

The 9 Nanas, Part 1

For more than 30 years, nine women in West Tennessee kept a secret from everyone, a secret that brought sweetness and goodness into their community. It all began during one of their weekly card games, when four sisters reminisced about the grandmother who raised them, MaMaw Ruth.

Mary Ellen, one of the women, told *DailyGood.org*, “MaMaw Ruth would read in the paper that someone had died, and she’d send off one of her special pound cakes. She didn’t have to know the family. She just wanted to put a little smile on their faces. And we started thinking about what we could do to make a difference like that.”

The women decided to start doing their family’s laundry themselves instead of sending it out. That savings brought them \$400 a month to work with. Then, they would eavesdrop in grocery stores to see if any of their neighbors needed financial help or just a little pick-me-up. For those who needed money, they would pay their utility bill and drop off a homemade pound cake, all anonymously. And so, the 9 Nanas were born.

Whenever you give alms, do not sound a trumpet...so that your alms may be done in secret. (Matthew 6:2)

What good can I do in secret today, Lord?

The 9 Nanas, Part 2

The 9 Nanas met at 4:00 a.m. every morning to make their special pound cakes, which they would then send to friends or strangers in need in the surrounding area—or drop off, secretly, in the dead of night. Each cake included a note saying, “Somebody loves you.” Their anonymous financial donations to those who were struggling continued as well, with no one, not even their husbands, being any the wiser for 30 years.

But one day, Mary Ellen’s husband noticed she was pulling money out of their bank account and confronted her about it, thinking she was having an affair. That’s when the 9 Nanas fessed up to their husbands about what they’d been doing. Happily, the husbands weren’t upset! Instead, they were eager to join in the giving. And when they told their kids about their mission, they agreed to pitch in as well.

The 9 Nanas still do their charitable work anonymously. Mary Ellen told *DailyGood.org*, “We want people to know that someone out there cares enough to do something. We want to make sure that happiness happens.”

God loves a cheerful giver. (2 Corinthians 9:7)

*Inspire me to bring happiness to someone,
Savior.*

A Homeless Peace Giver

“A peace giver is a person of truth. And the truth is that everybody should be respected in life. No one is discarded.” So says Sister Ave Clark, O.P. As an example, she pointed to a homeless man named Albie. He lives in New York, and made sure that his homeless friends all had a bench to sleep on.

During a *Christopher Closeup* interview about her book *Peace and Compassion...Holy Threads*, Sister Ave noted, “One of my [fellow] Sisters in that town helped Albie, and he’s now in an apartment in Brooklyn. But Albie was just diagnosed with cancer. [The Sister] put him in the hospital, and all the doctors there say, ‘This is an extraordinary man.’ Now who is Albie? He’s the man that was on the street that drank vodka a lot. But who is he? He’s a peace giver.

“Sometimes we think you have to have it all together in your head...[However], if you have it together in your head but it doesn’t move down to your heart, [that’s a problem]. I think you start with your heart first. That’s where compassion is born, because then not only do we transform the world, we are transformed, too. We get better and better.”

Blessed are the peacemakers. (Matthew 5:9)

*Teach me to be a peacemaker and peace giver,
Messiah.*

Deacon with a Servant's Heart

It is never too late to fulfill your lifelong dream! 90-year-old Brooklyn native Deacon John Flannery is a living testament to this truth. The path to his calling took him on many detours, including sewing habits for Benedictine monks at age 16—and serving in the U.S. Air Force during the Korean War.

During his employment at a rehabilitation center, two of his co-workers (who happened to be nuns) recognized his “servant’s heart” and advised him to pursue a vocation in the clergy. Having been told years ago he was not suited for the monastic life, Flannery initially “did not see himself as a candidate.” By 1978, however, he was ordained one of the Brooklyn diocese’s first “permanent deacons.”

Although he retired 20 years ago, Deacon John still assists at his local parish in Park Slope. Additionally, his recent stint in rehab, during which he successfully overcame anger and drinking issues, makes him an ideal and sympathetic confidante. “I can’t cure them [parishioners], but I can help them,” he told *The Tablet*. “Deacons are to be helpful servants.”

**Those who serve well as deacons gain a good standing...and great boldness in the faith.
(1 Timothy 3:13)**

Abba, bless all clergy members in their lifesaving ministry.

Live Like a Superhero

When Sister Hosea Rupprecht, FSP, of the Daughters of St. Paul, talks to students preparing for confirmation, she asks them to name admirable qualities about their favorite comic book superheroes. The reason? She's drawing a connection to the way young people can live out their Christian beliefs.

Writing for *OSV News*, Sister Hosea explained, "We make a list of superhero characteristics. It usually includes things like compassion, courage, self-sacrifice, strength... wanting the good of others, thinking of others before yourself, love, an outgoing spirit, etc. I ask the students, 'Wouldn't it just be amazing if all of us could live out virtues like these all the time?'"

Sister Hosea added, "The characteristics of a follower of Christ...look a lot like what we admire in superheroes: compassion, kindness, courage, self-sacrifice, forgiveness, looking out for the 'little guy'...If the characteristics of the superheroes we admire can help us live more courageously as disciples of our Lord, then let's pray for inner strength and try our best to be super men and women, super girls and boys."

**The integrity of the upright guides them.
(Proverbs 11:3)**

*Give me the inner strength to live courageously,
Jesus.*

Take the Good with the Good

You've probably heard the old expression, "You've got to take the good with the bad." Actor Steve Guttenberg, known for films like *Cocoon* and *Three Men and a Baby*, offers a more optimistic take on that adage.

On his Instagram page, the affable Guttenberg observed, "Sometimes, you gotta take the good with the good. I know it sounds kind of funny, but sometimes everything is going to be okay.

"Your day is going to go great. All those phone calls you made, you're going to get calls back. All those estimates you made, some people are going to buy your stuff.

"Everyone in the family is going to love you. All your friends are going to love you. The world is going to love you.

"Now, I'm not going to say that happens every day. But once in a while, you've got to take the good with the good. And sometimes, it is a great day. So, savor it. Savor those great days."

I believe that I shall see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. (Psalm 27:13)

Though troubles are inevitable, Lord, allow me to savor moments of goodness and joy when they come.

A Catcher of Faith

Former Los Angeles Dodger and New York Met Mike Piazza was one of Major League Baseball's best hitting catchers of all time. But throughout his 16-year career, there were moments his faith was tested, and he had to "trust [God], let go and believe," he explained during an interview at New York's Sheen Center.

One of those trying and emotional days came during Piazza's time with the Mets. It was the first game played in New York following the tragic events of 9/11.

His home run in the bottom of the eighth led to a win against the rival Atlanta Braves, but more importantly, it lifted the spirits of a grieving city and united New Yorkers that day. Piazza told *Catholic New York*, "I believe that God put wind underneath my wings."

Piazza added, "Life is full of challenges and difficulties and hurdles, but we always have to try to reach down deep to what we believe and trust that God has us."

For you who revere My name the sun of righteousness shall rise, with healing in its wings. (Malachi 4:2)

I know You have a plan for me, Lord, even though I may not understand it. May my faith help me persevere.

Ordinary Heroes, Part 1

Growing up in Queens, New York, Joseph Pfeifer felt drawn to two vocations: firefighter and priest. He attended the seminary for a few years, where he felt a particular affinity for hospital and prison ministry.

He recalled being a student chaplain at a Suffolk County house of detention, where he would walk the tiers of the jail, reach through the bars to shake prisoners' hands, then engage in conversation with them. And while stationed at St. Augustine's parish in Brooklyn, Pfeifer served as a student chaplain at Lutheran Medical Center, where he would often sit with patients or families in crisis and talk about their concerns and about God.

Pfeifer ultimately chose a career as a firefighter, but the badge number of 1513 that he received when joining the New York City Fire Department more than 40 years ago reminded him of his favorite gospel verse, John 15:13: "No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends."

After September 11, 2001, that verse took on new meaning for him.

I was sick and you took care of Me, I was in prison and you visited Me. (Matthew 25:36)

Help me reach out to the wounded and vulnerable, Lord.

Ordinary Heroes, Part 2

On the morning of September 11, 2001, New York City Fire Department Chief Joseph Pfeifer was investigating a gas leak in downtown Manhattan when he witnessed the first plane hitting the tower. This was an incomprehensible event for which no one had ever trained, but over the course of his career, Chief Pfeifer had learned to stay calm in dangerous situations and ask himself, “What do I need to do now, in this moment?”

That led the Chief to radio the dispatcher and request 150 firefighters, as he himself headed to the North Tower lobby to set up a command post. During an interview about his Christopher Award-winning book *Ordinary Heroes*, he recalled, “Firefighters... came up to me and said, ‘Chief, how can I help?’ I told them to go up to evacuate the building and then rescue those that couldn’t get out.”

“As they were going up the stairs, people were coming down...The firefighters did some ordinary things. They told the people, ‘Keep going, don’t stop, you can make it out of here.’ We know from people who survived, those simple words made all the difference.”

Be strong and courageous. (Joshua 1:6)

Holy Spirit, keep me calm in stressful situations.

Ordinary Heroes, Part 3

On the morning of September 11, 2001, as New York City Fire Department Chief Joseph Pfeifer was running the rescue operation in the World Trade Center lobby, he spotted the Fire Department's chaplain, Father Mychal Judge.

Chief Pfeifer told *The Christophers*: "I saw him praying, and it was physical prayer. I could see his lips move, and I could imagine it was like being in the Garden of Gethsemane asking God for this to pass."

"When the first tower collapsed and we tried to move quickly, I guess our chaplain didn't move fast enough, and he was hit by part of the building. I was the one that discovered him at my feet. I checked for a pulse, and I knew he was gone."

"The day before 9/11, [Father Mychal] was dedicating the 100th anniversary of a firehouse in the Bronx. He said in his homily, 'You never know when God will call you or what danger you'll run into. But what we do is put one foot in front of the other and respond to that call.' I think that's what our chaplain and our first responders did [all those] years ago."

**Let us not grow weary in doing what is right,
for we will reap at harvest time. (Galatians 6:9)**

*Guide my prayers and actions during dire
times, Lord.*

Ordinary Heroes, Part 4

One of the firefighters who interacted with Chief Joseph Pfeifer in the World Trade Center lobby on 9/11 was his brother, Kevin, to whom he had given his original badge number, 1513. It was the last time they would see each other because Kevin was killed in the Tower's collapse. The words of John 15:13 became even more relevant to Chief Pfeifer from that day on.

One small consolation came through the fact that documentary filmmaker Jules Naudet happened to be with Chief Pfeifer and was filming everything he could, including the brothers' final meeting.

During a *Christopher Closeup* interview about his book *Ordinary Heroes*, Chief Pfeifer said, "It was important to see those pictures of my brother in the lobby, and it was important to other family members. That day we lost 343 firefighters, and Jules was able to capture...69 people who passed through the lobby to receive orders to go up. Those pictures have meant a lot to family members, as it did to my family, myself."

No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. (John 15:13)

Lord, welcome the ordinary heroes who died on 9/11 into Your warm and loving embrace.

Ordinary Heroes, Part 5

In the years since 9/11, Chief Joseph Pfeifer has been focused on building a better world both locally and abroad, sharing the “message of working together, of connecting with each other, collaborating and coordinating...By leaders working with other leaders, we’re better able to respond to the needs of the people we serve.”

Though he has experienced much tragedy, Chief Pfeifer believes in the Christopher ideal of lighting a candle rather than cursing the darkness. During an interview about his Christopher Award-winning book *Ordinary Heroes*, he concluded, “In moments of darkness, we feel very much alone, that this is my pain. I think the only way to light a candle in that darkness is by connecting to others and sharing what we’re feeling. In doing so, we see a glimmer of hope.

“So, I think with the book and with the anniversary each year of 9/11, it’s not just reflecting on the past, but standing with each other and looking forward to create a world full of kindness. Little acts [of love] are those little candles of hope.”

He has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

(1 Peter 1:3)

*Guide me in performing little acts of love,
Holy Spirit.*

Pen Pals for the Ages

Being “pen pals” with someone may seem like a quaint notion from a bygone era, but high school student Afnan Faiza is breathing new life into this old-fashioned practice.

While she was volunteering at Sunnyside Community Services (SCS) in Queens, New York, it occurred to Afnan that the seniors who come to the center for meals and other programs might enjoy corresponding with her fellow students. And she was right!

As reported by *NY1*, Afnan paired students with seniors and now delivers mail back and forth between them. One twist is that the teens use a “pen name” in their letters. When they all eventually get together, the seniors will be asked to guess which student is their pen pal.

Ines Ruiz, one of the older adults at SCS, said, “We do have a lot of information that we can share, but [the young people] also have a lot of information that they can teach us, so we really do an interchange of ideas.” Afnan added, “I think they’ll also be able to learn a lot from each other.”

**Rich experience is the crown of the aged.
(Sirach 25:6)**

May the younger and older generations learn from each other, Divine Wisdom.

Opera Singer's Second Act

Presbytera Lea Garinis, as she is titled, is the wife of an Orthodox Christian priest. She has always had two passions in life: education and medicine. Garinis also has quite an ear for music, as evidenced by her Master's degree in vocal performance, and having had the honor of singing in numerous New York Lyric operas.

In the wake of her oldest son Constantine's bout with cancer in 2018, however, she found her heart turning more towards medicine. To that end, Presbytera Lea has recently enrolled in the nursing program at Farmingdale State College, having heard many positive testimonials from its graduates.

"I always had medical leanings," Presbytera Lea told the Farmingdale State College website. "My mother was an operating room nurse for 45 years...She used to say, 'If you find something you love, you'll never work a day in your life'...I decided it was a good time to switch careers, and the idea of nursing gave me a lot of purpose."

Thankfully, her son Constantine is now cancer-free.

Sing to the Lord a new song. (Psalm 96:1)

Lord, may our work fill us with both passion and purpose.

Seminarians in a Warzone

Catholic seminaries in the United States don't teach their future priests how to build a bomb shelter. This is, however, the case at the Ukrainian Greek Catholic seminary in Kyiv, Ukraine, because of the country's war with Russia. Despite the unsafe conditions, not one seminarian left the country, reports the Catholic Near East Welfare Association.

The seminary also offers its students experience in "military chaplaincy and pastoral care in times of war." This involves providing basic medical assistance, and talking with soldiers to meet their spiritual and emotional needs.

Markian Luchkiv, a seminarian in Lviv, has gained a deeper understanding of priesthood because of conditions in Ukraine. He said, "A priest should always go to the people, not distance himself from them or consider himself superior."

"As a future priest, I feel a responsibility, in the hardest times, to be together with that neighbor who needs spiritual care, to be close to that soldier who is possibly spiritually wounded and needs conversation, the sacraments, or Divine Liturgy."

Put on the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. (Ephesians 6:11)

Father, sustain Your children in warzones.

The Blind Runner

After being born visually impaired, Chris Adamson went totally blind by the time he was in the third grade. He always loved sports, though, and wanted to participate in some way. When he got older and began attending San Diego's Mission Bay High School, the perfect solution presented itself: track and field.

Chris told *ABC 10 News's* Steve Smith, "It's not a contact sport, you are just running. So I thought, why not just give it a go and see what happens. As it has turned out, I really love it."

When Chris is competing in the 100 or 200 meters, he doesn't run by himself. David Cervantes is his running guide, who keeps pace with him as they both hold a yellow tether so Chris can find his way around the track. "The tether pretty much tells him where he is on the track," Cervantes said. "It also lets him know where I am."

Chris takes a healthy pride in his accomplishments and hopes to serve as an inspiration to others, noting, "I'm trying to encourage more people that are blind to run track because it is not that hard."

Let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us. (Hebrews 12:1)

*Help me reach my potential despite challenges,
Lord.*

Unexpected Gift Saves Deacon's Life, Part 1

In December 2021, Deacon Joe Mantineo fell to the floor and hit his head after having a stroke at Our Lady Queen of Peace Church in Maywood, New Jersey. Seconds later, his pastor was at his side, so Joe asked for a blessing before losing consciousness and being rushed to the hospital.

A few weeks later, tests showed that his body had suffered no effects from the stroke, but the incident and subsequent examinations revealed that he had stage four kidney failure.

“The truly miraculous thing is that I did not have any effects of the stroke,” Deacon Joe said. “I didn’t have any paralysis [or] speech difficulties. My memory wasn’t affected. It was as if I had never hit the ground. But I came to realize that the Lord works in strange and mysterious ways, and it was His way of letting me know that my kidneys were failing.”

With an O-positive blood type, which is the most in demand blood type for organ transplants, Joe was faced with a potentially long wait for a new kidney. Then, he received an offer of help that could save his life. More tomorrow...

**I am going to bring it recovery and healing.
(Jeremiah 33:6)**

*Guide those who are sick towards healing,
Savior.*

Unexpected Gift Saves Deacon's Life, Part 2

After discovering he was suffering from stage four kidney failure, Deacon Joe Mantineo learned he would have a long wait on the transplant list. That's when his daughter Lisa offered to donate one of her kidneys to him.

At first, Deacon Joe didn't feel comfortable accepting this offer, but with a loving wife, four children, and eight grandchildren, he felt called to be present for milestones still to come. Lisa's kidney gave him the best chance of survival, so he accepted her generous offer.

The day of the transplant, Joe and Lisa arrived at the hospital, kissed each other goodbye, and went into separate operating rooms. Lisa's gift saved Joe's life.

Recovering in the hospital afterwards, Deacon Joe recalled the tremendous gratitude he felt towards his daughter and how he realized that she had come to embody for him the answer to Christ's call for us to be generous to those in need. "I'm alive," he said, "because Jesus spoke through my daughter."

**Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due, when it is in your power to do it.
(Proverbs 3:27)**

Help children show Christlike love to their parents, Jesus.

Love Makes You Resilient

On her Twitter page, therapist and author Lori Gottlieb shared an incident from a therapy session with a father who recalled the painful things his parents did to him growing up. “He went on to say that pain ‘builds character,’” Gottlieb wrote, “and he worried he was coddling his own son too much,” thereby making him weak and less resilient. Gottlieb responded that love makes people resilient, too.

The father began tearing up and noted that he simply wanted something positive to come from the suffering he had endured. Gottlieb told him, “From the pain came the love you give your son. You’re giving him the loving childhood you didn’t get. Don’t stop showering him with your love. You’re making him strong.”

She added, “I’m sharing this moment [because] many people who experienced painful childhoods have a complicated relationship with love, [thinking] it’s weak, it’s not to be trusted... But part of grieving the pain is letting ourselves experience the superpower of love and offering it to others.”

God is love. (1 John 4:8)

May all children receive the light of love from their parents, Father.

An Alcoholic Chooses Recovery

“Look, Hilary, your elevator is going down. You need to decide when you’re going to get off.” That was the message a friend gave Hilary Phelps, the sister of Olympian Michael Phelps, about her drinking problem.

Hilary took her first drink at age 14 because she never felt like she was good enough or pretty enough. “Getting drunk was a way to kind of quiet those voices,” she told the *Today Show*. “It numbed that pain.”

For years thereafter, Hilary admits she was a “volatile and dramatic” drunk who is lucky she didn’t wind up dead in a ditch. After her friend’s elevator comment, she realized she was tired of feeling miserable all the time, so she checked herself into a rehab facility and attended Alcoholics Anonymous meetings.

Regarding her initial vision of AA meetings, Hilary said, “I pictured this sad room filled with creepy men in trench coats, but meetings are wonderful...There are huge successes and joys... Everyone is just real and honest and vulnerable.”

In 2022, Hilary celebrated 15 years of sobriety.

**For freedom Christ has set us free...Do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.
(Galatians 5:1)**

Guide all addicts toward recovery, Redeemer.

An In-Utero Miracle

During a routine ultrasound at 30 weeks pregnant, Derek and Kenyatta Coleman learned their unborn daughter had a “vein of Galen malformation, a rare blood vessel abnormality inside the brain,” which can cause heart failure, brain damage, or death.

As reported by *CBS News*, a team of doctors from Brigham and Women’s Hospital and Boston Children’s Hospital offered to operate on the unborn child in the womb “using ultrasound guidance, a needle similar to those used for amniocentesis, and tiny coils that were placed directly into the abnormal blood vessels to stop blood flow.”

The Colemans agreed to try this groundbreaking procedure to give their daughter her best chance. Thankfully, everything went well. Baby Denver was born prematurely, but healthy.

Kenyatta concluded, “Derek and I are deeply rooted in our faith, and we prayed hard for this. There was no doubt in our minds that God would perform a miracle and He did, on a public platform using a little girl before she was even born. She made her mark on the world.”

Give the physician his place, for the Lord created him. (Sirach 38:12)

*Guide doctors in their healing mission,
Creator.*

A Principal Who Loves Her Job

It's rare to stay in the same job for 57 years, but this is the case with Sister Mary Stephen Healey, R.D.C. She has served as principal of Our Lady of Mt. Carmel School in Elmsford, New York, since 1966. And she has no plans to retire!

"I've never awakened and not been happy to come to school," Sister Mary Stephen, age 93, told *Eyewitness News*. Educators and students feel the same way. Kindergarten teacher Daniel Cavone said, "She is the heart and soul of this school and the heart and soul of this community."

At *AmericaMagazine.org*, Father Anthony Andreassi recalled struggling academically and socially in his local public school back in 1978. His parents enrolled him at Our Lady of Mt. Carmel, where Sister made him feel welcome: "She took a risk on a kid who needed some help. And my life changed dramatically because of that."

Maybe Sister Mary Stephen's worldview is central to her success. She says, "If we all live with compassion, the world would be a better place."

May my teaching drop like...gentle rain...on new growth. (Deuteronomy 32:2)

Fill educators with a love for their students, Jesus.

The Magic Light of Faith

Helen Keller, who became both blind and deaf as a child, once offered these reflections on faith: “Dark as my path may seem to others, I carry a magic light in my heart. Faith...illuminates the way.”

“Although sinister doubts lurk in the shadow,” Keller continued, “I walk unafraid toward the Enchanted Wood where the foliage is always green, where joy abides, where nightingales nest and sing, and where life and death are one in the presence of the Lord.”

Each of us carries that same “magic light” of faith in our hearts. But do we appreciate its ability to lead us through every difficulty? And do we thank God for His free gift of faith?

Appreciation and gratitude go hand in hand—especially in our relations with God. Start by thanking God for His gift of faith.

By the tender mercy of our God, the dawn from on high will break upon us, to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace. (Luke 1:78-79)

Ignite the magic light of faith within my heart, eternal God.

TV Nun Inspired by Real Person

If you've ever watched the British TV series *Sister Boniface Mysteries* on the streaming service *Britbox*, you might be surprised to learn that the title character's personality was partially inspired by a real person.

Set during the 1960s in a small English town, the show follows a nun named Sister Boniface, who helps police solve crimes because she has a degree in forensic science.

In an interview with *America* magazine, the series creator, Jude Tindall, shared some background information on this character: "Sister Boniface is actually inspired by an old teacher of mine. She was a naval surgeon, the first female wing commander in the R.A.F., and a Protestant. Then she became a Catholic nun. She was called Sister Agnes Bartel. She ended up running a department in University College London."

Tindall notes that her aunt is a nun who serves as one of two religious Sisters that consult on the show. With a chuckle, she said, "If we get something wrong, they're quick to tell us."

Render true judgments, show kindness and mercy to one another. (Zechariah 7:9)

Guide writers in creating realistic religious characters, Lord.

The Power of Choice

Summer Grace Vanni was shocked by the glorious experience of her taxi ride with cabbie Wasu. His car was spotless, he wore a shirt and tie, and he even offered her reading material and coffee.

Vanni asked Wasu, “Have you always served customers like this?” He responded that he had not. In fact, he had spent five years complaining all the time, like many of the other cabbies. Then, he heard about the power of choice.

Wasu explained, “Power of choice is that you can be a duck or an eagle. If you get up in the morning expecting to have a bad day, you’ll rarely disappoint yourself. Stop complaining!...Ducks quack and complain. Eagles soar above the crowd. I was always quacking and complaining, so I decided to change my attitude and become an eagle.”

Since adopting his new attitude, Wasu’s business more than doubled, with repeat customers calling him personally. He is also happier than he was. Vanni’s conclusion: “I hope we all decide to soar like an eagle and not quack like a duck.”

Be hospitable to one another without complaining. (1 Peter 4:9)

Help me choose a positive attitude today, Holy Spirit.

'Eye' See a Miracle, Part 1

Author Jonathan Merritt was at his local Warby Parker shop receiving a routine eye exam when the optometrist, Dr. Oh, asked if he could dilate his pupils. Merritt was reluctant to have blurry, overly bright vision all day, but finally conceded to Dr. Oh's request because the physician thought it was important. That decision saved Merritt from likely going blind.

The dilation allowed Dr. Oh to examine the backs of Merritt's eyes, where he saw a dark spot on one of them which required more tests at a retina specialist's office. After imaging there, the doctor told Merritt he had a retinal tear filled with fluid that was "ready to burst."

If that had happened, he likely would have experienced permanent blindness in that eye. The news shook Merritt to his core, he recalled at *JonathanMerritt.com*. A simple laser procedure, however, fixed the problem before he left the office.

Merritt heard the doctor say to a staff member, "My God, that guy is a very lucky man." Instead of luck, Merritt felt tempted to call it a "miracle." More tomorrow...

The skill of physicians makes them distinguished. (Sirach 38:3)

God, thank You for accomplished and caring doctors.

'Eye' See a Miracle, Part 2

Some would describe Jonathan Merritt having his eyesight saved during a routine exam as “lucky.” But this close call led Merritt to reflect on the nature of miracles.

At *JonathanMerritt.com*, he wrote, “In order to believe in miracles, you don’t have to walk through a parted sea or witness a corpse springing back to life. You only have to live awake and aware in the present moment. That’s what I’ve come to believe.”

“When I was younger, I thought about miracles only as events that defy the laws of nature. But that’s a rather limited definition, and if you accept such a definition, you may not experience miracles that often, if at all. But these days, I think of miracles more as ‘invitations to behold divine presence within the ordinary fabric of life.’”

“Miracles are experiences that both boggle the mind and touch the soul...Most importantly, they are all around us, often hiding in plain sight (pardon the pun) just waiting to be acknowledged. As I heard someone say years ago, ‘Sometimes miracles are just kind people with good hearts.’”

I led them with cords of human kindness, with bands of love. (Hosea 11:4)

Open my eyes to ordinary miracles, Creator.

Making 'Space' in Your Life

For many years, speaker and author Manda Carpenter felt her mind telling her, “Keep going. Push. Hustle. You’ve got this.” While she found some success, she also became a workaholic enduring stress and sleepless nights.

In her book *Soul Care to Save Your Life*, Manda recalled her pastor once telling her, “Manda, your mind lies, but your body tells the truth. This is one of God’s greatest gifts to us and is worth paying attention to.”

While out for a run before her birthday, Manda prayed to God to reveal what He wanted from her in the coming year. For the first time ever, she heard “the Spirit of God” speak to her audibly. It was only one word: “space.”

Manda writes, “Slowly I was converted from being an overextended, stressed-out person to someone who had a full life yet didn’t feel frantic or busy.”

Manda now helps others make space in their own lives, noting, “The pursuit of space is rooted in the belief that we are human beings, not human doings. We can’t, nor should we try, to be productive every minute of every day.”

My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest. (Exodus 33:14)

Remind me to make space in my life for You, Savior.

God Can Heal and Restore Your Spirit

Some people feel unworthy of God's love because of mistakes they've made in their past. But in their book *Heart-to-Heart Talks with Jesus*, Deacon Eddie Ensley, Ph.D., and Robert Herrmann have written a devotional as if the messages are coming from Jesus Himself.

Here is an excerpt from one of those messages: "I look on you and see you and your mistakes and your selfishness. I see your deep self, which abides under that. That is the self I wish to reach out to. My love can forgive. My love can cleanse."

"It is so easy to wear masks, to conceal your true self from other people. You even try to conceal yourself from Me, but I see under those masks. I look past those masks into your heart, into the child within, into your true self."

"Others do not fully understand you. You do not fully understand yourself, but I am the one who understands you and cherishes you and is glad that you are My child. No matter what you might have done in the past, I can lift you up and get you up straight and walking."

God, who is rich in mercy...made us alive together with Christ. (Ephesians 2:4-5)

Abba, may I never be afraid to reveal my true self to You.

From Gang Life to Religious Life

As a teenager in Artesia, California, Cesar Galan fell into gang life, which led to him being shot by a rival and paralyzed from the waist down. Angry and despairing about his condition, Galan received counseling from hospital chaplain Brother Richard Hirbe of the Friars of the Sick Poor, who inspired him to turn his life around.

Galan forgave his assailant and became both a hospital chaplain and religious brother himself. Eventually, he felt called to pursue the priesthood and was ordained in 2023, becoming the Archdiocese of Los Angeles's first ever paraplegic priest.

Life in a wheelchair presents challenges, but Father Galan has always met them head on. His main concern is serving his parishioners well. He told *AngelusNews.com*, "I just pray that God always gives me a heart for service. In my darkest days, I couldn't imagine myself doing this. But here I am. And to those discerning a vocation, I encourage them to look forward, and pay attention to what the Lord is telling you."

Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path. (Psalm 119:105)

Send me wise counselors to guide me down the right road, Lord.