November 1st 2026

WHEN MONDAY COMES

Faith for the Week Ahead

Please take this home and use it during the week.

Sunday worship is not meant to stay in the sanctuary.

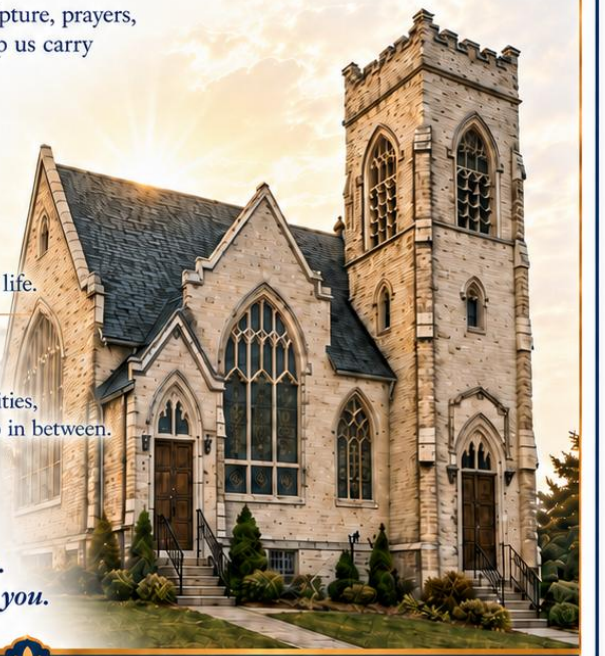
Each week, When Monday Comes offers Scripture, prayers, reflections, and simple encouragement to help us carry faith into everyday life.

- Read it with your morning coffee.
- Use a prayer before bed.
- Think about the weekly question.
- Share a thought with someone else.
- Let God speak in the ordinary places of life.

Faith is not only for Sunday morning.
Faith is for Monday decisions, Tuesday worries, Wednesday conversations, Thursday responsibilities, Friday weariness, Saturday hopes, and every step in between.

So please take this home, keep it nearby, and when Monday comes, remember:

God is still with you.
Christ is still calling you.
The Spirit is still working in you.



United Presbyterian Church of Whitinsville

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51 Cottage Street • Whitinsville, MA 01588
Sunday Worship at 10:30 a.m. • https://whitinpres.org

Another View
Who Are You Calling a Saint?

Scripture: 1 John 3:1–3; Matthew 5:1–12

November 1 is All Saints' Day. It also happens to be my 72nd birthday.

Now, before anyone gets the wrong idea, I'm reasonably certain the church didn't establish All Saints' Day to celebrate my arrival on earth. In fact, considering some of the things I've done over the past 72 years, I suspect several people could provide convincing evidence against my qualifications!

When we hear the word *saint*, many of us picture someone in a stained-glass window, perhaps with a halo, who lived an extraordinary life and always seemed to know exactly what God wanted them to do.

But I've been thinking about ordinary people whose examples have stayed with me. They weren't famous or perfect, but their kindness, encouragement, and concern for others sometimes taught me more about Christian living than a dozen sermons.

They showed kindness when anger would have been easier, encouraged rather than belittled, and cared about people who could do nothing for them in return.

One of those people, for me, wore a battalion chief's uniform.

A Chief Who Left an Impression

Years ago, I worked with a battalion chief who was one of the finest people I've ever known.

He was strict. He expected us to do our jobs correctly, follow procedures, and give our best effort. And he wasn't reluctant to correct someone who made a mistake.

Believe me, he had plenty of opportunities to correct me!

But he corrected mistakes without embarrassing anyone. He wanted us to learn, improve, and become better firefighters. He was positive, encouraging, and genuinely concerned about those under his command.

You wanted to do your best for him because you knew he wanted the best for you.

And his concern didn't stop with the firefighters.

He cared about the people we served, not just while their homes were burning or they needed an ambulance, but afterward, when the emergency vehicles had gone home and their problems hadn't necessarily disappeared.

He started a program to follow up with patients after ambulance calls. I volunteered to join him because watching him put people at ease was like watching a firefighter, therapist, and social worker all in one.

He also developed a program using fire department equipment to fill residents' swimming pools quickly. Residents paid for the water, but their families first had to attend a children's drowning-prevention class.

He knew swimming pools could be dangerous for young children. Some people objected to the program, so we did much of the work on our days off.

During the time we operated that program, we didn't have a single pool-related drowning. What mattered to him wasn't whether everyone liked the idea. It was protecting children. And we enjoyed doing it.

He also had a wonderful sense of humor. When waving from a fire truck, he reminded us to make sure the children could see all five fingers!

He persuaded me to play a character called Dwebble, smashing cakes with a mallet at a fundraiser, and even convinced me to dress as a woman for a firefighter's wedding fundraiser.

Picture me at six-foot-one and 270 pounds in a dress, wig, makeup, and fire boots.

I insisted on the fire boots. A man has to maintain some dignity.

Yes, photographs exist. No, they will not be appearing in this publication.

But his life wasn't without tremendous sorrow. He lost his only daughter and took on the responsibility of raising his three grandchildren.

I can't pretend to know everything he experienced privately. Grief is complicated, and faith doesn't make losing someone we love any less painful.

What I witnessed was his continued concern for others, his commitment to his family, and his willingness to serve despite the difficulties life had placed before him.

Even after I moved to another department, we remained close friends. And I tried to carry much of what he taught me into my later years in the fire service and emergency management.

A Question People Kept Asking

I knew he was a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, though many firefighters probably didn't know what church he attended. He rarely discussed religion and never pushed his beliefs on anyone.

Yet more than once, after he'd helped someone during a difficult call, the person would ask me: "Is your battalion chief some kind of minister?"

I'd tell them no, he was a firefighter.

He hadn't preached a sermon or mentioned his church. He had simply treated them with kindness, patience, dignity, and genuine concern.

He didn't have to tell people what he believed. Something about the way he treated them made people curious about what he believed.

Even when firehouse language became a little crude, he wouldn't embarrass anyone.

Instead, he might gently remind us to speak in a way we could be proud of, avoiding things we wouldn't want our children or families to hear.

Then he'd change the subject or go about his business. No lecture. No public humiliation. Just an invitation to do better.

And that eventually made me wonder about something. Would anyone ever ask a similar question about me? Not necessarily whether I was a minister. But would they recognize something of Christ's example in the way I treated them?

What If Someone Gave Out a Survey?

Imagine someone conducting a survey of our coworkers, neighbors, friends, family, and even strangers we've encountered.

What would they say about us?

Were we kind?
Did we listen when someone needed to talk?
Did we treat people respectfully when we disagreed?
When someone made a mistake, did we encourage improvement or make them feel foolish?
Did people generally feel better or worse after spending time with us?

And if we spoke about believing in God, did our actions give them any reason to believe our faith made a difference?

We can't please everyone. Following Christ doesn't guarantee agreement or admiration.

But there's a difference between wanting to be popular and caring about how our words and behavior affect other people.

It's easy to tell people what we believe. The more difficult question is whether they can recognize those beliefs in the way we live.

Footprints in the Sand

Have you ever walked along a beach and looked back at the footprints you've left behind?

Some are close to the water. A wave comes along, washes over them, and they're gone.

Others are farther up the beach, beyond the reach of the tide. Those impressions may remain long after we've walked away.

People can be like that, too.

We may forget hundreds of ordinary conversations yet remember the teacher who encouraged us when we were struggling, the supervisor who believed in us, the friend who stayed beside us during a difficult time, or the stranger whose kindness brightened an otherwise miserable day.

Sadly, harsh words can leave impressions that last just as long.

The person who spoke them may have forgotten the conversation years ago, but the hurt remains.

We've probably left some of those impressions ourselves. I know I have.

There have been times when my temper got ahead of my judgment, or I cared more about winning an argument than understanding the person standing in front of me.

And that's where God's grace becomes so important.

God's grace isn't limited to the footprints the waves can reach.

Through Christ, forgiveness is possible even for mistakes whose consequences haven't disappeared.

We may still need to apologize, make things right, or rebuild trust. Some hurts take a long time to heal. But our worst moments don't have to determine every impression we leave afterward.

Grace gives us another opportunity to choose our words more carefully, treat people kindlier, and begin leaving better footprints.

What Does Our Faith Look Like?

In Matthew 5, Jesus speaks of those who mourn, the merciful, and the peacemakers.

The Beatitudes challenge many of the things the world considers signs of success and importance.

And 1 John 3:1 reminds us of something remarkable: **God calls us His children.**

Not because we've accumulated enough good deeds or earned an impressive spiritual résumé, but because of His love.

Grace comes first.

Our actions are one way that gratitude for God's grace becomes visible in the lives of others.

We can disagree without cruelty, correct someone without humiliation, and be strong without intimidating others.

And when our tempers get the best of us, we can be just as willing to apologize as we were to speak in anger.

Before speaking, we might ask: **Will my words reflect Christ's example?**

Not because Jesus never spoke difficult truths. He certainly did.

But because there's a difference between speaking the truth out of love and using the truth as a weapon.

We don't have to be ministers, gifted speakers, or extraordinary people to demonstrate God's love. Sometimes our strongest witness is simply how we treat the person standing in front of us.

When Monday Comes

My battalion chief didn't need to tell me he was a good man. I saw it in how he treated others, and years later, I'm still trying to follow his example.

I doubt he'd ever want to be called a saint. But his kindness, patience, and service left a lasting impression on me. Isn't that one of the ways ordinary saints influence us, by leaving an impression or example worth following.

His lessons followed me into other departments and communities.

Perhaps the best way to honor the people who have influenced our lives is to put their lessons into practice—and then pass them along.

So, this All-Saints' Day, think about someone whose example helped strengthen your faith.

Someone who demonstrated kindness when it wasn't required.
Someone who encouraged you when you needed encouragement.
Someone whose actions helped you better understand what it means to live your faith.

Then ask yourself:
What am I doing with the lessons that person taught me?
What kind of impression am I leaving on the people whose lives cross mine?

We won't get every step right. God's grace doesn't depend upon perfection.

But tomorrow gives us another opportunity to walk a little more closely in Christ's footsteps.

Perhaps years from now, someone will remember a kindness we showed without even realizing how much it meant to them.

And considering it's my birthday, I can't think of a much better present than that.

Although, if anyone remembers the two weekends I spent dressed as an Egyptian dancing the Macarena at our fire department's Halloween haunted house, I'd appreciate it if they'd let the waves wash away **that** particular footprint.

Some impressions really don't need to last forever!

Faith Between Sundays
Weekly Reflections: November 1–7, 2026

The Impressions We Leave Behind

On All-Saints Day, we remember those whose faith and kindness influenced us, often without their knowing it. Just as they left impressions on us, we leave them on people we encounter.

This week, consider how faith becomes visible through listening, encouragement, correction, and care—not to earn God's approval but because His grace changes how we live.

This week, let's think about how our faith can become visible through the way we speak, listen, encourage, correct, and care for others. Not because we're trying to earn God's approval, but because His love and grace should make a difference in how we live.

Prayer for the Week

Heavenly Father, thank You for the people who have helped us understand Your love through their words and actions. Help us recognize the influence we have on others. Give us patience when we're frustrated, kindness when someone is struggling, and humility when we make mistakes. May the impressions we leave reflect more of Christ's love each day.
Amen

Sunday, November 1 — More Than a Halo

Scripture: 1 John 3:1–3; Matthew 5:1–12

In the Beatitudes Jesus honors mercy, peacemaking, and people who mourn or seek righteousness. In 1 John we learn that God calls us His children because of His love, not our perfect record.

Being merciful might mean giving someone another chance. Being a peacemaker might mean refusing to keep an argument going. Showing compassion might simply mean sitting beside someone who's having a difficult day.

Today's Faithful Step: Remember someone whose kindness or faith made a lasting difference in your life. Think about one quality you admired in that person and how you might demonstrate it yourself.

Prayer: Lord, thank You for calling us Your children. Help us recognize the ordinary opportunities You give us to show mercy, compassion, and love. Amen.

Monday, November 2 — What Do People See?

Scripture: Matthew 5:14–16

Jesus wants our light to point others toward God, not toward our own importance. Our faith is visible when we treat a difficult coworker, a store clerk, or someone needing help with patience and kindness.

We don't need to announce our faith in every conversation. People may forget what we said but remember how we treated them.

But what happens when someone sees how we treat a difficult coworker, speak to a store clerk, or respond to a person who needs help?

Sometimes our strongest opportunity to demonstrate our faith comes through patience, honesty, kindness, and a willingness to listen. People may not remember everything we say, but they often remember how we made them feel. And that's worth considering when Monday comes.

Today's Faithful Step: Pay attention to how you treat the people you encounter today, especially those who can do nothing for you in return. Try to leave one person feeling a little more encouraged.

Prayer: Lord, help my actions reflect the faith I profess. May others experience something of Your kindness through the way I treat them. Amen.

Tuesday, November 3 — All Five Fingers

Scripture: Ephesians 4:29

Paul reminds us that our words should be useful for building others up and offering grace to those who hear them. That's a pretty good standard to carry into our everyday conversations.

Words can encourage someone or help them learn. But sarcasm, anger, and thoughtless remarks can also remain with a person for years.

We all get tired or frustrated. Before answering, we can ask whether our words help the situation; if we've caused hurt, an apology can matter more than winning the disagreement.

But perhaps we could learn to pause a little more often and ask whether what we're about to say will help the situation or make it worse. And if we do say something hurtful, an apology may be the most important words we say all day.

We don't have to win every disagreement. Sometimes the better outcome is preserving someone's dignity while still speaking honestly.

Today's Faithful Step: Before responding to something frustrating, ask yourself whether your words will help or hurt. And if you've recently spoken harshly to someone, consider offering an apology.

Prayer: Lord, help me use my words to encourage rather than discourage. Give me patience when I'm frustrated and humility when I need to apologize. Amen.

Wednesday, November 4 — Correcting Without Crushing

Scripture: Galatians 6:1–2

Paul tells believers that when someone is caught in wrongdoing, those who seek to help should restore that person with gentleness. He also reminds us to carry one another's burdens.

Correction is sometimes necessary, but there's a difference between guiding someone and humiliating them. Which teachers or supervisors helped you improve by explaining what went wrong and encouraging another try?

Gentleness doesn't remove accountability; it changes how we offer it. We also need humility to accept corrections ourselves. And Paul's instruction to watch ourselves matters, too. We should remember that we're also capable of making mistakes and needing correction. After all, none of us has reached the point where we have nothing left to learn.

Today's Faithful Step: If someone makes a mistake today, consider how you can help them improve without making them feel foolish. And if someone corrects you, try to listen before becoming defensive.

Prayer: Lord, help me be patient with the mistakes of others and humble about my own. Teach me to correct with kindness and accept correction with grace. Amen.

Thursday, November 5 — After the Sirens Fade

Scripture: Philippians 2:3–4

Paul asks us to notice others' needs even when we're busy. During a crisis people may gather to help, but their attention often fades once their own lives return to normal.

It's easy to overlook someone else's difficulties, especially when their problems aren't immediately visible.

For the grieving or recovering person, life may never be quite the same. Sometimes the most meaningful kindness comes weeks later, after everybody else has moved on.

When the immediate crisis occurs, people often gather around to help. There may be visits, telephone calls, meals, and offers of assistance.

A call, an invitation to lunch, practical help—or asking 'How are you doing?' and staying to listen—can remind someone they're not being ignored. We can't solve every problem or carry every burden. But we can make sure people don't feel forgotten.

Today's Faithful Step: Think of someone who experienced a difficult situation recently. Reach out and let them know you haven't forgotten them.

Prayer: Lord, help me recognize the struggles others may still be carrying after everyone else has moved on. Show me how to offer encouragement and practical help. Amen.

Friday, November 6 — Footprints Worth Following

Scripture: Hebrews 10:23–25

Hebrews urges us to encourage one another toward love and good works. Encouragement takes neither authority nor an impressive title.

A child, coworker, or stranger can offer words we remember for decades, often without knowing the effect they had.

A child can encourage an adult. A new employee can teach an experienced supervisor something valuable. A stranger can offer kindness that someone remembers for the rest of their life.

Think of someone who believed in you when you struggled. You may still remember their words even if they've forgotten the conversation.

You might remember their words clearly, even though they've probably forgotten the conversation.

The impression can last much longer than the moment that created it.

We may not know how far our influence travels, but we can decide what kind of influence we'd like to have. And sometimes all it takes is helping someone believe they can keep going.

Today's Faithful Step: Encourage someone today. Thank a person whose example has helped you or tell someone who's struggling that you recognize their efforts.

Prayer: Lord, thank You for those who have encouraged me. Help me become someone whose words and actions give others hope and confidence. Amen.

Saturday, November 7 — A New Set of Footprints

Scripture: Lamentations 3:22–23

Even in Lamentations, a book of sorrow, we're told God's steadfast love and mercy are new every morning.

That doesn't mean every morning brings an easier life or that yesterday's problems simply disappear. But it reminds us that difficult circumstances and past failures don't have to be the end of our story.

We've remembered kindnesses to be thankful for and perhaps actions we'd change. We can't undo every mistake; sometimes we must apologize or repair the damage we've caused, but grace allows us to begin again.

Tomorrow brings new people, conversations, decisions, and chances to demonstrate kindness. We won't get them all right, but we can keep learning from Christ's examples.

Today's Faithful Step: Think back over the week. Remember one occasion when you left a positive impression and one situation you might handle differently next time. Thank God for His grace and ask for help taking a better step tomorrow.

Prayer: Lord, thank You that Your mercy is new every morning. Help me learn from yesterday, live faithfully today, and leave better footprints tomorrow. Amen.

From the Pew

Don't Drop Your Peanuts… Unless an Elephant Is Chasing You!

Scripture: Psalm 34:18; 1 John 3:1; Matthew 5:5

Elephants Never Forget

My father invented ROBO, an automatic car wash, so I grew up around machinery and some rather unusual promotions.

In 1968, someone decided to demonstrate how gentle the ROBO system was by washing a real elephant!

The advertising slogan was **"Elephants never forget… so don't forget to wash your car!"**

They advertised the demonstration, invited the public, handed out bags of peanuts, and even attracted the local television news.

Now, I don't know who first suggested putting an elephant through an automatic car wash, but I'm reasonably certain that person had never asked an elephant for its opinion.

And because of that promotion, I ended up running for my life, chased by a very large, very frightened, and very unhappy elephant.

The slogan *Elephants never forget—don't forget to wash your car* took on a different meaning for me: **Elephants never forget—and don't ever mess with elephants!**

The Importance of Being Important

I should confess that I wasn't exactly an innocent bystander.

I was wearing my bright ROBO T-shirt, and as the owner's son, I rather enjoyed letting people know I was somebody important. While the spectators stood in the designated viewing area, I chose a position directly outside the wash-bay exit.

After all, my father owned the operation. Surely, I could stand wherever I wanted!

Unfortunately, having the privilege to stand somewhere and having the good judgment to stand there are two entirely different things.

I was about to discover that distinction rather quickly.

Everything went well until the spray reached the elephant's backside.

Apparently, elephants have strong opinions about water being sprayed on sensitive parts of their anatomy.

The elephant trumpeted and decided the demonstration was over. Immediately!

He headed straight for the exit.

The trainer was dragged along behind him like a water-skier without a boat.

And standing directly in that exit was a rather proud young boy wearing a ROBO T-shirt.

I wanted to be noticed, and I certainly got my wish. Unfortunately, the one who noticed me most was the elephant!

The Fastest Pudgy Kid in Town

I was a pudgy kid, not particularly known for my athletic ability.

But when several thousand pounds of unhappy elephant comes charging toward you, it's amazing how quickly your athletic potential can improve!

I ran.

The elephant came close enough to take several swings at me with his trunk.

I had a promotional bag of peanuts in my hand, and somewhere in the emergency-management portion of my young brain, a plan developed.

Throw the peanuts!

Perhaps the elephant would stop for a snack instead of continuing after me.

I'd never heard of an elephant eating a young boy, but I had absolutely no interest in becoming the first documented case.

I don't know whether the peanuts helped. I was far too busy running to evaluate the effectiveness of my emergency plan.

Unfortunately, the elephant struck a projecting decorative panel and was cut during the commotion, but fortunately, he was not seriously hurt and survived.

Looking back, I feel sorry for him. He was a frightened animal caught up in a publicity stunt he hadn't volunteered for. At the time, however, I was considerably more concerned about my own survival.

And here's an interesting footnote, the promotion was a great success.

In 1970, ROBO launched its **"Win the Elephant of Your Dreams"** promotion. The grand prize was a live elephant delivered to the winner's home—or $4,000 for someone who preferred a backyard without an elephant.

The advertising promotion even featured the same elephant that had chased me!

Apparently, while I was trying to forget the entire incident, the advertising department was turning my childhood nightmare into a celebrity.

Why Me?

For years, I wondered why that elephant had chosen me. Eventually, an uncomfortable answer occurred to me: **I had put myself directly in his path.**

My desire to look important had contributed considerably to my predicament.

Sometimes our troubles really do involve decisions we made without thinking carefully about the consequences.

But we need to be cautious about applying that explanation to every hardship.

When someone receives a frightening diagnosis, loses a loved one, or faces circumstances entirely outside their control, it would be wrong to assume they somehow caused their suffering.

In John 9, Jesus encountered a man who had been blind from birth. His disciples wanted to know whose sin had caused the blindness—the man's or his parents'.

Jesus rejected both explanations. The disciples were looking for someone to blame. Jesus directed their attention toward the work of God.

We still ask similar questions when life becomes frightening.

Why me?
What did I do to deserve this?
Is God angry with me?

Sometimes our own poor judgment contributes to our difficulties. Sometimes someone else's actions hurt us. And sometimes terrible things happen for reasons we simply do not understand.

But **God doesn't need to send an elephant to get our attention.**

And trouble is not automatically evidence of divine punishment. Our mistakes may have consequences, but they don't mean God has stopped loving us.

God Hasn't Forgotten Us

Psalm 34:18 reminds us that God is near to the brokenhearted.

And 1 John 3:1 tells us something even more remarkable: God calls us His children.

We matter to Him.

Not because we've accomplished something impressive.
Not because we have an important title.
And certainly not because our father owns a car wash!

We matter because of God's love.

Jesus says in Matthew 5:5, **"Blessed are the meek."**

Meekness isn't weakness. It includes humility—the recognition that we don't have to make ourselves more important than the people around us.

That's a lesson I could have used before positioning myself in front of an elephant.

We all appreciate being recognized. But when our desire to be noticed becomes more important than doing what is right or wise, trouble may not be far behind.

Fortunately, God's grace means our mistakes don't have to define the rest of our lives.

We can acknowledge where we went wrong, take responsibility, make amends when necessary, and try to make wiser decisions next time.

Grace doesn't promise that every consequence will disappear.

But neither does God abandon us because we've made a mistake.

And when suffering comes through no fault of our own, His love remains just as certain.

Faith isn't believing that nothing frightening will ever come charging toward us. It's trusting that God hasn't forgotten us when it does.

Some Memories Never Leave

I should probably confess that my relationship with elephants has never completely recovered. Even after all these years, I avoid elephant exhibits when visiting the zoo.

I wasn't particularly enthusiastic about my daughter choosing an elephant on a merry-go-round, either. Wood, plastic, fiberglass—it made no difference!

I had developed what I considered a perfectly reasonable distrust of elephants, and I wasn't interested in testing whether that included amusement-park equipment.

Of course, I don't blame the elephant. He was frightened, and I had put myself somewhere I shouldn't have been.

But some memories stay with us. The frightening experiences we've had can change the way we see the world, sometimes long after the danger has passed.

They may make us more cautious. They may remind us of mistakes we don't want to repeat.

But they don't have to change what we believe about God's love. God remains merciful, even when life doesn't turn out as we expected.

When Monday Comes

When Monday comes, remember that difficulties don't mean God has forgotten you.

Some troubles arrive without warning. Others follow decisions we wish we had made differently. Either way, God's grace remains available, and we can bring our fears, regrets, and needs to Him.

We don't have to prove how important we are: **We're already important to God.**

The old ROBO slogan was: *"Elephants never forget… so don't forget to wash your car!"*

After 58 years, I have my own version:
Elephants may never forget, but neither does God forget His children.

And one final piece of practical advice. If an angry elephant ever chases you, don't worry about your peanuts.

Throw them! God will understand.

As for me, I've occasionally wondered whether that elephant might still remember the pudgy kid in the ROBO T-shirt. Back then, I was young, had two good hips, and could run considerably faster.

Today, I've got a new hip, a troublesome knee, and absolutely no desire to discover whether I can still outrun an elephant.

So, if you ever see an elderly elephant staring at a fellow with a cane, please don't point me out. **Some reunions are better left to the imagination!**

"Have something from your pew? A story, question, observation, or moment when faith showed up during the week? We'd love to hear it."

A Prayer When Life Feels Bigger Than We Can Handle

Heavenly Father, sometimes life becomes overwhelming. Problems seem to arrive faster than we can solve them, and we find ourselves frightened, exhausted, or uncertain about what tomorrow may bring.

Lord, You know the burdens we carry. You know the worries we speak about and the fears we keep hidden from everyone else.

You know when we are trying to be strong for our families, even though somewhere inside we are struggling ourselves.

Help us remember that we do not have to face everything alone. We don't have to pretend we're not afraid, and we don't have to find every answer before coming to You.

When our problems seem bigger than our strength, remind us that Your grace has not grown smaller. When we cannot see a way forward, give us enough light to take the next step.

When we become discouraged, give us patience. When fear overwhelms us, quiet our hearts with Your peace. And Father, help us recognize the people You place along our path—those who offer a helping hand, a kind word, or simply the comfort of staying beside us.

We know that prayer does not guarantee an easy tomorrow. Some problems take time, some wounds heal slowly, and some answers may never come as we hoped.

But through it all, remind us that **we are still Your children, still loved, still remembered, and never beyond the reach of Your grace.**

Help us place tomorrow in Your hands and find the courage to live faithfully today.

In the name of Jesus Christ, our Savior and our hope, we pray. **Amen.**

Wisdom From Bird Dog

Too Big to Handle?

Scripture: Psalm 46:1; Philippians 4:6–7

Bird Dog recently met a new friend named Rocky.

Rocky is an older Great Dane, and describing her as a big dog would be something of an understatement.

In fact, Rocky is about four times Bird Dog's size. Standing beside her, Bird Dog looks like she might have been included as an accessory!

When they first met, I wondered how Bird Dog would react.

After all, Rocky is a very large dog, and if she decided to become unfriendly, Bird Dog could have a rather serious problem on her paws.

But Bird Dog didn't seem concerned.

"Rocky, before we become friends, I have one question. Do you eat small dogs?"

She didn't bark, run away, or try to convince Rocky that she was actually a much larger dog than she appeared.

She simply walked up, gave Rocky a friendly sniff, and made a new friend.

As far as I could tell, Bird Dog never even considered how much bigger Rocky was.

Apparently, nobody had explained to her that this was a situation requiring a risk assessment, an evacuation plan, and possibly a mutual aid agreement!

And that got me thinking.

Of course, Rocky wasn't actually a problem. She was simply a very large dog.

Sometimes we look at something unfamiliar or intimidating and imagine the worst before we've even discovered what we're facing.

But other times, the problems in front of us really are frightening. They may threaten our health, our families, or everything we've worked to build.

Faith doesn't require us to pretend those problems are smaller than they are. It reminds us that they aren't bigger than God's ability to help us face them.

When Problems Seem Bigger Than We Are

How often do we encounter problems that seem so large they consume nearly every thought we have?

An illness, a family problem, financial difficulties, or an unexpected loss can leave us feeling overwhelmed.

And some of those problems really are enormous. They aren't imaginary, and they can't be solved simply by telling ourselves to stop worrying.

Sometimes our fears become so consuming that we forget something important.

We may not be able to handle everything we're facing, but that doesn't mean we have to face it without God.

Psalm 46:1 reminds us that God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.

Notice that Scripture doesn't promise we'll never experience trouble.

It reminds us where we can turn when trouble comes.

And in Philippians 4:6–7, Paul encourages us to bring our concerns to God through prayer.

That's important because when something frightening happens, prayer isn't always our first reaction.

We worry. We imagine everything that might go wrong. We try to solve the problem ourselves.

And sometimes we become so occupied with the size of the problem that we forget to turn to the One who has promised to hear us.

God doesn't need to throw lightning bolts or darken the sky to remind us He's listening.

His answers are often quieter than that.

Sometimes the problem changes. Sometimes someone comes along to help. Sometimes we find strength we didn't know we had.

And sometimes the difficulty remains, but God's grace helps us face another day.

And sometimes God's answer comes through another person.

A friend who calls at exactly the right time. Someone who drives us to a medical appointment. A neighbor who brings a meal. A person who sits beside us when there isn't anything useful to say.

Perhaps that's worth remembering on All Saints' Day.

The people who reflect God's love in our lives don't always do extraordinary things. Sometimes they simply show up when we need them.

We may have been praying for God to help us, without realizing that someone standing beside us was already part of that help.

Prayer doesn't mean we stop trying to solve our problems or refuse the assistance others offer.

It means we bring God into the very problems we've been trying so hard to manage alone.

And it doesn't mean prayer is a magic formula that guarantees the outcome we want.

Sometimes prayers are answered in ways we recognize immediately. Sometimes we understand only much later. And sometimes we continue praying without knowing why things haven't changed.

That's difficult. Especially when we are praying about something that matters deeply to us.

But even when we don't understand the answer, we can trust that God hears us and has not forgotten us.

A Lesson from Two Friends

Looking at those two dogs, I realized that Bird Dog hadn't allowed Rocky's enormous size to interfere with the possibility of a wonderful friendship.

Maybe there's a lesson in that for us.

Sometimes we spend so much time imagining what might happen that we forget to deal with what is actually happening.

But even when the danger is real, we don't have to allow fear to make every decision.

We don't need to pretend our problems are small.

We don't need to be ashamed when we're frightened.

And we certainly don't need to have everything figured out before asking God for help.

Sometimes the first step of faith is simply remembering that we can pray, even when the problem seems bigger than anything we can handle.

We may still need medical care, practical help, difficult conversations, or the courage to make changes.

Prayers don’t replace those things. It helps us face them while remembering that we are not alone.

Of course, Bird Dog probably wasn't thinking about any of this.

She was just happy to have made a new friend.

And knowing Bird Dog, she probably figured that a dog as big as Rocky might have some pretty impressive treats!

Bird Dog's Wisdom

"When something seems too big to handle, you don't have to pretend you're not afraid. Bring your worries to God. You may not know how things will turn out, but you don't have to face them alone."

A Question to Carry With You

Is there something weighing heavily on your heart that you've been trying to handle alone?

Have you taken time to bring it honestly before God in prayer?

And might God already have placed someone in your life who could help you carry part of that burden?