

Lenten Devotional

Wednesday, February 14 to Thursday, March 28, 2024



Oxon Hill United Methodist Church

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INTRODUCTION: GOOD NEWS!

Lent began as a period of forty days of fasting, praying and confessing our sins to help us prepare for Christ's Resurrection on Easter Sunday. It is meant to be a period of sober reflection, self-examination, and spiritual re-direction. Lent begins on Ash Wednesday and continues for 40 days not counting Sundays. The significance of the 40-day Lenten period is that Jesus retreated into the wilderness and fasted for forty days to prepare for his ministry on earth. Therefore, we are emulating Him when we observe Lent.

Isaiah 42 prophesied about God's chosen servant in whom His soul delights. That perfect servant is our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Jesus' character traits are love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5). The New Testament teaches us that as Followers of Christ, we must try to emulate these qualities.

Answering Jesus' call to service is not for the faint of heart. Jesus taught us that the greatest commandment, beyond loving God wholeheartedly, is to love our neighbors as ourselves. Our neighbor is anyone we meet or encounter. As Disciples of Christ, we must reach out to people who do not look like us, sound like us, or share the same origin or worldview. We cannot succeed in this calling without the Holy Spirit's.

Some have said that Jesus' teachings reflect an upside-down way of looking at the world. He taught us to love our enemies, turn the other cheek to those who physically abuse us, and forgive those who persecute us. This is not how the so-called "real world" operates, but our way is not God's way. If we are to be faithful Disciples of Christ, we must reconcile our actions to His teachings.

More than ever, the world needs the Good News about Jesus' resurrection. To share this Good News, we must reach out to all our neighbors. Our neighbors may be rich or poor, employed or unemployed, alcoholics or drug addicts, gay or straight. In Luke 5:32 Jesus said, "I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."

God loves us unconditionally, therefore during this Lenten season, let us strive to love our neighbors in the same way. With Jesus' example and the Holy Spirit's help, let's do all we can to make someone else's life a little better. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

Vivian Sayeh-Weeks

2024 OHUMC Lenten Devotional Editor

ATTUNE OUR HEARTS TO GOD

SCRIPTURE READING: **Mark 11:15-19**

"[Jesus] taught them, 'Hasn't it been written, My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations? But you've turned it into a hideout for crooks.'"

- Mark 11:17 (CEB)

When I get stressed, I often watch people rescuing animals on *YouTube*. My favorite one is the saving of baby seals by Ocean Conservation Namibia and the saving of sea turtles by Sea Turtle Biologist and The Dodo. I am inspired by these rescue missions. I became obsessed, spending time watching these rescues. One after another. It consumed too much time and turned my heart into "a hideout for crooks" that distracts my heart from being focused on God.

Jesus was indignant when people began selling and buying in the temple. Jesus said, "My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations? But you have turned it into a hideout for crooks." What made Jesus so upset? We make Jesus upset when we turn God's mission into mere charity, feeling ourselves good rather than worshiping and glorifying God.

We disregard God when we choose other things to ease our stress rather than seeking God's presence in prayer. This does not mean that we should not watch any videos. Instead, it means we need to use our time properly for the glory of God. As we begin our Lenten journey, let us re-examine our time spent that does not glorify God. On this Ash Wednesday, Jesus invites us to repent and attune our hearts to God by reminding ourselves that we are dust, and to dust we shall return.

Prayer: *Dear God, please forgive us when we seek other things rather than You. Help us to use our time wisely for your glory. In Jesus' name. Amen.*

Rev. Mi Ja Cho

Pastor, Oxon Hill UMC

Prayer Focus: Time spent with God.

JESUS KNOWS YOUR PAIN

SCRIPTURE READING: **Hebrews 1:1-3a**

“Both the one who makes men holy and those who are made holy are the same family. So, Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers. He says, I will declare your name to my brothers; in the presence of the congregation, I will sing your praises.”

- Hebrews 2: 11-12 (NIV)

Hebrews 2:11-18 illustrates how Jesus Christ knows what it is like to suffer, to feel pain, and to love. He put all his trust and left his life in the hands of God, just like we should. And because he is able to identify with us, we should be able to put our faith in him.

Not only did Jesus Christ fight temptation, but he died for our sins. When we go through trying times, we should be able to go to Him for help. And just because you don't get the answer you like, you shouldn't just drop your faith. For some reason we tend to always remember the "bad" things.

Life is going to be full of ups and downs and you're not going to always get what you want. But everything happens for a reason, and we should try and look at the trying times as a time to learn and grow. And because we go to him for help when things are not going well, we should be able to trust him.

"Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted (Hebrews 2:18)."

Prayer: *Dear Jesus, thank you for helping us when we are tempted.*

Krystle Fernandez

(Adapted from the 2009 OHUMC Lenten Devotional)

Prayer Focus: Someone facing trying times.

WHAT DOES THE LORD REQUIRE OF YOU?

SCRIPTURE READING: **Micah 6:6-8 and Psalm 63:1-4**

“He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you?
To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.”

- Micah 6:8 (NIV)

Micah prophesied that because the Israelites had sinned against God, he would allow the Assyrians and Babylonians to destroy them. However, Micah also provided hope to those who remained faithful to God and prophesied that a messiah, descended from King David, would be sent to Jerusalem to rule over God’s people.

I have wrestled with the question of whether I was doing what God required of me all my life. “The Walk to Emmaus” is a spiritual renewal program developed by the United Methodist Church that seeks to strengthen local churches through the development of Christian disciples. When I participated in the Walk to Emmaus, I finally began to understand what it means to be a true follower of Christ.

James 2:14-17 clarifies what Micah’s prophecy means about justice, mercy, and humility. It reads, “What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to them, go in peace; keep warm and well fed, but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.”

God wants us to emulate Jesus by treating others fairly, being kind and loving to everyone, and acknowledging that everything we are and everything we have comes from God.

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, thank you for teaching us through your Word what it means to serve you. Amen.*

Vivian Sayeh-Weeks

Prayer Focus: People struggling with their faith and discipleship.

THE TRANSFIGURATION

SCRIPTURE READING: **Matthew 17:1-6**

“And He [Jesus] was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became as white as the light.”

- Matthew 17: 1-6 (NKJV)

This has to be a very important passage as it is repeated in Mark 9:2-8 and Luke 9:28-36. I cannot equate or even comprehend this reading with any action I have ever known. It leaves me like it left the Disciples Peter, James and his brother John — “filled with awe.”

Prayer: *Holy and amazing God, I am so glad I know you and have you to lift me and keep me safe and able to turn my problems into opportunities. Thank you! Amen.*

Mickey McKitrick

Prayer Focus: Leaning on God’s power.

HABAKKUK RE-VISITED

SCRIPTURE READING: **Habakkuk 3:1-18**

“I will rejoice in the Lord; I will exult in the God of my salvation.”

- Habakkuk 3:18 (NRSVUE)

This time when I read Habakkuk, it was a totally different experience than it was before. I set aside my quiet time for study, just as I did before. This time it was more a “feeling” that I experienced, as I read and absorbed the scriptures.

I felt as if Habakkuk was speaking directly to me and my life. In my Bible, it’s called “The Prophet’s Prayer.” It begins with fear and trembling, I could relate to that. It ends with joy and triumph. I can relate to that.

The message I received is: it is through faith and trust in God that I can rise above circumstances. Jesus (Salvation) Christ (the Anointed One). God’s actions are all for the salvation and deliverance of His people; that includes me. He’s done it before and can do it again, for me.

Just like the prophet, I have asked “Why?” This time I felt the grace and comfort of God’s Spirit lift some of my burden.

Prayer: *Lord, continue to protect me and guide me in the right direction.*

Adrienne Nesbitt, deceased member

(Adapted from the 2015 OHUMC Lenten Devotional)

Prayer Focus: **Trusting in God’s faithfulness, even when in the deepest valley.**

AS DAVID LEADS US

SCRIPTURE READING: **Psalm 103:1-11**

“Praise the Lord, my soul; all my inmost being, praise His holy name. Praise the Lord, my soul, and forget not all His benefits – who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases.”

- Psalm 103:1-3 (NIV)

God never said we would not have hardships and grief in life or that we should blame our Father for any bad times we have. Just believe in God and hold onto His unchanging hands. Like the Lord, David told us to be compassionate, abound in love, be gracious, and be thankful. The Lord's love covers us from birth to death and beyond.

Over the last three years I have suffered seven deaths of close family and friends. I thank God every day for having had them in my life. I couldn't have lived without them.

David loved and feared the Lord. David would apologize for his inequities, and like David, we should do likewise. God is good always.

Prayer: *Dear Lord, thank you for all you have done for us and given us as we go through life. When we take two steps forward and three steps back, you are with us. When there is a gap, we need to get closer to You. Like David, we need to fear, love, and have a good relationship with You. Thank you for being on this life's journey with us. Amen and Amen.*

Barbara Williams

Prayer Focus: Guidance

PRAY AND BE THANKFUL

SCRIPTURE READING: **1 Thessalonians 5:12-18**

“...Pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.”

- 1 Thessalonians 5:17-18 (NIV)

Until I had my own family, there had been a lot of ups and downs in my life. I thank God that my husband and oldest daughter Krystle are in good health. However, my daughter Katryna and son Kevyn faced multiple health problems growing up. God helped me to carry on during these challenging times.

Here are some examples: Katryna was hospitalized twice. During her second hospitalization, she needed surgery and Nanay Patty Schnirel supported and visited us in the hospital with a smiling face and prayers. Kevyn grew up with severe allergies, and almost died twice in childhood; once when he was eight months old and again when he was five. Prayers helped me through all of this.

In 2020 my mother died, and we weren’t able to go back to the Philippines for the funeral. Five months ago, for the second time, I went through a difficult time in my life. Without the prayers and support of my family, church family, and friends I wouldn’t be here today in good health. Sometimes we just need to be patient in our circumstances, even if they change in the blink of an eye.

Whatever the circumstance, we should always pray for God’s guidance and protection, and be thankful. Thankful for his mercy and grace, thankful for his love, thankful for waking us up in the morning, thankful for a roof over our heads, thankful for food on our table, thankful for his forgiveness, thankful for our families, thankful for the air we breathe, and most of all, thankful for Jesus’ death on the cross for our sins – even though we don’t deserve it.

Prayer: *Father God, thanks for all your blessings. In Jesus’ Name. Amen.*

Julieta Fernandez

Prayer Focus: People experiencing health challenges.

PRAYER

SCRIPTURE READING: **Matthew 6:7-13**

“When you are praying, do not heap up empty phrases, do not try to be like those who do, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.”

- Matthew 6:7-8 (RSV)

I have always struggled with prayer. Not wanting to bother God with (what I consider) petty or trivial things. What right do I have to ask for personal things or for help with dilemmas when there is so much unrest, injustice, and trouble in the world? I have always been in awe of those people who pray so eloquently, quoting scripture, always knowing what to say when my prayers were so juvenile and simplistic.

Over the past few years, I have made a more concerted effort to communicate with God. I realize that God wants a personal relationship with me through His son Jesus. I’ve been trying to communicate by thanking Him for my blessings, praying for others, and sharing my fears and worries with Him. My prayers now reflect me having a “conversation” with God.

As stated in the quoted verse above, Jesus has said that it doesn’t matter if I don’t use eloquent phrases or quote scripture...many times that is just for show. Jesus gave us the guidelines for prayer – the Lord’s Prayer. I often say the Lord’s Prayer many times throughout each day – it calms me, helps me to stay centered, and gives me direction.

How reassuring it is for Jesus to give us this prayer to remind us that we are all equal in God’s sight and to remind us that God knows what we need before we ask Him. Thank you, Jesus, for making me feel loved and valued.

Prayer: *Dear God, thanks for the gift of your Son who shows us the way to you.*

Donna L. Apperson

Prayer Focus: Those struggling with how to pray.

LAID BARE

SCRIPTURE READING: **Psalm 139:1-6, 13-16**

“And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered.”

- Matthew 10:30 (NIV)

Recently I attended my college reunion. I have never been very comfortable in situations where there are lots of people I don't know. I am anxious about coping with my hearing loss, keeping up with conversations so as to not make mistakes. So, arriving on campus carries nostalgia but also anxiety.

A group of us who all lived together on the same floor of the dorm for four years have been pretty faithful about attending reunions. During the pandemic when our regular reunion date was postponed, we would periodically schedule a *Zoom* meeting, just to stay in touch.

So, after I had navigated registration and a walking tour, I made my way to my former roommate's house where I was staying. And the anxiety disappeared. Here was a person who I had known for a very long time, past some of life's largest joys and greatest sorrows. Despite not seeing each other in a while, there was no pretense here. We could be straightforward with each other, share difficulties and hopes for the future, which we did over that weekend, often far into the night.

On a deeper and more basic level, that is how the Lord sees each of us, bare, without pretense, just as we are, as He created us.

Prayer: *Lord, You know each of us completely, more than we know ourselves. You know our strengths and our weaknesses, dreams, and disappointments. There is no need to pretend with You. Help us to better understand ourselves and whatever vision You have for us in this earthly kingdom. Amen.*

Cindy Cobleigh

Prayer Focus: Our all-knowing God

FOLLOWING HIS PURPOSE

SCRIPTURE READING: **Matthew 5:13-16**

“You are the salt of the earth...You are the light of the world...Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.”

- Matthew 13:13, 14, 16 (NIV)

Salt and light are mentioned numerous times in the Bible. The positive uses of salt are for flavoring, healing, preserving, while light lifts spirits and guides us.

Recently, my husband and I flew to Lawton, Oklahoma for our grandson’s boot camp graduation. Before our departure, we attempted to arrange a Lyft ride at Lawton Airport but in frustration opted to call a cab.

On arrival, we went to THE restaurant. We found the Korean proprietors to be kind people and the food was good. They asked how we were going to get to our rental. When we said, “by cab,” she said there was only one cab company, and they weren’t dependable. We called the company but couldn’t get through. Our only alternative was to wait 6 hours for our son to arrive in town or WALK!

They were about to close. I asked Mrs. Kim if they ever gave rides and that we only needed to go 3.8 miles; she affirmed they did and they would!

En route, she shared that they had lived in Atlanta, until seven years ago. They became weary of big-city life and began praying for guidance as to where they should move. Somehow God directed them to Lawton, and they are happy.

They took us to our destination and would not leave until we were safely inside. They were like “the salt of the earth” and they let their light shine.

Prayer: *Dear Father, help us to retain our saltiness and to shed light on YOU.*

Sally Hoffman

Prayer Focus: To glorify God in all circumstances.

PRAY AND GOD WILL HELP YOU

SCRIPTURE READING: **Psalm 69:1-3, 14-18**

“Answer me, Lord, out of the goodness of your love;
in your great mercy turn to me.”

- Psalm 69:16 (NIV)

Do you have any wrong doings? Do you have things that you want God to save you from? Well, I have had an experience when I needed God’s help. The time I needed God’s help was when I broke my wrist. At first the pain wasn’t there, then when they tried to put my wrist back in place, I experienced the worst pain in my life.

That night I prayed for the pain to go down. Over time God helped the pain go down, and now I don’t feel any pain at all. God allowed my wrist to heal properly. If you have broken a bone or are experiencing any pain, if you pray, God will help you.

Prayer: *Dear God, I pray that you help us to worship and love you. Please give us the strength to ask you for help. God, please protect us. Amen*

Amir Smith

Prayer Focus: Never count God out.

LIVE A LIFE THAT REPRESENTS AND PLEASES GOD

SCRIPTURE READING: **1 John 3:1-3**

“Bear ye one another’s burden and so fulfill the laws of Christ.”

- Galatians 6:2 (KJV)

The behavior and actions of a believer’s life should represent the presence of who our loving Father is to us. 1 John 4:19 tells us that we love Him, because He first loved us.

During my recovery from rotator cuff surgery, the pain was always excruciating. At times praying became difficult but in the midst of my pain, I always knew God was near. His love and peace flowed through me like a river and helped to ease my pain. Resting and enjoying God’s peace was an amazing experience that drew me even closer to Him.

As ambassadors of Christ, the lives we live should be an example to others of the Holy Spirit dwelling within us. Our testimonies and praises of His greatness should be our song.

According to Galatians 5:22-23, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control and that against such things there is no law. As God’s children, reading His Word, listening, learning and being obedient are important to adopting the fruit of the Spirit.

Prayer: *Dear God, thanks for Your love that reassures me I am Your child. I want to always be a representative of You by loving others. In Jesus’ name, Amen.*

Roberta Brown Cooper

Prayer Focus: People recovering from major surgery.

UNVEIL MY EYES SO THAT I MAY SEE

SCRIPTURE READING: **2 Corinthians 3:12-18**

“Nevertheless, when it shall turn to the Lord, the veil shall be taken away.

Now the Lord is that Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.

But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.”

- 2 Corinthians 3:16-18 (KJV)

In simple terms this passage tells us that until we give up our sins, we are doomed to be blind to the Glory of the Lord. But how is it possible not to sin?

As humans we are not perfect. We sin every day without meaning to do so. We walk by the homeless without helping them, we fail to love our neighbor because they annoy us, we cheat on our taxes because everyone does. We are imperfect and therefore sin without intent.

Romans 11:26 says that “The veil of unbelief will be lifted, spiritual blindness will be shattered and so all Israel will be saved.” The veil was lifted by the sacrifice made by Jesus Christ. We are no longer veiled to the Glory of the Lord. We are forgiven. Praise be to God.

Prayer: *“Unveil my eyes to see your face – that I might recognize your grace – and all these plans you have for me – use them to set them free.” Amen.*

(Song Lyrics by Anita and Ben Tatlow of Salt of the Sound)

Judy Jackson

Prayer Focus: Through Jesus Christ we are forgiven, and the veil is lifted.

SEEK GOOD, NOT EVIL, THAT YOU MAY LIVE

SCRIPTURE READING: **Amos 5:6-15**

"For I know how many are your offenses and how great your sins. There are those who oppress the innocent and take bribes and deprive the poor of justice in the courts. Therefore the prudent keep quiet in such times, for the times are evil."

- Amos 5:12-13 (NIV)

God used Amos as His messenger/prophet, although Amos was not considered prophet material. He was a shepherd and sycamore-fig farmer, not an educated priest, or religious servant; but was faithful to his calling. He began his prophecy by pronouncing God's judgment upon nations, thereby denouncing the people's injustice, corruption, greed, and false worship – that were running rampant in Israel.

Amos' purpose was to go forth and carry out God's mandate upon northern Israel for their complacency, idolatry, and corruption of the poor. Amos' message to the people was to hate evil and do good because the "Lord's" coming is at hand." I am grateful to know that God is always with us to give us a second, third, fourth, or even fifth chance if we would only seek Him, acknowledge our sins, and ask for forgiveness. Surely, we don't want to be caught up in the "Rapture" and be subject to God's wrath.

Prayer: *Dear God, we thank you for your Bible, Jesus and all the ways you send messages that teach, and breakdown for us, principles on how we should live, and how to treat each other. Please God, teach us how to really love each other. In Jesus' Name, Amen.*

Mary Louise Clark

(Adapted from the 2012 OHUMC Lenten Devotional)

Prayer Focus: Those trying to speak truth to power.

TRUSTING IN GOD

SCRIPTURE READING: **John 11:17-27**

“...and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?”

John 11:26 (NIV)

I was diagnosed with breast cancer in October 2016. Years before that I was experiencing a discharge from my breast, and I asked my doctor if it could be cancer related. After many tests, I was informed that it was because I had an enlarged duct. While performing monthly breast self-examination, I felt a lump and consulted my primary care doctor who sent me for a biopsy. Later, my doctor informed me that I had cancer and referred me to a specialist. I sought a second opinion, but the result was ultimately confirmed. This process took two months. I did not believe it; I was in denial because I had no family history of breast cancer.

I went to two hospitals that I was not comfortable with and ended up at Virginia Hospital Center. The cancer specialist there said I needed to start treatment immediately. This was a life-changing moment for me because I felt that I was too young to die. I began praying for God to heal me without any treatment.

God has a plan for healing everyone differently and our way is not God’s way. That is what makes Him a miraculous God. I began my treatments in 2016. My treatment included chemotherapy, two surgeries, and radiation therapy. I have been in remission since then.

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, I thank you for the unconditional love you show me. I trust you with my life and believe you have healed me completely, in Jesus’ name. Amen.*

Theresa Dixon

Prayer Focus: People waiting on God.

SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

SCRIPTURE READING: **Deuteronomy 6:1-9**

“Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.”

- Deuteronomy 6:4 (NIV)

A scroll is defined as a roll of parchment or paper for writing or painting on. To some this conjures up images of ancient documents perhaps containing mysterious pictures or words of wisdom, knowledge, and understanding written centuries ago.

I keep such a scroll in the nightstand next to my bed. Although it wasn't written centuries ago, it was written longer ago than I care to think, especially since I wrote it. Making a scroll was part of our lesson one Sunday when I was a boy in Sunday School at Congress Heights UMC. We took two little pieces of wood and glued paper between them. On the paper we wrote the Bible verse of the day: “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one” (Deuteronomy 6:4). Then we rolled the little scrolls up and enjoyed unrolling them to read the scripture. We discussed that there is only one God and that we should Love God with all of our heart, soul, and strength.

I have kept this little scroll for many years and, thanks to a caring Sunday School teacher who took the time to impress this scripture on little children, I have kept the commandment to love God in my heart as well.

Prayer: *Dear God, Thank you for your Word and those who impress your commandments on our hearts. May your Word guide us daily and may we have caring hearts to share your Word and love with others. Amen.*

Don Apperson, Jr.

Prayer Focus: Those who take the time to bring God's word to children.

WHEN YOUR FEARS BECOME REALITY

SCRIPTURE READING: **Romans 5:1-8, 10-11**

“Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ...And we boast in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope.”

- Romans 5: 1-4 (NIV)

On March 24, 2023, I met with my Executive Director after a call from Human Resources. I knew what was about to happen but was still hopeful that my fears would not become a reality. My Executive Director informed me that my contract for the next school year was not being renewed. She gave me two options: stay until the end of the school year or leave immediately and get paid for the rest of the school year. I chose the second option. I don't even remember how I got back home that morning because I was leaving a job that I had held for 20 years.

I felt depressed for a few days and then I remembered Romans 5:1-4. I told the Lord that I would trust Him to provide for me. I spent time daily in His word and my faith steadily increased. Sometimes when we face tribulations, God has something better planned for us.

God allowed that “set back” to be my “set up” for my “come back.” Today I am grateful to Him for taking me out of that situation and placing me exactly where He wanted me to be. I am far better off where He has planted me. To Him be all the glory and honor forever!

Prayer: *Lord, help us to trust in you when our greatest fears become reality. Help us to know that you will see us through any storm that arises in our lives.*

Stevenette Sayeh

Prayer focus: People who lost their jobs.

GOOD SOIL

SCRIPTURE READING: **Mark 4:1-20**

“Others, like seed sown on good soil, hear the word, accept it, and produce a crop—some thirty, some sixty, some a hundred times what was sown.”

- Mark 4:20 (NIV)

In this passage Jesus is once again teaching. His method is through parables or storytelling. The farmer or Sower is the servant of God who spreads or shares the Word of God. The seeds he is sowing represent the Word of God.

The Sower sows his seeds into four different kinds of soil. The seeds on the footpath are quickly eaten up by the birds which could be Satan. Therefore, nothing good happens. The second soil is rocky or very shallow, so the seeds just dry up when the sun shines. They have no deep roots to anchor them. The third soil has thorns and weeds, so the seeds soon choke out, again producing nothing. The fourth soil is good. It is rich and fertile, as the Sower (God's servant) has taken time to prepare it for his seeds.

We can compare the different soils to the human heart. The footpath or hardened heart, Satan is in control. The rocky or shallow heart rejects religious feelings altogether. The thorny or weedy hearts could be considered a crowded heart concerned about the worries of daily living and worldly things. Thus, smothering the Word of God. The good heart (or rich and fertile) has been prepared to receive the Word of God and therefore bears fruits. What kind of soil or heart do we have?

Prayer: *Dear God, We thank you for all our blessings. We come to you asking that you prepare our hearts to hear your Word and be like fruitful soil. Amen.*

Dave and Patty Schnirel

(Adapted from the 2012 OHUMC Lenten Devotional)

Prayer Focus: To be doers not just hearers of the Word.

FAITH

SCRIPTURE READING: **Luke 5:17-26**

“When Jesus saw their faith, he said, “Friend, your sins are forgiven.”

- Luke 5:20 (NIV)

There was a group of young men who were raised in a public housing community. On reflection they all agreed it was the safest place they had ever lived. As adults they started their adventures, raising families, joining the military, purchasing their first homes.

During their adult journey of life, they discovered one of the group members had started using drugs. He was the first one to get a great job, to get married and to purchase a house. The group met privately and agreed to help him. They met with his family and agreed to support him in his treatment. Their plan was simple, if he was not at work, with his wife, or sleeping, one of them would be with him.

They naïvely believed their plan would work, after all, they grew up together, and they were best of friends. The plan seemed to be working. The group accompanied their friend to counseling sessions and met with his new circle of friends. Some of the group prayed for their friend, but over time his addiction took control of his life.

The group of friends met each other when they were nine years old. Forty-three years later, their friend had lost everything, his job, his family, and his life.

The journey of life is filled with challenges; the friends often asked one another why only this friend suffered from addiction and not the rest of them.

Prayer: *Loving God, thanks for filling my heart with compassion and wisdom. Shelter me from envy and contempt toward those with whom I disagree. Empty my heart of grievances and teach me to learn what I can control and to leave the rest to you. Amen.*

George Martin

Prayer Focus: People suffering from addiction.

GRACE: A GIFT BEYOND MEASURE

SCRIPTURE READING: **Ephesians 2:1-10**

"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith — and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God — not by works, so that no one can boast."

- Ephesians 2:8-9 (NIV)

Last year was my twenty-fifth-year anniversary of employment at my job. In recognition of that milestone, I was given an award along with a beautiful gift. I thought about the years of hard work and dedication that were put in during that time period. This gift was well deserved.

In the passage we are reminded of the gift of Grace, which is like no other. It is the unmerited favor, an outpouring of God's boundless love, a love that stoops down to rescue us in our brokenness and sinfulness.

Paul reinforces a foundational truth – our salvation is entirely by grace through faith. It is not our own doing; it is a divine gift. Understanding God's grace is similar to realizing the immensity of a gift received without deserving it. It's a pardon extended to the guilty, a second chance given to those who have squandered the first. This underlines the importance of humility, extinguishing any grounds for boasting. No amount of good works can earn this gift; it is freely given by a gracious God.

Prayer: *Precious Father, thank you for your unfathomable love and the transformative power of your grace — a gift beyond measure. Amen.*

Grace Lovelace-Townsend

Prayer Focus: Gratitude for God's gift

DISCIPLESHIP

SCRIPTURE READING: **John 17:11-19**

“I have given them your word, and the world has hated them, because they do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world.”

– John 17:14 (NET)

In this gospel, God truly reminds us how we should stay authentic towards our words and deeds. Sticking to what is true drives away the negativities and more so, it also reflects the importance of being blessed with a God who knows nothing but the truth. In addition, our God is a god of promises, He never leaves a man hanging but rather, He adheres to your purpose and keeps you and your own personal plans. He gives countless graces to those who are true in following and loving Him.

Reverence for life enables us to give respect when it is due. We should allow ourselves to know every truth without holding any hard feelings towards our oppressors. We should keep our word and live a life through prayer. This means we should live a life in accordance with truth because in this manner, we nurture our own souls. We are called to give respect to our own lives and also to those who surround us, and it should matter that we stick to the true core of our being.

Prayer: *Dear God, please give us a generous heart. A heart of flesh that burns within us. A heart always willing to love. A compassionate heart for those who suffer. Amen.*

Adapted from a Devotion of the De La Salle Medical Institute, Philippines

Prayer Focus: For prudence and leading by example.

TRUSTING IN GOD DURING GOOD AND BAD TIMES

SCRIPTURE READING: **Job 14:1-14**

“Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go.”

- Joshua 1:9 (NIV)

Whenever I read the Book of Job, I visualize an image of a man who is spiritually and morally upright but by no means one who is sinless. Job defends his moral integrity but admits being a sinner. The beginning of chapter 14 presents a pessimistic view of man's existence – man is born, man dies.

The writer expresses the insignificance of man's existence and describes life as brief and fragile. He suggests the life of a tree is better than that of man. Man's life, according to the writer, is like that of a flower; it lives a short life and is gone, whereas a tree may fall, but in God's mercy it can sprout new growth.

Job wishes for the grave as a temporary hiding place from God's wrath. He apparently believes that death will end his pain but questions if it will end his existence. This is a dramatic change from his earlier remarks concerning the grave (Job 7:9-10, 10:18-22). Throughout history people have wondered whether this life is all there is. Is there heaven or hell or does it all end here (Job 14: 14)? John 11:23-26, Isaiah 26:19, and Daniel 12:2 answer these questions for all of us.

Prayer: *Our Father and Creator you are always there for me. Through suffering and pain, I will never doubt your love and mercy. Thank you for all you have done, for all you do and all that you will do. Thank you, Father. Amen.*

Earlene V. Anders

(Adapted from the 2013 OHUMC Lenten Devotional)

Prayer Focus: People enduring multiple challenges in life.

TO LOVE UNCONDITIONALLY

SCRIPTURE READING: **Romans 12:1-6**

“Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good...”

- Romans 12:9 (NRSV)

For the Love of God.

When I got the diagnosis of heart failure, I felt devastated. I didn't know what that meant, I didn't know what to do. God has made a way for me to survive and to live well. He has provided me with a supportive family, a wonderful church family, good friends, and a very helpful support group.

I believe that the good luck has been the work of God. I've learned not to question what happens but to be thankful for what I have.

Because of God's love for me, and the love and support that I have received from family and friends since my heart failure diagnosis, I am trying to love others unconditionally. God's abundant love has also taught me to be sincere and loving toward others and freed me from showing disdain to anyone.

Prayer: *Lord, thank you for teaching me how to love. Amen.*

Lynda Bowman

Prayer Focus: Humility and accepting others' long- and short-comings.

FAITH AND HEALING

SCRIPTURE READING: **Mark 10:46-52**

“What do you want me to do for you?’ Jesus asked him. The blind man said, ‘Rabbi, I want to see.’ ‘Go,’ said Jesus, ‘your faith has healed you.’ Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus along the road.”

- Mark 10:51-52 (NIV)

For years the Jews had awaited the promised deliverer of David's line, the leader who would not only restore their freedom, but who would lead them to power and glory. They saw him as the “wonderworker” who would lead the people and perform miracles.

This scripture is about Bartimaeus, a blind beggar at Jericho, healed by Jesus on his final journey to Jerusalem. The story is significant because Bartimaeus addresses Jesus as the son of David, which is the title reserved for the expected Messiah. Upon hearing this, the bystanders are telling Bartimaeus to be quiet, but he cried out even more “Son of David, have mercy on me.” Jesus answers by pinpointing his faith as the real source of his sight, “Your faith has made you whole.”

The one essential for a miracle is “faith.” The way to a miracle is to place one's life in the hands of Jesus Christ, and say, “I know that you can make me what I ought to be.” To Jesus, Bartimaeus was not lost in the crowd in his hour of need, to Jesus, he was all that mattered. Jesus is like that for every one of us.

PRAYER: *Heavenly Father, show us a way to be strong and hold fast to your teachings, help us to continuously have FAITH in you, for through you all things are possible. Your teachings are what we need to live by and be healed. Amen.*

Neville Campbell-Adams, deceased member

(Adapted from the 2012 OHUMC Lenten Devotional)

Prayer Focus: The Blind

LIVING HOPE

SCRIPTURE READING: **1 Peter 1:3-9**

“Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

- Matthew 5:10 (NIV)

In First Peter, the apostle Peter praises God for “in His great mercy, He has given us new birth into a living hope.” When I read this, a phrase popped into my head “bringing hope for you and me.” It took me a little bit to figure out the connection.

One of my favorite hymns is #707, *Hymn of Promise* by Natalie Sleeth. Its rather sing-songy melody enfolds simple but very thought-provoking lyrics:

*In the bulb there is a flower, in the seed, an apple tree;
In cocoons a hidden promise, butterflies will soon be free!
In the cold and snow of winter, there's a spring that waits to be...
There's a song in every silence, seeking word and melody
There's a dawn in every darkness, bringing hope to you and me.
From the past will come the future; what it holds a mystery,
Unrevealed until its season, only God alone can see.*

Regardless of life's difficulties, at the core of our lives in Jesus Christ, there is a “living hope” – not useless or unrealistic but alive – a new beginning, a new dawn, a new season of life, revealed in God's own time.

Prayer: *Gracious and living God, we are most grateful for your gift of hope. In the midst of adversity, when it is difficult to see clearly, You promise us that your blessing will be here today and all the days ahead. Help us use and share that hope to make the world a better place. Amen.*

Cindy Cobleigh

Prayer Focus: Hope is eternal.

THE CALMNESS OF JESUS

SCRIPTURE READING: **1 John 8:3-11**

“They were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing him. But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger.”

- John 8:6 (NIV)

Facing a stressful situation can be challenging to anyone. Oftentimes, it is tempting to get carried away with the situation. We become tense, angry, and emotional, which aggravates the issue at hand.

I want to underscore the calmness that Jesus showed in stressful situations. I imagine the impatient faces of the pharisees and scribes, waiting for Him to fall in their trap. The woman in question must have been very ashamed and frightened. The spectators must have been anticipating the stoning. The tension was high as there was so much at stake.

Then there was Jesus, whose response the crowd awaited. To the crowd’s disappointment, He remained calm, a reaction they least expected. In that highly charged emotional situation that day, Jesus was the only one who had the right to pass judgement. But Jesus did not condemn anyone; His words, when He finally spoke, was like cold water poured on a quickly spreading fire, instantly arresting its damaging potential.

In our everyday lives, tension arises. We get into difficult situations, sometimes of our own making. It is my prayer that our words and actions will also be like the cold water poured on a burning fire of tension, so others may know that we are followers of Jesus. I hope that the Lord’s calmness will always prevail in our lives.

Prayer: *Dear God, help us be calm in every situation. May our calmness be a testament of your great love for us projected onto others with compassion.*

Cecile Innis

Prayer Focus: People suffering from anxiety and fear.

FAITH IN OUR TRIUNE GOD

SCRIPTURE READING: **John 6: 27-40**

“Jesus said to them, ‘Very truly I tell you, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is the bread that comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.’”

- John 6:32-33 (NIV)

The scripture reading, John 6:27-40, is the conversation between Jesus and the crowd after he had fed the 5000 miraculously the previous day. Jesus said to the crowd not to work for the food that spoils but for food that endures into eternal life.

They asked him, “What then we must do to do the works God requires?” Jesus answered them, “The work of God is this: to believe in the one He has sent.” Here, we note that Jesus did not say the works of God, but He said the work of God. God wants us to believe in whom He has sent, Jesus Christ.

Our work is simple and continual, to believe and have faith. No amount of work equates to faith. The smallest faith, like a mustard seed, is powerful enough to move a mountain. God has supplied us with the food we need to sustain our life eternally with the heavenly bread, Jesus who is the Word of God.

Prayer: *Lord, help us to be conscious of doing the work you want us to do, to believe in the one whom you sent, Jesus Christ.*

Bisrat Siyoum & Konjit Yirgashewa

(Adapted from the 2015 OHUMC Lenten Devotional)

Prayer Focus: Jesus, the Bread of Life

NURTURING LOVE AND ETERNAL SECURITY

SCRIPTURE READING: **John 15:1-8**

"I had planted you like a choice vine of sound and reliable stock. How then did you turn against me into a corrupt, wild vine?"

- Jeremiah 2:21 (NIV)

When I was a young teenager, I always admired how my mother practiced the art of accountability to raise and discipline her six young ladies. She was very good at staying calm as she verbally disciplined us. Her criticisms were always to the point as she 'pruned' us. My mother would acknowledge our inherent worth and help us clear away the debris in our lives.

Now that I am a mother, I view my children and their friends as seedlings, and try to practice the same art of child rearing that my mother lovingly used on us. Because children and seedlings have similar fundamental needs, their spiritual lives can be likened to a plant. The children must be rooted in God, and they need watering to thrive in good soil. Mothers nurture their children by providing them with proper nutrients (love and security).

God is like our loving mother, and we are branches in His vineyard. Jesus is our gardener who continuously nourishes our spirit. If we remain faithful to Him, our life will prosper and bear much fruit. If we remain faithful, the hard work we do will result in much more than we ever expected. Without constant care, maintenance, pruning, and watering, our spiritual life will wither up and die. As Jesus said in John 15:5, "...Apart from me, you can do nothing."

Prayer: *Thank you, gracious and loving God for Jesus Christ the True Vine, with his roots eternally grounded in you. We are grateful for your grace, mercy, and love that we have been grafted unto Him to bear much fruit.*

Josephine Orallo

Prayer Focus: All God's children

LOVE WHAT IS GOOD

SCRIPTURE READING: **Titus 1:1-16**

“Since an overseer manages God’s household, he must be blameless—not overbearing, not quick-tempered, not given to drunkenness, not violent, not pursuing dishonest gain. Rather, he must be hospitable, one who loves what is good, who is self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined.”

- Titus 1:7-8 (NIV)

Titus is one of the letters written by Paul to the young pastors of the first century. Titus was on the Island of Crete to take care of some unfinished business and to appoint elders. The people of ancient Crete were a difficult people to govern.

Paul instructs Titus concerning his ministry there. He details how Cretan believers are to participate in their community as good citizens. Paul's letter to Titus stressed that believers' deeds should reflect their faith. An elder must be blameless and have one wife. His children must be believers and not be wild or disobedient. Since he is entrusted with God's work, he should not be overbearing, quick tempered, drunk, violent, or pursuing dishonest gain. He must be hospitable, self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined.

How we relate to others is a clear reflection of our faith and beliefs. How we live in a godless society is as important as what position we hold in a church or corporation. How we overcome disagreements between believers will reflect our understanding of God's grace and forgiveness. This letter to Titus brings home the message that our behavior must be consistent with our beliefs for we have been redeemed to live Godly lives as witnesses to a godless world.

Prayer: *Dear Jesus, help us to be faithful and obedient, as you are faithful and obedient to our Heavenly Father. Amen.*

Jean Basileo

(Adapted from the 2015 OHUMC Lenten Devotional)

Prayer Focus: Faithfulness in Word and Deed

SEARCHING FOR GOD'S LIGHT IN THE DARKNESS

SCRIPTURE READING: **Psalm 88:1-9, 13-14**

"But I cry to you for help, Lord; in the morning my prayer comes before you.

Why, Lord, do you reject me and hide your face from me?"

- Psalm 88:13-14 (NIV)

When problems seem to look so large it looks like there is no way out, know that God is still with us.

When it feels like everything you anticipated or thought you knew is standing on its head, know that God is still holding you in the palm of His hand.

When things seem dark and gloomy, know that God will show you a way forward.

If you feel grief or fear, use the time to pray.

God is always with us even when we feel as if we are in our darkest hours.

Prayer: *Dear God, help us to be grateful in all situations, especially in our hours of darkness. Show us your light and goodness. Teach us to allow your light into our lives, and how to share your light with those around us. Amen.*

Gail Dempsey

Prayer Focus: Know that God is always with us.

EYES OPENED AND A HEART ON FIRE

SCRIPTURE READING: **Luke 24:13-27**

“He said to them, ‘How foolish you are, and slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken.’”

- Luke 24:25 (NIV)

Walking in life with our eyes and heart out of focus is like walking without a true direction to Christ. Surroundings, people, and events can blur our Christ-focused visual acuity and radiating-soul warmth of Jesus Christ.

We are in the presence of Jesus Christ with His actions and words at all times. Why do we fail to acknowledge this existence?

It reminds me of Luke 24, and how the two disciples walking on their way to Emmaus were unaware of whose presence they were in.

Instead, let our hearts burn within us, knowing that Jesus is always walking with us, talking to us, and opening up the scriptures to us.

Prayer: *Lord Jesus open our eyes and heart to your wonders. Your words and actions give us direction to be disciples for your glory. Please help us so that our attitude of honest gratitude will be seen by others as the ultimate gift you gave and paid with your life for all. AMEN*

Cheryl Nageotte-Woods

Prayer Focus: The power and glory of Christ in his death and resurrection.

TEACH US TO PRAY

SCRIPTURE READING: **Luke 11:1-10**

"Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God."

- Philippians 4:6 (NIV)

One of Jesus' disciples asked him to teach them to pray just as John had taught him. So, God said unto them "when you pray, say Our Father..." The Lord's Prayer".

Speaking from personal experience, when I was a child, my parents taught me to pray by kneeling, closing my eyes and to pray for daily bread, forgiveness of sins, lead us not into temptation and deliver us from evil, seek and you shall find, knock and the door will be open unto you for "God answers prayers."

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, we humbly ask that you continue to lead us in the path of righteousness for his name's sake. It is in Jesus' name we pray, Amen.*

Carmen Campbell-Adams

Prayer Focus: Gratitude for all that we have

SIN AND RIGHTEOUSNESS

SCRIPTURE READING: **EZEKIEL 18:1- 4, 25 – 32**

“In you, O Lord, do I take refuge; let me never be put to shame;
in your righteousness deliver me!”

- Psalm 31: 1 (ESV)

In this scripture God reveals through the prophet (Ezekiel) that it is through our own actions, that we die. It is our way of life, in sin, that turns us from God and declares our death. Those who are just, live by God’s way and turn from their sin. For God does not find pleasure in our death (sins), but in our living in Him. It is in His Love and Caring that He sent His Son to abolish our sins and give us everlasting life.

It is in His Son that we find the example of living a just life. In keeping Christ’s company and friendship we become brothers and sister because of Him. We live because of His living, suffering, dying, and rising again, all for our sake.

When we have trouble turning from sin, recognizing sin, and repenting of our sins, we only have to turn to Jesus, to be able turn away from sin, and learn to recognize and to repent of our sins. Then we can rejoice in our living because true peace and true happiness comes from living the just life in Christ.

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, thank you for Jesus, thank you for forgiveness and direction through Him. Help me to seek you in Christ. Help me to live a just life. For it is your grace and your glorious love that I seek. I want to live and live wholly in Christ. In our Savior’s Name. Amen!*

Susan McDonald, deceased member

(Adapted from the 2015 Lenten Devotional)

Prayer Focus: Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness.

FAITH

SCRIPTURE READING: **John 6:60-71**

“Now faith is assurance of things hoped for,
a conviction of things not seen.”

- Hebrews 11: 1 (ASV)

In this life, we are overwhelmed by what we see. Sometimes, we only believe in what we actually witness rather than not. But God has given us the faith, and a strong faith can even move mountains. This faith was the same faith that even our predecessors, who first believed in God, had with them.

The sad thing is that many believers nowadays backslide. To some, disappointments in their church is one of the reasons; to others, the reasons might be because of frustrations in life. But we should not take faith from there, because God has given us a genuine faith that whatever happens in our past, present and future life, that same faith we have keeps us clinging to the Lord our God.

Therefore, we say, nobody can separate us from His unwavering love. Let's keep the faith alive in our hearts and in our minds. There are times when we may lose hope, but our faith in You made us to hold on. We may leave You, but Your eternal love will never leave us.

Prayer: *God, the giver and nurturer of our faith, please help us to discern your will. It is in Jesus' name that we pray. Amen.*

Beatriz U. Concepcion

(Adapted from the 2011 Lenten Devotional)

Prayer Focus: For Faith to Trust in God's Plans for Our Lives

DOING THE LORD'S WORK

SCRIPTURE READING: **2 Corinthians 8:1-3, 8-15**

"And here is my judgment about what is best for you in this matter.

Last year you were the first not only to give but also to have the desire to do so.

Now finish the work, so that your eager willingness to do it may be matched by your completion of it, according to your means. For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what one does not have."

- 2 Corinthians 8:10-13 (NIV)

Living in today's society, it is not hard to become hyper focused on me, myself, and I. Nobody will fault you for making sure that you have all of your needs taken care of when it comes to your life. However, as followers of Christ, we know that we should also be quick to ensure that our neighbors have their needs taken care of as well.

I admit that this is something that I still struggle with myself at times. It is one thing to give aid to one another, but to seek opportunities to help those in need mirrors the life that Jesus lived on earth. In my opinion, one of the best feelings in the world is to receive a heartfelt hug or "thank you" from somebody I helped. Even if my assistance isn't acknowledged, I will still be in good spirits knowing that I did the Lord's work. We should all pursue the opportunity to help others whenever possible.

Prayer: *Dear God, help us find the desire and willingness to spread the blessings you've bestowed upon us amongst our fellow brothers and sisters of the world. Amen.*

KeVaughn Townsend

Prayer Focus: The desire to be others blessings.

SHOWING COMPLETE FAITH

SCRIPTURE READING: **James 2:16, 14-17**

“What if one of you said, ‘Go in peace! Stay warm! Have a nice meal!’?
What good is it if you don't actually give them what their body needs”?
- James 2:16 (CEB)

Do you think you have faith? If so, do you think you show and live out your faith in the things that actually matter in your life? This will vary but do you show your faith within your family? Your community? Your career? Your politics? If so, what would the percentage of showing your faith be in these areas of life? Would it be would it 25%? Maybe 50% or 100%?

In this passage of James, verses 14-17 highlight how faith is not just a prayer or sharing positive intentions through words of affirmation. It may begin like that, it but must be completed with faithful activity. For example, my final semester of college was focused on securing a job or paid internship prior to graduation. I consistently prayed about it. Then I joined a club, worked two non-paying internships at my university, and applied to federal internships and jobs all semester long.

I graduated with no internship or job secured. Even with this uncertainty, I affirmed myself with the saying, “If you pray about it, don’t worry about it.” Long story short, I received an internship offer two weeks later. I prayed about it, believed it, and took actions that reinforced what I prayed for (in faith) and believed throughout the semester and after graduation.

Prayer: *Dear God, help us to be aware of the situations where our faith is lackluster. Please give us the strength and courage to show complete faith from start to finish. Amen.*

Christopher Townsend

Prayer Focus: Steadfast faith in God

FOCUSING ON THE WORD

SCRIPTURE READING: **Luke 10:38-42**

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God,
and the Word was God.” - John 1:1 (NIV)

This scripture reading always has a double effect on me; it both convicts and inspires me. Martha and Mary, the two sisters mentioned in Luke can be seen as early members of the Christian Church’s Laity. Both had faith in Jesus and wanted to serve Him and learn from Him. As members of the Laity, many of us are trying to do everything we can to be followers of Christ and to observe His two greatest commandments: to love God wholeheartedly and to love our neighbors as ourselves.

After the sisters welcomed Jesus to their home, Mary sat at Jesus’ feet listening to his teaching. Martha, on the other hand, was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She went to Jesus and asked, “Lord, don’t you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!” But Jesus replied, “Martha, Martha, you are worried and upset about many things, but few things are needed – or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her.”

As members of the Laity and followers of Christ, we should take the time to meditate on God’s Word. Let us refrain from being so busy that we do not take time to walk and talk with God. Let us try to be still and listen for His still small voice and be guided by Him. Let us always remember to thank God for our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Prayer: *Dear Lord, help us to take time from our busy lives to be still and meditate on your Word. Amen.*

Vivian Sayeh-Weeks

Prayer Focus: Members of the Laity

OUR WONDERFUL GRACIOUS REDEEMER

SCRIPTURE READING: **John 6:27-40**

“Then Jesus declared, ‘I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. But as I told you, you have seen me and still you do not believe. All those the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away.’”

- John 6:35-37 (NIV)

Jesus is instructing the people to focus on the spiritual, not the physical. Previous scripture tells us that some in the crowd who had gone across the lake had asked, "Master when did you get here?" because they knew that He was not with His disciples when they crossed. The people were actually trying to figure out how He got there, not when. They had just witnessed the miracle of the fishes and loaves, yet they still tried to comprehend the mystery of Jesus in physical terms.

Jesus clearly instructed that He is the bread of eternal life, bearing God's seal of approval, doing God's will – still there was lack of understanding.

Imagine if we were part of that crowd. How readily would we understand a stranger's instruction that He is the means to eternal life? How readily do we understand it today? God sends us to Jesus to be saved, but we are called to do our part. We must love the Lord our God with all our heart and soul and strength. We must do the hard work of being obedient. We must continually seek guidance of the Holy Spirit to love and serve as Jesus loved and served.

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, help us be open to the guidance of the Holy Spirit, to have deep faith, and to follow the example of our Savior in all that we do. In Christ's Name, Amen.*

Sandy Vlcek, deceased member

(Adapted from 2013 OHUMC Lenten Devotional)

Prayer Focus: Faith to believe and trust our redeemer's saving grace.

MY SOUL THIRSTS FOR GOD

SCRIPTURE READING: **Psalm 42:1-5**

“As the deer pants for the water brooks, So pants my soul for You, O God.”

Psalm 42:1 (NKJV)

As I lay in the hospital bed for several days with COVID-19, I can relate to the bedridden Psalmist’s lament as the Bible selection notes he was unable to make his annual pilgrimage to Jerusalem. I missed Thanksgiving and Christmas and the funerals of two close friends. My thought was “Woe is me!”

Then toward the end of the passage I was reminded, “...Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my help...” Although I’m still in recovery mode, I would give up completely were it not for my hope in God and the encouragement of family and friends, especially my Church family who continue to pray for us.

Prayer: *Dear merciful and healing God, thank you for the many blessings you have given me on Earth. I am grateful that life doesn’t end here but will continue into eternity.*

Bob McKitrick

Prayer Focus: Counting blessings instead of hardships.

HOLDING THE LORD IN HIGH ESTEEM

SCRIPTURE READING: **Psalm 139**

“I am the Lord your God who teaches you to do what is good,
who leads you in the way you should go.”

- Isaiah 48:17 (NCV)

Society puts a lot of trust in professional people that are experts in their fields. We must remember that God's word is greater than man's word. Jesus is an expert when it comes to matters concerning us.

In the past, specialists gave me statistics and diagnoses, that either did not apply to me, or later changed miraculously.

Psalm 139 tells us that God knows every detail concerning us. It goes on to say that His knowledge is wonderful and too lofty for us to attain. This means that God knows us better than we know ourselves, so now imagine how much more He knows us compared to what others assume.

When the people we hold in high esteem give us a negative report, we need to turn to God, who we hold in higher esteem to turn things around in our life for our good.

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, thanks for reminding me that you designed me and that you are the author of my life. Psalm 139 says that you are familiar with all my ways. Lord, this means that none of my struggles are new to you. Please help me to always remember this no matter what insecurity I face; that peace comes when I give you full control to seize troubles too big for me to handle. Amen.*

Zahara Cherif

Prayer Focus: Those in need of comfort and healing

LIVING A LIFE WITH CONVICTION AND PURPOSE

SCRIPTURE READING: **John 18:1-27**

“The Lord is my light and my salvation – whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life – of whom shall I be afraid?”

- Psalm 27:1 (NIV)

This passage of the Bible foretells the story of Jesus – all the events as told to Him by His Father. Following the last supper with His disciples, Christ prays in the Garden of Gethsemane. He then identifies Himself to His followers, is betrayed by Judas, is judged by His own, is crucified on Mt. Calvary and is buried in a tomb (the passage stops here prior to the resurrection).

As the scripture foretells the events to happen, Jesus faces them straightforward and at one point even asks that Simon Peter not try to defend Him. In John 18:11, Jesus commanded Peter, “Put your sword away! Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?”

In contrast to this, Peter later denies Christ three times out of fear for his own life. The lesson in this for me is to live a brave and forthright life. Live a life with conviction and purpose. Find something good to do as often as possible, hopefully daily, if no more than to pray for people less fortunate than you. None of us will experience the awesome sacrifices of Christ. He gave His life for us. And like Him we should find ways to be positive, not hide from our obligations, and walk in the ways of the Lord. Unlike Peter, we should try not to lie, even during trying times.

Prayer: *Dear Lord, please help me to follow you wholeheartedly and hold on to your hand. Amen.*

Barbara Williams

(Adapted from 2010 OHUMC Lenten Devotional)

Prayer Focus: People living in fear.

SURVIVING DIFFICULT PERIODS IN LIFE

SCRIPTURE READING: **Jeremiah 10:11-24**

“The shepherds are senseless and do not inquire of the Lord; so they do not prosper and all their flock is scattered.”

- Jeremiah 10:21 (NIV)

Jeremiah is the prophet for us when we find ourselves having to live through difficult times and want some trustworthy help in knowing what to think, how to pray, and how to carry on. Jeremiah's troubled life spanned one of the most troublesome periods in Hebrew history, the decades leading up to the fall of Jerusalem, followed by the Babylonian exile.

What happens when everything you believe in and live by is smashed to bits by circumstances? When it happens, does catastrophe work to reform our lives to conform to who God actually is and not the way we imagined or wished Him to be? Does it lead to an abandonment of God? Or worse, does it trigger a stubborn grasping of the old collapsed system of belief, holding on for dear life to an illusion?

Jeremiah exhorts Jerusalem to turn away from their false idols and turn back to the one true God. The leaders failed to seek God's counsel or follow His commandments, and the people were scattered all over. We need spiritual resources to get through the dark days. As disciples of Jesus, we must exercise a patient endurance during dark days. This means exercising control over our intellectual life, remaining calm, and exercising wisdom and good judgment. To achieve this, we must pray continually, participate in worship, and read and study the Bible daily.

Prayer: *O God, we pray that in life's dark days we may have the light of your wisdom and the warmth of your love to guide and bless us. Amen.*

Al Elmond, deceased member

(Adapted from 2013 OHUMC Lenten Devotional)

Prayer Focus: Refugees and the homeless

ON ONE ACCORD

SCRIPTURE READING: **Philippians 2:1-11**

“Complete my joy by thinking the same way, having the same love, being united, and agreeing with each other.”

- Philippians 2:2 (CEB)

For a while now, I have been dealing with some physical issues. For the last few months, I’ve been unable to physically attend church in person and do some church duties. I started to worry about how these things could be done when I knew I couldn’t be there. Then I heard God say, “you have not, because you asked not.” So, I sent an email to some ladies asking for help with preparing and setting up communion, changing the altar paraments, watering poinsettias, removing Christmas decorations, flowers, and more.

In this Scripture reading Paul wrote of unity in the body, humility, love, and standing strong in the Lord. These things represented Christ’s attitude. Well, let me say, these ladies came together and worked in one accord with one mind and purpose, in unity to do what was necessary. Thank you, Lord. I so appreciate these women of God.

Thank you with all of my heart, Mary C., Sally H., Grace T., Barbara W., Cindy C., Cheryl W., Jackie M., Carmen C-A., and any others. They came together and became the hands and feet of Christ to work in unity and love with an attitude of Christ.

Prayer: *Dear Lord, help us to have an attitude of Christ. Teach us to be tender hearted and compassionate; loving to one another; how to work together with one mind and purpose as one body in Christ, in Jesus’ name we pray. Amen*

Barbara Hale-Johnson

Prayer Focus: Attitude of Christ

GROWING OLD ... OR NOT

SCRIPTURE READING: **John 21:15-19**

“Very truly I tell you, when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go.” - John 21:18 (NIV)

Dr. Martin Luther King ‘s last message 56 years ago on April 3rd still causes the few hairs on my head to “stand up” when I hear it. He reminded us that “Like anybody, I would like to live a long life – longevity has its place. But I’m not concerned about that now. I just want to do God’s will.”

MLK wanted to “feed” God’s sheep – his people, which Jesus instructed Simon Peter to do – and his lamb Jesus Christ, who like him died an even more tragic and violent death at a young age (both under 40). This feeding was teaching, encouraging, edifying, and exhorting us to be obedient and follow God’s Word.

Like Simon Peter, Dr. King’s martyrdom, as distinct from a natural death, was a special reference to Jesus’ crucifixion (see John 21:19). It should be a concern of everyone, no matter what death one dies, to glorify God in it, for what is our chief end but this, to die to the Lord, at the word of the Lord.

A lot of us at OHUMC are growing older, becoming physically more like babies. Many others do not have that privilege and leave early, like “Jesus, Martin, and John.” Whatever our fate, we should show love to one another while on this earth, strive to do good, and walk in the path that Jesus has cleared for us.

Prayer: *Dear God, please give me strength and courage to follow Jesus, no matter what comes my way.*

Vito Weeks

Prayer Focus: Those who had loved ones snatched away at an early age.

God is Good

May your struggles keep you near the cross
And may your troubles show that you need God
And may your battles end the way they should
And may your bad days prove that God is good
And may your whole life prove that God is good

See, may your struggles keep you near the cross
And may your troubles show that you need God
And may your battles end the way they should
And may your bad days prove that God is good
See, may your whole life prove that God is good

See may your struggles keep you near the cross
And may your troubles show that you need God
And may your battles end the way they should
And may your bad days prove that God is good
See, let your whole life prove that God is good

Thank you all so much for coming out

May your bad days prove that God is good
May your whole life prove that God is good
See, may your bad days prove that God is good
(c'mon)

May your whole life (yeah) prove that

God is good

- Song and Lyrics by Jonathan McReynolds

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-f9uGdJYPeA>



A BIT ABOUT SOME OF OUR CONTRIBUTORS



Rev. Mija Cho (p.1) has been Pastor at OHUMC since 2020. She is working on a doctorate in a dual program at Wesley Theological Seminary and Cambridge University.



Don Apperson, Jr. (p.16) chairs SPRC and is active in various Church ministries. A retired Navy engineer, Don is also an avid Nationals fan.



Julie Fernandez (p.7), a proud grandmother and cancer survivor, is OHUMC's Financial Secretary. Originally from the Philippines, she loves people and cooking.



Amir Smith (p.11), our youngest writer, is a 7th grader. He enjoys baseball, video games and playing with his younger brother.



Sally Hoffman (p.10), an avid gardener, has been a member of OHUMC since the 1970's. She is an unapologetic advocate for right.



Josie Orallo (p.28) works in healthcare, and is blessed with two children: Joanna and Jojo. Her motto: take a deep breath; it always calms your mind, heart & spirit.



George Martin (p.19), recently attended the 50th reunion of his navy warship. A boy scout leader, he's also active in the OHUMC bread ministry.



Adrienne Nesbitt (p.5) served as treasurer of OHUMC for 10 years and in various other capacities. She died in 2022 at 82 and gave a generous gift to the Church in her Will.