sermons.

When I started to strengthen my relationship with God, my service in church began to feel different to me. I became more excited about worship and had a renewed desire to give my best every time. Christianity is more than just a religion; it is a relationship between our heavenly Father and us, God's children.

*Prayer: Dear God, draw us into a closer relationship with you so that we may know you better each day. Help us to find renewed commitment in our service to you. Amen.*

### Thought for the Day

Spending time with God renews me to better serve God and others.

*(Mr.) Renaldo Yosua (West Java, Indonesia)*

**PRAYER FOCUS: PASTORS IN RURAL AREAS**

**MONDAY, APRIL 24, 2023**

## Stormy Weather

**READ: Psalm 147:7-18**

*[God] covers the sky with clouds; he supplies the earth with rain and makes grass grow on the hills. – Psalm 147:8 (NIV)*

As I watched the local news channel on the official start date of hurricane season, the weather forecaster gave advice about what to do and not do during a hurricane. Just hearing the number of hurricanes predicted for the year caused me to pause and pray. Stormy weather frightens me. When I hear forecasts for damaging winds, rain, tornadoes, hurricanes, or other inclement weather, I start praying – asking God to protect me, my family, my city, and my state.

But storms don't come every day. Some days God gives us gentle rains, bright sunshine, or a blanket of beautiful snow. Without these changes we could not enjoy seasonal flowers, lush grass, or beautiful forests. Such weather also blesses the farmland that provides us with food and material for clothing. Rain fills the ponds, lakes, and rivers, and snow covers the slopes so we can enjoy many outdoor activities. I thank God for the natural beauty of the land and for the provision of food, clothing, and recreation.

As today's scripture reading reminds us, God delights in those who hope in God's unfailing love. Whatever the forecast may be, we can trust our Creator, and this trust can bring us into a closer relationship with God.

*Prayer: Dear Lord, help us to trust in you. Whatever the weather, we know your purpose is for our good and for your glory. Amen.*

### Thought for the Day

Whatever the forecast, I can trust in God's care.

*(Mrs.) Betty White Coleman (Mississippi, USA)*

**PRAYER FOCUS: COMMUNITIES IN THE PATH OF HURRICANES**

**TUESDAY, APRIL 25, 2023**

## *A Crucial Ingredient*

**READ: Matthew 5:13-16**

*You are the salt of the earth. – Matthew 5:13 (CEB)*

One of my favourite meals is pinto beans cooked with diced onion, sweet pepper, tomato, garlic, and salt. Although we cannot see salt in our food, it is crucial. We always know whether or not it is present – too much can make a dish inedible, and too little leaves it tasting bland. Just the right amount ensures a tasty meal.

Salt is important in our faith as well. Jesus tells us to be the salt of the earth. I think this means we should show Jesus' love to the world in such a way that we bring forth its full flavour. Part of our Christian responsibility is not only to make ourselves pleasing to God but also to relate to others in a way that helps them become pleasing to God. What a big challenge Jesus has set before us!

Being salt to the world is both humbling and empowering. We are humbled because being salt requires us to direct our attention toward others. And we are empowered because we trust the Spirit and share Jesus' ministry as we strive to make the world pleasing to God.

*Prayer: O Lord, guide us to be salt in the world as we show your love to others. We pray as Jesus taught us, "Father, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us. And lead us not into temptation" (Luke 11:2-4, NIV). Amen.*

### Thought for the Day

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I please God when I relate to others with love.

*(Mr.) William G. Heck (North Carolina, USA)*

**PRAYER FOCUS: COOKS**

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 26, 2023

## God Who Weeps with Us

**READ: John 11:32-36**

*[God's] anger lasts only a moment, but his favor lasts a lifetime; weeping may stay for the night, but rejoicing comes in the morning.*

– Psalm 30:5 (NIV)

My son, who was 19 and a first-year medical student, died suddenly in a swimming accident. We were devastated. In our pain we questioned God: *Why did this happen when his future seemed so bright?* Many friends visited us to comfort and pray with us. One of my husband's friends wrote a letter, in which he said, "You must be wondering where God was at that time. He was right there weeping with you." These words comforted me, and I was reminded of the time Jesus grieved with Martha and Mary when their brother Lazarus died. (See John 11:35.) God is indeed right by our side grieving when we grieve.

As time went by, I decided to enroll in seminary to study the scriptures and learn more about the God who weeps with us. I was ordained and worked as a pastor for a few years. I was able to empathise with families who were going through an experience of loss and grief.

Four decades after the loss of my son, God is still strengthening me. I have known God's grace and comfort through the love and encouragement of my husband, my children, and my church community. Our God of compassion and love is good all the time, and I know that a day will come when I will join my son in God's heavenly presence.

*Prayer: Loving Father, thank you for your steadfast love and abiding presence. Fill us with your grace and peace, especially in times of pain and brokenness. Amen.*

### Thought for the Day

When I weep, God weeps with me.

(Mrs.) Navamani Peter (Karnataka, India)

**PRAYER FOCUS: THOSE GRIEVING THE DEATH OF A CHILD**

THURSDAY, APRIL 27, 2023

## Perspective

**READ: Matthew 6:25-34**

*Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? – Matthew 6:26 (NIV)*

Between being a full-time student, training for a sports season, flying airplanes, and all of the studying that goes along with those tasks, my daily schedule often drains my energy and leaves me feeling overwhelmed. I often lose track of time and forget to make space in my day for God.

My situation is not unique. All across the world, people must complete tasks in order to fulfill expectations, personal goals, or work. It can be easy to become overly focused on our current situation and lose sight of the big picture. However, God has a purpose for us all, and a God that great deserves our attention.

When we make God a priority in our lives, live according to God's guidance, and switch our focus to what God has planned for us rather than our daily tasks, our burdens become lighter and we can find comfort and rest in the promises of God. Since God provides for even the smallest of animals, we can have faith that God will provide for us.

*Prayer: Dear God, give us strength and help us to focus on your will rather than our own. Thank you for the blessings you have given us. Help us to use them to carry out your will. Amen.*

### Thought for the Day

I will not lose hope, for God will provide.

*(Mr.) Trevor Turco (Texas, USA)*

**PRAYER FOCUS: THOSE FEELING OVERWHELMED**

**FRIDAY, APRIL 28, 2023**

## *In the Background*

**READ: Romans 16:21-27**

*Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord. – Colossians 3:23 (NIV)*

Through several generations, various members of my family have been involved in ministry. One was a pastor, another was a missionary, two others were on the staff of different ministries, and several have served as volunteers. Although I have volunteered through the years, my main ministry now is as a Christian writer. I spend long hours researching, reading, and writing. Since my work takes place where others can't see it happening, some people assume that I am not heavily involved in church work.

In his letters, the apostle Paul mentioned various people who had done good work where others could not see it. In today's reading, Paul lists the names of several of them. While Phoebe tops that list in Romans 16:1, I am partial to the one who identified himself in Romans 16:22: "I, Tertius, who wrote down this letter, greet you in the Lord." Like me, Tertius was performing his ministry in the background.

While we may take for granted the work of those like Tertius, it's important to remember that not all work in ministry is visible to us. Nevertheless, that work is vital to the spreading of the gospel.

*Prayer: Gracious Lord, thank you for those who spread the gospel in ways that are not always visible. Give them the assurance that their work is important and needed. In the name of Jesus. Amen.*

### Thought for the Day

Regardless of my task, God knows the work I do.

*(Mrs.) Mary Hunt Webb (New Mexico, USA)*

**PRAYER FOCUS: THOSE WHO WORK BEHIND THE SCENES**

**SATURDAY, APRIL 29, 2023**

## Always There

**READ: Isaiah 43:1-7**

*The LORD says, "Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine." – Isaiah 43:1 (NIV)*

One of my aunts routinely mailed copies of *El Aposento Alto* – the Spanish language edition of *The Upper Room* – to her nieces, nephews, and friends. Through the daily devotional, I learned about Jesus and loving God. I kept every copy she sent.

At age 15, I declared my independence from my parents because they did not believe in me. I stopped studying the arts so I could pursue a career where I could support myself. Around this time, I also started attending church. But eventually, while trying to achieve my goals, I left the church and began to live a life of excess.

After seven years, I completed my doctorate, but I still wasn't happy. I began to experience an existential crisis, so once again I read my old copies of *El Aposento Alto*. The stories were as relevant as when they were first published. During this time I realised that God has always been there for me.

I have since returned to my faith community, and my joy is complete. God dwells in my heart and guides my life and faith. I remain grateful that despite my failings, God stood by me. God's love was manifested through my family, my church, and the stories in the daily devotional.

*Prayer: Faithful God, thank you for remaining faithful to us even when we turn from you. Fill us with your wisdom and give us the courage to trust in your saving grace. Amen.*

### Thought for the Day

God will always accompany me on my journey.

*(Mr.) Carlos D. Ortiz (Puerto Rico)*

**PRAYER FOCUS: SOMEONE SEEKING A FAITH COMMUNITY**

**SUNDAY, APRIL 30, 2023**

## *A Reconciling Dinner*

**READ: Matthew 5:43-48**

*Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.  
– Matthew 5:44 (NRSV)*

The young couple who lived below my flat frequently played loud music at night. Sometimes I would ask them politely to turn down their music.

One Saturday, the music was particularly loud. Frustrated, once again I asked my neighbours to turn their music down. The young man refused. “I think you’re obsessing over it.” he responded. Having gotten nowhere, I returned to bed. But I regretted that the conversation hadn’t gone well. I wanted to make peace, so I offered the only thing I could think of – dinner.

When the day of our dinner arrived, the young man, Brody, arrived alone, since his girlfriend had to work. It felt awkward, but I pressed on, wanting him to know I held no grudges. After our meal, my relationship with the couple improved. Once, when my car wouldn’t start, Brody helped me get to an appointment on time.

To live out our identity as God’s children, we are called to love even those who don’t love us. Extending kindness toward my neighbours required a willingness to respond with love. God has placed people in our lives who may challenge our ability to love them. How do we respond?

*Prayer: Dear Lord, loving people who are challenging to us requires more than human strength. Grant us your power to love them as you love us. Amen.*

### Thought for the Day

With Christ’s strength, I can always respond with love.

*(Mrs.) Allison Wilson Lee (Florida, USA)*

**PRAYER FOCUS: NEIGHBOURS WHO DON’T GET ALONG**



# 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 afterwards. 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/devotional/smallgroup.asp](http://www.upperroom.org/devotional/smallgroup.asp).

## Wednesday Discussion Questions

### March 1: *Incredible Faithfulness*

1. Describe your favourite prayer practice. What makes this practice meaningful and sustainable for you? What does this practice teach you about God and prayer?
2. If you track your prayers and petitions, what have you observed about your prayers by doing so? If you don't, how do you remain aware of the ways your prayers are being answered?
3. Do you tend to offer more petition prayers or thanksgiving prayers? Is it good to bring our petitions to God as well as our thanks? Explain.
4. When have you had a petition turn into a blessing or thanksgiving? What did you learn about God, yourself, and others through that experience?

### March 8: *Important Roles*

1. Did you recognise the names Jochebed, Shiphrah, and Puah? Why do you think many people are unfamiliar with these names and so many other biblical women?
2. Why do you think it is important to remember the names of people in the Bible? When was the last time you came across a name in scripture that you did not recognise?
3. Why do you think it is easy to overlook the people we do not know personally who make our daily life easier? What spiritual practices and prayers help you to keep those people and their work in the front of your mind?
4. What women have had the biggest impact on your life? Why? How will you honour them or show them your appreciation for all that they have done for you?

### **March 15:** *Support One Another*

1. Does your church have an outreach programme like the writer's church? If so, describe the programme. If not, describe any similar programmes you participate in or have heard about.
2. In what ways do you offer your time, resources, and support to people in need? How have you observed your efforts making a difference for the people you serve?
3. How does your behaviour and mindset change during Lent? How do you treat others differently in this season? Why?
4. What does it mean for you to see the face of Jesus in the people you meet? Does seeing Jesus in others change the way you interact with them? How do you keep your heart and mind open to the needs of others?

### **March 22:** *Resilience and Brokenness*

1. Do you ever feel like you need to be resilient and unbreakable? What scripture passages remind you that we don't always need to remain unbreakable?
2. When has brokenness in your life led you to new, beautiful growth? How did that experience affect your faith journey?
3. What does it mean to embody both resilience and brokenness at the same time? In what ways do your life and faith change depending on whether you are feeling resilient or broken or both?
4. Who in scripture most embodied resilience and brokenness? Did they embody just one at a time? Both at once? How does their story encourage and inspire you?

### **March 29:** *Lost but Found*

1. The students in today's meditation were motivated to search for lost items because they would receive accolades from their peers. What motivates you to help others? Why?

2. What do you find the most comforting and meaningful about the parable of the lost sheep? How has this parable influenced your life and your faith over time?
3. If you have ever wandered away from God, how did the Good Shepherd find you and lovingly bring you back? How can it be encouraging to someone who has wandered away to know that the Good Shepherd is always nearby?
4. When someone you care about leaves the faith, how do you respond? How do you remain hopeful for their return? What helps you to find peace in the situation?

### **April 5: *In Your Hands***

1. Have you ever watched a loved one struggle with memory loss or another health condition? What was that like? How did that experience affect your relationship with God and with your loved one?
2. When are your prayers the most honest and open? Why? How is your prayer experience different when you pray more authentically? Does it change the outcome?
3. When do you find it most difficult to trust God? What spiritual practices, prayers, or Bible verses help you continue to trust God when you are angry, confused, or hurting?
4. Where do you most clearly sense God's presence in your life today? How does slowing down and remaining open to God allow you to notice God's presence and provision?

### **April 12: *Enough***

1. When someone asks you to do something difficult, how do you respond? Has a scripture passage ever made you change your response like it did for today's writer? If so, what was the passage? How did it change your response?
2. Do you ever fear that you don't have enough to offer anything to others? What motivates you to share what you have anyway? What happens when you do?

3. When do you feel most in need of God's provision? When are you most aware of God's provision? Is it ever easy for you to lose sight of all that God provides? Why or why not?
4. In what ways have you been blessed by caring for those around you or by receiving the care of others? How do you remain open to God's call to care for others each day?

### **April 19: *Safe Place***

1. When you feel overwhelmed or fearful, what physical locations comfort you and help you find peace? What about that place makes you feel safe?
2. What peace and hope do you have knowing that through Christ, we all can access the refuge God provides? How does God's refuge get you through difficult times?
3. Describe a time when you were afraid or overwhelmed and found comfort through Christ. Who or what helped you experience that comfort?
4. Why can it be easy to forget about the comfort and safety we have in Christ when life is going well? How do you remain focused on and grateful for that safety in good times and bad times alike?

### **April 26: *God Who Weeps with Us***

1. Recall a time when someone's words comforted you and strengthened your faith. What did their words mean to you?
2. Have you ever experienced a devastating circumstance that eventually gave you a chance to grow in your faith or to help those around you? Explain the situation.
3. Why do you think we tend to question God when we are grieving or when life is not going as we hoped? How does God respond to our questions?
4. Why is the care of community so important when we are suffering? How does your community support you in times of grief and sorrow? How do you support those around you?



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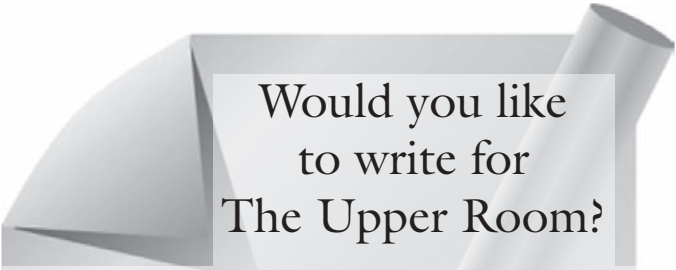
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- Use clear, simple words.
- Make only one point in the meditation.
- Include details about what you heard, saw, felt, said.
- Include a suggested Bible reading, scripture verse, and prayer.
- Avoid using poetry, hymns, word plays (for instance, “the light of the sun” and “the light of the Son”) because these do not translate.
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## A EVERYDAY CONTEMPLATIVE

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THE WAY OF PRAYERFUL LIVING

L. ROGER OWENS

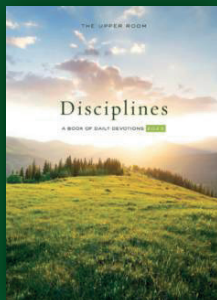
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