

PEACE AND PROMISE

DURING A CRISIS

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“*H*ear, O Lord, when I cry with my voice: have mercy also upon me, and answer me.” Psalm 27:7

IT WAS the Day of the Meltdown. We had been dealing with a lot of stress for months with my husband’s job. He had worked some days from 6:30 am to 3:00 am the next morning in an emergency situation. Finally it started to smooth out: enter Pandemic of 2020. Barely able to catch our breath we now faced a Twilight Zone world.

When our landline phone died out one morning, it was the finishing touch. I scheduled a phone technician appointment. Wait - that would mean a total stranger invading my safe space at home. He may unknowingly be carrying the dread virus. Collapsing on the couch and curling up under a throw, I dissolved into tears; stress overload. I cried out to the Lord.

Fighting against pressures of life and fear of the unknown, I would cancel the phone visit and hope for the best. Back to all the what-ifs. Crying, praying, and melting into the couch cushions.

“Lord, have mercy. You understand the stress. Please answer. Give me the assurance that all will be well. I need to know You will protect us from harm during this world crisis.” I added the final plea, “Fix our phone! Let someone call me so I know it’s fixed.”

In the stillness after my cry...the PHONE RANG. The welcome tone shocked me out of my tears as I dived off the couch to answer it. Somehow, somewhere, angels must have been busy fixing the phone wires. God heard my cry, had mercy and answered me.

-Cynthia A. Lovely

PROMISE:

God hears us, He answers. When we cry out to Him, He is quick to answer. It may not be as obvious as a malfunctioning phone coming back to life but if we call upon Him and ask for help, He will respond. Call on Him. Expect a response. Oh yes, and the answer may come along with a bonus of laughter: the miraculous phone call was...from a pastor.

*“P*ray without ceasing.” 1 Thessalonians 5:17

PRAYING without ceasing is a whispered prayer in line at the store; it’s a cry for help in the hospital elevator, a song of praise while doing the dishes.

I once thought it meant that I had to be at home on my knees 24/7. While that’s a great thing to be able to do, God wants to hear from me wherever I am. I can pray anytime I need to when I feel overwhelmed – *especially* when I feel overwhelmed with life. I know that God is always near -- as close as the air around me.

I’m glad that He makes Himself available all day, every day. He never sleeps at night and doesn’t put up an “out to lunch” sign in the middle of the day. I’m assured that God always hears me when I pray.

Another thing that allows me to easily pray where I am is that God’s not so concerned with the physical position I’m in when I talk to Him. I can be standing, sitting, walking or kneeling. When I want to pray, I can simply offer up my heart as I am. In my car is one of my favorite places to pray. You might find me going down the road, worship music turned up in my rolling prayer closet praising and praying – eyes open, of course.

I’m so thankful for the privilege of being able to talk to God anytime I want to. It sure helps as I navigate through the days of pandemic. I know that I’m not alone as I face new challenges in the whirlwind of change.

-Connie Clyburn

PRAYER:

Dear Lord, Thank you for the blessing of being able to talk directly to you. Help me to take advantage of every opportunity to spend time in your presence. In Jesus Name. Amen.

“*M*y voice shalt thou hear in the morning, O LORD; in the morning will I direct my prayer unto thee, and will look up.” Psalm 5:3

NOW MORE THAN EVER BEFORE, I need to start my days with earnest prayer.

Often I wake up and this may be the first thing on my mind but as soon as I jump into the day's activities, it can be pushed to the background. World events have brought the importance of prayer to the forefront and I need to look up and pay attention. I need Jesus.

I am even more conscious of this each morning when my husband leaves for work. He still has to go to work and be around others who may or may not be carrying the infection. Before he leaves each day, he pauses at the door so we can pray together. It is usually in a hug goodbye, holding each other in an embrace.

I pray divine protection over him and ask God to send angels round about him to keep all harm far from him. I pray for his office workers and his place of employment. I thank God for providing our needs.

Somehow, we end up swaying together in the rhythm of prayer. My husband will hold me with one hand at my waist and slip his other hand in mine raised to the heavens. We slow dance to the prayer without even realizing we are doing it.

Perhaps we are moving to the rhythm of God's heartbeat.

-Cynthia A. Lovely

PROMISE:

I will lift my voice each morning to the Lord. I resolve to cover my husband and my family in earnest prayer, asking for God's favor. This is a priority. I want the Lord to hear my pleas and also my praise first thing in the morning. And to start my day with a prayer-dance of praise.

“*B*e careful for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.” Philippians 4:6

DON'T GET upset and wring your hands over things. Things like events, sickness, disease, other people's actions – anything that is going on in the earth.

Sometimes I get in the worry lane and have to be reminded – be anxious for nothing. God's words, not mine. It is easy to think that He's never been through what we're going through. It can seem like our problems are so bad and there's God, up in heaven where everything is all perfect. His love is sufficient for us.

Jesus came to this earth, this very earth where we are. He walked through life as a man living the human experience. He did it for us. So we can bring every care to Him, our High Priest, who knows what we're going through. Bring everything with thanksgiving. Let Him know all your requests.

He cares for me. Situations look hopeless to us, but He conquered death, hell and the grave, and made a way -- the way. What a relief. Just to know that all I need to do is talk to Him about every concern. I'm good at talking.

I tend to want to figure things out on my own. I love to creatively work out ways to tackle a problem or figure a way to get something done. I think that's why I'm a worry wart now and then. He gently and lovingly reminds me - that's not my job. My job is to take it to Him in prayer.

-Connie Clyburn

PRAYER:

Dear Lord, I have so many fears, anxieties and worrisome thoughts. Thank you that I can bring everything to you. Thank you for your Word, letting me know that you expect me to lay it all at your feet and trust you. Help me not to take an anxious thought, but to give even a fleeting wisp of worry to you as soon as it pops up. In Jesus Name. Amen

“*T*here is that speaketh like the piercings of a sword; but the tongue of the wise is health.” Proverbs 12:18

NEWS FLASH! The new virus is deadly and contagious.

But if you wear a mask you're okay. Well then again, maybe not as terminal as we first thought but don't get close to anyone. Wait, we discovered the germs stay on surfaces for many days and surfaces are contaminated. It is best to stay home, don't go out.

Get out and get some fresh air. The lockdown will end in a few weeks. Or maybe a few months. Though some say this pandemic could return in the fall.

Conflicting reports and worrisome messages are bombarding us from every direction. Each disturbing item pierces our hearts and emotions with fresh fear and anxiety, ripping away peace and promise. We truly don't know who or what to believe.

Reliable sources no longer feel reliable. Stress levels are high and people are reactive. This is the time to think before we speak and resolve to speak hope and health.

Yes, we should stay aware of what is happening. My husband and I discuss events each day. But we are careful not to repeat every dire prediction we hear. The Lord instructs us to offer words of wisdom. We desire to have a “tongue of the wise” which promotes health.

Following this advice, we speak hopeful words, terms of encouragement - sharing God's Word above the clamor. It may take a constant effort to blur out the cacophony around us... but it will be worth it.

-Cynthia A. Lovely

PROMISE:

If I am cognizant of the damage of piercing words and instead speak words of wisdom, God tells me this will promote health. I resolve to avoid contributing to all the negativity. I want to be conscious of my words and how they may affect others. I will speak the peace of Jesus and share His words of truth and hope.

“*F*or as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body being many, are one body: so also is Christ.” 1 Corinthians 12:12

BEING part of the body of Christ is a connection like no other.

It bonds us with other like-minded people. It provides the support we so desperately need. In times like we’re in now, uniting together can mean all the difference.

We are all part of a whole designed to work together. We need each other.

Our body is made up of many working parts, all with important jobs. One isn’t more important than the other. I would be in a predicament without my ear or a hand. I want all of the members of my body to be present and in good working order.

It’s the same with the body of Christ. We are all connected and we’re all important. Something else I’ve noticed. We all have different gifts and talents that work together. I see it every Sunday when members of the body come together to organize and carry out church services as we’ve opened back up and meeting in person now. Everyone serving in their different areas came together to get the job done.

I’m happy where He has placed me along with my brothers and sisters in Christ. I know that I’m fulfilling my role, doing what God designed me to do when I’m working in harmony with other members of His body.

-Connie Clyburn

PRAYER:

Dear Lord, Thank you for allowing me to be part of your body. I love being where you can use me. Help me to recognize where I can function in my full capacity to help promote your work in the earth. In Jesus Name. Amen.

*“W*herefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do.” 1 Thessalonians 5:11

EVERYONE LOVES A PARADE.

It is always fun to celebrate and join others in moments of victory. But lately it doesn't seem like there is much to celebrate. Yet this world wide dilemma has challenged our creativity and we have responded by finding ways to connect and encourage one another even in this period of isolation.

My neighbor emailed me about a scheduled parade of cars on our country route for teachers to drive by student's houses and wave. I heard the first line go by and went out for my walk. The second line came through when I was on a quiet stretch of road with no houses or people around.

I waved and cheered on every driver and they seemed delighted to find a real person there, responding to me by waving back and blaring their horns. It was heartwarming. Cars lined with streamers, banners, signs and people making the effort to comfort and help each other.

I've watched other parades online as dedicated congregants organize car parades to go by their church to wave, beep horns, display signs of love to their pastor and leadership. All while respecting the rules of social distancing. Usually they are planned as a surprise and pastors are coerced into being there at the right time.

It is truly a hallmark moment and brings tears to your eyes to see the joy on their faces as people who miss one another find ways to re-connect. Our hearts reach out and meet in love and support and together we are strengthened.

-Cynthia A. Lovely

PROMISE:

We ourselves are encouraged when we reach out to others, especially during difficult times. As we obey God's Word to comfort and edify, it lifts our spirits and we all end up with smiles and essential laughter in our hearts.

“A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another.” John 13:34

WALKING IN LOVE WITH OTHERS. It doesn't seem like a hard thing to do...until a pandemic comes along. Then we're all disagreeing over things like toilet paper and hand sanitizer.

I try to remind myself every day how important it is to walk the **Love Walk** with others. Even if I don't agree with someone, I really don't have to make my voice heard. If I do feel the need to speak up, I'll keep my words kind.

Through walking in love, we strengthen the bonds that hold us together. That's really what we're to do – encourage and lift each other up.

Jesus set the example for us when He came to earth and gave His life for us on the cross. His whole ministry demonstrated walking in love. He showed us what it looks like. That's the ultimate love. It's agape love, the God kind of love.

If I make it my aim every day, it's not hard to do.

I jotted down some points to help me walk in love with others -

- Pray for them
- Consider them – not find fault
- Offer a word of encouragement
- Refuse to take offense

IF I KEEP it in mind as I go about my day, I'm pretty sure I'll remember to think before I bless somebody out for grabbing the last ten packs of disinfectant wipes at the grocery store.

-Connie Clyburn

PRAYER:

Dear Lord, Thank you for loving me first. I make it my aim to walk in the same love with others that you show to me each day. Please remind me to do this every day. Thank you. I love you. In Jesus Name. Amen.

“*Therefore said he unto them, The harvest truly is great, but the labourers are few: pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he would send forth labourers into his harvest.*” Luke 10:2

IT ALL CHANGED in one week.

The church was full. Musicians geared up. Worship service about to start and everyone ready for a powerful meeting.

The next week: empty pews, echoing sanctuaries, closed buildings.

His house has been full but the fields were empty. There has been a divine switch. God has turned things upside down with a challenge to His people to gather in the harvest. Emptying out the churches and spilling us out into the fields. No, it is not the fields of wheat and barley. Our modern day fields of ...social media. And the church has exploded onto it!

Realizing there was now a plethora of choices, my husband went “church-hopping” one Sunday morning. First he visited a service in the Far East led by our missionary friend. Then he stopped in Syracuse for a bit of insight and traveled over to North Carolina for a pastor-friend and finally to our favorite church in Long Island, New York.

Yes, the church body has stepped up and answered the call. There have even been “drive-in” services in parking lots, still adhering to precautions while reaching many people walking and/or driving by.

Whether pastors and leaders are technically challenged or pros, everyone has jumped on the bandwagon. Every day there are devotions, worship music, and sermons throughout the week.

From polished presentations to cozy home front offerings, you can find something that will inspire and encourage you. And people are responding. Those who haven’t attended church in years are connecting and home conversions are happening daily. Laborers are in the fields.

-Cynthia A. Lovely

PROMISE:

God is sending forth laborers into the harvest fields. End time events are happening, time is short and the harvest is great. I want to be a laborer in this ready field during this important and vital season.

“*F*or God hath not given us the spirit of fear, but of power, and of love and of a sound mind.” 2 Timothy 1:7

FEAR IS like the mirrors in a carnival funhouse.

It presents itself at every turn, making a situation appear distorted, scary and impossible to escape. Fear is no fun. Its intent is to make you shrink back and frantically run to find the nearest exit.

I know that God is not the one who brings fear to my door. He will show me the way out through His Word and the Holy Spirit leading me. Through Him, I can walk in power and love, and strength.

Some years ago, anxiety attacks plagued me. It seemed like they came out of nowhere and I thought that I was powerless to control them. Then I got ahold of the verse in Second Timothy. Boy, did I meditate on it. I spoke it out loud every time I felt anxiety trying to creep in. I prayed that verse. I made it mine.

Soon, I stopped feeling anxious. The attacks stopped. I found out that I was not powerless, because I had God’s Word to back me up. As I meditated on it, I could see me as God sees me. It made all the difference.

Sound mind. I know that fear can’t overtake me. It can’t as long as I know who I am and whose I am.

Now as I face days ahead that once seemed uncertain, I can stand in boldness knowing that I have power, love and a sound mind.

-Connie Clyburn

PRAYER:

Dear Lord, Thank you for your Word that I look in to see myself. I am who you say I am. I will always run to you for help when I feel overcome. In Jesus Name. Amen.

“*N*ow the Lord is that Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.” 2 Corinthians 3:17

AMERICA: the land of the free and home of the brave.

Though right now, it doesn't feel as free with so many restrictions set upon the people. Who would have thought we would be wandering around in face masks, avoiding crowds and hiding out in our homes. It is starting to feel like a third world country.

As far as brave, so many have been filled with fear and anxiety due to all the contrary and conflicting news reports plus conspiracy theories abounding on social media. Some of our elderly are sheltering in at home, afraid to go out at all. **But there is still Good News!**

No matter what is happening around us, Jesus offers true freedom and liberty. No one and nothing can take that away.

The Spirit of God has no restrictions and no boundaries. He can break through walls, cross over oceans, and enter into prisons: nothing can prevent the liberty found in the Lord. We are free to worship Him in our homes and soon once again, in our churches. But the reassuring fact is we don't have to have a church building to worship God in. That has been proven over the last few months. We are learning and we are growing in God.

The Lord invites us to enjoy the freedom and liberty in His Spirit. And honestly, we still have so much to be thankful for. I am glad I can go outside my country home, breathe fresh air, or take a walk around the lake. I can still come and go as I please, with a few precautions.

And everywhere I go, I walk in the promise of God, in His freedom and His liberty.

- Cynthia A. Lovely

PROMISE:

The liberty I find in the Spirit of God knows no bounds. I am free, wherever I am and wherever I go, to worship Him in Spirit and in truth.

“One generation shall praise thy works to another and shall declare thy mighty acts.” Psalm 145:4

LISTEN to the older generations tell of God’s goodness. It’s a living history book and a great reminder when walking through troublesome times.

I love to hear Christians tell stories about the goodness of God they’ve experienced over the years, especially the older ones who have walked with Him a long time. Their stories are inspiring and confirm that God is always with us, no matter the time or season.

His mighty acts are worth telling about. Our God doesn’t do things half way; He always goes above and beyond our expectations.

Generation after generation, God proves that He is true to His Word. Those who walked before us have gone through hard times, yet they never stopped telling of His wondrous works. They learned to praise Him in the midst of their difficult situations.

Going back even further, we can read stories of how God delivered the Hebrew children from destruction, making a dirt road for them to travel in the middle of a sea and feeding them when they thought they would die of starvation in the wilderness. He didn’t fail them then and He won’t fail us now.

A good story about God’s faithfulness is good to hear in times like these. I think I’ll start a testimony session and encourage others to join in and share about His goodness through the generations. We will encourage ourselves in the midst of our trial and leave a legacy for the generations coming behind us.

-Connie Clyburn

PRAYER:

Dear Lord, Thank you for your goodness that extends from generation to generation. Help me to remember all the good things you’ve done for me and then share my stories to encourage others. In Jesus Name. Amen

“*F*or Thou art my hope, O Lord God: thou art my trust from my youth.” Psalm 71:5

IMAGINE the thrill and anticipation of a newborn babe: add in the anxiety and concern of a birth during COVID 19.

This was the situation my friend found herself in when her oldest daughter carried her pregnancy smack-dab into the virus break-out. As her mother, she knew she wouldn't be allowed to support her in the hospital and would have to wait several days before she could see her new grandson.

In prayer, the Lord brought my former friend to mind to reach out and encourage her. We hadn't remained in contact but I obeyed and wrote her a card reminding her of all God had done for her. We had been in the same youth group together so I knew the miracles God had wrought in her life.

The Lord had brought her through many hard situations, over and over again. And I knew He would do it again. I shared some of the memories and encouraged her to remember how God has always been her hope and she has trusted Him from an early age...and needed to continue to trust Him.

Shortly afterwards I received a thank you card, with deep appreciation for adhering to the Lord's nudge and sharing much-needed words at this particular time. She was ministered to and reminded of God's faithfulness. I found out later she read the card every day, knowing without a doubt, it was the Lord speaking to her heart.

God brought my own words back to me when I begin to worry about the pandemic and how it may affect my family. Yes, Jesus has been *my* hope and *my* trust from my youth. And just like my friend, He has brought me through every trial and been faithful all my life. I trust in Him.

-Cynthia A. Lovely

PROMISE:

The Lord is my constant hope and no matter the situation my trust remains in Him from the earliest days of knowing Him. When I scroll back through memories of all God has done in my life, I am strengthened in my trust in Him.

“*Therefore my beloved brethren be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.*” 1 Corinthians 15:58

“I SHALL NOT BE, I shall not be moved...” The words of that old song we sang in children’s church so many years ago come to mind when I read this scripture. That simple little song proclaims that we will be like a tree securely planted by the water.

I am anchored in God, held strong in my faith.

Oh yes, trials are sure to come. This isn’t the first difficult situation and it won’t be the last. Here’s what I know. I’m established on *the* firm foundation. My faith is on the solid Rock, Jesus. That means I don’t have to be blown about by every wind that comes along. I chose to build on good ground.

My labor is not in vain. Though I’m in the world, I am not of the world. I don’t subscribe to what the world is selling. Comfort dwells in my house, but it goes beyond mere comfort. This is a deep, abiding security. I shall not be moved.

Though circumstances change with the tide and I face days like I’ve never seen before, I have a strong root that holds me secure. That assurance is what keeps me. It helps me stand when all around is shifting sand.

I imagine that I’m in a strong house built on a big rock, a sure foundation. All around are other houses built on the sandy shore with the tide inching nearer, threatening to take them down.

I’m so glad that, many years ago, a children’s church teacher taught a little girl to sing that song of assurance.

-Connie Clyburn

PRAYER:

Dear Lord, Thank you for helping me to be unmovable. I can stand in faith no matter what life brings. I will keep my roots deep in your Word and remain stable and fixed in you. In Jesus Name. Amen.

“*F*or I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the LORD, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end.” Jeremiah 29:11

CANCELLED. Postponed. Rescheduled.

The list continues to grow. Church services, events, meetings, appointments, graduations. A photo posted online spoke volumes of a young girl clearing out her school locker. She was supposed to be valedictorian. She brought her prom dress to school and on impulse, put it on for a picture. But the picture ended up with her slumped on the floor in front of her locker, her pretty dress cascading around her, leaning her head in her hands in sorrow and defeat.

The memories that should have been will not happen.

Disappointments similar to this one abound during the pandemic. Couples planning weddings are waiting till venues open again. Babies are born in secluded areas of the hospital without the support of family and friends. Grandparents have to quarantine weeks to be able to see their new grandchild. And families attempting to visit elderly parents in nursing homes are not allowed inside.

But wait, we are making our way around the restrictions. Families devise ways to connect with loved ones, making arrangements to stand outside their window, waving and holding written signs of love. Engaged couples plan simple, memorable wedding ceremonies instead of huge stressful events. Newborns are even more cherished and the wait for family to see them only builds the anticipation and makes the joy sweeter.

Times are tough but this will not be forever. There is a hope and a future for those who trust in God. Day by day He is revealing that hope and future to us and helping us to see what truly matters.

-Cynthia A. Lovely

PROMISE:

God still has a plan and it is not cancelled! We are in His thoughts and those thoughts include peace, with a specific intent and purpose. We can rest assured God is still in control and His perfect plan for us will prevail.

*“A*nd I will restore to you the years that the locusts hath eaten, the cankerworm and the caterpillar and the palmerworm, my great army which I sent among you.” Joel 2:25

I’VE BEEN ROBBED.

That’s what it feels like some days. I’ve missed being with family and friends – precious time is slipping away on these days when we must stay distant. I so want to gather at a restaurant enjoying a meal and good conversation. Shopping is a favorite, too. I want to run from store to store again, wearing myself out because my shopping buddy had to find that perfect pair of shoes.

You know what – God said He will restore what’s been lost. So there. And here’s the best part ... wait for it. That which He restores to me will be even better than I could ever dream or imagine. I encourage myself in that truth and I know everything will be alright.

God is on my side. Praise His Name forever!

He longs to give good things. Circumstances may look like the enemy has the upper hand, BUT God. He sees through the smoke and mirrors that have been set up to set me up. It’s only for a time – weeping may endure for a little while, but joy will soon come galloping in to save the day.

I choose to believe God’s report over the voices in the world that say the best is gone and things will never be the same again. I believe life will be even better than before for those who are in the Lord.

So, I will be glad. I will rejoice. Anything that has been taken from me will be restored.

-Connie Clyburn

PRAYER:

Dear Lord, Thank you that I can depend on you to restore anything that’s been lost during this time of pandemic. What the enemy meant for bad, you will turn around for my good. In Jesus Name. Amen.

*“W*ash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.” Psalm 51:2

I HAVE NEVER WASHED my hands so much in my life.

Every time I go out to get the mail or take out the trash. Wash hands. Open mail, wash hands. Read the newspaper, wash hands. Go anywhere in the car, use hand sanitizer and wash hands as soon as I get home. We are more conscious of germs right now than ever before. And we keep being reminded every day; wash those hands!

This brings the contemplation of how often do we check our heart. I remember my mother used to repent at the end of every day and ask God for forgiveness. She wanted to be sure her heart was clean before Him, clear from any sins. She scrubbed it clean with the Word of God and tears of repentance. I always admired her for this effort but oftentimes forget to do it myself.

I may think I am without sin but those little things creep in every day just like germs on our hands that go unseen and unnoticed - and yet they can be so damaging to us. “White” lies, envy, pride, anger and unbelief may all lodge in our hearts without us even realizing it.

God help me to be more circumspect about the condition of my heart.

I don’t want the infection of sin to grow and spread throughout my being, causing my heart to be dirty and my soul to be sick. I need a daily repentance and heart check to remain clean before God.

-Cynthia A. Lovely

PROMISE:

When I ask Him, God will completely wash away my sins. He will cleanse me from all sin and make me whole and soul-healthy once again. Each and every day I will continue to wash my hands and also...allow God to wash my heart.

*“V*erily I say unto you, except ye be converted and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.”
Matthew 18:3

WHEN I TRAVEL to my hometown to visit, it brings back fond, fun memories of my childhood. I think about the days when I would play outside for hours with my friends. There were no cares; no reasons to worry. The only thing on my mind was riding my bike and going to get ice cream.

I trusted, knowing that my parents were always there. I didn't give a second thought to what I would eat or where I would sleep at night. I knew they were looking out for me. I was born into their family. I belonged to them – as their child. This privilege meant I would never go without, because they had planned for me, wanted me and took care of me.

It's the same way with my Heavenly Father. He wants me to come to Him like a little child. I can trust Him knowing He will provide my every need. You see, just like my parents, He planned for me to be part of His family. Long before I was born, He knew me. And all of us who belong to Him can live the kingdom life here on this earth. He provides for us all the time, even when we're not thinking about it.

God Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth actually *planned* for me and loves me. I like to meditate on that wonderful truth. The message floods my heart and mind till it reaches way down on the inside of me.

And God planned for **you** and loves **you**. Imagine resting in His arms like a little child – the arms of the One who loves you unconditionally. You are His.

-Connie Clyburn

PRAYER:

Dear Heavenly Father, Thank you for loving me. You've provided everything I need, so I don't have to worry about a thing. I'm your child and that's enough. Help me rest completely in you, Lord. I love you. In Jesus Name. Amen

“Put on the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.” Ephesians 6:11.

I DID NOT WANT to go out into the battlefield. It was ugly out there.

But it was necessary to care for my family. I girded myself up with precautions. Not heavy armor but the protective coverings for this situation. Masked, gloved, with a mysterious bottle of liquid to use in removing fingerprints. My plan was in place to visit the best rural location where there would be less people. Yes, it sounds like I am ready to commit a heinous crime. Could it be burglary, kidnapping, or a drug deal?

No, I was ready to go grocery shopping.

These were the physical trappings of the day but the spiritual preparations were important. I would venture forth prayed up and armored with the Word of God in my heart. I was determined to be kind but careful, if someone got too close, crossing the lines of social distancing. Walking through the store aisles I was aware of those around me, so the enemy would not catch me ill prepared, or be near anyone sneezing and coughing.

I chose items carefully with one gloved hand. In one aisle I had to dodge a young unmasked clerk stocking shelves with another clerk chatting, as they both imagine themselves immune to the danger.

At the checkout counter, I remove my one glove and discard in the plastic bag I brought along. Purchases completed, I head to the car and towards home where we enter phase 2 – disinfecting everything. Though I feel like a Nancy Drew wannabe on a mission thinking of my next move, I realize these are crazy times so I must be wise.

-Cynthia A. Lovely

PROMISE:

When we cover ourselves with the whole armor of God and His divine protection, we will be able to defeat all the enemy's schemes and plans to harm us. We can walk out fully clothed in His strength and shield of defense... without fear.

“*F*or He shall give His angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways.” Psalm 91:11

THE BIG FRAMED picture of an angel ushering a little boy and girl across a beautiful bridge hung on my mom’s wall for years.

Though I wouldn’t have used the Early American-looking framed painting in my own house, it always brought a sense of comfort.

I don’t know if my mom still has that picture. It might have been relegated to the “giveaway” box by now. Reading Psalm 91:11 brought it to my memory. I wonder about the artist who created it and what was on his or her mind at the time. No doubt, the idea to paint the scene came from the same scripture. Or perhaps a childhood experience of angelic protection inspired it.

God commands his angels to keep track of me. It’s not a scary kind of checking in on me to see what I’m doing. They’re there to make sure I’m kept safe. That’s good to know in times like we’re seeing right now. They’ve always been there, but still the reminder is nice.

Angels keep me in all my ways. When I go out into the uncertain world and when I’m quarantined at home I am under their safe watch. I can be sure that I will never be alone.

-Connie Clyburn

PRAYER:

DEAR LORD,

Thank you for having your angels keep watch over me. In my comings and goings, I am kept safe. Help me to always trust you to take care of me. In Jesus Name. Amen.

“*H*e shall cover thee with his feathers, And under his wings shalt thou trust...”-Psalm 91:4

IT SOUNDS like a safe place of refuge.

The words bring to mind protection, security, and shelter. Most of us experience the need for safety and security at one time or another in this crazy thing called life. There are times we are almost desperate to find that place of refuge.

I was reminded of this scripture when we recently heard an online sermon from our favorite pastor, encouraging his congregants during the current crisis. In speaking about the storms of life we go through, he drew out the analogy of how a hen protects her chicks. As soon as she senses there is trouble close by, she begins to gather them into safety.

At the first sign of danger, the mother hen will emit a certain sound. The baby chicks are familiar with the sound and immediately respond by running to her to hide. She spreads her wings wide and ushers them all underneath the shelter of her wings. Then she covers them with her wings and tucks them in close so they are completely hidden. You can't see them. The enemy can't see them. They are sheltered and hidden from the dangers.

This beautiful story brings into focus the meaning of this scripture. How our great God and Savior is aware of all of our troubles. Nothing catches Him by surprise. He is always and forever watching out for us. As soon as there is a hint of trouble or danger, we can run to Him.

God covers us, tucks us in and hides us away from evil.

-Cynthia A. Lovely

PROMISE:

How great is the Father's love. Whatever dangers we face in this uncertain world, God is faithful to protect and grant a safe sanctuary to shelter in. He will gather us in close and cover us from harm.

*“A*nd he said, Come. And when Peter was come down out of the ship, he walked on the water, to go to Jesus.” Matthew 14:29

WALKING on water is pretty cool. I wonder if Peter even thought about temperature of the water before he stepped out of the boat.

His full attention was on Jesus – for a little while. The crashing waves were there when he stepped out of the boat **and** when he actually started walking on the water. Peter stepped out in faith, but somewhere in the time between the stepping onto the surface of the water and the sinking part, his faith waivered. Jesus didn’t go anywhere. He was still there. Peter changed his focus.

I’ve done that. I’ve been gung ho about doing something big in my life. I’ll decide to step out into the unknown because I know Jesus is there. But when it comes time to actually step, I have second thoughts. What if this is just a lame-brained idea? What if I fail? What if.... The “what ifs” can go on and on. And that’s where I start to sink. I start doubting if anything I do or say is worth a hoot. I start doubting my ability to do anything but sit around watching television and eating cookies all day. I’ve become pretty good at that during the days of quarantine.

Had Peter kept his focus on Jesus, I have a feeling he would have walked right up to Him on those waves and walked back to the boat with Jesus. I’m determined to be a water-walker. I will keep my focus on Jesus through reading His Word and asking for His help. I’m ready.

-Connie Clyburn

PRAYER:

Dear Lord, Thank you for your Word that helps me see myself the way you see me – a water-walker. I ask you to help me step out in areas where I need to. Thank you for strength, and for leading and guiding me. In Jesus Name. Amen.

“*B*ut even the very hairs of your head are all numbered...” Luke 12:7

WITH THIS CURRENT WORLD CRISIS, it is easy to feel lost, helpless, alone and...forgotten.

Thoughts of gloom and doom may creep in and you start to wonder if you really matter to anyone. I also battle these thoughts of unimportance and aloneness. Trying to make a difference for others but wondering if anything I do now really matters in the big picture. I may be disappearing into the wood-work where no one will find me again.

Then I'm reminded of this scripture and my imagination gets out of hand picturing - an Angel Hair Brigade. You know, those special angels whose main duty is to keep track of the hairs on your head. Well, it is possible there is such a thing. Think about it. All the people in this world and every single hair on every single head are numbered.

Sometimes I wonder if that is the reason men tend to lose their hair later in life. Perhaps the angels are tiring out and it is the one break they have to look forward to. Seriously, our God is perfectly capable of taking care of this task Himself because He is Almighty and all powerful.

This is the thought I will dwell on every time I brush my long hair - God is keeping track.

And the fact is we all lose some hair each day. So it is a constant watch over me to keep it accurate. I can't fathom this type of precision and meticulous care. Yet God. This is just a fraction of how much He cares for me and how important I am to Him.

-Cynthia A. Lovely

PROMISE:

EVERY SINGLE HAIR. Counted out every single day. I am important in God's eyes. And His eyes are watching over me daily. Nothing escapes His notice.

“*I*f ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.” John 15:7

I HAVE LEARNED that God cares about the difficulties I face in my job. Since the pandemic invaded our lives, I’ve had to work from home without some of the technology I’m used to using. So, there are times when I despair over not being able to figure out how to do something on my laptop or feel like I’m lagging behind. I let myself worry and get anxious. Notice I said that I *let* myself get anxious, instead of stopping to talk to Him first.

It’s not that I don’t know to pray. I do. Sometimes, though, I allow myself to get all bent out of shape and caught up in the problem. So I pray and give it to God. The answer isn’t always instant, but sometimes it is. I let Him know my need, giving thanks for the answer, and He hears me.

I know the truths were put in the Bible for my benefit. I am to be careful for nothing – I’m not to take anything for granted. I am to tell Him all my requests with thanksgiving. With thanksgiving, because He will hear me and He will answer.

I don’t have to be afraid to ask. I can approach the throne of grace with confidence. He longs to be merciful to me and provide help in time of need. I can trust the Lord with my requests.

-Connie Clyburn

PRAYER:

Dear Lord, Thank you that we can bring everything to you. I know that you hear me and you come to my rescue. Thank you, Father, that my heartfelt prayers are close to your heart. In Jesus Name. Amen.

*“W*hatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might...”
Ecclesiastes 9:10

WHEN I LOOK BACK on the past few months, I wonder what I will have accomplished with all this extra time.

I don't want to look back and think: wow, I wish I had gotten more things done. Since I am doing my office work at home I don't have the travel time to work. I am going out as little as possible to avoid crowds. Errands are minimal. It is time to figure out - whatever my hand finds to do, I need to do it with all my might. I have so many opportunities right now.

There are regular tasks around the house; de-cluttering, sorting through endless piles of papers and files and updating computer notes. Yeah, some of that could definitely last into a few months. I have sorted through decades of cassette tapes of sermons and music, now labeled and the rest given away or thrown out. Oh, and for the younger crowd, cassettes were what we used in the good ole' days before CD's and MP3's.

I am reading and writing more, enjoying music and practicing piano. Others may be into crafts, quilting, sewing, cooking, or gardening. I may not be able to meet with friends and family but I can stay in touch through phone calls, text messages and best of all, a thoughtful card in the mail. This is definitely the hour to reach out to those around us.

I also have time for more walks in the country and around the lake close to us. My husband and I plan road trips to neighboring towns over the weekends to visit farmer's markets and stroll through small villages.

And of course, the most important thing: I have more time for prayer, devotions and studying the Bible. There is plenty of "whatever my hand finds to do."

-Cynthia A. Lovely

PROMISE:

Yes, these are times of shelter and isolation but they can also be times of good progress and reaching goals. If I use the time wisely, I know God will bless it and it will help battle any boredom or restlessness.

“Come, let us sing unto the Lord; let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation.” Psalm 95:1

SINGING HAS ALWAYS BEEN a big part of my life. Growing up, I would sit in the back seat of the car and harmonize to Southern Gospel songs with my cousins.

As I got older, I began to sing in church. I loved singing with my friends in the choir and then I sang in a trio, taking the message of Jesus around our area. I realized how lifting up praises to God lifted me up. There’s really something to that. Notice the verse above says to make a joyful noise. I am filled with joy when I praise Him. I don’t think it’s possible to be anything else but happy in His presence.

When I sing to the Lord, it reminds me of His goodness toward me. I enter into His courts – the holy place. I find peace there. Offering praise to God, blessing His name benefits me as the worshipper. I’m infused with strength to face life in the crazy, upside down world.

I find an assurance that I can’t get anywhere else. I am hopeful in the midst of troubled times. It’s a sure, everlasting hope.

The world needs real hope right now. So many voices are talking all at once – some speak of better times ahead and some sell tickets for the gloom and doom show.

I believe that I, as a child of God, can help bring the atmosphere of heaven to earth when I praise. Praise changes the air. The enemy sure gets gone in a hurry when we magnify God.

Sing to the Lord. It brings joy to a troubled soul. It is a deep joy that can only come from a relationship with Him. It bubbles up from a place down inside, like a spring flowing from a mountainside.

I will sing joyfully to Him at all times.

-Connie Clyburn\

PRAYER:

Dear Lord, I lift up your sweet name in praise. Let me always have a song in my heart for you. The ability to bless you in joyful shouts of adoration lifts me up and gives me hope. Thank you for giving us the beautiful gift of music. In Jesus Name. Amen.

“*B*e still, and know that I am God.” Psalm 46:10

THERE IS a hush over the world.

Stop for a moment and listen. You will notice...the quiet. Everything has slowed down; some things have come to a complete standstill. Phrases like “shutdown, lock-down, pause” are in common use.

Less traffic, empty highways, shuttered stores, closed schools. It is a time to be still. Many of us are working from home and struggling to adapt to the online world of connection. Life has shifted to the slow lane.

In the stillness, perhaps God is trying to get our attention and remind us of who He is.

We can struggle against the slow tide or we can adjust and be thankful we have this opportunity to be still before our God. Realizing once again that yes, He is God. He alone holds all things in His hands. The excuses we’ve held about being too busy to spend time in prayer are now null and void.

We have the opportunity to quiet our hearts and our souls before Jesus. With the outside noise brought down to a minimum, we can allow the holy hush of God’s presence to surround us. He wants to work something new and fresh within us.

Cease movement. Welcome silence. God will be exalted in the nations and in all the earth.

-Cynthia A. Lovely

PROMISE:

For it is in the stillness, the sacred spot where we kneel in quietude before Him, it is there He will speak to us, calm us and center us for His divine purpose. And we will realize once again in all its fullness, the Lord, He IS God and He WILL be exalted.

“Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” Matthew 11:28

I LIKE to post memes on social media to encourage others, especially now, during this difficult time. But there are instances when I have to take my own encouragement, as well. Relax, I tell myself. It will all be okay.

The normal, daily challenges are enough. There are days I want to run with scissors through the house. And now there's even more added into the mix. Every day, the news and social media hit us with more bad reports. A world-wide epidemic is happening that newscasters and healthcare workers predict will only get worse. We are inundated with instructions of what to do and not to do, conflicting advice.

Yes, I am weary and burdened. Now is the time I have to settle myself down and remember. Remember all the times that Jesus has been right there, waiting for me, calling me. Instead of dwelling on the panic, I quiet my mind. I'll sit in my favorite chair or maybe even take a walk outside.

All the chaos disappears. The bumpy, treacherous road ends in His presence. I have arrived at my destination. He calls me to lay down every burden at His feet. I soak up the atmosphere in the throne room. The wonderful fragrant aroma of holiness surrounds me and I am at ease. This is a place where I can pour out my heart. Let anxieties spill out like a bucket of runoff water full of leaves and sticks and soot. He understands. Anxiety and uncertainty evaporate into a wisp. I give Him every fear. He is my rest.

-Connie Clyburn

PRAYER:

Dear Lord, Thank you for loving me. I am weary and heavily burdened, but I've decided to give it all to you. Help me now to relax in the rest you have for me. I fall into your arms and trust you with my life. In Jesus Name. Amen.

“*I* will both lay me down in peace, and sleep: for thou, Lord, only makest me dwell in safety.” Psalm 4:8

AS A LITTLE GIRL, I loved building my cocoon of a safe space on the living room couch.

I would pull a straight back dining chair close to the side. Then I would drape a thin summer blanket over the back of the chair and extend it over the back of the couch, creating a cozy tent world of comfort.

The thin blanket was colorful and soft rays of sunlight would filter through and cover me with a rainbow of promise. Propping up a few cushy pillows inside finished it off and I recall settling in and drifting off to sleep for a midday nap.

I long for that place of safety today as the world around me is in turmoil. After a difficult day, I go to bed hoping for a restful night but my eyes are wide open and the mind is whirling with thoughts. I wonder if things will ever get back to normal.

All I want to do is pull the covers over my head and land in a sweet far-off dreamland. Maybe when I wake up things will look different. Yes, I need my childhood tent world of protection once again.

The Lord promises us peace as we lay down because He is the only One who is able to keep us in that sweet space of refuge. Better than any childish creations, He will build a tent of protection around us so we may rest in Him.

-Cynthia A. Lovely

PROMISE:

If sleep becomes difficult, we can turn our wayward thoughts into a prayer and recite scriptures of promise to increase our faith. Ultimately, the Lord is the only One who can promise for us to be settled in safely. He will sing us a soft lullaby and lull us into peace. Sweet dreams...

“A merry heart doeth good like a medicine, but a broken spirit drieth the bones.” Proverbs 17:22

TAKE two laughs and call me in the morning.

I'd like to leave the doctor's office with that prescription – that's a laugh in itself.

The fact is, God wants us to have a good knee slapper every day. He put the laugh in us and it's important to not lose sight of that, especially in trying times. Laughing is therapeutic. That verse even says a broken spirit dries the bones.

I sure don't want to walk around with creaky, brittle bones. I'm going to laugh every chance I get. And I want to help other people find joy in their lives so they can enjoy every day.

I say that I like to look for the funny in every situation. It is good to find joy in life's circumstance. Yes, even in the difficult times. It's not simply a matter of “positive thinking” or “mind over matter” – it's God's way.

Don't think for a minute that God didn't laugh at some of the Hebrew children's antics. He was angry with them at times, but I think He laughed a lot, too. And you know the apostles had the occasional laugh with Jesus, sitting around eating supper or planning His next ministry outing.

There is something to laugh at every day. A good laugh does you good and makes a bad day brighter. I always feel better and my outlook is lighter when I get the giggles.

I'm going to allow myself to have fun and laugh. I hope you will too.

-Connie Clyburn

PRAYER:

Dear Lord, Thank you for giving us a sense of humor. How it helps us to get through life. You thought of everything, even the laugh. I praise you for the wondrous creation you made when you made us, your children. Now I will find something to be joyful about every day. In Jesus Name. Amen.

THE STORY

Cynthia wrote the first devotion during the pandemic and then started another. Once she got rolling along, she had a brilliant thought. Why not put together a booklet of about 30 devotions to encourage people during these difficult times? Well, why not. However, realizing this is a timely topic and it would need to be done quickly she had another thought: maybe it was time to invite someone else to join this project.

First thought was Connie - because Connie would say yes. With Michelle Medlock Adams as mentor to both of us, we were well trained to immediately say yes...when offered any decent writing project. Say yes, and figure it out later. Connie said yes. (We're still figuring it out.)

The North and the South joined together and this is the end result. Connie is from Tennessee and Cynthia from New York so their experiences with the current crisis are different, along with their accents and their pace of life. But they are best writing pals and they do agree on the power and presence of God and that Jesus is truly the only source of peace and promise.

We sincerely hope the devotions are an encouragement and blessing to you at this time.

BIO: Cynthia A. Lovely is a freelance writer, musician and minister's wife. She has been published in Chicken Soup for the Soul books, Catholic Forester, LIVE, Sasee, Tea Time and Romantic Homes, among others. She is a reporter for The Good News New York. She has completed a women's contemporary novel and a Christmas novella. Cynthia is a member of American Christian Fiction Writers, and she attends Blue Ridge Mountains Christian Writers Conference. She is forever grateful for the God-gift of her husband, along with the gain of a lovely signature. You may contact her at cllyrics@gmail.com or www.cynthialovely.com

BIO: Connie S. Clyburn is a freelance writer, blogger and editor of East Tennessee Christian Voice. Her children's book, Willy The Silly-Haired Snowman, was published in 2010. Another children's book is currently in the works. Connie loves to attend Blue Ridge Mountains Christian Writers Conference when her schedule allows it. She enjoys singing in her church's music ministry and motorcycling the back roads near their rural home with her husband. You may contact her at bubwardleon@gmail.com She is also the famous doublewide gal at www.wisdomfromthedoublewide.blog

