

## MOUNTAINTOP BLESSINGS

*I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help. My help cometh from the LORD, which made heaven and earth.*

PSALM 121:1-2 (KJV)

*He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall: But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.*

ISAIAH 40:29-31 (KJV)

**I** love how God connects with us right where we are — how seemingly several devotional readings can intertwine and speak to the heart and how God’s timing is always perfect.

On October 30, 2017, I packed my Bible, devotional readings, and prayer journal and made the two-hour drive to enjoy the beauty of God and His creation and to hike the Big Pinnacle of Pilot Mountain in North Carolina. I was feeling a little homesick and longed for the mountains. I was not alone; God met me there. The tree colors along the drive brought tears to my eyes as I thanked God for this opportunity to go to the mountaintop and spend time with Him. He builds my faith and hope.

From the summit of Pilot Mountain, I texted my nephew to tell him where I was and that I was remembering my parents. In turn, he texted my brother and sister-in-law who were also traveling that very day. They were close to the base of Pilot Mountain on their way back to West Virginia through North Carolina. (We each had not known the other was traveling.) They drove up to the summit, and we had a picnic lunch together, visiting over an hour. One act upon another to connect. God’s timing is perfect!

After our visit, I hiked 1400 feet above the valley floor on Jomeokee Trail to see the Big Pinnacle Knob jutting skyward more than 200 feet from its base. I walked where eagles soared just above my head. As I rested in the rock cliff, I thought, “God is not in the earthquake or the wind ... but in the still small voice.” I flew with the eagles that day. I sang the doxology in praise and prayer, in a whisper and with gratitude. Thank you, Lord!

*Lord, we don't need to know everything that lies ahead of us to trust you. You are trustworthy and faithful in all things and all areas of our lives. May our hearts be as light as the eagle's wings. As the light reflects through trees, may your light be reflected in our lives daily. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

DIANA McMILLION  
NORTH RALEIGH UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

## GOD IS NOT ROUTINE

*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 (NIV)

I like routines. I have exercise routines, routines for cleaning, routines at school and church. Routines help us accomplish what needs to be done without having to think too much about it. They help us keep moving forward. I don't particularly like it when my routines are disrupted, either. Sometimes it's just a minor inconvenience, like having to squeeze a walk into a busy day. Sometimes it's something more major, like figuring out how to get students and schedules back on track when we've had a snow day.

Routines are a good thing ... except when they're not.

Routines can have a negative connotation, too. Sure, having routines is orderly, efficient, and necessary in many areas of our lives. But when we talk about how things have become routine — as in boring, predictable, uninspired — that's not good. This thought came to me when my friend Sylvia and I had a discussion about ways we can get more kids to come to Vacation Bible School (VBS) this year, and she shared an idea she had that was very different. Our VBS program usually runs very smoothly. Everyone knows their job and does it well. But our conversation made me question if we have let it become too routine, and to wonder if we are meeting the needs of the children.

Not following a routine means change — and just the thought of change and all it can entail starts our hearts beating a little faster and the butterflies fluttering in our stomachs. Trying something new — doing something different — is scary. It's uncomfortable to be pulled out of our comfort zones.

God has routines in place. The sun rises and sets, the tides change, the seasons come and go. But God is not routine. It is certainly not routine to speak the universe into being! It is not routine to love people so much that God would send His Son to die in our place as atonement for our sins. It is not routine to offer the free gift of eternal life to all who accept it. No, these things are not routine. They are gifts of grace. We must take care in our lives to not be so routine oriented that we forget to love and grow and change and be the people God created us to be.

*Thank you, Father, for loving us so much. Help us to be willing to disrupt our routines to love you and your creation the way we should. Amen.*

BETH PRICE  
ZION COMMUNITY CHURCH

## GET PUMPED UP

*Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day.*

2 CORINTHIANS 4:16 (NIV)

I go to the doctor's office every eight weeks for an IV infusion to keep my Crohn's disease in remission. My dad jokes that I go to get "pumped up." The medicine prevents symptoms from occurring instead of dealing with symptoms after a flare-up. Because I watch what I eat and I am faithful to my treatment plan, I have been blessed that I haven't had any major issues since I was diagnosed 12 years ago. It is not the most pleasant experience to have an IV in my arm, but without it, my health would go awry. In the grand scheme of things, two hours every eight weeks is a small inconvenience to keep myself healthy.

Second Corinthians 4:16 made me think of my treatment. Just like my infusion "pumps up" my physical health, I also need to "pump up" my spiritual health. I do so by reading a daily devotion, praying, and talking with friends who act as spiritual steroids, to name a few. When I eat too much junk food, my body lets me know, and I have to refocus on eating correctly. If I skip my daily devotions or prayer time too often, I can feel the change in my attitude, and I need to refocus again.

"An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure" is an old adage for a reason. Don't wait until there is a flare-up to go to God. It takes only a few minutes each day to prevent our spiritual symptoms from occurring. Don't think of it as an inconvenience. In the grand scheme of things, it's a small commitment of time to stay spiritually healthy.

What is your spiritual infusion? Who is your spiritual steroid? How do you get spiritually "pumped up"?

*Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for all of the medicines you provide for us. Please give us the strength and determination to continue on your path so we don't have a spiritual flare-up.*

PATTI MOOD

TRINITY UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

## ZION'S CONTINUING EDUCATION CLASSES

*... continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of ... from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.*

2 TIMOTHY 3:14-15 (NASB) (ALSO READ VERSES 16-17)

Perhaps you know of a book entitled *All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten*. My title could be *Everything I Know About God I Learned at Zion*. From infancy through my growing up years, I was taught and guided by folks who loved God. People at Zion made it possible for me to attend Malaga Camp and Vacation Bible School, which were eternally significant for me, bringing me to conviction of sin and embracing the salvation of Christ.

The stories and principles of the Word of God were like the numbers on the dot-to-dot pages I enjoyed as a child. As an adult and still learning at Zion, I needed the dots connected to give me a fuller likeness of God. I discovered that God not only deserves my praise and thanksgiving for the things I like in life, but for everything, including those I would not choose. I learned the significance of the Passover and our understanding of Easter. How wonderful it was for me to see Jesus as God's sacrificial Lamb, prepared for us before the foundations of the world.

Pivotal to all of this learning was discovering the joy of asking questions of God. My mother had been brought up under the idea that it was wrong to ask questions about faith. "Just believe" and be content with that, don't probe around, which might be an indication of doubting. I was cut from different cloth and wanted to know what God meant by what He said and why He did what He did in the way He did it. The answer sometimes came before I had finished the question. At other times, I had to keep asking and searching before there was any satisfaction.

And now, there are the answers I have yet to receive, some of which I've come to realize may not be answered in this life. These mysteries may simply be too wonderful or too big to be understood within the limits of my humanity.

In my earlier years I didn't realize that as I grew in knowing God and His ways I would also grow to love Him more and better. The more I "see" Him, the more wonderful I find Him to be.

*Dear Lord, as we ponder your words and your doings in this season of anticipation, may we each grow to love you best. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

JANE FISH HARRE  
PROVIDENCE ORTHODOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

## WHERE IS GOD?

*“The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by human hands And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else. From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us. ‘For in him we live and move and have our being.’ As some of your own poets have said, ‘We are his offspring.’”*

ACTS 17:24-28 (NIV)

**W**e are living in a time when it seems that God’s presence can’t be seen. I have, however, experienced God in many ways this past year. I know that God is present and that He is taking an active part in our lives. I would like to share a dramatic experience from my life.

I have a shop in the basement of my home. One day I went down to do a small job using a gas torch. I didn’t know it, but the hose had a leak, and after a short period of time the gas was ignited by the torch I was using. There was a ball of flame and an explosion that shook the house, blew out windows, and did other damage.

I was basically unharmed. The hospital couldn’t find any reason to keep me. When I got home and removed the jeans I was wearing, I couldn’t find a burn mark anywhere. They looked like nothing had happened. The County Fire Marshal met with me to determine the cause of the explosion, and at the end of our discussion he said, “It is nice talking to someone who has lived through an explosion of this size.”

A week later, Maureen and I were in ShopRite, and I heard my name called. It was a good friend of mine, and he said, “Jim, I need to share with you.” He said, “I have a habit of praying when someone’s name comes to mind. Last week I heard your name. I took time to pray for you.” I asked, “Was it Tuesday you prayed?” He responded, “Yes.” I asked, “Was it at 11:00 a.m.?” Again he said, “Yes.”

I told him about the explosion. Weakly, I said, “You saved my life.”

We have no idea of all the ways that God is alive and active in our lives. We just need to realize it and be eternally grateful.

*Thank you, God, for your daily presence and loving care. Thank you that we are never alone. Thank you for faithful friends who pray for us.*

JIM KIER

PITMAN UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

## FEAR NOT

*Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me.*

PSALM 23:4 (NIV)

Lorna and her late husband, Bob, had operated a large farm for their entire married life. She was a well-known, independent woman. Lorna lived in a small, newly built home on the edge of her property, about a mile from her son.

One day, she arrived home near dusk with some groceries. She entered her home from the attached garage. As she was putting the groceries away, she noticed a car drive slowly up the road. She busied herself with her groceries when suddenly her lights went out. She checked her phone to find it was dead! She quickly closed her curtains and tried to stay out of sight, all the time trying to see who was outside. Noises indicated someone was trying to get in the front door.

She grabbed her keys and a flashlight, and she quietly made her way into her garage to her car. Her heart palpitating, she started the car and put it into reverse. Accelerating, she crashed through the garage door out to the road. Quickly changing directions, she sped down the road to her son's home. Luckily, he was home, and no one had followed her. She was safe.

Fortunately, Lorna had the wisdom to outwit the evil-doer that day. I believe God was with her and helped her through that fearful encounter.

I later visited Lorna in a local assisted-living facility. The evil that she encountered that day had taken a toll on her. She no longer wanted to live alone, so she moved to a facility where she felt safe.

As Christians we always have our Lord to help us through the hard times. During this Lenten season, we especially need to focus on God, to immerse ourselves in His Word, and to reflect on our own lives and relationship with Him. We also need to give thanks for His free gift of salvation.

*Father God, we give thanks that you will never leave us.*

GINNY GREEN  
EVANGELICAL UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

## EXAMINE MY HEART, O GOD

*And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God ask of you but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in obedience to him, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to observe the LORD's commands and decrees that I am giving you today for your own good? To the LORD your God belong the heavens, even the highest heavens, the earth and everything in it. Yet the LORD set his affection on your ancestors and loved them, and he chose you, their descendants, above all the nations — as it is today. Circumcise your hearts, therefore, and do not be stiff-necked any longer.*

DEUTERONOMY 10:12-16 (NIV)

**T**he theme of our hearts determines the stories of our lives. If our hearts are full of God, His Word, and His promises, then they will overflow into every area of our lives. During this Lenten season, we need to ask ourselves, “What am I allowing into my heart that sets the course of my life?”

We must be willing to acknowledge sin's presence in our lives. We must honestly examine where sin has taken root in us and where it may be leading us. The Spirit of God will produce heartfelt conviction in areas of needed change — the kind of conviction that will lead to repentance.

We need to let God “circumcise our heart.” We need to examine our heart and allow God to cut away anything that might restrict, interfere, or diminish our walk with Him. Then we will be able to walk in obedience to Him, love Him, serve Him, and observe His commands. We will be able to hear Him, and He will be able to use us. He will cleanse us of our sin and fill our heart with the fruit of His Spirit. This will set the course of our life to live out His love, His joy, and His peace; to show hope, kindness, faith, courage, grace, compassion, and thanksgiving; and to express praise to all we come in contact with each day.

He wants to revive our hearts. And it all begins with a spirit of brokenness and humility in confession of our sins. Then we'll know our life is set on the right course.

*And now, Lord, I will do what you ask of me. I will live in your presence in holy reverence, follow the road you set out for me, love you, serve you with everything I have in me, obey your commandments and regulations. You have set your affection on me and loved me, and you have chosen me. Search my heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Circumcise my heart by cutting away anything that should not be there. I come before you in brokenness and humility, acknowledge my sin, and will not be hardheaded any longer. Amen.*

LINDA TURK  
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