

Good News Daily

Sunday, January 3

Psalm 66 *Come and see what our God has done, what awesome miracles he performs for people!* (v.5 NLT)

I am a mentor for a “moms” group at our church. All the moms in the group have at least one child under the age of five. Often, they have multiple children close in age to the five-year mark. As a mentor, I encourage them to love God by caring for their husbands and children even when things appear mundane.

My favorite part of mentoring comes at the end of year. It’s a meeting where a handful of moms share their “God stories.” All the stories highlight some aspect of how God has worked in their lives. Some share heart wrenching issues of infertility, or miscarriages. Others share more positive events.

But all their stories end with the multiple ways of how God has worked within them and their circumstances to bring about life change and blessing. Life transformation is spoken and shared. This—a life transformed because of God’s work—is my definition of what miracles are made of.

Isaiah 66:18-23; Psalm 67; 1 John 2:12-17; John 6:41-47

Monday, January 4

Exodus 3:1-12 *There the angel of the LORD appeared to him in a blazing fire from the middle of a bush. Moses stared in amazement. Though the bush was engulfed in flames, it didn’t burn up. Then the LORD told him, “I have certainly seen the oppression of my people in Egypt. I have heard their cries of distress because of their harsh slave drivers. Yes, I am aware of their suffering. So I have come down to rescue them from the power of the Egyptians*

and lead them out of Egypt into their own fertile and spacious land. (vv.2, 7-8)

As Epiphany approaches and highlights Jesus revealing himself to humanity, we can see him here at the burning bush. Some scholars say “the angel of the LORD” is the presence of Jesus. I would have stared in amazement too!

This account is fascinating to me. I also find great comfort in it. These verses remind me that God does in fact see, hear, and deliver. He hears. He speaks. He responds. He is present.

God also became visible in the physical form of Jesus on earth. Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection all confirm the heart of the Father from the beginning. God sees us, He hears us and acts on our behalf, for life and eternity. This is the Epiphany we are privileged to celebrate!

Psalms 85, 87; Hebrews 11:23-31; John 14:6-14

Tuesday, January 5

Joshua 1:1-9 *“Study this Book of Instruction continually. Meditate on it day and night so you will be sure to obey everything written in it. Only then will you prosper and succeed in all you do.”* (v.8)

How would you feel if you had to “fill the shoes” of Moses? Yup! Pretty intimidated, inadequate and completely opposite of courageous! God knew this. In just nine verses, God commands Joshua to be strong and courageous three times. God also reveals to Joshua the secret of success.

I love the fact that God knows what we need before we even ask Him anything. I am also thankful that God’s word is available to me in print and electronic form. I don’t think we, as people in general, realize just how important God’s word is to thrive. Sometimes I can neglect the reading of it.

God Himself speaks these words to Joshua, making it pretty clear just how vital reading and meditating on His word is. I take

these words to heart. I want to prosper and succeed in everything I do. How about you? May God help us to be steadfast in reading His powerful word.

Psalms 2, 110; Hebrews 11:32—12:2; John 15:1-16

Wednesday, January 6

Matthew 12:14-21 *“And his name will be the hope of all the world.”* (v.21)

Today is Epiphany. It’s a big word that literally means “to manifest” or “to show.” It is God’s revealing Himself to all people; not just those who were Jewish. God manifested or showed himself in the person of Jesus to the Jewish people and to Gentiles. We celebrate Jesus coming in human form, showing us who God is.

Jesus taught, loved, and healed those who came to him. I am reminded that Jesus died for me personally. With faith in his name, my blind eyes were opened, my bound spirit was set free. Having faith in the person and name of Jesus, I found hope and new life. I still have many reasons to hope. Hope for physical healing, deliverance from generational sin, salvation for other family members, and every unmet need I have. No need and no person on my prayer list is exempt from the Lord’s power.

This is the extent of God’s love. All in. Sacrificial. The hope of all the world. What are you hoping for today? Ask God. He is our hope. Isaiah 52:7-10; Psalms 46, 97; Revelation 21:22-27

Thursday, January 7

Psalm 103 *The LORD is like a father to his children, tender and compassionate to those who fear him. For he knows how weak we are; he remembers we are only dust.* (vv.13-14)

When my husband and I got married, we made the decision to remain childless. As the

saying goes, then God laughed at our plans! Not only did we end up having one child, God blessed us with identical twins after our first daughter. Talk about surprises and God taking me in a different direction!

In retrospect, I can say without a doubt, I have learned so much about my relationship with God because I am a parent. I believe God planned it this way so I could more fully understand His perspective of being a Father and parent to me.

My spiritual life is fuller and richer because of becoming a mom and parenting three children. I thank God for allowing me the privilege of giving birth and parenting. It has changed my understanding and perspective of life and my spiritual journey. Thank You, God, for surprises and life altering course corrections from Your hand.

Isaiah 52:3-6; Revelation 2:1-7; John 2:1-11

Friday, January 8

John 4:46-54 *Then the father realized that that was the very time Jesus had told him, "Your son will live." And he and his entire household believed in Jesus. (v.53)*

My sister was the first in our family to have an active, growing relationship with Jesus. After going overseas with her husband who was in the military, they began attending a small home fellowship. It was then she made a commitment to Christ.

She wrote home often, sharing her experience. She wrote about finding forgiveness, accepting Jesus as her Savior, and how much her life had changed for the better because of starting a relationship with Jesus.

At first, the rest of our family was quite skeptical. We were afraid she may have been introduced to a cult! She continued to write, and our fears lessened. When she returned home, our

entire family noticed that she was indeed "different" because of her newfound faith.

It wasn't long before person by person, we each wanted what she had in her faith and made our own personal decisions to follow Jesus. It only takes one person to start a chain reaction of faith. Don't give up if you are praying for a family member!

Isaiah 59:15-21; Psalms 117, 118; Revelation 2:8-17

Saturday, January 9

Psalm 121 *The LORD himself watches over you! The LORD stands beside you as your protective shade. (v.5)*

Sometimes my adult children have said, "Adulting is hard! It was much easier to be a kid and have your parents look out for you!" In many ways, being a child has its advantages. You have no bills, you don't have a job, you don't need to make difficult decisions, and someone feeds you, clothes you, and houses you.

This verse declares that even as a parent and grandparent, I can be assured God is the one looking out for me. Not only is He the ultimate parent, but provider of all things to me. Just like everything was provided for me as a child, God is doing the same for me even now in my more mature years.

If I trust like I did as a child, I can be at rest in all things. I agree that "adulting" can be hard. Today, I will choose childlike faith and let God do the hard work for me. What will your faith look like today?

Isaiah 63:1-5; Psalms 122, 123; Revelation 2:18-29; John 5:1-15

by Pamela Newton

Used with permission from the BIBLE
READING FELLOWSHIP

PO Box 380, Winter Park, FL 32790
www.biblereading.org

Good News Daily

Sunday, January 10

John 1:1-34 *The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.* (v.5 NIV)

The light of Jesus can never be overcome with darkness. He came to take away (not to whitewash, but to take away) the sin of the world. That is why we feel so clean, so relieved, so new, when we confess our sin and receive his forgiveness. Our sin is truly gone. Jesus has taken it away. We are new creatures.

Something recently happened in our house which illustrated the difference between the darkness and the light. My husband works a four-day week and, on work nights, he goes to bed quite early. Being a “night owl,” I often stay up late on these nights. He is a loving and thoughtful husband and always leaves the little light by my side of our bed turned on, so I can find my way to bed.

One night he had forgotten to turn on the night light and, when I came into the room, it was quite dark. So dark that I could not find my way. I didn’t want to turn on the overhead light and awaken him, but I felt lost and reached out my hands to feel my way across the room. Our bed is a four poster, and I reached out into the darkness searching for a bedpost so that I could get my bearings. As I groped, I hit the bedpost with my hand, and it shook the bed. My husband awakened with a start and we frightened each other. We ended up having a good chuckle over it, but it could have been avoided if only there had been some light.

How like that is the world—groping its way in darkness, running into trouble. Jesus is the way and the light. All we must do is call on his name, and he will bring his light into our lives.

Isaiah 40:1-11; Psalms 146, 147; Hebrews 1:1-

Monday, January 11

Psalms 2 *Blessed are all who take refuge in him.* (v.12b)

I recently published a book of genealogy for my husband’s family. At the end of the book, I included some reminiscences of family members. My husband is one of 23 first cousins on one side of the family, and they all had memories of the grandparents’ home in Georgia. Some of the memories were funny, some tender with emotion. As we spoke with the cousins, eventually each one got around to remembering the back staircase in the old home. The grandparents were a loving Christian couple and their home was filled with love and laughter, but the darkness of the back staircase was frightening to the children. They wanted to find refuge from the darkness.

I, too, remember the stairs in my grandparents’ home. I remember having to go upstairs one night to get something and coming back down the stairs with the darkness behind me. I ran down those stairs and across the hall to the living room where my grandfather sat reading. I remember running to his chair and leaning against his shoulder. I felt safe there. His presence comforted me, and I was no longer afraid. I took refuge in him. He was a man who loved God and always remembered to thank the Lord for all his blessings. As a child, I saw God in my grandfather.

Our heavenly Father wants us to run to Him when we are afraid. He is our refuge in time of trouble and our light in the darkness. When we take refuge in Him, His joy becomes our strength. Blessed are we when we take refuge in Him.

Isaiah 40:12-23; Psalms 1, 3; Ephesians 1:1-14; Mark 1:1-13

Tuesday, January 12

Isaiah 40:25-31 *But those who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength.* (v.31)

Yes, those who wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.

It is so hard for us to wait upon the Lord. His timing is absolutely perfect, and yet we seem to always want to rush things. He never forgets. He cares about our smallest need and our tiniest desire. The key, of course, is if we are praying within His will. The more we know Him through the Scriptures, the more we will be within His will. He tells us to wait upon Him. We are impatient creatures and rebellious.

One of our grown daughters is “one year old” in full commitment to the Lord Jesus. He has taught her so much in the past year since she turned her life completely over to him and asked him to come in and teach her and lead her. She honors our Lord in her life, in her family and even in her relationships at work. After 16 years of living away from the rest of our family, she wants to “come home.” She wants to move back, nearer to her parents and her sisters. She hopes for broken relationships from the past to be healed but patience will be required.

God wants us to honor Him with all that we are and all that we have. He desires our love. When we look to Him for our strength and our power, He will not fail us. Wait upon Him. He will renew your strength, and lift you up when His timing is perfect.

Psalms 5, 6; Ephesians 1:15-23; Mark 1:14-28

Wednesday, January 13

Psalms 119:1-24 *I live as an alien in the land; do not hide your commandments from me.* (v.19)

When I read the newspaper, look at the evening news, overhear other people talking and see the condition of this world, I know that I am an alien in this land. My concepts, my standards are so different from those of the world. It stupefies me to even think that anyone would

choose the way of the world once the way of Jesus is presented to them. Paul, in so many of his epistles, refers to the fact that we are not of this world although we must live in it.

I once heard a Christian friend refer to her Earth Suit. She explained that her Earth Suit was her body. She lived in it while she was here on earth but, someday, she expected to have her new, heavenly body (and, she explained, she hoped that the new body would not weigh over 125 pounds). I am not sure that we will get to choose what our heavenly body will look like—I believe that God will give me the very best new body for eternity, made to His specifications. What could be better than that?

The Earth Suit concept is a good way to describe this body, though. It is the home for our soul and spirit while we are on this earth. When we believe in Jesus as our Savior, he covers us with the protection bought for us by his blood, shed for us on Calvary.

When we are committed to our Lord, we love his laws and we want to keep his statutes. It isn't a matter of trying to be good enough on our own. When we are his, we want to follow his ways.

Isaiah 41:1-16; Ephesians 2:1-10; Mark 1:29-45

Thursday, January 14

Ephesians 2:11-22 *But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.* (v.13).

As a child I grew up in the church, attending Sunday School and church services. But I was a doer of the word only and not a hearer of the word. I was a good girl and I cannot witness to having been plucked out of the gutter or saved from drugs. But I was empty inside, for I did not know what I believed. I had never heard the message that I could have a personal relationship with Jesus through the Holy Spirit. I did not know what it meant to “worship.” But I attended church

regularly hoping, desperately, that all the things I had heard about Jesus were true.

I had a hungry heart and in 1972, when a group of lay people came to our church to witness to the power of Jesus in their lives, God had prepared my heart to receive him as my Lord and my Savior. He had drawn me to him through a series of events; I was ready. I was about as empty as I could be, even though I had a wonderful husband and three healthy children. I had lived without Jesus as an integral part of my life just as long as I was able. There was a big space inside of me for him to fill, and he did. As I knelt at the altar and prayed a prayer of commitment, he was faithful. He came in and changed me. As a matter of fact, that is still my prayer, “Change me, O Lord, make me more like you.”

I want to stay hungry for more of him. We have been brought near by the blood of Christ. Let us press into him and draw nearer, still.

Isaiah 41:17-29; Psalm 18:1-20; Mark 2:1-12

Friday, January 15

Mark 2:13-22 *“Follow me,” Jesus told him, and Levi got up and followed him.* (v.14b)

Jesus was usually brief and to the point. He always had a perfect answer for the Pharisees when they questioned him and tried to trip him up. We can learn a lot by reading about our Lord and the things he said.

I once heard a story about two old women named Polly and Annie who were sitting on the porch chatting when a friend walked by. Polly asked the passerby, “How’re you doing today, Sarah?” Sarah answered and said, “Oh, not too good. My joints are aching and I have a toothache.” “Well,” said Polly, “let’s have a little prayer. Lord, please help my friend Sarah today, and heal her in the name of Jesus. Amen.” Sarah said “Oh, thank you, Polly,” and went on her way. Annie looked at Polly and said “My goodness,

Polly, you’re slipping! I could have made a 20-minute prayer out of that.”

Do we waste words? Do we try to make our prayers sound flowery? Jesus said to Levi, “Follow me” and Levi got up and followed him. He didn’t ask “where?” or “for how long?” or “give me a couple of hours to get ready.” Jesus didn’t give him an itinerary. Levi was drawn to Jesus. He got up and followed him.

Jesus came to save the lost, the sinners. He drew them to himself. He still draws us, today. Even those of us who believe, sometimes feel lost. When we call out to him, he is there and provides the way for us. What will you say when Jesus walks by and says, “Follow me”?

Isaiah 42:1-17; Psalms 16, 17; Ephesians 3:1-13

Saturday, January 16

Psalms 20 May the LORD answer you when you are in distress; may the name of the God of Jacob protect you. (v.1)

When I was a child, I was quick to anger when wronged. My mother always cautioned me to wait it out. She used to say, “The truth will out.” I just accepted that although, even now, the wording seems odd. What it meant was that the wicked always overplay their hand and trip themselves up. The truth will come out eventually.

Mother also would say, “Don’t lower yourself to their level.” It usually does no good to run around and defend ourselves to anyone and everyone. It just calls more attention to the lie and may cause others to doubt us. Our true friends will come to us if they hear a rumor about us. Others, who spread rumors, fall into the category of the evildoers.

My grandmother used to say, “Your fun will fly up and hit you in the face!” and that is what will happen to those who do evil. It will fly up and hit them in the face. “The truth will out.”

We are called to be like Jesus. As I read the Scriptures, I see that Jesus did not defend himself. He answered his critics with Scripture saying, “It is said....” We who follow him are called to live in his righteousness and, when we stumble, we are to ask his forgiveness and go on. Let us not waste our time worrying about the ugly rumors of the wicked. If we are like Jesus, our lives will prove them wrong. Let us not give them space in our heads—let’s give them to Jesus. He can handle them—and the problem.

Isaiah 43:1-13; Psalm 21:1-13; Ephesians 3:14-21; Mark 2:23—3:6

by Judy Canant

Used with permission from the BIBLE
READING FELLOWSHIP
PO Box 380, Winter Park, FL 32790
www.biblereading.org

Good News Daily

Sunday, January 17

Psalm 150 *Let everything that has breath praise the LORD. Praise the LORD!* (v.6 NKJV)

Have you ever desired to soar like an eagle? To sing like a bird? To be free without a concern in the world? If you think a bird is without worries, you're wrong. Each spring I watch as the Cardinal and the Carolina Wren build their nests. Each day I count the eggs, then eagerly await as new life bursts forth. However, it's not always a happy ending. An eagle swoops down and snatches the eggs from the nest. I mourn along with mama bird. Yet, she returns to the backyard each morning to sing her songs of praise to her creator, God.

We're told to praise God in the good times and the bad. The coronavirus kept many of us isolated for months. My son placed box-gardens filled with bright colored flowers and vegetables in my backyard. When I feel less than thankful, I gaze upon it and praise God!

Isaiah 43:14—44:5 Psalms 148, 149; Hebrews 6:17—7:10; John 4:27-42

Monday, January 18

Psalm 25 *Turn Yourself to me, and have mercy on me, For I am desolate and afflicted. The troubles of my heart have enlarged; Bring me out of my distresses! Look on my affliction and my pain, And forgive all my sins.* (vv.16-18)

After a year of procedures and surgeries, I enter the new year with hope, only to find myself facing a second hip replacement, followed by one procedure and surgery after another in the upcoming months. "When will it end?" I cry out to the Lord. I plead with God, "Please help me!" I know if I could touch the hem of Jesus' cloak, I would become healed. But only in my mind's eye will this happen. "On you I wait all the day" (v.5).

In chapter 3 of Joyce Meyers' book *Battlefield of the Mind*, it tells us we must purposely choose. I scribble the short sentence on a post-it note and tape it to the bathroom mirror. Over and over throughout the day I repeat the words, "I will never give up! God is on my side. He loves me, and He is helping me."

"Let integrity and uprightness preserve me, For I wait for You" (v.21).

Isaiah 44: 6-8, 21-23; Ephesians 4:1-16; Mark 3:7-19a

Tuesday, January 19

Mark 3:19b-35 *"If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. And if a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand."* (vv.24-25)

It's nearly seven months since the protests, sometimes called riots, broke out in all major cities in America. It began with the death of an African American man at the hands of a police officer. Other countries rose up in support of what is called "the black movement" or "black lives matter." As I write this devotional we're in the midst of the pandemic, named Covid-19, protest marches, and if you live on the east coast, Hurricane Isaias, now downgraded to a tropical storm. Some will say we're handed a "triple whammy." Unity and disunity. Looting and plundering. Destruction and mayhem. My heart breaks. While I struggle to remain neutral and non-judgmental in this "new normal," I see history destroyed; statues pulled down, broken beyond repair. The good and bad march through cities destroying lives and property. At this date in time, I pray for a peaceful resolution. However, as I write only God knows the outcome of these events. I can only pray, "Let there be peace on earth, and let it begin with me."

Isaiah 44:9-20; Psalms 26, 28; Ephesians 4:17-

Wednesday, January 20

Ephesians 5:1-14 *Therefore be imitators of God as dear children. And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma.* (vv.1-2)

To walk is to place one foot in front of the other never having both feet off the ground at the same time. We learn to walk as an infant, often falling, but someone picks us up and we persevere as we continue our journey through life. We walk down the aisle to the all-important music of graduation and weddings.

My wedding consisted of only immediate family. I didn't mind as long as my other requests were allowed. My wedding would be in a church. I would wear my Grandmother's veil and, most important, my Dad would walk me down the aisle and give me away. I'll never forget the look of sadness and his forced smile as he placed the hand of his 17-year-old daughter in the hand of another. However, the most important walk today is my walk with God. Psalm 116:9 says, "I will walk before the LORD in the land of the living." Micah tells us what the Lord requires of us, "...to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God."

Isaiah 44:24—45:7; Psalm 38; Mark 4:1-20

Thursday, January 21

Isaiah 45:5-17 *...I am the LORD, and there is no other; I form the light and create darkness, I make peace and create calamity; I, the LORD, do all these things.* (vv.6b-7)

When we the people of the world were told we were in a pandemic and we should isolate ourselves from this very dangerous virus, none of us dreamed we would still be in the same place months later. They call it "the new normal." Borders of our state (Florida) were shut down to outsiders (anyone entering from the north by land and air and sea from other ports). Stores were

closed. Where's the "toilet paper?" There's "necessary and unnecessary" businesses—hair salons, restaurants, bars, schools, and churches are the unnecessary. We now have virtual learning and no sports. We continue to be told to stay home, wear masks, and sanitize, sanitize, sanitize. There continues to be a fear of the unknown. The impact's a financial loss for most and loss of faith for others. Where are You God? Did you create this calamity as You did in the Old Testament? Lord, bring back the light and bring us Your peace. Amen.

Psalm 37:1-18; Ephesians 5:15-33; Mark 4:21-34

Friday, January 22

Ephesians 6:1-9 *And you, masters, do the same things to them, giving up threatening, knowing that your own Master also is in heaven, and there is no partiality with Him. (v.9)*

This very long sentence in Ephesians 6 says there's a balance between bondservants and we receive the same from the Lord, whether he's a slave or free. There's much talk about slavery and freedom these days, with uprisings and anti-this and anti-that in the forefront of media news. What's happening today also happened in the past. The Bible tells us in the Old Testament, Egypt's king set taskmasters over the children of Israel who were slaves to Pharaoh. They were starved and whipped into submission, while building the "supply cities." Paul writes in Galatians of "spiritual slaves" and how the Spirit of Christ in our hearts will set us free. We are sons and daughters of God through our faith in Jesus Christ. Let's not turn back to a past we cannot change, but continue forward down the path God has planned for us.

To quote Pastor Nancy Ogne, "God's love is present to us. This cannot separate us from the love of God."

Isaiah 45:18-25; Psalm 31; Mark 4:35-41

Saturday, January 23

Psalm 30 *Hear, O LORD, and have mercy on me; LORD, be my helper! (v.10)*

I can't remember hearing the words "I love you" when I was growing up. I assumed the words were reserved for the person you married, for one special person in your life, and the lyrics of songs. As I grew older, I expanded my use of the phrase to include my immediate family. I'm not comfortable saying or hearing the phrase from those outside my family unit. If I say "I love you" to everyone, it loses its special meaning and becomes simply three little words. If someone says, "I love you," you're expected to say it back. But what if you don't?

I recall after Mom passed, Dad and I had frequent phone conversations and I would end by saying, "I love you, Dad." I'll never forget his response: "You know I love you, why do I need to say it?" His response made me think how actions speak louder than words. After months of isolation caused by the pandemic, it's not words I yearn for, but a simple hug. "Abba, Father, I love you Lord."

Isaiah 46:1-13; Psalm 32; Ephesians 6:10-24;
Mark 5:1-20

by Shirley J. Conley

Used with permission from the BIBLE
READING FELLOWSHIP
PO Box 380, Winter Park, FL 32790
www.biblereading.org

Good News Daily

Sunday, January 24

Hebrews 10:19-31 *So now we must cling tightly to the hope that lives within us, knowing that God always keeps his promises!* (v.23 TPT)

By the time you read this, the whole COVID-19 scare will hopefully be safely in your rear-view mirror. However, right now, we're still in the thick of it, and it has brought many emotions to the surface—the worst of them being fear. People have been melting down right and left, and panic buying is the norm. Honestly, who thought it would be so difficult to find a hand sanitizer!

But even as I joke, I confess that I've lost my share of sleep over this. There are many unknowns, there is no vaccine, and people my age are dying from the disease. It's overwhelming. Yet it is in troubled times like these that I cling tightly to God's promises, just as the writer of Hebrew did. We are ruled by hope, not fear.

Though the virus scare is probably past, there are many things that cause us fear. But take heart! God *always* keeps His promises.

Isaiah 47:1-15; Psalms 63:1-11, 98; John 5:2-18

Monday, January 25

Galatians 1:1-17 *You know what I was like when I followed the Jewish religion—how I violently persecuted God's church. I did my best to destroy it.... But even before I was born, God chose me and called me by his marvelous grace.* (vv.13, 15 NLT)

This COVID-19 crisis has presented many opportunities for me to be petty, selfish, and ungrateful. I'd like to point my finger at the virus but, truthfully, it's not to blame. I don't need an excuse to behave badly. It comes naturally.

It's easy for me to dwell on my sinfulness—but when I do, I remember Paul. His behavior before the road to Damascus was reprehensible. He was an enthusiastic persecutor and murderer of Christians. Yet God chose him before his birth to become arguably the greatest evangelist of all time. Paul could have dwelt on his past bad behavior, but he chose to look forward toward the Lord's plan for his life.

Like Paul, I have a choice: look backwards at my sins and failures or look forward towards the “marvelous grace” that Jesus chose me for. It's a daily struggle choose to act against my nature but, with God's help, I can join Paul in choosing wisely.

Isaiah 48:1-11; Psalms 41, 52; Mark 5:21-43

Tuesday, January 26

Mark 6:1-13 *Jesus left that part of the country and returned with his disciples to Nazareth, his hometown. The next Sabbath he began teaching in the synagogue, and many who heard him were amazed. They asked, “Where did he get all this wisdom and the power to perform such miracles?” Then they scoffed, “He's just a carpenter, the son of Mary and the brother of James, Joseph, Judas, and Simon. And his sisters live right here among us.” They were deeply offended and refused to believe in him.* (vv.1-3 NLT)

During college I was a bit of a birdbrain. I got good grades, but emotionally and relationally I was very selfish and immature. However, after I graduated, I grew up personally, professionally, and spiritually. By the time I attended my ten-year reunion, I had a great career working for a Fortune 100 company and had led several Bible studies. I was a different person, yet many people at that reunion continued to treat me as a birdbrain. No amount of evidence could convince them otherwise.

This passage reminds me of that reunion. Since his baptism, Christ had grown into his full purpose and power as the Son of God, yet many in his hometown continued to see him as the scruffy kid who grew up under their noses. No amount of evidence could convince them otherwise.

I couldn't change the opinions of my classmates any more than Jesus could. However, I could choose whether to believe them or not. Christ knew his identity was found in God. As a Christ follower, so is mine. Is yours?

Isaiah 48:12-21; Psalm 45; Galatians 1:18—2:10

Wednesday, January 27

Galatians 2:11-21 *I have been crucified with Christ. My ego is no longer central. It is no longer important that I appear righteous before you or have your good opinion, and I am no longer driven to impress God. Christ lives in me. The life you see me living is not “mine,” but it is lived by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. I am not going to go back on that.* (v.20 MSG)

Ever since I was born (and possibly before) I've been a Chicago Cubs fan. I was born in Chicago, and though we moved to various cities, the “Cubbies” always had my undivided loyalty. I grew up following the box scores in my local paper. When I entered the working world, I had a little statue of a bear wearing baseball cap on my desk. But there's one thing about the Cubs that you might not know. During the last century, they never *won*. They hadn't won a World Series since 1907. Their nickname was the “Loveable Losers.”

My poor Cubbies (and me by association) became the butt of many office jokes. But what they never understood is that my love for the Cubs wasn't based on others “good opinions.” I loved the Cubs. Period.

So when I read this passage from Paul, I understood completely. It doesn't matter what others say, or how they make fun of me and ridicule my faith. My secular loyalty for my baseball team taught me that my ego isn't central. Because I love Jesus. Period.

Oh, and FYI, the Cubs did win the World Series in 2016. Never stop believing!

Isaiah 49:1-12; Psalm 119:49-72; Mark 6:13-29

Thursday, January 28

Mark 6:30-46 *Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, Jesus gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to his disciples to distribute to the people. He also divided the two fish among them all. They all ate and were satisfied.* (vv.41-42 NIV)

Sometimes I imagine myself in Bible stories, like this one about the miracle of Jesus feeding the five thousand with five loaves and two fish. If I were in that crowd, I'm sure I would have been awed by Christ's miracle. I'm also sure that, being a self-sufficient planner, I would have brought my own box lunch to the gathering. I would have shouted, "Praise God" while munching on my own store-bought loaves and fishes (from my favorite restaurant—not some scrawny, locally caught scrod). I would have been worshiping God with my "whole heart," but not with my "whole belly." I was okay with that.

But that was before COVID-19. This virus isn't something I can prepare for. Like the masses gathered around Jesus, I have a need inside me that can't be fixed by my own power. It's a need for healing rather than hunger, but that doesn't matter. I can't do this on my own. I've no choice but to rely on God's mercy, whatever form that takes. And, because of this, I finally realized what all those people discovered on that long-ago hillside.

It's not about the fish.

Isaiah 49:13-23; Psalm 50; Galatians 3:1-14

Friday, January 29

Psalm 40 *You are my helper and my savior. O my God, do not delay.* (v.17b NLT)

In the old but timelessly funny movie *Some Like it Hot*, downtrodden chorus girl Sugar Kane (brilliantly played by Marilyn Monroe) bemoans that she always seems to get "the fuzzy end of the lollipop." Though most of us don't have Sugar's problem of falling for low-life saxophone players (at least I hope not), I'm sure we can all relate to her lament. At one time or another, *all* of us have been stuck with the fuzzy end of the lollipop.

But no matter what trouble we are going through, we have a helper and a Savior, named Jesus. It doesn't matter if someone else caused our problem, or if we ourselves are to blame, the Lord is there to offer mercy, love, and forgiveness. Christ can make all things new—even fuzzy lollipops! Though it's generally a good idea to avoid low-life saxophone players.

Isaiah 50:1-11; Psalm 54; Galatians 3:15-22;
Mark 6:47-56

Saturday, January 30

Isaiah 51:1-8 *"The LORD will surely comfort Zion and will look with compassion on all her ruins."* (v.3 NIV)

In the 1942 movie *Casablanca*, Rick Baine, who is caught in a hopeless love triangle, says, "The problems of three little people don't amount to a hill of beans in this crazy world." Since the movie came out in the middle of World War II, it's understandable that the characters (and the audience), felt their own problems didn't matter much compared to that overwhelming war. Yet the unspoken truth behind Rick's words is that the problems of "three little people" *do* matter a great deal—to

those three little people. Those problems also matter to God.

In the ancient world, a small kingdom called Israel was conquered by Assyria, who in turn fell to the global power Babylon. As one of many, many fallen nations, no one gave a "hill of beans" to the plight of the Jews. But God cared. As Isaiah records, the Lord "looked with compassion on all her ruins." Though they were only unimportant slaves, God cared about the problems of the Israelites. And eventually He led Zion back to her home.

Sometimes our problems seem small compared to "more important" conflicts. But God always cares for your "ruins." They are never insignificant to Him, and He will always lead you home.

Psalm 55; Galatians 3:23-29; Mark 7:1-23

by Ruth Owen

Used with permission from the BIBLE
READING FELLOWSHIP
PO Box 380, Winter Park, FL 32790
www.biblereading.org

Good News Daily

Sunday, January 31

Isaiah 51:9-16 *"I am the one who comforts you. So why should you be afraid Have you forgotten the LORD who made you, who stretched out the skies and made the earth? Why are you always afraid ...?"* (vv.12-13 NCV)

As I write in the summer of 2020, billions around the world are afraid. The coronavirus still rages across the globe killing hundreds of thousands, filling us with anxiety about our health and wellbeing. Violent protests have broken out in the United States and other countries, causing injuries to people and the destruction of property. Far too many remain unemployed or under-employed. They can't pay their bills, feed their children, or get medical care. A national election looms over us, with sharp divisions in both major political parties that lead to aggressive arguments on Capitol Hill as well as in one-on-one conversations with voters who disagree passionately and fear the outcome.

This is why God's words in today's reading from Isaiah especially resonated with me. They helped calm my own nerves about the state of the nation and the planet. The Lord *does* comfort us with Christ's precious peace. And, as God reminded Job—who had lost much and was in despair—He made everything and is still in charge. Let's all try to remember that, this week.

Psalms 24, 29; Hebrews 11:8-16; John 7:14-31

Monday, February 1

Galatians 4:1-11 *So now you are not a slave; you are God's child, and God will give you the blessing he promised, because you are his child.* (v.7)

More comforting words from God. Paul tells us in verse 3b, "we were once ... slaves to the useless rules of this world." But through Christ's sacrificial death for our sins, God has

freed (or ransomed) each of us to become His child, just as Jesus is. As an only child, I like having many "sisters and brothers" in the faith community of which I am privileged to be a member.

If we are God's children, then won't our Heavenly Father ensure that we are taken care of, helped, protected, and healed? Perhaps not in exactly the ways we expect, but decent parents always try to do what's best for their kids. How much more will God give us His blessings, as this verse from Galatians proclaims. It might help improve our mindset, if each of us who believes in Christ thought of ourselves as his brother or sister, and all of us as God's children, loved beyond what we can ask of imagine. I'll try to remember that, this week.

Isaiah 51:17-23; Psalms 56, 57, 58; Mark 7:24-

37

Tuesday, February 2

Psalm 61 *God, hear my cry; listen to my prayer. I call to you from the ends of the earth when I am afraid. Carry me away to a high mountain. You have been my protection, like a strong tower against my enemies.* (vv.1-3)

Lately, I've had trouble sleeping at night. I wake up way too early in the morning while it's still dark and lie there thinking about, worrying over, wondering at, and questioning, far too many things. Being a Christian doesn't mean we won't feel anxious, or even depressed, at times. Some of the greatest spiritual heroes of our faith (e.g., St. Paul of Tarsus, St. John of the Cross, St. Mother Teresa of Calcutta) all experienced a "dark night of the soul" at some point in their mission and ministry. Sometimes, all we can do is pray the words of the psalmist: "God, hear my cry; listen to my prayer." And then, we need to remember—and trust—that He *has* been our protection and has carried us thus far.

Starting to pray often helps me get back to sleep. And I don't think God minds if I fail to finish what I started. He cares that we get our rest. So, this week, rest in the Lord whenever you need to.

Isaiah 52:1-12; Psalm 62; Galatians 4:12-20;
Mark 8:1-10

Wednesday, February 3

Mark 8:11-26 *Jesus sighed deeply and said, "Why do you people ask for a miracle as a sign? I tell you the truth, no sign will be given to you."* (v.12)

We read this verse and feel like yelling, "What's wrong with those people?" In the gospel passage immediately preceding, Jesus fed more than 5,000 people miraculously. Moreover, he's been healing the sick, restoring the handicapped, raising the dead, even turning ordinary water into the finest wine! Aren't these sufficient "signs" that Christ is truly the Messiah?

Ah, but are we any different? At times, our faith is so weakened or trampled down by circumstances (such as life in 2020). We, too, yearn for dramatic signs from God. *If only* [this or that would happen], we say, it would boost my faith. Well, sometimes, God is kind enough to oblige. Due to the pandemic, my husband was temporarily laid off. Yet, he was denied unemployment compensation because of his part-time job as our church's organist. He appealed, and for weeks heard nothing. Then he checked our bank account, and I heard him exclaim: "\$500 was deposited from who-knows-where—but it's marked 'UC.'" He was suspicious, but I replied: "That's an answer to prayer!" Thank you, Lord, for that sign!

Isaiah 54:1-17; Psalm 72; Galatians 4:21-31

Thursday, February 4

Galatians 5:1-15 *If you try to be made right with God through the law, your life with Christ is*

over—you have left God’s grace. But we have the true hope that comes from being made right with God, and by the Spirit we wait eagerly for this hope. (vv.4-5)

We’ve all heard of “DIY”—do-it-yourself—TV shows about fixer-uppers, or kits to build something without professional expertise. I’ve always tended to be a “DIY person.” Growing up as the only child of a single mother, I took on more responsibility than most children, and was also born with a “Type A” personality and an above-normal IQ. All of this made me think, as a teenager and young adult, that I could do anything—and I didn’t want or need anyone else’s help.

Then in my early 30’s, my self-constructed life fell apart completely, and beyond what any well-meaning friend or professional counselor could do for me, I needed major assistance! God graciously encountered me in the balcony of the church I was attending, and during Communion one Sunday, He changed me from a miserable DIY failure to a joy-filled WWJD believer.

Now that I’ve been a re-born Christian and a pastor for over 30 years, I read these verses and their truth resonates deeply. We can’t have DIY salvation—only God can do that for us!

Isaiah 55:1-13; Psalms 70, 71; Mark 8:27—9:1

Friday, February 5

Psalm 69 *LORD, answer me because your love is so good. Because of your great kindness, turn to me. Do not hide from me, your servant. I am in trouble. Hurry to help me!* (vv.16-17)

What jumped out at me in these verses were the phrases, “because your love is so good,” and “because of your great kindness,” describing why God will answer the psalmist’s desperate plea. Not because the pray-er deserves God’s help. But because the Lord loves His children who cry out to Him in need, with faith and trust.

Looking back over the 26 years my husband and I have been married, I realize that often we have done things for each other, or helped one another, simply out of love or kindness, not because either of us deserved it. When we, as Christians, do this for anyone—not for what we can get out of it, or expecting anything in return—we are caring for others as God does.

This weekend, if you find yourself in any kind of trouble, or need help, remember God’s love that “is so good,” and His “great kindness.” Talk to Him, and He will “hurry to help.” Thank you, Lord!

Isaiah 56:1-8; Galatians 5:16-24; Mark 9:2-13

Saturday, February 6

Psalm 75 *God, we thank you; we thank you because you are near. We tell about the miracles you do. I will tell about this forever; I will sing praise to the God of Jacob.* (vv.1, 9)

I never tire of sharing how Jesus rescued me—from myself, death, and hell. Therefore, I will sing praise to God forever, and I try to do that even when I don’t *feel* joyful or thankful. I could not have survived the challenges of 2020 without believing God was near, as well as trusting the Lord to bring good things out of all the suffering and the abnormal “new normal” (a term I’ve come to despise).

For instance, as I write, our church has been closed for five months. We missed much of Lent, all of Holy Week and Easter, and the season after Pentecost. But the weekly services we record and post on three social media platforms are reaching *triple* our parish’s average Sunday attendance. Online viewers number people around the world. What an opportunity to preach the gospel! And for our small country parish to become known. We hope and pray that some who’ve been worshiping virtually will attend when we re-open. Meanwhile, we continue to

share the Good News and sing praise to God “because He is near.”

Isaiah 57:3-13; Psalm 76; Galatians 5:25—6:10;
Mark 9:14-29

by Nina George-Hacker

Used with permission from the BIBLE
READING FELLOWSHIP

PO Box 380, Winter Park, FL 32790

www.biblereading.org