

## To Cast Shadows or Disperse Them

“Jesus challenged us to be the light of the world. What kind of light are we? Do we cast shadows or disperse them?” So writes Father Bob Colaresi, O. Carm., Spiritual Director of the Society of the Little Flower, in its *Between Friends* newsletter.

Father Bob goes on to share the story of World War II-era Dutch Carmelite priest Saint Titus Brandsma, who vocally opposed Hitler’s “fascist, demonic movement destroying human life and freedom.” The Nazis eventually arrested him, sentenced him to hard labor, tortured him in medical experiments, and murdered him via lethal injection.

But even in these darkest of times, St. Titus served as a light that dispersed shadows. Father Bob writes, “Titus encouraged his fellow prisoners to not hate the Germans or their guards. He believed and knew that yielding to hatred with hate would be the true victory of evil. He proclaimed God’s presence and love in everyone and especially with them in their suffering...He lived and preached forgiveness and kindness. He learned that the hidden God was the present God.”

**The path of the righteous is like the light of dawn, which shines brighter and brighter.  
(Proverbs 4:18)**

*Father, may my light disperse the shadows in this world.*

## Caring for the Incurable

Many people know Nathaniel Hawthorne as the author of books such as *The Scarlet Letter* and *The House of the Seven Gables*. But his daughter became noteworthy in her own right.

Rose Hawthorne Lathrop converted to Catholicism and became a nun who cared for terminal cancer patients in Manhattan. The Dominican Sisters of Hawthorne carry on that tradition today at a facility in Hawthorne, New York.

As reported by Leah Libresco Sargent at *Plough.com*, they serve about 25 patients at a time. The Sisters either receive medical training when entering the order—or come into it with some experience already. Primarily, however, their first duty is to their religious foundation, so they can “pray and love the patients.”

Many patients are poor and did not receive good treatment in secular hospitals. The Sisters make sure that changes in their final days and weeks. Sister Stella Mary, one of the nuns, said, “We love this person how God loves them, how God intends them to be loved.”

**Even though I walk through the darkest valley,  
I fear no evil; for You are with me. (Psalm 23:4)**

*May those who are dying experience Your love,  
Jesus.*

## A Nurse's Loving Act

Not only was Shariya Small pregnant at age 14, her triplets were born three months premature and had to spend five months in Community Hospital North's neonatal intensive care unit in Indianapolis. The one saving grace for Shariya was meeting neonatal nurse Katrina Mullen.

Nurse Mullen could tell that Shariya needed both material and emotional support. But Shariya was reluctant to open up about her situation, so Mullen didn't push. One day, Mullen revealed that she too had been a teen mom, and that is when Shariya finally came to trust her.

After the babies were released from the hospital, Shariya went to live with a relative, but kept in touch with Mullen. The babies were not being well cared for, so the Department of Social Services got involved.

Shariya then asked Mullen if she and the babies could come live with her. The kindhearted nurse agreed. She came to teach Shariya the mothering skills she needed—and even officially adopted her in 2022.

**We were gentle among you, like a nurse tenderly caring for her own children.  
(1 Thessalonians 2:7)**

*Bless nurses with big hearts, Savior.*

## Saved by Sarah

It was an elderly person's worst nightmare. Wheelchair bound Harry Smith, age 81, was walking his nine-year-old beagle mix, Sarah, when suddenly, his "electric wheelchair lost traction." Smith told Florida's *WPTV*, "I tried to back around to get out of it, and it went straight back instead and right down the embankment, and dumped me right in the water."

Smith did not know how to swim and could barely keep his head afloat, so he immediately began screaming for help. But it was the frantic barks of Sarah that alerted two bystanders working across the street to Smith's plight. "The dog was splashing in the water," one of the bystanders, Edward Suhling, said. "So...I jumped in the water, and my buddy grabbed [Mr. Smith's] arms, and I grabbed his legs, and we got him up on shore."

Suhling and his friend were also able to flag down a local police officer, Adam Doty, for extra assistance. Smith was thankfully unharmed, and he gives all the credit to Sarah. "She's such a good dog," Smith concluded. "Everybody in the neighborhood loves her...I love her, always have, always will."

**Ask the animals...they will teach you. (Job 12:7)**

*Paraclete, we thank You for the love and loyalty of our pets.*

## The Sign of a Great Chef

Melissa Keomoungkhoun and her husband, Victor Montiel, are both deaf, so eating out can be challenging. However, their experience at the Texas omakase restaurant Tatsu Dallas far surpassed their expectations.

The hype behind the omakase tasting menu is that the meals are hand selected by the chef and explained by word of mouth. This concerned the couple, so they let the staff know ahead of time that they were deaf.

When Melissa and Victor arrived at the restaurant, they discovered that its chef-owner, Tatsuya Sekiguchi, had learned how to sign the entire tasting menu in ASL (American Sign Language), which blew the couple away! Sekiguchi told the *Today Show*, “If I can help make it more special, I am very grateful...My belief is, everyday and everyone is special.”

Melissa plans to return to Tatsu soon and hopes this positive story will spread awareness to teach ASL in the hospitality industry “to create human connection through language.”

**To every province in its own script and to every people in its own language. (Esther 8:9)**

*Loving Jesus, guide me to create human connections.*

## Avoiding Emotional Burnout

Burnout can happen to anyone, be it a parent whose children demand lots of attention, or a priest who ministers to those in stressful situations. Father Michael Rennier has experienced this firsthand. Writing for *Aleteia*, he recalled snapping at an innocent request from a parishioner because he was emotionally depleted from his other responsibilities.

To prevent burnout, Father Rennier now carves out some daily quiet time, noting, “I give my activities that day to God, think about what I’m thankful for, and ask Him to be present with me throughout the day. If I’m feeling emotionally tired, I resolve to put guilt behind me about taking the time I need.”

Father Rennier notes that empathy, which allows us to feel other people’s pain, is a good quality, but it can lead to emotional burnout. Therefore, it’s okay to set boundaries. He concludes, “Do what you need to stay healthy. Eat well. Exercise. Read a book. Sit in the sun. The fruits of self-care, remember, are not for you alone. If you have more energy, you’ll be in a better frame of mind and will have more to give away to others.”

**He would withdraw to deserted places and pray. (Luke 5:16)**

*Teach me to avoid burnout, Prince of Peace.*

## The Holy Spirit Among the Spirits

When Vincent and Adrienne Clarke, owners of an Irish pub in Luxembourg, got a phone call from a Catholic priest asking if he could use their facility to hold Mass, they thought it was a joke. But Irish Redemptorist priest Father Michael Cusack explained that his request was 100 percent real.

Father Michael's church had suddenly been closed down by the government to make extensive renovations to the property, so his usual congregation of 1,000 English-speaking Catholics in Luxembourg had no spiritual home. He had heard the pub had a parking lot and ample room, so he called his fellow Irish expatriates to ask if they would host a Mass.

The Clarkes agreed, and 250 parishioners attended. They held Mass there a second Sunday too, before the diocese finally gave Father Michael other churches to use as his Sunday base.

The priest told *The Irish Mirror*, "There are so many expats here that there is a great sort of togetherness. I have great friends across all religions, all nationalities and all genders, and there are no dividing lines here. Everyone is here together, and we just get on with life. It's a microcosm for what the world could be."

**Let us exalt His name together. (Psalm 34:3)**

*Help me to see Your presence everywhere, Father.*

## Art Therapy Aids Homeless

Camillus House in Miami, Florida, provides shelter for 1,700 homeless people every night, while also offering them food, clothing, counseling, job training, and substance abuse treatment. There is one particular activity, however, that lifts residents' hearts and spirits: art therapy.

As reported by Jim Davis for *TheFloridaCatholic.org*, painting, drawing, and other art forms have proved popular at the facility, run by the Hospitaller Order of St. John of God.

Hilda Fernández, Camillus House's CEO, said, "Being homeless drives a lot of anxiety and depression. Anything we can do to help clients deal with their anxiety in a positive way, we'll try it." Art instructor David Rohn added, "[The homeless] need to rebuild their spiritual self. A creative endeavor is part of that."

Betty Gonzalez, who ended up homeless after losing her job, felt rejuvenated after learning how to paint. She has even sold several of her pictures at art shows hosted by Camillus House. "This is heaven," Betty said. "You can express. You can be yourself."

**He has filled him with divine spirit...to devise artistic designs. (Exodus 35:31)**

*Guide homeless people toward spiritual healing, Lord.*



## Good Deed Allows Senior to Retire

In a beautiful act of good will, people came together and donated over \$125,000 to an 82-year-old Walmart employee so he could finally retire.

Warren “Butch” Marion, a Navy veteran, was working in the Cumberland, Maryland Walmart, when popular TikTok user Rory McCarty walked in and started a conversation with him.

Astounded that this elderly man was still working eight-to-nine-hour shifts, McCarty knew he had to help. He created a *GoFundMe* page and shared it with his over 300,000 TikTok followers. “I wanted to help this Navy Veteran...do the things he would love to do that he may not be able to for financial reasons,” McCarty wrote.

McCarty raised over \$125,000 and presented a check to the grateful Marion, who was finally able to retire. Marion told *Cumberland Times News* he would use the funds to pay off his house and travel to Florida to see his kids, believing “the good Lord has blessed me for what I did in my younger years.”

**Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good, for His steadfast love endures forever. (Psalm 136:1)**

*Thank You, Father, for the good deeds of strangers.*

## The Healing Power of Cows

During his three tours of duty as a soldier in Iraq and his subsequent years as an anti-terrorism specialist, Marvin Frink witnessed the deaths of friends, colleagues, and civilians. But he never dealt with that trauma directly because he felt like that would be admitting weakness. Unfortunately, keeping his feelings bottled up resulted in debilitating post-traumatic stress.

Frink's first major step toward healing occurred when his father, a Baptist preacher, took him to the cattle ranch of a friend who was a Vietnam veteran. Feeding the cows produced a sense of peace and joy in Frink that he hadn't experienced in years.

Eventually, he started a cattle farm of his own in North Carolina, reports *People* magazine. More than that, Frink invites other veterans suffering from PTSD to visit the grounds so he can share his mental health journey with them and guide them toward resources that can help them.

Frink still sees a therapist and takes medication for anxiety, but the healing power of cows is real. He said, "Farming gave me a sense of purpose...And animals gave me a second chance."

**Like cattle that go down into the valley, the spirit of the Lord gave them rest. (Isaiah 63:14)**

*Guide those with PTSD toward healing, Savior.*

## **Avoid Being Disabled in Spirit**

The injuries that Army Captain James Howard sustained during his years of military service, both in the Middle East and in the U.S., left him a C-5 quadriplegic, paralyzed from the chest down with no hand or leg function.

Despite his limitations, Howard is living a full and rich life with his wife and son, while also participating in adaptive sports, including archery “where he draws his bow with his teeth.” In addition, he has created two nonprofits that serve veterans and children with disabilities.

In November 2022, the Tunnel to Towers Foundation gifted Howard and his family with a Smart home, allowing him to live with greater ease. The veteran was grateful and shared this message in the Tunnel to Towers newsletter:

“If you have a disability, focus on the things that it doesn’t prevent you from doing well, and don’t dwell on the things that it interferes with. Avoid being disabled in spirit. Helping others that are a lot worse off can sometimes be the best medicine when having a rough day.”

**God [gave us]...a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline. (2 Timothy 1:7)**

*Teach me to build on my abilities, Lord.*

## Bringing Back Nonna's Cooking

Devastated after the deaths of his mother, grandmother, and sister, Joe Scaravella tried to comfort himself by opening a restaurant that specialized in the Italian classics they were all great at cooking. Though he had never run a restaurant before, he used the inheritance his mother had left him to buy a vacant storefront in his Staten Island, New York community.

Scaravella named his establishment Enoteca Maria, after his mom. He then went in search of “nonnas” (the Italian word for “grandmothers”) that he could hire to cook the regional Italian fare he was looking to serve. The feedback was fantastic, and soon his restaurant was a success.

“A few years later,” reported the *Washington Post*, “Scaravella began inviting grandmothers from other cultures to cook their classics in his kitchen, and it got even busier.”

Brazil, Germany, Sri Lanka, and Taiwan are just some of the countries represented on the menu, which changes depending on which nonna is working. “There are so many different people from so many different cultures,” Scaravella said. “It just made sense to feature everybody’s grandmother.”

**She brings her food from far away.  
(Proverbs 31:14)**

*May we celebrate the love (and cooking) of nonnas, Lord.*

## **Make Room for the Important Things**

A philosopher stood before his students holding a jar, which he filled with rocks. When the rocks reached the top of the jar, he asked his students if it was full. They said it was. Then, the philosopher started dropping small pebbles in amongst the rocks, shaking the jar so the pebbles would find their way into the crevices, until the jar looked full again.

Next, the philosopher took sand and poured it into the jar until everyone agreed it was full. The philosopher then said to his students, “This jar represents your life. The rocks are the most important things: family, friends, loved ones, and the values we hold dear. If everything else was lost and only they remained, your life would still be full. The pebbles represent secondary things...like our work and the essentials that sustain us. And the sand is everything else. The small stuff.”

The philosopher concluded, “If you put the sand into the jar first, there is no room for the pebbles or the rocks. The same goes for your life. If you spend all your time and energy on the small stuff, you will never have room for the things that are important to you.”

**Strive first for the kingdom of God.  
(Matthew 6:33)**

*Help me keep my priorities straight, Father.*

## Life Saver at Sea

Many years ago, a life-or-death drama played out at sea during a whale-watching expedition. After the ship cleared the harbor, a tourist noticed a woman tinkering with the latch on a gate by the rail.

Why would she want to open the gate, he wondered? He watched for a few minutes, then spoke to the first mate. They both suspected that the woman was suicidal.

Minutes later, one of them went over to her for what seemed like a casual chat and stayed with her for three and a half hours. The conversation confirmed what the tourist had suspected: the woman was desperate and planning to jump overboard.

Three strangers had come together, and a life was saved because someone had noticed—and someone had listened.

Don't be afraid to follow your intuition.

**Encourage the fainthearted, help the weak.  
(1 Thessalonians 5:14)**

*Give me the courage to follow my intuition when helping others, Jesus.*

## The Jesuit Carpenter

Ken Honan grew up in a middle-class family in St. Louis. They didn't have money to hire someone to do work around their home, so Ken's father often did it himself. By the time Ken was eight, his dad was teaching him how to safely use a circular saw.

As he got older, Ken felt called to become a Jesuit brother. This means he wouldn't be ordained a priest, but would still receive similar training and formation as other Jesuits. He is pursuing his degree in U.S. History at Georgetown University, while also indulging in his passion for woodworking.

In an interview for *Georgetown.edu*, he recalled using his \$50 stipend in the Jesuit novitiate to make picture frames and a wine rack as Christmas gifts for his family. He also made "a solid cherry dining room table" for some friends.

Brother Ken reflected, "I took the vow name St. Joseph...for St. Joseph the Worker who was a carpenter. And for me, it's prayer and a commitment to justice. When you're working your way through 80- to 320-grit sandpaper, moving the sander in a circular motion for several hours, it's a good time for quiet and prayer."

**Bring wood and build the house. (Haggai 1:8)**

*Bless the hands and hearts of all craftsmen,  
Jesus.*

## Faith, Brick by Brick

LEGO remains one of the most popular toys in the world, crossing all cultures and continents. But did you know the creator of LEGO, Ole Kirk Christiansen, was a man of deep faith?

As reported by *Aleteia*, he grew up as the 10th child in a farming family in Denmark. Originally a carpenter who made LEGO bricks out of wood, he switched to plastic in 1949, prompting the business to thrive. Through it all—from tragedies, such as the loss of his factory to fire and the death of his wife at age 40, to successes in business and family—Christiansen always maintained a strong faith in God’s guiding hand.

He shared a morning prayer with employees each day, and gave his LEGO employees a copy of the book of Psalms with the LEGO logo on the cover. His son, Gotfryd, said, “I am convinced that my father’s faith in God, which was evident in everything he did, helped him through the sadness and difficulties he experienced. It gave him the comfort he needed to take on his new responsibilities, and the strength to pull through despite the obstacles he faced.”

**The Lord protects the simple; when I was brought low, He saved me. (Psalm 116:6)**

*May I always trust in Your goodness,  
Paraclete.*



## Part of the Whole

As you know, the Amish people maintain a simple way of life. They use technology only when necessary and believe that being “plain folk” is best.

Because they have this attitude toward life, the Amish people have great respect for one another. They really need each individual in their community, from the youngest child to the most experienced elder, to make it all work. Each person is depended upon to do some particular job in order for the entire community to survive.

In many ways, the same is true for all of us. Whether it be in a small community or a major city, each person must do his or her share in order for the whole community to function well.

Don’t be tempted to say, “What difference can I possibly make?” You are an important part of the whole community. Do your share, and we will all have a better world.

**We, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another.  
(Romans 12:5)**

*Holy Spirit, teach me to make a difference by the way I live my life.*

## The Biggest Win

The National Hockey League’s Vancouver Canucks were playing the Seattle Krakens in the latter’s home city. But one eagle-eyed Krakens fan noticed something amiss off the ice.

Nadia Popovici, a 22-year-old incoming medical student, observed a suspicious-looking mole on the neck of Brian “Red” Hamilton, assistant equipment manager of the Canucks. Rapping on the plexiglass partition to get his attention, Nadia held up her phone, where she had typed a message advising Brian to get this growth “checked out.”

It was a good thing he heeded her warning, as this mole turned out to be an early sign of skin cancer. “[Nadia] took me out of a slow fire,” Hamilton told *NBC News*. “And the words out of the doctor’s mouth were if I ignored that for four to five years, I wouldn’t be here...I’ve got a wonderful family...She saved my life.”

Months later, Brian and Nadia reunited at another hockey game. In gratitude for her lifesaving catch, both teams presented her with a \$10,000 scholarship. It was the “biggest win” of the night, as captioned on the Canucks’ social media page.

**The...seeing eye—the Lord has made.  
(Proverbs 20:12)**

*God, keep our eyes and ears open to those in need.*

## Community Hospitality

Would you like to improve the quality of life in your neighborhood? It's simple. Be more hospitable.

- Invite someone who lives alone to your house for a holiday meal or take them with you on an outing.
- Welcome the newcomer on your block by providing light refreshments on move-in day.
- Be aware of neighborhood happenings and when a baby is born. Or, when there is illness or death, make yourself available for errands, chores, or childcare.
- Welcome your children's friends, offering them snacks when they come to play, study, or listen to music.

Hospitality is the art of being gracious. Like any art, it can be learned. And you will probably find that you're having a wonderful time yourself as well.

**Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it. (Hebrews 13:2)**

*May hospitality bring flavor and friendships to my life, Gracious God.*

## A Measure of Grace

It seems a cruel twist of fate that a man who uses his voice to make a living would develop a condition that diminishes his speaking ability. Yet, such was the case with Peter Haskell, a longtime reporter for *WCBS 880* radio in New York City, who came down with a rare disorder called “spasmodic dysphonia.”

For several years—and with his bosses’ full support—Haskell continued reporting on the radio despite his difficulty speaking, hoping he could achieve a level of recovery. In 2022, however, he ended his on-air career, calling it “unsustainable.”

In his farewell letter to his colleagues and listeners, Haskell admitted he was unsure where his next season of life would lead him. Still, he felt deeply appreciative at having been able to cover so many important stories and meet “terrific people,” adding, “I’ve been fortunate to have lived my dream.”

Haskell concluded, “My vocal problems are obvious, but there are others facing more serious circumstances that are beyond our sight. We might not know their challenges, so maybe we can offer a measure of grace. Choose to be kind.”

**Do not be frightened or dismayed, for the Lord  
your God is with you wherever you go.  
(Joshua 1:9)**

*May all who struggle with illness receive  
kindness, Lord.*

## Country Star Makes Dream Come True

Kellen Hammock of Monticello, Illinois, was born with a hole in his skull. Though the condition was not life-threatening, he had to endure brain surgery when he was only eight days old.

As more surgeries followed in the ensuing six years, Kellen became a huge fan of country music star Keith Urban. When Kellen needed a cornea transplant that required him to wear “protective goggles 24 hours a day, seven days a week,” he only consented because he saw a picture of Urban wearing glasses.

In 2022, Kellen’s parents surprised him by taking him to an Urban concert. With seats in the first row, Kellen’s dad sat him on his shoulders, holding a sign that read, “I wasn’t supposed to walk. I wasn’t supposed to talk. Now I’m jamming to Keith Urban.”

Urban noticed the sign, came over to talk with Kellen, and gave him a hug. The youngster was thrilled. His mom, Whitney, told *WCIA.com*, “The fact that Keith Urban was humble enough to stop his concert, speak with our son, ask about his story, and give him a hug, it was the best feeling as parents watching our son’s dreams come true.”

**Clothe yourselves with compassion.  
(Colossians 3:12)**

*May compassion guide my actions, Jesus.*

## A Daughter's Search, Part 1

Deanna Shrodes of Tampa, Florida, knew she was adopted and yearned to know who her birth family was. At age 27, she learned the identity of her biological mother, Sally King, but King expressed no interest in meeting her.

Deanna, however, refused to take 'no' for an answer, so she just showed up at King's door one day to meet her personally. As reported by David Begnaud of *CBS News*, this was the beginning of a beautiful 20-year relationship between the two.

When Deanna inquired who her father was, King refused to tell her. The only thing she would reveal is that he was Greek and from Richmond, Virginia.

King died in 2019, taking the identity of Deanna's father to her grave. But Deanna kept searching and, because she is an ordained minister, praying. It was during one of those prayers that she claims God told her, "Your father's name is Gus."

After signing up with several DNA registries, Deanna connected with a cousin, whom she reached out to. He told her, "I think you're my Uncle Gus's daughter." More tomorrow...

**Search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. (Matthew 7:7)**

*Guide me in finding the love I need, Lord.*

## A Daughter's Search, Part 2

When Deanna Shrodes found the father she had never met, he was 92 years old and living in a nursing home because he could no longer care for himself. His name was Gus Nicholas. Best of all, he was overjoyed by her presence, saying, "I woke up this morning and I was alone...And now this afternoon, I have a daughter. I have a son-in-law. I have three grandchildren. I have great-grandchildren...I'm not alone in the world anymore."

Gus pleaded with his newfound daughter not to let him die in the nursing home. Even though they were still technically strangers, Deanna invited him to live with her and her husband, who is a pastor as well.

Deanna now feeds and cares for the biological father she never knew, relishing the answered prayer that is allowing her to get to know him this late in life. She told *CBS News's* David Begnaud, "It's the most worthwhile thing I've ever done in my life. It's the hardest thing, but it's the most worthwhile thing. It's the most incredible miracle I've ever had the privilege to live out. I'm living the dream."

**Do not cast me off in the time of old age.  
(Psalm 71:9)**

*Father, bring broken families together and unite them in Your love.*

## A Young Woman's Franciscan Ministry

As a child, Theresa Diersen didn't realize how much her family struggled to make ends meet. She just assumed everybody ate ketchup sandwiches and pancakes for dinner. Over the years, however, she grew determined to improve people's lives, which led her to serve those in poverty as the Volunteer Services Director at Cincinnati, Ohio's St. Francis Seraph Ministries.

As reported by *FranciscanMedia.org*, "Diersen works with upwards of 600 volunteers in a given month...managing [them] at the dining room for breakfast or dinner, making sandwiches for the center's popular Bag Lunch Program (which feeds 600 day laborers in the area, some of whom make less than \$35 a day)," or helping other outreach efforts.

Diersen, who embraces the Franciscan charism of serving the poor, said, "With so many people needing assistance, it can be emotionally draining. We're not just providing food or teaching cooking classes. SFSM is a safe haven, a resource for help, an ear to listen, or encouragement that they are not alone...I believe that working here is truly the work of God."

**Whoever gives to the poor will lack nothing.  
(Proverbs 28:27)**

*Guide me to do Your work in this world, Jesus.*



## Smokey, Oreo, and Jennifer

Asking a neighbor to take care of your pet dogs while you go on vacation may seem like an imposition. But for Robert, the neighbor in the above scenario, it proved to be a lifeline.

After his father died of colon cancer, Robert felt alone and purposeless for a long time. Then, his neighbors asked him to babysit their dogs—Smokey, Oreo, and Jennifer—while they went on vacation. Robert agreed. It turned out to be such a great decision that he wrote his neighbors a ‘thank you’ letter that they shared on *Reddit*.

Robert said the dogs gave him “the motivation to restart my life again.” Whenever he felt sad, one of the dogs would rub up against him and make him laugh. And needing to take the dogs to the park led Robert to meet new people and make new friends. “I feel like I’m part of the human race again,” he wrote.

Robert returned Smokey, Oreo, and Jennifer to their owners, of course. But he chose to adopt two dogs himself. He concluded, “I now take regular walks to the park with them and talk with friends...You brought back meaning to my life.”

**Who teaches us more than the animals of the earth? (Job 35:11)**

*Holy Spirit, guide me to live a meaningful life.*

## Reduce Me to Love

Author Hannah Brencher has incorporated “breath prayers” into her spiritual life. In her newsletter, she explains, “You pick a sentence, something that looks like a prayer, and repeat it under your breath over and over again.”

Brencher’s favorite breath prayer during moments of fear is “God, reduce me to love.” She first heard this particular prayer from a fellow volunteer at her church when they were preparing to host worship leaders from around the country. Brencher feels uncomfortable around strangers, so she was nervous about greeting so many new people that day.

Well, one of those strangers approached her with open arms to give her a hug, then started playing “Amazing Grace” on his harmonica. After their encounter, he told Brencher, “Just remember to look beneath the surface. Beneath the surface, we all just want to be seen.”

As he slipped into the crowd, Brencher expanded her original prayer, saying: “Reduce me to love. Teach me to see beneath the surface. Please help me to be a familiar face in a crowd, a light in a dark room. Turn me into love and wipe out all the excess fear.”

**Whoever loves...lives in the light. (1 John 2:10)**

*Replace my fear with Your perfect love,  
Father.*

## **'An Angel Sent from God'**

Dee Harkrider was in a bind. She had left her wallet in a Walmart shopping cart in Forrest City, Arkansas. The grandmother of seven, who lives on disability, was 20 miles away from this location and on her way to visit a friend in Palestine.

Fortunately, 19-year-old Delivontae Johnson, who pulled up next to Harkrider's cart shortly after she left, spotted the wallet. Since he knew Dee's home address from her driver's license, he started to drive towards her house, sending out a Facebook message to her in the meantime, informing her of his find. Johnson was unable to connect with Harkrider, but eventually reached one of her friends, who then called her and gave her Johnson's number.

They agreed to meet for the exchange at a restaurant in Palestine, where Dee hugged Johnson in gratitude. "I just felt like he was an angel sent from God," Harkrider told *USA Today*.

"The way I was raised, you don't take something that's not yours," Johnson humbly added. "You've just got to be honest...If you do good things, good things will follow."

**Trust in the Lord and do good. (Psalm 37:3)**

*Redeemer, may we remember no good deed goes unnoticed.*

## **Hearts Crowded with Gratitude**

In his book *Prayers for the Domestic Church*, Edward Hays shared a prayer for Thanksgiving. Here is an excerpt: “Lord God, our hearts are crowded with gratitude as we celebrate the feast of Thanksgiving. We come to this feasting table with great joy and eagerness, for we are truly grateful to You, our God, for all that we have been given.”

“We also thank one another for gifts, especially for the...love and affection that we have freely shared. We are thankful for all who are present at this feast, as well for all those who have labored in love...to bring this dinner to our table.”

“Lord, when I have food, help me to remember the hungry. When I have work, help me to remember the jobless. When I go home at the end of the day, help me to remember those who have no home at all. When I am in pain, help me to remember those who suffer. And in remembering, help me to destroy my complacency...and help me to be concerned enough to help, by word and deed, those who cry out for what we too often take for granted...In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.”

**Enter His gates with thanksgiving. (Psalm 100:4)**

*Thank You, God, for all my blessings. May I also be a blessing to others.*

## Writing Can Ease Anxiety

A romantic breakup, underemployment, and uncertainty about her future led to a worry-filled November for Lindsey Weishar. With the holidays approaching, she came up with a creative way to get her stress under control.

As Lindsey recalled at *VerilyMag.com*, “From December 1 to December 25, I would write a letter at the end of each day, in which I’d express gratitude for the small joys that happened that day...Having to write down the good things caused me to slow down each evening and acknowledge that, even amid the worries, there were moments of joy.”

Through writing letters, Lindsey found her mood improving because she was able to work through her anxieties, while also focusing on her blessings. She learned that doing something creative is a proven way to lift your spirits. Psychologists call it “positive affect.”

She concluded, “I’m now more motivated to turn to creativity to center my mind when the anxiety returns. My hope is that in this small daily activity you will discover joy.”

**Can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? (Luke 12:25)**

*Teach me creative ways to ease my worries,  
Creator.*

## How To Help a Grieving Friend

The holiday season can be a wonderful time of year, but for many who have experienced the loss of a loved one, it can be challenging. Writing at *VerilyMag.com*, author and nutritionist Aimee McNew shared some insightful and practical ways you can be there for your friends who are enduring grief:

- **Ask Them What They Need:** Check in and see if you can take a task or two off their plate (a rent check, walking the dog, etc.). Even offer to help them decorate or shop for the holidays.
- **Bring a Meal or Physically Be with Them:** Your friend may be looking for companionship to not feel so alone.
- **Give a Gift that Honors their Loved One:** Perhaps an ornament with a photo of their deceased loved one would be appreciated.

These small gestures can't erase the loss in your friend's heart, but the greatest healing power can come from the smallest acts of kindness.

**Then with much grief and anguish of heart I wept, and with groaning began to pray.  
(Tobit 3:1)**

*Lord, bless all those who are suffering from loss. Bring them solace and comfort.*