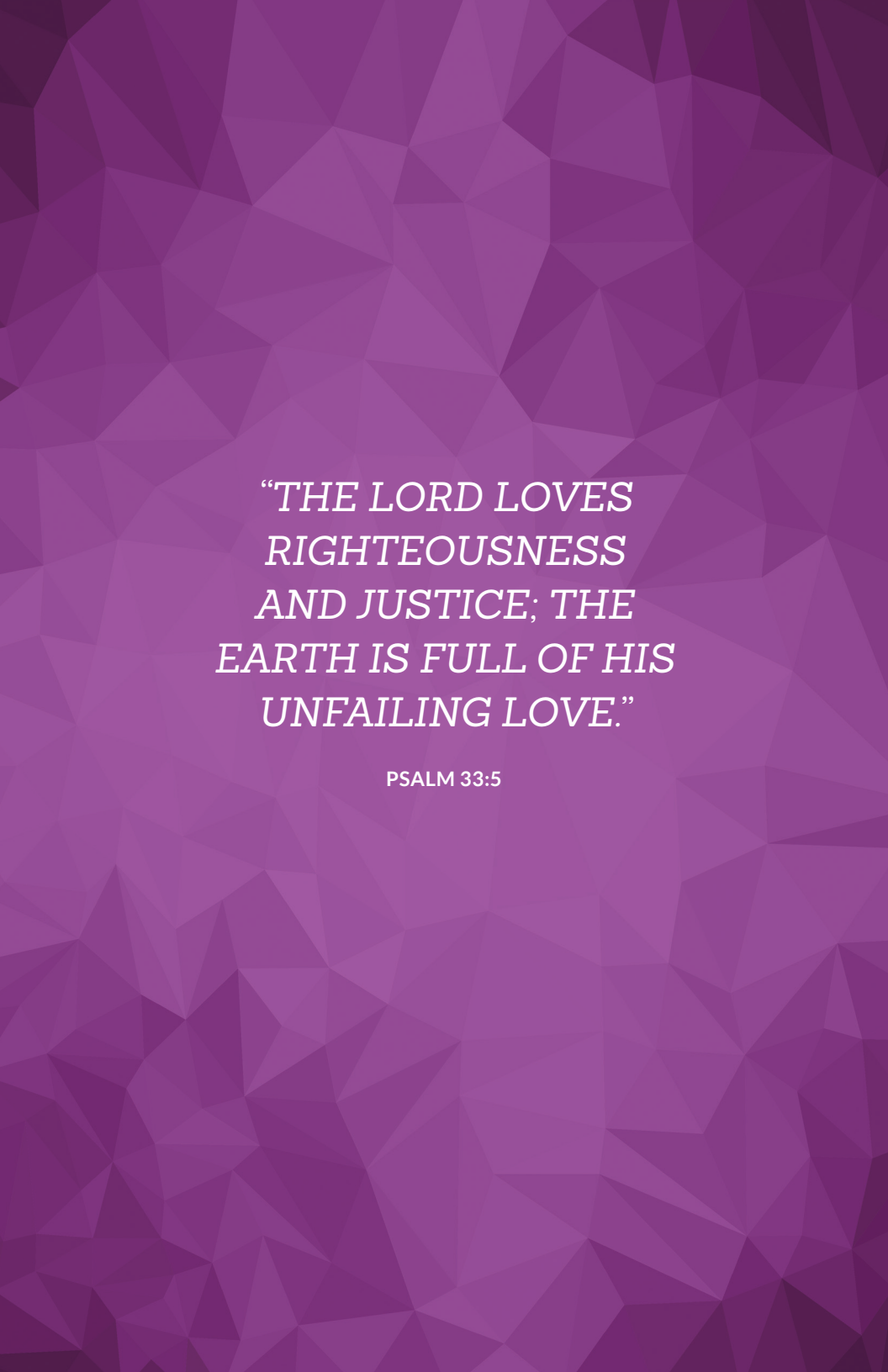


40 DAYS

OF FAITH
AND HOPE
IN ACTION

A Christ-Centred, Spirit-Empowered,
Mission-Focused Devotional Journey

The background of the entire image is a complex, low-poly geometric pattern in various shades of purple. The pattern consists of numerous triangles and polygons of different sizes, creating a textured, crystalline effect. The colors range from deep, dark purples to lighter, more vibrant hues, giving the background a sense of depth and movement.

*“THE LORD LOVES
RIGHTEOUSNESS
AND JUSTICE; THE
EARTH IS FULL OF HIS
UNFAILING LOVE.”*

PSALM 33:5

A Devotional Journey into God's Heart for Justice and Compassion

Whenever you embark upon a journey, it is always wise to have a clear destination in mind. Even though journeys can take some very interesting detours, a clear focus of where you want to eventually end up is essential. The family of The Christian and Missionary Alliance in Canada (C&MA) continues on a significant journey together. Our deepest passion is to reach the nations of the world with the compassion and love of Jesus Christ, not only to care for their physical and emotional needs, but also to see doors open to speak to the heart of their spiritual emptiness. From the very beginning, our founder, A.B. Simpson, articulated a simple but profound message. He declared, **The mission of the Alliance has ever been extremely simple. It is to make the Lord Jesus Christ real, and encourage His people to receive Him in all His fullness, and to give Him speedily to the lost world.** This remains our destination today.

God is calling us into a renewed commitment to be a Christ-centred, Spirit-empowered and Mission-focused movement. The design of this devotional journey is to rivet our focus on the destination: to live dynamic Christ-centred lives, to experience the fullness of the Holy Spirit, who renovates our character and invigorates our gifts and ministries, and to motivate us to risk it all to be on mission to reach the least-reached peoples of the world. I am convinced that as you embark upon this journey, God-given dreams, visions and passions will be unleashed with life-transforming power. We are living in some of the most turbulent times in human history; yet, in the midst of it all, a new openness and deep desperation for hope has emerged. This is our moment. This is our call. This is our destination. Join the journey.

Blessings,



David Hearn
President
The Christian and Missionary Alliance

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Be Still and Wait

Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him... — PSALM 37:7

In North America, being still is something that evades us. Our 24/7, goal-oriented pace devalues stillness. We pride ourselves on being “busy.” The scary thing is, based on Scriptural admonitions and practices of our forefathers, busyness is far from being a sign of well-being.

While it is hard to be still at the best of times, it is harder to be still when we are in rough times. Psalm 37 addresses the seasons in which we find ourselves facing injustice, when we feel people are getting away with things, well-meaning or not. A mixture of indignation and anxiety rises up, and we want to fix it within ourselves. It is at this time that God says, “Be still and wait for me to act.” King David wrote Psalm 37 most likely in the later years of his life when he was familiar with injustice and having to navigate emotions of anger, betrayal and confusion.

Too often in the Christian life, negative emotion is written off as a no-no and something to be rid of; however, this is not what the Bible teaches. God made us emotional beings, so we cannot just stop our feelings. The words given here are quite interesting. “Be still” in Hebrew is translated as “rest”; however, “wait patiently” is translated as “severe pain, anguish, writhing, suffering torture.” In essence, this admonition is really saying, “Trust God to act on your behalf while you wrestle through your emotions and anxieties.” God knows our frame and how we’re wired. Maturity as a believer is not pushing down your uncomfortable emotions or letting them rule you; it is owning them and, one by one, placing them in God’s hands. Sit back and rest in him; it will bring glory to his name.

FURTHER SCRIPTURE REFLECTION: PSALM 37

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. If you’re in this place today, take a few moments to quiet your heart. Ask the Spirit to help you identify your feelings. One by one, place them at his feet as an act of your will to wait for him.
2. How will I praise and serve God during this waiting period?

Kathy Klassen was raised in Ethiopia as a daughter of missionaries. She now serves at First Alliance Church in Scarborough, ON and ministers to people in the Spirit’s power to encourage an abundant life in Jesus.

Choose Courage

... Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go. — JOSHUA 1:9

Courage, slightly different from heroics, is a frightening word. More often than not, the heroic deed is inspired by a matter of impulse. There is little time for thought; afterwards, heroes are found processing what just happened.

Courage, on the other hand, counts the cost, faces the fear and does it anyway.

Courageous people are always heroes because they are not moved by a sudden impulse. I've lived through times when bullets were flying and beatings were threatened. Truth be told, I didn't choose those occasions, nor was I courageous. Forced courage is different from chosen courage. Most people don't think about courage, yet many decide to face hardships rather than quit. Many choose to battle through adversity rather than abandon their responsibilities. Think of the choice Jesus had in the Garden of Gethsemane.

Life requires choices. The Bible extends numerous opportunities to choose wisely. The weak are beaten down by life. They live in their regrets, wallow in their need, whine in their excuses and are often bitter, resenting hardship, people and, ultimately, God.

If there is anything praiseworthy, choose to dwell in those thoughts. Choose to resist bitterness from laying roots in your soul.

Everyone has enough hardships in life to be overwhelmed and succumb to bitterness; however, Jesus offers us the option to love. Any one of us can allow our thoughts to flow through the gutters and sewers of life. Jesus invites us to identify the waste in our lives when purity is squandered on lust or greed or anger. Acting on this challenge requires courage.

Abundant living isn't for the weak of heart. We can choose the easy, the alluring and the comfortable, but it results in a weakened individual. Society needs those who choose right over easy, pure over alluring, best over comfortable. Society needs the courageous.

FURTHER SCRIPTURE REFLECTION: PHILIPPIANS 4:8

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Based on Philippians 4:8, decide how Paul's counsel will influence the choices you face today.
2. Pray for the Holy Spirit to give you Christ-like courage.

David Collins was raised in Vietnam as a son of missionaries. Based on lessons learned as a pastor, missionary, educator, international development worker and senior executive, he founded Paradigm Ministries in 2007. Discover more at paradigmministries.ca.

Never Alone

Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." — MATTHEW 28:18–20

In response to the Lord's command to make disciples of all nations, I find myself living in Niger, West Africa, working among a people group who know little or nothing about Jesus.

I recently spent a night in a village on my way to a remote location where I had been invited to share the Gospel with a group of women who were inquiring about the "Jesus road." I stared up at the star-spotted sky as I prayed about the next day, marvelling at the God who created all that twinkling brilliance. I felt so small and insignificant as I remembered the psalmist's declaration that God "stoops down to look on the heavens" (Psalm 113:6). He stoops to look at what is so incredibly vast to me!

Then I was struck again with the wonder of the name Emmanuel—God with us! This God, whose enormity I cannot begin to grasp, is with me! He has promised to stay with me as I carry out his command to make disciples among a Muslim people group on the edge of the Sahara Desert.

This is what distinguishes Christianity from every other world religion. All the others require human effort that may or may not grant a person entrance into a better place for eternity; but our God, knowing our efforts at righteousness amount to a pile of dirty rags, came to us (Isaiah 64:6). To those who believe, he gave the right to become his sons and daughters (John 1:12), and Jesus promises to be with those believers until the end of the age.

His presence enables me to obey his command to make other disciples who will, in turn, revel in his presence.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. What difference does the promise of Jesus' presence make in my day-to-day life?
2. How am I obeying Jesus' commandment to make disciples of all nations? Is there something that he is asking me to do that I am resisting?

Lisa Rohrick is an International Worker with the C&MA in Niger, West Africa, one of the world's poorest countries.

Noticing the Spirit

He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith, and a great number of people were brought to the Lord. — ACTS 11:24

Barnabas is the unsung hero of the early Church. He is introduced to us in Acts 4:36 as someone who is committed to the radical ideals of communal life in the early Church. Next, he appears as the one who understands that Saul, soon to be Paul, has had an encounter with Jesus; and while the church in Jerusalem fears him due to his past life as a persecutor of the Church, Barnabas understands that God has placed his hand on Saul and helps him integrate into the life and mission of the early church. When the Spirit was doing something unique in Antioch, Barnabas was dispatched to see what was going on. Barnabas discerned the amazing work of God and equipped and empowered this fledgling group of new Christians. When the early church was engaged in a divisive debate over the nature of salvation and how it related to Gentiles, Barnabas advocated for the Gentiles, going against years of tradition in order to make the Gospel more accessible to all people.

Barnabas was a “noticer.” He had a genuine ability to notice where God was at work. Whether it was a new initiative of the Spirit, a doctrinal issue that needed to be sorted out or a person who needed to be encouraged and empowered, Barnabas was sensitive to where the Spirit was at work, and he was determined to help facilitate that work. As such, he played a key role in the unfolding of God’s story. Are you a “noticer”? Are you trying to actively discern where God is at work? As you notice where God is at work, you can help empower the Church to pursue God’s mission in our day.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Where am I noticing the work of the Spirit these days? How can I encourage the Spirit’s work in that context?
2. Is there someone I know who could use my encouragement in their ministry today? How is the Spirit prompting me to respond to their need?

Lee Beach is an Assistant Professor of Christian Ministry and Director of Ministry Formation at McMaster Divinity College in Hamilton, ON. Lee served in pastoral ministry with the C&MA for twenty-two years and is currently on the lead team of a church plant with his wife, Joanne, in Ancaster, ON.

Unshakable Companionship

Come near to God and he will come near to you... — JAMES 4:8

“Where are you, God?” How often have we uttered this short, desperate prayer? It seems that in our life’s journey, there are those moments when we wonder where God is located. One moment, we are basking in his presence, and the next moment, he appears to have vanished. How do we maintain close proximity to the Life Giver?

We need to be reminded of the truth of his abiding presence. The Biblical promise is repeated numerous times throughout, stating that in reality, “the Lord your God will personally go ahead of you. He will neither fail you nor abandon you” (Deuteronomy 31:6 NLT). Armed with this truth of God’s unshakable companionship, our conclusion is that he has not left us, but in fact, we have distanced ourselves from him.

A popular African proverb identifies this disconnect: “It is only when you are close to a man that you can begin to smell his breath.” In other words, your proximity to someone reveals your level of intimacy.

Are we walking and abiding close enough to God that we know his character? Is our wandering tendency the actual source of our feelings of abandonment? Are we daily drawing closer to his voice, to his presence, to his very breath?

Father God, I desire your abiding Spirit in my life. From this day forward, remove any barriers and close the gap so that our journey together will be sweet communion. Thank you that you will never fail or abandon me.

FURTHER SCRIPTURE REFLECTION: PSALM 139:7-12

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Have I been asking, “Where are you God?” Ask the Spirit to reveal any barriers that are presently keeping you from experience intimacy with God.
2. What can I do to draw nearer to him in order to experience his abiding presence?

Richard Enns, with his wife, Merinda, is the Canadian Regional Director for the Desert Sand Region.



Full-Time Service or Full-Time Christian

And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. — COLOSSIANS 3:17

We often hear people say, “If only I could serve the Lord full-time!” It doesn’t help that when we make altar calls asking for people to commit their lives in service to God, we often only do so for the so-called full-time vocational ministries. As a result, many people mistakenly believe that the highest form of service is when we “forsake everything” to become staff in a church or serve overseas as an International Worker. Is this really what God intended?

Scripture gives us numerous examples of God’s people serving him through their profession. Joshua served God by being the General of Israel’s army in the various campaigns to conquer the Promised Land. King David served by administering the Kingdom. Paul worked as a tentmaker who preached and taught the Gospel during his eighteen-month stay in the city of Corinth (Acts 18:3,11). These examples clearly show us that the issue is not about whether we serve the Lord in full-time vocational service, but whether we glorify him in all we do, regardless of occupation, because he called us to be full-time followers of Jesus.

In Romans 12:1-2, Paul reminds us that the will of God is “good and acceptable and perfect.” Whether he has called us to be an engineer, a homemaker or a pastor, his desire is that we serve and glorify him in whatever he has called us to do.

Dear Jesus, thank you for calling me to serve you in whatever you have given me to do. Help me to be faithful in pointing people to you by my words and actions, wherever I am.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. In what way can I glorify God and serve him in what I am doing today?
2. Pray for an opportunity to serve God in your community or workplace.

R.S. is an International Worker in the Silk Road Region.

Go for the Alien

So you, too, must show love to foreigners, for you yourselves were once foreigners in the land of Egypt. — DEUTERONOMY 10:19 (NLT)

An old Southern spiritual reminds us “this world is not my home, I’m just a-passin’ through.” Indeed, we are citizens of heaven; we are pilgrims and foreigners in this land. It could be said that we all have an immigrant story because our family histories have us coming from elsewhere. In this way, we can relate to the new immigrants on our street, in our school or at our workplace; we have a story to trade with them.

If we read the Scriptures through the eyes of an immigrant, we see how there were laws and provisions for the foreigners, aliens and the strangers who found themselves amongst the people of God. During harvest time, for example, the instruction was to leave some grain for the foreigner or stranger in their midst.

Jesus carried on this value of paying attention to people on the edge, on the fringe, the neglected ones of society. An example is how he engaged with Samaritans. The letters of Paul instruct the Church to use gifts of hospitality to link with and engage the outsider, the alien, the stranger, the foreigner in our midst.

With 200 million people migrating today, Scripture brings fresh impetus to our lives as Canadian Christians. Ask the Lord to open your eyes to the foreigner, the new immigrant, the stranger or outsider whom he puts in your pathway. Ask him to help you take the first step towards them as Jesus would likely do.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Ask God to open your eyes this week to notice strangers, and to say an affirming word to foreigners you encounter today.
2. To which immigrant individual or family can I show hospitality in the next three months?

Ron Brown is a missions coach based in Calgary. He has held several positions with the C&MA, including 26 years as a missionary in Africa. His 2014 memoir, *Intersections*, can be found at ronaldbrown.ca.

Missional Living Guards the Heart

"Now this was the sin of your sister Sodom: She and her daughters were arrogant, overfed and unconcerned; they did not help the poor and needy. They were haughty and did detestable things before me. Therefore I did away with them as you have seen" — EZEKIEL 16:49-50

As I grew up in the Church, I was always taught that the wrath of God on Sodom and Gomorrah was exclusively because of their sexual sins. Ezekiel 16:49-50 reveals that these immoralities were essentially the outworking of foundational or inner sins that, if honest, most people would admit they struggle with.

This passage identifies inner sins that foster the overt sins:

- Arrogance
- Self-indulgence
- Apathy towards the poor

When these sins prevail and dominate our lives, the result is a self-centered, self-gratifying lifestyle that creates a loss of compassion, a lost sense of value for individual people. When arrogance, self-indulgence and apathy towards others dominates, we care primarily about satisfying our own cravings and wants. The sexual sins of Sodom were symptoms of these root issues.

Misuse of power, arrogance, over-indulgence, indifference—we are all so prone to fall into the trap of these sins. Could this be why the call to **SERVE** others—to be mission-focused—is such a strong theme throughout Scripture? When we serve those less fortunate than we are, engage with the vulnerable who suffer injustices or commit to sharing the message of Christ with people who have never heard it, we conquer the temptation to succumb to these sins. As we serve, **humility** is cultivated to combat our arrogance and, instead of self-indulgence, **generosity** grows in us. Living in a posture of being others-centred increases our **sensitivity** and wards off indifference!

May Jesus' example of serving and the Spirit's presence in us nurture these traits in our lives and in our churches! As we strive to be mission-focused both corporately and individually, we will triumph over the human tendency to foster these inner sins.

FURTHER SCRIPTURE REFLECTION: PHILIPPIANS 2:1-8

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. What behaviours in my life reflect arrogance, self-indulgence or indifference?
2. Ask Jesus to reveal how you can be more intentional about being generous and sensitive to the needs of others.

Joanne Beach serves the C&MA as the Director of Justice and Compassion.

**AS WE SERVE, HUMILITY IS
CULTIVATED TO COMBAT OUR
ARROGANCE AND, INSTEAD
OF SELF-INDULGENCE,
GENEROSITY GROWS IN US.**

Embracing Grandfather Power

By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed each of Joseph's sons, and worshiped as he leaned on the top of his staff. — HEBREWS 11:21

Then he blessed Joseph and said, "May the God before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked faithfully, the God who has been my shepherd all my life to this day, the Angel who has delivered me from all harm —may he bless these boys. May they be called by my name and the names of my fathers Abraham and Isaac, and may they increase greatly on the earth." — GENESIS 48:15-16

The end of Jacob's life gives me hope. In spite of his many character flaws, he died with nobility; after all, he makes it into the Faith Hall of Fame. His faith invites me to embrace my current season of life with more vocational purpose, not less. There's a shift that needs to take place, and like every other sanctifying work, that shift requires death and resurrection.

The shift requires facing the fact that what worked for me as a younger man doesn't work anymore. The good news is that it isn't supposed to! The once scheming, self-sufficient Jacob is now losing muscle tone, eyesight and balance, but his truest spiritual energies are being released with prophetic insight and potency that will ultimately shape history. He places his hands on his grandsons and blesses them. In effect, by placing his hands on others, he's taking his hands off himself. He prays they will be encountered by the same God who encountered him: "...the God who has been my Shepherd all my life to this day" (Genesis 48:15).

The writer of Hebrews describes this demonstration of Jacob's strength in weakness as worship; what could be more worshipful and selfless than a dying grandfather performing this great giveaway? It's your turn, lads! God is with you!

This story reminds me of how my morality should portray the message of the cross, and it also encourages my mission as a father and grandfather.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. In what ways could God be inviting me to embrace "leaning on your staff" as a new season of expanding his strength in your weakness?
2. Are there one or two "sons" or "daughters" whom I am being prompted by the Spirit to bless?

Brian Buhler is the Senior Pastor of Pacific Community Church in Cloverdale, BC. He's been happily married to Myrna for thirty-seven years and is blessed with three children and five grandchildren.

Hourly Dependence

Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.

— MATTHEW 11:28

About 130 years ago, Annie Hawks wrote, “I need Thee every hour, most gracious Lord, no tender voice like Thine can peace afford.”

We might suppose that she wrote this when facing difficulty or when unable to handle her own affairs. Then again, she might have lived such a comfortable life that she never learned to face uncertainty that confront many: finances, illness, difficult decisions, challenging relationships or alarming situations.

I assume that Annie Hawks lived as many of us do, encountering the normal concerns of her day, along with the unexpected, the difficult and disappointing, but proclaimed that she need not walk her road alone. What might have caused anxiety, fear and stress for others did not disturb her peace. Peace came not from refusing to face everyday realities, but because she knew that Jesus died to give us peace; not only in heaven, but also for the present. Annie took his word for it.

Let us bring all the concerns of our lives to Jesus and trust him, trust his guidance, and receive his peace. Remember, if we lack wisdom, we must ask God “who gives generously to all” (James 1:5). We need to daily recognize him as a light to our paths and place our goals, aspirations and needs in his hands, tuning our hearts to recognize the voice of his Holy Spirit.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. What concerns do I need to surrender to Jesus’ loving hands?
2. To focus my eyes outward and off my own anxieties, whom can I encourage as Jesus would today?

Eunice Smith has served the C&MA for more than sixty years and has served in the Canadian Midwest District, the Caribbean Sun Region and the Canadian Pacific District. Eunice was ordained in Richmond Alliance Church, in Richmond, B.C., the church that she currently serves and calls home.

Behind the Scenes

In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision, "Ananias!" "Yes, Lord," he answered. The Lord told him, "Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying." — ACTS 9:10-11

Cornelius stared at him in fear. "What is it, Lord?" he asked. The angel answered, "Your prayers and gifts to the poor have come up as a memorial offering before God. Now send men to Joppa to bring back a man named Simon who is called Peter. He is staying with Simon the tanner, whose house is by the sea." ...Then Peter invited the men into the house to be his guests. The next day Peter started out with them, and some of the believers from Joppa went along. — ACTS 10:4-6, 23

We know Peter and Paul well. They were two of the most important leaders in the early church and, consequently, in the entire history of the church. Pull back the curtain, and you see Cornelius and Ananias standing behind Peter and Paul. Cornelius' request for a visit helped Peter interpret his creaturely vision and understand God's heart for Gentiles. Ananias obeyed God's call to meet Saul, later called Paul, and helped transform the Church's strongest opponent into its greatest proponent.

Behind another curtain, you'll find two people who aren't as familiar: Simon and Judas. What do we know about Simon, a tanner in Joppa, and Judas, a resident of Damascus? Simon opened his Joppa home to Peter and the people sent by Cornelius to allow an initial meeting. He witnessed the beginning of a game-changing conversation with huge implications affecting the church today.

Blind and thoroughly shaken-up, Saul was led to Judas' home in Damascus, where he stayed until Ananias showed up. Can you imagine hearing Ananias' prayer and witnessing the scales fall from Saul's eyes first-hand?

These experiences came from exercising the Holy Spirit's gift of hospitality!

Some are called to lead the Church, and others to strengthen their ministries, but there are many who have the awesome privilege of employing their Spirit-given gift of hospitality to provide a setting for God's work to be done. Opening your home or meeting someone for

coffee, with a prayer to be used by God for Kingdom advancement, is an important though sometimes overlooked and often undervalued gift God has given to his church.

Take heart, hospitable one. Keep encouraging others and watch for God to build his Church right before your eyes!

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Whose gift of hospitality has encouraged me along my journey with Jesus?
2. If you have this gift, when will you use it next? If you don't have this gift, who has it that you can affirm?

Douglas Gerrard has served in the C&MA for 36 years as a pastor and district superintendent and is currently executive vice-president. He is married to Glendyne (Director of Defend Dignity). They live in Oakville, ON.

**TAKE HEART, HOSPITABLE
ONE. KEEP ENCOURAGING
OTHERS AND WATCH FOR GOD
TO BUILD HIS CHURCH RIGHT
BEFORE YOUR EYES!**

We're in Birmingham

"Sir," the invalid replied, "I have no one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred. While I am trying to get in, someone else goes down ahead of me." Then Jesus said to him, "Get up! Pick up your mat and walk." — JOHN 5:7-8

In the spring of 1963, while racial tensions raged in the American South, Martin Luther King Jr. found himself in a jail cell. He was there as a result of being part of the protests that sought to confront the injustices of his day. Some of Dr. King's Caucasian contemporaries found it unbecoming for an ordained minister to be involved with such protests, and they let him know about their concern. Dr. King dispatched a letter from his prison cell in Birmingham, Alabama addressing those concerns.

Citing the examples of the Old Testament prophets and the New Testament apostles, Dr. King simply stated, "I am in Birmingham because injustice is here." Essentially, he was rhetorically asking, "Is there any other place I should be?"

In John 5, Jesus healed a man on the Sabbath. He was quickly confronted by the Jewish religious leaders who were upset at Jesus' clear violation of the law. Responding to their accusations, Jesus said, "My Father is still working, and I am working too." His response evoked several challenges, but certainly one of them was the idea that wherever there is brokenness, injustice and sickness, you will find the Father, the Son and the Spirit at work. Simply stated: It's what they do.

Wherever the curse is having its way, wherever darkness and brokenness are winning the day, wherever injustice shows itself, may the Church—the presence of Jesus on earth—be found there. It's what we do. It's who we are.

FURTHER SCRIPTURE REFLECTION: JOHN 5:1-8

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Where do I see injustice? How can I get involved as an instrument of Jesus' light and redemption?
2. How does Jesus' healing on the Sabbath make this point even more powerful?

Aaron Gerrard is Lead Facilitator of Ancaster Village Church, a new church community that began in Fall 2011. Visit ancastervillagechurch.ca.

Link to full text of Birmingham Jail letter: abacus.bates.edu/admin/offices/dos/mlk/letter.html

White-Knuckle Living

Surely God is my salvation; I will trust and not be afraid. The Lord, the Lord himself, is my strength and my defense; he has become my salvation. — ISAIAH 12:2

I was enjoying a sunny afternoon at the playground with two of my grandchildren. We were doing all the things you do at a playground—running, swinging, sliding and climbing. Four-year-old Parker asked, “Papa, can I play on the monkey bars?” Grabbing him around the waist, I lifted him to reach the high bar. His tiny hands formed a death-grip on the steel. He hung motionless, suspended a metre from the ground. Parker’s knuckles turned white, his muscles began to burn. Anxious, but still in control, he called out to be rescued. I quickly moved into position, ready to catch him. “Parker, let go, and Papa will catch you,” I offered. “No, Papa!” was his immediate, slightly panicked response. I continued to coax him, “Trust me, Parker. Just drop into my arms.” His little fingers held on for dear life. He wouldn’t let go. I swept him into my arms and hugged the fear out of him. It was a great day.

Sadly, many Christians live their lives hanging on for dear life rather than abandoning themselves completely into God’s caring arms. We believe in God, we’ve experienced the wonder of his love, forgiveness and grace, but rather than live in complete dependence on his oversight, care and provision, we white-knuckle it; tightly gripping the things of the world and our self-preserving ambitions.

Your salvation includes freedom from fear as you surrender to and depend on God. God wants us to stop the white-knuckle living and fall completely into his arms.

What are you hanging onto today that needs to be released? Surrender it to him. Release your grip and fall into his arms of love.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Can I remember a time when I released my grip and fell into God’s arms?
What was the result?
2. When I’m “hanging on for dear life,” what’s usually in my hands?
What do I need to let go of right now?

Larry Boss has been Lead Pastor of Kamloops Alliance Church for the last six-and-a-half years. Prior to moving to Kamloops, he served as an international pastor for five years in Cairo, Egypt and as an International Worker/pastor in Warsaw, Poland for ten years. Larry and Barbara have been married for 35 years. They have two children and four grandchildren.

Self-Authenticity in Ministry

Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.

Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones you have crushed rejoice.

Hide your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquity.

Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.

Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me.

Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.

Then I will teach transgressors your ways, so that sinners will turn back to you.

— PSALM 51:7–13

The gift we present in ministry is the Good News. We are the tool in ministry. We journey with others, and they also become part of our story. The lens through which we understand and support those we journey with is tinted. Our culture and traditions, family and church, and our experiences of the past and present are wounded and scarred, yet redeemed and transformed by this Good News, the living hope of Christ.

It's through recognizing and giving witness to our own forgiveness and healing through Christ that we can serve authentically. I invite you into a time of personal reflection and confession. Take this time to discern the voice of God. Allow God to see you as you prostrate yourself before his throne of mercy and grace. It is in being more transparent in confession and in acknowledging your brokenness that the richness of the Divine's grace may flood your being with love and the knowledge that you are God's beloved. It is from this Spirit-anointed posture that we most effectively "...proclaim good news to the poor...bind up the brokenhearted...[and] proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners" (Isaiah 61: 1–2).

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. In which areas of my life do I need God's healing and grace? What do I need to bring into the Light and ask forgiveness and restoration for?
2. What experience of healing or restoration might God be asking me to share as I come alongside others in the midst of pain or brokenness?

Helen H. Chan is a chaplain serving on the Alliance Association of Chaplains (AAC) in the Western Canadian District and on the AAC National Leadership Team.

Abiding in Christ Through His Words

Blessed is the one...whose delight is in the law of the Lord, and who meditates on his law day and night. That person is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither—whatever they do prospers. — PSALM 1:1-3

Many regard Psalm 1 as the prologue of the whole collection of 150 psalms. The psalmist highlights the lifestyle, path and result of two different types of people: the righteous and the wicked. As God's people, of course, we choose to follow the path of the righteous, resulting in God's blessings, protection and prosperity.

How can we be sure we are following the path of the righteous? One of the indicators as depicted in Psalm 1:1-3 is the love of God's words. We not only familiarize ourselves with God's teaching, but also take his words to heart and make them our life-guiding principles. This kind of life will be evident with vitality and fruit-bearing.

Coincidentally, in John 15, Jesus used the analogy of the vine and the branches to teach his disciples of a fruit-bearing life. He said, "If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you" (v.7). He also said, "If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love" (v.10). A Christ-centred life is therefore a life that is living in a close and loving relationship with Christ, imitating his example of obeying God's teaching, and a life that bears fruit, fruit that lasts.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. How are the righteous differentiated from the wicked? Which path am I taking?
2. Am I really delighted in his words? Does my soul thirst for his words or do I just read them as a chore?

Aaron Tang served as Senior Pastor of Emmanuel Alliance Church of Ottawa for more than 15 years. He is now Executive Director of the Canadian Chinese Alliance Churches Association (CCACA).

More Than Enough

But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.' — LUKE 10:33–35

The Good Samaritan understood that people are in a hurry on the road to Jericho. That is why he stopped when he saw a man in trouble. It's imperative to stop when we see a need. Interventions are rarely predictable. They are messy and often dangerous. The incident with the man on the road to Jericho was not a feel-good fix; it was a holistic intervention.

The travellers on the road had enough resources to help the victim but not the will. Looking back to when the Tabernacle was being built, the people of Israel had the will to provide what was needed. So much so that "... the people were restrained from bringing more, because what they already had was more than enough to do all the work (Exodus 36:6-7)." There is always provision enough to help people in need where there is a desire to see and to respond.

The Good Samaritan recognized that he did not have the capacity to care for the wounded man on his own. He enlisted the help of the innkeeper, who presumably understood the need of the wounded sojourner, and was willing to respond. The innkeeper and the Samaritan created a synergetic bond.

Everyone should look for an innkeeper to complete the triangle of help. Together, the innkeeper and Samaritan created a relationship for the sake of the man's restoration. The innkeeper was empowered to be a full-fledged partner and became an ally in the cause. As a result, he had a sense of ownership in the decisions regarding the care of the victim.

The priest and the Levite missed the divine encounter; both saw the wounded man, yet decided not to help. The Samaritan and his partner forged an ongoing network that

strengthened the cause of justice for the traveller who had ventured down the road to Samaria. With compassionate hearts working together, there was enough to meet the need.

FURTHER SCRIPTURE REFLECTION: LUKE 10:25–37, EXODUS 36:2–7

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. How do I respond to people with needs? How do trust and faith in God's provision impact my willingness to respond?
2. How does this concept of working together inform my perspective on helping those in need?

Richard Reichert, along with his wife, Hope, served as C&MA International Workers in three Latin American countries over a span of 34 years.

**THE GOOD SAMARITAN
RECOGNIZED THAT HE DID
NOT HAVE THE CAPACITY TO
CARE FOR THE WOUNDED
MAN ON HIS OWN.**

A Hug for My Sister

Father to the fatherless, defender of widows—this is God, whose dwelling is holy. God places the lonely in families... — PSALM 68:5, 6 (NLT)

“When you hug me, I feel in you the family love of my mother, my aunt, my sister...” These words spoken by a new Canadian often come back to my mind. The middle-aged woman was telling me about her arrival in Canada and how much she missed her family and the warmth of her close relationships. She explained that when other women, long-time Canadians, show her affection, she receives this care as coming from them but also as a welcome substitution for her mom’s, her aunt’s, her sister’s expressions of love.

David used lavish and extravagant language when he wrote Psalm 68. One word picture after another describes God’s power, his justice, his care, his protection. The psalm ends with our only possible response: “...Praise be to God” (v. 35).

The Spirit of this absolutely praiseworthy and powerful God lives in us. It is difficult to wrap our minds around the two opposite realities of this truth: our frail humanity is juxtaposed with our mind-blowing potential for being and displaying his love and power in our world!

When we go to church, we worship God, we learn more about him, and we enjoy his people, but we also have a great opportunity to embrace the lonely into our families. In the foyer after the meeting, we can say by hugging a new Canadian, “You are my sister in Christ; I love you.” When we walk down our street or go to the coffee shop, we can actively look for lonely people and know that God, through us, is embracing them with a smile and, step by step, is drawing them into his big family.

FURTHER SCRIPTURE REFLECTION: PSALM 68

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. At my church, is there a new Canadian who needs to feel the love of a new family? What can we do to embrace them?
2. Every time I go out for coffee, can I make warm eye contact with the servers and notice their name and smile? Can my smile cue me to ask God’s Spirit to draw them into his family?

Myra Brown, a member of Southview Alliance Church, volunteers in Calgary’s immigrant sector. Myra, a former International Worker in Africa, served on the Global Ministries Leadership Team of the C&MA for nine years.

Naturally Supernatural

And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey him. — ACTS 5:32 (NRSV)

The role of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Christ-follower invariably generates conflict in the Christian community. Few biblical subjects are more electrifying and controversial. The witness of the Scriptures, however, is unambiguous. Jesus Christ and his first generation of followers were indisputably energized by the Holy Spirit to proclaim the eternal Gospel of salvation for humankind. Embroiled in the cosmic conflict between the forces of light and darkness, their lives were conduits of divine power manifested in spectacular and subtle ways. Miraculous signs and wonders in the form of healings and exorcisms were complemented by gentle yet impactful words of wisdom spoken in conversation. Receiving unusual guidance through dreams and visions was normal in a Spirit-filled church culture, which birthed and shaped dynamic faith in the lives of converts.

Expectation of communication between the divine and human pervaded first-century worship gatherings. They were animated by public prophetic utterances and prayers in tongues alongside instruction and common meals. Early Christians lived with extraordinary generosity and prayerful boldness. Their spirituality was naturally supernatural and supernaturally natural. They were elevated above dependence on their natural capabilities and intimately connected to the Holy Spirit from whom empowerment came. They listened confidently for the Divine voice to guide them, trusting for provision and protection in what they were called to do. The consequences of their risk-taking lifestyle were often unpredictable. Remarkable evangelistic success and excruciating suffering, even martyrdom, went hand-in-hand in the lives of the early church members.

In our time, we will flourish when we listen to what the Holy Spirit is saying to the global Church; through genuine repentance, we will recover a personal and collective inspired, courageous and winsome Christ-centred life only possible in the Spirit.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Do I sense empowerment by the Holy Spirit in my life? Am I listening to his promptings?
2. What do I need to learn about the ministry of the Holy Spirit with which I am not currently familiar?

Charles Nienkirchen is a Professor of Christian History and Spirituality at Ambrose University in Calgary, AB.

Jesus the Refugee

When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. "Get up," he said, "take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him."

So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt, where he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: "Out of Egypt I called my son." — MATTHEW 2:13–15

This may be a strange Scripture passage to write a devotion from, but it is a personal reminder for me of the plight of millions of people around our globe. In our North American context, we often think of Jesus as the Shepherd, the Saviour King, the Messiah and the Healer; how often do we think of Jesus as the Homeless or the Refugee?

I was born a refugee, a child of parents who fled war-torn Vietnam and, through God's grace, ended up in an internment camp on the island of Hong Kong where my family came to know Jesus.

Today, there are over 51 million people around the world who are forcibly displaced from their homes (iafr.org). I am thankful that our family of churches is beginning to respond to the needs of refugees, but there is still a great need to be met. After landing in Canada, many refugees find themselves exhausted, distressed and in need of care and social aid. We have an incredible opportunity to respond as Christ-followers to the needs of refugees who come to Canada, as well as those who remain in refugee camps.

Next time you read Jesus' birth story, consider Christ's words "...whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me" (Matt. 25:40).

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Who are the refugees around me?
2. How can my church community be involved in the plight of displaced people around the world?

Thich Truong, his wife Alyssa and their toddler, Elliott, serve at Emmanuel Alliance Church in Ottawa, ON. He is passionate about the Church's role in justice and reconciliation.

For information on refugee sponsorship, visit: justiceandcompassion.com/canada-initiatives/refugee-sponsorship/

Extravagant Devotion

Some of those present were saying indignantly to one another, "Why this waste of perfume? It could have been sold for more than a year's wages and the money given to the poor." — MARK 14:4-5

Before Jesus went to the cross, the religious leaders plotted his death, and Judas planned his betrayal. An unnamed woman broke an expensive glass bottle and poured a precious anointment on Jesus' head, filling the room with fragrance to honour the Messiah.

Some of his disciples were outraged by the disruption and the waste: 'A year's wages poured out for nothing!' They began berating this uninvited guest for pressing her way into the middle of their gathering. Her action was offensive to those with an eye for financial responsibility and a more inhibited idea of how to love Jesus. They missed an important moment.

Jesus stopped them from further shaming her extravagant devotion. He understood the meaning behind her action and told them to leave her alone. This was not wasteful but rather a beautiful thing. Her act of devotion was a final expression of tenderness before Judas betrayed him. This anointing must have been precious to Jesus, as he knew he was soon to experience lashes, beatings, a crown of thorns and nails driven into his hands and feet.

She gave all she had, serving Jesus when others did not. She recognized who Jesus was, and she was willing to take a great risk to demonstrate her love for him.

Standing in contrast to those who plotted and betrayed, and to disciples who did not understand, this woman will be remembered for her so-called "wasteful" act of devotion. Her legacy is the declaration of the importance of love, kindness and care for others, which worship Jesus.

FURTHER SCRIPTURE REFLECTION: MARK 14:4-11

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Our hearts may struggle to identify with this woman and her brash devotion in the midst of sensible indifference and betrayal. Can we bring our mediocrity to Jesus and ask him for the courage to love as she did?
2. What am I willing to risk to worship Jesus? Reputation? Finances? Popularity?

Mardi Dolfo-Smith is the Discipleship Pastor of North Shore Alliance Church. She is married to Toni, and they have four "almost adult" children.

Why There Will Always Be a Church

As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. — 1 PETER 2:4–5 (ESV)

When the apostle Peter was wrapping up the first of his letters in the New Testament, he wrote about his readers being restored, confirmed, strengthened and established by the God of all grace. Who were these readers? They were people who, by coming to Christ, had become “like living stones” and were being built up as “a spiritual house,” at the same time and place, they were also “a holy priesthood.”

Plainly, God’s intention to establish, strengthen, confirm and restore his people has everything to do with them becoming and remaining stones in the walls of a temple where God is properly worshipped; it also has everything to do with them becoming holy priests offering “spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.”

What we can see in this is that an actual church requires its people to be involved so that the church does not become a temple with gaping holes in the walls, or a temple with priests missing. A real church needs real Christians so that it can be what God, by his grace, has created the Church to be. Real Christians need a real church in order to be the people that God, by his grace, has promised to restore, confirm, strengthen and establish them to be. That is why there will always be a Church.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. From 1 Peter 2:4–5, in which specific ways do participation in church life and being Christ-centred relate to one another?
2. Can I identify any personal tendencies or points of view that hold me back from a more wholehearted involvement in an actual church?

Mike Wilkins has been the pastor of West London Alliance Church since 1984. He and his wife, Deb, who works for Compassion Canada, have three adult children who live in Tokyo, Los Angeles and London, ON.

Jesus, Our Model for Spirit-Filled Living

...The words I say to you I do not speak on my own authority. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work. — JOHN 14:10

Spirit-empowered living is a promise for every follower of Jesus. Jesus modelled for us how to live in the power of the Spirit. When we read about Jesus doing miracles and living a sinless life, if we are honest, we may think, “Well, he was God; of course he could do all those things and live perfectly.” Yet, Scripture teaches that Jesus, while being fully God, was also completely human. Jesus, in his human capacity, limited himself to live and work in the power and presence of the Holy Spirit.

Here are a few examples of Jesus’ relationship with the Spirit:

- The Holy Spirit descended on him at his baptism (Luke 3:22)
- Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the desert (Luke 4:1)
- The Spirit of the Lord was on Jesus and anointed him (Luke 4:18)
- The power of the Lord was present for Jesus to heal the sick (Luke 5:17)

Peter summarizes Jesus’ ministry in Acts 10:38: “...God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him.”

Jesus had a practice of going to a solitary place to pray. It is fair to assume that in those moments, Jesus listened to the Father’s instructions and submitted to the Spirit. God longs to display his power and glory by empowering us with his Spirit. The model of Jesus living in submission and obedience to his Father and the Spirit invites us to do the same.

FURTHER SCRIPTURE REFLECTION: JOHN 14:9-17

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. How does Jesus’ example of only doing what the Father instructed challenge me?
2. Ask God to increase both your dependence on the Spirit and your faith to expect his unexplainable power to work in your context.

Joanne Beach serves the C&MA in Canada as the Director of Alliance Justice and Compassion.

The Cliff

...If the Lord is with us, why has all this happened to us? Where are all his wonders...?

— JUDGES 6:13

How would you like to step off a cliff with me today?

"Are you sure that's what you'd like to do, Lord? We have other options. We could have devotions together. We could pray with some buddies. We could tell a few strangers about you."

Yes, we could. I just like blessing you. Let's go to the cliff.

The cliff! You know, "cliff" and "blessing" don't seem to belong in the same sentence. "Cliff" and "danger" work for me. I've got some friends who say, "Cliff" and "stupid" are a pair. I know you like this kind of stuff, but realize that I don't have the luxury of seeing beyond the cliff.

I know. Why do you think I want to take you there? What do you think I want you to see?

"Well, for one thing, it's an invitation to the impossible. I guess that's what I see. That's also my point of resistance."

I don't need to take you to the cliff for you to know it's impossible. You know that now. What is it about going there, being there, actually stepping off the edge? What do you think I want you to see?

"My face on the canyon bottom?"

Nice one. That's pretty good. Now be serious.

"To be honest, Lord, every time we go to the cliff, I ask you the same thing: Why are we doing this? You never tell me."

That's true, and you've survived every time. What did you see in each of those times?

"Honestly? I don't know. My eyes were closed. I really hate heights."

Fair enough. What did you sense?

"You. I sensed you. You were with me. I could feel you holding me up."

Why do you think I want to take you to the cliff?

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Think of the contradictions you experience—hardships that result in blessings, blessings that turn out to be curses, events where the outcome surprises you. Write them down. What do you think God wants you to see?
2. Reflect on your perception of God through the process. How has it shaped your belief about him today?

David Collins was raised in Vietnam as a son of missionaries. Based on lessons learned as a pastor, missionary, educator, international development worker and senior executive, he founded Paradigm Ministries in 2007. Discover more at paradigmministries.ca.

**HOW WOULD YOU LIKE
TO STEP OFF A CLIFF
WITH ME TODAY?**

Declaring Truth

Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. — PHILIPPIANS 2:9–11

On the corner of my street in Niamey, Niger, sits a little structure where people gather five times a day to recite their prayers. It's a mini mosque with a maxi voice! Five times a day, the Arabic call to prayer blares over a loudspeaker mounted outside the building. It echoes throughout the neighbourhood at top volume with accompanying distortion and squealing feedback. Many people on the street have asked the imam to lower the volume, but he refuses.

The speaker is about twenty feet from my bedroom window, which means that when my neighbour yells into the microphone every morning at 5 o'clock, I am instantly pulled from sleep. While I never appreciate it, some days it bothers me more than others. It feels like the enemy is taunting my soul, "We have this place under control. What difference do you think you're going to make? You don't stand a chance!"

My counter-attack comes from the Word of God. Every morning, while my neighbour calls people to that which cannot save, I call my attention to the only One who can. I quietly recite some of my favourite Scriptures that draw me to fix my eyes on Jesus, who reminds me why I live in this country and assures me of his eventual victory.

While my neighbour chants that Mohammed is God's prophet, I recite the truth that, "...there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Jesus Christ, who gave himself as a ransom for all people..." (1 Tim. 2:5–6); "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

Then I fall back to sleep.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Do I really believe that the Bible's declarations about Jesus are true? How does my life reflect that?
2. Have I believed the taunts of the enemy when he tells me that my work for the Lord is futile? In what circumstances? What can I do to regain hope?

Lisa Rohrick is a C&MA International Worker. She works with the Fulani people doing community development and church planting in Niger, one of the world's poorest countries.

Missional Love

This is how much God loved the world: He gave his Son, his one and only Son...God didn't go to all the trouble of sending his Son merely to point an accusing finger, telling the world how bad it was. He came to help, to put the world right again. — JOHN 3:16–17 (MSG)

While many Christians have professed belief in God, can we authentically say that we *believe and obey* what he says?

Christ's commissioning in Matthew 28:19–20 has motivated Christians to embark on the mission for God throughout the ages, yet mankind's mindset sometimes appears to echo that first human deliberation over the word of God in the Garden of Eden. The response of Adam and Eve to Satan's question, "Did God really say...?" has sadly resonated throughout history, corrupting humankind's relationship with God, and with one another, as we disobediently turn away from a missional love for the world (Gen. 3:1).

Even now, it's as if Satan is still asking the question, "Did God really say...?" but with a new spin: "Did God really say he loves *the world*? Really? What about those who live a lifestyle or hold religious beliefs that are extremely different from yours?" Depending on our response, Satan may in fact be deceitfully leading us into contrary disobedience to God's word.

Scripture teaches us that God's mission goes beyond human reasoning. It begins with enemy love (Rom. 5:8, Matt. 5:44) and a desire to reveal Christ to the whole world so that all would *believe* and live (John 3:16). It is through one's *belief and obedience* that glory is given to God as we embrace his missional love for "the world" and reveal Christ as Lord and reconciling Saviour to all.

FURTHER SCRIPTURE REFLECTION: ROMANS 5:8, MATTHEW 5:43–48

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Has Satan tempted me with "Did God really say...?" and deceived me into ignoring what God has said? Is there any disregard for God's Word that has caused me to turn away from his missional love for the world?
2. In what ways can I guard against the temptation of Satan's questioning so I can genuinely believe and obey what God has said?

Serena Richardson works at the C&MA's national ministry centre as the Administrator of Justice and Compassion and lives in Brampton, ON with her daughter, Lauren.

The King's Apprentices

"Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will send you out to fish for people." — MARK 1:17

The Gospel of Mark begins in a hurry. Jesus gets baptized, starts preaching the "Kingdom come" and immediately calls his followers whom the Bible refers to as disciples.

Disciple is a familiar word that we often don't stop to think about. With familiarity, we miss its genius. The original Greek word, *Mathetes*, literally meant, "a student, learner or apprentice." This is the genius. These 12 followers weren't just an ancient posse; they were his students, his apprentices. Like young residences at the side of a master surgeon or like apprentice electricians carefully watching a master, these 12 had become students of Master Jesus. Everything about their daily lives were focused around him. They were, to borrow the expression, Christ-centred.

What was it that they were learning? They were learning how to live as citizens of God's Kingdom. They were listening to his Kingdom teaching and storytelling; they were carefully observing how he acted, prayed and healed; they were watching how and with whom he socialized. Through it all, they were learning how to live, act and walk as citizens of the King, according to his Kingdom ways.

Now, here's the remarkable thing. This term disciple is not reserved for just those original 12. If you are a follower of Jesus, you too are a disciple, an apprentice, a student of the Master, one whose life is centred around him, carefully learning from him the ways of the Kingdom.

Doesn't that change everything?

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Have I ever considered that the 12 disciples were actually apprentices of Jesus, seeking to learn from him how to live according to his Kingdom?
2. Have I every viewed myself as a student/apprentice of Jesus? What if a "Christ-centred" life was about learning to live the way Master Jesus demonstrated? What would that mean for me?

Andy Lambkin is the husband of Jolie and the father of four. He pastors simplechurches.ca and works with the Canadian Pacific District.

Are You Right or Left-Handed?

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. — JOHN 1:14

As a left-handed person in a dominantly right-handed world, I've spent some time imagining how life might be different if I were other-handed. Not having the ability to use the correct hand for a certain task can be comical at times, but also frustrating or even dangerous. Fumbling with a carrot peeler (yes, they're designed for right-handed people) is no big deal, but contorting oneself over a skill saw—yes, also for right-handers—look out.

John 1:14 reveals that Jesus is ambidextrous—not physically of course, but spiritually. He is described as being *full of grace and truth*. Jesus employed deft skill applying grace in one hand and truth with the other. For most of my life, I thought grace and truth were opposites. I supposed that if I applied one, it needed to be at the expense of the other, but in Jesus, both virtues are indivisibly united. In love, our Saviour meted out truth gracefully and grace truthfully.

As Christ-followers, we too are called to be people of both grace and truth, but we each have a natural tendency to emphasize one virtue over the other. Carried to extremes, truth without grace is harsh and ugly. Grace without truth is equally cruel because it doesn't allow honest recognition of our brokenness and need to encounter the real power of the Gospel.

What about you? How evenly do you apply the right- and left-handed qualities of grace and truth?

Lord, in your mercy, show us how to apply both qualities to ourselves and others for your honour and glory.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Which of the two qualities is currently less evident in my speech and conduct? What quality can I practise in my walk during this season of growth?
2. Spend some time considering Jesus' spiritual dexterity today (maybe try a few tasks with your non-dominant hand!) and thank him for applying both grace and truth so expertly in your own life.

Phil Vanderveen is serving as Associate and Worship Pastor of Peace Portal Alliance Church in South Surrey, BC.

Priorities in Balance is Your Best Investment

Jesus answered, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me." When the young man heard this, he went away sad, because he had great wealth. — MATTHEW 19:21–22

In a worship service in Guinea, a prayer was offered to the Lord that I will never forget. A leader in this Guinean local church stood and prayed for those of us visiting, "O Lord, I pray that my brothers and sisters in Christ and the Church in Canada would be freed from their dependence on material things so that they would experience the presence and provisions of Jesus in more profound ways!" Whether it was the earnestness in his tone or the simplicity of the mud and grass building in which we were meeting, the experience stirred my soul.

Matthew 19:16–30 is not about getting rid of our material wealth, but about one's complete devotion to following Jesus and holding nothing more important than that. I have to ask myself, "Is my commitment to living for Jesus more important than my job or pursuit of income; is it a higher priority than my family and my home full of possessions that fulfil not just my needs but my wants?" Jesus' encounter with the rich young man reminds us that when he calls us to follow him, we must be willing to give up everything in order to totally devote ourselves.

The message is not that wealth is bad, but that we need to put Jesus and his priorities first and foremost in our life. Our possessions must always be secondary, held as something that can be useful to serve others. The rewards for living completely committed to Jesus and his priorities will be worth it not only in this life, but also for eternity.

May the prayer of our Guinean brother be realized as we loosely hold onto our material possessions and live each day committed to following Jesus and serving others with the resources with which he has blessed us!

FURTHER SCRIPTURE REFLECTION: MATTHEW 19:16–30

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. What behaviours in my life might indicate that material wealth, comforts of this life or my reputation have a higher priority than my devotion to Jesus and his call on my life?
2. Ask Jesus to reveal how you can be more intentional about being generous with your resources and sensitive to the needs of others.

Joanne Beach serves the C&MA as Director of Justice and Compassion.

What's in Your Boat?

...the disciples woke him (Jesus) and said to him, "Teacher, don't you care if we drown?" He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, "Quiet! Be still!" Then the wind died down and it was completely calm. — MARK 4:38–39

When I read Mark 4:35–41, I thankfully cannot identify with the disciples' experience of being in a boat about to be capsized by a furious squall, but I can identify with the emotional response to their circumstance and their frustration that Jesus didn't seem to be aware or care that they were about to drown. He was asleep while they faced a serious, life-threatening storm! What seemed to be so certain to them only a short time before—that Jesus was the miracle-working teacher who loved them—was being drowned out by water pouring into their boat. Perhaps the underlying question to their comment of "don't you care if we drown?" was actually "do you really love us?"

When we're terrified by the reality of what we are facing in our boats, it's easy to feel like Jesus is asleep or not in the boat with us at all. It's easy to wonder if he loves us or cares about what is in our boats when the storm rages around us.

When Jesus stood up and rebuked the storm with, "Quiet! Be still!" the disciples may have thought he was also speaking to them. Their hearts needed quietening from the storm within, just like the storm outside. They needed to remember that Jesus was in the boat with them and their fears and anxieties. They needed to see with their eyes and know in their hearts that he was in control, even when all around them felt otherwise.

Jesus asks us for simple trust in the middle of furious squalls in our lives. He is in control. He's in the boat with us. The winds, waves, troubles and fears are under his watchful and loving eyes.

FURTHER SCRIPTURE REFLECTION: MARK 4:35–41

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. What is threatening to capsize my boat today?
2. What is Jesus saying to me in the middle of my storm?

Glendyne Gerrard is the Director of Defend Dignity, working to end sexual exploitation in Canada. She lives in Oakville, ON with her husband, Doug.

Christ's Ambassadors

Paul, an apostle—sent not from men nor by man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead— — GALATIANS 1:1 (NIV)

As a pastor of an English-speaking international church, I see people from many nations, including a number of ambassadors who attend our services. They are here representing their home countries, and while they are intelligent and gifted people with incredible abilities, their agenda is set not by themselves in their wisdom and experience, but by the foreign policy of their respective nations. Paul began his letter to the Galatians with his credentials: he was “sent not from man nor by man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father.” He was fully aware that his agenda was set by his King.

We also have a number of foreign students in the church who come on scholarships that cover their tuition but leave them almost destitute after paying for room and board; yet, in their humble circumstances, they are engaging in God's enterprise. Cooking for one another, twenty of them will gather in a small apartment to study scriptures, pray and spend time with God. These young men and women are realizing that they are Christ's ambassadors and are seeking to serve God, rather than their own ambitions, both in their current situation and when they return to their homelands.

For nearly 130 years, the Alliance has been in the business of preparing and sending ambassadors of Jesus Christ around the world, men and women who seek God's agenda and desire to “...not be sent from men nor by man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father...” (Gal. 1:1).

FURTHER SCRIPTURE REFLECTION: 2 CORINTHIANS 5:17-21

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Have I prayed and reflected upon what God's agenda is for me today?
What about the rest of my life?
2. How does my life reflect my calling as an ambassador of Christ?

Don Orr and his wife, Betty, are currently serving in their fourth term as International Workers in Poland. They have a passion for equipping and discipling people to be all Christ called them to be.

Engaged and Disengaged

"Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? ... If you keep your feet from breaking the Sabbath and from doing as you please on my holy day ... then you will find your joy in the LORD..." — ISAIAH 58:6, 13–14

I am intrigued by a counterpoint found in Isaiah 58. The prophet sounds a magisterial call for *engagement* in our world with a commitment to social justice, but also a *disengagement*—a rest—from this same call.

Isaiah is speaking about worship, but he stresses that worship is only authentic if it is complemented by a very specific kind of *engagement* with the world: a commitment to justice, to advocating and caring for the oppressed, to feeding the hungry and attending to the homeless. He calls for consistency, a congruency between our worship and our actions in the world. This is a simple yet powerful reminder that when we speak of the mission of the Church, it is a witness to Christ and to the Kingdom that is expressed in word and deed. More to the point, these words of the prophet remind us that there is no righteousness without justice, and more, there is no justice without economic justice.

The prophet also calls for *disengagement*; it is fascinating to see a call for social justice back to back with a call to Sabbath rest, a call for disengagement from the pressures and challenges of serving Christ in the world. This suggests that Sabbath rest is a vital spiritual practice. We are not called to unrelenting work and witness; rather, in Sabbath rest, we disengage and learn to trust God to do God's work in God's time. The call to Sabbath is a reminder that there is a rhythm to work and rest and to service and leisure at the very heart of creation and, interestingly, in the call of God on our lives.

Isaiah 58 reveals a fascinating counterpoint: a call to engagement and disengagement.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. In what ways am I engaging in social justice?
2. It is easy to become too involved in our fast-paced society. Is Sabbath rest in the Lord a priority in my spiritual life?

Gordon T. Smith is the President of Ambrose University in Calgary, AB.

Dwelling in the Land

Trust in the Lord and do good. Then you will live safely in the land and prosper. Take delight in the Lord, and he will give you your heart's desires. — PSALM 37:3-4 (NLT)

Two years ago, Marcos and Cecilia left their life of security in San Jose, Costa Rica and moved to a very poor and very rural community. They restarted life in an empty field with no access to comforts and conveniences. They left family, a small business and a growing community ministry. I remember Cecilia told me that God directed them elsewhere because there were other people who needed to hear of what his love and grace could do. God gave her a purpose, and she heard the Holy Spirit give direction.

They lived out of their car for weeks, trying to establish a home in an empty field. They made a water drill bit out of a soup can; a roof of leaves was all they had as they cooked over a fire in torrential rains. Marcos and Cecilia moved forward with a strong desire to serve God. They listened as the Holy Spirit gave hope and direction through difficult times.

Two years later, now they have a home that is the focal point of God's transforming work in this community. Every Saturday, 85 children meet to hear about God, memorize Bible verses and receive the only food that most of them will eat that day. Adults are welcomed to receive daily counsel. Women meet weekly to sew and interact as they explore God's Word. They also started a weekly worship time which has grown from eight people to a local church with 60 people attending three weekly services.

Psalm 37:3-4 directs us to trust in the Lord, to dwell in the land and enjoy safe pasture. As we delight in the Lord, he will give us the desires of our hearts.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. What are my desires for my local community?
2. How can I "dwell in the land" of my neighbourhood or community?

Curtis Doell is an International Worker in the Sun Region focusing on ministries of Justice and Compassion.

The Only Saviour

Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and to know that you are the Holy One of God." — JOHN 6:68–69

In a growingly secular world, saviours of all kinds continue to abound. While they might not appear to be of a religious kind, in their own way, each of them offers us some kind of salvation. Wholesale stores, car dealers, vacation resorts, diets, exercise, education and social networks all promise to meet our deepest needs if only we will trust in them and give our lives to them.

Of course, they cannot. Each may be able to offer us something, but none of them can meet our deepest needs. There is only One who can provide the kind and the depth of salvation that we need. Even if he did not realize it, this is what Jesus' disciple, Peter, said. While many of Jesus' disciples were leaving him, finding his teaching too hard and hoping to find what they wanted in something or someone else, Peter noted that those who had remained with him did so because there are no other options. Peter said, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and to know that you are the Holy One of God." Peter realized that if they were with Jesus, "the Holy One of God," they were with the only One who has what they really need—life. To even think about exchanging Jesus for anyone else would be foolishness.

The contemporary world is no different. Each one of us is tempted daily to look to someone other than Jesus to fulfill our needs, yet, we need to remember that Jesus, "the Holy One of God," is the only One who can meet not only our deepest needs but also all of our needs.

FURTHER SCRIPTURE REFLECTION: JOHN 6:60–69

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. To which contemporary "saviours" am I tempted to give my allegiance? Why do I find that "saviour" particularly tempting?
2. What can/should I do to ensure that my dependence upon Jesus stays primary?

Bernie Van De Walle is a Professor of Historical and Systematic Theology at Ambrose University and Seminary. Bernie has served in pastoral and elder roles in Alliance congregations and is currently a member of the Board of Directors of the C&MA in Canada. His study of A. B. Simpson and The Christian and Missionary Alliance, *The Heart of the Gospel*, has been translated into Vietnamese and Chinese, with translations into Korean, Spanish and French in the works. Bernie lives in Calgary with his wife, Colleen; they are the proud parents of two great sons, David and Ken.

Face to Face

The heavens are telling of the greatness of God and the great open spaces above show the work of His hands. — PSALM 19:1 (NRSV)

Intentionally living in the so-called “you don’t want to go there” neighbourhood of Toronto, Dan Buggie, Pastor of Lightpoints at Jane and Finch has a new perspective on life when seen through the eyes of youth:

“Through meeting some of the moms whose teenage boys are being mentored here, I’ve come to hear of their way of life back in South Africa. Despite the apparent lack of modern Internet technology in their homes there, they nevertheless had a strong realized sense of community and togetherness which here, we have “virtualized” through Facebook and other digital apps.

These moms are finding it hard to cope with the isolation and individualism that they see and experience here, being in a big city for the first time.

*Once, while taking the youth on a biking adventure, I was amazed by, and reminded of, how important a sense of wonder is in discerning God. Each time these youth would observe a bird or other animal, they would be inspired to praise God and marvel at his greatness in designing creation.”**

That sense of wonder is certainly hard to capture when we are hunched over our smartphones, trying to catch up on the latest news of the virtual world. “One has to ask the question, have our lives become so *virtually* busy that we have missed the opportunity to engage together in real face-to-face encounters with God’s creation?”

Misplaced wonder leads to wander. Instead of being enamoured with increased “memory” and “data storage,” let’s increase our memory and devotion to the reality that his memory is

our salvation and security. Only as we behold him face-to-face in true faith will the fog of our diversions turn into the fire of delight in his purposes to reclaim, redeem and restore broken and ruined lives.

Consider this unique perspective: “We don’t need more time for **Facebook**; what we really need is to **book** more **face-to-face** time.”

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Consider taking a week-long or even merely a one-day fast from media. What would a Christ-centred, Spirit-empowered, Mission-focused life look like without being virtually connected?
2. In what ways can I book face-to-face time with others in order to recognize, enjoy and regain a sense of wonder in God’s creation?

*Dan Buggie’s blog post Through the Eyes of Youth can be found at seatosea.net/new-ventures/lightpoints-at-jane-and-finch/news.

*I WAS AMAZED BY, AND
REMINDED OF, HOW IMPORTANT
A SENSE OF WONDER IS IN
DISCERNING GOD.*

I Can't Wait to See Jesus!

The disciples went and did as Jesus had instructed them. They brought the donkey...and those that followed shouted, "Hosanna to the Son of David!" "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" "Hosanna in the highest heaven!" When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, "Who is this?" The crowds answered, "This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee." — MATTHEW 21:6–11

I visited the Holy Land and walked the Jerusalem road where Jesus had humbly ridden that donkey. Like those who gathered 2,000 years ago, my heart was filled with faith, thanksgiving and praise, but I didn't see Jesus. I could only imagine the scene and would have traded my present situation with anyone in that biblical crowd to witness his triumphant entry.

I yearn to see Jesus. I ache for the day when my knees will instantly yield to him whom my eyes see. Along with the Church throughout the ages, my faith waits to see him,^[1] but wait a little longer I must.

Meanwhile, my faith hangs on; better yet, it grows. These eyes of faith, they see what is invisible. My faith rests upon the testimony of those who saw and touched him many years ago. My faith is deepened and empowered by the living Spirit who assures me that one day I myself will see Jesus. Faith both responds to what it sees and what it yearns to see. Today I believe that the Jesus who rode the donkey and the Jesus who will ride on a white horse is present right now, although invisible (Revelation 6:2). His Holy Spirit empowers my faith, but all the while my heart aches, and my eyes look to the skies, hoping to see Jesus.

FURTHER SCRIPTURE REFLECTION: JOHN 20:24–29

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Do I really thirst to see Jesus one day, or have I grown dangerously accustomed to not seeing him? How does that influence my daily Christian walk?
2. In the midst of my own trials, what can I do to be centred on a very present yet invisible Jesus?

Jean Martin is Professor and Director at l'Institut Biblique VIE (Life Bible Institute) in Quebec, which prepares lay and licensed workers for ministry in French. Visit ibvie.org

^[1] Article 11 of the Statement of Faith of the Christian and Missionary Alliance in Canada: "The second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ is imminent and will be personal and VISIBLE..."

Light and Momentary

For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal. — 2 CORINTHIANS 4:17–18

A former pastor of mine, when facing surgery, made this telling remark: “You can call it major surgery or minor, but if it’s on me, it’s major!” While we chuckle at this, there is quite a bit of truth here. Things feel quite different when they are happening to us.

The interesting thing is that the Apostle Paul says exactly the opposite when recounting his trials. Paul lists various trials and persecutions and then has the audacity to refer to them as “light and momentary troubles.” The word *light* in the Greek actually means that it is “easy to bear.” The word *momentary* means “for the moment.” Paul is saying that the problems we think are major, in the eternal scheme of things, are actually minor.

How can this be? Our problems are minor in comparison to the *major* impact they are having in the eternal realm. Each trial that you and I face, as we keep putting our trust in the Lord, is actually an investment into a currency that does not depreciate: “eternal weight of glory.”

While the pain on this end feels insurmountable and even causes us to question our faith, that very struggle is planting seeds of glory in an eternal Kingdom. While our natural inclination is to focus on how *major* it is, shifting our perspective lessens the pain and helps us rise above it. When suffering enters our lives, the question we really want answered is, “Why? Was it for nothing?” Paul is saying here that through eternal lenses, there is no such thing as a wasted trial. They are all achieving an eternal weight of glory.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Is there a major trial I am facing right now? Instead of rehearsing the “why” question or the “when will it end” question, ask the Spirit of God show you how he might be using this to benefit you eternally.
2. When standing with another in their struggle, ask the Lord to allow them to see what he is up to. Don’t tell them that their trial is “light and momentary,” but ask God to lend them his wide-angle lenses.

Kathy Klassen was raised in Ethiopia as a daughter of missionaries. She now serves at First Alliance Church in Scarborough, ON and ministers to people in the Spirit’s power to encourage an abundant life in Jesus.

And He Shall Reign Forever

...“Oh, how my soul praises the Lord. ...His mighty arm has done tremendous things! He has scattered the proud and haughty ones. He has brought down princes from their thrones and exalted the humble.” — LUKE 1:46–52 (NLT)

Perhaps you've seen the big Atlas statue in front of the Rockefeller Center. Did you know that directly across the street is a church? On one side of the street is a tribute to man's strength, industry and self-sufficiency; on the other is an image of Jesus atop an open door, welcoming one and all to his grace and into a community of forgiven and transformed men and women “spread out through all time and space and rooted in eternity” (C.S. Lewis).

Another contrast is the Rockefeller estate: part art collection, architectural marvel and story of three generations of very wealthy and important people. It sits on the east side of the Hudson River on a high hill, across from the first Alliance school, Nyack College!

At the Rockefeller estate, our learned tour guide pointed out the story of the family and art history — things that were clearly meant to impress us. At the college, however, it was a third-year nursing student who told us how amazed she was by the character of the Alliance missionaries in residence, and how important the spiritual life practices were at the school.

Simple, straightforward thought: the legacy of the school was actually far more impressive than all we had seen on the other side of the river! There is a legacy of thousands of trained people who went on to give the Gospel treasure across our continent and among the nations, which has led to other nations carrying it still further on. Incredible harvest!

However humble we may feel our efforts are in light of other contemporary empires of glimmering power, technology or cultural influence, remember that God is at work amongst his people. It is through us, he is building his eternal Kingdom.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. While human effort expires, God's work is continuous. What part of my life is a tribute to his work within me?
2. What does my spiritual life look like right now? Am I carrying the world on my shoulders like Atlas, or have I entered through Jesus' door of rest?

Mike Linnen, Director of Seamless Link, served as a pastor in an Alliance church in Ottawa for 11 years, and as the District Missions Consultant for the churches of the Eastern Canadian District for five years. He is married to Michelle and lives in Oshawa, ON with their two sons, Christopher and Nicholas.

Eat, Drink and Breathe

Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. — GALATIANS 5:25

For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit — ROMANS 14:17

What happens when the “treadmill” of life seems to be too fast, too steep? In the last year, I’ve intentionally improved my physical health. Two changes were needed: healthier food choices and increased exercise. I’m grateful for a treadmill in the basement, which was most helpful in the winter months. Normally, I eat a light snack prior to exercising. Water consumption also goes up, naturally. A good treadmill workout creates a thirst for about a litre of water.

And what about breathing? Unlike the deliberate choices for additional food and water, increased breathing just happens automatically. As the treadmill load increases through a faster pace or an increased incline, my breathing pace and volume go up—automatically!

What about our spiritual lives? What happens when the “treadmill” of life seems to be too fast, too steep? Do we thirst for living water? Do we spend more time spiritually hydrating with Jesus, the source of living water?

What about our spiritual breathing? Do we spend more time in prayer seeking the presence and power of the Spirit? Or, as life’s challenges increase, is our tendency to spend less time with Jesus, less time keeping in step with the Spirit?

The words of Galatians 5:25 and Romans 14:17 invite us to consider the importance of keeping in step with the Spirit’s presence, power and joy.

Dear God, help me to breathe you in. Even when I don’t feel particularly aware of my dependence on you, I know that I need you. Help me to live in the presence and power of your Holy Spirit today.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Am I in step with the Spirit? Is my spiritual breathing being hindered by the busyness, worries and pace of life?
2. How can I structure my days to ensure that I am exercising dependence on the Spirit?

Paul Lorimer is the Vice President, Finance for the C&MA.

New Seasons with Jesus

On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord. — JOHN 20:19–20

As my wife and I enter into the early stage of an upcoming new season, we are in a process of pondering our heart's disposition for what could lie ahead. Musing on John 20:19–23 brings a confidence and hopefulness for the changing seasons of our lives and vocation.

A new season? The frightened disciples were behind locked doors after the close of a heart-wrenching week where hope had risen and fallen to extremes. They realized things would never be the same; the intimate times of teaching and awe-inspiring miracles with Jesus were in the past. As enjoyable as it is watching the seasons fade, entering and exiting seasons of life present questions and fears.

Lord, could it just remain the same longer, not change? Is there a locked door which I would rather hide behind?

A new Jesus? Jesus made his way in through the locked doors, reminding us and his disciples that he is present, real and himself in the midst of uncertainties. In their joy of witnessing his return, they must have thought things would continue as they were before, but Jesus showed them that he would not be the same. So often I am caught in my classical restricted view of Jesus. I don't mind the occasional mind-stretching Jesus, but usually, I determine the boundaries.

Lord, am I willing to let go of my pre-fixed understanding of you and allow myself to experience you in new and fresh ways?

A new mission? Peacefully walking in the midst of their fears, Jesus breathes on them: "... As the Father sent me, I am sending you (John 20:21)." Every aspect of this account asks for

a courageous step of sacrificial faith. With faith we move to another season, experiencing a renewed understanding of Jesus to receive a new and challenging mandate with a fresh Spirit encounter.

What is in store Lord? How much do we want to be open to all that you have? Spirit of the Living Jesus fall fresh on me.

FURTHER SCRIPTURE REFLECTION: JOHN 20:19-23

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Are there any locked doors that I are hiding behind instead of breathing in the freshness of the Holy Spirit?
2. Does my view of Jesus change with each new season of my life? Do I trust him to take care of the small details as my life develops into further stages?

Francis Pearson is the District Superintendent of the St. Lawrence District, located in Montreal, QC.

**WHAT IS IN STORE LORD? HOW
MUCH DO WE WANT TO BE OPEN TO
ALL THAT YOU HAVE? SPIRIT OF THE
LIVING JESUS FALL FRESH ON ME.**

A People on Purpose

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. — 1 PETER 2:9–10

A theme that saturates both the Old and the New Testaments is that we are not merely a group of saved individuals; we are far more: we are an interconnected people who have been forged together with a common purpose and a manifest destiny, a unique calling and a characteristic like no other nation on the planet. We are born anew so that we can become a people whose distinguishing characteristic is that we are saturated, *together*, with the Divine Presence (God himself), that we hear and obey the voice of God *together*. Our presence filled with God's Presence speaks.

This was God's intention when he spoke to Moses and all Israel before he gave the Ten Commandments:

"Now if you...keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation"... (Exodus 19:5–6).

That purposeful promise, made to Israel, has been fulfilled in Jesus. All of Hebrew history was collapsed into him. When we enter into who he is, we do not merely escape the fires of hell; rather, we become the people that God intended in the first place. We are people of the Word marked by the voice of the Spirit *together*. Then, *together*, as a people, our submersion in the Word gives voice to the God we hear and love.

FURTHER SCRIPTURE REFLECTION: EXODUS 19:3–6 AND 1 PETER 2:4–10

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

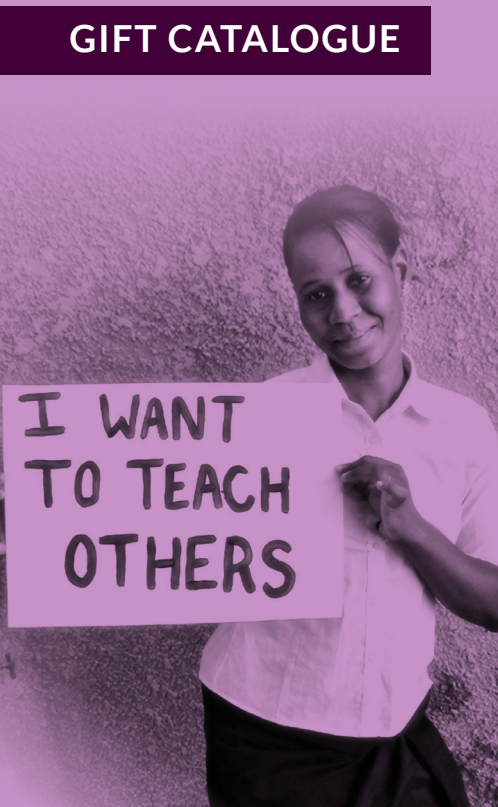
1. In comparing Exodus 19:3–6 with 1 Peter 2:4–10, make a list of what we are to become.
2. Pray to be a people on purpose.

David Chotka is the Lead Pastor of Spruce Grove Alliance Church in Spruce Grove, AB. David is married to Elizabeth, and they have two children, an adult son and a teenaged daughter.

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TO TEACH
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BUT YOU HAVE
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