

## A Lone Wildflower

**The angel of the LORD found Hagar near a spring** (Genesis 16:7).

**Scripture:** Genesis 16:1-15

**Song:** “Be Still, My Soul”

In the spring, tiny wildflowers created a blue covering across a nearby field. Later, bees buzzed around pollen-laden buttercups and pink phlox. But one morning I heard whirring motors and saw mowers cutting down swaths of grass and flowers. Saddened, I looked out and saw a lone pink flower. The mowers wouldn't see it or care, but I rushed out to rescue it.

Abram and Sarai had unfairly used Hagar to have a son. When Hagar conceived, the tension in the home stirred up waves of pride and jealousy, and Hagar ran away. Alone in the wilderness, she believed no one saw or cared for her. But God saw and came to rescue the lone servant girl and to right the injustice done her.

When we're treated unfairly, we sometimes let anger and pride escalate the situation until running away looks like the only way out. We might wonder if anyone cares. But God cares and sees what's best for us, sometimes calling us to stay in difficult situations and grow in faith and trust. God formed the petals of that lone wildflower to be a perfect vessel of golden pollen grains to feed the bees, and He longs to help us each grow to become perfect vessels of His love.

**Father,** thank You for Your ever-present love. May we grow to share Your love with people who are in unfair situations. In Jesus' name, amen.

---

January 3–9. **Kathy O'Neill** lives in Colorado with her husband. She loves helping others see God's hand in art, history, and nature.

## Trust Your Captain

**Lead me, LORD, . . . make your way straight before me**  
(Psalm 5:8).

**Scripture:** Psalm 5

**Song:** “Jesus, Savior, Pilot Me”

The morning started fair. There were gulls screaming overhead and sunlight sparkling off the ocean below the rocky cliffs where Winslow Homer, the American artist, lived and worked. Suddenly gusty winds brought dark clouds and rain. Homer rushed down to the shore, where he could see wind-whipped waves threatening a small sailboat. The gathered crowd told Homer that a local captain had taken their children for a sail. Now the storm had blown the boat into dangerous waters off the cliffs. The parents' cries from the shore built higher and higher as the boat struggled against the waves and wind. They cried to the captain to turn back toward the bay. But the captain knew that if he turned the boat, winds would dash it against the cliffs. Instead he wisely steered a straight course until the storm passed. Homer later painted this incident, showing the dangerous waves and rocks, as well as the blue sky ahead.

David needed wisdom to steer a path through danger, and he laid his requests before God—admitting he didn't know what to pray. Many times we don't know how to pray. Perhaps we're anxious about a situation with a friend or about whether a job is best for us. We often lack wisdom to know what is best, but like David, we can be confident God hears and understands our laments. We can pray expectantly, trusting our divine captain's wisdom to steer us in a straight course.

**Father,** thank You for hearing our laments and cries and for leading us in the best path. In Jesus' name, amen.

## Humble Hearts

**“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven”** (Matthew 5:3).

**Scripture:** Matthew 5:3-12

**Song:** “Jesus Calls Us”

In the thirteenth century, thousands of women joined the Beguines, a lay movement in many cities. They lived in community with other women, praying and studying the Bible together. Beguines lived humbly and served the sick and needy of their cities. They opened schools for girls and wrote poetry and devotional works.

Medieval people were used to those who withdrew from normal life to join religious orders and follow monastic rules. But it puzzled many that the Beguines dedicated themselves to serve the Lord in the world. How could people live like that when the world values not meekness but power, not poverty but riches, not mercy but getting even?

While the kingdoms of the world bless self-confident go-getters, God blesses those who recognize they are poor in spirit and need His mercy. After Jesus’ baptism, He preached that the kingdom of Heaven is near (Matthew 4:17), and the Beatitudes tell how we are to live as disciples in His kingdom. If we trust in the power of the King to change our hearts, we will soar to a loving relationship with Him. And following in Jesus’ footsteps, we can love our neighbors where we live and work.

**Father,** help us seek You with all our hearts and allow You to make us more like Jesus. In Jesus’ name, amen.

## Seal of Promise

**Abraham took . . . every male in his household, and circumcised them, as God told him** (Genesis 17:23).

**Scripture:** Genesis 17:23-27

**Song:** “El Shaddai”

It's called the Great Seal of the Realm, and for centuries each English monarch has had a unique metal mold to make their seals. Melted wax poured into the mold produces seals bearing the monarch's image. Only one mold exists at a time, so this seal on documents gives people faith in a document's authenticity. It also means the monarch approves and stands behind its content with his or her power.

When God renewed His promises to Abraham and commanded him to circumcise every male in his household as a seal of that covenant (Genesis 17:9-10), Abraham obeyed, showing his faith in God. Even though Abraham knew that his age rendered him “as good as dead” (Romans 4:19), he believed Almighty God could fulfill His promise of a child.

Time and heat from melted wax wears out molds. Queen Victoria had multiple seals during her long reign. But God's promises never wear out. God uniquely fulfilled His greatest promise with another miracle birth—His own Son, born to a virgin, who came to die and suffer God's fiery wrath for us. When we have faith that God can make us, though dead in our sins, alive in Christ, we become Abraham's descendants by faith and heirs of God's promises. He gives us a new heart sealed by the Holy Spirit, who renews God's image in us.

**Father**, help us bear the image of Jesus in the world. In Jesus' name, amen.

## Family Legacy

**This is the . . . family line of Abraham's son Ishmael** (Genesis 25:12).

**Scripture:** Genesis 25:12-18

**Song:** "The God of Abraham Praise"

I didn't pay attention to genealogy until I found (in a history of my hometown) a record from 1721 of a man with my last name. I began poring through records in old family Bibles. I read other records tracing my mother's family back to people who arrived in Nova Scotia in 1773. On my father's side, I saw the repetition of my father's first name in generation after generation—all the way back to a man who arrived in America in the 1640s.

We may not have much interest in Ishmael's descendants, but God has given us His genealogy, so let's pore through it to see what He wants us to learn. The Israelites proudly traced their ancestry back through Isaac to Abraham, but here they would have seen that Ishmael's sons, also descendants of Abraham, were their enemies.

How was Ishmael different from Isaac? Both men left a legacy of material prosperity, but it was faith in God's promises that set Isaac apart. Though my ancestors left me a good legacy of hard work and courage, it's not the most important legacy. Abraham passed on an all-important legacy of faith that is available to all. No matter what tribe or nation we come from, when we answer God's call to believe in Jesus, we become Abraham's descendants by faith and receive an eternal heritage as part of God's family forever.

**Father,** thank You that all who believe in Jesus become part of Your family. In Jesus' name, amen.

## Stronger than Granite

**Give thanks to the LORD, for . . . his love endures forever** (Psalm 106:1).

**Scripture:** Psalm 106:1-5

**Song:** “The Solid Rock”

The Old Man of the Mountain, a granite outcropping on Cannon Mountain, was once the symbol of New Hampshire. Glaciers had left ledges forming a man’s craggy profile. In 1805, the Old Man’s image began appearing on license plates, route signs, and postcards. He looked as solid and enduring as the granite he was made of, so many people didn’t know that efforts to hold the Old Man together had been going on for a long time. Crews often clambered over the ledges, attaching steel cables and filling cracks with cement. But on a stormy night in May 2003, campers heard a rumbling sound; daylight revealed that New Hampshire’s symbol of steadfastness and durability had crumbled and slid down the mountain.

If we read further in Psalm 106, we see that the Israelites continued to sin against God. Even after they had witnessed miracles and settled in the promised land, they often “crumbled” into unfaithfulness. We too sometimes slide into sin, even though we daily witness Christ’s blessings. Then we may wonder whether God can still love and forgive us.

But this psalm begins and ends (v. 48) with praise to God, because His love endures forever. We may falter, but Jesus binds us to himself with cords of love that are stronger than steel or granite. He will never let us fall away from the rock who is our God.

**Father,** thank You for forgiving our sins and holding us fast with cords of enduring love. In Jesus’ name, amen.

## Artist Eyes

**God opened [Hagar's] eyes and she saw a well of water** (Genesis 21:19).

**Scripture:** Genesis 21:8-21

**Song:** “Be Thou My Vision”

Many think they either have artistic ability or they don't, so I get doubtful looks when I tell students it's a skill everyone can learn. Doubts increase when I add that they must learn to see with artist's eyes. I first ask them to draw an object, which most finish in a couple of minutes. Then over the next few weeks, we draw objects quickly, but we also slow down so our eyes and pencils inch like snails along every edge. After these and other exercises, I ask them to draw the original object. Now everyone wants more time. Practice has opened their eyes to see what has been there all along.

After being sent away, Hagar and Ishmael wandered in the desert, soon running out of food and water. They forgot God's promises and saw only the bleakness of their situation. Then the angel of God called and told Hagar that God had heard Ishmael's cries. God opened her eyes to see a well. She also saw that God always keeps His promises.

When we go through difficulties, we might forget God's promise to always be with us. We may fail to see His hand guiding us—through our quiet times in Scripture and prayer or through friends providing hugs and listening ears. But when we remember God's promises, our “faith eyes” open to see that God has been with us all along.

**Father**, open our eyes to see Your love and care in big and small ways every day. In Jesus' name, amen.