

Praying Across the Miles



Devotions for
Adult Family Members
Separated By Distance

Fear

She said:

It feels like the day his picture fell off the wall. We lived in California, so an earthquake was the culprit, but it was still dashed on the floor. I'm picking up the broken pieces, and I can't stop crying.

Reflection:

1. As you read her words, did a specific incident of fear come to your mind?
2. What is keeping you from allowing God to help you overcome your fears?
3. How do you strengthen your relationship with God?

Holder of my fears

Blessed be thou, Jesus Christ, holder of my fears.
They tremble like small birds in your hands,
desperately struggling to get free.

Am I losing my sight?
Will my child be safe?
Can I do my job?
Will I be loved?

Am I good enough? There's no time!

You hold each securely in warm, strong hands.
You stroke them tenderly until they relax.
They fall asleep in the nest of your embrace.

And when all my fears are calmed,
You hold only me.
Beloved be thou, Jesus Christ.
Beloved!

*By Carol K. Everson
(Women's Uncommon Prayers)*

Scripture

Psalm 102: 1 – 2, 6-8

¹Hear my prayer, O LORD;
let my cry come to you.
²Do not hide your face from me
on the day of my distress.
Incline your ear to me;
answer me speedily on the day when
I call.
⁶I am like an owl of the wilderness,
like a little owl of the waste places.
⁷I lie awake;
I am like a lonely bird on the
housetop.
⁸All day long my enemies taunt me;
those who deride me use my name
for a curse.

Luke 8: 22 – 25 *Calming the Storm*

One day he got into a boat with his disciples, and he said to them, 'Let us go across to the other side of the lake.' So they put out, and while they were sailing he fell asleep. A gale swept down on the lake, and the boat was filling with water, and they were in danger. They went to him and woke him up, shouting, 'Master, Master, we are perishing!' And he woke up and rebuked the wind and the raging waves; they ceased, and there was a calm. He said to them, 'Where is your faith?' They were afraid and amazed, and said to one another, 'Who then is this, that he commands even the winds and the water, and they obey him?'

Control

“Mr. Winn will take you to get a haircut tomorrow.”

“No,” said our four year old son.

“But you like Mr. Winn,” I reasoned.

“Yes,” he replied.

“He will be here in a few hours.”

“But Mommy,” he protested, “that’s something I do with Daddy. I don’t want to go with Mr. Winn.”

It was time for negotiation. “Daddy keeps his hair short; you like to look like Daddy.”

“I’ll wait for Daddy to come home,” he declared.

“Even if your hair covers your eyes?”

“Yup. I want Daddy.”

Me too. Me too. Okay, you can wait.

Reflection:

1. Does this conversation sound familiar? Who’s in control?
2. Consider the things you worry about. How does worry actually hinder you?
3. The mother honored the child’s desire not to get his haircut. How will you release the need to control that which you have no power over?

God Bless

God bless all those that I love;
God bless all those that love me;
God bless all those that love those that I love,
And all those that love those that love me.

*From an old New England sampler
(Prayers for Children)*

Scripture

Proverbs 3: 1-2, 5-6, 11-12

My child, do not forget my teaching,
but let your heart keep my
commandments;
for length of days and years of life
and abundant welfare they will give
you.

Trust in the LORD with all your heart,
and do not rely on your own insight.
In all your ways acknowledge him,
and he will make straight your paths.

My child, do not despise the LORD’s
discipline or be weary of his reproof,
for the LORD reproves the one he
loves, as a father the son in
whom he delights.

Matthew 6:25 - 31

Lilies of the Field

“Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? Therefore do not worry, saying, “What will we eat?” or “What will we drink?” or “What will we wear?”

Conflict

Has it only been a month since I left home? You have always supported everything I've ever done, and we've known this would happen eventually. I've both dreaded and longed to be mobilized; this is what I've trained to do for years.

But it hurts to be away from you.

I'm learning to live full time in an environment I've only known part time. I'm taking on challenges that seemed distant only a few weeks ago.

And now we're half a world apart. How will we live? A day at a time!

I have to be here. I want to be here. I want to be next to you—right now! Conflict isn't limited to battlefields...

Reflection:

1. What conflicts are you presently facing in your life?
2. What is your "darkest valley"?
3. What will it take for you to truly follow Jesus?

Thoughts in Solitude

My Lord, God, I have no idea where I am going. I do not see the road ahead of me. I cannot know for certain where it will end. Nor do I really know myself, and the fact that I think I am following your will does not mean I am actually doing so. But I believe that the desire to please you does, in fact, please you. And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing. I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire. And I know that if I do this, you will lead me by the right road though I may know nothing about it. Therefore will I trust you always though I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death. I will not fear, for you are ever with me, and you will never leave me to face my perils alone. Amen.

- Thomas Merton

Scripture

Psalm 23

¹The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want.

² He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters; ³ he restores my soul. He leads me in right paths for his name's sake.

⁴Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff - they comfort me.

⁵You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.

⁶Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD my whole life long.

What If He Thinks I Don't Need Him?

First, it was the living room lamp. Then the light burned out in the entry way, followed by the landing. Out went the hall light. Is *everything* around here burning out? *He* takes care of light bulbs! I can do it, but if I do, I'll have to do everything around here. What if he thinks I don't need him?

Some things can wait. When he comes home, we'll go from darkness into light. But that hall light has to change now...

Reflection:

1. How do you deal with your frustrations?
2. When do you feel like you just can't handle it anymore?
3. Where might you find humor in the simplest of frustrations?

Scripture

Psalm 27: 1-3

¹The LORD is my light and my salvation;

whom shall I fear?

The LORD is the stronghold* of my life;

of whom shall I be afraid?

²When evildoers assail me

to devour my flesh—

my adversaries and foes—

they shall stumble and fall.

³Though an army encamp against me,

my heart shall not fear;

though war rise up against me,

yet I will be confident.

A Blessing Prayer for Frustration

Bless this distracting frustration, O Lord,
as it must be a powerful source of growth for me.
I cannot pray it away (although I have tried)
as it is obviously part of your plan.

So with wisdom and spiritual poise,
Let me embrace this blessed frustration,
Trusting in your divine intentions,
Your omniscient ways, and even at times,
Your sense of humor.

In the name of your Son, my Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Cynthia Horvath Garbutt
(Women's Uncommon Prayer)

Releasing & Accepting

Busy, busy, busy! So much to do, so many details to cover, so many projects to complete—such a foreign land. As I've written to you before—I don't fear dying as much as injury. Having been around enough military hospitals to know what can happen to a body, I live in fear of imposing burdens on you. I fear losing you.

It's time to let go of inordinate attachments, which include you. It's time to release my fear—even of losing my life.

There's a letter I must write to you—the one that says “to be opened in the event of my death”. Two more must be written; one for each of our children. It's time to release you—to encourage you to remarry if something happens to me. It's time to ask our children to forgive me for dying young and hope they'll understand when they're older.

The letters are coming.

Reflection:

1. Have you come to grips with the possibility of death or serious injury?
2. Reflect upon the seasons of your life – past and present.
3. How will you prepare for future seasons in your life?

Scripture

Ecclesiastes 3: 1- 8

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven:
a time to be born, and a time to die;
a time to plant, and
a time to pluck up what is planted;
a time to kill, and a time to heal;
a time to break down, and
a time to build up;
a time to weep, and a time to laugh;
a time to mourn, and a time to dance;
a time to throw away stones, and
a time to gather stones together;
a time to embrace, and
a time to refrain from embracing;
a time to seek, and a time to lose;
a time to keep, and
a time to throw away;
a time to tear, and a time to sew;
a time to keep silence, and
a time to speak;
a time to love, and a time to hate;
a time for war, and
a time for peace.

A Prayer attributed to St. Francis

Lord, make us instruments of your peace.

Where there is hatred, let us sow love;

where there is injury, pardon;

where there is discord, union;

where there is doubt, faith;

where there is despair, hope;

where there is darkness, light;

where there is sadness, joy.

Grant that we may not so much seek to be consoled as to console;
to be understood as to understand; to be loved as to love.

For it is in giving that we receive; it is in pardoning that we are pardoned; and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life. *Amen.*

Who Do I Talk To?

Everything I read says, "Contact the chaplain." What if your husband *is* the chaplain? What's there for you? My husband didn't go with his unit; he's an Individual Augmentee. I don't know anyone he works with; neither did he until he arrived in Afghanistan. Who do I talk to?

Reflection:

1. When have you experienced a time when no one was listening to you?
2. Reflect upon a time when you have heard the voice of God. Was the answer what you wanted or what you needed?
3. How might you make time in your day, with all the demands placed on you, to listen to the voice of God?

Scripture

Psalm 61: 1 – 3

¹Hear my cry, O God;
listen to my prayer.

²From the end of the earth I
call to you,
when my heart is faint.

Lead me to the rock
that is higher than I;
³for you are my refuge,
a strong tower against
the enemy.

A Prayer for Guidance

O God, here I am, a single entity, bearing the cares of many on my shoulders. Help me to continue to be a source of light for them by your spirit. Keep me from being weary. Help me to continue to remember that your grace is sufficient. Continue to light my path and help me in all things not to rely on my own insight but to trust in you with all my heart, for you will direct my path. *Amen.*

*Debra Q. Bennett
(Women's Uncommon Prayer)*

Emptiness Here

When he first left, our children slept with me. It comforted all of us. They needed to go back to their beds, and I to mine. The bed is so big....and empty. I pile pillows to fill up his side. I don't want to get used to having the whole bed to myself, so I make room. I lie awake and worry, tossing and turning. I'll paint the bathroom tonight.

Reflection:

1. What keeps you awake at night?
2. The psalm speaks of enemies and evildoers. What thoughts pervade your mind at night that is triggered by the empty space beside you?
3. What are some practical reminders or symbolic gestures that will ease your emptiness?

Scripture

Psalm 6: 3 – 9

³My soul also is struck with terror,
while you, O LORD—how long?

⁴Turn, O LORD, save my life;
deliver me for the sake of your
steadfast love.

⁵For in death there is no remembrance
of you;
in Sheol who can give you
praise?

⁶I am weary with my moaning;
every night I flood my bed with
tears;

I drench my couch with my weeping.

⁷My eyes waste away because of grief;
they grow weak because of all
my foes.

⁸Depart from me, all you workers
of evil,
for the LORD has heard the sound of
my weeping.

⁹The LORD has heard my supplication;
the LORD accepts my prayer.

Missed Miseries

When we are busy bemoaning some dreadful hardship that has befallen us, it would be a help to write down all those other dreadful hardships – the ones we lie awake dreading, the ones that never happened. Then, as we ready this long, long list of all the nasty things that never happened, we might praise and thank you, Lord, for these blessings and ask you to forgive us. For we trust our lives into your hands and then snatch them back again, to lie awake as we dread the next hardship that may never come.

The Reverend Virginia C. Thomas
(Women's Uncommon Prayer)

Emptiness There

Same story, different day. Work, sleep, eat, work. There's new meaning to "ordinary time"! I'm not doing anything heroic—in fact everything is mundane *ad nauseum*, so I just keep going.

You have been working so hard in your job while parenting our two young children. I have no doubt who has the heavier burden right now—your life is more complex than I ever wanted it to be.

Our son's birthday is coming up—I "celebrate" with a friend missing a year's worth of birthdays, anniversaries, and holidays. Coffee is good for commiseration. I'm trying to identify with your position. You'll host his birthday party. You'll help him open gifts. You send me photos and tell me about his "war protest" of refusing to get a haircut until I return - look at his long curls!

Tell him I'm proud of him. Tell him we'll go out for ice cream after visiting the barber. Tell him I miss him and his sister. Tell them I feel guilty about being away, even though guilt doesn't make sense right now.

Scripture

Luke 13: 18 – 19

He said therefore, 'What is the kingdom of God like? And to what should I compare it? It is like mustard seed that someone took and sowed in the garden; it grew and became a tree, and the birds of the air made nests in its branches.'

Reflection:

1. Can you recall a time when you felt that you were "potbound"?
2. The mustard tree provided a safe place for the birds to nest. Reflect upon the safe place you have helped to provide for yourself and others.
3. How will you use your personal growth help heal the effects of distance?

Repotting

We can learn something about ourselves by looking at a potted plant. Some plants don't mind filling up their whole pot. Others resent the crowding. Sometimes the effects of crowding are sudden and obvious. Drastic measures may be required. Sometimes these are painful and shocking. Making room for growth requires waiting – waiting for the pain to subside and the shock to register. Hopefully waiting for the growth that we desire. Will we make it or not? Help us to see this not as a problem but as a process. Help us surrender to the growth that only comes with pain, with division, with helplessness, with waiting. Especially the days and weeks of waiting.

Adapted from *Being Home: A Book of Meditations (Repotting)* by Gunilla Norris

Celebration

His birthday was a few weeks ago. I didn't expect it to be difficult, but I couldn't stop wondering where he was, who he was with, and whether bullets were flying. Do you celebrate birthdays while at war? My mother baked pecan pies (his favorite); they made it intact!

The doorbell rang. I don't want to see anyone; who could it be?

Alison stands at the door with a cake. She smiles and says, "I noticed that today is his birthday, so I brought over a birthday cake. How about we celebrate?"

I love you, Alison!!

Reflection:

1. Recall a time when someone has reached out to you and made you smile.
2. Reflect upon a time when you were afraid to ask a friend for help. Why did you hesitate?
3. What will you do to help a friend who needs a celebration?

My Friends

My friends are those who listen when I am sad,
laugh with me when I am happy,
are quiet with me when I am tired and who trust me.
God, protect them
and let me learn to trust them as they trust me.
Teach me to be as good a friend as they are to me.
And let me learn to treat you as the best of my friends,
and to trust you.

Prayers for Children

Scripture

Luke 11: 5 – 10

And he said to them, "Suppose one of you has a friend, and you go to him at midnight and say to him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves of bread; for a friend of mine has arrived, and I have nothing to set before him.'" And he answers from within, "Do not bother me; the door has already been locked, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot get up and give you anything." I tell you, even though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, at least because of his persistence he will get up and give him whatever he needs.

"So I say to you, Ask, and it will be given to you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened."

Resurrection

I didn't want to come here today. To smile and pretend everything is okay. It reminds me of the day he finally left the US after pre-deployment training.

They're singing the opening hymn, and I can't stop the tears. If I hurry, I can slip out without anyone noticing. Oh, the ushers. I have to get past the ushers. If I put on my sunglasses, they won't notice. It almost works, until the usher grabs my arm.

"Hey!" he says.

Damn, I'm caught.

Strong hands turn my shaking shoulders towards him. His voice is steady and calm, but soft and gentle. "He will come home. It will be okay. You have to believe that." He turned me around and steered me to my pew as the ancient words began, washing over me. I am enveloped in the timelessness. *He is risen! He is risen!*

Reflection:

1. Has there ever been a time when you had to be somewhere that you didn't want to be and you felt so alone?
2. I wonder if you have ever heard the Good Shepherd call you by name? What is Jesus asking of you?
3. How have you been transformed by the experience of separation, of listening for God's voice and of celebrating the gift of the resurrection?

Collect for Good Shepherd Sunday

O God, whose Son Jesus is the good shepherd of your people; Grant that when we hear his voice we may know him who calls us each by name, and follow where he leads; who, with you and the Holy Spirit, lives and reigns, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

Book of Common Prayer

Scripture

Romans 8:38-39

For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

John 10: 11-16

'I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The hired hand, who is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away—and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. The hired hand runs away because a hired hand does not care for the sheep. I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd.

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