

HOPE-FULL LIVING

•Daily Devotions for Living Life to the Fullest•

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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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Friday, July 1, 2016

Rest for the Weary

Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

Matthew 11:28-29

We live in a fast-paced world. Some days it is hard to keep up. Even walking in the shopping mall can prove hazardous as people rush by with little patience or grace.

It is interesting that Jesus called us to find rest in him. Rather than pushing us toward more activity, he calls us to lay down our burdens and have a deep and refreshing rest.

When my “to-do list” becomes overwhelming, I try to cut it down to just three items that God would consider important. Sometimes the first item on my list is “Pray,” as it helps everything else to fall into place.

While the world tells us to speed up and worry, God calls us to slow down and rest.

Heavenly Father, give me rest in you. Amen.

List: Write a “to-do list” for today limited to only three important items, or less, if you wish!

Read: Psalm 23

*Kerry Osborne
Sydney, Australia*

Saturday, July 2, 2016

Hope and Freedom

It is for freedom that Christ has set us free.

Galatians 5:1

I can only imagine the thoughts that entered the minds of immigrants as they first arrived in the United States throughout the years. For many, our country symbolized a better life. Opportunities like education and employment that were unattainable in their home country were now a possibility. The United States symbolizes many freedoms for all its citizens. In this country, we can freely choose where we want to live, work and worship.

The founding fathers of our country fought for the rights and freedoms that we have today. God's own Son Jesus fought for us, too, when he died on the cross so that we might have eternal life with him in heaven. Because of him we have hope and are forever free!

Dear heavenly Father, thank you for the hope you have given us by sending your beloved Son, so that we might have eternal life with you in heaven. Amen.

Reflection: Think of our freedoms today and those who made them possible for us.

Read: John 3:16

*Betsy Becker Niedringhaus
Ballwin, MO*

Sunday, July 3, 2016

Our Sacred Honor

Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD.

Psalm 33:12

Early in my schooling we were required to memorize and internalize these strong, stirring words: “In support of this declaration, with firm reliance on divine providence, we pledge to each other our lives, our fortunes and our sacred honor,” words signed by 56 concerned citizens of what was not yet a nation.

Our honor is indeed sacred. Our Creator not only gave each of us the equality of his love and care, but our worth, our honor in his sight regardless of failures, criticisms, handicaps or the negative opinions others might have of what we think or do. “On God rests my deliverance and my honor; my mighty rock, my refuge is God” (Psalm 62:7).

Lord, into thy hands I commend myself, my body and soul and all things, all that I am, all that I have and all whom I love. Amen.

Do: As we think about our precious gift of freedom, pray daily for our nation and its leaders.

Read: Hebrews 13:17-18; Psalm 84:11-12; Psalm 91:15; Psalm 33:12

*Connie Bretscher
Valparaiso, IN*

Monday, July 4, 2016

Free Indeed

So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.

John 8:36

I grew up thinking all the fireworks on July 4 were for me, since it's my birthday! When asked to show identification, I start to smile and wait for it: "Your birthday is on the 4th of July?" "Every year!" is my quick response. It's a great day for a birthday in the United States, as its citizens celebrate the nation's birth and the freedom from oppression won by those who sacrificed to achieve it.

Jesus has won freedom for us: freedom from sin and its slavery. By sacrificing his life, he paid the penalty for our sin. We now have freedom and life forever with our Savior Jesus. Let's celebrate our freedom today and every day.

Lord Jesus, I thank you for saving my life and giving me freedom. Help me to live in that freedom and follow you. Amen.

Share: Tell your family how thankful you are for the freedom Jesus won.

Read: Romans 8:31-36

*Steve Hess
Fort Myers, FL*

Tuesday, July 5, 2016

Learning From Our Pets

Train yourself for godliness; for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way.

1 Timothy 4:7-8

Observing our pets' behaviors can be helpful. Each time my dog gets up from her resting position or goes outdoors, she stops and takes a deep stretch to get ready for her excursion. It would be helpful for us upon rising to stretch, take some deep breaths and whisper a prayer.

It is a profitable, spiritual exercise for us to speak to God upon rising. Stand, stretch, reach your arms to the heavens and say, "Thank you, Lord! Please join me today in all that I encounter."

Before our daily Bible reading, we can ask the Holy Spirit to guide us in our reading, open our eyes to the truths of Scripture and help us apply what we read to our daily lives. Then we can walk in godliness and be good witnesses to what the Lord is doing in our lives.

Lord Jesus, help us to exercise godliness in our faith so that others may see you and believe in you. Amen.

Do: If you have a pet, give them some strokes and sing "Jesus Loves Me, This I Know."

Read: 1 John 4

Kay Charon
Glen Cove, NY

Wednesday, July 6, 2016

Summer Pleasures

This also, I saw, is from the hand of God, for apart from him who can eat or who can have enjoyment?

Ecclesiastes 2:24-25

“In the Good Old Summertime” ... warm, lazy days, family picnics, fireworks, swimming and boating, golf, vacations. Summer pleasures! Or not ... dangerous heat and humidity, endless disputes with family over when and where to go, complaints about food and selfish addiction to golf or baseball, leaving older relatives out.

Solomon, now in his older years, had tried everything—self-indulgence, toil, wealth, pleasures and even wisdom, concluding, “All is vanity.” That is, apart from God, summer pleasures are vanity. But eating and drinking and finding enjoyment “from the hand of God” because of Jesus’ death on the cross transform summer pleasures into hymns of praise and opportunities for witness.

Father, thank you for opening your hand and satisfying the desires of every living thing. Amen.

Receive: Enjoy God’s summer pleasures this week.

Read: Ecclesiastes 2; Psalm 145:15-16

*Stephen J. Carter
Oakville, MO*

Thursday, July 7, 2016

Bird Song

Look at the birds of the air.

Matthew 6:26

Experienced birders recognize many species of birds by their songs. In his book *What the Robin Knows* Jon Young reveals that within any given species, a variety of bird calls convey information about a bird's condition and territory. A singing bird establishes the absence of danger, while silence or calls of alarm denote the presence of a predator.

When Jesus taught about trust in our heavenly Father, he didn't point to religious leaders or his own disciples as examples. "Look at the birds of the air," he said. "They neither sow nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them" (Matthew 6:26). This heavenly Father "richly and daily provides me with all that I need to support this body and life." Through Jesus' death and resurrection, he has saved me from the ultimate predators—sin, death and the devil.

Teach us, Lord, to put our trust in you. Amen.

Sing praise: According to Young, when the predator has passed, the bird's silence or cry of alarm yields to vigorous singing. Praise God for his provision in your life.

Read: Matthew 6:25-34

Eileen Ritter
Grand Haven, MI

Friday, July 8, 2016

Timothy the Elder!

Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example.

1 Timothy 4:12

I have often wondered what St. Paul would have written to his young friend Tim if Tim had been 60-plus years old. My guess would be that Paul would have encouraged him in the same way, only more so, to “set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity.”

In today’s society, all too often it seems that people describe older people grounded in a “deficit-based” system rather than in an “asset-based” way. This same stereotype is often used with young people as well, as St. Paul infers in today’s reading.

Let us rise up, we older Timothys, not only to show the world our value and worth, but to point the world to the Lord of people of all ages and to set an example by celebrating God’s gift of aging, in what we say and do. Let no one despise your age!

Lord, thanks for people of all generations as we empower each other through vibrant, grace-filled living. Amen.

Reflect: How can I encourage the young Timothys around me more specifically?

Read: 1 Timothy 4:11-16; 1 Thessalonians 5:9-11

*Rich Bimler
Bloomington, IL*

Saturday, July 9, 2016

Power for Living

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation.

Romans 1:16

The term *horsepower* came about when farmers and ranchers used horses to pull big loads that were unable to be moved by humans. Dealership salespeople today advertise horsepower in trucks that haul heavy loads or in fast cars.

What label do we use to describe spiritual power? Bible references would include God power, Jesus power or Holy Spirit power. But another label is resurrection power. Resurrection power is not just God's power that raises us from the dead, but it is resurrection power because Christ is alive and lives in us to provide this power in our lives now.

If you believe in Jesus you have this power. Use it to give God glory, honor and praise by reflecting that resurrection power in your daily living.

God, your power is demonstrated in creation, in your Son Jesus and in your Holy Spirit. May we also demonstrate that power in our lives. Amen.

Reflect: How is Christ's resurrection working in your life today?

Read: Acts 1:8; Ephesians 1:18-21; Ephesians 3:20-21

*Ken Holdorf
Frisco, TX*

Sunday, July 10, 2016

Keep on Growing

Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

2 Peter 3:18

An ad I remember from my youth said, “You never outgrow your need for fresh milk.” Since then I have learned that isn’t true. Forty percent of adults are to some degree lactose intolerant.

What is true is that we never outgrow our need to grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ. We never outgrow our need to “walk in the light of the Lord” (Isaiah 2:5). We never outgrow our need to serve the Lord with gladness.

No matter what our circumstances in life may be, there are Spirit-filled ways that keep us growing in the grace of God. And there are fruitful ways we can share the light and kindness of Christ with those whose lives we touch.

Gracious Lord, help me to keep on growing in your grace. Open my heart and mind to ways I can share your light and love with others. Amen.

Ask: Pray each day for ways to walk in the light of the Lord.

Read: Isaiah 2:1-5; Matthew 5:14-16

*Gil Duchow
Hilliard, OH*

Monday, July 11, 2016

Easy Does It

For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

Matthew 11:30

How is the Lord inviting you to take it easy? Being productive is good to a point. Finding balance in your life is better.

The Lord reminds us that it is not on our own effort, but on his strength that we will move forward in faith. The Lord is with us, helping us as we go along.

Taking it easy is difficult for most people. We want to be in control of everything. As we learn to share our life with the Lord, we reduce our stress and strain. Hand over your day to the Lord, and see if things flow a little smoother for you.

Dear Lord, please help me to let go a little more today, and take it easy with you. Amen.

Action: Let go of one frustration today, and let the Lord handle it.

Read: Psalm 23:1-3

*Annette L. Sherwood
St. Louis, MO*

Tuesday, July 12, 2016

Mailbox Full?

I sought the Lord, and he answered me; he delivered me from all my fears.

Psalm 34:4

Now it seems that we have less postal mail and more email, and I might add also much texting, but I do not participate in that yet. I remember sending an email some time back. The person I sent it to never did answer it. Then, my original email was returned. An error message was included with my original email. It said that my email could not be delivered since the recipient's email box was full already.

How fortunate we are to have our Father in heaven. He does not have a "full box" that would have to reject our prayers. Just imagine all the prayers that are sent every minute of every day to our Father. He hears all of our prayers and everyone else's too. God always has time to hear all of our requests and deals with them in the best way for us.

I thank you, my heavenly Father, that you are always ready to hear and to answer my prayers. Amen.

Remember: Your prayers will always be heard.

Read: Isaiah 40:31

*Jim Wiedman
Lombard, IL*

Wednesday, July 13, 2016

Upside Down World

Whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.

Mark 10:15

Jesus' teaching turns the world upside down. The poor are rich, servants are greater than masters, the last are first, the first last and adults need to become like children. All my life I've been trying to be more grown up, and Jesus says it should be the other way around.

Must adults become more childlike to enter the kingdom? Children don't worry so much and have more fun. That's not what Jesus is talking about. I think he means that we should simply believe—or believe simply. Little children believe in their parents, and it takes many missteps on the parent's part to shake that faith in them. Our Father in heaven doesn't make any missteps, but sometimes there seems to be little evidence that he loves us. At such times it takes a truly childlike faith to believe and trust in God.

Dear Father in heaven, give us a childlike faith, so that we believe and trust in you, even when our world seems upside down. Amen.

Learn: Try to learn something from a child today.

Read: Mark 10:13-16

*Eldor Kaiser
Lenexa, KS*

Thursday, July 14, 2016

Thank You

We always thank God ... when we pray for you.

Colossians 1:3

Paul is thankful to the Colossian Christians for their faith. He commends them for the love that they share and the hope of eternal life that they possess. Paul praises them for being part of the spreading and growing of the Gospel.

Even though Paul is writing these words to the Colossians, they still apply to us today. We are thankful that you have remained faithful to God's Word. We commend you for keeping the faith and teaching it to others, so that we, too, may have the hope of eternal life. Thanks to all of you who are reading this for helping others learn about God and his message of salvation.

Thank you, heavenly Father, for faithful servants who have been examples to all of us. Amen.

Support: Volunteer to teach Sunday school. If you are not able to do this, pray for the children who attend those classes and the teachers who reach out to them.

Read: Colossians 3:1-14; Philippians 1:3-11

*Celeste Cummins
Storm Lake, IA*

Friday, July 15, 2016

The Hug Lady

Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience.

Colossians 3:12

Perhaps you caught this headline out of Dallas, Texas: "Hug Lady, 83, who gave out 500,000 hugs to soldiers, dies after battle with cancer." Elizabeth Laird, known as the "The Hug Lady" to thousands of members of the U.S. armed forces over the years, made it her mission to hug every single soldier as they boarded planes to deploy, and waited with a hug for them when they returned home. When she entered the hospital in her final days, many of the soldiers Laird hugged over the years stopped by to visit her at the hospital.

Over the years I've heard many voices say, "I have nothing to offer anyone anymore. I don't know why God keeps me around." But then there are other voices, like Elizabeth Laird's, who say, "Just be patient; God isn't finished with me yet."

Lord, let the love you have for me flow out of me to others. Amen.

Show: Keep your eyes open for opportunities to show love, and then show it.

Read: Ephesians 4:25-32; Colossians 3:12-17

*Edward Arle
St. Charles, MO*

Saturday, July 16, 2016

Staying Close

Behold I am with you always, to the end of the age.

Matthew 28:20

My dad had a friend who named his horse Closer. He would pick up his date with his buggy. When his date was seated beside him, he flipped the horse's reins and softly said to the horse, "Get up, Closer." He hoped his date might also comply. We need no tricks to "get up closer" to God. He is already by our side and in our heart.

A friend of mine told our pastor that he no longer felt as close to God as before. He said the pastor asked him, "Who do you think moved?"

Jesus reassures us of his closeness as we read his words in the Bible and as we receive his body and blood for our forgiveness in his holy meal. He promises, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." God is good.

Be near me, Lord Jesus, I ask you to stay close by me forever and love me, I pray. Amen.

Share: Visit someone and celebrate God's closeness to you.

Read: Romans 8:31-39

*Leo Symmank
Seabrook, TX*

Sunday, July 17, 2016

Old?

The old has passed away behold, the new has come.

2 Corinthians 5:17

So who's old? Is 80 the "new" old? Recently I offered a 79-year-old friend a copy of *Hope-Full Living*. She quickly replied, "Oh, no. That's for old people!" (She's really missing out, isn't she?) Does a walker, a cane or a hearing aid determine "old" or is "old" a state of mind?

Scripture unscrambles "old" and "new" from Methuselah, at 969 years old (Genesis 5:27) to the beautiful passage that says, "Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation" (2 Corinthians 5:17). We remember Abraham's Sarah, who was "advanced in years" and "worn out" (Genesis 18:12). Nine months later she gave birth to a baby! Can't you see old Elizabeth and her cousin Mary dancing a jig when they were both promised babies? (Luke 1:41).

On the days you feel like Methuselah, remember that Scripture encourages us to "rejoice in that day and leap for joy" (Luke 6:23). On second thought, perhaps we could just rejoice and skip the leap.

Lord, keep my heart and my love for you always new. Amen.

Do: Remove "old" from your vocabulary.

Read: 2 Corinthians 5:17-21

*Lois Scheer
San Diego, CA*

Monday, July 18, 2016

Cheer the Home Team

Behold, a great multitude ... crying out in a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!"

Revelation 7:9-10

It was a lovely service. I'd attended early church, giving me time to get to the ballfield to watch my grandson.

The baseball game was exhilarating. I jumped to my feet and cheered with every outstanding play. As the last runner rounded the bases, bringing home the win, the crowd was ecstatic. I'm sure more than a few voices were hoarse from screaming that afternoon.

I'm never embarrassed about showing my enthusiasm at a game. I wonder why I'm reserved at church. Shouldn't I show equal enthusiasm in worship? Do I ever stand and cheer for the One who won the ultimate victory on my behalf?

Lord Jesus, you deserve all honor and glory and praise. May I never forget or fail to cheer about your victory for me. Amen.

Cheer: Raise your voice and your hands. Cheer for the Lamb.

Read: Psalm 8:1; Psalm 47:1; Revelation 4:11; Revelation 7:9-12

*Lynne Waite Chapman
Fort Wayne, IN*

Tuesday, July 19, 2016

I'm Hungry and Thirsty

Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst."

John 6:35

Summer picnics with parents, family and friends provide special memories. Usually there is too much food and drink available, as well as the opportunity to eat and drink too much! Without all the food and drink you want, the picnic wouldn't be anything special. We are spoiled!

Jesus said we will never go hungry or thirsty. His words are puzzling if you just think of earthly food or water. Following our Savior and his words in the Holy Bible clear up any doubt that he meant eternal life with God.

Father, your everlasting love for sinners is difficult to understand. May we always ask you for forgiveness, remembering you forgive us and love us. Amen.

Be filled: Get your fill and quench your thirst—read the Bible daily.

Read: John 6:25-35

*Don Hollmann
Ballwin, MO*

Wednesday, July 20, 2016

Unanswered Prayers?

On the day I called, you answered me.

Psalm 138:3

Can you think of a time when you felt God was not answering your prayers? I had this thought: “The reason my prayers are not answered is because my prayers are already answered.” Most, if not all, of my prayers were answered either through material goods or through other people.

Often I have struggled with something, perhaps for years, and then discovered the solution to my issue within my grasp all along. I just did not see it. It may have been a physical issue that I put off addressing, but then my physician prescribed a medication or surgery, and it was resolved.

At other times my prayers were answered through another person, a professional, a relative or co-worker. A certain person spoke to me or listened to me or shared something with me, and my issue was resolved. God answers prayers in many ways.

God, thank you for providing resources and people in answer to my prayers. Amen.

Consider: Has God used you to answer to someone's prayer? Has God answered your prayers through material resources or through people?

Read: Psalm 138

*Jerrold L. Nichols
Fort Wayne, IN*

Thursday, July 21, 2016

Too Old to Serve?

There was a prophetess, Anna ... She did not depart from the temple, worshiping with fasting and prayer night and day.

Luke 2:36-37

When are we too old to serve?

There is a man in my son's congregation in Texas who found his life's ministry at 92. Shortly after his wife passed away, he in his loneliness was working in his workshop one day and hit upon the idea of making prayer crosses (one had been given to them during his wife's illness). It was a specially designed cross for two to hold as they prayed together. He gave them to my son to take to shut-ins and in time made 500 or more of them, donating all materials and labor.

If we wish to serve, and are able to, there is something we can do.

Lord, open my eyes to see how I can serve using my talents and abilities for you. Amen.

Ponder: Can you help fold and stuff bulletins, make meals for the sick or visit the homebound? There is always something you can do—even if you are homebound yourself: You can pray for others.

Read: Ecclesiastes 9:10; Job 12:12

*Harriet Stennfeld
Fort Wayne, IN*

Friday, July 22, 2016

My Protector

The Lord is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer, my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge.

Psalm 18:2

Traveling along a highway in the upper peninsula of Michigan, I had the privilege again of witnessing the majesty of God's power. The mighty strength of the rushing water over a multitude of enormous rock formations was breathtaking. The ability for the rocks to contain the everlasting spill of water was surely majestic.

God is my rock when unexpected concerns—death, illness, loneliness, stress—come upon me. I can rely on his strength to carry me through those times when I feel weak and afraid. I can find comfort in that ever-present image of God carrying me over the boulders presented in my life. His promise of his love and concern for me are a great comfort.

Dear heavenly Father, I praise you for your power and comfort as you carry me over the “rocks” in my life. I pray for your continued presence to sustain me in my times of weaknesses. In Jesus’ name, I pray. Amen.

Sing: “Abide with Me”

Read: Exodus 15:2

*Gloria Elder
Crystal Lake, IL*

Saturday, July 23, 2016

Our Advocate

The Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

Romans 8:27

Have you ever struggled with your prayer life? Have you ever debated within yourself to try to find the “right” words to express what is on your heart? I sure have. But there is hope for us.

We don’t need to struggle with our prayer words. There are no “wrong” words. The good news is that the Holy Spirit will take whatever thoughts and words we may use and take our petitions “with groanings too deep for words” (Romans 8:26) to the throne of our heavenly Father on our behalf. Whenever we need an advocate, someone to speak for us when we don’t know what to say, or when we are too broken and weak to articulate things or when we may be involved in something way over our heads, our ultimate advocate is the Holy Spirit. “The Spirit helps us in our weakness” (Romans 8:26).

*Holy Spirit, help my weak and stumbling prayers.
Amen.*

Examine: Where does the Holy Spirit fit in your prayer life?

Read: Romans 8:26-28

*Paul Eggold
Greendale, WI*

Sunday, July 24, 2016

In the Driver's Seat

And the Lord went before them by day in a pillar of cloud ... and by night in a pillar of fire ... that they might travel by day and by night.

Exodus 13:21

Car companies continue to toy with the concept of a driverless car and, every once in a while, bring out an experimental model to show the media. The challenge for marketing will be figuring out how many drivers are willing or eager to let go of the steering wheel. Letting go conflicts with human nature, which drives most people to want to be in control.

As the children of Israel traveled into the desert, they ran into this conflict. God planned to be in control, leading them safely by day and night. But they tired of God's plan and tried to assume control over the journey. "We need water, better food, a golden calf to worship!" they cried. God was not pleased and made the people wander in the desert for 40 years.

Letting God be in the driver's seat is always the best maneuver. He knows the route and the destination and has promised to get us there safely.

Dear Lord, safely steer my course today. Amen.

Let Go: Let God be in control of all things.

Read: Psalm 5:8; Psalm 25:4-5; Psalm 37:5

*Marj Maynard
Billings, MO*

Monday, July 25, 2016

Proclaiming Skies

The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.

Psalm 19:1

Many of my childhood nights were spent driving home late at night with my family from all my cousins' birthday parties. The country sky would be bright with brilliant light from the stars and moon. As dad would drive, I would watch the moon seemingly follow us all the way home, lighting the way. To my young mind that was God's way of lighting the way home.

As we look to the lights that God put in the sky, we are reminded of the Light of the world that breaks the darkness, and his Word that brightens the way as a lamp to our feet and a light to our path. Instead of living in the darkness of sin and death, we have our way lighted all the way to eternal life.

Lord, thank you for lighting my way and leading me. Amen.

Go: Take a walk outside tonight and watch the moon follow you.

Read: Genesis 1:14-19; Jeremiah 31:35

*Jeremy Klaustermeier
Warrenton, MO*

Tuesday, July 26, 2016

In The Pits

O Lord, you have brought up my soul from Sheol; you restored me to life from among those who go down to the pit.

Psalm 30:3

The first rule when you are in a hole is “Stop digging!” Sometimes circumstances or relationship reversals or emotions drop us into a pothole in life. We find ourselves staring at the world from grass-high level. In guilt or anger we may seek relief by digging away furiously, only deepening our dilemma. “Not necessary,” says the psalmist. “Take a break from digging. Drop the shovel and reach hands and heart towards the God who draws you up, restores your life from ‘the pit,’ who turns mourning into dancing.” It takes faith (courage) to let go of our own efforts and surrender the whole of things to God. But the call to “let go and let God” is a cliché for good reason. It works!

Loving Lord, take the shovel from my hands and open them toward you in prayer. For only you can deliver me from the pit. Amen.

Relax: Close your eyes, breathe deeply and realize: God's got this.

Read: Psalm 30; John 14:25-27

*Mike May
Kansas City, KS*

Wednesday, July 27, 2016

Prayer Pals

I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail.

Luke 22:32

The older I get, the more limited I become in areas of service. Where I used to be able to serve in the church kitchen, I find that my feet no longer cooperate. But God always provides an area of service. Currently I am making a soft green prayer shawl that will eventually go to someone who is in need. They may be in need of encouragement and support during a period of grief, in need of healing or in need of a peaceful death. So as I crochet the shawl, I weave in my prayers for the eventual recipient, praying that their faith in Jesus may not fail and that the shawl will remind them of God's loving arms around them.

Loving Lord, you tell us to pray for one another, yet only you know our deepest needs. Above all, I ask for a deep and abiding faith in you for everyone on my prayer list. Amen.

Ask: Pray for others, especially that their faith remains strong in the face of their challenges.

Read: Luke 22:31-33; Acts 12:5; 2 Corinthians 1:11

*Terry Weber
Williamsburg, VA*

Thursday, July 28, 2016

No Soul Wrinkles

I still proclaim thy wondrous deeds.

Psalm 71:17

“Grandma, what are you putting on your face?” says little Sam. “Wrinkle cream,” I reply. Sam said, “It must be working. You sure have lots of wrinkles.”

I really didn't need Sam to tell me that, but I actually do not mind wrinkles on my 95-year-old face. Although God does not blot out my wrinkles, he emphasizes, “I, I am he who blots out your transgressions for my own sake” (Isaiah 43:25). The wrinkles of sin are gone from my soul. It is clean. My spirit is renewed. I can face these years, frail though they may be, with strength—even joy. I give thanks each day for the blessings he has showered upon me—for Jesus' life, death and resurrection that assure me of that forgiven, wrinkle-free soul.

God still has plans for me, ways that I can serve through prayer, a cheerful smile or a thankful heart for those who help me.

Lord, I praise you for removing the wrinkles of sin from my soul. Amen.

Help: Perhaps growing old is difficult for someone that you know. Try to give him the joy of the Lord that is your strength.

Read: Psalm 71:17-21; Psalm 138:3

*Connie Bretscher
Valparaiso, IN*

Friday, July 29, 2016

Finding Rest in the Lord

Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

Matthew 11:28

Worry can rob you of joy and rest.

God has every day of your life already numbered and under his plan and control (Psalm 139:16). That takes all the pressure off of me and gives me both peace and rest.

“Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest,” Jesus says. We can bring every care to Jesus—our worries about our health, our finances, our children and grandchildren—any worry, no matter how small—and simply lay it at the foot of the cross, asking Jesus for peace and rest in the outcome.

Lord Jesus, when we are prone to worry, let us look to your Word for wisdom and comfort. Let us come to you first and freely with our burdens, learning from you, so that we might find rest for our souls. Amen.

Be aware: When worry is creeping into your day, take time to freely share your burden with God. Thank him that you can rest in his promises, both now and in eternity.

Read: Psalm 139; Psalm 23

*Lori Trinche
Westmont, IL*

Saturday, July 30, 2016

On Giving

And this, not as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us.

2 Corinthians 8:5

We are stewards of God's gifts to us. God wants to bless others through us. Giving is part of being his child. First, we give our will—our need to hold on to everything—to him, and then we are able to share with others. In the early church, they cared for the needy among them. They shared what they had without complaining.

We follow the example of Jesus, who gave his all on the cross for us: “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich” (2 Corinthians 8:9).

Hope in God and trust his Word: “My God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:19).

Lord, help us to live in a manner worthy of your calling through Jesus' merit and to his praise. Amen.

Do: Collect your change and give it to missions or a local food pantry.

Read: Psalm 51

Kay Charon
Glen Cove, NY

Sunday, July 31, 2016

Fix It

... according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.

Ephesians 1:9

On the farm, when something didn't work, you just fixed it: "If you have duct tape and bailing wire, you can fix anything." That works in many situations, but will duct tape and bailing wire fix everything? Our human nature needs fixing—physically, emotionally and spiritually.

The great news is that God provides the means to fix these things. All may not be fixed immediately, but we can trust God to fix all of our needs. Faith in the death of Jesus fixes our need for forgiveness. Faith in the resurrection of Jesus fixes our need for eternal life. Faith in the presence of Jesus and the power of the Holy Spirit can fix how we deal with life's challenges and troubles.

Thank you, God, that I don't have to rely on duct tape and bailing wire to fix my needs. You have provided your love in Christ and your power in the Holy Spirit to fix things, now and for eternity. Amen.

Remember: God is on call at all times to take care of your "fix-it" needs.

Read: Philippians 2:1-11 and 4:1-11

*Ken Holdorf
Frisco, TX*

Monday, August 1, 2016

The Dog Days of August

Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.

James 4:10

Growing up before air conditioning, we called those hot, humid, lazy days “the dog days of August,” when even a dog had no energy to run around.

As we age, we have less and less energy to run around. We may be frustrated by our lack of physical stamina or mental sharpness, which limit our daily routine, as well as our opportunities to serve our Lord and his mission.

God’s Word reminds us to humble ourselves “under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you” (1 Peter 5:6). God’s uplifting grace and strength may not always seem to come in a timely way. But when you live each day by faith in Christ, you can confidently cast “all your anxieties on him” (1 Peter 5:7), knowing he will uplift you and give you strength for the day.

Gracious God, uplift me each day. Give me the strength and guidance to uplift others. Amen.

Help: Find some ways you can uplift others despite your limitations.

Read: 1 Peter 5:6-11

*Gil Duchow
Hilliard, OH*

Tuesday, August 2, 2016

Family Ties

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

Galatians 3:28

Family structures have changed over the years. Remember the TV program *Leave it to Beaver*? Everybody got along and set a positive tone for the viewer. Today, family TV programs create an image of everybody going their own way. Today's families seem so busy, all going in different directions, with many not living close to one another, leaving a lonely feeling.

God's family members, young and old, have one thing in common—we belong to him. A family that keeps God as the center, even when family members are far apart in miles and thoughts, unites the family in love and faith in the Lord.

Our Father in heaven, may we always have comfort in knowing we are included in your family, a family that is united in you. Amen

Contact: Call, write, email or use social media to reach your earthly family to express your love.

Read: Ephesians 3:14-19

*Don Hollmann
Ballwin, MO*

Wednesday, August 3, 2016

Give Him Your All

He died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sakes died and was raised.

2 Corinthians 5:15

Recently I listened to a pastor who, in his sermon, sang this song: “Head, shoulders, knees, and toes, knees and toes.” I recognized that song from childhood, but as he sang and acted out the motions, my first thought was: What does this have to do with Jesus? When the pastor invited others to sing and act out the motions, it all became clear—this is what Jesus did—he gave his all for us.

Remember that Christmas song, “Love Came Down at Christmas”? Jesus came to earth in love to give his all for you and me. His head, his heart, his life were handed to us on the cross that his act of giving would move us to give our all for him—shoulders, knees, toes and hearts and hands as well.

Lord Jesus, you gave your life for me. Help me live my life for you. Amen.

Teach: Teach a child a new song.

Read: Romans 6:1-11

*Edward Arle
St. Charles, MO*

Thursday, August 4, 2016

He's All Spirit!

Jesus answered, "Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God."

John 3:5

The Holy Spirit leads us to repent of sin, assures us of forgiveness and the company of believers, and prepares us daily by his Word to welcome God's ultimate call—passing through death into the arms of our Savior Jesus Christ (Titus 3:5; 1 Peter 1:23).

In the meantime, the Holy Spirit puts us to work exactly where we will bear the most God-honoring fruit—a word of love and kindness, a prayer of intercession, a listening ear for a friend in trouble or grief. We lean on the Spirit for our daily expression of thanks and praise, service and childlike obedience (Ephesians 2:8-10; John 15:5).

The Spirit lets us know that we are the children of God, sons and daughters in service and sacrifice—fearless and faith-filled, eager to do the will of our Father in heaven (Romans 8:12-17)!

Holy Spirit, lead me to live a life of service and sacrifice toward others in Jesus' name. Amen.

Pray: Give thanks for the work of the Holy Spirit in your life.

Read: John 4:23-24; 1 Corinthians 2:8-13; Titus 3:4-8

*David P. Schmidt
St. Louis, MO*

Friday, August 5, 2016

Hoeing Corn

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

2 Corinthians 5:17

I was raised on a small farm where the alternating crops were corn and soybeans. Each summer, it was my job to hoe the errant stalks of corn out of the rows of soybeans. I could never understand the importance of this work. My father explained the corn would decrease the value of the beans when they were harvested.

In our lives, we have many “good” things taking our time and resources, but are they all the best things? Does the effort expended on some of our busyness detract from the important things we should be doing just as the corn detracted from the worth of the beans? God has given us his best in his Son, our Savior Jesus Christ. We can give him our best in loving and serving others.

Father, help us to hoe out the things that aren't important so we can concentrate on the things you want us to do. Amen.

Consider: Share with others that God has given us his “best” in his Son.

Read: Matthew 13:24-30

Gloria Doty
Fort Wayne, IN

Saturday, August 6, 2016

Cool Water

He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters.

Psalm 23:2

Here in Williamsburg, Virginia, it can get hot and humid in the summer. Is that true where you live? Here the sun just beats down on you. Clothes cling to you; perspiration gathers on your forehead. It can be unbearable. And yet in the midst of that misery, it can be equally refreshing to sit in the cool grass under the comforting shade of a large tree. It's even better if we sit on the bank of the James River; there is something so calming about being near water. And nothing quenches the thirst on a hot, humid day better than a cup of cold water.

That's how Jesus is with my soul. He calms me, he refreshes me and he quenches the thirst of my soul with his love.

Living Water, you bring refreshment to my soul. Let me share that refreshment with someone else today, even if it's in the form of sharing a cup of cold water. Amen.

Give: Share the refreshment that Christ brings to you with someone else today.

Read: Psalm 23; Matthew 10:41-42; Mark 9:40-41

*Terry Weber
Williamsburg, VA*

Sunday, August 7, 2016

Lovely!

Fix your thoughts on what is true, and honorable, and right, and pure, and lovely, and admirable.

Philippians 4:8

When you receive flowers or a card from a friend, you may smile and say, “Lovely!” The word expresses appreciation for the gift as well as its beauty. Other joys of life—a vibrant sunset, a sizzling steak dinner, a special visit from a friend—might also qualify as lovely.

The apostle Paul mentions *lovely* right alongside some lofty words like *true* and *honorable* and *pure*—words that describe a healthy relationship with God and others—as things to “fix your thoughts on.” Paul encourages us to appreciate God’s great love in Jesus, and he also urges us to treasure God’s extra gifts in life, which are truly lovely.

Father, thank you for all your blessings, including the lovely things. Amen.

Consider: What experiences qualify as lovely to you? Share the experience with a loved one, and give God thanks for these “extras” in life!

Read: Philippians 4:4-8

*Steve Hess
Fort Myers, FL*

Monday, August 8, 2016

Honey in My Mouth

How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth!

Psalm 119:103

Once a week, I have eggs and toast for breakfast. Toasting my bread just short of burnt, I then lather it with honey.

Honey is one of God's great gifts. Bees, earnest flying insects, gather nectar from flowering plants into hives to produce honey. They use it for food during cold seasons and humans have enjoyed it for centuries in recipes, for medicinal purposes, even as a shampoo ingredient.

The psalmist links honey to the "taste" of God's Word. God's words are sweeter than honey! Just as the tongue receives the sweetness of honey and rejoices, our hearts receive the sweetness of God's Word and are filled with joy. In Jesus, "the Word made flesh," we are drawn into the sweetness of God's grace and love.

Lord, open my lips and my life to the sweetness of your presence. Amen.

Taste: Sing or listen to the hymn "Amazing Grace" to hear sweet and comforting words about God's word of grace.

Read: Psalm 19; Revelation 10:8-11

*Paul A. Metzler
Shrewsbury, MO*

Tuesday, August 9, 2016

Genuine

Let love be genuine.

Romans 12:9

What does genuine love look like? Does it look like Valentine's Day, filled with hearts and candy and poems? Does it look like a sparkling diamond engagement ring? Does genuine love look like a child bringing a handful of flowering weeds to his mother, or the mother receiving the wilted bouquet with surprise and gratitude?

Love can certainly look like those things, but genuine love really looks like Jesus. We know that "God is love" (1 John 4:16), and that love in the flesh then, is Jesus. Our Savior humbled himself to be born among us. He taught and healed and fed others. He proclaimed the kingdom of God. Jesus put our needs ahead of his own. He said, "Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13). Do you want to see genuine love? Look to the cross.

*Lord Jesus, help me to love others as you love me.
Amen.*

Be genuine: Share the genuine love of Jesus in your words and actions.

Read: Romans 12:9-21; John 15:12-13

*Carol Geisler
Manchester, MO*

Wednesday, August 10, 2016

Gone Fishing

Jesus said to them, "Children, do you have any fish?" They answered him, "No." He said to them, "Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some."

John 21:5-6

I never was good at fishing. Summertime meant going once or twice, but it was never my favorite sport. Besides, I could never get those slimy worms on the hook, and then to think about drowning them—yuck!

Whether you plan to fish this summer or not does not really matter. What matters to the Lord is that we “cast the net on the ‘right side’ of the boat” of life! I confess that too often I catch myself doing things on the “wrong side,” just like I concentrated on those silly worms instead of enjoying fishing!

The “wrong side” might be a focus on our own problems and pains. The “right side” could be centering on the needs of others and bringing God’s love to those who feel like “worms.”

Lord, thanks for catching us so that we can catch others for you. Amen.

Do: Go fishing this summer, or at least cast out your nets to bring others to God’s network.

Read: John 21:1-14; Matthew 4:18-22

*Rich Bimler
Bloomington, IL*

Thursday, August 11, 2016

A Lifetime of Service

Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor.

Romans 12:10

My dad visited a woman in a nursing home. As he left, he heard the woman tell her roommate, “That was my pastor. He used to be so young.”

Just as my dad made calls well past retirement age, we are called to serve God and one another with fervor and zeal no matter our age or circumstance. We respond to his great love in Jesus by loving those around us. We visit our friends in the hospital and brush their hair as my mom did. We send cards and emails, not just when a friend loses a spouse, but months later when he still feels the lonely pain. We offer to pray with the person in the next bed. And, as if the joy of service were not enough, we look forward to the day when Jesus will say, “Well done, good and faithful servant. What you did for others you did for me” (Matthew 25:34-40).

Jesus, let me serve others with the fervent love you have for me. In your name. Amen.

Do: Decide right now what you can do to help someone in need.

*Read: Romans 12:1-21; Matthew 25:31-46; Philip-
pians 2:1-4*

*Ruth Geisler
Aliso Viejo, CA*

Friday, August 12, 2016

A Good Book

I love those who love me, and those who seek me diligently find me.

Proverbs 8:17

I love a good story as long as there is a happy ending. The hero has to have the purest heart, and he must be courageous.

Some of my favorite stories aren't found in the pages of novels, but in the books of Bible. In every book, God is our hero. Every story from Genesis to Revelation tells of his care and redeeming love.

This perfect hero shows himself in Genesis as the great Creator and the breath of life. In Exodus, he saves us from destruction, and guides us in the wilderness. In the book of Ruth, he is the kinsman-redeemer. In Esther, he is courage. In other books, he is the Prince, Redeemer, Shepherd and Savior.

Father, thank you for the Bible and for giving us the true story of your love and care. Amen.

Search: Read a book of the Bible. Search until you find our Hero.

Read: Deuteronomy 4:29; Psalm 18:2; Psalm 27:1

*Lynne Waite Chapman
Fort Wayne, IN*

Saturday, August 13, 2016

Thistles in God's Garden

A woman from Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." ... The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me?"

John 4:7, 9

Gardeners pull thistles, and thistles are generally despised. To the Jews, Samaritans were like thistles—worthless and despised.

But thistles are the emblem of Scotland. A legend about the battle of Largs, fought in the late summer of 1263, explains why. In order to catch the Scots sleeping, the Norse army took off their boots and crept forward in the dark barefoot. A Norse soldier stepped on a thistle and cried out in pain, warning the defenders and saving Scotland.

Even the "thistle people" in our lives have value. As a "thistle person" myself, I say to Jesus, "How can you possibly ask me for a drink?" Then Jesus offers me, even me, living water. God loves everyone, including the thorny and unlikable. What comfort!

Lord Jesus, I am glad that you love all people, even me. Amen.

Watch: Look for thistles in ditches and fields, and think of Jesus' love.

Read: John 4:1-29

*Eldor Kaiser
Lenexa, KS*

Sunday, August 14, 2016

Picking Blueberries

If you go into your neighbor's vineyard, you may eat your fill of grapes, as many as you wish, but you shall not put any in your bag.

Deuteronomy 23:24

Certainly one of my favorite activities of the summer is going out to pick blueberries. I go to the same U-Pick Farm every year. The manager, Hank, always says, "Hey, feel free to eat some as you pick." I take him seriously. Actually I think Hank would be better off if he did a before-and-after weighing of *me* instead of weighing that container of beautiful blue orbs.

As I waddle out of the blueberry patch, I think, "What if I spent as much time consuming the fruits of the Spirit?" "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control" (Galatians 5:22). I certainly could use some extra effort on that last one. And how much more satisfying my harvest would truly be.

Holy Spirit, help me to feast on your fruits. Amen.

Eat: Eat nine blueberries and with each one ponder a fruit of the Spirit.

Read: Galatians 5:19-26

*Don Luepke
Fremont, IN*

Monday, August 15, 2016

His Workmanship

We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works.

Ephesians 2:10

Zacchaeus, the “wee little man” of children’s music fame, climbed a tree to catch a glimpse of Jesus. Zacchaeus wasn’t hiding, but he was a lost sinner and Jesus found him. The Savior walked over to the tree, looked up and invited himself to the tax collector’s home. Zacchaeus was saved that day, and the wee little man put his new faith into action in a big way, restoring defrauded goods and giving to the poor.

Like Zacchaeus, we were lost sinners, but Jesus “came to seek and to save the lost” (Luke 19:10). We are saved by grace through faith and, like Zacchaeus, we can put our faith into action. We are God’s “workmanship,” each of us his masterpiece, created in Christ Jesus for the good works laid out like stepping stones before us.

Lord Jesus, help me to walk in the path of good works prepared for me. Amen.

Follow Jesus: Carry out the good works that appear in your life each day.

Read: Ephesians 2:1-10; Luke 19:1-10

*Carol Geisler
Manchester, MO*

Tuesday, August 16, 2016

Summer Waves

But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind.

James 1:6

When the heat index is off the charts and the air is stifling, it's a welcome relief to visit a beach and enjoy the waves. Waves are curious things; they can be refreshing and playful or huge and destructive.

The waves that wash over our feet are like the everyday pleasures we enjoy. As we walk further into the water, the waves become stronger. Occasionally, they sweep us off our feet and threaten to drown us. These waves are like the challenges in our lives. And sometimes, the waves resemble a tsunami that threatens to destroy everything in its path.

God promises to be with us and rescue us through every wave and problem that washes over us, big or small. All we have to do is ask for his protection.

Master of the waves, hold our hands as we walk through the problems in our lives. Amen.

Ask: Watching waves on a beach, or in any setting, recall God's promises to keep you safe.

Read: Isaiah 43:2; Psalm 5:11

*Gloria Doty
Fort Wayne, IN*

Wednesday, August 17, 2016

Hay Days

He dawns on them like the morning light, like the sun shining forth on a cloudless morning, like rain that makes grass to sprout from the earth.

2 Samuel 23:4

“Make hay while the sun shines” is an old saying that comes to life when we drive past the farms in our area, where hay is the main crop. Farmers need rain and sun to make the grass grow. Then they need more sunny days to dry the grass so they can mow, rake and bale hay to feed their cattle during the winter.

For the rest of us, “make hay while the sun shines” is about taking advantage of opportunities. The idea is similar to Jesus’ words in John 9:4: “We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming, when no one can work.” Every day God sends new opportunities. Even as seniors, we sow and reap through our words, actions and especially faith. Through that faith, we also wait eagerly for the day Jesus returns to take his harvest home.

Heavenly Father, make me mindful this day of every opportunity to serve and follow you. Amen.

Make hay: Use your words, actions and faith as tools to work in the Lord’s harvest fields.

Read: Galatians 6:6-10; 1 Peter 3:15

Marj Maynard
Billings, MO

Thursday, August 18, 2016

He's All Caring!

The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein, for he has founded it upon the seas and established it upon the rivers ... Lift up your heads ... that the King of glory may come in.

Psalm 24:1, 9

The world and everything in it, including me, is a precious gift of God. I thrive when I bask in the undeserved love of my Creator—acknowledging him, trusting him and celebrating his will for me. That's a very good place to begin my day.

I believe God is in charge, that he provides all I need for today, defends and protects me from all evil, blesses me with a memory of his everlasting kindness and leads me to thank him for his merciful care for me: “Oh give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever!” (Psalm 118:1). This I believe!

Thank you, heavenly Father, for your gift of faith that has led me to trust you as the Creator of all things. Strengthen me to fully rely on your guidance and direction. In Christ I pray. Amen.

Review: Discuss the Apostles' Creed with a friend and discover new applications of its truths.

Read: Genesis 1; Hebrews 11:1-3; Psalm 8:3-9

*David P. Schmidt
St. Louis, MO*

Friday, August 19, 2016

Suffering Servant

Comfort, comfort my people, says your God.

Isaiah 40:1

When I am suffering physically or emotionally, I pray. Often that energizes me to pray also for others. Recently, I thought about Jesus' conversations while he suffered on the cross for the sins of the world. He still took time to minister to individuals. He asked John to take care of his mother Mary. He promised the repentant thief that he would be with him in Paradise. This was the comfort of which Isaiah spoke. Jesus even prayed for those who were crucifying him, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

As Jesus in the midst of his suffering for all mankind continued to comfort and pray for individuals, so we too are given strength by God in the midst of our ailments to continue to bring comfort to specific people. Through it all God draws us closer to himself and to each other. We are truly blessed.

Dear Father, help me to grow spiritually and through my ailments equip me to be a better comforter in the lives of others. Amen.

Share: Speak peace and be a comforter in the name of Jesus.

Read: James 1:1-5

*Leo Symmank
Seabrook, TX*

Saturday, August 20, 2016

Feet First

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

Romans 10:15

With all the technology we have for sending messages it's easy to miss the point Paul is making in Romans 10:15. It must be a good one because Paul is making the same point made by Isaiah (52:7) hundreds of years earlier. Both were excited about the feet of those who bring good news. Feet? What's so great about feet?

In both Paul and Isaiah's world good news was brought by a messenger. No phones. No email. No electronic anything. News was delivered person-to-person, mostly by foot, and only got going when the messenger's feet did. No wonder Paul and Isaiah focused on feet. Until they moved, good news was no news.

Imagine all the good-news feet that have moved since Jesus was born. Because they moved, you and I know about our Savior.

Lord, by your Spirit stir my feet into action. Amen.

Remember: Who knows about Jesus because your feet moved?

Read: Isaiah 52:7

*Charles S. Mueller, Sr.
Bloomington, IL*

Sunday, August 21, 2016

Entertaining Angels

Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it.

Hebrews 13:2

Along with a furniture delivery one morning, God delivered a gentle reminder. I watched warily as two heavily tattooed young men heaved mattresses up my staircase. I hovered behind them, gazing protectively at my freshly painted walls and belongings. Fearing they were going to dash away, I instructed them to remove the plastic wrapping and assemble the furniture. They politely did as they were told.

As they were leaving, one of the men turned to me and said kindly, “Have a great day. God bless you.” “God bless you” is not a common phrase in Australia, and the notion that this young man was most probably a Christian came as a jolt.

How often do we judge people by their appearance, job description or background? One of the most remarkable qualities Jesus displayed was his complete acceptance of all.

Lord, help me to see others as you see them. Amen.

Do: Offer a greeting or kind word to someone you might normally judge critically.

Read: James 2:1-4

*Kerry Osborne
Sydney, Australia*

Monday, August 22, 2016

Letting Disappointments Go

We know that for those who love God all things work together for good.

Romans 8:28

Recently my wife and I cancelled reservations for a trip to Spain. We were packed and ready to go. Then an accidental injury just before leaving required us to cancel. This trip was to be in celebration of our 50th wedding anniversary!

We believe God works in all circumstances for our good. That's not to say it's always easy to trust God in painful or disappointing circumstances. If only we knew what God is accomplishing! Sometimes in retrospect we see how things did work for good. Often we simply walk in trust, not by sight.

At first no one could see the good in the cross of Jesus. Only later and in the light of Easter could God's people affirm that God had created a truly Good Friday for us all!

Lord, help us to walk in trust until we see your face and you reveal all to us. Amen.

Let go: Having trouble letting go of some disappointment? Ask God for help letting go.

Read: Romans 8:18-39; Ezra 8:21-23

*Ted Zimmerman
Napa, CA*

Tuesday, August 23, 2016

God Sees Both Sides

You, Lord, who know the hearts of all.

Acts 1:24

We had been cutting grass in our old clothes, but we had to get to the pharmacy. My husband decided his T-shirt wasn't dirty and didn't change. At the pharmacy, I stepped back and noticed that the back of his shirt had enough holes to be a fishnet. When I mentioned it to him later, he joked, "But there are no holes in front."

Here was a lesson about presenting a public face and hiding a private one. God sees it all. He knows if our motivations are like the presentable front of a shirt or the sinning back side full of holes. He knew, even before we were born, what our needs are, and he's not capable of forgetting. For all that, he sent us Jesus.

Dear Lord, thank you for seeing both sides of our souls, and loving us in spite of what we are. Amen.

Rest: Rest in the knowledge that God knows our failings—even ones we can't identify—and still cares.

Read: Psalm 139; Psalm 44:21; Romans 8:26-27

*Judy Scherr
Lemay, MO*

Wednesday, August 24, 2016

Aging In Spite of Myself

So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day.

2 Corinthians 4:16

I was holding my six-year-old great niece on my lap the other day when she looked up at me and said, “You look older than the last time I saw you.” How’s that for a dose of reality?

It is healthy to affirm that we are aging and that aging is a gift to share with others each day. This reminds me of a cartoon where a woman looks into the mirror and says, “Thank goodness the wrinkles are only on the outside!”

Our faces are a road map of every smile, tear, frown, furrow and gasp of surprise we’ve experienced along life’s way ... and a reminder that God has never forsaken us. May each wrinkle take me further away from relying on myself and bring me closer to relying on God’s bountiful grace and goodness.

Dear Lord, let my reflection in the mirror be a daily reminder that you see me through every yesterday, today and tomorrow. Amen.

Consider: What do you see when you look in the mirror? Wrinkles or a road map of blessings?

Read: Romans 8:1-11; Galatians 5:16-26

Jane P. Wilke
Woodbury, MN

Thursday, August 25, 2016

Grace Received

For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

John 1:16-17

Do you still remember that acronym we learned at Sunday school for the word *grace*? GRACE = God's Riches At Christ's Expense.

It was a wonderful way to remember how the salvation we have in Christ translates into our lives. Because of Christ, God transfers the riches of his salvation into our lives as a free gift of his love for us. It is something we believe.

Yet John tells us that grace is more than just something you believe in. For John, and for us, grace is received. God's grace permeates every aspect of our lives. It includes all the spiritual, physical and material blessings that we experience as we live each day in God's care. It is the manifestation of "God with us."

Heavenly Father, thank you that I experience your grace in tangible ways in my life: in the people who bless me with their presence, in my family, in my church and home. Grace is my experience. Amen.

Reflect: Deliberately identify the expressions of God's grace to you through the day.

Read: Matthew 6:25-33

*Lionel Otto
Adelaide, Australia*

Friday, August 26, 2016

Not So Anonymous

I have called you friends.

John 15:15

A friend of mine had strange news to share, or so he claimed. Someone sent him an anonymous letter. That in itself may not seem strange; meanness seems to be running rampant these days. This letter, however, was different. This letter was written in love: “I want you to know that you are truly loved and I am blessed to have you in my life. I thank God for you every day.” Signed: “A Grateful Friend.”

I don’t know if you’ve ever received a letter like that, but if you do, I hope you put it in a safe place and read it often. Giving someone a “piece of our mind” is wrongly considered by many to be a God-given right. Giving someone a word of love is like feeding a hungry soul from the very hand of God.

Lord, long before I knew you, you sent your love to me in Jesus. Thank you. Amen.

Send: Send a note of cheer and love to someone. You don’t even have to sign it.

Read: John 15:1-17

*Edward Arle
St. Charles, MO*

Saturday, August 27, 2016

Writing Psalms

*Let everything that has breath praise the Lord!
Praise the Lord!*

Psalm 150:6

The Book of Psalms is one of the most emotional books of the Bible. From beginning to end, we hear praise and hoorays on the one hand and sorrow and sadness on the other. It seems like it could have been written by you and me, inspired by God, of course.

Not to pick favorites, but I can easily imagine the Psalms being written by people 60 years old and above. The Psalms have that touch of reality, of people who have “been there, done that,” who have both celebrated life and cursed and became angry with God. Can you identify with this?

Read through the 150 Psalms. Look for traces of your own life and the lives of family and friends. Then celebrate the fact that the whole Bible, including the Psalms, assures us of a loving and gracious Savior!

Lord, thanks for allowing us to rant and rave as the psalmists do, knowing that you hear us and still forgive us. Amen.

Today: Write your own psalm to share your joys and struggles with the Lord.

Read: Psalm 13; Psalm 150

*Rich Bimler
Bloomington, IL*

Sunday, August 28, 2016

Magnify the Lord

Oh magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt his name together!

Psalm 34:3

I wear reading glasses or “cheaters.” It was a gradual process. First, I wore them only when reading for long periods. I could still see the average print. Now, I have to pull them on for most reading. They magnify the print. The print doesn’t change, but my focus and ability to see it as it really is changes.

Jesus Christ is the way of salvation. Sometimes our focus on God can become blurred by our sinful nature, life’s demands and setbacks or even too much happiness. When this happens, which may be off and on all day long, it helps to focus on God. As today’s verse indicates, it helps to get together with other Christians and magnify or enlarge, boost and intensify our God-vision. Sunday mornings are a great time to get together and be encouraged by the pastor and fellow Christians and to be an encourager of others, extolling God’s goodness.

My God of hope, stir up your Spirit within me to praise you! Amen.

Remember: Next time you put on your glasses, remember that God is great and good.

Read: Psalm 146:1-2; Jeremiah 29:11

*Nancy Rapp
St. Louis, MO*

Monday, August 29, 2016

Music to Your Ears

May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus.

Romans 15:5

What kind of music do you enjoy? Symphonies, jazz, country-western, classic rock, Broadway musicals, opera? All of the above and more? With so much music, everyone can find the combination of notes—harmony—that is most pleasing to their ears.

Today's verse mentions harmony in another sense, that of living together agreeably. Like musical notes that combine pleasantly, God's people are encouraged to live in harmony with one another. The key to this harmony is the phrase "in accord with Christ Jesus." Harmony, unity and fellowship all are made possible by the shared faith of believers that makes them "one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28). Cherish the harmony you have with Christian friends and family. When God's people live together in harmony "in accord with Christ Jesus," it's music to his ears.

Lord, help me live in harmony with others. Amen.

Grow: Expand your circle of Christian friends by sharing your faith and God's Word.

Read: Colossians 3:14-15; 1 John 1:7

*Marj Maynard
Billings, MO*

Tuesday, August 30, 2016

Neighbors

But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?”

Luke 10:29

Traditionally we think of neighbors as those people who live on our street, but Jesus implies in the parable of the Good Samaritan that the definition of *neighbor* should be much broader than that.

“My neighbor” means my family members, people at work, my friends on Facebook, those on my email list, the checkout lady, the people I hand my business card to, old classmates, grandchildren, the lonely widow I know and an international student who attends the nearby university.

In the Gospels Jesus is depicted as a man on the move. He left his home region, going into Tyre and Sidon because he knew the people there had the same needs as people at home. This foreshadowed the purpose of his death on the cross and the resurrection: all people would be his neighbors through his blood-bought forgiveness.

O Lord Jesus, open my heart to all people that I come in contact with today. Amen.

Do: Write out a list of names of people you could make contact with today.

Read: Genesis 12: 1-3; Acts 17:1-4

*Gordon Beck
Williamsburg, VA*

Wednesday, August 31, 2016

Invasives

Some seeds fell among thorns and the thorns grew up and choked them.

Matthew 13:7

One of my retirement activities is being a part of a group that works at prairie restoration in our area. We seek to help people become a “community of stewards.” We gather seeds from native grasses and wildflowers and then plant them in new areas to help preserve a portion of our land. But we are always confronted by invasives—non-native plants that take over the landscape. We are constantly fighting these pesky “weeds.”

In our lives the big invasive is sin. It works its way into the landscape of our being. We must be vigilant in pulling out those deep-rooted invaders before they too take over our existence. The true Master Gardener has provided a way to do so. Through the gift of his Son and by the power of his Spirit we are able to grow in fertile, weeded soil.

Lord, teach me what “weeds” to pull from my life that I might grow stronger in you. Amen.

Go: Pull a few “invasives” from your yard and your life.

Read: Matthew 13:18-23

*Don Luepke
Fremont, IN*

Thursday, September 1, 2016

Variety

O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth.

Psalm 8:1

As summer begins to wane, we see signs of coming change. It's like the plant world gets tired of being only varying shades of green and decides to put on a color and light show. Each year I view this array of blazing variety with mixed emotions: I'm exhilarated by the display and energized by cooler temperatures that don't zap my energy. But I'm also reminded that this is a prelude to that time when all these growing things will be at rest and we'll not see anything but bare branches for almost six months. Praise God, who is the orchestrator of this procession from barrenness to greenness to the explosion of colors. How comforting to trust that he takes us also through the seasons of life, always guiding us toward the fullness of life in him.

Lord, help me to praise your guidance and not let worries drag me down. Amen.

Project: Make a collage on a foam or cork board of some of the prettiest fall leaves

Read: Psalm 8; 2 Corinthians 3:17 to 4:1

*Mike May
Kansas City, KS*

Friday, September 2, 2016

Four Simple Words

If God is for us, who can be against us?

Romans 8:31

One of my all-time favorite comic strips is *Peanuts*. Charlie Brown is often portrayed as a lovable loser—a child filled with endless hope and determination—but who carries around with him his own cross in the form of his failures and brokenness. In one particular comic strip, Lucy tells Charlie Brown, “Sometimes I feel we are not communicating: You, Charlie Brown, are a foul ball in the line drive of life ... You’re a missed free throw ... Do you understand? Have I made myself clear?”

There may be times when we feel like Charlie Brown; everyone and everything is against us. Yet, there is good news, summarized in just four powerful words: “God is for us.” With our hope in Christ, we have nothing to fear, for we have a great protector, our Lord God, who takes us by the hand and leads us through life.

Dear Lord, thank you for being for us, and for reconciling us to yourself through Christ Jesus. Amen.

Consider: Think of the many ways God has shown how much he is for you.

Read: Job 7:17-18

Jonathan Vierkant
Arlington Heights, IL

Saturday, September 3, 2016

Toil or Pleasure?

That everyone should eat and drink and take pleasure in all his toil—this is God’s gift to man.

Ecclesiastes 3:13

A man watched stone masons at work. “What are you doing?” he asked. “Trying to make a living.” answered one. “Building a wall,” answered the second. “Building a cathedral to the glory of God,” answered the third. For the latter, labor found its most meaningful expression.

What meaning does work hold for you? I could answer, “I don’t work anymore; I’m retired.” Why am I so busy then? Because I am not designed to do nothing. Nor am I designed to simply keep busy. I am designed by God to use the abilities he has given to glorify him, especially through service to others. He has given me many opportunities to do meaningful work in volunteer roles. Writing devotions like these is one of them. How are you bringing glory to him today?

Thank you, Lord, for giving me many opportunities to glorify you and serve others. Amen.

Consider: What in your current “workload” brings you greatest fulfillment? Why?

Read: Ecclesiastes 3:9-13; 1 Peter 4:10-11

*Ted Zimmerman
Napa, CA*

Sunday, September 4, 2016

Wages and Gifts

For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Romans 6:23

The topic of fair—or unfair—wages is big news. Workers demand higher hourly wages. Employers refuse to increase their employees' pay, fearing the resulting price hikes will force them out of business.

There is nothing unfair about the wages we deserve, wages first declared in Eden: “You are dust, and to dust you shall return” (Genesis 3:19). For our sin—our daily rebellion against God—we earn death. No strikes or demands could help us, but God mercifully took that well-earned wage onto himself. On the cross, Jesus, God in flesh, suffered the penalty of death in our place. In exchange he gives us the free gift of eternal life. There is nothing fair about it, and for that, he deserves our endless praise.

Heavenly Father, thank you for the free gift of life in Jesus. Amen.

Spent: When you pay a bill, remember the price paid for your salvation.

Read: Romans 6:20-23; Revelation 7:9-12

*Carol Geisler
Manchester, MO*

Monday, September 5, 2016

Work

Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord, and not for men.

Colossians 3:23

I mow my lawn most weeks in the summer since the grass keeps growing. I often grumble when I have to do it *again*, but I have learned to be grateful for the work. My mother, and then my husband's family, considered work the opposite of laziness, which was about equal to sin.

Some truth is embedded in that attitude, but I'm grateful I've learned to work for a different reason. It keeps me moving and provides satisfaction in fulfilling short-term goals. A newly cut lawn is evidence of a job completed. It takes me longer than it used to. I hurt more the next day, but I can still do it. For every task I complete, for every time I can say I'm able, I thank God that I learned to work.

Thank you, Lord, for the opportunities to work at beautifying our surroundings, and for the blessings in accomplishment. Amen.

Remember: It's okay to take longer, get tired or need assistance—the work is God's gift to keep us going.

Read: Ecclesiastes 2:24-25; Ecclesiastes 5:18-20; 1 Thessalonians 4:11

*Judy Scherr
Lemay, MO*

Tuesday, September 6, 2016

Using Words

He who restrains his lips is wise.

Proverbs 10:19

“Think twice before you speak!” I still can hear my mother saying these wise words.

Recently I read this little poem:

A wise old owl sat in an oak.

The more he saw the less he spoke.

The less he spoke the more he heard.

Why can't we be like that wise old bird?

In the Book of Proverbs the writer makes this observation, “In the multitude of words sin is not lacking, but he who restrains his lips is wise.” Sometimes, as we age, we talk too much. It is still wise to be careful about what we say and what we do not say.

Lord Jesus, help us to be careful in our daily conversations. Amen.

Exercise: At the close of the day recall your conversations and see how wise you were. Ask Jesus to forgive your lack of wisdom.

Read: James 1:19-27

Walter M. Schoedel
Webster Groves, MO

Wednesday, September 7, 2016

I Will Wear Purple

*For you, O Lord, are my hope, my trust, O Lord,
from my youth.*

Psalm 71:5

My aunt, who passed away at the age of 89, collected teddy bears. Her favorite was a bear who wore a purple hat because it reminded her of the poem that starts like this: “When I am old, I will wear purple (with a red hat that doesn’t go or suit me at all).”

The poem goes on to speak of greeting “old age” with a spirit of spunk and spontaneity. So it’s no surprise that she also often said that she wanted to age like the man who wrote Psalm 71 because he didn’t dwell on the challenges of aging; instead he spoke of them with faith, hope and praise.

She looked at every day as a new beginning, confident that Christ her Savior had won forgiveness for her on the cross. I learned a lot from her ... so I think I will wear purple too.

So even to old age and gray hairs, O God, do not forsake me (Psalm 71:18). Amen

Reflect: What can you do to add some spontaneity to today?

Read: Psalm 71; Isaiah 41:8-13

*Jane P. Wilke
Woodbury, MN*

Thursday, September 8, 2016

God Himself

Now may the Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God our Father ... comfort your hearts and establish them in every good work and word.

2 Thessalonians 2:16-17

Often when I have asked for help from my trusted doctor, I hear, “Dr. Franklin is busy right now, but I can send his assistant.” That’s not always what I like to hear. But we can be assured that when we seek help from our gracious God, it is God himself who listens, comforts and acts.

Sometimes when we share our troubles with a friend, we notice his attention wandering. Not so with our heavenly Friend. When we pour out our hearts, we know we have his full attention. It is the Spirit himself who helps us with these prayers. God recognizes the anguish of one he loves and promises never to forsake you.

Out of his great love, if he does not see this as the time to remove your burden or trial, he will help you carry it.

Thank you, Father, that you have sent your Son himself, to live, die and rise again—for me. Amen.

Do: Make sure the comfort and cheer you receive from God himself is spread to all who need it today.

Read: Romans 8:16; Hebrews 5:2

*Edna Jakobsky
Ft. Myers, FL*

Friday, September 9, 2016

Debt Free

Be rich in good works ... generous and ready to share.

1 Timothy 6:18

My mother had an extravagant dream. She wanted to visit Europe, and in retirement, when my parents had the resources, they joined a European tour. In a shop on the island of Murano, famous for its glass-works, my mother picked up a small perfume bottle and the stopper fell out and shattered on the floor. The \$300 price tag was beyond their budget, but they had to pay it. That evening the tour director gathered everyone together and placed \$300, collected from the other tour members, in my parents' hands. My parents were moved to tears.

Now that bottle (sans stopper) sits on a shelf in our house, and when I see it, I think about another debt that would bankrupt us all. But God instead sent his Son to die for that debt—our sins—to pay what we couldn't. We are granted eternal life—even better than a European tour.

O Lord, help us remember that a generous spirit is an echo of the love you have given us in your Son. Amen.

Give: Make a donation to a charity.

Read: 1 Timothy 6:17-19

*Sally Beck
Williamsburg, VA*

Saturday, September 10, 2016

Discarding

Godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret.

2 Corinthians 7:10

Recently I began going through material stored in a five-drawer file cabinet. I spent time discarding newspaper clippings, programs and mementos. Looking at the “stuff” reminded me of good times and not-so-good times, incidents in my life of which I am proud and incidents I now regret.

Our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, wants me—and you—to discard our remembrances of past regrets. He has forgiven us. Now it is our turn to forgive ourselves. Now is the time to accept ourselves for who we are—sinners and saints because of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. Jesus enables us to discard old feelings of defeat and self-blaming. What do you need to discard?

Lord Jesus, help to remember that I have your forgiveness—full and free. Amen.

Do: Take an inventory of your life this far. What feelings and remembrances do you need to discard and give to your forgiving Lord and Savior?

Read: Psalm 103

Paul Eggold
Greendale, WI

Sunday, September 11, 2016

God Is Always With Us

God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.

Psalm 46:1

On this September 11 we again remember the anniversary of the World Trade Center bombing. When we pause to honor the victims, let us also remember the survivors—those men and women who tirelessly toiled to remove the remains and debris, and give comfort to the workers. Remember also, those who cared for the workers and their families.

Do you remember your own feelings of insecurity and terror when this horrific act occurred? Many people flocked to churches seeking help from God. When such events occur, we can say with Paul, “For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:38-39).

Dear Father, help us to remember your love is our true security at all times. Amen.

Ask: Pray for and with those who are worried and anxious.

Read: Psalm 46; Romans 8

*Ann Eissfeldt
Ballwin, MO*

Monday, September 12, 2016

Jonah Moments

Then Jonah prayed to the Lord his God from the belly of the fish.

Jonah 2:1

“Nineveh? You’ve always been right, Lord, but Nineveh? You don’t know what you’re asking!” Jonah said and ran in the opposite direction.

“Cancer? I can’t, Lord. You don’t know what you’re asking.” “Alone, after forty years of marriage? You can’t really want me to live like this!” And we, like Jonah, try to run away from God.

But God wasn’t finished with Jonah, and he’s not finished with you. After three days and nights in the belly of a fish, Jonah prayed, “I called out to the Lord, out of my distress, and he answered me ... Salvation belongs to the Lord!” (Jonah 2:2,9). God caused the fish to vomit Jonah up on dry land, and God called him again to go to Nineveh.

God hears our cries of distress from the belly of our deepest problems. He answers, he saves and he gives us another opportunity to live for him.

Rescue us, Lord, from all of our troubles, for you are our salvation. Amen.

Run: Instead of running from God in times of trouble, run to him in prayer.

Read: Jonah 1-4

*Eileen Ritter
Grand Haven, MI*

Tuesday, September 13, 2016

Getting Grace

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing: it is the gift of God.

Ephesians 2:8

“Mom, I’m going to give presents to my friends on my birthday,” 7-year-old Emma said. “Why?” her mom asked. “Then they’ll get grace.” It’s not easy for second-graders or adults to “get” or understand grace. While we were dead in our sins, God approached us with his great mercy and forgiving love. He placed all of our sin on Jesus, who had no sin (2 Corinthians 5:21), and Jesus said, “It’s my fault” and walked to the cross in our place. Heaven is ours with no merit on our part. We can’t understand it, but we can accept it through faith in Jesus. I don’t know if Emma really gave presents to her friends to help them get grace, but they will get it when the Holy Spirit works faith in their hearts.

Father, thank you for the gift of grace which I don’t deserve but gladly accept in Jesus. In his name. Amen.

Do: Respond to God’s grace by doing favors for others, just because you love them.

Read: Ephesians 2:1-10; Ephesians 3:1-20; 2 Corinthians 5:14-21

*Ruth Geisler
Aliso Viejo, CA*

Wednesday, September 14, 2016

The Holy Cross

For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved, it is the power of God.

1 Corinthians 1:18

Many congregations, schools and hospitals have the name “Holy Cross” to honor the cross of Christ. The origins of the September 14 festival called Holy Cross Day go back to 335 A.D., when a magnificent church was dedicated in Jerusalem to mark the sites of Jesus’ crucifixion, burial and resurrection. These were rediscovered during excavations initiated by Helena, the mother of Emperor Constantine.

Like Good Friday, Holy Cross Day is focused on the passion and death of Christ, but it is a celebration because we live in the resurrection Light. Christians focus on the cross by which our Lord Jesus reconciled the world to God and glorified the Father’s name. Jesus said, “And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself ”(John 12:32).

Lord, help me to lift high the cross through the love of Christ that I proclaim and share. Amen.

Praise: Sing or recite the hymn “In the Cross of Christ I Glory.”

Read: John 12:27-32; Romans 6:3-6

*Paul A. Metzler
Shrewsbury, MO*

Thursday, September 15, 2016

The Here and Now

This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.

Psalm 118:24

Sometimes we don't appreciate our current moments. We may be thinking about our upcoming appointments or rehashing the past. We can get caught up in what we should have done differently.

What is going on right now? Do you know? Or are you lost in your thoughts—the world of the past or future? Take a few times today to “relish the moment.” Whatever that moment is (even if it's unpleasant), ask yourself some questions: What do I hear, see, smell, etc.? Use your senses fully. Who is here? What does our relationship need right now?

What is God doing in my life right now? I am forgiven. So is the person with me. God is with me right now. How can I use my spiritual gifts or the fruits of the Spirit?

This is the day the Lord has made. Rejoice and be glad in it!

Thank you, Lord, for this very moment. Amen.

Recall: Remember that God is with you, right now, wherever you are.

Read: Matthew 28:20; Hebrews 13:5

*Stephenie Hovland
Portage, WI*

Friday, September 16, 2016

A Late-Night Snack

And they all ate and were satisfied.

Mark 6:42

You know the feeling. You're hosting a gathering. During the evening you're busy serving food, making sure no one goes hungry. The moment the last person says goodbye, you realize you're famished. You know that unless you eat a bite or two, you won't sleep. You nosh on what's left in some of the serving dishes, and wash it down. Four minutes later you're ready for sleep.

Jesus had been teaching thousands that day. The disciples helped with crowd control so people could take in his life-sustaining words. But they still had a long walk home. When our bodies are hungry, they shout at us. May we listen even more intently when our spirits are yelling for the comfort food of God's promises. He discerns each of our needs, and fills them in perfect sequence.

Father, thank you for knowing what we need, when we need it. Thank you for filling us. Amen.

Give thanks: Give thanks for the Bread of life.

Read: Psalm 4:4-8

Deane Schuessler
Woodbury, MN

Saturday, September 17, 2016

Keep It Simple

God is love.

1 John 4:8

Living God's way is not as complicated as we sometimes make it. A scribe once asked Jesus, "Which commandment is the most important of all?" Jesus' answer was, in essence, quite simple: "Love God ... and love your neighbor."

"Love God" by seeking his presence. Cherish his Word and do what it says. Give God praise for creation and salvation. Worship him "with all your heart, soul, mind and strength," wholly and completely.

"Love your neighbor as yourself," by thinking about their needs more than your own. Listen, support, uplift and share. Be patient and kind. Be known for your forgiveness and compassion.

Simple, yes. Easy, no. It is only accomplished by God's power and grace within us.

Guide me, Lord, as I seek to know you and share your amazing love with others. Amen.

Take action: Enjoy doing simple acts of love for others today.

Read: Mark 12:28-34; 1 Corinthians 13; Micah 6:8

Sharolyn Sander
Lincoln, NE

Sunday, September 18, 2016

The Best Part of Waking Up

Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.

Mark 2:17

A little boy surprised his grandmother by bringing her a cup of coffee. As the grandmother sipped her coffee, she noticed three of those little green plastic army men in the bottom of her cup. She asked, “Honey, why would three little green army men be in the bottom of my cup?” To which her grandson replied, “You know, Grandma, it’s like on TV: ‘The best part of waking up is soldiers (Folgers) in your cup.’”

What is the best part of waking up for you? Perhaps the best part is to see a familiar face or hear a familiar voice of a loved one? Or perhaps the best part is knowing that we have a God who really cares for us—a God who touches the untouchable, loves the unlovable and forgives the unforgiveable for the sake of Christ, who heals every sin-sick soul.

Lord, give us joy daily in remembering your love and care for us. Amen.

Do: Visit with someone who is discouraged.

Read: Psalm 118:24; Isaiah 60:1

Jonathan Vierkant
Arlington Heights, IL

Monday, September 19, 2016

Time to Refocus

When I am afraid, I put my trust in you.

Psalm 56:3

Clara was nervous as she sat in the examination room waiting for her doctor to return with her test results. In the midst of her anxiety, she forced her mind to focus on Scriptures she had memorized over the previous few weeks:

“You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you, because he trusts in you” (Isaiah 26:3).

“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid” (John 14:27).

“Behold, I am with you always” (Matthew 28:20).

By the time the doctor entered the room, Clara’s nervousness had been replaced by peace, the kind of peace that comes only from God.

Lord, when I’m in a hard place, help me focus on your Word. Amen.

Do: Write three “fear-busting” Scriptures on a 3 x 5 card and begin to memorize them this week.

Read: Psalm 46

*Carolyn I. Jones
Westerville, OH*

Tuesday, September 20, 2016

A Great State to Live In!

Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand.

Romans 5:2

I live in a state known for its “four seasons”—drought, fire, flood and earthquake! Many people, including myself, choose to live here. Is it because when we really want snow, we can drive to it?

As Christians, no matter where we live, there is another state we inhabit—the state of God’s grace. We were relocated there on the day of our baptism. We enjoy living there no matter what the weather or circumstances. We live and die there in the assurance of future relocation to an even better place. With the aid of God’s Spirit we seek to live as grateful and responsible citizens of this state. We do not begrudge others moving to this state—we invite them. What a wonderful place to live!

Thank you, Father, through Jesus our Lord, for granting us to live in the great state of your grace. Amen.

Invite: Reach out today to someone who needs an invitation to move to this state of grace.

Read: Romans 5:1-11; 1 Corinthians 15:1-11

*Ted Zimmerman
Napa, CA*

Wednesday, September 21, 2016

The Strength to Do It

I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

Philippians 4:13

Dr. Bennet Omalu, the wise Nigerian doctor in the movie *Concussion*, does an autopsy on a young NFL player and discovers that he died from brain damage. Dr. Omalu hesitates to reveal his findings because it means facing the powerful American institution that owns the one day of the week the church used to own—Sunday. His wife reminds him that God will give him the strength to do whatever God sets before him.

What God sets before us may not always be what we want to endure, either. No matter how we look at it, there are some situations that seemingly never change.

Jesus faced the pain, the cruelty and the embarrassment of going to the cross and was moved to pray in the Garden of Gethsemane that it would be removed, but his Father instead gave him the strength to go through with it. He will do the same for us.

O Lord, birth in me your strength to face the challenges of this day. Amen.

Pray: Pray for strength to face your challenges.

Read: Joshua 1:6-10; Matthew 26:36-46

*Gordon Beck
Williamsburg, VA*

Thursday, September 22, 2016

Wisdom From on High

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.

Proverbs 9:10

Wisdom is a common Bible word. The world defines it as a bundling of five different things, starting with the raw *intelligence* with which all of us are born. They add in the *knowledge* and the *experiences* collected in life to the *insight* and *intuition* we develop. Those five in combination are what Paul calls “the wisdom of this world.” One thing is missing for our use. The definition lacks a basic biblical ingredient known to us as “the fear of the Lord.” Fear? Really?

Given all that the English word *fear* stirs up in people, a better and more accurate translation of “the fear of the Lord” is “the reverence or awe in the Lord.” Our world and everything in it has been, and still is, in our Father’s hands. Our Father’s hands! Fear disappears for us when we know that. We view our Father’s world filled with wisdom from on high.

*By your Spirit, Father, fill me with true wisdom.
Amen.*

Search: Read the Scriptures to find true wisdom.

Read: Psalms 19:1; 1 Corinthians 3:19

*Charles S. Mueller, Sr.
Bloomington, IL*

Friday, September 23, 2016

God First

But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

Matthew 6:33

First things first. There is a priority to most things. Put the key in the car before starting it, for example, and crack the egg before scrambling it.

We are children of the King, headed to eternal life with God forever. God's greatest gift of salvation through Jesus is a fact. This fact is the starting place for every breath we take, every minute of the day—priority number one. It is the happy, never-ending reality in which we live. We have God's constant love and protection, his gifts of forgiveness and grace. By the time we bring our needs to God we realize that our needs are met by him, whose first priority is our salvation through his Son Jesus. It is a finished fact and our glorious reality! Let your joy bubble up and over to everyone you meet. Share this Good News with them.

Lord, you are the author of my faith. I trust that you have accomplished my salvation and will see it to completion when I see you face-to-face. Amen.

Praise: Sing "Just as I Am" and "It Is Well with My Soul" and live joy-filled.

Read: Philippians 1:6; Mark 10:15

*Nancy Rapp
St. Louis, MO*

Saturday, September 24, 2016

New Every Morning

The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.

Lamentations 3:22-23

This verse always creates a picture in my mind—rays of sunshine streaming through the clouds to shine on the earth. Although clouds sometimes block our view of the sun, we know it continues to shine.

The troubles of this life sometimes cloud our understanding, and we question God's never-ending grace and love. But God is faithful to his promises in times of illness or pain, as well as in times of great joy. He broke through earthly clouds of sin and darkness with the light of his only Son, Jesus. Our Savior's perfect life, sacrificial death and glorious resurrection are proof of God's constant love and mercy. Allow the rays of this Sonshine to brighten your outlook today.

Lord, open my eyes to see your faithfulness toward me. Amen.

Notice: Look for new "pictures" of God's faithful love and mercy.

Read: Deuteronomy 7:9; Psalm 100

*Sharolyn Sander
Lincoln, NE*

Sunday, September 25, 2016

My Favorite Place

And he came out and went, as was his custom, to the Mount of Olives, and the disciples followed him.

Luke 22:39

I can understand how Jesus loved it on the Mount of Olives. Luke tells us that it was the place to which Jesus would often return. What did that place mean for Jesus?

I can only guess, but I am sure that it was many of the things my favorite place means to me. My favorite place is my study and garden. It is there where I do most of my reading, writing and praying. I look out the window at our garden, which is an extension of where I like to be. This is the place where my Lord and I do our talking. Pictures of my family are there. Signs of my faith are around. It is a place of retreat, in the study, and a place I can share my life and faith with others, in the garden.

If the Mount of Olives was anything like that for Jesus, I can understand well why he would often want to retreat there.

Lord Jesus, thank you for filling my favorite place with a sense of your presence. Amen.

Pause: Think about what your favorite place means to you.

Read: Luke 22:39-46

*Lionel Otto
Adelaide, Australia*

Monday, September 26, 2016

Barber Shop Care

So that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.

2 Corinthians 1:4

I proudly go to a traditional men's barber shop where jokes and stories blend with the sound of scissors and other tools of the trade. There over the years, intergenerational relationships are built and genuine caring takes place. Last week my barber asked me and my prayer contacts to pray for a pastor who is struggling with cancer and has a gravely ill son. The pastor and his father were longtime customers whom I also know. That's barber shop care, beyond hair.

Paul demonstrates a strong caring relationship with the believers in Corinth because of the grace and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. He offers comfort to those suffering affliction and welcomes their comfort in his sufferings for Christ.

Lord, thank you for places where we are safe to give and receive your love. Amen.

Look: Find a "barber shop" place to give and receive care this week.

Read: 2 Corinthians 1:1-11

*Stephen J. Carter
Oakville, MO*

Tuesday, September 27, 2016

Retired?

Come away by yourselves to a desolate place and rest a while.

Mark 6:31

The thought of retirement can be unsettling. We are afraid of losing our identities that are so often tied to our work or raising our children. Perhaps we are in the midst of losing the status of a name plate on an office door, no longer receiving a regular paycheck, coping with an “empty nest” or discontinuing our busy, daily routines. It can leave us feeling scared of our future due to finances or perhaps feeling like we are no longer needed.

But our identities are in Christ and we can rest in that above all things.

We can rest in the promise that the God who created and redeemed us has also called us through our Baptism to have purpose in his kingdom, no matter what our status is in this world.

Lord Jesus, I look forward to pausing for rest, so that you can renew and allow me to rest in my identity in you alone. You will always have a kingdom purpose for me. Amen.

Praise: Thank and praise God no matter where you are and what he has planned for you.

Read: Psalm 4:8; Proverbs 9:10-11

*Lori Trinche
Westmont, IL*

Wednesday, September 28, 2016

Grandma's Button Box

Bind them on your fingers; write them on the tablet of your heart.

Proverb 7:3

My grandmother lived with my family when I was a child. She had a metal box in which she kept hundreds of spare buttons. I loved to play in them by running my fingers through them and watch the varied shapes and colors tumble about in my hand. Sometimes Grandma would give me a darning needle and I would string buttons on the thread while she told me about their origins. It was like having a box of memories in my possession.

We hold in our hearts the memories of all that God has done for us, and we can share those memories with future generations. What is the best memory of all? God sent his Son to be our Savior. We have good news to share!

Father in heaven, help us remember and share the many ways you have blessed our lives. Amen.

Remember: Share your memories of the many blessings God has showered upon you.

Read: 1 Chronicles 16:12; Psalms 77:11

*Gloria Doty
Fort Wayne, IN*

Thursday, September 29, 2016

Pay It Forward

The Son of Man came ... to give his life as a ransom for many.

Mark 10:45

“Pay it forward” has become a popular encouragement to donate to a cause, surprise a stranger with a good deed or give to others as we have been blessed. On a recent trip, my husband and I picked up munchies for our hotel room. A young mother deposited her beautiful three-month-old child in a carrier on the floor while she paid her bill. We oohed and ahhed and made funny faces as only we “grey heads” can do. The mother suddenly asked the checker to include our purchases on her bill. We protested every which way. She whispered to us, “I was mean to someone today.” Reluctantly we agreed while we promised to pray for her family and “pay it forward” for someone else.

Resuming our travels, it hit us: That was exactly what Jesus did on the cross for us. Knowing we would “be mean to many someones,” he paid it forward for us in advance.

*Thank you, dear Savior, for paying for our sins.
Amen.*

Do: Pay it forward.

Read: Luke 10:25-37

*Lois Scheer
San Diego, CA*

Friday, September 30, 2016

Pilgrimage

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

Psalm 119:105

I often think of my faith journey as a pilgrimage with God. Step by step we move along together through my life. Sometimes the path is easy, and I seem to stay on course. At other times, I walk along rocky, craggy slopes, barely moving forward and hoping I don't fall.

My pilgrimage with God is unique to me, and yours is only for you. Don't compare with others. You have lessons to learn, people to meet and life to live.

As we look back over the path we took to get here, we may have some regrets for the missteps we took. But do we remember to celebrate with gratitude all the many beautiful moments? Keep on course—God will light your way. Take one more step.

Dear God, You have brightened up my path, and I am so grateful. Amen.

Draw: Make a map of your pilgrimage of faith. Mark each guidepost of your journey.

Read: Proverbs 12:28; Psalm 16:11

*Annette L. Sherwood
St. Louis, MO*

HOLY HABITS for **HOPE-FULL HEALTH**

Here are some HOLY HABIT questions to enable you to hopefully REST more this summer. Discuss these questions with other people. Use them to refresh your own mind regarding your own RESTing patterns and needs. Add other questions and reflections as you go.

1. How do you find REST these days?
2. What makes you feel RESTful?
3. How can other people help create a RESTful spirit within you?
4. When someone says, “Get some REST,” how do you respond to their suggestion?
5. Do you feel more RESTed by doing things or by just sitting and relaxing? Remember Satchel Paige’s quote, “Sometimes I sit and think and other times I just sit!”
6. How can you encourage others to REST?
7. Discuss with others the importance of using mind, body and spirit in our RESTing activities.
8. Do you REST better while you are alone or while you are traveling or with others? Why?
9. What other questions and activities will help you to REST more?
10. Free one: “... so on the seventh day God rested”!

What a great idea, as we all REST assured in God’s love!

Hope-Full Praying

Safe Travels

Highways and airports are booming with summer travelers, Lord. Give them safe journeys, patient minds and pleasant weather. As vacationers vacate and families become familiar with each other again, bring joy, grace and hope to conversations, whether they be around a table, in a car or even at the local coffee shop. Amen.

Reuniting with Friends

Lord, bless all summer reunions and special times with old friends. Help us remember that a friend is a chat when we are lonely, a smile when we are sad, and a guide when we are searching. Thanks for being our friend, Jesus, to show us what true friendship really is. In your name. Amen.

The Blessings of Sunshine

Longer days bring more sunshine, Lord. Thank you for brightening up our lives this summer. Even when it is cloudy and gray, remind us that your Son is always shining in and through us, bringing the gladnesses of life into the sadnesses of life. Shine, Jesus, shine. Amen.

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