

THE UPPER ROOM®



WHERE THE WORLD MEETS TO PRAY

September–December 2022



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WHERE THE WORLD MEETS TO PRAY

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 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

One

The Lord will become king over all the earth; on that day the Lord will be one and his name one.

Zechariah 14:9 (NRSV)

Zechariah 14:9 makes a clear statement of devotion and faith despite the post-exilic chaos from which it emerges. It evokes an image of steadfast hope for the future of Jerusalem as she looks to rise triumphantly from the ashes of her former glory. The prophet Zechariah boldly declares that in the end God's ultimate rule over the nations and God's divine personhood are undiminished, despite apparent evidence to the contrary.

The Hebrew word *echad*, here translated as 'one', means unity, uniqueness, wholeness and indivisibility. This concept is also a pillar of the foundational Shema prayer found in Deuteronomy 6:4–9; 11:13–21 and Numbers 15:37–41. Why is this 'oneness' key to God's identity, and why is it important for us to understand? Simply put, God's essential unity asserted in prophecy and prayer offers us an invitation to a secure relationship with our creator as we navigate our fragmented world. May we by faith dare to proclaim – as Zechariah did – that no matter the circumstances, we will keep our eyes open for God's unwavering love and grace. May that love and grace take root in our governments, neighbourhoods, ministries and families – even as destructive and divisive elements seek to sow chaos among us. God is able.

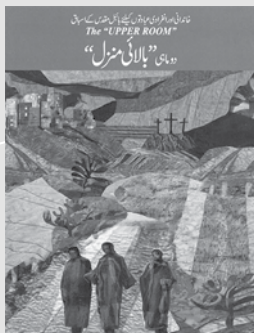
Revd Kimberly Orr

World editor and publisher

Where the world meets to pray



Hindi edition



Urdu edition

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

- K.D. Mecwan (India) •
- Navamani Peter (India) •
- Sammar Aaroom (Pakistan)

The editor writes...

The Lord God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground – trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food. In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

Genesis 2:9 (NIV)

The first thing we are told about God in the Bible is that God is the Creator – ‘In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth’ (Genesis 1:1). It is not surprising, therefore, that in each issue of *The Upper Room*, several meditations draw upon creation, especially plants and animals, for lessons about what God is like. Jesus himself frequently did this (e.g. Matthew 6:26–29), and both the Old and New Testaments attest to how creation highlights the glory of God (e.g. Psalm 19:1; Romans 1:20).

In this issue of *The Upper Room* you will find many examples of such reflections, and I was struck in particular by the number of references to trees (see especially 12 September and 19 and 25 October).

It is said that apart from God and people, trees are the most mentioned living thing in the Bible. I have not counted that myself, but regardless of the frequency of their mention, trees do feature at key stages in the biblical story. The mysterious trees of ‘life’ and of ‘the knowledge of good and evil’ are central to the stories of creation and the fall (Genesis 2–3). The tree of life features again in John’s vision of the New Jerusalem (Revelation 22). And at the climax of the biblical story, the cross upon which Jesus is crucified can be seen as a kind of tree (see Galatians 3:13, NRSV). Those are just a few of many examples.

As you may have seen in the back page of each issue of *The Upper Room*, the tree is also a symbol of the work of BRF. The seed of daily Bible reading planted in 1922 has, 100 years later, grown and branched out to various ministries that have touched millions of lives. As you daily meditate on the word of God, with the help of *The Upper Room* community, may you too, in the words of the psalmist, be ‘like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither’ (Psalm 1:3).

Daniele Och
UK editor

To explore more on the theme of trees in scripture, check out Martin and Margot Hodson’s meditations on ‘The wisdom of trees’ in *Green Reflections*, available at brfonline.org.uk

Shaking the foundations

Read Romans 8:31–39

In all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.

Romans 8:37 (NIV)

In 2011 my best friend from university was killed in a bomb attack in Jerusalem while she was on her way to meet me. She was a Bible translator doing a course in Hebrew. I was a vicar on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. Being rarely on the same continent, naturally we seized the chance to meet.

That tragedy shook the foundations of my faith. It still affects me and many others who knew her. How could God still be in control of our lives when such random violence could tear everything apart? I grew up in Northern Ireland during the Troubles, yet this was the first time political violence had ever touched anyone close to me. My friend's life and work for God's kingdom were cut off so senselessly. How could God allow it?

The words of Romans 8:31–39, which touched us when we came to faith at university, were the core of the sermon I preached at her funeral, and they remain key to my holding on to God in trust, even without understanding.

The global pandemic of recent years has shaken the foundations of so much in our world, our daily lives and perhaps our faith. But God promises that nothing can separate us from his love in Christ Jesus. When we can't hold on to him, may he give us trust that he holds on to us, always.

Prayer: *Lord, when our foundations are shaken, give us the power to hold on to you in faith, through Christ who loves us. Amen*

Thought for the day: 'God has said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you"' (Hebrews 13:5).

Mercia Flanagan (Northern Ireland, United Kingdom)

Anxiety and faith

Read Psalm 9:9–20

The Lord is a refuge for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble.

Psalm 9:9 (NIV)

I've dealt with anxiety and depression for a long time. Some days I feel like I can take on anything that comes my way; other days I feel like crawling under a rock. The constant stress of the pandemic has turned up the volume on these emotions. Most days, I feel trapped in a bubble with no way to break out.

The stress of these times wears on me, but it has also taught me about God's power, comfort and strength in new ways. I've always been a believer and talk to God on a regular basis, but this year has been different. I've clung to my faith like never before, praying and praising God for each new day and each new blessing. Even though my anxiety still remains, my relationship with my creator helps me to feel calmer and gives me the capacity to think about others. Because God is with me, I can set aside the bad feelings and work for good. And I always remember that it's okay to ask God and others for help.

Prayer: *Dear God, give us strength, guidance and perseverance so we can take on life's challenges and love others like Jesus does. Amen*

Thought for the day: On my darkest days, God's light is still with me.

Derrick Zurn (Pennsylvania, USA)

The best place

Read John 14:1–4

Do I have anyone else in heaven? There's nothing on earth I desire except you.

Psalm 73:25 (CEB)

After our father died following a prolonged illness, my siblings and I tried to care for our mother by renovating her house and making travel plans for her to see friends and family. She was excited to have her roof fixed, create a small garden and spend time with loved ones. Then, suddenly, she died in her sleep.

Her passing was incredibly painful for us, not only because it was unexpected but also because we had lost our father so recently. Whereas our father's illness allowed us some time to prepare for his death, we did not expect our mother to pass away so soon after. The reality of losing both parents seemed unbearable.

The morning after her interment, I was filled with sadness. Hoping to find encouragement, I turned to the Bible and saw Psalm 73:25. I took that verse as a heaven-sent message for me. It was as if my mother was assuring me that she was in the best place possible – with God in heaven. While we get a taste of God's goodness on earth, everything will finally be made right in the afterlife (John 14:1–4). I miss my parents, but the thought of their rejoicing in the presence of God eases my pain.

Prayer: *Dear Lord, when we are faced with death, help us to hold on to the hope of heaven, where we will join the communion of saints and rejoice in your presence. Amen*

Thought for the day: My joy will be made complete in heaven.

Marlene Legaspi-Munar (Batangas, Philippines)

Keep focused

Read Matthew 14:22–31

But when [Peter] noticed the strong wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, 'Lord, save me!' Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, 'You of little faith, why did you doubt?'

Matthew 14:30–31 (NRSV)

I have led seven trips to Israel over the past 25 years. During the course of those trips, we always take a boat ride on the Sea of Galilee. When we reach the middle, I ask the captain to turn the boat engines off. As we drift along in the water, I read two passages of scripture aloud: Jesus calming the storm (Luke 8:22–25) and Peter walking on the water (Matthew 14:22–23).

On my most recent trip, a small squall began to kick up the waves while we were travelling across the water. It occurred to me that Peter might have seen similar waves and felt a similar wind. And when he took his eyes off Jesus to look at the storm around him, he became fearful and began to sink.

I think we all can relate to Peter when we feel like life is out of our control. But if we turn our focus to Jesus through scripture and prayer, he will always be there to reach out his hand and pull us to safety.

Prayer: *Thank you, Jesus, for your constant presence. Teach us to rely on you in every situation. Amen*

Thought for the day: How will I keep my life focused on Christ today?

Gregory N. Seltzer (Florida, USA)

The power of water

Read John 4:1–15

‘Whoever believes in me, as scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them.’

John 7:38 (NIV)

On a recent trip with friends to a nearby lake, I visited a beautiful waterfall. I was able to hear it even before I could see the falling water plunging into the lake below. We anchored our boat and began to swim towards the waterfall. The force of the water, the sound and the coolness didn’t scare me. I swam with confidence to the waterfall, letting the water hit me on the head, neck and shoulders. My friends were smiling, and we stayed near the waterfall for quite some time, allowing the cool water to refresh us in the heat of the day.

That majestic waterfall reminded me of God’s love, power and constant presence. Jesus offers us living water. He quenches our thirst and fills us with his love until it overflows from us to others. This water satisfies like no other and fills the soul.

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, we want to be filled with your living water so that we may be refreshed and share your love with others. We pray as Jesus taught us, ‘Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: for thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.’**

Thought for the day: What evidence of God’s love and power do I see in my life?

Susan G. Walters (Kentucky, USA)

Trusting God

Read 1 Peter 5:6–11

Cast all your anxiety on [God], because he cares for you.

1 Peter 5:7 (NRSV)

In high school, French was a difficult subject for me. I had little interest in it, and my teacher's explanations were unclear to me; so I had difficulty in the course and received bad grades. Full of anxiety, I developed a hatred for the subject and prayed to God that I would never have to study it again.

When I was admitted to university, I learned that I was required to take multiple French courses. Fear gripped me, and I wondered how I would pass the classes. I prayed about my fears and asked God to make a way for me. I had full confidence that God would answer me.

After I had prayed, the Lord gave me courage and inspired in me an unexpected interest in French. I had an excellent French professor and received support from people around me. This, along with my constant trust in God, made learning easy. I excelled in my French courses and exams, and I even became a teaching assistant. It was a wonderful experience!

When we have problems or burdens and don't know what to do, we can turn to God. When we lay our cares upon the Lord in prayer, God has promised to sustain us.

Prayer: *Dear God, strengthen us when we are afraid, and give us confidence to face the challenges before us. Amen*

Thought for the day: God helps me carry my burdens.

Asamoah Joseph Omono (Greater Accra, Ghana)

Spiritual friendship

Read Ephesians 5:19–21

'Where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them.'

Matthew 18:20 (NIV)

In 2009, my friend Michelle and I had the opportunity to attend a Walk to Emmaus spiritual retreat. The experience was filled with community-building, worship and Bible study. We did not want to lose our excitement about our faith when we returned home, so Michelle and I started to meet once a week. We studied different materials and books over a cup of coffee and breakfast.

Eight years after we began our weekly ritual, Michelle moved across the country. I worried that this would make it difficult to continue our special friendship. I had always interpreted Matthew 18:20 as Jesus asking us to meet in person when we study and worship. But meeting virtually with Michelle has taught me that you do not have to be in the same room for the Lord to be with you. All you have to do is join your hearts and minds together.

While we can no longer share a meal at the same table, we continue to share details of our lives and encourage each other in our faith journeys by discussing *The Upper Room*, hymns and books. Our relationship is one that I cherish.

Prayer: *Dear Lord, thank you for the gift of spiritual friendships. For those of us with this type of friendship, bless these relationships. For those of us longing for a friend, please put the right people in our life. Amen*

Thought for the day: My faith is strengthened by the faith of others.

Yvette War Bonnet (Washington, USA)



Enabling all ages to grow in faith



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100 years of BRF

2022 is BRF's 100th anniversary! Look out for details of our special new centenary resources, a beautiful centenary rose and an online thanksgiving service that we hope you'll attend. This centenary year we're focusing on sharing the story of BRF, the story of the Bible – and we hope you'll share your stories of faith with us too.

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

To find out more about our work, visit
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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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