

May/June 2013

Today

refresh, refocus, renew



CALLED
TO BE A
PROPHET

ALSO: INTIMACY WITH JESUS

Friends:

One of my favorite restaurants serves delicious, spiced bread along with a dish of olive oil sprinkled with fresh pepper. Often brought warm and fresh from the oven, it's become one of our favorite appetizers. We've even tried to recreate the recipe at home. As a 21st-century North American, this is about the extent of my experience with olive oil.



But in biblical times, oil was critical. It was used for cooking and cleaning. It was a high-calorie staple in times of famine. It was a source of light when there was no other. It was used to confer blessing and anoint officials. It fueled a major economic industry. It even became the object of some surprising miracles.

As we'll see in our June devotions, oil was also used to anoint prophets. What, exactly, is a prophet? Do we still have prophets? How might you be called to be prophetic in today's world? Our June readings will help to answer these questions, and more.

But first, in May, we'll explore intimacy with Jesus. Our life and calling come through him. How can we walk with him closely? How can we hear his voice and dwell with him? How can we walk by the light of his lamp?

May you be refreshed, refocused, and renewed in God's Word!

—Steven Koster

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“Intimacy with Jesus”
John Kuperus



“Called to Be a Prophet”
Thea Leunk

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re:FRAME MEDIA

this month

Intimacy with Jesus

John Kuperus

The greatest relationship for us to cultivate in this world is our relationship with God. We enter into God's presence through the experiences of others, reflecting on features of God, listening to God's Word, and being obedient to his commands. As we seek God, we discover that he has also been calling us and speaking to us all along. The question is whether or not we are tuned in to God.

As I write these devotions, I am indebted to many others for thoughts and ideas that have inspired me. My greatest debt is to the Spirit of God and his leading.

Since he was young, John Kuperus has had a passion that everyone would know Jesus. Spreading the good news that "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners" (1 Timothy 1:15) is very important to him. To be better equipped for missions, John attended Reformed Bible College in Grand Rapids, Michigan. He applied these skills with marketplace evangelism in a business he started in Sussex, New Jersey. This calling continued to follow him, so John attended seminary and became a minister in the Christian Reformed Church, serving a church in Ontario for eight years. Currently he serves as a missionary for Youth with a Mission (YWAM). He witnesses Jesus changing lives as people walk out of the darkness into the light. John is married to Helen, and they have seven children.

IN THE BEGINNING

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.
—John 1:1

As we begin a new month, and as we seek to renew and strengthen our relationship with God, it is good for us to go back to the beginning, where it all began. Knowing our foundation gives us an anchor to navigate through life.

The apostle John begins this account by looking back before the creation of the world. “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” These words give us a peek into the triune God’s relationship of light and life. This is a love relationship in which the Father loves the Son, the Son loves the Father, and they share all things in fellowship with the Holy Spirit. Their fellowship is a union of acceptance, delight, and love.

Out of this relationship of love, creation was birthed when God

said, “Let there be . . .” (Genesis 1:3). Creation was not an accident but an intentional act of God. Humans are created from the dust of the ground; God breathes into us the breath of life (Genesis 2:7) to be united with himself in the circle of his passionate love.

The desire of every human being is to be part of a life-giving and loving community. As we express love to one another by including and selflessly giving to one another, we are connecting with our Creator and his purposes for us. That is how he designed us.

How great is your love for us, dear God, that we should be called your children. For that is what we are. Thank you, Father, Son, and Spirit. Amen.

COMMUNITY BUSTER

"You must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die." —Genesis 2:17

God came looking for Adam and Eve. Their disobedience had changed things, and they were hiding. A loving trusting relationship was broken, and they saw God in a new way.

What happened in the courts of heaven? Did God change? No! He is the same yesterday and today and forever. Then what happened on earth? Well, Adam and Eve changed with the introduction of death: "You must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die."

What did death look like? Suddenly Adam and Eve were anxious and hid from God. Their security and peace were destroyed, and shame, fear, and brokenness entered in. Adam said, "I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid." Their loving fellowship with God and each

other was replaced with fear, isolation, and loneliness. They were no longer experiencing life abundantly.

Why were they afraid? The presence of God meant the presence of love, joy, and life, and sin exposed Adam and Eve's misery and loss. This was unbearable in the presence of the Lord—and we have been hiding ever since.

But God, in his lovingkindness, is willing to enter into our darkness to bring restoration. So along with consequences for their sin, they also received God's promise (verse 15), and he blessed them by making clothes for them.

Lord, our broken fellowship with you is painful. Thank you for not giving up on us and for covering our nakedness. Amen.

WALKING WITH GOD

Enoch walked faithfully with God; then he was no more, because God took him away.
—Genesis 5:24

My wife enjoys walking, and she has walked with many different friends as walking partners. She rises early to meet with them. They walk together and get the bonus of a deepened relationship as they share their hearts by talking.

God is looking for a walking partner too. It appears from Genesis 3:8 that God took walks with Adam and Eve “in the cool of the day.” But then, because of sin, the relationship between God and Adam and Eve was broken.

As we continue in the book of Genesis, something remarkable is revealed as we read, “Enoch walked faithfully with God.” It seems that even after sin came into the world, humans could still walk with God and be healed of the fracture that caused separation. How could that be possible?

Hebrews 11:5 tells us that by faith Enoch “was commended as one who pleased God.” Enoch responded to God’s call, put his trust in him, and earnestly sought him. His faith enabled him to walk with God, and God took Enoch to be with him in heaven.

Communing with God continues to be a reality, and God yearns for us to walk with him. Today we can do that by keeping in step with the Spirit of God (Galatians 5:25), sent to live in our hearts through Jesus.

Father, our walks with you give us insight into how much you value and love us. Drawing close to you and hearing your heart for the growth of your kingdom excites us. In your name we pray. Amen.

THE ALTAR

There he built an altar to the LORD and called on the name of the LORD.
—Genesis 12:8

When I was in southeast Asia on pastoral visits with our Youth with a Mission (YWAM) teams, I stayed in hotels and homes that had altars set up for Buddha. People burned incense and food sacrifices on them as a way to honor their gods and their ancestors.

Using altars and sacrifices (offerings) goes back to the earliest times in human history (Genesis 4:3-5). What's important, however, is that we worship the one true God—and with the right attitude.

When God called Abram to leave his homeland, he obeyed in faith. Arriving at Shechem in the land of Canaan, Abram built an altar. Then he traveled toward Bethel, and he built another altar. The altar was his meeting place with God. There he took responsibility for his sin, and the door to heaven was

open for communication with God. As Abram worshiped, he received promises and abundant blessings from the Lord.

For New Testament believers, the altar is the cross of Christ. Christ's blood continues to wash the dirtiest of sinners clean and opens the gate of heaven. The danger is to neglect the altar and let sin go un-confessed, driving a wedge between us and God. When that happens, we find it difficult to hear God's voice, and our love for him wanes. An active altar points toward the one true God, delights the heart of our Lord, and brings revelation and light into our lives.

Father, in Jesus' name, help us to draw near to you with hearts full of faith, celebrating our relationship with you. Amen.

HOUSE OF GOD

"This is none other than the house of God; this is the gate of heaven."
—Genesis 28:17

Jacob had a very powerful dream that was a vision from God. When he awoke, he said, "Surely the LORD is in this place, and I was not aware of it." This gives us insight into something that continues to happen today; we can be in the presence of God and not be aware of him. For example, in a church service one person can experience a deep connection with God, while another person in the same service might not sense a connection at all.

Jacob commented further on his encounter with God by saying, "This is none other than the house of God; this is the gate of heaven." What did he mean by that? Was there a building present? No. Were there people present? No. Jacob's revelation was that the house of God was where God was present.

Years later, the apostle John spoke of Jesus as bringing the presence of God: "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us" (John 1:14). Jesus became God's dwelling place on earth, and that opened the way for God to live in us later through his Holy Spirit (see Acts 2:4, 33, 38). The apostle Paul explained: "Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in your midst?" (1 Corinthians 3:16).

The house of God is where God comes to live and bring new life in and among us. He wants to make our hearts his home. Does he live in you?

Father, may your kingdom come, and may your will be done in and through us as you live in us, your people. Amen.

THE POWER OF COVENANT

"I will take you as my own people, and I will be your God. Then you will know that I am the LORD your God." —Exodus 6:7

In our congregation an elderly man said, "We used to hear a lot about covenant, but now we do not hear anything about covenant anymore." That comment created a hunger in me to rediscover the way our intimate God works through his covenant promises.

The Bible is framed with the old and new covenants that God made with his people, the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. So the entire Scriptures are permeated with covenant living. The heart of God's covenant is captured in these words: "I will take you as my own people, and I will be your God." God is united with his people in the context of his unfailing love.

Marriage is probably the closest human parallel to God's covenant with us. Two people come together to become one, and

they vow to remain faithfully together until death separates them.

God's covenant partnership with us is truly remarkable, for how can an unholy people and a holy God come together? This is possible only through the cross of Jesus, by which we are reconciled to God. "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Corinthians 5:21). The covenant between God and humans is a reality through Jesus Christ, our Lord. In Christ, we belong to God!

Father, we thank you that you are our God and we are your people. Thank you for providing a way back to yourself by giving of your Son on the cross for us. Amen.

THE FACE OF GOD

Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, "It is because I saw God face to face, and yet my life was spared." —Genesis 32:30

In our culture we have many devices to stay connected—phone, email, texting, Facebook, Twitter, Skype, and more. And yet we travel great distances to have face to face contact. We long for the times when we can express ourselves in person with one another.

In the human realm face to face contact is important. But can you imagine what it would be like to have a face to face meeting with God?

In the Bible, the first person who speaks of encountering the face of the Lord is Jacob, after his wrestling match with an angel of the Lord, who spoke to him on God's behalf and with God's authority.

Jacob was completely changed from that encounter. He received a new name, Israel, and that meant he had a new

identity, given to him by God. As a result, new opportunities opened up for him.

That morning, Israel (Jacob) limped away with God's blessing, and he set off to reconcile with his brother, Esau. Because Jacob was changed, he said later to Esau, "To see your face is like seeing the face of God, now that you have received me favorably" (Genesis 33:10). That was remarkable, as jealousy and bitterness melted away after Jacob's encounter with God.

Do you or I need to have an encounter with God to see our brother or sister in a new way?

O Lord, we seek your face; we want to know you. Your promises are a treasury of life and new possibilities that we can find in you alone. Amen.

GLORY OF GOD

Then Moses said, "Now show me your glory."

—Exodus 33:18

When was the last time you asked God, "Show me your glory?" What motivated Moses to make that request?

After forty days on Mount Sinai receiving God's law for his people, Moses had come down to find the Israelites worshipping a golden calf. They were in a place of darkness and distrust in the God who had delivered them from slavery in Egypt. As a leader, Moses needed to set a standard without sliding down the slope of going with the flow.

When Moses prayed, "Show me your glory," he wanted to see the greatness, majesty, and splendor of the Lord. Moses needed a fresh revelation of God to empower him to continue to walk in the dark times he was in. He yearned for the assurance of God's radiant, powerful presence.

We too ought to be desperately seeking God's glory. Notice God's response to Moses: "I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim my name, the LORD, in your presence." God is delighted to answer Moses' prayer to reveal his glory, and God adds to the experience by proclaiming his name. Moses' heart was so captured by the glory of God that nothing in this world could compare to the surpassing greatness of the Lord.

Our Father, show us your glory to empower us to walk in our times with truth, wisdom, and integrity. Thank you for delighting in showing yourself to us and building our faith. Amen.

OUR DWELLING PLACE

Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty.
—Psalm 91:1

I met a refugee and asked her a number of questions through an interpreter. One question was “What is your favorite text in the Bible?” Without any hesitation she said, “Psalm 91.” When I asked why, she shared that she had been moving every six to nine months for her physical safety, but in her spirit she was safe in the Lord.

The tension we face in life is that even though we may “dwell in the shelter of the Most High” and “rest in the shadow of the Almighty,” we have to deal with troubles and daily struggles—and even deadly diseases and terrorizing attacks at times. The psalmist understood that this world is filled with uncertainties—and yet there is a place of safety. We can go up against giants and have to flee for our lives from dangerous

enemies, and still we can be in a safe place with the Almighty.

The question each of us has to address is “What is our dwelling place? What is our shelter or safety net?” If it is our money, family, home, or work, that will crumble. The enemy has come to kill, steal, and destroy. But the one place of safety in the universe from which no one can snatch us is “in the shelter of the Most High.” Our risen and ascended King has promised, “My sheep listen to my voice . . . and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and . . . no one will ever snatch them out of my hand” (John 10:27-28).

Ascended Lord, we praise you for the security and peace we have in you, regardless of what we experience in life. Amen.

HEARING THE VOICE OF GOD

Samuel did not yet know the LORD: The word of the LORD had not yet been revealed to him.
—1 Samuel 3:7

I am presently serving with Youth with a Mission (YWAM) in Kona, Hawaii. We have 22,000 staff around the world serving voluntarily. How can one mission recruit so many volunteers? The co-founder of YWAM, Darlene Cunningham, says the key is hearing the voice of God. When someone hears God calling them to work for him, they are willing to make great sacrifices. This is a foundational teaching for the mission, and it is reflected in a book titled *Is That Really You, God?* written by the other founder, Loren Cunningham.

We see in Samuel's life that hearing God's voice is something to be learned. Samuel was being mentored by Eli to be a priest in the temple. He learned about ceremonial washings, food laws, prayers, and reading the Law. His training would also

have included offering sacrifices of sheep, goats, bulls, and other animals. But in all this training Samuel had not learned to hear God's voice.

Three times God called Samuel, but Samuel thought it was Eli who was calling him. So Samuel went to Eli, and eventually Eli realized that the Lord was calling Samuel. So he instructed Samuel to say, "Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening." In this way Samuel was mentored to know the Lord and the power of his Word. And God used Samuel in powerful ways to lead his people as a prophet of the Lord.

Lord Jesus, speak to my heart. Prompt me to listen and obey. By your Spirit, guide us to hear your call today and to serve you faithfully. Amen.

STANDING

At that time the LORD set apart the tribe of Levi . . . to stand before the LORD to minister and to pronounce blessings in his name.

—Deuteronomy 10:8

In today's culture, what kinds of events make us rise to our feet? We stand in excitement when a goal is scored in a close game on the soccer or football field. We join in a standing ovation when we see an amazing performance. We rise when an honored guest enters the room.

In ancient Israel the tribe of Levi was set apart for another kind of standing. The Levites were chosen "to stand before the Lord to minister and to pronounce blessings in his name." This was a call to serve the Lord in the many duties required to help people worship God, and to share the good news of God's blessings for all. While this involved everyday work and routine, it also involved heart-stirring responsibilities to stand up for and honor the amazing Lord of heaven and earth who had delivered his people. So

the Levites were in this way like the angels of heaven. The angel who came to announce the birth of John the Baptist later said, "I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to . . . tell you this good news" (Luke 1:19).

God calls us to stand by putting on his armor so that we can "be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power." Our enemy, the devil, wants to knock us down, but in God's strength we can "stand against the devil's schemes" (Ephesians 6:10-11), using God's gifts to honor our Lord in all we do.

Lord, we stand in awe of you. Help us to serve and speak faithfully for you. In Jesus' name, Amen.

WALLS

“The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates have been burned with fire.”
—Nehemiah 1:3

An ancient city without a wall was wide open to be plundered by thieves or enemies. A city’s walls helped to protect people and their households, as well as the blessings they had been given. Walls provided security.

Nehemiah was grieved when he heard that the exiles who had returned to their homeland were “in great trouble and disgrace. The wall of Jerusalem [was] broken down.” He begged God to change the situation, and God called him to rebuild the walls (Nehemiah 2).

Often today we talk about walls that need to come down: walls of deceit and corruption, walls of racism and favoritism, barriers that prevent people from opportunities that all should be free to enjoy.

But there are also good walls that can protect us from harm

and evil influences. In our lives, we need walls to help us guard our hearts so that we can be loyal to our spouse and faithful to our family, friends, and community. Our spiritual lives also need walls to protect our relationship with God. Our walls crumble if sins like unforgiveness, selfishness, compromise, and rebellion take over in our lives.

Do any walls need to be rebuilt in your life? In your family? Your community? Do some walls need to come down, and others go up—so that sin can be cast out and kept out? Ask God for the wisdom to build a life that honors him faithfully.

Lord Jesus, thank you for your grace. Cleanse us from our sin, and build us up to stand firm in you. For your sake, Amen.

HEARING GOD'S WORD

"Everyone who [puts] these words of mine . . . into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock." —Matthew 7:24

In the story of the wise and foolish builders, Jesus explains that it's not enough to hear God's Word. We also have to put it into practice. We need to obey the Lord and seek to follow him with all our heart.

Picture the two kinds of people in the illustrations Jesus gives here. Both hear his words, but one puts them into practice and the other does not. One hears and obeys; the other hears and ignores. Both have had the same basic instruction. But while one follows the proven practice of building on a firm foundation, the other ignores that wisdom and builds a house that has no foundation at all.

Jesus is using a simple illustration that even children can understand. Among his listeners, everyone knew that only a fool would try to build a house without a foundation. A house like

that would fall apart in the path of a heavy storm. But a house with a firm foundation would withstand many storms.

Similarly, Jesus was saying, we must put God's words into practice. The only way to build a life that will last is to base it on the firm foundation of God and his Word. As the psalmist had said many years earlier, "The LORD is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer; my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge" (Psalm 18:2). Can we say that?

Let's not only hear the Word, but also obey it. In God's strength we can!

Father, we are listening to your Word. Help us put it into practice. Shape and mold us, we pray, so that our lives may honor you and last forever. Amen.

HARD HEARTS

“A farmer went out to sow his seed. . . . Some fell along the path; it was trampled on, and the birds ate it up.” —Luke 8:5

Jesus tells this parable about everyday farming to teach a spiritual truth. “The seed is the word of God,” he says. And for people who represent the hard-packed soil of the path, the Word does not sink in and take root. It is not understood, it is ignored, and the devil comes and takes it away “so that they may not believe and be saved.”

If we are hardened against God’s Word, we are unable to understand it. So a heart check is good for all of us.

Farmers remedy the hard ground by plowing it up. Spiritually we are called to the same remedy. In ancient Israel the prophet Hosea had to remind the people, “Break up your unplowed ground; for it is time to seek the LORD, until he comes and showers his righteousness on you” (Hosea 10:12).

The city of Nineveh during the time of Jonah stands as a model moving from a place of hard-heartedness to breaking up the unplowed ground and seeking the Lord. When Jonah preached in Nineveh, the people believed God and declared a fast (Jonah 3:5). They humbled themselves, prayed, sought God’s face, and turned from their wicked ways. And God forgave their sins and did not bring the destruction he had threatened.

How are our hearts? God’s remedy still works today.

Father, may your kingdom come and your will be done as our hearts grow fully devoted to you. Grant us courage to humble ourselves when our hearts are hard. Amen.

INTIMACY IS POSSIBLE

God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation.

—2 Corinthians 5:19

What is God's response to human sin, and to the brokenness, corruption, and violence that spread because of it? Does God give up on his good creation? Does God explode in anger because of Adam and Eve's disobedience, or because of the wickedness of their descendants, including us?

No, in effect God says, "I did not create you to perish. I created you for life and to be in fellowship with me. I will not abandon you, and I will not forsake you."

How can reconciliation between God and a fallen humanity be possible? On the one side is the triune God with holy intimacy, complete wholeness, and perfect love. On the other side is the corrupt, broken, fearful human race.

An invasion takes place when the Father sends his Son to form a union between God and fallen humanity. Jesus, the Son of God, becomes human in every way—except that he is without sin. He becomes a second Adam, and he does not fail to obey God. To complete the reconciliation, the Son has to pay the price of Adam's disobedience and die. By his death he breaks "the power of him who holds the power of death" (Hebrews 2:14) and reconciles all who will believe in him as Savior. The Lord our God has done this so that we can live!

Father, we stand in awe of you and your commitment to your creation. You have provided salvation for us through your Son, our Lord Jesus. We are eternally grateful! Amen.

SELF-DENIAL

“Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves. . . .”

—Matthew 16:24

Believers in Christ face the challenge of being desensitized to the filth in the world around them. The line between what is holy and unholy often becomes unclear. In the midst of the corruption and sin in our world, how can we be re-sensitized to live holy lives for the Lord?

Jesus explains, “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves. . . .”

And what does it mean to deny ourselves? It means putting to death our sinful nature and putting on the spiritual nature of new life in Christ (Ephesians 4:14-5:20). We cannot do this on our own, but all of this is made possible because Jesus came to live among us, fully human, and to die in our place so that we can be freed from the slavery of sin and the curse of death.

In Christ we are called to put sinful ways behind us—all immorality and impurity such as hatred, discord, jealousy, envy, rage, selfish ambition, greed, drunkenness, brawling, gossip, slander, and any kind of malice. Instead, we are to walk “in step with the Spirit” of God, bearing good spiritual fruit: “love, joy, peace, forbearance [patience], kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control” (Galatians 5:22-25).

Jesus is our example. He gave up his whole life for our sake, so that we might live. Will we give up our old, corrupt nature to live the full life God wants us to enjoy? In Christ we can!

O Lord, our souls thirst for you, the living God. Guide us to live for you. Our hope is in you, our God and Savior. Amen.

FRIENDS OF GOD

"I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you."
—John 15:15

We generally live up to expectations and titles. If we expect our teenagers to live irresponsibly, there is a good chance they will live up to that expectation. On the other hand, if we expect them to be responsible young adults, then they will seek to fulfill that expectation.

Jesus models expectations for us with his disciples. He tells them, "I no longer call you servants." That was a major change of understanding for his disciples. The role of a servant was to be obedient to commands from the master and to give attention to the task at hand. But Jesus changed the expectation by saying, "Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you."

Friends experience an intimate, personal relationship with one another. To be a friend of God

means to have access to the very heart of God. To know what the Master is doing and to have access to his heart is a tremendous privilege.

As we live and work within this relationship, our perspective changes because we are able to see through our Master's eyes, and our heart beats in tune with his. We work with the Lord and have this incredible anchor that gives us stability through any and every situation that comes our way in life. What a tremendous blessing!

Jesus, thank you for framing our relationship with you as friends. Thank you for showing your friendship by becoming one of us and for setting us free by dying for us and giving us new life. Amen.

ABIDING IN THE VINE

"I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing."

—John 15:5

If you want to make your life count, Jesus wisely explains how. He says, "I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing."

The challenge is to be devoted to living in and for Jesus, in a way like a branch is attached to a vine and depends on it for life. This takes our whole heart.

How can we accomplish this? Only by the power of Christ himself. He makes that clear when he says, "Apart from me you can do nothing" in the way of bearing fruit. And he adds, "You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last" (John 15:16).

In the verses of our Scripture today, the words "fruit" or

"fruitful" occur seven times. God's primary concern is not our comfort or happiness, but that we bear fruit. We need to let the gardener prune the self-centeredness and selfishness out of our lives so that we can truly remain in Jesus and bear fruit for his kingdom—"fruit that will last." Then others will enjoy God's goodness and be drawn to him also.

Christ is our lifeline, and he calls us to abide in him. Rather than living our own way, we grow to live his way, and he supplies all we need in order to do that. It's the only way to truly live—forever.

Lord, you have called us to live in and for you. Fill us with your life, that we may bear fruit and share your goodness. Amen.

THE POWER OF PROMISES

Peter declared, "Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you." And all the other disciples said the same.

—Matthew 26:35

When I was dating Helen, on the day after her birthday I asked her this all-important question: "Will you marry me?" Her response was to laugh and laugh, but finally she responded with, "Yes!" Then I began to wrestle with the thought, "I love her today, but how do I know I will be able to love her 10 or 20 years from now?"

We see this kind of fickleness in Peter. Peter says to Jesus before he is arrested, "Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you." Peter makes this promise to Jesus, but later that same night he denies even knowing Jesus. Later, when he realizes what he has done, Peter goes outside and weeps bitterly.

Peter weeps bitter tears because he has broken a promise with his best friend. This is a breakdown of relationship and community. At this point Peter is

probably also wrestling with his identity. Who is Peter? Is he the Peter who says he will never disown Jesus, or is he the Peter who blatantly disowns him when questioned?

I love Helen still today because of a promise, a covenant, we made with each other. Our promise is rooted in Jesus, the great promise-keeper, and this anchor gives us identity and creates a rich, joy- and peace-filled community of life.

Thank you, Jesus, for being the great promise-keeper and giving us an anchor in a very fickle world. We praise you for redeeming us, even when we break our promises. Amen.

CONNECTING WITH OUR FATHER

“My son,’ the father said, ‘you are always with me, and everything I have is yours.’”
—Luke 15:31

We can have a father, and perhaps even be involved with the family business, and yet have no heart connection with him. This can happen for various reasons.

We can also be robbed of intimacy with our heavenly Father. For some reason we are unable or unwilling to receive love and acceptance from him.

Jesus shares a story of a farm family to illustrate this tragedy: “There was a man who had two sons.” The first son closed his heart to his father and wanted to be independent. He boldly said, “Father, give me my share of the estate.” The rebellious son saw his father for what he could get from him. Then the son moved away and searched for love in all the wrong places. This son came to his senses when all his resources dried up.

Lonely and hungry, he returned home to his father.

The other son was obedient. He lived with and worked for his father, and yet his heart was far from him. He saw his father as a master for whom he needed to work. He said, “Look! All these years I’ve been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders.” His stubbornness became clear when he would not even celebrate with family and friends. At the end of the story, this son was still sadly outside his father’s house.

Are you living at home with the Father, or are you living as if you are Fatherless?

Father, we thank you for your great love for us. Help us to see your love and to celebrate being your children. Amen.

BREAKFAST WITH JESUS

“Come and have breakfast.”

—John 21:12

Have you made a mistake in the past that continues to stand out as a painful memory? Does that event continue to define you? What does God think of your past offenses?

Peter failed miserably by denying that he even knew his friend Jesus. The event was marked by a rooster crowing, Jesus looking at Peter, and Peter weeping bitter tears of remorse (Luke 22:60-62).

Now Peter and Jesus meet again. How will Jesus treat someone who abandoned him in his darkest hour? Will Jesus be angry and want to punish Peter? Does Jesus ignore him? No. As the disciples are fishing, they see Jesus on the shore. He calls to them, “Friends, haven’t you any fish?” “No,” they answer. He says, “Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some.” Jesus has

not given up on them. Jesus remains faithful and blesses them with a miraculous catch of fish.

Then Jesus invites them to “come and have breakfast,” a warm gesture of friendship and hospitality.

Next comes the crucial part of the story: Jesus addresses Peter’s denial by asking him three times, “Do you love me?” Jesus does not ignore the past; he addresses it. And the denials are canceled out by Peter’s new statements of love for Jesus.

Regardless of what you have done in your past, Jesus calls you to come and follow him too. Will you come, so you too can be forgiven?

Jesus, I want to come.
Accept and love me, I
pray. In your name, Amen.

ENGAGING WITH JESUS

“Her many sins have been forgiven—as her great love has shown. But whoever has been forgiven little loves little.” —Luke 7:47

How do we engage with Jesus? Do we invite him for dinner to have an intellectual conversation, or do we come weeping, seeking forgiveness, and trying to honor him?

Luke shares a story of two people who want to meet with Jesus. One is Simon the Pharisee, who is spiritually interested and wants to learn more about Jesus. The other is a woman who weeps at Jesus' feet, wipes his feet with her hair, kisses them and pours perfume on them. Simon is a good moral citizen, and the woman is someone who has “lived a sinful life.” Simon approaches Jesus in an intellectual way over a meal; the woman expresses the deepest cry of her heart as she seeks freedom from her sin.

Simon is surprised that Jesus would accept this treatment from a sinner, yet we find that

Jesus honors the woman. She receives forgiveness of sins, but we hear of no change in the spiritual condition of Simon.

Do we seek Jesus to affirm our own thinking and gain personal peace, or do we radically pursue him, asking for forgiveness and offering our best efforts in service to him?

Which sins do you tend to notice more—your own or those of others? Are you someone who knows how much you need to be forgiven? Give thanks today for God's mercy—and for the grace to be merciful.

Jesus, thank you for blessing us with your presence. Hear our cry for mercy, and cleanse us from every impurity in our lives. For only in you can we find abundant life. Amen.

CHOOSING A MASTER

“No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.” —Matthew 6:24

Jesus challenges us to think hard about who our master is. Is God our Master, or is money our master? We cannot serve both, says Jesus.

How do these masters operate in our lives?

God is loving, selfless, and generous. When God is our Master, he speaks words of life so that we do not have to worry. God, our Creator, cares for the birds of the air and clothes even the grass of the field.

Money, on the other hand, says, “If you have enough material possessions, then you will be secure and able to deal with any problem that comes up in your life.” Money calls us to be selfish and do whatever it takes to get ahead. It claims that the person with the most toys wins.

Money and the power of riches (and the people taken in by

them) threaten us by saying, “If you do not bow down to me, you will not get what you need or want.” Money is a greedy, selfish, deceiving spirit who wants to steal and destroy.

When God is our Master, we know we are in good hands. We can live from a place of generosity, knowing that God’s kingdom is recession-free. Even as trials come, we stand in faith as Job did, knowing our Redeemer lives (Job 19:25)!

Father, we want to put our faith and trust in you, not in money or possessions. Enable us to be generous and selfless as we grow to be united with you, our good and gracious Creator, Lord, and Savior. Amen.

THE BURNING LAMP

“He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.”

—Luke 3:16

Fire can be terrifying or comforting. It can be destructive and deadly if it gets out of control, or it can be a great source of warmth, heat, and light.

John the Baptist was known for his fire; he burned for God, bringing the light of God’s Word into a dark, troubled time and urging people to repent as he prepared the way for Jesus’ coming. Jesus said of him, “John was a lamp that burned and gave light, and you chose for a time to enjoy his light” (John 5:35).

What caused John to be set ablaze? He was filled with the Holy Spirit from birth (Luke 1:15), lived a life of self-denial, and spent time in the wilderness, where his relationship with God grew.

People were impressed with John, but he pointed them to

“one who was more powerful”—that is, Jesus, who is actually “the light of the world” (John 8:12). John prophesied this about Jesus: “He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.”

God’s will is for all his followers to have a burning spiritual passion for him. The question is whether or not we will yield ourselves to him so that he can fill us with that kind of passion for him. As the fire of God enters into us, people and nations will be changed.

Lord, let the fire of your Word enter us so that we will burn for you. Fill us to bring your light into this dark world, that people may see your goodness and have the light of life. Amen.

NEW WINESKINS

“No one pours new wine into old wineskins.”

—Mark 2:22

As we read through the gospels, a disturbing revelation comes to light. The religious people of Jesus' day were totally missing a new thing God was doing by sending his Son into the world. One religious group—the Pharisees—were much disciplined. They fasted twice a week, tithed a tenth of their goods, and faithfully read God's Word and prayed. Yet as the heavens poured out new wine by sending God's Son into the world, the religious leaders did not embrace him. What happened? Could we make that same mistake today?

In today's verses Jesus is asked why his disciples do not fast. He replies, “How can the guests of the bridegroom fast while he is with them?” The purpose of fasting was to deny and humble oneself before God, seeking his mercy and help from danger

and from the influence of sin. It drew people closer to God and helped them focus on living for the Lord. But fasting was not necessary for Jesus' followers while he was with them; they were living every day in God's presence.

The Pharisees were diligent about spiritual disciplines, but their hearts were not connected with God. And, yes, we can make that same mistake today. God continues to do new things on the earth. Are we so used to doing things a certain way that we have lost contact with the Lord of the universe? Do we recognize Jesus as he shows up in our world?

Lord, help us see the work you are doing among us today, and to join in with enthusiasm! In your name, Amen.

TAKING UP OUR CROSS

"Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me."
—Luke 9:23

Our friendship with God in Jesus is the greatest relationship on earth. And yet it is often separated by our refusal to submit to God's authority in our lives. We'd rather exercise our will instead of doing God's will. The spirit of self-will says, "I want to do it my way, and I will!"

Jesus provides a remedy for this disease when he calls us to take up our cross daily.

The cross is where we give up all that we are clinging to in this world. The cross is where our self-life is immobilized. This may seem restricting and be painful to our selfish ambitions, but as we obey the commands of Jesus in faith and in the power of his Spirit, we discover the greatest freedom and joy imaginable.

As we take up our cross daily, we enter into God's way of do-

ing things and are freed of our self-will. This is not an achievement but a process that we enter into daily, with God's help and in his strength, because we have a way of reverting to our old nature.

Are you willing to surrender yourself completely into God's hands?

If you answer "Yes," you are uniting with the Spirit of our Lord Jesus, whom God the Father sent to be the one Redeemer of the world.

Father, the safest place to be is in your hands. We humbly come before you and lay our self-will at the cross. Take charge and lead us on, we pray. Amen.

THE LOVE OF GOD

God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them.
—1 John 4:16

My wife asked me, “On a scale of one to ten, how much do you feel loved by me?” I asked her the same question, and we discovered that this is an area where we both have opportunity to grow.

This naturally raises a question: Why can’t we give and receive 100 percent love all the time? What blocks us from giving and receiving love?

Our enemy is selfishness, rooted in the sin of pride, which leads to all sorts of other sins. Our world is robbed of love because we become so full of ourselves. Unity is lost to self-centeredness.

This spirit is strong in our world today. We can be unloving when we sharply criticize others, speak harsh words, or have a secret distaste for others. In contrast to our depraved

self-centeredness, God is love. In him there is no selfishness. God’s love is displayed in his great generosity: “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16).

The remedy to our selfishness is love. Love’s source is God, who is love. As we pray for a full deliverance from self, we invite the Spirit of God to fill us with his love. The more the Holy Spirit gains ownership of my life, the more my heart will be filled with real, divine love.

Holy Spirit, send me a fresh outpouring of your love today. I repent of my selfishness and ask forgiveness. God of love, fill me with love. Amen.

THE BLOOD OF JESUS

You were redeemed . . . with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.
—1 Peter 1:18-19

My father used to enjoy singing, “There is power, power, wonder-working power in the blood of the Lamb.” That song enabled him to speak of a wonderful truth that we learn in God’s Word. It’s about “the Lamb who was slain,” who is worthy “to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!” (Revelation 5:12).

Blood is a mysterious substance connected to life. In ancient times, Scripture put it this way: “The life of a creature is in the blood” (Leviticus 17:11). Blood is not life, but it carries life. Life is spiritual, but in creatures it has a physical carrier, and that is blood.

Our life became contaminated because of our disobedience to God. Brokenness entered our world, introducing death and destruction. We needed a

way to be restored to a right relationship with God. And the only way to do that was to have the pure, uncontaminated life of Jesus Christ given in our place. Jesus shed his own pure blood for us, giving up his sinless life for our sake. As the apostle John affirms, “The blood of Jesus . . . purifies us from all sin” (1 John 1:7).

With God the Father and Jesus the Son, believers overcome Satan, sin, and death “by the blood of the Lamb” (Revelation 12:11). We are redeemed “with the precious blood of Christ,” our Savior!

Jesus, Lamb of God, we celebrate you and your precious blood. We come to you to be washed clean. Please help us to bring your self-giving love to our world. Amen.

BEING GRATEFUL

Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

—1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

Giving thanks is critical in any culture. An attitude of gratitude is very much appreciated by everyone. Jesus modeled thankfulness when he gave thanks for some bread and fish before he fed five thousand people (John 6:11). Jesus looked beyond the two fish and five loaves to the ultimate giver. Jesus gave thanks to acknowledge the giver of all good gifts, the one who blesses the earth each day.

The Hiding Place tells the story of Corrie and Betsie ten Boom. These sisters spent time in a German concentration camp because they were caught hiding Jews during World War II. Their barracks was crammed with women, the place smelled horrible, and they were tormented by biting fleas. Corrie was appalled, and she genuinely struggled to see God's goodness in this situation. But Betsie urged the reminder to "give

thanks in all circumstances," and Corrie grudgingly did so. Later they learned that the officers avoided that barracks because of the flea infestation, and that gave the women freedom to read their Bible together with the other prisoners and to pray without interruption.

Do you give thanks *in*, though not necessarily *for*, all circumstances? God can make use of even the worst situations to bring about good things (see Romans 8:28).

Father, we honor you as the ultimate provider for our needs. Help us see how we can give thanks in all circumstances, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

SALVATION

"All people will see God's salvation."

—Luke 3:6

In our verses for today, Luke introduces us to the international political and religious leaders of that time. Then we read, "The word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness." The whole world of that day was being governed by others; yet God called John to prepare for the coming of another King by leveling mountains and filling valleys. In the wilderness John preached a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

The wilderness is a risky and uncertain place. There we can see things through different eyes, beyond the reach of the status quo and normal expectations. That's where the Word of the Lord came to break and change the world.

Mountains were leveled and valleys filled as merchants repented of unfair business practices, soldiers repented of brutal

abuse to gain money, and government workers repented of unjust demands for taxes. High and low came to confess secret sins, and all were baptized in the Jordan River.

Preparation for the coming King was sealed in baptism as people plunged beneath the waters of the Jordan and came up again. It marked a commitment to end an old life and to begin a new one with God.

Today Jesus calls us to be baptized into the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Have you committed your life to the Lord?

Lord of all, thank you for your Word. Give us the humility to repent and to make crooked places straight in our lives. In your name, Amen.

THE BRIDE

"I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband."
—Revelation 21:2

When I began to date my wife, we made contact almost daily and were delighted to spend time together. A love relationship began, and eight months later she walked down the aisle, beautifully dressed in white. As I awaited her arrival at the altar, the thought on my mind was not the things she could do, or how we were going to pay the bills, or how many children we might have. No! She was my delight, and we were marrying because we were in love. We were entering into a covenant of oneness in which we would walk together for the rest of our lives.

Human marriage is a picture that points to the union of Jesus Christ and his church. As we read in Ephesians 5:25-27: "Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy . . . to present her to

himself as a radiant church . . . holy and blameless." When Jesus looks at us clothed in the white garments of righteousness, his heart soars with delight for us, his church.

While we live and work to serve our Lord and Savior each day, we can walk with him, keeping in step with his Spirit, obeying his commands, sharing his love, and bringing his good news of reconciliation and new life with God to others. In this way he is preparing us to join with him and the Father on that great day when he returns!

Jesus, thank you for your great love for us—for dying in our place so that we can be presented before the throne without fault and with great joy. What amazing grace! Amen.

this month

CALLED TO BE A PROPHET

Thea Leunk

Three special roles in the Old Testament were marked by anointing: the roles of prophet, priest, and king. Jesus, the *Messiah*—which means “Anointed One”—fulfilled all three of those roles. And now, by faith, Christians share in Jesus’ anointing, meaning we are called to these roles as servants and representatives of Christ.

This month we are going to look at Jesus’ work as a prophet. And as we do, we’ll also look into the work of the Old Testament prophet Elisha, whose life can help us understand our own prophetic call and ministry. Even more, Elisha’s life can help us hear the words of God and point us to the Word of God, Jesus Christ.

What is a prophet? A prophet is a press agent of the good news, someone who links God’s Word to God’s people. Sometimes a prophet brings a word of rebuke, sometimes a word of hope, sometimes a word of comfort, and sometimes not a spoken word but a life-giving deed or a sign of God’s presence and power.

May these readings and reflections help you grow in understanding the prophet role to which you are called, in the name of Christ, our one and only Savior.

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FINDING ELISHA

Elijah went from there and found Elisha son of Shaphat. He was plowing
—1 Kings 19:19

One of the most interesting people in the Bible is the prophet Elisha. He lived during a time of extremes in the history of Israel: extreme wealth for a few, extreme poverty for many, extreme weather, and extreme disloyalty to the true God.

Elisha served for over fifty years as a prophet, during the rule of four kings. By God's power he was able to do many miracles that pointed to the ministry and mission of Jesus Christ. Elisha's name also pointed to Jesus. Both the names *Elisha* and *Jesus* mean "God saves." Elisha was a farmer, not a graduate of prophet school. He was an ordinary person called by God. When Elijah threw his cloak over Elisha, Elisha knew the Lord was calling him to speak to the people of Israel.

Prophets aren't just special people in the Bible; prophets

include each and every one of us whom Jesus calls to follow him. Jesus extends to each of us the cloak of the prophet. He asks us to put it on and learn from him how to be a spokesperson for God.

What are we being called to do? We are to tell the good news that God is King, that Jesus the Savior has conquered sin and death, and that the Spirit of God is at work renewing every square inch of the world we live in.

Hallelujah!

We are ordinary people, Lord, but you have called us to extraordinary work. Help us to be the prophetic voices your world needs to hear. In Jesus' name, Amen.

AN IMMEDIATE YES

“Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will send you out to fish for people.” At once they left their nets and followed him.

—Mark 1:17-18

When out of nowhere, a wild stranger threw a smelly cloak over him while he was plowing, Elisha knew it was an invitation to join a prophet of God in his work (1 Kings 19:19-20). But how would he respond?

If I had been in that field, I would have wanted some time to think it over, consider all the consequences of my decision, and ponder whether Elijah would be a good teacher. But that’s not what Elisha did. His response was an immediate yes and a compassionate goodbye. Knowing that he might never return home again, he stopped his plowing and put on a big feast. By burning his equipment and slaughtering his oxen, Elisha signaled that he would not be turning back from this call. (See 1 Kings 19:21.)

In today’s verses, Jesus meets Simon, Andrew, James, and

John as they are fishing and mending their nets. He calls out, “Come, follow me!”—and their response is like Elisha’s. “At once,” Mark says, they left everything behind and followed Jesus.

If I had been one of them, I probably would have needed some time to think about it and finish my work for the day before dashing off after Jesus.

How often do I miss an opportunity to follow God’s leading because I am unsure or afraid of the consequences? Have you ever wondered that as well?

Lord, you invite us to follow you. If we say yes, we know we will never be the same. Help us to say yes and to bring your good news to all. Amen.

PICKING UP THE CLOAK

The company of the prophets from Jericho, who were watching, said, "The spirit of Elijah is resting on Elisha." —2 Kings 2:15

Years had passed since the time God chose Elisha to succeed Elijah as his prophet (1 Kings 19:16, 19-21). Now, after training Elisha, Elijah was going home to God. It was time to see if Elisha was ready to serve in his place. What might look like a good-bye tour of their favorite hangouts was really a test. First Elisha's loyalty was tested, and three times he said he would not leave. Next Elisha's wisdom was tested, and with true insight Elisha asked for a double portion of Elijah's spirit—the inheritance traditionally given to an eldest son.

Suddenly two things happened at once: a chariot and horses of fire came between them. And Elijah was sucked up into a mini-tornado and was gone! Because he saw Elijah taken away, Elisha received what he had asked for.

Then, in front of everyone on the other side of the Jordan River, Elisha was able to repeat Elijah's last miracle. With the cloak that had fallen from Elijah, Elisha parted the waters and walked across on dry ground. Everyone watching could see that Elisha had been chosen to be God's new prophet in Israel.

Each of us has been called and also equipped to be a prophet, right where we are and alongside the people we live with. Equipped with God's Spirit and his power, we are to pick up our cloaks and get to work.

Lord God, take us as we are, summon out who we shall be, set your seal on our hearts, and live in us so that we can truly be your prophets. Prepare us, Lord, in Jesus' name. Amen.

THE ANOINTED ONE

As Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove.

—Mark 1:10

Centuries after Elijah and Elisha were at the Jordan River (2 Kings 2), the Spirit of God descended “like a dove” on Jesus there, as he received baptism from John the Baptist. Jesus was the “Christ,” the “Anointed One.” In the Old Testament three kinds of people were anointed to special tasks—priests, rulers, and prophets. Jesus Christ became the ultimate fulfillment of all these roles. The Anointed One became our supreme Prophet, our perfect High Priest, and our almighty King.

If we carry his name, being called “Christian,” we also share in his anointing. We are called to be priests, rulers, and prophets in God’s kingdom.

So what is God asking us to do? We are to follow the leading of the Holy Spirit we’ve been given—like Jesus and the prophets who came before him. Today

this means we make known to the world the good news of Jesus. We make God’s presence known through our words and actions. We are to speak out, not remain silent. We are to act with courage, not retreat in fear. We are to offer God’s compassion to the world instead of indifference.

When we pick up the cloak of the prophet, accepting the anointing to which we are called, God will use us to be the persons through whom the good news is preached and the name of Jesus is known.

Jesus, we gladly join you and accept the blessing of the Holy Spirit. Help us to bring the good news of your great salvation and new life to all people, announcing, “Our Lord has come!” Amen.

I TOLD YOU SO

They sent fifty men, who searched . . . but did not find [Elijah]. When they returned to Elisha . . . he said to them, "Didn't I tell you not to go?"
—2 Kings 2:17-18

When Elijah was taken into heaven, Elisha was left behind with the great prophet's cloak. The community of prophets from Jericho weren't convinced that Elijah was gone for good, so they wanted to search for him. Elisha said there was no point in doing that, but they went anyway and then returned empty-handed.

"I told you so," Elisha said. That wasn't just a petty complaint. Elisha was saying, "Don't you get it? I am the Lord's prophet now. From now on, you'll have to deal with me. I am the real thing."

A prophet of God is an awesome person and is to be treated with respect. A prophet is someone with God's authority—and someone who holds God's authority is the real thing; you can't fake that.

Today we are prophets engaged in proclaiming the truth about God and his kingdom. Does that make us awesome people? We may need to accept that there is an aura of awesomeness about us—but we can't let that go to our heads. We need to take our genuine authority as God's prophets seriously—and thus honor God in all we do.

Will the people you meet today know that you are a prophet of the Holy One of Israel? If so, how? If not, why not?

You are awesome, O God, and we give you thanks for the ways you will use us to proclaim the truth about you to our neighbors and friends. Help us to speak your words faithfully. Amen.

THE REAL THING

The people were amazed at his teaching, because he taught them as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the law.

—Mark 1:22

Some would say that it's not important who you are; it's who people think you are—so just pretend to be the person you want to be. Act smart, and people will think you are smart; pretend that you can cook a gourmet meal, and people will think you can. But watch out! Don't pretend you know how to fly a plane or deliver a baby!

Another thing you can't fake is God's authority. Someone who has God's authority is the real thing.

The people were amazed at Jesus' authority. He was clearly doing the work of God. He was totally authentic in his actions and fully confident in his words. His authority went far beyond that of the teachers of the law. Jesus had the authority to command even demons to get out and be silent.

Prophets carry on their shoulders the authority of the One who made the world, owns everything in it, and claims every inch of it. We can speak confidently with God's words of life based on his Word, the Scriptures.

We need to take our real authority as God's prophets seriously. God sends us out to minister in his name and to spread the good news of his grace and truth.

How can you act with the authority of the one true God?

Dear Jesus, help us to speak up for you when we need to, to share the good news with confidence, and to honor with our lives the trust you have placed in us. Amen.

A POLLUTED SPRING

"This is what the LORD says: 'I have healed this water. Never again will it cause death or make the land unproductive.'"

—2 Kings 2:21

Jericho was the city whose walls had come falling down when the Lord God of Israel had led Joshua and the people into the land of Canaan. After the battle of Jericho, the city was destroyed and a curse was put on it: "Cursed before the LORD is the one who undertakes to rebuild this city, Jericho" (Joshua 6:26). About 550 years later, in the time of King Ahab, a man name Hiel of Bethel rebuilt it—and lost his sons in the process (1 Kings 16:34). By Elisha's time, people were living in Jericho again, and a company of prophets were there. The water, though, was bad. It was life-taking instead of life-giving.

Using salt in a ritual of separation, Elisha, with God's power, restored the water permanently. This act points us to a time when every spring will be pure and every city will prosper, and

"there will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain" (Revelation 21:1-7). Elisha's miracle points to the One who will bring complete blessing and wholeness to all people.

Prophets are like conduits, pipelines between God and the world. A prophet stands between the One who speaks and the ones who need to hear. Sometimes a prophet's message is one of pure hope and grace, light and love. A prophet's words can be a blessing.

What blessing has God called you to bring today?

Almighty God, thank you for the water of life that flows to us through Jesus, the Savior. Help us to bless those who need that water today. Amen.

A POLLUTED MAN

Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house."

—Luke 19:9

If you visit Jericho today, you will see two important sites. One is Elisha's spring, where Elisha healed Jericho's toxic water more than 2,800 years ago, making it pure again. The spring stands in a park, marked by colorful tiles. "To this day" the water is pure (2 Kings 2:22).

The second important site is in the center of town. It's a sycamore tree in a park. If you visit there, you will be told that while it might not be the same tree Zacchaeus climbed, it's located in the same area where Zacchaeus met Jesus.

Zacchaeus was a tax collector—a traitor to fellow citizens because he worked for the oppressive Roman government, and a thief because he could charge whatever he wanted for taxes and keep the extra money for himself. Zacchaeus was a polluted man.

But Jesus saw beyond all that, and he offered Zacchaeus a chance to separate himself from everything that defiled him. Zacchaeus showed by his response that from that day onward he was a changed man.

Jesus can do that with anyone. To those who seek him, he will be found. If people don't know they are lost, Jesus will seek them out.

The name *Zacchaeus* means "clean, pure." How happy Zacchaeus must have been to finally live up to his name!

Lord, you came to lift the curse of sin and to cleanse us of our unrighteousness. Where we are dirty, cleanse us; where we suffer under the curse of sin, free us. Amen.

MOCKING WORDS

Some boys came out of the town and jeered at him. "Get out of here, baldy!" they said.

—2 Kings 2:23

Bethel, which means "house of God," was named by Jacob when he had a vision and received a promise from God (Genesis 28:17-19). In Elisha's day Bethel was the house of a false god—a golden calf set up there by King Jeroboam (1 Kings 12:25-33; 2 Kings 10:29).

At the outskirts of Bethel, Elisha is mocked by a group of boys. What happens is not pretty. Angered by their teasing, Elisha curses them. Wild bears come out of the forest and maul 42 of them. Is Elisha just a vain man who doesn't like to be reminded of his lack of hair? What is going on?

The "boys" are teenage apprentices to the priests serving the golden calf. "Go away," they threaten, "or else!" Baldy? They could be mocking Elisha's head shaved in grief for Elijah (see Numbers 6:9). In any case,

this is not a playful group of children but a gang of thugs. To mock another human being is to insult someone made in the image of God, precious to the Creator. To mock God's prophet, though, is even worse, directly insulting the Lord.

We don't know if Elisha saw his curse fulfilled or if he was long down the road to Mount Carmel by the time the bears carried out God's justice.

Prophets are people of healing. But they also must stand against evil and the powers of darkness in this world—and name them for what they are. Do you name the evil you see—and rebuke it?

Lord of all, you are a God of compassion and a God of justice. Help us to be agents of both in your world. Amen.

BLASPHEMOUS WORDS

The teachers of the law . . . said, "He is possessed by Beelzebul! By the prince of demons he is driving out demons." —Mark 3:22

Jesus had returned to Galilee, but his presence resulted in a noisy crowd surrounding the house he was in and keeping everyone from eating. Rumor had it that Jesus was crazy. How else to explain what the people had heard about him?

Jesus had rebuked demons, cured many, forgiven sins, and healed people on the Sabbath. All this, plus parables that nobody quite understood—and with an authority that astounded them.

The Jerusalem authorities gave a darker explanation. They claimed Jesus was using greater demonic powers to overcome lesser demonic powers. They said he was a sorcerer bound to the powers of evil.

That was blasphemy, speaking profanely of God. To say that Jesus, who was anointed

by the Holy Spirit, was actually anointed with an evil spirit was to deny his divinity and mission. That's why Jesus said that whoever blasphemed against the Holy Spirit was "guilty of an eternal sin."

Jesus was responding not to a careless comment spoken in haste but to entrenched, hardened hearts that willfully denied the work of the Spirit of God taking place in their midst.

Today Jesus is still the miracle worker, teacher, and forgiver he was then. With what kinds of words do we describe him?

Teacher, Savior, Son of God, may all our words about you be worthy of you and your love for us. Forgive us when we dishonor you in what we say or do. Amen.

NOTHING BUT A JAR OF OIL

Elisha replied to her, "How can I help you? Tell me, what do you have in your house?"
—2 Kings 4:2

Olive oil was a “miracle ingredient” in Elisha’s time; it was a staple for everyday life. It was useful for fuel, lotion, medicine, and cooking.

When the widow tells Elisha that all she has is a little oil, she is saying that once her jar is empty, her last resource for light, heat, medicine, and food will be gone. Her final resort will be to sell her sons into slavery so that debts can be paid and they will not starve to death.

No wonder she has turned to Elisha for help!

But Elisha doesn’t produce a handful of shekels. Instead, he asks her what she *has*. That question turns her despair to hope. She sees that she has resources: oil and a God who cares for her. The miracle that happens results from her remembering that God is still

present in her life, still watching over her and her family.

Sometimes we find ourselves in seemingly impossible and tragic circumstances. It’s then that we need to be reminded that God never leaves us without resources, that God is there in both the big and small tragedies of our lives.

Our problems may never be much bigger than the dilemma of daily living, but no problem is too big or too small to bring to God’s doorstep.

Father, hear our praises as well as our cries for help. We know that you always watch over us and care for us. Help us to see what we have instead of what we don’t have. And provide for us, we pray, in Jesus’ name. Amen.

MORE THAN ENOUGH

They caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break.
—Luke 5:6

The widow in Elisha's day had only a little oil, but with God's help she ended up with every jar filled to overflowing (2 Kings 4:1-7). The disciples in Jesus' day had fished all night and hadn't had a nibble, but at the advice of Jesus they cast their nets one more time.

That was as "foolish" as trying to fill many containers from a small jar. You can't catch fish in deep water in the middle of the day! But just as the widow trusted Elisha and collected jars from her neighbors, Peter and the others trusted Jesus and let down their nets. And the results were amazing!

God's love for us is amazingly abundant. We are not loved in small drips but in flowing streams. God's love is not measured in minnows but in boats nearly sinking under the weight of their catch.

Grace doesn't just sprinkle our forehead; it flows down our face onto our chest and legs, soaking us with God's compassion and mercy.

Whether we are new Christians or Christians of long years of discipleship, Jesus calls us to generously share God's grace and love with others. Soaked to the skin with God's abundant love, we can't help wanting to pull others into that reviving pool with us.

Go and pour; go and cast! Then come and follow Jesus as we spread the good news of God's love.

Jesus, thank you for loving us so generously. Help us to be as generous with your love to the people we meet today. Amen.

A HOME AWAY FROM HOME

"You have gone to all this trouble for us. Now what can be done for you?"
—2 Kings 4:13

Shunem was a small town. A wealthy woman who lived in the village offered her home to God's prophet whenever he traveled through. Going far beyond the hospitality of offering a meal and bed, she had a special room built just for Elisha—a home away from home.

Elisha wanted to return the favor—but how? Offering to put a good word in for her with the king didn't seem to impress her. "I have a home among my own people," she replied.

Well, what then? In that time, no blessing was greater than to have a son, an heir. So Elisha, apparently hearing a word from the Lord, told her the good news that in about a year she would give birth to a son. And she became pregnant and had a boy the following year. A baby in return for a spare room—what a generous gift of God!

Opening a home to a stranger, feeding someone who needs a good meal, offering a place for a traveler to stay—simple acts of hospitality are never unrewarded when they are done in the name of Jesus.

God has welcomed us into his home. How could we do less than open our hearts to others who need a gracious space to rest, or recover, or find refuge? There are so many possible ways we can help others—and these might also provide opportunities to share the good news of Jesus with someone who may not know him.

Lord God, you have opened your heart to us and urged us to call it "home." Help us to offer a heart of love to others looking for a place to call home. Amen.

WELCOME HOME

These women were helping to support [Jesus and the disciples] out of their own means.

—Luke 8:3

Jesus' followers were a motley group of people: fisher folk, tax collectors, zealots, a woman who had been demon possessed, the wife of a royal official, and others. Some of them we know by name: Peter, Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Susanna. Others remain anonymous.

Like the Shunammite woman of Elisha's day, Mary Magdalene is named for the village she was from, Magdala on the Sea of Galilee. Like the Shunammite woman, she was a person of hospitality. Since Jesus was a traveling rabbi, she and others went along, helping to provide for him and his disciples with money they had earned.

Traveling with Jesus, Mary Magdalene watched, learned, and profoundly loved this wondrous person who had saved her from demon possession. Even better than that, Jesus

saved her from the curse of sin and the affliction of a life without God's love.

Later Mary Magdalene was the first to see Jesus after his resurrection, and he told her to go and tell the others (John 20:11-18). She was blessed with the honor of being the first to bring this good news!

Have you exercised that honor today as well? Whom might Jesus want you to share the good news with next?

Lord Jesus, may we always remember that every cup of water poured, every offer of help, every visit, every act of hospitality done in your name is the same as offering it to you. Help us to share your love and good news with others. Amen.

SHALOM

“Everything is all right,” she said.

—2 Kings 4:26

A boy old enough to help with the harvest but too young to handle the harsh heat of the sun—what desperation the woman must have felt as she helplessly watched her son die in her arms!

Hiding the news from the household and even from her husband, she turned to Elisha for help even though he was miles away. Elisha’s heart went out to her in her grief.

When Elisha traveled to her home, he asked God to bring the boy back to life. Though we aren’t told why Elisha stretched himself out over the boy, perhaps God used this method to transfer the power of life through Elisha into the child. Another child had also been restored this way through Elijah (see 1 Kings 17:17-22).

What a compelling story! But notice something that may

be even more compelling—the words the woman spoke twice: “Everything is all right.” In Hebrew she was saying, “*Shalom*.” In spite of the death in her arms, in spite of her grief and loss, she was able to say, “Everything is all right.”

In our lives too, everything is all right when we know that all our grief and sorrow can be placed in the hands of our Savior, who exchanged his life for ours so that death could be defeated once and for all.

Is everything all right with you?

Dear Jesus, thank you for taking our grief and heavy burdens onto yourself and carrying them for us. Thank you that because of you, everything is all right. Amen.

RESURRECTION HOPE

*When the Lord saw her, his heart went out to her and he said,
“Don’t cry.”*

—Luke 7:13

Jesus did many miracles, but when he raised someone from the dead, that was very unusual. So when Jesus gave the dead man of Nain “back to his mother,” the people knew a great prophet had come among them.

This was one of three resurrections in the record of Jesus’ miracles (see also Luke 8:49-56; John 11:38-44). But there’s another resurrection even more important: Jesus himself came back from death to life forever! And the implications of this for us and for all creation are as deep and as simple as the word spoken by the Shunammite woman of Elisha’s day: “*Shalom*” (“It’s all right”).

Death, grief, and despair no longer rule the day; Easter morning has ushered in a new age, a new era of light and life and joy that transform all things. Whatever failed us in the past

can be replaced by certainty and hope because now it will be all right.

For every mother mourning a child; for all who suffer the grief of persecution, imprisonment, and loneliness; for all who wake up each morning wondering how today can be any different than yesterday—there is hope. *Shalom* is possible; all will be well.

The Bible’s stories of resurrection insist that God’s world—our world—is a world of miracles, a world of possibilities, a world of hope.

Dear Jesus, we know you are at work among us, bringing healing to our world and to our lives. Help us to proclaim to others that they can live with hope in you. Amen.

FUELED BY HOPE

“Give it to the people to eat. For this is what the LORD says: ‘They will eat and have some left over.’”
—2 Kings 4:43

In his work as a prophet of the Lord, Elisha was both a public figure and a private individual. He advised a multinational military alliance and spoke in the courts of kings. But he was also a prophet in private, personal ways. He helped to free a woman from debt, to provide a family with a son, and to bring that son back to life again. By God’s power, he purified a spring of water and also a pot of stew, and he fed a hundred hungry men so well with twenty barley loaves that there were leftovers.

Elisha was a rescue worker whom God used to transform harmful situations and times of deep need into times of plenty and *shalom*—promises of full, flourishing life.

Elisha could see above, beyond, and through immediate ruin and misery to what God had

planned instead. His prophetic faith was fueled by hope.

Hope is the message all prophets bring from God into a troubled world. We prophesy that this world is a new creation, that we live in the era of new life. We proclaim to one and all the hope of transformation and new starts, the hope of justice and peace, the hope of reconciliation and forgiveness, the hope that is at work in us all.

Our work as prophets, like Elisha’s, is to witness to that hope and to be agents of that hope to people who have none.

God of hope and of new beginnings, thank you for your plans for us, plans of hope and a future. Strengthen the hope that is within us. In Jesus, Amen.

SMALL LOAVES

“Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many?”
—John 6:9

When Elisha received twenty barley loaves and some grain, he saw that by God’s power the food would feed a hundred people (2 Kings 4:42-44). Jesus took five barley loaves and two fish and fed a crowd of five thousand. At both meals there was so much that there were leftovers.

As in the days of Elisha, the Lord often did miracles to help with the personal needs of his people. Jesus, the bread of life, is concerned that we have not only food for our souls but also our daily bread. Sometimes we don’t appreciate how much God cares about our day-to-day needs.

But notice that Jesus does not feed the people by himself—he uses the disciples to distribute the bread and serve the people. As Jesus’ disciples today, we should expect the same—Jesus

will use us to share in his many ministries of compassion. He is eager to bring us into his work. He not only wants to feed us but also wants us to help him feed others.

Of course, like the disciples, we will look at our resources and wonder how we can make any difference. Our supplies will seem small and inadequate.

But Jesus doesn’t care about that. Our call is to offer what we have to him and to trust that it will be enough. We are to stand by, ready to serve and to be surprised by what he does with the resources we have.

Bread of life, we turn to you for all our needs. Give us this day our daily bread, and help us provide your bread of life for the world. Amen.

A WET SYRIAN

“Go, wash yourself seven times in the Jordan, and your flesh will be restored and you will be cleansed.” —2 Kings 5:10

Naaman was an important man, favored by the king, a decorated, successful army commander. But this high and mighty man had a terrible problem—leprosy. Then Naaman heard there was someone who could help, so he desperately sought out this “prophet . . . in Samaria.”

Imagine the great general’s disappointment as he was greeted by a servant with a message to go wash in the muddy Jordan River. Was this a joke?

Not a joke, but a test. Was Naaman willing to humble himself in order to be cured?

With the help of his wise servants, Naaman submitted to the instructions he had received. He went down to the river, got into the water, and got down on his knees before the God of Israel. The wet Syrian

came out praising the Lord God Almighty, saying, “Now I know there is no God in all the world except in Israel.”

The good news of this story is not just that Naaman is healed but that a Gentile (non-Israelite) is converted to faith in the true God through a sort of baptism in the Jordan River. Naaman returns home a changed and healed man—healed not only of a disease of the skin but also of the disease of sin in his heart and soul.

Jesus wants to heal us of all that is ill in our hearts and souls. Are we willing to kneel in humility before him and ask?

Lord God, may all that is ill in my heart and soul be healed by your touch. Wash me in the waters of your grace. Amen.

THE POWER OF FORGIVENESS

“Which is easier: to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Get up and walk?’”
—Matthew 9:5

Jesus’ healing of the paralyzed man is a miniature portrait of his entire ministry. Jesus cures not only diseases of the body but also the disease of the heart and soul. This points to the new life Jesus has come to bring to the world through his death and resurrection.

To ask for forgiveness is often seen as a sign of weakness. Such a humble posture doesn’t sit well with our view of our importance. Like Naaman in Elisha’s day (2 Kings 5), we don’t want to be at the mercy of someone else.

But forgiveness is the most powerful thing in the world. It can change not just our heart but also our entire way of life. It can go down to the deep and hidden roots of old and long-buried hurts.

Sometimes we think we can’t be forgiven for the terrible things we’ve done, but Jesus assures us there is nothing he cannot forgive or restore.

Forgiveness isn’t just something we ask for ourselves. Jesus reminds us that we too are to forgive others. It may even require us to take the first step and ask for forgiveness when we feel that only we have been wronged. But Jesus teaches us to pray, “Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us” (Luke 11:4).

Jesus forgave a paralyzed man; God forgives us. Who is God asking us to forgive?

Dear God, help us to pray for forgiveness and to forgive, knowing that we can love because you first loved us. Amen.

PAYING THE PRICE

“My master was too easy on Naaman . . . I will run after him and get something from him.”
—2 Kings 5:20

Gehazi was upset that Elisha had not accepted any payment for healing Naaman, an enemy Syrian. As Elisha’s servant, some of that payment would have trickled down to him. He didn’t care that someone had come to saving faith in the God of Israel; Gehazi was only interested in how he could gain from it.

Gehazi hauled his loot home and hid it. But Elisha trapped him with a simple question, saw through Gehazi’s lie, and announced God’s punishment.

By asking Naaman for a reward payment, Gehazi put Elisha’s (and thus God’s) integrity at stake. Naaman had experienced his healing as an act of grace freely given, but then Gehazi put a price tag on that grace.

When Elisha exposed his servant’s greed, treachery, and

lies, he exposed Gehazi’s soul. Gehazi was filled with envy and selfishness. His punishment was to suffer a disease that made him as hideous to others as his soul was to God.

We may cringe at Gehazi’s punishment, but he had a chance to “come clean” about his deeds—and he chose not to. Even more serious, his actions may have harmed Naaman’s faith in the one true God. He would have to pay severe consequences for his actions.

God takes our sins seriously, especially if they do damage to another person’s faith in him.

Lord, help us to be pure in heart and to be true servants to you. Forgive us if we have hurt another’s faith through our actions. Amen.

A LIGHT FOR THE NATIONS

*"There were many in Israel with leprosy in the time of Elisha the prophet, yet not one of them was cleansed—only Naaman the Syrian."
—Luke 4:27*

Jesus stood in the pulpit of his hometown; everyone knew him and eagerly anticipated what he would say. But why did they get so upset? What was wrong with what he said?

Jesus knew that many of the people there had come to see him perform—as if miracles were magic tricks, not signs that pointed to his anointing as the Messiah, the Savior. So he reminded everyone what had happened in the days of the prophets. Elijah was sent to help a widow—but not a Jewish one. And Elisha healed a leper—but he was the commander of an enemy army. Had God extended his grace to the “wrong” people?

Jesus wanted the people of Nazareth to see that the Messiah came to save not just the Jews but everyone. God’s grace is for people of all na-

tions. The passage he quoted in Isaiah is about being a light to all nations, not just one nation. That was a shocking message, so Jesus’ own people turned on him.

The wideness of God’s mercy and the depth and breadth of God’s grace may shock us still today. Jesus Christ came to save sinners—even those we might not think are worth saving. Jesus’ words challenge us to rethink our self-interested agendas. The good news of the gospel is for the whole world. Are we sharing it or keeping it to ourselves?

Light of the world, help us not to hide our light under a basket but to shine brightly and clearly with the good news of your salvation. Amen.

A SERVANT FAITHFUL TO GOD

Bands of raiders from Aram had gone out and had taken captive a young girl from Israel, and she served Naaman's wife.

—2 Kings 5:2

Naaman gets the spotlight in the story of his healing, but none of it would have been possible without a young girl who was taken from her homeland but remained faithful to her God. We know nothing about her except that she was part of the spoils of war.

But she knew one thing—that there was a prophet of God in Israel. Her simple sentence was a strong testimony of faith. She knew that where God was, there was always hope. And she dared to think that God cared for Syrians as well as Israelites.

In fact, the entire story of Naaman's cure is possible because of servants. A servant tells him about Elisha, a servant tells him what to do for a cure, and Naaman's servants convince him to follow through with the instructions. Almost everyone in this story is a servant to

someone: Naaman to his king, a young girl to her mistress, Elisha to the Lord God. And in the end, Naaman becomes a servant to the true God.

We also are called to serve our King and Lord. Sometimes that may take us far from home into lonely places where strangers do not know us or our God. But wherever we are, we can testify to what we do know—that our God is a God of love and grace.

Lord, when we find ourselves strangers in a strange place, help us to remember whose we are and to share that knowledge with those who are strangers to you. Amen.

SERVING AS HE SERVES

"No servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him."
—John 13:16

Jesus knew he was spending his last night with his disciples. He had tried to explain to them that to love him was to serve him; that to be the greatest was to be the least; that the call to discipleship was the call to serve others in the name of God.

Because he knew this was his last chance, he tried one more time to teach his disciples by showing them what he meant. Jesus was the one person in the room who was most clearly not responsible to wash their dirty feet. And yet he quietly got up, put on an apron, and made his way around the room, doing the work of the least important servant in a household.

When he had finished, Jesus took his seat and asked his disciples if they understood what he had just done.

"This is how people will know that I love them," Jesus explained. "This is how they will come to know me. They will see you serving the way I serve, acting the way I act, being the kind of person I am—and they will know." (See John 13:34-35.)

The next day, Jesus showed them exactly what it meant to be a servant when he gave up his life for them. He paid the ultimate price, the ultimate sacrifice for our sins.

Servants don't just share the good news; they are the good news.

Lord, help me to be your servant today. I ask for the opportunity to serve with love in your name. Amen.

TUNNEL VISION

“Don’t be afraid,” the prophet answered. “Those who are with us are more than those who are with them.” —2 Kings 6:16

It’s called tunnel vision—focusing on what is right in front of us, and not being able to get a broader perspective. Elisha knew quite a few people with that problem, people who reacted in foolish ways because they just couldn’t see the whole picture.

The king of Aram couldn’t see beyond his security breach to realize that someone bigger than a spy was involved. Elisha’s servant couldn’t see beyond the army of Syria to the armies of the Lord. The king of Israel couldn’t see beyond a captured enemy to know how to respond peacefully.

Their blindness leaves us wondering if we are as blind. Is there anything we are not seeing?

What Elisha sees is a world run not by rulers and armies but by the Lord. A prophet sees that

this world is under the authority of God and that God’s power, the only power grounded in love, is what really protects us.

To see with the eyes of faith is to see that God is at work not only in our daily life but also in the arena of battlefields and city streets. No matter where we are or what impossible circumstances we face, we can look beyond our short-sighted fears to see those who are with us and to rest in the certainty that the God who is with us is far greater than anyone who is against us (Romans 8:31-39).

Open our eyes, Lord, so that we can see you. Give us the vision to see your power at work in our lives and in our world. Amen.

EYES OF FAITH

"Blessed are your eyes because they see, and your ears because they hear."
—Matthew 13:16

Jesus was a bit of a puzzle to his followers. Why didn't he just spell out what he was up to? Why did he hide his message?

Jesus knew that many of the people were expecting the Messiah to act in big and obvious ways: they expected a new king who would sit on David's throne, overthrow the Romans, and bring his people into a new kingdom.

But Jesus wanted to open their eyes and ears to see and hear what God was actually doing.

For those with eyes and ears of faith, Jesus had come to bring a kingdom far bigger than one ruled from a capital city.

Faced with short-sighted people who could not see, Elisha prayed that others would see what he could see. He prayed that God would stop the evil that was planned. He prayed

that those who would do harm would see their mistake and change their plans. God answered Elisha's prayers. (See 2 Kings 6:8-23.)

A prophet is a prayer warrior because a prophet knows there is more power in a single prayer—God's power—than in all the chariots and horses of any king. We too can claim the power of God-centered prayer.

Whose eyes can we pray may be opened? What hearts can we pray may be filled? What evil can we pray may be stopped?

How can we help others see Jesus as we do?

Lord, open the eyes of all who do not see you, and open shuttered ears to hear your words of grace. In Jesus' name, Amen.

GOOD NEWS

They said to each other, "What we're doing is not right. This is a day of good news and we are keeping it to ourselves."

—2 Kings 7:9

This story is an awful one. A siege has reduced the townspeople to eating donkeys' heads and each other. The king is driven to attempt murder; a royal officer expresses deep doubt in God, and lepers desert to the enemy. It's about a terrible situation forcing people to desperate measures, people who have given up hope. This is a story about what happens when despair and fear and helplessness rule the day.

"Why should I wait for the LORD any longer?" asks the king. And God answers in a way that no one could have anticipated.

God acts—but no one is there to see it. God does a great thing, but what does it matter if no one is willing to talk about it?

By sharing the good news, the lepers help to save the city of Samaria. Without their mes-

sage, the king would never have heard the answer to his question.

A bearer of good news is like one starving person telling another starving person where to find food; being a prophet of God is a matter of one person telling another person the reason why they can hope.

What stories of the good things God has done for us can we share so that others will know there is good reason to hope in the Lord?

Open our mouths, Lord,
to be the bringers of good
news to others. Help us
to speak words of hope.
Amen.

A MESSAGE OF HOPE

*How can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard?
And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?*

—Romans 10:14

“Why should I hope?” asked the king of Israel in Elisha’s day (see 2 Kings 6:33). Why? Because God can make an army run away in fright. God can use unseen things to overcome the things that we can see (see 2 Kings 7:5-7).

God can rescue us and can turn away evil. God can spread a lavish banquet even in the presence of our enemies. God can bring salvation—light in darkness, comfort in grief, peace in bitterness, healing in brokenness, and strength in weakness.

Why should we hope? Because we have a shepherd who will lay down his life for his sheep in order to protect us. Because we have a Savior who can travel down into the deepest, darkest hell any of us can imagine and come out alive. Because there isn’t a single valley in the shadow of death that our shep-

herd cannot walk us through. Because he claims us as his own and will never let us go. That is why we can hope.

That is why we are prophets. We have been given the message of hope and are told to share it. How will others believe the good news unless they hear it, and how will they hear it unless they are told?

We have our assignment—go and bring the good news of Jesus Christ so that others too can have this hope.

Lord, our shepherd, thank you for your loving care. Help me to share the good news of your love with those who need to hear it. Amen.

GOD SAVES

When the body touched Elisha's bones, the man came to life and stood up on his feet.
—2 Kings 13:21

Elisha was old, having served as prophet of the Lord for over fifty years, and he was now dying. Even King Jehoash recognized that the real power behind the throne of Israel had not been in its kings, but in the prophet through whom God had sustained his people. Jehoash had put his trust in Israel's military strength, but all along it had been God who watched over the land and protected his people. In this last encounter, Elisha tried to help the king understand that God is the one to trust. Elisha's name, meaning "God saves," had pointed to that his entire life.

Even after death, Elisha's body pointed to God's power when another body that was shoved into Elisha's grave was restored to life. As prophets go, Elisha was one of the best and greatest, but even his ministry was unable to halt Israel's descent

into faithlessness. His work was able to bring only a few bright spots into this troubled time in Israel's history.

Israel needed a prophet who could give life on both sides of the grave, a prophet for whom the grave was not a final resting place. God's people needed not just a victory over death but victory over the grave itself.

We need that Prophet as well, the one whose name also means "God saves." Centuries later an angel told a carpenter named Joseph, "You are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21).

Come, O come, Immanuel, and save your people Israel. Come, Lord Jesus, and save us from our sins. Amen.

WORDS OF LIFE

The tombs broke open. The bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life.
—Matthew 27:52

Nobody had listened to Elijah or Elisha or the other prophets, so God came in person to tell the world the good news. Jesus said, in effect, “Come to me, all of you who work so hard at saving yourselves, carrying such terrible burdens of fear and despair, and I will show you how to embrace a life made free with light and grace” (see Matthew 11:28-30).

But the people were threatened by Jesus. They tried to silence him by killing him on a cross. They rejected the opportunity to embrace a new reality of resurrection and full life.

Jesus said, “I am the way and the truth and the life” (John 14:6). That message, that good news, needs to be repeated again and again and again. Every day someone is born who will need to hear it, to see it, to experience it.

There are so many ways we can share the good news of Jesus Christ’s love for us. Some of those ways will involve our mouths, some will involve our hands and feet, and many will include the use of media—print, broadcast, Internet, phone technology, and more. All of these require prayerful hearts and a willingness to let God use us and the resources he has given us.

Let’s respond to God’s call to be prophets of the good news. Let us let God start using us in all the ways we can, to be “Elishas”—faithful and true prophets of God.

“O use me, Lord, use even me, just as you will, and when, and where, until your blessed face I see, your rest, your joy, your glory share.” Amen.

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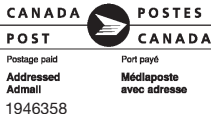
Under The Radar is helping me discover GOOD music I didn't know about. And when you consider that the music helps me engage with God, His Word, and His World, it's about as good as it gets! Thanks, UTR!

~ Albert in Harrisburg, NC



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