

FRIDAY, JANUARY 1, 2021

GOD'S NEW WAY

JOHN 1:1–18

Fresh Start

But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God.

John 1:12

We have the power of the children of God! That's amazing—but what does it mean? On this first day of a new year, we might take time to remind ourselves of a few of God's truths. As children of God, we are beloved, no matter what we do or say. God will never abandon us or give up on us. As children of God, we are heirs in Christ, heirs of his grace and mercy. We need not live in guilt and fear.

As children of God, we have a particular identity. We are part of a beloved community of believers who care for one another and the world, who proclaim good news (using words if necessary), and who are promised life beyond death. There is power in all of that—in love, in grace, in care. There is power in good news and resurrection too. And all of that is available to us, not because we have earned these gifts, but because God is loving and merciful.



O God, help me to live as your beloved, powerful child every day. Amen.

Beth Merrill Neel, Portland, Oregon

SATURDAY, JANUARY 2, 2021

GOD'S NEW WAY

JOHN 1:1-19

Created Beings

And the Word became flesh.

John 1:14a

The psalmist reminds us that we are fearfully and wonderfully made (Ps. 139). Our bodies grow and change. Some of our bodies dance, and some of our bodies run. Some of our bodies break down only to recover. Incarnate existence is a fragile thing, but it is the only existence we know.

In the person of Jesus, God became incarnate and put on mortal flesh. The physical body of Jesus would not last forever. The body of Jesus danced, maybe, and perhaps ran. The body of Jesus knew hurt too. Nonetheless, God took on all that joy and pain so that God might know a little bit of what it means to be human and so that we might know more of God. That's done through our bodies, with our minds that think and ponder, with our hearts that beat and race, with our hands that reach out for help and to help. What an amazing gift.



God, I thank you for my body and pray for its good care. Amen.

Beth Merrill Neel, Portland, Oregon

SUNDAY, JANUARY 3, 2021

SHED A LITTLE LIGHT

GENESIS 1:15

Let There Be Some Light

Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light.

Genesis 1:3

My toddler has blackout curtains in his room to help him sleep, and every morning as he wakes up, I open the door to his room and flip the lights on. "Good morning!" I exclaim. He never complains, but he always burrows his head into the bed or pillow because the light is too bright to be flipped on like that.

I'm betting you know how your own eyes squint when lights come on too quickly. Turning on all the lights before we're ready can be pretty painful. If you think about this in relationship to the hard times of our lives, sometimes the world can seem too bright.

When we are moving around in the dark, we have to learn to be gentle with ourselves. We have to find ways of letting others know how much brightness we can handle. We find ways to trust that the light won't always hurt. Whatever darkness you may be navigating through your life, may you allow light to enter in, little by little. Let there be some light.



*Light of the World, for whatever we may be facing,
let there be some light. Amen.*

Irene Pak Lee, San Jose, California

MONDAY, JANUARY 4, 2021

SHED A LITTLE LIGHT

ISAIAH 60:1–6

Awake My Soul

*Arise, shine; for your light has come,
and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you.*

Isaiah 60:1

I hate alarm clocks. They always go off before I'm ready for them, even though I set them so that I can hit the snooze button at least once. Recently, my spouse set the alarm ringtone to a setting called "gentle wake up." It's a soft, gentle melody that gradually gains volume and becomes a sweet-sounding tune. The problem? It would wake me up but not him. He likes it because he wants a gentle reminder to wake him up first, and then if that does not work, he sets another alarm that is loud and more urgent sounding.

This is a good analogy for many things in our lives. We don't like to be jolted into any kind of new awakening. We'd rather things happen gradually so that we can be prepared. And yet, as people of faith with a call to love all people, and with the realities of the current state of our world, to what does your soul need to awaken today? What jolt do you need to wake you up and spur you to action?



*Steadfast God, awaken our souls to your will this day.
Amen.*

Irene Pak Lee, San Jose, California

TUESDAY, JANUARY 5, 2021

SHED A LITTLE LIGHT

ISAIAH 60:1–6

Roly-Poly Joy

*Then you shall see and be radiant;
your heart shall thrill and rejoice.*

Isaiah 60:5a

In the midst of the early days of the 2020 pandemic, I had the privilege of having a toddler at home. I could have easily complained about trying to work at home with no daycare, but it was a privilege because of the ways in which he constantly reminded me of seeing and finding joy in everything. He was too young to realize what was going on, and so he was happy to have both of his parents home, taking him on regular walks around the neighborhood.

On one of those days, we went to our front yard and I had him help me pull weeds from our garden. As we pulled up a particular patch of weeds from the dirt, we found a family of roly-poly bugs living there. He had never seen these bugs before and squealed in delight. When I told him what they were called, he was even more excited, yelling, “Roly-Polies!” In that moment, he taught me that joy can be found anywhere. When we find it, we just have to recognize it.



Holy Creator, may we find joy in even the lowly roly poly. Amen.

Irene Pak Lee, San Jose, California

EPIPHANY, WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 6, 2021

SHED A LITTLE LIGHT

MATTHEW 2:1–12

Epiphany Star Gifts

“We observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage.”

Matthew 2:2b

Every year on or near Epiphany, I give out star gifts to everyone in the congregation. I prayerfully write a word on a star and invite folks to take a star to ponder. They are not allowed to choose their star. Instead, they are invited to randomly grab a star and then imagine, observe, ponder, and notice how that word arises for them throughout the year. They are asked to put it somewhere they will notice it and see it every day so that they can continue to be aware of how that word shines or perhaps is hidden in their lives. They can also share with one another throughout the year what they notice.

I wonder what the wise ones noticed about the star that no one else paid any attention to. What did they see, notice, imagine, and ponder? Were they looking for it, or did they just happen to stop whatever they were doing to pay attention? And what might we find if we pay attention to the star that is beckoning us today?



Star of wonder, star of night, guide us to thy perfect light. Amen.

Irene Pak Lee, San Jose, California

THURSDAY, JANUARY 7, 2021

SHED A LITTLE LIGHT

MATTHEW 2:1-12

Life-Giving Road

And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

Matthew 2:12

I am a people pleaser. Maybe it's because I'm an oldest child or maybe it's because there is something inside all of us that longs to be accepted and wanted. I learned at an early age that by being a people pleaser, I could find the acceptance that I longed for, but as I got older, I realized it was always temporary.

Here is the problem with being a people pleaser: You make everyone else happy and eventually make yourself miserable. It's impossible to make everyone happy, and trying to makes you tired. Really tired.

When it comes to decisions about relationships, I now ask myself, "Is it life-giving?" Howard Thurman stated it best when he said, "Don't ask what the world needs. Ask what makes you come alive and go do it. Because what the world needs is people who have come alive."* May we all live life doing what is life-giving rather than seeking to please others.



God, you came that we might have life. Help us to remember that and be life-giving to others. Amen.

Irene Pak Lee, San Jose, California

* John Blake, "Howard Thurman: The Overlooked Civil Rights Hero," CNN, <https://www.cnn.com/2019/02/01/us/howard-thurman-mlk-gandhi/index.html>.

FRIDAY, JANUARY 8, 2021

SHED A LITTLE LIGHT

PSALM 29

Using Our Voice

*The voice of the LORD is powerful;
the voice of the LORD is full of majesty.*

Psalm 29:4

More than half of the verses in this psalm talk about the voice of God and how it is used and heard. As children of God, we have also been given a voice to use to speak, educate, organize, and share good news. This can feel empowering or daunting depending on how you've been taught or discouraged to use your voice.

It took me a long time to “find my voice” for many reasons, but I am grateful that I found it. I realized that you do not need to have the most eloquent words to speak truth with love and justice and that fear is a liar. Black author and poet Audre Lorde writes about the real fear that accompanies any kind of voice we may want to express for justice but concludes that we must still share our stories, because our silence does not protect us or anyone. She writes, “When I dare to be powerful, to use my strength in the service of my vision, then it becomes less and less important whether I am afraid.”*



Lord, give me the words to speak light into hard places. Amen.

Irene Pak Lee, San Jose, California

* Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (New York: Crossing Press, 1984).

SATURDAY, JANUARY 9, 2021

SHED A LITTLE LIGHT

MARK 1:4–11

Feeling the Spirit Descend

And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him.

Mark 1:10

There was a viral video a few years ago with a little Asian girl in her pajamas stepping out into the rain for the first time. She's never experienced anything like rain directly falling on her before, and she is amazed. She squeals with delight and looks up into the heavens and really feels the drops on her face, her hands, and her head. At one point, she stops in stunned silence, extending her hands, and pauses for several seconds to absorb what is happening to her.

Watching it, I am reminded of how our baptisms truly are a moment for us to awe, for us to pause, for us to absorb that something new is happening among us. Even if we do not see it, the heavens are torn apart and the Spirit descends on us again and again, covering all of us like rain as we welcome someone new to the cloud of witnesses past and present. May we take time to absorb it as we observe Baptism of the Lord Sunday and remember our own baptism.



O Holy Spirit, descend on us once again today. Amen.

Irene Pak Lee, San Jose, California

SUNDAY, JANUARY 10, 2021

BEING KNOWN
PSALM 139:1–6, 13–15

Creating

*For it was you who formed my inward parts;
you knit me together in my mother's womb.*

Psalm 139:13

There is an innate desire in all of us to be known and loved just as we are. Psalm 139 is a beautiful summation of what it means to be known and loved by our God. As I write this, I can feel the gentle nudges and movements of a growing child inside my own womb. Nurturing and sustaining a life within my own body has shown me not only how much love and awe is involved but also how much sacrifice and discomfort is involved in creating something new.

And yet, we, as humans, continue to create and try new things in spite of sacrifice, discomfort, and pain, because we also know that those go in tandem with the wholeness and joy of knowing that we have been participants of making something ourselves. Through that creative process, I believe that because we participated in it, we know it.

What will you create or what are you creating now that challenges you and helps you grow?



*Holy Creator, grant us the creativity and endurance
to bring about something new to this world for your
glory. Amen.*

Irene Pak Lee, San Jose, California

MONDAY, JANUARY 11, 2021

BEING KNOWN

PSALM 139:1–6, 13–15

Understanding

*Even before a word is on my tongue,
O LORD, you know it completely.*

Psalm 139:4

I grew up with parents who spoke English as their second language. There were several times in my youth when I would have to translate their English to folks who could not quite understand what they were saying or when my parents struggled to find the words in English to communicate what they were trying to say.

As I grew older and as email and texting became more prevalent, I realized that I had never really “heard” their mistakes until I could visually see them, because my mind continued to correctly autotranslate whatever they were trying to communicate. I could always understand what they were saying. The same thing happened as I began raising a child of my own. People would struggle to understand his toddler words, and yet I knew exactly what he was saying. Being known and taking the time to understand someone is a gift that is learned. May we make that effort today with someone who we struggle to understand, whether it be across language, culture, or difference.



*God, grant us the patience to understand as we seek
to be understood. Amen.*

Irene Pak Lee, San Jose, California

TUESDAY, JANUARY 12, 2021

BEING KNOWN

1 SAMUEL 3:1–10

Up and Down

Then the LORD called, “Samuel! Samuel!” and he said, “Here I am!” and ran to Eli, and said, “Here I am, for you called me.” But he said, “I did not call; lie down again.” So he went and lay down.

1 Samuel 3:4–5

The first time I took my two-year-old out on a scooter, he was excited to try it out. I did a short demonstration, and he was ready. With a huge grin, he got on and did it for about five seconds. In that sixth second, he began to slowly lose his balance, and his little voice exclaimed “whoa!” as he fell down.

Without skipping a beat and with a smile on his face, he got back up and tried again. He fell and got back up three or four more times before a look of discouragement began to form on his face. After that, whenever we would try, I had to demonstrate again before he would do it, and now he’s a pro.

I am reminded that we all need guidance and encouragement when we are up and when we are down. We need to find those voices who will tell us the truth and perceive what is happening around us. Who is that for you? Are you that voice for someone else?



Holy God, may we be the one to lift someone up today. Amen.

Irene Pak Lee, San Jose, California

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 13, 2021

BEING KNOWN

1 SAMUEL 3:11–20

Difficult Truths

As Samuel grew up, the LORD was with him and let none of his words fall to the ground.

1 Samuel 3:19

A gift and a curse that I had for a long time was trying to give people the benefit of the doubt when listening or speaking with someone with whom I disagreed. This was a gift because it's kind to give people the benefit of the doubt. It was a curse because I found myself hearing words or phrases that at times diminished my humanity or the humanity of others. I used to choose to “let it go” because of assumed ignorance around the statement the person made.

However, over the years, I've found myself empowered to speak difficult truths more boldly, especially if the humanity of those around me or myself are being diminished in any way, shape, or form. I've also learned that this difficult truth telling is met with a lot of defensiveness and sometimes anger. I realized that avoiding those reactions was not benefitting anyone, and it was keeping me from being fully who I am. No one should have to diminish himself or herself in order to lift someone else up.



Almighty God, teach us how to speak difficult truths in love. Amen.

Irene Pak Lee, San Jose, California

THURSDAY, JANUARY 14, 2021

BEING KNOWN

JOHN 1:43–51

Seeing and Smelling the Roses

Nathanael asked him, “Where did you get to know me?” Jesus answered, “I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you.”

John 1:48

Throughout my life, it has usually been through the eyes of another that I have seen something that I had not noticed before. Sometimes it is as simple and delightful as my toddler stopping at every rose he sees to observe and smell it, thus allowing me to do the same. He also says hi to every ant he sees on the ground. Other times, throughout my faith journey, it has been someone recognizing a gift they see in me and then naming that gift to me. Usually I am surprised or taken aback at what they have noticed.

Nathanael was seen and known before he even knew Jesus, and when Jesus identifies him as already known, Nathanael is amazed and chooses to follow. Perhaps our challenge today is to start noticing and then naming those things around us that we normally wouldn't notice, whether that be roses along our walk, ants on the ground, or a gift in someone we see.



*Help us to pay attention, O God, so that we might be seen and help others to see themselves more clearly.
Amen.*

Irene Pak Lee, San Jose, California

BEING KNOWN
PSALM 139:13–18

Fearfully and Wonderfully Made

I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.

*Wonderful are your works;
that I know very well.*

Psalm 139:14

I grew up in a culturally Korean home in the United States. Navigating two cultures as a child was sometimes easy and sometimes confusing. For example, in Korean culture, if someone gives you a compliment, it is polite to reject that compliment several times rather than accept it. However, in U.S. culture, I learned that one is to simply say “thank you!” when receiving a compliment, and it is considered rude to reject it.

In general, though, I believe it’s much easier to shower others with compliments and praise rather than noticing, honoring, and accepting the gifts we have within ourselves. I struggled with the balance of humility and false humility for a long time until I realized that the God who knows me loves me so thoroughly that there is nothing I can do or not do to deserve that love. Today, how can we give praise to God for all of the ways in which we are fearfully and wonderfully made?



Loving God, help us to remember the ways in which you see and know us. Amen.

Irene Pak Lee, San Jose, California

SATURDAY, JANUARY 16, 2021

BEING KNOWN
PSALM 139:13–18

Known in Song

*I try to count them—they are more than the sand;
I come to the end—I am still with you.*

Psalm 139:18

Years ago, several members of our church choir decided to form a separate “care choir” that visited shut-ins to sing hymns to them. It was a holy practice, and members loved it. I was scheduled to make a particular pastoral visit to a member in hospice care. She was someone whom I had noticed had all the hymns memorized and could sing them without holding her hymnal when she was at church. So I made some calls at the last minute to see if anyone could join me to sing a few songs to her, and almost everyone in the choir showed up.

We squeezed into her room, and we sang and prayed together. It was a gift to all of us as we saw her singing along with us, even as she was coming into her final days. Now, anytime I visit someone in hospice care, I will always sing a hymn to them, and sometimes I am startled and blessed again to hear their voice joining mine.



*Loving One, remind us of the ways in which we are
blessed to be a blessing to others. Amen.*

Irene Pak Lee, San Jose, California

SUNDAY, JANUARY 17, 2021

ENJOYING GOD'S ABUNDANT LIFE

JONAH 3:1–5, 10

Abundant Life Obeys God's Mission

So Jonah set out and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the LORD.

Jonah 3:3

She's good at obeying—if I'm watching.

My chihuahua-terrier mix has an affinity for trash cans and sweets. My wife and I put both out of her reach when we leave the house. If we forget, we find empty boxes of Milk Duds or conversational hearts—or whatever else we have accidentally left accessible. A mild chiding sends her to her kennel. After four years, she obeys better, but occasionally temptation gets the best of her.

Jonah had an issue with obedience too. When God told him to go to Nineveh and warn them about God's coming judgment for their disobedience, Jonah ran the other way. A short stint in a large fish's stomach changed his mind.

Although God gives me the will to obey, my sinful bent prods me to run the other way. God may not use a kennel or a fish's belly to reroute my disobedience, but God will send whatever circumstances are necessary. God wants us to enjoy abundant life, and this can occur only when we obey our God-given mission.

Lord, give me the desire to obey your mission for my life. Amen.

Martin Wiles, Greenwood, South Carolina

MONDAY, JANUARY 18, 2021

ENJOYING GOD'S ABUNDANT LIFE

JONAH 3:1–5, 10

Abundance through Confession

And the people of Nineveh believed God; they proclaimed a fast, and everyone, great and small, put on sackcloth.

Jonah 3:5

Sometimes “sorry” is the hardest word to say. Students love to test the limits when their teachers are away. When I returned after a half day off, sticky notes greeted me, telling me how noisy the students had been and how they would not cooperate. After a stern lecture, I gave them an option: confess your guilt as one of the talkers or experience class-wide lunch detention. Out of five classes, only one had confessors. The remainder chose detention.

Jonah received an unexpected surprise after preaching to the Ninevites: they changed. He wanted them destroyed; God wanted them delivered from their evil ways. The Ninevites did what God wants all of us to do: repent.

Abundant life results from receiving God's grace, and God's grace arrives originally through the repentance and confession of my sin. But my life gets dirty from sins, from living in the world with evil. Quick confession is vital. Otherwise, my conscience will harden. Confess daily so that you can enjoy God's abundant life.



God of all grace, lead me to confession when I fail to obey your standards. Amen.

Martin Wiles, Greenwood, South Carolina

TUESDAY, JANUARY 19, 2021

ENJOYING GOD'S ABUNDANT LIFE

PSALM 62:5–12

Abundant Life Welcomes Silence

*For God alone my soul waits in silence,
for my hope is from him.*

Psalm 62:5

My dad pastored churches, and each home we lived in had an office. For a designated time every morning and every evening, Dad entered his study, away from the bustle of family life, and prayed over seven handwritten lists. His prayers weren't rigid or rehearsed, but he felt he needed this time to effectively lead God's people.

David needed silence so that he could focus on his hope: God. David's son, Absalom, had led a national rebellion against his father and had run him out of town. In silence, David sought guidance from God and contemplated his situation.

Our world is noisy, echoing sounds that beckon me to do, go, and buy. Not all noise is sinful, but it can become so if it steals my focus from the most important things: loving God and loving others. Silence pulls me back to the basics and gives me time to reconsider my priorities. Make it a point to find a silent spot daily where you can commune with your Maker.



*God of heaven, take me to those silent places so that I
can hear your Spirit. Amen.*

Martin Wiles, Greenwood, South Carolina

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 20, 2021

ENJOYING GOD'S ABUNDANT LIFE

PSALM 62:5–12

Abundant Life Endures the Unpredictable

*Once God has spoken;
twice have I heard this:
that power belongs to God.*

Psalm 62:11

Life is unpredictable. My middle brother has had many health struggles, with Parkinson's diagnosed at age forty and serious complications as the result of surgery. Each day presents new struggles, but his hope in God remains.

Faith explains how my brother can keep going in the midst of tragedy. It also clarifies how David could write a psalm of hope when his own flesh and blood had rebelled against him and stolen the kingdom from him.

Trials are parcel to life. Whether God sends them or allows them or we invite them through unwise or sinful actions, we should always run to the loving arms of our sovereign God. Confession—if needed—and trust, faith, and hope are all proper responses when life throws heartaches our way. Let your trials bring you closer to God, not drive you farther away.



*Merciful God, bring me to you when the trials of life
knock me down. Amen.*

Martin Wiles, Greenwood, South Carolina

THURSDAY, JANUARY 21, 2021

ENJOYING GOD'S ABUNDANT LIFE

1 CORINTHIANS 7:29–31

Abundant Life Entails Wise Choices

And those who mourn as though they were not mourning, and those who rejoice as though they were not rejoicing, and those who buy as though they had no possessions.

1 Corinthians 7:30

Mary Khoury was a teenager living in Lebanon. One day, a group of fanatics raided her village. The leader waved his pistol before Mary's family, saying he would shoot anyone who didn't convert to his religion. Mary had a choice. She informed the leader that she was a Christian and would not convert. The leader shot everyone. Two days later, the Red Cross arrived to help. Mary was the lone survivor, but the bullet left her physically disabled.*

Paul apparently felt the second coming of Christ would occur during his lifetime. Since time was short, he encouraged his readers to make choices with eternity in mind, laying aside earthly relationships and possessions.

We can't avoid choices. The best we can do is pray for God to provide wisdom as we make life's decisions, keeping in mind that this world is temporary. Abundant life entails choosing things that will keep impacting the world positively long after we're gone. Make your choices count.

God of all wisdom, guide me to choices that will grow your kingdom. Amen.

Martin Wiles, Greenwood, South Carolina

* Harold J. Chadwick, *Foxe's Book of Martyrs: Updated to the 21st Century* (Newberry, FL: Bridge-Logos, 2001).

FRIDAY, JANUARY 22, 2021

ENJOYING GOD'S ABUNDANT LIFE

MARK 1:14–20

Abundant Life Shares Good News

And Jesus said to them, "Follow me and I will make you fish for people."

Mark 1:17

A writer I'd admired for seven years had asked *me* to be a contributor to her site! I was aghast. And I wanted to tell everyone. It feels so good to be chosen, asked to be part of something exciting.

Jesus began assembling his band of followers by choosing Peter and Andrew and then James and John. His instructions to them were to leave their fishing occupation and share the good news of the gospel.

In our world of technological marvels, sharing the good news is easier. With a press of a button or the tap of a screen, I can send the news about what God has done for humanity around the world. Regardless of the methods I use to share the good news, I am responsible for sharing. Ask God to open your eyes to the opportunities you have to share what Jesus has done.



God, prompt me to share the good news with everyone. Amen.

Martin Wiles, Greenwood, South Carolina

SATURDAY, JANUARY 23, 2021

ENJOYING GOD'S ABUNDANT LIFE

MARK 1:14–20

Abundant Life Leaves Some Things

Immediately he called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed him.

Mark 1:20

We couldn't take it all. The time had come to leave one job and take another. Doing so meant moving from a larger home to a much smaller one. Since my wife and I were antique collectors, our larger home was filled with our treasures—treasures we would now have to leave. The parting caused sweet sorrow, but God had directed the change. We kept only the family heirlooms and some other pieces that held sentimental value.

When Jesus called James and John to follow him, they left their father in the boat. When he called Peter and Andrew, they left their fishing nets. Often, when Jesus called others to follow him, they had to leave something.

Sometimes, we must leave everything behind to follow God. But more often, we don't have to leave it all—just things that hinder our service, steal our focus, or jumble our priorities. God wants our complete love and obedience—our total heart. Anything that swamps the flow of love to God, we should cast aside. Abundant life demands it.



Gracious God, help me to put anything aside that prevents me from following you. Amen.

Martin Wiles, Greenwood, South Carolina

SUNDAY, JANUARY 24, 2021

LIVING IN THE SPIRIT'S PRESENCE

DEUTERONOMY 18:15–20

The Spirit Gives Power to Lead

I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their own people; I will put my words in the mouth of the prophet, who shall speak to them everything that I command.

Deuteronomy 18:18

“Why don’t you teach that Sunday school class?” they asked me. I knew I could. But I had also rambled spiritually and didn’t know whether or not I was up to the challenge. Then I remembered God’s calling to teach that I had heard as a twelve-year-old boy, and I said yes. That yes led to a lifetime of leading in various capacities.

Though initially reluctant, Moses accepted God’s call to lead the Israelites out of slavery and back to their promised land. Centuries later, early church leaders Peter and Stephen applied Moses’s words to Jesus (Acts 3:22; 7:37).

Everyone leads in some capacity. Fear, low self-esteem, peer pressure, inconvenience, and jumbled priorities can stifle us, but God’s Spirit gives us the power to overcome whatever we think prevents us from leading where God calls. Trust God to release the Spirit’s power in you so that you can obey God’s call to lead.



Spirit of the living God, release your power in me that I might lead where you direct. Amen.

Martin Wiles, Greenwood, South Carolina

MONDAY, JANUARY 25, 2021

LIVING IN THE SPIRIT'S PRESENCE

PSALM 111

The Spirit Provides

*He provides food for those who fear him;
he is ever mindful of his covenant.*

Psalm 111:5

Our bank account was overdrawn. My wife's surgery had rendered her temporarily unable to keep the toddler she had been caring for, and in her pain-induced state, she had forgotten some monthly drafts. We had until 5:30 p.m. to offset the shortfall. This situation capped off months of fighting to pay the rent and utilities and to buy groceries. That's when my mom visited the bank and deposited our shortage.

From the cradle to the grave—especially as king—David experienced a lifetime of watching God provide for him and others, and he praises God for such provision in the psalms. No, God doesn't promise to give us everything we want, but God does provide what we need to survive and to do what the Spirit leads us to do. God's provisions, gifts, and talents will always suffice for the opportunities. Never doubt God's ability to provide for you.



*God of provision, I trust you to give me what I need
in life. Amen.*

Martin Wiles, Greenwood, South Carolina

TUESDAY, JANUARY 26, 2021

LIVING IN THE SPIRIT'S PRESENCE

PSALM 111

The Spirit's Presence Provokes Praise

Praise the LORD!

*I will give thanks to the LORD with my whole heart,
in the company of the upright, in the congregation.*

Psalm 111:1

I sat and marveled. My wife and I were at the writer's conference we attend annually. Prior to the sessions, a worship leader led us in singing, and I watched the expressions of praise. Some lifted their hands to heaven. Others almost danced in place. Some stood quietly with their eyes closed or sang sedately. But all praised God in their own way.

David found ample reason to praise God, and he did so wholeheartedly. In these verses, he praises God's works, majesty, honor, righteousness, and grace. Regardless of what gestures we use or don't use, God is worthy of praise. I praise God when I think of who God is: creator, controller, lover of humanity. I praise God when I consider who I am because of my relationship with God: clothed in Christ's righteousness, forgiven of all my sins. Praise elevates God and helps us view life with the right perspective. Find time to praise God daily.



*Spirit of God, I give you the praise you are worthy of.
Amen.*

Martin Wiles, Greenwood, South Carolina

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 27, 2021

LIVING IN THE SPIRIT'S PRESENCE

1 CORINTHIANS 8:1–13

The Spirit's Presence Evokes Love

Now concerning food sacrificed to idols: we know that "all of us possess knowledge." Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up.

1 Corinthians 8:1

Kelly sometimes smelled of alcohol, but we loved her anyway. She rode a moped because she had lost her license for driving drunk. Each Sunday, she made her way to the altar. Ladies from the church surrounded her and prayed. For Kelly, alcohol was a stumbling block that has been difficult to overcome.

Paul's instructions in this passage refer to the eating of food sacrificed to idols, but the spirit of these words resonates today. Leaning on our "knowledge" of the destructive nature of Kelly's addiction would have puffed us up, as Paul said, but love builds all of us up.

Love doesn't justify wrong; our church didn't condone Kelly's actions, which hurt her and others, but we accepted her as a person worthy of our love. Love also works for the good of people. When we love God with all our heart, we will want others to experience the best God has for them. Let God's Spirit evoke love for others in you.



God of love, give me a heart that loves other as you do. Amen.

Martin Wiles, Greenwood, South Carolina

THURSDAY, JANUARY 28, 2021

LIVING IN THE SPIRIT'S PRESENCE

1 CORINTHIANS 8:1–13

The Spirit Builds Sensitivity

Therefore, if food is a cause of their falling, I will never eat meat, so that I may not cause one of them to fall.

1 Corinthians 8:13

I didn't agree with my paternal grandmother's opinion about women not wearing pants. Nor did I agree with some of my mother-in-law's ideas about Sunday activities. Dad never went to more than a handful of movies during his adult lifetime. And my other grandmother? She thought some curse words were not really curse words at all. I never argued about these issues. I chose sensitivity.

Paul's dilemma entailed believers who thought eating meat sacrificed to idols was wrong. He disagreed, knowing that idols weren't real and therefore nothing was wrong with the meat, but he nonetheless refrained from eating such meat when in their presence.

I can't please everyone. But, like Paul, I make a point not to purposefully do anything offensive to a fellow believer. We are all at different spiritual maturity levels—and with those various levels come greater comprehension. One day, our knowledge will be complete, but until then we can be sensitive to others' understandings of God's Word.



God in heaven, help me to be sensitive to the opinions of others. Amen.

Martin Wiles, Greenwood, South Carolina

FRIDAY, JANUARY 29, 2021

LIVING IN THE SPIRIT'S PRESENCE

MARK 1:21–28

The Spirit's Presence Leads to Worship

They went to Capernaum; and when the sabbath came, he entered the synagogue and taught.

Mark 1:21

Growing up as a PK (preacher's kid), I went to church every time the doors opened. I didn't always want to go, but I had no choice. As Dad migrated among churches, I watched people worship in various ways. Some lifted their hands. Others kneeled at the altar. Still others stood or sat silently with their eyes closed. Regardless of how people chose to worship, they did so to enter God's presence.

When the Sabbath came, Jesus went where he knew he would find worshipers, and he taught them "as one having authority" (v. 22). Although Christians changed the Sabbath day to Sunday to celebrate Jesus' resurrection, their purpose remained to worship. Worship of some sort has characterized people of all times. God has placed an unction within humans, and we need not limit our worship to one day of the week. It happens daily through our prayer times, Bible meditations, observation of nature, and association with other believers. While our needs are met through worship, worship is more about glorifying God—however we do it. Make it a point to worship God daily.

God of glory, I worship you today and every day. Amen.

Martin Wiles, Greenwood, South Carolina

SATURDAY, JANUARY 30, 2021

LIVING IN THE SPIRIT'S PRESENCE

MARK 1:21–28

The Spirit's Presence Heals

And the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying with a loud voice, came out of him.

Mark 1:26

My missionary friend serves orphans and widows in India. After one mission trip to Bihar, he messaged, “People have experienced physical and inner healing and have been delivered from evil spirits. Meetings that began at 10 a.m. were supposed to end by 5 p.m., but people sat with hunger to hear the word of God, and meetings stretched late into the night.”

Jesus also met someone with an evil spirit, in a strange place—the synagogue. Jesus healed the man and amazed the crowds who had gathered for worship.

I often wonder why I don't see the number of physical healings that were common throughout the Old Testament and into first-century Palestine. Perhaps because God has given medical professionals knowledge to bring about healing through procedures and medicine. Yet the greatest healing isn't physical but spiritual. Having a well soul—one restored to God through faith in Christ—far outweighs the joy of experiencing physical healing. Let the Spirit's presence bring the healing you need.



Spirit of God, grant me the inner and outer healing I need. Amen.

Martin Wiles, Greenwood, South Carolina

SUNDAY, JANUARY 31, 2021

OUR PURPOSE IS GOD'S PURPOSE

ISAIAH 40:21–31

Our Purpose Needs Perspective

*To whom then will you compare me,
or who is my equal? says the Holy One.*

Isaiah 40:25

We often place our trust and desire in relationships, money, position, family, and many other things that are not God. Our purpose becomes meeting physical needs in order to be fulfilled, but we need perspective. In one fell swoop, our earthly idols can be taken from us. But God endures. We are always one diagnosis, accident, economic downturn, or argument away from everything changing. But God never changes.

When we shift perspective toward God, we begin to recognize what great power and strength reign over our lives. Nothing can compare. We see that the needs we have can be met only by a creator who has heaven and earth firmly in hand. Our sense of security, belonging, well-being, and, yes, purpose, come from our pursuit of God alone.

With a God-centered perspective, our relationships, money, position, family, and more, become fragrant offerings instead of gods themselves.



Almighty God, please turn our eyes to you. May we live according to your will. Help us to find our purpose in you first. Amen.

Tischa van de Reep, The Woodlands, Texas