

2018
Volume 7

A Way in the Wilderness



**A Devotional Written
by Family and Friends
of Grace United Methodist Church**

A Note of Thanks

A Way in the Wilderness is a Lenten Devotional written by the friends and families of Grace United Methodist Church. These reflections and meditations come from the heart of the writers who were asked to share evidence of this truth with you. We hope you as the reader hear and see evidence of God working in your life and the lives of others through these stories.

Please use this devotional as a daily practice of reading, meditating, praying, and discovering new things about your relationship with God and others.

Many thanks and much appreciation goes first and foremost to the writers—you really wrote from your faith! We are deeply indebted to Dennis Dubois, parishioner and local artist, for the use of his artworks: “*A Way in the Wilderness*” and “*The Garden*” Also, we would like to thank Chris Dixon in helping to make this happen. Thank you all so much!

The Grace UMC Staff & Intentional Faith Development Team

Introduction

2018 Lent / Holy Week Celebrations

Please join us for worship and celebration this Lenten season.

Shrove Sunday Pancake Breakfast	February 11, 7:30 to 10:30 am
Ash Wednesday Soup/Salad Supper	February 14, 5:45 pm
Ash Wednesday Service	February 14, 7:30 pm
Lenten Wednesday Night Suppers	February 21, 5:45 pm February 28, 5:45 pm March 7, 5:45 pm March 14, 5:45 pm March 21, 5:45 pm
Palm Sunday Services <i>All worship services: 8:25 am, 9:45 am, and 11:00 am</i>	March 25
Maundy Thursday Service	March 29, 7:30 pm
Good Friday Service	March 30, 7:30 pm
Prayer Vigil (24 hours)	March 30-31, 8:30 pm
Easter Sunrise Service	April 1, 6:30 am
Easter Services <i>All worship services: 8:25 am, 9:45 am, and 11:00 am</i>	April 1
Confirmation Sunday <i>All worship services: 8:25 am, 9:45 am, and 11:00 am</i>	May 13
Change the World Day	May 19
Day of Pentecost Services <i>All worship services: 8:25 am, 9:45 am, and 11:00 am</i>	May 20

Cover Artwork by Dennis DuBois

I struggled with this: “A way in the wilderness?” A literal wilderness, a landscape? Perhaps “wilderness” is a metaphor, for what? Maybe this is to be a wilderness of the mind, Picasso-like?

The reference photo for the painting was taken on a backpacking trip and suddenly came to me in the middle of the night. I got up, found the photo, and knew this is what I was to paint. A metaphorical-theological painting of a literal wilderness! Let me explain. A painting should draw the viewer into the work. Is the trail drawing you into the dark of the “wilderness?” Or are you hiking out of the wilderness into sunlight? Your faith journey may sometimes take you into some dark places you don’t want to go to or make you wonder why you are in a “wilderness” at all. Christ provides the trail when you accept Him into your life. He will always be your backpacking companion, even when you think you may have lost the trail or realize you are perhaps on the wrong trail in someplace you don’t want to be. When you think you are lost, stop, orient your map and compass (Bible), shoot some bearings with your compass to the land features around you (pray), and He will show you the way.

What is Lent?

Our Lenten journey is one of “turning around,” of changing directions from self-serving toward the self-giving way of the cross.

The word *Lent* comes from the Old English word *lencten*, which refers to the lengthening of days and the coming of spring. Lent is not specifically mentioned in the Bible, but it is Biblical nonetheless. Throughout Hebrew history, based on the Torah, every religious festival required time for preparation, and it is from this example that Christianity has kept this tradition. Thus, Lent is the time of preparation for Easter.

Lent lasts 40 days; why 40? In early times each number was felt to reveal a certain aspect of God. The number 40 meant “complete.” There are many examples in the Bible of the number 40. Jesus spent 40 days in the wilderness preparing for His own spiritual journey and ministry. Sundays are not counted in Lent, they are considered “little Easters.” Hence, Lent actually lasts 46 days, but again, we only count the 40 days of preparation as Lenten days, and not the *rest* days of Sunday Sabbath.

Christians focus on their relationship with God, often choosing to give up something or volunteering and giving of themselves for others. Why give up something or volunteer and give yourself for others for Lent? Well, perhaps in the giving up or giving of yourself, you may find yourself sharing in the suffering of Christ, or at least coming to a greater understanding of temptation and suffering. Maybe the discipline of “giving up” or “giving” will help you focus on Christ or help you to understand the sorrow over your own sometimes selfish behavior. Maybe it will help you realize that God is ultimately what should fill your life, and not your belongings, desires, or habits.

Because we cycle around to this scenario every year, it also points to a cyclic understanding of spiritual growth. Every time we come to this part of the year, we come as changed, different people. Each time we contemplate the world ending, it is a different world. Each time we set out on a path toward God, we hopefully do it with greater depth and with more wisdom.

What are all the “other days”?

Shrove Tuesday – Shrove means “to repent.” Shrove Tuesday is celebrated the Tuesday prior to Ash Wednesday, and is sometimes celebrated in churches with pancake suppers as a reminder of the unleavened bread and the Israelites’ hasty departure from Egypt. Here at Grace UMC we celebrate this event as Shrove Sunday Pancake Breakfast on the Sunday prior to Ash Wednesday.

Ash Wednesday – Ash Wednesday is celebrated 46 days before Easter or 40 days not counting Sundays. It may fall anytime from February 3 to March 10. The ashes of Ash Wednesday are burned from the palm branches from the previous Palm Sunday. The ashes are mixed with oil and then a cross is smudged across the forehead as a symbolic reminder that we are all sinners and desperately in need of forgiveness. Although there is not a scripture associated with Ash Wednesday and Jesus did not celebrate Ash Wednesday with his disciples, we can draw on Old Testament references for remorse and sorrow associated with ashes. “O my people, put on sackcloth and roll in ashes; mourn with bitter wailing as for an only son.” – *Jeremiah 6:26*.

Palm Sunday – Palm Sunday is the Sunday prior to Easter and is the first day of Holy Week. Jesus entered Jerusalem and began his final days on earth. A large crowd gathered and greeted him

Introduction

waving palm branches and shouting, “Hosanna!” – *Matthew 21:1-11*.

Holy Thursday or Maundy Thursday – Holy Thursday is celebrated the Thursday prior to Easter. Maundy is Latin for *mandatum novum* or “new commandment” remembering Jesus’ new commandment recorded in *John 13:34*: “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.” Thursday services remember Jesus’ betrayal, His washing of the disciples’ feet, the Lord’s Supper (communion), and His final teachings as recorded in the Gospel of John. Here at Grace UMC the altar is stripped and everything is removed. All leave the worship service in silence as a reminder of the death of Jesus Christ.

Good Friday – Good Friday is celebrated the Friday prior to Easter, and it is an alteration of “God’s” Friday. Good Friday remembers Jesus’ crucifixion and His last words from the cross. On Good Friday a Tenebrae (Latin for shadows or darkness) service features scriptures, meditations, and extinguished candles as the Christ candle exits the room.

Easter Vigil (Holy Saturday) – The Easter Vigil or Holy Saturday is celebrated the Saturday prior to Easter. This Saturday evening service remembers the promises of God throughout history and the dark moments before the resurrection. Here at Grace UMC we celebrate the Easter Vigil with a 24-hour Prayer Vigil. The Prayer Vigil starts at the end of the Good Friday service and continues through Saturday until 8:30 pm.

Easter – Easter is celebrated the first Sunday after the full moon that occurs on or next after March 21, the spring equinox. Easter can be any time from March 22 through April 25. Easter celebrates Jesus’ resurrection from the dead. “He is not here, but has risen.” – *Luke 24:6*.

Sunday, February 18

Bible Passage

For we know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now, and not only the creation, but we ourselves who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope, for who hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience. —*Romans 8:22-25 (New Revised Standard Version)*

Devotional

It is a fact of life that everyone will, at one time or another, experience suffering. The Epistle to the Romans acknowledges this truth as it compares the suffering of the current realm to the agony experienced by a mother enduring the pains of childbirth. No matter how faithful we are, we are not promised a life without struggles and pain.

The children of Israel fleeing slavery in Egypt knew the groaning of despair the Apostle Paul described here. They endured the struggle of hunger, thirst, the anxiety of being lost, perhaps even fearing they had been forsaken by God and left to die. I imagine there are many reading this lesson who will recognize within themselves similar feelings. What do we do when we feel forsaken, when we feel like God has forgotten us?

Years ago a leading figure in the congregation Denise and I were serving, Mr. Elmo Whitlock, suffered a severe fall. He was rushed to the hospital and told, at age 85, that he had broken his hip and would need surgery. He knew how serious this was; surgery was risky and even if he survived the surgery many people at his age suffering such an injury never recover. I was a young minister, having only served a few as a youth minister and associate pastor. A short time before this, the pastor had left the church and I was asked to “fill in as interim pastor” until a new pastor could be found. Mr. Whitlock was the exact opposite; he had been the teacher of the Whitlock Sunday School class for many decades. He was so popular in the community that some people would come to his class and then go attend services at the Episcopal Church one block away. His class was so large they built their own classroom building, paid for entirely by the class, and located alongside the church. I felt so inadequate going to visit this saint of the church. I was praying as I walked the hallway and entered the room, praying that God would help me. As it happened, Mr. Whitlock was awake and alert and pleased to have me visit. Even in his pain, even in this time of uncertainty, he demonstrated a strength of faith that touched me deeply. It came time to pray and I prayed as best

Sunday, February 18

I could for his healing and God's faithful presence. As soon as I finished, Mr. Whitlock began. I will never forget his prayer: "Oh God, sometimes we feel like we are lost in the wilderness, but God we know, if we are in the wilderness, it is your wilderness." He went on to pray for me, for our church, and for others in need but what I will never forget was his confident, peace-filled assurance of God's unfailing care come what may. "Sometimes we feel like we are lost in the wilderness but God we know, if we are in the wilderness, it is your wilderness." I went into the room trying to strengthen and bless Mr. Whitlock, and he strengthened and blessed me. At times in life pain and suffering will come. Our world is like a mother in labor, but this too will pass. And even in wilderness, we can know that God sees us; God feels our pain; God will see us through.

Reflection

To help you meditate on today's devotional, consider the following questions:

1. What words and images from this devotion capture your attention?
2. What is God inviting you to do in response to this reading?
3. Write a one sentence prayer for today.

Prayer

Oh God, you our strength and security, an ever present help in times of trouble. You know our weakness, our fears, our doubts, the pain we feel, the tears we shed. How precious is your steadfast love, O God, all people may take refuge in the shadow of your wings. We turn to you now, we pray from the depths of our souls, even in groans too deep for words. Hear our prayer, O God, the prayers of those who suffer, those who doubt, those longing for light, give to each of these strength for each day and your hope and peace to see us through the night.

About the Author

In 2016 Rev. Clayton Childers returned with his wife, Rev. Denise Childers, to Grace UMC after being away for nine years. At Grace UMC, he enjoys singing in the choir and teaching the Progressive Sunday School Class. He also loves being "Bompa" to Mason, Parker and Ellie Scott. For his day job, Clayton works as Director of Conference Relations for the United Methodist General Board of Church and Society in Washington DC.

Bible Passage

Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength.

They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint. —*Isaiah 40:30-31 (New International Version)*

Devotional

This past year, I decided to join my school's track and field team. People had always told me that I was fast, and I really enjoyed being part of a team. For our first competition, though, I was really nervous to run against another team. My coach put me in the longest race against older and stronger athletes. During my first race, as I was hurtling my 80-pound body through the four laps around the track, my feet found those of another runner's and I came crashing to the gravel. Somehow, even with my scraped arm and bruised ego, I managed to get up and finish the race. After I got home, my mom and dad cleaned and bandaged my wounds, shared this Bible verse, and showed me some clips from the film, "Chariots of Fire." In the movie, based on a true story, Eric Liddell gets knocked down while running his race, but gets back up to chase down the rest of the runners and win. I learned more about how Liddell honored God by not running on Sundays, even forgoing running a couple of Olympic events because of his dedication to the Lord. Later in his life, Liddell became a missionary to China. Though I do not know yet how God plans on using me in the future, putting my hope in the Lord gives me strength and courage and a "Way in the Wilderness."

Reflection

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Monday, February 19

Prayer

Thank you for being our guiding light through the rough and bumpy paths of our lives. We look to you for our strength and cherish the way you help us not just survive, but thrive. Help us walk, run, and soar as we continue to grow in our faith. Amen.

About the Author

Nalin is an 8th grader at Metz Middle School and has been worshipping at Grace UMC since 2005. He was confirmed in 2017, and loves Jesus and his church family. He is deeply involved with the church's youth group, Jeremiah project, Wesley Singers, and enjoys leading Joyful Singers.



Tuesday, February 20

Bible Passage

He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds.

—*Psalm 147:3 (New International Version)*

Devotional

When I became divorced, I resigned myself to the fact that I would be by myself. My children were in college and both were ready to move on with their lives. I was not. My good friends, the Hudson's invited me to come to Grace UMC. I found that Grace UMC is the place to come if you want to feel a part of something, so I joined the choir. My choir nights helped me, but although I was surrounded by wonderful choir members, I still felt I was by myself. I wanted a partner who would share my life and my faith. As time went on, I found things changing in my life. I had a new attitude and embraced my single life, then I met Steve.

Steve and I often talk about our lives before we met and how life's journey brought us together. We recognize that our meeting was not a happy accident, but was the hand of God guiding us together. We know God is the reason for our contentment and happiness. He was who brought us together and He knew we were meant to be.

Reflection

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Prayer

The road seems long and the journey short. Let me be at peace with those I meet; their journey is not my own. May they learn from me, not hatred and injustice, but love.

Tuesday, February 20

About the Author

Betsy Buelow is a 7th grade Family and Consumer Sciences teacher with Prince William County Schools. She has lived in Manassas for 30 years and, prior to joining Grace UMC, was a member of Manassas St. Thomas UMC. She has two children and three step-children as well as six step-grandchildren. She and her husband, Steve, have been married for three years and were married right here at Grace UMC.



Bible Passage

Let my soul live, and it shall praise You; And let Your judgments help me. I have gone astray like a lost sheep; Seek Your servant, For I do not forget Your commandments. —*Psalm 119:175-176 New King James Version*

Devotional

I am forced to confess a painful truth. Over the last dozen years, I have successfully managed to go off the rails, dive off the deep end, and/or wander off course. I admit that I have unconsciously (semi-consciously, perhaps?) jammed the bulk of my free hours with too many leadership positions, standing committees, and just plain stuff. I have gone out of my way to make myself busy being busy. In retrospect, I realize that deep down I'm overcompensating in a vain effort to feel better, to salve a significant hurt that's been pushed down for far too long. The "busy being busy" syndrome has all but taken over my life, protecting me from stepping out in faith and living a genuine and best life. I have of late recognized that too many of these things are simply filler and that it is time to undertake serious reflection and introspection, closely examining my priorities. In other words, it's time to separate the wheat from the chaff and cast off those activities and commitments that are no longer feeding my soul and fulfilling my spirit. Amid the chaos that is everyday life, I must make the time to be still and know that He is indeed God.

Reflection

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Prayer

Merciful Father:

As much as I have believed I have been running from myself, in truth, I have been distancing myself from You. Help me to finally and fully grasp that to "be" wholly present, I must consciously and

Wednesday, February 21

deliberately choose to “do” less. I accept that in all things it is Your will, not mine. I pray that Your hand will guide me back to Your path and that I am able to remain still long enough to hear Your wishes.

About the Author

Megan Link is a graduate of Shippensburg University (B.A., Psychology), the College of New Jersey (M. Ed., Student Personnel Services, and James Madison University (M. Ed., School Library Media Services). A 27-year educator, she has been employed with Prince William County Public Schools for 20+ years, 13+ of those years gratefully and happily spent at Stonewall Jackson High School. Ms. Link is a past president of the Prince William Education Association and currently acts as the PWEA Treasurer. She also serves as treasurer of the Alpha Mu Chapter of Delta Kappa Gamma Society International for Key Women Educators. Megan is currently in her second year as Grace UMC’s Council Secretary. Her greatest joy is spending time with her children (Kate, Nathaniel, and daughter-in-law Jenna) and grandchildren (Cyrus, James, Anderson, and Adalyn). During school breaks and during the summer, Ms. Link enjoys vacationing with family in the Outer Banks, either on Ocracoke Island or in Southern Shores. A firm supporter of animal rescue, she resides in Manassas with Remy her Papillon-mix, adopted from the Prince William County Animal Shelter.



Bible Passage

I lift up my eyes to the hills—where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth. —*Psalm 121:1-2 (New International Version)*

Devotional

What is the Wilderness? Is it a scary place, is it a peaceful place, or is it a quiet place to go and be with God? How do you find your way?

For me growing up in West Virginia on a farm the fields, woods, and creeks became my playgrounds. Such freedom and happy memories of those times. Watching nature around me was a beautiful thing most of the time, but it could also be a very scary thing, as we have seen this year with the flooding, fires, and earthquakes.

I always knew God was an active part of my small world. Watching the farm animals and the wild animals, what more could a child ask for. Seeing the gardens grow, sitting up in the cherry tree when it was blooming, and looking out at the world through pink blooms, that is God's world at peace.

I always knew God was with me even in the bad times. I don't know how I know this, I just do. I feel God's presence more when I am in the outdoors, even if it is just sitting on the swing in our back yard watching the goldfish in the pond.

God puts paths in front of us all the time. Do we always pick the right one...no, but sometimes we get lucky and feel the nudge to take the right path. When in my wilderness, just as walking through the forest there is always a path. Sometimes it is hard to see, and you need to take the time to be quiet and still to find the hidden path, but it is always there. With God's help we do end up on it, sometimes quickly and sometimes it takes a while. He always places someone in our path to help us through; to me those are the small miracles that happen daily.

My wilderness is a peaceful place to rest, and appreciate all that I have been blessed with.

Reflection

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Prayer

Dear Lord, thank you for the nature that surrounds us each day. May we always take time to be still and quiet in your world to feel your nudges as to which path we are to follow. Forgive us the times we don't wait for that nudge as we take our own path in the wilderness. We are so blessed to live in this beautiful world even when things are not going the way we wish for, but we know you are there and we will make it through the wilderness. Amen.

About the Author

Judy Paap married her husband, Joe Paap, right out of high school. She has been mostly a stay at home mom as their four children grew up. She became a floral designer when their youngest daughter was in middle school. She has had her own business as a floral designer for weddings and events for 10 years now. Joe and Judy moved to Manassas in 2002.

Judy and Joe started going to Grace UMC in 2004. They lost our son Brian in 2009, and Grace UMC members were there to help them as they continue on that path of grief. Judy has been in many groups during her years at Grace UMC. She currently serves on the Building Committee, and is very excited to see our new addition come to life. Judy loves living in Manassas and loves my Grace family.

One of her greatest joys is watching her beautiful grandchildren grow up, ranging in age from age 11 years to 27 years. That is the biggest blessing God has given her.



Bible Passage

Remember that the person who plants a few seeds will have a small crop; the one who plants many seeds will have a large crop. You should each give, then, as you have decided, not with regret or out of sense of duty; for God loves the one who gives gladly.
—2 Corinthians 9:6-7 (*Good News Translation*)

Devotional

Our Lenten journey this season shows us a way in the wilderness. On this journey, it is important that we remember Paul's letters to the Corinthians. In 2 Corinthians, Paul reminds his followers to be conscious of helping their fellow Christians. He warns his followers that the person who plants few seeds will end up with a small crop, clearly encouraging those followers in Corinth to make every effort to help those in need.

Often we feel monetary giving is the only requirement, but there is really so much more to giving than just monetary help. There is time and ourselves that we can give, that so often is so much more important. Let us always remember that a gesture, as small as a kind word of encouragement or a listening spirit, can mean so very much more to an individual.

Reflection

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Prayer

Dear Lord, may we always remember how compassionate you were to those who were in need. May we always strive to follow your example in our daily encounters with others. Amen.

Friday, February 23

About the Authors

Rich and Toni Elgart have been members of Grace UMC since moving from Connecticut to Manassas in 1983. They have three grown children (Carolyn, Richard and Joseph) and seven grandchildren ranging in ages from 16 to 2. Both attend the 8:25 am service and have been members of the Applied Life Sunday School Class for several years.



Bible Passage

See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the desert and streams in the wasteland. —*Isaiah 43:19 (New International Version)*

Devotional

Have you ever been called by God to do something that you really didn't want to do? That's the position I found myself in a couple of times over the past nine years while living in Louisiana.

In the first situation, I was working in our church's food pantry but I was frustrated with the way it was being handled. Everyone is given a gift and my God-given gift is the ability to organize things. I had the desire to be involved in the management of the Livingston Parish Food Pantry, which was supported by three churches. But I didn't expect the person who was in the managerial position at that time to give it up. A couple of my co-workers were also frustrated, and said they were going to pray that I could at least be on the leadership team. Three months later, the person in charge of the pantry submitted her resignation as pantry manager, and I stepped into the position with my own leadership team.

The second situation was in finding a Sunday school class that I could fit into comfortably. I had spoken to the minister more than once about my dissatisfaction with what was available, and he encouraged me to form a new class of the type I wanted. That was not what I had in mind, but both ministers started taking turns encouraging me every week on my pantry day. Eventually the Associate Pastor suggested I ask Judy Nelson, who was a retired Chaplain from the Methodist Hospital in New Orleans. I thought, "There's my way out! Judy will say no." But when I asked Judy if she would be interested in co-teaching a new class, she was excited at the prospect. That's when I stopped wandering in the wilderness and took on that project.

It's not my desire to wander in the wilderness, but both of these situations turned out to be the greatest blessings I received over that period of time.

Saturday, February 24

Reflection

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3. Write a one sentence prayer for today.

Prayer

Lord, guide and direct us to answer your call with the faith that you will give us what we need to accomplish your desires. Amen.

About the Author

Lil George grew up in a small country church in Yell County, Arkansas. She lived briefly in Washington, DC with membership nearby. She moved to Manassas in 1967, and moved her membership to St. Thomas UMC. In 1978, she moved across town, and moved her membership to Grace UMC in 1980. In 2005, she moved to Clarksville, Tennessee with membership at Hillsdale UMC until 2008, when she moved to Denham Springs and transferred membership to Denham Springs First UMC. In April 2017, she "came home" to Manassas and Grace UMC. So she has a lot of "home churches," but was born and bred a Methodist.





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