

The logo features the words "40 DAY" in large, bold, orange, sans-serif capital letters. Behind the numbers "40" is a faint, grey outline of the state of Tennessee. Below "40 DAY" is a black, ribbon-like banner with a white dashed border, containing the words "Walk With God" in white, bold, sans-serif capital letters. Underneath the banner, the text "2013 | ANNUAL CONFERENCE" is written in orange, sans-serif capital letters, followed by "MEMPHIS & TENNESSEE ANNUAL CONFERENCES" in a smaller, grey, sans-serif font.

40 DAY

Walk With God

2013 | ANNUAL CONFERENCE
MEMPHIS & TENNESSEE ANNUAL CONFERENCES

*A daily prayer journal for the
2013 Annual Conference Season*

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Special thanks to The Tennessee Conference Spiritual Formation Team who, in conjunction with the Memphis Conference Discipleship Team, was responsible for the planning and creation of *A 40 DAY WALK WITH GOD*

Welcome to this “40 Day Walk with God” in the Nashville Episcopal Area of the United Methodist Church, which includes both the Tennessee and Memphis Conferences. This call to prayer can change your life and your church!

As Bishop McAlilly has called us to this season of prayer, the challenge becomes for all of us as to how we will respond. As we engage during this season of prayer around these forty prayer meditations written by spiritual leaders from across our conferences, God WILL show up and move through the people called United Methodist in the Nashville Area. As you respond to this call to prayer be prepared to step into the realm of “the greater things” that Jesus spoke about in the Gospel of John.

*I assure you that whoever believes in me will do the works that I do. **They will do even greater works than these** because I am going to the Father. I will do whatever you ask for in my name, so that the Father can be glorified in the Son. When you ask me for anything in my name, I will do it (John 14:12-14).*

As you read each day’s meditation, you will have the opportunity to focus your prayers around one of these four areas:

Congregational Excellence

Pastoral Excellence

Missional Excellence

God’s Transforming Presence - Offering Christ to a Hurting World

Included in this prayer guide are suggestions for use of the daily meditations for personal spiritual growth, and for expanding congregational usage of the guide through small groups, as well as other opportunities for ministry and service. There is also included at the end of the guide a suggested reading list of books for deepening one’s faith journey in the areas of spiritual formation and prayer. Pastors may go on-line at <http://bit.ly/40DaySermons> for suggestions on building a sermon series around the four topics listed above, plus a special topic for a fifth Sunday.

So, are you ready to begin? Let’s pray together the following prayer:

Prayer: Gracious, loving and faithful God, we come to you as we begin this journey of prayer together. Open our ears that we might hear well and open our hearts that we might love well. Heal us in body, soul, mind and spirit, both individually, and corporately as the Body of Christ. Forgive us when we sin, encourage us when we falter, and transform us into the very likeness and image of Christ. Come, Holy Spirit, come! In Jesus’ name we pray. AMEN.

HOW TO USE: A 40 DAY WALK WITH GOD Journey Together from April 24th through June 2

1. Be sure that every member of your congregation has access to the “40 Day Walk with God.” An electronic version is available for download at <http://BishopBillMcAlilly.com>
 - A. Encourage individuals to download it to their desktop or device for daily use.
 - B. Suggest that individuals may download, then print the journal for themselves - or offer to print a copy to those who may not have the ability to print at home
 - C. The prayer meditations for each of the forty days will be posted every day, beginning on April 24, on The Bishop’s Blog (BishopBillMcAlilly.com). You may “follow” his blog by submitting your email (all updates are automatically sent to your inbox) or just manually visit the site each day. We encourage everyone to submit a comment and to interact with others on the blog!
 - D. Pastors are encouraged to use a sermon series related to the “40 Day Walk.” Information is available on-line at <http://bit.ly/40DaySermons> -- sermon topics related to each of the four focal points of the 40 Day Walk are included plus a fifth additional topic, “Power of the Holy Spirit” (Greater Things).
2. For personal use, set aside time each day to sit quietly before the Lord, and ask God to speak to you through the reading for that day.
 - Read the focus at the top of the page for that day and meditate for a few moments on what that focus says to you.
 - Read the printed Scripture for the day. You might want to read surrounding verses from your Bible to set the passage in context.
 - Read the meditation, listening for what particularly speaks to you, underlining those places as you read. Go back and read again what you marked, listening to what God is saying to you.
 - “Pray” the printed prayer, expanding the prayer for your own life, for your local church, for your conference, and beyond.
 - Pray for the writer of the meditation, and pray for your pastor (s), your district superintendent, Bishop McAlilly, and other spiritual leaders in your life. Pray also for their spouses and families.
 - Journal your thoughts and reflections for that day.
 - READ**-What spoke to you as you read today's meditation?
 - REPENT**-Where is God showing you that you have failed to be obedient to the call to discipleship today?
 - RECEIVE**-What words of redemption and grace is God offering?
 - REMEMBER**-Who and what is God calling you to remember in prayer related to today's reading?
 - RESPOND**-How is God calling you to respond today?
3. For church use, start a prayer group or small study groups committed to reading the "40 Day Walk with God," or use it in a Sunday school class, or as a choir or UMW or UMM devotional resource.
 - Discuss together what particularly spoke to you that week and why.
 - Consider ways your small group or church could grow in the four focus areas of Congregational Excellence, Pastoral Excellence, Missional Excellence and God’s Transformational Presence – Offering Christ to a Hurting World.Plan together action projects related to each of the focus areas.
4. Give a copy to visitors who come to your church, as the "40 Day Walk with God" can be used at any time since the readings are not "dated.”

DAY 1

40-DAY WALK WITH GOD

I John 4: 9

This is how the love of God is revealed to us: God has sent his only Son into the world so that we can live through Him.

Our grandson, Thomas, is 18 months old. He can say a few words now, but my favorite is "Papa." He calls me Papa and sometimes calls his grandmother Papa. It makes me smile when I hear him say my name. Sometimes Thomas says "Papa" as praise. Sometimes he cries it when he is wounded and hurt. There are other times when he says "Papa" as a prayer.

Recently, in my own prayer life, it occurred to me that when I pray to God, call God's name, God must surely smile as I do when Thomas calls my name. In its simplest form, this is what prayer is. Sometimes when I say God's name it is praise. Sometimes it is when I am in pain. At other times, it is simply as a silent prayer.

Inviting God's presence to give us a deep sense of the many ways God's love is being revealed into us and through us is our hope for this prayer guide. For the sake of the mission of Jesus Christ in the world, we invite you to commit the next 40 days to a "Season of Prayer". We invite you to journey with us as we seek to bear witness to the love of God in the world.

Across the Nashville Area, we are calling you to be a disciple of Jesus Christ who will invite others to become a disciple who will then change the world. May this prayer guide be a tool to assist us as we lean into God's movement across our conferences.

We have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son to be the Savior of the world. I John 4:14

Prayer: O Lord, speak to us with clarity as we seek to bear witness to the world of your love. Keep our lives focused in you as we live into your desired future.

These things we pray in the strong name of Jesus Christ. AMEN.

Bishop William T. McAlilly
Nashville Area

REFLECTIONS FOR THE DAY

READ-What spoke to me as I read today's meditation?

REPENT -Where is God showing me that I have failed to be obedient to the call to discipleship today?

RECEIVE-What words of redemption and grace is God offering to me?

REMEMBER-Who and what is God calling me to remember in prayer related to today's reading?

RESPOND-How is God calling me to respond today?

Day 2

GOD'S TRANSFORMING PRESENCE – OFFERING CHRIST TO A HURTING WORLD

Psalm 139:7

“Where could I go to get away from your Spirit? Where could I go to escape your Presence?”

One Sunday afternoon I had just finished preaching my third sermon for the day. I was completely exhausted and drained of energy as I was driving the thirty-five miles back home. Then suddenly there it was right before my eyes. I stopped the car and got out, only to behold the glory of God's beautiful creation.

The majestic mountains rolled on both sides of me. Just below the dark-green and waxy leaves of the trees reflected the glow of the sunlit sky. There were tiny buds covering the ruby-leaf plum trees. The porches and lawns of the houses were filled with colorful flowers. The vines covering the walls and porches splashed of bright orange, yellow and red colors. It was a magnificent sight!

As I beheld the beauty of God's creation that summer day, suddenly I felt the Holy Presence surrounding me, filling me with little whispers of peace and love. My tired and worn body was completely transformed into a ray of energy, joy and new life. God's presence hushed my sighs of weariness, bringing a breath of cheer and ease to my troubled soul.

I am convinced that we can discover God's presence in all, yes all, of our daily lives; not only in the beauty of the earth, but in the faces of all our brothers and sisters. We can know God's presence when we serve others living with poverty and injustice; when we stand up for truth, justice and righteousness, when we protect the least, the lost and lonely, when we reach out to the poor, the homeless and imprisoned. How many times have we looked back over our lives only to realize that God's presence was there with us all the time: in the close encounter of an accident, the reconciliation of a family member, in caressing a new born child.

When was the last time you felt bathed in God's majestic presence? When was the last time you recognized God's presence in the ordinary, mundane circumstances of day-to-day living?

Prayer: Loving God, open our hearts to see your Holy Presence in all of our daily lives. May your closeness burst forth in the purity of the dawn and in the glowing ray of sunset, speaking your words of hope, joy and new life. May we always know your Holy Presence as we offer Christ to a hurting world. AMEN.

The Rev. Bettye P. Lewis
Director of Connectional Ministries-TN Conference

REFLECTIONS FOR THE DAY

READ-What spoke to me as I read today's meditation?

REPENT -Where is God showing me that I have failed to be obedient to the call to discipleship today?

RECEIVE-What words of redemption and grace is God offering to me?

REMEMBER-Who and what is God calling me to remember in prayer related to today's reading?

RESPOND-How is God calling me to respond today?

Day 3

CONGREGATIONAL EXCELLENCE

Ephesians 3:17-19

I ask that Christ will live in your hearts through faith. As a result of having strong roots in love, I ask that you'll have the power to grasp love's width and length, height and depth, together with all believers. I ask that you will know the love of Christ that is beyond knowledge so that you will be filled entirely with the fullness of God.

It had been coming for quite a while, but we had not recognized it for what it was, as I believe that we should. We lost precious children and teachers in a horrific event at Sandy Hook School. We also lost a parent and her troubled child. But, God came to save all of the cosmos in the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Doesn't that call us to accept our shared humanity with all of its brokenness? To do so would open in each of us opportunities for the pain of others to be felt. By acknowledging and feeling the pain of others, we can begin to respond with compassion. After all, the word "compassion" means "with passion." Compassion is not regret. Regret forgets until the next time. Compassion is active involvement in the healing process.

I pray that you have never had to suffer the horrific pain of such violence. And, I pray that you never will. I also pray that we will be more sensitive to the pain and struggles of others on all levels, whether in our own country or in other lands across the globe.

There are no easy answers to the pain and brokenness that surrounds us. There is, however, hope. Hope came in the form of an innocent child:

- exposed to the elements,
- the neglect of the community,
- and the retaliatory fear from both religious and secular leadership.

Hope came through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is this hope that draws all of us to gather together in the loving embrace of a congregation where mercy and compassion reaches out to one another to bring healing and wholeness.

Prayer: God, grant us compassion for those You came to save. Place in us your heart for others, that we might find the fullness of life through living in the embrace of your love in our churches and in our conferences. May our congregations be healthy examples of your forgiveness and grace.

Dr. John R. Bonson, Sr
Director of Connectional Ministries-Memphis Conference

REFLECTIONS FOR THE DAY

READ-What spoke to me as I read today's meditation?

REPENT -Where is God showing me that I have failed to be obedient to the call to discipleship today?

RECEIVE-What words of redemption and grace is God offering to me?

REMEMBER-Who and what is God calling me to remember in prayer related to today's reading?

RESPOND-How is God calling me to respond today?

Day 4

MISSIONAL EXCELLENCE

Acts 1:8

Rather, you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.

When the call came, I felt the very life knocked out of me. How could it be? Surely this was a bad nightmare that would go away when I awakened!

But I was wide awake, and the nightmare was real. My son had been murdered! How could I now survive?

The anger within me burned like a fire that was all consuming. Revenge was on the edge of the insanity that was consuming my heart...how does a parent move beyond such pain and grief?

The answer came as my wife and I and our younger son were driving down the mountain toward Florida where the random shooting had taken place in a church parking lot. The questions, both spoken and unspoken, were filling the air inside our car like a dark blanket that was almost suffocating us. How could something like this happen? Why did this happen? Why Jason? Who did this? Why? Why? Why?

It was 15-year-old David who broke through the dark myriad of unanswerable questions. He said, "We know where Jason is, but what do we do about the boy who killed him?"

I heard myself say, "We forgive him!" It was at that raw moment when healing began for our family. Forgiveness is that point where life begins for all of us. Jesus died so that we might live. That is the story that must be shared to the uttermost parts of the earth.

Prayer: Lord, help us to share our stories of faith so that others may find life through Jesus Christ.

The Rev. Tom Halliburton
Cumberland District Superintendent- TN Conference

REFLECTIONS FOR THE DAY

READ-What spoke to me as I read today's meditation?

REPENT -Where is God showing me that I have failed to be obedient to the call to discipleship today?

RECEIVE-What words of redemption and grace is God offering to me?

REMEMBER-Who and what is God calling me to remember in prayer related to today's reading?

RESPOND-How is God calling me to respond today?

Day 5

GOD'S TRANSFORMING PRESENCE - OFFERING CHRIST TO A HURTING WORLD

Acts 9:17-19a (Read verses 17-22)

Ananias went to the house. He placed his hands on Saul and said, "Brother Saul, the Lord sent me—Jesus, who appeared to you on the way as you were coming here. He sent me so that you could see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit." Instantly, flakes fell from Saul's eyes and he could see again. He got up and was baptized. After eating, he regained his strength.

This Scripture passage from the Book of Acts recounts the story of two men, both doing what they felt was faithful, both encountering the Risen Christ in their own way, both whose lives were changed forever. Saul was protecting the faith of his fathers, while Ananias was praying for the followers of the Way. They were apparently on opposite paths until Jesus called them together.

It was the whole-hearted pursuit of God that allowed both of these men to see with entirely new eyes, and to experience the most unexpected change of direction. Neither Saul nor Ananias anticipated God's direction, but the outcome has had lasting impact! That's the transformation of the world we seek, as we practice being and making disciples: the transformation of vision, to see what God sees, and to love as God does.

We have no chance of changing others' vision. It is overwhelming to consider the depths of the issues that face the Church and the world today. Poverty is an ongoing reality, we continue to battle disease, and many people feel hopeless and helpless. If it were up to us, we would be lost.

The Good News is still the good news: we serve the Risen Christ who makes the lame walk and the blind see. Unexpected course changes, hope and help and the power to persevere are all fruit of life with Jesus. Greater things are yet to come because He that is in the Church is greater than he who is in the world. Thanks be to God!

Prayer: Lord, we ask that you open our eyes to your transformational presence in the world around us. Help us to see with your eyes, to hear with your ears, and to speak with your voice. Help us to bring your presence to others. In Jesus' name, AMEN.

Sue Engle
Intentional Discipleship Action Team-Memphis Conference

REFLECTIONS FOR THE DAY

READ-What spoke to me as I read today's meditation?

REPENT -Where is God showing me that I have failed to be obedient to the call to discipleship today?

RECEIVE-What words of redemption and grace is God offering to me?

REMEMBER-Who and what is God calling me to remember in prayer related to today's reading?

RESPOND-How is God calling me to respond today?

Day 6

PASTORAL EXCELLENCE

Matthew 25:39-40

When did we see you sick or in prison and visit you? Then the King will reply to them, "I assure you that when you have done it for one of these brothers and sisters of mine, you have done it for me."

It was 1998. My family's life had taken a dramatic turn the summer of '96 when I answered the call of God to become a pastor. Friendships were forming for my son in his new high school, and life was going well, though, as family adjustments were being made. We had slowly moved into our new family "normal."

Then, my son came home from school one afternoon telling me that he had heard that a friend of his from his old school had been arrested for murder. He asked me to go visit him in Juvenile Detention. We were about to enter into a new world.

Murder was something one might see on TV or in the movies, but certainly was not a part of our lives. My son continued to press me to find time to go and visit his friend. Several weeks later, my son came to me with a letter that he had written. I wept as I read my 16-year-old son's letter to his friend. He shared in the letter about the freedom that he could find in his heart and life through repenting of his sins and asking Jesus Christ to be His Lord and Savior.

One day, sitting outside the chaplain's office at the prison, while reading to my son's friend from Romans, chapter eight, I found myself overcome with deep emotion as I shared with him how much Jesus loved him. I began weeping, while feeling an indescribable love well up in my heart for this young man. I, then, realized that God was pouring out His love "through" me to him. We were both deeply moved that day by the power of God's love at work in and through us.

Fifteen years later, while he still sits unjustly behind prison bars, I can honestly say that nothing has impacted me more deeply in life than the love that God deposited into our hearts that day. "Jesus loves us this I know, for the Bible tells us so!"

Is there anything greater than love? I think not. We read in I John that God is love. May we walk in no other authority than in the authority of God's love!

Prayer: Lord, teach us how to love well. Give us your heart for others, so that we might serve with excellence the sheep of your pastures.

The Rev. Dr. Diana M. DeWitt
Chairperson, Spiritual Formation Team-TN Conference

REFLECTIONS FOR THE DAY

READ-What spoke to me as I read today's meditation?

REPENT -Where is God showing me that I have failed to be obedient to the call to discipleship today?

RECEIVE-What words of redemption and grace is God offering to me?

REMEMBER-Who and what is God calling me to remember in prayer related to today's reading?

RESPOND-How is God calling me to respond today?

Day 7

CONGREGATIONAL EXCELLENCE

Colossians 3:12-14

Therefore, as God's choice, holy and loved, put on compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. Be tolerant with each other and, if someone has a complaint against anyone, forgive each other. As the Lord forgave you, so also forgive each other. And over all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity.

Colossae folks first heard the gospel from Epaphras, a beloved co-worker of the apostle Paul. Ever since the Colossians had received and understood the message of God's grace, fruit and growth had taken place. Paul gives thanks for this church, reminds them of their rescue through Christ, and now, in this passage, Paul's words are offered as encouragement for even greater things.

Prayer:

O Lord, help us put on Love like a beautiful garment to wear! Thank you for setting us free from sin by love for love! We understand that this gift we receive is the same gift to be given.

In all our congregations, our sisters and brothers in faith, may we remember and renew this awesome work of your grace on our behalf: your compassion for us, kindness to us, humility, gentleness and patience with us, your forgiveness of us and this incredible experience of your love through Christ Jesus.

Considering all that you have done for us, may we now with joy do the same, not only with each other, but with ALL! AMEN.

The Rev. Karen Barrineau
Clarksville District Superintendent-TN Conference

REFLECTIONS FOR THE DAY

READ-What spoke to me as I read today's meditation?

REPENT -Where is God showing me that I have failed to be obedient to the call to discipleship today?

RECEIVE-What words of redemption and grace is God offering to me?

REMEMBER-Who and what is God calling me to remember in prayer related to today's reading?

RESPOND-How is God calling me to respond today?

Day 8

MISSIONAL EXCELLENCE

Romans 8.26-27

In the same way, the Spirit comes to help our weakness. We don't know what we should pray, but the Spirit himself pleads our case with unexpressed groans. The one who searches hearts knows how the Spirit thinks, because he pleads for the saints, consistent with God's will.

One of Jesus' disciples asked of him, "Lord, teach us to pray" (Luke 11.1). The Lord must always teach us to pray, "For we do not know how to pray as we ought" (Rom 8.26). Prayer is God's gift that enables us to long for, seek, and call out to God. Through prayer we are able to answer that we are children of God, not slaves to fall back in fear. (Rom 8.14-15)

Without God helping us to pray, we are left in the world of our own making. But through prayer God teaches us to imagine, experience, and see possibilities beyond ourselves. Prayer is radical openness to God's possibilities.

If we don't pray with radical openness, we are limiting what God can accomplish in and through us, and we are limiting the reign of God's grace and the fulfillment of the creation. Through radical openness in persistent prayer, we can begin to see God's "greater things."

Jesus embodied radical openness to God and thus the fullness of God's mission to save the world. Prayer is the way *we* grow into Christ to see the missional and evangelistic possibilities before us.

If we allow God to cultivate the mind of Christ in us, then we are habitually *in the mindset of mission with Christ.*

We are habitually *noticing God showing up* in suffering, care, hope and transformation.

We are habitually *seeing the neighbor as ourselves.* And we are *joining Christ in the work he is already doing* among our neighbors and us.

Prayer: Lord, teach us and help us to pray so that we might not miss the opportunities to serve alongside you.

The Rev. John Collett
Nashville District Superintendent-TN Conference

REFLECTIONS FOR THE DAY

READ-What spoke to me as I read today's meditation?

REPENT -Where is God showing me that I have failed to be obedient to the call to discipleship today?

RECEIVE-What words of redemption and grace is God offering to me?

REMEMBER-Who and what is God calling me to remember in prayer related to today's reading?

RESPOND-How is God calling me to respond today?

DAY 9

GOD'S TRANSFORMING PRESENCE – OFFERING CHRIST TO A HURTING WORLD

Luke 13:10-13

Jesus was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath. A woman was there who had been disabled by a spirit for eighteen years. She was bent over and couldn't stand up straight. When he saw her, Jesus called her to him and said, "Woman, you are set free from your sickness." He placed his hands on her and she straightened up at once and praised God.

As we reflect on the transforming presence of Jesus in our lives, what a remarkably sweet gift is the healing presence of Christ that is always with us! Jesus reminds us that many of us are bent over, weighed down, overwhelmed and burdened. Every now and then, we need someone to speak a word of encouragement and lay gentle hopeful hands on us in His name that we may be able to stand up straight and tall, liberated through faith.

What must it be like to not have to look down at the ground, but look up to the Lord because we have been set free?

What must it look like to no longer be looked upon as cursed, but blessed and highly favored because we have been healed in the place of worship and praise?

What would happen if all those who came to the House, the Temple, the Church where we gather each Sunday morning; and brought those who were bent over because they were nameless, faceless and voiceless; and they were able to leap and jump and praise God for deliverance?

What would healing look like in each congregation if we all came expecting Jesus to be present to do great things in us, with us and through us?

Prayer: Precious Jesus, hear us when we pray for healing that we might stand up, reach up, look up and hold out until our change comes! Your transforming presence gives hope that we are not forgotten, invisible, or helpless. Heal us of the things that cause us to stoop over and not look up to give thanks to you. In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. AMEN.

The Rev. Dr. Cynthia Davis
McKendree District Superintendent-Memphis Conference

REFLECTIONS FOR THE DAY

READ-What spoke to me as I read today's meditation?

REPENT -Where is God showing me that I have failed to be obedient to the call to discipleship today?

RECEIVE-What words of redemption and grace is God offering to me?

REMEMBER-Who and what is God calling me to remember in prayer related to today's reading?

RESPOND-How is God calling me to respond today?

Day 10

PASTORAL EXCELLENCE

Luke 4: 31-36

Jesus went down to the city of Capernaum in Galilee and taught the people each Sabbath. They were amazed by his teaching because he delivered his message with authority. A man in the synagogue had the spirit of an unclean demon. He screamed, “Hey! What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are. You are the holy one from God.”

“Silence!” Jesus said, speaking harshly to the demon. “Come out of him!” The demon threw the man down before them, then came out of him without harming him. They were all shaken and said to each other, “What kind of word is this, that he can command unclean spirits with authority and power, and they leave?”

“They were astounded at his teaching, because he spoke with authority” (Luke 4:32). What did those gathered in the synagogue on that day hear, feel, or see that would spawn such a comment? Jesus’ authority was evidenced by the creative power he carried in his voice, his touch, and his actions. He had the power to make the deaf hear, the blind see, the captive to be set free. Jesus could “author” deep changes in a person, a group, or a world. That’s authority! On this day spoken of in Luke, chapter 4, Jesus loved a tormented man, and the result was that man gained a right mind. That’s power! That is authority of love!

Jesus’ love is a working love. It is powerful. It authors changes. I don’t have this kind of powerful love. I can, however, come under the authority of Jesus’ love for me and the world he created. I can be “refashioned” and “re-passioned” by Jesus love if I invite it to work on me instead of my working against it.

When I walk into a church that I am appointed to serve, there is not a chance of my love being of the ilk that creates changes of “Biblical proportions.” I don’t have that kind of “authority,” but I sure like to see Jesus’ authoritative love unleashed upon the people I serve and into the world that surrounds me. It is this powerful love that saved me, freed me, changed me and is re-creating me. All I can do is serve this Jesus who is so gracious as to have used His power on me...and then I can get to watch Jesus work!

Prayer: Lord Jesus, bring me under your authority. Mold me. Make me. Use me to your glory for the sake of this world you love....and are changing.

The Rev. Jay Archer
Cookeville District Superintendent-TN Conference

REFLECTIONS FOR THE DAY

READ-What spoke to me as I read today's meditation?

REPENT -Where is God showing me that I have failed to be obedient to the call to discipleship today?

RECEIVE-What words of redemption and grace is God offering to me?

REMEMBER-Who and what is God calling me to remember in prayer related to today's reading?

RESPOND-How is God calling me to respond today?

Day 11

CONGREGATIONAL EXCELLENCE

Acts 3:9-10 (Read verses 1-11)

All the people saw him walking and praising God. They recognized him as the same one who used to sit at the temple's Beautiful Gate asking for money. They were filled with amazement and surprise at what had happened to him.

Two recently Spirit-filled disciples make their way to the temple, expecting to do what they had done so many times before...pray. Everything is likely quite familiar to them. Familiar people are walking alongside them toward the temple. As usual, some friends compassionately carry their crippled friend to his familiar spot at the gate to beg for his daily sustenance. Though unnamed, the man has certainly become a fixture at the Beautiful Gate. Expectations are quite normal as well. The people would go into the temple to pray and this crippled man would receive alms from many of them. But for Peter and John and this unnamed man this day is different. The man will ask them for his normal alms, expecting to get something from them. But Peter and John expect greater things! God uses a couple of penniless, Spirit-filled disciples to genuinely connect with this man and become instruments of transformation for both the man and his normal reality.

I have lived with this story for the past ten years or so. Bishop McAlilly is challenging us to take Jesus at his word and approach our mission together "Expecting Greater Things." Peter and John show us that for greater things to occur, our focus must move beyond what we don't have so we can more powerfully offer what we do have. The Greek word for resurrection literally means to *stand up* or *stand again*. The crippled man at the temple gate experienced a resurrection in this sense. He has new life and renewed hope as a participating part of the faith community. He is a compelling example of persons in our mission field that healthy congregations are learning to love and to reach. Healthy congregations operate out of the basic premise that God accomplishes so much more *through us together* than we can each do simply on our own. In this we can indeed expect greater things.

Prayer: Loving God, enable us to move our focus from unhealthy scarcity to your healing abundance so we might become power-full vessels of your grace, seizing every opportunity to provide an environment for transformation needed by us all. Amaze us all as we expect greater things, in Jesus' name! AMEN.

The Rev. Dr. Richard W. Clark
Jackson District Superintendent- Memphis Conference

REFLECTIONS FOR THE DAY

READ-What spoke to me as I read today's meditation?

REPENT -Where is God showing me that I have failed to be obedient to the call to discipleship today?

RECEIVE-What words of redemption and grace is God offering to me?

REMEMBER-Who and what is God calling me to remember in prayer related to today's reading?

RESPOND-How is God calling me to respond today?

Day 12

MISSIONAL EXCELLENCE

Acts 2:42-45

The believers devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, to the community, to their shared meals, and to their prayers. A sense of awe came over everyone. God performed many wonders and signs through the apostles. All the believers were united and shared everything. They would sell pieces of property and possessions and distribute the proceeds to everyone who needed them.

In these verses we have the earliest recording of the practices of the Church in its beginnings. Whenever I hear folks lament over not singing the “old” hymns, or missing the “old” style of preaching and worship, I remind them of the events in Acts 2. Certainly, things evolve in time and context, but the bones of who we are as missionaries and disciples still live in these words of scripture.

The words of the old hymn that says, “Give me that old time religion,” set before us a challenge to look at our lives and our churches and to assess whether we can sing those words with sincerity. If, in fact, we truly embraced that “old time religion” of the apostles, we would be devoted to Bible study, prayer, worship, and fellowship within the Body of Christ.

If, in fact, we truly embraced that “old time religion” of the apostles, we would be in awe of the many miracles and signs of the “greater things” about which Jesus spoke.

If, in fact, we truly embraced that “old time religion” of the apostles, there would be no poverty, no brokenness, no loneliness, and no lack, for we would give out of our own resources to make certain that no one had needs that were unmet.

If, in fact, we truly embraced that “old time religion” of the apostles, we would “be” Jesus to our families, our communities, our churches, and the world around us.

Prayer: O Lord, help us in our devotional and disciplined lives that we might not ever forget the essentials, that we might not major in the minors, and that we might not just become disciples, but that we might make disciples, in Jesus’ name.
AMEN.

The Rev. Sky Lowe-McCracken
Paducah District Superintendent-Memphis Conference

REFLECTIONS FOR THE DAY

READ-What spoke to me as I read today's meditation?

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RECEIVE-What words of redemption and grace is God offering to me?

REMEMBER-Who and what is God calling me to remember in prayer related to today's reading?

RESPOND-How is God calling me to respond today?

Day 13

GOD'S TRANSFORMING PRESENCE – OFFERING CHRIST TO A HURTING WORLD

John 1:14

The Word became flesh and made his home among us. We have seen his glory, glory like that of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.

John 14:12

I assure you that whoever believes in me will do the works that I do. They will do even greater works than these because I am going to the Father.

In John's gospel the "greater things" are rooted and grounded in Jesus Christ, "the Word become flesh...full of grace and truth." We are created to "do the works" that Jesus did—preaching, teaching and healing—calling men and women to become disciples who make disciples. There is nothing more important, nothing more central, and nothing more urgent.

45% of the UM churches have not made a disciple in years. According to the major study conducted before the 2012 General Conference, only 15% of our congregations are "vital".

Jesus made disciples. We will never do thus until we repent of our disobedience and change. The first step to transformation is repentance.

Secondly, we are called to believe the gospel. In Jewish and Wesleyan teaching, belief is never separated from behavior. If we believe, we act in obedience. If we are not obedient and active, we do not believe.

The Holy Spirit is the Spirit that was in Jesus and is now poured out on all who ask and seek and knock. This Spirit is the reason that we are able to do greater things. The third essential is to receive the Holy Spirit.

Our response is joyful, intentional obedience. This is Christian maturity.

Prayer: Forgiving God, I repent of my failure to make disciples. I am called to this. I believe there is nothing more important. Fill me with your Holy Spirit and empower me for joyful obedience.

The Rev. Dr. Tom Albin
Dean of The Upper Room Ministries & Ecumenical Relations
GBOD | The United Methodist Church

REFLECTIONS FOR THE DAY

READ-What spoke to me as I read today's meditation?

REPENT -Where is God showing me that I have failed to be obedient to the call to discipleship today?

RECEIVE-What words of redemption and grace is God offering to me?

REMEMBER-Who and what is God calling me to remember in prayer related to today's reading?

RESPOND-How is God calling me to respond today?

Day 14

PASTORAL EXCELLENCE

Exodus 16:4

Then the LORD said to Moses, "I'm going to make bread rain down from the sky for you. The people will go out each day and gather just enough for that day. In this way, I'll test them to see whether or not they follow my Instruction."

Years ago I remember reading about a Methodist missionary recounting a visit from a student. He had been reading the Bible and said, "It writes here that when Jesus will come again, he will come with a shout. What will Jesus shout?" Reflecting on his walk with Christ on the mission field he replied, "Christ will shout ENOUGH! Enough poverty....enough suffering...enough hunger...enough hatred... enough death. Enough."

That word "enough" is one we struggle with in our culture. Voices bombard us daily saying we don't have enough. We must buy one more electronic gadget so life can be easier. We must acquire more money to be comfortable. We need more work on the house so it will compete in the market. We need one more car to make life fun. "Enough" gets stretched further and further from our reach. When is enough?

God tried to teach the Hebrews in the wilderness that "enough" was a matter of trust in God's love, provision, and grace. The Biblical narrative is full of illustrations of good people not getting that lesson. We see it all the way down to Jesus as he stood before the multitude. He kept telling the disciples that a few loaves would be enough.

This is a lesson the church continues to struggle with. We are filled with fear of the future. We are afraid there will not be enough time, energy, money, resources or whatever to take care of the "have to's," much less risk caring for those outside our circle. But Jesus patiently keeps saying, "Enough." Jesus keeps suggesting that we look at our "have to's," again. Do they reflect, "I love God with all my heart, soul, mind and strength and my neighbor as myself?" Enough! That shout transforms us because it shatters fear and releases us in trust to live the life Jesus called "Abundant."

Prayer: Lord, Jesus, in your power and in your love, release us for "enough."
AMEN.

The Rev. LeNoir Culbertson
Murfreesboro District Superintendent-TN Conference

REFLECTIONS FOR THE DAY

READ-What spoke to me as I read today's meditation?

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RECEIVE-What words of redemption and grace is God offering to me?

REMEMBER-Who and what is God calling me to remember in prayer related to today's reading?

RESPOND-How is God calling me to respond today?

Day 15

CONGREGATIONAL EXCELLENCE

Luke 21: 1-3

Looking up, Jesus saw rich people throwing their gifts into the collection box for the temple treasury. He also saw a poor widow throw in two small copper coins worth a penny. He said, "I assure you that this poor widow has put in more than them all.

Some weeks back, the church I attend was damaged by either a tornado or, at least, severe straight-line winds. The fellowship hall had a tree fall on it causing damage to the walls, floors and both roofs, including the roof over the sanctuary. Trees littered the property and parking lot. Our brothers and sisters from UMCOR have been a constant presence giving whatever it takes to help others in need. They give not from their abundance, but they gave and continue giving all they can to God.

Amazingly, last year the church applied for a church extension grant to fix the leaking roof, fellowship hall and a few other items. Out of the chaos of the storm and disaster, God has blessed us with a new roof and repairs that we, otherwise, would not have been able to accomplish. Three days after the roof was completed, as it rained and rained, we all stood in the church thanking God for the sound of the awesome rain falling on that new roof.

So what is a healthy congregation? Could it be that a healthy congregation is one that not only withstands the storms of life, but one which thrives *through* the storms of life? A healthy congregation is one that is able to celebrate in the rain, when the safety net of God's love and grace is firmly in place through surrendered servants who love the Lord with all their hearts, and who love their neighbors as themselves.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, giver of all good gifts, help us in this season of worry, doubt and mistrust to trust you as that faithful widow did so long ago. May we not only give out of our abundance, as so many of us often do, but to give our all to you as the widow who gave out of her poverty. Move us into your divine health. AMEN

Gerry Campbell
Lay Leader-Memphis Conference

REFLECTIONS FOR THE DAY

READ-What spoke to me as I read today's meditation?

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RECEIVE-What words of redemption and grace is God offering to me?

REMEMBER-Who and what is God calling me to remember in prayer related to today's reading?

RESPOND-How is God calling me to respond today?

Day 16

MISSIONAL EXCELLENCE

Acts 2:42-47

The believers devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, to the community, to their shared meals, and to their prayers. A sense of awe came over everyone. God performed many wonders and signs through the apostles. All the believers were united and shared everything. They would sell pieces of property and possessions and distribute the proceeds to everyone who needed them. Every day, they met together in the temple and ate in their homes. They shared food with gladness and simplicity. They praised God and demonstrated God's goodness to everyone. The Lord added daily to the community those who were being saved.

Today's Scripture reminds us that we are called to do what the early church did. They fellowshiped and were obedient to the apostles' teaching and participated in communion and prayer. Then, greater things began to happen.

The community began to notice the signs and wonders performed by the apostles. The new believers were generous in selling and sharing their possessions with glad and sincere hearts. They were living transformed lives and it was contagious.

We've heard a lot of questions about becoming vital congregations and about being disciples of Jesus Christ. But a better question to ask might be, "When did we stop being disciples and vital congregations?" As I reflected, Jesus softened my heart and encouraged me to return to the ways of the early church.

Over the years I have been able to identify others as missionaries (like school teachers) or evangelists (those that share Jesus). But I had been making excuses – that Jesus had called and gifted others, not me. Then, Jesus taught me that I am called and empowered to offer Him to others. Now I am intentional about not only meeting physical needs, but also sharing the Good News of Jesus through His transforming love.

Prayer: Jesus, thank You for calling us to follow You. Empower us to share You with everyone we meet. Yes, Lord, GREATER THINGS are still to be done! In Jesus' name we pray. AMEN.

Today may we look for the opportunities where God is already at work -- and join Him!

Holly Neal
Lay Leader-TN Conference

REFLECTIONS FOR THE DAY

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RESPOND-How is God calling me to respond today?

Day 17

GOD'S TRANSFORMING PRESENCE – OFFERING CHRIST TO A HURTING WORLD

Luke 13: 10-13

Jesus was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath. A woman was there who had been disabled by a spirit for eighteen years. She was bent over and couldn't stand up straight. When he saw her, Jesus called her to him and said, "Woman, you are set free from your sickness." He placed his hands on her and she straightened up at once and praised God.

"God's will, done His way, and in His timing" is a powerful prayer for individuals and for the church. However, when Jesus healed the crippled woman on the Sabbath He offended the synagogue rulers. Jesus called them hypocrites because they showed less compassion for this woman of sacred worth than animals in their care.

Jesus' simple prayer, "Woman, you are set free from your ailment," was filled with the transforming power of the Holy Spirit. The spirit that had been crippling her for eighteen years left her. She stood up straight and began praising God.

Healing of body, soul, and spirit causes us to praise the Lord who is the true source of all healing.

Since God's healing, transforming power so dramatically changed this individual, can we also believe that the Lord will transform families, congregations, districts, and annual conferences? Our theme from John 14:12 certainly encourages us to pray for even greater things than these.

"God's will, done His way." Those are challenging words. God's way is always better than any program, plan, or agenda that we could contrive.

Together let's consciously submit our will to God and pray that we'll be led by the Holy Spirit.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, we believe your transforming power and presence can change individuals and our churches and our annual conferences. Place your hand on our lives, set us free from any infirmity, and allow us to praise You wholeheartedly. AMEN

Margie Burger
Director of Prayer Ministries, Aldersgate Renewal Ministries

REFLECTIONS FOR THE DAY

READ-What spoke to me as I read today's meditation?

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RECEIVE-What words of redemption and grace is God offering to me?

REMEMBER-Who and what is God calling me to remember in prayer related to today's reading?

RESPOND-How is God calling me to respond today?

Day 18

PASTORAL EXCELLENCE

Luke 24:36

While they were saying these things, Jesus himself stood among them and said, "Peace be with you."

I was tired, worn out, and stressed to the max! I was mostly annoyed at the inconvenience when I first got the call from my doctor to tell me that I had cancer. In my war-wearied state of total burn-out, I remember thinking that it might be nice if I actually had cancer, then maybe I could get away for a while.

My melt-down came when I was informed that surgery could not be scheduled for several weeks. I wanted the cancer out of my body immediately! I broke down into uncontrollable tears. I remember sitting at my computer, desperately trying to e-mail my Spiritual Director for prayer. I was crying so hard that I couldn't see through the tears. My whole body was racked with sobs. I could barely catch my breath.

At one point, as I wiped the tears away, I saw my dog, Gus, sitting on the floor beside me. He was looking up at me with the most compassionate eyes I had ever seen. Around my feet lay all of his favorite toys. I had been oblivious to his efforts to cheer me as he had fetched all of his toys from around the house. Gus was dangerously possessive of his toys. No one was ever allowed to touch any of his toys. If he caught you picking up one of his toys, he would pounce on you, growling his warnings to back off. In his concern for me, though, Gus was now sacrificially extending his love in the only way that he knew how. Some people may think this is a bit of a stretch, but I saw the eyes of Jesus reflected in Gus' big, brown eyes as he looked up at me in that moment of sacrificial love.

When we extend sacrificial love to those in pain; when we are willing to give all that we have to help another bear their burdens; when we lay down our lives for others, it is then that we see the transformational power of God's love at work. I am physically, spiritually, and emotionally whole today because of the sacrificial love extended to me through the many friends and family that became Jesus for me when I was broken and weary.

Prayer: Lord, help us to bring the authority of your love to our families, our churches, and to the world around us. As you call us to greater levels of excellence in ministry, may we learn to love well.

The Rev. Dr. Diana M. DeWitt
Chairperson, Spiritual Formation Team-TN Conference

REFLECTIONS FOR THE DAY

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RESPOND-How is God calling me to respond today?

Day 19

CONGREGATIONAL EXCELLENCE

Colossians 3:16

The word of Christ must live in you richly. Teach and warn each other with all wisdom by singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. Sing to God with gratitude in your hearts.

We are given the assurance that, “where two or three are gathered” (Mt. 18:20), in the name of Jesus Christ, the Spirit of the Lord is there. One of the ways we can feel that most deeply is singing together.

Being a “Minister of Worship and Music,” I am, obviously, biased when it comes to the presence and prominence of music in the church. However, what you may not know is why I feel so strongly about it.

It is oftentimes difficult to explain the movement of the Holy Spirit to a non-believer, but it is easier to grasp this experience when in the presence of a singing community. Put simply, singing kindles the flames of the Spirit.

Music has the ability to speak to people in ways much deeper than mere words, and it helps us connect with the church through all ages—the past, present, and future. Singing old and new songs is more than a way of giving identity to our own generations; it unifies us with the Body of Christ in all ages and times.

What are you doing in your churches to encourage healthy congregational singing?

It may surprise you, but one of the most important things I have learned in this endeavor is to build and nurture trusting relationships. Within your churches, I would encourage you to ask, “How is it with your soul?”

But I would also add, “How is it with your song?”

Prayer: God, help me to “tune my heart to sing your grace,” and make me ever attentive to the needs of your people to proclaim their faith through singing.
AMEN.

The Rev. Jackson Henry
Chairperson, Order of Deacons-TN Conference

REFLECTIONS FOR THE DAY

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Day 20

MISSIONAL EXCELLENCE

Romans 10:8-10 (Read verses 8-11)

But what does it say? The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart (that is, the message of faith that we preach). Because if you confess with your mouth “Jesus is Lord” and in your heart you have faith that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. Trusting with the heart leads to righteousness, and confessing with the mouth leads to salvation.

Have you ever noticed how many of our favorite hymns are about trust? “Only trust him”, we warble contentedly. “Tis’ so sweet to trust in Jesus”, we advise in song. And what is more uplifting than standing in the great congregation, surrounded by family and friends, singing happily “Through it all, I’ve learned to trust in God?” But do we really? Trust in God?

Trust the God of Jesus Christ, Paul says. God is generous and God will save if only we trust. Paul seems pretty sure that this trust issue is a problem for Christians; so sure that he writes about it to the church at Rome – a church full of people Paul has never met! If we say that Jesus is Lord, Paul suggests, we ought to trust that the same God who ordered Jesus’ life will order ours. We might even believe that the same God who raised Jesus to transformational life in the Resurrection will transform us in the Resurrection life!

“Trust in God” is not just words, it’s a way of living in the world that says that we have placed ourselves in God’s hand. We place so much trust in people and things every day. Our employer will pay us for our work; our computers will not crash; drivers will obey traffic laws; the grocery store will have groceries. We put huge chunks of our lives in the hands of others. So why is it so hard to trust that God is faithful and *will* lead us to whole and healed lives through the Lordship of Jesus Christ?

As we take this walk with God, we need to slow down a little and think a lot. Think about how our response to God’s love in Jesus is shown in the lives we live as we trust God to help us order our lives as Jesus ordered his. Then we may truly sing with joy, “Tis’ so sweet to trust in Jesus.”

Prayer: Wondrous God, your love for us is faithful, no matter what. Help us in this season of prayer to give our hearts to Jesus’ way of living in the world. May this journey truly transform us as we learn to more completely trust in you. Amen.

The Rev. Lucinda Nelson
Spiritual Formation Team-TN Conference

REFLECTIONS FOR THE DAY

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RESPOND-How is God calling me to respond today?

Day 21

GOD'S TRANSFORMING PRESENCE – OFFERING CHRIST TO A HURTING WORLD

John 14: 25-26 (Read verses 15-27)

I have spoken these things to you while I am with you. The Companion, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything and will remind you of everything I told you.

We begin our Christian journey, as we respond to the invitation of Jesus to “Come, follow me.” Each of us in our own way responded, “Yes, I will follow you.” We never know where our simple response to the call of God in Christ will lead, or what it will offer to us in terms of challenge and fulfillment.

Jesus, who had compassion for the crowds, does not add another layer of “you should” to the invitation to follow him. For the invitation is first to “Come follow and come receive.” The promise is that through the power of the Holy Spirit we will be guided, taught, empowered, and sustained in every step we take with Jesus. So we claim our full inheritance as children of God and begin living a life of trust and fulfillment. The Incarnation is made real in us as we become a holy chalice to carry the Transforming Presence of God everywhere we are called to go.

The invitation of Jesus to every disciple is, “Come follow and together we will go where the wounds are.” That’s where Jesus always goes and there the Transforming Presence will heal wounds, and reveal God’s Kingdom. The invitation is “Come, walk with me, and see what the power of God can do when we walk together.” Our response? “*I will follow you* and share the Transforming Presence of God wherever you lead me, for I am yours.”

In Your Time of Prayer: Remember, reflect upon and give thanks for your call to follow Jesus. Give thanks for God’s love for you and desire to live with you and within you as you ask where God is leading you today. In joyful gratitude offer your life anew to God in Christ as you decide again to walk with Jesus for all time and wherever God leads.

Write and record your response and commitment so it will be remembered.

Bishop Reuben Job, Retired
Author and Leader in Spiritual Formation and Prayer

REFLECTIONS FOR THE DAY

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RESPOND-How is God calling me to respond today?

Day 22

PASTORAL EXCELLENCE

Hebrews 10:24

“Let’s also think about how to motivate each other to show love and to do good works.”

For a couple of years I volunteered to be an adult mentor to children in a local elementary school. Many of the children I met with on my weekly visits lived in the Settle Court housing project, which used to be one of most dangerous places to live in Nashville. Every Tuesday I would leave my office and drive to the school and spend two hours talking with children and reading to them.

One of the children I met each week was a little boy named Daniel. Daniel had unruly blonde hair, sparkling blue eyes and an unpredictable personality. Daniel could be cheerful or he could be angry and disagreeable; he was often sent to the principal’s office for misbehaving. But over the weeks of meeting with him we developed a bond of trust.

One Tuesday Daniel bounced into the office, saw me and said, “I knew you would come; you always keep your promises.” There were many Tuesdays when I was too busy to go to the school and I would start to make mental excuses for staying at work, but I would hear Daniel’s voice in my head saying, “I knew you would come.” Those words always motivated me to get in my car and drive to the school.

The world in which we live is broken and in need of healing. The world is in need of the transforming love of Jesus Christ. The world does not need a church that is perfect; the world needs a church that can be counted on to show up, a church that is motivated to show love and do good works.

Prayer reflection: Pray for the places in your neighborhood that could be transformed by the love of Christ. Consider a prayer walk through your church’s neighborhood.

The Rev. Ken Edwards
Chairperson, Order of Elders-TN Conference

REFLECTIONS FOR THE DAY

READ-What spoke to me as I read today's meditation?

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RESPOND-How is God calling me to respond today?

Day 23

CONGREGATIONAL EXCELLENCE

Philippians 4:11-13

I'm not saying this because I need anything, for I have learned how to be content in any circumstance. I know the experience of being in need and of having more than enough; I have learned the secret to being content in any and every circumstance, whether full or hungry or whether having plenty or being poor. I can endure all these things through the power of the one who gives me strength.

Balance is always a problem because there seems to always be more of something than something else. Paul was able to find balance where ever he found himself planted...even when he is under arrest.

He reminds us that he has had plenty and he has had nothing. Finding that balance is important, and Paul was able to find balance between his relationship with Christ, the people he loved, and his situation.

In our congregations, it has been my experience that those Christ followers that manage to find a balance between jobs, families, culture, worship, prayer life and concerns have the ingredients to cause the kingdom to become closer at hand.

So, how does one or a group of “ones” find that balance?

I believe that the key to finding this balance, which was exemplified by Paul's state of contentment, is by putting first things first.

Let us seek first the kingdom of God, let us pray continuously, let us do what it takes to balance our spiritual lives with our physical lives...let us be healthy, as both individuals and congregations, so that we are able to love God and love the neighbors Christ has given us.

Prayer: Lord, help us to focus, and help us to set our priorities to bring balance to our being. Amen.

The Rev. Stephen Webb

Chairperson, Fellowship of Local Pastors & Associate Members-Memphis Conference

REFLECTIONS FOR THE DAY

READ-What spoke to me as I read today's meditation?

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RECEIVE-What words of redemption and grace is God offering to me?

REMEMBER-Who and what is God calling me to remember in prayer related to today's reading?

RESPOND-How is God calling me to respond today?

Day 24

MISSIONAL EXCELLENCE

I Thessalonians 5:16-18

Rejoice always. Pray continually. Give thanks in every situation because this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

I wonder sometimes, if disciples of Jesus know and understand the importance of sharing the joy and thanksgiving of faith. In a world that is too often filled with gloom and doom, disciples need to bring the light of God's love in Christ Jesus with joy and thanksgiving. After all, we are to witness and proclaim the Gospel of Jesus which is the Good News.

John 14:28, says in part, "If you love me you would have rejoiced ..." I believe it is our responsibility as Christians to infuse and model for the world the joy and thanksgiving of being a disciple of Jesus Christ. It seems to me the two, rejoicing and thanksgiving, go hand in hand. When there is joy and rejoicing there is thanksgiving, and when there is thanksgiving there is joy and rejoicing.

Recently, at the Pulaski District Training, Bishop Bill McAlilly shared a God story with us. You could literally feel the joy and thanksgiving in the sanctuary, along with the spoken, "Amen" and "Praise God" as Bishop McAlilly told his story. We need to tell our stories of faith, and give witness to the blessings of a life in Christ. We need to celebrate with joy all that God is doing in our lives and in the world around us.

May we remember that the Church is called to be faithful to God in Jesus Christ, rather than to be successful according to the standards of the world. Jesus told his disciples in Luke 15:7, "... there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance." As we share our stories of faith, people will be drawn to Christ for redemption and salvation.

Prayer: Lord, help us to know and understand that "rejoicing and thanksgiving" is vital and important in expressing and witnessing to our faith. In the holy name of Jesus. AMEN.

The Rev. Ron Brown
Spiritual Formation Team- TN Conference

REFLECTIONS FOR THE DAY

READ-What spoke to me as I read today's meditation?

REPENT -Where is God showing me that I have failed to be obedient to the call to discipleship today?

RECEIVE-What words of redemption and grace is God offering to me?

REMEMBER-Who and what is God calling me to remember in prayer related to today's reading?

RESPOND-How is God calling me to respond today?

Day 25

GOD'S TRANSFORMING PRESENCE – OFFERING CHRIST TO A HURTING WORLD

2 Corinthians 5: 16-17

So then, from this point on we won't recognize people by human standards. Even though we used to know Christ by human standards, that isn't how we know him now. So then, if anyone is in Christ, that person is part of the new creation. The old things have gone away, and look, new things have arrived!

Paul knew at a visceral level the transforming power of Jesus Christ. The “old man” was a terrorist bent on destroying members of the Way. The “new man” was the most compelling ambassador for Christ in history.

For years, I carried the view of my Jewish father who renounced God after the Holocaust and bore deep resentments towards Christianity after experiencing much anti-Semitism. In high school I wrote a term paper about the hypocrisy of Christianity. I was known for my sharp and critical tongue. In college and in divinity school, I studied the psychological and sociological functions of the Christian faith with the aim of explaining it away. I disdained those with child-like faith. I even accused a Christian professor of the NT as being anti-Semitic.

Despite marrying Jay, a budding pastor, my struggles with Jesus continued for six more years. It was the brokenness of our marriage that finally drove me to my knees. I had a vision of Jesus on the cross, with the words, “Stop running, you who are heavy laden. Find rest in me.” Thus began a process of rebirth that continues to this day. I am becoming a “new creation” in Christ. Our marriage was also re-created, and within a year we were pregnant with our first child (previously I was afraid to be a mother). God helped my tongue become one that blessed rather than cursed others (James 3:10). He replaced my heart of stone with a heart of flesh (Ezekiel 36:26).

We United Methodists face a Corinthian culture that is secular, indulgent, and success-driven. We, like Paul, encounter broken, desperate and devastated persons, yet there is the wisdom of our Wesleyan heritage and the transforming grace of the Holy Spirit to help others shed the “old life” and become the new creation. Let us step with Jesus into this ministry of transformation.

Prayer: Gracious Lord, we come to you with personal confessions of our own doubts and unbelief. Set us free to experience your transforming power and grace, and then to be agents of your transformational grace to others. In Jesus' name. AMEN.

The Rev. Christine Archer
Spiritual Formation Team-TN Conference

REFLECTIONS FOR THE DAY

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Day 26

PASTORAL EXCELLENCE

Ezekiel 22:30

I looked for anyone to repair the wall and stand in the gap for me on behalf of the land, so I wouldn't have to destroy it. But I couldn't find anyone.

Why pray? Does prayer really matter? Won't God do whatever God wants to do regardless of whether I pray? These questions, or other similar questions, have undoubtedly pricked the edges of most of our consciousness at some time or another. A candid walk through Scripture tells us otherwise. For some reason, God has chosen to invite us to carry the privilege, and, albeit, the burden and responsibility of prayer. God *needs* our prayers. Ezekiel 22:30-31, is nothing short of a call to arms, or knees, if you will. "*But I found no one.*" Ouch! What if my prayers really could make that much difference?

Greater things...what are those? Let us stretch our expectations. It was mid-morning when the knock came to my office door. A church member asked me if I could immediately join him and his wife in the sanctuary for prayer. She was already on her knees at the altar, as her husband whisked me to her side. Her son was the president of US Airways, and they had just received word that one of their planes had crashed into the Hudson River. She did not need to say more. We all know that when a plane crashes, lives are lost. The question is usually, how many? I immediately began praying with the authority entrusted to Jesus' followers on the Day of Pentecost. I prayed for all of the obvious, including that her son would be given wisdom and discernment in dealing with the fallout and ramifications of this crash. What came out of mouth at the end of my prayer actually embarrassed me. With an authority that I did not know was in me, I declared, in the name of Jesus, that not one life would be lost in this crash! My body was covered in goose bumps. How could I possibly have asked for such an impossibility! I felt myself sort of silently breathing, "I am sorry, God." We parted, and I went back to my office.

The world knows this story as, "The Miracle on the Hudson." Could my prayer have really made a difference? Not one life was lost! I wonder. GLORY! God said, "If I can find one person to stand in the gap..." Is that person you?

Prayer: Lord, forgive us for not taking the call to prayer more seriously. May we walk in no other authority than the authority of love as we use that authority for your glory. In Jesus' name. AMEN.

Rev. Dr. Diana M. DeWitt
Chairperson, Spiritual Formation-TN Conference

REFLECTIONS FOR THE DAY

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Day 27

CONGREGATIONAL EXCELLENCE

Mark 12: 30-31

And you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your being, with all your mind, and with all your strength. The second is this, You will love your neighbor as yourself. No other commandment is greater than these.”

A little boy said to his Sunday school teacher, “The pastor said our congregation is healthy. When did we go to the doctor?” In other words, the little boy was asking who is qualified to check us out and make this pronouncement.

What makes us a healthy, vital congregation?

God gave the ultimate sacrifice, his only son Jesus, to atone for the sins of the world. A congregation that understands the magnitude of this sacrifice and the depth of God’s love is also a congregation that embraces God’s Kingdom and loves all creation.

A healthy congregation expresses their love of God in all they do. They love the world unconditionally as God loves us.

A healthy and vital congregation is passionate, joyful, and always ready to serve.

We are healthy because we have embraced the lifestyle of the Great Physician.

Prayer: Oh God, help us to love one another as you have loved us. Teach us to live in solidarity with all creation as we yearn to make disciples for Jesus Christ. AMEN.

The Rev. Roger Hopson
Executive Assistant to the Bishop

REFLECTIONS FOR THE DAY

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Day 28

MISSIONAL EXCELLENCE

2 Corinthians 8:1-5

Brothers and sisters, we want to let you know about the grace of God that was given to the churches of Macedonia. While they were being tested by many problems, their extra amount of happiness and their extreme poverty resulted in a surplus of rich generosity. I assure you that they gave what they could afford and even more than they could afford, and they did it voluntarily. They urgently begged us for the privilege of sharing in this service for the saints. They even exceeded our expectations, because they gave themselves to the Lord first and to us, consistent with God's will.

The Macedonian churches actually gave beyond their means as they responded to the desperate needs of their brothers and sisters in the Jerusalem church, even while they faced their own extreme hardship. Their extraordinary generosity far surpassed even the greatest hopes and expectations.

How were they able to accomplish this task?

They were not successful because of their abundant skills, compassion, or even a great love for their Christian brothers and sisters. No, the Macedonian churches excelled and did even greater things, because they gave themselves first to the Lord. They were able to reach out to others only through God's grace and God's provision.

God was not only primary, but in fact everything.

If we, likewise, are to be successful ambassadors for God, reaching out to bring the love of Christ to a lost, lonely, desperate world, then we also must surrender our all to God. We must humble ourselves before our omniscient Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer, offering everything we have and everything we are, seeking His will, not ours to be done in His mighty Church.

Prayer: Almighty, gracious, and loving God, we come to you this day grateful and humbled by the overflowing abundance of your grace, love, and blessings in our lives. We relinquish ourselves and our gifts and abilities entirely to your service to do your will. We also come to you repentant for all the times and ways we have made your holy Church our church. We ask now that you will use us as your vessels to accomplish your perfect will. AMEN.

Theresa Johnson
Spiritual Formation Team-TN Conference

REFLECTIONS FOR THE DAY

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RESPOND-How is God calling me to respond today?

Day 29

GOD'S TRANSFORMING PRESENCE – OFFERING CHRIST TO A HURTING WORLD

Luke 10:36-37

“What do you think? Which one of these three was a neighbor to the man who encountered thieves?” Then the legal expert said, “The one who demonstrated mercy toward him.” Jesus told him, “Go and do likewise.”

When I was a girl my father on several occasions asked me to go with him to his clinic on a weekend afternoon to assist him with a patient who had sustained a cut that needed to be sutured, or a fishhook that needed to be extracted. As the only doctor in our county during my early childhood, he worked at the hours when his patients needed him.

I recall my own inner struggle with the impulse to look away from the wounds, to avoid eye contact with the suffering patient who might be holding back their own tears. But most vividly, I realize that my father was cultivating my capacity for compassion: getting past the fear or revulsion about another person's suffering or injury, moving into a helpful form of assistance that would promote healing, and leading me to meet Jesus Christ—the one my father had decided to serve long before he trained as a physician.

The suffering of Jesus as he was tried, abused and executed was difficult for his disciples and his followers to confront. We see several responses, from hiding to standing by in anguish. We are called to follow Jesus into the suffering of our own journeys and to be present in love to the suffering of others. By not looking away, we grow the courage to address the suffering of our own neighbors in this world. Together, all of us who follow Jesus are invited to behold His suffering in the events of Holy Week. We are invited to resist looking away, and then, beyond horror or curiosity, we are invited to behold with love and hope the suffering in our own families, communities and global human family.

Where have you and I recently been tempted "to look away" or to escape from the wounds of our neighbors? As we follow this invitation of Jesus, let us pray that we will share in the resurrection power of new life and hope, as we bring the transforming presence of Christ into every situation.

Prayer: Jesus, where can I behold you in the world I inhabit? Give me courage to love and serve you with compassion. In Your grace. AMEN.

The Rev. Diane Luton Blum
Spiritual Formation Team-TN Conference

REFLECTIONS FOR THE DAY

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Day 30

MISSIONAL EXCELLENCE

Matthew 28:20b

“Look, I myself will be with you every day until the end of this present age.”

A commercial for the Arby's Fast Food Restaurant shows a man running down a street. The city looks like a ghost town. The only sound that can be heard is an eerie blowing of the wind that scatters paper between the high rise buildings. As the man runs wildly down the street, he cries out, “Where is everybody?” A few moments later he frantically screams again, “Where has everybody gone?” Then he sees a stranger dressed in a long black coat and walking slowing down the street with his back turned. In exasperation he runs up to the stranger, grabs him by his shoulders, and says, “Where is everybody?” The stranger slowly turns around while eating a sandwich and says, “To Arby's - roast beef sandwich sale.”

How often do we find ourselves like the man in the commercial? In times of crises how often have we felt alone, fearful and desperate? It seems as if everyone has gone to Arby's or to a party, but we have not been invited. Instead we are left all alone with our violent thoughts, alone with our grief, alone with our uncertainties that rob us of our energies. Moreover, in recognizing our loneliness and despair how can we not remember others who are dying without a circle of support, children who are neglected, persons who are poor, hungry and depressed, those who are assaulted and left to die. In the midst of this pang of loneliness it may appear that God has abandoned us.

However, let us not lose heart. Let us not grow weary. Through the quiet and unrelenting presence of God's Spirit, working through us, Jesus invades our lonely, yearning and bleeding world. Jesus becomes “Word made flesh” in the touch of a hand, in acts of compassion, in a hot and nutritious meal, in clothing the naked, in visiting the imprisoned, even in words of healing and sympathy. Jesus' presence is made real to us in the ordinary day-to-day occurrences of life in order that we may know what the Gospel writer Matthew knows: God's grace is with us, and Jesus is “with you always, to the end of the age.”

Prayer: Holy and Gracious God, what a blessed assurance to know that in the midst of our struggles, when the pressures of life mount from day to day, you will be with us, always. Thank you for your promise that you will never leave us all alone and forsaken. May your Spirit renew us with your everlasting grace and love. AMEN.

The Rev. Bettye P. Lewis
Director of Connectional Ministries - TN Conference

REFLECTIONS FOR THE DAY

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Day 31

CONGREGATIONAL EXCELLENCE

Colossians 3:12-14 (Read verses 12-17)

Therefore, as God's choice, holy and loved, put on compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. Be tolerant with each other and, if someone has a complaint against anyone, forgive each other. As the Lord forgave you, so also forgive each other. And over all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity.

Henri Nouwen's book, *The Return of the Prodigal* was my companion through the season of Lent this year. Reflecting on his personal experience of the parable and Rembrandt's painting, Nouwen invited me to encounter "Love Divine" anew. For me, personally, the most captivating element in Rembrandt's composition is the younger son tenderly embraced by the loving father; hands covering, comforting, receiving, and restoring. It seems to me the primary task of the church is to become the Father who runs from the house to receive and restore the wounded and broken.

"James" called our church and asked, "If I come to your church, will you love me?" As he arrived the following Sunday, I was struck and intimidated by his physical appearance. He was 6'4", wears a kafia (Arabic head-covering), a military vest, and carried a black bag. Others had received him, long before I met him, which created for me worry as to the actual answer to his question, "Will you love me?" Did we love him?

A few weeks later, while visiting James in his home following a hospitalization, I noticed a framed bulletin on the wall over his chair. "James, tell me about that." "That's the bulletin from my first Sunday at our church. That's the day I found my family. That's the day I found love."

It seems to me that vital congregations answer the question, "Will you love me?" with a resounding, "Yes!" We, the Church, offer through our hands the comforting, restoring, and tender embrace of "Love Divine". Our churches have been placed in communities where people are asking us, "Will you love me?"

Prayer: O, Love Divine, all loves excelling, renew in us ears to hear, eyes to see, and hands to receive those in our communities who long for your tender embrace. Clothe us with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, and may the deep mystery of your grace be revealed in and through our lives. In the name of Jesus the Christ. AMEN.

The Rev. Max Mayo
Cookeville First UMC- TN Conference

REFLECTIONS FOR THE DAY

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Day 32

MISSIONAL EXCELLENCE

Galatians 5:13-15

You were called to freedom, brothers and sisters; only don't let this freedom be an opportunity to indulge your selfish impulses, but serve each other through love. All the Law has been fulfilled in a single statement: Love your neighbor as yourself. But if you bite and devour each other, be careful that you don't get eaten up by each other!

God has created us with the ability to make many choices about our lives, including how we reach out to those who do not know Christ. Our role is to take what we've learned from God and pass it on to others.

Why? Because there is a hurting world out there. It is a world where the majority of people don't know Christ, and don't think they want to know Christ.

And we all get to choose what we are going to do (or not do) about the people in our own communities and throughout the world who don't know Christ. We get to choose how we will reach out to offer help to those who need assistance, to those who need to know someone loves them and that someone cares.

When Jesus was being talked about by the villagers in Jericho for befriending Zacchaeus, note what Jesus said to the crowd on that day, "The Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost" (Luke 19:10).

This captures the heart and ministry of Jesus. Can we say the same? Is this our focus? We might ask ourselves the following: If people followed me – would they get to Jesus?

Prayer: God, give us a heart like the compassionate and caring heart of Jesus. Stir within us a passion and burden for those who do not know you. Help us to get out of our comfortable places and begin to see people like you see people. AMEN

The Rev. Daphne Moses
Chairperson, Order of Deacons-Memphis Conference

REFLECTIONS FOR THE DAY

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Day 33

GOD'S TRANSFORMING PRESENCE – OFFERING CHRIST TO A HURTING WORLD

I Peter 5:10

After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, the one who called you into his eternal glory in Christ Jesus, will himself restore, empower, strengthen, and establish you.

How long is “a little while?” When you are healthy, waiting “a little while” can be mildly uncomfortable. When you are suffering, enduring “a little while” can be excruciatingly painful.

Think for a moment about how the woman in Luke 8, with the issue of blood must have felt after suffering for a year, and then another, and then another ten years on top of that. Can you imagine the sense of hopelessness and desperation she must have been experiencing?

How about the woman in Luke 13, who suffered for eighteen years with back issues?

And what about the man in Luke 5, crippled for thirty-eight years?

Yet, into each of their lives stepped the transforming presence of Jesus Christ. Each had not suffered so long that they were beyond the limits of Hope. That is Good News both for our lives *and* our churches.

The God of all grace can heal a twelve year illness, untangle eighteen years of dysfunction, and even break thirty-eight years of addiction.

Today, pray with thanksgiving, inviting the God of all grace to bring his transforming presence into areas of long suffering in our lives.

Prayer: Thank you, God of all grace, for restoring, supporting, strengthening, and establishing each of us and our churches. Amen.

Jonathan Dow
Executive Director, Aldersgate Renewal Ministries

REFLECTIONS FOR THE DAY

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REMEMBER-Who and what is God calling me to remember in prayer related to today's reading?

RESPOND-How is God calling me to respond today?

Day 34

GOD'S TRANSFORMING PRESENCE – OFFERING CHRIST TO A HURTING WORLD

2 Corinthians 5:17

So then, if anyone is in Christ, that person is part of the new creation. The old things have gone away, and look, new things have arrived!

I'm a person who likes change. But what does a change experience mean to someone who likes things the way they are? It can be painful. Moments of creativity seem less divine and more like hardship. Where is God when change needs to happen inside and outside of us?

Change is uncomfortable. Change can also bring doubt, fear, and uncertainty. Change may mean death. If you're not one to seek out change, you're not alone. Change is hard. Christ says to be new in Him everything must be re-created. It must not stay the same.

Change, faith and death connect us to God and allow us to know true presence of transforming power in Christ. If it weren't for change, faith and death there would be no hope in resurrection and new life.

I believe faith is what gets us up in the morning. Hope and love are what pushes and pulls us through life. A life full of faith experience prepares us for death.

Death sometimes happens while we are still alive. Death of our old self allows us to live a new eternal life. Change prepares us to meet God. Re-creation changes who we look like in Christ, because Christ makes all things new.

Are you "old" or are you "new"?

Are you "changing" or are you "staying"?

May you experience change, death of the old and life of the new, in and through Christ.

Prayer: O God, be in me, and everything that needs to be new in me. May the re-creations you have planned for all your people and your church be realized through servant-hood, compassion and change. AMEN.

The Rev. Regina Proctor
Spiritual Formation Team-TN Conference

REFLECTIONS FOR THE DAY

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Day 35

PASTORAL EXCELLENCE

Matthew 1:23

Look! A virgin will become pregnant and give birth to a son, and they will call him, Emmanuel.

Emmanuel—“God with us.” Neither God with me, nor God with you, rather “God with us” together. Pastoral excellence and church vitality grow out of this holy plurality. As surely as God is triune, so does God work in spirited relationships. God with me or you alone grows too easily into a God who looks and acts too much like our own pet emphases and projects.

“God with us” requires much checking-in with God and with each other. “God with us” understands that deepest renewal arises out of deepest relationships, and that God’s full image can only be borne relationally.

“God with us” insists that what we do together, while more difficult, remains most lasting and substantial. “God with us” invites us to explore the relationships that God places along our journey, especially welcoming the strangers as friends whom God gives us to serve. “God with us” refuses a lone ranger model and resists every temptation to clutch too tightly the many gifts God provides.

“God with us” depends on a trusted conference conferring what John Wesley pointed out as a means of grace and on which he built the practical disciplines of Methodism. As we approach this Annual Conference, may we anticipate it as amazing treasure—a three-day gathering with trusted Methodist neighbors in order to listen to God as we worship, commune, study the scripture, pray, fast/feast, and puzzle over vexing issues of faithfulness, confident that God promises to show up with truth that sets us free!

Prayer Focus: Pray for the communion of saints, living and dead, on whom you count for wisdom, courage, clarity, and correction. Pray for that cluster of people out of which your life of faith arises and flourishes. Pray for the gathering of saints which constitutes the Annual Conference towards which we now point.

The Rev. Gregory Waldrop
Co-Chairperson, Order of Elders-Memphis Conference

REFLECTIONS FOR THE DAY

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Day 36

TRANSFORMATIONAL PRESENCE

John 1:29

The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, “Look! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!”

Our final morning in Jerusalem took us to the Garden Tomb. My spirit was heavy on this last day of our pilgrimage. What a beautiful place! What a heavy heart I carried! As we walked, I noticed along the side of the pathway that there was a young, mid-thirtyish man kneeling next to a tree in the garden and praying. He was stocky built, wearing a blue shirt, Middle Eastern in his skin tones. His hands were resting on the tree with his head bowed in prayer. I noticed a shiny gold wedding ring on his left hand. I don't know why I noticed him. He was being quite unobtrusive in his quiet sanctuary.

I sought a path to a deeper garden spot to be alone for a quiet moment of meditation before re-boarding our bus. I sat down on a single concrete bench. In a few moments, I was distracted by the sound of a hedge cutter being started immediately behind me. As I turned toward the sound of the noise, I saw the young man who had been knelt in prayer beside the tree along the pathway when we had entered the garden. Although I never saw his face either time, it was the same shirt, the same mid-thirtyish stocky build, the Middle Eastern skin tones and the shiny gold ring on his left hand. My heart was strangely warmed as I realized that it had been the caretaker of the garden whom I had seen knelt in prayer. That was a precious thought to me. I got up from my seat and moved back toward my group to get on the bus to depart for our next stop.

The next day after arriving home, while thinking and praying, I heard clearly and distinctly a statement that would change my life forever, “Diana, Mary thought I was the gardener, too.” Oh, my goodness! I can't begin to find words to describe what I felt at that point. I cried the rest of that day, and into the next. I saw Jesus! It was Him! I actually saw my risen Lord in the garden near the tomb where His body had been laid over 2000 years ago; along the path where Mary had encountered her risen Lord, mistaking Him to be the gardener, until He spoke to her and her eyes were opened, as had been mine (John 20:15-16).

Prayer: Lord, open our eyes to see your Presence. Open our ears to hear your voice. Open our hearts to be transformed by your love. In Jesus' name. AMEN.

The Rev. Dr. Diana M. DeWitt
Chairperson, Spiritual Formation Team-TN Conference

REFLECTIONS FOR THE DAY

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Day 37

MISSIONAL EXCELLENCE

Genesis 1:1-2

When God began to create the heavens and the earth—the earth was without shape or form, it was dark over the deep sea, and God’s wind swept over the waters—

As a child, I learned this verse as “God sweeping over the chaos the water”. Over time I replaced the phrase “the face of water” with “the chaos of water”. The word chaos grows as an apt metaphor for my life.

Monday morning dawns reflecting on the sermon delivered, just hours ago. But the reflection is replaced by the revelation the next sermon is due in a few days. Looking into the weekly calendar, I find Bible studies, prayer services, and committee meetings. These fill the columns and set time aside. Hospital, nursing home, and home visiting needs attention. Oh, and the phone will ring for an unavoidable crisis.

The family calendar is no lighter. Doctor visits, PTA meetings, and afterschool activities will require time. I haven’t called mom and the dog needs to go to the vet. This is the normal weekly chaos of life. What do I do with this chaos?

Perhaps it is a good thing I learned the first two verses as God swept over “chaos”. Perhaps I should reflect on what God was doing while sweeping over “chaos”. God was creating. God is still creating. Just as God led me through the last sermon, so shall I be led for the next. My cluttered calendar of responsibilities and requirements are reminders, God through Jesus is with me and leading me.

The Good News is this: in all times, even the chaotic times, God through Jesus is with us, loves us, and saves us. Could there be any greater thing than to lead someone through the chaos of life into the peace of Jesus Christ?

Prayer: May I accept God’s presence in the midst of my chaos. May I see each event, requirement, or responsibility as an opportunity to share the Good News and to do greater things.

The Rev. C. Kevin Marston
Chairperson, Fellowship of Local Pastors & Associate Members-TN Conference

REFLECTIONS FOR THE DAY

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RESPOND-How is God calling me to respond today?

Day 38

CONGREGATIONAL EXCELLENCE

Colossians 3:17 (Read verses 12-17)

Whatever you do, whether in speech or action, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus and give thanks to God the Father through him.

I was walking along the sidewalk and noticed a little boy playing in a yard under the watchful eye of his grandfather. The little boy had a stick in his hand which he was obviously using as a sword. It was also obvious that he was winning this mock battle. As I reached him, he offered me the stick. I told him that he could keep it for himself. He ran over to his grandfather, they talked, the grandfather said, "He really wants you to have this stick." I dropped to my knees in front of the boy, extended my hands to receive my gift. As he handed it to me he said, "This is a magic sword. It will keep dragons away." I thanked him for the gift. He was happy and so was I, for I haven't had a dragon problem since that day.

We have been given a powerful gift to help make our congregations healthy. It isn't magic, but it is effective. Listen prayerfully to what Paul said: "*And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, giving thanks to God the Father through him*" (Colossians 3:17).

If we incorporate these two things into our planning and our prayers, greater things can happen. If everything we do is done in the name of Jesus Christ, our ministry will be focused. Any program, any activity, which doesn't meet this criteria wouldn't be done, freeing up time for needful things.

Our gratitude will open our hearts and lives to a deeper experience of God's grace. Gratitude is our response to the love God has given us through Jesus the Christ.

No, it isn't magic, but this gift of God can keep a congregation healthy and fruitful.

Prayer Focus: Look at all the activities your congregation leads or takes part in and raise this question, "Does everything we do fit the mission of making disciples?" and, how much of your prayer time is spent expressing gratitude to god? How much "thank you," as compared to, "give me."

The Rev. Harrell Nation, Jr.
Brownsville District Superintendent,-Memphis Conference

REFLECTIONS FOR THE DAY

READ-What spoke to me as I read today's meditation?

REPENT -Where is God showing me that I have failed to be obedient to the call to discipleship today?

RECEIVE-What words of redemption and grace is God offering to me?

REMEMBER-Who and what is God calling me to remember in prayer related to today's reading?

RESPOND-How is God calling me to respond today?

Day 39

GOD'S TRANSFORMING PRESENCE – OFFERING CHRIST TO A HURTING WORLD

Philippians 4: 4, 6b, 12

Be glad in the Lord always! Again I say, be glad! ... bring up all of your requests to God in your prayers and petitions, along with giving thanks... I know the experience of being in need and of having more than enough; I have learned the secret to being content in any and every circumstance, whether full or hungry or whether having plenty or being poor.

One afternoon as I was driving down Broadway in Nashville, I could not believe what I saw. There she was again. I had seen her three times before - the bag lady. Each time her very appearance had left me visibly shaken. Her presence had hung like an awful omen in my head. Her eyes were hollow. Her skin stretched across her face tight like a trampoline. The once bright colored dress had now faded and had been reduced to rags. And of course she carried her bag - a lopsided old tattered bag - containing all her earthly possessions. This time - I told myself - I would not pass her by. This time I would stop and speak to her, hand her a few dollars, and give her an encouraging word.

But as I approached her, an amazing thing happened. She greeted me with open arms and a warm loving smile. Her words were simply this, "Hi, I'm Anna. God is so good; God is so good; God is so good to me. And now I just want to thank him, yes thank him for his goodness and grace." But how could this be? How could someone living in extreme poverty, praise God and give thanks? Does this not seem unusual to give thanks when life has dealt us such devastating blows?

What about each of us? Can we say like Paul: "Rejoice evermore...in everything give thanks, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you?" And in giving thanks can we remember all the bag ladies – children, women and men - those who are hungry, ill-clad and homeless - by offering Christ to a hurting world.

Prayer: Gracious and loving God, empower us to give thanks in all things and circumstances. Open our hearts to see those who are lost, alone and suffering in a hurting world. May we become your servants by reaching out in ministry with our brothers and sisters whose grateful hearts can touch us and fill us with your Spirit of always giving thanks. AMEN.

The Rev. Bettye P. Lewis
Director of Connectional Ministries - TN Conference

REFLECTIONS FOR THE DAY

READ-What spoke to me as I read today's meditation?

REPENT -Where is God showing me that I have failed to be obedient to the call to discipleship today?

RECEIVE-What words of redemption and grace is God offering to me?

REMEMBER-Who and what is God calling me to remember in prayer related to today's reading?

RESPOND-How is God calling me to respond today?

Day 40 WALKING WITH GOD TO THE ENDS OF THE EARTH

Acts 1:8

Rather, you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.

Over these last 40 days, you have heard our sisters and brothers bear witness to the love of God in the world. As we gather for the coming sessions of the 2013 Annual Conferences, may we be attentive to the invitation to trust in God as we expect greater things across the Tennessee and Memphis Conferences as we live into being disciples.

My life has been enriched by the stories and prayers that have been offered here. As we engage in the business of the Annual Conferences, may we be attuned to the movement of God's spirit.

From Jerusalem
to Judea
to Samaria
to the ends of the earth.

We are called to move out from the places where God has planted us into our communities, our state, our nation, even to the ends of the earth.

May we live our lives as faithful disciples and allow the power of the Holy Spirit to guide our mutual work.

I give thanks to God that we are on this journey together.

Prayer: Speak, Holy God, to the concerns of our hearts. Call us to a deeper walk with you in these days of Holy Conferencing as we seek to be your witnesses across the Nashville Area. Speak, O Lord, for we, your servants are listening. In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen

Bishop William T. McAlilly
Nashville Area

REFLECTIONS FOR THE DAY

READ-What spoke to me as I read today's meditation?

REPENT -Where is God showing me that I have failed to be obedient to the call to discipleship today?

RECEIVE-What words of redemption and grace is God offering to me?

REMEMBER-Who and what is God calling me to remember in prayer related to today's reading?

RESPOND-How is God calling me to respond today?

Where Do I Go from Here?

There are many good books available to continue your journey into a deeper experience of Spiritual Transformation. Here are some suggested titles:

Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth by Richard Foster

Prayer by Richard Foster

Dimensions of Prayer: Cultivating a Relationship with God by Douglas V. Steere

Invitation to a Journey: a Road Map for Spiritual Growth by M. Robert Mulholland, Jr.

Praying Together: Forming Prayer Ministries in Your Congregation by Martha Graybeal Rowlett

Lord, Teach Us to Pray: A Study of Personal Prayer by Margie Burger

The Return of the Prodigal Son by Henri J. M. Nouwen

The Mystic Way of Evangelism by Elaine A. Heath

Intercessory Prayer by Dutch Sheets

Creating a Life with God by Daniel Walpert

A Guide to Prayer for All God's People by Rueben P. Job & Norman Shawchuck

Hearing God by Dallas Willard

You Were Born for This by Bruce Wilkinson

Children and Prayer: A Shared Pilgrimage by Betty Shannon Cloyd

Teach Me to Pray by W.E. Sangster

In the Pit with A Lion On a Snowy Day & Wild Goose Chase by Mark Batterson

Acts 29: Fifty Days of Prayer to Invite the Holy Spirit by Terry Teykl