



# Lighthouse

FAMILY RETREAT

## 30-Day Devotional

HOLD FAST HOPE

# Introduction: Hold Fast Hope

WRITTEN BY MARK PAUL, DEVELOPMENT

“Let us hold firmly to the hope that we have confessed, because we can trust God to do what He promised.”

**HEBREWS 10:23 (NCV)**

“Hold firmly to hope.” This is our joy as followers of Jesus and is the heartbeat of all we do at Lighthouse Family Retreat. We have “Hold Fast Hope” splashed on everything from our website to t-shirts. It’s who we are as believers and as members of the Lighthouse Family. We are people of hope. Hope in who God is and His faithfulness to the promises He has made.

This resource is a 30-day journey through the promises of who God is. His character and characteristics are the basis for our hope. Every day we have the opportunity to trust in those promises. Every day, those promises are new. Every day, He reminds us He is who He says He is.

Over these next weeks, you will explore four different aspects of who God is:  
**GOD IS IN CONTROL | GOD IS WITH US | GOD IS FOR US | GOD IS AT WORK**

Four truths. Four pillars of who God is. His activity in the world and our lives are built upon these four realities. They are the source of real hope.

*Our* hope is that *your* hope will be renewed. We would love nothing more than for your faith to be strengthened through daily scripture illumination and prayer time with God. We pray He will make Himself known to you in new and familiar ways as you sit down to spend time with Him every day.

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. Which of the four aspects of who God is do you have the most difficulty believing sometimes? Why do you think that is?
2. What things can you do to commit to going on this journey of hope for the next 30 days?

## PRAYER

God, I thank You that You love me. I thank You that You are good. Remind me that You are in control, especially when life seems out of control. Remind me that You are with me when I feel alone. Remind me You are for me, that You love me and have a plan for my life. Help me to see where You are at work in my life and in the world. Allow me to be a part of that work where I can.

**AMEN**

# Week 1: God is in Control

WEEK 1 | DAY 1

## The One Who Started It All

WRITTEN BY CHRIS WOODRUFF, EXECUTIVE & ADMIN

“For in Him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.”

**COLOSSIANS 1:16-17 (NIV)**

I grew up going to church twice a year – Christmas and Easter. I didn’t really have an understanding of who God was and why, or how, I even existed. I would often gaze into the sky at night and wonder – How am I here? How do I fit into this huge universe and planet? Little me. Could I be part of something bigger? Is there more to the life I am living?

Have you ever wondered these things? It wasn’t until my senior year of college that I learned who God is and began my journey of understanding who I am, and how I fit into His story.

It is in this scripture that we begin to see that it is so much bigger than us. We are part of a bigger story. Not only are we part, but we play a part. You, me, our kids, our siblings, our parents, our friends – we were all created within His story and with a purpose. He binds us all together, being created by Him and for Him. So, now we must dive deeper into this story and our part to learn and understand our individual unique role to play. He has created us and gifted us each uniquely. We must seek Him out to learn how He best wants to use us. Each day we can wake up knowing we are part of something so much bigger than us, so much bigger than the tasks at hand. We are created through Him and for Him to be a part of the eternal Jesus story!

### QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. What are three strengths you are uniquely gifted with? List out an example of how you have used each in your life.
2. What is one thing you can do today to live out your purpose and strengths?

### PRAYER

Father, You are the giver of every good and perfect gift. Thank You for creating me with a unique purpose in Your story. Use me today, Father. Give me Your eyes to see where I can leverage my gifts and my strengths in your name... for You and Your glory.

**AMEN**

# A God Who Doesn't Waste Pain

WRITTEN BY TODD CRAIG, RETREAT OPERATIONS

“And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose.”

**ROMANS 8:28 (NIV)**

January 1990 was one of the most difficult months of my life. On top of trying to navigate the typical complexities of middle school life, within a week I found out my parents were separating, and my dad was going into the hospital for a procedure to try to alleviate symptoms from an undiagnosed disease. The stability I had taken for granted in my life was crumbling underneath my feet. I was confused, hurting and, if I was honest with myself, scared.

Life doesn't always go the way we hope. Sometimes this is simply due to the fragility of life and sometimes it is the consequence of foolish decisions made by other people. Other times, it is the consequence of foolish decisions we have made. Regardless of why we are confronted with the challenges and disappointments in life, we can be left feeling hurt, scared, disillusioned, and hopeless.

The truth is, this is not life as God intended. In Genesis, we see creation as God intended. There is no hurt, pain, fear, sickness, or death. Each of these entered God's creation as a consequence of the sins of humanity. Adam and Eve's sin didn't just affect them, but all of creation. This is why life often doesn't seem as it should. The good news is God is a God of redemption! The Bible is full of stories of God taking that which was broken and redeeming it for His purposes. The pinnacle of God's redemptive work was in the defeat of death itself through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

When we are confronted with hurt, pain, confusion, and evil, we can place our confidence and hope in a God who, from the beginning, has desired that we would experience life abundantly. A God who has not only promised to redeem the hurt and pain we experience but has demonstrated His faithfulness to this promise.

I don't believe my dad's illness was part of God's original intention for His creation. Nor do I believe the broken promises that led to my parents' separation were what God desired for our family. But, in looking back, I can see how God redeemed my dad's health challenges to play a part in the reconciliation of my mom and dad. And He redeemed the brokenness in my family to draw us closer to Him as we rebuilt trust with one another.

The pain of that season was and is still very real, but I am thankful to serve a God who redeems even our pain for His good purposes.

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. When have you seen God redeem difficulties, hurt, or pain in your life for His good purposes?
2. In what difficult circumstances, hurt, or pain are you still seeking God's redemptive work?

## PRAYER

Heavenly Father, thank You that You desire good things for me. Thank You that You are always working in all things for my good. And, when I can't yet see your redemptive work in particular challenges and circumstances, give me the strength to continue to walk through them with the hope and confidence that You are working in ways I may not yet recognize.

**AMEN**

# A God Who Does What He Pleases

WRITTEN BY MIKE TAMBORELLO, RETREAT OPERATIONS

“You are only human, and human beings have no right to question God. An object should not ask the person who made it, “Why did you make me like this?” The potter can make anything he wants to make. He can use the same clay to make one thing for special use and another thing for daily use.”

**ROMANS 9: 20-21 (NCV)**

“Why did you make me like this?” From the time we are toddlers all the way through adulthood, we have the natural inclination to question authority. And if you happen to live in the United States as I do, we share in a long tradition of not only questioning authority, but expecting to be endowed with certain rights. No questions asked. Don’t tread on me! So as you read these verses in Romans, if there is anything in you that gets a little defensive, you are not alone.

The truth is, as much as we are wired to question, there is ultimately one authority figure who has the right to override any of our expectations of a life filled with liberty and the pursuit of happiness. That’s because, as counterculture as it seems, we serve a God who can pretty much do whatever he pleases.

This can be a pretty humbling statement to accept, even if you are someone who would say that you are a fully devout believer. I do believe that God created me, and that He created me for a reason.

When I was in college, I was convinced that reason was to become a successful actor and singer. To be specific, it was supposed to be me who played Hugh Jackman’s character in “The Greatest Showman”. The only problem is that by the time I got to high school I had become a baritone. And I was only 5’ 9” (and I still am at forty-something). I had the heart of a leading man in the body of an average guy.

Whatever shape that God has formed you into, it was done with a purpose. There are things that you just cannot change – the family you were born into, the physical circumstances of your body, etc. But you can change your perspective and embrace the idea that there is something that you were made to do that no one else can. It is not about what you are *not* able to do, but what you were specifically created *to* do.

Remember you are only human. This should comfort us because it reminds me that I am not expected to have all the answers, and yet there is a God who does. And He created me knowing exactly what I was made for. When you are able to understand that from a truly human perspective, it can be the difference between living a life of regret and living a life that is just plain full.

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. What is something about you, your life or your circumstances that you wish God had done differently and why?
2. How can you accept and make peace with how God has shaped you and your life to this point?

## PRAYER

God, thank You for making me with a unique purpose. Help me to accept the things that I cannot change, and to move forward on the path that You have for my life. I pray for Your patience as I ask questions, and that You would continue to shape my heart to be in alignment with the things that please You.

**AMEN**

WEEK 1 | DAY 4

# Illusion of Control

WRITTEN BY ADAM TOMBERLIN, DEVELOPMENT

“You will keep in perfect peace those whose minds are steadfast, because they trust in You. Trust in the Lord forever, for the Lord God is an everlasting rock.”

**ISAIAH 26:3 (NIV)**

We all want to be in control of situations in our lives because it makes us feel like we are powerful. It may even make us feel that we can affect outcomes or influence how others view us. This desire can touch every part of our lives.

A need to be in control that goes unchecked can easily become a sin of pride and arrogance. We begin to no longer trust those around us and, more importantly, we begin to trust God less and less.

We rely more on ourselves and our own abilities rather than our Heavenly Father. A belief that we know what is best for our lives begins to settle on our minds and hearts. It is so simple for that thought to lead us into doubting that God is good or that He wants what is best for us.

We begin to wonder why we are struggling with stress, anxiety, or desperately searching for peace and rest. The answer is found in Isaiah. If we are willing to let go of the illusion of control and trust God with more and more of our life and our plans, there is a peace that is found on the other side of that trust. There is a peace that comes from focusing on God and laying everything before Him.

God is inviting us to experience this stillness and comfort by not solely relying on ourselves and what we are capable of.

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. What in your life are you withholding from God?
2. What are some practical ways you could begin to let go of control and trust God more?

## PRAYER

Heavenly Father, thank You that I am not in control. Thank You that You are good in all things. Thank You that You have a deep and endless love for me as your creation. Help my distrust and break any lies the enemy wants me to believe about my own identity. Give me strength to rest in You and Your truths about me.

**AMEN**

# A God Who Turns Evil to Good

WRITTEN BY MICHELE LAROTONDA, PARTNER & LEADER DEVELOPMENT

“But Joseph said to them, ‘Don’t be afraid. Am I in the place of God? You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. So then, don’t be afraid. I will provide for you and your children.’ And he reassured them and spoke kindly to them.”

**GENESIS 50:19-21 (NIV)**

I went through a season of life where it felt like I was encountering hardship at every turn. I think most of us can say we’ve been through painful seasons where we’ve been wronged or where people we trusted in our lives have done things to betray or hurt us. In the midst of those seasons, it can be really difficult for me to keep my eyes on God and trust that He can make good things out of my pain.

If you look at Joseph’s life, it looks like one disappointment and betrayal after another. Joseph had every reason to throw up his hands and hold onto anger and resentment towards his brothers and even God. Instead, when his brothers come to him years after selling him into slavery because of their own jealousy, Joseph opens his arms to his brothers. I don’t know about you but if the person who harmed me came back needing my help, I’m not sure my initial response would be to provide for them.

However, Joseph does more than just provide, he encourages and speaks kindly to them. For me, I had to pause here and soak up this verse. Why was Joseph able to provide for, encourage, and be kind to the people who hurt him? I believe it is because Joseph trusted God. He trusted all those years that God was not done with his story. He trusted that God is who He says is.

If I look back now on the job I did not get, the hurtful way a relationship ended, the unkind things my friends said, or the grief of losing someone I love, I now can see how God protected me and never left me.

Don’t get me wrong. I am not saying I’ve walked away from every circumstance in my life and said, “This was worth it.” There are still pieces that are remarkably painful, and I would write the story differently if I could. However, I can say God has shown me His goodness in the midst of pain. He’s used my pain to offer hope and comfort to others. He’s provided purpose in my pain.

The place of continued growth, for me, is to keep my eyes on God in the middle of the story and remember His faithfulness.

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. Take a moment to write down a few times you experienced betrayal, hurt, or disappointment. Can you see how God redeemed what you thought could not be redeemed?
2. Is there a situation in your life (past or present) that you need to turn over to God and trust that He will reclaim even this chapter of your story?

## PRAYER

Heavenly Father, thank You for the story of Joseph. Thank You for using His story to remind me that you are always working. God teach me to keep my eyes on You and trust that You are a God of redemption and goodness. God root out of me the parts that want to hold onto bitterness. Teach me to have a heart like Joseph and speak with kindness and encouragement. In Your holy and precious name I pray.

**AMEN**

WEEK 1 | DAY 6

# A God Above All

WRITTEN BY CHRIS WOODRUFF, EXECUTIVE & ADMIN

“Yours, Lord, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the majesty and the splendor, for everything in heaven and earth is Yours. Yours, Lord, is the kingdom; You are exalted as head over all. Wealth and honor come from You; You are the ruler of all things. In Your hands are strength and power to exalt and give strength to all.”

**1 CHRONICLES 29:11-12 (NIV)**

“Not mine, but Yours, Lord.” This is not an easy concept for me. Selfishness was a core character trait of mine growing up. Rarely did I do things for others. Sure, my parents tried to instill the idea of helping others, but without a reinforcing message from the Bible to provide context and understanding of why, it just didn’t stick. I remember being in high school and starting to have things that I bought and paid for with money I earned from working hard. (Or at least, I thought I was working hard.) I was not quick to share or allow others to use my things. But little did I know, as much as I wanted to believe those things were mine, I didn’t truly own them.

We are simply stewards - managers - of all He has entrusted to us. Our home, our cars, our toys, our friends... all of our things belong to God. As a dad, I am entrusted with my kids. Everything we have is from Him. This is an attitude of the heart. In this world, it is easy to lose sight of this. This way of thinking can be countercultural. We have all heard of a successful businessperson being *self-made*. Well, I beg to differ. Wealth and honor come from our God. The opportunities we get and the doors that open in our favor all come from Him. Today, we must choose an attitude of gratitude for all God has entrusted to us with to use for His glory.

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. How can you use the “things” (your home, your car, your toys, etc.) God has entrusted you with to glorify Him?
2. How does a renewed attitude of gratitude and perspective as a manager versus an owner change how you will make decisions today?

## PRAYER

Father, everything in the heavens and earth are Yours. I want to be the best steward I can of all You entrusted to me. Give me opportunities today to leverage all I have for You, Your people, and Your glory.

**AMEN**

WEEK 1 | DAY 7

# A God of Purpose

WRITTEN BY TODD CRAIG, RETREAT OPERATIONS

“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,’ declares the Lord. ‘As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth; It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.”

**ISAIAH 55:8-11 (NIV)**

I attended a high school that required students to attend chapel every Wednesday. Once a month the school chaplain would lead us through a reading of Isaiah 55. I was wrestling with all kinds of challenging and confusing questions as I experienced and learned more about the world around me. I was trying to determine my place in the world. I was being confronted by loss and injustice in new ways. I was awakened to the painful reality that life wasn't as simple as I once thought it was. And, more importantly I was awakened to the truth that as I searched for answers in the world around me, they were hard to come by.

But, the words of the prophet Isaiah provided me two pillars of comfort and encouragement. First, these words reminded me that our God is greater than my understanding. It's ok that I couldn't always make sense of the world. It's ok that I often found myself asking “Why?,” “Why not?,” and “Why me?” And, I shouldn't be surprised when the answers from the world around me didn't satisfy - of course they didn't. The peace I was searching for could only be found when I placed my trust in a God who is bigger, who could see a larger picture than I could, whose thoughts were not confused and broken.

Second, these words provided a reminder that I have a God who desires my flourishing and is faithful and able to accomplish what He desires. As I wrestled with my identity, my place in the world and trying to make sense of chaos around me, I could confidently place my hope and trust in a faithful and good God when I couldn't place it confidently in my circumstances or even my own understanding. There is hope in knowing God could take the brokenness of the world around me and in my own spirit and bring new life.

As an adult, I continue to wrestle with many of the same questions I had as a young adult. In truth, I have only added to my experience of pain, loss, and sickness as I have gotten older. But, I have also witnessed how God can redeem those difficult experiences in ways I couldn't have imagined. And so, I continue to find comfort in knowing we have a God who understands our questions and struggles, who desires our flourishing and who is trustworthy and able to make that happen...even when I don't understand.

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. In what ways do you find comfort and confidence in knowing God's thoughts and ways are higher than your own?
2. Where have you seen God's faithfulness in your life? Where are you still searching for it?

## PRAYER

Heavenly Father, thank You for Your faithfulness to Your promises. I confess I don't always understand why I and those around me face so many trials, and so much pain, grief, and loss. But, Lord, I trust You and believe You desire that we would flourish. Grant me peace in the midst of my confusion. Grant me the strength to journey through this season holding on to Your promises.

**AMEN**

# Week 2: God is With Us

WEEK 2 | DAY 1

## Jesus' Other Name

WRITTEN BY MARK PAUL, DEVELOPMENT

“All this happened to bring about what the Lord had said through the prophet: ‘The virgin will be pregnant. She will have a son, and they will name him Immanuel,’ which means ‘God is with us.’ When Joseph woke up, he did what the Lord’s angel had told him to do. Joseph took Mary as his wife.”

**MATTHEW 1:22-24 (NCV)**

“What’s in a name?” Romeo asked in Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*. The truth is, especially in biblical times, there’s a lot in a name. In the Old Testament, people were given names that reflected how they looked (Esau = hairy!), what they did (Jacob = deceiver. Literally “he grasps at the heel.” He tried to take his twin brother’s first-born status before they even left the womb), or what circumstances they had faced (Naomi changed her name to Mara, which means bitter, after she lost her husband and both sons).

It’s fascinating then, to note what name the Lord gave the prophet Isaiah when he was describing the future Messiah that God would send to deliver His people (Isaiah 7:14). This name wasn’t meant to be His given name as much as it was a clear message about the purpose behind His work. He was sending the Messiah to take on human flesh for one reason – so God could be with His people, teach His people, and give His life for them.

Matthew references Isaiah’s imagery when he recounts the scene where an angel appears to Joseph to tell him his wife was going to give birth to this Messiah. Of course, his given birth name was Yeshua - Jesus - which means “God Saves.” It’s the same name as Joshua in the Old Testament. A fairly common name for a savior who entered the world in the quiet dark of night, was placed in an animal feeding trough, and grew up as a common carpenter’s son. All of it in order to be close to His beloved creation and to humbly carry out a plan to rescue them and set them free.

God is still with you today. His saving work continues from the moment you place your faith in Him up to this present day and beyond. His purpose in coming to this earth was to be with us. He continues to live inside us in the person of the Holy Spirit. Whatever you’re going through, however you feel in this moment, God is near. He still desires to be close to you. He wants to set you free from worry, anxiety, and fear. Let Him draw near to you and save you from any unhealthy thoughts, desires, or actions.

Rejoice! The God of the universe is with you.

### QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. Look up the meaning of your name if you don’t already know it. How does your name reflect who you really are? What name would you give yourself based on where you are right now?
2. In light of what God has done for you personally, what name or names would you give Him?

### PRAYER

God, thank You that You are always with me and always have been with me. Thank You that I’ve never been alone, even when I feel lonely. Help me to rest in the truth that You are always close, that You want to be close to me. Help me have faith that You’re near even when you seem silent or far away.

**AMEN**

# God Chooses You

WRITTEN BY MARIE MARTINIDES, PARTNER & LEADER DEVELOPMENT

“But you, Israel, my servant, Jacob, who I have chosen, you descendants of Abraham my friend, I took you from the ends of the earth, from its farthest corners I called you. I said, ‘You are my servant’; I have chosen you and have not rejected you. So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.”

**ISAIAH 41:8-10 (NIV)**

Rejection is never a good feeling. It doesn't matter what you look like, what you do for a living, if you are male or female, rich or poor, or have all the confidence in the world, it hurts. I know I'm not alone in thinking this because hundreds of musicians sing about rejection every day (just think "Achy Breaky Heart" by Billy Ray Cyrus for one example). The pain and suffering that comes from rejection is widely understood by all human beings.

The good news is that God's children don't have to settle for rejection. The opposite of rejection is to be chosen, picked, selected. In the book of Isaiah, we are told that God chooses us! This choice made by Him is not based on anything we do or have to offer. He doesn't need us, yet He *chooses* us.

The people of Israel, for example, were the least likely candidates to be chosen by God. At the time, they were rebelling, worshipping their own idols, and constantly testing the patience of God. However, God always keeps His promises! These were His chosen people and He was not going to let their actions take away from His promise.

For me personally, I find so much comfort knowing that regardless of my actions, circumstances, or physical appearance, God chooses me over and over again. There is nothing we can do to separate us from His love or His presence.

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. Think of a time that you experienced rejection. What feelings and emotions did it stir up?
2. Are there any fears that are holding you back from your day to day life? What's preventing you from giving them to God and resting in His righteous right hand?

## PRAYER

Dear God, thank You for choosing me. I know that I mess up and will never be perfect, but it gives me so much comfort knowing that You are always with me and that I do not need to fear. Whenever I am down or feeling scared, I know that I can rest in Your hands. You've got me and with You by my side, I am strong. Please help me to remember that I am chosen by You.

**AMEN**

WEEK 2 | DAY 3

# God Leads Us

WRITTEN BY MICHELE LAROTONDA, PARTNER & LEADER DEVELOPMENT

“The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing. He makes me lie down in green pastures, He leads me beside quiet waters, He refreshes my soul. He guides me along the right paths for His name’s sake. Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely Your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.”

**PSALM 23:1-6 (NIV)**

In a darker season of my life, I was surrounded by my enemies. My enemies didn’t look like the physical armies of David’s time. My enemies were anxiety and fear, and at times, consuming grief. I found it hard to put one foot in front of the other because I was terrified the rug would be pulled out from underneath me, again.

Psalm 23:5 says, “He will prepare a meal for me in the presence of my enemies...”

This scripture woke me up because it didn’t put a bow on the grief I carried. Instead, the scripture reminded me that I will be led into the darkest valleys I could ever imagine, I’d be surrounded by my enemies, and God would provide anyway. More than that, God would revive me. I would be safe at his table.

This put breath back in my lungs because it didn’t placate me with promises of an easy, perfect, painless life. Instead, it alluded to the trials we will have here on earth. But it didn’t leave me hopeless in my pain; instead, it whispered that God will provide wherever He leads.

If we take a step back and read Psalm 23 as a whole, that’s exactly what David is praising God for in all six verses. As I realized God will truly provide wherever He leads me, my fears and anxieties became less consuming. I may not want Him to provide the meal in the presence of my enemies - I’d prefer to enjoy the meal in the green pastures and beside the still waters. He will provide for me there as well. But it is a reminder that I am never alone no matter the circumstances or where the table is set.

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. What are some ways you are seeing or have seen God prepare a table for you during hard seasons?
2. Often we think of enemies as physical people, sometimes our enemies are feelings or circumstances that steal our joy. What are some of the “enemies” in your life that you are fighting today?

## PRAYER

Heavenly Father, thank You that You are always leading me. Even when darkness surrounds me You never stop leading me. God help me to remember today that I am never alone. You guide my steps and today You will provide wherever You lead. Keep my eyes on You. Help me to see where you are providing. In your Holy and precious name,

**AMEN**

# God is There, Always!

WRITTEN BY JULIE FESEFELDT, RETREAT OPERATIONS

“Where can I go to get away from your Spirit? Where can I run from you? If I go up to the heavens, you are there. If I lie down in the grave, you are there. If I rise with the sun in the east and settle in the west beyond the sea, even there you would guide me. With your right hand you would hold me. I could say, ‘the darkness will hide me. Let the light around me turn into night.’ But even the darkness is not dark to you. The night is as light as the day; darkness and light are the same to you.”

**PSALM 139: 7-12 (NCV)**

I can't imagine how people make it through anything without faith and a loving Father to lean on and trust. Thankfully, we don't have to because God is always there no matter what. It is up to us to believe that and allow Him into our hearts.

Growing up, I was super close to my Grandmother. She was an amazing lady and one of the most faithful Christian women I have ever known. What a role model! I have always tried to follow her lead in my faith and everyday life. Her daily walk with the Lord and the way she cared for others was the perfect example of how we should all live and “Lighthouse.”

My parents both sang in the church choir. Every Sunday, my Grandmother and I sat in the very last row of the sanctuary in a pew that was only big enough for the two of us. It was such a special time to witness her worshiping and praising her Lord and Savior. When my Grandmother passed away, we were looking through her Bible. She had Psalm 139 not only highlighted but had written in the margins, “God is always with us no matter what the circumstance or where we are.”

Through this verse and my Grandmother's daily example, God has taught me that no matter what I am going through or what I am thinking, He already knows and is there. He is always watching over me, protecting me, strengthening me, and guiding me through every valley and over every mountaintop. When we live our life following and trusting Him, we are loved, protected, strengthened, and cared for by the most amazing Father. No matter what we face, He has gone before us, knows what we are facing, and carries us through.

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. What feelings do you experience knowing that no matter where we are or what we are doing, God is watching and is there with us?
2. Have you ever tried to escape from God? What happened?

## PRAYER

God, I believe that You are always here with me. Even when I can't see You or feel You or hear You, Your word promises me that You are near. Thank You for those people in our lives who help us trust You more by the example they give. May I be an example for others that need to know You are with them.

**AMEN**

# Never Alone Again

WRITTEN BY JOSHUA RANDOLPH, PARTNER & LEADER DEVELOPMENT

“Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.”

**JOSHUA 1:8-9 (NIV)**

Have you ever found yourself in a situation that seems above your ability to manage? A challenging role you didn't ask for and wouldn't have chosen? The responsibility to lead in a critical moment with others looking to you for answers that you don't have?

If you have children then you know there are situations that seem scary to them. When faced with these situations children don't want to know all the facts behind why they shouldn't be afraid. What children want most in these situations is your presence. When they know you are near, it gives them confidence.

These verses are a promise God gave to a man named Joshua. Joshua was an assistant to Moses. After Moses died, God asked Joshua to take on the leadership role that Moses left behind. This was a heavy and scary calling. Joshua was to finish the job Moses started, which was to get the people of Israel into the land God promised them. It would include leading others into life-threatening situations on a regular basis.

Notice what God tells Joshua at the end of the verse - "...for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go." It was a promise of presence. God knows we can be scared by the challenges life brings and the role He asks us to play. He knows we can be full of fear when life-threatening situations are thrown our way. So He reminds us of the reality behind all reality - **HE IS WITH US**. He won't leave us.

God reiterated the promise of His presence through Jesus. The resurrected Jesus was about to leave His people for a time. His followers were going to feel like they were alone, but Jesus assured them that this would be impossible. Jesus spoke this promise - "...and behold, I am with you always..." (Matthew 28:20)

They would never again be alone. God, through Jesus, would make a way to bring us into His forever family and promises to always be with us. This is good news for us today! Wherever you are, whatever the suffering and challenges, you are not alone. You can cling to this promise. He wants you to hold tight and give you the courage and strength for the role He's called you to lead in today.

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. What is the most challenging, painful, or scary role that God has asked you to lead in this season of your life? (Tell God in your own words).
2. How would it make you feel if you believed that God was with you and wanted to give you strength and courage to face these challenges?

## PRAYER

Dear God, thank You for seeing me. Thank You for knowing me. Thank you for your willingness to be with me on the journey. To give me strength and courage to face the challenges surrounding me. Help me to reach out and hold on tight to Your promise and remember Your presence today. Thank You for those You have surrounded me with who provide comfort and strength along the journey. They are a gift from You. A reminder of Your presence. Thank You for them. In Jesus' name.

**AMEN**

## WEEK 2 | DAY 6

# No Need to Fear

WRITTEN BY ANNE DAVIS, RETREAT OPERATIONS

“Out of my distress I called on the Lord; the Lord answered me and set me free. The Lord is on my side; I will not fear. What can man do to me?”

**PSALM 118:5-6 (ESV)**

Distress is defined as extreme anxiety, sorrow or pain. You're either hurting mentally, physically, or emotionally. We all experience different forms of distress – job insecurity, money problems, losing contact with loved ones, illness, death of a family member. Distress comes in all sizes but all of it matters to God.

Distress in life will come and we will all call out to someone or something for help. The Psalmist declares that in his time of distress he called upon God, and He answered him and set him free. He was helpless but he knew where to run. I often find myself running to my closet to call my mom, who is always the first to remind me to take it to God. Isn't it so comforting to know that when times of distress come our way, we can turn to God? God is our refuge and strength in the time of trouble. He's a God who answers, a God who is on our side, and a God who helps.

When you're going through times of distress, it may feel as if it will never end. But God is always there and knows exactly what is happening. He is never surprised by the things we go through. So often I look back at times in my life where I felt so much anxiety and pain. I realize, as much as I called out to God, He didn't always change my situation. But He did change my perspective. He didn't always give me exactly what I prayed for but, looking back, I see His promise is true: His way is always so much better.

This verse reminds us that God is on our side, and there is no reason to fear. Even when we are surrounded by impossible circumstances, isn't it comforting to proclaim that God is on our side? Fear can squash joy, cause sin, steal freedom, and destroy relationships. How reassuring to remember that our fear does not alter His faith. Whatever fear you may be facing today, take it to Jesus. He's able and willing to cast it out with His perfect love.

### QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. In thinking of a time you experienced distress – who did you turn to for help?
2. Looking back at a time in your life where you were going through a hard season, can you see now where God carried you and held your hand as you walked through?

### PRAYER

Heavenly Father, thank You for loving us and for setting us free, especially in times of distress. Thank You for never leaving our side. Please continue to remind me that fear can't exist in the light of your perfect love for me.

**AMEN**

# His Plan to be Near Us

WRITTEN BY MIKE TAMBORELLO, RETREAT OPERATIONS

“Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and He will dwell with them. They will be His people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. ‘He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.’”

**REVELATION 21:1-4 (NIV)**

“...and He will dwell with them.”

This passage in Revelation is one of my favorites. I think it’s mostly because it paints a picture of a much better world. No more death, mourning, or pain? Sign me up! And this vision that God has in store for our future creates all kinds of questions in my mind. What will this new earth look like? Will it still revolve around a sun, and will the moon still be around? Will we still have four seasons throughout the year, and will summer vacation still be a thing? Will we even measure time the same way we do now, if at all? Lots of questions. But these and many other specifics about this new earth are left out. What is not left out is the fact that we will not be alone, because God himself is going to be there.

And then that creates other kinds of questions. Because the word that is used is the word “dwell”, as in “reside.” His plan is to live in close proximity “among the people”, not in a giant castle on a hill that is completely removed from all of the “peasants.” That being the case, I ask myself questions like - what will God look like? Will I even be able to look at Him? Will I be able to ask Him questions? Any chance He will play a game of pick-up basketball with me and my friends?

It seems silly to think that the God of the universe would take the time to recognize my existence, much less desire to spend quality time with me, but it is not so far-fetched when you look at His track record. From the very beginning, God intended to be with us. It started in a garden that He planted for the very first people He created. And even after sin entered the world, He set in motion a plan that culminated in the death and resurrection of his Son. At the heart of this plan was His desire to make a way for us to no longer be separated from Him – a way for Him to dwell with us.

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. If given the chance to sit across a table from Him, what are some questions you would have for God?
2. What are some ways that you have recently witnessed God’s presence in your life? How did it feel?

## PRAYER

God, thank You that Your desire is to be with me and not to leave me on my own. I pray that You would reveal yourself in big and small ways each day, and that I would recognize Your presence. As I anticipate Your ultimate provision of a new reality that is devoid of pain and suffering, help me to cling to Your promises and live this life in a way that, even now, draws me and others closer to You.

**AMEN**

# Week 3: God is for Us

WEEK 3 | DAY 1

## Nothing Can Separate Us from His Love

WRITTEN BY CHRISTY RICHARDS, RETREAT OPERATIONS

“So what should we say about this? If God is for us, no one can defeat us. Can anything separate us from the love Christ has for us? Can troubles or problems or sufferings or hunger or nakedness or danger or violent death? As it is written in the Scriptures: ‘For you we are in danger of death all the time. People think we are worth no more than sheep to be killed.’ But in all these things we are completely victorious through God who showed His love for us. Yes, I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor ruling spirits, nothing now, nothing in the future, no powers, nothing above us, nothing below us, nor anything else in the whole world will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

**ROMANS 8:31, 35-39 (NCV)**

Current events can leave us overcome with the feeling that we are alone. Even those of us with strong faith can feel overwhelmed by the chaos and the trouble. Watching just one hour of news provides so many options of things to worry about and focus on. Loneliness can give way to helplessness and we can end up quickly being overwhelmed. Paul wrote Romans as a letter to communicate the undeniable, unshakable truth. The truth that God and God alone offers the power of salvation- that it cannot be found within today's world.

In a season of vulnerability and insecurity, these verses become my security blanket.

“If God is for us, no one can defeat us...” is the verse I hear most often and carries with it a certain amount of comfort and certainty. Don't lose or skip over what Paul says next. Paul takes the time to list each and every perceived threat to losing God's love- one by one. He calls out the things that bring people worry and all the pitfalls of the human world. Pointing out that faith in God means never having to be afraid of “death nor life... or anything else in the whole world.” God's love overrules any and every threat to our eternal security. Comforting, encouraging and final, this verse leaves no room for anything other than perfect love.

### QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. What would our lives look like if we started and ended every day with these passages? How would it affect our confidence? Our choices? Our anxiety levels?
2. How can we live as though the above verse is true?

### PRAYER

Father, we come to You today grateful for the love You have for us. Grateful that as much as we face today and in the future in this world, we don't have to worry that anything happening now can separate us from You in eternity. Please help me to live today with these truths. Help me to focus on Your eternal love and not current events.

**AMEN**

WEEK 3 | DAY 2

# Song of the Savior

WRITTEN BY MARK PAUL, DEVELOPMENT

“The Lord your God is with you; the mighty One will save you. He will rejoice over you. You will rest in His love; He will sing and be joyful about you.”

**ZEPHANIAH 3:17 (NCV)**

I sang songs to my children when they were younger. When they were babies, I made up a song to sing while they were laying on the changing table and I was putting on their pajamas. It only had one line and I stole the tune from another song. But every time I changed them into their pajamas, I sang it to them.

In later years, as they grew, I took to singing songs that were more recognizable, when the lyrics fit the situation just right. They giggled at my songs when they were little, but by the time they became teenagers they mostly rolled their eyes. But still I keep singing.

I sing because I delight in my children. I love them more than I can ever tell them, more deeply than I can put into words. My playful songs hopefully communicate something to them that mere talking never could: I adore them. I enjoy them. I love being with them. They make me break out in song!

In context, Zephaniah 3, like many prophetic messages, begins with a warning that God will bring discipline to His people for their unrighteousness – for their lack of obedience and trust. But in the midst of their sin – in spite of it – He promises to love them, to restore them and to be with them.

The same promise is true for us. We are broken, rebellious people. Too often we are found with a lack of obedience and trust. We may even feel like God has abandoned us, that maybe He was never even there.

The beautiful truth of Zephaniah 3:17 is that God is for you. He not only loves you unconditionally, He delights in you. He enjoys you. He loves being with you. And so, He sings. He sings over you. It must be the most beautiful sound in the heavens. One day, we'll hear His song.

But for now, know this is true – God finds joy in singing over you.

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. What do you do to show your loved ones you delight in them?
2. What has God done in your life that shows He loves you and delights in you?

## PRAYER

Father, thank You that You are for me. Thank You for loving me in spite of my disobedience and lack of trust. Forgive me for my sin and brokenness. I ask You to restore to me the joy of my salvation. Help me know and feel Your delight in me. Let my words and actions bring You joy. In moments of fear and distress, remind me that You are singing words of comfort over me.

**AMEN**

# The Depths of God's Love

WRITTEN BY JACKIE JONES, RETREAT OPERATIONS

“But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ - by grace you have been saved.”

**EPHESIANS 2:4-5 (ESV)**

We have a child who can make us lose our cool. I'm not talking about the slightly-raise-your-voice kind of lose your cool, but loud-yelling-and-threatening-to-remove-everything-out-of-his-room kind of lose your cool. We've even threatened to make him sleep on the floor for a year. There are always apologies along with hugs and kisses by the end. But while you are in the middle of the battle, it is hard.

We have three other children who follow all the rules, say “yes ma'am” and who rarely get in trouble. But this child breaks every rule, is consistently rude and “trouble” is his middle name. But we love all of our children so much - no one more than the other. Their actions do not dictate how much we love them.

I remember, like it was yesterday, sitting on my front porch talking to God about this boy who frustrates us to no end (but who we love so very much). That morning, as I was confessing my anger and feelings of guilt and shame, I felt in my spirit God saying, “Do you know how much I love you? This great love I have for you is not because you do or say the right thing. This unconditional, sacrificial, overwhelming love is because you are my child, not because of what you do.”

After that morning on the porch, I always have two important questions for our children as we tuck them in at night. I ask them, “Is there is anything you can do to make us not love you?” and, “Do you know that I am always for you?” It's vital my children know my love for them is unconditional.

I am also working hard to remember that this is how my Heavenly Father loves me, too!

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. Have there been seasons of life where you felt like you have to perform to earn Gods love or have done something to make God love you less?
2. What are some truths from scripture that I can remember when I doubt God's love?

## PRAYER

Father, thank You for being rich in mercy. I am so grateful for the sacrifice that Jesus made on my behalf. Help me to remember that there is not anything I can do to earn Your love. You are for me and Your grace is beyond what I can even understand.

**AMEN**

WEEK 3 | DAY 4

# Never-Ending Love

WRITTEN BY JENNIFER WARD, PARTNER & LEADER DEVELOPMENT

“The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; His mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.”

**LAMENTATIONS 3:22-23 (ESV)**

I made a connection a few years back that might seem really obvious to most, but I just hadn't thought about it before - when I'm struggling or wrestling with something, it always seems worse at nighttime. Of course, this connection was made most obvious with my young children having a total meltdown near bedtime. But it's not just a thing my kids deal with as they get tired. There is something about the day coming to a close, and getting physically tired, that can make the weight of life's burdens feel heavier.

It can feel overwhelming to consider not having the energy for the next day or whatever you face ahead.

As I study this verse, I wonder if maybe that's the point. I need a *daily* reminder of my need for God, His love, and mercy and kindness - every single day. God does not give us all the energy for all the days all at once, but He does provide and promise new kindness and love for all the days.

This verse is a beautiful reminder that when life feels the heaviest, and the darkness and uncertainty of the night seem so long you're not sure how you can get through it - we can remember the promise that God's loving-kindness never runs out. And the morning brings a new day with new light and new hope from Him. In a changing world, God's unchanging love is constant. We can count on it for the next day, the day after that... and all the days.

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. What is one way that God has shown His kindness to you today? (One good thing you are thankful for?)
2. What are the changes or uncertainties about tomorrow that you need “new mercies” for?

## PRAYER

Dear Heavenly Father, thank You that in a world that is constantly changing and full of challenges that You are constant and Your love and mercy never run out. Thank You for giving us new gifts every day and no matter how dark things seem that You give us hope for the next day. Father, I pray first thing when I wake up that You will help me see the new mercies You give every morning.

**AMEN**

# All in God's Timing

WRITTEN BY KATELYN PIKE, DEVELOPMENT

“Be humble under God’s powerful hand so He will lift you up when the right time comes. Give all your worries to Him, because He cares about you.”

**1 PETER 5:6-7 (NCV)**

I’m a planner and a scheduler... just ask my Husband and you’ll quickly learn that life revolves around us being on schedule. Getting off schedule is a cause of anxiety in my life. So, you can imagine the slight uncomfortable feeling I get when I realize that to give my worries to Him, I must also rely on His perfect timing – not mine!

God wants to guide us all to that place of humility, where we are God-dependent and not independent. Trusting Him to exalt us in His perfect timing. Unfortunately, we, including myself, are more often interested in our personal plans and wants. For me, that is because I find comfort in following through with the plans I have made. I get uncomfortable when I have to rely on someone else or when I have to give up full control of a situation. I tend to get impatient waiting and wondering, “What’s the delay, God? Why keep me in this circumstance instead of just giving me the good now?”

When life feels like it’s just going wrong and the good we are promised can’t be seen on the horizon, what can we do? For me, I take a moment to remind myself He *is* a good Father and then I lean into the second verse.

We must move from trusting in ourselves, to giving it all over and trusting in Him. And this can be really hard. But this verse can be a strong word of encouragement – “Give all your worries to Him, because he cares about you.” Wow. He calls for us to first be humble and then to lay everything at His feet, including fears and failures. He is here not only as a burden bearer, but as our Heavenly Father.

Deviating from my plan for life will always cause me great anxiety. But I take great comfort in knowing that God wants me to give *all* of that to Him – because He cares. For years I tried to fight God for control of my life and my interactions. I didn’t trust in Him fully. I thought my plans - or my attempted plans - were right. It wasn’t until I started to let that go that I truly began to see His perfect timing for my life. As I stepped into His control, I could see His plan fall into place. Was it what I thought I wanted? No. Was I more scared and anxious than I’ve ever been to release everything and give it all to him? Oh, yes! But life is beautiful when I can step back and look at His plan coming together for me and am I oh so thankful that my “plan” didn’t work out. He cares for us more than we can ever care for ourselves. It’s time to humble ourselves and allow Him to do His work in our lives – on His time. He will carry our worries for us along the way.

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. What is something in our life that you need to surrender control of and give to God?
2. What are the worries you feel right now? What can you do today to give those to God?

## PRAYER

God, thank You for this day and Your timing in my life. Though I may not always understand the plan, I know You have a plan for my life and it is good. Your timing for everything is part of Your perfect plan in my life and I thank You that You care so much for me that You have a plan for me. God, let me be humble under You and ease my inpatients on the days that I feel like I just cannot wait anymore. Show me on those days that You are near and that it is ok for me to give it all to you.

**AMEN**

# I Love You This Much

WRITTEN BY MIKE TAMBORELLO, RETREAT OPERATIONS

“The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love. He will not always accuse, nor will He harbor His anger forever; He does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is His love for those who fear Him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us.”

**PSALM 103: 8-12 (NIV)**

“For as high as the heavens are above the earth”

There is a pretty standard practice among parents that has been in place for a long time. I’m not sure who started it, and I don’t remember ever making a conscious decision to make it a habit of mine, but it seemed to just naturally occur with each of my three daughters when they were babies. And the practice went something like this - I would look at them and say, “How much does daddy love you?” And I would stretch out my arms as far apart from each other as I could, and then speaking in my best baby voice – think Kristof imitating Sven in the movie *Frozen* – I would say, “SOOOO Much!” It would get to the point where they would put their arms out whenever I repeated that question, and there would be a huge smile on their face. Mission accomplished. Expert parenting award goes to me.

Fast forward to 2020 and all three of my daughters are teenagers. And while my strategy may not be the same as it was when they were little, I still try to do everything I can to let them know how much I love them. It’s not as simple as it once was. But no matter what, I always want them to know that I LOVE them and I am FOR them. What’s crazy is that is exactly how God feels about us. But when He stretches out His arms to demonstrate the magnitude of His love for us, the scale becomes much more epic. As in higher than the sky.

I’m not a rocket scientist, but I feel confident in my amateur assessment that if you blasted off into space in an effort to measure the distance between the earth and the “heavens”, you’d be hard pressed to come up with an answer. That’s a lot of love - basically unending.

It’s the kind of love that is able to withstand any journey, no matter the twists and turns.

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. Describe a time that you have experienced unconditional love. How did that make you feel?
2. What are some reasons that you would have a hard time accepting unconditional love?

## PRAYER

God, thank You so much for loving me as I am. As I continue on the journey that You have for me, please remind me that Your love for me is not contingent on anything that I do or don’t do. Thank You for Your son Jesus, who demonstrated the lengths that You will go through to pursue me and who provided a way for me to become your child. I pray also that I would be able to demonstrate to others the same compassion and grace that You constantly pour out on me. In Jesus name I pray.

**AMEN**

# Stuck in the Mud

WRITTEN BY KALEN GARY, EXECUTIVE & ADMIN

"I was in trouble, so I called to the Lord. The Lord answered me and set me free. I will not be afraid, because the Lord is with me. People can't do anything to me."

**PSALM 118:5-6 (NCV)**

I love animal documentaries and internet videos. From just cats being cats to full National Geographic stories. I once saw a video of a baby elephant who got curious and explored a mud pit but got stuck. Once he realized he couldn't move, he trumpeted with his little trunk to alert his mother. She ran with others from the herd straight to him and risked her own life to get him out. (And if you're like me, cue the tears.)

There is something so beautiful and instinctual about calling out for help from someone you trust to be there. It happens from the second we are born. We are reliant on someone to care for us because we cannot provide for ourselves and we cry to alert them of our needs. God tells us over and over again that He is for us. He is our creator and He wants us to call out to him – pray to him - about anything. Whatever "mud pit" is making you feel stuck in your life, it is not too messy, gross, or embarrassing for God. He will meet you right in the thick of it and offer you freedom. True freedom is His to give to us.

And once you are truly set free, He wants you to BE free! He does not set you free just to live in fear of another mud pit. Mud can be people or circumstances. It can be family, illness, finances, bad relationships, jobs, injustice, mental health, or so much more. Life will always include mud but the freedom God offers is one without fear of the mud. Knowing that life won't be perfect, spotless, or "mudless" but that God will meet you in it allows you to experience that true freedom in God that comes without fear.

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. Have you ever felt stuck in a mud pit? What did you do?
2. How would your life change if you were to experience true freedom from God?

## PRAYER

Heavenly Father, we do not deserve for You to come running towards us when we cry out, yet You do. What a good, good Father You are. We know mud pits in life exist and that life is not always easy. Help us to trust You to meet us there in the mud. Help us to live a life without fear of the mud. Give us the strength to resist giving any power to fear and to give all of ourselves to You! Thank You for loving us where we are and as we are.

**AMEN**

# Week 4: God is at Work

WEEK 4 | DAY 1

## We Work for His Glory

WRITTEN BY CHRIS WOODRUFF, EXECUTIVE & ADMIN

“You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.”

**MATTHEW 5:14-16 (NIV)**

It's no coincidence we are *Lighthouse* Family Retreat. A Lighthouse is the perfect metaphor for who we are and what we do. A Lighthouse is a beacon to give light to dangerous waters and the ships that sail them – so they know when the shore is approaching. For some ships, so they know when *hope* is approaching. Not only are we that as an organization, but *you* are that to others as well. You are a light, a beacon of hope in the name of Jesus. God has you where you are today for a very specific reason – to be a light to shine in your circle, that they may see the good you do in the name of the Father and give Him glory. Your good work is for Him!

We have an environment on our retreats for the parents of the families living through childhood cancer we serve – it's called *Common Ground*. It happens in the morning for a couple of hours each day of the retreat. It's also known as the heartbeat of what we do – the community and encouragement that happens is priceless. Several years ago, an emergency came up and the couple leading for that week had to cancel last minute. After calling everyone we knew, we had no replacement with only a couple of days until the retreat.

The solution: my wife and I were the last resort to fill in. It was one of the most intimidating weeks of my life. In an environment called *Common Ground*, we did not have one of the most important things in common – we had not personally been through childhood cancer. And we were now leading! We felt unprepared, out of place, and like we had nothing to offer. Little did we know, these are the situations God wants more than anything – to be in a place where the only way we get through this is with Him.

We surrendered our fear and chose to be a light of hope and encouragement, to love these families where they were and be a listening ear and a voice to pray. It wasn't about a story we needed to share, it was about shining our light of love to others with the sole purpose of glorifying Him. It was just what God wanted. There is something you are fearful of – something you don't feel equipped to do – that you are not ready for and that's okay. Hear Him saying, “I Am.” He is ready for you to step out of your comfort zone and shine your light for His glory. Today, take the first step.

### QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. What is something where you have felt the prompting of God, but you have not taken a first step out of fear?
2. How can you shine your light today and serve others so that they may see Jesus in you?

### PRAYER

Father, You are my hope and my strength. I want to be a light to the world for You and Your name. Give me the strength and courage to step out of my comfort zone to serve and love without fear. Use me today,  
Lord.

**AMEN**

WEEK 4 | DAY 2

# God's Poem

WRITTEN BY MARK PAUL, DEVELOPMENT

“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith — and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God — not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”

**EPHESIANS 2:8-10 (NIV)**

*We are God's handiwork.* Doesn't that make you feel good? God didn't just create us and turn us loose. Our souls are constantly being molded and re-worked in His hands. And He knows exactly what He wants us to become. Some translations say we are God's workmanship, which implies a level of skill on the part of the crafter. Whether you prefer handiwork or workmanship, the original Greek word behind it all is *poeima*.

That's right. It's the same Greek word that gave us our English word, *poem*. We can re-read verse 10 like this: “For we are God’s poem...” How cool is that? You are God’s poem. Poems are meant to be beautiful. Poems evoke emotion. They are rhythmic and reflect the author’s heart. There isn’t anything ordinary about poetry. It is ornate and special by design. There are layers and depths of meaning in every verse.

All of these things can be true of a believer who allows God to shape their life. There is nothing ordinary about you as God’s handiwork. You are a reflection of your Father’s heart. You are special by design. Your life and purpose are beautiful and are meant to stir up emotion in others – to point them to the Poet.

When I was in elementary school, I wrote a poem about dolphins relaxing on the beach, sipping Hawaiian Punch. It was my first try at writing poetry and it ended up being published in some kind of local publication. I don't remember what it was, but I remember my parents being proud of me. I haven't written many poems since then. I guess you could call it beginner's luck. Not so with God. He has been writing poems since the beginning of time. You are His poem. He knows exactly what He wants to say to the world through your life.

God is making you into something. He is at work. He's taking the raw materials of you and creating something. He's writing a poem with your life.

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. Think about a time when you felt stuck, unable to grow, or get past some obstacle or flaw in your life. Why did you feel that way?
2. Reflecting back on that time, in what ways can you see how God was molding you in that season, preparing you for what was to come next?

## PRAYER

Father, thank You for saving me. I recognize it is only by grace through faith that I have been made right with You. Thank You that You don't stop at saving me, but that You continue to work in my life all of my days. Help me to be pliable in Your skillful hands. Allow my life to become a conduit for Your love, beauty, and design to be displayed to the world. Thank You for Your work in my life and in the world.

**AMEN**

# What Grandma Knew

WRITTEN BY KALEN GARY, EXECUTIVE & ADMIN

“Because Jesus was doing this on the Sabbath day, some evil people began to persecute Him. But Jesus said to them, ‘My Father never stops working, and so I keep working, too.’”

**JOHN 5:16-17 (NCV)**

My grandmother on my dad’s side is the hardest working person I know. She passed away several years ago and still holds that title. She only got up to 5<sup>th</sup> grade in school and had to quit to help her family. She was the youngest of her family and was given the job of driving log trucks at the age of 13. She was maybe 5’3” in height and 90lbs. She was just this tiny, young, little girl pulling well beyond a fair share of the weight in her family. She fought for survival her whole life. When I was little, I would spend weeks with her during the summers helping on her little farm. She would teach me to fish, sow crops, drive the tractor, harvest the crops, cook, preserve food for the winter, sell her produce at the market, give food freely to the neighbors who weren’t as fortunate as us, and take time to give thanks to God for all He does. If you can’t tell, I am proud to share DNA with her and call her Grandma.

When I was little, I could barely begin to understand why we would thank God for all He has done when I had watched her get up before sunrise, work tirelessly all day with little help (that would be me), and take care of everyone in her community. She worked extremely hard with no complaints every single day of her life. She had been through some absolutely terrible times in her life, yet she still thanked God as often as possible. Seeing her work so diligently and hearing her thank God constantly made such an impression on my young heart. How can someone who was my example of a hard worker thank someone else for working even harder?

Being older and having more life behind me now has helped me better understand why my grandma was so thankful to God for His work. It’s not sweat, waking up early, or the constant toiling. It is unconditional love that is unending! He is at work for us *before* we ask, thank, or acknowledge Him. He works *through* us and sometimes when we don’t realize it. He is at work *after* we mess up or give up. He is our Creator and we are His creation. There is no limit to how much He will work to show us how much He loves us. And is that not worth all the thanks we can give?

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. How does it feel to know that God is constantly at work for you?
2. When was the last time you took time to thank Him? Take some time right now.

## PRAYER

Creator, it is impossible to thank You enough for who You are and what You do for us. Please accept our humble thanks that You love us so much that You never stop working on our behalf. Help us to look to You more often and offer our gratitude for all that You do. Thank You for the example of Your son, Jesus and how He taught us that there are no days off when you are doing good work.

**AMEN**

# He Works When We Can't

WRITTEN BY CHRISTY RICHARDS, RETREAT OPERATIONS

“But He said to me, ‘My grace is enough for you. When you are weak, My power is made perfect in you.’ So I am very happy to brag about my weaknesses. Then Christ’s power can live in me. For this reason I am happy when I have weaknesses, insults, hard times, sufferings, and all kinds of troubles for Christ. Because when I am weak, then I am truly strong.”

**2 CORINTHIANS 12:9-10 (ECV)**

For a long time, this verse didn’t resonate with me at all. I have a long history of putting achievement and success – perfectionism, really – over everything else in life. The phrase “I am happy when I have weakness...” just didn’t connect with me. Somewhere in the early years of my faith, I had misunderstood a major message. I felt I needed achievement to somehow impress God – to show my worth to Him. My thought was that if I admit weakness it would take away that worth and take me *farther* away from God.

The word I was overlooking in the above passage was GRACE. While grace can be easily understood when focused on others, it can take a lifetime to accept it for yourself. Remember that God has enough grace for you and all your weakness. He has enough Grace for your insults, for your hard times, and for your sufferings. Remember that to live with grace is to live with the belief that those weaknesses bring you CLOSER to God. In fact, it’s almost a requirement as it says, “Then Christ’s power can live in me.”

Show weakness, gain strength.

Have troubles, become stronger.

Accept God’s grace, become closer to Him.

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. Have you ever tried to hide your weakness or your suffering from others? How about God?
2. How can you show grace to yourself today?

## PRAYER

Father, I am so grateful that You don’t expect perfection from us – that in fact, our weakness can bring us closer to You. Thank You for the Grace You so generously share with us each day. Father, we ask not only for the ability to show grace to others but to also take time to show it to ourselves. Thank You for being always present in our weakness and in our suffering.

**AMEN**

# We Don't Always Understand

WRITTEN BY JOSHUA RANDOLPH, PARTNER & LEADER DEVELOPMENT

“Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. So, when he heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was.”

**JOHN 11:5-6 (ESV)**

There are times in our lives when circumstances are so difficult and painful that we can begin to question if God’s love and care for us are still a reality. The unexpected loss of a job, broken relationships that seem beyond restoration, and physical illness that traps us and our loved ones in pain. These circumstances that leave us asking, “Why would God allow this? How can anything good come from this?”

These circumstances and feelings aren’t unique to us. Jesus had friends who were going through these kinds of circumstances and asking the same questions.

Lazarus and his two sisters, Mary and Martha, were loved by Jesus. They were his friends. He taught them the truth about God and encouraged them. But one day, word spread to Jesus as he was traveling with his disciples that Lazarus was very sick. In fact, Lazarus’ life was about to end unexpectedly. Jesus knew all of this, but he did the one thing that nobody expected him to do. Absolutely nothing.

At this news, we might have imagined Jesus taking action in a number of ways; healing him from afar, going to visit him in his time of need, or even sending a message to him that this is part of the plan. None of this happened. Instead, Jesus remained where he was for two more days while Lazarus’ health declined, and he eventually passed away.

“How could anything good come from this?” I’m sure Lazarus’ sisters, were asking this question. Although they didn’t understand it at the time, Jesus did have a plan. He always does. Jesus was being extremely strategic in waiting. He had a plan that was bigger and better than anyone could have dreamed.

Jesus also has a plan for your life, even your painful circumstances, that he wants to use for good in the end. The fact is, we can’t understand the truth of who God is by looking at our circumstances alone. Our view is limited. We can’t see much beyond ourselves and we certainly can’t see into the future. These limitations can lead us to a premature and faulty conclusion about God’s love and care for us. Your heavenly Father sees you. He knows you. He wants to unfold a beautiful plan and purpose in and through your life that starts with trusting Him. What seems to be a senseless and painful thread today may need to be set in place in order for a greater plan to unfold tomorrow.

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. Is there something good in your life today that is the result of something that seemed painful and confusing while you were in the middle of it?
2. Read the rest of John chapter 11. Why do you think Jesus waited before going to visit Lazarus?

## PRAYER

Heavenly Father, right now, there may be circumstances in my life that are painful and difficult to comprehend. I can’t imagine why You are allowing them and how any good can possibly come from them. Help me to be patient and not let these circumstances overshadow the truth of Your love and care for me and my family. Be near as I wait and comfort me until I see Your beautiful plan unfold. Thank You that nothing, not even these present circumstances, can separate me from Your love in Christ Jesus.

**AMEN**

# The Next Step

WRITTEN BY JENNIFER WARD, PARTNER & LEADER DEVELOPMENT

“Blessed be the Lord, who daily bears us up; God is our salvation.”

**PSALM 68:19 (ESV)**

Last year I started getting into trail running for the first time. I have always loved anything outdoors, and especially getting out in the woods and hiking or backpacking. Trail running made me feel alive like road running never did, and I was hooked. There was a steep learning curve for me going from the road where I didn't really have to think about where my feet needed to land on the pavement, to trail running where there were rocks and tree roots to watch out for at every step.

After a few weeks of hitting the trails with my newfound adventure, I started to feel more comfortable and started running faster... one day I made the mistake of not watching where I put my foot and before I knew it, SNAP! I had twisted my foot on a rock, hit the ground hard, tearing my ankle in multiple places.

In the grand scheme of things it was a small injury, but it really altered what I had been able to do previously... it took weeks to be able to walk, and over a year for the injury heal where I thought I could run on trails again.

Recently, I decided to give trail running another shot... to be honest, I was super nervous, and the fear of injuring my ankle again made me sick to my stomach. The first time out on the trail was harder than I thought. I'm not generally an emotional person, but I fought back tears of anxiety at the thought of re-injury as I jogged deeper into the woods.

About halfway through the run, as I was talking to God about things on my mind that I was concerned and uncertain about, I heard Him say (not audibly, but as clearly as I've ever heard Him speak). “You don't have to be able to see ahead to where the trail is taking you, just focus on where you place your next step”. I knew He was speaking truth for my *life*, not just trail running.

Some promises in the Bible are for our lifetime, and some are for each day. In seasons of trial and uncertainty, the feeling of uneasiness about what the next month, week, or even day is going to look like can take an enormous toll. Some days the anxiety of the unknown can feel unbearable. When we face these days, there is truth in this verse to anchor us – that God will bear us up. Our Savior that died for us will daily carry us through the things that seem unbearable and a future path that feels unknown. That truth will become more powerful than our feelings, as we daily seek Him to place our “next step.”

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. What fears or anxieties are taking a negative toll on your life?
2. Why is it difficult to allow God's word to carry more power in our lives than on feelings?

## PRAYER

Father, thank You for Your promise to care for me day to day. Some days are just harder than others. I am grateful to rest in the truth that You are present in all of the days of my life. It is Your grace and strength that sustains me and helps me through. It is Your love that surrounds me. Please help me remember You are always near – in the good days and the bad. Help me focus on the next step You want me to take.

**AMEN**

# He Works While We Work

WRITTEN BY TODD CRAIG, RETREAT OPERATIONS

“Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed — not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence — continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.”

**PHILIPPIANS 2:12-13 (NIV)**

We are near the end of our 30-day devotional journey. The reality is, in our walk with Jesus, the journey is the destination. God’s greatest desire for our lives is that we would continually learn to walk in his ways. That we would let go of the notion that we know better than He does. That we would confess and repent from leaning on our own understanding and trust Him. That we would daily trade our:

Pride for humility

Selfishness for selflessness

Chaos for peace

Life of scarcity for life of abundance

Foolishness for wisdom

Idolatry for faithfulness

Lies for truth

Greed for generosity

Darkened heart for a transformed heart

Old life for new

It is God who works these things in us, but we are not passive. To work out our salvation with fear and trembling means to continually seek the character and presence of our Heavenly Father. We do this by continuing to create space to spend time in God’s word, in prayer, in spending time with others who are on the same journey, and in serving those around us. Most importantly, with every step of our journey we humbly ask God to shape our hearts like His.

Oswald Chambers writes, “God is not working toward a particular finish — His purpose is the process itself.” God’s desire is not that we would arrive at some imagined destination of perfection. God’s desire is that we would learn to trust Him. This is both the process and the end.

As you continue your journey, be encouraged that if you continually seek Him, He is faithful “to work in you to will and to act in order to fulfill His good purpose.” That’s His promise.

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. In what attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors do you need God’s transformation?
2. What commitments will you make to work out your salvation as you continue on your journey?

## PRAYER

Heavenly Father, thank You for loving me where I am as I am. Thank You for working in and through me to fulfill Your good purpose and for the confidence I can have that You will complete the work. Thank You that, by Your grace, when I fail You forgive and restore us back on the journey with You.

**AMEN**

# Wrap-Up: Hold Fast Hope

WRITTEN BY MARK PAUL, DEVELOPMENT

“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In His great mercy He has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil, or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God’s power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith — of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire — may result in praise, glory, and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. Though you have not seen Him, you love Him; and even though you do not see Him now, you believe in Him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls.”

**1 PETER 1:3-9 (NIV)**

Hope is *alive!* Literally. Peter tells us that, in Christ, we are *new*. And this newness is sealed and surrounded by a *living* hope. We don’t have to “keep hope alive” in our lives. This hope lives and breathes and moves on its own. It is always available and will never be taken away from us.

I’ll be honest. There have been times in my life where it felt as if I was losing hope. There have been circumstances and struggles that have tempted me to give up all hope. I didn’t fully understand in those times that it wasn’t my job to keep hope alive. The death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus has already done it. And because of that I have hope alive in me, burning like an eternal flame in the chambers of my soul.

I’ve had hope because God is in control. I have hope that He is with me and for me and that His work continues in my life to this day. Thank goodness! I need all the help I can get.

Hopefully, these 30 days have renewed your hope as well. But the daily connection with God shouldn’t end here. You have a new habit now. Find a new resource to go through or explore the Bible on your own. Ask a friend, mentor, or pastor to help if you don’t know how to continue. Don’t lose this momentum. Don’t let the daily connection with God become a casualty of busy lives and distractions. Fan this living hope into a flame in your soul – a flame to warm you and motivate you and sustain you, even in the darkest of times.

Thank you for going on this journey with us. It’s been our pleasure to join you each day. We love our Lighthouse community.

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. What is the most meaningful thing God has shown you in these 30 days together?
2. What things can you do to continue the prayer and scripture-reading momentum you have generated during this month?

## PRAYER

Father, thank You for these last thirty days together. I have learned so much and heard Your voice through Your Word and the faithfulness of others. Help me to find consistency in the discipline of meeting with You every day. I pray that the truth of Your word and our times of prayer together will deepen my faith on a daily basis. Thank You that I don’t have to fight to keep hope alive. It will always live in my soul because of Your son, Jesus.

**AMEN**