

HOPE-FULL LIVING

•*Daily Devotions for Living Life to the Fullest*•

October • November • December • 2015

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Hope-Full Living Mission Statement

To inspire God's seniors with the assurance that "This very day, I have a body, a mind, a spirit and a message—God's rejuvenating Gospel message to and through me—to share with my world, my friends and my Lord."

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Thursday, October 1, 2015

Times of Change

For I, the Lord, do not change.

Malachi 3:6

Fall is definitely a time of change. Some of the changes are quite obvious: shorter days, cooler temperatures and the changing color of the leaves. We have no control over these changes; they occur with no help from us.

Our lives fall into this pattern also. As we grow older, there are changes that occur naturally—things we also have no power to control: hearing loss, diminished eyesight, less energy and possibly more physical ailments.

There are, however, some things we can control. We can be a friend and counsel to someone who needs the benefit of our wisdom, we can let our actions be a good example of a child of God, we can pray for the needs of others, and we can be joyful in all circumstances.

Regardless of the changes in our lives, the good news is: God does not change.

Heavenly Father, help me remember you are in control of all things. Amen.

Talk: Discuss with someone the idea that change doesn't have to be a bad thing.

Read: James 1:17; Psalm 110:4

*Gloria Doty
Fort Wayne, IN*

Friday, October 2, 2015

One by One

Sing to the Lord with thanksgiving.

Psalm 147:7

Here I sit at my deck watching the leaves fall one by one. That reminds me to be thankful for the blessings that I receive from God—one by one.

As I see the leaves falling, I thank God for my family. Then as the leaves continue to fall, one by one, I remember the wonderful works that God has given me through the years: the fresh autumn air, the gift of music, good conversation, the ability to walk in my old age, the privilege to live in a free country. But the best blessing is the faith that God has given me in his promises through Jesus Christ and the working of the Holy Spirit in my life.

As long as I live, I will count my blessings, one by one, thanking my Lord. Yes, the Lord has done great things for me, and my heart overflows with thanksgiving.

Lord Jesus, thank you for all the blessings that you have showered upon me. Amen.

Count: Each day this week, count your blessings and thank God for them.

Read: Psalms 146, 147

*Walter M. Schoedel
Webster Groves, MO*

Saturday, October 3, 2015

Autumn Antiques

Even to your old age and gray hairs I am he, I am he who will sustain you.

Isaiah 46:4

I saw a sign recently that stated: “The most valuable antique is an old friend!” How true! One good thing about the gift of aging is that the Lord continues to put older adults around us to keep us from becoming lonely and feeling like an old autumn antique hidden somewhere in the attic!

We also continue to experience the loss of “antiques” in our lives as the Lord calls our spouses, relatives, neighbors and other friends to our heavenly home. These people antiques are certainly priceless, and none can be replaced.

May this season become a time for us to thank the Lord for our precious autumn antiques, whether they are people we love or old photos in the basement!

Lord, thank you for the antiques that you have given to me as gifts. Amen.

Think: Think about how you can share your antiques with others.

Read: Ephesians 1:16-18

*Rich Bimler
Bloomingdale, IL*

Sunday, October 4, 2015

Instrument of Peace

Do not let your hearts be troubled.

John 14:1

Who doesn't want to receive the gift of peace? But so often we let our worries get in the way of the peace God so longs to give us. Who can teach us a way of life that brings us peace?

St. Francis of Assisi, whose life we celebrate on October 4, asked God to help him give God's peace to others. He also said, "Remember that when you leave this earth, you can take with you nothing that you have received—only what you have given."

Like St. Francis, we, too, can be givers of God's peace by forgiving those who hurt us and by spreading joy. We can also be mindful that when we give the gift of peace to others, we give peace to ourselves.

Lord, just like St. Francis of Assisi, help me to be a sign of your peace to others today. Amen.

Do: Gift the gift of peace to others today by giving them a smile.

Read: John 14:1-14

*Sally Macke
St. Louis, MO*

Monday, October 5, 2015

You Never Walk Alone

Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.

John 8:12

During the turtle nesting period, I walk the beaches of Galveston and Padre Island looking for egg nests of one of God's endangered species, the ridley sea turtle. The other day I walked over a mile and never met a person. Yet I never walked alone. Jesus walked with me all the way.

I have discovered these beach walks to be special times to talk with Jesus about what is on my mind: my family, friends and the world today. As the plovers, sanderlings and seagulls skip along and the waves do their dance on the sands, I thank God the Father for his marvelous creation. For me, these are good times. Wherever you go to pray or walk, you never walk alone. Jesus walks with you through your troubles, your joys and even death, right into life forever with him and all the saints. Wow! What a walk!

Walk with me, Jesus, and I will dance in thanksgiving. Amen.

Choose: Choose a special place to pray.

Read: Romans 8:26-29; Matthew 28:20

*Leo Symmank
Seabrook, TX*

Tuesday, October 6, 2015

Mentoring

So Moses listened to the voice of his father-in-law and did all that he had said.

Exodus 18:24

Recently I was surprised when a woman asked me to mentor her. Me? I still have much to learn myself!

Ah, but haven't I benefited from the spiritual wisdom and experience of others? St. Paul instructed Titus to have older men and women teach and mentor the younger ones. I don't claim to be an expert, but maybe some of my faith and life experiences can help others. Sharing how God has helped me through various times in my life gives hope and courage to my friend when she asks questions. My asking and listening about her life helps her see God's hand more clearly too.

Who might benefit from your experiences of God's guidance?

Father, thank you for the wisdom others have shared with me. Help me to offer encouragement and hope to others too. Amen.

Share: Build a relationship with a younger person and share some of your stories with each other.

Read: Exodus 18:9-26; Titus 2:1-7

*Diane Bahn
Cypress, TX*

Wednesday, October 7, 2015

Notice

The Lord has done great things for us; we are glad.

Psalm 126:3

While I was walking outside, I noticed a few bright yellow leaves on the ground.

I stopped and looked up at the tree above. The tree was full of leaves that were green. Instantly, I smiled. The leaves on the ground caught my attention because they were so very vibrant. They were like little sticky notes from God saying, “Observe what is going on around you. Don’t miss it!”

The autumn season has arrived. Just on time, the weather has changed, and there is a new chill in the air. Leaves are beginning to show a little color. The daylight is getting shorter. Time marches on, and we are invited to slow down our pace again and notice the loveliness of the fall season.

Lord, thank you for the colorful surprises of nature that surround me. Guide me to savor and take in all of your marvels. Amen.

Observe: Reflect on and relish God’s smallest sign of autumn beauty.

Read: Isaiah 55:12; Proverbs 11:28

*Annette L. Sherwood
St. Louis, MO*

Thursday, October 8, 2015

I Love Baseball!

Has his unfailing love vanished forever? Has his promise failed for all time?

Psalm 77:8

Autumn is an exciting time for baseball, with the playoffs beginning as fans gather in full regalia. But I like baseball for a different reason. I like the sport because it is a game of failure. Babe Ruth struck out 1330 times while hitting his 714 home runs. Ernie Banks struck out 1266 times. We can all relate to that. How many times have we “struck out” this week by failing people, by not listening, by giving up?

Psalm 77 is our cry whether we are fans or not! The psalmist cried out to God for help, rather than putting his success on other interests, even baseball.

And just like in the game of life, grace bats last. Yes, there is victory for us, perhaps not in ballparks in Chicago or St. Louis, but in the hearts and lives of God’s people. “We won!” not because of a ninth-inning homer, but because of Christ’s victory on the cross.

Lord, thanks for bringing the victory home to us, in spite of our strikeouts. Amen.

Cheer: Continue to cheer for your favorite team, knowing we all are winners.

Read: Matthew 18:21-22; Ephesians 2:4-9

*Rich Bimler
Bloomington, IL*

Friday, October 9, 2015

Sparrows

Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father.

Matthew 10:29

I have bird feeders near my kitchen window that are visited by neighborhood birds. There they are, in all kinds of weather, chirping and pecking away at the seed. Many of them are common sparrows and not particularly high on any birdwatchers list.

Jesus said two sparrows were worth a penny, but they are important to our heavenly Father. Think how much more important we are. We are so important that God sent his Son, Jesus, to die for our sins. Because of Jesus' death and resurrection, all of our sins are forgiven and eternal life is ours.

Learn an important lesson from the lowly sparrow.

Creator God, thank you for taking care of even the smallest of your creatures. And thanks for always watching over me and guiding me day by day. Amen.

Do: Put out a bird feeder and let the birds remind you of God's care and love.

Read: Matthew 6:25-34

*Jeanette Dall
Batavia, IL*

Saturday, October 10, 2015

Hope-full and Joyful

Shout, and sing for joy, O inhabitant of Zion, for great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel.

Isaiah 12:6

A deep sense of the presence of God is expressed so often by the prophets. God was in the midst of his people. But today, for so many, God seems so far removed in our world, as though he is in his heaven and we are left to struggle along here on earth.

But the Scriptures tell us that God is not far removed (Romans 10:6-8). "He is risen" proclaims that Jesus is with us. His presence among us is great, for Jesus has overcome the world.

God wants the most for us from this life. He stands in opposition to anything that robs us of the joy and community and purpose for which we were created. In his presence, we can live each day full of hope and full of joy.

Holy Spirit, keep my eyes focused on Jesus and my heart filled with the sense of his presence. Amen.

Meditate: How does the faith that God is present with you change your present circumstances?

Read: Isaiah 12

*Lionel Otto
Adelaide, Australia*

Sunday, October 11, 2015

It Is No Mystery

He told them, "This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day."

Luke 24:46

Sherlock Holmes, a fictitious character created in 1887, is associated with solving mysteries; looking for clues that contributed to a tragic event was his specialty. Solutions to a mystery were at times somewhat unbelievable. Today we have the television program *CSI* that taps into that concept.

The Bible contains many accurate clues of God's plan, yet when the faithful followers of Jesus went to the tomb on Easter morning and found the tomb empty, the clues given them by Jesus were forgotten. Their anxiety was later calmed when Jesus appeared, for they saw proof of his promised resurrection. Although we will not see Christ until his return to take us home, regular reading of God's Word gives us our certain assurance of Christ's Saving Inheritance, our own *CSI*.

Dear Father, thank you for giving us the Bible with clues to everything we need for our heavenly inheritance. Amen.

Investigate: Search the Bible and know of God's certain love.

Read: Mark 9:30-32; Revelation 21:5

*Don Hollmann
Ballwin, MO*

Monday, October 12, 2015

Master Crafter

For we are his workmanship ...

Ephesians 2:10

Fall craft festivals are a favorite pastime of mine. Every year I'm amazed by the skill and ingenuity of the crafters who create all sorts of unique décor, gifts, accessories and generally fun stuff.

Even more amazing than all these craft show creations is the workmanship of God, the Master Crafter. His craftsmanship started on Day One, "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth" (Genesis 1:1), and hit its stride on Day Six, "Then the Lord God formed man of dust from the ground" (Genesis 2:7). Thousands of years later it became personal for each of us, "You knitted me together in my mother's womb" (Psalm 139:13).

As Christians, we recognize God's workmanship in creating the world and each of us unique humans. We honor his workmanship by cherishing earth's beauty and bounty and by caring for our bodies and minds. All were created out of love by the Master Crafter.

Creator God, I praise you for my life and everything around me, all the works of your hands. Amen.

Look: Take a look out the window and in the mirror, and thank God for his amazing handiwork.

Read: Isaiah 43:1-7

*Marj Maynard
Billings, MO*

Tuesday, October 13, 2015

New Learning

If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation: the old has gone, the new has come.

2 Corinthians 5:17

In the 1981 movie *On Golden Pond*, aging Ethel Thayer (Katherine Hepburn) and retired professor Norman Thayer (Henry Fonda) think they now have time when they can settle down and enjoy their pond-side, New England cottage. Their estranged daughter Chelsea (Jane Fonda) arrives with her betrothed and his son. Their plan of settling down is upset, and they are challenged to mend their relationship with their daughter and begin to relate to the new people in their lives.

Our God is in the business of making all things new. In the process of aging, God gives us new opportunities. Should we be surprised that the God who raised his Son from the dead has the same power to resurrect and renew old relationships?

O Lord Jesus, who has created all things, instill in me the anticipation of new opportunities this day. Amen.

Tell: Think of one relationship you could repair today.

Read: Psalm 118

*Gordon Beck
Williamsburg, VA*

Wednesday, October 14, 2015

Be Courageous

But Christ is faithful as a son over God's house. And we are his house, if we hold on to our courage and the hope of which we boast.

Hebrews 3:6

Do you remember watching *The Wizard of Oz* and how the lion wanted courage? Courage was a sign of strength to the lion.

The Bible reminds us over and over that we are to be full of courage through our faith. We will be blessed with the courage needed in all situations when we build our faith and trust on the right foundation. That foundation is God our Creator.

Courage allows us to persevere in difficult times. Through the truth of God's Word, we have courage. It is not easy to always have courage in a world where others are challenging and tempting us with worldly focused thoughts and doubts. Yet God tells us to have courage through our faith and not be afraid.

Lord, give me courage day by day. Amen.

Think: Think of a time when you felt you lacked the courage to be a witness of your faith to someone else. How was the Holy Spirit working in you during that situation?

Read: Mark 6:51

*Steven G. Liescheidt
Chesterfield, MO*

Thursday, October 15, 2015

Hope to Live By

... We also rejoice in suffering, because suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit.

Romans 5:3-5

The above words of the apostle Paul are getting into the nitty-gritty of hope. Rejoice in suffering? The character of a person is not measured by how well-liked or well-off he is, but by how he responds to life's inevitable pain, loss and grief. And character does produce hope that is as certain as God's grace through Jesus Christ. To rejoice in suffering means not to be glad that I have to go through what I am going through, but to be grateful that I am not going through it alone, that I know and believe in an all-present and all-powerful God who takes my hand through life and uplifts me when I falter or am afraid.

Dear Lord, thanks to you my suffering is temporal, but my joy is eternal. Amen.

Do: Take someone's hand who is suffering and assure them of God's love and yours.

Read: Romans 5:1-5

*Steve Albers
Kirkwood, MO*

Friday, October 16, 2015

Metamorphosis

Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall be changed.

1 Corinthians 15:51

Caterpillars. Crawling on the ground, munching on leaves. It seems their lives consist of nothing more than filling their bellies before their lives end. Yet in the sleep of the chrysalis, a metamorphosis occurs: A beautiful butterfly emerges, free to fly.

Our lives, like those of caterpillars, are earth-bound and self-centered. But God has promised us a complete makeover. St. Paul wrote, “If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old is passed away; behold, the new has come” (2 Corinthians 5:17).

How do we know? We have seen it happen all around us. God, who changes caterpillars to butterflies, sand to pearls and coal to diamonds, has given us the ultimate sign. He raised his Son Jesus from the dead, “the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep” (1 Corinthians 15:20). Because Jesus lives, we have new life with him now and forever.

Thank you, Lord, for the new life you have given me in Jesus. Amen.

Observe: Look for God’s hand in nature as his creatures change in preparation for winter.

Read: 1 Corinthians 15

*Eileen Ritter
Byron Center, MI*

Saturday, October 17, 2015

God's Caring Love

Yet I will not forget you.

Isaiah 49:15

Through the years I have developed a love for the Book of Isaiah. Even though it is frequently quoted in the New Testament, at times I am puzzled by what I read and do not understand what the prophet is saying.

But I do grasp the comfort that he offers as I continue my earthly journey. My favorite passage is where Isaiah writes about two powerful images of God's caring love: the way a mother cares for her child and the way God writes our names in the palm of his hands.

That brings me much comfort. The message is very clear. God does not forget me. I may forget him, but he sent his Son Jesus for me. His life, death and resurrection tell the story. What caring love.

Loving God, remind me each day that your love for me in Jesus is always there. Amen.

Check: Check your concordance and look up the passages in the New Testament where the holy writers quote Isaiah and ponder the message.

Read: Isaiah 49:14-16; 40:1-5; 61:10-11

*Walter M. Schoedel
Webster Groves, MO*

Sunday, October 18, 2015

It's Not Fair!

He judges the world with righteousness.

Psalm 9:8

Children are very concerned about things being fair—same number of toys, same privileges and so on. They often protest loudly, “That’s not fair!” Sometimes we feel like those children. It doesn’t seem fair that we try to live a healthy lifestyle but we still get sick. But our “couch potato” neighbor doesn’t even get a cold.

We may even question whether God is fair. But if God gave us what we deserve, none of us would make it to heaven—nothing we did would be good enough. In Romans 3:23 Paul writes, “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” God is not only fair by offering us a way to heaven, but it is free. We read in Romans 6:23: “For the wages of sin is death, but free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” What amazing grace!

Lord, help me to be fair in my dealings with others. Amen.

Consider: Are you being unfair to someone in your life? Show them grace.

Read: Romans 3:21-31

*Jeanette Dall
Batavia, IL*

Monday, October 19, 2015

To Save A Life

In him we have redemption through His blood.

Ephesians 1:7

“Why do you give blood so much, Grandpa?”
When your 14-year-old granddaughter asks you a question like that, you want to give a good answer. “My Dad was in World War II. He saw many soldiers die. He knew how precious life was. He always gave blood for others.”

But there’s a bigger reason, I told her. Jesus gave his blood to save my life. Every time I give blood I can help save three people from dying. But when Jesus gave his blood, he saved everyone’s life—forever! I don’t mind the pain when they stick me with that needle. Jesus suffered a lot more for me. I’m glad to do what I can to show his love to others.

Dear Lord, thank you for giving your blood to save my life. Let my blood flow to show your love to others. Amen.

Give: Give blood if you can. If you can’t, encourage others to do so.

Read: Colossians 1:19-20; 1 John 1:5-7

*Lonie Eatherton
Fenton, MO*

Tuesday, October 20, 2015

Passing Time

Jesus, when he began his ministry, was about thirty years of age.

Luke 3:23

Jesus grew and aged, as we do. At about the age of 30, he began his public ministry. As those years of teaching and healing drew to a close, “he set his face to go to Jerusalem” (Luke 9:51). There he would suffer, die and rise. The cross awaiting him took up more and more of his time.

As we grow older, health concerns and other worries of aging occupy our minds. Appointments, medications and insurance forms take up a lot of time. When such things overwhelm you, look to Jesus. “For the joy that was set before him,” he endured the cross for you (Hebrews 12:2). Let the cross of Jesus—and the joy of the empty tomb—take up more and more of your time!

Lord Jesus, when worries overwhelm me, let me think of your cross and of your love for me. Amen.

Focus: When you worry about the concerns of aging, occupy your mind instead with the cross of Jesus and the hope of life and resurrection in his name.

Read: Matthew 16:21-28; 1 Corinthians 2:1-5

*Carol Geisler
Manchester, MO*

Wednesday, October 21, 2015

Worthwhile Miles

Do good to everyone, and especially ... the household of faith.

Galatians 6:10

We took a long road trip earlier this year. There were Spanish missions and mountains, cities and countryside, rivers and dryness, starlight and headlights. But more important than the history we saw was seeing people with whom we shared history. We had taught with some and worshipped with some. There was also the aunt approaching 96 who still faithfully approached her church's altar. Sharing time and prayer with brothers and sisters in Jesus makes the miles worthwhile.

You may travel your miles by phone, car, letter, plane, train, computer or on foot. Be a smile, a story from the past, a reminder of Jesus to an old acquaintance. This, too, is how we do good in the household of faith.

Dear Jesus, thank you for putting us in a time and place where there are so many ways in which we can cross the miles to "see" a friend in Christ. Amen.

Reconnect: Take the time to reconnect with someone who is connected to Jesus.

Read: Acts 20:17-28; Luke 1:39-45

*Harry Edenfield
Brownstown, MI*

Thursday, October 22, 2015

Out of the Pit

He drew me up from the pit of destruction, out of the miry bog.

Psalm 40:2

Recently I had to research quicksand. The facts I found surprised me. I believed when someone fell into a pit of quicksand, the more they struggled, the faster they sank. That part is true. What isn't true is that they are doomed to a slow death. I learned that if a person will trust enough to first lie on their back, then roll over and swim to the side, they can be free.

Sometimes we find ourselves in a pit of despair that feels like quicksand. The more we struggle, the further we fall. When we believe we are sinking, do we listen to Satan's lies and believe we are doomed and there is no hope? Or do we trust God and his promises? He freed us from the pit of sin when he sent Jesus to die for us. If we trust him and his promises, we will be free.

Jesus, help us realize you are our escape from any pit. Amen.

Discuss: Discuss facts about quicksand with a friend and relate it to God saving us.

Read: Psalm 103:1-5; Isaiah 38:17

*Gloria Doty
Fort Wayne, IN*

Friday, October 23, 2015

Pray!

Pray at all times.

1 Thessalonians 5:17

I remember being home from college one weekend when my grandma said, “I pray for you, Steve, every day.” What great comfort and security that gave me, knowing that God connected Grandma and me through prayer, and what a great gift her prayers were to me!

Years later, our kindergarten-age son announced on the way home from church, “Today we learned a Bible verse: ‘Pray at all times. 1 Thessalonians 5:17.’” Grandma’s words came to mind as I saw another generation learning the blessing of prayer.

Today I have the blessing of praying for my grandkids—as well as for their parents and their grandmother, and for all people. Even though I don’t see them as often as I’d like, I can pray for them every single day. What a privilege it is to pray!

Thank you, Lord, for my loved ones. Please watch over them and bless them today—and every day. Amen.

Pray: Thank God for loved ones by name, and ask him to protect, guide and bless them today.

Read: Psalm 34; 1 Thessalonians 5:12-28

*Steve Hess
Fort Myers, FL*

Saturday, October 24, 2015

Preparation Time

But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made.

Luke 10:40

The fall season means winter is coming and we think of getting ready for the colder weather: Warmer clothing cleaned, heating systems checked, filters changed, automobile winterized, bringing house plants inside, leaves removed from gutters, winter fertilizer on lawns. The list can become quite lengthy.

However, there is one major event to prepare for—the celebration of the birth of our Savior, Jesus Christ. Like Martha, who was busy with earthly things, we get so involved in winter preparations and may lose sight of the birth of Jesus. Having God's Son first in our lives means we are always prepared for any situation or need.

God our Father, help us to always stay focused on your Son and the heavenly promise we have received from his resurrection and place our earthly needs second. Amen.

Remember: Earthly preparations are temporary; Christ is forever.

Read: Luke 12:22-31

*Don Hollmann
Ballwin, MO*

Sunday, October 25, 2015

Happy Trails

You have made known to me the paths of life; you will make me full of gladness in your presence.

Acts 2:28

After driving along the Mississippi River, enjoying the fall color, my sister and I ran into a snag. The scenic river town had no lodging. We ended up at a decrepit, slightly scary motel out in the country. Getting up early to escape, we were awestruck by a shimmering mass of yellow and golden foliage rising up a steep hill behind the motel. The brilliant colors continued all the way back to town. We agreed it was a once-in-a-lifetime sight.

Life's journey often crosses unplanned and unpleasant bumps in the road. Some are minor, like a dumpy motel, and others very serious. Only after getting back on smoother ground can we see the benefit, even beauty, of those rough patches. May we always be patient when God allows us to go through trials, trusting that he will keep us safely on the trail that one day will take us to eternal happiness.

Direct my paths, dear Lord, through the rough patches of this life and on to heaven. Amen.

Recall: Remember a time when God led you through trials that resulted in a happy ending.

Read: Proverbs 3:6; Psalm 37:3-6

*Marj Maynard
Billings, MO*

Monday, October 26, 2015

A Clock in a Thunderstorm

Mary ... sat at the Lord's feet and listened.

Luke 10: 39

Recovering from surgery recently, the pace of my life slowed to a steady crawl. I was reminded of the hurrying and worrying I usually do. Most of us are programmed as either a tortoise or a hare. A hare loves to rush around, climbing as many mountains as possible. A tortoise prefers to rest under a shady tree, content with the stillness, avoiding the noise.

The tortoise isn't worried or rushed and, in the words of Robert Louis Stevenson, perseveres "like a clock in a thunderstorm." While the hare is rushing, the tortoise is shuffling along, appreciating the beauty around him.

Mary, sitting quietly listening to Jesus, was rich in the wisdom of slowing down, while Martha remained anxious and troubled in the kitchen.

God leads us on a journey with lessons to learn and adventures to enjoy. The unhurried are present to absorb and experience it all.

Dear Lord, help me to enjoy slowing down, sitting at your feet, listening to you. Amen.

Rest: Sit at Jesus' feet as you read his Word.

Read: Luke 10:38-42: Matthew 11:28

*Kerry Osborne
Sydney, Australia*

Tuesday, October 27, 2015

Like A Bird

And we are witnesses to all that he did.

Acts 10:39

An old saying goes “Make your presence known.” I noticed again this year that my bird’s back. I say “my” bird because I’m sure it’s the same bird that nests in my tree every year and chirps so loudly and constantly that I want to file a complaint with the Audubon Society. This bird really makes his presence known!

I put my irritation aside long enough the other day to realize this chipper chirper has a lesson for me: we should be so constant and “noisy” making known the presence of Jesus in our lives. Or, as Luke puts it, “we are witnesses to all that he did.”

We certainly don’t want to be intrusive, but perhaps we can be a bit more fowl-tempered and raise our voices to tell others “Jesus loves me, this I know.”

Lover of all, give me voice to share your message of love to those who are around me. Amen.

Think: Think about “all that he did” and chirp it out!

Read: Psalm 104:16-17; Psalm 50:11

*Al Schenk
St. Louis, MO*

Wednesday, October 28, 2015

Salvation Story

I shall not die, but I shall live, and recount the deeds of the Lord.

Psalm 118:17

I was decked! A serious illness flattened me. Weak, wobbly and pretty helpless at times, I wondered if I would ever regain my health and strength. In bed one day, reading Psalm 118, I found the answer. God's Word assured me I would survive to tell all he has done to find me, rescue, heal and redeem me.

Recently, I witnessed how contagious such telling can be. During a retreat, the presenter encouraged us to share how we had experienced God's faithfulness. One after another, participants rose to tell their salvation stories. Amazement and awe grew with each telling. Then, pure joy erupted!

Each of us has a salvation story—too good to keep to ourselves. As long as God gives us life and breath, let's tell ours.

Lord God, how good and gracious you are! Open doors for me to share the story of your goodness, for your glory. Amen.

Recount: Find a notebook. Write your salvation story. Reflect. Take your time. Share. Ask others about their spiritual journeys.

Read: Psalm 103:1-8; Psalm 118:29

*Donna J. Streufert
South Bend, IN*

Thursday, October 29, 2015

Get in My Boat, Jesus

Then he climbed into the boat with them.

Mark 6:51

Mark tells of a time when the disciples were in a boat together on a stormy night. Even though they were able seamen, things got out of their control. On top of it all they saw Jesus outside the boat walking on the waves. Jesus clambered aboard their tossing craft and spoke words of calm. The winds calmed down, the seas calmed down, the disciples calmed down. In that order.

Life today has more storms than those that rage at sea. And we can find ourselves aboard more endangered “boats” than the nautical kind. The key question is, Who is aboard with us when the scary stuff starts happening? In Mark’s story, things got better once Jesus was on board. Nothing has changed for us. When life gets stormy, be sure Jesus is on board. All that’s needed for things to calm down is your cry for help. He can control life’s tempestuous seas.

Be with me this and every day, Lord Jesus, assuring me of your presence as storms arise. Calm me. And please calm the seas, too. Amen.

Ponder: What storms are out of control in your life that Jesus can control? Invite him aboard.

Read: Psalm 23; Acts 25:4-18

Charles S. Mueller, Sr.
Bloomington, IL

Friday, October 30, 2015

A Spirit of Gentleness

Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness.

Galatians 6:1

I was cleaning up tree debris recently: the excess tree seeds, some fall leaves, broken twigs, the usual clutter. I was working the broom at a furious pace but not seeming to get things together. Brilliant strategist that I am, I concluded a change of approach was in order. I slowed down with the broom, encouraging the lightweight stuff into a pile instead of whipping up a flurry of wind and dust, scattering instead of gathering. It occurred to me that the same approach is in order when we sit down with a friend or loved one whose life is a bit debris-laden. Helping others work through scattering moments in their life goes better if we don't work so fast. Listening, not knowing too much and staying curious all help as someone finds a way to pull the pieces together.

Jesus, help me not be over-anxious when people come to me and are struggling with things that are happening in their life. Amen.

Listen: Listen, listen, listen when a friend unloads.

Read: Galatians 6:1-5

*Mike May
Kansas City, KS*

Saturday, October 31, 2015

A Man of the Word

He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it.

Titus 1:9

On October 31, 1517, in determined fashion, Martin Luther bravely posted the 95 statements of discussion on the Castle Church door in Wittenberg, Germany. “Recant,” his opponents cried, but Martin Luther held fast and uttered words that we of faith cherish: “Here I stand, I can do no other. God help me! Amen!” As a result, Martin Luther was declared a heretic and was excommunicated.

Where is your faith today? Do you stand on the true words of Scripture and the Holy Sacraments? Do you faithfully spend time in the Word so that you grow in faith? Do you feel equipped to share the Good News with family, friends and neighbors?

Dear heavenly Father, you have given us an awesome task. Help us to remain faithful and true to your Word and Sacraments, to our personal time with you and in sharing the Good News with all whom we so dearly love. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

Study: Take time to read the Word today.

Read: John 1:1; 2 Timothy 4:2

*Claire Kuddes
Fenton, MO*

Sunday, November 1, 2015

Let the Light Shine Through

In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

Matthew 5:16

The congregation was observing All Saints Sunday. “Mommy, what is a saint?” her four-year-old asked. The mother pointed to the stained glass windows in the church, where a number of apostles were depicted. “Those are some of the saints: St. Peter, St. John, St. Andrew.” The child thought for a moment, then said, “Oh, I get it! Saints are people who let the light shine through!”

Not a bad definition. Saints are people who let the light of Christ, who lives in them, shine through in the genuineness of their faith and the graciousness of their lives.

Lord, let your light shine in my life so that they see, not me, but you, and give you glory. Amen.

Reflect: Reflect on some of the “saints” in your life who let the graciousness of Christ shine through to you.

Read: 1 Peter 2:9-12; Philippians 1:1-11

*Ted Zimmerman
Napa, CA*

Monday, November 2, 2015

Big Church or Small?

For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.

Matthew 18:20

How big is your church? Does it have thousands of members and a sprawling campus? Hundreds of members and a modest building? Or does your church directory fit on a single sheet of paper? Every Sunday, Christians worship in churches ranging from massive to tiny. Most are small to mid-size. For some folks, worship is limited to a bedside pastoral visit.

It's not the size of the group that matters. What's important is that the worshipers are gathered in the name of Jesus. Then the gathering becomes part of the Church with a capital "C"—the Body of Christ—and it's big! It includes all believers, beginning with Old Testament people who had faith in the promised Messiah, through today's Christians, and on to the end of time. Faith in Jesus unites all believers, across time and space, in the biggest Church ever—the Body of Christ, saints below and saints above.

Lord, remind me each Sunday that I belong to a big Church with all who believe in your Son. Amen.

Praise: Praise God for those who are already faithfully departed.

Read: Ephesians 2:19-22; Colossians 1:18-20

*Marj Maynard
Billings, MO*

Tuesday, November 3, 2015

Leaving Your Mark

Be kind to one another, tenderhearted.

Ephesians 4:32

I jumped onto the train just as the doors were closing. In my haste, I lurched forward right into the back of a smart young man in a white jacket. As I regained composure, my eyes widened at the sight of the perfect imprint of my Vivid Violet lipstick on the back of his jacket.

Each day we leave our mark on those around us. When Jesus met strangers along the way, he touched them with his love and compassion.

Just as Jesus offered life and hope, we too can leave our mark. Simple gestures, such as a warm smile, listening to a friend who is feeling sad or writing an encouraging card, can have profound consequences. Offering God's love to others is like throwing a pebble into a still pool. After the initial splash subsides, the ripples will continue, lapping against the shores of eternity.

Lord Jesus, show me today how I can leave my mark on those around me. Amen.

Share: If someone you know is sad, send them a card or give them a call.

Read: Ephesians 4:31-32; 2 Corinthians 3:3

*Kerry Osborne
Sydney, Australia*

Wednesday, November 4, 2015

Never Too Old to Witness

Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old, he will not depart from it.

Proverbs 22:6

She does not live in Asia, Africa or even in the South Pacific Islands. Jeralean Talley, 115, the world's oldest person, lives about 30 minutes from our south-east Michigan home. I do not know her, but I know what she believes. *The Detroit News* quotes Jeralean: "There is nothing you can do without God. If you want to do it right, follow him. I don't care what you do for me; if it weren't for the good Lord, you wouldn't do it."

Jeralean is older than any of us. The Lord has not departed from her. God's Holy Spirit still uses her to witness. Let us be encouraged: The Lord has not departed from us, and he still does use us too.

Dear Jesus, thank you from all who received Christian training as children. Amen.

Think on this: God willing, Jeralean will be 116 when you read this devotion. We have an older sister in Christ.

Read: Genesis 5:21-27; Luke 1:5-25

*Harry Edenfield
Brownstown, MI*

Thursday, November 5, 2015

Changes

Trust in the Lord with all your heart.

Proverbs 3:5

Changes are transitions in life. Remember when you started school, when you took a new job, when you bought your first home, when you moved to a new community, when your first child was born. How did you react?

In your later years, you are faced with more changes, transitions to be sure. What about retirement and health issues, family concerns, leaving your family home, losing friends and close loved ones? How are you reacting?

When changes come, the prophet calms our fears and frustration with these words, “Trust in the Lord with all your heart (your total being), and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him and he will make straight your paths” (Proverbs 3:5-6).

Lord Jesus, guide me as I live through the changes in my life. Amen.

Talk: Spend time with a friend and talk about how you are facing the changes in your life.

Read: James 1:16-18; Psalm 103

*Walter M. Schoedel
Webster Groves, MO*

Friday, November 6, 2015

On Your Own, But Not Alone!

The Lord lifts up those who are bowed down.

Psalm 146:8

Every time I read the story in Mark's Gospel about the widow and her generous offering, I am reminded of my grandmother. For the last 30 years of her life, she lived alone. Her only income was a small pension. But each month she would add a couple of silver coins to her small but slowly growing collection so that she could give it to her pastor to help a grandson study for the ministry.

We can be on our own as we live from day to day. But we can also have a deep sense that we are not alone. Through every moment, the Lord is with us. And when our spirits are brought low, the comfort of his Word can lift us up.

Dear Lord, keep my eyes always looking beyond myself to you. Let your comforting Word encourage me. Amen.

Place: Place an open Bible in a place where you regularly see it. Let it remind you of the Lord's presence with you.

Read: Mark 12:38-44

*Lionel Otto
Adelaide, Australia*

Saturday, November 7, 2015

Our Father's House

In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you?

John 14:2

At many a funeral service, I have heard John 14:1-7 read. As part of that reading, Jesus says, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life." Those words of Jesus follow a question from Thomas, who wanted to know how to get to the Father's house.

We are forever wanting to know the way, whether it's to a faraway place or a nearby town. So we carry our maps and guidebooks, listen carefully to directions and keep the GPS running on our dashboards.

Even when we lose our way on earth, we know that the Lord is leading us to our Father's house.

Dear Jesus, you who are the Way, lead us! As the hymn writer says, "Take my hand and lead me, upon life's way; direct, protect, and feed me, from day to day." Amen.

Imagine: Imagine what heaven will be like.

Read: Isaiah 30:21; Matthew 16:24

*Jerry Groth
Sturgeon Bay, WI*

Sunday, November 8, 2015

In the Lord

Greet the beloved Persis, who has worked hard in the Lord.

Romans 16:12

In Scripture we read about many New Testament saints, well-known people such as Mary, Joseph, Peter, John, Dorcas or Paul. But there are others about whom we know very little. At the end of his letter to the Romans, Paul greets many people, including Urbanus, Apelles, Julia and Nereus. Perhaps these little-known saints, like Persis, “worked hard in the Lord.” Who were these early Christians? What did they do? We will not know those answers until we meet them one day before Christ’s throne.

However unknown the service these saints rendered, however unknown the service you offer, it was and is done “in the Lord” and known to our Savior. Through us he will accomplish his purposes: “Be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain” (1 Corinthians 15:58).

Lord, accept my service in your name. Amen.

Pray: Give thanks for saints you have known who worked hard “in the Lord.”

Read: Romans 16:1-27; Colossians 4:7-18

*Carol Geisler
Manchester, MO*

Monday, November 9, 2015

From Mourning to Dancing

You have turned my mourning into dancing.

Psalm 30:11

Any kind of grief can seem like a lonely dance, After the death of Jesus, the disciples mourned by re-enacting the dance Jesus taught them: They gathered, they walked in tandem, and they ate meals together. By moving in these familiar ways, the Risen Christ was made visible.

When we grieve, we can be like a dancer that relies on muscle memory. We begin by doing what was once familiar. It's been many years since my dancing days, but I can still feel a dancer inside when I move.

We knew once how to dance and we will dance again on the other side of grief. Grief changes us but does not leave us frozen in our steps. Moving in our grief and sharing the dance with others is at the heart of our resurrection faith.

Resurrected Christ, fill our bodies with your Spirit so we may know life in you. Amen.

Connect: Connect with someone who is grieving with a note, a phone call or a visit.

Read: Psalm 30; Luke 24:13-35

*Jessica Gazzola
St. Louis, MO*

Tuesday, November 10, 2015

Boy, Am I Busy!

Be still and know that I am God.

Psalm 46:10

“Boy, am I busy!” I hear so many seniors I know say that. They have a lot—A LOT—going on. Some say they are busier than when they were working full time. Some, maybe even you, are wearing themselves thin and life is quickly passing by. As much as there is joy in doing all these activities and going places, perhaps something is being missed in the process.

Even in retirement, a stage of life when you are supposed to have a ton of time—you still only have the same twenty-four hours everyone else has. You may be busy, but there is still a lot—A LOT—God is trying to show you. Sometimes a person really needs to heed the urging of God to “be still and know that I am God.” You may find when you stop—even for a few minutes—and let God be God, peace, clarity and calmness often will overcome you.

Busy? Perhaps. Have a moment to be still? I’m sure you can find one.

Dear God, help me to let you be God, as I pause for a moment to relish in your creation. Amen.

Take time: Take time out to sit and talk with God.

Read: Psalm 46

*Cory A. Wielert
Crown Point, IN*

Wednesday, November 11, 2015

No Scars in Heaven

We await a Savior ... who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body.

Philippians 3:20-21

Lloyd massaged the long scar from his recent knee replacement. “Scars are like tattoos, but with better stories,” joked his friend Jim. “I wonder if all those scars will be gone when we’re in heaven.”

Lloyd said, “The Bible says we’ll be changed, and our bodies will be like Christ’s glorified body. I guess that includes scars, don’t you?”

In his vision of heaven, John saw a Holy City in which God “will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither ... mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things [like scars and their painful stories] have passed away” (Revelation 21:4). The only scars in heaven—the nail prints on Jesus’ hands and the mark of the sword on his side—have made eternal life possible for us.

Through your scars, Lord, I know you as my Redeemer and God. Amen.

Remember: Living with aches and pains? Remember God’s promise of a new body and eternal life through Jesus’ death and resurrection.

Read: John 20:24-29

*Eileen Ritter
Byron Center, MI*

Thursday, November 12, 2015

Live Long on the Earth

Honor your father and your mother so that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving to you.

Exodus 20:12

The Commandments are God's gifts to us, including the Fourth, "Honor your father and mother." Thanks be to God for children who have taken upon their shoulders with steadfastness and sacrifice the care and love of aging parents, sometimes with multiple needs. They have learned and are still learning the full meaning of the Fourth Commandment.

Some older adults can't be as independent as they once were, and so out of necessity they are on the receiving end of that care and love, something that they once did without hesitation but understandably are more reluctant to receive. Whether you are on the receiving end or on the giving end, love is spoken and shared mutually, embraced by God's love. Love is good for those who generously give care and those who graciously receive care, for such mutual care and compassion bodes well for all.

*Father, thanks for the grace to love and be loved.
Amen.*

Receive: Receive acts of kindness with gratitude.

Read: Exodus 20:1-17; Mark 7:9-13

*Steve Albers
Kirkwood, MO*

Friday, November 13, 2015

Different Gifts

And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, helping, administrating, and various kinds of tongues.

1 Corinthians 12:28

As a young pastor's wife, I was embarrassed and somewhat saddened when people seemed to assume I would join the choir. God did not give me a good singing voice. However, he did give me the gift of words, especially when expressed in poetry. My husband came up with the idea that I should write a poetic prayer to blend with the theme of each Sunday's sermon. That idea was well received by the congregation, and before long I was writing poems for Mother's Day banquets, Christmas, Easter and other occasions.

God chooses what gift or gifts to give each of us—it's up to us to recognize what they are and then use them in our church and for his glory.

Dear Father, help each of us to be thankful as we discover our special abilities and use them in your service. Amen.

Encourage: Encourage people to find ways to use their gifts for good in Christ's kingdom.

Read: 1 Corinthians 12:27-31

Harriet Stennfeld
Fort Wayne, IN

Saturday, November 14, 2015

Dayenu

You open your hand and satisfy the desire of every living thing.

Psalm 145:16

There was a time when our daughter was very ill, and my fervent prayers were for her to be okay. The Hebrew term *dayenu* means “that would have been enough.” “Okay” would, indeed, have been enough. But God, in his wildly, generous way, has given her blessings upon blessings. It was as if God said, “Just wait; see all that I have to give.” “Dayenu” is a song sung during the Jewish Passover. It recounts all the blessings God gave the Israelites and after each one, the chorus declares, “That would have been enough.” And yet the blessings continue. Why was I so humble in my prayers? And God’s blessings kept going—all the way to the cross and empty tomb, giving us the ultimate gift. Only he knows when enough is enough. Dayenu.

Dear Lord, your gifts are boundless. I ask in humility, but you bless with a generosity I can hardly imagine. Amen.

Recall: Recall a time when God surprised you with more than you asked for or with something totally different, but wonderful all the same.

Read: Ephesians 3:20-21

*Sally Beck
Williamsburg, VA*

Sunday, November 15, 2015

Routine Checkup?

Search me, O God, and know my heart!

Psalm 139:23

As we grow older, our annual calendars fill with routine medical checkups: primary care physician every six months with blood work, urologist, dentist and ophthalmologist. Are they truly routine for us? Or does each checkup raise fear in us? How easily we develop anxiety about our physical health, which weakens our trust in the Lord and limits our focus on others who need our care and witness.

Psalm 139 gives us perspective on a loving God who knit us together in our mother's womb, knows where we are and what we are doing every moment. With confidence and humility, we ask him for a daily, routine spiritual checkup: "Search me, O God, and know my heart!" Because of Jesus' death and resurrection for us, he offers daily forgiveness and eyes to see his physical and spiritual care for us. Thank God for routine checkups!

Search me, O God, and know my heart. Lead me in the way everlasting. Amen.

Reflect: Reflect on God's blessings for physical and spiritual health.

Read: Psalm 139

*Stephen J. Carter
Oakville, MO*

Monday, November 16, 2015

The Healing Touch

People were bringing little children to Jesus to have him touch them ... And he took the children in his arms, put his hands on them and blessed them.

Mark 10:13, 16

I recently had a massage. As I lay on the table, I couldn't help thinking of the healing power of touch. One human being is touching another human being to bring healing. The same can be said of hugs and handshakes.

Can you imagine the reaction of folks whom Jesus touched with his healing hand? It must have been a most powerful and memorable experience.

We have a sacred obligation—the high honor—to be Jesus' hands today. There are untold numbers of lonely, hurting folks, especially older folks, who are in desperate need of a caring touch. We are never too old to reach out and touch another human being with concern, care and love.

Lord Jesus, let me be your hands today as I reach out and touch another human being, especially someone in need. Amen.

Reflect: Reflect on what it has meant to you to be touched and/or hugged in a loving, caring way.

Read: Luke 22:50-51; Matthew 20:34

*Paul Eggold
Greendale, WI*

Tuesday, November 17, 2015

Purpose in Life

His master replied, "Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!"

Matthew 25:21

Do you remember the song from the '60s titled "Turn! Turn! Turn! (To Everything There Is a Season)" by the Byrds? The lyrics of the song started like this: "To everything, turn, turn, turn. There is a season, turn, turn, turn. And a time to every purpose under heaven." The lyrics were taken word for word from Ecclesiastes 3.

We seek to understand our purpose in each season of life. We continually seek God's will for us so that we can be faithful in all that we do as servants of God. We have a purpose in our faith-full mature years of helping others see God's guiding hand in their lives too.

Dear Lord, thank you for giving me a purpose in each season of life. Amen.

Reflect: Reflect on God's purpose for you today.

Read: Ecclesiastes 3:1-8

*Steven G. Liescheidt
Chesterfield, MO*

Wednesday, November 18, 2015

Friends Forever

I have called you friends.

John 15:15

It was a busy day. Darting from one task to another, I grabbed a pencil on the kitchen counter to write a quick note on the calendar. What I found surprised me. Printed on the pencil were these words: “Jesus is your friend for life.” I’d never seen the pencil before. I don’t know where it came from. But the message was welcome!

Even in retirement, our days can be hectic and stressful as we try to keep up with all we want and need to do. Friends who once shared a laugh, gave us a helping hand or a shoulder to cry on may have moved away or gone on to heaven. How good to remember: “Jesus is your friend for life!” Jesus called all those who believed in him and followed him his friends. Jesus knows his friends, you and me, by name. He promises he will never leave us or stop loving us.

Jesus, my forever Friend, your loving presence calms my fears, quiets my stress, lifts my spirit. Thank you, dear Friend. Amen.

Tell: Tell a friend how much his or her friendship means to you. Tell what Jesus’ friendship means, too.

Read: John 15:12-17

*Donna J. Streufert
South Bend, IN*

Thursday, November 19, 2015

Uniquely You

You knitted me together in my mother's womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.

Psalm 139:13, 14

Have you ever wished you were somebody else? Perhaps you'd like to be younger, thinner, smarter or richer.

We read about those who felt this way in the Bible. When God asked Moses to lead his people out of Egypt, he balked, wishing God had chosen somebody more eloquent.

But God doesn't make mistakes. He called Moses just as he was, stutter and all, perfect in his imperfection. Each of us is created with a unique purpose. You are a product of God's workmanship. Who are we, the pots, to question the mastery of the Potter?

We are fashioned to be a reflection of God who created us, regardless of our shape, size and style.

Lord Jesus, thank you for making me just as I am. Help me to accept and enjoy my unique purpose. Amen.

Notice: Acknowledge and praise others for their unique purpose and remind them how God loves them just as they are.

Read: 2 Corinthians 12:9

*Kerry Osborne
Sydney, Australia*

Friday, November 20, 2015

What a Wonder

What is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him?

Psalm 8:4

Did you hear the one about the teacher who asked her students if they could list for her the Seven Wonders of the World? After a brief silence, one little girl raised her hand and said, “Eyes, ears, taste, touch, smell, you and me.”

We can understand why the teacher might have smiled at the child’s answer. We can also understand if the teacher chose that moment to correct the child and turn this into a helpful lesson in geography or world history. We all want our children to understand the world in which we live.

What I find remarkable in the child’s answer, however, is a simple yet profound declaration of the wonder of God’s love that saw fit to give life to you and me. What a wonder!

O Lord, my God, thank you for giving me Jesus and the faith to believe in him. Amen.

Help: Help others see the wonder of God’s love for them.

Read: Psalm 8:1-9; Matthew 28:18-20

*Edward Arle
St. Charles, MO*

Saturday, November 21, 2015

Regular Maintenance

Seek the Lord and his strength; seek his presence continually.

Psalm 105:4

My teenaged grandson purchased his first car. It definitely wasn't new and had many miles on it. When he came to show it to me, I reminded him to make sure he checked the oil and other fluids occasionally. Several months later, I asked how it was running and if he had heeded my advice.

"To tell you the truth," he said, "I don't even know where to check that stuff. Won't a light come on to tell me if something is low?"

Many times we treat our spiritual lives the same way. We don't take the time to check our gauges. Don't wait for something in your life to break. Read God's Word regularly and spend time in prayer and fellowship with other Christians. Don't run low!

Jesus, keep us filled with your Word so we don't run low on the vital necessities. Amen.

Discuss: Discuss the idea of regular spiritual maintenance with a neighbor or friend.

Read: Hebrews 10:24-25; Psalm 1:1-3

*Gloria Doty
Fort Wayne, IN*

Sunday, November 22, 2015

Answer His Call

For the Lord himself will descend from heaven, with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet call of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first.

1 Thessalonians 4:16

I can just picture Jesus descending from heaven with a loud trumpet call raising, the Christian believers from their graves to ascend with him to their eternal homes. Whether I witness this event or am part of the resurrection, only God knows my future. All I know is that my eternal home is with my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

I find much comfort in this knowledge. I pray that you find strength and reassurance in God's love for you and his plan for your eternal salvation.

Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for your presence in my life. Bless me with your call to resurrection into your kingdom. Amen.

Spread: The good news of our salvation needs to be shared with everyone with whom we come into contact.

Read: Matthew 28:19

*Gloria Elder
Crystal Lake, IL*

Monday, November 23, 2015

Comfort Food

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

Acts 2:42

Recall a favorite meal. Maybe it was a dinner in an upscale restaurant or just a simple meal with friends. A favorite of mine was a menu of carrot soup, homemade bread and garden tomatoes with olive oil and tarragon. Perfect. Elderly friends had invited us for lunch on their patio; their warmth turned our simple meal into a celebration. Mealtimes can be occasions of intimacy—giving thanks for food lovingly prepared, sharing joys and sorrows. Hospitality is a witness to God's love and doesn't need to cause anxiety, as Jesus once reminded Martha. Our most intimate meal, of course, is the one our Lord invites us to—to share his body and blood and receive forgiveness for sins. Inviting others to share a meal at home can lead to inviting them to church and eventually to the Lord's Supper. That simple carrot soup was comfort food of the first order.

Lord, make us welcomers—in your name. Amen.

Invite: Invite someone for dinner—perhaps someone who doesn't have a church home.

Read: Hebrews 13:1; Matthew 25:35

*Sally Beck
Williamsburg, VA*

Tuesday, November 24, 2015

Overflowing With Thanks

Give, and it will be given to you. Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap.

Luke 6:38

In biblical times men wore robes with a fold of material over the front of their belts that could be used as a big pocket. When they went to the market, they could buy a big scoop of wheat and carry it home in their pocket. God tells us when we share the gifts he first gives us, he gives us heaps of blessings too big to fit in any pocket.

God gives us everything we need to live, both here on earth and one day in heaven. His gifts pour down on us. In response, we gladly give to others. Thank God now for the running-over gifts he gives you—it will take a long time!

Father, thank you for the surprising, numerous gifts you give me. Help me, in turn, to give to others. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Do: Keep a blessing book this week, recording all the blessings of God you have received.

Read: Matthew 6:25-34; Psalm 100

Ruth Geisler
Aliso Viejo, CA

Wednesday, November 25, 2015

The Taste Is Good

Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good! Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him!

Psalm 34:8

What a powerful connection there is between taste and trust. We may not often think about it, but the tasting of our food is an expression of absolute trust. We believe that the food is good. If we did not trust the food before us, then we would not even attempt to taste it.

The joyful gathering of a family around food is an expression of the trust between them. Is it any wonder that Jesus so often gathered around a meal with the people whose lives he sought to touch?

The psalmist encourages us to taste of the Lord, to sup at his meal table, to place our trust in him and find out just how good the Lord is. We find blessing as we take refuge in him.

Lord, each time we meet at your table, remind me of the trust that is between us. Remind me of just how deeply I trust in you. Amen.

Discuss: At your next meal together, discuss how trust plays such a part in your fellowship.

Read: Psalm 34

*Lionel Otto
Adelaide, Australia*

Thursday, November 26, 2015

Praising God

Sing to the Lord with thanksgiving; make melody to our God on the harp.

Psalm 147:7

Today we blend feasting and thanking God for his bounty, and I think that's a good thing. It's important in the midst of our feasting to remember the One from whom these blessings come. That's where singing to and praising God come in.

Thanksgiving is about remembering. So let's remember this: Through Jesus, God made us his own. Remembering every day that we are accepted, forgiven, loved and saved makes every day Thanksgiving Day. Singing, feasting and praising God require that we remember God as giver with gratitude in our hearts.

O generous God, accept the praise and thanksgiving that fills our hearts. Help us to remember all your gifts, from Christ's dying and rising to the salt and butter on our tables, and be grateful. Praise and thanksgiving are yours, O God. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Do: Share memories of Thanksgivings past with your family and give thanks.

Read: Psalm 147

*Eldor Kaiser
Lenexa, KS*

Friday, November 27, 2015

Now Thank We All Our God

Give thanks in all circumstances.

1 Thessalonians 5:18

The hymnist Martin Rinkhart begins his stirring hymn with the words, “Now thank we all our God.” Then he tells us how in the second line: “With hearts and hands and voices.” You may be surprised to learn that when Pastor Rinkhart wrote this in 1644, he was the only surviving pastor in the walled city of Eilenberg, Germany, which was so crowded with refugees and ravaged with the plague that 8000 people had died.

Yet this man was able to tell us how important it is that we give thanks “with hearts.” None of the precious gifts we receive is meaningful without the joy of the Lord in our hearts. We also thank “with hands”—hands that reach out and lift up those in need. And we thank “with voices” that speak of God’s ultimate care for us. This three-fold thanksgiving will carry us through whatever comes our way.

From you all blessings flow, O Lord. Amen.

Thank: Thank God in three ways today.

Read: 1 Thessalonians 5:18; Psalm 28:7

*Connie Bretscher
Valparaiso, IN*

Saturday, November 28, 2015

Our Literacy Buddy

Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path.

Psalm 119:105

Our community has a Literacy Buddy program to enrich the lives of preschool children. Children receive three letters and books from their assigned adult at given times during the year.

In the fall, we receive “letters” from our children, noting the kind of stories they like. Then, we go shopping! We comb the shelves looking for stories that match the children’s desires! What a blessing to deliver the books and see their eyes light up!

We also have a Literacy Buddy. This Buddy inspired numerous writers to put his actions into words, providing us with a roadmap for living forever...with him! His eyes must light up, too, when we delve deeply into his word or share a message from it!

The B-I-B-L-E, yes, that’s the book for me! Amen.

Consider: What Bible books/letters light up your eyes and why do they do so?

Read: All of Psalm 119—a devotional in itself on the Word of God.

*Louise Schini Weber
Fort Myers, FL*

Sunday, November 29, 2015

Always Advent

The Lord is at hand. Do not be anxious about anything.

Philippians 4:5-6

Advent celebrates the Christ who came, the Christ who will come again and the Christ who is with us now. Past, present and future. With Christ it is always Advent. If Advent means “he comes,” then Advent can happen any time of the year and in any place. Look for his coming to you in your Bible reading and in the Lord’s Supper. Look for him to come to you through the love and understanding of people around you, even from the same people who, at times, can be such a pain. God moves in mysterious ways.

There are people who need your love. Other people are offering their love to you. Open your heart. Christ is here. Christ is coming to you. He just keeps on coming and coming and coming with abundant blessings. He never stops. With Christ it is always Advent. So rejoice. The Lord is at hand.

Lord, come now. Bless me and make me a blessing to others. Amen.

Consider: To whom will I be an Advent blessing this week?

Read: Philippians 4:4-7

*Leo Symmank
Seabrook, TX*

Monday, November 30, 2015

Advent Calendar

Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.

1 Peter 3:15

We have a three-year-old great grandchild. In December, he will have a new sister. He is now old enough for an Advent calendar. For Advent, we will give him one containing a small surprise each day so he can prepare for the birth of the Christ Child and his new sibling.

It is important that each of us prepare for the coming birth. Perhaps you light an Advent wreath and read an Advent devotion. In Germany, each home hangs an Advent star and places candles in their windows to light the way for the Christ Child. However you prepare this Advent, remember the birth of our Lord who came to die for our sins. Despite the busyness of the season, let us also remember to give to those in need as we open our daily calendar of love and hope to others.

Lord, hear us as we seek to prepare for your coming. Amen.

Serve: Remember someone in need.

Read: Luke 10:25-37

*Ann Eissfeldt
Ballwin, MO*

Tuesday, December 1, 2015

Remember December!

Remember, O Lord, your great mercy and love ... according to your love, remember me, for you are good, O Lord.

Psalm 25:6-8

These days of December are good days to remember. We can focus on rejoicing in the birth of our Savior by remembering to reflect, refresh, renew, receive and reach out to others.

Refresh your faith in the Lord through worship, prayer and the Scriptures.

Renew your life by remembering and thanking the people around you who care for and remember you.

Receive new opportunities to serve others by praying for those who send you Christmas cards and phone you.

Reach out to others who need to hear the comforting words from you about a Lord who loves and remembers them.

Lord, help us to remember that you remember us every day and month of the year. Even when we forget you, we know that you always remember us. Amen.

Think: Think of other "R" words that help you remember the Lord this December.

Read: Titus 3:4-6

*Rich Bimler
Bloomington, IL*

Wednesday, December 2, 2015

Good News

How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!

Romans 10:15

A pastor friend of mine told me of a good news moment he had one day as he was visiting members in a retirement home. As he approached one woman seated in a wheelchair, he noticed she had a newspaper folded on her lap. His first words to her were: "What's the good news today?" Without missing a beat, she replied, "I don't know. I haven't read my Scripture yet."

The pastor came away startled but with new ideas for his sermon on Sunday. Instead of opening the day with the front page of the newspaper, why not start with the Good News of Jesus?

The words of this hymn may be a good way to get started: "Hark the voice of Jesus calling, 'Who will go and work today?' ... Loud and long the Master calleth; rich reward he offers thee. Who will answer, gladly saying, 'Here am I, send me, send me?'"

Lord Jesus, you brought good news into my life; help me bring it to others. Amen.

Ask yourself: Why not BE God's good news to someone today?

Read: Matthew 11:1-6; Acts 8:9-13

*Edward Arle
St. Charles, MO*

Thursday, December 3, 2015

Instant World

But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son.

Galatians 4:4

It seems that almost everything I see and hear is fast or “instant.” I can make a meal with instant potatoes, microwave meat and veggies, and instant pudding for dessert. Then I can email a note to anyone in the world and receive an instant reply. No wonder we become impatient when we need to wait hours, days or even months for something.

How about waiting centuries or even several millennia for a promise to be fulfilled? That’s what happened to the Old Testament believers. God promised a Savior to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Nearly 4,000 years later, “when the fullness of time had come,” Jesus was born in Bethlehem. The wait is over. We know Jesus as the Savior who forgives us and gives us eternal life.

Father, thank you for sending your Son into the world at just the right time. Amen.

Do: Make an effort to live today as God’s forgiven child.

Read: Romans 1:1-6; Galatians 4:1-7

*Jeanette Dall
Batavia, IL*

Friday, December 4, 2015

Dreary Days

Bless the Lord ... and forget not all his benefits.

Psalm 103:2

A day of sunshine is welcome in any season. Gently falling snow brings peace and beauty. But it's hard to welcome the dark and dreary days of early winter.

Some days are *internally* dismal and dreary, too. Nothing seems to go right. The phone doesn't ring. The news is filled with unrest and hatred. Self-pity devours gratitude.

Remember God is with you on those days too! His love wraps around you like a cozy, warm blanket. His Word will brighten your spirits and put praise on your lips. Recalling God's grace is sure to dispel clouds of guilt, worry and regret.

God often uses dismal times—and even dreary weather—to teach important lessons. Psalm 103 will help you remember all those benefits and disperse your dreary clouds.

Lord, we take refuge in your unfailing love! Let the Son shine in our hearts today. Amen.

Turn it around: Call someone who needs your encouragement and understanding.

Read: Psalm 103; Habakkuk 3:13-19

*Sharolyn Sander
Lincoln, NE*

Saturday, December 5, 2015

Footprints

Your path led through the sea, your way through the mighty waters, though your footprints were not seen.

Psalm 77:19

God's creation of the sea and accompanying sea-shores leave me in awe and wonder. When I was a young child, my family and I went on a beach vacation. It was the first time I experienced walking along the beach with the ocean lapping at my feet. I remember seeing my footprints in the sand and watching with amazement as the ocean waves washed them away.

As a Christian, I often think of the water of our Holy Baptism and how God has washed away all of our sins. He has adopted us into his family and continues to walk with us throughout our lives. While there may be times in life when we feel we are walking alone, we can rest assured those are the times when he is carrying us in his arms.

Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for your presence and guidance in my life. Amen.

Reflect: How has God's presence impacted your life?

Read: 1 Peter 3:21-22

*Betsy Becker Niedringhaus
Ballwin, MO*

Sunday, December 6, 2015

Daughter of Zion, Rejoice

The Lord has made proclamation to the ends of the earth: "Say to Daughter Zion, 'See, your Savior comes!'"

Isaiah 62:11

A few years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, we received an invitation to visit with social service agencies in the former East Germany during Advent. We stayed for several nights at the Lutheran Hospital residence in Dresden. Each morning, all went to the chapel for worship. With gusto, singing in German, we would sing the hymn, "Tochter von Zion" or "Daughter of Zion, Rejoice" to welcome the approaching birth of the Christ Child. The nuns, nurses, and hospital staff not only welcomed the Christ, but also their freedom to sing, worship and rejoice freely each day.

So often, we take our freedom to welcome the Christ Child into our midst for granted. May we remember the great sacrifice Christ made by coming to earth to suffer and die for our salvation.

Lord, keep us mindful of your gift to us as we prepare to celebrate your birth. Amen.

Enjoy: Savor the freedom you have to worship.

Read: Matthew 21:1-11

*Ann Eissfeldt
Ballwin, MO*

Monday, December 7, 2015

Advent Expectant

Your redemption is drawing near.

Luke 21:28

Advent has always been my favorite season of the church year, but never more so than when we were expecting our second child. Due to pregnancy complications, my wife was put on complete 24-hour bed rest. All regular activities were suspended, as our whole life routine became focused on expectant waiting.

Both our family and our faith were strengthened that year by the intense anticipation of the birth of our daughter and the birth, yet again, of the Christ Child in our hearts.

May you, too, find special ways this year to ready your heart and life for the birth of Jesus.

Holy God, bless me to ready myself for the love of Jesus to be born anew in me. Amen.

Ask: What might you do today to prepare more fully for Jesus' birth?

Read: Read: Psalm 25:1-10; Jeremiah 33:14-16

*Paul Metzler
Shrewsbury, MO*

Tuesday, December 8, 2015

God's Peace Guard

And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

Philippians 4:7

Security concerns worldwide raise our anxiety level and shatter our peace of mind—protection for our troops against terrorist bombs, guards at our embassies, Secret Service for our nation's leaders, airport security, police protection for lives and property. Anxieties also abound in our personal concerns for family and friends plus health and financial problems. Satan uses worries to rob us of peace and joy.

But Paul offers the Philippian believers the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding. Literally that peace stands guard at the door of our hearts and minds because Christ established lasting peace by his death for our sins and resurrection from the dead. No one can shake that peace of God. We pray with thanksgiving and rejoice in the Lord always for God's Peace Guard in all circumstances.

Lord, fill us with your Advent peace and joy to calm our anxieties. Amen.

Pray: Pray for peace and security in our world.

Read: Philippians 4:4-7

*Stephen J. Carter
Oakville, MO*

Wednesday, December 9, 2015

Many Hands Make Light Work!

Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.

1 Corinthians 12:27

When the weeds appeared in the bean field, my seven siblings and I grabbed a hoe. When the hay wagon pulled up to the barn, we all helped pack it in the haymow. And when the cattle broke through the fence at night, we all jumped out of bed and helped corral them back to the feedlot. After the task was complete, Dad would proudly announce, “Many hands make light work!”

The apostle Paul describes how all Christ’s followers work together when he writes, “You are the body of Christ” (1 Corinthians 12:27). The psalmist writes, “One generation shall commend your works to another, and shall declare your mighty acts” (Psalm 145:4). God can use us to connect our friends to Jesus.

Lord Jesus, use me today to connect someone to you. Amen.

Share: Talk with your neighbor about your peace with God because of Jesus.

Read: Psalm 145; 1 Corinthians 12:12-27

*Steve Hess
Fort Myers, FL*

Thursday, December 10, 2015

December Joy!

You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus.

Luke 1:31

Since our family has a son who was born in December, I can't help but think about the Holy Family and how our preparations were so different. Unlike Jesus' family, we did not know the sex of our baby. We weren't given a specific name.

Unlike Jesus' family, we only had a ten-minute car trip to the hospital. Medical professionals and technology awaited us, as well as warmth and comfort.

Everyone was delighted with our news. Baby showers gifted us with so much, way more than just swaddling cloths!

Like Jesus' parents, we, too, rejoiced at our child's birth. And, like Mary, we treasured every moment with our new son and with the visitors who came to see him.

Father, thanks for blessing our lives with children, especially with the life of the Holy Child of Bethlehem. Amen.

Celebrate: Rejoice in a child who is special in your life!

Read: Genesis 21:1-7; Exodus 2:1-10; Luke 1:57-66

*Louise Schini Weber
Fort Myers, FL*

Friday, December 11, 2015

God Fights For You

The Lord will fight for you; you need only be still.

Exodus 14:14

My sons and I once went backpacking. One evening an electrical storm came through. After the storm, a plane slowly circled the area, looking for any fires the storm might have started. Suddenly, below the plane, a single parachute opened and a lone firefighter descended into the wilderness to put out a small fire. What would that be like, to jump all alone late in the day to fight a small fire by oneself?

The people of Israel watched as the “storm” of Pharaoh’s army pursued them. Moses spoke into their fear, “The Lord will fight for you; you need only be still.” They were not alone.

Jesus “parachuted” into our lives to battle Satan, sin and death. We needed only to be still. He fought for us. Christ did everything for us. Be still; trust in the Lord; he fights for you still.

*Thank you, dear Jesus, for being on my side.
Amen.*

Be still: Remember one time when God rescued you.

Read: Exodus 14

*Don Schatz
Kenmore, WA*

Saturday, December 12, 2015

Raise Me Up!

... but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.

Isaiah 40:31

Most of us have probably prayed to be delivered from some burden. And we probably found our prayers answered in ways we had not anticipated. Rarely does God remove us from the situation. Rather, we find ourselves nourished and sustained by angels of a surprising variety: people who remind us of Jesus, his death, his resurrection, for us. And so we continue on our way with faith made strong.

When you know someone who is experiencing life's real downers, go. Offer consolation. And when the realities of your life are challenging, fear not to ask God—and his angels around you—for help. For he has promised to raise you up.

Thank you, O Lord, for lifting me up through the help of others Amen.

List: Make a list of “angels”—wonderful people who have come to your aid over the years.

Read: Psalm 91: Luke 2:10-11

*Richard Eissfeldt
Ballwin, MO*

Sunday, December 13, 2015

Getting Ready for Christmas

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say rejoice.

Philippians 4:4

During Advent we get ready for Christmas. Decorations are hung, the tree trimmed, presents purchased and wrapped. While we do all that, we also remember. We remember the great longing of the Jews for the Messiah. The Jews were not alone; we also remember our own longing for a Savior. Why do we long for a Savior? Because we are lost. We are lost because we have sinned. Underlying our worship during Advent is repentance for our sins.

But there is room for celebration during Advent, too, as the pink candle on the Advent wreath reminds us. The messages of Advent sometimes sound as if Jesus hasn't been born yet. But he has. Our longings for a Savior have been fulfilled. Let's celebrate ... and remember why.

O God, I rejoice that I have a Savior, and praise you for the gift of forgiveness. Amen.

Do: Light a candle and say a prayer beginning, "I rejoice, O Lord, because ..."

Read: Philippians 4:4-8

*Eldor Kaiser
Lenexa, KS*

Monday, December 14, 2015

Safe!

I call to God and the Lord will save me.

Psalm 55:16

My car was totaled. I went to the wrecking yard the next morning, signed some papers and retrieved all my possessions. The insurance man came that same day and gave me a check. No one was hurt in the accident and, now, having done all the legal stuff, I could relax.

Then I noticed I didn't have my key chain my daughter had given me. It was just a flat piece of metal with a cross embossed on it, but it was dear to me. I rushed back to the wrecking yard and searched my car. There it was!

"You're lucky," the man said. "We were to tow your car this morning!"

I was lucky! In Jesus, I was also blessed! On my way to an eternal "wrecking yard," God rescued me with a Savior. Like my key chain, I wasn't worth much in the eyes of the world. But, to him, I was a treasure to be saved!

Thank you, Lord, for rescuing me and bringing me back to you! Amen.

Remember: When you come across an inexpensive treasure, remember how God treasures you.

Read: Psalm 55

*Al Schenk
St. Louis, MO*

Tuesday, December 15, 2015

Come Quickly

Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.

Matthew 25:13

My younger brother Joey was full of mischief. Our mother warned him not to play on the lot where a new house was being built. Joey didn't listen. Joey disobeyed. What fun, he thought, to play on the steep mounds of dirt along the new foundation. Alas, the dirt moved and Joey slid—right down between the cement basement wall and the excavation. Joey was stuck and helpless. How he cried for help! “Mom, come quickly!” It was the only way Joey could be saved.

God knew we could not save ourselves from sin and death. He sent Jesus to rescue us and free us from the dangerous pits we dig for ourselves. Once he came as child and man. Soon he comes to take us home—forever. Lord, come quickly!

Dear Lord, whether you come to rescue me at the hour of my death or the end of time, I know I am safe with you and all is well. Amen.

Share: How will you spend your time till Jesus comes?

Read: Matthew 25:1-13

*Donna J. Streufert
South Bend, IN*

Wednesday, December 16, 2015

When Love Became Real

“Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel” (which means, God with us).

Matthew 1:23

St. Francis is remembered all over the world for his love of animals and his idea to act out the Christmas story. When Francis and his friend, John Velitta, provided hay, a manger, an ox and a donkey, monks and townspeople came to the living manger scene, carrying candles and torches. The villagers understood in a special way that God came to be with us. God loves us so much that he sent his Son to be born on earth as a real baby. Jesus suffered all the pain and hurt that we feel. And he died in our place to take the punishment for our sin.

When you see a nativity set this season, remember the night that God’s love became real, the night that Jesus was born to live among us and win us new life.

Jesus, thank you for entering my world that I may live with you forever in yours. Amen.

Do: Buy a simple, nonbreakable nativity set for your grandchildren or for the nursery or preschool at your church.

Read: Matthew 1:18-25; Isaiah 7:14; Isaiah 9:1-7

*Ruth Geisler
Aliso Viejo, CA*

Thursday, December 17, 2015

We Shall Overcome

In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.

John 16:33

A bit of Grandma's wisdom: Salt is what makes potatoes taste terrible ... if you forget to put it on them. To paraphrase: Faith is what makes life terrible ... if you do not have it.

Life can be beautiful, but we soon learn that troubles are often on the daily menu. At times they are devastating, crushing our spirit.

Jesus assures us that he has overcome the world with all its troubles. You can trust his sacrificial death and triumphant resurrection—FOR YOU! He has already overcome all that darkens your future. That includes the death you must die. Putting your faith in Jesus will transform the terrible taste of death into a bountiful feast of life everlasting. Trust Jesus, and be at peace today.

Loving Lord, teach me to remember that you are overcoming what troubles me most today. Amen.

Turn over: Turn over your troubles to Christ.

Read: Isaiah 53:4-6

*Paul Scheidt
Chesterfield, MO*

Friday, December 18, 2015

Where Are the Words?

Behold, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands.

Isaiah 49:16

“Good morning ... *friend*.” You have attended church services together for fourteen years.

This morning his name escapes you. You once recited the books of the Bible in one-and-a-half minutes. Now you can only get to Deuteronomy. “Onward, Christian soldiers ...” What *is* the next line? Frustration! Where are the words? I am blessed to be the adopted Oma (German for “Grandma”) each year for our kindergarten class. Did you know we have twenty-two “sweeties” and “honeys” in our class this year? I *cannot* remember their names.

But wait. Forgetting can be good. In Isaiah 43:25 the Lord says, “I am he ... and I will not remember your sins.” In Hebrews 8:12 we read, “For I will be merciful toward their iniquities and I will remember their sins no more.”

Lord, thank you for forgetting my sins because of Jesus. Amen.

Smile: It can substitute for missing words.

Read: Matthew 25:35 and the church directory: make notes!

*Lois Scheer
San Diego, CA*

Saturday, December 19, 2015

Unwrap The Gift

Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift.

2 Corinthians 9:15

Picture one of your all-time favorite Christmas presents. Do you think of shiny paper and a big red bow? No, we remember the gift itself.

The best Gift of all time came wrapped in swaddling cloths and manger straw, and lay in a dark stable. The awestruck shepherds didn't waste time puzzling over the wrapping. They saw and worshipped the promised Messiah, their Savior! Then "they made known abroad what had been told them concerning this child" (Luke 2:17).

These lowly shepherds expressed the "inexpressible" to everyone! And it filled the world with joy and wonder. While you enjoy the holiday "wrappings" of music, food, family and gifts, remember to unwrap the real gift: Jesus! Do what the shepherds did—glorify and praise God for all you've heard and seen by faith.

Lord, give us words that will help others unwrap the gift of Jesus' love. Amen.

Wrap gifts: Tuck a note about Jesus inside each one.

Read: Luke 2:8-20; 2 Corinthians 9:6-15

*Sharolyn Sander
Lincoln, NE*

Sunday, December 20, 2015

Good News on the Run

Write the vision; make it plain on tablets, so he may run who reads it.

Habakkuk 2:2

Do you remember Burma-Shave signs? On cross-country road trips, travelers watched for the storytelling ad signs set at intervals along the highway: “Ben met Anna / Made a hit / Forgot to shave / Banana split / Burma-Shave.” Another set of signs reminded drivers to obey the speed limit: “Angels who guard you / While you drive / Usually retire / At 65 / Burma-Shave.”

The shepherds learned the good news—not from signs, but from an angel. They had to see this for themselves! They took off at a run—“they went with haste”—to Bethlehem and saw their Savior. The birth of Jesus is still good news for a world always in a hurry: “Jesus Christ / Is born today! / He came to take / Your sins away!”

Lord Jesus, let me be quick to share your love and the good news of life in your name. Amen.

Write: Compose a Burma-Shave-style poem to announce the good news of Jesus’ birth.

Read: Habakkuk 2:1-4; Luke 2:8-20

*Carol Geisler
Manchester, MO*

Monday, December 21, 2015

Lighten Up

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it

John 1:5

What memories do you have of past Christmases that brought light into your days?

My memories include baking in the kitchen with Mom, singing carols with my siblings, reading stories and watching classic movies together with family. Each year I make a point to include time with loved ones and share in the joys of the season together.

Lighten up during the days ahead leading to Christmas Day. It is so easy to get overwhelmed by all the activities that come with this season. Remember that Christ's Light shines through your thoughts, words and actions, and others take notice. You can make all the difference to someone this Christmas. You can bring the Light of Christ into the world today.

Christ, the Light, shine on me and through me during this season of wonder. Amen.

Share: Shine some gentle light by sharing a joyful Christmas tradition with someone.

Read: John 1:1-5; John 8:12

*Annette L. Sherwood
St. Louis, MO*

Tuesday, December 22, 2015

Christmas Secrets

He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.

1 John 2:2

Dad had extra sermons to prepare before Christmas, so his study was off limits. The door was locked. Somehow, Santa knew that we went to church on Christmas Eve, and that's when he came. When we all came home from church, the study door was opened, and what glorious, shimmering light poured out!

The secrets revealed in that room, a decorated tree and gifts, were a surprise. Oh, there had been clues to the secret things happening, but I was too immature and self-centered to grasp them. There had also been clues over thousands of years to God's secrets, but even grown-ups didn't understand them at the time.

Now the secret is out. Jesus' sacrifice atoned for my sins and yours. We can rejoice and sing. Our sins have been erased. Forgiveness came at Christmas!

Loving God, we praise you for the sacrifice of your only Son to atone for our sins. Through your Spirit, help us to understand. Amen.

Reveal: Share some secret things done in your family at Christmas.

Read: 1 John 1:5—2:2

Eldor Kaiser
Lenexa, KS

Wednesday, December 23, 2015

The First Christmas Concert

*Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace
among those with whom he is pleased!*

Luke 2:14

The admission was free (by invitation only) ... the seating uncomfortable ... the audience, few in number, shepherds, not really ready to listen. The lighting, supplied by God, was glorious! ... The message, good news: God's Son born, for you. Glory! Peace!

And the music? Have you ever wondered, as I do, what was the tune and meter of this heavenly chanting? Was it all hallelujahs or was there a somber note foretelling the suffering of this baby, grown to manhood, sacrificed for my sins? Whatever the music, the message, as in all choral singing, was clear, emphatic and more important than the melody.

This nativity season, in the midst of your busy preparations, free your heart to rejoice and receive this indescribable love.

*Thank you for the music of the season, and for all
the ways in which it reveals your love to us. Amen.*

Do: Sing a favorite Christmas carol.

Read: Luke 2:1-14; 2 Corinthians 9:15

*Connie Bretscher
Valparaiso, IN*

Thursday, December 24, 2015

Elder John

Be faithful unto death and I will give you the crown of life.

Revelation 2:10

Elder Emeritus John went to heaven on Christmas Eve. He made plans for that trip most of his ninety-seven years. His parents didn't go to church, but there was that Sunday school teacher that lived next door and planted the seeds and encouraged the baptism. John was a World War II fighter pilot who knew his Co-Pilot intimately. He was the adopted granddad and history teacher for our fifth graders. Elder John quietly called on the sick, the delinquent, those who celebrated and those who mourned. He taught our Bible class and in gratitude we gave him his own parking place with an appropriate sign. On Christmas Eve a large wooden manger scene sat in that parking space, surrounded by flowers.

Lord, thank you for these pillars of the faith. Remind us to express our love and appreciation while they are with us. Amen.

Invite: You are never too old to invite a child—or adult—to Sunday school.

Read: Psalm 37:18-31

*Lois Scheer
San Diego, CA*

Friday, December 25, 2015

Something for Everyone

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.

Luke 4:18-19

My husband grew up in a family of ten children. He remembers that each Christmas the brothers and sisters would go shopping for gifts for one another. Money was scarce, yet no one was forgotten—even if the gift was just a candy bar. There was something for everyone.

Christmas reminds us Jesus came with gifts for everyone: love, forgiveness, and peace, purpose and plans for the future, friendship with God, an eternal home in heaven ... and much, much more! No one is forgotten. Jesus' gifts are for everyone who, believing in him, will accept them and not turn away.

Lord, by your Spirit's power, make my life a sweet song of invitation to everyone I meet to accept your gifts, too. Amen

Invite: Invite a friend for coffee. Share stories of your best Christmas gift.

Read: Luke 4:16-30

*Donna J. Streufert
South Bend, IN*

Saturday, December 26, 2015

Say What!?

For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.

Acts 4:20

Did you know that shepherds weren't included favorably in biblical society? Nor were women. Neither had a "say" in anything!

Then what a message our Good Father sent the world on that glorious night of Jesus' birth! The first to hear of his birth were *shepherds*! What a message he also sent on that unsurpassed Easter morning of Jesus' resurrection! The first to hear "He is risen" were *women*! Say what!?

God chose these marginalized folks to proclaim the good news of salvation. How can we, then, be silent, knowing this news? Do we ever have a story to tell!

Say it loud and clear. like the shepherds, "They spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child" (Luke 2:17), or like Mary Magdalene, "I have seen the Lord!" (John 20:18), or like Peter at Pentecost, who could not help but speak out.

Thank you, Lord Jesus, for opening the gates of heaven to all believers! Amen.

Share: Share the Good News of Christmas with someone today!

Read: Acts 2

*Louise Schini Weber
Fort Myers, FL*

Sunday, December 27, 2015

“Old” Friends

*The friendship of the Lord is for those who fear him,
and he makes known to them his covenant.*

Psalm 25:14

My two college roommates and I recently had a mini-reunion at my home after nearly fifty years since we graduated from a state university. It was amazing that we could “pick up” where we “left off” so many years ago. We have experienced many joyful as well as sad moments as our lives matured.

Our loving Father says to us, his children, “I am with you always to the end of the age,” and I am convinced that my loving Father has been with me, guided me, lifted me up, as well as rejoiced with me over so many years. I know that he will continue to walk beside me and lead me into the future.

Most Heavenly Father, you are my best friend and support as I experience my life here on earth. Thank you for your love and guidance. Protect and comfort me as you guide me through the rest of my earthly days. In Jesus’ name, I pray. Amen.

Do: Give someone from your past a call and meet for lunch or a mini-reunion.

Read: Psalm 23

*Gloria Elder
Crystal Lake, IL*

Monday, December 28, 2015

The Holy Innocents

Then Herod ... sent and killed all the male children in Bethlehem and in all the region who were two years old and under.

Matthew 2:16

Visit Bethlehem and you see a mountain nearby with steep sides and a flat top. This mountain is largely man-made. Herod built it to be one of several fortresses in the land. Its presence reminds us that the Christmas narrative isn't all sweetness and light. The Prince of Peace enters the world under the shadows of tyranny, injustice, the slaughter of innocents!

Our celebration of Christmas this year likely takes place in the midst of similar reminders of the world's brokenness: acts of terrorism, the flight of refugees, bloodshed in the name of ideology and control, Christian martyrdom. The day's Gospel is sobering, yet it is still Good News. God, not Herod and his ilk, is in control, and through Jesus, God will bring about a most gracious ending.

Thank you, Father, that you, not the forces of evil, have ultimate control. Amen.

Pray: Pray for the Christians in the Middle East, Africa and elsewhere facing persecution.

Read: Matthew 2:13-18; Romans 8:28-39

*Ted Zimmerman
Napa, CA*

Tuesday, December 29, 2015

Now, There's A Lot Less

And he said to them, "One's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions. ... Instead, seek his kingdom, and these things will be added to you."

Luke 12:15, 31

We recently moved from a two-story home into a small two-bedroom apartment and had to deal with the "downsizing" issue. What to do with the abundance of possessions after fifty-four years of married life is a heart-wrenching issue.

As we watched the vans drive away with our "no longer needed" items of furniture and furnishings, we were blessed in affirming with St. Paul "I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content" (Philippians 4:11). After all, life is much more than things. Life is a gift from God to be cherished, nurtured and strengthened with the greatest of God's gifts—the blessing of his love, for him and for each other.

So, we now have a whole lot less stuff, but we still have all of the assurance of God's love and hope!

Help us, Lord, to cling more tightly to all you provide that ultimately matters. Amen.

Pray: Pray for contentment with what you have.

Read: Luke 12:13-31

*David P. Schmidt
St. Louis, MO*

Wednesday, December 30, 2015

The Gift of Today

I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.

Romans 8:18

The past is history; the future is a mystery; today is a gift ... that's why we call it the present. We can remember the past, but we cannot live there. We anticipate the future, and we will live there, but not yet. Our future is not really a mystery—the Savior has opened the door to a future incomparably more glorious!

Today is a GIFT (the present)—not all of it welcome. But of this we can be sure: Just as the good times won't last forever, neither will the worst of times. Our God has promised that.

In view of such a future, today can be lived as a gift, in spite of its aches and pains. The future is no longer a mystery. Today is full of hope. Rejoice and be glad in it!

Fill me with hope, O Lord, so I may live confidently today, at peace in Jesus. Amen.

Review: Review how God has been with you throughout the past year.

Read: Psalm 46

*Paul Scheidt
Chesterfield, MO*

Thursday, December 31, 2015

Punctuation

What is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable.

1 Corinthians 15:42

A semicolon connects two independent sentences; placed at the end of one sentence, a semicolon shows that there is more to come.

A Christian's life is a sentence with a semicolon in the middle. Once you lived only for yourself; through Christ you love and serve your neighbor. Once you held on to grudges and nursed hard feelings; now you forgive as you have been forgiven. Once you worried about declining health or your financial future; now you trust the Father who provides for the birds and the lilies.

Life on earth is joyful and hope-filled with a semicolon in the middle. But at the end of this earthly life, we find another semicolon; God has prepared an even brighter future in heaven for those who love him.

Thank you, Lord, for the new life you have given me in Jesus. Amen.

Reach out: Share the joy and hope of new life in Christ with someone whose life is dark and empty.

Read: Romans 6:1-11

Eileen Ritter
Byron Center, MI

HOLY HABITS for **HOPE-FULL HEALTH**

Change is a wonderful yet challenging concept. We have a changeless Lord who continues to push and shove us by changing events, circumstances and people around us, but God loves and forgives us in the midst of it all! Here are some suggestions to consider as we work together on changing and rearranging our lives:

C: Christ is the center for all of our changes and for the ways we celebrate and serve him.

H: Hands-on ways help us celebrate this season by making Thanksgiving greetings, house decorations, Christmas cards and other gifts.

A: Ask others how they prepare for the holidays—what they cook, how they celebrate with family and friends, what worship services they observe.

N: New ideas from others can change “blah” days into “blessed” days. Read and discuss new ways to celebrate the Reformation, Thanksgiving, Halloween and Christmas.

G: Generational celebrations are great! Hug a child often! Tell a parent a good thing about her child. Put different ages together and mix. See what the Lord cooks up!

E: Enjoy! Whether or not you make changes in your celebrations and traditions, make sure the one ingredient you keep in all that you do is joy!

Blessings as you celebrate life in the midst of change, in full assurance of the presence of a changeless Lord!

Hope-Full Praying

Thanksgiving

Abide with me this day, Lord, as I thank you for the gift of being able to say “Thanks” to you. And as I thank you, nudge me also to say “Thanks” to the people you have put into my life, to care for me, laugh with me and enable me to say “Thanks” every day to you! Amen.

For Patience

Abide with me today and give me patience, Lord, to accept the unacceptable, to relax in the midst of all of the anxieties, to decipher your presence through all of the disappointments and to live a life of “Wow,” even in the midst of the worries, woes and wars. Amen.

The Wonder of Christmas

Abide with me, Lord, through this wonderful Christmas season! Make it wonderful, not only because of the gifts of family, friends, opportunities and special surprises, but even more importantly, because of the wonder of your great love for us when you showed up in that marvelous manger in Bethlehem! Amen.

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