

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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Sunday, October 1, 2017

It Rained (Alleluia!)

I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers.

Ephesians 1:16

The trick to serenity is to be thankful when there is nothing to be thankful for. Before you fall asleep each night, think of something that happened that day that made you thankful—one will do, but a dozen would be better.

The other day I made applesauce, remembering the recipe my great-grandmother Elsie used. The applesauce and the memories of my grandmother were good. I was joyful. I unscrewed the tight, heavy lid of a pickle jar I didn't think I could manage. I was joyful. A family picnic was rained out. I stayed home answering some correspondence, reading a little, and phoning an old friend a thousand miles away. That rainy day had joy in it.

I think about the people who are reading my words, and when I think my simple words may bring a little joy and comfort, I am thankful.

Lord Jesus, make me thankful for the people around me. Amen.

Reflect: Are you the kind of person people are thankful to know?

Read: Job 5:10; James 5:7

*Ron Beathard
Harrison, OH*

Monday, October 2, 2017

Mindset

Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.

Colossians 3:2

It seems like my mindset has a lot to do with how my day goes. If I start my day with a thankful attitude, everything flows smoother. On the days when I am cranky and crabby, everything is a struggle.

This year, I have been writing in a gratitude journal, and keeping my focus on all the things I can be grateful for each day. I haven't been perfect at it, but I can tell it has made a positive difference in my life.

Practicing gratitude helps me to be mindful of all that God has provided for me. The more I focus on gratitude, the more I grow in awareness of the blessings given to me each day. God is generous, and I am so grateful.

Generous God, I am so very grateful for the daily blessings I receive. Help me continue to grow in awareness of your care. Amen.

Share: Share a kindness with someone today.

Read: 1 Chronicles 16:8; Psalm 57:9

*Annette L. Sherwood
St. Louis, MO*

Tuesday, October 3, 2017

Seasons

He made the moon to mark the seasons; the sun knows its time for setting.

Psalm 104:19

Spring to summer, summer to fall, winter to spring—the pattern continues year after year. Sometimes spring is cooler or warmer, sometimes winter is particularly cold. But time and again the pattern continues. Each season brings its surprises.

The predictability of the seasons is a good reminder of God's faithfulness. Even when we are less sure of ourselves, we can depend on God's faithfulness to us. How fortunate for us that his faithfulness is not dependent on our steadfastness. We waver like the wind and rain, but God is with us in all that we do. His calming Spirit is like the spring breeze that wipes away the memories of the cold winter. The beauties of autumn inspire artistry and song. All are gifts of our gracious God.

Thank you, dear Lord, for your faithful companionship and for the gifts of your creation. Amen.

Share: Share with a younger person what it was that you liked about a particular season.

Read: Ecclesiastes 3:1; Galatians 6:8-10

*Gail Lutze
Valparaiso, IN*

Wednesday, October 4, 2017

Fixer-Upper

Cast away from you all the transgressions that you have committed, and make yourselves a new heart and a new spirit!

Ezekiel 18:31

Our culture seems obsessed with the television programs dealing with renovating homes. We enjoy watching the transformation from decrepit to a showplace-quality property. Of course, there is a hefty price tag attached for those renovations.

Local realtors often advertise homes that are not in the best condition as *fixer-uppers*. When you see that description defining a property, it is certain there is a lot of work to do before it will be livable.

How would God describe us if we were “on the market”? Are parts of our lives sagging and broken and definitely in need of repair? The answer would be a resounding yes. God takes our fixer-upper lives and does a complete remodel, starting with our heart. The cost for this was extremely high—the life of his Son.

Lord, take our weathered lives and transform us into the new creatures you designed us to be. Amen.

Think: While watching a makeover show, think about your own makeover.

Read: Psalm 98:1; Isaiah 43:19

*Gloria Doty
Ft. Wayne, IN*

Thursday, October 5, 2017

Look to Jesus

Looking to Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith.

Hebrews 12:2

The world today does not look to Jesus for salvation. The world looks to fast cars, to movie stars, to astrology and to athletes for directions in life. The author of Hebrews states that we should “look to Jesus” as the only Savior. We are to look to him by faith to be saved. Jesus is the author and perfecter of our faith. He is the champion, leader and forerunner of our faith. Jesus works to author and perfect faith.

Jesus is our focus and inspiration for spiritual matters. What the world offers to us are only temporary pleasures. We are to look away from earthly and sinful distractions, and to look intently upon Jesus as our source of salvation. We are to look away from other things that lead us away from Jesus and then look only to Jesus as our Lord and Savior. Look to Jesus to be blessed, forgiven, justified and renewed for Christian living.

Jesus, thank you for being the author of my faith life. Amen.

Look: Today look to Jesus for inspiration and direction.

Read: Hebrews 2:10

*David Bever
Las Vegas, NV*

Friday, October 6, 2017

Happy Harvest

Other seeds fell on good soil and produced grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.

Matthew 13:8

Crops of many kinds ripen for harvest in the fall. Seeds that were planted months ago in good soil took root and grew to maturity. Jesus talks about seeds and harvest. He compares the fruitfulness of seeds in good soil to a person: “This is the one who hears the word and understands it. He indeed bears fruit” (Matthew 13:23).

Believers want to be “one who hears the word and understands it.” We want the seed of God’s Word to take root and bear fruit. First comes hearing, as we read and study God’s Word. The understanding part, thankfully, is guided by the Holy Spirit, sent by God, “that we might understand the things freely given us by God” (1 Corinthians 2:12). Guided by the Spirit into understanding and faith, we happily receive God’s assurance in 2 Corinthians 9:10, that he will “increase the harvest of your righteousness.”

Lord of the harvest, bless my hearing and understanding that I may bear fruit for you. Amen.

Multiply: Sow the seed of God’s Word to others.

Read: 2 Corinthians 9:10-15; Psalm 126:4-6

*Marj Maynard
Billings, MO*

Saturday, October 7, 2017

Steady

He made my feet like the feet of a deer and set me secure on the heights.

Psalm 18:33

Most of our family vacations have been spent hiking in national parks. We've roamed 49 of the 50 United States, treading various heights and terrain, quite confident in our skills to handle even trails marked "difficult." Our last couple of trips, however, I've noticed that I'm a bit more unsteady on uneven terrain. Due to decreased flexibility that comes with age, I don't trust my footing as much as I used to. I may have to stick to easier trails these days, but when it comes to my faith, I don't have to worry.

God promises to keep us steady and secure even when we encounter difficult paths. With our footing firm in Christ, we will not fall. When we're weak, he gives us strength to conquer any obstacle gracefully and confidently. We can't trust ourselves, but we can always trust Jesus to keep our faith steady.

Jesus, remove my fear and give me a steady faith that trusts in you. Amen.

Hang on: When you encounter rough roads this week, cling to Jesus in prayer.

Read: Psalm 40:1-3; Proverbs 3:5-6

*Sandi Geis
St. Louis, MO*

Sunday, October 8, 2017

Childlike Faith

Jesus said ... “Have you never heard, ‘Out of the mouth of infants and nursing babies you have prepared praise’?”

Matthew 21:16

I thought I was doing a good job of teaching my grandchildren about Jesus’ love and care, but my young granddaughter taught me a valuable lesson. When she hurt her arm going to bed, she prayed that Jesus would make it better. The next morning, her mom asked if her arm was okay. Emma replied, “He didn’t get around to it yet.”

Emma wasn’t angry or upset because her prayer wasn’t answered yet; she trusted that Jesus would take care of it in his own time. I don’t always have that kind of trusting faith. I sometimes become impatient when my prayers aren’t answered quickly or in the way that I expected. I need to remember that my prayers are always heard and answered in God’s time and way.

God, thank you for always hearing my prayers and answering them in a way that’s best for me. Amen.

Talk: Talk about Jesus with a young child and really listen to what he or she says.

Read: Matthew 7:7-11

*Jeanette Dall
Batavia, IL*

Monday, October 9, 2017

Finding God

Let the children come to me ... for to such belongs the kingdom of God.

Mark 10:14

In the Sunday service when it is time for the children's sermon, they will joyfully race up to the altar where the pastor is seated on the stairs. After a prayer he tells a story that ties in with the day's lesson. One Sunday a little boy, about 5, was running up the main aisle with a puzzled look on his face. He turned around, headed back to the altar, stood there momentarily, turned, took the same trip again. Halfway up the aisle he smiled broadly, spun around, ran back to the altar steps, turned left, raced past the front row pews, and ran up the side aisle. The lost parents welcomed their lamb with open arms.

There are times in our life when we lose sight of our heavenly Father. He will always happily welcome us back into his loving embrace.

Help us to find you in all the circumstances of our lives. Amen.

Find: Look for a special object in your home that reminds you of your heavenly Father.

Read: Luke 15:1-7; Luke 18:15-27

*Edna Jakobsky
Ft. Meyers, FL*

Tuesday, October 10, 2017

Shelter of the Most High

Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain.

Psalm 127:1

Near the end of my first retirement home tour I noticed an elderly resident sitting alone in the hall, staring out a window. Somewhat apprehensively, I stopped to see if he would notice me. He looked me in the eye and proclaimed cheerfully, "I can watch the seasons change from this spot. Look at this lovely tree and the valley beyond. I really like living here!"

This feeble looking gentleman's gratefulness overflowed into words that reassured me. What power this man was able to share through his gratitude!

How often do we stop to appreciate our dwelling place? We are fulfilled only when we open our eyes to God's generosity.

Lord, open my heart to a new perspective on my home today. I feel your love in the way you provide for me. Amen.

Look: Examine the place where you live. Find something comforting you have taken for granted and give thanks.

Read: 2 Corinthians 1:3-4; Psalm 91:1

*Lisa Heule
Littleton, CO*

Wednesday, October 11, 2017

Centuries of Thanks

For I am sure that neither ... things present nor things to come ... will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Romans 8:38-39

My parents would have celebrated their 100th birthdays this year. Mom and Dad grew up in horse-and-buggy days. By the end of their lives, they had encountered jet travel and computers.

Incredible changes over one century create wonder and concern. The future “things to come” mentioned in today’s verse may seem exciting to some but scary to others. The same is true of “things present.” The apostle Paul’s message is that whatever happens, whether exciting or scary, nothing in all creation can separate us from God’s love through Christ.

As we look back with thanksgiving on God’s blessings, we see how the God of all centuries loved us and sent Jesus to be our Savior. With grateful hearts, we praise God for the inseparable bond we have with him through Jesus Christ.

Thank you, Lord, for enfolding me in an enduring bond of love through your Son, Jesus. Amen.

Pass it on: Love others as Christ loves you.

Read: Romans 8:31-39

*Marj Maynard
Billings, MO*

Thursday, October 12, 2017

Remember Your People

I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a servant of the church at Cenchreae ... Greet Prisca and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus.

Romans 16:1-3

I am always amazed at the meticulous way St. Paul remembers in his letters to the churches the people whose lives have touched his. His mention of them is personal, deliberate and filled with emotion. He thanks God for them.

It reminds me of something that happens every time we receive these *Hope-Full Living* devotions. Not only are the devotions thankfully received, but the writers are remembered with thankfulness, and God is praised for blessing us through these people.

People through whom our lives are blessed are precious gifts of God. We can bless them in a special way when we tell them the blessing they have been to us.

Lord, you fill my life with people of blessing. I thank you for them, as I thank them for the blessing they have brought me. Amen.

Write: Like St. Paul, write down the names of the people who have blessed you, and what their blessing is.

Read: Romans 16

*Lionel Otto
Adelaide, Australia*

Friday, October 13, 2017

What Kind of Blanket Are You?

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord, Jesus Christ, who comforts us in all our affliction.

2 Corinthians 1:3-4

People are like blankets. Blankets are used to cover up things, and we often cover up what we don't want others to see about us. There are horse blankets that are scratchy, wet blankets that put a damper on everything and "Linus blankets" that little ones drag around to feel secure.

Another kind of blanket is called a comforter. All of us have "chilly times" in our lives, when we are lonely, ill or worried. God comforts us. Jesus promises, "I will never leave you." Perhaps the worst chill is the cold blast of guilt, and for that God has the warmest words: "Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem and tell her ... that her iniquity is pardoned, that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins" (Isaiah 40:1-2). We are comforters when we share God's comfort with others.

O Lord, comfort me to comfort others. Amen.

Think: Think of ways you can be a comforter.

Read: Romans 12:14-16

*Eldor Kaiser
Lenexa, KS*

Saturday, October 14, 2017

The Biblical Yugo

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations.

Matthew 28:19

You might remember a short-lived automobile that was introduced in 1985 called the Yugo, the most affordable car sold in the United States. With a base price of \$3,990, it was thousands cheaper than the next car up. As soon as it was announced that the Yugo would go on sale, people stormed the dealerships and put down deposits. They did this before even seeing the cars, much less driving them. But the car was deeply flawed and the company went bankrupt within four years.

But the Bible is filled with God's "You Go's" which are sound and last forever. Often the second person pronoun is missing, but the message is clear. "Neither do I condemn you; go, and from now on sin no more" (John 8: 11). "Go out to the highways and hedges and compel people to come in, that my house may be filled" (Luke 14:23).

Lord, your directives are clear and intended for me. Lead and I will follow. Amen.

Go: Today, You Go and share Jesus' love with someone in need.

Read: Ruth 1:16; Exodus 4:12

*Don Luepke
Fremont, IN*

Sunday, October 15, 2017

Relaxing or Resting

Come to me ... and I will give you rest.

Matthew 11:28

We learn early how to relax. That's a good thing. But relaxing is not the same thing as resting. Relaxing is what we do for ourselves (that's good!), but resting is God's business. It's his gift to those who walk by faith in Jesus. It is because he loves us that he wants us to rest.

Relaxing can bring us many good things, but it cannot bring us peace with our Creator (Romans 5:1). Resting in the finished work of Jesus will. Relaxing can ease our aches and pains (that's good!)—but it cannot heal the pain and guilt of our sin. Resting in the knowledge that “there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:1) does. Relaxing can re-energize us for our daily tasks (that's good!), but it cannot tell us that our sins, though as scarlet, are now “white as snow.” Isaiah 1:18 tells us that.

Ah, that's better, now we are resting; now we can relax.

Lord Jesus, give me the rest I long for today. Amen.

Share: What passages in God's Word bring rest to you?

Read: Romans 5:1

*David Boyd
Staunton, VA*

Monday, October 16, 2017

Teamwork

A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.

Ecclesiastes 4:12

Often I find I can't go it alone. I can no longer do things I used to do by myself. I need help. I need to be a part of a team effort. I have learned to give thanks ever so much for that. I am so grateful for all those members of my family or friends who are on board with me as a team. I no longer have to do it alone. I like being part of a team.

The writer of the book of Ecclesiastes must have had teamwork in mind when he wrote, "Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken" (Ecclesiastes 4:12). We are a team of three—our triune God, our loved ones and ourselves. What a team!

My Lord and my God, you are a permanent part of my team with those who stand by me day after day. Thank you for each and every one of them. Amen.

Ask yourself: Are there people who need you to be part of their team?

Read: Ecclesiastes 4

*Jerrold L. Nichols
Fort Wayne, IN*

Tuesday, October 17, 2017

The Empty Vase

Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever.

Psalm 107:1

I like to imagine that each morning we receive an empty vase and are faced with the choice of how to fill it. We may notice that our vase holds only weeds, reflecting our worries, frustrations and aches and pains, or we may choose to fill our vase with flowers of vivid color and perfumed scent. Even on a challenging day, it is possible to search with an open and thankful heart for a flower for our vase. The “flower” may be a refreshing cup of tea, the kind smile of a friend, a Bible verse that speaks to our heart or a treasured memory.

The choice of how we fill the vase is ours alone. By suppertime we will either be left with a tangle of weeds or an exquisite bouquet. I pray that your vase overflows with the beauty that only thankfulness brings.

Fill me with your love and grace, O Lord, that I might bloom where I am planted. Amen.

List: List the simple things you have appreciated today, and thank God for them.

Read: Psalm 118:1-17

*Kerry Osborne
Sydney, Australia*

Wednesday, October 18, 2017

Half an Hour

How long, O Lord?

Psalm 13:1

“How long till we get to Grandma’s house?” “How long is it till lunch?” “How long till church is over?” My young son’s questions drove his older sisters crazy, until they found the perfect solution. No matter what he asked, they answered “Half an hour.” Since he was too young to understand minutes and hours, he was satisfied with their answer. He trusted that they, who knew how to tell time, knew how long it would be and had the situation under control.

“How long, Lord, how long?” Will my lonely days stretch on into years? Will the struggles of aging go on forever? How long, Lord, must I wait to meet my loved ones already with you in heaven? Our human minds cannot answer these questions. But like little children, we trust the One who holds all of time and eternity in his nail-pierced hands.

A thousand years in your sight, Lord, are as yesterday when it is past. Help us to remember that our times are in your hands. Amen.

Wait patiently: God has promised to make all things new in his time.

Read: Psalm 90

*Eileen Ritter
Byron Center, MI*

Thursday, October 19, 2017

The Power of God

I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes.

Romans 1:16

The Gospel, the good news of God's salvation in the person and work of Jesus, is the power of Almighty God. Any good news is powerful. It can bring a smile to one's face. It can be reconciling. It can be forgiving. The good news of God's Gospel is all of that and much, much more. It is spiritual "dynamite"; the Gospel is that powerful.

We can feel powerless sometimes, can't we? If you had all power, what would you do? God has all power, and he sacrificed his Son for humankind! The power of that good news is yours today. Be thankful for God's powerful love. Be glad that you are his child. He treasures you so much!

God of power and might, thank you for the real power of the Gospel to save me. Amen.

Practice: Practice the power of God's love by sharing it with someone today.

Read: Psalm 20

*Don Schatz
Kenmore, WA*

Friday, October 20, 2017

A Window for Your Mind

The appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus ... brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.

2 Timothy 1:10

Windows let in sunlight and fresh air into our homes! A house—or a mind—without a window is not much better than a cold, dark cave.

Faith in Christ Jesus is a window that enables us to see through the dark clouds—the blank walls that limit our vision in troubled times. By his death and resurrection, Jesus has opened a window that enables us to see God's saving mercy working in our lives. By faith we can see God at work even when circumstances offer little or no hope.

Do not allow the difficulties of today to obscure the reality of what Christ has done and what God is doing in your life. Be filled with hope and peace as your faith sees what your circumstances deny. Thank God for the open window of faith in your Savior, Christ Jesus.

Lord Jesus, open the window of my mind to see your loving mercy at work in my future. Amen.

See: Open a window; see by faith what God has done for you.

Read: Acts 16:14; Ephesians 1:17-18

*Paul Scheidt
Chesterfield, MO*

Saturday, October 21, 2017

An Unexpected Reason

Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

Corrie Ten Boom, in her book *The Hiding Place*, relates an incident which taught her to give thanks. She and her sister Betsy were transferred to the German prison camp called Ravensbruck. The barracks were extremely overcrowded and flea-infested. While studying 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18, Betsy reminded Corrie to thank the Lord for every detail of their living quarters. Corrie refused to give thanks for the fleas, but Betsy persisted and Corrie gave thanks. The sisters were surprised to find they could hold Bible study and prayer meetings without guard interference; the guards would not enter their barracks because of the fleas.

Gracious Lord Jesus, please help me be open to surprises in the ways you lead me. I promise to thank you for them. Amen.

File: Put together a file folder for cards on which you record times when God unexpectedly turned something bad into something unusually good for you and for others.

Read: Genesis 50:19-21

*Deane Schuessler
Woodbury, MN*

Sunday, October 22, 2017

Ready, Set, Go

And of this gospel I was appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher.

2 Timothy 1:10-11

Are you ready? Led by God to an Ethiopian who was reading Scripture, Philip asked, “Do you understand what you are reading?” The man responded, “How can I unless someone explains it to me?” *Are you set?* Philip invited the man to sit with him, providing the needed explanation. *Do you act?* At the man’s request, Philip stopped and baptized him.

Are you prepared to be the congregation member approached for help by a homeless woman with two children in the church parking lot? Are you the caring neighbor providing unexpected acts of kindness? Seek and recognize opportunities big and small. With a thankful heart for all that God has given in Jesus, go! Act!

Lord, open my eyes and ears to the needs of others so that I may, with gratitude for your many gifts, touch their lives with the love of Jesus. Amen.

Consider: Identify others’ needs (big or small) and individually, or with a group, provide for those needs (care cards, small acts of kindness, transportation, home repair).

Read: Acts 8:26-39

Judith Christian
St. Louis, MO

Monday, October 23, 2017

On Eagles' Wings

I bore you up on eagles' wings and brought you to myself.

Exodus 19:4

A baby eagle fell toward the rocks on the ravine below. Suddenly the mother eagle appeared, swooped down and caught the young eagle on her back. She flew up and dropped the little eagle. This time the father eagle caught the little bird on his back. The parent eagles continued until their young offspring learned to fly.

As we grow older, we may be afraid to try our wings as we face new challenges. Our heavenly Father watches over us and spreads his wings beneath us as we develop new skills at any age in service to others. The Father who loved us enough to send his Son to die for our sins will not forsake us in our earthly flights. So fly with wings like eagles! The Lord will lift you up.

When I grow tired, lift me up on your wings, Lord. Give me the courage and the strength that I need for today. Amen.

Ask: What is the challenge you now face? Take it to the Lord in prayer.

Read: Psalm 103:1-5

*Leo Symmank
Seabrook, TX*

Tuesday, October 24, 2017

Grandma's Wisdom

But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere.

James 3:17

It's hard not to compare ourselves to others, thinking that if only we had what they had, we would be happy. If you've ever felt that way, listen to what my grandma used to say. Grandma Mussell was a woman of few words, but when she spoke, we listened, as when she told us: "What if everyone wrote their troubles on a piece of paper, placed their list in a paper bag, and then threw their bag into a great big pile? I think you'd want your own troubles back once you read what troubles others were carrying!"

Her words were delivered with such simple grace and wisdom. Thanks be to God that his wisdom in sending his Son, Jesus, surpasses all troubles, today and every day!

Loving and compassionate God, turn our focus on troubles into a focus on gratitude. In Jesus we pray. Amen.

Consider: What troubles would you list today? How might they compare to those of others?

Read: James 3:13-18; Deuteronomy 6:4-9

*Jane Wilke
Woodbury, MN*

Wednesday, October 25, 2017

Dennoch

Give thanks to the Lord, call on his name; make known his deeds among the peoples!

Psalm 105:1

What stories of the past do you recall? Perhaps as a young child you were separated from your mother in a large department store. You heard your mother's voice on the department store's loudspeaker: "Meet me in the women's apparel section."

When we do not do the will of God and we are burdened with the resulting sin, in those moments we may dwell too much on our past and our mistakes. We should remember the German word *dennoch*. It means "nevertheless." We are sinners. Nevertheless, Christ has delivered us. He has died for us and broken through the dark cloud of death when he rose from the tomb. He calls us by name in Baptism and claims us as his children.

O Lord Jesus, fill our memory today with all the marvelous things you have done. Empower us to tell those stories to others. Amen.

Share: Share a good moment from your past that reflects Christ's presence with you.

Read: Psalm 105

Gordon Beck
Williamsburg, VA

Thursday, October 26, 2017

No Dead Ends

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

Romans 6:23

Driving in an unfamiliar neighborhood may bring you turn after turn into a dead end. There is no way out except to turn around and go the other way, right back to where you came from.

In our spiritual lives, going the wrong way leads to a dead end, literally. The path of sin leads to death (Romans 6:20-21). But in his mercy, Christ pursued us, and by his sinless life, his atoning death and his victorious resurrection, he brought us back to the Father, setting us on the right way that leads to life and joy (2 Corinthians 5:17-18). We celebrate our return every Sunday in the Confession and Absolution! There are no dead ends in Christ. We are redeemed, forgiven, and sent out to touch others with help and healing.

*Lord, help me reach out to others in dead-end places, sharing the joy and wonder of your love.
Amen.*

*Cherish: Rejoice that Jesus turned your life around.
Share that joy with others!*

Read: Romans 6:19-23; Psalm 51

*David P. Schmidt
Ballwin, MO*

Friday, October 27, 2017

Love Letters

These are written so that you may believe.

John 20:31

Soon after our relationship became serious, my wife and I were separated for six weeks with no way to communicate except through handwritten letters sent by airmail. All I could do was write. But those letters helped us nurture our love for each other. Nowadays, unlimited long-distance calling, email and text messages make it easy to stay in touch when apart, but it's not the same as writing and reading those handwritten letters.

God has sent us love letters, the Scriptures. John writes, "Jesus did many other signs ... which are not written in this book; but these are written ..." (John 20:30-31). Throughout the Bible, God tells us how much he loves us. He gave his Son to save us.

Thank you, Father, for your love letters to us. Help us to read and respond to your love in faith. Amen.

Write: Send a love letter in your own hand to a loved one.

Read: John 20:19-31; 1 John 1:1-4

*Steve Hess
Ft. Myers, FL*

Saturday, October 28, 2017

Two Men, Two Servants

And you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free

John 8:32

The apostle Paul was struck blind on his way to Damascus to persecute Christians. Bolts of lightning and thunder brought Martin Luther to his knees and to the promise and decision to become a monk. The apostle Paul became, without question, one of the best and most tireless missionaries in Christendom. Martin Luther labored to restore the truth, rid the church of false beliefs and expose erroneous practices. How thankful we must be today for both of these men and how God chose to use them.

God does not always employ such dramatic means to call us into his service, but he does call each of us to love him, serve him and speak for him each day.

Dear Lord, thank you for your servant, the apostle Paul. In this special 500th anniversary year of the Reformation, we thank you for the gift of Martin Luther and the restoration of the Gospel. Amen.

Do: If you haven't already done so, read a biography of Martin Luther.

Read: Ephesians 4:11; Matthew 28:19-20

*Harriet Stennfeld
Fort Wayne, IN*

Sunday, October 29, 2017

Amazing 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

Recently, I began learning to play the acoustic guitar. “Amazing Grace” was one of the first songs that I learned to play. It caused me to think about the grace our Savior has bestowed upon us.

While learning the fundamentals of music, I made mistakes along the way. It is often said that art imitates life. As we learn to live our earthly lives, we stumble and fall and make mistakes. However, no matter what happens in life, God is there, freely giving us his grace throughout all circumstances. Even when we feel alone and unworthy, he is there for us and provides us with forgiveness and encouragement. God’s gift of amazing grace; how sweet the sound!

Dear heavenly Father, thank you for your unwavering grace to me in all circumstances throughout my life. Amen.

Give: Today, freely give someone grace and understanding just as you have received these from your Savior.

Read: Ephesians 2:4-9

*Betsy Becker Niedringhaus
Ballwin, MO*

Monday, October 30, 2017

Reformation Bookends

... the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe.

Romans 3:22

In Christ alone we stand. Hear Paul's clear message in Romans. Only Christ's righteousness through his sacrificial death on the cross saves sinners who believe in him. Martin Luther's clear 16th-century message echoes Paul.

In this 500th anniversary of the Reformation, I realize that my pastoral ministry forms Reformation bookends. On the very first day of my ministry I attended a pastoral conference to discuss the 450th anniversary of the Reformation in the world of the 1960s. Now I observe the 50th anniversary of my ordination in a radically different 21st-century world. For me and for you, it's still all about Jesus. Share the saving message of Paul and Luther with someone today.

Help us stand firmly, Lord, on your righteousness for us and in us on Calvary and through Baptism. Amen.

Sing: Sing a Reformation hymn and tell a friend about Jesus.

Read: Romans 3:19-28

*Stephen J. Carter
Oakville, MO*

Tuesday, October 31, 2017

Live by Faith

The righteous shall live by faith.

Romans 1:17

The book of Romans helped to inspire the 95 Theses that Martin Luther wrote and posted on the Church door in Wittenberg on October 31, 1517. Romans sparked the Reformation and it is a cornerstone for understanding the Church's doctrines. Martin, in Romans, discovered that we are saved by grace through faith. The gospel is God's power to save us from our sins. The gospel saves everyone who believes in Jesus. God's righteousness is revealed through the gospel. We receive his righteousness by grace, through faith alone.

Living by faith means that you act, speak and think based upon what you believe about being made righteous by God. Living by faith means I am saved from sin, I am made right with God, I am filled with the Spirit, and I am inspired to do good works and to bless others.

Dear God, thanks for making me righteous by faith through Jesus. Amen.

Bless: How many people can you bless today with the good news about Jesus?

Read: Romans 1:16-17; Ephesians 2:8-10

*David Bever
Las Vegas, NV*

Wednesday, November 1, 2017

All Saints Day Is Your Day

So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God.

Ephesians 2:19

During late autumn and early November, Christians mark the last days of the long Pentecost season. Pentecost celebrates the giving of Christ's Spirit to his followers and asks believers "What now?" Answer: Live as children of God. Rejoice in his Spirit alive within you, empowering you to reach out to others with the same grace in Christ you have received.

Scripture urges us to look to the lives of believers gone before us for examples of faith and commitment (Hebrews 13:7). We remember these saints so that our faith and commitment will be strengthened by their example. Saints live not only in the past. Saints are all those who trust Christ for their salvation. Some live in heaven, seeing Christ face to face. Some live in your own home. All Saints Day is your day, too.

Lord, number me with your saints in heaven and the saints on earth. Amen.

Learn: Learn more about past saints. Imitate them in your current calling.

Read: Ephesians 2:19-21; Hebrews 12:1-2

*Donna J. Streufert
South Bend, IN*

Thursday, November 2, 2017

Purpose

The LORD will fulfill his purpose for me.

Psalm 138:8

David was a great king. He conquered Israel's enemies. He composed Spirit-inspired psalms. David was a sinner, but he was a sinner who repented and remained faithful to God. The king accomplished much, yet the apostle Paul points out that David fell asleep in death after "he had served the purpose of God in his own generation" (Acts 13:36).

When the time comes for the Lord to call us home, it will not be because we have accomplished our own purposes in life or the aims of our families or the needs of our employers—although, of course, we may have done all of those things. The Lord will summon us home when we have, like David, fulfilled the purpose of God in our own generation. Having completed what God set before us (Ephesians 2:10), we can with confidence fall asleep in Jesus, because Jesus fulfilled his Father's purpose—at the cross and the empty tomb.

Lord, fulfill your purpose in my life. Amen.

Comfort: Encourage others with the assurance that God is at work in and through them to accomplish his purpose.

Read: Psalm 138; Acts 13:32-39

*Carol Geisler
Manchester, MO*

Friday, November 3, 2017

Gonna Rise Again

I will put my Spirit in you and you will live.

Ezekiel 37:14

One of the most amazing images in the Old Testament is that of Ezekiel's Valley of the Dry Bones. The Lord tells Ezekiel to prophecy to a valley of bones. The bones rattle, are covered with flesh, and become living human beings again. Several months ago the husband of a dear friend died. She said at the end that her husband's breathing took on a rasping sound, something the nursing staff told her was a "death rattle," showing death was imminent. As, indeed, it was. As sad as that signal is, it reminds me of the rattle of the dry bones and the words of the spiritual, "Dem bones, dem bones, gonna rise again." The author of the spiritual knew, as we know, what the rattle signaled: God's promise to us that he will restore our dry bones, put his Spirit in us and we will live! Forever. Amazing.

O God, even in the dry periods of our lives, we know you can restore life to us. Amen.

Feel: Feel the bones inside of your hands and thank God for them.

Read: Proverbs 3:7-8; Proverbs 15:30

*Sally Beck
Williamsburg, Virginia*

Saturday, November 4, 2017

Brother Wind

*He who forms the mountains and creates the wind
... the Lord, the God of hosts, is his name!*

Amos 4:13

St. Francis of Assisi, born to wealth, came to his Lord through God's creation. So close to God's work did he feel that he addressed the elements in terms such as Mother Earth, Sister Water and Brother Wind. The wind has long been my friend. The November wind sounds like no other as it sweeps the branches bare and blows the leaves (hopefully into the neighbor's yard).

At Pentecost, God's Spirit came as a mighty, rushing wind. God told Ezekiel to breathe the breath of life into that field of dry bones. It is that breath of life, that Spirit, a gift from our Lord, that makes us truly alive—alive in Christ and he in us. That breath can breathe joy that is evident to all whose lives we touch. The Spirit can empower us boldly to face the trials and the pains of growing older.

Gracious Lord, help us to be aware, thankfully, of your empowerment in our prayer and our witnessing. Amen.

Tell and show: Let us always show and tell of your Spirit within us.

Read: Acts 2:1-22

*Connie Bretscher
Valparaiso, IN*

Sunday, November 5, 2017

Dried-Up Pens

Give thanks to the Lord.

Psalm 105:1

Recently I reached into a container on my desk to fetch a pen, but all were dried up from lack of use.

Gratitude is much like a pen. If it doesn't get used, it dries up and is eventually tossed aside. An attitude of appreciation is something that needs to be used every day. It has a two-fold effect. It makes the person offering thanks feel a sense of appreciation for what others do for them and it makes the giver of a good deed feel good about using God-given talents or personal resources to meet the needs of others. The psalmist had a positive attitude that valued appreciation for what God had done for him, directly or indirectly, when he wrote: "Give thanks to the Lord."

Good and gracious God, giver of every good and perfect gift, thank you for your constant presence seen in your love shown to me through the love of my dear family and friends. Amen.

Be grateful: Give thanks to God today by thanking someone who was kind and loving to you.

Read: Psalm 105

*Jerrold L. Nichols
Fort Wayne, IN*

Monday, November 6, 2017

Mr. Fix It

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

Romans 8:28

My father had the ability to fix almost anything. I would call on him when my car wouldn't start or the washing machine leaked. Dad never let me down. He always arrived, toolkit in hand, ready to fix it.

My heavenly Father is also the master of fixing things, and his expertise goes way beyond handyman skills. He takes my broken life and mends it so I am whole and my life has a purpose. He takes my regrets and disappointments and transforms them into new beginnings and fresh hope.

Our heavenly Father loves to rescue us and mend the parts of our soul that are broken. He takes our history and rewrites it with his healing hands, enabling us to live for his glory.

Dear Lord, please forgive my past mistakes. I leave my regrets and disappointments in your hands, and step into the future, secure in your love. Amen.

Write down: Write down past mistakes and then rip them up to remind you that Jesus did away with them all on the cross.

Read: Psalms 147:3, Proverbs 3:5-6, 1 Peter 2:24

*Kerry Osborne
Sydney, Australia*

Tuesday, November 7, 2017

Thankfulness

Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

1 Thessalonians 5:18

Gratitude stems from an understanding that we are dependent on God and others. Can we be thankful without some degree of surrender? We realize God's love and his complete provision in view of eternity and admit that some things are out of our control. God's will in Christ Jesus for us is forgiveness and life eternal. God is with us always.

Scientists have studied the beneficial effects of an attitude of gratitude. Benefits include a stronger immune system, lower blood pressure, better sleep, more feelings of joy and social connection. Even our thankful heart is a gift from God. These benefits confirm what God's plan all along has been: to bless his people on our pilgrimage toward life with him forever.

Dear Lord, create in me a thankful heart for your mercy and grace, the foundation for gratitude. Make me truly grateful for everything you provide. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Look: Say a prayer of thanks for things you can see around you right now.

Read: Psalm 50; Psalm 118

*Nancy Rapp
St. Louis, MO*

Wednesday, November 8, 2017

An Attitude of Gratitude

Be renewed in the spirit of your minds ... put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

Ephesians 4:23-24

The catchy refrain of a children's song asks an important question: "Are you humbly grateful or grumbly hateful?" It took a blinding encounter with Jesus to change hateful Saul into pious Paul. It took a traumatic ride in the belly of a whale to change Jonah's attitude toward Ninevah. How's your attitude today? Gratitude and humility are rare traits, cultivated during serious and honest time alone with God.

In the stillness of God's presence, we become aware of our smallness, our sin and our inability to manage life. We see the enormity of God's righteousness and holiness. He alone has the encompassing power, gentle forgiveness and everlasting patience to transform us into his grateful children.

Lord, give us humble hearts, filled with gratitude for all you have done. Amen.

Notice: Humbly change your grumbles into grateful expressions of praise!

Read: Acts 9:1-28; Jonah 2:8-9; Psalm 51:1-4

*Sharolyn Sander
Lincoln, NE*

Thursday, November 9, 2017

Obvious Love

Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.

Galatians 6:2

Jesus said, “A new command I give to you, that you love one another” (John 13:34). This is the law of Christ. It is the way people know we are disciples of Jesus—that we love one another.

Love is obvious. God’s love is obvious: Jesus came and carried the burden of our sin and death to the cross. He loves us. Rejoice in his love today. If you are burdened in any way, remember that Jesus has carried it for you. He speaks to you: “Come, heavy burdened one; I will give you rest.”

You can help carry another’s burden. You can pray for them and with them. You can give a hug or just hold a hand. You can let them know they are not alone, as God has not left you alone.

*Thank you, Lord, for carrying my every burden.
Amen.*

Carry: Carry your cares to the cross in prayer. Help another do the same.

Read: 1 John 3:11-24

*Don Schatz
Kenmore, WA*

Friday, November 10, 2017

Earrings

He who planted the ear, does he not hear?

Psalm 94:9

It has become a habit that my husband and I lose one earring each when we travel. Frustrating! Mine are only decorative—worn on me. But his are essential—worn in him. He has referred to his hearing aids as his earrings ever since he was given the gift of enhanced sound some years ago.

Do you remember the pictures of early hearing aids? Do you know you can buy an “Antique Foldable Metal Ear Trumpet” for \$329? One of God’s great gifts is today’s tiny hearing aids that are practically invisible but keep the wearer from being left out of conversations, worship and countless other places where hearing is essential.

Our Lord speaks frequently in Scripture about our need to “hear.” How grateful we are for the gift of my husband’s “earrings.”

Thank you, Lord, for all the aids that enable us to hear and to praise you in our senior years. Amen.

Encourage: Encourage the reluctant to make use of modern technology.

Read: Romans 10:17-18

*Lois Siemon Scheer
San Diego, CA*

Saturday, November 11, 2017

Thank You, Veterans

For you are my rock and my fortress; and for your name's sake you lead me and guide me.

Psalm 31:3

Recently I met a veteran wearing a WWII cap. I shook his hand and thanked him for his service. After introducing his wife of 71 years he shared that he'd served with General MacArthur and was in Japan when the atomic bomb was dropped! "I'll show you what helped me more than therapy after the war." He lifted a Bible from a bag on his wife's wheelchair. "Reading the Bible strengthened our faith! We also shared Jesus with our children, grandchildren and 24 great-grandchildren. And one of them is married, so we hope to share him with our great-great-grandchildren!" His wife smiled and nodded her head. Later I gave each of them a hug, and we agreed to talk in heaven someday! I will never forget them!

Dear Lord, please help all of us to respect, honor and support the veterans. Amen.

Do: When you meet veterans, shake their hands and thank them for their service.

Read: Psalm 5:8; Psalm 27:11; Isaiah 40:11

*Annette Schumacher
Muskego, Wisconsin*

Sunday, November 12, 2017

Remember

God remembered Noah.

Genesis 8:1

Did you remember to do the following: feed the pets, turn out the lights, pay the bills? It is important to know that God remembered Noah as a righteous person. The story of the flood is about God destroying all the sinners, but saving Noah. While Noah was in the ark, God did not lose track of him, and God does not lose track of us. God remembers us because of what Jesus did for our salvation.

The story of the flood contained hope: the flood ended, the mountains appeared and the ark rested. God remembered Noah, and Noah remembered God by building an altar. God is faithful to those who are his. We by faith need to remember God. How do I remember God? Trust his salvation, read his Word, receive Communion and speak up for God publicly. Remember the God who remembers you. He will be your joy and comfort in this life and in the life to come.

Lord, help me to remember you with my words, thoughts and actions. Amen.

Remember: Remember God in your daily devotions.

Read: John 14:26

*David Bever
Las Vegas, NV*

Monday, November 13, 2017

Value of Thanksgiving

The ministry of this service is not only supplying the needs of the saints but is also overflowing in many thanksgivings to God.

2 Corinthians 9:12

One day, I noticed a penny on the edge of the track at a school where I walk. I passed it by with hardly a thought. The next day, the penny was still there. In fact, it remained there for over a week! Nobody considered it valuable enough to pick up. I realized how blessed I am that I don't need a stray penny. I thanked God for the abundance I enjoy. I also remembered that Jesus calls us to be distributors of his gifts. That's the real value of Thanksgiving. So many people could really use a penny. In a third world country, just a few pennies could feed a family or provide life-saving medicine.

The next day, I picked up the penny. I started a collection to give to a mission that serves the hungry and shares the Gospel. I pray this small service will result in many thanksgivings to God.

Jesus, as you have blessed me, help me to bless others in your name. Amen.

Share: Give thanks for God's provision and find ways to share this month.

Read: 1 Timothy 6:17-19; 2 Corinthians 9:6-15

*Sandi Geis
St. Louis, MO*

Tuesday, November 14, 2017

The Be-Attitudes

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Matthew 5:3

It's been said that "attitude is a little thing that makes a big difference." The Beatitudes are a great example of that. But what a paradox they are. After all, there we find Jesus calling the poor rich and the hungry fed. What's that all about?

In Matthew 5:3-10, we find eight perspectives on being blessed, but the blessings don't come in packages we might expect. Here we see how Jesus turns the upside-down views that the world carries into the right-side-up view of living selfless lives filled with the Holy Spirit.

The first four Beatitudes focus on what difference being filled with his Spirit has for us, while the following four focus on the effect that being filled with his Spirit has on those around us. What a big difference it makes in shifting our attitude from self to Christ!

Dear Christ, may our lives be a reflection of attitudes that give glory to you. Amen.

Consider: What be-attitude needs a shift in your life today?

Read: Matthew 5:1-12; Philippians 2:1-11

*Jane Wilke
Woodbury, MN*

Wednesday, November 15, 2017

Salt Life

You are the salt of the earth.

Matthew 5:13

All along the coast of Florida we passed recreational vehicles, cars towing sailboats, and ancient VW buses with surfboards strapped to the roof, all adorned with window stickers proclaiming “Salt Life.” The proximity of the salt waters of the Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico influenced the lives of our fellow travelers.

According to Jesus, you are the salt of the earth. Salt permeates everything around it, adding flavor to food and salinity to sea water. Those who have experienced God’s redeeming grace through Jesus can’t help sharing that grace with others. Their joy permeates everything they say and do.

In ancient times salt served as a preservative, keeping meat and fish from spoiling. Through the work of the Holy Spirit, God preserves us from sin, death and the power of the devil.

Help us, Lord, to permeate our world with the joy of your salvation. Amen.

Pass the salt: Add some flavor to the life of a family member or neighbor today.

Read: Colossians 4:2-6

*Eileen Ritter
Byron Center, MI*

Thursday, November 16, 2017

Crumbs

Yes, Lord; yet even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs.

Mark 7:28

The Syrophenician woman's words bring to mind not only dogs under the table but also the hungry going through garbage. A non-Jew, the woman knew she was not entitled to what the children of Israel could expect. She only wanted the leftovers.

How did she know that even a crumb would suffice? Her faith told her Jesus was not just another prophet. Jesus knew, and the crumb of grace, though not yet declared for non-Jews, healed the woman's daughter.

Whether physically, emotionally, or spiritually in want, we know what it's like to wish we could have the leftovers. We all have our needs and regrets. Unlike the Syrophenician woman, we have more than crumbs because Jesus died on the cross for all. We have been adopted through Christ and rightfully have eternal life as children of God.

Father in heaven, bless us with the faith of the Syrophenician woman. Amen.

Give thanks: As children of God, remember that we have more than crumbs.

Read: Mark 7:24-30; Psalm 119:17-24

Judy Scherr
Lemay, MO

Friday, November 17, 2017

Living in Thanksgiving

Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving.

Psalm 95:2

At the end of the work week, some people celebrate TGIF, “Thank God it’s Friday.” TGIF reminds me of Good Friday, the day Christ died for us. All the sins of the past week have been forgiven. That makes the past week a good week.

For Christians, every day is a good day, because God is with us. God is good not only on Fridays, but every day. God is with us on days when we are filled with joy and on days when there is anguish and sorrow. He uplifts and upholds us. He will never forsake us, because he is our Father and we are his children. He loves us every day and always will. Every day is a day of thanksgiving. It is a day to give thanks with a thankful heart, a day to rejoice and to celebrate.

Dear Father, Son and Holy Spirit, I thank you for the many opportunities that you give me to serve with you in serving others. Amen.

Write: List the names of ten people (or more) and thank God for the ways they serve and love you.

Read: Psalm 95

*Leo Symmank
Seabrook, TX*

Saturday, November 18, 2017

God's Choir

I will sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously.

Exodus 15:1

This year marks the thirty-third year of my singing with an adult group called the Lutheran A Cappella Choir of Milwaukee. To be able to sing well enough to be admitted to the choir is reason enough to be thankful today.

The ability to sing—what a gift! My aim is to blend my voice with all the others in the choir. Also important is the ability to translate the thought and intention of the composer into pleasant sounds that can inspire and enrich the listener. And it is vitally important to follow the lead of the director as he attempts to interpret what the composer had in mind when writing the piece.

Dear fellow member of God's "choir," I am hoping that you can translate the words of the above paragraph into what it means to be a singer in God's choir because of our Baptism.

Give me a voice, O Lord, to sing your praises wherever I may be. Amen.

Reflect: Give thanks for the blessing of the God-given ability to make a joyful noise to the Lord!

Read: Romans 6:1-4

*Paul Eggold
Greendale, WI*

Sunday, November 19, 2017

So What Do You Say?

O Lord my God, I will give you thanks forever.

Psalm 30:12

At the beginning of each school year, I'd often find myself asking the preschoolers, "So, what's the magic word?" when they had a request. They quickly learned that requests were heard and usually granted when the word "please" was included. And, when our son was small, there were numerous occasions when after receiving a gift or compliment, we'd ask, "So, what do you say?" The consistent reminders paid off. Jason's grandmothers often remarked about his thoughtful, handwritten thank-you notes.

Morning or evening, blessings abound! Having lived in Hong Kong and Shanghai for several years, my mind often slips into a Cantonese thanks, "Dor Jeh" or a Mandarin thanks, "Xi Xi Ni" without thinking. What do I say to the Giver of my bountiful blessings? Simply, a *daily* thank you.

My heart is full of gratitude for all your blessings, good Father! Thank you. Amen.

Think: What words do you use to give God thanks?

Read: Luke 17:11-19; Exodus 15:1-21; 1 Samuel 2:1-10; 2 Samuel 7:18-29

*Louise Schini Weber
Fort Myers, FL*

Monday, November 20, 2017

Accept God's Gifts

God will supply every need of yours.

Philippians 4:19

My husband and I just had our door to the bathroom changed from a “swing-in” to a “swing-out” one. As we age, our chance of falling in the bathroom increases and a collapsed body against a “swing-in” door would prevent others from entering the room. Thank God for the wisdom and means to make this change.

What about you? Is God calling you to make changes in your life for your safety? Some of us let pride stop us from getting a cane, walker or hearing aid. But if we need these things and are able to buy them, we should feel blessed. These things are gifts from God that enrich our lives and keep us moving. Accept God's gifts with joy and feel God's love when you use them.

Loving God, thank you for always giving us what we need. Amen.

Do: Take steps to stay safe and help others to get what they need to stay safe too.

Read: Proverbs 27:12; Proverbs 16:18

*Catherine A. Welch
Southbury, CT*

Tuesday, November 21, 2017

Lost And Found

I have found the coin that I had lost.

Luke 15:9

Our family recently had a great evening together at a local restaurant. The next day I couldn't find my wallet: It wasn't in the car or the house. In a panic I called the restaurant. "Yes, our manager has your wallet in the safe." I drove back and thanked him profusely, saying, "God takes care of dogs, fools and children; I'm over 18 and I don't bark."

In God's eyes, I'm a lot like my wallet, lost at the restaurant. I don't even know that I'm lost, but my Good Shepherd knows. Jesus gave up his life to save the lost—like me. In this season of thanksgiving, let's show him how grateful we are that he found us and saved us.

Thank you, Jesus, for watching over me and saving me. Help me to follow you in faith, and to invite others to follow you. Amen.

Thank: Thank God for finding and saving the lost—like you and me.

Read: Psalm 28; Luke 15:8-10

*Steve Hess
Ft. Myers, FL*

Wednesday, November 22, 2017

And Be Thankful

Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful.

Colossians 3:15

These words were part of our wedding sermon text years ago! I remember well the pastor emphasizing these words: *And be thankful*. The whole text is talking about life together, especially in the church. These marvelous words of our Lord apply to any level of human relationship, including marriage.

The thankful heart is a loving heart; it's a giving heart; it's a heart that knows we are gifts of God to one another. We are thankful to the Lord for his loving gift of Jesus, our Savior. We are thankful he cares for our every need.

We are thankful for the people with whom the Lord has filled our lives. From whom are you thankful today? What name, or names, come to mind? What joy there is in the thankful life!

Thank you, Lord God, for your kindness; and thank you for all the people in my life. Amen.

Tell: Tell a spouse, family member or friend how thankful you are for them today.

Read: Colossians 3:12-17

*Don Schatz
Kenmore, WA*

Thursday, November 23, 2017

Unflaggingly Grateful

In everything, by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God ... will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Philippians 4:6-7

The Pilgrims held the first humble thanksgiving celebration in 1621, a year after they had arrived at Plymouth Rock. Two centuries later, a lone woman, Sarah Hale, championed the idea of calling on our entire country to hold a national day of thanks. She wrote letters to editors, asking them to support this cause. She even requested presidents Fillmore, Pierce and Buchanan to proclaim such a day.

Finally, during the Civil War, Hale pleaded for “just one day of peace amidst the blood and the strife.” On April 30, 1863, Abraham Lincoln proclaimed a National Day of Fasting, Humiliation and Prayer. He included words of repentance: “We have forgotten God. We have forgotten the gracious hand which preserved us in peace and multiplied and enriched and strengthened us.”

Thank you, God, for working through people to call our nation to remember you. Amen.

Thank: Give thanks to God in every prayer.

Read: Psalm 28:6-9

*Deane Schuessler
Woodbury, MN*

Friday, November 24, 2017

It Takes Two

Two are better than one.

Ecclesiastes 4:9

When I was a boy, I frequently walked down the railroad tracks near my home with a neighborhood boy. We tried walking the rails, but eventually lost our balance and tumbled off. Then one day we jumped up on the opposite rails, extended our hands to balance each other, and walked the entire section of the tracks without difficulty.

In life, especially in later years, we can't go it alone. We need a helping hand to keep our balance. Our brothers and sisters and sometimes strangers offer their hands to assist us in our walking. The Lord himself offers his hand to guide us on our journey. We can offer a helping hand to those around us.

Join me as I accept a helping hand when needed. Encourage me to offer a helping hand when I can. Together we can keep our balance.

Lord Jesus, extend your hand of love to comfort and console me. Lead me and support me in my daily walk. Amen.

Ponder: Spend time thinking how you can become a partner to someone who needs a helping hand. Then go and do it!

Read: Ecclesiastes 4:9-12

Walter M. Schoedel
Webster Groves, MO

Saturday, November 25, 2017

Born Winner

I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

Philippians 3:14

Are you a winner or a loser when it comes to life? There are some who honestly feel they are always coming up short when it comes to having good things happen to them: the girl who “never gets the guy,” and when she does, he ends up being the wrong one. The fellow who sits down to enjoy a piece of cherry pie and gets one with a tooth-destroying cherry pit.

We’ve all had days where nothing much seems to go right, but how many of us would say, “I’m a born loser. My whole life is one bad thing after another”? If you feel like a loser right now, hear this from St. Paul: “In all these things we are more than conquerors through [Jesus] who loved us” (Romans 8:37). We are born winners in Christ Jesus.

Lord Jesus, you went to the cross to give me life eternal. Help me to live victoriously for you. Amen.

Encourage: Tell a friend to never give up hope in Jesus.

Read: Philippians 3:12-21

*Edward Arle
St. Charles, MO*

Sunday, November 26, 2017

An Open Door

We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand.

Romans 5:1-2

Some doors say, “Welcome.” Others shout, “Keep out!” We do lock our doors when danger threatens, but we want them open when friends arrive.

By his cross Jesus unlocked the door to God’s grace. By faith in the Savior we now live in the house of the Father’s grace, mercy and love. Our sin and guilt—even our coming death—cannot close that door in our face. The cross is the key that keeps it open for us.

When your today feels like a prison and tomorrow looks like a locked door, remember this Gospel truth: The door of grace is open! Enter into God’s loving presence with faith and certain hope. In every circumstance, give thanks for the open door to life, today and forever.

O Christ, help us to enter into your grace with gratitude in our hearts every day of our lives. Amen.

Open: Open a door in your home as a way of welcoming Christ in.

Read: 1 Peter 1:3-9

*Paul Scheidt
Chesterfield, MO*

Monday, November 27, 2017

Mending A Broken Heart

The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit.

Psalm 34:18

It's just an old driftwood plaque with a pop can tab hanger, good news burned in simple strokes that keeps speaking through the years: "God will mend your broken heart if you give him the pieces."

A grateful young couple gave it to us a thank-you gift for ministry years ago. Now it speaks more loudly than ever to this old shepherd and shepherdess as losses pile up ... broken dreams, missed opportunities, terminal illness, death of loved ones and health issues that wear us down. We ministered to many others; now we are on the receiving end. The gospel comfort grows sweeter. The Lord mends our geriatric wounded hearts. Growing in wisdom, we care with a depth that was not possible in our younger years. We keep drawing closer to God's heart.

Thank you, God, when you come near my broken heart and my crushed spirit. Shine brightly on the dark days of my evening years. Amen.

Let go: Let go and let God heal you today. Offer this message as you listen to broken hearts around you.

Read: Psalm 34; Matthew 11:28-30

Rodney Otto
Grand Rapids, MI

Tuesday, November 28, 2017

Sticky Notes

You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

Deuteronomy 6:9

Growing up, we did not have sticky notes. Now we do and they have been very helpful as reminders of a doctor's appointment, a social event to attend, a call to make. In addition, you can use them to write down a Bible verse to help you remember what you have just read. Moses in his day made the very same suggestion without a sticky note. Read carefully Deuteronomy 6:1-9 and reflect on Moses' message for the children of Israel. We need to hear the very same message. "Hear ... the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might."

Write those words down on a sticky note. Then repeat them during the day and put them into practice.

Lord Jesus, help me remember who you are and what you have done for me through your life, death and resurrection. Amen.

Write down: As you read your Bible, write down certain Bible passages on sticky notes that can help you remember God's Word for the day.

Read: Proverbs 3:1-6

Walter M. Schoedel
Webster Groves, MO

Wednesday, November 29, 2017

Enduring

Oh give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever!

Psalm 118:29

The Lord has steadfast love that endures forever! That seems like such a huge statement, and it is hard for me to fully comprehend what it means exactly. The powerful words that strike me now are *steadfast*, *enduring* and *forever*! Wow! Have you ever taken time to just think about this verse? How could we not give thanks knowing that the Lord loves us like this?

Today, I am taking these words to heart. The Lord's love is beyond my human capacity to love. I feel a great sense of relief that the Lord's love is so grand. I will savor with gratitude the enduring love that lasts forever! I hope to pass this love on to those I meet as I move forward in the days ahead.

Gracious Lord, I am so very grateful for your steadfast, enduring and everlasting love. Thank you! Amen.

List: How would you describe the Lord's love? Write your description down or share it with someone.

Read: Psalm 26:3; 1 Corinthians 15:58

Annette L. Sherwood
St. Louis, MO

Thursday, November 30, 2017

Thumbs Up

Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, to build him up.

Romans 15:2

Recently I watched Cindy (manager of our favorite fast food diner) dash from point to point, expertly serving a multitude of hungry guests. I couldn't help but tell her, "You are amazing, just amazing!" She beamed. How little it took to put a smile on her face. How thankful I am for those who encouraged me in the past—a fellow teacher who became my mentor, a co-worker who helped me learn a new task, a leader who challenged me to accept a huge responsibility, a friend who comforted me with the gospel.

Jesus shows us how to serve and build up our neighbor with loving encouragement, for this he did himself with words and actions (Luke 10:38-42; Luke 13:10-17; Luke 21:1-4). His children follow his example.

Thank you, Lord Jesus, for your words of encouragement. Amen.

Watch: Today, watch for opportunities to build up your neighbor.

Read: Romans 15:1-7; 1 Thessalonians 5:12-14; John 13:12-17

*Donna J. Streufert
South Bend, IN*

Friday, December 1, 2017

Beholden

The gatekeepers were on the four sides, east, west, north, and south. And their kinsmen who were in their villages were obligated to come in every seven days.

1 Chronicles 9:24-25

Beholden—it is a word that is seldom used today, and although it has many synonyms, it carries more substance and meaning than any of them. Webster’s dictionary gives this definition of the word *beholden*: “to owe, indebted, under a moral obligation.”

We are eternally grateful for the sacrifice the Father made when he sent his Son to earth as a baby and we are forever appreciative to Jesus for leaving paradise to enter this sinful world, but we aren’t beholden.

We may owe others for things, but we do not owe God for what he gives us. All the blessings we receive from his hand come to us with no strings attached. We can enjoy his bountiful blessings and never be beholden to him.

Jesus, thank you for coming to earth for me. Amen.

Practice: Practice using the word beholden in conversations; explain the meaning of the word.

Read: 2 Corinthians 12:14; Hebrews 5:3

*Gloria Doty
Ft. Wayne, IN*

Saturday, December 2, 2017

Traditions

Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, [Jesus] gave thanks and broke the loaves.

Matthew 14:19

Realizing the importance of traditions in building family structure and spiritual values in young children, we introduced the Advent calendar to our young great-grandson. Before that, we introduced him to prayer when the family gathered for a meal. It has been a tradition in our family to say a blessing before we eat. Then the family joins hands and says in German, “*Gesegnete Mahlzeit*,” which means, “Blessed mealtime.”

Our great-grandson and now great-granddaughter do not start a meal without all at the table joining hands, giving thanks and saying “*Gesegnete Mahlzeit*.” No matter where we eat, or whom we are with, we must join together to thank our Lord for our food and join hands in the unity of family and faith.

Thank you, Lord, for the freedom to pray and give thanks for your blessings. Amen.

Remember: Teach traditions in your families so their faith is strengthened and continues for generations.

Read: Psalm 9; Psalm 107

*Ann Eissfeldt
Ballwin, MO*

Sunday, December 3, 2017

The Jesse Tree

The Root of Jesse will spring up.

Romans 15:12

One way our family celebrated Advent was to count the days before Christmas by using the Jesse tree. The Jesse tree, with symbols of Old Testament heroes and happenings hanging on its branches, reminds us that the roots of Jesus spring from Jesse, the father of King David. This gives us an opportunity to recall our faith's heritage rooted in God's Old Testament promises of a Messiah.

Symbols like the Jesse tree help us rehearse and review God's promises to save us from our sins and teach us God's will. Our children loved using the Jesse tree as part of their Advent celebration. Some of them still follow in this family tradition.

Lord Jesus, guide us on our Advent journey. Help us experience your coming that touches our daily lives. Amen.

Study: Study the genealogy of Jesus in Luke 3:23-37 and the words of promise in Isaiah 11:1-10.

Read: Hebrews 1:1-4; Romans 15:4

*Walter M. Schoedel
Webster Groves, MO*

Monday, December 4, 2017

Humble Gratitude

For he has looked on the humble estate of his servant.

Luke 1:48

A young virgin named Mary had every reason to be crushed under life's circumstances. An angel announces to her that she would give birth to a son without a man involved. How would her fiancé Joseph react to her pregnancy, not to mention her family and the townspeople?

Yet through the angel, through a visit to her relative Elizabeth, and through Joseph who marries her, God fills her with humble gratitude. Mary cries out, "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant." She willingly and humbly accepts her role as the mother of Jesus, the Son of God who will save his people from their sins. Humble gratitude in the midst of trying circumstances!

What are your current circumstances? Do you feel crushed or moved to complain? How might Mary's example lead you to humble gratitude?

Lord, fill me with humble gratitude today. Amen.

Sing: Sing Christmas songs and see Jesus in your circumstances.

Read: Luke 1:39-56

*Stephen J. Carter
Oakville, MO*

Tuesday, December 5, 2017

Enjoy the Children!

They were bringing children to [Jesus] that he might touch them, and the disciples rebuked them. ... [Jesus] said to them, “Let the children come to me.”

Mark 10:13-14

Remember the old phrase, “Children should be seen and not heard”? During the Advent and Christmas seasons, with children’s pageants and overactive kids all around, I must confess that sometimes I do wish for those “quiet” days. The culture in Jesus’ day viewed little children as “not quite ready for prime time” people. A case could be made that our culture also portrays little children, as well as older adults, as either “too young” or “too old” to be of great value. If that is true, we older adults have a fantastic opportunity to enjoy the children around us by laughing, listening and learning with them. And while we are showing their value to us, we in turn are revealing our value to them. We need each other—in the Lord!

Lord, thanks for children who laugh and play and even make lots of noise. Amen.

Place: Place your hand on a child’s head this week and bless him, just like Jesus did, and still does, through us!

Read: John 6:8-11; Matthew 11:25; Matthew 18:2-4

*Rich Bimler
Bloomington, IL*

Wednesday, December 6, 2017

Good Work!

I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

Philippians 1:6

As a child, I took tree trimming seriously. As my parents set up our artificial Christmas tree, I carefully reshaped each flattened branch. I guided my siblings to make sure ornaments were evenly placed. I bit my tongue as they haphazardly strew tinsel on the tree. Later, I removed those messy clumps and hung one thin strand at a time until at last the tree was perfect!

I'm sure of this: I annoyed my family. I'm also sure that more diligently than I prepared our tree, Jesus is preparing us for his return. He reshaped us in Baptism to be children of God. He guides us according to his will. He died on a cross for our forgiveness. His good work in us will be completed in time for his return. On that day he will present us perfect before God, fit for eternal celebration.

Thank you, Jesus, for adorning me with grace and preparing me for heaven.

Decorate: Trim a tree and remember the prep work Jesus does in you.

Read: Ephesians 1:3-10; Psalm 126

*Sandi Geis
St. Louis, MO*

Thursday, December 7, 2017

Waiting Well

I waited patiently for the Lord.

Psalm 40:1

Are you in a season of waiting?

Maybe you are waiting for a loved one to call or visit. Maybe you are waiting for a good diagnosis. Maybe you are waiting for a change in circumstances. Waiting can be hard, because impatience tempts us all.

Whatever the reason for your wait, God is beside you. Like Hannah, turn your waiting period into a time of honest prayer. Share your hopes with him along with your frustrations, worries and fears.

While you are waiting, God is waiting for you to praise him for who he is, no matter what you're facing. He is waiting for you to open your heart to his will. Your season of waiting can become a path to deeper fellowship with God as you learn to wait well.

*Lord Jesus, help me to trust you while I wait.
Amen.*

Pray: List your "waits" to God and pray for patience and trust.

Read: 1 Samuel 2; Psalm 37:3-7

*Sarah Geringer
Jackson, MO*

Friday, December 8, 2017

You of Little Faith!

And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me?

Luke 1:43

What does God think of us when we find it hard to trust him? Should we admit to him it is sometimes hard to believe? God knows our faith is not always strong. In our weakness he gives us signs that help us believe.

Elizabeth's greeting comforts Mary. Her cousin believes that Mary was truly carrying the Christ Child in her womb! When Thomas doubts the risen Lord, Jesus lets him put his fingers in his side as proof. God speaks in a burning bush so that Moses trusts it is God's voice.

God gives each of us what we need to grow in faith. He may provide a memory, a circumstance, an object or person who reminds us of his power and glory.

Lord, I want to be a strong believer. Help me when I am not. Amen.

Remember: Think of a time your trust in God weakened. Who helped you regain faith?

Read: Exodus 3:1-15; John 20:24-29

*Lisa Heule
Littleton, CO*

Saturday, December 9, 2017

Advent Deeds

Great and amazing are your deeds, O Lord God the Almighty.

Revelation 15:3

Our older granddaughter's senior year delivered a great challenge. Makayla badly injured her knee while playing volleyball. She spoke of hope during her strenuous rehab: the hope that drove her was to be able to return to athletic contests. She admitted that older people could probably not look to that particular place for inspiration.

We chronological seniors do find encouragement in Jesus' Advent-style deeds. Jesus entered our lives in Baptism. He is present to hear our prayers. He speaks intimately to us in daily Bible devotions. The Light of the world approaches in Advent candlelight and candlelight Christmas Eve services. His real presence inspires us as we taste his body and blood. He comes through the pastor's words of absolution. Christ promises a second coming for us and all believers. Spiritual rehab is truly an amazing deed.

Dear Holy Trinity, thank you for children's physical healing and their faith in you. Amen.

Listen: Listen to where the young find hope. Share your hopes with them.

Read: John 10:7-18

*Harry Edenfield
Brownstown, MI*

Sunday, December 10, 2017

Christmas Flower

You shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.

Matthew 1:21

Many people have poinsettias among their Christmas decorations. There is a Mexican legend about how poinsettias and Christmas came together. A poor Mexican girl wanted to give something to baby Jesus at the Christmas Eve service. All she had was a handful of roadside weeds. So she put them by the manger. Suddenly, the bouquet of weeds burst into bright red flowers. From that day on, poinsettias were known as “Flowers of the Holy Night.”

The shape of the poinsettia flower and leaves is sometimes thought of as a symbol of the star of Bethlehem which led the wise men to Jesus. The red-colored leaves symbolize the blood of Christ and the white leaves represent his purity.

Lord, thank you for sending Jesus into the world as the Savior. Help me to tell others the true message of Christmas. Amen.

Tell: Use a poinsettia to tell someone the Christmas story.

Read: Matthew 1:18-25

*Jeanette Dall
Batavia, IL*

Monday, December 11, 2017

All Together

And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together.

Isaiah 40:5

Performances of Handel's *Messiah* are popular December events. If you have heard or sung parts of this timeless work, you may recognize Isaiah 40:5. These words, repeated often, form the chorus in a section based on Isaiah's prophecy of salvation.

Just before verse 5, Isaiah prophesies that John the Baptist will "prepare the way of the LORD." At Jesus' baptism, the glory of the Lord is revealed. But Isaiah's words encompass even more. His prophesy includes God saving Israel from exile, to be seen by the "eyes of all the nations" (Isaiah 52:10). Isaiah also prophesies God's glory to be revealed at Jesus' birth. And in a final sense, Isaiah foretells Jesus' second coming—the ultimate day when the Lord's glory is revealed and "all flesh shall see it together." Revelation 1:7 gloriously affirms, "Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him."

"Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!" (Revelation 22:20)

Enjoy: Listen to a CD or online clip of "And the Glory of the Lord" from Handel's Messiah.

Read: Isaiah 52:9-10; 2 Peter 1:16-21

*Marj Maynard
Billings, MO*

Tuesday, December 12, 2017

Fourth Watch

And in the fourth watch of the night he came to them, walking on the sea.

Matthew 14:25

Having trouble sleeping? In the Biblical years, time was divided into eight three-hour “watches.” This narrative references the “fourth watch of the night.” That would be from 3 a.m. to 6 a.m., a time when we usually prefer to be sleeping.

But sometimes we’re awake—even in those pre-dawn hours—with pain, with worries, with stiffness, with waiting for someone to help. What happened to the disciples in a boat? Jesus came to them at that unlikely hour. For us, too, in the middle of the night when restlessness and fatigue defeat our preference to sleep, Jesus comes to us and says, “Take heart, do not be afraid.”

When those sleepless nights make us yearn for the dawn, Jesus, the Light of the world, is there to listen to our concerns and take away our anxieties.

Jesus, thank you for coming to me when I feel so alone in the darkness of the night. Amen.

Remember: Jesus is a ready listener to our prayers, even in the fourth watch of the night.

Read: Matthew 14:22-32

*David Ebeling
Bloomington, IN*

Wednesday, December 13, 2017

Christmas List

Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift!

2 Corinthians 9:15

What's on your Christmas list this year? New long johns? A pair of socks? Maybe a new watch or a framed photo of a loved one? Those tangible gifts have been on our lists for years. There is a point in life, especially if you have downsized, when those gifts no longer matter that much.

It's the intangible gifts that really make a difference—good health, a visit from a family member or even peace in a troubled world. God knew that was what we needed when he sent Jesus—the Healer, the Comforter, the Peacemaker—all wrapped up in one little bundle in a manger. What a gift! That precious bundle gave his life for us on the cross so that we might have eternal life. As we watch friends and family unwrap gifts this Christmas, remember that we have the most precious gift of all, given to us by our great God.

Gracious God, thank you for sending your Son, Jesus, to be the best gift I have ever received. Amen.

Write: Make a list of favorite gifts you have given or received.

Read: Romans 5:15-16

*Margaret Hinchey
Englewood, CO*

Thursday, December 14, 2017

Be a Receiver

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

Galatians 4:4

At Christmastime, each student came with a gift, eagerly waiting for me to open it. After years of teaching, my house abounds in those gifts. As I hang each gifted ornament on my tree, I recall those eager faces. That is part of receiving. The giving is in vain if there is no receiving.

The gifts that God gives to us all of our lives, increase our joy and thankfulness with each remembrance. Foremost is the gift of his Son to live and die for us. There is the ongoing gift of his forgiving grace. The use of his gifts in the giving of love, service and caring is true receiving. Our Christmas gift from our Father is and ever shall be: “Behold, I bring you tidings of great joy which shall be to all people.” Let us receive that gift, live it, love it and remember the giver—and then give it away.

Thank you, Father, for the gift of Jesus. Help us to share him with others every day. Amen.

Wrap: Wrap gifts for loved ones with love notes inside.

Read: Matthew 7:11; 1 Peter 1:3-5

*Connie Bretscher
Valparaiso, IN*

Friday, December 15, 2017

Who Started This?

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing.

Romans 15:13

A woman was shoved into an elevator filled with people and packages. It was not a happy crowd! Another upset shopper mumbled, "Whoever started this whole Christmas thing should be arrested!" After a moment of silence, a brave little voice responded, "Don't worry, they already crucified him!"

So, how are your Christmas plans going? Hectic, swamped, overwhelmed? That's okay; you will make it, because the Lord has already made it happen. His birth in the manger, his death on the cross and his rising from the grave have assured us of his hope, joy and peace in believing. And we are glad!

Lord, you are our God of hope, in spite of the crowds and the hustle and bustle of the Advent season. Settle us down and focus us on you. Thanks for "starting this whole Christmas thing." Amen.

Watch: Look for people around you who are harried, hustling and hurting. Remind them, joyfully, that the God of hope, Jesus, is with them.

Read: Romans 5:1-5; 1 Peter 1:3-9

*Rich Bimler
Bloomington, IL*

Saturday, December 16, 2017

I Want to See the End

Surely I am coming soon. Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.

Revelation 22:20

Advent seems like the longest season of the year. Perhaps it is because decorations are in stores by October or perhaps because we fill those weeks with entirely too many extra activities. It does seem there is no end in sight.

I attended a Christmas parade with my young granddaughter. She wanted to see Santa and his live reindeer as soon as we arrived. I explained they would be at the very end of the parade and she would have to wait. She was patient for a while but missed the joy of the other entries when she became upset because the “end” wasn’t coming quickly enough.

We often feel the same. First, there’s anticipation, then weariness, and finally, we can hardly wait until it’s over. As we realize how Jesus’ birth occurred in God’s timing, as does everything in our lives, we can appreciate the time spent waiting!

Heavenly Father, grant us wisdom to enjoy the anticipation that comes with the Advent season. Amen.

Consider: Discuss the joys of waiting rather than the difficulties.

Read: Luke 2:4-7

*Gloria Doty
Ft. Wayne, IN*

Sunday, December 17, 2017

Advent—The Road of Joy

Restore to me the joy of your salvation.

Psalm 51:12

Whether we are in our youth, in middle age, or in our later years, we may wonder, “What lies on the road ahead for me?” Advent is a road of joy. We may encounter disappointments, sorrow and suffering, but underlying it all there is joy. That joy has its source in God taking on human flesh. He experienced suffering and death. He rose from the dead and promised to raise us. In that is our joy. Looking down the Advent road ahead, we see life with God that never ends.

Ahead we see:

Jesus walking in love with us all the way.

Our hope and confidence is in him.

You can't beat that! Alleluia!

Sometimes the joy is so great you can't help but shout an alleluia and sing, “Joy to the world. Joy to you and me. Amen.”

Lord, there are days when I could use some joy. As I read and meditate on your Word, send your Holy Spirit to lift up my spirit with joy. Amen.

Greet: Visit someone who could use a little joy, even as Mary visited Elizabeth.

Read: Luke 1:46-55

*Leo Symmank
Seabrook, TX*

Monday, December 18, 2017

Exuberant Thanks

Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his steadfast love endures forever! Let the redeemed of the Lord say so.

Psalm 107:1-2

Last Christmas I risked gifting my twelve-year-old granddaughter with a dress. Nervously I watched as she unwrapped it, lifted the dress from the box and politely extended her thanks. But, did she really like it? Soon afterward I received a selfie of my granddaughter wearing the dress and a huge smile, with the message: “Grandma, I love the dress! Thank you soooo much!” The memory of that response still brings a smile to my face. I cannot help but wonder if I convey such exuberant thanks to my Lord for the greatest gift ever given and received: forgiveness of sins through the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus. Let us daily live our thanks in our words, actions, interactions and reactions. Let our “selfies” be expressions of joy and thanksgiving in Jesus!

Lord, lead me to exuberantly share the joy I have in you. Amen.

Consider: What does your “selfie” communicate to others?

Read: Psalm 107

*Judith Christian
St. Louis, MO*

Tuesday, December 19, 2017

Shadow and Light

I am the light of the world.

John 8:12

When we were small, we played with shadows. We wanted to see if we could trick them—outrun them, maybe. We also learned that the closer we moved to a light, the longer our shadow became.

The remembrance of our past sins is like a shadow following us. Many think that age makes the shadow disappear. But the paradox is that as we grow closer to Jesus our shadow becomes longer. We become more keenly aware that it is there. But then we turn and face the Light of the World, Jesus Christ. As we see him there, now in his Word, soon “face to face,” we come to understand once again how deep and wide is the mercy of God in Christ Jesus. Yes, we are aware of our sins—sometimes painfully. But we are more aware that though our sins were like scarlet, they are now white as wool (Isaiah 1:18).

O Light of the world, your Light “swallows up” my shadow. Amen.

Share: What passages in God’s Word are a source of Light to you?

Read: Hebrews 12:1-2

*David Boyd
Staunton, Virginia*

Wednesday, December 20, 2017

It's About Time

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

Galatians 4:4

We often pray at mealtimes, “Come, Lord Jesus, be our guest.” That is certainly appropriate, as long as we also realize that he is already with us, whether we pray that prayer or not. Advent reminds us that our Savior came to us at Christmas in order to die for us on the cross. He comes to us through the sacraments and through the people around us, right now, today.

It's about time that we show those around us that “He is and he is here—the signs are all around us!” So let us pray that we see him in suburbia, in the city and in the small towns, both in the United States and in the entire world. Still today we see the Lord at work even in that “little town of Bethlehem” in Palestine.

Lord, the time has come for us to “show and tell” others that you are living and loving people all over the world, even in your own birthplace. Amen.

Search: Check news sources online to find out what really is happening in that little town of Bethlehem.

Read: Luke 2:1-7

*Rich Bimler
Bloomingdale, IL*

Thursday, December 21, 2017

Brighten Up

The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?

Psalm 27:1

This time of year, the days get darker, and the night comes earlier. Overall, we have less daylight. The lack of sunlight can dampen our mood. We can start complaining about everything and get grumpy.

Can you focus on the Lord who brings light into your days? The Lord is the light that shines brighter than the sun. When we connect with the Lord of light, we brighten up. We can bring the light of the Lord to others we meet throughout the day. Combat the dark days and nights with thoughts of the Lord of light. Call upon the Lord for help. Remind yourself that the Lord is near, and guiding you in the darkness.

Lord of light, brighten me up, so I can share your light with those around me. Amen.

Count: Today, count all the sources of light you encounter. Reflect on how the Lord lights up your day.

Read: Genesis 1:3

Annette L. Sherwood
St. Louis, MO

Friday, December 22, 2017

A Christmas Carol

Now is the time of God's favor; now is the day of salvation.

2 Corinthians 6:2

Ebenezer Scrooge had a ghost problem. The spirits of Christmas past, present and future held out a very bleak picture. Were Scrooge to continue in his miserly ways, the chair of young Tiny Tim would become vacant.

We have a different and far more blessed Spirit. Our God, our helper in the *past*, has kept us in his care throughout years. And now in the *present* he grants us another joyful feast in which to savor the love that descends from heaven to earth in the person of the Christ Child.

And what of the *future*? Nothing but good awaits us on our upward path, for no eye has seen nor ear heard how much the Lord has in store for those who love him. The gospel of God's grace and mercy is unconstrained in showering us with great hope and expectation!

Dear God, bless us now in this season of joy and into our unending future. Amen.

Sing: Sing your favorite carol about God's Christmas presence.

Read: Psalm 90; Hebrews 13:5-8

Don Hoeferkamp
St. Louis, MO

Saturday, December 23, 2017

Christmas Miracle

*As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you.
Abide in my love.*

John 15:9

In looking for a movie that my wife and I might like to take in one afternoon, I found one with a synopsis that caught my eye: “A beloved patriarch asks his family for one gift this holiday season: to get along. If they can honor that wish and spend five days under the same roof without killing one another, it will be a Christmas miracle.”

In the movie cited above there was one family member who wanted healing for the family he loved and longed for a miracle to make that happen. When we recall how the angels on that first Christmas sang of a peace for all people, you can't help but wonder if God's dream was that we all could be one loving family and Jesus was the Miracle to make that happen.

Lord, make me an instrument of your love in this world. Where there is hatred, help me to spread love in Jesus' name. Amen.

Be kind: Be deliberately kind and caring to all the relatives this year.

Read: 1 John 2:28-3:10

*Edward Arle
St. Charles, MO*

Sunday, December 24, 2017

Treasure to Share

Lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven.

Matthew 6:20

To this day my sister and I can describe every nut and piece of candy children received in the glorious boxes given to us as we left the Christmas Eve service. When we achieved the heights of eighth grade, it became our turn to fill the boxes and share the treasure with the younger children.

Paul exhorted Timothy to teach rich people to be generous in sharing, so they could build up treasure for the future and claim that which is truly life (1 Timothy 6:17-19). That is the treasure we have to share today—the treasure of salvation and eternal life through the life and death of our Lord Jesus Christ. With Mary, we treasure the memory of the baby born in a stable and share the treasure of his salvation with everyone we know.

Holy Spirit, give me the words I need to share Jesus, my Priceless Treasure, with everyone around me. In his name. Amen.

Do: Share a Christmas treat or a treasured Christmas memory with visitors. Then share the treasured love of Jesus.

Read: Matthew 6:19-24; 2 Corinthians 4; 1 Timothy 6:17-20

*Ruth Geisler
Aliso Viejo, CA*

Monday, December 25, 2017

The Best Christmas Gift Ever

The virgin shall ... bear a son, and they will call his name Immanuel (which means, God with us).

Matthew 1:23

What is the best Christmas gift you ever received? Was it a special gift from your parents or a gift full of love from your spouse? Some of my favorite Christmas gifts have been simple, homemade cards or gifts that our children or grandchildren made for me.

The best Christmas gift anyone could ever receive is the presence of Immanuel, God with us, living in our hearts and homes. This name for Jesus assures us that no matter what troubles or struggles we may be facing, Jesus is right there with us. Each new day our Lord gives us the gifts that keep on giving—the riches of his love and kindness, his forgiveness and faithfulness. And unlike most of the gifts we get for Christmas, which are soon faded or forgotten, God's treasured gifts will truly last forever.

O come, O come, Immanuel. Abide with me with your grace and blessings, in this season and every season. Amen.

Share: Tell others about the best Christmas gift ever.

Read: Matthew 1:18-25

*Gil Duchow
Hilliard, OH*

Tuesday, December 26, 2017

Contrasting Christmas Scenes

The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father.

John 1:14

We worship with lowly shepherds before a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger. We also join the angelic heavenly host, singing praises to Almighty God, Creator and King. When these two pictures are in juxtaposition, we truly glimpse the wonder of Christmas! True God and True Man came to dwell among us, teach us and redeem us from sin and death.

Jesus Christ came for all: the humble and proud, the rich and poor, the wise and foolish, those anticipating his birth and those unaware of his presence. He offers forgiveness, love and peace today. He offers eternal life in the splendor of heaven to come.

Lord, enable us to see your humble birth with eyes that also see your glory and power. Amen.

Worship: When you see a manger scene, imagine singing with angels as you lay your crown before the King.

Read: Revelation 4:9-11; John 1:1-14

*Sharolyn Sander
Lincoln, NE*

Wednesday, December 27, 2017

Happy Endings

Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.

Philippians 4:6

The year 1992 was a difficult one for our family: three parents in nursing homes; the death of one parent; a child diagnosed with multiple sclerosis, a job loss; and the premature birth of our grandchild in December. That grandson did well: He's now 6' 5" and married! So his birth was a happy ending for 1992.

Baby Jesus was and is the happy ending for every year! God sent his Son to be the Savior of all people! And no matter what happens on our life journeys each year, the birthday of Jesus is a happy ending to celebrate at Christmastime. Believing this strengthens us to live our lives with joy and peace, giving thanks in all circumstances, knowing heaven is our final destination!

Dear Father, thank you for these most precious gifts at Christmas and for eternity: Jesus and heaven! Amen.

Do: Share this message with family and friends at New Year's.

Read: Philippians 4:4-7

*Annette Schumacher
Muskego, WI*

Thursday, December 28, 2017

Bearing Fruit in Old Age

[The righteous] still bear fruit in old age, they are ever full of sap and green.

Psalm 92:14

There is no retirement from bearing fruit for the Lord. As we grow older, we may change the type of activities we engage in, but the call to faithful living and fruit-bearing never changes.

Look around in your congregation. Consider the many who, despite growing older, are still serving in various ministries. In church as well as in society, they are earning the branding “the Responsible Generation.”

This doesn't happen only in organized church ministries. We are called to bear fruit in all of our relationships, in all of our actions, as we go about our daily lives.

Dear Lord, grant that as I grow older I am ever filled with the vitality of your Spirit and produce the fruits that bring you glory. Amen.

Write: Drop a thank-you note to some vital Christians who are still bearing fruit in old age. Let them know you are thanking God for them.

Read: Psalm 92; John 15:1-8

*Ted Zimmerman
Napa, CA*

Friday, December 29, 2017

All Day Long

From the rising of the sun to its setting, the name of the Lord is to be praised!

Psalm 113:3

Are you a morning person? Maybe you're like me, starting your day with a steaming mug and a devotion before the sun comes up. Perhaps afternoon is your favorite time of day. I like the lull of a quiet afternoon, which is good for reading and taking naps. Evening may be your time of choice, when everything has settled down for the night.

Whatever time of day you prefer, consider it your reminder to praise God. In the morning, you can praise him for his promise to be with you throughout your day. In the afternoon, you can praise him for his faithfulness. In the evening, you can recount his blessings to you. Any time of day is a great time to praise God!

Lord Jesus, you are worthy to be praised, every hour of every day. Amen.

Pray: Use different times of the day to praise God and pray for loved ones.

Read: Psalm 65:8; Psalm 55:16-17

*Sarah Geringer
Jackson, MO*

Saturday, December 30, 2017

In, Not For

Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

1 Thessalonians 5:18

For years I misread this Bible verse. I read it as, “Give thanks for all circumstances.” I thought: “No way am I thankful for the diagnosis of cancer. No way am I thankful for our painful church split. Nor can I imagine God asking me to be thankful for those situations.”

Fortunately, one day my eyes were opened to see that Paul did not say “for all circumstances,” but rather “in all circumstances.” What a world of difference the correct preposition makes! I can be thankful that we found a specialist. I can be thankful for two wonderfully skilled surgeons. I can be thankful for the prayer support we received. I can be thankful that we experienced the presence of Christ during some horrible days. I can be thankful for God’s constant steadfast love and you can too!

Lord Jesus, give me eyes of faith to see your bountiful blessings and to be grateful regardless of my circumstances. Amen.

Look: Look for reasons to give thanks in the darkest times of life.

Read: Psalm 28:7

*Glen VanderKloot
Springfield, IL*

Sunday, December 31, 2017

Our Duty

It was the duty of the trumpeters and singers to make themselves heard in unison in praise and thanksgiving to the LORD.

2 Chronicles 5:13

How magnificent it must have been! The work that Solomon had done for the house of the Lord was finished. The gold, silver, holy vessels and the ark of the covenant were brought up and placed in the Temple. And when all was set in place, the Levitical singers and 120 priest trumpeters raised a song of worship with trumpets, cymbals, lyres, and harps. It was their duty to make themselves heard in praise and thanksgiving to the Lord. And the glory of the Lord filled the house of God.

Lord, on this New Year's Eve, I praise your name with a song in my heart for all the blessings of the past year. I magnify you with thanksgiving. You are good and your steadfast love endures forever! Amen.

Do your duty: Let praise and thanksgiving to the Lord be heard from your lips along with the words "Happy New Year!"

Read: Psalm 69:30; 2 Chronicles 5

*Terry Weber
Williamsburg, VA*

HOLY HABITS for **HOPE-FULL HEALTH**

Here are some “attitude starters” for you to reflect upon and discuss with others, as together we share our gratitude to the Lord.

G: Greet a stranger today with a big “God bless you!” and see what happens.

R: Recall someone who recently shared an “attitude of gratitude” with you. Say “thanks” to this person.

A: Always remember to never accept a poor mood (attitude) as permanent.

T: Today I am thankful for ...

I: I showed my gratitude to the Lord today by ...

T: Try to remember a time when you did not exude an “attitude of gratitude.” What or who snapped you out of it?

U: Understand daily that life is not about you and it is not about me—it is about Jesus!

D: Develop a method of moving from an absence of gratitude to a celebratory attitude. Ask others for their suggestions as well.

E: Encourage both the happy and the sad people around you to cling to the Lord as he turns our sadnesses into gladnesses!

Let us continue to celebrate an “Attitude of Gratitude” as we “thank the Lord, for he is good and his mercies endure forever” (Psalm 107:1).

Hope-Full Praying

All Saints Day

For all the saints that have gone before me, I give you thanks. For all the saints who you continue to gather around me in my daily life, I give you thanks. For the promise that someday I, too, will gather with all the saints in heaven, I give you thanks. Keep us saints marching, Lord, here on earth and then on to heaven. Amen.

Thanksgiving

We thank you, Lord, for food and drink, for people around us who push us to think, for harvest and grain, for snow and for rain, for family and friends and joyous amens. For the gift of this day, in your name we pray. Amen.

Christmas

O little one of Bethlehem, you again have wrapped your presence around me this day. As I celebrate your birth, may I always be reminded that you come to me daily so that I can go to others daily to share the joy and blessings of your birth. Make me a gift of love and hope to others, Lord, as you have done to me. Amen.

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