



KAREN EHMAN  
& RUTH SCHWENK

*Settle my*  
SOUL

100 Quiet Moments  
TO MEET WITH *Jesus*

A *Pressing* PAUSE DEVOTIONAL

ZONDERVAN  
*Settle My Soul*

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1

## How to Scatter Unusual Kindness

*Karen*

*Once safely on shore, we found out that the island was called Malta. The islanders showed us unusual kindness. They built a fire and welcomed us all because it was raining and cold.*

—ACTS 28:1–2

*H*ave you ever read a story on social media about someone who did something over-the-top for a stranger? Like tipping a restaurant server not just the standard 20 percent, but maybe 500 percent? I love stories like these, and we don't just find them online.

Tucked in the pages of the New Testament is a two-word phrase that seemed to leap off the pages of my Bible one day. It rearranged my thinking and became a life mission.

In Acts 28:1–2, we encounter some unknown people who lived on a remote island where a boatload of people—including the apostle Paul—suddenly found themselves shipwrecked in the middle of a storm: “Once safely on shore, we found out that the island was called Malta. The islanders showed us unusual kindness.”

*Unusual kindness.*

I love the reason given for this above-and-beyond behavior. These verses don't say this unusual kindness was shown because Paul and his companions were important people. It doesn't declare, “The people from

the shipwreck had the exact political and theological views as the islanders.” No, they were treated with this unusual kindness simply because “it was raining and cold.”

Today we encounter all sorts of people who are up against the elements. We can’t always see these circumstances, but they are present nonetheless. Perhaps those people could use some kindness—even better, unusual kindness.

Kindness holds the door for an elderly person leaving the grocery store. Unusual kindness willingly carries the person’s groceries all the way to her car, puts them in the trunk, and sends her on her way with an “It was my pleasure” when thanked.

Kindness is smiling at the maxed-out mom with two kids who are pitching fits in the coffee shop line rather than staring in silence. Unusual kindness tells her to hang in there because she’s doing an important job and then pays for her coffee.

Kindness whispers a prayer for the just-moved-in neighbor who’s facing life all alone. Unusual kindness invites him to your house for a weekend supper, folds him into your family’s ordinary life, and asks questions to get to know him better.

Scatter some unusual kindness today. When you do, you’ll make someone else’s day—and yours!

Father, as I encounter people today, help me remember the example of the islanders of Malta and show others unusual kindness done in Your name. In Jesus’ name, amen.

∞ In the space provided, brainstorm a few “unusual kindness” ideas for the people in your life.

## SETTLE MY SOUL

Handwriting practice lines consisting of 20 horizontal dotted lines.



## 2

# Rethinking Solitude

Ruth

*Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed.*

—MARK 1:35

I never fully understood, or appreciated, the discipline of solitude until well into adulthood. Sure, I had studied about growing in Christ by reading God’s Word, memorizing scripture, devoting time to prayer, and serving others. But solitude always puzzled me, especially as an extrovert.

Who wants to be alone? I love people. I have always found myself energized by being with others, not by getting away from them! And then life, with all its joy and demands, began to open my eyes to the importance of getting alone.

What had once seemed strange to me suddenly began to feel like a necessity. I rediscovered passages like Mark 1:35. Jesus, after a long and demanding day, started His new day by getting up and getting alone—He practiced solitude. If Jesus needed solitude, surely I do too.

But God has been showing me lately that I have only partially understood the importance of solitude. Many of us tend to view solitude as *our* time away. It’s time to be alone with God. To hear from Him. To be refreshed. And while all this is true, I missed an important part of

solitude. Alone time is not the end goal. It is a means to something far more important, something that Jesus taught was the greatest commandment: to love God and love others.

In other words, solitude is not primarily about withdrawing *from* people, but withdrawing *for* people. Jesus withdrew for the sake of reengaging people to love, heal, and bless them. Solitude does require that we get alone, but we do it so when we reengage with family, friends, or coworkers, we are the kind of people who love others well.

Solitude is not just for us; solitude is for the sake of others.

Father, my soul finds rest in You alone. You renew me with Your love, grace, and truth. Help me cultivate the discipline of solitude, not just for my sake, but for the sake of others. Remind me that my times of getting alone with You are ultimately meant to move me closer to others—to bring life, healing, truth, and hope to those You surround me with. In Jesus' name, amen.

- ∞ What is one way you can begin cultivating the discipline of solitude in your own life?
- ∞ What are the top one or two obstacles you need to overcome to practice times of being alone?

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3

## Hang on a Second

Karen

*I assure you, believers, by the pride which I have in you in [your union with] Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily [I face death and die to self].*

—1 CORINTHIANS 15:31 AMP

When he was a middle schooler, my youngest son had a fondness for iPod games where a creature had to jump, twist, dodge, and dart in an effort to stay alive. Often he played them on our short commute to school each morning.

As we drove, we'd go over pick-up instructions. I'd also give my "Be sure your sins will find you out" lecture that my own sweet mama often gave me. My son would just keep playing his game, acting as if he wasn't listening. But I knew he was.

Often when jockeying for a position in the carpool line, I'd inform my boy that it was time to get out of the vehicle. Usually, still engaged in the game, he would utter the same phrase to me: "Hang on a second. I gotta die." As in, "I don't want to quit just yet. Let my character finish this round until it dies. Then I will get out of the car."

As he said it one morning, it spoke to my soul.

As a follower of Christ, I am to die to self. But so often I do not. I elevate self. I promote self. I think little of the other person and much of myself. But before I react, before I hurl a harsh word, before I pass

judgment or speak unkindly, perhaps I need to take a deep breath. To pause and ponder. To say in a spiritual sense, “Hang on a second. I gotta die.”

How do we learn to die to self in the everyday details of life? These daily, hourly, and even moment-by-moment decisions are difficult! If we try to die to self out of our own strength, it will seem impossible. In these times, we must draw deep from the power the Holy Spirit offers and let His proper response override our natural and sinful one.

So the next time we want to react in a way that won't please God, let's remember my game-lovin' guy and *before* we speak, take a deep breath. Take a pause that centers our heart, snaps our soul to attention, and gently declares, “Hang on a second. I gotta die.”

Dear Lord, may I learn to die daily. To both act and react in a way that pleases You. In Jesus' name, amen.

∞ What are some places or situations in which God is asking you to press pause and give yourself a minute to consider how your actions might affect others?

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## 4

# Is God at Work in My Life?

## Ruth

*If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea,  
even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast.*

—PSALM 139:9–10

**O**ur world was turned upside down not too long ago. After a series of tests, doctors finally diagnosed my husband with a type of blood cancer. As we wrestled with the initial news, my mind darted in a million different directions. Every emotion exploded inside me. I felt fear, insecurity, and even anger.

*God, what are You doing?* I said to myself. *This happens to other people. Not me.* And yet, as much as I resisted, my husband and I were instantly thrust into a new season of life, a different kind of journey than we ever imagined or wanted. This was our life. Whether I liked it or not, I was forced to answer the question, “Is God really at work in *this*?”

When life is not going the way I want it to, it’s easy for me to get angry. I can begin to make moral judgments about how life should and shouldn’t work. In essence, I am saying I can better plan my life than God can! I can be tempted to think God is indifferent, absent, or cruel. So anger can often reveal when my heart is not trusting, waiting, and believing in God’s power to accomplish what He wants to in, and through, my life.

SETTLE MY SOUL

Through my husband's cancer diagnosis, I am learning to trust God in new ways. As my heart gets exposed, my faith is expanding. Even in the midst of trials, I am learning that God really is at work in my life. When I am tempted to be angry or resentful, God reminds me that He is good, His purposes never fail, and like today's verse says, His hand will guide me (Psalm 139:10).

What are you going through right now? Are you tempted to doubt God's goodness or activity in your life? Is your anger revealing a heart that doubts God's presence and purpose? I pray that God would give you wisdom and faith to walk with Him, leaning on Him even in the storms.

Father, I trust You. I know You are good and faithful. I surrender my plans to You, knowing that Your purposes never fail. Give me faith to trust You and obey You even when I don't understand what is going on. I believe You are with me and for me. In Jesus' name, amen.

- ∞ How has doubting God's presence led to your becoming angry?
- ∞ In what area of your life are you most tempted to doubt God's work?

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## 5

# Go Find Your Old Self

*Karen*

*Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God.*

—2 CORINTHIANS 1:3–4

**J**sat on my twin-sized bed, curled up in my lavender bedspread, sobbing until I felt I had no tears left. My eleven-year-old self once again had her hopes dashed, causing a wave of grief that would only subside once exhaustion set in and sleep took over.

Over the years, the four walls of my bedroom witnessed the heart cries of a young girl trying desperately to navigate relationships, reality, and a new normal.

Toward the end of high school, I became connected to the little country church across the street where I was told the gospel story. I responded to the Spirit's invitation and placed my trust in Jesus. Becoming a believer didn't change my circumstances. But it *did* change my response to them.

As I spent time with my mentor from the church, Miss Pat, I saw where to take my sorrow, how to deal with my grief, and how to find comfort in the security of God's love.

Today's passage, 2 Corinthians 1:3–4, is a picture of this very concept.

As Miss Pat thought about the ways God had comforted her in the past, she reached out to me with that same comfort, helping me deal with the various situations life brought my way. She pointed me to the Father of compassion.

Today, as a mother of teenagers and young adults, I often find myself in a situation similar to hers. In many ways I feel that by ministering to the people God sends my way, I am being like Miss Pat was to me. I am comforting others with the comfort I myself have received from Christ.

If you feel your past hurts lack purpose, I have a very simple solution: Go find a version of your old self and encourage her. Comfort her. Love her. Point her to Christ. When you do, you will find purpose in your past pain. And you'll be an example to someone who just might keep the circle of comfort going.

Father, thank You for being my hope and comforting me in all my troubles. May I encourage others with the stories of Your faithfulness to me. In Jesus' name, amen.

☞ Who is your old self? Describe her below. Describe how you would have liked to have been comforted at that time in your life. Tuck this away in your mind, and commit to seeking out this old version of you. When you find her, love her well.

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## 6

# Reordering Our Thoughts

## Ruth

*“Keep this Book of the Law always on your lips; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful.”*

—JOSHUA 1:8

What consumes your thoughts most days? When given the chance, where does your mind wander? Are you frequently overwhelmed with worry or stress? One of the best things to do when that happens is meditate on God’s truth and love.

In the Bible we quickly discover that God changes us by changing how we think—through the reordering of our thoughts. In Joshua 1:8, we are told to guard God’s Word. Keep it close to our lips and mediate on it day and night.

Meditating is not the absence of thinking; meditation is the act of thinking rightly. When God instructs us to meditate, He is not asking us to empty our thoughts, but rather to focus our thoughts on Him. To meditate on God’s Word is to measure it carefully, thinking about a verse or passage over and over again. It is to keep coming back to God’s Word and fixing our hearts and minds on the goodness of what God is offering us.

As we meditate on God’s Word, we can allow God to change us by:

SETTLE MY SOUL

- ∞ Thinking about what is excellent or praiseworthy (Philippians 4:8).
- ∞ Allowing our minds to be controlled by the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:6).
- ∞ Feeding our minds regularly with the truth of God's Word (Romans 12:1–2).
- ∞ Resting and reflecting on God's promises (Psalm 62:1–2).
- ∞ Praying God's Word (Nehemiah 9:6–37).

Maybe instead of reading four or five chapters of your Bible today, God wants to you to slow down and meditate on just one verse. Let it soak in. Fight off every lie that is attacking your mind. Order your thoughts around what is true. Allow God to change you by changing your thoughts!

Father, Your Word is a lamp unto my feet. Teach me to slow down and fix my thoughts on Your truth today. Guard my thoughts from doubt, discouragement, and lies. Fill my mind with Your Word, and allow my thinking to be controlled by Your Spirit so I might experience greater life and peace. In Jesus' name, amen.

- ∞ Where do you struggle most with your thinking right now?
- ∞ How can you begin to meditate on God's Word today?

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## Know the Whole Story

*Karen*

*Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, “If you continue in my word, you really are my disciples. You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”*

—JOHN 8:31–32 CSB

**D**o you remember your very first job? My most-loved young-adult job was when I spent two summers at a nature center teaching classes for four-year-olds. I learned how to identify critters in the pond, how to tell a chipmunk from a thirteen-lined ground squirrel, and—of utmost importance—how to spot poison ivy.

My poison ivy identification skills have come in handy over the years. One time a friend suspected she had it growing all over her shed. Upon inspection, I discovered she was right. So her family took care to remove it, wearing long sleeves and gloves for protection.

But then she mentioned they’d burned all the ivy in a giant bonfire while they stood over it roasting marshmallows . . . Oh no!

While my friend knew the danger of touching the ivy itself, it hadn’t occurred to her that burning the plant—creating smoke that had the plant’s oils mingled in it—would cause a worse reaction than just touching the leaves.

Sure enough, her whole family developed blistering rashes, especially

on their faces, and their eyes became sorely bloodshot and painfully itchy. One son even developed a serious respiratory reaction. All this occurred because she only knew half the truth about poison ivy: that touching it is bad. She didn't know that burning it is even worse.

Like the Jews in today's passage who "had believed" in Jesus (John 8:31 CSB), the beginning of our walks with God is only half of the story. But we can't stop there. We must keep growing in Christ, continually walking in God's Word in a way that sets us free and keeps sin from poisoning our lives and causing a mighty, even painful, mess.

Jesus saved us (past tense), but He is continually perfecting us too (present tense) if only we will cooperate.

What a glorious thought: We can know the truth. The truth sets us free. How? "If you continue in my word" (v. 31 CSB).

Don't live half the story just by believing in Jesus. Keep going and growing into maturity.

Father, help me not just rest in my belief in You, but also  
continue in Your Word to find the truth-giving life You  
offer me through Your Son. In Jesus' name, amen.

∞ For you, what tends to get in the way of continuing in God's Word? Busyness? Laziness? Poor time management? What one change can you strive to make that will allow you to better spend time in God's Word?

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## The God Who Loves Us

### Ruth

*May your unfailing love be with us, LORD, even as we put our hope in you.*

—PSALM 33:22

Psalm 33 is a beautiful song of praise. It moves from praising God for His Word, justice, and faithfulness to recounting the story of God's mighty acts of creation. The psalmist praised God for keeping His promises and rejoiced in the assurance that God is our King. No matter what we are going through, we can meet God in praise and “wait in hope for the LORD; he is our help and our shield” (Psalm 33:20).

But as the psalmist comes to a close, he does not end with God's unfailing power, incomprehensible wisdom, or unrivaled glory. He has all those things, to be sure. No one is like Him. Despite many contenders, He has no rivals. The Lord is mighty, wise, good, and glorious. But in today's passage, the psalmist appealed to God's unfailing love: “May your unfailing love be with us, LORD, even as we put our hope in you” (v. 22).

God's is a kind of love that never ends. It doesn't run out or fall short, even when we do. God's love is the real thing. It is better than the highest praise from people. God is truly the only One who knows us completely yet loves us the most.

If you struggle with believing that God loves you, the real you, look no further than the cross. On the cross, Jesus satisfied God's justice

while pouring out His love. Jesus took our place, paying the penalty our sins deserve. By faith, His blood covers us. Washes us clean. Makes us new. Calls us out of hiding. Removes the need to pretend or fake it. We are completely loved with God's unfailing love.

Do you believe that? Is God's unfailing love an anchor for your soul? Or are you still trying to prove yourself to others and to God? I pray that today God's unfailing love would rest on you. That you would know and believe how much He cares for you, is with you, and desires to sustain you.

Father, I don't just want to know Your love for me; I want to feel Your love. Help me experience Your unconditional love for me in Christ. Give rest to my soul as You teach me about the depths of Your goodness and grace. Your love is what matters most to me. In Jesus' name, amen.

- ∞ In what ways do you still try to earn God's love?
- ∞ What is one way you can begin to rest in God's love on a daily basis?

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## 9

# Autocorrected Prayers

*Karen*

*The Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words.*

—ROMANS 8:26 ESV

I sat at a women’s conference table that was charmingly decorated with fresh flowers and laden with delicious food. The conversation flowed as five other women and I chatted about many topics. Most of the ladies were acquaintances, but I hadn’t met the woman sitting next to me. “My name is Mem,” she said as she introduced herself and we began visiting.

Mem was from another continent. Although her English was excellent, at times she couldn’t find the exact word to communicate what she was trying to say.

Several minutes into our conversation, my new friend tried to compliment me on something, but her words didn’t convey the proper sentiment. She took a deep breath and with frustration declared, “Oh, Karen. When you cannot understand my words, please hear my heart.”

This sweet woman’s request has stuck with me since that day, and it’s made me think of prayer. There are so many times when I just can’t find the right words to say to God.

Tucked in Romans 8:26 (ESV) is a heart-assuring promise: “The Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words.” It’s like God autocorrects our prayers!

The autocorrect function on a phone or electronic device automatically makes corrections for mistakes in spelling or grammar while we’re typing. How comforting it is that the Holy Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. When we just can’t find the words to pray, God still hears our hearts.

Many times my own emotions have been too deep for words. Each time I trusted that the Holy Spirit would intercede for me, “autocorrecting” my longings and carrying them to the throne of God. I said to Him essentially, “Please hear my heart.”

Remember the truth of Romans 8:26, and allow the Spirit of God to intercede on your behalf. God knows you completely—your thoughts, desires, all the inner longings of your heart. Trust that He’ll answer your deepest prayers, even when you can’t find the right words.

Father, help me pray with boldness, even when I can’t find  
the words to say, trusting the Spirit to intercede for me and  
carry my requests to You. In Jesus’ name, amen.

☞ How might knowing that the Holy Spirit intercedes for you  
change the way you personally look at prayer?

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10

## The Hardest Lessons

Ruth

*Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. The disciples woke him and said to him, “Teacher, don’t you care if we drown?”*

—MARK 4:38

We’d done the research. Figured out which boat was best for us. We even sat in it, paddles in hand, pretending we were in open water! And then we pulled the trigger and bought our first kayak. The only problem was that we had never been in the water with one, which is really the only way to truly learn how to kayak.

We can learn some lessons at the water’s edge, but some we have to learn in the water. This just happens to be the way Jesus taught His disciples too. In fact, when we begin to read Mark 4, we discover that “Jesus began to teach by the lake” (v. 1). The crowds gathered, and as they did, Jesus told them several parables about the kingdom of God.

But then something interesting happened in verse 35. Jesus went from teaching *by* the water to teaching His disciples *in* the water. He sent them out into the lake in a boat, where they quickly found themselves threatened by a furious storm. As I would have done, the disciples panicked and rushed to wake up Jesus, who was peacefully asleep.

It’s not that the storm wasn’t real or dangerous or serious. It was. But the real danger to the disciples was not the wind and waves; the real

danger was their lack of faith (v. 40) and confidence that Jesus was with them—faithful in the storm, able to get them through, and powerful enough to calm the chaos.

Jesus had to take His disciples from the lakeside to the lake to show His power, goodness, and faithfulness. The chaos of the storm and not the classroom of the lakeside would be their greatest learning moment.

Do you find yourself on a boat in the water in the middle of a storm? Do you need to be reminded that Jesus is God with you and for you, even in the middle of a storm?

Father, You are my help and my shield. My heart rejoices in You. I know that right now, with all my circumstances swirling around me, You are present. You are my God and my Savior, and I will trust in You. Increase my faith, and continue to show me Your faithfulness. In Jesus' name, amen.

- ☞ When has Jesus used the chaos of a storm instead of a classroom to increase your faith?
- ☞ How do storms reveal not only what you *do* believe but also what you *don't* believe?

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