

A RARE GIFT

COVID-19 is upon us, and many are experiencing great fear. Store shelves have been emptied, church services and schools have been cancelled or drastically changed, and many are suddenly without income. The virus spreads stealthily, and we are all potentially agents of contagion. People we care about are vulnerable, and some of us are suffering from the illness ourselves.

Around us, economies worldwide seem to be faltering, and our entire way of life has been upended. Theories and finger-pointing abound, as people seek a way of making sense of this unprecedented crisis. We are mourning the loss of safety that was felt when there was a secure consumer market, stable economy, and liberty to travel, eat out, and mingle at will.

We may fear what comes next globally or in our families. This event feels like a death (and will include real deaths), and it's easy to get fixated on the losses being experienced and feel hopeless.

It's easy to feel afraid. That's okay. Still, we do not despair and we do not panic. Why? Because we do not fear for our lives as do those who have no hope (1 Thessalonians 4:13). For those of us who name Christ as our Lord, we can find opportunities to share the reason for our hope with friends and family who are rarely open to the gospel (1 Peter 3:15).

But evangelism as we know it is different in the days of social distancing and isolation or self-quarantine. Loving our neighbors and working toward the health of our communities in this pandemic counterintuitively requires us to stay physically far from one another!

What can we *do* from home? While social media can play a role in expressing our love and hope, perhaps we should think of this as a time of spiritual preparation for our ministry to come, following Jesus' example (Luke 4:1–15).

To help you through this time of upended routines, uncertainty, and fear, we have brought together a selection of short daily devotionals we have published over the years. We pray they will keep you strong in your love of the Great Shepherd, who laid down His life for the sheep.

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We'll start with a thought from the story of Gideon, who certainly had cause to fear.

NEVER ALONE

Read Judges 6:11–18

My wife, Gloria, and little children have quite a rapport. Perhaps her friendly smile and white hair attract little kids to her. Recently, while we were waiting in a crowded restaurant's foyer to be seated, Gloria was sitting on a bench, when a 4-year-old girl sat beside her and cuddled up to her. The youngster poured out her troubles to Gloria. "Momma treats me mean. She smokes too much and has to go to the doctor. Grandma is really, really big." Gloria put her arm around the little girl and tried to console her. It seemed she was telling her, "I am right here with you, and I understand."

We never outgrow trouble, and sometimes the trouble seems overwhelming. The world treats us mean. We face health problems, family problems, financial problems, and problems at work. When the problems seem overwhelming, we feel the need to tell someone about them.

Thankfully, we can tell our loving heavenly Father all about our troubles. He is right there with us (see Deuteronomy 33:27). And like Gideon, who feared he was no match for the fierce Midianites, we can take comfort in God's promise, "Surely I will be with you."

PRAYER

Lord, You promised to be with me always, and sometimes You come to me through the love and care of Your people, my fellow church members. Help me to rely on Your presence as I face today's challenges. In Jesus' name, amen.

Jim Dyet, a former minister and editor, is now retired, living with Gloria, his wife of 59 years, in Colorado Springs. He enjoys freelance writing, golfing, and walking his two dogs.



The following thought is about a mysterious medical crisis and the One who can always bring healing.

THE HEALER

Read Mark 3:7–12

When I was a young man in my 20s, I was among the thousands of fans to follow a particular band because of the lead artist's music. The cost of getting in and the travel and time to be at each concert always proved to be a good decision.

The crowd from Galilee followed Jesus because of His miracles. For them, the time and effort to go to see, hear, and be near Jesus was always a good decision, and especially for those He healed. They all knew Jesus performed miracles.

When a Sunday school classmate of mine, Robert, inexplicably fell into a coma, the doctors tried everything that they learned from their medical training but nothing brought any change. A group of mothers from the Sunday school set up a prayer chain and began praying around the clock for Robert.

God brought Robert out of the coma. Even one of the doctors called it a miracle! The medical team had done all they could, and God responded by doing what the prayerful women had hoped He would. This isn't always the outcome, but how wonderful when God not only listens but *heals*!

Going to Jesus is always a good decision. He is never far from us—always within the reach of faith-filled prayer.

PRAYER

Dear Lord, thank You for Your continual presence with us and the gift of Your healing power in our lives. In Your name, amen.

Bob Hurte lives with his wife and two adult children in northwest New Jersey.



Today's devotion describes a time and place that stands in stark contrast to how that place looks during this virus. Perhaps we can all find the world a quieter place today in which to pray.

BE STILL FOR HE IS GOD

Read Lamentations 3:25–33

New York, where I grew up, is known as “the city that never sleeps” and with good reason. There are cars in the streets, ambulances with sirens blaring, and people out during all hours of the day and night. How hard it was for me, therefore, to “wait quietly” (v. 26) or “sit alone in silence” (v. 28) regarding anything in my life, including prayer.

It was in the difficult trials of my life, during which no amount of trying to coerce God to act was ever successful, that I learned the joy and release of entering His sabbath rest of stillness and quiet. Experiencing the rest of God is not idleness; it is enjoying a continuous state of contentment and peace knowing that He is God and we are not.

In Lamentations we read about and empathize with the author who is crying out due to his afflictions and suffering. He affirms, however, that those who wait for the Lord will receive hope and compassion from the Lord. When we learn to trust in the goodness of God in spite of our afflictions, it becomes easier to wait on Him for His timing and His answers to our prayers.

PRAYER

Lord, help us to trust You and to learn to rest in Your love, knowing that You always want the best for us. In Your great and mighty name we pray, amen.

Deborah Markowitz Solan, of Cuyahoga Falls, Ohio, is a substitute teacher and conference speaker. She is committed to sharing God's intimate love with everyone in her life.



Sometimes our circumstances suggest that the odds are stacked against us and all of our efforts will be wasted. But perseverance in prayer changes us, and sometimes it changes our circumstances too.

RELENTLESS

Read Luke 18:1–8

With 45 seconds remaining on the scoreboard, the crowded high school gymnasium erupted. Fans cheered, whistled, clapped, stomped, and screamed. It became clear that the girls' basketball team from Hoxie, Kansas, a tiny dot on the map, would soon win the game.

But this wasn't just an ordinary league competition; it was the playoff game for the state championship. Moreover, a once-in-a-lifetime title was at stake. This squad of girls would soon secure their fourth banner as state basketball champions.

During four brief years of participating in high school sports, their persistence and dedication had netted an unprecedented 95 game winning streak. Over the course of their high school career, these girls learned to work together and play together. They practiced early in the morning before classes began and again later in the day after classes ended. The players disciplined their bodies and minds, learning never to abandon hope. They were relentless.

In Jesus' parable, the widow persevered against all odds. She continued requesting help and never stopped hoping. Like that widow, I am in constant need of help against spiritual forces that try to take me down. I must be relentless in prayer.

PRAYER

O Lord, I'm grateful You hear my requests all the time. Strengthen me so I don't despair. Keep infusing Your strength in me so I can resist every temptation that comes my way. In Your holy name I pray. Amen.

Vickie Hodges lives with her husband, Steve, in the mountains of western Colorado. She loves to travel, camp, paint, and engage with people from various cultures.



The thought below takes us from mindfulness of death, disease, and fear to the peace we have in Christ.

THE ONLY SOURCE OF PERSONAL PEACE

Read Judges 6:19–24

As tensions at home and abroad seem to spiral out of control, we may find ourselves dealing with excessive worry. It seems that the cost of keeping body and soul together increases monthly, global conflict escalates, terrorism threatens our personal safety, and dangerous new diseases appear to spring up overnight.

For some of us, worry can spiral into anxiety and/or depression, which is best treated by mental health professionals, potentially with medication. But all of us who are dealing with worries must look to the Lord for peace.

The Lord is the only source of peace and that He is always near His people. If we take our concerns to Him and leave them with Him, His peace will guard our hearts and minds (see Philippians 4:5-7). Isaiah 26:3 (NASB) promises: “The steadfast of mind you will keep in perfect peace, because he trusts in you.” Instead of looking around and being distressed, we can look above and be at rest.

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, I have many reasons to worry today, but one overriding reason to have peace of mind: my life is in Your hands. Though I'll be tempted to take it back, I ask You to carry me through every difficulty. In Jesus' name, amen.

Jim Dyet, a former minister and editor, is now retired, living with Gloria, his wife of 59 years, in Colorado Springs. He enjoys freelance writing, golfing, and walking his two dogs.



The young girl featured in today's devotional would not abandon her practice of standing in the gap for someone who was vulnerable, though it would've been much better for her. During this crisis, we may wish for rapture or miraculous deliverance, but it may be that God desires us to remain standing in the gap for our neighbors.

RESOLUTE

Read Ruth 1:6–11, 14–18

When did housing get so expensive? In 2016 in the United States, almost half of renters were spending 30% or more of their income on housing. This fits the definition of being cost burdened to have place to live. This doesn't even take into consideration whether or not that place is safe or in good repair.

Around the country, nonprofit organizations seek to protect vulnerable families from falling into homelessness after the loss of a job or other financial hit. And when homelessness does occur, those same organizations often step in to help find housing and other services. A family could be in despair, but in their time of need, caring people nationwide still see hope and seek to help their neighbor.

When Naomi pleaded for her daughters-in-law to remain in Moab with their parents, nobody would have faulted them for staying behind. Their lives would have been immeasurably easier at home; with Naomi, only uncertainty, hardship, and a foreign culture awaited. But Ruth had determined to love her husband's family and serve Israel's God, and was not dissuaded by a reversal in her circumstances.

Naomi lacked both the strength for hard labor and the will to start over after so many personal losses. When Ruth placed Naomi's needs above her own, she could protect Naomi from further hardships. Her loyalty was non-negotiable, her resolve firm. May we have as much godly character as Ruth displayed when life throws us a curve.

PRAYER

Father, please help me to be faithful, because You are always faithful. In Jesus' name, amen.

Neil Bowers is a husband, dad, grandpa, and Sunday school teacher who lives in San Diego, California.



Most of us would not have chosen the uncertainty and disruption we're facing during the coronavirus crisis. Our Plan A involves living life as normal. But as we turn to Plan B, let's remember who's actually in control of all our plans.

PLAN B

Read Mark 14:43–50

Peter knew how to resolve the crisis in the olive garden the night of Jesus' betrayal. His failure to defend Jesus had nothing to do with lack of skill or courage. Peter's problem was just Jesus! Jesus, Himself, prevented Peter's use of violence to protect Him (Matthew 26:52). At that moment, Peter the Fearless became Peter the Planless and led the way into the darkness of the grove.

The principle of Plan B is difficult for Christians to embrace. As a people of faith, we can feel disloyal when we create a back up plan, in case God doesn't do what we *really* hope for in Plan A. Updating a will in case we are not delivered from cancer feels like we don't believe God can or will heal. Drawing up plans for a low-cost renovation instead of the high-cost building program we desire looks like we don't think God will provide the funds we want or need. To even think an alternative seems unfaithful.

But accepting our Plan B as God's plan is always a faithful response. No matter what, we begin with the prayer, "Your will be done" (Matthew 6:10). Then we proceed with, "If it is the Lord's will" (James 4:14–15). We prepare to accept the inexplicable, "not my will, but yours" (Luke 22:42), and follow through with, "even if he does not [deliver us]" (Daniel 3:17–18).

PRAYER

Father, may my dreams of Plan A not interfere with my willingness to follow Your plan. In Jesus' name, amen.

Harold Comings is a retired Senior Pastor who lives with his wife, Judy, in Florida.



Despite frightening financial realities caused by this disease, God hasn't ceased to be the one who laughs at what humans consider impossible.

NO LAUGHING MATTER

Read Genesis 18:1–15

When hearing of a family member's impossible financial challenge, my father told me, "They're not going to make it." On paper, he was right. Their income was no match for the need. I countered Dad's prediction with God's promise to be faithful against the odds, but he laughed it off.

In Genesis 18, Sarah also laughed at the even greater impossibility of bearing a son. She had good reason for that reaction. Her husband, Abraham, was nearly 100 years old, and she was 90. Considering bodies well past their reproductive years, both Abraham and Sarah passed off God's promise as a really good joke.

But God wasn't joking. A son was born to this couple at precisely the time He promised (see Genesis 21:2). How fitting that the boy's name, Isaac, means "laughter."

Though we aren't facing pregnancy as a nonagenarian, many of our circumstances can seem just as impossible. God promises, for example, that if we hope in the Lord, He will renew our strength (Isaiah 40:31). But how can we hope after losing a loved one, a job, or a home? God says that if we love Him, He is working all things for our good (Romans 8:28). But how can negative events in our lives have a positive outcome?

Despite our questions, God's promises are nothing to take lightly. As with Abraham and Sarah, we can trust God to come through in His way and time in our toughest situations.

PRAYER

Lord, help me to take Your promises seriously, especially when challenges overwhelm me. In Jesus' name, amen.

Sherri Langton is a magazine editor and workshop speaker at Christian writers conferences. She enjoys playing drums and percussion at her church, as well as walking and swimming. Sherri lives in Denver, Colorado.



Because COVID-19 is an international disease, we are more mindful these days of people from other nations: China, Italy, Iran, and more. It's never a bad time to pray for people—those who are our brothers and sisters and those who are not—and a crisis like this is an especially good time.

A STRANGER'S HEART

Read Exodus 23:1–9

How do you say, “May I borrow a cup of sugar?” in Burmese? Nepali? Arabic? Spanish? If you lived in an apartment in Clarkston, Georgia, this could be a common question. Clarkston is an international village a few miles northeast of Atlanta, and Time magazine cited it as the most diverse square mile in America. It is home to refugees from almost 150 countries, who speak more than 70 languages.

Many of these refugees have fled their home countries to escape war, persecution, and massacre. In the 1990s, the United Nations and the United States government chose Clarkston as a prime location for displaced refugees. These strangers enjoy the freedoms of America. They also face the same physical, social, and spiritual needs as US citizens. Mission organizations and churches collaborate to meet some of these basic needs.

The Israelites had been strangers in another land. They knew the sadness, fear, and loneliness of displacement; they realized that culture and language barriers hinder relationships, making life hard. Their experiences remind me to show compassion and to be a friend to those with needs.

PRAYER

Lord, give me compassion to help, share, empathize, and love others well. Equip and use me to display Your presence and provision. In Jesus' name, amen.

Vickie Hodges lives with her husband, Steve, in the mountains of western Colorado. She loves to travel, camp, paint, and engage with people from various cultures.



Even at the best of times, we know that God's will is not always being done on earth as it is in heaven. And then when something new and disturbing breaks in, as has happened to us now, it can shake our confidence even more. It's a good thing that God's work doesn't rest on our unswerving faith!

GOD'S PROMISES ALWAYS PREVAIL

Read 1 Samuel 19:8–12

From the time we are young, we are told timeless tales of good versus evil. Fairy tales, myths, and epic battles revolve around cheering for the good guy, hoping that he has the smarts and strength to outwit and outlive the bad guy. The final climax of each adventure is a nail-biter. It looks like evil will triumph, but at the last moment, the good guy wins!

In Scripture, we see good versus evil, but when God is the good guy, we cannot watch the battle scenes with the same sit-on-the-edge-of-your-seat uncertainty. In the real world, God always wins.

God had already promised David would become the next king. Jesus, the Savior, would descend from David's royal line. There is nothing that could have prevented God from keeping His covenant promise, not even King Saul's quest to kill David. In our lives we draw comfort and confidence from God's promises of salvation, provision, glory, and blessing. When it looks like evil will prevail, instead of doubting, trust that no evil spirit, force, or entity can prevent God from keeping His promises.

PRAYER

Almighty God, thank You for the assurance of Your victory over all evil. Please help me to trust in You to keep Your promises. In Jesus' name, amen.

Rachel Schmoyer is a pastor's wife and mom of four. She is from Whitehall, Pennsylvania.



One benefit of major life disruptions is opportunities to speak life to people who would normally not be open to hearing it—if we can find the courage to do so.

COURAGE TO SPEAK

Read Acts 6:8–15

I had become a believer in Yeshua (Jesus) a few months before my grandfather was dying in a Jewish hospital in Brooklyn, New York. He was an angry man whose life was filled with trouble. I sensed the Lord wanted me to share my newfound faith with him and gathered the courage to visit him. He became hostile and, with a loud voice, told me to leave.

Nevertheless, I decided to pray out loud for him. Surprisingly, he began to pray out loud in Hebrew and then told me he was afraid to die. I shared God's love with him and Jesus' promise of eternal life. He prayed the sinner's prayer and two days later, he passed from this life to the next.

Stephen was filled with the Spirit, wisdom, and faith as he spread the Word of God amongst the Jews. Even a large number of priests became obedient to the faith. Despite the persecution he faced, Stephen was courageous and steadfast.

God will sometimes call us into situations in which sharing our faith will not be easy or popular. But He also prepares us to be witnesses to the gospel. Though my faith was young, I could pray for my grandfather. Though Stephen was persecuted, he preached.

What hurdles will you overcome as you follow the lead of the Holy Spirit?

PRAYER

Lord, grant us wisdom and courage to speak boldly even if we face opposition for Your name's sake. In Your name, amen.

Deborah Markowitz Solan, of Cuyahoga Falls, Ohio, is a substitute teacher and conference speaker. She is committed to sharing God's intimate love with everyone in her life.



Feeling afraid? Facing danger? Or maybe just discomfort? In such times, we can take our cue from David.

FINDING COMFORT IN THE FUTURE KINGDOM

Read 1 Samuel 20:35–42

After winning the Olympic gold, runner Eric Liddell left his fame to become a missionary in China during the Japanese occupation. He did his missionary work while watching over his shoulder in fear of his life, but he was able to live through the danger and discomfort because he clung to the promise of the kingdom of Heaven.

God had promised that David would be the ruler of the kingdom after King Saul. While waiting for God's timing in keeping that promise, David gave up his comfortable life. He gave up life with his wife, Michal. He left his best friend whom he would see only one more time. He gave up life as a celebrated soldier. Perhaps this is why David wept more than Jonathan did.

Both Eric Liddell and David chose to live in light of God's promise of the future kingdom.

It's not easy to live as a believer in Jesus Christ. Believers are persecuted around the world. Where there is no persecution there is the draw of living comfortably. Focusing on God's coming kingdom is the motivation to push through life on earth.

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, when I am discouraged in this life, let me gain strength by looking forward to Your heavenly kingdom. In Jesus' name, amen.

Rachel Schmoyer is a pastor's wife and mom of four. She is from Whitehall, Pennsylvania.



In this uncertain time, we are reminded that our circumstances don't prevent us from casting our burdens upon the Lord.

DECISION TIME

Read Ruth 1:1–5

A German preacher faced a hard decision. Newly called to the pastorate, he had convictions against pew rent and pastors' salaries, fearing human dependence might compromise a pastor's boldness. Claiming 1 Peter 5:7, George Muller purposed to cast all his worries upon God, telling no one of his financial needs. Eliminating his regular income, he began living only on unsolicited offerings.

Muller determinedly held to this principle for the next 62 years while caring for Britain's orphans, ultimately building and operating five orphanages and raising 10,000 children with no regular source of support. He told his needs only to God, who always supplied.

When famine came to Israel, Elimelech contrived a plan to leave the promised land. He, his wife Naomi, and his two sons of marriageable age crossed into Moab, where intermarriage and idolatry had already caused the deaths of 24,000 Israelites. He allowed circumstances, rather than godly principles, to control his decision. Following his death, however, God redeemed Naomi's situation.

The Moabite woman Ruth, far from pulling Naomi away from Him, actually helped her mother-in-law become part of the Bethlehem community once more. And God provided for both women, even including the foreign woman in His Son's genealogy (Matthew 1:5). No matter where our lives take us, God is willing and able to redeem us and our circumstances.

PRAYER

Help me, Lord, to make every with confidence that You can supply for my every need. In Jesus' name, amen.

Neil Bowers is a husband, dad, grandpa, and Sunday school teacher who lives in San Diego, California.



During times when many around us are focusing on what they have lost, it's difficult not to shift our focus to those things, as well. Today's thought reminds us to fix our eyes on the author and perfecter of our faith.

REJOICE IN OUR BLESSINGS

Read Luke 6:17–23

My friend Maryann survived cancer twice but then faced a third battle. On my last visit with her she was pale and weak. She did not recognize me until I spoke, and the sound of my voice brought my name back to her memory.

Maryann had lost much of her physical strength and abilities. This was a battle that Maryann was losing. Even though she recognized her physical body was failing she still knew that she was victorious in the spiritual battle for her soul. And that was her focus. She was more interested in what she still had and what she would soon gain than what she had lost, the poverty of her circumstances, and her poor health.

The source of her conviction was the knowledge that she was a child of God, saved by faith in Jesus Christ, and a member of the kingdom of God. She was losing everything physically, but she knew the blessing of life in the kingdom of God was secure in her eternal destiny.

Jesus promised in His Sermon on the Mount that even though all who follow Him will come upon some sort of poverty in their life, and will lose something eventually, our hope is not in what we can lose but in Christ and His eternal kingdom.

PRAYER

Dear Father, thank You for the blessing of hope in You and my place in Your kingdom because of the gift of Your Son, my Savior, who purchased my destiny in Heaven. In Jesus' name, amen.

Bob Hurte lives with his wife and two adult children in Northwest New Jersey.



CLOSING THOUGHTS

COVID-19 has wrecked our routines and broken down things we thought were solid. But we must remember that this time is an opportunity to boast in our weakness.

Our tendency is to elevate ourselves and glorify the flesh. We don't like feeling like we're not masters of our own destiny. But God's power resides not in our strength and sufficiency but in our weakness (2 Corinthians 4:16-18).

When we are weak, it reminds us that we are not God. And that's a healthy reminder. The part of us that likes to control our lives is defeated, and our flesh is out of the way, allowing Christ's power to flow through us, producing "fruit that will last" (John 15:16).

Instead of giving in to fear or trying even harder to control the present or predict the future, use the rise of hard feelings as a reminder to pray. Thank God for the researchers seeking vaccines, treatments, and more knowledge about the virus; thank Him for all medical personnel who are treating the sick; thank Him for grocery store workers and truck drivers and so many others who are still working tirelessly in the face of such challenging times.

Lift *all* your worries, great and small, to God because He does care for you (1 Peter 5:7).

This is a time to watch for all the new things God will do in His church and in His creation. In this strange season, prepare your heart, your mind, your spirit, and your body to share the good news and freely speak about all that He has done for you.





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