

THE UPPER ROOM®



WHERE THE WORLD MEETS TO PRAY

May–August 2019



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WHERE THE WORLD MEETS TO PRAY

Susan Hibbins

UK Editor

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33 LANGUAGES

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How to use *The Upper Room*

The Upper Room is ideal in helping us spend a quiet time with God each day. Each daily entry is based on a passage of scripture, and is followed by a meditation and prayer. Each person who contributes a meditation to the magazine seeks to relate their experience of God in a way that will help those who use *The Upper Room* every day.

Here are some guidelines to help you make best use of *The Upper Room*:

- 1 Read the passage of scripture. It is a good idea to read it more than once, in order to have a fuller understanding of what it is about and what you can learn from it.
- 2 Read the meditation. How does it relate to your own experience? Can you identify with what the writer has outlined from their own experience or understanding?
- 3 Pray the written prayer. Think about how you can use it to relate to people you know, or situations that need your prayers today.
- 4 Think about the contributor who has written the meditation. Some users of the *The Upper Room* include this person in their prayers for the day.
- 5 Meditate on the 'Thought for the day' and the 'Prayer focus', perhaps using them again as the focus for prayer or direction for action.

Why is it important to have a daily quiet time? Many people will agree that it is the best way of keeping in touch every day with the God who sustains us, and who sends us out to do his will and show his love to the people we encounter each day. Meeting with God in this way reassures us of his presence with us, helps us to discern his will for us and makes us part of his worldwide family of Christian people through our prayers.

I hope that you will be encouraged as you use the magazine regularly as part of your daily devotions, and that God will richly bless you as you read his word and seek to learn more about him.

Susan Hibbins
UK Editor

CAN YOU HELP?

Here at BRF, we're always looking for ways to promote the practice of daily Bible reading, and we would like to ask for your help in spreading the word about this valuable resource.

Can I ask you to spread the word about the usefulness of *The Upper Room* in aiding daily meditation and prayer? This could be among your friends and contacts, or at any events in which you might be involved, such as church or a Bible study group, or a conference, special service, retreat or workshop.

We would really value your help, and we'll happily send you some sample copies if you can use them. Just let me know how many you would like and I'll arrange for them to be sent to you. If you wish you can email me at **susan.hibbins@brf.org.uk**.

If you're active on social media, we can supply cover graphics for use on Twitter, Facebook and so on, and we can also supply information packs to churches and groups if you pass on any requests to me.

Thank you in advance for helping us to publicise our Bible reading notes.

Susan Hibbins
UK Editor, The Upper Room

Living as Easter people

This Jesus, God raised up. We are all witnesses to that fact.

Acts 2:32 (CEB)

In the season following Easter, it seems that Jesus' death and resurrection should have utterly transformed the world. Jesus is risen! He has appeared to his disciples, and the Holy Spirit dwells within us. And yet, the world still suffers violence and unrest. People still become ill and face persecution. For Jesus' first followers it might have seemed easier to reflect on the incredible events and life of Jesus Christ with gratitude and awe but then move in a less challenging direction than the one to which Christ called them.

At times, it is tempting to give up, to turn away from a confusing calling or a challenging ministry or the exhausting good work God has called us to. But as many of the writers in this issue remind us, the difficult times often give us the opportunity to experience God's presence anew and reclaim our identities as his beloved children. They remind us that following Christ is not without difficulties, but it is worth it in the end. When we hold on to the promise of new life in Christ and remain persistent in prayer and steadfast in faithful living, we claim the hope of resurrection that the season of Easter embodies.

Living as Easter people amidst the challenges of daily life is not easy, but together – as the body of Christ – we can remind one another of the hope and joy that God offers to us all. As we travel this season together, I pray that the honest words of struggle and encouragement in this issue will give you strength to persevere when life is not easy and that the stories of joy will help you to celebrate the good life made possible through Jesus Christ.

Lindsay L. Gray

Editorial Director, The Upper Room

Where the world meets to pray

Hindi

The Council of Communication, Literature, and Publication and the Lucknow Publishing House organised an *Upper Room* writing workshop in Lucknow, India. Thirty-three people submitted meditations for publication as a result!

Odia

The Odia edition team is partnering with Christian youth organisations and local pastors to host small groups for fellowship and to share *The Upper Room* with young people.

Editions of *The Upper Room* are printed in:

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The Editor writes...

Recently my daily Bible reading was Acts 10:34–43. In it, Peter speaks of God's love for every nation and people, giving an account of Jesus' life, death and resurrection, through which all those who believe in him will receive forgiveness of their sins. In just ten short verses, Peter reveals the purposes of God for the world and for every person in it.

Towards the end of the passage, Peter describes how he and the other disciples were chosen to become Jesus' witnesses, commanded to carry on Jesus' mission and to preach the good news. They are, he says, those 'who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead' (v. 41, NIV). Apart from illustrating Jesus' human life, I wonder what was on Peter's mind just then.

Did he remember the meal on the beach (John 21:1–13), when Jesus cooked breakfast for his friends? Did he think of the silvery dawn light breaking over the water, and the leap in his heart when he realised that the figure on the shore was Jesus? And, most importantly, did he remember how Jesus talked to him later, forgiving Peter's earlier denial (John 18:15–18) and commissioning him to 'feed my sheep' (John 21:17)? It was the moment that Peter's new life as Jesus' 'rock' really began.

How do we see ourselves, as part of God's eternal plan? Maybe the idea seems too daunting. Who are we to be witnesses for Jesus? To me, these few words that Peter included in his description of good news for the world remind us that our lives as Christians begin simply: in forming a friendship with Jesus. It is us, you and I, who Jesus waits for on the beach; he is happy to sit down with us in that lovely setting and cook us breakfast. He will forgive, commission and send us out in the same way as he sent Peter and all the other disciples, to continue his work, to bring his love and friendship to those we meet and, in so doing, to further God's purposes in the world.

Susan Hibbins
UK Editor

The Bible readings are selected with great care, and we urge you to include the suggested reading in your devotional time.

Visiting Willy

Read John 6:43–48

I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut. I know that you have little strength, yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name.

Revelation 3:8 (NIV)

I remember the sound of the gravel under my tyres as I drove up the lane to visit my friend Willy. I can still see him waving from his porch – one arm extended and the other leaning on his walking stick. ‘What took you so long?’ he’d ask.

‘I stopped to ask some deer for directions.’ This joke always made him laugh. We’d sit and talk about nature, his children and how the stroke had made him angry and less motivated. I mostly listened. He just needed to be heard. Willy had a long history of drug abuse, alcoholism, wrong turns and pain that he carried deep inside.

I visited Willy for about a year and watched him grow weaker over time. He wouldn’t talk about God. ‘That isn’t for me. I am okay as I am,’ he’d say. One rainy afternoon, as I pulled into Willy’s drive, he walked unsteadily towards me through the tall grass to welcome me. ‘I did it!’ he exclaimed.

‘Did what?’ I asked.

‘You know – went down to the old church and got sorted.’ I smiled and shook my head with an awesome feeling of fulfilment. We chuckled and walked back to his garden. In the last months of Willy’s life, the Holy Spirit had called him to walk through the church doors and forever be with God.

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, thank you for opportunities to share your love and grace with others. Amen*

Thought for the day: My small actions can make a huge difference in someone’s life of faith.

Matt Simmons (Kentucky, US)

I can do it

Read Exodus 4:1–12

[The Lord] said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me.

2 Corinthians 12:9 (NIV)

Although I had joined a Christian church group almost two years earlier, I had never taken a prominent role in its ministry. One day I got a message from our leader that said, ‘Meli, you have had a lot of extraordinary experiences, so I want you to give the sermon the last week of this month.’ Feeling inadequate, I refused and told him that I had a fear of public speaking. The leader replied that I needed to start speaking in front of people so I could become more comfortable with it.

Then I remembered that when God first called Moses to lead the Israelites out of Egypt, Moses refused several times, saying that he was not an eloquent speaker (Exodus 4:10). But in spite of Moses’ weaknesses, God still used him to lead a great nation, Israel, out of Egypt towards the promised land.

We all have weaknesses, but we don’t have to let those become an excuse to refuse the work God calls us to do. God doesn’t rely on our weaknesses but on our willingness to rely on his strength. This can give us full confidence to aim our best efforts towards doing great things to his glory.

Prayer: *Dear God, we have many weaknesses, but we know that we can do anything because you are our strength. Amen*

Thought for the day: ‘I can do all things through [Christ] who strengthens me’ (Philippians 4:13, NRSV).

Meliana Santoso (East Java, Indonesia)

Steadfast love

Read Romans 8:35–39

Give thanks to the God of heaven. His love endures forever.

Psalm 136:26 (NIV)

Several years ago I took on a devotional challenge in which participants choose a word to concentrate on for the year. I chose the word ‘love’, initially focusing on examining my love for God. To reinforce my commitment, I pinned up a photo in my office of a heart drawn in the sand on the beach with waves crashing nearby. Inside the heart was another heart saying, ‘Love God’. One morning a colleague noticed the image and said, ‘Wouldn’t it be great if after the waves crash over it, the words “Love God” were still there?’ He smiled and walked away, saying, ‘Not likely, is it?’

His remark made me reflect again on what it means to love God. Just how steadfast is my love for God? Is my love for him ‘written in the sand’ only in good times? When things get tough, is my love for God still readily spoken, tangible, visible? How likely am I to declare firmly that I love God after a storm has come and the waves of loss, grief, disappointment, rejection and fear have crashed over me?

The questions I asked myself still remain. But after reading Psalm 136, I was thankful, knowing that God’s love for me will always stand.

Prayer: *O God, help us to remember that your love for us is infinite and everlasting. May we remain steadfast in our love for you in every situation. Amen*

Thought for the day: God’s love is steadfast. Is mine?

Cassius Rhue (South Carolina, US)

Facing change

Read Isaiah 33:2–6

[The Lord] will be the sure foundation for your times, a rich store of salvation and wisdom and knowledge; the fear of the Lord is the key to this treasure.

Isaiah 33:6 (NIV)

The day was hot, but inside my heart felt cold and fragile. Tears streaked down my face as my twin boys headed off to college. My day-to-day mothering came to a screeching halt that morning, leaving me to face an empty nest.

Later that week, a pair of doves built a nest on my trellis. When their babies hatched, the nest hummed with activity. The parents worked constantly to feed the hungry chicks. The babies grew quickly, and soon the nest became too crowded. One morning, I noticed that the nest was empty. The doves – not just the chicks, but the parents as well – had moved on.

The birds taught me that God designed our lives to have changing roles and seasons. As I watched the birds, God prompted me to seek a new role for my new season – in this case, a second career as a writer.

As we face the changing seasons of our lives, we can go to God for stability, wisdom and knowledge. Thankfully, God weaves blessings into each season of life.

Prayer: *Dear Lord, help us to face each change with faith. We ask that you would provide stability, wisdom and strength so that we may adapt to new roles and seasons well. Amen*

Thought for the day: God will help me adapt to each new season of life.

May Patterson (Alabama, US)

Like a child

Read Mark 10:46–52

Whoever becomes humble like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

Matthew 18:4 (NRSV)

A minister friend of mine was recruiting volunteers to portray biblical characters at a special church service. Knowing that I enjoyed acting, she asked me to play Bartimaeus, the blind beggar who called out to get Jesus' attention. As the children rotated through several Bible scenes in groups of four or five, I sat cross-legged, with my eyes closed tight, calling out, 'Jesus, have mercy on me!' With each group, the teacher read the story from the Bible, and then the group moved on to the next scene. To my surprise, after one group moved on, one child turned back. I was about to open my eyes when I heard her footsteps and felt her small hands on my head. 'Jesus loves you,' she said, 'and he has given you back your sight!'

I was deeply touched that this child had not been content to leave the blind beggar alone, still wanting to meet Jesus. I wondered how often I have avoided reaching out to a hurting person. When could I have shared words of hope with someone in need? This child's faith has inspired me to take the time to talk with others about Jesus' love.

Prayer: *God of love and mercy, help us to have the faith of children, and may we live out that faith in how we interact with others. Amen*

Thought for the day: I will trust Jesus with a childlike faith as I reach out to those in need.

Jim Harris (Virginia, US)

Learning from bees

Read 1 Corinthians 12:4–14

The body is not made up of one part but of many.

1 Corinthians 12:14 (NIV)

In February 2017 the government moved my family, neighbours and friends in the La Barquita community in Santo Domingo, in the Dominican Republic. We were all relocated to a new community with better living conditions. A week after I moved into my new house, however, a swarm of bees arrived. I was unsure what to do; I did not want to harm them, but I also did not want to share my home with them.

I hoped that through prayer I would be able to determine what God was trying to teach me through the bees, so I asked my church family to pray with me. I then turned to the Bible. When I read 1 Corinthians 12:12–13, I recalled that bee colonies are united in their work to produce honey and to keep their colony healthy.

We can follow the example of unity we see in bee colonies by working towards God's purpose in harmony as a family, congregation and community. When we come together for the greater goal of furthering God's kingdom, we can be as unified and effective as a bee colony, working as one body.

Prayer: *Almighty God, help us to work for your kingdom, united through Christ. Amen*

Thought for the day: I am one of many members of the body of Christ.

Andrea Ramírez Zabala (Puerto Rico)

Finding the food

Read Matthew 28:16–20

Jesus replied, 'It's written, People won't live only by bread, but by every word spoken by God.'

Matthew 4:4 (CEB)

When I was a young boy in the 1950s, my family would visit my mother's parents in Ohio. Their house backed on to a busy railway line. The rear entrance to their house had a porch – and more often than not after playing with my cousins I would find a homeless man sitting on the porch eating a sandwich with a glass of milk that our grandmother had prepared for him.

I asked Grandpa why the men always came to their house instead of any of the others in the row by the railway line. He took me down to the railway and showed me how some of the sleepers directly behind his house had paint or chalk markings on them. He said, 'This is how the homeless people tell one another where to find food.' They used whatever they could find to mark the sleepers.

That lesson from my grandfather is one reason I participate in prison ministry – to help others find food for their souls. As Christ-followers we are to tell others where to find the real nourishment for life: God's word. Jesus didn't tell us to go build churches and invite our friends and neighbours. He told us to go and tell others where to 'find the food'!

Prayer: *Dear God, guide us in our efforts to show and tell others your life-giving word. Amen*

Thought for the day: God wants us to show others how to find the food of life.

Martyn Haynes (California, US)

A talent to share

Read Exodus 23:6–9

Don't take advantage of poor or needy workers, whether they are fellow Israelites or immigrants who live in your land.

Deuteronomy 24:14 (CEB)

As a volunteer with new refugees coming into my town, it breaks my heart when I hear so many stories of unscrupulous people taking advantage of them. I wonder how I can help them, even when my energy and time are limited. I met Aung Lin and his daughters last autumn and then visited him over Christmas. He had stepped on a land mine in a refugee camp in Thailand, losing one foot, both hands and his eyesight. Then his wife died. When he came to Nebraska with his four daughters, a couple from his ethnic group in Burma agreed to take them into their home. I hoped that in some small way I could help this family. When I visit Aung Lin, I hope that along with the rice, fruit and money I bring, I also brighten his day by showing God's love to him.

God has given talents and skills to each of us for helping others. Those who love to sew help refugees to learn these skills. A craft group has been organised to help earn money for the refugee families. A retired teacher helps the new students with their homework. My 81-year-old friend Sunny helps the refugees to learn about the customs and culture of our area. Whether with a refugee, a lonely elderly person or someone at church who is ill – each of us has a talent that can be shared to the glory of God.

Prayer: *Dear God, open our minds and hearts to ways that we can be of help and encouragement to others. Amen*

Thought for the day: Every day I can depend on God to show me someone in need.

Nancy R. Meyer (Nebraska, US)

Joyful prayer

Read Luke 11:5–13

Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.

Philippians 4:6 (NIV)

When I returned home from the market with my groceries, my three-year-old son, Alan, spotted the biscuits I had bought. He exclaimed loudly, ‘Papa, biscuits!’ Then suddenly he began to cry as he kept asking for them. Alan’s behaviour made me a little sad. I thought, ‘Why doesn’t he ask with a smile? Doesn’t he trust me?’

I began to think about the way I ask something of God. Often, like Alan, instead of asking God trustingly, I burst into tears and keep crying for the same thing again and again. God is pleased to hear our requests, but the apostle Paul says we are not to be anxious as we pray. I know that I sometimes forget Jesus’ promise: ‘Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you’ (Matthew 7:7).

God knows what we need before we even ask, but he wants us to ask with faith and thanksgiving. He wants to fill our lives with love and joy, and he will do so. That’s why God sent Jesus – to bring us abundant life (see John 10:10).

Prayer: *Loving God, give us hearts full of faith so that we may receive in abundance. Amen*

Thought for the day: I will approach God today with trust and thanksgiving.

Hiteshkumar Jashvantbhai Solanki (Gujarat, India)

Hope out of despair

Read Zephaniah 3:14–20

The Lord, your God, is in your midst... He will rejoice over you with gladness, he will renew you in his love; he will exult over you with loud singing.

Zephaniah 3:17 (NRSV)

In my first term at college, I found myself floundering, depressed and unsure of myself. No major event had triggered these feelings; I couldn't explain why I felt so alone. While I still believed in God, I began to doubt that my life was worth anything to him. It was a struggle just to get out of bed every morning and go through the motions of each day.

Though that year was painful, I did learn one crucial lesson: that God is never nearer to me than when I am suffering. And that suffering was not a punishment from God; rather, it forced me to stop relying on my own strength and abilities. I learned to lean on God and the powerful truths of the Bible, not on my own unpredictable emotions. God loves me. He has good plans for my life. He does not hold my sins against me. Those truths anchored my soul amid the storm-tossed waves.

As I navigated my depression, my prayer life grew and deepened. My heart clung to the truths in the Bible. Gradually, through the help of many who reached out to me, prayed with me, encouraged me and counselled me, I found my way out of despair. Then I realised that I had not been abandoned; instead, God had filled me with hope.

Prayer: *Dear God, when we're tempted to despair, teach us to put our hope in you. Amen*

Thought for the day: When I'm hurting, God is near.

Kate Underwood (Illinois, US)

Transformed

Read Romans 12:1-3

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

Romans 12:2 (NRSV)

I was approaching my older years when God let me know in no uncertain terms that my many years of prodigal-son-type bad behaviour – excessive drinking and gambling, for instance – needed to come to an end. After crashing my truck into a tree during one of my drunken stupors, I finally saw a clear choice: I could allow God to rule the rest of my life, or I could choose the world. I made the decision to let God's love, grace and forgiveness convert me into a fruitful Christian, beginning with repentance and breaking away from the wasteful life I had led for 55 years.

Abstaining from that lifestyle of reckless behaviour changed my life to one worth living – fasting from my worldly ways in order to feast on God's word. I now try to serve others and give back in gratitude for all God has given me. I will always be a Christian who is under construction, attempting to refrain from the bad habits that plagued me for so many years. But now I have a Saviour who has transformed me into a wiser, loving and more caring person.

Prayer: *Dear God, guide us each day so that we may come to love you more and do your will. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen*

Thought for the day: I will serve God by serving others.

John Groves (Maryland, US)

A mother's faith

Read Matthew 7:13–14

[Jesus said,] 'Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to.'

Luke 13:24 (NIV)

A devout follower of Jesus Christ, my mum has emailed a 'Weekly Inspiration' to her children, friends and colleagues for over five years. Each of these emails contains an inspiring and motivational message that has served as a guide for me on how to live out the week ahead through believing and having faith in God. My mum's relationship with God always serves as an example for me of what Jesus meant when he said, 'Make every effort to enter through the narrow door.'

Mum has always made her best effort in her own journey towards salvation, and is constantly finding new ways to spread the word of Christ and lead others to him. From her weekly inspirations, to distributing *The Upper Room*, to being an active church member, my mum inspires me to be a better person and to make sure I am putting forth my best effort so that I may be able to enter into God's kingdom.

Prayer: *Dear God, each day give us the courage and strength to live out our lives according to your will. Amen*

Thought for the day: Today I will find new ways to inspire others to share the good news of Christ.

Clint Bowman (North Carolina, US)

Before we even speak

Read Luke 7:11–17

‘Before they call I will answer.’

Isaiah 65:24 (NIV)

One day while driving to work, I was troubled about a task that God had asked me to do. I was late for work, caught in traffic, so I decided to listen to the radio. During the programme someone gave a testimony that provided strength and clarity for my own struggle. I knew then that I had experienced God’s promise: even before we pray the Lord will answer.

This reminded me of the story of the funeral of a widow’s son in a town called Nain, as recorded in Luke’s gospel. As the procession was leaving the town gates, it met with Jesus. Before the widow even opened her mouth, Jesus raised her son from death. Jesus saw her heart – and in love and great empathy gave the son back to his mother alive!

God is truly our ever-present help in times of need. When we are living with sorrow or confusion, we can remember that he sees our hearts and will answer us – often before we even speak.

Prayer: *Dear Lord, help us in the midst of pain and confusion not to forget your presence. May we at all times be sensitive to your voice. In Jesus’ name. Amen*

Thought for the day: God knows my pain even before I give voice to it.

Neliswa Shauna Chigudu (Johannesburg, South Africa)

Encouragement

Read Acts 15:30–35

Judas and Silas, who themselves were prophets, said much to encourage and strengthen the believers.

Acts 15:32 (NIV)

Life was difficult for new Christians in the first century because the culture they lived in was not attuned to the ways of Christ. When people persecuted them for their beliefs, they became discouraged. Judas and Silas are two whom God sent to encourage other believers, to help their faith become stronger. In fact the words ‘encourage’ and ‘encouragement’ are used countless times in the New Testament. Throughout the centuries, receiving encouragement has been important to all Christians as they grow and mature in their faith.

One morning when I was attending a conference and praying about something special I could do that day, God nudged me to focus on encouraging others. That day God sent several people my way who needed encouragement. As far as I could tell, I did not make a huge difference in anyone’s life. It could be that someone’s life was changed and I didn’t know about it. But that day I did learn that people appreciate and are strengthened by words of encouragement. I also learned that each of us is encouraged even as we encourage others.

Prayer: *Dear God, lead us to people who need encouragement and give us the words to strengthen their faith. Amen*

Thought for the day: God can use me to encourage others.

Tom Kennedy (Texas, US)



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

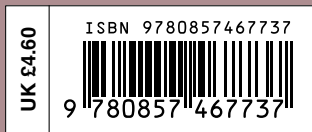
All the meditations are written by readers of *The Upper Room*, who seek to share the insights of their faith with others.

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

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

This edition of *The Upper Room* is published by The Bible Reading Fellowship, which works to see lives and communities transformed through its creative programmes and resources for individuals, churches and schools.

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



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