

Prayers of the People

The Cooperative Baptist Fellowship's
Year-long Guide to Prayer

2023-24

SPIRITUAL GUIDES

WELCOME

Greetings! I am so glad this collection of reflections from across the Fellowship has made its way into your hands. My hope is that this little book provides a soft landing place and launching pad for your prayer life in the coming months. This year's theme was inspired by John Phillip Newell's recent book, *Sacred Earth, Sacred Soul: Celtic Wisdom for Reawakening to What Our Souls Know and Healing the World*. As I read Newell's collection of writings on Celtic wisdom, I was struck by its structure. Rather than choosing specific themes of Celtic spirituality around which to write, his collection grew around the lives and stories of Celtic leaders throughout the ages, from St. Brigid of Kildare, the mother saint of Ireland, to the more recent life of author and environmentalist John Muir. Newell's book reminded me of the impact that even just one person can have on our faith—shaping our spirituality, our theology, our ministry and our lives.

For this year's *Prayers of the People*, we invited writers to share with us about someone who has made a significant impact on their lives, a spiritual guide so to speak—one who has shaped their faith, their theology or their prayer life. As you will see, the offerings are wide and varied, ranging from friends and family members to mentors and colleagues, from the characters of Scripture to authors and theologians past and present. As I compiled this year's submissions, I found myself overwhelmingly inspired by the lives and stories held within these pages. These reflections capture the full spectrum of what it means to be human, and what it looks like to follow God. There are stories of profound beauty and staggering loss. There are tales of supportive community as well as experiences of isolation and burnout. There are reflections on doubt and faith, hope and healing, and the gifts and challenges of ministry life around the globe.

But what these reflections share is the unified reminder: Whoever you are, wherever you live and wherever you find yourself on the journey of faith, you cannot do it alone. We all need people and places that offer us support and encouragement, sustenance, challenge, friendship and compassionate care. We all need spiritual companions as we navigate the journey of faith. My prayer is that this beautiful collection of meditations will be a spiritual companion for you in the year ahead.

Meg Lacy Vega

INTRODUCTION

A Word about Structure and Themes

Categories

This year's *Prayers of the People* reflections arrived to us in many different shapes and sizes but a few categories of "Spiritual Guides" emerged among them, which you will notice as you move throughout the book. These categories, color coded by group, are:

- **Biblical Companions:** These reflections include biblical stories and characters from Scripture that inspire each writer in their spiritual life or ministry vocation.
- **Wise Guides:** This category includes reflections on various Christian leaders and thinkers throughout the ages who continue to impact the lives and ministries of CBF field personnel, chaplains and pastors today.
- **Saints Among Us:** These reflections share stories from within our communities, or the everyday saints whose lives of service touch, heal, challenge and transform the world.
- **Learning Faith:** The reflections in this category span a wide variety of spiritual topics, but they in common are spiritual truths passed on to them from the spiritual guides in their lives.

Structure

Contributors were encouraged to write about their spiritual guide(s) in whatever style felt most natural to them. We have taken these reflections and structured them into a similar pattern for you to follow each week. You will notice that each week's reflection includes three parts:

- **Opening Meditation:** This often includes a quote or passage of Scripture to set the tone for the reflection ahead. Read these slowly and allow yourself a moment to settle in before jumping into the body of the reflection.
- **Contributor's Reflection:** Weekly reflections are chock-full of personal stories, spiritual insights and theological wisdom.
- **Pray, Practice, Ponder:** In this closing section, you are invited to offer a prayer, ponder a question or try on a spiritual practice to deepen your connection to the material.

Liturgical Organization

Many portions of this year's *Prayers of the People* do not have a specific theme beyond that of "Spiritual Guides." However, there are themed sections for the liturgical seasons of Advent and Christmas, Lent and Eastertide. We hope this will enable readers to connect the Prayers of the People with themes naturally arising in the life of their local congregation.



ABOUT THE EDITOR

Rev. Meg Lacy Vega is a minister, writer and yoga instructor passionate about helping each of God's children cultivate wholeness and belonging. Meg received a Bachelor of Arts in Religion and Sociology from Samford University and an Master of Divinity from Candler School of Theology at Emory University. Meg has served in churches across the Southeast, from Birmingham to Richmond, and leads spiritual retreats for clergy, women and congregations. Meg is currently a second-year chaplain resident at Dallas Children's Health specializing in pediatric spiritual care.



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HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

Individual Sacred Space

Use these reflections, prayers and activities as a part of your personal devotional rhythm each week. Ponder the weekly reflection at the start of the week, then allow the stories and perspectives to shape your prayer life in the days that follow.

Family Prayer

Prayers of the People is a great tool for teaching children and teens about prayer and introducing them to mission and ministry around the globe. You can read each week's reflection as a family, then use the Pray, Practice, Ponder section to deepen your experience through conversation and activities. Encourage kids to continue their exploration through research on the prayers, people groups and practices mentioned.

Small Groups

Create a short-term small group focused on themes around missions or prayer, or incorporate weekly reflections into a church leadership gathering (like a Missions or Ministry Council). Use the prayers here to prompt conversation in a Sunday school class or as a guide for a weekly prayer meeting.

In Worship

Create a monthly "Mission Moment" in your worship, sharing a story or prayer request from one of the weekly reflections; or use it as a prompt for children's sermon each week. This year's guide follows the broad strokes of the Revised Common Lectionary, making it easy to incorporate the prayers seasonally, during Advent, Lent and Easter.

Children and Youth

Mission teachers of *Pathlight* can use the guide to make connections with the lessons they are teaching. They can share prayers from particular CBF field personnel, places around the world, or teach on particular prayer practices. Share copies of *Prayers of the People* with parents and families of children. See www.cbf.net/pathlight for more information about this free weekly download.

OCTOBER 1

Lola Pada: Leading from the Margins

Leah Boling

Chaplain, Director, Air National Guard
Chaplain Corps, Maryland



■ *Saints Among Us*

Matthew 25:40

Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did it to me.

When people ask me about my journey to become a chaplain, I always think back to Lola Joaquina Pada, a cherished member of our church in Southern Philippines. Lola is a Filipino term for “grandmother.” While I was not related to her by blood, we called her Lola Pada out of respect and love. She also happened to be my parents’ Ninang (“godmother” in Filipino) at their wedding.

As a young girl of about six-years-old, I used to play on our church playground across from the SBC-owned hospital. I often saw Lola Pada dressed modestly and neatly, carrying a Bible and going into the hospital. Curious, I asked my mother about her and learned that she was a volunteer chaplain who visited patients and their families, offering comfort, prayer and sometimes even singing with them. That was the first time I had heard the word “chaplain.”

I was captivated by Lola Pada’s dedication and compassion and I would sometimes watch her minister to the patients and their families. Her example left a lasting impression on my heart, and I knew I wanted to follow in her footsteps, bringing comfort and compassion to those in need.

I forgot about Lola Pada until I attended seminary and considered what type of ministry to pursue. I reflected on my childhood memories of Lola Pada and the impact she had

on my life. I believe without her knowing, she planted a seed in my heart to follow a calling in chaplaincy.

I sometimes wonder if Lola Pada had been a man, would I have shown the same level of interest and curiosity. I'm not sure. But I'm grateful I had the opportunity to witness her dedication and love for those she served. She empowered me to pursue my calling. She made it possible for me to be the chaplain I was meant to be. I hope I can be a positive example for other girls and women, just as Lola Pada was for me. I want to model what it means to be a woman of faith with a calling and a purpose. To all the "Lola Padas" in the world, thank you for your dedication and for inspiring others to follow in your footsteps.

PRAY, PRACTICE, PONDER

Today, ponder who in your life has shaped your sense of calling, values or purpose. Recall even those you may have "forgot about" whose ministry impacted you at a young age. What are their names? What do you remember about their stories? What did their life teach you that you still carry with you? Offer a prayer of thanks for these individuals and how they impacted your life. Spend a moment contemplating how your life now impacts others.

Birthdays this Week:

CH = Chaplain
EP = Engagement Partner
FP = Field Personnel

FPC = Child of Field Personnel
PC = Pastoral Counselor
S = CBF Staff Member

1 Tina Boyles Bailey, Austria (FP)
2 Maha Boulos, Lebanon (FP)
2 Keith Holmes, Emeritus (FP)
3 Jonathan Bailey, Southeast Asia (FP)
3 Matt Norman, Spain (FP)
3 Andrew Finkler, Fayetteville, NC (CH)
4 Michael Metcalf, Statesville, NC (CH)
4 Jana Lee, Larnaca, Cyprus (FP)

5 Kate Blackshear, Austin, TX (CH)
5 Jo Ann Hopper, Emeritus (FP)
5 Gregory Thompson, Oakwood, GA (CH)
5 Christopher Towles, Pfafftown, NC (CH)
5 David White, Murfreesboro, TN (CH)
7 Daniel Brockhan, Cheektowaga, NY (CH)
7 Mary Kaylor (S-North Carolina)
7 Melissa Rodriguez (S-Florida/CBF Global)

OCTOBER 8

Rahab: Lessons on Hospitality

Carson and Laura Foushee

CBF field personnel, Japan



■ *Biblical Companions*

Hebrews 11:31

By faith Rahab the prostitute did not perish with those who were disobedient, because she had received the spies in peace.

Growing up, I (Laura) do not particularly remember learning Rahab's story or her example being highlighted as a "hero(ine) of the faith." The story she is part of is a complex one; she makes her initial appearance in scripture in Joshua 2 as a part of the recounting of Israel's violent siege of Canaan in Israel's quest for the promised land. Her own background as a prostitute, though disputed by some modern scholars, may make her seem like a less-than-noble character. Yet for one who is mentioned just twice in the book of Joshua, she is noted three times in the New Testament. She is among three women mentioned in Jesus' lineage in Matthew 1 and she, along with Ruth, accounts for one of two of Jesus' non-Israelite ancestors. In James and Hebrews, she is heralded alongside those like Abraham who lived lives of both faith and good works. Hebrews 11:31 summarizes the model of her faith in her act of receiving, or welcoming, the spies in peace.

Over the last few years, I have had the opportunity to preach in several Japanese congregations, including delivering one sermon that explores Rahab's example alongside our call as the church to welcome others in peace. Her feminine and ethnic-outsider perspective challenges us to view hospitality not in terms of etiquette or politeness, but as an act of faith that may change both the one giving and the one receiving hospitality. The hospitality Rahab initiates because of her faith in the Lord God is mutually reciprocated to her by Israel as she and her family are saved during the fall of Jericho and taken to live among the Israelites. As she learns to live in a

new culture, Israel is also changed as she becomes a mother in the line that would lead to the Messiah. The risk we take in offering true hospitality is that it may change our lives. The possibility of offering hospitality is that it will become an act of faithful peacemaking.

As a part of our call to cultivate beloved community in Japan, hospitality plays a central role in our day-to-day ministry. Rahab's example has become a challenge for me and our partner congregation to engage in a similar model of mutual hospitality that brings about peace in this world. In working with our church on how to meet the needs of the internationals in our community so that they may lead full, healthy lives as minorities in a homogeneous society, we must be reminded that these relationships are mutual. We, too, can be recipients of hospitality as we open our hearts to one another. Hospitality is sharing meals together, worshiping together, supporting our congregation together and learning from one another. In this best kind of hospitality, no one leaves unchanged by the relationship, and we have a chance to sow a seed of God's peace in the world.

PRAY, PRACTICE, PONDER

What does hospitality mean to you? Is it about etiquette and politeness, or something deeper: "an act of faith that may change both the one giving and the one receiving"? Today, ponder the meaning of hospitality. You may wish to read Rahab's story found in Joshua 2. Can you recall a time when you experienced the kind of hospitality that transformed you, and others involved?

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CH = Chaplain
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8 Melissa Kremer (S-Georgia)
8 Lucas Dorion (S-Alabama)
8 Robb Small, Geismar, LA (CH)
10 Larry Aaron, Danville, VA (CH)
10 Joseph Boone, Cold Spring, KY (CH)
10 Beth Duke, Smithville, TN (CH)
10 Cinda Smith, Batesville, AR (CH)
10 Jay Martin, Woodland Park, CO (PC)
10 Tina Woody, Spartanburg, SC (CH)
11 Randi McFarland, Lynchburg, VA (CH)
11 Laura Senter, Everett, WA (CH)

12 Melba Miller, Gainesville, GA (CH)
12 Terry Newell, Zebulon, NC (PC)
12 Loren (Greg) Sink, Fayetteville, NC (CH)
12 Ben Newell, Emeritus (FP)
13 Bob Newell, Emeritus (FP)
13 Fran Turner, Emeritus (FP)
13 Lloyd Blevins, Fayetteville, NC (CH)
13 John Painter, Charleston, SC (CH)
13 Gretchen Watson, Louisville, KY (PC)
14 Yarelis Montex de Oca, Miami FL (CH)
14 Yuri Sekscinski, Temple, TX (CH)

Dr. Hinson: Creative Spirituality

Cindy Ruble

CBF field personnel, Malaysia



■ *Saints Among Us*

“Who do you want to be and how are you going to get there?” my spirituality professor, Dr. Glenn Hinson, asked.

It is a simple question with a complex answer. “I want 10 pages,” he said. Ten pages?!

That simple question has reverberated throughout my life. “Who do you want to be and how are you going to get there?”

The “how” is always the same—with intentionality.

Growing spiritually takes intentionality

It doesn't just happen

It requires self-reflection

Self-examination

Raw honesty

Commitment to grow and become more

To mirror more each day the One we follow

Day by day

Moment by moment

I remember Dr. Hinson's reading Scripture and a student asking what version of the Bible he was reading. He smiled and said his own. He was reading in Greek and translating it as he read. Dr. Hinson was always intentional in his spirituality, intentional in his scholarship. He modeled a life of faith and nurtured spiritual formation in all his students. We were expected to think, to draw deeply from scripture, to ask questions, to reflect, to journal.

I loved Dr. Hinson's classes. They resonated. I remember reading the book *Prayers* by Michel Quoist in Dr. Hinson's class. Dr. Hinson asked us to read one of Quoist's prayers each day and then journal one of our own. I still have my journal. It is sitting beside

me on my sofa in Malaysia as I write this. I learned to journal prayers about all of life. My favorite way of praying is journaling prayers about ordinary life. Reflecting is good for the soul. It helps me to grow. It also helps me to see when God has answered my prayers because sometimes I miss God's answers.

Dr. Hinson used to start every spirituality class with 10 minutes of silence. Awkward at first; but oh, how I grew to love it! It calms the soul. I didn't grow up in a church tradition that taught or nurtured meditation. Yet Psalm 46:10 tells us to "be still and know that I am God." I now regularly meditate. Meditation is stillness. Meditation is intentional silence that leaves space for God. Joshua 1:8 instructs us to meditate on the book of law day and night, so that we may be careful to do everything written in it and then we will be prosperous and successful. Psalm 1:2 tells us that the person who meditates on the law of God is like a tree planted by streams of water and that that person will prosper. It has been 30 years since I was in Dr. Hinson's class and I still hear his voice in my life. He still guides me. Thank you, Dr. Hinson!

PRAY, PRACTICE, PONDER

As a spiritual practice for today, set a timer for 10 minutes of intentional silence and stillness. Notice any resistance you feel at the thought of this, or any relief you feel at being asked to slow down. As you "leave space for God" in your day through this practice of silence, pay attention to when your mind rushes toward the next thing, or wanders back to what happened yesterday. Rather than criticize yourself for this wandering, simply invite yourself to return to the words of Psalm 46:10: Be still and know that I am God.

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16 Cameron Vickery (S-Fellowship Southwest)
16 Matthew Andrews, Birmingham, AL (CH)
16 Karen Black, Fort Worth, TX (CH)
16 Betty Drayton, Sumter, SC (CH)
16 Greg Greason, Kansas City, MO (CH)
16 Sarah Neeley, Tyler, TX (CH)
16 Monty Self, Little Rock, AR (CH)
17 David Fambrough, Greenville, NC (CH)

18 Hank Demous, Opelika, AL (CH)
18 Jenine Crew (S-CBF Global)
18 Danny Garnett, Irmo, SC (PC)
20 Chuck Hawkins, Pearland, TX (CH)
20 Abby Nichols, Nashville TN (CH)
20 Luke Langston, Durham, NC (CH)
20 Richard Brown, Roanoke VA (CH)
20 Annette Ellard, Louisville, KY (FP)

OCTOBER 22

Rev. Bob Childress: The Man Who Moved a Mountain

Rick Burnette

CBF field personnel, Florida



■ *Wise Guides*

There are few places in America more beloved than the Blue Ridge, rising like an ancient Great Wall across a third of the breadth of the nation. It has the burnished beauty of a country long lived in, of doorsills worn thin, of deep cool footpaths beneath the poplars.

Richard C. Davids, [The Man Who Moved a Mountain](#).

About 20 years ago, while serving with CBF Global Missions in northern Thailand, I was given a book, *The Man Who Moved a Mountain* by Richard C. Davids (1970, Fortress Press). This biography of Rev. Bob Childress (1890-1956) resonated with me on various levels.

Childress was a Presbyterian minister born and raised in southwestern Virginia at the climax of a very violent period in Appalachia during the early 20th century.

From my time in western North Carolina, I gained an awareness of those days, learning about my dad's great grandfather, an infamous moonshiner who shot and killed a revenue officer in 1920. I listened to Granddaddy Crawford's accounts of witnessing drunken brawls. I also heard that the granddad of one of my classmates had been a local fugitive after taking someone's life, although we knew him as a nice, old Holiness preacher.

My 1960s and 70s mountain community bore no resemblance whatsoever to those violent days and I've often pondered how such a change could have happened. The life and ministry of Bob Childress might offer a clue.

Childress' impoverished turn-of-the-century community was soaked in alcohol, overrun by guns, stained by constant violence, unable to support a decent educational system and undermined by fiery, fatalistic preachers who failed to speak out and act against these evils.

Overcoming his own rough period of youth, with encouragement from a young Presbyterian preacher, Childress began to reach out to hurting neighbors while serving as a lay preacher. While in his 30s, he felt the call to be a full-time minister. Despite having only an eighth-grade education, the former blacksmith powered his way through high school and college, finally receiving a degree from Union Seminary in Richmond prior to ordination.

On June 3, 1926, Childress and his family moved to violent and impoverished Buffalo Mountain, not far from where he was raised. The next three decades of ministry were built on his neighborliness, prophetic voice and constructive action.

In addition to preaching and teaching, the pastor reached out to the most violent in the community. He convinced many of the futility of gun culture, persuading them to disarm, thereby gaining friends as well as church leaders from among former rogues. He also made inroads among local alcohol producers and dealers, as well as the uneducated Hardshell Baptist preachers, whose fatalistic theology had helped to perpetuate bloodshed.

To enable more children to attend the Presbyterian school and stimulate the local economy, the pastor advocated for bridges and improved roads. With an abundance of timber on Buffalo, he established a sawmill that employed local men. The pastor also engaged another local asset, rocks, using them to construct six sturdy and attractive stone churches around Buffalo Mountain.

Childress died of a heart attack in 1956, leaving behind a legacy of local cooperation, reduced violence and poverty, improved infrastructure, and a functional educational system, as well as healthy church communities.

While serving in CBF Global Missions' efforts in northern Thailand and southwest Florida, the testimony of Bob Childress has inspired me. His example, in recognition of God's loving presence, illuminates needed integrated and collaborative ministerial approaches in response to physical, spiritual and societal challenges around the world.

PRAY, PRACTICE, PONDER

Sometimes we imagine the physical, the spiritual and the societal as distinct, separate spheres of life and ministry. Yet, Rev. Childress reminds us that they are integrally intertwined – one cannot be separated from the others. Today, pray for CBF's ministry in North Ft Myers, and for CBF's impact on physical, spiritual and societal challenges around the world.

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22 Missy Ward-Angalla, Uganda (FP)
22 Keith Cooper, Lubbock, TX (CH)
22 Paul Robertson, Sugar Land, TX (CH)
23 John Lassitter, Martindale, TX (CH)
23 Carl Price, Lebanon, TN (CH)
23 John Ray Roberts, Blacksburg, VA (CH)
23 Michael Weaver, Beaver, WV (CH)
24 Charles Lumpkin, Greensboro, NC (CH)
24 Wes Monfalcone, Casselberry, FL (CH)

24 Robert Powell, Birmingham, AL (CH)
24 Rick Ruano, North Miami Beach, FL (CH)
25 Doug Cobb, McGregor, TX (CH)
25 Suzie, Southeast Asia (FP)
25 Nina Golston (S-CBF Global)
26 Dean Dickens, Emeritus (FP)
27 Robert Carter, Virginia Beach, VA (CH)
27 Kathy Hoppe, Broken Arrow, OK (CH)
27 Terrell Moye, Palm Beach Gardens, FL (CH)



Janet Jasper: Burnt Offerings

Scarlette Jasper

CBF field personnel, Kentucky and Tennessee

■ *Saints Among Us*

Hebrews 12:1

Since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us.

As I think about the spiritual guides that I have been blessed with in my life, the most spiritual person I have ever known was my mother-in-law, Janet Jasper. As a child, we moved a lot. I did not have a strong family or spiritual foundation. I attended various types of churches throughout my childhood as we traveled throughout the country. We worshiped with Baptists of all types, Methodists, Lutherans, those of the Apostolic Faith, Pentecostals, etc. At other times, we did not attend church at all.

After visiting Kentucky to care for my siblings after my mother had cancer surgery, I met my future husband, Brian. I not only fell in love with him, but also with his mother. Janet was the most beautiful person, inside and out. She truly lived out her faith. She was involved in her home church for more than 45 years, teaching Sunday school, Vacation Bible School and participating in other ministries of the church. More importantly, she lived out her faith at home.

She was a Christian mother and homemaker and the spiritual leader of the family. I can't tell you how many Bibles she had worn out through reading and studying the Word. Janet had a spiritual practice of writing down important scriptures and journaling prayer requests and praises on index cards. Often as part of this spiritual practice she would tear up these cards and burn them as an offering to the Lord on her little grill outside. Her morning Bible study and prayer time were conducted at her kitchen table.

This was her “prayer room.” She suffered from chronic back pain and had to apply heat on her back every morning to be able to move throughout the day; this was done while sitting at the table with her Bible and coffee. Janet modeled spirituality in all aspects of her life; her life itself was a spiritual practice. She was loving, kind, humble, generous, compassionate and non-judgmental. There is no end to the fruits of the Spirit that describe this saint.

Janet has gone home to be with the Lord; but it was not before impacting my life as well as the lives of her children, grandchildren and everyone who was fortunate enough to know her. Janet was my “mom” and mentor and her presence mattered in my life for over 35 years and impacted me tremendously. I strive to be like “Gran” in my personal life as well as in ministry. Her life had ups and downs like all our lives. She always modeled her faith and praised God and sought wisdom through prayer no matter the circumstances, including her last days with us. I was humbled and blessed to be with her during those days. I hope that when my time comes to join the Lord, I can keep my sense of humor and especially my faith as she did. She is loved and missed daily.

PRAY, PRACTICE, PONDER

On November 1st, those who follow the Revised Common Lectionary will celebrate All Saints Day, a time of remembering and honoring the “great cloud of witnesses” who inspire us to faith. Today, as a spiritual practice, make a list of the great cloud of witnesses that surrounds you. Name each of the individuals that came before you who have nurtured your faith, taught you about God, instilled a deep spirituality. After making your list, in honor of Mother Janet, tear it up and burn it as an offering to God. Allow this practice to be your prayer today.

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29 Mike Hutchinson, Emeritus (FP)
29 Sam Scaggs, Dublin, GA (CH)
29 Troy Todd, Norfolk, VA (CH)
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30 Hazel Thomas, Arlington, TX (CH)
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4 Mary Stinson, Berea, KY (CH)
4 Mark Westebbe, Waynesboro, VA (CH)
4 Tarvick Linder, Korea (CH)



Claude Deal: The Water Well

Renée Owen

CBF Director of Chaplaincy and Pastoral Counseling

■ *Saints Among Us*

John 4:13-14 (The Message)

Jesus said, “Everyone who drinks this water will get thirsty again and again. Anyone who drinks the water I give will never thirst—not ever. The water I give will be an artesian spring within, gushing fountains of endless life.”

My first full-time ministry position was as a clinical pastoral education (CPE) chaplain resident at Duke University Medical Center. I was 25-years-old and ready to live out God’s call for my life to be a chaplain. I was excited to be in a place that welcomed me, people who were teaching and mentoring me and trusting me to care for patients, families and staff. I was loving every moment.

And then, about two months in, the exhaustion hit after multiple overnights and in-house on-calls. There were 36-hour days going from overnight on-call, responding to trauma calls, codes, supporting families as their loved ones died. I was also caring for staff who had experienced a tough day. Then I was going into a day of training and group processing.

“How am I supposed to do this? How can I keep up this pace?” I started to question myself. “Is this really what I want to do for the rest of my life? God, what in the world have you called me to do? Surely you can’t think that I can do this, at this pace, forever.”

Thankfully I had a wise, experienced chaplain supervisor, Claude Deal. Not only was Claude wise, experienced and had the ability to call you out and hold you accountable when needed; Claude also had one of the most caring hearts I've ever known.

One day as I was sitting in one-on-one supervision with Claude, I confessed to him my overwhelming, cumulative exhaustion. Claude listened as I unloaded the account of my most recent on-call and shared the heaviness I was carrying after the death of Richard, an 11-year-old boy I had been visiting for weeks in the hospital who had died after a long battle with cancer.

Claude, in his wisdom, with a gentle smile on his face, asked me if I had ever seen a water well. He began describing to me a beautiful well, deep in the ground, with the stone that surrounded the opening to the well, the bucket that hung overhead by a rope, ready to be lowered into the well to draw up fresh, clean water. As I pictured this well in my mind, Claude invited me to imagine that I was using the rope, lowering the bucket into the depths of that well, then pulling on that rope, bringing a bucket of fresh, cool, clean water back up to the surface of the well. He then invited me to imagine that I was then using that water for good, sharing it with others and even drinking from that water myself when I needed it.

Claude asked me to imagine that I was continuing to come back to that well, again and again, to lower the bucket, pull it back up, full of beautiful, clean, cool water, using that water for good. He then paused, looked at me and asked, "Renée, what's going to happen when you go to that well one day, and it hasn't rained?" I thought for a moment, started to answer, then paused and said, "It's going to be completely empty." Again, in his most compassionate voice, Claude looked at me and said, "Renée, it has to rain."

For the past 28 years, this image of a well has sustained me through many tough days. Claude's words of wisdom and invitation to imagery gave me a lifeline to sustain my ministry and to live out my call to serve. How are we refilling our wells? When we lower our buckets, into the depths of our wells, are we pulling up life-giving water? Or are our wells bone dry?

Jesus once invited a Samaritan woman to drink from the life-giving water of a well. God invites us to care for one another, to uplift, encourage and empower one another so that together we can "make it rain," refill our wells, live out our call to serve, and continue to share God's love and the hope of Christ to renew God's world.

Go now and make it rain.

PRAY, PRACTICE, PONDER

Today, ponder the following questions: What is the amount of water in the well of your life? Is your well full, or bone dry? What do you need today? Is it that you need to lower the bucket and pour some of your water out into the lives of others? Is it that you need to take time to refill your well with the life-giving water Jesus offers? Allow these moments of reflection to be your prayer today.

Birthdays this Week:

CH = Chaplain
EP = Engagement Partner
FP = Field Personnel

FPC = Child of Field Personnel
PC = Pastoral Counselor
S = CBF Staff Member

5 Cameron Gunnin, San Antonio, TX (CH)
6 Kyle Fishbaugh, Fayetteville, NC (CH)
6 Gloria Hopper, Monroe NC (CH)
6 Meghan McSwain, Winston-Salem, NC (CH)
6 Jeff Lee, Macedonia (FP)
7 Craig Butler, Sugar Land, TX (CH)
7 Pat Coley, Talofofo, Guam (CH)
7 Darrell Hudson, Georgetown, TX (CH)
8 Evan Sieges, Burlington, NC (CH)
8 Mark Weiler, Greeley, CO (CH)
8 Jay Kieve (S-CBF Global)
9 Debby Bradley, Owensboro, KY (CH)

9 Charles Seligman, San Antonio, TX (CH)
9 Audrey Wilson, Durham, NC (CH)
10 Kevin Crowder, Fredericksburg, VA (CH)
10 Holly Johnson, St. Petersburg, FL (CH)
10 Ralph Mikels, Jr., Seymour, TN (CH)
10 Brooke, Southeast Asia (FP)
11 Phoebe Khano, 2010, Belgium (FPC)
11 Scott Blair, Bethesda, VA (CH)
11 Dana Durham, Sacramento, CA (CH)
11 Bert Sanders III, Winston-Salem, NC (CH)
11 Steve Sweatt, Birmingham, AL (PC)

NOVEMBER 12

The Book of Ruth: Finding Ourselves in the Story

Karen

CBF field personnel, North Africa



■ *Biblical Companions*

Ruth 2:8-10

Then Boaz said to Ruth, “Now listen, my daughter, do not go to glean in another field or leave this one, but keep close to my young women. Keep your eyes on the field that is being reaped and follow behind them. I have ordered the young men not to bother you. If you get thirsty, go to the vessels and drink from what the young men have drawn.”

When I was preparing for pastoral ministry in my church in Northern Africa, I realized I needed some additional practice with using the simple past tense in French. It’s a tense that’s mostly used for telling legendary tales, for talking formally about events in history and, as it happens, for telling Bible stories. While my classmates skimmed the surface of this almost irrelevant tense, I asked my teachers for a bit more time with it. After all, I’m going to need to know how to read Scripture in French. So, my teacher, an Islamic scholar, asked me to choose a Bible story to read out loud to him as practice. I chose the story of Ruth.

Ruth has been an important character for me for a few years now. I find myself coming back to her story again and again, comforted by the familiar drama and Ruth’s sacrificial devotion to Naomi. I find courage in the story of an outcast Moabite woman who finds a warm welcome in the heart of Israel. I appreciate how Naomi wrestles honestly with her grief and hunger. I resonate with how Ruth seems to be on guard for threats from unknown field workers. And sometimes I chuckle at the antics of the men in the city gate. But the character who inspires me the most is Boaz.

Boaz was out-of-town when Ruth and Naomi showed up on his land. When Ruth asked permission to glean from the servants who were in charge, they spoke on behalf of their master and extended grace to her. When Boaz comes and sees her, learns her

story and assesses her risk, he takes special precautions to protect her and provide for her. In every interaction with Boaz, he shows us that he is a man of honor, integrity and kindness. But beyond that, Boaz has cultivated a culture of hospitality and welcome that becomes a blessing to Ruth and Naomi and certainly to countless others in Bethlehem.

I don't often find myself in Ruth's shoes. My life has never been upended by drought, war, widowhood or hunger. I pray to never know the depth of Naomi's grief and agony. But I can easily imagine myself as Boaz in this story. How am I cultivating a culture of welcome? Do others know me to be a gracious landowner? How do I use my resources to bless those who are hurting? How far am I willing to go to be an agent of redemption?

PRAY, PRACTICE, PONDER

The story of Ruth is familiar to many of us. If you do not know this brief story, consider reading the four chapters of the book of Ruth before meditating on this question: With whom do you identify in the story of Ruth? Maybe you see yourself in Ruth, the foreigner and outcast who finds a surprising welcome. Or perhaps it is Naomi with whom you most resonate—as she wrestles honestly and openly with her grief and hunger. Or, it could be Boaz, the person of privilege in the story who uses his security and resources to protect and bless others. Ponder which character in this story you most identify with, and how God may be inviting you to play a part in welcome and blessing.

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12 John Lepper, Crestwood, KY (PC)
13 Devita Parnell (S-CBF Global)
13 Matthew Posten, Louisville, KY (CH)
13 Gail Smith, Hillsborough, NC (CH)
13 Cindy Wallace, Sterling, VA (CH)
13 Shelia Earl, Emeritus (FP)
13 Earl Martin, Emeritus (FP)
14 Katie Anderson, Louisville, KY (CH)
15 Elizabeth Eaton, Fredericksburg, VA (CH)
15 David Simmons, Harrisburg, PA (CH)
15 Eric Whitfield, Cheyenne, WY (CH)

16 Andrew Stubblefield, Pensacola FL (CH)
16 Margaret Harvey, Austin, TX (CH)
16 Gloria Hopper, Monroe NC (CH)
16 Edwin Hollis, Odenville, AL (CH)
16 Anita Snell Daniels, Emeritus (FP)
16 Lori Gooden (S-Fellowship Southwest)
17 Elizabeth Thompson, Littleton, CO (PC)
17 Benjamin Burton, Louisville, KY (CH)
18 Jody Long (S-Georgia)
18 Elaine Greer, Frankfort, KY (CH)
18 Kristin Long, Richmond, VA (PC)

St. Francis of Assisi: Inspiration for Ministry

Janée Angel

CBF field personnel, Belgium



■ *Wise Guides*

I grew up in Teutopolis, Illinois, current population of 1,644. The German/Dutch town is so small that it is still considered a village. Its only church, St. Francis of Assisi Roman Catholic Church, sits on the highest piece of land. As a child there, I attended the elementary school which was previously a private Catholic school. I was taught by nuns, attended first communion rehearsals with my classmates during the school day and during recess, played in the park that was decorated with statues of the crucifix and St. Francis himself.

By the time I took my first church history class in seminary, I felt as though Francis and I had become friends. He intrigued me. I almost always pictured him, carved in stone, with a bird resting on his hand. He seemed one with nature and friendly to me as a child who had grown comfortable playing around his statue.

I wrote a paper on him in that church history class. I learned about how he heard the voice of God calling him to rebuild his church. I treasured his humility as he denied things of this world and took a vow of poverty. I liked his friendship with Clare. His prayer of peace read, “Lord, make me an instrument of thy peace. Where there is hatred, let me sow love,” set to music, is still a song that I find myself humming when things are too quiet.

Moving to Belgium with CBF in 2004 afforded me the opportunity to visit Assisi, Italy. All alone, with my journal and Bible in hand, I visited the basilica that bears Francis’ name. I sat quietly in a back pew, tuning into my thoughts, as tourists shuffled in and out.

Walking just a bit outside the activity of Assisi, I found the church where Francis heard Jesus’ voice in 1206. It was empty. Not the average destination for most visitors. It still looked a bit in ruins. Still, surrounded by olive trees, it held a rustic charm. It was simple, unlike the basilicas in town.

Francis said, “for it is in giving that we receive.” That’s what he did. That’s what we do as we serve the Lord. We give of our time. We give of our money. We give of our families. We give of our homes. And we receive too. We receive joy in the obedience. We receive peace

in helping. And sometimes we receive new sisters and brothers in Christ who will share eternity with us.

I brought a two-inch delicately carved wooden statue of Francis home with me. He still stands near my books today. When I glance his way, he is still a reminder that “may I not so much seek to be loved as to love, for it is in giving that we receive, it is in pardoning that we are pardoned and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.”

PRAY, PRACTICE, PONDER

The Prayer of St. Francis

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace;
where there is hatred, let me sow love;
where there is injury, pardon;
where there is doubt, faith;
where there is despair, hope;
where there is darkness, light;
and where there is sadness, joy.
O Divine Master,
grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console;
to be understood, as to understand;
to be loved, as to love;
for it is in giving that we receive,
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
and it is in dying that we are born to Eternal Life.
Amen.

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19 Will Kinnaird, Keller, TX (CH)

19 T. Nancy Cox, Georgetown, KY (CH)

20 Chuck Christie, Loganville, GA (CH)

20 Kevin Park, Bellingham, WA (CH)

20 Lindsy Hines (S-CBF Global)

21 Fred Madren, Indianapolis, IN (CH)

21 Janet Pittman, Emeritus (FP)

22 Becky Smith, Emeritus (FP)

23 Julie Walton, Richmond, VA (CH)

23 Heather Hurd, San Antonio TX (CH)

23 Dihanne Moore (S-CBF Global)

24 Will Barnes, Savannah, GA (CH)

24 Peggy Gold, Durham, NC (CH)

24 Robert Fox (S-Church Benefits Board)

24 Will Manley, Johnson City, TN (CH)

24 David Posey, Medina, TN (CH)

24 Ruth Santos-Ortiz, Atlanta, GA (CH)

25 Gary Batchelor, Rome, GA (CH)

25 Tony Biles, Richfield, NC (CH)

25 Robert Cooke, Selma, NC (PC)

25 Ed Farris, Topeka, KS (CH)

25 Brad Hood, Knoxville, TN (CH)

25 Chan Shaver, Jamestown, NC (CH)

25 Lee Weems, Pineville, LA (CH)

25 Cassandra Wilson, Gahanna, OH (CH)

25 Sue Smith, Fredericksburg, VA (FP)

Eugene Peterson: (re)Reading Scripture

Kim and Marc Wyatt

CBF field personnel, North Carolina



■ *Wise Guides*

The Introduction to the New Testament of *The Message*, states its “contemporary idiom keeps the language of the Message (Bible) current and fresh and understandable.” Eugene Peterson notes that during the project, he realized this was exactly what he had been doing in his 35 years as a pastor, “always looking for an English way to make the biblical text relevant to the conditions of the people.”

This has been our experience too. The words from *The Message* have given us a fresh look at familiar scriptures these past 30 years as we live our lives and serve cross-culturally.

What I (Kim) have come to think of as my life verse, Romans 12:1-2, just jumped off the page as I read it from *The Message*:

So, here’s what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work and walking-around life—and place it before God as an offering. Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for him. Don’t become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You’ll be changed from the inside out. Readily recognize what he wants from you and quickly respond to it. Unlike the culture around you, always dragging you down to its level of immaturity, God brings the best out of you, develops well-formed maturity in you.

And the verses that Marc has found especially meaningful from *The Message* are also from Romans 12, verses 12-16:

Be alert servants of the Master, cheerfully expectant. Don't quit in hard times; pray all the harder. Help needy Christians; be inventive in hospitality. Bless your enemies; no cursing under your breath. Laugh with your happy friends when they're happy; share tears when they're down. Get along with each other; don't be stuck-up. Make friends with nobodies; don't be the great somebody.

The Message continues to be a spiritual guide to us as we seek to become more like Christ.

PRAY, PRACTICE, PONDER

As a spiritual practice, choose a favorite Scripture passage or two and look them up in *The Message* translation (online, if you do not own a hard copy). Notice what strikes you about the different wording Peterson offers. What resonates? What challenges? Choose one passage to write out on a piece of paper and leave it in a place you will see it regularly in the week ahead.

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26 Carol Fletcher, Athens, GA (CH)
26 Randy Penneroud, Anderson, SC (CH)
26 Michael O'Rourke, Durham, NC (CH)
27 Posey Branscome, Charlotte, NC (CH)
27 Macarena Aldape, Emeritus (FP)
27 Shauw Chin Capps (S-CBF Global)
28 Joel Whitley, Emeritus (FP)
28 Ronald King, Midland, GA (PC)
28 Mark Tidsworth, Chapin, SC (PC)
29 Paul Mullen, Clemmons, NC (CH)

30 Rick McClatchy (S-Texas)
30 Jeffrey Ross, Washington, DC (CH)
1 Joseph Farry, Greenville, SC (CH)
1 Amy Jacober, Phoenix, AZ (CH)
1 Claire George, Richmond, VA (CH)
2 Beth Joyner, Rochester, MN (CH)
2 Connie Beemer, Kirkwood, MO (CH)
2 Laura Roach, Morgantown, NC (CH)
2 Daniel Attenberry, Owensboro, KY (CH)

A photograph of a snowy forest. The trees are covered in snow, and the sunlight is filtering through the branches, creating a warm, golden glow. The scene is peaceful and serene.

THE ALREADY AND NOT YET: REFLECTIONS ON THE THEMES OF ADVENT AND CHRISTMAS

December 3-31

The season of Advent means there is something on the horizon the likes of which we have never seen before.... What is possible is to not see it, to miss it, to turn just as it brushes past you. And you begin to grasp what it was you missed, like Moses in the cleft of the rock, watching God's backside fade in the distance. So, stay. Sit. Linger. Tarry. Ponder. Wait. Behold. Wonder. There will be time enough for running. For rushing. For worrying. For pushing. For now, stay. Wait. Something is on the horizon

*From [Through the Advent Door: Entering a Contemplative Christmas](#)
by Jan Richardson*



Waiting: Oswald Chambers

Jenny Jenkins

CBF field personnel, Haiti

■ *Wise Guides*

When God gives you a vision and darkness follows, wait. God will bring the vision He has given you to reality in your life if you will wait on His timing.

Oswald Chambers, My Utmost for His Highest

Waiting is not something easy in today's world of "instant," "fast," "express." We seem to have little time to wait for anything or anyone, even God. And yet, throughout scripture God says wait—wait on God and God's timing. We see it in the stories of Abraham and Moses. None of us can imagine waiting 40 years for a vision from God to come to pass. We want it now! But in Scripture, time and time again, God tells us to wait.

One of the well-known theologians that God has used on my journey is Oswald Chambers. I have used his book, *My Utmost for His Highest*, daily for many years. I am always amazed at the new insights that I discover each time through. One theme seems to come up often and it's the theme of waiting. Waiting on God. Waiting on GOD'S time. Not getting ahead of God. Not becoming an obstacle or hindrance to the providence of God.

In my journey in Haiti, I have entered a season of waiting. There has been so much civil unrest and insecurity that many ministry activities have had to be put on hold due to shortages and the danger. And I find myself crying out to God, "When? Your people are hurting and struggling—when will You answer?" And the response comes back, "My time is perfect, rest in it."

Oswald Chambers wrote his missives over 100 years ago and amazingly, so much is still very relevant in our time. So, during this time, seeking God, abiding in God, worshiping and praying, and waiting for God’s timing becomes paramount. Being obedient and being present, doing the little things God puts in front of us, serving and loving God’s people, waiting on God’s plan and time.

PRAY, PRACTICE, PONDER

Mark the beginning of the Advent season by making note of what you are waiting for, yearning for, or hoping for this December—both in your life and in the life of the world. Advent invites us into the paradox of the “already” and the “not yet”: to see God’s kingdom already blooming among us, and to hope and pray for what is not yet fully healed, transformed, made new. Consider the lives and prayers of CBF field personnel as you ponder: how do their longings for the communities in which they serve impact your own hopes and dreams?

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3 Shane McNary (S-Great Rivers Fellowship)
3 Gennady Podgaisky, Ukraine (FP)
3 Rosemary Barfield, Jeffersonville, IN (CH)
3 Ed Beddingfield, Buies Creek, NC (PC)
3 James Heath, Dry Prong, LA (CH)
3 David Wilson, Chapel Hill, NC (CH)
3 Rachel Gunter Shapard (S-Together for Hope)
3 Andy Jung (S-North Carolina)
4 Elizabeth Richards, Emeritus (FP)
4 Jose Albovias, Louisville, KY (CH)
4 Myles Shipp, Gloucester, VA (CH)
5 Kenn Lowther, Columbus, OH (CH)

5 Chris O’Rear, Nashville, TN (PC)
7 Robert Wilder, Jacksonville, FL (CH)
8 Tommy Deal, Palmyra, VA (CH)
8 Edward Erwin, Chesapeake, VA (CH)
8 Shane Gaster, Deland, FL (CH)
8 Virginia King, Columbia, SC (CH)
8 Donald Kriner, Canton, GA (CH)
9 Timothy Gregory, Reno, NV (CH)
9 Wayne Hyatt, Spartanburg, SC (PC)
9 Herman Meza, Rota, Spain (CH)
9 Julie Brown, Emeritus (FP)



Wondering: Living the Questions

Chris Towles

CBF-endorsed chaplain and adjunct professor, Wake Forest Divinity School, Winston-Salem, North Carolina

■ *Learning Faith*

Be patient toward all that is unsolved in your heart... Do not now seek the answers, which cannot be given you, because you would not be able to live them. And the point is, to live everything. Live the questions now. Perhaps you will then gradually, without noticing it, live along some distant day into the answer.

Rainer Maria Rilke

The primary story that impacted my faith and calling deals with listening and presence. While I was an undergraduate in Mississippi, there was a time when I struggled with wondering what I believed. I wondered how much of my beliefs were inherited from parents, pastors and my community context. At that time, I didn't feel like I could share my wonderings with my friends. Eventually, I remembered Tim Thomas, a former minister of mine, who lived maybe around two hours away. We spoke on the phone and he suggested we meet somewhere between.

We met at a greasy little chicken restaurant with odious orange benches. It wasn't that Tim gave me advice or shared a Bible verse; it was that he listened to my struggles without condemnation. That is what meant so much to me. It wasn't that I came out of that conversation with answers, but that there was someone who was willing to sit with my questions.

As a minister at a university, I see one of my ministries as creating space where students can wonder. College students are at a transitional stage in which they are figuring out who they are. They encounter people who think about life differently. They wrestle with how much of their beliefs are their own. Creating that space for wonder has required developing the active listening skills that Tim demonstrated.

A few years ago, a young Muslim student came to me for pastoral care. I was the faculty advisor for the interfaith council and I knew many students from various traditions well, but this was my first pastoral care meeting across traditions with someone I'd never met. I wasn't exactly sure what pastoral care should look like across traditions, but I leaned heavily on active listening. It turns out that this young woman had similar struggles to those I described back in that chicken restaurant so many years earlier. She was a biology major, wrestling with belief in God. She didn't feel like she could talk to an imam or another Muslim for fear of condemnation. She felt the advice she would have received was "pray more" and "read the Quran more." What she seemed to need at the time was mainly someone who was a non-anxious presence and was comfortable with her struggles and who would not look down on her for wondering.

When I was in college, it took a great deal of trust for me to share my thoughts; I am honored when students share their struggles with me now. I figure one way to honor their struggles and trust is to offer an attentive ear, to be present and to resist the temptation to "solve" their struggles with answers.

PRAY, PRACTICE, PONDER

Sometimes we are tempted to solve our questions or challenges prematurely. But curiosity, presence and wonder are spiritual disciplines, practices that nurture our faith and trust in God. This Advent, create space for wonder for yourself and others. Adopt the posture of a child, allowing yourself to be in awe at the little things, like twinkling lights or moments of connection. Invite yourself to practice being present with "all that is unsolved in your heart" rather than jumping to half-baked answers. Notice how God shows up in this liminal space.

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10 James Williams, Montgomery, AL (CH)
11 Paul Kinney, College Park, GA (CH)
11 Ron Handlon, Fort Worth, TX (CH)
13 Rick Landon, Lexington, KY (PC)
13 Scott Lee, Snellville, GA (CH)
13 Frank Stillwell, Lexington, KY (PC)

13 Robin Sullens, Dallas, TX (PC)
14 Ardia Lecky (S-CBF Global)
15 Katie Fletcher (S-Together for Hope)
15 James Close, Louisville, KY (CH)
15 Sheree Jones, Winston-Salem, NC (CH)
15 Anna Anderson, Rocky Mount, NC (FP)
16 Ina Winstead, Emeritus (FP)
16 Lee Ann Rathbun, Austin, TX (CH)
16 Chelsea Turpen, Addison, TX (CH)



DECEMBER 17

Companioning: Spiritual Friendship

Michon McCorkle

Family Matters Christian Counseling, Indiana

■ *Learning Faith*

Proverbs 27:9

The heartfelt counsel of a friend is as sweet as perfume and incense.

In January 2020, my husband accepted a new role within his company that moved us from our beloved Charlotte, N.C., to Carmel, Ind. The move from our home, family and familiarity was difficult, but my husband thrived in his new position and appeared extremely satisfied with the transition. However, the move caused great pain and grief for me as I left behind my private practice, my friends and my house of 18 years. It was at the beginning of Covid-19, and we didn't know anyone in Indiana. I was lonely, sad and isolated. The gray skies left me depressed and confused about the move. In response, I began to pray and ask God for friends that were Christian, married and with similar values. I had no idea how this would happen since everyone was behind masks at the time, but God led me to new friends one-by-one in the most unlikely places.

I met Nicole while shopping for my new home in Indiana at a housewares store. Nicole is also from North Carolina, and we bonded over our love of cast iron cookware and southern cooking. I asked her out for coffee and she gladly accepted. Nicole was a lifeline for connection that resuscitated my life.

I met Petra in a Mexican restaurant waiting for carryout. She commented on my purse, which opened the door for conversation. We shared a couple of laughs and promised to keep in contact. Petra and her family adopted my husband and me with open arms. We have a standing invitation for Sunday dinner and family events. Their love and care helped to ease the ache from missing our own family gatherings.

Next is Lisa, my workout partner of almost two years. We met through a running group and have been "accountability partners" ever since. We push each other to reach our fitness goals. Lisa is a natural comedienne; her humor is medicine to my bones.

Finally, there is Kenyata, a friend from Charlotte who moved to Indiana late last year. Kenyata is my spontaneous and adventurous friend, whether we are trying new foods or traveling. She and her husband have been in Indiana for less than a year, and we've already been on two international trips and are planning another.

The way God brought about these relationships confirms that God cares about the minor details of life. It reminds me that God fully knows, hears and sees us. Engaging in true fellowship and actively building community brings healing to the soul. Ministry requires us to attend to the needs of others, and we sometimes forget that our souls require nurturing as well. Hopefully, sharing my personal journey to healing will prompt you to ask for help and to share your burdens with those willing to love and support you (Galatians 6:2).

PRAY, PRACTICE, PONDER

You may have heard of the ancient practice of *lectio divina*, or “sacred reading,” in which a passage of Scripture is read slowly and meditatively multiple times, so the reader can listen to God’s word with “the ear of the heart.” *Visio divina*, or “sacred seeing,” is a similar practice, in which a scripture is read, and then an image is presented for the reader to contemplate, listening for the stirring of God’s voice within. Today, you are invited to try this reflective practice by reading Luke 1:26-45 and pondering the questions below as you gaze upon Lauren Wright Pittman’s rendering of Mary and Elizabeth on the opposite page.

- What do you notice as you gaze at the image?
- How do you feel when you look at the image?
- What does this image communicate to you about spiritual friendship?

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17 Buddy Presley, North Augusta, SC (CH)
17 Ronald Wilson, Northport, AL (CH)
17 Maria-Grace Khano, 2014, Belgium (FPC)
17 Elket Rodriguez, U.S.-Mexico Border (FP)
17 Ian Dyke, Greenville, SC (CH)
18 Elizabeth Nance-Coker (S-South Carolina)
18 Loris Adams, Indian Trail, NC (CH)
18 Joel DeFehr, Oklahoma City, OK (CH)
19 Kathryn Ashworth (S-North Carolina)
19 Bernard Morris, Chester, VA (CH)
19 James Palmer, Tampa, FL (CH)
19 Anna-Grace Acker, 2005, Uganda (FPC)

20 Robert Brasier, Queen Creek, AZ (CH)
20 Melissa L. Dowling, Austin, TX (CH)
20 Larry Glover-Wetherington, Durham, NC (PC)
20 Alan Willard, Blacksburg, VA (PC)
21 Bethany McLemore, Roanoke, VA (PC)
21 Lynn Hutchinson, Portugal (FP)
22 Sarah Wofford, Mooresville, NC (CH)
23 Frances Brown, Surfside Beach, SC (PC)
23 Robert Elkowitz, Cumming, GA (CH)
23 Steven Ivy, Indianapolis, IN (CH)
23 Hal Lee, Clinton, MS (CH)
23 Linda Strange, Denton, TX (CH)



Mary and Elizabeth © Lauren Wright Pittman, lewpstudio.com.

DECEMBER 24

Birthing: Mary

Rev. Meg Lacy Vega

Chaplain Resident, Dallas Children's Health,
Texas



■ *Biblical Companions*

We are all meant to be mothers of God...for God is always needing to be born.

Meister Eckhart

Last December, the spiritual care staff at our hospital organized a small worship service to celebrate three beloved interns whose time with us was coming to a close. The service was in mid-December and the preacher, a local Episcopal priest, chose to focus on the story of Mary during our time together. I was delighted by this choice, because Mary's story has become increasingly important to me during my training to become a pediatric hospital chaplain. At the hospital, I see Mary everywhere.

Sometimes I see her literally. When visiting Catholic Latino and Latina patients, I frequently open the door to find Mary's face staring back at me in an icon of the Virgin of Guadalupe. These young patients and their families have taught me about Our Lady of Guadalupe, her mysterious appearances to the Mexican peasant Juan Diego, and the role Mary plays in their faith. Often, it is their connection to Mary that gives them hope that God will heal them. Sometimes, I join them in calling on Mary as we pray the rosary together, "Hail Mary, full of grace, blessed art thou among women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb..."

Other days, I see Mary metaphorically. When I meet a new pediatric patient and find his or her mother faithfully waiting at the bedside, I think of Mary and her supportive role in Jesus' ministry. When I sit with a mom who is baffled by sudden, disorienting news, I recall Mary's encounter with the angel Gabriel. When a mother shares with me her feelings of powerlessness over her child's suffering, I wonder about Mary's experience of watching Jesus suffer. When I kneel on the floor with a mom whose pain is erupting through her terrified, guttural cries after receiving the news, "there is nothing more we can do," I hold in my heart an image of Mary at the foot of the cross.

I see Mary everywhere, in each of the mothers I visit in the hospital. I see her in their strength and their confusion, their questions and their courage, their hope and their grief. Serving as a pediatric chaplain, I have come to feel deeply connected to Mary. I am inspired by her story of mothering. I feel supported by her loving, fierce presence. And so, when the Episcopal priest opened her homily by speaking about Mary, my skin tingled with a sense of God speaking to me. What she said was this:

“Residents and interns, chaplains-in-training, I believe you are like Marys. By the mystery of the Holy Spirit, something new and precious has been growing inside you these past few months of clinical pastoral education. God has planted seeds of new life in each of you—new ideas and experiences, new challenges and theological questions, new hopes and dreams and callings. Like Mary, you hold a gift from God within you: this precious new life. Right now, it is young and fragile, delicate. So, like Mary, your job is to protect it. Your role is to nurture it. To provide the sustenance and time and space it needs to become what God intended it to be.”

As the priest concluded her homily that day, I was reminded of the words of the 14th century Christian mystic Meister Eckhart: We are all meant to be mothers of God...for God is always needing to be born.

PRAY, PRACTICE, PONDER

What is God birthing in you this Christmas season? Perhaps it is a new idea, a new hope or dream, a new project, a new relationship, a new practice. Today, ponder how you will nurture and protect this new life within you. Allow this time of reflection to be your prayer today.

Birthdays this Week:

CH = Chaplain
EP = Engagement Partner
FP = Field Personnel

FPC = Child of Field Personnel
PC = Pastoral Counselor
S = CBF Staff Member

24 Michael Carter, Dallas, TX (CH)
26 Jim Morrison (S-Church Benefits Board)
26 Freddy Hinson, Rocky River, OH (CH)
26 Scottie Stamper, Charlotte, NC (CH)
26 Nicole Tota, Sioux Falls, SD (CH)
26 Haley Seanor, Birmingham, AL (CH)
27 Sean Roberds (S-Mid-Atlantic)
27 Larry Austin, Fredericksburg, VA (CH)
27 Solon Smith, Louisville, KY (CH)
27 Jonathan Madden, Cincinnati, OH (CH)
27 Steve Clark, Louisville, KY (FP)

28 Claudia Forrest, Cordova, TN (CH)
28 John Halbrook, Pound Ridge, NY (PC)
28 Thomas Holbrook, Berea, KY (PC)
29 Kimberly Miller, Winston-Salem, NC (CH)
29 Art Wiggins, San Diego, CA (CH)
30 Revonda Deal, Emeritus (FP)
30 Shay Crenshaw, Raleigh, NC (CH)
30 James Garrison, Arden, NC (CH)
30 Kenneth Kelly, Black Mountain, NC (CH)
30 Ramona Reynolds-Netto, Orlando, FL (CH)
30 Lex Robertson, Oklahoma City, OK (CH)



Imagining: Alice Walker

Deirdre Jonese Austin

Author, minister and member of CBF's
Pan African Koinonia, North Carolina

■ *Wise Guides*

“God is different to us now, after all these years in Africa. More spirit than ever before, and more internal. Most people think he has to look like something or someone—a roofleaf or Christ—but we don’t. And not being tied to what God looks like, frees us.”

Alice Walker

Who is God?
What is God?
Where is God?

These are questions on which I reflect as I read my Bible alongside Alice Walker’s *The Color Purple*.

When I read my Bible alongside the literary works of Alice Walker, a writer, poet and activist, I am invited to encounter an expansive God. This is a God who is everywhere and in everything—the people around me, the trees, the color purple. Walker writes, “God is inside you and inside everybody else. You come into the world with God. But only them that search for it inside find it. And sometimes it just manifests itself even if you not looking, or don’t know what you looking for.”

As a minister whose work focuses on Black women, I think it is important that we can find God in ourselves and in each other. This is because it challenges an image of God that has been used to justify our oppression, the God of the slave owners and white supremacists, the God of those who perpetuate gender-based violence, the God of those who seek to rob women of their call and the other images of God that are harmful and death-dealing to our bodies, spirits and humanity. We can affirm that the violence we experience and

that was experienced by our ancestors is not God; God is not the cause of our pain, violence and suffering. God does not have to look like our oppressors, but God also does not have to look like us.

Walker writes, “God is different to us now, after all these years in Africa. More spirit than ever before, and more internal. Most people think he has to look like something or someone—a roofleaf or Christ—but we don’t. And not being tied to what God looks like, frees us.” We can see God in ourselves and in those around us. Seeing the *imago dei* in others mandates that we love others, that we love our neighbors as ourselves. And yet, seeing God in everything mandates that we not only love other humans, but that we love and care for all of creation. When we see the image of God in our neighbors, we won’t harm them. When we see the image of God in nature, we will work to preserve and conserve it. Alice Walker calls us to continue the justice work of Jesus in calling out harm and promoting an ethic of radical love for all of creation.

PRAY, PRACTICE, PONDER

What images of God have been important to you over the course of your life? Maybe you have imagined God as shepherd or king, God as mother hen or powerful warrior. How do these images shape your view of who God is? This Christmas season, ponder what new images of God are being born in your mind and heart. What images of God bring a “radical love for all creation” alive in you?

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31 David “Tod” Smith, Farmington, NM (CH)
1 Rebecca Brown – Elizabethtown, KY (CH)
1 Varughese Jacob, Houston TX (CH)
1 Christina Pryor-Pittman, Lexington, SC (CH)
1 Sam Bandela, Emeritus (FP)
2 Tammy Stocks, Emeritus (FP)
2 Emi Brand, Orlando, FL (CH)
2 Rick Bennett (S-Tennessee)
3 Christopher Bowers, Powhatan, VA (PC)
3 William McCann, Madisonville, KY (CH)

4 Joshua Hickman, Crete, Greece (CH)
4 Scott Hudgins (S-North Carolina)
5 Richard Durham, Mount Pleasant, NC (CH)
5 Charles Kirby, Hendersonville, NC (CH)
5 Kevin Lynch, Spartanburg, SC (PC)
5 Calvin McIver, Sacramento, CA (CH)
5 Linda Serino, Memphis, TN (CH)
6 Larry Hardin, Topeka, KS (CH)
6 Santiago Reales, Winston Salem, NC (CH)

RENEW: SPIRITUAL PRACTICES FOR THE NEW YEAR

January 7-February 4

Anything can become a spiritual practice once you are willing to approach it that way—once you let it bring you to your knees and show you what is real, including who you really are, who other people are, and how near God can be when you have lost your way.

Barbara Brown Taylor





JANUARY 7

Silence: Thomas Keating and Pierre Teilhard de Chardin

Christine

CBF field personnel, Africa/Middle East

■ *Wise Guides*

Above all, trust in the slow work of God.
We are quite naturally impatient in everything to reach the end
without delay.
We should like to skip the intermediate stages.
We are impatient of being on the way to something unknown,
something new.
And yet it is the law of all progress
that it is made by passing through some stages of instability—
and that it may take a very long time.
And so I think it is with you;
your ideas mature gradually—let them grow,
let them shape themselves, without undue haste.
Don't try to force them on,
as though you could be today what time
(that is to say, grace and circumstances acting on your own goodwill)
will make of you tomorrow.
Only God could say what this new spirit
gradually forming within you will be.
Give Our Lord the benefit of believing
that his hand is leading you,
and accept the anxiety of feeling yourself
in suspense and incomplete.

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, SJ, Hearts on Fire

Slow is not my forte. Nor is “letting.” I want to make things happen; maybe it’s impatience, maybe control, mix in a little pride—probably all of the above; it’s this human nature of ours. But somewhere along the way on this faith journey of mine, and particularly on this road to saying “yes” to a life in ministry overseas, I got introduced to these two men, these Christian contemplatives whom I’d never heard of before; but I’m certain I wouldn’t be here now if it weren’t for their work and writings and the Holy Spirit. They are Thomas Keating, a Trappist monk, and Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, a Jesuit priest.

Unlike many in Baptist circles, I grew up with spiritual practices such as *lectio divina* and with theologians like Bonhoeffer, Buechner and Nouwen. I knew a broader view of Christianity and the spiritual life than many of my peers; but prayer was still always an active thing. It came from my initiative to write or speak or think my desires and requests, petitions and thanksgivings, praise and adoration, anger, fear and doubt.

And then, in college and grad school and seminary, I was exposed to these new voices who said, “sit still and listen.” Just be with God, and here’s how you can do that. Make the time to sit long enough to let the clutter clear—the dizzying slew of daily life; then see what’s underneath; pay attention to what rises. Listen to what the Spirit is saying to you and notice how it changes you. Notice how you slow down, even as the world continues to race. Notice how you become a person of peace, of compassion. Notice the courage that appears, seemingly without explanation. It was in the practice of centering prayer that I first learned to slow down, or at least how to try.

And then, in that season of wrestling, of not wanting to wait, of not understanding God’s timing, I came across these words from Chardin. They were the exact words I needed then, and they’re ones I continue to return to as the temptation and the desire to lean on my own strength, to make my own way, rise. It’s a constant struggle and the words and wisdom of these spiritual guides who’ve gone before me is the tether I need to take a deep breath, a prayer itself, to let go, to lose my grip on control, to trust that God is good, that God is who God says He is, that God will guide me even when we’re not moving as fast as I’d like or think we should be or we’re not going in the obvious direction I think we should be going. Trust in the slow work of God. I love the underlying assumption in this line...trust that God is at work, even if you don’t see it. The implication is that, of course, God is working. Thanks be to God.

PRAY, PRACTICE, PONDER

The 16th century Christian mystic, St. John of the Cross, said, “God’s first language is silence.” When we are still and silent, with the intention of being present with God, we join God in God’s first and deepest language. Today, set aside a few minutes to be quiet and still in order to rest in God. If you are new to this type of meditative prayer, you can simply set a timer for five minutes, and see what happens. Notice if your mind wanders, or if you are tempted to get up and do something, or if it is easy for you to simply be. If this style of prayer is already familiar to you, you may wish to commit to a longer stretch of time, or to use a word or image as your guide, similar to a centering prayer practice. We often spend our lives working on God’s behalf; sometimes we forget God’s invitation to come to Him and rest our weary souls.

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7 Richard Catlett, Richmond, VA (CH)

7 Denny Spear, Dunwoody, GA (CH)

8 Luis Caiza, Elizabethtown, KY (CH)

8 Rachel Hill, Shelby, NC (CH)

8 Ellen Burnette, Emeritus (FP)

8 Ethan Lee, 2009, Macedonia (FPC)

9 Paul Hamilton, Lodge, SC (CH)

9 Jeffrey Perkins, Westchester, OH (CH)

9 Bill Cayard, Emeritus (FP)

10 Melody Harrell, Emeritus (FP)

10 Jill Zimmer, Columbia, TN (CH)

11 Jorge Zapata (S-Texas)

11 Michael Gerace, Baker City, OR (CH)

11 Ed Waldrop, Augusta, GA (CH)

12 Neil Cochran, Greenville, SC (CH)

12 Phillip C Moody, Lexington KY (CH)

12 Scott Smallwood, Englewood, FL (CH)

13 Dianne McNary (S-CBF Global)

14 Thomas Cantwell, Paducah, KY (CH)

JANUARY 14

Creation: God's Sanctuary

Danielle Glaze

Founder of Mana Teaching Ministry, pastor at
First Baptist Church, Teachey, North Carolina



■ *Learning Faith*

There are two books through which God is speaking: the book of
holy scriptures and the big book of the universe.

John Scotus Eriugena

Lil Red Bird

Cardinal by another name
I call you Messenger of God
Your bright red body whether it
Be against the gray and brown of Winter.
Or the bright green of Spring and Summer.
You always get my attention
And I dare not look away.
As long as you stay, I watch.
Messenger of God
You remind me of the precious blood
Shed on Calvary for me.
It works and is still working.
You remind me that the Lord is with me and
Shows up in special ways to make sure I know.
My daddy called you red bird.
He said you show up as an ancestor or as a warning
That pain is on the way.
I say you show up to tell me God sees me and is with me.
You show up to tell me that no matter what,
God is present and will make sure I know it.

Lil Red Bird, thank you for making me take moments to
Be still and know...
Lil Red Bird thank you for the beauty that you are!
Lil Red Bird you preach really well-be who you are...in season and out!
Be brilliant in all your beauty,
Let the Lord take care of you the way He takes care of me.
Lil Red Bird thank you for reminding me...
God is real, He knows me, He loves me, and He is with me.
Lil Red Bird to God be the glory! Thank you.

—Danielle Glaze

The older I've gotten and the more I know, the more I find God, hear God and see God in creation. In the beauty of flowers and weeds, in the glorious sounds of birds singing in the morning, and in the spectacular colors of the sun setting that could never be replicated. Nature and especially birds remind me of the freedom and transcendence we have been gifted by the Lord.

I would encourage you to take more time to allow nature to testify to you and encourage you of God's love and care for you. God speaks through all creation and since God takes care of all the living things that don't sow, be encouraged God will take care of you. God especially speaks to me through cardinals. When I'm low or crying out in Spirit, they appear in the least likely places and they remain as long as I'm willing to stay. I hear God saying through their presence...I've heard you; I see you, I'm with you!

As Psalm 19:1-4 (NIV) says:

The heavens declare the glory of God;
the skies proclaim the work of his hands.
Day after day they pour forth speech;
night after night they reveal knowledge.
They have no speech, they use no words;
no sound is heard from them.
Yet their voice goes out into all the earth,
their words to the ends of the world.

PRAY, PRACTICE, PONDER

As a spiritual practice for today, take your Bible outside for an experience of “dislocated exegesis.” Simply put, dislocated exegesis is reading a biblical text in a different, perhaps surprising, place to see how our context changes the way we hear God’s word and respond to God’s Spirit. Turn to Genesis 1 or Psalm 19 and read about God’s creation as you dwell within it. Notice how your experience of the text shifts due to your change in context. Let this experience be your prayer.

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15 Ingrid Estrada (S-CBF Global)
15 Ian Bell, Louisville, KY(CH)
15 Keith Ethridge, Belton, TX (CH)
15 John Foxworth, El Paso, TX (CH-Ret.)
16 David Hormenoo, Durham, NC (CH)
17 Matthew Hanzelka, Round Rock, TX (CH)
17 Aaron Norman, 2005, Spain (FPC)
17 Glenn Norris, Sherwood, AR (CH)
18 William Beaver, Fort Hood, TX (CH)

18 Jeanell Cox, Cary, NC (CH)
18 Justin Nelson, Mount Airy, NC (CH)
19 Kelly Adams (S-CBF Global)
19 Jackie Ward, Goshen, KY (CH)
19 Lyndsay Williams, Chesterfield MO (CH)
19 Kaelah-Joy Acker, 2008, Uganda (FPC)
20 Marshall Gupton, Smyrna, TN (CH)
20 Kevin Morgan, Pisgah Forest, NC (CH)
20 Paul Tolbert, Camp Atterbury, IN (CH)



Friendship: Don't Go It Alone

Dewey Bland

Chaplain at the Federal Correctional Institution, Three Rivers, Texas

■ *Learning Faith*

If you're a young man and you're not being admired by an older man, you're being hurt.

Robert Moore, Iron John: A Book about Men

Joshua had Moses (Exodus 32-33) and Elisha had Elijah (1 Kings 19:16, 19-21). I am so thankful for two godly men who have mentored me in the faith and in life. Even after their “responsibilities” toward my ministry ended, they have nurtured a sweet friendship for decades now.

Dr. Mac Wallace was my clinical pastoral education supervisor during my two-year residency in the mid-1990s. From that clinical relationship, a reciprocal fondness developed and continues today. Mac, whom I refer to as my spiritual mentor, has turned 80 now and continues to lead ministers. We have shared in many Biblical and pastoral discussions since I left hospital chaplaincy. Some of our best times together have been while on the water, wetting a hook, or playing nine-ball around a billiards table. I have been so blessed and have benefited from his genuine love for me. About 10 years ago, I gifted Mac a walking stick. To be in his presence and to feel his friendship offered me a glimpse of God's desire to walk with me and provide for my care.

Chaplain Bill Lang was my third and fifth supervisor in the Federal Bureau of Prisons. Our friendship began in early 2001 in West Virginia. We were coworkers, a Southern redneck and a Boston Yankee, what a pair we made! We have laughed, cried, encouraged and challenged each other. We raised our families together and now enjoy long talks over the phone. As I continue my prison ministry and he has long retired, I am

fully aware that even today Bill can relate to the struggles I encounter championing the First Amendment rights of the incarcerated. We have often remarked to each other, “We will have a special place, just inside heaven’s gates”.

These two men have allowed me to positively live out a warning by Robert Moore: “If you’re a young man and you’re not being admired by an older man, you’re being hurt.” Because of Mac and Bill, I have not been hurt. I will never hunger from not being fed by these two older men. I thank my God each time I remember them.

PRAY, PRACTICE, PONDER

What is your experience of friendship? Today, ponder which friends in your life have been deep spiritual companions. Perhaps make a list of those who have most supported, encouraged or replenished you. Take a moment to offer gratitude to God for these friendships and their influence on your life.

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S = CBF Staff Member

21 George Francis, Tampa, FL (CH)
22 Bruce Moore, Barrington, IL (CH)
22 Jim Hylton (S-North Carolina)
23 Richard Atkinson, Bastrop, TX (CH)
23 Deborah Fortune, Atlanta, GA (CH)
23 Brent Raitz, Cleveland, OH (CH)
23 Trevor Wilson, Malmstrom, MT (CH)

24 Stephen Reeves (S-Fellowship Southwest)
25 Chris Nagel, Houston, TX (CH)
25 Mich, Emeritus (FP)
26 Tina Hall, Manassas, VA (CH)
27 Darrell Bare, Charleston, SC (CH)
27 Ben Sandford, Alexandria, VA (CH)
27 Stacey Cruze, Georgetown KY (PC)



Family: Forming Faith at Home

Jade and Shelah Acker
CBF field personnel, Uganda

■ *Learning Faith*

Proverbs 22:6

Train children in the right way, and when old, they will not stray.

The two people who have had the most profound influence on my life, personally, spiritually and professionally, are my parents, Dorothy and Jerry Hubbard. For 30 years, my parents served as missionaries in Zambia. Now, they continue to serve God and others in their community in Alabaster, Alabama. For as long as I can remember, my parents would wake up early in the morning to read the Bible and pray. To this day, they still meet each morning for a focused and intentional prayer time. They have an extensive prayer list and take prayer more seriously than anyone I know. My dad reads through the Bible twice a year in a different version and spends hours studying and preparing for his weekly Sunday school class. My mom reflects the love, compassion, gentleness and wisdom of Jesus as she ministers to those around her. I consistently hear stories from people about how they have been impacted by my parents. I don't take this for granted. They raised me in a home where I never doubted that I was loved by God or that God had a purpose for my life. Now, as I serve on the mission field, I realize more and more how much my faith and my ministry calling were developed by my parents. I also feel empowered and encouraged to know that they are specifically praying for me, my family and our ministry every single morning—and yes, they also pray through CBF's *Prayers of the People* guide each year! I'm so thankful to God for my parents and the legacy they have passed on to me.

—Shelah Acker

My secret ambition in life has always been to one day look back to the place from which I have come and to have a mindset like Job. So far, I've experienced a lot of trials in my short life, and thankfully I've had many people to guide me. I met Mr. Chad on my first day of physical education at my new school last year. Mr. Chad was my PE teacher, and although he was in his 30's, had experienced more than most people in their entire

lifetime. Mr. Chad suffered from multiple issues like early arthritis, ADHD, OCD, bipolar disorder and extreme depression. There has never been a day when Mr. Chad didn't feel physical pain in his body. Like Job, Mr. Chad continued to trust in God no matter his circumstances. He also mentored those around him and said that his pain was worth it to teach younger minds about what trusting in God can do.

Job experienced unbearable pain in his life. He suffered through a life of torment, but he managed to stay strong and put his hope and trust in God. As my family serves God here in Uganda and walks through our struggles, it is sometimes easy to forget that suffering gives us an opportunity to lean on God and trust in God. Many people around the world are suffering physically, spiritually and mentally. We have the opportunity to do the same as Mr. Chad—even when we ourselves are suffering. We can offer hope and help to others and teach them to lean on God.

—Anna-Grace Acker (17-year-old daughter of Jade and Shelah Acker)

PRAY, PRACTICE, PONDER

Family faith practices form us in the love of Christ from a young age. Today, ponder what spiritual practices you witnessed at home as a child, or participated in with your family. Maybe you learned to pray for friends and loved ones, or you participated in spiritual conversations with adults. Maybe you learned to explore and care for God's creation, practiced lighting candles during Advent, or read Bible stories before bed. What practices does your family engage in today? In the week ahead, notice how you spend time together as a family and consider how faith practices can become woven into your everyday routine.

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28 Chuck Ahlemann, Des Moines, IA (CH)
28 Marcia Henry-Day, Griffin, GA (CH)
29 Glen Foster (S-West)
29 Christopher Bowers, Powhatan, VA (CH)
29 Darryl Jefferson, Charlotte, NC (CH)
29 Zachary Brand, Orlando, FL (CH)
30 Matthew Benorden, Lawrence, KS (CH)
30 Hal Ritter, Waco, TX (PC)
30 Nathan Rogers, Anchorage, AK (CH)
31 Rebecca Adrian, Irving, TX (CH)
31 John Manuel, Fort Hood, TX (CH)

31 Paul Smith, San Diego, CA (CH)
1 Tammy Snyder (S-Florida/Caribbean Islands)
1 Susan Collins, Stone Mountain, GA (CH)
1 Brad Jackson, Springfield, OH (CH)
2 Lauren Lamb (S-CBF Global)
2 Joe Alverson, Nicholasville, KY (CH)
2 Veronica Martinez-Gallegos, Concord, NC (CH)
2 Terry Tatro, Louisville, KY (CH)
3 Richard Dayringer, Grove, OK (PC)
3 Rachel Erickson (CH)
3 Woody Baker, Ahoskie, NC (GSC)



FEBRUARY 4

Love: Practicing God's Presence

Annette Ellard

CBF field personnel, Kentucky

■ *Learning Faith*

We ought not to be weary of doing little things for the love of God, who regards not the greatness of the work, but the love with which it is performed.

Brother Lawrence, [The Practice of the Presence of God](#)

As I have considered the many spiritual guides who have influenced me throughout my life, I have been most struck by the common thread of that influence—love. Love truly is the be-all and end-all. Without it, we are nothing. With it, we have everything.

When I was seven-years-old, my Sunday school teacher gave me a sticker. It said, “GOD LOVES YOU. I LOVE YOU.” It was so special to me, I stuck it inside the front of the Bible my grandparents had given me for Christmas. How amazing it was to know God loves me. That teacher never knew the profound influence that sticker had on me then and even now.

When I was 11, after my daddy died, my mother joined the army and I went to live with my grandparents while she was in training. During that time, Mama was given a New Testament with the bold-print title “GOD IS LOVE.” Mama let me have it after she finished her training, and the translation which is in common English became my primary Bible for reading in my early teens. The cover emphasized that Scripture passage from 1 John 4, and I thought deeply about how important it was—so important the publisher had used it to title the whole New Testament. Of course, that publisher never knew the profound influence that tattered paperback had on me then and even now.

In my early 20s, while in a seminary class on the classics of Christian devotion, I read *The Practice of the Presence of God*, the writings of Brother Lawrence, a 17th century French Carmelite friar. After a childhood of poverty and an early adulthood of war

that left him permanently lame, Brother Lawrence entered the priory as a lay brother and spent the rest of his life working first in the kitchen and later by repairing sandals. In all that I encountered in that seminary course, it is one statement by Brother Lawrence that has stuck with me ever since: “I flip my little egg in the frying pan for the love of God.” The thought that everything we do in life should be for the love of God was at once astoundingly simple and relentlessly demanding. Such a humble man as Brother Lawrence surely never imagined that, more than 300 years after his death, his writings would have such lasting influence on a 20th century seminarian and then and missionary even now.

Finally, in my later 20s, when I was struggling with several decisions, I sought the help of a trusted counselor. Realizing I was paralyzed by the fear of making the wrong choice, she suggested that I stop trying to determine what was “the right thing” or “the wrong thing” and instead choose “the loving thing.” I only saw her a couple of times after that meeting, so she never knew how much she helped me with those decisions then or how her wisdom has guided much of my decision-making for more than half my life, even until now.

Now, 17 years into our ministry among refugees from Burma, Steve and I hope that love is the essence of all we do. And we pray that those we serve will come to know that we love them and that God loves them. We pray that they will know that God is love, fully shown among us in Jesus. We pray that we will not grow weary, even in doing the seemingly small but necessary things, if we do them for the love of God. And we pray that the love with which our work is done will be evident to those we serve so that they will love God more.

PRAY, PRACTICE, PONDER

Brother Lawrence’s writing, *Practicing the Presence of God*, encourages Christians to do all things, even the most mundane, with an awareness of God’s presence and God’s love. As a spiritual practice in the week ahead, choose one activity that you do each day and commit to practicing the presence of God while you complete it. Perhaps it is as simple as brushing your teeth, or as lengthy as a daily walk. You may wish to set a reminder on your phone or leave a note for yourself to prompt you. Before you begin, pause and take a few breaths to connect with God’s presence and love. When the activity is complete, take a few more silent breaths to draw this time with God to a close.



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4 Jane Martin, Emeritus (FP)
4 Delores Kay Smith, Hickory, NC (CH)
5 Rubén Ortiz (S-CBF Global)
5 Andrew Bowles, Fort Worth, TX (CH)
5 Brian Cleveland, New Orleans, LA (CH)
5 Joanna Tarr, Kansas City, MO (CH)
8 John Boyles, Lynchburg, VA (CH)
8 Biju Chacko, Jacksonville, FL (CH)
8 Larry Johnson, Midlothian, VA (CH)

9 Shaquisha Barnes, Durham, NC (CH)
9 Nathan Cooper, Greenville, SC (CH)
9 Jo Kirkendall, Biloxi, MS (CH)
9 Elizabeth Milazzotto, Louisville, KY (PC)
9 Willie Smith, Fredericksburg, VA (CH)
10 Bradley Chahoy, Colorado Springs, CO (CH)
10 James Rentz, Spartanburg, SC (PC)
10 Cynthia Thomas, Houston, TX (CH)

LENT: THE WILDERNESS OF THE SOUL

February 11-March 24

God uses the desert of the soul—our suffering and difficulties, our pain, our dark nights (call them what you will)—to form us, to make us beautiful souls. He redeems what we might deem our living hells, if we allow him. The hard truth, then, is this: everyone who follows Jesus is eventually called into the desert.

Marlena Graves, A Beautiful Disaster



Stillness: Lessons from the Wilderness

Jewel Cannon

Student.Go participant and member of CBF's Pan African Koinonia, Georgia

■ *Learning Faith*

I have learned things in the dark that I could never have learned in the light, things that have saved my life over and over again, so that there is really only one logical conclusion. I need darkness as much as I need light.

Barbara Brown Taylor, Learning to Walk in the Dark

One theme in my spiritual life that I am discovering and honoring is stillness. It is similar and synchronous with the themes of silence and darkness. Generally, when Christians feel like they are experiencing a season of darkness, silence and stillness, they may feel as if they are in the “wilderness” or “valley.” The wilderness is thought of to be scary, lonely and exhausting.

I am reminded of these biblical characters: Hagar, the Israelites, Elijah, David and Jesus. Each of these was led into the wilderness by God. Hagar was comforted by God and even named God in her situation. Elijah was comforted by God when he was in the cave feeling defeated. The bread was provided to the Israelites as they wandered around the desert. Jesus showed us how to pray and recount scripture when he was facing temptation by Satan in the wilderness.

All these narratives have a common theme and setting. In the wilderness, we learn to depend on God like Hagar did. We learn that God sees what we are going through. Hagar names God, El Roi, the God Who Sees. Elijah's loneliness in his cave teaches us that while we are waiting and things seem still, to seek the still, small voice of God. King David who expressed many emotions in his Psalms teaches us that even though we walk in the valley of the shadow of death, we need not fear because the Divine is with us. In other psalms, David teaches us the importance of lament. Our laments are sacred

and when we cry out, we get closer to the Lord. Finally, Jesus teaches us to remain in the word and keep scripture in our hearts, for even in the silence in the Garden of Gethsemane, in the silence of the wilderness before the angel shows up to Hagar, and in the silence of Elijah's cave, God dwelled there.

In my spiritual life, through these characters, I am learning to appreciate silence, stillness and darkness. I am grateful that in these three things, God is present. That is comforting to me. While we wait in periods of silence, stillness and darkness, we listen for the still, small voice of God that eases our hearts and minds. The wilderness is not our final destination. We are only passing through. Silence and stillness are temporary. In conclusion, this quote by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. inspires me to be steady and unmovable: "Only in the darkness can you see the stars."

PRAY, PRACTICE, PONDER

Ponder this blessing by Jan Richardson for the beginning of Lent.

Wilderness Blessing

Let us say
this blessing began
whole and complete
upon the page.
And then let us say
that one word loosed itself
and another followed it
in turn.
Let us say
this blessing started
to shed all
it did not need,
that line by line

it returned
to the ground
from which it came.
Let us say
this blessing is not
leaving you,
is not abandoning you
to the wild
that lies ahead,
but that it is loathe
to load you down
on this road where
you will need
to travel light.
Let us say

perhaps this blessing
became the path
beneath your feet,
the desert
that stretched before you,
the clear sight
that finally came.
Let us say
that when this blessing
at last came to its end,
all it left behind
was bread,
wine,
a fleeting flash
of wing.

Birthdays this Week:

CH = Chaplain
EP = Engagement Partner
FP = Field Personnel

FPC = Child of Field Personnel
PC = Pastoral Counselor
S = CBF Staff Member

11 Lauralee Estes, Northport, AL (PC)
11 Katee Harris, Rose Hill, NC (CH)
11 Will Runyon, Albany, GA (CH)
11 Jamie Ambrose (S-Alabama)
11 Ashley Mangrum, Boston, MA (CH)
12 James (Terry) Raines, Richmond, VA (CH)
13 David Fox, Roanoke, VA (CH)
13 Dianne Swaim, North Little Rock, AR (CH)

14 Roger Bolton, Conyers, GA (PC)
14 Grace Martino (S-Northeast/CBF Global)
14 Charla Littell, Burlington, NC (CH)
15 Michon McCorkle, Carmel, IN (PC)
16 Rebecca Hewitt-Newson, Glendale, CA (CH)
16 Brad Mitchell, Birmingham, AL (CH)
16 Carter Sapp, Houston, TX (CH)
17 Annie Laura Walker, Birmingham, AL (CH)



Spiritual Direction: Seeking Support

Dianne McNary

CBF Offering for Global Missions Advocate,
Arkansas

■ *Learning Faith*

Our lives are not problems to be solved but journeys to be taken with Jesus as our friend and finest guide...We also need guides: spiritual friends, a spiritual director, or a spiritual accountability group that can function for us as a safe place to bear our souls.

*Henri J.M. Nouwen, Spiritual Direction:
Wisdom for the Long Walk of Faith*

During the past year, I had some incredible emotional and spiritual lows. I was suffering burnout. I needed something, but wasn't sure what. I wanted to read and study, but didn't know where to start. I couldn't pray, I couldn't sing. My voice was strangled and cut off.

Finally, I admitted I couldn't drag myself out of this hole. I reached out for help from my husband and CBF's member care folks. Through guided discussions and prayer, some meds and time, I began to come out of the fog. I made the decision to spend some dedicated time restoring my relationship with God. During this process, I found "T" who agreed to be my spiritual director.

Previously, I was uncomfortable with the idea of spiritual direction. What is that? Why would I need this? But at this time in my life, I realized that I needed a little help and my experience has been nothing but positive.

I have a place to talk through my thoughts without judgment;
to cry or laugh;
to share my highs and lows;
to have someone to reflect back what I am saying;
and to ask questions that I may not have considered,
or am afraid to ask.

I'm so thankful that the suggestion was made and that God led me to a good match for me. Praise for member care and the concern they show for our field personnel daily. Pray for an accepting environment that allows Christians to seek guidance when it's needed.

PRAY, PRACTICE, PONDER

Today, pray for the spiritual, emotional and physical wellbeing of CBF field personnel around the world. Ask God to continue to provide safe places of respite, encouragement and spiritual support for them. Pray that each individual and family will have the courage to ask for help when they need it, and that their needs will be met with acceptance and openness, and that they will find a "good fit" for support, like "T."

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18 Edward Fleming, Winston-Salem, NC (CH)
18 George Nytes, McCord, WA (CH)
18 Jean Pruett, Charlotte, NC (CH)
19 Leah Ryan, New Castle, VA (CH)
20 Amanda Ducksworth, Salt Lake City, UT (CH/CST)
20 Younsoo Park, Fort Drum, NY (CH)
21 Ellen Sechrest (S-CBF Global)
21 Rebecca Church, Louisville, KY (CH)

21 Linda McComb, Clinton, MS (CH)
21 Jeffery Thompson, Gainesville, GA (CH)
21 Stephanie Patterson, New Castle, NC (CH)
21 Cindy Adair Inman, Spartanburg, SC (CH)
22 Stephanie McLeskey, Mars Hill, NC (CH)
23 Michelle Robinson, Columbia, SC (CH)
24 Edwin Badillo, Levittown, Puerto Rico (CH)
24 Danny Tomlinson, Belton, TX (CH)



Burnout: Healing in Community

Jeromy J. Wells

Chaplain at Rogers Behavioral Health,
Wisconsin

■ *Learning Faith*

Some days you will be the light for others, and some days you will need some light from them. As long as there is light, there is hope, and there is a way.

Jennifer Gayle

It takes honesty to admit when something is no longer a good fit. It takes even more extraordinary courage to do something about it—especially when doing something about it may mean changing careers.

This was where I found myself as an Air Force chaplain over the last decade. Looking back over the incredible opportunities I had to serve others, I realized I had mishandled my symptoms of burnout and need for care. Eventually, my symptoms led to depression—one of the 12 stages of burnout. I later learned “the onset of each case is unique, making it difficult to identify burnout early in its course.”* I knew something unhealthy was happening, but I believed it was my responsibility to figure it out. And like a warrior, I pressed on.

What are the support pathways for chaplains who are hurting and need additional spiritual and mental health care?

I recently read an article by Bruce Rogers-Vaughn which inspired me to write to him. And a few days later he wrote back! His thoughtful response communicated nothing less than an “unconditional positive regard” for me. I knew it wasn’t a sales pitch, and I decided I wanted to read more from him. So, I bought his book, *Caring for Souls in a Neoliberal Age*. As I slowly digested each page, I sensed I was getting closer to a well of hope, and I

connected with something much more profound—something I couldn't articulate before. Essentially, depression is not simply a “you” problem; it's also an “us” problem. So, yes, we have to do better with caring for ourselves. That includes recognizing the voice of depression and burnout in our peers and coming alongside them collectively. We don't have to suffer alone.

Bo Prosser planted a seed of awareness in me over a decade ago when he said, “Jeromy, even Jesus surrounded himself with close friends.” Everything is a process. It may have taken a while, but eventually, I found my grounding and took the steps necessary for recovery and growth.

One of those steps included allowing others to become my extended family. As an only child, I always dreamed of having siblings. Now I know I have several siblings who refuse to let me handle things alone. I am forever grateful for God for bringing those people into my life. We are in this together.

PRAY, PRACTICE, PONDER

You don't have to suffer alone. In fact, it is often through sharing our burdens in community that we find a deep sense of joy and belonging. Today, ponder your own community: Whom do you support? Who supports you? Take a moment to pray for CBF-endorsed chaplains and pastoral counselors who often bear a heavy emotional and spiritual load. Ask God to surround them with communities of support and healing where they can share their burdens with others.

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25 Lindell Anderson, Fort Worth, TX (CH)
25 Rick Foster, Lynchburg, VA (CH)
26 Christa Chappelle, High Point, NC (CH)
26 Rodney Craggs, Louisville, KY (CH)
26 Sheryl Johnson, Richmond, VA (CH)
26 Louise Mason, Richmond, VA (CH)
26 Kimberly Reid, Kaneohe, HI (CH)
27 Linda Moore, Greenville, NC (CH)
28 Amanda Adams, Jeffersonville, IN (CH)

1 Wayne Patterson (S-South Carolina)
1 Brent Peery, Conroe, TX (CH)
1 Gregory Wolfe, Owensboro, KY (CH)
1 Chris Scales, Lubbock, TX (CH)
2 Chris Aho (S-CBF Global)
2 Amy Cook (S-North Carolina)
2 Faith Fitzgerald, Pasadena, MD (CH)
2 Michael Patterson, Columbus, GA (CH)
2 Steve Oswalt, Urbana, IL (CH)
2 Glenn Williams, Louisville, KY (PC)



MARCH 3

Lament: Lessons from the Psalmist

Kamilah Aminah Jones

Pan African Koinonia member and
CBF Leadership Scholar, Georgia

■ *Biblical Companions*

Psalm 27:1

The Lord is my light and my salvation—whom shall I fear?

I will always reference and hold Psalm 27 close to my heart. This Scripture comes to mind because it was one of the psalms my grandmother repeated throughout my childhood. I heard the wailing of these words that made me feel a vibrational depth of pain, suffering and perplexing, yet also an unmovable and resolved faith that rendered praise and bold confidence through her voice as I heard her recite this scripture. The psalm opens with these words: “The Lord is my light and my salvation—whom shall I fear?”

I now recognize that my grandma was modeling the intimate relationship that God desires to have with us. Despite the confusion, hurt and disappointment, God is the greatest One we can call on in all circumstances. God wants us to express our lament and hand our problems to God. Lament is not a complaint, but brings us into an intimate relationship with God through our lamenting. In turn, it serves as a form of adoration, respect and praise to God as the only One who can remedy or assist us with our most profound concerns; God cares.

Life brings highs and lows and happiness and sorrow that can naturally lead any human being to turn their backs on God because of the feeling or thought that God had forsaken us and has turned away from us as we constantly witness the images and harmful experiences of oppression, injustice, racism, prejudice, inequity, inequality, ableism, sexism, misogyny, various forms of brutality and violence, homophobia, xenophobia and more present daily in our society. How can we understand that God is our light and our salvation if all people don't recognize that we're all made in God's image and that God

loves all of us and desires justice and peace for all of us? Instead, one can misinterpret this Scripture with disbelief and thoughts that God is only the light and salvation of some people in our world. In turn, this thought leads some to feeling that freedom and peace are not inclusive of all. Some are afraid because of the lack of societal assurance that God is a steadfast stronghold and not being certain of the truth that there's nothing to fear because all wrongs will be righted in God's timing.

By recognizing that we have a life, there is hope, faith and confidence to hold onto God's promises within Scripture. As this psalm continues, we understand, "When the wicked advance against us to devour us, our enemies and foes will stumble and fall. Though an army besieges me, my heart will not fear; though a war breaks out against me, I will be confident even then" (Psalm 2-3). Depending on life circumstances, it can feel like it will take an astronomical level of faith to believe these promises of God. However, God states we only need faith the size of a mustard seed. "For truly I tell you, if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you" (Matthew 17:20-21).

How is the faith conundrum resolved for those that disbelieve and doubt? This question is stated with compassion because we will face this challenge in various ways as we journey through life. There is not one answer or a magic wand to wave to make an experience change in our favor instantly. But radically resolving myself to believe, trust and hold God accountable to God's promises has given me peace. It has drawn me closer to scripture; living within our world guided by Scripture in my daily interactions with God, has increased my confidence, knowing and expecting that God has not forsaken me through all things.

I can testify to God's faithfulness; I've always considered myself to be patient; but trusting God's faithfulness has taken a level of patience I would have never known was possible; it has involved the blind testing ground in wisdom to trust where you don't see the evidence of what is to come or how it will come or even if those things desired will ever come. It has taken humility to remain upright and tenacious despite the various attacks we can experience. This Scripture reminds me of the anguish we all experience and the countless blessings as we live on this Earth. There is still hope because, in the end, we know that our "heads will be exalted above the enemies who surround us, and sacredly, this will lead us to praise with shouts of unbridled joy and sing, making beautiful music from our heart, mind and spirit because of God's faithfulness" (Psalm 27:6).

It's my prayer for those who believe and don't believe that they can summon from the depth of their being, like my grandmother, the hope, confidence and praise despite any adversity, that God is indeed faithful and will continue to be faithful as we depend on God's word.

PRAY, PRACTICE, PONDER

The ancient practice of lectio divina, or “sacred reading,” is a method of reading scripture in order to connect with God’s Spirit within it. Unlike studying scripture, which is focused on unearthing its meaning and application, the practice of lectio divina is an invitation to listen meditatively and contemplatively, “with the ear of the heart.” Today, read Psalm 6, a beautiful psalm of lament, in the tradition of lectio divina, by following the guide below.

First Reading: Read Psalm 6, receiving these holy words into your spirit.

Sacred Pause

Second Reading: Read Psalm 6 again, noticing what word or phrase stands out to you today. Take this word or phrase to God in prayer. What is God saying to you in this word today?

Sacred Pause

Third Reading: Read Psalm 6 a final time. Take a moment to offer gratitude for the living Word that continues to move and speak to us.

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3 David Bosley, Vienna, VA (CH)
4 Kristin Akins, Maitland, FL (CH)
4 Ed Lemmond, Athens, TN (CH)
5 Buddy Corbin, Asheville, NC (CH)
5 Donnie Marlar, Rochester, NY (CH)
6 Jarrod Foerster, Fort Still, OK (CH)
6 Ronnie Adams, Emeritus (FP)

7 Laura Foushee, Japan (FP)
7 Wade Rowatt, Louisville, KY (PC)
8 Marian Boyer, Florence, KY (CH)
8 Susan Kroeker, Columbus, OH (CH)
9 Stuart Collier, Vestavia, AL (CH)
9 Michelle Norman, Spain (FP)

MARCH 10

Presence: J.S. Park

Nataly Sorenson

Executive Director of the Gaston Christian Center, Dallas, Texas



■ *Wise Guides*

My faith burns slower, more methodical, seated in the back, plagued with questions, desperate in prayer, trusting those rare moments when Christ is fully visible.

J.S. Park, [What The Church Won't Talk About](#)

I stumbled upon someone who has been nurturing my faith via Instagram. His name is J.S. Park. His post caught my attention and immediately I began to scroll through his feed reading about his experience as a hospital chaplain and father to a two-year-old daughter. Park shared stories about entering the room when patients were intubated, holding space for grieving families and the moments when he got it wrong. His stories resonated with me. I had recently resigned from being a hospital social worker in the intensive and neuro-intensive care units. At times, by patient or patient's family request, I had conversations regarding faith, illness and grief. I realized not many people gave the patient or family the freedom to feel.

Reading Park's posts felt like balm to my weary soul and reminded me of the precious work social workers, chaplains, pastors, ministers and everyday people can experience if we open ourselves to it. I think in Christian circles we often propagate the idea of false positivity. We fear the stillness; we do not want to feel the discomfort when someone shares their grief. We want to silence people's fears, worries and pains, and we quickly brush them off with a quick blurt of "God is in control." God says "do not worry." "They are in a better place now." "Look at the bright side." And the list goes on and on.

Park shares about being present with people where they are. He says, "They say it's not easy. But I don't believe it's always so hard. Sometimes it is harder not to. It can take seconds to be gracious. As simple as breathing. Or one look. It is hard to break systems. To heal DNA. To march against hostility. To create safe policy. And to protect those with stolen dignity. But it begins here, between you and me. Usually the best theology is you."

J.S. Park has influenced my spiritual practice and theology in challenging me to be present. To live in the now—not where we romanticize the past, glamourize the future, or wish to be in the tomorrow. We become blind to the weeping mother, the angry brother and the sick child. In Scripture, we find Jesus seeing, looking and turning his gaze towards a person, a group, a crowd. We find Jesus having compassion. We find Jesus hearing and listening to those whom the rest of the group rebukes and tries to silence.

May we also live like Jesus—God with us—and be present. Present to see and hear those around us. May the divinity in us see the divinity in them.

“I see you. I hear you. I am with you. I am for you. I am here.”

J.S. Park is a Korean American, son of immigrants, hospital chaplain, and Christ-follower. He has a blog called “J.S. Park: Hospital Chaplain, Skeptical Christian—A blog for busted-up, beat-down people (like me). He is also the author of *The Voices We Carry: Finding Your One True Voice in a World of Clamor and Noise*. He is currently working on a second book on grief coming out in May 2024.

PRAY, PRACTICE, PONDER

Jesus, thank you for being present and with me in my mountaintops and in my valleys. Thank you for being “God with us.” Holy Spirit, teach me to live in the now. To be present to my grieving friend, to be present to my mother with dementia, to be present with my sick spouse, to be present with my feelings. Father, show me ways to live in the now. To give my dad an unexpected phone call. To let a stranger cry in my arms. To listen instead of trying to fix. May I see, hear and be.

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10 Dean Akers, Washington, DC (CH)
10 Cindy Bishop, Piedmont, SC (CH)
11 Julia Flores, Lynchburg, VA (CH)
11 Lisa Nisbet, Louisville, KY (PC)
11 Rebekah Ramsey, Concord, NC (CH)

12 Rickey Letson (S-CBF Global)
12 Leah Leath, Concord, NC (CH)
12 Robert Stanley, Atlanta, GA (CH)
15 Carita Brown, Catonsville, MD (CH)
15 Mary van Rheenen, Netherlands (FP)

MARCH 17

Grief: Community Care

Alicia and Jeff Lee

CBF field personnel, North Macedonia



■ *Learning Faith*

John 1:5 (NIV)

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome.

Just over a year into our marriage and well into our graduate programs, we were ecstatic to learn we were expecting our first child. That joy turned quickly to concern as Alicia was very sick, in and out of the hospital. We desperately hoped to make it through the second trimester. When that hope was crushed and our world devastated, the Logsdon Seminary faculty enveloped us with love.

Each one of the Logsdon professors spent time with us in our hospital room, praying over us. They entered the worst moment in our lives and stepped into our grief. In a generous act of compassion, they organized a beautiful memorial service for our son—for us, really. However, it was more than that. They created space for our grief, honored our grief and shared in our grief.

We had no idea how our grief would break us, how the loss of our son would nearly destroy our faith and our marriage. While we know God saved our faith and marriage, we can testify that it was God through Logsdon Seminary professors. Their faith provided the scaffolding for our own while we examined the holes our experience had created in our faith. Rather than crumbling altogether, we were sustained by their faith while we reconstructed our own. They acted as our spiritual guides, showing us who God is when we were not sure anymore. They spoke truth into our lives and marriage when we could not see a way forward. They offered us a safe place to question, doubt, reconnect and rebuild.

Now, 17 years after the loss of our son and nearly 11 years in overseas missions, STILL Logsdon professors minister to our hearts, encourage us in our faith and marriage,

walk with us through our grief, and partner with us and champion God's work in North Macedonia. As our spiritual guides, they taught us how to minister to people in their grief through their ministry to us all those years ago. They taught us what it is to embody a ministry of long-term presence because of their faithful ministry to us. And we are forever grateful.

PRAY, PRACTICE, PONDER

What losses have you experienced over the years? What individuals and communities supported you in your grief? Today, ponder what grief you may be carrying with you during this season of Lent. What losses have taken place in your life, your family, your community or your relationship with God over the last year? Take some time today to journal, pray or talk with a friend about your grief.

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17 Byron Bell, Atlanta, GA (GA)
17 Mary Gessner, Madison, AL (PC)
18 Dodie Huff-Fletcher, Louisville, KY (PC)
18 Gabriel Pech, Vecenza, Italy (CH)
18 Gregory Qualls, Mooresboro, NC (CH)
18 Beth Riddick, Fredericksburg, VA (CH)
18 David Robinson, Newport News, VA (PC)
19 Bob Fox (S-Kentucky)
19 Jennifer Bordenet, Orlando, FL (CH)
19 Angel Lee, Durham NC (CH)

19 Kim Schmitt, Fayetteville, GA (CH)
20 Ada Foushee, 2019, Japan (FPC)
20 Anna Allred, Asheboro, NC (CH)
20 Cynthia Corey, Brunswick, GA (CH)
20 William Hemphill, Stone Mountain, GA (CH)
21 Aaron Weaver (S-CBF Global)
21 Walter Jackson, Louisville, KY (PC)
21 Alan Melton, Waynesboro, VA (PC)
21 Michael Strickland, Falls Church, VA (CH)
23 J. Claude Huguley, Nashville, TN (CH)

MARCH 24

Sacrifice: Good Friday

Mary

CBF field personnel, Southeast Asia



■ *Learning Faith*

John 15:13

No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends.

In the midst of Holy Week and on this day, which marks Dad's first birthday since his death, I am pondering the prompt for this year's *Prayers of the People*: spiritual guides. I am reminded of a note sent to supporters a little over a year ago. You may have read a tribute to my husband, Hunter, who died in 2021, in CBF's *fellowship!* magazine. Hunter and my dad shared the unenviable bond of simultaneously battling cancers. After completing a series of chemotherapy treatments in the middle of 2021 with mixed results, Dad had been ready to put an end to the treatments. Then Hunter died more quickly than we had hoped. At that point, Dad asked for another round of chemotherapy. (I would be told these things after he had begun these treatments.)

Why the change of heart? He wished to stay longer to console me and to spare me additional grief so quickly on top of Hunter's death. For a brief season, I struggled with this choice. For my part, I would not have asked him to do this. In fact, it is likely that I would have discouraged it. I knew what awaited this faithful follower of Christ—and smile now when I think of him in God's presence even as I long to hear his voice. While I did not want to lose him, I would have spared him the suffering that his choice to remain entailed. Like the characters in O. Henry's *The Gift of the Magi*, we would sacrifice our desires for the joy of the other.

As Good Friday approaches, yes, I consider the great sacrifice made for all of us on that day. I also see so many of the faces of those who draw others closer to the sacrificial One through their acts of love and joy-infused sacrifice. "My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends" (John 15:12-13). God loves lavishly, and people respond with daily acts of

laying down their lives. Through the years, ever so slowly, I have learned to pay attention to those acts. Some of those acts, like my Dad's, are hard to miss. Others are easy to overlook: a listening ear, a kind word, a necessary hard word not easily spoken, patience beyond measure, abundant provision disguised as daily bread, humble instruction, a "widow's mite," "seventy times seven" forgiveness, and on and on and on. God is speaking and acting all around us. May God, give us ears to hear and eyes to see. Thank You, God, for each of Your children whose love brings us closer to You.

PRAY, PRACTICE, PONDER

As a spiritual practice today, make a list of all those who have embodied God's love to you through actions of sacrifice. The list may be long or it may be short. Put the list in a prominent place and as Good Friday approaches, contemplate this list each day. Ponder how these individuals and their sacrifices have shaped your understanding of God's love and sacrifice.

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S = CBF Staff Member

24 Gina Biddle, Dallas, TX (CH)
24 Michael Liga, Pearland, TX (CH)
24 Michael Gross, Roswell, GA (CH)
24 Emory (Chip) Reeves, Martinez, GA (CH)
24 Mark Spain, Canyon Lake, TX (CH)
24 Todd Walter, Inman, SC (CH)
24 Michael Liga, Rochester, MN (CH)
25 Jade Acker, Uganda (FP)
25 Gary Nistler, Evans, GA (CH-Ret.)

26 Tyler Conway, Waco, TX (CH)
27 Ken Chapman, Jefferson City, MO (CH)
27 David Gladson, Pendleton, SC (CH)
27 Amy Karriker, Great Falls, MT (CH)
28 Lynda Schupp, Corinth, TX (CH)
29 Phil McCarley, Charles Town, WV (CH)
29 Michael Shea, Mars Hill, NC (CH)
30 John Emmart, Stoughton, WI (CH)
30 Jonathan Ludwig, Fresno, CA (CH)
30 Layne Rogerson, Cheraw, SC (CH)



EASTER AND PENTECOST: STORIES OF RESURRECTION FROM THE SAINTS AMONG US

March 31-May 19

Jesus's resurrection is the beginning of God's new project not to snatch people away from earth to heaven but to colonize earth with the life of heaven. That, after all, is what the Lord's Prayer is about.

N.T. Wright, Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church



MARCH 31

Som: A Light for Christ

Kirk and Suzie

CBF field personnel, Southeast Asia

■ *Saints Among Us*

I may just be one small candle in the darkness, but I want to be the light of salvation to many people in need of the Light of Life.

Som

These words were penned not by a saint of old, but by a young man who has come to be an incredible blessing to us. We first met Som almost 25 years ago, when we moved into a bamboo and thatch house across the street from his place in a village in the mountains of Southeast Asia. He was in high school then, and shyly came to our house to ask for help on his English homework—which turned out to be translating some heavy metal songs that contained many words we felt should not be translated!

Som had a rough childhood. His father often fell into alcohol-fueled rages, beating his mother mercilessly before abandoning the family. The trauma of that and other abuse sometimes left his mother in a listless state, unable to care for herself or her son. By age seven, Som was doing the cooking and other domestic chores. Free public school in Som's area only went through grade nine, but a CBF-connected Korean church in Houston made it possible for Som and several of his friends to continue their studies at an agricultural junior college and then university. On the weekends and during school breaks, Som and this group of friends began working with us to produce literacy materials in the local language and translate the New Testament and portions of the Old Testament.

Working on the translation team for over 10 years gave Som the opportunity to become deeply acquainted with Scripture and the person of Jesus. Yet he could not quite come to a place of personal faith—saying that he would believe if only he could experience a miracle. When the New Testament was published, he went on to other employment. Several years later, Som called us on the phone, his voice full of excitement. The night before he had experienced something that felt more real than any ordinary dream.

He saw a white bird coming down upon him and felt an overwhelming sense of peace and love. He woke with the sense that he had encountered Jesus. He felt that the miracle he had been praying for had indeed happened—not a miracle of healing or seeing water turned into wine, but a miracle of a changed heart. He asked to be baptized.

Som, fearful of the social consequences that he knew would follow, asked that we not tell other villagers about his decision to follow Christ. But as time passed, villagers noticed a change—and Som felt emboldened to be open about his faith. Now, almost weekly, Som posts about his faith on Facebook. He even wrote a short book to share with friends, narrating his life from the early days of emotional trauma and poverty to the new life and hope he has found in Christ. His observations about Scripture and walking with Jesus are profound and inspiring to us.

PRAY, PRACTICE, PONDER

Som stated: “I may just be one small candle in the darkness, but I want to be the light of salvation to many people in need of the Light of Life.”

Today, pray for Som, for his strength and joy as he continues to share the Light of Life. And pray for CBF field personnel Kirk and Suzie whose care for Som, and for others in their community, is strengthening the light of Christ around the world.

Birthdays this Week:

CH = Chaplain
EP = Engagement Partner
FP = Field Personnel

FPC = Child of Field Personnel
PC = Pastoral Counselor
S = CBF Staff Member

31 Tim Madison, Clearwater, FL (CH)
1 Jennifer Dill, Pittsburgh, PA (CH)
1 Craig Walker, High Point, VA (CH)
1 Greg Smith, Fredericksburg, VA (FP)
2 Frank Morrow, Emeritus (FP)
2 Leonora Newell, Emeritus (FP)
2 Dorcus Cater, Snellville GA (CH)
2 Christie McTier, Harlem, GA (CH)
2 Wayde Pope, Crestview, FL (CH)
3 Mark Reece, Little Creek, VA (CH)
3 Wayne Sibley, Pineville, LA (CH)

3 Thomas Wicker, Salado, TX (CH)
4 Truett, 2011, Southeast Asia (FPC)
5 Caroline Legrand (S-CBF Global)
5 Patrick Baxter, Akron, OH (CH)
5 Eddy Ruble, Southeast Asia (FP)
5 Darcie Jones, Columbia, SC (CH)
6 Brittany Caldwell (S-Great Rivers Fellowship)
6 Lauren Deer, Raleigh, NC (CH)
6 Steven Mills, Flat Rock, NC (CH)
6 Jeffrey Wright, Cartersville, GA (CH)



Isaac: Empowering Indigenous Leaders

Lita and Rick Sample
CBF field personnel, California

■ *Saints Among Us*

Genesis 12:1-2

Now the LORD said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing.”

Fremont, California, is home to the largest concentration of Afghans anywhere outside of central Asia, with more than 60,000 Afghans living in and around Fremont. Right after my wife, Lita, and I moved here from Houston, Texas, we became involved in various ministries directed toward Afghans, particularly refugee families. For years, we prayed that the Lord would bring to the Bay Area a compassionate, educated Afghan Christian—a gifted evangelist to plant and pastor the first Afghan Christian church in our area, perhaps one of the first Afghan churches in the nation.

God answered those prayers by bringing Isaac from Afghanistan to northern California a few years ago. I met Isaac when he first arrived at a Persian New Year Nowruz festival at a local park where our local team of church leaders interested in evangelizing Afghans had a booth at the festival. I was immediately struck at how Isaac was able to share the Gospel with Afghan Muslims with sensitivity and clarity while being completely true to the Gospel message without any compromise to Muslim objections. He really is a powerful evangelist. Isaac and I quickly forged a very close friendship and partnership in the gospel that becomes richer all the time.

Lita and I were thrilled when Isaac started an Afghan church based in Fremont and were honored to attend his wedding to his lovely bride, Mary. Together, Mary and Isaac are an Afghan ministry power couple. Having reached 20-plus years of Afghan ministry in this city, I am happy to report that we now have a strong leadership team of various

local pastors, church leaders, lay people and others serving in the Afghan ministry with Isaac as our ethnic pastoral leader. Our entire Afghan ministry team looks to Isaac for guidance and leadership as we all seek to bear witness to Jesus Christ. His wisdom on how best to present the gospel to Afghans has been pivotal in our ESL programs, outreach events, volunteer enlistment and basically every element of what has become a powerful Christ-presence among our local community of Afghan Muslims. That is in addition to his pastoral direction of his own ethnic Afghan congregation with its young-in-the-faith community of Jesus-followers.

One of the things that has impressed us most about Isaac is that, in addition to all the ministries with which he is engaged locally and in person with Afghans in our community and with the many times he speaks in local churches to interpret what is happening within the Afghan ministry network here in the Bay Area, Isaac has also developed an effective and flourishing global ministry in which he engages in discipleship with Afghans around the world via the internet. Under his tutelage numerous Afghans who are recent converts to Christianity are benefiting from his teaching and discipleship as they meet with him regularly online.

PRAY, PRACTICE, PONDER

Local, indigenous leadership is often an answer to prayer for field personnel and the communities in which they serve. Today, pray for Lita, Rick and Isaac, and their ministries in Fremont. Ask God to continue to raise up Afghan Christians to lead in their community.

Birthdays this Week:

CH = Chaplain
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FPC = Child of Field Personnel
PC = Pastoral Counselor
S = CBF Staff Member

- 7 LaCount Anderson, Rocky Mount, NC (EP)
- 7 Bonnie Hicks, Woodstock, GA (CH)
- 7 Mary Wrye, Henderson, KY (CH)
- 7 Brandon Johnson, Lillington, NC (CH)
- 8 Laura Johnson, New Bern, NC (CH)
- 8 Drexel Rayford, Birmingham, AL (CH)
- 9 Jessica Hearne, Danville, VA (FP)
- 9 Scarlett Jasper, Somerset, KY (FP)
- 9 Alexis Johnson, Birmingham, AL (CH)
- 9 Jim Pruettt, Charlotte, NC (PC)

- 9 Steve Vance, Charlotte, NC (CH)
- 10 Alan Rogers, Kaneohe, HI (CH)
- 11 Laura Broadwater, Louisville, KY (CH)
- 12 Andy Hale (S-North Carolina)
- 12 Leslie Brogdon (S-CBF Global)
- 13 Landon Alberson, Chula, GA (CH)
- 13 Alden Gallimore, Winston-Salem, NC (CH)
- 13 Steve Sullivan, Durham, NC (CH)
- 13 Brian A. Warfield, Spencer, OK (CH)



APRIL 14

Ayse: Overwhelming Love

Karen Morrow

CBF field personnel, Texas

■ *Saints Among Us*

Genesis 50:20-21 (The Message)

Don't be afraid. Do I act for God? Don't you see, you planned evil against me but God used those same plans for my good, as you see all around you right now—life for many people. Easy now, you have nothing to fear; I'll take care of you and your children.

Throughout my life I have had different spiritual guides who have encouraged me in my Christian faith; the most unlikely was a new Muslim convert from the Middle Eastern unreached people group among whom we were called to work.

Ayse and her family were political asylum seekers in Germany when she came to faith through reading the Bible and dreams. She was the first in her family to become a Christ-follower; but with time, her whole family became believers. As I met weekly with Ayse to study the Bible, I was always amazed as she would share with me what God had taught her through scripture the previous week. I had a front row seat to see the work of the Holy Spirit preparing her.

Despite all our prayers, Ayse and her husband Salih's asylum case was denied and they were suddenly taken from their apartment and deported to their home country. Ayse called me from the airport in tears, asking for us to care for her children who had not been at home when they were taken.

Ayse boldly shared her faith with the police who escorted them on the plane and testified of the angels who walked alongside them as they navigated their way back to their village in the eastern part of the country. The story of their deportation and a copy of her testimony from a German Christian magazine was published on the front page of the local paper. They feared for their lives and went into hiding. But what man

meant for harm, God used for good. People came to them wanting to know more about their faith and Ayse shared of God's work in her life.

Our German church supported them financially and helped care for and reunite them with their children. The transition was very difficult, and the family struggled to find work. With time, they became an integral part of the small but growing Christian church in this predominantly Muslim country. Today, Ayse leads Christian women's retreats and Salih runs a kebab shop where they witness to God's work in their lives and the joy and hope God provides.

Through it all I have had the privilege to see and experience God's overwhelming love, protection and faithfulness to them amidst all the struggles. I see God in a new way and when personal doubts arise, I lean on God, knowing God's faithful presence.

PRAY, PRACTICE, PONDER

Today, ponder where God has used an unlikely witness in your life to encourage and accompany you on your journey to be more like Christ. Who is this person? Where did you encounter them and what did they teach you through their witness? Perhaps, as a spiritual practice this week, you will take a moment to write a note, send a text, or offer a prayer of gratitude for their presence and the unexpected impact they had on your faith.

Birthdays this Week:

CH = Chaplain

EP = Engagement Partner

FP = Field Personnel

FPC = Child of Field Personnel

PC = Pastoral Counselor

S = CBF Staff Member

14 Kerri Kroeker, Calgary, Alberta, Canada (CH)
15 Jeff Flowers, Evans, GA (CH)
15 Don Pittman, Emeritus (FP)
15 Jeff Langford (S-Heartland/Global)
16 Kay Wright, Virginia Beach, VA (CH)
17 Allison Anderson, Morgantown, WV (CH)
17 Mary Beth Beck-Henderson, Winston-Salem, NC (CH)

17 David Jones, Newberg, OR (CH)
17 Jene Smith, Lexington, KY (CH)
18 Cyrus Bush, Pfafftown, NC (CH)
18 Ray Cooley, Wallingford, CT (CH)
18 Mason Jackson III, Fort Myers, FL (CH)
18 Nathan Solomon, Washington, DC (CH)
19 Michael Lee, Hendersonville, NC (CH)
19 Zach Medlin, Salt Lake City UT (CH)
20 Susan Stephenson, Edmond, OK (CH)



Justine: Joy in the Lord

Missy Angalla

CBF field personnel, Uganda

■ *Saints Among Us*

Romans 12:12

Rejoice in hope; be patient in affliction; persevere in prayer.

I first met Justine at a job interview to serve with us on staff as a social worker. Our ministry programs were at an important growth point and we needed an additional social worker to serve with us.

I remember feeling an instant peace with her. She was humble and had a wise and gentle presence, perfect for a social worker serving among vulnerable communities. Justine has now served on staff with us for the last eight years. She is originally from Uganda, but has lived as an immigrant in Europe and has firsthand experience of living away from home. I have learned and grown a lot while serving with her over the last eight years. She has a strong faith and dependence on God. Whenever there are challenges going on, Justine turns directly to God first to ask for wisdom and provision.

She also has incredible joy of the Lord! I have greatly enjoyed working with Justine because we have been able to find joy in even the most challenging situations. Her joy and laughter are contagious. This laughter is a reminder to me of God's faithful presence with us. The laughter provides a lightening of tension and the ability to breathe more deeply.

Our ministry focuses on working with the most vulnerable refugee families within our communities. These situations are often incredibly complicated, requiring a holistic multi-faceted solution. No matter how in-depth and robust our ministry programs, the situation is always bigger than us. Together, we remind one another of the foundational verse for our ministry from Ephesians 3:21 where Paul proclaims "we serve a God who

is able to do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine.” We see that firsthand every day as God moves powerfully in the lives of the most vulnerable refugees within our community through providing hope, healing and restoration.

PRAY, PRACTICE, PONDER

Maintaining joy in the midst of challenging circumstances is truly a spiritual discipline. What brings you a sense of joy? Not the exciting-but-fleeting feelings of happiness, but the deep, abiding experience of joy. Perhaps snuggling with a child or pet brings you joy, or maybe it’s time spent in prayer and meditation, or noticing new blooms on the flowers outside your window, or taking a walk in the woods. In the week ahead, in honor of Justine, commit to a daily activity that sustains your joy in the Lord.

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22 Judith Wortelboer-Grace, Temple, TX (CH)
22 Barry Pennington, Pleasant Hill, MO (CH)
22 Brittany Ramirez (S-CBF Global)
23 David Kolb, Lexington, NC (CH)
23 Isaac Lopex, Crowley, TX (CH)
24 Brenda Atkinson, Greenville, SC (CH)
24 Rhonda Gilligan-Gillespie, Memphis, TN (CH)
24 Laura Mannes, San Antonio, TX (CH)

24 Travis Smith, Forest City, NC (CH)
24 Leslie Stith, North Kansas City, MO (CH)
25 Victoria Whatley (S-CBF Global)
25 Judah Foushee, 2022, Japan (FPC)
25 Connie Graham, Fitzgerald, GA (CH)
25 Ellen Garner-Cook, Jefferson, GA (CH)
25 Jane Hill, Knoxville, TN (CH)
27 Pat Davis, Baton Rouge, LA (CH)
27 Pete Parks, Williamsburg, VA (CH)



Daniel: Forgiveness

Jessica Hearne

CBF field personnel, Virginia

■ *Saints Among Us*

Matthew 18:21-22

Then Peter came and said to him, “Lord, if my brother or sister sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?” Jesus said to him, “Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times.”

Forgiveness does not relieve someone of responsibility for what they have done. Forgiveness does not erase accountability. It is not about turning a blind eye or even turning the other cheek. It is not about letting someone off the hook or saying it is okay to do something monstrous. Forgiveness is simply about understanding that every one of us is both inherently good and inherently flawed. Within every hopeless situation and every seemingly hopeless person lies the possibility of transformation.

Archbishop Desmond Tutu, *The Book of Forgiving*

I have known Daniel for many years, though his relationship with our community has not always been a positive one. Daniel had started coming to Grace and Main Bible study over 11 years ago. He was the one who finally convinced Bruce to come to my house for a community dinner, a decision that eventually led to Bruce’s getting sober and becoming a leader in our community. Bruce and Daniel were old friends, and Daniel tried several times to get sober like Bruce. The process was much more difficult for Daniel, though, and every time he relapsed, he got more frustrated with Bruce’s success in the face of his own failure. Finally, during a particularly bad relapse, Daniel broke Bruce’s wrist with a baseball bat before leaving the community, possibly for good, we thought.

So, it was a surprise to me when, about three years later, not long after moving in to the first home of his own in many years, Bruce invited Daniel to be his first hospitality guest. Even though I had been helping run my own hospitality house for years at this point, I couldn’t understand how Bruce was able to forgive the abuse that he had endured from

Daniel and, more importantly, how he could trust his old friend again after such a bad break. But Daniel's health was starting to decline, and Bruce knew that Daniel needed a place to stay where he would have a friend to help care for him.

It wasn't long before Daniel would return the favor. Daniel was there when Bruce went to the doctor and found out the first time about the cancer. Daniel was there at the hospital every day, helping Bruce eat as much as he was able, sitting with him so he wouldn't be alone. Daniel helped sneak Bruce's cat into the room one evening as the nurses conveniently didn't come by the room for a while. Daniel was at Bruce's side when he went home to die, watching the sun set over the community urban farm that he had put so much of himself into. And after Bruce passed, Daniel stayed in Bruce's house, offering hospitality himself to another friend, Jody, who needed a place to stay while he also tried to quit drinking. Daniel would tell me, in those times when Jody would relapse that, if Jesus could help him after all that he had done, Daniel knew Jesus could also help Jody. And when he did, Jody would need a place to stay.

Daniel and Bruce certainly aren't the people that I would have ever thought could be spiritual guides for me. However, I do not think I've ever known anyone else who could so radically embody Jesus' command in Matthew 18 to forgive "seventy times seven" times. Daniel and Bruce lived the gospel of forgiveness: they forgave each other, just as God had forgiven them. And they both lived that forgiveness through acts of radical hospitality.

PRAY, PRACTICE, PONDER

Sometimes our spiritual guides are people and experiences we would never expect. Today, ponder the role of forgiveness in your life. Who has forgiven you? Whom have you forgiven? What people and experiences have taught you about forgiveness and reconciliation? You may wish to spend some time journaling about these questions. Allow this to be your prayer today.

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PC = Pastoral Counselor
S = CBF Staff Member

28 Carrol Wilson (S-CBF Global)
28 Gary McFarland, Charlotte, NC (PC)
29 Ted Dougherty, Winston-Salem, NC (PC)
30 Melissa Neal, Floyd, VA (CH)
30 Charles Wallace, Fort Worth, TX (CH)
1 Michael Coggins, Navarre, FL (CH)
2 Cathy Cole, Aiken, SC (CH)
2 Stephen Murphy, Hull, MA (CH)

2 Deborah Reeves, Dripping Springs, TX (CH)
2 Victoria Youell, North Charleston, SC (CH)
3 Blake Herridge, Waco, TX (CH)
3 Doug Jackson, Ardmore, OK (CH)
3 Alexander Reyes, Reston, VA (CH)
4 Johann Choi, Fairfield, CA (CH)
4 Gary Metcalf, Kingsport, TN (CH)
4 Skip Wisenbaker, Atlanta, GA (CH)



Esau: Hope for the Future

Brooke and Mike

CBF field personnel, Southeast Asia

■ *Saints Among Us*

Jeremiah 29:11

For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the LORD, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope.

Esau is the youngest in his family. He is the third of four siblings to have come through our ministry for university students here in Southeast Asia. The others have graduated and Esau will soon. Although many times we are mentored by our mentors, sometimes, we are mentored by our mentees. We have looked at expanding our ministry team through the pandemic and we have been weighing individuals in our ministry. For two years, I have had my eyes set on Esau's taking a leadership role.

He is not your typical leadership candidate. He is one of the younger members of our group and he is quiet. He's not shy, but he is careful not to speak out of turn. He is slow to speak, but quick to listen. He waits for others to move into their own conversations and then he comes to me to ask questions, deep and profound questions, that the others do not expect from him.

For the last year, Esau had been applying for a job that he knew nothing about. We have seen his helpfulness, his willingness to work when others are happy to sit, his desire to learn new things and push past his comfort zone, and his courage to lead our men's Bible study, men who are older than he. And, recently, he said yes to joining our team after graduation.

In our country, the pandemic is just now ending, and things are returning to normal. Esau will graduate in a month and the whole world is ahead of him. Esau is helping me to see the world and ministry potential with younger eyes. His faithfulness and his helpfulness remind me of our role as servants, not just teachers. Esau is encouraging me to be quick to listen, slow to speak and to ask difficult questions, even when I know I

may not like the answers or that I would have to change. Most importantly, after a long pandemic with so many losses, Esau is reminding me of God's impact even in dark times and the hope for the next generation of Christ's servants in this country.

PRAY, PRACTICE, PONDER

What can you learn from the next generation? Today, ponder those who are "Esau" in your own life. Then spend some time in prayer for Brooke, Mike and Esau as they bear witness to God's love and light in Southeast Asia.

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CH = Chaplain
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FP = Field Personnel

FPC = Child of Field Personnel
PC = Pastoral Counselor
S = CBF Staff Member

5 Austin, 2004, Southeast Asia (FPC)
5 Karen Long, Birmingham, AL (CH)
5 Jacquelyn Green, Roanoke, VA (CH)
5 Sarah Wilson, Raleigh, NC (CH)
6 Adam Granger (S-CBF Global)
6 Carol Dalton, Swannanoa, NC (CH)
6 Jessica Jasper, Elizabethtown, KY (CH)
7 Allison Rodgers, Elizabethtown, KY (CH)

8 Rusty Elkins, Edmond, OK (CH)
8 Brenda Pace Jones, Hendersonville, NC (PC)
9 Rich Behers, Lakeland, FL (CH)
9 Leigh Jackson, Austin, TX (CH)
9 David Harding, Emeritus (FP)
11 Leah Boling, Joint Base Andrews, MD (CH)
11 Jonna Garvin, Manassas, VA (CH)
11 Cy Miller, Marion, NC (CH)



The Women: The Power of Mothering

Aleisha A. Langhorne

Pastor, Luther Rice Memorial Baptist Church,
Maryland

■ *Saints Among Us*

This piece is a reflection on the influence and power of women, most notably, Eve as an Ezer*—a helper; women in the genealogy of Jesus as listed in Matthew [Tamar (Matthew 1:3); Rahab (1:5); Ruth (1:5); and the wife of Uriah the Hittite (1:6)]; and the unnamed women who influenced countless generations of prophets. The power of a woman's influence is reflected in this tribute and poem of thanksgiving to the women who influenced my life.

To: My Momma, Momma Green (adopted grandmother), Granny (maternal grandmother), Cousin Elsie (paternal matriarch), Granny Scott (family friend), Miz Granny (elder I met along the way), and all the women who have poured into me along the journey. At the time of this writing, all of these listed, except for my mom, reside in my great cloud of witnesses.

Thank you from a mother-ed child.

El Shaddai, another name for God, means the breasted one, the nurturer. How grateful I am for every breast that has nurtured me.

You held me in your arms physically and figuratively, rocking and sheltering me from a world designed to harm me (or to not let me be me). Your words and ways to live by have nurtured and sustained my soul. Your love fed my heart and paved the way to make me whole. You are still my help in the time of the storm, the soft space I run to when I fall, the strong force that pushes and prods me along, the hard (stern) face that allows me to do no harm. Healer, helper, friend, a momma, this girl's deepest friend.

**Ezer – a helper, not as an assistant but as Savior; used to describe God as our very present help; used to describe Eve.*

Thank you for loving me the best way you knew how, for giving me the best parts of you, the parts flawed, time-tested and true. The parts of your heart given to me; the help as I struggle in learning how to be. Perfection did not know your name, yet in your love I perfectly remain.

The God in you built up the God in me. You hold me up when I falter and fumble; you help me to navigate paths (this journey or world) full of danger. Healer, helper, friend, a momma, this girl's deepest friend.

I lean into your grace as I run my race thankful that a part of you is reflected in my face. Though all of your life was NOT wonderful, because of you I am a wonder to behold. A mother-ed child.

Thank you, from a mother-ed child. Healer, lover, friend, a momma, this girl's deepest friend.

PRAY, PRACTICE, PONDER

Who or what has mother-ed you? Not everyone has a positive maternal figure. Reflect on the ways in which mothering or the lack thereof influenced your life. Then take time to release the pain and/or celebrate the joy associated with mothering in your life.

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CH = Chaplain
EP = Engagement Partner
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S = CBF Staff Member

13 Tracy Dunn, Hereford, TX (CH)
13 Samson Naidoo, Denison, TX (CH)
14 Scott McBroom, Charleston, SC (PC)
15 Patrick Cardwell, Chapel Hill, NC (CH)
15 Melina Grier, St. Joseph, MO (CH)
15 James Jeffers, Hoover, AL (CH)
15 Larry Layne, Montgomery, AL (CH)
16 Lauren Hall, Katy, TX (CH)

16 Steven Harris, Salem, VA (PC)
16 John Reeser, Sautee Nacoochee, GA (CH)
17 Jennifer Call, Salem, VA (CH)
17 Matthew Weems, Columbia, SC (CH)
17 Nell Green, Emeritus (FP)
18 Clay Polson, Waco, TX (CH)
18 Greg Slate, Littleton, CO (CH)



Bill Mason: A Pentecost Legacy

Gennady and Mina Podgaisky
CBF field personnel, Poland/Ukraine

■ *Saints Among Us*

1 Corinthians 12:4-7

Now there are varieties of gifts but the same Spirit, and there are varieties of services but the same Lord, and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

I (Gennady) met Bill 20 years ago. He came to the Village of Hope Foster Families Ministry Center in Bucha, Ukraine, with the first team of volunteers from North Carolina. They came to help to rebuild the former youth communist camp which was abandoned and in a state of disrepair. The camp was closed after the Chernobyl disaster in 1986. This was Bill's third trip to Ukraine. He, along with several other men, had come to Ukraine before on scouting trips, looking for a suitable property for the foster families' ministry center.

Bill was a family man, who had raised several children and who had a long and successful engineering career which had taken him around the world. He worked hard and provided for his family as well as being active in his local church. Bill was not a preacher or a teacher; he was a hands-on kind of person. He showed his faith and dedication to the Lord through practical deeds of love and service to others. He has lived his faith by coming to Ukraine 19 times in the past 21 years.

He spent his time being instrumental in managing the rebuilding of several buildings and making the whole property of the Village of Hope operational. He served as a "construction consultant" and helped to receive/lead/manage dozens of volunteer teams and hundreds of volunteers who came to the Village of Hope in the summers. In the years prior to the war, three foster families with up to 24 foster children lived at

the Village of Hope. Bill saw his efforts coming to fruition, and he met and maintained a relationship with a number of the foster children who had come to and who grew up in the foster families residing on the property.

He was not used to being idle and doing nothing. Upon his retirement, he wanted to be useful and spend the rest of his life by serving others, utilizing his life and work experiences. He did it so well. Often just his presence, even with no words, encouraged and inspired others to do better whatever they were doing or to get involved in service to others. He was there when we needed him. He promoted the ministry of the Village of Hope stateside and spoke in many churches, recruiting volunteers and raising funds on behalf of the ministry. That was his life purpose, and he was a faithful servant in God's hands. I want to be Bill when "I grow up." Thank you, Bill, for your faithfulness, your example and your inspiration; you did well.

Several years ago, my wife and I came to the heartfelt realization that we will never be able to retire, even if/when we reach retirement age. Regardless of where we will be living, there will always be people in need, hurting people, people who will need counseling, words of wisdom, encouragement, spiritual guidance or just our presence. We have been called by God to this type of ministry. We have been faithful to our calling, and God has not withdrawn that call upon our life. We will never be without "work."

We want to be like Bill, going and doing whatever he could, until he could do it no more. Bill passed from an illness on March 21, 2023. I know that when Bill met his Creator, he heard the words, "Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!" (Matt. 25:21)

PRAY, PRACTICE, PONDER

This Pentecost, recall Paul's words to the Christians in Corinth: To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. Each of us are given gifts and skills for the healing and transformation of God's world. It is our responsibility to use these gifts, as Bill did, to impact others. Today, ponder your legacy. What gifts and skills has God given you? How are you using these to leave a legacy?



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S = CBF Staff Member

19 Mary Ahn, Round Lake, IL (CH)
19 Mark Sumrall, Houston, TX (CH)
20 Julie Perry, Charlottesville, VA (CH)
20 Marcy Thomas, Brentwood, TN (CH)
21 Carson Foushee, Japan (FP)
21 Pat, Emeritus (FP)
21 Ron Winstead, Emeritus (FP)
22 Jon Ivy, Tuscaloosa, AL (CH)
22 Travis Yelton, Colorado Springs, CO (CH)

23 Polly Barnes, Brandon, MS (CH)
23 John Schumacher, Columbia, SC (CH)
24 Paulette Porter-Hallmon, Spartanburg, SC (CH)
24 Jordan Tripp, Raleigh, NC (CH)
24 Yesel Yohakim Rodríguez Zayas, 2012,
US-Mexico Border (FPC)
25 Rick Burnette, Ft. Meyers, FL (FP)
25 Daniel Mitchell, Columbus, GA (CH)
25 Kelly Russell, Tuttle, OK (CH)

MAY 26

Family: Servant Leadership

Sue and Greg Smith

CBF field personnel, Virginia



■ Learning Faith

Matthew 25:40

Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did it to me.

My (Sue) parents taught me a lot about the practical aspects of faith and practice. I grew up in rural Arkansas with very strong Methodist roots. My dad, John McCoy Nutt, was born in 1916, and had even been named after John Wesley and the bishop by a circuit-riding preacher. The preacher and Bishop McCoy were staying with my grandparents as they came through town just a week after my dad was born.

Until my appointment to mission service, there had been no clergy in our family history—just a host of lay leaders, church trustees, Sunday school superintendents and teachers, music leaders and folks who saw that the church bills were paid, records were kept, the door was unlocked and the grass mowed, the stoves lit or the air conditioners on, and the pews dusted and floors swept.

There was no discussion each week about church attendance—we were always there! Or what to put in the offering plate. My parents prepared their Bible study lessons on Saturday nights and on Sundays my mom wrote the checks and slipped them into the offering plate while my dad led the music during worship. I was given two quarters each week, one for Sunday school and one for worship. The plate never passed without something being put in.

While that sounds like a pretty “religious” upbringing, it wasn’t. And that’s not what truly influenced my faith. It was what happened outside of church. It happened when my mom mowed yards for older people who couldn’t do it themselves. Mom mowed yards well into her 80s, at one time mowing five yards besides her own. And of course, the church yard!

It was when my dad went out on cold, dark nights to deliver gas to a family who had discovered after work that their tank was empty. He drove a propane gas truck as an

independent contractor, and he figured that people were going to have a hard time sleeping and then getting the kids to school if they had to spend the night in a cold house with no hot breakfast the next morning.

It was when my mom walked every day to the post office (she didn't drive) to pick up mail for a neighbor who was homebound, then for another who had "bad knees" and couldn't get out. The list went on and on.

It was when a family traveling through our town ran low on gas on Christmas Eve with 30 miles to go to get home that night. My dad and I packed them into our Pontiac and took them home, leaving their car in our driveway until they could return a few days later with gas.

It was when my mom transplanted wildflowers from her yard for her new Mexican neighbor's yard and showed her how to water and care for them, even though they spoke different languages.

What most influenced my faith was not what my parents talked about or the church we attended, but what I observed about their own faith in everyday life. They normally and naturally did "what Christian people do." Today, I realize that I've made their faith and faith practices my own. My parents have always been deeply rooted in spirituality and practice, striving each day to do what Jesus would have done in each situation they faced. My dad passed away when I was 21. But as I lean toward ministries of accompaniment and pastoral care, toward addressing social and community needs, toward treating others as Jesus would treat them, I'm continuing my family's strong legacy of faith practice and passing it along to my sons and their families. And I know my dad is there, guiding my heart and steps in the right direction.

PRAY, PRACTICE, PONDER

How would you define servant leadership? Today, pray for the ministry of Sue and Greg Smith in Fredericksburg, Va. Thank God for their servant leadership, and for the servant leaders in your own congregation and community.

Birthdays this Week:

CH = Chaplain

EP = Engagement Partner

FP = Field Personnel

FPC = Child of Field Personnel

PC = Pastoral Counselor

S = CBF Staff Member

26 Stephanie Coyne, Conyers, GA (CH)
27 Grace Freeman, Dunwoody, GA (CH)
28 Kenneth LeBon, Fort Jackson, SC (CH)
28 David Smith, Alpharetta, GA (PC)
29 Aleesa Naish, Birmingham, AL (CH)
30 Beom Jung, Lawrenceville, GA (CH)
30 Lane Riley (S-South Carolina)

31 Stacey Buford, Murfreesboro, TN (CH)
31 Blake Miller, Greenville, SC (CH)
31 LouRae Myhre-Weber, Twin Bridges, MT (CH)
31 Kelley Woggon, Louisville, KY (CH)
1 Thong, Lun, Houston, TX (CH)
1 Karen, North Africa (FP)

JUNE 2

Walt Disney: Imagination

Rev. Emi Brand

Staff Chaplain at Arnold Palmer Hospital for Children, a part of Orlando Health, Florida



■ *Wise Guides*

Proverbs 4:18 (ESV)

But the path of the righteous is like the light of dawn, which shines brighter and brighter until full day.

There is a great, big beautiful tomorrow, shining at the end of every day.

Walt Disney, The Carousel of Progress

At Disney World, I rarely need to wait in line for one of my favorite rides. Tucked away in the corner of Tomorrowland sits one of the oldest rides in the Magic Kingdom. It's called the Carousel of Progress. The ride is a hidden gem that usually is forgotten and neglected by most park visitors (much like the Hall of Presidents). But to me, there is something soul-soothing in Walt's 20-plus-minute ride through recent history. I find comfort in viewing the minor changes to our daily lives that culminate in radical change.

Faith is remarkably similar. A little mustard seed here and another one there and before you know it, you have a field full of faith. I plant seeds for others, but I also plant seeds in my own heart. Faith comforts me when it seems like nothing else can. After a grueling shift, when my body physically shakes against the waves of vicarious trauma that threaten to pull me under, discouraging thoughts tickle at the edge of my mind. Did God really call me to pediatric chaplaincy? Is it really okay that I am "a woman doing a man's work"?

Even with a well-lit path, I stumble and question. But faith (and the grace of God) is what keeps me moving forward. I learned early in ministry the importance of keeping a "happy journal." Mine is soft pink and has a picture of a sloth hugging a llama. In it, I

keep identified moments of joy and healing. This little journal acts as a testimony to the fingerprints of God. I turn to its pages when I am discouraged so that I can remember the ways in which I have personally seen God move. I see a glimmer of peace in the heart of a NICU mom who fears an upcoming procedure. I remember a Hindu father thanking me for teaching him how to pray. I hear the laughter of the little girl who is a walking miracle. I recall the vision of Jesus with his arms wrapped around a bereaved father.

I have learned to see the miracle of life, but also the miracle of death. I see the progress in my own heart, in my faith, in my understanding of who God is. As I journey on the path before me, my vision grows brighter and brighter.

When you feel discouraged, or you stumble on your own path, I leave you with these words from the Carousel of Progress: “There’s a great, big, beautiful tomorrow, shining at the end of every day.” Don’t give up, friend. God is by your side. May God give you the eyes to see.

PRAY, PRACTICE, PONDER

Have you ever kept a “happy journal”—a collection of your experiences of joy and healing? If you were to keep one, what would you write about today? As a spiritual practice, find a scrap of paper or write in your own journal a story of happiness you wish to carry with you. Notice the power of writing it down. What do you see that you may not have noticed before?

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CH = Chaplain
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2 Durham Harris, Hattiesburg, MS (CH)
2 Inakali Kuruvilla, San Antonio, TX (CH)
2 Gary Sparks, Tyler, TX (CH)
2 Sahir Daniel Rodríguez Zayas, 2015,
US-Mexico Border (FPC)
3 Susan Arnold, La Grange, KY (CH)
3 Sean Burson, Minot, ND (CH)
4 Laura Davis (S-Virginia)
4 Sarah Smith, Winston Salem, NC (CH)
5 Jennifer Clamon, Indianapolis, IN (CH)
5 Stacy Sergent, Mount Pleasant, SC (CH)
5 David Smelser, Preston, MS (CH)
5 Kody Witt, San Antonio, TX (CH)

6 Erskine Alvis, Hillsborough, NC (CH)
6 Michael Costner, Valdese, NC (CH)
6 Parker Ebling-Artz, Kansas City, MO (CH)
6 Greg McClain, Lillington, NC (CH)
7 Butch Stillwell, Candler, NC (CH)
7 Carol Wilkinson, Winston-Salem, NC (CH)
7 Diann Berry, Emeritus (FP)
8 Janice Newell, Emeritus (FP)
8 Larry Lawhon, Boone City, NC (CH)
8 Randy Parks, Sparta, NJ (CH)
8 Clay Porter, Stanton, TX (CH)
8 Joseph Primeaux, Chesapeake, VA (CH-Ret.)
8 Jeromy Wells, Jefferson, WI (CH)

JUNE 9

Mentors: Envisioning Calling

Layne Rogerson

Hospice Chaplain, McLeod Hospice, South Carolina



■ *Learning Faith*

In the early 1980s, when I was about 16-years-old, I was at my home church, First Baptist Church, Cheraw, S.C., for revival. The only thing I remember about the preacher was that he was a missionary on stateside assignment, and he had a shiny bald head. But what I do remember clearly is hearing God speak to me, calling me to ministry. As a 16-year-old I had no idea what that meant. The only way I knew women could serve in ministry was to go to a faraway country, to a culture where I did not understand and a language I could not speak. Every Wednesday night at church, we faithfully read about and prayed for missionaries who served around the world.

A decade later, I returned to my home church because the pastor I loved was retiring and I wanted to worship with him one more time. The pastor preached on second chances. During that service it was as if I were transported back to that revival service. In my mind and heart, I promised God I would be faithful to God's call to ministry this time!

At that time, my family were members of Oakmont Baptist Church in Greenville, N.C. The church had recently called Beth MacLeod Thompson to serve as minister of Christian education. Never had I seen, heard of, or known a woman who served as a minister in a local congregation. Beth was a pioneer in Baptist women in ministry and her faithfulness to her call to ministry made it possible for me to envision myself serving in ministry.

Beth was a gracious mentor, an excellent minister and a trusted friend. We ended up serving together on staff at Oakmont Baptist Church for seven years until I felt called to transition to serve as a hospice chaplain. I remained a member of Oakmont until I moved to South Carolina in 2015 and Beth continued to serve at Oakmont as associate pastor until her retirement shortly thereafter.

Beth taught me so much: the professionalism of being a minister; the passion to read, study and continually grow in my faith; how to integrate the challenges and pain of life, so

that I could be a better minister. One particular sermon that Beth preached has guided my work as a hospice chaplain daily. The essence of the sermon is that when you are faced with questions and doubts, cling to what you know to be true: God loves you. Now, with every visit, I remind our patients, “God loves you, and cares about every single detail of your life.” I experience the power and presence of the Holy Spirit every time I speak these words.

So, to each of those I have mentioned above: the missionary with the shiny bald head, Rev. Dr. Archie Neal and Rev. Beth MacLeod Thompson, know that your presence mattered!

PRAY, PRACTICE, PONDER

Who has shaped your image of what a leader looks like? Today, ponder which mentors and ministers had the most significant impact on your vision of leadership. What thrust or quality did they embody? Have you taken the time to thank them? Turn your list into a prayer of gratitude, or a spiritual practice of letter writing to give thanks for those who shaped the leader you are today.

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9 Michelle Cayard, Emeritus (FP)

9 Sara Stubbs, Monroe, NC (CH)

9 Patricia Taylor, Tuscaloosa, AL (CH)

9 Maria Robertson, Canton, GA (CH)

9 Doug Wiggington, Pineville, LA (CH)

10 Cindy Goza, Little Rock, AR (CH)

10 Christopher McDaniel, Charleston, SC (CH)

10 Ansia Picou, Highland, NY (CH)

10 Michael Osment, Martin, TN (CH)

10 Aaron McGinnis, Dublin, GA (GA)

10 Kim Wyatt, Raleigh, NC (FP)

11 Thomas Lewis, St. Augustine, FL (CH)

11 Joshua Hearne, Danville, VA (EP)

12 Mathew Brown, Phoenix, AZ (CH)

12 Mark Chambers, Ness City, KS (CH)

12 Emma Jane Conley, Round Rock, TX (CH)

12 Brady Lanoue, Arlington, VA (CH)

13 Richard Forest, Louisville, KY (CH)

13 Kim Thompson, Columbia, SC (CH)

13 Christine, Africa/Middle East (FP)

14 Caitie Jackson (S-North Carolina)

14 Tracey Lopez, Vienna, VA (CH)

14 Chaouki Boulous, Lebanon (FP)

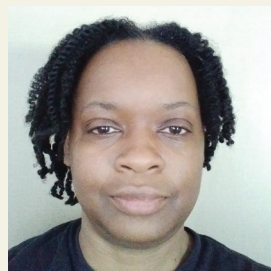
15 Melissa Whaley, Winston-Salem, NC (CH)

JUNE 16

Bishop Cornelius: A Spiritual Father

Lavonia Winford

Active Duty Air Force Chaplain; Installation
Chaplain; Pituffik Space Base, Greenland



■ *Saints Among Us*

Philippians 4:13

I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

This verse is the mantra I repeated to myself as I strived to do what no other African American woman had done in the Mississippi Army National Guard. To get the full picture, I will take you back to where it first began—where God introduced me to a woman whose husband would later become my mentor and spiritual father.

The year was 2001 and I was standing at the counter in the Department of Human Services (welfare office) when the administrative person began to make small talk. She asked me if I had a church home and invited me to her church. I was recently divorced and had very little money. I found it to be a sign that God was calling me to something greater.

I visited her church the following Sunday with my seven-year-old son in tow. I strategically sat at the back so I could leave immediately as the service ended. And I executed my plan to perfection for about three weeks. The senior pastor noticed my pattern and changed his routine. The next week when I went to worship, he ended the sermon at the exit door. This meant that I would have to pass him on my way out. Wouldn't you know it? He stopped me before I could exit and asked me to stay so we could chat.

After shaking hands and kissing babies, he asked me, “to not come to church and just sit, but to come to participate since I would get out what I put in.” Then he put me to work. I started out as an usher, then graduated to Sunday school teacher, and eventually to associate pastor. With his encouragement, I wanted what he had, a seminary degree.

However, I did not want to follow in his footsteps and be a local pastor. I was in the military and felt called to be a military chaplain.

Bishop Cornelius McClellan took the time to nurture my faith; without him, I would not be able to imitate Christ for all the military men and women in my charge. I have been deployed to Kuwait, stationed at Thule Space Base in Greenland, stationed at a training base in Mississippi, with my next assignment in the United Kingdom. With a divine encounter that started in a welfare office in Mississippi and through the mentorship of Bishop McClellan, I too am teaching people from all over the globe to be about the Father's business. For, I (you, we) can do all things through Christ who strengthens me (you, us).

PRAY, PRACTICE, PONDER

Who has been a spiritual father to you? This Father's Day, give thanks for the spiritual fathers in your life who have shaped your view of yourself and of God as Father.

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CH = Chaplain
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PC = Pastoral Counselor
S = CBF Staff Member

16 Kimberly Emery, Hartville, OH (CH)
18 Bill Hayes, Bogart, GA (CH)
18 Mary Ligon, York, PA (CH)
19 Maime Murphy, Boca Raton, FL (CH)
20 Lonnie Turner, Emeritus (FP)
20 Tim Johns, Buffton, SC (CH)
20 Jeff Lancaster, Cartwright, OK (CH)
21 Jim Cook, Salisbury, NC (CH)
21 Susan Harthon, Indianapolis, IN (CH)

21 Jeff Hoppe, Broken Arrow, OK (CH)
21 Ken Lake, Fort Mill, SC (CH)
21 Adam Page, Kingsport, TN (CH)
22 Kirk, Southeast Asia (FP)
22 Sharon Eldridge, Smithfield, NC (CH)
22 Joanne Henley, Winston-Salem, NC (CH)
22 Jessica Prophitt, Cheyenne, WY(CH)
22 Sara Robb-Scott, Durham, NC (CH)

JUNE 23

Peter: Perfectly Imperfect

Elket Rodríguez

CBF field personnel, U.S.-Mexico Border



■ *Biblical Companions*

John 6:67-69

“You do not want to leave too, do you?” Jesus asked the Twelve. Simon Peter answered him, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and to know that you are the Holy One of God.”

If there is a biblical character whose story with which I identify, it is Simon Peter. Passionate, impulsive, impatient, brave and yet cowardly at the same time. Deeply human and yet profoundly spiritual. When he seems lost, he is found. Confused, but convinced. Simply, perfectly imperfect.

Peter was Jesus’ artwork for us to see and enjoy the effects of the planting and the sowing of the word and the power of the Holy Spirit. Peter’s shortcomings were always compensated for by the precious power of God’s grace. Like me, Peter knows that when all the anxiety and the noise dissipate, there is only one place to find satisfaction. We can either go to “the place” or “the place” can pursue us with steadfast love—like Peter experienced when Jesus appeared to him on a beach. When all is said and done, Peter and I remember that only Jesus has the words of eternal life.

PRAY, PRACTICE, PONDER

The spiritual practice of colloquy invites us to journal an imagined conversation with God, Jesus or another biblical character. As a spiritual practice today, try out the practice of colloquy by writing an imaginary conversation between Jesus, Peter and yourself about what it means to be imperfectly human. What questions do you have for Jesus or Peter? What responses do they offer you? Perhaps there is argument, some humor, a confrontation or acceptance. Allow yourself to be playful in this conversation. After you have finished, close your time of prayerful journaling with a moment of gratitude for this unique way of connecting with God.

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23 David Lowe, Fort Worth, TX (CH)
23 Mishawn Costen (S-CBF Global)
23 Brett Bardoff, Asheville, NC (CH)
24 Robert Brown, Henrico, VA (CH)
24 LaToya Cross (S-CBF Global)
25 David Weatherspoon, Memphis, TN (CH)
26 Elias Crosby, Lilburn, GA (CH)
26 Michael Ferguson, Fort Drum, NY (CH)
26 Anna Jacks, Birmingham, AL (CH)

26 Tamara Witte-Walczac, Baltimore, MD (CH)
27 Alicia Lee, Macedonia (FP)
27 Debbie Pierce (S-Mississippi)
28 Emily Perry (S-Alabama)
28 Roger Rich, Lexington, SC (CH)
29 Kevin Adams, Cincinnati, OH (CH)
29 Ellen Gregory (S-Heartland)
29 Carrie Harris (S-CBF Global)

JUNE 30

The Landons: A Need is Not a Call

Mary Van Rheenen

CBF field personnel, Netherlands



■ *Saints Among Us*

Matthew 14:22-23 (The Message).

As soon as the meal was finished, he insisted that the disciples get in the boat and go on ahead to the other side while he dismissed the people. With the crowd dispersed, he climbed the mountain so he could be by himself and pray. He stayed there alone, late into the night.

“A need is not a call.” My husband Keith Holmes wrote those words on the bathroom mirror for me recently. I had been having a tough time with ministry-related boundaries, and these wise words were much-needed. This was not the first time I’d needed that reminder. I first heard these wise words from Rick Landon.

Rick and Judy Landon served for many years as “member care” for the CBF Romany Team. “Member care” are professional mental health providers who volunteer to be resources for CBF field personnel. At the time, Rick was co-clinical director of the Interfaith Counseling Center in Lexington, Ky., and taught spiritual formation at The Lexington Theological Seminary. Judy is a warm and thoughtful person. We first met them more than 20 years ago on the steps of the (then) International Baptist Theological Seminary in Prague. We had just arrived for a CBF Romany Team meeting and were not sure who these pleasant people were or why they were there. We soon found out.

Rick and Judy led a session on loss. As part of the workshop, we split into pairs. Judy was my partner. “So,” she said, “tell me about your losses.” I about lost it. A few months earlier we had returned from our first “home assignment” in America. While we were there, we discovered that a dear old friend had died and that we were just in time to make it to her funeral. This was followed by the death of my favorite uncle. A month or so later, Keith’s mother unexpectedly passed. And after we returned to the Netherlands in January, my 16-year-old dog died. Rick and Judy hadn’t known about these losses, but the Spirit had led them to prepare this topic.

In following years, Rick and Judy led retreat days at our team meetings, made home visits, advised, encouraged and even opened their home to us when we passed through Lexington. On another of those team retreats, Rick led us all through lectio divina, a way of listening to and praying Scripture which was new to me. It was something that my spirit needed at that time. For years afterwards, using lectio divina with the lectionary Scripture readings for that week became a vital part of my daily time with God.

And now, Keith is reminding me that “a need is not a call,” just when I need to hear those words again. Rick and Judy have retired, but their legacy continues to minister to us.

PRAY, PRACTICE, PONDER

The ancient practice of lectio divina, or “sacred reading,” is a method of reading Scripture in order to connect with God’s Spirit within it. Unlike studying Scripture, which is focused on unearthing its meaning and application, the practice of lectio divina is an invitation to listen meditatively and contemplatively, “with the ear of the heart.” Today, read Matthew 14:13-21 in the tradition of lectio divina, by following the guide below:

First Reading: Read Matthew 14:13-21, receiving these holy words into your spirit.

Sacred Pause

Second Reading: Read Matthew 14:13-21 again, noticing what word or phrase stands out to you today. Take this word or phrase to God in prayer. What is God saying to you in this word today? How does this connect with “a need is not a call”?

Sacred Pause

Third Reading: Read Matthew 14:13-21 a final time. Take a moment to offer gratitude for the living Word that continues to move and speak to us.

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S = CBF Staff Member

30 Ira Campbell, Nashville, TN (CH)
30 Margaret Guenther, Richmond, VA (PC)
30 Amy Holtz, Richmond, VA (CH)
30 David Potter, Oklahoma City, OK (CH)
30 Thomas Thornton, Spartanburg, SC (CH)
1 Paul Baxley (S-CBF Global)
1 Kyle Boyer, Jacksonville FL (CH)
1 Debra Walters, Lawrenceville, GA (CH)
2 Kyle Tubbs (S-Oklahoma)
2 Jennifer Dockum, Ashland, VA (CH)
2 Aaron Mussat, Shreveport, LA (CH)
2 Steven Smith, Shreveport, LA (CH)

2 Sara Hunt-Felke, Tampa, FL (CH)
3 Elizabeth Ellis, Crestwood, KY (PC)
3 Brenda Lee, Williamsburg, VA (CH)
3 Ascanio Peguero, Fort Worth, TX (CH)
3 Leland Parks, Louisville, KY (CH)
4 José Jimenez-Abrams, Austell, GA (CH)
5 Mark Snipes (S-Virginia)
5 Coy Callicott, Louisville, KY (CH)
5 Jeff Fryer, Murfreesboro, TN (CH)
5 Amy Dills-Moore, Atlanta, GA (CH)
6 Debbie Kubo, Arlington, TX (CH)
6 Shelah Acker, Uganda (FP)

JULY 7

The Book of Isaiah: Trusting God's Promise

Chaouki and Maha Boulos

CBF field personnel, Lebanon



■ *Biblical Companions*

Isaiah 41:10

So do not fear, for I am with you, do not be dismayed for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.

For the last few years, the book of Isaiah has had a big influence in my (Maha) life. Although I'm not writing about the life of Isaiah as a prophet, the book of Isaiah is full of encouraging verses. One of the most encouraging verses is Isaiah 41:10 (above). When working in a hard part of the world where the needs are great, we always fix our eyes on the Lord and remember these verses...“do not be dismayed for I am your God...I will strengthen you and help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.”

The needs started with the refugees that were overflowing into the country. Then in 2019, the economic situation in Lebanon was shaken by the devaluation of the Lebanese currency against the dollar. It's been falling ever since. The dollar that was equal to 1,500 liras in and before 2019, is today 90,000 lira to a dollar. The middle class that managed to pay for rent, gas, medicine and more is now at a halt financially. The salaries of the people are little compared to the immense expenses of merchandise at this time. And we, the children of God, are looking at all these needs and crying out to the Lord. And God always comes through for us and answers our prayers. God strengthens us and upholds us with God's righteous right hand so we won't fall nor stumble. Praise God at all times.

PRAY, PRACTICE, PONDER

Today, pray for the people of Lebanon. Lift up the tangible needs, struggles and fears mentioned here. Pray for Chaouki and Maha that as they hold the struggles and hopes of the Lebanese people, God will continue to strengthen and uphold them.

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7 Barbara Dail, Greenville, NC (CH)
7 Steven Flowers, Waynesboro, VA (PC)
7 P. Randall Wright, Rockhill, SC (CH)
7 Wyatt Miles, Atlanta, GA (CH)
8 Yesenia Zayas Cruz, US-Mexico Border (FP-S)
8 Renato Santos, Miami, FL (CH)
8 Steve Sexton, Knoxville, TN (CH)
8 Robert Summers, Lexington, KY (CH)
9 Miriam Dakin, Lynchburg, VA (CH)
9 Charles Godfrey II, Charlotte, NC (CH)

10 Tiffne Whitley, Emeritus (FP)
10 John Helms, Jefferson, GA (CH)
10 Heather Rothermel-Forrester, Lilburn, GA (CH)
10 Whitney Edwards Russell, Whiteville, NC (CH)
11 Steven Shaw, Norfolk, VA (CH)
11 Jamie Rorrer (S-North Carolina)
12 Christopher Morris, Winston-Salem, NC (CH)
12 Stacey Pickering, Tyndall AFB, FL (CH)
13 Craig Stevens, Saluda, SC (CH)

Trust: God is at Work

Eddie Aldape

CBF field personnel, Spain



■ *Learning Faith*

Growing up in a Baptist church, I remember having many Bible studies over the years. They all seemed to be great; but it often seemed to me that we would go from Bible study to Bible study without seeing any long-term effect. Maybe there were changes in people; but I personally did not notice any. I do not know why, but there was one Bible study that has really influenced me throughout the last 25 years in ministry. It made so much sense then and it still does today. I have adopted the seven realities of the study:

1. God is at work.
2. God wants to be in a relationship with us.
3. When God shows us something, that is an invitation to join God.
4. God speaks to us.
5. We have a crisis of belief.
6. We allow God to make the adjustments in our lives.
7. We will experience God.

Whenever I get stuck or do not know what to do, I stop and run through these spiritual truths and wait, pray and look for a hint from God.

I had my plan on how we were going to do ministry in India. I was convinced that it was a great plan. Once we arrived, we were overwhelmed with so many things hitting us at the same time. The number of people, the extreme poverty, the not knowing the language or being unable to understand the English accents and our being way out of our comfort zones. It all had us wanting to pack our bags and return home. Maybe God had made a mistake; or better yet, we had made the mistake of thinking we could do this. We literally wanted to go home.

After our pity party, we began to pray for guidance. It was then that we remembered, “God is at work.” God had been at work in India way before we arrived there. We were only there for the ride. As soon as we realized that, a big load was removed from our shoulders. It reminded me of when Peter started walking on the water and suddenly started drowning when he took his eyes off Jesus. We had done the exact same thing.

We began by doing prayer walks, asking God to open our eyes to what God was doing. As soon as we would start being overwhelmed, we would remind ourselves that first principle: God is at work, not us. Once God showed us something, we took it as, “the invitation for us to join God.” We really learned to depend on the prayers of others and on ours. As soon as we start depending on our abilities, we are overwhelmed. We have

a crisis of belief and things seem impossible. Once we adjust and again remember that for God nothing is impossible, we can experience God doing God's thing and our faith is strengthened.

Before going to India, we would ask people to give to missions or to come do missions with us. And if nothing else, they could pray for missions. The first time we returned to the States, the first thing I did was apologize to those I had told these lies to. We came to realize that prayer was the only thing that kept us going. We also learned that if people pray for missions, they will want to do missions, and they will want to give to missions. Every time we would start sinking, someone would send us a card or an email saying that they were praying for us. It was like a booster shot. I could imagine being like Popeye eating spinach and regaining his strength. Knowing we were not alone in this, gave us strength to keep going.

PRAY, PRACTICE, PONDER

Today, ponder where you find yourself in the list of “seven realities.” Consider what next step God may be inviting you into.

1. God is at work.
2. God wants to be in a relationship with us.
3. When God shows us something, that is an invitation to join God.
4. God speaks to us.
5. We have a crisis of belief.
6. We allow God to make the adjustments in our lives.
7. We will experience God.

Pray for Eddie Aldape and his ministry in Albacete, Spain, that wherever he finds himself in the “seven realities” today, God would make the next steps crystal clear.

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FPC = Child of Field Personnel
PC = Pastoral Counselor
S = CBF Staff Member

14 John Deal, Emeritus (FP)
14 Denise Massey, Lilburn, GA (CH)
14 David Stamile, Waco, TX (CH)
15 Jean Randolph, Swannanoa, NC (CH)
15 James Tippins, Fernandina Beach, FL (CH)
15 Cameron Hunt, Columbus, OH (CH)
16 Amy Blevins, Mountain Home, TN (CH)
16 Mark Hart, Fair Oaks Ranch, TX (CH)
17 Cindy Meadows, Roanoke, VA (CH)
17 Leanna Pearse, St. Louis, MO (CH)

17 Kimberly Sheehan, Nashville, TN (CH)
18 David Graves, Birmingham, AL (CH)
18 Timothy Hunter, Gatesville, TX (CH)
18 Tom O'Neal, Charlotte, NC (PC)
18 Luke Tyler Moody, Lexington, KY (CH)
18 Collin Wilcox, Lubbock, TX (CH)
19 Steven Hill, Knoxville, TN (CH)
19 Jason Pittman, Emeritus (FP)
20 Carol Ashworth, Richmond, VA (CH)
20 Tim Mayhall, Dothan, AL (CH)

JULY 21

Ananias: Prophetic Courage

Brian Foreman

**CBF Coordinator of Congregational
Ministries, Georgia**



■ *Biblical Companions*

The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of convenience and comfort, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy.

Martin Luther King, Jr.

The conversion of Saul receives lots of attention in Scripture. However, there is a figure in the middle of this story with whom I resonate more each time I encounter the story. Ananias has a dream from God inviting him to go restore Saul's vision and deliver a message of instruction from God. I cannot help but read his response to God in verse 13 in the voice of a somewhat sarcastic college student: "Lord, I have heard from many about this man!"

Consider it: God tells him to go to the most oppressive member of the Jewish religious leaders and make sure he's all fixed up. In fact, God even tells Saul that Ananias is coming to him. I would have been sarcastic with God just to hide my fear. And yet what does Ananias do? He acts faithfully and goes to Saul. We probably do not give ordinary people credit for heroic acts like this; and yet it is Ananias that forms me to be courageous when being faithful, even in hard situations. He must have considered arrest or even death as a real possibility. That is a far more significant response to his faithfulness than any rebuke or rejection I might face.

PRAY, PRACTICE, PONDER

O God, when I am afraid, remind me of the courage of Ananias and so many saints that have gone before so that I might know you today. When my words to you are less than holy, I thank you for knowing my fears and how they are masked. Will you give me the courage to be bold? Will you help me see the importance of showing up like Ananias did? In a world where presence matters in new and hard ways, I pray that you use me as a witness to your peace and love, even in the scary places. Amen.

Birthdays this Week:

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S = CBF Staff Member

21 Peter Arges, Durham, NC (CH)
21 Susan Lanford, Wichita Falls, TX (CH)
21 Twyla Nelson, Jackson Springs, NC (CH)
21 Walter White, Arlington, TX (CH)
21 Lavonia Winford, Mildenhall, UK (CH)
22 Jessie Kearns, Abbeville, SC (CH)
22 Bonnie Reedy, Lumberton, NC (CH)
23 Mark Traeger, Sumter, SC (CH)
23 Nathanael Blessington Thadikanda,
Richmond, VA (CH)

23 Butch Green, Emeritus (FP)
24 Glynn Ford, Reston, VA (PC)
24 Jeff Huett (S-CBF Global)
24 Casey Ramirez (S-CBF Global)
24 Laurel Link, Winston-Salem, NC (PC)
24 Ronald Oliver, Goshen, KY (CH)
26 Scott Jensen, Saint Joseph, MO (CH)
26 Rick Sample, San Francisco, CA (FP)
27 Peter Ott, Okinawa, Japan (CH)
27 Sandra Smith, Moore, SC (CH)

JULY 28

Peter: What I Have, I Give

Pilar Castrillo

CEO of Migrant Journey, Florida



■ *Biblical Companions*

Acts 3:6

But Peter said, “I have neither silver nor gold, but what I have I give you; in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, arise and walk.”

This is a mercy's history.

What I have I give you.

Peter gave healing.

What could I give as a migrant, with a small organization, to help other migrants? That was the question after Hurricane Ian devastated parts of Florida. It affected migrants like me who, with their deft hands and light feet, get food produced on the ground to the supermarket shelves.

A week after Ian, we made it through flooded carts. The first contact, a mother with her son. My skin still prickles and my heart bleeds as I relive her low-volume words asking for water. It was the first day she was able to leave her house. She was incommunicado, with no access roads. Her pleading face, her low voice and trembling hands asking for water, where she could find it for her family. The hurricane had devastated her mobile home.

She asked for water and I had none. She asked for help in mute language with sad eyes, and what I had I gave her: hope that I would return in two days to help her and others with resources and to remedy their need. There were thousands in the same conditions; there was no work as the hurricane took away the crops; no money; no hope of help.

I am a migrant like her; this is not her final place of life just as it is neither mine nor yours. We are all migrants in this land increasingly hit by greed and destruction that cause chaos in the natural forces. Peter gave what he had. And we, a team of volunteers united by

a passion for service, provided what we had as immediate help for basic needs. We are giving help that represents dignity, mercy and whatever we have for that neighbor who is helpless and in need.

As I write this near the city of Arcadia, Fla., the wagons are again full of supplies to assist. We will again give what we have, which is neither gold nor silver. We have love and hope.

And you? What do you have to give to others?

PRAY, PRACTICE, PONDER

What do you think you are “supposed to” give to others? What do you have to give? Consider this: It may not be silver or gold, but your time and your talents, your gifts and skills, your love and hope. Spend time in prayer today asking God to show you how God wants to use what you have to give to others, and to make a difference in the world.

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S = CBF Staff Member

28 Daniel Fairchild, Panama City, FL (CH)
28 Matthew Greg, Columbia, SC (CH)
29 Karen Morrow, Aledo, TX (FP)
29 Wayne Morris, Lawton, OK (CH)
29 William (Butch) Wise, Spokane, WA (CH)
29 Briana Whaley, Palm Harbor, FL (CH)
30 Paul Byrd, Cumming, GA (CH)
30 Garnett White, Midlothian, VA (PC)
30 James Francovich, Emeritus (FP)

31 Brian Foreman (S-CBF Global)
31 Amber Blackwell-Childers, Inman, SC (CH)
31 Cindy Thorpe, Florence, SC (CH)
31 James Tille, Lakewood, WA (PC)
1 Stephen Saunders, Live Oak, TX (CH)
3 Mary Ellen Yates, Louisville, KY (PC)
3 David Wirth, Mt. Orab, OH (CH)
3 Mina Podgaisky, Ukraine (FP)

AUGUST 4

Paul Fiddes: Relational God

Matt and Michelle Norman

CBF field personnel, Spain



■ *Wise Guides*

We find God revealed in the cross, which involves a set of relationships. When we ask, ‘Who is God?’ we are confronted by an event which we can only describe in relational terms: a son relating to a Father in suffering and love...a Father who suffers the loss of a son...and the Spirit of love is between them. In these relationships the world and human beings are necessarily included.

Paul Fiddes, *The Creative Suffering of God*

Baptist theologian Paul Fiddes has been a major influence in my (Matt) life as I reflect on what it means to practice my faith as mission. The context that Michelle and I minister in here in Barcelona is very relational. We often find ourselves having conversations about life, hopes, fears, God and Christianity over coffee or a meal. Meals here in Spain can take hours as one is expected to sit, eat and then enjoy each other in conversation called *sobre mesa*, translated as “around the table.”

At the core of most of the ministry that we do—whether with immigrant and refugee mothers and their children, giving food to people in need, coming alongside pastors as they seek to help their churches engage their local communities, developing trainings for church leaders and pastors who lack access to theological training, engaging in our community group, or simply reimagining what church looks like in such a secular, post-Christian society at our Mosaic ministry—is a focus on developing relationships.

When I reflect theologically on why building relationships seems to be at the core of all we do, Fiddes offers helpful insight. He observes that the theological idea of the Trinity helps to define what it means to be a person created in God’s image. Personhood becomes something tied to relationship. Being a person means having a distinct identity, an otherness that only makes sense relationally. Fiddes says that God is best described as

an “event of relationships,” and “not as three individual subjects who have relationships.” Fiddes expounds, “Talk about God as an ‘event of relationships’ is not, therefore, the language of a spectator, but the language of a participant. It only makes sense in terms of our involvement in the network of relationships in which God happens.”

The significance of this perspective from Fiddes is that it helps one understand ministry as sharing oneself with another as God does within Godself. We find relationship at the core of all that we do here in Spain because God is relational. In the Trinity, we see God giving Godself to the world in ministry. Our missional call is to participate in this ministry by sharing who we are and by inviting others to share who they are as well. In so doing, transformation happens as God, present and ministering, helps us all become who we are created to be. This transformation is our hope here in Spain.

PRAY, PRACTICE, PONDER

Today, pray for the Norman family and their relational ministry in Barcelona, Spain. Pray that through the Normans, others will come to know a God who is present relationally. Pray for the relationships that they build, that they may be mutually transformational so that all become participants in God’s ministry in the world.

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4 Paisley, 2012, Southeast Asia (FPC)
4 Lindsey Moser, Colorado Springs, CO (CH)
4 Mark Pruitt, Martinsburg, WV (CH)
4 Diane Stamey, Clyde, NC (PC)
5 Mary, Southeast Asia (FP)
5 Susan Allen, Midway, KY (CH)
5 Ronald Howard, Tuscaloosa, AL (CH)
5 Donald Lederer, Kingsport, TN (CH)
5 John Oliver, Durham, NC (CH)
5 Charles Hamilton, Stone Mountain, GA (CH)
5 Tiffany Seaford, Charlotte, NC (CH)

6 Larry Hamm, Greenwood, IN (CH)
6 Deborah Jenkins, Colorado Springs, CO (CH-Ret.)
7 Merrie Harding, Emeritus (FP)
8 LuAnne Prevost, Knoxville, TN (CH)
8 Janée Angel, Belgium (FP)
9 Sarah Roome, Greer, SC (CH)
10 Megan Doud (S-Georgia)
10 Javier Perez (S-CBF Global)
10 Nicholas Wright, Ft. Campbell, KY (CH)
10 Elliott Sample, 2004, San Francisco, CA (FPC)

AUGUST 11

Calling: Listening for Vocation in Community

Anna Anderson

CBF field personnel, North Carolina



■ *Learning Faith*

Vocation does not come from willfulness. It comes from listening.

Parker Palmer

A significant spiritual marker in my life occurred when I was a student beginning to learn more about vocational ministry. The spiritual guides were mentors from different walks of life, but all were people who had given their own lives to mentoring students and young adults just starting out in ministry. I got to know many of these folks in a weeklong orientation. We had communicated by written mail (before the days of email, texting or any other kind of instant communication), but spent time getting to know each other better in the weeklong orientation process for summer student ministry.

At the end of my orientation week, I was in a commissioning service for summer missions. It had been a very good week, exploring more and more about the call of God on my life. I was anxious to get to my place of summer service, but very unsure of all the particulars that I would face relating to the job I had said a resounding yes to. Uncertain of the ways everything would unfold, I was nervous. I was a little afraid of failing or not doing a good job. I wanted desperately to succeed at this kind of “trial run” for ministry. After all, summer service was only 10 weeks.

Was I ready for a lifetime of vocational ministry? I had no idea if I was. During that service, we prayed, we sang, we listened, we waited. And while we waited on God to speak, I distinctly and clearly in a way unlike anything I had ever experienced before, heard God say to me, “I choose you.” I was so caught in that moment, I wasn’t really sure someone else had not spoken aloud. But it was the voice of God clearly calling me into that space of

uncertainty, fear and anxiety reassuring me that I had indeed been chosen by the Creator for something I didn't even begin to understand.

Those who walked alongside, most of whose names I do not even remember, nurtured and encouraged and guided me to a place where I was able to hear and believe that I was going in the right direction for ministry. I am so thankful for that opportunity. It still encourages and reminds me how significant a thing it is to listen. God still speaks in ways that are clear. God still calls. God still chooses. And thankfully, God uses others in our lives to remind us of and to call out what we cannot even articulate ourselves. I remember the mentors today and I give profound thanks for their leadership and love for me.

PRAY, PRACTICE, PONDER

God sometimes uses others to remind us of our purpose and gifts when we cannot articulate them ourselves. Today, ponder a time in which someone spoke truth from God to you about your calling, talent and purpose. Then, recall a time when you have offered encouragement to someone else about their purpose or gifts. Hold these moments in your heart with thanksgiving for the ways God speaks in and through us.

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11 Rachel Greco (S-Georgia)
11 Robbie Byrd, Fayetteville, NC (PC)
11 Justin Murphy, Leesburg, FL (CH)
11 Karen Rector, San Diego, CA (CH)
12 Charline Berry, Baltimore, MD (CH)
13 Rodney Bolejack, Denton, TX (CH)
13 Thomas Dougherty, Mechanicsville, VA (PC)
13 Byron Greene, Jacksonville, FL (CH)

13 Wayne Maberry, Alturas, FL (CH)
13 Johnny Taylor, Dallas, TX (CH)
13 Stephanie Bohannon, Pinehurst, NC (CH)
14 Mike, Southeast Asia (FP)
14 Stella Perrin, Larnaca, Cyprus (FP)
15 Daniel Shadix, Prattville, AL (CH)
15 Hannah Turner, Research Triangle, NC (GSC)
16 Don McNeely, Emeritus (FP)

AUGUST 18

Puritan Ancestors: Companions in Struggle

Mike Hutchinson

Retired CBF field personnel



■ *Wise Guides*

The Lord judges not as man judges. Better to be cast out of the church than to deny Christ.

Anne Hutchinson

I hear dead people. Puritans of the past give voices to the present. They are dead, but through their preserved diaries, poems and sermons I hear them. I will never see their faces, but I hear their thoughts, I will never shake their hands, but clearly see them, pointing me back to the straight and narrow way.

Bradstreet, Mather or Milton—I listen to their struggles to become holy temples and living sacrifices to the Word of God. Windford, Bradford or Edwards—their voices stir my faith to total faithfulness in following our Savior. Anne Hutchinson, the original American Women in Ministry founder, shows by example what Holy Scripture revealed to her.

In present stress and daily questions of staying in The Way, I hear others who have shared the same temptations, who have lived in the same godless society but who have stayed true and given voice to their victories. Their struggles, sometimes against government and sometimes against religion, were great and long-suffering. But they stood their ground for holy living and discipline to God's way of living out a faith proclaimed verbally.

The struggles for me today can be the same. So I listen and my heart hears dead people who guide, encourage and help me find a living Christ today.

PRAY, PRACTICE, PONDER

As a spiritual practice today, choose one of the Puritan leaders mentioned above and spend some time Googling them. Learn about their story, their beliefs and their ministry. Allow the past to speak to the present and notice what inspires you.

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18 Peggy Foskett (S-Kentucky)
18 Anyra Cano (S-Fellowship Southwest)
18 Thomas Riley, Wilson, NC (CH)
20 Joyce Cleary, Emeritus (FP)
20 Jim Ivey, New Albany, IN (CH)
20 Sharon Spivey, Wilmington, NC (CH)
21 Inetta Riddell, Lake In the Hill, IL (CH)
21 Alice Tremaine, Corbin, KY (CH)
22 Daniel Hix, Maryville, TN (CH)

22 William Thompson, Los Alamitos, CA (CH)
22 Sharondalyn Dupree, Sacramento, CA (CH)
22 Delores Stimpson, Durham, NC (GSC)
23 Allen Williams, Emeritus (FP)
23 Marc Wyatt, Raleigh, NC (FP)
23 Mike Bumgarner, Norman, OK (CH)
23 Keith Little, New Bern, NC (CH)
24 Timothy Boschen, Waynesboro, VA (CH)
24 Craig Klemptner, Hewitt, TX (CH)
24 Brian Wilson, Louisville, KY (CH)

AUGUST 25

Alice Walker: Outside the Fold

Meg Rooney

CBF Leadership Scholar, Georgia



■ *Wise Guides*

Here's the thing, say Shug. The thing I believe. God is inside you and inside everybody else. You come into the world with God. But only them that search for it inside find it.

Alice Walker

African-American womanist novelist, short story writer, poet and social activist, Alice Walker is not a believer. She does not attend church. She doesn't partake in any of the religious related practices that we hold dear. But she is a theologian and I have felt closer to God through her than anything I have encountered in my recent seminary classes.

This semester, I decided to take an undergraduate course that met my passion for writing and rhetoric. It was within this class that I was assigned to read and write a rhetorical analysis on Walker's Pulitzer-winning novel, *The Color Purple*. Of course, like any other seminary student, I was most intrigued by Walker's depiction of and relationship with God. "Here's the thing, say Shug. The thing I believe. God is inside you and inside everybody else. You come into the world with God. But only them that search for it inside find it" (Walker, *The Color Purple*, p. 194).

Walker presents a very spiritual, inclusive God that is with every person all of the time. She pursues an agape kind of love. Not too far from Christianity, is she? Regardless of who we are and what we do, God has made a home in us. God loves us in a way that we can't understand and calls us to do the same to others. To love without reason. Sometimes it is easy to get wrapped up in the religious technicalities. We go so far in trying to make the church perfect that we lose the holiness of why we are gathered in the first place.

As I continue to deconstruct and reconstruct my faith while in seminary, I am anchored to two truths: God is with me and loves me. This is the foundation upon which I will continue to build my faith. I hope it provides some comfort and relief knowing that you do not need to do anything to be worthy of God's love and presence. It has already been given. We just have to receive it.

PRAY, PRACTICE, PONDER

Has there ever been someone outside the Christian tradition who has significantly influenced or strengthened your love of God? Perhaps it is an individual you know, an author you've read, or a public figure whose leadership inspired you. Jesus was always using those on the margins to point the "religious" folks toward the true God. Today, ponder what you have learned about God from those outside of Christianity.

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25 Arville Earl, Emeritus (FP)
25 Robert McMillan, Oklahoma City, OK (CH)
25 Megan Pike, LaCross, WI (CH)
26 Cindy Ruble, Malaysia (FP)
26 LaToya McLean, Wilmington, NC (CH)
27 Verr Dean Williams, Emeritus (FP)
27 Jim Kirkendall, Biloxi, MS (CH)
28 Sarah Greenfield, Honolulu, HI (CH)
28 Penny Hoey, Greenville NC (CH)
28 David Morrell, Jacksonville, FL (CH)
28 Randal Walton, Lynchburg, VA (CH)

29 Robert Blackwood St. Petersburg, FL (CH)
29 Pam Foster, Haslet, TX (CH)
29 Blake Strother, Durham, NC (CH)
30 Becky Buice Hall (S-CBF Global)
30 Teresa Darnell, Louisville, TN (CH)
30 Christiana Liem, Houston, TX (CH)
30 Stacey Painter, Charleston, SC (CH)
31 Barbara Miller, Vero Beach, FL (CH)
31 Cecelia Walker, Birmingham, AL (CH)
31 Marie Gordon, Atlanta GA (CH)
31 Karr La Dickens, Emeritus (FP)

REFLECTIONS ON PRAYER AND FAITH

September 1-September 22

I don't know exactly what a prayer is.
I do know how to pay attention, how to fall down
into the grass, how to kneel down in the grass,
how to be idle and blessed, how to stroll through the fields,
which is what I have been doing all day.
Tell me, what else should I have done?
Doesn't everything die at last, and too soon?
Tell me, what is it you plan to do
with your one wild and precious life?

Mary Oliver



SEPTEMBER 1

Prayer: You Are Beloved

Hannah Turner

Global Service Corps, North Carolina

■ *Learning Faith*

It is by being awake to this God in us that we can see God in the world around us. The great mystery of the contemplative life is not that we see God in the world, but that God within us recognizes God in the world.

Henri J.M. Nouwen, *The Only Necessary Thing*

I think Jesus's whole life is continually claiming 'I am the beloved from God' identity in the midst of everything...Prayer then, is listening to that voice - to the One who calls you Beloved. It is to constantly go back to the truth of who we are and claim it for ourselves. It's not what I do. I'm not what people say about me. I'm not what I have. Whatever we do, we have to go back regularly to that place of identity.

Henri J.M. Nouwen, *The Only Necessary Thing*

This past year has brought to me a collection of simple, but radical truths. The more I grow, the more I reckon with the reality that I fall short, that I get distracted easily and that I can't do everything right. Prayer for me has been a surrender that doesn't always want to surrender. In the naked loneliness, I am met with the truth: "You are beloved," says the One who orchestrates the rhythm of my breath. I have been coming to God, not always with something to say, but to just be with God. And that is hard. It is in this human natured resistance of wanting to work to be enough that the beautiful irony of the gospel is revealed to me. A perfect God would send God's son to die for me. The more I sit with the realization that I always come empty-handed and wordless, whether I believe it or not, the more I crave to come back to that place. When you grip something, it creates tension and after a while you begin to ache and strain. It feels good to not hold anything. Besides, we need empty hands to be able to continue tending to God's Kingdom on Earth.

PRAY, PRACTICE, PONDER

Today, meditate on this blessing from Jan Richard, from *Circle of Grace*.

Beloved is Where We Begin

If you would enter
into the wilderness,
do not begin
without a blessing.

Do not leave
without hearing
who you are:
Beloved,
named by the One
who has traveled this path
before you.

Do not go
without letting it echo
in your ears,
and if you find
it is hard
to let it into your heart,
do not despair.
That is what
this journey is for.

I cannot promise
this blessing will free you
from danger,
from fear,
from hunger
or thirst,
from the scorching
of sun
or the fall
of the night.

But I can tell you
that on this path
there will be help.
I can tell you
that on this way
there will be rest.

I can tell you
that you will know
the strange graces
that come to our aid

only on a road
such as this,
that fly to meet us
bearing comfort
and strength,
that come alongside us
for no other cause
than to lean themselves
toward our ear
and with their
curious insistence
whisper our name:

Beloved.
Beloved.
Beloved.

at the end of my
orientation week

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S = CBF Staff Member

1 Lucy Hearne, 2013, Danville, VA (FPC)
1 Ralph Stocks, Emeritus (FP)
1 Reginald Bradley, San Francisco, CA (CH)
1 Terry Eddinger, Winston-Salem, NC (CH)
1 Bisser Ovcharov, Houston, TX (CH)
1 Julie Cadenhead, Pensacola, FL (CH)
2 Dennis McDuffie, Atoka, TN (CH)
2 Sara Moran, Greer, SC (CH)
3 Jenny Jenkins, Haiti (FP)
3 Ann Owen, Viera, FL (CH)
4 Vicki Lumpkin, Greensboro, NC (CH)
4 Shirley Massey, Chapel Hill, NC (CH)
4 Cintia Aguilar (S-Fellowship Southwest)

5 Eddie Aldape, Spain (FP)
5 David Brown, Emeritus (FP)
5 David D'Amico, Emeritus (FP)
5 Kelly Belcher, Asheville, NC (CH)
5 Roger Benimoff, Grand Prairie, TX (CH)
5 Becky Brannon, Gainesville, GA (CH)
5 Alexandria Geovanni, Lake Charles, LA (CH)
6 David Stone (S-North Carolina)
6 Carla Cherry, Worthington, OH (CH)
6 Daniel Edward Tatum, Marietta, GA (CH)
7 Martha Harper, Madison, MS (CH)
7 Lee Hendricks, Greenville, NC (CH)
7 Lita Sample, San Francisco, CA (FP)



SEPTEMBER 8

Prayer: Simple Conversations with God

Ellen Sechrest

CBF Director for Mission Engagement,
Georgia

■ *Learning Faith*

I pray because I can't help myself. I pray because I'm helpless. I pray because the need flows out of me all the time, waking and sleeping. It doesn't change God. It changes me.

C.S. Lewis

When I think of prayer, it often seems complex. But in reality, it's simple. The ways I prayed as a child were honest and simple. As a youth, I was encouraged to pray and use a devotional guide, and I did so without fail. I was a rule follower and didn't want to disappoint God.

My youth minister, Ty, told us once that sometimes we may not be able to pray because of a situation in our lives, but to know that someone else is praying for us when we can't. I struggled with that because I thought I should always be able to pray. My dear youth mentor, Bill (a woman) always told us she was praying for us by name. I thought that was sweet, but not until later would I understand the importance.

My Grandma Mize was a faithful pray-er. She always signed her cards: "With love and prayers, Grandma." She was a poor woman of simple means, but with a great understanding of the power of prayer which made her rich.

Then came college and seminary. With so much work to do, you'd think I would have prayed all the time. But I would go for long periods of time not praying. Those were the days in the valley when I remembered that Bill, Grandma, my mother and others were praying for me when it seemed words escaped me. I finally understood why we needed others praying for us.

While serving as a church minister, I wrote a lot of prayers for worship and experiences. At times it was hard because I wanted to say the right words and would fret over them. Then I saw the movie *Shadowlands*, about the life of C.S Lewis. One of his quotes is, “I pray because I can’t help myself. I pray because I’m helpless. I pray because the need flows out of me all the time, waking and sleeping. It doesn’t change God. It changes me.” I yearned for that prayer to flow out me all the time.

Now at age 58, I find myself back to my childhood way of praying. Simple conversations with God. Praying for others. Listening. It’s not the words that matter so much, it’s the time I spend with God that is life changing.

I am praying for you, my sisters and brothers.

PRAY, PRACTICE, PONDER

The simple conversations that children have with God can inspire adults in their prayer life. Praying in Color is an activity that helps even adults cultivate a sense of play and wonder in their prayers. Today, practice Praying in Color by gathering a few pens, crayons, or markers and a blank sheet of paper. Then, using words, images and doodles, draw or write your prayers to God. Pay attention to how this time with God feels, and how you experience God’s presence in new or different ways.

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S = CBF Staff Member

8 Daniel Hall, Pineville, KY (CH)
8 Jody Harrison, Dallas, TX (CH)
8 Chad Mustian, Dallas, TX (CH)
9 Rhonda James-Jones, Hiram, GA (CH)
9 Brett Barber, Durham, NC (CH)
10 Nancy Campbell, Kansas City, MO (CH)
10 Sarah Montoya, San Francisco, CA (CH)
10 Tashara Boochee, San Francisco, CA (CH)

11 Courtney Hester, Jacksonville, GA (CH)
11 Larry Hovis (S-North Carolina)
12 Bryan Lake, Cumming, GA (CH)
13 Scot McCosh, Fayetteville, NC (CH)
13 Richard Morris, Lebanon, PA (CH)
13 Kathy Turner, Charlotte, NC (CH)
14 Bart Grooms, Birmingham, AL (PC)
14 Priscilla Howick, Jacksonville, FL (CH)



Prayer: Just a Little Faith

Reginald A Bradley

Staff Chaplain, San Francisco VA Health System, California

■ *Learning Faith*

Mark 11:24, 25 (NIV)

Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sin.

When I think about prayer, I reflect on my youth and my desire for change whenever challenges occurred. The youngest sibling of three, I did not understand the tears as they flowed from my mother’s eyes, when we sat on the third-row pew in church. Now, I realize she desired change from stumbling blocks and mountains that tormented her life, apparently ones larger than herself. Her life of prayer resonated with me and is now a vital part of my life and spiritual practices. I’m privileged and confident to know my relationship with God is secure. Even in “stillness” and the “meanwhile” period as I wait for God to answer, I have assurance that God knows what is best for me and is always seeking to restore peace and harmony in my life as I strive to serve others.

As a chaplain in the clinical setting, prayer, meditation and songs of praise are often used as interventions to restore peace, a sense of self-worth, as well as hope when life circumstances become difficult for care recipients, often waging war against the mind, body and Spirit. These inevitable and unusual circumstances often cause spiritual distress. Through prayer and continuous removal of unwanted mountains in my life, I’m reminded that God is the ultimate Comforter and desires peace, joy and love to pour into the lives of others.

Believers are charged to spread such comfort to others; “God comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God” (2 Cor. 1:4). Prayer is the channel to not only acknowledge the supremacy of God, but also to invoke God’s grace, mercy and loving-kindness in our

lives and in the lives of others. One surrenders as a willing vessel to promote divine change. The great danger, however, is not that we shall believe in prayer too much, but that we so often believe too little, harboring unforgiveness for self or perhaps others, or that our mustard seed faith is weightless and non-measurable for petition before God.

I can identify with Peter as it pertains to human nature, because doubt has a way of slithering into one's heart-felt prayers to God. The foundational scripture (Mark 11:24, 25) gives Peter and the masses today knowledge, wisdom and insight about faith, prayer and forgiveness. Peter's curiosity allowed a teaching moment for Jesus. Jesus has a way of using His creation and things familiar to humankind, so that a broader concept and/or lesson is revealed. In this lesson, a fig tree is emphasized. Peter remembered and said to Jesus, "Rabbi look! The tree you cursed has withered!"

"Have faith in God," Jesus answered. "I tell you the truth, if anyone says to this mountain, 'Go throw yourself into the sea' and does not doubt in his heart but believes that what he says will happen, it will be done for him." This passage reminds us in our prayers/petitions before God, that it is all right in continuity to hold God's hand; but we must be mindful to release the prayers, to believe in God's infinite abilities, and to trust the process, as well as the outcome. Have faith in God!

PRAY, PRACTICE, PONDER

Question: What are the mountains in your life? Is it the mountain of guilt, shame, trust, unforgiveness, anger or perhaps the mountain of fear?

A Prayer for the World: When Life is Hard

Gracious and most merciful God, Giver of all life; may we all recognize the great value of the life you have given to each one of us. But look in a special way on those who no longer find any meaning in the lives they are leading. You can see every moment of the human heart and you know what depths of despair, discouragement, frustration, loneliness or self-hate have led them to the edge on which they stand.

Have mercy on them and open their eyes to see that the road has not ended. Fill their hearts with new hope. Place people in their lives who will love them, with your own love, and who will give them a reason to pray and believe that you move mountains. Let them know they are worthwhile, included in your plans and needed. Amen



Birthdays this Week:

CH = Chaplain
EP = Engagement Partner
FP = Field Personnel

FPC = Child of Field Personnel
PC = Pastoral Counselor
S = CBF Staff Member

15 Brandy Mullins, Manvel, TX (CH)
16 Debbie Haag (S-South Carolina)
16 Dick Allison, Hattiesburg, MS (CH)
16 Matthew Dinkins, Matthews, NC (CH)
16 Jeff Ellison, Heath, TX (CH)
16 Karen Heistand, Rochester, MN (CH)
16 Byron Johnson, Paris Island, SC (CH)
17 Elket Rodriguez, US-Mexico Border (FP)
17 Angela Clark, Matthews, NC (CH)
17 Jean Craddock, Lexington, KY (PC)
17 Tammy Latimer, Springfield, MO (CH)
17 George Rossi, Charleston, SC (CH)

17 I. Malik Saafir, Nashville, TN (CH)
18 Jenni Shannon (S-Kentucky)
18 Mark Johnston, Augusta, GA (CH)
19 Cari Willis, Benson, NC (CH)
20 David Bluford, Lenoir City, TN (CH)
20 Katherine Moneypenny, Douglas, GA (CH)
20 Renée Owen (S-CBF Global)
20 Heidi Dechow, Salisbury, NC (CH)
20 Adam Ridenhour, Winston Salem, NC (CH)
20 Beth Roberts (S-Church Benefits Board)
21 Mark Flores, Lynchburg, VA (CH)



Faith: God's Plan

Delores Stimpson

Global Service Corps, North Carolina

■ Learning Faith

Proverbs 19:21

The human mind may devise many plans, but it is the purpose of the Lord that will be established.

We all have the freedom to make plans for our life. We may be thinking about college, families and careers; but we must also have faith and trust in God that our steps will be established according to the plan that God made for us before we were formed in our mother's womb. When we follow God, we will find our purpose. God instructs us in the path we should follow; but we often desire to control our lives, predicting the outcome. God directs us according to God's plan and watches to make sure we stay on the right path.

I developed the plan that I thought was right for me. What I learned early in my career is that God was executing God's plan. While I enjoyed my work and career, my joy was in forming intense relationships with others that were very fulfilling. My spiritual life was intertwined closely with my work life and I needed both every day! Demonstrating care and compassion for others, growing relationships, mentoring, encouraging others offering support and praying for and with others, is much more than a job. A job is also a mission and working for God gives more joy and comfort than ever imagined!

After leaving the workplace, I asked God, "What next?" I became restless, but I prayed and waited. God led me to Welcome House Ministry, then to manage the Welcome House ministry across the Research Triangle, North Carolina Region, and now to volunteer as a CBF Global Services Corps Post-Career Field Representative.

I will follow God and the purpose God designed for me.

PRAY, PRACTICE, PONDER

Lord Jesus,

Our work and our service to you are eternal. We do not turn away or leave the work you have planned for us to do. You instruct us to use our gifts and talents to honor you and serve others. You order our steps and watch over us to make sure we stay on the right path. We are your handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works that are planned for us. Help us to work for your purpose, to delight you and to glorify your holy name.

We want others to see us as a shining light, showing love to others as you show your love to us. Please direct our steps, hold our hands, and grant us grace and mercy to live for the purpose you planned. Guide us when we fall and strengthen us when we grow weak. Teach us to give hope to the hopeless, show hospitality and compassion, and build relationships that are bound in your love. Help us to shed the fear in welcoming strangers to our communities, embracing them as our neighbors in Christ.

Amen.

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22 Kim Chafee, Virginia Beach, VA (CH)
22 Josh Reglin, Tahoka, TX (CH)
22 Becky Shoaf, Atlanta, GA (CH)
23 Donna Seay, Baltimore, MD (CH)
24 Chad Cooper, Colorado Springs, CO (CH)
24 Laura Popa, Saginaw, MI (CH)
24 William Stewart, Norfolk, VA (CH)
25 Angel Pittman, Emeritus (FP)
25 Durrell Brown, Powder Springs, GA (CH)
26 Randy Brookshire, Greenville, SC (CH)
26 Sunny Mitchell, New Orleans, LA (CH)
26 Keith Parker, Brevard, NC (PC)

26 Beth Sexton, Lincolnnton, NC (CH)
26 Lynwood Walters, Gainesville, FL (CH)
26 Jeffrey Walton, Richmond, VA (CH)
26 Gloria White, Pearland, TX (PC)
27 Cathy Anderson, Kennesaw, GA (CH)
27 Peggy Johnson, Hurst, TX (CH)
28 Jonathan Amaya, Houston, TX (CH)
28 Renate Krukliis, Braselton, GA (CH)
28 Beverly Baker, Ahoskie, NC (GSC)
29 Asrubal Forte, Miami FL (CH)
29 John Harris, Pelham, AL (PC)
30 Todd Weber, Louisville, KY (CH)
30 Rachel Webb, College Station, TX (CH)



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