

# A Word from the Pastor . . .

The following devotionals serve as a spiritual treasure for guidance in following Jesus through our prayers, presence, gifts, and service. They are designed for a forty day period, ending with a time of invitation. It is my prayer and hope that these personal stories and gems of wisdom would not only bless you on a daily basis, but lead you into a greater experience of God's presence and Christian discipleship.

As you will also discover, these devotions are written from the mind and heart, and we are privileged to gain from the faith walk of others. I thank those who have written, for allowing God to work through them, and I look forward to having others write in the future.

I invite you to read prayerfully each day, and not to rush. Only a few minutes at most is needed to do the reading, allowing for a time of reflection and application. We can even carry the spirit and truth of these readings with us throughout the day, allowing our heart to further embrace the steps of faith and blessings that God longs for us to have.

May God truly bless you as you read each day, and may we truly grow in the grace and truth of what it means to follow Jesus and build his kingdom on earth.



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "David McVay". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

DAVID McVAY

## Taste and See Day 40: Invitation

by Elaine Blair

*“...and showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God. It shone with the glory of God, and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal.”*  
- Revelation 21:10-11 (NIV)

Growing up in the fifties was such a wonderful time. Raised in Arkansas, my family, as well as 8-10 other close families, would spend a week in Eureka Springs at a resort called Lake Lucerne. It consisted of a lodge, cabins circling the lake, and a pavilion with a juke box and the best hamburgers one could imagine. All day we swam, paddleboated, fished, played cards or Monopoly. It was heaven! At night we played bingo in the lodge or danced at the pavilion. I can't begin to make you understand the wonderful memories that this rustic place has for me. I have been many places in the years since, but no place has the pull that Eureka Springs has for me even after so many years.

If such a simple place as this can have such a tight hold on me, then what would I think of the place that God has prepared for me in eternity? Jesus said that he would prepare a place for me. My responsibility to Him is to be worthy of the place that is waiting for me. Are prayer, presence, gifts and service enough? Without faith, none of these things guarantee my seeing the Holy City. But when I get there, I hope it looks just like Lake Lucerne. Only this time the cabins will sparkle. Bingo will be played with diamonds instead of corn kernels. And the dancing will be to the music of the Celestial Choir and the Angels.

**PRAY TODAY:** Most gracious Father, you have equipped us with all that we need to do your work. Let us be generous with our love so that all will see you in us. Amen.

## Taste and See Day 1: Introduction

# LISTEN

by Sandra Nasca

*“Faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the word of Christ.” - Romans 10:17*

I have to admit that when asked if I would be willing to write a devotional for a church booklet, I was, to say the least, hesitant. My faith, while very strong, is something very personal to me, and I have never been one to “evangelize.” In the few seconds between the request and my answer, my memory of my rather circuitous path back to regular attendance at church flashed before me. While my faith throughout my life never wavered, my attendance at church virtually disappeared when I was young. When I met my husband, Lenny, he was singing in the choirs of two different churches and asked me to accompany him. At the first church, a different denomination, after such a long absence from church, while the rafters didn't shake and I wasn't struck by lightning, the service and environment did not call to me. The next Sunday, we went to a local Methodist church, and I entered the sanctuary to find a seat so I could hear the choir. When I entered, I felt a great relief and peace as if I had finally found my place. I hadn't spoken to anyone yet, no great events had happened, but I knew that I was being welcomed “home.” It was as if God, with his infinite patience, had seen that my heart was ready to return to him and serve, and for the last 26 years, I have done so.

In those few moments of recollection, I made the decision to be a part of writing this devotional book. At our first meeting, we were given categories from which to choose where we would be the most comfortable in writing a brief devotional. One of the categories was service, and I felt that I could write something that would reflect how I felt about service to my church. I raised my hand to volunteer and the word “introductory” flew out of my mouth. I can't help but believe that God put the word in my heart since it was never my intention, but why? After much reflection, I have come to believe that it is because God wants me to demonstrate that even those of us who are quietly faithful have the power to reflect and serve Him. This devotional booklet has the words and power to help guide your faith and prayers through reflection on a daily basis.

Read the scriptures, stories, and God's words that follow and let them speak to your faith and heart.

Matthew 17:5 “While he was still speaking, a bright cloud enveloped them and a voice from the cloud said, ‘This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to Him!’”

The facts are that God has spoken to all of us! He has a best selling novel out; you may have heard of it. It's called “The Holy Bible,” but do we listen to God when we read his Word or pray? God is continually sending us messages within our hearts. Open your heart towards God. Listen to His messages of strength, peace, love, power, and encouragement and know they are His gift to you.

## Taste and See Day 2: Introduction

# GOD WILL MAKE A WAY

by Sandra Smith

*“...I will even make a way in the wilderness,  
and rivers in the desert.” - Isaiah 43:19 (KJV)*

I am blessed in that I grew up in a Christian home. My parents took me to church, and I learned to pray, read my Bible, and tithe my allowance at an early age. I grew up, graduated from high school, started college, married, graduated from college, and began to live the American girl's dream of the late 1950s and early 1960s.

Jimmy and I had a precious little daughter, Elizabeth Lynn, born in 1961. When Lynn was fourteen months old, she was diagnosed with a malignant tumor in her abdomen. Ten months later, after four surgeries, two cities and two hospitals, fifty-six days of in-patient radiation therapy, numerous doctors, nurses, needles, tubes, and huge, frightening machines, we were told nothing else could be done.

People all over Alabama and other states had joined Jimmy and me as we prayed and begged God to heal Lynn. On the day we received the crushing news of the medical road's end, I went out of Touro Infirmary in New Orleans, Louisiana, to get a breath of air. As I walked back up the broad stairway from the lobby to the second floor, I remember praying, “Lord, we've done all we know to do and the medical community has done all they know to do. My prayer is simply that your will be done in our lives, even now.” Almost immediately I was filled with a deep sense of peace and with the assurance that we would be all right.

Lynn died two months later, but I knew then, and I know now, God will make a way if we surrender to His will.

**RESPONSE:** May we give our lives to Him, trusting Him to make a way.

**PRAY TODAY:** Lord, as we surrender each area of our lives to you - prayers, presence, gifts, service - help us to trust you to provide a way for us to keep our commitments to you. Give us peace and the calm assurance that your grace is sufficient to meet our every need.

## Taste and See Day 39: Invitation

# LEAD ME IN THY RIGHTEOUSNESS

by John Jinright

*“Some give freely, yet grow all the richer;  
others withhold what is due, and only suffer want.*

*A generous person will be enriched, and the one who provides water  
for others will himself be satisfied.” - Proverbs 11:24-25 (NRSV)*

Today is an exciting opportunity to find out what blessings God has in store for you. It doesn't matter where you are in your faith; at this moment you are entitled to all the benefits, rights and privileges of membership in God's family. All you have to do is ask.

Ask God to remove anything that blocks you from two-way communication with Him. Read the Holy Bible and pray for God's Holy Spirit to inspire and reveal His will to you. God loves you and wants to bless you richly, but you must ask in order to receive. How will you hear from God? By prayerfully reading the Bible and loving your neighbor as yourself. God will manifest Himself to you in other people as you show God's love to others. This is service, ministry and witness all neatly packaged in one simple commandment (Matt 19:19).

God desires your praise and thanksgiving. This is affirmed by scripture and eloquently outlined in the UM Book of Worship as your prayers, presence, gifts and service. As Paul writes, “each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.” (2 Cor. 9:7) If you're not sure where you belong in the presence, gifts and service department, start by asking God in your prayers to lead you.

“As your brothers and sisters, we give thanks for all that God has already given you and we welcome you in Christian love. We promise to surround you with a community of love and forgiveness that you may grow in your trust of God, and be found faithful in your service to others.” (UM Hymnal & Book of Worship, Baptismal Covenant I)

**RESPONSE:** Lead me, Lord, lead me in Thy righteousness; make Thy way plain before my face. (S. Wesley)

**PRAY:** That through offering my prayers, presence, gifts and service in community with God's family, God will create within me, through the grace of Jesus Christ, a spring of water welling up to eternal life. Amen.

## Taste and See Day 38: Invitation

# PROMISES TO GOD

*by Scott Flowers*

If you are reading this devotional, it is probably safe to assume that you are a Methodist. One of the things we Methodists have in common is the promise we made at the time we joined our church. We promised to support it with our prayers, our presence, our gifts and our service. Promises, like marriage vows and traffic laws, are meant to be taken seriously. We are not supposed to be able to pick and choose which promise, vow or law we want to honor and which we want to ignore. Like the ten commandments, they are all equally important.

However, we humans are all blessed, or cursed as the case may be, with certain talents, desires and abilities. It is easier for some of us to be better stewards of our money than to get dirt under our fingernails. Some of us like the physical labor part of service and get great satisfaction out of seeing immediate results from our work. Still others are great prayer warriors, diligent in the habit, discipline and study required to be eloquent speakers when asked to pray publicly.

Whatever our lot in this life has given or taken from us, we all should remember the promises we made, promises not only publicly in church, but most importantly the promises we made to God.

He knows what motivates us, moves us to sympathy when we see sadness, moves us to generosity when we see need and moves us to honor the promises we made to him, publicly and privately.

**RESPONSE:** Lord, guide me in being faithful to my promises.

**PRAY TODAY:** Dear father God, please help us in our quest to be good stewards of your gifts, to pray tirelessly to do your will, to show up even when we want to stay home, and to serve you by serving others. In the name of Jesus we ask this of you.

## Taste and See Day 3: Introduction

# TIME?

*by John Jinright*

*“To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven.” - Ecclesiastes 3:1 (KJV)*

Time opens up the mysteries of the soul, and this can be frightening, especially when we realize that all of our time disappears on us. The day is as close as your skin and can weigh you down or move you up, yet this day vanishes. The only ground of time is the present moment.

In the Christian tradition, our liturgical calendar takes us from Advent to Pentecost. It may seem boring to some, but taking that same journey year after year isn't really the same journey. Heraclitus said, “You could not step twice into the same river; for other waters are ever flowing onto you.” Think for a moment how your life has changed in the past few years! How my Easters have changed in the last 10 years!

During Holy Week this year, Dr. Phil Kelley sang “Were You There” and prior to the service, we practiced the music he brought for the accompaniment. Imagine how we were surprised to discover that the arranger had swapped out the traditional musical harmony for some old jazzy chords! We both appreciated an artist's desire for a new expression of an old message, but sometimes you just have to show some love for the folks that need that “old, old story” told with the same old reassuring foundation of familiarity. Perhaps 10 years ago I might have played the notes as they were handed to me, with their unfamiliar chords and strange sonorities, but this Easter we chose the old familiar version without reservation or discussion.

Every year we face different challenges. We lose loved ones. We meet new friends. Each year is unique, but, like Easter, the challenge of being human confronts us at regular intervals. Sometimes the harmony is unexpected and disturbing. Sometimes it is serenely peaceful and beautiful. How we react is entirely up to us. As a good friend of mine always reminds me, “it's easy to praise God when you win the lottery!”

**RESPONSE:** Thank you, God, for being with me in storm and sunshine and loving me every step of the journey. Help me to thank You for every gift You give. Give me the wisdom to discern Your ways and the openness to respond to Your will.

**PRAY TODAY:** To receive the blessings of God by prayerful study of the scriptures using reason and logic, and by reflecting upon the sacraments of the church and the spiritual journeys of others God sends our way.

## Taste and See Day 4: Introduction

### I AM THE SHEEP

by Scott and Anne Claire McNaughton

*“The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.” - Psalm 23:1*

When Grace and Anne Claire were about six and ten years old, Amelia and I became convicted that we should begin to try to memorize some scripture as a family. We found this to be easier said than done. It was really hard to find uninterrupted time when we were all four together. After many failed attempts we finally settled on dinner as the designated time. On one of these nights when Anne Claire was just beginning to learn how to tap into these skills, she burst out with, “I am the sheep. God is the shepherd. I shall not want.”

At the time it tickled me. But now that I think about it, she was right. If God is the shepherd, then I want to be the sheep. John 10:11 says “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.” Don’t we all want and need a shepherd like that?

**RESPONSE:** Jesus, thank you for being the shepherd that I need in this life. Thank you for the promise and hope of the life to come.

**PRAY TODAY:** For the willingness to submit to the Shepherd. To accept Jesus for Who he is in acknowledgement of who I am - a sheep.

## Taste and See Day 37: Service OPPORTUNITIES TO GROW

by Bobbie Swisher

*“...through love serve one another.” - Galatians 5:13*

I believe I have always known about happiness in serving. My childhood home in Medina, Ohio, must have been reasonably close to a railroad. It was the early thirties, and in the summer, tired, ragged-looking men would often enter the yard, knock on the back door, and ask Mother if she would give them some food. She always gave them a full plate of whatever she had, and they would sit on the back stoop by the cistern pump to eat it. Gerry and I, perhaps 4 and 5 1/2, stood and watched them consume every bite. I recall a feeling of satisfaction that Mother could do this. Actually, she was setting an example of compassion and service for us.

And we had our mite boxes, square with a coin slot on top, that were passed out at Sunday School to be returned filled with coins for missions. Every penny that went into those boxes represented a forfeited hunk of pink bubble gum or a licorice stick, but it was good to feel how heavy the boxes could get, even if it was only with pennies.

Of course, it is in the church that I have learned the most about serving one another through love. I can call up countless memories of watching and helping members of the church extend love and assistance to others through prayers, visits, the work of their hands, concerned telephone calls, notes, gifts, food, whatever was needed. And the work of the church allows us to become “something more” as we join in teaching or committee meetings or enrichment studies. It has seemed to me that the joy that comes from participation in such serving exceeds all other pleasures. When God places us in situations where we are needed, He gives us a great gift. The opportunity to be of service to others, to have our lives and our talents used in His kingdom is a blessing beyond all measure, and it lasts for a lifetime. Here is the chance to make the hours we spend worthwhile; here is the window to witness.

**RESPONSE:** Father God, daily you put before each of us the tasks that will help us to grow in faith and in following Jesus’ command to love our neighbors as ourselves. Let my life serve you and be a reflection of your great love.

**PRAY TODAY:** To be attuned to God’s call to serve Him wherever He needs us.

## Taste and See Day 36: Service

### WHO'S WORKING?

by Alice Phillips

*“Jesus said to them, ‘My father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working.’” - John 5:17*

It was Sunday and my husband, my toddler daughter and I headed for church. “There’s a church, Mommy.” “Yes, that’s a church.” “But that’s not our church. God doesn’t work there.”

The members of that church we were passing probably would not have agreed with my baby, but she made me think about some things. Does God work at my church? Do I work at my church?

The answer to the first question is unequivocally yes. I see him here; I hear him here; I feel him here. The answer to the second question I am not so sure about. Do I work at my church?

We all know God does not need our service to make him greater. We need to work in his service to make ourselves greater, not materially or socially, but greater spiritually. And there are many types of work we can do in his service. We can begin with work in the church, the primary place to worship him. A building must be maintained. Bible lessons need to be led. Hymns should be sung. Young believers need to be encouraged. Food needs to be prepared. Funds need to be raised. Plans have to be made. Visitors should be welcomed. God’s message should be spread throughout the community. Where in all of this is my job?

**RESPONSE:** Currently I teach the Ann Love Sunday School Class, but I wonder if I am doing my part. When I joined the church, I promised my service. Am I keeping that promise?

**PRAY TODAY:** That I will find the work God has for me.

## Taste and See Day 5: Introduction

### GIANTS

by Buddy Starling

*“It is God who arms me with strength and makes my way perfect.” - Psalm 18:32*

We all had one growing up - a superhero. Whether it was Superman (Superwoman), Spiderman or Captain America, we all at one time or another marveled over them. There are probably a number of common attributes which captivated us about these larger than life figures: they were the “good guys,” dedicated to saving the day, leading the charge for right over wrong, and restoring the moral compass of society.

Having been blessed with three sons, the superheroes I witnessed them embrace and emulate in their younger years seemed to possess one distinct characteristic which impressed them beyond all others: strength — super-power, invincible strength — the kind only superheroes possess. Interestingly enough, at that age they placed God in “superhero” status and clearly saw him as the ultimate “Power Ranger.”

Even though they have all grown and matured, physically and spiritually, I’m still very thankful that they included God in their world of superheroes. Their views of God from that perspective allowed me to see Him in a light that was healthy for me at the time.

The British missionary James Hudson Taylor, credited for converting 18,000 Chinese to Christianity during his 51 years of ministry in China, once said, “Many Christians estimate difficulty in the light of their own resources, and thus they attempt very little and they always fail. All giants have been weak men who did great things for God because they relied on His power and presence to be with them.” James Hudson Taylor was a superhero through his obedience to God, and his words remind us that there is a superhero (giant) in all of us.

As I mature in my faith, I have come to realize that the only “extraordinary” trait God expects of us is obedience to Him. And through that obedience to Him, we will reflect the extraordinary qualities of a superhero.

**RESPONSE:** Thank you, God, for allowing me to see new perspectives of you through my boys and for being a superhero to them— then, now, and forever. You are the ultimate Power Ranger!

**PRAYER:** Father, we do not expect to be “giants” every day, but as we live and grow in your kingdom, allow us to know that we are only strong in You. Thank you for making our way perfect.

## Taste and See Day 6: Introduction

### HANDS

by Carla Rice

*“For I am the Lord, your God, who takes hold of your right hand and says to you, do not fear; I will help you.” - Isaiah 41:13*

Have you ever thought about just how important hands are? We touch, feel, feed, guide, lead, love, comfort, speak, pray; hands are so important.

Schools start each day with the Trojan Minute-Morning Announcements; each session ends with a moment of silence. One morning I realized there was a hand on my shoulder, my hand. The hand was there for a reason, to feel God and His presence. One of my favorite verses is “Be still and know.” Each morning, I am still and I know. What a wonderful way to start each day, knowing all I have to do is to put my hand on my shoulder and feel His presence, His hand. Then I need to remind myself throughout each day and every day to remember to be still and know and to think before I act or speak. In all situations God is with us. We are held in His mighty Hands.

**RESPONSE:** Take time today to think about the hands that have touched you - Mother, Father, family, friends and God through each of them.

**PRAY TODAY:** Thank you God for faithfully watching over us each and every day, and giving us the assurance that we are held in your hands through good times and bad.

## Taste and See Day 35: Service

### THE KINGDOM OF GOD

by John Jinright

*“The time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God is at hand; Repent, and believe in the Gospel.” - Mark 1:15  
(see also Matthew 12:28 and Luke 17:21)*

The term “Kingdom of God” is a central concept in the New Testament; it’s mentioned nearly 100 times in the three synoptic gospels alone. Jesus was sent by God to give us this “good news.” Have you ever thought about how different interpretations of the focus of God’s message might have changed over the years?

When we look at Judaism’s focus during Jesus’ time, it was on community, i.e., a collective vision shared by God’s chosen people. Jesus’ teaching focused on the person and his/her relationship with God.

In the book, *Jesus of Nazareth*, Joseph Ratzinger examines what he calls the four dimensions of the Kingdom of God. The first dimension is Christological; i.e., Jesus is the Kingdom of God. The second is mystical; since you are made of the image of God, when you surrender yourself to God, His kingdom grows out of you. The third dimension is ecclesiastical; i.e., the church is the Kingdom of God. Since the end of World War I, many theologians have focused on a more eschatological dimension; i.e., the Kingdom of God comes after the “End Times.”

As you give yourself up to God’s will in service, you will begin to encounter the Kingdom of God. Which dimension of His kingdom are you focused on? How will your service today bear witness to the Kingdom of God?

**RESPONSE:** Dear God, help me to rid myself of the things that separate me from You. Grant me, I pray, glimpses of Your kingdom here on earth and help me to serve my neighbors according to Your will.

**PRAY TODAY:** That through unselfish service, all people may be united in one holy faith and charity to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.

## **Taste and See Day 34: Service WITH ACTIONS AND IN TRUTH**

*by Edith Smith*

*“If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has not pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth.” - 1 John 3:17-18*

We are so blessed, and yet we think who we are and what we have are so because we worked hard and planned ahead. I remember the first time I saw a homeless person. I remember wanting to move to the other side of the street so I wouldn't have to walk by her. I didn't want her to ask me for money. It was obvious with the shopping bags I carried that I had money to spend on myself. But I didn't want to give any to her. I worked hard for my money and wanted to use it to enjoy my vacation. Besides, I was disgusted by the homeless woman's appearance. She clearly had not had a bath in days, maybe even weeks. Her hair was course and unruly, and she was missing most of her teeth. In my mind I thought, "How does someone end up like this? She must be on drugs, or an alcoholic, or mentally ill." I passed by her on the other side of the street.

That night after eating in a nice restaurant, I walked out and saw another homeless person. I couldn't believe that the restaurant would allow someone like him to be sitting outside. I also couldn't believe that I had seen two homeless people in one day. What was the deal? I again tactfully avoided giving this homeless person any money. I rationalized that, if I gave him money, he would probably go buy liquor or drugs rather than a meal and a room. Besides, I had a few days left on my vacation and I wanted to keep as much for myself as possible.

Days after I returned from my vacation, these homeless people were still on my mind and working on my heart. I gradually realized my logic for not helping them was judgmental and selfish. I wanted to pick and chose when and to whom I give. I did not feel pity for these homeless people God had put in my path. I had judged them not worthy of my charity.

I realized that the service was only "lip" service. I go to church and recite prayers for the poor and hungry. Sometimes, I give money to organizations that help the poor who have been "approved" as really in need. When I was confronted with the reality of a person in need, however, I began making excuses. I came to realize that God was not interested in why I did not help. I should have helped them. Jesus helped the lepers, the destitute, and those despised by society. The money I should have given to help the homeless persons may not have helped them but for a few hours, but my gift would have been very pleasing to God. I realized it is not about what we give or how much we give, but how willing we are to give.

**RESPONSE:** Lord, all that I am and all that I have belong to you. Help me share my many blessings with a willing heart.

**PRAY:** For a heartfelt commitment to seek opportunities to actively serve others and testify your love.

## **Taste and See Day 7: Prayer THE DISCIPLES' PRAYER (OUR PRAYER)**

*by Tom Murphree*

*“One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said to him, ‘Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples.’ He said to them, ‘When you pray, say: Father, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, Give us this day our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us. And lead us not into temptation.’”  
- Luke 11:1-4*

How many times have each of us recited the “Lord's Prayer?” When you pray it, do you listen to the words and grasp the meaning of what you are saying? Jesus' disciples witnessed Jesus praying many times and they were obviously impressed that his prayers were a powerful means of help and assurance to him. They wanted to be able to draw on the same source of assistance in their daily lives. Jesus' response to the disciples' request to teach them to pray is what we now call the “Lord's Prayer,” but it really is supposed to be the disciples' prayer, or more specifically, our prayer.

Much like the 23rd Psalm, the “Disciples' Prayer” gives me a wonderful sense of confidence that the Lord cares for me, a sinner, and hears my prayer.

The real meat of the prayer is in the phrase “thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.” This is our aim: to be an instrument that brings about his kingdom rather than somebody who destroys it. What a worthy goal to strive for in our lives!

**RESPONSE:** Lord, you have given me the perfect prayer. Help me to remember what you tell us when we recite the “Disciples' Prayer.”

**PRAY TODAY:** Lord, you have promised us that one day your kingdom will reign on this earth. Give me the strength to help make that happen by the way I live my life.

## **Taste and See Day 8: Prayer**

# **OPENING OUR HEART TO GOD'S PRESENCE**

*by Eleanor McKeller*

*"Reverence for God gives a man deep strength."  
- Proverbs 14:26*

I kept hearing a pecking sound as I finished up the ironing. I went to the door, but no one was there. Night was coming, so I lowered the blinds at all of the windows and forgot the unknown sound.

The next morning, and all the other mornings for weeks, the sound was repeated. Finally, I spotted the noise maker. It was a beautiful red cardinal. He would move from window to window during the day. I kept lowering blinds to keep him from hurling himself against the hard glass. As soon as no visible blind was at the window, he would return day after day. He was seemingly determined to enter my house. He was knocking at my window, begging for an invitation to enter.

I did not want a bird in my house, not even a beautiful cardinal.

Then as he persisted in visiting me, I wondered if he could be a reminder that Jesus threw his whole body against an uninvited world. Was this bird a reminder from Jesus? Was Jesus speaking to my soul, asking me to let him in? I had always thought of me, knocking at Jesus' door. Could He be knocking at the window of my heart? Was I putting up a blind to keep Jesus out?

I realized that a noise from the soul can be to God or from God. He is always speaking and listening.

**PRAY TODAY:** Lord, please open my heart to your presence. Help me to listen for your noise as well as asking you to listen to mine.

## **Taste and See Day 33: Service**

# **GOD FORGOT TO GIVE ME A TALENT**

*by Cathy Beckett*

*"It was he who gave some to the apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ."  
- Ephesians 4:11-13 (NIV)*

Growing up I wondered why I was the only one who didn't have a talent (gift). My parents, sister and friends could all sing, dance, paint, cheer, or play sports. You know where I am going with this.....me - nothing.

Then one day years later, my daughter sent me a card that addressed this issue in my life. It said, "The most visible creators I know of are those artists whose medium is life itself. They neither paint or sculpt. Their medium is being. Whatever their presence touches has increased life. They see but don't have to draw. They are the artists of being alive."

So, I guess that is why I became a teacher, not just in a classroom but in life. I don't know how much of the subject matter my students remember, but I hope they remember I taught them to give gladly of themselves and serve God where he places them. For me, it is with the children of God ages eight to eighty. My talent is "being" here to do service for our Almighty God!

**RESPONSE:** Father, you have shown me where my gifts lie. Help me to continue to be your instrument of service.

**PRAY TODAY:** For your heart to open to the possibilities presented to you or hidden to discover the joy of service beyond self.

## **Taste and See Day 32: Service SERVING THE LORD**

*by Jim Colley*

*“Service the LORD with gladness...” - Psalm 100:2*

*“...but as for me and my house,  
we will serve the LORD.” - Joshua 24:15*

*“I press on to reach the end of the race and receive the heavenly prize for  
which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us.” - Philippians 3:14*

Daddy was determined I would understand the satisfaction one feels from good hard work. When I was six years old, I started my first job - cleaning the large cricket cages at Bisby's Cricket House. Being the oldest son, I was responsible for shoveling coal into the furnace every evening. If I forgot and the furnace was empty, smoke would bellow through the whole house announcing to everyone that I had failed my duties! During the summers of high school, I left each morning with my post hole diggers and headed to whatever county road they were building. My job was to put in posts for the barbed wire fences that followed the roads. Daddy always felt work gave me a purpose and that work wasn't work if you enjoyed it. I was fortunate to love practicing medicine for many years. Then I began to have numerous health problems including the loss of vision in one eye. For a long while I asked the Lord, "why me?" During a Sunday School class discussion, it came to me clear as a bell... "Why not me?" At that time I began to reassess my life. I began to give more time to the church. I now enjoy teaching Sunday School, serving on church committees and serving as a lay delegate to the Annual Conference. I want to be available whenever the preacher calls and needs me...working with volunteers that just want to serve the Lord. I have learned to look at the church as a "mission in progress"...reaching out to me so I could reach out to others. I love my new "job" and hope I will be able to continue working for the Lord for years to come. And at my "retirement," I plan on my rewards being those of Heaven!

**RESPONSE:** O Lord, teach me to better understand thy will so that I may become more successful working for you and my church. Father, help me to stay focused and remember our mission, "making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the community and world."

**PRAY TODAY:** Father help us, I pray, to remember that we are the church, and, while working with one another, to develop more patience, love and understanding. We pray for your perfect will to be done, and that you will "grant us the serenity to accept the things we cannot change, the courage to change the things we can, and the wisdom to know the difference."

## **Taste and See Day 9: Prayer FORGET THE AMEN!**

*by Patsy Colley*

*“Pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is  
God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.” - 1 Thessalonians 5:17-18*

*“Before you were born I set you apart.”  
- Jeremiah 1:5*

I've always been pretty organized and find life is easier for me during the work week when I stay on a schedule. I wake up at the same time, have my coffee and spend my prayer time before getting dressed to head out the door at pretty much the same time each morning. I have always patted myself on the back that I remember my morning prayer even when things get busy. It is the way I start my morning.

Then one day I realized that in my hurry I had left out someone I meant to pray for. I decided that I would certainly include this person the next morning when I prayed. In fact, I wrote myself a note to remember her. That night I had a visit from the Lord. He always has a way of getting my attention while I am rushing through life! I realized I was visiting Him at my convenience in the mornings and then putting Him on the shelf while I tackled the day's problems on my own. No wonder I was so tired at the end of each day.

So, I made myself and Him a promise. I would forget the "amen" each morning and let my whole day be an open-ended prayer to Him. This way He would be a part of every experience I had, every thought I conceived and every emotion I felt. My life would be His life.

What a difference this has made. I have a wonderful partner in all I do. A partner that has known me since before I was born. And at the end of each day I can say AMEN, AMEN.

**RESPONSE:** Let the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart, be acceptable in Your sight, Oh Lord my strength and my redeemer...

**PRAY TODAY:** Lord, accept my whole life as a prayer of Thanksgiving to You. Use me as you will to serve You.

## Taste and See Day 10: Prayer

### PEACE

by Cindy Boswell

*“Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.” - Matthew 6:34*

While cleaning my stove one day I started a fire. My hair and face were burned by the flame and about 1/3 of my body was burned by the burning oil. My right wrist and arm were burned the most severely. I called for help after I extinguished the burning drapes and the back door. I found our puppy, brought her in, changed clothes and sat to wait for help. As I sat there, I started praying. I told God “I am depending on you to help me through this. No matter what, I know you are with me.” At that moment, I felt a *peace* that I had never felt.

When help finally arrived, I was sitting in the kitchen floor waiting. My Dad took me to the emergency room and the healing process started. The blisters were cleaned and wrapped with bandages. Silvadene was applied to my face. Funny thing about this medicine, it goes on white then turns to silver. Not exactly what a 20 year old female wanted to look at in the mirror. So after looking in the mirror that Thursday, I again started my conversation with God. I remember it so clearly, sitting in the middle of my bed, with the puppy sleeping in the doorway to my bedroom, I started, “God I know that there is meaning in all this. My face will heal pretty fast, but I use my hands in everything that I do. You know that I play the piano for church almost every Sunday and I don’t think there will be anybody there this Sunday to play. You know the people at Grimes UMC deserve to get to sing with music. So what do you think?” I sat there for a minute and then said, “I will make you this promise, if you will heal me enough to play this Sunday, anytime I am asked to play or sing and it is humanly possible I will do it.” Again I felt the *peace* of God.

That afternoon, my mom took me to see Dr. Cook. He looked at me with tears in his eyes and told me I was beautiful. He then asked my mom if he could speak to her outside. I heard him telling her that I probably would have some significant scars and that the chances of using my right hand were almost “0”. I asked them to come back in and told them not to worry. God and I had talked it over and everything was going to be okay. Since there would be no one else to play at church Sunday, I would be there to play. Feeling a little cocky I looked at Dr. Cook and said, “My God is bigger than you and he assured me it is okay. Will you come hear me play Sunday?” He came and I played.

The words of the song “What A Friend We Have in Jesus” keep coming to mind - “Oh what *peace* we often forfeit, Oh what needless pain we bear. All because we do not carry, everything to God in prayer.”

**RESPONSE:** Father, thank you for the *peace* you bring to my life everyday through the power of prayer.

**PRAY TODAY:** Pray that God will bring *peace* into your life. When you ask God for something, believe it will happen.

## Taste and See Day 31: Service

### ALL GOD’S CHILDREN

by Amelia McNaughton

*“Dear friends, let us love one another, because love is from God, and everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God...Love consists in this: not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Dear friends, if God loved us in this way, we must also love one another.”*

- 1 John 4:7,10-11 (HCSB)

One Sunday morning as Scott and I were rushing around getting ready for church, we converged on the girls’ bedroom closet. Grace had managed to produce only one shoe, and we were late. Scott and I both believed we understood what the problem was. I spoke first, “She needs a bigger closet.” Scott looked at me in disbelief. “That’s not it at all,” he said. “She’s got way too many shoes!”

Sometimes we can look at the same situation and set of circumstances and yet come away with completely different conclusions. I think this is one of the reasons why Jesus spends so much time encouraging us to love each other. Many times our perspectives are different depending on our life experiences, but God’s perspective remains unchanged through all of time. Anais Nin says, “We don’t see things as they are; we see them as we are.” As Christians, Jesus calls us to see the world and the people in it as He sees them. After all, we may be the only Jesus someone ever meets.

**RESPONSE:** Jesus, show me the world through your eyes, giving me a servant’s heart to love your children as you have loved me, for I am just another child in your kingdom.

**PRAY TODAY:** For the discernment to see not only ourselves for who we really are, but others for the value that God has placed in them.

## Taste and See Day 30: Service A GIFT OF FREEDOM

by Bobbie Swisher

*“...every perfect gift is from above, coming down  
from the Father of lights...”*

- James 1:17

When Jean Botts died, I was miserable. It wasn't just that I missed her; the problem was that I needed one more conversation with Jean. I needed to tell her just how much she had meant to Rhae and me...how much we loved her. But I had been hesitant to speak out because I was really inhibited about mentioning the end of life. I didn't feel comfortable even touching the possibility of her death.

Recently, I received a wonderful gift from a friend. There was the number blinking on my phone and Virginia Clower saying, “Bobbie, please call me.” Virginia had been VERY sick, and when she answered, I asked how she was feeling and had encouraging things to say about improvement. But Virginia interrupted me. “Bobbie, I'm dying, and I want to say ‘Goodbye’ to my friends. She knew this was true...and I was convinced.

Suddenly, all the barriers were down. I was free to ask if she was afraid. “Oh no, not a bit.” Free to recall with her the near-death experience she had when she was in the hospital and God speaking to her personally. “Bobbie, He just loves us so good!” she had said. God had told her she needed to come back and reassure her friends. And that is just what Virginia had done for me. We were free to say that we loved each other, and that we hoped to see each other in the future.

Virginia Clower has shared many things with me in the past: various plants, gardening wisdom, humorous stories about what was going on in her life. But the courage to speak about her own passing is the biggest gift she could give to me. God had given her a mission and a message. I was blessed in receiving it.

**RESPONSE:** Father, you know my greatest needs and answer them in wonderful ways. Grant me the courage to speak openly and sincerely about topics that need to be shared among all of us.

**PRAY TODAY:** For God's loving guidance as we minister to one another.

## Taste and See Day 11: Prayer HE KNOWS

by Candy Howard-Shaughnessy

*“Finally, be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power. Put on the full armor of God, so you can take your stand against the devil's schemes...and pray with all kinds of prayers and requests...and always keep praying for all of the Lord's people.”*

- Ephesians 6:10-18

January 2009 in a local store I saw a friend I knew from an organization to which we both belonged. She indicated she, her sister, and another friend were exercising every morning at 4:30 a.m. and invited me to join. I hesitantly joined them the next morning. We continued to exercise and socialize (as most women do) and became close friends. I quickly learned they were all Christians and active in their church. It was nice to be in the presence of strong Christian women. I looked forward to 4:30 a.m. where we discussed life events, shared Bible verses, spoke encouraging words, and prayed for each other (sometimes praying together). It was as if we were exercising physically and spiritually; and I needed it - more than I knew. My father was battling terminal cancer. As they were taking this journey with me, praying and supporting me, my friend (and her sister) unexpectedly lost their father from a massive heart attack one evening in March. Our prayers, tears, support of each other, and faith in God tied us together and bound us for life.

Three months later (June 2009), my father passed away. My three friends were with me every step of the way. Their faith in God, prayers and words of kindness spoke to me in every way and helped carry me through dark days. I shortly returned to exercising and although my body probably needed rest, my spirit needed the company of my Christian friends. We were invited to attend a Bible Study and went as a group to another church to attend the study. Again, God knew what we needed as it was the perfect study for someone who recently had lost a loved one.

Looking back, I am not sure what prompted her to invite me to exercise other than God knew. I prayed God would help me through my father's illness and death, but never realized God's plan. God knew I needed them; He knew they needed me; He knew we'd support each other's Christian walk; we needed Him. As I often reflect (and tear up when I do) about that year, I realize God hears our wants, knows our needs, and provides what we need even when we don't recognize it. This life is about Him, not us, and as we battle worldly issues, we should pray for His guidance. God explains in Ephesians 6:10-18 to put on the “whole armor of God.” In verse 18, He reminds us to “never stop praying, especially for others, to stay alert and keep praying for God's people.” Prayer is powerful!

It's been two years now, and each day I am thankful for the many Christian friends I have and for God's blessings even when I didn't recognize them. I put on the whole armor of God and pray with supplication. God knows my needs even when I don't have sense to know...and He does!

**RESPONSE:** Thank you, Father, for hearing our prayers and knowing what's best for us.

**PRAY TODAY:** When you tell God your wants and needs in prayer, believe He will provide what's best...even if you don't realize...believe He is wrapping His arms around you and providing for His child. “Fathers know best.”

## Taste and See Day 12: Prayer

# THE MOST POWERFUL TOOL WE HAVE

by Elaine Bassett

*“We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express.”*

- Romans 8:26

I believe in prayer although I don't really understand how prayer works. I know that God is not some kindly old man who sits on a large throne with a telephone to his ear, listening to our supplications and pleas. But as for the life of me, I can't figure out the process — or even the logic — of how prayer works and how prayers are answered. One thing I do know, however, is that prayer does work; it is the most powerful tool we have as children of God. It is our link to Him, our connection to that great Holy Father. Our uttered words and even our unuttered thoughts reach His ears somehow, and He responds.

I also believe that some places are particularly holy places for praying. The altar at our church is one of those places for me. When I think of the many saints from our church who have knelt at that altar and asked for God's protection, his guidance, his healing touch, I believe that the spirits of those saints are present to help us in our time of prayer. When I kneel at the altar after taking communion, I can feel the presence of the Comforter that Jesus spoke about. I can feel the stirrings of the Holy Spirit, and somehow I know that my prayers at that altar are heard.

Finally, I believe that when many of us pray together, the power of our single prayer is multiplied. “Where two or three are gathered together, there I will be in the midst.” Jesus himself says that He will be present when we pray together! If we can deliberately join together in prayer, with Jesus himself in the midst, what power we can have! Can you imagine what our church could do if each Sunday before the start of church we gather at that blessed altar and utter our prayers? We can ask for guidance and strength for our pastor, stirred hearts within our congregation, new eyes to see the needs of our church and community, motivation to meet those needs, healing for the sick, comfort for the bereaved — and those mighty prayers would be heard! It would be hard to hold us back; there would be nothing our church could not accomplish — if we pray together and ask the Holy Spirit to hear our collective prayers.

I do believe that prayer is key to our growth — both as disciples of Jesus and as a church that shines with the love of the God who gave us the precious gift of prayer.

**RESPONSE:** Dear Father, hear our prayers and let us feel the stirrings of your Spirit. Amen.

## Taste and See Day 29: Gifts

# STOP DOUBTING

by Joe Bradley

*“But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples were saying to him, we have seen the Lord! But he said to them, ‘Unless I see in His hands the imprint of the nails, and put my finger into His side, I will not believe.’ After eight days His disciples were again inside and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors having been shut, and stood in their midst and said, ‘Peace be with you.’ Then He said to Thomas, ‘Reach here with your finger, and see My hands; and reach here your hand and put it into My side; and do not be unbelieving, but believing.’ Thomas answered and said to Him, ‘My Lord and my God!’ Jesus said to him ‘Because you have seen Me, have you believed? Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed.’” - John 20:24-29 (NASB Updated)*

I started out as the “Doubting Thomas” of givers. Several years ago, as Claire and I drew closer to God through our times of prayer and daily devotionals, we both felt moved to substantially increase our level of giving. We both felt that by increasing our level of giving, with the ultimate goal of tithing, we could tangibly demonstrate to God how our hearts and minds were growing more trusting through the daily reading of his word. We wanted to show God that with every passing day, we were striving to become more faithful, more obedient, and more Christ-like. We wanted to acknowledge to Him that we recognized that He was the provider of all things. And, we wanted Him to know that we truly believed that He had the power to help us do more with ninety percent of His provision than we could do on our own with one hundred percent. There was only one problem. Me! You see, together Claire and I have five children and at this particular time in our lives, we had three children in college. It seemed to me that the Holy Spirit had picked a really bad time to move my heart toward increased giving. And, like Thomas, I had my doubts. So I boldly declared to Claire that “it” (increased giving) just wouldn't work. I put it all down in a spreadsheet so I could prove to her that our targeted level of giving, which was much higher than any amount we had ever given, would create problems down the road. Demonstrating childlike faith, Claire's reply was, “just write the check and see what happens.” It hasn't always been easy. In fact, it has been hard to do at times. And, during the years, I have had a few more “Doubting Thomas” moments, but year after year, as promised, God has faithfully provided all of our needs. And through this process, Claire and I have grown closer to God and have enjoyed watching as He has supernaturally worked in our lives and in the lives of our children in so many ways.

**RESPONSE:** Lord, even though Thomas walked on earth with you and witnessed your miracles in person, he doubted your resurrection until he could see for himself. You were patient and kind with him and showed him your wounds, proving the faithfulness of your promises to your disciples. Today, we pray that you will show us the same patience and kindness as we struggle in our human frailty to fully trust in your promise to provide for our every need. In Your name, Amen!

**PRAY TODAY:** That God will give you childlike faith as you contemplate the sharing of your resources.

## Taste and See Day 28: Gifts

### GIFTS

by John Dew

*“Ascribe to the Lord the glory due His name; bring an offering,  
and come into his courts!”*

- Psalms 96:8

Growing up as a preacher’s kid, I saw some of the many ways the United Methodist Church uses our gifts. We all see the benefits of contributing money that pays for the building and the salaries, and keeps the air conditioning, lights, and heat on.

But many of us don’t see how God does much more with our gifts. Our giving supports the education and training of the ministers we will have 20 years from now. Our gifts support the retirement of pastors from 20 years ago and sustain the widowed spouses of our former ministers.

Our gifts enable us to have the capacity to reach out in ministry to the poorest among us in our own country and around the world.

Jesus gave everything for us, even his life. God blesses us with so many gifts. Out of this abundance, we should be thankful to return our time, our money, and our talents to enable God to reach out to those in need through the ministry of our church.

**RESPONSE:** Almighty God, giver of life itself and all the good things we enjoy, help me experience the joy of giving my time, my personal resources, and my attention to you.

**PRAY TODAY:** To boldly express our love of God through our giving.

## Taste and See Day 13: Prayer

### JESUS SPEAKS TO US

by Paul Hudson

*“A man’s mind plans his way,  
but the Lord directs his steps and makes them sure.”*

- Proverbs 16:9

Listen for the voice of God to guide you. Stay tuned to His voice and He will lead you in the paths of righteousness for His name’s sake.

Several months ago, I received an invitation to attend a men’s prayer breakfast as the guest speaker and share my testimony. With a bit of reluctance, I accepted the invitation. I put the date on my calendar and soon got busy with other things.

A few weeks later, a reminder was sent confirming the date and time for the men’s breakfast. I was really in a struggle over sharing with others my testimony, and more importantly, what to say!

It has always been my routine to have prayer time each morning. While traveling, this is a special time to clear my mind and talk to God. On one particular morning, as I was driving along, my thoughts were on the upcoming speaking engagement. I was filled with feelings of doubt.

What could I possibly have to say that would be of interest? Surely someone else could do a better job! I began coming up with all kinds of excuses.

Suddenly, I noticed a small country church with a large sign in front. As I got closer, I could read the words . . . “Everyone has a testimony, but no one will ever hear it unless you share it!” WOW! I looked at the passenger seat to see if Jesus had hitched a ride!

The message was loud and clear. No way was I going to miss out on sharing my testimony! Jesus speaks to us every day in many ways. Through worship, scripture, prayer and even the most unlikely ways, we can hear Him.

Give your life to God, and He will create a right heart in you, one that will want to do the things He would have you do.

**RESPONSE:** Dear Father, place the desire in our hearts to pray, worship, study and share your word. Help us to be still and hear your guiding spirit. In your most Holy Name, Amen.

## Taste and See Day 14: Prayer

### CALL ON GOD

*by Parker Smith*

*“Call on Me and I will answer you, and I will tell you great and mighty things, which you do not know.”*

*- Jeremiah 33:3*

As a college student, when my teacher gives me a question, I turn to the textbook to find the answer. When I have problems with my truck, I turn to the owner’s manual. As a Christian, when I have a life question or problem, I know I should go to the Bible and look for the answers in the scriptures. The Bible is like an owner’s manual for life. But when I have problems or questions, I am more likely to go to parents, my friends, or the Internet to look for answers. It seems that even the modern translations of the Bible are sometimes hard for my brain to wrap around and understand. It’s a big book, and it’s hard to find answers by flipping through it. Even when I find an appropriate scripture, I must try to interpret the answer from a parable or try to relate what happened 2000+ years ago to what is going on today.

Because understanding the Bible has been so difficult for me to do by myself, I really appreciate going to Bible studies and letting the teacher tell me what a Bible passage is saying. I also really appreciate a Bible with footnotes. It dawned on me one day that rather than relying on the scriptures of my Bible, I was relying on the teachers or footnotes in my Bible to make the lesson of the Bible relevant. I was an immature Christian using the props of my teachers and footnotes to communicate with God. I wasn’t praying and asking God to give me the answers found in the Bible.

We may have the Bible, but for the Bible to become relevant to the problems we face in the world today, we need to pray that God will reveal his truth and peace as we read His Words. I have discovered that the disciplines of prayer and reading the scriptures go hand in hand. It is difficult to read and understand the Bible without prayer. After all, Jesus is the great teacher and the Bible is his textbook.

**RESPONSE:** Lord, I call on your Son to fill me and guide me as I read the Holy Word so that great and mighty things will be revealed to me.

**PRAY TODAY:** For the renewed commitment to study God’s Word, and to call out to God and depend on Him to make the Bible relevant in my life.

## Taste and See Day 27: Gifts

### FAITH AND TRUST IN GIVING

*by Muriel Saunders*

*“But just as you excel in everything - in faith - in speech - in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in your love for us - see that you also excel in the grace of giving.”*

*- 11 Corinthians 8:7*

Until I became a transformed person, through small group Bible study, prayer and sharing in Christian love with others in my group, I did not have the true faith and trust in God I needed to obey his command to tithe. I now have that faith and trust I need to obey His command to tithe. I now have that faith and trust I need to obey His command to give ten percent back to Him. I now know that everything I have comes from God and belongs to God. I’m just giving back to God what belongs to Him anyway. We must trust in God and not rely on ourselves. God knows what we need before we do, so as you grow in your serving and giving there will be no need to have fear of what God asks you to do, for as you seek God with your whole heart you will find that your help in all things comes from the Lord.

**RESPONSE:** Lord, I thank you for all my many blessings you have bestowed upon me; help me to continue to use them to your glory.

**PRAY TODAY:** I pray God will lead you to give as He commands and that you will give with a cheerful heart. Also, I pray for discernment to use and give your resources wisely.

## Taste and See Day 26: Gifts

### GENEROSITY

by Barbara Petry

*“...but she out of her poverty, put in everything.”*

*- Mark 12:44b*

In years of working with psychiatric patients, there are those who gave me far more than I gave them. Mary was hospitalized shortly before Thanksgiving. She had been mentally ill for years. She lived on very, very little.

As Mary had to go to another hospital, I took her to her apartment to get some things. When we entered her neat apartment, most touching was her kitchen table. It was properly set with blue-flowered placemats, matching napkins, white dishes, and blue glasses. I complimented her on how nice her table looked. Mary replied, “I keep it set in case someone wants to eat with me.” There were seconds of silence packed with years of pain — for we both knew that the postscript following a psychiatric diagnosis reads “isolation and rejection.”

As we were leaving, Mary picked up a sack of groceries. I said that she would not need to take groceries. Mary humbly said, “These are groceries for the needy. I got too sick to walk them to the post office.” God gave me Mary so when introduced to the treasure of extravagant generosity, I would fully understand its meaning.

**RESPONSE:** Thank you for placing people in our path who teach us so much. Christ can present himself in many ways if we will be present for the class.

**PRAY TODAY:** God, give me a spirit of extravagant generosity that I may give it to others as freely as you gave your life for me.

## Taste and See Day 15: Prayer

### GO AHEAD - ASK!

by Jack Boswell

*“So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened. Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, though you are evil know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!”*

*- Luke 11:9-13*

It was a hot summer day. I sweat profusely so my glasses quickly become fogged. I chose not to keep them on my person as I unrolled and erected fence wire alone. After the wire is unrolled, it must be “stretched” tight before it is attached to the support posts. The stretcher bar is secured with a series of bolts and “nuts”. Without the use of this bar, the fence wire would hang loosely and be subject to destruction by domestic and wild animals. As I hurriedly assembled the bar, predictably, I dropped one of the small nuts into the forest leaves. Of course I was angry at my own clumsy behavior and frustrated that I did not have my glasses handy to search through the leaves. I was disgusted that I would have to lose at least an hour while I returned to the barn and secured a proper sized nut.

Suddenly I “felt” the need to pray. “God, you remind me to ask and I shall receive. You tell me if I have faith the size of a mustard seed, I will be able to move mountains. I don’t need to move a mountain. I just need to find one simple little nut. I know you can do all things. I now trust that you will help me find that little nut.” My anger and frustration left me. I knelt with assurance and began carefully moving handfuls of leaves. Suddenly, there appeared the wayward nut. Aloud I said, “Thank you God, I know you are always there.”

**RESPONSE:** God, if there is something I need from You or from someone, help me to ask first rather than struggle with it and cause myself unnecessary difficulties.

**PRAY TODAY:** For God to give you strength and courage to believe that He is only a prayer away. And there is nothing He can’t do if we only ask.

## **Taste and See Day 16: Prayer**

# **VISITATION WITH GOD**

*by Eleanor McKeller*

*“Knock and it shall be opened unto you.”*

*- Matthew 7:7*

When I was a little girl attending Sunday School, I saw a picture of a door with Jesus beside it. The picture hung in the classroom all of my years in the early childhood department. I puzzled over the meaning as I knew Jesus could go anywhere, and I had been told he was everywhere.

My childish mind did not know that an invitation of welcome could keep the door locked. Over the years, I attended church spontaneously. Only after I became a mother was I hurried enough to see that my omission of worshiping with God’s people could create fear, or sadness, but never a loss of caring from God.

Even though I had not attended church regularly. I had knocked on Jesus’ door many times with prayers that were often selfish and foolish. I did not let Jesus into my life fully as I was too busy. I tried to raise a child without relying on Jesus and my church family.

Then one summer day my child was involved in an accident that hurt someone else. I prayed seriously for the accident victim and my child, who felt guilty. I felt the presence of God as I prayed. I felt his peace come to me.

As the doctors worked on the child, no surgery became necessary. His injury disappeared as the doctors watched. My God showed another miracle. He is still alive and listening to those of us who need Him. My prayer this time was answered with a yes.

**PRAY TODAY:** Dear Lord, help me to remember that you are waiting to hear from me. My prayer may not be your will, but it will give me the comfort of your presence. I thank you for being close enough to me to give me a comfort as I need it. Forgive me for the times when I ignored your love and help.

## **Taste and See Day 25: Presence**

# **THE DISCIPLE**

*by Eleanor McKeller*

*“I was glad when they said unto me,  
let us go into the house of the Lord.”*

*- Psalm 122:1*

One Sunday morning after church service, I spoke with another member of the church. I mentioned that my elderly friend, who could not hear, was regular in attendance. I wondered why. How could a sermon that she could not hear be inspiring to her? She always came down the aisle, leaning on her cane, and smiling at other church members.

Then I learned what church is. The person who could not hear came to church for a reason much greater than to hear a sermon. She had explained her attendance by saying, “I never hear the sermon. My presence is an act of worship. Maybe I’ll inspire others to come regularly.”

What a great testimony for church presence. She was being a disciple in an unusual way.

I recalled my attendance at church meetings and Bible study groups. What I had thought of as a selfish pleasure on my part might possibly be a form of discipleship. Could I have influenced any one?

It is up to me to be close to God wherever I am. I know that church is for worship, and even if I don’t always hear the message, I can recognize God’s presence and hear God. Being deaf to the sermon opens opportunities to serve God in other ways. I can be seen worshiping, an act of love and devotion.

**PRAY TODAY:** Please God, help me to appreciate the church and the church family’s comforting presence in my life. Please forgive me as I removed myself from your house of worship and my church family. I know I hurt you, but I hurt myself also. I do love to feel your presence as I join other Christians in worship.

## Taste and See Day 24: Presence

# THE MOST IMPORTANT RELATIONSHIP

by Amy Spurlock

*“Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus...”*  
- Hebrews 12:1-2a

Have you ever had a friend — someone with whom you like to spend time, who understands your sense of humor and always has your back? Then slowly, you might drift apart. Maybe you don’t work or live in the same place anymore, or one of you marries, or isn’t online. You make excuses, because you are so busy; and then you don’t call or email, and suddenly that good friend becomes a distant friend. And then your friend becomes someone you used to know. The moral, then, of this story: in order to maintain a relationship, you need to spend time and effort on it.

The most important relationship we will ever have is with God. What do we bring to our relationship with God? Do we bring enough? Do we bring anything to this relationship? It is easy to coast along as a distant acquaintance with God, especially when we are captain of our own lives and things are good. Think of this — God loves us even when we don’t acknowledge or think we need Him. He is there, always. What *would* our relationship be if we devoted the time, love and attention to God that we devote to others we love? Awesome, in the truest meaning of the word.

God wants a relationship with us. He wants our time. So how do we spend time in God’s presence? To be in God’s presence, we need to spend time with Him — attending services, reading the Good Word, Bible study, praying, and serving His church. We need to be present with Him when we do all these things, because while God won’t drift away from us, we do drift away from Him.

I have personally felt the power of God’s love when I most needed it during a battle with cancer. Cancer is a battle fought in illness and fear, with chemo arrows and Grim’s reaper. I don’t despair, though, because I am blessed to have the armor of God’s love and a shield of faith. The mighty Apostle Paul says that if we are in His presence, we too can race with perseverance as Jesus did. God’s presence in my life, and my time spent in His presence ensures that in my race I keep my eye fixed on eternal life, no matter the victor. God’s presence and mercy abide in me.

## Taste and See Day 17: Presence

# BEING PRESENT

by Beth Collier

*“Blessed are those who have learned to acclaim you,  
who walk in the light of your presence, O Lord.”*  
- Psalm 89:15

Two meanings come to mind when I think of the word Presence. One is being physically present and another is being in God’s Presence. There are so many places in church to be present, such as worship services, Sunday School, special musical programs, children’s and youth programs, committee meetings, fellowship meals, mission work, Bible studies and covenant groups. God is in our presence at each of these places to guide and direct us.

I am continually renewed in my relationship with God, by being present and in God’s presence through participation in Bible studies. Several years ago, when Pastor John Brannon offered various Bible studies, I remember thinking, do I really have time for a Bible study. Two people helped me realize that I did. One was Edith Smith, who encouraged me to join the study she would be leading. The other was Jason Reeves, who spoke in church about the importance of being in a Bible study. In the fall of 2009, I attended Pastor David’s study on John Wesley’s General Rules as a Guide for Christian Living. After the study, the participants were encouraged to form small covenant groups. I am currently a member of the Wesley covenant group that meets on Wednesday nights at 6:00. We are a close knit group of six, which allows me to share more than I would in a larger group. We are learning so much more about the Bible and the importance of a close relationship with God. We often comment that we have always known the stories of the Bible and God’s Love, but have gained a deeper understanding through our studies.

Kevin Turner, a former Alabama football player recently diagnosed with ALS disease said, “We don’t need to let the gap widen between us and God. By having a close relationship with God at all times, we are prepared for when bad times come our way.”

**RESPONSE:** Lord, thank you for the opportunity to learn more about you and grow closer to you through my experiences in Bible studies and small groups.

**PRAY TODAY:** For more small groups to be formed in our church.

## **Taste and See Day 18: Presence**

### **BECAUSE HE LIVES**

*by Carolyn Crowe*

*“Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and  
do not lean on your own understanding.”  
- Proverbs 3:5 (ESV)*

I consider the hours immediately following the birth of my younger son the darkest of my life. No complications were expected, but at birth he simply could not take the first breath of life. Based on the frantic activity in the delivery room and the medication being administered, I knew he was in dire distress. It took about 10 long minutes before I heard the first faint cry. After a week in the NICU, I was allowed to take him home with no assurance from his doctor that he had not suffered brain damage. The best he could offer was, “only time will tell.”

Based on my medical knowledge, I believed it would be a miracle if he did not have some damage. I prayed fervently for that miracle, but with doubt tugging at my mind, I also prayed for the strength to handle the difficult future that might await me. The anxiety was almost unbearable.

One Sunday morning in church a soloist with the voice of an angel sang “Because He Lives.” As she sang, “How sweet to hold a new born baby, and feel the pride and joy he gives; but greater still the calm assurance, this child can face uncertain days because he lives.” I felt the cloud of doubt lift from me. I was engulfed in calm assurance. Suddenly I knew, “Because he lives, I can face tomorrow; because he lives, all fear is gone; because I know he holds the future, and life is worth the living just because he lives.”

The worship service was set and the soloist was going to sing whether I was in church or not, but had I not been present I would have missed the opportunity for God to richly bless me with a boost of faith and trust. For me, presence in church is important because we never know what part of the worship service God will choose to bless us, or what we might say or do that will be a blessing to someone else.

**RESPONSE:** Dear God, thank you for your never-ending presence in my life and for the blessing your church has been to me over the years.

**PRAY TODAY:** For all those who share their time and talent in the work of the church. They may never know exactly how God is using them, but use them He does!

## **Taste and See Day 23: Presence**

### **THE RIGHT PLACE AT THE RIGHT TIME**

*by Alice Phillips*

*“Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you  
shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a  
Sabbath to the Lord, your God.”  
- Exodus 20:8-10*

Being in the right place at the right time is important, and I don't leave it to chance. I plan to be there when I need to be. That's why I'm in church every Sunday morning. I believe it's the right place at the right time.

I was reared in a Methodist home. Every Sunday morning, my parents loaded us all up (there were eight of us) and we headed to church. There was never discussion about the merits of going or staying away. We went. We followed John Wesley's worship schedule, sang Charles Wesley's hymns, recited the creed, prayed the Lord's prayer, and gave our tithes. I've never gotten past that. On Sunday I feel I have to be in church. I'm not comfortable if I'm not.

I'm a practicing Christian every day of the week, but Sunday is special. It's the day I focus on God. I study the Bible; no matter how many times I read it, I always learn something new. I praise God in song; Laura and David make great selections. I pray for his blessings, and I enumerate them too.

One of my blessings is belonging to First United Methodist Church of Troy. We members care for each other; we celebrate and commiserate together. It's a loving place to be. So on Sunday look for me in the back row of the balcony. That's where I'll be. It's the right place at the right time.

**RESPONSE:** Lord, help me to stay in the right place.

**PRAY TODAY:** That you will find your Sabbath and keep it holy.

## **Taste and See Day 22: Presence**

# **IS CONDEMNATION KEEPING YOU FROM THE PRESENCE OF GOD?**

*by Laura Mixon*

*“For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.”*

*- John 3:17*

I absolutely love this scripture. It reminds me of how much I am loved by my wonderful Savior. God did not send Jesus to this earth to condemn me; He sent His Son to save me! And when I fall short of the glory of God and begin to criticize myself for my shortcomings and failures, I have to step back and realize that this type of response is not one of Christ. This response is Satan's attempt at trying to make me feel unworthy of Christ's love and forgiveness.

Unfortunately, it is easy to give in to this type of response, not only to ourselves, but also towards others. We live in a world/society where criticism prevails. We are criticized on a daily basis, at work, school, and even at home. In addition, even though we hesitate to admit it, condemnation even happens in our places of worship . . . the one place we should be free and safe from condemnation and ridicule.

Matthew 7:1-6 reminds us that we are in no place to condemn others: <sup>1</sup> “Do not judge, or you too will be judged. <sup>2</sup> For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. <sup>3</sup> Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? <sup>4</sup> How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? <sup>5</sup> You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye. <sup>6</sup> Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs. If you do, they may trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces.”

This scripture falls in the “this is much easier said than done” category. Sometimes, we have a hard time forgiving ourselves for our mistakes, and we begin to question why God would choose to forgive us. There are other times when we are so busy “picking the speck in our brother's eye” that we forget our purpose as a Christian: “to be kind and compassionate towards one another, forgiving each other just as Christ forgave you” (Ephesians 4:32). I believe, in order to be truly in God's presence, we must rise above the urge to condemn and embrace the blessings that come from being in the ‘judgment free’ zone.

**RESPONSE:** Father, help me to be mindful that I am in no place to condemn others, or myself. Forgive me when I am quick to pass judgment. Help me, instead, to show your kindness, compassion, and forgiveness to myself and those I encounter each day.

**PRAY TODAY:** That we will strive to be present with God through the daily practice of sharing His love with those around us.

## **Taste and See Day 19: Presence**

# **SEEK GOD**

*by Nancy Barr*

*“Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things.”*

*- Matthew 6:33-34*

Since I was a child, I have been a believer in our Lord, Jesus Christ. Once married, it was important to my husband and me that we attend church and raise our children in church. We were active when our children were young, but in time I started working a full time job and life was hectic. Before we realized it, the children were grown and we were not putting the Lord first in our lives.

As a father loves his children, the Lord acted in our lives as both of us went through some physical trials. Only the Lord could see us through these. He blessed us and answered our prayers. Both of us were healed and felt a new commitment to Christ.

I questioned myself - was my church not meeting my needs or was it me? I decided it was me. I joined a Bible Study in August 2009 which has led to another Bible Study that has changed my life. We are a small group but we seek the Lord, study His word, pray and love what the Lord is doing in our lives. I hate I missed so much time, but with the Lord it is never too late, and thank goodness He never gives up on people. Seek ye first His kingdom!

**RESPONSE:** Our Father, it is never too late to seek you. Thank you for the wonderful relationship that has developed through Bible study, prayer and sharing with you. Keep me open and ready to do your will.

**PRAY TODAY:** To seek the kingdom of God first. If we do this, everything else falls into place.

## Taste and See Day 20: Presence

### GOD'S PRESENCE

by Jeff Spurlock

*"Thou dost show me the path of life; in thy presence there is fullness of joy, in thy right hand are pleasures for evermore."*

- Psalm 16:11

The night my youngest daughter was born, her pediatrician met me in the hallway of the hospital and told me that I had a very special girl on my hands. "Of course," I said, beaming from ear to ear, "she's my daughter," I answered.

But that's not what the doctor meant. He commenced to tell me that Sarah's head was two times smaller than the average newborn's head. In other words, she was born with microcephaly which would take away her ability to walk, talk or do much of anything without assistance. But what Sarah's limitations could not take away were her abilities to love and to be loved.

For almost two decades, I watched a beautiful young girl grow with God's presence. While she could not verbally communicate with the world, I knew what she was saying through her sweet smile and infectious laughter. She was indicating that God loves all of us and His presence is eternal.

Sarah passed away one day before her 17th birthday and moved on to a place where she sees God and Jesus daily. While she could not communicate normally when she was alive, I am certain now she is dancing, singing and talking to everyone. I'm confident each person in Heaven knows my Sarah.

God is always here for us. We do not have to seek out His presence when troubling times occur. He is available when we get that job promotion, hit the winning home run or when a newborn baby comes into our lives.

So, please take *some* time daily to communicate with God and to thank Him for His presence. He has *all* the time in the world for us.

## Taste and See Day 21: Presence

### BEING THERE

by Barbara Petry

*"...not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together."*

- Hebrews 10:25a

I did not remember this event in my childhood. It was told to me as an adult. From the time I can remember, my brother and I loved church. We declined any invitation that would prevent attendance at Sunday School and Church. We had our place on the front row, center aisle of the Sanctuary. We were around five years old when this became our practice.

Years later, someone asked me if I remembered the Sunday we were recognized for five years of perfect attendance. That our presence was worthy of recognition puzzled me. It was their nurturing presence that we sought. However, our presence must have been meaningful, as someone had to have been counting. Perhaps it was our faithfulness and commitment that gave our presence value.

One might decide his or her presence is of no consequence and his absence never noticed. My experience tells me that one cannot minimize the impact of simply, quietly "being there."

**RESPONSE:** Gracious God, thank you for your unfailing Presence in the life of those who seek You. Let us present ourselves in worship with the receptive mind of a child and strive to have a presence that is inspirational to others.

**PRAY TODAY:** That we adorn our lives with the radiance of Your Presence so others may be inspired to seek Your Presence in their lives.