

A person with long blonde hair is seen from the back, holding a dark mug. They are looking out a window at a bright, hazy sunset or sunrise. The background is a warm, golden-yellow glow from the sun, with some faint outlines of trees or buildings visible through the glass.

# Moments of Grace

17

HOPE-FILLED  
DEVOTIONS TO  
HELP YOU  
THROUGH  
THE COVID-19  
PANDEMIC

BY THE EDITORS OF GUIDEPOSTS

# Moments of Grace

THE NOVEL CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC has plunged us into uncertain times. Stay-at-home directives have disrupted our economy, our communities, our families, our sense of well-being and security. And what comes next is even less certain. Will we be safe? How long will the pandemic persist? Will our lives ever return to the normal we once knew and now miss so much? No wonder so many people are feeling such heightened anxiety. We at Guideposts are going through these times with you, experiencing the same challenges and struggles. What follows are 17 devotions by Guideposts editors sharing their own journeys in the pandemic and where they have found hope and comfort...and where we hope you might find solace too.

## Worry, My Inner Foe

I WAKE UP THESE MORNINGS fighting off the anxiety that seems to have lain in wait for me while I slept. Will there be more frightening news today? Will the Covid-19 infection rate start to decline? Are my family and friends safe and healthy? Am I? Will things ever go back to the way they were? I didn't know how much I liked the way things were until it was swept away by this awful virus, this invisible enemy.

Then there is the crazed robin in my yard. Every morning he flings himself at my windows. *Thunk. Thunk. Thunk.* Sometimes the noise makes it impossible to work. He finally ceases his attack only to lay siege to the side-view mirror of my car, turning the black finish white in the process. It drives me and Gracie crazy. "You're a bird dog," I say to her. "Do something!" But she only paces back and forth, a worried expression on her face, tail drooping.

Finally I appealed to our vet, Dr. June. "What do I do about this crazy bird?"

"He's not crazy, just territorial," Dr. June told me. "This is nesting season and he's staking claim to your yard. He sees his reflection in your windows or in the side-view mirror of your car and he thinks he sees a rival, an enemy. Close your curtains and hang a towel over the mirror. That should stop it."

Dr. June's advice worked. No longer agitated, the robin flew off. But something else my vet said stayed with me. What the bird took to be his enemy was really just his own reflection. I am the same way. I think my anxiety is something prompted by the uncertainties of the day. Yet those are external factors. My fears and worries are internal. They do not lie in wait but arise within me. And too often they occupy the space where grace should be, where the one thing I can be certain of—God's protective love—can abide. Yes, I wake up to a troubled world these days, but I also wake up to a loving God who has lain in wait for me while I slept.

*God of love and protection, abide  
with me during these difficult times.*

—EDWARD GRINNAN

## Make a Joyful Noise

MY WIFE, CAROL, AND I are just sitting down for dinner. We've said grace and I'm about to dig into the delicious chicken soup—healing—that she's made from scratch when I hear a bit of noise from outside. Someone banging on a pot, it sounds like. What's that?

I look at my watch. 7:00. Of course. Even though we've been doing this every night since quarantine...well, it still takes me by surprise. We get up from the table. I grab an empty bottle and a spoon. Carol gets her favorite pot lid out of the cupboard and another spoon. We open our windows and lean out. We start making a joyful noise. Like everybody else in our New York City neighborhood.

Yes, it is a joyful noise. It's meant to be a shout-out to all the medical workers here in the city and the first responders, especially those good folks at the hospital only 15 blocks away. Thanks for their good care.

But it's become a little more than that too. A chance to let off steam. A reminder that we got through the day. An opportunity to wave out the window at the neighbors we don't get to see quite as much—only from a distance of six feet away and all of us in our masks. For two minutes, I bang my bottle and Carol bangs her pot lid. Then I say amen. It is a prayer as much as grace was at the beginning of dinner.

*God, thank you for your care.  
Be with those in harm's way.  
Your strength will never leave us.*

—RICK HAMLIN

## Dogs Know Best

THERE IS ONE MEMBER of our household who is happy about quarantine: our dog, Gabriel. Gabriel is a two-year-old hound mix we got at a shelter in January 2019. We can tell he had a hard life. There are scars on his legs and he was terrified of everything when we brought him home. He's better adjusted now, but he still monitors the door anxiously whenever one of us leaves the house.

No one is leaving much these days and Gabriel is flourishing.

Here's his quarantine routine: Wake up, eat breakfast, go for a walk around the block followed by a treat. Head upstairs to our son Benjamin's room for some early pampering. Benjamin is usually awake reading and he invites Gabriel onto his bed. Then it's back downstairs to help keep the kitchen floor clean while the kids messily make breakfast. Afterwards comes a longer morning walk with the whole family to give everyone some fresh air before school and work.

The start of online school means it's time to head for our daughter Frances's room, where she has laid out a fleece blanket on her bed, perfect for dog naps until school ends after lunch. The rest of the day features variations on this pattern until evening, when the family gathers on the sofa for books and prayers. Why is it always one of the parents who ends up sitting on the floor to make room for the dog?

I have resented quarantine with every fiber of my being. And I have spent these weeks full of anxiety—for our family, my work, our nation and Kate's and my parents, who are in assisted living facilities on the West Coast.

For Gabriel, nonstop time with family has been the cure for his worries. As life gets simpler, closer and more connected, Gabriel thrives. I have begun to wonder whether his perspective is the answer to my own anxieties.

Life with God is a relationship, and God likes relationships. Families are meant to be together. Time at home, hard as it is, is time living as God intended. Maybe Gabriel is not the only member of our household thankful for quarantine.

*God, help me to accept what I cannot change and to remember that your priorities are always better than mine.*

—JIM HINCH



## Uncle Eddie

I FIND MYSELF THINKING ABOUT my uncle Eddie these days and missing him a lot. He was a man of both faith and science.

Eddie started out in pre-med but switched to biochemistry, excited by the prospect of doing research on new medicines and vaccines. Early in his career he worked with Dr. Jonas Salk on scaling up the polio vaccine for mass production.

As a kid I loved my visits with my uncle. He'd take me on a tour of the large pharmaceutical laboratory where he led a team of researchers. I'd stare wide-eyed at the electron microscopes and testing machines. On one visit he told me about a project the team was working on to synthesize human insulin using recombinant gene technology. Not that I could grasp much of this. But I did have a diabetic friend and it made me feel good that Uncle Eddie was doing something to help him.

Eddie's life was not rooted just in science, though. It was rooted even deeper in his faith. Nearly every day he attended morning Mass. He had no problem kneeling in a pew at 7 a.m. and sitting at his research bench at 8. For him, science was a way God helped humans help each other. It was the lens through which we could view creation. I doubt it ever occurred to him that there was anything irreconcilable between science and religious faith.

Yet in the throes of this pandemic where doubt abounds, people are questioning both. They are wondering what and who to believe and where to turn. I even find myself wondering that too sometimes. It is at those uncertain moments that I remind myself of one thing I must do: Say a prayer for the scientists.

*Lord, guide the women and men to whom you  
have given such great gifts. People like my uncle Eddie,  
who believed in your providence above all else.*

— EDWARD GRINNAN

## Reason to Sing

WE COULDN'T GET TOGETHER as a choir to sing for Easter. No service at church. Only a virtual service on Zoom. Our choir director, undaunted, insisted that we should still do the "Hallelujah" chorus from Handel's *Messiah*, one of those classics we sing every Easter.

He sent emails with links to the music and to a recording so we could practice at home. "I want all of you to sing your part into your phones and then send the audio file to me." He'd take all the individual parts and mix them, creating a virtual chorus.

I did my best, practicing my part. When I was ready, I downloaded the recording he sent of the accompaniment. I listened to that in one ear while I sang my tenor part into my phone. *Gosh, I don't sound half bad*, I thought.

But when I played back the audio, I was horrified. Just one lone voice. No support from all the other singers around me. Ugh. It didn't sound like the "Hallelujah" chorus at all. Worse than me singing in the shower. I sent it off, with apologies.

Easter morning I wasn't expecting much from our choir director's mix. And yet, there it was. That glorious sound. You could make out the individual voices, but you could also hear a whole chorus with the organ accompaniment under us. Music.

No telling how long it'll be before we're together again in the choir loft. But for now I take comfort that each of us, at home, in our private prayers, in our quiet music-making, is doing our best to remember that "He shall reign forever and ever...." There's always good reason to sing.

*Hallelujah. You are indeed "King of kings  
and Lord of lords" now and forever.*

—RICK HAMLIN

## Thank You, Mom

I WAS HAVING A HARD TIME dealing with all the uncertainty the stay-at-home order brought. In the best of times, I am an anxious person. Now each day began with concerns over the well-being of my family, my friends and myself. Plus I felt cooped up and bored, which only made it worse. Usually I combat anxiety by scheduling activities, spending time with friends and heading outdoors. But none of that was available to me now.

I brought this up to my mom on one of our many FaceTime calls. How I was having trouble sleeping, and having trouble staying in a good mood.

She stopped me. “Why don’t you try knitting?”

Knitting? Sure, I’d learned how when I was a kid. But I hadn’t tried in years, and I’d never finished a project. I didn’t have the patience. How was looping yarn over and over going to help?

Over the next few days, though, I couldn’t get Mom’s suggestion out of my head. *I guess I’ll give it another shot*, I thought. I placed an online order for a set of needles and a skein of yarn.

The materials arrived, and I got started making a thick scarf. Suddenly I was able to watch shows and listen to my favorite podcasts without my mind drifting to doom and gloom. Mom was right! I was amazed at how doing something so simple, so repetitive, helped calm me down. The more the scarf grew, the more I felt myself ease into this new, slower pace of life.

The scarf is now nearly 12 inches long. It’s not perfect—it has snags and holes—and I had to start over once. But that’s not the point. I’ve been reminded that the greatest peace of mind comes from appreciating some of life’s simplest things. And for that, I’m grateful.

*God, please help me continue to slow down  
and find joy in the simple things in life, even when  
this season of solitude is through.*

—HILARY RIBONS



## You-Know-Who

I STOOD IN LINE at the pharmacy trying to observe social-distancing protocols in the narrow aisle. I was picking up a prescription for Julee and juggling a few hard-to-get items we needed...exam gloves, disinfectant wipes and cleansers, plus aloe vera skin cream to address the damage all this pandemic hygiene was doing to my hands. I was wearing a basic surgical mask. My fellow shoppers were similarly outfitted.

The woman in front of me in line turned and glanced at my armful of cleaning products, then at me.

“You know what I hate about these masks?” she said, over her shoulder. “No one can see when you’re smiling. You go ahead of me. You’ve got your hands full.”

I tried to protest but soon we were doing a social-distancing dance as we repositioned ourselves in line. “Thank you,” I said.

“We’re in this together!” she said, smiling, I imagined.

“I used to be a nurse, a long time ago,” the woman continued. “There’s a lot you can do to stay protected but the rest is up to you-know-who.” She nodded towards the ceiling.

Before I could reply I was called up to the counter. I paid for my things and nodded to my new friend as I was leaving.

Loading my purchases in the car I felt a smile form beneath my mask. Here I was with all my protective, officially recommended germ-slaying products. And sure, they made sense under the circumstances. I’d be back for more in a week. But the greatest protection I can rely on comes from you-know-who, as the lady said. Protection that never needs replenishment.

*Lord, I know who you are—the One whose protection is ever-present, whose sheltering arms are always open.*

—EDWARD GRINNAN

## Count Your Blessings

I TRIED NOT TO but I kept a secret tally in my head of all the things that we were missing, those things we couldn't do because we were abiding by this necessary, important and yet claustrophobia-inducing shelter-in-place protocol. No church on Sunday, only a virtual replacement. No choir rehearsals. No chatting with my colleagues at the office, only meetings on Zoom. No running into neighbors on the street, just awkward conversations from six feet apart, talking through our masks.

After one Zoom meeting too many, I clicked the mute button and muttered to myself, "At least God can't mute any of us." I wondered if God was getting tired of hearing all my complaints.

Then came an email suggestion from our daughter-in-law, Karen, who's married to our son Will. She sent it not only to Carol and me and our other son and his fiancée but also to my three siblings and their spouses and their kids and their spouses: "Let's have a family Zoom session on Sunday night. All of us."

We live in New York and they all live in California, 3000 miles away. But there we were on a Sunday night, more than 20 of us, little pictures tiled on a screen like a giant version of the old TV show *Hollywood Squares*, with Will moderating. "Tell us," he said, "about some highlight you've had in the last few weeks."

All at once we were counting our quarantine blessings. Time spent with family, cooking new recipes, cleaning out closets, working from home, reading a book, watching an old movie. And this, all of us connected from coast-to-coast to celebrate our love for each other.

What a novel chance to give our thanks aloud in the midst of a tough time. Yes, there is always something to be grateful for. Even on Zoom.

*Help me, Lord, know the uncountable blessings  
of this life you have given to me.*

—RICK HAMLIN

## Circles of Prayer

HAVE YOU WORRIED, like I have, that our day-to-day worlds would become smaller, less vital, even claustrophobic during the pandemic?

In my pre-Covid life, prayer consisted of three concentric circles: I prayed for the inner circle of my friends and family; then for those in my larger social orbit; and finally for the sick and poor and embattled of the whole wide world, but almost always in vague and general terms.

Now I pray also for the masked and gloved cashier ringing up my groceries at the corner bodega. I pray for the neighbors across the street I've never met, who before existed only as shadows flitting behind the windows of an apartment I coveted, but who I now see pacing the length of their barren rooftop every night at dusk. I pray for the subway workers, people I never paid much mind to before, risking their lives to keep my city going, literally going. I pray for those who live alone and wonder if they might die without ever again touching, or being touched by, another human being. I worry about the group of teenagers who still hang out in front of the pizza joint, roughhousing with each other, close, far too close. And of course, the legion of healthcare workers whose commitment places them in the jaws of danger every day.

For the first time in my life, I pray for individual towns and cities, for states and countries that no longer seem like mere dots on a map. My accountant's wife died last week in Long Island. My friend's brother in Seattle had a Covid-related stroke. My former student's mother is on a ventilator in Hong Kong. The suffering *out there* does not feel vague or general anymore.

The advent of Covid-19 has not made my world smaller—it's been made larger by the circles of prayer widening out into the world. We may be socially distant from each other and that could continue for a long while, but we don't have to be spiritually distant. Our hearts never have to shelter in place.

*God, thank you for the opportunity in this time of crisis  
to become more connected to each other and to you.*

—KIMBERLY ELKINS

# A Golden Angel

AS MUCH AS I'VE GROWN more grateful for the things I took for granted before this lockdown, I am increasingly thankful for the things that are getting me through the long days since. Number one on the list is our golden retriever, Gracie. Why Gracie? I'll explain.

She starts early, letting us know it's time to get up. No sleeping in and letting the day slip away! She parks herself in the kitchen until we get breakfast under way. Can't skimp on nutrition. And yes, she gets a bite for her trouble.

Julee works upstairs while I set up my computer in the downstairs office. All morning between naps and playing with her toys, Gracie is up and down the stairs looking in on us. She lets me know when it's time for her thyroid medication, which she gets in a treat. She's never more than a few minutes off. A little later she rests her chin on my keyboard. *Let's not forget about our exercise!* Time for our daily hike.

We don't usually eat lunch but we do have a midafternoon snack Julee calls "tea time." As you can imagine, we're never late for tea time.

Then it's naptime for Gracie...and us too, if she has her way. Later, as afternoon morphs into evening, and especially if work seems to be going on too long, Gracie is back and forth between us, chin on my keyboard again, her big fluffy tail slapping the floor. Time to knock off and get dinner going. No unnecessary overtime, if she has anything to say about it.

Evenings are meant for relaxation, watching a movie or reading or lazing on the back porch, Gracie always close by, supervising our activities, her infallible internal clock and natural need for order keeping Julee and me—especially me—organized and focused under circumstances that can easily descend into stress and disorder.

Before it gets too late and I get involved with an old flick I'll probably fall asleep watching well into the wee hours, Gracie leads the way upstairs with a glance over her shoulder. *Are you coming?* Yes, of course, it's bedtime. You're right as usual, Gracie. Time for rest. But first I'll say a prayer.

*Thank you, Lord, for all of the angels you send us,  
especially this one with the big fluffy tail who helps  
make sure we take care of ourselves.*

—EDWARD GRINNAN

## Share the Care

OUR DOWNSTAIRS NEIGHBOR posted something on Facebook. “I seem to have all the symptoms,” she wrote. A bit of a cough, a fever, loss of her sense of smell. “I called my doctor and he agrees, so for now I’m staying at home with my husband.” Covid-19, a little too close for comfort.

I sent her an email. “Gosh, I’m so sorry to hear the news. I hope it’s a mild case. Let us know if there’s anything we can do for you. A grocery run? A trip to the pharmacy?”

She assured me they had everything they needed at home. A full refrigerator and freezer, plenty of dry goods in the closets. They’d be fine. Fortunately, her case seemed to be mild.

But every morning as I trundled downstairs to go out for a run, I’d see their newspaper at the front door of our apartment building, sometimes two newspapers. *The least they could have done was cancel their subscriptions*, I thought. For days, I’d bring the newspapers inside and put them on their doormat, where they disappeared.

One morning I noticed a sign on their door written in florid red pen. “To whomever brings us our newspapers in the morning, WE’RE SO GRATEFUL. It means more than you can ever know. Thanks, thanks, thanks.”

Hadn’t I asked if there was something I could do? Here it was, a favor I didn’t even know I was doing, one done—I confess—with some irritation. Now it was my turn to be grateful. Sometimes God plants good deeds on our hearts without our even knowing it.

*Show me, Lord, how I can help those in need.*

—RICK HAMLIN

## Sounds of Silence

ORDINARILY I SIGH when it's time for our dog Gabriel's evening walk. One more have-to in an already crowded day.

Now, every chance to get outside is a blessing. Sometimes all four of us humans go on the evening walk, Kate, me, Frances and Benjamin. The kids take their Razor scooters and careen around Central Park while the parents talk or just revel in one blessing of New York's otherwise unnerving shutdown: crystal-clean air.

You can see stars in New York now. When the moon rises, it is sharply etched against the night sky. Birds make their evening calls. Sometimes I can even hear the sound of water rushing through the park's artfully constructed creeks. During the day, the city's silence unsettles me. At night, it is revelatory.

One evening, we were walking along a path that loops from the park's west side to the east side and back. On the east side, it passes close to where the humanitarian organization Samaritan's Purse has erected a large tent hospital to treat Covid-19 patients.

That hospital is a symbol of New York's tragic role as the epicenter of the pandemic in America. I am heartened by the show of support. I am also dismayed by the rising tide of illness and death. People in our parish are sick. We know other people who have died.

We passed by the tent hospital and paused to look. Then we continued along the path toward home. We came to an expanse of meadow and sports fields where the kids have played soccer in summers past. In the dark, the meadow seemed vast, a huge well of silence and peace. In the distance, skyscrapers and apartment buildings rose like a chain of mountains.

Kate and I stopped while the kids raced up and down a nearby slope with Gabriel. I took in the silence, the stars, the cool, clean air. Most days, it was hard to feel God's presence in the grind of worry, sadness, work, home schooling, and caring for aging parents far away.

Now, God's presence was all there was to feel. I let my worries subside and took Kate's hand as the kids scooted ahead and we made our way home.

*God, you are always present even when we are too worried or distracted to notice. Give me eyes to see you and a heart to feel your love.*

—JIM HINCH



# The Blessing of Bilbo

GROWING UP, I was never a cat person. I thought cats were too fussy and holier-than-thou in attitude. However, when my household went in self-quarantine in early March, I began to spend a lot more time with my boyfriend's Siamese, Bilbo.

Bilbo is an indoor cat who, at 12 years old, has been in self-quarantine for basically his entire life—and he's pretty satisfied with it! I started looking to him for ways to structure my days, especially as they dragged into weeks, then longer. What could a cat teach a human about being cooped up?

We feed Bilbo wet food in the morning. If we don't, he screams. Sometimes, the Covid-19 news is just too much to bear, and I'm tempted to burrow under my covers and stay in bed. But, no. Bilbo howls and howls. So I'm up, putting on a pot of coffee, and dishing out Bilbo's breakfast.

Next, it's time for exercise. For me, that means yoga. For Bilbo, it's zoomies across the apartment floor.

Partway through my workday, I notice Bilbo happily sunning himself near a window. That reminds me to go out for a brisk walk—six feet apart from other pedestrians!—in between Zoom meetings. I feel the sunlight on my skin, and it helps to settle my anxiety and brighten my mood.

If I catch myself snacking too much between meals, or eating a whole bag of chips for dinner, I need only look to Bilbo. Recently I saw him walk over to his bowl, sink his head into it and devour his food. Two minutes later, he threw it all up on the hardwood floor. An important reminder that stress eating only leads to more stress.

Bilbo's most important teaching, however, is simply doing what he does best, which is to love us. He cuddles constantly and purrs every day. When the dishes pile up or my boyfriend and I fight over our small Queens apartment, I try to be more like Bilbo. How lucky are we to be stuck at home with the ones we love?

*Lord, let me be more like my cat,  
who loves hard even when times are tough.*

— MARI PACK

## A to Z

EVERY NIGHT before I go to sleep, I sit up in bed, close my eyes and pray about whatever is on my mind, emptying it of worries. Anxieties have a way of making themselves known, distracting me from my attempts at inner peace. “You take them, God,” I say, catching each thought and releasing it like a bird.

“What if we get sick?” I wonder. “What if one of us needs to be hospitalized?” “What if we run out of money?” “What if one of our kids gets sick?” “What if I unknowingly infect someone else?” “What if we haven’t been doing enough to protect ourselves?” “What if we’ve been doing too much to protect ourselves?”

There is no end to it. I’ve learned it’s foolish to stifle the worries and pretend they don’t exist. Better to acknowledge them and put them in better hands. Better yet if I go through the alphabet and think of others who could use prayer. There’s always someone for each letter. Some need that could be filled. Some worry to be relieved of. A to Z. I don’t always find someone for the letter Z...but X can mark the spot for enough worries.

That feels better. I feel better. Thinking of that whole community of people I care about, many of whom have prayed for me.

Lastly, I picture the hospital only blocks away—where I, too, in times past have been a patient. I pray for the doctors, the nurses, the med techs, the janitors, the orderlies, the food workers. I can see them walking those corridors in my mind’s eye, God’s angels doing God’s work. *Be with them, Lord. And be with those who need them.*

Lights out. I sink into bed, lay my head on my pillow. There will be new worries tomorrow. But for tonight, they have been given rest.

*Thanks for the reminder, Lord, that worries can always be given to you. I give them away gladly.*

—RICK HAMLIN

## A Word From Gracie

HI. GRACIE HERE. Edward and Julee's golden retriever. I need to discuss an important topic (with Edward's help). Social distancing.

I am what you would call an extrovert. How do we know this? I wag my tail a lot. That is a strong indicator. I also wiggle my butt. And smile. I smile all the time. Humans frequently ask me, "What are you so happy about?" Breakfast! Lunch! Dinner! Treats! Pets! Hugs! Love!

So for me to stay away from people other than my immediate humans is very challenging. I can't go shopping for treats at the puppy store right now, for instance, which I love to do on Saturdays. I can't visit with people on the street anymore. Even when I go to the vet, Dr. June comes out to the car to examine me. I'm not even allowed to play with other dogs for fear of virus transfer! I don't understand!

The other day the FedEx man came up the driveway in his familiar truck. I love that truck! He had my food! I charged out to greet him, as usual. Where would I be without my food? Before I could slam my butt into him—how I greet my favorite humans—Edward shouted out the window, "Please don't touch her." Usually the FedEx man gives me a hug and a treat. But Edward was saying that if he had germs they could go onto me and then onto my humans. Not good! So the FedEx man stepped back and put my treat on the ground for me.

Later that night I sat at the edge of my yard looking up at the stars and wondering why I, of all the dogs in the whole world, felt sad. We living beings need each other! We need to love and be loved! That's so hard now. But distance doesn't make me love less. I think it makes me love more. My humans do something called praying and they have been praying a lot for this sad time to pass and for everyone to be safe and together again. If I could pray, that's what I would pray for too. All the time.

*Father, Gracie misses her friends. I miss my friends too.  
I miss crowds and the restlessness of a great city.  
This virus, this microscopic filament of RNA, has managed  
to separate the people of the world. During this time,  
let us be together in our love of you.*

—EDWARD GRINNAN

## Quarantine Cut

MY HAIR WAS GETTING SHAGGY. I'd gotten a haircut back in early February, and every time I looked at myself in the bathroom mirror, I was relieved to see that my hair looked just fine. Longer than usual and getting pretty gray, but I echoed a refrain I've heard from friends, "At least you have hair." I figured my wife would tell me when I was just too scruffy.

That moment arrived. "I need to cut your hair," Carol said. She used to cut our boys' hair when they were young. All right, they were two or three years old when she first wielded her clipping shears...but then, didn't she do it for a while after? I mean, up to the time they were in junior high? And just the other night, when we were FaceTiming a friend, the woman said to Carol, "Who cut your hair? It looks great."

"I did it myself," Carol responded. "Trimmed my own bangs."

I should have been reassured. It would be more than just my bangs, though.

We went outside—"We don't want all that hair inside," she said—and we sat under the elm tree, where our neighbors could see us. (Surely they made wry comments from beneath their masks.) I held up my cell phone as a mirror and Carol cut.

You know what? It looks very good. Almost professional. Who knew? My wife can cut hair! "That's because she practiced on me," our son Will commented on the selfie I posted on Facebook. No matter. Spend enough time with the people you love, even in quarantine, and you discover their hidden and not-so-hidden gifts.

*Lord, let me never underestimate  
the talents of my loved ones.*

—RICK HAMLIN

# The Path Ahead

## SO WHAT COMES NEXT?

As hard as it was to enter into this lockdown, it now seems almost as hard to contemplate emerging from it. At least for me. I know we are not going back to the way things were no matter how much I miss it. But what will the new normal look like and feel like? How will life change?

Everyone agrees that a certain degree of social distancing—a term I increasingly want to distance myself from—will continue for the foreseeable future. We will wash our hands and wipe down our surfaces and wear masks and avoid crowds. We will continue to fear the virus.

But does that mean we will fear each other? The other day on my hike with Gracie, tackling a steep section of a remote trail on a lovely spring afternoon, I was surprised to see a man with his dog coming towards us. My surprise quickly morphed into apprehension. I pulled Gracie at least 10 feet off the trail to give the man plenty of space, slipping and sliding clumsily. When the man drew even with us he stopped, nodded, knocked the mud off his hiking stick and then his boots.

“Perfect day,” he said. The dogs’ noses were pointed in the air, trying to catch an informative whiff of each other at a distance.

“Under the circumstances,” I replied, struggling to muster a rueful smile.

“My doctor tells me you’re not likely to contract the illness out here in the open air. More likely to get poison ivy.” Then the man moved on, his dog looking back longingly at Gracie as we scrambled back on the trail.

Gracie and I enjoy stopping and jawing with people we meet on our hikes. Yet my first reaction to this stranger was trepidation. My whole body tensed. How do we love our neighbors when the measures we must follow to protect ourselves are conditioning us to fear them? I’m worried that when this lockdown lifts I won’t see people the same way. I mean, will we ever hug again? Hold hands in prayer?

Faith, I constantly tell myself, is trusting in the unknowable and in the one thing I can know—that a loving God is leading me even when the path is unclear.

*Lord, teach me new ways to love my neighbor until it is safe to love them the old-fashioned way again.*

—EDWARD GRINNAN

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