

NEW YEAR'S DAY, THURSDAY, JANUARY 1

“Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him.” Matthew 6:8 (NIV)

NEW YEAR'S DAY TYPICALLY IS NOT one of reflection or planning for me. I get frustrated when I set goals that get derailed by stress or unplanned events. This past year was filled with such experiences. An automobile accident, broken relationships, and the deaths of close friends created ongoing challenges and losses. I awoke on January 1 feeling tired and ready for a new year to start.

I spent my devotional time thinking about the prior year's events. I had learned how much of life was out of my control. Could new beginnings with a fresh calendar reclaim anything? I wondered if goals for practical rhythms, including simple prayer practices, could help my overall well-being. I wrote down a few daily tasks that could sustain physical, emotional, and spiritual health no matter what the upcoming year held—exercising for five minutes each morning, taking vitamins, meeting a daily writing goal, and praying for three to five concerns. These felt achievable because they were small steps that could be built upon.

Posting the list on my bathroom mirror, I was reminded of hopeful beginnings and who gave them to me. I couldn't control my life, but there was Someone who did. Jesus already knew what the upcoming year held, including events I saw as unplanned. As I brought my needs to Him, while also caring for myself, He would meet those needs. New beginnings for a new year! —BRENDA L. YODER

FAITH STEP: *As you reflect on the past year, thank Jesus for always being in control. Whether you make resolutions or not, pray for Him to reveal the beginning you need.*

FRIDAY, JANUARY 2

Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his love endures forever.
1 Chronicles 16:34 (NIV)

NEW ENGLAND WINTERS ARE COLD, especially since we keep our thermostat on low in our house to combat the rising cost of propane. That means I'm eternally cold from October to May, even indoors. Knowing this, my husband gave me a heated vest for Christmas. It has a rechargeable battery pack that powers the coils sewn into the back of the garment, heating them up so they radiate warmth. It's an amazing invention and the perfect gift for me! Sometimes, I stop right in the middle of my busy day, close my eyes, and focus on the sensation. Taking the time to consciously bask in the warmth helps me appreciate how it envelops me with exactly what I need, protecting me from the cold.

Like all earthly things, however, it doesn't last for long. After four hours on the high setting, the battery pack becomes depleted. Because it takes a full eight hours to recharge, I have to layer up with more clothes to get through the day.

Unlike my vest, Jesus's love for me has no time limit. It endures forever. His grace is always radiating out from where He resides in my heart, spreading warmth and joy if I just stop long enough to close my eyes, focus on the sensation, and bask in the glow. No matter how much I call on Him, He never becomes depleted. Jesus constantly envelops me in the warmth of His love. —CLAIRE MCGARRY

FAITH STEP: *Put on a heated vest, get under an electric blanket, or put something on straight from the warm dryer. Close your eyes and feel Jesus's love radiate through you.*

SATURDAY, JANUARY 3

*Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me?
Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him,
my Savior and my God. Psalm 43:5 (NIV)*

WHEN I LISTED MY GOALS for the year, one was for healing of a skin condition called pityriasis rosea. But instead of writing the words out, I abbreviated my goal to “healed of pity.” At first glance, I laughed at my silly sentence. On second thought, I’d created a perfect goal: to become free of feeling sorry for myself. And I know just the One who can empower me to do that: Jesus.

Jesus has many ways to heal a sickness, a situation, or a person. He also has unlimited grace for me to overcome the pity that threatens to steal my joy when things don’t change as quickly or in the way I want.

When a sickness lingers, instead of questioning my worthiness to receive healing, I’d like to trust Jesus’s perfect timing. When my plans fall through, I want to believe that Jesus will create better ones for me. When someone else is chosen to do the job I thought I deserved, I hope to rejoice with them and be content. My goal is to believe Jesus is at work to bring all sorts of good into my life, especially when I don’t feel well.

Instead of getting a fresh sheet of paper to write my goals on, I left “healed of pity” just as it was. I think it’s a worthy goal. Not only for this year but also for life. —JEANETTE LEVELLIE

FAITH STEP: *As you write out goals, make two columns. List those that only Jesus can resolve and ones you can work to achieve with Him.*

SUNDAY, JANUARY 4

If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin. 1 John 1:6–7 (NIV)

I LIVE IN A TWO-STORY TOWNHOUSE, so it's a little short on sunlight on the ground floor. The builders compensated by installing many light fixtures, especially in the kitchen and connected foyer, for which there are seven light switches (I kid you not). As a matter of thrift and preference, I don't always keep all the lights blazing, which has some ramifications.

My downstairs floor is a variegated, sand-colored, textured ceramic that does an amazing job of concealing dirt. One fluorescent light is too bright for my everyday taste and reveals absolutely every smidgen of dirt. If that light isn't on—and especially if I'm not wearing my glasses—my floor looks perfectly clean. But if I really want a spotless floor, I must put on my glasses and turn on all the lights to see clearly.

God, Himself, is light. Just as my brilliant kitchen lights reveal the hidden dirt, in His light, I can see clearly how very much I need the purifying light of the world, Jesus. When I see my sin, I can gratefully repent and return to Jesus, who cleanses me from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9). In Jesus's equalizing light, I can walk in right fellowship with God and others—and on a clean floor no less! —ISABELLA CAMPOLATTARO

FAITH STEP: *Pray for Jesus to illuminate any areas of unconfessed sin in your life. Then walk into your most brightly lit room and thank Him.*

MONDAY, JANUARY 5

He will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart. Psalm 91:4 (NIV)

YOU NEVER KNOW HOW YOU'LL react in a crisis, but recently I found out. As my husband drove us to a homeschool conference in North Dakota, twelve hours into our eighteen-hour journey we hit black ice. The trailer we were pulling fishtailed violently and rolled into the ditch, threatening to pull over our truck with it.

“Hold on, everyone, we’re going to roll!” he called out. Abruptly awakened from the passenger seat, I automatically shouted, “Jesus!”

Seconds later, the truck’s wheels miraculously gripped the road, and the trailer astonishingly flipped back onto its wheels and jumped back onto the roadway.

I breathed a sigh of relief, glad that Jesus’s attentiveness and mercy are not contingent upon the length or eloquence of my prayers but, instead, on His steadfast love and kindness.

You never know how you’ll react in a crisis, but thankfully my first response was to cry out in prayer. I might have been sleeping, but Jesus wasn’t. —TRICIA GOYER

FAITH STEP: *Make an auto emergency kit. Include a flashlight, blanket, bottled water, and first-aid supplies. Include a piece of paper with Psalm 91:4 or a favorite verse written on it to calm you if you ever need to cry out to Jesus on the road.*

TUESDAY, JANUARY 6

He who was seated on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." Also he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true." Revelation 21:5 (ESV)

EVERY YEAR, I SELECT A word to focus on, but this year I selected a phrase: all things new. We had lost our home and everything we owned to a wildfire that swept through our community. For almost three years, we worked through the insurance process to receive our payment to replace our contents and rebuild. It was a tedious and exhausting process where we had to create an extensive spreadsheet listing every item in our home that we could remember. My mind constantly focused on what we had lost.

Finally, we reached an agreement with our insurance company. I no longer had to add items to a seemingly endless inventory. This was a significant switch in my thought life. I could now put behind me trying to remember all we had lost and dream about our future.

As I was praying about my word for the year, I came across Jesus's promise to make all things new. Everything we will put in our home will be new to us. We will find a new couch, plates, linens, measuring cups, books, and more. This phrase seemed appropriate for me. Not just because of the new home and items that will fill it but because of the unique opportunity I have to allow Jesus to do new things in my life. The hopeful anticipation of newness was a needed shift in my daily outlook. Forgetting what was lost, I focused on the new things Jesus is doing. —JEANNIE BLACKMER

FAITH STEP: *Write in your journal about something new Jesus is doing in your life.*

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 7

Saul's son Jonathan went to David at Horesh and helped him find strength in God. 1 Samuel 23:16 (NIV)

EVERY WEDNESDAY MORNING, A DOZEN friends and I meet on Zoom to discuss the Bible study we're doing. Afterward, the leader assigns partners with whom we share prayer requests and encourage in little ways until we meet again the following week.

I consider these women, whose age differences span thirty years, my sisters in faith. Our love for Jesus bonds us. Our Zoom room provides a safe place to be transparent without fear of being judged. We share our wins and losses, assured the others will celebrate our joys and feel our sorrows. Most of all, we commit to encouraging one another's relationship with Jesus so we can best flourish through thick and thin.

My sisters in faith demonstrated their commitment when a loved one's death left me feeling devastated. They listened with empathy as I processed my pain and then, one after another, spoke words of comfort before asking Jesus to hold me close to His heart.

They helped me find spiritual strength as I invested time and energy into the life of a local friend caught in a heartbreaking situation. They saw my emotional fatigue and asked Jesus to fill me with wisdom and discernment.

Jonathan did much the same for David. He knew David was scared for his life, so he went out of his way to find him in the wilderness. Then he spoke truth into David's life to help him regain a right perspective. By doing so, he helped David find strength in God.

That's what good friends do, right? —GRACE FOX

FAITH STEP: *Who, in Christ, is a sister in faith to you? Reach out and encourage her by Zoom or FaceTime today.*

THURSDAY, JANUARY 8

When pride comes, then comes disgrace, but with humility comes wisdom. Proverbs 11:2 (NIV)

WHO SAYS MULTITASKING IS A myth? I had it all figured out. Baking six dozen cookies to take to a church reception was time-consuming, but I could do other things while the cookies were in the oven. I read my devotions and ironed my jacket. I emptied the dishwasher and put a load of clothes in to wash. I answered some emails and wrote a get-well note to a friend. No matter where I was in the house, when I heard the timer go off, I'd remove the cookies and put in another sheet.

Feeling proud of my intricate timing, I decided to hop in the shower, wash my hair, towel-dry, and remove the last batch of cookies. Ten minutes. I had it down! Stepping out of the shower, I heard the timer blaring. *Perfect*, I congratulated myself. But the timer sounded odd somehow. I hustled into the kitchen, and I realized why. It was the smoke alarm!

The kitchen was filled with smoke, and my cookies were black. Something was horribly wrong with my oven. I jerked the smoking cookies out, thinking I'd need to call the repairman immediately. But then I noticed that right next to the button for bake was the button for broil. *Uh-oh. Wrong button, Pat.* In my desire to prove to myself I could do it all, I'd messed up. *Jesus, you're the only One who can do it all—that's no myth.* I had a dozen burned cookies to prove it. —PAT BUTLER DYSON

FAITH STEP: *Recall a time when your pride brought you down. Journal about it and put the page in your Bible next to Proverbs 11:2.*

FRIDAY, JANUARY 9

*I praise the word of God; I trust in God, I do not fear.
What can mere flesh do to me? Psalm 56:5 (NABRE)*

GROWING UP IN THE NORTHEASTERN part of the country, I had always loved winter. Sledding, hot cocoa, blanket snuggles, and chunky sweaters. A snow-covered town warmed my heart. However, after a diagnosis of moderate arthritis, winter was losing its charm. I quickly joined the ranks of those who could predict the weather by their joint pain. Amid a bitterly cold and icy winter, my bones and joints ached more than usual. I spent more time idly indoors, yearning for the coming of spring to ease my pain—warmer days, the vibrant colors of rebirth, happily chirping birds. My heart longed to run from the metaphorical abbey and spin in the open meadow like Fräulein Maria in *The Sound of Music*. If only my arthritic knees and seasonal allergies would cooperate.

Like Maria, I find consolation in Jesus and in song. Psalm 56 (my favorite) was both my lament and my praise to Him throughout the achy cold of winter. Unexpectedly resting with Jesus allowed Him to ease me into an unanticipated busy spring and summertime for my family. Jesus rejuvenated me. Despite my aches and pains, He sweetly prepared me with rest for the active seasons ahead. For Jesus pairs our sufferings and our joys to perfection, and He makes everything good in His time (Ecclesiastes 3:1). Spinning in the open meadow of His love, I will forever sing His praise! —GLORIA JOYCE

FAITH STEP: *Close your eyes and think of your favorite season. Imagine Jesus joining you in that beautiful place doing your favorite activity.*

SATURDAY, JANUARY 10

“Come now, let us settle the matter,” says the LORD. “Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool.” Isaiah 1:18 (NIV)

THIS MORNING, I VENTURED OUT on our porch to see how much snow had fallen overnight. The once-bare tree branches were coated in sparkling frost. Every house was covered with a bright white layer of snow. Icicles hung off eaves. It looked magical.

My seven-year-old neighbor was perfecting snow angels in his front yard. “Do you want to come make some snow angels over here too?” I called. With a shout of laughter, he bounded across the street. Looking at the fluffy snow, I said, “I may need to make one with you.” This made him laugh harder. We flopped down and began moving our arms and legs back and forth. He created a perfect snow angel and popped up to observe my attempt. “Your arms are too high.” My snow angel looked like an overachiever with arms flung high above her head. We both laughed. Even with a funky snow angel, there was something beautiful and bright and joyful about the day.

It is amazing to know that when Jesus forgave me, He saw my heart as white as the pristine snow on my lawn. The dark blotches of sin and shame were wiped away with His willing sacrifice. When Jesus died, He made it possible for me to live a beautiful, bright, and joyful life. —SUSANNA FOTH AUGHTMON

FAITH STEP: *On white paper, write in pencil the sins that are burdening your heart. Ask Jesus to forgive you, then erase each one. Thank Jesus for making your sins as white as snow.*

SUNDAY, JANUARY 11

*Let us keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, on whom our faith depends
from beginning to end. Hebrews 12:2 (GNT)*

THE LAST TIME I PLAYED charades at my daughter's house, my four-year-old granddaughter stole the show. Each time Leo took a turn, which was frequently, her family knew what was coming. She would make the hand signal for movie, drop down on all fours, and start to look ferocious. One or more family members would shout, "*Lion King!*" and Leo would respond with an excited yes. A couple of times, Leo seemed about to imitate another animal, but when someone yelled "*Lion King,*" she decided that was the correct answer. Even when someone guessed the answer before she made any movement, Leo couldn't resist saying yes. We all laughed and clapped as we enjoyed seeing Leo's excitement about one of her favorite movies.

That night as I went to bed, a thought played through my mind. It's not a bad idea to be fixated on a *Lion King*, not the Disney animated one but the One in the Bible. Jesus is called the Lion of Judah (Revelation 5:5) and King of kings (1 Timothy 6:15). What precious reminders that I always have a fierce Protector ready to battle for me, Someone who has power over anything that can touch my life. Having my thoughts fixed on Him is guaranteed to help me feel safe, secure, and loved.

The best part of having Jesus as my *Lion King*? There's never any charade involved, and He is always the right answer.
—DIANNE NEAL MATTHEWS

FAITH STEP: *Jot down reasons why you love thinking about Jesus as your Lion King. Turn this activity into a prayer of praise and adoration.*

MONDAY, JANUARY 12

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves. Philippians 2:3 (NIV)

MY SON, MASON, AUDITIONED FOR his high school's play, *Les Misérables*. He was elated when he landed a lead role. My daughter, Jocelyn, auditioned for her middle school's play, *Frozen*. She was heart-broken when she just got ensemble.

After Jocelyn's day of disappointment, she picked herself up, brushed herself off, committed to her part, and got excited for her brother. Hearing her brag to all her friends about his lead role and saying how proud she was of him filled me with joy.

I'm not one to verbalize my jealousy, but I sure do feel it. When wearing an old dress to a wedding, I resent the beautiful women in their fashionable clothes. As I drive by homes in my town that I know have amazing backyards with impeccable landscaping surrounding their built-in pools, envy washes over me.

Jesus never once expressed any desire for what others had. If anyone deserved better, it was Him. As King of kings, He had a right to live in a palace, draped in jewels, reigning over a kingdom that could have catered to His every whim. Yet He humbly valued others above Himself—even to Calvary (Ephesians 5:2).

Rather than listening to that voice of jealousy in my heart when others have what I want, I need to listen to the voice of Jesus speaking words of truth. When I think I deserve better, Jesus gives me the visual of my daughter valuing her brother above herself. How could I wish for anything more? —CLAIRE MCGARRY

FAITH STEP: *Memorize Philippians 2:3 and recite it any time jealousy arises in your heart.*

TUESDAY, JANUARY 13

A kind answer soothes angry feelings, but harsh words stir them up. Proverbs 15:1 (CEV)

I'VE NEVER BEEN ONE TO jump out of bed at the first sound of the alarm. I need a slow start to my day. A morning that begins with an invitation rather than a command. This is why I used a snooze button and set my alarm for thirty minutes before I needed to wake up. The strategy was effective but not the most pleasant way to begin the day. Who wants to be jolted awake by a cacophony of alarms blaring into their ears every nine minutes? Not me—and certainly not my husband.

I finally found a better solution when I began experimenting with the alarm feature on my smartwatch. It doesn't use sound to wake me up but rather a subtle vibration on my wrist. The soft, gentle movement feels more like the wake-up taps of a loving grandmother than the harsh screams of a drill sergeant, and any negative or angry feelings I have about waking up have disappeared. My body responds, "I *get* to wake up now," rather than, "I *have* to wake up." Plus, I still get to snooze!

This shift in my morning ritual reminded me of how important it is to communicate with kindness rather than force. Jesus modeled this strategy often, speaking the truth in a firm but always gentle manner. This strategy draws me to Him even now, and it makes me want to communicate as He does—firm but kind. Even in alarming situations. —EMILY E. RYAN

FAITH STEP: *Set an alarm for your busiest time of the day. When it chimes, let it remind you to be gentle and kind like Jesus.*

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 14

All your robes are fragrant with myrrh and aloes and cassia; from palaces adorned with ivory the music of the strings makes you glad. Psalm 45:8 (NIV)

I SAT MOTIONLESS, STARING AT my son's silent guitar. The rich rosewood instrument seemed lost on its stand in the corner. I knew exactly how it felt. The pain of losing my son, Steven, in a car crash was more than I could bear. Tears dripped down my cheeks, knowing I would never hear him play again.

Steven had mastered almost every instrument, but the guitar was his passion. I remembered the last time our family was gathered. He played, while we belted out "Cheeseburger in Paradise." Even though the memory should have brought me happiness, the guitar only emphasized what I had lost.

Removing the instrument from its stand, I hugged it against my chest. I put it in its case and placed it in a closet. I figured if I couldn't see his guitar, I wouldn't be reminded of what would never be again.

Days later, I found myself humming one of the songs Steven had written. Then I thought about how the psalmist told us to make music to praise the LORD (Psalm 33:2). Isn't that exactly what Steven had done with his God-given musical talent?

I realized Steven's guitar was an instrument to show God glory. It didn't give me pain, nor could it take away my pain—only God could do that. I removed the guitar from the closet and strummed the strings. And for the first time in a long time when thinking about Steven, I smiled. —JEANNIE HUGHES

FAITH STEP: *Write down ways Jesus has taken away your suffering and replaced your sadness with the comfort of His love.*

THURSDAY, JANUARY 15

“Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet not one of them is forgotten by God. Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Don’t be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.” Luke 12:6–7 (NIV)

STANDING AT THE WINDOW OF our cozy cottage, I stared out at the wintry scene. With temperatures well below freezing and the wind blowing amid an ice storm, no cars drove past, no delivery vans parked nearby. I saw zero activity, aside from the numerous birds gathered around our maple where the feeders hung empty. They looked hungry. And I worried—had my husband, David, and I stored enough provisions for ourselves to make it through until the weather cleared?

Getting seed out to the birds seemed daunting. A blanket of snow hid a thick layer of ice covering the walkways and road. The front and back stairs were too treacherous to consider. Then David mentioned the basement steps. Protected from the weather, they’d be the safest exit. We could help our feathered friends after all. As he made his way to the feeders, the birds scattered, then returned to feast on the nourishment they sorely needed.

I watched, giving thanks that we could take part in Jesus’s safe-keeping of this tiny part of His creation. As my husband stamped snow from his shoes in the mudroom, a sigh escaped my lips. I didn’t need to spend my time fretting. Jesus’s Word, emblazoned in my heart, reminded me I would not go hungry. To Him, I am worth many sparrows. A priceless promise, indeed. —HEIDI GAUL

FAITH STEP: *Do you know any sparrows, feathered or otherwise, in need? Set aside some time to fill your bird feeders, donate to a food pantry, or provide a meal for someone. Feed everyone with kindness as Jesus did.*

FRIDAY, JANUARY 16

As for me, I look to the LORD for help. I wait confidently for God to save me, and my God will certainly hear me. Micah 7:7 (NLT)

MY SISTER, NAN, AND I decided to install cameras in the assisted living apartment of our ninety-year-old mother who has Alzheimer's disease. We were concerned about Mom falling and wanted to monitor her movements and the staff's care of her more closely. Mom often gets up in the middle of the night to walk aimlessly around the apartment for hours in the dark. Soon after we got the cameras, I saw Mom get up late one night and became worried that she was not safely in bed getting the rest that she needed. But then Jesus reminded me just to ask Him to leave my mother in His hands to watch over her. So I did, trusting Him to take good care of her.

Mom already knows she can trust Jesus. When she's alone and feels confused or needs assistance with a task, I frequently hear her say on camera, "Help me, Lord." And she randomly offers a "Thank you, Lord" for seemingly no particular reason throughout the day or night. I love to see and hear her do that. My mother was the one who taught me that Jesus tells us to call on Him at any time and always to give thanks. Even though Mom's memory may not be as sharp as it used to be, she remembers to call on Jesus and be grateful. I am inspired to follow her example. —BARBRANDA LUMPKINS WALLS

FAITH STEP: *What do you need Jesus to help you with today? Just say, "Help me, Jesus" and remember to tell Him, "Thank you, Lord!" when He comes through for you.*

SATURDAY, JANUARY 17

You have become weak, so make yourselves strong again.
Hebrews 12:12 (NCV)

AS A FITNESS INSTRUCTOR, I'M always seeking new exercises for my students. Their physical challenges include back issues, heart problems, and joint replacements, so I'm constantly looking for beneficial, safe, but challenging exercises to help improve well-being and physical fitness.

Meanwhile, I'm torn between knowing I should exercise but preferring to sit and read my Bible instead during the cold winter months. Unless I'm teaching an indoor fitness program or aqua fitness at the pool, the only exercise I get is an occasional two-mile walk after church with a friend. Like most people, I'm too sedentary during the winter months. So, by the time all the winter holidays have passed, I'm ready to start moving again. Thankfully, my students are, too, and they make sure I know that they're ready to get going again ASAP. So, there's no avoiding it.

I want to be a better steward of my God-given body. Blessedly, Jesus provided a way to motivate me to get out and exercise by having me lead additional fitness classes at the community center. That way, I *have* to show up. And by creating an inspiring workout playlist composed of motivating, uplifting faith-based songs, I feel as though I'm flexing my spiritual muscles too. Plus, there's the added bonus of being able to share an encouraging message through music at the same time as we move our bodies. If I want to serve Jesus and the family of God, I need to be strong in body, mind, and spirit. —CASSANDRA TIERSMA

FAITH STEP: *If you need inspiration or motivation to exercise your physical body, play some uplifting Christian music and move, praising the Lord Jesus for your God-given body.*

SUNDAY, JANUARY 18

*Direct your children onto the right path, and when they are older,
they will not leave it. Proverbs 22:6 (NLT)*

FOR THE UMPTEENTH TIME, WE told our then-teenaged son AJ it was time to clean his bathroom. For the umpteenth time, he sighed and sing-songed, “Okaaaay.” Eventually, it got done. Whenever my husband, the original Mr. Clean, supervised the operation, it got done very well. If he didn’t, telltale signs of grime always remained. On one of those cleaning days, I noticed my hubby was watching television downstairs while I heard water running upstairs, the strong smell of bleach permeating the air. To my surprise, AJ was cleaning his bathroom—without supervision. “Dear, did you tell him to clean? Or did he do it on his own?” Andrew paused his program and answered, “Nope, he did it himself.” We both exchanged a smirk and a raised eyebrow.

This started a pattern. AJ knew when to clean and didn’t need prodding anymore. When it came to praying and reading the Bible, the same pattern emerged. At first, Andrew commanded the kids to come downstairs for Bible study. They dragged themselves to the dining room table, phones in hand (only to look up scriptures, of course), slumped into chairs, and mostly listened. Before long, when our study leader asked someone to open in prayer or read a scripture, they volunteered. Andrew and I exchanged another smirk, a raised eyebrow, and a smile. When we stuck to the process Jesus set in place for training our children in these ways, it *did* bear fruit. Now it is up to them as young adults to choose to stay on the path. —PAMELA TOUSSAINT HOWARD

FAITH STEP: *Thank Jesus that He is patient when He directs you again and again. Extend that patience to others.*

MARTIN LUTHER KING JR. DAY, MONDAY, JANUARY 19

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.”
Matthew 5:9 (NIV)

AMONG THE LONG LIST OF Martin Luther King Jr.’s accomplishments is his advocacy for the passing of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Both acts changed the course of US history forever. The only thing that eclipsed *what* MLK Jr. did is *how* he did it: peacefully. Despite being arrested twenty-nine times on charges ranging from civil disobedience to traffic violations—considered by many to be trumped-up charges—he never resorted to violence to defend himself. His constant message was this: “Hate cannot drive out hate, only love can do that.” In fact, his stance of nonviolence won him the Nobel Peace Prize in 1964, making him the youngest recipient of his time, at the age of thirty-five.

As a minister, activist, and one of the most famous modern-day pacifists, Martin Luther King Jr. followed Jesus, the best example of all time. Jesus knew that physical confrontation and condemnation made others defensive and combative. Instead, He used love and tenderness.

Even when Christ was arrested on His own trumped-up charges, He never once fought back or uttered a word in His own defense (Isaiah 53:7), even when whipped and beaten.

To celebrate the legacy of Martin Luther King Jr., may we model his Christlike peacefulness and be an example of love in all situations. —CLAIRE MCGARRY

FAITH STEP: *If you’re inclined to respond to someone with condemnation, try peace instead. Take note of the outcome.*

TUESDAY, JANUARY 20

God has given both his promise and his oath. These two things are unchangeable because it is impossible for God to lie. Therefore, we who have fled to him for refuge can have great confidence as we hold to the hope that lies before us. This hope is a strong and trustworthy anchor for our souls. It leads us through the curtain into God's inner sanctuary. Hebrews 6:18–19 (NLT)

MY HUSBAND AND I HAVE a dream to cruise the Great Loop, a 6,000-mile yacht adventure through the eastern part of the United States.

When the time comes, we'll launch from Lake Michigan and make our way to the Mississippi River, then south to the Gulf of Mexico. We'll cross the Gulf to Florida, then navigate around it and back north up the Atlantic coast. Finally, we'll head west through the United States or Canada and back to the Great Lakes, where we'll complete the trip when we "cross our wake" where we began.

Along the way, we'll often anchor overnight to avoid higher dock fees. If done skillfully, anchoring can be safe and more economical. To anchor well, we'll need to master discerning whether the anchor takes hold deep on the seabed.

A lot of faith is involved in considering the Great Loop adventure. For now, we're anchoring our hopes in Jesus's provision and care for this dream we trust will happen someday.

The dream is already teaching me to anchor myself with Jesus and discern if my hold is truly on Him even when I can't see.

—ERIN KEELEY MARSHALL

FAITH STEP: *When it comes to a concern in your life, consider if you're anchoring yourself solidly on Jesus. Choose to believe He can keep you secure even when you can't see.*

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 21

“If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and then the Romans will come and take away both our temple and our nation.”

John 11:48 (NIV)

WE RECENTLY CELEBRATED A FAMILY anniversary—the day a match was found for a kidney transplant for my nephew. While he and his wife raced to the transplant hospital almost four hours away, the life-giving kidney donated by a grieving family began its almost 1,500-mile flight from the donor’s hospital.

Any number of things could have delayed either the road trip or the flight. All had to happen precisely for the kidney to be viable when it reached the operating room. After waiting years for a rare match, how heartbreaking it would have been if it had been delayed too long!

We often wonder about Jesus’s delay in responding to save Lazarus from death. In fact, His friend had been dead four days before Jesus reached him and called Lazarus out of his tomb (John 11:1–44). Verse 15 indicates Jesus let His disciples know He was glad for the delay, so they would finally believe.

But there’s more to the story, as there always is with Jesus. Raising Lazarus was the inciting incident that pushed Jesus toward the cross. Those who witnessed the scene raced the two miles back to Jerusalem to report what had happened, what Jesus had done. The leaders were livid, fearful. “So from that day on they plotted to take his life” (John 11:53, NIV).

Christ’s gift for Lazarus directly led to His ultimate sacrifice. We could say Jesus was the donor who gave us life. What response can we have but gratitude? —CYNTHIA RUCHTI

FAITH STEP: *Take a moment to thank Jesus for counting the cost and sacrificing His all for you.*

THURSDAY, JANUARY 22

*By wisdom a house is built, and through understanding it is established.
Proverbs 24:3 (NIV)*

“SO MUCH HARD-EARNED, GOD-HONORING WISDOM,” a friend messaged me after I was a guest on her podcast. I was the episode’s expert as a therapist and someone with personal experience on a difficult parenting subject I rarely discussed in open forums. My expertise was professional and personal. Yet I felt vulnerable sharing personal struggles when I didn’t know how they would be received. But the phrase in the text, “hard-earned wisdom,” made me pause. Others rarely validated my most painful life experiences because few people were privy to them. The story I shared in the interview was one of the most challenging I had walked through. Had wisdom grown from that heartache? As a counselor, I knew it was important to share what I had learned so someone else would not feel alone as I had. As a parent, I worried about what others would think of me.

As I sat in silence that evening, I felt Jesus impress upon me that my pain had a purpose. Wisdom and encouragement evolved from the trial. As difficult as it was, my experience was a gift to be shared with others that could not be curated elsewhere. I felt gratitude as I accepted the gift of my friend’s words that God never wastes difficult times. Being vulnerable and sharing problems are difficult, but hard-earned, God-honoring wisdom is Jesus’s gift for life’s sorrows. Wisdom from life’s problems—a hard-earned treasure.

—BRENDA L. YODER

FAITH STEP: *Take a quiet moment to list the lessons you have learned from your difficult seasons, thanking Jesus for the wisdom you’ve gained. Be willing to share the gift of hard-earned, God-honoring wisdom when someone needs it.*

FRIDAY, JANUARY 23

Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing. 1 Thessalonians 5:11 (NIV)

HALFWAY THROUGH MY WORKDAY, I was feeling pretty weary. Not even a strong afternoon coffee provided the kind of pick-me-up I needed at that moment. Suddenly, a text flashed across my phone screen. *Cara!* “Prayed for you this morning.” Five words strung together and accented with a heart emoji at the end. My spirit soared and a smile came across my face as I thought of this faithful friend I’d gotten to know so well over the last couple of months. My weariness melted away. How could Cara have known this was exactly the encouragement I needed at this moment?

People need encouragement. We need one another. It’s easy for me to get distracted cycling through my daily to-do lists, laser focused on what I need to accomplish instead of being tuned in to who or what the Holy Spirit brings to mind. By encouraging others, I’m intentionally letting that person know I care and that they hold value and worth in my eyes. It probably didn’t take Cara much time to type and send that text, but the benefit from it made all the difference for me. Her simple words pointed me back to Jesus because she had prayed for me. That text replaced my weariness with encouragement.

So how did Cara know just what I needed and when to give it? She didn’t, of course, but Jesus did. Jesus is the ultimate pick-me-up. —KRISTEN WEST

FAITH STEP: *Ask God to show you someone who needs prayer and an encouraging text, then press send.*

SATURDAY, JANUARY 24

*I will praise you, Lord my God, with all my heart; I will glorify
your name forever. Psalm 86:12 (NIV)*

DURING DINNER WITH SEVERAL FRIENDS from college, one of my classmates shared that his wife calls him “Mr. Wonderful.” We all laughed and teased him about that. But later I thought that moniker was a great way for my classmate’s spouse to affirm and express her love and appreciation for him and who he is to her.

In Psalm 86, King David does the same thing as my friend’s wife. He gives honor and glory to the Lord for His wonderful works and for who He is. David says in verse 10 (NIV), “For you are great and do marvelous deeds; you alone are God.” I, too, must praise Jesus for all He does for me. From waking me up each morning and protecting me as I go here and there throughout the day to providing everything I need and then some, Jesus deserves my constant thanks and gratitude. I know I often take so many things He does for granted, but I pray that the Lord will remind me that He isn’t obligated to take care of me because I’m so wonderful. He does it because of His unfailing love, not just for me but for all His people. That’s more than enough for Jesus to be my Mr. Wonderful, now and forever. —BARBRANDA LUMPKINS WALLS

FAITH STEP: *What wonderful things has Jesus done for you today? Write them down and praise Him for His loving-kindness.*

SUNDAY, JANUARY 25

For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments.

1 John 5:3 (NKJV)

I PICKED UP MY COFFEE at the drive-through. As soon as the steaming cup contacted my palm, I knew my order was wrong. Again. A cup of half coffee and half cream should not be so hot—or so complicated. It's only two ingredients. The barista had steamed the cream, even though I'd asked her not to. I could drive away with my scalding drink, but it was late, I was two hours from home, and I needed a caffeine pick-me-up now, not after it cooled. With an apology, I asked the barista to remake my order. She explained so much cream would make my coffee cold and asked if I wanted an iced coffee. I smiled and sighed. “No. Just half coffee, half cream, please.”

I get it. My drink is too simple. If I had ordered a venti iced skinny hazelnut macchiato with sugar-free syrup and an extra shot, light ice, and no whip, the drink would align with the intricate orders the barista was accustomed to.

How can something as simple as two ingredients be so complicated? I bet Jesus wonders the same thing—not about my coffee but about my walk with Him. Following Jesus requires two basic ingredients: to love and obey. But sometimes I add more and whip up a concoction I call “Good Christian Girl.”

Study the Bible daily. Pray long prayers. Never miss church. Serve more. Don't watch that movie. Don't sin. All are good, but turning Jesus's simple order into a complicated checklist changes the flavor.

Love. Obey. That order is easier to swallow. —KAREN SARGENT

FAITH STEP: *Make a coffee date with a friend and share what Jesus has been teaching you lately.*

MONDAY, JANUARY 26

Timely advice is lovely, like golden apples in a silver basket. To one who listens, valid criticism is like a gold earring or other gold jewelry.

Proverbs 25:11–12 (NLT)

WITHIN A FEW WEEKS OF one another, three people gave me the same feedback: “You don’t need to go into details and explain yourself.” I was hurt because I listened to every single detail they shared whenever they talked to me. Yet they were quick to interrupt or hurry me along, signaling they got the gist of what I was saying. I’m sure they meant well by their comments, but I didn’t agree with what they said.

It’s not that I can’t take feedback. I’ve received tough critiques before. Early in my career, one of my managers challenged my superfluous writing that produced multiple-page documents. She urged me to whittle down my text to one-page executive summaries. She clearly saw how much I loved words. That love earned me a playful nickname, “Wordy McWordy.” Even though my writing style worked well in previous jobs, I embraced my manager’s feedback and adjusted my style accordingly.

Feedback from other people may or may not be helpful, but the one person whose feedback is always true and edifying is Jesus. Whether I encounter rebuke or gain a new perspective from His Word, I hope to graciously accept His feedback and make whatever changes He says are needed in my life. Perhaps I could call myself “His Word McWordy” as a reminder. —ERICKA LOYNES

FAITH STEP: *Do you have a tough time hearing feedback from others or Jesus? Reflect on how you can embrace critiques to be your best self.*

TUESDAY, JANUARY 27

I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you with my loving eye on you. Psalm 32:8 (NIV)

MY DAUGHTER AND I OFTEN laugh about the Minecraft incident. Several years ago, my eight-year-old grandson decided to teach me to play his favorite video game during my upcoming visit. I thought that was sweet—but talk about pressure. Roman kept telling his mom beforehand that he just knew Nana would be a great player. After a brief session, however, he proclaimed me the world's worst Minecraft player. (I had chopped some leaves off a tree with my sword but didn't find any gold or weapons.) A couple of days later, Roman decided that his faulty teaching had been the problem, and he tried again. This time he instructed me simply to have my avatar follow his, but I couldn't even do that. And so ended his dream of transforming Nana into a worthy Minecraft opponent.

I'm thankful that Roman still loves me even though I'm pathetic at playing video games. I'm even more grateful that Jesus loves me even when I'm not as teachable as I could be. Jesus is transforming me to live a life worthy of my calling as His follower. He wants me to think, speak, and behave in a way that honors God, to bear fruit for His kingdom, and to grow in knowledge and understanding (Colossians 1:10). Some days I'm a poor student. But Jesus continues to instruct me and never gives up. —DIANNE NEAL MATTHEWS

FAITH STEP: *Have you ever felt as if you're not living up to Jesus's expectations? Don't play that game! Trust His unconditional love and His promise to lead and teach you day by day.*

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 28

You thrill me, LORD, with all you have done for me! I sing for joy because of what you have done. Psalm 92:4 (NLT)

I LOVE RODEOS. I GREW up going to them, and every year we go to one in Denver. The wildness of the whole event thrills me. This year, I sat by a boy and his sister. His parents, juggling a baby, sat in front of them. When the lights went out and fifty women on horses, with saddles lit up, carrying flags galloped in and around the arena to loud music, he looked at me with his eyes wide open. Obviously, this was his first rodeo. Throughout the competition, his jaw would drop, and he would turn his face to me, shocked and delighted. I wish I had a picture of his face when the bull riding event started.

The day before the rodeo, I heard a podcast about the wildness of Jesus. His existence on earth didn't seem predictable and safe. He performed unbelievable miracles. Imagine Him, rubbing mud on the eyes of a blind man. When the man washed off the mud, he could see (John 9:6–7). I'd love to have a photo of that moment too. He must have been overjoyed about Jesus, the Son of God, who healed him.

The combination of the podcast and the wild rodeo that stunned and delighted the boy beside me challenged me to boldly share my faith with others. I truly do want to see the thrill on loved ones' faces when they realize what Jesus has done for them.

—JEANNIE BLACKMER

FAITH STEP: *Who could you talk to about Jesus? Take a risk, and start the conversation today.*

THURSDAY, JANUARY 29

When Jesus returned, a crowd welcomed him, for they were all expecting him. Luke 8:40 (NIV)

OUR DAUGHTER ESTHER RECENTLY BOUGHT her first new home as a single mom. Rather, an old home. Super old. When the realtor showed the darling two-story Cape Cod to Esther, she said, “It’s in good shape. It just needs some TLC.” Of course, the realtor didn’t mention that her definition of the word *some* was more than most people’s.

The first time the heat went out in Esther’s house, snow and ice were gusting southward from Lake Erie into our Illinois prairie. Schools were closed. Supermarket shelves boasted no milk, bread, or batteries. And White’s Cooling & Heating repairmen had to work overtime.

“Can we stay with you guys for a day or two until our heater gets fixed?” Esther texted.

I knew she asked only out of politeness. Esther knows our home is always open to her and the grandkids.

“Of course you can!” I replied. I pulled a second pound of hamburger from the freezer for tacos, put sheets on the extra beds, and set the table with our special occasion goblets in each person’s favorite color.

Similar to how our home is always open to our daughter, Jesus is always available to me. He’s free to talk and listen 24/7 (Matthew 28:20). He shares divine wisdom through His Word (Psalm 119:105). He strengthens me through His Holy Spirit (Ephesians 3:16). And every time I ask for His help, I hear His sweet voice, “Of course I’ll help you. You’re family.” —JEANETTE LEVELLIE

FAITH STEP: *Think of all the ways Jesus is available to you. In a prayer of commitment, make yourself available to Him.*

FRIDAY, JANUARY 30

When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." John 8:12 (NIV)

I STRUGGLE WITH DEPRESSION AND anxiety. Someone once said this is like having Tigger and Eeyore living inside the same body, which is pretty accurate. This morning I woke up before it was daylight in the fetal position. As I tried to go back to sleep, my heart slammed against my chest and echoed in my ears. It seemed like ants were crawling through my veins. I wanted to jump out of my skin (anxiety), but inertia and exhaustion held me to the bed (depression). It's a hard place to rest. The worst of both worlds.

It was into this world of human misery that Jesus came. As God, He didn't have to take on flesh, but He did. Jesus willingly stepped inside our skin and walked around, experiencing the inner life we know with all its emotional complexity, as well as the tangible, physical limits of being human. Jesus became one of us to rescue us from these bodies of death (John 11:25–26).

As the sun started to peek over the horizon this morning, the light reminded me of Him, staring into the darkness, the howling void of our fallen world, and not turning away. With Jesus as my Light, it's an easy place to rest. The Light of life. The best of both worlds. Even Eeyore would agree. —GWEN FORD FAULKENBERRY

FAITH STEP: *Make a Pinterest board or a magazine/photo collage called "Light." Fill it with images that remind you of ways Jesus, our Light, overcomes the darkness.*

SATURDAY, JANUARY 31

Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world. James 1:27 (NIV)

“HOW WAS YOUR CHICKEN, NANNIE?” I asked.

“That ole raw chicken was so burned you couldn’t eat it,” she mumbled, face scrunched in a scowl.

I chuckled. Only Nannie could use *raw* and *burned* in the same description.

Nannie lived in the nursing home where I worked as activity director throughout college. At eighty-nine, her body was spry, and her mind was sharp. Her spirit, however, seemed angry and troubled. The widow made negative comments about everything and everybody, pushing back potential friendships with other residents. Perhaps she had offended her family also. Her son lived five miles away but never visited once during my years there.

Even though Nannie scared me at first, my job description was to relate positively to all residents. I pushed my fear aside and reached out. Soon Nannie was helping me set up for activities. She fed the aquarium fish on my days off. She got up early, dressed, and waited for my arrival. We eventually became friends, and I took her negativity with a grain of salt.

Jesus looked after the widows while on earth. He defended them against the teachers of the law (Mark 12:40). He uplifted a widow for her generosity (Mark 12:42–43). He showed compassion by raising a widow’s son back to life (Luke 7:12–15).

I’m glad I got to be like Jesus with Nannie. Our friendship blessed and enriched both of our lives. —BECKY ALEXANDER

FAITH STEP: *Look for an opportunity to be like Jesus as you reach out to a widow at work, at church, or in your family.*