



*Christina Friberg*

I am a widow, with three sons, five grandchildren, and two very small great-grands. I attend First Denver Friends. I'm retired from being a church secretary for Presbyterian, Episcopal, and Lutheran churches at different times, and loved all of them. I recently sold my home of twenty years and moved into a lovely condo—yay, no more yard work. I do some volunteer work for the Visiting Nurse Association and in my free time I read a lot. I just spent a lovely week in Seattle with my brother Dale, followed by a cruise to Alaska with my former college roommate. Fabulous!

*BIBLE READING: James 5:16; John 13:34-35*

My friend Carolyn stopped by unexpectedly and handed me a pretty gift bag. “I know you’re having surgery soon—I thought you needed a special gift,” she said. I pulled out a soft turquoise and lavender knit...something. “It’s a prayer shawl! I made it for you.”

“Oh, Carolyn, I’m thrilled to have it—and I love the colors,” I said. I wrapped myself in it, then wrapped my arms around her in a big hug.

A beautiful card attached to one corner read, in part, “The prayer team gathered and asked God to bless this shawl. It is our prayer that it will encircle you in God’s love and peace, now and always.”

Carolyn was part of a new group at her church, the “Rachel Circle,” which taught women to knit in their prayer shawl ministry. Members met to knit twice a month between services for forty-five minutes, giving beginners time to get help. Then they would work on their projects at home. Since their beginning they’ve given prayer shawls to many parishioners and friends undergoing chemo or surgery, or experiencing life difficulties such as divorce, depression, or loss of a loved one.

With my cuddly prayer shawl tucked around my shoulders I pictured myself encircled in God’s arms. My surgery—to correct crooked toes—came out perfectly, and my straight toes are definitely an answer to prayer. Thank you, Carolyn, and all you busy knitters for your loving labor, and especially your prayers.

*SONG: Day by Day and with Each Passing Moment*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Father, make me generous with my time and talent, helping others with prayer in their times of need.*

—Chris Friberg

*BIBLE READING: Matthew 8:1-3*

After much encouragement from us, my husband's father, Carl, agreed to join a small group from our church. They were exploring together what it means to be a Christian. He loved it, especially their honesty and willingness to say what was on their hearts. One night, the discussion question was "If you could have anything in the world, what would you ask for?"

Carl said, "I'd get a drink." When he saw their puzzled expressions, he went on to explain that he was an alcoholic—so desperate for a drink, he felt like he was on fire.

The leader walked over to Carl. "Our brother is suffering and needs our prayers tonight." Group members, from eighteen to sixty years old, surrounded him and put their arms around him, praying earnestly. Amazingly, the desire for a drink left him, and that was the first step on his journey into sobriety. Later, he confessed to me that the group's physical touch moved his heart as much as their prayers. Although he was kind, hospitable, and generous, he was also very lonely. "Other than your family," he said, "I can't remember the last time anyone has actually reached out and touched me. I truly felt loved."

Jesus was always touching people: the blind man, the children, the woman who touched the hem of his robe—even the leper. Although our words are important, let's not forget the power of a loving touch.

*SONG: He Touched Me*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Lord Jesus, give me wisdom for the right words when I'm encouraging a hurting person, and when it's right, remind me to put my arm around them or take their hand as I pray.*

—Chris Friberg

*BIBLE READING: Isaiah 40:29-31*

Depressed and troubled by my situation at work and the possible closure of my husband's mining job, I opened my book of devotions. Hoping for an answer, I read the Scripture from Isaiah 40:29-31.

“He gives power to the faint, and to them who have no might he increases strength,” it begins, and finishes with “they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength...they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint” (KJV).

Wonderful words, yes, but not the help I was looking for. At that moment I heard a thump, followed by a crash. It had to be the cat, but what had she done?

Following the sound, I climbed the stairs. My husband had just built a bookcase by mounting boards on the corner walls above the stair landing, and the cat—curious as always—had jumped up on the lowest shelf. She was gone, but a book lay open on the floor. I started to shut it but couldn't resist looking to see what was on that page. There, in bold print, was exactly the same Scripture from Isaiah, along with a letter from the author.

I felt God saying “I meant it the first time—now listen!” So I did. I waited on the Lord, and in amazing ways he worked out all the problems. And I learned that action is not always the answer. I also learned that when God wants me to have a certain message, he'll make sure I get it—even from a cat.

*SONG: Speak, Lord, in the Stillness*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Thank you, Father, for speaking to me even when I tried at first to ignore your words. Help me to listen, to believe, and to take heart from your words.*

—Chris Friberg

*BIBLE READING: Psalm 16:9-11*

2005 was my year of loss. On May 27, my husband, Morris, died; in June my friend of twenty years, Cherice; in July my father. Then, as if that wasn't enough, in early September I fell and broke both wrists, and lost my job.

When my sister called in October and told me that our dear niece Debbie had contracted a mysterious virus and died, it was too much. I couldn't stop crying. Finally, I called my son Morris and his wife, Cam. "I can't deal with this," I wept.

Later my son Scott called. "Mom, at 5 o'clock I'm kidnapping you. Dress warmly." Cheered by the prospect, I pulled on a sweater and cords. Scott picked me up and we drove to a miniature golf course. There we met Morris, Cam, and eleven-year-old Charity. Charity hung red licorice around my neck. "Sustenance," she said, "for the big competition."

As we started, Morris said "Mom, we figured you've had enough grief, so tonight we're celebrating Debbie's life."

The sun set with red, pink, and purple streaks across the sky. Crisp fall air, trees with bright autumn leaves glowing—a perfect evening for a celebration. I discovered I could hold the club—despite the two casts. Competition was fierce. Finally, the last hole. Cam aced us all with a spectacular hole in one. Then the truth hit me—my tears were for my own pain. But my loved ones were experiencing joy—they were celebrating. I hugged my kids. "Thank you, everybody, for giving me a new perspective."

*SONG: For Those Tears I Died*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Lord, help me not to only grieve the loss of my loved ones, but also to celebrate that they are with you, experiencing fullness of joy and eternal pleasures forevermore.*

—Chris Friberg

*BIBLE READING: Matthew 6:31-34*

I was one of those people who figured I'd always been a Christian. My earliest memory of Jesus was knowing he was the Son of God, and believing that he still lives. So it wasn't until I was doing one of my Bible Study Fellowship lessons, sitting in a big chair in my living room, when the thought came to me: "One of these days I'll give it all up and give my life to the Lord." Then I had to stop and ask myself, "What would you give up?" I couldn't think of anything good I'd have to give up, but what came to mind was depression, worry, despair, fear of death. Not one thing worth hanging on to!

So I said "Lord, will you take over my life? I give it all to you, and hope you will lead and guide me from this minute on."

I didn't recognize the change in my life until I woke up the next morning and couldn't wait to get out of bed. Everything was brighter—the sky a bluer blue, the grass a greener green. I looked at my father-in-law with a new love and began to accept his help gladly. So all I can say is, I don't think I was really saved until I asked God to take over my life! Later I found my life's verses, which are the verses for today's reading.

*SONG: Living for Jesus*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Thank you, Father, for saving me, for giving me new life in Christ, and for introducing me to the Holy Spirit. Thank you for giving your Son to give me that life.*

—Chris Friberg

*BIBLE READING: 1 Peter 4:8-11*

I have a perennial garden out front, and often see my neighbors pausing in their walks to admire it. Recently my friend Sarah visited and said before she left, “I just want to look at your flowers.” Then she added emphatically “But do *not* tell me about the weeds!”

How did she know that I was poised to point out the hateful, long green shoots of crab grass that intermingled with the day lilies, irises, sweet William—and everything else growing there? Her words made me think. Whenever I look at my garden, do I admire the sweet yellow potentilla, the perky orange marigolds, or the bright blue blooms of the ajuga ground cover? No! My eyes go immediately to the interloping crabgrass and I despair that no matter how hard I try, I cannot get rid of it.

Fortunately, God does not do that with us. He does not look at me and focus on my shortcomings, failures, or sins. Instead he looks at me with love and understanding, and sees the likeness of his Son Jesus Christ that I am becoming. So I am trying to get rid of my focus on weeds and spend more time admiring the work of God’s hands. Someday, he promises, we’ll have gardens without thorns or thistles (like crabgrass), but until that time I’m learning to revel in the *beauty* before me.

*SONG: All for Jesus*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Lord, help me to see others and creation with “weed-free” eyes, and be always thankful and aware of the infinite variety and loveliness of your creation.*

—Chris Friberg

*BIBLE READING: Matthew 10:8; Mark 6:30-42*

A couple of years ago, in the spring, when two fourth-grade girls heard from missionary Debbie Thomas that orphan children in Rwanda were illiterate because they couldn't afford schooling, they knew they wanted to help. Best friends Haley (10) and Melanie (9) were shocked that it cost one child in Rwanda \$200 for a year of school, so they put their heads together and prayed. They had recently learned about "mustard seed faith"—that with faith the size of a mustard seed (Matthew 17:20), nothing is impossible. Naming their project "The Africa Miracle," they made a big poster with maps of Africa and Rwanda, wrote out their Bible verse, and asked people to help them raise \$2,000—enough to send ten orphans to school.

Poster in hand, they visited each Sunday school class in our church and shared their dream, describing plans for lemonade stands, cookie sales, and just telling people about the children's need. After the class tours, they sent out emails and talked to friends at school.

The 2' x 3' poster went up on the church bulletin board, with the address of where to send donations. Money began coming in, with gifts from \$1 to \$200, from folks and classmates who'd caught the girls' vision. By October, without cookie sales or lemonade stands—simply by telling people and praying—they'd received \$2,000. The Africa Miracle became a reality, and ten Rwandan orphan children went to school.

*SONG: Give of Your Best to the Master*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Father, free me from selfishness. Open my heart and my mind to giving to you and your causes freely, to bless others and to bless you for all your gifts to me.*

—Chris Friberg