

# Lenten Devotional



## 40-Days of Power: *Metropolitan Cares*

Metropolitan Baptist Church  
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*Dr. Maurice Watson, Senior Servant*

Dear Metropolitan:

Welcome to the **40-Days of Power Lenten Devotional for 2018!** For many years, members and friends of Metropolitan have contributed to the creation of a booklet of daily devotions for the Lenten season. Our theme for this year is *Metropolitan Cares!*

As we reflect on the salvific work of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, our hope is to bring God's Word into your daily life with each devotion you read. As you daily meditate on the scriptures, creatively find ways to apply the lessons, and prayerfully seek God for guidance and direction, we believe this experience will only enhance your spiritual development and maturity.

In addition to this devotional, there are a variety of ways you can engage in feeding your spirit during this season:

- Join us for **Church-Wide Bible Study** beginning Tuesday, February 13<sup>th</sup> for a new series *Chase the Lion* by Mark Batterson will serve as our study guide. Based upon 2 Samuel 23, it is a true story of an ancient warrior named Benaiah who chased a lion into a pit on a snowy day – and then killed it. For most people, that situation wouldn't just be a **problem** . . . it would be the last problem they ever faced. However, for Benaiah, it became an **opportunity** for him to step into his destiny. After defeating the lion, he landed his dream job as King David's bodyguard and eventually became the commander-in-chief of Israel's army under King Solomon. So come out to Bible Study to learn how you can also gain the faith and courage to conquer your lion. Books are \$14.00.
- Participate in our **ARK (Acts of Random Kindness) Project**. Each week, members are encouraged to do at least one act of random kindness. ARK cards will be available after each worship service.
- Call in for the **Morning Glory Prayer Call**, every weekday at 6:00 a.m. (See **Prayer Calendar** for daily prayer schedule)
  - Conference Call Information: 1-555-604-9589; Access Code: 251509.
- And **The Bible Challenge** is back! We will be reading the Book of 2 Samuel; forms can be picked up in the front office or downloaded from the Daily Bread.

Also, Pastor Watson keeps reminding us that we are a church in transition. I want to share a statement he made last year from the pulpit:

"Prior to my coming to Metropolitan our church theme was *Metropolitan Strong*. I think that was a great theme to have at that time because we needed to be strong while we were in the wilderness. But now that we have come out of the wilderness our theme is moving now from *Metropolitan Strong* to *Metropolitan Cares*. People want to know how much we care about them. It is our job to inform them that we care about families, children and youth, senior citizens, young adults, middle-aged adults, singles, marriages, health, the environment, and this community. We are Metropolitan who cares about people and we need you to help us to bear witness to this truth."

Metropolitan, we have been given our marching orders to demonstrate to this community just how much WE CARE! My hope and prayer is something written within the pages of this document will feed your spirit, encourage your heart, and stir your faith to be an expression of God's love and care. Because just maybe, *we have been called for such a time as this!*

In Christ,

Rev. Adriane Blair Wise

Minister of Christian Spiritual Formation



# What is Lent?

by Dr. Shirley Jackson

*But when you **give** to someone in need . . . When you **pray** . . . And when you **fast**.  
Matthew 6:3,5,16 (NLT)*



Have you ever wondered why you sometimes feel compelled to give to the person on the street corner or to humble yourself and pray on behalf of someone or to just stop watching your favorite TV show for a season? It's amazing how God has wired us to do certain things and we don't have any idea why. God created us to worship Him. We are never so fulfilled until we do.

Furthermore, the ways He created us to worship Him are the same three ways we demonstrate our love one for another. We pray for each other, we spend quality time with each other and with God, and we give to the needy and to build up the kingdom of God. Lent is all about removing any distraction that causes us not to be available to honor God in any of these ways. It is designed to make us conscious of how we spend our time and resources that God has made us stewards over. It's about living life to its fullest with all the gusto you can while being in the will of God. It's about daily recognizing who is your Maker and the Keeper of your soul! It's about acknowledging Him in all your ways knowing that He will give you the desires of your heart.

Matthew 6:19-34 reminds us that we don't have to store up treasures for ourselves or worry about anything, not what we will eat or what we will wear, or how any of our needs will be met. God promises that when we put Him first by praying, fasting, and giving that we can't help but grow even closer to Him and that every one of our needs will be supplied (6:33-34).

## APPLICATION

1. Commit to join us on the Lenten prayer line at least 3 days each week.
2. Give a sacrificial offering to God each Sunday during Lent.
3. Do something extra kind for someone today.
4. Read Matthew 6 (NLT) in its entirety and mediate on it.

## PRAYER

*Heavenly father, I pray that each of us are drawn a little closer to You,  
through the sincere sacrifices we make during this Lenten Season to demonstrate our total dependency on You.*

*We pray blessings over every sacrifice we make to become more  
Christ-like in our commitment to care for each other.*

*In the name of Jesus, we pray.*

*Amen.*

**Wednesday – February 14, 2018**

# *So...What Does Metropolitan Care About?*

by Servant Jonathan K. Branch

*That there should be no schism in the body; but (that) the members should have the same care one for another.  
1 Corinthians 12:25 (KJV)*

The theme Metropolitan Cares has different meanings to different people. Unlike past Metropolitan slogans such as, Metropolitan Strong, On the Word, Under the Cross, and Becoming the Kingdom, Metropolitan Cares speaks of an active and inclusive church. Nevertheless, the question that comes to mind concerning our current slogan is “Metropolitan Cares...about what?”

“Metropolitan Strong” spoke to the resilience of our congregation. When I consider the challenges our church endured the past few years, I can only look back and wonder, “How did we make it?” “How did we survive?” Over the years, I saw many friends and colleagues who were an integral part of the church leave; gone suddenly. Their reasons for leaving varied. The temptation to leave even crossed my mind more than a few times. However, when I have the privilege of looking over the congregation on some Sundays and see the “remnant” of members who remained through it all, I say to myself, “There is something else at work here, something stronger than just church membership, something binding”

When Pastor Watson announced that we would change our slogan from Metropolitan Strong to Metropolitan Cares, my first thought was, “that will be on a T-shirt soon,” and it was. I didn’t understand the significance of going from strength to caring at first. Now, I understand that some forms of caring come from a position of strength. We have been “through the fire.” Now, we have to take on a position of caring, not only for our individual ministries, but for the congregation as a whole.

I have always regarded Metropolitan as being a patient and tolerant congregation. I have long believed that this trait is based in faith: an unrelenting faith in the providence of God; an unshakable faith in the grace of God; and an unstoppable faith in the mercy of God. The caring expressed by members of Metropolitan is birthed from this faith.

So what does Metropolitan care about? I believe that we care about our ministries and how we can affect our members in a positive way. I believe that we care about our pastor and the leadership of the church. I believe that we care about the growth of the church and the future of Metropolitan. As demonstrated this past year, I believe that we deeply care for the families of our church, but most of all, I believe that we care about each other.

Metropolitan Cares, and I am glad about that.

## **APPLICATION**

Pray for our church, the leadership, and ministries.

## **PRAYER**

*Heavenly Father, give us a heart to care about the things that are important to You.  
May the hope-filled testimony of Your abiding presence and awesome power, during the trying of our faith strengthen us;  
that we may show others Your faithfulness, love, and compassion through caring words and deeds.*

*In Jesus’ name.*

*Amen.*

**Thursday – February 15, 2018**

# *A Servant's Heart*

by Servant B.J. Brooks

*For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.*  
*Galatians 5:13 (NKJV)*

Pastor and Deacon are the two scriptural offices of the Baptist Church as identified in Philippians 1:1. Pastors are charged to provide for the spiritual well-being of the congregation through the proclamation of God's Word, prayers, and ministry. Deacons are charged to care for the physical needs of the congregation so that Pastors may concentrate on spiritual needs.

While a Pastor cannot minister to every congregant during times of challenge, Deacons are charged to be an extension of the Pastor and to care for the congregation as the Pastor's representatives. Deacons prepare and serve Holy Communion, prepare and assist the Pastor with Holy Baptism, visit the sick and elderly, offer prayers before and after surgeries, serve in-home Communion to those who are unable to attend worship, stand with families in times of loss and tragedy, lead ministries, share personal and financial resources with those in need, and the service goes on. Deacons are called to an extraordinary service to the people of God.

"Deacon" is derived from the Greek word "diakonos" which is a standard ancient Greek word meaning "servant," "waiting-man," "minister," or "messenger." (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deacon>) In keeping with this definition, Metropolitan Baptist Church Deacons are called "Servants" as we serve God, our Pastor, our congregation, and our communities.

The truth, however, is that every member of the Metropolitan Family is a "servant" because we are all called to serve. We are called to serve one another, to stand in the gap for each other, to lend a helping hand to those in need, to pray for one another.

There are those within the Metropolitan congregation who quietly and selflessly give and serve others. Their names may never be called, and that is usually their preference, because they serve not to be noticed, but out of obedience to The God-Spirit alive and burning within them. Helping, nurturing, and serving are as natural for them, as is breathing for us. It requires no thought. Our hearts are driven to act, to move, to give, to serve.

Pastors, Ministers, Deacons, Servants, Members, Brothers, and Sisters, by any name, the Metropolitan Family is blessed to be filled with caring Servant Leaders. Some are ordained; others are not. All are called.

## **APPLICATION**

Are you true to the servant call on your life? Are you prayerful about God's plan for your life?  
Have you been a blessing lately or are you receiving the blessings? Are you sitting or serving?

## **PRAYER**

*Dear God, teach me, show me, command me to serve.  
Show me how to show others how Metropolitan Cares.  
Give me a Servant's Heart.  
Amen.*

# Heartfelt Gifts

by Mrs. Janet M. Vernon

*Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give,  
not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.  
2 Corinthians 9:7 (NIV)*

The St. Jude Bible Class makes an annual Christmas visit to the Stoddard Baptist Home to teach the Sunday School lesson, share hugs, and gifts. About 10 years ago, we asked for the names and needs of residents without family connections. We received about 10-12 names including the name of a spry gentleman, the late Mr. Johnson. Since he had not come to chapel, we made our way to his room to meet him. To put it nicely, he refused our gift and shooed us away. Yet, he kept the copy of *Our Daily Bread*.

Fast forward to the next Christmas, Mr. Johnson met us as we came through the door. Holding our breath, we did not know what to expect, but God works in mysterious ways. During the year, Mr. Johnson had started reading the *Our Daily Bread* and with help and encouragement from others, accepted Christ as his Lord and Savior. Mr. Johnson was like a Town Crier letting everyone know, "The nice ladies from the church are here!" He greeted us every year until he was no longer able to attend chapel. Then, we made our way to his room to receive the warm greeting we came to love, share God's Word, and gifts. We believe Mr. Johnson was able to reflect on our initial visit and realize we were sincere in our witnessing and giving. It was a heartfelt gift!

We, as Christians, are required to have a giving spirit. It should be innate, meaning it comes naturally. There is something deep down in one's being, perhaps the Holy Spirit, that allows us to give spontaneously. It is an infectious spirit that gives without the promise of anything in return, but God's blessings. To give from the bottom of one's heart, means being able to meet someone's need in a loving and meaningful way.

Helping by responding to specific needs is more beneficial to the recipient and satisfying to the giver as both will know exactly how the gift is to be used. This fact was shared by charities following the donation of tractor trailer loads of clothing and furniture to areas devastated by hurricanes as there were no facilities to store or sort goods. 2 Corinthians 9 reminds us that those who give freely and generously will be remembered, for it is God alone who blesses us with resources. Most of us will never be called upon to give all we have, as in the widow's offering (Mark 12:41-44). For we are asked just to share a portion of our resources. It is very clear, we have a mandate from God to be cheerful givers of heartfelt gifts!

## APPLICATION

Take a moment to write out at least three things you are grateful to God for today.

## WRITE A PRAYER

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# *Caring: Fulfilling the Law of Christ*

by Mrs. Charlotte Brookins-Hudson

*Bear one another's burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ.  
Galatians 6:2 (NASB)*

I recently was challenged to apply this Scripture. Last fall, Pastor Watson preached a sermon titled, "Another Yes." He said that our faith cannot rest on our past responses to God. God is continuously asking us to respond with "another yes." Around this time, I learned that my Cousin Edna's health was declining and that her husband, Mac, needed help with her care. I thought I would prepare meals for them; sit and chat with them for a while; and then return to the comfort of my normal life. However, I later learned that cooking and brief visits would not be enough. Mac and Edna had no children and Edna's sister Doris was away in Texas caring for their elderly mother. My physical presence was needed. God was asking me for "another yes."

The day after Thanksgiving I packed my suitcase, left my husband and son, and went to help care for Edna. I planned to return home five days later. I did not. The next morning, I discovered that Edna wanted to go to the hospital and was waiting for me to dress her. After Edna was settled in her hospital room, I drove back to DC. Three days later Mac called and informed me that I needed to come to the hospital because Edna's condition had worsened and hospice care was her only option. I packed my suitcase again and told my husband I didn't know when I might return home. Three days earlier I had taken for granted that there would be more opportunities to "talk" with Edna. Now Edna was not speaking and her eyes remained closed. I guess this is what the songwriter meant when she said, "Time is filled with swift transition" (*Hold to God's Unchanging Hand*, Jennie B. Wilson). Things can change so quickly.

Being a caregiver is inconvenient and labor intensive, yet, it is ministry and the will of God that we "bear one another's burdens." As I sat with Edna in her hospital room, I held her hand, spoke to her, read Scriptures, sang songs, and prayed for her comfort and peace. I left the hospital to begin hospice care. Edna came home the next day, I helped comfort and care for her. When Edna's sister returned, I told Edna I was going home and that I knew she was going "home" as well. Two days later Edna made her transition. While Edna's transition brought tears to my eyes, I thank God for the opportunity to do what I could to render "another yes" to the call of caring for another. Caring is indeed fulfilling the law of Christ. When we do so, we sow "good" seeds that will reap a "good" harvest. In this, we cannot "lose heart." The Bible says, "And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart" (Galatians 6:7 NKJV). Fulfill the law of Christ by bearing someone else's burdens.

## **APPLICATION**

How can you pray for a caregiver today?

## **WRITE A PRAYER**

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# A New Commandment

by Reverend Annie M. Lanier

*A new commandment I give unto you. That ye love one another, as I have loved you, that ye also love one another.  
By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.  
John 13:34 – 35*

In what sense are we to understand that this was a new commandment? Leviticus 19:18 says that we are to love our neighbor as ourselves, so if that is repeated here in John, how then is it new? The Lord's answer reveals what is new, for here contains the command, 'Even as I have loved you'. Having love for one another is a distinguishing characteristic of Christians by which the disciples were known, and we also are known as those who strive prayerfully to be more Christ-like daily.

Christians are not to be known by distinctions of wealth, education, fame, fortune, earthly honors, or special attire, but are to be distinguished by a genuine, consistent display of love, caring, compassion and sharing. Even as I have loved you is a new expression of love, and it reveals the strength of attachment we as Christians ought to have. We are called upon in the new commandment to love until it spreads throughout the congregation, throughout the community, throughout the neighborhood, and throughout the country.

Consider, then, the times in which we live. There have been no such times in the past. We are seeing and hearing sounds unknown, and strange storms threaten our safety, verbally and physically. What shall we say to these things? Let us consider the love of Christ, the love of God in which we live, move, and have our being. Our world changes when justice prevails. When we love one another, no matter who they are, justice and peace become part of our reality. When we work for justice and equality, we are fully living into the love we are commanded to show one to the other by Jesus.

As often as we participate in the ordinance of Holy Communion, and we remember that Jesus loved us so much that He died for us, we also re-emphasize our covenant relationship with Him. This covenant instructs us in what we are to do as Christians to show forth our love one to another. A caring love, a sharing love, and a ministry of love.

Jesus makes plain His call to the disciples. "Let me give you a new command: Love one another. In the same way I loved you, you love one another. This is how everyone will recognize that you are My disciples, when they see the love you have for each other" (verses 34-35).

## APPLICATION

Jesus was bold and clear then. How much clearer do we need Jesus to be for our own lives of discipleship now?

## PRAYER

*Heavenly Father, help us to live out Your new command.  
Convict us when we would be unloving to one of Your children.  
May Your abiding love transform our hearts and minds so we may see ourselves and our neighbors  
as You see them; and show them the same love, mercy, and compassion You continue to show us.  
In the name of Jesus we pray.  
Amen.*

# True Reflection

by Mrs. Janice Watson

*“Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do. But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection.”  
Colossians 3:12-14 (NKJV)*

When our daughters were younger, they would play dress up using my clothes, shoes, and accessories. Their small feet only filled half my shoe, but they would still proudly say, “Mommy, I look like you.” Jesus tells us to not be content with just looking like Him with outward adorning, but to be like Him. We are to mature in the likeness of Him by loving one another as He loves us.

Life is complex and Jesus’ teachings often do not make sense to the natural. Vision hinders sight, but the blind can see; to get, we must give; to live, we must die; to be wise, we must become fools for Christ; to be happy, we must mourn; to save life, we must lose it; and to be first, we must be last. Yet, this is what the cross of salvation is: a sinless man died so sinful humankind could be saved. This is the love about which Jesus speaks.

We have the opportunity each day to reflect our Savior, not simply with outward attire, but with self-sacrificing compassion, thinking well of one another and having a tender heart of love. No one has life all figured out. People, in general, are doing the best they can with what they have and know at the present moment.

There is never a moment when someone isn’t seeking spiritual direction. Who better to demonstrate than his disciples (you and me) that Jesus is the Way? Let us strive to live our lives in such a way that people not only say we resemble our Father, but that we act like Him also. Then, the world will see a true reflection of Jesus Christ.

## PRAYER

*Heavenly Father, I am not content only being in your image. Help me to constantly grow in Your likeness.  
Teach me how to love like You, even unto death when you prayed,  
“Father, forgive (love) them, for they do not know what they do.”  
Make me mindful that the world is watching my life.  
Rule my thoughts, safeguard my lips and order my steps.  
As You continue to transform my life, may others see You in me and they, too, will proclaim,  
“You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” and they will want to follow you.  
In Jesus’ name, I pray.  
Amen.*



# *Caring Smurf*

by Ms. Kristin Elizabeth Hicks

*So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all people,  
and especially to those who are of the household of the faith.  
Galatians 6:10*

In 1957, William Hanna, Joseph Barbera and George Sidney founded Hanna-Barbera Productions. It was home to some of your favorite childhood cartoons like *The Jetsons*, *Yogi Bear* and *Scooby-Doo*. My personal favorite was *The Smurfs*! Each of the 100+ Smurfs had a special task in the village, according to their ability and needs of the community. Do you remember Brainy, Clumsy, Hefty, Jokey, Smurfette and the infamous Papa Smurf? In every episode, the Smurfs would contend with the evil wizard, Gargamel and his cat Azrael. Initially Gargamel wanted to turn the Smurfs into gold, then he wanted to eat them, and by the end of the original series, his only goal was to simply destroy them. He failed every time. Why couldn't he capture them? He didn't have a "village" behind him.

Every time Gargamel thought he had captured them, the Smurfs would always come together to help one another get free from their situation. They saw their fellow Smurf in need and jumped right in to help! They did this without anger, animosity or selfishness. They cared for one another. They exuded love (even grumpy Smurf) and put their minds together, you know, a little teamwork. With a little guidance from their leader, Papa Smurf, they would always find a way to escape the danger, obstacles, fear, and traps that Gargamel had set, only to return to the safety of their village ... or so they thought until the next episode.

As human individuals, we tend to think that we can handle every situation and everyone we encounter by ourselves. As Christians, we add a little prayer to that, maybe some holy oil, and then dive into the unknown. That's faith. But whether we be an "independent woman," a "man of valor," or a kid with an "S" on our chest, there WILL come a time when you need help. It's something we don't like to admit or have to ask for but rest assured, when you can't handle things on your own, God will provide you with a village, and they will help.

In the Christian village our heavenly Father provides individual gifts, wisdom, and guidance so that we might be of support and service to one another because He cares. They will spiritually and literally feed you when you're hungry, clothe you when you're naked, give you a ride to the doctor when you're too weak, pick up your groceries for you, and cook. They will make sure you make it to bible study, play games with the kids, offer a tender hug when you need it most, and hold you accountable. Some may even sing you a soothing line from your favorite hymn, hold your hand, save you from danger and pray for you when you can't pray for yourself.

The Metropolitan village I know does all of that and some. They support your dreams, speak positively over your life, nurture your spiritual development, encourage youth, visit the sick and shut in, help you reach physical and health goals, sing praises from their bellies, attend graduations, challenge your faith walk, show up at your door unannounced with two arms full of love and so much more just because Metropolitan Cares!

Like the Smurfs, we encounter challenges and obstacles every day that test our faith and sometimes require us to ask for help. Some experiences are more impactful than others. But through it all, God has surrounded us with a village of faith that lifts our brothers and sisters up in unimaginable ways. The village of faith is not a bunch of mushroom houses in a forest, it's the special place in our hearts where the Christian love we have for each other resides. It's where we, the *Christian Caring Smurfs*, help one another in a time of need and use our special gifts from God to be a blessing to someone else.

## APPLICATION

What village do you reside in? What's your Smurf task or name?  
How are you using it to be of service in the Christian village or to defeat the Gargamels of life?

**Wednesday – February 21, 2018**

# *What Do I Do?*

by Ms. Cecelia Toulson

*Therefore, comfort each other and edify one another, just as you also are doing.  
1 Thessalonians 5:11 NKJV*

Ever have one of those “I don’t know what to do moments?” I did recently.

Just before Christmas, my grandmother suddenly fell ill and transitioned quickly. I can't begin to capture how grieved I was and continue to be. I know, death is simply a part of life, but we often miss its finality. After death, there's nothing left to do. It will not change. No longer could I conjure up a plan, refinance, finagle, reschedule, reshuffle or even manipulate anything to change its outcome.

There I was, stuck! Stuck, because I'm a doer. I do stuff, and I try to do it well and generously, if possible. Ah, but what was there to do?

I couldn't go home. My mom was in a nursing home and my grandmother had transitioned, so those places I fondly remember in my head and in my heart were gone long ago. There I sat, stunned and wondering, what was I going to do?

I simply didn't know what to do, so I prayed.

As sure as day, two names came to mind, Linda Prom and Shirley Jackson. Now, that didn't strike me as odd initially because I love 'em both, but it didn't go unnoticed that the answer to my prayer was simply to reach out to people who I generally see on Sunday mornings. Random women from church who took an interest in me for some unknown, unexplainable reason. Women, with their own families and daughters, who blessed my socks off and ministered to me like I was theirs. Women who called me, prayed with me and for me, who took me to dinner, who texted me and who wrote me beautiful notes full of love and encouraging words reminding me that ***Metropolitan Cares*** – for real.

No longer shall I ever forget the importance of fellowshiping with other believers. No longer would I hide at home, attending Bedside Baptist because I was feeling sad or forsaken. No longer would I casually take for granted those brief exchanges we have with folks on Sunday mornings. No longer would I take for granted this notion of **“Metropolitan Cares.”** I've seen so many times how Metropolitan folks are there for each other, but I forgot that spirit of serving is not just reserved for others; it's reserved for me too in my time of need.

I shall never forget this!

## **APPLICATION**

How can you demonstrate and ‘live out’ this Metropolitan Cares?

## **PRAYER**

*Heavenly Father, thank You for the many ways in which You show us just how much You care for us.  
Thank You for placing us in one another's lives to bear one another's burdens,  
and to strengthen and encourage one another when we feel weak.  
We thank You this day and everyday for Your love that abides with us, now and forever.  
In Jesus' name we pray.  
Amen.*

# Do You Care Enough to “Not Care”?

by Ms. Nona Florence

*“...When this is done, I will go before the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish.”  
Esther 4:16b (NIV)*

A vile, racist plot had been set in motion. The king had unwittingly given his approval. Letters had been sent out, in multiple languages, to every province in an empire that spanned from India to Iraq. Bribes had been paid. Gallows had been built, and the lives of thousands were in peril. Enter Esther, the orphan Jewish girl turned queen. Enter Esther, literally. Walking into the king’s chambers, unannounced and uninvited, was a suicide mission. To save her people, Esther was putting her own life on the line.

Esther had counted the cost. She’d sought wise counsel. She’d fasted. She’d prayed. She’d even asked others to intercede. She knew exactly what she was doing. She knew the price, and it didn’t matter. At least not anymore. She hadn’t wanted to speak up, but silence was simply not an option.

Sometimes our love of an ideal, institution, person, or people reaches such an extent that the personal cost pales in comparison. I think of Pastor Maurice Watson condemning the hateful, “dehumanizing” rhetoric and policies of President Trump in the presence of Vice President Pence, or the 156 brave young women who stared down former gymnastics “doctor” Larry Nassar at his sentencing hearing. Who was in the room, who wasn’t, personal fear, political fallout- none of that mattered.

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. once said, “If a man hasn’t found something for which he is willing to die, he isn’t fit to live.” At some point, each of us has to come to our own Esther “if I die, I die” moment, where we’ve counted the cost, and come to the conclusion that whatever else is at stake matters so much more.

A preacher once said, “No matter where you start, make your way cross country as fast as you can to Calvary.” Esther’s story is Old Testament. In the New Testament, we encounter another person reaching his “if I die, I die” moment. In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus looked into a “cup,” wanted an escape route, faced his moment of truth, and came to the conclusion, “Not my will, but thine, be done.”

## APPLICATION

For what, or whom, do you care so much that the cost simply doesn’t matter-not the time,  
the money, the energy, the sacrifice, or the risk?  
Esther cared enough to “not care.” So did Christ.  
Do you?

## WRITE A PRAYER

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# *Free*

by Ms. Ruth R. Walker

I am free to be me.

Who is this me that I am free to be?

Is it this person I see when I look in the mirror?

Is it the father or mother; son, daughter, friend;

The person that others see when they look at me?

Is it the person I feel and sense is the self that is seeking?

To break loose from the bonds that I have imposed?

I am free to be the me that is the creature of my creator.

The nature of God abides in me.

God is light. I am enlightened.

God is life, I am vital.

Strong and energetic; God is good and I am worthy.

God's blessings are unlimited and I have talents and abilities.

God is substance, I have plenty.

God is love.

I attract love and fulfillment into my life.

Now today, I can seek of the real me;

the nature of God abides in me.

I am fully aware and appreciative

of my divine potential

fears fade, faith is strong.

I am free to be the me,

that God meant me to be.

# *With God, You've Got This*

by Ms. Cynthia Latham

*Be still, and know that I am God.*

*Psalm 46:10*

To be saved is to be conscious and aware of the power of God in one's life. Grace is not just to get us into heaven, but to get us through this life on earth. As believers in Christ, we must accept the reality of life's challenges, obstacles, opposition, trials and tribulation; yet, we are victors! In acknowledging these vicissitudes, however, we must not give them power over our lives.

Psalm 46 gives us a deeper sense of assurance as we engage in life that God is our refuge and strength and a very present help in trouble. Indeed, it takes courage to rise to the challenge and to know that God gives strength when strength is needed.

## **APPLICATION**

During this sacred season, as you set yourself apart for God:

- Acknowledge the obstacles but do not give them power.
- Renew your spiritual focus.
- Recommit to the journey with stubborn faithfulness.
- If God did it before, trust then He will do it again
- Remember, with God, you've got this!

## **WRITE A PRAYER**

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# Ministry That Makes a Difference

by Reverend Soammes Williams

Read Mark 2:1-12

*Then they came to Him, bringing a paralytic who was carried by four men. And when they could not come near Him because of the crowd, they uncovered the roof where He was. So when they had broken through, they let down the bed on which the paralytic was lying.*

*Mark 2:3-4 (NKJV)*

Bill Hybels makes the following statement in his book Courageous Leadership: “I believe that the local church is the hope of the world... If they ‘get it’ and get on with it, churches can become the redemptive centers that Jesus intended them to be.” This truth is exemplified in the declaration, **“Metropolitan Cares!”**

Four men decided to make a difference in the life of another. They made a conscious decision to bring him to a place where they know a difference can be made in his life. **They care!** Four **caring people** came together for a common purpose. They were clear on their mission. Only with a clear understanding of the mission can we make good decisions about what we will, or will not, do.

When you are inspired with an idea for a project, event, or service, ask yourself at least three questions before approaching the Pastor or staff:

1. How does it help or enhance our mission?
2. What is the scriptural basis for it?
3. Does it help us, or others, to know Christ and to make Him known?

In order to have a “ministry that makes a difference” we must operate based on our **common purpose**. Another lesson we see is that they are working in a **cooperative partnership**. They came together and made a conscious decision to do a good work - together not individually to get the man to Jesus.

Also worthy of note is that there were challenges once they reached the house. With the press of the crowd they could not just walk in. The situation called for **creative persistence**. When challenges arise somebody has to think creatively and partner with others to serve effectively. In ministry there will always be challenges. There will always be folks who don’t show up, but we must meet obstacles with **creative persistence**. Don’t give up. Don’t quit.

To get the job done, they needed **courageous participation**. I can only imagine the response to the suggestion that they go through the roof. Someone may have started listing the what ifs: what if we can’t do it; what if the owner gets upset; what if we get sued; what if we get hurt; what if, what if?

We must learn to look beyond our challenges; beyond our fears; beyond our comfort zone; beyond what we perceive to be our limitations. It’s not about our limitations. We serve a God who has none. We must be open to the leading of the Lord, then **courageously participate** in the work He has for us in order to be a “Ministry that Makes a Difference.” **We are Metropolitan and Metropolitan CARES!**

## APPLICATION

Read and meditate on Mark 2:1-12 and jot down your initial thoughts to write out a short prayer.

## PRAYER

*Heavenly Father, nothing worth doing for Your glory comes without risk.  
Grant us with the faith, courage, and wisdom to carry out the work You have given us.  
Help us to remember that if we commit our works and our way to You, our thoughts will be established as  
You give us the wisdom and clarity of mind to do the work, and in the end, You will bring it to pass.*

*In Jesus name.*

*Amen.*

# Appalling Silence

by Reverend Brenda Girton-Mitchell

*Then, as He was now drawing near the descent of the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works they had seen, saying: 'Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord!' Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!' And some of the Pharisees called to Him from the crowd, 'Teacher, rebuke Your disciples.' But He answered and said to them, 'I tell you that if these should keep silent, the stones would immediately cry out. Luke 19:37-40 (NKJV)*

I was preparing materials for a racism workshop to be held during an observance of the birthday of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. As I studied his most famous writings, this quote from his letter from the Birmingham Jail, disturbed me. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. said "We will have to repent in this generation not merely for the hateful words and actions of the bad people but for the **appalling silence** of the good people. (emphasis added) Human progress never rolls in on wheels of inevitability; it comes through the tireless efforts of men willing to be co-workers with God..."

I have read and recited those words many times, but in the current climate in our nation, the weight of the words hang heavy on me as one who professes to believe in Jesus as our King, our Lord, and our Savior. I feel compelled to take this opportunity to speak a word for Him as I urge us not to let the political leaders or the crisis of the day, take our eyes off of the only one who can see us through.

Luke 19 tells the story of the Triumphal Entry of Jesus as He made His way to the Mount of Olives. The people who had witnessed His works began to shout out their praises, but some of the Pharisees told Jesus to tell His disciples to be quiet.

I pray that in the midst of challenging times, when some would say to the saints who are serving God with gladness, "why are you doing that, why do you give so much, what are you so joyful about, it doesn't take all that," someone will have a flashback, remember what God has already done and that He still has all power in His hands. He wants us to be His witnesses and His workers. He wants us to serve Him in spirit and in truth.

I feel blessed to be a part of a church family that knows how to witness for Christ, how to stay focused on the mission of serving God by serving others, how to speak truth to power. We have witnessed the goodness of Jesus. We will not let the rocks cry out for us. We will not grow weary of being co-workers with God.

## WRITE A PRAYER

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# Watch Your Words!

by Mrs. Brenda Courtney Young

*Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus.*

*Philippians 2:5*

My husband sometimes refers to me (lovingly I hope) as a bully. For years, I've struggled to understand why he refers to me as such because it never feels good when he calls me a bully. And it's difficult at best to correct a behavior if I don't see myself displaying it. As best I can tell, he and our daughter may take what I say as forcing them to do what I want. My perspective is that I'm asking that they do what is right.

Recently, my sister was going through a low period. The holidays are a tough time for her so I often invite her to events I attend during the holidays in hopes of lifting her spirit. This particular time, she sent me a text stating "she's lonely." I responded, "I don't know if this will work for you, but when I'm feeling some kind of way, I pray to God to remove whatever is causing that feeling, leave it with Him and move on to focus on something else." She responded saying "Wow, how can you assume I don't know God." I was taken aback and asked, "What do you mean?" to which she said "Read your text!" I did, and further shared it with my daughter who immediately focused on my first words, "I don't know if this will work for you, but..." as condescending.

While it was not my intent, upon reflection I see how what I said could be interpreted as me having a superior attitude toward her. I saw how easily my words had been misconstrued. I immediately apologized and asked for her forgiveness. She came over to our home later that day and I hugged her and said I was truly sorry.

Faith and mercy are two of my spiritual gifts. I see myself as one who encourages others in my confidence in God; and one who loves to assist those who are suffering or in need of anything I have or can provide. After all, everything I have belongs to the Lord. However, I find it difficult at times to effectively communicate a message from my heart in a way as not to be misunderstood. My prayer is that the Lord will remove anything from me that is not of Him and that His Word be in my mouth.

## APPLICATION

Remember, our words have the power to help or hurt a person. Do you owe someone an apology?  
Is there someone you need to ask for their forgiveness? Don't delay, do it today.

## PRAYER

*Dear Heavenly Father, let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in thy sight,*

*O Lord my strength and my redeemer.*

*Speak through me by Your Word and the power of your Holy Spirit,*

*so my words may convey your unfailing love to administer grace, mercy, and peace.*

*May You also edify those I encounter on this day.*

*In Jesus' name.*

*Amen.*

# Go Through. Go Back.

by Ms. Nona Florence

*“But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail.  
And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers.”  
Luke 22:32 (NIV)*

She had done it-survived the horrors of slavery, and the perils of the Underground Railroad. Now she was free, and safe. No one would have blamed her if she stayed right there. But she didn't. Harriet Tubman went back. 15 times, at least, according to historical records. She rescued hundreds. “And I could have rescued more,” she said, “if only they knew they were slaves.”

Dictionary.com states that to “care” is to “feel concern about . . . and to make provision for.” Often, the things, and the people, we care the most for are deeply rooted in our personal experience. We can show others the way because we've journeyed that way ourselves. But our humanity often gets in the way of God-ordained purpose. Often, when we've survived, our thought process is, “I've been through that door. Now I am going to close it, and dead bolt it. And I am not going back.” It takes courage to go back, to face the fear and the pain all over again. But just like with Harriet, someone else's liberation is based on our willingness to go back.

Of all the Bible's heroes, few people embody this like Simon Peter. He had just had the worst night of his life, and he returned to his pre-Christ occupation-fishing. Perhaps he couldn't deal with the pain and embarrassment of denying Jesus not once, not twice, but three times, all in the span of a single night. Peter never imagined things would end up like this. He'd walked on water. He'd been the only one of the 12 to correctly state who Jesus was. Now this.

Then Peter had a little talk with Jesus. Or maybe Jesus had a talk with Peter. Jesus knew Peter had to go back. If Peter had gotten that despondent and discouraged, imagine what the others had to be thinking “Oh no, not Peter! Peter's given up! What hope is there for the rest of us?” They'd seen Peter walk on water. They'd heard his declaration, and Jesus' response. Jesus spoke to Peter's humanity, which is why he refers to him as “Simon.” Jesus was saying to him, and by extension, to us, “You lived it, the rise, the fall, the redemption. The best way to love me is to love others, to pull them out of the same dark room you were once in.” Only you know your journey. Only you know where you've been. Maybe it is time to go back. Like Harriet. Like Peter.

## APPLICATION

What's your “door?” Maybe it is time to take the lock off, if you haven't already.  
You've gone through. You've survived. Now go back. Someone is waiting!

## WRITE A PRAYER

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# *She Sat With Me*

by Reverend Arnette L. Georges

*Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God.*

*2 Corinthians 1:3-4 (NIV)*

This happened almost twenty years ago but I remember it as though it was yesterday. I was experiencing a Lupus flare which made my body feel weak, especially my legs. I don't know how it happened. There was no precipitating event that I can recall. One minute I was walking, the next I was on the floor. I am certain I didn't trip. I recently heard someone say that the floor moved from under her feet. Perhaps that's what happened to me. I felt awful. I really didn't want to be treated like "less than," an invalid, or sickly because I have Lupus. I was at a work event. Before I had time to really think about what happened, my supervisor came and sat on the floor with me and made sure a crowd did not gather. She asked, "How can I help?" I shook my head and with tears in my eyes said, "I don't know." She told me that was okay and that I should take as long as I wanted; when I was ready, she would help me to get up. We sat there for a few minutes in silence. Then slowly we began to talk and eventually began to laugh. Pretty soon I was back on my feet and all was well.

What impressed me about her actions was that she was willing to sit with me. She did not rush me to my feet, in an attempt to erase the fact that I fell. She did not offer me tissues to wipe my tears. No, she demonstrated compassion by sitting with me in the place of my sorrow, allowing me to experience all the emotions that accompanied my experience, then helping me to regain my sense of balance when I was ready to do so. She provided the comfort I needed based on *my* expression of need and not based on what *she* thought I needed. I believe this is the type of compassion and comfort this Scripture speaks of—Godly compassion and comfort in times of trouble is individualized and intentional. It is caring personified.

## **APPLICATION**

Are you like me, a fixer?

Are you quick to provide the solution or offer a series of alternatives based on your personal assessment of the issue?

Consider what it would feel like to ascertain the person's needs before you act.

Consider what it would feel like to sit with someone in their place of pain or sorrow.

## **PRAYER**

*Father God, give me the opportunity to show someone this type of compassion and comfort.*

*In Jesus' name.*

*Amen.*

# *Caring Is An Action Word*

by Reverend Dr. LarSi Claiborne

*“...Love one another; as I have loved you...”*

John 13:34 (NKJV)

In our reference scripture, Jesus commanded that there be reciprocity in love. Have you ever thought about how many people in your community are serving as caregivers for loved ones? It is estimated that, annually, family members in America provide billions of dollars in uncompensated care to those in their family circle. I live in a Florida retirement community where this stark reality confronts me daily. Wherever I go--restaurants, grocery stores, doctors' offices, pharmacies--I am reminded of the extensive care provided by caregivers to their loved ones, including husbands, wives, children, grandchildren, brothers, sisters, friends, and other family members. The most obvious support is reflected in the provision of vehicular access which includes taking out or putting back wheel chairs and/or walkers to facilitate mobility; transferring and pushing the loved one into and out of facilities, reseating them as required, and speaking up for their service needs. The care and support we cannot see includes cooking and cleaning and help with eating, bathing, toiletry, and dressing. Caring is not passive. It is an action of the heart and of the hands.

Some loved ones are easier to care for than others because they're always aware of the generosity demonstrated by the provision of care. Others are very difficult--angry at having to give up their independence and submit their will to new ways of living. Accepting the loss of your independence as you become more dependent on the support of others requires humbling of the spirit! In James 4:6, we are reminded that God "gives grace to the humble."

So what about the caregiver? Serving as a caregiver in any capacity is an act of self-sacrifice. Caregivers often sacrifice their physical, emotional, and financial wellbeing for the wellbeing of another. While paid caregivers have the added incentive of compensation to motivate their sacrificial acts, unpaid caregivers are generally motivated by love, compassion, and duty in accord with the will of God. "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service." Romans 12:1 (NKJV)

Service is the key to caring. How we sacrificially care for others in our life journey is a demonstration of service in action. It's as if God created unique opportunities for us to demonstrate our love for Him through "care-giving missions." In many families, the responsibility of care-giving falls disproportionately to one family member when others could share the effort and make it easier on all. As Christians, our challenge is to remember that caring with hearts and hands is the way to honor God by loving each other as He has loved us.

Families, let's stop squabbling over who should take care of mama, daddy, or auntie and share the load with each other so that God will be glorified. Caregivers, don't be too proud to ask for help! Reach out to let others know how they can support you. Sisters and brothers in Christ, let us support those who are care-giving by offering to carry out their responsibilities for a day (or even a week) to allow them time off for personal care and uplift. Being provided a few hours on Sunday for the simple pleasure of going to church would be a special blessing to some caregivers! Provision of transportation is another area where support is welcomed. You can prepare meals for caregivers. Or simply take a moment to send notes of encouragement to caregivers to let them know that they are not alone in their "care-giving mission." Show someone that we serve a God who sees all and knows all! As Jesus concludes in John 13:35, "By this they will know that you are my disciples..." (NKJV)

## **PRAYER**

*Lord, give us eyes to see and ears to hear the cries of those who need our support.*

*We are your hands and feet in the world, and the love we demonstrate to each other represents our reciprocal love for You.*

*Thank You for this privilege.*

*In Jesus' name, I pray.*

*Amen.*

# Abide in God's Love

by Reverend Pamela Porter Wright

*As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love. If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love. These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full. This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends. You are My friends if you do whatever I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you. You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you. These things I command you, that you love one another.*

*John 15:9-17 (NKJV)*

This is what the Lord wants us to do - abide in His love. To abide means to continue without fading or being lost. That is exactly what our Triune God wants for us, His children, to continue with Him without growing faint. God does not want us to lose the freshness and excitement of a newly born again Christian. Remember yesterday or yester-years when you could not get enough of learning more and more about the love of God? That is how he wants us to remain, on that focused path, running into His arms – abiding in Him.

God truly wants the best for us and will go to the ends of the universe to bring us back into His fold. Because we are mortal human beings, God knows that it is tough for us to remain vigilant and not grow weak, losing our strength or dropping back into our old ways when we lose our strength. We all remember the promising start when we became sold out for Jesus and nothing was going to turn us around. However, life gets in the way sometimes or maybe that was not you but you suffered a loss of a loved one that meant the world to you and now they are gone. Do we lose focus at that time or do we grow closer to God?

Whatever befalls us in this mortal worldly world – we should not run back or stay in our weakened stage of life. We have to get up and keep moving, take some time but we need to go to God in prayer because you know He hears our prayers. The verb “hear” in Hebrew often implies the response. God does something about the prayers of the righteous. The operative question is - How's your prayer life?

If we do not call, God will not answer. But all who do call on the Lord find that they are within reach of His help. Our relationship with God through His covenant made long ago demands His faithfulness towards us and in turn our faithfulness towards Him. As the scripture (John 15:13) states *Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends.* God is our friend – Abide in Him and he will abide in us forever and ever. Amen

## WRITE A PRAYER

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# *Gifts from the Heart: A Ministry of Love*

by Ms. Robin J. Matthew

*You will know them by their fruits.  
Matthew 7:15-20 (NKJV)*

From the very beginning, Gifts from the Heart felt special. Just the idea of providing school age children clothes and toys at Christmastime is enough to encourage anyone to sign-up, but one could quickly see how God was moving through the hearts of His people. Church members began giving more and more of their time, talents and treasure to the effort, often asking to be assigned another child to buy gifts for. Even Rev. Brenda and I, after putting in long hours preparing for the registration and collection process, still found time to shop for our assigned children.

There is a real sense of community among the Gifts from the Heart donors and volunteers. In the church office it is not uncommon to hear a donor referring to the child they were assigned as “my child” while describing the cute outfit or shoes they bought. Volunteers lovingly gift wrap each present with artistry and panache. The chatter and often uproarious laughter of the men, women and children who volunteer throughout the days and nights of gift wrapping lightens the day and sends us home with a smile. Once the hard work is over and the Metropolitan elves deliver the gifts to the designated pick-up location, the families are so appreciative. They all thank us and some remark incredulously of the generosity of the people of Metropolitan, sometimes with tears in their eyes but always with a smile. It is amazing how Gifts from the Heart has united the Metropolitan Church family to each other and the community under the banner of love as we have sought to demonstrate care, compassion, and love for others.

## **APPLICATION**

- What are you passionate about?
- How are you living out that passion?
- Is there a specific ministry that peaks your interests?
- What are your next steps in getting involved in ministry?

## **PRAYER**

*Lord, help us to continue to share the fruit of Your love with those we do not know,  
and may not know You so they might see You in us and draw nearer to You.  
In the name of Jesus*

# He Knew You First

by Ms. Traci Miller

*Jesus saw Nathanael coming to Him, and said of him, "Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!"  
Nathanael said to Him, "How do You know me?" Jesus answered and said to him, "Before Philip called you,  
when you were under the fig tree, I saw you."*

*John 1: 47-48*

At some point, as you mature in Christ, you find out that Jesus knew you before you knew Him. Maybe you realized it when you were a child singing, Jesus Loves Me. Or, maybe when the preacher told you that God knew the number of hairs on your head or when you heard the thing about the foundation of the world.

Nathanael was looking for Jesus because Philip said that they'd found the one about whom Moses and the prophets had written in the law. Nathanael was not just curious, he was already a believer. Philip did not have to convince Nathanael to look for God because Nathanael already wanted to. So, because he wanted to look for Jesus and believed that he'd find Jesus, Jesus showed up almost immediately. And, when He did show up, He let Nathanael know that He knew him and that He'd seen him under the fig tree.

It is deeply powerful to look for Christ and find Him. But, it is life changing to realize that when you find Him, He already knows you and has been watching you. And, He's probably been listening to you too. And, if He's been watching, listening and knows you all of that must mean you matter. And, if you matter to the Creator of all things, then really, nothing else matters. In fact, once you realize that with Him, nothing else matters and without Him nothing else matters, your life is permanently elevated to a place of knowing and peace. You ascend.

Wait, it gets better. You aren't just willy-nilly looking for Jesus for no reason. Rather, before you were even aware of God, He already deposited in you the desire to know, watch and listen for Him too. He gave you the longing for Him in the first place. He's responsible for all of it. He set you up.

Why would God do that? Perhaps because the only way for your life to truly work is for you to look for Him, find Him and know Him. So, maybe as a kindness, He gave you what you want of Him, like He did with Nathanael. He bade you to look and you have the joy of finding Him and the peace of realizing that in that divine relationship, nothing else matters.

When Jesus saw Nathanael's faith, He promised him that he'd "see heaven open and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man." What a glorious and perfect promise from Christ, which is available to you too all because He knew you first.

## APPLICATION

Read Psalm 139. Meditate on the goodness of a loving God who knew you in your mother's womb. Write out a short prayer of thanksgiving to God.

## PRAYER

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# God is Faithful, Even While We Sleep

by Ms. Bernadette White

*I will both lie down in peace and sleep; for You alone O Lord make me dwell in safety.*

*Psalm 4:1*

Is it even possible to get a good nights' sleep? The stressors of the day often causes **distress** at night. The news is bad. There is a pending storm in the forecast. A child has been abducted. A family member has died. The company is downsizing and 20% of its labor is now without work. Even when all the above is happening, we still must get a good nights' sleep. However, when the night falls the stress that we are experiencing becomes an impediment to a good nights' rest. How do we manage **stress** which is the root cause of our **distress**? What do you do when night falls and sleep evades you?

In Psalm 4, the writer starts by saying, "hear me when I call ob God of my righteousness. You have relieved me in my distress; have mercy on me and bear my prayer." In other others, when you are distressed, call out to God and ask him to listen to your prayer. Communicating with God helps us to speak about those things that are keeping us up at night.

As the writer of this Psalm continues to probe God for answers, he recognizes that all that we experience throughout the day sometimes makes us angry. It's ok to be angry but do not sin in the process. Learn to manage your emotions in a way that honors God but allows you to communicate just how you are feeling. The Psalmist writes in verse 4, "be angry but do not sin; mediate in your heart on your bed and be still." By putting your trust in God, you are allowing him to bring peace to your heart and spirit. That peace will help you prepare for a good night's sleep.

The Psalmist continues to implore God to show us who He is, not just for ourselves but also for the world to see. Verse 6 reads, "There are many who say, who will show us any good. Lord, lift up the light of your countenance, upon us." God's light is the source of strength that we need to face life's daily stressors.

In the end, sleep is the one tool God has given us to replenish and refresh ourselves to face another day. It plays an important role in our physical and mental health. Sleep is active in healing and repairing the heart and blood vessels. Adequate sleep is a key part of a healthy lifestyle and can benefit your mind, heart and soul. So it is fitting that Psalm 4 ends with a declaration of calmness, "I will both lie down in peace and sleep; for you alone O Lord make me dwell in safety." Our faithfulness in God allows us to go to bed at night and forget about the stressors of the day.

## APPLICATION

Remember the words of Paul, be anxious for nothing but in everything by prayer and supplication let your requests be made known to God. It's the peace of God that will enable us to rest at night.

## PRAYER

*I pray ob God, even in the midst of trials and tribulations that you know the stressors that exist in my life.*

*Grant me peace God as I lay down to sleep.*

*In Jesus' name I pray.*

*Amen.*

# Appreciating Love Gifts from God

by Ms. Rita Palmer

*Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights...*

*James 1:17 (KJV)*

*Some People Feel the Rain and Others Just Get Wet* is the title of a book I read by James W. Moore. The book inspired me and reminded me of the many blessings of Jesus Christ that we just take for granted. Blessings that we may not always think about as being blessings such as things in nature, the elements and the environment in which we live. On one occasion in scripture, *When Jesus entered into the ship, his disciples followed him. And, behold, there arose a great tempest in the sea, insomuch that the ship was covered with the waves: but Jesus was a sleep. And his disciples came to him, and awoke him, saying, "Lord save us! We are perishing!" But he said unto them, "Why are you fearful, O you of little faith?" Then Jesus arose, and rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was a great calm* (Mathew 8:23–26 KJV).

Jesus could feel the rain, but His disciples could not feel the rain, they just got wet. They were fearful before witnessing the power of Jesus Christ. They were not able to feel the rain. Do we take time to smell the roses, feel the wind, the rain, the warmth of the sun, or do we just get wet and complain? Why can't we be thankful for the rain, the snow, the wind, the sunshine? All of these are gifts from God. If we stop complaining about events in which we have no control, we would become good shepherds of the earth, and be grateful for the gifts we have been given by God.

Our spirituality allows us to feel the rain rather than just getting wet. By being spiritual, we are in partnership with God. When we feel the rain we cannot deny water, food, or shelter to anyone nor should we wage war over the resources that God has gifted us with. We pray for those who feel the rain and we continue to pray for those who just get wet. God gave the same gifts to all of us. So, let's all take the high road... Pray more, share more, smell the roses and stop complaining about things.

## APPLICATION

No matter what the weather is today, allow yourself to bask in it and reflect on it as a gift from God.

## PRAYER

*Dear God, forgive us for all the times we have not appreciated the gifts of nature,  
that you have so lovingly blessed us with.*

*In the name of Jesus, I pray.*

*Amen.*



*Ms. Dee Bolton, Photographer*

# *Being in God's Righteous Right Hand*

by Dr. Shirley Jackson

*I have chosen you...I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.*

*Isaiah 41: 9b, 10b (NKJV)*

There is nothing like being snuggled up in a warm blanket on a cold winter's night. That's what I feel like when I think about being in the hand of God. I have no fear, no doubts, wants or needs in his hand. I'm safe and secure, confident, and motivated to go to the next level or to run on and never look back. The words "right hand" occur 166 times in scripture and have several significant meanings. The first meaning I think about is one of authority and strength. Isaiah 41:10 says, "Fear not, for I am with you...I am your God and I will strengthen you...I will uphold you with My righteous right hand." In Isaiah 41:13, God said, "For I, the Lord your God, hold your right hand; **It is I** who say to you Fear not, I am the one who helps you!" If we ever want to know where our help comes from, it comes from being in the righteous right hand of God.

Further, there is nothing but blessings in the right hand of God. The Jewish patriarchs believed in passing the blessings from God on to their children and grandchildren as in the case of Jacob, who on his death bed, stretched out his right hand and laid it on the head of Ephraim, his youngest grandson and placed his left hand on the head of Manasseh, crossing his hands, for Manasseh was the firstborn and should have received the blessing (Gen 48:14). Lastly, we know that God is sovereign, and he will bless whom he will bless but there appears to be something very special about God's righteous right hand and even about being on his right side. We know that as we pray that God has his son, Jesus, seated at his right hand (Ephesians 1:20) making intercession for us.

It seems to me that there is something very special about being in the right hand of an Omniscient, Omnipotent, Omnipresent God. There are blessings and favor, safety and joy, and the assurance that He will fight our battles and calm all our fears. He's in full control, He's high and mighty, He is Sovereign, and He meets every need and exceeds all of our wildest dreams and expectations.

## **APPLICATION**

Invite someone who you know is unsaved to trust God today.

## **PRAYER**

*Thank you, Dear God, for keeping me in Your righteous right hand!  
Even though You have the whole world in Your hand, there is still room.*

*In the name of Jesus.*

*Amen.*

# *We Gather Here in Acts of Love and Good Works*

by Ms. Helena Johnson Dunston

*Let us think of ways to motivate one another to acts of love and good works.*

*Hebrews 10:24 NLT*

I've heard this scripture twice in **two days** on **two separate & different** occasions. That's powerful for my senses. To begin, let **ME** think of ways to motivate myself then others shall fall in. My commitment to personal change starts with **selflessness**. I'm ~~not~~ a selfish person. I volunteer, mentor, fundraise, support groups, donate, contribute, sacrifice, and give.

Honestly, I DON'T FOLLOW-UP! I'm mostly in the moment. I find **the passion** in what I do, see things through to the end, and then move on to the next thing. Sadly for me, that's not fulfilling. **If I come back to see the results of my work, I can see clearer what I've begun. I would be, NO, I would feel more complete.** If I only...those three words should inspire. If I only motivate others to continue my work. If I only would follow my passion. If I only had focus.

I have joyfully been wed into a family that motivates one another continuously to deeds of affection and prosperity. They come together, for Birthday celebrations, family reunions, Home Goings as if they are all the same event. The theme for each of these gatherings should be shout out as the family mantra **"we gather here in Acts of love and good works" Look at God...** "Girl you look fabulous! Are you taking care of yourself?" I hear that each time I see each person...**EVERY TIME**. I wonder **"I just saw you two weeks ago."** But that doesn't matter because God brought us together again. I feel loved and new each time. My time with them teaches me that time spent showing outward love in this house, **will be time spent receiving God's love in His house.**

## APPLICATION

My 2018 devotional will be my commitment to personal change.  
I commit to dig deep within myself to bring out life in others so they may fall in line.

## PRAYER

*Heavenly Father, help us to make the most of the time you have given us by spending time in fellowship with one another and showing your love through kind words and deeds to family, friends, and neighbors.*

*Fill us with more of You so we may pour Your goodness into the lives of others.*

*In Jesus' name.*

*Amen.*

# Pray Like Abraham

by Ms. Amanda Randolph

*Then the men turned away from there and went toward Sodom, but Abraham still stood before the Lord. And Abraham came near and said, "Would You also destroy the righteous with the wicked? Suppose there were fifty righteous within the city; would You also destroy the place and not spare it for the fifty righteous that were in it? Far be it from You to do such a thing as this, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous should be as the wicked; far be it from You! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" So the Lord said, "If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare all the place for their sakes." Then Abraham answered and said, "Indeed now, I who am but dust and ashes have taken it upon myself to speak to the Lord: Suppose there were five less than the fifty righteous; would You destroy all of the city for lack of five?" So He said, "If I find there forty-five, I will not destroy it." And he spoke to Him yet again and said, "Suppose there should be forty found there?" So He said, "I will not do it for the sake of forty." Then he said, "Let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak: Suppose thirty should be found there?" So He said, "I will not do it if I find thirty there." And he said, "Indeed now, I have taken it upon myself to speak to the Lord: Suppose twenty should be found there?" So He said, "I will not destroy it for the sake of twenty." Then he said, "Let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak but once more: Suppose ten should be found there?" And He said, "I will not destroy it for the sake of ten." So the Lord went His way as soon as He had finished speaking with Abraham; and Abraham returned to his place.*

*Genesis 18:22-33 (NKJV)*

When faced with what seems like calamity all around, bad news today, and even worse news tomorrow, we wonder "how should we pray"? Confronted with the intended judgement of God toward Sodom and Gomorrah, Abraham found himself in a similar position and chose to petition God. We observe Abraham's conversation with God regarding the imminent destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. Abraham understood that he was about to witness an entire community being sentenced to death. Unwilling to believe that there were no righteous living in the cities; Abraham, full of compassion for the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah, proceeded to petition God.

Abraham reasons with God. He asks God to spare Sodom for the sake of the righteous that live there. In the familiar account, Abraham begins by inquiring of God what if fifty righteous can be found and reduces the number to ten. God agrees to spare Sodom if ten righteous can be found. Like Abraham we live in a time when many have little reverence for God and minimize His relevance. Science works to transcend the creative process of life and the Word of God is portrayed as inaccurate. This viewpoint is continued as an expressed belief that sin doesn't exist; only personal choice and individual truth.

As Abraham did, we need to petition our God, to spare the cities, countries and world we live in for the sake of the righteous and the righteous-to-be. We have been assured of the expressed will of God that none be lost and all be saved (1 Timothy 2:3-4). Do we respond to the signs present of the Second Coming of Christ with the same inattentiveness that we would to a neighbor's car alarm going off at the same time every day? Can we see that the signs are an alarm and this alarm is calling us back to action? Has our ability to recognize the urgency of the situation been diminished by the distractions of life? Whether the activities involved are church, family, or career oriented is of little significance. What matters most is our response to the signs.

As we consider the warning of tribulations to come, we must revive an urgent focus on answering the Great Commission given to us by God. We must share the Gospel of Jesus Christ! Prayerfully, we will choose to stand against distractions with minds that are focused, hearts that are open and a will that is determined to obey God.

## WRITE A PRAYER

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# Scandal

by Ms. Traci Miller

“Cyrus, at some point, you have to pay the bill.” Olivia Pope, *Scandal*

*Come near to God and He will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Grieve, your and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and He will lift you up. – James 4:8-10*

This is the most memorable line for me from the hit show, *Scandal*. Cyrus, the President’s Chief of Staff, was in jail, falsely accused of assassinating the President-elect. And, while he did not commit THAT crime, he had committed many other crimes and sins so he was guilty, notwithstanding. Power is like that.

While he was whining to Olivia on the jailhouse phone she told him, “you have to pay the bill.” You have to balance the equation. You can’t just sin, sin, sin and expect that there is no accounting. You must balance the sheet. You have to answer for your transgressions and fix them. It’s not free. You can’t get away with bad behavior forever so at some point you have to pay the bill.

As Christians, paying the bill is not just a paying for what you took or did. It is not simply compensating your victim or doing better next time. Or, giving your jacket to the homeless lady, paying the scholarship, buying the *Gifts from the Heart* stuff or even going to jail. It's not so easy.

In fact, the truth is that you can never fully account for your own sins. There are too many. They are too destructive and too consistent. We are wretched sinners who were damned to hell before Calvary. Jesus died for our sins so we don’t have to. But, still it’s not that simple.

When Christians pay the bill, we must stand naked and embarrassed before our Christ about our behavior. Shame and humility must fill our hearts when we ask for forgiveness. Why? Because you are supposed to be as sorry as your behavior is bad. A contrite and pained heart is a heart God can restore and transform. Your shamed nakedness is what He uses to wipe your slate clean, draw you in closer, and force the enemy to flee.

But, more than that, your ability to willingly (not forcibly) stand naked before your Christ is a major act of faith. The translation for that act of submission is, “Here I am, in my most vulnerable posture. You see all of me including my hidden places. Take me and fix me.” Such is an incredible act of faith, which God loves and from which you will be abundantly favored. Your character is strengthened, your wisdom enhanced, and your integrity is upright.

James knew it would take faith to humble yourself before Christ. Christ knows it too and because your faith pleases Him and helps you, He lifts you up, diminishes your will to sin, and pays your bill.

## APPLICATION

Ask the Lord to mend, fix, heal, and make whole what is broken in you.  
Remember, there is nothing too hard for God to handle!

## PRAYER

*Make me over again Lord.  
For Your glory.  
In Jesus’ name.  
Amen.*

# *It's Your Choice*

by Mrs. Angli Black

*Let love be without dissimulation. Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good. Be kindly affectionate one to another with brotherly love; in honour referring one another; Not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord; Rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer; Distributing to the necessity of saints; given to hospitality.*

*Romans 12:9-13 (KJV)*

“Please mommy, please”, little Timmy continued to plead with his mom as he inhaled the aroma of the mouth-watering cookies she had recently removed from the oven. As it had often done before, his unrelenting requests, big sad eyes and cute little round face had all but worn his mother’s resistance down and she was just about to give in when she had an idea. She leaned down, looked directly at him to get his full attention and simply said, “I tell you what Timmy – you may have one cookie right now or you can wait until after dinner and you may have two delicious cookies – IT’S YOUR CHOICE”.

In Romans 12:9-21 God gives us instructions on how we should behave as His children and certainly each of us should want to please Him. God shows us love in many ways and admonishes us to love others. If the foundation of all our actions is love, following God’s guidelines will not be oppressive.

Christ challenges us to love as He loved. As Christians, our love should be sincere and without double-standards. We should be kind and caring toward one another and demonstrate that we, like Christ, love His people.

Although God gives us commands and He desires for us to obey them, He will not force us to conform to His wishes. He wants us to resemble Jesus but, He grants us free will which allows us to adopt a lifestyle that exemplifies behaviors that are in line with the new life we receive when Christ comes to dwell in us.

It may seem difficult to show love and to be kind to everyone and to do so all the time. Surely, it does require some effort on our behalf, as it is our responsibility. We must daily make a conscious, deliberate, and intentional determination if we are to yield to God’s instruction.

Like Timmy, we can decide on selfish gratification that only pleases ourselves, or we can live a life that demonstrates that “kindhearted affection” and “brotherly love” that God speaks of in this passage. Yes, God gives us the mandate but God allows us to resolve. And like Timmy’s mom God leans in and peers into our heart- and says, You must decide, IT’S YOUR CHOICE.

## **APPLICATION**

Ask God for wisdom and discernment to make the right choices today.

Ask, and you will receive.

## **PRAYER**

*Lord, please help me to make the right choice and consider how my actions will make someone else feel.*

*In Jesus, I pray.*

*Amen.*

# The Ministry of Waiting!

by Dr. Shirley Jackson

*Wait on the LORD; Be of good courage, And He shall strengthen your heart; Wait, I say, on the LORD!*  
*Psalm 27:14 (NKJV)*

Have you ever watched a child's feet dance up and down while he has both hands outstretched as he waits for his parent to open a piece of candy? The wait must feel like an eternity to that child. But what about the mother of five living in abject poverty year after year and no matter how hard she works, she can't see her way out? And what about people who are living with cancer or a disease for which there is no cure? And what about a family member or friend who has been waiting months and years for a kidney or lung transplant? And we all have friends and family members waiting for a new job opportunity or just the right soul mate. In all of these circumstances, God allowed these people to be in a season of waiting where their faith is on trial.

I pray for people whose faith is on trial because in our own strength, waiting is very hard. James (1:2-3) reminds us to *count it all joy when the trying of our faith comes*, knowing that the trying of our faith, develops patience. It is patience that we need to endure the trials. That's why the scripture tells us to *be of good courage, and again I say, "wait"!* It's not about how long we wait, it's about **how** we wait. We must have the determination of Job, *though He slay me, yet will I trust him* (Job 13:15) and we must have the resolve of the Hebrew boys being thrown into the fiery furnace, *but even if he doesn't save us... I know he can* (Daniel 3:18). This attitude is the courageous spirit and resolve one needs to withstand the test and trials in the Ministry of Waiting.

My heart goes out to the man who laid at the pool of Bethesda for 38 years, and the woman who suffered with the issue of blood for 12 years, and Paul being in prison almost all of his life, and even Abraham and Sarah as they waited for the promised child. Jacob had the right attitude when he willingly worked 14 years to attain his bride, Rachael. God's timing is not our timing. According to II Peter 3:8, *with the Lord, one day is like a thousand years and a thousand years like one day*. Meanwhile, you must keep doing the work of the Lord while you wait, as if all is well, because it is! It's all God. It's in His time and His destiny for your life!

**Prayer:** Lord, I thank You for those who You have called to the Ministry of Waiting and for the reward that You have in store for them. I pray for a breakthrough in their life that will blow their mind. I pray that they remain faithful. In Jesus Name. Amen.

## APPLICATION

Pray a special prayer for people who are in a season of waiting  
(for a mate, a home, employment, cure for cancer, heart, kidney or lung transplant).

## WRITE A PRAYER

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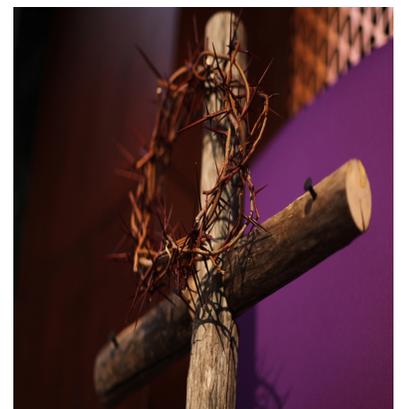
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*Photo Credit: Kathleen Barry. United Methodist Communications.*

# *Reflecting on the Art of Love and Forgiveness*

by Dr. Muriel Kennedy

*If anyone boasts, 'I love God,' and goes right on hating his brother or sister, thinking nothing of it, he is a liar. If he won't love the person he can see, how can he love the God he can't see? The command we have from Christ is blunt: Loving God includes loving people. You've got to love both.*  
*1 John 4:20-21 The Message (MSG)*

We are admonished to love the Lord our God with all our hearts, our souls, our minds, and our strength. Jesus tells us that this is the greatest commandment issued by God. The second is to love our neighbors as ourselves. So it is in this order: first we must love God, then we must love ourselves, and then we should ideally love our neighbors as we love ourselves. It is the love we have for ourselves that we are to extend to our neighbors. Thus, our individual and collective goal is to love ourselves so that we can, in turn, truly love our neighbors as we love ourselves.

This means that we learn how to love and embrace all of who we are—the good, the bad, and the proverbial ugly (according to the common expression). That enables us to consequently love others for *who they are* and *as they are*. I am of the belief that when we feel loved, cared for, and forgiven by both God and ourselves, we are more likely to love, care for, and forgive others. The ability to love others truly and sincerely is a beautiful thing, and the ability to love others unconditionally paves the way for forgiveness.

## **APPLICATION**

Who do you need to forgive today?

## **PRAYER**

*Dear Heavenly Father, I thank you for being the epitome of LOVE and for teaching us how to FORGIVE!  
In Christ, I pray.  
Amen.*

# The Made-Up Ministry

by Ms. Cecelia Toulson

*And when they ran out of wine, the mother of Jesus said to Him, "They have no wine." Jesus said to her, "Woman, what does your concern have to do with Me? My hour has not yet come." His mother said to the servants, "Whatever He says to you, do it."*

*John 2:3-5 (NKJV)*

I've always found it interesting that only the book of John mentions the wedding at Cana when Jesus turned water into wine. It was still a miracle, but what was its significance? Did Mark, Matthew, and Luke not think it was important? I don't know, but if I'm allowed to use my Holy Ghost imagination, I would conclude that it was a made-up ministry.

Perhaps, it was simply a chance to bless a couple on their wedding day. It didn't change their lives, but it did extend a wedding celebration – and that's what made-up ministries look like – simply an opportunity to serve in the moment.

So, with that in mind, I'd like to share with you some "Made-up" Ministries I've experienced at Metropolitan. A few years back, there was a senior woman who passed out Bible verses handwritten on paper with candy taped to them. Her purse was chocked full of them – sometimes it was peppermint and other times it was butterscotch. But whatever it was, it was a nice treat and a way for me to read another Bible verse while enjoying a tasty treat. And, it was simply her way of finding an opportunity to serve in the moment; demonstrating this notion we call Metropolitan Cares.

This leads me to note some other Metropolitan "Made-up" Ministries. Charlotte Hudson takes amazing sermon notes and sends them out. Let me tell you, they are simply amazing! Dr. Kim with her long, joyful hugs – just another way of serving in the moment. I, too, have fallen victim to participating in a few made-up ministries. Dr. Nikki Westmoreland and I started a 'Pocket Change Ministry' where we send a few dollars to Metropolitan kids who are away at college. As simple and spontaneous as it sounds, it's fun and I hope it blesses them. Another "Made-up" Ministry we started was designing and selling Metropolitan T-Shirts and giving the proceeds to the church. We just made it up. See a need, fill a need – that's how ministries begin.

Our last made-up ministry was to go out and greet those who were taking the bus ride to Arkansas to support our pastor. We passed out fleece throws and lunch vouchers (\$10 bills) to all who rode the bus. There was nothing special, no fanfare, no convocation or swearing in was needed – just a willingness to serve in the moment because Metropolitan Cares.

## APPLICATION

What made-up ministry can you participate in? How can you serve in the moment?

## WRITE A PRAYER

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# *Invisible Spirit in the Wilderness*

by Minister Shirley Carr

*Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil.*

*Matthew 4:1 (KJV)*

Sometimes, God may lead us through a dark wilderness for His Glory. In some instances when words of praise have been spoken over us, our assignment may be to face Satan face to face. Our weapons are our faith, knowledge of who God is in us, and speaking in Godly wisdom from His word. We must exemplify character that reflects the image of Christ Jesus as we operate in love. We are the epistle of Christ. We minister boldly from the messages He writes not with ink, but by the Holy Spirit within our hearts (2 Corinthians 3:3). We operate knowing that Christ is the head and we are members of His body (1 Corinthians 12; Ephesians 4:11-16). We have been anointed by God and sealed by the Holy Spirit. We cannot see Him, yet we know He is in us and with us. In the flesh we stand in the natural, but operate from the supernatural (The Holy Spirit). We are anchored as we walk in our purpose. In our walk, we see an opportunity to speak truth boldly. And we feel passion rather than pain as we perform.

I have three questions for you:

1. Can God trust you to glorify Him when tempted by Satan?
2. Can you speak truth when Satan speaks partial truth?
3. Would you be willing to walk in the supernatural from the heavenly realm while your flesh stands in the natural in the earthly realm?

Like Joseph and Job, we endure suffering and pain as we glorify God speaking His Word as our sword. We are in a fiery spiritual battle. Satan comes to literally kill, steal and destroy (John 10:10). We come with love and grace from God. We may suffer iniquity, agony and pain, but our faith assures us that our God will deliver us from them all. Satan fights hard and long, and he inflicts pain. No matter what, we will win because we have the victory through Christ Jesus. We seek the face and grace of our Savior as He sits high above the heavens and looks low supplying us with what we need for the battles we face, and for the ministry and edification of God's body. He is invisible, yet we work lowly and gently in love.

Sometimes we cry out to other members of the Body of Christ for encouragement as we encourage ourselves because we can't hear or see God, yet we hurt. A word or a prayer from other members of His body makes a difference. We glorify God as we work in unity led by the Holy Spirit. Jesus is the head and we are members of His body. The Bible says that we must love each other. We are all children of God, made in His own image. When we discern another member's spirit being pressed down we must reach out to them in love, offer a kind word, share a cup of tea with them, offer a sacrificial gift, or see what they need and try to supply that need. We as members of the Body of Christ are Divine connections which are made by Him and each part in its own special way helps the other parts so that the whole body is healthy and growing and full of love (Ephesians 4:16).

We all have journeys. This story began with an account of a time when I needed a member to pray for me in my time of deep pain and agony. When Jesus was in His wilderness an angel came to His rescue. We at Metropolitan care. We reach out to other members and non-members in their hour of pain to supply their needs, to glorify Jesus, and to edify His Body. We are all God's people, and we love one another as Christ has loved us. He may be invisible in the natural, but He is real. Amen.

## **APPLICATION**

Sit on the other side of the table with someone who may be hurting or need a word of prayer from you.

# *The Cross is Our Altar of Reconciliation*

by Reverend Dr. LarSi Claiborne

*“All things are of God who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation.”  
2 Corinthians 5:18 (KJV)*

The song writer says, “Come let us worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness. Give Him the honor. Give Him the praise. Come let us worship the Lord. Let’s give Him the praise.” How often do we praise God for our beating heart, for the privilege of being alive even in the midst of pain and sorrow? We are reminded in the Book of Psalms that “The heavens declare the glory of God and all of nature His handiwork.” (Psalm 1:1) As humans, we too are a part of His handiwork and just our being alive, no matter our circumstances, declares His glory.

We can be grateful that the God of creation always has a plan for the wellbeing of His handiwork. His unbounded love permeates the natural world and the animal world. It is manifested in the care He provides through seasons of dormancy to nurture the growth of animals, trees, plants, flowers and all the beauty integrated throughout His earthly kingdom.

For the human family He created in His image, He gives special care. He watched over you and me as we were formed in the womb (Jeremiah 1:5). He numbers every hair on our head (Matthew 10:30). His eyes are always on us and His ears are open to our cries (Psalms 34:15). He arms us with strength (Psalms 18:32a). Most of all, He provides us with the shield of His salvation (Psalms 18:35).

A shield covers or protects from danger. Jesus covers and protects from the bondage and penalty of sin those who accept him as Lord and Savior. This is God’s provision for the redemption of His human family. The salvation shield comes by way of Calvary’s cross where Christ died as the sacrificial lamb for our sins. In this sense, the cross is our altar of sacrifice that reconciles us to God by putting us in harmony and right relationship with Him. Therefore, Jesus is the shield of God’s salvation spoken of by David in Psalms 18 before Christ came to earth.

Christ followers are the benefactors of this sacrifice. Through Jesus Christ, we are redeemed forevermore from the bondage and penalty of sin. Only the blood of Jesus can wash away our sins. For this great gift, our job is to worship the Lord and give Him honor and glory and praise. Sisters and brothers, let us thank God morning, noon, and night for our salvation through the cross of Jesus Christ. Tell everybody you meet that there is an open invitation for all to come to the cross, our altar of reconciliation. Let us care for the eternal state of our souls by accepting the love God extended on our behalf through Jesus Christ. He wants us to spend eternity with Him.

Stop replaying the yesterday tapes of your life, and remember that God has wiped away even your worse sins as if they never occurred. You dishonor Him when you refuse to let them go. Forgive those who have offended you in the same way that God continues to forgive you. Remember that there is no greater love than to lay down your life for a friend (John 15:13). God did this just for you on Calvary’s cross. In the same way, let us be a friend to God by sacrificing our will for His will—loving as He loves, giving as He gives, and serving as He serves.

## **PRAYER**

*Heavenly Father, we are forever grateful for the cross of Jesus Christ that reconciles us with you.  
Help us remember to give you honor, and glory, and praise for this great gift throughout the days of our life.  
We love you and worship you just for being who you are.  
In His mighty name, we pray.  
Amen.*

**Sunday – March 18, 2018**

# *Christian Duty to Those Who Repent: Giving What You Want to Receive*

by Mrs. Angli Black

*Take heed to yourselves: if thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him. And if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him.*

*Luke 17:3-4 (KJV)*

Most often when I heard the word “repent” I immediately thought about conversion, a turning away from or a changing of one’s mind and actions. It was the requirement one must experience in order to be given the gift of a new life in Christ. One would repent and God would forgive.

While that is precisely what the Bible teaches, the passage in Luke 17:3-4 adds what I believe is another dimension concerning the idea of repenting for the disciple of Christ Jesus. These verses help me to understand another opportunity and responsibility given to me to show God’s love and compassion.

When considering the word “repent” in the context of the Luke passage, it seems to me that these verses are not emphasizing the sin or wrong that was committed, instead it is more concerned with the responsive behavior I will demonstrate towards someone else. From this perspective it causes me now to not only be thankful for the way God accepts my repented heart, but moreover, counsels me that I am called to have that same acceptance for others.

The scripture warns the Christian to “*take heed of yourself*”, to “*be careful of yourself*”, “*to watch yourself*”, to “*pay attention to yourself*”, and to “*be concerned about others*”. It refers to the sin or wrongdoing, not by me, but of some other follower, and how I must respond to them when they repent, even if the sin is against me. I must be ready and willing to receive the one who has done wrong and to forgive them for the trespass just as I desire to be forgiven by God.

This scripture also challenges me to allow my acceptance and forgiveness of others to be limitless. I can’t imagine what life would look like if I served a God that allowed me only one repentant opportunity. How difficult it would be for me if God did not love me enough to allow me to come to Him over and over again. So, because He does, it is my Christian duty to follow the example of a forgiving God.

## **APPLICATION**

What is it that you want to receive today?

What are you willing to give away today?

## **PRAYER**

*Thank you God for the occasion(s) to repent and know that You will forgive me.*

*Please help me to offer that same assurance to those seeking forgiveness from me.*

*I the precious name of Jesus, I pray.*

*Amen.*

# God Cares for Us

by Servant Jonathan K. Branch

*But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion on him, and he went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him.*

*Luke 10:33-34 (KJV)*

The story of the Good Samaritan is one of my favorite stories in the Bible. It is one of the many parables that Jesus told during his ministry. It is a simple story, yet it is impactful. A traveler is beaten, stripped of his clothing, and is half dead alongside the road. First, a priest passes him by, then a Levite avoids him. Finally, a Samaritan helps the injured man, although Samaritans and Jews historically despised each other. Jesus is described as telling the parable in response to the question from a lawyer, "And who is my neighbor?" The conclusion of which is that the neighbor figure in the story is the man who shows mercy to the injured man, that is the Samaritan.

The story not only described a kind and compassionate act, but it also describes one of the first indications of nursing care in the Bible. Since I chose a career in an occupation known for caring, I often wonder what drove the Samaritan to be so compassionate. I wonder if his compassion was a God given trait or a spur of the moment decision. I can recall when I first began my nursing career, I didn't really feel much compassion. I was more interested in the patient getting well, and moving along the disease process, like we were taught in school. I didn't consider nursing as an art at that time...to me it was pure science. It wasn't until I matured in my career that I realized, not all patients are the same. Humans are not machines, and each one of us reacts differently in similar situations. I had to understand tears, pain, medication effects, and I had to actively listen to my patients. I had to learn compassion.

I am thankful everyday that God is compassionate to us. That He cares for us in ways that we don't even realize. When I look back over my life, I am amazed at how God has intervened in the activities that have shaped me, even during times when I didn't feel that close to God. When I realize that I could have made horrendous choices for my life, God nudged me in the right direction (and sometimes it was much more than a nudge).

Like the Good Samaritan cared for and showed compassion for the injured Jewish traveler, I believe that God cares for us. We were made in His image and His likeness, and He only wants what is best for us. After all, He sent his son to die on the cross for our sins, and all He asks us to do is Believe. How simple is that?

As Metropolitan continues to grow and re-establish itself in the community, the slogan "Metropolitan Cares" will become more meaningful and even more important. I am convinced that it will be the catalyst for the expansion of our ministry. As we continue to care for each other, remember, God cares for us!

## APPLICATION

How are you demonstrating that "Metropolitan Cares" about the church? Our community? Our country?

## PRAYER

*Lord, help me to always show compassion and caring for my fellow-man.  
Please give me a heart to think kindly of others, and to always treat people with respect.*

*In Jesus' name, I pray.*

*Amen.*

# Metropolitan Cares

by Dr. Sophoria “Nikki” Westmoreland

*Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?*

*Then said I, here am I; send me.*

*Isaiah 6:8*

Care is defined as the provision of what is necessary for the health, welfare, maintenance, and protection of someone or something. Metropolitan Cares therefore, could be defined as the provision of what is necessary for the health, welfare, maintenance, and protection of all God’s children. Care is not tinged with selfishness, the need for praise, or any shadow of wickedness.

In order for this pronouncement, that “Metropolitan Cares” by our Senior Servant (head) to be made obvious to the mind or eye, it must be embraced by the Sheep (body). It must be carried out by day and night with undisguised, unmistakable sincerity of heart and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Care is an action word for understanding, being aware of, being sensitive to, and experiencing the feelings of another.

Isaiah 6:8 says, “Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I; send me.” We as members of the body of Christ here on earth should say to God “Here am I; send me!” Why? To take seriously our holy vows *to watch over one another in prayer, aid each other in sickness and distress, and cultivate Christian sympathy*. We are the walking representation of the love of Christ and the power and long-lasting effects of showing others that we care. We have a responsibility to give the best care we can to other people.

According to C.S. Lewis, love is unselfishly choosing for another the highest good. Showing that we care is a choice, and I believe the seed for caring is sewn in a grateful heart. A posture of gratitude releases us from the chains that would so easily weigh us down and cause us not to show we care.

Over the years of my membership at Metropolitan, I have seen and experienced the many ways we care for each other, through the community we serve and the building (space) we occupy. A small sample is listed here.

- Acts of care are serving communion to the sick.
- Acts of care are mentoring graduate students.
- Acts of care are visiting members in rehabilitation centers.
- Acts of care are driving someone to a doctor appointment.
- Acts of care are collecting socks for the homeless.
- Acts of care are waiting for someone until their ride comes.
- Acts of care are helping the senior saints get into the building.
- Acts of care are booking a last minute flight to attend a funeral.
- Acts of care are praying for the needs of church members.

Acts of care are sometimes big and sometimes small but deliver the same message - ‘Metropolitan Cares’. Care and kindness are the heartbeat and essence of Metropolitan Baptist Church.

## APPLICATION

What “Acts of Care” will you demonstrate today?

## PRAYER

*Heavenly Father, we honor You today with our Acts of Care.*

*Reveal to us who You would have us to serve and give us the guidance to know how to do it well.*

*In Jesus’ name, we pray.*

*Amen.*

**Wednesday – March 21, 2018**

# Turn Your Light on Please!

by Reverend Brenda Girton-Mitchell

*Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover them, and not to hide yourself from your own kin? Then your light shall break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up quickly; your vindicator shall go before you, the glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard. Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer; you shall cry for help, and he will say, Here I am. Isaiah 58:6-9 (NKJV)*

From the beginning of creation light has been essential to our existence. God the Creator declared in Genesis 1:3 “Let there be light.” Jesus, the Messiah, was sent to be the light of the world; and throughout scriptures He admonished believers to be the light - to not hide their light under a bushel but to let it shine

Isaiah 58 is written against a backdrop of people who have returned from exile expecting their lives to get better. They thought positive change was imminent but times are still extremely harsh. As a coping mechanism, the Israelites have returned to pagan rituals and are not aligned with God’s will. The text draws contrasts between false and true worship. It is not enough to observe the religious rituals. Rituals do not equal righteousness.

Fasting was one of the rituals used to connect with God. To abstain from food and drink creates time and space for focusing more on God. Isaiah contends the people are self-serving in their fasting They do what they do to be seen but their actions are unbecoming and do not honor God. Rituals must be accompanied by the service God desires.

We are living in times when darkness can become overwhelming Every once and a while we need to ask ourselves the question- is my light on? Can I see what I am doing? Is it working toward God’s purpose for service rather than personal ambition? Isaiah cautions us, if our actions are me centered – they are unacceptable to the Lord.

It is easy to get caught up in details, doing church, majoring in the minors, but missing the mark on being a light in the midst of someone’s darkness.

God’s expects us to choose the fast that will save other people from oppression and satisfy THEIR needs.

- To share food with the hungry
- Help the homeless
- Cover the naked
- Strengthen the family
- To graciously meet unmet needs

Isaiah says, “Then your light shall break forth like dawn...”

## APPLICATION

This week turn your light on please. Show you care.  
Do something to demonstrate compassion for someone in need of food, clothes or shelter.  
It may be as simple as not ignoring the request from someone you drive by every day.

## PRAYER

*Lord, help me to shine my light.  
For the sake of Christ.  
Amen.*

# PTSD!

by Minister Imogene Hunt

*“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance:  
against such there is no law.”  
Galatians 5:22-23 (KJV)*

Have you been diagnosed with PTSD? Yes, You! And, NO! Not the world’s designation or description of PTSD—Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. But, a new different, better kind of PTSD—**God’s PTSD!** A Christian son or daughter diagnosed with **God’s PTSD** is someone who embodies the attributes of Galatians 5:22-23.

By now, you may be scratching your head and asking yourself...”What is this PTSD?” So, I will no longer keep you in suspense. This type of **PTSD** is:

**P – PRAYER** --- Do you have an active prayer life, praying to God not just for you and your family, your friends, your church family, but for others, as well? Do you include the strangers on the streets, hospital patients, and the prison population?

**T -- TEACHING** -- Do you share and exercise your gift with your family (especially young children and grandchildren), your community, your church family, co-workers, and strangers? Are you aware that you can teach without use of verbal or written word? Yes! You can! Allow your Christian life to become your teaching tool.

**S -- SERVICE** -- Do you feel compelled to offer your gift of service to your family, church family, friends, community, co-workers, and strangers? Christ even told us that He came not to be served but to serve. *Imagine that!* The Only Begotten Son of God came into this world to serve us, who were slaves to sin and enemies of The Triune God: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

**D – DEDICATION** ---Is there anything you are dedicated in pursuing? Your dedication may be manifested in numerous tasks, goals, projects, and works. What are you dedicated to, first and foremost? Is it Emmanuel and His command *“to love one another as I have loved you?”*

## APPLICATION

It is easy and simple to begin. Start by taking it one day at a time, one thing at a time to avoid discouragement and a sense of being overwhelmed.

- **STEP 1:** Tomorrow when you get up, greet your family enthusiastically with a big smile on your face, warmth in your eyes, and a friendly good morning
- **STEP 2:** Repeat this process on your way to work and throughout your day.
- **STEP 3:** When you return home at the end of a long workday, repeat the same process.

Remember to continue this process for the next 30 days and you will be amazed at how much you enjoy the positive feedback you will receive. You are well on your way to demonstrating Christ’s **PTSD**. Please feel free to employ your creativity to design your own list of positive, affirming actions to actively demonstrate that “Metropolitan Cares” for every individual.

# Reflecting on the Lord's Prayer

by Dr. Muriel Kennedy

*Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.*

*Matthew 5:23-24 (NKJV)*

Just as we can *choose* to hold a grudge, we can also *choose* to love and forgive. Jesus summarizes this point very nicely in Matthew 5:44–48, wherein He explains how we are to treat those who mistreat us. Eugene Peterson, in *The Message: The Bible, in Contemporary Language*, puts it this way: “You’re familiar with the old written law, ‘Love your friend,’ and its unwritten companion, ‘Hate your enemy.’ I’m challenging that. I’m telling you to love your enemies. Let them bring out the best in you, not the worst. When someone gives you a hard time, respond with the energies of prayer, for then you are working out of your true selves, your God-created selves.

This is what God does. He gives his best—the sun to warm and the rain to nourish—to everyone, regardless: the good and bad, the nice and nasty. If all you do is love the lovable, do you expect a bonus? Anybody can do that. If you simply say hello to those who greet you, do you expect a medal? Any run-of-the-mill sinner does that. In a word, what I’m saying is, ‘Grow up. You’re kingdom subjects. Now live like it. Live out your God-created identity. Live generously and graciously toward others, the way God lives toward you.’”

## APPLICATION

Read the entire chapter of Matthew 5.

## PRAYER

*Dear Heavenly Father, thank You for teaching us to pray as you taught your disciples.*

*In the name of Jesus, I pray.*

*Amen.*

# *The Mercy of God: Sustainable and Renewable*

by Amanda Randolph

*O give thanks unto the LORD; For He is good: For His mercy endureth for ever.  
Psalm 136:1*

Sustainable energy is described as, “energy that is about finding clean, renewable sources of energy – sources that renew themselves, rather than sources that can be depleted. Sustainable energy is energy that we will never use up or deplete. It is inexhaustible.” (*The Department of Energy*)

This description brings to mind the mercy of God. Mercy is an unearned gift from God. We enter this world in need of it and simply by believing that Jesus is the son of God, we become recipients of God’s mercy. The mercy of God is available to us in all of life’s circumstances. This gift is most effective in our lives when we are confident that the gift is ours and we hold the expectation that it will continue to be so. When we are merciful to others we exemplify God’s precious gift of mercy in action and share the many ways mercy blesses us. This positions us to be a blessing in our families, communities and work places.

Throughout the Bible, mercy is referenced many times:

- In Psalm 23:6 we see mercy described as a life companion – “Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life . . .”
- Psalm 103:17 points out that not only does mercy last forever, it continues through generations – “But the mercy of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting . . . and His righteousness unto children’s children . . .”
- Psalm 51:1 assures us that mercy is abundant and available to cover our sins – “Have mercy upon me, O God . . . according to the multitude of Your tender mercies blot out my transgressions.”
- Lamentations 3:22-23 describes mercies that are provided “new” to us “every morning”

Then there is the 136th chapter of Psalms which instructs us to “give thanks unto the LORD; for He is good: for His mercy endureth forever.” This chapter beautifully describes God through His works in creation and love while alternately reminding us that “his mercies endureth for ever.” They are inexhaustible and never depleted! Reading through this chapter, the mercies of God become even more tangible to us if we pause a moment and personalize a verse or two, for example:

- Psalm 136:16 – “To Him who led His people through the wilderness, for His mercy endureth forever.” Do you remember a time when God led you through a fearful situation?
- Psalm 136:23 – “Who remembered us in our lowly state, for His mercy endureth forever.” How many blessings have you received that were undeserved and due simply to the mercy of God?

## **APPLICATION**

Yes, we can be very grateful for the mercy of God; mercy that will always be with us and for us and will never be depleted! As we consider this great gift from God, let’s use every opportunity God provides to share His mercy as often as possible.

## **PRAYER**

*Lord, thank You for your mercy towards us.  
We receive it in the wonderful name of Jesus.  
Amen.*

# The Power to Heal Through Touch

by Reverend Jesse Wood

*And when the woman saw that she was not hid, she came trembling, and falling down before him, she declared unto him before all the people for what cause she had touched him, and how she was healed immediately. And he said unto her, Daughter, be of good comfort: thy faith hath made thee whole; go in peace.*

*Luke 8:47-48 (KJV)*

Did you ever stop to wonder how the bleeding woman found in Luke 8:43-48 knew that if she could get close enough to *touch* Jesus, she would be healed? How did she know? When she entered the crowd that day, she had one mission in mind. To touch Him. She did not intend to say anything. She did not want to disturb anyone. In fact, she was hoping she could blend in the crowd, come from behind, press her way through, sneak her touch, and then leave without ever being noticed. And yet there was something about her touch that when she made contact with just His clothes, the Bible says His virtue left Him and went into her. At that moment she was healed.

Never underestimate the power of touch!

One of my favorite times during our Sunday morning worship services at Metropolitan is when we show how much we care by greeting one another. Not only are we taking a fellowshiping moment to say good morning, but we also add a holy hug and a handshake. On the surface it may look like that's all there is to it, but scientists have proven that human touch has power far beyond its appearance. For instance, when a mother breastfeeds her baby, she's not just offering sustenance. Her very contact with her baby is life giving. The profundity of that connection has value far deeper than sharing milk. In fact, so life-giving is touch that there's a medical condition called Failure to Thrive (FTT), which shows up when a human is devoid of touch. An infant can die without touch, and an adult can shrivel, become ill and die, as well. From the cradle to the grave, the brain needs the stimulation that comes from contact and connection if it is to develop. We need the caring connection and tenderness of touch not just to survive but to thrive.

Jesus knew the power of touch. Just one touch from Him, and blinded eyes were opened. Lame limbs were restored. Leprous skin was made smooth. Deaf ears were unstopped. And stammering tongues were settled.

It's amazing to think how often He lent His healing touch while on His way somewhere else. Stories of Him being interrupted are not rare. When He encountered the bleeding woman that day, He was on His way to heal Jairus' 12-year-old daughter. By the time he arrived at her home, the wailing women were in full force, thinking He was too late since the girl had passed away. They didn't realize that for Jesus, death is just another opportunity. He assured them she was only sleeping. But they rejected his word so He dismissed them and their disbelief. He took the girl's stilled hand. Suddenly, she arose! Oh, the healing power of touch!

## APPLICATION

The next time you greet another worshiper, don't think of it as just a feel-good moment in the service.

Know that your hand shake and holy hug may just be the life-giving moment somebody else needs to survive and to let them know that Metropolitan Cares.

## WRITE A PRAYER

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# Love One Another

by Servant Rosemarie Singletary

*A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.*

*John 13:34-35*

Each morning when I rise, I think of how gracious God is to give me another day and another chance to get things right. While standing in my bathroom in the wee hours of the morning, I often hear the whispers of the Holy Spirit reminding me of the things I could have done differently yesterday, and of the things in store for me today. It is in these moments that I am reminded of how blessed I am, and how good God's favor has been over my life. I am reminded to be kind, generous and loving—especially to those who are less fortunate and are in need of a kind word or a gentle touch. This sacred time spent with the heavenly Father, reminds me that it is now up to me to share His love with others as I go about my day.

Too often we see and judge others through our own eyes, but, what if we—the people of God—stopped for just a moment to see them through the eyes of the Father? I believe we would see things more clearly; like the hurt, the pain, the brokenhearted, the lonely and the lost. As Christians, we should step out of our comfort zone, and unconditionally love the people around us, by offering hugs, smiles and hope to all. We can start by taking the time to ask a passerby how they are doing, or, an elderly neighbor, if there is anything we can do for them. When you ask, please be ready with an open mind and a listening ear to hear what they have to say. Sometimes a listening ear is all that is needed to make someone's day a little brighter.

Some time ago, I had an experience that changed my mind about the power of a hug. One Sunday at MBC, while drying my hands in the restroom, I saw a beautiful lady; one who I had seen many times before, but, had not had the opportunity to speak with. I noticed she had a solemn look on her face, and I extended a bubbly "Good Morning!" in my usual way. She looked very surprised that I had even noticed let alone spoke to her. As I turned to leave, my spirit said, "Give her a hug." I immediately turned back and asked her if I could give her a hug. With a warm gesture, she replied, "Yes." I gave her a great big hug and she smiled and said, "I needed that". Oh, how my spirit soared high knowing that just one hug made a difference in one person's life that day. Just imagine what a beautiful world it would be if each of us would just commit to reach out to at least one person each day and make a difference in that person's life.

## APPLICATION

I challenge you to do as God commanded and "love one another: as I have loved you".  
Reach out and love on someone today!

## WRITE A PRAYER

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# *He's Not Heavy, He's My Brother*

by Reverend Arnette L. Georges

*On one of the days while Jesus was teaching, some proud religious law-keepers and teachers of the Law were sitting by Him. They had come from every town in the countries of Galilee and Judea and from Jerusalem. The power of the Lord was there to heal them. Some men took a man who was not able to move his body to Jesus. He was carried on a bed. They looked for a way to take the man into the house where Jesus was. <sup>19</sup>But they could not find a way to take him in because of so many people. They made a hole in the roof over where Jesus stood. Then they let the bed with the sick man on it down before Jesus.*

*Luke 5:17-19 (NLT)*

I used to have a poster that depicted a strong African-American male hanging over a wall with an outstretched arm holding tightly to the arm of an African-American boy. The caption read, "He's not heavy, he's my brother." This Scripture reminds me of that poster. The man's weight didn't matter. The distance between where they started their journey and the place where Jesus was teaching didn't matter. The only things that mattered were that their friend needed to be healed and the only person with power to heal was in town. Their friend could not go on his own; the Scripture said he was not able to move his body. Love was in action that day.

These men cared enough to cancel their appointments, sacrifice their time, and attend to the needs of their friend. There are examples of this type of caring at Metropolitan. Yes, we see it in our leadership but it is also present in members of our congregation who do not have titles. These members adjust their schedules to visit the sick and drive seniors to church. They sacrifice financially by slipping money in the hands of congregants who need help. They show Christian love when they open their homes to those in need of a hot meal or a place to live. By their actions they say to others, you're not heavy, you are my brothers and sisters.

## **APPLICATION**

Have you stretched your hand to help anyone at MBC within the past year? If no, what would it take for you to do so? How have you personified "Metropolitan Cares"?

## **PRAYER**

*Father, help me to personify "Metropolitan Cares" in all that I say and do. For Your glory.*

*In Jesus' name, I pray.*

*Amen.*

# *New You! New Year!*

## *New You! Same God!*

By Minister Imogene Hunt

*For I am the Lord, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed.*

Malachi 3:6 (KJV)

Today and every day we have the blessing of being able to bring about change within ourselves and the space we are privileged to occupy on God's earth. The question for you is – and it's a personal one – are you in the process of evolving, changing daily into a better you? Are you actively engaged in becoming the Son or Daughter God destined you to be? Are you on the journey to fulfill your pre-destined purpose and destiny for the building of God's Kingdom on earth? Or, are you merely taking up space, waiting until your name is called? You may say, "Well I'm not a bad person. I don't set out to intentionally ridicule, gossip, kill, or hate anyone else. I wouldn't dream of robbing a bank or kidnapping someone. I know a lot of people who are far worse than I am." OK! We get it. You're not a "bad" person. But, the challenge still remains..." Our Lord challenges us to throw off the old self and put on the new self, daily.

Have you taken the time to conduct a self-evaluation against God's measuring stick? Who have you gone out of your way to help today? Your effort doesn't require much exertion. A Christian hug. A cheery hello or good morning. When is the last time you extended a stranger the courtesy of allowing that person to merge in front of you in heavy traffic? Did you pretend that you did not notice the young mother in the grocery line in front of you who had more food in her cart than money in her purse and was forced to put back one of her items? You heard the cashier politely say that she was still \$1.05 short. Yet, you just stood there, fuming because you were in a hurry and needed to get going. The meager amount would not have disrupted your monthly budget...a Starbucks Venti costs far more than a dollar. Let her know "Metropolitan Cares."

We are called to remember that we are engaged in the process of becoming new creatures every day. Each day God gifts us with a new resurrection, a new opportunity to become more and more like His Son, Jesus, The Living Christ. The late Sam Cooke's soulful "A Change is Gonna Come" says "It's been too hard living, but I'm afraid to die 'cause I don't know what's up there beyond the sky." Well, I know! Our Heavenly Father, Our Lord and Savior, His Holy Spirit, and a host of angels are waiting to welcome us home. At the end of each day, regardless of how good we evaluate ourselves, there is still room for improvement. I recommend this simple prayer, Father help me do a better job for you today than I did yesterday but not nearly as great as tomorrow. We must change! God does not change—He's the same yesterday, today, and forever!

### **APPLICATION**

What new thing is God trying to do in your life?

### **PRAYER**

*God, thank You for the new thing You are doing in my life*

*In Jesus' name.*

*Amen.*

# God Did The Unimaginable

by Helena Johnson Dunston

*“Then Peter came to Him and said, ‘Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?’ Jesus said to him, ‘I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven. Matthew 18:21-22 (NKJV)*

Lin-Manuel Miranda is the composer, lyricist, playwright and actor of the Broadway musical hit, *Hamilton*. Miranda skillfully uses singing and rapping to creatively depict the life of Founding Father, Alexander Hamilton; particularly his family life. Alexander Hamilton was married to Eliza Schuyler and very close to her sister, Angelica. Philip is their firstborn child. In the course of their marriage Alexander Hamilton has an extramarital affair that he publicizes in a 37-page letter that brings infamy to the family. When Philip is 19 he is killed in a duel defending his father’s honor. Angelica is an integral part of the Hamilton family and a staunch protector of her sister who she believes is the best thing that ever happened to Hamilton. It is through these words of Angelica that we get a sense of the Hamilton’s grief as they mourn the loss of their son:

“There are moments that the words don’t reach. There is a grace too powerful to name. We push away what we can never understand. We push away the unimaginable. They are standing in the garden, Alexander by Eliza’s side. She takes his hand. Forgiveness. Can you imagine? Forgiveness. Can you imagine?” This is unimaginable isn’t it? Eliza is able to forgive and hold hands with the person who has caused her so much pain and sorrow.

Doesn’t this strike a chord? God did the unimaginable and demonstrated His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Psalmist Vanessa Bell Armstrong puts it this way: “God could have chosen to never love again. Fallen man could go his way and die in his sin. But God in His compassion said, ‘I’ll pay redemption’s price.’ So He took on the form of man and became the perfect sacrifice. If riches could have paid the debt, then God could have sold, all the walls of jasper, and the streets are pure as gold. But He knew the price of one lost soul was more than wealth could buy; and if redemption were ever bought, only love would satisfy. “For God so loved the world that He gave His only Begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish, but they shall have everlasting life” (John 3:16).

God did the unimaginable! God looked beyond our faults and saw our needs. Unimaginable! Even when we are unfaithful to God, God is still faithful to us! Unimaginable! So, when we think about how God has forgiven us and given us another chance, by the power of the Holy Spirit and through the grace of God we can demonstrate our love toward each other through our compassion and forgiveness.

## APPLICATION

In your journal write about at least three times God has shown you compassion, grace and mercy by forgiving you when you know you didn’t deserve it. Identify someone who has hurt you in some way and show him or her compassion and forgive him or her.

## PRAYER

*Father, thank You for doing the unimaginable in my life, for securing my salvation.  
I give You all the glory, honor, and praise for being such a loving God.  
In the wonderful name of Jesus, I pray.  
Amen.*



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