



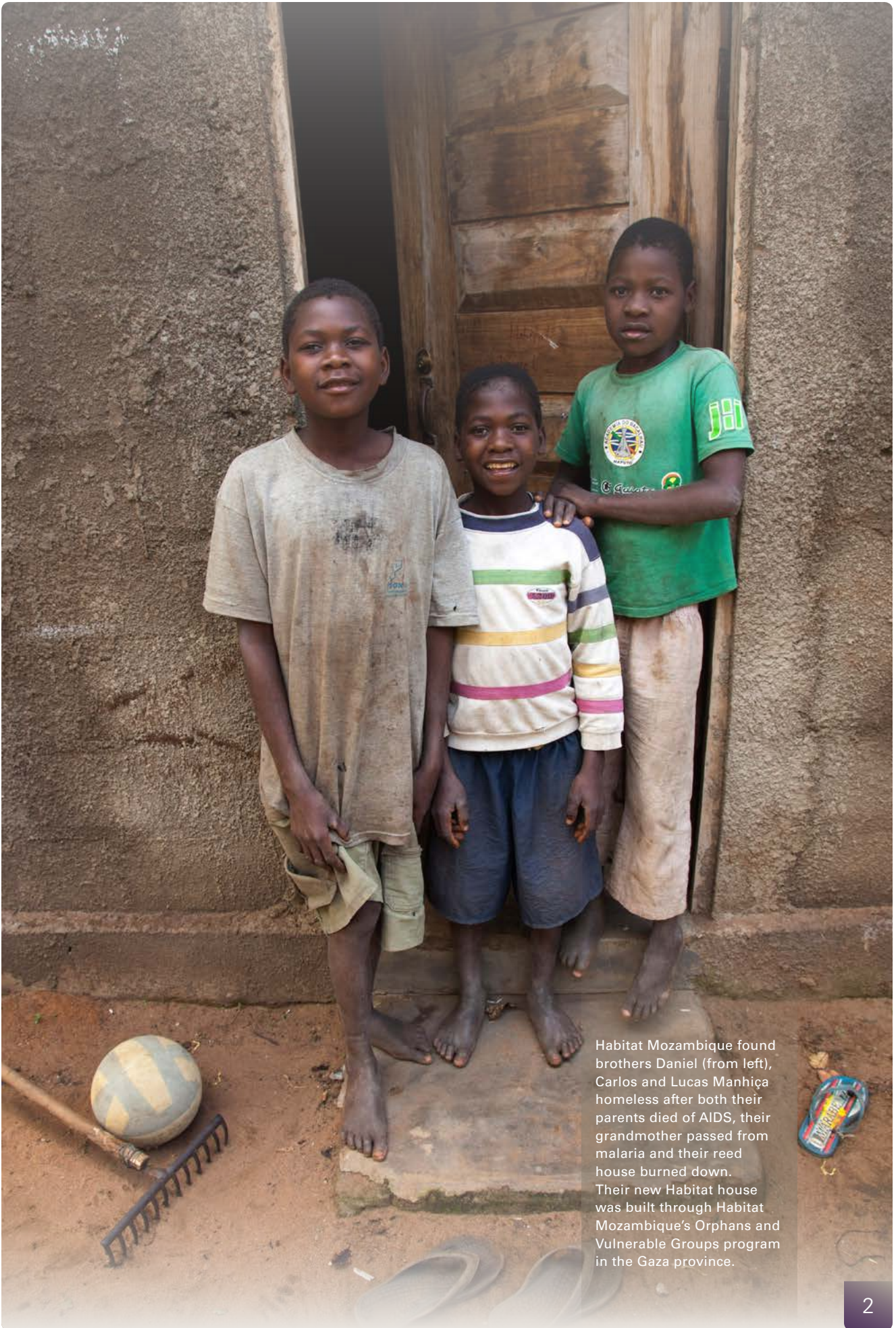
Updated for 2015

The Season of Lent


40 Days of Prayer, Service and Sacrifice



HABITAT FOR HUMANITY • KEEPING GOD AT THE CENTER



Habitat Mozambique found brothers Daniel (from left), Carlos and Lucas Manhiça homeless after both their parents died of AIDS, their grandmother passed from malaria and their reed house burned down. Their new Habitat house was built through Habitat Mozambique's Orphans and Vulnerable Groups program in the Gaza province.

reetings during the season of Lent, when we prepare our hearts to celebrate great traditions and the new excitement that surrounds Easter.

Traditionally, Lent is observed from Ash Wednesday through the Saturday of Holy Week. The entire season consists of 40 days plus six Sundays — often called “little Easters” — and serves as a reminder of the hope we have in the resurrection of Christ.

As part of Habitat for Humanity’s commitment to ensure that God remains central to everything we do, we developed this devotional booklet to guide you during this period of reflection, repentance and prayer.

As you explore these brief and thoughtful meditations, written by a variety of authors from the Habitat family around the world, my prayer is that God will be present with you and that you will experience the wonder of hope.

Discussion questions are included with each devotion to facilitate personal reflection and for use in a group setting. Suggestions:

- Invite others to pray with you during this special Lenten season.
- Plan special devotional times with staff and other supporters.
- Schedule a spiritual retreat for prayer, meditation and renewal.
- Use select meditations for a devotional time during Habitat build projects.

Thank you to all who have contributed to this resource, and may God’s rich blessings surround all who use it. May this Lenten season help you draw nearer to God as you anticipate a glorious Easter.

In partnership,

Jonathan Reckford
Chief Executive Officer
Habitat for Humanity International

On the cover:

In Managua, Nicaragua, 10-year-old Sherling Gongora visits with volunteer Richard Brendel of Charleston, South Carolina. Brendel was a member of a Build Louder team that spent 10 days helping to build a new home in Nicaragua in partnership with Sherling’s family. The team also met with communities, NGOs and government officials to advocate for decent housing. © Habitat for Humanity International/Ezra Millstein

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TO DUST YOU SHALL RETURN

By EDDIE TURNER

“By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread until you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; you are dust, and to dust you shall return.” — [Genesis 3:19, NRSV](#)

One of the oddities of churchgoing is that many of us voluntarily go to a place — even donate money to keep it running — and then on Ash Wednesday someone stands and tells us, “You are dust, and to dust you will return.” The nerve! That sounds like the words of a movie villain, or at least an angry driver. (“You’re dust, buddy!”)

When I hear the phrase repeated in the Ash Wednesday service, it rattles around in my head for a few days. It is so starkly different from the other messages we often hear. What about all that hard work that has gone into building our self-esteem and encouraging our children to believe in themselves? The dichotomy reminds me of a Lydia Davis story, in which she writes, “How does a person learn to see herself as nothing when she has already had so much trouble learning to see herself as something in the first place?”

This pronouncement that we will return to dust challenges any self-importance we might harbor, challenges our fragiley constructed dignity, and it certainly challenges our long-term plans.

Ash Wednesday, which is the first day of Lent, calls us to cast off our pretensions and to approach the season with an appropriate measure of solemnity. In the moment of receiving the ashes, we are reminded of our fate.

However, the imposition of the ashes with the sign of the cross reminds us that we have hope. We are not helpless or without worth. We have a savior, and through Habitat for Humanity, we have amazing opportunities to be the hands and feet of Jesus as we build homes, communities and hope.

PRAYER

Father, we thank You for this season of reflection. Give us unflinching vision for our own mortality and humility, and give us fearlessness to cast off pretensions and false independence. Ground us in Your love, Your power and Your strength that flows out without conditions or boundaries. Amen.

Eddie Turner is an international volunteer projects manager for the Global Village program of Habitat for Humanity International and is based in Atlanta.

FOR DISCUSSION

1. When does humility inspire you to serve more intensely, and when does it inhibit you?
2. How is the season of Lent a motivator for you?
3. What will you cast off during Lent, and how will you bring hope?

¹ Lydia Davis, “New Year’s Resolution,” Samuel Johnson Is Indignant, 2002, page 46.

IN ORDER TO GO UP, WE MUST GO DOWN

BY NATOSHA REID RICE

In 1173, work began on a freestanding bell tower in the city of Pisa, Italy. After the second story was completed, builders realized that the tower's foundation, at only 3 meters deep, was not adequate and was built on weak, unstable subsoil, causing the tower to lean to one side. Construction was halted in 1178 to allow the soil to settle beneath the structure and was not resumed until 1272, almost a century later! During construction, many techniques were used to try to correct and compensate for the tilt, but nothing really worked.

The builders were so intent and focused on getting the building up that they did not spend the time and resources to go down and build a solid foundation.

In the familiar parable found in [Matthew 7:24-27](#), Jesus gave clear instructions about constructing a proper foundation.

Perhaps it is too late to create an adequate support for the bell tower in Pisa, but we can always practice disciplines that draw us closer to God and deepen and strengthen our foundations of faith. Lent is the perfect occasion to focus on prayer, Bible study, selflessness and service, and to reflect on the ministry of Habitat for Humanity.

As an organization, are we digging deep enough for a firm foundation? We cannot merely set our sights on a grand strategic plan; we must also dig deep both as an organization and as individuals. We must dig deep in our own Habitat spaces.

- Digging deep requires us to go beyond pretense and appearance to authenticity. We must live out our faith.
- Digging deep requires us to go beyond our level of comfort and dive into something more meaningful.
- Digging deep requires us to go beyond ourselves and to serve God first.

Our diligence now in drawing closer to God and drawing strength from His mighty power will keep us strong when the rains come, the streams rise and the winds blow. Building a firm foundation will enable us to reach higher and stretch further as we seek to obey God's commands.

PRAYER

Dear Lord, we thank You for the opportunity to be a part of this wonderful Habitat ministry. As we work to make Your love and hope a reality for many, help us to "dig deep" in our faith and reach beyond ourselves to provide safe spaces for others to dwell and prosper. During this Lenten season, may we reflect upon and be energized by the transforming power of Your life and witness in the world. Please help each of us to remain rooted and established in Your love so that we are not swayed or discouraged by daily challenges, but press on to accomplish the great work You have called us to do. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.

Natosha Reid Rice is associate general counsel of Real Estate and Finance for Habitat for Humanity International and is based in Atlanta.

FOR DISCUSSION

1. To what disciplines are you committing during Lent?
2. What is the purpose of committing to one or more disciplines?
3. How will that practice help you deepen your foundation of faith?
4. In what areas will you dig deeper at work and in your personal life?

HAMMER IN THE HAND OF GOD

BY ARUNA PAUL SIMITTRARACHCHI

Lent has no meaning without referring to Christmas and Easter. Christmas calls us to believe that God is among us, while Easter brings us to the victory of Christ's death on the cross.

God's being among us and within us has been the theme of all the prophets. When Jesus entered into his public ministry, he proclaimed, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord" ([Luke 4:18-19, KJV](#)).

How does this relate to us in our ministry?

- "To preach the good news to the poor" — Habitat for Humanity brings hope to the poor and demonstrates that there is more to life. Habitat can change the worldview of the oppressed and the neglected.
- "To heal the brokenhearted" — Through Habitat, we can convince the voiceless, the neglected and the deprived that they are loved and cared for.
- "To preach deliverance to the captives" — Habitat provides a decent place to call their own to those who live in overcrowded conditions, those who toil but never make enough, and those who roam with no place to lay their heads. Habitat helps those who are hurt feel recovered, relieved and healed.
- "To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord" — Habitat can help free people from the bonds of poverty and restore their dignity.

As we reflect on our mission to empower the poor and the neglected, it takes a lot of humility and willingness to empty ourselves. "God among us" becomes meaningful only as we become the hammer in the hand of God. As we live with home partners and communities in our hearts and minds, we see how God uses us to build upon the strong foundation of His love.

Thus, Lent will be a time for us to renew our commitment to change things — beginning with our hearts.

PRAYER

We do pray for change of heart to understand Your modeling, Lord. Cover us with Your spirit that we may bring hope to the downtrodden, that we may be eager to heal the brokenhearted, and that we can help deliver those who are bound by the constraints of poverty. Amen.

Aruna Paul Simittrarachchi is national director of Habitat for Humanity Nepal.

FOR DISCUSSION

1. What does it mean to you for God to be among us?
2. What would your leadership style be if you followed the example of Jesus?
3. How are you doing in adopting this style?
4. What comes after the house dedication if Habitat preaches deliverance?

AVAILABLE

BY BARBARA SMITH

“Jesus said unto him, ‘If you wish to be complete, go and sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me.’”

— [Matthew 19:21, NASB](#)

Achieving a goal feels extremely good. Think about the sense of accomplishment you feel when you complete the items on a “to-do” list. [Matthew 19:16-22](#) relates an accomplished young man’s exchange with Jesus about obtaining eternal life. “Teacher,” he asks, “what good deed must I do to have eternal life?” As their dialogue continues, Jesus challenges the young man — who is no doubt accustomed to attaining his goals — to embrace the uncomfortable, to live selflessly and empty himself of what many consider valuable. “Come, follow me,” Jesus implores.

There are times when we seek answers from God, and His response might not make sense to us. Often, God’s plan shifts our attention away from ourselves and toward serving others. [Philippians 2:3-9](#) is a good example. When we have more than we need, we have more to offer others. Jesus invited the rich young ruler to trade his materialistic drive for an open-handed journey of faith, but at that call, the young man took a sorrowful exit. Those awaiting compassion, justice and mercy would have to wait for someone else. Did the young man fail to remember that when we show kindness to others, we are actually lending to God Himself — the God who promised to reward us? See [Proverbs 19:17](#). God is faithful to all His promises!

What we acquire in life should produce more than self-contentment. Our personal triumphs should compel us to create victories for those lacking the means to secure hope on their own. Most importantly, these successes should motivate us to honor God. We might not be asked to sell all our possessions, but Jesus is calling us to follow Him. That faith journey enables us to discover what truly pleases God; it gives way for His Word to transform our lives. This faith journey shapes the way we regard the needs of others. It leads us to self-sacrifice. Are you available?

PRAYER

Father, thank You for every blessing and success You have gifted to us. Teach us how to honor You with these gifts. When You call us to invest in what is truly valuable, may we make ourselves available to humbly follow You. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Barbara Smith is a youth volunteer engagement specialist for Habitat for Humanity International and is based in Americus, Georgia.

FOR DISCUSSION

1. Share a time when you experienced the reward of “lending to the Lord.” (See [Proverbs 19:17](#).)
2. How can God use our accomplishments to give hope to those who need it most?
3. As Jesus calls us to self-sacrifice, what steps can we take to follow?
4. Read [Luke 6:38](#). How does this passage motivate availability to service and self-sacrifice?

HOPE TO SHARE

By TOM JONES

The congressman and I had spent a Sunday afternoon participating in the dedication of four “Houses that Congress Built.” We were running late to catch our planes. A 10-year-old-girl who would be living in one of the homes would not allow us to leave. She grabbed our hands, literally tugging us up the stairs of the home we had just dedicated.

With a wonderful, indescribable facial expression, she exclaimed, “This is my room! And I have my own closet!”

After some really fun give and take, we had to leave. The congressman said, “You know, I don’t believe I have ever experienced such joy and hope in another person.” So also it was for me!

What a privilege it is for us at Habitat for Humanity to be channels for God’s Holy Spirit to work through us to instill joy and hope. Time and again, we are given opportunities to make God’s love real and permanent in the lives of others, while also deepening our own love and faith and joy and hope. We join Paul in his expression to the Romans: “We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ ... and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.” ([Romans 5:1-2, NKJV](#)).

Lent is a time for believers to prepare for deepening the Easter experience of the resurrection of Christ and the celebration of the never-ending presence of Christ here and now. Lent is 40 days, based on Jesus’ 40 days of preparation for His ministry on earth. May this Lent 2015 be such a preparation time for each of us and for Habitat ministries becoming better than ever channels for God’s Holy Spirit to bring joy and hope to people everywhere.

PRAYER

God, present and alive through Christ’s Holy Spirit, in these days of Lent, deepen our recognition and commitment to bring “Your Kingdom on earth, as it is in heaven.” Remind us that

**“Men and women, richer, poorer,
All God’s people young and old,
Blending human skills together,
Gracious gifts from God unfold.”¹ Amen.**

Tom Jones lives in Gainesville, Georgia, and is ambassador-at-large for the CEO for Habitat for Humanity International.

FOR DISCUSSION

1. What experiences have you had with Habitat that enabled you to share joy and hope with partner families, colleagues, staff members and volunteers?
2. When have you felt God has used you as a channel to make God’s love real in others?
3. In what specific ways will you communicate the Easter love of God during Lent?
4. How can we help local congregations, denominations and other groups use Habitat as a channel for responding to God’s clear call to mission in today’s world?
5. How can we use this Lenten period to help each other be more conscious of our Habitat ministries as times of “rejoicing to share the glory of God”?

¹ Jane Parker Huber, “Called as Partners in Christ’s Service,” The Presbyterian Hymnal, 1981, page 341.

YOUR “TO-DO” LIST

BY KELLE SHULTZ

Ever have one of those days when you take the time to do something that you really don't have the time for, and you discover something wonderful as a result? I found a wonderful nugget on Facebook recently that made me think of [Galatians 6:9](#), and I have been thinking about it ever since.

What struck me was this list of the hard things you have to do in life:

- You have to care more about others than they care about you.
- You have to make the call you are afraid to make.
- You have to lead when no one else is following you.
- You have to deliver results when making excuses is an option.
- You have to be kind to people who have been cruel to you.

The post went on to say that the hard things are the easiest to avoid, and yet these are the things that define you — the difference between living a life of mediocrity or a life of outrageous success.

It got me thinking about success and being outrageous in it. I think for that to happen, I need to add a few things to the “to-do” list. These additions are not necessarily hard, but I believe they are necessary for me to have a successful life. Your list may be similar or very different.

- Prepare a eulogy now for your parents and be ready to share their lives at their funerals. Tell how their love and hard-learned lessons shaped you into the person you are, and describe the impact they had on their community.
- Take a walk in the snow at night and feel the quiet.
- Shake a veteran's hand and say, “Thank you for your service.”
- Make a valentine.
- Have a baby fall asleep on your chest. Snuggle up to her tiny head, and breathe in the smell of innocence and life.
- Have a best friend whom you love like family.
- Learn to make fudge so tasty that everyone who eats it wants the recipe.
- Indulge in a bubble bath with someone you love, and include a rubber ducky.

What I want to emphasize is the importance of doing the hard things and the heart things. Life is a gift from God. Be mindful that we owe it to God to appreciate, respect and enjoy His gift by being outrageously successful in life.

PRAYER

O Lord, we give thanks to You for this glorious gift of life You have given to each of us. Show us how to embrace the gift. We pray that You will help us to see joy as we greet our trials for the day and through this know we are loved by You and can do the hard and heart things with You by our side. Amen.

Kelle Shultz is president and CEO of Knoxville Habitat for Humanity in Knoxville, Tennessee.

FOR DISCUSSION

1. We are molded into the people we are through the hard stuff in life and how we handle it. Tell about a hard choice you made that changed your life. In making this choice, did you find yourself closer to God?
2. Within your role at Habitat for Humanity, do you ever make decisions no one else wants to make or hard choices that are necessary? Does doing so help you learn and become a stronger leader?
3. What would you put on your “to-do” list?
4. Do you already do any of the items you would put on your list? If so, how do you feel? If you don't, why not?

MIND THE GAP

By JENNY WILLIAMS

“He answered, ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind’; and, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’”
— [Luke 10:27, NIV](#)

I worked in London a few years ago and heard the phrase “mind the gap” every day as I stepped into and out of the tube (subway). Hearing those words so often reminded me that in our world, the gap between the haves and the have-nots is vast, and we are in danger of accepting it.

The gap is almost too large to comprehend when comparing our world of “must-have” gadgets and homes with rooms we don’t use with the lives of those who have to stand up when it rains because their roof leaks — or because they have no roof at all.

I first connected with Habitat for Humanity in Northern Ireland, working beside people from deeply divided communities who put aside their differences to build walls together. I have since had the privilege of traveling with Habitat to many other places, and I remember all the Habitat homeowners I have met; they have taught me so much about faith and hope and love.

In [Luke 10:27](#), the whole of the Christian gospel is summed up in just a few words: Love God, and love your neighbor. We are called not to mind the gap, but to help close it. We are to do everything in our power to demonstrate that every person is equal. That means we need to change how the world works.

Last year when I was in Mozambique, I met Clara, who, with the wider community, was a partner in a process that was transforming her life. I loved it when Clara showed us how to build her home. She was confident about how much sand to put in the cement and checked that we were laying the block well. Our lives couldn’t have been more different, but there was no gap. Everyone gave, and everyone received, and hope was at the heart of it all. Clara held on to hope for the future, which was built on the foundation of her new home.

Lent is a season to renew our commitment and strengthen our faith. As we journey toward Easter, let’s travel as people of hope — hope for a world as God would have it, a world where everyone has a decent place to live. Make your Lent an active one; consider some of the ways you can change how the world works.

PRAYER (with thanks to William Barclay)

Heavenly Father, Your love for us is new and strong every day. May Your love grow within me this Lenten season so that I will see more clearly what loving You and loving my neighbor means. Give me today something of the love that was in Your heart, something of the help that was in Your hands. Help me to live in such a way today that others may know that I began the day with You and that I am walking with You. Amen.

Jenny Williams is CEO of Habitat for Humanity Northern Ireland.

FOR DISCUSSION

1. What can we learn about God from the simplicity of the Great Commandment?
2. Who is our neighbor in today’s world?
3. What gaps can you see in your own community?
4. Are we most likely to help people who are easy to help? How might we expand our acts of kindness?
5. Who makes the stuff you buy? Could you switch to buying fair trade products?

THE VALUE OF HOPE AND THE SIMPLE POWER OF LOVE

BY RICK HATHAWAY

Think of what life would be like without hope.

- Hope keeps us going when the situation we face seems impossible.
- Hope is the expectation that we will obtain something specific we desire.
- Hope is there for the single mom who doesn't know how she is going to feed her children and keep a roof over their heads. She might give up if it were not for the hope that some type of breakthrough is right around the corner.
- Hope is a gift from God that can bring joy in the midst of very difficult circumstances. Hope encourages us that victory is imminent.

In spite of how wonderful, important and life-changing both faith and hope are, they pale in comparison with the simple power of love. Scripture tells us that love is greater than both faith and hope ([1 Corinthians 13:13](#)).

Habitat for Humanity is gifted by God as a simple yet powerful expression of love. I feel so very fortunate to have seen God showering love on Habitat supporters as they toil to raise money, select families, recruit volunteers and build houses. Some of the most powerful expressions of love I have seen in this ministry have come from the hearts of homeowners. We can only imagine the hopelessness they have experienced, the despair — and sometimes hatred — that has gripped their lives as they struggled simply to survive.

Yet, so many times, those we are blessed to work with offer a wide smile, even while the world around them is filled with uncertainty, and they face challenges beyond what many of us could tolerate. I expect that this strength to carry on also fuels the overwhelming gratefulness they express when God blesses them with a new home.

Those in the middle of severe poverty retain and demonstrate the power of love in ways that can be inspiring to each one of us — and to a complicated world. Our opportunity is to recognize and be attentive to the blessing God is giving us as we work with people who have much more experience in turning hopelessness into happiness through the power of love.

PRAYER

Dear Lord, we thank You for the work You give us in this ministry and pray You will use our time to effectively apply the simple power of Your love — wherever we are and amid whomever You may lead us to meet. Help us to always be open to learn from those we seek to serve. Amen.

Rick Hathaway is area vice president of Asia/Pacific for Habitat for Humanity International.

FOR DISCUSSION

1. Think of a Habitat homeowner or volunteer who amazed you with a sense of hope and love. Share that story with others.
2. How do you think God uses Habitat to teach us about faith, hope and love?
3. How do you think the poor are able to demonstrate graciousness and love in the midst of poverty and substandard housing? Consider first of all those who are Christians; then consider those who are of other faiths.
4. Think of times when you have seen people in need but did not stop and talk or respond because you considered yourself too busy. Discuss how we can change our attitudes from one of clutter and complexity to one of applying the power of love more effectively and naturally — as a blessing.

UNLEASHING A DEEPER UNDERSTANDING

BY RENÉE LEWIS GLOVER

[Psalm 127:1](#) reads, “Unless the LORD builds the house, the builders labor in vain.”

[First Corinthians 13:13](#) says, “And now these three remain: faith, hope, love. But the greatest of these is love.”

These two verses help guide my life and my leadership decisions at Habitat for Humanity. They remind me that the work of building homes and communities — and ultimately helping to change societies — is sacred work, and God must be at the center. These passages further remind me that we must demonstrate God’s love in all our dealings with families, the community and each other. First Corinthians 13 explains why — and how. I like this translation from the New King James Version of [verses 4-10](#).

We are living in a time where there is so much conflict in our world around religion, race, culture and class, among other things. Rabbi David Rosen, the international director of interreligious affairs of the American Jewish Committee, stated at a recent conference, “Religious wars and conflicts are seldom over religious doctrine but territory.” Similarly, I believe class wars and tribal and racial conflicts throughout the world are mostly about territory, resources and access.

All the terrible news stories we see each day are occurring at a time when the world is getting flatter in terms of the speed of connections and the need for collaboration. We are a more interdependent and more diverse people, yet fewer people than ever before possess a greater concentration of the world’s wealth and opportunity. To resolve these conflicts, we must look to God for answers. We know that an essential part of the answer is to expand access to opportunity (which includes a safe and healthy home) to a larger and more diverse segment of the world’s population. A “zero-sum game” philosophy in which we are content for some to prosper at the expense of others will be the undoing of us all.

Psalm 127 and 1 Corinthians 13 set a very high bar, but when we step back and reflect — particularly during this season of Lent — we realize what an awesome responsibility it is to build a home, to revitalize a community and to change the world. We must hold ourselves to very high standards lest we think we are doing this work to glorify ourselves rather than God. This knowledge and humility will guide our paths and unleash a deeper understanding of the universal humanity of all of God’s children, regardless of race, nationality, religion, culture or class.

PRAYER

Dear God, please help us remember our work is not merely building physical structures but also constructing places of hope, opportunity, dignity and beauty where children of God can love, nurture, teach, learn, heal, grow spiritually and use their God-given gifts of unlimited human potential for the betterment of the families, the community, society and God’s world. Amen.

Renée Lewis Glover is chair of the board of directors for Habitat for Humanity International in Atlanta.

FOR DISCUSSION

1. How is the work of Habitat sacred for you?
2. How do you react to the continual stories of violence and conflict in the news?
3. How does the concept of the “zero-sum game” influence you and your behavior?
4. How have you seen God glorified recently in your life and in Habitat’s work?

WHAT TIME IS IT?

BY STEVEN WEIR

Barefooted children happily chased each other through a maze of tight, tangled alleys lined with fragile, pieced-together shelters. Young women bathed as modestly as possible at a community water point, and young boys swam in from the ocean that serves as the toilet.

This was my first visit to a fisherman's village during my first month as a Habitat for Humanity International partner in Sri Lanka. I was trying hard to ask intelligent questions while my mind attempted to sort through a reality that was unimaginable.

"You must be a very important person," a young man said to me through our interpreter.

"Not really," I responded. "Why do you think that?"

"Because you are wearing a watch," he replied. "Someone must be expecting you, and it is important that you are on time."

Twenty years later, I often think about that man in the fisherman's settlement, who, even if he could have afforded a watch, had no reason to wear one because he did not feel he was important enough to anyone. I am reminded of how Christ experienced and lived a different reality.

- Jesus sat with, ate with and lived with the most marginalized in society.
- The ruling elite and religious faithful completely missed not only God's message through Christ, but also God incarnate among them in the person of Christ.
- Christ saved His harshest rebuke for those with power, position and prestige — for people like each of us — like Habitat.

Easter is the culmination of a gospel message that urges us into a new way of seeing — through a new way of being. Several biblical texts explain this new way of being: "[the gate is narrow...](#)" "it is easier for a camel to go through the [eye of a needle...](#)" and "[the last will be first...](#)"

I wonder if God needed to send His Son to be sacrificed to get our attention, to shock us into the depth of God's love for us. Could it be that the bridge that is needed to reconcile us to God is not because God was unable to reconcile with us, but because we were unable to even see the need and to imagine a process for reconciliation?

God's sacrificial grace is unimaginable, as foreign to me as that fisherman's settlement. Perhaps the watch we need is one that reminds us it is time to see the reality of the world as God sees it. If the last 10 calls on our cell phones are to people who look just like us, then we need to question how successful we are at seeing the world differently.

PRAYER

Prayer: God, let me see the world as You do and act in ways that reflect the reality of Your unimaginable grace. Today, help me to make time to engage with those at the center of Your Kingdom. Amen.

Steven Weir is vice president of global program development and support for Habitat for Humanity International, based in Atlanta.

FOR DISCUSSION

1. Read [Isaiah 58:1-3](#) and [5-10](#) and also [Acts 4:34](#). How can Habitat for Humanity support the church in helping to ensure that there will not be a needy person among us? What is our responsibility as individual believers?
2. What is one thing you can do during Lent to begin living into an authentic relationship with people marginalized in your community?
3. When you have tried to help someone who is marginalized or poor, how did your approach help both you and that person overcome a poverty of being, a poverty of community and a poverty of stewardship?
4. In order to "see" the systemic barriers that the materially poor face in our community, consider asking a few of them what the biggest challenges are to becoming more "resilient" when unexpected expenses occur. What could you or your faith community do to begin to help change the systems?

LET US WALK OUTSIDE OUR COMFORT ZONE

By ANA CUTTS

Pope Francis says in his Lenten message, “We Christians are called to confront the poverty of our brothers and sisters, to touch it, to make it our own and to take practical steps to alleviate it.”

Recently, one of Pope Francis’ friends, Padre Jorge (also a Franciscan friar), walked us around the slums of Jose Leon Suarez on the outskirts of Buenos Aires. Having walked and worked in the poorer neighborhoods of Argentina with Habitat for Humanity over the past 10 years, I was surprised to find myself out of my comfort zone. This was poverty in dimensions far more complex than we have dealt with firsthand. These slums, like many around the world, are built on the smoky mountains of rubbish dumps. But it is not just the smells and the moving earth that complicate building and living here; as in many slum areas around the world, commercial interests have sprung up around the “merchandise” (or what most of us would call garbage). Criminal activity has increased, affecting the most vulnerable in this home to 160,000 people.

Walking through the area was like fasting 40 days and nights in 40 minutes! This stripped us of all the answers we thought we had and left us in a barren desert of material and moral destitution. How could we, a small NGO struggling to make ends meet, “touch” this misery, “make it our own” and “take practical steps to alleviate it”?

In the midst of this scenario, we met Adriana, the mother of two toddlers in a Catholic kindergarten — a child of this slum and a child of God. She was challenged by her surroundings, yet blessed by her spiritual riches. Together with Padre Jorge and so many others we met that day, we remembered the words of St. Paul: “having nothing, and yet possessing everything” ([2 Corinthians 6:10, NIV](#)). The one gem Padre Jorge possesses, and which he infused in us, is hope.

Back in our Habitat office, we still feel like the disciples facing the multitudes in Bethsaida. Our instinct is to say, “You are too many; go away!” We have nothing — neither the answers nor the resources — and yet, we have everything in our hope and faith that God will show the way. It is surely no coincidence that we should face this challenge just as we begin to think of ways to build sector impact.

PRAYER

Lord, in You we trust. Strengthen us this Lenten season to walk outside of our comfort zones and touch the poverty of our brothers and sisters. Help us understand that poverty hurts. Help us to be humble when confronted by the complexity of the social problems that surround us. As we approach Easter and remember the sacrifice of Your Son Jesus Christ, who not only came to us as one of us, but as one who lived in poverty, fill us with the hope of His resurrection. Help us to trust in Your guidance and Your will as we seek to find practical solutions to alleviate material poverty. Fill us with the riches of Your grace. Amen.

Ana Cutts is national director of Habitat for Humanity Argentina.

FOR DISCUSSION

1. How can we challenge ourselves this Lent to go outside of our “professional” comfort zone and touch the poverty of our brothers and sisters?
2. How can we strengthen each other, as a faith-based worldwide community, to find God’s guidance to build impact?

HOPE BUILT

BY DONNA FAULKNER

“God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble” ([Psalm 46:1](#)).

“The LORD Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress” ([Psalm 46:7](#)).

“Be my rock of refuge, to which I can always go; give the command to save me, for you are my rock and my fortress” ([Psalm 71:3](#)).

Scripture tells us that God is our strength, our rock, a very present help, a refuge and a fortress. However, sometimes it doesn't feel that way. Most of us would like to think “a very present help” means “an immediate help.” We want God to step into bleak situations in our lives and change them. What we really yearn for though is hope — that belief that things are going to get better.

At Habitat, we feel that God has called us to make life better for those who simply need a helping hand. Building hope is even part of our mission statement. As we answer God's call to put love into action for those on the other side of the community or the other side of the world, though, let's not forget the co-worker sitting in the office next door. Even professional Habitat hope builders need an encouraging word, a prayer sent up and the knowledge that others care.

Maybe you are struggling during this season. There's hope for you. Pray, expect, wait — and repeat. And have the courage to tell someone. There's a power in sharing your story with a compassionate listener who can understand, relate or say, “Me too!” When we share our burdens and pray for one another, we find the “very present help” we so desperately seek.

During Lent — and every day — let's make an extra effort to put God's love into action and build hope.

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, we call out to You, our very present help. We lift up those both near and far who are living in situations that feel hopeless. Open my eyes to see their suffering. Help me to build their hope. May the light of Jesus Christ and the hope He brings shine in all the dark places. Amen.

Donna Faulkner is a writer/editor in Habitat for Humanity International's Office of the CEO in Atlanta.

FOR DISCUSSION

1. What does it mean to build hope?
2. Have there been situations in your life that have seemed hopeless? Who saw your suffering during that time?
3. Is there someone you sense could use a good word today?

SOLEMN OBSERVANCE: PERSPECTIVE FROM MY PLACE OF PRIVILEGE

BY STEVE CAMPBELL

First and foremost, I recognize the indescribable privilege of being a child of God. “For His Holy Spirit speaks to us deep in our hearts and tells us that we really are God’s children” ([Romans 8:16, TLB](#)).

Second, I was born into a family of relative wealth, globally speaking, affording me many tangible advantages that so many of my sisters and brothers around the world have not, and may never possess.

Third, I was raised in a household that placed a high value on having faith in God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Very privileged, indeed.

I have done nothing to deserve these advantages. It is pretty clear to me, though, what I am called to do with the gifts and talents God has bestowed on me. That direction is summarized so well by the prophet Micah: “He has told you what he wants, and this is all it is: *to be fair, just, merciful, and to walk humbly with your God*” ([Micah 6:8, TLB](#)).

How much penance could I possibly endure for all the times I took for granted my place of privilege, all the advantages I have been given and my choices that have led me astray from God’s path? I shudder to think about what might be required if penance alone were the answer.

So, as I consider my path during this time of solemn observance — as many of us do during Lent — I can only be joyful. This joy emanates from my understanding of grace. The message of Easter and the incomprehensible choice Jesus Christ made is certainly humbling — and at the same time a source of great joy!

What, now, shall I do with this joy? How can I “square it” with the period of solemnity that Lent brings, with my place of privilege and advantage and with my opportunity to make new choices today? I think Mordecai gave me a clue when he encouraged Esther: “Who can say but that God has brought you into the palace for just such a time as this?” ([Esther 4:14, TLB](#)).

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, I come to You today on my knees and with hands raised and spread wide! Your Son has taught us how to live in solemn observance of Your love for us as Your children and to embrace the joy of Your grace, Your gifts and Your promise of eternal life. Give me the courage to follow Your will today, especially in the myriad small choices that become my path to You. Amen.

Steve Campbell is director of operational partnerships for Habitat for Humanity International’s Global Programs and is based in Atlanta.

FOR DISCUSSION

1. How do you define “solemn observance”?
2. What do you perceive as your privilege or advantage?
3. How do you balance the notion of penance with the great joy of Easter?
4. Are we called to suffer?
5. Have you ever made a seemingly small choice that, in retrospect, changed your path significantly?

OUR GOD IS ABLE

BY JAE EARLY

Sometimes things are just hard on this earth. We try and try, but we fail in so many ways and wonder, “What difference can I make?” From relationships with others, to work, to the problems of poverty and homelessness, and even to our relationship with God, life can appear overwhelming and sometimes hopeless. But it isn’t.

Throughout God’s Word to us in the Bible, God constantly tells us we are not alone, and when we align our desires with Him through Christ, great power flows freely to make a difference in this world ([John 15:5](#)). Of course, this requires radical faith in the knowledge that God is really who He says He is — that He is, in fact, sovereign over all.

He tells us He is love ([1 John 4:8](#)) and that without love, we do not know Him. Without love, we cannot access His power and serve others whom He loves just as much as He loves each of us.

Each day, we have the opportunity to deny our self-driven desires and wants and to take up our cross and follow Christ ([Matthew 16:24](#)). Without the sacrificial love of placing others before ourselves, we won’t be living out the kind of radical faith that Christ taught and demonstrated. And we won’t be making the kind of impact in this world that He desires. Too often we settle for so much less, concentrating on our personal world and neglecting those whom God has put in our paths to love in word and deed. The abundant life He wants for us is possible only with that sacrificial mindset and lifestyle ([John 10:10](#)).

Can we be all things to all people? No. God has equipped each of us uniquely to love and serve where He has placed us. We are all blessed that He has chosen to place us at Habitat for Humanity, to tangibly serve those who need the basics of life. In so doing, as our mission statement confirms, we are putting God’s love into action building homes, communities and hope.

PRAYER

Dear God, we praise You for who You are — the God of love, creation, salvation and eternal life through Christ. We praise You for the ability to love and serve others. Please help us have the radical faith necessary to have the abundant, meaningful life You have planned for us. Please help us be good stewards of all Your great blessings. Amen.

Jae Early is senior director of human resources for Habitat for Humanity International and is based in Atlanta.

FOR DISCUSSION

1. In what ways does God equip us to serve others?
2. Why does He want us to serve others?
3. What happens when we serve others?
4. Can we follow Christ and not serve others?

GUARDIAN ANGELS

By DENISE GAVALA

The world was my oyster! I had a great job and parents whom I adored, and I was surrounded by great friends. I didn't have a care in the world. Then Superstorm Sandy hit, and my whole world was shaken. The ocean waves that had knocked at my parents' door came flooding through their home. Floors, walls, and family treasures lay in ruin. As I stood at the bottom of the stairs of my parents' home of 50 years and looked around, I felt hopeless.

And then, out of the darkness, people started to come from all over. It was something that could only be explained by this verse from [Luke 4:10, NIV](#): "He will command his angels concerning you." Habitat for Humanity volunteers and other groups of wonderful people pulled up in the dead of winter with tools, generators and skills I could not imagine. When one group left, another group came and started where the others left off. I fed them hot meals, ran errands and thanked them profusely. For the first time, I experienced the true goodness of human nature. It was always there, but that goodness came to me at my lowest time and opened my eyes to a lifetime of giving back. From all states, backgrounds, ethnicities and religious beliefs, they became my guardian angels with a goal of bringing my parents back home.

I am not a very religious person, but what I came to realize was that God had a plan for me. I was simply one of His servants working that plan and not really knowing why. With the help of strangers, my parents were one of the first families in the area who were able to move home. Many days were filled with my parents thanking the individuals who helped them.

Out of something bad, something really good happened. This experience restored my faith in God and made me a better person. My dad, my biggest supporter in life, got to live in his beloved home again. He recently left this world to be with the Lord, knowing I was guided by the love of strangers, which gave him peace knowing all was right with the world. Through life, my dad had always taught me to be good, kind and charitable. "Yet a little while and the world will see me no more, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live" ([John 14:19, ESV](#)). Physical things can be replaced, but love, memories and guidance will live in your heart forever.

PRAYER

God of love, bring us back to You. Send Your Spirit to make us strong in faith and active in good works.

Denise Gavala is the daughter of a Habitat for Humanity partner family in Ortley Beach, New Jersey.

FOR DISCUSSION

1. How has giving back to someone in need changed you?
2. When someone needs help but is too proud to accept it, how do you show that it is OK to accept a helping hand?
3. How is God calling you to be a guardian angel for someone today?

EASIER SAID THAN DONE!

BY TERRY PETKAU

“Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light.”

— [Matthew 11:28-30, NKJV](#)

Everyone needs to take time to rest as a means of regaining the strength needed for the next day. Such a simple instruction, and yet so hard for some of us to follow!

At Habitat for Humanity, we work hard because we see the exhausting challenge many parents face when moving from place to place as they try to find a safe and affordable home for their families. We see them working multiple jobs to pay for basic necessities. Each day, they face mounting bills, they see their children in unhealthy living environments, and they feel trapped. We can only imagine how difficult it must be for them to take the time needed to rest from their labors.

Habitat offers hope to families through affordable homeownership solutions. Even though the need continues to outpace what this humble ministry can offer, and our resources are stretched more each year, many people are dedicated to this wonderful ministry, putting in extra hours and making countless sacrifices to offer families a hand up.

We all know that working hard can be very rewarding, especially when our hard work results in helping a family reach their dream of homeownership. But we must not forget to rest! No matter what the task or project at work or school, there is nothing more rejuvenating than a good rest after a long day. God rewards hard work, but He also instructs us to take time to rest and recover so we can maintain our health and contribute to the best of our abilities.

Tomorrow is Sunday, one of six “little Easters” during Lent, so let’s not forget to take a break and know that our God is always there to provide the strength and energy we need for the challenging work before us. We must recognize when we are taking on too much, and, above all, we must remember that our Heavenly Father has encouraged us to rest in Him and trust Him to carry our load. That is what faith is: trusting God to carry our load.

PRAYER

Our God and Heavenly Father, with humble hearts, we thank You for the opportunity to leave our burdens to You. Teach us to truly rest in You so we can be strong and faithful servants each and every day.

Terry Petkau is national director of building services for Habitat for Humanity Canada in Waterloo, Ontario.

FOR DISCUSSION

1. Many people practice prayer and fasting during Lent. How do you feel rest applies to Lent?
2. Have you experienced times when you just don’t have time to rest or you can’t seem to rest because of the stress of your workload?
3. What are some ways we can practically rest in the Lord?
4. How can we help those around us find ways to rest rather than carry the entire burden on their own?

THERE IS HOPE ... EVEN IN DIFFICULT TIMES

By GUSTAVO GUTIÉRREZ

Many of us are tempted to provide easy answers to complex questions in life. Working in a ministry like Habitat for Humanity, however, reminds us of the implications of our prophetic role. Like Jeremiah, we find that making profound connections with people leads us to astonishing admissions of personal grief, anguish and fury.

Wouldn't it be nice if simply desiring that everyone had decent shelter was the easy answer for responding to that pressing need? Wouldn't it be more efficient to deliver housing solutions to people without generating a deep empathy for and commitment to them? I love passages like [Jeremiah 31](#) (and the entire section — Jeremiah [30-33](#) — known as “The Book of Consolation”). However, I am constantly reminded that the proclamation of hope in [Jeremiah 31:17](#) and God's grace in verses [31-34](#) are not easy answers. Rather, they are costly ones that come from difficult times in life!

The historical context of today's reading was a tragic time in both Israel's history and the prophet Jeremiah's own life. On one hand, the end of Judah was near. With all her allies reduced to vassals or weakened by internal strife, Judah was left virtually alone to face the new world empire, Babylon. The Babylonians had come in 598 B.C. and would come again in 586 to destroy the country and the city. [Jeremiah 31](#) is set between these two Babylonian invasions. Historically, Judah's time was short.

It was also a tough time for the prophet, as he felt God had deceived him ([Jeremiah 20:7](#)). Isn't it true that it is easier to share and proclaim hope when you are OK, but much harder when you feel that many things in your life have spun out of control and you are experiencing an emotional or spiritual crisis?

“There is hope for your future, says the LORD ...” ([Jeremiah 31:17, RSV](#)). Was this a new covenant, a new beginning? This might sound like an easy answer to a very complex situation, but when this oracle comes from someone like Jeremiah, the weeping prophet, it is good to pay close attention! Hope, in this context, is a principle of revolutionary openness to the future where Jeremiah finds not only consolation in difficult times, but also the protest of the divine promise against suffering.

We can never succumb to the easy answer of hopelessness. Such despair can take on two forms: presumption, as a premature, self-willed anticipation of the fulfillment of what we hope for from God, and despair, as the premature, arbitrary anticipation of the nonfulfillment of what we hope for from God. Like Jeremiah, we proclaim, even in the midst of difficult times, hope for new beginnings!

PRAYER

O Lord, deliver us from those temptations involved in taking the easy way out, a form of spiritual laziness and complicity, in accomplishing Habitat's ministry. Grant us the courage to go beyond our own limitations and doubts, our own deceptions, so we can be Your instruments of building hope in the midst of difficult times! Amen.

Gustavo Gutiérrez is national director of Habitat for Humanity Mexico.

FOR DISCUSSION

1. Have you ever felt difficulties in sharing a word of hope when you don't see hope in your own life?
2. The context of Jeremiah 31 reminds us that we must walk through our Good Fridays before we reach Easter. Is hopelessness, in the forms of presumption and despair, an easy way out, one we have considered taking?
3. How strongly do you believe in a God of second, third, fourth, infinite chances? Can you share a time or an opportunity of new beginnings in your own life?

THE COMPASSIONATE CHRIST

BY KENNETH W. BENSEN

The man beside the pool had been there for 38 years, but no one had helped him get into the water so he could be healed. The Compassionate Christ understood the man's need and immediately healed him ([John 5:1-8](#)).

The Compassionate Christ will do the same for us today. Christ cares about us and our daily needs. One of our problems is that we take things into our own hands and do not wait for Christ to help us. I have done this, and so have you. In not waiting, we miss so many blessings.

In addition to Christ working directly in our lives, He often sends people to help us. Christ has sent many people into my life to help me on my journey. After 10 years in the ministry, I was frustrated and thinking about leaving. In the midst of my frustration, Christ sent a dying 80-year-old woman into my life. During my visits, while I thought I was ministering to her, she began to minister to me. She sensed my frustration and showed me that Christ had a plan for my life. If I would follow Him, He would take care of me, allowing me to continue in the ministry of helping others.

As members of the Habitat for Humanity family, Christ wants to help us help others in need of decent and affordable housing. You and I often do not want to wait for Christ to guide us. We go our own way. As a result, the work gets harder, our frustration grows, and the results of our efforts are hampered by our desires to go it alone.

Christ continues to work miracles for His good, our good and the good of those God has called us to serve.

In this Lenten season, let us relax, trust in the Compassionate Christ and allow Him to work in our lives so He can help us continue to serve those in need of decent, affordable shelter.

PRAYER

Allow me to trust in the Compassionate Christ and to follow His guidance so I can continue to help others. Amen.

Kenneth W. Bensen lives in Green Valley, Arizona, and is founder and past president of Habitat for Humanity Michigan.

FOR DISCUSSION

1. Identify times in your life when Christ helped you.
2. Identify times in your life when Christ sent a person into your life to help you.
3. Identify times in your life when you resisted Christ's help.
4. Identify times in your life when Christ sent someone connected with Habitat to help you.

THE RISKY BUSINESS OF HOPE

By JONATHAN GOOD

This week marks the midpoint of our Lenten journey to the cross. We're halfway through the trek, which began with ashes of mourning three weeks ago and will end in the hope of glory three weeks from now. Halfway points can be tough: You've come too far to turn back, but you're not close enough to the finish to start coasting.

Not that we should ever coast on our faith journey, but halfway through Lent, it's understandable if we find ourselves thinking a bit about the home stretch of Holy Week. As difficult as His journey to Jerusalem was, even Jesus thought ahead. In Mark's Gospel, we read how Jesus took time to prepare, even for what He knew would be the last events of His life ([Mark 14:12-16](#)). He told two of His disciples to find a man carrying a jar of water in Jerusalem and to follow him home. Wherever the man went, that was where Jesus and His friends would share their last Passover meal. The disciples were to tell the homeowner: "Get ready. Jesus is coming."

It's a nice story and very poignant. It's also incredibly powerful. But I'm afraid much of its impact is lost on us today. First, the disciples had to find one person in a big city (Jerusalem's population was nearly 50,000). Although men were not typically water carriers — that was women's work — the task was still daunting. Preparing for Jesus can be like that.

Next, there was the issue of the upper room where the Passover meal would be held. Jesus said the man carrying water would enter a house with a large, furnished upper room. Not all homes had such a room — especially one that would fit 13 people. This meant that the servant the disciples would follow probably served a wealthy homeowner, one who could afford to build a spacious second story. This homeowner had a lot — and a lot to lose. He would clearly be taking a risk by welcoming Jesus, who by that time was a fugitive, wanted by both the Jewish leaders and Roman authorities.

As we prepare for the hope of Easter, by all means we need to ask ourselves: Are we making room for Jesus in our hearts? But we also need to ask: Are we taking risks to welcome Him? Are we coasting toward Easter, or are we taking on new challenges to prepare for the hope Jesus brings? Habitat for Humanity's work of building homes, communities and hope is surely daunting. It might even prove to be the upper room where you can do the risky business of encountering Jesus in a new way this Lent.

PRAYER

Lord Jesus, forgive us for the times when we want to coast our way to the cross. In this season of Lent, remind us of the difficult journey You took on our behalf and of the hope of glory which You've given through the cross. Give us courage to take on new challenges as we serve You in all we do. Amen.

Jonathan Good lives in Minneapolis, Minnesota, and is director of faith partnerships for Habitat for Humanity International.

FOR DISCUSSION

1. What have you already done during this first half of Lent to better prepare yourself for the message of Easter? What can you do in the second half of this journey?
2. Do you have an "upper room" on your Lenten journey? If so, where or what is it? If not, where or what could it be?
3. Have you ever thought of Jesus as a fugitive? Discuss the implications of this for the 12 disciples and for His followers today.
4. Habitat's vision is daunting: "A world where everyone has a decent place to live." Do you view your work in tackling this challenge as an act of faith? Why or why not?

LET'S BE "LEAD FOLLOWERS"

BY KEVIN CAMPBELL

Since it was first issued in 1989, I've kept a copy of Henri Nouwen's "In the Name of Jesus" close by. In this book, Nouwen does a masterful job of connecting the three temptations Jesus faced in the wilderness to the challenges Jesus posed as He commissioned Peter.

Jesus was first tempted to be relevant: Turn these stones into bread ([Matthew 4:1-3](#)). Jesus challenged Peter three times, "Do you love me?" ([John 21:17](#)).

Jesus then had the temptation to be spectacular — to throw Himself from the highest point of the temple ([Matthew 4:5-6](#)). Jesus challenged Peter to become a shepherd, saying, "Feed my sheep."

Finally, Jesus faced the temptation of power: "All this I will give you" ([Matthew 4:8-9](#)). Jesus challenged Peter to be led rather than to lead. This one caught my attention this year.

I've always been intrigued to look for things that distinguish Habitat for Humanity as a Christian ministry. There are great practices that we can take from secular institutions, but what sets us apart?

We've given a lot of attention to what it means to be a leader, and I've attended many leadership conferences, seminars and workshops. It's popular these days to think of servant leadership, but Jesus' final challenge to Peter suggests that we aren't ultimately to be leaders, but rather followers.

Jesus leads us to places unknown. By avoiding the temptation of power, we can love as Jesus wanted us to love. We can follow confidently, knowing that we are loved and protected and that a glorious journey lies ahead. Rather than leaders, we should be "lead followers," enthusiastically following in the way of the Great Leader.

PRAYER

Lord God, we come to You seeking Your protection amid the temptations that come our way. In Your wisdom, we ask that You give us the words and actions we need to respond to the temptations of the world in a loving way. We seek always to resist temptation, not for our own success, but to demonstrate Your love and to raise You up as the leader we seek to follow in all things. Amen.

Kevin Campbell is president and CEO of Habitat for Humanity of Wake County in Raleigh, North Carolina.

FOR DISCUSSION

1. Identify a place or two in your life where the desire to control has overtaken the call to love.
2. What challenges you most: a desire to be relevant, spectacular or powerful? Which is the hardest to put behind?
3. What ways do you see Habitat distinguishing itself as a Christian organization? In what ways do we struggle?

DOING THE GOOD NEWS

BY GARY L. HANSEN

“What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them?” — [James 2:14, NIV](#)

It was later in the evening, and I was crying! I was not sad, and I was not overly happy. Along with 10 others from Michigan, I was sitting in a circle in a hotel in São Leopoldo, Brazil. In the middle of a devotion and a reflection on the workday, I looked into the faces of the other sweaty and tired servants, and I started to cry.

We knew this was a holy moment — a God moment. Each of us, for several days, had been on a mission trip (using much of our own money) and sweating our way through building a Habitat for Humanity house in unbearable heat. Little did we know that seeds of hope were being planted in us.

We already knew each other’s stories. We knew in our hearts and minds that faith had taken root within and among us, but now we knew for sure what it felt like to act upon our faith and to live out the good news. The combination of all this made me cry. It was one of the most powerful God moments that I have witnessed.

The second chapter of James reminds us how our faith comes alive by helping others ([James 2:14](#)). A life-changing experience can happen using a wheelbarrow or a shovel or a hammer — work done because of Jesus. Days and weeks become priceless when safe and affordable homes grow out of mission trips, when they are woven into our faith experiences.

Together, can we agree to have our eyes wide open for opportunities to be instruments of hope? Together, can we agree to let our words of faith be woven with works of faith?

PRAYER

Dear God, give us the opportunity to do what we believe. Give us open eyes to see Your hand in our lives. Make us thankful for the miracle moments where everything You desire comes together in us. Amen.

Gary Hansen is a retired bishop of the North/West Lower Michigan Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, located in Lansing, Michigan.

FOR DISCUSSION

1. When have you had a holy moment when faith and works were one?
2. What works or actions seem to fit your skills and gifts?
3. What other parts of the Letter of James speak to you?
4. How have you seen Habitat create opportunities for other woven moments? What other service opportunities have resulted in holy moments for you?

THERE IS HOPE

BY PAM CAMPBELL

The past 15 months have been challenging for our family. We've experienced serious health issues, the death of a parent, the loss of a job, dear colleagues retiring and a number of other trials. Those events have taken their toll, and, at one point, the stress seemed like more than we could handle. I called upon friends to laugh and cry and pray with me — and I noticed almost instant changes in the mood at our home.

I set up new budgeting tools, we talked a lot about needs and wants, and we made some adjustments to our spending. We are paying our bills; we have food to eat; and we are warm, safe and dry. We are also committed to respond to God's call to share our resources. We are going to be OK.

Through it all, we have claimed the promise found in [Isaiah 40:31](#). We have felt our strength renewed, and we know the blessings of being lifted up when we no longer have strength of our own.

Many other people in my circle are hurting, however. We are at the point in life when our parents need extra care, our adult children need a different kind of support, and we feel powerless in a world filled with pain. We encounter disappointment, dismay and disgust, but we also experience relief, reconciliation and respite.

I keep coming back to a phrase that is the hook in a song I love: "There is hope."

I cling to these words even when it is hard to believe them — like when the news is filled with violence or when seemingly perfect marriages crumble. However, I have never doubted that Jesus remains the same. Jesus gives us hope.

At Habitat for Humanity, we build homes and communities, but we really build hope. We help people believe that their lives can be better, and we walk alongside them to create new opportunities.

During these last days of Lent, in particular, may we draw strength from the assurance that always there is hope.

PRAYER

Great and gracious God, thank You for Your presence in all circumstances. Thank You for images and melodies that stick in our minds and our hearts to remind us that there is hope. Lord, we pray for those who feel hopeless. Shine on them the light of Your power and Your great love. Amen.

Pam Campbell lives in Mount Juliet, Tennessee, and is communications manager for Habitat for Humanity International's Office of the CEO.

FOR DISCUSSION

1. When have you experienced hope when circumstances around you seemed bleak?
2. When have you experienced hopelessness? How has God ministered to you in that time?
3. Whom do you know who needs to hear the message of hope? What are you going to do about it?
4. What is God calling you to do individually, and as part of Habitat, to bring hope to the world?

TRUST IN THE LORD

By RICK McDANIEL

As I write this message of hope, my family reels with the pain of loss. You see, this morning we lost our pet of 13 years. Even though it was clearly Wrigley's time, it does not lessen the blow. So the family will pause in grief and begin to move on in life without Wrigley. I wonder how each family member will handle the pain, the grieving process and the moving on with life.

As I think about me and my family and Wrigley, I am also compelled to think about you. We have all experienced loss, but we do not all reach for the Lord to carry us through. Though heartbroken, I am comforted. I cling to the promises of Scripture passages like [Proverbs 3:5-6](#) and [Jeremiah 17:7-8](#). I feel the Lord holding me tight right now. It is such a comfort to be held by the Lord! I pray my wife and children reach for Him today. I pray that you reach for Him, too. No matter what you go through, trust in the Lord. There are many things that need to be done, but the first is to just trust in the Lord.

During this Lenten season, may we as members of the Habitat for Humanity family reflect on the trust that we place in the Lord and the hope that prevails. The Lord offers us His salvation, and through Him we are truly made whole as members of His one body of believers.

PRAYER

Father, we place our trust and our hope in You. We know that You are no stranger to pain and suffering and death. We know that You came for us, You lived for us, You died for us, and Your resurrection and salvation are for us. We thank You, Jesus, by placing our trust and our hope in You. Amen.

J. Rick McDaniel is finance manager for Habitat for Humanity International ReStores, based in Atlanta.

FOR DISCUSSION

1. In times of great pain and sorrow, do you first reach for the Lord to comfort and sustain you or your loved ones? Do you let go of what cannot be controlled and trust in the Lord?
2. What steps will you take to make God a source of hope and strength?
3. Do you find your thoughts turning to God in times of both sorrow and joy? Explain.

GOD-SIZED TASKS

BY TIM DAUGHERTY

“I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.” — [John 16:33, NIV](#)

Today is St. Patrick’s Day. I found it fitting to be assigned to write a devotional for this day, given my Irish heritage!

When most people think of St. Patrick’s Day, they think of leprechauns and all things green. They think of shamrocks and parades. However, many people — including me until now — might not know St. Patrick’s story and why we celebrate on this day.

St. Patrick, who is largely credited for spreading Christianity throughout Ireland, was born in Britain and, as a teenager, was taken away in a raid by the Irish and enslaved for six years. He escaped, and later in his life, he was called by God to go back and bring the good news of Jesus to the very people who had enslaved him. What a difficult calling, and what tremendous faith he showed in accepting his calling!

At Habitat for Humanity, we also are called to a daunting mission. Right now, 1.6 billion people are living in conditions that no human should have to endure. That is a very difficult number to wrap your head around. It can be overwhelming.

Sometimes we think when we have answered our call to service, the hard part is done. That is not the case. Throughout our lives, we are going to be faced with difficult — seemingly impossible — tasks and situations.

In our Scripture reading today, Jesus says, “In this world you will have trouble” ([John 16:33, NIV](#)). He doesn’t promise us an easy path. But Jesus doesn’t stop there; the same Scripture concludes with Him saying, “But take heart! I have overcome the world.”

I know that if I try to do things in my own power, I will utterly fail. I find great hope in the fact that Jesus has overcome the world and promises that “I am with you always, to the very end of the age” ([Matthew 28:20, NIV](#)).

I also find great hope in the wonderful team at Habitat that has been assembled to tackle the issue of poverty housing. I am inspired by my colleagues around the globe who, every day, work to express the love and teachings of Jesus while helping build homes, communities and hope.

We don’t have to do this on our own! What comfort we have knowing that “if God is for us, who can be against us?” ([Romans 8:31, NIV](#)).

PRAYER

Dear Lord, we thank You that, if we are willing, You will guide our steps. We thank You that You are with us and that You place people in our lives to help us with our journey. Help us to shine Your light in this world. Amen.

Tim Daugherty is deputy director of direct marketing for Habitat for Humanity International’s Development department, based in Atlanta.

FOR DISCUSSION

1. Can you think of a time in your life when you have seen or felt God at work in a difficult situation?
2. Were/are there people in your life whom God has used to help you through those situations?
3. How will these experiences influence how you react to the next difficult situation you face?
4. How can we as Habitat continue to be a beacon of God’s hope in the face of such a daunting mission?

BATHED IN GRACE

By JONATHAN T.M. RECKFORD

Recently, I read an article in Christianity Today by Pete Briscoe about being on a journey from law to grace. He spoke of always having a taste of grace, but over the past few years deciding to bathe in it. I understand completely what he is talking about.

I had always called myself a Christian, but as a young adult, I had drifted, and my faith played no central role in my life. It wasn't until God put the right person in my life who integrated faith and intellect that I was able to reconcile my theological questioning and integrate my heart and my head.

In his article, Briscoe said he assumed his spiritual health was determined by how consistent he was in his quiet time, how many books he had read, or how long he prayed every day. One of my great concerns during my time of questioning was that I did not want to be a hypocrite. I didn't want to claim to be a Christian if I was not meeting all the requirements.

How freeing to learn that experiencing the fullest blessings of Jesus is not dependent upon how good we can be, but how intimately we are walking with Jesus. In [Matthew 22:34-40, NIV](#), Jesus reminds us that being in true relationship with God is at the heart of our faith.

It is interesting that we draw near to Jesus by practicing the spiritual disciplines, which we emphasize during Lent, of being still before God, of reading Scripture, of prayer and of listening. The difference is in how we approach those disciplines. From a more legal mindset, we can put them on our "to-do" list, mark them off and move on to the next task. However, that does not deepen our connection with God. When we are bathed in grace, we eagerly seek God in our quiet time, study Scripture for God's direction and have honest conversations with the belief that God hears and answers our prayers. As a result, we draw closer to God.

It is through that connection that we find hope. Henri Nouwen talks about the difference in optimism and hope. Optimism, he says, is the expectation that things will get better. Hope is the trust that God will fulfill His promises.

I feel so blessed because of the ways I see God's amazing love demonstrated in the lives of so many Habitat for Humanity partner families and supporters around the world. I see such amazing examples of hope — and promises fulfilled.

During this Lenten season, may we focus on grace and be people of hope.

PRAYER

Gracious God, we come to You eager to be bathed by Your grace to live as people of hope. Our tendency is to do the least amount possible to pass the grade, but fill our hearts so that they will be overflowing with eagerness to serve others. Free us from the law and show us how to journey in grace.

Jonathan T.M. Reckford is chief executive officer of Habitat for Humanity International, based in Atlanta.

FOR DISCUSSION

1. What is your focus during this Lenten season? What commitments have you made? What do you hope to achieve?
2. Have you ever felt that you were bound more by the rules of religion than the responses of faith?
3. What will you do during this Lenten season to draw closer to Jesus?
4. What will be different in your life if you focus on living with hope?

WHEN WE THINK HOPE IS LOST

BY JASON VANCE

The Scripture passage from [Ezekiel 37:1–14](#) paints a vivid picture of both despair and hope. I am sure we have all faced times when we felt dried up and spent! Probably many more times, we have witnessed other people who have lost hope. This passage about dry bones may conjure up for us thoughts of majority-world countries where some people are extremely malnourished. However, all around the world — and even within our circles — we will find people who are suffering and seeking something in which to put their hope.

The amazing promise that Ezekiel offers us is that God has the power to make things new. As hopeless as a valley full of dried bones can appear, those bones can have life again. God not only wants to provide life, but wants us to live it to the fullest! We find more in this passage than just the breath of life. God also promises to give the people of Israel their own land. Not only can God create life from death, but God can also provide land when there isn't any!

At Habitat for Humanity, we have the opportunity to provide hope to people by helping them obtain their own land. This is a powerful way for us to participate in the work God is doing to restore life and hope in the world! Even though we may not be able to provide an immediate miracle, we know the same God who breathes hope into every situation empowers our efforts.

When we provide hope for others, we are reminded of the hope God brings to us. At times, our jobs, our relationships, our church commitments and other areas of our lives make us feel dried up. In those moments, however, we can reflect on God's life-giving power, and we can have confidence in God to breathe life into us. In turn, we can then share that life with others.

PRAYER

Lord God, we thank You for Your breath of life! Thank You for giving us confidence in the hope You provide. Please help us to share that hope with others who are struggling and feel cut off from You. Give us the strength to be Your hands and to bless others with the abundance You have given us. Amen.

Jason Vance is digital technologist for Habitat for Humanity of Michigan.

FOR DISCUSSION

1. Think of a time when you felt like hope was lost and you were dried up and spent. What helped you get through that dark time?
2. What is the most hopeless situation you have ever seen?
3. Can you imagine God breathing life into that situation? What would it look like?
4. Can you imagine the people of God bringing the life they have been given to build hope in that situation?

A TIME OF PREPARATION

By SCOT SELLERS

The Lenten season is a time of preparation. It is a time for us to prepare ourselves to better understand and appreciate the great gift our Lord gave to each of us: His willingness to give His life up so that we could know Him and be with Him for eternity. [Philippians 2:4-7](#) reminds us that Jesus willingly sacrificed the highest place in heaven to spend time on earth with us, and He ultimately sacrificed Himself for us. What a blessing!

Jesus asks each of us to give of ourselves and our resources, to serve those in our world who are less fortunate. But how we give is perhaps the most important issue of all. Our Lord asks us to give cheerfully, in a way that displays happiness and optimism ([2 Corinthians 9:6-7](#)). As we give cheerfully to serve others, the joy of the Lord is visible through us and is contagious. Those we serve are blessed with joy and laughter as well as the blessings of a new home or the decent sanitation facilities we have helped them attain. Others, who may have the resources to give but who have not been as eager to share, may be inspired by the joy they see in us and may ask about the motivation for our giving. All this leads to more opportunities to serve Jesus as we help those around us.

Let's consider how to encourage one another to give cheerfully and abundantly, as the Lord has done and continues to do for each of us. We can provide wonderful encouragement to those in our circles of influence to expand their horizons and experience the joy of sharing their abundance with others.

PRAYER

Dear Lord, You have blessed us so abundantly, far beyond anything we deserve. Thank You for Your graciousness to us and for the incredible gift of our salvation. We desire to serve You, and to do so with joy and love that is contagious. Please develop in us the ever-increasing joy of being a cheerful giver and humble servant to those in need around us. We thank You that You always hear our prayers. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.

Scot Sellers lives in Las Vegas, Nevada, and is a member of the Habitat for Humanity International board of directors.

FOR DISCUSSION

1. What does it mean to give abundantly? Do I feel I am currently giving abundantly? If not, how should I adjust my giving?
2. What does it mean to give cheerfully? Is there anything that is getting in the way of my giving cheerfully? In my prayer times during this Lenten season, is the Lord revealing other opportunities to give that I need to more carefully consider?
3. How can I encourage others around me to get involved in the ministry of Habitat for Humanity?
4. How can I encourage others around me to love and do good works?

PROPHETIC VISION AND OUR CALLING

BY MARGARET BELL

The prophetic vision from [Micah 4:3-5](#) is also a Habitat for Humanity vision.

It is a beautiful vision of peace in a world where everyone has a place to eat (sweet figs) and to drink (wine from the grapevine), a place to feel safe and a place to feel at peace. This sounds a lot like our modern-day Habitat vision of a world where everyone has a safe, decent place to live.

In 2010, I took part in the Everest Build in Nepal. Hundreds of volunteers came from all parts of the globe to help build 40 bamboo homes in a week. Our partner homeowner was an 82-year-old widow named Som Maya. Her new Habitat home had a kitchen and a porch where she could safely prepare meals for her family, and a bedroom and living area where she and her family could feel safe and secure. She no longer needed to fear the cold winds of winter, the monsoon rains of summer, the threat of disease from having to cook inside, or the possibility that rodents would scurry about her as she slept. Recently, we learned that Som Maya has departed this earth, and we grieve her indefatigable spirit, her infectious smile and the memory of our shared tears of joy the day her Habitat home was dedicated. It is my hope and belief that Som Maya lived out her last years in her own home unafraid and at peace — just the way Micah envisioned.

Micah's vision didn't stop there, and neither does Habitat's vision! Micah goes on in verse 5 to say, "For all the peoples walk, each in the name of its god, but we will walk in the name of the LORD our God forever and ever." As we strive to keep God at the center of all that Habitat does, this verse feels like such encouragement. We are called to work in partnership with our brothers and sisters of any faith or no faith to fulfill the prophetic vision — be it Micah's or that of Habitat's founder, Millard Fuller — to create a world where everyone has a safe and decent place to call home.

PRAYER

Loving God, we have heard Your call to serve one another, to give refuge to the stranger, to show hospitality to those in need. When we answer this call, we give witness to Your grace and love and help bring healing and hope to our communities. We long for the coming of Your Kingdom, when all will find shelter and all will know the safety of home. We humbly ask You to grant us the faith, hope and love to keep God at the center of all that we do. In Your grace and power we pray, amen.

Margaret Bell is faith relations manager of Habitat for Humanity of Metro Denver in Colorado.

FOR DISCUSSION

1. How do you feel called to work for the peace that Micah prophesied centuries ago?
2. How do your fears and your faith relate to each other?
3. When do you feel safe and at peace?
4. What does it mean to you to keep God at the center?
5. How do you believe we are called as Christians to work side by side with people of other faith traditions?
6. What is your prophetic vision for the world?

HOPE WHEN YOU CANNOT SEE

BY LISA NICKERSON

When I consider the concept of hope, I think of the well-known verse from [Hebrews 11:1, NKJV](#): “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.”

[Romans 8:24](#) expands on this thought, adding that hope, in itself, is not necessary if we already know or have seen the outcome.

In [Romans 15:13](#), the Apostle Paul magnifies God as the essence of hope, powered by the Holy Spirit.

Last July, I traveled to meet with a team of Global Village volunteers to build a home with Habitat for Humanity Malaysia. On our first day at the build site, we were greeted by Eric, our charismatic construction manager, who explained the status of the project and what we could expect to complete. We could see a roof standing over an unformed foundation. Eric explained that to keep the team dry during heavy rainfall, the roof had been prebuilt, leaving the foundation untouched. He went on to describe all the tasks that needed to be completed before we could get to the real meaty work of bricklaying. We needed to dig trenches, build the latrine, dig the foundation, dig the water runoff system, tie steel for footers and move rocks.

Looking at the unformed foundation and considering all the work that needed to be done, I confess that I began to lose hope. I began to think that we would be unable to see walls go up before leaving Malaysia. But that is the thing about hope: Not only does it not require evidence to work; it also doesn't even require human power.

As our build in Malaysia continued that week, we slowly began to see progress. We completed the latrine and the drainage, poured concrete for the footers, started on the exterior walls, poured concrete for interior floors, and then got to work on the interior walls. Before too long, we could join the homeowner in imagining what her home would be like.

Our faith walk is so often like the story of our build in Malaysia. We may have an unfulfilled need that appears to be unreachable. But God fuels us with the seed of hope that grows our faith to keep us going, and eventually we witness the results of His good work.

PRAYER

Dear Lord, thank You for being the giver of hope and for lighting our way when we do not see. Instill in us the faith and hope to continue Your good work so that we might serve Your people. Amen.

Lisa Nickerson is associate director of Women Build for Habitat for Humanity International, based in Americus, Georgia.

FOR DISCUSSION

1. [Romans 8:24](#) says “hope that is seen is not hope,” What does that mean to you?
2. When have you experienced the joy of God's handiwork, even if there seemed to be little hope?
3. According to [Romans 15:13](#), God is the source of hope. What then does it mean in [Proverbs 13:12](#) when it says “hope deferred makes the heart sick”?
4. What are ways that we can cultivate hope and faith?

FAITH IN ACTION

BY ANNA MATEVOSYAN

Today we look at another example of faith as the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen ([Hebrews 11:1](#)). This meditation from Armenia reminds us that God's mighty power is at work — over time, and even when we are unaware.

Every believer's faith includes a narrative, with some stories more dramatic than others. The truly captivating story of Christianity in Armenia began with Gregory, the apostle and patron saint of Armenia, who was called the Illuminator because he brought the light of the Christian faith to the state.

St. Gregory, who was born in 257, visited Rome early in his life. Along the way home, he paid a visit to his native region of Cappadocia, where, having refused to sacrifice at a large idolatrous feast, he was thrown into prison. He remained a captive in Khor Virap, in the Ararat region of Armenia, for nearly 14 years. During his entire captivity, Gregory had been praying for the diseased sister of King Tiridates. When she began feeling better, he was released from prison, and he declared the healing was by God's grace.

St. Gregory immediately began preaching Christ and his faith for 65 days, and afterward, the Armenian Apostolic Church was established in Vagharshapat. Five of those days were devoted to fasting and praying. The people and the king deprived themselves of food with heartfelt repentances for past offenses to receive deliverance. According to the commonly held tradition, this was the way that the seeds of the Christian faith were sown in a small country, known as the land of Noah. During the season leading up to Easter, the Armenian people still observe five days of fasting and praying.

The story of Gregory the Illuminator calls us to be patient and forgiving. This voice from centuries ago reminds us how God empowers each of us and enables us to bring hope to others.

PRAYER

Our Father in heaven, thank You for Your presence, which has joined us together from all over the world. We pray that we are firm in faith and courageous in pursuing the light as a gift. Please equip us for every good work in Thy word. In our Savior Jesus' name we pray, amen.

Anna Matevosyan is program officer for Habitat for Humanity Armenia.

FOR DISCUSSION

1. Do we rejoice in faith?
2. How does hope in the Lord's steadfast love renew our strength?
3. What does forgiveness teach us?
4. Will repentance bring us closer to Christ?
5. Why should we keep faith and good conscience?

FAITH BUILDS HOPE

By DOUG MURRELL

Shortly after arriving at Habitat for Humanity, I made my first visit to the Republic of Haiti. Even years after the devastating earthquake that rocked this mountainous island, the remnants of destruction are still overwhelming.

I fully expected to find communities depressed and in despair. Instead, I was struck by what I saw in the eyes of the people: dignity and determination, resolve and resilience.

In dire conditions, how is hope possible? As I looked at Haiti's mountains in the distance, I realized I was looking at the answer. In [Matthew 17:20, NIV](#), Jesus tells his disciples, "If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you."

Why does faith motivate? Once again, [Hebrews 11:1, NASB](#), provides an insightful truth: "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." In other words, faith is the absolute confidence within us that good is going to come. Faith is both internal and external; it cannot be hindered by external conditions or temporal circumstances. Faith remains. Faith sustains. Faith births hope in the heart of a people.

Such conviction drives us to act or to put our faith into action. Faith in action restores, revives, repairs, reforms and re-envisions. It is the language of change and possibility. When I remember the resilient people of Haiti or other nations under similar duress, it is clear to me that faith inspires the actions necessary to move forward. God has gifted each of us with a measure of faith through His precious Son, Jesus Christ, our blessed hope.

PRAYER

Father God, we thank You for the ultimate act of love — the sacrificial gift of Jesus Christ — that we may have life and be reconciled to the family of God. May those who encounter us today be filled with hope, their faith activated because of Christ in us, the hope of glory. Amen.

Doug Murrell is director of faith engagement for Habitat for Humanity International, based in Atlanta.

FOR DISCUSSION

1. What are the three biggest mountains in your life?
2. What is the single best indicator that you are growing in hope?
3. What can you do to build hope in your heart?

TWO PILLARS OF FAITH

BY GREG SKOWRONSKI

My eyes filled with tears as I listened to microentrepreneurs and their business mentors share stories of life transformation. The past few months of business training and discipleship had produced income growth, genuine friendships and new followers of Jesus. I thanked God for all He had done. I had moved to Johannesburg, South Africa, for exactly this type of moment.

A few days later, my eyes again filled with tears as an entrepreneur asked for my advice. His family in Mozambique was hungry, but his business was slow, and he had no money to send to them. “What will you do?” I asked.

“I am trusting God,” he answered.

These experiences taught me that faith rests on two pillars:

1. Confidence in God’s ability to do the miraculous.
2. Unwavering commitment to God in whatever He chooses to do.

In the book of Daniel, we see how Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego displayed these two faith pillars as they stood before King Nebuchadnezzar. Threatened with death, they still refused to worship an idol of gold and trusted God no matter the outcome.

“Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego replied to him, ‘King Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to deliver us from it, and He will deliver us from Your Majesty’s hand. But even if he does not, we want you to know, Your Majesty, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up’” ([Daniel 3:16-18, NIV](#)).

At Habitat for Humanity, celebrating the completion of our 800,000th home gave us confidence in what God is doing through us. As we seek to serve the 1.6 billion people still in need of decent, affordable housing, we remain committed to God and His plans in whatever He chooses to do.

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, above all else, we place our trust in You. We pray for the ministry of Habitat, and we thank You for all You have provided for us and through us. As we work to demonstrate Your love to those in need of decent homes, we ask for You to miraculously multiply our efforts. During times of disappointment and setbacks, give us great faith to remain committed to You and Your purposes in all that we do. Amen.

Greg Skowronski is director of capital markets and financial systems for Habitat for Humanity International and is based in Atlanta.

FOR DISCUSSION

1. What is the boldest thing you’ve done in your life based on your faith in God?
2. What have you done to maintain faith and trust in God when you faced great difficulty, disappointment or uncertainty?
3. What are you praying for that is so big only God can make it happen?

YOU ARE EQUIPPED TO SERVE AND BRING HOPE

BY RHEA TRICHE

On days when problems become overwhelming, have you ever lain in bed or looked in the mirror and thought about or even asked yourself, “Why am I here? What is my purpose? Why did God create me? Does my life even matter?”

The prophet Jeremiah understood such moments of despair and offers some powerful words about hope. [Jeremiah 29:11, NIV](#), says, “For I know the plans that I have for you,” declares the LORD, “plans to prosper (develop, mature) you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”

God created us all to solve problems. Where there is a problem, there is a purpose; where there is a purpose, there is a promise; where there is a promise, there is a price. It is not that God made us and then created something for us to do. God had a purpose for your life before you were formed in your mother’s womb ([Jeremiah 1:5](#)).

You are the answer to some individual. You are the answer to a community. You are the answer to the nations! You are the hope that will bring change for today and tomorrow.

Jeremiah reminds us that we all have individual God-given gifts that we are to use to bring hope for a prosperous future. Today, as you meditate and pray, reflect on messages from the prophet as you answer the questions provided.

PRAYER

Today, Lord, show me how I can use the gifts You have given me to bring hope as I serve on behalf of and beside those less fortunate. As I begin to understand what You have for me to do, I will look to You for strength to work the plan. Even when it gets hard, I will rejoice because I am reminded that I am fearfully and wonderfully made. I am here for a purpose, on purpose, to serve others and bring hope! Amen.

Rhea Triche is an organizational development consultant for Habitat for Humanity International’s Global Programs, based in Atlanta.

FOR DISCUSSION

1. Do you know the plans that God has for you?
2. Do you know how these plans are to be used to solve problems?
3. Are you fully using these gifts skillfully, to give hope to others?

CROSSING INTO SAMARIA

BY JOE GATLIN

“May your trip be uneventful.” It’s just a simple wish that a trip will unfold as planned. We prefer to get from here to there with a minimum of fuss, a lack of surprise and none of the unexpected. Just a trip, not a journey.

The disciples likely murmured these words as they stuffed their few possessions into their knapsacks. Jesus had announced it was time to leave Judea and return to Galilee. Going home to Galilee was good. But why go through Samaria?

Jews did not travel through Samaria even though it was smack dab in between Judea and Galilee. Instead they traveled around Samaria. They had a long history of disdain for the Samaritans, that branch of the family that dishonored itself by disregarding the traditions.

Traveling through Samaria would be the equivalent of our walking through, rather than around, the patch of yard where the dog defecates.

“He had to go through Samaria,” we read in [John 4:3-4, NRSV](#). Why? There were no external circumstances — no laws, no inclement weather, no bad road conditions — that forced Jesus to take that route. And apparently, since He ended up lingering there for a few days, He was not driven by a sense of urgency to take the shortest road possible back to Galilee.

The “had to” for Jesus must have been internal. He felt compelled to cross into Samaria. It behooved him to cross into Samaria. No matter how uncomfortable it would make others or how many taboos he would break, Jesus had to go through Samaria. It was necessary. And strategic. After all, Jesus came to save the world ([John 4:42; 3:17](#)), not just Judea and Galilee.

Jesus’ sensitivity to the Spirit resulted in an extraordinary encounter with a woman at the well and the eventual understanding of His disciples that the good news is universal and reconciling. A journey that made no sense was an essential part of the Gospel story.

Tomorrow begins Holy Week, when we remember another journey that Jesus had to make: to Jerusalem, and ultimately to the cross. It is a week punctuated by triumph and tragedy but wrapped in God’s deep and abiding love for us. As we begin this journey together, may we be willing to follow where God leads us, and may we respond obediently when God compels us to act for Him.

PRAYER

Holy Spirit, help us listen so we may humbly know what borders we should cross, what uncomfortable situations we should move into, what taboos we should break, what relationships we should build and what languages we should learn. Amen.

Joe Gatlin lives in Waco, Texas, and is director of field operations for the U.S. Office of Habitat for Humanity International.

FOR DISCUSSION

1. Is there a person in your Habitat for Humanity organization you have avoided and whom you should “travel” out of your way to see?
2. How can we leave room in our strategic planning for the strategy of the Spirit?

LET YOUR LIGHT SHINE

By GREG DILS

She sat alone in the hotel lounge, where our Global Village team had just arrived after a week of helping build a Habitat for Humanity home in Costa Rica. As we stumbled through some very poor attempts to place our orders in Spanish, she noticed our trouble and helped translate for us. We soon invited her to join our team for dinner. She listened intently as we all talked about the amazing week we experienced, the work we completed and the connection we made with the partner family.

Near the end of the meal, she told us how she felt that God must have led us to be there with her that evening. She had distanced herself from God over the past few years and had just gone through a bad breakup with a longtime boyfriend. That night she had been feeling very depressed before she met us. However, the positive attitude and caring spirit that our team had shown during the meal was to her a witness of God's love and a sign of hope and life, even in her time of sorrow. She decided that she was ready to reconnect with God right away. One of our team members gave her a Spanish Bible bought earlier in the week.

Jesus instructs in [Matthew 5:14-16](#) that we are to be the light of the world and to let our light shine before others in order to glorify God. Opportunities to serve as witnesses to God's love are all around us. In our team's case, this special moment was completely unplanned and was a result of just talking and sharing our experiences. Our team went into the week thinking that the purpose of our trip would be to build decent, affordable housing with a family in Costa Rica. We never guessed that God had an extra purpose for us: to offer hope to a young lady in a time of emotional crisis.

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, we thank You for the opportunity to be a light to others in this world. Help us to keep our eyes open for situations where we can serve as witnesses of Your great love. May our work bring glory to Your name. Amen.

Greg Dils is a Global Village team leader from Tiffin, Iowa.

FOR DISCUSSION

1. When have you served as a witness of God's love?
2. How do you find opportunities to let your light shine for the glory of God?
3. Why does Jesus want us to be the light of the world?
4. Whom do you know who could use extra light shining in his or her life?
5. How will you witness to others this week?

BELIEVE IN THE LIGHT

BY DIANNE HALL

“Walk while you have the light, so that the darkness may not overtake you. If you walk in the darkness, you do not know where you are going. While you have the light, believe in the light, so that you may become children of light.” — [John 12:35-36, NRSV](#)

One of the great benefits I have enjoyed while working with Habitat for Humanity is to lead several Global Village work teams. During my travels in the U.S. and other countries, it has been very moving to see how Habitat works in the world with no regard to race or religion. Habitat is open to all, to bring hope and homes to those who need decent shelter. We see a similar notion in [John 12:32](#), where the Greeks are representing a growing understanding of the universal nature of God’s revelation. Jesus’ salvation is intended for the whole world, not just a few.

In [John 12:35-36](#), we are urged to walk in the light, so that in the midst of the darkness, we can find a way to the light. During the 1990 Jimmy Carter Work Project in Tijuana, Mexico, I saw that light coming out of the dark hills above the campground. It was near the end of the week, and we were celebrating with the homeowners the joys and hopes that would come with their new homes. Many folks lived in makeshift cardboard boxes all along the hillside next to the work site. In the midst of our celebration, we saw one single light near the top of the mountain, then another, and another until a long, single line of lights cascaded upon us. Homeowner representatives were expressing their gratitude for the hope these new homes brought them, and they were using light. Out of their darkness came light, and God’s love and compassion surrounded all of us that night.

On this Holy Tuesday, and each day that we work together with our brothers and sisters of different cultures and languages to build homes, we come to experience the true light that has come into the world, the light that shines in the darkness and makes all things new. May this light always shine in our hearts and through our actions.

PRAYER

Gracious God, we pray that all that we do will bring a sense of hope into the lives of those we meet and be a manifestation of the light of Your love for Your children. Amen.

Dianne Hall lives in Americus, Georgia, and is the chaplain for Habitat for Humanity International.

FOR DISCUSSION

1. How big is your world? Does it include people of every race and tongue and nation?
2. How have you seen the love of God shared in your world?
3. What would it look like for the light of the world to be known to you, through you, in your life, in your household, in your community, in your actions?

LESSONS IN FAITH, HOPE AND LOVE

By LAURA FERENT

Whenever I have an opportunity to be around Habitat for Humanity families, I am reminded of three things that are the foundation on which our lives are built: faith, hope and love.

In my recent visit to Ethiopia, I had the privilege of visiting an incredible project aimed at integrating leprosy-affected people and their families into communities. The story of love shared among homeowners was a vivid expression of [1 Corinthians 13:4-8](#).

Stigmatized by society, leprosy-affected people become outcasts and are forced to beg for a living. The husband (and only breadwinner) of the family I visited fell sick and could not go out and beg for a few days; therefore his family (a wife and 4-year-old daughter) had no food to put on the table. Seeing their challenge, the neighbors brought them food and gave them a little money to get through this difficult time. The Habitat homeowner could not believe the love and care extended to his family. They were not only accepted, but embraced by the rest of the community.

I am humbled by the lessons we learn from the people we encounter on our journey with Habitat — lessons of love, faith and hope, which bring us closer to the spirit of this holy season. Easter is the main Christian holiday in the Orthodox Church in both Ethiopia and Romania, where I come from. During Easter, we are reminded that the Crucifixion was not the end of the story. The Resurrection is the completion of Jesus' sacrifice on the cross to save us from our sins.

It was God's great love for us that led Jesus to the cross. Even as Jesus prepared for that agonizing moment, He also sought to prepare the disciples for what was ahead. His commandment in [John 13:34](#) to love one another is also a crucial message for us. Love for one another is the reason homeowners share with each other, and it is the focus of volunteers, donors and staff members who are committed to the vision of eliminating poverty housing. As we are now two days before Good Friday, let us be reminded of God's love and the way we can share it with others around us.

PRAYER

God, let us be reminded of Your love and Your call to love one another as You love us. Let us share our love with the ones around us, for it will strengthen our relationships and our trust in a better world, a world that can tackle the enormous need for decent shelter. Let us be inspired by Your love, and allow us to continue Your work so that we bring hope and faith to our world.

Laura Ferent is learning and organizational development director for Habitat for Humanity International's Europe, Middle East and Africa area office in Bratislava, Slovakia.

FOR DISCUSSION

1. What lessons of faith, hope and love have you learned on your personal journey with Habitat?
2. What does the story of the leprosy-affected people tell us about the impact Habitat has in communities?
3. How have you seen love manifested in Habitat's work?
4. How can we continue to make love actionable in Habitat?
5. Have you experienced a time when someone unexpectedly shared God's love with you in a tangible way? If so, what did you learn from that experience?
6. Between now and Easter Sunday, what will you do to share God's love with others?

WALKING BY FAITH

BY TOMMY PRINCE

*“Have faith in God when your pathway is lonely;
he sees and knows all the way you have trod.”¹*

Those are the first two lines of a hymn I sang many times growing up. Each verse of “Have Faith in God” promises that God is in the midst of, and responsive to, life’s difficulties: loneliness, unanswered prayers, pain, sorrow, grief, despair and failure. I have to admit that as a young person, I thought this was pretty simplistic. Surely life was more complicated, and there was more I had to do in facing life’s challenges than to have faith in God. The reality, though, was that I had not really faced that many struggles at the time I held those thoughts.

Having been on this journey now going on six decades, I have a different perspective. The directive is simple, but not simplistic. It does not mean that having faith in God in the midst of life’s difficulties is easy. Over the past few years, my wife and I have experienced some troubling times: extended, undiagnosed illness; unemployment; foreclosure; death of a parent.

Very often, in the midst of those struggles, I wanted to see and know where the path was leading. I wanted to see and know how God was working, what God was doing and what God’s answers were to my prayers. I wanted to live by sight, not by faith. I had it backwards. In [2 Corinthians 5:7, NKJV](#), it says, “For we walk by faith, not by sight.” God sees and knows our paths. Verse 2 of “Have Faith in God” urges us to wait on the Lord, trust his Word and be patient. That is not always easy, but we can count on God to be with us.

Faith is substantive. The substance of our hope for being able to face life’s difficulties is grounded in having faith, not in having sight, not in having the ability to see what’s ahead. We are able to face life and the challenges it brings because God is faithful to us, and our response to Him is to “have faith in God.”

PRAYER

Loving and faithful God, give us the ability to have faith in You in the midst of life’s difficulties, recognizing that faith in You is our hope. Give us grace to face all that comes our way, knowing that You see and know all the way we have trod and that we are never alone. Amen.

Tommy Prince is learning and organizational development manager for Habitat for Humanity International and is based in Atlanta.

FOR DISCUSSION

1. Have you had the experience of wanting to see and know what life is going to bring, so you could be better prepared for it?
2. What are some of life’s challenges that you have had to face and that required faith because you could not see the future?
3. What does it mean to say, “Having faith is simple, but not always easy?”
4. What are some instances where your faith has been affirmed and God has met you in the midst of life’s challenges?

¹ B.B. McKinney, “Have Faith in God,” Baptist Hymnal, 2008, page 508.

Day 39: Good Friday

GOOD FRIDAY

By MIKE CARSCADDON

“Jesus called out with a loud voice, ‘Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.’ When he had said this, he breathed his last.” — [Luke 23:46, NIV](#)

A significant portion of each of the four Gospels is devoted to telling the Passion narrative. They recount what Jesus does and says during the last week of His life, moving Him toward His crucifixion and confrontation with death on Good Friday. These final chapters are the heart of the Gospel.

Good Friday, with all of its pain and suffering, was inevitable. Jesus knew what was ahead of Him from the start. Yet, even as Jesus spoke His final words from the cross, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit,” He put His trust in God.

Today, as we observe Good Friday according to our own traditions, it may be easy to focus only on the dark, somber reality of the day. However, as Christians, we don’t despair, for we, too, put our trust in God. Because of Christ’s victory over death, we have a sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life.

Being hopeful is a powerful state and a mindset that means much to us at Habitat for Humanity. Several years ago, I visited an urban slum in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. We were going to see a community toilet project that had recently been completed and was providing the residents with proper sanitation for the first time. A woman approached us and said that her eyes had been opened and now she saw what was possible. She and her neighbors were eagerly planning their next project: a community kitchen. From the hopelessness of not even having a means of sanitation, she now had hope, and her entire outlook on life had changed.

We are blessed to share our hope in God through the ministry of Habitat for Humanity.

PRAYER

Lord Jesus Christ, we come before You recognizing the pain of pardon and the depth of Your mercy. We acknowledge the sins of our hearts and seek Your forgiveness. We can hardly fathom a love so great that does not leave us in despair, but rather points us to the hope of resurrection. Thank You for Your gifts of mercy, grace and hope. May we be merciful, offer grace and provide hope in all that we do. Amen.

Mike Carscaddon is executive vice president of international field operations for Habitat for Humanity International and is based in Atlanta.

FOR DISCUSSION

1. Do you always trust in God, even in difficult times?
2. Think of a time when your trust in God was tested. What did you learn?
3. How does hope affect your life?
4. What is your Good Friday tradition? How does it reflect the meaning of this special day?

REJOICE IN THE PROMISE

BY LIZ CROSSMAN

As a child, I knew that every Easter I would get a new outfit for church and dye Easter eggs, and the Easter Bunny would leave a basket of candy. I never did like the Peeps, but I loved those bright candy eggs with something white on the inside. Without doubt, Easter was a joyous time, but it wasn't until I was older that the true meaning and joy of Easter emerged.

My husband, David, and I welcomed our son, Matthew, into our lives in 1970. We had anticipated his birth with love and joyful hearts, not knowing what God's plan was for us. You see, Matthew was born with cystic fibrosis, and our lives were forever changed. As Matthew grew, his health was always an issue, but we did our best to keep his childhood as normal as possible. That included buying new outfits, dyed eggs and a basket full of colored-cellophane grass and candy at Easter. (He didn't like Peeps, either.) We also had a greater understanding of and trust in the promise God made when He sacrificed His Son, Jesus.

Matthew passed away in late March of 1985, a week before Easter. Of course, we mourned our loss and have missed Matthew every day since. But we knew that God had called him and would keep His promise of eternal life. [John 11:25-26, ESV](#), says, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die."

Since 1985, we have not celebrated Easter with new clothes, colored eggs or candy. Instead, we rejoice in the promise that Jesus' death and resurrection brings. We know one day we will join Matthew in God's Kingdom. Until that time, I will always grin when I pass the Peeps on the market shelves at Easter time.

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, by raising Christ Your Son, You conquered the power of death and opened for us the way to eternal life. Let our celebration today raise us up and renew our lives by the Spirit that is within us. Grant this through our Lord Jesus Christ, Your Son, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. Amen.

Liz Crossman lives in Eagle Point, Oregon, and is former chair of the Habitat for Humanity International board of directors.

FOR DISCUSSION

1. How do life experiences influence our understanding and beliefs of holidays?
2. Are life's challenges really mercies in disguise?
3. Do traditions like dyeing Easter eggs, getting new Easter clothes and giving out candy-filled baskets augment or diminish the importance of Easter?
4. Reflect on the awe of Christ rising from death and the earth's awakening from winter to spring. Is it possibly God's sign that though something appears dead, it's not?
5. What signs did Jesus give to His disciples to prove He was not dead?

The purpose of these Lenten devotions has been to help each of us prepare our hearts and minds for the remembrance of Christ's death on the cross and His glorious resurrection. He suffered and died that we might live!

With prayer and meditation, we have now come to the glory of Christ's redemption. He has restored our joy in living and our hope for the future. We are not alone, for through His suffering, death and resurrection, He has reached out His hand, touched our souls and lifted our spirits through His promise of everlasting life. Our response of gratitude is to follow His example and be His hands and feet to love and serve others.

Join together with all God's children in celebrating this remarkable gift of salvation. Have a happy and blessed Easter!

Keeping**GOD**@the Center

AS A CHRISTIAN ORGANIZATION,
HABITAT FOR HUMANITY IS COMMITTED
TO ENSURING THAT GOD REMAINS
CENTRAL TO EVERYTHING WE DO.
THIS MEANS THAT THE CONCEPT OF
“GOD @ THE CENTER” IS WOVEN INTO
THE WHOLE FABRIC OF HABITAT’S
MINISTRY. EVERY HABITAT ENTITY
WORLDWIDE IS ENCOURAGED TO INCLUDE
IN ITS STRATEGIC PLANS A CONSCIOUS
COMMITMENT TO SEEKING AND
DEMONSTRATING GOD’S LOVE.



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