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**Rhonda Rhoades** is happily married to Phil and is the mother of four grown children and the grandmother of 2 with another on the way. She and her husband have pastored the Church of the Nazarene in Garnett, Kansas, for the last 29 years. She serves as the Minister of Worship and also accompanies the choirs at the local Junior/Senior High School. She loves to read and try all kinds of crafts.

**Connie Riddle** and her husband are in search of new restaurants and exciting places to travel. She is a Master Gardener and volunteers in a community garden that provides over 4,000 pounds of veggies for the needy each season. For more than 40 years Women's Bible study groups have helped Connie stay in God's word. She wants to be remembered as one who walked in Jesus' own footsteps.

**Ruby Ruschhaupt** worked as an administrative assistant. She served as Sunday School teacher, choir member, local church women's ministries director, and PrimeTime ministries coordinator. Ruby enjoys knitting, reading, and bowling. She is married and enjoying retirement as well as keeping in touch with family and friends.

## **When You Feel WORTHLESS** **Mandy Farmer**

**Scripture:** [Genesis 3:1-8](#)

Does it surprise you that the first struggle known to man was, in part, a struggle with self-worth? From the beginning of time, the great deceiver has tried to convince us that we are not good enough. We don't measure up. In one way or another, he tries to defeat us with a lie. You are not smart enough, pretty enough, talented enough, old enough. You fill in the blank. Satan wants us to look around and compare ourselves to others and decide that we are worthless because of some gift we don't have. And it's all lies. Pure lies.

Eve was created and placed in a luscious garden full of every good thing. But Satan was able to convince her that she didn't measure up. He told her there was something better which God was keeping her from.

I, too, had a "perfect life" growing up on a farm with good Christian parents. Love and happiness spilled all around. God had given me wonderful abilities. I was a straight A student and I was an accomplished pianist. And people said I should sing on the radio.

But somehow, I was convinced that I didn't measure up.

- Height ~ While the oldest in my school class, I was also the shortest.
- Weight ~ My neighbor called me "Butterball."
- Athletically ~ My siblings were successful in sports, but not I.

All these things kept me from believing that I had any worth.

The belief that I needed to obtain these things kept me shackled to Satan's lies, which held me back from God's amazing plan for my life. My sight was on accomplishing things that weren't for me. Satan set me up for failure after failure. I could not believe that I was even lovable. Yes, my family loved me. They were expected to love me. I spent a lot of time doing things to be approved by others, never realizing that what matters is being approved by God.

And that is what we all are – loveable and approved. God chose us from the very beginning. He created us in His own image. He loved us then. He loved us in our sin. He loves us now. He wrote my name and yours in the palm of His hand! He validates us! He made us His child, and that makes us each a princess! Can you throw out the lies and stand on the truth that God loves you? Can you take a step toward knowing that you are treasured and beautiful in God's sight? Chosen. Approved.

### **Points to Ponder:**

- Read these scriptures: [Psalm 139:13-14](#); [1 Samuel 16:7](#); [Isaiah 49:15-16](#); [Ephesians 2:10](#); [1 John 3:1](#); [1 Peter 2:9](#)
- What does God say about you in these scriptures?
- Write these scriptures out, replacing the pronouns with your name.
- Which verse encouraged you the most? Post it on your mirror, your computer desktop or any place where you will see it often. Memorize it with your own name in it.

**Prayer:** *Lord, thank You for making me in Your image, fearfully and wonderfully made! Help me to throw out the lies Satan wants me to believe. Help me to compare myself only to what You want me to be. Thank You for keeping my name in the palms of Your hands. Your little princess! In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.*

## **When You Get Kicked in the Shins** **Mandy Farmer**

**Scripture:** [John 16:33](#)

“He kicked me on purpose!”

That was the cry of my little five-year-old son as he came off the soccer field. It was a bit difficult to help him understand that getting kicked in the shins is all part of the game. When the rules of the game are to kick a ball down the field and keep it from the opposing team, we're going to get kicked in the shins once in a while.

It's the same in the 'real' world filled with hate and violence. Even when we are trying to show love and acceptance to others, once in a while we are going to get kicked in the shins like the participant in a soccer game.

Because God has given every person free will, each one may choose how she wants to live. What we must realize is we are not an island. Our choices do affect others, and their choices affect us. This is why bad things happen to good people. Therefore, we must be prepared for bad things to come our way; and when they do, we need to focus our hearts on God, allowing His Holy Spirit to direct our response.

Look at the bigger picture. Where is the wrongdoer coming from? Does she have situations in her life that are causing her to lash out? Does she know about the love of Christ? Our reaction to our trials is what directs others' eyes to God. If we change our focus from the hurt we experience and look at the situation from God's viewpoint, would our response be different? Would we then be able to see the greater picture?

### **Points to Ponder:**

- Read [John 16:33](#). Who will have troubles in this world? What encouragement does Jesus give us?
- Read [Psalm 34:17-18](#), [Psalm 91:15](#); [Psalm 50:15](#). What should we do when we are in the midst of trouble? What will God do for us?
- Read [Matthew 5:43-48](#). How are we to treat those who hurt us? Recall a time when you were hurt. How did you respond? How should we respond?
- Read [Matthew 9:36](#). How did Jesus respond when He saw the people? How should we respond when we see those who are lost?
- Read [Luke 23:33-43](#). What was Jesus' response to those who were crucifying Him? Is this our response when others hurt us?
- Read [James 1:2-4](#). According to James, how should we respond when troubles come our way? What can God do through the trials, if we allow Him?

**Prayer:** *Lord, Thank you for staying by my side when I am hurt through no fault of my own. When I look at how You were treated here on earth and how You always returned love for hate, I realize that I, too, must not take it personally when I receive abuse. Help me look at those around me as You look at them. Help me to show love as You do so others will see You and not me. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.*

## **When the Music Stops** **Mandy Farmer**

**Scripture:** [Isaiah 42:10](#)

I love to sing, but there was a time when the music stopped for me.

My greatest desire was to have children and at this point to have a little girl. God blessed us with a beautiful, dark-headed princess. The trouble was I couldn't voice the song. I wanted so much to sing to my precious baby, but the notes got caught somewhere between my heart and my throat. I would cry at the drop of a hat, and I had no idea why I was crying.

Those months were frustrating for me. I struggled to be my typically happy self. I wanted to feel joy over my little girl, but at times I didn't even want to hold her. There was an emptiness that I could not fill even though the desire was there.

Maybe you are struggling with depression. Please know that God is walking with you through this. He hasn't left you. Sometimes we can't see Him, but He is there. He promises to never leave you nor forsake you. He tells us so over and over in the Bible. I love to read it from the Amplified version.

Hebrews 13:5 "I WILL NEVER [under any circumstances] DESERT YOU [nor give you up nor leave you without support, nor will I in any degree leave you helpless], NOR WILL I FORSAKE or LET YOU DOWN or RELAX MY HOLD ON YOU [assuredly not]!"

Isn't that wonderful?

When we fall into depression, it is a serious matter. Don't take it lightly. Don't try to go it alone. Don't buy into the social stigmas of depression. See your doctor. There could be an imbalance that can be corrected. For me, it was a hormonal deficiency dealing with the thyroid.

In the meantime, don't give up on God. You may feel that He is far from you; but in all reality, He is right there carrying you. Make a habit of reading a Psalm or two each day. David experienced depression when he was being hunted down by King Saul. His writings will comfort you as he pours out his heart to God but finally turns it around and ends up praising Him. God is going to bring you through this!

### **Points to Ponder:**

- Read [Psalm 23:4](#). God is nearest when it seems the darkest. The Hebrew wording for "valley of the shadow of death" literally refers to deep, deathly darkness.
- Read [Psalm 40:1-3](#). What should we do when in a dark place? What does God promise for us?
- Read [Psalm 30:4-5](#). We may not be able to sing while we go through our trials, but we can speak His praises. Read scriptures like these aloud. The darkness will only last a while. His favor lasts forever!

**Prayer:** *Lord, when I am in a dark place, remind me that You are there. Hold me close and let me feel Your presence. May Your light shine through me to encourage others in their dark places. Help me endure through the night and find Your joy once again in the morning. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.*

## **When You Get Burned** **Mandy Farmer**

**Scripture:** [Isaiah 53:5](#)

The other day, I burned my hand. I was trying to get the leftover wax from a candle votive. I foolishly decided to pour boiling water into the votive to remove the last of the wax. In doing so, the hot water splashed over onto my hands. Thankfully, I quickly held my hand under cool water and then stuck it into an ice pack.

Later that night, taking my shower, I would not allow the water to run over my hand because the pain was intolerable. Since the water made my hand burn, I held my hand away from the shower stream while I bathed.

Is this our reaction emotionally, when we are burned by the world? Do we protect the wound and pull away from anyone or anything that might actually be the solution? I recall my children getting splinters in their hand. Oh, how it would hurt, but they wouldn't allow me to touch it ... or even look at it.

Many times we do this with our Savior. He comes to our aid, but we won't let Him apply the necessary healing balm. Because of our fear of additional pain, we hide the wound from the One who can actually heal the wound.

In her book, *Unshamed*, Christine Caine talks about remaining imprisoned even though the chains are gone. Those who have been deeply wounded by life respond the same as my children with the splinter. They draw into themselves, curling up in a fetal position, scarcely looking up. Or they hide pain, not allowing anyone to even know there is a hurt. Caine says, "Until we learn to trust God in the wilderness by exposing our baggage and allowing Him to heal all of those broken places, we will never experience true freedom."

Christ took the pain and the shame on Himself so we could be healed. His suffering makes us free but we have to take the first step toward Him. We have to hold out that wound and cry out, "It hurts, Jesus!"

The sooner we reach out, the sooner He can do His work in us. Don't wait another day. Let's be brave enough to quickly reach out to Him. Let's allow His blood to flow over us as a healing balm.

He is waiting. He's begging us to show Him our hurts so that healing can begin!

### **Points to Ponder:**

- Read [Psalm 103:2-4](#) and [Psalm 147:3](#). Why does the Psalmist praise God in these verses? Can we trust God to do the same for us?
- Read [Luke 8:43-48](#). When the woman heard Jesus was coming nearby, what did she do? What was it that made her whole again?
- Read [Psalm 107:19-21](#). God's promises often come with a stipulation. In these promises of God, what must we do first before God heals us?
- Read [Isaiah 61:7](#). If we give up our pain and our shame, what will we receive in return?

**Prayer:** *Oh! Jesus, I open my broken, burned heart to You. You alone know how it feels to be so terribly hurt. Only You can heal my hurts. Here is my pain. It hurts so much. Please ease my pain and heal the hurt. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.*

## **When We're Pressed on all Sides** **Mandy Farmer**

**Scripture:** [Exodus 27:20](#) (NLT)

When I read this scripture, I couldn't help but think of the Apostle Paul's writing in [2 Corinthians 4:8-10](#): "We are pressed on every side by troubles, but we are not crushed. We are perplexed, but not driven to despair. We are hunted down but never abandoned by God. We get knocked down, but we are not destroyed. Through suffering, our bodies continue to share in the death of Jesus so that the life of Jesus may also be seen in our bodies."

Ray Vander Laan shared in his video studies "That the World May Know" that olives are pressed twice. The first pressing with the large rock is to crack open the olives and create a pulp. Then the olives are placed into a basket and pressed again causing the oil to come out of the olives and flow through the basket becoming the finest oil.

Our lives are like these olives. We need to be cracked in order to release the light of God into the world. If you were to see an olive press, it would seem that the olives would get crushed by the large stone. But they are only cracked open, made into a pulp.

I've had times when I was cracked. I have had the "stones of life" rushing toward me and felt for certain I would be crushed under the weight. But Paul says we are NOT crushed, only pressed on every side. As we are pressed by troubles on every side, our lives are cracked open and the light can shine through. Until we are pressed and cracked, we cannot shine His Light.

But then, we also need to be pressed again, made unrecognizable, in order to become pure and holy. We must be strained by the second pressing, to remove anything of ourselves. The second press makes the oil pure, straining us of self.

When we are saved, we have the Light inside us, but we need to be cracked open so that others will see the Light ([2 Corinthians 4:7](#)). We now have this light shining in our hearts, but we ourselves are like fragile clay jars containing this great treasure. This makes it clear that our great power is from God, not from ourselves.

We are that fragile clay jar, containing the light of the world. The light peeks through our cracks and imperfections. The oil is where the power comes from. The oil is from God...the Holy Spirit.

### **Points to Ponder:**

- Have you invited Christ into your heart and life? Click [here](#) to learn more.
- Have you allowed Christ to shine through the cracks in your life? Is your heart supple enough to crack open so others can see Jesus inside? [Matthew 5:13-16](#)
- Are you allowing Christ to press hard on you so the Holy Spirit can make you pure and holy? How is God pressing hard on you to develop endurance, character, and confident hope? [Romans 5:3-5](#)

**Prayer:** *Lord, I give myself to You. Come in and be the One moving in my life. I give my heart to You as a clay jar. Break it open so that others will see You in me. Allow Your Holy Spirit to do His work within me so my life will be made pure and holy. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.*

## When Others Speak “Evil” of You Mandy Farmer

**Scripture:** [1 Kings 19:1-9](#)

Can you relate to Elijah after Jezebel had spoken all kinds of evil against him? His complaint went something like this. *“Everyone is picking on me. All I’ve tried to do is do what is right but I get attacked. No one wants to do right anymore and they are all out to get me.”*

I’ve had awful words spoken to me that cut to my core. The vile words spewed in my face repeated themselves over and over again. I had done nothing to deserve them but the words played over and over like a bad dream. Why would anyone say such things to me? What had I done that caused them to react in such an awful way? How could I stop the bad movie that kept playing in my head?

Most of us have been the target of bullying in one way or another. In today’s society, you hear about it all the time. But are we handling it the right way? All I hear is how we need to encourage the victims and tell the accusers they are so very wrong for their actions.

Let’s consider a more scriptural way to work through a bullying situation.

1. Run to God. Elijah didn’t go complaining to everyone else. He spoke to God about the problem and God tended to his needs.

2. Examine your own heart. Is there any truth in what was said to you? When David sinned against the Lord, the prophet Nathan came to him and confronted him. David realized he had sinned and immediately repented ([2 Samuel 12:1-13](#)). If there is truth in what was said, correct it. If there is no truth, forget it and move on. Remember in this world, you will be falsely accused. But God will bless you in the long run (Matthew 5:10-11)

3. Consider how you can use the trial for good. I’ve sat in many a group where everyone attests to being bullied. I began to wonder, “So what happened to all the bullies? Where are they today?” They may still be bullying people. But the truth is they have probably been bullied themselves. Many times the wounded will wound others. In her book, *Wounded by God’s People*, Ann Graham Lotz shares about her injured dog that tried to bite her. When we are wounded, we sometimes lash out in order to protect ourselves. Perhaps the one who has wounded you has been wounded herself. Reach out in love. Try to make a difference in her life. You might find someone who needs a little healing balm themselves.

### Points to Ponder:

- Read [Matthew 6:33](#). To whom do you run when you have troubles? Do you complain to all your friends? Do you talk with God?\*
- Read Psalm 32:3-5; [Psalm 119:59](#); [Jeremiah 31:19](#); [Galatians 6:4-8](#). When trials come your way, do you examine your own actions to see if you have been the cause of the problem? Do you take responsibility for your own faults and correct them?
- Read [Matthew 5:38-48](#) and [1 Peter 3: 8-18](#). How should we react when we are treated unfairly? How should we repay evil? How did Christ react when treated wrongly?

**Prayer:** *Lord, help me run to You when I am treated unfairly. Remind me of Your attitude toward sinners. Give me a heart of love for those who do not love You that they may see You in me. In Jesus’ name, we pray. Amen.*

## When Satan Reminds You of Your Past Mandy Farmer

**Scripture:** [Psalm 103](#)

It happens at the most unexpected, inopportune moments. Just as you are about to step up to a new role, Old Slue Foot climbs onto your shoulder and tells those old lies you thought had already been dispelled. He throws in your face the sins of your past or the feelings of unworthiness which you have struggled to keep at bay. Satan wants to condemn you because of your past. But these things are forgiven and “removed as far as the east is from the west” ([Psalm 103:12](#)).

I had things in my life that I wanted to forget. But I could not seem to find a way to forget them. I did a word study and found there are not many scriptures telling us to forget; rather, the majority of scriptures say DON'T FORGET.

- Don't forget the good things He does ([Psalm 103](#)).
- Don't forget His Word ([Psalm 119:16, 93, 141](#)).
- Don't forget the things you have been taught ([Proverbs 3:1](#)).
- Don't forget your Creator ([Ecclesiastes 12](#)).
- Don't forget God's providence in the past ([1 Corinthians 10:1](#)).
- Don't forget He saved you ([2 Timothy 2:8](#)).

When Satan reminds you of past sins and troubles, let it be a reminder of what God has done. “Yes! Praise the Lord He has delivered me from my sinful past!” Begin to list all the good things God is doing in your life. Go to His Word and begin quoting those wonderful scriptures that tell of God's salvation and how He keeps us in the palm of His hand. Satan will not be able to stand nearby. He will flee from your presence ([James 4:7](#)). Let his lies be a reminder that you have been gloriously saved ([1 John 1:9](#)). You are a new creation ([2 Corinthians 5:17](#)). There is now no condemnation ([Romans 8:1](#)).

[Isaiah 43:18](#) says, “Do not dwell on the past.” We cannot - must not - continue to listen to Satan's lies. Resist Him as quickly as possible ([James 4:7](#)). His lies are like quicksand; they will pull you down, deeper and deeper, entangling your life so you are completely paralyzed ([1 Peter 5:8](#)). That is his goal. Don't let it happen.

Follow the words of the apostle Paul by remembering those that have gone victoriously before us and by throwing off the weights that so easily entangle us ([Hebrews 12:1](#)).

### Points to Ponder:

- Find a few promises to memorize so that you are prepared for Satan's darts. Look up the scriptures I have mentioned above or find others that increase your faith in these difficult times.
- Share a story from your life when God provided in a miraculous way.
- In [Joshua 4](#), God had the Israelites stack 12 stones as a memorial of crossing the Jordan. This was to be a reminder for them and their children of what God had done. Do you have memorials in your home to remind you of what God has done for you?
- Do you tell the stories to your children and their children so that your faith is passed on to the next generation? If you haven't, then do it today. Set out an object as a reminder or celebrate your spiritual birthday just as you do your physical birthday.

**Prayer:** *Lord, I reject the lies of the enemy who tries to destroy me. I praise You for saving me from my sins. I thank You for Your providence; how You have delivered me in the past. Your love endures forever.*

You have \_\_\_\_\_. {List specific things God has done in your life.}

*Thank You, Jesus! In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.*

**Work: God's Design and Plan**  
**Linda Hardin**

**Scripture:** [Genesis 2:15](#)

The Bible opens with God creating the universe and everything in it. Take a quick glance through chapter one and you'll find several verbs: created (v.1), separated (v3.), called or named (v. 8) are some examples. Basic English grammar reminds us that verbs are action words. God worked to create the universe.

In Genesis 2:15, God put man "in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it." Tom Nelson in *Word Matters* writes the Hebrew word *avodah* is behind the word translated as "work" in this verse. It is used to describe the back-breaking work of the children of Israel when they were slaves in Egypt. It is also used to refer to the work of building the tabernacle and the artistic creativity involved in making the linens for tabernacle use.

Nelson further suggests God's original plan was for our work and worship to be seamless, not separating into sections as is often common today. This means God intended for "our work, our vocational calling, to be an act of God-honoring worship." What an interesting concept!

Look at the verbs from Genesis 1, and see how many relate to your work or job. As women, we create many times a day as we prepare meals, decorate, and maintain our homes. Sometimes we develop something new and give it a name. Other times we organize and separate things into drawers and categories. Think about your job and all the ways you are creative every day.

One summer while a student at Trevecca Nazarene University (then College), I took a summer class that included students who were already teachers. One teacher said, "Some live to teach. I teach to live." That comment influenced my teaching career. I determined to be a teacher who found great joy (creativity) in my classroom.

Work consumes the majority of our days. Admittedly some are for an employer, while others are caring for our families and ourselves. For some of us, it is the source of much of our identity. What would happen if we considered work to be an important aspect of being human and an essential element of loving our neighbors as ourselves?

**Points to Ponder:**

- What difference would it make in your job if you considered it as part of your worship to God?
- Thomas Merton said, "All vocations are intended by God to manifest His love in the world." What would happen if you saw your job as a way to manifest God's love?
- How do you find yourself being creative in your job? Are there ways you can improve your creativity?
- How can viewing your job as part of God's creative process change how you feel about your job?

**Prayer:** *Father God, You know the place I work. Help me to accomplish my tasks as part of my daily worship to You. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.*

**Work: Jesus, the carpenter**  
**Linda Hardin**

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**Scripture:** [Mark 6:1-6](#)

There is much about Jesus' life before he began his ministry that we don't know. Biblical scholars provide insights based on cultural practices and other historical sources for some ideas. Jesus probably experienced life as a typical young man in Nazareth. We know Joseph was a carpenter; based on cultural expectations, Jesus worked beside Joseph in his shop.

The townspeople knew Joseph and his family. Many of them were regular customers and had conversations with Joseph, Jesus, and the rest of the family. Their lives didn't differ from other families. They all worked each day to provide for basic needs. Life had a predictable routine, even for Jesus.

Let's think about this. Jesus, the Son of God, spent the majority of His life working, probably as a carpenter. Was this to experience life as a human being to understand the challenges humanity faces? To experience hardships? To understand needs? To live life fully human, yet fully divine? I think so.

Tom Nelson in *Work Matters* suggests Jesus understands difficult customers and co-workers because He encountered them. The servant attitude we see as Jesus washed the disciples' feet was first learned in the shop as Jesus filled customer orders.

When John the Baptist baptized Jesus as recorded in [Matthew 3:13-17](#), the voice from heaven said "...with him I am well pleased." I think this included Jesus' work as a carpenter in Nazareth.

I hadn't thought much about Jesus' work prior to His ministry before writing this devotional series. I find this intriguing...Jesus' understanding of life includes the workplace. He understands the good and bad times, the challenges that cause me to grow as an employee as well as those that give me grief, and the overwhelmed feelings when there just aren't enough hours to complete the tasks. Now how encouraging is that?!

**Points to Ponder:**

- How does thinking of Jesus as a carpenter working an everyday job change the way you see your work?
- What difference would it make in my job if I truly believe Jesus understands every experience?
- What changes would I make if Jesus was one of my co-workers?

**Prayer:** *How encouraging to think Your Son understands the workplace! Help me as I complete today's tasks to be aware of Your presence and to look to You for strength, wisdom, and grace. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.*

**Work: Calling or Vocation?**  
**Linda Hardin**

**Scripture:** [Jeremiah 29:11-13](#)

Work—it's on everyone's calendar. It's the place where we spend about 60 percent of our time. It's the major source of income and a prime source of personal identity. For some, it's a regular routine that fills several days of the week requiring interpersonal cooperation and teamwork to accomplish a goal. For others, it's doing laundry, cooking, nurturing, home schooling, and the myriad of tasks that fill a mother's day. Others make their way to a home office and complete their responsibilities with little face-to-face contact with employers or other employees. However it happens for you, work fills a major portion of time for most adults and many older teens.

So, does my work matter to God? Does it matter to Him where I work? Does He call people to specific professions or jobs besides full-time ministry?

I remember sitting around the breakfast table in the mid-1950s with my family and the evangelist holding the revival at the church my dad pastored. In the course of the conversation, the evangelist's wife looked at me and said, "I believe our Linda will be a teacher and a pastor's wife." (One of two isn't too bad.)

As I went through high school and headed to Trevecca Nazarene University (then it was College), my major was education. It seemed a natural fit. I enjoyed the education classes and became involved in the campus education club. As I recall, I was one of a few who had a signed teaching contract the day I graduated from Trevecca.

Yet, I remembered a chapel service in our freshman year when the speaker asked those to stand who felt they were called by God. I stood because God called me to be a teacher. A friend tugged my hand and whispered, "You can't stand. You're not called." I quickly sat down as I realized my friend only viewed "called" as those who were preparing for full-time ministry.

Who was correct—my friend or me? It's a debate that continues, possibly indicating there is not a definite answer. Whether or not you feel called to a specific ministry, profession, vocation, or job your work matters to God.

**Points to Ponder:**

- Does God call individuals to specific jobs and vocations as well as those in full-time ministry?
- What difference would it make for you if you believed God called you to your current job?
- How are or can you be an instrument of God's love, grace, and mercy at your job?

**Prayer:** *As I go to work, give me Your eyes to see how I can represent You to my co-workers and supervisor(s). May everything I do today be done as a love offering to You. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.*

**Work: My Mission Field**  
**Part 1**  
**Linda Hardin**

**Scripture:** [Colossians 3:23](#)

I heard about a person who said there was no connection between what happened at church on Sundays and the rest of the week. I wondered how anyone could compartmentalize his or her life so that being a Christian didn't affect every aspect of it. This way of thinking doesn't mesh with the truth that as Christian we take Jesus Christ wherever we go. This most certainly applies to our jobs.

One of the distinguishing traits of an employee who is a Christian is our work ethic. We live out the Golden Rule every day. It involves loving not only the co-workers you get along with but also those you don't. It also means doing good to those who dislike or mistreat you. No small challenge, but doable as we are empowered by Jesus Christ.

Here are other suggested traits.

- Focus on work during work hours. Most managers want their employees to be productive, to produce high-quality products, to treat customers well, and to accomplish this in a highly ethical manner. Employee fraud continues to increase. Estimates state that businesses lose more than \$600 billion per year due to employee theft and fraud. Other studies indicate that employees spend more than one hour per day sending and reading personal emails, planning vacations, scheduling appointments, caring for children or aging parents, and surfing the web.
- Produce quality work. It gives a sense of self-respect and pride in a job well done.
- Treat company resources, equipment, and products with care.
- Exemplify honesty and integrity. Integrity shows strength and stability.
- Be a team player. Humbly and willingly accept assigned tasks.
- Develop your skills. Exhibit a willingness to learn new skills and to improve other skills. Learn from mistakes and receive criticism as opportunities for learning.

George Watson said, "The best part of all that we say or do for the Lord is that which others do not see or hear; it is the secret flavor of pure love which rises like fragrant incense to Him we love and serve."

**Points to Ponder:**

- Take an honest look at your work ethic. How well does it reflect Jesus Christ? What changes do you need to make?
- How are you living out the Golden Rule every day at work?
- Identify a co-worker to whom you can apply the Golden Rule or a trait that needs to change or improve. Develop a plan to accomplish your goals.

**Prayer:** *Father God, I need Your help to be an effective Christian employee. Guide my thoughts, actions, responses, and all I do so I effectively show Your love, grace, and mercy to others. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.*

**Work: My Mission Field**  
**Part 2**  
**Linda Hardin**

**Scripture:** [Matthew 5:16](#)

When we meet a new person, the first question we typically ask, “What is your name?” A follow-up question often centers on what the person’s job is. Several years ago one of Dr. Brad Estep’s sermons included an illustration about a woman asked what her job was. Her response was “I’m a missionary for Jesus Christ, cleverly disguised as a clerk.” This is a good way to see our jobs as an integral part of life as a Christian.

However, we often find ourselves employed by companies with stringent restrictions about sharing our faith. For some this includes the items you display in your work space as well as your words. One way to resolve this challenge is to apply the adage that says our actions speak louder than our words. Linda St. Myers in a recent email sent this suggestion: *Be the person who touches the lives and hearts of people. Be a positive light to others as you put a smile on their faces. For in the end... it's not what you say that matters; it's how you make [people] feel that lovingly stays in their memory.* How could an employer find fault with this attitude?

There are occasions when we want to provide some concrete ways of subtly sharing our faith. Here are some suggestions.

- Listen “to the end of the sentence” as Harold Ivan Smith, author and grief consultant, recommends. Based on what you hear, find ways to make a difference.
- Offer to help in a specific way. It may be helping with a project at work or something outside of work hours.
- Send encouraging notes or emails.
- Give sincere compliments as often as you can.
- Pray for your co-workers that God will open doors and provide opportunities for you to share your faith.
- Remember, the loudest sermon you preach will be your example.

**Points to Ponder:**

- What difference would it make in your work place if you saw yourself “as a missionary for Jesus Christ cleverly disguised as \_\_\_\_\_(insert your job title)?
- Is your attitude at work a positive light to others? If not, what changes can you make?
- Identify a co-worker with whom you can begin to share your faith in non-verbal ways.

**Prayer:** *Father God, thank You for my job...even on those days when I wish it wasn't my job. Give me insights and wisdom to enable me to be your missionary in my work place. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.*

**Work: Mentoring Others**  
**Linda Hardin**

**Scripture:** [Titus 2](#)

Typically our thoughts turn to older women mentoring younger women when we read Titus 2. Yet, there are applications to our jobs.

I clearly remember receiving my first class list. As the second grade teachers reviewed their lists, they quickly determined I had “the student.” They correctly assessed this student as one who would test even the most experienced teacher. I remember my fellow teachers listening, encouraging, and offering suggestions that year. While we didn’t label it, they mentored me.

Recently a friend shared how she worked with a young man in her department. She saw his potential and watched as he sabotaged his chances for advancement with his attitude and comments. Lori identified his strengths, offered suggestions for improving his attitude, and encouraged him to develop his skills. Mentoring occurred again, even if Lori was the only one who recognized it.

In verses seven and eight, Paul urged Titus to be a good example to others so they would see his good deeds and want to imitate him. If we want co-workers to act in a specific way, we must model that trait.

Slavery was common when Paul wrote this letter to the Ephesians. However, the concepts can easily be applied to employers and employees instead. Slaves did not have many rights in relation to their masters. For Christian slave owners, this changed as they viewed their slaves as brothers and sisters in Christ. Being adopted into the family of God changed their relationship status. While the slaves still worked for the owners, these Christian masters now saw their slaves as fellow believers.

What happens if we substitute “employees” for “slaves” and “managers” for “masters”? Paul calls all Christian employees to work as if Jesus Christ were their supervisor. Working as if Jesus Christ were the boss should make every employee treat co-workers with dignity and respect, to encourage each other, and to want each one to be the best employee possible.

**Points to Ponder:**

- In your workplace, who are you mentoring and who is mentoring you?
- How would you rate the work example you set? What are the areas where you can make improvements?
- How would your work ethics change if Jesus was your boss?

**Prayer:** *Father God, as I go to work help me to be a good example. Show me the individual I can mentor. Guide me as I look for someone to mentor me. Throughout this day, help me to be an instrument of Your grace, love, and mercy. In Jesus’ name, we pray. Amen.*

**Work: My Response to God's Voice**  
**Linda Hardin**

**Scripture:** [Isaiah 6:1-8](#)

When we read these verses, our thoughts typically turn to Isaiah's cleansing. We read about God's holiness filling the temple and Isaiah recognizing his "unclean lips." We also think of this as Isaiah's call to deliver God's message.

Oswald Chambers in *My Utmost for His Highest* suggested Isaiah overheard God's conversation and responded rather than this being a specific call to a specific person. Isaiah's life was cleansed, and he was ready for God to use him. Chambers further suggests this same call is for all who are in God's presence and hear His voice.

Isaiah's world, like ours, was full of moral and spiritual decline. We too, like Isaiah, can be cleansed and forgiven so that we can hear His voice when God asks, "whom shall I send?" Our answer should come as a response to being forgiven and cleansed.

What would happen if we saw our work as our response to God's call to share His love to a desperate world? As Spirit-filled believers, we take God's presence with us wherever we go, including to work. Chambers wrote, "The Son of God reveals Himself in me, and I serve Him in ordinary ways of life out of devotion to Him."

Tom Nelson in *Work Matters* reminds us that we spend more time witnessing to others through our work than we do with our words. The old adage states our actions speak so loudly, people can't hear what we say. God's call to holy living is 24/7. Work isn't considered as time-out.

**Points to Ponder:**

- How does this change the way I view my work?
- How well does the way I work reflect my devotion to God?
- What changes do I need to make?

**Prayer:** *Father God, thank You for forgiving and cleansing me. Help me to complete my work as a love offering to You. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.*

**Be still and know**  
**Linda Watson Carson**

**Scripture:** [Psalms 46:10](#)

BE STILL.

There is immense power in being still before God. Hannah Whitehall Smith suggests that all things come to those who trust and are silent. Acknowledging this fact greatly changes how we work. Rather than continually struggling, we inwardly *sit down* before the Lord and allow His Spirit to work. We may not see or even sense how this begins to create intimacy with God. It will work if we get our spirits quiet enough to allow His Spirit to work in us.

All relationships require effort. To have a causal relationship with God is not sufficient. An intimate, special, and detailed relationship is required in order to possess a vibrant connection to the Almighty. The apostle John says the test for determining whether or not we truly know the Lord is if we keep His commandments. "But if anyone obeys his word, love for God is truly made complete in them. This is how we know we are in him: Whoever claims to live in him must live as Jesus did ([1 John 2: 3-6](#))."

This is one of the greatest promises in all of scripture! Jesus gives us the key to hearing His voice; grow in intimacy with Him and obey His word. Obedience is the key that opens the door to hearing God's voice. If we want to keep lines of communication open and flourishing between God and us, we must obey Him. The closer we are to God, the more readily we hear His voice. We bring a smile to His face when we sit at His feet, hear His voice, and discover secrets reserved for friends.

Leave it all quietly with Him: failures, fears, foes, and our future.

**Points to Ponder:**

- Why is it difficult to be silent before our Heavenly Father?
- What hinders me from knowing Him?
- Do you have a desire to know Him?
- How will I hear His voice?

**Prayer:** *I want to develop an intimate relationship with You, Father God. Help me to take time to sit and listen to Your voice. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.*

**Intimacy with God**  
**Linda Watson Carson**

**Scripture:** [James 4:8](#)

Intimacy with God comes through exposing ourselves to God and then opening our lives to Him. As you come near to Him, you begin to hear His voice. Our ability to recognize His voice hinges on allowing Him to speak through the Word, listening to the Holy Spirit, then obeying His voice.

So it is with sheep. They have a secret language with their shepherd that they understand. The shepherd often spends the evening with them in their sheepfold. In the morning, as the shepherd opens the gate and leaves, he calls his sheep to follow him; and they instinctively obey him. The only way the sheep will ever recognize his voice is by spending time with their master.

Christians are the Lord's sheep, and He is our shepherd. We begin to learn how to recognize God's voice by spending time with Him. Through the power of prayer, opening His Word, and asking the Holy Spirit to guide our hearts and minds, we begin the process of an obedient, effective life in Christ.

Surrender and true open-handedness is crucial to hear from God. This is the beautiful part of the whole process of learning to listen and be open to whatever He has to say to us. This is forming radical obedience.

**Points to Ponder:**

- How great is my desire to draw near to God and hear His voice?
- How did the sheep know the voice of the shepherd? ([John 10:10](#))
- Do I spend time in the Word to hear and recognize His voice?
- Can you recall a time in your life when God spoke to you through His Word?

**Prayer:** *I admit, Father God, that I often allow other voices to drown Your voice. Help me to be more attuned to Your voice and then to be willing to do what You say. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.*

## Intimacy through Solitude Linda Watson Carson

**Scripture:** [Isaiah 30:15](#)

Solitude comes with a price. Struggle and encounters with a false self often bring an encounter with the loving God who offers himself as the substance of a new self. Solitude is not a location; it is a state of heart and mind.

I remember a time in my life when I was very weary. I had seemingly lost my closeness to God, and I knew that God was not the problem. I knew part of my struggle was that I needed quiet time and solitude. I had three little girls who were very demanding of my time. I felt so drained of energy and strength. I was desperate for time with the Lord. I began to pray, "Please God, help me. I need You. I need time with You. I will do anything to find that closeness to You, that very thing which once motivated me to maintain an intimate relationship with an almighty God".

One morning shortly after, I woke up at 3:00 a.m. and went back to sleep. The next night I woke up at the same time, 3:00 a.m. By the third night it dawned on me; God was providing a time of solitude. When I started arising at 3:00 a.m. and having an hour of solitude, I would go right back to sleep; then I woke up at my normal time and felt as refreshed as if I had slept the entire night through. If you are serious to find time alone with God, ask Him, and He will provide a time of solitude for you.

Here are some ideas for practicing solitude:

- ✓ Try finding time for a half hour "prayer walk" in a nearby park.
- ✓ Try spending a few hours – possibly even a half day – without words.
- ✓ Either inside or outside your home, find a place to spend time in which you focus on the benefits of solitude.

**Points to ponder:**

- When have you experienced periods of solitude?
- Referring to today's scripture, think about ways solitude can produce confidence?
- What is the most important reason for solitude?
- Define solitude in your own words.

**Prayer:** *In the busyness of my life, I struggle to find time for solitude. Thank You, Father God, for this reminder of its importance. Help me to find—or make—the time for solitude, even if it's getting up earlier. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.*

## Intimacy through Discernment Linda Watson Carson

**Scripture:** [John 16:3](#)

Discernment could be defined as the ability to obtain sharp perception or judge well. How do we obtain or gain God's guidance? The referenced scripture refers to the Holy Spirit's guidance. Pray to the Holy Spirit specifically. The reason is simple. The Holy Spirit has been given to us as a counselor, the one who leads into all truth. [John 14: 16-17](#) refers to God the Father giving us an advocate to help us and be with us forever...the Spirit of truth.

We need to hear from God and know that He desires to talk with us. God wants to hear from us. It's inherent to His nature. It's a part of any vital relationship. It's called "Communication." Moses was a good example of listening to God and following His instructions. [Jeremiah 33:3](#) says, "Call unto me and I will answer and show you great and mighty things."

God waits for us, His children, to listen, to hear, and then to respond. Questions are ok and are acceptable to God. However, there will be times when He will ask us to just trust, even when we don't understand. If you don't believe your Heavenly Father wants to consistently communicate with you, that's when you begin to say, "God, please show me that You want to talk with me, to guide me, and to give me that discerning Spirit."

We need to listen to God in order to understand His will for us. In praying for God's direction or will, we often grit our teeth or clench our fist trying to accept what He is asking us to do. His will is one we can take to the bank and always trust. The more we trust, the less we fear. Take a look at [Jeremiah 29:13](#).

We need to hear from God to have a growing faith. At times we tend to get self-absorbed. We want to orchestrate everything, even our faith. Faith is also a gift from God. In order for our faith to grow, we must believe He will give us discernment to know His will. Intimacy will come as we develop discernment and communicate on a regular basis with God.

### **Points to Ponder:**

- Why do we need to be discerning?
- Name some individuals who have sought and followed God's will?
- Name some scripture that reveals to us that He wants to lead us into discerning His will.

**Prayer:** *Thank You, Heavenly Father, for sending the Holy Spirit who dwells within me. Help me to listen for Your voice, and give me wisdom to discern Your voice from all other voices. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.*

## Intimacy through Resting Linda Watson Carson

**Scripture:** [1 John 3:19](#)

My late husband, Larry Watson, was a coach at Olivet Nazarene University and also served as a life guard at the college pool. He had many stories of how he rescued lives of students in the pool. One day he saw a student struggling in the water, out of control. He immediately jumped in the water to save him. The individual was so out of control with his wailing, kicking, and swinging his arms and legs that when Larry got to him he couldn't be of any use until he was able to calm the student down.

God desires to speak to us in all the arenas of our life. He is there to guide and sustain us in all the issues we encounter during our day-to-day living. Often our "panic-mode" keeps us from hearing the calming voice of God. "Come unto to me all you who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest" ([Matthew 11:28](#)). Resting begins when we release the control of our lives and begin to rest in the confidence that "God will meet/supply all of our needs according to His glorious riches in Christ Jesus" ([Philippians 4:19](#)). We need to learn how to wait on and rest in Him.

God spoke to the nation of Israel through Moses. God said the people would find strength and confidence in being still and trusting Him. We need to stop relying on our strength and begin trusting in God in all life's problems and circumstances.

Moses said to the people "Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the Lord will bring to you today. The Lord will fight for you; you need only to be still" ([Exodus 13-14](#)). As you surrender, stand still, rest in Him and watch Him fight the battles in your life.

### Points to Ponder:

- What situation(s) are you struggling in now, and how will you let go and surrender to Him?
- Can you let go and let God direct you?
- How do words like Surrender, wait, rest, and stand still affect you?

**Prayer:** *I surrender to You, O Lord, my plans, hopes, and dreams. I trust You to guide my plans, hopes, and dreams. Help me to live in total surrender to You. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.*

**Finding Mature Peace**  
**Linda Watson Carson**

**Scripture:** [Ephesians 4:11-14](#)

Last year in August of 2016, our great granddaughter, Suzi, turned one-year-old. Her mom, Laura, had been breast feeding her since birth and enjoys sensing the closeness and love of her child during this process. However, this way of receiving nourishment will not last forever. Eventually Suzi will mature and develop enough to drink from a cup provided by her mom. Before you know it, she will go to the fridge, pour her own drink, and sit down to watch TV or listen to her favorite music.

We cannot remain a physical infant forever. It is God's intention for us to grow into mature adults contributing to society in all areas of our lives. It is also His intention for us to mature spiritually, as well. As we mature in Christ, our souls will begin to desire more and more "spiritual food." As He begins the weaning process in us, and as we respond to His leadings, we will be able to find rest, peace, and spiritual nourishment in Him.

When David ascended the throne of Israel, he confessed his inadequacy. "My heart is not proud. I do not consider myself with great matters" ([Psalm 131](#)). David didn't take credit for the blessing of becoming king. Instead he made his life more and more dependent upon God. As he weaned himself from his personal talents and ambitions, his trust in God's ability began to become the new normal in all areas of his everyday life. To have an intimate relationship with God, we must wean ourselves from worldly things by the power of the Holy Spirit. It is then we find mature peace called ... rest.

**Points to Ponder:**

- Where is peace not a part of your life?
- What things need removed from your life in order for you to have that mature peace/rest?
- How will you go about removing those things that will hinder that process?

**Prayer:** *Help me, O God, to be completely dependent on You. Grant me rest as I trust You. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.*

## Intimacy through Peace Linda Carson

**Scripture:** [Colossians: 3:15](#)

Through intimacy with God, we gain peace, which is a gift. It develops as we remain in His presence. He calms and reassures us as we surrender to Him. When we get off track and go back to relying on our own strength, we will lose the power and wisdom and peace that only He can provide. The choice is ours and ours alone to make. He will honor our “free will.”

Recently my husband and I were at odds about something. I kept bringing up the issue and wouldn't let it go. I did it in a way that sounded right to me. I put a smile on my face and waited for the right time to attack again. I tried not to be the nagging wife; however, each time I brought it up, I would lose my peace. Finally, I realized I must surrender, give it to the Lord. I would trust Him to work it out, and He did.

Often it is difficult to surrender our desires to the Lord. Our ambitions, many times, are based around fulfilling our own needs right now that we think are important to succeed. However [Philippians 3:7](#) says, “Whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ.” If we continue to rely on ourselves and what pleases us, we live for ourselves and discount the power of the Holy Spirit.

In [1 Samuel 19](#), David was on the run, fearing King Saul would find and kill him. Many nights he lived in fear rather than peace. As David continued to surrender to God, he found a renewed peace, rest, and intimacy in his divine relationship.

Satan fights to block an intimate relationship with the Father. He leads us into rebellion; Jesus leads us to salvation. Satan tells us lies; Jesus tells us the truth. Satan motivates by hate; Jesus motivates with love. Satan followers experience idolatry, discord, selfishness, enslavement to sin, and eternal darkness; Jesus offers love, power, peace, kindness, faithfulness, freedom from sin, and eternal life in heavenly realms.

### **Points to Ponder:**

- When do you lose your peace with God?
- What causes you to finally surrender to God's plans?
- Reflect on the times you lost your intimacy and how you ultimately reclaimed it?

**Prayer:** *Lord, I often live in the midst of circumstances and situations that lack peace. When I find myself in these places, help me to look to You for peace. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.*

## **Brokenness: Hannah and Peninnah** **Rhonda Rhodes**

**Scripture:** [1 Samuel 1:1-20](#)

In today's scripture, we find ourselves drawn into the misery of two women. Do you feel angry at the injustice of Peninnah, the other wife, who seems to have it all? In verse 4 we see that she has "sons and daughters." Peninnah seems to almost enjoy taunting Hannah (vs. 6). It seems almost inhuman to be so mean and cruel in such a sensitive matter, but Peninnah doesn't care. What could possibly provoke such action?

Could it be that Peninnah, with all her children, still wanted more? Did she feel cheated by Hannah for some reason? Was there something that Hannah had that allowed jealousy to rise up in her spirit causing her to lash out?

Many of us have found ourselves in Hannah's shoes. We feel her grief and her broken heartedness as she begs God for a child. No doubt the constant interaction with Peninnah and her many children was a thorn in Hannah's heart as she struggled with her barrenness. To be childless in this time in history was to be looked down upon by all of society. Motherhood was of utmost importance to the family. Motherhood created workers, and workers created wealth. The more sons you had, the better off you were; but Hannah had none. Look at verses 10-11, and let yourself feel her grief, her misery. So, Hannah turned to the only One who could change her circumstances.

Brokenness runs all through this story. Peninnah has children, but she watches time after time as her husband gives the double portion to her rival, Hannah, "because he loved her." Peninnah had children and station in life, but it couldn't replace the love of her husband. Her heart longed to be loved by her man, but it was obvious that he loved Hannah more.

Hannah had the love of a good man, his favor and his heart, but it wasn't enough. She wanted more. She wanted children. It's obvious in the story that her husband didn't fully understand her need to hold her own child at her breast. He wanted his love to be enough.

As we return to find Hannah at the altar of the LORD, we get a glimpse into her most heartbreaking moment. As Hannah pours out her heart to God, she is misunderstood by the priest Eli. However, she didn't back down or cower at his accusation. No, she stood her ground, denied his accusation of drunkenness, and told him what she wanted. Her bravery and her boldness was answered with a blessing. "Go in peace, and the God of Israel grant your petition. . ." must have been the sweetest words she had ever heard.

### **Points to Ponder:**

- What words are you longing to hear from the LORD?
- Has jealousy ever made you act in ways that you were ashamed of?
- What lengths will you go to (or have you gone to) in order to feel loved?
- When you are struggling with something, do you seek to solve the problem by yourself, or do you run to God?
- Is God enough?
- Does your worth come from God or from another source?

**Prayer:** *Dear Father, forgive us when we have sought answers to our pain in anything or anyone but You. Heal all the wounded places in our hearts so we can say "You are enough." Teach us how to run to You for every need. Thank You for loving us so much. In Jesus' name, I pray. Amen.*

**Brokenness: God Hears  
Rhonda Rhodes**

**Scripture:** [Psalm 127:3- Psalm 128](#)

The day started out a little unusual. I received a call from my second daughter saying, “Mom, we have to pray for Danielle. Megan just e-mailed me and said we need to pray!”

I didn’t know what was going on that would cause Megan to contact Amber, but I immediately knew to pray for my daughter; and I started praying for healing. It was absolutely a Spirit-led prayer, because I didn’t know why I started praying that way. I had also been learning to pray scriptures, so I began looking through God’s Word and found myself in Psalm 127 and 128. I highlighted and underlined the verses and wrote Danielle and Zach’s names in the margin. I was claiming these as promises from God. I continued to pray these scriptures for months, reminding God that children are a gift from Him so that worshippers are continually being raised up.

The Psalmist knew what has been true for women since the beginning of time. Babies (children) are very important. Children are a heritage from the Lord, a blessing that most of us desire fervently. In the Psalmist culture, a man who had many children also enjoyed respect at the city gate (the place where social, commercial and governmental proceedings took place). So, men and women alike knew the importance of children.

There are few things more devastating to a woman or a man than the loss of a child. Deep inside us we believe that we are supposed to live long and enjoy many experiences. When those things are cut short by death, we wrestle with the injustice of it all. Sometimes our anger is incorrectly directed at God instead of at the “thief who comes to steal, kill, and destroy.” This heartache lingers all through life.

Let me share some of Megan’s words with you. “So, I’m just sitting here this morning working on my stuff, and I didn’t realize that I had totally zoned out until I came out of whatever the Holy Spirit was showing me...So I saw Danielle, and I cupped my hands around her womb. I could see her female parts and they were essentially half dead (dull colored, not moving); and then I started praying and asking the Holy Spirit to bring her fallopian tubes and uterus back to life and to connect them. . . It was like watching a medical show on TV where you see the blood flowing back in and everything gets bright red and swells up like its coming alive. When I came out of this vision, I had this feeling we need to pray. Now! This cannot be my imagination. This is God”

Megan had never met Danielle. Earlier Danielle had suffered a miscarriage and was still devastated by the loss. For months we prayed, and then God came to Danielle and asked her when she was truly going to believe He had healed her and trust Him?

**Points to Ponder:**

- Have you ever had God speak clearly to you only to be faced with opportunity to doubt?
- Is God still good even when we don’t receive the answer we want, even when we suffer?
- What scriptures do you stand on in faith?
- Where do we find value when society says we are lacking?

**Prayer:** *Father, heal our broken hearts and forgive our doubting. May we trust in Your goodness even when we are in the midst of struggle and pain. In Jesus’ name, I pray. Amen.*

## **Brokenness: When Friendships Hurt** **Rhonda Rhodes**

**Scripture:** [Psalm 41](#)

Few things devastate us as much as the loss we suffer when a friendship is broken. All the shared secrets, the long talks over coffee, the sense of belonging and being accepted seem to flee away in a moment. Shame, rejection, loneliness, and hurt come marching into our soul like wooden soldiers with blank stares and shouts of “You’re unworthy and cast aside!” [Proverbs 17:17](#) seems to mock us with its assuring words, “A friend loves at all times. . .” and we find ourselves more in [verse 22](#), “. . . but a crushed spirit dries up the bones.”

None of us are immune. Even King David was not immune to the treachery and loss of a close friend. David was not afraid to cry out to His LORD in complete honesty of emotion and pain, confident God would hear his cry and heal his heart.

David never mentions this friend by name, but we can be sure of one thing – this friend was close. This friend was one of a very few who had access to the king and had a place in David’s heart, and spent much time with David. Why do I think that? Because the pain was great, and only the betrayal of a very close friend can cause that much pain.

In today’s world, the pain of a friend’s loss can be compounded by the use of social media. Pain can be inflicted by a post on Facebook, or a video of our friend with her “new bestie” on Snapchat. Our choices to “unfriend,” “unfollow,” or “delete” feel like we attended a funeral, and part of us just got buried.

When in the midst of our pain we turn to Jesus Christ for solace and comfort, we find that we indeed have “a friend who sticks closer than a brother” ([Prov. 18:24](#)). Turning to Jesus is a deliberate choice. It’s better to pour out our anguish to Him than get caught up in the trap of “sharing” our pain with others. Though we are hurting, it is never a wise choice for us to tear down the one who hurt us and in so doing cause others to have a poor opinion of our friend.

Contrary to the world’s view on this, God’s Word tell us to take a different approach:

“Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you” ([Eph. 4:29-32 ESV](#)).

“Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive” ([Col. 3: 12-13 ESV](#)).

### **Points to Ponder:**

- Was David’s Psalm surprising to you? Why/why not?
- Is anger ever appropriate? If so, when?
- Is forgiveness easy? Why or why not?
- What emotions do/did you feel when losing a friendship?
- Is forgiveness an option for believers?
- Have you moved from hurt to forgiveness?
- How has Jesus helped you move to new friendships?

**Prayer:** *Father, help me to live Spirit led so that I can forgive with Your power and love as You love. In Jesus’ name, I pray. Amen.*

**Brokenness: God's Antidote**  
**Rhonda Rhodes**

**Scripture:** [James 4:8](#) and [Hebrews 10:22](#)

Several years ago I visited my parents. I felt excited because my 18-month old niece would be there, and I would have time with her when no one else would be around. When I arrived, I hugged my parents; but Ava was cautious, studying me from afar. She watched my every move, but she would not come to me. Only once during the day did she come into my arms and draw near to me. Oh, how I wanted her to run into my arms and hug my neck and feel safe in my presence. Surely if she knew how much I loved her she would come running to me, but I was a stranger.

I wonder how often God feels the same way I felt that day. I would gladly have lavished hugs and kisses on her and given her my full attention, but she would not draw near. I was a stranger, and she didn't know if she could trust me.

God desires to show us His great love and lavish us with His presence. We are not sure we can trust Him, and so we remain afar. We hear songs about His love and great mercy; we hear sermons about His wonderful grace and forgiveness; and we even listen to others testify to His awesome presence in their lives, but we remain rooted in place. We do not draw near and find out for ourselves the truth others have experienced.

Scripture says to "draw near to God." The promise attached to this drawing near is that He will draw near to us. Absolutely nothing should mean more to us than His drawing near to us; nothing should be more important than us drawing near to Him. We want the "good life" that scripture speaks of – love, joy, peace, blessings and answered prayer – but our brokenness says we aren't worthy.

However, God says we are worthy to draw near! God desires for us to draw close and give Him our brokenness so He can give us HIM. Here's where we start:

1. Daily read the Word – If I were with Ava daily, she would know me. Daily time with God lets us know Him because God's Word is living, so ask Him to speak as you read. Get a notebook and write down any new things you learn or phrases that speak to your spirit. A journaling Bible is also a great tool.
2. Pray daily – Make time to pray because you'll never 'find' time. Create a place in your home where you daily listen to what God wants to say. Tell Him how marvelous He is, thank Him for everything you can think of, and then lay your needs before Him. Back your requests with Scripture.
3. Get to church. No excuses! Expect God to meet you there. Participate in the service. When you've spent time with Him all week, you won't want to miss corporate worship.
4. Confess and repent of sin. Confess means to admit and tell. Repent means to have a complete change of direction. Find friends who will support your new direction and walk with you.

**Points to Ponder:**

- Is God a stranger or an intimate friend?
- What keeps you from drawing near?
- Have you confessed and repented of your sin so that you are walking in a new direction?
- Have you allowed your brokenness or God to define you?

**Prayer:** *Father, my brokenness can only be healed by You. Only in Your presence will my brokenness be replaced with joy and peace. To You only will I cling. In Jesus' name, I pray. Amen.*

## **Brokenness: The Past Is Gone!** **Rhonda Rhodes**

**Scripture:** [Isaiah 43:18-19](#)

Today's scripture puts a burst of hope into the life of a believer! God tells us to forget the former things. Our past is just that – PAST! Praise Him! Can I get an AMEN? When we give our hearts and lives to Christ Jesus, our past no longer defines us because God Himself is “doing a new thing.”

It took me years to really grasp the fact that my past was not a hindrance to God's redemption. He was there when the shame of being molested became my cloak. He was there every time the boy at church bullied me. He was completely aware of the time I cheated during Quizzing and when I took an extra Ice Cream bar at school. He watched as I tried to sneak back into the dorm after curfew. (So did campus security!) He was there, and He forgave it all when I confessed my sin; He bore my shame so I didn't have to. I am forever grateful.

The problem arises when other people still think our past should define us. Then, the liar Satan starts bombarding our thoughts with his accusations. However, we do not have to agree with them. We can, through the power of the Holy Spirit, walk a new direction and agree with God's “new thing.” [2 Corinthians 5:17](#) puts it this way: “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come”!

Our agreement must be with Christ; and we must remain “in Him” so we can fight in the spiritual realm, not in our flesh. This fight can only be won with God's Holy Word as our weapon. When Satan brings up your past, you remind yourself “I am in Christ, so my past is forgiven.” When a friend, foe, or family member tells you you're no good and will never rise above your past, do not accept those words as truth. Fight back by not agreeing with them, and say who you really are. “I am the righteousness of God in Christ Jesus” ([Phil.3:8-9](#)). “I am a new creation; the old me is gone and the new me has come.” “The Lord rejoices over me with loud singing” ([Zeph.3:17](#)) Remind yourself that you are God's child, and the past is no longer in God's memory ([Ps.103: 11-12](#)).

Your past might have been a wasteland and desert, but God is creating an oasis within you. He believes in you and He has plans for you, and He has plans for your life that your past cannot thwart. He wants to set you free from the bondage of the past, the bondage of your thought life, the bondage of strongholds, and remove the shackles from around your life. Freedom, sweet freedom is yours.

Words have life in them, so use your words wisely. Listen to your self-talk and find out what you are saying about you. Change your old negative habits for new habits that focus on what God is doing. (God loves me with an everlasting love.)

### **Points to Ponder:**

- Who have you agreed with that is destructive to your self-worth?
- How hard is it to change your self-talk?
- What new thing is God doing in you?
- What past sins have you let define you?
- What lies does Satan whisper to you?

**Prayer:** *Father, open my ears and my heart to Your voice and help me to hide Your Word in my heart so that I can speak the truth to myself and others. I accept Your thoughts about me. In Jesus' name, I pray. Amen.*

## **Brokenness: We're Highly Favored** **Rhonda Rhodes**

**Scripture:** [Luke 1: 26-56](#)

Mary. Her name conjures up visions of long brown hair, sweetness, goodness, and purity. We wonder what kind of young woman she must have been to get the attention of Almighty God. What kind of girl was she that God would consider her worthy to be the Mother of His Only Son. What type person is greeted by the Angel Gabriel, "Greetings Highly favored woman. The Lord is with you"?

Surely she was the best daughter any mother could ask for. She probably helped without being asked. She undoubtedly obeyed her parents at all times, and there's no way a "highly favored" girl ever argued or fought with her siblings, right? She probably never had a hysterical melt down or acted like a diva. No doubt she never gossiped about the boys or other girls in the neighborhood. We've imagined Mary, a teenager, as someone too good to be true. What was it she had that God saw and was pleased with?

Mary, just a simple girl who chose to believe.

That's what made her stand out. She believed. She wasn't perfect. She wasn't chosen for her beauty or her last name, or because she came from the right side of the tracks. No, God wasn't concerned about such things. He allowed a harlot, a Midianite, and a scorned daughter-in-law into the lineage of His Son just to prove we are all acceptable to Him when we believe and worship Him. Our broken family or broken heritage will never be an issue to Almighty God because He is never put off by our brokenness. He sees us as we are – His chosen one. His beloved one. His!

Mary believed what the angel told her and yielded to God's plan, even though it would cost her dearly. Her reputation, the doubt of her fiancé, and the disapproval of her parents were all put to the test. What if Mary never saw her parents again after they found out she was pregnant? What if they followed the law and never spoke to her again? Even though there was joy in being chosen, there was surely pain in the broken relationships. Still, God protected her by sending her to her cousin, Elizabeth, for three months; then He gave Joseph a dream that confirmed Mary's trustworthiness. Thankfully, Caesar wanted a census at just the right time for Mary and Joseph to leave town – for a few years.

Mary's obedience afforded her the complete attention of Adonai; and He watched over her continuously, just as He watches over you and me. You and I are ordinary girls. We come from small towns in the middle of nowhere and big cities in every land, yet God is aware of each one of us. He watches over us with loving care. He is seeking our hearts and waiting for our yielded obedience so He can do the miraculous through us too!

Greetings, highly-favored woman. The Lord is with you. Don't be afraid. He goes before you, behind you, and He hems you in on every side. There is no need to fear.

### **Points to Ponder:**

- What about Mary's reaction to Gabriel surprises you?
- How do you think you would have responded to his greeting?
- If you were Mary's mother, would you have believed her story?
- In what areas of brokenness are you still saying "no" to God?
- What area of brokenness are you keeping from God? Are you willing to move close to Him?

**Prayer:** *God, I'm totally Yours. Use me. In Jesus' name, I pray. Amen.*

**Brokenness: Not Anymore!**  
**Rhonda Rhodes**

**Scripture:** [Psalm 139](#)

Today, let's talk about you! You are precious to God. You are wonderfully made in His image, and He is delighted with you. Don't believe me? Then let's take a look at His Holy Word and see what He says about you.

[Verse 13](#)—He formed you. Every single inch of you. Every hair, every eyelash, every single freckle was formed by His hand. He knit you together, and He is overjoyed with the final product that was birthed into this world.

[Verse 14](#)—You are wonderfully made, and He considers you perfectly formed. He doesn't compare you to anyone else because He is perfectly pleased with the "you" He created. He was so happy with you that He never created another like you. Oh, you've passed on some similarities to your children, and you inherited some from your parents; but there is not another "you" in the entire universe.

[Verse 15](#)—There is nothing about you that is hidden from Almighty God. His love rejoices over you, and He was very careful as He intricately wove your form, your hair color, your eye color, your voice! He took great pleasure in every detail.

[Verse 16](#)—God decided when you would be born and how many days you would have on this earth. He gave you every second of time so you could glorify Him. He couldn't wait to give you life so He could bring forth every detail He planned for you.

Now, I know every day of your existence hasn't been perfect. I'm quite sure Satan has made certain you've had some trouble along the way. He tried to break your spirit, to take your faith, to make you doubt the goodness of God; but nothing can change the fact that you are completely loved by the Father. God gave you so much potential; and Satan tried(s) to steal it by sending pain, problems, and persecution.

Oh, if you could just see the pleasure God has in you, His beloved child! That's why it is so important that believers get our worth from the Father. He alone sees us as we really are. He alone is the One our lives are to please, and He alone is the easiest task-master to please. When we line our vision up with the deceiver, we put ourselves at his mercy, and he is a hard task-master. Satan is a taker. Satan is never satisfied; and when we get in agreement with him instead of our Father, we will never measure up.

[Verses 1-6](#)—Beloved, read it again! God searches your heart, and He knows you! He doesn't know about you; He knows every detail of your life, every hair on your head, and every tear you have shed. He watches over every step you take and He provides a shield about you on every side. Revel in that thought and let it penetrate your heart. He lays His hand upon you, and you are blessed indeed.

[Verses 23 and 24](#)—Dear Abba, please search my heart and know my thoughts. Search them thoroughly so that nothing is left unchecked. If there is anything in my life that grieves You, then please show me and accept my complete repentance. Line my thoughts up with Your thoughts, and protect me from every lie of the enemy.

**Points to Ponder:**

- Where does your worth come from?
- Do you think God is pleased with you?
- Whose opinion do you value more than God's?
- Is All Well?

**Prayer:** *Dear Father, I'm awed that You lovingly created me and You know all the details of my life. Sometimes I find it difficult to believe. Help me to always look to You for worth, wisdom, and guidance. In Jesus' name, I pray. Amen.*

## Ruined Lives, Broken Pieces Connie Riddle

**Scripture:** [Nehemiah 1:1-11](#)

One of my favorite stories in the Old Testament is about Nehemiah, who was King Artaxerxes' wine taster. He was a man of prayer. He inquired about the Jewish remnant that remained in Jerusalem. "They said to me, 'Those who survived the exile and are back in the province are in great trouble and disgrace. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates have been burned with fire'" ([Nehemiah 1:3](#)). The wall was down; the gates were burned, and they were weak and in total despair. There was no protection for the city. Nehemiah wept, mourned, and prayed day and night. He desired to travel to Judah to help. He prayed, "Oh Lord, God of heaven, the great and awesome God, who keeps His covenant of love with those who love Him and obey His commands, let your ear be attentive and your eyes open to hear the prayer your servant is praying" ([Nehemiah 1:5-6](#)). He pleaded for favor to speak to the king, his boss. This started a chain of events that led to the rebuilding of Jerusalem.

When my husband and I were first married, away from our hometown, and with one daughter in tow, my mother became concerned because our little family did not go to church and had no spiritual interest. One day a local pastor came to invite us to church. It was obvious to me that Mom had called and asked him to visit. He seemed so caring and non-judgmental that my daughter and I went to church the next Sunday. As we continued to attend, the words of the songs and sermons jumped out at me with pointed meaning. I soon prayed my first heart-to-God prayer, "Jesus, come into my life and forgive my sins." My little world was in ruins, and I didn't know it. Things were about to change.

My rebuilding process began because a mother prayed and pleaded with Our King, Jesus, that her daughter and family would come to know Him.

We'll learn more about Nehemiah's journey as we study together this week. Things were about to change.

### Points to Ponder:

- Why was Nehemiah so burdened for Jerusalem?
- Have you ever felt a need so burdensome that you wept, mourned, fasted, and prayed day and night? Maybe that's today. Name this burden before the Lord, and ask Him to work in your situation.
- When Nehemiah prayed, what did he ask God to grant him? [Nehemiah 1:11b](#)
- Do you have friends or family members who are in "great trouble and disgrace?" What is the first thing you can do to help them?
- Is your heart burdened for someone? Claim a specific scripture promise for them, pray, and do not give up.
- Have you prayed to ask Jesus into YOUR heart? He is the only ruin builder. Click [here](#) to learn more.

**Prayer:** *Many in our world, our country, among our friends and our families have broken-down, ruined lives. As the song "I Will Serve Thee" says, "Heartaches, broken pieces, ruined lives are why You died on Calvary." Lord, help me to see where the walls need to be built up in my family and even in my own heart. Give me strength to pray and go forward, like Nehemiah, with Your mission on my heart. Encourage those who feel there is no hope. I pray You would give me success and favor to mend and rebuild the walls and the gates that are broken down. I trust You today because You are the gracious God who cares. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.*

## What Do You Really Want? Connie Riddle

**Scripture:** [Nehemiah 2:5-10](#)

As Nehemiah prayed for Jerusalem, God began to show him a plan of action. How far in prayer would you go to help a relative, a friend, a neighbor, or a nation? Nehemiah's journey would take him over 800 miles. Even though he was afraid and apprehensive, he trusted in his prayer to God and went before the king. Artaxerxes noticed he was sad and wanted to know why. Nehemiah told him about Jerusalem being in ruins. The king asked, "What is it you want?" The Scripture says Nehemiah prayed to the God of heaven before he answered the king. I love this part! He prayed before he answered the king. He became bold and specific. In [Nehemiah 2:5](#), the king consented to all his requests, gave him letters to ensure safe passage, provided supplies, and sent army officers and cavalry to protect him. That's quite a parting gift. It is far above what Nehemiah could have thought to ask.

Nehemiah went from mourning to praise because God abundantly answered his prayer for success and favor. But this was only the beginning. As we will see, Nehemiah traveled to Jerusalem and put God's plan into action with these letters of approval and supplies to repair the gates and the wall.

After my heart-to-God prayer, I began to study the Bible, and it came alive. As it says in [Hebrews 4:12](#): "For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart." God answered my mother's prayers and was restoring my "ruins." He began to rebuild my rubble-filled life.

### Points to Ponder:

- Think about it. Nehemiah became so bold. How did he know what he should ask the king? Did he already have this in his mind, or did God give him these answers as he prayed?
- Have you ever prayed for wisdom or courage before you spoke to a boss, a family member, a friend, or even an enemy? Can you expect God to give you the words to speak? ([Luke 12:12](#) and [Luke 21:15](#))
- Is there a specific mission that God has put on your heart? Ask Him to show you His step-by-step plan.
- What are your expectations that God will provide abundantly in answer to your prayer? Can you pray a specific promise? ([Ephesians 3:20-21](#))

**Prayer:** *Lord, thank You for Nehemiah's example of trust in Your almighty, gracious hand. Help me to pray easily and often when I don't know what to do. What mission do You have in mind for me today? I want to be Your available servant as I seek Your will for my life. I pray for my family and friends that they will want Your will for their lives. Help me be instrumental in leading them to You, Jesus. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.*

## **The Hand of God is Upon Me** **Connie Riddle**

**Scripture:** [Nehemiah 2:11-18](#)

Nehemiah recognized God's hand upon him when he said, "Because the gracious hand of my God was upon me, the king granted my request." He had presented his burden to the king and traveled to the city of his fathers, Jerusalem. He stayed there for three days before he told anybody what he was doing and what God had put on my heart to do for Jerusalem ([Nehemiah 2:12](#)).

Now it was time to examine the walls and gates, to assess the situation, and to put feet to his prayers. He set out at night with a few men. He trusted these men not to say anything. He was on a secret mission of restoration. It was God's plan in which he was placing his confidence and trust.

They found that all around the wall and through each gate there was ruin and ashes. There were gaps in the wall, and the gates were burned down. There was no protection for the Jewish remnant.

I knew my mother had been praying for me, my husband, and our daughter for several years. I thought she prayed because there was something wrong with us. One of my fondest memories is when I told her I was going to a Bible study. She immediately got a ticket to California to see what was happening in my life. She wanted to see this answer to her prayer (me). She landed, we hugged, and we prayed together for the first time. My mother died at 49. Now, I understand and miss her prayers.

Tomorrow we will see how the vision and mission begin and how the Jews worked side by side to fulfill the mission.

### **Points to Ponder:**

- What do you think Nehemiah was doing for three days before he started examining the walls? It is certain he was praying as they walked.
- Do you have a task that is too big for you? Take time to ask God for His plan of action to put feet to your prayers.
- Nehemiah took a few trusted men with him to examine the city walls and gates. Do you have friends you know you can trust to join in a God-given task to walk beside you? Ask them to join you.
- Have you ever been on a prayer walk? Go by yourself or plan one with a few trusted friends.

**Prayer:** *Today, Lord, as I look at my week ahead, help me to place each activity in Your hands. Help me to be careful in planning, examining my situations and appointments, and asking that Your hand guide me. I'm so thankful I don't have to go on my journey alone without Your wisdom, favor, and blessing. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.*

## Disgrace to Determination Connie Riddle

**Scripture:** [Nehemiah 3](#)

Nehemiah had examined the walls of Jerusalem at night and was ready to let the Israelites know his assessment and God's plan. He revealed the trouble they were in, telling them Jerusalem's walls and gates were in ruins. He gave the speech of a lifetime and asked the Jewish remnant to join with him to bring their city and its people out of disgrace. He did not leave out the most important ingredient—God's hand working in it all. Nehemiah let the people know that God would guide and speak to them as they carried out His purpose for this master rebuilding plan.

The Jews said, "Let us start rebuilding." Nehemiah's words were a rallying speech. I wish I could have heard him remind the Jewish remnant about the ruin and brokenness around them and how God's hand was upon him and what the king had said to him.

They became aware of their city's need for an "extreme makeover," a fortifying wall and locked gates. They were ready to work together to unfold Nehemiah's vision and God's plan. Priests worked together; families pitched in; goldsmiths used their talents; and merchants worked to rebuild walls and gates. They encouraged each other. Notice there were nobles who wouldn't work because they didn't want to be under someone else's supervision. That's another devotional all together. Today, we see unity and fortitude as the Jews used all their ingenuity to repair and rebuild their precious Jerusalem.

As I started my new adventure with Jesus, I began examining my own walls and gates with the help of my pastor, my new friends, and a personal Bible study. I could see my gaps and gates needed repair.

The people could see the disgrace they had been living with and wanted to change their city, Jerusalem. They were closing the gaps. So we must also.

### Points to Ponder:

- How had they not seen that they needed to rebuild? Had they seen it but were afraid to act?
- What part of the story in Nehemiah impressed your thoughts as you read it? The families working together jumps out for me.
- Go back and read [Nehemiah 1-3](#). Notice each time he prays and acknowledges God's hand throughout. What can you do similarly for your circumstances that are in disarray?
- Are you discouraged that your prayers aren't being answered? Ask God to show you where He's working and for "signs" of encouragement.
- How did the Jewish remnant respond to Nehemiah's message?
- How can you and I encourage others to pray, grow, and recognize their own disgrace?

**Prayer:** *Jesus, I want to be Your worker building a fortified kingdom, home, family, city, and country for You. Guide me in helping lead others to recognize Your plan for their lives. Give me words to say to others that will spur them on to live lives tuned into Your power. Help us live and work together like the Jews did in this story, side-by-side, hand-in-hand because they knew it was God's will and God's plan. Thank You for this biblical example that reminds us to pray and trust God. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.*

## Opposition to the Building Efforts Connie Riddle

**Scripture:** [Nehemiah 4:1-15](#)

Going back to the second chapter ([Nehemiah 2:10, 19-20](#)) we see there was opposition in the air, even as Nehemiah traveled to Jerusalem. There were several men who were "disturbed that someone had come to promote the welfare of the Israelites." The men mocked them saying, "What is this you are doing? Are you rebelling against the king?"

These men tried to discourage the Jews at every turn. They contrived to get Nehemiah to focus on the problems and not on the power of God. They told many lies and thwarted the plans of these people. Nehemiah stood firm and told his people, "Do not be afraid of them. Remember the Lord who is great and awesome, and fight for your brothers, your sons and daughters, your wives, and your homes" ([Nehemiah 4:14](#)).

Nehemiah, with God's wisdom, protected the Jews against the opposition. There were some who didn't want to see Jerusalem rebuilt. Nehemiah told the Jews, "The God of heaven will give us success. We his servants will start rebuilding." He set up half of the people to continue to work and half to protect them with weapons.

They did not stop. They did not give up. They prayed and made a plan. Half of them were assigned to be on the alert and guard the other half while they worked on the wall. They protected each other and continued to work. Nehemiah said, "Our God will fight for us!"

Later in [Chapter 6, verse 9](#), as Nehemiah was looking back, he said: "They were all trying to frighten us thinking, 'Their hands will get too weak for the work, and it will not get completed.' But I prayed 'Now, strengthen my hands.'" This short and simple prayer got them through distraction, delays, disturbances, and doubts. The good news is the Jews "All returned to their own work." God answered prayer, and the people listened and carried on with a renewed sense of protection and power.

As I grew stronger through study and prayer, there were times I felt distracted. I stayed with it, and God helped me focus on His will and not listen to the voices around me. His Word alone was my strength and focus.

There is so much more to study, but read tomorrow's devotional to see the most exciting part of this nation's story.

### Points to Ponder:

- Are you distracted or defeated today? Remember, God has a plan, and He will help you to focus and continue the work He has given you.
- Do you continue to work even when there are distractions and disturbances around you? Search the scriptures for a favorite verse that God will use through prayer to give you strength to hold onto during these times.
- Pray Nehemiah's prayer to the Lord, "Now, strengthen my hands."
- Read [1 Corinthians 16:13](#). It encourages us to stand firm. It would be a great scripture to memorize.

**Prayer:** *Lord, like Nehemiah, my prayers before You will seek You continually, always knowing You are faithful. Help me fight for my family, rebuild broken walls, stand firm, and not be distracted. Lord, help me not listen to mockers, liars, or scoffers. You are powerful and can give me peace, deliverance, and strength when all that is around me is confusing and in ruins. Give me success! In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.*

## Victory is Ours Connie Riddle

**Scripture:** [Nehemiah 7:1](#)

In our previous study, we saw the Jews working hard to do God's will. They were closing the gaps in the walls, and their enemies were angry. The opposition came, yet the people continued the work. One prayer Nehemiah prayed before much of the opposition took place was, "Remember me with favor, O my God, for all I have done for these people" ([Nehemiah 5:19](#)). This is just one of the many times Nehemiah reminded God of his faithfulness and his willingness to follow His plan. This story is full of prayers of a man who had a firm belief in his almighty, gracious God.

In spite of all the opposition and lies, ([Nehemiah 6:15](#)) states, "So, the wall was completed . . ." There must have been great rejoicing. [Nehemiah 7:1](#) says "after the wall had been rebuilt and I had set the doors in place, the gatekeepers and the singers and Levites were appointed." What great excitement filled the moment at so great an achievement.

"So, the wall was completed!!"

This is so encouraging to see the Jewish remnant come together, press on, work hard, even with distractions, and complete the work. Nehemiah made a long 800-mile journey with many opponents bidding for attention. The task God put on his heart was finished. Tomorrow, we will read the "rest of the story."

God worked in reshaping my life. Walls, gaps, and rubble were mended because of my mother's prayers. My life was complete, but not my family's. God was also working in my family. My daughter received Christ as I prayed with her. Several years later, my husband, who was watching God work in my life, came to Christ. God's promise is true ([1 Peter 3:1-4](#)). My daughter and I were able to rejoice the day my husband prayed to receive Christ. All the way home, we sang, "We're a Christian family." Another ruined wall was being restored.

### Points to Ponder:

- Ruin and rubble in our world is all too evident today. Take time to see the victories God is giving along the way, and trust the rest in His faithfulness to hear and answer your prayers.
- Have you looked for the victory signs God is completing His work through you in His Kingdom?
- Read the scriptures for today to remember the many prayers Nehemiah prayed.

**Prayer:** *Oh God, in spite of the challenges, in spite of the concerns I see before me, help me today to rejoice because You are working as I minister for You. Help me to see Your hand at work to fill the gaps and mend the gates of protection in my life, in my family, and in my friends' lives. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.*

## God's Word Remembered Connie Riddle

Scripture: [Nehemiah 8:1-12](#)

The people had worked together under Nehemiah's supervision and trusted in God's hand of strength. The walls were built; the gaps were closed; and the prayers were answered. The opposition was silenced. Read [Nehemiah 6:15-16](#). When all the surrounding nations heard about this they, ". . . were afraid and lost their self-confidence, because they realized that this work had been done with the help of our God." Jerusalem's enemies recognized God's hand in their finished project, and they were afraid.

It was time to claim their victory and rejoice. Nehemiah appointed gatekeepers and singers for protection and praise ([Nehemiah 7:1](#)). Today, our choirs, ensembles, and instruments help us lift our praise to God. Nehemiah knew that music honored God for His love for us, our protection, and daily strength.

In the next great part of this story, we see the people gathered by the Water Gate. They requested Ezra, the priest, bring out the Book of the Law of Moses. As he stood above them and read the scriptures, all the people bowed down and worshiped the Lord. As they heard these words read, they began to weep. They began to see how they had not listened to God's Word and how their lethargy had led to the ruin of their precious Jerusalem. Nehemiah said to them in [Chapter 8 verse 10](#), "Go and enjoy choice food and sweet drinks . . . This day is sacred to our Lord. Do not grieve, for the joy of the Lord is your strength." They did what he said because "they now understood the words that had been made known to them."

They continued for days listening to the reading of the Book of the Law of Moses, celebrating with joy, and remembering their victories.

After my mother prayed and I got involved with a powerful women's Bible study of over 200 ladies, I remember being able to sing the words of the hymns I had sung when I was a child; but I now sang them with greater understanding and wisdom. God's Word became a guiding light – chastising, comforting, and creating in me a desire to trust Him. As I joined with an excited group of ladies, I learned to pray throughout my day. I began to pray for my husband and my daughter through the years. I have found short prayers, fast prayers, long prayers, and heavy, heart-to-God prayers have been answered. I'm so thankful for a mother who cared enough to watch and pray for me and then pray WITH me after I found Jesus as my personal Savior. You too have reason to rejoice.

### Points to Ponder:

- Do you see how Nehemiah's prayer example and actions led to preparing the people to respond to God's Word with repentance? How will your life of praying, believing, and living bring fruitful results?
- Did they see Nehemiah's prayers and trust in God's hand? Did his example urge them to repentance?
- Do you find music to be a source of inspiration? Let your music leaders know how you appreciate all they do to lead your service in worship.
- How will reading the Bible consistently and being involved in a study with other women personally help you to model Nehemiah's trust in God?

**Prayer:** *Lord, thank You for all You have done in my life to continue to draw me closer to You. Your written Word is so important. Help me to continue to read it and apply its truth to my life. Let me be an example to others in prayer as Nehemiah was. Give me determination not doubt in all that You will ask me to do. Thank You for mothers who pray to make a difference in their world. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.*

## The Call of Abram Ruby Ruschhaupt

**Scripture:** [Genesis 12:1-9](#)

We are moving! To most people those three words strike anxiety, fear, and anticipation in their hearts and minds. Moving can be daunting no matter if you are just moving down the street (as a friend of mine recently did), across town, across country, or even to a new country.

God called Abram to “Go from your country, your people and your father’s household to the land I will show you” (vs 1). Abram packed up his household and all their possessions and started out. As you read further in this and following chapters, you will see they travelled a long way, not sure where the journey would eventually end. Abram trusted God.

Many years ago I felt God called me to make a similar journey with a few differences. I left my country as well as my family. I was able to take some of my possessions. I did know where I was going but had never been there and did not know anyone who lived there. Prior to going, I met one person briefly who lived where I was going. Abram was seventy-five years old when he started out. I was much younger. I said good bye to my dad, brothers and sisters, and many beloved nieces and nephews.

This was a scary thing; but like Abram, I trusted God because I knew He was leading. There were bumps along the way from the time I accepted a position in another country until I actually got there. There was a tremendous amount of paperwork to complete in order to obtain a visa and other required documents. It took much longer than anticipated; but the position was held for me, so again I knew God was leading.

I had an auspicious beginning in my new country. As I was descending from the airplane upon my arrival, I broke the heel off my shoe; and since my luggage did not arrive with me, I did not have a change of clothes, including another pair of shoes. Not good!

As bad as that seemed at the time, I look back now and realize it could have been worse. Many times when we survey those around us, we can see ourselves in a different light. Things are not always as bad as they seem. We all face difficulties. It is our response to those difficulties that make the difference.

### **Points to Ponder:**

- How can we be sure God is calling us to a different place of ministry?
- What could hinder you from saying yes?
- Have you been challenged by such a situation? How has God guided and brought you through it?

**Prayer:** *Dear Lord, help us discern Your call and be willing to trust You to lead us in the right direction. We are thankful for Your sustaining love and guidance. In Jesus’ name, we pray. Amen.*

## Abram's Destination Ruby Ruschhaupt

**Scripture:** [Genesis 12:8](#)

Abram and his family arrived in the vicinity of Bethel, and Abram pitched his tent. There he built an altar and called on the name of the Lord. The scriptures don't state why he built an altar there or what was involved in "calling on the name of the Lord." The Old Testament contains many instances where God's people built altars for one reason or another. I can imagine that Abram was grateful for a time to "pitch his tent" after such a long journey.

When I arrived at my destination, I looked forward to settling into this new adventure to which I felt the Lord had called me. When I arrived at the place where arrangements had been made for me to stay, the kind person who answered the door stated she changed her mind and was no longer offering a room. With that rebuff, unlike Abram, I was not ready to build an altar! In fact, I momentarily wondered if I had somehow misunderstood God's calling. It seems it doesn't take much for me (us) to doubt when things don't go as planned. Well, the very next day this lady called and said I seemed like a nice person, so she would be willing to rent me a room in her home.

Thus began my sojourn in my new country. I don't know what was in Abram's conversation with God, but evidently God must have told him that he was to travel on. I didn't sense God asking me to move on, but I certainly wondered if I should turn around and go back. Going back was not an option; the very next day God literally opened the door for me to stay. There were many challenges. The climate was much different, and I missed my beautiful mountains. Because I didn't know anyone, I was constantly meeting new people, which meant assessing and being assessed. It was not always comfortable.

In [verse 10](#) of this chapter, we read that there was a famine in the land, and Abram took his family and journeyed to Egypt. These verses tell us Abram felt it necessary to tell a lie in order to spare his life (or so he thought) instead of trusting God. The lie got him into trouble. I have to admit it was sometimes difficult to always be truthful when meeting new people because I was anxious to impress.

God was not pleased with Abram; neither did He abandon him. Likewise, God does not abandon us when we fail to heed His leading. He gently but firmly calls us back.

### **Points to Ponder:**

- How do you handle a new and difficult situation?
- Have you been tempted to lie in order to be accepted? What challenges did it create for you?
- When or how have you found God to be faithful even when you've messed up?

**Prayer:** *Thank you, Father, for Your faithfulness and unfailing mercy and grace, which are abundantly available to those who call on Your name. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.*

## **Broken Relationships: Part One** **Ruby Ruschhaupt**

**Scripture:** [Genesis 27](#); [Genesis 37](#); [Matthew 26:14-50](#); [69-75](#); [Acts 15:36-40](#)

The Bible gives us many instances of relationships that didn't last or were interrupted for a period of time. Examples include the birthright that came between Jacob and Esau; the hatred the brothers had for Joseph; Jesus' betrayal by Judas; Peter's denial of Jesus; Paul and Barnabas' disagreement about who should be taken on their missionary journeys. There are many other examples in the Bible, and this is also true in our lives. Sometimes relationships and/or friendships fall apart.

Another woman and I had a long, close friendship; then one day it came to a halt. I began dating, and she seemed happy for me; but when it got serious, something happened and her position changed without giving me an explanation. She refused to attend any of my bridal showers or the rehearsal dinner. She did come to the wedding but not the reception.

After the honeymoon, we were invited to her home for dinner; and then we invited them. Those two gatherings were very cool – as though we were total strangers. After that there was a total break in our relationship. Several times I wrote a note trying to mend the friendship or at least seek forgiveness for whatever had caused her to throw away a long-standing friendship. There was no acknowledgment that these notes had been received. I was devastated. Finally, after much prayer, I surrendered and left the situation with the Lord.

Many years later, I received a phone call inviting us to their 50<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary and asking me to help serve at the reception. There was no hesitation on my part to accept the invitation; and though we didn't have much time for conversation, I felt this might be an opening. However, it didn't materialize. Then some time later another call came inviting us to an 80<sup>th</sup> birthday party. Would I help serve the cake? Of course! Again nothing happened.

### **Points to Ponder:**

- How can broken relationships be healed?
- Have you experienced a broken relationship? How did you approach the situation?
- Is God interested in helping us mend our broken relationships?

**Prayer:** *Dear God, help us step outside ourselves and see the situation with Your eyes and be willing to be directed and guided by You. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.*

## **Broken Relationships: Part Two** **Ruby Ruschhaupt**

**Scripture:** Genesis [37](#), [39-47](#)

Several years after my friend's husband died, she moved to a home not too far from where we lived. I fixed lunch and took it to her and her family helping her move. Several times I went to her home and helped her accomplish some tasks she could no longer do on her own. Sometimes we would get together for tea and knitting. During this time the conversation never touched on the time when our friendship was broken. When I prayed and asked God for help, I was certain He was directing me to let it go. It seemed He was also saying, "Does it really matter now what caused the broken relationship? It is more important to show kindness and grace in the time of her need."

She began attending our church, so I introduced her to women of similar age, explained the various Sunday School classes available, and sat with her during the morning service. I began picking her up for various events at church, and a surface relationship began to develop.

Read Joseph's story in Genesis chapters 37, 39-47. Joseph and his brothers were reunited. In fact, Joseph was vital in saving their lives because of the famine. God planned for Joseph to be in this place at this time, even though he had difficult times before he reached this place in his life.

You remember Jesus tested Peter and questioned him three times if he loved Him ([John 21:15-17](#)). Peter was reconciled to Jesus and became a great preacher of the gospel. Relationships can be restored.

As I mentioned previously, broken relationships will happen. We are human. What matters is how God wants us to handle these broken relationships and that we do all we can to bring about restoration.

### **Points to Ponder:**

- What difference does it make that you may never identify the cause of the broken relationship?
- Do you have a relationship that needs healing?
- What steps can you take to begin the healing process?

**Prayer:** *Dear God, help me to build up and restore any relationship that would hinder anyone from being reconciled to You. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.*

## **Cancer: My Family's Nemesis** **Ruby Ruschhaupt**

**Scripture:** [Psalm 46](#)

When I was in my early twenties, my mother was not well. We were told she had gall stones and needed surgery. She scheduled surgery, and we were prepared for her to come out of this well since she was a strong woman. I was at work in another town from where my parents lived and waited to get word from my dad or my sister as to how she was doing. When the day was almost done and I had not heard, I phoned the doctor's office. They put me through to the doctor, and he proceeded to tell me very kindly and compassionately that my mother had cancer and that it had spread. In those days they could not detect it like they can now, and it was too late for my mother. I was totally shocked and unable to take it all in. My co-workers took me home as I was in no condition to drive. I lived with my sister and her family at the time and had to break the news to them. Since we were prepared for gall bladder surgery, the cancer diagnosis took us all by surprise.

How was I to deal with this? So many things went through my mind. My mother would not be around to see me get married, be a grandmother to my children, or give me much needed advice in the coming years. Then God reminded me what a wonderful mother I had and how she worked so hard for her children. She lived long enough to see us all into adulthood.

How do you deal with catastrophic illnesses? Do you blame someone – even God? Or do you realize pain is in our world, and no one is immune. Cancer became an illness to reckon with in my immediate family. In addition to my mother, my father, two brothers, and a sister succumbed to this illness.

Does this put you in constant fear that you might be the next one? In my case, I chose to put my trust in God and do my best to live a healthy lifestyle, all the while knowing that is not a guarantee to keep you from illness.

Psalm 46 became very important to me. Verse 10a says, "Be still, and know that I am God. Then in verse 1, we read, "God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble."

### **Points to Ponder:**

- When an unexpected tragedy or trouble comes into your life, how do you handle it?
- Are you living a healthy lifestyle? If not, what changes can you and do you need to make?
- Is God your source of strength and help?

**Prayer:** *Dear Heavenly Father, help us to be in a relationship with You that when unexpected situations come our way, we immediately turn to You because You are our help and strength in time of trouble. How thankful we are for Your faithfulness! In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.*

**Cancer: The Nemesis is Mine**  
**Part One**  
**Ruby Ruschhaupt**

**Scripture:** Psalm [46:1](#) and [10a](#)

On a weekday morning in August 1998, as I was getting ready for work I discovered a hard lump in my left armpit. I mentioned it to my husband who said a doctor's visit was immediately necessary. The doctor scheduled a mammogram, sonogram, and biopsy to further check it out. I prayed, "Dear God, help me to trust You and know that You care for me and have all things in Your control."

The radiologist said that the surgeon would definitely want to perform a biopsy. I must admit I was somewhat nervous and praying that it would be benign like a previous one in 1991. The day of surgery arrived. In recovery and once I was awake, the doctor told me the biopsy was malignant. He had already informed my husband. I was somewhat stunned; it was not what I expected. I needed to make an appointment in a week to get the full report and make plans. My husband and I prayed fervently for God's help as we waited for the full report.

Before all this happened we had planned and purchased tickets to fly to be with my family for a reunion. The surgeon's report was disconcerting: malignant and melanoma. He then said the lump in my armpit was not the primary place, and it had to originate somewhere else in my body. He said I needed to see an oncologist as soon as possible. I told him about our vacation plans and that I had no intention of missing my family reunion. He reluctantly agreed but said I had to make this appointment immediately upon our return.

Due to an airline strike, we drove 2000 miles one way to be with my family. Because of my surgery, my husband had to do all the driving. Our church friends and our families prayed for us. God journeyed with us too.

We left Mitchell, South Dakota, and I read the devotional for that day. It was entitled "What Did I Forget?" Quite appropriate since I forgot to take cookies made especially to take to the reunion! Part of the devotional read as follows: "Always remember to forget the troubles that pass your way, but never forget to remember the blessings that come each day." My husband and I talked about taking one day at a time and trusting God for the future – whatever that may be.

As we were leaving Butte, Montana, the devotional I read included [Philippians 4:11](#): "I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content." I thought it quite appropriate since we had driven through several states. Of course, we know this did not mean a "state as in a place" but the state of our body or mind. The devotional centered around attitude...a good or bad attitude...it's our choice.

**Points to Ponder:**

- Think about a time when you received unexpected news. What scripture verse(s) sustained you or provided guidance during this time?
- How can you remember to count your blessings when you really want to ask God why?
- How can you apply [Philippians 4:6](#) when you are blindsided?

**Prayer:** *Dear God, help us to understand that in this world there is sin and pain, and no one is immune; but with Your help, we can overcome sin and face any difficulty as You provide strength and guidance. Oh Lord, we pray for faith to trust You completely. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.*

**Cancer: The Nemesis Is Mine**  
**Part Two**  
**Ruby Ruschhaupt**

**Scripture:** [Psalm 30](#)

It was so good to arrive at my sister's home and share my "news" with them. As they prayed with us, I prayed, "Dear God I know I trust You, yet it is hard not to think about what the future may hold – bad and good. Whatever it is Lord, may it all be for Your honor and glory."

We soon had to make the journey back. As we were driving in Montana, we could see a rain storm ahead; but it cleared before we had to drive into it. As we rounded a curve, we were greeted with the biggest and brightest double rainbow I had ever seen. We thought we would drive right into or under it. We took this as a promise from God.

So many ways God showed His love for me through the love of my family, the time of sharing and praying with my sister and brother-in-law, and in enjoyment of His wonderful creation. The mountains, the ocean, and the lush vegetation were breathtaking. These scenes and experiences are forever burned in my mind.

Of course, in the back of our minds was the reminder that surgery was planned upon our arrival back home. What would that be like? Would it be good or bad? A CAT scan to determine where cancer cells may be present was performed. Then surgery removed more lymph nodes under my left arm. So many people were praying, and I felt that support. When we finally got the report from the 32 lymph nodes they removed, it was negative. No cancer present!! My devotions that day included [Psalm 30:2](#): "O Lord my God, I called to you for help and you healed me." [Psalm 30:11-12](#): "You turned my wailing into dancing; you removed my sackcloth and clothed me with joy, that my heart may sing to you and not be silent. O Lord my God, I will give you thanks forever."

If and when you face a difficult time in your life here are some scriptures that were and continue to be so helpful to me.

- [Psalm 115:1](#): "Not to us, O Lord, not to us but to your name be the glory because of your love and faithfulness."
- [Psalm 46:10a](#): "Be still and know that I am God."
- [Isaiah 40:31](#): "But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint."
- [Isaiah 41:10](#): "So do not fear for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand."
- [Psalm 34:8](#): "Taste and see that the Lord is good, blessed is the man who takes refuge in Him."

God's Word, the Bible, is so rich in promises and encouragement for our daily lives. The most important thing we can do is to saturate ourselves so that we can recall these promises at any time.

**Points to Ponder:**

- What scripture verses speak to you in difficult times?
- Think about the people who could support you in prayer during difficult times.
- How has God shown His love for you?

**Prayer:** *Dear God, help us to be Your faithful followers, and equip us to reach out to those in need who may not know You or are not aware of Your love and faithfulness. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.*