

MARCH-APRIL 2012

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THE UPPER ROOM®

YOUR PLACE TO MEET GOD

Sarah Wilke, Publisher
Lynne Deming, World Editor

38 LANGUAGES

Interdenominational International Interracial

ARMENIAN
BULGARIAN
BURMESE
CHINESE (2)
DUTCH
ENGLISH (22)
ESTONIAN (3)
FRENCH (2)
GREEK
GUJARATI

HINDI
HUNGARIAN (2)
IBAN/ENGLISH
ILOKANO
INDONESIAN (2)
ITALIAN
JAPANESE (2)
KANNADA/ENGLISH
KISWAHILI (2)
KOREAN

KUKI
MALAYALAM
MEITEI
NORWEGIAN
ORIYA
POLISH (2)
PORTUGUESE (5)
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SINHALA
SPANISH (6)

SWEDISH
TAMIL
TELUGU
THAI (2)
URDU
VAIPHEI
ZOMI
ZULU (radio)

For further information about the international editions of
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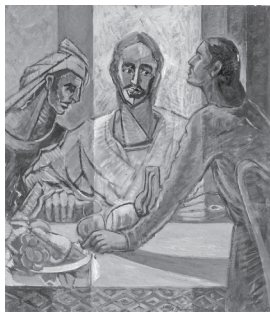
COVER ART INTERPRETATION

The Supper at Emmaus

Artist: Roy De Maistre

(Australia, 1894-1968)

Interpreter: Mona Bagasao-Cave



Line, shape, color: All visual art begins with these. To artist and musician Roy De Maistre, color was more than just one of the elements. Color spoke not only to the eyes but to the ears and emotions as well. Color sang, cajoling the viewer into feeling music.

This issue's cover art allows us to relish De Maistre's "harmonization of color" and to observe the way he allows color to take precedence over shape and line in a painting. The vertical stripes in *The Supper at Emmaus* are clearly not intended as background — the matte onto which the figures of Christ and his companions are cast. As the stripes intersect the figures, they do not "disappear" behind them. Rather, the lines alter the appearance of the figures, forcing even the large presence of Christ into several small sections and denying it the prominence it might hold had not it been trisected. Interrupting the flows of deep coral, muted violet, and multi-toned ivory is a rectangle of bright coral — the principle color to which all the others are harmonized. This color block, however, is clearly an object: the table at which the three figures sit.

So what are we to conclude about these colors moving their way through the painting? I am hard-pressed to shape into words the message the artist intended in the line, shape, color, and music of his work. Even so, I invite you to look and listen to *The Supper at Emmaus*. Give your senses time to see and hear the song and the voices that sing it.

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HOW TO USE THIS MAGAZINE EACH DAY*

Before you begin: Sit quietly for 30 seconds or so to settle your spirit. Take a few deep breaths and get comfortable.

Read: Open your Bible and read the portion of scripture suggested beside the date. After you read, pause to think about the passage. What comes to mind? What in it got your attention?

Quoted verse: The quoted verse relates to the central point of the day's meditation. Read it slowly and think about its meaning for you. Once or twice a week you might memorize a quoted verse.

"Story": These meditations are written by people from around the world. After you read the main part of the page, ask yourself, "How do this person's words connect with my life?"

Prayer: To end your quiet time, pray the prayer at the bottom of the page. You may want to add to it, mentioning people or situations that come to mind during your reflection.

Thought for the Day: This element invites you to respond or sums up an idea from the day's reading. Repeat the thought a few times and recall it throughout the day to remind yourself of what you heard from God.

Link2Life: This suggests ways to connect your life of prayer with your life in the world. L2L may suggest web sites to visit; however, we do not endorse any site. Readers should use their own judgment about acting on information they may find.

Prayer Focus: This suggests a subject for continuing prayer after your devotional time, joining with believers around the world in doing so.

With small groups: See pages 72-76 for a model.

To start a meeting: Online (devotional.upperroom.org/resources/meeting-starters) we offer a list of current meditations by subject and directions for using them to begin meetings.

*Read more about spending time with God in "How to Have a Daily Devotional Time" at: devotional.upperroom.org/quiettime.

Embracing Forgiveness

Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother [or sister who] . . . sins against me? Up to seven times?" Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times." — Matthew 18:21-22 (NIV)

As so many churches do on Ash Wednesday, the one I attended for many years had an annual ritual that encouraged worshippers to release something from their past — anger, jealousy, guilt, regret. Each of us wrote our burden on a slip of paper; then one by one, we solemnly dropped it in the flames of an urn.

One year as I put pencil to paper, my first thought was of my lingering anger over a former colleague's misconduct. Yes, I decided, I was finally ready to let go of this. As I watched the paper hit the fire, I felt I was prepared to forgive.

After church, I shared with a close friend what I had written. "But isn't that what you wrote last year?" she asked.

I started to say no, but the memory flooded back. She was right. I realized that I had mentally reached back into the flame and picked up what I thought I had let go. And here I was, a year later, returning to the same place.

As much as we know that anger is a crippling emotion, as much as we crave the freedom of forgiveness, the hard truth is that we can also take pleasure from our indignation. Being wronged seems to offer us the right to wallow in it.

Ridding ourselves of anger is rarely a matter of "letting go." Often, we must pry it from our hands and our hearts.

In the somberness of this Lenten season, Christ's words remind us: Finding forgiveness isn't a one-time act. It's an ongoing discipline that we must embrace, again and again, with the whole of our hearts.



Sarah White

Publisher

IN TIMES OF/FOR HELP WITH ...

- Anxiety: Mar. 10
- Bible reading: Mar. 7, 14, 23,
28; Apr. 16, 17, 23
- Christian community: Mar. 2,
6, 8, 10, 14, 31; Apr. 29
- Compassion: Mar. 29;
Apr. 6, 11, 20, 28
- Creation/Nature's beauty:
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Apr. 17, 20, 22
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- Evangelism: Mar. 5, 14, 22, 26,
30; Apr. 5
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Apr. 10, 16, 23, 25
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Apr. 20
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Apr. 18, 26
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- Social issues: Mar. 8; Apr. 14
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Apr. 15, 19
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Apr. 11, 21
- Trust/Worry: Mar. 10, 24;
Apr. 13

WANTED: ORDINARY PEOPLE

THUR
MAR 1
2012

READ **Matthew 14:22-33***

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God — what is good and acceptable and perfect.

— Romans 12:2 (NRSV)

What would you do if Jesus came to your church and said, “I’m looking for a few ordinary people”? Why would Jesus be interested in ordinary people?

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

God calls ordinary people to be extraordinary servants.

Yet these are the ones Jesus called to be his friends: fishermen, a tax collector, a teacher, a homemaker. I

have related to Peter more than any of Jesus’ other followers.

Peter was impulsive, like me. Seeing Jesus walking on the water, he said, “Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you.” Jesus did and Peter got out of the boat and walked on the water, something no one except Jesus had done. That is not ordinary. Then Peter looked around at the wind and the waves, and he fell. That is what I would do. That’s ordinary.

After Jesus’ arrest, fear overcame Peter and he denied knowing Jesus. I hate to say it, but I probably would have done the same. I am grateful that Jesus loved and forgave Peter and commanded him, “Feed my sheep” (John 21:17). Peter later became a preacher in the early church. The longer Peter walked with Jesus, the more he was changed. And the more I walk with Christ, the more I realize how much he wants to help me become the servant God wants me to be.

Prayer: O God, help us ordinary people to be extraordinary workers for your kingdom. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

Sue Tornai (California)

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

FRI
MAR 2
2012

A DAY LATE AND A PRAYER SHORT

READ Ephesians 3:14-21

Pray without ceasing.

— 1 Thessalonians 5:17 (NRSV)

Monday morning, I woke up eager to pray for my granddaughters. Eight and eleven years old, they were attending their first day in a new school. I had planned to pray that they would have a good experience, dedicated teachers, and kind friends. Just as I settled down to focus on my prayer, I realized I had made a mistake in timing. My granddaughters had moved with their parents to Beijing, China, for the year. Their school in China was in a time zone 14 hours ahead of mine, so their first day of school was long over. They had eaten supper and were already asleep. I had not prayed for them before their first day at the new school, and I felt terrible.

My granddaughters may have been in school, but I am the one who learned a lesson. If I had been praying for my granddaughters every day, I would have prayed for them on their first day in their new school no matter what the time zone. God is constant, and prayer is available to us at all times. I don't want to pray just when I have a special request; I want to build a daily discipline of praying, especially for my family.

Prayer: O God, we want to be as consistent in communicating with you as you are in communicating with us. Teach us to speak to you and listen to you throughout every day. Amen.

Link2Life

Click to see a picture of Jan with her granddaughters.

Jan Winston (Kansas)

GOD'S TIME

SAT
MAR 3
2012

READ Isaiah 41:8-13

Jesus said . . . , "Do not fear, only believe."

— Mark 5:36 (NRSV)

The year I graduated from college, I went into a deep depression. I lost my appetite as well as much of my energy and strength. Two years passed. When I visited a psychiatrist, the doctor said it would probably take another two to three years to recover. Actually, it took about six years.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Even as we struggle,
God is healing us.

God brought me healing in spite of hard trials and challenging experiences. Medical help was necessary, but I had leaned too much on the doctor's words, "two to three years." As I look back, all the days of painful experiences and anxious feelings were days overflowing with God's blessings. God had been with me, using the hard times to teach me and mold me.

Now, no longer fearing sickness, I take courage and live joyfully, entrusting everything to God. In that trust I have found true healing. No matter how weak we become, God loves us, forgives us, and heals us. Whatever the situation, if we trust in God, we can live expectantly — always in God's time.

Prayer: Dear God, we thank you for the ways you heal us. Help us to trust you more and to wait patiently for your hand of love on our lives. We pray as Jesus taught us, saying, "Father, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us. And lead us not into temptation."* Amen.

Hirono Shinomiya (Shizuoka, Japan)

*Luke 11:2-4 (NIV).

SUN
MAR 4
2012

1ST SUNDAY IN LENT

READ James 3:1-12

*Those who guard their mouths preserve their lives;
those who open wide their lips come to ruin.*

— Proverbs 13:3 (NRSV)

One Sunday during Lent, I told my small group that I was going to try not to say any negative or unproductive words and to speak only helpful words to others. That week I was doing fine. I began each day as usual, reading my Bible and *The Upper Room*, and meditating on what God was saying to me.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Set a guard over my mouth,
O LORD; keep watch over the
door of my lips (Ps. 141:3).

By Friday, however, I faltered. During a conversation with a friend, I let my words get me in trouble. As the Bible tells us, the tongue is difficult to tame (see James 3:8). After seeing how my words had hurt my friend, I felt that God was displeased with me. I apologized to my friend, and then I prayed and asked God to forgive me.

My friend reached out to me in love and reconciliation, but I still felt ashamed. However, I knew God did not want me to dwell on my mistake. I got out my Bible and my copy of *The Upper Room* and asked God to help me. That day's suggested Bible reading, Romans 8:31-39, reassured me that nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ; and I was able to feel forgiven.

Prayer: Dear God, thank you for your love and forgiveness. Teach us to honor you in our relationships with others. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Donald Wright (Tennessee)

A LIFE THAT MATTERS

MON
MAR 5
2012

READ Romans 5:12-19

*God opposes the proud, but gives
grace to the humble.*

— 1 Peter 5:5 (NRSV)

On the evening of June 17, 1968, I gave my life to Jesus Christ while watching a televised evangelistic crusade. Although it was certainly needed, this decision wasn't in my plans and was certainly difficult to accept.

Life had become a monotonous grind. The freedom of being a young adult, newly married, and working a steady job as an auto mechanic were good experiences — but not good enough to remove a gnawing sense of something missing in my life. I grew up in the church and knew the stories of Jesus, but I had dismissed them. My aptitude for fixing things convinced me that if given the time, the means, and the freedom, I could eventually fix this mysterious hole in my life all by myself.

Imagine my resentment when the evangelist said that I needed Christ. But the more he preached, the more I saw the truth of what he was saying. By the end of the broadcast, I had asked Christ to “fix” me. And through the power of love, God saved me — cleansing my conscience and giving me a new reason for living. Nothing has created a greater impact on my life and the way I live it than committing myself to following Christ.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Abundant life begins when we commit ourselves to following Christ. (See John 10:10.)

Prayer: Dear Lord, help us to admit that we need you. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Bill Fisher (Virginia)

OFFER THEM LIFE

READ 2 Corinthians 2:12-17

*We are to God the aroma of
Christ among those who are being
saved and those who are perishing.
To the one we are the smell of death;
to the other, the fragrance of life.*

— 2 Corinthians 2:15-16 (NIV)

Many years ago I went to Egypt for a Christian women's conference. One day we visited the Zabaleen area where Coptic Christians live and work sorting the garbage from the city of Cairo. The rubbish was piled high on every side: plastics in one heap, bottles in another, rubber tires in yet another location. These piles were like small mountains, and in the middle of this area stood a tiny concrete church building.

Fires were raging as unrecyclable material was burned. Pigs were running around the church, consuming anything edible. The stench outside was horrible, but I felt warm, loving fellowship inside the church. The spiritual atmosphere was like the sweetest perfume imaginable. One little girl, obviously very poor, came up to me and broke off a piece from her loaf of bread to give to me. In Arabic she said, "In the name of Christ."

What do we bring to our encounters with the people we meet every day? Can others see that we are Christians? Do we offer them life in the name of Christ?

Prayer: Dear Lord Jesus, help us to carry the fragrance of life to those in need today and to everyone we meet. Amen.

Link2Life

Click to see a picture of
Zabaleen childrenc.

Pat Rantisi (Shropshire, England)

A LONG, COOL DRINK

WED
MAR 7
2012

READ **John 4:5-15**

[Jesus] cried out, "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink. As the scripture has said, 'Out of the believer's heart shall flow rivers of living water.'"

— John 7:37-38 (NRSV)

Each spring, I love seeing my patio planters overflowing with colorful flowers: coral petunias, blue lobelia, dusty miller. The planters never look better than when I first set the nursery-bred plants in the pots. I water them well each day for a week or two, happy for rainy days when God does the job for me.

Link2Life

Click to see a picture of Sherree's colorful planters.

But I am soon distracted and forget to keep the flowers watered. After just a few warm, dry days, every flower stem bends and the foliage droops down the sides of the pots. I fear the worst. But I'm thankful that if the soil is not completely dried up, I can water the plants and see them revive.

This makes me realize that I need the water of God's word as desperately as my patio flowers need water. If I forget reading the Bible and praying, I will soon droop. The stresses of life can overwhelm me, just as my flowers wither in the heat.

Yet those who believe in Christ tap into an endless supply of water. Jesus promised that if we come to him and believe in him, streams of living water will flow from within us. When I take time to read my Bible each morning, I feel stronger — more able to survive the day. When I see my patio flowers drooping for lack of water, I run for the hose. But I also stop and think, *Have I turned to Christ lately for a cool drink of the water of life?*

Prayer: Dear Lord, refresh us daily by the water of your word, that we may grow and mature in you. Amen.

Sherree G. Funk (Pennsylvania)

Prayer Focus: GARDENERS

13

THUR
MAR 8
2012

CITIZENS

READ 1 Peter 2:4-10

There is one body and one Spirit — just as you were called to one hope when you were called — one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

— Ephesians 4:4-6 (NIV)

I happened to walk past the federal courthouse at a time when many people were leaving the building. All were smiling

and many were dressed in special clothes. Some paused in the windy, chilly weather to have pictures taken with their companions.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

For citizens of God's kingdom, every day can be a day of joy.

I soon discovered the source of their joy. These people had just become U.S. citizens and had received the documents that assure them the rights, security, and privileges of this citizenship. People from many different countries now share one allegiance. From many other cultures, they now share one homeland. From many other backgrounds they came — seeking a better life for themselves and their children.

The family of believers and the church offer a similar unity. We are an assembly of many but with one Lord, people who share hope for a better life now and eternal life to come.

Prayer: Dear God, thank you for Jesus, through whom we now enjoy the many benefits of being a part of your kingdom. Amen.

Kenneth Athon (Indiana)

THE ROSE OF LENT

READ Romans 8:18-23

**FRI
MAR 9
2012**

The sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us.

— Romans 8:18 (NRSV)

Several years ago my wife and I were given a small, nondescript and humble-looking plant called a Lenten rose. We set it outside near our house and watered it occasionally. As winter approached, we inquired whether it should be transplanted, perhaps taken indoors. We were advised to leave it alone, that it would survive. And it did, the foliage remaining green through the winter. When the season of Lent arrived, the plant began to perk up and blossoms appeared. It then began to bloom with bright, pinkish flowers much earlier than other flowering plants. It did this consistently as Easter approached, its blossoms and foliage always full and beautiful.

We have come to see this as a reminder of the hope we have in Christ. We go through trials, temptations, sicknesses, and storms that could destroy us. But they do not. Each Lent offers us an opportunity to focus on the sacrifice of Christ for the sins of the world. This contemplation and meditation ultimately bear the “fruit” of appreciating the true meaning of what God’s love has given us — the promise of a glorious resurrection, life in Christ, and the gifts that we celebrate on Easter Sunday. Like the Lenten rose, we slowly but surely mature into fullness of life.

Link2Life

Click to see a picture of
Jack’s Lenten rose.

Prayer: Dear Lord, as we mature in faith and meditate on Christ’s sacrifice for us, help us to grow and blossom as a witness to our world. Amen.

Jack L. Matthews (Alabama)

SAT
MAR 10
2012

TRUSTING THE LORD

READ Psalm 118:1-9

*With the LORD on my side I do not fear.
What can mortals do to me?*

— Psalm 118:6 (NRSV)

Recently I spotted an advertisement for a bookkeeping position that offered a competitive salary and generous benefits including health insurance. I applied for the position, along with 125 others. After narrowing the number of applicants down to 14, the company chose three of us for a final interview. The final interview went well, and I felt excited and confident that I had landed the position.

My excitement quickly turned to despair when the manager sent me an e-mail saying they had changed their minds and decided that outsourcing the position would be more cost-efficient for the company. My weeks of praying and preparing had been for nothing. How could God have let this happen to me?

The answer came to me from Lucille, an older woman in my church. She said, "Honey, God didn't do this to you. The company manager made a business decision. God never left your side and is with you to walk you through the pain and disappointment." Her words of wisdom made me realize how quick I am to blame God for all that goes wrong in my life instead of leaning on God to see me through the hard times.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

What happens to us is not a measure of God's love for us.

Prayer: Dear God, help us to understand and accept that while bad things happen to good people, your love for us is constant. Amen.

Priscilla Clements (Florida)

2ND SUNDAY IN LENT

SUN
MAR 11
2012

READ Romans 8:1-17

There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death.

— Romans 8:1-2 (NIV)

When I first read the scripture quoted above, I had to sit with it for a while. There is no condemnation; I have been set free from sin and death. That is a lot to

take in. I have been walking with God for quite some time now, and still some days I find it hard to believe that I have truly been set free. I know this

in my head. I have been taught this, but there is a difference between knowing and believing. I still find myself trying to earn God's love and forgiveness when it has been freely given to me.

God does not want me to feel as if I am constantly striving to prove myself or as if I am constantly failing at my relationship with him. God simply wants me to sit and allow grace and mercy to pour over me like a flowing fountain. When I let God into my soul, I hear a whisper: *You don't have to prove anything to me. I came to conquer sin so that you don't have to feel unworthy. I made you in my likeness.*

I have to allow myself to feel like the beautifully and wonderfully made person whom God created, not someone who is beaten up by the world. I am grateful that we are not required to earn God's love. I just have to allow myself to feel it, to accept my freedom through Christ. I am thankful that God loved me enough to become human and die so that I may know what this freedom is.

Prayer: Dear God of salvation, in our weakness, hear our prayers. Amen.

Allison Fasig (Tennessee)

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

"If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed" (John 8:36).

MON
MAR 12
2012

CARRIED ON THE PATH

READ Proverbs 3:5-6

Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.

— James 4:10 (TEV)

When my daughter Becky was about two years old, our family went canoeing in Michigan. On the return trip, my wife and son started down the trail; but when I reached down to pick up Becky, she objected. She had ridden in the canoe or been carried all day, so now she wanted to walk.

Link2Life

Click to see a picture of William and his daughter.

I knew that Becky couldn't walk the quarter mile of rough trail ahead of us, but I decided to let her try. When she got tired, I'd carry her. She refused to walk ahead of me, so she tottered along behind; and the two of us slowly proceeded down the path. After about 15 minutes, I heard Becky yell. I turned quickly and found her sitting in the middle of the trail, crying. She wasn't hurt; she was just too tired to go on. As I scooped her up in my arms I told her, "You don't need to cry, Becky. Just ask Daddy to carry you."

As I walked along the path with Becky in my arms, I thought about our relationship with God. Just as I knew that Becky couldn't travel the path on her own, God knows that we cannot travel the path of life on our own. In the same way I was watching over Becky, waiting for her to ask to be carried, God watches over us, ready to carry us when we can go no further.

Prayer: Dear God, help us to remember that you are always with us, ready to carry us when we need it. Amen.

William Malmsten (Michigan)

SMALL MIRACLES

TUES
MAR 13
2012

READ Exodus 14:10-25

*Moses stretched out his hand over the sea.
The LORD drove the sea back by a strong east
wind all night, and turned the sea into
dry land; and the waters were divided.*

— Exodus 14:21 (NRSV)

I am a lawyer. When helping religious organizations, I often come across situations that, from my human perspective, seem completely irresolvable. Those who have encountered the bureaucratic machine in Russia will understand. I can give you an example.

I needed to submit some documents so that a theological seminary would receive its license as an educational institution. I stood in line. I was number 98. Everybody said that submitting those documents that day would be impossible, but doing so was essential. I took my number for the line and went about my business. At the end of the working day, I went back to the place where I needed to submit the documents; but I was prepared to come back on another day. When I got there, I saw that they were calling number 97. I was the next one called and the last person served that day.

I can offer countless examples like this one. I often find myself wondering,

Is it simply luck? But to me it is not. I see it, rather, as the hand of God at work.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

God acts in our lives
every day; I will watch
for these small miracles.

Prayer: Dear God, thank you for miracles we see in everyday life. Amen.

Kim Sergey (Moscow, Russia)

WED
MAR 14
2012

A NEIGHBOR'S LOVE

READ John 13:31-35

*The whole Law is summed up in one commandment:
"Love your neighbor as you love yourself."*

— Galatians 5:14 (TEV)

The same week that my husband's parents were killed in an auto accident, a new neighbor moved onto our block. She understood that this was a difficult time for me, so when I needed a babysitter, she helped. When I was too tired to cook, she brought a meal. When I needed spiritual guidance, she read

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Love is the distinguishing mark of disciples of Jesus Christ.

scripture to me. I was drawn to her kindness.

Looking back, I realize that my new friend was showing me the unconditional love of God. No one had ever done that before. And because of her loving me, I began to read the Bible for myself. As I read and studied the scripture, I found Jesus as my Lord and Savior. I will be eternally grateful to this neighbor.

Jesus told his followers in John 13:34-35, "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. . . . By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (NRSV).

Do we love our neighbors in ways that cause them to see Christ in us? Showing the love of Christ to others can change their lives forever. It changed mine.

Prayer: Dear Jesus, make us aware of those who need to know your love. Then, empower us to show it. Amen.

Karen Stapleton (Colorado)

Real people. Real stories. Real faith.



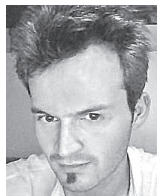
Accountant and office manager Sheryl Buckner (p. 31) likes to jet ski.



Jonathan Truax (p. 32) is a pastor, husband, and father of three.



Retired English teacher Carmen Narváez (p. 23) still tutors students in grades 5-12.



Working in Asia, Christopher McKenna (p. 60) is a spiritual-fantasy novelist and English teacher.



Vietnam vet and U.S. Navy Seal Donald Wright (p. 10) is also a chess enthusiast and fitness trainer.



Linda Beahm (p. 35) - hospice-medical director who loves walking, reading, and listening to music.



Former music teacher Jacob Schneider (p. 26) is a composer, band member, and church-choir director.



Former missionary-nurse-in-Peru Pat Rantisi (p. 12) and her husband spent 20 years in Palestine running an orphan's home.

Share YOUR story today!

The people pictured on these pages did.

See devotional.upperroom.org/guidelines for writers guidelines or send a stamped, self-addressed envelope to the editorial office address (p. 1).

YARD WORK

READ Colossians 3:5-10

The LORD says, "Do not remember the former things, or consider the things of old. I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert."

— Isaiah 43:18-19 (NRSV)

The yard was a mess. Winter weather and high winds had scattered tree branches, dead leaves, and hundreds of pinecones over our property. The whole place needed a thorough cleanup.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Where is my spiritual growing edge? How can I cooperate in what God is doing?

I set to work, and soon I had assembled a sizeable stack of sticks. Grabbing a rake, I mounded pinecones

and needles into a thick pile. Several hours passed. I stopped to check my progress; the yard looked neat and tidy. The grass was still brown and dry, but as I knelt for a closer look, I saw tiny green shoots. Spring was coming, but these signs hadn't been noticeable until the debris was removed.

Sometimes our spiritual lives are like my yard — brown, barren, and littered with debris. Like a thorough yard cleanup, the weeks of Lent give us a chance to examine ourselves, to focus on our spiritual life, and to remove the debris so new growth can emerge.

Prayer: Dear God, we open our lives to you during this Lenten season. Help us remove the debris in our lives, and fill us instead with your presence and love. Amen.

Valerie Battle Kienzle (Missouri)

Prayer Focus: THOSE PRACTICING A
LENTEN DISCIPLINE

THE LOVING ARMS OF GOD

FRI
MAR 16
2012

READ Psalm 23

Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you are with me.

— Psalm 23:4 (NRSV)

My grandson Danny is a beautiful gift from God. Danny has Down syndrome. At five years old, he cannot walk up or down stairs without assistance. He was with me at school when I met with teachers and students to work on an end-of-the-year session. Without my knowledge or permission, Danny decided to explore.

I had no idea he had left the room until I heard a heart-wrenching scream from down the hallway, near the stairwell. I knew right away what was happening. As I ran down the hallway, I saw Danny surrounded by well-meaning students who were trying their best to calm him. He reached for me when he saw me. Upon taking my hand, he immediately descended the stairs, singing calmly, without even glancing at the steps.

The words of Psalm 23:4 came to me: “Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you are with me.” With the same confidence that my grandson showed in reaching for me in his frightening moment, we can reach for God’s loving hand in difficult or challenging times.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

In our dark valleys and in our daily tasks, God walks beside us.

Prayer: Dear God, thank you for sheltering us. Help us remember to reach for your hand in troubling times. Amen.

Carmen G. Narváez (Puerto Rico)

UNDERNEATH THE WORDS

READ Luke 8:1-15

[Jesus'] disciples asked him what this parable meant. He said, "The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of God has been given to you, but to others I speak in parables, so that, 'though seeing, they may not see; though hearing, they may not understand.'"

— Luke 8:9-10 (NIV)

All around Jesus and his disciples were scores of people, many of them religious leaders, who saw and heard but didn't understand. They saw the healings, the miracles; they heard the words of Jesus, his teachings; but they couldn't or wouldn't understand. Why? Because just as soil has to be softened to receive seed, our hearts must be ready to receive the word of God.

Many times an argument between two people isn't really about the subject they are discussing. Often it's about an earlier circumstance, often unrelated to the current conversation. (Stop in the middle of your next disagreement with someone close to you, and see if this is true.) The key to resolving a conflict is willingness to listen until we understand the feelings underneath the words, to come to a deeper level of understanding.

Christ wants to take us to that deeper understanding. The Pharisees weren't able or willing to go there, but we can be. We can learn to listen with our heart.

Prayer: Dear Lord, we want to hear you. We want to hear and understand our children, our parents, the people closest to us, and those with whom we work. Amen.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Today, I will listen
with my heart.

Dan G. Johnson (Florida)

3RD SUNDAY IN LENT

READ Acts 9:36-41

SUN
MAR 18
2012

For God alone my soul waits in silence. . . . Trust in him at all times, O people; pour out your heart before him; God is a refuge for us.

— Psalm 62:5, 8 (NRSV)

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Quiet time with God is a pause that spiritually refreshes.

Making quilts for friends and family became for me a spiritual discipline. I fell into a routine: work, home, dinner, tidy up, and quilt. I spent hours quilting — lost in thought about the God who created me (designing me just as I design my quilts), who knew me before I was born and “stitched me together” into being. The stillness of those moments provided the perfect setting for God to capture my attention.

I did not realize until recently that the time had become somehow sacred. Only after the projects were done and my quiet evenings were refilled with the busyness of life did I realize that I missed those moments of peace in which I could sit quietly before God and think, pray, and even at times lament. And God was there, reminding me of the great love shown to me through Jesus.

When I find my evenings starting to fill up with noisy activity, I am going to make more quilts.

I pray that I will be able to recreate those quiet moments and invite the Spirit of God to dwell within me, to teach me, to correct me, and to instruct me. Then I can minister to

others through the tangible warmth of a handmade quilt and through sharing the love and peace and comfort found in Christ.

Prayer: Dear God, when our lives are filled with busyness, remind us to seek quiet time to deepen our relationship with you. Amen.

Link2Life

Spend quiet time to create your own letter or artwork that celebrates a special relationship.

Penny Rasnake (Virginia)

STAYING IN TUNE

READ Romans 7:18-25

After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, support, strengthen, and establish you.

— 1 Peter 5:10 (NRSV)

As a guitar player, I find that keeping my guitar in tune is one of my most trying tasks. The guitar is susceptible to changes in

temperature and humidity that affect the strings. And often I strum with so much force that the strings lose their pitch. Keeping my guitar in tune requires frequent adjusting.

Link2Life

Click to see a picture of Jacob with his guitar.

For those of us who are vulnerable to wandering away from our faith, keeping our hearts in tune with God also requires attention. As the world buffets us, daily prayer and Bible study and frequent fellowship with other believers enable us to stay in tune with God and to resist temptations that can lure us away from faithful obedience.

God, in infinite grace, is ready and willing to forgive us, restore us, and help us keep our hearts in tune with our Creator.

Prayer: Dear Lord, help us to resist temptation and live in harmony with you as we pray, "Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, as in heaven, so in earth. Give us day by day our daily bread. And forgive us our sins; for we also forgive every one that is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil."* Amen.

Jacob C. Schneider (Maryland)

*Luke 11:2-4 (KJV).

TEARS OF COMPASSION

TUES
MAR 20
2012

READ **John 11:32-44**

Jesus wept.

— **John 11:35 (NIV)**

Life was going well for our family when I got a diagnosis no one wants to receive: “You have breast cancer that will require a mastectomy as soon as possible.”

We had questions. My three children were 17, 14, and seven. *Would I survive to see them grow up? Why did I need a mastectomy at 41 years old?* It felt unfair. We hurt, and we cried a lot.

On a Sunday afternoon drive, my husband and I noticed that in front of a country church a sign read, “Jesus wept.” Why did Jesus weep when he planned to raise Lazarus to life? When he saw Mary’s grief, her mourning over the loss of her brother, Jesus felt compassion for her.

When we grieve our losses, we are helped by reminders that Christ feels compassion for us. When we face unexpected disappointments — health problems, broken relationships, shattered dreams — we remember that Jesus understands. Since the Bible promises, “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever” (Heb. 13:8), we know that the same compassion Jesus felt for his friends he also feels for us.

Prayer: Dear God, thank you for the compassion you feel for us. Help us to trust you, even when we do not understand why losses have to come. Amen.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Christ feels compassion for me when I am hurting.

Brenda Tucker (South Carolina)

WHAT IS GRACE?

READ *Ephesians 2:4-10*

*God demonstrates his own love for us in this:
While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*

— Romans 5:8 (NIV)

I was in third grade when I committed what I thought was a horrible sin: I tore my math book. My feelings of guilt were confirmed by my seatmate. “You’re in trouble now!” she pronounced.

I panicked. What would my punishment be? My handmade clothes and home-style haircut showed that my family could not afford to replace the textbook. I decided that confessing was easier than getting caught, so I headed for the teacher’s desk. With tears, I admitted my guilt.

To my surprise, she reached for her tape dispenser, pulled off a piece of tape the length of my six-inch ruler, smoothed it into place along the torn page, and handed back the book. “There. All fixed,” she said, bestowing on me a smile that melted my fear.

Years later I struggled with the Christian term *grace*. Whenever I asked veteran Christians to define the word, I got pat answers: the acrostic “God’s Riches At Christ’s Expense” or the pithy, “God’s unmerited favor.” Not until I remembered what a third-grade teacher did for a guilt-ridden student did I understand grace. My definition of grace comes not from what she said but from what she did.

Prayer: Dear Lord, use us to help others understand your love and grace that reach past our sin. Amen.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Each of us can be to others a picture of God’s grace.

Karen Wingate (Illinois)

WOULD YOU PRAY FOR ME?

THUR
MAR 22
2012

READ Proverbs 3:5-6

*The prayer of faith will save the sick,
and the Lord will raise them up.*

— James 5:15 (NRSV)

I was calling Sandra Zaiter to ask her to speak at a Thanksgiving Day luncheon. For many years she worked in Puerto Rico as a director of children's TV programs. My generation grew up watching and learning from her as she gave timely advice and taught us everything from everyday values to simple mathematics.

Link2Life

For information about **Sandra Zaiter**, click here.

Her life took a 180-degree turn in 1975. One day while at the beach, she decided to dive, unaware that the tide had receded and that rocks were close beneath the surface. The impact with them left her a quadriplegic. Nevertheless, her professional life continued. Now I was calling to invite her to share her thoughts about being thankful. As our conversation drew to a close, she asked, "Pastor, in a few days I'll be having some medical tests. Would you pray for me?" We spent a few more moments on the telephone as I prayed for this national television personality.

After the call, I opened *El Aposento Alto* (the Spanish edition of *The Upper Room*) to read the meditation for the day. The title of it was, "Pray for Me"!* Praying for others is more than an opportunity; it is a privilege God presents to us. That day I learned that when we are asked to pray for someone, we should do it. God will take care of the rest.

Prayer: Loving God, grant us the sensitivity to recognize and act on opportunities to pray for others. Amen.

Julio R. Vargas Vidal (Puerto Rico)

*November 10, 2010.

FRI
MAR 23
2012

DEEP ROOTS

READ Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

When the sun rose, [the seeds] were scorched; and since they had no root, they withered away.

— Matthew 13:6 (NRSV)

Early one morning while watering the small garden on our balcony, I noticed that the brambles around the flowers were

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

How can I nurture the seeds of love and goodness that God has planted in me?

thick and strong. I pulled out the brambles and put them on the floor. Later I looked out on the balcony and noticed that the brambles had wilted. The reason was simple: their

roots were no longer receiving nutrients from the earth.

This reminded me of the sower in today's scripture and the seeds that were cast on rocky ground. The plants sprang up quickly but did not flourish because there was little soil and no depth for their roots to take hold.

This parable tells us why believers who stray from God wither spiritually when faced with difficulties. For us to meet life's challenges, we need God's word to be deeply rooted in us and our faith to be deeply rooted in Christ.

Prayer: Dear Lord, help us to receive the seeds of your word so that our faith will take root, thrive, and remain strong. Amen.

Richard E. Rodriguez (Valle del Cauca, Colombia)

INCLINE YOUR EAR

SAT
MAR 24
2012

READ **Jeremiah 29:10-14**

The LORD says, “*Incline your ear, and come unto me: hear, and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you.*”

— Isaiah 55:3 (KJV)

Whenever I think of my father, I picture him at our kitchen table. During the early hours of morning, I commonly found him sitting there with his Bible open and his head bowed. He was either reading or praying, so I moved about the kitchen in silence until he spoke first.

One particular day, I knew that something was different. My father had an appointment with his attorney. Several business partners had left my father with a debt he couldn't pay. My father was going to lose his business and the home we loved so much.

He chose to trust God to look after us. No matter what he lost, no one could take away his faith in the God he loved. That faith might be all he had at the end of this day, but his faith was enough.

My father did lose his business and our home. The people around him could not understand his joy after losing so much. Recovering from this great loss took several years and a lot of prayer and hard work, but God restored even more than we lost.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

God's commitment to us outlasts anything life can bring.

Prayer: Dear God, help us to trust you with the circumstances of our lives. Amen.

Sheryl Buckner (Virginia)

SUN
MAR 25
2012

4TH SUNDAY IN LENT

READ John 20:1-9

The women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell [Jesus'] disciples.

— Matthew 28:8 (NIV)

When I have an empty stomach, I tend to grumble and complain about my hunger. When my car's gas tank becomes empty, it always seems that fuel prices have just taken another jump. And like any preacher, I don't enjoy looking out from the pulpit and seeing empty pews.

Oddly enough, however, the best news in history is, "It's empty!" On Easter morning the tomb where Jesus was laid was found empty. The stone had been rolled away, the body of Jesus Christ was gone, and the news of his resurrection began to spread from that moment on. The women who were the first witnesses of this miracle ran to share the story.

The Church of Jesus Christ has been "running on empty" ever since. Nearly 2000 years later, we're still celebrating the good news of the empty tomb and passing it on to those who haven't yet heard or don't yet believe. Because of the empty tomb our hearts can be filled with joy. Because of the empty tomb our homes can be filled with faith, hope, and love. Because of the empty tomb we know that the promise of eternal life is true.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Because of the empty tomb,
we know the promise
of eternal life is true.

Prayer: Faithful God, fill us with your joy, that others may see your life in us. Amen.

Jonathan Truax (Ohio)

SPEAK UP!

MON
MAR 26
2012

READ Nehemiah 2:1-10

Nehemiah prayed, "O LORD, let your ear be attentive to the prayer of your servant. . . . Give success to your servant today, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man!" At the time, I was cupbearer to the king.

— Nehemiah 1:11 (NRSV)

After completing my professional education, I accepted a job in a supervisory role for a large company. I was the only Christian employee working at that level, though the company did employ a few other Christians.

During Lent, I asked the Director of Human Resources for a day off to observe Good Friday. He informed me that this day was not on the company's list of official holidays. Then he asked me about the origin and significance of Good Friday. I tried my best to explain my faith and understanding about the death and resurrection of Jesus the Christ and its importance in the Christian life. The director listened to me with interest. After this, I returned to my office.

About 30 minutes later, I received a phone call from the director. He informed me that the managing director for the company had given approval to include Good Friday in the list of authorized holidays for Christian employees. I was overjoyed to hear this good news! In this rather unusual situation, the Lord enabled me to use my position to share the good news of Christ and to improve the work environment for the Christian minority in my workplace.

Prayer: Dear God, thank you for our faith. Help us to look for opportunities to share the good news of the gospel. Amen.

Zafar Iqbal (Punjab, Pakistan)

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

How can I use my influence to tell the story of Christ?

TUES
MAR 27
2012

PATHETIC OR PROMISING?

READ Psalm 51:6-12

Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me. . . . Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free spirit.

— Psalm 51:10, 12 (KJV)

Every year after Easter Sunday worship, we have all our children and grandchildren over for a big meal, and afterwards some of us

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

God takes us from
pathetic to promising.

play in the yard. This year while I was retrieving a ball my grandson had thrown, I noticed one of the maple seedlings I had planted last fall. I remembered that when

I set out the tiny seedlings last October, they had looked pretty pathetic. At the time I wondered if they would make it through the winter. As I looked closely at the little seedling, I was surprised to find a new bud giving way to tiny leaves.

I soon found myself thinking of Easter's time of renewing and restoring life — not only in nature but also within me, as a time for me to examine myself and renew my spiritual life. I remembered the psalmist's words, "Renew a right spirit within me. . . . Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation."

We don't have to look very far to see God at work in the world around us. By God's grace and love we are fed, strengthened and renewed — not only during the Easter season but every day.

Prayer: Dear Father, help us to recognize where the Holy Spirit is working in us, and grant us the courage and strength to cooperate in what the Spirit is doing. Amen.

Bob Kirkwood (Ohio)

GOD'S WORD

WED
MAR 28
2012

READ Romans 8:31-39

Paul wrote, "I am convinced that neither death, nor life, . . . nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."

— Romans 8:38-39 (NRSV)

Lily and her husband, Ed, were loving and devout parents. This child was their fourth; and as her physician I anticipated

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

The words of scripture can strengthen us and give us life.

a quick, uncomplicated delivery. When Lily was ready to deliver, she excitedly squeezed Ed's hand and pushed. Suddenly everything changed. The

baby's heartbeat crashed. "Push hard, now!" I urged.

Terrified and exhausted, Lily clutched Ed's hand and pleaded, "Help me!" He looked at her and at the baby's heart monitor. Then he grabbed her hand between both of his hands, and in a strong, reassuring voice began to speak the words of Romans 8:38-39.

While he spoke, Lily pushed with all her strength. She became stronger. I could feel the powerful calm that enveloped us all as we struggled to deliver the baby. With a surge of strength and determination, she pushed their baby boy into the world. His heart rate was slow, his breathing shallow, but he quickly responded to resuscitation and wailed with vigor.

I often think of that delivery when a husband spoke words of God's presence and power. This couple taught me about faith by their witness to the power of scripture.

Prayer: Dear God, give us the strength of your word. Amen.

Linda Beahm (Virginia)

THUR
MAR 29
2012

RECYCLED LOVE

READ Matthew 25:31-46

[The king] will reply, "I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me."

— Matthew 25:45 (NIV)

A woman often comes to our house on Sunday afternoons asking for our old newspapers and magazines. One week after I gave them to her, I asked her, "Do you sell them?"

She responded, "No, madam. I give them away. I take the newspapers to an elderly man so he can cover his walls to make his room warmer."

I inquired further, "And what about the magazines?"

She answered, "They are for a paraplegic young woman whose days are more pleasant by having something to read."

I stared at the face of this woman carrying the heavy bags of magazines and papers. "Is this not too much weight for you?" I asked.

But she replied, "Oh, no! I am going to get more!"

I learned a beautiful lesson from this woman. With few material possessions of her own, she was caring for people more needy than she. What an example of how Jesus taught us to live!

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

We find life when we
live for others.

Prayer: Beloved God, we want to share your gifts and your teaching with other people. So fill us with your love that we eagerly help others in your name. Amen.

Anizia D. Chagas Von-Held (Rio de Janeiro, Brazil)

PLANTING SEED

FRI
MAR 30
2012

READ Mark 4:1-20

Paul wrote, *“I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth.”*

— 1 Corinthians 3:6 (NRSV)

I live in a rural area where many people plant vegetable gardens. One friend had a tradition of always planting potatoes on Good Friday. But one year the ground was still frozen on that day. Nevertheless, with a heavy, sharp shovel and a lot of work, he managed to plant his potatoes. Those of us who knew him laughed gently about it; we thought he had simply wasted his time.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Plant, tend as you can, and leave the rest to God.

Imagine our surprise when later in the year he harvested a nice crop of potatoes. Some of the seed potatoes had survived and grown in spite of the harsh conditions.

That memory helps me continue to read, live, and speak the word of God even when I am around people who seem to reject what they see and hear. There was a time when I was afraid of that rejection. I thought the seed of God's word would simply perish in the harshness of their hearts anyway. But the faith of a gardener planting potatoes in harsh conditions increased my faith in the worth of planting seeds for God in all conditions. Weeks, months, or even years later, those seeds may sprout and grow into a harvest as one more person comes to belief in the Creator.

Prayer: Dear God, help us overcome fear or laziness so that we are always ready to speak for you. Guard and nourish every seed of faith planted by the actions of your people. Amen.

Gale A. Richards (Iowa)

WHAT TO DO?

READ Acts 22:2-11

Paul said, “I asked, ‘What am I to do, Lord?’ The Lord said to me, ‘Get up and go to Damascus; there you will be told everything that has been assigned to you to do.’”

— Acts 22:10 (NRSV)

It often seems that just when I have things figured out, something new comes along to confound me. My family has faced several situations lately that just aren't what we had expected: health problems, a daughter moving to another state, the opportunity for one of us to attend college later in life.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Changes are constant, but so are God's guidance and love.

Each of these creates questions that must be answered. To that end, I often ask, like Paul, “Lord, what do you want me to do?”

Saul's conversion on the road to Damascus was dramatic. His life changed in an instant. Often our own lives change in an instant as well. And when dramatic changes occur, our reaction to our circumstances can be like Saul's: “Lord, what do you want me to do?” After we ask the question, we wait for God's answer.

This waiting is often the hardest part of the process, and we probably won't hear the Lord's voice as Saul did. But God speaks to us nonetheless. Often our Christian family can be God's voice speaking to us. When we talk with someone we trust who believes in God, we may hear God speak. When we search God's word and pray, God's answer for us will come as surely as the answer came to Saul.

Prayer: Dear God, sometimes when we don't know what to do, circumstances threaten to overwhelm us. Keep speaking to us until we hear you. Amen.

Margie J. Harding (Maryland)

PALM SUNDAY

SUN
APR 1
2012

READ Matthew 26:17-35

[Jesus] said, "Go into the city to a certain man, and say to him, 'The Teacher says, My time is near; I will keep the Passover at your house with my disciples.'"

— Matthew 26:18 (NRSV)

Reading today's passage may cause some to protest. The kind soul who volunteers to host the Passover is casually referred to as "a certain man." In his defense we might say, "Doesn't he have a name? Being overlooked never feels good. Doesn't his hospitality warrant disclosure of his identity?" The apparent ill-treatment of this "certain man" seems out of character with Jesus' earlier message concerning the judgment of the nations. In that message Jesus says those who show kindness toward "the least of these" will inherit the kingdom (Matt. 25:31-40). Why, then, is the host in today's passage relegated to obscurity?

One nagging thought interrupts this protest. *We* may not know the identity of the "certain man," but *Jesus* did and trusted him to make arrangements for the Passover meal that we remember as the Last Supper. Some Bible scholars speculate that the unidentified man was actually the writer of the Gospel of Mark.

It may seem that we are anonymous in the world's eyes, but Jesus knows who and where we are. He may also need our willingness to serve him selflessly, without public praise or acknowledgment. Can we? Will we? Whom can God count on for certain?

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

I will serve Jesus Christ without needing public praise.

Prayer: Dear Jesus, help us to be willing to serve you whether we receive thanks or not. Amen.

Kwasi I. Kena (Tennessee)

MANY CROSSES, ONE CHRIST

Crosses of different styles, materials, and colors fill one wall of the room in my home where I have my regular time with God. I also collect crosses that I wear. One piece from Bulgaria copies a section of a famous cross. The necklace I have been wearing during Lent, a present from a dear friend, depicts events in the life of Jesus. I especially treasure a cross from El Salvador that shows Christ surrounded by flowers and people from Central America because this Christ looks as if he is about to give the world a hug.

The crosses in my collection are more than decorations; to me they represent our human efforts to understand the meaning of Jesus' death. The Gospels describe the disciples as puzzled, afraid, distraught, even doubtful in the time surrounding the Crucifixion. After the Resurrection, the New Testament writers recorded their exploration of all their questions; one answer was not enough.

My personal understandings of the meaning of Jesus' death have many dimensions too. Some of my crosses, particularly the one from Bulgaria, remind me of our human capacity for evil and violence. A section of that cross pictures Jesus at the moment of crucifixion, surrounded by his mother and his disciples. A blameless man "attested . . . by God with deeds of power, wonders, and signs that God did through him" (Acts 2:22, NRSV), suffered a humiliating death. A man free of guilt and without sin (2 Cor. 5:21; 1 Pet. 2:22; Heb. 4:15) was accused, found guilty, and tortured. Finally, he was nailed to a cross, exposed to the ultimate humiliation.

Sadly, we are not free of guilt in all this: "Were you there when they crucified my Lord?" the old spiritual asks. We are capable of the same cruelty — of judging others, condemning without proof, moving with the mob rather than discerning for ourselves the truth, participating in oppression, or ignoring someone we see being treated unjustly.

Though we are capable of cruelty, Christ is able to show mercy and healing in all the settings of our life. Christ has saved us from eternal sin and death, but time and again we need healing and forgiveness. Our salvation is a long-term project. We will need to repent and to receive God's grace all our days. And God offers that grace freely.

Scenes on my cross show Jesus washing the disciples' feet and blessing the children. One scene shows wheat and grapes, reminders of the meal that symbolizes Jesus' covenant with his people. A dove symbolizes God's promise to give us power and to stay with us. After being abandoned by his disciples, Jesus the Christ came to give them hope, to offer Peter a new chance, and to promise them power to witness to his love.

For centuries the message of the Christ has crossed generations and continents to give people hope. We believe because someone in the past talked about God's grace to others who came to believe — and then told others who told others, who told others who, eventually, told us. My grandfather kept his well-used copy of *El Aposento Alto*, the Spanish version of *The Upper Room*, next to his Bible. I saw *El Aposento Alto* in the hands of my parents daily. My faith began with their example of faith represented by their reading scripture and praying, their participating in a community of faith, and their trusting in God's grace. The image of Christ about to hug the world reminds me of the tenderness of my grandfather and his love for us. The flowers, the little houses next to Jesus, and the mountains bring memories of my grandparents' farm. Like the psalmist, I can gladly say, "Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all generations" (Ps. 90:1).

The cross invites us to look at our sin and our guilt, accepting that we were there when they crucified our Lord. I have been guilty of cruelty and violence. I have judged others. I have participated in lynching others with my words. But I have also known God's grace. I have experienced God's love and the forgiveness I don't deserve. This season invites each of us to look at the cross and ask, "What do the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus the Christ mean for me in my need, my guilt, my sin?" My ancestors had to define their faith, to decide what they believed. So do we. Is the cross a symbol of death or of life for you?

Several meditations in this issue guide us to revisit the scenes of Jesus' final days. You may want to read again the meditations for March 3, 5, 6, 8, 9, 11, 21, 24, 25, 26, 28, and 30 and April 2, 3, 5, 6, 23, 26, and 27 to prepare for responding to the reflection questions on the next page.

Questions for Reflection:

1. What symbols or practices of the Christian faith hold special meaning for you, and why?
2. How do you feel about jewelry that depicts the cross? Why do you or why do you not display Christian symbols in your home or office?
3. What does the cross mean to you? How did you come to this understanding?
4. What part does confession have in your faith journey? Why?
5. What do you know about symbols and practices of the Christian faith from other countries or traditions? How do they differ from your own? What value might there be in reflecting on the differences and similarities among various Christian traditions?
6. What do the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ mean to you? How have you recently come to see them in a new way?

— CARMEN GAUD

Carmen M. Gaud was born in Puerto Rico. She is an elder in the United Methodist Church and a member of the Desert Southwest Conference. Carmen has been the editor of *El Aposento Alto* since 1995. Before working at The Upper Room, she worked as the editor of resources in Spanish for the United Methodist Publishing House.



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FROM DESOLATION TO HOPE

MON
APR 2
2012

READ Daniel 9:20-27

Gabriel said, "At the beginning of your supplications a word went out, and I have come to declare it, for you are greatly beloved."

— Daniel 9:23 (NRSV)

During the season of Lent, we are invited to examine our lives and our faith to see where we have failed or fallen short in faith and practice. Then we enter the beauty of Palm Sunday, and later we watch as the tide of opinion turns against the Anointed One. After remembering and reenacting a meal in an upper room, we weep before a cross and a grave.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

In every loss God offers hope.

This passage from the Book of Daniel may seem a strange reading for Holy Week. But Daniel contains images that resonate with the experiences of Jesus and his world. We are reminded that in the midst of the world's stark realities, hope exists. The messenger Gabriel comes to Daniel to offer wisdom and understanding and to assure Daniel that he is greatly loved. Gabriel is the same messenger who assured Mary that she had found favor with God and would bear the son of the Most High who would save us from our transgressions.

The good news is this: Every struggle has within it a seed of hope; every calamity carries the possibility of redemption. God speaks through dreamers and messengers to show us the way to new life. A Word goes forth, full of grace and truth, and his name is Love. The night has begun to pass away. Already the True Light that enlightens the world is shining.

Prayer: Eternal God, open our hearts and minds to your loving presence, that we may be transformed in life and faith so that justice, kindness, and love may reign over all the earth. Amen.

F. Richard Garland (Rhode Island)

TUES
APR 3
2012

SURPRISED?

READ Matthew 28:1-10

The angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; he has risen."

— Matthew 28:5-6 (NIV)

The one consistent element in the gospel accounts of that first Easter morning is that everyone was surprised. No one expected an empty tomb, much less the presence of the risen Christ. The women who came to the tomb had good reason to be surprised. They had watched Jesus die. They had seen his bloody, lifeless body taken off the cross. They had followed Joseph to the tomb. They had heard the heavy thud of the stone that was rolled in front of the opening. They knew Jesus was dead.

The only way to feel the surprise of resurrection is to face the reality of death. The only way to be prepared for Easter morning is to experience the emotion and events of Holy Week.

As a pastor, I've discovered that I don't need to encourage people to be in worship on Easter Sunday. But each year I find myself doing everything I can to encourage people to be here on Maundy Thursday when we join Jesus and his disciples for the Last Supper and Good Friday when we experience the darkness that fell over the earth when Jesus died. Once we have followed the way that leads to the cross, we can better experience the surprise of Easter morning.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

How am I following the way that leads to the cross?

Prayer: O God, thank you for the glorious surprise of Easter. Thank you for the love we see in Jesus Christ. Amen.

James A. Harnish (Florida)

FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT

WED
APR 4
2012

READ Galatians 5:13-26

The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things.

— Galatians 5:22-23 (NRSV)

One day on the way to the office, I saw a driver who seemed quite impatient. He drove his car recklessly from one lane to another, trying hard to get ahead of the other cars. Then I noticed a Christian symbol on his car's rear window. It occurred to me that many people might have wondered whether such an inconsiderate driver was truly a follower of Christ.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
When we live the fruit of the Spirit our faith becomes real.

All of us could easily be as guilty of impatient actions as that driver — especially if we are behind schedule and trying to make up time. We might behave in ways that even more blatantly contradict our Christian faith. Others — including unbelievers — always see us. That's why Jesus commanded us to do good: in order to bring glory to God.

Galatians 5:22-23 reminds us of the fruit of the Spirit, the last of which is self-control. This is perhaps the most challenging gift of all because we are usually in the midst of hectic days. But remembering to live the fruit of the Spirit lets others see our faith in Christ in all the actions of our lives.

Prayer: Dear Father, help us to have self-control in whatever we do each day so that our actions may glorify your name. Amen.

Marcelina Dewi Kumalasari (Jakarta, Indonesia)

THUR
APR 5
2012

THE LAST MEAL

READ 1 Corinthians 11:23-26

*Whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup,
you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.*

— 1 Corinthians 11:26 (NIV)

In most cultures, condemned prisoners can ask for anything within reason for their last meal. Their requests are sometimes

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Today may be my last day to share the news of salvation.

unusual: tacos, fried okra, half a cake. Sometimes they are more mundane: steak, chicken, ice cream. I've often wondered what it would be like to know I was consuming

the last meal I'd ever eat and also what food I'd request for that meal.

Even as Jesus ate his last meal, he continued to teach the disciples, using the bread and wine to drive home a point they were unwilling to accept. He was going to die. They didn't get the full import of the message until after his sacrificial death and glorious resurrection. But for centuries afterward Christians have celebrated what we now call the Lord's Supper to memorialize what Jesus did for us.

The next time we sit down to a meal, what if we imagined this would be our last one? Perhaps we'd go out of our way to make the rest of the day count a bit more. We might even be encouraged to tell someone else about a Savior who, at his last meal and with his last breath, thought of us. What a wonderful gift he gave us! Why not share it?

Prayer: Dear Father, never let us forget the sacrifice that is at the heart of Easter. Amen.

Richard Mabry (Texas)

GOOD FRIDAY

FRI
APR 6
2012

READ Psalm 100

God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

— John 3:16 (NIV)

I woke up determined to be sad. After all, Good Friday was the day Christ died. I considered fasting, a Good Friday tradition that invites Christ's followers to consider his suffering. But then I got hungry. I looked out the window, expecting to see a dark, dreary day because of the saying that it always rains on Good Friday. But when I looked outside, I saw a beautiful spring day. I simply couldn't get out of my good mood.

I went downstairs and read a note my daughter had written for me. She reminded me that I have often said, "God loves you, and so do I." Her words helped me to understand.

I remembered that I had briefly awakened the previous night with the distinct and wonderful thought: *How God must love us to sacrifice Jesus! How Christ must love us to endure that agony!* How can I help but feel joy when I recognize and feel God's love? I was joyful that morning because Good Friday is an occasion for joy.

The first Good Friday was a sad day, but every Good Friday since has been a joyful reminder that Jesus died for our sins. Even more amazing is that on Easter morning he conquered death for us all.

Prayer: Dear Lord, thank you for the ultimate sacrifice you made for us on that first Good Friday. Amen.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Good Friday is good because it shows how far God will go to save us.

Bruce Bedingfield (Illinois)

SAT
APR 7
2012

ONE IN CHRIST

READ 1 Corinthians 12:12-20

You are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.

— 1 Corinthians 12:27 (NIV)

Once again our mission group arrived at Back Bay Mission in Biloxi, Mississippi. Since it was several years after Hurricane

Katrina, our band was struck by how empty that area remained. In addition to many deserted lots, some small trailers still stood beside houses in disrepair.

Link2Life

Click to see pictures of David's group helping after Katrina.

That night several of us described what we saw: the devastation of the area, its poverty, and the atmosphere of hopelessness. After years we saw much destruction and much that still needed to be rebuilt.

The next afternoon, as we had been working in teams on two different houses, we noticed something. Just four houses down from our United Methodist/United Church of Christ team, a group from a Mennonite church worked. Farther down the street was a team from a Presbyterian church, and just three houses from them, a group of Catholic mission campers.

That night as we talked again, we realized that hope sometimes comes in little bits. Later in the week local residents thanked us, saying that churches around the country were still making a difference and helping to keep hope alive for the residents of the area. The body of Christ has many different parts, but when we act in Christ's name, serving with others, we become the living hands and feet of Christ working to rebuild homes and lives.

Prayer: Dear God, bless all of us as we work together to serve you. Amen.

David Russell (Illinois)

EASTER SUNDAY

SUN
APR 8
2012

READ John 4:46-54

Jesus said, *“I came that [my sheep] may have life, and have it abundantly.”*

— John 10:10 (NRSV)

My heart was deeply stirred. My daughter, my little girl now actually an adult, was in deep distress. A significant relationship had suddenly ended. She had been praying for something to change in this relationship, but what had happened? Death. “That’s not what I expected,” she said.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
Because Christ is risen, the final word is not death but life.

About 120 miles north of where I live is the city of Christchurch. In February 2011, a violent earthquake destroyed the central city, took many lives, and wrecked homes, schools, businesses, and the lives of thousands. Death. Not expected.

The Gospel of John tells of an official whose son was dying. Disregarding rank and his dignity, this man asks Jesus to come to his home and heal the boy. “Go; your son will live,” says Jesus. At the moment Jesus spoke, the boy’s condition changed, and he lived. Because of Jesus, not death but life.

Death is ever near in all human affairs. But today, in defiance of death, we celebrate that Christ is bigger than our deaths. He calls us to believe his words, “I came that [you] may have life!” As we face deaths of many kinds, we too have life when we believe Christ’s words. It is a mystery, but our believing cuts through death’s threats and takes the hand of God. And in the hand of God, living or dying, we too will live — for Christ is risen! Hallelujah!

Prayer: Living Christ, we celebrate your victory over death. We welcome your power that as your agents, we may bear your life into the world. All glory to you, now and forever. Amen.

John Franklin (New Zealand)

NOT ME

READ Amos 7:12-15

Amos answered Amaziah, "I am no prophet, nor a prophet's son; but I am a herdsman, and a dresser of sycamore trees."

— Amos 7:14 (NRSV)

Sometimes a verse of scripture strikes me as humorous; Amos 7:14 did the first time I read it. In that passage, God asked Amos to do something new — something Amos had never done before. Amos tells Amaziah that he is neither a prophet nor the son of a prophet. He is nothing more than a herdsman and a tender of sycamore trees. I think Amos' comment is a bit funny, perhaps because I can relate to it so well.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

With God, we are more than we think we are.

Though Amos is not making excuses in the context of this passage, what he says sounds a lot like what I might say when I am making excuses. How many times when I have perceived God asking me to do something, whether it was to go on a mission trip, write a devotional, or teach a Sunday school class, have I told God I didn't think I was up to the task? How many times have I replied, "But Lord, I am not a teacher, or the daughter of a teacher . . . I am just a housewife and a tender of tomato plants!"

But we can trust that just as God equipped Amos, God will equip us to do whatever we are asked to do. The Lord asks us to risk doing more than just taking care of our herds, sycamore trees, and tomato plants.

Prayer: O God, help us to accomplish what you ask of us, even though we are inexperienced and insecure. Grant us hearts and hands willing to do your work. Amen.

Harriet Michael (Kentucky)

GOT WINE?

TUES
APR 10
2012

READ John 2:1-11

The first of his miraculous signs, Jesus performed at Cana in Galilee. He thus revealed his glory, and his disciples put their faith in him.

— John 2:11 (NIV)

We might expect the Son of God to begin his public ministry with a spectacular miracle: raising someone from the dead, healing a leper, multiplying loaves and fishes, casting out an evil spirit, calming a raging storm, or walking on water. But Jesus launches his ministry of miracles by saving a party.

The guests at the wedding reception have drunk all the wine. So Jesus makes more. Turning water into wine doesn't bring anybody back from the dead or free anyone from life-threatening illness. It does, however, reveal a God who is interested not only in the spiritual dimension of our lives or the life-and-death issues.

The Lord works in the average, everyday, run-of-the-mill, mundane moments of our lives. A relationship with a God who was interested in only the big issues of life would be no more personal than our relationship with the emergency operator on the telephone. But our infinite, almighty God chooses to relate to us on an intimate level, not from Mount Sinai but in our homes.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Our big God often works
in small ways.

Prayer: Dear Lord Jesus, may we recognize the many small miracles in our lives today. Amen.

James N. Watkins (Indiana)

BELOW THE SURFACE

READ Luke 7:36-50

Now when the Pharisee who had invited him saw [the woman weeping and bathing Jesus' feet with her tears], he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what kind of woman this is who is touching him — that she is a sinner."

— Luke 7:39 (NRSV)

Recently as we traveled the familiar road toward our home, I took time to look beyond the front yards of the houses we passed and to focus on what lay behind them. I was surprised to see rose gardens and gazebos that I had failed to notice before, as well as garages, shops, and even a trash pile that wasn't readily obvious.

Reflecting on this, I realized that usually I look only at the surface of both places and people. I judge by outward appearances, often not taking time to look behind the exterior.

The Bible tells us that Jesus saw more than the obvious. He recognized "flower beds" in lives deemed ugly.

Too often we do not see what lies in the "backyards" of other people. But when we strive to look closely at the people we meet, we can grow to love them as Christ does.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Jesus valued each person he met; so can I.

Prayer: Dear Lord, help us to see the hidden worth of the people we encounter each day. Lead us to love as you love. Amen.

Joette McDonald (Ohio)

FAMILY RESEMBLANCE

THUR
APR 12
2012

READ Ephesians 5:1-20

*Be imitators of God, as beloved children,
and live in love, as Christ loved.*

— Ephesians 5:1-2 (NRSV)

When I was a child, a couple living nearby adopted a child. As the child grew, he developed an admirable character. His

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

We can come to reflect God's likeness through prayer and scripture reading.

physical appearance, movements, mannerisms, and facial expressions — everything about the child — would cause doubt that he was adopted. The same was true as he grew up.

As a child, youth, and young man, he was like his adoptive father. That loving family's imprint on the child was made in the intimate relationships of daily living.

How is our relationship with Christ? Do we find time to be with him, to read his words and follow his teachings? More important, do we respond as he would? Do we “live in love, as Christ loved”? Do others see us as beloved children of God?

Prayer: Live in our hearts, Father, that through prayer and meditation on your holy word we may reflect your spirit. Make us like Jesus who taught us to pray, “Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.”*

Aníbal Hernández (Tucumán, Argentina)

*Matthew 6:9-13 (KJV).

FRI
APR 13
2012

TRUST ANYWAY

READ Isaiah 55:6-9

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

— Proverbs 3:5-6 (NIV)

No matter how hard I tried, I just couldn't see the two whitetail deer. Though I searched where my husband pointed, all I saw

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Today, I will trust God even when I cannot see or understand what God is doing.

was a thicket bordering the mountain meadow where we were walking. Staring into the tangle of branches and leaves, I strained to see them. Frustration and anxiety began to rise in me as

Carl described the lovely animals. *Why can't I see them?* I thought, eyes still focused on the thicket. *Is Carl playing a trick on me?*

I shifted my focus from the thicket to my husband. When he looked down at me, it suddenly didn't matter that I couldn't see the deer. I knew they were there because I know my husband. Observing his character and conduct through the years allows me to trust him, even when what he says doesn't make sense to me. Also, I remembered that he stands head and shoulders above me so his vantage point is different than mine.

At that moment I remembered that God's vantage point is infinitely higher than mine. God sees the total picture, not just the tangle of situational "branches and leaves" that sometimes confounds me. When I shift my focus, I know I can trust God's love, character, conduct, and word — even when things don't make sense from my point of view.

Prayer: Faithful God, help us to know you well enough to trust you even when we don't understand. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

Deborah Slate Ginder (Virginia)

THROUGH GOD'S EYES

SAT
APR 14
2012

READ 2 Corinthians 5:14-21

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 (NRSV)

I was visiting a friend in the hospital when a nurse came to say it was time for lunch. When I asked my friend about the hospital food, she replied, “When people complain about the food, I tell them, ‘God makes it all perfect and delicious; it’s humans who ruin it.’”

Her words caused me to reflect that it’s not just food that we ruin. Every day, children are born into this world. Each begins as a little baby with promise and an open future. Knowing this and reading Ephesians 2:10, I think about those who are homeless or incarcerated. I wonder, *Aren’t those who were neglected or mistreated as children, those who end up in detention centers, prisons or homeless shelters, also made in God’s image and created for life in Christ Jesus?* All of us come into the world with promise, imprinted with God’s desire that we live fully.

No matter what we do that can ruin our lives or how much abuse others inflict on us, that child still lives somewhere deep inside each of us. God can re-create any of us from within, restoring us and giving us new life. And that restoration can begin on any day we offer ourselves to God.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

No matter what life does to us, God offers us restoration and hope.

Prayer: Dear Lord, help us to value each person, looking at one another through your eyes of love. Amen.

Dan Nelson (North Carolina)

SUN
APR 15
2012

PRIORITY SPENDING

READ Matthew 25:14-30

To one he gave five talents of money, to another two talents, and to another one talent, each according to his ability.

— Matthew 25:15 (NIV)

This past Sunday in worship, our pastor preached on the familiar story of Jesus feeding the 5,000. (See Matt. 14:13-21.) In that story, Jesus' disciples offered two fish and five loaves of bread to him, and that meager fare became enough to feed the multitude. The disciples saw how powerful small gifts could be when they were placed in Jesus' hands.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

How would I have spent the money in my envelope?

On Sunday, our pastor concluded his sermon in a surprising way. He had the ushers distribute envelopes containing money — five, ten or twenty dollars each — to the congregation. He then challenged us to use the money prayerfully, doing as much good as possible with it for people outside our church.

Our congregation came alive in discussion about how each of us might use our money in ways that our gifts — like those of the disciples — could be multiplied in serving God. *But isn't this what we are asked to do every day?* How we use what God gives us — yes, our money, but also all of our other possessions and our talents — defines who we are as God's people.

Prayer: Father God, may your will be done as we make decisions about how we spend our money and use our talents. We want to be faithful. Amen.

Gary R. Dowdy (Tennessee)

A LAMP AND A LIGHT

MON
APR 16
2012

READ Psalm 119:1-11

The psalmist wrote, “Your word, [O LORD], is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.”

— Psalm 119:105 (NRSV)

I have been reading *The Upper Room* for more than 50 years. When I became a teacher in a school run by missionaries, I never

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Every part of the Bible has something to say to us. Read a new passage.

missed meditating on the message in *The Upper Room* before my first class began.

Now it has become my habit to also read the recommended Bible verses; otherwise, in my regular

Bible reading I tend to read only the passages I like. Reading the Bible verses suggested each day helps broaden my perspective and gives deeper meaning to the writer’s testimony and how that portion of God’s word relates to life. Moreover, after 50 or more years, I realize that the words of scripture as well as the words of testimony from the writers have become “a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.”

Now I use *The Upper Room* as the guide for our family altar — our regular time with God. I continue my journey of getting to know God better and better as I spend time in meditation and prayer with my family.

Prayer: O Lord, we know your word will never pass away. May it be a light for our path, forever leading us closer to you. Amen.

Link2Life

Find out about the work of a missionary from your church or area who is in another country. Pray for his or her ministry.

Seung Jae Oh (Taejon, Korea)

TUES
APR 17
2012

WEATHERING THE STORMS

READ 2 Corinthians 4:6-12

Jesus said, "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."

— John 16:33 (NIV)

A severe rainstorm approached our town like a threatening and uninvited houseguest. The media warned us to prepare, so

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

We have no choice about when storms come, but we can choose to prepare our spirit to face them.

my husband cleaned our rain gutters and stored our lawn furniture. I gathered flashlights and bottled water. At dawn, we awoke to wind gusting through the trees as a downpour hammered the ground. But

because we had prepared, we were able to face the storm with less anxiety.

Life is full of times of preparation. We prepare for school exams and job promotions. We prepare for a baby to be born, for retirement, and yes, even for harsh weather. Should we not then prepare our minds and spirits for life's inevitable personal storms?

When we faithfully read the Bible and pray, we prepare spiritually for the storms of life. This may sound simple, but such disciplines help us to know God's character more deeply so that when trials occur, we won't feel overwhelmed and question God's goodness. Instead, because of our intimacy with God, we will know that God is ever-present in any storm. And we can know God's peace through it all.

Prayer: Merciful Father, thank you for being with us in the midst of our storms. Help us grow closer to you by reading your word and spending time with you in prayer. Amen.

Karen Y. Foster (California)

DAILY COURAGE

WED
APR 18
2012

READ Joshua 1:1-9

*Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged,
for the LORD your God will be with
you wherever you go.*

— Joshua 1:9 (NIV)

As I waited for my husband to complete his rigorous physical-therapy regimen, a poster in the office caught my eye. It said, “Courage doesn’t always roar. Sometimes courage is the quiet voice at the end of the day saying, ‘I will try again tomorrow.’”

Few of us will be called to do something as heroic as saving a child from a burning building, donating our bone marrow, or giving our life for our faith. But many of us will be called to live patiently with a handicap, to do our best at a frustrating job, or to love as Christ would even those whose apparent aim is to cause us misery. Those situations call for daily courage.

Whatever our circumstances, we can take heart from God’s words to Joshua: “Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go.” Whether our daily challenge is a stressful job, a stubborn child, or the struggle to recover from an illness or addiction, God is with us. We can turn to God for the courage to try again tomorrow.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Even for those who trust
God, sometimes just
showing up is a victory.

Prayer: Dear Lord, give us the courage to live as you would have us live, every day. Amen.

Lisa Stackpole (Wisconsin)

*Mary Anne Radmacher

THUR
APR 19
2012

THE TRUE GIFT

READ Mark 12:13-17

*Jesus . . . said unto them, Render to Caesar
the things that are Caesar's, and to
God the things that are God's.*

— Mark 12:17 (KJV)

Recently I received some Chinese money from a friend. Apart from being pink, it looked pretty much like the currency I'm

familiar with. What struck me most about it was the picture of Chairman Mao on one side. I realized then that money has not changed much since the time of Christ. When Jesus was

asked about paying taxes, he looked at a coin bearing Caesar's likeness and said, "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's."

I often manage to muddle up these two ideas. Too often I am happy to give to the church when really my heart is elsewhere — thinking about work, what I'll eat, my future plans. In effect, I have been giving my money to God when my heart is focused on worldly concerns.

Of course my giving to the church is not wrong; but if I do not give myself truly to God, my offerings of money are pointless. True generosity is about giving ourselves openly and unreservedly to God.

Prayer: Dear God, as we give our gifts to you, may we give the best that we have — our hearts and our lives — in gratitude for your great love for us. Amen.

Christopher McKenna (South Lanarkshire, Scotland)

FREEDOM AND JOY

FRI
APR 20
2012

READ 1 John 1:5-10

God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

— John 3:17 (NRSV)

As I prepared for my first year of teaching, the principal suggested that I allow my second-grade students to help create a list of classroom rules and the consequences for keeping or breaking them. I accepted a few of their suggestions for rewards, such as being the

first in line for lunch or for free time at the end of the day. But I had to throw out their ideas for punishment such as not being allowed to eat lunch or kneeling on rice for the rest of the day. The students were too harsh. Loving teachers want to correct bad behavior; they don't want to make students hate school.

I often think of this experience when I hear people say that God sent an earthquake to punish Haiti or a hurricane to teach New Orleans a lesson. Our God is a loving God who does not act in that way. Then again, God doesn't have to. Like my second-graders, we punish ourselves unmercifully. But God persists in offering us the freedom and joy of being forgiven.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
God is loving and forgiving.

Prayer: Loving God, thank you for filling us with the joy of your presence. Help us remember that you love us even when we sin. Amen.

Judy Northen (Texas)

THE CHILDREN

READ Zechariah 8:3-8

The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them. . . . They will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain; for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.

— Isaiah 11:6, 9 (NRSV)

When I open the Sunday paper, cynicism usually pervades my thinking. All the news seems bad or sad, and I usually feel

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

We are brothers and sisters
in spite of the conflicts
that divide us.

discouraged or depressed about what I read. But on this Sunday morning, children are pictured on the front page of the world-news section of the paper.

The picture catches my attention and then my heart. The girl, a Palestinian, is in a wheelchair; the boy is an Israeli Jew wounded by a Hamas rocket. The article says that they have developed a close friendship. It occurs to me that “of such is the kingdom of God” (Luke 18:16, KJV).

The children are enjoying and loving each other without regard to politics, injuries, scars, or disabilities. They remind us that we have the opportunity to see one another as children of God rather than as people labeled by politics or beliefs. To see beyond outward appearance is a challenge; but with prayer and faith, we can look deeper into ourselves and others to find ways to live in peace.

Prayer: Dear God, teach us to love one another as you love all your children. Amen.

Lynne Carver (Florida)

INCREASE THE HARVEST

SUN
APR 22
2012

READ **John 15:1-8**

Jesus said, *“This is to my Father’s glory,
that you bear much fruit.”*

— John 15:8 (NIV)

Compared to my neighbor’s, my tomato vines were measly and struggling. Why? We planted similar seedlings in the same soil, experiencing the same rain and sun. Why was the fruit produced vastly different?

Eventually, I figured it out. After I harvested previous crops, I failed to replenish the soil with fertilizer and nutrients the way my neighbor had. As a result, my vines were barely producing while his produced enough for his family’s use and also to give away to others.

The lesson I learned can also be applied to my spiritual life. When I constantly try to produce the fruit of faith without replenishing my spirit’s soil, the result is fewer and smaller fruit.

The Lord provides nutrients for my spirit in the Bible, through prayer, and in Christian community, but I’m the one who has to work it into the sod of my soul. The results are rich spiritual soil. As the biblical writer Jude emphasizes, “Beloved, build yourselves up on your most holy faith; pray in the Holy Spirit” (v. 20, NRSV).

Prayer: Dear Lord, help us to remember to read your word and to pray regularly so that we may bear much fruit for you. Amen.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

What am I doing to
make my soul more
hospitable soil for God?

Raymond N. Hawkins (Tasmania, Australia)

MON
APR 23
2012

VALUABLE LESSON

READ Luke 6:37-42

*Why do you see the speck in your neighbor's eye,
but do not notice the log in your own eye?*

— Luke 6:41 (NRSV)

When I was 10 years old, I complained to my mother about my best friend, who teased her little sister and played mean tricks on her. My mother listened as I went into a lengthy, detailed story.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

God's word offers practical wisdom for living.

When I was through, Mother said quietly, "If I remember right, I heard you teasing your little sister just

before dinner. Don't you think you should remove the beam from your own eye before you criticize your friend?"

She was right. I had been teasing my sister, and I was embarrassed to have been caught. I replied rather flippantly, "A beam is too big to fit in anyone's eye."

Instantly I knew I was in trouble. "Young lady," Mother replied, "you know full well what I mean. Furthermore, you will not make light of the Bible's words. Is that understood?"

I nodded meekly; my face grew red with shame, and I wished I were somewhere else. My mother made me read and memorize the verses about the beam and told me to think about how they related to my complaining.

Now when I find myself tempted to criticize, I hear my mother's words again and breathe a prayer of thanks for the lesson she taught me that day.

Prayer: Long-suffering God, thank you for those who teach us to apply the truth of your word. Amen.

Doris Kennard (Michigan)

A HIGHWAY FOR GOD

TUES
APR 24
2012

READ Isaiah 40:1-5 and Matthew 3:1-3

*A voice cries out: "In the wilderness
prepare the way of the LORD."*

— Isaiah 40:3 (NRSV)

When the mountain road between our town and the city was undergoing major reconstruction, every motorist experienced inconvenience, dust, and incessant noise. Traffic flow was slow, and vehicles were often stopped for 20 minutes or more. Tempers flared and deadlines were missed. But now, a year later, we enjoy speeding across the mountain on a splendid highway.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY
God is in the reconstruction
business.

As I drove the route after the work was completed, I became aware of the soft voice of the Lord telling me that this experience offered a valuable lesson. Yes, we had recently experienced frustration and irritation at prolonged delays. Nothing seemed to be happening except buffeting and chaos. But the highway reconstruction reminds me that God is preparing each of us to be a highway for the Lord's coming.

The Bible gives us an example of this in John the Baptist. John's calling was to prepare the way for the coming of the Messiah. His message was disturbing, yet full of hope. So we can take heart. Despite the disruptions and seeming chaos in our lives, the Lord is at work. Christ is reconstructing our lives so that we can be a highway for his coming into the lives of others.

Prayer: Our Creator and our Teacher, work in our lives to make us useful instruments for your Spirit to move into the lives of others. Amen.

Gerald McCann (Western Cape, South Africa)

WED
APR 25
2012

LOVE IN, LOVE OUT

READ Mark 12:28-34

You shall love your neighbor as yourself.

— Leviticus 19:18 (NRSV)

The verse quoted above is repeated in Matthew, Mark, Luke, Romans, Galatians, and James. What an important teaching this verse must be to be included so many times in the Bible! Yet many of us have difficulty with it — partly because we do not understand that without self-love we cannot love our neighbor.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

The foundation of loving others is loving God and self.

I realized this when I began to resent the time I spent doing things for an elderly relative. I felt as though I had no time for myself. I was tired, cranky and resentful. I had to discover what it meant to love myself. I found that for me it was any number of simple acts of lovingly caring for myself so that I could care for others. I had to learn to say no without guilt when my intuition so directed. When life became hectic, I reminded myself to eat balanced meals; get adequate rest and exercise; take time to laugh; make time for self-renewal in walks, meditation, prayer, reading, a luxurious soak in a warm bath, or a conversation with a close friend.

These little ways of taking care of myself become deposits into my energy bank. When I remember to do them, my life is like a full checking account; I have resources to care for others.

Prayer: Blessed Lord, help us to lovingly care for our own bodies — your holy temples (see 1 Cor. 6:19-20) — as well as our spirits, so that we may be able to show your loving care to those you send our way. Amen.

Jill Bakke (Colorado)

OUR STRENGTH

THUR
APR 26
2012

READ **John 14:15-27**

Jesus said, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. . . . Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid."

— John 14:27 (NRSV)

When I was in my early teens, I had to undergo minor surgery. The night before the surgery I was afraid and could not sleep. When my dad visited me in the hospital the next morning, I broke down in tears. But he comforted me, gave me a Bible, and asked me to read the 14th chapter of John's Gospel.

Jesus spoke these words to the disciples on their last night together. They did not understand him; but later when they faced trials and persecution, they remembered his reassuring words and became bold and strong in their faith. (See Acts 4:13-22.)

As I read Jesus' words, peace flooded my heart; my fear left me. I realized that God was with me. I was able to entrust the surgery into God's hands, and I went confidently into the operating room. The procedure went well, and I recovered completely. To this day that chapter in John is my favorite. In every difficult situation in life, I have found peace and strength in those words of Jesus.

Prayer: Thank you, Lord, for promising us your peace. May it give us courage in every trial and faith to live confidently as we pray, "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."* Amen.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

The Bible offers us strength
in every situation.

James Ernest Sundara (Tennessee)

*Matthew 6:9-13 (NIV).

FRI
APR 27
2012

A SWEET TASTE

READ Colossians 1:1-14

Those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn within a large family.

— Romans 8:29 (NRSV)

Those of us who had just participated in the Shavu'ot service at a messianic synagogue had been invited to stay and eat afterwards. I listened to the friendly woman beside me explain, "We celebrate Shavu'ot seven weeks after Passover by eating milk products because it reminds us that the milk of God's word nurtures us." Shavu'ot is an annual celebration of firstfruits being offered to God.

As I took a bite of dessert, the creamy, sweet taste of cheesecake filled my mouth. My heart gently warmed as we spoke of Jesus as our firstfruits, the firstborn of a large family. Two millennia ago, Jesus gave his life on a cross. Why was this sacrifice necessary? Jesus gave himself, the lamb without blemish, to die on our behalf. He paid the price we could not pay.

Again I savored the celebratory cheesecake. I thought about the sweet savor to God that Jesus must have been when he willingly became the Way for us. Jesus became our open door to God. Now we can be part of God's family. And as we yield to the Spirit's work of forming us into the image of Christ, we too can be a sweet taste to God.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Allowing Christ to live in us is our daily offering to God.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, transform us day by day to make us like Christ. Amen.

Janna Longfellow Hughes (Texas)

RESTING IN THE SHELTER

READ Hebrews 4:1-10

SAT
APR 28
2012

[The LORD] will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart.

— Psalm 91:4 (NIV)

Entering the grocery store, I see a small child who is having a toddler meltdown. He throws his arms and legs out, flopping to the floor, crying, beside the rack of grocery carts. His mother bends down to him and, speaking softly, picks him up and calmly turns toward the exit. As they pass, I overhear her telling him, “It’s all right. You’re tired. Let’s go home now.” As the child is soothed, his wailing recedes; and by the time they reach the door, his head is nestled peacefully against her neck. I think, *What an understanding mother she is!* Clearly she knows that the little one will be better behaved once he’s rested.

The compassionate mother reminds me of our heavenly Father who patiently provides us with rest when we’re out of sorts. We may not even realize we’re tired; but when we feel we cannot take another step, maybe we shouldn’t. Maybe we need to turn to the shelter of God’s loving arms and there find rest and peace.

Prayer: Dear God, you understand when we’ve had enough. Help us to reach out to you and to accept the rest only you can provide. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

Susanna Chenoweth (Indiana)

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

God calls us to rest
when we are weary.

SUN
APR 29
2012

FAITHFUL WITNESS

READ Acts 2:43-47

Jesus said, “*You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.*”

— Acts 1:8 (NRSV)

We are a new congregation, and we still do not have a church building. Our services are held in a borrowed space. During the week, Bible studies are offered in members’ homes.

Link2Life

Click to see pictures of Mauricio’s church.

One day we learned that a church group from overseas was coming to visit our faith community. “Why are these

strangers coming to visit?” someone asked. “We don’t even have a church building to host them.” Someone else responded, “We don’t really know. We know that they started reading *El Aposento Alto* because they knew we use it, and they want to learn more about us. They want to participate in our activities and perform service projects.” Listening to the comments, I was surprised.

Soon our visitors arrived. They participated in our worship service and joined us in our Bible study. During our time of prayer, one of our guests said, “Friends, our group belongs to a church of substantial means. But in our short time together here, we have seen how you treat each other with love in everything you do. This experience has affected us deeply, and we will tell our sisters and brothers back home about it.”

Again, I was surprised. I thought we had nothing to share, but I saw that God placed us in this place at this time to bear faithful witness.

Prayer: Dear God of power and hope, thank you for the faith that unites Christians around the world. Amen.

Mauricio Rapuano (Buenos Aires, Argentina)

A MAP TO CHRIST

MON
APR 30
2012

READ **John 14:1-7**

We are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.

— 2 Corinthians 5:20 (NRSV)

I work for a small municipality in a rural area of Tennessee. Perhaps the most interesting of my many job responsibilities is creating maps. The maps I produce vary in simplicity from a drawing representing a single parcel of land with zoning information to more detailed maps of regions with street names, building footprints, streams, and topographical data.

However, no matter what features I include on a map, without accurate data it is, in essence, useless. Without the proper labeling, orientation, and scaling, a map of the Smoky Mountains might look just like a map of the Swiss Alps. And without the proper legend and reference markers, a map of a biking path might direct the user into the middle of a river.

Something similar is true of our lives. Many of us are like living maps that lead others to Christ. To do this our maps must include love, kindness, gentleness, and generosity. They must be oriented in such a way that the user is pointed heavenward and not in the direction of the world. And they must be scaled to encompass all of God's children, not just some select group that we feel most comfortable with.

I want to allow God to shape my life so that it guides others toward Christ.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

We may be the only maps
to Christ some people
will ever see.

Prayer: Guide and Friend,
thank you for your presence in our lives. May others see in us a way of living that leads them to you. Amen.

Brad Peters (Tennessee) — See back cover.

AN EASY PLAN TO USE *The Upper Room*[®] IN SMALL GROUPS

Christ is among us in fresh ways when we gather together, listening to God and to each other.

Once a week, gather with other believers to share a longer devotional time of about an hour. You may meet any time during the week and replace that day's reading with Wednesday's reading.

- Begin by reading the Bible passage on the **READ** line and the day's meditation, allowing silence for at least a minute afterwards. Then ask members to turn to the questions for that date listed below or on one of the following pages (73-76).
- Ask someone to read aloud the questions one by one, giving each group member the opportunity to answer after each question. If anyone prefers not to answer a particular question, move on to the next person.
- Discuss how everyone thinks differently, and try to hear what the Holy Spirit may be saying to you in all this.
- Decide what you will do with God during the week.
- Be quiet and pray together.

For a more detailed meeting guide, see
devotional.upperroom.org/resources/small-groups.

MARCH 7: *A Long, Cool Drink*

1. What is your favorite springtime ritual or activity?
2. What is your favorite flower, and why?
3. Who taught you the names of flowers, trees, birds, etc., and how and when? Or, if you don't know these names, why might learning them be worthwhile? How is such knowledge valuable?
4. On a spiritual droopiness scale, with 1 being practically on the ground and 10 being in radiant bloom, where would you place yourself today, and why?
5. The psalmist wrote, "My soul thirsts for [God]." How do

you become aware of your need for God? For you, does that feel like thirst or like something else?

6. What pattern or guide do you use for your Bible reading? How do you choose what passages to read?
7. What do you think Jesus meant when he said that “rivers of living water” would flow out of a believer’s heart? Have you ever experienced this? If so, when and for what reason? If not, should you be seeking that experience?

MARCH 14: *A Neighbor’s Love*

1. Have you ever had an experience like Karen describes, where a person came into your life at the exact moment you needed someone? If so, what was your need and how did the person respond?
2. Read aloud 1 Corinthians 13:4-7. Which of the characteristics of love listed here comes most easily to you? In which ones do you want to grow?
3. What ways of witnessing to the love of God have you engaged in? What ways of witnessing are most effective with you?
4. If friendly, harmless visitors from another planet were to attend your church next Sunday, what would they be likely to say in their report home about how Christians treat one another? If you knew in advance they were coming, what might you want to do differently than usual, and why?
5. What have you done recently to love the people who live near you? What could you do to love them more and show them the love of God?
6. How do loving and being loved change people? Where have you seen love change someone’s life?
7. What person in your life has most clearly shown you the love of God? What specific words or actions make you say this?

MARCH 21: *What Is Grace?*

1. What is your earliest memory or clearest memory of realizing you had done something wrong? How old were you at the time? How did you deal with the feelings you had?
2. What is your definition of sin? Why might a child equate tearing a book with sin? How would you distinguish between an error and a sin? Can they ever be the same thing?
3. Read aloud 1 John 3:20-21. What do these verses say to

you about our emotions in relation to sin and guilt? Why do you think these verses are in the Bible?

4. For you, is confessing that you've done something wrong easy, or is it difficult? Do you find it easier or harder to apologize to people than to confess wrongdoing to God? Why are you as you are in this?
5. What is the difference between having a guilty conscience and acknowledging that we are sinners? How does Christian repentance differ from feeling bad about something we've done? (See 2 Cor. 7:9-10.)
6. If someone who had never been inside a church asked you what grace is, how would you answer? What story or stories might you use to illustrate the concept of grace?

MARCH 28: *God's Word*

1. What is your image of a good parent? Who are the best parents you know, and why do you identify them as such?
2. What Bible verses comfort and calm you in difficult situations?
3. What does this meditation say to you about Bible study and memorizing scripture?
4. When have you experienced someone's reassuring presence making an immediate difference to you in a time of struggle? What was the situation, and what did the person do? If you cannot recall an incident, how do you connect this story with your life?
5. Who has demonstrated to you in practical ways the power of scripture? What did that person or persons do?
6. Would you do what this man did, start quoting scripture aloud in a difficult situation? Why or why not?
7. Have you ever had someone quote scripture "at" you, to convince you of a point or to reprimand you? If so, what feelings did you have? Or, if you haven't experienced this, what do you think might cause someone to use scripture that way?

APRIL 4: *Fruit of the Spirit*

1. Were you surprised to see that the writer of this meditation is from Indonesia? Did you automatically assume the incident being recounted happened in the USA? If so, why did you

make that assumption? Does the fact that this took place in Indonesia change any of your ideas about that culture?

2. What does this story say to you about human nature?
3. What is your pet peeve about how people behave? What “pushes your buttons” and challenges you to behave lovingly?
4. Where do you need more self-control? What makes you say this?
5. Read aloud Galatians 5:22. Which fruit seems to grow naturally in you? Which fruit is in shortest supply in your life?
6. As you heard the list of the fruit of the spirit, did particular people come to mind? Who is your model of someone who lives by the power of the Holy Spirit in daily life? How do you want to be more like that person?

APRIL 11: *Below the Surface*

1. Think back to a time when you were surprised by something you suddenly noticed for the first time in a familiar place. What caused you to see the familiar place differently? What lessons might such experiences hold for spiritual life?
2. When have you encountered beauty in an unexpected place? What was your response to it?
3. Besides 1 Samuel 16:7, what verses or stories in the Bible encourage us to look beyond outward appearances?
4. Read aloud James 2:1-4 and then sit in silence, thinking about your congregation. Do these verses challenge your usual way of doing things? Why or why not?
5. In the light of the verses from James 2 that we just heard, how can we explain racial divisions in the church? How should the church respond to prejudice of any kind?
6. Whom have you taken for granted this past week? Why do you say this? How can we help ourselves to not take for granted the people we see often?
7. How does the “Thought for the Day” challenge you? What kinds of people do you most often struggle to welcome and appreciate?

APRIL 18: *Daily Courage*

1. Have you ever had physical therapy, and if so, did it help you? What did you learn about yourself in the process of 75

doing it? If you've never had physical therapy, what have you heard about it?

2. "Courage doesn't always roar. Sometimes courage is the quiet voice at the end of the day saying, 'I will try again tomorrow.'" What Bible verses or stories can you connect to this quote?
3. According to comedian Woody Allen, "Eighty percent of success is showing up." How could this apply to the spiritual life and growing in faith?
4. Who is your favorite model of "daily courage," and why?
5. Lisa mentions the strain of dealing with "those whose apparent aim is to cause us misery." Have you ever had to deal regularly with a person like that? If so, how did your faith help you? If not, what spiritual practices do you think might help in such a situation?
6. How might the advice in 1 Peter 3:15 apply to the situation described in the previous question?
7. Where do you need "daily courage"? How can the people in this group help you to find the courage you need?

APRIL 25: *Love In, Love Out*

1. Why do you think Leviticus 19:18 is quoted so many times in the New Testament?
2. Who is your all-time favorite neighbor, and why?
3. Today's writer mentions being "tired, cranky, and resentful" as signs that she needs to take better care of herself. What are your signs that you need special care? How do you behave? What emotions are signals for you?
4. If you loved your neighbors the way you love yourself, what would your neighbors be lacking right now?
5. Do you feel guilty when you say no to people? If so, can you say why? If not, how did you learn to say no without feeling guilty?
6. When is saying no the right answer, even to someone at church who's asking you to do something good?
7. Which of the self-care activities that Jill lists do you do best and most regularly? Which do you need to do more often? Which is the most important "deposit" in your "energy bank"?

To use our Lenten Study Guide, go to: devotional.upperroom.org/lent2012.

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