

simpleGRACE

April 2017

Your daily dose of hope

**THE AUTHOR OF
THE SHACK**

**"GOD NOT ONLY
LOVES YOU...
GOD *LIKES* YOU!"**

**DAILY DEVOTIONAL
GROW CLOSER
TO JESUS THIS
EASTER**

**CECE WINANS
FROM
STRESS
TO BLISS**

**SPIRITUAL
CURES**

- ❖ Anger
- ❖ Fear
- ❖ Frustration
- ❖ Loneliness
- ❖ Worry

**RORY
FECK**
on life
after
losing
JOEY

**LOVE
NEVER
DIES**



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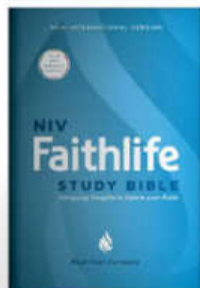
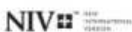
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simpleGRACE

April 2017

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Daily Devotional

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Honor our Lord this Easter by turning over your heart to Him every day
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Living Your Faith

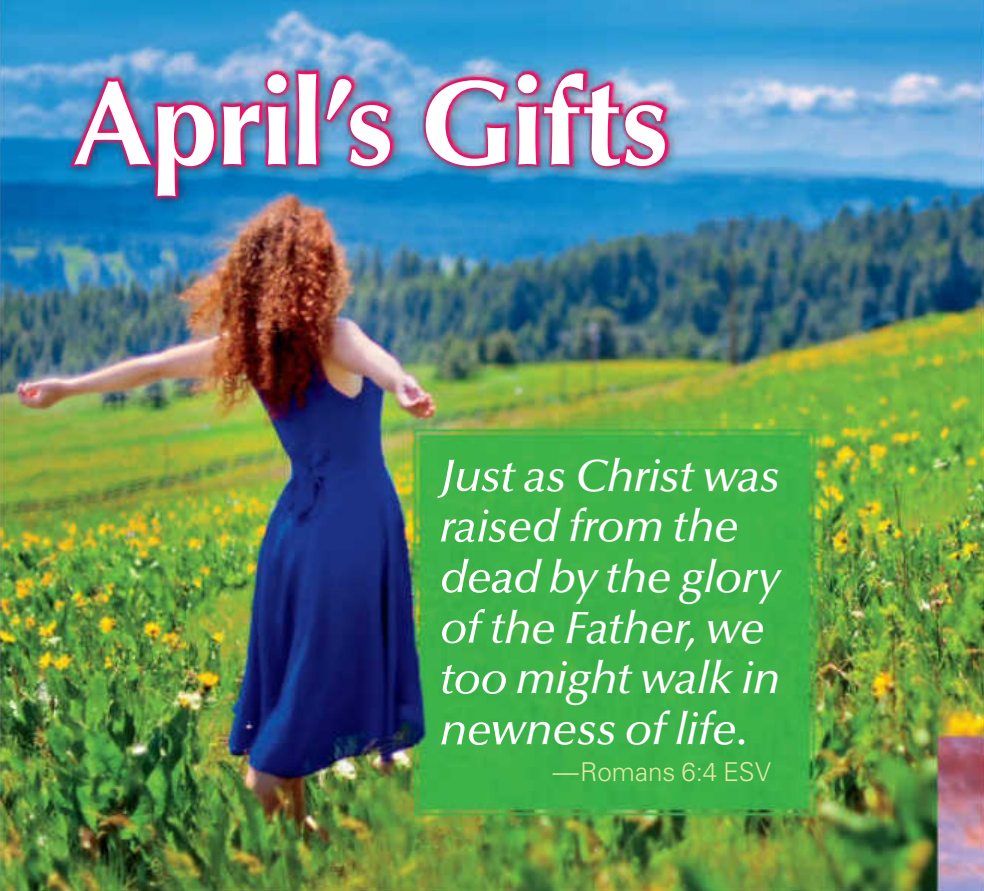
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April's Gifts



*Just as Christ was
raised from the
dead by the glory
of the Father, we
too might walk in
newness of life.*

—Romans 6:4 ESV



*My God is my rock,
in whom I find
protection. He is my
shield, the power that
saves me, and my
place of safety.*

—2 Samuel 22:3 NLT

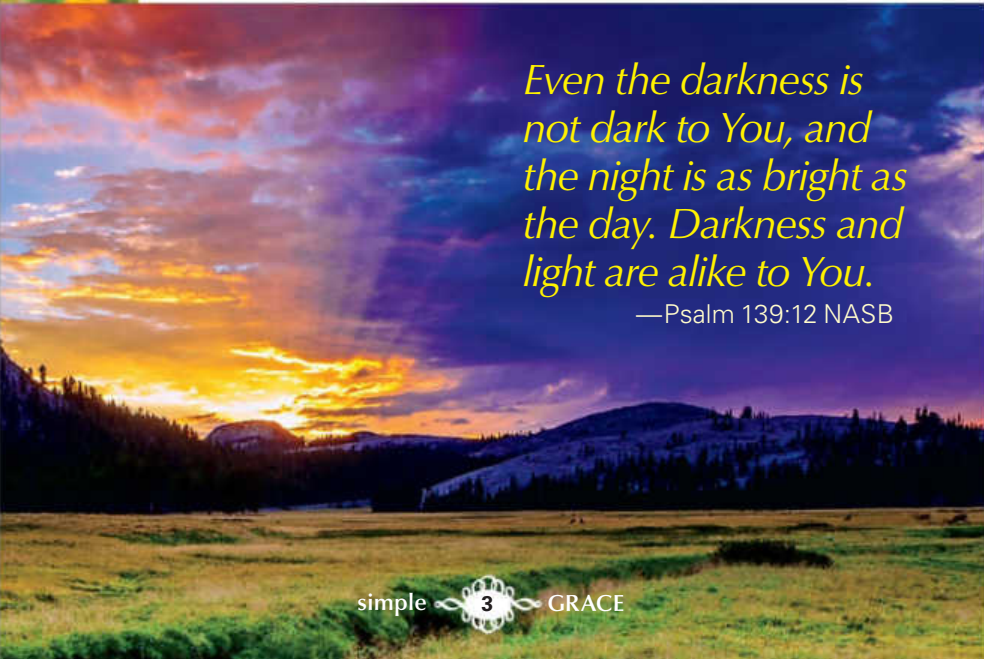


*Holy, holy, holy is
the Lord of hosts;
the whole earth
is full of His glory!*

—Isaiah 6:3 NKJV

*Even the darkness is
not dark to You, and
the night is as bright as
the day. Darkness and
light are alike to You.*

—Psalm 139:12 NASB



Mailbox

Feedback, comments & inspiration
from readers like you!

SG restored my faith!

"I can't tell you how healing it was to read about Lysa TerKeurst's hard-won prayer wisdom in the March issue of your magazine. Like Lysa, I also survived a serious illness, but I've been so angry at God for my suffering. Lysa's realization that pain saved her life helped me see God's plan for my own life."

—Sara Mack, Cheyenne, WY

Helps me wake up happy

"Every night, my mind used to race with stressful thoughts from the daily grind, and I couldn't settle down enough to fall asleep. Now I just pick up *Simple Grace*. Gazing at the beautiful photos and reading each day's devotional centers me and quiets my worries. I go to bed feeling lighter, brighter and closer to God."

—Heidi Tiller, Tulsa

We'd love to hear what you think of *Simple Grace*—write to us at Mailbox@simplegrace.com with your thoughts and suggestions

Cures loneliness

"My problems often make me feel detached and isolated from those in my faith community, like I'm the only person going crazy with guilt, doubt and fear. But seeing all the pleas from other readers in your magazine proves I'm not alone. Joining this prayer circle and offering up others' burdens alongside my own has been so transformative!"

—Talia Ferguson, Reno, NV

Turns pain into peace

"A series of personal crises have left me bedridden. A kind friend gave me your magazine, and I can't tell you what a lifeline it's been. Reading uplifting stories like Reba's triumph over pain, worry and self-doubt has connected me with an inner strength I didn't know I had. *Simple Grace* brims with love and reminds me God is always by my side."

—Norma McCloud, Phoenix

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Inspirational now

WHAT'S NEW ON SCREEN

HISTORICAL

The Zookeeper's Wife

Based on the bestselling book by Diane Ackerman, this film tells the true story of Christian couple Jan and Antonina Żabiński (Jessica Chastain), who helped hundreds of Jews during the 1939 Nazi invasion of Poland by hiding them in their Warsaw Zoo. Their faith and courage is inspiring. (In theaters March 31)





BIBLICAL

Barabbas

Starring Billy Zane (*Titanic*) as Barabbas, this two-part miniseries tracks the thief's spiritual journey after being spared crucifixion instead of Jesus. Originally aired on TV in 2012, the film is worth revisiting for its unique perspective on the Easter story and God's promise of redemption. (\$10 for DVD, Amazon)



DOCUMENTARY

Facing Darkness

During the 2014 Ebola outbreak in West Africa, U.S. aid worker Dr. Kent Brantly caught the deadly virus while caring for patients. This film captures the miracle that unfolded when Samaritan's Purse, a Christian relief organization, stepped in to save him. (In theaters one night only on March 30)



ROMANCE

I'm in Love With a Church Girl

Trying to put his drug-dealing past behind him, Miles meets nice-girl Vanessa who shapes his life and spirituality in unexpected ways. As his relationship and faith endure major trials, Miles discovers love is what brings him closer to God. (\$4 to rent, Amazon and iTunes)





INSTRUMENTAL

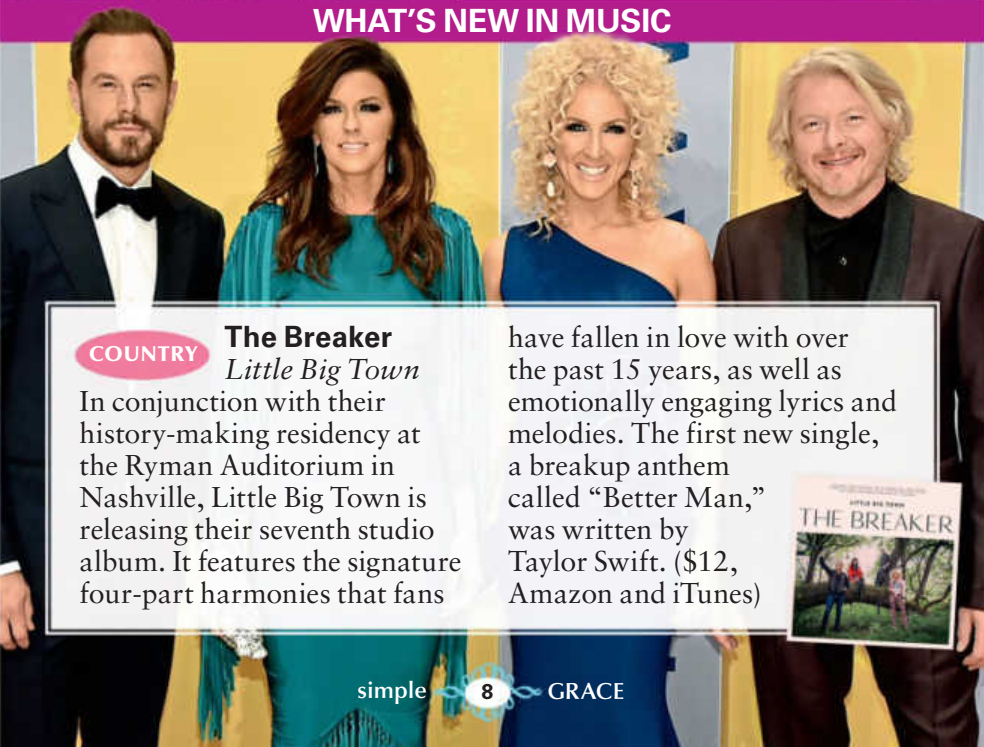
Hymns from Home

Josh Singletary

It's been seven years since the talented Josh Singletary released his last solo piano album, and his much-anticipated follow-up features stellar performances of 12 personally significant hymns. The pianist and baritone singer for popular Southern gospel group Tribute Quartet, Josh interprets moving songs like "Be Thou My Vision," "He Hideth My Soul" and "Were You There" with sensitivity and grace. (\$12, Amazon and iTunes)



WHAT'S NEW IN MUSIC



COUNTRY

The Breaker

Little Big Town

In conjunction with their history-making residency at the Ryman Auditorium in Nashville, Little Big Town is releasing their seventh studio album. It features the signature four-part harmonies that fans

have fallen in love with over the past 15 years, as well as emotionally engaging lyrics and melodies. The first new single, a breakup anthem called "Better Man," was written by Taylor Swift. (\$12, Amazon and iTunes)



**CONTEMPORARY****Open Hands***Laura Story*

This is the fifth album from Grammy-winner Laura Story, and her latest accomplishment raises the bar even higher by exploring the challenges and rewards of giving life's ups and downs over to God. Through powerful lyrics in songs like the titular "Open Hands"—which features the talented Mac Powell from Christian rock band Third Day—Laura captures the beauty in saying, "Jesus, I surrender all." (\$12 Amazon, \$10 iTunes)

**HIP HOP****Steven Malcolm***Steven Malcolm*

In his self-titled major label debut, Christian rapper Steven Malcolm channels his love for God and his music-making prowess into a collection of upbeat and honest tracks. The first single, "Hot Boy"—a song that celebrates his passion for Jesus—exemplifies Steven's ability to set inspiring, honest and motivating messages to catchy beats. Listening to his purpose-driven music is energizing and faith-affirming. (\$10, Amazon and iTunes)





MEMOIR

Between Heaven & the Real World

Steven Curtis Chapman

Most know Steven Curtis Chapman as a Christian music legend with many Grammy and Dove Awards to his name. In his new memoir, Chapman opens up about the behind-the-scenes struggles and experiences—like the tragic loss



of his daughter—that shaped him, his music and his relationship with God. (Revell, 2017; Hardcover \$23, Kindle \$13, Nook \$13)

WHAT'S NEW IN BOOKS

ROMANCE

Annie's Recipe

Lisa Jones Baker

Annie Mast and Levi Miller were best friends until Levi's father was shunned by the church. Now, 10 years later, Levi has returned to the Amish community of Arthur, Illinois, for a brief visit, and he and Annie discover their bond is as strong as ever. This heart-warming second installment in the *Hope Chest of Dreams* series reinforces the power of love. (Kensington, 2017; Paperback \$8, Kindle \$6, Nook \$6)



BIBLE STUDY

The Women of Easter

Liz Curtis Higgs

Viewing the events surrounding Jesus' death and resurrection through the eyes of Mary of Bethany, Mary of Nazareth and Mary Magdalene, award-winning Bible teacher Liz Curtis Higgs uncovers fresh insights in Scripture that deepen our understanding of His loving sacrifice. It's the perfect way to prepare for this season of solemnity and joy. (Waterbrook, 2017; Hardcover \$15, Kindle \$12, Nook \$12)



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How did you

Simple Grace caught up with gospel legend CeCe Winans to ask our favorite question

Over the past few years, God has called CeCe Winans to serve Him in ways she never imagined—like founding Nashville Life Church and recording her first solo album in a decade. But no matter the challenge, the 10-time Grammy winner knew the Lord had it covered.

“We forget that when Jesus was on the Cross, He said, ‘It is finished.’ Sometimes I’ll worry, *Lord, can You do this?*” says CeCe. “But then God says, *I’ve already done it!*” This morning she prayed to remember that gift. “I said, ‘Lord, I thank You that I’m ahead and not down. I thank You for Your supernatural eternal blessings, the anointing of the blessing of Abraham, to walk in the fullness of what You, Jesus, have *already* paid for us.’” Here, more of CeCe’s prayer insights.

Sharing God’s love through music

Pick up CeCe’s newest album, *Let Them Fall in Love*, written by her son Alvin Jr. (\$8, Amazon and iTunes)



pray today?

CECE'S 3 PRAYER DOs

1 ASK FOR DIRECTIONS

"When I'm unsure about which way to go in life, I open my heart and ask God for directions," shares CeCe.

"For instance, my husband, Alvin, and I *never* wanted to start a church, but people were always asking us, 'You guys starting a church yet?'"

So after years of this, we prayed, *God, if this is what You want, please make it clear, because we don't feel it.* Before we knew it, things started to happen and God put Nashville Life Church on our hearts...you can't get any clearer than that!"

2 PRAISE AWAY ANXIETY

"When life hits me hard or I'm feeling anxious or sad, I begin to praise God so I don't stay down," says CeCe. "The enemy doesn't play fair—and self-pity, stress and anxiety is a tool of the enemy. So when I start to feel those negative

emotions, I say out loud, 'No!' and refuse to let it overtake me. Then I turn to the Lord and love on Him because the Bible says that the garment of praise will lift the spirit of heaviness—it's not always easy but works every time."

3 WIN SOULS

"We do this challenge at church where we try to win as many souls as we can, and now I try to 'win souls' in almost everything I do," says CeCe. "It forces me to focus on others and reminds me that it's actually not about me—it's about God

and sharing His love. For instance, today I was doing a Facebook Live announcement about my album and I prayed, *Lord, I need Your supernatural power, this is about You!* Just trying to win souls for Him makes everything so exciting!"

"How I know

HE LOVES AWAY OUR LONELINESS

"How come you live all alone and are so sad?" my neighbor's 7-year-old son, Leo, asked me. I'd reluctantly agreed to babysit him on a rainy Saturday afternoon and with every new question, I regretted it more and more.

"Since my husband and I had split up and my daughter had gone off to college, my life had derailed. I'd never imagined I'd be alone at my age, but I was. Every morning I wrote in my prayer journal asking for God to help me find a person who would bring me joy again, but nothing ever changed. *Why do I have to suffer through this pain?*

I'd write to the Lord, *Jesus, please help me feel less lonely!*

"As my depression had grown darker, my anger had begun to bubble to the surface. *Why can't this kid just mind his own business?* I thought as Leo peppered me with more questions. 'I guess God just wants me to be alone!' I snorted back, fearing it was true.

"Several days later, I'd been moping about when the doorbell rang. I opened it to find Leo standing on my step with a toothy grin hugging a goldfish bowl. 'This is Ruth,' he announced. 'I want you to have her because you're wrong. God doesn't want *anyone* to be alone.'

"I blinked back tears and reflected on my prayer for someone special to be placed in my path. My plans definitely hadn't included a little boy or a goldfish, but the empty corners of my soul brightened and I realized: With God in my heart, I was never truly alone."

—Amy Eastwood, 59, Gary, IN



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God is real"

HE FINDS US WHEN WE'RE LOST

"Last year as Easter approached, my usual joy was replaced with a strange emptiness and despair. Desperate to get in the spirit of things, I went to Walmart to search for decorations for our family dinner that Sunday, but my spirit still felt as dull as the eyes of the stuffed bunnies that stared out at me from the store's shelves. *Where is my fire for You, Jesus?* I prayed. *I feel so lost.*

"Suddenly a little girl came and sat right in the center of the aisle. She closed her eyes, held her hands together and began to pray. 'Are you lost, honey?' I asked, echoing my own thoughts.

"Not for long,' she answered, confidently, completely unafraid. 'I said a prayer like my mommy told me. Jesus will find me.'

"I wanted to tell her prayer doesn't give instant answers and I could take her to the customer service counter...but suddenly a young woman rounded the corner and scooped her up into



her arms. 'Thank you, Lord,' the woman uttered, burying her face in her daughter's hair.

"As I watched them walk away hand in hand, I understood that what I had really lost wasn't my fire for Jesus...it was my childlike trust in Him. *Lord, take away this doubt*, I begged. *Please find me!* And by simply saying those words, I felt a warm, brilliant flame flare in my heart.

"Today whenever doubt seeps in, I think of that precious child in the store and remember that it's okay to be lost, I just ask Jesus to come and find me!"

—Ruth Shelby, 58, Lexington, NC

LOVE NEVER DIES

"I'd been completely lost since my mother passed away from brain cancer late last year. She had been my best friend, my confidant and such a light in my world. My grief ran deep, but my questions went deeper. I wished God had an 800 number where I could call Him directly and ask all the things that tormented my heart. *Why couldn't I have had more time with her? Am I a faithful woman if I am angry and question You?*

"One afternoon I stopped in at a new thrift store that opened up in town. While hunting through racks of old sweaters, picture frames and teacups, my heart broke, thinking of how much Mom would have loved this place. Suddenly, I spotted a wooden board on a shelf nearby. Someone had hand-painted scrolling lettering across the front and as I read the words, I felt my legs almost buckle beneath me. It said, *I love you a bushel and a peck and a hug around your neck*. My mom had sung that song to me when I was a little child. Every time I'd gone off to school. Anytime I hadn't felt good. Whenever she'd



wanted to make me laugh. It had even been the last thing she'd ever said to me before she took her last breath. As I picked up the sign, I could feel my mother beside me, her presence undeniable and her soul at peace. She wasn't sick or in pain any longer. She was where she so wanted to be...with God in His beautiful kingdom, but still loving me.

"That night as I curled up on the couch, I kept glancing up to where I hung the wooden plaque underneath my mother's photos. The questions and grief I'd carried were now a lovely sense of understanding: that our love would keep us close, always."

—Hillary Stone, 61, Charleston, WV

PHOTO AND BACKGROUND: GETTY

Until I hold you again, find peace in
"Heaven's Embrace"

On its sculpted bench,
your porcelain remembrance shares
this promise-filled message:

*On Angel's wings you were taken
But in my heart you'll stay
And in God's light you will rest
Until we meet again someday*

Shown smaller than
approximate size of 7" high



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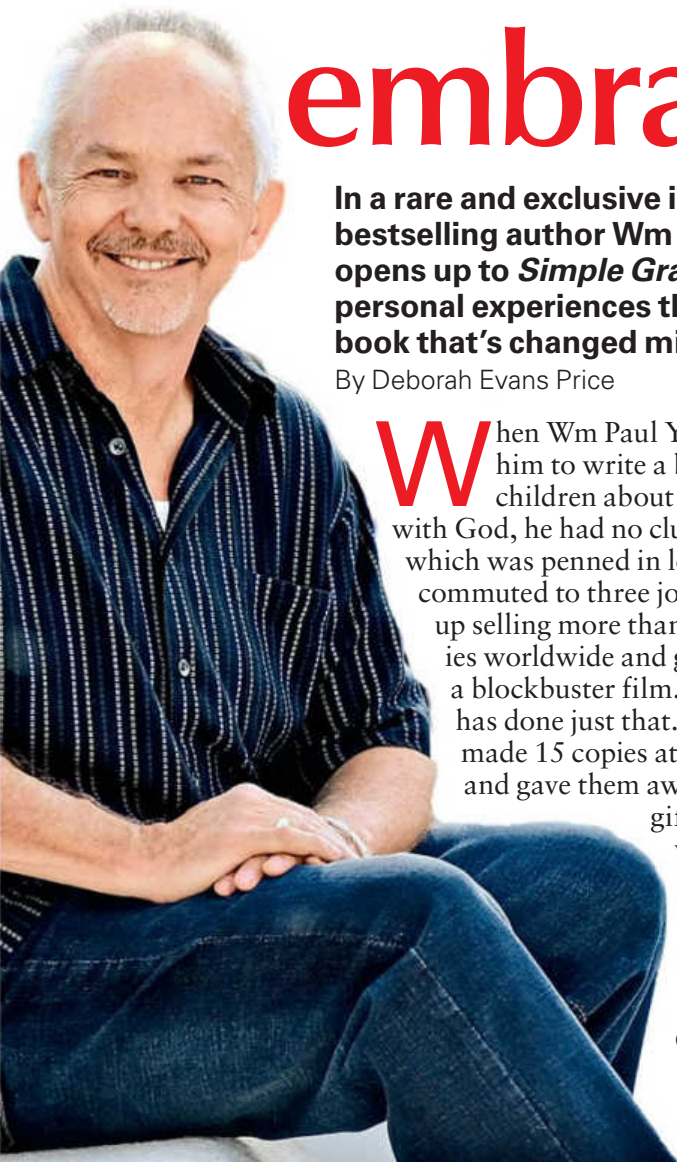
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"I constantly embrace"



In a rare and exclusive interview, bestselling author Wm Paul Young opens up to *Simple Grace* about the personal experiences that inspired the book that's changed millions of hearts

By Deborah Evans Price

When Wm Paul Young's wife asked him to write a book for their six children about his relationship with God, he had no clue that the novel—which was penned in longhand as he commuted to three jobs—would wind up selling more than 20 million copies worldwide and go on to become a blockbuster film. Yet *The Shack* has done just that. "I originally made 15 copies at Office Depot and gave them away as Christmas gifts," laughs Paul, who goes by his middle name. "I just wanted my kids to know the God that healed my heart." But God had bigger

feel His



The Shack comes to the big screen

Ten years after the book's release, *The Shack* movie is poised to reach new hearts

with the story of Mackenzie "Mack" Allen Phillips, a grieving man who receives an invitation from God to spend a weekend at the shack where his daughter was murdered. "This is one of the most faithful adaptations of any book-to-screen that I've seen in a long, long time," raves author Wm Paul Young. Download the soundtrack (\$10, Amazon and iTunes) featuring a new duet by Tim McGraw and Faith Hill.



Papa (Octavia Spencer, left) offering comfort to Mack (Sam Worthington, right)

plans for *The Shack*...and for Paul. Here, he shares how his relationship with God brought him through his painful past to insights that can help *you* grow closer to our Lord.

OUR FATHER IS LOVING

Born in Grande Prairie, Alberta, Canada, Paul spent his childhood in Netherlands New Guinea, where his parents were evangelical missionaries to the Dani, a fierce primitive tribe. As a child, Paul was taught that God the Father was angry, disapproving and distant, which mirrored the way he saw his own father. "Being around my dad was like walking around a minefield, with the explosive devices changing positions every night while I slept," Paul shares. "Because of our theology, I ended up imposing my dad's anger on the Father.

"So as a child, I turned to Jesus to save me from the Father," says Paul, "but what I really needed was for someone to save me from my own dad." ➤



➤ Through his relationship with Jesus, Paul slowly realized the Father wasn't the wrathful deity he'd grown up with. He was kind, always present and unconditionally loving. "It took me 50 years to erase the face of my dad from the Father," admits Paul, explaining that this is why in *The Shack*, he portrays Papa (what the characters call the Father) as a gentle black woman. "This imagery upset some people, but it was as far away as I could get from the anger and terror I knew as a child, and closer to the tender Father I now know."

GOD HEALS ALL HURTS


In addition to a tumultuous relationship with his dad, Paul also

experienced sexual abuse as a child—first in the tribal culture, then while attending boarding school. "One of the graces I've been given is that I never attributed the hurt that human beings inflicted on me as originating in God," Paul shares. "There is evil in this world and people make their own choices. But God was there to pick up my pieces. He climbed inside me and spoke to my heart and that took me in the direction of being in an amazing relationship with Him."

The only way to move forward in the midst of great sadness, Paul learned, is to encounter great love. "God's love is always present, and oh, it is great!" he exclaims. "Some things are still not healed in me, but I constantly feel His embrace."

GOD IS THREE TIMES THE JOY

Over the years, as Paul's relationship with God became richer and deeper, he developed unique bonds with Jesus, the Father and the Holy Spirit. "I believe there is only one God," states Paul, "and I never feel

A photograph of Paul, an older man with grey hair, wearing a dark suit and tie, embracing a young girl named Izzy. Izzy has long blonde hair and is wearing a white shirt. They are both smiling and looking down. The background is slightly blurred, showing other people and a brick wall.

Paul, having a "God moment" with a girl named Izzy at the 100th anniversary of The Children's Aid Society in 2013

like I'm only praying to Jesus as opposed to the Father or the Holy Spirit, but there is a sense that I'm talking *first* to one of the three." Paul illustrates this in *The Shack*, by portraying the Father (Papa), Jesus and the Holy Spirit as individual characters, each with a unique personality.

When praying to the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Paul often asks, *What do I need to be praying? What are You trying to do here?* "I've discovered that prayer isn't usually about me at all," shares Paul. "It's about my participation in the world in one form or another. I get a nudge or an idea and I'll say, 'Tell me what is this about. Can I participate?' If you just stay present to one day at a time, you begin to interact

with what's going on right in front of you, and then God's nudge turns into action!"

SPIRIT BRINGS US TRUTH

As a self-described "question asker and seeker of knowledge," Paul likes to call on the Holy Spirit in particular for inspiration and answers. "The Holy Spirit teaches us stuff we can't find in books, and I want more people to be able to hear what the Holy Spirit is saying to them because it's always going to be something good!" Paul enthuses.

"The Spirit guides us, answers questions and gives us a better sense of who we are so we can break free from a sense of unworthiness and encounter the character of God in new ways." ➤

Paul addresses *The Shack's* big controversy

Since the book's release, there has been one scene that has incited heated debates and criticism, in which the main character, Mackenzie, asks Jesus, "Do all roads lead to You?" Jesus replies, "Not at all. Most roads don't lead anywhere. What it does mean is that I will travel any road to find you." Some argue that this implies Paul is suggesting that there are other ways to the Father apart from Jesus. Paul clarifies: "In the Early Church, they didn't think the gospel was that you can receive Jesus into your life; they thought the gospel was that Jesus had received you into His life, into His anointing with the Holy Spirit, into His relationship with the Father," Paul explains. "So, yes, salvation is in Jesus. We've been included in Him. We've been created in Him. It's about knowing the truth, and the truth is a person."



➤ GOD IS ESPECIALLY FOND OF US

Today Paul wears a lot of hats as a pastor, author, husband, father and grandfather, but he says his true identity comes from God loving him for who he is. “True love recognizes us for who we are, not the good things we’ve done, not the bad things we’ve done,” he says. “That’s how I love my nine grandchildren—each one is a special individual—that’s how God loves us.”


To illustrate this in *The Shack*, Papa often says, *I am especially fond of...a given person*. “There’s a world of difference in saying ‘I love you,’ which is about me, and saying ‘I am especially fond of you,’ which is about you,” Paul says. “The latter addresses a disquiet in our souls that cries, *God, I know You love me, but do You know me and do You like me? Is there anything about me that’s worth loving?*”

During a visit to a women’s prison, Paul saw firsthand the power of knowing God sees us each as special. “Most of the women were there because they’d suffered betrayals—I can relate, we all have some sort of prison

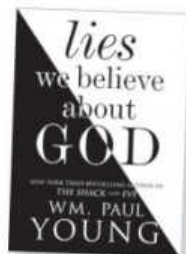


Paul with his wife Kim (left) spending time with all nine of their beloved grandchildren last year

in our lives,” he says. “One woman came up to me in tears and asked, ‘Do you think Papa is fond of me?’ I replied honestly, ‘Papa is *especially* fond of you!’”

She looked into my eyes and said, ‘That’s all I need to know.’ I thought, *Oh dear, that’s all any of us needs to know!* It’s taken me most of my life, but I now know that God loves me, is especially fond of me, is for me...and He always will be.” 

Pick up Wm Paul Young’s new book, *Lies We Believe About God*, (Atria, 2017; Hardcover \$20, Kindle \$11, Nook \$11)



Crystalline angels
float among the
branches



(shown smaller than
actual size of 4")

Shipment One

"The Holy
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Shipment Two

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"Heavenly Blessings" Christmas Tree

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"God showed true love



One year after the death of his beloved wife, Joey, singer-songwriter Rory Feek opens his heart to *Simple Grace* about how God carried him through grief and taught him that love never leaves us

By Deborah Evans Price

"Do you think God is going to heal me?" Joey Feek asked quietly as she looked into her husband Rory's sad eyes. He didn't want to answer such a question...but he knew he had to. Rory couldn't lie to his wife after all she'd been through—the painful treatments, the tears, the prayers. "No, honey," he replied. "I don't think He is."

"I didn't think so," Joey sighed, and smiled the sweetest smile. "That's okay," she added, "I got to experience everything I wanted to. I'm ready now."

Today, a little more than a year later, Rory looks back on

me that never dies”

that conversation in awe. Of Joey’s strength. Of her unshakable faith. “Joey never stopped believing that [healing] was possible, and she believed it right up until then,” Rory shares in his new book, *This Life I Live: One Man’s Extraordinary, Ordinary Life and the Woman Who Changed it Forever*.

Rory also watched Joey’s love for God grow stronger until the day they said their worldly goodbye on March 4, 2016.

“You can’t watch the woman you love go through what Joey went through and not be changed,” he tells *Simple Grace*.

“Changed by her. Changed by God. Changed by her faith and how she lived it out to the end of the line. Joey helped me fully realize the potential of my character...and my walk with God.”

Here, Rory shares how Joey renewed his heart, how God got him through losing the love of his life and how he is finding his way back to joy.

GOD HEARS OUR PRAYERS

When Rory met Indiana native Joey Martin at a songwriters’ night in Nashville in 2002, he

was instantly smitten with the beautiful aspiring singer in the dusty cowboy boots. At the time, Rory was a divorced father raising two daughters,

Heidi and Hopie, and he had seen his share of heartache. For years he’d longed for a deep, lasting love, but every relationship had ended in disappointment. Finally, he’d put all his hopes for love in God’s hands. “Whatever it is that we refuse to give to God,” Rory muses, “is probably *the one thing* He wants from us.” ➤

“You can’t watch the woman you love go through what Joey went through and not be changed.”



Joey Feek: “Jesus never leaves us”



In a 2014 interview, five months before her cancer had returned, Joey gave us a glimpse of her sweet relationship with the Lord...

and it was this love for Him that had sustained her through the days to come: “The biggest thing for me is that [God’s] *always* here,” Joey said. “He’s always waiting on us to come back to Him. When we got home the night after we had my [cervical cancer] diagnosis, He kept coming to me and every hour I’d pray, *I need You, Oh bless me now, my Savior!* Jesus comes when we’re at our lowest, at the bottom of the barrel, and reminds us that He’s never going to leave us or forsake us, whether it be here on Earth...or up in Heaven.”

➤ Rory got on his knees. “I humbled myself and emptied myself into God. And then I stood up and tried not to be the same man I’d been for the past 35 years,” he shares. “When you die to yourself, it’s then that you truly live.” And soon after meeting Joey, Rory began to see that every heartbreak, every lonely night, every dashed dream, had just been bricks in the road that had lead him straight to her.

GOD IS OUR FOUNDATION

After a whirlwind courtship, Rory and Joey were married on June 15, 2002, just two months after they met. For their wedding, they chose a single verse to live and love by: *As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord* (Joshua 24:15). “It was printed on the napkins for our wedding reception and even deeper in our hearts as we started our marriage,” Rory shares. “We took it to mean: ‘It’s not about what I want; it’s about what *He* wants.’ When people looked at our relationship and saw Joey serving me and me serving her, what they’d really be seeing was us serving Him.”

With a solid foundation of faith, Rory and Joey embarked on an incredible journey. The

couple began singing and writing songs together, and in 2008 they won third place on CMT's talent competition, *Can You Duet*, which led to record deals, national tours and their own television show that highlighted life on their Tennessee farm.

But it was their love for Jesus and their harmony on and off the stage that made them one of country music's most beloved duos. "Joey and I rarely ever raised our voices at each other," Rory recalls. "We talked. We reasoned. And we cried. But what we did most was pray. Sometimes we prayed together. We held hands and lifted our problems up to someone bigger and smarter than us. Sometimes we prayed on our own. I still do."

Rory notes most of his private prayer time doesn't really look like praying at all. "It looks more like driving or working or making dinner," he says with a laugh. "But inside I'm trying to be prayerful, to communicate with God and ask Him for guidance. I often pray for wisdom



Rory shares beautiful memories—like this one of Joey and their daughters (clockwise from left: Heidi, Hopie and Indiana) in the fall of 2015—on his blog, ThisLifeLive.com

and patience. I try to think about God and what He wants. I just try to get the focus off of myself and onto where it's supposed to be—on Him."

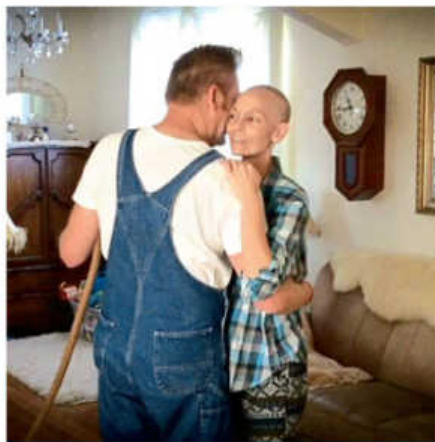
GOD TEACHES US LESSONS IN LOVE

On February 17, 2014, Rory and Joey welcomed a precious baby girl and named her Indiana. "Indy was diagnosed with Down syndrome, but all we could see was how incredibly beautiful she was and how lucky we were," describes Rory. "God had already written a great story of our life, but with Indiana, He gave us an *incredible* story of love that we never could've imagined for ourselves." ➤



➤ Three months after Indy's birth, their story took another unexpected turn when Joey was diagnosed with cervical cancer. She had a hysterectomy and was declared cancer-free. But a year later in June of 2015, the cancer returned and metastasized in her colon. After many painful surgeries, radiation and chemotherapy treatments, it continued to aggressively spread.

In October of 2015, they stopped treatment and returned to their farmhouse to focus on the time they had left together. "We came home. Not to die.



By November of 2015, Joey was often too weak to walk, so instead, Rory took her into his arms and they danced

But to live," Rory explained on his blog, ThisLifeILive.com. "To put our hands in each other's and sit out on the back porch and watch the sun set as our sweet little baby girl plays on a blanket in front of us. To bask in the glory of the beautiful life He's blessed us with, and try not to question why we can't have more of it together."

During the next few months, Rory and Joey also looked for God's lessons in the heartache. "He gave me Joey and Indiana for a reason," Rory says. "Joey was the light in my darkness. I have a feeling that Indiana is here to teach me everything. She's going to teach me what unconditional love is. Not the version that I want it to be. I'm still trying to remember that this life isn't about me, no matter how many times the man in the mirror tells me it is."

GOD HAS A BIGGER PLAN

During her final weeks, Rory says that Joey's faith never wavered. "Faith went from being important to Joey to being the only thing. I saw it happen," Rory recalls. "When all you have is your family and time, you don't want to do a bucket list or anything else—you

decide what's most important and everything else goes away." Rory says he'll never forget how Joey always kept her Bible in her lap those last days. "She was so focused on God," he adds. "Not on herself or on her illness. That was just amazing to see." On March 4, 2016, as the family held hands and prayed around her bedside, Joey, only 40 years old, went home to Jesus.


Today, a little more than a year after Joey's passing, Rory doesn't have any regrets, but he admits he would have done a few things differently. "[I'd] cherish every moment of every day more," he admits. "I'd love Joey more and serve her more and do a million gazillion things to show her more how much she means to me. No matter how much of that I did, it still wasn't enough. She always deserved more."

Putting his heart in God's hands again has been his shelter from the grief. "It's not always easy, but trust in Him changes everything," Rory states. "It overcomes emotions like fear and hopelessness. There's something powerful about believing He has a bigger plan for us all."

Rory also finds joy in knowing that every precious moment he and Joey had together was



Indy and Rory watching a video honoring Joey in her home town of Alexandria, Indiana, the week after she'd passed away

an awesome gift—and that love never leaves us. "I've been sustained by the love I've been given," Rory says. "Love that I know I don't deserve. And I am sustained by God's gift of having time, precious time, to be together, to love our baby, to say goodbye a hundred times. And kiss goodbye a thousand." 

Read more about Rory's love story with Joey in his new book, *This Life I Live* (Thomas Nelson, 2017; Hardcover \$25, Kindle \$13, Nook \$13)



An Easter feast



Herb-Crusted Crown Roast of Lamb

from the heart

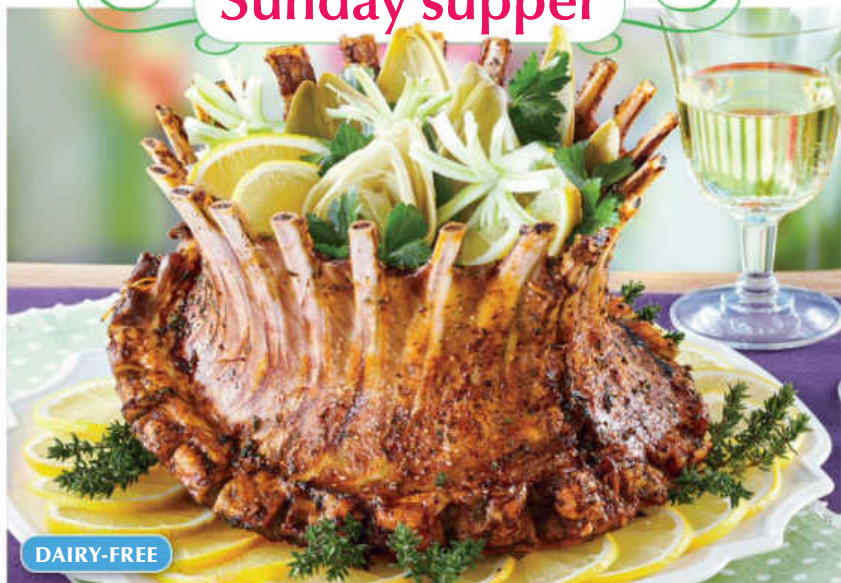
Celebrate our risen Savior as you gather the whole family around a heaven-sent holiday dinner of savory roasted lamb, creamy potatoes and fresh spring asparagus—*hallelujah!*

Parsnip-Potato Smash

Asparagus with
Citrus Hollandaise

Turn for the easy recipes

Sunday supper



DAIRY-FREE

Herb-Crusted Crown Roast of Lamb

ACTIVE TIME: 15 min. TOTAL TIME: 1 hr. SERVES: 6

- 2 cups fresh bread crumbs or panko crumbs
 - ½ cup mixed fresh herbs, like parsley, thyme, and rosemary
 - 2 cloves garlic
 - 2 tsp. lemon zest
 - 3 Tbs. olive oil, plus more for brushing lamb
 - 1 (4 lb.) crown roast of lamb, prepared by butcher
- 1 Heat oven to 425°F. In processor, pulse together crumbs, herbs, garlic, lemon zest and olive oil to combine. Season to taste with salt and pepper.
 - 2 Place lamb on sheet pan. Brush inside and outside of roast with oil; season generously with salt and pepper. Gently press crumbs onto flesh side of lamb to coat. Wrap bone ends with foil to prevent burning.
 - 3 Roast 25 to 30 min. or until thermometer reads 130°F for medium-rare. Place on platter. Let rest 15 min. before carving. Garnish with lemon slices, thyme and artichokes, if desired.
- Perserving:** Cal. 774 Pro. 90g Carb. 28g Fiber 3g Sug. 2g Chol. 272mg Sod. 495mg Total fat: 31g Sat. 9g Trans. 0g



GLUTEN-FREE

Asparagus with Citrus Hollandaise

ACTIVE TIME: **10 min.** TOTAL TIME: **20 min.**
SERVES: **8**

- 2 egg yolks**
- 1 lemon, juiced**
- 1 orange, juiced**
- 1 lime, juiced**
- 1 stick butter, melted and warm**
- 2 lbs. fresh asparagus**

1 In skillet over low heat, cook yolks, $1\frac{1}{2}$ Tbs. lemon juice, $1\frac{1}{2}$ tsp. *each* orange and lime juice and 1 Tbs. water 1 min. or until thickened, stirring. Remove from heat; stir 1 min. more.

2 Pour mixture into blender. Blend 30 sec.; let cool 2 min. With machine running, drizzle in butter; blend until thick. Season.

3 In saucepot, boil asparagus in enough water to cover 4 min.; drain. Top asparagus with sauce.

Per serving: Cal. 129 **Pro.** 2g **Carb.** 3g **Fiber** 1g **Sug.** 1g
Chol. 76mg **Sod.** 101mg **Total fat:** 13g **Sat.** 8g **Trans.** 0g



GLUTEN-FREE

Parsnip-Potato Smash

ACTIVE TIME: **20 min.** TOTAL TIME: **25 min.**
SERVES: **8**

- 1 lb. baby red potatoes, diced**
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cups sliced parsnips**
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup chicken broth**
- 4 oz. nonfat cream cheese**
- 2 Tbs. chopped chives**

1 In saucepot over high heat, bring potatoes, parsnips and enough salted water to cover to a boil. Cook 10 min. more or until vegetables are fork-tender; drain well.

2 Transfer potato mixture to large bowl. Using hand masher, mash potatoes and parsnips with chicken broth, cream cheese and chives. Season to taste with salt and pepper.

3 Garnish with additional chives and bacon bits, if desired.

Per serving: Cal. 81 **Pro.** 4g **Carb.** 16g **Fiber** 2g **Sug.** 2g
Chol. 2mg **Sod.** 208mg **Total fat:** 0g **Sat.** 0g **Trans.** 0g

BLESSED HOME

Beautiful mini



"He is
risen!"

-Matthew
28:6

egg bouquets

Whether you're using them to brighten up your home or giving them as loving Easter gifts, these easy-to-make eggshell nosegays serve as a wonderful reminder of how we are all renewed by the sacrifice Jesus made for us

Supplies

Eggs
Teaspoon
Craft-store floral foam
A handful of seasonal flowers
A handful of floral filler
Pink paint pen
Poster putty

TOTAL TIME:
15 MINUTES



Step 1: To create each egg bouquet, start by using the edge of a teaspoon to crack and remove the top quarter of the egg's shell. Then empty out the yolk and rinse the shell well.

Step 2: Cut a small piece of floral foam to fit inside the shell. Soak the foam in water and place it in the bottom of the shell. Snip a trio of seasonal blooms and a small handful of floral filler (like baby's breath) to about 3 or 4 inches. Carefully insert stems into the floral foam.

Step 3: Pick up a bright-pink paint pen (from the craft store) and use it to write a verse about Easter, like Matthew 28:6, on the front of the shell. Let dry. To finish, gently press a piece of poster putty onto the base of the egg bouquet, then press it onto a tabletop to display.

MOMENTS TO TREASURE

Resurrection garden

Feel joy fill your heart as you help your little ones craft a rock garden that reminds them that Jesus died so we could live forever with Him



EASY HOW-TO

Supplies

1 (10") terra-cotta saucer
1 (4") terra-cotta pot
2 sheets of faux moss
1 round sheet of faux moss
About 7 river rocks
6 wood sticks
Twine
Poster putty

TOTAL TIME:
15 MINUTES



Step 1: Start by placing the round sheet of moss on the terra-cotta saucer. Then lay the terra-cotta pot on its side in the center of the moss, creating the “tomb.” Drape the other sheets of moss over the pot and anchor on either side with two or three rocks.

Step 2: Lean the biggest river rock against the pot’s opening (as shown). Continue to sprinkle a few rocks around the garden.

Step 3: To make each cross, crisscross two wooden sticks and affix them in the center by knotting a length of twine. Press crosses into the moss, behind the tomb, using poster putty.

THE MIRACLE OF EASTER MORNING

Accounts of Easter morning differ slightly across the Gospels, but they center on an amazing discovery: Mary Magdalene and her companions visited Jesus’ tomb to anoint His body. But when they arrived, the women were shocked to see the stone was rolled aside—Jesus’ body was nowhere to be seen! Instead, they met an angelic messenger who told them that Jesus had risen. Amazed and excited, the women ran to tell the disciples the miraculous news!

Pure joy in

Celebrate new beginnings and our risen Savior with these delicious blueberry-lemon rolls coated in a sweet glaze



every bite



Turn for the easy recipe

Bake up love

Blueberry-Lemon Sweet Rolls

ACTIVE TIME: **30 min.** TOTAL TIME: **2 hrs.**
SERVES: **16**

- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup, plus 2 tsp. milk**, *divided*
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup butter**, *at room temp. and divided*
- 3 cups unbleached flour**
- 1 ($\frac{1}{4}$ oz.) pkg. rapid-rise yeast**, like Fleischmann's
- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup granulated sugar**, *divided*
- 1 lemon**, *zested and juiced*
- 2 large eggs**
- $1\frac{1}{2}$ cups fresh blueberries**
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup blueberry preserves**
- 1 cup powdered sugar**

1 In microwave-safe bowl, heat $\frac{3}{4}$ cup milk and $\frac{1}{4}$ cup butter 90 sec. or until 130°F. Using stand mixer fitted with paddle attachment on low speed, mix flour, yeast, $\frac{1}{2}$ cup granulated sugar, 1 Tbs. lemon zest and $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp. salt 15 sec. Beat in heated milk mixture 30 sec. or until moistened. With mixer on medium speed, beat in eggs. Beat 3 min. or until dough is smooth and glossy; shape into a ball. Place in greased bowl. Cover with plastic wrap. Let rest in 15 min. or until dough has settled.



2 In bowl, toss blueberries with preserves to coat. On floured work surface, roll out dough to 12" x 18" rectangle. Brush dough with remaining butter; sprinkle with remaining granulated sugar and dollop with blueberry mixture. Starting at long end, roll dough into a log; pinch seam to seal. Cut into 16 equal slices. Arrange slices in 2 greased 8" baking pans. Cover lightly with towel. Let rise 1 hr. or until dough has doubled in size.

3 Heat oven to 350°F. Bake rolls 30 min. or until golden and center of dough is 190°F. Meanwhile, in bowl, whisk together powdered sugar, 2 tsp. milk and $1\frac{1}{2}$ tsp. lemon juice to form glaze, adding additional milk or lemon juice to thin as needed. Drizzle glaze over warm rolls. Serve warm or at room temp.

Trusting the Love that never dies

When we surrender what drags down our spirit to our Lord, everything changes

To honor the sacrifice Jesus made for our sake, we've added a new dimension to our devotional starting this Easter Sunday. Beginning on the day of His new beginning, we vow to spend five minutes in simple, loving prayer (for details on how, please see page 94) and then notice what we've lost and what we've gained. By jotting these things down, we can see how much we accomplish spiritually even during these times in which it seems as though we're not doing anything at all. Once the month is over, we'll snip out these little notes and keep them in a jar as a tangible reminder of the power of infinite, self-giving love.

Carol Brooks



Turn the page to start April's daily devotional →



APRIL 1,
2017

*Teasing out
the sacred from
the scaffold*

Saturday



A READER ASKS

“Dear Lord, I love the prayers I learned by heart for church and the feeling of community that comes with reciting them along with my congregation, but I’m worried at the way I struggle to connect with You when I’m by myself. I feel embarrassed speaking to You ‘off book’ like I’m doing right now, without memorized words to guide me. Even worse, I’m scared my hesitation means that I don’t have a strong enough relationship with You. I’ve been having a crazy few weeks and would really like to offer up some of my confusion, doubts and frustrations, yet I have trouble addressing You without the standard script, *Our Father who art in Heaven, hallowed be Thy name*. I mean, anything less formal feels disrespectful! What is the secret to feeling freer to talk from my heart and connect with You more personally?”

Wisdom of the Word

The Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.

—Paul in a letter to the Romans, 8:26 NKJV

We understand and yet...

We don’t want to be disrespectful in prayer. When we talk to You, traditional practices feel appropriately reverent. But then we don’t feel the closeness that others report having. What’s the best way to get close to You?

JESUS IS THE ANSWER

Dear child, it's understandable that when you're in your mind and you imagine the majesty of your Father and the purity of Myself, you become tongue-tied and rely on words you've memorized. The secret to overcoming your fear is to move out of your mind and into your heart.

"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment."

—Jesus to the Pharisee lawyer, Matthew 22:37–38

Can you try something for Me? First, think about all I've done for you. Do you feel overwhelmed to the point of fear? Yes, that's a natural response. Now with your thinking mind relaxed, let your heart flow with love toward Me. Feels good, yes? Much easier. You don't need to think through how you are small and I am large. You don't need to feel guilty because I sacrificed for you in a way that you cannot sacrifice for Me. No...you just simply need to let your love flow and accept My love in return. No need to overthink it.

Try imagining your heart as the church and rote prayers as the scaffolding. These words can help keep your heart in the right place and help heal it. The words are a way for your mind to help out your heart. But these words are not the *source* of our connection: your heart is. Your connection with Me is heart-to-heart through love ferried by the Holy Spirit. The more you love Me, the closer we will become. So easy...so beautiful.

Need help with a

If you wake up with a strong feeling that the devotional for that date doesn't address, feel free to use this cross-referencing system to find another day to read. You deserve to free yourself of *whatever* is weighing on your heart!

Angry?

Reclaim divine joy

- 52** From judged to joyful
- 54** Finding the divine light
- 60** Sowing seeds of kindness
- 64** Bridging big divides
- 82** Compassionate fix for anger
- 98** Freedom from irritation
- 108** You are always pure
- 126** Spreading good will

Distracted?

Gain light and clarity

- 68** Gaining strength in weakness
- 96** The secret to big joy
- 104** Cultivating true abundance

Lonely?

Feel God's presence fully

- 48** Turning loneliness into love
- 62** Taking refuge in Christ
- 128** Knowing you're never alone

Hard on yourself?

Rediscover your loveliness

- 42** Letting the heart take charge
- 48** Turning loneliness into love
- 72** Surrendering all shame
- 90** Accepting God's invitation
- 124** You're forever beautiful

Envious?

Discover a new perspective

- 56** Deeper connection to God
- 118** Realizing less is more
- 124** You're forever beautiful

Worried?

Relax into peace

- 42** Letting the heart take charge
- 72** Surrendering all shame
- 74** Key to walking by faith
- 76** Setting loving boundaries
- 112** Sharing your joy in Jesus
- 120** Healing your heart

specific problem?

Stressed?

Feel cradled by calm

- 64** Bridging big divides
- 74** Key to walking by faith
- 86** Walking into His arms
- 98** Freedom from irritation
- 106** Powerful tension reliever
- 116** Trusting Him to fill the void
- 120** Healing your heart
- 132** The beauty of growth

Ashamed?

Feel lifted in love

- 56** Deeper connection to God
- 60** Sowing seeds of kindness
- 72** Surrendering all shame
- 78** Opening to self-forgiveness
- 90** Accepting God's invitation

Overwhelmed?

Surrender your burdens

- 76** Setting loving boundaries
- 96** The secret to big joy
- 106** Powerful tension reliever

Hurting?

Receive comfort

- 48** Turning loneliness to love
- 54** Finding the divine light
- 62** Taking refuge in Christ

Despairing?

Uncover hope

- 86** Walking into His arms
- 100** Loving salve for grief
- 116** Trusting Him to fill the void

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APRIL 2,
2017





Sunday

*It's always the
right time to give*

A READER ASKS

“Dear Lord, my life has been filled with so many people that I’ve never felt lonely...until recently when I had a breast cancer scare. Everything turned out fine, but the experience made me realize I don’t have any close female friends I can turn to in a crisis. I’m grateful to have a good husband, grown children and dozens of kind acquaintances from my volunteering circles. I can even say I have more social interactions online than ever before. And yet I really wanted to call a confidant the day I got home from the hospital and just scream and sob, but I scrolled through my phone and had no one I could trust with the intensity of those feelings. My husband and I are great companions but we don’t share certain things with each other. I feel too old to try to find a best friend now—it just feels as though it’s too late. Are some people just destined to not have a truly close friend?”

Wisdom of the Word

He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds...His understanding is infinite.

—King David to the returning exiles, Psalm 147:3, 5 NKJV

We understand and yet...

We feel so much comfort knowing You are always there for us, but we need our friends too. Realizing that the busyness of life has made it difficult to nurture close relationships leaves us feeling pained and isolated. How can we fight this sense of aloneness when we are already feeling so low?

JESUS IS THE ANSWER

Dear child, it is never too late to love and be loved in return—and no one is destined to not have someone they can pour their heart out to. Now that this need has come into your awareness, you can take steps to remedy your lack.

The friend you seek is likely already known to you. To learn her identity, you only need to search your heart. Let Me help with that.

Sitting comfortably and still, close your eyes, bring your hands together and send out a beautiful ray of love from your heart. Relax as you feel the Holy Spirit lift your spirit in confirmation of My overwhelming love for you. From this place of being held in My love, begin to bring acquaintances one by one to mind and heart. As you imagine them, send them a loving prayer like, *May you feel loved and held*, or, *May you know peace and joy*. As you open your heart toward different people and send out your loving intentions, you'll feel differently with each one. Some will bring your heart a golden feeling...it's those you best resonate with. It's those you want to pursue in deeper friendship from a place of openheartedness.

Just the act of sending others your love and Mine through loving prayer will bring a greater sense of love into your life. The more you give, the more you will receive. The more you open your heart in love, the more you will feel loved. I'm always by your side to help.

“With the measure you use, it will be measured to you, and still more will be added to you.”

—Jesus to His disciples,
Mark 4:24

Sunday



Free yourself to be you

A READER ASKS

“Dear Lord, I’m frustrated and sad that everyone in my life treats me like I’m a simpleton. The way I’ve usually coped is with a sense of humor, or acting like I don’t know something when I absolutely do just so I won’t be criticized. But now I’m at a new job and I need people to take me seriously and yet, they are still condescending. How can I feel capable when everyone else thinks I’m not?”

Wisdom of the Word

If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ.

—Galatians 1:10

We understand and yet...

Sometimes we make ourselves less than we are out of fear. And then we’re angry when we’re looked down upon. What is the way out of this?

JESUS IS THE ANSWER

Dear child, why are you giving away your power so freely? There is one thing in your world that you can have 100 percent control: how you see and treat yourself. You should never, ever give that away. If and when others judge you, you must let those judgments roll off your back.

Beyond that, you must never hide your light. If you have strength and knowledge, those are gifts your Father gave you.

Out of respect to Him, you must be who you are...you must show the world your beauty, your power, your love. You owe it to your Maker to be all He made you to be. I understand that this can be scary. I understand it can be easier to present yourself as less than you are. But any time you reject or hide a part of yourself—especially a beautiful part—you are disrespecting your Father.

Come to Me now in loving prayer so that I may help fortify you to be all you are made to be. Send Me a beautiful wave of affectionate love and feel your spirit lift as the Holy Spirit brings you confirmation of Me in you. Now ask Me, *Jesus, who am I to you?* And feel the golden joyful love in My reply. Soak in this joy...let it penetrate and strengthen every cell in your body. You are Mine. As My own, you must go out into the world with your head held high and with your worth apparent. Shine your light, My precious one, as a way of honoring Me.

"No one after lighting a lamp puts it in a cellar or under a basket, but on a stand, so that those who enter may see the light."

—Jesus to the crowd,
Luke 11:33

Monday

Regifting My light



A READER ASKS

“Dear Lord, I found out my mother-in-law regifted jewelry I lovingly chose for her birthday and I’m so offended, I can’t shake this mix of rejection and anger. She’s always been tough to shop for, but I thought these dangle earrings were *perfect*—they looked just like a pair she’d owned and lost years ago. She acted thrilled after opening the present, but now my sister-in-law owns them! I don’t want to be petty, so how can I let go of my hurt?”

Wisdom of the Word

Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

—Paul in a letter to the Ephesians, 4:32

We understand and yet...

When people act thoughtlessly, we feel wounded and can struggle to forgive. Since we’re not the ones in the wrong, isn’t it on *them* to extend the olive branch?

JESUS IS THE ANSWER

Dear child, I can understand your hurt, but if you pause for a moment, you'll realize that I'm a big believer in regifting. I say that with a broad smile.

What I would most like for you to do is to love Me and your Father and the Holy Spirit with your whole self—mind, body, spirit, soul. When you do this, you turn yourself inside out, which allows the Spirit to clean out the grudge and fear that has built up, leaving a clean slate that can receive all the light—peace, joy, love and tenderness—We have to offer you.

Once filled with this pure divine light, I ask that you go out into the world “regifting” what you’ve received to those around you. Through an openhearted caring, you pass this light from your eyes to the eyes of another and create a spark in them. This spark not only fills them with peace and joy and love, it encourages them to seek out the source of the light. It helps lead them to Me.

Please forgive those who pass along what you’ve given them: There is no harm in giving what you have received. Come to Me now in prayer so you may be cleansed and lit from within, so you may be a purveyor of My light and a giver of My love. Simply send Me your love and relax into the love the Holy Spirit infuses your spirit with in return. Try to rest in My arms, quietly and tenderly, for five minutes. There...you're ready to light up the world.

“Your eye is the lamp of your body. When your eye is healthy, your whole body is full of light, but when it is bad, your body is full of darkness.”

—Jesus to the crowd, Luke 11:34

Tuesday

APRIL 5,
2017

*The true nature
of joy in the word*

Wednesday

三

A READER ASKS

“Dear Lord, the other day a few members of my church group were sharing their favorite Bible passages, and they were so passionate, it actually made me feel sad that I don’t have a connection to any particular story or verse of Scripture like they do. Of course, I respect and honor God’s word with every fiber of my being, but I was amazed at the way these people’s eyes gleamed with adoration. They were on fire! I could see how lit from within these parishioners were as they recited beautiful excerpts from memory—everything from Genesis to Revelation, these folks knew Scripture like the back of their hand. I feel bad admitting this, but I envy them the charge they get from sacred text. What is wrong with me that I actually feel bored when I try to read the Bible? I feel sinful and sad and lost from You. Please help!”

Wisdom of the Word

I write to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one.

—John in his first letter to the early Christians, 2:14

We understand and yet...

We go through seasons during which the Bible feels like any other book.

We see others moved to tears at a given verse while our hearts remain cold. Reading it feels more chore than joy. Why are there times when Scripture moves us and others times when it doesn’t?

JESUS IS THE ANSWER

Dear child, you are wise and kind to be concerned over your lack of feeling for Scripture. In truth, it is a symptom of a spiritual ailment. Fortunately, the remedy is at hand.

Imagine you have a cell phone tucked into the pocket of your jacket, but you've forgotten it is there. You search

frantically, then in desperation, go to your computer and activate the "find my phone" feature. Suddenly you feel a vibration right by your side. You're overcome with relief and joy—*Ah! It was here all along!*

The connection between the Bible and Me is not so different. I, the Word, live hidden in your heart just like the phone was hidden in your pocket. When you read the word in the Bible, you activate the Word in your heart just like your computer activates your phone. You feel the same wondrous relief (*Ah! It was here all along!*), only it's much more powerful (*God was with me all along!*)

The Biblical word is your homing device to find the Word (Me) in your heart. The thrill you see in others when they read the Bible isn't so much about the text as it is that as they read or recite it, they realize with overwhelming fullness that I am always in their hearts.

To feel this wonderful resonance, all you need to do is reach out to Me more frequently in quiet, loving prayer so My presence grows stronger in your heart, spirit and mind.

**And the Word became flesh
and dwelt among us, and we
beheld His glory, the glory as
of the only begotten of the
Father, full of grace and truth.**

—John the Evangelist, 1:14 NKJV

Wednesday

You can't hide from Me

A READER ASKS

“Dear Lord, I’m rude to people when I can remain ‘face-less,’ and I’m ashamed of it as this is otherwise out of character. For example, while on the phone with customer service to fix a computer virus, I had to wait on hold for 40 minutes. When tech support picked up again, I snapped and gave the guy a piece of my mind. He was so courteous and actually solved my problem, and now I feel rotten. How can I avoid lashing out again?”

Wisdom of the Word

**Whoever guards his mouth preserves his life;
he who opens wide his lips comes to ruin.**

—Solomon to the men of Israel, Proverbs 13:3

We understand and yet...

Whether we’re driving or we’re posting comments online, we often act out of character when we can’t be seen. Please help us better live our values!

JESUS IS THE ANSWER

Dear child, your question is a very good one and opens up an excellent topic for reflection: Why should you be kind to others?

When you are unkind only when you cannot be seen, it suggests that your answer to that question is “so others are kind to me in return.” But that is not your best answer.

The best answer is that you are kind to others so that you may live more fully in Me and draw closer to your Father. It matters not the response you get from others.

It may help to imagine your Father’s kingdom as a place where the state of your heart dictates where your spirit travels. When your heart is tender, open and loving—no matter whether you can be seen by others or not—your spirit moves into the company of other hearts that are tender, open and loving and draws closer to the throne where I sit. In other words, you tend to your own heart in order to move to your most joyful place, your Father’s kingdom (which is in your midst even though you can’t now apprehend it). The way others react is beside the point. It doesn’t matter if you’re seen by others or if they appreciate your open heart: The more you open your heart, the more joy and peace you’ll feel because you’ll be closer to Me.

The more you live this teaching, the more loving you will feel toward others even when no one else can see.

“For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?”

—Jesus to the crowd,
Matthew 5:46

Thursday

Don't take the bait

A READER ASKS

"Dear Lord, I'm so worn-out from my husband's constant lies. Whenever we argue, he twists my words and denies things I know are true—statements I've made, lines he's crossed, the reality of our life together. He tries to make me think *I'm* crazy and is such a master at it that I *do* sometimes second-guess the facts. It's not even the lies that bother me as much as the chronic anxiety I feel when he's around. How can I clear his toxicity from my mind?"

Wisdom of the Word

If anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness.

—Paul in a letter to the Galatians, 6:1

We understand and yet...

It seems those closest to us are the ones capable of hurting us the most. When they act cruelly and use intimate knowledge against us, what can relieve our pain?



JESUS IS THE ANSWER

Dear child, when someone tries to bait you into leaving your truth to enter theirs, take your refuge in Me. By retreating into My truth, you'll protect yourself from their bullying without striking back. And My truth—unlike yours—is a fortress they can't breach.

Imagine that I am a golden castle that provides you with a guaranteed home base. The more you spend time with Me in quiet, loving, aware prayer, the more comfortable you feel in this home—and the easier it is to return when you feel threatened by others or even by your own fear.

The next time your loved one tries to draw you out into an argument, send up a prayer like, *Jesus, please take me home*, and feel yourself surrounded by My peace. Your loved one may continue to talk, but you will feel miles away and safe in My arms. You will also be able to send out love in the hopes that this will encourage your loved one to stop his or her game playing.

When a loved one is provoking you and is not appeased by your sending out love, you may need to make a bigger change. To receive guidance regarding this, spend time in quiet, loving prayer with Me to give the Holy Spirit an opportunity to fully infuse your spirit with your Father's truth. Just five minutes of mind quiet can bring you startling clarity about what lines to draw when.

"And if the house is worthy, let your peace come upon it, but if it is not worthy, let your peace return to you."

—Jesus to His disciples,
Matthew 10:13

Friday

APRIL 8,
2017



*The gift that's
always wanted*

Saturday



A READER ASKS

“Dear Lord, I apparently offended a friend by giving her a religious card with Bible verses for her wedding, and now I’m trying to hold back this resentment that an action I consider beautiful could be seen as ‘crossing the line’ in this couple’s eyes. She hasn’t accepted You as her Savior, and so I fear for her soul. I love her and I’m frightened that she won’t be saved. Is it so wrong to reach out like this? Everything is so politically correct now and it just ruins the experience of living my faith. Even my usual friendly ‘I’ll pray for you’ has started to taste bitter in my mouth. I feel that as a Christian I have a right to let my love of the word and of You show, without feeling insecure and worrying what other people think. Aren’t I right to push back against this bigotry?”

Wisdom of the Word

Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all.

—Paul in a letter to the Colossians, 3:11

We understand and yet...

We don’t intend to offend others when we show our love for You, so their rejection hurts. Our acts of kindness are inspired by You and the messages of Scripture. Even if they aren’t received well, aren’t these faithful gestures a force for good in an increasingly materialistic world?

JESUS IS THE ANSWER

Dear child, I thank you for the love and honor you show Me, and doing so in private is always an uncomplicated good. But when it comes to sharing your faith with your neighbor, things can get trickier.

“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.”

—Jesus to His disciples, John 13:34

You must weigh your every action against this new commandment. I'll overdo it to show you what I mean: If your neighbor is Muslim, you must ask yourself if giving her something like the Bible on a special occasion is truly a kindness. Would you like to receive a copy of the Koran at a baby shower? Or would it feel as though your friend was being aggressive and stepping out of line? This consideration of how you would feel if the same type of thing was done to you is always your best guide.

Often you tell yourself that you're doing something for a higher purpose when you're actually gaining some satisfaction from being “right.” Since this is a natural human impulse, the only way around it is to hold your sense of what's right very loosely and lightly. You may think you know the reality of an aspect of life; but because of your limited ability to apprehend your Father's ways and means, you may have gotten it wrong. That is why you must avoid judging others. There is no shame in your limitations.

Remember: I did not command you to be right. I command you to love. And that you can always do.

Saturday

PALM SUNDAY, 2017





Sunday

*The art of
radical humility*

A READER ASKS

“Dear Lord, looking at the palm cross hanging in my living room and reflecting on the humble way You took Your triumphant journey to Jerusalem, I’m distracted by this mounting frustration with a certain group of leaders in my church community. They like to brag and show off their wealth and power in totally inappropriate ways, in such contrast to Your modesty. I know I should be preparing my heart for this important week of Your passion, death and resurrection, but instead I’m dwelling on these off-putting displays—fancy cars parked in front of the church, expensive jewelry and outright bragging. Just today I overheard one man boast that he ‘saved’ our church by having a stained-glass chapel installed to the tune of tens of thousands of dollars. I don’t want to leave my church, but the contrast between their boasting and your humility is troubling. Please guide me!”

Wisdom of the Word

Therefore you have no excuse, everyone of you who passes judgment, for in that which you judge another, you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things.

—Paul in a letter to the Romans, 2:1 NASB

We understand and yet...

Witnessing other people’s failings triggers frustration and doubt in man’s essential goodness. We want to wipe the anger from our hearts but it keeps churning when we see how far their actions fall from the mark. How do we stop ruminating on the ways others fall short?

JESUS IS THE ANSWER

Dear child, the heart of compassion and the soul of humility is seeing your own weakness in that of another. What you are describing are people who are making themselves feel as though they're superior to others by using worldly wealth as a yardstick. When you get caught up in judging them, you are doing the same thing—making yourself feel superior—but using a different yardstick (your “goodness”).

“Would that you, even you, had known on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes.”

—Jesus, weeping, to Jerusalem and His disciples, Luke 19:42

The way out of this cycle of judgment is to see your own weakness in the other: The braggart's vanity over his fat wallet is the same feeling as your vanity over your good and proper action. You also give into the temptation to feel superior. Find it in your heart to forgive the braggart and you will automatically forgive yourself. Vanity is part of being human: Your goal is to recognize and release it. You cannot avoid it. No one can.

The secret to peace is the humility that you are not superior to any other. The secret to peace is the humility that you are all in the same boat. It is hard to go this low, I know, but it is the only way to rise. Come to Me now in loving prayer so I might give you the strength to surrender your superiority. Close your eyes, send your love to Me as though on a beam of light and allow the true light I send back to you take away your sense of being better.

Sunday



Just a heartbeat away

A READER ASKS

“Dear Lord, I read about You forgiving other people’s sins, but I get no sense of relief because I feel like what I’ve done falls outside the scope of ‘forgivable.’ In fact, it’s so bad that I can’t even put it into words here. I’m so ashamed, anxious and burdened that I can’t escape my self-hatred. I knew better than to do what I did, and I went through with it anyway. There must be limits to Your grace, right?”

Wisdom of the Word

Behold, the Lord’s hand is not so short that it cannot save; nor is His ear so dull that it cannot hear. —The Prophet Isaiah to the people of Israel, 59:1 NASB

We understand and yet...

Certain actions seem so awful that they fall outside the bounds of Your mercy. Is it possible to get so lost and distant from You that redemption is out of reach?

JESUS IS THE ANSWER

Dear child, there is no place that your Father's mercy cannot reach. And no place too far for My love to find you. No matter how far you've run from Me, you can always turn and fall into My arms.

"Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance."

—Jesus in response to the Pharisees questioning why He dines with tax collectors and sinners, Luke 5:31–32

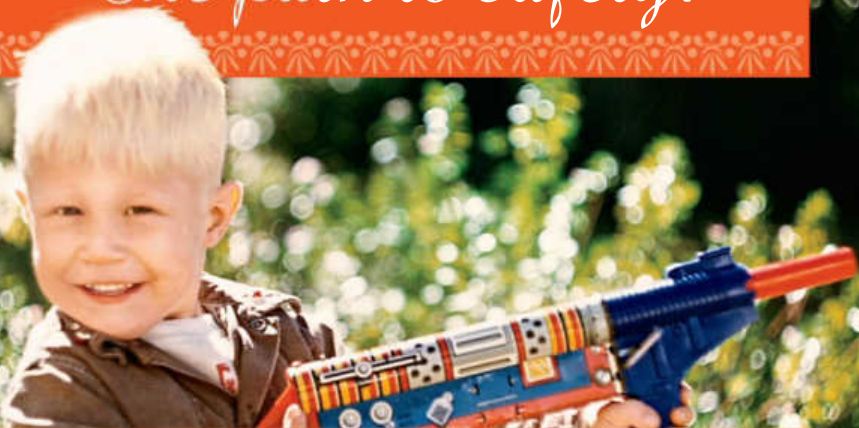
If you've committed a grievous act, it's you who I preferentially seek. I very badly want to bring you home from where you've wandered. Forgiveness is always yours. Always and already.

Imagine a concentrated drop of black ink. It seems so dense, so concentrated, so unyielding to change. Now see yourself allowing the ink drop to fall into a glass of water. The black becomes lighter. Now see it fall into a filled bathtub. It loosens up so you can't scarce a trace of it. Now see it fall into the largest ocean. It disappears.

When you surrender to Me in prayer, you are engulfed by a purity so vast that your stain disappears and you are left spotless no matter how black the spot. Let's try it now: Close your eyes, clasp your hands and bring to mind the crime that is making you self-hating. Send Me a wave of love. Feel the Holy Spirit bring you My love in return and surrender to that feeling. In that surrendering, release your crime. Let it go. Let it go. Feel My love sweep it away into My vastness. And just like that...it's gone.

Monday

The path to safety?



A READER ASKS

“Dear Lord, I have a confession to make: I have always heard Your call to do more to support Your work in the world, but I have pretended not to hear. I know You want me to pursue a certain career, but I feel afraid. I feel as though it will lead to failure and poverty, so I choose not to hear. Is that terrible?”

Wisdom of the Word

But you, take courage! Do not let your hands be weak, for your work shall be rewarded.

—Ezra to the Israelites, 2 Chronicles 15:7

We understand and yet...

Sometimes we ignore Your call out of fear. We know it's wrong to pretend not to hear what You tell us...but when we lack the courage to act, we do just that. Is that okay?

JESUS IS THE ANSWER

Dear child, imagine a little 3-year-old boy alone in a dangerous jungle with little else than a toy gun to use to protect himself. See him swagger and wave his gun at any lions or monkeys who approach him, confident that he is well able to protect himself. Imagine him scorning the safety of his cozy bedroom for the thrill of the “hunt.” Very misguided? Yes.

“The kingdom of God is not coming in ways that can be observed, nor will they say, ‘Look, here it is!’ or ‘There!’ for behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you.”

—Jesus to the Pharisees, Luke 17:20–21

This is how I see you when you wander away from your Father’s will for your life and “take on the world.” Full of your own bluster, you think you know best how to keep yourself safe. The trouble is, just as the boy in My story doesn’t have the sense to apprehend the danger around him, you don’t have the *senses* to apprehend the truth. What your eyes see and what your ears hear is not all there is. You must walk by faith not by sight.

You are moving through your Father’s kingdom right now—your heart guides your journey, love is your means of locomotion. You must listen with your heart to the guidance of your Father: That is the only way to stay safe.

Do you have five minutes to listen right now? If so, come to Me in a quiet loving prayer. Rest in Me and allow the Holy Spirit to bring you the truth of your Father’s will for you and the courage to carry it out.

Tuesday

Drawing the kind line

A READER ASKS

“Dear Lord, I’m forever lending my sister money that she never repays, and the feeling of being ‘used’ is tearing me apart inside but I can’t stop. My husband gets furious every time I pull out my wallet, but I believe if I love her hard enough and long enough, she’ll get her act together. Everyone else has abandoned her, so I’d feel too guilty turning my back. But this puts strain on all my relationships, even with You. What do I do?”

Wisdom of the Word

For each will have to bear his own load.

—Paul in a letter to the Galatians, 6:5

We understand and yet...

We want to steer those we love out of harm’s way, but can’t ultimately control them. Taking on their burdens is exhausting. Is it selfish to step back?



JESUS IS THE ANSWER

Dear child, the secret to loving another in a way that elevates both of you is to be found in an open heart. You always want to make sure your love is flowing outward without the obstruction of jealousy or resentment or grasping.

That said, your actions are another matter. When someone you love takes advantage of your generosity in a way that doesn't serve either of you, it's the loving thing to draw the line. In a case where you're always lending your loved one money, you could well be perpetuating a weakness that she would be better off correcting. By refusing to lend, you spur her to take positive action in her life. In this way, denying her request serves her. You're loving her as you would want to be loved.

When you are faced with a difficult decision concerning helping another, it's good practice to come to Me first. Do you have five minutes now for a "diagnostic"? If so, settle into stillness, close your eyes, clasp your hands and send Me a glorious blast of love directly from your heart. Feel your spirit lift as the Holy Spirit brings you confirmation of our communion. Now bring to mind and heart your loved one and ask for My help like, *Jesus, please search my heart for any grudge I may be holding.* Relax and remain still to allow the Spirit time to clean your spirit and free your heart. Whatever line you draw from this place of purity will be a loving one.

"He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water."

—Jesus to the crowd,
John 7:38 NKJV

Wednesday

HOLY THURSDAY,
2017

*The secret to
forgiveness for
even the worst
betrayal*



Thursday

A READER ASKS

“Dear Lord, I’m thinking of how You hosted the traitor at the Last Supper and I’m addressing You now as a traitor myself, desperate for forgiveness. I cheated on my husband a few weeks ago and feel such gut-wrenching remorse for my weakness in the face of temptation. Seeing how my betrayal has destroyed my partner and our marriage, I spend every waking moment regretting my selfish decision to engage in a meaningless fling. You washed Judas’ feet along with the other disciples, knowing that he was not loyal and would sell You out to the authorities. Even though I’m not deserving of that kind of grace, the fact that You showed such incredible love to someone so despicable and unfaithful gives me a bit of hope. But I don’t know how to begin atoning to my husband or to You. How do I earn a second chance?”

Wisdom of the Word

But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.

—John in a letter to the Early Church, 1 John 1:7 NKJV

We understand and yet...

We all make mistakes, yet humbling ourselves and seeking forgiveness is hard. We want to apologize and make everything right again, but don’t always know the best way—some lapses feel so shameful that forgiveness seems downright impossible. How can we redeem ourselves?

JESUS IS THE ANSWER

Precious one, all I want for you is to see with clean eyes. When you make a mistake—even a grievous one that involves betraying another—it’s as though a film covers your eyes. My light doesn’t come in and My light doesn’t go out. You lose the connection with Me. You stop being a conduit of My goodness in the world.

“Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave Me no water for My feet, but she has wet My feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You gave Me no kiss; but she, since the time I came in, has not ceased to kiss My feet... For this reason I say to you, her sins, which are many, have been forgiven, for she loved much; but he who is forgiven little, loves little.”

—Jesus to Simon, Luke 7:44–47 NASB

The more you feel guilty and berate yourself, the thicker the film over your eyes becomes. All the self-reproach does nothing but increase the distance between us. You are not your own judge and jury. You must not put yourself on trial and hand down the verdict.

Instead of sitting high on a court bench, fall to your knees and simply love Me. I will remove the film from your eyes. I will fill you with My light and love. I will wipe your slate clean. And your love for Me will increase. And in return, you will receive even more love from Me. Your great mistake can be My great opportunity to love.

From this place of purity in Me, you will know how to make amends to the one you have wronged.

Thursday

GOOD FRIDAY, 2017





Friday

Please love Me

A READER ASKS

“Dear Lord, as I try to keep the significance of today at the top of my mind, I’m distracted and frustrated by all the people wishing me a ‘Happy Good Friday!’ Do they not grasp the horror of what happened to You and the meaning of Your sacrifice?! I’m not trying to tell people how to feel or behave, and I do see that they mean well, but I get this knot in my gut when I hear people doling out perky well-wishes on such a solemn day. Earlier at church, I couldn’t concentrate while praying and reflecting on Your suffering because people were buzzing about the coffee and doughnut social hour after the service, so I snapped at them. I know I didn’t handle the incident properly, but I’m so offended by their disrespectful party planning on this day of mourning. Aren’t I well within my rights to pipe up and call them out?”

Wisdom of the Word

Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.

—Paul in a letter to the Romans, 12:17–18

We understand and yet...

Some claim to have accepted You into their heart but their behavior doesn’t line up. It’s disappointing and frustrating to see people in our faith communities act disrespectfully to You because they don’t know any better or don’t care. How can we be more patient role models?

JESUS IS THE ANSWER

Dear child, if your heart is heavy with hurt for Me on this day then you are truly blessed. If you feel mournful and grumpy and confused, I thank you. To feel pain on this day is testament to your abiding in Me and My abiding in you. You are chosen. You are lucky. You are blessed.

That's why you must shift from passing judgment on your cheery neighbor to feeling compassion for them. They truly know not what they do. They know not what they are missing. Your heart should weep for them rather than your mind race with condemning thoughts.

As you mourn with Me today, do so publicly if that's possible. Show the world what it looks like to be My follower on the day you commemorate the crucifixion. Be gentle with your neighbor. Rather than scolding them, allow your broken heart to be "contagious" and prompt them to come to Me truly in loving prayer.

Most of all, send Me your love. Your love helps My heart and today My heart is hurting. Find 10 minutes today to simply close your eyes, clasp your hands, and send Me your beautiful love. Share with Me all of what's in your heart. Your love helps. And when you send your heart out to Me, I send My heart out to you and we rest in each other's arms. I need that today. And so do you. Because for that brief time, you are in your Father's kingdom. Please join Me, for a moment, in Paradise.

**"Truly I say to you,
today you shall be
with Me in Paradise."**

—Jesus on the Cross to
the thief who showed
compassion to Him,
Luke 23:43 NASB

Friday

HOLY SATURDAY, 2017



*Waiting for your
new dawn*

Saturday

A READER ASKS

“Dear Lord, it’s so hard for me to think about Your disciples’ despair as you lay lifeless in the tomb...it’s like the pain I endure every day over losing my faith, only magnified by a thousand. I should feel lucky—lots of people get that gut-punch of doubt after a tragedy or dark night of the soul, but not me. I’m just an average person with a regular life who woke up on too many mornings without a prayer in my heart. I’d get on my knees and clasp my hands but couldn’t sense You were there to hear me, so I did it less and less until it stopped even occurring to me to try. It’s a cold kind of hell living like this. I have little hope of my faith returning. Is there any hope for me?”

Wisdom of the Word

For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

—Paul in a letter to the Romans, 8:38–39 NASB

We understand and yet...

Nothing hurts worse than the torment of Your absence from our lives. Even though we know You are forever opening Your arms to us, sometimes our faith wavers or slips away completely and we find ourselves alone. When that light goes out, how can we find our way back to You?

JESUS IS THE ANSWER

Dear child, one way back to Me when you've fallen away is to take a walk. It doesn't matter where. Just put on your shoes and open the door and go out. Find a rhythm to your steps and start looking around.

"Therefore, give orders for the grave to be made secure until the third day, otherwise His disciples may come and steal Him away and say to the people, 'He has risen from the dead,' and the last deception will be worse than the first."

—The Pharisees to Pilate, Matthew 27:64 NASB

There's the cheerful face of a pansy to your left, a pretty patch of moss peeking out between the cracks in the sidewalk to your right. Sense your breath, your aliveness, the aliveness of everything your eye touches. Can you feel the spark that's in you? That's Me.

When you've tired yourself out from walking, find a patch of ground on which to sit. Close your eyes. Clasp your hands. Bring an image of Me to mind that pleases you. Allow your heart—not your mind, only your heart—to respond. Do you feel it warm and grow? Now release that feeling up to Me. What do you feel? A lift in your spirit? That's the Holy Spirit fortifying the connection between us. Send Me another wave of love. You'll feel even more lifted as more of My love infuses your spirit. Rest in this feeling for as long as you are able.

I am always with you. No grave can hold Me. When you find that you can't sense My presence, tire your body and mind so your heart may see. I will be there. I promise.

Saturday

EASTER SUNDAY,
2017

*Come alive
with Me*



Sunday

A READER ASKS

“Dear Lord, today is a joyous day, and yet I am having trouble feeling the happiness I should be feeling at Your bodily resurrection. The truth is, I don’t feel like I deserve it: I have failed to live up to my Christian values in small and large ways, and it all comes to a head today as I reflect on Your sacrifice and how far short I fall of meriting any kind of ‘forgiveness of sins’ or ‘newness of life.’ I am petty, kind to others only when it’s convenient to me and generally irritable despite all the blessings You’ve given me. The pain You endured on my behalf and for all my fellow sinners just feels so far beyond the realm of what my behavior should warrant that I truly cannot feel anything but shame when I think about the miracle of Easter. I know myself to be profoundly unworthy of Your sacrifice, and so I feel completely overwhelmed by it.”

Wisdom of the Word

But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, and by His scourging we are healed.

—The prophet Isaiah, 53:5 NASB

We understand and yet...

Reflecting on the magnitude of Your sacrifice and love brings our sense of our own unworthiness to the surface. When we reflect on what You did to give us eternal life, our many mistakes and flaws feel all the more glaring. How can we ever hope to be worthy of You?

SUNDAY, APRIL 16, 2017

JESUS IS THE ANSWER

Precious one, now, now child, let's not start out so *big*. I didn't go through what I went through for you to have you draw back at the enormity of My sacrifice. No, My life and death is an invitation to you to begin again. Let's begin together as a seed and watch the glorious plant that our love creates grow.

"The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field, which indeed is the least of all the seeds; but when it is grown it is greater than the herbs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and nest in its branches." —Jesus to the crowd, Matthew 13:31–32 NKJV

So let's start small.

Imagine that all the love you and I could share is encapsulated in one small seed. The water and the light that it needs to grow can be found in the to-and-fro of our hearts. You send love to Me. I send love to you. This back and forth feeds our own creation. In this way, we help grow your Father's eternal kingdom. Open your heart, summon your courage and come to Me in loving prayer now. Let's see what we can build together.

Sunday

TODAY I SPENT ____ MINUTES IN LOVING PRAYER

I released

I received

THANK YOU, LORD! 4.16.17

Loving Prayer

To honor of our risen Lord this Easter, we are introducing a new way of using our daily devotional. In place of the daily advice to offer love to Jesus in prayer, we are including a place to record what you surrendered in love and gained through grace. Here, we feature a guide to this form of prayer

When asked by a Pharisee what was the greatest commandment of religious law, Jesus was very clear: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment” (Matthew 22:37). Jesus was building on what Moses said to the Israelites as recorded in the Book of Deuteronomy (13:3): Moses referenced loving with your whole heart and soul; Jesus adds mind to the mix. We at *Simple Grace* take Jesus at His word and have dedicated ourselves to loving our Lord in a quiet, mindful way daily.

MORE THAN SENTIMENT

When was the last time you felt overwhelmed by love? Maybe it was when you were watching your granddaughter sleep, or

in response to a gift of flowers your husband surprised you with. When you think back to that moment, can you remember how strong the power of that love was? Rather than a fleeting thought or even a feeling, that love felt almost as though it had a substance and strength like light or sound or wind.

That kind of powerful love is what Jesus meant in his commandment to us: You send Him your worldly love and He'll respond with His divine love. You send Him your limited feeling and He'll transform it into something infinite and eternal.

As you rest in the golden state that this loving to and fro creates, you give the Holy Spirit an opportunity to cleanse your spirit of all the grudge that builds up in daily life. As Jesus transforms your heart, the Spirit reorders and purifies your spirit.

primer

GETTING STARTED


Find a quiet space where you won't be disturbed for five minutes. Settle into a comfortable sitting position and bring your hands together in prayer or simply clasped. Close your eyes and give your thoughts a minute or two to drift from your mind. See them as so many passing clouds—they're there, but you don't have to think them through. Shake out the tension from your shoulders and anywhere stress has gotten stuck.

From this place of mental and physical stillness, bring to mind an image of Jesus. Feel your heart open and your body relax even further. Imagine that your love is a powerful, permeating substance like light or wind and direct it either inward or outward toward Jesus. You'll feel your spirit lift as the Holy Spirit brings you confirmation of your loving communion.

Now here's the hard part: Rest in His arms, staying still in mind and body for five minutes. (It may help to set a timer so you don't have to worry about when



to finish.) As thoughts arise, allow them to pass by so you can fully receive. Jesus asks us to love not only with our heart and our soul but also with our mind: Surrendering our thoughts, leaving our small self behind, is critical to experience a fuller communion with Him. As you emerge from this prayer, you will feel filled with love, light and sweet peace.

Just five minutes a day can fill your heart with love, leave your spirit newly refreshed and bring you closer in every way to your Lord and Savior. 

The secret to big joy

A READER ASKS

“Dear Lord, I planned a lot of quality time with friends and family this past weekend in honor of Easter, but I found my mind constantly wandering. I would be talking to one friend and then wonder if there was someone better to talk with. I would be at one event and think about wanting to be at another. I ended up sapping all the joy out of my ‘happy time’ with this restless longing. Can You help?”

Wisdom of the Word

The young lions suffer want and hunger; but those who seek the Lord lack no good thing. —Psalm 34:10

We understand and yet...

We’re eager to spend as much time as possible with those we love. But sometimes our mind gets so restless that we can’t experience the joy right in front of us. Why?



JESUS IS THE ANSWER

Dear child, it sounds as though your problem comes from always thinking big: You find yourself comparing big differences (between people, between events) rather than simply savoring the small.

One way to bring yourself into the joy of the moment is to notice something usually beneath notice: the ring on your friend's finger, a certain inflection to her voice, the way the light dances on the tabletop. Take in the details and send up a quick prayer of gratitude to your Father for building such loveliness into His creation. By doing so, you will ground yourself in the right now and feel the joy that is always with you.

Even better, when you savor the small—the rich taste of a warm chocolate chip cookie, the cheerful face of a just-born daisy, the feel of your child's cheek—they become like so many coins in your treasure chest in your Father's kingdom. As you build this treasure, your heart will make more of these moments and your treasure will grow. So simple. So lovely. Can you take a few minutes to come to Me in love and reflect on this now?

"For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."

—Jesus to His disciples,
Luke 12:34

Monday

TODAY I SPENT ____ MINUTES IN LOVING PRAYER

I released

I received

THANK YOU, LORD! 4.17.17



Freedom from irritation

A READER ASKS

“Dear Lord, I love my grandchildren, but their rude behavior (cussing, talking back, using cell phones at dinner, etc.) is completely inappropriate, and my temper with them has gotten so bad that they no longer want to visit. I thought one benefit of being a granny was that I could speak my mind and command respect, but I’m realizing the consequences now and regretting my sharp tongue... even though I know I’m right. Help me find patience!”

Wisdom of the Word

A fool vents all his feelings, but a wise man holds them back.

—Solomon to the men of Israel, Proverbs 29:11 NKJV

We understand and yet...

It’s tough to hold back our anger when people are rude.

We want to let them know when they’ve gone too far without hurting our relationship with them...but how?

TUESDAY, APRIL 18, 2017

JESUS IS THE ANSWER

Dear child, I'm so sorry for your frustration with the rudeness and insensitivity of the younger generation. I know how you feel and had similar irritations when I walked your world.

One way to send a signal to others without alienating them is to simply withdraw your light. As a radiant child of a merciful Father, you radiate light and love and

"If then your whole body is full of light, having no part dark, it will be wholly bright, as when a lamp with its rays gives you light."

—Jesus to the crowd, Luke 11:36

peace wherever you go. When someone crosses a line, you can simply "go dark" for a moment. Fall silent and turn your light inward. Send your heart out to Me in love and offer up a mental prayer like, *Jesus, please help lead this one back from the brink of rudeness*. You might also turn away from the one who has offended you to tend to a simple chore or other physical activity. As you do this chore, continue feeling the love I have for you—soak it in—and continue sending Me your love. You'll feel your spirit lifted as the Holy Spirit cleanses and purifies. In minutes, you'll feel your jangled nerves give way to joy.

Tuesday

TODAY I SPENT ____ MINUTES IN LOVING PRAYER

I released

I received

THANK YOU, LORD! 4.18.17



APRIL 19,
2017

*The secret to
moving past pain*



Wednesday

A READER ASKS

“Dear Lord, after losing my husband to a sudden heart attack, I’m in the worst emotional pain of my life and feel as if there’s no end to it. I’ve always turned to You in hard times, but I’m so overcome with despair that I can barely even pray. When I do find the strength to call out to You, desperate for just a moment of relief, I only feel the same panic I felt as my husband died in my arms before yet another wave of grief hits me. I feel like I’m drowning. I never even had the chance to say goodbye. This hopelessness is so unbearable that it feels like there’s nothing to grab on to anymore and the knowledge that my life with him is over keeps dragging me under. I don’t know if I am strong enough to survive this alone. I need You, but how do I find You in this prison of pain?”

Wisdom of the Word

For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.

—Paul in his first letter to the Corinthians, 15:21–22

We understand and yet...

Letting go of loved ones rips into our hearts so much that even though we trust it is part of Your bigger plan, we fall into despair. When the enormity of our pain prevents us from feeling You by our side, it’s truly more than we can bear. What’s the way out of this captivity to pain?

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 19, 2017

JESUS IS THE ANSWER

Dear child, I am so sorry to hear of the intensity of your pain and even sorrier that it has imprisoned you. But your prison bars are an illusion: In truth, you are free and abiding in Me. Your loved one is likewise abiding in Me. In Me, you and he are still as one. The treasure of your love lives eternally in your Father's kingdom.

“Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me.”

—Jesus to His disciples, John 15:4 NKJV

To discover for yourself the truth of your situation, you need to find a way to quiet your mind so your heart can hear, so your spirit can see. One way to do this is to physically tire yourself out. Once your body has let go of the tension it's been holding, it's easier to allow your thoughts to simply fall out of your mind. In this state of worn-out blankness, check your heart. Do you feel a little kindle of joy? That's Me abiding in you. Send out your love to Me and feel a lift. That's you abiding in Me. Rest here quietly with Me and you may receive a sense of your loved one. This will ease your pain and lead to true healing.

Wednesday

TODAY I SPENT ____ MINUTES IN LOVING PRAYER

I released

I received

THANK YOU, LORD! 4.19.17

Moving past pettiness

A READER ASKS

“Dear Lord, I’m proud of how often I bite my tongue, yet the more I hold back the barbs that are always on the verge of slipping out, the more resentful and bitter I become. Between lazy neighbors with messy yards, clueless moms in the PTA and a sister who can’t keep a job, it takes every ounce of restraint to quiet my judgments. How can I find inner peace?”

Wisdom of the Word

Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

—Ephesians, 4:32

We understand and yet...

We know only You have the authority to judge, yet we constantly carp at others.

Even if we don’t vocalize our judgments, we still think them. How do we stop?



THURSDAY, APRIL 20, 2017

JESUS IS THE ANSWER

Dear child, when you find yourself making many small judgments of others, there are two faulty assumptions at play. You're assuming: (1) there is not enough for everyone; (2) if someone gets less, you get more. You're like a bird peck-peck-pecking at others in the hopes that you'll eke out the least, last crumb.

"For to everyone who has will more be given, and he will have an abundance. But from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away."

—Jesus to His disciples, Matthew 25:29

In truth, there is not only enough love and comfort and peace for all of you—the more you receive and pass along to others, the much more you'll receive. The secret to feeling as though you have enough is to constantly give away. It's as though you're eating from a feeder that is constantly replenished: the more you consume, the more that is offered. And the better what is offered is.

So give freely from your heart in the confidence that you will be given to abundantly and well. Let judgments of your neighbor fall away in the sure knowledge that there is more than enough for all of you.

Thursday

TODAY I SPENT ____ MINUTES IN LOVING PRAYER

I released

I received

THANK YOU, LORD! 4.20.17



Freedom from stress

A READER ASKS

“Dear Lord, I’ve been under a lot of pressure at work these days and so my ‘glass of wine with dinner’ has turned into two glasses. And lately it’s even snuck up to three. I hate to admit it, but I like the sense of blotting out what’s making me tense. Still, something inside of me is cautioning that I shouldn’t be escaping my troubles in this way every night. Should I be worried and cut back?”

Wisdom of the Word

For people will be lovers of self...lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God.

—Paul in his second letter to Timothy, 3:2, 4

We understand and yet...

Sometimes we need the stress relief that our comfort of choice brings us. How do we know what’s okay and when we’re taking blotting out our troubles too far?

JESUS IS THE ANSWER

Dear child, while indulging in a worldly comfort to ease the stress that comes from daily life can be a healthy act of self-care, if you find yourself relying on it day in, day out, you'll want to look more deeply into the underlying cause of the tension you're feeling.

The trouble is: When you block out your troubles with worldly comforts, you also block Me out. This can set up a vicious

cycle: When you turn to the worldly comfort, you block out My help and comfort, which in turn causes you to feel more troubled, which in turn drives you back to the worldly comfort. You can see how this cycle could create a serious problem in your life if left unchecked.

When you're feeling so tense or sad or angry that you want to turn to a worldly comfort to blot it out, turn to Me in prayer instead. Rather than covering over the hurt, you'll be releasing it—truly freeing yourself of it and purifying your heart. I love you. Come to Me now.

“So also you have sorrow now, but I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you.”

—Jesus to His disciples,
John 16:22

TODAY I SPENT ____ MINUTES IN LOVING PRAYER

I released _____

I received _____

THANK YOU, LORD! 4.21.17

Friday

APRIL 22,
2017

*A forgiving heart
washes away
all the dirt*





Saturday

A READER ASKS

“Dear Lord, I was sexually abused for many years starting as a preteen, and I’m sick of being told that forgiving my abuser is the way to find peace. I’m happy for others in my support group who say that finding the strength to forgive has brought them healing and closure, but the mere thought of forgiving the man who committed such savage acts against me feels like yet another violation. He’s disgusting and evil, and he spread his ugliness to me and now I have to carry that for the rest of my life. How could I ever stop raging against what happened? It’s the only power I have left! The others in my group are pressuring me to let go of the hatred I have against the man who hurt me. And I know You also say to forgive, but I don’t think You have any idea what that would take from me.”

Wisdom of the Word

Finally, all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind. Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing.

—Peter in his first letter to the early Christians, 3:8–9

We understand and yet...

Some crimes against us are so terrible that we hold on to anger as if it were a lifeline. Others tell us that forgiveness is freedom, but it can feel as though letting go of hatred is just a loss on top of loss. When things go this far, how do we make our peace?

SATURDAY, APRIL 22, 2017

JESUS IS THE ANSWER

Dear child, I am so sorry for the pain and hurt you've had to go through. I send out My heart to you. But I disagree with your analysis of your situation: Although horrible things were done to you, you do not need to carry one ounce of ugliness throughout your life. When someone violates you, they dirty themselves, they carry the ugliness. You are left pure.

Then Peter came and said to Him, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times?" Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven." —Matthew 18:21–22 NASB

However, you do sully yourself with your own anger. You are harboring two kinds of "dirt" in your heart: the mistaken notion that you are made ugly by another's ugly actions and your hatred for your attacker. Search inside yourself and find the way that you condemn yourself for your attack. Once you find it, release it to Me in prayer. Let the Holy Spirit sweep it away. With your self-condemnation gone, you'll find that forgiving the one who hurt comes easier. Let Me help. We can do this together.

Saturday

TODAY I SPENT ____ MINUTES IN LOVING PRAYER

I released

I received

THANK YOU, LORD! 4.22.17

APRIL 23,
2017





Sunday

*Your loving
following lights
the world for
others*

A READER ASKS

“Dear Lord, ever since my husband stopped attending church services with the family last fall, I’ve felt stressed and resentful over my heightened responsibility to raise our three children as good Christians. This used to be a responsibility we shared equally, but it seems the spiritual direction of our family now rests solely on my shoulders. It’s all too overwhelming. Plus, my husband’s lack of faith seems contagious: My youngest has started voicing resistance to going to church and says he’d rather stay home with his dad. I fear if my children grow up and stop being practicing Christians, it will be all my fault, and my anxieties are having a bad ripple effect on my marriage. People always say raising kids takes a village. How can one lowly person like myself tackle such an awesome responsibility as raising Godly sons and daughters alone?”

Wisdom of the Word

But if the unbelieving partner separates, let it be so. In such cases the brother or sister is not enslaved. God has called you to peace. For how do you know, wife, whether you will save your husband? —Paul in his first letter to the Corinthians, 7:15–16

We understand and yet...

When those closest to us are not on the same page spiritually, it creates division and stress. Shared values are the glue that holds communities together, so it’s especially painful when loved ones choose a path that takes them away from You. What’s our role when others veer?

SUNDAY, APRIL 23, 2017

Sunday

JESUS IS THE ANSWER

Dear child, I'm so sorry for the hurt you're feeling, and I appreciate your concern over the spiritual well-being of those you love. But your Father made each one of you with free will for a beautiful reason: He wants each one of you to come to Him in pure love and genuine affection. He does not require any performance on your part nor does He twist your arm. He wants all hearts but only those that are freely given.

"My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me...and they shall never perish."

—Jesus to the crowd,
John 10:27–28 NKJV

When it comes to the hearts of others, you help by showing them what's in your heart and telling them your love story with Me. Sharing your tenderness toward Me and your joy in Me is a gift you give the world. Such love and joy is often contagious.

Much more than that, however, you must not do. You must not threaten or cajole or bully another into a faith relationship. Those who come to Me in that way do not stay with Me. Let Me relieve you of the burden of shepherding others. I am the good shepherd. The more lovingly you follow Me, the more likely others will too.

TODAY I SPENT ____ MINUTES IN LOVING PRAYER

I released

I received

THANK YOU, LORD! 4.23.17

A place is set for you

A READER ASKS

“Dear Lord, I’m going deaf and it becomes scarier and more stressful every day. Now even with my hearing aids I have a hard time understanding anyone without lip reading, and I can’t distinguish sounds. My friends, family and I have prayed constantly for healing, but the more we pray, the worse my hearing seems to get. That just doesn’t make sense to me! Isn’t there something You can do?”

Wisdom of the Word

When the righteous cry for help, the Lord hears and delivers them out of all their troubles.

—David to King Abimelech, Psalm 34:17

We understand and yet...

When some aspect of our body breaks, it can be confusing and terrifying. How can we keep hope alive when we are in pain? How do we avoid being sucked into despair?



MONDAY, APRIL 24, 2017

Monday

JESUS IS THE ANSWER

Dear child, I am so sorry you are facing a breakdown in your body. I feel your fear with you, but you needn't give into despair. Each worldly ending gives your spirit a new way to live.

"For My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him."

—Jesus to the crowd, John 6:55–56 NKJV

It's as though as you're in a kitchen with bare cupboards except for a few crumbs, and a part of the roof caves in. At first you think this is awful...until you see the feast that had been hidden by what you took for shelter.

It is hard to face that your body will eventually falter, your heart will stop beating. But I grow stronger in you as your body fails. The secret: Tune in to how I fill the void.

As you feel your hearing diminish, listen for Me. As you feel your vision diminish, look for your Father. As your body has trouble moving, feel the wind of the Holy Spirit flow through your bones. We are with you. You need only to quiet your mind and open your heart and you will discover new wondrous gifts in the rubble.

TODAY I SPENT ____ MINUTES IN LOVING PRAYER

I released

I received

THANK YOU, LORD! 4.24.17



The fast lane to Me

A READER ASKS

“Dear Lord, I’m so envious of my now former neighbors who recently moved to a huge home in a ritzy community. Every time I drive by their old house at the corner of my block, I get this overwhelming sense of frustration and then start feeling like a failure. No matter how hard I work, I realize I’ll never get the big dream house or the life of comfort that they have. I know it’s wrong to covet, but I can’t stop comparing. What can I do to feel less jealous?”

Wisdom of the Word

Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on the earth.

—Paul in a letter to the Colossians, 3:2

We understand and yet...

It’s easy to get caught in the trap of wanting what we don’t have. It’s hard not to dwell on all the ways we are lacking. Please help us move past our envy!

TUESDAY, APRIL 25, 2017

Tuesday

JESUS IS THE ANSWER

Dear child, there is a problem of having worldly things (both material and experiential) that is easy to miss. The more you have—the “richer” your spirit is—the more your spirit worries over losing.

The less you have—the “poorer” your spirit is—the more open you are to the gifts that the Holy Spirit brings.

Think back to the last time you had a song stuck in your head. Another song would come on the radio, and though you’d know it was playing, you couldn’t really hear it, couldn’t really lose yourself in it, because you had the first song on mental replay.

Your spirit isn’t so different: If it’s caught up in a song of worry and grasping, it’s hard for it to receive the purifying melody that the Spirit brings. And worldly gain always brings the temptation to grasp for more.

That’s why gaining what you desire in the world can be dangerous. When you see another gain, know that this gain results in raising the spiritual hurdles they face. For most people, having less results in much, much more.

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

—Jesus to the crowd,
Matthew 5:3

TODAY I SPENT ____ MINUTES IN LOVING PRAYER

I released

I received

THANK YOU, LORD! 4.25.17

The background features a close-up of several ornate, white ceramic plates with gold rims and delicate floral patterns in blue and pink. These plates are arranged in a slightly overlapping manner. In the foreground, a white lace doily with a complex, repeating geometric pattern is visible. The overall lighting is soft and bright, creating a clean and elegant aesthetic.

APRIL 26,
2017

*Trading in silver
for pure gold*



Wednesday

A READER ASKS

“Dear Lord, my basement is bursting at the seams and I’ve finally accepted that I have to de-clutter, but the thought of chucking or donating anything down there tugs at my heart. Most of the items are from the estate of my dear great aunt with whom I was especially close, and just looking at them brings back so many memories of her kind, loving soul. Cleaning out her home after she passed away several years ago was emotionally difficult, and I was too upset to make decisions about the countless lamps, notebooks, china and other knickknacks. The objects’ sentimental pull hasn’t lessened since then. I certainly plan to keep one or two special items, but the rest is really stressing me out. However, I also feel it’s disrespectful to the deceased to get rid of these keepsakes. Is there a way to de-clutter without littering my conscience with guilt?”

Wisdom of the Word

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

—Paul in his second letter to the Corinthians, 5:17

We understand and yet...

It’s hard to let go of precious possessions we’ve collected over the years. We associate the tangible things with people and experiences that have slipped away. Discarding these items feels like saying goodbye to priceless memories. How can we let go...without *letting go*?

JESUS IS THE ANSWER

Dear child, what a beautiful heart you have! I appreciate how much you want to do right by the people you love, but you don't need to hold on to their material possessions to honor them. Worldly things are fleeting, but what lives in your heart and what you create with other hearts is forever.

To let go of material symbols of eternal love, you may want to have a sweet kind of ceremony. You can go through each object one by one and bring to mind and heart the loving moment it brings up. Then you can even kiss the symbol before putting it in a box to donate to the needy or to throw away.

The loving moments that these material things represent live on in a real way in your heart and in your Father's eternal kingdom. By trusting this teaching, by having faith in My promises, you can heal your heart and become liberated from the ways in which the material world holds you captive. Let your faith in the power of your own heart in Me set you free.

"[The Lord] has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives."

—Jesus in the temple at Nazareth, Luke 4:18 NKJV

TODAY I SPENT ____ MINUTES IN LOVING PRAYER

I released _____

I received _____

THANK YOU, LORD! 4.26.17



*You, forever
beautiful*

A READER ASKS

“Dear Lord, when I look in the mirror, I see an old lady that doesn’t seem like ‘me.’ Wrinkles mar my forehead. My hair is thin and wispy. My teeth look gray. I don’t know how to reconcile this face I see and my sense of myself as young and beautiful. Please help.”

Wisdom of the Word

Do not let your adorning be external...but let your adorning be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God’s sight is very precious.

—Peter in his first letter to the exiles, 3:3–4

We understand and yet...

When we don’t feel attractive, it’s hard to shine our light in the world. We struggle to see ourselves as You do. How can we find that “imperishable beauty”?

JESUS IS THE ANSWER

Dear child, can you do Me a favor? Quiet your mind and open your heart and tenderly search your spirit. Do you feel a shimmering joy? If not, keep searching...it's quiet and subtle and sweet but it's there. Once you feel it, like a beautiful twinkling stream of light, zero in on it. That's you! Yes, it's the part of you that's eternal...and this part of you grows in loveliness even as your material body begins to fade.

"If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him."

—Jesus to Judas (not Iscariot), John 14:23 NKJV

That shimmering, beautiful you is who is with Me and Your Father: We are all together. Eternally. All you need to do is love Me for this to be so. As you love Me, you will receive Me and My Presence will inform your choices. You will keep My word, and I will keep you.

The next time you look in the mirror, instead of studying your flaws, look for the glimmer of your imperishable self in your own eye. You'll see it there: Forever young and beautiful in Me.

TODAY I SPENT ____ MINUTES IN LOVING PRAYER

I released

I received

THANK YOU, LORD! 4.27.17



*So much
better to be free
in Me*

A READER ASKS

“Dear Lord, I get so annoyed when I am kind or courteous to a stranger and they don’t take a second to acknowledge it. I’ll let another car merge ahead and they won’t wave. Or I’ll grab the door for people at the bank and they breeze ahead like I’m invisible. One time, I couldn’t hold back a sarcastic ‘You’re welcome!’ I *should* be nice without expectations, but shouldn’t they also be polite?”

Wisdom of the Word

Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. —Paul in a letter to the Philippians, 2:3

We understand and yet...

It’s upsetting when others don’t reciprocate our kindnesses. Even though we’re not trying to play tit-for-tat, we expect a certain level of common goodness. Are we wrong?

JESUS IS THE ANSWER

Dear child, I understand your frustration with the discourtesy of others, but in truth, you should feel sad for them. Your heart should go out to them.

Think back to the last time you were in a very bad mood and were yourself discourteous. Don't spend time mentally making excuses for yourself...just reflect on how you felt when you were unkind to another. You felt awful. You were either angry at Me or disappointed in Me or simply ignoring Me altogether. It was not a good state.

"So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit."

—Jesus to the crowd,
Matthew 7:17

Contrast this by reflecting on how you feel when you are kind to others. Your spirit is light and joyful. You feel expansive, like sharing the good feeling you receive from Me. What a blessed state that is!

The good feeling that makes you spread joy and kindness is something your spirit receives from the Holy Spirit. When your spirit is healthy, you bear good fruit in the world. When your spirit is diseased, you spread unkindness. It's so much better to be healthy, free and light that it behooves you to forgive those who aren't.

TODAY I SPENT ____ MINUTES IN LOVING PRAYER

I released _____

I received _____

THANK YOU, LORD! 4.28.17

APRIL 29,
2017

*You're never
alone*

A close-up photograph of a young girl with blonde hair and blue eyes, smiling broadly and hugging an adult. The girl's face is the central focus, showing her teeth and joyful expression. She is wearing a white long-sleeved shirt. The adult's dark hair and shoulder are visible on the left side of the frame. The background is a soft-focus outdoor scene with green foliage and bright light filtering through the leaves.

Saturday

A READER ASKS

“Dear Lord, it feels like everyone in my life has left me and I don’t know how to deal with this devastating loneliness. Last year my husband and I got divorced, my son went to college on the other side of the country and my best friend moved out of state for a new job. I used to feel sorry for the women I would see eating dinner all alone in a restaurant, or going to the movies on a Friday night by themselves... but now *I’m* that woman. I have tried joining a Bible study group and doing bunco game nights at the community center, but after a few weeks the meetings just fall by the wayside. To be honest, constantly being surrounded by strangers or acquaintances makes me feel even more alone and pathetic. I’m afraid I will feel this way for the rest of my life. Is this Your plan? Please help me!”

Wisdom of the Word

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

—God to the Prophet Isaiah, 41:10 NKJV

We understand and yet...

We know You are with us always, yet loneliness can still be terrifying, devastating and overwhelming. We need someone we trust to hug us, talk to us and just be physically present. How can we find the courage to face this kind of emotional isolation?

SATURDAY, APRIL 29, 2017

Saturday

JESUS IS THE ANSWER

Dear child, I feel your pain over your feeling of aloneness and can understand how deeply sad it must make you. Your Father, Myself and the Holy Spirit exist as a Trinity so we can always be together, exchanging love, never alone. And I lived and died to extend an invitation to you to join us.

"And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: I in them, and You in Me."

—Jesus in prayer to God the Father, John 17:22–23 NKJV

When you start spending time with Me throughout your day in playful, conversational prayer, your sense of isolation will lift. Your spirit will be infused with peace and comfort. When you go out into the world, others will sense this quiet joy and gravitate toward you in a new way. Like attracts like. With Me in you, you will be drawn to others who are one with Me and they to you.

You are never alone, precious one. I am always with you. All you ever need to do is send your heart out to Me to feel My presence. Love Me with a quiet mind and an open heart and you will feel the love that's always there for you.

TODAY I SPENT ____ MINUTES IN LOVING PRAYER

I released

I received

THANK YOU, LORD! 4.29.17

A photograph of a forest with tall, slender trees. The ground is covered in a dense layer of small white flowers, possibly wildflowers or daisies. The trees have green foliage, and the overall scene is bright and vibrant. The text is overlaid on the top left of the image.

APRIL 30,
2017

*The beauty of
new growth*



Sunday

A READER ASKS

“Dear Lord, as a woman of color, I’m really despairing of how much hatred I’ve had to face in my life, both directly and through constant media coverage of the violence and discrimination directed at minorities. As a kid, my parents always told me I’d have to work harder than everyone else just to be treated with a modicum of respect because of my race. I’ve found it to be true—I got into a top college, graduated with honors and have been fighting for fair treatment from colleagues ever since my first job. I’ve been in situations so often where people doubt my abilities just because of my skin color. And it breaks my heart to see the trolls on social media spewing their hate at everyone who doesn’t conform to their worldview. I try to block it out, but their venom is corroding my belief in humanity’s goodness. Help me find hope again.”

Wisdom of the Word

I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned...I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

—Paul in a letter to the Philippians, 4:12–13 NKJV

We understand and yet...

Whether it’s because of our appearance, income, gender, politics, faith or anything else, it hurts to feel that others are stacking the deck against us. We know that life isn’t always fair, but how do we handle our anger when we don’t receive the respect we give to others?

SUNDAY, APRIL 30, 2017

JESUS IS THE ANSWER

Dear child, one of the greatest challenges you'll ever face is to break the cycle of hate. As I showed you by the way I lived My life when I walked your world, you must never hate the haters. I never did. Even on the Cross, I forgave all. You must strive to do as close to the same as you are able.

It is not for the sake of the haters that you forgive: It is as a favor to your own spirit. You want to stay as free

from anger, grudge, hate and resentment as possible so that your spirit will be freer to receive the peace, joy, love and gentleness that comes to you through the Holy Spirit.

Imagine a tree that held on to some of its dead leaves. When a beautiful breeze blows in, all the new green leaves float up in harmony while the dead leaves rattle and groan. You want to constantly be releasing everything that's dead in your spirit so you may feel young and green and lifted in love by the Spirit. So lifted by that love that you pass it on to your neighbor—even the ones who hate, *especially* the ones who hate. Thank you, My precious one.

“This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.”

—Jesus to His disciples,
John 15:12 NKJV

Sunday

TODAY I SPENT ____ MINUTES IN LOVING PRAYER

I released

I received

THANK YOU, LORD! 4.30.17

Statement of Faith *from the Editors of Simple Grace*

The word “creed” comes from the Latin root word meaning “heart.” So at *Simple Grace*, our creed is not just a collection of facts that we believe in our heads—it is a statement of beliefs that we give our hearts to. It’s a simple list: We are not theologians, but ordinary Christians eager to share our faith with our readers.

We give our hearts to the living triune God, who created and sustains the universe, who came to humanity in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, and who continues to be at work among us in the Holy Spirit.

We give our hearts to Jesus Christ, the second person of the Trinity, true God and true human. We believe that the life of Jesus offers us the most perfect glimpse at who He is and what He calls us to be.

We give our hearts to God’s continuing revelation to us, especially in the Bible, the inspired Word of God. The Bible is our ultimate authority, our trusted guide, our deepest source of comfort and strength and the bedrock of our faith. We believe that God also speaks to us in other ways, especially through the beauty of creation and through communities and individuals of goodwill.

We give our hearts to the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity, who comforts and sustains us, and through whom God’s love is poured into our hearts and our lives.

We give our hearts to our calling as children of God. We believe that God calls us to be in a relationship of love with Him and with others, and the best way to deepen these relationships is through a life of worship and prayer, and through prayerful reading of the Scriptures.

We give our hearts to our profession as editors and writers. As women of various ages, races and Christian denominations, we dedicate ourselves to serving our sisters and brothers in Jesus Christ in the spirit of love and truth. We strive to provide inspirational, loving content for readers across all branches of the Christian family.

Our Mission

We seek to encourage others in the simple joy of abiding in God's grace through beautiful images and inspirational real-life stories. We strive to help others develop a closer relationship to our Savior through daily devotions written from Jesus's perspective & grounded in Scripture.

We're here to help!

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Art Director Jessica Son
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Deputy Photo Director Christie Geiger
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Copy

Senior Copy Chief Tara Hans
Copy Editor Rebecca Abma

Contributing Writers

Nancy Fitzgerald, Lisa Maxbauer, Diane Nichols

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58 West 40th Street, Fifth Floor,
New York, NY 10018
212-764-3344 baueradsales.com

PRESIDENT, PUBLISHER Ian Scott

Creative Services Dir. Kara L. Ascitto
Chicago: 312-664-2244
Los Angeles: 310-575-1162
Texas: 469-229-0600

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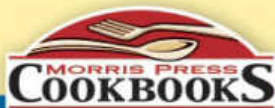
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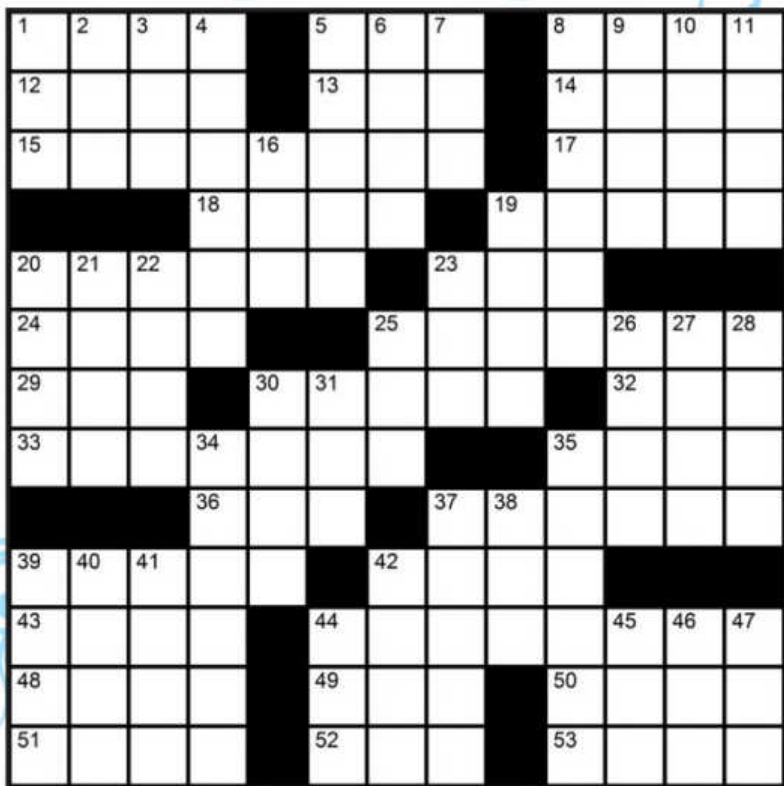
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Crossword



PHOTOS: I STOCK. CROSSWORD: HARVEY ESTES

ACROSS

- 1** Profound
5 Snake sound
8 Animal that has no understanding (Psalm 32:9)
12 "My eyes are ____ toward the Lord" (Psalm 25:15)
13 "So that's it!"
14 Part of a molecule
15 Faith
17 Sitar player Shankar

- 18** Mystery author ____ Stanley Gardner
19 "Pick one or the ____"
20 "While my glory ____ by, I will put you in a cleft of the rock" (Exodus 33:22)
23 "Silly me!"



8 ACROSS

- 24** "Suuuuure..."
- 25** Beggar at the gate (Luke 16:20)
- 29** New York Knicks org.
- 30** Do this and shine (Isaiah 60:1)
- 32** Before, in verse
- 33** Area that bordered Samaria (Luke 17:11)
- 35** Racing sled
- 36** Hot under the collar
- 37** Confined, with "up"
- 39** Unfaithful kisser (Matthew 26:49)

- 42** Neighbor of Pakistan
- 43** "Break ____!" (good luck on the stage)
- 44** Accumulates
- 48** It will bow at the name of Jesus (Philippians 2:10)
- 49** Dell or Gateway products
- 50** Sacrifice provided for Abraham (Genesis 22:8)
- 51** They hear (Deuteronomy 29:4)
- 52** Oohs' partners
- 53** Consenting votes

DOWN

- 1** "The" in German
- 2** Her name means "source of life" in Hebrew
- 3** Snaky swimmer
- 4** Melchizedek, for example (Genesis 14:18)
- 5** Leaves the harbor
- 6** Cobbler's creation
- 7** Saint, in Spanish
- 8** Sister of Mary (Luke 10:38-39)
- 9** Great Salt Lake state
- 10** The greatest, in 1 Corinthians 13
- 11** Eastern ruler
- 16** Test for college srs.
- 19** Seep slowly
- 20** Engine noise
- 21** "Dancing Queen" band
- 22** "Set me as a ____ upon your heart" (Song of Solomon 8:6)
- 23** Courtroom VIPs
- 25** Some exchanged truth for this (Romans 1:25)
- 26** Enlist again

- 27** Hankering
- 28** Bird feeder fill
- 30** Cry of despair (Joel 1:15)
- 31** Traffic stopper
- 34** Some call them their gods (Isaiah 42:17)
- 35** Desolate
- 37** If anyone come after me, let him deny himself and take up his ____ and follow me (Matthew 16:24)
- 38** Rowing tool
- 39** Maggie Gyllenhaal's brother
- 40** Wrist bone
- 41** Thirsty animal of Psalm 42
- 42** Skin irritation
- 44** Bath installation
- 45** Abbr. on a can of motor oil
- 46** Thurman of films
- 47** Noncommercial TV network that aired *Downton Abbey*



37 DOWN

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Solution to Crossword on pg 140



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"My moment of Grace"



"Finding a new furry friend in my backyard."

—Christie Geiger,
West Caldwell, NJ

"Cruising with my little adventurer!"

—Vanessa Nichols,
Lakeland, FL



"Seeing this beautiful butterfly while doing my devotional."

—Melissa Butler, Southbury, CT

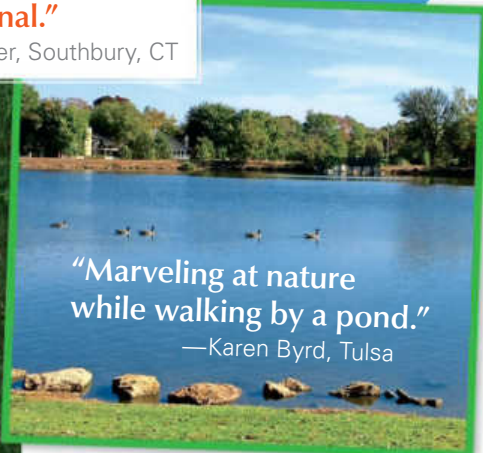


Have a photo of someone or something that lifts your spirit?

Please email it to us at MyPhoto@simplegrace.com

"Getting our great-granddaughters ready for Sunday school."

—Frank Miller, Crossville, TN



"Marveling at nature while walking by a pond."

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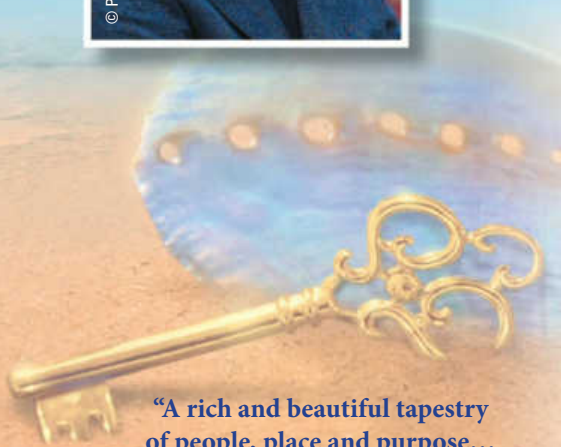


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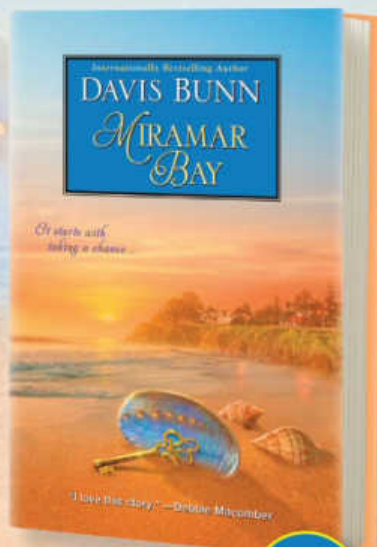


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