Vienna Presbyterian Church

Discover (or Rediscover!)
Your Favorite Verses

Summer 2017
Do you regularly wear a seatbelt?

Recently I was talking with a friend about why we do spiritual disciplines like prayer and Bible study. She answered that they are what keep you moving forward when your life gets rocky. They help keep us stable, and help us realize that life will continue on, that God is in control. I answered, “Kind of like a seatbelt?”

Just like seatbelts! Think about it, seatbelts allow us to drive faster, safer. They hold us in place when we need to take a fast turn. They hold us in a place of safety when we hit a speed bump. Even more importantly, they can be what gets us through a car crash.

We may not feel like we need scripture or prayer when life is going well, but our spiritual disciplines are what allow us to go faster, safer: in our marriages, with our children, in our workplace. They help keep us going when life gets out of control. If we know scripture, it immediately comes to mind to remind us that *God is in control*, that *Jesus’s yoke is light*, or that *the Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want*. Scripture is one of the straps of the seatbelt that support and encourage us when life starts to get out of control. It reminds us of who God is and what God is doing, and what God can do.

This summer we will be looking at Go-to or favorite Bible verses. Many of our congregation submitted their favorite Bible verses, and why they like them, or why they are meaningful. I am sure they will bless you as well.

We invite you to join in. Maybe share your favorite Bible verse with us at life@viennapres.org, on Facebook, or our new church communication platform, Realm. Spend some time reflecting on each day’s verse and how it speaks into your life now. Use the added reflection questions to let these Go-to verses sink into your life.

On the back page of this devotion, there is a list of top 10 scriptures for different life situations. Take some time to reflect on them and let them sink into your hearts and minds, so they will be there, like a seatbelt, when needed!

Blessings,

Shannon Jordan
Sunday—June 4
Acts 2:1-13
When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. Amazed and astonished, they asked, ‘Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God’s deeds of power.’ All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, ‘What does this mean?’ But others sneered and said, ‘They are filled with new wine.’

Monday—June 5
Lamentations 3:19-33
The thought of my affliction and my homelessness is wormwood and gall! My soul continually thinks of it and is bowed down within me. But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope: The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. ‘The Lord is my portion,’ says my soul, ‘therefore I will hope in him.’ The Lord is good to those who wait for him, to the soul that seeks him. It is good that one should wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord. It is good for one to bear the yoke in youth, to sit alone in silence when the Lord has imposed it, to put one’s mouth to the dust (there may yet be hope), to give one’s cheek to the smiter, and be filled with insults. For the Lord will not reject forever. Although he causes grief, he will have compassion according to the abundance of his steadfast love; for he does not willingly afflict or grieve anyone.
Reflection by—Sally Mitchell

When my son Sam was three years old and became tired or hungry, he would announce in a very loud voice, “I DON’T LIKE NOBODY!” After a meal or a nap, he would return to his usual sunshiny self.

I’m usually fairly upbeat but sometimes I “don’t like nobody” either. Life can get a little too messy—grown kids annoy me, my husband goes out of town and our dogs get sick on our new carpet, maybe throw in a little car trouble and a hurtful remark by a friend. After a week of that, I feel myself closing down and I go inward. Even a handful of Doritos or an afternoon nap doesn’t snap me out of it.

I close myself off to others. And to God.

I like this verse because the Prophet Jeremiah gets my pain. Jeremiah encountered many difficulties in his life and some scholars refer to him as "the weeping prophet." No rainbows and unicorns for Jeremiah—he doesn’t sugarcoat the state of his being. He says his soul is “downcast” with pain. He is consumed with bitterness and gall. Gall is a nasty little state of being, isn’t it? Merriam-Webster calls it rancor.

By reading this scripture, Jeremiah helps me to do the mental switch from being bummed out to hanging onto the Lord’s strong shoulders.

Even Mona Lisa has bad days.

Sam is a grown-up now, married and expecting his first child (my first grandchild!) in July. I’m fairly certain that he doesn’t yell I DON’T LIKE NOBODY to his wife or neighbors—but still, he’s human and can get out of sorts.
Jeremiah knows—and so do I—that there is a remedy to our bitterness and gall. The remedy is God! His love keeps us from getting sucked down the rabbit hole of anger or rancor or hopelessness. Jeremiah reminds us: *The Lord is good to those whose hope is in him, to the one who seeks him.*

**Your turn:** Where do you go when you feel down or bitter? Can you wait quietly for the Lord?

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**Tuesday—June 6**

*2 Chronicles 7:14*

If my people who are called by my name humble themselves, pray, seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land.

**Reflection by—Phyllis Swenson**

In our modern technological, social media world, there appears to be a lack of humility and a great deal of pride. People are practicing incivility while remaining anonymous behind a keyboard. There’s a lack of compassion for the voiceless and marginalized. Prayer is no longer encouraged in schools and, in most places, to say the name of “God” in the media is now considered anathema. Proverbs 16:18 says that pride goes before destruction and an arrogant spirit before a fall. But God promises that if we will humble ourselves and pray and turn from our wicked ways, then he will hear us, forgive our sins and heal our land.

This verse from 2 Chronicles 7:14 reminds me of a movie that was made in 1950 called “The Next Voice You Hear,” starring Nancy Reagan Davis and James Whitmore. It is about a family in a small town whose lives were changed by the voice of God which was broadcast over the radio one night at the same time all over the world. The voice was heard by every race of people in their own native language. It spoke over the radio for six days to warn people to love each other and turn from their destructive ways or the wrath of God would be demonstrated through natural disasters. People everywhere began to pray and love God and each other. God heard their prayers and expressed his deep joy over the transformation of people’s hearts in his final radio broadcast.

This movie may seem a bit old-fashioned and out of touch with reality, but isn’t God’s voice still heard from the pulpits, from people crying in the wilderness and in some modern day Christian films? On April 25, 2017,
Pope Francis gave a surprise Ted Talk which was broadcast all over the world to people of all faiths, with subtitles in every language. He urged everyone to love one another as Jesus loved us, to turn from our wicked ways and embrace each other as children of God. The Pope’s message was one of hope. It reminds me of the movie, “The Next Voice You Hear,” because he was a voice used by God which was broadcast to people all over the world in their own language, using subtitles. Yesterday’s fiction has become a modern day fact. God will heal our land if we humble ourselves and pray in unity and love.

Your turn: If God spoke out loud to you, what do you think he would say?


Wednesday—June 7

Psalm 103:12
As far as the east is from the west, so far he removes our transgressions from us.

Reflection by—Scott Slocum
This is the remarkable assurance of pardon we often receive at the conclusion of our prayer of confession during our Sunday worship service. I did not know the source of this quotation until I stumbled on it while reading the Psalms. There are many beautiful hymns in the Psalter, but Psalm 103 stands out for me because all the verses leading up to this proclamation are equally compassionate and reassuring. “He forgives… heals… ransoms me… surrounds me with loving kindness… fills my life with good things.”

East and west, sunrise and sunset. An early church father started his day with a prayer, “Today I start,” an acknowledgement that however we have missed the mark, we have the opportunity to move on, to begin again every day. This Psalm asserts that regardless of what we do, God loves us; and as the author Richard Benner wrote, “Nothing we can do will make God love us more; nothing we can do will make God love us less.”

Your turn: What do you feel you may have done that caused God to love you any less? How do you feel knowing that God loves you no matter what?
Matthew 6:25-27
‘Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life?

Reflection by—Sue Hamblen
My father, my mother-in-law and my brother-in-law passed away several years ago, all within months of each other. It was a time of incredible sadness for my husband’s and my families. We’d been a part of each other’s lives since 1972, so the losses were deep and painful. I worried about my mom, my siblings, my kids, and in particular my brother-in-law’s sons – one still in high school. It felt surreal as we planned seemingly endless memorial services and funerals. I wasn’t sure how life would ever return to what I remembered as pretty ‘bump free’.

The following year, it was slowly revealed to us the depth of my daughter’s abuse by VPC’s past Youth Director, Eric DeVries. I experienced grief on a completely new level. I worried about my mom, my husband, my kids, my new grandson, and my own bruised faith. Our lives were ‘bump free’ no more.

At various times, the worry overtook my daily life. I was in pain and my faith was seriously waning. I didn’t understand how God had let all of this happen to my family. I projected my worry into the future – how would we get over the pain of our loss, where would my daughter be in 10 years, how did I mitigate the damage to the rest of the family that was an inevitable byproduct of sexual abuse – the list of worries was endless.

Although I’d read and heard this scripture a number of times, one morning the words took on a personal and special importance. My worry was fruitless and exhausting, and certainly not adding an extra hour to my time on earth! Worry is inevitable if you’re a parent, daughter, son or grandparent – it comes with the territory of having a family. However, I have this passage readily available throughout my home, office and car for quick reference and confirmation that worry is a needless exercise. God is in control, and this scripture serves to remind me so.
Your turn: What causes you worry? How would turning that worry over to God affect how you live your life?

Friday—June 9

*Micah 6:6-8 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)*

“With what shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before God on high? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?”

He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?

**Reflection by—Megan Kritsky**

The prophet Micah tells a story of the Lord’s frustration with his people. The people have become their own ‘gods’ and have turned from Him, they have forgotten that God is with them. I can relate.

I express my thanks to God: for my family, my church, my home, the beauty of our Earth. But I feel completely unworthy of any of those blessings. Unworthy of the love and grace that God has for me. You see, I’m a horrible rule follower. And this is not a new phenomenon. I rebel often, in thought and deed. I am not worthy of God’s love. If this were a little league game, I’d have hit the slaughter rule, game over.

But in Micah, I am told that God is not a scorekeeper. God does not need an elaborate show to forgive me. What God requires is hard, but not unattainable. Micah is reminding us to do justice (love my neighbor), love kindness or often times this is translated as mercy (forgive others as I want to be forgiven), and walk humbly with my God (be in a relationship with God). This is an Old Testament arrow pointing to the grace we receive in Christ. Our Lord gives us the foundation of our relationship with him, to love him and to learn to live like him. It makes me feel hopeful, as if I can really do this! Even with my rebellious spirit.

Your turn: How are you doing justice? How are you being kind to those around you? Are you walking humbly with your God?
Saturday—June 10

John 3:16

For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son that whoever BELIEVES in Him shall not perish but have ETERNAL LIFE.

John 3:16
Sunday—June 11  
*Ephesians 2:4-10*  

But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the ages to come he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness towards us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God—not the result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.

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Monday—June 12  
*Zephaniah 3:17*  
The Lord, your God, is in your midst, a warrior who gives victory; he will rejoice over you with gladness, he will renew you in his love; he will exult over you with loud singing.

**Reflection by—Mary Hatzilambrou**

_Sing to the Lord a new song. I will sing of your love forever. Sing for joy to God our strength._ Singing to God in worship and praise is an integral part of our lives as Christians. When we had our daughter in 2001, and we noticed her love of music, nurturing her talent for service in the church was a primary goal for her development. After all, God relishes and appreciates his people’s rejoicing in song.

Then at one Sunday service, the scripture reading was Zephaniah 3:17.

Instead of us singing to God, the tables were turned--God was singing **to us**! Eureka—what an epiphany! This message had the same impact on me as the idea that God sent his son to save us **while** we were yet **sinners**. It doesn’t make sense; yet it makes perfect sense. The same God who loves us enough to give his only son is the same God that would rejoice over us. Out of this image, I can fully grasp that God can and does indeed take great pleasure in giving us all things. And that He naturally wants to give us more than we ask or imagine, even more than we do for our own children. With this in mind, it is rather easy to put my full trust in God.
Your turn: Do you feel God’s pleasure in you, even when you sin? If not, why?

In what ways have you seen God’s kingdom, accessible to you here on earth? In what ways has he done more than you’ve asked for or imagined would be possible?

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Tuesday—June 13

Ecclesiastes 3:1-13 (NIV)

A Time for Everything

There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens:

- a time to be born and a time to die,
- a time to plant and a time to uproot,
- a time to kill and a time to heal,
- a time to tear down and a time to build,
- a time to weep and a time to laugh,
- a time to mourn and a time to dance,
- a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them,
- a time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing,
- a time to search and a time to give up,
- a time to keep and a time to throw away,
- a time to tear and a time to mend,
- a time to be silent and a time to speak,
- a time to love and a time to hate,
- a time for war and a time for peace.

What do workers gain from their toil? I have seen the burden God has laid on the human race. He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the human heart; yet no one can fathom what God has done from beginning to end. I know that there is nothing better for people than to be happy and to do good while they live. That each of them may eat and drink, and find satisfaction in all their toil—this is the gift of God.

Reflection by—Joan Tomlinson

The phrase "Timing is everything" is how I used to reflect on this scripture. I guess you could say, my timing, planning and efforts. My viewpoint, however, changed dramatically when it was chosen to be read at my Mother's funeral. An emotional time in life for many reasons, but at the moment of her passing and planning of her celebration of life, I was lost. Emotions, questions, memories and reflection took my thoughts in
many directions. As I have reread this passage since her passing, the realization becomes ever more present God holds us not from just beginning and end, but everything in the middle too.

The realization of life's events are our seasons and time to experience growth, only not on our own. The key point is "not on our own." Life began for each of us with God loving us and creating us. The moments between our birth and death, each hold a special season of life. We are given these moments to turn to God, for thanksgiving, help, questions and answers and a guiding loving hand.

While I may not receive all I am searching for it is my trust in God to guide me where He wants me to go, knowing He loves me! I close this scripture reflection with the last verses, "11 He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the human heart; yet[a] no one can fathom what God has done from beginning to end. 12 I know that there is nothing better for people than to be happy and to do good while they live. 13 That each of them may eat and drink, and find satisfaction in all their toil—this is the gift of God. "

**Your turn:** What does this scripture say to you? What is your life experience through the words of this scripture? Have you thanked God for the "times" of your life (to this point)?

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**Wednesday—June 14**

*Psalm 103:8-10*

The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. He will not always accuse, nor will he keep his anger for ever. He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities.

**Reflection by—Jacquie Garland**

Although I have always believed in the existence of God and viewed God as a loving God, I did not understand God’s unfathomable grace and forgiveness of sins. I felt unworthy of God’s love and feared that I would be condemned to hell for my many sins. As I look back on my life, I see how God has not treated me as my sins deserved. Rather than punish me, He has shown me the errors of my ways by blessing me.

When I was a teenager, I had horrible fights with my mother and said ugly things. As I got older, we no longer fought, but I still was impatient and
said things that were hurtful or uncaring. This was not one single sinful act but constant bad behavior. My mother showed me love and I returned with nastiness. I said that if my children treated me unkindly, I deserved it after how I had acted. God had a different approach. Instead, he blessed me with something that I did not deserve - children who are loving and caring and respectful.

Sins are not only things done wrong, they are also things that we have not done. How many times have I not loved my neighbor as myself? How often did I forget to send a message to a friend or neighbor who was going through a difficult time? Rather than isolate me during my difficult times, God blessed me with caring friends who showed me support.

As I look back on my life, I see God’s steadfast love for me and continual forgiveness. I am so grateful that he has not treated me as my sins deserve and has instead blessed me in so many ways. His grace is beyond understanding.

**Your turn:** How do you know that God has forgiven your sins, no matter how grave you think they were? What would happen if you fully embraced your forgiveness in Christ? How would you feel about yourself? How would you feel when others mess up or do something that is ugly?

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**Thursday—June 15**

*Mark 8:36-37*

For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? Indeed, what can they give in return for their life?

**Reflection by—Phyllis Swenson**

I love this verse because it reminds me of the passage in 1 Corinthians 6:19, “Don’t you realize that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who lives in you and was given to you by God? You do not belong to yourself.” When we were born, God breathed the breath of life into our bodies and we became living souls. The Holy Spirit is a gift given to us by Jesus when we accept him as our Lord and Savior. What a precious gift of life. Yet, so often, we see in our world that people prefer to sell their souls for wealth and fame and abuse their sacred body temple of the Holy Spirit for sexual pleasure, food and substance abuse. The result of selling our souls for worldly gain is eternal death.
I am reminded of the old German story about Faust who sold his soul to the devil, Mephistopheles, for worldly gain. Faust was bored with his life and, after trying to take his own life, made a bargain with Mephistopheles for pleasure and power. Mephistopheles gave Faust magical powers with the agreement that his powers would last a certain number of years. After those years were over, Faust’s soul would be the property of Mephistopheles to be damned as his slave in hell for eternity. What a horrible price to pay for worldly gain. Yet we see it so often in our world, especially among the rich and famous. The saddest part is, people idolize the rich and famous with their expensive temporary toys and greedy appetite. Our souls are eternal and worth so much more than temporary things that we worship. Only God is deserving of our worship and praise.

A similar story to the Faustian myth is the story of the fall of Lucifer. In Isaiah 14:12-15, the prophet Isaiah laments the fate of Lucifer, who was known as the morning star. Lucifer sold his angelic soul after boasting of being greater than God. But, because of his pride, Lucifer was cast out of heaven into the fiery pit of hell. Lucifer had the mistaken idea that it was better to rule in hell than serve in heaven. Just like many people today who are hypnotized by power and pride, Lucifer paid the price of losing his eternal soul and forfeited his relationship with God.

Truly, there is no profit to be gained in the world without God. Jesus said in John 10:10 that the thief (pride, power, profit) comes only to steal, kill and destroy, but that he came to give life and give it abundantly.

**Your turn:** List the ways God has given life to you through Jesus Christ in abundance. What would you like to ask Christ to do for you, to show your belief in his great love?

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**Friday—June 16**

*Mark 9:24*

Immediately the father of the child cried out, ‘I believe; help my unbelief!’

**Reflection by—Scott Slocum**

This, to me, is the most moving encounter Christ has with a supplicant desperately in need of his healing power, a parent seeking a miracle for a child. The father of a demon-possessed boy has begged the disciples to heal him. They cannot. Jesus arrives and the father begs, “Have mercy on us and do something if you can.” “If I can?” Jesus asks. “Anything is possible if you have faith.”
Here I see the father, tears welling up in his eyes, trembling with emotion as he responds in desperation, “I do believe; help my unbelief.” Can’t you hear it? The plaintive cry for help from a desperate man who doubts his faith is strong enough to win Christ’s healing touch. I want to embrace him, comfort him. It’s not his faith but Jesus’s faith in God’s great love for us that restores that boy.

Your turn: Are there areas of your life that you don’t believe God has power? Relationships? Health? Finances? Ask God to help your unbelief today!

Saturday—June 17

GOD is our refuge and strength, an ever present help in trouble

- Psalm 46:1
Sunday—June 18
2 Timothy 1:1-7
Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, for the sake of the promise of life that is in Christ Jesus, to Timothy, my beloved child: Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.
I am grateful to God—whom I worship with a clear conscience, as my ancestors did—when I remember you constantly in my prayers night and day. Recalling your tears, I long to see you so that I may be filled with joy. I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that lived first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, lives in you. For this reason I remind you to rekindle the gift of God that is within you through the laying on of my hands; for God did not give us a spirit of cowardice, but rather a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline.

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If you do, you can join in the conversation on these devotions, and other ways to communicate with VPC!

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Monday—June 19

*Proverbs 3:5-6*

Trust in the LORD with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him and he will make your paths straight.

**Reflection by—Valerie Clark**

*Proverbs 3:5-6* is one of my favorite go-to verses. At a young age, I realized that bad things happen to good people and we are not in control. It was an anxiety-producing realization that led me to become a “worrier.” As I grew, I tried to overcome my anxiety with the logical reasoning that worrying is unproductive. I liked the quote: “worrying is like a rocking chair. It gives you something to do but it doesn’t take you anywhere.” Nevertheless, when I became a mother, entrusted with four amazing children, logic was not enough to keep me from worrying.

I felt waves of anxiety return as I realized I would not be able to protect my children from troubles. I joined a small group here at VPC that was reading the book: *Calm My Anxious Heart* by Linda Dillow. This book and the group of women I met through this study helped me to see that the antidote to worry is a solid trust in God.

I memorized Proverbs 3:5-6 and meditate on it often. It reminds me:
- To trust in the one who *is* in control.
- My own understanding of a situation is so limited, but God’s power is unlimited. I have seen him take seemingly impossible situations and make a way.
- When I give my concerns to him through prayer, God blesses me with clarity and peace.

Sometimes, God’s timing is not as fast as I would like. I find myself taking back problems that I had previously surrendered to him, and trying to solve them myself. I combat that tendency when I make it a priority to practice the spiritual disciplines. Daily devotional and prayer time, a weekly worship service and meetings with my small group all help me to keep my focus on God, the blessed controller of all things. When I do these things, I have peace, even in the midst of trouble.

**Your turn:** Do you struggle with worry? Is it hard for you to trust God in times of trouble? I encourage you to memorize Proverbs 3:5-6 and engage in spiritual disciplines. My new favorite quote about worry is “You can worry or you can trust God. You can’t do both.” In order to trust God, we have to know Him.
“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.

Jeremiah 29:11
Wednesday—June 21  

*Psalm 25:4-5*  
Make me to know your ways, O Lord; teach me your paths.  
Lead me in your truth, and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation;  
for you I wait all day long.

**Reflection by—Roy Dunn**  
I love these two verses and have related to them for years. As we go  
through this earthly life, it’s easy to wonder whether we’re on the correct  
path, whatever that may be. As life throws curves and challenges our way,  
it’s often easy to wonder if we have become sidetracked or “lost”. David,  
who wrote Psalm 25, seemed to be calling on God to deliver him from his  
enemies while also seeking God’s will and the forgiveness of his sins. In  
these verses specifically, David demonstrates a strong desire to have  
God’s guidance and an understanding of God’s truth. He recognizes God  
as his Savior, and expresses his continual (“all day long”) hope and/or  
faith in God. As he often does in psalms he wrote, David praises God and  
calls for His help.

As I go through my days seeking God and wanting to ensure I’m on the  
correct path, I recognize that it’s easy to try too hard to do the seeking.  
It’s easy to sidetrack myself with too much doubt or worry. I must  
frequently remind myself that God knows the path I’m on, he knows the  
path he wants me to follow, and he knows what and how to teach me so I  
get there. My job, so-to-speak, is to ensure I’m ready when he does reveal  
or show or teach or guide. To be ready, I must continually rest my hope  
and faith in him, all day long.

**Your turn:** How might we prepare ourselves to be ready for God’s  
guidance on the paths to follow?

What spiritual tools can help us with that preparation?
Thursday—June 22

I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

Philippians 4:13
Friday—June 23

\textit{Luke 17:3}

Be on your guard! If another disciple sins, you must rebuke the offender, and if there is repentance, you must forgive.

\textbf{Reflection by—Judy Dressendorfer}

Sadly, after 11 years of marriage, 2 children, and 4 years of my husband’s infidelity and verbal abuse, my marriage failed. I failed. My husband then relocated 1700 miles from his children, remarried, and announced that there would no longer be visitation. His children would not be welcome in his new life. Shocked and heartbroken all I could think of was "how could I have brought a person like that into my loving Christian family? How could I have brought 2 children into this world who will grow up fatherless? Why did his behavior change? What did I do to cause this?"

Depression often causes self-blame.

I clung to my Bible for strength, but found it impossible to forgive either my husband or myself. One day I heard the word "Broken Home", a term used to describe Single-Parent families. God knows me well and I firmly believe that it was his way of making me rise to the occasion. My children are NOT going to be raised in a Broken Home! No more looking back, I put on my "big girl pants" and began looking forward with a positive attitude. Luke 17:3 speaks to me not only about forgiving my former husband, but also myself. I have repented for my sins that may have contributed to the divorce and I have experienced redemption through a loving relationship with Christ.

Having been raised in an environment devoted to family, friends, and values, I was shocked at the losses caused by divorce. The future I planned for my children was gone. Financial security was gone. Married friendships were gone. Needed confidence was gone.

It breaks my heart to know how many of our community are suffering in a similar manner. I have been so blessed by VPC’s DivorceCare Ministry. If you know anyone who is suffering through Separation or Divorce please send them to our VPC DivorceCare website. We have been where they are. We are committed to their care.

\textbf{Your turn:} Who do you know that is suffering through a divorce? How can you offer them a way to connect with the loving relationship with Christ, or Christian community? On another note, who do you need to forgive?
Saturday—June 24

*John 15:5*

I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing.

**Reflection by—Elaine Hamlet**

I attended a conference with Bruce Wilkinson (The Prayer of Jabez and Secrets of the Vine) during my tenure with Prison Fellowship. The first night was about forgiveness. I had something in my life for which I had been unable to forgive, 17 plus years.

During that evening, Bruce led us through several moments of prayer and reflection on anything we might need to forgive and be able to forgive. I was unable to forgive this "unforgivable act against my daughter" by someone outside our family. I was determined to NEVER forgive this individual for what had happened. I turned my back on God, overwhelmed with anger, not realizing what this was doing to me and said God would have to forgive, don't ask me to do so. Little did I know later that night, I would have a forgiveness encounter with God in my room. I was awakened in the middle of the night. God came to me, and after a time of listening to him with tears flowing, I was finally able to forgive. It was THE most emotional event of my life and finally forgiveness came with God by my side. I will never forget that night as long as I live. I was a new person the next morning.

Our session the following day was about John 15:5. You ask, what does this have to do with forgiveness? Well, for me, it taught me that God is the vine upon which we all are connected. We are the branches and things in our lives can cause us to become dead to God and we withdraw from him and our branch no longer bears fruit and will need to be pruned. However, God did not prune my branch, but came to me with forgiveness the night before and brought life back to me. As the Scripture says, "If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit, apart from me you can do nothing." Indeed, it's true, you can't do anything without God, even forgiveness. This branch is once again alive and bearing much fruit. For this, I am very grateful!

**Your turn:** What are you trying to do in your own power? What would work better if you tried to do it relying on Jesus for strength, power, wisdom and energy? Is there someone or something you need to forgive? What is stopping you from doing it?
Sunday—June 25

Philippians 4:4-9
Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.

Monday—June 26

Philippians 4:6-7
Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Reflection by—Pam Thrasher
Most of my life, I have worried about life events and family. It all really hit me about six years ago. Many stressful situations happened in my life and then we made a move to northern Virginia after living in Ohio for 19 years. It seemed that life kept throwing painful and stressful events that involved our family from a myriad of sources. However, God has a divine plan. I slowly relinquished my will and started to trust God. During the past four years, I have devoted more time to worship, serving and studying the Bible. Through this, God has helped to transform me into a less anxious and worrisome person. I am turning it over to God in prayer and learning that his plan is so much greater than anything I could have envisioned.

Your turn: Why do we worry? Is it a control issue or fear? Isn’t faith enough to combat our fear?
Tuesday—June 27

Philippians 4:8

Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.

Reflection by—Phyllis Swenson

I love this Bible verse because it is a gentle reminder to keep my thoughts focused on God and not on the things of the world. It is so easy to be distracted by the thoughts and drama of a secular society that’s designed to tempt us every day to take our focus off what really matters. What truly matters is our relationship with Jesus Christ. He alone is what is true, noble, right, pure, lovely and admirable. He alone is deserving of our praise and admiration. By focusing our thoughts on Christ Jesus, he becomes our wisdom, hope, and strength to overcome the fallen nature of this world. Meditating day and night on the lofty thoughts of our Lord unites us to God’s righteousness, holiness and redemption. In Christ alone our hope is found and our victory is assured in God’s eternal glory.

This lovely Gospel verse reminds me of my late husband Warren’s favorite prayer, “The Serenity Prayer,” by Reinhold Neibuhr. He would pray it every day. It helped him to keep his mind focused on things that were true, noble, right, pure, lovely and admirable. It was his way of giving praise and glory to God while keeping his mind off the world. Here is the complete version of “The Serenity Prayer” which Warren loved so much:

“God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change; courage to change the things I can; and the wisdom to know the difference. Living one day at a time; enjoying one moment at a time; accepting hardships as a pathway to peace; taking, as He did, this sinful world as it is, not as I would have it; trusting that He will make all things right if I surrender to His will; so that I may be reasonably happy in this life and supremely happy with Him forever and ever in the next. Amen.”

Your turn: What ways can this verse help you to keep focused on Jesus Christ and not be distracted by worldly desires?

Is there a favorite prayer that comes to mind that reminds you of this verse?
Do you believe that this verse will help you to think in more positive, loving and joyful ways to live a life of abundance that Jesus came to give in fullness?

Wednesday—June 28
1 Thessalonians 5:16
Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

Reflection by—Barbara Greig
I came across this verse a few years ago and immediately thought it was a wonderful guide for daily living. Very simply put and easy to do. However, when I tried to put it into practice, it was not so easy. There are times when it is difficult to be joyful — when worry dominates your thoughts, when someone has said or done something that has hurt you deeply, when you are grieving the loss of a loved one, a relationship or a job. Which brings us to the second part of the verse. Give those cares and concerns to God in prayer. If we continually focus on God and put our trust in Him, all we need to do is “Let go and let God.” What a relief! The last part — giving thanks to God regardless of whatever is happening at the moment requires deliberate and concentrated effort. Look around you — there are many others who have difficult crosses to bear. You can bring the verse full circle by helping others to carry the burden of their crosses. That will bring joy to your own soul.

Your turn: What would this look like in your life? Really? Can you even consider this in all circumstances? Consider asking God to give you a heart that can do this in all circumstances.

10 of the most popular verses in the Bible
John 3:16
Matthew 6:33
Jeremiah 29:11
Romans 8:28
Isaiah 40:31
2 Corinthians 5:17
Matthew 11:28
Matthew 28:19
Philippians 4:13
Proverbs 3:5
Thursday—June 29  
*Luke 10:30-37*

Jesus said: “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was, and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper. ‘Look after him,’ he said, ‘and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.’

“Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?”

The expert in the law replied, “The one who had mercy on him.”

Jesus told him, “Go and do Likewise.”

**Reflection by—Nina Graves**

The story of the Good Samaritan is a story many of us learned and loved early in our childhood. Through this story, Jesus teaches us to be compassionate, and have mercy on our neighbors.

This is also a stewardship lesson. It teaches us that God intended money to do good in his Kingdom. Money plays a huge role in leveraging the good we can do in people’s lives. The Good Samaritan had the desire to help, but his willingness to use his resources allowed him to help more effectively. He had the margin to give to someone in need when the opportunity arose.

As stewards of what God has entrusted to us, we are called to look for opportunities to leverage those resources to accomplish good deeds. By living within our means, not incurring consumer debt and being good stewards of God’s gifts, we can create margin in our lives so that we can be generous when the opportunity arises.
Friday—June 30

1 Corinthians 15:55-57

‘Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?’
The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Reflection by—Joan Tomlinson

As I type, I have just learned my uncle has passed away. He was the last of my late father's siblings. I feel myself fondly reflecting the lifelong adventures, celebrations and associated memories of my childhood. This news and new emotional journey arrives near the approaching one-year anniversary of my late father's passing. Neither my uncle nor my father were well enough to share their final days.

This sad news is a large mixing bowl where the ingredients of joy and comfort of wonderful memories are mixed together with sorrow, tears, and loss. Seasoning this mixture of emotion is the vivid reality and knowledge that in every part of our lives there is a time, reason and season for everything. Understanding the reality of death is at times very difficult to comprehend.

This passage reminds me of Kari Jobe's song, "Forever." Ms. Jobe emotionally sings of the darkness upon the world without sunlight and the weeping moon and stars as Jesus willingly accepts every sin as he hangs on the cross for us. She goes on to reflect the events of Good Friday until he rose again. She hauntingly sings of Jesus's last breath, laying in the dark tomb and crescendos to the shaking ground and the rolling away of the stone as Jesus rises from death. The pinnacle refrain of her song, "His perfect love could not be overcome...Our resurrected King has rendered you defeated."

I found comfort and question in this passage, however, death and its sting does not separate us from God, Jesus, or our loved ones. While I may be sad, I'm also joyful for the lives of my father, uncle and other loved ones who have passed.

Glory to God for the life Jesus lived and continues to live...alive in us.

Your turn: Do you find comfort in this passage? Do you hope Jesus is with us in times of triumph or tragedy?
Saturday—July 1

*Matthew 5:16*

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

**Reflection by—Scott Slocum**

It is remarkable how under the right circumstance a Bible verse comes alive. And here’s why I am so excited about this. The Ignite! Campaign fuels our efforts to reach out to those in need in Vienna, and what we do for our neighbors, enriches us. We are blessed to be a blessing. Jesus is Lord. Scripture is our authority. And EVERYONE, EVERYONE is called into discipleship. We are told to “Love the Lord, and love our neighbors as ourselves.” Our love for our neighbors through our service to them as disciples of Christ enriches our relationship to God.

Our deeper relationship with God enables us to go deeper in service to our neighbors.

Our Outreach program in whatever form it takes is going to touch our worshipping community in untold ways. And if we do it right, we – the salt of the earth, the light of the world – will fulfill Jesus’ declaration in *Matthew 5:16*.

**Your turn:** What do you feel called to do to show love for your neighbors? How does it affect your relationship with God? Are you salty? Are you light? What is bland in your sphere of influence? What is dark, or even dim?

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Sunday—July 2

*Psalm 42*

To the leader. A Maskil of the Korahites. As a deer longs for flowing streams, so my soul longs for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and behold the face of God? My tears have been my food day and night, while people say to me continually, ‘Where is your God?’

These things I remember, as I pour out my soul: how I went with the throng, and led them in procession to the house of God, with glad shouts and songs of thanksgiving, a multitude keeping festival.
Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my help and my God.

My soul is cast down within me; therefore I remember you from the land of Jordan and of Hermon, from Mount Mizar. Deep calls to deep at the thunder of your cataracts; all your waves and your billows have gone over me. By day the Lord commands his steadfast love, and at night his song is with me, a prayer to the God of my life.

I say to God, my rock, ‘Why have you forgotten me? Why must I walk about mournfully because the enemy oppresses me?’ As with a deadly wound in my body, my adversaries taunt me, while they say to me continually, ‘Where is your God?’

Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my help and my God.

Monday—July 3
Psalm 90:1-2
Lord, you have been our dwelling-place
  in all generations.
Before the mountains were brought forth,
  or ever you had formed the earth and the world,
  from everlasting to everlasting you are God.

Reflection by—Shannon Jordan

There have only been a couple of years in my entire 50 years that I didn’t spend the week of 4th of July at Lake Lure, NC. My grandparents bought the house when my mother was six, so it has been an entrenched family tradition. We would eat burgers and hotdogs, have slaw, sliced tomatoes and cucumbers, corn on the cob and fresh peach cobbler for dessert. Often we cranked our own homemade ice cream. We would sit in front of fans on really hot days in the un-air-conditioned house, and swim for hours off the dock. We loved to water ski and would get up early to slalom before other boaters got up and marred the glassy surface. We loved staying up to watch the grown-ups play cards at night and were always excited when we could join in. We would get up in the morning to go swim with my grandfather and use his soap-on-a-rope instead of taking a bath. We would take the old mahogany Chris Craft boat up to the head of the lake to watch fireworks and would want to be closer so that the ashes would fall on us.
It is hard to believe that the hosting grandparents each summer now are not my grandparents, but my parents. That I am the middle-aged parent and my kids are the young adults. My nieces and nephew are the “little grands”. I am no longer the one wanting to get up in the morning to slalom, but I am the one driving the boat for my kids on the tube. Things change. We don’t play bridge or regular poker, but Texas Hold ‘em or Left-Right-Center if the little grands are playing. Things change. We take a different boat to the fireworks and still like to get super close. We do have air-conditioning now, and a couple of extra bathrooms, so some changes are good.

One of my favorite things about Lake Lure is to sit on the new patio in a comfy rocking chair (another good change!) and look at the mountain across the lake. The mountain looks different each day. Sometimes it has a different look several times a day. But it is the same mountain.

Similarly, as I have grown older, God has looked different to me. But God is God. From everlasting to everlasting, God is God. When things are going well, God is God. When things are stressful, God is God. Some things change, but God never does. I can trust God, even when I can’t trust myself, my circumstances, or even those around me. God is God. God doesn’t change, even if my view or perspective does.
As you read this, you can imagine me sitting on the patio, looking at the mountain. Or, if it is around 9 pm, I will be on the boat, trying to get closer to catch the ashes. Some things I hope won’t change, but if they do, I will know that God will remain the same!

**Your turn:** How does the fact that God doesn’t change affect how you see your life? How does it affect your responses to circumstances?

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**Tuesday—July 4**

Reflect on these lyrics to *God Bless America* and pray for our country.

God bless America, land that I love.
Stand beside her and guide her,
Through the night with the light from above.
From the mountains to the prairies, to the ocean white with foam --
God bless America, my home sweet home.

"God Bless America"
Words and Music by Irving Berlin
As recorded by Kate Smith (1939)

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**Wednesday—July 5**

*Psalm 46:10*

He says, “Be still, and know that I am God;
   I will be exalted among the nations,
   I will be exalted in the earth.”

**Reflection—Lee Self**

C.S. Lewis says, “*God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains: it is his megaphone to rouse a deaf world.*”

As I recall reading this verse, it was not a whisper, but a shout. It felt like God was literally putting me in my place, and I almost felt paralyzed as the reality of those words hit home. Yes, I was in pain, but I now see that the pain was a merciful gift from God. Finding my proper place in relationship to God was exactly what I so desperately needed.
Although I’d accepted Christ as my Savior as a child, and had grown in my relationship with him through a vibrant youth ministry in my church, I drifted away when I went to college and got married. For nearly 30 years I was trying to create my own life and fix my own problems. The more I tried, the tougher the problems became. When I was finally worn out from playing God, and trying to control everything, God humbled me. He showed me that I couldn’t do it on my own, and what’s even better, I didn’t have to. Because I wasn’t alone!

When I began to get out of his way and let go, my problems came to a head. And that’s when miracles happened. My broken marriage was restored. My husband surrendered his life to Jesus, just three years before dying of cancer. But I didn’t lose him...I know where he is! God is always in control, whether we know it or not. He will be exalted among the nations, and in the earth. He has given us everything we have, and has chosen us to be his stewards.

Your turn: What has God given you to steward? A family? A career? A home? Relationships? A ministry? Where have you begun to consider these your own instead of his? What is he asking you to let go of?

Thursday—July 6

*John 21:12-14*

Jesus said to them, ‘Come and have breakfast.’ Now none of the disciples dared to ask him, ‘Who are you?’ because they knew it was the Lord. Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. This was now the third time that Jesus appeared to the disciples after he was raised from the dead.

**Reflection by—Mary Pella**

My Dad was king of the Sunday morning breakfast on our family camping trips when I was young. He would carefully slice up the potatoes that he had roasted by wrapping them in foil and placing them in the hot coals of Saturday night’s camp fire, adding onion and scrambled eggs, all cooked in his cast iron skillet. As the early birds of the family, this was often time for just me and Dad, enjoying the aroma of the cooking breakfast and his coffee while we talked or just enjoyed the early morning beauty of the woods. These were times of comfort; being in my Dad’s presence made me feel content, joyful and safe. I looked forward to these special times together and eagerly got dressed so I could be outside with him.
I’ve always loved visualizing the scene John shared about that morning when Jesus prepared a campfire breakfast for his disciples, imaging what it was like being with Jesus that morning. After a long night of fishing and while still grieving the loss of their Lord and friend, wondering about their future, Jesus again shows his disciples his goodness and grace, giving them a net full of fish with his instructions to toss the net to the other side of the boat, and then greeting them with a hot breakfast of fresh bread and grilled fish that he prepared for them over a crackling campfire. What joy they must have felt again being in his presence and once more being reassured that their Redeemer lives!

These verses also challenge me to consider how I arrange my life to make special time with Jesus my priority – time just for me and Jesus. He is always there waiting and ready to greet me by our “campfire.” He offers me nourishment for my soul, unspeakable joy and the only real security there is.

**Your turn:** What do you need to do to make your “campfire” one-on-one time with Jesus your priority?

What’s getting in the way of spending time with Jesus more regularly?

What environment do you need to create to be able to focus on what Jesus has to share with you?

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**Friday—July 7**

*Matthew 22:36-40*

‘Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?’ He said to him, ‘ “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.” This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: “You shall love your neighbour as yourself.” On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.’

**Reflection by—Barbara Carlson**

I love coming to worship at VPC on Sunday mornings because I have developed relationships with so many wonderful people there. The fact that the VPC pastors and staff encourage relationship- and community-building is very important to me. These relationships have helped foster my spiritual transformation.

From this scripture I think Jesus wants us, with every part of our being, to learn who he is and try to live and act like him. Also, he wants us to love
and connect, develop relationships with our neighbors (whether friend or stranger) so that we can spread God’s love and teachings and connect in relationships with our neighbors outside our church and neighborhoods. This scripture fits so beautifully with the VPC mission statement: Becoming Like Christ Together for the World.

I used to think that I could just come to worship on Sunday, walk into the sanctuary for the service and out again, and somehow that would be enough “God” for me. But I think God has offered us his Kingdom right here on earth, to live, worship, pray, rejoice and celebrate … not in solitude… but in community with others who are studying and engaging to love and live like Jesus and to love others in a relational community. It is through participating in Sunday school classes, deacons, Growing Your Soul classes, small groups, choir, session, Great Banquet, missions, and ESOL classes that I have felt connected to other people who are also on their prayer-filled journey to learn to live and love like Jesus and to love their neighbor. I am so thankful to be at VPC in a community of seekers, where there are so many opportunities to engage with one another and learn how to live and love like Christ and serve others like Christ.

As Pete says - Love the Lord, love the people, serve the Lord, serve the people.

Your turn: Meditate on Jesus’ words in these two scriptures. How do I “love God”? Am I completely engaged with my heart, soul and mind, seeking the grace of Jesus and the power of the Holy Spirit, or am I restricted by my human limitations? What are some of the current obstacles to my engaging in relationships with others, reaching out to connect, to love and serve others?

ESOL 202 Grammar morning class –
Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and these things will be added to you.

Matthew 6:33 © Adron 14
Sunday—July 9
Matthew 22:37-40
He said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.” This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: “You shall love your neighbour as yourself.” On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.’

Monday—July 10
Proverbs 3:5-6:
“Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.” (NIV) “Trust God from the bottom of your heart; don’t try to figure out everything on your own. Listen for God’s voice in everything you do, everywhere you go; he’s the one who will keep you on track.” (The Message)

Reflection by—Betty Price
Let me put this right up front: I’m single…never married…and I’ll be 70 in August. Wow! How on earth did I end up in this situation? Certainly not a place I ever dreamed I would be. “Old maid”, “abnormal”, “poor thing”, “must be something wrong” – I’ve heard, or at least thought, all these things about myself. According to this couples, world, I really don’t belong. And I’ve often felt that.

But God’s perspective is something so totally different. All of us, his children, are “fearfully and wonderfully made”, carefully crafted in the womb with a unique imprint of his divine nature. He has a plan for each of us that no one else can fulfill. Proverbs 3:5-6 tells us that when we trust in the Lord with everything we’ve got, recognize he is in control and stop trying to understand everything, he will guide our lives. He wants us to be “fully us”, the way he designed us.

God has put me on a journey of discovering how blessed I am with singleness. This requires a commitment every bit as much as marriage – a commitment to the unique role God has given me, a cherishing of the people that are part of this blessing. The commitment is different, and it won’t meet my needs in the way a spouse would. I’m learning to stop comparing my single blessing to that of a married blessing. My “road less traveled” may have bumps and ruts, but so does even the “perfect marriage”. My job is to seek out ways to deepen and enhance my unique blessing.
**Your turn:** Do you ever feel like you don’t belong? Why? Is there something special about you that God may be trying to use?

Think about the unique life-path God has put you on. Where do you see him working to transform you more and more into his image? What can you learn about God’s unique provision for you?

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**Tuesday—July 11**

*Romans 5:1-6 (NIV)*

Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we boast in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.

**Reflection by—Amy Lochhaas**

It’s all about the Holy Spirit.

People who were filled in the Bible included a few Old Testament people…Daniel comes to mind at first…then a few others in the gospels like John the Baptist but mostly in Acts and Romans and beyond including the Disciples, Paul, of course, and Stephen was even mentioned as being “full of the Holy Spirit”.

We are told that our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19), that the Holy Spirit can deliver God’s messages to us with power and conviction (1 Thessalonians 1:5), and also through severe suffering, joy is given (1 Thessalonians 1:6).

I believe it is an ongoing practice as described in Jude 19-21, where they talk of continuing to “pray in the Holy Spirit, and to keep in God’s love”. The closer our walk with God, the more in communion we feel with him, and the more we know ‘His voice’, as the Holy Spirit moves in our lives. He is our Advocate. The Spirit of Truth goes out from the Father and works into our lives (John 15:26).
The results of my times of closeness to God through the grace of the Holy Spirit in my life, have shown up in my life as such:

- I notice a closer relationship with others as I put effort into staying present and not living in the past or the future.
- I have a giddy feeling like that of a carefree child.
- I feel joyful and grateful for everything in my life…the bad and the good.
- I have the ability to let go of anger or mistrust which usually is a task to do.

It’s a more peaceful way of living. I feel lighter.

I love these specific verses in Romans because we can all relate to it. Not so much as maybe the disciples in the first century, but we have all felt suffering and worked through it showing our perseverance. We teach our children about character and feel it ourselves as we work through hardships, and can be an example of hope to them. All this is a fantastic example of what Christ can do in us…not done of our own accord.

We are the temple of the Holy Spirit and it is our purpose here on earth to be living examples of Christ’s love. The closer we are to God, and the more we feel that longing to be in communion with him, the more the Holy Spirit has a chance to flow through us.

Think wind, people.

Prayer: Thank you, God, for loving me so much that you would want to always be in communion with you. I truly have nothing to fear because you are for me. I have been created for the purpose of serving and honoring you, and in doing so, I live with joy knowing my life here is just the beginning of what’s ahead. Help me to be in constant communion with the Holy Spirit and to feel the flow of you in my life. Amen.

Wednesday—July 12
Psalm 23

The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want.

He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters; he restores my soul.

He leads me in right paths for his name’s sake.

Even though I walk through the darkest valley,
I fear no evil; for you are with me;  
your rod and your staff—they comfort me.

You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;  
you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.  
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life,  
and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD my whole life long.

**Reflection by—Duo Wang**

Why Psalm 23:4 is my favorite verse: It is pretty common that we deal with various stresses or pain or fear when health is a problem, job is insecure, or there is the loss of a loved one.

God is our shepherd. The shepherd is able to provide his sheep with food and water, and protect them from wild animals which would put the lives of the sheep at risk. In this paragraph, Jesus claims a role that he is truly our protector, our comforter and our guide. From the two tools mentioned: rod and staff, I gain the great comfort, confidence and hope in my daily life because I know our Lord leads me through valleys, as the beginning of Psalm 23:4 describes.

**Your Turn:** How are you comforted by the idea of God being your shepherd? Do you live your life as if God were your protector and provider?

**Thursday—July 13**

*John 16:33*

“I have told you these things so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take courage; I have overcome the world.”

**Reflection by—Phyllis Swenson**

When I reflect upon this Bible verse, it reminds me of the woman with the issue of blood who touched the hem of Jesus’ robe and was healed instantly. Jesus felt healing energy flow from his body and when he discovered the frightened woman, who was brave enough to touch his robe in faith, he comforted her with his compassion. He called her “Daughter” and said that her faith had made her whole and to go in peace.

Those of us who follow Jesus are sons and daughters of the Most High God. But sometimes the trials and tribulations of this world can seem too
much to bear. Some of us are in denial at the enormity of life’s problems. I hear many people deny the sins of the world by making statements such as, “It’s all good.” By saying, “it’s all good”, we deny life’s brutal reality and negate what Jesus said about tribulation. The reason Jesus came to a dark world was to die on the cross and rise from the dead in order to overcome the world and to give us life. He did not die because everything was good, but because of all the sin and evil in the world. Jesus said in Mark 10:18 that no one is good except God alone.

My late husband, Warren, used to quote Henry David Thoreau by saying that the mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation. That is true. But the other side of the coin is that we can turn our quiet desperation over to Jesus where he will help us to carry our cross and overcome the world in triumph like he did. Jesus said in Matthew 11:30 that his yoke is easy and his burden is light. The Psalmist says that weeping may last through the night, but joy comes in the morning. Jesus came so that we will all have life and have it abundantly. God wants us to be joyful because the joy of the Lord is our strength (Nehemiah 8:10). Psalm 37:4 reminds us that if you take delight in the Lord, he will give you the desires of your heart. The Catholic theologian and philosopher, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, gave us a true definition of joy when he said, “Joy is the infallible sign of the presence of God.” No matter what tribulations we face in life, we are victors, not victims, in Jesus Christ who has overcome the world.

**Your turn:** Think of the many ways Jesus has walked you through the storms of life and delivered you peacefully into new beginnings through the miracle of his grace.

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**Friday—July 14**

*Hebrews 13:5*

Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.

**Reflection by—Bob Baker**

**Never!**

Yesterday I planted a young maple tree by the creek behind our house. It was special because I grew it from a seed and nurtured it for several years. This morning the creek massively flooded its banks during a torrential rain—a rare occurrence. When I looked out I couldn’t see my tree. I wondered if it had been swept away in the raging current. When the water subsided, I walked down to the creek. And here’s what I saw…
The tree, though stripped of some leaves, was still there! In that moment, I heard His’ still, quiet voice remind me, “Never!” He was referring to this verse, which has for years been an anchor for my soul because:

- “I” is who loves me so much more than I can even understand!
- “Leave you, forsake you” means that even in the midst of the floods of life, in which I find it hard to see him, he is still there!
- “Never” is the word that ties who our Lord is with what he promises. It’s absolute because God is not capable of lying!

As I reflect on my life experiences, I recall that my floods have involved painful losses. But I know that as I cared for this tree from a seed, he is doing the same for me. I may not understand why the floods or why the timing of them. But, I know that no floods of painful circumstances or even those resulting from my own unwise choices can separate me from him and his love. NEVER!

**Your Turn:** As you reflect on the trials in your life, how did he let you know that he was with you and would not forsake you?

In addition to this promise, he also promises that if we draw near to him, he will draw near to us (James 4:8). What is a way that you can draw near to him in adversity?
Saturday—July 15
Isaiah 40:28-31

Have you not known? Have you not heard?
The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth.
He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable.
He gives power to the faint, and strengthens the powerless.
Even youths will faint and be weary, and the young will fall exhausted;
but those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength,
they shall mount up with wings like eagles,
they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.
Sunday—July 16

Acts 2:42-47

They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

Monday—July 17

Hebrews 13:1-2

Let mutual love continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it.

Reflection by—Robin Portman

I just LOVE to entertain! There is nothing that brings me more joy than to have a houseful of friends and loved ones, sharing food, music and fun. I love to make and serve great recipes, and I even enjoy cleaning up---reflecting on fond memories of the party as I put everything away.

It is fun and easy to entertain my friends and family. But how often do I show the same hospitality to someone I do not know well? Or, even a total stranger? Somehow it is not so easy, even a bit scary. What if I make a bad impression on them, or they do not accept my greetings or invitations? I have to admit, I used to let my fears get the best of me.

But, a few years ago I realized that strangers aren't strangers after I take the time to genuinely reach out, talk to them, engage with them. I find joy in the simple conversations with people who I do not know well---and they soon become fast friends. Just two months ago, I bumped into a business acquaintance who I did not know well, but I somehow sensed that she needed a friendly conversation. Turns out, she had just broken up after a long-term relationship, she was starting a new job, had some anxiety, and really appreciated some warm wishes and prayers. I invited her to my home for dinner, as I knew my husband was hosting a small dinner party for my birthday the next day. To my surprise, my
acquaintance accepted joyfully—and she has quickly become a new, good friend. To this day, she mentions how much that first conversation meant to her!

I believe that we all show the love of Christ within us when we give love and hospitality to friends and family---but it is especially true when we give that love to mere acquaintances and even strangers who need us. Who knows, they could be angels!

**Your turn:** How hospitable are you? How well do you give love and hospitality to friends, family, acquaintances and even strangers?

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**Tuesday—July 18**

*Matthew 24:35*
Wednesday—July 19
Matthew 11:28

Thursday—July 20
Romans 8:31-39 (NIV)

What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written:

“For your sake we face death all day long;
we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.”

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither
angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Reflection by—Amy Lochhaas

The power of Christ and the breadth of what the Holy Spirit covers, resonates with me as I read this scripture.

In times of trouble, those moments can be the turning point of some people’s faith in Christ. They may ask, if God is so loving, why could he let something like this happen to me? I have had some difficult obstacles happen to me in my life that were significant, so I can relate. But to me, these verses are the realization that no matter what hardships we go through in life, that our fallback doesn’t need to be the fear that God has abandoned us. Instead, these things do happen because we live in a fallen world. When they do happen, God is there for us. He doesn’t create these things willy nilly to happen to poor unsuspecting people just to get back at us for something we may have done. He loves us too much for that. When things do happen, he is there with outstretched arms to help us through the pain.

Paul reminds us that NOTHING can separate us…it’s actually IMPOSSIBLE to be apart from the love of Christ. We can feel assurance and not fearful with these words of God through Paul’s writing. He covers it all:

- Neither death nor life (covering our eternal life)
- Nor angels or demons (covering influences in our lives)
- Nor present or future (covering all time!)
- Nor any powers (just in case anything else hasn’t been already covered!)
- Nor height or depth (covering all logical/mathematical measurements of any kind)
- Nor anything else in ALL creation (covering any other living thing ever created)

NOTHING can separate us… It keeps me humble to think of this. It’s only through God’s grace that this is. It’s nothing to do with what we’ve done or haven’t done. It’s a gift to us from our loving Father. This gift comes to us in the form of the Holy Spirit working through our lives which is like a fresh breeze.
I can’t help but think of the Chopin Fantasy-Impromptu in C# minor. It’s full of sixteenth notes. Flowy runs, beautiful melodies which grab you to the core. I’ve recently been listening to all the versions of recordings of the many artists who have tackled this monster of a piece. In my humble opinion, it’s the musicians who ‘play the music’ instead of trying to be precise with all those notes which makes the difference. When you ‘play the music’, the flow is evident. It’s the way the music falls into place and how it should sound. You don’t hear the pedal stopping the musical phrases, and miss where the crescendos and pianissimo sections should be. Instead, it’s the long beautiful phrases that outline the piece. You can see the big picture, and it’s a relief to hear. It’s as it should be.

I can recognize that feeling and illustration in our spiritual lives. If we are so focused on the specific things that encompass our lives, all the busy sixteenth notes, we won’t ever see the beautiful melodies God has planned for us, the way our music is supposed to flow. It’s not as compared to what it should be when the Holy Spirit intertwines in our lives and becomes one with the direction our lives should be going in according to God’s plan.

Let’s make music together by becoming like Christ… Together… for the World.

**Your turn:** Are you playing the music or focusing on perfection? How busy is your life? What do you need to let go of to have room for God’s melody to play in your life?

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**Friday—July 21**

*Romans 8:28*

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

**Reflection by—John Hall**

To me, the great assurance of this wonderful statement starts in TRUST (“And we know”). Paul speaks from his own deep certainty of faith, despite starting his life spiritually as “an enemy of Christ”. I cannot image any way Paul, or anyone…myself certainly included…can come to such a “WE KNOW” profession without the grace given to us by our Lord’s Holy Spirit.
The **reassurance** of the second phrase, (“In ALL THINGS”) is, to me, that God is TRUSTWORTHY in every aspect of our life. In good and bad times, in joy and sorrow, sickness and health…. No matter what, I believe our Lord is there with us.

The **promise** of the third phase (God works for the good) is that our Lord is active (WORKS FOR) in and through his creation, us, and that true to his character of GOODNESS he works for the good…..IN ALL THINGS.

The scope of God’s will for goodness is UNIVERSAL (“Those who love him”). Jesus calls to everyone who will listen, and accept his purposeful Love, Redemption and Saving Grace.

There are two “mysteries” in this passage. The first is that God’s good is in all things. We remember…. Hitler’s horrors, deaths of innocents, tragic illnesses and disease…. And ask ourselves “How can a loving God be in these things?” The second is “called according to His purpose”. Do you, like me, wonder at the concepts of “election” or “predestination”? As the years pass, I find myself worrying less about understanding the mysteries of our God…..and more about living out what I know God calls us all to as his disciples (remember “Love the Lord, love the people, Serve the Lord, serve the people”?!).

How to end? “Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so”. Our God reigns!

**Your turn:** Which of these concepts is the easiest for you to grasp? Which is the most difficult? How is your life impacted by your belief or unbelief that God is working through the good and bad of your life?

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**Saturday—July 22**

*Hebrews 10:24-25 (NIV)*

And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

*Ebre 10:24-25 Haitian Creole Version (HCV)*

Se pou nou yonn veye sou lòt pou yonn ka ede lòt gen renmen nan kè nou, pou yonn ka ankouraje lòt nan fè sa ki byen.

Pa pran egzanp sou moun ki pran abitid pa vin nan reyinyon nou yo. Okontrè, se pou yonn ankouraje lòt fè sa, koulye a pi plis pase anvan, paske nou wè jou Seyè a ap pwoche.
Reflection by—Emmy and Wood Parker

In March 2012 we went to Haiti to see firsthand the work of the Community Coalition for Haiti (CCH) that VPC had been supporting for years. CCH was providing excellent healthcare services, animal programs and support for communities in Haiti. While we were there two directors, i.e., principals, from two different schools met with us. They told us that their primary need was to have someone teach their teachers how to teach. They asked us to come back to Haiti and provide professional development for their teachers. We developed a proposal for the CCH Board, and they agreed to support our efforts. We chose a verse from Scripture – Hebrews 10:24-25 - as our theme verse. Our newly formed team hoped that it would help us to “spur one another to love and good deeds” as well as “encourage” the Haitians that we would be working with.

Our team encourages these Haitian educators by searching with them to find ways to meet the educational needs of their students even while they face difficult working conditions and very few resources. These faithful Christians, whom we have grown to love over the years, have taken risks in their teaching and have tried new techniques that our team has taught them. They have learned much, and their Christian faith and desire to improve as educators encourage us.

The in-country CCH staff – whom we also love greatly - encourage us and spur us on to keep coming back time after time. They keep our teams healthy and safe, and they make it all possible with their cooking, prayers, transportation, security and tireless translating.

We quickly realized that serving the Haitian people in this way was going to involve trips to Haiti four times a year. The importance of the verse deepened. Now our team recognizes that those who do not travel to Haiti with us are exceedingly important to us and this ministry. We are thankful for the people who travel to Haiti with us, of course. We are also thankful for the people who choose to be a part of this ministry by encouraging our teams and spurring us on to love and good deeds as they “do their part” here in the States. Every prayer offered, each child sponsored, each goat, turkey, book or Haitian art purchased, each little dress made, each question asked, each email sent to us is a great encouragement. CCH would not be doing the work it is doing without this support from many people, not only in northern Virginia but also in many other States. Praise God!
We are thankful for this verse that inspires and commands our teams to encourage and spur others on. We are appreciative of those who encourage us. Let’s all keep encouraging and spurring each other on!

**Your turn:** Who encourages you? Who do you encourage? How are you using your gifts, talents and passions to serve God and others?

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**Sunday—July 23**

2 Samuel 9

David asked, ‘Is there still anyone left of the house of Saul to whom I may show kindness for Jonathan’s sake?’ Now there was a servant of the house of Saul whose name was Ziba, and he was summoned to David. The king said to him, ‘Are you Ziba?’ And he said, ‘At your service!’ The king said, ‘Is there anyone remaining of the house of Saul to whom I may show the kindness of God?’ Ziba said to the king, ‘There remains a son of Jonathan; he is crippled in his feet.’ The king said to him, ‘Where is he?’ Ziba said to the king, ‘He is in the house of Machir son of Ammiel, at Lo-debar.’ Then King David sent and brought him from the house of Machir son of Ammiel, at Lo-debar. Mephibosheth son of Jonathan son of Saul came to David, and fell on his face and did obeisance. David said, ‘Mephibosheth!’ He answered, ‘I am your servant.’ David said to him, ‘Do not be afraid, for I will show you kindness for the sake of your father Jonathan; I will restore to you all the land of your grandfather Saul, and you yourself shall eat at my table always.’ He did obeisance and said, ‘What is your servant, that you should look upon a dead dog such as I am?’

Then the king summoned Saul’s servant Ziba, and said to him, ‘All that belonged to Saul and to all his house I have given to your master’s grandson. You and your sons and your servants shall till the land for him, and shall bring in the produce, so that your master’s grandson may have food to eat; but your master’s grandson Mephibosheth shall always eat at my table.’ Now Ziba had fifteen sons and twenty servants. Then Ziba said to the king, ‘According to all that my lord the king commands his servant, so your servant will do.’ Mephibosheth ate at David’s table, like one of the king’s sons. Mephibosheth had a young son whose name was Mica. And all who lived in Ziba’s house became Mephibosheth’s servants. Mephibosheth lived in Jerusalem, for he always ate at the king’s table. Now he was lame in both his feet.
Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

Love never ends. But as for prophecies, they will come to an end; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will come to an end. For we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part; but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end. When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways. For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known. And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.

Write in this heart what you love. What does love look like to you?
**Tuesday—July 25**  
*Psalm 91:1-2*  
You who live in the shelter of the Most High, who abide in the shadow of the Almighty, will say to the Lord, ‘My refuge and my fortress; my God, in whom I trust.’

**Reflection by—Phyllis Swenson**
I recently saw a precious video about a little girl who saw her shadow for the first time and was afraid of it. Whenever her shadow moved with her, she would start to cry. She did not know that what she was seeing was a part of herself. She was terrified because she thought the shadow was a monster chasing after her. Her father patiently and lovingly kept explaining to her that it was only her shadow and that it moved whenever she moved. He let her know that she had nothing to be afraid of. After several minutes of tears and uncertainty, the little girl began to realize that the shadow on the ground was not a monster, but only her reflection playing with her. She then began to laugh and play with her shadow.

Today’s Psalm talks about resting in the shadow of the Almighty. On many occasions, Jesus would tell his disciples to “fear not.” Jesus is the light of the world in whose shadow we find rest and comfort from fear. But for most of us, myself included, it can be difficult to rest in the shadow of the Almighty when we see so much unrest in the world. Many times I find myself struggling to trust God and finding rest beneath his protective wings. Like the little girl who was afraid of her shadow, I find myself afraid of the world and afraid to run to God and find shelter in his shadow. But the Psalmist encourages us to know that God’s faithfulness is our shield and protection.

How do we let go of fearing God’s shadow and allowing ourselves to trust in him? For me, having a relationship with Jesus Christ through prayer is helpful. It’s not always easy for me to allow Jesus to enter every room of my body temple in order to mold, shape and clean house. But when I turn my fears over to God through honest prayer and surrender, I often find myself resting beneath the shadow of His smile. Someone once said that if you have a weak prayer life, you are going to have a high worry life. Jesus promises that if we cast all of our cares upon Him, He will give us rest. For his yoke is easy and his burden is light. God invites us daily to rest beneath His mighty wings without fear and in perfect trust.

**Your turn:** We are made in the image and likeness of God. We are a part of God. Name some ways that God invites you to rest in his shadow in perfect trust.
Wednesday—July 26

*Psalm 62:1-2*

Truly my soul finds rest in God; my salvation comes from him. Truly he is my rock and my salvation; he is my fortress, I will never be shaken.

**Reflection by—Mark Pella**

Pastor Pete talks about the three T’s: Treasure, Talent and Time. Just one glance at this church’s budget and it’s clear that we’re blessed with Treasure. Listening to our music program shows that real Talent abounds here. Still, there’s one area that it seems still we could use some work: Time.

This congregation is very generous with food to deliver for Our Daily Break (ODB) and we always seem to have enough people to sort and bag. But this is a three-step process and the one area where we could use more help is delivering to the individuals or families on Sunday after church. This is the “time” issue. Now I’m not sure if the problem we’re talking about is clock time or if the real issue is “face time” —I suspect that many in our congregation aren’t comfortable delivering, knowing that this means putting yourself face to face with those in need. I know, because I once was one such person.

Let me tell you a short story that changed my view of ODB delivery. Mary and I delivered to a small apartment in Annandale where only a young teenage boy was home. He seemed at bit wary opening the door to a couple of strangers, but his mother must have told him to expect us. As we made several trips to carry the half-dozen bags, Mary saw the boy rip into the first bag for something to eat. It was clear that this was more than just the premise that teenage boys can be bottomless pits when it comes to food! There was a different look in his eyes, one that I haven’t forgotten. That look reminded me of the simple fact that I’ve never been THAT hungry in my life; and that if we didn’t take the time to deliver to THAT home, THAT day, then THAT boy’s hunger would have worsened. I felt a mix of joy along with a bit of shame as we returned to the car, because I was hoping to get that “delivery” over with so I could go home and watch a NASCAR race. The realization hit me that this delivery likely was the most important thing I’d do that month, much less that day. That delivery was time well spent indeed.

ODB deliveries provide food to a family that lasts days to a week, but that one experience now feeds my desire to make at least one delivery every
ODB Sunday—NASCAR can wait! So please join us and make time for just one delivery on ODB Sunday to ensure that the mission work is complete—by delivering food to those in need. I’m not asking you to feed thousands with a few loaves, or turn water into wine. Just the minor automotive miracle of using your car, SUV or minivan for one very special trip on ODB Sunday—a trip that just may help YOU more than the people you serve that day. I promise you that it’s time well spent. So thank you—for your TIME.

Your turn: Where is your salvation? In what you do? In what you earn? How would you spend your time differently if you understood that your salvation, your worth, is from God? Would you live your life differently and more generously?

Thursday—July 27
Romans 12:1-2
Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

Reflection by—Lisa Baltzer
For a long time, I assumed that the renewing of my mind would develop gradually as I persevered in Bible study. One day, I realized I had gathered information about God, but I still didn’t know God, I only knew about him. I knew from the Bible that God is love, but I didn’t know God and his love experientially, that is, deep in my heart. I believed God could love others, but I wasn’t sure he could love me. For me, Renewing Prayer Ministry at VPC is mending my head-heart schism.

Renewing Prayer invites Jesus to bring truth to the lies we believe. As the Lord illuminates truth and brings understanding to Scripture, we come to know truth experientially and with certainty.

At one Renewing Prayer session, I was annoyed and frustrated over a circumstance in my life, sensing much stronger emotion than the situation merited. What was upsetting me so much? What was causing my over-the-top negative response?
Renewing Prayer ministers encouraged me to let my mind connect to an earlier time I had felt those same emotions. As I revisited a memory, I discovered that I believed that I was powerless, that I had no voice, that I didn’t count. The facilitator then invited Jesus to reveal his truth to me. Receiving Jesus’ truth is a safe and holy place -- a place of quiet openness, surrounded by the Lord’s gentle love.

His truths to me that day: I created you. I love you. What I say is the truest thing about you. What others say or do have no impact on your significance and value. Learn to let my peace and calm fill you in challenging situations.

In those moments of hearing from the Lord, my strong emotions were replaced by Christ’s peace and calm. The Holy Spirit personalized truth I knew from Bible study -- that God loves me -- moving it from my mind down into my heart. I now knew experientially my identity and my value in Christ.

Being transformed by the renewing of my mind is a partnership. My part is to open myself to God through Bible study and spiritual disciplines such as Renewing Prayer. Then, the power of the Holy Spirit, in his way and in his time, will accomplish in me what I cannot do for myself.

**Your turn:** What are your pet peeves? What are your triggers? What relationships are harmed by hurt, anger or unforgiveness? How would your life be different if you were freed from these concerns?

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<th>Top 10 Verses on Worry:</th>
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<td>Romans 8:31</td>
<td>Acts 3:6-8</td>
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Friday—July 28
Psalm 37:4

Take delight in the Lord,
and he will give you the desires of your heart.

Psalm 37:4
Saturday—July 29

*Matthew 5:16*

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

**Reflection by—Scott Slocum**

It is remarkable how under the right circumstance a Bible verse comes alive. And here’s why I am so excited about this. The Ignite! Campaign fuels our efforts to reach out to those in need in Vienna, and what we do for our neighbors, enriches us. We are blessed to be a blessing. Jesus is Lord. Scripture is our authority. And EVERYONE, EVERYONE is called into discipleship. We are told to “Love the Lord, and love our neighbors as ourselves.” Our love for our neighbors through our service to them as disciples of Christ enriches our relationship to God.

Our deeper relationship with God enables us to go deeper in service to our neighbors.

Our Outreach program in whatever form it takes is going to touch our worshipping community in untold ways. And if do it right, we – the salt of the earth, the light of the world – will fulfill Jesus’ declaration in Matthew 5:16.

**Your turn:** What do you feel called to do to show love for your neighbors? How does it affect your relationship with God? Are you salty? Are you light? What is bland in your sphere of influence? What is dark, or even dim?

Sunday—July 30

*Romans 12:1-2*

I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.
Rejoice evermore.
Pray without ceasing.
In everything give thanks.
For these things are the will of God in Jesus Christ.