

THE UPPER ROOM®



WHERE THE WORLD MEETS TO PRAY

May–August 2022



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Daniele Och

UK editor

INVITATIONAL
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INTERNATIONAL

37 LANGUAGES

Multiple formats are available in some languages



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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 to the magazine 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 *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 magazine 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.

Daniele Och
UK editor

Could you write a meditation for *The Upper Room*?

The Upper Room is, as far as we know, unique in that its readers are its writers. Known as the place ‘where the world meets to pray’, contributors from the widest imaginable range of backgrounds and locations share their faith experiences and biblical insights with the entire *Upper Room* community.

BRF publishes the UK edition of *The Upper Room*, and editor Daniele Och is on the lookout for some new UK-based writers. If you think you could write a short meditation on a Bible verse, rooted in your own experience, why not have a go? Each day’s meditation aims to help people make a connection between their lives and what God is doing in the world, but to have any chance of being published, it’s important to write in an appropriate style. You need to include:

- 1 a Bible reading and quotation
- 2 the meditation (200–250 words)
- 3 a short prayer
- 4 a Thought for the day
- 5 a Prayer focus

The maximum word count for all these elements together is 300. Send your reflection by email to theupperroom@brf.org.uk. Alternatively, submissions can be sent by post to **The Upper Room, BRF, 15 The Chambers, Vineyard, Abingdon, Oxford OX14 3FE** but please include an email address or phone number. Make sure your name and contact details are clear. Only successful contributors will be contacted and no correspondence will be entered into. A modest fee is paid for successful submissions.

Top tips for writing for *The Upper Room*

- Begin by studying and meditating on the Bible, so that its power supports your words.
- Connect scripture with your own life. Your experience is unique.
- Make only one point.
- Avoid using very familiar illustrations – try to be original.
- Avoid the use of ‘You should...’, ‘You need to...’, ‘You must...’
- Use language and examples that appeal to the senses.
- Indicate which Bible version you use for quotations.
- Remember your audience.

Good luck! We look forward to reading your meditation.

Waypoint

Stephen replied... ‘The God of glory appeared to our ancestor Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran, and said to him, “Leave your country and your relatives and go to the land that I will show you.” Then he left the country of the Chaldeans and settled in Haran. After his father died, God had him move from there to this country in which you are now living.’

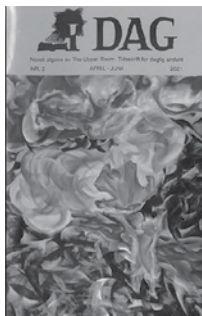
Acts 7:1–4 (NRSV)

In the passage above, Stephen opens his prophetic sermon with the sojourn of Abraham. Because we know the end of Abraham’s story, it is easy to gloss over the fact that Abraham almost didn’t make it to the promised land. As Stephen states, Abraham ‘settled’ in Haran, about halfway between Ur (modern-day Iraq) and Israel. According to Genesis 12, it took a renewed and direct call from God to move Abraham from his comfort zone.

As we enter the midpoint of the calendar year, this is a good opportunity to evaluate our own comfort zones. Are there ways in which we have stopped short of fulfilling God’s gospel call? Have we settled for a waypoint rather than fully making room for the reign of God to flourish?

Jesus asks those who follow him to risk living beyond the borders of comfort and familiarity – the settled – and to follow him into whatever and among whoever may lie ahead; for, as Jesus said, ‘No procrastination. No backward looks. You can’t put God’s kingdom off till tomorrow. Seize the day’ (Luke 9:62, MSG).

*Revd Kimberly Orr
World editor and publisher*



Norwegian edition

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

- Kate Carroll (Ireland)
- Øystein Brinch (Norway)

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The editor writes...

I lift up my eyes to the hills. From where does my help come? My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth.

Psalm 121:1–2 (NIV)

Towards the end of last year, as I was editing this issue, I spent several evenings helping out as a stagehand for a local amateur production of *The Sound of Music*. It was the first time I had been part of a theatre crew, and it was exciting to see all the activity that takes place out of sight of the audience.

‘Out of sight’ was very much our mantra as stagehands. We had to wear dark clothing, preferably black, and try to carry out the scene changes quickly but quietly and before the stage lighting came on for the next scene. (I often failed to meet any of those goals.) When setting up the stage at each venue, the stage manager stuck a line of tape to the floor at the sides of the stage. This marked the ‘sight line’, separating the wings from the stage – that is, the line between being out of and within the audience’s line of sight.

Our ‘line of sight’ is the theme of many meditations in this issue – whether that be where we focus our attention (18 May), gaining a new perspective (29 May), noticing signs of God’s presence (27 July) or the ways in which God’s care for us often goes unseen (12 August). Indeed, in one reflection, the author draws lessons from all the work that goes on ‘Behind the scenes’ at the theatre (see 15 June), something I now have a greater appreciation for.

In the final scene of *The Sound of Music*, as the Trapp family are anxious about fleeing across the mountains into Switzerland on foot, the Mother Abbess quotes Psalm 121:1, encouraging them to change their ‘line of sight’ – to see the mountains not as a barrier, but as the means by which God would bring their salvation. I pray that the meditations in this issue will likewise encourage us, in whatever circumstances we find ourselves, to change our perspective: to fix our eyes on Jesus, the one through whom God has brought our salvation.

Daniele Och
UK editor

A tiny puddle

Read 2 Corinthians 3:12–18

All of us are looking with unveiled faces at the glory of the Lord as if we were looking in a mirror. We are being transformed into that same image from one degree of glory to the next degree of glory. This comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

2 Corinthians 3:18 (CEB)

On my way to work in the morning, I looked up at the sky. The rain during the night had stopped and I could see blue sky between the parting clouds. The edges of the clouds were shining in the morning sun. I was moved by the great beauty of nature that God has created, and I slowed down to gaze at the sky.

Then I noticed a small puddle on the ground. It was surrounded by pebbles and mud. However, a portion of the beautiful sky above was reflected in its tranquil surface. Then I thought, ‘The beautiful sky is like God, and we humans are like the puddle!’

In contrast to the huge sky, the puddle was tiny. Yet its tranquil surface reflected and showed me the beauty of the sky. What about me? Is my heart tranquil and peaceful? Not always. My heart is troubled from time to time.

On Sundays, I go to church and feel peaceful. But when I am back in everyday life, I sometimes find myself getting irritated. I want to be like the tranquil puddle – tiny but peaceful, reflecting God’s love and sharing it with others.

Prayer: *Dear God, thank you for offering your great love to us. Calm our souls, and use us to reflect your love. Amen*

Thought for the day: When my heart is at peace, I can reflect God’s great love.

Hisako Adachi (Kanagawa, Japan)

No distance in prayer

Read Matthew 8:5–13

‘Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.’

Matthew 18:20 (NRSV)

When I served as a pastor at a church in Pennsylvania, someone called me with a personal concern. As the conversation ended, I asked if I could pray with him. Sounding surprised, he asked, ‘Can we do that over the phone?’ Praying over the phone was new for him. Maybe it doesn’t sound strange to us today, but it’s easy to resist at first that which is different. But we prayed, and God did the rest.

Every generation creates new ways of expressing love for Christ. As a pastor, I am always searching for innovative ways to reach people. Social media has become the new way to proclaim the same message: Jesus and his redeeming love for us on the cross.

We hear this word from Matthew’s gospel: ‘Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.’ Christ is the glue that binds us even through our new technologies. Years ago, I heard another phrase that stuck with me, and I think about it when I pray with people over the phone or on social media: ‘There is no distance in prayer.’ Because of Christ, we have a strong connection holding us together!

Prayer: *Dear Lord, remind us that you can draw us together in community no matter the physical distance between us. In your holy name we pray. Amen*

Thought for the day: There is no distance in prayer.

Cletus L. Hull III (Pennsylvania, USA)

Spiritual clutter

Read Jeremiah 4:14–18

O Jerusalem, wash your heart clean of wickedness so that you may be saved. How long shall your evil schemes lodge within you?

Jeremiah 4:14 (NRSV)

The apartment building I had lived in for four years closed. As my neighbours and I began to move out, I marvelled at the amount of stuff people had been able to fit into their apartments. My own quarters had been pretty bare, but there was always plenty of room for the regular stream of friends coming in and out to visit. Had I accumulated more things, there would not have been enough space for all of the shared meals, impromptu dancing and games of charades with those I cared about.

Though I'm not an avid collector of material possessions, I do have a tendency to store up unnecessary and even dangerous things in my heart: grudges, harsh words, hypocritical thoughts and bad attitudes. My heart can become so disorderly that there's little room left for God or other people. Unless I give the Holy Spirit complete freedom to remove everything that isn't valuable, I will remain isolated in the cramped confines of spiritual clutter.

God longs to live close to us, to share the space of our lives so we can enjoy intimacy with God and with one another. Clearing the junk out of our hearts can be difficult, but when we do, we open ourselves to experiencing life as God meant it to be.

Prayer: *Dear God, thank you for loving us enough to enter our messy hearts and clear space for eternal life. Amen*

Thought for the day: What do I need to clean out of my heart to make more room for God?

Megan L. Anderson (Indiana, USA)

Standing strong

Read Daniel 1:1–15

If sinners entice you, do not consent.

Proverbs 1:10 (NRSV)

Sitting in a hall with my fellow university classmates, we waited in tense silence for the French test to be distributed. This was my final language exam, and I needed to pass. But when the test was handed out, I couldn't make sense of it. I noticed my classmates cheating and was tempted to join them, thinking, 'Cheat now and repent later. God is merciful, right? You don't want to risk failing.'

We've all experienced situations like this. Like Eve, we feel tempted by fruit that would compromise the life God wants us to have. The key to standing our ground against temptation is to know our convictions and commit to them in our hearts.

Daniel modelled this when he resolved to keep the diet laid out in the Jewish law and avoid foods provided by the king of Babylon. God honoured and rewarded his commitment. When we know what our faith requires and commit to it, we can fight temptation – even if that means failing and retaking a French test, like I did.

Prayer: *Dear Lord, teach us the truth of your word. Empower us to live in ways that glorify you. Amen*

Thought for the day: I will commit to God's way, knowing that it is always better.

Joseph Adeoye (Kwara, Nigeria)

Promise of peace

Read 2 Corinthians 9:6–11

The peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Philippians 4:7 (NIV)

Since my husband, Doug, became ill a few years ago, we've curtailed many of our activities, including driving in the snow. When it snows on a Sunday, we have a home worship service together. Doug plays the piano, we take turns reading scripture and we listen to a sermon online.

One Sunday, I couldn't concentrate on our worship. Snow had fallen fast during the night, and I was worried about clearing the driveway. 'How can I possibly shovel it by myself?', I thought. We were nearly finished with our service when I heard scraping outside. I peeked out the window and saw two neighbour boys clearing the driveway. What an answer to our need! Since then, the boys have shovelled for us whenever it snows.

Philippians 4:6 tells us not to be anxious, but to present our requests to God with thanksgiving. This command comes with a promise: the peace of God. I am not sure I prayed about shovelling the snow that day. But since then, whenever I face a new challenge, I pray, 'Lord, you know we need... Thank you for your provision.' Answers don't always come in the way I expect. Sometimes God shows me how I can handle the task; other times God sends someone to help. No matter the situation, God provides.

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, help us trust that you will provide what we need. Banish anxiety from our hearts, and fill us with peace. Amen*

Thought for the day: God knows exactly what I need today.

Elizabeth Erlandson (Nebraska, USA)

Rest for the weary

Read Ephesians 4:17–28

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God – what is good and acceptable and perfect.

Romans 12:2 (NRSV)

Every day I get a peaceful moment when my daughter has gone to sleep for the night and the house is cleaned from the day's activities. This is the moment when my weary soul longs for rest. In the early days of parenthood, I sought this rest on our couch in front of the TV or scrolling through social media on my phone. I learned very quickly that this did not give me the rest I sought so desperately. I became aware that filling my weary soul with entertainment and counsel from the world yielded undesirable results – a quicker temper, shorter patience and selfishness.

It was then that I read Paul's words to the Romans to 'be transformed by the renewing of your minds.' For me, that renewal comes from intentional time spent in God's word and an effort to grow my relationship with Christ. Whether I exchange a TV show for a Christian podcast, or replace time on social media with time spent reading scripture or quiet time in prayer, God is sufficient to sustain me. The things of this world may sparkle and promise rest, but only God can truly renew our weary souls.

Prayer: *Loving God, thank you for the riches of your word and for opportunities to rest. May our lives glorify you. Amen*

Thought for the day: Time spent in God's word gives rest to my weary soul.

Sarah Hopkins (Colorado, USA)

The land of ‘What Is’

Read Job 38:1–11

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

Jeremiah 29:11 (NRSV)

I had told my new roommates that the renovations to our rented apartment would be complete before school started. But there we were, with a week of online school behind us and still no apartment. I felt responsible and blamed myself. What if I had communicated more with our landlord? What if I had found another place as a backup? What if, what if, what if?

It is easy to get caught up in the land of ‘What If,’ but as I thought over scripture, I remembered the words from Jeremiah quoted above and God’s words to Job, ‘Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge?’ (Job 38:2). Who am I to put my plans above God’s? And when I dwell in the land of ‘What If,’ I put my own plans and abilities before my trust in God. If I truly believe that God has great plans for me, I should stop asking ‘What if?’ and trust God.

Now, as I sip warm coffee at the breakfast table in my completed apartment, happily moved in with my roommates, I try my best to live in the land of ‘What Is’ – the place where God lives.

Prayer: *Dear Lord, thank you for the good plans you have for us. Give us the strength to trust you. Amen*

Thought for the day: I will trust God’s good plan for my life.

Samuel Wagner (California, USA)

A steady path

Read Luke 18:15–17

Start children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old they will not turn from it.

Proverbs 22:6 (NIV)

My life has been full of strong role models. My mother was head of the household and the single parent of six children. She worked from morning till night to support us. My grandmother Bertha left us a great legacy, teaching us by example to be hardworking and strong, instilling in us the assurance that God is always with us.

In the afternoons, my grandmother would permit us to visit Doña Esther, a woman from the neighbourhood who enjoyed looking after children. She always prepared something delicious to eat. While we ate, she read aloud stories and parables from the Bible. These stories left a deep impression in my young heart and mind, and my life began to change. Despite financial constraints, my constant hope and prayer was to continue my studies. I asked God to help me reach my goal of becoming a teacher.

I persevered, and my goal became a reality. My cornerstone of faith was laid by the strong people in my life who followed the teaching to ‘start children off on the way they should go...’ Because of their guidance, I remain on a steady path that leads to God.

Prayer: *Dear God, thank you for people of faith who mentor children and provide opportunities for them to know you. Amen*

Thought for the day: How can I encourage someone to seek the path that leads to God?

Gloria Amparo Valencia Riascos (Valle del Cauca, Colombia)



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Find out more at brf.org.uk/centenary.

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UPPER ROOM is a unique publication which has a worldwide readership of some three million. Each daily meditation includes a Bible reading, reflection and prayer. Questions for small group study are also included for each week.

All the meditations are written by readers of *The Upper Room*, who seek to share the insights of their faith with others.

‘I love the varied stories and choice of Bible passages. I look forward to my quiet time with God each day, using these notes. They also guide and widen my prayer horizon. Thank you.’

‘I feel so enriched... reading people’s personal experiences born from lives of faith, not simply doctrine or cold dogma.’

This edition of *The Upper Room* is published by BRF, which works to enable all ages to grow in faith and understanding of the Bible through its creative ministries and resources for individuals and churches.

The Upper Room is also available in giant print for the visually impaired. For more information, see page 156.

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