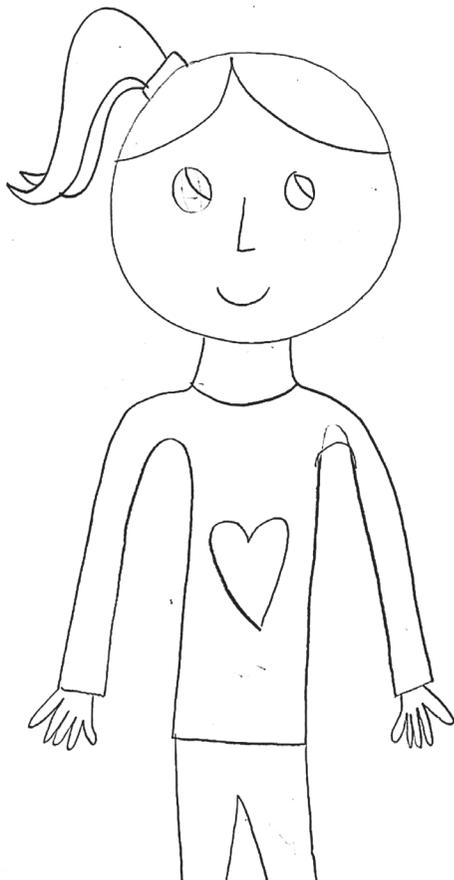


He Knows Your Name.



*"I have redeemed
you; I have called
you by name, you
are mine."
Isaiah 43:1*

**Devotions
for the 2022
Lenten Season**

New Philadelphia Moravian Church

On the Cover:

Elle

My parents chose my name because since I have such a long last name my parents wanted a short name and my mom wanted part of her name, Kate, in my name so my middle name is Katelyn My full name is Elle Katelyn Windemuller.



Dear Friends,

One of my favorite passages in the Gospels is Matthew chapter 10. It's a pretty long chapter (40 verses) but I believe it summarizes ministry and mission in 5 concrete steps:

1. Jesus called his disciples *in*
2. **He knew them by name**
3. He gave them instructions
4. He gave them authority; and
5. He sent them out

Isn't that what Jesus does with us in and through the church?

We are called in to be part of the Body of Christ. He knows us by name (and we get to know more about him and more about each other). We receive instructions and authority from God's Word. And then we are sent out into the community and the world to share what we have and what we know.

That second step is so important! Matthew chapter 10 lists the names of all 12 disciples because they were important to Jesus. Getting to know each other and getting to know Jesus and inviting Jesus to get to know more about us is part of an overall plan that has been around for about 2000 years.

In this Lenten Devotional Guide we will see lots of names — many of them will be familiar and others may not be. It's amazing and comforting to know that Jesus knows all of us... by name. He knows your name!

On a few of the days during Lent you will see that there is simply a passage of Scripture (the Daily Texts for that day). These verses can help us know more about God and about ourselves.

On those days, simply take these 4 steps:

1. **Read** the verse (with your full attention, and, if possible, with “fresh vision,” as if reading it for the first time)
2. **Meditate** on the verse (Is there a word or phrase that touches your heart in a special way?).
3. **Say a prayer** that reflects what your mind and heart have learned from the verses.
4. **Contemplate** what impact the verses might have on your day... and beyond.

I look forward to seeing your names and joining you on this journey as we walk together throughout these 47 days, always remembering that... “He knows your name!”

Pastor Sam

“All these blessings will come upon you and accompany you if you obey the Lord your God: You will be blessed in the city and blessed in the country.”

Deuteronomy 28:2-3 The NIV Study Bible

In the Old Testament book of Deuteronomy, Moses and the Israelites have spent 38 years displaced from their homeland and wandering in the wilderness due to their disobedience to God and His Law. They are in the process of entering into the land of Canaan. Moses has to transfer over to Joshua his role as leader of the Israelites into Canaan. Moses knows that the success of the Israelites depends on their obedience to God and God’s Law. Moses delivers farewell addresses where his intent is to instill in the Israelites their history of disobedience to God and the consequences and hardships that they endured while also presenting a covenant of renewal to them. Moses encourages the Israelites to proceed on a new path of obedience and presents to them the laws that were especially needed at such a time in a warm, personal, sermon form of expression.

There are more than 80 citations of Deuteronomy in the New Testament. Jesus quotes more from Deuteronomy than from any other book in the Old Testament. Jesus directly ties Deuteronomy to the New Testament. This is done when Jesus proclaims that the essence of the entire Old Testament Law and prophets could be summed up by the commandment “to love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and to love your neighbor as yourself”(Matt. 22:37; Deut. 6:5, 10:19). Jesus also responds with Scripture from Deuteronomy when He is tempted by Satan in the wilderness (Matt. 4:4, 7, 10; Luke 4-12; Deut. 8:1-3, 6:1-13, 16).

The Inspirations of the Holy Bible Scriptures serve as a Guide Book to Living the Life that God Desires and Intends for us. If we read and reflect on the histories and teachings of the Scriptures, we learn or are reminded of God’s faithfulness to us and His grace, love, and salvation for us. It encourages us to learn from our transgressions and to continue to strive to be obedient to God. It is an opportunity to enhance our love and care for others. The joys experienced by practicing living God’s Life Plan is rewarding beyond description.

Prayer: *Dear Lord, thank you for your guidance and the instructions you provide us for life. Thank you for your grace, faithfulness, love, and salvation when we keep our line of communication open to you and love for you in our hearts. We pray that you continue to guide us and give us wisdom in making choices and decisions and in all we do. Please lead us in how we can best serve you. Thank you for the opportunities and callings you bestow upon us. Amen.*

Laurie Renner

Day 2

Thursday, March 3

“Nevertheless he left not himself without witness, in that he did well, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness.”

Acts 14:17

On their trip to Lystra, Paul and Barnabas had the opportunity to minister to a man who was crippled at birth and had never walked. Seeing he had the faith to be made well, Paul said in a loud voice, “Stand upright on your feet.” The man sprang up and began walking. The crowd lifted up their voices and proclaimed Barnabas and Paul to be the Greek gods, Zeus and Hermes. The men quickly protested the proclamation and tore off their clothes and ran into the crowds shouting “we are men like you” and “turn from these vain things to a living God.”

Paul and Barnabas resisted the temptation to take credit for their actions without hesitation. When we serve others that should be a wonderful reminder to us that it is fine to feel good about helping others but we should be careful to give credit to God for providing the opportunity for us to serve in his name.

Prayer: *Gracious God, our small sacrifices fall far short of the ultimate gift you provided us. May we continue in this season of sacrifice to remember Paul’s admonishment to honor you as we strive to help others. Amen*

David Stanfield

*“Soon the world will no longer see me, but you will see me.
Because I live, you will live too.” John 14:19*

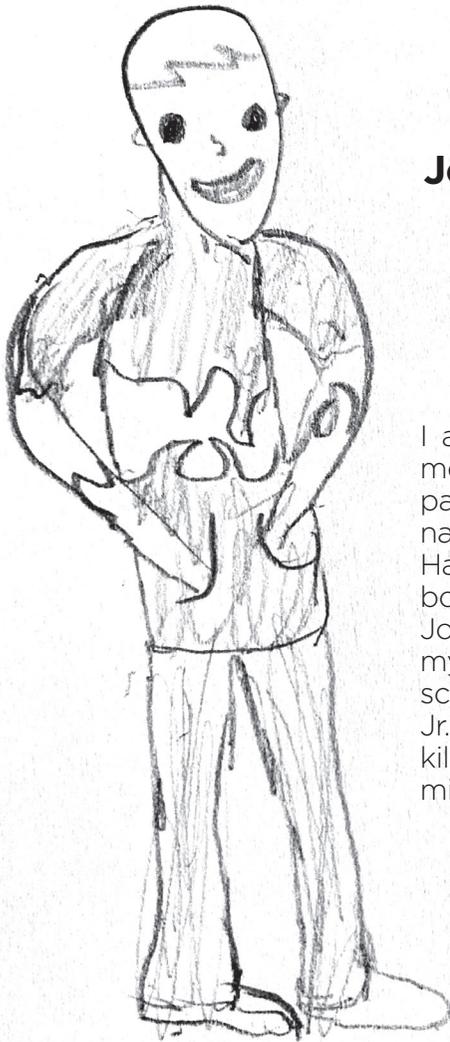
This is the last hour that Jesus has his disciples gathered around him and he is warning them once again what will happen, and what it will mean. They must have known at this point that there was something ominous around the corner, for there was much unrest. Jesus must have felt their concerns and at the same time his true need to get across his purpose. (I can remember trying to be sure our young sons understood all they should as we took them to college — last chance effort to teach all my values.)

He begins this passage by saying that he will not leave them as an orphan (v. 18), fatherless, without comfort and direction, but will be with them. He teaches and reminds them that though they think in a physical sense, they need to understand and trust in a spiritual sense. He’s taking them along a different path, one that doesn’t fit the norm they understand. Because He lives, and He lives in them, they will realize His presence when no one else can, even after He is gone. The world — the unbelievers — will not see Him, because the world, the sinners, do not know Him or accept Him as they do.

For me, this harkens to our Advent devotional guide, where we studied names of Jesus. The first was Emmanuel, meaning God-With-Us. This is saying once again that as believers God/Jesus is with us, and because of Him we will have life forever — in the spiritual sense. He is “in us” and therefore we are in Him.

Prayer: *Thank you, God, for your willingness to share in our lives and we pray that we keep you “with us” as we are “with you”, as we live moment by moment. Amen*

Nancy Holland



**My name is:
John Edwin Greenwood
& my nickname is**

Win

I am named after two honorable men who were important to my parents. I get the Edwin part of my name from my great-grandfather, Hal Edwin Church. He fought in both WWII & the Korean War. The John part of my name comes from my mom's best friend from high school, Major Larry John Bauguess, Jr. He served in the Army & was killed in Afghanistan on a peace mission in 2007.

Win Greenwood

“The whole Earth is filled with awe at your wonders; where morning dawns, where evening fades, you call forth songs of joy.” Psalm 65:8

I really love this verse for many reasons. It is so joyful and positive. It conveys the awesomeness of God’s world. And it brings up one of my favorite subjects: singing!

Growing up our family sang a lot. We sang the blessing at every meal — breakfast, lunch and dinner. Sometimes we sang more than just the blessing. Most evenings we would usually gather around the piano. I guess you could say we called forth songs of joy where morning dawns and evening fades.

In this Lenten season may we be filled with all of God’s wonders. May we be joyful for all his great gifts — especially the great gift of his Son.

Prayer: *Lord, you are an awesome God! Your marvelous wonders fill the earth. We will sing your praises where morning dawns and evening fades. Amen.*

Carol Garber

“But the Lord is in his holy temple; let all the earth be silent before him.” Habakkuk 2:20

“Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, ‘Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star and have come to worship him.’” Matthew 2:1-2

These scriptures offer instruction for our faith journey. Habakkuk invites us to “be silent before him” and Matthew’s invitation is “to come and worship him.”

According to Merriam Webster, the definition of silence is “to be free from sound or noise: STILL”. The definition of worship, again according to Merriam Webster, is “to regard with great or extravagant respect, honor or devotion.”

Life is full of noises that distract and often confuse. It is sometimes hard to “be still” isn’t it? But how do we hear God speak unless we are listening for his voice in quiet reverence or as Habakkuk instructs to “be silent before him?” Oswald Chambers in *My Utmost for His Highest* writes: “The busyness of things obscures our concentration on God. We must maintain a position of beholding Him, keeping our lives completely spiritual through and through.”

Perhaps during these weeks of Lent, we will set aside a few minutes each day to listen for God’s voice as we meet him in faithful and devoted worship and as he waits for us to receive his extravagant grace, forgiveness and love. When we open our hearts to receive these gifts, may we be so overwhelmed by his grace that we will be compelled to worship him extravagantly, giving thanks for the gift of his beloved Son.

The footnote for Matthew 2:2 in the Life Application Bible says that the Magi traveled thousands of miles to worship the newborn King. Now that is extravagant worship!

Prayer: *Father, speak to me, I am listening. Amen*

Janet Williams

“But when these things begin to take place, straighten up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.” Luke 21:28 NASB

Considering one verse of Scripture alone is often misleading. Context is key and Jesus is making this statement between His entry into Jerusalem and His Crucifixion. His audience is listening against the backdrop of Jewish Law which casts concepts like atonement, redemption, purification, sanctification, and salvation in a different light from what we understand today. Studies of verses like Luke 21:28 often bypass a meaningful instruction on how these terms apply in Christianity and go for the jugular — what are the signs of the end times and when will it come? It is unfortunate when that happens. Perhaps it’s more helpful to discuss what “these things” are and Jesus gives us ample guidance.

Jesus enters Jerusalem and encounters one group of people after another: his disciples, the Pharisees, the Sadducees and the garden variety of people who just hang around to see what’s going on. In His response to questions, we see what Jesus meant when he referred to “these things.” He warns against turning His house of prayer into a den of robbers, giving to God out of one’s surplus instead of one’s poverty, or that “many will come in My name...saying the time is near....do not go after them.” Reading earlier chapters in Luke referencing “these things” is instructive, not only because it helps us understand what Jesus was saying but also because we can see 21st century examples of all of them. “Nations will rise against nations, there will be earthquakes, plagues, famines, and terrors.” That is not just Scripture; it was last night’s news. “These things” are happening now! How do we look at this passage and just not crumble under the weight of what Christ is saying?

There is a reason why Jesus said that no man, not even the Son, knows when the end times are. If we can know based on the signs then trying to interpret them will become central to our faith. In addition to trying to understand what “these things” are, perhaps we should also ask Christ, “Knowing they exist, what do we do?” Continuing to read this passage gives a measure of understanding and a peace of mind.

Anticipating confusion, Christ immediately gave a parable about fig trees. “As soon as they put forth leaves, you see it and know for yourselves that summer is now near” (v. 30). Without regard to any other entity that the fig tree could represent, I know verse 30 is true. My husband and I have fig trees in our yard, and blueberry bushes, azaleas, geraniums, coleus, and on it goes. When we see flowers, leaves, blooms, or buds, we know summer is coming and **that knowledge results in certain actions**. We prepare soil, fertilize, check for diseases, put up netting to deter birds — **all are actions based on the signs we see**. And there it is. Verse 31. “So you also, when you see these things happening, recognize that the “kingdom of God is near.” The remainder of the chapter tells of the behavior we should exhibit based on the signs. “Be on guard, so that your heart will not be weighted down...” (v. 34). “Keep on the alert at all times, praying...” (vs. 36). We are told to observe the seasons, to be aware of the signs, and to behave accordingly. It is not necessary to know when the kingdom of God will come. Simply knowing that it is near is comfort enough.

Prayer: *Our Father, Who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy Name; Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen.*

Trudy Farnell

*“There is no Holy One like the Lord, no one besides You;
there is no Rock like our God.” 1 Samuel 2:2 (NRSV)*

This text is straightforward. It underlines the basis of our faith that God is our foundation; our hope manifested in his son Jesus Christ, and our Creator.

I remember one of my favorite things to do as a kid was skip rocks across the pond with my friends. We scoured the shore and shallow areas for the smoothest rocks we could find. Then with a sidearm toss you could skip it about 6-7 times on the water and perhaps make it to the other side.

No one went for the heavy or rough edged rocks. They just sunk with a loud noise, never to be seen above the pond again.

The book of Samuel is believed to be about 2500 years old. I don't know if they skipped rocks back then too. But I'm sure they used different rocks for various uses, both smooth and rough.

I believe God is our Rock. I also believe sometimes that feels like a smooth surface beneath us, easy to walk on and appreciate. But rocks are also jagged, sharp, disformed, etc. They might hurt when you step on them, and are difficult to handle.

There are always two sides to a relationship with God. As we anticipate Easter and think about the gift of eternal salvation, let us also realize when we've been 'smooth' or 'rough' in God's eyes. What brought you closer to Him this past year, what took you farther from Him this past year?

Life is not always easy to understand. It's unpredictable, heartbreaking at times, and joyful beyond our wildest dreams in certain moments. Give thanks for those moments, and be honest with yourself about the choices or actions that took you farther from God.

Prayer Focus: *I have to think he appreciates the beauty of a smooth rock too, so how can we be that for him during this time of Lent and beyond? May God bless you and your loved ones always.*

Bob MacReynolds

“For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.” Ephesians 2:10

What am I here for? What is my purpose in life? We’ve all wondered that at some point.

Perhaps you’ve heard someone say (or maybe you said it yourself): “I can’t help it, it’s the way God made me.”

Paul’s letter to the Ephesians is addressed to Christians. He wrote “You were dead through the trespasses and sins in which you once lived... But God, who is rich in mercy, ...made us alive together with Christ.” (Ephesians 2: 1-2a,4-5)

What Paul is saying here, rather, is “this is what God in Jesus Christ re-made you and me for: to do good works.” Here is how the Amplified Bible expresses it: “For we are His workmanship [His own master work, a work of art].” I would, however, add the caveat that we are unfinished works of art. In Leonardo DaVinci’s charcoal sketches we can see only glimpses of the masterworks we know he later created. If you’ve ever seen Beethoven’s sketchbooks, you’d never be able to decipher his scribbling unless you were familiar with the symphonies we now enjoy in concerts and recordings. We offer ourselves to God as clay and let God mold us, form us, and make us to be vessels used for God’s service.

And what is God expecting us to do with this re-created life? Paul has a very practical answer: good works. Wait. Really? Paul said that? I thought he was skeptical of “works.” Well, yes, if we think works are going to earn our salvation, Paul would certainly want to set us straight. Rather than salvation being seen solely as a “get out jail free” card to rescue us from hell, it seems that Paul is suggesting that redeemed lives have a practical purpose here and now to show God’s love, compassion, and justice in a world which sorely needs it, and helps bring others to realize their own need for God.

In our work — whether that is our actual career or our church vocation through our spiritual gifts — through our creativity, through our attention to detail, through our care and concern for others, we reflect the God who created us, who cares for us, who

made us God's own. And our works reflect the light of God in our lives to draw others to God, as Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount:

"You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven. (Matthew 5:14-16)

Prayer Focus: *May our light shine, and to God be the glory!*

David Blum

To the angel of the church in Philadelphia write:

*“These are the words of him who is holy and true, who holds the key of David. What he opens no one can shut, and what he shuts no one can open. **I know your deeds. See, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut. I know that you have little strength, yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name....** Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches.” Revelation 3:7-8; 13*

Over 30 years ago I attended my first serious Bible study. I had been going to adult Sunday school and other gatherings when a group decided to pursue a more intense recommended study, The Letters to the Seven Churches by Charles Swindoll. When we studied these chapters in Revelation, the presentation was on cassette tapes, the latest technology.

The Seven Churches of Revelation are: Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea. How many of those names are familiar because they have been used as names of places or churches? Obviously, our church name is here, but Ephesus, Smyrna and Sardis have been used in the western world far from that Roman province of Asia, now Asia Minor in our modern geography. These seven churches were in cities that were on a major route through that Roman province with other connections to areas near and far so the letters to these seven churches were also letters to the churches of Roman Asia and to all those that come after. We know that the letters are to more than these few churches not just because we have maps of ancient road networks but also because of the number “seven” that appears throughout the complete passage: seven churches, seven lampstands, seven angels. That number “seven” was a count but also had a further meaning, as some recurring numbers do in scripture, of “complete”.

Each letter follows a pattern of the Risen Christ evaluating the church with His instructions and judgment based on that assessment. The evaluation of the church at Philadelphia is the only one of the seven that is completely positive without listing needed changes or describing difficult situations that are coming.

Over those meetings listening to lessons on these letters, I came to understand several perceptions that have only been reinforced over the decades since:

- In these passages, we are told that the Risen Christ is truly head of the church and must be fully recognized as the one who guides and enables whatever we may accomplish. He considers our fidelity in following His path and may well find a church lacking with potentially harsh consequences for that congregation. Laodicea was a wealthy city with a congregation that was “neither hot nor cold”. Christ declared that He would “spit you out of my mouth”. (v. 16) And He did.
- “Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches.” (v. 13) A similar command appears in the address to each of the churches. It reinforces our always remembering that we must have those spiritual “ears” that enable our truly hearing what the Spirit says. Every decision for the congregation made by anyone entrusted with that responsibility must be prayerfully considered to make sure it is consistent with what He wants us to do in small and large matters.
- We are to know scripture in both Old and New Testaments because the New Testament refers back to the Old in so many passages. In v. 7, Christ refers to Himself as the One “...who holds the key of David”, which refers to Isaiah 22:22.
- When studying scripture, learning about the geography of the place along with its history and economy may be necessary to comprehend the real meaning and to help us grasp analogies to the present. These Letters to the Churches are one of the passages that are nearly incomprehensible without that broader knowledge; but when read with understanding of the references embedded in the phrases, these letters are invaluable guidance to all churches.

Those who decided on the name of the Sunday school started west of Salem in the mid-nineteenth century knew these letters. I like to imagine they picked the name “New Philadelphia” because they remembered His words to that church and wanted their new gathering to live up to the promise to and accomplishment of their ancient namesake: **I know your deeds.**

See, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut. I know that you have little strength, yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name. (v. 8)

Prayer focus: *The Daily Topics for Prayer on p. 9 (Kindle edition) of the 2022 Daily Texts has the following prayer suggestions for each Friday (as printed):*

Our Own Church Fellowship. For the purity, zeal, and practice of the church as a witnessing fellowship of the love of God. That the church may be a light to the world wherever its congregations are found, and that it may be active in redeeming mission in these communities.

One way of considering these suggestions for prayer topics would be asking for His help in deserving that open door and in keeping His word as we recognize that any power to do so must come from the Risen Christ.

Mary Ruth McRae

“And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life?” Matthew 6: 27

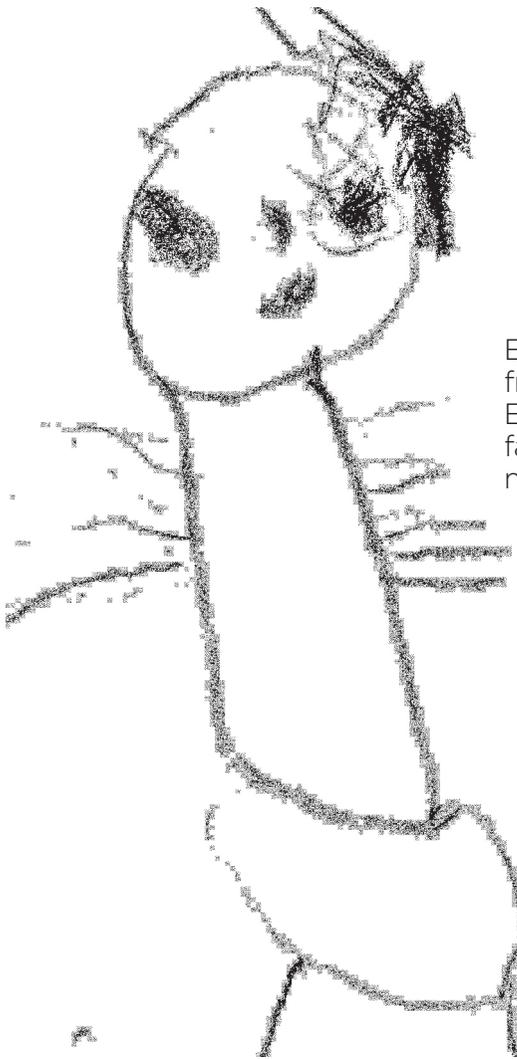
Jesus knows what our lives can be like — worries present themselves every day. For some, the worry is not just, “What will I eat?” but “WILL I eat?”

Whether our worries are about situations of great consequence or seemingly insignificant — “Will I get my devotion written by the deadline?” — Jesus wants us to trust Him and know that He will always take care of us.

Worrying about a situation will not change the outcome. Rather than being anxious about all the uncertainties in our lives, Jesus wants us to learn to live a life that is truly dependent on Him. If we take one day at a time and make our primary focus serving Him each day, He will help us face any troubles that may come our way. He knows us by name and will never abandon us. Instead of looking at things through a “worry lens” let us learn to always use a “trust lens” to keep our focus on Jesus.

Prayer: *Thank you, Lord, for helping us know that worry does not accomplish anything in our lives. You know our struggles and will always help us through all of life’s difficulties if we trust you. Help us to trust you more as we learn to live more closely to you. Amen.*

Sandra Gray



**My name is:
Eliza Ruth Olsen**

Eliza

Eliza is a combination name from both grandmas, Elizabeth and Elsie. Ruth is a family name, and Eliza is named for several aunts.

“And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything. Rather, he himself gives everyone life and breath and everything else.” Acts 17:25 NIV

Chapter 17 of Acts describes Paul’s ministry in three cities. Today we will journey with Paul to Athens. The Application Study Bible notes “Athens, with its magnificent buildings and many gods, was a center for Greek culture, philosophy, and education. Philosophers and educated men were always ready to hear something new, so they invited Paul to speak to them at the meeting of the Areopagus.”

In Athens, Paul was confronted with a different audience. Greeks did not have the Scriptures of Hebrew faith in their tradition. The Athenians were devoted to philosophy. Paul’s message begins with familiar terms of nature and creation.

Let’s back up and read verses 24 and 25 from The Living Bible.

“He made the world and everything in it, and since he is Lord of heaven and earth, he doesn’t live in man-made temples; and human hands can’t minister to his needs—for he has no needs! He himself gives life and breath to everything, and satisfies every need there is.”

Paul’s message outlined truths about God.

He is the Creator — v24

He is the source of all life — v25

He is the provider — v25

He is not a distant deity — v27

He is Savior — v30-31.

Prayer Focus: *Present Christ to others*

Nancy Renn

*“But many who are first will be last, and the last first.”
Mark 10:31 NIV*

Jesus spoke these words to his Disciples after relating an encounter with a rich young man who had asked him what he must do to inherit eternal life. Jesus told him to obey the commandments and to sell everything he had and give the money to the poor and then “follow me.” The young man turned and walked away. The man was one of the firsts who would be last.

What must we do to inherit eternal salvation? Firstly, believe in the Basic Beliefs of the Moravian Church and follow the Commandments, but must we sell everything we own and give it to the poor? Today, that is probably not practical, but we should give generously, and happily, to our Church, and to charities, organizations and schools that we support. Tithing is a written measure of what our fair share should be. Giving is not just financial. Another important factor, and something that is often more difficult, is the giving of our time.

I feel that having money, by itself, is not a sin. The sin is the love of money and putting it before everything else. Having the ability to give is a blessing and it will bring joy as we provide support to others.

Prayer: *Dear Lord, please help us all be better Christians and continue to guide us in our Faith and as we go through our daily lives. Help us give generously, in a loving spirit and keep us from becoming complacent in our service to, and our love of Jesus Christ. In Jesus' name, Amen*

Bob Rustad

*“You will go out in joy and be led forth in peace;
The mountains and hills will burst into song before you,
And all the tress of the field will clap their hands.”
Isaiah 55:12*

Isaiah 55:12, paints an astonishing and joyous scene. I picture a high-definition, colorful animated scene emerging before my eyes. Like Dorothy in the “Wizard of Oz,” it is like opening a door from a black and white world into a Technicolor world where mountains and hills are singing, and trees are clapping their hands! How can I help but smile and feel uplifted? It certainly makes me picture heaven, and yet Isaiah shares God’s offer of this to His people still here on earth!

To learn the context of this verse, some online research led me to two audio lessons on Isaiah (parts 1 and 2) by Charles Swindoll from his series called “God’s Masterwork.” (<https://insight.org/resources/bible/the-major-prophets/isaiah>)

On this website, I learned that “Isaiah prophesied from 739–681 BC” in Jerusalem, through the reigns of four Judaeen kings. This would be like being the pastor in Washington D.C. to four consecutive presidents. Isaiah’s accurate foretelling of the coming of and life of Jesus is so miraculous, considering he had these Godly insights 700 years before Christ’s birth.

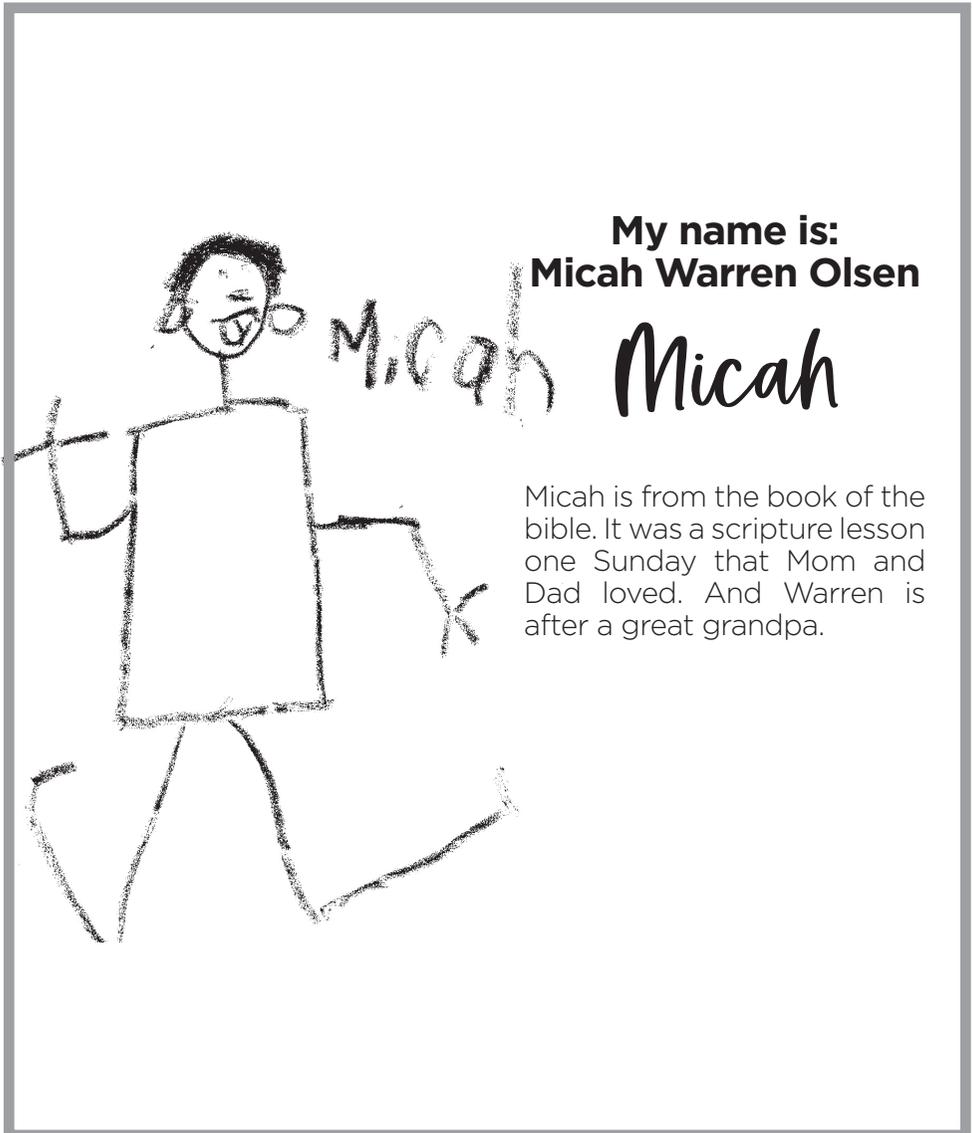
Equally as inspiring is Swindoll’s explanation that the book of Isaiah has parallels to the Bible itself! The Bible has 66 books; the book of Isaiah has 66 chapters. The first 39 chapters of Isaiah discuss the law and judgment on the people of Judah who had fallen away from God. This is similar to the first 39 books of the Bible: The Old Testament! Swindoll explains Isaiah chapters 40 — 53 describe God’s comfort, grace, deliverance and promise, and chapters 54 — 66 are about hope. This parallels the New Testament books 40 — 66. That’s more than a coincidence; that’s a “God Job!”

My bible entitles Isaiah 55 “An Invitation to the Thirsty.” We are the lucky people whose name God knows. This chapter makes it so clear how much God loves us, and He fervently wants us to accept the gifts He has for us. Isaiah 55:12 gives us a perfect

image of a glorious Easter morning in Spring. Praise God for his everlasting love!

Prayer: *Dear God, help us to remain forever thirsty for your love and guidance. You offer us gifts beyond measure, and yet we often drift away like your chosen people in the Old Testament. Thank you for the hope you offer for a better life when we strive to love and serve you.*

Beth Byrd



**My name is:
Micah Warren Olsen**

Micah

Micah is from the book of the bible. It was a scripture lesson one Sunday that Mom and Dad loved. And Warren is after a great grandpa.

“Thus says the Lord, ‘I have heard your prayer, I have seen your tears; indeed, I will heal you.’” 2 Kings 20:5

This drama unfolds in chapter 20 of 2 Kings, around 712 B.C. King Hezekiah was very ill, near death, and told by the prophet Isaiah to “get your house in order.” Hezekiah responded by doing something typical for God’s Old Testament people: He reminded God of his own virtue: “Remember...how I have walked before You in truth and with a loyal heart ...,” he told God. Why did he take that approach?

Many Old Testament stories show that blessings and curses sent by God were predicated on whether or not a person had been obedient. In the Psalms, for example, we read many pleas for mercy based on the perception of personal righteousness. Hezekiah was just following the order of the day when he nudged God with “...I have done what was good in Your sight.”

Of course, under the New Testament, it is Christ’s righteousness, not our own, that saves us. Focusing on that contrast, however, may cause us to miss the point of Hezekiah’s story.

What happened when Hezekiah earnestly and privately prayed to God? The answer is in verse 5. God *listened*. He *heard* the words of sorrow. He *saw* the tears. And, he *healed* Hezekiah.

Of course, not all of our prayers have such outcomes. Some answers may come more slowly. Sometimes when we hear from God, the answer may not be what we hoped for. Focusing only on the answer, however, shortchanges us, for it’s in the act of praying, of communing with God, that our relationship grows and we learn to trust in God’s wisdom and divine vision.

Prayer: *God, we know that you love our prayers, our conversations with you. Draw us into deeper relationship during this Holy Season through our earnest prayers, as we bring all of our sorrows, fears, insecurities and weaknesses to you. Amen*

“And you, my son Solomon, know the God of your father, and serve him with single mind and willing heart; for the LORD searches every mind, and understands every plan and thought. If you seek him, he will be found by you; but if you forsake him, he will abandon you forever.”
I Chronicles 28:9

In this rich passage from the Old Testament, David is telling his son Solomon to know and learn of God with both heart and soul, and worship God with a perfect heart and willing mind. David acknowledges God as his own God, and then instructs his son to let God be his chief aim as well. What a *powerful* message from parent to child. David also warns Solomon of the dire consequences of forsaking God — abandonment forever. Someone in our Sunday School class recently declared that the most important thing we could do as parents is to raise our children to know God. And I agree with him.

Just as David instructed Solomon, God also wants us to serve him with our whole heart — not holding back but giving God our total devotion. After all, nothing is hidden from our all-knowing God who sees every single facet of our hearts. This should result in our joy and not our fear since God knows the worst about us and loves us anyway. God understands all my personal, intricate hopes and plans and thoughts. How comforting!

What is a willing heart, as Solomon referenced? One that is open to God’s plan and not ours only. God will respond with guidance; after all, he perfectly understands our thoughts.

How do we actually seek God? How can we know God? Through fellowship with other Christians, reading and studying the Bible, praying, listening to music that honors Him, singing His praises, walking outside in God’s beautiful creation, meditating, being still and listening, and opening our hearts to his direction/leading. Relax, lower your shoulders, close your eyes, breathe in deeply, and fully concentrate on God; look for him.

The last part of this verse reassures us that if we seek God, we will be able to find him — we will not be abandoned. Sing hallelujah, praise the Lord. Sing with a cheerful heart!

Prayer: *Father God, thank you for your Word and the encouragement we find in it. We are amazed that you, the God of the entire universe, want us to personally seek you and you are always there to greet us. Help us examine ourselves in this time of Lent, and search for you daily.*

Mona Brown Ketner



**My name is:
Danielle Lynn Gatewood**

Danielle

My moma and dad named me after my grandpa whose nickname is Dan and gave me my grandma's middle name Lynn, and my whole name is Danielle Lynn Gatewood.

LECTIO DIVINA

*“Remember the long way that the Lord your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, in order to humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart.”
Deuteronomy 8:2*

Read the scripture

Meditate on the scripture

Pray for understanding

Contemplate the scripture

“Jesus said: Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.” Matthew 11:29

“Jesus was in the stern, asleep on the cushion; and they woke him up and said to him, “Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?” Mark 4:38

“Jesus, don’t you care that we are about to die?” The disciple asked the Lord. The waves were slamming the sides of the boat. The sky was long past ominous. Rain was stinging the cheeks of the disciples as it poured heavy from the sky. Panic coursed through their veins as they realized none of their human efforts were enough to save them from drowning. Images of their loved ones flashed in their mind’s eye and suddenly things that seemed so important before they boarded the boat were utterly meaningless. Grudges long held begged for forgiveness. Possessions long sought after paled in comparison to one more embrace, to the sound of loved ones laughing around the table. Coins jingling in their purses held no value here. They wouldn’t be able to carry them through death’s door. The disciples looked at each other and where they had once measured themselves against one another, they now searched for the best in each other, hoping that their brother had some knowledge, some gift, some ability that they could call forth to bring life into this hopeless situation. They longed to be rescued.

Was the disciple’s voice angry when he spoke to Jesus? Did he sound terrified? How do you sound when you are at the end of yourself? It didn’t matter. Nothing mattered in that moment except the disciples had laid it all down. I wonder how long Jesus laid there sleeping waiting for this moment to arrive, for the disciples to arrive. How long did they labor in vain before they remembered him? How long before someone noticed he wasn’t standing by their side shoveling buckets of water overboard as two more poured in? When did the idea occur to involve Jesus in this situation? I imagine it was almost too late.

What was it like for the disciples, in sheer terror, to encounter a peace that surpasses human understanding? A peace that allowed the Lord to be able to rest amidst such tumult. A peace that dared to defy danger and death? What was it like to watch the Lord speak out into time and space and do what none of them could? When the wind began to still and the clouds began

to part revealing beams of sunlight, and when the waves began to settle and level out the surface of the deep, what happened in the hearts of the disciples?

Jesus could have prevented the storm. He could have spared the disciples the trouble. He could have made the journey safe and comfortable. If he had done so, I wonder when they would have realized that they needed him?

Prayer: *Lord, we need you. We pray for your wisdom to guide us. Help us to walk through the storms of life with your peace. Thank you for being ever present within us through the power of your Holy Spirit. Amen.*

Hollie Gomez

“When my life was slipping away, I remembered God and my prayer got through to You, and made it all the way to Your Holy Temple. Those who worship hollow gods, god frauds, walk away from their only true love. But I’m worshipping You God, calling out in thanksgiving and I’ll do what I promised to do! Salvation belongs to God!”
Jonah 2:6 The Message Bible.

In the book of Jonah, we are given the example of one who is so overcome with fear of what God has asked of him that he goes to great lengths to avoid His directions.

The companion New Testament scripture is from 2 Timothy 2:19.

Nevertheless, God’s solid foundations stands firm, sealed with His inscription, “The Lord knows those who are His and everyone who confesses the name of the Lord must turn away from wickedness.” The Women of Faith Bible

In Timothy, Paul is writing to two of his younger associates, encouraging them to follow God’s lead but to always pray to discern and be open to the message from Him.

In both of these passages we are asked to be very diligent to take second place to God’s leading, being careful to offer God’s words without judgment.

I think there are about four billion people on Gods earth. Each one has different abilities and a unique understanding of his or her place. We as Christ’s voice have to be very careful with the message we have been entrusted to convey. There are many reminders from God, one of which we sang on a recent Sunday morning:

Here I am Lord, Is it I Lord?

I have heard You calling in the night.

I will go Lord if You lead me.

I will hold Your people in my heart.

He never asks more from us than we are able to give Him. We just have to stay open to His leading and pray without ceasing.

Saint Teresa of Avila wrote these words, which I read often in my devotions:

Let nothing trouble you;
Let nothing frighten you;
All things are passing;
God alone is unchanging;
Patience obtains all things;
Those who possess God want for nothing;
God alone suffices.

My prayer is a favorite one, also from Saint Teresa:

“Lord, grant that I may always allow myself to be guided by You, always follow Your plans, and perfectly accomplish Your Holy Will. Grant that in all things great and small, today and all the days of my life, I may do whatever You require of me.” Amen

Linda Jones

“You have kept count of my tossings; put my tears in your bottle. Are they not in your record?” Psalm 56:8

Sometime around 2008, my mother flew out to South Bend, Indiana to visit me with the expectation that I would drive her back to her home in Eastern N.C. at the end of the visit.

The morning we were preparing for the return portion of the trip, we got up early, hoping to leave by 6:00 a.m. It was 500 miles to Breezewood, Pennsylvania, always a landmark on a drive across the Indiana and Ohio Turnpikes. After Breezewood, it was only another 125 miles to Washington, D.C. where my sister Tammie lived, and where we would spend the night. (This routine was established early after my move to South Bend).

As I backed out of the driveway, my mother offered this: “I’d like to be in Breezewood by lunchtime.” Always interested in setting new world records, I found this entirely do-able, albeit for a late lunch.

After the first two hours, with 150 miles covered (we had reached Toledo), my mother awoke from her nap and remarked, “Oh, the Lord is really blessing our travel; I think we’ll be in Breezewood by lunchtime!”

I couldn’t let the opportunity to respond pass. While my mother had been an adult Sunday School teacher for 65+ uninterrupted years, I thought she was a little naïve about what God chooses to “bless.” I proceeded to try and set her straight with: “Oh, mama, God does not care what time we get to Breezewood. Do you really think with all of the crises in this world, that where we have lunch and what time we arrive in Breezewood are of any import to God?”

My mother gave me a look that clearly expressed her feelings: “What kind of child have I raised?”

And we traveled on. There isn’t enough time to recount the two events that occurred shortly after our exchange. Suffice it to say that they included 18-wheelers, unsecured tailgates, obstructed views in mirrors, a car that didn’t have enough pick-up and people who were driving even faster than me.

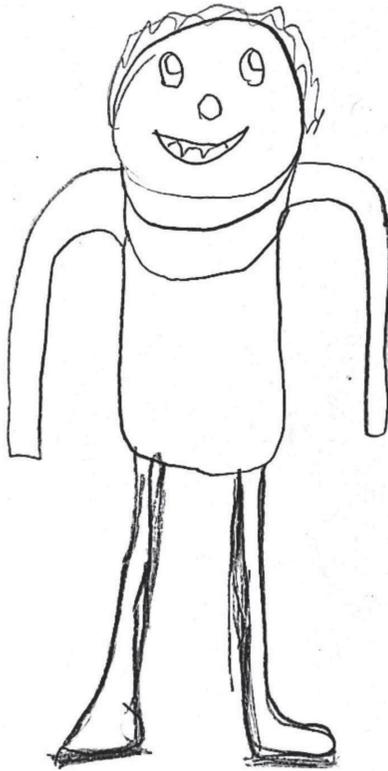
The first incident left me shaken, but able to continue driving. The second incident forced me to pull over to the shoulder and try to control my heart palpitations. I remember looking over at my mother whose head was on the headrest, whose eyes were closed, and whose lips were moving in prayer. She eventually looked over at me with a mixture of disgust, pity and superiority, and said: "And you don't think God cares what time we get to Breezewood?"

Today's scripture from Psalm 56 reminds us that God kept a record of everything that happened to David. The God who hears prayers that can't be enumerated counted each tear marking the hurts and suffering of this man who wanted His heart, this man He loved. Can you fathom such a thing?

I can't. But then, I didn't think God cared what time we got to Breezewood either.

Prayer: *God, have mercy on us when we are audacious enough to think we know Your mind. How comforting it is to know that even our smallest insecurities and fears are not too small for your interest. Help us accept that there are mysteries beyond our understanding. Hear our prayer, O Lord. Amen.*

Clyde Manning



**My name is:
Owen**

Owen

My parents named me after my great, great grandfather.

“But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it.” 1Timothy 6: verses 6-7 NIV

When I was a teenager, I strategically chose when to lobby my wants and desires to my parents. Whether it was a new coat or a new car, my mother often quipped, “if you’re not happy with what you have, you won’t be happy with more”. This effectively ended the conversation and I knew that my calculation to express my needs had fallen on deaf ears. I mostly felt frustrated and thought my mother was nothing short of severe. Little did I know that my mother’s well-worn quip had emerged straight from the 6th chapter of 1Timothy.

This first book of Timothy is identified as one of Paul’s 3 pastoral letters. Paul is writing his young protégé and fellow pastor Timothy to instruct him on appropriate behavior and decorum as he leads the church in Ephesus. By the time we reach the 6th chapter, Paul’s instructive letter crescendos with his stinging assessment of the root of all evil: money.

In verse 6, what does “godliness with contentment is great gain” mean? In one translation, the Greek word for contentment, **autarkeia**, is defined as “a mind contented with its lot.” Is Paul merely instructing Timothy — as my depression-era mother had instructed me — to be happy with what you’ve got? Yes, but there is more in this verse: “great gain”(laying our treasures in heaven) can only be achieved when godliness (living a Christian, obedient life) MEETS with satisfaction with our lot.

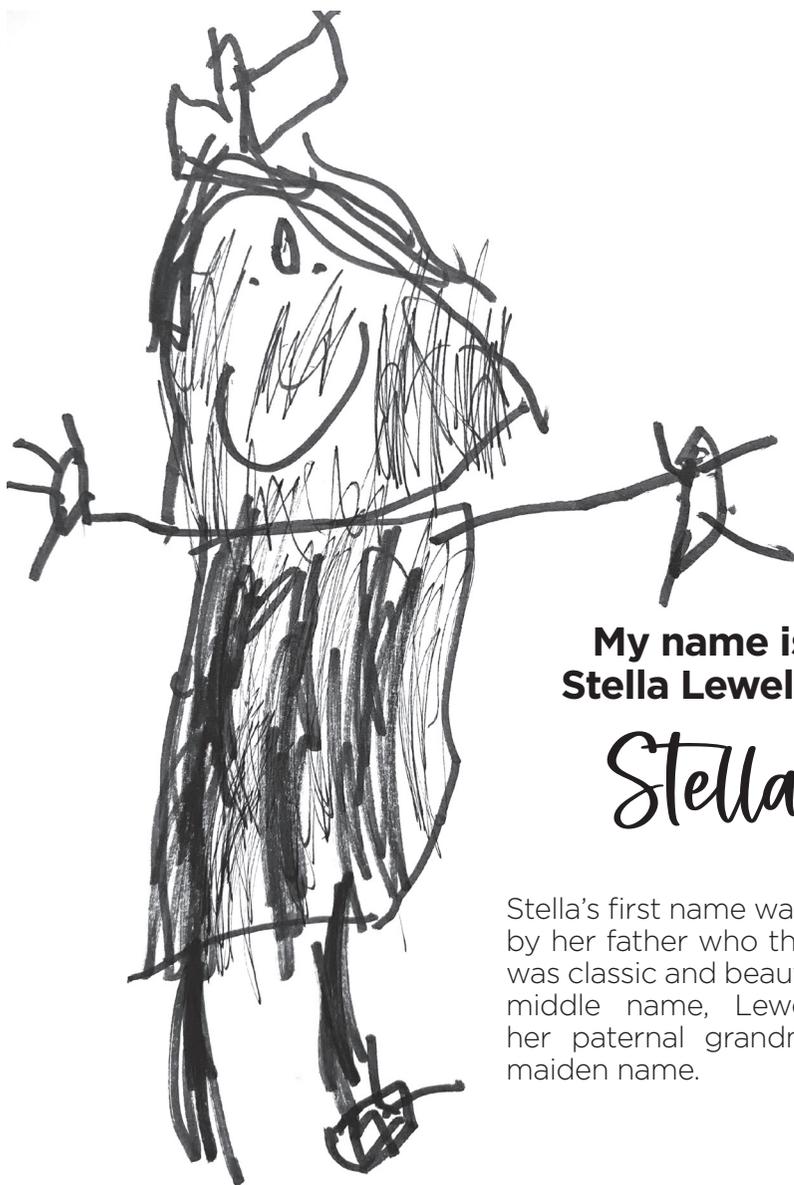
In verse 7, “For we brought nothing into the world, and we take nothing out of it”, has a commonly used secular translation: “You can’t take it with you”! No one will argue with the truth of that statement. Perhaps what Paul really wants Timothy, and me, to understand is the transient nature of earthly possessions — not to make us feel guilt over what we have, but to grab our attention and teach us the futility of being ensnared by the material world. When I was a teenager, I had both a coat and access to my family car. While my needs were met, that was not enough. My mother, while tough, had it right. It is not merely riches that Paul (and my mother) eschewed, but rather the LOVE of material

possessions and how a life devoted to acquiring more, more, more becomes the object of our worship.

I have pondered and chewed on this scripture for several days. As I sit on my patio and admire my backyard, I am having difficult conversations with myself about materialism and its grip on my life. What are my idols and more importantly, where is my heart? Am I yearning to read my Bible to more deeply study God's instructions on achieving "godliness with contentment?" Or would I rather spend time visiting a favorite Internet travel sight, check the latest swings in the stock market, or spend money on bedding plants and shrubs for my yard? I find myself overwhelmed by my own selfishness.

Prayer: *Almighty Creator, I am humbled by my selfishness and my lack of obedience to your Word. During this Lenten Season, I pray for your gift of discernment so that I will rightly navigate the material world in which we live. Amen.*

Tammie Manning



**My name is:
Stella Lewellyn**

Stella

Stella's first name was picked by her father who thought it was classic and beautiful. Her middle name, Lewellyn, is her paternal grandmother's maiden name.

Psalm 118:24

While a review of various translations will show many ways to recite the verse above, I think the version familiar to most of us will give us plenty to think about.

This is the day . . .

You could say, it's all we've got. Yesterday is gone and for all we know tomorrow may not arrive. But we do have today. Willie Nelson wrote, "Yesterday's dead and tomorrow is blind, so I'll live one day at a time." It seems there may be considerable wisdom offered by those who counsel that we should seize the day, be present to and live in the moment, be mindful.

that the LORD has made.

Now there's helpful reminder that you won't get from your local TV meteorologist as they pass along helpful information about the expected high/low temperatures, clear or cloudy skies, humidity and precipitation or lack thereof. Who's behind all of this? It could be very instructive to know who created these unique hours between one sunrise and the next.

Let us rejoice and be glad!

Depending on what the aforementioned meteorologist has accurately or inaccurately predicted for our singularly unique day, this rejoicing and gladness may come naturally or require considerable effort on our part. We should probably just make that a conscious act of will from the get go.

Prayer: *"Lord Jesus, I lay down my life for you this day, no grumbling, no complaining, and giving thanks in every situation — because this is the day that the LORD has made, and I will rejoice and be glad!"*

Michael Crane

He said, "The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer" 2 Samuel 22:2 NASB

David speaks these words upon the deliverance from his enemies. The account of this event is given in 2 Samuel 21. The violence is horrifying and the warfare is relentless. Halfway through the chapter, the Scriptures tell us that, "When the Philistines were at war again with Israel...David became weary." (2 Sam. 21:15). And the pounding begins anew for seven more painful verses. It's as if David, his men, and servants played a game of Whack a Mole with the Philistines. When one was subdued, another popped up. Finally, after an exhausting twenty two verses, 2 Samuel 21 ends. All enemies have fallen, "...by the hand of David and his servants," and the reader, like David, is worn out.

With David, there is no sleeping in, no breakfast in bed the next day. Instead, this man after God's own heart begins chapter 22 with a beautiful hymn of praise.

*The Lord is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer;
My God, my rock, in whom I take refuge,
My shield and the horn of my salvation,
My stronghold and my refuge;
My Savior, You save me from violence.
2 Samuel, 22:2-3*

How does David do it? How does one experience chapter 21 and emerge singing hymns of praise in chapter 22? David does not strike me as one who retreats from reality, nor does he seem to be delusional. How does he navigate the distance between being a man of action and a man of praise?

The argument can be made that we are living chapter 21 right now. Our Philistines are rising tension internationally as troops are being deployed in Europe. At home, gun violence is breathtaking, and a rising suicide rate has us reeling. Living in eastern North Carolina, empty shelves in Walmart are part of the landscape during hurricane season. But I am unnerved when it happens on a Thursday afternoon in February and no storm is forecast. I've not even mentioned the quick march to almost one million Americans dead of COVID. So what do we do?

Let's take a page out of David's playbook. A hymn of praise can call us to rest, to "Be still and know that I am God." Reading the rest of this chapter, David's words can be of great comfort as we acknowledge that God is a lamp and "illuminates my darkness" (vs. 29). Our Rock and Refuge often calls us to action. Not only are our feet made "as hind's feet and set on our high places" (v.34) but our Stronghold also "trains our hands for battle" (v. 35).

David's words are not cockeyed optimism. They represent a mindset that, should we adopt it, will order our universe, order even the most mundane aspects of our lives. These three — thanksgiving, gratitude, and praise — remind us of Who God is and are the foundation, the starting place, of a relationship with Him.

Prayer: *"I will give thanks to You, O Lord, among the nations, and I will sing praises to Your name. "*

Trudy Farnell

“He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever.” Luke 1:54-55

These two verses conclude Mary’s Magnificat, the great hymn of the Church. This “song” of praise and worship is Mary’s response to her cousin, Elizabeth, who pronounced Mary to be “blessed among women” as the future mother of the Lord. For context, it is good to read all ten verses of the Magnificat, Luke 1:46-55.

⁴⁶ And Mary said,

My soul magnifies the Lord,

⁴⁷ and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,

⁴⁸ for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant.

For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed;

⁴⁹ for he who is mighty has done great things for me,
and holy is his name.

⁵⁰ And his mercy is for those who fear him
from generation to generation.

⁵¹ He has shown strength with his arm;
he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts;

⁵² he has brought down the mighty from their thrones
and exalted those of humble estate;

⁵³ he has filled the hungry with good things,
and the rich he has sent away empty.

⁵⁴ He has helped his servant Israel,
in remembrance of his mercy,

⁵⁵ according to the promise he made to our ancestors,
to Abraham and to his descendants forever.”

Missionary and scholar, Stanley Jones, called the *Magnificat* the “most revolutionary document in the world.” William Barclay apparently agreed, identifying three “revolutions” — moral, social and economic — within Mary’s words.

1. *He has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts* shows us that a prideful life is inconsistent with a Christian life.
2. *He has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate* reveals the evil of attempting to rank people. It is a reminder that Jesus came as Savior of all.
3. *He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty* is a warning: Living to amass wealth and power will strip us of our humanity. A society in which some have too much and others too little cannot be called Christian.

While Mary's words turn the world upside down for those who study and interpret them, we're forced to wonder: Did she recognize her words as revolutionary? Or was Mary, this woman of faith, this woman overwhelmed at being chosen as God's vessel, simply telling us how God works?

Mary's words provide examples of how God exalts the lowly, the humble, and those who fear him. God uses the poor and powerless; indeed, "His strength is made perfect in weakness" (2 Cor. 12:9). In verses 54 and 55, Mary connects this theme of God working through the weak to Abraham.

When God called Abraham, at advanced age and without children, "Father of a great nation" and promised to make his descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky, it may have seemed like a cruel joke. Yet God made a covenant with Abraham, and his heirs, keeping His promises and magnifying His strength through the lives of weak and helpless men and women like Saul, and David, and Solomon.

And finally to a young woman of no consequence named Mary.

Through human weakness, God brought the salvation of the world. And in His strength, He brought victory over death.

Prayer: *Lord, you call us to reject pride, practice humility and share our blessings with others. Strengthen us to greater faith, like Abraham's, and greater understanding, like Mary's. May her words of "revolution" guide us to clearer morality, deeper compassion and greater generosity.*

Clyde Manning



**My name is:
Samuel Tucker Gomez**

Samuel

"My name means "hears from God" because Samuel in the Bible was a prophet and my dad's first name is Samuel. My grandpa and great grandpa were also Sam. Tucker is my mom's maiden name."

“He will call upon me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him and honor him.” Psalm 91:15

“For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile — the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him.” Romans 10:12

These two passages, from the Old Testament and the New Testament, act to bring together both parts of the Bible for us. God gives His promise to all who call on Him, as Savior, to be with us and deliver us in times of trouble, as well as honor us as we honor Him.

Also, God’s promise is available to everyone who calls on Him. Genesis 1:27 tells us that God created man in His own image, male and female He created them, not Jew or Gentile. The separation of Jews and Gentiles began in the mid-second century due to politics and changing demographics.

Thankfully, because the Lord is Lord of all, the only group we need to belong to is the worldwide group of believers. By calling on Him as our Lord and Savior, we become a believer. His abundant grace, mercy, love, and protection will be with us always.

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, it is comforting to know that no matter who we are; where we are; the color of our skin; or the language that we speak, that by calling on you, as Lord and Savior, we will be richly blessed. Thank You. We love You. Amen*

Bill Donald

“Suddenly there was an angel at his side and light flooding the room. The angel shook Peter and got him up: ‘Hurry!’ The handcuffs fell off his wrists. The angel said, ‘Get dressed. Put on your shoes.’ Peter did it. Then, ‘Grab your coat and let’s get out of here.’ Peter followed him, but didn’t believe it was really an angel — he thought he was dreaming.” Acts 12: 7-9 (The Message)

The basket for the hot air balloon was taller than I’d imagined. But seven of us climbed inside it and looked out at the grassy earth where the others in our group watched us. The young *pilote* leapt over the side of the basket, lithe as a dancer or tightrope walker, perched his feet on the top rim of the basket, and gave more gas to the burner, letting the hot air give rise to a balloon above a basket full of women. I could almost feel the earth’s gravity pulling me down even as we lifted, light as feathers.

Here we were, mothers who had met to write ourselves through grief after the deaths of our children, about to float over the French countryside near the Loire River. It seemed like a dream. Did we sign any sort of liability waiver in case the balloon didn’t make it back to earth? No. Did we even speak the same language as the *aeronaut* who was guiding us thousands of feet up into the sky? No, we just climbed into the basket. Only one of us had enough command of French to converse with confidence, and we were already beginning to ascend when she asked in her best French, where we were going. We all understood the *pilote’s* answer: “*Je ne sais pas.*” I don’t know. We will go where the wind takes us, he added when he saw our surprise. We did not even gasp, just followed with our eyes our bird’s eye view of the vastness of the countryside and the river. We floated quietly upward toward sun dogs, swaths of rainbow light on either side of the sun. We rose above some of the grief we carried that afternoon. We all did something we never imagined we would do. We were changed for it.

Perhaps Peter had that kind of trust to follow the angel’s instructions to put on his belt and sandals and cloak and follow him out of that prison. Peter thought it was a dream, a vision, something not real, but he followed the guide without question,

moving toward freedom. He had been imprisoned by Herod with four squads of four soldiers to guard him, and in the cell, he was shackled to two soldiers, one on each side. This was during the week of Passover, and Herod planned a public lynching after Passover.

This story from Acts, Luke's accounts of the beginnings of the church, the first missionaries, of apostles following Jesus's great commission, is about Peter, persecution, prison and prayer. It is also about trust. It is the story of a messenger, an angel, standing in the light, who was followed into the night by Peter, who thought he was dreaming until he found himself outside in the street knocking on the door of a house where all inside were praying for him. Rhoda, who heard Peter's voice at the gate, was so amazed that she ran back to tell Peter's friends and left poor Peter still knocking on the gate, now quite awake and probably hoping not to be discovered by soldiers.

Of course, we, the readers, know that Peter's escape was not discovered by Herod's soldiers until the next morning, that Peter rejoiced with his friends who had prayed for him, that we can listen for God's voice to us in messengers he sends, that we can pray earnestly for those in our midst who are suffering or in danger, and that God can lift us, each one of us, above our suffering.

We can rise above pain in ways we do not expect, and we can find God's comfort in unexpected ways. Part of the Lenten journey leans us toward pondering — about persecution, prayer, and trust in the very one who knows our name.

Prayer: *God of life and light, help us to see you in the dark places of our lives, to trust and follow you through the dark to light. May we trust you as Peter trusted the angel who led him from prison; may we listen for your voice, your messengers, and trust that you will lift us through our doubt and our pain. Peace. Amen.*

Kay Windsor

“Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.”

Matthew 25:40

“Whoever oppresses the poor show contempt for their Maker, but whoever is kind to the needy honors God.”

Proverbs 14:3

When I first read these verses, I realized my involvement with the poor and needy has been pretty unresponsive. This was not reinforcement for me. Having to write this Devotion has been good for me.

These verses have triggered several confirming thoughts for my 21st century faith journey. First was realizing that this was one of Jesus’s last conversations with His followers. It is a **Man**-to-man sharing of God’s practical advice and wisdom passed on to those with whom Jesus had spent the last three years of His life.

The Proverbs verse is wisdom that God passed on to His people in 700BC (+/-) through a Wise Man. Matthew passes on God’s same message in person! Today, in 2022, we know that God continues to pass on the same advice and wisdom to His folks 3,000 years later.

This is not a detailed “how to do it instruction”, or parable, or a miracle but just practical man-to-man advice of how to serve those we come in contact with in our daily life.

God’s assignment for most of us is not to be a large stone that makes a big splash but pebbles making constant ripples in God’s world. It’s a telephone call, a visit, sensing hurts and disappointments, helping out with physical or financial support, a smile, a passing “God Bless You” at the grocery store, a hello, a thank you to the folks picking up your garbage, providing comfort when there’s been a death or family split, etc.

I do wrestle with the thought that I use this as justification for my complacency. Maybe it’s time to push outside my box. Maybe I should become more aggressive in my involvements with the poor and needy.

Prayer: *Father God, we pray you will open our eyes, ears, heart and hands to recognize needs of those we come in contact with each day. Give us the wisdom to know how to serve others.*

Melvin Holland

And he said, "Go forth, and stand before the Lord." And behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and broke in pieces the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a still small voice." 1 Kings 19:11-12

Elijah was discouraged and needed God to speak to him. God sent the wind, an earthquake, and fire but He didn't speak through any of those things as He sometimes had in the past. Instead, He spoke to Elijah in a still, small voice.

There have been times when I've wished for a bold message from God to tell me what to do about troubling events in my life. However, like Elijah, I find Him when I am quiet and still. That soft inner voice will speak to me if I will listen. He sometimes speaks through a sermon, the wisdom of a Christian friend, or even a song, but most often through a quiet, small voice.

Prayer: *God, thank you for these verses that remind us to slow down, get quiet, and listen for your gentle voice. Give us ears to hear and hearts to respond so that we may see the exciting future you have for us.*

Cynthia Ferrington



**My name is:
Jack Andrew Huddleston**

Jack

Jack was named after his family members. Jack was chosen after his paternal great grandfather, Jack Sparks, and Andrew, is after his maternal grandfather and great grandfather. These names were chosen in the hope that Jack would exhibit the traits of these men, as they made a lasting impression on us

Balaam said, “Must I not take care to say what the Lord puts into my mouth?” Numbers 23:12

This scripture falls in the middle of the story of Balaam, a sorcerer, and Balak, the Moabite king who was terrified of the Israelites camped on the plains of Moab, just on the edge of the Promised Land.

Balak had heard about the Israelites slaughter of the Amorites, and believed the same was in store for him and his people. Frightened, he decided to have a “professional” put a curse on the Israelites. Balak sent out an entourage with plenty of cash to convince Balaam to accompany them to Moab and help. Balaam turned down the request after having his own conversation with God who told him: “Don’t do it! Don’t curse the Israelites, for I am blessing them.”

Not to be deterred, Balak made a second attempt to woo Balaam. This time, he was more successful. God gave Balaam permission to make the trip and meet with Balak; however, knowing Balaam well, God was very specific, instructing him to only say the words He would give him.

Things didn’t end well for Balak, as Balaam listened to God and never produced the hoped-for curse. Things didn’t end all that well for Balaam either, for even though he never acquiesced to Balak, his personal agenda — his delight in being in the spotlight — compromised his role as God’s servant. If you read the entire story, you’ll find that God had to tell Balaam THREE TIMES to use only the words He would give him. Why was Balaam so hardheaded?

We see the relevance of this scripture by taking it at face value. It is about the power of words — any words, all words. Of even greater significance, this story demonstrates the folly of using God’s words as tools to tickle the egos of those whose approval we seek, or as weapons to advance an agenda. It took the space of three chapters in Numbers and an encounter with the angel of God while riding a donkey for Balaam to get it right.

We should never preface our words with “The Lord said to me,” unless those words are the product of intense prayer and a divine

certainty that what we say lines up with the truth of God as revealed in the Scriptures. God will lead us to see His truth but He will not tolerate lies about or distortions of what He says. This is a story about paying more attention to the Lord's words, discerning them, believing them, and heeding them.

Prayer: *Lord, may we, like Balaam, be careful of the words we speak and the messages they contain. On this day, may we use your words to bring truth and hope to another. Amen.*

Day 29

Wednesday, March 30

“That God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men’s sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation.”
2 Corinthians 5:19 NIV

In this passage Paul writes that through Christ, God restored the world to a relationship of harmony and righteousness with Him. Instead of holding our sins against us, God forgave us. And then He entrusted us with a very special job. We are to bring His message of reconciliation to others.

As Christians, we are never without purpose and all of us have the ability to be God's messenger. Those abilities may vary, but each in his own way has a place in the circle. We have opportunities all around us to help others who have lost their way or need to be reminded of the way. We can offer encouragement and hope to those who need it despite our own trials and woes. God equips us with the necessary tools and then sends us forward to share His message.

Prayer: *Lord, help us to step out in faith, secure in the knowledge that you have chosen us to share your message of reconciliation and hope. Guide us as we seek those that need to feel your love. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

Jerrie Andrews

“If we are faithless, he remains faithful—for he cannot deny himself.” 2 Timothy 2:13

I was struck by today’s doctrinal text from 2 Timothy and in reading it, I picture our faithful Savior. The Father is listening as his beloved Son speaks on our behalf and asks the Father to strengthen and bless us. “He cannot deny himself.”

Close your eyes, rest your mind and take a long, slow breath.

Now envision Jesus, unadorned and simply dressed, kneeling in humble prayer. As we focus in on this scene, I wish we could hear his words because he prays for us.

Pause. Be still and hold that thought close to your heart.

Jesus, the Savior, the Son of God, prays for each of us. He prays that we may be saved and strengthened, set apart for blessing.

Romans 8:34 says, “It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us.”

In John 17 we hear Jesus pray, “I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask you to protect them from the evil one. They do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth.”

The Savior is on his knees, beside the Father now and praying for you and for me — praying for our strength, praying for our blessing, praying for what is weighing on our hearts and minds.

I invite you to hold this image, claim this knowledge and carry it with you today and through this Lenten season.

Our Lord and Savior, Jesus, is kneeling and lifting us in prayer, that we may gain strength through him. He offers peace as we lay our burdens in his upturned hands.

Prayer: *May it be so.*

Evie Blum

LECTIO DIVINA

“O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise.” Psalm 51:15

Read the scripture

Meditate on the scripture

Pray for understanding

Contemplate the scripture

*“We declare to you what we have seen and heard.”
1 John 1:3*

“We know that in everything God works for good with those who love him, who are called according to his purpose.” Romans 8:28 RSV

Everything that happens fits into a pattern for good for those who love God and are called according to His plan.

God chose them to bear the family likeness of his Son. He chose them long ago, made them righteous in his sight, and then lifted them to the splendor of life as His own sons and daughters.

For us, this is truly a beautiful vision of our faithful lives as believers.

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, thank you for having chosen us to be your sons and daughters. Thank you that your Son, Jesus, is the eldest of a family of many brothers and sisters, and that we are all related to this family.*

Sandy & Steve Jones

“So take a new grip with your tired hands, stand firm on your shaky legs, and mark out a straight, smooth path for your feet so that those who follow you, though weak and lame, will not fall and hurt themselves but become strong.”
Hebrews 12:12-13

Sometimes, a single verse can stand on its own, with a strong, clear message that makes perfect sense. More often, though, we need context provided by what comes before, and sometimes after, a verse. That is so in today’s reading.

Paul begins chapter 12 with the analogy of life being a race (and yes, it is somewhat cliché): The faithful are in the grandstands and Jesus is our coach. Paul gives us a divine “pep talk,” telling us to remember Jesus’ own struggles in the face of cruelty, and to keep our eyes on Him.

He then segues into several verses of encouragement for the times when God punishes and disciplines us. But he tells us something important here: God’s corrections come out of love and they are always for our ultimate benefit. We grow in strength and character as the result. It’s all part of our “training.”

So, Paul gets us ready for the “big game” of life in verses 12 and 13, by rousing us to a stronger grip, a firmer stance, and a smoother path. Remember, faithful followers have inspired and nurtured us; now it’s our turn. For sure, others are watching and following our lead.

Prayer: *There is such comfort, God, in knowing that your corrections are for our good. It is part of our training, and comes from your deep love for us. Help us keep our eyes on our coach, Jesus. Amen*



**My name is:
Luke Daniel Gomez**

Luke

“My name means “light”. Also, mom used to call me “Daniel Son” when I was in her belly after the Karate Kid because I kicked so much. She also said that she would think of a lion when she thought of me and Daniel was in the lion’s den and God protected him. My mom’s uncle and my dad’s uncle both had Daniel in their names, too.”

“He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters; he restores my soul.” Psalm 23:2-3

I wondered what more I could say in a devotion about two Bible verses we can all recite by heart; and after much prayer and meditation, I decided to write about my dog.

In April of 2007 through a series of unlikely events, I adopted a dog that I named Nellie. I already had three dogs and a teenager. I needed another dog like I needed a hole in my head. Nellie wasn't just any dog; she was a special needs dog. She had been abused and abandoned; she suffered from seizures; and she was still so emaciated even after being in rescue for six weeks that you could still count her ribs. She was absolutely terrified of people and semi-feral.

The rescue agency made a home visit and introduced us to Nellie. She jumped at my touch and cowered. I've NEVER had a dog that was afraid of me, not a good start. We introduced the other dogs to her one-at-a-time, and she seemed more at ease with them than she did with me. I had my doubts, but the rescue agent said she did better with me than with any of the other four families he had tried, and I said okay.

On our second day together, she bit me when I tried to pick her up. It was my fault, I scared her. She immediately realized what she had done and began to shake and cower. With blood running down my hand and dripping onto her snowy white fur, I gently picked her up, called her by her name, and told her it was alright. She was so innocent and fragile, and in need of real love. Right then I knew I was going to have to earn her trust, and I vowed that I would turn this little 8-pound dog's life around. I would not desert her or give up on her as others had in the past. I fastened a leash to her collar and for six months I used the leash to slowly coax her to me, softly calling her by her name, Nellie, and then gently touching, soothing, and praising her when she got to me. Finally, one day when I called her name she came on her own. I had gained her trust and she knew I loved her; and the leash came off. It's now almost the spring of 2022 and Nellie has been with me for 15 years. She's got some arthritis in her hips, and she is completely blind. She trusts me with everything in her life.

So, what does Nellie have to do with Psalm 23? Well, did you know that like Nellie, sheep are fearful creatures and will not lie down if they are scared? The scripture says He makes me “to” lie down. He doesn’t make the sheep lie down, He takes away the fear so the sheep can lie down and sleep without fear. Sheep will also not venture into or cross fast flowing streams. So again, our good shepherd leads them to a tranquil place where they can quench their thirst.

Like those sheep lying down in the green pastures, Nellie sleeps without fear on a satin pillow in a fluffy basket. She is nourished with ever flowing water from a charcoal-filtered fountain and food is placed in her bowl twice a day. She is old and blind, yet her life is complete, and she wants for and fears nothing because she has placed her trust in me. Her soul has been restored and she will live out her days in love and comfort.

Jesus, calls each of us by name, asking us to trust Him to take away our fears. He will provide for us all that we need. He will restore our souls. Just like the vow I made not to give up on Nellie, when we let Him be our shepherd and guide, He will lead us in the paths of righteousness for His name’s sake, and He will never give up on us. When we heed His call and listen to His voice, like Nellie, we have nothing to fear, and we can live out all the days of our lives and dwell in the house of the Lord forever. Amen.

Prayer Focus: *Psalm 23*

Nancy Leonard

“When they had sung a hymn they went out to the Mount of Olives.” Mark 14:26

Throughout the Bible there are many references of singing to the Lord, praising Him for His majesty, goodness, and intervention in the lives of His chosen people. Moses and David sang for victories over their foes in conflicts. We sing hymns of praise, joy, thanksgiving and guidance at our worship services.

But what were the Disciples of Christ celebrating? They had just finished the Passover meal where Jesus had told them He would be betrayed by one of them and that He would not observe the Passover again until He was in God’s kingdom. Surely, the hymn they sang was not a victory march. Likely, Jesus was the choir director; and what would be on His mind, on the way to the agony of Gethsemane? Likely, it was a hymn exalting the majestic power of God to strengthen Him through the struggles ahead, not just past guidance and blessings.

Jesus came to the Mount of Olives to pray. But He sang before praying. In our services we sing before and after praying. In our private daily prayer life do we sing? Perhaps many do. But a lot of us do not; we only make a joyful noise when we try.

I am one of the “joyful noise” group in a church service. While thinking about what Jesus and His Disciples sang I decided to try “thought” singing “How Great Thou Art” in my private prayer time. Perhaps some of you non-singers might experiment doing this with your favorite hymn.

Prayer: *Lord, as I come before you with prayers of adoration, thanksgiving and petitions, accept the song in my heart and mind as though I sing it correctly, although I am silent or mumble.*

Lacy Bellomy

“O the depths of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and how inscrutable His ways!” Romans 11:33

The Grand Canyon was carved out by the Colorado River. I'll bet you know that. Its walls are one mile high. You may know that, too. Did you know that some of its crystalline rocks were formed during the Proterozoic Era, about 1,200 million years ago? Yeah, I didn't either.

I remember my first, and only, trip to the Grand Canyon. My mother had always wanted us to take a family vacation there, but a trip that would take that long was definitely not my daddy's idea of a vacation. So, about six years after his death, my mother and I made the trek.

I remember when we stopped at the first overlook. We parked and got out of the car with anticipation and trepidation, and slowly walked to the metal railing separating us from terra firma and thin air. I wonder how many people cry when they see the Grand Canyon for the first time. We both did. Part of it, admittedly, was that daddy wasn't seeing it with us; in fact, that all five of us were not together. But an even greater part was that we didn't know what else to do in the face of all that glory. We didn't have the words...just the *utterance of O!*

Throughout the first ten chapters of the book of Romans, Paul deciphers the mystery of the Gospel. Finally, by chapter eleven, he can go no further without giving God glory. And Paul admits it: In spite of all that he knows and understands, in all that has been revealed to him, there are still aspects of God that are beyond words. The more he understands, the more he is amazed at the depth of God.

How can the *depths of the riches of God* be reduced to mere words when those riches are immeasurable? After all, God “owns” the earth, the air, all that we see and feel, but there are the spiritual riches too. Can words describe the beauty of the atonement, pardon, and mercy that God has conferred on sinful people by the gospel?

How can the *depths of the wisdom of God* be reduced to poetic phrases? Wisdom that has created a plan of salvation based on heavenly grace and not earthly works?

How can we understand the *depths of the knowledge of God* when that depth is inexhaustible? His knowledge that reminds us over and over again of the disproportion between God and man, Creator and the created?

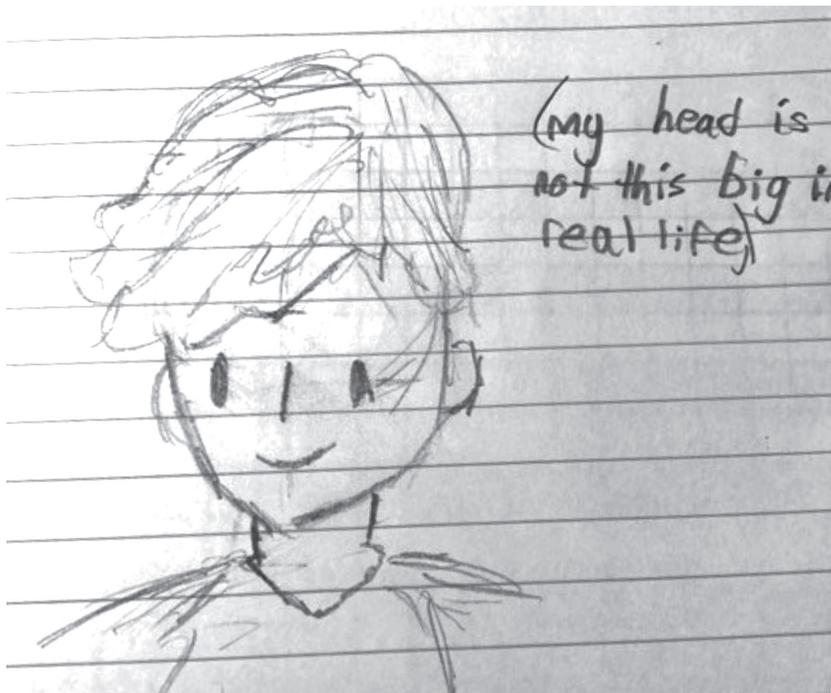
In other words, Paul couldn't really put God — His riches, wisdom and knowledge — into words either, other than to utter "O!" as he sat on the abyss and wondered at their depth.

One theologian describes verse 33 as a "worshipful moment" in Paul's letter to the Romans, going on to suggest, that "if any of God's ways do not move us to delight and wonder, it may be that our hearts are not yet fully conformed to him, and our minds are not yet transformed by the renewal that comes from knowing him."

My mother and I encountered the grandeur of God in the Grand Canyon. It was a worshipful moment for us, and our tears were an expression of delight and wonder. Sometimes, the riches, the wisdom, and the knowledge of God are just too deep for words.

Prayer: *God, you amaze us, and sometimes leave us speechless. Search our hearts then, and may you conform and transform them through our relationship with you. Amen.*

Clyde Manning



**My name is:
Charles McNeil Greenwood**

Mac

My full name is Charles McNeil Greenwood. Charles is from my dad and his dad, my Poppy. Mac comes from my middle name, McNeil, that was my mom's grandmother's maiden name. The reason everyone calls me "Mac" is probably because it's easier to say that "McNeil".

Me!

“And by this we will know that we are from the truth and will reassure our hearts before him whenever our hearts condemn us; for God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything.” 1 John 3:19-20

There are many statements concerning faith and values I heard as a child that have remained with me through the years. These observations have become part of the bedrock for the values my parents worked tirelessly to provide.

Two of these have become my “Go to Statements” or the first things that pop into my mind when I need guidance on a pending decision.

1. My Mother always told me, “There will be many times in life you will do things that me or your Dad will never know about... But Jesus will know.”
2. The second was made by a wisecracking top-hat-wearing cricket who was the travel companion of Disney’s “Pinocchio” — Jiminy Cricket, “And always let your conscience be your guide.”

One’s conscience can be defined as, “The ‘highest authority’ and evaluates information to determine the quality of an action: good or evil, fair or unfair and so on...” As a believer, the “highest authority” mentioned in this statement is God. When I evaluate a decision, my mind can rationalize several paths, but in my heart, the “Highest Authority,” God, provides what is the best path based on Christian values. Free will now kicks in and it is up to me to open my heart and mind to choose the path I will follow. In all honesty, sometimes I have and sometimes I haven’t followed the path recommended by my conscience’s Highest Authority. When this happens, I usually have feelings of guilt that leads to me to question my faith.

This is just one way a Christian can develop a questioning heart. Other ways are — Something happens that puts us in a bad temper. We say something that is hurtful to someone. We give into a temptation. We feel like we have been misunderstood and accused of having a less than an acceptable motive. We haven’t helped those in need as we feel we should have. We haven’t been actively involved in church activities as we have been in the

past or feel we should be. All of these can leave us feeling isolated and filled with doubt about our faith.

In these situations, God not only knows our name, but He knows what is in our heart. God knows our accusations about our faith are not true. He says if we show love in our actions this will reassure our faith in our hearts. We should not wait until we are forced to show love, but we should be deliberate about it. We should set ourselves to the task of finding another person in need and helping them.

People have discovered that much of the loneliness and emptiness they experience in their lives were simply a result of shutting themselves away from the needs of others. As soon as they began to minister to another's life, they discovered that there was an accompanying wonderful sense of reassurance and an awakening of the spirit of joy in their own hearts.

Prayer: *Our Father, we thank you for these words, which are of such practicality that we tend to lose the effect of them upon our own hearts. But, Lord, teach us now to be responsive. That your word is wonderfully true. That anyone who begins to obey it will find for themselves that these things work exactly as you have outlined to us. Make us responsive today, to return good for evil, a loving word for a harsh one, a kind and thoughtful expression in place of sarcasm and one caustic in spirit. Grant to us Lord, to find those who are in need, to minister and encourage them, and to share something of ourselves with them that we might express this kind of love. By this shall we know that we are of the truth. We thank you in Christ's name, Amen*

Smitty Welborn

“When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins.” Colossians 2:13 NIV

When I read about and meditate on Paul’s letters I like to step back and think about a couple of things. First, I remember that these books of the Bible are actual letters. They were written to a specific group of people, sealed, sent, received, opened, and then read by those people. That is really helpful to me because I can imagine a group of believers that Paul is responding to, including me. They are seeking his wisdom and earnestly want to understand the teachings of Jesus more deeply. They have humility about where they are in their faith journey, with many being new to the faith. I can imagine that group of believers waiting in anticipation, eager for the response from Paul. His letters speak to what people were experiencing then and to what we are experiencing now.

Another way I think about it as a letter is that it was intended to be read as a whole. Again, imagining this letter being delivered, opened, and read in one sitting to the entire congregation at Colossae. That tells me the way Paul approaches the whole letter is important. How he greets the group, how he prays for them, all before he even gets to the meat of the letter, where he challenges them to do better and gives them some concrete ways of applying the word to their lives. He provides firm guidance all the while encouraging and lifting them up. What can we learn from Paul’s approach?

Paul embodies doing all things in love. He reminds us that we are to encourage each other and join together in love. We are able to do this through not by any human trait, but by the Holy Spirit because “God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Colossians 1:27).

I think it is also helpful to remember that Paul has never even met the people he is writing to in Colossae. The tenderness he has for them is born out of the Holy Spirit and love. He sincerely considers them to be his brothers and sisters in Christ. They are part of his family. As Christians, we are part of Paul’s family, and we are part of the Colossians’ family. This book is part of our family history. That is absolutely radical! When Paul writes this

letter not even a lifetime has passed since Jesus walked the Earth. Paul's conversion and subsequent missionary journeys have brought the Gospel to Gentiles (to us!). Paul reminds us of the transformational power of Jesus' life and resurrection. That is what gives us new life (Colossians 2:13). That is what calls us to be part of a new humanity.

Paul greets the believers in Colossae with thanksgiving and prayer. He does that before he addresses any of the challenges he has heard about. How might we pray for our brothers and sisters in Christ constantly, passionately, and as if they were part of our family (they are!)? How might we do this especially when we disagree with those in the church? Paul shows us how right here in Colossians 1. I encourage you to pray this prayer from Colossians 1 for all believers in Christ, especially those with whom you disagree:

Prayer: *We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all God's people— the faith and love that spring from the hope stored up for you in heaven and about which you have already heard in the true message of the gospel that has come to you. In the same way, the gospel is bearing fruit and growing throughout the whole world — just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and truly understood God's grace. You learned it from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on our behalf, and who also told us of your love in the Spirit.*

For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you. We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives, so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and giving joyful thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of his holy people in the kingdom of light. For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. Amen.

Andi Williams

“The Lord reigns, let the earth be glad; let the distant shores rejoice..” Psalm 97:1

We live in a **BIG, BIG** world, on a big planet called Earth.

Do you think the psalmist means our Earth, our planet? Maybe, maybe not; I don't really know. I do know that with my limited mind of time and space and distance, I need some reference points to imagine the magnitude of just how huge our earth is.

So...with some help from Google, here is a little bit of information about our big earth:

- Earth is the fifth-largest planet in our solar system;
- The equatorial circumference of Earth is about 24,901 miles;
- The world's population is an estimated 7.87 billion people;
- The shorelines on Earth total approximately 372,000 miles.

Wow! We do live in a big, big world and our Lord is sovereign over it all. The scripture provides comfort and a peace of mind and a reminder that the Lord we serve and worship reigns over all the earth and beyond! Let us rejoice and be glad!!

The vastness of the Lord's reign is hard to fathom. Just imagine... He knows all our names...all 7.87 billion (and counting) of us! His arms...sufficient to reach in one sweep the farthest souls on the most distant shores. Let us rejoice and be glad!

In spite of and in the midst of local, national and international challenges, trying times, changes, uncertainty and unknowns, we can be glad and rejoice in the Lord. The psalmist reminds us that we do not have to worry...the Lord reigns! He is in control! He's "got this"! Let us rejoice and be glad!

Thinking about these things brings to my mind a simple song; a song that I learned a long time ago. The song, in its simplicity, sums up the psalmist's assurance for us that our Lord reigns! We can sing with confidence, gladness and rejoicing! I bet you know it...how about singing it as part of your devotions today!

“He's got the whole world in his hands,
He's got the whole-wide world in his hands,
He's got the whole world in his hands,
He's got the whole world in his hands.”

Prayer: Dear Lord, thank you for the comfort that scripture brings. Help us to remember you are in control and we have nothing to fear. Thank you for keeping us in the palm of your hands. Hallelujah and Amen!

Marie Rodden

Day 40

Sunday, April 10

“At the same time, we wait for the blessed hope and the glorious appearance of our great God and savior Jesus Christ. He gave himself for us in order to rescue us from every kind of lawless behavior, and cleanse a special people for himself who are eager to do good actions.” Titus 2: 13-14

The Blessed Hope in this verse is referring to the Delight of the Church, when Jesus Christ appears in glory to take those who are members of His mystic Body, from the earth into heavenly places. We are taken into His presence in a moment — in the twinkling of an eye, before God deals with the godless world, during the Great Tribulation. He will remove Christ’s Body, which is the Church, at His appointed time and return to working through His people, when the gospel of the Kingdom will be preached throughout the world.

The Blessed Hope of our great God and Savior should motivate all believers to godliness and promote each child of God towards joyful anticipation of His imminent arrival. Watching and waiting excitedly for His soon return, should inspire us to do the work that God has given us to do. Day by day we should look for Him and be ready to welcome Him, so that we will not be disappointed at His coming.

This hope is the appearance of the glory of Christ. There will also be a future appearing, mentioned in this text as in 1 Timothy 6:14, and 2 Timothy 4:1. This appearing will be “of the glory” indicating the coming of Jesus.

The 14th verse continues to comment on the work of Jesus Christ, referring to him as the One who sacrificed Himself on our behalf. This is a reference to the death of Jesus on the cross, offering His life as a sacrifice for our sins. The purpose of His sacrifice was in two parts. The first is to rescue believers from sin or lawlessness. Secondly, the death of Jesus is to cleanse or

purify — meaning to free us from sin and its consequences. As children of God we are both family and citizens of His kingdom. Being freed from sin and its power, we are given renewed strength to do good works. This is reflected in Ephesians 2:8-9, which speaks of salvation being by grace through faith, apart from works.

Prayer: *Thank you God for your son Jesus Christ who sacrificed his life for our sins. Guide us that we may do and follow your will. Amen*

Evon Crooks

Day 41

Monday, April 11

“Through whom (Jesus Christ) we also have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.” Romans 5:2 (NKJV)

All of us are sinners and will need the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. However, we have access to be forgiven of our sins if we first believe and have faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, God’s Son who was sacrificed on Calvary for us. So having faith in Jesus Christ will allow us to be redeemed by God the Father; His peace will reign in our lives. This peace comes only through His grace and allows us to be upheld by His everlasting and unconditional love, which is given to us undeserving sinners. This love is freely given to all those who have been accepted through faith. How wonderful that it makes us blossom and keeps us safe as we journey through life. This grace and love protects us through perilous times and this secular culture. We must always be appreciative and thankful for the Lord’s unconditional love, which will make us shine with goodness and love to our fellow beings in this world.

This acceptance and grace through faith will help us believers to be resistant to assaults and temptations of this world. We will stand strong in the storms that will pass through our lives; we will have firm footing through the grace of God, the rock of our salvation. As humans we are prone to weaknesses of the flesh but the Lord God, all powerful Savior, has armed us with His never ending grace and love. This, as a result of faith, has given us protection and shields us from the evil web in this carnal

world. Let us stand firm to our convictions, the Word of God, and delight in His love and grace as we become beacons of light emitting His goodness and love to all.

Again, let us stand firm on the rock, the source of our faith, and accept the grace afforded us by the sacrifice of God's Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. We must be in constant communication with Him through prayer and discipleship to those who do not know Him or His Word. If we do these things we may rejoice and have hope for the glory of God in His kingdom to come. This kingdom will eventually reign on earth on the return of our Lord Jesus Christ. Such a splendid, joyous and heavenly state to anticipate.

Prayer: *Dear Lord and father, we praise you for your awesome love and forgiveness. We as sinners are undeserving but grateful for your enduring grace and promise of a glorious reunion with you in Heaven. We thank you for the fortitude you have given us to resist the evils of this world and for your forgiveness when we succumb in weakness. Lord we continue to ask for your protection and repent of our sins. May your Holy Spirit permeate all those who are receptive to your Word. All this we ask in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen*

Carol Crooks

“For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the son he loves.”

Colossians 1:13

In reading this text, I found it interesting how the word ‘dominion’ was used of all things, the definition there being “sovereignty or control”, which to me illustrates just how much of a difference God makes for us before we’re even able to speak his name. Like the metaphor we often use, a shepherd guiding us, his sheep, away from danger and into safe and lustrous pastures. Like the shepherd he does not leave any in his flock behind, no matter color, gender, orientation, anything, he does the same thing for us and everyone else in this earth without regard for our differences as we are all one in the eyes of God.

So the lesson that comes to us on this day is to be God’s willing sheep; look up to and follow your shepherd at all times knowing whatever he has in store for you lies in those green and plentiful pastures, even if the journey to get there isn’t always what you anticipate.

Prayer: *Lord God we thank you for rescuing us, as unworthy as we may be, from all things that defy you and please help us to remain faithful and loyal sheep to you our shepherd. Amen*

Ryan MacReynolds

“And he shall stand and feed his flock in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God. And they shall live secure, for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth.” Micah 5:4

Micah is one of twelve Minor Prophets who call out God’s people for bad behavior and warn them of the coming consequences. The fact that this is a short book (hence the term “minor”) doesn’t make its message any less urgent. God is coming to bring judgment to His people who have disobeyed and rebelled for 500 years. His wrath is here!

Through Micah, God enumerates the behaviors and practices that He abhors. They include: injustice; idolatry (including sorcery and fortune-telling); corruption among political and religious leaders; and exploitation of the poor. Micah’s warnings come in two sections of the book, with each followed by beautiful and poetic words of redemption. Today’s passage in chapter 5 is the redemption passage that follows the second “rant” against the broken covenant and the very bad news that the Assyrians will capture the northern kingdom, Israel.

It is helpful to read from the beginning of the chapter. In the first two verses, Micah announces that God is going to act in a way that is His habit: He will make something exceptional from something inconsequential. A great leader will come from little ‘ole Bethlehem. This will happen when God brings the remnant back to Israel. They will receive their promised redemption in a leader who is strong and stands in the majesty of God. Today’s verse compares Him to a Shepard, one who will bring security, and be “great to the ends of the earth.”

In this prophesy, Micah joins other Old Testament writers who forecast Jesus’ birth. They include Moses, Isaiah, and Jeremiah, who teach us that Jesus will fulfill God’s promises: “a scepter will rise out of Israel”; “a shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse”; and He will raise up for David a “righteous Branch.”

Almost the entire book of Micah is one of describing actions and consequences. It is not a book of history, only; its warnings are an invitation for us to look in the mirror, and honestly examine our lives.

And, it is a book of promised redemption, for God does not come to destroy, but to correct us so that we might turn to Him with our arms wide open.

Prayer: *Help us to heed the warnings of prophets like Micah, and to understand that his words are also to us. Thank you for your Word, and its prophecies that have been fulfilled through our beautiful redemption, Jesus. Amen*

Day 44

Thursday April 14

“I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.” John 6:51

We think of bread as a common food item that we eat regularly along with other foods to sustain our bodies. In John 6:51 Jesus uses bread symbolically saying, “I am the living bread that came down from heaven.” The “living bread” refers to Jesus’ flesh, His body to be eaten and His blood as drink for those who seek eternal life. He offered himself as a living sacrifice so that we may live in Him.

John 6:51 provides spiritual direction for our commitment to serve God and carry out His will in our lives. “Whoever eats this bread will live forever” asks us to answer the call to accept and serve Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior.

“This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.” We all have a need to be loved, to belong and to have purpose in our lives. Sometimes we falter and look in the wrong places for our needs to be met. Turning to our Lord and Savior in prayer can satisfy our needs and longings.

A personal challenge for each Christian is to continue to grow in faith, becoming closer to God each day. Spending more time in prayer and reading the Bible can have positive outcomes on our thinking, spoken words, and decisions. We are blessed at NPMC to have a full and varied array of opportunities for worship and outreach: Worship Service on Sunday, Sunday School Classes, “The Gathering” on Thursday nights, Book Study Group, community outreach, Bible School, Blood Drives, and the South Fork School Project.

Prayer: *Dear God: Help us to make choices that bring us closer to Thee. Amen.*

Toni Bigham

LECTIO DIVINA

*“Turn my heart to your decrees, and not to selfish gain.”
Psalm 119:36*

Read the scripture

Meditate on the scripture

Pray for understanding

Contemplate the scripture

“Jesus Christ humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death — even death on a cross.” Philippians 2:8

“It is He who saved us and chose us for His Holy work, not because we deserved it but because it was His plan long before the world began- to show His love and kindness to us through Christ. And now He has made all this plain to us by the coming of our Savior Jesus Christ, who broke the power of death and showed us the way to everlasting life through trusting Him.” 2 Timothy 1:9-10

This has been called Paul’s farewell letter to Timothy, encouraging him and reminding him of what he was “called” (He knows my name) to do through the Holy Spirit. Timothy may have been growing fearful of death and suffering as he watched what was happening to not only Paul, but to so many others who were spreading the Gospel. Paul reminds him that God chose him to be a part of His plan to show His love and kindness to all through Christ. (God loves us, chose us and sent Jesus to die for us.) He reminded him also that Jesus had broken the power of death, the fear of those who have no hope. His faith and his trust in Jesus would give him the strength and courage to face anyone or anything that came against him and his message of salvation.

Today some of us may be afraid to go forth and declare the Good News of our Savior because there may be negative reactions to our message. Remember that you have been chosen (He knows your name); you have God-given abilities (organizing, singing, writing music, teaching, bookkeeping, praying, friendly chatter, sewing, serving in many different ways) to help get the message through. Have faith and trust in Jesus, and his Spirit will guide you into His Holy Work.

Prayer: *Lord, remind us of the work to which we are called: Showing Your love and kindness to others, and declaring the Good News of our Savior!*

Darla Bonnett

*“When David’s time to die drew near, he charged his son Solomon, saying, “I am about to go the way of all the earth. Be strong and keep the charge of the Lord your God.”
1 Kings 1:1-2*

“Jesus, the risen Lord, said, ‘Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you’” John 20:21

Names were really important in “Bible times.” People were often given names that reflected an important aspect of their character. In John 20:21, the writer calls Jesus by name (“JESUS... said, “Peace be with you...”). You may remember that before Jesus was born, an angel appeared to Joseph, called him by his name, and told him that Mary would have a son and then said, “you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.”

The name “Jesus” is derived from the Hebrew name Yeshua, which means “to deliver; to rescue.” The story in John chapter 20 reminds us how Jesus lived up to (or lived into) that name. He rescued us and delivered us by conquering death. The Lord is risen... indeed!

Forty days ago you may have read my introductory letter at the beginning of this guide and the beginning of our Lenten journey. I said that Jesus gave us a model of ministry in 5 steps: We are called in. He knows us by name. We receive instructions. We receive authority. And we are sent out to share this message of deliverance with the whole world.

Jesus blessed those frightened disciples with his PRESENCE. He offered them his PEACE. And then he gave them a PROCLAMATION: “As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” What a fitting conclusion to this journey (or is it a beginning?). We have heard the thoughts of many whom Jesus knows by name. We have reflected on God’s word (for instruction and authority). And now it’s time to go out and proclaim that name so that all people may know him by name and know the peace that comes from knowing that He knows our name.

Pastor Sam

This is the tenth consecutive year that we have produced a Lenten Devotion Guide here at New Philadelphia. As always, thanks goes to everyone who helped create this Guide, including our writers for sharing their thoughts about their assigned passages, and Paula Chrysson for providing graphic design and layout. And a big shout out to the young artists who provided beautiful artwork for this guide!



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