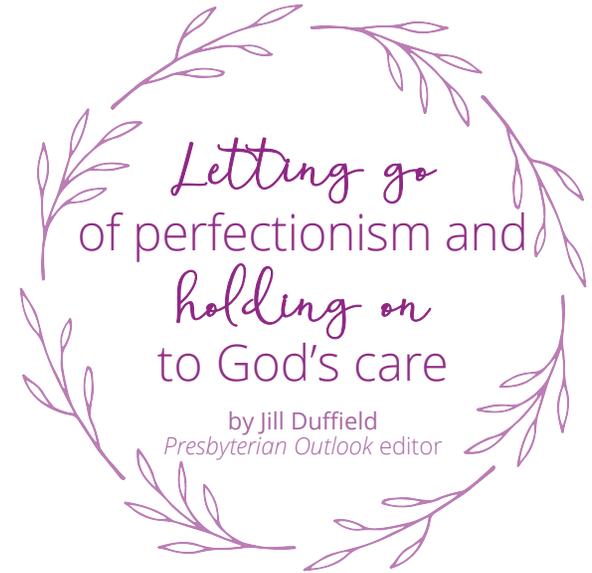


Sunday | MATTHEW 18:12-14

Lost. Confused. Disoriented. Afraid. Alone. Even with our smartphone giving us turn-by-turn directions, the parable of the lost sheep still resonates. All of us, at some point or another, know the anxiety of being vulnerable and directionless. My ability to get lost is legendary. I force myself to make a mental note of whether I need to go right or left when I exit my hotel room. I take a picture with my phone of where my car is located in parking garages. One of my great and real fears is getting lost. My friends with keen senses of direction think me neurotic and alarmist when I voice my anxiety about driving somewhere new or meeting them in an unfamiliar place. I relate to the lost sheep, somehow separated from the flock. I wonder if that lamb's cellphone went dead while on the way back to the pasture, rendering him helpless and wondering how long it would take before the others noticed his absence.

We can be sure that Jesus notices when we've wandered or run away, when we've gotten turned around or been left behind. Jesus never fails to notice our vulnerability, our deepest fears, our lostness. Jesus notices and cares and comes to find us. When we wonder if the flock has simply moved on without us, we can be assured that the Shepherd never gives up on us. No matter how far away we are, no matter how long we've been gone, he keeps looking for us until he brings us safely home.

*Good Shepherd, you never fail to notice when we are missing from the flock. You value us so much that you will leave the ninety-nine in order to seek us out and bring us home. When we are afraid or anxious, unsure where we are or where to go, you come to us, care for us, assure us we are not alone. Amen.*



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## Monday | PSALM 23

Read this beloved psalm aloud. Perhaps find several translations and note the differences. What feelings come to you as you read it? What places or people does this psalm bring to mind? As you go about your day, take one verse with you. Write it down, keep it close, pull it out when you need a reminder of God's abiding care.

*Lord, you are our Shepherd, our protector, guide and leader. When we are in shadowy places, fearful and uncertain what will happen next, bring us back with your rod and staff. Lead us to places of refuge, rest and renewal. Remind us that you chase us down with goodness and mercy. Amen.*

## Tuesday | LAMENTATIONS 3:25-26

Patience is a virtue, or so we are told. However, there is more than patient waiting admonished here. The first verse gives us some agency as we wait. We are told to seek God, not only wait for God. How might you seek God today? Remember, we are promised that those who seek will find.

*Patience, Lord, is difficult to come by in our world of instant gratification and on-demand everything. We do not like to wait. And yet, you tell us to wait — not passively, but eagerly and all the while seeking you. You promise that those who seek do indeed find and so today we anticipate seeing you everywhere. Amen.*

## Wednesday | MICAH 7:7

God hears us. Sit with that truth for a moment. As you pray today – for yourself, your loved ones, the world – remember that God hears you. God is right now listening to you. What difference does that reality make in the prayers you voice, the words you speak, the hopes you hold close?

*Gracious God, we know your word does not return to you empty. You promise, too, to hear our words, to listen to us, our hopes and desires, our doubts and lamentations. Today we speak boldly to you, holding nothing back, because you know each utterance before it is even on our lips and you not only hear, but respond. Amen.*

## Thursday | MATTHEW 5:3-8

Blessed. What does that word mean to you? We may hear “God, bless you” after we sneeze or, in certain regions of the country, “Bless your heart.” Sayings like “too blessed to be stressed” are emblazoned on T-shirts and throw pillows, but in light of this text, what does it really mean to be blessed?

*You, God, bless us, with your power to not only be present but to transform our most painful circumstances. Being blessed does not render us immune from suffering. Being blessed offers us a sliver of light through the cracks, a lifeline in tumultuous waters, the assurance that we are more than our circumstances and immeasurably valued by none other than the Most High God. Amen.*

## Friday | LUKE 12:7

This is one of those verses that feels like hyperbole — every hair on our heads counted by God, really? What if, for today, you carried this possibility with you? What if you imagined today that God knows and values everything about you and about everyone you encounter? Notice how this impacts your perception of yourself and others.

*Lord of all, aren't you too busy to pay attention to every detail of our lives? It is all but impossible for us to believe that we, and every creature, are that important to you. And yet, you hold nothing back from us, not even your Son. So we abide in the promise that we are more precious to you than we could ever hope or imagine. Amen.*

## Saturday | 2 CORINTHIANS 1:3-4

Consolation is not a word we use much anymore, short of describing a second-tier prize. In this verse we are told that God consoles us, enabling us to console others. Think about who and what brings you comfort. How does your faith bring consolation? How can you console someone today?

*God, when we are afflicted, disappointed and reeling from loss, you console, comfort and care for us. That consolation comes in the form of people, prayer and moments of the peace that passes understanding. May the relief of your grace prompt us to extend that grace to others who right now need to know your care. Amen.*

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