



Linda Michael

Retired after forty-one years of full-time teaching and busier than ever, I am exploring the gifts the Lord is lending me. I learned a lot about God's many gifts while working as an advanced education specialist for Clear Creek ISD, my home district. God has gifted us in so many ways, and we should use those gifts to praise and honor him.

My husband and I live in League City, Texas, and love to travel and spend time with our three sons and two grandsons who live nearby. I grew up in the Bayshore Friends Church in Bacliff, Texas, and now serve at Bay Area First Baptist Church in League City. Here I am at my retirement luncheon with four of the six men in my life: husband Don, and sons Scott, Sean, and Steve.

May God help you open more of his gifts through the readings this week.

BIBLE READING: Romans 10:15

“And how will they preach, except they be sent? As it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things.” (Berean Study Bible)

“Beep, Beep...”

There sat the rickety little green bus, patiently waiting to take us on its rambling route to church. It was never very full on those Sunday mornings of my long ago, but it was there. It was there to carry me on the road to salvation.

Someone had to drive that little bus, keep it washed, change its oil, and fix those pesky flat tires. There were all the someones providing reasons for the little green bus to make its runs—the teachers, the sponsors. There were those who ventured to camp clear up in Kansas with that bus of uncertain health and its load of rambunctious teenage souls.

I took for granted all those invested hours—all that energy, planning, and caring. Later as a parent, I recognized their importance and wanted my sons, and now my grandsons, to have encouragers, trainers, and enlighteners like I did. Those dear people, and, yes, even that little green bus, helped me build a foundation in Christ to weather and survive the storms of life.

When you are feeling tired or disheartened about teaching that class, mowing that church lawn, or mixing up all those gallons of punch for rowdy VBS kids, look up from your task. Look up to the cross. You hold a remarkable opportunity and responsibility in your hands. You are laying the building blocks for a successful and happy life in Christ. Let God use you. You are very important to his plan.

SONG: Do Something (Matthew West)

PRAYER SUGGESTION: Pray for strength to be God’s hands and feet on this earth.

—Linda Michael

BIBLE READING: John 10:7-10

Years ago when life was a whirlwind, I found a rare minute to sit with a big bowl of chocolate almond marshmallow ice cream. Couldn't do that often—past the lips and straight to the hips—so I usually bought flavors I didn't like and wouldn't be tempted to eat. The boys would eat anything. But for some reason on this particular day, I felt I owed myself that ice cream.

Mid-bowl, I realized I hadn't really tasted any of those bites taken between teaching table manners, avoiding sticky fingers, mopping spilled milk, and a hundred other interrupters. There I was, splurging on all those luscious calories and not enjoying a single one of them. What a waste!

The rest of that ice cream was sweet, smooth, rich, cold. The nuts were crisp and coated in crunchy, dark chocolate, the marshmallow cream soft and sweet. I chose to slow down and pay attention to each spoonful. I experienced the flavors, textures, temperatures. How I enjoyed that ice cream!

We get so busy with life that we forget to live. We wish away precious seconds of our lives awaiting payday or the weekend or Christmas, not noticing the joys of each moment, the little presents from God that each day holds.

Give yourself a gift today. Choose that wonderful abundant life that Jesus has promised and paid for with his dear life. Take him at his word: "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly."

Enjoy!

SONG: Open My Eyes, That I May See

PRAYER SUGGESTION: Pray for seeing eyes and listening ears.

—Linda Michael

BIBLE READING: Proverbs 3:5-6

It was twilight in the storybook German village deep in the Black Forest. Our high school German classes helped us decipher a sign advertising a folk festival. Setting out on foot, we became hopelessly lost. We managed enough German to ask a strolling couple for directions, and fortunately they wanted to practice their English. Armed with their instructions, we confidently set out, promptly became lost again, and decided to turn around.

“No,” came the voices of the same couple from way down the block behind us.

Waving, we continued on. Each time we were about to make a wrong decision, those distant voices called out, “No.” They followed us at a discreet distance the entire long way, and it was a very long way. When in sight of our destination, they returned to their evening walk, many blocks off course, I’m sure. Wouldn’t it be nice to have a distant voice follow us through life, telling us the right decisions to make and the right paths to follow?

Well, we do have a Guide. Our God is more than willing to supply directions, but as in our adventure, we have certain responsibilities. We must ask for directions. We must listen. We must trust and act on the information. We must keep communication lines open, even if at times the distance from our Guide seems great. We must continue on, even when the journey is long. Only then will we reach the heavenly festival.

SONG: If You Want Me To (Ginny Owens)

PRAYER SUGGESTION: Pray for guidance and a trusting spirit.

—Linda Michael

BIBLE READING: Luke 2:52; Hebrews 4:15-16

“Let’s sing the story about Jesus and his dog!”

“Jesus and his dog? Don’t know that one.”

“Yes, you do. We sing it every Christmas. You know—the one about his dog being a good and faithful friend. He even followed Jesus to Bethlehem.”

“You’ve lost me. Sing a little bit of it for me.”

“Sure. *‘Old Cumallyee, faithful. Joyful and Triumphant.’* See, it even tells the dog’s name...”

We take a lot for granted. We think everyone understands what we mean. Sometimes we just say things because they sound nice or we’ve always said them that way. We really aren’t listening even to ourselves.

Jesus was real. Jesus *is* real. Mary labored to birth him. She changed his diapers, watched with pride as he took his first steps, as he learned to feed himself, as he grew strong and tall. She kissed his “owies” and marveled at a growing boy’s appetite. Joseph patiently taught him to build. I wonder if Jesus scattered sawdust and built towers with leftover blocks of wood. When he missed the peg but not his finger, it hurt. He knows how it feels to be sick or upset. He knows about joy and disappointment and depression. He knows because he was real. He *is* real.

I like the idea of Jesus having a dog. I can just see old Cumallyee padding along beside him on a dusty road, snuggling up to him by a campfire on a dark night, fetching a stick thrown by his master. It helps me to remember that Jesus is real. He understands.

SONG: O Come, All Ye Faithful.

PRAYER SUGGESTION: Express thanks for Jesus’ understanding and love.

—Linda Michael

BIBLE READING: Psalm 92:1-2, 4-5 (The Living Bible)

One assignment I gave to my students near Thanksgiving was to write a thank you letter to someone whose good deeds are often taken for granted. Most letters go to Mom or Dad. Dogs, cats, and teacher even get a few.

What about a thank you to God—not necessarily for those big, important things in life like love of family, good health, and salvation—but for all those little things that spice up our lives and make even bad situations a little more tolerable? Things like a long, hot shower after a hard day. That has to be one of God’s special gifts to humankind. A rainbow brushed across a watercolor sky. A baby’s giggle. Chocolate. Paint box fields of spring wildflowers. Low humidity in a Texas Gulf Coast summer. Finding the missing object at last. A deep blue sky feathered with white wisps of clouds. A cool breeze on a hot day. A splash in a pool. Ice Cream. The red and gold of autumn leaves. A deep breath. Clean sheets. Watching your kids run and play. Putting the last piece into the puzzle. A just-right parking space. A good joke. That delicious fragrance of something baking. A restful night’s sleep. Something made just for you. Pictures of your kids when they were little. Good guacamole and crisp chips. A cold glass of iced tea. A hug. A long laugh....

Thank you, Lord. Thank you.

SONG: The Joy of the Lord (Rend Collective)

PRAYER SUGGESTION: Thank the Lord for all the joys he brings you.

—Linda Michael

BIBLE READING: Psalm 4:1; 2 Corinthians 12:9

Broken... left femur... hospital... Where?... so little... several days... spiral fracture... Drive?... Texas Children's Hospital... pack... money... toys... peanut butter sandwiches... Parking?... three weeks... isolated... traction... body cast... two months... food?... parking lot D... stolen cars, towed cars... Money?... sleep with purse... crying... isolated... pain... hanging from pin through bone... Sleep?... He only fell off a chair!... How?...

The words, the movements came to me in staccato bursts. Everything was disjointed. I felt so lost. Poor Sean—he was in so much pain and I felt totally helpless and isolated. What do I do, Lord? He's only two years old. What do I do? Help! Rescue me!

“Hear me when I call, O God of my righteousness: thou hast enlarged me when I was in distress.” Tears stung my eyes. Boy, did I ever need to be enlarged to meet this situation. I felt *so* small, so incredibly inadequate and helpless. I had to depend on people I knew nothing about. I had to depend totally on my God who knew everything about me.

“Thou hast enlarged me when I was in distress.” How did the person who chose that verse for the devotional written at such a great distance and time away know I would be reading and needing those words so badly on this particular day? God's timing is perfect. Troubles come to everyone. I'm so glad I have a loving God to help me through mine.

SONG: Standing on the Promises

PRAYER SUGGESTION: Pray for God to enlarge you to meet the needs of the day.

—Linda Michael

BIBLE READING: 2 Timothy 1:8 (The Living Bible)

It was during a college vespers service that it happened.

“Hurry, hurry! We have to go to the cellar. Hurry!”

I entered the dark, crowded cellar with great uncertainty. What was going on? Sweet strains of “Amazing Grace” filled the dank air. There was still no clue. BANG! BANG! BANG! Someone was beating on the door. BANG! BANG! BANG! Strangely uniformed soldiers carrying guns forced open the door.

“We’re looking for Christians,” growled one of the uniforms. “Are there any Christians here?”

Was this for real? My head told me surely not, but my heart told me to fear. Bill, a tall, quiet agriculture major, spoke up. “I’m a Christian,” he admitted boldly.

I don’t remember the rest. That doesn’t matter. The whole thing had been a very pointed object lesson. I really don’t think Bill was in on the plot. I really don’t think he knew, but he spoke right up.

Every day there are people in the world facing persecution for their Christian faith. We in America are very fortunate. We really haven’t had to face such a dramatic situation for real. And, yet, every day in our land of freedom there are people all around us asking that same question. “Are there any Christians here?” Will we answer?

SONG: Whom Shall I Fear (Chris Tomlin)

PRAYER SUGGESTION: Pray for the gift of courage to share God’s plan.

—Linda Michael