

ST. JOHNS PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

DEVOTIONS
FOR 2010

The background of the lower half of the page features a soft-focus image of green leaves and blades of grass. The leaves are scattered across the upper and middle portions, while the grass is more prominent at the bottom. The overall color palette is muted greens and yellows, creating a natural and serene atmosphere.

Lent

Introduction

These are not pretty stories for your entertainment. They are the work of members of the body of Christ, the Church, giving you testimony of God's faithfulness in their lives. May your faith be strengthened this Lent through the reading of these testimonies to KNOW Christ intimately.

How to use this book...

- Read the Bible passages which correspond to each testimony.
- Ask God what He has to say to you about what you are reading.
- Write it down and journal about what you are learning.
- Use the prayer at the end of each testimony to guide your own prayers.

Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God - this is true worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is - his good, pleasing and perfect will.

Romans 12:1-2

WEDNESDAY,
FEBRUARY 17TH

Title: A Promise Kept
By: Eleanor Oldham
Scripture: Matthew 11:28

At one time in my life, my problems seemed overwhelming. They were so many and so complex that I didn't know where to begin. I begged God to show me what to do and to help me to do it. Shortly after that I found this poem that changed my life. I read it daily for several months.

PROMISED STRENGTH

by Grace Noll Crowett

One day when my burden seemed greater
Than my body and spirit could bear,
Weighed down by the load, I faltered
Beneath my sorrow and care.
And cried to the heedless silence
As I walked where I could not see,
Where is the strength that is promised?
Where is the strength for me?
And suddenly, out of the stillness,
A voice came clear and true:
"My child, you are striving to carry
A burden not meant for you.
And the thought of the years outstretching
Before you have darkened the way,
While the only strength I have promised
Is the sure strength day by day."
I took one step - and I found it,
Quite easy, indeed, to take.
And the burden slid from my shoulders
And my heart that was ready to break
Gave thanks that my eyes were opened
And my shoulders were eased of their load
As I say, step by step, I was strengthened
To walk on the roughest road.

Prayer: Dear Jesus, thank you for caring for us. Thank you for freeing us from our burdens. Amen.

THURSDAY,
FEBRUARY 18TH

Title: Action!
By: Charlotte Wintz
Scripture: 1 John 3:18

Recently we experienced the death of Tim's father, a wonderful man who touched many lives. Mixed with this sad time for our family, was joy for the outpouring of love and support from our church family. On New Years Eve, Tara prayed over my father-in-law's bed and minutes later stood hugging my daughters as they watched their grandfather leave the Earth for his eternal home. In the chaos of the next few days, I was surprised at the number of people from our church who, though they'd never met any of our extended family, or Tim's dad, took time to come to the memorial service, the funeral, and some did both. The number of cards, emails, and hugs were many and often perfectly timed.

Throughout these days I found myself asking two questions:

- How do people get through tough times without the love and support of a church family?
- Would I show the same love to others that was shown to me when needed? Had I in the past?

Shortly after his death, I was talking to Erin George before church and I was thanking her for being at the funeral service. Her words were simple, "Love is an action." Those four words summarized exactly how I felt: loved. I realized more than ever that as Christians we should take action, even little actions, to make others feel loved.

Prayer: Lord, thank You for a church family who not only has love but is willing to express it in actions. Help me to be sensitive to the needs of others in and out of our church and to have the willingness to take the necessary action to show love as You would. Amen.

**FRIDAY,
FEBRUARY 19TH**

Title: BFFL (Best Friends For Life)

By: Mallory Wintz & Jordan Padilla

Scripture: Ecclesiastes 4:10

Mallory's Perspective

Just recently my grandfather passed away, and it hit hard for me personally. I remember communicating with Jordan from the youth group and telling her how much I needed someone to talk to and she was there for me. Through our conversation she invited me over to hang out with some of the youth on New Year's Eve. By going and spending time with my friends, I was able to take my mind off things and really enjoy their company. Her actions showed how good of a friend she is to me and how much I know I can rely on her.

Jordan's Perspective

I was out with a couple of family friends watching the Gator bowl parade downtown when I received a text message from Mallory. In her text, she was really in need for someone to talk to. That night, I was planning a get together with some of the youth group and I thought we should extend the offer to Mallory. As soon as I was going to send her a text to invite her, I received one from her saying "I just want my youth friends." I knew then God was giving me a sign. She came over that night very upset, but as the night progressed, I could see she was having a great time, and we were enjoying her company as well.

In situations like this, we find that it's nice to have the support of friends. Someone you can talk to, someone who can take your mind off upsetting moments, and someone who can truly show you God's grace. During the Lenten season we encourage you to show your neighbor God's love and know what it is to be a good neighbor and friend.

Prayer: God, we pray that we can show others your love, and be there for those struggling so that we can pick them up and be the friend they need us to be. Amen.

SATURDAY,
FEBRUARY 20TH

Title: Big Questions
By: George Currie
Scripture: John 3:16

When I was a young boy I used to look out my window into the night sky as I was preparing for bed. I would think on the meaning of life and what happens after death. **Ecclesiastes 3:11** says *God "has set eternity in our hearts"* (God also tells us that all is vanity or futile in this material world of ours "*under the sun*"). I had big questions – I was looking for answers.

My parents gave me a Red Letter Edition Bible on my eighth birthday. I read it each night, especially the apparent wisdom and wonder of Christ's words. I was particularly intrigued by **John 3:16**. The Bible seemed to contain important truths, but they remained as pieces of a great puzzle until I attended a Billy Graham crusade at the age of twelve

There I heard a local pastor assemble these pieces of the puzzle for me by presenting God's plan of salvation: Romans 3:23 "*For all have sinned*" by violating God's commandments; **Romans 6:23** "*For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord;*" Ephesians 2:8-9 "*Salvation is not of works;*" and Romans 10:13 "*Whoever will call upon the name of Lord will be saved.*" In other words, I had the hope of John 3:16 and the conviction of Romans 6:23. And I accepted the gift God offers, his promise in Jesus, by faith.

I went from feeling depressed and without hope to being full of hope and joy. I felt like a new person and wanted to use my gifts in service to God. An otherwise melancholy Ecclesiastes ends with hope in stating that when all is said and done, the whole purpose of life can be summed up in this manner: *to fear (love/respect) God and keep his commandments* (Eccles. 12:13). All else is "*futility*" and "*striving after the wind.*" What exactly are God's commandments? When asked in **Matthew chapter 22**, Jesus said, "***You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. ... You shall love your neighbor as yourself.***"

Prayer: Lord, I pray that we will renew ourselves, and we, as individuals, will strive to obey Your greatest commandment. That when we are asked, as the Westminster catechism asks, "What is the chief end of man?" we will know the answer: "To glorify You." (Eccles. 12:13 and Matthew 22:37-39). Your Glory is what life is *all* about. Amen.

**MONDAY,
FEBRUARY 22ND**

Title: Consolation

By: Robin Doering

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 1:3-4

Nancy and I were spending a long weekend in Savannah, Georgia. When we returned to our room at the Bed and Breakfast there was an emergency message from our son, Chad, to call my mother's home. My brother, Ernie, and his wife, Sally had been killed in a car wreck on Friday night. My mother was distraught; she could not get control of her deep sorrow.

I don't remember the drive home; my mind was racing. I was in the mindset that "I" could fix things with Mom when I got there. As I look back, I should have relied more on God at this point. Mom was devastated by loss, but Sunday morning we left her briefly to attend worship. I remember thinking, "Where else would I be but in God's house during this time of grief in my life?"

Planning the funeral was hard and was made harder by my worry over my mother's distress. The evening we were to receive friends at the funeral home, I thought it would be overwhelming for her. I sent Mom back home with Chad, so the rest of the family could spend some time alone in the chapel. When I returned to her from visitation, there was a special peace as I entered the house. Mom and Pastor Bobby were praying. She told me God's Holy Spirit had filled her and given her peace and understanding. That peace was visible on her face. We all prayed and thanked God.

Just after we finished praying, a small summer rain shower came over the house, it seemed just on our street. The rain passed quickly and then right in our front yard there was a rainbow, not up in the sky- where you can see both ends of the rainbow. No, this rainbow was only in our yard, brilliant as any rainbow I have ever seen. I knew it as a sign from God, the only one I've seen. Mom was with us at the Chapel that evening, composed and very outgoing to the four hundred who had gathered to grieve with us.

God filled each of us who were at the house that afternoon with His Spirit, and the Spirit burned bright in our hearts through the following weeks and months.

Prayer: Lord, I pray we do not sell You short. Thank You for being with us in our time of sorrow and when we call on You through prayer. Help us to rely on Your promise to be with us, as we worship together in the Lenten season. Amen.

**TUESDAY,
FEBRUARY 23RD**

Title: Dealing With Doubts
By: Bill and Diane McFadden
Scripture: Matthew 14:28-30

The reason this story means so much to us is that over the course of many years when we tried to accomplish a difficult task or tried in some way to solve a problem, there have been (and will continue to be) times when we take our eyes off the Master. When the sinking begins we know that in order to have peace in our lives from struggles and problems our eyes must always be on Jesus.

The joy of knowing Jesus is that He is always there with the soft voice whispering in our ear, "Oh, ye of little faith, why did you doubt?" What a comfort it is to know we have a Savior that loves and cares for each of us if only we will keep our eyes on Him.

Learning this at an early stage in our marriage, we have been blessed in so many ways. Never living near relatives, our family is the church of believers that have always been there to help guide and instruct us on our journey to knowing the saving grace of Jesus Christ.

A Christian life is difficult to always maintain. Jesus is there to take our hand and keep us from sinking in the sea of desperation.

Prayer: Thanks be to God for His wonderful gift to all mankind - A Savior, Jesus Christ!!!! Amen.

**WEDNESDAY,
FEBRUARY 24TH**

Title: Don't be Anxious

By: Trip Stanly

Scripture: Philippians 4:6-7

I continually see God in my life in both times of doubt and stress. He challenges me to walk by faith and rewards me when I do professionally. And when I ask him for that "peace that transcends all understanding" during times of doubt and stress in my professional life, He is quick to give it and maintain it. I could not do what I do without Him.

My natural default is to sweat the small stuff, be it dealing with mechanical equipment that always breaks down at the wrong time or trying to close a real estate deal in a short time frame. But when I stop and give it to God, He is quick to give me peace.

Prayer: Lord, forgive me for being anxious in everything. Help me, Lord, to trust You more. Help me to let go. Fill me with Your peace that transcends all understanding. I need Your help. Amen.

THURSDAY,
FEBRUARY 25TH

Title: Exercising Our Gifts

By: diann catlin*

Scripture: Romans 12:6

Years ago, as I was teaching a study on Spiritual Gifts, I had an “aha” moment. “What if every person planted in a local church really exercised his gift?” I don’t mean rock in a comfy chair with his gift; I mean pump iron with his gift. The Administrators would be leading in the Spirit, the Helps and Hospitality equipped saints would be making meetings cozy and inviting in the Spirit’s way. The Teachers and Prophets would never have to be asked to teach because they would already be sharing the Word full steam ahead.

As they “worked out” their salvation with fear and trembling, the Body would become healthy, agile and “fit” for Kingdom work. Each gift would realize the Head is Jesus, not a Ron, a Tara, or a Dan. Why they wouldn’t even miss a “pump” or “beat” because they were all exercising their gifts to the Spirit’s rhythm with their eyes on the Christ, the trainer/leader of the work out!

The background music would be prayers of those with Faith, and when the Body needed anything, Giving would be ready in the wings. Exhortation would be shouting encouraging words, and Showing Mercy and Gifts of Healing would be listening with the Spirit’s heart to those who were hurting, calling fervently on Christ as the great Physician.

Prayer: As we receive feeding from Dan through the Word, and guidance from the Spirit, “Lord please bind this Body at SJPC together with the sweat of exercising our gifts for Your glory. Let no one try to stifle another gift, but instead let us work hard at exercising our giftedness. Then as we worship and pray, hear truth and serve, as we seek to identify the pastor/teacher You will send to us, help us to allow You, Jesus, to take your rightful position as Lord over us. Make us fit bondservants ready to do Your will.” Amen.

**ed note - diann prefers no capitals in her name*

FRIDAY,
FEBRUARY 26TH

Title: From Generation To Generation

By: Kevin Crainshaw

Scripture: Psalm 100:5 & 2 Timothy 1:3, 5-6

I don't have a great testimony of a life that was in despair and suddenly the love of God shown through the darkness and saved me. I wasn't searching for answers to life's challenges; actually life was pretty good. We didn't have much, but I had two parents at home; my mom played the piano at church and we were there frequently. Honestly, I was born on a Friday and I'm pretty sure I was in church the next Sunday.

When I was born we attended a Pentecostal church. Every Sunday the Pastor would give an invitation for those that wanted to receive Christ to come forward. He would pray a prayer out loud and those wanting to receive Christ would pray after him. One Sunday, I desired to pray that prayer but was too embarrassed to go forward so I prayed in my seat. I was actually standing in my seat. You see, I was only three or four years old. So I prayed and asked Christ into my life.

My grandparents were visiting us and I told my grandfather that I prayed the prayer with "that man," and it felt so good I was going to do it again that night. I didn't know anything about the grace of God. I didn't know that I was born a sinful person. I didn't know that through Christ, He was the propitiation for my sin or that His work of atonement reconciled me with God... *I barely understand those things now.* A simple drawing of the Holy Spirit drew the heart of a young boy to pray and Christ entered my life, on that day. It changed me, and I felt it.

My testimony and encouragement is not just a salvation prayer as a child. My life's story and testimony are based on Psalm 100:5. I'm very fortunate to have come from a long heritage of believers in Christ. I learned from my parents, they learned from their parents and they learned from their parents' dependence on Christ and walking with Him daily. Our lives aren't perfect, and we don't have the perfect family tree, but I am encouraged to continue this heritage in the lives of my children and to pray for them, my grandchildren, and my great-grandchildren, none of which are even born yet, because I know my parents, grandparents and great-grandparents prayed for me.

Prayer: O Lord, establish your righteousness in me; my children and my children's children. Draw us close to you so that as a family we may serve you faithfully and walk in your goodness, love and faithfulness from generation to generation. Amen.

SATURDAY,
FEBRUARY 27TH

Title: "GIFTED"

By: Jamie Russell

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 12: 4-6, 18

What does it mean to be 'gifted'? I recently struggled with this concept, as my son heard the results of his testing for 'gifted' placement. My inner Mother Bear roared that night, as I comforted my son, who could not understand why he had not qualified. I'd *like* to say I had wise words of comfort for him. (He certainly didn't want to hear all the ways his *mother* thinks he's special.) All I could do was embrace him. Later, I prayed for wisdom to help him find peace with who God created him to be.

Over the next few days, a mother's prayer for her son became a Father's gentle rebuke of His daughter. He reminded me of struggles I've had accepting my own gifts and limitations. I have questioned Him over the years for not calling me to one 'higher' ministry, but to other, less 'significant' areas of service. God gave me the ability to sing harmony, and serve in mostly 'supporting roles', why do I question him? Am I expecting to find for myself a more important role than the one God Himself envisioned for me? (Really?)

Just as that 'Gifted' test ascribes different priorities to one child's gifts and talents over another's, so too have His children assigned artificial significance (or insignificance) to the gifts He has given each of us. Parents encourage their children to 'be themselves', and not compare their abilities with their siblings. Why would we expect God to feel any differently about His children comparing their gifts and abilities?

We may be sitting in a corner, wishing we 'qualified' for a higher calling. Child of God, you most certainly do 'qualify' for the unique calling God has placed on your life. If you think you are not 'gifted', then think again. God is unconvinced by the meaningless 'tests' we give ourselves, and the evaluations we give one another. Climb up in your Father's lap, and listen as He shows you all the ways that He made you unique. You are Gifted! Wonderfully, fearfully Gifted!! Now, go do something about it!

Prayer: Dear God, You are all-knowing – You know me better than I know myself! I thank you for the gifts and abilities you have given me. I know I don't always understand how I fit into your Master plan, but I trust You. Forgive me for comparing my talents to those You have given others – whether I've belittled my own talents, or exaggerated the gifts of others. Give me the strength to see the needs of others that I am uniquely qualified to meet. Help me to see that serving You **is** the highest calling on my life, in whatever form that takes. Let me be your GIFTED, fearless servant. In Jesus' name, Amen.

MONDAY,
MARCH 1ST

Title: God Is Watching Us

By: Dan Graham

Scripture: 2 Chronicles 6:20

Solomon's supplication reminds us that God is always watching us – at the church building and everywhere else for that matter. We are often under camera surveillance when we bank, shop, and drive. One of the reasons for the surveillance is that when we know authorities are watching us that knowledge will have a positive affect on our deportment. I often say that surveillance cameras are not a threat to us if we are not doing anything wrong.

When I worked as a chaplain at a Georgia prison, I was constantly on camera while on campus. One of my Sunday night duties was to arrive early and set up the chapel for worship. Part of the room arrangement included rolling a heavy bookshelf from the corner to a place where the inmates could access the many devotional resources loaded on the shelves. One night when I was alone and in a hurry, I pushed the shelf too fast and it began to sway. I ran from side to side trying to keep it from toppling, but I eventually turned over the shelf, spilling the books on the floor. I wanted to kick the shelves and the books - repeatedly. I remembered, however, that the correctional officer in the control booth at the main entry might be watching the monitor for the chapel camera. Instead of a lot of wild language and wilder actions, I took a deep breath, righted the shelf, and reloaded the books. The duty officer never mentioned to me that he had seen me in my comic circumstances, but knowing that someone might have been watching had altered my behavior for the better.

During Lent, a renewed awareness of God's watchfulness may help us to remember that God is indeed watching us. Perhaps that awareness will help us to do a better job in our spiritual discipline in Lent and throughout the year.

Prayer: Vigilant God, remind us that you are always watching and let that knowledge empower us to behave better as individuals and as a congregation. Let us also remember that you are watching because you love us, care for us, and want the best for us. Amen.

**TUESDAY,
MARCH 2ND**

Title: God Is Working His Purpose Out

By: Betsy Free

Scripture: Jeremiah 29:11-14

I believe God does have a "good, pleasing and perfect will" for our lives as Romans 12:2 says. One of the great advantages of growing older is the gift of reflection on how God's plan is being worked out in my life.

I believe every experience I have had has led me to be exactly where I am today. I take comfort today knowing that God has been with me and will continue to be active in my life as I seek Him and live day by day. I know I have stepped off the path many times in my life, but God has been there nudging me back... He has redeemed my poor decisions.

The words of Jeremiah are very comforting and encouraging to me. Life is hard at times. There will always be ups and downs along the way. One particular period of time comes to my mind. It was a season (about a year) of great loss for me. It was the death of 4 people who were at the center of my life for many years...my mother, my husband, my brother and my spiritual mentor ("other mother"). I found myself in a time of unexpected pain of loneliness and sadness. I was overwhelmed and immobilized.

Someone sent me a little book about grieving the losses in our lives. The book focused around several verses from Psalm 30.

Psalm 30:5; 10-12: "For his anger lasts only a moment, but his favor lasts a lifetime; weeping may remain for a night, but rejoicing comes in the morning.....You turned my wailing into dancing; you removed my sackcloth and clothed me with joy, that my heart may sing to you and not be silent. O Lord my God, I will give you thanks forever."

I could only read a few pages at a time. I don't remember how long it took, but by the time I got to the end of the book I had stopped weeping and I was finally out of the night and into the joy that comes in the morning. I was able to look toward the future with hope.

Prayer: Dear God, bless your people at St. Johns as we go through a transitional time. Help us to be hopeful and encouraged by your words in Jeremiah. God has a plan for St. Johns and it is good! We thank you for sending Pastor Dan to walk with us and guide us during this time. Amen.

WEDNESDAY,
MARCH 3RD

Title: God With Us In Cracker Barrel

By: Polly Walker

Scripture: Deuteronomy 31:8

About three years ago, my cousin, Elaine, was having a lot of difficulties. She had lost her husband and was facing the possibility she had ovarian cancer. Wanting to be with her husband's family in this stressful time, we found a friend to drive us up to Georgia for a visit.

On the drive back, we stopped for lunch at Cracker Barrel in Brunswick, GA. A group of young people were seated at the table behind her, and I just happened to glance at the T-shirt of the young man sitting directly behind her. "Turn around, Elaine. Read his shirt," I said and she turned, not knowing what to expect. This is what she saw:

"The Lord Himself goes before you...Deuteronomy 31:8."

Elaine smiled. She's a wonderful Christian. She knew those words were for her. God was with her through that trying time. My point is that the Lord speaks to us every day, if we look for Him.

I believe the Lord has sent Dan Graham to us and that His hands are around this church (Rom 8: 28). My hope is that the church will be enthused to stay together going forward (Rom 8:38-39).

Prayer: Lord, I know You will send the one You want. My prayer is that the church will be in prayer, listening for You as You speak. Amen.

THURSDAY,
MARCH 4TH

Title: God's Meaning of "Good"

By: Jim Nolan

Scripture: Romans 8:26-30

I had read or heard this passage many times with various, questionable interpretations. Does "God make good things from bad situations" or do "good things happen to those who love God?" Did God predestine that those who love Him will be saved, and so it doesn't matter what we do on Earth as long as we "love God?" Is there a "Holy silver lining" in every bad event? I struggled with this question: **Am I one of the predestined, called, justified and glorified, as described in the 30th verse? And how can I know the answer to that question?**

My adoptive mother, who lived in Lafayette, LA, was diagnosed with cancer in August 2005 and I began travelling about twice a month to visit her. By late January 2006, she was finishing up chemotherapy and feeling much better. In late March, however, a CT scan revealed numerous brain tumors. Aggressive radiation treatment caused severe short-term memory loss. She spent several months in a nursing home, then returned home, where she lived the last six months of her life.

During those exhausting visits, I took care of her house and plants (she had an incredibly green thumb), and managed her affairs. I was also searching for God's purpose in her struggles and suffering. I wanted explanation. I struggled with the concept of predestination and this passage in particular. As verse 26 says "we do not know what we ought to pray for." I didn't know what I should pray for, either. I prayed a lot, and focused on the passage. What "good" does God work for in all things? I believed that I loved God, so therefore He must have been working for my "good," if I were counted as one of those predestined souls. God predestined those he foreknew "to be conformed to the likeness or image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers." The answer was forming: my transformation more into the image of Jesus Christ was "the good" referred to in verse 28.

Later a friend suggested I pray that her illness would bring glory to God. I could plainly see transformation in my life, through sharing in my mother's struggles over the last 18 months. My selfishness and my pride had been chipped away and polished. The suffering had brought growth to me, my mother and our relationship. We spoke many, many times about her salvation, her life, and her memories. I grew in my faith, and in my love and appreciation for her. Our relationship was made new.

Prayer: Lord, may You be glorified in this telling of the way that You helped me and worked that "good" in me, in my mother, and in our relationship - and for letting me see what You were doing. Thank You for answering my question. Thank You, that when she died, we were at peace. Amen.

FRIDAY,
MARCH 5TH

Title: God's Plan

By: Sandy Currie

Scripture: Jeremiah 29:11

Around age sixteen, I started to question my beliefs and to resent the rigidity of religion and the Catholic Church I was raised in. I stopped attending church.

Later, I married a man in the questioning stage of his faith. Still holding true to Catholic rules, we married in the Catholic Church and signed a paper promising to raise our children in the Catholic Church. We had our good times and bad times as the song goes, but I began questioning what life was all about. I tried filling the void with career changes, women's groups and hobbies while my spouse became distant.

One day my friend and I decided to try a community church we had heard about. I was still skeptical of religion but enjoyed the music, the friendly people and the low key approach of the preacher. I had been attending about one month when one day, after the preacher gave the invitation to ask Jesus into one's heart, I couldn't stop crying. I finally understood what a sinner I really was and I felt horrible. I gave my life that day to Christ and made a 180 degree change in my personality. I became a much more compassionate person and had a clear view of my purpose in life. My favorite verse became Jeremiah 29:11. Unfortunately, my husband of twenty years wanted nothing more to do with me and asked for a divorce. I was devastated, as he had been my soul mate and my "god" for many years.

Even with the extreme sorrow of the end of my marriage, however, I continued to feel joy in being a Christian and to draw on strength from the Holy Spirit and the church to get me through. I found purpose. Gone was the void in my life. The void was replaced by peace, a sense of purpose, and the certainty of eternity.

Prayer: Lord, grant that our church would be the kind of place that welcomes seekers like I once was. Amen.

**SATURDAY,
MARCH 6TH**

Title: He Knows My Name

By: Scottie Phillips

Scripture: Philippians 4:7-11

The difference faith in Christ has made in my life since my acceptance of Christ as my personal Savior is that before I only knew of Christ and who he was. Now after asking Christ into my life as my personal Savior I know HIM as a personal friend who is always there and has always been in my life.

And yet while I have not always been there for HIM, Christ still accepted me and gave me HIS grace and forgiveness which I did not earn and certainly did not deserve.

The peace and knowledge of HIS Grace is what helps me to strive to follow HIM and be not of this world but follow Christ in His image and with honor.

Prayer: May we seek the wisdom & guidance of our Heavenly Father and may the congregation be transformed & renewed by the Holy Spirit and truly seek that which is the good & acceptable will of God. Amen.

MONDAY,
MARCH 8TH

Title: Healing Spirit of Christ

By: Brad Russell

Scripture: Luke 12:22-26

Philip Yancey wrote, "In the normal course of providence, God works in and through creation, not despite it. For this reason, some answers to prayer are difficult to prove with certainty." I have recently experienced tribulations of life. I knew God would use these events to bring about great good to many and a resolution to my benefit. I had such an unwavering faith that it surprised me.

Faith is "confident belief in the truth, value, or trustworthiness of a person, idea, or thing." Faith tells us God can and will do what is in our best interest because he said he would. We are promised that Christ lives within us and when I was recently diagnosed with cancer I experienced the power of turning things over to his will. Much more than just healing of body and spirit, I experienced an outpouring of love, giving testimony to the power in the great commandment. This even extended beyond myself to members of my family who have been affected in positive ways moving them closer to God through the love of the church, the body of Christ.

Now that I am healed through his divine mercy, I am given the opportunity to allow Christ within me to demonstrate love and mercy to others in need. My prayer is that my heart remain willing and my will subservient to his needs. For I know, this will bring me great joy.

Prayer: Father in heaven thank You for Your great gift of salvation. Keep our hearts open to sanctification through Christ living in and through us. Let us be transparent vessels to allow the light of the Holy Spirit to shine on Your children and bring them closer to You so that Your glory will be evident to all. For we may experience no greater joy than to glorify You by our obedience to the great commandment of loving You and Your children as ourselves. In the name of Your Holy Son our Lord, Jesus Christ, I offer this prayer. Amen.

TUESDAY,
MARCH 9TH

Title: His Boundless Love

By: Tom Gunn

Scripture: Luke 12:32

Since childhood I had been instilled with the idea the world was good and bad and I had to do everything possible to be good and to do good in order to live a good life. I was sent to Sunday School, to Vacation Bible School, even to tent revivals that came to town, and I sat through long-winded preachers at all-day preaching events with dinner on the grounds at my grandmother's country church. Goodness and hard work equaled a life, if not successful, at least honorable: that was what I was learning.

When I was twelve, we moved and an elderly neighbor and his wife persuaded my parents to allow them to take me to their church and attend its activities. On a Palm Sunday I was baptized as a teenager in the basement of an unfinished Methodist church building which was raising money to complete the sanctuary. I was committed to working with my fellow members on the project, and I jumped in with both feet, intent to begin a life of serious good works, but I found I was falling into a trap - the "green stamp" mentality of faith, which is that if you do enough good things you can earn credits and at some point cash in your book of stamps for something bigger. I realized it's easy to slip from the good side of life to the bad, that I was capable of doing sinful things and in the words of the confession, I had ". . . erred and strayed from thy ways like lost sheep . . . [had] offended against thy holy laws . . . left undone those things which [I] ought to have done, and . . . done those things which [I] ought not to have done." Earning salvation I realized was an impossibility given my sinful human nature, regardless of how good I was or how much good I attempted. What to do?

Later after some trying personal times I was visiting a church, and when the gospel was read, it was as though the words of Jesus had been aimed directly at me for that particular time. It was Luke 12:32. The realization was God doesn't take pleasure in condemning us, that his pleasure is the overwhelming generosity of a loving father toward his children. His boundless love is what it is. We cannot earn it.

How does that kind of love, in spite of our frailties, transform us? Part of that transformation is from a life of fear, sorrow, and disappointment to one of joy through salvation and to giving of ourselves completely, utterly to him who has done everything for us.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, forgive us for our fear that you are detached from our lives and are out to get us if we aren't good enough. Help us to better understand that your magnanimous gift of salvation is part of the loving relationship you desire with each of us. May we be inspired to respond to that love with confidence and joy. Amen.

WEDNESDAY,
MARCH 10TH

Title: Home

By: Karen Bigham

Scripture: Jeremiah 29:11-14

I know for sure that God speaks to each of us personally. We may not be paying attention, and we may be trying to drown out his voice with the noise of many other things, but he is talking. In fact, the very reason I believe in God is that I know he has spoken to me. It isn't as though I hear God every day, but there have been times when it was clear that God spoke....and had something surprising to say.

The most surprising time was when after eighteen years of a happy marriage I began to be bothered by recurring thoughts regarding little girls in China, abandoned and orphaned for the unfortunate reason of being born second in the family, or being born female. We were childless by choice, not infertility. Yet for some reason it suddenly seemed there were orphaned Chinese girls everywhere I turned – on television, in the newspaper ads of adoption agencies, and even friends who announced their intention to adopt. I finally recognized that it was happening for a reason, and decided to investigate my feelings, although I felt crazy doing so at the age of 43. My husband outright questioned my sanity, but I just couldn't shake the feeling. After an eighteen month journey of faith and hope, we brought Leah home from Wuhan, China. Our soon to be ten year old daughter is living proof of the providence of God, because I know for sure that we were meant to be a family just as surely as any couple who conceive and deliver a biological child.

Prayer: Lord, thank You for speaking to us. Give us the ears to hear You and the heart to earnestly look for You. Amen.

THURSDAY,
MARCH 11TH

Title: Image and Dominion

By: Joe Schmidt

Scripture: Genesis 1:26

Man is made in the image of God to reflect God on the earth. God is something we cannot physically see, taste, touch, hear, or smell, as is the essence of man. God breathed spirit into earthly clay and created each of us individually and uniquely. We sing hymns and pray out loud to exercise that breath and give thanks and praise to God for the gift of Life.

God delegated dominion of the earth and all in it to mankind in the beginning. Man was and is to take the gifts and abilities given and exercise God-delegated sovereignty. God's plan was to work through man and mankind was to know God in themselves and see God in others. Mankind was not given dominion over itself, though. To get the job done mankind must step up and use the gifts given at creation for the responsible dominion of the earth: to bring heaven to the earth!

Jesus Christ came to set things straight and exemplify the proper relationship with God the Father and plant idea-seeds for mankind to nurture their own gifts and stop wanting the gifts given to another.

When we are busy wanting something outside of our own unique selves, we cannot see the forest for the trees, and we miss the fact that we have gifts ourselves. Each of us came with gifts. If we use them, they grow and shine. If we ignore them, they decay and disappear. When we use our own gifts we follow Jesus' example.

Prayer: Father, we give thanks for our life and gifts and experiences. Sometimes we do not understand all the whys and wherefores, but we do understand that You are always there for us and may appear through others many times before we notice. We thank You for Your persistence in looking after us; we praise You for loving us enough to give us the all the tools needed to handle the really-big dominion job; and we look forward to the day when the many more seek to bring heaven to the earth through Your gifts, Your men, and Your women, all according to Your plan. In Jesus' name we pray today. Amen.

FRIDAY,
MARCH 12TH

Title: In the Land of the Living

By: Tara Thompson

Scripture: Psalm 142

Growing up with my alcoholic mother and her drug addict boyfriend enabled me to respond to a God who cared about me and the decisions I made. As I grew in my relationship with Him and in my knowledge of the Scriptures, I was able to see the many ways He had been present in my life. The consistency and intensity of His love for me throughout my life was undeniable. Not only did He have plans for me, but He also forgave me my faults. His grace to me enabled me to extend forgiveness to my mother. I could have walked in the path of sin modeled for me at home, but God shielded me and protected me. In His loving-kindness and mercy, I had a reason to hope and a promise of new life. God had not abandoned me as a child. Jesus redeemed my life in the land of the living. Jesus offered me a better way of life in the here-and-now. His promises aren't something we must wait until eternity to experience. God is with us, guiding us, loving us and making *this* life meaningful.

Prayer: Open our eyes and hearts to the many ways You are at work in our midst. Help us to embrace Your promises of new life and relationship today. Grant that we would see and celebrate Your mercies in the land of the living! Amen.

**SATURDAY,
MARCH 13TH**

Title: Love

By: Frances Whaley

Scripture: John 3:16, Romans 3:23
& 1 Corinthians 13

Sunday School was very much a part of my life beginning in the primary class (for those six and seven years old). Each Sunday we said short Bible verses repeating God's love for us: God is love; Love one another. We sang songs about God's love to us: Jesus loves me; Praise Him, praise Him all ye little children, God is love; Jesus loves the little children all the children of the world. Moving up to the intermediate and juniors class, the verses were even longer to memorize – like the entire chapter of 1 Corinthians 13!

When pain and suffering comes in our lives we feel betrayed and alone – “God, if You love me, why would You allow this to happen to me?” God allows situations to go on for as long as it takes to bring us into a closer relationship with Him. The healing that comes from God's love transcends any and all that happens to us on this earth.

Prayer: Loving and merciful Father, help us to know that Your grace is sufficient for us. Show us how to trust Your love even when things seem out of sorts. Amen.

MONDAY,
MARCH 15TH

Title: Love Letters

By: Betsy Gaines

Scripture: Mark 10:17-18

How difficult is it to bring up God in conversation? I didn't think I was "good enough" for my praise to make a difference to anyone else. I had many excuses for Him to overcome to convince me- He's written His love letter and you and I are the stationary! (2 Cor 3:1-5)

I had an annoying acquaintance from my hometown that I bumped into at college. He introduced me to his friend, and I thought: "Any friend of Bruce must be a loser." His friend was looking at me and thinking the same thing. How do I know? We've been married almost thirty years. God can use any messenger, even social lepers.

I'm old enough to remember when Chairman Mao coined the evil term "politically correct" to criminalize the truthful speech he didn't want to hear. Chinese Christians know God's message is not politically correct. If God allows you to suffer for speaking the Truth, you are in excellent company (John 18:37-38)

You are a clemency letter that overturns a death warrant. "Judge not! Hypocrite!" Satan will twist even Christ's words to silence you. But Christ also said, "Rebuke your brother..." (Luke 17:3) You will know when it is time to speak, when your motive, in all humility and obedience, is to glorify God- when loving God and loving your neighbor coincide in Good News! (2 Kings 6:24-7:9)

Now I think like this: I was spiritually hungry, but you were too self conscious to offer me the Word, the Bread of Life. I was spiritually thirsty and you withheld the Living Water, so as not to offend. I was exposed and near death and you didn't want to draw attention to my nakedness by telling me of the covering of the Glory of God. I was in prison and you "respected" our cultural differences and I never heard that the Son of Man could make me free. (Psalm 63)

Prayer: Dear and Righteous Lord, Your name is holy. How beautiful it is that You trust us - that faith, Your gift, comes by hearing. We know You are preparing fertile soil. Empower us to work for You by proclaiming the name of Christ, Emmanuel. (Psalm 40) Amen.

TUESDAY,
MARCH 16TH

Title: Miracle
By: Mollie Lackey
Scripture: John 16:33

My husband (Brock) and I were newlyweds enjoying our new life together, but we didn't quite have everything figured out. One of those things we didn't have yet was health insurance. Not having health insurance, for any amount of time, feels like you have nothing to lean on when things might go wrong. But I knew God was bigger than those things. Then it struck. I was faced with stomach pains beyond belief. I reluctantly ended up at the emergency room with fear of having no insurance. I went anyway, because I knew God was bigger than my fear. I ended up having appendicitis, needing surgery within an hour of being at the E.R. I had supportive family and friends there to see me cry when the nurse told me the surgery would cost thousands without insurance. In one night and one surgery, I lost my appendix and was \$32,000 in debt. I was healthy and appendicitis free, but I owed a lot of money, which was very scary for Brock and me. I knew I could trust God, but reality looks at you in the face and challenges you to lose that trust, especially when it's over \$30,000. But I knew God was bigger than money. With the large amounts of love and generosity of St. Vincent's Hospital, many doctors, my co-workers, my boss, parents of my students, and you the church, Brock and I ended up only owing about 10% of that \$32,000. God took away my debt and kept me safe through surgery. He also showed me an enormous amount of love through plenty of home cooked dinners, cards, flowers and more filling our apartment. Through surgery and this experience, God showed me He is a lot bigger than the "GIANTS" in our life, even though they seem huge to us.

Prayer: Dear God, thank you so much for my miracle that I get to share with others. I pray that whatever "GIANTS" our church might face, whether it be financial problems, fears, or illnesses, I pray, we stick together trusting you and knowing you are bigger than those "GIANTS" and you will take care of us. Amen.

**WEDNESDAY,
MARCH 17TH**

Title: My Way Back

By: Clive Jackson

Scripture: 2 Timothy 1:7

I grew up in a very Christian home, so I never remember a time when I did not believe in Jesus Christ. But when I went through a heart breaking divorce in 1974-1975, I got away from the church.

One day, Harriet Gardiner came out to May-Cohen's in Orange Park where I was working and invited me to come to her Sunday School Class at St. Johns. And I did. That class meant so much to me. I was in the class until Harriet Gardiner had to stop teaching. Also around that time, Mary Mixon asked me to come back to the choir, which I did, and I'm still singing! So I count those two encounters as saving me.

I got back into the church - the women's group on Monday and as many other activities as I can participate in. And I have so enjoyed all of the people in Joe Schmidt's class and his wonderful teaching - every Sunday.

I am so thankful that God led me back to the church - through these people. All of my three children went to Sunday School at St. Johns and had very great teachers always.

Prayer: Dear Lord, we thank you for friends, we thank you for teaching and we thank you for inviting and calling us, and when we wander away, calling us back. Amen.

THURSDAY,
MARCH 18TH

Title: Overcome
By: Thad Danson, Jr.
Scripture: Romans 12:19-21

I've tried my best through my long 17 years on this earth to be as nice as possible to everybody and treat everyone with respect. As most people will know though, in high school, its hard to get that same respect back from others. It used to really bother me when people would be rude and call me names like they are in the third grade or something. Whatever situation it may be, I always turn to this passage to keep me away from retaliation. At times it was very difficult to hold back, but I would always remember the last part of this verse, "do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good." This taught me it's okay to walk away from a situation, even if people make fun of me for it. I tell myself: why listen to those people when the one person that has any right to judge me is the one and only Jesus Christ? What they say means nothing! As difficult as it may be to sit there and not say something back, it's easy knowing that I'm doing right by what God tells me to do. And that's to treat my enemy as my neighbor and not be overcome by the evil that is upon me but to overcome that evil with good.

Prayer: May the Lord bring down his blessing for all of us and in the moment of anger and frustration, may God's overwhelming love and guidance allow us to refrain from confrontation and turn what is a bad situation into something good. Amen.

FRIDAY,
MARCH 19TH

Title: Perfect Power

By: Anne and Tony Nasrallah

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 12:9

This passage of scripture which God spoke personally to the apostle Paul has become a recurrent theme in the story of our lives. Certainly, our restoration in the aftermath of the accident that killed our two sons and permanently injured Anne is the most visible example of how God reached down to us in our weakness and held us together. Many years have passed since that time when nearly every day was spent in constant conversation with God. In hindsight we realize that it is almost easier to stay close to God in a life or death situation-ask anybody who has laid alone in a hospital bed late at night, wondering if there is going to be a tomorrow.

Maybe it was to our advantage as young twenty-something's to come face-to-face with the fact that NOTHING that we all spend so much time on, not "job security", "retirement funds", "fitness", "intellect or talent", "church or community standing" - all good enough pursuits - can ever compare with the touch of God that we receive in our times of vulnerability. I fondly remember Pastor Ron Smith saying, "If the devil can't make you bad, he'll just try to make you busy." It took years to realize that being "busy" was just a way of feeling self-reliant. We have learned to be wary of anything that makes us feel so self-sufficient that we are not relying on God.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, we thank You for the times when our weaknesses, either personal or as a church, make us more dependent on You, for Your power is made perfect in our weakness. Amen.

**SATURDAY,
MARCH 20TH**

Title: Post Season

By: Tim Kerr

Scripture: Psalm 139:23-24

Before my wife put a ban on any sports radio while we were together the phrase "A number of things have to happen" became the official signal that football season was in full swing.

The purpose of the phrase was to answer the question of which teams needed to win or lose so your team could make the playoffs. So, what does this have to do with my faith transformation?

Well, for transformation to happen or continue to happen "A number of things have to happen." Early in my faith journey I depended on others to do a lot of the heavy lifting for me. Not surprisingly, I didn't make much progress. As we saw from the last week of this year's NFL season, depending on other teams to win or lose can leave your team at home. I find it the same with my spiritual formation. If I depend on the pastor, Sunday school teacher or others I won't reach my full potential.

I need to be fully involved and take my journey seriously.

These verses from Psalm 139 have helped make my journey more personal between myself and God.

Prayer: Investigate the spiritual life of St. Johns, Oh Lord. Show us everything about ourselves, our strengths and weaknesses. Ask us the difficult questions, so that we have a clear picture of what You are about, and how we fit in Your game plan. Amen.

MONDAY,
MARCH 22ND

Title: Power Dressing

By: Mary A. Samford

Scripture: Luke 24:44-53 & Acts 1

*"I am the church,
You are the church,
We are the church together..."*

Wasn't it fun - when we were kids- singing this little song in Sunday School, pointing fingers at each other and laughing?

But now we are adults. As Paul said, "When I was a child, I spoke like a child..., thought..., and reasoned like a child; when I became a man I put away childish ways." (1 Cor. 13:11) As adults we know the life and love of Jesus, our Lord who, in his final command to us after His resurrection said that "repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached in [Christ's] name to all nations (Luke 24:47).

So maybe it's time to remove our "play clothes" and don our "work clothes." In Acts 1:8, He further assured us that we would be equipped for this "work" by the power of the Holy Spirit. Yes, as the little song said, "We are the church together."

Helen Keller was fond of this quote from Edward Everett Hale. "I am only one, but I am one. I cannot do all things, but I can do something. The something I ought to do, I can do. And by the grace of God I will."

Prayer: Thank You, Lord, for the challenge! Help us, we pray, to accept this challenge, renewing our strength daily by feeding on Your Word. Thus we can KNOW you more intimately and both GROW and GO forth empowered by the gift of the Holy Spirit as you promised in Acts 1:8. Amen.

**TUESDAY,
MARCH 23RD**

Title: Pure Joy

By: John Otterson

Scripture: Ephesians 2:8-10 & James 1:2-3

I was blessed to have been raised in a Christian home with parents that modeled Christian values for marriage and parenting. The challenge in the book of James to a comfortable lifestyle as a Christian came to me as an adult when faced with the realities of spiritual warfare.

St. Johns helped me to strengthen my faith and to confront the challenges through a 1997 mission trip to the former Soviet Union. The first knock on a stranger's door brought me front and center in sharing the Good News. The anxiety of the moment was eventually overwhelmed by the joy in seeing the power of Christ touch a person's life. The trip included confrontation with cults, political forces and being arrested by the local police! But that is another story for another time....

Over the past twelve years, I have come to recognize that Christian living in our country offers many of the same challenges and confrontations. However, it is a blessing to be used by God and it is a greater blessing to see the transforming power of Christ.

Prayer: Thank You, God, that You have us where You want us, with all the time in this world and the next to shower grace and kindness upon us in Christ Jesus. Saving is all Your idea, and all Your work. Help us to trust You enough to let You do it. Our salvation by faith is Your gift from start to finish! We don't play the major role. If we did, we'd probably go around bragging that we'd done the whole thing! No, we neither make nor save ourselves. Thank You, God, that You do both the making and saving. Create each of us by Christ Jesus to join Him in the work He does, the good work He has gotten ready for us to do, work we had better be doing. Amen.

**WEDNESDAY,
MARCH 24TH**

Title: Refreshing

By: Clara D. Flores

Scripture: Proverbs 11:25

Learning the weekly Memory verse in Sunday School meant getting attention from my family members later when they listened to us recite the verses. We often heard Grandpa pray in church and always ask a blessing before meals with all family members present.

I am thankful that I was brought up in a Christian family and accepted Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior when I was about 12 years old and was baptized in the Baptist Church. It meant that my outlook on life was different than some.

We had a new pastor once that really made a lot of friends with our youth group, singing and talking to us. I can still hear him sing "Old Man River," which is not a hymn. His sister was our choir director. Most of the teens I grew up with became Christians through our Sunday School teachers and the pastor's influence. He often came to our youth services and sang with us and we persuaded him to sing "Old Man River."

Not having faith that God is ever present would make life so hard in times like being in the earthquake in Haiti. Hearing and seeing the news from Haiti is shocking and hurtful, even with an ocean separating us from the horror. We can sing "Peace Be Still" but know that the aftershocks will continue for weeks or months. We were so glad when our military arrived and we trust them to help while we pray for their safety in that area which is so dangerous at this time.

Prayer (from Romans 15:12): May the God of hope fill us with joy and peace as we trust in Him so that we may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

**THURSDAY,
MARCH 25TH**

Title: Send Me
By: Harry Mathews
Scripture: Isaiah 6:1-8

My walk with God, I think, would begin with my mom. She would remind me of God's power to know all and see all, especially what's in my heart. I went to church a lot growing up at my mom's wishes.

Growing up, my dad, who was a kind and hard-working man, had a serious drinking problem which caused us to move often. I was always the new kid, on welfare, in the reduced lunch line, wearing Salvation Army clothes. At the age of 13, I was baptized at Marietta Baptist Tabernacle in Georgia.

God introduced me to Anne in 1983, we married in 1984, two years later she conceived and gave me the option to quit partying or take off my ring. Twenty-five years later, I'm still wearing the ring! We discussed having a proper family with good Christian morals.

A couple of years after joining a church and learning God's will for our lives, I heard a missionary talk. I thought it'd be an honor to serve God and see the world. But I thought Anne wouldn't go for it, so I ignored the tugging on my heart.

A year later the same missionary came back to our church. This time I heard that small voice say, "Tell her what you're thinking." Skeptical, I asked her opinion about me going to Haiti and she thought it was a wonderful idea. However, we weren't sure we could afford it.

The following Tuesday, my pastor called and told me two church women gave \$700 toward my trip. I immediately went to my room to pray – for forgiveness, for being semi-trusting in His provision – thankful for His provision.

I've been to Haiti three times and to Africa. Every time I say, "Yes, use me Lord," He has provided and blessed me. It's kind of scary; I have this peace I don't understand and yet, I do. I believe God's will is – His good, pleasing and perfect will – for me to be a living sacrifice.

Prayer: Lord, help me to be sensitive to Your will for my life. Use me to do good and be a blessing for Your sake. Help me to align what I want with what You want. Amen.

FRIDAY,
MARCH 26TH

Title: Shine!

By: Jonathan Nasrallah

Scripture: Romans 12:2

Romans 12:2 is one of the verses I've tried to define my high school life with, and it reminds me of another saying that's guided me. It isn't quite biblical in origin; it's actually a Newsboys lyric. It reminds me why "conforming to the pattern of this world" is so dangerous. The lyric I'm thinking of is, of course, "SHINE make 'em wonder what you got, make them wish that they were not on the outside looking in!" In high school, everyone seems to be defined by something, and I have a pretty good feeling this is going to be true in the real world too. There are kids at my school who are 100% in love with God. Everyone at school can tell there is something different about them (not just their friends or other Christians). These are the students that "shine" and their continual ministry by example has opened more doors than anything they can say in a single conversation with a friend or classmate looking for something more from this life. I strive every day to be one of these students, and I feel like I've done a pretty good job. It's really easy to fall into the patterns of the world, but it's necessary not to, not only for your relationship with God, but for the expansion of the kingdom of heaven.

Prayer: I pray that all the members of St. Johns can demonstrate the love of Christ everyday in their personal interactions and decisions. Let our removal from this world "shine" like a lamp on a stand and a city on a hill. Let our transformation speak as a testament to all people of the joy that Christ brings into our life. Amen.

**SATURDAY,
MARCH 27TH**

Title: Shut Up & Listen

By: Trudy Padilla

Scripture: Psalm 46:10

Like so many others, I like to talk. My mother will tell you that I like to hear myself talk which stems back to the "Gabby Abby" doll she got me when I was a little girl. I could pull a string on Abby and she would record what I said, then say it back to me. I would play with her for hours. Abby always talked back, but never said anything I didn't like. She never told me to clean my room or do my homework and sometimes she even sang to me ("Rhinestone Cowboy" was her favorite song). I miss Abby.

Unfortunately for me, God does not operate like Abby. I don't get to pull a string when I am ready to hear Him. I have to listen...constantly and I might not like what I hear.

A few years ago I struggled with this A LOT. My prayers were mostly me talking. My conversation with God was one way. One day I was praying very early in the morning. I was very upset and was pleading for something from God. Suddenly, in the midst of all my "noise" I really heard God. It wasn't a booming voice or a handwritten note, but it was unquestionably God giving me instruction. I got up immediately and responded. I liked it. It was not what I expected and at the time, was not what I wanted, but it was good. That one moment led to a career change that has blessed our family in more ways than we can count; opportunities for mission trips; a bigger house and an extra house that was used to bless 3 families during hard times and so much more.

God told me, through Psalm 46:10 to listen to Him, trust in Him and He will be exalted. He's doing the heavy lifting. I just need to be still!

*Psst....now it's your turn. BE STILL!

Prayer: Father God, thank you for hearing our prayers, even the ones we don't speak out loud. Please open our ears and hearts to hear you and move us to respond. Give us the opportunity today to exalt you. Amen.

MONDAY, MARCH 29TH

Title: Sought

By: Carol Whyrick

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 5:17

Before I accepted Christ as my personal Savior I was a living illustration of the warning in Romans 12:2, "do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world." Conform I did, and in a big way! For the first 35 years of my life I wandered in the world, convinced I had things under control. The reality is my world consisted of bitterness, envy, strife, deceit, lust of the flesh, indulgence, self absorption, entitlement and anger. Eventually I hit bottom and that's where God found me. I sure wasn't looking for Him, but thankfully He found me! As Isaiah 65:1 declares, "I revealed myself to those who did not ask for me, I was found by those who did not seek me." I surrendered my life on November 26, 1995 based on the promise given in Romans 10:13, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved" and I've never regretted that decision.

I began to seek the Lord and the wisdom found in the Bible. One of my favorite scriptures is Jeremiah 29:11-13. My life now bears the fruits of the spirit. Where there was bitterness, there is now love. Where there was envy, there is now joy. Where there was strife, there is now peace. Where there was deceit, there is now kindness. Where there was lust of the flesh, there is now faithfulness. Where there was indulgence, there is now self-control. Where there was anger, there is now gentleness. Only God can accomplish that!

When I think of who I am today, in Christ, it is a vivid study of contrasts to the "old me". Truly, I am a new creation. In reflection, every aspect of my character has been transformed by the renewing of my mind (Romans 12:2).

Prayer: Thank You God for Your renewal and faithful abundance and for blessing us beyond what we ever could have imagined. Help us to seek Your will for our lives and to say "Yes." Amen.

**TUESDAY,
MARCH 30TH**

Title: Spirits or Humans?

By: Joe Schmidt

Scripture: Romans 12: 1-2

When I notice that I am holding my breath or breathing shallowly in fear, I know I am regarding myself as a human being, alone in the world, locked up by a protective mind that can think no new thoughts and possesses finite limits of understanding. Compassion for another is impossible while inundated with fear for self. When in such a dark state, I trip and fall often and can have a spiritual experience only when out of ideas, out of assets, out of hope and grasping for ever-elusive answers. At these times I discover I can see a light at the end of the tunnel. My mind is terrified because it is out of ideas and cannot understand it is in way over its head. Curiously, the light demands attention and closer observation as it dissolves and clarifies the darkness and removes the fear.

As I approach the light I breathe more deeply, feel more alive, understand more, but it is not a mental understanding, but a heart-leading-mind-following understanding. The mind wants to take control back, but cannot as it is still overwhelmed and clueless. Yet it yields to the light; it surrenders to the light... not surrender as in capitulation, but surrender as in ceasing fighting, ceasing struggling. What is this light? The light is spirit and it is unconcerned with control or protection because it knows the origins of its strengths and powers are infinite and divine. Spirit allows the mind to choose to ignore it until such time as the mind is overwhelmed and gives up. Then spirit cascades its gifts of joy, understanding, compassion, healing, miracles, and salvation.

Prayer: Father, we thank you for giving us the light to illuminate our spiritual origins in the face of those who feel confined to their physical senses and thoughts. We thank you for widening our horizons infinitely with each loving conversation. We thank you in advance for forgiving us when we lose focus of where we are and what we're doing and somehow crawl off the living-sacrificial altar. We thank you for the empowerment felt each time we present ourselves as living sacrifices and we know that every day more and more feel the same and are bringing heaven's blessings to earth. Amen.

WEDNESDAY,
MARCH 31ST

Title: The "E" Word
By: Beau Norton
Scripture: Philemon 1:6

Evangelism is a fun word, isn't it? If you want to make someone cringe I would highly suggest throwing this word around often. When most of us think of evangelists, images of spiritual head hunters probably come to mind. These fanatical people run around throwing Bibles at people and the only thing that can quench their hunger is a successful conversion. I think most of us get intimidated about evangelizing for these same reasons. We are afraid to become "those people" and we get discouraged when people say "no." I think the problem with evangelism is our picture of evangelism. As patients in God's house, we spend so much time in the hospital that some of us begin to think we are the physicians. Maybe evangelism is about more than a "yes" and maybe it's about more than playing doctor. Maybe evangelism is about my own spiritual health care too.

The last several years of my life had been spent in a Christian bubble. All of my family and friends were Christians. I interned at a church. I worked at a Christian store. I went to a Christian theological seminary. One day I realized something was very wrong with my life. How do I reach a world if I never put myself out there? I made the decision to go back to work at Best Buy and was overwhelmed. I was surrounded by atheists, agnostics, and every other brand of spirituality you could imagine. I began to develop a friendship with a co-worker who was a Jehovah's Witness, never realizing what kind of impact that would have on my own walk with Christ. I was confronted with questions that urged me to dig deeper into God's word to answer things I had never even considered. Whether or not my act of evangelism was successful I may never know, but what I do know is that I have grown closer to understanding the fullness of all the good things I have in Christ.

Prayer: Dear Lord, help us for our own sakes to be prepared to discuss our faith in the Lord Jesus and His love for us. May we be active in sharing our faith, so that we will have a full understanding of every good thing we have in Christ. May our words give great joy and encouragement and refresh the hearts of those you put in our way. Amen.

THURSDAY,
APRIL 1ST

Title: The Fires of Faith

By: Graham Crainshaw

Scripture: 1 Peter 1:6-7

It was the end of my freshman year in high school when I got the news that my family was going to move to Florida. I couldn't believe it. Just after I had started high school, grown very close to my new friends, and basically had begun a new chapter of my life, God told my family that we were supposed to move a thousand miles away to a place where we knew absolutely no one. I was devastated, and for a while I was really angry at God. But then I stumbled across the words of Peter and I was reminded that all these trials I've gone through are eventually going to pay off. I realized the joy that awaits me in my future is going to be so vast and incomprehensible that all these speed bumps in my life are going to seem like a distant dream. I wonder if I'll even be able to remember them.

In a few months, I'm going to be heading for college and starting another life again. And to be honest, it scares me. Once again I have to leave behind the people whom I've grown to love very much. This is the fire that purifies my faith – and it burns. But I know that it's just one more test that will put me one step closer to the ultimate reward.

Prayer: Dear Lord, thank you so much for reminding us through your word that the rough spots in our lives only last a little while, and that on the other side of life it will all be worth it. Help us to be burning examples of your love even in the midst of these difficulties. Amen.

FRIDAY,
APRIL 2ND

Title: The Lord Will Be With You

By: Nancy Doering

Scripture: Deuteronomy 31:8

I first came across verse 8 in Deuteronomy 31 while I was in Bible Study Fellowship in 2001. We had studied Deuteronomy and that verse had “jumped” out at me. In fact, I wrote the verse on a small card and whenever I went into surgery I carried it in my hand.

I remember on each occasion I would read it to the surgeon and the nurses; they assured me it would be in my hand when I woke up, and it was. It was like taking God's grace into surgery with me – kind of a visual for me. I didn't quite realize it then, but God had placed that verse on my heart knowing I would really need to rely on His word. In April 2004, I was diagnosed with breast cancer. That verse, along with others I had memorized, became my peace and comfort during my surgery and the following radiation treatments (I did have to rewrite the verse on a new card several more times as it became crumpled and well used!).

As I look back (I'm a 5 ½ year cancer survivor), I realize God was, is, and will be my force field. He surrounds me through the trials in my life. He carries me. And His grace is sufficient for me. I carry my little cards with Deut. 31:8 on them in my purse and pass them out to others during their trials. I trust God will give them His grace, peace and comfort as He gave me; and as He gives freely to all who seek Him.

Prayer: Lord, thank You that You go before us and are with us. Help calm our fears and give us courage knowing You will never leave us nor forsake us, just as You were in the desert and just as You've been in countless surgeries. Amen.

SATURDAY,
APRIL 3RD

Title: What A Friend!
By: Susan Davis
Scripture: John 15:11-15

John Scrivener wrote a hymn that says:

*What a Friend we have in Jesus, all our sins and griefs to bear!
What a privilege to carry everything to God in prayer!
O what peace we often forfeit, O what needless pain we bear,
All because we do not carry everything to God in prayer.*

*Have we trials and temptations? Is there trouble anywhere?
We should never be discouraged; take it to the Lord in prayer.
Can we find a friend so faithful who will all our sorrows share?
Jesus knows our every weakness; take it to the Lord in prayer.*

Knowing and believing this for many years has been a great comfort to me. In raising our five children, Jesus has been a guide and support. In my own life, Jesus opened my eyes to see people through his eyes- to try to be understanding and compassionate. I often fall away and when I do, I ask for forgiveness and pray: "Lord, help my unbelief."

Prayer: Lord, You have asked us to call upon You in the day of trouble. You stand ready to help us, so that Your name will be glorified. Thank You for Your friendship. Amen.

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