



God Hears Her



A Joyful
Christmas

31 Morning & Evening
Devotions

Our Daily Bread



God Hears Her



A Joyful Christmas

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Devotions



Our Daily Bread
Publishing™

God Hears Her, A Joyful Christmas: 31 Morning and Evening Devotions

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Introduction



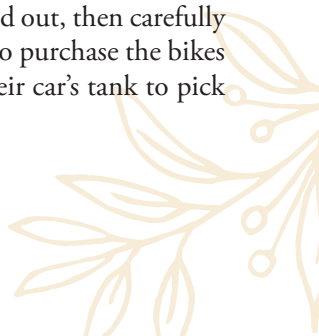
Finances were tight, and Dot wanted to make next Christmas special for her three young boys. So early in January, she found three shiny bicycles at the local department store and put them on layaway. For the next eleven months, she scrimped—creatively saving money from her 75-cents-an-hour wage to make Christmas a joyful occasion for her boys.

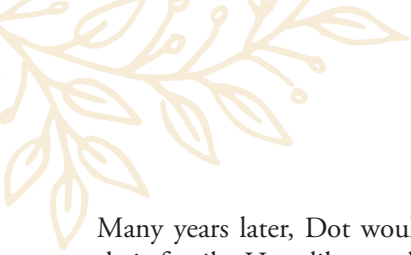
But it wasn't enough.

A week before Christmas, she was still \$14.50 short. Her son Ricky asked whether she had checked the piggy bank.

"I *know* there's not \$14.50 worth of pennies in there," his mother told him.

To her amazement, when each coin was poured out, then carefully tallied, the amount equaled \$15.50: enough to purchase the bikes and—with the extra dollar—to put gas in their car's tank to pick them up!





Many years later, Dot would call it God's *Christmas miracle* for their family. How like our humble God (Philippians 2:8) to use something simple and ordinary, like a piggy bank, to give pure joy.

More than two thousand years ago, God himself came to us in the most ordinary of ways, through the pain and struggle of childbirth. Upon entering our world, Jesus joined an ordinary family who experienced the challenges, joys, and beauty of everyday life. The outcome of His humble, commonplace—yet miraculous—entrance into the world? Pure joy (Luke 2:10).

Years later, Jesus hung from a wooden cross, dying. Suffering, He stayed faithful to His mission, drinking the cup His Father had given him until *it was finished* (John 18:11; 19:30). How was He able to complete His task and endure such pain? Scripture tells us it was because of joy (Hebrews 12:2). Christ's joy in His eternal purpose, in what lay ahead for Him—for all of us—enabled Him to finish His work so we could receive the world's greatest gift: a personal relationship with our Savior.

This Christmas, the women writers of *Our Daily Bread* invite you into this joy. For many, the “holiday season” is a time of both celebration and sorrow, laughter and loneliness. Whatever your highs and lows, spend time with Jesus at the beginning and close of your day, with these morning and evening devotions. Lovingly written by the diverse family at Our Daily Bread Ministries, each entry contains a Scripture passage to read and a devotional with an inspiring story to help you listen to the very heart of God.

As you soak in God's presence while reading *God Hears Her, A Joyful Christmas*, may you grow ever more confident of God's faithfulness to you. No matter the hardships you encounter, the scars you carry, the fears you face, you can rest assured: God is *for* you. Your Savior is quietly, humbly—yet miraculously—working on your behalf: Creating beauty out of ashes. Hope out of sadness. New beginnings out of loss. And, as He has since entering our world so long ago, offering you—and all of us—His overflowing, forever joy.

I have told you these things so
that you will be filled with my joy.
Yes, your joy will overflow!

(John 15:11 NLT)

—Anna Haggard
Associate Content Editor
Our Daily Bread Publishing





December 1

MORNING



I bring you good news
that will cause great
joy for all the people.

Luke 2:10



JOY

Luke 2:8-12

After Adam and Eve disobeyed God in the garden of Eden, joy was lost. God expelled them from Eden to prevent something worse from happening. If they had eaten from the tree of life after eating from the tree of knowledge of good and evil, they would have lived forever in their misery.

Life outside the garden was not easy. Adam and Eve had to work hard for their food. The reality of death was everywhere, and animals preyed on one another. Even worse, the couple's firstborn son murdered his younger brother. What could be worse? Sin had pierced their lives, and the couple could not stop joy from draining out.

But God had a plan to restore joy for mankind. Joy was lost in the garden when death came, but joy returned through birth—the birth of God's own Son at Bethlehem. "I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people" (Luke 2:10). Jesus grew up to heal the sick, give sight to the blind, and raise the dead. But this was just a taste of things to come. Jesus entered our world, experienced our sorrow, and conquered death—giving us hope that He will keep His promise to end pain, and eliminate sorrow and death (John 11:25–26; 1 Corinthians 15:3–4; Revelation 21:4).

No wonder Christmas is the season of joy!

—*Julie*

Delight in the joy of the good news





December 1

EVENING



Godliness with
contentment is
great gain.

1 Timothy 6:6

THE YARD-SALE CHRISTMAS

1 Timothy 6:6-10, 17-19

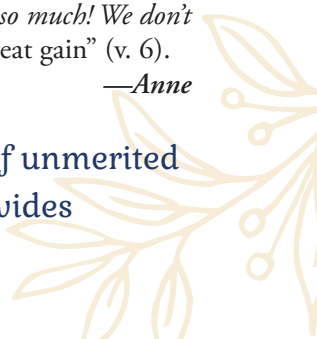
A mom felt she'd been overspending on family Christmas gifts, so one year she decided to try something different. For a few months before the holiday, she scrounged through yard sales for inexpensive, used items. She bought more than usual but for far less money. On Christmas Eve, her children excitedly opened gift after gift after gift. The next day there were more! Mom had felt guilty about not getting new gifts so she had additional gifts for Christmas morning. The kids began opening them but quickly complained, "We're too tired to open any more! You've given us so much!" That's not a typical response from children on a Christmas morning!

God has blessed us with so much, but it seems we're always looking for more: a bigger house, a better car, a larger bank account, or [fill in the blank]. Paul encouraged Timothy to remind people in his congregation that "we brought nothing into this world, and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that" (1 Timothy 6:7-8).

God has given us our very breath and life—besides providing for our needs. How refreshing it might be to enjoy and be content with His gifts and to say, *You've given us so much! We don't need more.* "Godliness with contentment is great gain" (v. 6).

—Anne

Be content with the abundance of unmerited
joy our gracious Lord provides





December 1

MORNING



The Word became flesh and
made his dwelling among us.

We have seen his glory, the
glory of the one and only Son,
who came from the Father.

John 1:14



A CHRISTMAS LETTER

John 1:1-14

Every Christmas, a friend of mine writes a long letter to his wife, reviewing the events of the year and dreaming about the future. He always tells her how much he loves her, and why. He also writes a letter to each of his daughters. His words of love make an unforgettable Christmas present.

We could say that the original Christmas love letter was Jesus, the Word made flesh. John highlights this truth in his gospel: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (John 1:1). In ancient philosophy, the Greek for Word, *logos*, suggested a divine mind or order that unites reality, but John expands the definition to reveal the Word as a person: Jesus, the Son of God who was “with God in the beginning” (v. 2). This Word, the Father’s “one and only Son,” “became flesh and made his dwelling among us” (v. 14). Through Jesus the Word, God reveals himself perfectly.

Theologians have grappled with this beautiful mystery for centuries. However much we may not understand, we can be certain that Jesus as the Word gives light to our dark world (v. 9). If we believe in Him, we can experience the gift of being God’s beloved children (v. 12).

Jesus, God’s love letter to us, has come and made His home among us. What an amazing Christmas gift! —Amy

Revel in the joy of being God’s beloved child





December 1

EVENING



Ascribe to the LORD the
glory due his name;
bring an offering and
come into his courts.

Psalm 96:8

OUR PERFECT GIFT


Romans 12:1-8

Every year our local botanical garden hosts a celebration of Christmas around the world. My favorite display is a French nativity. Instead of the traditional scene showing shepherds and wise men with gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh gathered around the manger, it shows French villagers bringing their gifts to baby Jesus. They bring bread, wine, cheese, flowers, and other items that God has given them the ability to produce. This reminds me of the Old Testament command to bring the firstfruits of our labor to the house of the Lord (Exodus 23:16-19). This depiction of the nativity illustrates that everything we have comes from God, so the only thing we have to give is something that God has given us.

When Paul instructed the Romans to present themselves as a living sacrifice (12:1), he was telling them to give back to God what God had given them—their own selves. This includes the gifts He gave them, even their ability to earn a living. We know that God gives people special abilities. Some, like David, were skilled in music (1 Samuel 16:18). Some, like Bezalel and Oholiab, were skilled in artistic works (Exodus 35:30-35). Others have skill in writing, teaching, gardening, and many other things.

When we give back to God what He has first given to us, we give Him the perfect gift—ourselves. —*Julie*

Savor the joy of serving God with
your abilities

The page is decorated with several golden snowflake illustrations. One large, intricate snowflake is centered at the bottom, with several smaller ones scattered around it, including one in the top right corner and another in the bottom left corner.



December 3

MORNING



My soul glorifies the Lord
and my spirit rejoices
in God my Savior.

Luke 1:46-47

A MOSAIC OF BEAUTY

Luke 1:46–55

Sitting in the courtyard of the Church of the Visitation in Ein Karem, Israel, I was overwhelmed with the beautiful display of sixty-seven mosaics containing the words of Luke 1:46–55 in as many languages. Traditionally known as the Magnificat from the Latin “to magnify,” these verses are Mary’s joyous response to the announcement that she will be the mother of the Messiah.

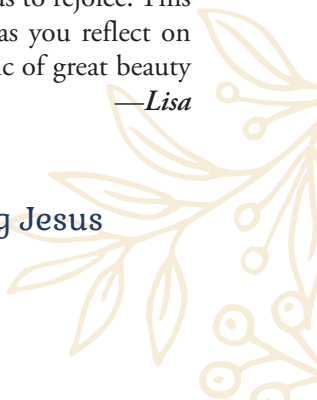
Each plaque contains Mary’s words, including: “My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior. . . . For the Mighty One has done great things for me” (vv. 46–49). The biblical hymn etched in the tiles is a song of praise as Mary recounts the faithfulness of God to her and the nation of Israel.

A grateful recipient of God’s grace, Mary rejoices in her salvation (v. 47). She acknowledges that God’s mercy has extended to the Israelites for generations (v. 50). Looking back over God’s care for the Israelites, Mary praises God for His powerful acts on behalf of His people (v. 51). She also thanks God, recognizing that her daily provision comes from His hand (v. 53).

Mary shows us that recounting the great things God has done for us is a way to express praise and can lead us to rejoice. This Christmas season, consider God’s goodness as you reflect on the year. In doing so, you may create a mosaic of great beauty with your words of praise.

—Lisa

Reflect on the joy of praising Jesus





December 3

EVENING



Weeping may stay for
the night, but rejoicing
comes in the morning.

Psalm 30:5

ALWAYS WINTER

Psalm 30:4-12

Unlike some of my family—the ones who can't wait to go downhill skiing—I don't look forward to winter. When the first snowflake falls, I immediately start calculating how many months of Michigan winter are left.

Imagine C. S. Lewis's fictional world of Narnia, where for a hundred years it was always winter. Cold, wet snow—with no hope of springtime ever arriving to wipe away the memories of icy temperatures and piles of white stuff. But worst of all, in Narnia, Christmas never came. Always winter and never Christmas! To me, the best part of winter is the anticipation, excitement, and wonder of Christmas. Life is bleak when you have nothing to look forward to.

There are some whose souls are locked in winter. The hardness of life has frozen their hearts. Disappointed with life, they find that each day is filled with despair. "Weeping may stay for the night," the psalmist tells us, "but rejoicing comes in the morning" (Psalm 30:5). In the darkest times of our lives, God longs to turn our "wailing into dancing" (v. 11).

David wrote, "When anxiety was great within me, your consolation brought me joy" (Psalm 94:19). If you cry out to God in the midst of your "winter," you can experience the joy of the Christ of Christmas today.

—Cindy

Contemplate the joy of anticipation





December 4

MORNING



The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory as of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

John 1:14



THE TIME OF OUR REJOICING

Deuteronomy 31:9-13

When Christmas displays go up before Halloween displays come down, I long for the days when people didn't think about Christmas until after Thanksgiving. However, there may be a legitimate reason to celebrate Christmas in October.

No one knows the exact day when Jesus was born, but December 25 is unlikely. His birth may have been in autumn, when the weather was still warm enough for shepherds to be outdoors with their flocks. We know that Jesus was crucified on Passover, and that the Holy Spirit came on Pentecost. So some scholars have reasoned that Jesus's birth may have occurred on another Jewish holiday, the Feast of Tabernacles, or Sukkot.

Although we cannot know for sure, we do know that it would be in keeping with God's way of working to send His Son—the Word made flesh who “dwelt” (“tabernacled”) among us (John 1:14)—on the Feast of Tabernacles. Sukkot was a time when observant Jews lived in temporary dwellings and listened to the Word of the Lord being read (Deuteronomy 31:10-13).

For Jews, Sukkot is “the time of our rejoicing.” For all of us, our time of rejoicing is the birth of Christ, who brings the joy of salvation to all the world.
—*Julie*

Bask in the joy of your salvation





December 4

EVENING



Thanks be to God for
his indescribable gift!

2 Corinthians 9:15



A REFRESHING CHANGE

2 Corinthians 8:1-9

Starting each October, catalogs begin to fill up my mailbox advertising clothes, appliances, shoes, candles, books, music—more than I could ever need or want for myself or for loved ones at Christmas.

But a particular catalog I received one November was a refreshing change. It was filled with ways people could give to orphans, the poor, the hungry, the sick, and the disabled through an international Christian ministry. The note in the front of the catalog read: “Share the light and love of Jesus Christ with people whose lives are filled with darkness and despair.” What a relief to think about something other than buying one more thing for someone who already has so much!

The Macedonian church was an example of generosity (2 Corinthians 8:1-6). They gave themselves first to the Lord, then to those helping the needy in Jerusalem. Paul encouraged the Corinthians to follow their example and Christ’s, who gave himself and “became poor, so that [we] through his poverty might become rich” (v. 9).

Do you want a refreshing change this Christmas? Consider new ways to give yourself to the Lord and to those in need. It’s a meaningful way to thank God for “His indescribable gift” of salvation through His Son.

—Anne

Cherish the joy of giving of yourself





December 5

MORNING



The Word became
flesh and made his
dwelling among us.

John 1:14

THE MEANING OF CHRISTMAS

Luke 1:26–38

Each year it seems that Christ's birth is acknowledged less and less during the Christmas season. An editorial in a British newspaper stated, "Christ has been detached from Christmas, and the season is now apparently just a time for being kind and ensuring that no one is lonely."

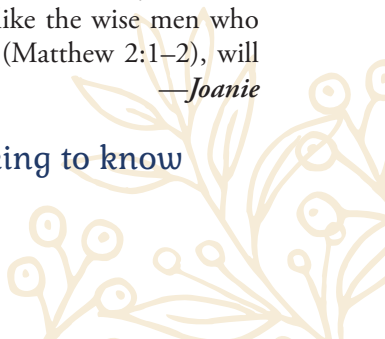
We have a magnificent opportunity to spread the good news that Jesus is the reason for the season. Here are three perspectives on the true meaning of Christmas that we can share with others:

- Christmas is a birthday celebration, honoring Jesus. God's Son took on human flesh and "made his dwelling among us" (John 1:14).
- Jesus came for our sake. He was born to die on a cross for our sins, and He was resurrected to give us forgiveness and eternal life (1 Corinthians 15:3–4).
- We can urge people to respond to Jesus with faith, accepting His offer of salvation (John 1:12; 3:16).

This time of year is more than just a season to be kind. Christmas is about Jesus—the real reason for the season. So, let's take the opportunity to tell others the miraculous story of Jesus, God's Son. And let's pray that many, like the wise men who came to worship the promised Savior (Matthew 2:1–2), will seek Him and find Him this year.

—Joanie

Celebrate the joy of seeking to know
Jesus better





December 5

EVENING



I thank my God every
time I remember you.

Philippians 1:3

A BLESSING BOWL

Romans 1:1-10

The familiar bing of an arriving email caught my attention while I wrote at my computer. Usually I try to resist the temptation to check every email, but the subject line was too enticing: “You are a blessing.”

Eagerly, I opened it to discover a faraway friend telling me she was praying for my family. Each week, she displays one Christmas card photo in her kitchen table “Blessing Bowl” and prays for that family. She wrote, “I thank my God every time I remember you” (Philippians 1:3) and then highlighted our efforts to share God’s love with others—our “partnership” in the gospel.

Through my friend’s intentional gesture, the apostle Paul’s words to the Philippians came trickling into my inbox, creating the same joy in my heart I suspect readers received from his first-century thank-you note. It seems Paul made it a habit to speak his gratitude to those who worked alongside him. A similar phrase opens many of his letters: “I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is being reported all over the world” (Romans 1:8).

In the first century, Paul blessed his collaborators with a thank-you note of prayerfulness. In the twenty-first century, my friend used a Christmas photo and a Blessing Bowl to bring joy into my day. How might we thank those who serve in the mission of God with us today?

—*Elisa*

Appreciate the joy of the work of God’s people





December 6

MORNING



You will fill me with
joy in your presence,
with eternal pleasures
at your right hand.

Psalm 16:11



PRESENTS OR PRESENCE?

1 John 2:24-29

Oswald Chambers once wrote: “It is not God’s promises we need, it is [God] himself.”

At Christmastime we often say, “God’s presence is more important than presents.” But the amount of time and effort we spend on shopping for gifts may indicate otherwise.

In certain parts of the world, people give gifts on December 6. By doing so, they have the rest of the month to focus on Jesus and the wonder of His birth, God’s perfect gift to us.

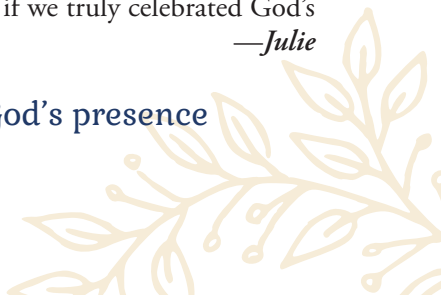
When we say we want God’s presence more than presents from others, perhaps we’re being truthful. But how many of us can honestly say that we want God’s presence more than His presents?

Often we want gifts from God more than we want God himself. We want health, wealth, knowledge, a better job, a better place to live. God may indeed want to give us these things, but we can’t have them apart from Him. As David said, “You fill me with joy in your presence” (Psalm 16:11). Presents may make us happy for a time; earthly gifts from God may make us happy temporarily, but fullness of joy comes only when we remain in a right relationship with God.

So, what would Christmas be like if we truly celebrated God’s presence?

—Julie

Rest in the joy of God’s presence





December 6

EVENING



Blessed is the one who
trusts in the LORD, whose
confidence is in him.

Jeremiah 17:7

WE NEED HOPE

Colossians 1:3-14

Adam and Eve didn't need hope, because they didn't lack anything they needed. And they had every reason to think that life would go on as pleasantly as it started—with every good thing that God had given them to enjoy. But they put it all at risk for the one thing the serpent said that God had withheld: the knowledge of good and evil (Genesis 2:17; 3:5). So, when the serpent came with his offer, Eve was quick to indulge, and Adam was quick to follow (3:6). They got what they wanted: knowledge. But they lost what they had: innocence. With the loss of innocence came the need for hope—hope that their guilt and shame could be removed and goodness restored.

Christmas is the season of hope. Children hope for the latest popular toy or game. Families hope that everyone can make it home for the holidays. But the hope that Christmas commemorates is much bigger than our holiday desires. Jesus, the “Desire of All Nations” (Haggai 2:7 NKJV), has come! He has “rescued us from the dominion of darkness,” bought our redemption, and forgiven our sins (Colossians 1:13–14). He even made it possible for us to be wise about what is good and innocent about what is evil (Romans 16:19). Christ in us gives us the hope of glory.

Praise God for the hope of Christmas!

—*Julie*

Lean into the joy and hope of Christmas



The Writers



Alyson Kieda has been an editor for Our Daily Bread Ministries for over a decade and has more than thirty-five years of editing experience. Alyson has loved writing since she was a child and is thrilled to be writing for *Our Daily Bread*. She is married with three adult children and a growing number of grandchildren. Alyson loves reading, walking in the woods, and being with family. She feels blessed to be following in her mother's footsteps—she wrote articles many years ago for another devotional.

Amy Boucher Pye is a writer, editor, and speaker. The author of *Finding Myself in Britain: Our Search for Faith, Home, and True Identity* and a devotional book *The Living Cross* lives in London. She runs the Woman Alive book club in the United Kingdom and enjoys life with her family in their English vicarage.

Anne Cetas became a follower of Jesus in her late teens. At nineteen, she was given a copy of *Our Daily Bread* by a friend. She also devoured Discovery Series topical study booklets from Our Daily Bread Ministries. Several years later, she joined the editorial staff of *Our Daily Bread* as a proofreader. Anne began writing for the devotional booklet in September 2004 and moved all the way up to being executive editor for the publication. Anne is now retired; she and her husband, Carl, enjoy walking and bicycling together. They volunteer as mentors in an urban ministry.

Bree Rostic is a writer, speaker, spoken word artist, and communication specialist with Our Daily Bread Ministries. Bree's passion is sharing God's love for women to see healing and restoration. She gained her admiration for the Word of God through serving as a teacher in her local ministry. Breonna is married to Daryle, and together they raise their three kids in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Cindy Hess Kasper served for more than forty years at Our Daily Bread Ministries. She learned a love for singing and working with words from her father, Clair Hess, longtime senior editor for the ministry. Now retired, Cindy and her husband, Tom, have three grown children and seven grandchildren, in whom they take great delight.

Elisa Morgan, perhaps best known for her long tenure as CEO of MOPS International, lives in Colorado with her husband, Evan. She now cohosts two programs with Our Daily Bread Ministries—*Discover the Word* for radio and the *God Hears Her* podcast—and continues to write books on the Christian life, spiritual formation, and evangelism, including *When We Pray Like Jesus* and *You Are Not Alone*.

Jennifer Benson Schuldt has been writing professionally since 1997 when she graduated from Cedarville University and began her career as a technical writer. Jennifer lives in the Chicago suburbs with her husband, Bob, and their two children. When she isn't writing or serving at home and church, she enjoys painting and reading poetry and fiction.

Joanie Yoder and her husband established a Christian rehabilitation center for drug addicts in England many years ago. After being widowed, she wrote a book, *Finding the God-Dependent Life*, which was published by this ministry. Joanie went home to heaven in 2004.

Julie Ackerman Link, after a lengthy battle with cancer, went to be with the Lord on April 10, 2015. Julie began writing articles each month for *Our Daily Bread* in 2000. She was a popular author with *Our Daily Bread* readers, and her insightful and inspiring articles have touched millions of lives around the world. Julie also wrote the books *Above All, Love* and *A Heart for God*, published by Our Daily Bread Publishing (ODBP). Her book *100 Prayers Inspired by the Psalms* was published posthumously by ODBP in 2017.

Keila Ochoa and her husband have two young children. She helps Media Associates International with their training ministry for writers around the world and has written several books in Spanish for children, teens, and women. She serves in her church in the areas of youth, missions, and women's ministry.

Kirsten Holmberg is a speaker, author, and coach based in the Pacific Northwest. She's the author of *Advent with the Word: Approaching Christmas Through the Inspired Language of God* and several Bible studies. She speaks regularly at business, church, and community events, encouraging others to step closer to Jesus and better know His love for them through His Word. Find her online at kirstenholmberg.com or on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram (@kirholmberg).

Lisa Samra desires to see Christ glorified in her life and in the ministries she serves. Born and raised in Texas, Lisa is always on the lookout for sweet tea and brisket. She graduated with a BA in journalism from the University of Texas and earned a Master of Biblical Studies degree from Dallas Theological Seminary. Lisa now lives in Grand Rapids, Michigan, with her husband, Jim, and their four children. Jim is pastor of the church started by the founder of Our Daily Bread Ministries, Dr. M. R. DeHaan.

Lori Hatcher and her husband live delightfully close to their four grandchildren in Lexington, South Carolina. The author of three devotional books and a blog, she loves to mine God’s Word for treasure and share what she uncovers. She is the author of the Our Daily Bread Publishing book *Refresh Your Faith*.

Marion Stroud went to be with her Savior on August 8, 2015, after a battle with cancer. Two of her popular books of prayers, *Dear God, It’s Me and It’s Urgent* and *It’s Just You and Me, Lord*, were published by Our Daily Bread Publishing. Marion worked as a cross-cultural trainer for Media Associates International, helping writers produce books for their own culture.

Patricia Raybon, a former *Sunday Magazine* editor at *The Denver Post* and former associate professor of journalism at the University of Colorado at Boulder, now writes bridge-building books “to inspire people to love God and each other.” Passionate for God’s Word, she also supports Bible-translation projects worldwide. Her award-winning books include *My First White Friend* and *I Told the Mountain to Move*. A mother of two and grandmother of five, she and husband Dan live in Colorado. Find her at patriciaraybon.com or on Facebook or Twitter @patriciaraybon.

Poh Fang Chia never dreamed of being in a language-related profession; chemistry was her first love. The turning point came when she received Jesus as her Savior as a fifteen-year-old and expressed to Jesus that she would like to create books that touch lives. She serves with Our Daily Bread Ministries at the Singapore office as an editor and is also a member of the Chinese editorial review committee.

Remi Oyedele is freelance writer with twin passions for God's Word and children's books. Her ultimate life goal is to shape scriptural truths into stories for children and children at heart. Remi has an MA in writing for children. A native of Nigeria, she currently resides in Central Florida where she spends her spare time reading and blogging at wordzpread.com. Remi is married to David, her number one blog fan.

Xochitl (soh-cheel) Dixon equips and encourages readers to embrace God's grace and grow deeper in their personal relationships with Christ and others. Serving as an author, speaker, and blogger at xedixon.com, she enjoys singing, reading, photography, motherhood, and being married to her best friend Dr. W. Alan Dixon Sr., a college professor. You can find out about her books at ourdailybreadpublishing.org.

