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ENDORSEMENTS

Comfort is a God-given grace that can surprise and almost overtake us during the most painful and tumultuous times. Just when we are at our lowest; just when we've lost all hope, God sends relief through the consolation of an uplifting word, an inspiring image, an insightful question, and an encouraging remark. This is why I love Lynn Severance's new book, *Seeking the Light of God's Comforter—When Challenges Dim Our View*. Through photos, quotations, intuitive questions, and warm-hearted stories, Lynn helps the reader embrace the solace of the Holy Spirit. With every page, we find another reason to trust God through the toughest of times. I heartily recommend this special devotional book—something that will bolster every hurting heart!

—Joni Eareckson Tada
Joni and Friends International Disability Center
Agoura Hills, California

Lynn Severance is a woman of great courage. We read in the Scriptures how “He will give us the treasures of darkness; riches stored in secret places.” Lynn’s life is that treasure with riches stored in who she has become. Her work has preceded her already and “gone global”! When I was a concierge at HEAL AFRICA’s hospital in the Congo DRC, people came from around the world to work with the least, the last, and the lost. We oftentimes read one of Lynn’s devotionals around the breakfast table before we began another day at the hospital. Lives have been touched, hope restored, and destinies altered through her words. My late husband, Tim Hansel, believed in how his story connected to Lynn’s story. His hope was that other readers would find HIS story therein, helping them to move forward in God’s life-giving ways. As Lynn has surrendered to her chronic illness over the past thirty years, her life circumstances continue to be a servant of the gospel.

—Anastasia Hansel, MA, Global Leadership
Founder of Global Women in Leadership Network
Motivational Speaker and Adventure Coach
Dana Point, California

My friend Lynn Severance has the gift of encouragement, and you will experience her gift as you absorb this book. Lynn writes from a place of deep pain and even deeper faith. Her hard-won insights on Scripture and God will bless, comfort, and move those who have faced suffering and wondered why . . . and what's next. All of us experience affliction if we live long enough—some of us more than others. Chronic pain, loss of physical ability, even broken relationships are normal parts of the Christian walk, though we are tempted to think otherwise. *Seeking the Light of God's Comforter—When Challenges Dim Our View* doesn't sugarcoat this truth. It does, however, help us to discover the sweet presence of the Spirit amid the sometimes bitter circumstances of life. Highly recommended!

—Stan Guthrie, author
*God's Story in 66 Verses:
Understand the Entire Bible by Focusing on Just One Verse in Each Book,
All That Jesus Asks: How His Questions Can Teach and Transform Us*
Wheaton, Illinois

Lynn Severance shares her heart, passion, and faith journey in, "*Seeking the Light of God's Comforter—When Challenges Dim Our View*. As an optometrist, I have the joy of helping people daily with their vision. Lynn is a patient of mine with considerable visual challenges, yet recognizes God's vision in His gift of grace to persevere. Through Lynn's writing and photography, she opens the eyes of her readers to see God's word in a new way. She shares her perspective of how God's Comforter has changed her vision and how He can change yours, and that of others blinded by pain and trials. May God's grace and love be evident in your spiritual journey, as you are encouraged through His words, Lynn's photography, and the meditations in this book. Thank you, Lynn.

—Nancy G. Torgerson, OD, FCOVD
Alderwood Vision Therapy Center
Lynnwood, Washington

Lynn Severance and I met when she came on staff where I am a devotional writer for Rest Ministries, an online Christian website for those with chronic illness. As we got to know each other, I learned of the many life challenges she has faced with grace and a strong faith. I went from being inspired by her heartfelt writings to being inspired by her life itself. I believe that the comforting truths, so beautifully written, combined with Lynn's amazing photographs will provide the encouragement and inspiration she embodies. I'm grateful to be able to call her my friend, and even more grateful to have had the privilege to endorse her writing, as I am convinced they are words that many will glean quiet comfort from during their challenging days.

—deni hansen-gray weber, Psy/D, ET/P
licensed Indiana psychologist
professional educational therapist, retired
admin, Peace in Chronic Illness
mixed-media and pastel artist

What a convergence of authenticity and beauty is this grace-filled offering by Lynn Severance. Hope hallmarks every page as Lynn reflects on her own life experiences, particularly those of chronic and debilitating illness, and views them through the lens of expectant faith in a loving God. She is tried but not disappointed. Her faithfulness in persevering with the questions is surpassed only by God's faithfulness in providing the courage and comfort needed. All of this is gathered up and given as gift of beauty to the reader. Lynn chronicles her journey with the language of a sage/poet but also with the artistry of pictures that delight the eye and stir the heart. This book is a gift to all who walk the challenging path of seeking God's Light in difficult times.

—Kathleen MacInnis Kichline, MDiv

Author: *Sisters in Scripture, Never On Sunday, and Elders of the Bible*
adjunct faculty School of Theology and Ministry, Seattle University

In *Seeking the Light of God's Comforter—When Challenges Dim Our View*, Lynn comes beside those with chronic illness, which is not a temporary loss as it rips away hopes and plans. The gift of this book is that Lynn digs deeply into her own soul, facing the reality of permanent loss and then puts what she finds on paper. The reader feels Lynn's constant spark of hope. She never turns away from what is hard. She feels the fears, admits her fallibilities, and draws us closer to her. We are comforted that we have found someone willing to share the run-away emotions illness brings. Lynn is determined to not miss a word that the Holy Spirit whispers to her. Facing the upheavals takes time and energy we don't have. Lynn gives us a starting place through her words and stunning photography. I am eager to share Lynn's book with others, offering them a taste of what God can do when we surrender our dreams over to Him and open our hearts to what He has planned.

—Lisa Copen, founder of Rest Ministries, Inc.,

Author: *Refresh Me, Lord: Prayer for Those with Illness* and
Beyond Casseroles: 505 Ways to Encourage a Chronically Ill Friend
Designer of inspirational jewelry, *Gutsy Goodness*
San Diego, California

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Heartfelt appreciation to those who are listed below:

Lisa Copen

Your vision for Rest Ministries begun in 1997 has come to fruition and continues to grow! Hundreds of thousands of those living with chronic health issues, and needing Christian connections with others who understand these challenges, are now enriched in the deepest of ways—His ways. Bless you. I am privileged to call you friend and be a part of your team of devotional writers. This book would never have come to be without your influence in my life.

Mary Lou Koch

How could we have known when we met in 1968 that your one statement to me in 2008, “I think you should write devotionals for Rest Ministries,” would evolve into this book? In 1968-69, you helped me teach forty-five first graders how to read at St. Michael’s in Silver Spring, Maryland. Now there may be some among them who will be blessed as they read this book! Your friendship, encouragement, and the strength of your prayers has kept me believing during the stand-still times of this journey.

My Fellow Devotional Writers at Rest Ministries

You keep encouragement flowing in my life, along with our thousands of readers who comment about how their lives have been enriched. Your courage facing your own challenges, your support and ceaseless prayers through various crises, and above all your friendships, are soaked in every word that flowed into this book. I pray I represent “us” well. Each of you is evidence that God holds the whole world in his hands. As we have shared in depth from various parts of the United States of America and internationally, we have also come to know how deeply He holds our hearts.

Tim Hansel

Your influence in my life came years before I had the privilege of meeting you. That meeting, which included your wife, Anastasia, brought me two treasured friendships. Your writings helped me take the first steps in learning to live in a body that took an unexpected turn. You helped me discover how God asks and equips us to live out the lives we are given when challenged beyond our ability to believe it is possible. This may not be the book we had hoped to co-write. God called you home before that dream came to be. But I felt you perched on my shoulder as each word flowed forth to become this one!

James Walker

You told me you wanted no acknowledgment when my book was published. I told you that was “too bad” for how could I not give thanks for our years of friendship correspondence, your belief in me, and in my writing. You helped me hone my writing skills because yours were so keen from thirty years as a newspaper journalist for the *Vancouver Sun* in Vancouver, B.C. There was no chance for us to say, “Goodbye,” in 2009. As you peek from heaven above, I am here to tell you, “Look what has finally happened, dear James!”

David Severance, Jr.

You are a gift (as well as a dear twin brother) and so was your surprise birthday gift of my first digital camera in 2009 “so I could get really good photos for my book.” Thank you for the early editing of some of them before I learned how to do that myself, and for sharing many articles you found about publishing as you encouraged me to persevere and keep my hopes for publication alive.

Apple Retail Store Personnel, Alderwood Mall, Lynnwood, Washington

You have had one enthusiastic student since I bought my first laptop computer in 2008. All I have come to know in using it, I owe to your personable, patient, and expert trainers. I'll look at a photo I learned to edit, a graphic visual design I made, or the Powerpoint presentation I created and see the faces of the ones who were my teachers. You truly are “geniuses.”

Dick Staub

Thank you for founding The Kindlings, a relational movement seeking to rekindle the spiritual, intellectual, and artistic legacy of Christians in culture. Although The Kindlings endeavors occur in various venues, it was my attendance in 2010 at KindlingsFest, held on Orcas Island in the San Juan Islands of Washington that put me on the road leading to the publication of this book.

Jerry Root

There you sat at KindlingsFest, 2010, surrounded by your “entourage” at a lunch table. I knew not one soul that first day. Close to stumbling as I tried to find somewhere to sit, you beckoned me to join your group. We exchanged names and then your subtle question, “What’s with the cane?” led us into a spirited conversation lasting way past dessert. At that time, having never read one word I ever wrote, you referred me to your friend and literary agent, Stan Guthrie. You, your kindnesses then, and your support ever since, are so appreciated.

Stan Guthrie

Jerry Root paved my road to meeting you. You have graced my life ever since with counsel and consistent encouragement. When doors opened and then closed, you steadied me to keep persevering. During the stretches of quiet inaction, when God was working behind the scenes, your belief in me and my writing remained steadfast. It all has led to his perfect timing for this book's publication. Having your calm reassurances are blessings I will carry always.

My “Sisters in Scripture,” St. Thomas More Catholic Church, Lynnwood, Washington

You came into my life at a juncture when much of my mobility and functioning had been leveled. I found you after some months of steps that equipped me to even be at a church. My involvements thereafter with Bible studies have been ongoing, as has your care and inspiration. You are not only sisters, but friends who enrich my life. I love you!

Brookview Community Church, Brier, Washington

Jason Huguenin, pastor (and former first-grade student of mine), I remain amazed at how we reconnected after thirty-four years! Now I learn from you as I listen to you teach. I feel like a “proud mama.” And to my Brookview weekly Life Group: your passion as Christ followers, your prayers for me during times I cannot attend, the sharing of our joys, needs, hopes, dreams, or simply taking some evenings to have fun, bring cheer to my world. Each of you is so appreciated!

Photos

I want to thank Dave Peterson and his daughter-in-law, Mary Peterson, for their watercolor images specifically created to image the messages in the texts they accompany. Your artistic talents add a glow to this book’s essence. Abundant thanks to each individual who gave me a “personal property release” to use a photo of mine taken on your premises. To the best of my knowledge, at the time of this book’s publication, the credits listed are current and may help readers find out more about you!

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I am thankful for your prayers and encouragement during my years of hopes and continued endeavors. Each one of you holds a special place in my heart. I am forever grateful for your support in a wide variety of ways.

Redemption Press

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My Holy Three—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit

You beckoned and I said, “Yes,” and entered your triune dance. How patiently you guide the choreographed steps you choose for my life. Even when I stumble, your faithfulness holds me steady. You are Life, Love, and Light. I wrap all mentioned above, and the others who take time to read this book, within your embrace as we step in time to the music you have yet to introduce. Amen.

Lynn L. Severance
Lynnwood, Washington
April 2016

DEDICATION

To Tim Hansel, mentor, friend, servant of the Lord, exhibitor of grace, joy, and steadfastness; exuberant encourager to me and countless others during his years of chronic pain and challenges.

At the core of spiritual writing is hungering for wholeness, for self, for meaning. The question, “Who am I?” reverberates quietly in these pages, as does a willingness to be known. I wonder sometimes why I choose to make my spiritual musings visible. I want to believe it is mostly because such vulnerability creates what we might call “a soulful being together” between the reader and the author. A kind of communion born through the meeting of vulnerability and identification. It is in this delicate communion that books bestow their small transformations.

—Sue Monk Kidd, *Firstlight*

INTRODUCTION

Is it possible, during our times of crises and challenges, to know comfort? It is possible, but first it takes a seeking and the understanding that seeking and finding takes time. When we are weary from the drain of life's burdens, there is only one true rest that beckons us to its comfort. We are to seek the One who has said He can give us rest. We allow him to define what we need.

Our Creator has recorded each of our days and knows us thoroughly. He sent a Comforter—his Holy Spirit—who dwells within us and within each challenge we encounter. We can choose to reach for the light of his Presence and encouragement. Many people live with chronic pain, illnesses, or conditions, and never feel the cessation of what these challenges bring to them. Allowing God to help bring the light of acceptance in the face of these circumstances is a type of healing.

When we, and others, are in shorter seasons of trials, choosing to seek direction and comfort from God's indwelling Spirit will move us through these times. There is no way around them. Their realities have to be faced. The worldly momentary comforts will not satisfy for the duration. Dwelling in the daze of crises for too long and refusing the light of hope will move us into deep despair.

In the devotionals that comprise this book, I have chronicled my journey to the conclusions that I have just shared. They did not come quickly. I continue to have struggles as I learn. Ultimately, the lessons have meant positioning myself during times of need to be intentionally seeking and receptive of God's grace. It has meant asking hard questions. "What do you want to do through this challenge and loss in my life, Lord? How can you work through this pain?" It has meant living in the questions and waiting on his responses. I have come to experience God's steadfastness. The ways He has chosen to respond reflect how my faith has grown into light—the light of some of his revelations.

These devotionals were originally written and published online via Rest Ministries. This online Christian-support site has a variety of resources to encourage those living in chronic pain and/or with chronic illnesses. Among its resources are daily devotionals posted on the site and also available via subscription and download to e-readers.

I have revised my writings with the hope that now they will also bring encouragement to those who are going through briefer seasons of trials. The photos I have taken are visual images of each text's messages.

I invite you to join me in this journey. We will learn what can come as we seek the ultimate Comforter's ways of bringing us rest in the midst of our challenges. There are times life's light has dimmed because of how we feel. God may appear to be dim as well. Together we can renew our hope and walk into the Light of his consistent presence, care, and faithfulness.



SECTION ONE

HOPE—FAITH—REDEMPTION—LOVE—PRAISE

I am looking at calendar pages that tell me it is winter in my part of the world. I am also gazing at a vase containing a sunshine-splashed display of daffodils in full bloom. A warming trend compelled these flowers to emerge regardless of a calendar's dictate.

Seasons have rotations and serve their purposes. Yet within traditional expectations, variations can arise. When challenges come into each of our lives, we cannot count on consistencies. A time of joy can be interrupted with unexpected news that brings pain. A time fraught with anxiety can rotate into relief as we breathe sighs of gratitude.

God will work within the challenges of our days. For some, chronic conditions require an intentional daily assurance that He is always near. For others, a season of challenges may be shorter but just as intense in feeling. All of us need the comfort of hope to persevere. We need the gift of faith to access such hope.

With our trust, God can help us traverse any difficulties we face. His love guides us through whatever concerns surface, the ones we never expected on any calendar of our lives.

The writings in this section of the book deal with harsh realities, but the qualities of springtime dominate in their messages. These are gifts God wants to bring to us if we can open our hearts to receive them. Our faith, giving reception to them, is what we return to the Giver.

Bless you as you read!

Lynn

1. Travel Accessories

You have not given me into the hands of the enemy but have set my feet in a spacious place.
(Psalm 31:8)

Am I spending my life in spacious places? My view can seem confining as others rush by me to involvements in many places. Does activity always mean that productivity follows? It seems that as I commit each day to the Lord, He is the one who defines what is productive for me.

I believe strongly that, as Christians, each of us is traveling on the same road, gifted with various talents, yet wearing different shoes. God determines the kind of footwear He hands us for use at various times of our journey. We decide whether to accept or reject our shoes.

They come laced with his grace for the job at hand. They come soled with his promise to travel with us as He knows the way He has ordained we should go. Others' footwear may look more chic but, in his eyes, we can be right in step with what He wants.

God loves and cherishes each of us. He sees us as equal in his eyes and longs that we view one another in the same way. We are stepping out in style with our perfect travel Companion!

There are days we may need sprinting shoes. At other times we could be handed hiking boots for the heavy terrain and for endurance on difficult trails. Perhaps He chooses a pair of dancer's shoes for moments of unexpected joy. After we have experienced a hard day, cushy socks or slippers may await us. How about the occasions we can go barefoot and rest in green pastures!

All times are productive—worthwhile—if God has called us to them. He gives us what we need during this trip called life. Let's thank him, smile at our fellow travelers in their footwear, and cheer one another onward as we travel together.



Lord, thank you for handing me accessories as you guide my life journey. Your will is my security—your grace is my grip. Your eyes value my efforts as I value others accompanying me. We are quite the fashion parade! Amen.

2. Oh, What a Beautiful Morning!

Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD rises upon you.
(Isaiah 60:1)

I have always loved this verse. It has a joy that bursts with freshness!

Recently, the Scripture came to me in an e-mail. I was surprised as different feelings arose within me when reading it. What had changed?

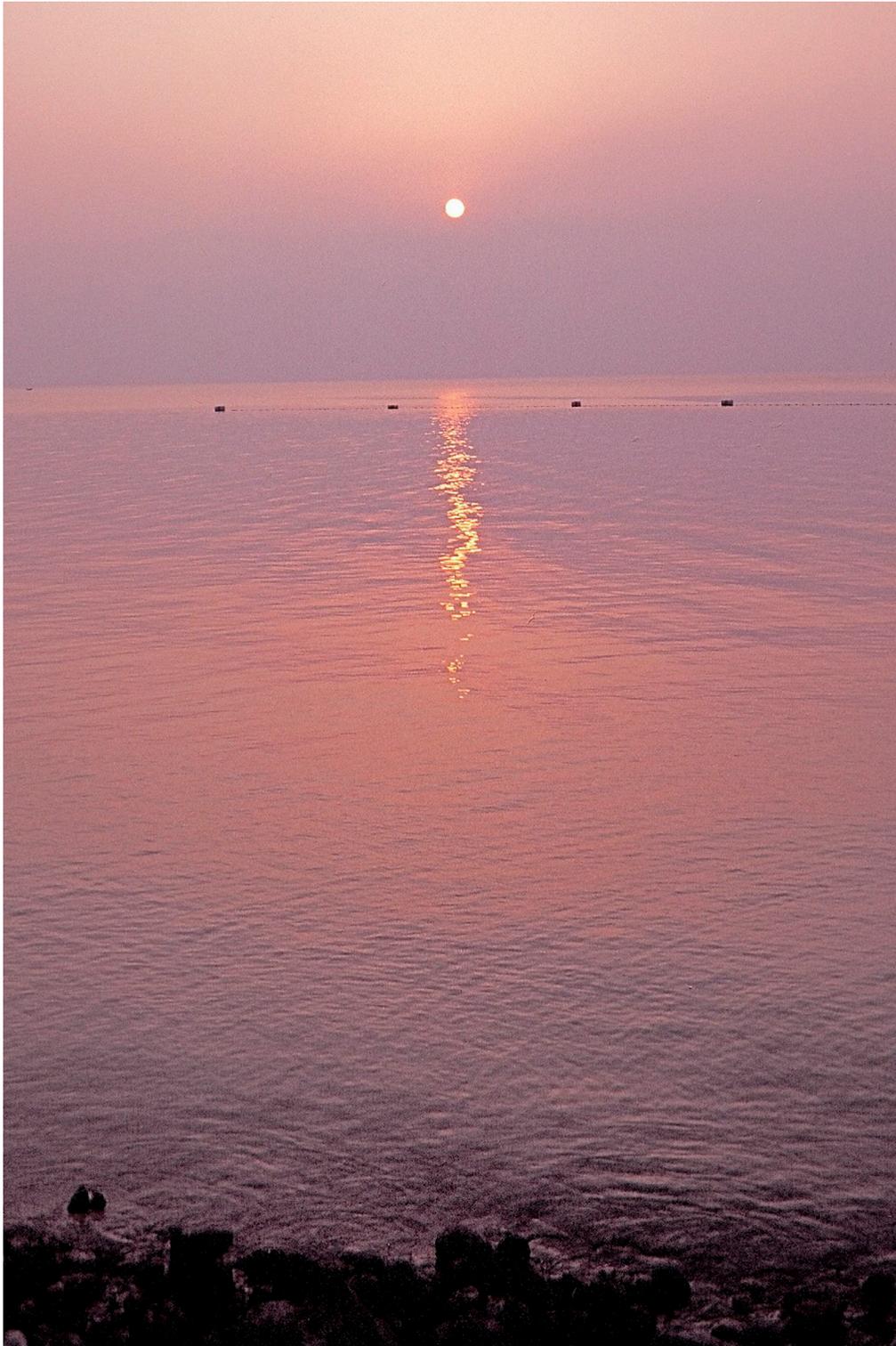
With some thought I recognized, with my particular challenges, mornings are the most difficult time of the day for me. My mother's cheery voice calling, "Rise and shine," when I was a child, had me bounding out of bed and racing into the day. Even in my younger adult years, mornings were my time to get much accomplished. I savored the quietness of the day's beginnings

Are mornings a more difficult time for you? This is understandable if insomnia has been an uninvited guest. Even sleeping through the night, getting into the day can be a slow process for many. My good intentions are there. I am grateful for the gift of God's new day. Feeling less than strong, I am grateful for his strength that comes through to help.

I own this truth as I pray with sincerity. *Oh, Lord. I don't really arise and shine. I try but it is such intense work. I am grateful for the day. How can I be grateful for the way I feel? I want to return to loving this Scripture verse. I long to appreciate the mornings enthusiastically as I did in the past.*

I process the words. Light can bring joy. Joy can bring a lightness. It says my light has come. The challenges feel heavy.

My focus needs redirection. God's presence is within me. It is the glory of the Lord that rises upon me each new day. Whatever I can or cannot accomplish, the Lord's glory is still upon me. He will help me manage how I feel. I matter that much to him. He is the quiet in the day's beginnings. I can arise and shine with him and for him.



Lord, thank you for shining upon me and noticing all my efforts. Your consistent faithfulness helps me choose to enter each day. What a privilege this is. Now I recognize the joy. It's you!

3. What Are My Real Needs?

*“If I send them home hungry, they will collapse on the way, because some of them have come a long distance.” His disciples answered, “But where in this remote place can anyone get enough bread to feed them?” “How many loaves do you have?” Jesus asked. “Seven,” they replied.
(Mark 8:3-5)”*

Jesus’ teachings nourished the spirits of those gathered to listen to him. During this event recorded in Mark, their need for food was also met. A miracle occurred as Jesus broke bread, had his disciples distribute the pieces to more than four thousand, and leftovers remained—enough to fill seven baskets!

In kind, God cares about my every need. He knows how undernourished I can become in all areas of my life. As someone who lives alone and with chronic illness, how can I evaluate what I am truly needing as each day dawns?

Are my feelings on edge, and my hopes on hold? Is my spirit in need of some freshening? What is in Jesus’ basket for me? Among many gifts, I’ll find prayers to be offered, strength from his Word, and encouragement to relax and to cease from striving. Yet, in this account, I see something else. Jesus asks his disciples to distribute the food to the crowds. I am designed for relationship both with him and with others.

Do I isolate myself from nourishment that friends could bring? Can I risk letting others know of my need for them? Am I willing to wait for their *yes* if their lives are busy? Chronic illness does not make me exempt from the desire for human connection. It is most important that I have enough. If I become drained, my own opportunity to bring nourishment to others is weakened.

This Scripture passage reminds me the answer to all I need has its foundation in God. He asks others to contribute as they come alongside me. Together, relationships are formed.

The Lord wants no one to collapse on the way Home from lack of care.



Lord, your basket of provisions holds bread, blessed and broken. Your basket is always full. Help me receive from you and from others the gift of relationship. Thank you that you meet every one of my needs in abundance. Amen.

4. Putting the *New* in New

*“See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland.
(Isaiah 43:19)”*

For years I read this verse waiting for a new thing because a new thing was going to be a really *great* new thing. While I waited, my life moved along. I discovered God is the giver of gifts. These come in different packages and in various ways. I prefer gifts that radiate with joy and freedom. I am not confident I have the eyes to see the suffering and pain that infuses my world, your world, the world, as *gifts*.

As a midlife adult I returned to a place in the Rocky Mountains that had good memories for me from my childhood days onward through my high school years. In unexpected ways, I discovered my body was compromised at the higher elevations in Colorado. Events were enjoyed but through a fog of intense physical disorientation.

There came an afternoon when I sat by a creek reminiscing of carefree days in this particular setting. I watched the water flow, come to a rock in the middle of its path, and flow around it, unhindered. It was a nostalgic time. I brought all the years and experiences of *me* to these moments by the familiar creek. God met me that day with some insights.

He sees all of my days from their beginning until their ending. His bringing each day to me is what is *new*. Sometimes there are joys. Other times obstacles emerge. He flows with his grace and with me, either through them or around them. He is with me. I am not to be waiting for him to arrive. Obstacles are an opportunity for his strength to be manifested. His faithfulness is foremost in my thoughts if I stop and remember He has been with me in the past, continues to dwell with me in the present, and He will lead me into tomorrow.



Lord, thank you. With clearer eyes I look upon all my years. The flow of your living water and your strength that never fails, remains consistent. Help me always carry you and this awareness with me. Amen.

5. Cell Power . . . Can You Hear the Call?

“Do not turn me over to the desire of my foes, for false witnesses rise up against me, spouting malicious accusations. I remain confident of this: I will see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living.”
(Psalm 27:12-13)

Mankind. God’s masterpiece. Created in his image. We begin our life as one single cell. Then cell upon cell continue knitting together, forming intricacies unique to each of us.

Though created in God’s image, we are born separated from him because of mankind’s sin. He longs for reconciliation. That was provided when God’s Son, Jesus, willingly became man. Eventually, he took all the sins of mankind upon himself, dying in our place upon a cross, conquering sin, and removing the barrier between the Father and us.

This salvation is open to all. With a heart recognition and acceptance of Christ’s completed work, we become a single unit once more united with our Creator.

So how can I look at my life, a life created in God’s image, a life reconciled to my loving Creator, when the sacred cells He created are not functioning properly? My body seems not my own. I strive. I pray. I grieve. I seek help. I have an innate desire to persevere.

God sees me as whole in him. He knows the completed plan for my life I cannot yet see nor fully understand. He hears my prayer, knows my grief, holds me close and whispers, *Be still and know that I am God. I am the overseer of each cell.*

“Lord, I believe you can intervene and touch the cells of life where your plans for me are deeply embedded. Yet I often feel numb, scared, and weary.”

I have the supreme authority, Lynn. My Spirit is neither numb nor unaware of what you are going through. I am able to calm the storm of your concerns. Press into me. Listen. Receive my strength. Let any cells of negativity and concern drain away. I will replace them with touches of acceptance and patience. Co-labor with me. Cell upon cell I designed the blueprint that is you.



Can you hear and trust my call? “Yes, Lord! I do hear and trust your call.” Amen.

6. Being Called a Friend

I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.

(John 15:15)

Friend. What a powerful word. I can count on my treasured friends to be available and trustworthy, to listen and love, to share deeply and empathize.

Jesus calls me friend and is my friend. Friendship is perfected in him. Thus, I struggle with this following paradox. I long to alleviate the suffering of my friends. I can encourage but I cannot heal them of physical or emotional pain. My perception becomes strained as I think upon Jesus, capable of healing, seemingly allowing suffering to remain.

How do I resolve my thought-filled conflict as I trust my truest friend? I come to this conclusion:

I look at how He lived.

He emptied (veiled) his nature as God to take on the nature of man in flesh (Philippians 2:6). He knew all the temptations I encounter. He modeled best how to resolve them. He cried. He grieved. He laughed. He loved. He was misunderstood. He persevered.

I go to the garden of Gethsemane where the human Jesus pleaded with his Father to spare his sufferings (Matthew 26:39). Taking on mankind's sin was beyond anything he had experienced. He trusted his Father, yet, being human, He anguished. Any of my sufferings pale in comparison.

My lesson in the garden? Surrendering involves my trusting what I cannot understand. Jesus' trustworthiness was never deeper than on the cross. After that surrender came victory and mankind's reconciliation to his eternal home.

Jesus now dwells with his Father in resurrection glory. He did all that was asked. My journey here on earth continues. In time, I will understand all that has been asked of me. The Father will make all things clear. Jesus calls me friend, in part so I can trust the Father as He did.



Lord, because you surrendered, I can surrender. The difficult moments are significant, even bearable, because you call me your friend. I call you Savior and friend. I choose to trust you. I choose to thank you. Being friends makes all this possible. Amen.

7. How Am I Dressing These Days?

“Can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your life? And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these.”

(Matthew 6:27-29)

As a little girl I loved to put on my mother’s party clothes, jewelry, and high-heeled shoes. Then I’d go parading around the house! As a young woman, dressing for special occasions was fun. During these time frames, the outer image seemed most important. I now am more concerned about how I am dressed internally.

A mental mirror checks my attitudes. Are worries consuming my time? Are fears that my challenges will worsen grabbing at my joy? Am I envious of those whose lives seem easier? If these thoughts were seen externally, would I parade around town for all to see me? No.

Yet God sees these inner musings. In my weaknesses, I can labor and spin and get nowhere with these disquieting thoughts and feelings. His words about the lilies help me to focus.

The flowers receive his sunshine and rain. I see how beautifully they are dressed in his attentiveness toward them. I desire to receive God’s exhortation to cease from striving. I know his consistent faithfulness and that he provides for all my needs. I have a choice to receive and be thankful for what he gives. I can dress in the comfort his care.

God regarded me with joy when I played dress up as a little girl. He could see I longed to be lovely. But as flowers grow, so do young girls. My God has been shaping me into his image. He has asked me to let him do the dressing up so, when fully grown, all of who I am is as He intended. Thus clothed, perhaps others will see his image in me, too.



Lord, growing up is hard even when I am already a grown-up! I choose to accept the finery of your lessons even when they seem unlovely. Help me remember you are leading me toward being dressed in your splendor. Amen.

8. Looking at the Glass, Lightly

“For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.”
(1 Corinthians 13:12)

As I write, it is my birthday. I am grateful for the gift of my life! More than seven decades ago doctors pronounced I would not survive the delivery room. Today, happier words greet me. A former first-grade student writes, “Miss Severance, thanks for learning me good.” I smile at his grammatical joy aimed at me!

Have I *learned good*, Lord? You have blessed my days in many ways. I am filled with gratitude. There have been tremendous challenges, beginning with my fight to live beyond the delivery room. At that time you instilled a love within me to choose life. I don’t like the trials but I treasure the ways you help me through them. Realistically, looking from *this side of the glass*, parts are smudged and splintered from the challenges and choices that have comprised my life.

I see these imprints because your light shines through showing them to me. I also acknowledge and view the beautiful moments. I choose to recognize both. I desire to dwell in the buoyancy of your light that lifts me above a world that can clamor, wanting to pull me down. Someday I will understand reasons for many of my life events during these past decades. I am in no rush. Delivery to my eternal home will come and all things will be made clear.

It could be that any *whys* that exist now will be unimportant then. I will abide in the knowing and not in any asking. The *learning good* part is my trusting you while looking at the glass of my life lightly. I want to seek your wholeness in what appears broken. In the midst of any challenges, I am still a reflection of you. I want nothing to dim that image.



Lord, every day I see glimpses of beauty amidst the more marred parts of your created world. Help me recognize your touch, especially in my life events that are hard to understand. Knowing you understand can bring me a peaceful contentment. Amen.

9. Seeking Sanctuary

“Splendor and majesty are before him; strength and glory are in his sanctuary.”
(Psalm 96:6)

I have lived in the same apartment since 1974. Those who come to visit graciously tell me they feel peaceful when they are in my home. I have many remembrances of joys experienced here. When difficulties have entered my life, my home has remained a sanctuary.

Yet, what defines a *sanctuary*? Some would say it is a holy structure such as a church or a temple. I have just called my home a sanctuary. Do I have to be in a particular place in order to feel the security associated with such shelter? When life and its challenges lift my peacefulness, when concerns get heavy, where do I go? I have come to know I can seek sanctuary deep within, where God dwells. His presence is his promise to be ever near.

This psalm does not say strength is in my sanctuary. It says that strength is in God’s sanctuary—part of his very presence. He offers his strength to me. He knows I have very little of my own. I am in awe that He wants to dwell within me. I am so grateful he does.

When I am too weary from the battles that rage, He says, “Come and rest.” He lightens my load if I let him. I can choose to persevere and overcome with him. He is the shining holy One who keeps my spirit alive and faith burning brightly. Do I get to this place of peace quickly when disturbances enter my life? Not always, but He patiently waits. He trusts and knows I will.

Psalm 96 expands to proclaim the various praises that are due God from all creation. I join in the choruses and give my thanks.

It is not necessary to seek a man-made sanctuary, although they have their place for respite. My refuge is within where I meet with the One who is in residence and yet a part of me.



Lord, I praise you and delight in your faithful and loving presence within me. Your strength can be my strength. Your light can be my light. Together we can shine as a gracious sanctuary wherever we may be. Amen.

10. Shadows

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

The word *shadow* evokes a variety of feelings. Unexpected shadows can bring delight when I see them cast a beautiful design. Conversely, some can bring alarm with their foreboding forms.

This psalm exhorts me to rest in the shadow of the Almighty. I know I can trust his emanating light to provide shelter if I stay close to him. It can deflect shadows that would attempt to intrude on my life and bring confusion. Therein, he offers safety, comfort, and guidance.

As I pondered this concept of *shadows*, I wondered if faith might be like a shadow. Scripture tells me that faith is, in part, “assurance about what I do not see” (Hebrews 11:1). As I am walking with the Lord, I depend on his light and his sight.

The past lies behind me, covered by the shadow that his light, grace, and forgiveness cast upon it.

I am to live in the *now*, trusting the One in the lead.

My future, vague to me, is clear to him. My faith becomes sight when the Lord chooses to move me into the light of what He already sees.

Both connotations of *shadow* are depicted in Scripture. “Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for You *are* with me” (Psalm 23:4a NKJV). “Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows” (James 1:17).

I’ll have times of fear. The challenges that life brings long for restoration. When I step outside God’s zone of comfort, I falter. I am reminded of how much the security of his shelter provides. I need but take one step back to where He will envelop me.

Faith. Shadows. Both are gifts from God. Both are places where He dwells and invites me to enter in and share the security of a safe space with him.



Lord, our adventures have been many. Your light sheds meaning when I cannot see clearly. I remain grateful that you are my haven of peace as I choose to remain close to you. Amen.

11. Remaining Hopeful

“Show me your ways, Lord, teach me your paths. Guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my Savior; and my hope is in you all day long.”
(Psalm 25:4-5)

Hope is a key to staying focused on the Lord. It is one of God’s gifts I can lose sight of quickly. It happens in the blink of a thought! I stray away for a time. You each know these types of thoughts: fear I have failed God or others, fear I will not get through a time of grief to feel joy again, fear of what a medical test will show, fear of what the future may hold.

I rob the present of God’s peace when I worry.

I cringe, catching myself when these times arise. Yet, if negative thoughts go undetected, they escalate. The feelings that accompany them do as well.

When I snap back from my mental straying, I am humbled. My desire is to discern quickly the side trips that have me stumbling off the path where God can teach me. I want my hope focused on him, not on imagining a future yet to come. Looking back upon my former days, I confidently remember how He has never forsaken me.

Some of my *tomorrows* held harsh news. He faithfully steered me through those rough times. I could not depend on my own strength. He and his strength kept me moving, rebuilding my hope in him. These were his deepest times of teaching me, an answer to this psalm’s plea.

Scripture tells us there is faith, hope, and love and the greatest of these is love. My perspective that hope is needed to keep me focused does not diminish love. It is God’s love that helps me return to his path when I get drawn away. My remembrances that He is my hope strengthen my faith.

He beckons me to follow this triune pattern by putting all three of his gifts into their proper perspective, centered in him. When they work in tandem, I am able to remain hopeful.



Lord, my deepest longing is that I remain steadfast as I love you, hope in you follow you, and faithfully trust in you completely. Amen.

12. Singing a Song of Zion

“By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept when we remembered Zion. There on the poplars we hung our harps, for there our captors asked us for songs, our tormentors demanded songs of joy; they said, “Sing us one of the songs of Zion!” How can we sing the songs of the Lord while in a foreign land?”

(Psalm 137:1-4)

We can feel catapulted into a foreign land when intense challenges are upon us. They wear us down to the point of exhaustion. The temptation to give into the physical and emotional captors is very real, even though our feelings regarding them need expression.

Messages in the Psalms convey the highs and lows that are a part of life events. They also reflect God’s faithfulness at all times. Originally sung, now they can bring comfort during our times of upheaval and pain in whatever form we receive them.

Knowing that down through the ages others have struggled with the same cries may help us feel less alone in facing our experiences.

“Then my head will be exalted above the enemies who surround me; at his tabernacle will I sacrifice with shouts of joy; I will sing and make music to the Lord.”

(Psalm 27:6)

“Praise the Lord with the harp; make music to him on the ten-stringed lyre.”

(Psalm 33:2)

My faith and trust in God was present during the years before chronic illness erupted and changed my life. In the crucible of these ensuing years, and within shorter seasons of challenges, He has forged a deeper reality of himself.

He understands. He notices. Rather than hanging up his harp of love and comfort, He is ever ready to soothe my soul and heart. He rejoices over me with singing!

I rest in his calming assurance. If I am to be held captive by anything, let it not be by my afflictions but by the One who dwells with me in the midst of them.



Lord, you have entrusted me with your presence. I could choose to cling to yesterday. I would rather walk forward with you and be nourished by the new songs you have for me. With you as my maestro, I want to excel as I sing! Amen.

13. Stepping Toward Spring

“Let us acknowledge the Lord; let us press on to acknowledge him. As surely as the sun rises, he will appear; he will come to us like the winter rains, like the spring rains that water the earth.”
(Hosea 6:3)

When the calendar indicates spring’s arrival is near, I rejoice! The sunshine will beam off blooming flowers instead of warming the soil awaiting the first signs of their emergence. I am ready for a renewal in my body and in my hopes through a stream of sunshine soaking into my being. There will be smiles on people’s faces rather than the frozen looks indicating the endurance of winter’s harsher elements.

These thoughts remind me there are seasons in our lives. Challenges invade, be they chronic or short term. It can seem like a long winter. A possible refreshment can appear, promising relief. This could take the form of a medical treatment or improved health. It might be a personal breakthrough, emotionally or spiritually. However it comes, it brings a positive spark and a sense of spring’s arrival.

There is a different slant in the following translation:

*“Let us know; let us press on to know the Lord; his going out is sure as the dawn;
he will come to us as the showers, as the spring rains that water the earth.”*
(Hosea 6:3 ESV)

This quickens some light within me as I await the balm of spring. I press on to know the Lord and his going forth. *Knowing* people is different than acknowledging them. *Knowing* means I have spent time with them and I experience them in deeper ways.

God longs for me to know him, to see him as the dawn, to press on and refuse to dwell in the gloom of my challenges. He moves forward watering the way that has been dry and dreary. As He leads me through the winter, spring shines just ahead. With my eyes on him I won’t miss the glow that will soon be in view.



Lord, thank you that your spring rains can revive my crumpled emotions and parched soul. As you help me press on to know you and follow you, glimpses of the dawn come closer. Spring truly becomes a reason to rejoice! Amen.

14. Saying *Yes* at the Edge of the Unknown

I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.
(Isaiah 41:10b)

I had sought refuge in a small memorial chapel during an unexpected drenching rain shower. Very minimal daylight was present inside. Tapered candles, lit and placed in trays of sand, were the first images I could see. Then I saw her in sculpture, bathed in candlelight—Mary holding Jesus in her arms at the foot of the cross.

God had chosen Mary to birth Jesus. An angelic encounter brought this news to her. Anointed words greeted her bewilderment, “Do not be afraid” (Luke 1:30). Humbly, Mary said *yes* in agreement. How could she have deeply known what that *yes* would mean? We now know it was a pivotal moment for all of mankind.

In this sculptured image, I viewed a mother looking at the mutilated dead body of her son. This occurred before a Resurrection Sunday. Mary was human and so was her grief. She may have wondered how much more she could withstand from that *yes* murmured thirty-four years earlier.

Yet each of us can have our beginning moments of saying *yes* and receiving Jesus as our Lord and Savior. Our spiritual womb, once void, fills with his presence. How can any of us know where our *yes* will take us?

Such a commitment places us at the edge of many unknowns. It will mean *yes* to plans bigger than our understanding, *yes* to times of both ease and difficulty, and *yes* in faith to follow a risen Lord in trust, regardless of what occurs along the pathway of our lives. The One we follow assures us there are no unknowns to him. “Do not be afraid.”

Mary’s years of love and faith were not in vain. Neither are ours. With each *yes* we gain strength. It may seem as weak as a small flickering candle’s flame, but accessing God’s grace, we continue moving into his wider light. One day we will step into the eternal light of home where there will be no more unknowns.



Lord. *Yes.* As those who have gone before me and who were upheld as they walked in your righteousness, I choose to do the same. Amen.

15. Bearing Faithfulness

“Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.”
(John15:4)

Jesus speaks of the need to abide in him, that through him I am nourished, live, and have my being. Though I am created in God’s image, the living out of this reality unfolds slowly. Jesus modeled how it is done. My choices let God help me learn how to remain in him.

He died to self, in part, so I can abide in him and bear the fruits of his Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, and faithfulness. It behooves me not to flinch when the vine seems confining. I may not completely understand God’s ways, but that He died to self means it is something He asks of me. Too much of *me* and weeds compromise the vine!

He wants me to bear faithfulness in two different ways. First are the pruning times known only to the two of us. He knows what He is doing to help me grow, to keep me clinging close, to correct, but never condemn my attitudes or actions, and to redirect my life for his best—and mine. I will feel birth pangs. If I can remain steady, trusting him, I experience resilience of new growth. By his grace and my stillness, his work can be accomplished.

Secondly, I can bear fruit, or carry faithfulness, to those whom I meet as I share God’s love with them or toward them. This is an outgrowth of my personal times with him. When I am in settings that make loving difficult, I can remember it is his love I bear. His unconditional love for me can shine through to others when I have experienced it myself. He gives in abundance in order for me to succeed in all He asks me to do.