

THE UPPER ROOM

May-August 2023

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

Daniele Och

UK editor

INVITATIONAL
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INTERNATIONAL

36 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

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Crossing the Jordan

[Jesus] went away again across the Jordan to the place where John had been baptising earlier, and he remained there. Many came to him, and they were saying, 'John performed no sign, but everything that John said about this man was true.' And many believed in him there.

John 10:40–42 (NRSV)

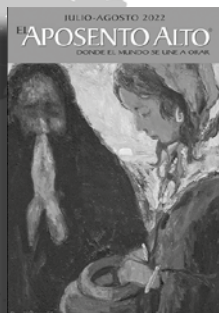
In this scripture passage, the apostle John records a detail that is often overlooked. As Jesus makes his final journey towards Jerusalem, John says that Jesus crosses the Jordan river at the place where John the Baptist had met him a few years earlier. Jesus' wading through the Jordan and crossing into more Romanised territories – instead of playing it safe and sojourning among his Jewish compatriots – crystallises the global, intercessory mission of the people of Israel, Jesus and the church.

Throughout the Bible, crossing through water symbolises the birth of something new: a new covenant people (Exodus 14:21–25; Joshua 3), a new advent of God (Mark 1:9–10), and now a renewed mission to 'go into all the world and proclaim the good news' (Mark 16:15), and not just to those who look, think and act like us. John Wesley, one of the founders of the Methodist movement, paraphrased this call with the words, 'The world is my parish.'

As we move into the heart of 2023, will we have the holy courage to wade into the depths of God's love and grace, and follow Jesus 'across the Jordan'? Let us remember our baptism and renew our commitment to our global gospel mission.

Revd Kimberly Orr
World editor and publisher

Where the world meets to pray



Spanish edition

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

- Julianis Báez Pichardo (Dominican Republic)
- Ruth Mancilla (Mexico)
- Sandra dos Santos (Uruguay)

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The editor writes...

'What do you have against me, man of God? Did you come to remind me of my sin and kill my son?'

1 Kings 17:18 (NIV)

The story of the widow at Zarephath is not the best known of the episodes in Elijah's dramatic life, as told in 1 Kings. But for me it reveals as much about both the awe-inspiring power and the tender-hearted grace of God as the two more familiar stories that follow it (the contest with the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel, and the Lord's 'still, small voice' at Horeb).

While famine ravages the land, the prophet Elijah is led to the home of a widow and her son who face starvation. In a demonstration of his sovereign power, however, God causes the widow's supply of food to miraculously never run out until the famine is over. So far, so good.

But then the boy falls ill and the widow watches on helpless as his condition deteriorates, until finally he dies. The woman, distraught, lashes out at Elijah, in the verse quoted above. She has seen that his God is powerful, but that doesn't mean that he is good. Like other gods, she thinks, the God of Elijah can be easily offended; she has obviously done something to incur his wrath and her son has paid the price.

I have to admit that it takes much less dire circumstances for me to start questioning God's character. I find it all too easy to think that God is more inclined to remind people of their sin, and punish them for it, than he is to demonstrate grace and compassion. And given the success of books like Philip Yancey's *What's So Amazing About Grace?*, I don't think I am alone in that.

One way to change this mindset is to continue to prayerfully read the Bible, where page after page, in stories like this one, God shows that he is, first and foremost, 'compassionate and gracious... slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness' (Exodus 34:6). This is nowhere more evident than in the life of Jesus.

Back in our story, notice how Elijah does not try to answer the woman's accusations. Instead, he takes the boy to his room ('the upper room') and prays. In response, God raises the boy from the dead – showing not only his extraordinary power, but also his abundant tender grace for this bereaved widow.

As you read and pray with this issue of *The Upper Room*, may you, like the widow at Zarephath, also come to know the Lord as he truly is.

Daniele Och
UK editor

Solid as a rock

Read 1 Peter 2:4–10

'I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.'

Matthew 16:18 (NIV)

As a child, I developed a fascination with rocks. I would wander the desert areas around my home picking up rocks of all shapes and sizes. My rock collections would line the window sills at home or pile up on the back porch. I could hold a rock in my hand and imagine that it may have been formed in the fire of a mighty volcano or through the pressure of an ancient sea. I also tried to imagine how God put all these things in motion, resulting in the rock I held in my hand.

In the quoted verse from Matthew, Jesus recognised the inner strength of his disciple and calls him Peter, which translates to 'rock' in Greek. Even solid rock has its cracks, flaws and imperfections. But despite his imperfections, Peter went on to spread the good news wherever he went.

What about me? I tend to have far more flaws and imperfections than I would like to admit. Still, I ask myself, *Am I strong enough, like a solid rock, to be the foundation of love and forgiveness that Jesus has called me to be?* Thankfully, through the grace of God, I don't have to be perfect to fulfil God's purposes for my life.

Prayer: *God of grace, guide us on a path that leads us to an unshakable faith, as solid as a rock. In the name of Jesus, the living cornerstone. Amen*

Thought for the day: I don't have to be perfect to fulfil God's purpose for my life.

Doug Wingert (Arizona, USA)

Remaining hopeful

Read Mark 5:21–34

He said to her, 'Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease.'

Mark 5:34 (NRSV)

Several years ago, my wife and I were trying to have a second child. When she experienced three miscarriages in three years, we did not understand. We were disappointed and confused. But even though our hearts were sad, we found strength and continued to hope in the unlimited power of the Lord Jesus.

Every morning, we prayed and had quiet time to renew our strength. We were particularly encouraged by the story of the woman in today's scripture reading. She remained hopeful that she would be made well, even after twelve years. Her story and her faith encouraged my wife and me to continue believing that God would answer our prayers.

One day, our church held a revival meeting. During an altar call, people who had experienced miscarriage were prayed for. A few months later, my wife became pregnant again. Although she experienced bleeding and needed to go on bed rest during her pregnancy, our second child was born healthy. Like the woman who was healed after twelve years, we continued to hope in the Lord, and what we experienced was a blessing.

Prayer: *Faithful God, we praise you. Thank you for teaching us always to hope and believe in you. In the name of the Lord Jesus, we pray. Amen*

Thought for the day: Even when I don't understand, I will continue to trust and hope in God.

Wardes (Jakarta, Indonesia)

Bookends

Read Ecclesiastes 4:9–12

Carry each other's burdens and so you will fulfil the law of Christ.

Galatians 6:2 (CEB)

I love listening to our church choir as their voices lead us in praise from the chancel. For me, they are also a visible reminder of what praying as a community can do.

Years ago, my husband sang in the choir. He stood beside an older gentleman who was unsteady on his feet and whose legs sometimes gave out. On the other side of this man stood another young man, a good friend of ours. As the choir stood to sing, my husband and our friend were like bookends for the man between them, ready to catch him if his legs gave way. Every time we rose to sing, I watched the three men orchestrate their rise and descent.

To this day, I see the image of them in my mind as I offer prayers for my family, friends, neighbours and country. I thank God for the people who buttress me with their prayers, helping and sustaining me when I falter. This is a great comfort we are able to offer each other.

Prayer: *Loving God, thank you for our companions. Make us aware of those around us who need to be supported by both prayer and acts of compassion. Amen*

Thought for the day: My prayers can help steady the faith of others.

Andrea Doering (New York, USA)

New thatch

Read Psalm 51:1–12

‘He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.’

Philippians 1:6 (NIV)

An old cottage in our village needed new thatch, as the original was in bad shape. Removing the old thatch was a messy, time-consuming business, but it needed to be done properly before the new could be added.

I thought work would start on the ridge and gradually move down, but in fact it was the opposite. This took a long time and at first it seemed that the master thatchers were not doing a very tidy job. I had reservations about what the finished job would look like. But I needn't have worried, as only when all the straw was in place was it trimmed and started to look like I had initially expected. The finished roof is a sight to behold, a perfect finish.

Maturing as a Christian is painful and costly. Our old way of life is removed as we repent of our sins and ask the Lord to cleanse our hearts. Our lifestyle, behaviour and mindset need to change, but usually this does not happen overnight and our lives may look messy at times. We are a work in progress. Yet the grace of God works in our hearts and we become changed, a work of art.

Re-thatching the cottage took around three weeks. The work in us will take a lifetime, but in the hands of the Master Craftsman it will be worth it.

Prayer: *Dear Lord, please make me the best that I can be, more like Jesus my Saviour and friend. Amen*

Thought for the day: How does the Lord want me to change?

Ann Armstrong (England, United Kingdom)

God's helping ways

Read Isaiah 55:8–11

Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding.

Proverbs 3:5 (NIV)

One day a woman in our senior living community hurried down to my office. As the assistant manager, I listened as she told me about the sudden spray of water coming from under her bathroom sink. Then I ran up to the second floor with the woman following, but instead of going into her apartment, I entered the one next door. The woman protested that I was entering the wrong apartment. I said, 'I know,' and proceeded to enter her neighbour's apartment anyway. I knew nothing about plumbing, but what I did know made all the difference.

Earlier that morning I had phoned for a plumber, and I knew he was working on a problem in the neighbouring apartment. I suspected the two problems were related, but more importantly, I knew I could immediately produce a plumber to deal with the woman's situation.

I could easily empathise with the woman's confusion. So often I do not see the whole picture. When we give our problems over to God, we may wonder, *How will God help? Why is this happening instead of that?* We often have our own ideas about how to solve a problem, but God sees the big picture. We can trust God to guide us through.

Prayer: *Thank you, God, for all the ways you help us. Your ways are better than ours. Help us trust in you today. Amen*

Thought for the day: God's way is the best way.

Kim Louise Clarke (Alberta, Canada)

Quiet moments

Read Psalm 148:1–14

Sun and moon, praise God! All of you bright stars, praise God!

Psalm 148:3 (CEB)

Sunrise walks are an important spiritual and physical exercise for me. Sometimes I wake before dawn with the sense that the Creator has something to show me. And I'm never disappointed as I step out under fathomless stars and into the calm, pre-dawn air.

Often I give voice to the spontaneous and heartfelt prayer of thanksgiving that rises within me. I understand how the beauty and magnitude of God's creation could elicit the psalmist's cry: 'Sun and moon, praise God! All of you bright stars, praise God!' When a guiding star or clear crescent moon adorns the night sky, I'm especially glad to have been invited to witness God's handiwork.

In the stillness of these early morning moments, I sense God's presence. I become aware of the calm that surrounds me in this place on this planet at this hour, and I'm grateful to God for leading me to this moment. With my soul stilled, I give praise and ask for guidance in my Christian walk.

Prayer: *Thank you, God, for quiet moments in the beauty of your creation. Open our hearts to your promptings be still before you. Amen*

Thought for the day: When my soul is still, I become receptive to God's presence.

Joann Wilson (Nebraska, USA)

My shadow

Read Matthew 28:16–20

‘I am with you always, to the very end of the age.’

Matthew 28:20 (NIV)

Running has always been part of my life. Even now that I am a senior citizen, God still blesses me with the ability to run three to four times a week and occasionally participate in a race. On sunny days I notice my shadow running with me, coaching me on my stride, posture and pace. However, on cloudy days my shadow is nowhere to be seen. I am left to run on my own.

We can think about God’s presence or absence in our lives in a similar way. When life is great, we are happy, the world is wonderful and we feel that God has blessed us. When health problems, marriage troubles, job loss or financial hardships arise, we may ask, ‘Where are you God? Why aren’t you here with me?’

But even when we cannot perceive it, God is with us 365 days a year, caring for us and watching over us, no matter what we are experiencing. And God will be there with us until the end of our life’s race.

Prayer: *Dear Lord, help us to remember that you are always with us and that you will see us through each day. We pray as Jesus taught us, ‘Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one’ (Matthew 6:9–13). Amen*

Thought for the day: God is with me always.

Ron Lutz (Ohio, USA)

Turning to scripture

Read Psalm 18:30–36

Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

Romans 10:17 (KJV)

Watching TV and spending time on social media were starting to have a negative effect on me. Everywhere I looked, I seemed to find bad news – people infected by a disease, a recent earthquake, a shooting, people who had recently lost their lives. With each passing day, fear and worry began to creep into my mind. Eventually, I found it hard to leave my house. My emotions were fluctuating, but I seemed to be heading more towards sadness.

My ‘faith tank’ was getting low, and I asked myself, *What should I be giving my attention to instead?* The one thing that helped me was listening to God’s word. Day by day, I began spending more time studying scripture; I listened to sermons and teachings; I sang and danced along to worship music. Although I did not experience an instant change, I kept at it. The more I listened to God’s word, the better I felt and the more confident I became. With time, the fear and heaviness left. Spending time in God’s word can help move us beyond our fears and is always worthwhile.

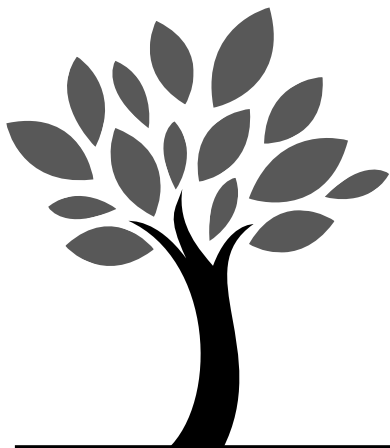
Prayer: *Merciful God, we thank you for your word, which builds us up and dispels our fear. Thank you for the loving protection you provide. Amen*

Thought for the day: When I feel worn down and afraid, I will turn to scripture.

Selina Machado (Blantyre, Malawi)



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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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