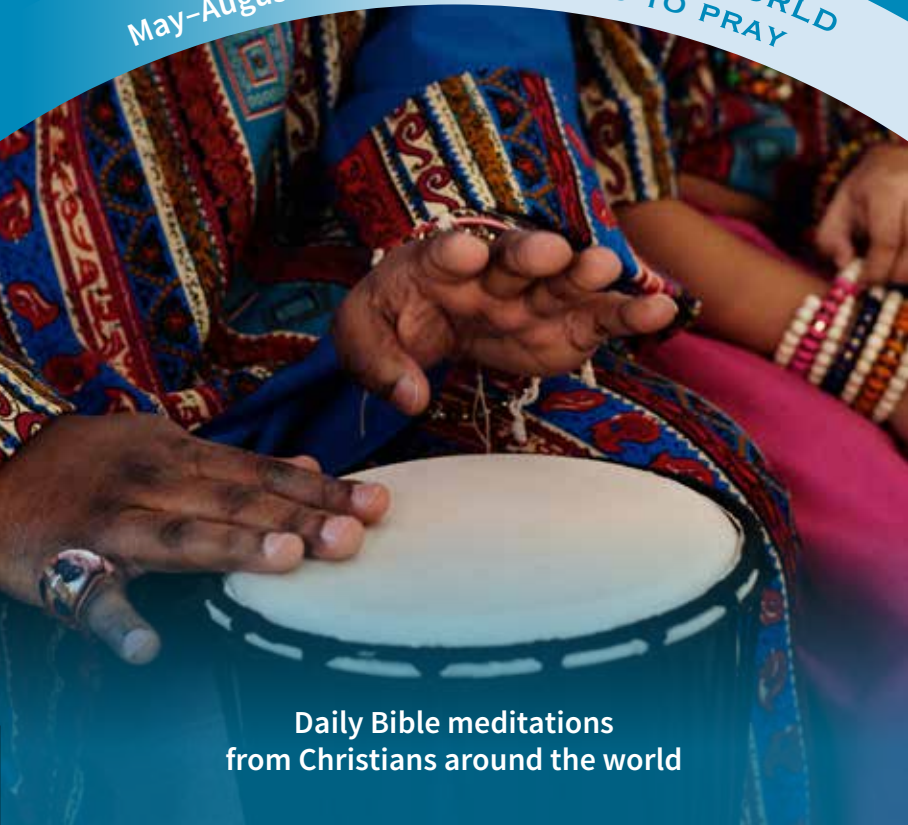


# THE UPPER ROOM

May–August 2024

WHERE THE WORLD  
MEETS TO PRAY



Daily Bible meditations  
from Christians around the world

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# THE UPPER ROOM

**WHERE THE WORLD MEETS TO PRAY**

**Kimberly Orr**

World editor and publisher

**Daniele Och**

UK editor

INVITATIONAL

INTERDENOMINATIONAL

INTERNATIONAL

34 LANGUAGES

Multiple formats are available in some languages



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### **Acknowledgements**

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# How to use *The Upper Room*

*The Upper Room* is ideal in helping us spend a quiet time with God each day. Each daily entry is based on a passage of scripture and is followed by a meditation and prayer. Each person who contributes a meditation seeks to relate their experience of God in a way that will help those who use *The Upper Room* every day.

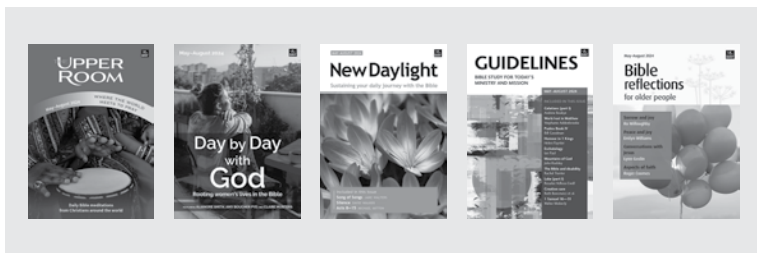
Here are some guidelines to help you make best use of *The Upper Room*:

- 1 Read the passage of scripture. It is a good idea to read it more than once, in order to have a fuller understanding of what it is about and what you can learn from it.
- 2 Read the meditation. How does it relate to your own experience? Can you identify with what the writer has outlined from their own experience or understanding?
- 3 Pray the written prayer. Think about how you can use it to relate to people you know or situations that need your prayers today.
- 4 Think about the contributor who has written the meditation. Some users of *The Upper Room* include this person in their prayers for the day.
- 5 Meditate on the 'Thought for the day' and the 'Prayer focus', perhaps using them again as the focus for prayer or direction for action.

Why is it important to have a daily quiet time? Many people will agree that it is the best way of keeping in touch every day with the God who sustains us and who sends us out to do his will and show his love to the people we encounter each day. Meeting with God in this way reassures us of his presence with us, helps us to discern his will for us and makes us part of his worldwide family of Christian people through our prayers.

I hope that you will be encouraged as you use *The Upper Room* regularly as part of your daily devotions, and that God will richly bless you as you read his word and seek to learn more about him.

## Helping to pay it forward



As part of our Living Faith ministry, we're raising funds to give away copies of Bible reading notes and other resources to those who aren't able to access them any other way, working with food banks and chaplaincy services, in prisons, hospitals and care homes.

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for all your support

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# Spiritual formation

*Train yourself in godliness, for, while physical training is of some value, godliness is valuable in every way, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come.*

1 Timothy 4:7–8 (NRSV)

The verse above is a good reminder of the central principle of spiritual formation: the sure and certain knowledge that we were born to enjoy a meaningful and engaging relationship with God. We become more fully human as we learn to reflect more vividly the image of God who created us.

Models of spiritual formation can be found throughout scripture, including Jesus' teachings on prayer and discipleship. The apostle Paul further emphasises the importance of spiritual disciplines in his letters, such as in Colossians 3:16 where he writes: 'Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God.'

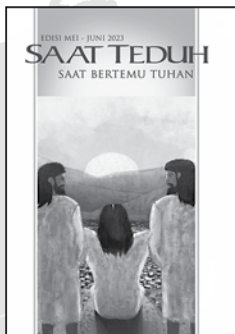
Through the power of the Holy Spirit we can engage more faithfully in spiritual disciplines and begin to mirror the life of Christ. This transformation is not a one-time event but rather a lifelong process that requires perseverance, self-awareness, self-forgiveness and discipline.

Finally, spiritual formation is not just an individual pursuit but also a communal one. We are called to journey together in our faith, supporting and encouraging one another along the way. This can be seen in the early church's emphasis on fellowship, worship and breaking bread together. May we find renewed ways to bear one another's burdens and to grow in grace for the sake of sharing the good news of Jesus with a hurting world.

*Kimberly Orr*

*World editor and publisher*

## Where the world meets to pray



Indonesian  
edition



Japanese  
edition

### Writers featured in this issue of *The Upper Room*:

- Agnes Wee (Singapore) • Kazuo Ishikawa (Japan)
- Paul Kurpengmund Anda (Papua New Guinea)
- Kaori Yano (Japan) • Kumalawaty Sundari (Indonesia)

Gifts to the international editions of  
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# The editor writes...

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

Lamentations 3:22–23 (NRSV)

In the 1993 film *Groundhog Day*, a jaded weather reporter, Phil, finds himself every day waking up in the same small town on the exact same day (2 February, Groundhog Day) over and over again. Nothing that Phil does each day changes the fact that the next day begins and carries on in the exact same way as before. Only Phil's memory remains throughout the time loop. While at first he takes advantage of living without consequences, as whatever he does each day does not matter, and of having limitless time to learn new skills, eventually the tedium of the repetition becomes unbearable. But, he discovers, even death is no escape. He still wakes up on the same day at the same time, with the same song playing from the radio. Although the film is a comedy, Phil's situation is, in fact, a nightmare.

The film came to mind as I have been reflecting on the verses above from Lamentations. Although the verses are familiar to me, and I have read them often over the years in *The Upper Room* and other BRF Bible reading notes, one thing about them has only just recently struck me – the combination of eternity (in v. 22) and newness (in v. 23).

While in one way, Phil's time loop in *Groundhog Day* is a blessing (he is immortal – his life, it seems, cannot end!), what makes it, in fact, a curse is the repetition; that is, the lack of anything new. By contrast, the composer of Lamentations finds hope in the fact that not only does the Lord's love and compassion never end – nothing, not even death, can stop them – they are also '*new every morning*'. What a promise! The Lord's love for us never dies, it goes on and on and on. But it also never gets boring, never gets repetitive, never grows stale; the Lord's mercies are always new, always fresh, always surprising.

As you read this issue of *The Upper Room*, there will no doubt be scriptures and themes that are familiar to you, especially if you are a regular reader. My prayer, though, is that through these readings the Lord will show you each day something new about his never-failing love and compassion for you.

*Daniele Och, UK editor*

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# From loss to abundance

## Read Isaiah 61:1–6

*[The Lord has sent me to] provide for those who grieve in Zion – to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of joy instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair.*

Isaiah 61:3 (NIV)

Following a fierce summer storm, my husband and I went outside to see an uprooted tree stretched across our yard. As we cleaned up the broken branches littering our lawn, I mourned the loss of the tree. On summer days we had rested under its shade, listening to the rustle of leaves in the breeze and singing birds in its branches. Now all that remained was an ugly stump. However, my husband took a more pragmatic view, realising the tree's absence allowed more sunlight to reach his vegetable garden. The plants would flourish with more sunlight to strengthen them.

Losing a tree cannot compare to losing someone or something precious, but it provides a picture of how God can turn loss into abundance. Amid the pain of significant losses in my life, God filled up the emptiness with an abundance of love. God gave me beauty and joy in spite of my loss and mourning, and praising God lightened the heaviness.

Where a tree once stood, now light floods our garden. Likewise, our scars of loss do not need to remain places of pain and darkness. Rather, they can be markers of where God met us and brought new light to our lives.

**Prayer:** *Dear Lord, thank you for comforting us when we are brokenhearted. When we mourn, you offer beauty, joy and praise to fill us up. Amen.*

**Thought for the day:** When I feel empty, God's love can fill me.

---

*Valerie Ronald (Manitoba, Canada)*

# Source of strength

## Read Joshua 1:1-9

*But as for you, be strong and do not give up, for your work will be rewarded.*

2 Chronicles 15:7 (NIV)

As I was growing up, my parents didn't have much money, and we were always on a tight budget. Both my parents would wake up at 5.00 am every morning and head to work. There were times when my dad wouldn't come home for months. At an incredibly early age I was left with the responsibility of taking care of both my younger siblings.

I had to help my brothers pack their lunch for school, wait for them to board the bus, and then get ready for school myself. Arriving home after school, I would immediately rush to the kitchen and prepare food for my brothers because there were times when my parents would get home late. Some days I felt too tired to complete all these tasks, but I still managed not to complain and to help my parents all I could.

After one very hectic day, I was simply overwhelmed. My parents would always read the Bible to us, and that day I specifically remembered, 'But as for you, be strong and do not give up, for your work will be rewarded.' I prayed and asked God for strength to continue.

Sometimes our responsibilities can overwhelm us and make us want to give up. It's important to remind ourselves that God is here with us to give us strength and courage to persevere.

**Prayer:** *Heavenly Father, we ask for strength on the days when we want to give up. Keep us always aware of the hope and future you have for our lives. Amen.*

**Thought for the day:** I won't give up; God is by my side.

*Nestor Castellanos (Texas, USA)*

# Imitators

## **Read 1 Corinthians 10:23—11:1**

*Be imitators of God, as beloved children, and walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.*

Ephesians 5:1–2 (NRSV)

A few weeks ago my daughter returned to work after the birth of her baby, and I started my new job: caring for my grandson. It's only one day a week and leaves me physically exhausted, but I'm loving it. My grandson is not yet verbal or mobile, but he is alert and always learning. He watches, listens and imitates. He smiles when I smile, and he tries to clap when I clap.

Children learn so much by imitation. Even as adults, we can easily begin speaking, behaving and thinking like the people we associate with most. Spending time with people who speak and act in encouraging and edifying ways will help us to speak and act in similar ways.

Likewise, if we want to imitate Christ in our speech, actions and attitudes, we need to spend time with him. We can do this by learning about his life through the gospels, by sitting quietly in his presence, or by talking to him in prayer. Doing so is good for us and the people who spend time with us. The more we imitate Christ, the better examples we will be for others.

**Prayer:** *Thank you, Jesus, for living out an example of how to glorify God. Help us to imitate you in all things as we spend time with you and better learn your ways. Amen.*

**Thought for the day:** I am better able to imitate Christ when I spend time with him each day.

---

*Joy Margetts (Wales, United Kingdom)*

# God cares

## Read Psalm 147:1–11

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

Matthew 6:26 (NRSV)

My wife and I recently spent an afternoon relaxing on the porch swing just outside our front door. At one point we noticed a nest of baby birds near an upper corner of the porch. Every few minutes the mother bird returned to the nest to deliver morsels of food to the chicks. We wondered how such a delicate nest in such a precarious location could keep all those hatchlings from falling to the ground. That seemed like a miracle to us and still remains a mystery.

As we marvelled at the sight of those birds and their nest, we recalled instances in our own lives when we too felt as if we were in a vulnerable nest, suspended high off the ground. We had no idea what was keeping us from falling, but we trusted that the nest God placed us in would be secure. It may not have happened right away, but like a mother bird, God always provided what we needed.

**Prayer:** *O God, thank you for tending to our needs day after day and year after year. We can surrender our fears and insecurities because we know you are watching over us. Amen.*

**Thought for the day:** If little birds are important to God, then I am too.

---

*Roberto Escamilla (Oklahoma, USA)*

# Brokenness to blessings

## Read Joel 2:18–27

*I will restore to you the years that the locust hath eaten, the cankerworm, and the caterpillar, and the palmerworm, my great army which I sent among you.*

Joel 2:25 (KJV)

Many years ago I was going through a very rough time, just coping day by day clinging to faith and trusting that God would help me soon. Then one day out of the blue when I was alone, this verse came into my mind: ‘I will restore to you the years that the locust hath eaten.’ I received it as a promise from God that whatever I was going through would pass, and that God would restore what I had lost and bless me.

Years later, this verse is still vividly clear in my mind. As I look back now, I realise the Lord has indeed restored my life and blessed me in many ways. Through this verse, I’ve learned that God’s promise of restoration means that God can take what is broken and put it together again, making it better than it was before.

God has enabled me to use my past to help others today. As a life coach and youth mentor, I’m now able to empathise and understand better the challenges and helplessness others are going through without judgement or prejudice. God has indeed turned the ashes of my past to beauty – the beauty of helping those who are in the wilderness now. That in itself is a blessing.

**Prayer:** *Lord God, thank you for your promise that you will never leave nor forsake us when we are in the wilderness. Help us to trust in your promise of restoration. Amen.*

**Thought for the day:** When faced with challenges, I will trust that God will see me through.

*Agnes Wee (Singapore)*

# Eyes to see

## Read 2 Peter 3:14–18

*Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen.*

2 Peter 3:18 (NIV)

Our Bible study was going to be about the word *grace*. We were asked to share a verse about it, and I chose 2 Peter 3:18.

The morning of the Bible study I looked out my apartment window. A large grey sack was lying in the parking spot next to my car. Was it a person? I didn't see any movement. I looked out a while later and saw him – a very dirty man standing by his sleeping bag. He was one of the many people who are homeless in our city.

I was outraged. Much money and effort has been spent on addressing homelessness in our city, yet many people remain on the streets. I took a photo of him and sent it with an email to my landlord. Then I felt an inner twinge. Whatever his situation, he was a human being, sleeping on the pavement.

I thought of 2 Peter 3:18 and began to pray, asking for guidance. I felt my heart soften. How would Jesus respond? I thought about Jesus' actions in scripture and knew that Jesus would want me to pray.

Two weeks later I met a young woman holding a sign asking for help. I prayed for her and felt encouraged to talk to her. Her story surprised me, and she welcomed prayer. As we prayed together, I felt God's peace and joy.

**Prayer:** *Dear Jesus, open the eyes of our hearts to see others as you do. Help us to grow in the grace and knowledge of you. Amen.*

**Thought for the day:** Following Jesus' example helps me respond with grace to the needs of others.

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*Lyla Peterson (Oregon, USA)*

# It's all coming back to me

## **Read Deuteronomy 6:4-9**

*Train children in the way they should go; when they grow old, they won't depart from it.*

Proverbs 22:6 (CEB)

A while ago I had a neighbour who was a young mother, like myself. We began to meet regularly for tea and, in time, our conversations turned to the Bible. My neighbour had had no church connections since early childhood, but she was curious about the Christian faith and so we began to look at the Bible together. After a while, I suggested that she read one of the gospels on her own, just a few verses each morning. She chose Matthew.

Days later I remembered that I had a booklet explaining that gospel, so took it round to my friend, but she refused it. 'I don't need that,' she explained, 'because what I learned at Sunday School is starting to come back to me.'

Reflecting on my neighbour's unexpected response has shown me that what we teach even the youngest ones stays deep in their minds, and one day, through those thoughts, God can draw them to himself. What an encouragement – especially for Sunday school teachers!

**Prayer:** *Lord, help us to sow seeds for you today, which you will then carefully nurture in the lives of others. Amen.*

**Thought for the day:** I can plant seeds for God to grow (see 1 Corinthians 3:5-9).

---

*Elaine Brown (Scotland, United Kingdom)*

# One day at a time

## Read Exodus 16:1-18

*'Give us today our daily bread.'*

Matthew 6:11 (NIV)

I woke up one morning filled with anxiety about my finances. But I found great hope when I started meditating on *The Upper Room*. That day's meditation was about how God's promises shine in contrast to the clouds that overshadow us. When I finished my prayer and closed *The Upper Room*, I looked at the cover art – three women of different ages were collecting something white from above. I read the cover art interpretation and learned the women were gathering manna.

When the Israelites left Egypt, they faced many challenges, including what they would eat. God made food called manna rain down from the sky for them, but they could only collect the amount they needed for each day.

The same God who met the needs of the Israelites will provide for us too, one day at a time. Perhaps this is why Jesus taught us to pray, 'Give us today our daily bread,' in Matthew 6:11 and why Paul wrote in Philippians 4:19, 'My God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus.' Praise be to God!

**Prayer:** *Dear God, thank you for faithfully meeting our needs one day at a time. Amen.*

**Thought for the day:** God will faithfully provide for me each day.

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Saralaveni Prabhakar (Andhra Pradesh, India)





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‘I very much appreciate reading the contributions from so many different places, and indeed so many different cultures.’

‘I feel so enriched... reading people’s personal experiences born from lives of faith.’

‘Like is an understatement – I am in love with *The Upper Room* daily devotional!’

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