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Connection SDMI



SDMI
USA/CANADA REGION

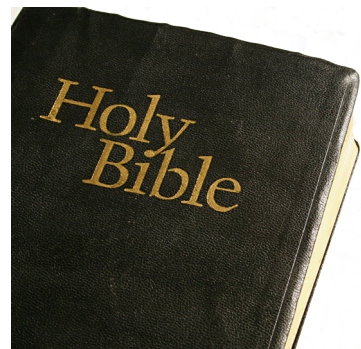


DISCIPLESHIP AND THE WORD

I WANT TO BE LIKE JESUS! by Rev. Larry R. Morris

“I want to be like Jesus” is a common declaration of new and old Christians alike. In many ways, that declaration is the door to discipleship. But what is there about Jesus that we can emulate that will bring us closer to what He was and who He is?

Even a cursory study of the gospels will leave no doubt that Jesus was a serious student of the Scriptures. We see the evidence in His response to the religious scholars at the temple when He was a boy (Luke 2:41-52). More evidence of Jesus’ knowledge and reliance upon Scripture is revealed during His time of intense temptation in the wilderness. When Satan challenged Him to pick an easier life path, He let Scripture speak for Him (Matt. 4:1-11). When Jesus’ authority was questioned by the religious leader of His day, He referenced the Scriptures in defense of His position (Mark 12: 1-37). Jesus had a profound respect for and belief in the Scriptures, and they were the foundation upon which He lived.



As we seek to be Christlike disciples, it only makes sense for us to align our priorities with His. It makes good sense for us to pattern our lives after the pattern He set for us – that is the study of the Scriptures. In fact, throughout the centuries an essential foundation

of discipleship was knowledge of Scripture. Discipleship and the study of Scripture were inseparable. To be a Christian disciple was to study the Word, to memorize the Word, to live a life shaped by the Author of the Word. The Word pointed every believer to the same reality – a unified and united relationship with our Creator and Savior.



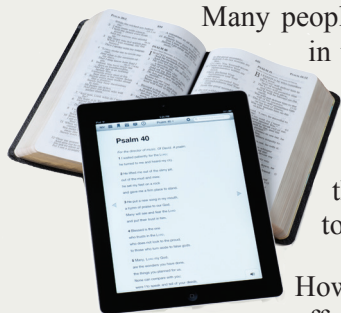
However, our lives can become so busy and full that we often forget the essential connection between discipleship and Bible study. We neglect the very thing God has provided to help us grow in maturity in Him - the very thing through which we can find His peace and guidance.

In this issue of “Connection,” you will find inspiration, instruction, and resources which will help you and those you disciple grow to be more like Jesus. And that is what the world is waiting for – to see Jesus in you.

Larry Morris is the SDMI USA/Canada Regional Coordinator.

DiscipleshipPlace.org...A Bible Study Resource

by Rev. John Comstock



Many people read Scripture devotionally, and this is a wonderful practice that can help us experience God in transformational ways. However, this practice becomes even more meaningful when we also take time to study the Bible in-depth. Gaining clarity on key insights into the background of the text is important for sound application. Sound Bible study requires digging beneath the words on the page in order to understand things like the historical context, the authors, and the audience to whom the Bible was written. The good news is that it isn't necessary to know Hebrew and Greek in order to engage in adequate Bible study. If that were so, many of us would be in trouble.

However, studying the Bible does take time and effort. While many are unwilling to take the time and effort it requires, those who do will often discover a depth of insight that breathes new life into their souls. Thankfully, we are blessed by generations of men and women who have given their lives to studying Scripture, and their work becomes our treasure.

This is exactly what is available at The Discipleship Place (www.DiscipleshipPlace.org). You will find the resources you need under the "Study" menu item. Currently, there are seven Bible studies written by great scholars who are held in high esteem in the Church of the Nazarene. These FREE Bible studies will take you deep into Scripture so that you can anchor your life in the Word of God. On the website you will find Bible studies for I Corinthians, II Corinthians, Book of Acts, Galatians, Gospel of John, Gospel of Luke, and Romans. You can even receive a certificate of completion by letting us know when you complete each study. Check them out. If you have any questions, feel free to email us at DiscipleshipPlace@nazarene.org.

John Comstock is the SDMI Continuing Lay Training Coordinator, Church of the Nazarene.

HIS WORD, OUR HEARTS: Growing Closer by Learning God's Truth

by Dr. David and Lisa Frisbie

The careful study of God's Word protects us from the dangers of disobedience. Storing God's truth in our hearts and minds prepares us to successfully avoid giving in to temptation, falling into sin, or drifting away from God. Like a powerful multivitamin or a timely inoculation, the Word of God shelters us against spiritual dysfunction.

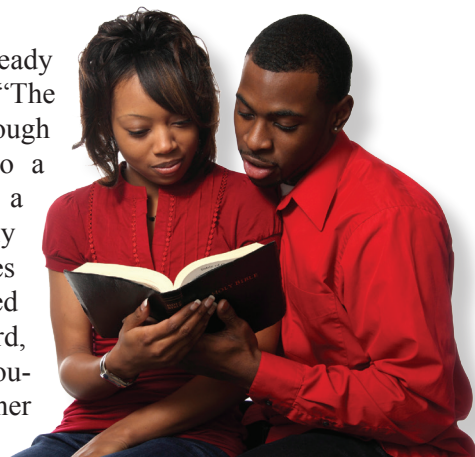
For couples, the study of God's Word can be a unifying experience - not only protecting each partner from sin but also growing the marriage closer, deeper, and stronger. The daily study of Scripture is a top "healthy habit" for couples. Couples who study God's Word together:

- Mature spiritually by learning God's values and priorities.
- Align their spiritual growth so that neither partner falls behind.
- Prepare for more effective parenting by studying God's precepts.
- Develop strategies for thriving in their marriage and family.
- Learn how to live in spiritual victory and avoid defeat.

These and other benefits are compelling reasons why couples should make it a priority to study God's Word together daily. This is one reason why SDMI has been developing a partnership with the American Bible Society across the past few years, strengthening the connection with this important ministry.

A number of resources are in development that will help couples build a new "healthy habit" into their daily routine. One

of these resources is already online and available at "The Discipleship Place" through SDMI. "Thirty Days to a Stronger Marriage" is a Scripture-based daily devotional that gives couples a pre-selected passage of God's Word, aimed at helping couples grow closer together while learning Bible truths. Like many of the resources from SDMI, this book-length devotional study is available for free at www.thediscipleshipplace.org (Tools>Devotionals>Marriage Devotionals).



For my wife and me - busy in ministry and in life - a daily focus on Scripture has been a unifying, uplifting, encouraging experience that not only brightens our day but also bonds us together and supports our desire to "go the distance" and finish strong. We are hiding God's Word in our hearts - growing closer to Him and to each other.

Dr. David and Lisa Frisbie serve together as Executive Directors of Healthy Habits for Parents and Families in Rancho Santa Fe, California. They are the authors of dozens of articles and twenty-six books about marriage and family life.

5 REASONS TO ENGAGE YOUR BIBLE by Dr. Arnie Cole

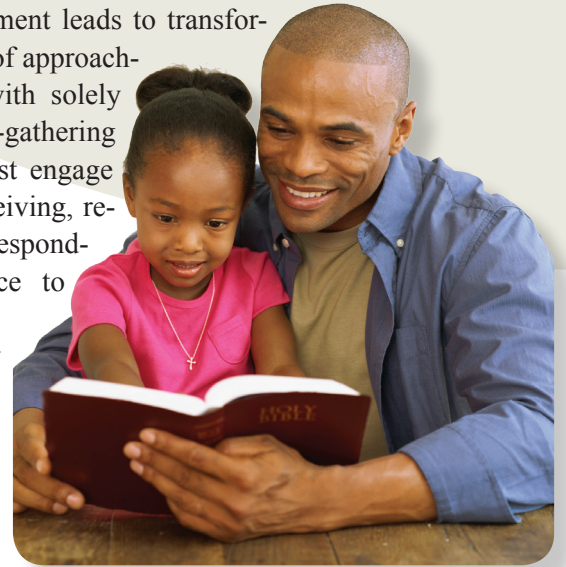
Preachers like to thump it. Theologians dissect it. Bookstores line their shelves with countless versions of it—in multiple sizes, colors, and styles for every taste. Yet the world’s best-selling book—the *Holy Bible*—also is humankind’s least understood, least agreed upon, and least read resource. How can this be? And here’s another eye-opener: A staggering number of American believers (1) don’t grasp what the Bible is for, (2) read it only “on occasion,” and (3) are ignorant of basic Scriptural teachings and truths.

Since 2005, I’ve been on a quest to learn why Christians own Bibles but rarely read them. More importantly, I’ve set out to determine the level of impact God’s Word has on a believer’s spiritual life. So ten years ago, my team and I at Back to the Bible launched an ambitious survey of 175,000 people around the world. Here’s what we learned:

1. The Bible matters—a lot! According to our research, individuals reported that Bible engagement has the most powerful impact upon individual spiritual growth.
2. Consistency is the key to spiritual growth. Our research uncovered significant differences in the moral behaviors and spiritual maturity of believers who read or listen to the Bible at least four times a week. The lives of Christians who rarely read the Bible appear identical to those who don’t follow Christ at all.
3. Scriptures unlock a two-way conversation with God. That’s why it’s important to receive Scripture at least four or more times a week. Relationships need daily, consistent connections in order to grow. It’s the same way with God.

4. Bible engagement leads to transformation. Instead of approaching the Bible with solely an information-gathering mindset, we must engage Scripture ... receiving, reflecting on, and responding in obedience to God’s Word.

5. Bible literacy builds a “protective factor” within us. As we set our minds on Scripture, we are less likely to take part in negative and soul-robbing behaviors—specifically, things like viewing pornography, abusing illegal drugs, giving into drunkenness, and engaging in sex outside of marriage.

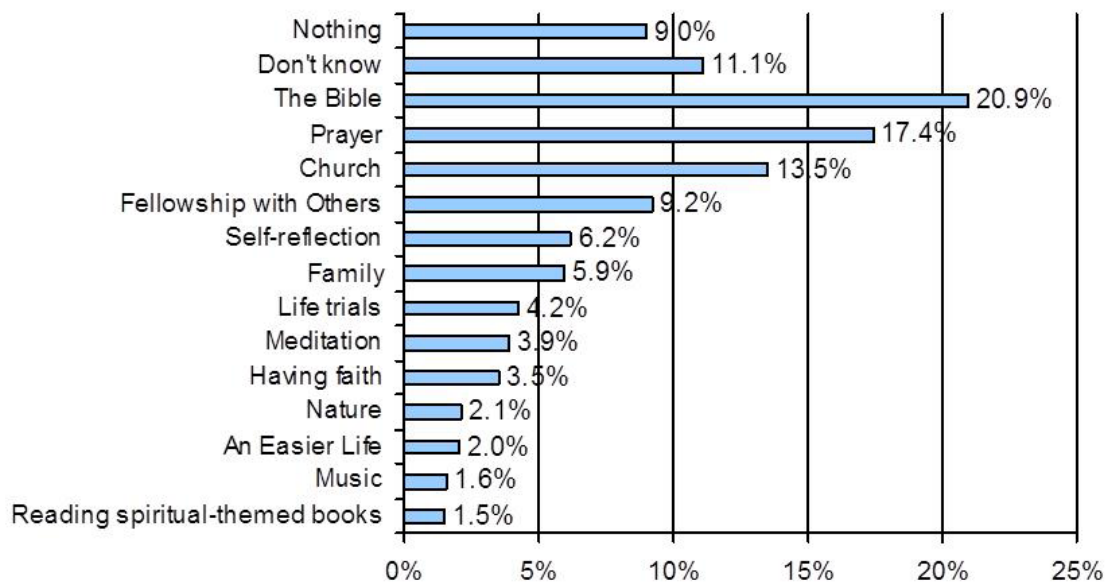


If we agree that Bible engagement makes a difference, what can we do to help people engage the Bible? Perhaps we could start by carving out regular times for people to share how engaging the Bible has made a difference in their own lives. As people hear the transformational impact Scripture has had in someone else’s life, it can stimulate an appetite that will encourage them to pick up a new habit with eternal results.

Arnie Cole is CEO of Back to the Bible.

What helps you grow Spiritually?

Results from survey of 175,000 people



BIBLICAL LITERACY: UNCHANGING TRUTH IN A CHANGING WORLD

by Rev. G. Daniel Harris



We live in a world that experiences constant change. If we choose to resist this constant change, our efforts are often futile. Change is a part of our lives; resisting it, although a typical human reaction, is often unnecessary and unproductive. There are times and situations when change is the best choice.

But when it comes to our faith in God and in the Scripture upon which a large portion of our faith rests, change is often not the best course of action. Scripture declares that our God is an unchanging God. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever. Although our understanding of it may experience times of change, adjustment, and further illumination, His Word does not change.

Thus, in an ever-changing world, Christians can find a solid, un-

changing foundation for their faith in Scripture. In His Word, the Christian can find an unchanging direction, purpose, and meaning for life.

- **Direction** – In how God has and continues to fulfill His promises to mankind.
- **Purpose** – In that God has chosen Christians to share His Good News with their world.
- **Meaning** – When the Christian discovers how God’s active movement in the fulfillment of His promises are all a part of His efforts to restore the relationship with Him that was broken by mankind’s sin.

When the world forces change upon the Christian - change that clearly conflicts with what we find in God’s Word - the Christian can find peace in knowing that mankind has no authority to re-define truth. God-defined and Christ-revealed truth recorded in the pages of Scripture does not change. It is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

Dan Harris is the SDMI Kids Reaching Kids Coordinator, Church of the Nazarene.

CHOOSING A CHILDREN’S BIBLE

by Rev. Leslie Hart

More than knowing *about* God’s love, we want our children to know God’s love personally. More than knowing *about* the Bible, we want them to know the Living Word. We want them to love hearing the Word brought to life by parents and teachers reading it aloud. We also want them to develop a deep hunger for more of His love letter to them, and to explore its beauty and discover its truth. Considering the importance of the Word as well as the important developmental differences between age groups, how do we choose the best Bible version to use?

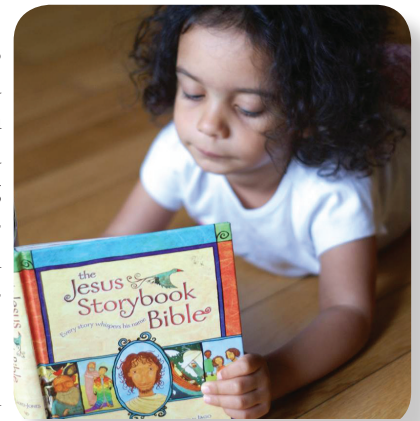
Well-illustrated Bible storybooks are the best choice for preschoolers. Examine the table of contents. Which stories are included? Are they woven together into a tapestry depicting the whole of Scripture or simply treated as stand-alone stories? How do they treat key events corresponding to Christian sacraments and doctrines like the virgin birth, baptism, the Lord’s Supper, etc.? Read a few stories aloud. Do the illustrations effectively portray the core message? Is the paraphrase simple enough to be accessible to young minds while remaining faithful to Scripture, or has the writer taken liberties that call into question biblical accuracy?

Elementary students should have a complete Bible in simple, modern language. The NIRV (New International Reader’s Version) and ICB (International Children’s Bible) are solid choices. Look for a well-constructed Bible with a durable cover. Compare the translator’s treatment of key verses and passages to your

preferred adult translation. Age-appropriate features corresponding to those found in adult study Bibles can broaden understanding and spark interest in exploring deeper on their own, provided they do not distract from the main message of the biblical text.

Things to remember when choosing a children’s Bible:

- **Translation:** Biblical accuracy; age-appropriate readability
- **Illustrations:** Visually appealing, colorful, realistic, age-appropriate
- **Study Helps:** Each Bible book begins with consistently well-written, age-appropriate, accurate, educational overview/summary. Look for contextual study notes & devotional thoughts throughout, providing helpful and relevant life application insight as well as accessible, age-appropriate index and study guides (dictionary, maps & charts, etc., clearly connected to content).
- **Cover:** Durable, appealing, comfortable size



Leslie Hart is the USA/Canada Children’s Ministries Coordinator.

GROWING DISCIPLES THROUGH GOD'S WORD

by Duane Brush

I was still in my first year as pastor when I felt a growing urgency to challenge believers to read through the Bible in a year. I hammered together a program I called “Bible Journey” from the resources I found at hand. I set a reading schedule and planned weekly sessions on Tuesday nights to provide background and opportunity for discussion. It was nothing fancy, but about a dozen people went through the program.



At the end of the year, we met to celebrate. I asked people to share what it meant to them personally to read through the Bible. They spoke of a new love for the Scriptures, how the Bible had “come alive” for the very first time. Several spoke of spiritual growth and a renewed commitment to serve Christ fully. A few couples had done their reading together and spoke about how it brought them closer together and deepened their devotional life.

I knew how important reading the Scriptures was to basic Christian discipleship, but my “Bible Journey” helped me to see first-hand the potential for spiritual growth and deepened faith. The amazing thing was how easy it was to pull together and how eager some were to participate. Many believers want to read and learn the Bible; what they often lack is the structure and support to make it happen. Providing a basic reading plan in addition to some historical context and creating a group to encourage one another was really about all it took.

There are some helpful resources available.

- Both *Reflecting God* and *Standard* in the WordAction Adult *Faith Connections* curriculum already contain a coordinated program to read through the Bible in a year. These readings are roughly chronological and provide the foundation for individual or group emphasis.
- The Engage the Word program (<http://engagetheword.org>) is a 40-day emphasis to kick start Bible reading in your local congregation.
- The American Bible Society has a daily Bible reading program where the text can be sent each day directly to your internet connected device (<http://dailybible.americanbible.org>).
- Biblica, formerly the International Bible Society, has the “Bible in a Year” reading program based on the New International Version (<http://www.biblica.com/en-us/bible/reading-plans/>).

The plan, of course, is not the most important thing; it is encouraging believers to daily read and study the Bible. That is when it truly becomes “the Word of God for the people of God.”

Duane Brush is a pastor, editor, and educator living in Grandview, Missouri.



On September 27, SDMI will launch the 5th year of Engage the Word, an annual 40-day emphasis designed to help people develop life-long habits of daily Scripture engagement. This emphasis can be used individually or with families, small groups, and even congregations. Feedback from this Bible engagement emphasis has been overwhelmingly positive, with inquiries coming into our office each year well in advance of the release of promotional materials. This tells SDMI that people are eagerly seeking ways to engage with God's Word.

The 2015 theme, “Red Thread of Redemption,” begins at the beginning – Genesis 1:1 – and goes through Revelation. Each daily Scripture reading will engage the reader with one of the Bible's compelling, often-familiar stories.

All the resources in English and Spanish are FREE to download and print at engagetheword.org. The resources include a church bulletin and posters for promoting the emphasis, reading lists for participants, 5 adult Sunday School/small group lessons, sermon outlines for pastors, daily devotionals, and a family poster for parents and children to share. In addition, participants who sign up individually can select how to receive the daily Scripture passage electronically – by text, email, audio file, or through iOS/Android app.

For more information, go to engagetheword.org today.

A HINDU, A MUSLIM, AND THE BIBLE by Aletha Hinthorn



Soon after two young doctors arrived to begin an Infectious Disease fellowship, we invited their families to our home to celebrate the Fourth of July. One was a Hindu couple from Nepal; the other was a Muslim couple from Pakistan

As we sat around the table eating hamburgers, I was filled with a compelling love for these new friends. “What can I do for you? Can I take you to get a driver’s license?” They didn’t have a green card, so that was the wrong question.

Anita, the Hindu, agreed to go shopping, and we began a warm friendship. When my husband asked her husband if they would be interested in attending Alpha at our church to learn about Christianity, he quickly responded, “Yes! And can we bring our children?”

They came and received the gospel gladly. Soon they were coming to worship service each Sunday. They replaced the idol in their home with a sign that said, “As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.”

Ana,* the Muslim, spent many lonely hours in her apartment. When I asked, “Would you like to learn English by studying the

Bible?” she quickly consented. Each Thursday morning I would pick up both Ana and Anita and take them to my home to read the book of John. Then we’d have lunch and visit the mall.

One day Ana shyly said, “I see you have a lot of Bibles. Could I have one?” I was thrilled to give her one but knew she would have to hide it from her husband. He was very offended when we showed them a movie about Jesus. “The worst thing a Muslim can do is to believe a man could be a God!” he said indignantly.

The last time I saw Ana she said she had prayed to my God, and the pain she had experienced for weeks went away. Still, she seemed to be afraid to say she believed in Jesus.

The Muslims moved back to Pakistan, and I have no way to contact Ana. But when I recall driving to her home with tears running down my cheeks as I prayed for them, I remember God’s promise: “Those who go out weeping, carrying seed to sow, will return with songs of joy, carrying sheaves with them” (Ps. 126:6).

My hope is in a faithful God whose Word never returns void.

*Ana’s name is changed.

Aletha Hinthorn is founder of *Come to the Fire*. Sign up for her blog at cometothefire.org. Her husband, Daniel Hinthorn, MD, is Director of Infectious Diseases at the University of Kansas Medical School.

MOR2LIF BIBLE STUDY FOR WOMEN

by Dr. Linda G. Hardin

Mor2Lif



The Women’s Ministries General Council, in partnership with the USA/Canada Regional Sunday School & Discipleship Ministries office, developed the video Bible Study series called *Mor2Lif*, which targets young women between ages 25 and 35. Written to challenge women to live with a Christ-centered perspective, this series provides videos, leader’s guides, and participant outlines on six relevant topics: Relationships, Communication, Conflict, Forgiveness, Work, and Sexuality. Each video is designed to address a specific topic and delves into what the Bible says about each topic. Then participants are challenged to implement new discoveries into their lives.

Each session begins with an 8-10 minute video, followed by discussion questions that lead into “What Does the Bible Say?” This section takes the participants to related Scriptures and guides them through a study. The “How Does This Affect My Life?” and “Now What?” sections help participants make life applications as individuals consider new insights and develop strategies for implementing them.

The release of this Bible Study series fulfills a long-held vision of the Women’s Ministries General Council. This series provides informative, Bible-based, Wesleyan-rooted studies. The videos feature real-life conversations and circumstances designed to initiate discussions that naturally flow into a search for biblical answers and Christlike applications.

Go to sdmiusacanada.org to download the videos plus background information, a leader’s guide, and a participant guide for each of the six topics. You can also order a FREE DVD of the videos by emailing sdmi@nazarene.org.

Linda Hardin is a ministry consultant to SDMI, USA/Canada Region.



THY WORD HAVE I TREASURED IN MY HEART

by Wm. Marshall Duke

Nazarene adults ages 55-90+ from 21 USA states recently traveled to beautiful Colorado Springs, Colorado, and to the foot of Pike's Peak for the Prime Time Rocky Mountain retreat, a special worship, fellowship, and educational event. When attendees were asked what Scripture and Bible study means to them, some had this to say:

- It brings a peace and helps me to stay focused on eternal priorities.
- It allows me to learn about our Heavenly Father and His Son, Jesus Christ, how they love me, and what my identity is as a child of God.
- It helps me to say, "Holy Spirit, be my guide."
- It enables me to learn who I am, why I am here, and what I should be doing with my life.

A common message from participants was that, on any given day, God can speak through a particular passage and bring comfort, hope, peace, and direction. For example, **Dick from Ohio** cites Philippians 4:4-5: "Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near." This Scripture has been an encouragement for him to look up to God. Read on to see what others had to say. (*All Scripture NIV unless otherwise noted.*)

Richard from Tennessee likes Acts 4:13: "*When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus.*" Richard explains that if we have the Spirit of God within us, we need not be afraid to share the saving grace of Jesus Christ with anybody.

Harold from Missouri referenced both an Old and New Testament passage, calling these two passages the "Golden Gate Bridge of the Bible," noting their "pylons go deep in order to support the weight of grace." II Samuel 14:14: "*Like water spilled on the ground, which cannot be recovered, so we must die. But that is not what God desires; rather, he devises ways so that a banished person does not remain banished from him.*" Add to that John 3:16: "*For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have everlasting life.*" Harold says, "So many think 'grace' is about something I pursue; rather, God 'devises ways' so we find our way home."

Terri from Arizona cites Jeremiah 29:11-12 and says that when she listens and follows God's plans instead of her plans, things turn out so much better! "*'For I know the plans I have for you,' declares the Lord, 'plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you.'*"

Michael and Oleta from Colorado each have a favorite to share. He finds strength from Romans 8:28 (Amplified Version)... "*We are assured and know that (God being a partner in their labor) all things work together and are (fitting into a plan) for good to and for those who love God and are called according to (His) design and purpose.*" Oleta is comforted by Proverbs 3:5-6... "*Trust in the Lord with all your heart; don't rely on your own intelligence. Know Him in all your paths, and He will keep your ways straight.*"

Sharon from Kansas is helped by Psalm 94:19 (Living Bible): "*Lord, when doubts fill my mind, when my heart is in turmoil, quiet me and give me a renewed hope and [peace].*" She says when answers to her prayers seem slow or nonexistent, worry often overtakes her, robbing her of joy. When she prays this verse, slowly peace comes until she is able to rest in the Savior's arms.

Mark from Ohio explains, "You can't go wrong when you trust in and submit to the Lord." He refers to Proverbs 3:5-6: "*Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight.*"

Isaiah 43 speaks clearly to my own heart: "Don't be afraid, I have redeemed you. I've called you by name. You're mine. When you're in over your head, I'll be there with you. When you're in rough waters, you will not go down. When you're between a rock and a hard place, it won't be a dead end – Because I am God, your personal God, The Holy of Israel, your Savior" (*The Message*).

Do you have a special, meaningful verse that sustains and gives you strength? Are you searching each day for God's "Word for the day" for you and your circumstances? Through experience, many older adults have learned that the Lord has anticipated all of our problems and all of our needs, and He put help in the Scriptures for us...if only we seek it!

Marshall Duke is pastor of Pastoral Care, Springdale (Ohio) Church of the Nazarene, and SDMI Prime Time Ministries Coordinator, Church of the Nazarene, USA/Canada Region.

UPCOMING EVENTS...

Engage the Word 2015
40 Days of Bible Engagement
September 27-November 8
engagetheword.org

New SDMI District Chair
Orientation
September 29-October 1
Kansas City, Missouri

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