

C O U R T N E Y S I L B E R M A N



ONLY GOD
makes things grow

A P E R S O N A L J O U R N E Y T O
G R O W C L O S E R T O G O D

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“Neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth.”

1 Corinthians 3:7


ENCOURAGING

WOMEN *for* CHRIST

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WEEK TWO

Prayer

SCRIPTURE REFERENCE

Don't worry about anything, but in everything, through prayer and petition with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God.

Philippians 4:6

SONG

"Call My Name" by Third Day

Day One: Get Up and Pray



TODAY'S VERSE

My heart rejoices in the LORD, my horn is lifted up by the LORD. My mouth boasts over my enemies, because I rejoice in Your salvation.

1 Samuel 2:1

Without question, my favorite time of the day is the early morning. Granted, a morning person can make this claim quite easily (night owls, I feel for you—hang in there!). I've had a consistent morning quiet time with the Lord for over two years. I wake up around the same time each morning, say a prayer for God's help before my feet hit the floor, put on my glasses, pick up my Bible, and head down the stairs to some delicious, freshly-brewed Dunkin' Donuts coffee. I pour my coffee (add the cream and the sugar, of course!), head over to my favorite chair next to a tall reading lamp complete with a three-way light bulb, and begin my time with Jesus. Ahhhh, what a beautiful picture I just described. But did my mornings always start out this way since I got saved? Not at all! What it took to get me into this habit was like climbing up a steep and rocky hill, coupled with tears and frustration that turned some suspecting heads (read: my husband). Read below for what I wrote over two years ago when I first began writing this study.

I have just experienced nearly two weeks of no morning prayer time, from my usual 6 a.m. to 7 a.m., because the daylight savings time change has thrown me off. I used my sleepiness as an excuse to stay in bed that extra hour, and as a result, my feeling of closeness with God has wavered. I prayed for God's help, and this morning, I was up at 6 a.m., enjoying my peace with Him before the chaos of the day began. There is absolutely, in my experience, a direct correlation

between spending time with God in prayer and my close feeling with Him throughout the rest of the day.

My daily prayer time has varied during this season of my life because I have two small children, one of whom likes to wake up at an inconsistent time each morning. For months I would get up before the rest of the family and come to my favorite spot on the couch in the family room, start the coffee pot, and begin my time with God. And then I would get so discouraged and frustrated, to the point of tears, when one of my children would wake up early and end my time before I was ready. And I prayed for God to allow me the morning time He needed for me, and to not have fear or use my child's inconsistent wake times as an excuse to quit my routine. So I persevered, and God answered my prayer, and for almost an entire month, I had a sleeping family until 7 a.m. each morning so that I could have quiet time. And my life with Him took off yet again. I believe that it was during this time where He started revealing His plan for this Bible study. It was an amazing time.

Then daylight savings time ended several months later, and I was just too tired to get up those first few days, which turned into one week, which turned into two. And before I knew it, I had lost my touch with God the way it was a month earlier. It was just so easy to fall out. And that was just what the enemy wanted. And I prayed again, begging God to get me up to spend that time with Him. And He again faithfully answered my prayers.

Why is something so easy as establishing a morning quiet time so difficult to actually do in practice? Would it really have taken over six months to get into a routine of watching the latest reality show every Tuesday night or going to Cold Stone Creamery every weekday after lunch? Of course not! Do these activi-

ties make Satan tremble with fear? No way, but a daily routine of time alone with God in prayer and Bible reading—now that will make his knees shake.

Luke 22:46 helped me persevere during the time I was working towards my goal. It stayed in my head for those difficult months, and God still uses it to help me when I am wavering some mornings to get out of bed.

Read Luke 22:39-46. Fill in the blanks from verse 46.

“Why are you _____?” He asked them. “_____ and _____, so that you won’t enter into _____.”

Jesus was about the face the most challenging, painful and stressful time in his life here on earth—He was about to go through the humiliation and excruciating pain of being arrested, tried, mocked, beaten, and nailed to a cross. He was going to be separated from His Father in heaven while he bore the sins of all mankind for all time. He asked his disciples to stay awake and pray with him before these events were to happen, but they could not as they were “*exhausted from their grief*” (v. 45).

Prayer is powerful. The more I pray, the more I understand God and His will. Just as good, honest communication with the people in your life create stronger relationships, we grow closer to God when we purposefully and consistently spend time with Him in prayer and reading His Word.

It is the last thing the enemy wants us to do. Because of this, we can easily come up with excuses as to why we don’t have daily quiet time with God. But one of the ways we can fight the enemy is to acknowledge what he’s doing and ask God for His help.

If you do not have a daily routine of prayer and devotion to God, what may be some of the reasons why? Ask God to open your heart to Him.

OR, if you already have a daily routine, what could you do to strengthen it? What is missing from it that you desire to add?

Read the same story of Jesus in Gethsemane, but this time read it in Matthew 26:36-46. Focus on Matthew 26:40-41. Write verse 41 below.

Jesus says to us, “*The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.*” Even Jesus had to go back and pray several times before He was fully surrendered to the Father’s will, thereby receiving the peace that can only come from a complete surrender to God. The only way we are going to fight against the enemy’s schemes to destroy our prayer time is to recognize that in our flesh we will always give in. It is only through the power of God’s spirit within us that we can overcome. My friend Lonnie Juers writes, “The spiritual battle is a constant battle; you can never rest on the laurels of yesterday. Choose humility and obedience to God at the beginning and end of each day, and at each breath in between.”

I made the mistake of resting on the laurels of my first awesome month of morning prayer time that I thought it was invincible. I thought I was invincible to Satan’s attacks on it. I was clearly wrong.

We need to remember that spending daily, quality time in prayer is so threatening to Satan that he will stop at nothing to halt it. Recognize this now and don’t allow him to break the bond of communication and fellowship that God so desperately wants with you. When you are strong in prayer and fellowship with the Father, there is nothing more peaceful and more freeing to you, and nothing more honoring to God. Allow that peace to grow in you today, and ask God to help you never let it go.

Dear Heavenly Father,

I need your help, God. I desperately want to share your peace through daily, consistent prayer to you,. but so much is blocking my way. Help me to get to you through prayer. Give me the resources, the time, the patience and the wisdom to understand how daily prayer with you can change my life. Be with me and strengthen me when I fall into temptation to not pray. Draw me to you so that my daily prayer time becomes a top priority. Thank you so much for your perfect love of me. In
Jesus' name, Amen.

What is one new truth you learned today?

Day Two: The Benefits of Prayer



TODAY'S VERSE

Therefore let us approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us at the proper time.

Hebrews 4:16

When I first began writing this study, I developed a good writing habit. Instead of finding time here and there to write, I used the Tuesday mornings my children were in preschool to work. I realized that if I didn't purposefully schedule time during my week, I would never get around to writing. So Tuesday mornings were blocked off for working on my Bible study. I didn't check my email, I didn't clean the house, I didn't go grocery shopping and I didn't answer the phone. I simply used the time to focus on writing. And because I saw the benefits of this consistency (i.e. completing the first draft), I was more energized and enthusiastic every time Tuesday rolled around.

Earlier on, I was fretting about finding time to write. At the time, I had accepted God's calling to create this study, but was wondering how I would find the time to write during that busy season of my life. My children were too young to entertain themselves for any length of time, so writing while they were home did not work. For a while I believed that God was going to provide sporadic time to write, which He did for a while, but I realized that it was going to take a long time to finish if I just wrote a little here or there. I prayed for guidance and direction, and a concrete plan for writing.

A couple of weeks later, God provided the answer through the message at church that Sunday. The pastor gave a practical way to create a plan for achieving a goal that God has set. I took notes on the message, then spent the rest of the day thinking about how the

information could apply to me. I prayed for God's answer and for His will to be done, and He led me to use my Tuesday mornings for writing, giving me His peace that He would guard the time from outside distractions. I felt a greater sense of closeness with Him, knowing that I was aligning myself more to His will.

Is there a good habit that you've developed recently? If so, please describe it below.

When we ask God for His help through prayer, we grow closer to Him. Prayer with an open Bible is *the way* that we discover His plan, gain peace, and honor Him. It encourages us, cleanses us, renews us, and allows us to see how God can work in our lives. When we see God answering our prayers, our faith grows. We see that He hears us and we are strengthened. We see that He is faithful to His Word, and our understanding of Him and His purpose is revealed a step at a time.

The benefits of prayer is seen numerous times in the Bible. One of the most compelling accounts is the story of Daniel in the lions' den in Daniel 6.

Take a moment to read through Daniel 6:1-28.

Daniel was an honest, righteous man who had faith in God. He distinguished himself to the Babylonian king with such humility and grace that the other king's administrators were jealous of him. They wanted to find charges against Daniel, but knew there was no other way than to prosecute based on his belief in one God (the Babylonians worshiped pagan gods and practiced sorcery and magic, practices detestable to God according to Deu. 18:10-13). The king's men said in verse five, "*We will never find any charge against this Daniel unless we find something against him concerning the law of his God.*"

They convinced the king to issue a decree stating that anyone caught praying to any god or man except the king over the subsequent thirty days would be thrown into the lions' den. But Daniel was a devout Jewish man and would not dishonor God by following the decree. He prayed to God in his upstairs room where the windows opened toward Jerusalem (v. 10).

Fill in the blanks with the rest of Daniel 6:10 below:

_____ times a _____ he got down
on his _____, _____, and gave
_____ to his God, just as he had done
_____.

The king's men found Daniel praying and told the king, who had no choice but to follow the decree and throw Daniel into the pit of lions. Daniel prayed while he was in the lions' den, and God answered his prayers. *"My God sent His angel and shut the lions' mouths. They haven't hurt me, for I was found innocent before Him"* (v. 22).

Daniel modeled consistent devotion and faith in God. He didn't just pray when he was in trouble, he prayed and gave thanks to God daily. He witnessed the benefit of his prayers in such a climatic way in the lions' den when God saved his life. His faith in God had grown *before* this potentially disastrous event, so that when his time of need came, his established faith saw him through.

Look up 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18. Write v. 17 below.

What does constant prayer look like in a typical day? For me, I make an effort to acknowledge Jesus' presence wherever I am, look to Him for guidance and make the choice to surrender to His will in the situations I encounter. Sometimes I simply chat with Him in my heart. Sometimes I engage in a long dialogue while I'm alone in the car or folding the laundry in my bedroom. Sometimes I just cry out, "Help me, Lord!" when I am frustrated, angry, upset or confused. He is always with me. Jesus promises that he will answer our prayers and that he will guide us according to His will. He tells us concretely the

benefits of our prayers.

Read Matthew 7:7-8. Write verse 8 below.

Like Daniel modeled and Jesus taught us, constant and consistent prayer are the keys to seeing the benefits of prayer. As we spend time communicating with God, we are opening ourselves to His communication with us. When we take the time to pray, we are allowing God to enter our situations and show His hand in our lives.

Proverbs 16:3 says, *"Commit your activities to the LORD, and you plans will be achieved."* Recall the good habit you have developed recently. Did you allow God's hand in establishing it? If so, what did you ask for help with specifically? If not, what could you use His help with? Write the date next to your answer so that you can look back later and see what God has done.

I hope that I've provided some insight on the benefits of prayer. I am praying for you that this knowledge strengthens your desire to pray and to invite God into your daily situations ² that your faith grows and that you grow closer to Him because of it. Continue to pray, Beloved Sister, and let Him show you all He can do.

Dear Heavenly Father,

Thank you for teaching me about the benefits of prayer. It is my prayer that you give me a heart to pray more often and more fervently about the daily situations of my life. I want to grow my faith in you, and I know that I can do that through prayer. Encourage me and strengthen me as only you can.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

What is one new truth you learned today?

Day Three: How To Pray



TODAY'S VERSE

Pray at all times in the Spirit with every prayer and request.

Ephesians 6:18

Life can be such a whirlwind sometimes. When I wrote this lesson initially, I had just experienced a crisis with God's provision written all over it. Not coincidentally, I learned how to pray that week with greater wisdom and understanding than before.

My loving, 81-year-old grandmother had just gone to the hospital for outpatient gallbladder surgery. The surgery was seemingly successful, so my mom took her to our family's house in the mountains for grandma to spend some time recovering in a setting she enjoys. She was recovering well, then all of a sudden, crisis struck and she had to be rushed to the hospital for a severe infection and heart attack. It was frightening for both my mom and my grandma because things went downhill so quickly. One morning grandma was fine, and then the same afternoon she was delirious from the infection and having a heart attack.

I received the call one Sunday afternoon from my dad who told me what had happened. I immediately called my mom to help in any way that I could. The hospital grandma was staying at was only two hours from my home in Glen Allen, so I got there quickly. Because God knows these things are going to happen before we do, He provided for me to spend time with my grandma and mom. My in-laws happened to be visiting us that Sunday and were planning on staying until Monday to spend time with the kids. A Sunday-Monday stay is not typical for them, as they visit mostly during the weekends. But this time they were there and generously stayed until Tuesday afternoon so I could leave first thing Monday morning for the hospital. In the midst of a crisis, God provided.

I cried and prayed all the way to the hospital that

Monday morning. Because the Lord has strengthened me through past hurts and painful experiences, I had a sense of peace the whole time. I am not afraid of death as it is part of life, I just kept asking God to be with us and guide us through the challenge, and for us to make all decisions according to His will. I prayed for my mom and grandma to grow closer to Him because of this and to strengthen all of our relationships. God listened.

I cannot explain what happened over the two days I was there, other than to say that God works in wonderful ways. He poured His love and His strength into the three of us and guided us through each moment. We were not panicked or weak. We did not make poor decisions out of fear. We sat back and took it one moment at a time, trusting Him through it all. The three of us sat in grandma's hospital room and laughed repeatedly over what happened the night grandma came into the hospital. Because she was delirious from the infection, she kept wanting to get out of bed and get pumpkin pie out of a refrigerator that she believed was in her room. The nurses had to hold her down to keep her in bed. She threatened them by saying she would call the FBI because they couldn't take away her rights to the pumpkin pie. At the time it was scary, but once grandma was back to health, it was actually a really funny scene. That laughter was from God.

After a long visit that Monday and reassurance that grandma was going to be okay that evening in the hospital, my mom and I left to have dinner then spend a night at her house, just the two of us. I had packed an overnight bag just in case I needed to stay, and there, once again, God knew what was needed for the future. I couldn't remember the last time my mom and I had time together, just the two of us. Maybe since before I was married. I had no idea how important and how precious time with her alone was. I just thought that all the times we were together with my husband and children were just as important. Not to say that they are not, but there is something special about God allowing me to be just a daughter, and my mom to just be my mother. No roles of wife, grand-

mother or mother obscuring the time, just our roles as mother-daughter together. And we had so much fun. We talked about important things and trivial things. We watched our favorite show on QVC (that is only on Monday nights—funny how God can even provide the small things that He knows we love) and chatted and laughed. It was a blessing, and it certainly opened my eyes to the importance of time alone with just my mom. I would have never thought of this need had my grandmother not gotten sick.

The next morning, we had a talk over coffee, then I went on to visit my grandma again before heading back home. Grandma was doing better by then and got out of the hospital at the end of that week. God provided the whole time. Praise our Lord and Savior, who is always there for us, no matter what.

Read Matthew 6:9-13. What is this familiar passage called?

I don't know about you, but for most of my time growing up, I had the Lord's Prayer memorized, but I didn't understand what it really meant. This is Jesus' teaching on how we should pray. It is so powerful and wonderful. Allow me break it down for you.

"Our Father in heaven, Your name be honored as holy" is guidance to our first step in prayer. We first acknowledge God in heaven and honor Him above all else. I begin my morning prayers with, "Dear Father, You are truly amazing."

Write your own prayer of praise and acknowledgement below:

done here on earth. I pray something like this, "Jesus, I ask for You to give me an obedient heart today and to submit to Your will for my life. I trust in You and Your ways, as You have shown me that Your ways are always better than mine. I pray for Your guidance and strength, and for me to follow Your will for my life."

Write your own prayer of submission below:

Then Jesus tells us in verse 11 to pray, *"Give us today our daily bread."* Jesus is encouraging us to ask Him for the things we need and to depend on his provisions on a daily basis. This is where prayer can sometimes be difficult for us because we don't always know what we need. We may think we need something that we really don't need, or we pray for needs that are really wants. But I encourage you not to worry about this, and to continue to pray for the things you think you need. The Father knows us better than we know ourselves, and will truly provide the things needed. So ask away, and be prepared to be enlightened on what your wants are versus your true needs. He will show you, and you will be so thankful for the blessing of wisdom that comes with discovering what your true needs are, and that He will supply them. The daily bread part of my prayers this morning went like this, "Jesus, I need your help with writing my Bible study lesson this morning. Please give me the time, the energy, the words, and the Scripture that you want included in today's lesson on how to pray. May my words glorify you and you alone."

Write your own prayer of petition below:

Verse 10 says, *"Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven."* This means that we are acknowledging God's kingdom and we are submitting to His will for our lives—that His will in heaven be

In verse 12, Jesus teaches us to pray, *“And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.”* Here we are to repent for our sins, ask for God’s forgiveness, and forgive those who have hurt or offended us. This is so important, and quite frankly, you may not know what you are praying for specifically when you begin. Or you may know well. I always ask God to show me where I need to repent if I stepped out of His will in a situation I didn’t realize at the time. And He’s quick to show me in His loving way. When we accepted Jesus as our Personal Lord and Savior, we are immediately forgiven of all our sins—past, present and future. However, we need to continue to ask for forgiveness when we make mistakes on a daily basis. This serves two purposes: 1) it reminds us that we are humans living in a fallen world and we will not be perfect here, and 2) it puts us in a place to be humble before God. Humility is one of the most important lessons we will learn here on earth. It is the opposite of pride, which says we can do it all by ourselves.

This verse also tells us we are to forgive others for the pain and hardship they have caused us. Please understand, Beloved Sister, that I know how difficult it is to forgive others. But this is what I’ve learned—true forgiveness can only come from Jesus. People can hurt us badly, in ways that are downright mind-boggling and utterly heartbreaking. We are never called to forgive others out of our own strength. We pray for God to give us hearts to forgive because only Jesus himself is the Great Healer. If you need to forgive someone today for the pain they have caused you, pray for help. It may take time for Him to mend your heart, but if you make the choice to ask for His help in forgiving that person who wronged you, you are following His will and He will bless that choice. He will supernaturally give you the forgiveness you ask for. But please, don’t waste another second of your life being bitter or harboring a grudge against someone else. Jesus has called you to be free.

Write your own prayer of repentance and forgiveness below:

This leads to the last line of the Lord’s Prayer, *“And do not bring us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.”* We talked about the enemy last week, and this is how we should pray daily for God’s protection from Satan. Only through Jesus can we be led away to not fall into sin. Again, this is not something we are ever called to handle by our own strength. The enemy has thousands of years of experience tempting people to sin—he is way craftier than we can imagine. But Jesus has already won the victory over sin when He died on the cross for us. The enemy knows that his time is short and that those who have accepted Jesus are protected for eternity. He cannot have our souls, but he can make us believe his lies and make our earthly lives miserable if we let him. So choose not to, and choose to receive Jesus’ help. I have learned over the past year to pray constantly and consistently for God’s help regarding my daily struggles with temptation. Tomorrow we will talk about desperate prayers, and the Lord knows that I have prayed a lot of those. They go something like, *“Jesus, I am tempted to lash out at the ones I love and fall into the trap of anger and rage over this situation that is not going my way. Please, give me your strength and your peace to handle this, to not get angry, to not lose my patience, and to trust in you.”*

Write your own prayer of deliverance below:

In some later manuscripts of the Bible and in most Lord’s Prayers that are recited at churches, the conclusion is, *“For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.”* No matter what life brings us, God’s ultimate will is for His glory to be shown through Jesus Christ. We pray for His will to be done in each situation and to bring honor and glory to Jesus. We will talk about this more in our last week of study.

I hope this lesson has given you some practical help with the Lord’s Prayer. Pray to God daily,

hourly, anytime you need help, and anytime you are thankful for all He's done for you. Through prayer, you will grow closer to Him and your faith will be strengthened in new and marvelous ways.

Dear Jesus,

You are so wonderful and powerful—through you anything is possible. Thank you for my life and for the lessons you are teaching me that strengthen my faith and bring me closer to you. I need your help to continue to learn how to pray. May your will be done. May I always have a strong fellowship with you, and may my life bring you honor and glory. In your Heavenly Name, Amen.

What is one new truth you learned today?

Day Four: Needing God — Desperate Prayers



TODAY'S VERSE

Casting all your care on Him,
because He cares about you.

1 Peter 5:7

Yesterday we learned how to pray the way Jesus himself taught us. In those times when life seems to be “at bay,” we can take the time to learn how to pray in a more formal way. But then there are times when our world seems to collapse around us. We suddenly lose a loved one. We lose a job. One of our children becomes very sick. A spouse has betrayed our trust. A family member is diagnosed with cancer. A friend’s teenager commits suicide. And the list goes on and on. You may be experiencing one of those times right now, or perhaps you’ve experienced one in the past. And you know that nothing can compare to the pain and suffering the situation brings. You may even be tempted to walk away from God, thinking if He loved you so much, why would He bring so much pain into your life. Perhaps you are very angry at Him. Rest assured, many of us have been there, even yours truly.

I don’t know exactly why God allows such difficulty to fall upon His children. But I do know one thing—He always has a reason. He doesn’t allow difficulty in our lives in vain, He allows it so that ultimately, we will grow closer to Him and be conformed to the likeness of His Son Jesus.

Read Romans 8:28-30. Write out verse 28 below:

God is not promising us, as followers of Christ, that we will only have good things happen to us in our lives. But He does promise us that “*all things work together for the good of those who love God.*” I believe that we get to see some of the good during our life here (Ps. 27:13). But the fullest extent of the good will only be realized when we are at home in heaven (1 Cor. 13:12). That is why we are called to have faith and believe His promises to us.

Fill in the blanks of Psalm 119:50:

This is my comfort in my _____:
Your _____ has given me
_____.

Just today I was struggling again in my marriage to the husband I adore and am crazy about. We have been living in a spiritually mismatched marriage for over three years. I cried to God with another desperate prayer. These are the raw moments of our prayer lives with God—the moments when our vulnerability shows through and where we have no other choice but to get down on our knees and plead for His help; where our cries reveal our compassions, our real needs, our real hurts, and our real hearts. These times open us up in ways that “normal” or “happy” times could never. It is in these times when we discover more of who we are, who God made us to be, and who God is. These times allow God the perfect opportunity to show us who He is—our Creator, our Friend, our Wonderful Counselor, our Healer, our Ultimate Redeemer, our Savior. Even though you may be tempted, Beloved Sister, don’t walk away from Jesus. Run toward Him, outstretching your arms and pleading for His help. We will never feel more loved by Him than during these moments.

Look up two powerful verses in your Bible: Romans 8:18 and Hebrews 10:35-36. What is God's message to us in both of these verses?

God reminded me this afternoon to not lose heart—great is my reward for following His will, even when His will involves pain and suffering on my part. Tomorrow we will talk about how Jesus' rewards are not like the world's rewards and this will give us more insight into how we can cope in difficult times. But for now I encourage you, wherever you are in your life, whether it be in a time of plenty or a time of want, to cry out to God whenever you feel the need to. Rest assured He is listening to every word, catching every tear you cry, and orchestrating the world around you to show He alone is God. There is nothing He allows that He doesn't provide a way to come out victorious on the other side. And it's often darkest before the dawn. Just as Jesus' disciples' hopes were shattered on Good Friday, the day their Messiah died, and the two days following were some of the darkest they'd seen, Sunday morning did arrive, along with the power and splendor of the resurrection, showing the world that Jesus is indeed victorious over death, and that everyone who believes is saved. Remember that when you are struggling, and in your darkest times, that your Savior is waiting to show you through—to show you all the glory to His Name that goes along with rescuing you once again.

Dear Jesus,

I desperately cry to you for help. I am struggling like no other time, and I am lost and feel hopeless. I need you to rescue me. Please show me your love and guidance. Show me that I am not suffering in vain—that you are providing good out of this dark situation. Praise you, Lord. In Your Heavenly Name, Amen.

What is one new truth you learned today?

Day Five: Not As the World Gives



TODAY'S VERSE

Peace I leave with you. My peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Your heart must not be troubled or fearful.

John 14:27

Read the underlined words from THE MESSAGE. How does the words “well and whole” help us to understand what Jesus means by “peace?”

How does the world leave us according to THE MESSAGE?

I am once again reminded this morning of the importance of reading Scripture in different English translations to get the full effect of the message being conveyed (go to biblegateway.com). Review the chart below to see a side-by-side comparison of the different renderings. Focus on the underlined words.

HCSB [©]	NIV [©]	THE MESSAGE
Peace I leave with you. My peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. <u>Your heart must not be troubled or fearful.</u>	Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. <u>Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.</u>	<u>I'm leaving you well and whole.</u> That's my parting gift to you. Peace. I don't leave you the way you're used to being left—feeling abandoned, bereft. So don't be upset. Don't be distraught.

Fig. 1: John 14:27 translations (emphasis added)

Describe the slight difference in meaning between the underlined words in the HCSB and the underlined words in the NIV.

This is such a wonderful promise—Jesus gives us nothing as the world gives. He instead gives it better than the world could ever give! He also promises to never leave us so we do not have to be fearful or troubled, ever. As we wrap up our week on prayer, we are going to talk today about the peace that comes from prayer—a peace that we cannot find anywhere else, and certainly not from the things of this world.

Take a moment to open up your heart to the Lord. Ask Him to help you answer the following question: When you are stressed, overtired, angry, or frustrated, and are in need of peace, what are some of the first things you do to try to attain it?

May I guess at a few of the things that may have ended up on your list? Did calling a friend or family member, going shopping, eating something indulgent, crying, getting a drink (wine, beer or the stiff kind), taking drugs, whether it be legal or illegal ones,

sulking by yourself, taking your emotions out on someone else, veg'ing out in front of the TV, listening to music, engaging in inappropriate behavior of any kind, or exercising end up on your list? (Many of those ended up on my list not too long ago.) While some of these may be therapeutic in a healthy manner, let me ask you another question.

Has anything you listed ever sustained your peace in long term?

Beloved Sister, here's the thing—nothing in this world will ever bring you the peace that can only come through a close, intimate relationship with Jesus Christ. You may try to attain it in other ways, but it is a false peace—one that will never sustain you nor enlighten you to the ways that bring true healing and change. If you are anything like I used to be, those things actually brought about more pain and suffering.

That being said, let me clarify something about some of the other methods discussed. I am not suggesting that talking things out with friends or family members, crying, listening to music, or exercising are poor methods. They are wonderful ways of working out our human emotions. What I am saying is that prayer needs to be done before or in accordance with these activities. And what may occur, as it so often happens with me, is that God will use these activities to help give you the peace that can only come from Him.

There have been several times when I was upset and praying in the car. I would turn on the radio to the Christian station and hear a song that directly related to my fears at that moment. God would fill me with a sense of love and compassion, knowing it was no coincidence the song playing was exactly what He selected for me. He was letting me know that He heard my prayers and was calming me with His presence, all the while reminding me to not be afraid or worried for He is always with me.

Read Philippians 4:4-7. Fill in the blanks for verse 7 below.

And the _____ of God, which _____ every thought, will _____ your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

What does this verse mean to you personally?

You may have heard the term *supernatural* when discussing ways of thinking from God that we cannot put into words. Used in context, through prayer to Jesus, we are promised a supernatural sense of peace that surpasses any thought or worry.

God has a way of working out the circumstances around us when we invite Him into our lives through prayer. We could never accomplish this on our own. Ephesians 3:20 says, "*Now to Him who is able to do above and beyond all that we ask or think according to the power that works in us.*" God is all-powerful (omnipotent), all-knowing (omniscient), all-loving (omnibenevolent) and present everywhere (omnipresent). There is no problem in your life He cannot help you with. There is no problem too big for God. He wants to help you. He is waiting for you to exercise your faith in Him and ask for His help.

Over four years ago, God called me to a life of women's ministry. With the long road that (prayerfully) lies ahead, which included finishing my master's degree program and beginning an online women's ministry, I get overwhelmed with how I'm going to accomplish it all. But then I am reminded I am not going to accomplish it, but *Christ will accomplish it through me*. There is a bumper sticker that encourages me every time I get overwhelmed. It simply reads, "Not I, But Christ." It is based on Galatians 2:20—"*I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.*"

The prophet Elijah also experienced an overwhelming threat and a deep depression which left him feeling abandoned.

Read 1 Kings 19:1-18. Fill in the blanks from verse 4.

"I have had _____!"

Elijah lived during the reign of a wicked queen

named Jezebel. In 1 Kings 19 he experienced a crisis of faith when Jezebel sent him a message saying she was going to kill him. He had proved to the Baal worshipers that the Lord is the only true God (see 1 Kings 18). She worshipped Baal and was enraged at his actions. Fearful for his life, left all alone and at the end of his rope, he traveled a day's journey into the desert and cried out, "*LORD, take my life, for I'm no better than my fathers*" (1 Kings 19:4).

Elijah is considered one of the greatest prophets of God. He heard God speak to him and prophesied accurately of God's great works. Despite the evidence of God's presence in his life, he still experienced a crisis of fear and abandonment. After crying out, God responded with miraculous provisions and the reassurance of His presence.

Remember the story of Elijah when you feel you are all alone. God is always with you. He is waiting to help you in extraordinary ways. Pray to Him, Beloved Sister, and He will give you a peace that is unlike anything the world can give.

Heavenly Father,

You are amazing. The things you can do and coordinate are beyond my understanding. I am very thankful to have you as the Counselor of my life. Remind me to come to you in prayer when I need help, and provide me with the peace that transcends every thought. Praise you, Father. In Jesus' name, Amen.

What is one new truth you learned today?