



THE UPPER ROOM

September–December 2023

WHERE THE WORLD
MEETS TO PRAY

Daily Bible meditations
from Christians around the world

EDITIONS

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WHERE THE WORLD MEETS TO PRAY

Daniele Och

UK editor

INVITATIONAL
INTERDENOMINATIONAL
INTERNATIONAL

34 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

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.

If you've enjoyed and benefited from our resources, would you consider paying it forward to enable others to do so too?

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Longing for God's presence

Just like a deer that craves streams of water, my whole being craves you, God. My whole being thirsts for God, for the living God. When will I come and see God's face?

Psalm 42:1–2 (CEB)

This familiar opening to Psalm 42 reminds us that humans were created to long for and cry out for the presence of God. The image of a defenceless doe helps make the scene all the more poignant and poetic. A doe alone at a stream would feel nervous and exposed. The necessity of her thirst would drive her to the water's edge, but the very act of drinking puts her into a physically vulnerable position. So before taking a drink, she will shriek and bark to warn off any lurking predators and to seek protective assistance from friendly companions that may be nearby.

The psalm encourages us to cry out to our creator from the depths of our being and to acknowledge our need for the living God to act on our behalf. Our existence is linked to God's life and creative will. But of course, desiring to literally see the face of such a vibrant and immense being could have dangerous, unintended consequences. As Exodus 19 warns, a full-on experience of God's direct presence is beyond our human capacity.

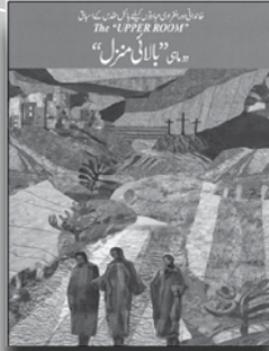
The act of prayer, as outlined in Psalm 42, properly mediates our engagement with such a powerful being. Yes, there are boundaries between humans and God, but when we cry out to God, we can be assured that the creator of the universe loves us and wants to be in relationship with us.

*Revd Kimberly Orr
World editor and publisher*

Where the world meets to pray



Sinhala edition



Urdu edition

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

- Ruth Haroon (Pakistan)
- Shantha Rosa (Sri Lanka)
- Flora Sagadevan (Sri Lanka)

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The editor writes...

Christ is all, and is in all.

Colossians 3:11 (NIV)

As the blurb on the back cover says, all the meditations in each issue of *The Upper Room* are written by its readers. As a result, each day you are reading the insights and perspective of a different person in a different context – often from a different part of the world. What unites them all, however, is the desire to share some insight into the nature and character of God that they have gained through their day-to-day life, be it a conversation with a friend, an observation from nature or an answer to prayer.

This diversity of writers, which is a key feature of *The Upper Room*, is likewise a characteristic of the Bible. As even a cursory flip through its pages will reveal, the Bible is not a single book, but a collection of books, written by dozens of different authors from different backgrounds and over hundreds of years (and there isn't space here to mention all the other issues surrounding how the Bible came to be formed and the variations in what different Christian traditions consider to be scripture). Yet amid all this variety is the common thread of God's love for the world, whose ultimate expression is found in the person of Jesus Christ.

If creation reveals something of the nature of the creator, then the richly diverse nature of the Bible should come as no surprise. It is, after all, inspired by the God who created the heavens and the earth 'in all their vast array' (Genesis 2:1), whose love 'surpasses knowledge' (Ephesians 3:19) and who 'transcends all understanding' (Philippians 4:7). God cannot be contained within one perspective, one tradition or one creed.

Several of the meditations in this issue reflect on this aspect of God as revealed in his creation and his people – see, for example, the meditations on 19, 21, 26 September; 1, 4 October; 4, 12, 29 November; and 2, 9 December. As you read, I pray that you will come to know something new about who God is and what God is like from the insights of your fellow *Upper Room* readers who, though different from yourself, are nevertheless, together with you, part of the one people of God in Christ.

Daniele Och
UK editor

Walking in high places

Read Habakkuk 3:16–19

The word of God is living and active.

Hebrews 4:12 (NRSV)

When I first memorised today's scripture reading, I was not sure what it meant. 'The Lord God is my strength, and he will make my feet like hinds' feet, and he will make me to walk upon mine high places' (Habakkuk 3:19, KJV). *What are 'hinds' feet?* I wondered. *In what 'high places' do they walk?* Now Habakkuk's prayer has become my own. I've come to understand how the feet of a deer scaling rocky cliffs is an analogy for life.

Habakkuk struggled with failed crops, dying livestock and an invading army of Babylonians. He cried out to God, yet he also vowed to wait patiently. Our family has struggled with work- and family related stress, surgeries and illnesses, and storm damage to our home. During those times, fear and doubt overwhelmed us. Yet scripture gave us peace and promised direction and hope for the future. It taught us how to wait on God.

Habakkuk's prayer ends with rejoicing that God will enable him to keep going. God's word does that for us. The Bible enables us to view our struggles from God's perspective and to persevere.

Prayer: *Steadfast God, thank you for the confidence scripture can inspire. Help us listen to your word. Amen.*

Thought for the day: Scripture holds meaning for my life and hope for my future.

Melinda Burlison Box (Texas, USA)

A lesson from children

Read Mark 10:13–16

'I was a stranger and you invited me in.'

Matthew 25:35 (NIV)

Two newcomers to the local Boys' Brigade company were born in Brazil and spoke only Portuguese. Their family had recently immigrated to Scotland, as their father was training to be a Church of Scotland minister, and had moved into a house nearby.

At first the two boys struggled to learn English. The other boys in the company helped them, and at the same time willingly learned Portuguese from their two new friends.

In today's reading, Jesus points to children as an example of the kind of people to whom the kingdom of God belongs. In the same way, the behaviour of this group of boys provides a lesson for all of us. It is commendable to welcome strangers from other nations into our communities and to introduce them to our ways. It is even better, however, to learn from them also and to show how much they are valued.

Prayer: *Dear Lord, help us to welcome others into our land, into our churches and into our homes. 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: Jesus said: 'Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me' (Matthew 18:5).

Bill Findlay (Scotland, United Kingdom)

Wasting time

Read Ephesians 5:8–20

Be careful, then, how you live, not as unwise people but as wise, making the most of the time, because the days are evil.

Ephesians 5:15–16 (NRSV)

I'd say that I manage my time well, so it startled me recently to discover I'd wasted an entire week! I couldn't believe it, but there it was on my phone app usage report: *solitaire* – seven days, 10 hours, 13 minutes. I had wasted an entire week playing *solitaire*.

In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul urged believers to use their time carefully. He exhorted them to follow the example of Christ and to seek God's will when deciding what activities to pursue. Paul advised that we spend time worshipping God, encouraging one another and singing songs of thanks and praise.

What could I have done instead of playing *solitaire*? What if I'd studied the Bible or memorised scripture during those seven days, 10 hours, 13 minutes? Suppose I'd called church members who are lonely, written encouraging notes, prayed for missionaries or volunteered in places where I could share the good news. It's the small, unnoticed distractions that take up the time the Lord grants us. Some distractions might steal opportunities and others hinder obedience. When we carefully examine our walk, we can make sure each step follows Christ.

Prayer: *Dear Father, help us to spend our time wisely, doing things that build up others and glorify you. Give us courage to imitate Jesus. Amen.*

Thought for the day: How is God calling me to use my time?

Renny Gehman (Texas, USA)

A morning song

Read 1 Peter 5:1–11

Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me.

Psalm 51:10 (KJV)

Years ago, I worked at night. It was a hectic life. I took my two children to and from school and then to sports or after-school activities. I seldom slept well; I was always grumpy and completely exhausted by the weekend. So I asked my family to please keep the house quiet until 10.00 am on Saturdays, hoping to get needed sleep.

Early one Saturday I awoke to the shrill voice of my four-year-old, Andrew, singing at full volume. I bounded from our bedroom, half-asleep and irritated. But as I came to Andrew's bedroom, his words pierced my soul. He sang: 'Create in me a clean heart, O Lord, my God.' He was sitting on the floor looking up at me, his hands full of plastic toys.

As I stood there, still recoiling from irritation, my attitude suddenly changed. I told him how beautiful his song was. He had revealed an important need in my life that I had overlooked. In my haste to take care of my family's earthly needs, I had neglected to keep my heart filled with the peace, love and joy that only God can give. In the many years since then I have been reminded of that lesson each time I think of my son's morning song.

Prayer: *God, our parent, as we try to meet the needs of our family, help us remember that our greatest need is staying close to you and showing your love to those around us. In Jesus' name. Amen.*

Thought for the day: In the busyness of my day, I will remember God's joy.

Sam Whatley (Alabama, USA)

Shaped by Christ

Read 1 John 4:12–16

God is the one who enables you both to want and to actually live out his good purposes.

Philippians 2:13 (CEB)

Clad in his favourite work gloves, my husband's strong hands have dug gardens, shovelled snow and fixed cars. The worn leather gloves are permanently curved in the shape of his hands. But when they are laid aside on the shelf, no matter how much they resemble my husband's hands, the gloves are lifeless.

Like a glove moulds to a hand, my soul is shaped by the light of Christ within it. This is what I desire, but sometimes I get distracted by my own agenda. I draw near to God by focusing on scripture and listening prayerfully. God's power restores my spirit and works through me to accomplish that which I cannot do on my own.

It takes time to break in a new pair of gloves, yet with use the leather gradually forms to the hand's unique shape. When our soul is formed to the shape of our indwelling Saviour, we can work towards God's purpose for our life. It is a close, loving partnership.

Prayer: *Dear Lord, strengthen us by your Spirit so that we can fulfil the purposes you have for us. Amen.*

Thought for the day: God works in and through me to fulfil God's purposes.

Valerie Ronald (Manitoba, Canada)

Embracing obstacles

Read James 1:2–8

Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance.

James 1:2–3 (NIV)

For years I viewed health issues, career setbacks and other difficulties as frustrating interruptions to the life I wanted. Every time I overcame a tough situation, another one sprang up, slowing my progress.

However, God helped change my attitude towards such challenges through an unlikely sport: dog agility. For over a decade I ran alongside Portuguese water dogs through winding courses filled with jumps, tunnels and other obstacles. In agility competitions, speed is less important than successfully navigating each obstacle.

Both in dog agility and in life, I have learned that what is most difficult can prove most important. And thankfully we do not endure trials alone. Today's reading from James teaches us that perseverance is developed through the testing of our faith during life's trials and is key to making us 'mature and complete'. It also reminds us that God's guidance is available to all who seek it. Much like my dogs could master difficult agility courses when they sought my direction, I have discovered that I can better handle challenges when I direct my attention towards God. When we keep our focus on God, we can find joy even in life's most unwanted interruptions.

Prayer: *Dear God, help us to see our difficult circumstances through your eyes, knowing that our struggles can help us grow to be more like Jesus. Amen.*

Thought for the day: Focusing on God will help me find joy no matter my circumstances.

Patrick Klingaman (Maine, USA)

The fire

Read John 14:15–27

‘I will ask the Father, and he will send another Companion, who will be with you forever.’

John 14:16 (CEB)

I was six years old and sleeping soundly when I was shaken awake and yanked out of bed by my panic-stricken mother who was saying: ‘There’s a fire.’ Her trembling hands pulled a shirt over my head as we ran outside and away from our apartment. We stood at a distance, and I heard my mother softly murmuring prayers for God’s protection as firetrucks roared in and the crew began fighting the blaze. Clutching her hand, I looked up to see smoke pouring from many windows of the building we had just escaped. My heart pounded loudly, and I remember praying, ‘I pray the Lord my soul to keep.’ I did not have a lot of prayers to draw upon at that age, but my mother’s murmurings and the security I felt as she pulled me closer brought me great comfort.

In my adult life, when I face unexpected and sometimes terrible events, I often experience something similar. The Holy Spirit surrounds me, calming my racing heart just as my mother did so long ago, and I again whisper, ‘I pray the Lord my soul to keep.’ In today’s scripture reading, Jesus said he would ask the Father to send a Companion who would never leave us. God sent the Holy Spirit with a promise to be with us always and forever. We are never alone in this challenging life.

Prayer: *Loving God, thank you for holding us always through the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.*

Thought for the day: I always have a companion in the Holy Spirit.

Gael Stuart Phaneuf (Colorado, USA)

Unexpected generosity

Read Genesis 22:1–19

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.

Psalm 23:1 (NRSV)

Several years ago, I was employed in a school administration office. One day I had only enough money for my commute to the office. Because I had no money to buy breakfast, I continued working at my desk rather than joining the others who left for the canteen.

Suddenly I heard a voice behind me, and I turned to see a friend of mine who was a pastor. I was surprised to see him at school. He invited me to join him for breakfast in the canteen where he paid for my meal, gave me some extra money and offered me a pair of shoes. I could not believe it! My shoes had holes in them. When I asked him what prompted him to extend all these kind gestures, he said that he felt called to do so.

This incident occurred seven years ago, and it led me to have complete trust in God for all my needs. Presently, I am a student at a theological college, and I believe my friend's generosity was the beginning of God's calling upon me to serve in ministry full-time. God can provide for our needs in surprising ways.

Prayer: *Dear God, you see our needs and provide for us in unexpected ways. Thank you. Amen.*

Thought for the day: I can trust God to meet my needs in unexpected ways.

Shantha Rosa (Sri Lanka)



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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.

