A decorative background featuring stylized floral motifs, including five-petaled flowers and spiral patterns, rendered in black and grey tones. The design is elegant and modern, with thin lines and a clean aesthetic.

A 40-day devotional study & prayer guide  
focusing on uniting & building your  
local women's group.

# From the ground up.

By Kathy Barron

A Resource of  
ARP Women's Ministries



## **Praises, Petitions and Personal Thoughts:**



## Day 40: With Love

**READ 1 CORINTHIANS 13**

**W**e are at the end of our 40 days of prayer. Your women's organization is ready to embark on its way to new growth—spiritual and numerical we hope. You have been faithful to pray for the work that has gone before and for the work that lies ahead. You have encouraged the planners and prayed for them and for your local church's leadership.

You still have questions.

In the midst of all of this it is important to remember that it is all about the love that God has for His children. We are to love one another . What does love look like to you? Move beyond the romantic emotion to the verb "to love." How are you going to demonstrate love through the work of the women in your church? Is your heart full of love for those who will be impacted by it? Do you see the way that this new organization can fulfill its call to love through that work? Will that love be broadcast beyond your church to others?

Part of that love is continued prayer and encouragement for those who will lead. Please don't forget to pray for the women who lead in your church, in the presbyterial, on the Board of ARP Women's Ministries, and for the new Administrator. Pray for them to seek wisdom, to work together in harmony, to have servants hearts, and to listen to you, the woman all will seek to serve.

**Today:** Pray, with a thankful heart, for all who have had a part in this process and for the future leadership.

## From the Author:

Christian women growing and serving together—What a beautiful concept!

The focus of these 40 devotionals is unifying your women to build up your church and the ARP Church as a denomination. The prayer requests are directly related to the process being undertaken by local leadership of evaluating your church's women's ministry, BUT they could be used by any church. The goal is for every woman in your church to be joined together in prayer.

These devotionals come from my heart, a passion that God has given me for the value of women ministering to women. God uses His Word, our ministers and teachers, our own prayer and meditation, and fellow believers to grow us into more faithful disciples. Twenty-five years ago God really began to awe me through the power of women ministering to women. I have seen my own life transformed. Fellow Christian women have upheld me through the loss of an infant daughter; they taught me the power of prayer; they modeled sharing their faith in day to day experiences; they laughed with me and cried with me. Who else but Christian sisters would have cleaned my house when I broke my foot shopping? Yes, shopping—I said they laughed with me.

Through God's leading and their encouragement I recognized a role in developing opportunities for other women to grow together. In those experiences I have seen women come to faith in Christ, new Christians grow into beautiful Christian mothers and servants within the church, relationships repaired or enhanced by new understanding of godly marriage, faith communities strengthened by the affirmation of spiritual gifts, and military communities supported by their service. In the 10 years since my husband and I left Air Force life and returned to South Carolina and our roots in the ARP Church, I have been drawn to help ARP women grow together. Perhaps because of my experiences outside our denomination, I have seen how much we need to draw more of our women, especially young women and new Christians, to understand the blessing and uniqueness of Christian women fellowshiping together.

My prayer is that this resource will draw the women of your church closer together so that your church, your service, and your witness are strengthened.



### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Kathy Barron is a graduate of Erskine College (1973) and Erskine Theological Seminary, receiving her Master of Arts in Christian Education in May 2005. Married to John Barron for 32 years, they spent the first 22 years as an Air Force family, worshiping and serving in a variety of military chapel communities and civilian Presbyterian churches. Since 1995, they have been members of First ARP Church in Rock Hill, S.C. Kathy has served on local, presbyterial, and WSU boards and was a member of the WSU Task Force for reorganization. John and Kathy have one son, Jeremy, who has brought a lovely daughter-in-law into their lives.



## Day 1: A New Vision

READ PROVERBS 1:7A AND 29:18

**S**ometimes when we're told about something new we have a clear vision of what it looks like. Other times visualizing is almost impossible. Some of us are better at seeing certain things in our minds' eyes than others.

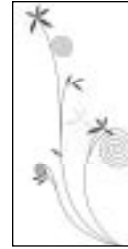
Where are you on this day? Do you have a picture in your mind of what women's ministry in your church should "look like"? Are you at a total loss to explain what your leadership is about to do?

I wonder what Abraham and Noah and Moses and Mary thought when God shared a glimpse of their future with them. It took a lot for them to trust their futures to His hands. It was hard to leave the known for the unknown.

It's hard to trust someone else with your future. It's hard to believe that God has it all in His hands and under His control. The verses for today call us to trust that God does have a plan for your church and for its women's ministry, even when we don't understand it.

As a member of the Task Force, I can assure you that we spent much time in prayer trying to clarify our glimpse of God's vision for the women in our local churches. We continue to pray that we remained faithful to that vision. We also pray for your church, that you may develop your own vision for women's ministry as it can best serve your church and God's kingdom.

**Today:** Pray for clarity of vision for your leadership as they begin this journey of planning and evaluating.



## Day 39: ...And Caterpillars

READ PHILIPPIANS 4:4-7

**I**n the previous devotional we looked at the butterfly giving way to a new butterfly. Take a moment to think about those in your church who have never been part of woman to woman ministry, those in churches that have not had a women's Bible study or service opportunities for women, and those new Christians who have never experienced the mentoring of a spiritual mother.

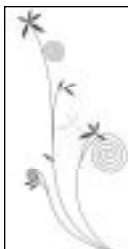
Have you ever watched a toddler examine a caterpillar? They've never seen one before. This caterpillar is as unique and mysterious and fascinating to them as the butterfly will be in the future.

Don't wait until your organization is perfect. It never will be anyway! Invite those who have never experienced a butterfly to examine the caterpillar or cocoon. Tell them that you are doing a new thing and that your prayer is that they will be part of it.

Encourage them to examine where they are receiving the nourishment they need to work and play and minister to others. Have they found a place of spiritual nourishment uniquely designed for them? Do they understand that one of the greatest blessings and growth experiences of life is joining together with other believers to meet a need through service.

Rejoice together in the new opportunities before you—and examine all those caterpillar legs with awe.

**Today:** Pray for a joy-filled desire to draw others into this new experience with you.



## Day 38: Butterflies...

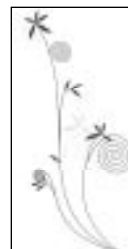
READ PSALM 105:3 AND PSALM 118

**A** butterfly is a beautiful thing. We all enjoy watching them float above the flowers. We've all heard stories of the impact of a butterfly at a crucial point in someone's life. It is often used as a symbol of new birth for Christians. It is one of the most visual symbols of something being transformed into a new being that God has provided in creation.

As I have had opportunity to share with others my excitement over the transition to ARP Women's Ministries, I have used the butterfly image also—perhaps in a little bit different way.

Even a new butterfly begins with another butterfly. You may see the existing structure of your women's organization as a beautiful thing. That doesn't mean that a new and different organizational structure can't be a beautiful thing, worthy of equal celebration. However, there will be some days ahead—in fact, this planning process is part of them—when the emerging organization is going to look more like a seemingly stagnant cocoon or a many-legged caterpillar than a beautiful, floating butterfly. But we can't reach that new butterfly without the necessity of those other stages of life. We must wait patiently through each stage. We must marvel at the work God is doing and the work that we will see ahead, the blessings of new vision.

**Today:** Pray for a rejoicing but patient heart through each stage of life as your church and your women process these changes.



## Day 2: The Next Right Step

READ PROVERBS 2:1-5, 24:3-4

**H**ow often do we say, "I wish I knew what to do next," or "I can't," when we really mean "I'm not sure how"? God assures us that He will provide what we need to know when we need it. All we have to do is seek His guidance.

Changes in our lives are often scary. We want to see all of the picture before we take a step. Your planning team probably feels that way about the work it is doing. God doesn't always let us see beyond the need to take that step. He just promises to guide our steps of faith.

When my son was in college, toward the end of one semester, he called as stressed out as I've ever heard him. He didn't feel he was going to be able to finish the semester's work, especially dealing with a troublesome professor, and didn't know what to do or where to turn. I certainly didn't know what to tell him to do but I was able to tell him where to turn. We prayed together over the phone—God gave me the words to say: "Lord, show Jeremy the next right step to take to be able to complete his work..." As we prayed, Jeremy was able to calm down and he successfully completed the semester.

In the years since I have prayed that prayer many times for myself and with others who were struggling to find wisdom and direction. I don't always know when the answer will come—but it's always on time when it does.

**Today:** Pray that the members of your planning team will stop often and ask God to show them the "next right step."



## Day 3: God's Plan

READ PROVERBS 2:5-6, 31:26 AND JEREMIAH 29:11-13

**I**n years past, most of our ARP churches were the center of a community of faith and activity. Faithful women, taught by previous generations, sought ways to serve beyond their local communities. Thus, the Woman's Synodical Missionary Union was formed to support foreign missions.

Today, in many of our ARP churches, the community of faithful women includes many who do not come from ARP families or from Christian homes. They may be new to the faith. Even if they became Christians at a young age they may have had no model of Christian womanhood from whom to learn. We need to provide those models—those Christian spiritual guides—within our communities of faith. If we don't make intentional efforts to teach women to be Christian mothers, Christian wives, Christians in the workplace... where will they learn how?

God knows His plans for each one of us. Has He placed you in a church to learn from another woman who is more spiritually mature? Has He placed you there to train one who is spiritually younger than you? Is there someone in your church who is a strong Christian woman, but she has had no example of how to be a Christian parent and there's a baby on the way? Look around you. What is God's plan for you right now?

**Today:** Pray for your leaders and every woman to be filled with newness of heart, ready to see what God has planned.



## Day 37: Peace in Christ

READ EPHESIANS 2:14-22

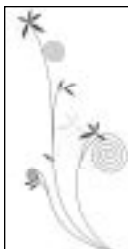
**I**n every new thing, there is always someone or several "someones" who are glad to tell you why it just won't work or be as good as the old thing. These people can be divisive or they can be loved and accepted for who they are.

I'm sure we've all heard the many jokes, "How many \_\_\_\_\_ does it take to change a light bulb?" Well the ARP version I heard of this is answered: "Three—one to change it and two to tell you how good the old one was." It's okay to reminisce about the wonderful heritage our women's ministries have. We need to honor and remember the foundation of the work we are about to begin. Years of faithful women's ministry precedes the work that we are now doing.

In fact, your organization may have found that what you have been doing is just perfect for your church. You may be reading these devotionals and saying that nothing will really change. Your church may be starting from scratch with only a small women's Bible study as a beginning. OR, you may be looking at a major shift in the ministry your women will undertake. Whatever is the case, peace rests in realizing that God is in control.

This passage points out that our peace is to be found in Christ. If you have been placing your prayers before God through the power of the name of Jesus Christ, then you can rest in the peace that He will deal with those who would oppose ANY new thing.

**Today:** Pray for a peaceful transition and hearts of unity.



## Day 36: Rejoice!

READ EPHESIANS 4:20-21

**W**e are nearing the end of our time of joining together in prayer and preparation. Your planning team, which may be your whole group, is ready to present the plans and see them implemented in the coming months.

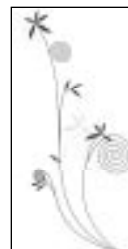
This should be a time of rejoicing. Through your prayers you have participated in the work that has taken place. Through your prayers your church is facing a new opportunity for faithful service to make it stronger and a greater witness to Christ's work.

Plans will be placed before you and your fellow female believers. Volunteers will be recruited to serve in various capacities. Challenges will need to be faced as the rough spots are ironed out.

It is a time of new beginnings. No one is too old for new beginnings. No one is too immature for new beginnings. No one loves new things more than the average woman, I don't imagine.

Most women love to celebrate also. Birthdays, anniversaries, our children's achievements, graduations, promotions, babies, and any other excuse we can find to come together and rejoice.

**Today:** Pray that every member of your congregation will rejoice together in this new thing that your women's organization is beginning.



## Day 4: Tradition and Newness

READ PSALM 119:89-91

**I** like to do things my own way. What about you? I don't want someone else telling me what to do. Why change something that's working perfectly well for me? Some of us like the energy of innovative, new ideas. Others love tradition and the peace of doing things the way they've always been done. I bet you hear both in your church from time to time. Tradition is a point of pride in the ARP Church—so much so that it's often the subject of humor.

For those who are new to the church and to the work of its women, we need to instill some of this pride in tradition. BUT, that pride needs to be centered in gratitude for the work God has done in us and through us as we sought to serve Him through the decades.

To those who have been immersed in the work of the women for many years, we have much for which to be grateful. Yet, we need to see the ministry from the point of view of those who have not grown up with our heritage and who don't have Mom and Grandmom down the road to guide them in building a Christian home or challenging them to learn the Bible and serve God.

Take time to look at the ministry of women from someone else's point of view. Which does your church need to provide: more opportunities for personal spiritual growth or more opportunities to reach out and serve?

**Today:** Pray for open-mindedness among all of the women of your church and of our denomination. Hear God speak.



## Day 5: Lord, Use Me

**READ: JAMES 1:5, MATTHEW 6:33, LAMENTATIONS 3:21-26**

**A**gain we are reminded to put our hope and trust in the Lord—to ask Him, to seek His guidance, to trust in His faithfulness.

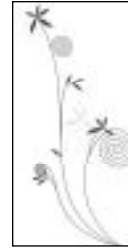
What is it that you feel you need from your women’s organization or from your church? What is it that you feel you have to contribute? What has God been saying to you about your involvement with the family of God? The answer to any or all of these questions may be “Nothing,” or it may be several things. As your leaders are working to see God’s plan for the women’s ministry role in your church, this is a good time for you to examine your personal role.

Do you feel you have been “used and abused” by too many volunteer efforts? Do you need to rest and be nourished for a while before you are strong enough to serve? God has gifted each of us for service to His Church but, as Jesus demonstrated, He also calls us into rest—to spend time in His presence through prayer and study of His Word.

Have you spent the last year or so being nourished and feel unused—ready and able, with God’s help, to step out to serve in some way? Have you reached a healthy balance of personal study and time of service and know exactly where you feel best able to bring glory to God?

We all are integral, vital parts of the body of Christ!

**Today:** Pray that as your leaders seek understanding of the place of your women’s group, you will also seek your unique place in God’s community of faith.



## Praises, Petitions and Personal Thoughts:



## Day 35: Open Ears

**READ EPHESIANS 2:10 AND 4:2-3**

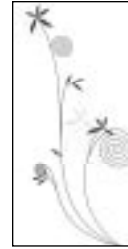
**O**ne of the reasons God places us in families, spiritual and physical, is that we can't do it all on our own. God is always there for us but we know that He often uses others to guide us on our journeys.

Through this refinement of details, the planning team will need to hear the ideas and insights of those that they have entrusted to help them. They will have to hear each other and be open to making changes. It's hard to put your heart into something and have someone else tell you it's not perfect. But then, none of us is perfect. This process will not produce a perfect plan. At every step of the way we will all need to be open to new ideas and insights.

Even as your church will need to continue to evaluate and refine, so, too, will the denomination's board and the presbyterial boards. For a while, it's going to be hard to balance the ideas that come from someone simply not liking change and the ideas that need to be expanded, developed, and implemented.

It sounds like everyone is going to need a lot of patience and understanding. We're going to have to listen to one another and pray together for wisdom.

**Today:** Pray for open ears and wise decisions for the Women's Ministries Board, for your planning and leadership teams, and for presbyterials making changes.



## Praises, Petitions and Personal Thoughts:



## Day 6: Guided By the Holy Spirit

READ ACTS 11:1-18

**U**nexpected changes came for the apostles. This group of Jewish men, taught from birth to be separate from Gentiles, were now being called to reach out to these same “unclean” Gentiles. The rumblings began and a “committee” had to be formed to deal with it. Peter explained the facts of what had happened. Peter passionately expressed the way he had seen God’s hand at work. He had witnessed the power of the Holy Spirit at work.

In the work of our denominational Task Force, a small measure of this was experienced. Over the years, the need for some change was evident. While some women’s organizations are thriving and seeing growth, others are struggling. New churches need new organizations. While God’s truth has not changed, women need to meet the needs of other women in some different ways because our society and culture are different now.

As this group of women met, we prayed, we talked, we observed, we asked questions, and we prayed some more. At each meeting we felt God’s hand at work as ideas were shared, developed, and tossed out or accepted. Guided by the Holy Spirit, ARP Women’s Ministries is the result.

Each local church has this same opportunity—to experience working hand-in-hand with the Holy Spirit to develop the best program to serve your women and your body of Christ.

**Today:** Pray that your planning team will seek the Holy Spirit’s guidance in what needs to remain and what needs to be added or deleted to build your program.



## Day 34: Help Comes from the Lord

READ PSALM 121

**I**n my NIV Bible this is called “The traveler’s psalm.” Women’s ministry is on a new journey in our denomination. We are building on our strong heritage to venture into new territory. As you have been participating in these devotionals, we hope it is evident that those who have been planning have sought their help from above—from God.

God has set this vision in the hearts of many of our women—enough that it was affirmed that we should act. As your church meets to hear and understand your plans, I hope you will recognize the role of God as the Helper and Guide and Source for all that is good in these plans. If these plans are set firmly within His purpose—you have been praying so faithfully for this—then He will prepare the way for the plans to be carried to completion. The Lord will watch over these plans. As long as the women are unified in looking to Him for guidance along the way, they will not be deterred by circumstances that seem to point in another direction. These 40 days of prayer need to become part of your way of life. Pray for your church, your staff, your women’s organization and for specific activities that are taking place. If each of you is faithful to do so then you will remain firmly in that place where God watches over you and guards you from stumbling.

**Today:** Pray for recognition of the Source of your help and provision. Rejoice in the Lord.



## Day 33: God Cares about the Details

READ PHILIPPIANS 1:3-6

**W**hat have I forgotten?

Have you ever had one of those days when you know there's something you should be doing or should have done and it just won't come to you? I have been amazed how often, seemingly without any reason, I have been reminded of something undone just in time to carry it out. I credit those moments to a gracious God and His understanding of my poor ability to remember everything I need to do.

Just recently—the day before we were to go out of town—I thought, I don't remember making the house payment this month. There was no particular reason it should have come to mind. I'm pretty good about making payments, but the last month has had some added responsibilities. I checked my checkbook and, sure enough, there was no check for the mortgage. This date was the last day before the assessment of a rather large "late penalty." A day later would have been too late. We would have been gone. But today, I could drive to the savings & loan and make the payment without the penalty.

God is detail-oriented. Just read the first five books of the Bible if you doubt it.

Following the meetings with various groups in the church and time to evaluate the work that's been done, the planning team is busy finalizing the details—completing the work.

**Today:** Pray for clear understanding of any details God wants worked out before the plan is presented.



## Day 7: It's a "Keeper"

READ DEUTERONOMY 4:9

**M**uch has already been said about newness and change. Let's not forget the past or the valuable traditions. These are the things we need to maintain and pass on to those who serve God after us.

Women in the ARP Church have a strong tradition of supporting the spread of the Gospel throughout the world. Helping youth have opportunities for spiritual growth has always been part of our nurturing nature. The unique ministry of Camp Joy has touched our hearts. Are there other traditions or special ministries that your church's women feel especially close to and called to serve?

Does your church have an inter-generational event that's become a treasured tradition as it witnesses to God's faithfulness? Is there a particular community need that your church is uniquely qualified to meet? Is there a ministry within your church that your women handle particularly well and feel called to continue? What is God doing in your church that is part of the heart and soul of your identity as a body of Christ? And what things need to be allowed to go by the wayside as you seek to serve more faithfully?

Let your planning team hear from you. God calls us to hold each other accountable in our service and in sharing the work He has done in our lives with others. Drop them a note today to encourage them and to tell them what you find most valuable in women's ministry.

**Today:** Pray that your planning team will embrace the past while not being burdened by it.



## Day 8: Spiritual Mothers

READ TITUS 2:3-5

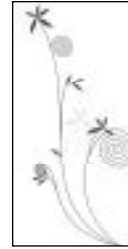
**S**ome of you may have been asked to share with us “the most meaningful aspect of participating in the work of the women.” OR, you may be in a church where there has not been a women’s group in name or function. I wonder what YOU are thinking might be the most important aspect of women ministering to women. Is it currently happening in your church or is it something new to consider?

Here’s one idea: “Being a part of our WOC has helped me greatly in my spiritual journey.” [She goes on to list 4 things that have helped.] Number One on her list is, “The older women have served as mentors and I am doing the same now for the younger women.” Does that sound like exactly what you read in our Titus verses?

Today, we often call this spiritual mothering. One of the greatest blessings of my life, as I moved from place to place during my husband’s career in the Air Force, was coming in contact with Christian women who had something to teach me about being a woman of faith. Some of these women were chronologically older, but often they were younger—yet giants (and mothers to me) in their faith.

If you have ever been blessed by a spiritual mother, God is calling you to pass that blessing on to those coming behind you. Begin to pray for the courage and wisdom to serve God in this way.

**Today:** Pray that this church will find ways to encourage women to share their faith journeys with others.



## Day 32: ‘Accentuate the Positive’

READ PHILIPPIANS 2:12-16

**T**ake a minute to write down every concern you have about changes in your women’s ministries, or about having a women’s group in your church:

Now, what are you going to do with those concerns? Do you have all the facts or are you working on rumors alone? Is your pet project part of your concern? Are you going to complain about them to the other women? Are you going to grumble to your husband and children? Are you going to go before God and place them there, asking Him to clarify which ones you should address with the planning team and which ones you should just let go?

On the other hand, what things are you excited about? Let’s write those down also:

How are you voicing that excitement?

**Today:** Pray that you will clearly see the positive and will be able to let go of the negative as the plans are revealed to you. Pray for the encouragement of the planning team.



## Day 31: The Session AND the Women

READ PHILIPPIANS 2:3-4, EPHESIANS 5:21

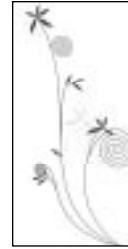
**A**s we have said earlier, the planning team is going to need to be unified with your pastor(s) and Session to be clear how the work of your women is best integrated into the mission of the church. In our denominational form of government, the Session has responsibility over all that takes place in the local church. As moderator of the Session, the senior pastor, must make sure that this work is carried out and this responsibility understood.

For many years in many churches, the WOC has been allowed to function pretty much on its own. In other churches it was disbanded as seemingly unnecessary or possibly divisive to the work of the church. It will be important as changes are made or as a women's group is begun that these attitudes and perceptions be avoided.

While most of the work of the local church can be accomplished through "all-church" committees, the ministry of woman to woman is a unique and important part of ministry that cannot be fulfilled in any other way. (Men need to minister to men in specific and unique ways also).

In each church, there are probably specific ministries that the women are more passionate about than are, for example, the youth or the Session. All of this must be discussed, basing our desire for service in God's call and our understanding of God's Word.

**Today:** Pray that the Session of your church and your pastors will recognize this need for a unique ministry among your women as a building block for your church.



## Day 9: Blessed to be a Blessing

READ TITUS 2:3-5

**H**ow do I discipline my toddler in a godly manner when all he understands is "NO!!!"? How do I deal with my husband traveling all the time when I have 3 children all going in different directions each day? What do I do with myself now that my children have left the nest? Do you know a good recipe for pepper jelly? How much food should I take to the church potluck? How do you find time to pray with your husband/children before you leave the house each day?

Some of these may not seem like "spiritual" questions. Yet, they are the stuff of our daily lives. In all things, we are called to worship God. How do you make that a reality in your life? As my pastor asked one Sunday morning, "How do you worship God when someone pulls out in front of you and cuts you off?"

Being with Christian women who have shared or do share our day to day experiences grants us unique insights into how every moment can be given over to God. Being reminded that God gave us not only the 10 Commandments but also encouragement in how to live for Him daily is both a comfort and a challenge. Where do you learn these things if not from those who have already walked the same road? Do you realize what a blessing it can be to an older believer to have someone seek her advice?

**Today:** Pray for those who need to reach out for guidance as they struggle in the daily reality of living their faith.



## Day 10: New Traditions

READ PHILIPPIANS 3:13-14

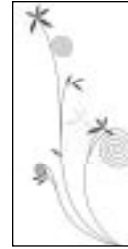
**W**e have spent time this week talking about lessons from the past and impact on the future—Christian traditions and spiritual mothering. Part of examining tradition is knowing when it may need to be changed or eliminated—if it’s not serving a useful purpose. Spiritual mothering includes helping women develop new traditions that are faithful to today’s needs in both church and family.

Consider change within the context of family: Traditions may need to be kept or updated or even eliminated. Do you, if you are married, keep all of your childhood Christmas traditions? Has your journey of faith challenged any of those traditions? Have you developed new traditions that are unique to your family? If your children have left home have you ever felt hurt by traditions they have abandoned?

As your women’s organization considers change, consider that some things may have to be eliminated to allow for new things to become meaningful. Letting go is hard. Yet, we all know that what worked in 1950 is not necessarily right for 2005 and beyond. (I mean, are poodle skirts really practical for riding in today’s cars?)

Just as Jesus’ disciples had to develop new ways to worship as they became apostles and grew the church, so we may need to let go of some things ourselves.

**Today:** Pray that you and your organization will be able to let go of the past with grace, as it is necessary. If you are starting something new—pray that you will be wise in what you establish.



## Praises, Petitions and Personal Thoughts:



## Day 30: The Lord's Plans

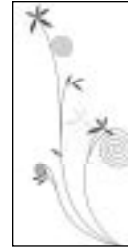
**READ PROVERBS 15:22 AND 21:30.**

**T**hese verses look at the plans we make. We are advised to seek counsel and to recognize the Lord's hand in our planning.

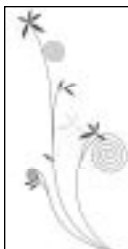
All the details need to be ironed out as the planning team prepares to present their proposals to you and to the church as a whole. They will need to seek wise counsel to be sure they have not forgotten something or have not done something that conflicts with the vision of your church. They will need wise advice to present this in a clear and understandable manner. They will need the Lord's counsel to assure that the plans will succeed as He would have them.

**Today:** Pray for the planning team:

- That they will know who to ask—who the wise counsel is.
- That they will be able to present the plans in an understandable manner to the church leadership.
- That they will examine and be unified on any changes that are suggested.
- That they will be able to present the plans in an understandable manner to the women of the church.
- That the women will be open to the changes and seek to understand the vision.
- That there will be patient hearts among all of the church members as changes are implemented.
- That women will be eager to serve one another, the church, and the community of the world.
- That love and harmony will prevail.



## Praises, Petitions and Personal Thoughts:



## Day 11: Your Church's Mission

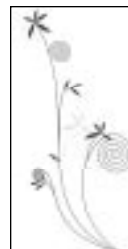
READ 1 CORINTHIANS 12:4-5, 11

**W**hile these verses apply to individuals working within a local family of faith, I believe they also can apply to individual groups within a church and to individual churches within the larger Church universal. Have you considered what your church's unique ministry is? Within the community? Within the ARP Church as a denomination? Do you pray for your church to recognize and fulfill God's purpose—its mission?

Knowing your church's mission will help you to serve it more faithfully. If your church is primarily nurturing family groups, how can you serve those families? If your church has a large population of single parents, how does that change your personal ministry to nurture them—or does it? If your church has a strong senior adult program, do you have gifts that can serve to encourage them in some special way? Are you part of their fellowship and service projects?

Examine your spiritual gifts in light of your church's mission or vision. Don't say that you don't have any spiritual gifts. Everyone who claims Christ as Savior and Lord is gifted by the Holy Spirit. You may need some help discerning them or developing them usefully, but that's part of what a nurturing church does. Our vow to God as all are baptized is to nurture one another.

**Today:** Pray that all members of your church, especially each woman, will begin to seek how they "fit" into the mission God has ordained for your church, your family of faith.



## Day 29: Church Harmony

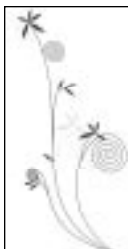
READ 1 PETER 4:7-11

**W**e have not previously said much about the officers and professional staff of your local church. Your church may have a paid staff of one (or even none) or you may have a large staff assigned to specific roles. You may have several dozen officers or several officers. Your church may or may not have women as deacons.

Part of harmony within the body is promoted by all of these folks working together. Your planning team has used some guidelines to remind them to meet and confer with the officers and staff of your church. In many cases some of the things the women have been doing may be done in the future by an all-church group. In other cases your women's group may be asked to venture into new paths of service. There may be things that have overlapped or been duplicated in the past that can be consolidated now.

One of the big changes that may take place is in how you will give your offerings. Our denominational agencies rely on the offerings of our churches for support. In the past the women have taken up *MANY* specific offerings for many specific things. Yet, some of these same agencies are served through our church's budget and through specific Sunday offerings. Isn't it more harmonious to give as a unified body rather than separating the women's money from the rest of the church? Think about it.

**Today:** Pray for clear understanding and gracious giving as a new plan for financial support is developed in your church.



## Day 28: Give Yourself Fully

READ 1 CORINTHIANS 15:58

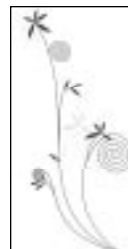
**H**ave you examined what your role is going to be in this new ARP Women’s Ministries? The new denominational constitution states that every ARP woman is a member of this organization. Will your role be in the local church? Are you willing and able to serve in the presbyterial union or at the denominational level? Are you a born leader or are you a “worker bee” or do you “just attend?” If the latter, what do you accomplish for God through this attendance—providing encouragement and support for others, gaining strength through the fellowship of Christian women, growing in knowledge of God and His plan? I bet you don’t really “just attend.”

We are all called to “stand firm” in our faith. But this is not a standing still. In fact, it has been said that there is no such thing as standing still when it comes to our faith. Either we are moving forward—growing spiritually—or we are moving backward—allowing our faith to be weakened by failure to yield to and learn of God.

As you experience God’s hand in your life, you become more eager to share those experiences with others, to help others over similar hurdles in their faith journeys, and to grow more through prayer and study.

What are you eager to do? How will you give yourself “fully to the work of the Lord...”?

**Today:** Pray not only for yourself but for every woman of your church to be eager to serve one another in some capacity—including an eager desire to learn and grow.



## Day 12: Part of the Church

READ 1 CORINTHIANS 12:12-27

**T**oday I’m going to take some “poetic license” and paraphrase this passage. Here goes:

The church is a unit, though it is made up of many different people. So it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one church—whether men or women, rich or poor, we were all given the same Holy Spirit. Now the church is not made up of one type of person but of many. If one should say, “Because I am not a good cook, I can’t attend church suppers,” she would miss out on great church fellowship. And if another should say, “Because I don’t dress well, I can’t go to church,” he would not cease to need to worship in community. If everyone only cooks, where would the teachers be found? If all drive the van, where would we get the set-up crew?

But in fact God has arranged everyone in the church, just as He wanted them to be.... As it is there are many parts, but one church. The Bible study teachers can’t tell the students, “I don’t need you!” And the table-setters can’t say to the dishwashers, “I don’t need you!” On the contrary, those behind the scenes are indispensable, and the parts that recognize their need to learn, we seek to teach. And the parts that are uncomfortable are made to feel welcome and valued. Those who have found their niche need no special treatment. But God has combined the members of the church and has challenged us to become one in unity and harmony, so that all should have equal concern for each other. If one suffers, everyone suffers with them; if one is honored, we all rejoice. Now each one of you is necessary to the church of Christ.

**Today:** Pray that all women will know that each one is needed to complete and serve the church.



## Day 13: One Family

READ 1 CORINTHIANS 12:26

**D**o you share your joys and sorrows, your successes and failures, your insights and questions, with your family of faith? If so, does that sharing time give you insights into the blessings and needs of others?

Part of being one family is to come to know and understand the other members of the family within a loving relationship—a safe and secure place of refuge. Part of being one family is celebrating together and part is crying together. Part of being one family is holding each other up in the struggles of life. Part of being a family is teaching younger ones the ins and outs of life within the family and how this family deals with the outside world. Part of being one family is respecting each other, listening to each other, and valuing each other as individuals with unique God-given gifts.

Part of being a family is reaching across the miles or across town to be in touch when you are separated. Part of being a family is working together—working together to meet the needs of the family, to make things run smoothly, and to help others “who don’t have it as good as we do.” Part of being a family is telling the stories of our family’s past, learning how that has shaped our present, and how it may impact our future. Part of being a family is lovingly helping one another overcome the hurts of life.

**Today:** Pray that the ministry of women in your church will help build a loving family.



## Day 27: Wanted — Leaders

READ 1 CORINTHIANS 12:12-27

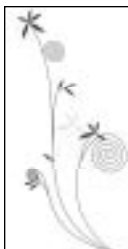
**T**his passage, which we’ve addressed before, speaks to the place each person has in building up Christ’s body, the Church. However, today we want to consider specifically those who are called into leadership positions.

As the planning team reaches the end of its evaluation and organization, leaders will need to be found to carry out the work that has been established. Some, who have been leaders in the past, could take on the attitude that they don’t want to be part of this NEW organization. Some may decide they’ve given all they want to give of time and talent and resources. Some may see this as the very call they have been seeking.

Your prayers will be vital:

- Prayers that hearts will be open to hear God’s call to leadership—for those who must ask and for those who will be asked.
- Prayers that personal biases will not stand in the way of God’s call.
- Prayers that every woman will find her place within the ministry—some as leaders, some as administrative help, some as students, some as mentors, some in several places at once.
- Prayers that everyone will have a servant’s heart.
- Prayers that new members and those on the fringes will be reached through your ministry.

**Today:** Pray through these needs, that every woman will be blessed and your church will be strengthened.



## Day 26: Details and Order

READ PROVERBS 16:3 AND 1 CORINTHIANS 14:40

**Y**our planning team, hopefully, is at work getting the details ironed out, the wording correct, and meeting with other church leaders to examine how best to implement the new aspects of women’s ministry in your church.

If you’ve been a member of any Presbyterian denomination for very long, you’ve probably heard the phrase “decently and in order.” We often use it to explain why it takes us so long to do anything. Your version of 1 Corinthians 14:40 may not use this exact wording but this verse is its source. In the context of 1 Corinthians Paul is especially speaking about worship. Yet, all that believers do is to be done as worship to God. Therefore, all we do should be done “in a fitting and orderly way” (NIV).

As you work to develop your women’s ministry according to God’s plan as exemplified in the needs of your church, your women, and the denomination it will be important that a sound organizational structure supports this work. It will be even more important that this work is regularly placed before God, committed to serve His purpose. This means remaining open to the need for revision and regular evaluation, and a willingness to support the resulting decisions and potential changes that are made. It also means that the various groups within your church will need to work in harmony for the greater glory of serving God.

**Today:** Pray that all the details of organization will be understood and for harmony within the whole local church.



## Day 14: A Spiritual Act of Worship

READ ROMANS 12:1

**I**n today’s world of graphic images on TV and in the movies, this verse that speaks of “offering your bodies as living sacrifices” may conjure up all sorts of images. BUT, if you think about it, the word “living” removes some of those images. God calls us to offer our bodies to Him as living sacrifices as a “spiritual act of worship” (emphasis mine). Obviously we are not reading about human sacrifice as pagans would view it.

We are to submit to God’s purpose out of heartfelt gratitude for His grace and mercy in calling us to be His children. We are considered worthy to be a sacrifice to Him. WOW!!! Think about the rules for sacrifices—unblemished, the first fruits, clean. Only by God’s gracious act through His Son—the only perfect sacrifice—can we even be an acceptable sacrifice.

What can I give to God for that gift? Only myself—it’s the sacrifice He desires and it’s the only sacrifice He will accept from me. I must realize that He has offered me the opportunity to be covered in a perfect sacrificial form—no matter what my past is like. I must offer Him all of me in worship. I must offer all I do as an act of worship. Whether I am an infant in the faith or have lived a long life of faithful service and spiritual growth, I am equally worthy to be a sacrifice to Him. What must I offer Him? The best that I have to give. It all belongs to Him and it all comes from Him.

**Today:** Pray that every woman in your faith community will know she has something to give in offering to God—herself.



## Day 15: To Let Them Know

READ JOHN 17:20-23

Jesus closes this part of His prayer with these words, “May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.” These struck me as I read them in the context of women’s ministry.

“...to let the world know that you sent me...”

What girlfriend have you told about God’s work in your life? With what little girl have you sung “Jesus Loves Me” and explained who Jesus is?

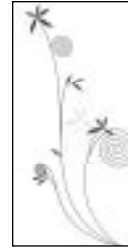
“...and have loved them even as you have loved me.”

What hurting Christian sister have you hugged and reminded that God is love? What struggling young mother have you assured of the availability of God’s wisdom and strength?

We are to be unified in these endeavors. We need to pray for one another and to hold each other accountable in this purpose. Underneath all the vision statements is this call to tell others of God’s faithful acts and His love. Is the person next to you on the treadmill going to hear it if you don’t say it? Is your friend from the hallway at preschool going to know that God will help her through the carpools and the laundry if you don’t tell her? Is the lady receiving chemo in the next chair encouraged by God’s faithfulness if you don’t share your experiences?

Whom have you called to pray with you so that you can be bold enough to do this? That’s part of why your Christian sisters in the family of God are there.

**Today:** Pray for unity in your desire to make God’s love real to others.



## Praises, Petitions and Personal Thoughts:



## Day 25: Open to Serve

**READ ROMANS 12:9-13, EPHESIANS 4:29-32**

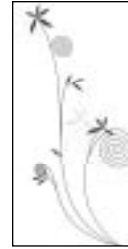
**T**hese are just two of the many times the Bible speaks to us about our responsibility to others before ourselves. We are repeatedly encouraged to build each other up, to not frustrate another person, to look at ourselves honestly and recognize our own human frailty, to not judge others.

As we open our hearts to possibly new aspects of the work of our women, is your mind already set on what you are “willing to do” and what you “just can’t see doing?” Have you already determined that some aspect will “never work in this church?”

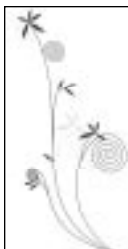
We have many homebound members in my local church, some without family in the area. The burden for these people kept coming to mind yet I knew that visitation had never been a ministry that I had carried out well in the past. I didn’t want to bring up this need as I didn’t see how I could possibly be the one to help meet it. Out of the blue, it seemed, I was approached to help organize and administer a visitation committee that would be chaired by someone with a real heart for visitation and pastoral care. For the last four years, I have served as the administrator and the ideas we developed have been passed on to another church.

Every believer is called to service. Right now you may not know what that service is or can be. Any call that God places on a heart is also accompanied by God’s promise to provide all that we need to fulfill it. Be open.

**Today:** Be still, pray, and be open to God’s call as you seek to serve in your church and beyond.



## Praises, Petitions and Personal Thoughts:



## Day 16: Building Blocks

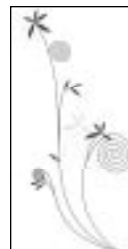
READ GENESIS 2:4-25

**H**ow many times have we heard someone say—only half jokingly—“Where would this church/organization be if the women didn’t take care of the details?” While these questions smack of pride and arrogance on the part of women, in another sense they are true. God created both male and female for a reason. As long as we women remember that the similar questions can be asked in reverse, we have some understanding that all are part of God’s plan.

While newly planted or struggling churches may feel that separating the women for some activities is divisive in the local church, my personal belief is that women, as a unified group, can be a strengthening and unifying building block. God made us different from men for a reason. Sometimes that uniqueness maybe a particular strength in a group of women working in unity of spirit. I also think when women are unified, each woman is strengthened. Therefore everyone—man, woman, or child— benefits from her strength and spiritual growth.

In diverse or scattered communities, it may be the women who are able to gather and build unity with greater ease than a mixed group. In churches with a large population of single-parent families, a women’s group may uniquely be able to understand and provide resources for nurturing those families. Groups working together toward a common goal are less divided but rely on the strength and gifts of each part.

**Today:** Pray that your church will value its women as a group that can serve in unique ways to build it up.



## Day 24: The Witness of Prayer

READ JAMES 1:5 AND EPHESIANS 3:14-19

**Y**esterday’s passages were about unity within the body of Christ. When our eyes are focused on God and not on ourselves, that unity is easier to achieve.

In James we are instructed to actively seek wisdom and in Ephesians, Paul prays for Christ’s followers to be empowered by the Spirit to serve and to be rooted in God’s love.

Once we acknowledge God’s worthiness of our praise and honor and glory, then we can more effectively approach Him with our need for His guidance and power to be at work in our lives. We will be more centered in His will rather than our own so our petitions will also be focused on His desires and vision.

What must the Ephesians have felt hearing these words of Paul’s prayer for them. What does it do to your heart and soul to know that someone else has prayed specifically for you, has brought before God your life and your circumstances? I think it is one of the most amazing ways that the Spirit works in our lives. As believers, it’s hard to not want to live more faithfully and joyfully when we know that our lives have been brought before God in specific and personal prayer. There is great comfort in the midst of turmoil, stress, and grief in knowing not only that others are concerned but also that God has heard your name spoken in His presence.

**Today:** Let your planning team members know they are in your prayers. Let them know the content of those prayers.



## Day 23: Praise God

READ JOHN 17: 20-23 AND ROMANS 12:3-8

**W**hat happens when you gather with a group and say you are going to begin by praising God? Do you begin by calling God by many of His names and acknowledging many of His attributes? Then, do the phrases and prayers begin to start off with “I want to praise you, God, for the work You have done in my/someone else’s life...” or “I praise you, Father, for the way you have allowed me to...?” These latter are thanksgiving. Give me a minute to explain.

What’s the difference?

What difference does it make what we call it?

Through the modeling of some of my spiritual mentors, I have seen how praise to God focuses on Him alone—His names, His character, His attributes. Leave me and other humans out of it.

Why?

When we look solely at God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit we begin to lose sight of ourselves, our desires, our preconceived notions of how things should be done. When we are forced to examine what we know about His character and attributes—unrelated to how we have been impacted—we realize how seldom we live as though we believe in those attributes. We also realize how small we are in the grand scheme of God’s plan. This time of praise can release us to really hear what He is saying to us NOW rather than examining what He has done in the past.

**Today:** Take time to list God’s names, attributes, and characteristics. Praise Him!



## Day 17: Our Words

READ EPHESIANS 4:7-16, 29

**W**e’ve talked previously about building up the body of Christ. Today’s passage is foundational to that concept. Everyone whom God has called to be His is gifted in some way. Every gift is given to build up Christ’s body—the Church. Verse 29 reminds us that not only our actions are to be building blocks but also every word we speak.

We’re in the midst of change. While we may be most aware that the women of the denomination have made some major changes, Synod is also in the midst of changes. Our individual churches seem forever in a state of change. Everywhere that there is change there will be “grumbling and murmuring.” What words can we say that will be edifying—that will build up and encourage in the midst of change? What thoughts do we have running through our heads that need to be “taken captive” rather than let loose to do damage among the people of God.

While it IS necessary to speak up against things that would harm our witness or that are not theologically sound, it is often things that are not remotely dangerous to either that cause us the most divisiveness of spirit. Although it seems over-used: “What would Jesus do?” Look at God’s character and attributes in relation to our attitudes. Does that affect our actions and words? Often, five minutes of worship and praise to God at the opening of a meeting will diffuse meaningless dissension. Think about that in relation to change.

**Today:** Pray that God’s unchanging nature will pervade all discussions of change.



## Day 18: Sharing the Wisdom

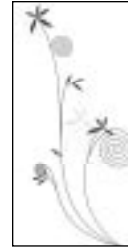
READ PSALM 78:1-4

In most of our churches the women span all age groups. At Erskine Seminary, the three classes are called Juniors, Middlers, and Seniors. That seems like an appropriate way to look at our adult women. Women who are college age, beginning their careers, just married, or raising young children would be Juniors. Middlers are those who are more established in careers, have older children who may be more self-sufficient, may be caring for parents, or are beginning to look at what to do when empty nest hits. And, of course, one of the most vibrant groups in any church is the Seniors. The kids are away, the workday world is (or soon will be) behind us, family responsibilities are not as great except to guard the health of those closest to us.

What do each of these groups have to offer within women's ministries? How can we learn from one another more intentionally? What service can the Senior women provide for the Middlers?—How can more energetic Juniors serve the Seniors?—etc.

A few years ago as part of our church women's retreat we were eating dinner in downtown Hendersonville. One of the Middlers began asking some of our dear Seniors to share their life lessons with us. What a treasure that time was—especially as one of those dear ladies moved away not long after. Our Juniors learned a great deal. Do you make an effort to provide transportation so that you can benefit from the wisdom of the ages in your activities?

**Today:** Pray that plans will include intentional opportunities to serve one another no matter your age or life station.



## Day 22: Loving Tasks

READ 1 CORINTHIANS 13:1-3.

In the past, has your women's organization been "task-based," "theology-based," or "person-based?" This is an interesting question to consider. The Task Force met with Susan Hunt, the author of many books on the role of women and on women's leadership. She asked us which of these we wanted ARP Women's Ministries to be.

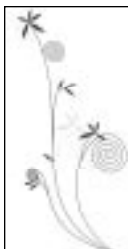
As we have listened to the growing concerns of women's groups in the local churches it seemed that the WSU was perceived as very TASK-BASED. There was so much that a WOC was supposed to DO. There was also an equal amount of paperwork and record-keeping to accompany it.

As we began to work out new ideas for how to handle finances and giving through the women, we often heard something like, "How will that agency function if the women don't maintain their current level of giving?" or "If the women don't promote that offering, then the giving will decline." These also seem to be task-based thoughts.

We are to place love for God first in our lives. This means placing His plans, His purposes, His vision, ahead of any other concerns. While we don't want to abandon any of the good tasks to which He has called us, we also don't want to let the task overtake the love in meeting that vision.

What is His greater plan at this time for the women of our churches? What is the voice of the Holy Spirit calling us to do right now?

**Today:** Pray for the sustained support of denominational agencies as the women transition their manner of giving.



## Day 21: Seeing the Vision

READ PROVERBS 29:18 (IN MORE THAN ONE VERSION)

**T**hroughout Scripture, when God gives one of His chosen people a vision or a revelation it is not hidden from others. Moses shared his vision for the people of Israel by going to Pharaoh and making it known quite clearly. Joseph shared with his brothers the revelation God had given to him about their role in his life’s purpose. Christ gathered His closest followers and prepared them with His vision for the world and for their ministries. Paul, in his many letters, shared his vision of God’s call upon believers.

As the WSU Task Force met we did our best to keep the Executive Board apprised of our direction and our vision. We tried to show them how it fulfilled our call to service through the teaching of the Bible. Hopefully, as you/your planners meet they will give you glimpses of the vision for your church. You may be preparing for an event to look at the overall picture of what they are doing and how it fits into the work of the women denominationally. Your support, your encouragement, and your prayers will be vital during this time.

Take time to listen to God’s voice speaking through the work and planning that is being done. Realize that these women have a responsibility not only to you and your church but also, even more importantly, to the vision that God has given them. Take time to pray specifically over each aspect of the planning.

**Today:** Pray for clarity of vision for the planning team, for every woman in your church, and for your church family.



## Day 19: Perseverance

READ ISAIAH 40:28-31

**A**s I look at the “Day 19” I realize that your leadership is about halfway through the process of evaluating the work of women in your church. They’re probably about ready to give it up—tired in mind and body.

Hopefully, you have sustained them by remaining faithful to pray for them. But you may have just picked up this devotional guide and flipped through it realizing that you haven’t done what you committed to do either. Day by day it’s hard to remain faithful to commitments—especially to an “extra” commitment like this one.

These verses are a special treasure in my family— especially to our son. In one of my many reflections on this verse it dawned on me that Isaiah says RUN and not be weary, WALK and not faint. Now in my world of poor exercise habits I can tell you that I am more in danger of fainting after trying to run for a while than I am from walking and when I am weary I tend to walk, not run. Yet, in the spiritual realm of living day to day, I realized that it’s much easier to leave God behind—for my faith to faint—in the midst of day to day stuff—the walking. When the crises come—the need to run—I may become weary but I do remember to lean on God and my faith comes into play.

Perseverance seems to say if I keep faith active in the walking, the running has less chance of wearing me down. Are you weary or fainting today?

**Today:** Pray for your planning team to rely on God at every step so that they can finish without fainting.



## Day 20: Two Are Better than One

READ ECCLESIASTES 4:9-12

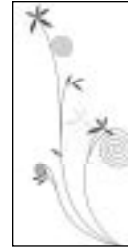
One of the purposes of ARP Women’s Ministries is to draw ARP women together in a spirit of Christian community. If you’ve ever attended the Family Bible Conference at Bonclarcken or a women’s retreat provided by either your church or your presbyterial, you have experienced this unique community.

Sometimes our churches are so isolated from one another that we feel all alone in our concerns for the denomination of which we are a part. Sometimes our women’s group is so small that we don’t feel a special connection with any one woman. Sometimes we feel that we can’t have an impact on the denomination’s work or on the world community as only one group of women.

Joining together as a larger community helps us recognize our part in the larger community of faith. There are opportunities to learn and grow that simply can’t happen in a one-church group. Once you meet a special Christian woman from Alabama who seems to understand all that you are experiencing, you go home and find some way to keep in touch—strengthening one another by this unique friendship.

The friendships I have made at conferences and retreats and in serving on various boards are special treasures. I would love to see everyone have such opportunities.

**Today:** Pray that as your planning team establishes your women’s ministry they will include and encourage opportunities for you to gather and/or serve with other ARP women.



## Praises, Petitions and Personal Thoughts: