

Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. PHILIPPIANS 3:13, 14

My older brother and I were abandoned by our biological father. Because he left our mother when we were very young, we never met him. All we knew of him was that he was a sailor, tall and handsome with fiery red hair and freckles, and spoke with a southern accent. All attempts to locate him failed, so we gave up. I grew up wondering why he didn't want us, which left a scar on my young heart.

I was clumsy, often tripping over "nothing" on the playground. I was made fun of at school. My hair was short and cut square around my pale face. My eyes lacked the sparkle of happiness that should characterize a typical eight-year-old. I was frequently the brunt of jokes and teasing.

Because I often played by myself, recess was my least favorite time of day, but physical education class was even worse. We played kickball, also called soccer baseball, which I hated. The game involved kicking a ball and running around bases. As the children lined up, captains chose their teams. I was always chosen last. The teams took their positions, and I was sent to the far section of the field because I wasn't very good at this game. Then my team began to yell, "Get back! Timmy's up!" Timmy always kicked the ball really hard. I just stood with my arms crossed. Suddenly, I heard the cries, "Dumb DeWeese! The ball is coming to you! Catch it!" Looking up, I saw the ball heading straight for me. I stretched out my arms and caught it! In disbelief the other children erupted in praise, "Yay! Dumb DeWeese caught the ball!" For a brief moment, I was a hero, praised by my classmates, but it was short-lived. Things returned to normal when it was my turn to kick the ball and I struck out, causing my team to lose the game.

Insecurity and low self-esteem stayed with me into my teens and adulthood. Events in early childhood can affect who we become, but we don't have to stay that way. I had every right to be bitter and angry; after all, I was rejected by my father, friendless, and easily taken advantage of because I longed to be accepted. The more I dwelled on it, the more it became a reality. I gathered a bouquet of thorns. But holding onto past experience, as bitter as it may have been, becomes too heavy to bear and may eventually affect our health. We become slaves to our feelings.

I read this account by Ellen White recently:

"Many, walking along the path of life, dwell upon their mistakes and failures and disappointments, and their hearts are filled with grief and discouragement. While I was in Europe, a sister who had been doing this, and who was in deep distress, wrote to me, asking for some word of encouragement. The night after I had read her letter I dreamed that I was in a garden, and one who seemed to be the owner of the garden was conducting me through its paths. I was gathering the flowers and enjoying their fragrance, when this sister, who had been walking by my side, called my attention to some unsightly briars that were impeding her way. There she was mourning and grieving. She was not walking in the pathway, following the guide, but was walking among the briars and thorns. 'Oh,' she mourned, 'is it not a pity that this beautiful garden is spoiled with thorns?' Then the guide said, 'Let the thorns alone, for they will only wound you. Gather the roses, the lilies, and the pinks.' Have there not been some bright spots in your experience? . . . When you look back into the chapters of your life experience do you not find some pleasant pages? Are not God's promises, like the fragrant flowers, growing beside your path on every hand? Will you not let their beauty and sweetness fill your heart with joy? . . . It is not wise to gather together all the unpleasant recollections of a past



life,—its iniquities and disappointments,—to talk over them and mourn over them until we are overwhelmed with discouragement. A discouraged soul is filled with darkness, shutting out the light of God from his own soul and casting a shadow upon the pathway of others” (Steps to Christ, pp. 116, 117).

I chose to let go of my thorns and gather the roses. When Christ came into my life, I discovered who I was in Him! I was once a skinny little girl who thought she could do nothing right—but became a child of God, a royal princess of the King of kings (1 Pet. 2:9). No longer am I fatherless, for He became my Father (Ps. 27:10; John 16:27). No longer am I rejected and friendless, for my Father in heaven calls me His friend (John 15:15). I know I have great value, for He gave His life for me (John 3:16). What a reason to rejoice!

Suggested Format for the Prayer Time

Praise

- Lord, we praise You for Your transforming power!
- We praise You that You have called us Your friends (John 15:15).
- We praise You for choosing us to be Your children.

Confession

- Lord, we claim Your victory over the sin in our lives.
- Forgive us for choosing to dwell on the “thorns” of the past and allowing those experiences to discourage us. Thank You that if we confess our sins, You are faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us (1 John 1:9).

Supplication and Intercession

- Lord, we uplift our church leaders around the world. Please grant them wisdom as they make important decisions and lead Your people.
- We ask for Your grace to forgive those who have wronged us. Lord, please bring healing and restoration to families.
- Lord, may each of us be a friend to the friendless, revealing God’s love to those in need of affection.
- We pray for our children. Please empower them to stand boldly for you when they encounter obstacles and pressure. Help them to make wise choices and stand for truth (Isa. 44:3, 4).
- Teach us to follow Christ’s selfless example by meeting the daily needs of people close to us. Equip us to serve as medical missionaries, community volunteers, and friends to the needy.
- Lord, may a mighty revival of primitive godliness sweep Your church in the final days. May we stand for truth though the heavens fall.
- Lord, show us how to share the gospel with Muslim people groups. We pray that they hear and respond to Your offer of grace.
- We pray for the seeds of truth sown in Japan during last year’s Total Member Involvement outreach. Please send laborers to work and pray for Japan.
- We pray for the seven names on our lists. Please show each person how much Jesus loves them.

Thanksgiving

- Lord, thank You for Your promise: “He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ” (Phil. 1:6).
- Thank you, Lord, that You can fill us with joy and peace.
- Thank You that You are already working in the hearts of people we are praying for.

Suggested Songs to Sing

“A Child of the King” (SDA Hymnal #468); “Blessed Assurance” (SDA Hymnal #462); “There’s Sunshine in My Soul” (SDA Hymnal #470); “Wonderful Peace” (SDA Hymnal #466)

Promises to Claim as You Pray

- “When my father and my mother forsake me, then the Lord will take care of me” (Ps. 27:10).
- “What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?” (Rom. 8:31).
- “Can a woman forget her nursing child, and not have compassion on the son of her womb? Surely they may forget, yet I will not forget you” (Isa. 49:15).