



## FOREWORD

“Quarantine.” It is a word that means 2-weeks of isolation for those who have been exposed to the coronavirus. It is really Latin for “40 days,” reminiscent of famous biblical moments that signify times of devotion, fasting, penance, praying and grace. This devotional is a collection of “40-Moments” that members of the Our Savior Lutheran (OSL) family have written. Biblically sound or not, their submissions are honest reflections of doubts and affirmations in their struggles. Each testimony is accompanied with a vaguely related Bible reading assignment and reflection question for the reader.

# WEEK 1

## Read Exodus 16:1-15

**Reflection:** Mana means, “What is it?” How has God provided for you in mysterious ways through Jesus in your “deserts” in life?

## Breaching the 40<sup>th</sup> Wall

by

Taetia Phillips-Dorsett, OSL Church Member

I had often wondered what it would be like to celebrate my 40<sup>th</sup> birthday, for years before when my husband celebrated his we “did the town”. We traveled from the Virgin Islands to Las Vegas, Nevada and enjoyed 8 days, 9 nights of seeing the sites, shows, great foods and shopping. Naturally, I assumed my 40<sup>th</sup> birthday trip would be more extravagantly filled with a European vacation or a Cruise, because wives always up the ante.

However, I was not prepared for the journey in 2016 that life unexpectedly took on my 40<sup>th</sup> birthday weekend. I had not been feeling very well so we nixed the international travel idea and had settled on a weekend trip to Puerto Rico. Unfortunately, I woke up one morning and my legs were painfully inflamed and I could not move them. After taking a picture of it and contacting one of my doctors, they urged me to go to the ER. Upon arrival and work up it was discovered that I had contracted a 2<sup>nd</sup> bout of MRSA, which is a bacteria. I had previously contracted it 2 years before after a fall at work that led to an infection. However, this was much different as I required a wheelchair and could not even go to the bathroom by myself. As I sat in the ER hearing the doctors debating whether or not to admit me, it had a startling effect. Was this what was planned for my HUGE 40<sup>th</sup> birthday, another hospitalization? You see, I had already spent time in hospitals on 7 prior occasions for surgery. The last of which had left me traumatized and afraid to be admitted to any hospitals. Two years prior, during a hysterectomy, I had been given a drug to help prevent blot clots during surgery. This was the normal protocol for persons who have Multiple Myeloma to prevent further surgical complications. Unfortunately, the exact opposite happened and I began to rapidly bleed out about 4 hours after the successful surgery. This prompted an emergency surgery that evening, which to this day I really don't remember. It required a long stay in the ICU and several months of recovery, but God saw me through it.

So, imagine, on my 40<sup>th</sup> birthday the anxiety that I felt being back in the hospital once again. Selfishly, all I thought about was that I had already settled for a smaller birthday trip and now I wasn't going to go anywhere. This had to be akin to when the Israelites wandered in the desert for 40 years and although they were fed manna as sustenance, some complained and wanted better. They were not appreciative of the fact that their Lord and Savior had delivered them from slavery and provided daily meals to keep them from starving. I too had unfortunately succumbed to the mentality that God “owed” me for paying my tithes and my taxes. I had taken for granted the obvious, that God had still blessed me with life, a good life even 6 years into a cancer diagnosis. I made the decision that weekend to practice gratitude and to renew my faith in the wonders of what God could do. My Oncologist was able to negotiate with the ER doctors and they opted to let me go home after some IV antibiotics along with the promise that I would rest and take all of my subsequent medications. Little did I know that this experience would be the catalyst for my preparation for the tumultuous next 4 years of my life. But that is for another testimonial. I am a living reminder that through God's work, word and love that all things are possible!



# WEEK 2

## “40 Moment”

by

Carol Reynolds-Srot, OLS Church Member

I can think of many “40 Moments” in my life, some of which were major and devastating. But the one that stands out in my mind right now is simple and was a godsend.

Although lots of bad things have transpired because of the COVID-19 pandemic, a few things occurred for me that have been blessings.

I started a new job in December 2019, and it meant a weekday four-hour, round-trip commute. On Saturdays, I could barely drag myself out of bed. I felt like I had jet lag. Often my body felt rubbery and my feet felt prickly for the first few hours of the day. I was a bit horrified. I had grown up in NYC, where a train commute was the norm. But it had been decades since I had taken public transportation, and along with that latent experience was a body that was four decades older. Despite my physical ailments, I considered my weekday train rides my trip to mecca. I enjoyed the view and the sounds, and I often looked out at the skies as I prayed—giving thanks for all my blessings. I was happy because I had finally found my dream job: a challenging and fulfilling role, complete with a large office that sported a picturesque view; amicable co-workers; and a place where I was treated like a prized possession.

In addition to the trying commute, tests done in the beginning of 2020 revealed that I had added yet another chronic disease (besides being diabetic) to my list of medical maladies. The new condition was exacerbated by stress.

I felt blessed to have found a perfect job so late in my career, and I felt a little guilty for lamenting my troubles (though only to my husband). I was relatively healthy, and my problems seemed minor. COVID-19 had hit. People were dying. Others lost their jobs. I was still working full time, as well as teaching part time. It didn't matter how I felt; I would have to endure it and deal with the physical repercussions of the commute and any additional stress. Then, on March 13, 2020, I was relegated to work from home. And 11 months later, I am still working from my dining room table. This has meant no commute at all, more sleep, and less stress to aggravate Condition Number 2.

Although I eagerly await the COVID-19 vaccine and venture out only for bike rides, long walks, and occasional trips to Publix, the pandemic brought me a panacea for my pain. While these problems are more like paper cuts than stab wounds, they are a part of my daily life, and my blessings have given me a stable path that I can handle.

In closing, I wanted to share one of my favorite Bible verses that correlates to my situation. Jeremiah 29:11—“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”

### **Read Romans 8:22-30**

**Reflection:** What good has God worked for you in the challenges that you have faced?

# WEEK 3

## Overcoming the World

by

John Waldron, OSL Church Member

In the world you will have trouble....John 16:33.

I am sure at one time or another most of you have received THE CALL. The one that changes your life. If you haven't, you will.

Mine came April 1st 2016. And it was no April fool.

"Mr. Waldron this is Sandra at the group home. We just called 911 for your daughter. "

This wasn't possible. Jodi was fine Sunday. She sang at the church service in Covenant Village.

"Mr Waldron we think she had a stroke. "

What! Impossible! Not Jodi. She's only 25.

Ok John. Remember what they taught you. I took a deep breath and let it out.

"What hospital?"

"Memorial "

If over the next days and weeks I did anything smart it was my next act.

Prayer.

"God I can't fix this. Only you can. "

Driving to the hospital in a thunder storm that fit my mood I ran over possibilities in my mind. I succeeded in making myself feel worse.

In the Emergency Room I found Jodi sitting on a bed with an aide from the group home.

" It's Daddy. "

" Jodi, can you sing Jesus Loves Me?"

Jodi burst forth in song while I thought

I knew those people were wrong. Stroke my fat Aunt Martha. Thanks Lord.

The Resident and the Radiologist told me there was no immediate indication of a stroke. But, she was running a low grade fever and they wanted to hold her overnight.

So all I was looking at was a night in a hospital chair. Fine with me.

The next day we were released and went back to the group home.

Happy ending right?

Wrong.

Jodi did not get better. She got worse. And no one knew why.

ER Nurse: " They might have missed the stroke."

Resident: " Does Multiple Sclerosis run in your family?"

Paramedic: "She's faking."

In three days Jodi was paralyzed.

You find out who your friends are. I've got good ones.

Pastor Ray: " She's on our prayer list "

Bible study partner: " Sending prayers."

All much appreciated.

Jodi showed no improvement

I was sick. I don't mean upset. I was physically sick. Returning to my car on evening after pausing to throw up on Pine Island Road I took a call from my wife's college roommate.

"You alright, John?"

"No."

"You know, my father had something like this. It was Guillaume Barre syndrome. "

It was what? I think I might have heard of that.

My old high school classmate: "John. I called my mother. She was a nurse remember? Ever hear of Guillaume Barre?"

The Physical Rehab Therapist at the Rehabilitation Hospital: " I've seen this before. Guillaume Barre."

When I finally got Jodi to her primary doctor. The diagnosis?

Guillaume Barre.

Know the great thing about Guillaume Barre? It's treatable.

It took time. More than a year. Therapy, wheelchair and on to a walker. Today all Jodi has is a slight limp.

I'll take it.

Lesson? I can't push my way through things. God's plan is God's plan. I don't have to understand. Just accept. It's tough. I still have to remind myself of that every day.

So, when you get your phone call. Pause three beats and take a deep breath.

Then pray.

And remember the rest of John 16:33

"Be of good cheer. I have overcome the world. "

### **Read John 16:33**

**Reflection:** What are you praying that God will help you overcome today?

# WEEK 4

## The Hand of God

by

Charles Hofman, OSL Church Member

My period of trial and reaffirmation of faith lasted well over forty days. Crouched in the branches of a large tree I was pruning, I slipped and fell fifteen feet to the ground and landed on my back. I was rushed to the hospital where I was asked the same questions repeatedly to ascertain any brain injury. After a long period of intense observation to determine if I would remain conscious, I underwent further medical examination. I sensed even then that my allegorical "Fall by means of a Tree" had spiritual overtones.

Tests determined a possible injury to my liver. I was wheeled to a laboratory where a medical technician explained he needed to secure a sample of my liver by using a large apparatus that worked like a stapling gun. During the procedure I had to remain conscious while the stapler slammed through my flesh to secure the liver sample. A searing pain surged through me as the apparatus punctured my body. The sample proved insufficient, so the process was repeated a second time and I writhed in agony once again. This time the results were adequate...

While lying in my hospital bed, my back was severely wrenched out of shape and I felt excruciating pain. There I remained in the semi-darkness in my torn work clothes they were reluctant to remove for fear of incurring greater back injury. Later, a surgeon entered and told me that X-rays revealed my vertebrae had four severe fractures, two in the thoracic region and two in the lumbar area. He urged me to undergo spinal surgery as soon as possible since my spinal column might deteriorate progressively without surgery.

After he left, another doctor entered the room to assess my condition. He advised me not to undergo surgery. Instead, he recommended that a special body brace be designed to hold the spinal column rigid so the vertebrae fractures could mend themselves over a long period of time.

An overwhelming flood of relief filled my body as I listened to his comforting, reassuring voice. As he left the room, he placed his hand on my shoulder and then on my head, and I felt as though Christ through him had blessed me with a benediction.

I followed his advice. My body was fitted with the brace and I was strapped and laced inside for six months as God healed my fractured back. The brace was rigid, chafing, and sweaty, yet all the while God gave me the faith to endure. Months later, the brace was removed and I was able to use my back as well as I had before. God healed me through the beneficent touch of the hand He had provided. This lengthy ordeal reaffirmed my assurance that God's grace can renew and restore us through His healing power.

**Read Isaiah 53:4-6**

**Reflection:** How has Jesus' wounds brought you healing and life?

# WEEK 5

## God Saw Me

by

James Leone, OSL Church Member

### My 40 Moment:

In 2019 I was in the midst of my own personal 40 moment. I was in pain every day. I had been in this pain for over a year. It was because I was in need of two different surgeries. I had a torn meniscus in my knee and a disc in my spinal vertebrae compressing my spinal cord and nerve root. I had already had two previous surgeries both on my knee and on my cervical spine. My job duties made it impossible for me to do desk duty. I would pray every morning when I arrived at work for God to give me the strength to make it through the day. And I would pray again each night when I got home right before I iced myself down.

I did not see how I was going to be able to continue working my job, as it was making my physical conditions worse. Early retirement was an option on August 26, 2019, but I would lose my full benefits that I had worked twenty years for. Still, I continued praying every day, as I knew God saw me and what I was going through. I also knew He would be faithful, even if I could not see a way through.

What I could not see is that God was about to open a door for me. In July 2019, I was offered a new job, within my company. One where I could keep my benefits, would offer me a much greater opportunity for growth and mobility, and wouldn't beat me up physically. It even allowed me to get both the surgeries I needed to have done last year in 2020 while missing a minimum of work days. God is faithful always, even when we aren't. And He will always see us through.

### Read Isaiah 53:4-6

**Reflections:** In what ways was Jesus crucifixion, as prophesied by Isaiah, a surgery on Jesus' body that brought healing to us all?

# WEEK 6

## God Grace and Mercy

2013 Diagnosis of Follicular Lymphoma

by

Norma Miller, OSL Church Member

The year got off to a good start—my son was getting married on July 27<sup>th</sup> in Texas. Friends and family were travelling from all over—Jamaica, New York, Tennessee—and his bride was from Oklahoma so it was to be a grand affair.

I was seeing my primary doctor every 4 months, monitoring my blood pressure. Since I was on medication I thought “why am I seeing a doctor every 4 months when I am on medication and my blood pressure is under control?” Then my labs came back and the ride began.

The numbers for my liver were off, a barrage of tests began, ultra sound, pet scan, bone marrow, CT, and finally MRI, which showed cancer, Follicular Lymphoma. One hears cancer and you think that your life is over.

“Dear God, I want to be around to see my son get married. Is this why I was spared on 9/11?” Through it all God never left my side. I did not share the news with too many people, only a few close friends, family, and also a few of my church family.

The wedding was fabulous and life went on until all the tests were completed. After the wedding on July 27<sup>th</sup>, treatment began on November, 5 infusions. The cancer that I have has NO SYMPTOMS and so, life went on.

I have 2 amazing grandchildren. I visit my oncologist every 6 months.

On the last visit in November, I asked, “How will I know if there is a change? There are no symptoms.” I remember a close friend telling me that if it was a mistake, the diagnosis was incorrect. Of course, I get anxious before my visits to my oncologist but then I get the thumbs up and I keep it moving, I just know that God has a plan for us all and my favorite verse is Jeremiah 29:11: “For I know the plans I have for you declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”

Even with this pandemic, I think God just wants us to be still and know that he is in charge. It is all in His hands.

### Read Jeremiah 29:11-14

**Reflection:** How does Jesus confirm God’s plan to harm you but to give hope and a future?

