

A Follower of Jesus

Vonda Rodeheaver

Scripture: [Acts 9: 1-2, 36](#)

Tabitha was from Joppa, a Jewish Mediterranean coastal town with Greek cultural influence. Her Hebrew name was Tabitha, but she was known by her Greek-speaking friends as Dorcas. (Often Jews living in areas of strong Greek cultural influence spoke not only Aramaic but also Greek.) Tabitha was a devout Hebrew believer living in a Hellenized town. She was zealous for God. She was well known and was referred to as a “disciple” of Jesus. She would have been considered as a member of “the Way”, people who believed that Jesus had been resurrected from the dead and that therefore Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of God. Tabitha, or Dorcas as her friends called her, always went about doing good and helping the poor.

Saul, another devout Hebrew, was born in Tarsus of Cilicia, a town under the influence of Roman rule and culture. Young Saul was brought to Jerusalem where he was trained to follow the Old Testament Law and the religious customs of his ancestors. He excelled under the teaching of a leading rabbi named Gamaliel and he was quite zealous for God.

At one level Tabitha and Saul hold much in common. They both had been raised to be devout Jews even though born into contexts of strong gentile influence. Yet there is a key difference between Saul and Tabitha at this point in the story. Saul was zealous to keep the Jewish laws but refused to believe that Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of God. To Paul, Jesus was dead. No resurrection happened.

Saul had a lot of company. He would obtain documents from the high priest and council giving him permission to bring people of the Way to Jerusalem to be punished and imprisoned. In Acts 22:4, the converted Saul says he persecuted the followers of this Way to their death, arresting both men and women and throwing them into prison. Several places in Scripture refer to Saul persecuting both men and women of the Way. Saul had no problem dealing with women as harshly as he dealt with the men who believed in Jesus.

In a day when there were threats against followers of the Way, a day when persecution awaited those who believed that Jesus was resurrected from the dead and that he was the Messiah, Tabitha was known as a disciple. She remained true to Jesus by always doing good and helping the poor, no matter the risk.

Points to ponder:

- Have you ever felt threatened because of your beliefs that Jesus is the Son of God, our Messiah?
- Have you ever been persecuted for being a follower of Jesus?
- In Tabitha's world there were very real threats to those who believed in Jesus. Saul had no problems persecuting both men and women who believed and yet Tabitha remained known as a disciple, a believer, a follower of Jesus.
- In our world today it seems there is an ever increasing resistance to followers of Jesus. We can take hope from those who have gone before us . . . by women such as Tabitha, who followed Jesus and went about doing good and helping the poor . . . even if following Jesus might not have been the popular thing to do.

Prayer:

Lord, help us take courage to be known as disciples of Jesus . . . to continue doing good and helping the poor, even if there might be opposition from those who don't believe.

A Disciple of Jesus **Vonda Rodeheaver**

Scripture: [Acts 9:36](#)

Have you ever wondered what it must have been like to be called a disciple? Acts 9:36 says that in Joppa there was a disciple named Tabitha. Here was a woman introduced as a disciple, a follower of Jesus! This is how she was known. That's exciting!

How did Tabitha (Dorcas) receive the distinction of being called a disciple? She was a believer in Jesus. She so believed in Him that she followed His example. Jesus was compassionate. He took time to help people both physically and spiritually. He was not afraid to reach out to the lowly outcasts of society. He gave His disciples a clear call to follow him . . . to follow His example. Tabitha followed His example by always doing good and helping the poor.

Jesus made it clear that as you have done it to "*the least of these you have done it unto me. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me*" (Matthew 25:31-36). As we follow Jesus in doing good and helping the poor, we are actually helping Jesus. Tabitha (Dorcas) learned about discipleship from Jesus. She followed His example of ministering to those in need . . . and in the process ministered to them in Jesus' name.

Points to ponder:

- Who are you following today?
- Who is your example?
- Whose life do you choose to emulate?
- Have you ever been called a disciple of Jesus?
- As we look around us are there people in need of compassion? Is there someone who needs a physical or spiritual touch from the Lord? Are you willing to follow Jesus' example by taking time to help those in need today?

In today's society, I'm not sure we go around calling each other disciples; but what a way to be known! I don't know about you, but I would love to be known as Vonda, a disciple of Jesus.

Prayer:

Lord, help us be known as disciples, followers of Jesus. Help us to be aware of those in need and follow Jesus' example of ministering to those who are poor or unlovable.

Working for Jesus **Vonda Rodeheaver**

Scripture: [Acts 9:36-39](#)

The Greeks called Tabitha Dorcas, meaning Gazelle or graceful one. I can't help but think that Dorcas was graceful and grace filled. Dorcas always went about doing good and helping the poor. This included the widows in her town. The widowed women talked about the many garments that Dorcas had made for them. In a society where many widows had no status without a man to care for them, they were often left to the good graces of others, dependent on the generosity of someone such as Dorcas to provide for them. Dorcas made them garments (vs. 39).

Garments . . . how important to receive garments! As women we tend to care about how we look; how fitting that Dorcas made garments for the widows in need of clothing. It must have made them feel good to know that they had new garments to wear! Those who were recipients of Dorcas' generosity stood weeping, showing Peter the coats and garments that Dorcas had made for them. Is it any wonder they were saddened by the loss of one so caring and so generous? Who would care for them now? Who would make them garments? They had lost a true caring and compassionate friend. Is it no wonder that they stood around weeping?

How do we wish to be known? Dorcas was known for doing good. Her work reflected Jesus. She took her resources and her time to sew garments for the widows. When the widows thought about Dorcas, they must have thought about Jesus when He spoke of His heavenly Father clothing the lilies of the field (Luke 12:27-18). Just as He provided for the lilies, God provided for their clothing through Dorcas. Her work was a reflection of God's grace and compassion for those in need, especially the widows.

Points to Ponder:

- What kind of work are we known for?
- How do you wish for others to see your work?
- Is your work an extension of God's grace and compassion?

Prayer:

Lord, help us to be grace-filled. Help us to work, using our time and resources in such a way that we will be an extension of God's love and compassion to those around us.

A Jesus Friend **Vonda Rodeheaver**

Scripture: [Acts 9:31-41](#)

After Saul's conversion, there was a time of peace in the churches of Judea, Galilee, and Samaria. Jesus' disciples were traveling about, freely sharing the good news of the gospel. Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, had just healed a man named Aeneas in the town of Lydda. The news about this healing spread a day's journey over to the town of Joppa. In a day when there were no telegrams, phones, computers, or social media, news traveled to the next town over . . . a day's journey. Can you imagine!

Not only was Dorcas a disciple, but her friends were disciples. Tabitha (Dorcas) became ill and died. When her friends heard that Peter was five miles away in Lydda they sent two men to bring him to Joppa. Surely if Peter was able to heal a man who was crippled, they believed he could do something for their friend Dorcas. Dorcas' friends knew where to go for help. They counted on God's ability to do miracles through Peter. They had amazing faith! Dorcas' friends were definitely followers of Jesus!

I'm reminded of the crippled man whose friends had faith that Jesus could touch him; so they went above and beyond, bringing their friend to the house where Jesus was. When they discovered it was so crowded they couldn't get in, they came up with a plan to carry their friend up on the roof and then lowered him through a hole, right in front of Jesus. Was their faith rewarded? Yes! The crippled man was healed. They knew who to turn to. Jesus!

Was Dorcas' friends' faith rewarded? Yes! They sent two men to get Peter, urging him to come without delay. Peter came and asked everyone to leave the room where Dorcas was laid. Then Peter got down on his knees and prayed. He said, "Tabitha, get up!" Tabitha was raised from the dead and presented to her friends, the saints and believers.

What powerful faith! What wonderful friendship! God used Dorcas' friends to help restore her life. They knew who to turn to for help! Jesus!

Points to Ponder:

- What kind of friends do we have?
- Have we invested in friendships with other believers?
- Do our friends know who to turn to for help?
- Are we able to be that friend, bringing someone to Jesus?

Prayer:

Lord help us to be a friend that believes that with You all things are possible. Help us to bring people to Jesus with faith, believing that You are the answer.

Lord, sometimes we're the ones who need help. Please surround us with friends who know who to turn to . . . who will bring us to Jesus in our times of need.

Resurrected **Vonda Rodeheaver**

Scripture: [Acts 9:37-41](#)

Can you imagine Tabitha's surprise? I've always wondered why, when someone was raised from the dead in the Bible, the one who prayed over them often had everyone leave the room. Perhaps it was just a bit much for the person to wake up and discover a lot of people standing there? Or the power of God was so powerful . . . who knows. **B**ut the scripture says when Tabitha opened her eyes, she saw Peter and sat up. It must have been a surprise to see Peter there with her! Peter held out his hand and helped Tabitha to her feet. Then he presented her to all the saints and believers. Wow! It must have been a wonderful reunion! All of the widows who had just shown Peter the garments that Dorcas had made for them were rejoicing! All her other friends, saints, believers, disciples . . . they were all rejoicing! They had just witnessed resurrection! New life!

I'm sure some of you may be thinking, "Why was it so wonderful for Dorcas to leave heaven and come back down to this old world to live among people once again?" The good news is that Peter's bringing Tabitha back to life as opposed to leaving her in heaven is a reminder that our hope is not simply heaven; our hope is new creation and resurrection. God is not just interested in saving our souls; God is also interested in resurrecting our bodies . . . full salvation. Instead of our bodies just decaying in death, God has provided the promise of the resurrection of our bodies as well. Death wins nothing.

Sometimes God chooses to give us a glimpse of that final resurrection when all believers will be given a new body. Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done . . . on earth as it is in heaven. A new body!!! I'll take that! (When the time is right . . .)

Points to Ponder:

- God has provided a plan for the salvation of our souls and resurrection of our bodies.
- As Christians, our hope is resurrection, new creation, and all things being made new!

Prayer:

Thank You, God, for providing salvation, resurrection, and a home in heaven for all who believe in You!

We Are Here to Serve **Vonda Rodeheaver**

Scripture: [Acts 9:41](#)

When Tabitha (Dorcas) is brought to life, raised from the dead, Peter presented her to the widows and the disciples alive. The last time they had seen Dorcas, she was dead, gone from this world. They had washed her body and laid her in an upstairs room. It seemed so final. When Peter came, the widows took him upstairs to the room where Dorcas' body lay. They stood around weeping, showing Peter the robes and other clothing that Dorcas had made while she was still with them. Moments later Peter was presenting Tabitha to them alive!

It's significant to realize that when we are given new life, it's not just for ourselves; it's for the sake of the believers, as well. Tabitha (Dorcas) wasn't brought from death to life so she could live longer; she was given more life so she could give to others, she could continue doing good and helping the poor, she could continue making garments for the widows. Being a Christian means that we are not saved so that we can merely have a private experience, but we are saved to be given to others.

When Saul was saved, he was also commissioned to the Gentiles. The Lord told Ananias, "This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel" (Acts 9:15). When Dorcas was resaved by being brought from death to life, she was given to her church, the community. We are saved to be given.

Points to Ponder:

- Who are you giving yourself to?
- When God saves us, we are given new life not only for ourselves but the sake of the believers, as well.

Prayer:

Lord, thank You for saving us. You have saved us for a purpose. Help us to faithfully live out that purpose by giving ourselves to our church and community.

Hope for All! **Vonda Rodeheaver**

Scripture: [Acts 9:40-42](#)

So, what is the reason Luke recounts the story about Tabitha (Dorcas)? It continues to show the power of the resurrected Jesus to save all people from their sins. Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, has raised Dorcas from the dead, providing another resurrection account, showing that God desires to give new life and resurrection to all who believe. Peter is about ready to go to Cornelius, a Roman centurion, a righteous God-fearing Gentile (Acts 10). How does Peter have credibility as one of Jesus' disciples or apostles later as he speaks to the centurion? It is because he was given power by the Holy Spirit to raise Dorcas from the dead. Just as God was with Peter bringing Tabitha back to life from the dead, so he is with Peter in helping bring Cornelius into the family of God. Peter realizes the Gospel is for all people and Cornelius realizes Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. He and his entire household are saved.

Luke begins addressing the book of Acts by speaking to Theophilus, a God-fearer and a Gentile who worshiped Israel's God but did not become Jewish. He wasn't circumcised and didn't follow the Judaic laws regarding food or the Sabbath. It would be like going to worship but never being invited to the potluck because the Jews would not eat with Gentiles. He would have learned about God at the synagogue but he was never really included because he never became Jewish.

Theophilus likely became a Christian when he heard the good news of the Gospel that both Peter and Paul were preaching. They proclaimed that Jesus was risen and that Gentiles were fully included as people of God. The synagogue leaders were likely telling Theophilus not to listen to Peter or Paul's preaching. So who should Theophilus believe . . . the synagogue rulers or Peter who just raised Tabitha from the dead? (Paul also raised Eutychus from the dead in Acts 20:7-12.)

The story of the resurrected Tabitha (Dorcas) is hope for Theophilus. It is hope for the centurion and his family. Why? As Gentiles, they can now be fully included into the people of God. The hope of resurrection is for both Jew and Gentile. The promises of God are for everyone. All can be included in the family of God. As the story of Dorcas' resurrection became known all over Joppa, many people believed in the Lord.

Points to Ponder:

- As we place our trust in the resurrected Jesus, the Messiah, the Son of God, we too are promised a place in the family of God!
- Sharing the good news of the resurrected Jesus brings about salvation to those who believe.
- All are welcome to believe!

Prayer:

Lord, help us to share the good news of the Gospel. Thanks for providing salvation to all who believe!

Stepping Out Toward Recovery **Ruth McDowell Lavendar**

Scripture: [Ruth 1: 4-5, 7](#) (NRSV)

"When they had lived there about ten years, both Mahlon and Chilean also died, so that the woman was left without her two sons and her husband . . . So she set out from the place where she had been living . . . and they went on their way to go back to the land of Judah."

Naomi, above all Old Testament characters, knew loss. She lost her homeland, her identity, her life's partner, her sons, and her hope. By our standards, Naomi was out of options. She was an "alien" in a land where one loss had piled on another.

I identified with Naomi, as I could never have predicted, in the final hours of 2010 - three months into a sudden, tragic widowhood. My youngest son was "gearing up" for what we thought would be a decades-long commitment to a missionary assignment in the heart of China. In less than twelve months, I would lose two of the three people around whom I had built my life. I felt powerless, overwhelmed, almost paralyzed.

As we follow Naomi's story through chapter one of Ruth, we read that, in time, she saw the chance of a future back home. The famine was past, the "Lord had considered his people and given them food." She SET OUT, a major first step toward recovery, an act of what seemed to be blind faith. These six years later, Naomi's story resonates with me. In times of loss, we are often ruled by fear of the unknown. We wait to be rescued; we wait for normalcy to return. But, we must SET OUT in faith.

Points to ponder:

- What loss has shaped your life in the last decade? The last year?
- What actions are available to us in our loss? How might Naomi inspire us?

Prayer:

Lord, show us how to move forward into the next phase of our journey homeward.

Speaking Out With Courage **Ruth McDowell Lavendar**

Scripture: [Ruth 1: 20-21](#) (NRSV)

"Call me no longer Naomi, call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt bitterly with me. I went away full, but the Lord has brought me back empty; why call me Naomi, when the Lord has dealt harshly with me, and the Almighty has brought calamity upon me?"

Naomi had good days and bad days on her journey home. Saying good-bye to Orpah was a wrenching moment. Hearing Ruth vow never to leave her, to adopt Naomi's faith in God must have been energizing, the inspiration to keep going. Still, when Naomi faced the townspeople of Bethlehem, she was broken and bereft of human comfort.

Thrice she accuses the Lord of dealing bitterly and harshly with her and bringing calamity upon her. No longer Naomi but Mara, she is a woman suffering the depths of her loss. As such, she is a character that all readers can identify with.

We've all experience such moments. The loss of a loved one, divorce, a long and painful separation for military service, a move we don't want to make, the loss of a job, a tragic event that leaves us "homeless." There comes a day when we speak aloud Naomi's words: "The Almighty has brought calamity upon me..." In that statement, we admit our deepest fear, our greatest need.

Here, in this public confession, is the fork in the road where all mourners must pause and choose. No option seems good on the morning after the fire or the morning after the funeral or the morning after the divorce papers have arrived in their final form. But often, when looking back months or years later, that morning is a new beginning. Stating the worst often opens the way to the solution.

Points to ponder:

- Think about your own Naomi moment and how far you have come since then.
- What calamity is happening in your own neighborhood?

Prayer:

Lord and Father, thank you for loving us, even as we are screaming out our accusations and fears.

Reaching Out in Mercy
Ruth McDowell Lavendar

Scripture: [Ruth 2: 10-12](#) (NRSV)

" . . . All that you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband has been fully told me, and how you left your father and mother and your native land and came to a people that you did not know before. May the Lord reward you for your deeds, and may you have a full reward from the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come for refuge."

It is easy to lose sight of Ruth's losses as Naomi recounts her own in the early verses of the book of Ruth. Then we hear a listing of her losses and sacrifices through the voice of Boaz on her first day of gleaning in his field. I think of her as a woman in her mid-twenties, totally powerless, dependent on the "favor" of the powerful. Surely, this is why she falls prostrate before him, her face to the ground.

Last week I met my friend America for coffee. In 2012, she had been my student in a Women's Lit class. America lost her dad to a heart attack when she was 19, then her mother to cancer before her 21st birthday. I remember her pleas on Facebook, trying to find homes for her mother's cats that cold December. At the time, our campus of under 1,000 acted briefly with words, promises of prayers, etc. Then our world moved on, her losses easily forgotten.

We would like to think that there's a Boaz for every Ruth. A Pope Francis for every Syrian refugee. An answer for the complicated tragedy of every young orphan. I know that such is not always the reality.

Boaz had heard Naomi's story and had taken it to heart. His contribution to Ruth's new role in Naomi's life was small – a little barley, left-overs at best. But, IT MADE ALL THE DIFFERENCE!

Everywhere we turn, there are populations of "aliens," "foreigners," the marginalized who experience losses we can only imagine. As followers of the Christian God, we are compelled to ACT, with Boaz as our example.

Points to ponder:

- Imagine a world where every Boaz found his/her Ruth to lift out of poverty or loss.
- Share stories of someone acting as a Boaz.

Prayer:

Father of us all, lead us to the people whose lives we can change with resources You provide.

Seeing Through the Mirror **Ruth McDowell Lavendar**

Scripture: [1Corinthians 13: 12](#) (NRSV)

"For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known."

Some losses will never be recovered in this lifetime, in this world of broken humanity. Surely, the loss of a child is so profound, so unthinkable, so wrenching that no one on the outside looking in can imagine – even for a moment – the depth of the loss.

In the "heady" early days of my years as a pastor's wife, I met Alma Kelly. Her son's remains had been sent home from Viet Nam in two separate body bags, months apart. I was 30-something, and I lamely tried to speak words of comfort; I know now I failed utterly.

As a new mother in my mid-twenties, I witnessed the family devastation close up when my 15-year-old brother-in-law died suddenly one Wednesday morning of a heart problem no one dreamed he had. His mother Elsie lived 33 years after his passing – perhaps the most gentle spirit I have known in my lifetime. The loss of Tommy was always fresh, seldom spoken of except in family prayer moments, but a defining wound in a life that held other overwhelming wounds.

Standing by her grave a dozen years ago, I was still speechless, impotent in my human need to connect the dots of cause/effect and sowing/reaping that we try so hard to express in human language.

Elsie saw and I see through a dim mirror, like glasses broken or lost. But Elsie, on that March day in 2004, saw "face to face." It is our great hope! Our only hope. And that is enough to keep walking life's journey.

Points to Ponder:

- Who in your circle of friends is experiencing loss and needs a friend? Sometimes our presence is all that's necessary.
- How does your hope of life after death encourage you to keep on keeping on?

Prayer:

Lord, our Father, our brother, our dearest friend, teach us to believe in the day that we will see and know and UNDERSTAND face to face in your presence.

Keeping Ourselves Unstained **Ruth McDowell Lavendar**

Scripture: [James 1: 27](#) (NRSV)

"Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to care for orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world."

I remember the day in Africa ten years ago that Verna quoted this scripture, turning from the front seat of the van to "address" the three of us in back. We were on our way to a Kenyan orphanage where 35 children were being cared for by one woman and her daughter. As never before, the words of James burned into my heart.

Somehow I had missed "in their distress" in my earlier readings. The idea of tying this sort of care to keeping oneself "unstained by the world" had also never resonated with me as forcefully. Over these ten years since that March day, I have heard these phrases over and over – sometimes in Verna's voice. They affect my understanding of how we – the church – must view the most vulnerable in our society.

Not being able to identify personally with their loss is not a valid excuse. Assuming that "their distress" has a few weeks' expiration date is shallow and often shameful.

As wave upon wave of Syrian refugees crossed into Europe last summer and fall, I saw "their distress" as individuals – widows, orphans, broken families. I felt urgency to ACT, to GIVE, to get INVOLVED. Religion that is pure, for me, drove me to an organization that distributes boots for the long journey northward. My small part, combined with others, acknowledges the loss suffered and our "calling" as members of the human family to keep ourselves "unstained" by fear and apathy.

Points to Ponder:

- Identify someone near you that needs some type of care.
- Think of ways you can do something to ease their dire circumstances.
- Who can hold you accountable to ensure you'll take action?

Prayer:

Lord, Father of all, teach us to act in love and compassion to the distressed of our world.

Separating Treasures from TREASURE **Ruth McDowell Lavendar**

Scripture: [Matthew 6: 19-21](#) (NRSV)

"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven . . . For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

There are some losses in life that should be seen as secondary. Temporal things, things bought with money, things that might be offered in an estate sale a few months after we're gone. Sadly, over my lifetime, I have watched as more and more of us who follow the Man of Galilee amass larger and more expensive piles of "stuff." And then comes fire, wind, rain, a man in a ski mask, a sure-fire stock purchase gone wrong, a financial set back that seems like the end of our world for a month or a year, maybe longer. We grieve the loss of a ring, a sports car, an antique table or cabinet far longer than Matthew would advise us to.

Jesus set the example for His disciples about traveling light. One tunic will do; two is too many.

Sizing down as we reach a particular age in our lives, giving away things we once loved, accepting the losses experienced when the natural world wreaks havoc. All of this is HARD. We lose our perspective for a while. We whine; we covet; we settle for counting our blessings in light of EARTH'S treasures.

My own attachment to treasures that rust has forever been changed by my three long-term visits to Kenya and the lovely people I came to know well. On a day when I hear myself investing time and energy in comparing my "stuff" with a neighbor's, I think of George and Jackson and Agnes – treasured friends who own little but feel RICH in heavenly terms. And, almost immediately, my attitude adjusts!

Points to ponder:

- How are earth's treasures being balanced in your life these days?
- How did you get through a major property loss in the past?

Prayer:

Lord, help us to learn how to hold loosely to treasures and tightly to Your hand.

Stumbling, Falling, Holding His Hand **Ruth McDowell Lavendar**

Scripture: [Psalm 37: 23-24](#) (NRSV)

"Our steps are made firm by the Lord, when he delights in our way; though we stumble, we shall not fall headlong, for the Lord holds us by the hand."

2016 has brought a major loss into my life. Sixteen weeks into a new normal, I am still feeling the deprivations of a fall in early February that fractured my pelvis in four places. For weeks I lost almost every "gift" of autonomy that I had taken for granted for 60+ years. My biggest victory was "graduating" to a cane in late March, then to a quick stroll on a crowded beach in late April, holding tightly to my husband's strong arm.

Walking without pain is the single focus of my life in these spring days.

Five years ago, in the toughest days of my widowhood, I rediscovered Psalm 37. The psalmist's words about stumbling, not falling headlong, and being held by the Lord's hand radically changed my view of my world that Easter Sunday 2011. They resonate again today, bringing a comfort truly indescribable.

Through all of life's losses (and there will be many), the great God of the universe surely "holds us by the hand." I bear witness to that promise with fresh eyes. As the EMS guys lifted me onto the stretcher that early Wednesday morning, I said, "I'm gonna talk to Jesus now." "Help me, Jesus," I repeated over and over during that long ride. Looking back, I KNOW He did; I FELT His tender touch.

Points to ponder:

- Name the many ways we stumble in the course of our lives.
- How do we know that the Lord is holding us by the hand?

Prayer:

Lord, make us truly grateful for the moments in our lives when we know we are saved from falling head long. Give us eyes to SEE and find comfort.

Sold Out! **Cheryl Roland**

Scripture: [Acts 16:13-15](#)

Our plan was to politely endure the 90-minute timeshare sales presentation, then enjoy three free nights at the beautiful lakefront lodge. However, the salesman capitalized on our youthful vulnerabilities and skillfully pressured us into making a purchase. Just after signing on the dotted line we came to our senses, evaluated our budget, and with overwhelming urgency, withdrew from the deal. We were sold but not willing to sell out. The cost was too great.

To be sold out for Christ is to be devoted to Him, regardless of the cost and without reservation. The Apostle Paul was a great example of radical obedience, one who abandoned everything to follow Christ. Prompted by a heart of gratitude to Jesus, who had changed his life forever, Paul readily shared his faith with all who would listen.

On the Sabbath day, Paul, Silas, Luke, and Timothy approached the river bank looking for a place to pray when they came upon a group of women who had gathered there. Unlike a high pressured salesman, Paul simply spoke about Jesus, Lydia listened, and the Lord opened her heart to respond to His message. Jesus satisfied her longing as she believed and was baptized. She was not just sold, but sold out! Regardless of possible financial loss, persecution, or rejection, she shared Jesus with her family, and all those in her household believed.

Points to Ponder:

- Have you ever been pressured into making a purchase? What are the causes and cures for buyer's remorse?
- What is the difference between believing in Christ and being sold out?
- Review Paul's approach to evangelism in Acts 16:11-15 and list three characteristics that made him effective.
- How did Lydia express her gratitude to Jesus for His life-changing grace? How did she express her gratitude to the disciples?
- Read Matthew 6:33 and share ways your life reflects God's priorities.

Prayer:

Search my heart, oh God, and cleanse any offensive way in me. Give me an undivided heart, and lead me to full and complete surrender. In the strong name of Jesus, I pray. Amen.

No Other Gods! **Cheryl Roland**

Scripture: [Acts 16:13-15](#)

A potbellied Buddha, encased in an ornate box, was proudly displayed in the new restaurant. At the base of the box was an offering, an orange and a cigarette. Our waiter explained, “Happy Buddha make business good.”

Buddha images are worshiped around the world, but recently they have become an alarming trend in home décor. A shopper remarked, “It’s karma. You don’t have to be a Buddhist to like Buddha.” Buddhism is a doctrine of self-realization, of cause and effect. It teaches success by works. Your reincarnated future is just an echo of your past.ⁱ

New Testament culture was steeped in idol worship and religious superstitions, but Lydia rejected all other gods to worship Jesus, the Son of the living God.

Let’s follow Lydia’s example and passionately share Jesus, who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life, (John 14:6). A. W. Tozer said, “In the midst of this great chill there are some who will not be content with shallow logic. They will admit the force of the argument, and then turn away with tears to hunt some lonely place and pray, ‘O God, show me thy glory.’ They want to taste, to touch with their hearts, to see with their inner eyes the wonder that is God.”ⁱⁱ

Points to Ponder:

- Have you noticed sculptures of Buddha in your local home stores? A young man described himself as a Buddhist-Baptist. Do you know someone who confesses Christ and yet embraces other faiths? Read Exodus 20:3-6.
- Read Ephesians 2:8-10. What false doctrine was Paul addressing?
- Read 2 Timothy 4:1-5. Paul spoke of a time when people would not seek sound doctrine. Describe their desires. What are Christians to do? Ephesians 3:7-8 in The Message expresses it well.
- Read Isaiah 6:1-8, and give God praise for His amazing grace. “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of His glory.” Lord, show us Your glory!

Prayer:

Heavenly Father, You are the One true God. Help me to identify any compromise or weakness in my devotion, and forgive me. May my constant plea be “show me Your glory!” Amen! Amen!

We're Facebook Friends! **Cheryl Roland**

Scripture: [Acts 16:11-15](#)

Leading a Bible study at the shelter for homeless women has alerted me to the consequences of decisions. *Rochelle, was a new resident undergoing drug rehabilitation. She spoke quietly, "I know you. In fact, we're Facebook friends. Remember, my husband's parents attend your church."

Shocked by her pale demeanor, this young mother of three had been a part of a loving Christian family. Her destitute circumstances were the result of a chain of unwise decisions that began with a flirtatious encounter online. He seemed so much more interesting than her husband, who worked long hours and failed to attend to her emotional needs. The divorce was excruciating. He got custody of the children, sold the house and moved as far away as the law would allow. All other family members withdrew their support. Her employer considered her adulterous affair an unprofessional breach of trust, and the other man lost interest when her drug money ran out.

Both good and bad decisions have consequences. Researchers claim we make 35,000 decisions a day.ⁱⁱⁱ In just two verses of scripture we see Lydia's chain of choices. She sought a place of prayer on the Sabbath, worshiped God, and chose friends who shared her faith. With a teachable spirit, she listened as the scriptures were taught and embraced a personal relationship with Christ. Lydia shared the joys of Jesus with her family and she, along with all of her household, was baptized. She then extended hospitality to seasoned Christians who shared God's steadfast love.

Points to Ponder:

- Facebook is a connector for friends and family. Share your experiences. Read I Corinthians 10:13.
- What advice would you have given Rochelle to strengthen her marriage? Read James 1:5.
- How does Lydia inspire you? Read Acts 16:11-15, 40.
- Read Matthew 7:24-27. What are the consequences of each decision?
- Meditate on Colossians 3:16 and give God praise.

Prayer:

Lord Jesus, thank You for Your power that keeps me strong in the face of temptation. Guard my heart, and fill me with desire for Your perfect will in every decision. Amen!

A Good Fake? **Cheryl Roland**

Scripture: [Acts 16:15](#), [Luke 8:1-15](#)

The Council of Fashion Designers of America has appealed to Congress for copyright laws to protect their original designs against the \$600 billion counterfeit purse industry. In an attempt to raise awareness against counterfeits, one company produced unique designer purses that are boldly stamped with the phrase “You Can’t Fake Fashion.”^{iv v}

Counterfeit design is nothing new. In ancient days only the elite wore purple. Fabrics dyed with a secretion from a rare shellfish were expensive; however lichen plants produced a similar dye referred to as “poor man’s purple.”^{vi vii}

The Bible describes Lydia as a seller of purple. According to tradition, she was a respected business woman who sold authentic Italian textiles to the elite class. She was influential as others put their confidence in her judgement. It is natural for people to respect and follow those who are considered experts in their field.

To authenticate her sincere conversion, she appealed to the disciples. “If,” she said, “you consider me a believer in the Lord, come and stay at my house.”

In the parable of the sower, Jesus explained. “... the seed on good soil stands for those with a noble and good heart, who hear the word, retain it, and by persevering produce a crop” (Luke 8:15). Lydia stood the test! She was an authentic Christian.

Points to Ponder:

- A “knock off” is an unlicensed copy of something sold at a lower price than the original. Have you ever purchased a “knock off?”
- How do you detect counterfeit money?
- Read Acts 5:1-11. What did Ananias and Sapphira do to displease the Lord?
- Read Luke 8:1-15. Notice verse 14 and describe what choked the seeds.
- Read Luke 8:5 again, and praise God for His extravagant love. He scatters an abundance of seeds in unlikely places then nurtures us to maturity.

Prayer:

Lord, I want my life to be authentic. Help all my actions and words to reflect Your love. In Jesus’ name, I pray, Amen.

Funny Bones, Lazy Bones, Dry Bones!

Cheryl Roland

Scripture: [Ezekiel 37: 1-14](#)

As children, we were taught that laughter was not appropriate in church. Oddly enough, laugh attacks occurred more frequently there than any other place. In our attempt to explain, we blamed it on our funny bones.

Anatomists claim adults have 206 bones and out of that number we must admit we might also have a lazy bone or two. Unmotivated and lethargic, we fail to conquer the simplest tasks. Someone bemoaned, “Doing nothing is the most tiresome job in the world because you can’t quit and rest.”^{viii}

Physical, mental and spiritual lazybones prevent us from persevering when prayer becomes difficult or the Word seems irrelevant. When we are easily dissuaded over a period of time, those lazybones become dry bones, without life or love.

All too often a cloud of apathy will hover over a worship service. The music lacks energy, prayers are lifeless, and the sermons seem stale. Leonard Ravenhill writes, “I marvel at the Lord’s patience with the sleepy, sluggish, selfish Church!”^{ix}

At what point do we apply ourselves to push through and override those lethargic feelings to sing, pray, and worship as unto the Lord? One leader who lacks fervor and personal victory can affect an entire congregation just as one victorious soul can inspire a multitude. Lydia was a perfect example of one who received the power of God’s Spirit to impact her world.

In the vision of the valley of dry bones, God gave blessed assurance, “I will put breath in you, and you will come to life. Then you will know that I am the Lord” (Ezekiel 37:6).

Points to Ponder:

- When you are spiritually dry, what steps do you take to regain victory?
- Read Ezekiel 37:1-14 aloud. Share insights. What verses give you encouragement?
- Read Acts 16:14. What changes occurred in Lydia after she received Jesus as Lord?
- How do you, as a follower of Christ, affect your home, church, and place of work?

Prayer:

Lord, all too often I feel spiritually lethargic and dry. Breathe on me breath of God. Fill me with joy as I worship You, both personally and corporately. In Jesus’ name, I pray, Amen.

You're Welcome!
Cheryl Roland

Scripture: [Acts 16:13-40](#)

Emotionally and physically exhausted, they arrived on our doorstep without notice. "It was a mandatory evacuation," they lamented. The hurricane threatened homes within a 200-mile radius, so they packed up their treasures and drove six hours, feeling certain we would extend Christian hospitality. Our friends, their two children, and one panting, pacing dog were distressed. Their expectations were simply to find safety and shelter from the storm.

However, a different kind of storm brewed within me. Inconvenienced, unprepared, and filled with frustration, I went through the motions of extending hospitality without experiencing the joy of serving others in Jesus' name.

Soon after her conversion Lydia invited Paul, Silas, Luke, and Timothy to her home. They had already been in Philippi for several days, so perhaps they enjoyed a delicious meal served in an elegant setting, then returned to the inn. They were guests invited by a gracious hostess.

But as Paul and Silas passionately preached the life-changing power of the resurrected Christ rather than Caesar's lordship, they experienced mounting opposition. It was at Philippi that they were stripped, flogged, and thrown into prison. Upon their miraculous release, they arrived on Lydia's doorstep without notice. Undoubtedly, both men had deep flesh wounds requiring first aid; their clothing was stained, and their stomachs ached for food. Was Lydia inconvenienced? Did she resent her unexpected guests? The scriptures tell us that Paul and Silas met the brothers at Lydia's house. Not only did she welcome Paul and Silas, she also provided a gathering place for fellow believers to be blessed and encouraged by the remarkable testimonies of God's miraculous power.

Points to Ponder:

- How do you prepare your heart and home for unexpected guests?
- Read Psalm 4:9. What are we to guard against?
- Read I Timothy 5:1, and share ways hospitality extends beyond opening your home to others.
- After reading Hebrews 13:2 & 16, reflect on a time when you were blessed by a guest. Give God praise.

Prayer:

Lord, sometimes the best ministry opportunities present themselves to me as inconveniences. Help me to respond with Your love, grace, and mercy. In Jesus' name, I pray, Amen.

Keep on Praying for all the Saints! **Cheryl Roland**

Scripture: [Ephesians 6:10-28](#)

America's presidential limousine, "Cadillac One," is armed for battle! Its protective features include five-inch bulletproof windows and eight-inch highly fortified doors. The steel rimmed wheels keep rolling even if the tires are flattened. There is a metal plate underneath to protect it from roadside bombs and the gas tank is surrounded with foam to guard against explosions. The limo is sealed from within in case of chemical attacks. Defensive weapons such as tear gas canisters, shotguns and grenade launchers all add a sense of protection. It is a manmade fortress on wheels.^x

The scriptures describe escalating political unrest in Philippi. Paul and Silas stood strong in the face of persecution. They were armed for battle with the belt of truth and the sword of the Spirit. Crowds gathered as they were dragged into the marketplace to face the authorities for proclaiming Jesus as Lord. No doubt, Lydia and her band of believers were also at risk.

Prior to Lydia's salvation, she and her friends met at the river for prayer, seemingly without fear of physical or spiritual attack. The change must have been dramatic as those same women, now armed and empowered by the Holy Spirit, prayed fervent prayers for the saints and sinners. They were able to stand strong against the spiritual forces of evil, and they learned that God would protect them as they fearlessly made known the mystery of His gospel. Whatever the attack, when we are fortified with the armor of God, He is an unfailing fortress, shield, and defender.

Points to Ponder:

- Read Ephesians 6:10-18 and list each piece of armor. In what area are you most vulnerable?^{xi}
- Read Acts 19:13-16. Does Satan know you are a follower of Christ? Read verses 17-20. How was God glorified through the enemy's attack?
- Is God asking you to host a Lydia prayer meeting in your home? For information on how to get started, go to www.TitusWomensMinistry.org.
- Look again at Ephesians 6:18, and pray as the Spirit leads.

Prayer:

Lord, our world is in desperate need of Your cleansing, healing power. Strengthen our faith, and teach us to pray fervent, effective prayers in the strong name of Jesus! Amen.

Purloined Praise **M. ReeAnn Hyde**

Scripture: [Exodus 1-4](#)

Heavy bricks. Raw hands. Aching backs. Straw dust. Sleep deprivation. Survival. Little reason for praise. For generations the Hebrews knew these things as their constant companions. Any reason for praise had been stolen (purloined) from them for centuries. God's people were suffering terribly for no other reason than they were alive and numerous. They needed help.

In Exodus 3, we read that God sent Moses with a message. *"So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians."* What a great thing to hear! At last, a word from Elohim, the God of justice! He has heard! He is going to act! He will see them through!

God is the glorious God of mercy and justice. He does have compassion. He will see right done in his time. He is all about saving people from their troubles. In the book of Exodus, we see how God performs his mighty work of justice, mercy, and compassion for all those who would follow him.

We, the adopted descendants of Moses, Aaron, and Miriam, the orphans collected from the pagan streets, the frazzled slaves of sin, know this through the marvelous work of Jesus Christ. This is the same God who called a group of slaves to be his own and, in a time when praise seemed impossible, gave them a future of praise.

God looks at you the same way he looked upon Moses, Aaron, Miriam, and all of the Hebrew people. He sees an individual and a people who need help and compassion. He also invites us to be part of his great work in the world, to lead people to the Savior so their stolen joy can be returned.

Excerpts from *Who is God? A Devotional Journey Through Genesis and Exodus* by M.R. Hyde (author's pen name)

Points to Ponder

- Read [Acts 7:1-53](#) (a brief history of the Israelites as recounted by Stephen) and write down your observations of the kinds of things that stole points of praise from God's people.
- What kinds of things are weighing you down and stealing your joy right now?
- Have you asked God for help in these things? If not, why not?

Prayer: Dear God, I need Your help. I ask You to help me to return to a place of praise. Help me to see through the sorrows, sins, and disappointments of this life to the kind of hope that I can seize hold of again. Return to me the joy of my salvation. Amen.

Postponed Praise M. ReeAnn Hyde

Scripture: [Exodus 5-6:12](#)

Chronic pain, long-term pain, never-ending pain—now those are ugly words. They cast a spell of gloom and torment, depression and resignation. We don't want those kinds of things in our lives, do we? Neither did the Hebrews. For 400 years they had been in slavery to the Egyptians. After 400 years of brick-making, don't you imagine the Hebrews would have just given up? How many times does a person have to be beaten down by hard labor and cruel slave masters before they give up?

There is a reason human beings keep on going even in the face of what seems interminable pain—we have hope woven into our very being. We were created in God's image, and He gives us His great and precious promises (2 Peter 1:4), so we bear within us this eternal hope that things can get better.

No matter how weary they became and no matter how many times they were beaten down, the Hebrews had hope in their hearts because of the promise God had made to their ancestors (Genesis 12:1-3). In the song "When You Believe," sung by the character of Miriam in the film *Prince of Egypt*, songwriters Kenneth Edmonds and Stephen Schwartz penned these wonderful words: "Though hope is frail, it is hard to kill." Even though outright praise had been postponed, this tiny flicker of hope could not be snuffed out because the eternal God of goodness had made a promise to them.

Let us remember that our pain is temporary; and if we do just as the Lord God has commanded us, as the Lord Jesus Christ has taught us, and as the Spirit of the Lord has enabled us, we will be able to praise God again.

Points to Ponder

- Reflect on Proverbs 13:12. How has hope been deferred in your life?
- Recall a time when it was difficult for you to praise. What did God do to get you beyond that?
- What promises has God made to believers generally and to you personally?
- Read Colossians 3:12-17. How can you help instill hope to those around you?

Prayer: Lord God, I thank You for what You are going to do for us in the future. By the power of the Holy Spirit, I reach out to take hold of hope for me, for my family, for my church and for our world. Give me the long view—the eternal view—of Your work in this world. Amen.

Excerpts from *Who is God? A Devotional Journey Through Genesis and Exodus* by M.R. Hyde (author's pen name)

Prelude to Praise: Part One
M. ReeAnn Hyde

Scripture: [Exodus 6:28-7:13](#)

It's going to get worse before it gets better. Have you ever had anyone tell you that before? This is something a doctor hints at. It is another reminder that pain can be temporary. If you have a tumor or a broken bone or an infected tooth, the doctor has to do something. He's got to cause you more pain to get to the healing place. Doesn't that seem odd? Recovery from surgery is no fun. But we enter into an agreement with the doctor that we will let him cut our skin, muscles and nerves, causing us pain, so that the pain and poor health conditions we are currently living with will be diminished, if not obliterated.

The Hebrews had a cancer—it was the cruel oppression of slave drivers. This cancer, this evil had to be dealt with in a war-like manner. But they also had something else. The Hebrews had God, the Creator of the universe, the Sustainer of life, the Merciful, Jehovah the Provider, the God of covenant and promise. God is all-powerful, all mighty, all strong, and all compassionate. He brought healing and restoration, hope and comfort, reclamation and strength for their journeys—even through the war of good versus evil.

With God, sometimes our path to freedom gets worse before it gets better. And Satan does not want to let us go. So he engages in great spiritual battle with God and with us for our souls. Then God, like a good surgeon who sees exactly what the problem is, also knows that sometimes the pain intensifies before it subsides.

Our God is all-powerful, all mighty, all strong, and all compassionate. He brings to us healing and restoration, hope and comfort, reclamation and strength for our journey—even in the middle of the battle.

Points to Ponder

- Where does your strength come from in the middle of your battles?
- Do you need to rely more on your Savior? If so, in what specific ways?
- What kinds of weapons of righteousness do you use the most?
- Reflect on Ephesians 6:10-20. What else could you employ as you wait for God's victory?

Prayer: I thank You, God, for my battles. For without them I would not understand how great of a Savior You are. I ask You to give me a taste of the victory that can be ours. Help me to know that the pain that I experience now is not forever. Amen.

Excerpts from *Who is God? A Devotional Journey Through Genesis and Exodus* by M.R. Hyde (author's pen name)

Prelude to Praise: Part Two
M. ReeAnn Hyde

Scripture: [Exodus 7:14-11:10](#)

There were ten plagues of Egypt, each topping the other until the final plague touched the household of the Pharaoh in a very personal way. God gave plenty of room and time for the Pharaoh to make the right decisions for his own people and for the Hebrews. Each plague was announced by Moses and Aaron prior to its arrival. Over and over again God gave Pharaoh the opportunity to change his mind. Imagine how different this would have all been if Pharaoh had acknowledged God!

In the middle of all these plagues, the Hebrews suffered terribly as well. God spared them some of the plagues, but some of the others they had to endure. It certainly got worse before it got better. What a terrible night during that last plague! Making war with God guarantees sorrow.

It got worse before it got better. In fact, it got really, really bad. What do you imagine the Hebrews were thinking during all of this? What do you imagine the Egyptians were thinking? There's one thing that we know for certain. The Hebrews had God, the Creator of the Universe, the Sustainer of Life, the Merciful, Jehovah the Provider, the God of Covenant and Promise.

Indeed we suffer greatly at times—and many times not from things we ourselves have done. We suffer temporary pain from corrupt systems and bad leaders, from the sins of the world, and the sins of our parents. But we who believe have a promise from our God that our suffering leads us to release from captivity and into peace with him. We must always remember that even when war is raging in our bodies, in our culture or in our spiritual world it is God who leads us into his great future.

Points to Ponder

- What kind of impact has suffering had on your life?
- In what ways has God sustained you during times of trouble?
- Meditate on Psalm 116 and share with someone how God has helped you.

Prayer: Oh, God my Savior. Thank you for how you have helped me in the past. I pray today for your strength and comfort. Give this same strength and comfort to my neighbors who suffer as I have. Amen.

Excerpts from *Who is God? A Devotional Journey Through Genesis and Exodus* by M.R. Hyde (author's pen name)

Patterns for Praise M. ReeAnn Hyde

Scripture: [Exodus 12:1-30](#)

There are events in our lives that are important to remember. It is important for us to remember how God has delivered us. God knows this about us and he knows how quickly we forget. He is mindful of our humble condition. So when God sets up rituals and remembrances he does it so we won't forget his love and compassion.

God had given the Hebrews very specific directions to follow to avoid the troubles the Egyptians experienced. The very specific directions God gave them not only helped them to avoid the pain of death, but prepared them to leave four centuries of Egyptian slavery, and more importantly, to remember his work on their behalf. The very specific directions incorporated the following: readiness to go, a special type of meal and an offering or sacrifice of the most unique kind.

Readiness, for God, does not imply a state of being perfect, or being cleaned-up or being absolutely prepared for any contingency. It means you are willing to let him do what he is going to do and you are willing to obey despite your fears. Readiness is required for deliverance.

God initiated the Passover—a tradition of helping the Hebrews remember a great and decisive victory of God on behalf of his people. God described precisely why they were to celebrate. In verses 14 and 17 we see that the Hebrews were to celebrate “*as a festival to the Lord*” and to “*celebrate God bringing them out.*” In advance of their complete deliverance, God was setting up a time of remembrance for them. Before they took one step further they were to incorporate patterns of remembrance into their lifestyle and that would lead to praise.

Points to Ponder

Each one of us has Passover experiences in our lives.

- How do we remember them?
- What do we tell our children about these events?
- Do we tell them that the symbols that we have of our new life with God are far more than just symbols—that they are tangible reminders of God's deliverance from terrible trouble?
- How can you set up patterns for praise in the future?

Prayer: O Lord, my God, I remember today what you have done for me. Thank you for the symbols of our deliverance. Help me to teach others the importance of setting up patterns for praise in their lives. Amen.

Excerpts from *Who is God? A Devotional Journey Through Genesis and Exodus* by M.R. Hyde (author's pen name)

Pursuit of Praise
M. ReeAnn Hyde

Scripture: [Exodus 13:17-14:31](#)

The threat of death was all around the Hebrews. Behind them the Egyptian army raged toward them. On their right and on their left walls of water could have collapsed and thundered over them at any moment. And before them the narrow gap that they could see could collapse and destroy all hope. But this was God's miracle of deliverance. And every one of the Hebrews passed through God's miracle. As the last foot was planted on the opposite shore, they had the opportunity to pursue praise.

God kept His word! God did deliver the Hebrews—and with plunder. They piled so much stuff onto their carts and wheelbarrows that they had more than what they would need for provision ahead! The 600,000 men, besides women and children, literally walked out of slavery and crossed an impassible sea on dry ground! Not one sword or whip touched their skin. That is something worth remembering!

You have been given many opportunities to look back and see the times and ways God has delivered you. How do we know this? It is because you are reading this right now. If it were not for God and His great power and mercy, you would have been destroyed multiple times. God's grace and His power are eternally linked together. Over and over again He has offered the strength of His right arm to you, the deliverance from enemies, the miracles that keep you from ultimate harm.

We should respond the very same way the Israelites did. *“And when the Israelites saw the great power the LORD displayed against the Egyptians, the people feared the LORD and put their trust in him and in Moses his servant”* (Exodus 14:31).

Points to Ponder

- What is your life like now because of God's saving work?
- How are you now behaving in light of God's saving work?
- Do you need to refresh your memory, repeat some patterns that lead to praise?
- How should we respond to His great demonstrations of love and power?

Prayer: Oh, God! Let me pursue praise instead of despair, thanksgiving instead of disappointment, and rejoicing instead of grumbling. I want to praise You the rest of my life. Free my lips to praise You more! Amen.

Excerpts from *Who is God? A Devotional Journey Through Genesis and Exodus* by M.R. Hyde (author's pen name)

Promoting Praise
M. ReeAnn Hyde

Scripture: [Exodus 15:1-21](#)

Now the Hebrews truly knew the reasons for unbridled praise! They sang and danced, for they had been redeemed! The whole nation rejoiced. Why would they not do so? Four-hundred years of oppression had been obliterated. The oppressors had been completely stopped by God's mighty right arm. Nature had been deployed on their behalf. Fire, cloud, and water were the defensive weapons of their Savior.

Moses' voice rang out, "*I will sing to the Lord, for he is highly exalted.*" And then, as one voice, the entire nation joined in! They had everything to celebrate. This was their very personal God, and He deserved their very personal, individual and corporate praise. The moment was ripe for praise. "*The Lord is my strength and my defense; he has become my salvation. He is my God, and I will praise him.*"

They retraced all of the events together, singing of the sure victory provided by their God. Aaron, Miriam, their families, their cousins, and their neighbors raised their voices in adulation. No one else could have provided such a deliverance! He was most worthy of their praise.

And then Miriam picked up a tambourine and delighted the Lord with praise that could not be constrained to just her voice. Her entire being was employed to praise God. She took Moses' phrase of personal rejoicing and turned it into an exhortation for her people. There was still more singing to be done! "*Sing to the LORD, for he is highly exalted. Both horse and driver he has hurled into the sea.*"

Today, remember what God has done for you, your family, your church, and your world. You need to sing to the Lord today, for He is indeed highly exalted! Write a song to God, declare it publicly, rejoice with your whole being! Lead your people in praising God for what He has done!

Points to Ponder:

- Have you written down God's victories in your life? Do so in detail, thanking Him at every word.
- Have you shared these with other—even the "old victories"?
- Read Psalm 118 standing up, out loud, and with gusto—in front of your Bible study, family, or during your personal devotional time. What did it feel like to praise God in such a way?
- Sing your favorite praise song as loud as you can and from the depths of your heart.

Prayer: Oh, God, You are my God, and I praise You today. May my life be filled with praise and thanksgiving to You for all that You have done and all that You will do. I use every fiber of my being to give You praise so that others may join me in the celebration. Amen.

At Home with Sisters **Amy Steinbrook**

Scripture: [Luke 10: 38-24](#)

I am blessed to have a younger sister. Growing up, she was my continual playmate. We made up all different sorts of games and had fun being little girls. By nature we are different, which did cause conflict at times. Our relationship as adults is different from when we were children because we each have our own families, and many miles separate us. Even though things are different, I still know she is there for me as I am for her.

In the book of Luke, we get to see how another set of sisters interact. Mary and Martha are sisters from the village of Bethany. They were great friends with Jesus and the disciples. Actually, whenever Jesus or the disciples were in Bethany, they would stay with Mary, Martha, and their brother, Lazarus. What a privilege that would be!

This particular time, Martha is working herself to death fixing a meal, keeping drinks filled, picking up after the others, trying to get the food set up and sat out in an orderly manner. We've all been there, worked so hard cleaning up before a party, and worked twice as hard making sure everyone was happy during the party. I can so relate to Martha, I can get caught up in task just like her. Now, while Martha was working industriously, Mary was sitting at the feet of Jesus and worshipping every word He spoke. Mary loved Jesus deeply, and nothing in the world mattered to her except Jesus. It's beautiful how Mary is able to let everything go, especially her sister, and just enjoy being with Jesus.

I have thought about this passage many times. To be honest, it isn't an easy passage for me. I know we are to love Jesus as Mary did, and I do love Him. My practical side says, love or not, things have to get done. How on earth are people going to eat if we all just lie around? Understandably, this isn't the point Jesus was trying to make. He wants us to love Him unconditionally. To do so, I have learned you have to be creative to find time with Him each day. I have times of prayer and praise in the shower due to it being my only time to be alone. I even write out my prayers because I get anxious and distracted during prayer and can't say focused with my eyes closed. So whatever you have to do to show God you love Him, do it! God created you, and He understands the everyday challenges of life around you. So, be creative and enjoy those around you...especially Jesus!

Points to Ponder:

- How often do you let the busyness of life get in the way of your time with Jesus?
- What are some ways you can change this?
- Who is your "sister" who can hold you accountable for your changes?

Prayer:

Lord, in a world where it is so easy to be like Martha and get caught up in the things around us, help us find time to show You how in love with You we are. Help us enjoy the people You put into our lives and not find it challenging or stressing. Allow us to overlook the things we should be doing and enjoy the life you have designed us to live. In Jesus' name, amen.

Conflict Resolution with Abigail

Amy Steinbrook

Scripture: [1 Samuel 25](#)

The first thing you learn about Abigail is her husband, Nabal, is not a nice man. The Scripture calls him a fool, rich but foolish. Abigail deserves a big “bless your heart” because the same Scripture states she is intelligent and beautiful. This was obviously an arranged marriage.¹

The basic story is Nabal had not noticed that David and his men had been protecting his shepherds and sheep. When David’s camp started to run out of food, he sent messengers to Nabal. The messengers told Nabal about how they had been protecting his shepherds, and they asked for provisions; but Nabal refused them very rudely. Nabal’s actions deeply insulted David, and David responded by preparing to slaughter Nabal and his household. A servant tells Abigail how Nabal handled the situation with David’s request and the approaching danger. Wisely, Abigail quickly devised a plan to save them all.

Marg Mowczko on *New Life Ministry* webpage states,

Abigail was not just intelligent and beautiful, she was also brave. It would have been no mean feat to confront David and four hundred of his men who had been insulted and were intent on revenge with their swords at the ready. Yet Abigail approached David and, with great diplomacy, humbly offered him a “peace offering.” She gave David and his men plenty of food. Her quick actions saved her household from disaster, and kept David and his men from unnecessary bloodshed.²

In the book *Twelve Women of the Bible: Life Changing Stories for Woman Today*, the actions of Abigail’s conflict resolution were described in four points:

1. **She cogitates.** Abigail thinks deeply and seriously about the situation at hand.
2. **She participates.** She doesn’t ask Nabal for permission and takes action according to what she feels is best.
3. **She negotiates.** She thinks about her words and humbly asks David to reconsider his actions. She calls him “My Lord” as a sign that she respects him.
4. **She advocates.** She asks David to remember her when he leaves her land. Once she arrives home, she notices Nabal’s drunkard state and chose to tell him when he has sobered up³.

These steps can be as helpful to us when we face conflict or a difficult issue. How often do we jump to conclusions or speak before we think things through fully? Abigail’s example reminds us that relationships are valuable, and we must do whatever we can to keep them healthy and whole, even if we must deal with tough issues and have those difficult conversations we’d rather not have.

Points to Ponder:

- How do you most often deal with conflict?
- What steps can you take to improve your conflict management skills?
- Consider using the steps outlined above to help with conflict.

¹ I wonder why Abigail’s parent choice Nabal to be her husband.

² <http://newlife.id.au/christian-living/abigail-1-samuel-25/>

³ Harney, Sherry, *Twelve Woman of the Bible Participants’ Guide*, 2010, Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing.

Prayer:

Lord, You know I don't like conflict, and I don't often manage it well. Help me to learn from Abigail to cope with conflict in productive ways. Give me grace and wisdom as I deal with conflict today. In Jesus' name I pray, amen.

Created for Companionship
Amy Steinbrook

Scripture: [Genesis 2:18-24](#)

Most little girls dream of their wedding and how beautiful they will look in their dress. There is something beautiful about the dreams of flowers, everyone dressed up, and the celebration of love that makes the joining of two people incredibly special. Even though some couples don't have a traditional wedding, the ceremony is a union or joining of two people. The couple is making a covenant between themselves and God. The introductions of the wedding ceremony state, "...to join together this man and this woman in holy matrimony, which is an honorable estate, instituted of God in the time of man's innocence, signifying unto us the mystical union that exists between Christ and His Church."⁴

God designed marriage so that Adam wouldn't be alone. In verse 18, God says it is not good for man to be alone. Matthew Henry wrote, "If there were but one man in the world, what a melancholy man must he be! Perfect solitude would turn a paradise into a desert, and a palace into a dungeon."⁵ God created Eve for Adam as a companion. Woman was designed to be a helpmate and to bring deeper meaning and significance to man's life through his relationships. God already gave Adam all the animals and the angels of the garden, but Eve gave Adam a companion of his own kind to truly have a communication and a committed human relationship.

Women are created to be in relationships with God and others. The world often tells us women we are supposed to be completely independent. We are not strong if we show weakness. We can only rely on ourselves. These thoughts are completely against what God created us to be. We are supposed to rely on God and others. It's fine if we show weakness or are a bit co-dependent at times. Like Eve, we draw self-worth from our relationships. This explains why the health of our relationships – with the Lord and with others – determines our enjoyment of life. We were designed to engage in meaningful relationships and that is why we feel isolated and lonely without companionship.⁶

Points to Ponder:

- Read [Genesis 2:18-24](#). How does seeing you were created for relationships help you with your current relationships?
- What are some noticeable differences between the ways men and women view relationships?
- How can this insight help you when you feel lonely?

Prayer:

Lord, You created us for relationships. Thank You for the relationships I have. Bless them and help us to show Your design for them. Guide me to form new relationships so I can share Your love and grace with others. In Jesus' name I pray, amen.

⁴ Nazarene Manual, Rituals, 803. Matrimony page 263

⁵ Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible* Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1986.

⁶ Focus on the Family; Women Series, The Blessings of Friendship, Ventura, CA: Gospel Light Publishing, 2004.

Ruth's Love for Her Mother-in-law
Amy Steinbrook

Scriptures: [Ruth 1: 6-22](#)

In most parts of the ancient world, and many underdeveloped parts of our world today, the only way to survive a famine is to move to a more fertile place, if at all possible. Naomi, her husband, and her sons did just that when they crossed the Jordan River into Moab. They settled in, their sons even marrying Moabite women, Orpah and Ruth. After about 10 years, following the deaths of Naomi's husband and sons, news came that Bethlehem was recovering. Naomi set out for a return to Bethlehem, and she encouraged her daughters-in-law to return to their families in Moab. Orpah did as Naomi requested, but Ruth instead pledged her life to Naomi in these familiar words: *"Wherever you go I will go, wherever you lodge I will lodge. Your people shall be my people and your God, my God. Where you die I will die, and there be buried"* (vs. 16-17).

Some may find it ironic that words so often chosen for the sacrament of marriage were a pledge from a daughter-in-law (a foreigner at that) to her mother-in-law, from one widow to another. To make this pledge to someone who wasn't from your homeland or who wasn't your husband was never done. Not many women today would make such a pledge to her mother-in-law. Thinking of the widows I know, not one of them would have chosen to stay with their husband's family. Each of them has tried to pull herself together and make it on her own. Too often we may (deep down or secretly) rely more on our own family and forget that the in-laws may be just as willing to assist as our own parents. Many times in my days of ministry, I have heard ladies who are mothers-in-law say, "I am just waiting to be asked."

The relationship between Ruth and Naomi illustrates the power of mutual commitment between persons. When we choose to surrender to loving another person, we form a relationship that testifies to God's faithfulness and not just our own. Ruth and Naomi also shared a mutual commitment to survival. Sometimes a great and necessary mission can be the place where we discover our own gifts and in the process discover God's abiding and creative presence with us.

Points to Ponder:

- Discuss a time you have had to rely heavily on your spouse.
- How is your relationship with the in-laws?
- Is there something you could do to make it better?
- What new insight have you learned from the relationship between Ruth and Naomi?

Prayer:

Thank You, Father God, for families. Help me to rely on my extended family rather than being self-reliant. Bless my mother-in-law, and help us model our relationship after Ruth and Naomi. In Jesus' name I pray, amen.

Tell Your Story
Amy Steinbrook

Scripture: [Titus 2:3-5](#)

When I was young, I would spend a long time making sure my make-up and hair looked just right. I really didn't need to wear make-up, but I enjoyed being a girl. Recently, I was getting ready to go to church, and I was thinking about how now I need the make-up. My eyes sometime look really dark around them, and I am just getting older. Then I was fixing my hair and noticed a new patch of gray hair. It may have been there for a while, but to me it was new. You know what I'm talking about! We've all been there!

During my reality check of how I am getting older, I was reminded that the Bible gives us instructions as older Christians. We are to help the younger women in our lives by encouraging them do what is right. This reminded me of all the wonderful ladies I have had in my life who have taught me so many wonderful things. Especially my paternal Granny, who taught me how to love others like Jesus loves us.

Love was a gift for her. It didn't matter what was going on; if you went into Granny's house, she loved you like nothing had ever happened. You could request her to cook anything, and she would joyfully fix your requested dish. There was nothing special about Granny's house except for her healing love. While she was doing things around the house, you were expected to tag along and help. Then she would tell stories of when she was young. She would always include stories about Jesus. You could sit on the porch swing with her, and she may break out into a hymn. She was joyful and loving because of Jesus.

I think about Granny often, even though she has been gone for several years. I will be doing something, and the way she did the task will come to my head. I am so thankful she told me her story as we did things around her house. My maternal grandmother also told me her story of salvation. I treasure these stories because this is how God has worked in the heritage of my family.

Too often we minimize our story and think it isn't worth telling. That isn't true! The chorus of the ever loved hymn "Blessed Assurance" says, "*This is my story, This is my Song! Praising my Savior all the day long.*" We need to share our testimonies with younger ladies. Hopefully, they will be able to praise the Lord with you as they see where Jesus has brought you. Consider writing down your testimony or telling someone special to you about how Jesus came into your heart. Let's begin to praise God for where He has brought us and sharing that joy with those around us.

Points to Ponder:

- Have you spoken a word of testimony lately?
- Tell about something God has worked out in your life recently.
- Within the next week, I will tell _____ (insert a name) my testimony.
- Tell about someone (other than yourself) that testimony has help strengthen your faith.

Prayer:

Lord, help me as I begin to tell people about what you have done for me. I know it may not be easy at first but I know you will guide me and strengthen me. It is in Jesus' name. Amen.

True Feelings
Amy Steinbrook

Scripture: [John 18:15-27](#)

Recently, I watched the movie *The Little Rascals* with my children. We have seen it several times, but it is one movie on our re-occurring watch list. At the beginning of the movie, Alfalfa is singing his heart out to Darla. He is telling her how much he loves her and can't live without her. His buddies are spying on him, and he is not aware in the least. Once he becomes aware, he changes his tune and tells his friends he doesn't really like her. She gets upset with him, and he feels terrible. Alfalfa decided to write Darla a letter which says: "*Dear Darla.....I can't live without you...Really..YOU! Love, Alfalfa.*"

This reminded me of how Peter told Jesus he would never deny him. Yet three times during Christ's arrest, Peter denied Christ. How often have we committed ourselves to be a part of something yet inside we are figuring out ways to get out of it? Why is it so hard for us to tell other how we really feel at times?

In Alfalfa's instance, he wanted to avoid ridicule and embarrassment from his friends. He loved Darla but knew how his friends felt about girls. For Peter, he loved Christ. He was one of Christ's best friends, yet Peter knew the crowd was angry. They may want to kill him along with Jesus. What a terrible thought! Do feelings of embarrassment or lack of self-confidence mean that we would allow others to suffer? When these situations arise, I hope I will be able to stand up and do the right thing from this point forward. Isn't part of being a Christian walking in the light you are given? So what about you?

Points to Ponder:

- Have you ever had your feelings hurt because someone did the opposite of what they said they would do? Tell your group.
- What are some reasons people don't go through with their true feelings?
- What can you do to help you recognize situations where you may not be able to express your true feelings?

Prayer:

Heavenly Father, thank You for your unconditional love and Your willingness to forgive us when we make bad choices. When a situation arises that may be difficult for us to understand, help us to know the right thing to do. If we are to stand up against the crowd, make us bold and strong as we do so. In Jesus' name, amen.

We Need Each Other **Amy Steinbrook**

Scripture: [Romans 5:7-8](#)

For several years, I have practiced the observance of lent with fasting something I enjoy for the 40 days leading to Easter. This isn't something I grew up doing; but in my desire to grow closer to God, I decided to give it a try. As the time approached this year, I was torn on what I should fast. I began to pray, and I came across a blog entry by Karen Ehman⁷. The blog suggested adding something to your daily practice instead of giving something up. She proposed writing a note to a friend, family member, or a service provider telling them how thankful you are for them.

I decided to give this a try because expressing my feelings is something I am not good at doing. By making a legitimate commitment, I thought I would be able to do this with the Lord's help; but I knew this was going to be a challenge. I am naturally an introvert and would rather keep things to myself.

God did help me with expressing myself, but He taught me something even more important. I was able to see how much we need others. Some of the people I wrote, I knew very little about and wasn't sure what I should say to be encouraging. I would pray about each note I wrote because I wanted to say what God would want me to say. I became more comfortable with each note I wrote.

Yet, I was completely surprised by the number of people I had written to who called, texted, or emailed me about how much the simple card meant to them. As I began to practice the verse, "*So reach out and welcome one another to God's glory. Jesus did it; now you do it!*" I grew closer to people and God simultaneously. And that is a beautiful thing.

Points to Ponder:

- Have you ever stepped out of your comfort zone and was surprised by the results?
- What are some other small ways you can "reach out and welcome one another?"

Prayer:

Lord, thank You for Your continual guidance and care. Lead us as we attempt to reach out and welcome others. May our efforts be glorifying to You. If we step out of our comfort zone, lead us in Your ways. Amen.

⁷ The complete entry can be found at <http://www.karenehman.com/2015/02/the-reverse-lent-challenge-dont-give-something-up-take-something-on/>

A Time to be a Martha, A Time to be a Mary

Rhonda Cook

Scripture: [Luke 10: 38-40](#); [Ecclesiastes 3:1](#)

My “to do” list never ends. And if it were empty, I would quickly be making more lists! My Inbox is never empty. There are so many errands to run and tasks to complete. Often I can find myself so busy doing “good” things that I miss out on the “best” things.

Martha was busy hosting Jesus and His disciples at her home. There was much work to do, and she was very busy doing it all. Her sister, Mary, sat in the other room at Jesus’ feet, listening to His every word. When Martha complained to Jesus that Mary was not helping, Jesus explained that Mary had chosen what was best.

Corrie ten Boom, a Dutch Christian who helped many Jews escape the Nazi Holocaust during World War II, is credited with saying, “If the devil cannot make us bad, he will make us busy.” A stunning thought that the devil could delight in all my busyness, even of good things.

Ecclesiastes 3:1 tells us, “*there is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven.*” There are certainly times when our “to do” lists are long and really must be completed. But there are times when we must put those aside and see Jesus in our midst, spend time with Him, and obey when He gives us a new instruction that wasn’t in our plans.

There is a time to be a Martha and a time to be a Mary. So often we are so BUSY being a Martha (serving and doing and serving and doing) that we don’t take time to put aside our “to do” list and just spend time with Jesus.

Points to Ponder:

Take time today and every day to:

- see our great God
- feel His presence in your life
- read His Holy Word
- spend time in prayer (talking **and** listening)
- look for Him at work around you
- wonder at the amazing creation He has given us to live in
- just be in awe of who He is

Prayer:

Dear Jesus, help me to see You today, to take time to talk to You and to listen to You, to praise You, to worship You, and to be in awe of You. Don’t let me be so busy with my own to do list that I forget that You are what’s most important! Amen.

Serve with Joy **Rhonda Cook**

Scripture: [Luke 10:40](#); [Nehemiah 8:10](#)

We all get busy with activities in our day-to-day lives: meals, family, school, work, laundry, errands, sports, etc. As women, we are usually busy serving others in so many ways.

Do we serve with joy or with grumbling because we are doing the work and others are not helping? Or because there is so much to do? Or because we are so tired? Or because we would rather be reading a book and relaxing?

Think about Martha. There she was, busy in the kitchen preparing and serving a house full of guests. And she saw Mary just sitting at Jesus' feet. She was not happy. When she raised her concerns to Jesus, she appeared to be grumbling and complaining.

Others can usually tell if we are serving with joy. For instance, it is obvious when you see a nurse who loves serving others or a teacher who loves teaching children. It is also obvious when you see those who do not have joy in serving others.

Our joy can be a testimony to others. Often others are watching us as we go about our day-to-day activities. When we have joy and peace in the midst of life's challenges, then our lives can shine as an example of what God can do when we wholly belong to Him.

Nehemiah 8:10 tell us that the joy of the Lord is our strength. If we perform our many duties "as unto the Lord," then the Lord will give us strength to complete each one and do it with joy.

Points to Ponder:

- How have you served others with joy in the last week?
- What opportunities for joy have you missed as you served others?
- Are you aware that others are noticing your joy?
- Dwell on Nehemiah 8:10 and gain strength from it.

Prayer:

Dear Jesus, today as I serve You and others, let me serve with joy. And let that joy renew my strength. And may You receive glory. Amen.

Great Faith Rhonda Cook

Scripture: [John 11:21](#); [John 11:32](#); [Ephesians 3:20](#)

Their brother, Lazarus, was sick so Mary and Martha sent word to Jesus, “Lord, the one you love is sick”. The sisters knew that Jesus loved Lazarus very much. They were confident that He would come quickly. And they waited, and they waited. Where was Jesus? Why had He not come?

When Jesus did finally arrive, Lazarus had been in the tomb for four days. Martha learned of Jesus’ return and she ran to meet Him. She cried out to Him, “Lord if you had been here, my brother would not have died.”

When Mary learned that Jesus had returned, she ran out to meet Him. She also cried out to Him, “Lord if you had been here, my brother would not have died.”

Of course the story goes on. But let’s stop here and consider this statement made by both sisters. Mary and Martha knew of the many miracles that Jesus had performed. There was no doubt in their minds that Jesus could have healed Lazarus ... if only He had been there in time!

What great faith they both had! Clearly they had **no doubts** about what Jesus could do. Jesus had healed others, and Jesus loved Lazarus; so of course He would have healed Lazarus, if only there was still time.

Remember that Ephesians 3:20 tell us that Jesus “*is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine...*” The sisters could only imagine and believe that Jesus could heal Lazarus while he was alive. They never imagined Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead.

Do we have even this much faith? We have seen miracles in our own lives and in the lives of others. Yet when we have a problem, where is our faith level? Do we believe that God **can**? Do we believe that God **will**?

Points to Ponder:

- Remember miracles in your own life or in the lives of your family.
- Look for God at work in your life. How do you see Him working in the “circumstances” of your life?
- Do you believe in miracles? Do you believe God can... that God will?
- Praise God for the miracles and for doing more than you can ask or imagine.

Prayer:

Lord, today help me to see You at work in my life and the lives of my family and friends. Increase my faith for Your glory. Amen.

Special Thanks **Rhonda Cook**

Scripture: [John 12:1-3](#)

Jesus had performed an amazing miracle in raising Lazarus from the dead! Imagine the emotions felt by Mary and Martha after receiving this miracle from Jesus. There were not say “thank you” enough to tell Jesus how grateful they were. While Jesus was dining at Lazarus’ house, Mary had an idea. She had an expensive perfume in her room, to be used only on special occasions. *This* special occasion deserved nothing but the best!

As Mary so carefully poured the perfume on Jesus’ feet, the house filled with the fragrance of the perfume. The fragrance of thankfulness was sensed by all present. Mary could never repay Jesus for bringing her brother Lazarus back to them, but she wanted to say thank you in the most special way she could think of.

Our God loves it when we take time to thank Him and to praise Him.

When you lay down to go to sleep at night, pause to think about the day and all that you have to be thankful for that day....for life, health, and strength, for every breath you’ve taken, for every breath taken by those you love, for that contact by a friend just when you needed it most, for seeing God at work in the lives of your family, for the rainbow, for His beautiful creation, for giving you the talents and abilities to handle your responsibilities, for the good night’s sleep you are about to enjoy...

Points to Ponder:

- Have you thanked Jesus lately for dying on the cross and for offering eternal life?
- What do you need to be thankful for today?
- Are you giving your best to the Lord today?
- Think of a very special blessing that God has given to you. How did you thank Him? Or how would you like to thank Him right now?

Prayer:

As I lay me down to sleep, let me remember to thank You for the blessings of the day, the big ones and the many ones I usually take for granted. Amen.

Who Am I?
Rhonda Cook

Scripture: [Psalm 139:13](#); [Luke 12:7](#); [Romans 8:17](#)

There are so many things I love about the beach. One of my most favorite times is to sit on the beach at sunset and watch God paint the skies with amazing colors that are constantly changing. After sunset, then I sit back and wait for the first star to appear. My husband and I race to see who can find the first star. And then another pops out and another and another. Soon the sky is filled with more stars than we can count.

I marvel at the amazing universe our God has created. The waves come in and go out; they know when and where to stop. We have stars and moons and planets and galaxies, and they all obey the order set by the Creator.

And I think to myself...the God of the Universe knows my name. He knit me together in my mother's womb. He knows the number of hairs on my head, something I don't even know about myself.

So when I may feel discouraged or have trouble with self-worth or confidence, I think about our great God. He knows **me** by name, and He wants a personal relationship with **me**. And then, I remember this: Jesus came to earth, died for my sins, and offers eternal salvation. Romans 8:17 tells us that we are co-heirs with Christ. It doesn't get any better than that!

Points to Ponder:

- Do you ever lack self-confidence?
- What do you do when you feel discouraged?
- Remember:
 - The God of the Universe knows **your** name
 - He knit **you** together in your mother's womb
 - He knows how many hairs **you** have on your head
 - **You** are co-heirs with Christ!

Prayer:

Oh, Heavenly Father, we praise you for who you are. And we praise you for who we are in You. Thank you for loving us and knowing us personally! Help us to remember that are worth is in **you**.

Play Your Own Part

Rhonda Cook

Scripture: [1 Corinthians 12:27](#); [John 14:15](#)

On a sports team, there are many roles to play. For example, in baseball, the outfielders play very different roles than the pitcher, who plays a very different role than the catcher, etc. Likewise, in a choir, the sopranos sing different notes than the altos or the tenors or the bass. When each member sings their own notes, then beautiful music happens...literally!

As children of God, we each are gifted with our own unique talents and gifts. And we each are given assignments, maybe just for the day or just for the moment. God may tell us to speak an encouraging word to a stranger or to share our testimony with a group. We may never know the impact that our obedience to God's assignment may make in the lives of others. We may never see that stranger again; but if God puts it on our heart to speak to that person, then He has a plan of how to use that.

Remember, we each have our own assignments from God. Focus on playing your own part and doing it to the best of your ability. God will pour out blessings on His children who obey Him.

Points to Ponder:

- What roles has God assigned you?
- Have you accepted those roles, and are you trying your best to fulfill them?
- When you have heard God whisper a simple assignment to you (like offering a word of encouragement to a stranger or your spouse or other family member)? Did you accept and obey, or did you push it out of your mind?

Prayer:

Dear God, thank You for entrusting me with Your divine assignments, my overall roles in life as well as those day-to-day assignments that have Your purpose even though I may not always understand them. Help me to hear You and to obey, to fulfill my role and to be used by You to make a difference in the lives of others. Amen.

Praying for Others Rhonda Cook

Scripture: [John 11:3](#); [Mark 10:27](#)

Praying for others is a true gift to them. Prayers make a difference in the lives of others and can change family history from this point forward.

“Prayer Changes Things” – this was taught to me as a child by my mom, who was an amazing prayer warrior. She taught me by example as she prayed every day for those she loved. She prayed for spiritual needs, physical needs, and every other kind of need. When I had a test at school, I knew that she would be praying at that time. What strength and confidence that gave me as I faced tests and other of life’s challenges!

Mary and Martha called on Jesus when they were in desperate need as their brother, Lazarus, was so sick and at the point of death. They knew that Jesus could have healed Lazarus. But after Lazarus died and was placed in the tomb, the sisters thought there was no more hope. Mark 10:27 tell us “*all things are possible with God.*” Jesus knew their need and responded, not on their timeline but on the Father’s timeline. He went beyond their wildest expectations and did what they all assumed to be the impossible.

With today’s social media, we are often asked to pray for others. It is very easy to simply write back a comment saying that we are praying. But with that commitment comes a responsibility to follow through and pray for that need. I want to be one who can be counted on to pray.

Points to Ponder:

- What impossible situations do you face today? Remember that with Jesus nothing is impossible.
- Who is on your list to pray for every day?
- If you have parents, grandparents, or others who prayed for you as a child, and if you have the opportunity, thank them.
- What commitments to pray for others have you made lately?

Prayer:

Dear God, I believe that nothing is impossible for You. Thank You for those who have diligently prayed for me as a child as well as those who currently do so. Help me to pray for my family every day and to have confidence that my prayers are being heard and answered, in Your way and in Your time and for Your glory. Amen.

ⁱ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Karma#Karma_in_Buddhism

ⁱⁱ A.W. Tozer, *The Pursuit of God*. (1948, revised, Bloomington, MN, Bethany House Publishers, 2013).

ⁱⁱⁱ Joel Hoosmans, March 20, 2015, *Leading Edge Journal*, <http://go.roberts.edu/leadingedge/the-great-choices-of-strategic-leaders>

^{iv} Council of Fashion Designers of America, <http://cfda.com/the-latest/you-cant-fake-fashion>, 3/19/13

^v Chavie Lieber, Dec 1, 2014, Why the \$600 Billion Counterfeit Industry Is Still Horrible for Fashion <http://www.racked.com/2014/12/1/7566859/counterfeit-fashion-goods-products-museum-exhibit>

^{vi} USDA Department of Agriculture/Forest Serv <http://www.fs.fed.us/wildflowers/ethnobotany/dyes.shtml>

^{vii} Women of the Bible: Lydia/http://dailyprayer.un/daily_devotional_blog/women-of-the-bible-lydia

^{viii} Author unknown, <http://www.selfhelpdaily.com/quotes-about-perseverance>

^{ix} Leonard Ravenhill, *Why Revival Tarries*, (Grand Rapids: Bethany House, 1959, 1987) 103.

^x *Business Insider*, Amanda Macias, 2/10/15 <http://www.leftlanenews.com/the-beast-10-things-you-need-to-know-about-the-presidents-limo.html>

^{xi} Recommended reading, *Born for Battle* by Arthur Mathews, OMF Publisher

Writers

Rhonda Cook retired from the corporate world after 31 years and felt God had new opportunities ahead for her. She served as Women's Ministry Director at the First Church of the Nazarene in Birmingham, Alabama, on the North Alabama District Women's Ministry Council. Rhonda enjoys leading women's Bible studies as well as hosting women's retreats at the beach.

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Vonda Rodeheaver serves on the Southern California District Women's Council and in various ministries at her local church in San Diego. She has ministered alongside her husband, Steve, at Southeast Church of the Nazarene for the past 29 years. They have three wonderful young adult children.

Cheryl Roland is the wife of Dr. David G. Roland, Superintendent of the Northeastern Indiana (NEI) District Church of the Nazarene. She serves as the NEI District Women's Ministries director, event coordinator for Come to the Fire Holiness women's conferences, and hosts a monthly Bible study for residents of the Open Heart Home, a shelter for homeless women. She loves to read, write, walk, talk, pray, listen and teach that Jesus is the joy of living.

AmySteinbrook is a pastor's wife, mother of two children, and elementary school teacher. Her husband pastors the Ravenna (Kentucky) Church of the Nazarene. They reside in Irvine, Kentucky.