



God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble... God says, “Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth.” The LORD Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress.

**Excerpts from Psalm 46**

### God with Us

Psalm 46 tells us that God is with us. And we can be still and know God. Even when life feels like this stone wall, crumbling and cracking, falling down and breaking, we discover that God is with us.

Our life of faith is about being intentional, and about building our relationship with God. God longs for us to lean in, to draw close, to rely on and trust God. When we don't notice God and instead go our own way, God continues to pursue us. Between the crumbling stones, the water can seep, the plants can grow and light can get through. God can work with whoever we are, however we are feeling about life. It is in our noticing God and turning around to draw near to him that our greatest rewards are found.

Just like this stone wall is foundational, our relationship with God is the bedrock of our life. We are thankful for the congregational members who have shared their stories. This takes courage and trust in God. Thank you for receiving them with grace and appreciation. It is in the stories of others that we find our own voice and realize that **God IS with us.**

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year, for we know that this truth has the power to change our lives and change our world!

Pastor Justin Williams

**Prayer:** God of Hope and Resurrection, may Your empty tomb remind us that You are with us always. Death could not hold You. Strengthen us with Your resurrection power that throughout all of our lives—through the hills and the valleys—we may continue to feel Your presence as we grow together in our faith to share Your love and change our world. Amen.

## Easter Sunday - April 17

*“Be still, and know that I am God! I am exalted among the nations, I am exalted in the earth.” The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge.*

*Psalm 46:10-11 (NRSV)*

Psalm 46:10 says, “Be still, and know that I am God.” While that is one of my favorite scripture passages, I am not sure that is the passage that would typically come to mind on Easter Sunday. It seems to be much more fitting for Advent or Lent. It seems to make sense to “be still” during these times of reflection and preparation. Even Christmas has beloved songs like *Silent Night* that speak to stillness. Easter, however, is a day filled with celebration. It is a day where we rejoice as we proclaim “Hallelujah! Christ is risen.” However, I wonder if in the midst of all the noise and celebration, we might need this reminder even more—“Be still, and know that I am God.”

I don’t know about you, but the times when I have felt God most are not in the moments of celebration but in the moments of stillness. While I trust God is there on the mountain top, I seem to experience God most in the valleys. It is in those times when I am reminded of my need for and dependence upon God. It is in those moments when I am not sure that I can make it on my own. It is in those moments where I need to be reminded “God is with us.”

Easter certainly isn’t a day of stillness, but Easter is a day where we discover how it is that we can find peace and rejoice even in the midst of the valley. Easter is the day that provides us with the hope that the valley will never have the final word. The empty tomb is a reminder for us that death will never have the final word. The worst things are never the last things. There is hope!

So, today, in the midst of the hallelujahs, take time to reflect. Reflect on the empty tomb. It is a quiet place. Jesus is no longer there. Take time to be still, knowing that God is with us... knowing that Jesus has conquered the grave... knowing that there is indeed hope! That is the reason we rejoice. It is easy to get so caught up in the celebration that we can actually forget to be still and experience the truth that we are celebrating. Let’s not make that mistake this

## The Season of Lent

**Lent** is the season of forty days, not counting Sundays, which begins on Ash Wednesday and ends on Holy Saturday. The season of Lent is a preparation for celebrating Easter. Easter is the first Sunday, after the first full moon, after the vernal equinox. For this reason, Easter is never the same date two years in a row.

Lent is a time for penance by all Christians. The First Sunday describes Jesus’ temptation by Satan; and the Sixth Sunday (Passion/Palm Sunday), Christ’s triumphal entry into Jerusalem and his subsequent suffering and death. Because Sundays are always little Easters, the penitential spirit of Lent should be tempered with joyful expectation of the Resurrection.



**Ash Wednesday** emphasizes a dual encounter: we confront our own mortality and confess our sin before God within the community of faith. The use of ashes as a sign of mortality and repentance has a long history in Jewish and Christian worship, and the Imposition of Ashes can be a powerful nonverbal and experiential way of participating in the call to repentance and reconciliation.



**Holy Week** begins with Palm Sunday and continues through the great three days from sunset on Holy Thursday through sunset Easter day. This is the climax of Lent and the whole Christian year, and a bridge into the Easter season. These days proclaim the mystery of Jesus Christ’s passion, death and resurrection. During these days, the community journeys with Jesus from the upper room, to the cross, to the tomb, and to the garden.

## Ash Wednesday - March 2

*We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.*

*Romans 8:28 (NRSV)*

I have never been out of a relationship with God. I was blessed with wonderful parents who constantly modeled their strength and faith. God has been central in my life through all of my joys and struggles, and He's guided me with all of my major decisions. But I believe my most powerful experience of connection with God was in 2007 when I was diagnosed with non-Hodgkin's lymphoma.

I had been suffering for months with constant pain in my neck and shoulder and I continually prayed to God for relief or a diagnosis. When the diagnosis came, I experienced not only God's presence with me directly, but also through the love and prayers of others. He provided what I can only describe as a cloak surrounding me. I knew I was going to get through whatever was before me. God showed up in my doctor's care for me, in my staff at school who prayed for me and wore bracelets with my name on them, and in my friends and family that took wonderful care of me when things got rough. I had a mantra that I repeated every day, and it is the scripture at the top of this devotion. God provided me with the strength to stay positive, to go to work every day and still care for my family.

Having cancer changed my life and my relationship with God. When I faced breast cancer ten years later, I didn't despair. I knew God would continue to take care of me.

Joy Waldron

**Prayer:** Heavenly Father, we ask that You continue to be our rock. Help us to always be aware of the many ways that You connect with us and provide care. We are so grateful for the people You place in our paths at the right time to help us see You in our lives. Amen.

## Saturday - April 16

*Preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction.*

*2 Timothy 4:2 (NIV)*

As a mom of two teenagers, it is important that I try and stay organized. Calendars, reminder notes, places to put important papers - I try to do my best. Organization helps me from being overwhelmed, and usually helps me prepare for the week. While this is important for my weekly routine, God is more interested in me being prepared than being organized.

When I think back over the Christmas season, I tried to use my same organization skills as I participated in mission for the church. When I sat down to write my letters for The Drop, I made sure I had a space to write, a good pen, and the address list right in front of me to double check the information. When I planned dinner for Family Promise, I made a detailed ingredient list and made sure I had enough containers for the food. This organization was important, but I also needed to prepare my heart to give, which sometimes get lost. I had to be reminded to pray for those incarcerated men we were reaching out to through our notes. It was the same for the families at Family Promise, so that the meal could nourish both their bodies and their spirit. Both were important - the actual act of giving and the preparation of our own hearts and minds in prayer for those children of God we were about to serve.

As I think about how I prepare to experience and share God's love, for me it comes from regular study. I wish it came more naturally to me (like brushing my teeth) to remember to pray and reflect, but I need to have a set time each day to make sure this happens. It is the time I feel that I am in relationship with God. I realize the importance of preparing myself through daily study and reflection so that I am open to hearing Him during Lent and the rest of the year.

Lynda Wiley

**Prayer:** Heavenly Father, help us to be thoughtful in our preparation as we go through this Lenten season. Help us to read, reflect, and pray on a regular basis. Just like nourishing our body with good food and movement, help us nourish our spirit and love for You with regular interaction. Help us not to be distracted by our busy life and set aside time to focus just on You during this season and always. In your name we pray. Amen.

## Good Friday - April 15

*(And they said to him, 'Lord, he has ten pounds!') 'I tell you, to all those who have, more will be given; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away. But as for these enemies of mine who did not want me to be king over them—bring them here and slaughter them in my presence.'" After he had said this, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem. When he had come near Bethphage and Bethany, at the place called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of the disciples, saying, "Go into the village ahead of you, and as you enter it you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden. Untie it and bring it here.*

*John 19:25b-30 (NRSV)*

In my few years of practice in ministry, I have learned that even in the imminence of a person's death God surrounds us. I have witnessed holiness and even wholeness as a person was going to let go of this earthly life and breathe their last. But I never expected that I would experience an enveloping, loving, and fierce presence of God when my brother was dying. As my brother and my whole family were in Russia, I knew in my spirit that I needed to fly out there and be with all of them. As I was flying out I was guided by the comforting and still presence of God and as the distance to my hometown of Samara was getting shorter and shorter, I was giving my mom instructions to gather my brother's ex-wife and his sons and my dad. When I arrived I had the most beautiful conversation with my brother and he gave me the most beautiful brotherly kiss. Then I gathered everyone around my brother. We encircled him in our love and care and as I was instructing my family how we were going to pray, I said that we would pray the Lord's Prayer and the Serenity Prayer. And as I was about to start, Igor started us off with praying the Lord's Prayer. In all of my years with my brother, faith and prayer was not something that he talked about and he even made fun of my faith and the vocation that I chose sometimes. But there he was leading his family in prayer. After this Igor became very ill and was taken into the hospital where he spent his last three days on Earth. In those three days, Igor constantly talked to God and prayed. God was present in all these beautiful circumstances surrounding his passing. He got to see his sister and give her a last kiss. He was able to reconcile with his wife. His younger son, Rusty was baptized just a few hours before Igor passed. And most importantly, Igor reconciled with God. In the midst of suffering and pain, God's presence and love surrounded him and us all. Igor died peacefully in his sleep as Jesus came to take him to his eternal home.

As we observe Good Friday today, we are reminded of Jesus' death and how painful it must have been for him and his family as he was dying on the cross. This is a time of mourning and grief, a time when we ponder the limitations that we have as humans, including our own death. Yet we trust that because of Jesus' death, we can experience God's love and God's peace in any circumstances of our life. Because of Jesus' death, we are surrounded by God's everlasting love that will lead us home one day.

Katya Brodbeck

**Prayer:** O Holy God, full of love and brilliant light, today we surrender to You, we surrender our hearts and our lives. We ask that You grant us the serenity to accept the things we cannot change, courage to change the things we can, and the wisdom to know the difference. Amen.

## Thursday - March 3

*"Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him."*

*James 1:12 (ESV)*

It is such a blessing to still be part of a small prayer group with a couple of friends from the days when I taught at Wyandot Run. We share praises in good times and support each other during bad times.

One of our prayer warriors told us she believes that every day is a test. You just need to pass today's test! I had always tried to take one day at a time - but this seems to have a deeper meaning and has taken it to the next level for me.

Your day might be filled with problems at work or a fuss with your family. Maybe you left one of your shopping bags at the grocery store, or your child had a bad game. Maybe you lost a piece of jewelry, or you had to get your tire fixed. Maybe you were late for an appointment, or your purse was stolen. You might have had an unexpected expense or a visit to Urgent Care. It seems like everything can be an ordeal! But you just need to pass today's test.

My mom has a few favorite phrases that she always says to me when things go wrong: "This too will pass" and "there is no problem too big to solve." Now I can add to my list of encouraging words that, "I just need to pass today's test."

Lori Kipfer

**Prayer:** Dear God, please give us the strength and courage to pass the test of each day. Amen.

## Friday - March 4

*Moses said to the LORD, "You have been telling me, 'Lead these people,' but you have not let me know whom you will send with me. You have said, 'I know you by name and you have found favor with me.' If you are pleased with me, teach me your ways so I may know you and continue to find favor with you. Remember that this nation is your people." The LORD replied, "My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest."*

*Exodus 33:12-14 (NIV)*

Moses was tired and anxious. He already tried explaining to God that he was not the leader God wanted or expected him to be. Now, after doing God's will and leading the Israelites out of Egypt, Moses finds himself back in front of God begging for inspiration and guidance. He was doubting himself, again, and wondering how much more of this he could take before it becomes too much for him to handle.

I have always been a go-getter, a "Type A" personality, someone who is always up to a challenge, and often one who diligently sees a commitment through until the end. Last year, after a series of setbacks, disappointments in several aspects of my life, and added stresses, I found myself at my breaking point. After a dramatic weight loss, long-term troubles sleeping, and finally a trip the ER for chest pains, I stood face-to-face with the anxiety that had taken hold in my life. It was my Moses moment, where I found myself telling God that I can't take much more and wondering if this state of anxiety and despair was my new normal.

God's response to Moses' anguish and cry for help was simple, that God will always be with Moses and give him rest. Even though God always walks with us, sometimes it takes crying out to Him to remember that He is there with us and can give us reprieve from our weariness. While my journey with anxiety is ongoing, and has its ups and downs, small moments of rest are often found when I frequently remind myself that God will always be with me. Those moments grant me peace, and the hope that I need to keep putting one foot in front of the other when life becomes overwhelming.

Drew Thiele

**Prayer:** Dear God, our great Counselor and Redeemer, we frequently lose our sight of You when answering the call to do things we think we can't do. Despite Your glory and grace, we often face moments where our worldly minds begin to become fatigued and overwhelmed, where hope begins to fade from deep within us. In those moments Lord, as You did with Moses, remind us that You are with us and that You can lighten our burden if we hand over our anxieties and stresses to You. Open our hearts and minds so we can remain focused on Your love for us, Your desire to walk our journeys through life with us and remind us to share Your love gracefully with all that we encounter in our daily lives. In the name of Your son, who came to bear our burdens and give us rest. Amen.

## Holy Thursday - April 14

*How can we sing the songs of the LORD while in a foreign land? If I forget you, Jerusalem, may my right hand forget its skill. May my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth if I do not remember you, if I do not consider Jerusalem my highest joy.*

*Psalms 137:4-6 (NIV)*

April 13, 2000, I was headed to Chennai, India! It was exciting to work in a new country. Our hosts were gracious and cordial. They took us during the day to many interesting places as we worked from 3pm-11pm to connect to the computer system in the United States.

April 16 happened to be Palm Sunday. For many years, Holy Week has been significant for me. I find that the journey from Jesus' triumphal entry to Jerusalem on a donkey on Palm Sunday, to the confusion of Holy Thursday, the agony of Good Friday, and then the incredible victory of Easter to be a spiritual journey for me personally as well as for our whole Christian community. But I found myself in India during that week... I was in a foreign land trying to remember my song.

But my wonderful hosts from India knew it was the Christians' Holy Week and they remembered to take us to the sight that was attributed to where the beloved apostle Thomas did ministry. It was a beautiful little chapel. And I remembered my song through the kindness of those I thought were strangers, who cared enough to know something about me. And God found me there.

Kim La Rue

**Prayer:** God of all the earth, thank you for the blessing of people who know how to offer hospitality in little and big ways. Thank you for knowing where we are and finding us there. Help me to offer the same kind of hospitality to others, so that they know they are loved. Amen.

## Wednesday - April 13

*Let us be concerned for one another, to help one another to show love and to do good. Let us not give up the habit of meeting together, as some are doing. Instead, let us encourage one another all the more, since you see that the Day of the Lord is coming nearer.*

*Hebrews 10:24-25 (GNT)*

Humans, People, Earthlings! These nouns are the most significant way that I know God is with me. He is with me through my ordinary days and my harder days when I've faced my scariest circumstances. I remember being in pre-op for my first cancer surgery and feeling a complete calmness. I was thinking of all the people praying for me from the church I attended. In addition, I was held in prayer by congregation members from my parent's church and my in-laws' church and I knew emphatically I was in God's hands.

Fortunately, many of my friends outside of my church home are also believers that point me to the truth when I need to hear it, encourage me with scripture when needed and surround me with their unconditional love. The connections with women in our small group Bible Study have had a tremendous role in me walking through life knowing God is with me. My friends in our small group directed me to podcasts that provide me the opportunity to build a closer relationship with God, technology allowing God to pursue me! I spend many hours on the road for work and listening to Old Testament Bible Studies; these books revealed a significant role in understanding Christ and has deepened my awareness that throughout all time, God's desire is to be with us, ALWAYS!

Kristina MacKenzie

**Prayer:** Father, I praise You for creating us to be in relationship with others. To learn, to serve, to worship with others. I am grateful that when I am with others it is always leading me to a closer relationship with You. I am grateful that through You, modern technology has been created that provides opportunities to enhance our faith and trust that You are always with us. Amen.

## Saturday - March 5

*Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.*

*Psalm 23:4 (KJV)*

On September 17 last year my husband Krishna woke me up at 1:45 in the morning. He was in bad shape. We called the squad and they came immediately and we all went to Riverside Methodist Hospital. You gotta give a plug for the Methodists anytime you can!

In the emergency room the doctors and nurses were putting up IVs, drawing blood, testing all the vitals and basically doing what they could to keep him alive. Within a few hours he was in the ICU. It was the first time I'd ever been in this part of any hospital but it is very definitely Intensive Care. All I could do was sit and watch.

Like most people I read a daily devotional so I opened mine for the day and it was Psalm 23 verse 4. I doubt I'll ever feel much closer to God than I did at that moment. I wasn't sure how things were going to turn out but I did know God was beside me and that my role was to be beside Krishna as he walked through that valley. He made it safely back home thanks to the devotion of the staff who walk that same valley with so many others each day.

Gillian Anantharaman

**Prayer:** Heavenly Father Your timing is so perfect. thank you for letting us know You're there when we need You most. Amen.

## First Sunday in Lent - March 6

*And he said: "Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever takes the lowly position of this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me.*

*Matthew 18:3-5 (NIV)*

Sometimes, I think I make following Jesus too complicated. Jesus asks us to trust and listen to God's words. Trusting God as an adult can be difficult at times because we think we know better. Children trust their parents to teach and help them through life. I need to trust God and listen to God's voice. I think God wants us to talk/pray with him everyday. For me what has helped me do this is reading devotionals as I am eating my breakfast. They are not long and I feel it starts my day focusing on God at least for a few minutes. Prayers do not need to be long or eloquently worded, just pray for people as you interact with them or they come to mind.

Working with children and children with special needs always encourages me. Children do not worry, they live in the moment and truly enjoy the beauty of their surroundings - a sunny day, a colorful leaf or a snowflake. Children encourage and help each other. They don't care about the color of your skin or how much money you have. They know we are all on the same team with God. Children like to be together playing, working, laughing and talking.

Children are always learning. I take advantage of the small groups in our church to read through the Bible or a book. I often gain new insight to a verse in the Bible that I have read before. Also, when children know better they do better. I realize I had many beliefs that were challenged about race and gender. Luckily, I have some wonderful young teachers who help me to see that everyone is a child of God. I am called to love others not judge others.

Children know that they are enough. That God creates each one of us with different talents and abilities to share with others.

Karen Barwinski

**Prayer:** God, help us to learn that the kingdom of God is not earned by human effort, but received in a childlike trust as a gift of the mercy and grace of God. Be with us as we pray, encourage, trust and try to follow Jesus daily. Amen.

## Tuesday - April 12

*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercy and the God of all consolation.  
2 Corinthians 1:3 (NCB)*

We gathered in the living room of a young family member whom we had just lost to a sudden cardiac-related event. His minister was there to lead us through this time together as we began the grieving process. I will never forget the first words that Pastor Frank said to all of us:

“Don't let anyone ever tell you that there is a reason for everything.”

That moment is stuck in time for me as my inner voice responded with, “Yes! Thank goodness someone finally said that out loud, and he's a member of the clergy, too!” In my mind, we have come to use this trite expression when we cannot come up with something better to say especially to someone who has had a significant loss in life.

Our God is always with us; however, He is not like some fictional character that is flipping switches on a day-to-day or even moment-to-moment basis deciding when we will have good times and bad times. He is not commanding triumphs and tragedies from some mythical mountain top! My faith journey keeps growing along with yours and our God is one to celebrate with us and also offer comfort to us each step of the way. Our foundation of faith must be built upon the beautiful and the painful events of our earthly existence to prepare us for Glory! And the Father of mercies and the God of all consolation will carry us every step of the way.

Todd Hardesty

**Prayer:** Dear Father, Let me turn my eyes to You on this day and every day knowing that You have my heart and soul in the palm of Your hand. Thank you for my life and the bounty that You have provided. I sing Your praises with all that I am! In Jesus' name. Amen.



## Monday - April 11

*Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.  
Hebrews 11:1 (KJV)*

I can't remember a time when I didn't have a relationship with God. I grew up in a Christian home. I went to Sunday school while my parents went to church and I joined them in church when I was older. I longed to continue this relationship with God as I went through my school years and into college. Today, I'm in church almost every Sunday or watching remotely. I even try to find a church to go to when on vacation - being in weekly fellowship with other believers is very important to me.

My relationship with God has grown stronger through service opportunities and small group Bible studies. I have served as a Stephan Minister, am a member of the All In Community that works as an advocate to help incarcerated people as they re-enter society, and write letters to a person in prison through the Hope Letters group of our church. These settings help me to reflect on who I am and what God continues to call me to be. Jesus served others. Jesus washed the disciple's feet to show service and to encourage the disciples to do the same. I think Jesus always asks us to serve not as just a way to do good for others, but He knows serving others helps to build up our faith and our connection to God. The more we live into our faith, the more our faith is strengthened and fortified. As our faith grows, we grow, and God's kingdom grows bigger and stronger.

Bill Barwinski

**Prayer:** Loving God and Father, help us and lead us to be more like You. Help us to see what we can do to help our neighbors near and far. Allow our actions, deeds, and words show that we love our neighbors as ourselves and in turn show honor and glory to You. In Jesus name. Amen.

## Monday - March 7

*It is not enemies who taunt me I could bear that; it is not adversaries who deal insolently with me I could hide from them. But it is you, my equal, my companion, my familiar friend, with whom I kept pleasant company; we walked in the house of God with the throng.  
Psalm 55:12-14 (NRSVCE)*

God was with me through divorce. I generally avoid discussing my divorce but as Fred Rogers said, "Anything that's human is mentionable, and anything that is mentionable can be more manageable." God used my friends, particularly Lisa, who took long walks with me. For over a year, Lisa asked me to come back to church. The church was the scene of my betrayal (deceived by my closest friend). One beautiful summer morning, I gave in and attended worship. Lisa and I sat in "our pew" where we had sat 20 years of Sundays with our "intact" families.

The scripture reading was Psalm 55—David's complaint about a friend's treachery in entirety. Please read the whole passage to know the depths of my feelings (they were not pretty). Lisa and I laughed hysterically. God knew exactly how I felt. He speaks directly to our needs. He understands our deepest feelings, losses and frustrations. He is with us through it all.

Brenda Allen

**Prayer:** Dear God, Thank you for being with me. You are with me for long walks in the sunshine. You are with me when I want to fly away and when I want to be at rest. Help me be the friend who does not give up on a grieving friend. Thank you for giving me the strength to manage my feelings. Amen.

## Tuesday - March 8

*In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.*

*Matthew 5:16 (CSB)*

We all have had uniquely different faith journeys as we made our way through this life. We may have found ourselves in periods of doubt, feeling moments of anxiety, battling desperation and hurdling over challenges that come our way with the storms of daily life. Thanks be to God for the grace he has offered us through our faith and trust in Jesus Christ.

My faith journey had its up and downs and even a period I call my time of “indifference.” I was going to church on a regular basis, but I wasn’t truly engaged in my faith in a meaningful way. Work was stressful, we were living in a new location and I found myself challenging my priorities and looking for some meaningful purpose in my life. I was on a long drive home from a business trip and to pass the time, I was playing a new CD by an artist named, Van Morrison. I had several Van Morrison songs I enjoyed, but I never knew he had authored spiritual songs. A song entitled “Whenever God Shines His Light” comes on and I am listening to the music and not paying attention to the lyrics when it gets to the refrain “Reach out for him.” Those words caught my attention and I pushed replay with my ears now focused on the lyrics. The song now had my full attention and I listened with much greater intent and quickly found myself singing along. That song created an awakening in my faith and has now become one of my favorite Van Morrison tunes. As I look back on that drive home, I now realize that God was speaking to me that night and offering me the purpose I was seeking.

In closing, I would like to share the song’s first verse as prayer for us all.

*Whenever God shines his light on me  
Opens up my eyes so I can see  
When I look up in the darkest night  
And I know everything’s going to be alright  
In deep confusion, in great despair  
When I reach out for him, he is there  
When I am lonely as I can be  
And I know that God shines his light on me*

Amen.

Alex Dumm

## Palm Sunday - April 10

*Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.*

*John 14:27 (KJV)*

It has been my experience that people often feel close to God in times of chaos, crisis, loss, pain or when they are at a breaking point. I love to hear the stories of people feeling God is with them in those moments. God seems to grab us and pull us through and allow us to feel His presence in those times. I have had more moments like these that I am not even able to count. As my head came around this topic, “God with us” it dawned on me, I have had just as many moments of happiness when I have felt God with me. I thought, why does my head go to the darkness instead of moments of light? So, here is a moment of light when I felt God with me.

My family is very busy. My children are 19 and 17-years-old and they have their own lives that do not include me as much as I would like, so I try desperately to sneak moments of family time together! In the past year my family has found an activity that we all love to do together – kayaking. We started with one kayak and now we all are able to go out and venture on the water together, even my dad takes part in our Brownlee Family Fun! When I say, let us go kayaking everyone stops whatever they had planned and says, “I am in.” We pack up the kayaks and hit the water.

The moment we are on the Scioto my body relaxes. As I look around and see Jadon and my dad fishing, Jaylynn paddling around or just reading a book in her kayak and Jason and I just tooling around I find such peace. The water is calming, there is a breeze that cools us from the hot sun, the trees leaves almost sing a song as they sway in the wind and I hear echoes of “Mom... come look at this, Mom... come paddle over her” my heart is warmed and at that moment I feel God with us.

God knows our lives are crazy and busy and yet He provides moments when all is calm and all is perfect. If we remember to stop and look around in those moments, we can feel His presence. We know only He can give us these moments in His creation and we need to stop, reflect on them, cherish them and thank Him for providing such spaces and moments for us in our lives!

Rebecca Brownlee

**Prayer:** Dear Lord, thank you for allowing me to know You provide my light! Help me to remember the moments of calm, peace and beauty when life is chaotic. Thank you for allowing me to feel You with me when I am in Your perfect creation. Amen.

## Saturday - April 9

*When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."*

*John 8:12 (NIV)*

I started walking on a regular basis about 6 years ago. My sister was going through treatment for breast cancer at the time. I had read that walking could possibly reduce the chances of breast cancer and help my anxiety. I was intentional with my efforts to boost my physical and mental health. I liked walking alone. I could set my own pace, spend time with myself to exercise, breathe and relax.

Instinctively, I found myself praying for my sister while I walked. I felt a spiritual connection as soon as I hit the path. I loved the smells, the sounds, the leaves in the breeze. Reflecting in this quiet space, reminded me that this is a beautiful world created by God. I quickly became intentional with my spiritual growth while walking. Some days I read a devotional before heading out on the path. Other days I listened to hymns while I walked. I no longer thought of it as walking alone, but as walking with God.

Walking in this intentional way, continues to deepen my faith. There are days that are dark, days that I fall, and days with thunderstorms. I continue to move forward through these days because I know that God is with us.

Karen Jordan

**Prayer:** God, help me recognize You are with me on the path of life. Take away my distractions and show me how to walk step by step with You in faith. Amen.

## Wednesday - March 9

*Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.*

*1 Thessalonians 5:11 (NIV)*

Ice Skating

One winter day my brother and I were going to skate on a pond. It was really cold out and the snow made everything sparkle in the sunlight. It seemed that the birds were really happy because they wouldn't stop singing. I was really excited because this was going to be the first time I had ever skated on a pond. When we got to the pond some teenagers were playing hockey.

After I laced up my skates, I looked over at the wooden ramp you could use to get onto the ice. I thought it looked too steep, very rickety, and super slippery. Instead, I tried getting onto the ice from the grass. It was hard because the ground was higher than the pond. I was also really scared that I would break the ice and fall into the pond. But then the teenagers noticed us trying to slide down onto the ice. They stopped their game and helped my brother and I onto the ice. Once I was on the ice, I felt happy and very grateful that those teenagers had helped us.

Even though they could have just kept on skating, those teenagers helped us onto the ice. Their kindness was a real example of someone living God's love because they were willing to help someone who was scared and uncertain.

Abby Lewis (10 years old, 5th Grade)

**Prayer:** Dear God, thank you for providing helpers and encouragers in our lives. Help me to also be a helper and encourager to others. Amen.

## Thursday - March 10

*Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.*

*Isaiah 41:10 (ESV)*

This past year has been a tough one. My daughter was in the hospital for a week, so sick that we worried about losing her, yet every test came back negative. Even after she was back home, we went from doctor to doctor before finally getting a diagnosis and putting her on a treatment plan. In the middle of all that, I discovered that I have a brain aneurysm. Then my 94-year-old father's health grew worse and many decisions needed to be made to care for him. I was emotionally exhausted.

Deep down inside, I knew God was with me, yet I still felt hopeless. And that was when God began to work through my family and friends to support and encourage me. Church friends encouraged me to work with a Stephen Minister, who helped me see hope and positivity when I couldn't see it myself. My small group members assured me that when I couldn't find the words to pray myself, they would be praying for me. Friends and family sent encouraging cards and e-mails, a high school friend sent me a book that helped him when he went through a tough time. God made sure that I knew he was right there every moment and that I would be able to see Him in the face of every person who helped me throughout the year. What a blessing to know that we are never alone, God will always be with us!

Nancy Cuartas

**Prayer:** Dear God, thank you for always being with us, even when we lose our way and feel abandoned. You show Your love for us through the people in our lives, assuring us that we never have to face difficult times alone. Amen.

## Friday - April 8

*Pray constantly. Give thanks in everything, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.*

*1 Thessalonians 5:17-18 (HCSB)*

### The Storm

My friends, family and I were coming back from Yellowstone National Park, and we decided to drive through Nebraska on our way back home (to Columbus, OH). It was a nice drive until we noticed something terrible. We all huddled around Dad's phone looking at the weather app in front of us which showed a bubble of red and purple on the radar. We tuned into the truck radio channel... "80-90 Mile per hour winds... Seek shelter immediately." It repeated this incessant message for a while until we turned it off. "What can we do?" I asked Dad. "The only thing we can do is pray," Dad replied. So, I prayed and prayed. Our car was shaking in the wind, and our friend's camper was carried six feet across the parking lot right ahead of us, but we knew if we prayed, God would save us. The winds calmed. God's hands were wrapped around the car. We made it to a safe resting stop where we slept in our camper knowing that we were protected by God now and always.

Alex Donaldson (10 years old, 5th Grade)

**Prayer:** Dear Jesus, help us to always remember to pray and to ask You to help us. Sometimes life is scary, and we forget that You are always with us. Help us to go to You. Thank you for being with us and protecting us. Amen.

## Thursday - April 7

*Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.*

*Philippians 4:8-9 (NIV)*

I went to Catholic grade school for 8 years. There wasn't a playground. Recess was spent on a blocked off street alongside the school and church. A favorite way for me to spend recess was sitting by myself in the empty church. The painted ceiling, stained glass windows, white marble altar were all so beautiful, so quiet.

This was very different from home where my dad and younger sister lived with chronic illnesses. Dad used a large, loud breathing machine throughout the day, my little sister often cried because of injections and finger sticks. There were full meals to be cooked, cleaned up and constant housecleaning to keep everyone as healthy as possible. It was busy and noisy all the time. While sitting alone in church, I distinctly remember thinking, "It's so quiet, I think I can hear the air, maybe it's angels, maybe it's God."

Fast forward to age 27, my first encounter to Bible teaching was a Bible study on Philippians. Reading those verses, I understood my experience in my beautiful, quiet church - it was God just for me in that place - no doubt at all.

I've learned much since those experiences. Particularly, it isn't only in the moments of silence or suffering we can be certain God's with us. This assurance is ours in the noise, chaos and joy of everyday moments. All the attributes in this verse exist in our most ordinary situations. Be attentive, "think about such things...the God of peace will be with you."

Mary Ring

**Prayer:** Dear God who is always with us, help us pay better attention to all of the ways and moments You are present for us. In those moments let us remember to offer You the praise, worship and love You so deserve from us. May Your desire to have a loving relationship with us give us the confidence to have a loving relationship with You. Amen.

## Friday - March 11

*Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast.*

*Psalms 139:7-10 (NIV)*

Influenced by our recent study, "I Heard God Laugh," I found humor in how God decided to answer me one time -- and how long He took! I have a strong conviction that God hears everything I bring to Him. Sometimes he gives me a quick answer, but sometimes I wonder if He has fallen asleep.

A number of years ago, after the women's movement began, I started working for a company located in the very Southern town of Memphis. However, company headquarters were in England and most of the employees were from other parts of the country or foreign countries. The new customs of the women's movement were well respected by our company. Everyone carried their own boxes, and the first person to the door opened the door. I adapted quickly, although not comfortably.

At the same time, I found a church I liked. It had a history of Southern traditions. On Sundays, I felt the need to respect the church traditions, but when Sunday turned to Monday, I had to quickly change personas. Before I moved away, the church that was steeped in tradition introduced our first black female minister. This change came about over a thirty-year period, but it reminds us that people do change.

At that time, whenever I approached a door in the presence of others, I felt a twinge of discomfort in the uncertainty of whether I should open the door or let someone else open it for me. Needless to say, I asked God for some insight and help. I never felt He sent me the clue I was looking for, but I had every confidence He heard me.

Years later, I moved to Columbus. Suddenly, everyone was opening the doors for me. At first, I was perplexed, but eventually, it dawned on me. In the interim, with the passage of time, I had become OLD. People were showing me courtesy because I was older. Now, I no longer had to be concerned about who should open doors. How nice! After I figured it out, I laughed, and I think I heard God laugh. Although He let me wait until I became old, eventually He did answer my prayer as I knew He would. It reminded me of the old adage, "Be careful about what you ask for, you may get it."

Arlene Diaz

**Prayer:** Thank you dear Lord, for holding me fast! I love that You are always listening to me, and You NEVER forget me! I love You! Amen.

## Saturday - March 12

*But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him.*

*James 1:5 (NASB)*

It was the end of a typical day in the operating room, and I was exhausted. The day was full of stressful and challenging operative procedures. The usual headaches of not enough staff, over booked cases and the physical demands of standing for long hours (while wearing masks, hats and sterile gowns that hold in body heat and moisture). As I was driving home, I began to reflect on the day and wonder if it was time to leave such a high stress environment for a desk job. Maybe it was time to turn over the keys to the younger staff? Where would I go; what would I do? Many questions. No answers. I turned to God, and I asked Him: God, you know me, you know this is rough on this senior nurse. Should I stay...should I go somewhere else...can you give me a clear, definitive answer because I absolutely want to know it's from you!

Minutes later, I pulled into my driveway, got out of the car and walked to the mailbox. Inside were bills, bills, advertisements...and...a card!?

The card was addressed to me and was from a patient that I had taken care of several weeks ago. This patient wanted me to know how grateful she was that I was there for her when she needed surgery. Her case had been cancelled once and had been in jeopardy of a second cancellation. The doctor was going to cancel the second surgery unless someone with experience was in the room to manage the case. A call was made to me (35+ years experience), and I agreed to come in on my off shift to get her surgery done. She had learned about me volunteering to help with her surgery and reached out to let me know that she was grateful for my response to her need. I was stunned. I had just minutes before asked God for a clear answer and here it was. The card had been sent two days before I asked the question...a clear sign that it was a response, it was clear, and it was from God. This card contained 100% of all the elements that I had asked for. The answer was stay...you are needed...nursing is the field that I want you to stay in...your work is not done...and your work is useful and effective.

The following day at our morning safety huddle, prior to starting surgery, I shared with my team exactly what I had just experienced. It was difficult to read the card, as my eyes were all watered up. I concluded with this challenge to my fellow nurses...if you are unsure...if you question and want answers...if you have doubts and seek wisdom....ask it of God. Ask Him to be clear and specific and expect Him to answer. He answered me in dramatic fashion, which made it clear to me. I am here to stay as my mission is not completed.

David Narance

**Prayer:** Lord God, walk each day with me and show me what Your will is. When I have doubts, when I am afraid and when I am exhausted, help me to be strong, confident and trust that You are with me. Amen.

## Wednesday - April 6

*So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.*

*Isaiah 41:10 (NIV)*

We moved from NE Ohio to central Ohio in mid-2019 to be near The James for cancer treatment of my Hodgkin's Lymphoma. God gave us so many signs along this life changing journey and opened doors that it was hard not to notice Him being near us.

And then 2021 came and a third major cancer had invaded my body with a large cancerous growth in my nose that had metastasized into my lymph nodes of the neck. This just reconfirmed our decision of moving, so we were at peace with the diagnoses and care we were about to receive.

But God showed His presence to us along the way. I had just been forthright with my surgeon and asked if he were a man of faith. He assured me he was and confirmed that by sharing how he was teaching his son to pray. After the surgery a friend had sent me a photo of God directing the scalpel for the surgeon, who in this case looked 99% like my surgeon. I shared this with my doctor, Dr V, who asked that I email it to him as a reminder.

Then one night in the hospital I had a vivid dream with unbelievable clarity including Jesus in all of His glory. He asked me what I most wanted, and I replied, "to remain on earth with my wife to continue to serve Him." He told me then it shall be done, putting any anxiety at ease.

From post-surgery came the need for radiation and another doctor. After meeting Dr M, I took his hand into mine, looked into his eyes, and said "I trust you and God to ensure I am cured." He looked back at me and said he was glad I said that because without God nothing is possible. His radiology is all dependent upon God. Then at a later appointment he asked if we minded if he prayed for us... nothing like holding hands in an examination room being prayed for by the radiologist.

So, during this past year God has shown Himself through the faith of doctors, through a dream, and during discipling of others who listen to my story. God is real!

Harry Poston

**Prayer:** God, thank you for always being there for us. May we be aware of Your presence for our own well-being as well as sharing with others who can rejoice at the Good News. Amen.

## Tuesday - April 5

*"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest... For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."*

*Mathew 11:28, 30 (NIV)*

For those of you familiar with the Enneagram personality test, I'm a 2. For those of you are not, that means I'm a helper. I like to constantly be doing, giving, helping. That's not a surprise for those who know me. I'm a social worker by training, the youngest of three kids, a mom, a wife. I've created a life of being constantly on the go and taking care of others. While on the surface those things are good, sometimes I twist them to be about me. I use it as a shield to insulate myself from feeling or experiencing life. I surround myself with activities that keep me from listening to my daughter asking me to play dolls with her. They prevent me from joining my husband on a walk with the dog. And they certainly keep me from listening to the still, gentle voice of God around me.

As I started to think about an intention for 2022, I kept coming back to 'be still.' God kept reminding me that being busy is not what He is calling me to do. Instead, I need to experience the now, listen to my body and the words He puts in my heart. Spend more time in nature, enjoy these years with my young daughter and just be still.

Abigail Hartung

**Prayer:** Jesus, help us to pause from our rushing to focus on the gifts You have placed in our lives. May we care more about accomplishing Your list for the day than our own. Amen.

## Second Sunday in Lent - March 13

*How weighty to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them! I try to count them—they are more than the sand; I come to the end I am still with you.*

*Psalms 139:17-18 (NRSV)*

On Wednesday, October 6, I woke up with a God nudge. It involved driving to Maryland to visit my grandmother. She had just turned 89 but her health had taken a turn after battling pancreatic cancer for the last 4 years. My wedding day was a few weeks later on October 21. I talked to my fiancé and we both agreed I should act on the feeling, so off I went.

About an hour into my drive I received the dreaded call that Willie Schnetzler had passed away. Precious Willie, who captured our hearts with her joyous smile and Jesus loving energy. Her battle with cancer as a 10-year-old little girl had now ended. I made my calls, stopped on the side of the road to calm my tears. So many emotions were hitting- sadness, frustration, peace with an end of suffering, and anticipation for what I was about to experience seeing my grandmother. I was completely alone, but in a sense, not at all. God was in the mountains.

My entire family ended up coming to visit my grandmother that weekend. It was a holy experience for each of us; to sing old hymns together and be still in her presence as we guided her on her passing. I drove home on October 8 and she passed peacefully the next day after each of her children, grandchildren and great grandchildren had seen her.

When you read this whole story it really does sound sad, doesn't it? Two losses, one at the beginning of life, one nearing the end; two incredible, influential and faithful women. But despite the utter sadness that week brought and thereafter, I never felt alone. That is Emmanuel: God with us. God reminds us of Willie with "Willie winks" of rainbows in the sky and beautiful clouds in motion. And I knew my grandmother was with me on our wedding day as I wore her veil and soaked in the perfection of marrying my husband in the Maryland mountains. God with us shown through God's heavenly saints with us.

Rev. Hannah VanMeter

**Prayer:** Holy God, continue to teach us to be still in Your presence. We know that our worries can cloud this but we ask that You continue to instill in us the importance of being still, for it is there and then that we hear and experience You. And through that, we feel the presence of those whom we miss so dearly. Thank you for loving us so well, and always being with us, no matter how alone we may feel. Amen.

## Monday - March 14

*Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous! Do not tremble or be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.”  
Joshua 1:9 (NASB)*

On a cold December morning, my mom and I had driven 40 minutes to the nearest mall to do some Christmas shopping. We had spent a few hours picking out gifts for some of my seven siblings. As we left the mall, the Illinois wind was blowing fiercely with the start of a winter storm. It was howling until we slammed our car doors shut, safely inside our station wagon. It was quiet. My mom put her keys into the ignition, the engine tried but it would not start. I was scared. What would we do? There were no cell phones to call dad and little money for car repairs. It was so cold out. My mom was not scared. She bowed her head and started praying out loud, "Hail Mary, full of Grace, the Lord is with Thee" until she was finished with this favorite prayer. She tried the engine again, and it started! She smiled at me.

My mom has given me a faith foundation to build upon, where God is with us listening to our prayers.

Patty

**Prayer:** Lord, let us be strong and courageous when life is challenging. Amen.

## Monday - April 4

*Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God for you in Christ Jesus.  
1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 (NASB)*

Dear God,

Good morning! Thank you for another day that I can begin fresh and new. Yesterday didn't go so well as you know. Yes, I woke up late and was rushing to get out the door to the doctor. I forgot our morning talk till I was in the waiting room...waiting. Did you know that is a great place to talk to you? By the way, thank you for giving me arthritis in every joint. Each morning I am reminded of the tin man when Dorothy has to oil each joint before he can move!

Yesterday, I forgot to thank you, Lord, for my daughter who so lovingly "folded" my stiff joints into the car and drove me without a single complaint. What did I do to deserve such a wonderful daughter?

Today, I look forward to my online bible study group, not only for the education but also for the fellowship and sharing I find myself in need of these days. Thank you, Lord for surrounding me with such loving and insightful brothers and sisters. God, giving thanks and rejoicing daily is sometimes hard for me and sometimes I forget. But I will strive to work on this.

Time to close for now, Lord. But please send someone my way to bless and lift up. Thanks again for listening!

Your servant,  
Nancy Heaver

**Prayer:** Holy and Gracious God, open our eyes to see the gifts You give us daily. Open our ears to hear the cries of those in need. Give us the courage to meet those needs. We rejoice and give thanks for the dear gift of Your Son whose example we strive to emulate. Amen.



## 5th Sunday in Lent - April 3

*You also must be ready, because the Human One is coming at a time when you don't expect him.*

*Luke 12:40 (CEB)*

God has been seen in my life when I least expect it. When I thought I knew how my life was going to pan out, God had a different path for me and I had no idea how influential his plan would be until I felt that I was exactly where I needed to be. God put me on the path of being redistricted from the high school I was supposed to go to. My brothers went there and all my “friends” were going there as well. I thought to myself, “This can not be right, I’m supposed to go to this high school to be happy.” I fought his plan time and time again. I thought that I knew what my life was supposed to look like but in reality God’s plan was the opposite. Finally, the school accepted my transfer and my gut feeling told me to say no. After all this fight and anger, why would I reject the transfer? Now, I’m in my second year at Olentangy, the school I was redistricted to, with brand new friends, a sport that I’ve fallen in love with, and a totally different life than I thought I would have. God was not there when I was praying for superficial stuff. I did not see him when I directly asked him to be there. He was there for those life altering decisions. He was that gut feeling. I did not know that going to Olentangy was the presence of God until my mom told me that she never actually submitted the request to transfer schools. To this day, we are not quite sure what happened, but whatever did happen, happened for a reason and that changed my life for the better. God is there when you least expect it.

Leah Wenner (16 years old, Sophomore in High School)

**Prayer:** Dear heavenly Father, I pray that you are there for us when we think that our life is all figured out. I pray that you remind us of the plans you have for us so we can trust in you to live the life as your disciple. Help us trust in you when we think we know what is best, because your plan is so much greater than we could ever imagine. Amen.

## Tuesday - March 15

*For I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord. They are plans for good and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.*

*Jeremiah 29:11 (TLB)*

I am a planner. I make lists, set goals, and always have a backup plan. My husband, Paul, and I moved to Powell from Dublin 10 years ago to our “forever” home. We planned to spend the rest of our retirement doing many things on our bucket list.

Life changed when Paul’s leukemia took his life and impacted mine. My well-constructed plans were disrupted and I needed to manage by myself; to become more independent and comfortable making decisions for my future. One day I came across this passage from Jeremiah. What a comfort it was to read and re-read the assurance that God, too, was a planner and God had plans for me. I wasn’t going to be alone but rather have God as my guide.

I have always had a strong faith, believed in God with my whole heart, and I trusted that wherever God would lead me I would gladly follow. But what did he have in mind for me? I needed to be patient while his plans unfolded. My church was my safe haven. Worship, small groups, and Bible studies became my biggest blessings as I found my grief manageable and my faith growing stronger each day.

However, managing a big house and realizing that perhaps another plan would soon be needed, I prayed for God to once again guide my decision making. I placed my name on a waiting list at Worthington Christian Village where my parents lived for many years. I patiently waited for God to assure me that this was the right decision. After a three-year wait I finally received word, on October 20, that an independent cottage was available for me. This was the anniversary of the day we met in 1959. God knew that this was a way I would be assured that Paul approved of my decision to move.

On December 23 with the help of my family and dear friends I made the move! I am now settled in comfortably and love my new home. Once again, God had plans for me...

Nancy Tela

**Prayer:** Loving God, thank you for giving us patience as we wait for Your plans to be fulfilled. Please continue to give us the comfort and assurance we seek. In Your holy name we pray. Amen.

## Wednesday - March 16

*Continue to ask, and God will give to you. Continue to search, and you will find.  
Continue to knock, and the door will open for you.  
Matthew 7:7 (ERV)*

Several years ago there was a seminar in Cincinnati. A group of us decided to attend to grow in our faith. I procrastinated in registering. When I did the door was shut. NO! It can't be! All my friends were signed up.

I called the registrar and was put on a long maybe list. I didn't have much chance. I let God know my predicament and asked for help. I persisted in calling back several times. Same response! I kept praying. There must be a way, God!

One day I had lunch with another friend. I complained about missing my chance to attend a great seminar. She said she'd signed up, but sadly couldn't go. She readily agreed I could take her place. God answered my prayers.

Excitedly I phoned the registrar and explained I had found a way, but she said, "No, that wouldn't be fair." "But." "No buts!"

Depressed I hung up, and rather angrily asked God, "Why?" Two days later the phone rang. It was the registrar. She said they'd reconsidered my request. I was allowed to attend. You can imagine my prayer of thanks that day!

Like Matthew says, be persistent, keep knocking. I know that it doesn't always happen, but I have faith that God will even then provide a blessing if we're open to seeing it.

Dave Woodyard

**Prayer:** Lord, doors are often hard to open, we need Your help. Bless us with persistence and guide us in the direction we need to go to find the right key. Amen.

## Saturday - April 2

*In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.  
Matthew 5:16 (NIV)*

I recently found myself in one of those fast food drive through "pay it forward" situations. You may be familiar with this. You pull up to the window to pay for your order and the cashier says, "The car in front of you has already paid for your order!" First you are surprised and happy that a perfect stranger would pay for your order. You may even do a quick look around to see if you can catch a glimpse of the car and the person who just paid for your order. Then you have a decision to make, do you keep the kindness going and do you pay for the order behind you in the line?

This random act of kindness example reminds me of God's love for me. God's love for me is both in the hills and in the valleys of my life. God's love is something that is given to me freely and is meant to be passed on to others. To pass this love of God to others is so important and can be done in so many ways! Be on the lookout during your day for someone who may be in need of your kindness. It could be someone you know or a perfect stranger that just needs your words of encouragement. Or it could be that God's love can be shared through serving and being part of one of the PUMC mission teams that serve at Common Ground Free Store or at Good Works! Or it could be writing a letter to someone who is incarcerated through PUMC Hope Letter writing! These are just a few examples. There are so many more ways to pass the love of God to someone and to "pay it forward" both in a simple way or in a way that takes additional time and effort.

During this Lenten season, Jesus represents the ultimate "pay it forward" person. He gave His life on the cross so that our sins are forgiven and that we may have eternal life! Just like in the drive through line, we have a choice to make. Like Jesus, will we keep the chain of love and kindness going and "pay it forward?" May we each choose to say "yes" to "paying it forward" during this Lenten season.

Karen Curren

**Prayer:** Dear Lord, thank you for this day. Help me to love others and to "pay it forward" by spreading Your love and kindness to others. Help me to be on the lookout for someone who needs words of encouragement or just to be heard today. Thank you for loving me and for loving those who may not know You yet. Your love never ends and we are grateful for that. Amen.

Song to listen to today: *Promises*- Maverick City Music

## Friday - April 1

*I have placed my bow in the clouds; it will be the symbol of the covenant between me and the earth.  
Genesis 9:13 (CEB)*

Once when I was little, I was at a festival and I wanted to go on a carousel, but I had to go on a different ride because that's the ride that my sister was on. I was sad and I cried. Then my mom crouched down to my height and asked me why I was crying. I told her I wanted to go on a different ride, but we stayed in that line. I kept crying though and my mom asked again why I was still crying. Then I said, "Look!", and she turned around and saw a rainbow in the sky. I was crying because the rainbow was so beautiful, and it made me happy even though I had just been sad. That reminded me of the promise that God made with the rainbow. Then I got to go on the carousel. There were no lines, and I was the only one on it. I felt so happy I could burst with joy. Sometimes when you are sad, simple things can make you feel better, like a rainbow.

Emma Hilty (9 years old, 4th Grade)

**Prayer:** Dear God, thank you for Your rainbow. Thank you for Your promises. Help us to always see Your bow in the sky when we are sad and crying. Thank you for being with us. Amen.

## Thursday - March 17

*"Be still, and know that I am God! I will be honored by every nation. I will be honored throughout the world."  
Psalm 46:10 (NLT)  
Acknowledge that the LORD is God! He made us, and we are his. We are his people, the sheep of his pasture.  
Psalm 100:3 (NLT)*

When I think of Lent, the words still and listen come to mind. This year we are focusing on being still. How do we do this and why??

Well let me share a story: at work we were talking about communicating with others. You say something, the other person should respond. And so the dialogue goes. It doesn't include think of what I say next. To be an active listener you need eye contact, to listen and cue into body language clues or context clues that may be included in the conversation. So how do we dialogue with God? Prayer/scripture/study/serving/music/nature the list is endless but a good place to start. (They are also good examples of ways to hear his voice).

Offer up words and see what happens. You may be surprised at how God/ Jesus or the Spirit responds. For example: I was contemplating quitting tennis. The usual "they don't need me," "there are enough players," and "I am terrible so why bother" were running through my head.

Well as I shared this in prayer time, my phone went off. A text for the next match. Yes, I was on the roster! But it didn't stop there...an extra blessing, or sign that I was needed and not invisible...my partner was a "Sandy" too...wait there is more...the team also had another "McKinley" (my tennis sister as we joke). Thus I received a LOUD confirmation that God heard my prayer and plea. How can I doubt the timing of the text? Or that my name is a combination of two players on the team. Yup, I am needed. (By my team and God). Will you join us this Lenten season praying and pleading and being still (and hopefully listening)?

Sandy McKinley

**Prayer:** God, You are an amazing Creator. You know all about us and want to hear us and respond back. Help us to be still and listen so we can respond back to You by serving in Your name. Let us see You, hear You, feel Your love, and be filled with You. We invite You to be with us and come beside us. If it is hard for us to be still or listen, help us practice that too. Thank you so much for providing ways for us to be drawn closer to You. We love You! In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

## Friday - March 18

*Don't fear, because I am with you; don't be afraid, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, I will surely help you; I will hold you with my righteous strong hand.*

*Isaiah 41:10 (CEB)*

A couple times in my life I felt the presence of God. This is a time I felt that way. There was once a very sad thing that happened to me and I was very upset. My Grandmother had passed away and I was very upset about that. I was crying and my family members helped me calm down. I was sad and angry and confused all at the same time and felt all mixed emotions. It felt uncomfortable and weird. But once I calmed down, I felt this feeling I really had not felt before. I felt safe and comforted. I was thinking so peacefully and thought how my Gramma was in a better place and that hopefully I would meet her again someday.

Maren Liba (9 years old, 4th Grade)

**Prayer:** Dear God, thank you for being with me. Help us to not be afraid when we are sad or scared. Help us to let You strengthen us. Thank you for comforting me and letting me feel Your presence. Amen.

## Thursday - March 31

*Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches.'*

*Revelation 3:22 (NIV)*

I can't remember a time that I have not felt that God was with me. Sunday School, youth group, adult Bible studies and mission trips....all brought me into a closer relationship with God. I had read Bible stories and heard personal accounts of how God was with people AND actually spoke to them, but I had never experienced that. Oh yes, I had moving experiences of being so close to Him, that I felt embraced by his Love and Grace, but that wasn't the same as God SPEAKING to me. Until one Sunday evening at church.

In 2001 we were meeting for disciple classes at our Toledo UMC. We were eating while 3 people were giving a presentation. One of the presenters, a pastor from Romania, was explaining about many missions who helped young boys, but none that helped abused and neglected girls. They envisioned a group home of a dozen at risk girls living with a mother and dad who had the support of the local church. It was to be called The Deborah House after the strong, old testament female judge. They were trying to find churches who could send mission teams to help build the home and to help build relationships, showing God's love to these girls.

As the presentation ended, it hit me! It wasn't an actual voice, but I definitely heard God say "Go!" We had gone on local and out of state mission trips with the church and our friend Sally was on every trip. She was sitting across the fellowship hall. Sally and I looked at each other, locked eyes and it was like a confirmation of God telling me to investigate and eventually lead our church on 3 mission trips to Romania!

Tim Kreps

**Prayer:** (from hymn "*Hear I Am Lord*")

Hear I am, Lord it is I, Lord? I have heard You calling in the night.

I will go, Lord, if You lead me. I will hold Your people in my heart. Amen.

(In western Romania there are now 2 Deborah houses, ministries to a local juvenile prison and a local orphanage, a back to school program, a program to help graduates transition back into society and a mountain retreat/Christian training center.)

## Wednesday - March 30

*And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.  
Matthew 28:20 (NRSV)*

My whole life, I've always felt closest to God when I'm near water. I'm sure this began because my family spent a week every summer at the beach when I was growing up. I remember being filled with awe watching the water. Sometimes the water was as still as glass and sometimes roaring with crashing waves, sometimes so clear I could see shells and fish, sometimes so churned up you couldn't see anything.

As I grew up and began attending retreats with my church youth group, the camps we went to always had a lake. We'd have time throughout the weekend to go off on our own to journal and talk to God, and I always chose to go near the water.

Now, as an adult, I still find myself gravitating to water. My new favorite place to sit and spend time with God is the dock at our lake house. It is so quiet and beautiful, very peaceful. I spend my time watching the trees and the birds, listening to the water lapping against the dock, and feeling the calm that all this brings me. Being near the water always makes me feel God's presence.

I feel so fortunate to have grown up in a Christian household where I've always known about God. Because of this, I've always been able to talk to God and tell him my wants, needs and dreams, but I have to admit that I haven't always been very good at listening. Since spending time on the dock, I've begun to practice listening for God. Consciously making myself stop thinking about me and putting effort into quieting my brain and listening. This has definitely been much harder than it should be, but I'm getting better at it. And I feel my relationship with God strengthening. I am truly thankful for this special place that makes me feel so close to God.

Debbie Wenner

**Prayer:** Dear Lord, You have given us so many beautiful places, visual reminders of You and all the blessings You bestow on us. As we see this beauty, may we remember that You are always with us. Amen.

## Saturday - March 19

*God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble.  
Psalm 46:1 (NIV)*

The decisions we make each day have consequences that the Lord is aware of and is in control. An example is in the flow of activity involved after I fell and bashed my left temple, causing skin to be pulled apart and a volume of bleeding to occur almost immediately around my left eye. The YMCA staff was immediately responsive, supplying pads to try and stop the bleeding but recognizing also that this required immediate professional care. When asked if I preferred an ambulance or a family member, I asked for my daughter. On arrival, in just 10 minutes, she immediately said, "help me load him in the car and we'll get him to the emergency care unit."

On arrival we went to the overload space as they were very busy and had no open treatment rooms. One attendant showed up frequently to provide fresh pads that I would hold up against my wound. But were there any bone fragments? Thankfully the MRI machine operator was still there who was supposed to already be at home. No bone fragments but the doctor says he was concerned that the skin flaps had been open too long and may not regenerate if just sutured back. As he started working he quickly decided it was strong enough and changed to the plastic surgery needles and said it was time for fun. Jen, my daughter was surprised when the doctor asked her to put on sterile gloves as he needed someone to hold the skin position needed by each suture. The Lord helped her through each step and she only needed short sit downs with her head between her knees for just a few seconds. But she did not miss a step. I noticed the doctors attitude shifted stating "all this is going to be fine" and then offered very affirmative and complementary comments about the help that she was providing him and how well this was going. He indicated the need to visit a plastic surgeon who just happened to be his buddy. When we later called, we were pleased to already be expected and scheduled first the next day. That surgeon also was very pleased with the work already done.

In reviewing this chain of events, I am convinced that these occurrences are not by chance but were a result of divine intervention. I am impressed that each step was available exactly as needed not requiring any worry on my part as I noticed each contact would become quite interested and helpful as they started to work with us. These services were all provided by top notch individuals. I believe this confirms prayers and God's intervention in our lives if we pray and listen. And that may require continual requests for understanding of His direction. No more "Help me with today's exam." But daily asking for help with understanding His will in your life. Wow, how strange that you didn't know that HE KNOWS and is just waiting for YOU.

Dave Tucker

**Prayer:** Our creator, let us trust in You. Amen.

## Third Sunday in Lent - March 20

*GOD guards you from every evil, he guards your very life. He guards you when you leave and when you return, he guards you now, he guards you always.*

*Psalm: 121: 7-8 (MSG)*

Kendra and I had just walked into the house after a wonderful mom/daughter afternoon, when my cell phone rang. The caller ID indicated that it was my doctor calling, which at 5:00pm on a Saturday afternoon did not bode well. This call changed my life as I knew it.

I had an MRI two days before, my massage therapist recommended I talk to my doctor about getting one done. In his words, “my wires were crossed.” I had been in a car accident the year before, and the migraine headaches became debilitating, causing a leave from work. My doctor had gotten the results and wanted to make sure I had the information as soon as possible.

The first thing he told me was to stay out of cars as much as possible as another accident could leave me paralyzed. Second thing was that there was strong evidence of a stroke in the cerebellum. He was going to set up an appointment for me to see a neurosurgeon as soon as possible. I was alone in the house when I got this news. Kendra went out with friends, and my husband, Tom, was singing downtown.

In many ways it was a blessing to be alone. I had time to try to digest what my doctor told me, and work through some of the emotions prior to sharing the news with Tom. It also, for a moment, rattled me to the core. Then a feeling of calm came. I knew I would not be facing the upcoming challenges alone.

Faith is a strong centering force. It helped to deal with two separate neck surgeries, recovery, and unexpected side effects. I was able to face the unknown with the confidence of grace and peace.

Rita Stevenson

**Prayer:** Dear Lord, thank you for the centering force of the Holy Spirit, which can help one to face the unknown with peace and grace, knowing that the Spirit is always present in all moments. Amen.

## Tuesday - March 29

*Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe.” Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!” Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me?*

*Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.”*

*John 20:27-29 (NRSV)*

As I write this, I am waiting to pick up a visitor traveling from Newark to Columbus. This waiting triggered my memory of when I flew from Newark on September 9, 2001. I was engrossed in a book and barely looked as the pilot pointed out the twin towers. My luggage arrived the next day, and we all remember what happened the day after that. It could have been me. Would I have had the courage to fight and die for what is right? I am not a crier, but I couldn't contain it during the pastor's prayer the next Sunday as I felt a wave of spiritual presence. Yet, time passes, and I haven't thought about Newark in years...until today. I wonder if the Disciples thought it could have (or should have?) been them when they looked up at the cross the next day. The vividness of what we now call the Lenten period must have motivated them to pass on all of Jesus' teachings that they did not yet understand until after the cross. Experiencing others' life-changing spiritual revelations is what I think of as “one body in Christ.” I truly believe that God asks us to simply be open like Jesus was. That sounds crazy until it doesn't. The Disciples were far from perfect, but they became increasingly open as teachings turned into spiritual encounters and ultimately into bold witness. Of course, I feel doubt and uncertainty, but fighting to stay open in today's challenging and apathetic world helps others to pull me back. Then, I too want to leave my unique fingerprint in his open side and proclaim, “My Lord and My God!”

Jeff Firkins

**Prayer:** Holy God, thank you for those believers who helped me grow my faith. Please help me to witness more boldly for others to see and believe in Your risen Son. I pray for openness to all during this Lenten period and all those in the future until we are filled at last. Amen.

## Monday - March 28

*Abraham answered, "God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son."  
And the two of them went on together.  
Genesis 22:8 (NIV)*

God provided for His people all through the Old Testament. Besides providing a ram for Abraham to sacrifice instead of Isaac, He sent Moses to lead His people out of Egypt and fed them in the wilderness. Once they reached the Promised Land, He provided leaders like Joshua and the Judges and when they were going astray, He sent the prophets.

In the New Testament, He continued to provide by sending His Son, Jesus Christ, to atone for the sins of all men and then the Apostles to spread His word. Today, He still provides. He sends leaders like Martin Luther King, Jr., Billy Graham and Mother Theresa to spur us on to Christian action. Sometimes, His provisions are quieter and more personal. The miraculous rescue of a driver from a burning car. The presence of people with just the right skills to match a difficult situation. Churches and individuals who reach out to help the less fortunate. If you listen carefully, you might hear Him calling you to provide for a brother or sister in need.

Don Moore

**Prayer:** Loving Father, thank you for watching over us. We are blessed and humbled by Your care and concern. Use us, we pray, as Your instruments here on Earth, ministering to our brothers and sisters wherever they may be. Amen.

## Monday - March 21

*The LORD your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; he will rejoice over you with gladness; he will quiet you by his love; he will exult over you with Loud singing. Zephaniah 3:17 (ESV)*

I will admit it I have it pretty good living in Northern California. On New Year's Day I walked out my front door and was greeted by the sweet scent of daphne flowers in my garden. I can anticipate the advent of spring earlier here than one can in Ohio. Each year as spring approaches, I am again reminded in so many ways that God is with me. And then I remember Robert Browning's optimistic *Pippa's Song*:

*The year's at the spring,  
And days at the morn;  
Morning's at seven;  
The hill-side's dew-pearled;  
The lark's on the wing;  
The snail's on the thorn;  
God's in his heaven—  
All's right with the world!*

There are so many flowers that it is impossible to choose a best, and so it is with hymns. But we can have our favorites. One of my favorite hymns is *In the Garden*, written by gospel composer C. Austin Miles in 1912. It describes an intimate encounter with Jesus:

*I come to the garden alone  
While the dew is still on the roses  
And the voice I hear, falling on my ear  
The Son of God discloses.*

*He speaks and the sound of His voice  
Is so sweet the birds hush their singing  
And the melody that He gave to me  
Within my heart is ringing.*

*And He walks with me  
And He talks with me  
And He tells me I am His own  
And the joy we share as we tarry there  
None other has ever known.*

I feel safe and at peace as I walk and talk with God in the person of Jesus. I imagine our closeness as He reaches out to hold my hand. Holding a hand is such a wonderful, emotional act of love. I recently held the hand of a dying parent, and it was an unforgettable experience. Blessed be our Lord who lets us know that we are His own, in the deepest and most loving way.

Michael Ott

**Prayer:** Dear God, thank you for being with us in friendship, intimacy and compassion. Help me to see joy in all Your creation and remember that You are always with me, not in fear but in love. Amen.

## Tuesday - March 22

*Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and to know that you are the Holy One of God."*

*John 6:68-69 (NIV)*

I moved to Wesley Glenn Retirement Community in Columbus, July 1. During this time of transition, I continued my daily appointment time with the Lord as I sought refuge and strength in God. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 1:4: "I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that has been given you in Christ Jesus."

I look forward to visiting with you soon as I come and share my book, *I'm Up; Soul Devotions for Seniors* with 10 contributors, four from our church. As a senior, it is difficult to get up out of bed. Then we call on Jesus and Jesus lifts us up to face our daily challenges and serve our Lord. The devotions talk about our daily challenges, some funny, serious, and inspiring ventures. Examples of devotions: Jesus said we must become like a child to enter the kingdom of God. Well, I qualify for I now wear depends, take gummies for calcium, use walker/cane, etc. Another devotion: Grandmother: Where's Mary? As grandparents we are concerned for our grandchildren and pray for them. There are hymns at the end of some of the devotions because even when memory declines, we remember the hymns.

The Holy Spirit guided me in the writing of the book. The book's purpose giving us assurance as we hold on to God's promises of eternal life when we go home on God's free trip ticket to live forever with our Lord.

Beverly Avers

**Prayer:** Help me Lord to be still as I face the challenges of each day. For where else can I turn but to You. For You have the words of eternal life. Help me to trust You as I find refuge (protection, shelter) and rest in You. In Jesus Name I pray. Amen.

## 4th Sunday in Lent - March 27

*He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the human heart; yet no one can fathom what God has done from beginning to end.*

*Ecclesiastes 3:11 (NIV)*

Grief: I don't know many people who haven't been introduced. Of course much has been written, much has been experienced, but it is never the same for any of us. Each page of the grief book brings both predictability and unpredictability.

One of my very best friends (and I surely tell you one of God's most amazing creations) died. It'll be exactly one year to the day when we will be proofing and compiling this Lenten Devotional 2022 series so she's deeply on my mind. We've produced these Lenten booklets for a decade plus and every year when we are unclear if we'll have enough writers, I'd always do a last request to her, "C'mon", I'd email or text, "this booklet will be better with you in it, because you ooze inspiration." Since she was oozing her gifts to so many, sometimes she'd have time, sometimes she wouldn't.

Today I opened the PUMC 2014 Lenten devotionals and in a God wink moment, I flipped the page right to her name...she wrote not one devotion, but two, go figure.

I heard someone on Lectio 365\* say that "seeds of eternity are planted inside our souls." I wrote it down because I needed to sit in those words. As I grieve older losses in my life or newer ones, I find clarity in the promise that although grief may be deep and wide, it doesn't match the promise of eternity, hope and light broader than our eyes can see or our minds comprehend. May our hearts be lifted into that promise of perfect peace in all things and in grief.

Dana Ullom-Vucelich

**\*\*Prayer:** Father, help me to remember that You are in control. Help me to remember to trust (and not fight or redirect) the path You have designed for me. Help me to relish the cleansing of my sins and be in perfect peace. Amen.

\* Lectio 365 is a free online application

\*\* Prayer of Belinda Molihan Jones (*PUMC Lent: A Season of Hope, April 8, 2014*)



## Saturday - March 26

*I lift up my eyes to the hills from where will my help come? My help comes from the LORD, who made heaven and earth.*

*Psalm 121:1-2 (NRSV)*

One dark snowy morning I left our home near Cleveland for the two-hour drive to the Methodist Theological School in Ohio. The familiar drive was uneventful until I hit a patch of unfamiliar black ice. As the car spun around, the headlights beamed onto the guard rail now in front of me. The thought of crashing into the deep ditch below flashed through my mind. Mercifully, the guard rail stopped the car. Shaken, I gave thanks for the guard rail's protection while also wondering what to do in this precarious predicament.

Just then two men emerged from the ditch beside the highway and knocked on my window. "Are you alright?" one asked. The men told me that they were working in the adjoining field, saw my headlights, and came to see if they could be of help. One man stepped onto the interstate highway and directed traffic into the left lane. The other guided me to turn the car around in the berm without going into the ditch and back onto the highway headed again toward MTSO. I was back on my way without even a moment to say, "Thank you!"

That dark morning God was with me in a protective guard rail, headlights that beamed a call of distress and two men who interrupted their work and took risks to be of help.

Sandy Huber

**Prayer:** Merciful and Gracious God, creator of heaven and earth. You are present and work through ordinary things and ordinary people. Give us eyes to see and courage to act so that we represent You as Your helpers in both good times and precarious predicaments. Amen.

## Wednesday - March 23

*Now Samuel did not yet know the Lord: The word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him... The LORD came and stood there, calling as at the other times, "Samuel! Samuel!" Then Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant is listening."*

*1 Samuel 3:7, 10 (NIV)*

Every time I hear this story, I am always jealous of Samuel. How lucky was he to hear God speak directly to him? Have you ever heard God speak to you? I would say I never had, but was it that God was not speaking to me or was it that I was not listening?

I joined PUMC for fellowship, Bible study and friends. One thing I have loved is all the studies this church has to offer. I have attended the pastor bible study and book studies, I have helped with Vacation Bible School, and I have attended youth events. However, I never really felt like I knew God. I was always around hoping one day he would talk to me.

Then came the day when I opened up the Sunday bulletin and saw a new class being offered. The class was Disciple Fast Track, a 24-week commitment to studying the Bible. Many thoughts went through my head, "I've always wanted to read the whole Bible," "24-weeks is a long time," and "7 o'clock at night is late." Even though I had reservations, it was actually very easy for me to say yes and sign up for this study.

Now that we are about halfway through the study and finishing the Old Testament, I have realized that this was God speaking to me. He was telling me that if I really wanted to know him, this was my way to do it.

I was always waiting to hear God's voice out of the darkness telling me what to do, but this time his voice was in the form of a few words in a Sunday bulletin. Now I feel like I am beginning to understand my place in God's life. I am learning how we all came to be and how I can use my faith to learn and teach others. When you feel as though you cannot hear God, pause and look around because he may be speaking to you in a way you haven't been paying attention to.

Alyssa Thiele

**Prayer:** Oh Lord, we thank you for giving us this precious life. We acknowledge that without You and Your words we would stray from living a faithful life. We pray that You continue to speak to us in many ways so that we can spread Your name and message to all those who need it. Be with us this and every day. Amen.

## Thursday - March 24

*In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. Then God said, "Let there be light;" and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness.*

*Genesis 1:1-4 (NRSV)*

On a beautiful June day in 2018, I was hiking solo along a trail cut into the side of a very steep and bare hillside. Deep blue water churned through the boulders in the creek 80 feet below on my right side. It had rained heavily the night before. Birds flew through the canyon that had been created by the creek. There was a breeze in the air. The sky was so blue. I tripped and fell over the edge.

The Dolly Sods Wilderness Area is dotted with rhododendron bushes. They are beautiful plants covered with broad green leaves and beautiful pinkish-white flowers. In this area they usually grow up to around 10 feet tall and are equally as wide. I dropped 6 feet and landed in the middle of one of these bushes. The bush was growing horizontally out of the hillside. I found myself lying face down along a branch inside of the bush. I recovered my glasses from a branch to my right and my hat from a branch to my left. Through the leaves, I could see the water flowing through the boulders directly below me. Birds still flew through the canyon. There was still a breeze in the air. The sky was so blue. Yes, God provides.

Steve Bettencourt

**Prayer:** Almighty and everlasting God, thank you for life. Thank you that we are surrounded by so much life each and every day. Thank you that we have each other. For it is from You and You alone that truly gives us all that is Good and all that is holy on the face of this earth. Amen.

## Friday - March 25

*From inside the fish Jonah prayed to the LORD his God. He said: "In my distress I called to the LORD, and he answered me. From deep in the realm of the dead I called for help, and you listened to my cry.*

*Jonah 2:1-2 (NIV)*

When I think of God is with me, I think of Jonah and the whale. God was with Jonah when he was inside the whale, just as he was with me through my hard time and healing.

One day I was skateboarding in my court and as I came up in the driveway I fell off of my board and onto my wrist. I cried because I hurt my wrist. The next day we went and got it checked out at the doctor and I found out that I broke it. I felt sad because I couldn't play sports and it was also my writing hand. I knew God was going to be with me through that hard time though because God is always with me.

Sarah Hilty (10 years old, 5th Grade)

**Prayer:** Dear God, thank you for being with me. Thank you for reminding me of Jonah's story when I was having a hard time. Help me to always remember Your stories to help me in my life. Amen.