

## God Is with Us

**God said, “I will be with you [Moses]. And this will be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God on this mountain” (Exodus 3:12).**

**Scripture:** Exodus 3:1-12

**Song:** “God Himself Is with Us”

I grew up in Africa, so I tease and say that I have lived a fairy-tale life because I lived long ago in a faraway land. We had unreliable electricity back then and often found ourselves in a dark house at night. It frightened me, but my father always assured me that God was with us, even in the darkness.

Lack of electricity is nothing to be afraid of, even on the darkest night. Throughout my life when I have had frightening experiences, my father’s words always came to mind. God is with me.

One of Jesus’ names is Emmanuel, which means “God with us.” Moses must have been frightened when he saw the burning bush and heard God speaking. Like me as a child when my dad shared the truth of God’s presence with me, Moses surely felt relief and comfort hearing that too. This truth remains. God is always with us. No matter how dark our circumstances, God is with us.

**Father,** how comforting it is to know that You are with us always, in everything we do. Help us to trust You when we experience uncertain times. In Jesus’ name, amen.

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January 4–10. **Harriet E. Michael**, the daughter of missionaries, is a wife of 41 years, a mother, a grandmother, a substitute teacher, and active in her church and community Bible study.

## God Uses Ordinary People

**“Pardon me, my lord,” Gideon replied, “but how can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family”** (Judges 6:15).

**Scripture:** Judges 6:11-16

**Song:** “Just a Closer Walk with Thee”

In the early 1930s, Miss Mary wanted to go to Africa as a missionary. She'd hoped to teach the Bible to little African children, but the mission organization with whom she applied said she was too small and frail to go alone to a place like Africa. So she taught Bible to American children in a rural country school instead. Most of the children she taught were the sons and daughters of poor farmers. My mother was one of those children.

At the time Miss Mary tried to go to Africa, medicine was still fairly primitive. Missionaries often succumbed to tropical disease. In fact, they sometimes brought their own caskets with them, using the space to pack their clothes and other goods. Naturally, the small, frail, single Miss Mary was considered too risky to send out. Yet God blessed her ministry here in the US tremendously! Out of her years as a Bible teacher came many ministers and missionaries, including my mother.

God's plans are not always our plans, but His plans are perfect. God often uses weak, poor, ordinary people, giving us things to do that we could never imagine and using us in ways we never dreamed of. Certainly He did this with Gideon and Miss Mary.

**Heavenly Father,** use us for the work in Your kingdom as You see fit. In the end, may all the glory go to You. In Jesus' name, amen.

## Uncertain Times

**In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord, high and exalted, seated on a throne; and the train of his robe filled the temple** (Isaiah 6:1).

**Scripture:** Isaiah 6:1-8

**Song:** “In Times Like These”

April 14, 1865. January 24, 1929. December 7, 1941. February 22, 1963. These are all important dates in American history. On each of them, the lives of the people living in the United States changed abruptly. What are these dates? What significant things occurred on them? They are, in the order listed: the day President Abraham Lincoln was assassinated, the day the stock market crashed, the day the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor, and the day of President John F. Kennedy’s assassination.

How frightening and uncertain these days must have seemed to the people who experienced them. Though each incident differed, they all have rocked the worlds of the people impacted by what happened on those dates.

Isaiah’s vision, which is recorded in today’s reading, happened during a time of uncertainty. We know this partly because of the first few words of the passage, “In the year that King Uzziah died.” The political change that happens when a king dies always brings uncertainty. What did the prophet see at that time? He saw the Lord, high and exalted! God is always in control and still on His throne, no matter how uncertain the times may seem.

**Almighty Father,** You are sovereign and in control even when our world seems out of control. Teach us to look to You instead of fretting about our circumstances. In Jesus’ name, amen.

## Wholehearted Commitment

**“No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God” (Luke 9:62).**

**Scripture:** Luke 9:57-62

**Song:** “I Have Decided to Follow Jesus”

Prior to his marriage to Ann Hazeltine in 1812, Adoniram Judson, one of the first American foreign missionaries, sent his prospective father-in-law a poignant letter. In it he asked permission to marry Ann but also mentioned many of the potential difficulties and dangers Ann might experience as his wife traveling overseas with him, some quite extreme. He longed for his potential father-in-law’s permission and blessing to marry, but he also wanted to be honest about the many risks they might encounter in the years ahead.

Ann’s father loved the Lord too and gave his blessing to the union. Adoniram and Ann married on February 5, 1812, setting sail for India just two weeks later. By God’s design, they did not stay in India very long but ended up traveling on to Burma, where Adoniram spent the next 38 years of his life. He and Ann indeed faced many of the dangers he had expressed in his letter to his father-in-law, including his own imprisonment and her untimely death.

Their ministry bore fruit, nonetheless, and their bravery has inspired so many over the years. Commitment to Jesus often comes with a cost, yet He expects us to follow Him wholeheartedly. No looking back!

**Father,** You know the plans You have for us. You know what lies ahead. May we trust Your leading and follow You with all our hearts. In Jesus’ name, amen.

## Tattling

**You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge another, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things** (Romans 2:1).

**Scripture:** Romans 2:1-11

**Song:** “Out of My Bondage, Sorrow, and Night”

Little Shirley and her brother Tim were told to nap for an hour every day. Shirley’s and Tim’s rooms connected with a small bathroom between them. From her room, Shirley could see into her brother’s room if both doors stood open.

On occasion she noticed that Tim was not napping. She would scramble out of her bed, find her mother, and tell her that Tim wasn’t obeying. Of course, her mother always pointed out to Shirley that she was not napping either! Though Shirley had this pointed out once or twice, she would forget and do it again and again.

It’s funny to hear about this kind of thing happening when children are involved. But aren’t we just as quick to see the fault in another person while overlooking our own sins and shortcomings, as Shirley was? Today’s verses pierce our hearts with this truth. However, Romans 2:4 offers good news when it tells us that God uses kindness to lead us to repentance. The kindness of God’s forgiveness—as well as His strength to help us grow in faith and obedience—is available to us every day. Don’t miss it.

**Heavenly Father**, thank You for Your kindness. Thank You for leading us to repentance. May we follow Your leading and pass judgment on ourselves first. In Jesus’ name, amen.

## God Knows

**Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?” “Yes, Lord,” he said, “you know that I love you.” Jesus said, “Feed my lambs” (John 21:15).**

**Scripture:** John 21:15-19

**Song:** “Rescue the Perishing”

Charlotte Diggs Moon, fondly known as Lottie Moon, served as a missionary to China from 1873 to 1912. At the end of her career, the people with whom she worked faced severe poverty and famine because of uprisings and conflicts in the area where she lived. Touched by their suffering, Lottie gave away her own food and provisions to the starving people around her, at great expense to herself. She became so malnourished that her fellow missionaries insisted she return to America. She never made it, dying en route. She literally died of starvation because she gave her food to others.

In today’s reading, Jesus asked whether Peter loved Him. When Peter answered saying he did, Jesus instructed Peter to feed His lambs. Jesus repeated this question twice more, each time giving instructions about taking care of the people He called His sheep.

In order to feed God’s sheep, we must first love God more than worldly things. Certainly Lottie Moon did this. We may not have to go hungry and give away our food like Lottie Moon did, but there are a myriad of other ways we can demonstrate our love for God by helping those He has placed in our lives.

**Father,** open our eyes to the needs around us. Work in our hearts to help us learn to love You more than the things of the world. In Jesus’ name, amen.

## Learning to Fish

**When [Simon and his companions] had done so, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break** (Luke 5:6).

**Scripture:** Luke 5:1-11

**Song:** “I Will Make You Fishers of Men”

When my son Trapper was a child, my husband taught him to fish. John placed a fishing rod in Trapper’s hands and cast it into the waters with his hand over Trapper’s. Then he set the line so it would hold in place. Trapper was to stand on shore holding his rod, but while John was busy with his own line, Trapper’s line began to jerk. The little guy did not know how to reel the line in and did not let his dad know he had a fish on. Instead, he ran backwards, right into a park bench!

Trapper flipped over the bench backwards but caught the fish. This certainly was not the best way to get a fish out of the water. John had some more teaching to do.

In Luke 5, Jesus taught the disciples to fish; and in this experience with Him, they saw His power firsthand. But Jesus’ real goal was teaching them to fish for men—teaching them how to spread the gospel so that people would be “caught” into God’s kingdom. The rest of Luke records the gospel story, and those who read it will learn how to fish too. Jesus is still in the business of teaching people to fish.

**Heavenly Father**, teach us to become fishers of men. Grant us clarity as we read Your Word. In Jesus’ name, amen.