

November 10

Sunday Morning

Cinda King

"...I beheld a great multitude...of all nations...before the throne...and with a loud voice...worshipped God." Revelation 7:9-11 (KJB)

It had been one of "those" mornings. I had overslept, the skirt that had fit last week was now miserably snug, the kids were at each other's throats, traffic was moving at a snail's pace, and I wanted to be anywhere but where I was going. I maneuvered into a parking space, took a deep breath, gave one last glance in the mirror putting on my best Sunday morning smile and walked into church. As I made my way through the foyer, greeting those I passed, I had to wonder if anyone could sense how I was really feeling. Could they tell that my soul was anything but worshipful? Did the anger and frustration created by my hectic morning show on my face or in my posture? I also wondered how I could possibly take my usual place in the choir and participate as a worship leader during the service, feeling the way I did.

Reluctantly, I joined the rehearsal. The words and music woven together became a prayer, and I could feel my heart begin to soften and the tension of the morning fade away. I considered God's love for me and was ashamed of my earlier attitude. If God had crowned a human such as me with glory and honor, how could I not return that adoration? With a new sense of humility, I entered the sanctuary, knowing that I had come to the right place. I was glad to be in the house of the Lord. I have discovered that most of my Sunday mornings tend to be surprisingly hectic and frustrating, but if I will stop and consider anew the opportunity for worship, my spirit will calm, and I will be able to say from deep within my soul *Alleluia, Amen*.

Lord, Remind me today that true worship is not influenced by world, but by a right relationship with you. Amen.

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November 9

Model Men

Judy Jenkins

"Trust in the Lord and do good." Psalm 37:3 (NIV)

Each summer our grandchildren come to our house for Grammy and Grampy Camp. It is a busy and fun time, with each day bringing a new adventure.

The previous fall, my husband Gary had decided not to teach in the preschool department. Last summer during our grandsons Clayton and Sheldon's week, they asked Grampy if he missed being a Sunday school teacher. He told them that he really did miss being with the children and seeing how much they grew from week to week. Clayton said when he grew up, he might be a baseball player, and when he had time, a Sunday school teacher. I told him I thought that would be a great idea, and I knew he could do it if that was what he wanted to do. Sheldon, three years younger, never misses an opportunity to keep up with his big brother, no matter what they are doing. So Sheldon said he was going to be a baseball player, and in the off season, he was going to be like Brother Bob, their church pastor in Lexington. Yes, Sheldon, I believe you could do both because you are so determined!

I'm thankful for the men in families and the men of the church who model Christ in their lives for children to see. What you say and how you act does matter.

Thank you Jesus, for strengthening men to be who you have called them to be and for having them model your attributes for all to see. Amen.

November 8

Attitude

Judy Jenkins

"And work with a smile on your face, always keeping in mind that no matter who happens to be giving orders, you're really serving God." Ephesians 6:6 (The Message)

While working for Republic Bank, I trained new employees who were to work as customer service representatives and branch managers. It was basic training about banking systems and customer service. There were certain tasks no one really liked doing; however, they had to be done each day. Of course, the new person usually as the one selected to do these jobs. Many trainees come and go, moving up the corporate banking ladder. One who taught me a most valuable lesson was Missy. She was young, well-educated, friendly, and beautiful to behold. After a few days of training, I asked Missy to do one of the less desirable tasks. She just smiled at me, saying, "Judy, I would be happy to." She would be happy to! And smiling as she turned to get it done! This was Missy; she was always happy to do whatever it took to get the job done.

It was such a pleasant surprise and so fresh, I had to try this phrase myself when asked to do something I might not want to do. I started at home, just to see how it sounded and what type of reaction I would receive. So when my daughter asked, "Mom, would you get me a glass of milk?", I responded with "I'd be happy to." You know, I think my children looked at me as I must have looked at Missy the first time she told me she would be happy to. I told my family how much Missy was changing attitudes around the bank with these words.

Missy is one who moved up the ladder at the bank. She allowed Jesus to shine though her life with a smile and an "I would be happy to" attitude.

Dear Lord, Thank you for young teachers in our lives. Amen.

November 7

Fairness

Cinda King

"...the Holy Spirit fell on them just as on us at the beginning...then God gave the same gift to them as he gave to us." Acts 11:15-17 (RSV)

My son and daughter are typical siblings, one minute enjoying each other's company, and the next exchanging barbs. The four years' age difference lends itself to countless declarations of unfairness by my son. Actually, "it's not fair " could be recorded in his baby book as his very first sentence. Regardless of whether it is a situation with his older sister, a privilege revoked, or a scheduling conflict which prevents him from doing something he wants to do, he breaks into a litany of all the reasons why life is treating him unfairly.

I know one day he will understand that his sister has certain privileges simply because she is older, and eventually he will have the same opportunities. He will understand that poor choices have consequences which often that means something he enjoys will be temporarily taken away. And, when he has children of his own, he will see how difficult it can be to juggle the busy schedules of the family. For now, however, it just seems to him that he is getting the short end of the stick.

If I am truly honest, I suppose that I also have days when I want to cry out to God regarding the unfairness of particular circumstances in my life. After all, didn't God say He would give me the desires of my heart? I ask, seek and knock, but still don't get what I want. I see others receiving blessings, so I wonder if God is treating me unfairly.

The truth is, God demonstrated ultimate fairness when Jesus the Christ was given over to the cross for the salvation of the world. Anything else that I could ask for or expect pales in the light of that gift.

Oh God, Help me to be thankful for the gift of your son and to remember that you are fair and loving. Amen.

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November 6

Finding God

Judy Jenkins

“Who are you, Lord?” Saul asked. “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,” He replied. “Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.” Acts 9:5-6 (NIV)

Last year, I was blessed to hear Dru give his testimony as a new Christ-follower. He told a young boy how his parents had divorced, leaving him and his brother devastated. They lived with his mother who made poor life decisions, so they had to live with his father who provided for their physical needs; however, love and acceptance were missing.

Being an “A” personality type and very bright, Dru became an excellent student and was determined to be successful at whatever he did. This way, he wouldn’t need anyone to depend on ever again. And that is just what he did. He built up a company and sold it, then opened a consulting company, then another, having 300 employees and two firms working for several large companies as consultants. He was at the top of his life with two prosperous firms, a lovely wife, children, a mansion, cars, trips, and money. Whatever he wanted, he could have. However, he felt he was losing it all. What was the meaning of life? He sat in his office at midnight wondering if God was real. Did God really exist? If God did exist, where was He?

Dru went jogging the following weekend, trying to clear his head and get a grip on his life. He started sobbing, crying out to God, “I want to change. God, I want to try to know you. Please God, direct me. If you’ll just give me a sign, that I might know you are trying to reach me.” At that point he looked and found himself in front of a Baptist church. “God, tomorrow I’ll be here.”

Dru went home that day sobbing. His wife knew something big had happened. He told her that God had come to him during his run, so Dru was going to church the next day. A few Sundays later, Dru and his wife accepted Jesus as their Savior. At his office, this A personality type had made a 180 degree change; different people told him that they had believed the Devil would have changed before Dru would. Now Dru is still a hyper personality, but now he’s an “A” type for the Lord, never missing an opportunity to witness to others, telling them what God has done for him. Instead of losing all he had, he gained everything in Christ Jesus.

Father God, Thank you for calling each of us to yourself. Amen.

November 5

Prayer Works

Judy Jenkins

"Then Jesus told His disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up." Luke 18:1 (NIV)

Last Easter, I had the pleasure of meeting Dru who had become a Christ follower the year before. I had heard his testimony on a previous visit to Houston. The more I had thought about it, the more I wanted to know what it was that pushed him to the point to call out to God. Feeling rather brave, I asked Dru to share with me what made him seek God at this point in his life.

Dru told me that the year had not been going well. His wife's sister knew this and had decided to pray for him. Then she had placed written prayers all around Dru, under his chair at work, beneath his desk, in his wallet, and in various places around his home. She made Dru her prayer responsibility. She asked God to do what only He could do through the Holy Spirit to touch Dru's heart. I had never heard of anyone doing this before prayer, yes, but not the written prayers all around someone. How faithful God was to hear all those prayers!

I wish everyone could hear both Dru and his wife speak of what God has done and is doing making changes in their lives. They are excited to tell others about Jesus Christ and His love. They told me they had been able to share Jesus with several large groups plus individuals in the workplace who wanted to know what had brought about the change which could be seen in their lives.

Dear Father, You are so faithful to hear our prayers. Dru and his wife's journey has not been easy; they have many more hurdles ahead of them. Continue to bless them and guide them. Thank you for allowing them to pass my way. Amen.

November 4

Without Storms There Would Be No Rainbows

John Dye

"The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they might have life, and have it abundantly." John 10:10 (NAS)

We use the term "crazy" rather loosely. Historically, we think of folks like Edison or the Wright Brothers. During the infancy of these great men's inventions, they were often laughed at and misunderstood. I wonder if they felt a certain peace and validation when their dreams became reality. Why do some people have a different vision than others? Some biblical figures were once thought to be nuts. Job lost everything and barely kept his sanity. However, he never gave up. Moses was disgusted by people he could never understand. I wonder if he ever shouted at the Israelites, "I told you to stay away from idols!" Noah built an ark and everyone laughed until it started raining. I wonder if he stuck his head out of the ark window and shouted, "Who's crazy now?" Then Jesus had twelve followers who were spiritual giants one minute and imitated the Three Stooges the next. Although not in the same group as those folks, I do know what it is like to be a little crazy. Being crazy is seeing and hearing things that others don't. Being crazy is having thoughts that others laugh at. Being crazy is wanting to physically shake people, saying, "Don't you get it?" Being crazy is when the group that doesn't understand consists of your family and friends. Mental institutions are full of people who finally gave up and embraced crazy because they were tired of the fight. Sometimes I have almost given up and become crazy. We begin to question our sanity when we lose our confidence and become gripped with fear. At one time in my life, things I had always taken for granted were now difficult and fearful. I was attempting to avoid defeat, but I never embraced the abundance God had intended for me. When my job was gone, I felt like a piece of half-eaten fruit abandoned on the roadside. However, there is a rainbow when you experience His presence. He gave me the gift of writing to help me, so I can't lose. Now I'm just waiting for the next blessing. The job is back, and I have numerous people to thank for their validation. One question I ask God is, "Do you think I'm crazy?" I feel a firm hand on my shoulder as He says, "I don't think so, and even if you were, I would still love you."

Father, Thank you for never giving up on us and for giving us the strength never to give up on ourselves. Amen.

November 3

Take up the Basin and the Towel

Bobbi Whitten

"The King will reply "I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these...you did for Me.'" Matthew 25:40 (NAS)

Jesus and His disciples have gathered to share the Passover meal; He knows it is the last time He will be with them before the crucifixion. He knows Judas will betray Him, Peter will deny Him, and the rest will desert Him. The disciples argue over who is the most important (Luke 22). To teach them a lesson, the Savior becomes the servant by washing their feet (John 13:1-17). Foot washing is a very intimate act between two individuals. Both must humble themselves to take part. One must have the courage to kneel, and the other must have the humility to yield. We see Peter's reluctance to let Jesus wash his feet. But Jesus stresses the importance of Peter's yielding. On a previous occasion, Jesus yielded by allowing a sinful woman to wash His feet with her tears and dry His feet with her hair before anointing them with expensive perfume (Luke 7:36-50). She needed to be able to show her love and gratitude for the difference Jesus had made in her life. There are always people around us in need, so we need to follow our Savior-Servant's example by taking up basin and towel. In doing this, we are allowed to minister to Jesus. At other times, we may have the need and humble ourselves, so someone else can wash our feet. By this, we give them the opportunity to minister to Jesus, too. Contemporary Christian writer-singer, Michael Card expressed it in "The Basin and the Towel":

"In an upstairs room, a parable is just about to come alive. And while they bicker about who's best, with a painful glance, He'll silently rise. Their Savior-Servant must show them how through the will of the water and the tenderness of the towel. And the call is to community, the impoverished power that sets the soul free. In humility, to take the vow, that day after day we must take up the basin and the towel. In any ordinary place, on any ordinary day, the parable can live again when one will kneel and one will yield. Our Savior-Servant must show us how through the will of the water and the tenderness of the towel. And the space between ourselves sometimes is more than the distance between the stars. By the fragile bridge of the Servant's bow we take up the basin and the towel."

Lord, Make us servants according to your example. Amen.

November 2

Truth

John Dye

"...and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free." John 8:32 (NAS)

For several years, this has been one of my favorite Scriptures. Today, I still treasure those words, but embrace them from a different perspective. When your life is heading in the direction you want, the pursuit of truth seems like a very worthwhile objective. However, when roadblocks and obstacles prevent you from accomplishing your goals, truth begins to take on a different perspective. What is true on Monday may not be true on Friday.

In the book of Jonah, God sent the evangelist to preach to the population of Nineveh. They repented, but Jonah was upset because he wanted God to destroy these hated people. When Joseph first heard Mary was pregnant before they were married, he was angry. His first reaction was to disbelieve the message he received. Jesus chose twelve men to help him change the direction of mankind. The truth was, after the selections were completed, there were plenty of folks shaking their heads and asking why he picked those guys. Some of those doubters were the disciples themselves.

The truth is not always easy to find. It often seems the truth is not even constant. There are days when God seems to encourage our doubts. Then a thought comes to me: doubt sometimes creates faith. And according to the Scriptures, without faith it is impossible to please God.

Heavenly Father, Help us to always recognize that you are the Truth who does indeed make us free to love and serve you. Amen.

November 1

Stars

Cinda King

"He counts the number of the stars; He gives names to them all."

Psalm 147:4 (NAS)

One of my favorite childhood memories is of our family outings to the Ohio River on hot summer evenings. When the day's work was completed, each of us pitched in to hurry the process along. While Daddy readied the boat and hitched it to the car, my brother, sister and I would change into our swimsuits and help Mother gather the towels and picnic items for the adventure that awaited us.

I loved everything about those evenings - the loamy smell of the riverbank, the sound of barge horns, and the taste of hotdogs and marshmallows cooked on an open fire. But, the part of the adventure I enjoyed most came after the sun went down and the moon was just a sliver in the sky. On those nights, I was certain God had put more stars in the sky just for my enjoyment. I was never very good at identifying the constellations, but spotting the first shooting star was always a challenge and a thrill.

These days, I live in the city. Street lights and 24-hour businesses light the night skies, so the stars don't shine as brightly as I remember. Yet, on those rare occasions when I return to the country, it seems that there are not only more stars, but they are closer and brighter than I have ever seen them before. I am always awestruck by the spectacle, as if seeing it for the first time. And if by chance I get to see a meteorite coursing across the sky, I am all the more thankful to the God who not only numbered the stars, but gave them their names.

Lord, Help me to see your hand at work in nature and in the world. Amen.

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October 31

Prayers Answered

Steve Pennington

“Cease striving and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations. I will be exalted in the earth.” Psalm 46:10 (NAS)

Everyone has things happen to them as youngsters; some good, some bad. In late summer before I began the third grade we were living in a coal mining town when I realized that my mother was sick, real sick. I overheard the words “hemorrhaging blood.” I wasn’t positive I understood; however, I knew it wasn’t good. I can still remember Mom’s frequent coughing while she was in bed. Soon afterward, dad told us we needed to move to Beckley, West Virginia, where there was a tuberculosis sanatorium so the doctors could care for Mom. Dad sold his restaurant business and we moved to a new town. Although Dad could visit Mom, we kids were too young. When it was warm, we could play beneath her second floor window.

Many were the nights I prayed for Mom’s recovery. When things are tough, even young children bargain with God. If our desires are not too difficult to fulfill, we simply dream about things we’d like to have. But when our needs are harder to meet, we turn to God to grant our prayers. Sometimes our tears show how strongly we want God to grant our prayers. I know I shed tears and said lots of prayers so God would allow my mother to recover. After six months of complete bed rest, and ten additional months in the sanatorium, Mom was eventually discharged. When older, I asked Mom about her illness. She told me she did exactly what the hospital staff instructed her to, and left the rest to her doctor and God. My mother has always been a doer, not a talker, and she has set a good example for her three children. She reads her Bible and spends time in prayer daily. In May she turned ninety. Until then, she had driven herself to church, to the grocery, to doctors’ offices, and to her senior citizens group. Over fifty years ago, God saw fit to heal my mother of tuberculosis. Like Christ, my mother will tell you her opinion if you ask. If we go to Him in prayer, the Holy Spirit will give us an answer. To truly benefit from prayer, we need to open up to God’s will, which is often different from what we think we want.

Dear God, Please help us to be in your will and know what to ask for. Amen.

October 30

The Naked Truth

John Dye

"If...being clothed we shall not be found naked...we would be unclothed, but clothed... that mortality might be swallowed up of life." II Corinthians 5:3--4 (KJB)

One of my favorite stories happened on a family trip to Florida. I was attempting to shower in our handicapped-accessible hotel room; my wife Joni had placed a chair inside the tub so I could sit. The problem was no grab bar, and the chair was not very substantial. In my attempt to use the chair, I slipped in the tub. Fortunately, the landing was soft, so I was not injured. However, my problem was I was trapped like a dill pickle in a vacuum-packed jar. I made several unsuccessful attempts to free myself, but that only led to fatigue and frustration.

Joni finally suggested we call the front desk for help. Her suggestion made sense, but presented some difficult scenarios for me. If men have trouble asking directions when they are lost, you can multiply my apprehension to the tenth power in this situation. In addition, there are probably ten things in the world scarier than my being naked, so I was not excited by the prospect of being nude in front of strangers. However, after being stuck in the tub for about twenty minutes, I was willing to risk the emotional scars of having the hotel staff see my bare behind.

Another of my fears is my deficiency in the area of small talk; when it comes to this, I end up wading in the shallow end of the pool. But I swim with the big fish when it comes to worry. The problem with skilled worriers is that sometimes we vault past major problems for the minor ones. For instance, I was more concerned about having a conversation with the folks at the hotel than I was about being freed from the tub. The folks from the hotel arrived and quickly pulled me out. The conversation was sparse but both parties knew why. In life there are no accidents, so I wonder what God was trying to say. Was He telling me to relax and embrace the hand of a stranger? If so, I am thankful for the growth opportunity. But next time I grab a stranger's hand, I hope I am clothed.

Father God, Help us to realize that in your eyes, our physical nakedness is nothing compared to our spiritual nakedness. Thank you for clothing us in righteousness. Amen.

October 29

Gleaning

Cinda King

“Now when you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap to the very corners of your land, nor shall you gather the gleanings of your harvest...you shall leave them for the needy and the stranger.” Leviticus 19:9-10 (NAS)

Youth groups have been raising money for mission trips, camps, and other activities for longer than I can remember. Every weekend the fast food restaurant at the end of my street allows a different group to hook up their hoses and wash cars for donations. Donuts, magazines, wrapping paper, and candies are peddled door to door, and items are solicited for auctions and yard sales. Creativity goes a long way as these groups amass the funds needed to venture out to change the world for Christ.

Growing up in the country, the fund raising activities had a much different look. Yes, we washed our fair share of cars, trucks, and even an occasional tractor, but the efforts I remember most vividly are the gleaning parties. My father, like many of the other men in the church, was a farmer. Each fall, when the harvest began, he was not concerned if the combine dropped a few ears of corn along the way. Although it certainly cut into his profits, he knew that those ears would be harvested on another day.

Daddy would hook the low-sided grain wagon to the tractor as we climbed in for the ride to the field. Slowly driving back and forth over the length of the previously harvested field, he would allow us to gather the ears of corn that had been left behind. When the wagon was filled, or the field picked clean, we would head back to the barns and transfer the corn to burlap bags to be taken to the grain elevator.

I don't remember how much money we made those many years ago, but I do remember it was satisfying and fun to be working with friends toward a common goal. I also remember that the farmers embraced the timeless value of the gleaning principle and the impact it would have on future generations and the kingdom of God.

Oh God, Giver of all good gifts, remind me to consider those less fortunate as I go about my daily activities. Amen.

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October 28

The Day Love Said No

John Dye

“Then the mother of the two sons of Zebedee came to Jesus...and...said to Him, ‘Command that in your kingdom these two sons of mine may sit one at your right and one at your left.’ But Jesus answered, ‘You do not know what you are asking...Are you able to drink the cup I am about to drink?’ They said to Him, ‘We are able.’ He said to them, ‘My cup you shall drink, but to sit on my right or on my left is for those for whom it has been prepared by My Father.’” Matthew 20: 20-23 (NAS)

Mothers tend to have little objectivity when it comes to their sons. If you disagree, try umpiring a Little League baseball game. I suppose sons should be grateful for their mothers’ bias considering all that moms go through in order to provide a safe delivery into the world. That nine-month ride where the child rests about ten inches below the heart produces a lifelong advocate. Mothers always want what they think is best for their children, but sometimes they want it so desperately, they wish for the wrong things.

In the story given in Matthew, the irony is that the mother was asking that her sons share the same experience that Jesus did—a cross. This would be like asking God to put your children in the electric chair. In Jesus’ eyes, this had to be a silly question to ask, but His response is gentle and loving. She did not get what she asked for, but she got what she needed, which was a compassionate explanation of why her request was being denied.

This story reminds me of errant prayers that I have offered in the past and how God’s wisdom intervened, so I got what I needed and not what I wanted. I think about dating relationships, jobs, and various other decisions I have made. Many of the things I asked seemed so right at the time, but if I had gotten them, they would have been a disaster. I also regret that on some major decisions, I didn’t ask. That may be the real tragedy-- that we forget to ask. I am so thankful that we serve a God who doesn’t give us everything we want or deserve. The Bible mentions giving appropriate gifts to the ones we love. A father would not give a stone to a child who asked for a fish. Love is the driving force that controls the quality of the gift. Love sometimes gives the greatest gift: saying no.

Father, Help us realize that “no” can sometimes be a more loving answer than “yes.” Amen.

October 27

Singing for the Lord

Cinda King

"Shout joyfully to the Lord...Come before Him with joyful singing."
Psalm 100:1-2 (NAS)

He loves to sing, enthusiastically joining in at each and every opportunity, lifting his strong voice with passion and conviction. In spite of his great love of music, however, he has a difficult time matching the pitch and consequently endures a good bit of ribbing. Thankfully, his good nature allows him to take it all in stride, so he keeps singing.

In the small country church which I attended as a child, the song leader (we didn't call them Ministers of Music back then) would often issue the invitation to the congregation, saying that it didn't matter whether you could carry a tune, you were still welcome to join the choir. He professed to be of the "joyful noise" school of thought. I'll admit that there were times when I questioned his methodology as it always seemed that those with the loudest voices were also the most challenged in tonality.

Perhaps *rua*, the original word translated as "joyful noise" lends insight and encourages us to read on. In today's Scripture passages, and no less than six other times in the Psalms, the word *rua* is a verb which literally means to shout to the Lord. Later in the passage, we are summoned to worship, sing, give thanks, and bless God's name.

When I see the pleasure my friend derives from singing, I know that he has read to the end of the chapter. I admire his resolve to sing on, even when the crowd might encourage him otherwise. We would all do well to follow his example, to embrace the exhortation of the Psalms, and to aspire to the philosophy of William James who said, "We do not sing because we are happy, we are happy because we sing."

Oh God, Help me to hear and share the song that you have placed in my heart. Amen.

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October 26

Family Matters

Susan H. Dawson

"...You have been my help. Do not abandon me nor forsake me, O God of my salvation! For my father and my mother have forsaken me. But the Lord will take me up." Psalm 27:9-10 (NAS)

I have always been a family-oriented person. When my immediate family lived in Houston, I would spend each summer in Louisville with my grandparents. From the moment school let out, I would fly to Kentucky, not returning until the day before school began. Even as a teen, I never complained about spending holidays with my extended family in Louisville. I cheerfully left steady boyfriends for my grandmother's memorable meals and my cousins' camaraderie.

My husband's small family is now deceased--except for one cousin still in town. My family consists of fragments at best: an aunt, cousins, and step relatives, all out-of-state. Our two sons also live away, so we are left with our two cats and a few good friends.

One of the positives that drew me to Saint Matthews Baptist Church was the friendliness of people. Coming from a mega-church where I had not felt connected, I was warmly welcomed by many. To meet people, my husband and I participated in the Wednesday evening dinners. Each week, we sat at different tables to meet new folks. One night, three women sat down at my table. Upon introduction, I was astounded to discover an aunt that I had never known! Because my parents had divorced when I was a toddler, I hadn't had any connection with my father's family. Although my aunt had grown up at SMBC, after she had married my father's brother, they had lived away from Louisville most of her life.

On my spiritual journey, I have learned that being righteous means being in a right relationship with God, family, and friends--a tall order by any standard! I know that God is in the business of restoring relationships. I have been blessed to find a "new" aunt and a "new" cousin (her elder daughter), so my family circle has increased.

Thank you, God, that you care enough about us to surround us with loving family so we won't travel through life alone. It makes trying to be righteous a little easier. Amen with Joy!

October 25

A Symphony for My Friends

Marie Wessinger

"You have changed my sadness into a joyful dance."

Psalm 30:11 (NLB)

If I could write a symphony,
I would write a symphony of healing...
 Healing of broken relationships,
 Healing of broken spirits,
 Healing of broken bodies,
 Healing of broken minds.

I surrender to you, God, feelings of
 sadness, helplessness, hopelessness and despair.

I turn to you, Great Composer,
 to be with my friends who struggle,
 to give them daily melodies of strength and wholeness,
 comfort and friendship
 in the midst of brokenness.

Help them know that even the discord in their lives
 is transformed by You
 and woven into dynamic harmony.
We long for the day when we will be able to hear it.

May they be comforted by knowing that You,
 through your son, Jesus Christ,
 experienced the brokenness of the world
 and have overcome it.

Therefore, we join together in dancing
 with hope and joy and thanksgiving.
O Lord, Help us, as faith partners, to sing a new song because
Jesus Christ has overcome the brokenness of the
world. Amen with joy!

October 24

Green Pastures

Marie Wessinger

"We also rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces perseverance, and perseverance produces character, and character produces hope...because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit."

Romans 5:3-5 (NIV)

He makes me lie down in green pastures...
No, they are not always green pastures.
 Sometimes they are brown, dry, grassless lands,
 Scorched by the sun's heat.
Perhaps the cloud that passes overhead
 Will bring a little shade
Or one cloud will be joined by other clouds
 Until there is a cloudburst of refreshing, living water.

No, they are not always green pastures...
 Sometimes it is rough, rocky terrain,
 Where tender feet and soles are bruised and cut.
But as I step around a large rock
 I hear the sound of a rushing stream.
In a quiet place I lean against a solid rock
 As He gently washes my painful, bleeding wounds.

But the hardest days are when there are only thistle and thorns.
 On those painful days I do not feel healing or relief.
 I do not understand...He has abandoned me!
But then I see a crown of thorns, worn so long ago,
 And a pair of outstretched hands, pierced by nails.
The hands turn as if to leave,
 But instead pull back a curtain of thorns
And suddenly, He surprises me
 With a resurrected garden of yellow roses.

Knowing that Jesus experienced death and suffering on the cross for each one of us, grant that we may see through the curtain of thorns in our lives to allow God's garden of love to pour into our hearts through the Holy Spirit. Amen.

October 23

Real Success

Anne Faulls

“Through the heartfelt mercies of God...Sunrise will break in upon us, shining on those in the darkness, those sitting in the shadow of death, then showing us the way, one foot at a time, down the path of peace.” Luke 1:78-79 (The Message)

My heart was dark. Oh, on the outside, people saw an intelligent, successful woman, of diverse, interesting experience. But on the inside, I had Seasonal Affective Disorder of the heart. I had gained knowledge and success by seeking and seizing opportunities that seemed to present themselves in my life. I was an opportunist of sorts, with an empty heart, devoid of light and peace.

While I was basking in the limelight of professional success, I experienced a devastating emotional blow. I was derailed. Losing all hope and motivation, I began to make poor choices with my life. I thought that I had been a spiritual being, but in all my seeking, I had never accepted Jesus as my Savior. I thought myself too intelligent to believe in the seemingly supernatural aspects of Jesus’ life. He was a great teacher of historical significance, but nothing more. I thought that God had given me control over my life, so I had to exercise that control relentlessly or experience failure. I experienced failure all right; my spirituality had failed me, and my heart was dark.

In July, my then seven-year-old grandson Nathan accepted Christ, and his daddy was going to baptize him. I drove to Owensboro to share in this ritual. Several moments in that day’s service pecked at the shell I had formed around me, and I began to change. At the invitation, my legs carried me to the front. It was not something that I had willed. My son Greg, the pastor, greeted me with a look of shock. He asked “What are you doing here?”

I answered, “I accept Jesus as my Lord and Savior.” There was a lot of weeping and celebrating that day. A few months later, Greg baptized me, and I joined St. Matthews Baptist Church. The Spirit was at work. My epiphany was a gift from God, a light which now shines on the path that He wants me to travel. I cannot control the direction of this path, but I can make the choice to follow the light. Life still happens with its ups and downs. But now there is light; I am able to see the resources and feel the warm comfort that God has blessed me with, for I have the light of Jesus in my heart, and I am at peace.

Lord God, Thank you for your spirit-sent salvation. Amen.

October 22

Pure Religion

Doris Proctor

"Pure religion before God and the Father is this: to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction and to keep oneself unspotted from the world." James 1:30 (NAS)

My life-long goal, and that of my parents, had been that my brother and I go to college. We learned of a small women's college called Blue Mountain in Mississippi which sounded wonderful. So in late August, just after my seventeenth birthday, I rode the train to Birmingham, then on the FRISCO rail line to New Albany, Mississippi, and finally on to Blue Mountain, arriving at 6:30 in the morning.

In this, my very first experience away from home, everything was exciting. I found to my surprise, I could do alright scholastically. I learned to keep a Cash Book, a college requirement for all students to record monthly money received and spent. I remember that most months, my expenditures were all of \$5. That bought an occasional ice cream cone and a few greeting cards as well as needed school and personal supplies. I was an independent young woman for the first time.

One of my most vivid memories is of Mother Berry, who was the ninety-year-old daughter of the founder of the college, Gen. M. P. Lowrey, a Confederate chaplain in the Civil War. Mother Berry was still active as a hostess in the dining room. She began each meal with a devotion; her favorite was to ask us to quote the above Scripture. Although I learned it by constant repetition, I also learned it more deeply by the example of her life. She was known in the little town as the person to go to if one had trouble. She kept a big wooden box outside her office where we could deposit any items that might help someone else have a better life.

In the many years since I left Blue Mountain, no memory is dearer nor is any verse more a source of guidance. So often I remember the bent figure of a smiling little old lady dressed in black with a kind word for all.

Dear Lord, May we always have others in mind as you do, to help them as you help us. Amen.

October 21

Prayer Discipline

Judy Jenkins

"Praise be to God, who has not rejected my prayer or withheld His love from me."

Psalm 66:20 (NAS)

Being a Christian almost fifty years, wouldn't you think prayer should be one of those automatic things we do, like breathing? Many times I felt overwhelmed, having a hard time keeping up with all of the requests and being faithful to pray as I had promised. I shared this with my Sunday school teacher at the time. She gave me a guide which included circles in a ripple effect, from a small center circle beginning with self, to larger outer circles which eventually worked out into the world. After using this guide for several months, it had become way too full and illegible.

I thought I need to learn more about prayer, so I found a workbook by T.W. Hunt & Catherine Walker entitled *The Disciples' Prayer Life*. Yes, I was in way over my head from day one, but God helped me work through the book. The study had too many prayer lists and guides for me; however, here are four I find most helpful: daily praise and worship, daily prayer needs, weekly prayer needs, and a Scripture guide.

Daily praise provides the opportunity to learn Scriptures which describe God and how He desires to be praised.

Daily needs have to do with personal needs, repenting and turning to God for personal health, family, and work.

Weekly needs provides categories; for example, Monday – missionaries, their families, their protection, and so on.

The Scripture guide provides a place to record verses that are most meaningful and is a quick reference guide.

When praying is hard, I find reading these Scriptures bring needed peace. This study has helped calm me as I pray, allowing me to be with God and enjoy time in His presence.

Holy God, Creator of my soul, thank you for giving us prayer as a way to praise and communicate with you. Amen.

October 19

For Such a Time as This

Jim Brock

“Do not think that because you are in the king’s house you alone of all the Jews will escape. For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father’s family will perish...you have come to royal position for such a time as this.” Esther 4:13-14 (NIV)

Most of us may not be queens or kings, or even royal boot wipers. Mordecai’s plea is as vital 2,500 years after it was originally uttered as it was for his beautiful and endangered cousin, Esther. She found herself in the Persian royal court of one of the world’s most affluent, powerful monarchies. Every need was met, and no doubt most of her wants as well. She was beautiful, pampered, and at least initially, protected. She had it all. Yet, upheaval was coming. Traditional structures were being challenged, racism was mounting, and security in all the worldly trappings Esther had taken for granted was being threatened. Faced with such a dilemma, she was in a position to choose. She could keep her head down and her mouth shut, hoping that the agents of hatred and destruction would overlook or perhaps simply tolerate her. Or, she could join the fight against evil in a way that singled her out for possible extinction.

Probably most of us have never considered the parallels between our own lives and that of this harem queen. Like Esther, we find ourselves in the midst of a world where things that used to seem unshakeable, even eternal, are being challenged, if not attacked: marriage, godly sexuality, faith in the Transcendent, respect for authority both earthly and heavenly, to name a few. Also like Esther, we can choose to hunker down, be politely passive (or politically correct), and hope that it all blows over, leaving us relatively unscathed. Or we can, in the tradition of the Jewish heroine, speak out boldly for the things which we believe even when our persons and positions are endangered in the process. We can make a deliberate and thoughtful decision not to keep silent when faced with vehement, vicious opposition, whether it is aimed at our moral codes, our schools, our families, or our churches. Do we understand that God has put us in this time and place by design? Do we ever consider that each of us may have a significant, even dramatic, God-appointed role to fulfill? Both Mordecai and Esther realized that boldness on her part could result not only in loss of her place in the palace, but even in loss of her life. This was not a clever game, but a real matter of survival. Thankfully, Mordecai was able to help Esther see her involvement in a life-or-death struggle. Praise God that she was willing to take the necessary risks that ultimately blessed herself and countless future generations. Will we do the same?

Dear God, Grant us the same courage. Amen.

October 18

“Wallowing”

Cinda King

“If the world hates you...know that it has hated me before it hated you...all these things they will do to you for my name’s sake, because they do not know the One who sent me.”

John 15:18-21 (NAS)

Occasionally, I have days when I am convinced that I am undoubtedly more miserable than any person has ever been in the history of the world. Whether my misery is from illness, anger, frustration, or exhaustion, I do not want anyone to top my complaint. Sometimes, I will even remind my husband that, at least for a few moments, I want to be angrier or more frustrated about a particular situation than he is. After a short time of what my mother often referred to as “good, old fashioned wallowing,” I’m ready to face whatever is bothering me with a cool head.

Today’s passage from John 15 reminds me that there is no unpleasant situation in my life that Christ did not experience in his short time on earth. As I have searched the Scripture, I have yet to find the words “Been there, Done that, Got the t-shirt to show for it,” but I suspect that is a sentiment Christ knew all too well. He experienced the hate and the distrust of the world. He endured abuse and unjust treatment by those who should have understood who He was. And He knew what it meant to be a good friend - one who would lay down his life for another.

So, on those “wallowing” days, I would do well to harken to the words of Christ as recorded in the gospel of John and know that regardless of how terrible I might think my situation is, there will always be One who will know and understand, simply because He has been there. He sees when my plans go awry and shows me a better way, a way made clear by a loving Father. And, if I suffer an injustice, I can be sure that I have a Friend who can relate to my plight. After all, He has the proverbial t-shirt to prove it.

Lord, Help me to trust you and to know that you understand what I am going through today. Amen.

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October 17

Doors

Anne Faulls

"I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved."

John 10:9a (NIV)

We all have images of doors, and gates, portals in our personal memories. It may be the big double doors we paused in front of holding our mom or dad's hand on the first day of school. It may be the hospital room door behind which our loved one lay dying. It may be the beautiful church doors through which we walked to move down the aisle toward the rest of our life with our spouse. Each door was a transition to a new time of life bringing with it opportunity, pain, or protection.

In the Old Testament, we have the image of the door marked by the blood of the lamb. Those behind marked doors were saved. The Lamb of God offered us His blood to mark the door through which we can find eternal life with Him.

I'll never forget the day that I walked through that door.

Father, Thank you for the patience you have shown to me when I was reluctant to pass through the door to salvation. Amen.

October 16

“O Come and Let Us Worship and Fall Down”

Doris Proctor

Many years ago, my husband Bob, who was Professor of Psychology at Southern Baptist Seminary, was asked by denominational leaders to design a questionnaire. This document was to be sent to denominational and church leaders in the Southern Baptist Convention. When he had completed the project, the leaders waited to receive people's responses. When they began to come in, it was found that in most Southern Baptist churches, the leaders felt that one of their weakest skills was the practice of worship itself. Out of that study grew many efforts at teaching our people to learn more about worship and how to approach God in this way. And yet, I find that my own ability to worship truly is still in need of improvement. Being in the choir for many years, I have sincerely sung such songs as "O Come, Let Us Adore Him," "The Lord is in His Holy Temple," and "The Lord Bless You and Keep You." But I sometimes think that still I don't know how to feel the awe and reverence I could and should in God's house.

There is in our community a Messianic Jewish congregation. They are a Christian group, but they try to hold onto the things in their Jewish heritage that are emphasized in the Old Testament. I believe we can learn from their example and remember that as we worship in truth, we are worshipping with Peter, Paul, John, and Jesus himself.

Our pastor has preached on this very subject, helping me to see more clearly that God is our ever-present friend, whom we can worship at any time, any place. And whenever I come into the church sanctuary, I hope I shall enter in prayer and reverence, with a new awakening to how much this means to my Christian life.

Dear Heavenly Father, Forgive our lack of awe and reverence and teach us how to truly worship you. Amen.

October 15

Working Faith

Russell Hoffman

“Whatever you do...work heartily as for the Lord rather than for men...from the Lord you will receive the reward of inheritance. It is the Lord...whom you serve.”

Colossians 3:23-24 (NAS)

Often work is a challenge to my faith. How can all the hours I spend at the workplace be where I can grow in my faith? When work is particularly difficult, how can God redeem the situation? Some aspects of work are not as God originally intended. Genesis 3:17-18 considers the *“painful toil”* and *“sweat of your brow”* necessary just for food because of Adam and Eve’s sin. Throughout the Bible, God speaks of redeeming our problems with work. Even the ultimate sinful work situation, slavery, is addressed by Paul in Colossians 3:22. His words to slaves have been most helpful to me when struggling with the spiritual dimensions of work. We are all subject to forces and people who wish to control us against our will; this is the essence of being enslaved. But God can redeem even that situation, because we are *“working for the Lord.”*

Old Testament rituals of offerings relate to our labor and its fruits. The first fruits were dedicated to God, just as we should dedicate our work, our passions, and our joys to Him daily. In morning prayers, I have visualized an altar, then placed my day’s work efforts upon it. I believe He accepts our offerings of inconvenience or frustration, of discomfort or disappointment, of pain or sweat, as a form of sacrificial love. Jesus showed us the model, so we can reflect it at work. As Christians, work takes on other spiritual dimensions as well. Not only are we called daily *“to act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with God”* (Micah 6:8), but Jesus expects us to be his hands and feet (Matthew 25:31-46). For this awesome responsibility, Jesus promises to work alongside of us. The image of a yoke is of a working partnership, each one pulling together. Sometimes things at work are difficult emotionally or physically, so I don’t feel up to the challenges. Sometimes I am subject to circumstances, institutions, and forces beyond my control. But after His resurrection, Jesus said, *“All authority in Heaven and earth has been given to me”* (Matthew 27:18). He is in control, even of these things that are far beyond me. Because He is so strong, sharing His burden should be easy (Matthew 11:30).

Lord, We praise your strength, for the assurance found in your Word,
for your love and work shared with us. Amen.

October 14

Stitching Life Together

Cinda King

“Peter arose and...they brought him into the upper room; as all the widows stood beside him weeping and showing all the garments that Dorcas used to make while she was with them.” Acts 9:36-43 (NAS)

She had a husband and five children to care for, an endless routine of laundry, cooking, and cleaning. There were mending jobs waiting in the sewing basket, patterns and new fabric to be cut, and quilt pieces yet to be assembled. As the family grew, so did her skill as a seamstress, flawlessly fashioning clothing for school, work, church, and special occasions. The children married and soon grandchildren became a part of her life. She sewed matching shirts and dresses for Easter morning, doll clothes with tiny buttons and delicate lace, and a quilt for each granddaughter's hope chest. Endeavors touched by loving hands creating perfect stitches.

My grandmother left this earth many years ago, but her legacy lives on each time I see the beautiful quilt displayed in my home, a quilt with fabrics from Easter dresses and pajamas I wore as a child. Recently, as I rummaged through boxes in the back of my closet, I rediscovered a collection of beautiful handmade doll clothes, and I sensed anew her devotion to precision.

As a child visiting her, I would marvel at her patience as she sat at the quilting frame which frequently displaced the dining room table. Stitch by stitch, inch by inch, she worked tirelessly, creating a work of art to be enjoyed for years to come.

I will forever be influenced by the life of my grandmother. Her devotion to family, her strong faith and love of Scripture, the generosity she extended to others, and the example of piecing each day together, stitch by stitch, will remain with me for all the days of my life.

Oh God, Help me to live this day well, not for fame or fortune, but simply as an example of your goodness and love. Amen.

October 13

Service

Judy Jenkins

"There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord." I Corinthians 12:5 (NIV)

How much they have grown, I thought, looking at a recent picture of my three granddaughters. Maybe I should send a copy to Doris and Bob Proctor, since they certainly have played a big part in my grandchildren's lives.

When our son David was a high school senior, the Proctors invited him to visit Samford University in Birmingham where their son David was a sophomore. Since the boys had been good friends in the church youth group, our David told Doris that sounded great; he would really like to visit Samford. She mentioned to me how glad she was that David was going to visit. As time drew near for the trip, David told his mom that he didn't want to go. I told him he'd have to tell Mrs. Proctor, not an adult! Since he couldn't do this, he went anyway. Guess what? When Dr. Proctor brought David home late Sunday evening, he declared it had been the best trip ever! The visit was much more than any of us expected.

To condense the past twenty-three years, David ended up at Samford and graduated in four years, meeting a delightful Christian young lady named Julie in his junior year. They married after graduation; both got positions in Birmingham, started their family, moved to Houston, and are very active at West University Baptist Church.

Isn't it beautiful how God uses people and relationships to work His plans in our lives? Yes, I give Mrs. Proctor most of the credit for my daughter-in-law and granddaughters because she didn't hesitate to take responsibility for a young man one weekend in February. This decision years ago to visit his friend has guided him to this day.

Dear Lord, Thank you for placing caring individuals in our lives who are your servants doing the work of being a friend. Amen.

October 12

Rejoice in the Lord Always

Ella Mae Young

"...Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be known to God. And the peace of God which surpasses all comprehension will guard your hearts and your minds...Finally...whatever is true...honorable...right...pure...lovely...of good repute, if there is any excellence and anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things." Philippians 4:6-8 (NAS)

I'm glad I learned this verse years ago, for I found it very relevant to my needs the night my husband suffered a cerebral hemorrhage and had only a few hours to live. Driving to the hospital, I prayed for God to be with me through whatever was ahead, never realizing then that my husband was not going to live. As I stood by his side in the emergency room, I can only tell you that I felt surrounded by a very calm peace, *"the peace of God which transcends all understanding"* (4:7). As I went through the following weeks having to make many decisions "on my own," I found God's grace to be sufficient, just as Paul said. Each day God gave me a special verse, a song, a phone call, a note, a hug, just as I needed it. There were verses like Isaiah 41:10, 46:4, and 65:24; Psalms 32:10, and 68:19. There were songs like "God Will Take Care of You," "Day by Day," and "What a Friend We Have in Jesus."

God also sent me just the people to help me through difficult decisions: help with my finances, help selling a car, help with my contrary computer, help with plumbing problems, and friends to comfort and encourage me. How thankful I have been for all of God's care. Life, in the midst of mourning, had become a thanksgiving and praise time, for I felt God's presence. In all circumstances, God's grace and peace were there. Tears came often; I went through many boxes of tissues. I felt the loneliness, the pressures, and the loss. But even then, I could stop and say, "Thank you, God, for your steadfast love and care."

After I had been on my own for several months, the pastor of my daughter's church asked the congregation to think of their happiest memory from the preceding year. My first thought was God's goodness! Remembering my loss, I still was truly thankful for all God had done for me. We present our requests to God, with thanksgiving, and His peace will keep guard over us, so we can rejoice in Him.

Thank you, Heavenly Father, for your grace and peace. Amen.

October 11

Taking Your Chances with God

Jim Brock

“Again I saw...that the race is not to the swift, or the battle to the strong, or bread to the wise, or riches to the discerning, or favor to the skillful; rather, time and chance happen to all of them. For man certainly does not know his time...so people are trapped in an evil time, as it suddenly falls on them.” Ecclesiastes 9:11-12 (NIV)

The Bible is a book of hope and encouragement, right? Most would answer yes, but then we run across writings like Job, and Lamentations, and Ecclesiastes, works that tend to leave us with many unsettling questions. Job cried out for a divine explanation of the theodicy problem; that is, he begged to know why good people suffer. The response he got was essentially that God is God, and that this side of Heaven even Job was not going to gain a satisfying grasp of this dilemma. Jeremiah lamented his heart out across five chapters where he complained that, *“the Lord has exhausted His wrath, poured out His burning anger; He has ignited a fire in Zion...it has consumed her foundations”* (4:11). Just when Jeremiah knew it couldn't get any worse, he was kidnapped and hauled to Egypt, dying there. The preacher of Ecclesiastes repeatedly concluded that much of the world he discerned was nothing but vain uselessness. Is there a problem here?

A thorough reading of Scripture reveals that God is not only creator, healer, and giver of all good gifts, but He is likewise the God who permits one brother to kill another, at times initiates cataclysmic natural disasters, has engineered the annihilation of clans and nations across history, and even asks His followers to obey sometimes unsavory political regimes. It stands to reason, then, that voices like those of Job, the Weeping Prophet, and the Wisdom Preacher must also be included in our Good Book. Otherwise, it would still be good but not nearly so real.

Surely, some turn away from messages such as those taught in Ecclesiastes. We prefer that our Scriptures not provide for the interference of uncertainty and randomness in our lives. It's frightening that the Bible suggests God does not micromanage His entire creation. Yet, it is even more unnerving to contemplate an existence where all our traumas are due to heavenly design. The preacher of Ecclesiastes was inspired to recognize that once the Creator put the universe into motion, He also permitted the intrusion of chance, or “luck,” in many of our experiences. The bottom line remains, however, that God is still God, thus ultimately in charge. He promises, in the midst of our senseless, absurd world, never to leave us nor to forsake us. That kind of Good News offers an assurance that makes each

unpredictable day livable.

God, Help us to persevere in the midst of seemingly random situations. Amen.

October 10

Bearing Burdens

Doris Proctor

"Bear ye one another's burdens." Galatians 6:2 (KJV)

We read this in the New Testament. And those words never meant anything more special than many of Jesus' teachings until my husband Bob and I moved into "assisted living" when we both reached our mid-eighties. Here we have learned just what it means to "bear one another's burdens." We have seen these words borne out in the lives of people around us.

We knew a man who, whenever he saw someone, even on the darkest day, said, "Fine day, isn't it?" Even though he has died, his words stay with me. A lady I know always has a smile on her face, and I have not heard her say anything negative about any person. Is it surprising that she is in her nineties and still retains a sure step and a smile for everyone? I know she is a Christian.

Another friend shows concern for the least-likable of the people she knows and always misses them if they are absent from a meal or two; she is sensitive to their needs. A man we know leads in welcoming new people to the building, not because he needs friends (he was elected "King of the Residents" recently), but because he loves people and wants to help them.

We know several people who bear not only their own burdens with patience and love, but also those of an ailing spouse, year after endless year. And some bear burdens for each other, as each has his or her own ailments. Some of these friends may not even be Christians. They may have learned this way of life from a Christian parent, friend, or spouse, but each is following this command of Jesus.

"Bear ye one another's burdens." It is a command for Christians, not an option. And He set the supreme example.

Lord, Help us bear the burden we do not seek as well as the ones we do seek.
Amen.

October 9

Come Near

Anne Faulls

"Come near to God and He will come near to you." James 4:8a (NIV)

We live in complicated times. To quote 19th century British poet William Wordsworth, "The world is too much with us; late and soon, getting and spending, we lay waste our powers." He talks of the wonders of nature that we miss.

However, I talk of our relationship with God. We have closets, and basements, and garages full of stuff. We are lonely living in a technological world where contact with another is a nanosecond away. We often feel like we're on a runaway railroad train. We got on that train hoping to get someplace in this world, but all we end up with is a glimpse of God as we whiz past church on a Sunday morning.

Stop for a moment. Do you feel God? He's been there all the time. Carve out a place in your heart where at any moment of awareness, you feel near to God.

Thank you, Lord, for your ever-presence. Help me to remain aware that you are always with me. Amen.

October 8

Seed of Hope

Marie Wessinger

"We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed."

2 Corinthians 4:8-9 (NIV)

After all the depression and the tears,
there is still a small voice,
still an "atom of silence."
That "atom of silence" is a seed,
a seed which has been planted within a soul
to be nurtured and loved to a new wholeness.
And if depression would come again,
there is still an "atom of silence,"
a seed of hope that life will survive.
It will be a life that is more than survival,
a life of strength and resilience,
growing from tiny seeds of hope to blossoms
of many colors.
And the soul of the people will celebrate
the patches of multi-colors gathered into one,
forming this quilt of life and hope.
The patches of multi-colors will be integrated,
separate yet one quilt,
reflecting joy and pain, sorrow and love.
Though people will trample this soul of mine,
it will survive
to re-sprout, grow, and blossom.
I will join in the tapestry of life,
offering my gifts of healing and of love,
joining brothers and sisters in this human race.

Praise be to the Almighty,
Quilter of the multi-colored patches of our lives, sewing with
threads of hope and meaning, known and unknown.
Amen with joy!

October 7

Show Me a Sign

Susan H. Dawson

"If now I have found favor in your sight, then show me a sign..." Judges 6:17 (NAS)
Gideon using the fleece and defeating the Midians in Judges 6:37-40

The end of the spring semester in 1998, I was totally burned out, so I decided to quit teaching. I gave all my materials to my older son's girlfriend who was just beginning her teaching career. I took the much-needed summer to re-charge. With the fall approaching, I wondered about my future. A realtor friend wanted me to work for him, so I obtained my real estate license, but before Thanksgiving, I knew it was not for me. Since I am a long-time antiques lover, I thought of antique appraisal. Taking the necessary courses to become certified meant going out of state, so I rejected that idea also. In the spring, I was restless and worried, not knowing what I was supposed to do because it has always been difficult for me to hear from God. I was floundering.

Then I spied a small newspaper announcement about teaching English at a Polish summer camp. Hearing the speaker relate her experience the previous summer struck a chord in me. Since it was volunteer work, I had to pay my expenses, but because it was a non-profit organization, my expense was tax deductible. I had already spent a large chunk of money on the real estate course, so at the leader's suggestion, I applied for a grant from the University of Louisville, my alma mater. When telling friends about this opportunity, I asked them to pray about it with me. I decided to use receiving the funding and the outcome of this trip as a "fleece" for whether I should return to the classroom or pursue another career. The university gave me half the needed money for the trip—a miracle in itself! Friends also gave me unexpected donations since we had supported their children on mission trips, so my expense was minimal.

My month-long experience was magical and truly life-changing! The Polish students were a teacher's dream: intelligent, creative, and talented. I returned to teach international students in U of L's Intensive English program for five years. I now teach English as a Second Language (ESL) and American English courses. I have never regretted returning to the classroom. Using the trip as a fleece for God's will about my vocation was accurate.

Thank you, God, for guiding us to our place and helping us accomplish what you have for us there. Amen.

October 6

All Chords Lead to Him

John Dye

"But wishing to justify himself, he said, 'Who is my neighbor?'" Luke 10:29 (NAS)

My adventure started several weeks ago when my son purchased an electric guitar and amplifier with his discretionary funds. Since then, every few days I have been required to listen to a 30-minute rendition of the famous Deep Purple hit, "Smoke on the Water." When children make decisions their parents are not thrilled about, sometimes a parent will take the low road, saying, "He never would have bought that if I had been there." There is about as much truth in that last statement as an innocent spectator at the scene of a train wreck being responsible for derailing the train. Even though I saw the wreck before the actual crash, I seriously doubt I could have kept the train on the track.

I would love to share this musical treat with you; come by during one of Jordan's jam sessions, or better yet, we could take the show on the road and drop him off at your place. Just tell me which direction your house faces; you can detect the sound for about eight miles. Many people say time seems to go by so quickly. I can assure you that thirty minutes of "Smoke on the Water" not only will make time stand still, but will cause you to feel as if you have entered the time machine from Hell.

I wondered, "Did I do something in my youth that is responsible for this behavior?" I could not recall a similar situation. I could recall watching *Guns n' Roses* with my dad and wondering what else Miss Kitty sold at the Long Branch besides alcohol. I never asked, as I am not certain he would have responded. I was a low tech child; my definition of technology was adding another layer of aluminum foil to the rabbit ears. We only had four stations then, so by today's standards, I am between 56 or 196 channels short of a load.

Those of you who have witnessed firsthand the christening of a new instrument, an extended dance recital, or various other childhood performances realize that it was God's love that kept you from killing. After thirty consecutive minutes of "Smoke on the Water," there is not a jury anywhere that would convict.

God expects and receives more patience from us when we are dealing with those we love, which is similar to the Biblical question, "Who is your neighbor?" Are there events in your worship service that are like fingernails on the spiritual blackboard? If those experiences help enhance worship for others, what should our response be? Sometimes God gently reminds me that all chords lead to him.

Father, give us the patience to love those outside our family as family.

October 5

My Pastor Was Right

June McNeely

"Give and it will be given unto you. They will pour into your lap a good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over." Luke 6:38 (NAS)

"You can't outgive God" was a favorite theme of my pastor from my youth, so I learned early to tithe and to give above the tithe. I discovered the truth of that statement in an unusual way. I remember exactly when I felt God's call to serve Him full-time. I said, "Yes, God, I'll do what you want me to do." I assumed I would be a foreign missionary because I didn't know women could do anything else. This meant I would have to give up my childhood ambition to be a librarian and teacher. In our small school, the librarian also taught.

While a student at Georgetown College, I learned other ways a woman could serve God. One student convinced me a pastor's wife could serve God full time; I married him and became a full-time church worker. However, one night as I spoke at a banquet for what is now Acteens, I asked the girls if they were sure they were in God's will. I had not planned to say that, so I realized God was speaking through me. I told Him if I had understood correctly, He had better tell Gerald because we had two little girls, so I couldn't go into a foreign field alone. When I went home, I didn't tell Gerald about the experience, but I prayed about it.

Shortly afterward, we were having a series of missionary speakers in our church. I couldn't attend because both of our girls had chicken pox. Gerald came in after the meeting and asked, "What would you say if I thought God could be calling us to foreign missions?" I simply said, "Let's pray about it." We were already praying for the Spanish Baptist Theological Seminary, at the request of a missionary teaching there. They needed someone to teach New Testament, which Gerald was then teaching at a Campbellsville University extension. We soon realized God answered our prayers by calling us because the country was closed to the Gospel at that time. Gerald was to teach in the only evangelical seminary open in Spain, with no assurance the government would allow it to remain open. To my surprise, they needed a librarian! I thought I had given up my early desire to be a librarian. I also had the added opportunity to teach student wives. Another blessing was the privilege of starting a church in the seminary building.

Thank you, God, that we really can't outgive you. Thank you for the privilege of serving you. Amen.

October 4

The Journey

Doris Finch

"What shall I render to the Lord for all His benefits toward me?" Psalm 116:12 (NAS)

The psalmist answers with: "I shall lift up the cup of salvation and call upon the name of the Lord." Having lived eight decades, I have often asked in these declining years how I can more acceptably express my love to the Precious One who has given me so much. I recall a hymn from my youth by Charles H. Gabriel:

So precious is Jesus, my savior, my King,
His praise all the day long with rapture I sing;
To Him in my weakness for the strength I can cling,
For he is so precious to me.

I have lived through numerous vicissitudes. Growing up in the Depression, there was school, employment, marriage to Bryce, the birth of children, the death of parents, the marriage of children and birth of grandchildren, and more recently, the death of our precious grandson. In the context of that psalm, I am reminded of the words: "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His godly ones." The tragedy of losing our eldest grandson shattered our hearts as nothing else. The healing has been painful and slow. Death became a more preeminent reality as our family circle was broken. Our two children, our son-in-law and our daughter-in-law have blessed us immeasurably. They will become our legacy along with three remaining grandchildren. And so the final stanza:

I praise Him because He appointed a place
Where someday, thro' faith in His wonderful grace,
I know I shall see Him--shall look on His face,
For he is so precious to me.

As the Living Bible aptly paraphrased: "Though our bodies are dying, our inner strength in the Lord is growing every day...so we do not look at what we can see right now, the trouble all around...but we look forward to the joys in Heaven..."

Through thirty years of changes, the one eternal, stabilizing force has been the priceless nurture of Christians. Thanks to God for the incredible people He has placed along my journey; I am extraordinarily blessed and eternally grateful.

Precious Lord, We entrust our lives to you for the future; may we be faithful to share the "cup of salvation" with joy and love. Amen.

October 3

The Hope of Our Resurrection

Thomas Kirkpatrick

“So teach us to number our days that we may present to you a heart of wisdom.”

Psalms 90:12 (NAS)

Working in a trauma hospital, I was sensitized to suffering. My favorite head nurse occasionally said, “Life is tough when you die.” This is meant as a cynical joke, but for the Christian, it contains the HOPE of the resurrection. If we live long enough, we will pass through the tough experiences of life. Family members die, our friends die, and we become frail as our bodies lose strength. But at the end, we graduate through death to a new life. The father of a sixteen-year-old turned to me immediately after being told by the doctor that his daughter had just died from injuries suffered in a car accident. He asked, “Why did God do this? If He loved her even a portion as much as I do, why did He allow this to happen? If He is all-powerful, He could have prevented this!” After the heat of the loss has passed, we can reason with our minds again as well as our emotions. First, god has chosen to give us freedom to make choices which may put us and others in extreme danger. I become most aware of this as I descended from a plane in Beirut, Lebanon. The path for the passengers was guarded by two long lines of soldiers each holding an AK47. I had my small son in my arms, followed by my wife and small daughter. Second, there are evil influences, even evil people, in this world who delight in putting us at risk. Check Romans 8:37-39 and Ephesians 6:12. Third, to die means to be present with the LORD. I have only heard of two people who went to God without dying. One as Enoch and the other was Elijah. For the rest of us, dying is the only way to get to the next life. Dying is not necessarily a bad thing, but as one comic said, “I just don’t want to be there when it happens.”

Even with Christian hope, we still have mixed emotions about dying. I think that is alright because we are aware of those we leave behind while looking forward to seeing Jesus.

Thank You, Lord, that death is not the end. Thank you for the resurrection which gives life, hope, and purpose to all our days. Amen.

October 2

Breath of Heaven

Dennis Boswell

"The angel went to her and said, 'Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you.'" Luke 1:28 (NIV)

When my mother passed away, I was plunged into despair. She had inspired me throughout my life. Unconditionally, she had loved me and my siblings even while we suffered the abuse and neglect of our alcoholic father. Her death created an unshakable loss for me. In the days following her funeral, once the glow of the well-wishes from family and friends had faded, I spiraled into despondency. I struggled with difficult questions: How had my mother found the strength to persevere under the dreadful conditions she endured? What inspired her to sacrifice herself for her children? Why did God sentence my mother to her painful existence? Where was God when she and her children were being abused? Without satisfactory answers to these questions, I agonized that my mother had endured a lifetime of hopelessness.

Just before Christmas, sitting alone in a room lit only by the glimmer of the family Christmas tree, the answers finally flooded over me in the lyrics to seasonal music playing in the background. "Breath of Heaven (Mary's Son)," as sung by Amy Grant, began to lift my despair: "I have traveled many moonless nights, cold and weary with a babe inside. I am frightened by the load I bear. In a world as cold as stone, must I walk this path alone?" These fearful words attributed to Mary, the expectant mother of Jesus, reflected the anguish my mother surely felt. Perhaps, like Mary, she had lifted up this same prayer: "Be with me now, Breath of Heaven. Hold me together. Be forever near me...lighten my darkness, pour over me your holiness." At last, I felt the burden of my despondency take flight; my mother had not been alone or hopeless after all! "But I offer all I am for the mercy of your plan. Help me be strong. Help me be."

God had not abandoned my mother! As with Mary, she had been "*highly favored*," so the Lord had answered her silent pleas. His presence had given her comfort and strength in her dark hours. Now God's presence was lighting my own personal darkness! Receiving His revelation, I belatedly celebrated her life just as God had--with Joy!

God, Grant us discernment and wisdom to understand. Amen.

October 1

Psalm 23

Cinda King

I have entered a new phase of life as my daughter will soon reach the completion of her high school years. Minutes, hours and days are consumed by thoughts of college and the future direction of her life and efforts.

As a parent, I am torn between the fear of allowing her to venture out into the world, and the excitement of knowing she has her whole life ahead of her - a life brimming with opportunities, adventures and challenges. Knowing that I will not always be at her side to help her make right choices, I am forced to rest in the lessons I can only hope she has learned along the way. I wonder if the morals and values she has seen modeled by so many wonderful Christian examples have become deeply imbedded in her soul. Is there more I should say, more I should teach her, or is it simply time to trust?

I want her to know that regardless of where life might take her, she is never alone. On those days when the torrential rains come, I hope she remembers that the sun will surely shine again. When the road seems impassable and the mountains too high to climb, she need only look inside her heart to see the right path clearly before her. And, if the day should come when it seems the whole world has turned against her, I hope she remembers that not so many years ago a blessing was prayed over her as oil anointed her head, and a life-long promise of goodness and mercy fell from Heaven.

Help me, Oh God, to rest in your promise of goodness and mercy all the days of my life.
Amen.

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September 30

Worry

Sandy Martin

"But now the Lord my God has given me rest on every side, and there is no adversary or disaster." 1 Kings 5:4 (NIV)

I was a worrier about everything. My late husband said, when something was over that I had worried deeply about, "Okay, now what are you going to find to worry about?"

Then things happened which I really DID worry about, not just "borrowed" worries, but things that affected me to the core. As a certified worrier, I became a mess, but I didn't want people to know because my "worries" were so personal. Remembering an old movie, daily I would actually stand in front of the mirror, run my hand in front of my face, and say: "It's show time, folks!" It worked for the outside world, even for my family and best friend, those who knew me better than anyone. But inside, I was dying.

Easter Sunday, I attended church because my young niece Lizzie wanted me there for her baptism. Although I had been reared in church, something happened to me that Sunday. I can only explain it by saying God's hand reached down and touched me. He was there, so all I had to do was ask Him for help. I sat there for a long time while the invitation went on longer than it ever has. Finally, I decided that it was continuing because God was waiting for me to do what I knew I had to--accept Jesus all over again. I finally did.

One of the things our pastor said to me shortly afterwards was that I had to "Let Go and Let God." I'd start worrying enough to make me almost physically ill, then I'd start repeating my mantra "Let Go and Let God." I would calm down; the knots in my stomach would loosen, and I'd be peaceful again, or at least enough to really ask God for help.

Months before, on my way to a critical appointment which had caused so much worry, I had said, "God, whatever you want to happen, let it, then help me to accept it." I was actually calm when I walked in. Although things didn't go exactly as I wanted, they did go SO much better than they could have. That night I received an email from my Sunday school teacher who knew nothing of my turmoil. She quoted 1 Kings 5:4: *"But now the Lord...has given me rest on every side...there is no...adversary"* Reading, it hit me--I hadn't worried! I had turned my problems over to God through it all.

God, Help us abandon ourselves to you, remembering you know our needs and will provide. Amen.

September 28

At the Foot of the Cross

Michael R. McCormick

"So the other disciples were saying... 'We have seen the Lord!' But he said to them, 'Unless I see in his hands the imprint of the nails, and put my finger into the place of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe.' Jesus came... and stood in their midst and said... 'reach here with your finger, and see my hands... do not be unbelieving.' Thomas answered... 'My Lord and my God!' Jesus said to him 'Because you have seen Me, do you believe? Blessed are they who have not seen and yet believed.'"

John 20: 25-29 (NAS)

I was diagnosed with colon cancer, and after surgery, I retired, and we moved back to Louisville. The next Easter Sunday, our family joined a Baptist church. We had enjoyed a twenty-two-year friendship with the pastor and his wife, yet we were apprehensive about joining such a large church. We were pleasantly surprised how quickly and lovingly the congregation gathered us in. We helped with the Christmas Connection, and I joined the culinary ministry, cooking for the youth retreats. My faith was invigorated by the Christian maturity of our youth.

In the fall, doctors found the cancer had spread to my lungs and liver. Treatment began with a prognosis of one to two years. Our pastor asked my wife Carla and I if we would like to join a prayer support group. We gladly accepted. We met in the small upstairs chapel at the foot of the wooden cross. We were only five, but we quickly bonded. All were suffering from a chronic long term or life-threatening illness. At each meeting, we shared joyful praises, fears, and tears. We learned from each other how to cope with scary test results. We discussed our mortality. Are the earthly needs of our departure taken care of? Had we prepared ourselves spiritually? Most importantly to me, we found ourselves praying for each other. As I prayed for them, it took the burden of self-concern off my shoulders. The wondrous thing was that each of us was at peace with our Lord and the outcome of our illness. I believe the biggest fear we have is the "exit strategy." Grief is felt for those who will be left behind and family events that will be missed. After the last four years and all the blessings I have survived, my biggest frustration is figuring out how I can serve the Lord in my gratitude.

May God grant us His peace which truly does transcend all understanding.
Amen.

September 27

Cloudy Weather

Debbie Locke

"He spoke to them in the pillar of cloud." Psalm 99:7 (NAS)

During the final week of February, my mother and I found ourselves at the hospice unit of a local hospital. My father was there because of his terminal illness. The weather was particularly dreary and overcast the entire week. As we sat day after day and watched my dad slowly drift from this earth, I found myself meditating on the situation, connecting with work over the telephone, and greeting the dear family and friends who visited our somber room. To stay busy, I daily carried my Bible study materials with me. I was in the midst of a study, and thought I could keep up with my readings in spite of having missed so many meetings.

The large windows that faced the parking lot of the hospital revealed nothing but clouds and the occasional rain shower. With the passage of each day, and Dad's final hours, I remarked that I wondered if the sun would ever shine again. Not coincidentally, during my Bible readings, a series of verses caught my attention. The writer was connecting instances in the Bible where the Lord appears, guides, protects, instills worship, and is present in the clouds. In Exodus, God tells Moses that He will come to Moses in a dense cloud, and later, the glory of the Lord settled on Mount Sinai in a cloud. The Israelites were led by the cloud through the wilderness. In Matthew 17, the Lord spoke from a cloud when Jesus was transfigured on the mountain. In Revelation, we are even promised *"He is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see Him..."*

I knew that God was speaking to me from the clouds; He had been comforting me all week – bringing prayers, phone calls, visits, and food from fellow Christians. I saw His love in so many ways; He was supporting me, caring for me, loving me. He understood what I felt during this most difficult time. Losing a loved one is never easy, but I know that the Creator was speaking to me through His Word – and through His clouds. I no longer let cloudy weather depress me; instead, it reminds me of God's promises that He will care for us, no matter what the circumstance, and that *"the Son of Man will return coming in a cloud with power and great glory"* (Luke 21:27).

Heavenly Father, Thank you for your distinctly-speaking Word. Thank you for your creation – especially for clouds, reminding us that you made them, and you are in them. Help us remember you will guide and protect us through our troubles. Amen.

September 26

Delayed Answers Are Not Denials

Subhro S. Sircar

“He was telling them a parable to show them that at all times they ought to pray and not lose heart.” Luke 18:1 (NAS)

We all have experienced delays of answers to prayer. This can happen for two main reasons: perhaps the Lord wants you to learn *“patiently waiting upon God in prayer”* (Ps 40:1) when He delays. This requires perseverance in your prayer life (Col 4:2). The other reason could be, you prayed to the Father to give you *“patience,”* and in answer to your prayer, He sends demanding situations to teach you patience, *“because suffering...produces endurance”* (Romans 5:3). This was true with me. When I prayed for a specific need, I soon gave up; I lacked perseverance in prayer. Although my coming to the US was a miracle, it taught me a great lesson of trust in God. But my staying and continuing my studies here has been equally another great learning of spiritual truth. When I came to the seminary for my PhD studies, I could not bring my family due to financial reasons; the promise of financial support had not materialized. As a result, my family could not join me, so we had to go through painful separation, and also more severe financial crises. This went on for a year. I made a few attempts to send applications to different scholarship agencies, but I met rejection and denials. These are the occasions when your troubles can cause the most harm to your relationship with God. However, God used this situation in order to bring me closer to Him, and to cause me to trust Him more, to cling to Him more faithfully, more firmly, and more simply. As a result, I experienced God very closely, which I never had before. God started to work through His people in answer to our prayers. With the financial guarantee from the two churches, my family applied for their visas. But they were denied twice in a year. So our painful separation and struggles continued for another year. We continued in our journey of faith and perseverance. Therefore, God honored our third attempt; finally, all the prayers were answered after almost two and a half years of patient waiting, and enduring faith. The failure to *“persevere”* is the most common problem when an answer is delayed. Giving up is admitting defeat. C. H. Spurgeon said, *“Delayed answers to prayer are not only trials of faith; they also give us opportunities to honor God through our steadfast confidence in Him even when facing the apparent denial of our request.”* For some who pray expecting an answer, it takes a long time to learn that God’s delays of answers are not His denials.” This is a test of our faith and perseverance, necessary for us to be effective and victorious.

Father, Give us patience and faith to persevere. Amen!

September 25

God's Design

Gerry Harrah

"God will generously provide all you need. Then you will always have everything you need and plenty left over to share with others"

2 Corinthians 9:8 (NIV)

God's Design is a new ministry that my husband Jim and I have started. Its purpose is to enrich lives by making homes a more pleasant place for everyday living. A new refugee family was due to arrive and would be given an apartment where they would embark on their new faith journey. We learned of their arrival just one short week before, and immediately made the commitment to furnish the apartment. There are specific items required by the government for the living quarters, and these items must be in the apartment when the family arrives. As we had been collecting household furnishings for several months and had a full warehouse, I felt it would be an easy task. However, in checking through the list of items, we were missing a double bed, a kitchen table with chairs, and a chest of drawers. There was little time remaining to collect these items, but I was not concerned as I had faith that somehow God would provide.

Meanwhile, I learned that our church Mission House was preparing for a new missionary family, so they were working on renovations. I called to see if perhaps we could supply them with some furnishings. As it turned out, they had items they did not need and were wanting to dispose of as quickly as possible. When I walked into the basement, there sat a double bed---exactly what we needed! After loading all of the items, I mentioned that the refugee center had said kitchen tables and chairs were very difficult to find. We had not received one as yet. But in the mission house garage was a kitchen table! However, there were no chairs. The next day, I was working at the warehouse and a person from another ministry using the warehouse asked if I needed any chairs, as they had some to give away. We acquired close to a dozen chairs, and four went perfectly with the table we had received the day before. All that remained was a chest. The next evening at the women's dinner, I sat next to someone who had items she wanted to donate, and among them—I'm sure you have guessed it by now---was a CHEST.

Dear God, I pray that I will always have the faith to know that you and only you are the one who fulfills my every need. Give me the compassion to share your generosity with others less fortunate. Amen.

September 24

Encouragement in His Presence

Joyce Cordell

"...they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up on wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint." Isaiah 40:31 (KJV)

Years ago, the Lord began to impress upon me that He wanted me to write. Through a series of experiences, He gave me a passion to write about lesser known Biblical characters and eventually led me to begin with Malchus, who had his ear cut off in the Garden of Gethsemane during the arrest of Jesus.

Over a five-year period, I researched and wrote this historical novel, all the while thinking "who am I to take on such a major task?" Oh, I had written scripts, devotions, and Bible studies, but nothing of this magnitude. Yet over and over, the Lord encouraged me. One such time occurred after I had finally edited the story for the last time and had begun the process of seeking a publisher.

Plans were delayed while I played nurse to my husband who had fallen and broken his leg. One morning he was able to be on his own. I sat down on the unmade bed desiring to have a long overdue, in-depth prayer session with the Lord. I stretched out on the bed and rested my head on the pillow. I thanked God for carrying us through the long ordeal and for miraculously healing my husband's leg.

My thoughts turned to my book. "What should I do, Lord?" I prayed. "You've taken me this far. I know you'll continue to lead me, but I'm so weak and tired. Please give me yet another sign of your encouragement and nearness. Help me know that I'm in your will."

I rolled my head over on the pillow and was struck by a bright stream of light. The blinds were closed, but a sunbeam had found its way through a tiny opening in the blinds. With eyes closed, I basked in the warmth of its light, allowing it to flood my face and fill my soul. I rolled my head back the other way, smiling and praising God for His goodness and His graciousness to give me this small sign of His presence.

I prayed further, and then rolled my head back over for one more ray of sun, but it was gone. The angle of the sun had changed. God had provided that light of encouragement only for the moment I needed it, making it all the more special.

Within a few days, I received two offers on my book and signed a contract.

God, Help us when we're discouraged and depressed about major and minor experiences in our lives. Amen.

September 23

Are You Afraid of the Dark?

Susan Wilder

"The Lord is faithful to all His promises and loving to all He has made."
Psalm 145:13b (NIV)

I am definitely not a horror movie fan; I was the one who always covered my eyes with my hands and barely peeked through my fingers as my sisters and I watched "Dark Shadows" at 4:00 in the afternoon.

Clay, my brave eight-year-old son, hit a scary wall. He was truly afraid to go upstairs in our home by himself. One day I was downstairs cleaning the kitchen and told him to go upstairs to take his shower. "Oh, mom," he wailed, "I can't do that by myself."

"Oh, yes you can," I assured him. I reminded him that when Mollie was afraid of having her appendectomy, our children's minister had helped her recall Psalm 56:3 which states, *"When I am afraid, I will trust in God."* I suggested he recite that verse as he ascended the stairs. So he gave it a try. I heard him begin quietly, "What time I am afraid, I will trust in God." Then a little louder, "What time I am afraid, I will trust in God." Then with more gusto, "What time I am afraid, I will trust in God!" I chuckled as he continued his task. By the time the water was running, he was chanting at the top of his lungs over and over again, "What time I am afraid, I will trust in God! What time I am afraid, I will trust in God!" When he returned downstairs, I asked if his chanting had helped the situation. "A little, I guess," he replied. Not necessarily a life-changing spiritual event, just a beginning to the reality of the care God offers us.

Can you imagine the fear of Zechariah, of Mary and Joseph, and of the shepherds when the angels brought news about the coming of Jesus? These fears were real, so immediately the angels reassured them. Zechariah was a priest; Joseph and Mary had been reared in the synagogue, learning Scripture. I wonder if any of them clung to that verse in their time of fear?

What about you? Do you have any fears or uncertainties in life right now? Do you trust the promise and assurance of God's word? Sometimes, like Clay, you may be quoting that verse as you stomp up the stairs, but God still hears, still cares, and still keeps His promises!

Dear God, Thank you for your faithfulness to me and to your promises. Help me to cling to your promises and to always trust your Word. Amen.

September 22

Experiencing God's Love

Linda George

"My Presence shall go with you, and I will give you rest." Exodus 33:14 (NAS)

I love the hymn, *"Standing On the Promises."* Over and over we read in God's word promises of His presence; nothing can separate us from His love. How sweet it is to stand on these promises of God!

A number of years ago, through circumstances over which I had no control, my life took a turn; I began a journey on a road I had not traveled before. Instead of the security I had known for many years, there were only uncertainties. The journey was very frightening, and it took me places I did not want to go.

As I struggled through this journey day by day, God gave me just enough strength for each day. He renewed my strength each morning as I sat with Him at the table. One morning, after the journey had taken me into what seemed a deep, dark pit, I cried out to God in desperation. I was reading from Exodus 33, and God spoke these words to me, "I will remove my hand, and you will see." The following dialogue ensued. "Lord, what will I see?" As I pondered the Scripture, He showed me the words, *"my glory."* "Yes, Lord," I said, "now show me Your glory, please."

As I left the table that morning, I began to look with anticipation for God to show me His glory. I was expecting my circumstances to change dramatically. Early in the morning two days later as I was pondering these verses, the words from a song came to my mind, "Oh, the glory of Your presence."

"That's it, Lord," I said, "Your glory is Your presence in my life." Then He spoke these words to me, "My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest."

Life is full of uncertainties, but no matter what life's circumstances bring, the only thing that really matters is God's presence in your life. Yes, the journey eventually took me out of the pit. Yes, circumstances did eventually change for the better. While I would not want to travel that road again, I would not take anything for the way God revealed Himself to me during those days.

Thank you, Father, for your presence in my life and for the deep and abiding love relationship we share. Amen.

September 21

Trust in God

Kevin Thompson

“Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him and He will make your path straight.” Proverbs 3:5-6 (NAS)

On my ninth birthday, I made a profession of faith by accepting the Lord Jesus Christ as my personal Savior; I was baptized the next Sunday. I have very vivid memories of the day that I joined church. I loved church and being there with my family, who along with our pastor influenced my decision. I grew up in a family that put God first. My mother and father worked hard raising eight children. But no matter how hard it was, they always thanked the Lord for all the blessings each day. Growing up, we saw this faith as a foundation for life.

Some of my greatest memories as a child were from church, like singing in the junior choir, going to vacation Bible school, being ambassador-in-chief in the R.A.s, and learning the books of the Bible. Great men in the church mentored me, including our choir director. There were Cedarmore campouts, dinner on the grounds, Wednesday dinners and prayer meetings, and special outings with our pastor.

As I grew older, my life became different. Something happened that I didn't have any control over. I became an unhappy person because these things prevented me from achieving my goals in life. I became an underachiever in so many ways. I resented the hand I had been dealt. When I was eighteen, I quit going to church and became a self-centered person lacking God and any spirituality in my life. It was a dark, rough going most of the time without praying to ask God for help. There were lots of failures, heartaches, addictions, and pain. But through it all, I managed to get by somehow.

My life changed dramatically at forty years of age. I was real tired of doing things my way since nothing was working. I wanted to believe that God could help me, but I was afraid. Then a voice interrupted a program on my car radio, saying that God is and always was with me. I stopped my car, surrendered, and asked God for help. I prayed, “God, please help me. I can't do this anymore!” Then the miracle happened. The memory of my childhood and my trust in God was so vivid at that moment. Imagine that!

Dear God, Thank you for calling us back to you when we have wandered. Keep us in your caring presence forever. Amen.

September 20

What Will I Give?

Bill Hutchison

"And there came a certain poor widow and she threw in two mites , which make a farthing."

Mark 12:42 (KJV)

This widow had received and was blessed. She then gave it away and was blessed. It is equally as blessed to receive as it is to give.

Some thirty-five years ago, I went to my sponsor Charlie and told him that I wasn't going to return to his house every day and listen to him share his experience and strength and hope with me. I told him that I could not keep taking what he was so freely giving to me. As I started to leave, Charlie placed his hands on my shoulders and said, "Bill, if you do not receive, you will have nothing to give away."

In Receiving and Giving

"I will give you what little I have. Hide it away for yourself or it will tarnish, give it away to someone else and you may keep it in all its brilliance forever."

I failed and was given success; I surrendered and became a winner. I give it away that I may keep it. How much has God given me? How much has God given you? ALL!

Dear God, Thank you for the insight of good friends, giving and receiving. Amen.

September 19

When God Sends a Cardinal Tapping at Your window!

Jan Dean

"Let everything that has breath praise the Lord." Psalm 150:6 (NAS)

The Lord Jesus and I have such a sweet relationship. One of the ways He has always spoken to me is through *birds*. Over the past two weeks, there has been a precious little cardinal tapping at my window. This particular cardinal has been tapping non-stop. Nothing can make him go away! If I walked to the kitchen, the Cardinal followed me there and tap, tap tapped at that window. When I went back to the bedroom to study the Bible, he followed me there again. In October, I was having an especially hard time, doubts, fears, warfare, when, out of nowhere, a beautiful cardinal showed up and started tapping constantly on my window. This sweet bird made my "blues" go away. Then, just as mysteriously as he arrived, he left, only staying a few days. A few times, I have been up in the wee hours of the morning, worshipping God and reading the Bible. Suddenly, a bird will begin to sing outside my bedroom window. To make it even more beautiful, once it happened in the middle of the *winter*! Now, another Cardinal is visiting me. Just in time, too, for I have been undergoing major doubts, fears, and warfare. Is Satan trying to bring me down?

It's always at the right time this little cardinal shows up, and this time, he has not left! Last night, when it was really stormy, I became a bit concerned for this little bird. It was dark and windy, with lightening. I walked to the dining room, and the little cardinal followed me. He tapped a few times, going back and forth from a branch to the bay window. Then he went back to the branch and sat. As I sat there watching, I marveled at his persistence. Suddenly, another cardinal landed on the branch beside him. They sat there, side by side, and KISSED!!! Their little beaks pecked each other several times, they rubbed their heads together, and then the one who had suddenly shown up, flew away. It was at that point I went down to my knees to worship my King, Our Creator! How endearing to think of the Lord sending one of His most beautiful birds to fellowship with me.

Lord, Thank you for opening my heart to the gifts of the day. Amen.

September 18

Shelter in a Time of Storm

Joyce S. Martin

"You will keep [her] in perfect peace whose mind is steadfast, because [she] trusts in you."
Isaiah 26:3 (NIV)

My mother was deathly afraid of thunderstorms. Many a spring and summer night growing up in South Central Kentucky, she would awaken my dad, my sister, and brother, and me, outfit us with blankets and a lantern, and hurry us to the safety of our root cellar thirty feet from our front door. There, nestled between the hand-hewn wooden box with our year's supply of potatoes and row-upon-row of home-canned fruits and vegetables, we would hunker down to wait out the storm. I don't think I ever made that late-night journey without my Bible under my arm. And once inside that dank, musty cellar, with my siblings sound asleep, my mother worrying about whether our house was still standing or whether a tree might fall and block the cellar door, and my dad patiently indulging my mother, by lantern-light I would silently read chapter after chapter. There, I experienced the comfort that comes from reading sacred Scripture in a time of storm.

Half a century has passed since those nights. I must admit that I still love the smell of a musty root cellar. And while I do not fear thunderstorms then nor now, other fears that have sent me to the pages of Scripture seeking comfort, guidance, and strength.

There has been the fear of failure, and the fear of success;
The fear of being forgotten, and the fear of being remembered.
The fear of being less than my Creator means me to be,
And the fear of being more.

The fear of not trusting my Heavenly Father, and the fear of trusting Him.
The fear of not letting God be God, and the fear of letting God be God.

When those fears, and many others, have crept into the dark night of my soul, the only sure place I have to turn has been the same source of strength and courage which I turned to in the root cellar—the Word of God and the God of the Word. Acknowledging my fear, and naming it, I turn to the Father for strength; I have found Him faithful, an ever-present shelter in my times of storm.

Dear Heavenly Father, Thank you for the comfort and promise of your Holy Word; may we abide by it and in it. Amen.

September 17

Grandparenting

Judy Jenkins

“Old people are distinguished by grandchildren; children that pride in their parents.”

Proverbs 17:6 (NIV)

Grandmothers – I knew early on there must be something magical about being a grandmother because my mother loved having the grandchildren overnight, all of them piling in bed together telling her all kinds of stories. She hung on every word.

Most of us who are grandmothers can't keep the magic inside; we just have to talk about our grandchildren. My brother-in-law says the only reason one grandmother listens to another is so she can have her turn telling about her grandchildren. How true! Since I had never spent any special time with my grandmothers, I determined that when I became a grandmother, I wanted my grandchildren to remember how special visits were with me at my house. We have had some really fun times together; sometimes I wished I hadn't started some of those fun events, as they want to do them each time they visit.

One thing we started is reading a devotional before going to bed. The grandchildren are always ready for this activity because it's a way to stay up just a little longer. Now they choose the devotional book and read it to us. I was fortunate enough to find a great little children's devotional book called *God Is In The Small Stuff for Kids* by Bruce & Stan. I have another one for older children titled, *Family Devotions for Children* by Keith Taylor; however, my grandchildren still want to use the first one. The beauty of this little book is reading one verse, accompanied by a cute and meaningful two-page story with colorful pictures, and four positive points, then talking about “the small stuff.” Some examples are: “What do you think? How would this make you feel? Was that fair? Share about your favorite animal. Name some things you like to do on a rainy day.”

The grandchildren enjoy asking Gary and me the questions very much, and then they give their viewpoints on stories or the small stuff. This has been a marvelous way for us to share our faith with our grandchildren, and in turn, we learn where they are on their faith journey. Many times we are surprised to learn new insights from them.

Dear Father, Thank you for the many joys you give us in life, especially grandchildren.
Amen.

September 16

Worry Not

John Summers

"Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own." Matthew 6:34 (NIV)

For whatever reason, this verse did not make an impact upon me until I was in college. Through years of Baptist Sunday School and Sunday sermons, I seemed to have missed this verse. When I needed it, the Holy Spirit was there to guide me to these words of Jesus, and give me the courage to live it.

Worry is an insidious thing. It is a cancer that destroys our hope and faith. If we are consumed by worry, we fail to take advantage of God's love and guidance. We take our eyes off of Christ. God does not want his children to live this way!

Worry wastes time and physical and emotional energy. It paralyzes us with fear. All of us have concerns and troubles, but God wants us to come to Him with those concerns. The nail-scarred hands of Jesus can carry all our burdens if we allow him to.

The American writer Mark Twain said, "I've had a lot of worries in my life, most of which have never happened." If we are really truthful with ourselves, we would have to admit it is so with us as well. Today, will you drop your burden of worry, and walk with confidence in the light of Christ's guidance, mercy, and love?

Most gracious and holy Lord, Be with those who suffer under the burden of worry. May they have the courage to take the bold step of placing those burdens in your hands. May they choose to live differently, surrounded by the freedom of your love and friendship. Today and forever, may they walk in your light. I pray this in the name of Jesus, the one who is Faithful and True. Amen.

September 15

Work

Russell Hoffman

“Then the Lord God took the man and put him into the garden of Eden to cultivate it and keep it.” Genesis 2:15 (NAS)

Some days I am reluctant to go to work. Sometimes, my heart is just not in it! This makes me question my motivation, my attitude, and the reason God placed me in this job. These are faith questions. How can we find joy and fulfillment in our jobs?

In Genesis, Adam is given a job: to take care of the garden. Surely this “Garden of Eden model” is one of the keys to the ideal work situation. We should know that God has put us in a certain place to do a certain job, and we need to know that He will be walking and working with us day by day as He did with Adam. A strong dependence on Him to find a job, and a close faith-walk with Him day-to-day, through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, are basic ingredients to a fulfilling job.

Through each decision in the of preparation for my job as a doctor, I asked for the Lord’s leading. When each decision came, He always provided an answer. Often I did not see the long-term plan, but He was faithful to provide direction at each “fork in the road,” month-by-month and year-by-year. I was able to enter my profession with the conviction that He had led me there.

On workdays when joy and fulfillment seem lacking, it is very important to be able to reflect on that leading of the Holy Spirit. Being Spirit filled and Spirit led minute to minute and hour to hour is still a challenge for me.

Gethsemane is the other garden of Scripture. Here Jesus chose to pray, asking for strength and rededicating Himself to His Father’s purpose for His life (Mark 14:32-42). A teenager, John Mark, witnessed this dramatic scene and later wrote the gospel bearing his name (Mark 14:51-52). Here the disciples were found too physically weak to watch and pray with Jesus.

There is no doubt that being in good physical condition helps us function better in many ways, including emotionally and spiritually. Jesus prepared for his trials and suffering with fervent prayer. What He asks of us daily is only a drop compared to the ocean of His sacrifice. Should we not prepare in a similar way each morning?

Lord, please guide me today. I want to depend on you more than I did yesterday and to allow your Holy Spirit to inspire my every thought, action, and word. Amen.

September 14

Strength in the Lord

Linda Rodgers

"I can do all things through Him who gives me strength." Philippians 4:13 (NIV)

One winter more than ten years ago, I began experiencing severe pains in the back of my head which extended down into my neck. They would be sudden, stopping me from doing whatever I was engaged in at the moment. After five months of collecting all sorts of medical specialists and tests to determine the cause, I finally received an answer. The neurosurgeon called to tell me that due to a birth defect, I had no spinal fluid around my brain stem.

He went on to say, "Don't fall down or have an accident, or you will die." This report was quite upsetting, in addition to the method he was going to use to fix my condition. He said he would remove a part of my brain that he assured me I did not need. At that time, my daughters were eleven and nine years old; I really didn't want to leave them or my husband Barry.

This verse became my focus. We had practiced it in Bible Drill many times. I can truthfully say it was one of the verses that got me through that scary day of surgery. I went in with the peace of knowing that God was with the surgeon that day, so I would wake up either in the arms of my family or the arms of my Savior. It has continued to give me strength, so I have used it to encourage others since that time. Nothing is more comforting than knowing that God is with you each minute of the day.

Dear Lord, Thank you for your peace and presence which does indeed strengthen us whenever we need it and ask for it. Amen.

September 13

Trust

Deborah Bass

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

Life happens...and it is sometimes so painful we feel unable to cope. As a Christian, I know GOD is our loving Father, but I still ask "Why" on many occasions. Who has not cried out to GOD, "Why did this happen?" When no answer seems acceptable, I am comforted that GOD doesn't expect me to understand all, but HE does expect me to "TRUST HIM".

One family in my hometown lost their only two children, just three years apart. Angie was killed by a drunk driver at age nineteen, and Todd at the same age, was killed in a single car accident. How could so much tragedy happen to one family? All hearts, prayers, and eyes were on this couple. Angie had become a Christian, and led her parents to the Lord. During this time, their church family comforted them and lifted them to the Lord. They were, and continue to be an inspiration to the community for their unwavering faith in their Heavenly Father.

Who would have thought years later, they would receive a telephone call telling them they had an eight-year-old grandson? Todd's girlfriend had had his son later that year, unbeknownst to his parents. This little boy lived in an unstable environment. Eventually, the grandparents were able to keep him permanently, and provide a loving Christian home. He has been the sunshine in their lives for seventeen years.

When the circumstances of life occur, and we ask "Why?" Ultimately, we will have an opportunity to ask our Heavenly Father, but for now, we need to Trust in the Lord.

Help us, Heavenly Father, to trust even when circumstances seem terrible and illogical. We need to know that all things work together for good. Amen.

September 12

Was it Something I Said?

Jim Brock

“And the tongue is a fire...an unrighteous world among our members, staining the whole body, setting on fire the cycle of nature, and set on fire by hell...no human being can tame the tongue—a restless evil, full of deadly poison.” James 3:6-8 (RSV)

Wow! James had a way of going straight to the issue at hand without mincing words, yet he did so in a way that encouraged while correcting, that comforted while warning. A holistic Christian orientation toward life views a God-ordained, ongoing interchange between the physical and the emotional, between the mental and the spiritual, between all four types of human behavior—feelings, thoughts, words, and actions. This means that what I do with my body impacts how I will feel emotionally, not just physically. It also means that my emotions impact the ways I think and judge, and those cognitions in turn influence my spirituality. Likewise, how I talk affects how I think, which in turn influences the way I feel. All the parts that make up who I am interact with each other in a multi-directional, unending life cycle designed and pronounced good by God.

Humans are the only creatures endowed by their Creator with the ability to communicate via language. Have you ever considered that the human command of language is one of the qualities that defines being created in God’s image? There are others as well, but use of verbal symbols is a unique, dramatic gift that God has shared with no other earthly beings. Surely this renders the tongue both powerful and special. What a tragedy that the potential for good encompassed in our verbal capabilities is so often traded for the opportunity to criticize, complain, and curse! Don’t we scorn God in the decision to do so?

In fact, the potency of language is more remarkable than many behavioral specialists realize. If I want to influence someone to become different, I can focus on one of four behaviors—their feelings, their thoughts, their actions, or *their use of words*. Feelings and thoughts are both hidden forms of behavior, meaning they’re harder to access, and harder to alter. Actions and words, however, are surface behaviors that can be experienced by others, so that’s where we start in our attempts to lead others to change. The reality is that if we begin talking differently, we will inevitably begin to think in line with our words, and eventually even begin to feel accordingly. Never underestimate the power of the tongue. It is not incidental that God created via his words, nor that He empowers us with language. He intends that we engage in good works, meaningful deeds, and life-changing acts, with our spoken behavior. When we do otherwise, we sell ourselves short, and we sell God short. Amen.

September 11

Reflections

Joana M. Johnson

“He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.” Micah 6:8 (NIV)

“May the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer.” Psalm 19:14 (NIV)

Growing up, I don't remember hearing much about spiritual gifts. After coming to this church and hearing our pastor talk about them and the importance of being in touch with our stories, I began to think about my story. With encouragement, I took the spiritual gift analysis and found that my highest score was mercy. Reflecting on my life story, I began to trace God's timeline in my life. I came from a Christian background. My grandparents were founding members of the present Baptist church in Gratz, KY, my hometown on the Kentucky River.

The first five years of my life were spent living with an aging grandmother, which was an early exercise in quietness and gentleness. My next experience was when my father died suddenly, leaving my mother with an eight-year-old in a small town without many opportunities for work or socializing. As I grew into the teen years, I tried to be thoughtful and considerate.

Next came marriage to a hometown boy and the birth of our daughter. When my daughter was three, my mother-in-law became ill with terminal cancer. I helped with her care. Then came my second child, a son. When he was five, we moved to Louisville for better employment and better schools. One of the first things we did was look for a Baptist church.

During these early church years, my husband and I visited five elderly couples through what was called the Extension Department. One of my neighbors was an elderly diabetic lady. One day in an over-the-fence conversation, she asked if I could take her to the doctor and the bank while the children were in school, as her eyesight was failing, so she didn't feel comfortable driving by herself anymore. This friendship built into buying her groceries and eventually getting her into a nursing home, and finally, making her funeral arrangements.

My mother's health began to fail after a fall and broken hip, so she came to live with us. She had a second fall, and the hip could not be set, so she was bedfast; I became her caregiver.

Some years later, my husband had to take early retirement due to health conditions. I again became the caregiver as the last two years of his life, he was bedfast. My cousin began to have some serious health problems, so she asked me to find her a

nursing home. I cared for her special needs since she had no immediate family.

At present, I have a HUGG friend who is very much alone, and I'm trying to help her with personal needs. In looking back, I see God preparing me step-by-step to be a caregiver. He has led me through each day; some days were moment-by-moment. There were times when I thought, "I can't do this any more." But God is faithful. I just need to trust His promises, for He will provide what I need each day. Great is God's faithfulness to me.

Dear God, Thank you for your grace and your mercy and for opportunities to do what you have called me to do. Amen.

September 10

I Will Never Be Shaken

Skip Ford

“My soul finds rest in God alone; my salvation comes from Him. He alone is my rock...He is my fortress. I will never be shaken.” Psalm 62: 1-2 (NIV)

“Life is difficult” is the first sentence in Scott Peck’s book, The Road Less Traveled. Each of our life stories confirms this life lesson as truth. Peck notes that once we accept the fact that life is difficult, we face the need to respond. Much of what happens to us in life is out of our control. Yet, we never lose control of our response to the world of hurt we may experience.

During a time when life circumstances presented a difficult challenge for me, I discovered Psalm 62. In this Psalm, David expresses great confidence in God as he declares *I will never be shaken*. However, when you read of David’s life, it is filled with an inordinate amount of adversity. David was shaken by life circumstances on many occasions. How could he claim to never be shaken?

The answer to that question is obvious. In the midst of the times of distress in his life, David learned to “wait upon God.” Essential to the discipline of waiting upon God is the decision to slow down and accept life as it is, not as we would have it. We must understand that we are creatures who, by ourselves, cannot bring about all that we desire. Waiting upon God is a discipline. It calls for doing what must be done when it needs to be done. The benefits of waiting upon God far outweigh the difficulties. Waiting is like planting seeds in the soil of hope. It is waiting in faith, trusting that seeds have been planted and something good will grow. Lewes Smedes helps me grasp the relationship between waiting and hope by writing: “We wait in the darkness for a flame we cannot light; we wait in fear for a happy ending we cannot write. We wait for a not yet that feels like a not ever. Waiting is the hardest work of hope.”

Waiting upon God led David to establish a deep personal relationship with Him. It was out of this intimacy with God that David found rest for his soul. Psalms 62 continues to guide my life as I offer it as a prayer to begin each day.

Dear God, I live with confidence that I will never be shaken, for as Paul writes, nothing will be able to “*separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord...He alone is my rock and my salvation.*” Amen.

September 9

Peacemakers

Doris Proctor

“Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall inherit the earth.” Matthew 5:9 (NAS)

One early spring Sunday I was at church alone, yet I was not alone. I was surrounded by a host of people, some of them friends, and some potential friends. I needed friends. Our group of seniors was growing ever smaller. Many, like my husband Bob, had not been able to come to church this day. I missed them, and I especially missed Bob.

The service began, with the theme of another of the Beatitudes on which our pastor had been preaching very meaningful and helpful sermons: Blessed are the Peacemakers. The Beatitudes have always been a favorite passage for me, as I have taught them in Sunday school and studied them with various teachers. In the music sections, in the children's sermon, and especially in the pastor's sermon, we were led to see that peacemakers are not those other people who are inclined to "pass by on the other side," but the real peacemakers are us Christians sitting in the service, listening. I realized I had never thought of myself as either a peacemaker or a non-peacemaker. Did it really apply to me? Did I know people to whom I could help bring Peace? Yes, said our pastor, we are the peacemakers if we are Christians. And I realized that yes, by being friendly instead of neutral, by being helpful instead of inconsiderate, by caring even when I encounter those who are hostile, I can really bring a bit of peace in my little space in the world.

Yes, of course, I know people who fit all the characterizations I was thinking of, as well as those I like by instinct. And I can do something about it. I left the service praying that I would in actuality become a peacemaker as well as a Christian who has enjoyed so many of God's blessings, so I would give all that I could to others. This is still my prayer.

Dear God, Please help us to realize that we are to be your hands and feet in this world to do your will. Amen.

September 8

A Walk on the Beach

Joe Walters

The beach at Treasure Island, Florida is a special place for me and my family. It has been forty-four years in a row that we have gone there each summer. We have watched our three babies grow into successful men who now bring their families to the same beach. We have made many friends from all over the country who migrate back each summer to be together as family. Throughout the years, there has been much laughter and sadly enough, a few tears, when due to death, some of our friends are no longer in our presence, but only in our memory banks.

Over the years, I have probably felt closer to my God while strolling on the beach, hearing the surf rush the shore, feeling the cool sand under my feet, and the bright sun on my face, and hearing the sound of children playing under the blue sky above.

It was on such a day that the following words came to me. While these words were written some years ago, they are still as relevant as ever. I can't wait to walk the beach again.

Psalm 23 (According to Joe)

The Lord is my Lifeguard; I shall not want.
He maketh me to lie down in cool sand,
He leadeth me beside the still surf.
He restoreth my soul: He leadeth me to do right to others,
and spread laughter so that this might be a happier world to live in.
Yea, though I walk through the troubled and stormy seas and threatening rip tides of
life, I will not fear,
for Thou art with me.
Thy warm sun, cool breezes, good friends, and loving family, they comfort me.
Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of my friends and feedeth me delicious
shrimp and lobster when I am hungry:
Thou fillest my cup with happiness to overflowing.
Surely good friends, a loving family,
and a merciful God will be with me all the days of my life,
and I can dwell in that Celestial Paradise above forever. Amen.

September 7

God REALLY Cares

Susan H. Dawson

“Are not two sparrows sold for a cent? And yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered.” Matthew 10:29-30 (NAS)

The idea of God loving us is integral to our Christian faith, however we come to know it. We may say we understand this basic concept, but do we really? It is one thing to know something intellectually and an entirely different matter to know it experientially, in our hearts. The idea that GOD, the Almighty, the Omniscient, loves us, is truly unbelievable. We may also attempt to internalize the premise that God LOVES us, actually cares about us in an ongoing relationship. Then, to finally believe that God loves US is just entirely too incredible because we know how we really are deep down inside with all of our petty concerns and overweening sins.

As a Christian of many years, I know that God loves me because He saved me; I know He cares for me because He has touched me and healed me. But childlike, in the busyness of daily life, I forget and need to be reminded and, thus, reassured. Lately, I have been watching Joyce Meyer’s television program “Enjoying Everyday Life.” Several weeks ago, she was pounding home the point that God really does love each of us and truly cares about whatever we care about—regardless. I basked in this realization throughout my chilly spring day at school. I had put a craft store 40% off coupon for a friend’s birthday present in my winter coat pocket. After lunch at home, the weather warmed, so I went out to run errands wearing only a sweater. Pulling into the store parking lot, I realized that I had left the coupon in my coat pocket. Since it was too far to return home, I shrugged off my disappointment as I walked toward the store. Then a woman pushing a cart approached and offered me her unused coupon. Smiling broadly, I thanked her. A coincidence, you say? I don’t think so! I silently thanked God for caring about even the most minute details of my daily life. I couldn’t help grinning all the way home, ecstatic about this blessing, a small but significant sign that He does indeed love me. The GOD of the universe LOVES ME!!!

Dear Heavenly Father, Thank you for caring about us and blessing us abundantly in large and small ways—even beyond our wildest expectations. Amen.

September 6

Holes

Anne Faulls

"He who digs a hole and scoops it out falls into the pit he has made."
Psalms 7:15 (NIV)

In its simplicity, this verse speaks volumes about where my pride has gotten me. When my terminal self-reliance kicks in, I usually mess up the simplest of tasks trying to do it myself. If I try to head off trouble by acting quickly, I cause even more. If I try to fix a friend's bad habit, I lose the friend. If I seek attention, I get the wrong kind. My pride has dug many holes, and I have dirtied myself falling into them.

If I am centered in prayer and not on myself, I will remain on level ground.

Heavenly Father, I place my feet on your narrow path, and ask that you help me to negotiate the holes dug by myself and others. Amen.

September 5

Let's Go Krogering

David Garrard

"Who is like you? Majestic in holiness, awesome in praises, working wonders?"
Exodus 15:11 (NAS)

Every now and then, I field a benevolence call for our church. We have a policy of not giving cash, so for food needs, I go to Kroger and purchase a gift card. Most of the time, getting the card means making a special trip to Kroger.

And so, on this particular day when I arrived at church, I found a message from a gentleman needing food for himself and his family. The day was extremely busy, and I remember thinking, "I'm not sure I'll time to deal with this, maybe later." So I chose not to return the call. Around noon, I opened my *Upward* lunch bag and spread out my sandwich, chips, and carrots to eat at my desk while continuing to work. As I gave thanks for my food, I thought again about the gentleman who had called, and especially his children. "God, if you want us to help him, please help it happen," I prayed. Then, I picked up the phone. The man lived downtown, and the need was urgent, so I agreed to help, even though it meant stopping my work and making a trip to Kroger. Then I had an idea. "Is there a Kroger store near you?" I asked. He said yes. I found the number and called the store. "We are trying to help a family that lives near you. I was wondering if I could use our church credit card to purchase a gift card," I asked.

"I don't know if we can do that," the young man said. "You need to talk to the manager."

After a moment, another voice came on the line. I went through the whole thing again. "I don't know if we can do that. You should talk to our manager." And I thought I *was* talking to the manager!

And then "the God moment" happened. The next voice that came on the line said, "This is Lisa Kaiser. How may I help you?" It was a God moment for me. because Lisa Kaiser was my neighbor during the seventeen years we lived in Hikes Point. She began working at the local Kroger as a teenager, and now Lisa was a store manager, managing not just any Kroger, but the exact one I had called.

Dear God, Thank you for arranging things in your timing and order to happen as you see fit. Amen.

September 4

When Storms Rage

Ella Mae Young

"...there arose a fierce gale of wind, and the waves were breaking over the boat...the boat was...filling up. Jesus himself was...asleep...they woke Him and said...'Teacher, do You not care that we are perishing? He...rebuked the wind and said to the sea, 'Hush, be still. And the wind died down and it became perfectly calm. He said...'Why are you afraid? How is it that you have no faith?'" Mark 4:36-40 (NAS) "You will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast, because he trusts in You." Isaiah 26:3 (NIV)

The disciples had been with Jesus for some time but still had not learned to really trust Him when "storms" came along. They were frightened and thought they were about to die as the waves battered their little boat. They were totally amazed when Jesus quieted the raging storm just by ordering calm.

I have always liked to collect one-line "sermons" seen on many church marquees. Years ago, I found a refrigerator magnet picturing a small boat tossing on high waves. The message was: "Sometimes Jesus calms the storm. Other times He lets the storms rage but calms His child."

I've thought about that throughout my life, for many times my "storms" were not calmed, as I had prayed they would be. But always, God was there guiding me through the storms, if I would just reach out and let Him hold my hand. I well remember when my three children were teenagers; our family went through some years of testing. The trials seemed interminable at the time. How we prayed for God to provide His peace in our home! It seems He must have had other lessons for us to learn, for the storms raged on, but God was faithful and brought us all safely through.

In everyone's life there come times when we wonder where God is and why He's allowing the turmoil. We're just like the disciples—wondering how Jesus could sleep when they were going to drown. We so easily forget that the same God who sends joyous times our way is still with us through the tough times. It's during "stormy" times that we truly learn about the greatness of God's love, mercy, and faithfulness. We have only to trust Him; He keeps His word to be with us always. Our God who made the heavens, earth, sunshine, and rain is always there to calm His children.

Lord, Help me to always remember that you love me and want what is best for me. Help me to trust you to bring me safely through all the storms of my life. Amen

September 3

A Safe Place

Bert Akin

“ And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Counselor to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth whom the world cannot receive because it neither sees him nor knows him; you know him for he dwells with you and will be in you. I will not leave you desolate; I will come to you.” John 14: 16 -18 (RSV)

The house in which I was born on January 3, 1926, is still located on Bellevue Avenue in Louisville, Kentucky. It provided a safe, shady area for a small boy to play with little cars on make-believe streets and hills. It was my safe haven where monsters could not catch me. I made motor noises with my vibrating lips that sounded authentic to me. As I grew older, I used that same shady sanctuary in which to read.

One day, while sitting there reading Thomas Wolfe's novel, *You Can't Go Home Again*, I came across the passage where the character of the editor, Foxhall, who in real life was Wolfe's editor, Maxwell Perkins, declares that each enemy, when destroyed, is replaced immediately with another. Webber, the hero who represents the author Wolfe, disagrees. He held to the belief that each person's life can and will be better. I have always had this unprovable, yet hopeful view. Of course, we as Christians have the promise of Jesus, passed on to us by the Holy Spirit, that He will always be with us. Our faith helps us look forward with hope, love, charity, and gutsy faith. We have God's promise never to leave us or forsake us. That's even better than having a safe place to run to and hide in. The Holy Spirit will always be with us wherever we go. What could possibly be safer than that?

Father, Keep us aware of your presence at all times. Help us to overcome our tendencies to worry and to fear. Give us the wisdom to see how much better our lives can be if we can just relax and know that our Helper is always at hand. In the name of our blessed Savior, Jesus Christ, we pray. Amen.

September 2

Remembrance: An Affirmation of Faith

Marie Wessinger

"Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever."
Hebrews 13:8 (NIV)

Changing seasons of nature,
Changing seasons of life,
Summer, fall, winter, spring,
Colorful leaves fall,
Leaving barren branches.
Sometimes our lives lie barren.
But in the season of darkness
A new Light and Life appears.
He is the Light of the World!
Shepherds worship Him
But He is really the Shepherd of us all.
So no matter what the season
Of nature or of life,
We are safe in the arms of Jesus.
We rest securely in His everlasting arms,
Every day in this year.
He is the Alpha and the Omega,
The Bright and Morning Star.
He is the same yesterday, today, and forever.
In Him we put our faith, our love, our trust.
Amen.

September 1

Mustard Seeds and Mountains

Elaine Parker Akin

"...the disciples came to Jesus...and said, 'Why could we not cast it [the demon] out?' He said...'Because of your little faith... if you have faith as a grain of mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, Move from here to there, and it will move...nothing will be impossible to you.'"

Matthew 17: 20-23 (RSV)

"The kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed which a man...sowed in his field; it is the smallest of all seeds, but when...grown, it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree."

Matthew 13:31 (RSV)

Parts of the Bible are difficult to understand; some of Jesus' teachings are puzzling. I wish our dear Lord had qualified some of his answers, giving us a better reason than insufficient faith when we ask and it is not given, when we seek and do not find, or when we knock, but it is not opened to us. Is prefacing every prayer with "If it be thy will" the secret? The disciples felt similar frustration. Once they asked Jesus why they could not cast out a demon that He banished. He rebuked the disciples along with the demon by saying: "If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can move a mountain." Christians understand this as meaning our tribulations result from inadequate faith.

Jesus also compares the mustard seed to the Kingdom of Heaven; its amazing propensity for growth can symbolize our mustard seed faith growing in a similar way. We begin with "Now I lay me down to sleep," a very good start. However, as time goes by, our heavenly petitions become more complex and lengthy; our concerns expand to the world. We have little understand of God's mysterious ways. So we must choose whether to allow our faith to increase or diminish with each new trial.

Loving God, we thankfully acknowledge with awe that you are our creator, promising to be with us in our earthly life. Send the Holy Spirit to strengthen our faith and give us the courage to walk steadfastly through seasons of adversity. Amen.