

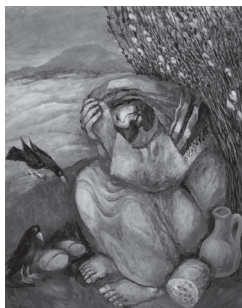
SEPTEMBER-OCTOBER 2020

# THE UPPER ROOM<sup>®</sup>

WHERE THE WORLD MEETS TO PRAY



# COVER ART INTERPRETATION



## *Elijah*

**Artist: Sieger Köder**  
(Germany, Contemporary)

**Interpreter: Kathryn A. Kimball,**  
Curator, The Upper Room Chapel/  
Christian Art Museum

Elijah walked into King Ahab's court and declared, "As the LORD, the God of Israel, lives, whom I serve, there will be neither dew nor rain in the next few years except at my word" (1 Kings 17:1, NIV). Then following God's directions, Elijah ran away to hide in the ravines near the river Cherith. This is the scene depicted in Sieger Köder's painting, *Elijah*.

Taking shelter under a large shrub, Elijah crouches holding his head in his hands. A water jug sits at his side. The golden-brown shades of his robe blend into the ravines beyond, while the blues of his headdress meld into the colors of the shrub, sky, and mountains. The ravens promised by God lay meat and bread at Elijah's feet. Scavenging ravens usually indicate death, and anyone searching for Elijah would not expect to find life where ravens gather. But Elijah has shown great trust in God, and God has been faithful to protect and provide for him.

We can only imagine what Elijah must be feeling, seeing the abundant food and water at his feet, the rich valley of golden grasses and mountains in the distance, yet knowing he must hide. Does Elijah respond to God's divine direction with lament or prayers of thanksgiving? When we are faced with difficult circumstances, what is our response? Will our prayers include lament or be full of thanksgiving? Will we, like Elijah, follow God's direction and trust God to be faithful?

# STRENGTH IN WEAKNESS

**TUES  
SEPT 1**  
2020

## READ 2 Corinthians 12:1-10\*

**Paul wrote, “[The Lord] said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.’”**

— 2 Corinthians 12:9 (NIV)

As a nurse in a busy surgical-oncology unit, I was feeling depleted. Slumped into a pew in the quiet hospital chapel, I gazed mindlessly at a group of candles in the corner. One flickered weakly. “How will I get through this shift, Lord? I feel like that candle — about to burn out.” The verse quoted above flashed through my mind, bringing comfort. Our weakness elicits God’s compassion — not God’s judgment.

Reaching into my pocket for a pen to scribble my thoughts, I pulled out a latex glove. How useless it seemed! Then lifting my right hand, I studied its strong tendons and slipped it into the blue glove. The lifeless material was now filled with form and strength. As I opened and closed my gloved fist, God reminded me that I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me (see Phil. 4:13). I left the chapel reassured that God’s strength and power within me — not my weakness — would prevail.

**THOUGHT FOR THE DAY**  
When I am weak, I can find strength in God’s power.

God does not ask us to be strong on our own. God asks us to pray and believe that God’s power is with us. We can trust God to fill us and to equip us for any task the day brings.

**Prayer:** Thank you, Lord, for the presence of your Spirit and your power within us this day. Amen.

**Dee Aspin (California, USA)**

**Prayer Focus: ONCOLOGY NURSES**

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

## LOVING ONE ANOTHER

READ Luke 6:27-36

*Jesus said, "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you."*

— John 15:12 (NRSV)

When I was 11 years old, a new family joined our church. Alex, the 13-year-old boy in this family, was a bit of a wild child. I mostly avoided Alex because I thought he was too loud and immature. After a few months, my mom told me she had scheduled an afternoon for me to hang out with Alex.

### THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

God can bless me through unlikely friendships.

I was not thrilled by this proposition. My mom did not force me to go, but she said she thought it would be a good thing to do because Alex didn't have many

friends. God tugged at my heart, and I agreed to go. Alex and I had fun, and from then on I spent a lot of time with him. To this day, he remains one of my closest friends.

God calls us to love all people. I believe God sets up situations like this more frequently than we may notice. Now when I find myself not wanting to be around someone who is different from me, I think back to when I met Alex and reflect on the blessing that our friendship has been. I remember that God loves me unconditionally. So what excuse do I have not to love those different from me?

**Prayer:** Dear God, help us to be open to new friendships and to love others as you love us. Amen.

Gabe Herman (South Dakota, USA)

# SEARCHING FOR PEACE

THUR  
SEPT 3  
2020

READ Psalm 91:1-13

*[The LORD] will command his angels concerning you  
to guard you in all your ways.*

— Psalm 91:11 (NIV)

Recently, I was going through a difficult time. I went to the church atrium to pray and try to find peace. In the atrium, I admired the birds perched on the leafy trees, and I noticed three large, green lizards on one of the trees. The lizards were leisurely eating the abundant leaves. Then I remembered that the trees have thorns. *How curious, I thought, the lizards seem serene. How can they maneuver around the trees without feeling pain or harming themselves?* As I thought more about this, I remembered that God equipped these creatures with a scaly, dry outer layer that protects them.

Then my thoughts turned to today's scripture verse. How reassuring to know that God's angels protect us! Along with these angels, God provides us with prayer and scripture as tools to help us find peace. We can trust that God will protect us and free us from anxiety.

## THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Don't be anxious; present  
your requests to God.  
(See Phil. 4:6.)

**Prayer:** Creator God, sweep away all anxiety and make us new again. Grant us peace in mind, body, and spirit. We pray as Jesus taught us, "Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, as in heaven, so in earth. Give us day by day our daily bread. And forgive us our sins; for we also forgive every one that is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil" (Luke 11:2-4, KJV). Amen.

Evelyn Jiménez Vélez (Puerto Rico)

## IN SMALL WAYS

READ Matthew 25:31-40

*Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.*

— Matthew 25:40 (NIV)

When I was younger I looked forward to retirement as a time when I would do something great for God. I envisioned a missionary trek where I would bring hope to all I would meet. Or I would finally write an important treatise that would capture everyone's heart and save the world.

When I retired two years after cancer treatment, I did not

### THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

I can share God's great love in small ways.

have the energy for either of those dreams. Instead I worked one morning a week serving in my church's food pantry, another visiting my mother in the memory-care

facility where she lived, and others volunteering at a local school. But I was disappointed. It didn't seem big enough.

Then I remembered the common phrase "Bloom where you are planted." I looked for little ways to share great love. Now I make cards of encouragement for the people who receive food from our food bank. I put together thank-you baskets for my local mail carrier, volunteer firefighters, and the aides at my mother's home. I post a daily prayer online based on my devotional.

It is not the size or grandeur of our mission that counts. We can all do something to bring God's grace to the world around us.

**Prayer:** Lord of all, lead us to ways to share your love with those around us. Amen.

Kim Whitlock Sisk (Oklahoma, USA)

# GOD IS EVERYWHERE

SAT  
SEPT 5  
2020

READ Genesis 39:20-23

*If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there.*

— Psalm 139:8 (KJV)

As I grew up, I heard my parents say that God is everywhere. I used to wonder, *How can God be everywhere when I cannot see God?* But after I started attending church, I began experiencing God's presence in every situation.

When I lost my job, I felt God's presence. At times I felt like giving up, but a voice within me kept reminding me that God is faithful. During those trying moments, Joseph's story became real for me. Joseph went through challenge after challenge, but God was with him. When he was thrown into a pit (see Gen. 37:24, KJV), jailed (see Gen. 39:20, KJV), and finally made a ruler in Egypt (see Gen. 41:40-43, KJV), God's presence was all around.

In my struggles, I formed the habit of rising early to praise and worship God. During those dark moments, God's presence

and grace were my greatest hope and refuge. I knew that God understood my situation. My family saw the hope I found in God's presence, and they joined me in worship.

A year later, I continued to experience God's presence when I found another job even better than the one I'd lost. No matter our situation, God will not fail us.

## THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

When I look, I can find signs of God's presence all around me.

**Prayer:** Ever-present God, surround us with your presence in every situation. Amen.

Benedict Mutweko Musee (Kajiado County, Kenya)

SUN  
SEPT 6  
2020

## PEACE IN OUR HEARTS

READ Joshua 1:1-9

*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 had just returned from the market one morning when I was shocked by a message from my friends. They informed me that three churches in our city had been bombed. All churches in the city had to cancel their services that day, so some of a friends and I agreed to hold our own worship service at my friend's house. Even in the midst of the chaotic situation, we could worship God, pray, and share a sermon. The situation in our city could not prevent us from continuing to praise and worship God.

### THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

When chaos abounds, I can find peace through worshipping God.

Through that experience I realized that many things — big and small — can scare us. But even amid our fears, we can continue to believe that God is with us no matter what happens. When we pray and put our trust in God, God will give us peace in our hearts. We do not have to fear because when we are with God, we are more than conquerors. (See Romans 8:37.)

**Prayer:** Dear God, we believe that whatever happens, you are still with us. Help us to look beyond our fear and to accept the peace that you offer us. Amen.

Meliana Santoso (East Java, Indonesia)



# A STEADFAST EXAMPLE

MON  
SEPT 7  
2020

READ John 13:12-17

*I have set you an example that you should  
do as I have done for you.*

— John 13:15 (NIV)

As I took out the trash one afternoon, I saw a car approaching. The driver rolled down the window and said, “Hi.” I recognized her as one of my neighbors. She went on to say that she had been diagnosed with cancer, and the doctors were performing tests to see if it had gone to her spine. When I told her I was sorry to hear this news, I tentatively added that I would pray for her. I had never brought up my faith with her, but I felt led to share. She responded, “I knew you would pray for me. Thank you.” As she went on her way, I praised God. I realized that I had quietly set an example as a Christian to my neighbor — and in doing so had given her a word of hope.

Though we may be timid in sharing our faith, we can set an example of what it means to be a Christian. As we set an example through our daily living, God will bring opportunities to share our faith with others. Our

opportunities may be a commitment to pray or an invitation to share the gospel. God will direct our paths and the words we speak. Jesus set an example for us through his actions, and we can offer Christian love to others through our actions and words.

## THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

How will my actions  
demonstrate my  
faith today?

**Prayer:** Dear heavenly Father, help us to be examples of Christ in our actions and words. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

Jodi Wheeler (Arizona, USA)

**TUES  
SEPT 8  
2020**

## THE WELL-MARKED TRAIL

**READ Proverbs 4:10-18**

*This is God, our God forever and ever.  
He will be our guide forever.*

— Psalm 48:14 (NRSV)

Hiking in the forests of the Pacific Northwest, I have sometimes taken the wrong trail. These unmarked paths seem inviting at first, but before too long they narrow and end, leaving me frustrated and sometimes lost. Over time I have learned, sometimes the hard way, that the only sure way to get to where I want to go is to follow a well-marked trail. When I look back on my life, I see many times that I went down the wrong path. Ignoring advice, avoiding friends, and trying to do everything my own way, I made some really bad choices. Instead of trying to be the best that I could be, I chose sub-

### **THOUGHT FOR THE DAY**

With God, I can trust that  
I'm on the right path.

stance abuse. Instead of doing what I needed to do to have the best in life, I became content living with the worst.

Finally, when I had reached rock bottom, a friend who had struggled with similar issues in the past convinced me to visit his church with him. Seeing for myself the effect faith in Christ had on the lives of the people around me, I made the decision to let the Lord's ways guide my life. Since that day I have never looked back because I have seen so many good opportunities ahead. I finally learned that God's path is the only path worth walking.

**Prayer:** Dear Lord, when we begin to get lost, help us to remember that your way is always open, waiting to lead us to you. Amen.

**Mark A. Carter (Oregon, USA)**

## READ Mark 3:13-19

*[Jesus] went up the mountain and called to him those whom he wanted. . . . And he appointed twelve, whom he also named apostles, to be with him, and to be sent out to proclaim the message, and to have authority to cast out demons.*

— Mark 3:13-15 (NRSV)

I have recently been spending more time reading God's word and praying, and though I could be more consistent in my practice, every day I grow closer to God than I was the day before. When I read scripture it becomes God's voice to me, and I learn what God is calling me to do. I pray that as I draw closer to God day by day, I will be better equipped to serve God.

In Mark 3:13-15, Jesus first called the disciples to himself and then sent them out to preach, heal, and minister to those in need. In Jesus' presence, they could receive the anointing and the boldness to serve others. I have found that since I've grown closer to God, I am better able to share God's word with others. Without first going to God, we won't have much to give to others. Being in God's presence equips us to go out and serve God by caring for God's people.

### THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

How can I draw closer to God today?

**Prayer:** Dear Lord, draw us closer to you each day. Help us to hear your voice in your word so that we may share your love with others. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Enid Adah Nyinomujuni (Dar es Salaam, Tanzania)

THUR  
SEPT 10  
2020

## JOY AND GLADNESS

READ Psalm 104:10-28

*Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty;  
the whole earth is full of his glory.*

— Isaiah 6:3 (NIV)

As I sat at my window watching the rain fall on the leaves, I reflected on how much I had been through since my cancer diagnosis. Five rounds of chemotherapy, a bone marrow transplant, and six months in the hospital had left my body, mind, and soul exhausted. My world had become gray, dark, and lonely. I prayed for something, anything, to lift my spirits.

As the rain hit the leaves, I felt my prayer being answered. The droplets splashed and sparkled in the air, catching bits of light refracting to make an array of colors. With the wind moving through the trees, the branches danced and swayed; loud cracks of thunder sounded almost like a rhythm. In the world that I thought of as gray and dark, music and color

### THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Even in the darkest of storms,  
joy and gladness exist  
with God.

rivaled even the most beautiful language of today's psalm. I just had to open my eyes to look for it.

Sometimes during our most trying days, we lose

our ability to see the beauty that exists around us — in God and in ourselves. While it may not seem true at times, the world is shining with the radiance of our Creator. In our most difficult moments, it is more important than ever to see that divine light.

**Prayer:** God of all beauty, thank you for the grace and gladness you have woven into the world. Help us to look for your light so that our hearts can be filled with your love. Amen.

Samuel Felderman (Iowa, USA)

**Prayer Focus:** THOSE RECEIVING CHEMOTHERAPY  
TREATMENTS

# LOVE LIKE JESUS

FRI  
SEPT 11  
2020

READ John 13:1-15

*Having loved his own who were in the world,  
[Jesus] loved them to the end.*

— John 13:1 (NIV)

I suspect that all of us have felt let down or disappointed by someone. When this happens, we may be tempted to give up on the person who has made us feel that way. We may feel hurt to the point of despair. But we can choose to maintain peace by turning to God.

Jesus had every reason to give up on his disciples for their inconstancy and their doubts, and he knew of Judas' plot to betray him. And yet Jesus stayed with them, ate with them, and astounded them by washing their feet. Jesus repeatedly showed loyalty, humility, and love.

We can learn so much by looking at Jesus' actions. Jesus challenged his disciples, and all of us, to follow his example. Thankfully, we have the Holy Spirit to help us serve and love others — even when we feel like they have wronged us.

## THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

How will I follow Jesus' example today?

**Prayer:** Dear Lord, strengthen us to love others even when we feel hurt, bitter, or disappointed. Help us to demonstrate your grace and forgiveness. Amen.

Lynda J. Samuel (Scotland, United Kingdom)

## GOD'S COMFORT

READ Psalm 4:1-8

*In peace I will lie down and sleep, for you alone,  
LORD, make me dwell in safety.*

— Psalm 4:8 (NIV)

One Saturday night as my wife and I were babysitting our grandsons, I learned a valuable lesson from God.

After I had read a few books to them, it was time for the younger one to go to sleep. He lay peacefully in his crib, so I stealthily crept from the room. As we sat downstairs reading the 3-year-old for bed, I heard the little one cry out in distress. As I entered the room, I found him panting and sobbing; but

when he saw me, he calmed down. As I sat with him in a rocking chair, attempting to comfort him, I realized how God, through this child, was comforting me.

### THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

God can comfort me in any situation.

At times, we may be like my little grandson. When life doesn't go our way, we can become scared or feel we're at the end of our rope. Our Father God knows how to give perfect love to comfort us in our hopelessness and fear. When we are at our lowest, God wants to surround us with comfort and peace, and whisper those words of Psalm 46:10: "Be still, and know that I am God!" (NIV).

**Prayer:** God of comfort and peace, help us to trust that you have us in your arms now and forevermore. Amen.

David Payne (Missouri, USA)

# GRANDMA'S FAITH

SUN  
SEPT 13  
2020

READ Deuteronomy 6:1-9

*Train children in the right way, and  
when old, they will not stray.*

— Proverbs 22:6 (NRSV)

Growing up, I watched and listened as my grandma read her Bible aloud every night before she went to bed. As a child, I wondered why she did it. Watching my grandma practice her faith made me want to know God. I wanted to know what sustained and nourished her through pain and sorrow and gave her sheer joy in living. I wanted to know where my grandma found her strength. As I grew older, I understood that having a connection to her Creator gave her hope and got her through life's most difficult times.

Over and over, I return to the image of my grandma reading her Bible. From her example I have learned that God alone gives me strength in my weakness, light in my darkness, comfort in my distress, and eternal life in my death. God used my grandma's simple but profound example to help me in my own journey toward

**THOUGHT FOR THE DAY**  
How can I be an example of  
faithful witness to others?

God. And as I practice my own faith today, I never know what impact it might have on someone else or how God might use me. Let us all live out our faith so that others can see and hear the love of God.

**Prayer:** Dear Lord, thank you for giving us strength through your word. Help us to be witnesses of faith to others every day. Amen.

Xavia Arndt Sheffield (Pennsylvania, USA)

MON  
SEPT 14  
2020

## AN INVITATION FROM GOD

READ John 14:12-14

*Jesus said, “I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son.”*

— John 14:13 (NRSV)

At the age of 23 I married a man who was not a Christian. Our lives became extremely busy running a school. All the while I prayed for my husband's salvation.

One day, after we had been married for 30 years, my husband showed me an invitation he had received to a

### THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Persistence in prayer is  
never a waste.

Christian crusade to be held in Tokyo. Feeling a leading from God, we went.

When at the end of the gathering the leader invited participants to

accept Christ, my husband bowed his head before the Lord. He believed in Jesus that day, and at Christmas that year he was baptized. His life was filled with eternal hope, joy, and service to God. When a new school building was built, he led a Christian dedication ceremony. When our church was in need of a place to worship, we offered the all-purpose room at our school — and my husband provided a cross for the platform. He invited the students to Sunday worship.

This is the way the Lord answered my many years of prayer. I experienced the grace of the Lord, grace that human wisdom cannot comprehend.

**Prayer:** Our loving Father, use us as channels of your love. Be with us and help us to become good witnesses for you. Amen.

Itsuko Kunori (Gunma Prefecture, Japan)

**Prayer Focus:** FOR PERSISTENCE IN PRAYING  
FOR LOVED ONES



**TUES  
SEPT 15  
2020**

## DESIRE TO SERVE

**READ Psalm 139:1-10**

**The LORD says, “*Before they call I will answer; while they are still speaking I will hear.*”**

**— Isaiah 65:24 (NIV)**

Moved by the power of the Holy Spirit, I had asked Jesus to be the Lord and Savior of my life. Soon thereafter, I began learning more from the Bible and Christian writers about the incredible love that God has for me. I have come to see that we are to share with others the love of God through caring words and actions.

**THOUGHT FOR THE DAY**  
How will I be open to God's invitation to serve today?

One day, I was praying about how I could practice being a Christ-follower through one of the ongoing ministries at my church.

But none of them seemed to fit me, so I put the thought aside. The next day, a letter came announcing the church's intent to start a new caregiving ministry, along with an invitation to join the first training. That experience was life-changing for me and was the beginning of my years of participation in many different caregiving ministries.

I sometimes wonder if God was so glad I had finally come to the point of wanting to serve that God just couldn't wait to send the answer to my prayer. Whatever the reason, to God be the glory!

**Prayer:** Almighty God, thank you for knowing us so deeply that you bring together our desire to serve you and opportunities to do so. In the name of Jesus we pray. Amen.

**Bob Peterson (Texas, USA)**

# CHANGES

WED  
SEPT 16  
2020

## READ 2 Corinthians 4:7-18

*Even if our bodies are breaking down on the outside, the person that we are on the inside is being renewed every day.*

— 2 Corinthians 4:16 (CEB)

I love to walk on the beach looking for seashells. When I was younger, I dreamed of discovering a perfect conch or whelk. In all my days of beachcombing, however, I've seen mostly chipped scallops, common cockles, barnacle-infested oysters, and the pieces of once-whole whelks. As I've gotten older, I have come to appreciate the small, smooth pieces that roll in with the waves. The purple and cream ones are my favorite, but there are also lovely pinks, browns, blacks, and even iridescent golds. Worn by tides and time, they are not the vessels they once were. Instead, they have become beautiful in a new way.

Like those shells I am not now what I once was. Aging, illnesses, and extensive dental surgery have changed my physical appearance. Yet, because of God's abiding love and guidance, I still have value and beauty. My earthen vessel may not be as young as it once was, but I take comfort in knowing that I am an ever-evolving creation. As today's reading reminds us, "We have this treasure in clay pots so that the awesome power belongs to God and doesn't come from us" (2 Cor. 4:7, CEB). No matter our physical changes, our actions can speak of God's power and renewing presence in our lives.

**THOUGHT FOR THE DAY**  
How can I glorify God in this stage of my life?

**Prayer:** Dear Father, thank you for abiding with us through life's gales. Help us to become new creations in you so that others can see the power of your love. Amen.

Regina K. Carson (Virginia, USA)

**Prayer Focus:** THOSE WORRIED ABOUT AGING

23

**THUR  
SEPT 17  
2020**

## FAITHFUL SERVANT

**READ 1 Samuel 3:1-10**

*Love the LORD your God with all your heart and  
with all your soul and with all your strength.*

— Deuteronomy 6:5 (NIV)

One of my favorite Bible stories is that of Samuel. His mother, Hannah, had begged God to give her a child. God blessed her with a son, Samuel, whom Hannah brought to serve in the temple.

We can imagine little Samuel helping Eli, the high priest in the temple of Shiloh. Samuel might have done chores and run errands for Eli and the believers who came to the temple. Samuel's work must have been hard, but he served diligently as a loving and faithful steward in God's house.

### **THOUGHT FOR THE DAY**

Every act of faithful  
service is sacred.

Samuel served God with all his strength. He didn't complain when he thought Eli was calling him in the

middle of the night; he was zealous! For Samuel, no work was menial, and every job was important. Because Samuel was faithful in small matters, God entrusted him with big matters. Samuel eventually became one of Israel's greatest prophets.

Loving God with all our strength means volunteering our time, talents, care, and resources for God and others. No work is menial or degrading in the service of God — every act of service is holy and pleasing to God. The story of Samuel can inspire us to serve God with all our strength.

**Prayer:** Dear God, help us to serve you like Samuel did. Remind us to be zealous in all our work, because every act of service is pleasing to you. Amen.

**Wati Mollier (Nagaland, India)**

## READ Psalm 28:6-9

*Cast all your anxiety on [God],  
because he cares for you.*

— 1 Peter 5:7 (NRSV)

My Boston Terrier, Fester, loves the game of fetch. Often when he brings the ball back, he will not let go of it and instead it becomes a game of tug-of-war. I tell Fester that if he wants to play fetch, he has to let go of the ball. This made me think of the times I go to God in prayer with a problem or need. Instead of leaving it with God, I start worrying about it again. Holding on to my problems does me no good either.

**THOUGHT FOR THE DAY**  
Whatever today brings,  
I will let God handle it.

When I have trouble letting go, it helps me to delve into the Bible and read God's promises. After all, God has the answer to every problem or challenge I will ever face and has promised to be with me no matter what. God is never standing around wondering what to do. It is also helpful to recall God's past faithfulness in my life — answered prayers and situations that seemed hopeless but eventually worked out. From the smallest to the biggest problem, if we let go of our worries and let God handle them, God always comes through.

**Prayer:** Dear Lord, help us to cast our cares on you, knowing that when we let you handle them, you always have the best solution. Amen.

Brenda Brooks (Virginia, USA)

## A NATURAL SYMPHONY

**READ Genesis 1:1-25**

*Let the fields be jubilant, and everything in them; let  
all the trees of the forest sing for joy.*

— Psalm 96:12 (NIV)

I enjoy walking my dog in a nearby neighborhood built around a series of small ponds surrounded by large trees and bushes. Often I listen to music on my portable music player as we walk.

### **THOUGHT FOR THE DAY**

I will listen attentively for  
God's wonders today.

One morning the battery died halfway through the first song. At first I was annoyed. However, I began to listen to the rustling of

the cottonwood trees, the calm splashing of small fountains in the center of the ponds, the chatter of birds, the quacking of a duck, and the occasional melody of a wind chime.

Many distractions and activities fight for our attention, from the technology of smart phones and computer screens to the rush of day-to-day chores and business. Yet none of this can compare to the melodies, art, and miracles of God's creation.

I still enjoy walking with my music player. Every now and then, though, I leave it at home and enjoy the beauty of God's creation. When I choose not to let my music block out the world around me, I recognize that God has composed an entire symphony of peaceful sounds. And it is beautiful music, indeed.

**Prayer:** Dear God, help us to take the time to enjoy and care for the world you created. Amen.

**Lisa Tate (New Mexico, USA)**

# A TIMELY GIFT

READ Matthew 8:23-27

SUN  
SEPT 20  
2020

*The disciples went and woke him, saying, "Lord, save us! We're going to drown!" . . . Then he got up and rebuked the winds and the waves, and it was completely calm.*

— Matthew 8:25-26 (NIV)

Until my sister passed away, she would send me *El Aposento Alto*, the Spanish-language edition of *The Upper Room*. Last summer, another sister sent a copy of the magazine to me. Little did I know what a source of blessing and strength it would be at that particular time. On September 20, 2017, María, a Category 4 hurricane, hit Puerto Rico. The 16 hours my family and I spent huddled in our home were terrifying, and we prayed for God's mercy. Words can barely describe the difficulty of the subsequent weeks and months.

However, each morning I reached for *El Aposento Alto* because I knew that in it I would find a message of strength and blessing. God's messages sustained us as we waited in the very long lines to purchase food, water, or oil to supply light during the long hours of darkness. Reading *El Aposento Alto* each day was the perfect way to share God's love with my family, especially with my son. He had been in the process of working on his doctoral thesis. Not knowing how the storm's aftermath would affect his studies increased his anxiety. But reading God's word each day renewed our spirits as we began to see our situation slowly improve. We knew we could move forward each day because God was by our side.

**THOUGHT FOR THE DAY**  
God's sure refuge is stronger than any storm.

**Prayer:** Ever-present God, when we call out to you in distress, you hear our prayers. Give us strength to face the hard times. In the name of Jesus Christ, we pray. Amen.

Carmen González-Bello (Puerto Rico)

**Prayer Focus:** THOSE RECOVERING FROM HURRICANES 27

## GOOD MORNING, LORD

READ Exodus 4:10-12

*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)

Last year our church welcomed a new pastor. I was immediately struck by her approach to the morning prayer. She started by saying, “Good morning, Lord.” Then she continued her conversation with God.

### THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Today I will try praying in a new way.

Her way of praying made me think about prayer in general and how we as Christians communicate with God. Isn't prayer just

a conversation? Is kneeling at our bedside or reciting prayers the only way to talk to God? I don't think so. We have conversations every day with our family members, our co-workers, and our friends. Maybe God would like us to think of prayer as that same type of conversation.

I have now started talking to God in a conversational way. I feel closer and speak more often to God than I would if I only prayed on my knees morning and night. I can have these prayer conversations as I drive my car, or sit on my deck with a glass of tea, or as I wake up to another day God has given me. Any time can be a good time for a conversation with God.

**Prayer:** Good morning, Lord. I have much to share with you. Thank you for this time together. Amen.

Al Alexander (North Carolina, USA)

# LEARNING TO TRUST

**TUES**  
**SEPT 22**  
**2020**

**READ Matthew 17:14-20**

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

— Jeremiah 29:11 (NIV)

Years ago, I spent a great deal of time in the mountains rock climbing, hiking, and camping with friends. At the time I had a beloved dog that I often took with me. When the trails required squeezing between rocks or climbing up or down narrow, steep paths, my dog had to trust me to carry her through safely.

As a young dog, she resisted coming close enough for me to hold her, and after much coaxing would stiffen and twist until I set her feet on easy ground. Once we had safely made our way through, she would wag her tail and shake and snort in relief. As she matured, she learned to trust me — then we could maneuver through all kinds of places!

I often remember my dog when I encounter problems and sense God encouraging me to be more trusting. Do I resist when

God wants to pick me up and pull me through, or do I walk closer and allow God to carry me? As I continue to experience God's trustworthiness, I know I am always secure when I draw near to God.

## **THOUGHT FOR THE DAY**

When troubles arise, I will trust  
God to carry me through.

**Prayer:** Faithful and loving God, help us to trust you with everything in life. Amen.

**Carrie Knight Kitzmiller (Texas, USA)**



## A LITTLE SIP

READ John 4:7-15

*[The LORD] satisfies the thirsty and fills  
the hungry with good things.*

— Psalm 107:9 (NIV)

My prayer partner lives in a different state. When we lived in the same city, we prayed with each other weekly. Although over the years she has moved to three different states, we continue to pray by phone.

### THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Prayer connects me to others and to God.

Occasionally we both get busy, so we don't pray together as often. But eventually one of us will text the other to schedule our prayer time. We always spend the first few minutes catching up on our lives, then we ask each other about our prayer requests. Finally, we pray.

During a recent call, we remarked that our time together was like having our thirst quenched. We both laughed when my friend said, "All we needed was just a little sip." Psalm 107:9 tells us that God satisfies thirsty souls.

Praying doesn't have to be complicated or follow a certain ritual. It's simply talking to God as a friend, coming to our Creator honestly and openly about our cares and concerns. When my friend and I end our prayer time together we say goodbye, knowing that we both can continue our conversation with God.

**Prayer:** Dear God, thank you for friends who help us to spend time in your presence and find peace in the power of your love. Amen.

Kathy Gaillard (Wisconsin, USA)

## READ Acts 2:17-21

*Seek first [God's] kingdom and his righteousness,  
and all these things will be given to you as well.*

— Matthew 6:33 (NIV)

Many years ago our family went on a holiday trip to continental Europe. One day we went on a sightseeing trip on the famous Königssee near Berchtesgaden in Bavaria, Germany. Königssee is a deep lake surrounded by high mountains that create an enormous echo. The guide on the electric ferry was also a good trumpet player; so as we reached mid-sea, the ferry stopped and he played a short song. Seconds after he finished, the music was thrown several times back and forth among the mountains.

This experience has made me think about how the word of God can be like an echo in our hearts and thoughts — not just for seconds but through many years. Today's quoted verse is one of my favorites. Another verse that has become an anchor for me is Acts 2:21: "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." These verses and many others have brought me hope for this life and the next. My prayer is that I will allow these verses to speak through me so that they may echo in the lives of those I meet.

### THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

God's word can live in me and  
flow through me to others.

**Prayer:** Father in heaven, thank you for your word that tells us about your limitless love. Help us to let your love live in our hearts. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

Øystein Brinch (Oslo, Norway)

## LASTING BEAUTY

READ Isaiah 40:28-31

*Charm is deceptive, and beauty is fleeting; but a woman who fears the LORD is to be praised.*

— Proverbs 31:30 (NIV)

My life has not been the same since my breast cancer diagnosis. When I look in the mirror, I do not like what I see. I feel like I have aged 10 years. My hair is short and receding, thin on the top and speckled with gray. My eyelashes and eyebrows are barely visible. It is difficult to find cute shirts or dresses during the summer because I have only one breast. I was not prepared for the permanent changes that chemotherapy and a mastectomy have caused.

But throughout this journey, people have been watching me. They weren't looking at my physical changes; they were watching my walk with God. My strength — that comes from God — has been encouraging to others. Though my walk has not been easy, it is comforting to know that my faith is helping others.

### THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Today I will seek to see Christ in myself.

Like most people, I want to look appealing — to myself and others. But while circumstances and age have changed my appearance, I am learning to look beyond my physical imperfections. I may look different on the outside, but my desire to please God has not changed. Beauty fades, but my relationship with God will last throughout eternity.

**Prayer:** Dear Lord, help us to maintain a strong relationship with you through tough times, for our good and the good of others. Amen.

Sherri Pickett (California, USA)

# "BE OPENED"

SAT  
SEPT 26  
2020

READ Mark 7:31-37

*[Jesus] looked up to heaven and with a deep sigh said to him, "Ephphatha!" (which means "Be opened!").*

— Mark 7:34 (NIV)

At a recent parish retreat we were asked to share a personal story about a profound experience that taught us something about ourselves. The story I first thought of telling involved a deep healing experience. But certain details connected to my experience were too intimate, so I chose to share a different story. Fear and shame had censored me. I was worried about what people would think if they learned such intimate details about me.

Then someone else told a story that was similar to the one I had been too afraid to tell. I ended up wishing I'd had the courage

to share my original story with the group. Who knows what further healing might have come had I opened up and entered a more vulnerable space as this person had done?

God wants us to move beyond our fear and shame. God wants us to live openly, honestly, into the fullness of who and what we are — who God created us to be. That means entering a space of compassion and vulnerability the way Jesus did. Often, it is in those moments of raw, unabashed honesty that God speaks and moves through us most powerfully.

**THOUGHT FOR THE DAY**  
God calls me to share my story  
with honesty and courage.

**Prayer:** O God, help us to open up our lives to others who want what is best for us. In the name of Jesus, we pray. Amen.

Jennifer A. Hudson (Connecticut, USA)

## NO UNIMPORTANT PART

READ 1 Corinthians 12:12-31

*The parts of the body that people think are the weakest are the most necessary.*

— 1 Corinthians 12:22 (CEB)

I recently joined a church choir. At my age I can no longer hit the high notes, so I've switched from singing soprano to the lower range of alto.

At first, I envied the sopranos, who often carry the melody. Their clear, high notes are the most noticed sounds in our choir. How impressive it is when they hit a high G! Meanwhile, I sing the more subtle alto tones that I hardly used to notice.

I changed my perspective, however, while listening to a recording of our latest performance. I realized that every vocalist has an important part in a choir. While the altos don't normally carry the melody, our voices add an exquisite harmony that enhances the choir's performance.

### THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

My role is important  
to the church.

Like altos, many church members perform roles that seem to fade into the background. Some collect

donations for projects. Others serve on committees that plan special events. Some stock the kitchen. Still others ensure that the lawn is mowed. No matter how minor they may seem, all these jobs are important to the life of the church.

Whatever talents we have, we can use them not to receive applause but to focus on doing our part in serving God.

**Prayer:** God of all voices, help us to perform our part of the work to the best of our ability, knowing that we are serving you. Amen.

Lu Fullilove (Texas, USA)

## READ 1 John 5:1-5

*Who is it that overcomes the world? Only the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.*

— 1 John 5:5 (NIV)

On September 28, 2018, a 7.5 magnitude earthquake hit the Indonesian island of Sulawesi, triggering tsunami waves of nearly six meters and inflicting a death toll of more than 2,000. Many more people were missing. I cried, “O, God, how many more disasters?” Each time people perish in a natural disaster, I feel pain for this world.

As I was feeling depressed by the aftermath of the earthquake in Sulawesi, I attended a worship service at my home church. The speaker for the day read some of today’s reading from 1 John, which says that we shall “overcome the world” if we keep our faith, believing in our Lord Jesus Christ’s victory. Relief came upon me with hope that Jesus will rescue us. “The sound of weeping and of crying will be heard . . . no more” (Isa. 65:19). “There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain” (Rev. 21:4). These words calm me and bring me peace.

The world is suffering, but we have hope for the future when we trust God and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.

**THOUGHT FOR THE DAY**  
God’s words can comfort me  
through suffering.

**Prayer:** Dear God, comfort us in our present suffering and pain. Help us to have faith in a future with you. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

Kong Peng Sun (Singapore)

**TUES  
SEPT 29  
2020**

## A SACRED PAUSE

**READ Luke 5:12-16**

**Jesus said, “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.”**

— Matthew 11:28 (NIV)

When my children were young, I homeschooled them. Lunchtime was usually my first break of the day. At noon, I gathered everyone to eat, and we held hands to pray. But as I bowed my head and spoke thankful words to God, my mind sprinted ahead: *eat quickly, put away the dishes, ready the afternoon lessons, begin dinner preparations . . .*

### **THOUGHT FOR THE DAY**

I can enter into God's presence any time of day.

On one especially hectic day, before I prayed I consciously took a slow, deep breath. I relaxed my shoulders.

I cleared my head. I prepared my heart to be thankful to God for our food, my children, and all the good in my life. It was a sacred pause to recognize my shortcomings and God's ability to provide. My needs were many in the middle of a busy day — not only food, but also energy, patience, and discipline. Most of all, I needed a moment of God's peace before I started my afternoon.

God meets us where we are: overburdened, tired, running on empty. Not only is God the provider of the gift of food at mealtimes; God is also the giver of renewed energy, contentment, and balance for the hours ahead. By quietly entering into God's presence, we offer a moment of gratitude and receive the peace God promises.

**Prayer:** Father God, remind us to pause and enter into your presence many times each day. As we offer our gratitude, may we receive the rest and peace you promise. Amen.

Natalie D. Hall (Texas, USA)

READ Matthew 4:18-22

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

— Proverbs 3:5 (NIV)

On a beautiful fall day, I drove along a narrow, curving road on a mountain in North Carolina. As I began the descent, multiple road signs warned, “Road Worsens After Truck Ramp.” I gripped the steering wheel, tapped the brakes, and prepared for the worst. But the next several miles did not get narrower or curvier. In fact, the road never worsened at all. At the foot of the mountain, I thought, *Those signs ruined my drive!*

Then I thought about the ominous “signs” I place in my own path — like the one that whines “Day Worsens After Lunch” or the one that warns “Life Worsens After 60.” Those signs ruin my day and invite fear into my life.

I don’t need those signs anyway — Jesus has given me the guidance I need. Just as the disciples dropped their nets and followed Jesus, I must drop my signs and follow him. With Jesus by my side, I can ascend the mountain of my fear and move forward despite obstacles. And with confidence in Jesus’ love, I can find joy in my life’s journey.

**THOUGHT FOR THE DAY**  
What “signs” keep me from following Christ?

**Prayer:** Dear God, help us to trust in you and rejoice in the journeys of our lives. Help us to let go of negative thoughts so that we can follow you. Amen.

K. Anne Smith (Tennessee, USA)



THUR  
OCT 1  
2020

## CHANGED

READ 2 Corinthians 5:16-21

*If anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come:  
The old has gone, the new is here!*

— 2 Corinthians 5:17 (NIV)

When I became a Christian, I noticed many positive changes in my life. I became more joyful and peaceful. I started going to church, and I enjoyed having fellowship with other believers. Previously the Bible had seemed like any other book, but I started to love reading scripture, which had become alive to me. God became real and personal. I had truly become a new creation in Christ: Old things had passed away, and all things had become new. Even my older brother

noticed the changes and commented, “Surely there is such a thing as salvation. This girl has changed.”

As the years pass by, I continue to change as I grow

in my faith and knowledge of Jesus Christ. People change as they grow and experience new things. But God, the creator of all things, is dependable and trustworthy. What a blessing to know that God’s love for us never changes.

**THOUGHT FOR THE DAY**  
How has following Christ transformed me?

**Prayer:** Dear God, thank you for your steadfast love. Help us to continually change into the likeness of Jesus. As Jesus taught us, we 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” (Matt. 6:9-13, NIV). Amen.

Charity M. Kiregyera (Kampala, Uganda)

# OVERCOMING SIN

FRI  
OCT 2  
2020

READ Romans 8:5-14

*If you live according to the flesh, you will die; but  
if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds  
of the body, you will live.*

— Romans 8:13 (NIV)

Late one evening, I saw a large spider crawling in my bathroom. Thankfully, this didn't send me into a horrified yelling fit. The spider's presence did, however, motivate me to remove it — fast.

Soon after getting rid of the spider, I thought of my reaction to my sin. God spoke clearly to my heart:

*If you were that quick and*

*serious about overcoming sin, think how many fewer problems you would have and how much better off your life would be.*

As we see in the scripture quoted above, God's word gives us firm counsel about the importance of addressing actions that keep us from having a deeper relationship with God. If we are determined and disciplined, we can overcome our sin through confession, repentance, and the power of the Holy Spirit, trusting that God is always ready to forgive us.

## THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

With God's help, I can  
overcome my sin.

**Prayer:** Dear Lord, thank you for the gifts of Jesus Christ, your Holy Spirit, and your word — all of which empower us to overcome sin. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Tyler Myers (Ohio, USA)

## *No Hurry*

In John 11, Jesus receives word that his friend Lazarus is sick. Instead of rushing to Lazarus' bedside to heal him, verse six says that Jesus "stayed where he was two more days" (NIV). In the meantime, Lazarus dies. Had I been one of the disciples, I would have had a hard time understanding why Jesus didn't drop what he was doing and set out for Bethany immediately. There was, however, a point to Jesus' delay: "that God's Son may be glorified through it" (v. 4) and "that [the disciples] may believe" (v. 15). The time was of no consequence to Jesus, who went on to raise Lazarus and teach us something in the process — namely, it's not only the end result that matters but also what we learn in the time it takes getting there.

There's something to be said for proceeding steadily but not quickly. I drive an hour each morning to get to my office, and my commute covers long stretches of rural highway. I am not a slow driver, but I am also not a fast one. I take my time, and I enjoy the ride — drinking my coffee, watching the sun rise over the hills, allowing my mind to go wherever it pleases. My early morning commute is a time for introspection, a time to check in with myself. I value my drive for what it has taught me about the joy of not being in too big a hurry.

I do, however, tend to rush at other times. When I was in graduate school, I couldn't wait to be finished. It was not an altogether pleasant experience; I thought the faster it went, the quicker I could move on to a phase of life that seemed more appealing — one without lectures, papers, and late nights studying for exams. Looking back, I wish I had listened more carefully to the lectures, read some of the books more thoroughly, and paid closer attention to the people around me. Had I seen then as clearly as I do now that what happens on the journey is as important as reaching the destination, I might have spent less mental energy being frustrated by the pace. I might have freed my mind to be more attentive to and grateful for the self-discovery I was gaining in the process.

While the journey between life's milestones is important,

so too are the much shorter distances we traverse each day — the time we stand in line to order a cup of coffee, the duration of a dull meeting, the afternoon bus ride home. I want to take my time with the same confidence Jesus had getting to Lazarus. I don't get the sense that Jesus wasted that time but instead used it intentionally. The story reminds me that there is value in not being in a hurry — that no matter where we are on the journey there is a lesson to be learned in the moment. When things are going slower than I would like, I ask myself, *What am I not paying attention to that I should? What is this supposed to teach me? What is God trying to tell me?* Even — perhaps especially — in the delay, there's something to learn.

Several meditations in this issue address slowing down and learning a lesson from the moment at hand. You may want to read again the meditations for September 4, 10, 14, 27, 29 and October 7, 10, 14, 17, 26, and 28 before responding to the reflection questions below.

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION:

1. When have you rushed through a situation or experience only to later wish you had slowed down? What did you learn from that experience?
2. Read John 11:1-44. What stands out to you the most in this story? Do you think the outcome might have been different had Jesus gone to Bethany immediately? Explain.
3. In what circumstances is it easiest for you to be present and attentive? At what times is it most difficult?



— Andrew Garland Breeden  
Acquisitions Editor

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## UNSEEN

### READ 1 Samuel 16:1-13

*The LORD said to Samuel, "Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The LORD does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart."*

— 1 Samuel 16:7 (NIV)

One day while I was pruning my tree, a woman came up to me and asked why I was doing it. I told her that the leaves and branches were being eaten by caterpillars and weren't growing, so I was cutting them to allow new shoots to grow. This morning while I was watering my plants, she came again and asked, "Why are the leaves not growing? You should not have cut the leaves and branches!" I told her that a new leaf

#### THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

With God's help, I can see beyond what is in plain sight.

was growing — it was just small. She looked at the branch and said, "I don't see it!" Then she walked away.

I can sometimes be like that woman — seeing only what is in plain sight, not looking deeper to what is hidden. When suffering comes, I may notice only the suffering and not what God provides during hardship. I may longingly compare my life to others' instead of appreciating the blessings God has given me.

Today's scripture reading tells us that God sees deeper, beyond the outward appearance. When God is present in my life, God helps me to look for what lies hidden. By staying close to God, I can experience God's unseen guidance and peace in any situation.

**Prayer:** Dear God, help us to look for what lies hidden. Draw us close to you, and guide us with your compassionate heart. Amen.

Linda Chandra (Banten, Indonesia)

# TABLE FELLOWSHIP

SUN  
OCT 4  
2020

**READ Ephesians 4:3-6**

*[Those who accepted Peter's message and were baptized] devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.*

— Acts 2:42 (NIV)

Every day when Edwin, my Nigerian college roommate, would prepare his native foods in our kitchen, the house would fill with a distinct aroma that didn't appeal to my American palate. One afternoon, Edwin invited me to share his evening meal. Finding no suitable excuse, I reluctantly agreed. We sat across from each other at the table, where Edwin had placed one pot of a soup-like mixture and one plate that held a ball of biscuit dough. After the blessing Edwin explained, "In my country, we eat from one bowl as a sign of friendship." He took a piece of dough, dipped it in the soup, and ate the two together. I was humbled that Edwin counted me as a friend, and this meal became sacred to me. It reminded me of Holy Communion — one loaf, one cup, one Body, one people. Better than ever before, I understood that transformation happens at the Lord's Table. God unites people into the body of Christ.

**THOUGHT FOR THE DAY**  
At the Lord's Table, I unite with other Christians as family.

This same transformation happens when we sit down to eat with a Sunday school class or share a meal with people who are experiencing homelessness or gather for Holy Communion. Jesus shows up in the breaking of bread. We have the opportunity to invite others to share this meal, and around the Lord's Table we will be united as God's family.

**Prayer:** Dear Lord Jesus, as you invited us to the table and into your family, help us invite others to your table and your family. Amen.

**Kevin Thomas (Alabama, USA)**

MON  
OCT 5  
2020

## COMFORT IN LONELINESS

READ Psalm 147:1-7

*[God] hath said, I will never leave thee,  
nor forsake thee.*

— Hebrews 13:5 (KJV)

I work in a memory-care facility with residents who have middle-to-late stage dementia. One day, a resident named Margaret told me that she felt lonely and didn't know where her family was. She didn't remember that her family had recently visited. I tried to reassure her that she was not alone,

### THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Scripture serves as my  
reminder that God is  
always with me.

and I gave her a hug and a smile. But it seemed like that wasn't what she needed to hear in that moment. Margaret started to walk away and then turned

around to look at me. She said, "God said he will never leave us or forsake us." I told her that she was absolutely right. As she walked away, she seemed to feel better. Although Margaret struggled to remember many things, she remembered a Bible verse that brought her comfort at the right time.

I believe that God sends us the encouragement we need in the exact moment we need it — through songs, experiences, other people, and the Bible. I have experienced this in my own life and witnessed it in the lives of others. We serve a mighty God! Whatever we're facing today, we can trust that God is here for us. God will never leave us or forsake us, and we are never alone.

**Prayer:** Dear Lord, guide us to show your love to those who are lonely. During our own times of loneliness, remind us that you are with us. Amen.

Jenny McBride (Alabama, USA)

# A BEAUTIFUL MESSAGE

**READ Isaiah 58:7-11**

**TUES  
OCT 6  
2020**

*A generous person will prosper; whoever refreshes others will be refreshed.*

— Proverbs 11:25 (NIV)

Every time my family plans a trip to the northern part of Puerto Rico, I suggest going to the city where I was born. On one trip, our visit coincided with a craft fair in the plaza. Artisans and vendors displayed an array of merchandise. Music filled the air as musicians entertained the crowds. It was a festive and joyful day with much to see and do.

During the busiest time of the day, my daughter stood in line to buy lunch at a food stand. It was hot, and people complained about the heat and the long line. Suddenly a disheveled woman approached. She seemed disoriented, speaking unintelligibly,

## THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

God rejoices in my acts of kindness.

and a few customers shied away from her. But the owner of the food stand immediately stopped what he was doing and approached the woman in a gentle manner. His voice was filled with compassion when he asked if she would like something to eat. He quickly served her a generous meal. Moments later, she was smiling as she went on her way.

My daughter returned to us with tears in her eyes. She said, "I have witnessed and heard the most beautiful message, a message far better than the ones I normally hear. It has opened my eyes and helped change my attitude. I pray I can honor God by showing mercy and compassion to others."

**Prayer:** O God, help us to abide in your love and to show compassion to others just as Jesus taught us. Amen.

**María M. Urdaz (Puerto Rico)**

**Prayer Focus:** ADVOCATES FOR MENTAL HEALTH  
AWARENESS



## WHERE THE BIG FISH LIVE

READ James 1:1-12

*Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him.*

— James 1:12 (NIV)

I recently took my eight-year-old grandson fishing for the first time. We spent much of the day casting our lines into the middle of the lake. He was excited to catch and release some small sunfish, but he really wanted to catch a bigger

### THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Following Christ can be risky, but it's always worth it.

fish. As the day wore on, he suggested we cast into the shadows where the water was full of reeds. I told him it would be risky — that we would probably get our

hooks tangled with the reeds. “But Grandpa,” he said, “I think that’s where the big fish live.” So we cast into the shadows, and our lines got tangled with the reeds more than once. But we persevered and finally knew the thrill of hooking a big fish.

Jesus did not promise us that following him would be easy. It may seem safer to keep to our usual routines rather than to take a risk by speaking about and acting on our faith. But James tells us that if we faithfully persevere, the Lord promises us a great reward.

**Prayer:** Gracious and loving God, thank you for the wisdom of children. Give us courage to take a risk and to persevere for the sake of Christ. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

Doug Wingert (Arizona, USA)

## READ Hebrews 4:12-16

*The word of God is alive and active.*

— Hebrews 4:12 (NIV)

I made yogurt from scratch the other day and was amazed at how simple the process was. All I had to do was bring a gallon of milk to a rolling boil and then lower the temperature. When the liquid was cool enough, I dropped in a dollop of yogurt that contained active live cultures. Then I covered the whole thing and let it sit for 24 hours. During that time, the cultures multiplied and grew, turning the whole bowl of milk into beautiful creamy yogurt. The active cultures were real, even though I couldn't see them.

The day after I made the yogurt, I was sitting in church listening to my pastor talking about the word of God being alive and active. I couldn't help but think of the yogurt.

I wonder if a little of God's truth added to my life could grow and create change until it affects my whole being. I wonder how much God's word is changing me without my noticing. How much change will continue to happen if I add more scripture to my heart, day after day? The possibilities fill me with excitement and hope!

**THOUGHT FOR THE DAY**

The word of God creates  
change in my heart.

**Prayer:** Thank you, Lord, that your word is alive and can create change in us so that we become more obedient to you. Amen.

Cara Grandle (Oregon, USA)

FRI  
OCT 9  
2020

## WIND AND WAVE

READ Mark 4:35-41

*Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!*

— Mark 4:41 (NIV)

Anyone who has traveled with me knows that I fall asleep in uncomfortable and unconventional places. Whether in crowded subways or on bumpy van rides — sitting or standing — I'll find a way to get some shut-eye. However, I can't say that a small fishing boat in the midst of one of Galilee's squalls would be my idea of a pleasant napping spot. But it seemed to be adequate for Jesus. While his disciples

battened down the ship's cargo against the raging sea, Jesus settled in for a snooze.

Often we cry out as the disciples did: "Save me, Lord! Don't you even care?"

### THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Today I will focus on God's power instead of the storm.

After Jesus rebuked the wind and the disciples, they were awestruck: "Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!" We must ask ourselves: Who is God, in whom I claim to trust? Do I rest in the arms of a Creator and Sustainer, or have I constructed a cold and distant savior who is powerless to meet my needs?

While we might fear for our lives in the storm, God remains unthreatened. If we choose to focus on the storm, it will inevitably overtake us. But if we choose to focus on God's presence and power, we can be confident that our circumstances hold no power against the Master of wind and wave.

**Prayer:** Lord God, teach us to seek you during the storms of life. Give us faith to walk on the waves and to trust in your everlasting love for us. Amen.

Joel Broberg (Minnesota, USA)

# GOD OF RESTORATION

SAT  
OCT 10  
2020

READ Isaiah 61:1-7

*There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens.*

— Ecclesiastes 3:1 (NIV)

One morning, I was looking at new growth on a branch of my potted plant. A few days earlier, the very same branch had looked too old and worn out to produce any new leaves, and I had considered pruning it. But in that short time, the plant produced new green leaves — not just one, but a cluster of three!

Sometimes I feel the way my plant looked. We may feel so worn out that we think we can't do anything. But God can restore and make everything new. God is able to bring a harvest even from a field that seems barren to us. There is a purpose and a correct timing for everything under heaven. God has blessings in store for us. We need only to be still, believe, and receive them.

## THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

God is able to restore even the most worn-out parts of me.

**Prayer:** Dear Lord, we cast all our cares on you, trusting that you can handle every situation better than we can. Amen.

Deepika Emmanuel Sagar (Rajasthan, India)

SUN  
OCT 11  
2020

## TOUCHSTONES

READ Luke 12:22-28

Jesus said, “*Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to your life?*”

— Luke 12:25 (NIV)

During the 25 years I have been reading *The Upper Room*, I’ve noticed that common themes and favorite scriptures seem to return again and again. The passage from Luke

### THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Despite my worries, I can trust God’s provision.

12 may be one of these favorites. At first I thought overreliance on certain passages was a problem; other parts of the Bible could be neglected in the

process. Then I realized that we have “touchstone” passages of scripture because they speak to us in ways that are unique but also universal.

Today the passage from Luke is about the stress and worry for the future that many of us face. But the passage assures us that such concerns are minimal in the grand scheme of things. We leave the passage with peace, resolve, and a renewed faith that God will provide for us. This becomes a core message that Christians can share with others because learning to trust God’s provision is one of the most universal facets of the human experience.

**Prayer:** Loving God, help us to see the big picture in a world where our daily lives seem consumed with minutiae. Guide us to prioritize what truly matters — our love for you and our neighbor. Amen.

Andrew Billings (Alabama, USA)

# CONFIDENCE TO WITNESS

MON  
OCT 12  
2020

READ Matthew 11:1-11

*Jesus said, “Truly I tell you, among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet whoever is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.”*

— Matthew 11:11 (NIV)

When I tried to share Jesus with someone who was more successful and more educated than I, the words tumbled out of my mouth in a confused heap. Then when the person disagreed with me, my mind went blank. I couldn't come up with a quick response. So I walked away, red-faced with embarrassment. *I'm just not smart enough to tell people about Jesus*, I thought.

One morning, Jesus' words in the verse quoted above challenged my assumption of not being good enough. In them,

I heard a personal message that being a member of God's kingdom gives me great value. I had fallen into the trap of measuring my worth by using standards that were not God's standards — education, worldly success, and wealth. Those false values kept me feeling inadequate and afraid to talk to others about Jesus.

We each have value because of who Jesus is and what Jesus did for us. And that can't be taken away. When we remember that Jesus is the basis for our self-worth, we can be confident in telling anyone — no matter how rich, successful, or educated — about him.

**Prayer:** Heavenly Father, may your love and the knowledge that our value is from Christ Jesus help us to share the gospel boldly with others. Amen.

**THOUGHT FOR THE DAY**  
Because Jesus died for me, I  
can live boldly for him.

Darlene J. Ellis (Oregon, USA)

**TUES**  
**OCT 13**  
**2020**

## WAITING

**READ Habakkuk 1:1-5**

*I will take my post; . . . I will keep watch to see  
what the Lord says to me and how he will  
respond to my complaint.*

— Habakkuk 2:1 (CEB)

Few things can dampen our resolve or put our faith to the test more than waiting. While we may struggle to accept it, God's timing is God's own. Habakkuk began his dialogue with God with a complaint. In his lament, he demanded God's attention. He pleaded for justice as he looked at the violence

### **THOUGHT FOR THE DAY**

I will wait on God's promises.

and injustice around him in Judah. How could God allow such evil? But judgment against Judah would come. More astounding, the agent of God's judgment on

Judah would be a people Habakkuk thought of as even more wicked than the people of Judah.

When we question God, we may not expect a response; but Habakkuk did. When he questioned God, he did not quite understand God's plan but vowed to wait. Scripture does not indicate how long the prophet prayed and waited for God's vision, but Habakkuk remained steadfast and waited for God's reply. Habakkuk's prayerful response confirms his faith and obedience to God: "I will rejoice in the LORD; I will exult in the God of my salvation" (3:18, NRSV). Habakkuk shows us the value of waiting resolutely on the response of God, who works for our good.

**Prayer:** Everlasting God, thank you for hearing our complaints. Grant us patience as we wait for your response. Amen.

**Hazael Alvarado Hernández (Mexico City, Mexico)**

## READ Matthew 13:18-23

*As for what was sown on good soil, this is the one  
who hears the word and understands it,  
who indeed bears fruit.*

— Matthew 13:23 (NRSV)

My husband was a brilliant physician. He retired early because he has Parkinson's disease. Since his voice has become soft and monotone, I sometimes have trouble understanding what he is saying. However, our adult son always understands what his dad is saying. One day I asked my husband what was different between our son's approach and mine. He said, "Our son listens with his heart." Then I realized that I was so preoccupied with household duties that I was not listening intently enough to hear and understand my husband — his words fell on rocky ground. Our son listened intently with a joyful heart and was able to understand his father.

I began to wonder if this is also the way I approach scripture. Sometimes when I read the Bible, I can be so preoccupied with my to-do

**THOUGHT FOR THE DAY**  
When I focus on God, I can  
better understand God's  
message for me.

list that I don't listen for God's message. Just as I can better understand my husband when I focus on him, I will be better able to hear the message God is sending me if I focus on God's word. If we focus and listen with our hearts, we all will be better able to reflect God's love and bear fruit.

**Prayer:** Dear God, give us receptive hearts to listen to the needs of others and to hear the message you are giving us through scripture. Amen.

Karen M. Fite (Alabama, USA)



THUR  
OCT 15  
2020

## GOD'S HANDS AND FEET

READ Luke 10:25-37

*Go and do likewise.*

— Luke 10:37 (NIV)

An image of Jesus laughing hangs on a wall in my office. When a friend saw the image of Jesus with his head thrown back and mouth wide open in uproarious laughter, my friend responded with sadness: “I don’t see how God can laugh with so much suffering in the world.”

### THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

As God’s disciple, I am tasked to care for those in need.

I agreed. For many years my communication with God included my doubts as to who God is. One day

while watching news on TV, I saw a pitiful scene of a woman clutching an infant who was starving to death. I lamented, “God, if you are a loving, compassionate being, how can you allow this?” Suddenly a mental image of a tearful God cradling the mother and child looked at me and said, “If you are my disciple, how can you allow this?” The question hit me hard. My indignation turned to discomfort. No longer could I indulge in my smug accusations of God. I am responsible.

Since that day, I have begun to pray in a new way. Instead of complaining to God, I now seek insight to discover my role in the face of suffering. That image of Jesus laughing became not only about humor but also about liberation and understanding my role in God’s world.

**Prayer:** Dear Lord, open our hearts and minds to see those who are suffering. Give us the courage and tools we need to respond. Amen.

Bill Roy (Florida, USA)

# A LEAP OF FAITH

FRI  
OCT 16  
2020

READ Hebrews 11:1-29

*Faith is the substance of things hoped for,  
the evidence of things not seen.*

— Hebrews 11:1 (KJV)

Recently I visited an art display entitled “A Leap of Faith.” It featured a pitch-dark staircase which would light up only after someone had the courage to mount the first step.

This artwork reminds me of taking that first step with God even when we do not see the whole staircase, trusting that it will lead us to our desired destination. Often we underestimate the importance of every step we take in paving the way to a complete and fulfilling Christian journey.

Hebrews 11 describes how people such as Abraham, Moses, and Rahab took that leap of faith.

We, too, can grow stronger from difficult situations by stepping into them in faith rather than running away from them. Thereby we gain experience that will help us to navigate our way with courage and joy as we journey with God.

## THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

When I take a leap of faith, my  
joy in the Lord increases.

**Prayer:** Dear God, give us the courage in difficult situations to take that leap of faith that draws us closer to you as we pray, “Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in 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” (Matt. 6:9-13, KJV).

Ho Pei Fah (Singapore)

SAT  
OCT 17  
2020

## WALK SLOWLY

READ Psalm 1:1-3

*Be still, and know that I am God! I am exalted among the nations, I am exalted in the earth.*

— Psalm 46:10 (NRSV)

For many years I quickly drove past a forest alongside the highway. To me it was just an unremarkable bunch of trees. Then one day, traffic was at a standstill. I looked at the forest and noticed a walking path, so that weekend I hiked through the trees. I saw many varieties of mushrooms, elegant ferns, complaining squirrels, and scampering chipmunks. When I looked up I saw beautiful rays of sun shining through the

### THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Today I will take time to notice the details of God's world.

canopy of leaves. It was tranquil and stunning. When I took the time to slowly walk through the forest, I saw so much more.

Too often in our spiritual lives, we zip through our daily reading of the Bible and close the cover — done for the day. But when we slowly walk through each verse, noticing the words and what they mean in that passage, we will see things that we never noticed before: the struggles of a particular character, the resolution of familiar events, and how God is sovereign over it all. We may understand for the first time how a passage fits perfectly with the rest of the chapter to ultimately create a complete book. When we slow down to see that there is so much more, we may find assurance and beauty. The stories of our faith are stunning!

**Prayer:** Creator God, may we never be too busy to be amazed by all that is in your world and in your word. Amen.

Bob LaForge (New Jersey, USA)

# A TRUE FRIEND

SUN  
OCT 18  
2020

**READ Philippians 4:4-9**

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

— Philippians 4:6 (NIV)

For the past two summers I have worked at a Christian camp. The first year made me stronger in my faith and happy to show others the light of Christ working through me. I thought the next year would be the same, but it turned out to be quite the opposite because I had to deal with bullying from some of the campers. It was hard to show the light of Christ when hurtful words led me to believe I wasn't good enough. I kept asking myself, *Why do they hate me?* and *What am I doing wrong?*

Thankfully I had a friend who prayed for me and let me know that all the bullies' negative comments about me were not true. My friend reminded me that my identity comes from Christ. Then I read Philippians 4:6. After reading that verse, I started sharing my troubles with God, asking God to take my burden and give me peace.

I still had to endure the bullying, but I knew that what they said wasn't what Christ thought of me. And I still had a friend who stood alongside me. I held on to God, who led me through it all and helped me grow. Now I know how much love and peace God provides.

## THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

When I am torn down,  
God lifts me up.

**Prayer:** Thank you, God, for helping us learn from our trials. Give us your peace and joy in the midst of them. Amen.

Kate Reisenauer (South Dakota, USA)

MON  
OCT 19  
2020

## SHINE YOUR LIGHT

READ Matthew 5:13-16

*Let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.*

— Matthew 5:16 (NIV)

One bleak, cloudy, autumn day, I went to do my grocery shopping. As I approached the shopping center, I was astounded by a liquidambar tree in the full glory of its autumn colors. Against the gray day and gray buildings, the tree stood out with its bright gold and red leaves. It seemed to light up the world around it with its beauty.

**THOUGHT FOR THE DAY**  
Daily opportunities to shine  
Christ's love abound.

I remembered how Jesus said that we as Christians should be the light of the world and thought, *If only*

*I could light up the world as well as that tree does! How can I improve my ability to do this?* Pondering this question, I realized that I needed God's help — I needed to draw closer to God by reading my Bible daily and praying for guidance. As I try to follow the teachings of Jesus more closely, I pray that my light will shine more brightly and point others to God.

**Prayer:** Loving God, may our lives show others that we belong to you. Help us to shine brightly to the world around us. Amen.

Margaret Martin (Australian Capital Territory, Australia)

# THE CHEERING CROWD

**TUES**  
**OCT 20**  
**2020**

**READ Hebrews 12:1-3**

*Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles.*

— Hebrews 12:1 (NIV)

I was standing with my hands raised above my head as I gasped for air. My legs and lungs burned from my first cross-country race of the season. I congratulated the person who finished in front of me and continued to cheer on the people still coming in.

After a few minutes it seemed that everyone had finished the race. But the clock was still running, so many people were waiting eagerly for the last runner. Soon a boy came around the corner. A crowd ran beside him, yelling and cheering him on to finish the race. The boy was ecstatic as he crossed the finish line.

As I reflected on this day, I understood Hebrews 12 in a new way. It says that everyone is running the race of life and being encouraged

## **THOUGHT FOR THE DAY**

Whom is God calling me to encourage today?

by a huge crowd in heaven and by those around us. When the race is long or we come upon hills, we may think, *There is no way I can make it.* But God and our supporters cheer, “You can do it!” Before we know it, we can look back and see all the distance we have covered with the help of our “cloud of witnesses.”

**Prayer:** Dear God, thank you for cheering us on and helping us through hard times. Amen.

**Chris Hemstock (South Dakota, USA)**

WED  
OCT 21  
2020

## PRAYING INSTEAD

READ Luke 18:1-7

*Can any one of you by worrying add  
a single hour to your life?*

— Matthew 6:27 (NIV)

I used to worry a lot, which produced feelings of fear, sadness, or confusion. So I decided to try to turn each worry into a prayer.

Sometimes a scripture verse came to mind when I prayed. When worried about something in the future, I prayed, “Therefore do not worry about tomorrow . . . Each day has enough trouble of its own” (Matt. 6:34, NIV). When I worried about a loved one, 1 John 5:14 helped me: “This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us” (NIV). When worried and confused about what to do, I remembered, “If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you” (Jas. 1:5, NIV). Often, praying the scripture verse resulted in peace.

### THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Praying scripture can  
bring me peace.

When no verse came to mind, like the woman in today’s reading who repeatedly appealed to the judge, I prayed about the same thing again and again.

Prayer can help keep our worries from resurfacing. If we practice, praying when we are worried can become a habit. Then, over time, our worried thoughts and negative feelings may decrease as God’s peace increases.

**Prayer:** Loving God, forgive us when we worry. Help us to trust that you can handle all our fears. Amen.

Deb Vellines (Missouri, USA)

# A HELPING HAND

THUR  
OCT 22  
2020

## READ Psalm 41:1-3

*Whoever oppresses the poor shows contempt for their Maker, but whoever is kind to the needy honors God.*

— Proverbs 14:31 (NIV)

I was in a hurry when I came to a stop at a traffic light. A homeless person approached my car. As he came toward the driver's side, I began to assume the worst of him even though he had given me no reason. I thought about not rolling down the window, but when he looked directly at me, his smile changed my way of thinking. I saw Christ in his smile. He seemed sincere as we talked briefly. Courteously he asked, "Sir, can you help me?" I felt great empathy for him.

I asked myself what Jesus would do in a similar situation. It was a cold December morning; perhaps the man had not

even had a simple cup of coffee. I extended my hand and offered a donation of money. He said:

"Thank you so much, sir, for your love. God bless

you a thousand times over, and your family as well." The light changed and so did my attitude. My encounter with this man reminded me that God shows us abundant compassion every day. We can do no less.

### THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

I can overcome my prejudice when I remember Jesus' love.

**Prayer:** Merciful God, free us from prejudices that keep us from being generous and loving. Help us to see a reflection of Jesus in the faces of those we encounter today and to extend a helping hand to those in need. Amen.

Elí Samuel Morales Morales (Puerto Rico)



## STRENGTH

READ Psalm 27:1-5

*The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? the LORD is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?*

— Psalm 27:1 (KJV)

My life was going well, but then everything changed. I was in a doctor's office every day for a week. I was told I had macular degeneration. *Wasn't my severe glaucoma enough?* I thought. I experienced a meniscus tear and a painful cyst in the same knee. *Wasn't one or the other enough?* My doctor informed me that I was a diabetic. *Lord, I prayed, when is my trouble going to stop?*

**THOUGHT FOR THE DAY**  
God's mercies and strength  
are new every morning.

I realized I was feeling sorry for myself and questioning God, so I asked for help. The next moment, I thought of Job. Job's trust in God was amazing, especially considering all he lost and all he went through. My thoughts turned to Paul. I thought about all the times he was jailed, whipped, and shipwrecked. I wondered how often Job and Paul asked when their troubles would stop. Then I thought of Jesus' suffering. Jesus was beaten and humiliated, but that wasn't all. Jesus died on a cross, and God offered us salvation. I believe that God gave me these thoughts to help me realize that I could endure my problems. I knew God would love me and be with me through everything. I felt better. I felt stronger. God gave me strength then, and God will give me strength tomorrow.

**Prayer:** Dear Lord, thank you for your strength that helps us to keep going through pain and change. Amen.

Margaret Bishop (Kentucky, USA)

**Prayer Focus:** THOSE EXPERIENCING MULTIPLE  
HEALTH ISSUES

# SMALL MINISTRY?

SAT  
OCT 24  
2020

## READ 1 Corinthians 15:50-58

*Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord,  
because you know that your labor in  
the Lord is not in vain.*

— 1 Corinthians 15:58 (NIV)

My mom's ministry was sending birthday cards with encouraging words. For more than 30 years she sent cards to people and never tired of her work. On the day she died, she had 10 birthday cards ready to be mailed. When I arrived to help prepare for her funeral, my dad asked me what we should do with the cards. I told him that we needed to mail them.

### THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

What ministry is God  
calling me to today?

In the week leading up to my mom's funeral, many people told me how much receiving a birthday card from my mother had meant to them. At the funeral, I asked how many people had received a birthday card from my mother. Nearly everyone in attendance raised their hand. Mom's ministry seemed like a small thing, but it touched many lives. She stood firm and let nothing move her as she did the work of the Lord.

We can all strive to accomplish the good that we have the opportunity to do. When we ask God to give us opportunities to serve, we need not worry about the size of our ministry or its outcomes. God will work through us to provide meaningful results, whether we see them in our lifetime or not.

**Prayer:** Dear God, thank you for giving us opportunities to serve you by serving others. Amen.

Steve Wakefield (Georgia, USA)

SUN  
OCT 25  
2020

## NO LIMIT

READ Psalm 46:1-7

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

— Psalm 46:1 (NIV)

A gospel singer in my country wrote a song with the lyric, “[Go] upward, forward. There is no limit.” When I heard this song, I was working in the daytime and leading a Bible study twice a month in the evening. I was often surrounded by worries about daily life and the future, and these worries

### THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

I bless others by embracing  
the gifts God has given me.

clouded my ability to connect with and reflect on God. But through the song I felt that God was speaking directly to my heart, saying, “Don’t be discouraged. Just

move forward. I am always with you and will provide for you.” I was filled with relief and peace. I was able to face my challenges instead of running away, even though my situation had not changed.

During my difficult time, God used a gospel singer’s gift to connect with and encourage me. Each day we can use the gifts God has given us to move upward, press forward, and hopefully encourage others along the way. With God, there truly is no limit.

**Prayer:** Gracious God, thank you for being faithful to your promises. Encourage us to move forward each day. Amen.

Eiko Kato (Miyagi Prefecture, Japan)

# FREEDOM

MON  
OCT 26  
2020

READ John 8:34-38

*If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.*

— John 8:36 (NIV)

I am in prison, but I am more free now than I was prior to incarceration. Though I was a pastor, worship leader, and staff member in several congregations, I lost touch with the God I shared with others. Through a pattern of destructive choices and the desire to be seen as successful, I lived a double life that came crashing down and hurt many people. Because I never slowed down or paused to listen to God, I became callous to my own sin.

I now realize that I had built my life around my own desires and not on the solid foundation of Christ. Since my incarceration, my parents have died, my children have been adopted, and my wife and I are finalizing our divorce. In the last few years, the life I built has been torn down. It has been painful, but sometimes we have to let go of what we hold dear and cling to God instead. Jesus said, “Come with me . . . to a quiet place” (Mark 6:31, NIV). I never imagined that for me that place would be prison. Here I have learned to listen to the Lord.

None of us can go back. But we can all look forward to what lies ahead. We can choose God today and every day. Trusting God each day is living in freedom.

**Prayer:** Dear God, thank you for the freedom that you have given us through the life, death, and resurrection of your son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

**THOUGHT FOR THE DAY**  
God can set me free.

Nicholas Patterson (Florida, USA)

**TUES**  
**OCT 27**  
**2020**

## NOT ALONE IN SORROW

**READ Joshua 4:1-7**

*Jesus wept.*

— John 11:35 (KJV)

I went to church feeling numb the morning after eleven people were massacred at Tree of Life Synagogue during a Shabbat service in nearby Pittsburgh. I needed to kneel at the altar and grieve over that hate-filled act while surrounded by people of faith. As I entered the church, someone handed me a small round stone.

### **THOUGHT FOR THE DAY**

God weeps with us in  
our suffering.

Our pastor invited us to lay our stones on the altar and demonstrate with a physical act our faith in God and God's faithfulness to all

generations. Our pastor's idea to place stones on the altar was inspired by the Jewish tradition of placing stones on graves. Stones remain long after flowers wilt, through the storms and chill of winter while we await the return of warm, sunny days. As I went up to the altar, I felt the warm stone in my hand. Then I released it and knelt with friends praying at the altar rail for our fractured world.

I left church that morning still in sorrow but assured once again that God understands our hurts and grieves with us. In the same way, God calls us to enter into the sorrow and suffering of all our neighbors, even those we have not met.

**Prayer:** Everlasting God, thank you for your Holy Spirit who walks with us through valleys of despair. Empower us to walk in love alongside others. Amen.

**Jan Woodard (Pennsylvania, USA)**

## READ Mark 14:32-36

*Many plans are in a person's mind, but  
the LORD's purpose will succeed.*

— Proverbs 19:21 (CEB)

My dream has always been to work for one of the world peace organizations. I prayed for God to help me. Because I knew that having experience would make it easier to find a job, I planned to volunteer at the organization I hoped would hire me.

I was happy when I got a call from the organization inviting me to apply for a position. I was called back for the second, third, and

final stages of the selection process. I felt confident that I would be accepted. But finally they chose one of the other candidates. I was disappointed and angry. This was the dream I had spent so much time and energy preparing for.

Two months later, I learned of a Christian institution working for disadvantaged children. Though I was disappointed that God had not helped me achieve my original dream, I still feel that God wants me to serve others who are less fortunate than I am. I decided to apply, trusting that God knows what is best for my life. If I am not selected, it's okay. Here I am, God. Use me.

**THOUGHT FOR THE DAY**  
God's plans for me may be bigger and better than my plans for myself.

**Prayer:** Dear Lord, give us courage to serve you in whatever ways and places we can, on every step of our journey. Amen.

Yanti H. Damanik (West Java, Indonesia)

THUR  
OCT 29  
2020

## FRIENDS WHO ENCOURAGE

READ 1 Peter 5:6-11

*The God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast.*

— 1 Peter 5:10 (NIV)

Sherry and I have been lifelong friends even when hundreds of miles separated us. When I was diagnosed with breast cancer for the second time and told that my uncertain future would be filled with months of chemotherapy and radiation, I was overwhelmed with anxiety and fear. My prayers seemed to go unheard.

### THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

I can offer God's encouraging word to others during challenging times.

Then I received a card from Sherry. Inside she had written, "1 Peter 5." I quickly turned to my Bible. I scanned the passage search-

ing for some solace or direction. When I read verse 10, I felt Sherry's note was God's answer to my prayers. The scripture passage reminded me that God loved me and in time would once again use me for God's glory.

A few months later Sherry suffered a debilitating stroke. Now it was my turn to offer support and encouragement. I sent her 1 Peter 5! In the following months, Sherry and I have thanked God for our long friendship and the encouragement we give each other by sharing comforting words and our favorite Bible verses. Just when we need God most, faithful friends can help reconnect us to God.

**Prayer:** Dear God, thank you for your word that we can share and use to encourage each other. Help us to use our suffering for your glory. Amen.

Carolyn Ellis (Tennessee, USA)

# FIRST AND LAST

READ Matthew 20:20-28

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*Whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be your slave; just as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve.*

— Matthew 20:26-28 (NRSV)

Growing up, my brother and I had an ongoing dispute as to who was the favorite child. As the firstborn, I thought I had an edge. I'd been around the longest. But Steve, younger by four years and the only son and grandson, could rightly claim his own special place in our family.

My grandmother refused to succumb to our persistent efforts to have her choose which of us was her favorite grandchild. My brother and I would find a time when Gram wasn't surrounded by rival grandchildren and ask, "Gram, who is your favorite?" My grandmother's typical response, always offered with a smile, was, "You are my bestest and my worstest."

**THOUGHT FOR THE DAY**  
In God's eyes, I am loved.

Many years later, the memory of this silly bit of dialogue still causes my brother and me to smile. It was the perfect non-answer to an unfair question. It reminds me of a story from Matthew's Gospel. The mother of James and John wanted Jesus to favor her sons in the coming kingdom. Jesus pointed out that her request had significant consequences.

So much of life is like this: We have a sense that we should be a favored child of God, perhaps at the expense of another. Gram had a way of reminding us just how much we were loved, not only by her but by God, who created all of us.

**Prayer:** Dear God, thank you for loving all your children. Teach us to do the same. Amen.

Ricki Aiello (Connecticut, USA)



## GRATITUDE

READ Psalm 30:4-12

*Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.*

— 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 (NIV)

I began the Camino de Santiago, the Way of Saint James, weighed down by issues in my life and with a deep sense of tiredness. My spouse and I had decided to undertake this journey to have some time out of our frantic everyday lives. We hoped to rest, be restored, and to listen to what God wanted to tell us as thousands of people have done on this pilgrimage over the centuries. As we walked, I sensed God

### THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

God has given me much  
to be grateful for.

whispering “gratitude” to me over and over again. It wasn’t the message I was expecting or even looking for, but it was clear.

As the days passed, a deep sense of gratitude for my family, my friends, my life, my home, our country, and even my struggles started to settle deep in my soul. I have come to realize how gratitude can lead us to fulfillment and ultimately to joy in our lives.

**Prayer:** Dear God, open our eyes to all that we have to be grateful for. Thank you for awakening a sense of gratitude in our hearts. Amen.

Jess Gunning (Ballito, South Africa)

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