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# THESE MOMENTS

## CLAIMING TIME FOR SPIRITUAL GROWTH

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### Making Something out of Nothing

*Jeff Cook*

It was a memorable post-sermon comment!

As I greeted people after a morning worship service, one person commented on the sermon, saying, “It never ceases to amaze me how you can make something out of nothing!”

She immediately looked flustered and said, “Oh, I didn’t mean that as it sounded!”

I loved her comment. I believe she was saying that something I had said had helped her hear something new in a familiar Scripture passage—that there are multiple depths to be discovered in our faith stories.

There are many aspects to reading and studying Scripture. I think we should be aware of the historical contexts in which Scriptures were written. When reading the Gospels or the epistles of Paul, for example, it is theologically insightful to know that both Jesus and Caesar were being called Son of God and Lord.

As we try to read Scripture within its historical context, we also need to read Scripture in *our* historical context. We need to read it in *These Days!* We need to do so because we are reading about God, about people’s experiences of God, about what God has done. We need to do so because the God about whom we read is not done doing! God is not finished with creation or with creating.

So we read with faith, with imagination, with prayer, and we allow stories and words to dance their way into our experience, to open eyes and hearts and imagina-

tions to seeing Christ in the world of these days. We welcome God to continually expand our capacity to love—to love the Christ in others; to love those of different ethnicity, race, gender identity, age, and sexual orientation; to love those of other faith traditions and life experiences; and, in this faithful welcoming of God in our living, to discover that new creation is present in and among us.

As we read these devotions, let us do so with our prayers that God might help us to make something out of what appeared to be nothing, to rediscover the Heart at the heart of all creation, and to find in *These Days* renewed faith for the living of these days.

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*Lord, help us to appreciate the many ways Scripture has been speaking to people across the millennia, and may your sacred text speak to us where we are today. Amen.*

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## SUGGESTIONS FOR USING THE DEVOTIONS

**Pray** for God's enabling, that you be open to God's word for you today.

**Read** the Scripture twice.

1st—make it familiar to yourself.

2nd—watch for a word or phrase that arrests your attention.

**Meditate** on this word or phrase, or just sit quietly, breathing deeply and gently.

**Listen** attentively for God's word for you today.

**Read** the devotional reflection.

**Thank** God for the grace given.

**Consider** making an entry in a reflection diary or journal.

SURPRISING GRACE

2 KINGS 5:1-14

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## A Funny Story

*“Let him come to me, that he may learn that there is a prophet in Israel.”*

2 Kings 5:8b

It’s a funny story about power, protocol, and the presence of God. It’s a funny story about a powerful commander, bringing the ancient equivalent of tanks and missile launchers to consult a prophet. It’s a funny story about a king shredding his clothes when asked for power he doesn’t possess.

It’s a funny story about the royal protocol of sending expensive gifts to a king, and the prophet’s protocol of sending a servant to tell the commander to go jump in the river.

It’s a funny story about the presence of God in an uncredentialed captive girl who shares news of a prophet in Samaria, and the presence of God in unnamed servants who advise the commander to “do what the prophet says.”

It’s a funny story when the presence of God speaks to the powerful through those without any apparent power; those familiar with the alternative script of God’s uncontrolled healing power and audacious protocols.



*God, continue to tell us the funny stories of your power that is greater than all human power and protocol, showing up in the most unlikely places and prophets. Amen.*

SATURDAY, JULY 2, 2022

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SURPRISING GRACE

PSALM 30

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## Healing Help

*O LORD, you brought up my soul from Sheol,  
restored me to life.*

Psalm 30:3a

In 2017, I was diagnosed with depression. I began an eighteen-month medical leave. Depression manifests in many guises and expressions. I lost any sense of the presence of God in my life. I found myself incapable of praying. Both God and I seemed to have descended into a spiritual vacuum, to be on sabbatical from each other.

Healing came gradually with the support of family, friends, health care professionals, and a spiritual adviser. With healing came a new relationship with God. Somehow the absence of God brought forth, for me, a new awareness of the presence of God.

The writer of Psalm 30 praises God for delivering him out of the Pit. He celebrates that “weeping may linger for the night, but joy comes in the morning” (v. 5b), and that mourning can be turned to dancing (v. 11a).

Psalmists complain to God, lament to God, negotiate with God, and praise God, and they collectively witness to a faith that proclaims that, in presence and in absence, God is with us; God’s love enfolds us.



*God, may your healing grace sustain us when we experience both the summits and the valleys of life. Amen.*

Jeff Cook, Winnipeg, Manitoba

GOD IS AFOOT!  
COLOSSIANS 1:1–14

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## Hope Is Afoot!

*Just as it is bearing fruit and growing in the whole world, so it has been bearing fruit among yourselves from the day you heard it and truly comprehended the grace of God.*

Colossians 1:6

While it was Shakespeare who wrote “the game is afoot” (*King Henry IV*, part 1), it is Sherlock Holmes who usually gets the credit. When Holmes told Watson that the game is afoot, he meant that something was already present and unfolding. Biblical stories tell us God is afoot—God’s grace is present, active, and unfolding in this world.

Trusting that God is active in the world is what Christians call *hope*. Hope is trusting that there is more to reality than data suggests. Hope is trusting that God is always doing new things, always creating, always birthing new creation.

Hope is afoot when we plant a tree, shop for electric cars, affirm another’s gender identity, continuously expand our definition of who is our neighbor so that we expand the circle of those whom we love. Try starting each day in the spirit of Christ and the spirit of Holmes—start by texting someone a message: “Hope is afoot!”

*God, open our imaginations and deepen our faith to discern your Spirit afoot in this world, giving birth to a new world of peace and compassion. Amen.*

Jeff Cook, Winnipeg, Manitoba

GOD IS AFOOT!

LUKE 10:25–37

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Care Is Afoot!

*“Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.”*

Luke 10:35b

Today, as citizens of the United States celebrate Independence Day, the parable of the Good Samaritan calls us to lives of interdependence.

We know that the traveler from Samaria was good because he stopped to help the victim of a crime of theft and assault. The Samaritan helped because he was moved by compassion. He tended to the person's wounds, took him to an inn, stayed with him and aided him, and then paid for ongoing care and support and promised to return.

Who is my neighbor? My neighbor is the one who embraces as neighbor all whom God embraces as neighbor, the one who responds to suffering with compassion, the one who chooses to be in the company of the suffering rather than to avoid the suffering. A neighbor is one who knows that, in God's love, interdependence holds more healing and blessing than independence.



*God, let your love inspire us to love everyone as neighbor and to be neighbor to all whom we meet. Amen.*

Jeff Cook, Winnipeg, Manitoba

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GOD IS AFOOT!

AMOS 7:7–17

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## A Prophet Is Afoot!

*“The land is not able to bear all his words.”*

Amos 7:10b

Amaziah is the “professional” religious person who has access to King Jeroboam. Amaziah tells the king that Amos is spreading fake news.

In telling the king that “the land is not able to bear all his words,” Amaziah was saying, “You need to deal with this, either by exile or execution—whatever is the current preferred way of silencing your critics.” Amaziah confronts Amos and says that in this regime there is no place for alternative stories to that of imperial rule; only pro-administration comments are allowed here.

Jesus said that prophets are not welcome in their hometowns (Luke 4:24). Prophets are not welcome in many places, because prophets pay attention to God. They remind us of God’s vision, God’s dream for the world. They remind us that we can’t abuse God’s creation in pursuit of profit and leisure while also working to heal the planet. They remind us to love mercy and seek just relations. When prophets are afoot, God is calling for our attention.



*God, open our souls to the prophets in our midst. For the sake of the land, of this world, let us bear their words. Amen.*

Jeff Cook, Winnipeg, Manitoba

WEDNESDAY, JULY 6, 2022

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## GOD IS AFOOT!

PSALM 82

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### Justice Is Afoot!

*Give justice to the weak and the orphan.*

Psalm 82:3a

Psalm 82 doesn't tell us if God called an emergency meeting of the council, but it does tell us that God wasn't pleased with the council members.

The psalm offers an imaginative image of a divine council consisting of "the gods." If we let *gods* refer to any ideology or system that calls for loyalty, that promises salvation, that manages and controls our lives, then a contemporary council might include the gods of militarism, consumerism, and empire.

God calls the gods to account and reminds them of God's mission statement: "Give justice to the weak and the orphan, maintain the right of the lowly and the destitute. Rescue the weak and the needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked" (vv. 3–4).

God's justice is *not* "just us." God's justice is living in just relations, is living as one expression of God's creation, is living for the well-being of all God's creation. Psalm 82 invites us to imagine our mission statement, our life practices, as expressions of our justice-making God.



*God, expand our compassion so that we may be heralds of harmony in your creation. Amen.*

Jeff Cook, Winnipeg, Manitoba

GOD IS AFOOT!  
COLOSSIANS 1:1–14

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## Saints Are Afoot!

*To the saints and faithful brothers and sisters in  
Christ in Colossae.*

Colossians 1:2a

I have never received a letter that begins: “Dear Saint.” I suspect most of us have never received such a letter, or text, or email—unless we read Paul’s epistles to first-century faith communities and hear them as letters addressed to our faith communities.

Paul often began with the salutation “to the saints.” In the early church, *saint* didn’t refer to the super religious. *Saint* was another word for *Christian*, meaning “companion of Christ.”

Writing to the churches in Colossae, Paul defined the saints as those bearing fruit.

We aren’t called to be perfect (whatever that might mean) but to be fruitful, to bring to fruition the spirit of Christ in our midst.

Saints are recognized not so much by the glow around their heads as by the food shared by their hands, by time spent visiting in care facilities, by their welcoming and affirmation of God’s diversity of humanity, by their courageous compassion in being peacemakers. So next time you feel like looking at a saint, look in the mirror!



*God, awaken the saint in each of us! Amen.*

Jeff Cook, Winnipeg, Manitoba

