Daily Guideposts 2022
A Spirit-Lifting Devotional
Dear friend,

We welcome you with joy to a new volume of *Daily Guideposts 2022*, the daily devotional book that has become a touchstone for so many on their faith journey. If this is your first time reading *Daily Guideposts*, welcome. We’re so glad to have you! And if you’re a longtime, devoted reader, welcome back! This volume is filled with more of the heartfelt, inspiring devotions you have come to know and love.

The theme for this year's book is “The Lord Is Near” based on Psalm 145:18: “The Lord is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth” (NIV). Within, our forty-eight writers show how, amidst the brokenness of this world, they experienced God's ongoing redemption and miraculous love, as they called upon Him daily and found Him so very near.

In Psalm 145, David tells us the Lord is “filled with unfailing love,” that He “always keeps his promises,” and that He “helps the fallen” (NLT). These words were a balm to us and our writers this year as we walked faithfully with God, called upon Him, and drew near to His heart.

For some writers, it was a year of letting go, saying goodbye, or experiencing loss. Others enjoyed new blessings and gifts, forgiveness and reconciliation, joy and laughter. Yet all share stories of rejoicing in every circumstance, as they saw God’s nearness and faithfulness, His hand guiding, blessing, delighting, and comforting them.

Pablo Diaz tells of moving from New York to Florida and how God’s plan was evident throughout that journey; Erika Bentsen delights us with an endearing story about friendship that happens to include a lot of s’mores; Vicki Kuyper reflects on how God’s unconditional love guides her in life, especially in being a grandmother; Sabra Ciancanelli shares an unlikely and beautiful story about being comforted in her grief by a goose; God uses something as simple as laundry to help Ashley Kappel experience and teach gratitude to her daughter; Jon Sweeney is surprised by a reminder of God’s hope when he gets a second bag of chips with his lunch; Julia Attaway experiences the power of prayer and hope of God’s love as she prays for family friends; and Rick Hamlin tells us how he can sing the Lord’s praises after his mother’s passing, among many more stories.

This year, we are pleased to welcome three new writers, Jerusha Agen, Jenny Keller, and Shirley Raye Raymond. And we are filled with
gratitude as we say a fond farewell to beloved writer Elizabeth Sherrill, who is retiring from *Daily Guideposts* after many years as a contributor. She will be missed! While Sharon Foster and Bill Giovannetti are not featured in this year’s book, we hope to welcome them back next year.

This volume has six special series for you to enjoy. Stephanie Thompson takes you along as she learns and experiences more about prayer than she thought possible in “Praying Together.” Ginger Rue shares humorous and delightful stories—and spiritual lessons—in a series about her dog, Cookie. Debbie Macomber reflects on the many times she has seen God’s fingerprints on her life, evidence of His goodness and provision. From a convent in Italy to a small church in Massachusetts to a pristine lake in New Hampshire, Gail Thorell Schilling will take you on a tour of many “Sacred Spaces” where she has experienced God’s presence. Carol Knapp uses her gifts and passion for the Bible as she plumbs Scripture for her series “Wisdom’s Delights.” Logan Eliasen will spend Holy Week with us as he travels to a friend’s wedding. And Lynne Hartke remembers Christmases past and present in her Advent series.

Wherever you find yourself in your faith walk, we’re so glad you’re here, ready to embark on a journey of drawing closer to God’s goodness, mercy, and love. We pray God’s richest blessings upon you this year as you call upon Him, knowing He’ll be near in every moment.

Faithfully yours,
Editors of Guideposts

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**A Special Message for Daily Guideposts Readers**

We would like to share some news with you, our loyal readers. After much soul searching and conversations with many of you, we have decided to change the title of this devotional to *Walking in Grace*, beginning with the 2023 edition. We hope you like the new name! We believe this change will help us bring these messages of hope and encouragement to even more people. Everything else will remain the same. You’ll hear from the same wonderful writers who share stories of their faith journeys. *Walking in Grace 2023* is already in the early stages of development, and it promises to bring you all of what you have come to expect from America’s favorite devotional.
New Year’s Day, Saturday, January 1

PRAYING TOGETHER: New Year, New Revelation

See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland.
—Isaiah 43:19 (NIV)

New Year’s Day, 8:00 a.m.—my favorite morning of the year. With my husband and teenage daughter still sleeping, I have a rare moment to myself. Sitting in the stillness of my home office, I hold a steaming cup. I savor the opportunity to reflect on the year behind me and the one ahead.

I’m a goal-setter, so making resolutions is something I relish. As I do each year, I methodically make my list: lose weight, exercise daily, write a novel, have a consistent quiet time, clean every room in our house of clutter. I love setting goals! New beginnings hold such promise.

Pleased with my New Year’s list, I turn to last year’s resolutions to see how I fared: lose twenty pounds (accomplished by summer’s end, before regaining ten over the holidays); exercise three to four times a week (success); awaken a half-hour earlier to pray (ugh, such a fail); write a novel (worked on it for a week, then abandoned it); deep-clean every room (does thinking about it each day count?).

I flipped the pages two years back. You guessed it—the list of changes I’d planned to implement into my life looked pretty much the same. I checked resolutions from previous years. Even five years ago, it was the same! I’ve been setting identical goals over and over again, only to watch them fade into the winter gloom.

Like a champagne cork popping across the room, it hit me. I might like making resolutions, but I don’t like keeping them!

Lord, I want this year to be different. Help me to find the new beginning I crave by setting resolutions that I’ll actually keep.
—Stephanie Thompson

Digging Deeper: Job 8:7; Proverbs 16:1–9; Jeremiah 29:11
PRAYING TOGETHER: Only One Resolution

One thing I ask from the LORD, this only do I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze on the beauty of the LORD and to seek him in his temple. —Psalm 27:4 (NIV)

Irritation bubbled up that New Year’s Day when I discovered that my beloved resolution-making activity had been a sham for all these years. I was still cogitating about my resolutions when my family and I walked into church the next day. After we found seats, I saw the sermon topic: resolutions. Great, I thought. Another reminder of how I’ve fallen short.

Our pastor confided that he liked making New Year’s resolutions too. I sat forward in my chair. He paced away from the pulpit and shared his secret: Instead of making a list of them like I did, he made only one resolution a year. He’d done this for the past twenty-five years. His one-resolution-a-year habit had therefore grown into an arsenal of twenty-five life changes because he had concentrated on adding only one new behavior at a time.

He then divulged the most important resolution he’d ever made—his first, in fact—which was now a lifelong habit: praying with his spouse.

Out of the corner of my eye, I peeked at my husband sitting on the other side of our daughter. We’d been married seventeen years. We prayed before meals, but I think Pastor was talking about something more meaningful.

Michael traveled for work. Our schedules were different. These days, we passed like two ships in the night. But more than that, I didn’t know if Michael would want to commit to a daily prayer time with me.

An unmistakable flutter inside my chest confirmed that I needed to pursue this. But would Michael agree? Would he help me make and keep this one resolution?

Lord, give me courage to ask a question that might result in a no. Prepare Michael’s heart if this is to be.

—Stephanie Thompson

Digging Deeper: Luke 10:4–42; Philippians 3:12–14

DAILY GUIDEPOSTS 3
Monday, January 3

*I have given you an example to follow: do as I have done to you.*
—John 13:15 (TLB)

Every morning I walk across the street to our huge neighborhood pool where I swim alone for twenty-five minutes before joining the water aerobics class. I love that I get to exercise for a total of about two hours every morning and chat with my women friends. Before I leave the house, I have to remember five things: my towel, my key to the pool gate, my water shoes, my sun hat, and my sunglasses. Five things. I’d forget one or two if I wasn’t in the habit of asking myself, “Do you have the five things?” before I walk out the door.

Same thing goes for church. I need four things for that: my reading glasses, my church contribution envelope, a small notebook, and a pen in my purse, just in case the priest says something during the homily that I specifically want to remember and ponder later.

Every week, when I run down my list of things to remember to take out the door, either to the pool or to church, I also try to remember to prepare my heart. I tell myself, “No gossiping at the pool. Be nice to that woman who talks too loud and interrupts the class with her loud laughing.” At church I have to remind myself to stop thinking about what so-and-so is wearing and stop fuming over the fact that the air-conditioning is too cold again.

The older I get, the more lists and reminders become a part of my life. But the best lists are the ones that keep me squared away with Jesus, whether I’m in church or at the pool or anywhere else.

*Jesus, bless all those I come in contact with and help me bless them by being as much like You as I can muster today.*
—Patricia Lorenz

*Digging Deeper: Galatians 5:22–24; 2 Thessalonians 3:11–16*
Tuesday, January 4

WISDOM’S DELIGHTS: Wisdom of Knowing Jesus

All things have been handed over to Me by My Father, and no one knows who the Son is except the Father, and who the Father is except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal Him. —Luke 10:22 (NASB)

Letters and words are lifelong friends. But numbers have always been something of a mystery. Over a period of months after seeing the number 22 appear again and again, I finally wondered if I should be paying attention. What a surprise during prayer to receive a nudge to look at Bible verses numbering 22! In my Scripture reading, I began noting these verses—excited for how God would speak His wisdom and truth to me through them.

Luke 10:22 follows a spontaneous exclamation of joy from Jesus. He has sent seventy of His followers ahead to the towns He plans to visit to prepare the people for His coming. To tell them, “The kingdom of God has come near you.” (v. 9) They return thrilled with their success.

Jesus praises His heavenly Father that it is not the “wise and intelligent” (v. 21) who are willing to believe He is sent from God—but humble folk who would not be considered worthy of recognition by those in positions of authority in that day.

Then comes the breathtaking affirmation that only Jesus knows the Father—and that He is willing to make Him known among human-kind. My heart leaps. God is knowable through the life of Jesus. So I feel a hunger to read what the Bible says about Him—every word and action, every assurance, every promise—and to make them my own. Because they are for me. And for all who believe.

Jesus, the greatest wisdom I can desire is intimacy with God through You.

—Carol Knapp

Digging Deeper: John 17:3, 26; Ephesians 1:17, 3:19; Colossians 1:15
Wednesday, January 5

And call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me. —Psalm 50:15 (KJV)

Years ago, right out of college, I met a woman who told me she had lost everything in a house fire. Not one belonging was spared. Thankfully, she lived alone, didn't have pets, and wasn't home at the time. She leaned in and confided, “I was devastated, but now I can honestly say it was the best thing that ever happened to me.” At the time, I was struggling to find a job, and this woman, a friend of a friend, a stranger, had given me the wisdom of her experience.

Fast forward to last week, when my husband was laid off. I went for a walk, looking for any silver lining to grasp onto, and this woman and her story came back to me.

“At the time I felt so lost,” I remembered the woman say, “But you have no idea how freeing it is to start over. It’s a gift. Starting over is always a gift.”

So now, as my husband and I go through the process of letting go of what we had and embracing our current situation, I hold onto the trust that in every bit of difficult news, there is a chance, as hard as it might seem, to rethink it as an opportunity—a chance for something new.

Dear Lord, help me to take upsetting news in stride, to be thankful for life’s thorns and storms, hoping that one day I may look back and see them as blessings in disguise.

—Sabra Ciancanelli

Digging Deeper: Psalm 86:7; Isaiah 40:29; 2 Corinthians 12:9
Feast of the Epiphany, Thursday, January 6

*Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty.* —Revelation 4:8 (NIV)

By the time Epiphany rolls around, my Christmas spirit is usually on the wane. I’ve been looking with anticipation to the nativity for more than a month already, starting on that first Sunday of Advent. By now, Christ has been born in a manger. The shepherds have kept their watch. There have been many silent nights. And the tree needles are all over the floor.

Today is the day we celebrate the arrival of wise men from the east who came to see for themselves if the promise of a Messiah had come true.

It reminds me of my old neighbor Bill. Bill had been raised a deer hunter by his father, and went hunting every season for more than a half century, until one quiet early dawn when, sitting in his blind up in an oak tree, Bill was stunned to see a magnificent elk stroll into the clearing. Bill didn’t have an elk-hunting license, but it wouldn’t have mattered. He told me that he couldn’t have pulled the trigger anyway. He was awed down to his wool socks. And he never hunted anything again.

This Epiphany (the word means “revelation”) I am going to follow Bill’s lead and look past the tree—whose needles are falling—to focus on the crib, where the Lord brings me to silent awe.

*Jesus—Friend, Lord, Teacher, Savior—I wonder at what You’ve done for me!*  
—Jon M. Sweeney

*Digging Deeper:* Psalm 33:8; Revelation 4:1–3
Friday, January 7

Because of the LORD’s great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.
—Lamentations 3:22–23 (NIV)

More than thirty years ago, as I prepared to be a bride, my friend Darlene and I had a complicated falling-out. The cause of the argument has become hazy over the years, but our friendship came to a sudden stop. I replaced her as my maid of honor and severed all ties. But I never stopped thinking about her and wondering if we would ever reconcile.

We had a few mutual friends, and over the years, I would ask them how she was doing and whether she was happy. Despite our departure from each other, I wanted the best for her. About a decade later, when I moved to a town not far from where she was living, I saw a mention in the local newspaper about her nephew and instinctively dialed her phone number from memory. I hoped she wouldn’t answer, but she did. We traded semi-awkward pleasantries, spoke politely, and then went our separate ways again. While I wanted to reconnect, I didn’t have the courage to make the suggestion.

Later I learned that her mother passed away. I immediately recalled that when my mother had died—years before my wedding—Darlene was one of the first people to just sit with me and let me cry. I’d never forgotten that gesture and knew that I wanted to offer some sort of solace to her as well.

At her mother’s wake, we shared a strong embrace. It had been thirty years since we had seen each other, and so much had changed. But it seemed like a perfect time to make things new again.

Lord, I thank You for the ability to begin again. Your mercy and grace are never-ending, and I am forever grateful.
—Gayle T. Williams

Digging Deeper: Isaiah 43:18–19; 2 Corinthians 5:17
Saturday, January 8

Behold, I will do a new thing… —Isaiah 43:19 (KJV)

We live in an old wooden two-story house built in 1845 on the highest hill in Macon, Georgia. From the vista of our front porch, much of the saga of American history has been glimpsed by families whose names now recede in time. For the past twelve years, we have enjoyed sharing in this evolving story.

Several weeks ago I uncovered a treasure in the backyard. It is a buried trove of old, hand-shaped, red clay bricks formed by long-forgotten craftsmen and masons. Over time, I unearthed two hundred bricks and have washed and stacked them. Now I am deciding how to preserve and use them.

I admit I am a bit crazy to be so excited about old bricks that are bruised and chipped. But there is something about the quest to discover and preserve lost relics, images, and stories that fascinates me. I have intuited that God is also delighted to find “old bricks,” like many of us are, and restore us to useful purpose. We may be cracked and chipped and stained by the chapters of life, but our usefulness and character may be just beginning. God can restore purpose for our present day in every season of our life.

Dear God, throughout my life, use me to accomplish and fulfill Your purposes. Amen.

—Scott Walker

Digging Deeper: Job 12:12; Psalm 92:2–14; Proverbs 16:31
Sunday, January 9

SACRED SPACES: Chiavari, Italy

So, what shall I do? . . . I will sing with my spirit, but I will also sing with my understanding. —1 Corinthians 14:15 (NIV)

The heavy front door at Casa Rosmini, the convent bed-and-breakfast where I am staying in Chiavari, Italy, doesn’t budge.

“Bottone nero!” pipes the tiny nun in the reception.

Ah, the black button! I press it, and the door glides open. The dear lady grins and bobs in acknowledgment. For two days now, the Sisters and I have managed to communicate in my meager Italian and their equally limited English. Mercifully, their hospitality and loving smiles convey more than words. But this morning, I overslept for the service in the convent’s chapel. As I hurry to the Basilica Cattedrale de Nostra Signora dell’Orto (Cathedral of Our Lady of the Garden), just down the street, I look forward to the familiar rites.

My eyes adapt to the dim interior of the cavernous church, its Baroque sanctuary extravagantly encrusted in gold and hung with paintings. In the sparse congregation, no one speaks or looks at me. The service begins, but even with a program I cannot follow it. The melodic Italian language is incomprehensible. In what should be my inclusive faith community, I feel like a stranger.

Suddenly, the organ swells. The “Celtic Alleluia”! I learned it years ago in Wyoming. As I join in the singing, the melody evokes other Christian communities where I’ve sung it: in Boston, in New Hampshire, in France. And now in Italy. No longer a stranger, I feel drawn into the sacredness of this place, this community of believers. Both here and at the convent, though our languages differ, our spirits are one.

Lord of All, how beautifully You connect me to my brothers and sisters in Christ.

—Gail Thorell Schilling

Digging Deeper: Psalm 117; Matthew 18:20; Ephesians 4:4–6
Monday, January 10

They were longing for a better country—a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.
—Hebrews 11:16 (NIV)

I am not a native New Yorker, but I consider the city my home. I came here from Michigan via graduate school in New Haven, Connecticut. I was born in Havertown, Pennsylvania, and have lived in New Mexico and New Jersey. Still, I’ve lived in New York longer than all those places put together. So yes, I consider myself a New Yorker.

My first winter here saw the blizzard of ’83, when the city ground to a halt under nearly twenty inches of snow. I was here for the Wall Street crash of ’87 and another devastating blizzard in ’96. I was here on September 11, 2001, when terrorists struck the World Trade Center, and in August 2003, when a massive blackout left most of Manhattan, including our Chelsea neighborhood, without power for several steamy days. I remember the city reeling after the Great Recession hit in 2008 and the flooding after Superstorm Sandy in 2012, just as the economy was coming back.

“Boy, you guys really go through it,” my sister back in Michigan recently said, the subtext being, “Boy, you are really crazy to live there.” Not at all. I wouldn’t live anywhere else, though I admit New York isn’t for everyone.

Through all those crises, New Yorkers prayed. We may not be part of the Bible Belt, but there are over two thousand churches within our city limits, plus mosques, synagogues, temples, and hundreds of daily twelve-step meetings.

New York is, at heart, a praying place, populated by people of faith who put our city in God’s hands through thick and thin. Maybe that’s why I love it here. We are a city of God.

Lord, thank You for watching over our beautiful city and over people like me who have come to call it home.
—Edward Grinnan

Digging Deeper: 2 Timothy 4:16–18; Revelation 21:1–4
Tuesday, January 11

Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. —Philippians 2:3 (ESV)

I was walking up to the grocery store when I saw a woman at the entrance struggling to get her walker over the curb. As she struggled, I paused. I wanted to help her, but I hesitated.

Would I be intruding on her personal space? What if my help made her uncomfortable, as she wanted the dignity of doing it herself? What if she had a friend or family member close by, already ready to help her out?

In the thirty seconds that I stood there thinking, hesitating, another woman came up behind her and said, “My name is Maria. Let me help you.” She grabbed the woman’s bags, helped her up the curb, and walked next to her into the store.

For the next half hour as I shopped, I saw Maria. Maria selflessly walked through the entire store with the woman—walking slowly, helping her grab cans from shelves and pick the perfect peaches. Maria never left her side.

I have no idea what Maria’s plans were for that day, but I do know that she gave them up to help the woman who needed help. Immediately, without hesitating.

I had paused. And if I am honest with myself, even if I had jumped in to help the woman over the curb, I probably would have helped her up and then moved on to finish my shopping. I don’t think I would have stayed with her the entire shopping trip.

But Maria did.

And I hope that next time, I will be like Maria.

Jesus, give me the humility and patience to jump in to help anytime someone needs help. Help me not to pause, not to hesitate, but instead to be Your hands and feet.

—Erin MacPherson

Digging Deeper: 2 Corinthians 9:8; Philippians 2:5–8
Wednesday, January 12

For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me. —Matthew 25:35 (ESV)

Look, Mom! A chickadee!” my daughter called, pointing to the bird feeder outside our window. We’d been enjoying learning about the feeder’s many visitors. In particular, we’d wondered how such diminutive creatures could weather central Alaska’s long, frigid winters. From our bird book, we discovered that, to stay warm, chickadees sometimes burn through as much as ten percent of their body’s fat reserves in one night! The following day—if enough food is available—they pack on the same amount of fat in preparation for the next night.

Knowing this, we’d been diligent about making sure our feeder never ran out of seeds. It felt good helping God feed His “birds of the air.”

But this morning, as I watched the birds flit between the feeder and the snow-covered spruce trees, my thoughts turned to those humans left outside, without shelter, food, or safety. To the world’s refugees—of whom Jesus had been one—fleeing violence. The homeless. The marginalized. The trafficked, lost, and abused. There was so much desperate need in the world.

What could I possibly do to make a difference?

But I looked again at the chickadees on our feeder, whose coming night would be easier, thanks to the seeds we put out. God is aware I cannot fix the world. Yet His call to action remains: “Share your bread with the hungry, shelter the oppressed and the homeless, clothe the naked when you see them.”

In the face of staggering odds, He compels me to be moved, to do something. To act.

Lord, I understand now that by focusing on my feelings of being overwhelmed, I’ve been focusing on myself. Help me see others’ needs as I believe You do—personally, individually, and with an open heart.

—Erin Janoso

Thursday, January 13

The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.
—Matthew 9:37–38 (NRSV)

I was teaching a class titled Writing to God when one student asked, “What do you think heaven is like?” It led to quite a discussion. It’s an important question for Christians who are as focused on reaching the Lord in the next world as on doing His work in this one.

I had to think about my own answer. When envisioning the Lord, I usually perceive a great, mighty light. But how do I see heaven? At that moment, He gave me a glimpse. I gazed at the women in the class, all my age or older, all worn with their own cares and the world’s sorrows and everything else that made them seek out a class on writing to the Father. In the eyes of one woman, who often smiled even as she dedicated her life to a church outreach ministry while struggling to pay her bills, I saw heaven. I also saw heaven in the worry lines of another woman’s forehead as she prepared to make a ten-hour drive in the middle of winter to visit a sick friend. I saw heaven in the determined optimism of a third woman who was single and had found the courage to move into an assisted-living facility.

I realized in that God-given moment that “seeing” heaven, at least from here on earth, may be simply seeing others the way He sees us: broken, struggling, hopeful, challenged—and beautiful.

Father, when earth seems so far from heaven, let me see it and all who are in it with Your eyes.
—Marci Alborghetti

Digging Deeper: Psalm 84; John 3:31
Every January, when the Daily Guideposts submission deadline is announced, I go into a panic. This year’s deadline was April 3, when my students are writing longer pieces, my grammar students are struggling, and my midsemester grades are due. In addition, my daughter Charlotte was getting married in February.

“This deadline’s scary,” I told my editor, and she obligingly, unexpectedly extended it to after finals. What a blessing!

In March, though, as always, ideas for devotionals started flinging themselves at me. Soon after Charlotte’s wedding, I had several drafted. Apparently, the habit of writing about God’s work in my life in March is so securely embedded in my brain that I can’t not write about it.

That’s the way of habits. They’re unconscious. Our bodies just do them.

As a sufferer of PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder), I’m habitually triggered on the anniversary of an assault I suffered one December in grad school. End-of-semester activities, Christmas carols, and scents of pine and cinnamon tell my body it’s that time of year, and suddenly I’m struggling. My therapist once said my body’s instinctive reactions to the attack—such as playing possum during the attack and being unable to remember key parts afterward—had protected me. It occurred to me that my Christmastime triggers caused me to operate that way too. And once I became aware of that, my triggers became reminders to grieve my losses and to celebrate and praise God for my survival.

Likewise, the unconscious habit of my mind to write about God in March, during my most stressful time of year, is evidence of God’s presence in my life. He created me—indeed, He created all of us—to be creatures of habit. Just as spring follows winter, year upon year, God ensures that I will return, despite everything, to Him.

Thank You, God, for the evidence of Your abiding presence in me.

—Patty Kirk

Digging Deeper: Psalm 13, 40

Friday, January 14

For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. —Psalm 139:13–14 (NIV)
Saturday, January 15

BLESS ED BY ONE SWEET COOKIE: Closer Encounters

So then let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding.
—Romans 14:19 (ESV)

The other day during her walk, my dog, Cookie, raised her hackles and barked fiercely at a scary presence. “What is it, girl?” I asked, then turned to see that Cookie was protecting me from... my neighbor’s leaf blower. He’d left it sitting on his lawn. I couldn’t convince Cookie that the leaf blower was harmless until I took her over for a closer look.

Upon inspection, Cookie realized she could let her guard down and relax. When my neighbor came back and I explained what we were doing, he joked that I should teach Cookie how to use the machine and thus put her energy to good use!

I walked along, chuckling at my silly pup, but then I thought again about an incident that had been bothering me for days. A woman had taken offense at a comment I’d made and had upbraided me in front of a large group of people. I’d certainly meant no offense and had thought I was just making a lighthearted joke, but she had seen it differently. I asked a friend who’d witnessed the incident if I’d been out of line. “No,” my friend replied. “Her response was sharp and rude.” Other witnesses agreed that the lady was “just that way.” And yet I couldn’t put it out of my mind.

Cookie had gotten up close and seen things differently; maybe I could too. I thought the circumstances in this woman’s life had left her bitter. Maybe she stayed on guard to protect herself. I wrote a sincere note, apologizing for having offended her. She never responded, but I felt much better. And with that burden lifted, I could turn my attention to more important matters—like teaching Cookie how to use that leaf blower.

Father, let the Holy Spirit teach me to see more clearly.
—Ginger Rue

Digging Deeper: Proverbs 12:16; Ephesians 4:32
PRAYING TOGETHER: Just Ask

Again, truly I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything they ask for, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven.
—Matthew 18:19 (NIV)

As I got ready for bed, our minister’s sermon replayed in my mind. He had shared that he concentrates on only one resolution each new year and is thus able to keep it. Those resolutions then became twenty-five lifelong habits. His first and best resolution, he’d said, was praying with his spouse.

I wanted to replicate his idea, but reasons why it wouldn’t work bombarded me: Michael traveled during the week. I was preoccupied with our daughter until bedtime. Michael didn’t like “churchy” activities. I worried that my husband wouldn’t want to commit. That he’d say no. Or, worse, that he’d say yes to appease me. It would become drudgery. We’d quit. I’d be resentful.

Maybe I should pick another resolution. Just because it worked for our pastor didn’t mean it would work for us. Truth be told, we rarely connected on a deeper level. I plucked up my courage.

Michael was watching television. I scooted next to him on the couch. “What would you think about praying together each day?” I tried to be nonchalant, but the quiver in my voice betrayed me.

Michael smiled. “That’s a great idea!” He grabbed my hand.

We bowed our heads. Awkward silence.

“I’ll start,” I said. I praised God for the idea to pray together. I thanked Him for Michael’s willingness. I prayed for family members, friends, and those who were sick. Michael added his petitions. We said “amen” and hugged.

Holy chills ran down my spine. Praying together, I felt closer to God and my husband too.

Thank You for showing me, Lord, that the best resolution is one that brings me closer to You.
—Stephanie Thompson

Digging Deeper: Ecclesiastes 4:9–12; Acts 1:14
Martin Luther King Jr. Day, Monday, January 17

All the believers... had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. —Acts 2:44–45 (NIV)

Perhaps surprisingly—because I’m an African American—my first impression of Martin Luther King Jr. was that of an intellectually gifted middle-class preacher whose life bore little resemblance to mine. A Mississippi girl who’d worked as a maid from age twelve into adulthood, I saw little kinship between me and this well-versed minister-scholar. But as I observed his actions, I recognized the unveiling of something far exceeding intellectual prowess: a godly man fixated on the needs of all.

In one edition of King’s book Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community?, Vincent Harding links Dr. King’s vision to a quote from Thomas Paine: “We have the power to begin the world over again”—a wonderfully idealistic statement that captures King’s core. Likely best known for the words “I have a dream,” King boldly declares that “brotherhood [would one day] be the condition of man, not the dream [italics added].” In order to begin the world anew, he believed, we must be anchored together by a strong sense of commitment to the worth of every human being, no matter the race or class.

In the book of Acts, community isn’t defined by proximity but by the needs of one’s fellow man, and though the Jerusalem converts couldn’t have known it then, the Holy Spirit would eventually deposit their community spirit far and abroad.

Jesus’s blood offers the only real way to begin again—a miracle He performs for each repentant believer. But He left it to the hearts of people like the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., and to you and me, to extend the power of the cross through compassion for all.

Jesus, help me never to forget that what I do affects so many more than me.
—Jacqueline F. Wheelock

Digging Deeper: John 13:34–35; 1 Thessalonians 3:12; 2 Thessalonians 1:3
January

THE LORD IS NEAR

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Tuesday, February 1

PRAYING TOGETHER: When I Don’t Know How to Pray
Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. —Romans 8:26 (NSRV)

A young relative was making bad choices. We didn’t know all the details, but his grades had dropped, and he was rebellious and defiant at home—not keeping his room clean or doing household chores.

Michael and I were stymied. This boy had been a fun-loving, happy child. Did he have a learning disability? An emotional problem? Depression or anxiety issues? Was he being bullied or peer-pressured at school? Using drugs or alcohol?

His mother confided that he’d recently made friends with someone who had a poor reputation. The situation disturbed me greatly. We had already been praying for him for a couple of weeks, but nothing had changed, and I was discouraged. When Michael called that evening I switched my phone to speaker, sat on the bed, and hugged my knees. I didn’t know what, or how, to pray. Lord, reach him!

Michael asked that this young man would be strong and make right choices.

Then it was my turn. Lord, I don’t know how to pray. I took a deep breath. When I exhaled, bold words tumbled out of my mouth: “If it’s Your will, remove this negative influence from his life.”

The blunt idea surprised me, but it became my prayer mantra. A week later, we discovered that the student who had been a bad influence was sent to a long-term, out-of-state reform academy.

Our young relative still had challenges, so we continued to keep him in prayer. But now, even when I did not know how or what to pray, I knew, thankfully, the Holy Spirit did.

God, thank You for answered prayers and for interceding when I can’t find the words to pray.
—Stephanie Thompson

Digging Deeper: Proverbs 22:6; Isaiah 58:11; John 14:20
Wednesday, February 2

*Show me your ways, LORD, teach me your paths. Guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my Savior, and my hope is in you all day long.* —Psalm 25:4–5 (NIV)

The weather is a hassle to many folks—too hot, cold, windy, whatever they don’t like about it. But you won’t hear weather complaints from me. I live on a ridgetop and have a three-hundred-sixty-degree view of the valley below, sky above, and mountains in the distance. Most days, the sun shines on my little piece of earthly paradise. When it doesn’t, I enjoy watching clusters of gray clouds float through the trees as rain showers come my way.

The most spectacular views occur in the cooler months, on those rare days when the ground is warmer than the air and the temperature difference deposits a thick layer of fog between the ridges. By early morning, it settles to the valley floor and covers everything except the tallest peaks in a fluffy meringue. From my hilltop vantage point, what appears to be a sea of frosted glass spreads from my yard to the next ridge, looking like a solid walkway across a wide expanse. At least one cup of coffee is required to sweep away my morning brain fog and make me focus on the truth—the frosted-glass floor is an illusion covering the valley underneath.

Each time I observe this unique weather phenomena, I thank God for lifting me out of the fluff this world wants us to believe is solid ground. Every day I thank Him for providing me a better path to walk in life—one built on His truth, illuminated by His light, covered in His love, and lined with eternal hope in Him.

*Lord, show us the way to Your solid ground and give us the wisdom to walk it daily with You.*

—Jenny Lynn Keller

*Digging Deeper:* Psalm 40:2, 119:105; John 14:6
Thursday, February 3

Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation? —Hebrews 1:14 (NIV)

I left work after six that overcast winter evening. It was already darkish. Highway construction had squashed the two lanes into a curvy path between orange cones. The road was almost invisible against the oncoming headlights, so I drove slower than the forty-five-mile-per-hour construction-zone limit.

Without warning, a road worker stood before me. I skidded to a stop just inches from him. He didn’t move or even flinch. He just gestured angrily at his sign and the looming machine about to cross.

I shared this story with my husband when I got home. How there’d been no warning this monster truck was about to cross. How the lined-up headlights of oncoming cars—stopped by another imperceptible flagman—had backlit this man, his sign, those cones, making them all just vaguely darker shapes in the darkness already all around. How the man seemed angry at me, when it was his crew’s fault, not mine, that I hadn’t seen him. How I’d almost killed him.

Days later, rage still sizzled through me. I stopped at the site to confront the crew about their dereliction of duty, but they waved me down the road to another crew, who just looked at me with confusion.

I have post-traumatic stress disorder, which converts even near-traumas into inescapable wrath and horror. It wasn’t until weeks later that I was able to realize the truth of the situation: I hadn’t killed that man. Surely an angel, or God Himself, had stood near me or that man, near us both, and kept the invisible worst from happening.

Thank You, Lord, for all the disasters You protect me from that I don’t even know about!

—Patty Kirk

Digging Deeper: Acts 12:1–18
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