

# Prayers of the People

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

What is  
saving your life  
right now?

**2024-2025**

# What is Saving Your Life Right Now?

In her 2007 memoir, *Leaving Church*, Barbara Brown Taylor tells the story of being invited to speak to a local congregation. When she asks her host to provide a topic for the talk, he says simply: “Just come tell us what is saving your life right now.” Taylor writes about how this question reoriented her. Most of us know what’s killing us, challenging us or frustrating us. And, if asked, we can articulate it. But few of us stop to notice and name what is restoring us, what is giving us life. Jesus told his followers that he came to give life, and life abundant (John 10:10), so it is not a far leap to suggest that the things that give us life are also the ways God is present with us, and the ways we are awakened to God’s Spirit in our lives. The people, places, practices and experiences that give us life are, in many ways, our embodied prayers.

For this year’s *Prayers of the People*, we invited leaders from across our Fellowship to reflect on the question posed to Barbara Brown Taylor: ***What is saving your life right now?*** As a result, this year’s guide is filled to the brim with stories of friendship and community, hard-won bits of spiritual wisdom, creative practice of prayer and rest and reflections on our experiences of looking for new life during dark and difficult times. Unlike the life-denying forces we often encounter in culture, politics and business (and even sometimes within our own minds and hearts!), these stories reflect on the life-giving goodness of God’s provision, and the small and large ways God is at work saving us, sustaining us and restoring heaven on earth.

The reflections gathered in this year’s guide are authentic, personal, thoughtful and moving. They invite us onto holy ground and help reorient us to a different way of seeing the world around us. My hope is that as you read these reflections, you too will feel restored to life. And that maybe, just maybe, you will be inspired to begin noticing what is saving your life each day, each week, each month; and celebrating God’s provision and your own embodied prayers.

—Meg

## About the Editor

Rev. Meg Lacy is writer, speaker, pediatric chaplain and yoga teacher who currently serves as staff chaplain for Cardiac ICU and Transplant at Children’s Medical Center in Dallas, Texas. Meg received a B.A. in religion and sociology from Samford University and an M.Div. from Candler School of Theology at Emory University. Meg has served in churches across the Southeast, and often leads spiritual retreats for churches, women and clergy. Meg lives in DFW with her two pups, Ruth and Olive.





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BEHOLD...A **NEW** THING

Isaiah 43:19

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## Design Team

Meg Lacy  
Editor

Aaron Weaver  
Content and Creative Strategies Officer

Lauren Lamb  
Marketing & Communications Manager

Jeff Langford  
Graphic Designer

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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 and 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 introducing children and teens to CBF 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 a children's sermon each week. If your church follows the liturgical calendar in worship, this year's guide includes a particular section for the season of Lent which could be used for weekly reflections as a lead in to worship.

## 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](http://www.cbf.net/pathlight) for more information about this free weekly download.

# Sacred Spaces: The Places and People that Give Us Life

September 29 - November 17

“Heaven and earth, the Celtic saying goes, are only three feet apart. And in thin places that distance is even shorter. These are places that make us feel something larger than ourselves, as though we are held in a place between worlds...”

—Kerri ni Dochartaigh

The following reflections touch on the environments in which we experience life-giving sustenance. Some of these environments are physical locations, while others are communities of people, or even seasons of life. Each reflection below invites us into a “thin place”—a sacred space where the lines between heaven and earth are blurred, and we remember we are standing on holy ground.

SEPTEMBER 29



# I Need You to Survive

**Paul Byrd**

Program Director, Georgia Rural Health  
Innovation Center, Mercer University School  
of Medicine, Cumming, Ga.

## **Romans 12:5**

So in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.

Two years ago, I stepped away from chaplaincy and into a new role helping ministers and healthcare providers create collaborations to improve health disparities in rural communities. While it is important work, I have missed the connection to the sacred space of direct ministry. As I struggled to find perspective, I had an experience that has helped me connect to the vitality of this new context.

Late last year, while attending a health fair that we organized with one of the faith/health collaborations that our program helped to resource, my wife, Terri, and I visited the church where blood donations were being received and where Terri would make a blood donation. The American Red Cross was set up in a beautiful worship space with high ceilings and stained-glass windows. A piano and lectern on the chancel and an altar front and center. The patient exam tables for donating blood were placed among the chairs where the congregation would normally sit. Worship music flowed from a small speaker and filled the room. It was beautiful, peaceful and calming.

As we talked with the nurse, a song began to play and I began to sing along:

“I need you, you need me,  
We’re all a part of God’s body.  
Stand with me, agree with me.  
We’re all a part of God’s body.”

To our delight, Terri’s nurse joined in:

“It is God’s will that every need be supplied.  
You are important to me, I need you to survive.”

Here in rural Georgia where there is so much health disparity and where race and religion can often divide, we found ourselves in a profoundly holy moment. A young African-American nurse and two older white people in a predominantly white church singing to one another about how we can prayerfully pledge to care for one another spiritually and tangibly.

“I pray for you, you pray for me.  
I love you, I need you to survive.  
I won’t harm you with words from my mouth.  
I love you, I need you to survive.”

As Terri began her donation, something happened. Her normally upbeat voice got quiet, the color left her face, and her hand became clammy. She whispered, “I don’t feel good...I think I’m going to faint.”

Before I could even think, the nurse calmly and quickly jumped to Terri’s aid. Her head was lowered, her feet raised, cold wet towels were placed on her head and neck. Her caregiver spoke gently, reassuring her. After a few frightening minutes, she was back. Her color and speech returned to normal. She was able to complete her donation.

However, in those few, fragile moments, we were invited into the sacred space of personally understanding the impact of ministry in this new context and doing the holy work of bringing people together to save lives.

Now, when I find myself at my office desk or as I sit in meetings about building collaborations and begin missing the holy moments, I stop and hum that lovely chorus. I’m taken back to that sacred space and inspired to lean into the difference that this new role can make.

## Pray, Practice, Ponder

On your phone or computer, find Hezekiah Walker’s song, “I Need You to Survive” (It can be found on YouTube or through most music apps.) As you listen, let the lyrics wash over you. Prayerfully notice what word or phrase stands out for you today. Consider sharing this line with a friend or, in the style of *Lectio Divina*, take this word or phrase to God in prayer, pondering what God is speaking to you through it.

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CH = Chaplain

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29 John Harris, Pelham, AL (PC)

30 Rachel Webb, College Station, TX (CH)

30 Todd Weber, Louisville, KY (CH)

1 Tina Boyles Bailey, Austria (FP)

2 Maha Boulos, Lebanon (FP)

2 Keith Holmes, Emeritus (FP)

3 Jonathan Bailey, Indonesia (FP)

3 Andrew Finkler, Fayetteville, NC (CH)

3 Matt Norman, Spain (FP)

4 Jana Lee, Cyprus (FP)

4 Michael Metcalf, Statesville, NC (CH)

4 Tess Perrin, 2004, Cyprus (FPC)

5 Kate Blackshear, Austin, TX (CH)

5 Jo Ann Hopper, Emeritus (FP)

5 Gregory Thompson, Oakwood, GA (CH)

5 Chris Towles (CH/S-North Carolina)

5 David White, Murfreesboro, TN (CH)





OCTOBER 6

## Behold...A New Thing!

Dianne McNary

CBF OGM Advocate

### Isaiah 43:19

I am about to do a new thing;  
now it springs forth; do you not perceive it?  
I will make a way in the wilderness  
and rivers in the desert.

About this time last year, I was packing up our belongings preparing to move back to the United States after 19 years ministering among the Roma peoples in Slovakia. There were so many conflicting emotions as we decided what to pack and what to give away. Excitement and apprehension. Happy and sad. Ready for new challenges and desire to keep doing the same old things. How do you pack up almost 20 years of your life into some boxes and bags?

I had recently gone through a period of reflection and discernment when the opportunity to return to the U.S. was presented. At first, I had no idea what I might do next. I still have a nursing license so that was an option; but it wasn't my first choice. It was my back-up plan. I wanted to stay involved with Global Missions. Following Nell Green as the next Offering for Global Missions Advocate was just the ticket. I have always enjoyed visiting churches, sharing stories and getting to know people. This was the perfect role for me. The challenge of learning new skills and being pushed outside my comfort zone has been life-giving to me during this transition back to Arkansas.

Sharing my colleagues' stories and promoting their ministries as I encourage congregations to give generously to the Offering for Global Missions which ensures that CBF field personnel can live out their call, expands my calling in new ways.

God is doing a new thing. Do you not perceive it? For 2024-25, the Offering for Global Missions theme is "Behold...a new thing!" based on Isaiah 43:19. Each year we set aside two weeks to pray for our CBF field personnel and the Offering for Global Missions. Join us this week, Oct 6-12, 2024 to lift up our field personnel and their ministries around the world.

I encourage you to give generously to support the Offering for Global Missions which provides salary, benefits and housing for CBF field personnel around the world.

## Pray, Practice, Ponder

God of healing and justice, you have called us by name and we are your children. When rivers rage, they will not sweep over us. When we walk through fire, we will not be consumed because we are precious in your sight. We are precious and called.

We are witnesses to your grace and love. And we are called to share your love with all we meet. We are called to act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with our God.

Open our hearts, O Lord, that we may welcome people from other places.

Open our eyes, O Lord, to see the new things that You are doing.

Open our ears, O Lord, that we may hear a word from You.

Open our hands, O Lord, that we may be offer healing grace to others.

Open our minds, O Lord, to see others in a new way. Amen.

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7 Daniel Brockhan, Cheektowaga, NY (CH)

7 Mary Kaylor (S-North Carolina)

7 Melissa Rodriguez (S-CBF Global)

8 Lucas Dorion (S-Alabama)

8 Robb Small, Geismar, LA (CH)

8 Melissa Kremer (S-Georgia)

10 Larry Aaron, Danville, VA (CH)

10 Joseph Boone, Cold Spring, KY (CH)

10 Beth Duke, Smithville, TN (CH)

10 Jay Martin, Woodland Park, CO (PC)

10 Cinda Smith, Batesville, AR (CH)

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 Ben Newell, Emeritus (FP)

12 Terry Newell, Zebulon, NC (PC)

12 Loren (Greg) Sink, Fayetteville, NC (CH)

OCTOBER 13



## At Home in My Calling

**Charlie Reynolds**

CBF Associate Endorser for Military Chaplains

“Our deepest calling is to grow into our own authentic self-hood, whether or not it conforms to some image of who we ought to be. As we do so, we will not only find the joy that every human being seeks—we will also find our path of authentic service in the world.”

—Parker Palmer, *Let Your Life Speak*

What is saving my life right now is serving as the CBF associate endorser for military chaplains. I feel like my whole life, including 57 years in ministry, has been preparing me for this opportunity.

My first ministry position was serving as the Royal Ambassador (RA) leader for eight young men in my church in the Blue Ridge Mountains of Virginia when I was 16 years old. For seven summers I served first as an assistant counselor and, in the seventh year, as director of the Peaks of Otter RA Camp and Mountaineering School. As a professional minister, I have served as a missionary journeyman, minister of youth, church planter and pastor before serving God and country for 28 years as an army chaplain. God is allowing me to use those years of ministry experience to empower our CBF military chaplains in their ministry.

There is nothing more fulfilling than being a mentor/counselor for our CBF chaplains. On my worst day as an army chaplain, Gerry Hutchinson, a former CBF endorser, was there for me. Being there for our CBF chaplains is what gives me life. Every time I visit one of our chaplains and meet with their commanders and supervising chaplains, I am always amazed by the ministry they are performing, often in extremely difficult and sometimes dangerous circumstances.

One of the accomplishments of which I am most proud is the initiating of our Military Chaplain Church Sponsorship. Renee Owen, the director of CBF Chaplaincy and Pastoral Counseling, Carrol Wilson, our chaplaincy and pastoral counseling specialist, and I cannot do all that we want to do to support the almost 900 CBF chaplains.

We are asking CBF churches to sponsor a military chaplain. We are hoping that we will have enough participating churches to expand this ministry to our V.A., healthcare, correctional facilities and law enforcement chaplains. I believe that every church should have the blessing of sponsoring a chaplain. If you are interested, email me at creynolds@cbf.net.

I wrote a book, soon to be published by Good Faith Media, called, *A Quest for Warrior Priest: Enlisting Warriors as Healers and Peacebuilders*. I close my book with these words: "Every breath you take belongs to God. Each breath is an opportunity for God's healing presence to enter your life. Every day is an opportunity for God to use your life to bring healing and redemption to his world."

Thank you for supporting our CBF chaplains who live out these words every day. I challenge you to live them as well.

## Pray, Practice, Ponder

Today, consider where in your life you feel connected to your authentic self and calling. In what role, whether professional or personal, do you feel most fulfilled and connected to God's work in the world? After pondering this question, consider offering a prayer for CBF military chaplains around the world, as they work as agents of peace and healing in the midst of challenging circumstances.

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13 Lloyd Blevins, Fayetteville, NC (CH)  
13 Bob Newell, Emeritus (FP)  
13 John Painter, Charleston, SC (CH)  
13 Fran Turner, Emeritus (FP)  
13 Gretchen Watson, Louisville, KY (PC)  
14 Yarelis Montex de Oca, Miami FL (CH)  
14 Yuri Sekscinski, Temple, TX (CH)  
16 Matthew Andrews, Birmingham, AL (CH)  
16 Karen Black, Fort Worth, TX (CH)

16 Betty Drayton, Sumter, SC (CH)  
16 Sarah Neeley, Tyler, TX (CH)  
16 Monty Self, Little Rock, AR (CH)  
16 Cameron Mason Vickery (S-Fellowship Southwest)  
17 David Fambrough, Greenville, NC (CH)  
18 Jenine Crew (S-CBF Global)  
18 Hank Demous, Opelika, AL (CH)  
18 Danny Garnett, Irmo, SC (PC)

OCTOBER 20



## Legacy in Indonesia

Brooke and Mike

CBF Field Personnel, Indonesia

### John 15:4-6, 8

“Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing... My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples.”

My family used to be farmers. We lived on both sides of the Missouri River’s banks in Kansas and Missouri. My great grandfather is known for building the wooden bridge over the creek. The road in front of his land bears his name. As a child, doing things with my grandmother usually meant a visit to the farm, to plant, to reap or simply to chase or be chased by the chickens and the goats.

My grandmother eventually migrated South with the rest of the family. She sold the farm, and the county rebuilt the bridge. On that old parcel of land, there’s no trace of our family besides a name on a street sign.

We moved to Indonesia 10 years ago. As we discern God’s calling for the next 10 years of life and ministry, I’ve wondered if our work here is done and what trace will be left by our life and work in this country if called to serve elsewhere.

An accounting of the fruit God is bearing in this land brings us life and helps us to know that wherever we may find ourselves in the years ahead, we leave a significant trace of our presence.

Nearly a decade ago, I preached under a tarp in a jungle clearing. There was hope for a church in that place, but not much else. Last year, we returned to that village to install solar lighting on the church built in that clearing years later.

Illness precluded us from participating in a project in a rural village. Our team went forward. A year later, the church had doubled in size and one of the teenagers had given their life to ministry.

People of little to no faith have found faith in our community. Those of faith have found a sense of calling to live out their faith. Some have devoted their lives to serving Christ here and abroad.

An honorific, granted by years of study and research, has opened unimagined doors for dialogue. We have broken fasts, prayed over and mourned with people from a myriad of faith traditions.

The schools and communities where we have served or where our children are educated, we will leave for the better.

People have known us by our fruits, fruits that will bear seeds and more fruit in their time.

—Mike

## Pray, Prayer, Ponder

Heavenly Father, may the legacies we leave behind us, whether it is moving from one place to another, or from this life to the next, be an ever-present lingering of the Gospel truth and love proclaimed in the name of Jesus. Amen.

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20 Richard Brown, Roanoke VA (CH)  
20 Annette Ellard, Louisville, KY (FP)  
20 Chuck Hawkins, Pearland, TX (CH)  
20 Luke Langston, Durham, NC (CH)  
20 Abby Nichols, Nashville TN (CH)  
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 Nina Golston (S-CBF Global)  
25 Suzie, Southeast Asia (FP)  
26 Dean Dickens, Emeritus (FP)



## Prayers for New Life

**Kim and Marc Wyatt**

CBF Field Personnel, Raleigh, N.C.

“Celebrate God all day, every day. I mean, revel in him! Make it as clear as you can to all you meet that you’re on their side, working with them and not against them. Help them see that the Master is about to arrive. He could show up any minute! Don’t fret or worry. Instead of worrying, pray. Let petitions and praises shape your worries into prayers, letting God know your concerns. Before you know it, a sense of God’s wholeness, everything coming together for good, will come and settle you down. It’s wonderful what happens when Christ displaces worry at the center of your life.”

—Guest at Welcome House Raleigh

Refugee guests of Welcome House Raleigh arrive weary and off balance. With only the possessions they carry in their arms, they are homeless. Life as they knew it back home is gone forever. They are lost. It takes time for folks to regain their bearings and feel at home. Of course, they aren’t home yet. They are in a holding pattern, a pause. We welcome them to beloved community and help them get situated in their new bedrooms.

The pause can take weeks, even months. Not knowing the future is frustrating and stressful. Every day our guests await news from their agency caseworkers that a permanent home has finally been found. It is an unspoken prayer. Having a home, they hope, will erase some of the loss and replace the emptiness with a promise of a new life.

Refugees slowly but surely let down their guard. Peace and welcome are strong and compelling influences. Most welcome friendship. It is a sacred space. The “pause” is a place where humanity is reclaimed. It is where we practice Christ’s presence. The transformation from strangers to friends is shared by all, both guests and hosts. We never grow tired of it. It is lifegiving.

And then comes the day! They get the news. An apartment has been secured. Our team works closely with volunteers and the refugee agency to furnish the apartment ahead of moving day. They gather their belongings, often much more than they arrived with,

and we take them to their new home. A “welcome home” door mat greets them. Their key opens the door. Inside, everything is in its place and every room is ready. After such a long and hard journey, they are finally home again. Their prayers are being answered. No matter how long it takes or how involved the work, we never grow tired of the ministry of welcome and hospitality toward strangers.

The quote at the beginning of this reflection was written by the elder of a refugee family who were our guests during their “pause” at Welcome House. It now hangs on the wall near the front door.

## Pray, Practice, Ponder

Pray for those who are now experiencing a time of “pause” at Welcome House Raleigh. Pray they might experience this sacred space as healing and restorative, a place where new dreams and new life can begin. Pray for strength, joy and wisdom for those who serve and lead at Welcome House.

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27 Robert Carter, Virginia Beach, VA (CH)

27 Kathy Hoppe, Broken Arrow, OK (CH)

27 Terrell Moye, Palm Beach Gardens, FL (CH)

29 Mike Hutchinson, Emeritus (FP)

29 Sam Scaggs, Dublin, GA (CH)

29 Troy Todd, Norfolk, VA (CH)

30 Richard Brown, Troutville, VA (CH)

30 Hazel Thomas, Arlington, TX (CH)

31 Abina Johnson, New Orleans, LA (CH)

1 Kasey Jones (S-CBF Global)

1 Lynne Mouchet, Johns Creek, GA (CH)

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2 Mickie Norman, Leland, NC (CH)

2 Lindsay Winslow, Birmingham, AL (CH)

2 Ryan Yaun, Wetumpka, AL (CH)





## Unexpected Opportunity

**Juan Garcia**

CBF Moderator and Pastor, Primera Iglesia  
Bautista de Newport News, Va.

### **Matthew 19:14**

Jesus said, “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.”

As I ponder what is saving my life right now, I don’t want to sound cliché, but the answer is “Jesus.” He is constantly saving me.

Now, how specifically he is doing that or how I am specifically experiencing his salvation in this season in my life—that’s where it gets interesting. Currently, I have the privilege, along with a member of our congregation, of coaching my son’s soccer team in our city league. That’s something I never thought I’d be doing. I didn’t grow up playing soccer. As a matter of fact, my sport is basketball and when I try to play soccer with some people from our church, I find myself putting my hands instead of my feet to work. Hence, the oddity of my current situation. Yet, God worked things out in a way that I find myself engaging with and coaching a group of kids from different walks of life in a sport that I am still learning myself.

The experience has been a blessing for me. It has been a breath of fresh air to my otherwise very ordinary pastoral and personal routine. It has been a source of renewal as I embrace these children, check on them during practices and games, show them Jesus’ love, pass on to them the little I know about the sport, challenge them to learn and improve and encourage them not to give up, since the game is not over until it is over. Being able to be the source of love, encouragement and fun to kids who sometimes look like they are lacking those things in their lives, has been to me a God-given and life-giving gift.

Jesus told his disciples to “let the children come to him,” and that’s precisely what I am trying to do through this unexpected opportunity of coaching my son’s soccer team. And it happens to be that God is using that to save my life these days.

## Prayer, Practice, Ponder:

Lord, may we never forget that your salvation and life-giving presence can be found in those unexpected opportunities you throw our way. Help us not to miss them, but to embrace them, so we can experience new life.

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3 Michael McCawley, Fort Bragg, NC (CH)

3 David Reid, Boise, ID (CH)

4 Laura Ayala (S-CBF Global)

4 Tarvick Linder, Korea (CH)

4 Mary Stinson, Berea, KY (CH)

4 Mark Westebbe, Waynesboro, VA (CH)

5 Cameron Gunnin, San Antonio, TX (CH)

6 Kyle Fishbaugh, Fayetteville, NC (CH)

6 Gloria Hopper, Monroe NC (CH)

6 Jeff Lee, North Macedonia (FP)

6 Meghan McSwain, Winston-Salem, NC (CH)

7 Craig Butler, Sugar Land, TX (CH)

7 Pat Coley, Talofoto, Guam (CH)

7 Darrell Hudson, Georgetown, TX (CH)

8 Evan Sieges, Burlington, NC (CH)

8 Jay Kieve (S-CBF Global)

8 Mark Weiler, Greeley, CO (CH)

9 Debby Bradley, Owensboro, KY (CH)

9 Charles Seligman, San Antonio, TX (CH)

9 Audrey Wilson, Durham, NC (CH)

NOVEMBER 10



## My Heart: Ministry in the Middle East

Chaouki and Maha Boulos  
CBF Field Personnel, Beirut, Lebanon

### Revelations 3:8

Behold, I have set before you an open door and no one can shut it.

What's saving our lives right now is the ministry in the Middle East.

Lebanon was affected by the war that began on October 7, 2023, because of her shared borders with the neighboring country. After the war started, we headed back to the United States to spend some time there from October to January. We felt like fish outside of water.

We were doing ministry by phone, and Maha continued to be heavily involved in ministry that kept going despite the trouble in south Lebanon. The four women's meetings that convene on a weekly basis kept going strong, as did the weekly men's meetings.

Needless to say, we missed our different ministries tremendously. It didn't help being so far away. The women in the meetings kept calling us and telling us how much they missed us.

Although there were many social activities happening in the U.S., we could always feel the huge difference between the two worlds. One is easier in daily matters and the other is harder—even in the smallest things. In the U.S., you can go to the supermarket and get your needs. While overseas, the local families and some refugees struggle to get a pound of ground beef because it has gone up so much in price.

I remember Rasmi, a Syrian refugee woman whose husband is suffering from jaw cancer. He's being treated in Syria while she and the kids had to stay back. She has no income and depends on what people donate to her. We helped Rasmi with food, rent, milk

and more for her four children. She knows that when everything closes in on her, we will always assist her and her children in any way we can. She always thanks us and is grateful for the churches and people who don't know her but are ready to stand by her side when all her resources are depleted.

I also remember the older Lebanese woman, Eve, who has no children. Her husband passed away many years ago and left her with no income. Have you ever thought how hard it is to have no money? Have you ever thought what you might do if you had no currency, no credit cards and no one to stand by you in times of need?

Not having cash has always struck me as very, very hard. We helped Eve with her medicine, bought her some groceries and beef and left a little cash with her. Praise the Lord for His caring love to the people we serve. And this is mainly because of the contribution of wonderful people like you.

## Pray, Practice, Ponder

The people we meet in our ministry always pray for you. They pray:

- That the Lord would pour out His love on you.
- That the Lord would give you good health and take care of you and your families.
- That you will never face closed doors.
- That you would be always guided by His Holy Spirit.

Offer a prayer today for Christians in Lebanon and across the Middle East for God's love to pour out on them, for their health and safety, that doors will be opened for them and that God's Spirit would be their guide.

### Birthdays this Week:

CH = Chaplain

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FP = Field Personnel

FPC = Child of Field Personnel

PC = Pastoral Counselor

S = CBF Staff Member

10 Brooke, Southeast Asia (FP)

10 Kevin Crowder, Fredericksburg, VA (CH)

10 Holly Johnson, St. Petersburg, FL (CH)

10 Ralph Mikels, Jr., Seymour, TN (CH)

10 Jim Smith, Emeritus (FP)

11 Scott Blair, Bethesda, VA (CH)

11 Dana Durham, Sacramento, CA (CH)

11 Phoebe Khano, 2010, Belgium (FPC)

11 Bert Sanders III, Winston-Salem, NC (CH)

11 Steve Sweatt, Birmingham, AL (PC)

12 Jason Coker (S-Together for Hope)

12 John Lepper, Crestwood, KY (PC)

13 Shelia Earl, Emeritus (FP)

13 Earl Martin, Emeritus (FP)

13 Matthew Posten, Louisville, KY (CH)

13 Gail Smith, Hillsborough, NC (CH)

13 Cindy Wallace, Sterling, VA (CH)

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 Anita Snell Daniels, Emeritus (FP)

16 Lori Gooden (S-Fellowship Southwest)

16 Margaret Harvey, Austin, TX (CH)

16 Edwin Hollis, Odenville, AL (CH)

16 Gloria Hopper, Monroe NC (CH)

16 Andrew Stubblefield, Pensacola FL (CH)



## The Sai River

**Carson and Laura Foushee**  
CBF Field Personnel, Kanazawa, Japan

### Psalm 98:4,8 (NIV)

Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth; break forth into joyous song and praises...Let the rivers clap their hands, let the mountains sing together for joy.

Nestled between the Japan Alps and the Sea of Japan in Central Japan lies the city of Kanazawa. Though traditional sites and cultural activities as well as delicious seafood are a few of the reasons I love my city, what saves my life is time spent along the Saigawa (Sai River).

Snowmelt from the mountains runs down into the Sai River and is carried out to sea. Flowing through the middle of the city and located just under half a mile from our family's home, the river features greenways on either side that go for miles. These provide space for exercise, communal gatherings and appreciation of the beauty of nature that surrounds us.

Podcasts escort me on runs as I look up at the snowy peaks, take in the clear water and search for herons, whom I affectionally call my "bird friends," hunting for supper. I pass youth heading home from school on bicycles, couples chatting on steps leading to the water and groups of seniors playing ground golf on the floodplains.

Public parks dot the greenways and offer places for families and friends to gather. My family and I often spend weekends, our children climbing on playground equipment, pretending to fish with sticks in a tadpole pond and playing tag with school friends and their families.

Each season brings new beauty and opportunities for adventure along the Sai River. Picnics under puffy white blossoms on cherry trees in spring offer chances to deepen relationships with old friends and to make new ones. Unobstructed views of fireworks

shows in the city and in towns in the distance light up summer evenings. Bright yellow, orange and red leaves burst forth in the trees along the banks to announce the arrival of fall. In winter, small hills and open spaces create pleasant sledding spots for all ages.

While all of this leads me to join the earth in shouts of joy to the Lord, it is the unpredictable nature of these trips that make me appreciate life along the Sai River even more. Due to its location on the west side of the mountains, coupled with unique weather patterns that come across the Sea of Japan, Kanazawa is one of the rainiest extratropical cities in the world. Wet and heavy snowfalls are also a winter reality and often force me to stay indoors. Weeks sometimes go by before I find myself on the river once again.

But I know that when I return, the river, in all its beauty and opportunity, will be waiting. And this continues to give me life.

## Pray, Practice, Ponder

Take a walk in a natural space today. Observe the life and beauty that abounds. Join the earth in praising our Creator God who has and continues to make all things new.

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17 Benjamin Burton, Louisville, KY (CH)  
17 Elizabeth Thompson, Littleton, CO (PC)  
18 Elaine Greer, Frankfort, KY (CH)  
18 Jody Long (S-Georgia)  
18 Kristin Long, Richmond, VA (PC)  
19 T. Nancy Cox, Georgetown, KY (CH)  
19 Will Kinnaird, Keller, TX (CH)  
20 Chuck Christie, Loganville, GA (CH)

20 Lindsy Hines (S-CBF Global)  
20 Kevin Park, Bellingham, WA (CH)  
21 Fred Madren, Indianapolis, IN (CH)  
21 Janet Pittman, Emeritus (FP)  
22 Becky Smith, Emeritus (FP)  
23 Heather Hurd, San Antonio TX (CH)  
23 Dihanne Moore (S-CBF Global)  
23 Julie Walton, Richmond, VA (CH)

# Nourishing Theology: Life-Sustaining Beliefs

November 24 - January 26

“What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us.”

—A.W. Tozer

“The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.”

—John 10:10

The word “theology” literally means “talk about God.” Our theology is central to who we are as individuals and as Christians. Yet we are often unaware of our “God talk” or why it even matters. In the following reflections, leaders from across the Fellowship explore their beliefs about God, self and others, and how these beliefs nurture their souls. Jesus says that unlike the thief who comes to destroy, his mission was to give abundant life.

The reflections below invite us to think anew about aspects of our faith, and to develop ways to talk and think about God that are life-giving and life-sustaining.

**NOVEMBER 24**

## **Holy Peace**

**Angel F. Lee**

Chaplain, Atrium Health, Wake Forest Baptist  
Hospital, Winston-Salem, N.C.



### **Matthew 5:9**

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

My ultimate desire for my life is peace. I used to understand peace as the absence of conflict and people pleasing. As a Black woman in America, I have learned that there is no peace without conflict. I continue to see people who look like me being killed and treated unjustly. I constantly face microaggressions and oppression in the spaces that I occupy. Choosing not to address injustice fills my being with hopelessness, as it feels that there is no end to injustice. My former understanding of peace is what the dominant culture wants me to believe so that the status quo will remain. Yet, it was leading me to a slow death, and I felt it in my spirit.

What has saved my life is an understanding of holy peace. Jesus says to his disciples, “Do not think that I have come to bring peace to earth; I have not come to bring peace but a sword” (Matthew 10:34). Understanding Jesus as a radical prophet who taught and exhibited God’s love for all creation, contrary to the dominant culture, helped me to understand holy peace.

I get to walk in the footsteps of Jesus in my work as a chaplain educator. I teach clergy to connect with divine wisdom and to care with love and compassion. I advocate for those who are experiencing injustice within the hospital and the community. I love my students and patients with the love of God. True peace comes by acknowledging and combating “the spiritual forces of evil in heavenly places” (Ephesians 6:12) with the love and power of God.

My classroom is a brave space for clergy to identify such forces and process how to address them with divine love. What brings me the most joy is witnessing the transformation in my students’ pastoral care, preaching and leadership due to my



radical love and teachings. To know that God uses me to advance peace IS saving my life right now.

Writing also saves my life; for I hear the voice of God when I write. I wrote the poem below several years ago. This piece was healing then and continues to heal me when my spirit is affected by the evil and hate in this world. May the peace of God that surpasses all understanding rest in your heart.

## Pray, Practice, Ponder

Read the poem below slowly, meditatively, as a form of prayer.

### Woman of Confidence

I look in the mirror and see a woman of worth.

She is so blessed that her cup constantly overflows with riches.

So, she gives her time, wisdom, care and materials so that others can know their worth.

I look in the mirror and see a woman of love.

She is so blessed that she is surrounded by caring communities.

So, she smiles and basks in the glory of her natural and spiritual family.

I look in the mirror and see a woman of strength.

She is so blessed that God sends angels to protect her on all sides.

So, she walks confidently everywhere she goes, knowing that she is God's anointed.

I look in the mirror and see me.

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24 Will Barnes, Savannah, GA (CH)

24 Lynn Brinkley (S-CBF Global)

24 Robert Fox (S-Church Benefits Board)

24 Peggy Gold, Durham, NC (CH)

24 Will Manley, Johnson City, TN (CH)

24 David Posey, Medina, TN (CH)

24 Ruth Santos-Ortíz (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 Sue Smith, Arkansas (FP)

25 Lee Weems, Pineville, LA (CH)

25 Cassandra Wilson, Gahanna, OH (CH)

26 Carol Fletcher, Athens, GA (CH)

26 Michael O'Rourke, Durham, NC (CH)

26 Randy Penneroud, Anderson, SC (CH)

27 Macarena Aldape, Emeritus (FP)

27 Posey Branscome, Charlotte, NC (CH)

27 Shaw Chin Capps (S-CBF Global)

28 Ronald King, Midland, GA (PC)

29 Paul Mullen, Clemmons, NC (CH)

30 Jeffrey Ross, Washington, DC (CH)

28 Mark Tidsworth, Chapin, SC (PC)

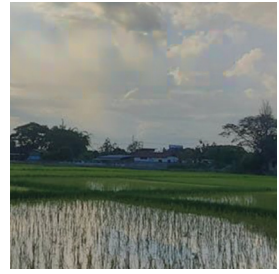
28 Joel Whitley, Emeritus (FP)

DECEMBER 1

# The God Who Honors Our Struggles

Mary

CBF Field Personnel, Southeast Asia



## Lamentations 3:22-23

The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.

What is saving my life right now? Well, in a word, God. I truly don't mean to be flippant or dismissive, but it really is the first response that comes to mind every time I try to reflect on this question. Then my mind wanders in more directions than I can track. How do I encapsulate what it means to have an ongoing awareness of the presence of God in my life moment-to-moment or the myriad ways God keeps me attuned to that presence? Therein lies my challenge. Perhaps it's because I have a short attention span; but God's revelatory processes, like God's mercies, are new every morning. More accurately, God creates new combinations each day.

In recent months, I have found myself less distracted by the frustrations of the limits of the people we read about in Scripture and more engaged with the God who honors the struggles of those determined to be in relationship with God. God's interactions with each of us are unique because our stories are unique; I marvel at God's love, tenacity and understanding. While I see God in a different light in Scripture, the seeming paradoxes of life and faith rest more comfortably within me. What we sometimes identify as contradictory experiences or emotions are complementary, with God shaping them into something beautifully compelling. Human relationships, spiritual disciplines, nature, art, music, movement, tragedy, laughter, science, literature, conflict—the list is inexhaustible. God uses combinations of all of these in wondrous variety to transform me, to transform us. God is always available and at work to draw us closer. As we offer ourselves to God's nurture, we are made new.

# Pray, Practice, Ponder

Merciful God, thank you for honoring the struggles of your children throughout the ages, and for honoring the struggles in which we find ourselves today. Be with us when we grow weary of our own humanity. Remind us that your mercies are new every morning. Help us to trust that the combinations you create in our lives each day arrive to transform, strengthen and nurture us to become more like you. Amen.

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- |  |   |
|--|---|
| 1 Joseph Farry, Greenville, SC (CH)          | 3 Shane McNary (S-Great Rivers Fellowship)    |
| 1 Claire George, Richmond, VA (CH)           | 3 Gennady Podgaisky, Poland (FP)              |
| 1 Amy Jacober, Phoenix, AZ (CH)              | 3 Rachel Gunter Shapard (S-Together for Hope) |
| 2 Daniel Attenberry, Owensboro, KY (CH)      | 3 David Wilson, Chapel Hill, NC (CH)          |
| 2 Connie Beemer, Kirkwood, MO (CH)           | 4 Jose Albovias, Louisville, KY (CH)          |
| 2 Beth Joyner, Rochester, MN (CH)            | 4 Elizabeth Richards, Emeritus (FP)           |
| 2 Laura Roach, Morgantown, NC (CH)           | 4 Myles Shipp, Gloucester, VA (CH)            |
| 3 Rosemary Barfield, Jeffersonville, IN (CH) | 5 Kenn Lowther, Columbus, OH (CH)             |
| 3 Ed Beddingfield, Buies Creek, NC (PC)      | 5 Chris O'Rear, Nashville, TN (PC)            |
| 3 James Heath, Dry Prong, LA (CH)            | 7 Robert Wilder, Jacksonville, FL (CH)        |
| 3 Andy Jung (S-North Carolina)               |   |

DECEMBER 8

# Wrestling with God

Co'Relous Bryant

Senior Pastor, United Church of Lincoln, Vt.



## James 1:5-6

If any of you is lacking in wisdom, ask God, who gives to all generously and ungrudgingly, and it will be given you. But ask in faith, never doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind.

When the logic of this world fails to offer a cogent explanation of what the heck is going on. I turn to divine interrogatories for relief. I have developed a bold posture of asking God to provide answers for the growing incongruence of how things are and how they ought to be. I do this under the guise of seeking wisdom, but between you and me, it's my chance to cross-examine the One who has the whole world in His hands. This unabashed, childlike "but why?" approach is saving my spiritual life right now. Because whether in God's wisdom or humor—God, on occasion, responds.

As a young boy, my mother warned me not to question God. At that age, I would be complaining about not being able to go out and play because of the clockwork summer afternoon thunderstorm in northeast Florida. Every afternoon in the summer, between 4 and 4:30 p.m., the skies would darken and open and suspend every child's daily recreation dreams. I would suck my teeth and stomp my feet and ask, "Why does God have to make it rain right now? Why, God, why?" My southern mother would snap back almost reflexively, "Child, don't you question God." Since childhood, I have carried a real complex about questioning the Creator.

Imagine my surprise and delight when years later in seminary I come across Genesis 32. Jacob wrestling with God. Wrestling!?! I was so hung up on making God an interlocutor and here was this patriarch of our faith in a literal tussle with the Almighty. And if you read the passage carefully, you see that Jacob not only wrestles, but then he demands a blessing, and then he, wait for it, asks a question about God's name. The audacity to inquire! The nerve! So now friends—I keep a running tally of holy questions.

But I have also discovered that my mama was right—as always. She was right to tell me to be careful about questioning and demanding things from the Ancient of Days. More often than not, when I pose a question to God in the mirror, the answer to that question is staring me back in the face. Remember, friends, many biblical scholars believe that Jacob was actually just wrestling with himself. So be careful. It's okay to question, wrestle even, but God's solution might just be you.

Wondering where God may be in the midst of serious poverty? God may be wondering where you are. Wondering where God may be in the treatment of our neighbors and refugees? God may be wondering where you are. Wondering where God may be in the everchanging brokenness of our world? God may be wondering....

So, friends: question, interrogate, cross-examine—wrestle. But when God has a question for you, be just as faithful in the answering as you are in the questioning.

## Pray, Practice, Ponder

Reflect on a time when you have wrestled with God. How did this change your faith and your life? Consider this: Are you prepared to be the answer to your own prayer?

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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 Julie Brown, Emeritus (FP)  
9 Timothy Gregory, Reno, NV (CH)  
9 Wayne Hyatt, Spartanburg, SC (PC)  
9 Herman Meza, Rota, Spain (CH)  
10 Beth Roberts, Chapel Hill, NC (CH)

10 Keith Stillwell (S-Together for Hope)  
10 Gary Strickland, Sioux Falls, ID (PC)  
10 James Williams, Montgomery, AL (CH)  
11 Ron Handlon, Fort Worth, TX (CH)  
11 Paul Kinney, College Park, GA (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)

DECEMBER 15

## Patience and Prayer

Delores Stimpson

CBF Field Personnel, Durham, N.C.



### Matthew 7:7 (NIV)

Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.

I can remember how excited I would become when mom and dad would announce our annual vacation. I was eager and impatient as I looked forward to the family trip. We always went to either Atlantic Beach, designated for Black people because of segregation, or to visit relatives in Ohio. We did not take extravagant trips or stay in luxury hotels, but my excitement never changed. I was so impatient, enjoying crossing off the days on the calendar until it was time to leave!

Have you ever become impatient? I believe we all have felt impatience in our lives, and we find it extremely hard to wait! It may be an offer for a new job, a first date, an important trip, recovering from illness or other experiences.

### Have you ever grown impatient while waiting on God to answer your prayers?

Waiting requires patience, obedience and determination. The will to wait is a gift from God. He gives us the Holy Spirit so that we can walk patiently with him. Sometimes we might feel that he is going to say “no” or “not now.” We have to remember that regardless of the answer, God knows best!

I have received so many blessings in giving time to listen to stories from refugee families about their journeys to America. I sometimes ask how long they had to wait for approval to leave their homes behind and come to another country. Refugee families do not have the privilege to select a country. They are assigned a destination. Their answers may be that it took as long as 13 years. I confessed to a family that I did not think I could endure that experience. They responded that it was patience and prayer. They have blessed me by their example to wait on God when I become impatient.

## Is there anything that you are afraid to say to God in prayer?

I shared the refugee example of patience and the fact that their responses included prayer. Their prayers were bold prayers and extremely specific. They wanted to leave trauma, fear and war behind, even if it meant starting a new life in a foreign country. They prayed boldly, in anger and sorrow, and were extremely specific. God answered their prayers, and they are now here after showing patience and courage while waiting on God.

- David's lament in Psalm 13:1: *How long, Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me?*
- James 4:2 tells us that we have not because we ask not.
- Our prayers should also be persistent as shown in the Parable of The Persistent Widow in Luke Chapter 18.

## Pray, Practice, Ponder

Ponder a time when you grew impatient while waiting for God to answer your prayer, or a time when you were hesitant to even utter the cries of your heart aloud to God. What did you learn through that experience about yourself, God and a life of prayer?

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15 Anna Anderson, Rocky Mount, NC (FP)

15 James Close, Louisville, KY (CH)

15 Katie Fletcher (S-Together for Hope)

15 Sheree Jones, Winston-Salem, NC (CH)

15 Derric Stinchcomb (S-CBF Global)

16 Lee Ann Rathbun, Austin, TX (CH)

16 Chelsea Turpen, Addison, TX (CH)

16 Ina Winstead, Emeritus (FP)

17 Ian Dyke, Greenville, SC (CH)

17 Maria-Grace Khano, 2014, Belgium (FPC)

17 Buddy Presley, North Augusta, SC (CH)

17 Elket Rodriguez (S-Fellowship Southwest/FP)

17 Ronald Wilson, Northport, AL (CH)

18 Loris Adams, Indian Trail, NC (CH)

18 Joel DeFehr, Oklahoma City, OK (CH)

18 Elizabeth Nance-Coker (S-South Carolina)

19 Anna-Grace Acker, 2005, Uganda (FPC)

19 Kathryn Ashworth (S-North Carolina)

19 Bernard Morris, Chester, VA (CH)

19 James Palmer, Tampa, FL (CH)

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 Lynn Hutchinson, Portugal (FP)

21 Bethany McLemore, Roanoke, VA (PC)

## God Hears You

### Kan'Dace Brock

Lead Pastor and Co-Founder, The Message Church, San Antonio, Texas



#### 1 John 5:14

This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us.

“Zoë, Chloë, come here.” This phrase is often heard in our home when Fredricc and I are trying to get the attention of either our newly-minted seven-year-old or our soon-to-be three-year-old. While most days I can’t tell you if I am coming or going, I am so grateful to be their mother. You see, both of our girls have a birth narrative that almost resulted in their lives being concluded before they even began. So, when I look at them or tell them to “come here,” I am reminded of the prayers I prayed while in college to become a mother. When I hear them laughing, yelling at each other, screaming or playing with each other, I am reminded of the talks Fredricc and I had about being parents one day early in our marriage.

On the days when I am ready to throw in the towel, God uses my girls to give me a hug, climb in my lap and remind me that “I am the best mommy ever!” And while there are some challenging days, I can say without a doubt that these little girls are saving my life. Their love for God, for one another, for their dad and for others is a beautiful reminder of God’s grace in human form. Their long- and short-term memories about the flowers they picked on the walk we went on last week, or the unkept promise to get ice cream after work, to the endless interrogation about “what’s for dinner,” is a beautiful reminder that what I prayed for many years ago, is right here in front of me.

So now, when I tell the girls to “come here,” I know that even if I am wrong in whose name I called, it is the confidence that I prayed to God for this moment and God’s will is made manifest in that I can call out “Zoë, Chloë, come here.”



# Pray, Practice, Ponder

As you go throughout your day, ask yourself the question, “God, what are you calling me to hear, feel, taste, see, explore or remember as a reminder that God hears me?” In your time of reflection, may you be reminded of God’s answer to your prayers being made manifest right before your eyes.

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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 Alisha Damron Seruyange (S-Alabama/Global)  
23 Linda Strange, Denton, TX (CH)  
24 Michael Carter, Dallas, TX (CH)  
26 Freddy Hinson, Rocky River, OH (CH)  
26 Jim Morrison (S-Church Benefits Board)  
26 Haley Seanor, Birmingham, AL (CH)

26 Scottie Stamper, Charlotte, NC (CH)  
26 Nicole Tota, Sioux Falls, SD (CH)  
27 Larry Austin, Fredericksburg, VA (CH)  
27 Steve Clark, Louisville, KY (FP)  
27 Jonathan Madden, Cincinnati, OH (CH)  
27 Sean Roberds (S-Global)  
27 Solon Smith, Louisville, KY (CH)  
28 Claudia Forrest, Cordova, TN (CH)  
28 John Halbrook, Pound Ridge, NY (PC)  
28 Thomas Holbrook, Berea, KY (PC)

DECEMBER 29



# Music that Speaks to the Soul

Jenny Jenkins

CBF Field Personnel, Haiti

“Beautiful music is the art of the prophets that can calm the agitations of the soul; it is one of the most magnificent and delightful presents God has given us.”

—Martin Luther

When answering the question “What is saving your life right now?” at first glance the standard answers come up: Jesus, church, community, Bible. Certainly, those are great responses and Jesus truly does save our lives. But as Christ followers, when life gets tough and the path seems dark, littered with big rocks, fallen trees and is basically blocked, what do we do? We have Jesus, so what is next?

I seek music that speaks to my soul in that moment, and that expresses the frustrations or sadness that I am feeling and slowly settles my spirit, reminding me to praise God in all situations. Feelings and emotions don’t give us the truth. We must seek God for truth and God has given us the gift of music. Just look at the psalms David wrote, expressing what he was feeling and his reaching out to God. I heard a few quotes from Martin Luther recently in a sermon, including at the start of this reflection, and the one below:

“We can mention only one point (which experience confirms), namely, that next to the Word of God, music deserves the highest praise. No greater commendation than this can be found—at least not by us. After all, the gift of language combined with the gift of song was only given to man to let him know that he should praise God with both word and music, namely, by proclaiming [the Word of God] through music.”

Recently, with the obstacles that have come up in my life in the work in Haiti, it is music that has helped me most by bringing me to a calm place that helps me focus and prioritize what is next and most important. It reminds me that God is truly in control and worthy of our praise—even in the dark places when we can't see the way. When we praise him through prayer or song, or whatever, God is faithful to bring that peace we cannot explain. I thank God for the gift of music.

## Pray, Practice, Ponder

Take time now to read a psalm or listen to a song that expresses what you are experiencing at this time. Reflect on the words, the melody and the blessing of God through music.

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29 Kimberly Miller, Winston-Salem, NC (CH)  
29 Art Wiggins, San Diego, CA (CH)  
30 Shay Crenshaw, Raleigh, NC (CH)  
30 Revonda Deal, Emeritus (FP)  
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)  
31 David "Tod" Smith, Farmington, NM (CH)  
1 Sam Bandela, Emeritus (EP)

1 Rebecca Brown, Elizabethtown, KY (CH)  
1 Christina Pryor-Pittman, Lexington, SC (CH)  
1 Varughese Jacob, Houston TX (CH)  
2 Rick Bennett (S-Tennessee)  
2 Emi Brand, Orlando, FL (CH)  
2 Tammy Stocks, Emeritus (FP)  
3 Christopher Bowers, Powhatan, VA (PC)  
3 William McCann, Madisonville, KY (CH)  
4 Joshua Hickman, Crete, Greece (CH)  
4 Scott Hudgins (S-North Carolina)

**JANUARY 5**



## **All Aspects of Our Lives**

### **Annette Ellard and Steve Clark**

**CBF Field Personnel, Louisville, Ky.**

#### **Romans 8:38-39 (NIV)**

For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

When first asked to respond to the question, “What is saving your life right now?” I thought about all the things I’ve been doing to improve my health.

First, I spent a good bit of time on doctor appointments and tests, and did research to improve my physical health. Then, new medications, supplements, physical therapy and exercise goals. And finally, a dramatic change in my diet—eliminating added fat, cutting out meat and giving up caffeine!

My doctors, research and choices have led me to a significant lifestyle change—one focused on whole health. I’ve returned to guided breathing and other relaxation techniques and added calmness and a mindfulness app to my watch. I’ve endeavored to better organize my work with a system of binders and list making. I’ve started spending more time with family and friends and less time watching the news.

That also has been a boon for my spiritual health. I’ve realized I don’t need to see all the details in order to ask for God’s intervention, to pray for justice and mercy. I’ve also tried to be present in my home church more often, including Wednesday evening for corporate prayer. And giving more attention to prayer with my family.

Ironically, for years, I’ve been telling the young adults that I serve that God cares about all aspects of their lives—mental, emotional, physical and spiritual. I believe God wants us to be healthy in every possible way so that we may enjoy the fullest of lives.

Over several months, I had been making real progress, and I felt good about it. That's what's saving my life right now, I thought. I began writing.

But then, I got a phone call from a friend in crisis. I spent the next several hours encouraging my friend not to end their life. All the while, the first line of an old hymn I could barely remember kept running through my mind. "Oh Love that will not let me go."

Later, when I returned to finish writing, I had a new perspective. All the things I had been doing to improve my life may very well extend my life, but ultimately, none of them will save it.

So, what is saving my life right now? Love.

Yes, that's Love with a capital L.

The Divine Love that permeates the whole of Scripture.

Love that creates us. Love that redeems us. Love that sustains us.

Love that will not let us go!

Scottish minister George Matheson lost his eyesight as a young man. By his own account, at age 40, when he composed the hymn "Oh Love that Will Not Let Me Go" in 1862, he "was suffering from extreme mental distress, and the hymn was the fruit of pain."

Like Matheson, my friend also lost much in his youth and has sometimes suffered extreme mental distress. Thankfully, he has realized that Love—with a capital L—is saving his life right now as well, and Love will not let him go.

## Pray, Practice, Ponder

Read the lyrics of the beloved hymn, Oh Love that Will Not Let Me Go, below. As you do, ponder what God is stirring in you about the nature of Love, how we care for ourselves, and for those around us

O Love that will not let me go,  
I rest my weary soul in thee;  
I give thee back the life I owe,  
That in thine ocean depths its flow  
May richer, fuller be.

O Light that foll'west all my way,  
I yield my flick'ring torch to thee;  
My heart restores its borrowed ray,  
That in thy sunshine's blaze its day  
May brighter, fairer be.

O Joy that seekest me through pain,  
I cannot close my heart to thee;  
I trace the rainbow through the rain,  
And feel the promise is not vain,  
That morn shall tearless be.

O Cross that liftest up my head,  
I dare not ask to fly from thee;  
I lay in dust life's glory dead,  
And from the ground there blossoms red  
Life that shall endless be.

## Birthdays this Week:

CH = Chaplain

EP = Engagement Partner

FP = Field Personnel

FPC = Child of Field Personnel

PC = Pastoral Counselor

S = CBF Staff Member

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)  
7 Richard Catlett, Richmond, VA (CH)  
7 Denny Spear, Dunwoody, GA (CH)  
8 Ellen Burnette, Immokalee, FL (EP)  
8 Luis Caiza, Elizabethtown, KY (CH)

8 Rachel Hill, Shelby, NC (CH)  
8 Ethan Lee, 2009, Macedonia (FPC)  
9 Bill Cayard, Emeritus (FP)  
9 Paul Hamilton, Lodge, SC (CH)  
9 Jeffrey Perkins, Westchester, OH (CH)  
10 Melody Harrell, Emeritus (FP)  
10 Jill Zimmer, Columbia, TN (CH)  
11 Michael Gerace, Baker City, OR (CH)  
11 Timothy Morgan, Pensacola, FL (CH)  
11 Ed Waldrop, Augusta, GA (CH)

JANUARY 12



## The Fullness of Hospitality

**Matt and Michelle Norman**  
CBF Field Personnel, Barcelona, Spain

“So, the classroom where truth is central will be a place where every stranger and every strange utterance is met with welcome. This may suggest a classroom lacking essential rigor, a place in which questions of true and false, right and wrong, are subordinated to making sure that everyone ‘has a nice day.’

But that would be a false understanding of hospitality. Hospitality is not an end in itself. It is offered for the sake of what it can allow, permit, encourage and yield. A learning space needs to be hospitable not to make learning painless but to make the painful things possible, things without which no learning can occur—things like exposing ignorance, testing tentative hypotheses, challenging false or partial information, and mutual criticism of thought. Each of these is essential to obedience to truth. But none of them can happen in an atmosphere where people feel threatened and judged.”

—Parker Palmer, *To Know as We Are Known*

This year has been a good year. We have had a challenging year filled with change, challenges, anticipation, disappointment and hard work; but we have also enjoyed it. When I reflect on what has made life good, I realize the reality of the full range of human experiences is what makes it all worthwhile—from hard to easy, heavy to light, sad to joyful, angry to calm, painful to comfortable, new to normal. Right now, that’s what’s saving my life.

Our ministry activities in the Barcelona area, as well as in the wider European community, involve nurturing spaces that express the fullness of God’s love—spaces where people can come to recognize both themselves and others as valued creations of God and live out this understanding in practical ways in their everyday lives. So,

one might say that hospitality or nurturing hospitality is the core of this ministry. But hospitality can have different meanings and so I want to submit the understanding that Parker Palmer offers, “A learning space needs to be hospitable not to make learning painless but to make the painful things possible, things without which no learning can occur—things like exposing ignorance, testing tentative hypotheses, challenging false or partial information, and mutual criticism of thought.”

This understanding helps one imagine the fullness of hospitality. It also helps one awaken to the fact that in any given space, the host and those hosted can at any moment change places. Indeed, when one shifts from being a host to being hosted, or vice versa, this is often a lifesaving moment.

This year, I have been saved by simple actions like asking a new friend how they see God working in their life and being asked the same question; like being invited into homes to share a meal; listening to pastors and church leaders share what they are learning and, in their stories, seeing God in a new way; like crying with mothers as they seek a better life for themselves and their children; like watching refugee kids run and play while shouting out loud in broken English, “Happy, happy, happy, happy!” These experiences and so many like them are moments of transformation in my life, where God is nurturing new life. And isn’t that what salvation is?

## Pray, Practice, Ponder

Ponder a time when you recently gave or received “the fullness of hospitality.” It may be a small or simple moment, like the ones listed above. Share this moment with a friend, or hold it in your heart and mind today, allowing God to use it to nurture within you the fullness of God’s love.

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12 Neil Cochran, Greenville, SC (CH)

12 Phillip C Moody, Lexington KY (CH)

12 Scott Smallwood, Englewood, FL (CH)

13 Katie Dean, Atlanta, GA (CH)

13 Dianne McNary, Little Rock, AR (FP)

14 Thomas Cantwell, Paducah, KY (CH)

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)



JANUARY 19



## Don't Ask What the World Needs

Jeffrey A. Howard

CEO, The Resource Hub; CBF Emmanuel  
McCall Initiative consultant

“Don't ask what the world needs, ask what makes you come alive and go do it. Because what the world needs is people who have come alive.”

—Howard Thurman

The above quote from Black Christian mystic Howard Thurman resonates with me, capturing what is currently saving my life: my passion for social justice, the deconstruction of white theology and my commitment to a more just world for people of color. This inner fire propels me forward as a Black male in a world that often overlooks me, empowering me to uplift narratives and engage in spaces that affirm my voice.

My journey began with an awakening to the systemic injustices that pervade our society. Witnessing the disparities faced by Black communities in the year of the unrest while pastoring an all-white church, unable to engage in the fight, awakened a conviction within me. This sentiment drives my work, compelling me to confront and dismantle the oppressive structures that seek to silence and marginalize people of color. As I do the personal work of deconstructing white theology, while embracing Black liberation theology, I have reclaimed a faith rooted in the struggle for justice and equality.

In my ministry, I strive to create spaces where Black voices are not only heard, but celebrated. I am dedicated to ensuring that the stories of those who are least, left out and overlooked are brought to the forefront. This mission is not just about speaking out against injustice; it's about building a community where young Black individuals can see their worth and potential. I want to pave the way for a future where my soon-to-be four-year-old, Hudson the Great, and my soon-to-be eight-year-old, Ladybug, can thrive without apologizing for who they are. I want them to grow up in a world where their voices are valued and their contributions recognized.

Finally, my passion for social justice and dedication to my ministry are what make me come alive. They give me purpose and drive, reminding me that my voice matters. As I navigate spaces that often seek to undermine and dismiss my experiences, I am committed to creating opportunities for myself and others to speak out and be heard. By doing so, I hope to contribute to a world where Black narratives are uplifted, Black engagement is encouraged and every individual has the opportunity to live fully and freely. This is what is saving my life right now, and it is what keeps me moving forward with hope and determination.

## Pray, Practice, Ponder

Lord, torment me. Keep before me the faces of the hungry, the lonely, the rejected and the despised. Inflict me with pain for those who hurt, are wounded, are oppressed, are abused and are victims of violence. Lord, give me a burning thirst for justice and righteousness. Give me the hope of Harriet, the writing skills of James Baldwin, and the ability to get into “good trouble” like the Honorable John Lewis. Help me, God, to leave this world a better place and, when I’ve done all that I can do, allow me to hear, well done! Ase and Amen.

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19 Kaelah-Joy Acker, 2008, Uganda (FPC)

19 Kelly Adams (S-CBF Global)

19 Jackie Ward, Goshen, KY (CH)

19 Lyndsay Williams, Chesterfield MO (CH)

20 Marshall Gupton, Smyrna, TN (CH)

20 Kevin Morgan, Pisgah Forest, NC (CH)

20 Paul Tolbert, Camp Atterbury, IN (CH)

21 George Francis, Tampa, FL (CH)

22 Jim Hylton (S-North Carolina)

22 Bruce Moore, Barrington, IL (CH)

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 (EP)

JANUARY 26



## Sowing Seeds for the Long-term

**Eddie Aldape**

CBF Field Personnel, Almería, Spain

### **Matthew 13:3-8**

Some seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants... still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop—a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.

I hope I am not the only one who feels this way—thinking I am young, when each year, a week before my birthday, my body reminds me that time flies. The other day, I was reading how an elderly man was attacked by four young girls; the first thing that came to mind was: “How could they do that to a frail, elderly man?” As I continued reading, I discovered that the elderly man in the story was 60-years-old. I am 60-years-old. That caused me to rethink so many things.

On my side of the family, most relatives live to be in their 90s, which is great; but that led me to think about the rest of my life. If live to be 90, that means I have only 30 more years; and if 60 years have gone by so quickly, what will I do with the rest of my life?

This has also led me to think about our ministry in Spain. Although our time in India came to an abrupt end, the ministry not only continues, but thrives. What about our work in Spain? What do we have to show for our time here? How much longer will the Lord use us here?

I started talking with local ministry partners about this and all have been very supportive. It has been said that “Spain is a missionary’s burial ground” in that it is a tough country to evangelize. Friends have pointed out some of the things God has done through us and yet we really do not have anything tangible that we can see. Long-term presence and being fully devoted to being the presence of God, establishing relationships, building community and sowing seeds are great; but we have yet to see fruit. Our friends have also encouraged us by reminding us that there are times in which one sows, others water and others get to harvest.

As we watched last year's promotional video for CBF's Offering for Global Missions, something that Shane McNary said has helped me deal with this. He said, "If we invest our efforts in programs, once we are gone, the programs will end; but when we invest in people, the seeds we have sowed will bring forth fruits, even long after we are gone."

The relationships that have been cultivated here have recently started to show signs of germination. Most of the people we minister to are Muslims who have just finished celebrating the annual Ramadan. This year, I decided to participate in Ramadan with them. During the month of Ramadan, Muslims fast from sunup until sundown and do not take any kind of drink either. As they do so, they seek God's will and search for truth. I told them that I would fast with them, but that I was going to be praying for them and their struggles. I did fine with not eating, but I was so thirsty. At the end of Ramadan, we were invited to several meals of celebration. One friend told me that since I had observed Ramadan with them, they now had to join me in prayer. We were asked to say grace for the meal. I will take that as a glimpse of hope and my joy.

## Pray, Practice, Ponder

Today, reflect on the last year or so of your life. What seeds have been planted that are beginning to germinate? These can be seeds you have planted in relationships, professional projects, personal goals or something else entirely. Consider what seeds fell "among thorns" this year and have been choked out. Take a moment to pray, offering God gratitude for the seeds that took root, and asking for God's guidance as you discern how to let go of the ones no longer bearing fruit.

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26 Tina Hall, Manassas, VA (CH)

27 Darrell Bare, Charleston, SC (CH)

27 Stacey Cruze, Georgetown KY (PC)

27 Ben Sandford, Alexandria, VA (CH)

28 Chuck Ahlemann, Des Moines, IA (CH)

28 Marcia Henry-Day, Griffin, GA (CH)

29 Christopher Bowers, Powhatan, VA (CH)

29 Zachary Brand, Orlando, FL (CH)

29 Glen Foster (S-West)

29 Darryl Jefferson, Charlotte, NC (CH)

30 Matthew Benorden, Lawrence, KS (CH)

30 Nathan Rogers, Anchorage, AK (CH)

30 Hal Ritter, Waco, TX (PC)

31 Rebecca Adrian, Irving, TX (CH)

31 John Manuel, Fort Hood, TX (CH)

31 Paul Smith, San Diego, CA (CH)

1 Susan Collins, Stone Mountain, GA (CH)

1 Brad Jackson, Springfield, OH (CH)

1 Tammy Snyder (S-Florida/Caribbean Islands)

# Beloved Community: Relationships that Heal

February 2 - February 23

“The soul is like a wild animal—tough, resilient, savvy, self-sufficient and yet exceedingly shy. If we want to see a wild animal, the last thing we should do is to go crashing through the woods, shouting for the creature to come out. But if we are willing to walk quietly into the woods and sit silently for an hour or two at the base of a tree, the creature we are waiting for may well emerge, and out of the corner of an eye we will catch a glimpse of the precious wildness we seek. Unfortunately, community in our culture too often means a group of people who go crashing through the woods together, scaring the soul away...”

—Parker Palmer, *A Hidden Wholeness*

“Beloved community is formed not by the eradication of difference but by its affirmation, by each of us claiming the identities and cultural legacies that shape who we are and how we live in the world.”

—Bell Hooks, *Killing Rage: Ending Racism*

The following reflections explore the communities and relationships that invite us to be our true, authentic selves and how these relationships sustain us in the work of ministry and mission. Beloved Communities restore our faith in humanity and remind us to see the image of God in all we encounter.

**FEBRUARY 2**

# Joyful Fellowship

**Amanda Adams**

Chaplain, Carl M. Brashear Radcliff Veterans  
Center, Radcliff, Ky.



## Hebrews 10:24-25 (NRSVUE)

And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

“Fellowship” is defined as a friendly association, especially with people who share one’s interests—such as a group of people meeting to pursue a shared interest or aim, or a guild or corporation. It has also become a term used to describe a gathering of church folk. It is what church folk do before and after a worship service. It is what church folk do before and after Bible study and Sunday school. It is also what church folk do just because it gives them meaning and purpose to share with one another their thoughts, dreams and desires. It is what I do every week to give me life.

I am an extreme introvert. You may be asking me how fellowship gives me, an extreme introvert, life. I have undiagnosed attention deficit disorder. I am one of those who seeks out answers to my medical conditions on WebMD. All the anxiety and depression I feel every day often times keeps me from wanting to face the world and makes me wish to retreat into my own little bubble. Fellowship does not allow me to do that. Fellowship allows me to step out of my comfort zone and experience the world through the eyes of other people whom I love and cherish in my life. Fellowship allows me to appreciate all those people whom God has put forth in my life to encourage me, ground me, support me and love me. And, yes, I am extremely tired and completely drained after retreating to my comfort zone, as all introverts are.

I am so grateful and thankful that I have my circle of friends and family that I can turn to in my times of woe and all around downtroddenness. God has given me people who provoke me to love and good deeds, never neglecting to draw me into fellowship with them. They encourage me as we wait together for the coming Day of our Lord.

So, what is saving my life right now? It's fellowship. The joy that comes with knowing that I am not alone in this world. The comfort that comes with knowing there are people who love and support me. The peace that comes with knowing God will never leave or forsake me. It reminds me of one of my favorite hymns:

*What a fellowship, what a joy divine, leaning on the everlasting arms; what a blessedness, what a peace is mine, leaning on the everlasting arms. Refrain: Leaning, leaning, safe and secure from all alarms; leaning, leaning, leaning on the everlasting arms. Oh, how sweet to walk in this pilgrim way, leaning on the everlasting arms; Oh, how bright the path grows from day to day, leaning on the everlasting arms. What have I to dread, what have I to fear, leaning on the everlasting arms? I have blessed peace with my Lord so near, leaning on the everlasting arms.*

## Pray, Practice, Ponder

I encourage you to find a group to engage in fellowship. You may have a group that you meet with regularly. Discuss with them what is saving your life right now. If you are without a group currently, find at least two to three people to meet with you who have a common interest. There is healing in a group gathered together. There is love in a group gathered together. There is peace in a group gathered together.

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S = CBF Staff Member

2 Joe Alverson, Nicholasville, KY (CH)

2 Lauren Lamb (S-CBF Global)

2 Veronica Martinez-Gallegos, Concord, NC (CH)

2 Terry Tatro, Louisville, KY (CH)

3 Richard Dayringer, Grove, OK (PC)

3 Rachel Erickson, Chattanooga, TN (CH)

3 Kathie Thomas, Emeritus (FP)

4 Delores Kay Smith, Hickory, NC (CH)

5 Andrew Bowles, Fort Worth, TX (CH)

5 Brian Cleveland, New Orleans, LA (CH)

5 Ruben Ortiz (S-CBF Global)

5 Joanna Tarr, Kansas City, MO (CH)

7 Xiomara Reboyras (S-Florida/Caribbean Islands)

7 Aundrea Shepherd, Leicester, NC (CH)

8 John Boyles, Lynchburg, VA (CH)

8 Biju Chacko, Jacksonville, FL (CH)

8 Larry Johnson, Midlothian, VA (CH)

**FEBRUARY 9**

# Relationships of Resilience

**Karen Morrow**

CBF Field Personnel, Fort Worth, Texas



## **Colossians 3:17**

And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus.

When asked “What is saving my life these days,” my response is the smiles and laughter of refugee women. Their resilience and thankfulness for simple acts of kindness bring me great joy.

The old saying “a woman’s work is never done” rings true for refugee women. They are the primary physical and emotional caregivers for their families who have often gone through trauma before arriving in a safe place in the United States to start a new life.

Initially, hope springs forth from the women and then the challenges of navigating life in a new country without the ability to speak English, without an understanding of how our systems work and the difficulty in finding jobs to support their families turn the women to despair. They have given and given and have nothing left to give.

Recognizing that most of these women come from communal societies where life is lived in multi-generational homes, we saw a need to build community support within their cultures and cross-culturally with other women for friendship and support.

This past year, we began Healthy Hearts and Homes—a weekly program designed to use art, music, movement and education to provide refugee women a space to heal while building friendship and community.

Each week, American women gather to share their talents with refugee women—watercolor painting, glass mosaics, string art, floral arrangements, yoga, dance, etc. The opportunity to create is healing and movement releases the tension in their bodies.



Communication is limited as most refugees don't speak English; but through charades, Google Translate and lots of laughter, friendships are formed and community built.

Periodically, we host educational events with translation led by medical professionals on such topics as when to see a doctor, home health care for children, women's health care and more. The women are eager to learn and thrilled to receive medicines and other medical items.

Walking alongside refugee women as they transition to life here brings me joy. What act of service brings you joy?

## Pray, Practice, Ponder

Today, take a moment to consider what life is like for refugee women and the challenges they face. Pray for these women and those serving refugees. Ask yourself how you might be a part of welcoming refugee families. What resources or connections do you have that might bless these families? Ask God to show you tangible ways you can be involved.

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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)  
11 Lauralee Estes, Northport, AL (PC)  
11 Katee Harris, Rose Hill, NC (CH)

11 Ashley Mangrum, Boston, MA (CH)  
11 Will Runyon, Albany, GA (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 Charla Littell, Burlington, NC (CH)  
14 Grace Martino-Suprice (S-CBF Global)  
15 Michon McCorkle, Carmel, IN (PC)

**FEBRUARY 16**

## **Choose Love**

**Alicia and Jeff Lee**

**CBF Field Personnel, Skopje, North Macedonia**



“Around the table we offer friendship and celebrate life. Our meals offer a divine moment, an opportunity for people to be seduced by grace into a better life, a truer life, and a more human existence.”

—Tim Chester, *A Meal with Jesus*

What is saving my life right now? That question is one of intrigue. There is a plethora of different things that we cherish in life at this moment. Family, friends, work, school, nature. All these things are integral to our life now. Living in Macedonia, these are foundational to culture and relationships. Specifically, we would like to mention the time we spend with our friends.

In Macedonia, we have a cultural event that is called Kafana. This event revolves around good company and good food. In Macedonia, meals are an event, and Kafana is the biggest of mealtimes. Kafana is a group of friends coming together in a traditional restaurant for about five hours. There is music, food and conversations. The culture of Macedonia is based on connecting with friends over a good meal.

Relationships are essential for survival here in Macedonia. We have been truly blessed over our 12 years in Skopje to have made several close friends. These friends have become part of our family. It is difficult to live away from our biological family. But because we have built great relationships here, we are able to survive through the joys and sorrows that this life brings. Life is a journey of ups and downs, and it is better to have a friend to journey with. One of our favorite movies is “Cool Runnings” in which the lead, Derice Bannock, gives the bobsled the name “Cool Runnings.” When asked what it meant, Derice says, “Peace be the journey.” We must have peace on our journeys.

One of our great friends exposed us to the great 13th century poet Rumi. And we would like to leave you with one of his poems.

## Choose Love

Because of the beloved  
My heart is happy,  
My soul illuminated.  
From the beloved's greenery  
Hundreds of blessed rivers  
Are flowing to the rose gardens.  
In order to enter into your rose garden,  
The soul makes peace with the thorns.  
Choose love, choose love.  
Without this beautiful love,  
Life is nothing but a burden.

## Pray, Practice, Ponder

Jesus was always inviting people around the table for food and fellowship. Even on the night before his crucifixion, he gathered his disciples, his friends, around a time for what we refer to as “The Last Supper,” the basis of our ritual of Communion or Lord’s Supper. Gathering around the table can be a deeply holy, relational and spiritual experience. When is the last time you gathered with friends or family for an extended and leisurely meal? What was it like for you? Today, ponder the mystery of sacred time around the table, and how it connects us to God and others in new and surprising ways.

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S = CBF Staff Member

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)

18 Edward Fleming, Winston-Salem, NC (CH)

18 George Nytes, McCord, WA (CH)

18 Jean Pruet, Charlotte, NC (CH)

18 T Thomas, Emeritus (FP)

19 Leah Ryan, New Castle, VA (CH)

20 Amanda Ducksworth, Salt Lake City, UT (CH)

20 Younsoo Park, Fort Drum, NY (CH)

21 Rebecca Church, Louisville, KY (CH)

21 Cindy Adair Inman, Spartanburg, SC (CH)

21 Linda McComb, Clinton, MS (CH)

21 Stephanie Patterson, New Castle, NC (CH)

21 Ellen Sechrest (S-CBF Global)

21 Jeffery Thompson, Gainesville, GA (CH)

22 Stephanie McLeskey, Mars Hill, NC (CH)

**FEBRUARY 23**

## **Longing for Community**

**Jessica Prophitt**

**Chaplain Major, United States Air Force**



### **Hebrews 10:24-25**

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

When I was growing up, I was fortunate enough to live on a street where we became surrogate family with a handful of neighbors on our block. In the summers, we kids would house-hop throughout the day. The mom who was “lucky” enough to get the crew around lunch would set out sandwiches and juice boxes for the hungry mob. During the school year, there were many Friday nights when my own mom would fill her wine glass and we would walk to the house across the street to catch up on the latest gossip in the “hood.” After my parents divorced, my mom kept us in that neighborhood because of the closeknit community supporting us. This meant she would commute an hour a day to and from work, but she had peace of mind knowing we had “surrogate parents” to look out for my brother if needed.

Now, as an Air Force chaplain, my husband and I have moved with our two boys about every two to four years. We say goodbye to friends and neighbors and do our best to reestablish community in our new location as quickly as possible. This lifestyle has often left me yearning for the long-established community where I grew up. I long for my kids to have adults in their lives who love them and claim them. I long for my husband and me to have friends who invite themselves over with wine glasses in hand. I long for community that blurs the boundaries between friends and family.

For anyone who's ever served in the military, you know a departure is rarely a “goodbye” but a “see you later.” As my husband and I prepare to uproot and move yet again, I've connected with several friends and colleagues currently stationed at the location for which we are bound. The move has also sparked conversations with others from both my military and CBF circles that will likely lead to connections in our new

home. I will always long for an established community of neighbors whose physical presence is accessible. But during this season of life, the communities I've become a part of, communities that reach across the country and, in some cases, the world, are saving my life.

I'm reminded that I've been called to engage with a community that's much bigger than a block or a neighborhood, but which spans states and nations. This "community" has broadened my sense of who my neighbor is and has deepened my understanding of the vastness of God's Kingdom. While I pray that one day I'll have that closeknit community in which I grew up, I'll be forever grateful to have been part of so many friend circles, families and neighborhoods.

## Pray, Practice, Ponder

O Gracious God,

For adventures and moves that beckon us out of our comfort zones and into new lands,  
we give thanks.

For the opportunity to widen our circles and lengthen our tables, we give thanks.

For acquaintances who become friends, we give thanks.

For friends who become family, we give thanks.

For phone calls that fill us and for arms we fill, we give thanks.

For the vastness of your kingdom, and the depth and breadth of your people, we are in  
awe.

In Christ name we pray, Amen.

### Birthdays this Week:

CH = Chaplain

EP = Engagement Partner

FP = Field Personnel

FPC = Child of Field Personnel

PC = Pastoral Counselor

S = CBF Staff Member

23 Michelle Robinson, Columbia, SC (CH)

24 Edwin Badillo, Levittown, Puerto Rico (CH)

24 Danny Tomlinson, Belton, TX (CH)

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 Chris Scales, Lubbock, TX (CH)

1 Gregory Wolfe, Owensboro, KY (CH)

# Lenten Wilderness: Looking for Life in Difficult Times

March 2 - April 13

“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*

The following reflections invite us to consider the things that save our lives when we find ourselves in dark or difficult seasons. If you worship in a faith community that follows the liturgical calendar, this week marks the beginning of the season of Lent, the 40 days of fasting and prayer that prepare us for the celebration of Easter. Lent is an intentional invitation to move into the wilderness, as Jesus did in Matthew 4, and these reflections provide companionship on the wilderness journey.

**MARCH 2**



## **Remember, We are Dust**

**Mary VanRheenen**

**CBF Field Personnel, Europe**

### **Psalm 103:14 (ESV)**

For he knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust.

Learning to live with my own “frame” has been a life-long, life-giving process. I remember sitting in the doctor’s office about a year after our youngest child was born. I’d felt tired for a long time and had finally come to find out why. Then I saw the doctor’s questions were leading towards a problem that I’d seen in other family members. A sibling had wrestled with it. A parent and a great uncle had been hospitalized for it. It was a chronic problem I really did not want to have: depression. It would be several more years before I was willing to try medication. Our doctor here in the Netherlands prescribed a very low dosage to counteract the winter blues. When spring came, I wondered about stopping.

“I’ve lived with you on medication,” my husband Keith said. “And I’ve lived with you without medication. Keep taking it.”

Rick Landon, our CBF member care person at the time, agreed. “Thank God for your medicine just like you thank God for your food.”

Since then, I’ve added another medication, prescribed by the same helpful Dutch doctor, this one for restless leg syndrome. It isn’t a strong dosage; but without it, I literally cannot lie still enough to sleep through the night. Lots of other things help—exercise, the right kind of mattress, prayerful journaling at the close of the day. Even with all that, I’d still be a crazed insomniac without the medication.

We are but dust. The Creator molded that dust into clay and breathed eternity into us. But in this imperfect world, some of that dust is also imperfect. My dust has a chemical imbalance. Meditation helps. Prayer time and fun time with friends help. Time outdoors, regular exercise, creative expression, adequate rest—all help. Knowing that I am a child of God through the power of the risen Jesus helps even more. But none of that

corrected the chemical imbalances in my brain. So, I thank my Creator for all of that—plus the pills in my hand as I take the daily medication which keeps me sane.

## Pray, Practice, Ponder

When our children were young, we made a point of discussing how every human being has differences. We kept it concrete. That family member has limited eyesight and wears glasses; this friend can't walk and uses a wheelchair. The concept fascinated our daughters. They wanted to know what their flaws might be. What are your differences? Are you ready to accept help for them, whatever that help might be?

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2 Chris Aho (S-CBF Global)

2 Amy Cook (S-North Carolina)

2 Faith Fitzgerald, Pasadena, MD (CH)

2 Steve Oswalt, Urbana, IL (CH)

2 Michael Patterson, Columbus, GA (CH)

2 Glenn Williams, Louisville, KY (PC)

3 Woody Baker, Ahoskie, NC (GSC)

3 David Bosley, Vienna, VA (CH)

4 Kristin Akins, Maitland, FL (CH)

4 Ed Lemmond, Athens, TN (CH)

4 Jane Martin, Emeritus (FP)

5 Buddy Corbin, Asheville, NC (CH)

5 Donnie Marlar, Rochester, NY (CH)

6 Ronnie Adams, Emeritus (FP)

6 Jarrod Foerster, Fort Still, OK (CH)

7 Laura Foushee, Japan (FP)

7 Wade Rowatt, Louisville, KY (PC)

8 Marian Boyer, Florence, KY (CH)

8 Susan Kroeker, Columbus, OH (CH)



**MARCH 9**



## **In Grief and Love**

**Daniel Sostaita**

Senior Pastor, Iglesia Cristiana sin Fronteras (ICSF), Winston-Salem, N.C.

“Grief, I’ve learned, is really just love. It’s all the love you want to give, but cannot. All that unspent love gathers up in the corners of your eyes, the lump in your throat, and in that hollow part of your chest. Grief is just love with no place to go.”

—Jamie Anderson

On February 23, 2024, my mom (born July 31, 1932) departed this life to be with the Lord. No one likes goodbyes and that painful agony, especially when it is a loved one. My mom lived the last 22 years in my home, along with Irene, my wife of 33 years and my three beautiful daughters Barbara (Barby 31), Daniela (K 29), and Victoria (Vicky 24).

Caring for my mom was not easy. Becoming a primary caregiver, without resources or legal status, automatically makes you the only source responsible for sustaining the life of the person who is in your charge (my mother). Within this context, a unique bond is also generated, being a provider child, a caregiver child and a child who gives love and receives love.

Understanding how the Lord took care of us all these years and understanding that suffering can be a sweet experience in Christ, leads me to another reflection: Pain is inevitable, but suffering is optional. The love of my wife and my daughters are the elements that are saving me during this time of mourning.

# Pray, Practice, Ponder

My prayer today is this: Thank you, Lord Jesus, for my beloved congregation of Sin Fronteras, friends, colleagues, neighbors, partners in our activism, community leaders; in short, all those who day-by-day commit themselves to be wipers of tears and washers of feet for our community. They also save me every day.

Pain aligns us with God's perspective; everything is stored in the memory that often eventually saves or rescues us.

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9 Stuart Collier, Vestavia, AL (CH)

9 Michelle Norman, Spain (FP)

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 Leah Leath, Concord, NC (CH)

12 Robert Stanley, Atlanta, GA (CH)

15 Carita Brown, Catonsville, MD (CH)

15 Mary Van Rheenen, Netherlands (FP)



## Living In the In-Between

**Mike Liga**

Hospice Chaplain, Mayo Clinic,  
Rochester, Minn.

“It can be seen that mental health is based on a certain degree of tension, the tension between what one has already achieved and what one still ought to accomplish, or the gap between what one is and what one should become.”

—Victor Frankl, *Man’s Search for Meaning*

Through my work as a chaplain, I am increasingly aware of the tension within me. Namely, the person I was, the person I am and the person I will become.

I’ve struggled with identity for most of my life, not having had a physical, psychological or even a theological home. I grew up in the “in-between,” whether that’s growing up in two cultures (American and Filipino), or in two theological frameworks (Pentecostal and Baptist traditions). The resulting feeling has been a cycle of self-shame and an unease from never having the ability to please anyone.

As I reflect upon being in the “in-between,” I see now that it has been a gift all along. The very thing that I found shameful, has now brought me to a place of peace and wonder. The “in-between” has always been my home.

I can see now the “detours” in my life have been nourishment to my soul. By detours, perhaps I mean more of the unexpected paths of life, even within a single day—a call from a friend, a surprising affirmation from a colleague, a smile from a patient. These fillers of joy and meaningful encounters have always made me feel at home, a hospitality between destinations.

I wonder in my own life at the power of slowing down and embracing those moments of surprising detours. Seeing them not as a chore or a distraction, but as glimpses of joy and opportunities for growth. I wonder if what is saving my life is not just

tolerating these detours, but simply being open and present to them. Seeing them as opportunities to see God and see myself anew, constantly learning the wonder of being with God and others.

In a busy and efficient world, particularly in the West, I wonder if what we need most is slowness and presence during the tension we sense within and outside ourselves. And perhaps we might see that tension, transience, slowness and openness as part of deep enrichment to our souls.

## Prayer, Practice, Ponder

God, may we see your wonder in the tense, the transient, and the detours of our lives. Would that we would be open to them, following the leading of your Spirit into the unknown with courage and humility. Amen.

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17 Byron Bell, Atlanta, GA (GA)  
17 Mary Gessner, Madison, AL (PC)  
17 Andrew Hoyle, Alexandria, VA (CH)  
18 Jennifer Hawks (S-CBF Global)  
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 Jennifer Bordenet, Orlando, FL (CH)  
19 Bob Fox (S-Kentucky)

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

MARCH 23



## Holding the Light

**Brittany Ramirez**

CBF Field Personnel, Baguio, Philippines

“I will hold the Christ-light for you in the nighttime of your fear. I will hold my hand out to you, speak the peace you long to hear.”

—*Servant Song* by Richard Gillard

In 2020, with a global pandemic, the world changed for everyone. For our family, that change was the death of the dream of what our life and calling would look like.

After getting stuck away from our home and ministry in China due to the pandemic, then forced to return to the United States for three years, it was hard to see and understand how God could possibly use this painful time. It was hard to believe and see God’s light and presence in our lives and future.

As field personnel, it is hard to share when we struggle with belief. But it is important for us all to be authentic and honest in those times of struggle, because that can be a time when we see the work of the Spirit in our lives and community. With the theme of “What is saving your life right now?,” I can say that it was a death that saved my life. It was the death of a dream, turned into a resurrection and hope of a new possibility. And when I look at what sustained me through that death, I point to community.

When all seemed lost for our calling, our ministry, our hope of how we could take part in the mission of God in our world, we found our community of faith, holding hope and light for us in the darkness. Our community of families, support partners and churches sustained us through their prayers, continued financial commitment to maintain our ministry upon return to the field, their affirmation and their belief that we were still being called. They believed for us that we would get back to ministry—even when our hope wavered.

The artist, Scott Erickson, writes, “We have our resources, skills, and technologies to offer... but it seems what we most deeply need to receive and what we most deeply need to offer is the Light of Presence.”



It was our community that offered us the light of presence and held the Christ-light for us in the midst of our darkness. And isn't this exactly what we are called to do for each other as Christians?

We could not have imagined in 2020 where our journey would lead us. We could not have imagined the way God would not only sustain our calling to minister among the Chinese community, but to broaden that call into a beautiful partnership with Philippine Baptist Theological Seminary and ministry to overseas Chinese in Baguio, Philippines. What has been saving my life the past few years, has been the Light of presence and hope from our CBF communities and churches. And what a joy it is to be able to go back out with renewed calling and offer that light of presence to others along their journeys.

## Prayer, Practice, Ponder

How are you experiencing community right now? Have you been able to hold the Christ-light for someone in your community recently? Or are you experiencing a time where you need someone to hold onto hope and light for you? Take some time today to practice Visio Divina with the attached art by Scott Erickson or find another piece of art that is meaningful to you.

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23 J. Claude Huguley, Nashville, TN (CH)

24 Gina Biddle, Dallas, TX (CH)

24 Michael Gross, Roswell, GA (CH)

24 Michael Liga, Pearland, TX (CH)

24 Emory (Chip) Reeves, Martinez, GA (CH)

24 Mark Spain, Canyon Lake, TX (CH)

24 Todd Walter, Inman, SC (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)

28 Leah Tripp (S-CBF Global)

29 Phil McCarley, Charles Town, WV (CH)

29 Michael Shea, Mars Hill, NC (CH)

**MARCH 30**

## **Psalm of Lament**

**Gennady and Mina Podgaisky**

**CBF Field Personnel, Kraków, Poland**



### **Mark 9:24 (ESV)**

In seeking the Lord's help, a man came to Jesus once, fell to his knees weeping, and said, "I believe; help my unbelief."

*The following was written by Mina on Feb 7, 2024 at a CBF field personnel debriefing retreat.*

My life...ministry...faith journey to hope in revelation.

Lord, because I know that you know, and because I know that you care...

You have traveled along the bombed streets all over Ukraine.

You have seen the dead bodies on the streets of Bucha, Izum, Mariupol, Kharkiv...

My grief has clouded my ability to see your hand, your power, your goodwill and your loving kindness.

My story has the good, the bad and the ugly of the war in Ukraine. Sometimes, Lord, I see more bad and ugly than good and beautiful.

Blessed are those who are forced to stare straight into the paradox of the ugliness of the war in Ukraine and the numerous miracles that You, God, have performed throughout these two years I have spent in Ukraine. I have held both the pain of losses and the joy of reencounters in my heart; my heart aches and my heart and soul are tired. We are collectively tired of this war in Ukraine; of the war in Israel, in Palestine, in Africa, in the other parts of your world!

Moving forward always requires us to leave something behind. What if I don't want to leave anything behind?

I do not want to leave Kyiv behind!

I don't want to leave my new church behind!

I do not want to leave my dog behind!



I do not want to leave my home Bible study group behind!

I do not want to leave my friends behind.

I do not want to leave my KCA teachers, students, Lesia my secretary and the library behind.

I do not want to lose the Village of Hope.

I do not want to leave my new minimalist living room behind.

I do not want to leave my new office/craft space behind.

I do not want to leave the place I have called home for more than two decades.

Betrayal has cut my heart in two—one-half to survive the war and one-half to grieve the war. Yet in the process, I believe in Your loving mercies that are new every day!

Lament is the pathway from heartbreak to hope. Not yet peace, in my case; still, I hope! In the book of Revelation, there is an ending to lament; there is healing, restoration and redemption.

Let revelation become a reality in my life and the lives of Ukrainians soon!  
God, you know. God, you care!

## Pray, Practice, Ponder

For those times when You, O Lord, carried me through the hard times; for those times that I know You are working for my good; for those times that I have not seen my losses and pain being redeemed; I pray: “Lord, help my unbelief!” Thank you for saving and being my hope! Amen!

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CH = Chaplain

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S = CBF Staff Member

30 John Emmart, Stoughton, WI (CH)

30 Jonathan Ludwig, Columbia, MO (CH)

30 Layne Rogerson, Cheraw, SC (CH)

31 Tim Madison, Clearwater, FL (CH)

1 Jennifer Dill, Pittsburgh, PA (CH)

1 Greg Smith, Arkansas (FP)

1 Craig Walker, High Point, VA (CH)

2 Dorcus Cater, Snellville GA (CH)

2 Christie McTier, Harlem, GA (CH)

2 Frank Morrow, Emeritus (FP)

2 Leonora Newell, Emeritus (FP)

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 Patrick Baxter, Akron, OH (CH)

5 Darcie Jones, Columbia, SC (CH)

5 Caroline LeGrand (S-CBF Global)

5 Eddy Ruble, Emeritus (FP)

**APRIL 6**



## **A Little More**

### **Taylor Edwards**

**Associate Pastor to Families and Faith Formation, First Baptist Church, Wilson, N.C.**

#### **John 1:5 (NLT)**

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness can never extinguish it.

“What is saving your life right now?”

This question from Barbara Brown Taylor has recurred throughout my being in the past couple of years and always makes me think. This question wasn't a big, scary question that should cause people to be worried about me if I didn't answer it the way they wanted.

Rather, it is a question about what is shining in my life in the midst of all the gloomy darkness. I always felt like the answers people were looking for were small little things—like checking off a to-do list, watching their kids learn how to walk or taking a walk on a warm, sunny day.

Believe me, I've had moments of little things that saved my life right then and there. For awhile, a chore-tracking app was saving my life because it motivated me to mop my kitchen floor and wash towels. There have also been moments when going for a walk an hour before the sun sets on a warm spring day has saved my life that day. But I have to be honest. There are more often days where it takes a little more than that to save my life.

The reassurance that my friends will pick me up when I fall apart is saving my life on my worst days. Making the time in my week to worship God in a space where I don't have leadership responsibilities is saving my life on my worst days. Mentors who tell me hard truths and sit with me as I process them save my life on my worst days.

I'd like to think that it only takes little things to save my life every day. But in all honesty, that's not true. Life is hard. Ministry is hard, and I have some pretty bad days where a walk at a golden hour isn't going to be enough to save me. Some days I need to see God in bigger ways, whether that is through the comfort of a friend, an honest leader, or the presence of the Holy Spirit being made known to me.

I am thankful for the small moments of joy or motivation that save me; but some days, it takes more to save a life.

## Pray, Practice, Ponder

Pray for those who need “a little more” today, who are yearning to see God in bigger, bolder ways. Ask for the Holy Spirit to intercede for them “with groanings that cannot be expressed in words” (Romans 8:26).

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6 Lauren Deer, Raleigh, NC (CH)

6 Steven Mills, Flat Rock, NC (CH)

6 Jeffrey Wright, Cartersville, GA (CH)

7 LaCount Anderson, Rocky Mount, NC (EP)

7 Bonnie Hicks, Woodstock, GA (CH)

7 Brandon Johnson, Lillington, NC (CH)

7 Mary Wrye, Henderson, KY (CH)

8 Laura Johnson, New Bern, NC (CH)

8 Drexel Rayford, Birmingham, AL (CH)

9 Jessica Hearne, Danville, VA (FP)

9 Scarlett Jasper, Corbin, KY (FP)

9 Alexis Johnson, Birmingham, AL (CH)

9 Jim Pruet, Charlotte, NC (PC)

9 Steve Vance, Charlotte, NC (CH)

10 Alan Rogers, Kaneohe, HI (CH)

11 Laura Broadwater, Louisville, KY (CH)

12 Leslie Brogdon (S-CBF Global)

12 Andy Hale (S-North Carolina)

**APRIL 13**



## **Choose Joy**

**Rick Burnette**

**CBF Field Personnel, Immokalee, Fla.**

### **James 1:2-4**

Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

I'm not going to lie. These are challenging times. Now in our early 60s, Ellen and I have entered an interesting stage of life. We lost one parent recently and the surviving three are very elderly and increasingly frail. We feel the pain of hardships being faced by our adult children. And our farmworker neighbors in Immokalee are caught between a rock and a hard place with unbearable conditions in their homelands while facing increased hostility in the United States.

The world is on fire and it's easy to slip into some stage of despair. Despair desiccates the soul and can paralyze efforts related to my role as a husband, son, dad, granddad, neighbor, coworker and missionary. As I am not immune from despair, its prevention requires intentionality.

Joy is the opposite of despair. Joy is the antidote to despair. I used to think that joy was mostly serendipitous. But I've come to realize that as much as I might choose to expect despair, I can also nurture joy.

My black and brown friends are teaching me about joy. In recent years I've become familiar with the term "Black joy."

In a January 24, 2024, Center for Action and Contemplation post, African American theologian and teacher, Barbara Holmes, asserted that resilience is needed for our current circumstances, along with a "steadfast belief that joy is a healing inner event and a spiritual practice."

I confess that I've been holding out on joy. Unless things were just right in my personal universe, I reserved the right to express thankfulness and entertain the possibility

of joy. Joy is not merely passively received. It's within reach. And it's necessary for a healthy spiritual ecosystem, allowing us to engage with a world of need and opportunity.

For me, joy has three key precursors: gratitude, awe and positive action. Gratitude is doable. Counting blessings isn't a heavy lift, starting with the low-hanging fruit of family, health, vocation and the natural beauty that surrounds me.

Thankfully, awe comes quite easily in my usual outdoor settings. During morning walks, I am awestruck by the sunrise grandeur. The stained glass of dawn—orange, gold and pink clouds—never fails to generate wonderment. Routine garden activities induce awe as I observe everyday botanical miracles: germination, emergence, growth, flowering and fruit formation.

Even though our work is heavy, despair-destroying joy is often derived alongside coworkers, in the presence of the least of these. Lord, bless those with whom I'm privileged to rub shoulders.

The American congressman and civil rights leader, John Lewis, summed it up best: "Do not get lost in a sea of despair. Be hopeful, be optimistic. Our struggle is not the struggle of a day, a week, a month, or a year, it is the struggle of a lifetime. Never, ever be afraid to make some noise and get in good trouble, necessary trouble."

Yes, there's also that good trouble—necessary trouble—that awaits us all, if we dare.

## Pray, Practice, Ponder

Walk prayerfully and meditatively along the street, in the woods, or in the garden. Allow awe, presented in any manner, to penetrate your senses to be recognized within your mind and soul. Offer it back to God in gratitude.

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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)

14 Kerri Kroeker, Calgary, Alberta, Canada (CH)

15 Jeff Flowers, Evans, GA (CH)

15 Jeff Langford (S-Heartland/Global)

15 Don Pittman, Emeritus (FP)

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)

19 Michael Lee, Hendersonville, NC (CH)

18 Nathan Solomon, Washington, DC (CH)

19 Zach Medlin, Salt Lake City UT (CH)

# Living Waters: Finding God in Creation

April 20 - May 18

“But ask the animals, and they will teach you;  
the birds of the air, and they will tell you;  
ask the plants of the earth, and they will teach you;  
and the fish of the sea will declare to you.

Who among all these does not know  
that the hand of the Lord has done this?  
In his hand is the life of every living thing  
and the breath of every human being.”

Job 12:7-10 (NRSV)

“I think that there are places inside of us that are always in need of healing, no matter who we are. We carry anxiety, we carry stress, we carry grief, we carry anger. And I’m convinced that just being still in the natural world in and of itself can open up some of those places and have us safely recognize the healing that needs to take place.”

—Rev. Beth Jones

The following reflections explore how the natural world propels us into communion with God our Creator. Through poems and prose, these reflections invite us to consider and experience the life-giving qualities of God’s created world. This spring, set aside time to immerse yourself in God’s creation, to be sustained by spending time in beauty of the natural world as often as you are able.

APRIL 20



## Peace and Strength in Creation

Sharon Felton

CBF Congregational Advocacy Manager

### Psalm 104:10-14, 24-25, 31

You put gushing springs into dry riverbeds.

They flow between the mountains, providing water for every wild animal—  
the wild donkeys quench their thirst.

Overhead, the birds in the sky make their home, chirping loudly in the trees.  
From your lofty house, you water the mountains.

The earth is filled full by the fruit of what you've done.

You make grass grow for cattle; you make plants for human farming in order  
to get food from the ground,

Lord, you have done so many things!

You made them all so wisely!

The earth is full of your creations!

And then there's the sea, wide and deep, with its countless creatures—living  
things both small and large.

Let the Lord's glory last forever!

Let the Lord rejoice in all he has made!

As I write, it's spring in Kentucky! Trees and flowers are blooming and beautiful! Baby horses (foals) are being born and running through pastures. The sky is blue, the grass is green and everything seems to be waking up from a gray chilly winter. Cool breezes brush against my face, all while being warmed by the sun.

It's truly a life-giving time of year. I love being outside and seeing all the beauty awakening, the new life blossoming and taking its first steps into this great, complex majestic creation. I have always found peace and strength in creation. Being outside often draws me closer to God as I find that God reveals God's self to me through Creation.

Anytime I can be in the mountains, I see the character of God through God's creation. The majestic mountains, giant trees and wide-open skies remind me of God's power, of God's all encompassing "hugeness!" That no matter what I'm going through or experiencing, God is big enough and strong enough to walk with me.

In the winter months, I have watched snowflakes drift down and land on my jacket and I notice the intricate detail of each individual flake. I see the birds and animals roaming with their unique markings and patterns. All are evidence to me that God cares deeply about the smallest details of my life as well. God creates beauty and purpose. God knows me. God walks with me and wants to know the most intimate and complex details of my life. God's care and design of the many patterns and colors used in creation—from the wings of birds to the petals of the flowers and the varied design of snowflakes—demonstrate to me God's intention to know me and be involved in my life.

When I go to the beach, it's the same. The wideness and depth of the ocean; the brilliance of the sunrise and sunset; the majesty of dolphins rising with the waves and the tiny intricate details of every shell and every grain of sand. All remind me that God is paying attention and involved in every aspect of God's unbelievable creation.

While I love spring and the newness and life that comes every spring, it's clearly not the only time I see and experience God in nature. It's just a beautiful reminder that God continues to work in creation and in my life. God reveals God's self through God's creation every day in large and small ways, reminding me to breathe deeply, to love deeply, including loving myself, and to work to help others experience the life-giving sustenance that comes from being part of God's wonderful, complex creation!

## Prayer, Practice, Ponder:

Find some time today to go outside. If you have time, go for a walk, or just take a few minutes and sit outside. Take deep breaths. Close your eyes and listen. What do you hear? Breathe deeply. Open your eyes. What do you see? Look closely, deeply into the world around you. Do you see something new? Notice the various colors around you? Look for God in the small and large wonderful things around you. Take a deep breath and focus on God's care for you. How can you extend that care to others today?

### Birthdays this Week:

CH = Chaplain

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FP = Field Personnel

FPC = Child of Field Personnel

PC = Pastoral Counselor

S = CBF Staff Member

20 Heidi Ruiz (S-Virginia)

20 Susan Stephenson, Edmond, OK (CH)

21 Ben Brown (S-Virginia)

22 Barry Pennington, Pleasant Hill, MO (CH)

22 Brittany Ramirez, Philippines (FP)

22 Judith Wortelboer-Grace, Temple, TX (CH)

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 Leslie Stith, Lee's Summit, MO (CH)

24 Travis Smith, Forest City, NC (CH)

25 Judah Foushee, 2022, Japan (FPC)

25 Ellen Garner-Cook, Jefferson, GA (CH)

25 Connie Graham, Fitzgerald, GA (CH)

25 Jane Hill, Knoxville, TN (CH)

25 Victoria Whatley (S-CBF Global)



APRIL 27



## By the Waters

Stella Perrin

CBF Field Personnel, Larnaca, Cyprus

### Matthew 15:29

Jesus left there and went along the sea...

**By the Waters**—written on April 9, 2024

Each day you are there,

Melodically moving in and out.

At times gently touching the sand;

At times seemingly angry with something important to say;

Hiding creatures of every color and shape,

Providing a haven in the deep.

Near the shore, you are light, allowing shifting glimpses of rock;

Gazing out, you are dark and mysterious,

Hues of blues and green shimmering when touched by light.

Where do you begin? Where do you end?

Standing by you, I feel small but safe in your vastness.

The rhythm of your movement reassures me;

Your sounds hush my questions.

I stand silently listening, praying to the One Who set your boundaries,

Who placed the moon above to guide your tides.

Here I am, fully alive and fully at rest.

# Pray, Practice, Ponder

Creative, Magnificent One,

Your creation beckons us to ponder your beauty and your glory. Quiet us, Lord; make us lie down by the still or moving waters or on a hillside that our souls may be restored. Open our eyes to gaze on your majesty expressed in the gifts of color and light. Open our ears to the sounds of love expressed in birds singing and waves crashing. May the breeze touching our skin be a reminder of your grace gently enveloping us in your life-giving presence. Help us be still, soaking up the life and beauty around us so that beauty and life may spill into the lives of others. Amen.

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27 Pat Davis, Baton Rouge, LA (CH)

27 Pete Parks, Williamsburg, VA (CH)

28 Gary McFarland, Charlotte, NC (PC)

28 Carrol Wilson (S-CBF Global)

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)

MAY 4



## Even the Sparrow Finds a Home

Kirk and Suzie

CBF Field Personnel, Southeast Asia

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

—John Scotus Eriugena

Through our many years of service in Southeast Asia, my husband and I have come to appreciate tropical landscapes—verdant rice fields, coconut trees, dense jungles and an incredible variety of flowers—God’s creativity on full display!

*“See how the flowers of the field grow...” (Matthew 6:28b).*

Before we had kids, one of Kirk’s and my favorite things to do after a long day of ESL teaching was to drive our motorcycle through the rice fields and watch the sunset. To this day, we continue to find spiritual refreshment and rejuvenation in nature—especially when we take a moment to be still, look up at the sky through the leaves of a tree and know that God is God!

But like everyone else, we tend to worry—about our kids; about our ministry; about our ever-expanding “to-do” lists; about all the people we fear we will be letting down; about aging; about the anger and divisions that have overtaken so much of our world. Lord, have mercy. Lord, help me to get it all done. Lord, help me to remember what is important.

*“Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?” (Matthew 6:26)*

Among all created things, birds have a special place in my heart. Years ago, while living on the 14th floor of a Bangkok apartment building, I was amazed to see tiny birds among the plants on our veranda. One looked like a yellow hummingbird and seemed to appear on my porch when I needed a little lift. He—or his identical twin—also showed

up a few blocks away, in the garden of a dear friend in the final stages of cancer—even as a Christian physician shared the Gospel with her. We were amazed to discover our common winged friend as we planned to read the Gospel of John together.

*“Even the sparrow finds a home, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young, at your altars, O Lord of hosts, my King and my God.” (Psalm 84:3.)*

Now our own birds—our kiddos—have flown the nest. For the first time in 26 years, it’s just Kirk and me again. Our downtown apartment is far from any rice fields, but we do have some trees on our sixth-floor balcony. And birds. One mama bird has built her nest right in the center of our porch; she stares me down when I hang out the laundry. Others flit around wildly, riding the winds funneled through the forest of skyscrapers. We downloaded an app to identify them based on their songs. We call our new home “Sparrow’s Rest.”

*“Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? And not one of them is forgotten before God Why, even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not; you are of more value than many sparrows!” (Luke 12:6-7)*

This is a great Gospel truth—that God knows, remembers and loves God’s people! This is what sent Jesus to the cross—and the stone rolling away. Jesus came to give us life—life to the fullest. Life eternal.

My prayer is that you will be reminded of God’s life-giving love today—maybe, like me, by one of God’s smallest winged ambassadors!

## Pray, Practice, Ponder

Today, pay special attention to the birds and other small creatures who make an appearance throughout your day. What do these small beings have to teach you about God?

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4 Johann Choi, Fairfield, CA (CH)

4 Gary Metcalf, Kingsport, TN (CH)

4 Johnny Richards, Raleigh, NC (CH)

4 Skip Wisenbaker, Asheville, NC (CH)

5 Austin, 2004, Southeast Asia (FPC)

5 Jacquelyn Green, Roanoke, VA (CH)

5 Karen Long, Birmingham, AL (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

8 Rusty Elkins, Edmond, OK (CH)

8 Brenda Pace Jones, Hendersonville, NC (PC)

9 Rich Behers, Lakeland, FL (CH)

9 David Harding, Emeritus (FP)

9 Leigh Jackson, Austin, TX (CH)

MAY 11



## Solitude in Creation

Christine

CBF Field Personnel, Africa/Middle East

“It is in solitude that we discover that being is more important than having and that we are worth more than the results of our efforts. In solitude we discover that our life is not a possession to be defended but a gift to be shared.”

—Henri Nouwen

I live in the middle of a very busy urban neighborhood. There’s beauty in this communal life, but quiet moments are rare. Early on a Sunday morning as the sun is rising, there might be a moment of peace; but inevitably, it’s not long until it’s interrupted by a honking car horn or the revving of a motorcycle engine. Days are crowded and packed with people, hollering over each other and the noise around them, buying their groceries, having coffee with a neighbor, picking kids up from school, making their way through the tasks of daily life. People walk everywhere and it’s a place that’s full of life. It’s one of the reasons I chose to live here—to see the realities, to pull back the curtain, to have a truer glimpse of how this community lives.

But between the actual noise and the inside “noise” perpetuated by the stresses of the hardships and uncertainties in the neighborhood and the lives of those around me, it can be like a frog in boiling water. You don’t even realize it’s happening until it’s too late. It can feel impossible to find a space for peace, for stillness, for silence.

What’s saving my life right now? It’s creation. The rustling of the leaves in the wind outside the sunroom of my temporary home; rooftop sunsets at a friend’s house; the stillness of birds chirping outside my window as the new day dawns; hours to sit beside the ocean, listening to the lapping of the waves; the fresh, cool air of a hike in the woods with friends and colleagues. I’ve been reflecting recently on how often Jesus lived and modeled this pattern. Of course, the stillness and solitude and peace of creation are saving my life right now; it saved Jesus’ life too. We see over and over again in the Gospels that when Jesus was sad or grieving, he would go off to be alone. When he was

tired from the overwhelming needs of life and work and ministry, he went into the hills by himself to pray. And each time he returned refreshed, more able to meet the needs of those around him, more grounded in his need for God's strength to sustain him, more able to say "yes" to what God was asking of him, more fully able to love the people in his life and the strangers who came seeking help. May it be so with us.

## Pray, Practice Ponder

This week, set aside time for silence and solitude. This may be for five minutes, or a few hours. If you don't know where to start, begin with the "Five Senses" grounding practice: Find a quiet space, inside or outside, and wake up to the world around you by noticing: five things you can hear, four things you can see, three things you can touch, two things you can smell and one thing you can taste.

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11 Larry Ballew, Emeritus (EP)

11 Leah Boling, Joint Base Andrews, MD (CH)

11 Robbi Francovich, Emeritus (FP)

11 Jonna Garvin, Manassas, VA (CH)

11 Cy Miller, Marion, NC (CH)

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 Nell Green, Emeritus (FP)

17 Matthew Weems, Columbia, SC (CH)

**MAY 18**



## **Listening to the Waves**

**Lita and Rick Sample**

CBF Field Personnel, San Francisco Bay Area,  
Calif.

### **Psalm 107:28-31**

“Lord, help!” they cried in their trouble,  
and he saved them from their distress.  
He calmed the storm to a whisper  
and stilled the waves.  
What a blessing was that stillness  
as he brought them safely into harbor!  
Let them praise the Lord for his great love  
and for the wonderful things he has done for them.”

We can all agree that “trouble” is part of life. Sometimes it is pretty overwhelming. In past years, I’ve struggled through two cancers and heart issues, and some other significant challenges along the way. It wasn’t easy, and I can’t imagine walking this path without Jesus by my side.

Looking back at the hardest times of my life, I can see God’s hand holding me and carrying me through it all. Where I find the most peace and comfort is when I go to the beach, sit and listen to the waves, watch the birds and get lost in my thoughts—sometimes just emptying my mind.

There is much to say about the beach. The sound of the waves distracts me from life’s overwhelming busy-ness and distractions. It’s as if the setting slows the world down for a little while. Grounding myself in the damp, cool sand connects me to the Lord, and I find myself breathing praise for what God has created and done for me.

Watching the waves roll in as the sun begins to fall from the sky, I see the water begin to calm, and I find myself matching its tranquil rhythm. Breathing the fresh clean air renews my strength and calms my spirit. The clouds on the horizon begin to turn

shades of pink, purple and orange, as the sun tries to stretch its arms out from behind the blanket of white, giving one last show of brilliance as the canvas before me turns a bright orange as its song's sweet ending. It's like looking at a glimpse of God on the throne, showing us God's glory, before dipping into the sea. All worries and burdens are washed away by the sound that covers me. It is comforting. This is when I know that my Lord is carrying me in peace and wholeness.

I find myself not wanting to leave. This moment is given to me, and the connection with God is so deep, that it is indescribable. I wait until the rays are all but gone, then turn to walk away. There are no words to speak, nothing to share. My heart is full and in ways, even healed.

As I read Psalm 19:1-8, I am taken back to that place.

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.

—Lita

## Pray, Practice, Ponder

This is a perfect time to reflect on the poem, “Footprints in the Sand” by Mary Stevenson. Many of my generation know this well and for us and those who never have heard it, I hope it will remind you of God's great love and care for us.

As you prepare to read this, breathe in deeply and slowly exhale. Relax your shoulders. Picture yourself at the ocean's edge, cool water lapping your toes, as your feet sink into the sand. Think of God's all-encompassing love for you.



## “Footprints in the Sand” by Mary Stevenson

One night I dreamed I was walking  
along the beach with the Lord.  
Many scenes from my life flashed across the sky.  
In each scene I noticed footprints in the sand.  
Sometimes there were two sets of footprints,  
other times there was one set of footprints.  
This bothered me because I noticed that  
during the low periods of my life, when I was  
suffering from anguish, sorrow or defeat,  
I could see only one set of footprints.  
So, I said to the Lord, “You promised me  
Lord, that if I followed you,  
you would walk with me always.  
But I have noticed that during the most trying periods  
of my life there have only been  
one set of footprints in the sand.  
Why, when I needed you most,  
have you not been there for me?”  
The Lord replied,  
“The times when you have  
seen only one set of footprints,  
is when I carried you.”

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18 Clay Polson, Waco, TX (CH)

18 Greg Slate, Littleton, CO (CH)

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,  
Harlingen, TX (FPC)

# Revived by Ritual: Life-Giving Spiritual Practices

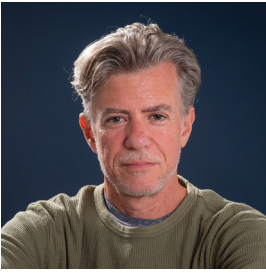
May 25 - August 17

“Ultimately, Christian practices can be understood not as tasks but as gifts. Within these practices, we do not aim to achieve mastery, but rather to cultivate openness and responsiveness to others, to the created world, and to God.”

—Dorothy Bass, *Practicing Our Faith*

The following reflections cover a wide spectrum of spiritual practices: from traditional Christian practices of prayer and contemplation, gratitude practices, creative practices involving art and media and practices that focus on self-care and rest. Each practice is an invitation to breathe new life into the soul and wake up to God’s life-sustaining care for you. This summer, “try on” some of these practices and notice where God shows up for you with them. Pay attention to when a particular practice revives or sustains you.

MAY 25



## When Music Becomes Prayer

Jonathan Bailey

CBF Field Personnel, Bali, Indonesia

Two, three, four...  
I waited patiently for the Lord  
He inclined and heard my cry  
He brought me up out of the pit  
Out of the miry clay  
I will sing, sing a new song  
I will sing, sing a new song  
How long to sing this song?  
How long to sing this song?  
How long, how long, how long  
How long to sing this song?

—Psalm 40 modified by Bono, titled “40”  
the last track on U2’s 1983 album *War*

Music and meditation are saving my life right now. It could be listening to music or playing music; either one will do really. And it is meditation—a daily sit on the cushion, making space in my heart and mind—that’s been keeping me together lately. My life has been ruffled quite a bit the past few years and the Spirit seems intent on teaching me about change. Music and meditation are a way for me to see and cope with impermanence.

Making music has always been a part of my life—whether it was singing to Dad’s harmonica as a kid, children’s choir, youth choir, then adult choir at church, studying cello and a bit of banjo, drumming as a young missionary in West Africa, leading music in an African church during seminary days and falling in love with the music of the Balinese gamelan. There is hardly a time when making music has not been a part of my life.

I know there's no record of Jesus singing in the Gospels, but I've always imagined he did.

Listening to music a part of my routine, too. It can be a mirror of the present moment. I'm told that more regions of the brain become active when listening to or playing music than any other activity in which we can engage. Listening to music particularly connects me to things in my past, evokes emotions and can set a mood. I love the ethereal chants of Hildegard von Bingen in my early morning contemplation; storytellers like Jim White in the late afternoon; Coltrane for the evening; and the haunting harmonies of Arvo Pärt late at night.

Music (and other arts, too) do more to open me to the mystery of God than anything else I know; and, strange as it may sound, touching mystery is the best antidote for the challenges of change. Music becomes prayer when it gives voice to the cries of the soul.

## Pray, Practice, Ponder

What music is resonating with your soul these days? Maybe the lines of an old hymn are on repeat in your mind, or maybe there is a popular song that keeps coming on the radio at just the right moment. It could be a Celtic chant, an 80s ballad or an African-American spiritual. Whatever it is, take some time today to immerse yourself in music as a spiritual practice that opens you up to the mystery of God.

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25 Daniel Mitchell, Columbus, GA (CH)

25 Kelly Russell, Tuttle, OK (CH)

25 Rick Burnette, Immokalee, FL (FP)

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)

JUNE 1



## Take a Look in a Book

**Alden Gallimore**

Pastor, First Baptist Church, Altavista, Va.  
and Navy Reserve Chaplain in Training

### **Micah 6:8 (NRSVUE)**

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

What is saving my life right now? It's a big question, and one I struggle to answer. I could say many things are saving my life right now. I often tell my congregation that we live during a difficult time in history and the evening news is sure to remind us. My hope is that the other contributors and whoever reads this will have a more straightforward answer by the end.

If I had to choose one thing right now, it would be the personal growth and meditative moments created through reading books. As a minister, part of my role is to offer meaningful reflections for my congregation's spiritual growth. However, sometimes those meaningful reflections can be hard to find for my own development and respite. This is where the reading of books fills a life-giving need for me.

I'm sure many people could say they enjoy reading; but there's one difference: I'm not really a reader. As a child, I would often fall asleep while reading anything. But as an adult and now as a minister, when I find an interesting book that provides meaningful reflection, I can't put it down!

Lately, I have learned to carry the book I am currently reading wherever I go, just so I can read another chapter at every opportunity. Through this habit, I have learned more about the world and myself in a way that screen-based content cannot offer. Once I finish a reading session and put the book down, I feel more refreshed and prepared to take on the world!

Of course, I'm sure you are curious about what I've been reading. Lately, there have been two books that have made an impact: David Gushee's *Still Christian* and *Forgive for Good* by Fred Luskin.

I was late getting to *Still Christian*; so many of you have already read it. What resonated most with me is that while we may sometimes feel alone in our ministry efforts, we are not. Balancing Baptist life in a post-evangelical world while still serving in the evangelical realm is burdensome, to say the least, but I am grateful to know I'm not alone in my role. In what feels like a world of fundamentalists, it's a challenge to be a different kind of Baptist.

## Pray, Practice, Ponder

Before you continue with your day, go read something. It can be anything. Take a book off a shelf, fire up your e-reader or find an interesting article. You'll be glad you did. I'm sure something will speak to you, because now you are looking for it. Remember that you are not alone in this world.

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1 Karen, Northern Africa (FP)  
1 Thong Lun, Houston, TX (CH)  
2 Durham Harris, Hattiesburg, MS (CH)  
2 Gary Sparks, Tyler, TX (CH)  
2 Inakali Kuruvilla, San Antonio, TX (CH)  
2 Sahir Daniel Rodríguez Zayas, 2015,  
Harlingen, TX (FPC)  
3 Susan Arnold, La Grange, KY (CH)  
3 Sean Burson, Minot, ND (CH)  
4 Laura Davis (S-Virginia)  
4 Mark Johnson, Hoover, AL (CH)  
4 Sarah Smith, Winston Salem, NC (CH)  
4 Harrison Wilmes, Lexington, KY (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 Diann Berry, Emeritus (FP)  
7 Jenny Perkins, San Antonio, TX (CH)  
7 Butch Stillwell, Candler, NC (CH)  
7 Carol Wilkinson, Winston-Salem, NC (CH)

JUNE 8



## Practicing Gratitude

Anna Anderson

CBF Field Personnel, Rocky Mount, N.C.

“Starting here, what do you want to remember?  
How sunlight creeps along a shining floor?  
What scent of old wood hovers, what softened sound from outside fills the  
air?  
Will you ever bring a better gift for the world than the breathing respect  
that you carry wherever you go right now?  
Are you waiting for time to show you some better thoughts?  
When you turn around, starting here, lift this new glimpse that you found;  
carry into evening all that you want from this day.  
This interval you spent reading or hearing this, keep it for life -  
What can anyone give you greater than now, starting here, right in this  
room, when you turn around?”  
—William Stafford, “You Reading this, Be Ready”

I found a little wooden sign in a store recently that reads, “Today is a good day to thank God.” I bought the sign and hung it in my office so that I see it each time I sit at my desk, pondering or writing, answering emails or spending time on Zoom. These are the moments for which I always want to be reminded—to thank God. They’re not necessarily those favorite moments, but they remind me to be grateful for all of the moments I have been given. All the moments I experience every day.

Having my first grandchild who is now two-years-old has brought me such a new perspective on living in the here and now. I knew this, of course, before the birth of this precious one, but I have been made so much more aware of the gratitude that living in the moment brings. I am thankful for the times we spend holding hands with each other, the looking into the eyes of one another, the times we laugh together, the times we experience the joy and wonder of some tiny little part of creation like a dandelion, or the blowing of the bubbles from the bottle, or the amazement at the little truck that rolls, the splashing in the bathtub and the giggling joy that sliding down the slide at

the playground brings. These are the good times. These are the rewards of recognizing life's gifts.

I am grateful for every day, every moment, that I have been given, every experience of each of those days that I carry into the evenings with me. What we have is now. That's all. And what a joy and privilege to live in the moment of the here and now.

Serving as a field personnel takes us to places on some days that can be awfully heavy and sad. There are so many reasons in this world to be despondent and to see so much that is so wrong. I reflect on that little sign at the end of the day, "Today is a good day to thank God." Every day. All the moments.

## Pray, Practice, Ponder

Loving, Creator God, how can I thank you for all the gifts you have poured onto me? How can I live in the kind of gratitude such an amazing God deserves? Show me the ways of Jesus every day, Holy God, and help me to live like you. And let the gratitude I feel flow through me into the world. Amen.

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CH = Chaplain

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8 Larry Lawhon, Boone City, NC (CH)

8 Janice Newell, Emeritus (FP)

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)

9 Michelle Cayard, Emeritus (FP)

9 Maria Robertson, Canton, GA (CH)

9 Sara Stubbs, Monroe, NC (CH)

9 Patricia Taylor, Tuscaloosa, AL (CH)

9 Doug Wiggington, Pineville, LA (CH)

10 Cindy Goza, Little Rock, AR (CH)

10 Christopher McDaniel, Charleston, SC (CH)

10 Aaron McGinnis, Dublin, GA (CH)

10 Michael Osment, Martin, TN (CH)

10 Ansia Picou, Highland, NY (CH)

10 Kim Wyatt, Raleigh, NC (FP)

11 Joshua Hearne, Danville, VA (EP)

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

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 Christine, Africa/Middle East (FP)

13 Kim Thompson, Columbia, SC (CH)

14 Chaouki Boulos, Lebanon (FP)

14 Caitie Jackson (S-North Carolina)

14 Tracey Lopez, Vienna, VA (CH)



JUNE 15



## Moving Our Hands

**Karen Alford**

CBF Field Personnel, Togo, West Africa

“If you work with your hands, sabbath with your mind. If you work with your mind, sabbath with your hands.”

—Rabbi Abraham Heschel

What is saving my life right now is doing yard work and a surprising source of inspiration from an app. My yard is huge with fruit trees, flowers, garden plots and tons of bougainvillea. Without copious amounts of raking, pruning, weeding, (did I mention raking?), it rapidly turns into jungle. Working with my hands, being able to see the tangible results of my work is satisfying. But more satisfying and astonishing is the peace in being reminded that God is in control and that things are growing and blooming and maturing beautifully despite anything else going on in my life that feels discouraging or disappointing.

Nature doesn't need me to make it happen. It's a gentle reminder that most other things in my life are happening and evolving at their own pace too, and I need not feel they are my sole responsibility and can only happen or succeed if I "make" them so. It's a huge relief to consider that just maybe, just maybe, God is in control of those things too.

Related to that theme is a lesson I'm learning from a paint-by-numbers app I use sometimes to help me relax. The app offers a huge, ever-growing selection of mandalas, nature scenes, places, flowers, mosaics, etc. A numbered palette of colors appears at the bottom and when you tap a color, the parts of the picture that correspond with that color turn gray. You tap the gray areas, and the picture starts coming to life.

At first, I resented being forced to use colors I didn't choose, especially since the ones who generate these pictures sometimes use lots of shades of orange, reds, pinks and yellows while I prefer dark blues, purples and greens. But as the picture comes to completion, I am astonished at the beauty that has been created. Especially using shades of color I don't like, didn't know existed and would never have chosen to go side-by-side.

I've developed a lot of gratitude for those creators I used to resent—for their vision and ability to see potential where I see none. And I love that colors I would never use, never even imagine, can come together to create such startling beauty. Mind you, the picture doesn't always come together all at once. Sometimes I'm genuinely confused about how it can possibly be redeemed with so much of that shade of green! Sometimes I stay skeptical until it is finished. Then I see the magic.

Maybe what is happening in my life at any given moment is also just shades of color I don't always prefer or would certainly never choose. Maybe if I stop judging the colors according to my personal preference and trust in the genius of the designer creating the picture, I will see the perfection and beauty in the end. Maybe all that feels weird, doubtful and uncomfortable is just a necessary part of the genius and perfection that is unfolding. And I find that thought saving for me indeed.

## Pray, Practice, Ponder

In the quote on the previous page, Rabbi Abraham Heschel invites us to consider how we rest and how we work. For those whose work is primarily physical, requiring the use of their hands and bodies, “sabbath,” Heschel suggests, is an invitation to rest the body and activate the mind. For those whose work is primarily mental, the opposite may be true. Today, ponder how you spend your working hours, and how this impacts what “sabbath” rest looks like for you.

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

15 Zulma Zabala (S-CBF Global)

16 Kimberly Emery, Hartsville, OH (CH)

18 Bill Hayes, Bogart, GA (CH)

18 Mary Ligon, York, PA (CH)

19 Maime Murphy, Boca Raton, FL (CH)

20 Tim Johns, Buffton, SC (CH)

20 Jeff Lancaster, Cartwright, OK (CH)

20 Lonnie Turner, Emeritus (FP)

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)

JUNE 22



## Reaching Out

Jana Lee

CBF Field Personnel, Larcana, Cyprus

“We are hardwired to connect with others; it’s what gives purpose and meaning to our lives, and without it there is suffering.”

—Brené Brown

What is saving my life right now? To be honest, technology is saving my life. To be more specific, the ability to communicate with and through technology.


Right now, I am thousands and thousands of miles away from my family and long-term friends. The ability to talk with them as much as possible is a constant blessing in my life. The ability to share updates from my life and hear all about theirs keeps me going when I am missing them. The ability to share all my emotions from afar is needed. From a simple text or voice note on WhatsApp to a Zoom call that lasts hours, they all make me happy and keep me going. Sharing a happy moment from my day lifts my spirits more than I can say. Venting about stressful or sad days encourages me to not keep the hard parts of life to myself.

Along with keeping up with my forever friends and family, technology also gives me the ability to connect and meet new people here in my new place of work. It creates the opportunity to share pictures, articles, ideas and resources from so many people. Everyone knows how frustrating or mind-numbing technology can be at times. But I am forever grateful for how it keeps me connected to the people I need in my life.

## Pray, Practice, Ponder

The practice of reaching out or staying in touch takes effort in our fast-paced, information-crazed world. To develop life-giving bonds, we must prioritize connection.

How do you practice staying connected to systems of support—family and friends near and far. Do you think this can be seen not just as a relational practice, but as a spiritual one?



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Your word is a lamp that gives light wherever I walk.

Psalm 119:105 (CEV)

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22 Sharon Eldridge, Smithfield, NC (CH)  
22 Joanne Henley, Winston-Salem, NC (CH)  
22 Kirk, Southeast Asia (FP)  
22 Jessica Prophitt, Cheyenne, WY(CH)  
22 Sara Robb-Scott, Durham, NC (CH)  
22 Linda Stringfellow (S-Together for Hope)  
23 Sarah Ballew, Emeritus (EP)  
23 Brett Bardoff, Asheville, NC (CH)  
23 David Lowe, Fort Worth, TX (CH)  
24 Robert Brown, Henrico, VA (CH)

24 LaToya Cross (S-CBF Global)  
24 Sharon Felton (S-CBF Global)  
25 David Weatherspoon, Memphis, TN (CH)  
26 Elias Crosby, Lilburn, GA (CH)  
26 Michael Ferguson, Fort Drum, NY (CH)  
26 Sharon Fry, Midlothian, VA (CH)  
26 Anna Jacks, Birmingham, AL (CH)  
26 Tamara Witte-Walczac, Baltimore, MD (CH)  
27 Alicia Lee, North Macedonia (FP)  
28 Roger Rich, Lexington, SC (CH)

JUNE 29



## The Life Anchor of a Chaplain

**Robert Stanley**

Manager of Spiritual Health, Wellstar Spalding Medical Center, Wellstar Sylvan Grove Medical Center, Griffin, Ga.

“Self-care is never a selfish act—it is simply good stewardship of the only gift I have, the gift I was put on earth to offer others. Anytime we can listen to true self and give the care it requires, we do it not only for ourselves, but for the many others whose lives we touch.”

—Parker Palmer, *Let Your Life Speak*

As spiritual care providers, chaplains carry so much emotional weight in silence. Our parishioners bring to us news of troubled youth, new health challenges and everyday trials and tribulations they encounter. As we journey with them through these troubling times, we assist them in carrying the weight. Their weight becomes our weight.

Additionally, if you add on the pressure of being a chaplain, providing support during times of death, how much more weight are we carrying? What happens when a spiritual care provider or chaplain has his or her own challenges to bear or his or her own griefs to process? Who will journey with the chaplain who finds himself or herself as the identified patient?

When we ourselves need a chaplain, we must recognize the urgency of the need. While we have spiritual access to the Father through prayer and meditation, there are still times when we need a more tangible source of support. But where do we turn? The need for chaplain support became evident during the pandemic as hospital chaplains saw more deaths in a three-year period than they had seen in their entire careers as clinical care providers. In the midst of so much death, I asked myself, “What is saving your life?”

One thing that screams out to me is self-care. Self-care is so much more than making sure we eat proper meals and get the correct amount of sleep. Three areas of self-care are life-sustaining: spiritual self-care, physical self-care and emotional self-care.

Burnout is a real phenomenon that can end a spiritual care provider's vocation if the reasons for burnout are not addressed. If we do not refill invest in our spiritual wells but continue to draw from them, we will find ourselves in a position of spiritual drought.

A connection to the Holy is what saves my life as a professional chaplain. The Holy Spirit directs me in providing care that is beneficial to my flock, and it also guides me to provide silence when needed. I could not do this work without such a connection. My discernment through the Holy Spirit also guides me in knowing when I need my own spiritual tank refilled.

I also find that attending to my physical well-being is just as lifesaving as attending to my spiritual well-being. My health is a vital part of my livelihood. When there is pain or discomfort in my body, I am not fully available to my flock. Regular exercise helps me be more present mentally and helps me maintain my physical well-being; therefore, regular visits to the gym are also what is saving my life as a spiritual care provider.

The final measure that I consider to be lifesaving is regular check-point sessions with a mental health provider. These appointments provide a soundboard for many of the critical events that I encounter and allow me a space where I can relinquish some of the emotional weight that I carry. Time to vent and process has been lifesaving for this clinical chaplain.

## Pray, Practice, Ponder

This week, ponder the Parker Palmer quote at the beginning of this reflection, and consider how you care yourself in these three life-sustaining areas: spiritual wellbeing, physical wellbeing and emotional wellbeing.

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29 Carrie Harris (S-CBF Global)  
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30 Margaret Guenther, Richmond, VA (PC)  
30 Amy Holtz, Richmond, VA (CH)  
30 David Potter, Oklahoma City, OK (CH)  
30 Thomas Thorton, Spartanburg, SC (CH)  
1 Paul Baxley (S-CBF Global)  
1 Kyle Boyer, Jacksonville FL (CH)  
1 Debra Walters, Lawrenceville, GA (CH)  
2 Jennifer Dockum, Ashland, VA (CH)  
2 Sara Hunt-Felke, Birmingham, AL (CH)

2 Aaron Mussat, Shreveport, LA (CH)  
2 Meghan Rush, Midlothian, VA (CH)  
2 Steven Smith, Shreveport, LA (CH)  
2 Kyle Tubbs (S-Oklahoma)  
3 Elizabeth Ellis, Crestwood, KY (PC)  
3 Brenda Lee, Williamsburg, VA (CH)  
3 Leland Parks, Louisville, KY (CH)  
3 Ascanio Peguero, Fort Worth, TX (CH)  
4 José Jimenez-Abrams, Austell, GA (CH)  
5 Coy Callicott, Louisville, KY (CH)  
5 Amy Dills-Moore, Atlanta, GA (CH)  
5 Jeff Fryer, Murfreesboro, TN (CH)  
5 Mark Snipes (S-Virginia)

JULY 6



## Healing through Poetry

Meg Lacy

Staff Chaplain, Children's Medical Center,  
Dallas, Texas

“Poetry is a natural medicine; it is like homeopathic tincture derived from the stuff of life itself—your experience.

“Poetry is simply speaking truth. Each of us has a truth as unique as our own fingerprints. Without knowing that truth, without speaking it aloud, we cannot know who we are and that we are already whole. In the most profound way, speaking our truth allows us to know that our life matters... that our suffering, our joy, our fears and our hopes are important and meaningful. One of the best kept secrets in this technically oriented culture is that simply speaking truth heals.”

—John Fox, *Poetic Medicine*

Over the past few years, I have experienced several significant changes in both my personal and professional life. I have shifted from serving a local church, to becoming trained as a pediatric hospital chaplain. I have made not one, but two cross-country relocations. I have navigated changes in my personal and family relationships. Even my day-to-day schedule and responsibilities are quite different than they were just a few years ago.

One of the things that has helped me stay (mostly) grounded in the midst of all this transition is poem-making. I say poem-making, rather than poem writing, because I am not talking about writing poetry in the traditional sense, in which the goal is to create a beautiful piece of art to share with the world. Poem-making, in contrast, is the practice of writing one's story, exploring one's feelings, experiences, hopes, griefs, fears and dreams through the creative process of poetry. The words written may be shared with a close friend or family member, or they may never be shared with another soul. The point is not publication, or elegance. The point is to invite vulnerable reflection and encourage openness to the deep questions and feelings at the core of one's soul. If I were to name one thing that is saving my life right now, it is poem-making.

I was first introduced to the idea of writing poetry as “medicine” for the soul during my chaplaincy training, through John Fox’s book *Poetic Medicine: The Healing Art of Poem-Making*. My fellow chaplain residents and I were encouraged to read and write our way through each chapter, using the poems and prompts within as a launching pad for our own writing, to engage with the beliefs, stories, pains and hopes that make up our lives.

This assignment was twofold. First, as budding spiritual caregivers, it was intended to help us understand our own stories at a deeper level so we could use our stories to connect with those we encounter in the hospital each day. Second, it was a way to teach us about the process of emotional and spiritual healing and how creativity can be a conduit for our wholeness.

For me, poem-making is a deeply spiritual practice. Poem-making helps us listen to ourselves and reflect on our stories. It helps us touch our pain, and also our strength and resilience. It helps us invite God into the places within that need healing, and to pay attention to God’s presence and movement in our lives. And it often brings joy and surprise when words of wisdom and truth come spilling out onto the paper that we didn’t even know we had in us.

## Pray, Practice, Ponder

Read the following poem by Carrie Newcomer. As you read, listen for the line or phrase that stands out to you. Then use this line to start your own poem—penning a few words with your thoughts and feelings today, exploring why this line resonated with you or how it connects with your story. Remember, your words need not be eloquent. Just honest. Use your poem to invite God into the hidden places within your soul.

### **I’m Learning to Sit with Not Knowing**

Carrie Newcomer, *Until Now: New Poems*

I’m learning to sit with not knowing.  
Even when my restless mind begins jumping  
From a worried  
What next?  
To a frightened  
What if?  
To a hard edged and impatient  
Why aren’t you already there?

I’m learning to sit and listen,  
To pat myself on the knee,



Lay my hand on my heart,  
Take a deep breath,  
And laugh at myself.  
To befriend my mistakes,  
Especially the ones,  
That show me how  
I most need to change.

I'm learning to sit with whatever comes  
(Even though I'm a planner).  
Because so much of this life  
Can't be measured or predicted.  
Because wonder and suffering visit  
When we least expect  
And rarely in equal measure.

I'm learning to sit with  
What I might never know  
Might never learn,  
Might never heal.

I'm learning to sit with  
What might waltz in and surprise me,  
Might crash into my days,  
With unspeakable sorrow  
Or uncontainable delight.

I'm learning to sit with not knowing.

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6 Shelah Acker, Uganda (FP)

6 Debbie Kubo, Arlington, TX (CH)

7 Barbara Dail, Greenville, NC (CH)

7 Steven Flowers, Waynesboro, VA (PC)

7 Wyatt Miles, Atlanta, GA (CH)

7 P. Randall Wright, Rockhill, SC (CH)

8 Yesenia Zayas Cruz, Harlingen, TX (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 John Helms, Jefferson, GA (CH)

10 Heather Rothermel-Forrester, Lilburn, GA (CH)

10 Whitney Edwards Russell, Whiteville, NC (CH)

10 Tiffne Whitley, Emeritus (FP)

11 Jamie Rorrer (S-North Carolina)

11 Steven Shaw, Norfolk, VA (CH)

12 Christopher Morris, Winston-Salem, NC (CH)

12 Stacey Pickering, Tyndall AFB, FL (CH)

12 Wendy VanHosen, Suffolk, VA (CH)

**JULY 13**



## **Connect with Nature**

**Scarlette Jasper**

CBF Field Personnel, Corbin, Ky.

### **Psalm 46:10**

Be still, and know that I am God.

The activities and spiritual practices that are life-giving to me at this time revolve around nature. I can get out and go hiking or camping and totally disconnect from my electronics. No cell phone, no computer, no radio, no TV, etc. I can just sit and listen to the sounds of God's creation. I can hear the birds, frogs, crickets, mosquitoes, etc., making a joyful noise into the Lord. I love to be able to hear the ocean or the sound of water rushing over rocks in a nearby stream.

My favorite aspect of being out in nature is sitting by the campfire and listening to the stream or sitting by the lake and feeling the sun on my face and the breeze coming off the water. Those are the times when I feel most connected to God on a very individual and personal level. Those are the times when I can express my joy and revel in the beauty of the Earth that God has created.

Many people can connect with nature. For anyone in ministry, I often recommend taking a walk, planting flowers, listening to the birds, etc., as spiritual practice or a way to experience rest and find peace.

## **Pray, Practice, Ponder**

Today ponder how time in nature brings rest and peace for you. If there is a particular activity you enjoy outside, can you make it a priority in the week ahead?

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14 John Deal, Emeritus (FP)  
14 Denise Massey, Lilburn, GA (CH)  
14 David Stamile, Waco, TX (CH)  
15 Cameron Hunt, Columbus, OH (CH)  
15 Jean Randolph, Swannanoa, NC (CH)  
15 James Tippins, Fernandina Beach, FL (CH)  
16 Amy Blevins, Mountain Home, TN (CH)  
16 Mark Hart, Fair Oaks Ranch, TX (CH)  
16 David McDaniel, Kansas City, MO (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 Luke Tyler Moody, Lexington, KY (CH)  
18 Tom O'Neal, Charlotte, NC (PC)  
18 Collin Wilcox, Lubbock, TX (CH)  
19 Steven Hill, Knoxville, TN (CH)  
19 Jason Pittman, Emeritus (FP)

JULY 20

# Praying in Community

Lynn Hutchinson

CBF Field Personnel, Portugal



## Matthew 18:20

For where two or three are gathered together in my name, I am there among them.

I became part of our small “congregation” when I joined some women for a weekly prayer call more than 10 years ago. The others had been praying together longer than that. There are four of us now and we often give thanks to God, saying that we do not take this gift of time together for granted. When I am absent, I am delighted and reassured to know that they are still praying. When I return, they say, “Lynn’s here!” with a lilt in their voices and my heart gives a little leap of joy.

Decades ago, I lived in the same African country as one of these women. Another was a colleague as we both raised families in Europe. Often, we have gone years without seeing one another. Another woman and I have only been in the same physical space once. Yet I know and love each of these women as family. We may be continents and time-zones apart, but praying together brings us close. I hear the hearts of the others, and I receive grace while listening.

Why are these women and this practice “saving my life”?

- I find **purpose** in praying to support them, their families and others they accompany in life. There are people for whom we have prayed for months or even years.
- I hear their compassion and am **inspired to love others better**.
- Their prayers often reframe situations, leaving me with **new perspectives**.
- Sometimes we need the **strength of friends to help carry a burden**. When words fail me and I don’t know how to pray, they do.
- I can’t do everything by my own strength, and I don’t have to. There is a **reminder of our dependence on God** who is able to do abundantly more than we can imagine.

- Joy is **shared** with friends who rejoice with me and I with them.
- We offer **gratitude for answered prayers**. Those answers don't go unnoticed.
- When they praise God, I receive a reminder of what God is like—not just what God has done for us.
- There is a **focus on the fact that we exist for God and God's greater purposes**. We are privileged to be part of something bigger and more lasting than ourselves.
- I am honored to observe first-hand the deep wells of their faith. As I hear their expressions of faith, my own **faith is renewed and strengthened**.
- We are meant to live in communion with one another and praying together **brings us into God's presence in a fuller way**. "For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them." (Matthew 18:20). Each time, I leave our prayer conversation knowing that God was truly present.

This practice has been a gracious gift from God and these prayer sisters. At different times, this call has provided inspiration and motivation, healing, strength to tackle hard challenges and the encouragement to not give up or the spark of joy and gratitude I carried into the day.

Do you have someone with whom to pray? If not, ask the Lord to guide you to that person.

## Pray, Practice, Ponder

This week, ponder how you find connection and spiritual community. With whom do you pray? How do you reach out for support when you need it? What are the barriers to the practice of leaning into community in a vulnerable way?

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20 Matthew Fuller, Milwaukee, WI, (CH)

20 Tim Mayhall, Dothan, AL (CH)

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 Sara Long, McGregor, TX, (CH)

22 Bonnie Reedy, Lumberton, NC (CH)

23 Butch Green, Emeritus (FP)

23 Mark Traeger, Sumter, SC (CH)

23 Nathanael Blessington Thadikanda,  
Richmond, VA (CH)

24 Glynn Ford, Reston, VA (PC)

24 Jeff Huett (S-CBF Global)

24 Laurel Link, Winston-Salem, NC (PC)

24 Ronald Oliver, Goshen, KY (CH)

24 Casey Ramirez, Philippines (FP)

25 Laura Tadlock, Birmingham, AL (CH)

26 Scott Jensen, Saint Joseph, MO (CH)

26 Rick Sample, San Francisco Bay Area, CA (FP)

JULY 27

## The Old, Old Story

Brittany Caldwell, RN

Minister, Natchez, Miss.



I love to tell the story  
Of unseen things above,  
Of Jesus and His glory,  
Of Jesus and His love.  
I love to tell the story,  
Because I know 'tis true;  
It satisfies my longings  
As nothing else can do.  
I love to tell the story,  
'Twill be my theme in glory  
To tell the old, old story  
of Jesus and His love.

—Katherine Hankey, *I Love to Tell the Story*

I love antiquing. Whether you call it antiquing, thrifting, shopping consignment or my favorite word for this hobby—junkin’—it gives me life. The junkier the store, the better, because I feel like I’m on a treasure hunt as I dig through bins of random odds and ends, work my way through hangers of children’s clothing or lay out a tablecloth on the floor to see what condition it’s in. Whether I actually leave the story with a single purchase or not doesn’t matter; it is the opportunity to peruse these items—each one unique and each one with a story to tell—that saves my life on the days when my own story feels like it’s going nowhere.

My most recent purchase was for a wedding shower I was hosting. I went to my favorite “vintage market” (i.e. junk store) in search of a recipe box. I found an old, ornately carved, wooden box buried under layers of placemats in a China cabinet. When I opened the box, there were a few things inside: a button in the shape of a bee, a lock

that clearly had been used to lock the box once upon a time and a card that said, “Happy anniversary to the one who completes me. Love, Joe. June 10, 1942.” There were also several pieces of torn paper which, when I pieced them back together, said “Happy Easter to my beautiful and sweet wife. I love you. Love, Joe.”

I asked the owner of this particular booth about the box and she said that she had found it at an estate sale and just couldn’t bring herself to dump out the contents. They seemed meaningful, and it felt wrong to part them from the box. When I got home, I painstakingly glued the bee and the lock inside the box, then “mod-podged” the two notes to the lid. It felt like a sacred act. This was someone’s story, someone’s love story, and it was about to be part of a new love story of a couple for whom I cared a great deal. The next day, when I gifted it to the happy couple, the bride cried, telling me that the couple’s one-year anniversary would fall on next Easter. She felt blessed to be a part of the continuation of this story. (Try to buy that at Target!)

Perhaps my penchant for old things with stories comes from my love of the “old, old story, of how a Savior came from glory, how he sought me, and bought me, with his redeeming blood.” In Luke 1, the author writes: “Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word. With this in mind, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, I too decided to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught.”

The Gospel is the greatest story ever told, relayed to us over the course of two millennia by the gospel authors and by a whole community of believers who continued to tell the story to one another. And the story is not yet done; we get to be part of the continuation of that story, a story of love and sacrifice, the conquering of sin and death and of resurrection and hope and new life. It is our sacred calling to learn the story and to preach that story in word and in deed.

May we take the time to painstakingly preserve our story, so that it might continue to be told again and again, generation after generation.

## Pray, Practice, Ponder

Today, ponder how you preserve your story. Do you write or journal? Do you remember important people and moments in photographs sprinkled around your home? Do you collect trinkets or other items of personal or sentimental value? Consider how you claim and celebrate your story and reflect on how your story intertwines with God’s story of the healing of the world.



# DAWNINGS

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27 Peter Ott, Okinawa, Japan (CH)

27 Sandra Smith, Moore, SC (CH)

28 Daniel Fairchild, Panama City, FL (CH)

28 Matthew Greg, Columbia, SC (CH)

29 Wayne Morris, Lawton, OK (CH)

29 William (Butch) Wise, Spokane, WA (CH)

29 Briana Whaley, Palm Harbor, FL (CH)

29 Colin Kroll (S-CBF Global)

29 Karen Morrow, Fort Worth, TX (FP)

30 Paul Byrd, Cumming, GA (CH)

30 James Francovich, Emeritus (FP)

30 Garnett White, Midlothian, VA (PC)

31 Amber Blackwell-Childers, Inman, SC (CH)

31 Brian Foreman (S-CBF Global)

31 Cindy Thorpe, Florence, SC (CH)

31 James Tille, Lakewood, WA (PC)

1 Stephen Saunders, Live Oak, TX (CH)



AUGUST 3



# The Practice of Presence

Tina Boyles Bailey

CBF Field Personnel, Graz, Austria

Love Unleashed  
Love... Freed.  
Boundaries... Broken,  
Bridges... Crossed;  
Walls... Crumble.  
Grace lives in these places,  
allowing us to love  
beyond what we thought was possible;  
allowing us to also be loved by others.  
Risking  
Daring  
Embracing.  
The radical truth of boundless love  
modeled and embodied by Jesus.  
“God in and with us.”  
May I always remember this...  
Love freely and boldly  
for when the source  
love  
is flowing,  
it never dries up.  
Oh, God, even in the darkest of days  
help me to love as you do.

—*Boundless Love* by Rev Dr. Tina Kay Boyles Bailey

What is saving my life right now? Leaning into love, taking time to be truly present in the spaces I am in. It is so easy to disconnect or lose focus on what is around us and to stop seeing when life becomes overwhelming or is not going along in an expected plan. And when I take time to breathe deeply in both the highs and lows of my day, to take a

walk, to look up, to just sit alone or to be in conversation with another person without a plan or agenda or in being truly being present, leaning in. Love just gets unleashed in my soul. It was from one of those times that I wrote the poem above.

## Pray, Practice, Ponder

Take a few moments to take some deep peaceful breaths and think through your day, reflecting on the highs and lows. Then imagine bringing them together as you hold them in your hands. And when you are ready take another deep breath, as you exhale, imagine letting those moments go with boundless love making space for what comes next. This is from a spiritual practice called the examen.

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3 Mary Ellen Yates, Louisville, KY (PC)

3 Mina Podgaisky, Poland (FP)

3 David Wirth, Mt. Orab, OH (CH)

4 Lindsey Moser, Colorado Springs, CO (CH)

4 Paisley, 2012, Southeast Asia (FPC)

4 Mark Pruitt, Martinsburg, WV (CH)

4 Diane Stamey, Clyde, NC (PC)

5 Susan Allen, Midway, KY (CH)

5 Charles Hamilton, Stone Mountain, GA (CH)

5 Ronald Howard, Tuscaloosa, AL (CH)

5 Donald Lederer, Kingsport, TN (CH)

5 Mary, Southeast Asia (FP)

5 John Oliver, Durham, NC (CH)

5 Tiffany Seaford, Charlotte, NC

6 Larry Hamm, Greenwood, IN (CH)

6 Deborah Jenkins, Colorado Springs, CO  
(CH-Ret.)

7 Merrie Harding, Emeritus (FP)

8 Janée Angel, Belgium (FP)

8 LuAnne Prevost, Knoxville, TN (CH)

9 Sarah Roome, Greer, SC (CH)



# The Practice of Table Fellowship

**Alice Tremaine**

Chaplain and Advance Care Planning  
Coordinator, Baptist Health, Kentucky and  
Indiana

## Psalm 23:4-5a

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.

I've always been struck by the contrasts depicted in the 23rd Psalm: A prepared table and an overflowing cup, in the presence of danger, or enemies. Who has the gumption to enjoy an extravagant meal while staring at one's mortal enemy?

There's nothing I enjoy more than sitting at a table and sharing a meal with dear friends. I love a beautifully decorated table, generous portions of food and the merry sound of laughter among friends. It is this kind of table that I imagine when I read this psalm—an abundantly and artfully prepared table, situated among friends whose hearts overflow with joy, just as their cups overflow.

Yet, in that same image, I am suddenly aware that a threat looms just across the table, in the figure of a present enemy. Surprisingly, the party doesn't stop. The guests feel the tension, the juxtaposition between joy and fear, celebration and the threat of loss, and continue to allow their cups to be filled.

Like the psalmist, I am all too aware that life is full of contradictions and unpredictable changes. One moment, we are lying down in green pastures and resting beside quiet waters, and the next moment, we are walking through the valley of the shadow of death. In both my ministerial calling as a chaplain and in my personal life, I have experienced

the complex truth that life can be beautiful, rich, exhilarating and also extremely painful, sometimes all at once.

When my father was diagnosed with ALS, a terminal illness, many years ago, I felt that all the easiness and joy I had experienced in life were over. Life as I knew it would never be the same. All the color had drained from my life; from then on, my life would be forever divided between before and after the diagnosis, and the associated losses that would follow.

I was surprised to find that, eventually, my heart was still able to hold both joy and pain, sometimes at the same time. While my life has indeed changed, it is not without color.

What saved my life then and is saving my life now is the community around the table—filling each other’s cups, passing the bread around, allowing conversation and laughter to flow easily, all while having the courage to look fear in the face together.

The table is always set before us, lavishly prepared by God, even in the presence of danger or loss. May we dare to enter into community, experiencing the fullness of God’s goodness and mercy our whole lives long.

## Pray, Practice, Ponder

This week, consider gathering with friends or family around the table, sharing one another’s stories of pain and loss, and “filling each other’s cups”—both physically and spiritually.

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10 Megan Doud (S-Georgia)  
10 Javier Perez (S-CBF Global)  
10 Elliott Sample, 2004, San Francisco, CA (FPC)  
10 Nicholas Wright, Ft. Campbell, KY (CH)  
11 Robbie Byrd, Fayetteville, NC (PC)  
11 Rachel Greco (S-Georgia)  
11 Justin Murphy, Leesburg, FL (CH)  
11 Karen Rector, San Diego, CA (CH)  
12 Charline Berry, Baltimore, MD (CH)  
13 Stephanie Bohannon, Pinehurst, NC (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)  
14 Lou Ann Gilliam (S-North Carolina)  
14 Mike, Southeast Asia (FP)  
14 Stella Perrin, Cyprus (FP)  
15 Daniel Shadix, Prattville, AL (CH)  
16 Don McNeely, Emeritus (FP)



## Forest Bathing

**Jessica Hearne**

CBF Field Personnel, Danville, Va.

“The sun shines not on us but in us. The rivers flow not past, but through us. Thrilling, tingling, vibrating every fiber and cell of the substance of our bodies, making them glide and sing. The trees wave and the flowers bloom in our bodies as well as our souls, and every bird song, wind song, and tremendous storm song of the rocks in the heart of the mountains is our song, our very own, and sings our love.”

—John Muir

I don't sit still well and never really have. I have always gravitated toward work that would keep me on my feet and constantly moving. In my work with the church at Grace and Main, I am out and about all the time—managing the Urban Farm, helping people with transportation, picking up and delivering donated items. By the time I finally sit down in the evening, I am often surprised by how sore my feet are. I love to be moving and doing!

When it comes to the parts of my work that are less active, it is sometimes difficult to convince my mind and body to stop moving. Whether it's returning phone calls, submitting financial statements or sending quick emails, the transition to stillness is jarring, and I find myself making an excuse to get up and move around every so often to try to clear my head. During these times when the need to be still is too overwhelming, I take some time to go outside.

Recently, I learned the term “forest bathing,” which I find very intriguing. The idea comes from Japan, where people started practicing it in the 1980s as a way to fight burnout in a society that was increasingly technology and achievement oriented. The term describes a practice of immersing oneself in a forest, connecting with creation through mindfulness practice while surrounded by greenery. I didn't know the term until recently, but as soon as I learned about this practice, I immediately believed in the validity of it. After all, I believe that my own desire to go outside comes from the need to connect with my Creator by being among creation.

So, when I am feeling overwhelmed—when my thoughts are jumbled and my body can't be still—I step outside. Even just five minutes among the flowers and birds in my own front yard will help me feel grounded and clear my head. When life and work are overwhelming and I need to take time to listen for the voice of God, I take a walk on a nature trail or along the river that winds through our city. The smell of honeysuckle, the sight of deer and groundhogs, the sounds of rushing water, all proclaim the glory of God. They are a reminder of the words of the prophet Isaiah: “For you shall go out in joy, and be led back in peace; the mountains and the hills before you shall burst into song, and the trees of the fields shall clap their hands.” (Is. 55:12 NRSV).

## Pray, Practice, Ponder

This week, try on the spiritual practice of forest bathing. You can do this in a park near your home, in your yard if you have one or even on a tree-lined city street. Step outside and immerse yourself in the world around you with all of your senses. Take off your shoes, if you are able, and walk through grass. Touch your hands to the trunk of a tree. Smell a leaf or flower. Soak up the energy of the natural world.

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18 Anyra Cano (S-Fellowship Southwest)

18 Peggy Foskett (S-Kentucky)

18 Thomas Riley, Wilson, NC (CH)

19 David Turner (S-CBF Global)

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 Bradley Boberg (S-CBF Global)

22 Sharondalyn Dupree, Sacramento, CA (CH)

22 Daniel Hix, Maryville, TN (CH)

22 Delores Stimpson, Durham, NC (FP)

22 William Thompson, Los Alamitos, CA (CH)

22 Mark Wagner, Vashon, WA, (CH)

23 Mike Bumgarner, Norman, OK (CH)

23 Keith Little, New Bern, NC (CH)

23 Allen Williams, Emeritus (FP)

23 Marc Wyatt, Raleigh, NC (FP)

# Not Alone: Beloved Community Continued

August 24 - September 21

“The soul is like a wild animal—tough, resilient, savvy, self-sufficient and yet exceedingly shy. If we want to see a wild animal, the last thing we should do is to go crashing through the woods, shouting for the creature to come out. But if we are willing to walk quietly into the woods and sit silently for an hour or two at the base of a tree, the creature we are waiting for may well emerge, and out of the corner of an eye we will catch a glimpse of the precious wildness we seek. Unfortunately, community in our culture too often means a group of people who go crashing through the woods together, scaring the soul away...”

—Parker Palmer, *A Hidden Wholeness*

“Beloved community is formed not by the eradication of difference but by its affirmation, by each of us claiming the identities and cultural legacies that shape who we are and how we live in the world.”

—Bell Hooks, *Killing Rage: Ending Racism*

The following reflections explore the close relationships in our circles of friends and family that are places of refuge, authenticity, support and joy.

**AUGUST 24**



# The Gift of Grandchildren

**Greg and Sue Smith**

CBF Field Personnel, Carthage, Ark.

## **Ruth 1:16**

But Ruth replied, “Don’t urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God.”

Have you ever found yourself staring at something—or someone—so intently that, without realizing it, you were crying? It could be a beautiful landscape vista that created in you an amazing sense of awe. Or a masterful painting that penetrated your soul more deeply than anything ever had before. Or an act of kindness so genuine and compassionate that it reminded you, despite humanity’s waywardness, that God did pronounce our creation to be “very good.”

I have. I recently found myself brushing away a tear. It happened when I beheld, as if for the first time, the gift of my grandchild. Just the thought of that moment even now brings tremendous life, joy and peace to my soul.

Sue and I have six grandchildren, each a gift of salvation. Together, a gift more wonderful than words can describe. A gift that saves me time and again.

Whether my gift comes...

- When one of my grandchildren cries out “Pappa” or “Abuelo” (I go by both!); or
- When I kneel next to the younger grandchildren and watch the helicopters and airplanes take off and land at the local airport; or
- When I hang a picture on our wall or a drawing created with care on our refrigerator; or
- When I toss a ball or shoot hoops and we talk about the day; or
- When I watch them play with their friends with such joy and enthusiasm; or
- When I hold our youngest in my arms and gaze at a big, toothless smile looking back...



It's all the same. Each is a precious, wonderful and joyful gift from a loving and saving God.

The biblical Ruth couldn't contemplate life without her family. That is the essence of her plea to her mother-in-law Naomi not to send her away. While I cannot "cling to" my grandchildren as Ruth clung to Naomi, I share her sentiment of life as unbearable apart from the ones who give meaning and joy to our own.

If I had enough space here, I would also include Sue, my children, my parents, my sister and her family and others as God's gifts of salvation in my life.

But the faces, smiles, laughter, silliness—even the mischievousness—of my grandchildren signify at this stage of my life a vital, yea critical, way God is saving me.

*¡A Dios sea la gloria!*

—Greg

## Pray, Practice, Ponder

Who or what brings so much joy to your life that imaging it moves you to tears? Today, ponder how God might be using this gift as a part of God's salvation, your restoration and your wholeness.

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24 Timothy Boschen, Waynesboro, VA (CH)

24 Craig Klempnauer, Hewitt, TX (CH)

24 Brian Wilson, Louisville, KY (CH)

25 Arville Earl, Emeritus (FP)

25 Robert McMillan, Oklahoma City, OK (CH)

25 Megan Pike, La Crosse, WI (CH)

26 LaToya McLean, Wilmington, NC (CH)

26 Cindy Ruble, Southeast Asia (FP)

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 Teresa Darnell, Louisville, TN (CH)

30 Christiana Liem, Houston, TX (CH)

30 Stacey Painter, Charleston, SC (CH)

**AUGUST 31**

# The Gift of Connection

**Kelly Adams**

CBF Director of Clergy Support



## **Matthew 18:20**

For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them.

It seems silly to type it, let alone say it aloud, but what is saving my life right now is my cell phone. I refuse to leave home without it, and not just because I need the maps app frequently to help get me around in an area in which I've lived less than a year. I don't leave home without my cell phone because it is my connection to those whom I hold most dear.

It is the way I hear the voices of my husband and son when I travel, which is often. Hearing their voices is reassuring and grounding when I'm in the chaos of an airport or missing morning snuggles. It is a gift to stay attuned to the daily lives of the two people I love most in the world.

It is also the way I stay connected to my oldest and dearest friends. There's a WhatsApp thread through which five of us who have known each other at least since high school message daily. The subject varies; some are messages about the joys and challenges of motherhood and work; but more often they're memes about getting older or growing up in the 80s and 90s. Our connection is life-giving because it is to people with whom I can be my most genuine self. There are other folks with whom I stay connected mostly through my phone: a few former coworkers who are dear friends, the matron of honor from my wedding, and my mom, who can never have enough pictures of her grandson.

My phone is also how I stay connected to co-workers through text threads that serve primarily to help one another and think together. These threads can and often do digress into humor that is often well-timed and much-needed. It is a crucial link to each other when we're traveling separately and when very few people around us understand the nuances of our work.

So, it's not the cell phone that is saving me after all; it's the connection it provides to the rooted relationships I need to truly thrive both personally and professionally. What and who are the connections that are saving you?

## Pray, Practice, Ponder

Gracious God, You are generous to place in our lives people who reveal something of your goodness and grace. Whether it's one person or 20, we are grateful for the rooted relationships that reach out or answer at just the right time, reminding us we are loved and giving us hope when we most need it. For these friends and loved ones, we give you thanks and praise. Amen.

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31 Marie Gordon, Atlanta GA (CH)

31 Karr La Dickens, Emeritus (FP)

31 Barbara Miller, Vero Beach, FL (CH)

31 Cecelia Walker, Birmingham, AL (CH)

1 Reginald Bradley, San Francisco, CA (CH)

1 Julie Cadenhead, Pensacola, FL (CH)

1 Terry Eddinger, Winston-Salem, NC (CH)

1 Lucy Hearne, 2013, Danville, VA (FPC)

1 Bisser Ovcharov, Houston, TX (CH)

1 Ralph Stocks, Emeritus (FP)

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)

5 Eddie Aldape, Spain (FP)

5 Kelly Belcher, Asheville, NC (CH)

5 Roger Benimoff, Grand Prairie, TX (CH)

5 Becky Brannon, Gainesville, GA (CH)

5 David Brown, Emeritus (FP)

5 David D'Amico, Emeritus (FP)

5 Alexandria Geovanni, Lake Charles, LA (CH)

6 Valerie Caldwell, Stone Mountain, GA (CH)

6 Carla Cherry, Worthington, OH (CH)

6 Ellen Di Giosia (S-Texas)

6 Daniel Edward Tatum, Marietta, GA (CH)

6 David Stone (S-North Carolina)

## Who Has Your Ear?

### Adrian J. Bullock

Triangle Area Campus Minister, CBF of North Carolina



#### 2 Timothy 2:6-7

For this reason, I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands. For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline.

During my sophomore year of high school, my social studies teacher told our class that in order to know your future, you must first know your past. In the same way, to know what is saving my life now requires me to look back at what has saved me up to this point. And when reviewing my life, the words of the late Dr. Haywood T. Gray come to mind. My life has been nothing but the “unseen hand of God” directing, navigating and propelling me to where I am today.

#### What has saved me?

- **My mother’s prayer** when I was a newborn baby that could fit in the palm of her hand. I was born three months prematurely and the outcomes of my life and my mother’s life were uncertain. My oldest sister had died three years earlier during another risky birth incident. However, alone in her hospital room, my mother recalled telling God: “God, I’m giving him to you.” And ever since that day, I know that God has been with me.
- **My grandmother’s words of encouragement** to a little six-year-old boy struggling to learn on his grade-level. At that time, I can recall being taken out of the regular classroom with all my friends and walking into a very small, dimly-lit room every week. And in this room, one-on-one with a remedial teacher, I would work to learn how to sound out words and put sentences together correctly. Each evening, I would go to my grandmother’s home after school and, as I sat at her kitchen table trying to do homework that felt too challenging for me, I told her, “Grandma, I can’t do this.” Hearing this led her to respond quickly by saying, “Don’t you ever say you can’t. You can do anything if you’re willing to work hard for it.” And then she

went into her room, pulled out her Bible and taught me my first memory verse, Philippians 4:13, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”

- **The Christian Church.** From my childhood I have had a deep love for the church, begging my mother to take me there. Finally, my grandparents, and eventually my grandmother and mother combined, took on the responsibility of making sure I was involved in church life. To some, I was a bit awkward. I never wore the newest clothes or held the latest cellphone; but I had a love for things like public speaking and history. I was bullied often from elementary through high school because of my interests. In addition to this, I often avoided in my studies things like English and Spanish because I found no joy in them. Middle school was a place I dreaded going, week-after-week, because I felt I didn’t belong. However, if I could just make it to the weekend and be a part of the church community, I knew that I could go to the place where I felt generally accepted and affirmed.
- **Real genuine friends.** I made it to college, even though I was not the best student in high school. I enjoyed my college experience because I knew that this was where I would receive the tools I needed to get where I wanted to go in life, which was to serve in ministry. My friends, while diverse in their desires of college life, for some reason always had my back. And even in times that I wanted to quit or I started questioning my calling or who I was, they always encouraged me to press on.
- **Real invested mentors.** Whether in ministry, guidance or just a listening ear, God has sent people such as my pastor, other ministers, coaches, influential professors and advisors who wanted to see the best from me. They see in me what I often cannot see in myself, pushing me further when I feel like I’ve given it my all. They encourage me to continue to grow and mature everyday as a person. Without their investment, I am not sure where I would be today.
- **My wife.** Even as that awkward school kid, I prayed to be able to one day marry someone with passion, the desire to build and leave a legacy and with a heart driven by their love for Almighty God. My wife, Aneika, has become my best friend in life, my listening ear and my eyes that are able to see around the blinders in life.
- **God.** Because without God, I would not have survived to see the last 28 years of my life. It is to God to whom I owe the greatest portion of my gratitude.

**The totality of what has saved my life up to this point is what is saving my life right now.** One question I have been asking myself recently is, “Who has your ear?” To whom do I listen who has the ability to steer me one way or another? What is saving me right now are the people who have my ear. God-sent people who care not only about the image I share in public, but about the struggles I may deal with privately. People who can see past the title “reverend” or “pastor” and who can see me authentically as “Adrian.” People on whom I can call during my “midnight of the soul” experiences. People who care enough to tell me the truth—even in moments where I honestly don’t want to hear it. When I look back on this present time, just as I have over the last 28 years of my life, I will be able to see all of the things from which I have been saved and the good things to which I have been pushed because of the people who have my ear.

# Pray, Ponder and Practice

Today, as you seek to fulfill whatever tasks have been assigned to you, I invite you to **pray** for God to put the right people in your life—God-sent people who bring out the best in you and want to see the spirit of God working through you. I also invite you to **ponder** on who currently “has your ear.” Who are the people to whom you actively listen? Are they helping to pull out the best in you, or are their words hindering you from fulfilling your God-given potential? I also invite you to **practice** discernment. Ask yourself if you need to make some changes in the circle of those who have influence over you.

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S = CBF Staff Member

7 Martha Harper, Madison, MS (CH)

7 Lee Hendricks, Greenville, NC (CH)

7 Lita Sample, San Francisco, CA (FP)

8 Daniel Hall, Pineville, KY (CH)

8 Jody Harrison, Dallas, TX (CH)

8 Chad Mustian, Dallas, TX (CH)

8 Kristen Pierce, Lilburn, GA (CH)

9 Brett Barber, Durham, NC (CH)

9 Rhonda James-Jones, Hiram, GA (CH)

10 Tashara Boochee, San Francisco, CA (CH)

10 Nancy Campbell, Kansas City, MO (CH)

10 Sarah Montoya, 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)



## Spiritual Friendship

Bev and Woody Baker

CBF Field Personnel, Ahoskie, N.C.

### Proverbs 17:17

A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity.

Starting a Christian Men's Job Corps ministry at 64 is daunting. But there is no doubt the Lord is bringing about this opportunity. Cooperative Baptist Fellowship has provided the practical help needed. Through CBF's Global Service Corps, health insurance is available and financial partners can get involved. Field personnel, Anna and LaCount Anderson, provide years of experience in poverty ministry and have been a consistent source of ministry advice. Pat Byrd and her team of women volunteers have 12 years of experience with the Roanoke Chowan Christian Women's Job Corps. We witnessed their success and knew the program had the potential to expand and be adapted for a Men's Corps.

Despite these assurances that God was at work, I was daunted by the energy needed to begin a new corps. This was made apparent at the site coordinator training held by the Woman's Missionary Union. The ministry framework that WMU has designed over the years was very detailed and reassuring. The immense task of building the foundation for the Men's Corps was laid before me. Where should I start?

It was then that the Lord sent me a friend. Rev. Roy Faison moved into the same office to begin his own chaplaincy ministry. Equipped with the gift of encouragement, Rev. Roy came alongside me to offer a listening ear, a wise observation and a timely pat on the back. He is a consistent presence and was there to assist with setting up a game plan and offering advice when asked.

But what I appreciate most about Rev. Roy is having a brother in Christ to speak words of life into the everyday. Whenever I am expressing my frustration or fear for the next challenge, Rev. Roy has a verse or two to share. We read together, discuss the meaning and the application to the situation. Inevitably, we hear from God. Through our

dialogue we are encouraged or get affirmation for a way to proceed in the particular circumstances of the day.

Rev. Roy has been a life-giving friend. His dedication to scripture and unwavering belief that God's Word holds the truth to guide us through our daily journeys has kept me grounded in Jesus, our life-saver. What a gift a brother in Christ can be in these days of stepping out in faith.

—Woody

## Pray, Practice, Ponder

Who in your life is a spiritual friend? Who arrived in your life at just the right moment, to offer encouragement, wisdom and Christ-like presence?

### Birthdays this Week:

CH = Chaplain

EP = Engagement Partner

FP = Field Personnel

FPC = Child of Field Personnel

PC = Pastoral Counselor

S = CBF Staff Member

14 Hephzibah James Chetepally,  
Augusta, GA (CH)

14 Bart Grooms, Birmingham, AL (PC)

14 Priscilla Howick, Jacksonville, FL (CH)

15 Brandy Mullins, Manvel, TX (CH)

16 Dick Allison, Hattiesburg, MS (CH)

16 Matthew Dinkins, Matthews, NC (CH)

16 Jeff Ellison, Heath, TX (CH)

16 Debbie Haag (S-South Carolina)

16 Karen Heistand, Rochester, MN (CH)

16 Byron Johnson, Paris Island, SC (CH)

17 Angela Clark, Matthews, NC (CH)

17 Jean Craddock, Lexington, KY (PC)

17 Tammy Latimer, Springfield, MO (CH)

17 Elket Rodríguez, Harlingen, TX (FP)

17 George Rossi, Charleston, SC (CH)

17 I. Malik Saafir, Nashville, TN (CH)

18 Mark Johnston, Augusta, GA (CH)

18 Jenni Summer Shannon (S-Kentucky)

19 Cari Willis, Benson, NC (CH)

20 David Bluford, Lenoir City, TN (CH)

20 Heidi Dechow, Salisbury, NC (CH)

20 Katherine Moneyppenny, Douglas, GA (CH)

20 Renée Owen (S-CBF Global)

20 Adam Ridenhour, Winston Salem, NC (CH)





## Worship and Prayer

Janée Angel

CBF Field Personnel, Antwerp, Belgium

“He does not ask much of us, merely a thought of Him from time to time, a little act of adoration, sometimes to ask for His grace, sometimes to offer Him your sufferings, at other times to thank Him for the graces, past and present, He has bestowed on you, in the midst of your troubles to take solace in Him as often as you can. Lift up your heart to Him during your meals and in company; the least little remembrance will always be the most pleasing to Him. One need not cry out very loudly; He is nearer to us than we think.”

—Brother Lawrence, *The Practice of the Presence of God*

As much as a life spent serving others is a blessing, over the last year we have also felt the heavy weight of this life. As we connect with others, it involves trust and vulnerability. Relationship involves risk. And in only a moment, that can all be broken.

We have experienced partnerships that have ended in pain. We have seen many walk away from a life in Christ. And we have felt the fatigue of ministry. And in the midst of all the hurt, we are sure that the Lord has us here in this place for this time. And just when we feel like we have no more to give, we see someone decide to follow Jesus. We get to walk with people longing to learn to serve the Lord. Or we meet new ministry partners willing to risk it all to work together because we whole-heartedly believe that God has called us to work in community.

And so, to answer the question of what is saving my life right now seems relatively easy to answer. My answer is prayer and worship.

A life connected to the Lord is one that is bathed in prayer. There are moments when life seems overwhelming, and I simply breathe my prayers. I inhale the love of God and exhale the hurt and pain that I feel. I breathe until I feel God’s hand on me and the stress begins to melt away.

There are other moments that I sit with our daughters and pray through the questions of the examen. For what am I thankful today? Where did I see God at work today? And where do I still need God to intervene in my life right now? All of these questions help our daughters and me to recognize how God is actively at work in and through us.

And then I worship. As a former music teacher, I often say that music is my other language (besides English, French, Dutch and Arabic). It is the language that connects me to the throne room of heaven. And I believe that worship adds light to the atmosphere. When I am tired, worship gives me energy. When I am sad, it brings healing. And when I am joyful, it fills me with thanksgiving.

My lifeline now and always is to sit in the presence of the Father. It allows me space to come with an honest heart and a pure song and find comfort and peace in the only One who can offer the lasting kind.

## Pray, Practice, Ponder

Today, practice dwelling in the presence of God in a way that feels authentic to you. Perhaps through music and worship you might spend time with God, or by identifying a “breath prayer” to carry with you through your day. Or, you can use as a guide the following examen prayer questions: What am I thankful for today? Where did I see God at work today? And where do I still need God to intervene in my life right now? Take a moment to reignite and celebrate how God is actively at work in and through your life and offer gratitude to God for this divine companionship and provision.

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21 Mark Flores, Lynchburg, VA (CH)  
21 Finnley Ramirez, 2019, Philippines (FPC)  
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 Phineas Marr, New Orleans, LA (CH)  
24 Laura Popa, Saginaw, MI (CH)  
24 Juniper Ramirez, 2015, Philippines (FPC)  
24 William Stewart, Norfolk, VA (CH)  
25 Durrell Brown, Powder Springs, GA (CH)  
25 Angel Pittman, Emeritus (FP)

26 Randy Brookshire, Greenville, SC (CH)  
26 Sunny Mitchell, New Orleans, LA (CH)  
26 Keith Parker, Brevard, NC (PC)  
26 Beth Sexton, Lincolnton, 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 Nicole Farrar, Norfolk, VA, (CH)  
27 Peggy Johnson, Hurst, TX (CH)  
28 Jonathan Amaya, Houston, TX (CH)  
28 Beverly Baker, Ahoskie, NC (GSC)  
28 Renate Krukalis, Braselton, GA (CH)



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Isaiah 43:19





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