

**Lent 2022**

# **Embracing the Unknown**

**The Congregational Church of Brookfield  
Lenten Devotional Guide**

Offered to you by:  
The Deacons and Stephen Ministers of CCB

## **“Embracing the Unknown”**

If our ongoing Covid-19 pandemic has taught us anything, it is perhaps “expect the unexpected.” Circumstances and world affairs have been constantly changing for the past 2 years, and with all that uncertainty, it is natural we may feel off balance and even anxious or depressed. Public health statistics show that, in addition to Covid causing so much sickness and death, stress-related illnesses, mental and physical, have been on the rise.

Truth be told, in spite of what Pastor Jen likes to tell her Mission Trip participants, flexibility is often NOT fun! It is so much easier to stand and walk on firm pavement than on constantly shifting sands. And walking on water? Not for the faint of heart. Leave that to Jesus!

This Lent, we find ourselves wondering how our Christian faith might help us cope with change. Can Jesus give us the peace we need to accept what comes, and courage even to embrace the unknown?

With gratitude to all those who helped to curate devotions, format the contributions, and bring this resource to life, we hope this year’s Lenten devotional guide will help us all take the spiritual steps we need to move forward with the confidence of faith during these uncertain times. As Jesus showed us – from his first steps out into the wilderness to be tested from his last steps up the hill to Calvary – we can trust our loving and gracious God to guide our faith journeys and guard our lives, from beginning to end.

May your Lenten season this year be blessed with new insights and understanding as we walk together toward an unknown future. May we look forward, with confidence, to the new life Christ promises at Easter.

***Pastors Bryn & Jennifer***

## **How to Embrace the Unknown**

We hate the unknown! Everyone has to live with it, and we all have different ways of handling it. Most of us would not hand a car salesman our checkbook and tell him to surprise us with any type of car, nor would we go to a restaurant and tell the waitress to surprise us with anything on the menu.

And while we might enjoy not knowing a baby's gender until it's born, most of us would agree that the higher the stakes the less exciting and more fear-provoking living with the unknown becomes. This is especially true when we're talking about matters of life and death. What happens when we die? What will heaven be like? These are questions Christians have asked for centuries. God gives us as many details as we need, but maybe not as many as we'd like.

So Paul explains what we do know using a metaphor the church can relate to — planting a seed and seeing what grows. Just like a seed looks nothing like the plant that grows from it, our heavenly bodies will be beautiful and unlike anything we know right now.

Likewise, we don't have all the answers to anticipate eternity in heaven. Just like a gardener knows plants come from seeds, we know eternal life will come for those who put their faith in Jesus. So, we look forward to heaven with the same anticipation of a gardener waiting for an unknown seed to grow. Instead of staring at the seed trying to figure out what the plant will look like, he cares for it daily, trusting and waiting to see the end result. We nurture our faith by spending time with Jesus, going to church, and growing in our understanding of the Bible.

And as we get to know the character of God, it's easier to trust Him with everything, even the unknown.

*Prayer: God, you know us better than we know ourselves. Help us to put our trust in You during times when circumstances or fears weigh heavily on our hearts. Let us come to You for peace and comfort and strength as we face our unknowns.*

Source: *1 Corinthians: A 35 Day Devotional* (biblegateway.com)

Submitted by: Marie Immohr and Steve Waschak

## **As a deer longs for flowing streams, so my soul longs for you, Oh God.**

I had always started my days early with a morning devotional. But everything changed after Hurricane Michael. My days were filled with long early morning commutes and many hours of storm cleanup. My home, office, and even one of my most sacred spaces- the altar in our sanctuary- had all been destroyed. I not only felt like God was far away; I felt like I could not find God. Had God left and taken everything that felt safe in my life?

One morning on my ride into town, I noticed a deer darting frantically from one downed tree to another. It looked scared and lost and seemed to be searching for something. Tears filled my eyes as I remembered Psalm 42:1. Like that deer, I was darting back and forth- desperately searching for God. With everything familiar and routine gone, it felt like God was gone too. But I just needed to look for God in new ways. I knew then that Hurricane Michael could take many things, but it could never take away God's presence.

Later that day I felt overwhelmed by the massive trees that had fallen in my yard, so I prayed. A few hours later, a group of volunteers offered to clear the trees. God had once again shown up in an unexpected way. I found God's presence as soon as I slowed down and looked.

*Prayer: Dear God, when we feel overwhelmed and lost, help us not to give up seeking your presence. Give us clear eyes to see you at work in ways we never expected.*

Source: *The Upper Room, October 2021*

Submitted by Sharon Santi

## **Do this and the lights will turn on**

*“This is the kind of fast day I’m after: to break the chains of injustice, get rid of exploitation in the workplace, free the oppressed, cancel debts. What I’m interested in seeing you do is: sharing your food with the hungry, inviting the homeless poor into your homes, putting clothes on the shivering ill-clad, being available to your own families. Do this and the lights will turn on, and your lives will turn around at once. Your righteousness will pave your way. The GOD of glory will secure your passage. Then when you pray, GOD will answer. You’ll call out for help and I’ll say, ‘Here I am.’”*  
~ Isaiah 58:6-9a

In Jesus’s Sermon on the mount, he tells us that we are the light of the world. In this passage from Isaiah we learn how it is that we can turn on that light.

- Break the chain of injustice
- Get rid of exploitation in the workplace
- Free the oppressed
- Cancel debts
- Share your food with the hungry
- Invite the homeless into your home
- Put clothes on the shivering ill-clad
- Be available to your own family

We can turn on our light for Jesus by caring for others in these ways. As our light shines it will reflect Jesus’s love to all the world.

Prayer: *Our parent God, give us the wisdom and courage to turn on our light for you by caring for others in need so that your light will be reflected far and wide.*

Written by: Ruth Reda

## Right After It's Over

On a long hike through an Indiana forest, I stumbled upon a spindly tree that tumbled off a cliff. Walking in the cool caverns below, I could see how the wind and the rain had eroded the ground under its tangled roots, but that the tree did not simply fall. It snapped at the base, and tipped over into the chasm beneath. Much to my family's dismay (who wanted to keep hiking), I was transfixed. The tree didn't die. Or, as I announced loudly to my six-year old, THE TREE MADE A SERIES OF IMPORTANT CHOICES.

At first the tree grew straight down, as if surrendering to gravity. After all, there was nowhere else to go. But at the point of breaking, the remnant began to thicken. It must have taken years, but its roots grew wider and deeper. Then, in a shocking act of hubris, the tree decided to try growing sideways. It added a few wobbly branches that stuck out entirely horizontally, like a gymnast might use her arms on a balance beam. More years passed. But at some point, the tree decided that sunlight was a good idea, and the only direction to go was up. This is what happens when you anthropomorphize trees, I said, shaking my head. But nonetheless, my eyes got misty as I traced how the trunk made a perfect U-shape and, rather impertinently, grew straight toward the sky. *Can you picture it?*

Perhaps you know what it's like to be pushed off the edge. By some gust of wind, you suddenly knew your precious lives were hanging on by so little. The human condition is all thin roots and rocky soil, and so you fell. When your life is snapped at the stem, there is almost nothing to do but watch yourself break. You find yourself trying to remember to breathe. You can hear your own voice and it might sound strange. Time is slow and surreal. *Is this me? Is this really my life?*

In the aftermath of devastation, the best we can do is survive. Try to sleep. Remember to eat. Keep breathing. Nothing will feel possible, but there you are. Another day. Even that may feel like a miracle. There comes a season where you begin to realize: *I could stay like this forever.* Overwhelmed and broken. WHO COULD BLAME ME? Did you even hear what happened? It's unthinkable. The world I loved is over now.

Our self-help culture will try to explain to you that this is the time to become better than before. Get back up! There are no set-backs, only set-ups! This is teaching you something or showing you a different path. Doors are closing and windows are opening, after all. You know, now that we're talking about it, you might even be *lucky* that this happened. After all, this is an opportunity.

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The deep evil inherent in the Perfectibility Paradigm is on full display. Your humanity is now a liability. Your grief and fear and confusion and fatigue is wielded as evidence of your failure. You are not only a person who has lost, but a loser.

Please, please, please, hear me say to you: you are not ruined or broken or a failure. You are simply in pain. And God is with you. This is God's great magic act, in my opinion. The more we suffer, the more we can't get away from God's insistent love.

When life is hanging upside down, we must try to send all available energy to the roots. Drink a glass of water. Utter the words: "God, help me." Try to get outside. Tell someone that you're struggling. Don't forget to sleep. It might not feel like much. But with these small acts of nurture and taking stock, you are like my favorite tree. You are letting yourself grow straight down. Grief is a long story.

Someday you might try to get your balance, peeking your branches out a little. Seeing if you can reach and stay stable at the same time. Perhaps a short trip. A more casual conversation with others. Letting your guard down.

There will be days when you will be able to look around and ask: what is here? Where is there some ground to stand on? Is there anything that tastes good now? That nourishes? Where is there room to grow? If so, you might be ready for a turn.

As my friend Nora McNerny says, there is no "moving on." There is only "moving forward." Yes, there will be days when it might be crucial to pull down the blinds and lie in the dark. (Or recommit to watching every episode of television shows *Community* or *The West Wing*.) But in the meantime, my dear, you are growing. You are tired and might be scared, and you may have lost too much. But you are not finished yet. Not today.

*Prayer: Blessed are you, after the fall. In this new and unrecognizable landscape. At the still point between what was and what's to come. Time has stretched itself, and there seems to be a future somewhere for some people and things, but it touches you only lightly.*

*Blessed are you, right here, in between. At the end that comes before the beginning. That grief is a long story, and maybe, somehow, you are still in it. Growing straight down in the dark where sorrow breathes best. Where roots find their secret springs in crevices that are well-hidden. Where God's great magic act of love begins.*

*Blessed are you, starting to sense that maybe sunlight can reach you, even here. And you reach out, finding yourself in a fierce embrace. And God's voice saying: You are not the bad thing. You are not ruined. You are not broken, nor over, nor a failure, nor learning a lesson. You are my suffering one, and you are loved, you are loved, you are loved.*

*Blessed are you, maybe ready for the turn. Straight up.*

Source: Right After It's Over by Kate Bowler

Submitted by: Pastor Jennifer Whipple

## **Embracing the Unknown: Confronting Temptation**

### **Luke 4:1-13**

<sup>4</sup>Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, <sup>2</sup>where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing at all during those days, and when they were over, he was famished. <sup>3</sup>The devil said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread.”

<sup>4</sup>Jesus answered him,  
“It is written, ‘One does not live by bread alone.’”

<sup>5</sup>Then the devil led him up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. <sup>6</sup>And the devil said to him,  
“To you I will give their glory and all this authority; for it has been given over to me, and I give it to anyone I please. <sup>7</sup>If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours.”

<sup>8</sup>Jesus answered him,  
“It is written, ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.’”

<sup>9</sup>Then the devil took him to Jerusalem, and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him,  
“If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, <sup>10</sup>for it is written, ‘He will command his angels concerning you, to protect you,’ <sup>11</sup>and ‘On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.’”

<sup>12</sup>Jesus answered him,  
“It is said, ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’”

<sup>13</sup>When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him until an opportune time.



## **Quotations On Embracing the Unknown**

"God never said that the journey would be easy, but He did say that the arrival would be worthwhile."

~ Max Lucado

"If you can't fly, then run, If you can't run, then walk, If you can't walk, then crawl, but whatever you do, you have to keep moving forward."

~ Martin Luther King Jr.

"Don't quit, and don't give up. The reward is just around the corner. And in times of doubt or times of joy, listen for that still, small voice. Know that God has been there from the beginning—and he will be there until . . . The End."

~ Joanna Gaines

"When fear knocks on your door, send faith to answer. Fear is a feeling that has only the power we give it. You can feel fear and still do anything you know you need to do, even if you 'do it afraid.'"

~ Joyce Meyer

"I can do all things through Him who strengthens me."

~ Philippians 4:13

"Be faithful in small things because it is in them that your strength lies."

~ Mother Teresa

"God will meet you where you are in order to take you where He wants you to go."

~ Tony Evans

" Be strong and courageous. Do not fear or be in dread of them, for it is the Lord your God who goes with you. He will not leave you or forsake you."

~ Deuteronomy 31:6

Prayer: *God, may we listen with our ears and hear with our hearts the words of encouragement and understanding You have given others to speak to us.*

Submitted by: Marie Immohr

## **If I've learned anything from life...**

It's that sometimes, the darkest times can  
bring us to the brightest places.

I've learned that  
what seems like the end of the road is  
actually just the discovery that we are meant  
to travel down a different path.

I've learned that  
no matter how difficult things seem,  
there is always hope.

I've learned that  
No matter how powerless we feel or how  
horrible things seem, we can't give up.  
We have to keep going. Even when it's  
scary, even when all of our strength  
seems gone, we have to keep picking  
ourselves back up and moving forward,  
because whatever we're battling in the  
moment, it will pass, and we will make  
it through.

We've made it this far.  
We can make it through whatever

Source: Danielle Koepke

Submitted by: Carol Ryan

## **THE UNKNOWN**

*“The unknown periods have hit each one of us from time to time. For me, one of those times was after my first husband died. I was alone and did not know what to do.”*

*~ Ruth Allen*

My journey began when I was feeling low

I was relaxing when in the bath where I saw this glow.

It was coming from the skylight above so bright and clear

I knew it was God who was so very near.

So I softly began to pray

I don't know what to do or which way to turn

That is when I knew I would let God lead the way.

By listening and following the Lord

Many new doors opened wide

So I learned not to be afraid of the unknown because He was by my side.

He taught me to listen and follow his choice

So each morning I start the day listening for his voice.

You can Embrace the Unknown

knowing you are not alone.

Written by: Ruth Allen

## **The Lord's faithful love**

*"The Lord's faithful love is from forever ago to forever from now for those who honor him."*

*~ Psalm 103:17*

I love the beach. Whether the sun is shining or it's cloudy and rainy, the smell of the salt water, the endless view and the sound of breaking waves soothe my soul. The breaking of the waves and vastness of the ocean are assurances for me of God's steadfastness and presence.

Over the years I've collected boxes of seashells. Now I allow myself one shell per visit. On my last visit, while I was walking along the beach, a shiny shell caught my eye. But when I picked it up and looked closer, I saw that it had a hole in it and was scarred by tiny stones embedded in it. I tossed it aside but felt a little nudge I couldn't explain. I picked up the shell again and brushed off all the sand.

It occurred to me how much my life was like that shell- certainly far from perfect. But despite my imperfections, God has never cast me aside. That shell now sits on my desk next to my Bible as a daily reminder that God loves me just as I am.

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, thank you for the assurance that you will never toss us aside. Thank you for loving us just as we are.*

Source: *The Upper Room, September 2021*

Submitted by Sharon Santi

## Overcome Your Fear of the Unknown

*“But blessed are those who trust in the Lord, whose confidence is in him. They will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream....”*

*~ Jeremiah 17:7–8*

New ventures can be scary. Going on a trip somewhere new, or starting a new ministry at church, or starting on a new work project—it’s hard to take that first step. What if you get sick away from home? What if no one’s interested in the new ministry? What if you do a terrible job on the new project?

There are always too many fears and too many unknowns, and we like to be in control of our environments. But sometimes new ventures are exactly what we need.

Jesus does not want us to become complacent in our faith—He wants us to be working for Him. His Word is alive and active, and if we obey His Word, then we will be too.

Trees may look delicate and pretty, but they have deep, deep roots, often deeper and larger than the part of the tree above ground. Those roots are fed by water we can’t see either, and they have a remarkable ability to survive.

In this passage, Jesus compares us to trees. If we are trees, we also have a deep root system in Jesus Christ. We are watered by the immense reservoir of strength and power through the Holy Spirit. And the fruit we bear has eternal consequences.

Prayer: *Pray and ask Jesus to show you how you can “branch out” and serve Him in new ventures. Don’t be afraid, because you’re anchored in Christ and His power.*

Source: *Mornings with Jesus*, Devotions for Inspiration

Submitted by: John Pondiccio

## **Trust and Obey**

*“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”*

*~ John 3:16*

We cannot help but marvel at the love our Heavenly Father has for us. John 3:16 says it all: 'For God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life.'

That sounds easy enough, but we all know that life is not always easy. Our faith has its ups and downs much like waves upon the waters. We can become blind-sided by illness, job loss, broken relationships, or death. Often we struggle to cope on our own. Our Heavenly Father's promise to always be there for us can sometimes be difficult to believe.

When I was about eight years old, our extended family gathered for a big party at Matagorda Beach on the Texas Gulf Coast. I was playing with some of my cousins in the surf and paying no attention to the high tide coming in. Suddenly, without warning, a large wave crashed down over me. I had no idea which direction was "up." I could not cry out for help, so without hesitation, I prayed to Jesus to save me. The next thing I remembered was feeling the strong arms of my brother-in-law as he scooped me up out of the waters and held me tightly.

As young as I was, I had been taught to go to Jesus in prayer when I was in trouble. That advice still works for me today. God's arms surround us when we need Him, if only we trust and obey Him. One of my favorite hymns puts it this way: When we walk with the Lord in the light of His Word, what a glory He sheds on our way.

While we do His good will, He abides with us still and with all who will trust and obey. Trust and obey, for there's no other way to be happy in Jesus than to trust and obey." Eternal God, we thank You and praise You for sending Your Son Jesus to pay the ultimate price for our sins. Help us to remember all You do for us in our daily lives. Give us the strength to trust and obey You always. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Source: *A Family Lenten Devotional*, First United Methodist Church Kileen

Submitted by: Carol Ryan

## **Embracing the Unknown: *Pressing Forward***

### ***Philippians 3:14 - 4:1***

*3<sup>14</sup>I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus.*

*1<sup>5</sup>Let those of us then who are mature be of the same mind; and if you think differently about anything, this too God will reveal to you. 1<sup>6</sup>Only let us hold fast to what we have attained.*

*1<sup>7</sup>Brothers and sisters, join in imitating me, and observe those who live according to the example you have in us. 1<sup>8</sup>For many live as enemies of the cross of Christ; I have often told you of them, and now I tell you even with tears. 1<sup>9</sup>Their end is destruction; their god is the belly; and their glory is in their shame; their minds are set on earthly things.*

*2<sup>0</sup>But our citizenship is in heaven, and it is from there that we are expecting a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. 2<sup>1</sup>He will transform the body of our humiliation that it may be conformed to the body of his glory, by the power that also enables him to make all things subject to himself.*

*4Therefore, my brothers and sisters, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, my beloved.*

### ***Luke 13:34***

*13<sup>34</sup>[Jesus said,] “Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!”*

## **Facing the Unknown**

Occasionally I come across share-worthy wisdom from our like-minded ministry “partners”. Individuals or organizations that are aligned with the philosophy and core messaging of Embracing Brokenness Ministries. No exception today as I read Charles Stanley’s *In Touch Devotional*. May it not only bless you, but challenge you to a different way of thinking.

Tucked into Hebrews 11 is a short phrase that indicates Moses’ approach to life: “for he endured, as seeing Him who is unseen” (Heb. 11:27). There was no shortage of uncertainty in Moses’ life. How could someone “slow of speech” address Pharaoh (Ex. 4:10)? How could a murderer become God’s chosen man? How would anyone lead the stiff-necked Israelites (Deut. 9:13 NIV)? And how would they cross the Red Sea, conquer Canaan, or survive 40 years in the desert?

Moses knew what the Lord expected of him, but he didn’t have supernatural vision into the future. So he couldn’t see the outcome of his obedient actions. The Israelite leader moved forward by faith—trusting in the Lord’s power to guide, protect, and overcome. Moses derived security solely from God, who consistently kept His promises.

Life hasn’t gotten more certain in the millennia since Moses led the Israelites to the Promised Land. Modern believers wonder about things, too. Will I ever marry? What if I lose my job? What happens to my kids if I pass away? How can I accomplish all I have to do? Thankfully, the source of security hasn’t changed in all that time. God is still the only certainty in this life. You can count on the One who is faithful, just, and loving (2 Timothy 2:13; Psalm 89:14; Eph. 2:4).

The lesson from Moses’ life is to cling tenaciously to the Lord. Even situations that look hopeless are cupped in God’s sovereign hand. Moreover, though the way looks dark and the road seems untraveled, He walks before us. Continue forward in confidence, as seeing Him who is unseen.

*Prayer: God, thank you for being the unseen force in our lives. Let our faith in You help us to see our paths forward more securely, especially as we face the challenges in our world today knowing that you will guide and protect us.*

Source: *In Touch Devotional* by Charles Stanley (Embracing Brokenness Ministries)

Submitted by: Marie Immohr



## The Truth About Morning

*There is a vastness that quiets the soul. But sometimes we are so squarely in the midst of life's forces that we can't see what we're a part of.*

The truth about morning is that it is the small light of the beginning breaking through, again and again. It is a wisdom so large and clear, one which carries us through our lives so quietly and completely that we seldom see it.

Day after day, we are covered with the dust and grit of what we go through. It tends to weigh us down, and then we think and scheme and problem solve. Then we worry if it will all really work, and if it is the right thing to do. It all makes us dark and cluttered.

But despite our stubbornness of concern, we tire and must turn what has happened over to the hammock of night. This is a good thing. For no matter how unfinished we seem, the letting go into sleep is nothing short of a quiet miracle.

This letting go into sleep is an innate, reflexive form of meditation, no different than a fly rubbing its face or a doe licking its fawn. Sooner or later, without discipline or devotion, despite our resolutions and mistakes, we each must sleep. We must surrender to the quieting of all intent and regret, so that the small light of the beginning can rise in us, again and again.

There is no escaping this profound simplicity: what happens covers us like dirt. It covers our hearts and minds, till, at the shore we call exhaustion, we slip into the waters of sleep in a daily sort of baptism, so we can begin again.

So whenever you feel urgent or overwhelmed, whenever you feel pressed to figure things out or to rethink the unthinkable...rest...so that the endless beginning—which some call the voice of God—might break through what has happened. And you will wake feeling like dawn.

Source: *The Book of Awakening*, Mark Nepo

Submitted by: Carol Ford Eagan

## How Can I Make Every Day a Celebration of Life?

*“Be full of joy in the Lord always. I will say again, be full of joy. Let everyone see that you are gentle and kind. The Lord is coming soon. Do not worry about anything, but pray and ask God for everything you need, always giving thanks. And God’s peace, which is so great we cannot understand it, will keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.”*

*~ Philippians 4:4-7*

Today is the day you can make a choice between living in the pain of the past or letting all you’ve learned produce wisdom, compassion, depth, and even joy within you. *“Those who cry as they plant crops will sing at harvest time; Those who cry as they carry out the seeds will return singing and carrying bundles of grain.” (Psalm 126:5-6)*

Let this day be a significant one. Let this day be an event, a milestone you can point to and say, *“That was the day I chose joy! That was the day I let the Lord of my life turn my sorrow into singing – my mourning into celebration.” (see Esther 9:22)*

Just as certain painful events can cause our lives to come to a full stop, God calls us now to a new start.

Just as pain and sorrow brought us to tears of remorse and regret, God calls us now to celebrate.

It’s the appropriate time – the appointed time – to look within once again. This time, find that little spark of joy flickering there. Blowing ever so gently upon it, see it glow brighter and brighter then explode into laughing flames of celebration.

It’s okay to feel good again. To laugh and sing again. God says we may throw off our mourning and rejoice.

It’s time to plan a celebration. To make life fun again. It will take as much determination and commitment to celebrate as it ever did to repent and surrender.

Source: *A New Heart...A New Start* by Neva Coyle

Submitted by: Mark Lyon

## **Overcoming the Fear of the Unknown**

*"Then you will know which way to go, since you have never been this way before."*

*~ Joshua 3:4a*

Do you have a fear of the unknown? If so, then you know how nerve-racking it can be. Fearing the unknown can cause us to live on pins and needles as we spend precious energy anticipating the worst-case scenario. There are two problems with this type of fear:

1. The future is not here.
2. The future is not ours.

While the future may be out of our hands, it's not out of the hands of an adequate and trustworthy God. When we face a worrisome unknown situation, we can look to Joshua as an example.

It's recorded in the first chapter of Joshua that before Moses died, God passed the baton of leadership to Joshua. The Israelites had been wandering in the desert for 40 years under the guidance of Moses. Now, their journey was almost over. Just beyond the Jordan River was their promised land—the land that God had guaranteed to Abraham and his descendants.

Upon reaching the Jordan River, Joshua and the Israelites set up camp by the stream and awaited God's direction. Much like their meeting with the Red Sea, God had to make a way for them to cross over the river. On the third day, God told the officers to instruct the people that when they saw the Ark of the Covenant (where God's Presence abided) to follow it because they had "never passed this way before" (Joshua 3:4). In essence God was saying, *Follow Me and I'll see you through this unknown territory.*

You see, the Lord understands our fear of the unknown. He realizes that you may be in a situation that you've never passed through before and you're afraid. It may be the first time you've been without employment. Maybe you've just been diagnosed with an illness or your child is in rebellion. You've never been down this road before and you don't know which way to go or what to do. God will guide the way.

Joshua's life was unpredictable and full of unknowns much like yours and mine. Yet, he successfully resisted fear by keeping his focus on God rather than the events surrounding him. Just as God guided the Israelites through unknown territory, He will guide you and me. When we come to a place we've never passed through before, God is present to help us.

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"When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned;

the flames will not set you ablaze. For I am the LORD, your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior; (Isaiah 43:2,3b, NIV).

Even though the children of Israel were not told how they would pass over the river, the people went forth in faith. We too can move forward in faith sharing in the promised presence of God leading the way through our unknown circumstances.

Prayer: *Dear Lord, thank You for Your promised presence. It comforts my heart to know that I am not alone. Lead me, Lord, through the unknown in my life. Make Your path clear and I will follow it. In Jesus' Name, Amen.*

Source: *An Untroubled Heart: Finding Faith that is Stronger Than All Your Fears* by Micca Campbell

Submitted by: Leslie Sands

## Learning to Embrace Change

*“But blessed is the one who trusts in the LORD, whose confidence is in him.”*

*~ Jeremiah 17:7 (NIV)*

Looking out my kitchen window, I wonder where this wave of sadness is coming from. Life is good. My kids are out on their own, working in careers they studied for and are passionate about. I should be happy about that, right?

I am! I am happy about that.

*So why the tears?*

Then I see my yard for what it is: empty. No kids on the trampoline. No one playing in the springtime sun. Quiet. Empty.

I hadn't expected these feelings to filter into my heart. My kids have been flying back and forth from this nest for many years, slowly but surely making lives of their own. The release has been small, manageable steps to the independent lives they live today. And while I'm excited for their adventures, I'm also a little sad in this change of season for me.

Isn't it just the worst to have to admit something is *over*? Transitions in life can sometimes be exciting. And sometimes they're just plain hard. At times, they can even be an odd mixture of both. That's where I am. It's exciting to see my kids doing work they are gifted for, *and* it's hard to have them so far away and not see them as often as I would like.

I am trying to embrace *different*.

There have been many seasons of different in my life; I'm sure there have been seasons of different for you, too.

Bringing home a baby for the first time, starting a new role or learning a hobby. Different can feel so uncomfortable. *What am I doing? I don't know how to do this.*

**Continued on next page**

Overwhelm tries to take over. Doubt seeps in. Leaving a secure job to stay at home or leaving the safety of home to secure a job. *I knew how to do that. But this ... I don't want this.* From potty training to personal training, from restoring failed finances to restoring failed relationships, our hearts and minds whisper: *It would be so much easier to just check out. Slip into survival mode.*

Maybe we're there already.

During these times of transition and change, we have the opportunity to look again at where our confidence lies. Have we been basing it on our titles of "mom," "employee," "daughter" or "volunteer"? With that season gone, has our confidence gone as well?

Today's key verse helps us take a close look at our confidence and where we are putting our trust: *"But blessed is the one who trusts in the LORD, whose confidence is in him"* (Jeremiah 17:7).

When we build our confidence in the Lord, trusting Him for our worth, our purpose and our next step in life, Jeremiah 17:7 says we will be blessed. It doesn't say we will have it easy, but we can be blessed with peace and the knowledge that no matter what changes next in our lives, the Lord never will. He is secure, stable and steady.

Is it OK to still grieve in our times of change? Absolutely! Acknowledge it. Cry those tears and share your pain with a friend. Whether the change is something good like a marriage or painful like a death, change is still hard.

Yes, it is a good thing to see change for what it is. So, I'm going to sit here for a bit, let the tears fall, and thank the Lord for all the good, even while I grieve a little.

Prayer: *Oh, dear Jesus, thank You that You get me even when I don't get me. I am so grateful, Holy Spirit, that You are in me, helping me to process change and preparing me for the next season of my life. In Jesus' Name, Amen.*

Source: *Learning to Embrace Change*, Proverbs 31 Ministries

Submitted by: Carol Ford Eagan

## Listen

*“Listen to advice and accept instruction, that you may gain wisdom in the future.”*

*~Proverbs 19:20 ESV*

Now he speaks to hundreds if not thousands of people regularly but before that, he said yes to being at a weekend where he would hear Christian men talk. He predetermined that none of the answers that he needed to hear was going to come from a well-dressed, stable minded, smooth talker. INSTEAD he got me.

A group previewed and approved the words that I was going to say but on the fly I added just a few more words. I remember them. They were, “I don’t have anything you want. I don’t have money, a house or a wife but I do have a sense of humor and a fierce sense of loyalty to my friends.”

During my talk a disruption broke out in my small audience. Someone went to the man that I would later befriend and it wasn’t long before the disruption settled down. He spent the rest of my talk staring at me. A couple more encounters came and went where he remained at a distance. I could feel his eyes on me. We gradually talked and became friends. In time we both were to give talks, so I got to hear his.

During his talk he explained that the answer to his personal struggle was the same answer to the question that I asked you. That he was prepared to carry it out. He claims that the few words that I added to my Christian talk made the difference to his attentive listening, choosing life and taking to heart the Christian message that I was talking about.

No, I don’t take credit to anything that happened that day. I just had an idea and went with it. Did God put those words on my heart to say? I think so. All that concerns me now is that this big-hearted wonderful guy, whose name is Tom, is in a better place in his mind.

*Prayer: Dear God, there are so many times when I didn’t listen to you and got it wrong. Thank you for second and third chances. Thank you for when I got it right. Thank you for never giving up on me. Please help me with clarity in knowing your message to me. Thank you. Amen*

Written by: Pete Lane

**Embracing the Unknown: *Inviting New Life*****Isaiah 55:1-13**

<sup>55</sup><sup>1</sup> Everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you that have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. <sup>2</sup>Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy? Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food. <sup>3</sup>Incline your ear, and come to me; listen, so that you may live. I will make with you an everlasting covenant, my steadfast, sure love for David. <sup>4</sup>See, I made him a witness to the peoples, a leader and commander for the peoples. <sup>5</sup>See, you shall call nations that you do not know, and nations that do not know you shall run to you, because of the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, for he has glorified you.

<sup>6</sup>Seek the LORD while he may be found, call upon him while he is near; <sup>7</sup>let the wicked forsake their way, and the unrighteous their thoughts; let them return to the LORD, that he may have mercy on them, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. <sup>8</sup>For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the LORD. <sup>9</sup>For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.

<sup>10</sup>For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return there until they have watered the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, <sup>11</sup>so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and succeed in the thing for which I sent it. <sup>12</sup>For you shall go out in joy, and be led back in peace; the mountains and the hills before you shall burst into song, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands. <sup>13</sup>Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress; instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle; and it shall be to the LORD for a memorial, for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off.

**Luke 13:6-9**

<sup>13</sup><sup>6</sup>Then he told this parable: "A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came looking for fruit on it and found none. <sup>7</sup>So he said to the gardener, 'See here! For three years I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree, and still I find none. Cut it down! Why should it be wasting the soil?' <sup>8</sup>He replied, 'Sir, let it alone for one more year, until I dig around it and put manure on it. <sup>9</sup>If it bears fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.'"



**Monday**

**March 21, 2022**

## **Embracing the Unknown – Facing the Scary Path**

I have been fired three times. There are other terms for what happened – I'd been let go, reorganized out of my job, laid off. What is interesting about all three cases is this – before every one, I had been struggling with my work/life balance. I was not loving the job. I was thinking daily and praying daily about what I should be doing in my future. In all three cases, God threw the unknown before me.

Around 1990, I was working as a recruiter for a job placement agency in Stamford. I enjoyed helping people be placed in jobs but the work was not as rewarding as it had originally been and the commute to Bethel was beginning to wear me down. I started thinking about new jobs and even went as far as looking at re-enrolling in college to get a second degree. And then I got the call from my boss to tell me that they were letting me go. It was a recession. Companies were not hiring as much. They were tightening their belts and were not using recruiters to hire. I was out of my job. I was shocked. I could not believe that I was being let go. I had always thought that people were let go because they were bad at their jobs or had done something bad to get them fired. Clearly, I was young and unknowing. So, while I had been deciding if I wanted to quit – if I wanted to do something else – dragging my feet – God had other plans. God said “get on with it”.

It turned out to be the kick in the pants that I needed, as the next job I landed was as a Customer Service Supervisor at Grolier in Danbury. All of a sudden, I was in a new job, meeting new people, doing new things. I loved it. And that job led to me moving into Marketing that I loved even more – selling books and book clubs to kids. There was a lot to learn but I was growing and advancing at every turn.

During my 20-year stay, Grolier was bought by Scholastic and I moved from Customer Service Supervisor to Marketing Coordinator to Associate, to Assistant, to Manager to Director to Senior Director. In the seven years that Scholastic owned the company there was a layoff every year. It was tiring and stressful wondering if you would be let go “this year”. Again, I was thinking it might be time to move on but I liked it most of the time so I kept on trying. In the end, Scholastic could not make selling book clubs profitable. They decided to sell off what they could and proceeded to lay off hundreds of employees. Again, decisions were out of my control. And yet, I wondered “is this Gods way of saying “find something less stressful and more rewarding””. The unknown became the opportunity.

That layoff was in 2008, the year of another recession and I spent 18 months looking for a job. And while the job hunt was not fun, the time in between was great. Both my daughters played lacrosse and field hockey. I went to every game. I was able to go to school events that were during the day. I could attend the Serendipper luncheon at our church. I had more time for leading church committees and Girl Scouts. I had more time for myself and others.

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Eventually, I found a job with Really Good Stuff, an elementary education supplies company.

The position at Really Good Stuff was rewarding and led to other promotions. And again, after a few years, they were purchased by a much larger corporation that had other ideas in mind for how to obtain growth. There was a lot of turmoil, layoffs, and unhappy employees. And to make matters worse, the company decided to move from Monroe which was 20 minutes away to Shelton that was 50 minutes away. I began seriously wondering how to improve my situation. I hated the commute but believed that if the work environment improved my unhappiness would improve.

My team and I started talking about being zen at work. We believed that if we could create a calm work environment it would help. And I also believed that if we realigned some of the staff, we could be happier. When I pitched the concept to our President that we were too top heavy and needed more “do-ers”, I did not think that I would be the one who was let go. I was stunned. What would I do? I was not the spring chicken that I was back in 1990. I had a tough time grasping the reality of it.

And yet, a friend said one of the wisest things to me – you have been given the gift of time. I stopped. I stopped spinning. I thought about that for a while. God had given me time. Whoa! The unknown ahead of me was mine to create. Once again, God ended one trial and forced me to look at the unlimited choices of paths ahead. I am not sure where these paths will lead me. But I can tell you what I am doing – I’m meeting friends for lunch, walking in the woods with my dog, spending time with my family, and doing some consulting. Every day is an adventure. Every day we can choose to see what God has available to us. Every day we can decide to take a new path to embrace the unknown. And sometimes we need to recognize that the scary unknown thing that is ahead of us is just what God wants us to face.

Written by: Carol Ford Eagan

## **Life in the Tank**

*“Love, and do what thou wilt.”*

*~ Saint Augustine*

It was a curious thing. Robert had filled the bathtub and put the fish in the tub, so he could clean their tank. After he'd scrubbed the film from the small walls of their make-believe deep, he went to retrieve them.

He was astonished to find that, though they had the entire tub to swim in, they were huddled in a small area the size of their own tank. There was nothing containing them, nothing holding them back. Why wouldn't they dart about freely? What had life in the tank done to their natural ability to swim?

The quiet yet stark moment stayed with us both for a long time. We couldn't help but see those little fish going nowhere but into themselves. We now had a life-in-the-tank lens on the world and wondered daily, in what ways are we like them? In what ways do we go nowhere but into ourselves? In what ways do we shrink our world so as not to feel the press of our own self-imposed captivity?

Life in the tank made me think of how we are raised at home and in school. It made me think of being told that certain jobs are not acceptable and that certain jobs are out of reach, of being schooled to live a certain way, of being trained to think that only practical things are possible, of being warned over and over that life outside the tank of our values is risky and dangerous.

I began to see just how much we were taught as children to fear life outside the tank. As a father, Robert began to question if he was preparing his children for life in the tank or life in the uncontainable world.

It makes me wonder now, in middle age, if being spontaneous and kind and curious are all parts of our natural ability to swim. Each time I hesitate to do the unplanned or unexpected, or hesitate to reach and help another, or hesitate to inquire into something I know nothing about; each time I ignore the impulse to run in the rain or to call you up just to say I love you - I wonder, am I turning on myself, swimming safely in the middle of the tub?

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Sit quietly until you feel thoroughly in your center

Now rise and slowly walk about the room you are in.

Now walk close to the walls of your room and meditate on life in your tank

Breathe clearly and move to the doorway and meditate on the nature of what is truly possible in life.

Now step through the doorway and enter your day. Step through your day and enter the world

Source: *The Book of Awakening* by Mark Nepo

Shared by: Kim Downey

Submitted by: Leslie Sands

## **Why Should I Keep Persevering When Life Is Hard?**

*“I wait for the Lord to help me, I trust His word. I wait for the Lord to help me more than night watchmen wait for the dawn, more than night watchmen wait for the dawn.”*

*~ Psalm 130: 5-6*

Some situations have offered me just two options – I could either panic or pray. My tendency is to panic, like the Israelites by the Red Sea (Exodus 14:10) or the disciples on the Sea of Galilee (Matthew 8:24-25). I’ve had my share of hyperventilating, heart-racing panic attacks. But the Lord has spent years trying to show me that prayer is the means by which I can, if I choose, stay even-tempered, self-possessed, cool-headed, and strong-spirited, even in a crisis.

When we can’t press forward, move sideward, or step backward, it’s time to look upward and to ask God to make a way. Referring to his days as a fugitive, David said, “In my distress I called upon the Lord, and cried out to my God. He heard me from His temple” (2 Samuel 22:7). The writer of Psalm 107 declared, “They cry out to the Lord in their trouble, and He brings them out of their distresses. He calms the storm, so that its waves are still” (vv. 28-29).

I remember such times in my life – when my father suffered a heart attack, when a job possibility blew up in my face, when a friend was overdosing on cocaine, when my child got involved with the wrong crowd. There was little I could do except plead with God. Sometimes those prayers were prolonged.

Other times, however, my prayers were quite short. Amy Carmichael developed many variations of a prayer she learned from the famous Bible teacher Dr. F. B. Meyer. When meeting someone she didn’t like, she would silently pray, “Thy love, Lord.” In a crisis, she’d whisper, “Thy help, Lord,” or “Thy wisdom, Lord.”

Sometimes when I’m worried, I just lift up my heart to heaven and say, “Lord...,” followed by the name of the one for whom I’m concerned. Looking back over the years, I’ve never faced a crisis in which, in response to earnest prayer, whether prolonged or instant, God didn’t make a way (James 5:16). That’s the great secret of those who put their hands in the hand of the One who can part the seas.

Source: *The Red Sea Rolls*, by Robert J. Morgan

Submitted by: Mark Lyon

## **Now What?**

*“Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.”*

*~ Romans 12:2 NIV*

The day had been much like any other until I met with my supervisor in late afternoon. The corporation where I had worked for the previous five years had decided to eliminate my position. Suddenly and without notice, I was unemployed. Fear over-whelmed me: all I could think of was, *Now What?* Panicked and feeling betrayed, I spent the next several days focusing on my hopeless situation. Then one morning during my quiet time, two questions came to mind: *What does God want me to learn from this? What new door is God about to open?* Changing my thoughts of fear into anticipation put my focus back where it belonged – on God. I remembered that every overwhelming circumstance that I face in life is an invitation to become more like Christ.

Our perception of a situation can either steal or enhance the peace that God freely offers to each of us. The choice is ours: conform to the pattern of this world or allow God to renew our minds.

Prayer: *Protector of all who trust, when life is overwhelming you offer us peace in the middle of chaos. Help us to focus on you when we are tempted to look at the hardship. Amen*

Source: *The Upper Room*, November 2012

Submitted by: Steve Waschak

## How To Face the Unknown

I just heard a sermon on the radio from a minister who was speaking of Paul and his questioning of how to face the things ahead of himself and I have to say it got me very intrigued about the subject matter for his sermon.

First and foremost, we all have to admit there are things in life we have to face that we have no idea how to approach, events we have never faced before. Sickness, heartache, disappointment, death of loved ones and any number of events that we really have no concept of how to face.

But we do know how, it's just we don't want to admit sometimes that we cannot prepare for something we have never done. The children of Israel all through the Old Testament constantly were faced with the unknown, but was it really unknown after all?

Prophet after prophet told them of things, God had spoken to them (the prophets), and when these things came to pass the people were surprised. When God performed miracles or hardship came even slavery to other nations and God brought them home to the land they were promised through Abraham, they would vow to follow Him. But they always fell back into old habits and cried out for help. King after king (some good and some not so good), came and went and the people would follow their leaders to good times and bad. Sound familiar? Anyone? These habits would lead to wealth and riches, or poverty and misfortune and the people never seemed to learn, even with the greatest of leaders. David, Solomon, Joshua, Moses one by one they spoke to the people like leaders of old, Elijah, Samuel among others showed great works, and they would still go back to their old ways.

We as modern Christians have a wealth of information about the greatness and goodness of God and even though He tells us in His Word, and His son Jesus said that He will NEVER leave us nor forsake us, we doggedly march on as if nothing happened stubbornly doing things on our own. His Word, our Holy Bible, is still the bestselling book in print, and nothing has changed between the time it was written until now except for modern versions. So His promises still remain the same.

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Every day we wake up we face the unknown because we don't know what the day holds for us. **But, by faith, we walk ahead** to face those things that only God knows lie before us and if, God willing, He chooses a path that is either joyful or sad **we know that He walks with us.**

The children of Israel could visibly see at times God's presence, as in the cloud by day and the fire by night. They could see Him surrounding the tabernacle when the priest went in to the holiest of holies by a cloud and still they had doubts and fears. Our doubts and fears are no less than theirs in this day we live in, but we are supposed to be more intelligent and educated and sensitive to things we don't understand because we have people smart enough to tell us what we need to do to live longer, be stronger, be more adaptive to our world and evolve into a more capable being.

The problem today is not how well we understand the world around us and that it is everchanging day to day. The problem is that we don't want to admit that God does NOT change and never will, therefore as the scripture says, "We ought to obey God rather than men."

When you wake up tomorrow to face another day, if you are so blessed to see another day, look to God and say, "Father what would you have me do today that I can serve you better? And if need be, please take my hand and lead me in to a right path."

If you do this, only then will we be able to face the things that this life throws at us and just maybe someone will see Jesus in our lives and want what we have.

**A Savior who will always be with all of us to face whatever lies ahead.**

Prayer: *"God bless you is my prayer"*

Source: *Red Oak Devotions*

Submitted by: Leslie Sands



## **Embracing the Unknown – Moving towards happiness**

When I was young my father worked in sales for IBM. This meant we lived by the motto of “I’ve Been Moved”. By the time I was 16, I had lived in six states, attended 4 elementary schools, 2 junior highs and 2 high schools. I was always known as “the new kid”. I never had more than a handful of friends and I always felt like they were hard-earned.

In 6<sup>th</sup> grade, I moved from Louisiana to Massachusetts. It was a tough move for a 13-year-old girl with a southern drawl who still wore dresses with knee socks to move to the Northeast where all the kids wore jeans and corduroys. I was bullied. I was teased. While at home I was talkative, at school, I was quiet and spent a lot of time with my head buried in a book. Then we left Massachusetts for the Main Line in Pennsylvania where I found my place amongst all the other outcast kids of the school.

At the age of 16, my father came home and said we had a big discussion topic for dinner. Normally when we moved, my father just told us. Me and my sister were set to packing up our belongs and within a few weeks we were on our way to a new state, a new house and a new school. This time, my father asked us if we were ready for a new adventure. He had been offered a position as a vice president in Japan. While I did not want to move, I understood that this was a big deal for my father. My sister who was 11 at the time may not have fully understood but once my mother and I said we would be game for the adventure, she agreed to the move too. We were truly headed into the unknown.

I will never forget Day 1 at the American School in Japan. Here I was, again, in a new school...back to being the new kid. I remember being introduced in the front of all the classes, which is a mortifying experience as a shy, quiet, outcast kid. And then lunch time came. This was a dreadful experience as I had to find a place to sit knowing that I would be eating alone. And then a miraculous thing happened – someone sat with me. She asked me where I was from. I replied that I was from the Philadelphia area but had lived in 6 states. She replied that she was from Australia and lived in 6 countries. A discovery hit me in that moment. These kids did not know me. These teachers did not know me. They did not know that I was the nerd. They did not have any clue that I was the quiet outcast kid. I could choose to be who I wanted to be. And in that moment, I choose to be a happy person, a girl who laughed and made friends. This was my moment of embracing the unknown.

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All these years later, I see that moment of that girl sitting was me as the work of the hand of God. God was handing me a clue, a clue to what could be. I could have kept my eyes closed. I could have continued on my path as it had been and be the girl who stayed in the shadows.

But God showed me that there could be another path. I could decide to move towards the unknown.

Doing this does not mean that it will be the path that's easier. New paths are hard. You have to clear the path ahead of you, enter into territory that you have never been in before, meet obstacles and take on challenges. I had not been good at making friends, but I learned. I had not understood how to move into a crowd of unknown people and come out on the other side with people liking me. It was not easy but with each step, it was a step towards happiness. God shows us different paths. He provides the light and we just have to be brave enough to step into it.

Written by: Carol Ford Eagan

## Embracing the Unknown: *Returning Home*

### **Luke 15:1-3, 11-32**

<sup>1</sup>Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to him. <sup>2</sup>And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, “This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them.” <sup>3</sup>So he told them this parable:

<sup>11</sup>Then Jesus said, “There was a man who had two sons. <sup>12</sup>The younger of them said to his father, ‘Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me.’ So he divided his property between them.

<sup>13</sup>A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and traveled to a distant country, and there he squandered his property in dissolute living. <sup>14</sup>When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need. <sup>15</sup>So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. <sup>16</sup>He would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything.

<sup>17</sup>But when he came to himself he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger! <sup>18</sup>I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; <sup>19</sup>I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands.”’

<sup>20</sup>So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him. <sup>21</sup>Then the son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’

<sup>22</sup>But the father said to his slaves, ‘Quickly, bring out a robe—the best one—and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. <sup>23</sup>And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; <sup>24</sup>for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!’ And they began to celebrate.

<sup>25</sup>“Now his elder son was in the field; and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. <sup>26</sup>He called one of the slaves and asked what was going on. <sup>27</sup>He replied, ‘Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has got him back safe and sound.’ <sup>28</sup>Then he became angry and refused to go in. His father came out and began to plead with him. <sup>29</sup>But he answered his father, ‘Listen! For all these years I have been working like a slave for you, and I have never disobeyed your command; yet you have never given me even a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends. <sup>30</sup>But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him!’

<sup>31</sup>Then the father said to him, ‘Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. <sup>32</sup>But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found.’”

## **A Steady Presence**

*"Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock."*

*~ Matthew 7:24-25 NIV*

Jesus states above that those who hear His words and do them are wise builders. They have built their homes on rock-solid foundations. The winds howl, the rains come – even a flood comes – but the house stands firm.

Growing up I came across the old cement mixer that Dad used to make our home's foundation. He reenforced the foundation by dropping field stone in, along with iron rods, and interlocking each end into the next. Despite this effort, the house burned down twice before I was born. Some burned beams remained and you could smell them on a rainy day.

My Dad never spoke to me about Jesus' teachings directly. I did however have a father figure who taught me to look for parallels between life and scripture even though it might not be spelled out for me. During this new, after-Covid time, it seems to me that our resilience is nurtured by work that we have done on our spiritual foundation before the crisis. (Though it is never too late to try reinforcing our faith foundation with scripture and fellowship with like-minded people.)

Might a future generation find the tools from the formation of your foundation? Maybe a marked, bookmarked or worn Bible or like my father – a steady, quiet presence through thick and thin.

Prayer: *Dear Lord, many people have been blindsided during this time of Covid. I pray that I along with them will find our spiritual foundation resilient and a resolve to keep reinforcing our faith. Amen*

Written by: Pete Lane

# Light of the World

*“You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. 15 Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead, they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house.”*

*~ Matthew 5:14-15 NIV*

In this passage of scripture, Jesus calls his followers the “light of the world”. He is counting on us to be his light in the world. Exactly what is the purpose of that light?

Light has three characteristics that give us deeper understanding of how this light is to be used.

- Light reveals what is true.
- Light guides us.
- Light reflects.

Jesus wants us to be his light that will reveal the truth about his teachings and push back the darkness that distorts or hides what is true.

Jesus is telling us to be the points of light that will guide others to find Him, the source of light, and His message of love and forgiveness.

Another way we can be a light for Jesus is to reflect his teachings. Just as a periscope can reflect things around corners or over walls, our actions reflect Jesus’s teachings to others near and far.

We are the light of the world. We must keep that light shining brightly to reveal the truth of God’s message, guide others to Jesus and reflect his love to all people.

Prayer: *Holy One, we pray for the courage and wisdom to shine your light to all the world so that the truth of your teachings will be understood.*

Written by: Ruth Reda

## **Embracing Uncertainty**

*“Faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.”*

*~ Hebrews 11:1 (NIV)*

One day I began to feel disturbed by thoughts of what my future might look like. I wondered if I had made a wrong choice, and I felt confused and overwhelmed with fear. I asked God to speak to me and help me, but I felt the same. I tried to recall a scripture verse that would help me, but I could not remember one. I began to lose hope.

Later I saw a post on social media that contained the word uncertainty and a reference to Hebrews 11:1. I quickly turned to the verse and read it again and again. I learned that by embracing my uncertainty with faith, my fears lessened.

I still question what my future will look like, and I worry about choices I have made regarding my career or education. But scripture reminds me that faith will enable me to let go of my fear and trust God.

Hebrews 11 reminds us that whenever we feel disturbed and stressed about the future or our choices, we can put our faith in God, who holds our future and wants the best for us. With this assurance we can embrace uncertainty with faith and encourage others to do the same.

Prayer: *Dear Lord, please help us to have faith in you and to let go of fear as we entrust the future to you. Amen.*

Source: *The Upper Room, February 2022*

Submitted by: Carol Ford Eagan

## **Facing The Unknown**

Imagine, if you can, leaving your loved ones behind as you depart for a war zone. Think, if it is possible, how you would feel if you were told you had stage-four cancer and there was no treatment to help prolong your life. Consider, if you will, what you would do if you discovered that your loved one had abandoned you.

While we hear of these tragedies impacting others, few of us would welcome or want them to invade our lives or the lives of our loved ones. But what happens if they do? The Psalmist gives us comfort if or when we must embrace the unwelcome tragedies of life.

“In times of trouble may the Lord answer your cry,” he writes. Not hear your cry, nor think about your cry, nor put your cry on His waiting list. But may He answer your cry.

Life is filled with unexpected tragedies. One moment everything is the way we had planned it to be and the next moment things are upside down. Often we are faced with unforeseen temptations that present choices we never thought we would have to face. But, fortunately, we do not face life alone. We have the protection of God, the power of the risen Christ, and the presence of the Holy Spirit to rescue us from defeat.

We cannot avoid the trials or tragedies of life. Nor do we need to face them alone. God is there to protect and defend us. Victory is ours when our lives are in God’s hands.

Prayer: *Thank You, Father that Your ear is open to our cry and Your strength available when we need help. May we look to You, and not ourselves. In Jesus’ Name, Amen.*

Source: *Seeds of Hope Daily Devotionals*

Submitted by: John Pondiccio

## **Never Alone**

*Jesus said, "I am with you always."*

*~ Matthew 28:20 (NIV)*

I once took a train from the airport in Philadelphia to my sister's town 35 miles North. Though it was late at night, the train was crowded with people and more boarded as we approached downtown. As we proceeded North, more people exited than boarded and more and more seats became available. My destination was the last stop before the end of the line, and when the conductor called out the name of my stop, I was the only one left in my coach.

I liken this train ride to life's journey. During our childhood, we are surrounded by our family and friends. As the years pass, our family grows and our number of friends increases. But sooner or later, we begin to experience loss. One by one, family and friends pass away. As we travel through our senior years, more and more people dear to us exit our lives. If we live long enough, we may find ourselves the only remaining family member and with few, if any, close friends.

But we have someone who will never leave us during life's journey: Jesus Christ. He has promised that he will always be by our side. (See Matthew 28:20.) He goes with us all the way to the end of the line, until we reach our heavenly home.

Prayer: *Good Shepherd, comfort us with assurance that you will be at our side in each season of our lives and will always walk with us each step of the way. Amen*

Source: *Daily Guideposts*, Wayne Greenawalt

Submitted by: Jeanie Bergman



## Inner Strength

*“I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord’s holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.*

*Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.”*

*~ Ephesians 3:16-21*

On my first trip to New York City, I was greatly impressed by the tall skyscrapers that form the Manhattan skyline. However, the exteriors of these structures conceal much more than they reveal. The buildings can reach so high only because of what is inside them. They are fortified inside with steel, concrete and wire mesh. This reinforcement allows the building to rise upward and remain stable and strong, even when storms come and winds blow. Each structure is a marvel of engineering and construction- on both the outside and inside.

Our Christian lives resemble these tall buildings more than we realize. Only when we look to God – the ultimate architect and engineer – are we best equipped to weather the storms of life. God is our inner strength when this world throws difficult and demanding situations at us. Prayer, Bible study, and worship are to our Christian lives what concrete and steel are to tall buildings. We can remain strong and stable with the assurance that God will always give us inner strength to meet whatever challenges come our way.

Prayer: *Dear Lord, help us to seek the power of your unfailing strength in our lives. Lead us safely through the storms of life. Amen.*

Source: *The Upper Room*, January 2020

Submitted by: Steve Waschak

## **Embracing the Unknown: *Living in the Now***

### **John 12:1-8**

*12<sup>1</sup>Six days before the Passover Jesus came to Bethany, the home of Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. <sup>2</sup>There they gave a dinner for him. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those at the table with him. <sup>3</sup>Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus' feet, and wiped them with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.*

*<sup>4</sup>But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (the one who was about to betray him), said, <sup>5</sup>"Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor?" <sup>6</sup>(He said this not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief; he kept the common purse and used to steal what was put into it.) <sup>7</sup>Jesus said, "Leave her alone. She bought it so that she might keep it for the day of my burial. <sup>8</sup>You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me."*

## **God brings the best out of you**

*“Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will. “*

*~ Matthew 12:2*

I recently read a story about Robert Smalls, a slave who commandeered a Confederate ship and sailed it to the Union army. When he was a young boy, his mother told him a proverb about the frogs in hot water. When the frogs were put in cool water, they were content. As the water got hotter, they realized too late that there was no way out. I thought that she was trying to help him understand the plight of the slaves, who were trapped in servitude.

However, at the end of the book, Robert Smalls remembers that lesson from his mother and relates it to his master. He thought his master knew it was wrong to keep slaves but could not figure out how to overcome the “hot water” of the culture in which he was living.

Both of those groups of people were conforming to the patterns of this world at that time in history. What are the patterns in today’s world that challenge us to seek God’s will?

The Message states it this way:

*“Don't become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You'll be changed from the inside out. Readily recognize what he wants from you, and quickly respond to it. Unlike the culture around you, always dragging you down to its level of immaturity, God brings the best out of you, develops well-formed maturity in you”*

Prayer: *Father in heaven, we pray for your guidance to lead us to see the patterns of this world that you want us to embrace. Keep us from being immature and help us develop a well-formed maturity.*

Written by: Ruth Reda

## Can Man Live Without God?

*“We live in Him. We walk in Him. We are in Him.” Some of your own poets have said: ‘For we are His children.’*

*~ Acts 17:28*

When one attempts to live without God, the answers to morality, hope, and meaning send one back into his or her own world to fashion an individualized answer. Living without God means lifting oneself up by his or her own metaphysical bootstraps, whichever way is chosen. In a world where cultures now freely intermix with each other, one would imagine that progress is being made in finding common ground on the issues of the “supernatural.” Yet, the closer we come to each other, the further apart our inner worlds seem to be.

May I add just one brief idea to this? It is not merely that living without God creates an enormous tension for morality, hope, and meaning; living without God is also making an absolute commitment to a philosophy of life’s essence and destiny which, if wrong, affords absolutely no recourse should it be proven false. That is the degree of faith required of one who espouses an antitheistic lifestyle. Bertrand Russell and others, in their own maverick ways, bragged about what they would say to God should they happen to be surprised and meet Him after death. But those grandstanding words impress *us* more than I believe they will God, and they sound better before the final crossover than they will afar.

Can man live without God? Of course he can, in a physical sense. Can he live without God in a reasonable way? The answer to that is No! because such a person is compelled to deny a moral law, to abandon hope, to forfeit meaning, and to risk no recovery if he is wrong. Life just offers too much evidence to the contrary.

Outside of Christ there is no law, no hope, and no meaning. You alone are the determiner and definer of these essentials of life; you alone are the architect of your own moral law; you alone craft meaning for your life; you alone risk everything you have on the basis of a hope you envisage. As a cynic once put it, “We are all in this together, alone.” You have made life’s greatest decision, taken the greatest gamble, and answered the greatest question of our time if you choose to live without God.

Source: *Can Man Live Without God* by Ravi Zacharias

Submitted by: Mark Lyon

## **The Unknown Future**

*“You have taken from me friend and neighbor—darkness is my closest friend.”*

~ Psalm 88:18 NIV

I'm in a pretty good place at the moment. We've certainly had our ups and downs but we've come out the other side in a healthier place.

I'm looking forward to the future and am excited about some changes that are happening soon. While there is still much to do I feel I have the resources to really make a difference. Good for me!

While life is sitting pretty for me at the moment, it is not the case for many others. Even those close to me are experiencing grief and pain in their circumstances. And reality dictates that there will come a time when I find myself back in that challenging place.

Psalm 88 reminds me that life does not always go according to plan. Challenges come and life gets tough and sometimes you just want to check out of the pain.

There is no answer at the end of this psalm, and that is often the case in life. There are no answers, there is no clarity.

But, God is there. In all the pain the psalmist does not forget to call out to God. When we are feeling like we're at the end of despair we know we can call out to God.

He may not give us an answer straight away but He will incline His ear towards us and sit with our pain.

Prayer: *Lord, may we experience Your comfort when times are tough. And when things are going well for us, may we be Your comfort to another in need. Amen.*

*Are you in a place where you need comfort or can give comfort?*

Source: *The Daily Devotional - Daily Inspiration from Linda Bailey*

Submitted by: John Pondiccio

## **All Fall Down**

*“Lead us from the real to the unreal.”*

*~Hindu invocation*

It was a snowy night, and Robert was recalling the time two springs ago when he was determined to paint the family room. Up early, he was out the door, to the hardware store gathering the gallons of red, the wooden mixing sticks, the drop cloths, and the one-time brushes that always harden, no matter what you soak them in.

He mixed the paint outside and waddled to the door with a gallon in each hand, the drop cloth under his arm, and a wide brush in his mouth. He began to chuckle in telling what happened, “I teetered for minutes, trying to open the door, not wanting to put anything down. I was so stubborn. I had the door almost open when I lost my grip, stumbled backward, and would up on the ground, red paint all over me.”

At this point, he laughed at himself, as he has done many times, and we watched the snow fall in silence. I thought of his little story the whole way home. Amazingly, we all do this, whether with groceries or paint or with the stories we feel determined to share. We do this with our love, with our sense of truth, even with our pain. It’s such a simple thing, but in a moment of ego we refuse to put down what we carry in order to open the door. Time and time again, we are offered the chance to truly learn this: We cannot hold on to things and enter. We must put down what we carry, open the door, and then take up only what we need to bring inside.

It is a basic human sequence: gather, prepare, put down, enter. But failing as we do, we always have that second chance: to learn how to fall, get up, and laugh.

- *Meditate on some threshold you are having trouble crossing in your life. It might be at work, at home, in a relationship, or the doorway to greater peace.*
- *Breathe steadily and look to yourself to see if you are carrying too much to open the door.*
- *Breathe slowly and with each out-breath put the things you are carrying down.*
- *Breathe freely now and open the door.*

Source: *The Book of Awakening*, Mark Nepo

Submitted by: Carol Ford Eagan

## **Do Not Worry**

*During the forty years that I led you through the wilderness, your clothes did not wear out, nor did the sandals on your feet.*

*~ Deuteronomy 29:5 (NIV)*

Eight years ago when I faced the decision of whether to leave a good job in order to care for my children full time, God spoke to me through today's quoted verse. God cared for the people of Israel in a very practical way—their sandals did not wear out!

This helped me believe that God cares about the details of our lives and provides for them. It gave me the courage to leave work and have faith that God would look after our family. It was not always easy, but God looked after us month by month, year by year.

Recently our circumstances changed, and I began to worry. How can I find a job that will allow me to earn, yet still be able to care for our boys? We prayed, and God answered in a wonderfully practical way. Someone at church—who was unaware of our situation—approached me and asked if I would be interested in a job at her workplace. I could hardly believe it when I found out that the job was exactly what I needed in terms of working hours and flexibility. I accepted the job with a heart full of gratitude. We are meeting all of our family's needs—and I have learned once again to trust our God who leads us and cares for us.

Prayer: *Thank you, Lord, for being our great provider. Help us to put our trust in You to lovingly attend to the details in our lives. Thank you for being the Great Provider. Amen*

Source: *Daily Guideposts*, Julie Ann Brown

Submitted by: Jeanie Bergman

## **How, Lord ... can I face the unknown?**

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

*~ Joshua 1:9b*

God grabbed Moses' attention with a burning bush. He said, "I am sending you to Pharaoh." For every one of Moses' excuses, God had a reassurance. (Exodus 3)

God chose Joshua to lead Israel after Moses' death. Time after time, He promised, "I will be with you wherever you go." (Joshua 1)

God commanded Jonah, "Go to Nineveh and preach repentance," but Jonah ran the other way. After living inside a great fish for 72 hours, Jonah was ready to obey God's call. (Jonah 1-2)

What is God's call for you today? What unknowns do you face? Unemployment or a new job? A new baby or an empty nest? Relocation or retirement? Moses, Joshua, and Jonah faced multiple challenges just as we do today. God provided strength and courage for them; He does so today. *"For nothing is impossible with God"* (Luke 1:37).

Prayer: *O God, I, like the people of old, want to give You excuses or run away from You. Forgive me and take away my insecurities. Hold me close, and warm me with Your love. In Jesus' name. Amen.*

Source: *Mustard Seed Daily Devotions* by Marcia Gomulka and Myrna Lou Meyer

Submitted by: John Pondiccio



## **Embracing the Unknown: *Trusting God with the Future***

### **Luke 19:28-40**

<sup>28</sup>[Jesus] went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem. <sup>29</sup>When he had come near Bethphage and Bethany, at the place called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of the disciples, <sup>30</sup>saying, “Go into the village ahead of you, and as you enter it you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden. Untie it and bring it here. <sup>31</sup>If anyone asks you, ‘Why are you untying it?’ just say this, ‘The Lord needs it.’”

<sup>32</sup>So those who were sent departed and found it as he had told them.

<sup>33</sup>As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, “Why are you untying the colt?” <sup>34</sup>They said, “The Lord needs it.” <sup>35</sup>Then they brought it to Jesus; and after throwing their cloaks on the colt, they set Jesus on it. <sup>36</sup>As he rode along, people kept spreading their cloaks on the road.

<sup>37</sup>As he was now approaching the path down from the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the deeds of power that they had seen, <sup>38</sup>saying, “Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!”

<sup>39</sup>Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, order your disciples to stop.” <sup>40</sup>He answered, “I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out.”

## Offer Value

*“The stone that the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone.”*

*~ Psalm 118:22 (NRSV)*

My old wheelbarrow had rusted out, and both handles had been broken, repaired and re-broken. I was about to throw it in a dumpster with no regret. But then a person next to me said, “Your wheelbarrow has a good wheel. Can I have it?” He had brought his wheelbarrow to the dump because its wheel had broken but with my good wheel he could repair his wheelbarrow. I was delighted that someone could benefit from this object I was about to throw away.

Sometimes we see no value left in something we choose to discard. It is a happy surprise when someone tells us that we have just what they need. Similarly, we can look at our lives and think we have nothing useful left to give, especially when our bodies and minds stop working like they used to. But we may discover new ways to help a person in need or make someone’s day with kind words. What we believe holds no value may be what matters most to someone else.

When I am discouraged by my mistakes, I try to remember that sometimes by offering the things we may overlook or devalue we can become blessings to others. God can use what we reject to change the world.

Prayer: *Gracious God, may your spirit flow through those parts of us that we have given up on. Help us to look for the blessings in others that they may not see.*

Source: *The Upper Room*

Submitted by: Sharon Santi

## **I'm always walking into the unknown**

Nik Wallenda is a member of the world-famous seven-generation Wallenda family of high wire performers. He's famous for his walks on the high wire across the Grand Canyon, Niagara Falls, between skyscrapers high above Times Square, New York, and a nearly 32-minute walk across the fire-y Masaya volcano in Nicaragua. Nik's book titled *Facing Fear* tells of his conquest not only of these perilous walks but of his conquest of fear, especially after the collapse of an eight-person high wire pyramid in Sarasota, Florida that nearly killed all eight of them. After the accident, Nik had to conquer his fears or he would never walk the high wire again.

Nik says, "I'm always walking into the unknown." But aren't we all? Every day when we get up in the morning, we have no idea what the day will hold. That's why it's such a comfort to read verses in the Bible that assure us of God's presence with us as we go about our responsibilities each and every day.

My favorite is Isaiah 41:10 NKJV, that tells me, "Fear not, for I am with you; Be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, Yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand." How many times have I taken hold of that verse when I was afraid!

Another favorite of mine is Matthew 10:29-31 NKJV: "Are not two sparrows sold for a copper coin? And not one of them falls to the ground apart from your Father's will.... Do not fear therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows."

When a big "unknown" looms in your future, hold on to God's promises, and watch your fear turn to faith and peace.

Source: *Facing Fear*, Nik Wallenda with Don Yaeger

Submitted by: John Pondiccio

## **Even in the Dark**

*To be broken is no reason  
to see all things as broken.*

Seldom seen, growing along the ocean floor, the white-plume anemone is a watery blossom. It is white lace opening under tons of black, opening as if bathed in the sun, while so far from the sun.

This is the trick to staying well, isn't it: to feel the sun even in the dark. To not lose the truth of things when they go out of view. To grow just the same. To know there is still water, even when we are thirsty. To know there is still love, even when we are lonely. To know there is still peace, even when we are suffering.

None of this invalidates our pain, but only strengthens our way back into the light.

Source: *The Book of Awakening*, Mark Nepo

Submitted by: Carol Ford Eagan

## **Emergency Prayer**

*“Be my rock of refuge, to which I can always go.”*

*~ Psalm 71:3*

On September 11, 2001, Stanley Praitnath was working on the 81st floor of the World Trade Center South Tower when he saw an airplane flying directly toward him. Stanley prayed a quick prayer as he dove under a desk for protection: “Lord, I can’t do this! You take over!”

The terrible impact of the plane crash trapped Stanley behind a wall of debris. But as he prayed and cried for help, Brian Clark, a worker from another office, heard and responded. Making their way through rubble and darkness, the two found their way down 80 flights of stairs to the ground floor and out.

When encountering terrible threats, David asked God for help. He wanted to be assured of God’s nearness as he faced enemies in battle. In a heartfelt petition David said, “Be my rock of refuge, to which I can always go. Do not be far from me, my God; come quickly, God, to help me: (Psalms 71:3, 12).

We are not promised deliverance from every difficult situation we face. But we can be confident that God hears our prayers and will walk alongside us through everything.

Prayer: *Precious Lord, when life is suddenly too hard to handle, it is such a comfort to know we can call You. Whatever comes my way, please come near to me, Lord, to help. I cannot make it through anything without You. We praise Your name and thank You. Amen*

Source: *Our Daily Bread* by Dennis Fisher

Submitted by: Jeanie Bergman

## **Faith, Friends, Family**

*“Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above your-selves.”  
~ Romans 12:10*

When asked why I came to this church, my first response was my faith. Reading, learning, and obeying God's word led me to a church where I could grow in my faith.

After attending only a short time, we began to recognize faces and to learn the names of people who also chose to attend this church. From these people came invitations to join in church activities, where we met more and more people. We began to get to know these people, and bonds started to form.

From there, friendships developed: strong, deep, long-lasting friendships. I can truthfully say that some of my best friends are the people I go to church with. God knows that we need other people in our lives, and He blesses us by putting them in our paths. Thank you, God, for friends.

We also need deep, long-lasting relationships to help us get through the difficult times and to rejoice with us in the good times. These are the people we feel closest to, whether they are family by birth or friends we have come to accept as family. Our church family loves us and accepts us as we are. We rely on them and know that God has given them to us for special reasons. Thank you, God, for giving us such a wonderful church family!

Prayer: *Thank You, God, for friends. Amen.*

Source: *A Family Lenten Devotional*, First United Methodist Church Kileen

Submitted by: Carol Ryan

## Unknown Surprises

Maggie (6-turning-7) and Evelyn (10-turning-21) asked if we could go to the park to skate. I said yes and so we loaded up their skates, located helmets, and bundled up. On our way - *Encanto* soundtrack going yet again - I warned them that due to the recent thaw, the rinks might be closed. They were still game to try but when we drove to the pitch-dark park, sure enough, the ice was soupy from that unseasonable thaw earlier that day. Disappointed at first, we elected to take a walk since we were already there.

**There is a particular quality to the night when you're a bit further away from the city lights.** It's a more neighbourly dark, perhaps, because the moon seems brighter and the stars aren't competing for anyone's attention. The white spruces towered above us, lining the paths in silence, the snow on their boughs reflecting the light by which we navigated.

At first, Maggie was nervous in the darkness. Usually it's summertime when we're outside at this hour of the day and we have our own friendly campfire. We held mittened hands as we walked until she realized there is actually plenty of light, reflected from the moon and the snow. Her eyes adjusted and her steps became more certain. **When we stop fighting the darkness, it welcomes us as old friends.**

The girls were captivated by the stars, spread across the sky like a banquet. Evie stopped us and then crouched low, wrapping one arm around Maggie, the other gesturing up to sky as she sought to point out the Big Dipper and the North Star. Older kids do love to teach younger kids, whether the younger kids like it or not, but Evie always has a captive audience in Maggie. "Their light happened millions of years ago," Evie said, waving upwards, "but we get to see it still."

Is there anything better than when a kid whispers "*wow*" under their breath?

They fell silent, gazing upwards with their winter toque pom-poms tipped back. Suddenly they both gasped as a star streaked across the sky in a blaze and then was gone as suddenly as it had appeared.

Do you ever have these moments? **When it's just an ordinary, even tiring, day and then something streaks across which seems precious and important and fleeting all at the same time?** Like your brain or your heart or - me being me - the Holy Spirit stops you to say, "Hey, you're going to want to notice this, trust me."

**Continued on next page**

These moments are saving my life right now. The geopolitical hot takes right now may take me right out. All eyes are on Ukraine, on Ottawa, on the borders, and still we make pancakes and bacon, still we go for walks, still we bear witness to two little girls in the darkness watching the stars. Blaise Pascal once wrote, **“In difficult times, carry something beautiful in your heart.”**

**When the world is struggling or when we are exhausted, we are invited to the holy conversation of noticing.** Noticing the sanctuaries of spruces still available to us, noticing the stars, noticing our children, noticing the night. We live into the darkness until it becomes a friend.

**We build altars right in the rubble of nonsense and tragedy to bless what remains good, here, right now.** Noticing the breath in your lungs, the cold, the cadence of Psalms in your bones even still, the creak of snow under your boots, the prospect ahead of a cuppa tea and a hand to hold while you fall asleep. I still believe God is putting all things right, I still believe so many of us are trying to join in that work, and so **it is worth noticing what is already steadily ordinarily glorious.**

**This is how we catch our breath.** This is why noticing can also be a form of prayer and of praise and even of worship again, our conversation with God to say, yes, I see the sanctuaries and altars and invitations of this place, these people, this moment, and I won't miss it. It is precious and important and fleeting, as vital as water and stars and piles of books. **Pausing to notice and name, especially when we are sad or discouraged, tired or overwhelmed, is as good as hallelujah.**

*Prayer: Holy One, help me to remember that even in the midst of exhaustion and difficulty, in the midst of overwhelm and challenge, you invite us to pause and to notice by placing beauty in our paths. Help us to stop, to notice, to feel your presence and to hear your voice as you offer your love and grace. Help us to take a deep breath in and to exhale hallelujah. Amen.*

Source: Excerpt from “Field Notes” by Sarah Bessey

Submitted by: Pastor Jennifer Whipple



## Embracing the Unknown: *Moving from Fear to Hope*

### **John 20:1-18**

**20** Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. **2** So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him." **3** Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went toward the tomb. **4** The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. **5** He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. **6** Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, **7** and the cloth that had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. **8** Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; **9** for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. **10** Then the disciples returned to their homes.

**11** But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; **12** and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. **13** They said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She said to them, "They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him." **14** When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. **15** Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?" Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away." **16** Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to him in Hebrew, "Rabbouni!" (which means Teacher). **17** Jesus said to her, "Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" **18** Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord"; and she told them that he had said these things to her.