

saint mary's press

Good News Day by Day

Bible Reflections
for Teens

Dee Bernhardt

Larry Schatz

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PREFACE

Welcome to *Good News, Day by Day*. We are pleased to share our reflections with you.

Each day's entry contains a Bible verse, a brief reflection, and a short prayer. For more about the Scripture passage, suggestions for further reading in your Bible are also included.

To get the most from the reflections, use them daily. Prayer can happen at any time of the day, but it's best to pick a specific time when you have at least five minutes of quiet time to think about what you are reading.

Read the Bible verse aloud several times—if you can—so that you hear the message in the words. Then read the reflection ideas and consider the question(s) at the end. You may want to start a prayer journal and write your responses to the questions in it. After you have given a question some thought, imagine God sitting right there with you, and address the short prayer directly to God. You may want to add your own thoughts or spend some time in silence with God as well.

You can check out the suggestions for further reading in your Bible immediately or at a later point in the day. These are to help you become more

familiar with the Hebrew Scriptures and the Christian Testament of the Bible. We encourage you to consider using *The Catholic Youth Bible*, also published by Saint Mary's Press. *The Catholic Youth Bible* contains hundreds of study, prayer, and life application articles, many of which are connected to Bible passages used in *Good News, Day by Day*.

As you journey, consider that many others are joining with you in your devotions, using these same reflections, and enjoy the adventure of learning and praying the *Good News, Day by Day!*

January 1

MARY, MOTHER OF GOD

When the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children. (Galatians 4:4–5)

Today we celebrate the beginning of a new year and focus on the mother of Jesus, Mary, the human being who said yes to God and helped to change the world. Let us resolve to be like Mary, to say a heartfelt yes to bringing Jesus into our world every day of this year.

Dear God, as this year begins, help me to follow in Mary's footsteps each day. Let me resolve to be all that you have called me to be, and help me to live as your child each day.

January 2

When he was at table with them, he took the bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him. (Luke 24:30–31)

After Jesus had risen, he walked along with some of his followers toward the town of Emmaus. His followers didn't immediately recognize him, even though he talked with them for quite a while. It was only when he broke the bread that they realized they were with Jesus. How many times do we see Jesus in the people we walk with? Do we see Jesus a little more when we stop and take time to eat with other people? When we spend time with others and get to know them, we are able to see Jesus in profound ways. In whom will you see Jesus today?

God, help me to see you in everyone I walk with today.

For more: Read the whole story of the journey to Emmaus (Luke 24:13–53).

January 3

I have called you by name, you are mine. (Isaiah 43:1)

We have heard many times in many ways: we have been called, we have been chosen, we are special to God. And yet it is easy to forget this. We have a special bond with God and God with us, in much the same way as we have a special bond with our family. No matter what happens, that bond will always be there, for God loves us. When we are angry with God or when we forget that God is with us, that bond of love will still be present and cannot be broken.

Loving God, thank you for loving me as part of your family. Help me to always be aware of your love for me.

For more: Read First Corinthians, chapter 13, and ask yourself how God has shown you the love that is talked about in this chapter.

January 4

ELIZABETH ANN SETON
(1774-1821)

She opens her hand to the poor, and reaches out her hands to the needy. (Proverbs 31:20)

Elizabeth Ann Seton is the first person to be declared a saint who was born in the United States. She opened the first Catholic school in the United States and founded the Sisters of Charity. Clearly she is a woman who saw a need and moved ahead to meet that need. She once said, "The charity of our blessed Lord . . . was gentle, benevolent, and universal." Her legacy of Catholic schools and the Sisters of Charity is with us today.

O God, let my first goal today be to do your will; secondly, to do it in the way that you will it; and thirdly, to do it because it is your will. (Based on a prayer by Elizabeth Seton)

January 5

For God did not give us a spirit of cowardice, but rather a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline. (2 Timothy 1:7)

God has given us a spirit of power and love. We have the power to love, and love changes everything. We have the power to love the genius in our history class, the power to love the person who does things we ourselves would never do, the power to love ourselves enough to abstain from unhealthy behaviors. Love is a powerful force—ask people who have felt that they were not loved at some point in their life. We have the spirit and power of love. Would others know that from looking at our life?

Gracious God, thank you for giving me the power to love and the spirit to love those who seem unlovable, even myself at times. Help me always to show your spirit of love and the power of that love to my friends and even to strangers.

For more: Read the story of Jesus and the woman who was caught in adultery (John 7:52—8:11).

January 6

EPIPHANY

In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, asking, "Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage." (Matthew 2:1-2)

Today we celebrate the faith and the insight of the strange visitors who came to visit the baby Jesus. They saw a star, listened to God, and followed. After a difficult journey, they were eventually led to Jesus. In many ways we too are like the kings. God puts a star on our horizon that leads us on a difficult journey. Being Christian in this culture, especially as young people, is not easy. And yet if we follow the star of our faith, like the kings we will find Jesus, and we will truly be able to pay Jesus homage by the way we live our life.

God of the journey, help me always to follow your star, even when the way is long and difficult.

For more: Read about the wise men in Matthew, chapter 2. You probably know it, but have you read it lately?

January 7

You shall not murder. (Exodus 20:13)

This command seems pretty straightforward and easy, right? Not always—not if we see a person as more than just a body. A person is body *and* spirit. Therefore this command also means that we may not murder someone’s spirit by talking behind their back or belittling their talent or making fun of them. Rather, we are called to support one another.

Gracious God, help me always to see the good in others, even in those I don’t want to like, and always to work to build up their spirit, not to tear it down.

For more: Read Matthew 5:21–26, where Jesus talks about this commandment. Also read all the commandments found in Exodus, chapter 20.

January 8

In those days John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness of Judea, proclaiming, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near." (Matthew 3:1–2)

According to the image we are given of John the Baptist in the Bible, he was quite a character. He gave up everything, even his life, to spread the word, urging people to change their ways and to prepare themselves for the presence of God among them. Even though he was eccentric, we are called to be like John, for we are called to be witnesses to the presence of God among us by what we say and do. Are you being a good witness?

God, show me the way to be your witness to the world, and give me the courage to be an instrument of your presence.

For more: Read the story of Peter and his witness to Jesus in John 18:25–27 and John 21:15–19. Because Peter is human, it's a two-part story!

January 9

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. (Matthew 4:1)

At times reading and studying about Jesus can be depressing. After all, he is divine and sinless. Are we supposed to be like that? Passages such as the preceding one remind us that Jesus was fully human, like us. He was not immune to temptation. Jesus was holy not because he was never exposed to sin but because he turned away from sin. We may not always make the right choice, but with God's grace we can choose rightly.

Loving God, help me to make choices that reflect your desire and love. Please lead me away from temptation, but when I find myself there, deliver me from evil.

For more: Read stories from one of the Gospels—Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John—and see how they portray Jesus. What aspects can you most identify with?

January 10

You are the light of the world. . . . Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your [God] in heaven. (Matthew 5:14–16)

Even a small light in a dark room is extremely powerful, for the room is no longer dark. This is why Jesus uses the image of light: even a little bit can change everything. We are asked to be a light of goodness and hope. Our light can and does make a difference. The light we shine by refusing to make fun of a person that everyone else picks on, changes the entire room for that person. How else can you be a light for others?

God of light, thank you for giving your light and life to me. May my light shine so that others may see it, and may others see you through me and come to know you better.

For more: Read John 8:12–20, in which Jesus asks no less of himself. Jesus says he is the light of the world.

January 11

Commit your way to Yahweh; trust in God who will act. (Psalm 37:5)

The funny thing about trust is that to learn to trust, we must trust! Spend some time today considering the ways you do and do not trust God. Ask yourself, Can I commit my way to a God whom I do not trust?

You know, God, trusting can be very hard for me sometimes. I want your will, my way. Please teach me to give more of the control in my life to you.

For more: Read Psalm 37, which speaks about trust and the patience we need when other people do not treat us fairly.

January 12

You shall not cheat one another, but you shall fear your God; for I am the Lord your God. (Leviticus 25:17)

Early in life we may do what is good out of fear. As we mature we may learn to do good out of love. Can you think of one area of your life as a child in which you were honest out of fear, but now you are honest out of love? in which you acted responsibly out of fear, but now out of love?

Dear God, sometimes I am afraid of you, but mostly I just forget you are there at all! Please help me to be more honest in my daily interactions so that I can grow away from my fear of punishment toward love of you.

For more: Look in John 8:31–32, to see why Jesus told those who believed in him that “the truth will make you free.”

January 13

Now John wore clothing of camel's hair with a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. (Matthew 3:4)

Jesus and John the Baptist were cousins born only three months apart. Although John was an important messenger of God, he certainly did not conform to the dress or diet of his day. Can you think of anyone you know whom you ignore because of his or her strange appearance? Just because someone is different, does that mean that God does not live in them?

Dear God, keep me from judging others based on appearance. Remind me every day that who I am and who my friends are on the inside is much more important than what we wear on the outside.

For more: Check out Luke 12:22–34 to see what Jesus tells us is more important than food and clothing.

January 14

So now, O Israel, what does the Lord your God require of you? Only . . . to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul. (Deuteronomy 10:12)

That's all God wants, is it? That's a lot! It seems like the older we get, the more we are challenged to live our life according to God's values. Do you take your values as a Christian seriously?

Dear God, I'm not always sure that I can measure up to those around me. I turn to you for guidance, but your way seems out of reach. Help me to trust that you are there, supporting me in my search for the right values.

For more: Figuring out how to walk with, serve, and love God can be complicated. Look at Matthew 25:31–45 to find some practical help.

MARTIN LUTHER KING JR.

And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age. (Matthew 28:20)

Martin Luther King Jr. spoke out and ultimately gave his life for the civil rights of all people. Few people have not heard his famous "I Have a Dream" speech. But Reverend King also had doubts, and this was one Scripture verse from which he took great strength. Where do you turn when you have doubts?

Always-present God, like Dr. King I sometimes have doubts. Help me to believe like him that someday, even though I'm a sinner, I'll hear your voice say to me, "I take you in and I bless you because you tried."

For more: Psalm 139 reminds us that God knows everything about us, even when we were in our mother's womb. Read over Psalm 139 and consider what your call to serve might be.

January 16

Beloved, do not imitate what is evil but imitate what is good. (3 John 1:11)

Does it sometimes seem that people who break the rules have the best lives? Their lives are certainly exciting, yet when we speak with them on a deeper level, we often find a loneliness that is hard to explain. Try to think of someone you know whose life reflects the deep happiness that only goodness can bring.

Dear God, I am so tempted to imitate what I know is evil, just because it looks like fun! Please give me the wisdom to recognize the long-term consequences of my actions. Thank you for the people I know who through their life teach me what is good.

For more: The Third Letter of John is a very short letter. Try reading it aloud slowly. Are you more like Diotrephes or Demetrius?

January 17

Do not be a hypocrite before others, and keep watch over your lips. (Sirach 1:29)

It is easy for us to talk about other people. Conversations that start out as sharing the news can easily become gossip sessions. As Christians we are called to be kind and merciful. Today when you talk about another person, make sure that what you say is kind.

God of compassion, when I get together with my friends, I find it easy to judge those who are not like me and to trash their reputation. Help me so I talk about other people just as I would want them to talk about me.

For more: The Apostle Paul lists clear instructions on how to live as a young Christian in the First Letter to Timothy. It's worth reading.

January 18

Let no one despise your youth, but set the believers an example in speech and conduct, in love, in faith, in purity. (1 Timothy 4:12)

No matter how old we are, some people always see us as “kids.” The older we get, the more frustrating this can be. But at other times, we claim that we’re not old enough to know better, when in our heart we truly do know that we haven’t set a good example. Perhaps today is a good day to examine your actions to see what kind of an example you are.

Dear God, inspire me to set a good example no matter what my age. I am young, but I can, with your power, love other people.

For more: Read Proverbs, chapter 2, to find good advice on how to become wise.

January 19

*Noah did this; he did all that God commanded him.
(Genesis 6:22)*

When we think of Noah and the ark, we think of how faithful and smart Noah was to follow God the way that he did. Yet imagine how unpopular he must have been, building that big boat in his yard when it wasn't even raining. Consider what you would do if God asked you to do something so publicly unpopular. But doesn't being a Christian sometimes call us to unpopular behavior?

Saving God, even knowing that Jesus died for me, I sometimes lose sight of my responsibility to follow through with my faith. When I falter, please remind me of Noah and his family, who endured public ridicule because of their strong and sure faith.

For more: Check out the three young people in Daniel, chapter 3, who chose to go through a fiery furnace rather than deny their faith.

January 20

Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. (1 Thessalonians 5:16–18)

Sometimes we meet people who always seem to be happy, and we might be tempted to believe that these people have lives free from bad experiences. Some suffering is part of every life, so it may help to remember that we can, with God's help, decide to be joyful even in the face of disaster. Decide to focus on the good today, and see how your day shapes up.

Dear God, when life is not going my way, I want other people to make it right again. I sometimes choose to shower my unhappiness on whomever I meet. Help me to concentrate on your blessings this day so that I can be an inspiration to others and reflect my faith in you.

For more: The First Letter to the Thessalonians, chapter 5, advises us on how to live so that we are prepared for the second coming of Christ. Try to live a different verse of this chapter each day for a week.

January 21

God is not a human being, that he should lie, or a mortal, that he should change his mind. (Numbers 23:19)

Some of us are blessed enough to have someone that we can trust with any secret in the world. Imagine how trustworthy God must be if human confidences can be that strong! Take some time today to trust God with one of the secrets from the silence of your heart.

Patient God, move in my heart and shine your light on the dark corners so that I can give over my secrets to you. Please strengthen my trust that you are worthy of my highest confidence.

For more: In Numbers, chapter 23, we hear the story of Balaam and his prophecies. Take some time to consider if you would have been as trusting of God as Balaam was.

January 22

At Gibeon the Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream by night; and God said, "Ask what I should give you." (1 Kings 3:5)

We do not often hear of God making such an extravagant offer as this one! When Solomon answers, he asks to know what is best for his kingdom. If God made this offer to you, what would you ask for?

God of all goodness, my first thought upon hearing this question has a lot to do with my own gain. Help me to remember that I am only one small part of a much larger Kingdom, in which you reign.

Get the whole story of Solomon by reading the First Book of Kings in your Bible, starting with 1 Kings, chapter 2, in which Solomon's father gives him some truly inspirational advice.

January 23

Shun youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart. (2 Timothy 2:22)

Passion can be a dangerous word because we often associate passion with physical love and lust, but to be great at anything, even at living like Christ, requires passion. Passionate people become totally absorbed in and committed to the object of their passion. Can you let go of or shun the passions that distract you from following God? How can you be passionate about Christ?

Dear God, give me passion for truth, for service of my neighbor, and for hope in the future. Please strengthen my resolve to pursue your way and to become passionate for those things that will endure.

For more: The Song of Solomon speaks freely and openly about the virtues of passion. Read this beautiful love poem in your Bible today.

January 24

FRANCIS DE SALES

I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. (John 13:34)

Francis de Sales lived during a difficult time for the church. He preached love and moderation when the church was splitting apart. He took his time praying and thinking about decisions before taking any action on them. His bottom line on every decision was love. In one of his writings, Francis reminds us, "A single Our Father said with feeling has greater value than many said quickly and hurriedly."

Say the Lord's Prayer (the Our Father) slowly and thoughtfully.

For more: When Jesus' Apostles asked him to teach them how to pray, he taught them the Lord's Prayer. You can find the story of this special prayer in Luke, chapter 11.

So be careful not to forget the covenant that the Lord your God made with you, and not to make for yourselves an idol in the form of anything that the Lord your God has forbidden you. (Deuteronomy 4:23)

We are easily tricked into worshiping idols: the idols of success, wealth, fame, even youth. These may not look like idols, but when they become more important to us than our faith and trust in God, that's what they are. Do you have any idols in your life?

God of mercy, of course I want to stay on your good side, but I want to be comfortable too. Please help me to remember that all my successes are good as long as I keep my priorities straight, with you at the top of the list.

For more: Read Mark 10:17–31, the story of a man who put the idol of his possessions ahead of following Jesus.

January 26

I treasure your [word] within my heart, that I may not sin against you. (Psalm 119:11)

Whenever our friends give us compliments, or family members let us know that they love us, their words stay alive in our heart and are easily remembered. This psalm reminds us that the word of God belongs in that same special corner of our heart and mind. With God's word in our heart, our actions can be guided by it. Take some time today to consider which stories or quotes from the word of God have a place in your heart.

Dear God, when I remember the respect of my friends and the love of my family, it really helps me to live what I believe. Help me to treasure your word so that I will be able to take strength in it each day of my life.

For more: Read Luke 4:14–30 to learn how powerful the word of God was in Jesus' life.

January 27

Jesus said to them, "Truly I tell you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are going into the kingdom of God ahead of you." (Matthew 21:31)

This verse marks the end of a parable about two sons. One does what he was asked to do; the other says that he will but never gets to it. The point is that actions speak louder than words. Today consider the differences between some of your good intentions and your actions.

Wise God, help my actions match my good intentions. Please open my ears so that I can hear and do what you say, what you want.

For more: Sometimes we can get sidetracked. Read John 8:1–11 to see how Jesus dealt with one woman who had lost her way.

January 28

Do not abandon old friends, for new ones cannot equal them. A new friend is like new wine; when it has aged, you can drink it with pleasure. (Sirach 9:10)

Friends can be complicated. We must leave some behind because they are leading us into trouble, but there are those who stand by us through all the trials of our life. Today think of an old friend, and write him or her a letter or an e-mail, even if you cannot send it.

Dear God, thank you for the gift of friendship that makes life bearable many times. Help me to cherish my true friends, and give me the wisdom to leave the false ones behind.

For more: Read John 15:12–17 to find out who Jesus' friends are.

Peter said to him, "Though all become deserters because of you, I will never desert you." (Matthew 26:33)

Peter, always the most vocal of the Apostles, just had to prove to Jesus that he was the number-one Apostle, so he made a bold promise instead of listening to what Jesus was telling him. We too sometimes promise things that we really cannot control. Today try listening carefully to others and learning from them instead of making bold promises.

Dear God, the trouble with me is that I truly believe I can follow through on my bold promises. Please help me to consider the cost of my words before they get out of my mouth.

For more: Matthew 26:69–75 tells us the ending to this story. What would you have done?

January 30

MOHANDAS GANDHI

But Jesus said to him, "Do not stop him; for whoever is not against you is for you." (Luke 9:50)

Gandhi, a Hindu, spent much of his life studying Christianity. His life of passive resistance in India poses a real challenge to Christians because we are called to that way of living. Nonviolent resistance was the loving means that led to India's freedom from British rule. Gandhi remarked, "The means may be likened to a seed, the end to a tree; and there is just the same inviolable connection between the means and the end as there is between the seed and the tree." Today consider the Gospel challenge to live your life guided only by love.

Dear God, it is easy for me to write off those of different faiths than my own because they are not Christian. Please help me to realize that the most important path for me to monitor is my own.

For more: In Luke 9:46–48 we learn who is the greatest in the eyes of Jesus.

JOHN BOSCO

Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. (Mark 10:14)

John Bosco had a difficult childhood while growing up in Italy. So when he became a priest, he opened homes and schools for homeless teens. He loved these street kids, but needed patience with them. He would remind himself that Jesus “treated sinners with a kindness and affection that caused some to be shocked, . . . others to gain hope in God’s mercy.” Can you think of any cause to which you would dedicate your whole life?

Dear God, John Bosco gave his whole life to the service of the church and the education of homeless young people. Please show me where I belong, so that my life will also make a positive difference.

For more: Read Mark 10:13–16 to hear how Jesus dealt with the little children.

February 1

The Lord bless you and keep you. (Numbers 6:24)

These days the only time we hear people say, “God bless you,” seems to be when we sneeze or when we visit our elderly relatives. Yet the Bible reminds us that we must bless one another and also bless God. Give a blessing to a friend or a family member today. The blessing may take the form of praise or thanks too.

Merciful God, I praise and bless you because you have given me so much to be grateful for. Sometimes blessing someone else feels awkward. Give me the right words to share a blessing. You have given me wonderful blessings, so help me share them with those around me.

For more: When Mary’s cousin Elizabeth saw her pregnant with Jesus, she gave Mary a blessing. Read Luke 1:39–45.

PRESENTATION OF THE LORD

When the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, they brought [Jesus] up to Jerusalem, to present him to the Lord. (Luke 2:22)

According to the Law of Moses, parents had to present their firstborn son to God, so they did. As devout Jews, Jesus' parents followed the Law. They had to travel a long way and wait their turn, but they did it because it was the right thing to do. Would you take all that trouble to maintain a tradition that affirms your relationship with God?

Holy One, when it comes to laws that benefit me directly, I'm all for respecting the law and waiting my turn. I'm afraid that I fall short of your parents when it comes to your laws. Give me the patience to trust and follow in your ways.

For more: Find out which law Jesus felt was the most important by reading Matthew 22:34–40.

February 3

So if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. (Colossians 3:1)

Seeking the ways of Christ can be difficult if we don't really know where to begin looking. At baptism we are raised with Christ; now we encounter Christ through meditating on the Bible, listening to wise and good people, and praying. Have you made a commitment with your life to follow Christ?

Dear God, on this day I renew the commitment made at baptism. I commit my life to following you. Please give me lots of road signs so I stay on the right path.

For more: Read Psalm 119:1–20 and consider how you can seek God with your whole heart.

February 4

The Lord is not slow about his promise, as some think of slowness, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish, but all to come to repentance. (2 Peter 3:9)

In our culture we get into the habit of thinking, Three strikes and you're out! Peter reminds us that God doesn't think that way. Thank God today for being patient with you.

Forgiving God, you are truly loving to put up with me sometimes. It's a wonder that you don't just call it quits with the human race, and with me in particular. Thank you for your patience. You promised that you would never give up on me. Help me to not give up on you.

For more: Read Second Peter, chapter 3, to see Peter's response to the impatient people of his day.

February 5

Seek advice from any wise person and do not despise any useful counsel. (Tobit 4:18)

Sometimes we meet a wise person and we know it. Other times it takes longer for the wisdom to sink in. We do not always want to hear what a wise person has to say. Today consider who the wise people are in your life. You might start a journal in which you write down little bits of wisdom that you hear from people or have read.

Dear God, help me to recognize the wisdom that I encounter each day so that I can become more wise and more grounded in you. Thank you for the people you have sent into my life to point me in the right direction.

For more: Spend some time with Psalm 77 and write your thoughts in your journal.

In the morning, while it was still very dark, [Jesus] got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed. (Mark 1:35)

God wants to hear from us. All we have to do is take a little time and start a conversation. The trouble is that we get distracted. Jesus got up early and isolated himself so that he could pray. Today take at least one minute and pray in your own words. You have at least a spare minute.

Dear God, I know the prayers I learned at church, but they don't always express what I'm trying to say. Please teach me to start my day off in conversation with you.

For more: Look in Jeremiah, chapter 1, to find the story of a young person's conversation with God.

February 7

Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 2:4–5)

Most of us excel at watching out for ourselves. Jesus' compassion stood out as unusual among the people of his day because he reached out to all the people that everyone else rejected. Take some time today to reach out to someone outside your usual group of friends.

Dear God, I am comfortable in my group of friends, and I'm not sure I want to reach beyond my boundaries to welcome others. Please show me how to be more compassionate toward others, and lead me to the friends I need to support me in following you.

For more: Read John, chapter 8, for an example of Jesus' great compassion. With whom do you identify?

February 8

But Joseph said to them, "Do not be afraid! Am I in the place of God?" (Genesis 50:19)

Joseph went through a lot in his life. He suffered greatly at the hands of his brothers, and was even sold by them. Yet in the end, he not only forgave them but he welcomed them back into his new life. Is there someone in your family that you need to forgive?

God of mercy, people like Joseph seem so unreal. Help me to remember that your Spirit can guide me to forgiveness in my heart and to open myself to the grace of that guidance.

For more: The whole story of Joseph challenges us to reconsider how good we have it. Check it out in Genesis, chapter 37.

February 9

Cast all your anxiety on [God], because [God] cares for you. (1 Peter 5:7)

Have you ever been really worried about something that you were afraid to share with anyone, even your closest friends? That's what makes a relationship with Jesus so wonderful. He is always here to listen and care. Share something with him today from the secret places in your heart.

Dear God, I have been carrying this around for a long time. Now I'm inviting you to help me carry it. (Mention your secret concern.) Thank you for caring enough to help me out.

For more: Look in Matthew, chapter 7, where Jesus reminds us not to judge others, but instead to approach God for what we need.

February 10

The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding banquet for his son. (Matthew 22:2)

In many of the parables or stories that Jesus told, he described heaven in terms of a party. In this story from Matthew, we hear about someone who refused to wear the robe that was provided and so got kicked out. We are invited to the banquet of heaven. Are you willing to “put on” Christ so that you can stay?

Dear God, I want to share in your banquet, and I do try to reflect you in all that I do. Please be patient with me as I continue to grow into my understanding of what it means to follow you.

For more: Read the whole parable of the wedding feast in Matthew, chapter 22.

February 11

Desire without knowledge is not good, and one who moves too hurriedly misses the way. (Proverbs 19:2)

This proverb urges us to check out things before rushing into them. Slow down! It can be too easy to make a quick decision, only to regret it later. Spend some time today asking God to guide you in a decision that you are making.

God of patient listening, at times I wish I had more options, but at other times the choices seem to be too many. I am asking you today to walk with me and guide me through this decision I am making. (Tell God about the decision.)

For more: The Book of Proverbs is full of advice for us. Read chapter 19 to learn more about the virtue of integrity.

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

Above all, my beloved, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or by any other oath, but let your "Yes" be yes and your "No" be no, so that you may not fall under condemnation. (James 5:12)

We know that Abraham Lincoln was a man who took a stand. The following is something Lincoln said that we should think about: "My concern is not whether God is on our side; my great concern is to be on God's side, for God is always right."

Dear God, I am working on taking a stand on many things: with my parents, the rest of my family, and my friends. Please help me to consider what I say before I say it, so that my word can stand strong, like Abraham Lincoln's.

For more: In Sirach (Ecclesiasticus), starting at chapter 51, verse 13, read the poem about how to seek wisdom and how to become a person of your word.

February 13

Do no evil, and evil will never overtake you. (Sirach 7:1)

Some books of the Bible surprise us with practical insights about everyday life. Sirach is one of those books. Sometimes we need to learn the obvious from someone else to really hear it. Today consider a time when you did something you shouldn't have done and it caught up with you.

Dear God, the trouble with me is that I don't always recognize evil as evil until after the fact, and by then it is too late! Please inspire me to walk in your light so that I will not need to struggle with evil at all.

For more: Read Sirach, chapter 7, to find other ways to become wise and to avoid evil.

February 14

SAINT VALENTINE'S DAY

We love because he first loved us. (1 John 4:19)

We celebrate loving and being loved on this special day. Of course most of us find it easier to love someone who loves us first, and that's what this verse is about. God loves us first and always; we only need to respond to that love. Imagine God sending you a valentine today. What would it say inside?

God who is love, on this day of celebrating love, I want to remind you that I love you. Even when I sometimes walk away or seem disinterested, please know that you have a special place in my heart.

For more: Loving God can appear to be an overwhelming task. Read First John, chapter 4, to hear some ways to start.

February 15

*I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth.
(Genesis 9:13)*

A rainbow arching over a valley or a city skyline is a beautiful sight. The next time you see one, remind yourself of this passage in Genesis. Imagine it as a sign of God's eternal love for us.

O God, author of all that is good and beautiful, thank you for the gift of the rainbow and your covenant with us. Open our eyes to the signs of your love all around us.

For more: Spend time repeatedly praying Genesis 9:13.

February 16

Now therefore revere the Lord, and serve him in sincerity and in faithfulness. (Joshua 24:14)

The word *revere* is not one we use a lot, but it is the root of the word *reverence*. What does it mean to revere the Lord? How can you serve the Lord today “in sincerity and in faithfulness”?

O great and holy God, we your people revere you. Help us to witness to others our reverence for you, and let us always serve you faithfully and sincerely.

For more: Read Joshua 24:14–15 in a study Bible.

February 17

The Lord came and stood there, calling as before, "Samuel! Samuel!" And Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant is listening." (1 Samuel 3:10)

What a wonderful response to God: "Speak, for your servant is listening." Try to make that your prayer today. Quiet yourself, and then slowly repeat Samuel's simple prayer several times.

Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.

For more on prayer, read all of First Samuel, chapter 3.

David and all the house of Israel were dancing before the Lord with all their might, with songs and lyres and harps and tambourines and castanets and cymbals. (2 Samuel 6:5)

We don't usually associate dancing with worshipping God, but for David and his people, they were clearly connected. Why do we often hesitate to consider dancing and singing as ways to worship God? Let loose. If you know a hymn, hum it or sing it.

Dear God, help me to overcome my somber attitudes about religion and worship. Help me to praise you with all my being. Let me not be afraid to sing and dance for you.

For more: Pray Psalm 98.

February 19

My child, keep my words and store up my commandments with you; keep my commandments and live, keep my teachings as the apple of your eye. (Proverbs 7:1–2)

Ask yourself: How well do I keep God's words with me? Do I strive to keep God's commandments? Do I treasure the teachings of God? Ask your Creator's views on your commandment-keeping.

Dear God, I ask your help in striving to keep your word. Let your words and your teachings truly become "the apple of my eye." Help me to live the good life.

For more: Read about God's two great commandments in Matthew 22:37–40.

February 20

[Jesus said,] “Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.” (Matthew 5:44)

Let’s be honest: we all know people we don’t like, and we probably know people who don’t like us. It’s not enough to not be mean to them or to wish them no harm. We are to pray for them—pray for their health and happiness and pray in thanksgiving for their lives. Maybe Jesus has something here, for in praying for them, we may begin to see them differently.

God of love, I know that you love all your children and want us all to live together in peace and happiness. Show me how to pray for those who persecute me.

For more: Turn to Luke 23:34, and read of Jesus’ final hours on the cross. Jesus follows his own advice.

February 21

So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today's trouble is enough for today. (Matthew 6:34)

Jesus obviously didn't live in the twentieth century. How can we not be anxious in these busy times? Nonetheless Jesus tells us not to worry. Jesus does not ask us not to think about tomorrow, but rather not to be anxious about it. It's easy to get so stressed out over a big test that we start getting stressed about everything else. Here is wisdom: pay attention to one day at a time. Prepare for the test but don't stress. Stay focused, and pray for strength, wisdom, and peace!

Gentle God, it's easy to become obsessed with the details of my life. Help me to keep them in focus and always to turn to you for guidance and strength.

For more: Read the story of Mary and Martha (Luke 10:38–42). How do you think each of these women would respond to Matthew 6:34?

GEORGE WASHINGTON

I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. (Genesis 12:2)

These words from Genesis are the words spoken by God to Abraham, a first ancestor of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. George Washington is considered to be a founder of the United States. What would Washington say today were he to look upon the city that bears his name and the country he served as its first president? What makes a nation great? Is the United States a blessing?

Dear God, on this day we pause to thank you for the women and men who have heard your call to leadership and responded. We stand on their shoulders. Help us to continue to make our nation great, as you would have us great: that is, a nation of peace, justice, charity, and community.

February 23

[Jesus] . . . said to them: "Listen and understand: it is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but it is what comes out of the mouth that defiles. . . . What comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this is what defiles." (Matthew 15:10–11,18)

Gossip kills. It kills the spirit and self-esteem of the person who is at the center of the gossip, and it can kill possible future friendships for that person. More important, gossip kills the people who are doing the gossiping, for every time we gossip, we kill a little kernel of goodness in our heart and take in a little piece of destructive evil. Are you becoming a gossip?

Bless the words of my mouth, O God, that I may resist the desire to tear others down. Help me keep my heart pure and my words supportive, encouraging, and hopeful.

For more: Gossip is a form of judgment. See what Jesus says about it in Matthew 7:1–5, Mark 4:24–25, or Luke 6:37–42.

A Canaanite woman from that region came out and started shouting, "Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David." . . . He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." But she came and knelt before him, saying, "Lord, help me." (Matthew 15:22–25)

For this quote to make sense, you really need to know the whole story. Jews and Canaanites rejected one another. When the woman asks Jesus for help, he responds that he did not come to help non-Jews. She argues that he should help everyone. Jesus eventually changes his thinking and helps her. Challenging a person to grow like this is okay, as long as it's done in a caring manner. Here the woman challenges Jesus. His response told the world that Jesus would save non-Jews too.

Merciful God, sometimes it's hard to confront people about difficult issues. Give me the words to help others grow, not to tear them down. Give me the courage to actually challenge others when it is good to do so.

For more: Read the whole story in Matthew 15:21–28.

February 25

Teach me your way, Yahweh, and I will obey you faithfully; give me an undivided heart. (Psalm 86:11)

What does it mean to serve God with an undivided heart? What does it mean to divide our heart? What keeps us from loving and serving God wholeheartedly?

Pray this verse several times slowly, and repeat it through the day: Teach me your way; give me an undivided heart.

For more: Read all of Psalm 86.

Rejoice, young man [and woman], while you are young, and let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth. (Ecclesiastes 11:9)

Many people—maybe most people—dread growing old. They envy youth and strive to look younger. Take some time today to simply enjoy being young and full of energy. Don't let all the pressures facing you get you down. Rejoice! But remember, getting older has its gifts too.

God, life is your gift. Help me to appreciate my own youth and all the energy I have. Let me make the most of my youth in order to give you glory. Let me have a cheerful heart through the tough days too.

For more: See Ecclesiastes 11:7–10.

February 27

Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. (Matthew 11:28)

February can be a long, dreary month when snow has blanketed the ground for months. How do we cope with the February blahs? Have you ever unloaded on God? God is the best listener around. Our faith and our God are sources of hope, especially when we are feeling hopeless, but we need to go to God.

Gentle God, thank you for being with me in my struggles and for carrying my burdens. May I always be open to your hope. I come to you for rest and for hope.

For more: Even Jesus unloaded on God; check out Matthew 26:36–46, Mark 14:32–42, or Luke 22:39–46.

February 28

Let those who are friendly with you be many, but let your advisers be one in a thousand. (Sirach 6:6)

An adviser is a friend or a trusted adult that we can confide in and whose advice we can rely on. Who serves as an adviser in your life? If you cannot think of anyone, who is someone you could seek out for those times when you need counsel or advice?

God, thank you for my friends, and thank you especially for those individuals whom I can trust and in whom I can confide. Help me to be a good friend and not to offer advice unless I am asked to do so.

For more on friendship, see Sirach 6:5–17.

February 29

For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them. (Matthew 18:20)

Do you ever get tired of people hassling you to go to church? Does God really care if we go? The answer is that we don't go to church for ourselves. Jesus tells us that he is with us in a special way when we gather together in his name. We experience God in a different way when we gather with our community to give praise and thanks. That can't be done at home. Ponder your involvement with a community of faith.

Jesus, thank you for your church, the community of believers that you have gathered. May I continue to be part of that community, growing and learning from it.

For more: Read about the early church and what it meant to Paul in Romans, chapter 16.

Jesus said, . . . “If you wish to be perfect, go, sell your possessions, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.” (Matthew 19:21)

Jesus is pretty clear: being a nice person simply isn't enough. Though this command is tough and, some would argue, quite unrealistic, there are things we can do. Give clothes that you never wear to charity. Perhaps go without some treat for a week and give the money that you would have spent on it to your favorite charity. Get together with your friends and have a rummage sale for a good cause. Though we may not be ready to be missionaries just yet, we can still help poor people.

I am grateful for my many blessings, generous God, for I know that I am well cared for. May I always be mindful of those who go without and of my duty to care for them.

For more: Read the whole story in Matthew 19:16–22. Can you identify with the young man who questions Jesus?

March 2

You shall love your neighbor as yourself. (Matthew 22:39)

Do your friends treat you the way you want to be treated? Chances are they do, or they wouldn't be friends. How about those who are not your friends? Do they respect you the way that you want to be respected? Do you respect them the way you would want to be respected? When you are in a difficult situation, ask yourself, How would I want to be treated if the situation were reversed? Chances are you'll get some new insight into the situation.

God of all, give me the vision and integrity to always respect people and to treat them as I would want to be treated.

For more: Jesus takes it one step further; see Luke 7:36–50.

Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me. (Matthew 25:40)

Christ dwells in each of us. Therefore Christ is in every person that we meet. It is up to us to find Christ in each person, as difficult as that can be at times. Christ is in our teachers, our friends, our parents, our neighbors—in every single person. Everything we do or say to another human being, we do or say to Christ. Are we doing and saying things worthy of Christ?

God, I know that you dwell in every person on earth, for you love each one of us. Help me to see your face in each person and to treat them as you.

For more: See John 14:15–26, especially verse 23. The Spirit does dwell in each of us.

March 4

[Jesus said,] “Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother.” (Mark 3:35)

Jesus made it clear that we are all connected. All of us who do the will of God (or at least try to do the will of God) are members of the family of God, the Body of Christ, sharing a common faith. And yet being a member of a family is not without obligations, such as caring for one another, sharing our material goods when necessary, and praying for and with one another. How do you help care for this family to which you belong?

Gentle Parent of us all, thank you for making me part of your family and for connecting me to so many wonderful people. May I always be grateful for my family.

For more: See John 19:25–27.

*All things can be done for the one who believes.
(Mark 9:23)*

This true story of one young woman has been repeated many times. She spent her first semester of college partying and drinking. By the end of the semester, she was on academic probation and struggling socially. One January night she attempted suicide. She survived, left school, went home, took a good, long look at her life, and got help. She returned to school and is now close to graduation. She learned to believe in herself, and that made all the difference. It's true, all things are possible for those who believe in God's grace.

I know that you believe in me, God, for you have called me by name. I pray that I may have the courage to believe in myself.

For more: Jesus believed in Peter; see John 21:15–19.

March 6

And [Jesus] entered the temple and began to drive out those who were selling and those who were buying in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money changers. (Mark 11:15)

Is it okay to be angry? We seem to get conflicting messages: we should always love others, and yet even Jesus got angry. Love does not preclude anger. It's okay—even helpful—to be angry at times. The dilemma comes in how we deal with our anger. If we act out of our anger in a way that is intended to be hurtful, we're not doing anyone any favors, including ourselves. But acting out of our anger in a way that lovingly points to the truth, as Jesus did in the Temple, can be a holy gift.

I know that anger is natural, God. Help me to act out of my anger in a loving way, and forgive me for the times I have been hurtful because of my anger.

For more: Look at Mark 3:5. The incident in the Temple wasn't the only time Jesus got angry.

I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" And I said, "Here am I; send me!" (Isaiah 6:8)

God calls us mostly through human need: a crying child, a lonely grandparent, a starving homeless person, a friend who needs tutoring. How open are you to God's call in your life? If you sense that God is calling or sending you forth, how willing are you to respond as Isaiah did, "Here am I, Lord; send me"?

God, you are always available for us. Help us to realize that you are not so much interested in our ability or our inability, but rather in our availability. Here am I, God; send me!

For more: Read Isaiah 67:1–13.

March 8

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

A woman came to [Jesus] with an alabaster jar of very costly ointment, and she poured it on his head as he sat at the table. . . . [Jesus said,] "Truly I tell you, wherever this good news is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in remembrance of her." (Matthew 26:6,13)

In Jesus' time, rulers were signified by anointing. This unnamed woman symbolically anointed Jesus as the Messiah, leading Jesus to recognize that her action was part of the Gospel proclamation. On International Women's Day, take time to remember all the women in your life who have done amazing things and are in danger of being forgotten.

Thank you, God, for the amazing women who have walked this earth, many of whom I do not know by name, and for the way they have made the world a better place.

For more: check out the Book of Ruth and the Book of Esther.

The world and all that is in it belong to Yahweh, the earth and all who live on it. (Psalm 24:1)

This is God's world. Like renters or visitors in a national park, we are here for only a short time. Like renters or visitors, even though we don't own the earth, we need to take care of it. How do you treat the earth: as God's? as your personal property to do with as you please?

O God, this world is yours. You have given us the opportunity to live in it, but only for a while. Let us never forget that all this earth and all of us belong to you.

March 10

I will pour out my spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions. (Joel 2:28)

Do you have a vision that guides your life? What are your dreams? Do you seek God's help in determining God's vision for your life?

O God, you have planted deep within each of us a vision of who we are and what you are calling us to. Open me to the power of your dreams and your vision for my life.

March 11

A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger. (Proverbs 15:1)

Such a simple proverb, but so much truth in it! How often do we make a tense situation worse by a cutting remark? Try a gentle response, the “soft answer,” the next time you are in conflict.

Patient God, your Son, Jesus, showed us the way of gentleness. Give me the strength and determination to avoid harsh words and cutting remarks. Help me to master the soft answer.