

HOPE-FULL LIVING

• *Daily Devotions for Christian Seniors* •

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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, April 1, 2012

Hope for Today

... having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you ...

Eph 1:18

She kept the sticky note on her door. It was years old now, wrinkled and stained. But every time she passed it, she read it and gained strength. Three short lines, questions for her from her counselor in a time of great sorrow and doubt, when she despaired of life itself: Where am I? Am I present? Am I paying attention to “now”? These three questions still opened her up and helped her through the day.

Sometimes the burden of life can seem too heavy. We might be paralyzed not only by the past, but also by the future. If you have been in this “place,” you know how frightening it can be. A core piece of faith is letting go, paying attention to now, entrusting both the past and the future to the love of God. In other words, that’s what hope-full living is all about.

O God, I commend myself to you: past, present and future, that I might be present to your grace and full of your hope. Amen.

Write: Write those same three question on a note that you can see each day.

Read: Ps 46; 2 Cor 12:9

Jeffrey Loudon

Monday, April 2, 2012

My Aging Life

I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

Phil 4:13

Living in the aging process can be extremely difficult. Sometimes my body hurts. I can no longer do the things I want or used to do. I'm stiff, sore and afraid of falling. While people say these are "the golden years," my life often does not feel golden at all.

This aging process, is it what God wants for me? I know God loves me and has a plan for my life, and I take great comfort in that fact. The Bible does not say life will be perfect. In fact, the Bible chronicles many people in difficult situations.

God gave me life, and my life is in his hands. Christ suffered and died for me, and I should continue to live for him. My older body does not prevent me from telling everyone about Jesus Christ and his love for everyone. So God's plan for my life continues on, aging body or not. And most blessedly, I can pray.

Dear Lord, help me to continue to live my life for you throughout my entire life span. Amen.

Tell: Tell someone how God continues to provide love and light in your life, even when you are feeling immobile and incapacitated.

Read: 2 Cor 1:3-4; Jos 1:9

Jean Plesko

Tuesday, April 3, 2012

A Labor of Love

For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labor of love.

Heb 6:10 (KJV)

After a year and a half of declining health, Lloyd finally died, faithfully trusting in his Savior to the end. Lloyd's wife, Joyce, stuck with him through it all. It was at times very hard. But it was a "labor of love."

In the Bible, God assures us that he will not forget our "labor of love" in his name as we "minister to the saints." A labor of love is not done for the sake of any payment or reward. A labor of love is done simply out of love. What labor of love have you done? What are you doing now that is a labor of love?

Surely the greatest labor of love was when Jesus took our lovelessness and sins upon himself and died in our place. This is love—that he loved us and gave himself for us on the cross. Lloyd and Joyce loved each other. But even more, they both knew the Savior's love for them. That's what makes every loving action a true labor of love.

Dear Lord, help me to love others as you have loved me. Amen.

Act: Do something kind for someone who is hard to love. Let it be your labor of love today.

Read: 1 Jn 4; 1 Cor 13

Lonie Eatherton

Wednesday, April 4, 2012

God Is Merciful

Who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity ... he delights in showing mercy.

Mi 7:18

Here is a simple definition of mercy: when you *don't* get what you *do* deserve. In Micah, we read that God pardons iniquity. He has mercy. He doesn't give us what we do deserve.

There's more! Some penalty for sin *is* due. "The wages of sin is death" (Rom 6:23). But instead, God, in his mercy, gives us life, even life eternal. I'm guessing you see what's coming next. Someone did bear sin's penalty.

Christ stepped in as our substitute. He took our place in death. We will still die. But having died in our place, Christ has turned our death into a gateway to the unveiled presence of God. Now that is getting what we don't deserve.

The one who has mercy invites us to be merciful. We didn't earn mercy. Nor do others.

Merciful God, thank you, and thank you again for your mercy toward me. Amen.

Think: Who has the Lord placed on your heart today in order to show them mercy?

Read: 2 Cor 1:3-7

Don Schatz

Thursday, April 5, 2012

The Cross Is Bigger

May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Gal 6:14

A grandfather was walking down the street with his grandson. As they came to a church, granddad said, "See the big cross on top of the church?" His grandson looked up, pointed to the cross and shouted, "That's not a big cross, that's a little cross!"

Life is all about perspective. To the 70-year-old man, that cross was big because it had been the focal point for so many years to him. But to the 6-year-old boy, that symbol seemed so little, and perhaps even insignificant, because it did not hold the rich meaning as it did to his granddad. Aging does this to people. As suffering and pain become a reality to us, as pieces of our secure life dwindle and are depleted, like health, finances and friends who die, Christ's cross takes on a larger meaning. Life comes and goes, and we continue to boast in the cross of our Savior! Yes, the cross is getting bigger each day! And I'm glad!

Lord, move us to see your cross growing bigger and bigger before our eyes, each day. Amen.

Show: Show someone a cross. Explain why it is big in your life.

Read: Jn 19:17; Lk 9:23

Rich Bimler

Friday, April 6, 2012

Kindness Triumphs

What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?

Mi 6:8

As citizens of the world, we work for justice. As the Church, we are called to reflect the kindness of God. Its highest calling is to demonstrate forgiveness and kindness through Christ's death and resurrection. Only God's kindness and God's mercy give hope and create a thankful heart.

Jesus prayed, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." When Jesus prayed that prayer, he was not asking for justice for himself, but for mercy for those who had wronged him and for you and me.

We see God's greatest kindness, and power, in Jesus dying on the cross for our sins and praying, "Father forgive them." It is not God's justice, but his kindness that brings us back into the family. The Lord has blessed many to live in a land of the free. He has blessed all of us a thousand times over to include us as freely forgiven saints in his family.

O Lord, be merciful to me and open my heart to show love and kindness to others. Amen.

Be Kind: Is there a person to whom you are not kind? Ask God to help you show him or her kindness.

Read: Gal 5:22-26

Leo Symmank

Saturday, April 7, 2012

Did Our Best?

Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost.

1 Tm 1:15

Overall we lived moderate, common-sense lives. Not that we were prigs. We danced, dined, drank, traveled. Yet I bet the Boy or Girl Scout lists, along with the Ten Commandments, were never far away.

Nevertheless, we discovered we could not get through life with clean hands. Conflicts arose, maybe between the demands of our jobs and our families. We often failed one or the other. Sometimes we did not know what was right. Then there are the secret, loathsome weaknesses we've never overcome. Only those who struggle to do right know how hard it is.

We have a Savior! Let the painful memories of failures, mistakes and sins drive home the astounding fact that God forgives us anyway. God would turn our very regrets into appreciation and humble gratitude for what Christ did to save us. Though I am the "foremost sinner," God's grace is bigger.

Thank you, Lord, that you forgive and forget what I cannot forgive and forget myself. Amen.

Challenge: Take your regrets to the foot of the cross, and leave them there today.

Read: 1 Tm 1:12-17; Ti 3:4-7; Rom 7:14-25a

Robert Hereth

Sunday, April 8, 2012

The Habit of Alleluia!

He has risen; he is not here.

Mk 16:6

During the night of Shrove Tuesday, a large wooden cross is placed in the center of the garden of my home church. On Holy Saturday, the cross is wrapped in gold foil, so what greets people on Easter Sunday morning is the brilliance of the resurrection.

When I was young, it was my dad's turn to wrap the cross. Just as my dad was starting, one of those late spring snowstorms arose. I insisted that I take hot chocolate to my dad. When I arrived, the cross was half wrapped.

As we stood at the foot of the half-wrapped cross, it was clear that we sing out "Alleluia!"—not just because of the empty tomb, but because of the cross. The gold foil of the resurrection is possible—only because of the cross.

Lord, empower us to always be in the habit of singing alleluia to you. Amen.

Think: Reflect on hot-chocolate moments in your life.

Read: Mk 16:1-8

Paul Park

Monday, April 9, 2012

Sing a New Song!

Oh, sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord, all the earth!

Ps 96:1

Have you heard the songs of spring? Birds cheerfully awaken us. Flowers trumpet vibrant colors. Bumblebees buzz with delight. All of God's creation seems to burst into harmony!

God takes great delight in you! He offers unconditional love, joy, peace and victory—now and forever—through our Savior, Jesus Christ. God created you for a unique purpose and equipped you with the gifts to play it out—no matter how large or small your audience.

Try something new this spring. Are you the best cookie baker in town? Love to use a hammer? Do you have a listening ear? Each act of service can be a new melody of praise. Titus 2 implores seasoned adults to “sing” by example to the next generation. The Spirit gifted you with a special song; the world will be blessed to hear it!

Lord, put a new song of joy in my heart, and empower me to share it in meaningful ways. Amen.

Create: Sing a favorite song with a child, your spouse, a shut-in or anyone who will sing along.

Read: Ps 100; Ti 2:2-5, 11-14

Sharolyn Sander

Tuesday, April 10, 2012

Care for Your Beloved

What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.

Mt 19:6

“In sickness and in health.” That’s how we promised to love and care for one another on that day of our marriage 50 years ago. We never imagined what those words would mean to us. We had our share of physical ailments, of course, but we were not prepared for the slow onset of memory loss. Call it “dementia” or “Alzheimer’s,” but it is so hard to care for my beloved with all the daily indignities. I never expected the day would come when she would not even remember my name.

Yet each day I recall those words spoken before the altar so many years ago: “in joy and sorrow,” and, of course, “in sickness and in health.” Isn’t that the vow our Lord made to us on the day of our baptism? In our sin-sickness and our resurrection health, our Savior was and is faithful, and so will I be.

Lord, give me strength and a capacity for gratitude for all that has been. Amen.

Support: How might you support spouses burdened with the care of the other?

Read: Ru 1

Donald and Margaret Hinchey

Wednesday, April 11, 2012

Spiritual Body

It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body.

1 Cor 15:44

There is a difference between the body prior to death and the body transformed through death in resurrection. Christ's body after the resurrection was physically real. He ate fish with his disciples. His disciples could touch his body. He walked and talked.

What difference does my body post-resurrection make for me today? The promise of resurrection and the nature of our resurrected bodies are living examples of how God has changed us.

The vision of our resurrected bodies is not a spiritual carrot God is dangling before us. It is the future example of what God has made us already: spiritual beings who think spiritual thoughts and dwell on spiritual realities. We are children of God today, and we have eternal life. Spend today in eternity, and don't sweat the small stuff.

Eternal God, empower me to live the resurrected life to your glory today. Amen.

Share: Share the hope of eternal life with someone today.

Read: 1 Cor 15

Don Schatz

Thursday, April 12, 2012

Beginnings

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Mt 28:19

We all have beginnings, and incidentally there are times when there are endings too. Sometimes those endings are something we look forward to in order to begin again, start fresh, start anew.

Today I invite you to begin your day “in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” Remember who you are in Christ, and whose you are on account of his death and resurrection. Begin anew and start fresh with your Lord in your heart, at the front of your mind, intertwined with your thoughts and beside you as you go out the door. Look at this as a day of change, where you may stop for a moment and begin refreshed, renewed and restored in the grace of God.

Today this beginning with Christ may certainly bring about many things, but more importantly, this beginning may also bring many blessings in his name.

Grace me with wonderful beginnings in the name of Jesus. Amen.

Recall: Recall your baptism in the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Read: Mt 28:16-20

Cory A. Wielert

Friday, April 13, 2012

The Creation

Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?

Jb 38:4

When Job doubted the most, that was God's response. In other words, look around at this wonderful world, a place where we are related to every other living thing! It's a gift, and it's not of our making.

Take a look around you, no matter where you are. In the city, look at your fellow human beings, at the trees and plant life, maybe the dogs and cats and birds. If you are in the country, look at the forests and meadows. Bend low, and look at the flowers. If it is fall or winter, look at the leaves decaying back to enrich the soil. Look at the clouds. Notice their shape, color and the speed with which they move.

Sometimes there are moose in my yard. When my daughter walks home from school, she has to watch out for them. They are ungainly and beautiful, powerful and dangerous all at the same time. The moose for me are a sign from God. What is your sign?

Gracious God, thank you for this home, given to all living creatures as a gift. Amen.

Watch: Pay attention to where you live and whom you live with, and give thanks.

Read: Ps 104

Jeffrey Loudon

Saturday, April 14, 2012

H2Oh!

Pour out your heart like water in the presence of the Lord.

Lam 2:19

Rejoice, that you know your God well enough to pour yourself out to him! Rejoice, that you know yourself better with each passing day! Rejoice, that you have so much more to offer your family, your friends, the world, than you did even five years ago.

You live with abundance in ideas, in experience and in spirit. The gift of you overflows, and it's time to pour out your heart to us all. What can you tell me about God? That God wants us to dream big? God wants us to live large? Maybe that all is manageable in life with God's help?

Pour out your stories about God to those whose lives you touch and watch what happens. From trickle to stream, gusher to geyser, you know God rejoices when your heart flows!

God, you have gifted my spirit with your promised abundance. Now it is my turn. Give me the vision and strength to pour my heart out like water, in the name of Christ. Amen.

Find: Find someone who needs to hear your favorite Bible passage, and read it to them.

Read: Dt 6:4-9; 2 Tm 4:1-7

K. S. Wuertz

Sunday, April 15, 2012

The Beauty of the Earth

Let the rivers clap their hands, let the mountains sing together for joy; let them sing before the Lord.

Ps 98:8-9a

It's here! Yes, spring! The grass is green; the trees are dressed in delicate, new leaves. The flowers are beginning to bloom. We praise God for the beauty of the earth.

The hymn “For the Beauty of the Earth” reminds us that the beauty of the earth and sky is an expression of God’s love for the earth—and us! Each day the sun comes up and goes through its course in the hours of day and night. How can anyone look at the sky full of stars and not see the glory of God?

The last stanza of the hymn speaks of seeing God’s glory and love in the coming of his Son. What could be more glorious than a Savior who became part of God’s creation?

Open our eyes, Lord, to see your glory and goodness in the wonders of creation. Help me to see your glory also in other people, and in the forgiveness you offer through Jesus. In his name I pray. Amen.

Go: Go outside or look out a window. See something—a tree, a flower, a person—for which you can praise God today! Say “Alleluia” three times.

Read: Ps 8:3-9; Lk 12:27-31

Eldor Kaiser

Monday, April 16, 2012

Holding God's Hand

Even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me.

Ps 139:10

One of my favorite things to do is walk around the neighborhood with my three-year-old granddaughter. Hand in hand, we inspect rocks, leaves, bugs, etc. She soon lets go of my hand and runs ahead of me. The sound of a barking dog or a loud motorcycle brings her racing back. Sometimes, as she is skipping ahead, she doesn't see a raised section of sidewalk, then trips over it, falls and skins her knee. This brings her limping back, chin quivering and in need of some extra loving.

We do the same thing with our loving Father. We start out being close, but soon become distracted until life's loud noises and bruises send us running back to God. Life would be much easier if we continued to hold his hand.

Heavenly Father, let me never run too far from you. Amen.

Look: Look for areas of your life that have become too far away from God. Make an effort to take his hand again.

Read: Jn 10:29

Gloria Doty

Tuesday, April 17, 2012

Forget to Remember

Make me understand the way of your precepts...

Ps 119:27

“My wife is in the early stages of dementia. She forgets a lot and other things she repeats and repeats ...” My friend shared this several times during our visit.

But God remembers: “I will remember my covenant that is between me and you” (Gn 9:15). That covenant ties us to the heart of God and his salvation for us forever!

But God forgets too: “I will not remember your sins” (Is 43:25).

There are things we must never forget: obligations made to each other in love and how to forgive.

There are other things we must forget: spouses’ mistakes.

There are yet more things we do well to forget: the art of insult and cutting remark.

There is one thing in particular to remember: we are loved eternally by God in Christ!

Lord, may I remember your promises and forget nonessentials. Amen.

Forgive: Forgive and forget the hurt that someone has done to you.

Read: Ps 103:6-14

Tom Zehnder

Wednesday, April 18, 2012

It's OK to Be Old

Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace.

Col 3:15

Did you know that aging begins at conception? Aging is a programmed life change, and you age throughout the continuum of life. In truth, we are born to die. Our society devalues older people, and that is called ageism. We consider ourselves old when society categorizes us as old. We remain the same person no matter what our age, and as we age, we become more like ourselves. We are what we are, only more so. That means we should always strive to be more like Jesus. He is the model for our life.

Our age does not change the fact that God sent his Son to die for us. Age is no barrier to working in God's kingdom. The Bible tells us stories of older persons (Joshua, Isaiah, etc.) who continued to do God's work throughout their lives. Our life for God is never done. We do not retire from his work. We are always, "in his service." That is the reason it is OK to be old.

Father God, fill me with your fountain of life, so I may continue to serve you all of my days. Amen.

Serve: Continue to serve God every day of your life.

Read: Is 46:4; Ps 36:9

Jean Plesko

Thursday, April 19, 2012

Kite Hopes

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.

Rom 15:13

Kites—those colorful, airborne spots of hope: the kite our granddaughter flew on the beach; the kite flying from the roof of a building in the South Bronx; the kite the nursing home resident flies from his wheelchair near the entrance to his residence.

The kites, though, are tethered to an earthly reality. The lifeguard said no kites on the beach. The kite in the South Bronx was connected to a neighborhood of poverty, crime and brokenness. The nursing home resident knows he won't leave his wheelchair. Are those kites just respites from life's harshness?

Yes, and much more. They are part of the mix, just one of the ways we share with others our hope in God's salvation, even as we struggle with life. God desires that we abound in hope that spills over to others, maybe even at the end of a string.

*God of hope, fill me with your joy and peace.
Amen.*

Visualize: Think of a way to visualize God's love to someone today.

Read: Jn 3:8; Ps 16:11

Sally Beck

Friday, April 20, 2012

Loving Kindness

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life.

Ps 23:6

Sometimes in my Scripture meditations, I compare different translations of the Bible out of curiosity. The word *mercy* in Psalm 23 appears only in the King James and ESV translations. Others use *love* or *loving kindness*.

As caregivers, we may show mercy or empathy for the person for whom we care, but do we forget to express the love and loving kindness? As we care for our loved one—spouse, parent, child or friend—do we have a hard time remembering the love amidst the problems and fatigue?

Remember to show the love and loving kindness that is in your heart, even when it seems deeply buried. Jesus hears our prayers for the strength we need to continue.

Dear Lord, give me strength, courage and loving kindness. Help me remember that you alone know what is ahead and you will be there with me. Amen.

Share: Share the loving kindness of God with someone today.

Read: Ti 3:4-5

Maggie Hilmer

Saturday, April 21, 2012

A Little More Light

For it is you who light my lamp; the Lord my God lightens my darkness.

Ps 18:28

Once I reached 80 years of age, it seemed that there weren't as many lamps in my world as once was the case, and that those there were didn't shine as brightly as they once did. You too? Or is that just me?

Come to think of it there are a lot of other places in life that once were "brighter" in my life that now seem to be dimming. Shadows are edging in. My world doesn't seem as safe a place to be. I am increasingly concerned for my family. And why can't I feel better, get stronger or mend quicker? As all that darkness gathers, I don't see as well or hope as much. We need more and better light.

At home I flip a switch to get both. In life why not ask the Source of all the brightness I need to shine in, on and through me? Now that's a bright idea!

Shine into all the darker corners of my life, Lord. Let your brightness reflect from me to others. Amen.

Shine: Any idea how you can let his light in you shine so that others who see it will glorify the Source of all light, your Father in heaven?

Read: Jn 8:12; Mt 5:14-16

Charles S. Mueller, Sr.

Sunday, April 22, 2012

Spiritual Reading

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven ... a time to seek.

Eccl 3:1, 6

Do we spend more time searching for keys and glasses than for God? Listen for him by reading the Bible and spiritual works. As seniors cut back on work, there's opportunity for listening to God. After breakfast we might sit down with a spiritual book and a cup of coffee. Too often, we go for milk, rinse yesterday's mugs, take our pills, observe the low pill supply and, lest we forget, order refills online. A nephew's e-mail pops up. We answer him, read a library notice. Gathering laundry we walk back to our open book just as the clock strikes noon. We need to groove the God-seeking reading habit into our brain.

Lord, the creator and master of time, help me make time to search for you by reading. Amen.

Set the Alarm: For the next 12 days, set an alarm for a time to listen to God in spiritual reading. With no exceptions, read uninterrupted. Gain a new habit of seeking God each day.

Read: Eccl 3:1-9; Jn 6:35-58

Patricia Rice

Monday, April 23, 2012

So You Are Retired!

Even to your old age and gray hairs ... I will carry you; I will sustain you and I will rescue you.

Is 46:4

A retired man said to me the other day, “I am bored with living. I feel unwanted. I am washed up. I have no purpose for living. I am in the way. I might as well die.”

Maybe this is you talking. If so, look again at our verse for the day. God promises to sustain, carry and rescue you, even in your old age. You can count on his promises because of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. That’s why the apostle wrote, “Fix our eyes on Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith” (Heb 12:2).

Retirement is simply another stage on life’s journey. It is a time to let God reposition your life. As the psalmist writes, “Planted in the house of the Lord ... they still bear fruit in old age” (Ps 92:13-14).

Lord Jesus, reshape my life in these retirement years. Amen.

Challenge: What can I do to make these retirement years a blessing to others?

Read: Heb 12:1-3; Ps 92:1-4, 12-15

Walter M. Schoedel

Tuesday, April 24, 2012

143. 1433.

We love because he first loved us.

1 Jn 4:19

I receive messages on my cell phone with “text shorthand.” For instance, “143” means “I love you.” It is based on the number of letters in each word. One replies, “1433”—I love you too.

Jesus is God’s text message. Jesus is the Word. Jesus said 324—God is love (yes, I made that up). God makes us part of his text message to the world. We love because he first loved us.

As “little Christs,” we have the wonderful message of God’s love to share. God looks at us and says 143. We look at God as his children and say 1433. You are God’s 143 to the world. No one can say 143 like you can. God knows what he’s doing. God knows you. God loves you. Today he will show many how much he loves others by sending them you.

God of love who is love, thank you for your love. May I be your 143 to the world today. Amen.

Explain: Explain God’s “143” to someone today.

Read: Jn 1:1-4; Jn 3:16

Don Schatz

Wednesday, April 25, 2012

Ageless Grace

Your name, O Lord, endures forever, your renown, O Lord, throughout all ages.

Ps 135:13

My family and I walked the Freedom Trail on a recent trip to Boston. After four hours of touring historic buildings my 8-year-old daughter had a breakdown. “I don’t care what some people did ten thousand million years ago!” she cried.

Do we risk encountering this response in our Christian witness today? Is simply retelling the old, old story of Jesus and his love a turnoff for people living in this post-modern world?

Sharing the Good News of Jesus’ life, death and resurrection is vitally important. But God’s grace is also on display in our Spirit-led actions and attitudes today. It is not history; it’s HIS story—one that is always up to date. Keep that in mind today as you follow our Lord on his trail to freedom.

Lord, help me to tell of your ageless grace through what I say and what I do. Amen.

List: Make a list of times throughout your life when God’s grace was especially evident. Then share that list!

Read: Eph 2:1-10; 2 Tm 1:8-14

David Mead

Thursday, April 26, 2012

Divine Math

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

2 Pt 3:18

When I was in school, I loved math. I still remember learning to add and subtract, multiply and divide. Maybe Peter had math in mind when he wrote to the believers in the first century. He wanted them to grow in their faith. He suggested that they become involved in addition and multiplication—a lifestyle for us as we age.

First, ADD to your faith, the faith that God has given you—goodness and knowledge, self-control and endurance, godliness and love (2 Pt 1:5-7).

Second, God MULTIPLIES his grace and peace to you (2 Pt 1:2). As you spend time meditating on his word, his grace and peace are multiplied many times over.

Lord Jesus, help me to grow in my relationship with you and those around me. Amen.

Be Aware: Notice how divine math can help you resist temptations.

Read: 2 Pt 1:2-9

Walter M. Schoedel

Friday, April 27, 2012

A Twist on Forgiveness

If you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.

Mt 6:14-15

A dear friend of mine told me recently that her adult son revealed that he was “finally able to forgive her.” She was stunned. What had she done that needed forgiving? As the mother of six, she knew she made mistakes. But she never intentionally hurt her son. Not knowing what else to say, she said, “I forgive you too.”

In the Lord’s Prayer, Jesus reminds us that we will be forgiven in the same measure that we forgive. Scary thought. If we don’t forgive, God won’t forgive us. It’s our choice.

Holy God, help me to forgive others from my heart—all others—no exceptions, so that I might experience your love and forgiveness to the full. Amen.

Pray: If there is someone you just can’t forgive, pray the Lord’s Prayer daily and open your heart to its words.

Read: Mt 25: 31-46; Jb 42:1-6

Gwen Costello

Saturday, April 28, 2012

Good Shepherd

All we like sheep have gone astray.

Is 53:6

My sister and I have a favorite memory from a trip. We saw a lamb jump a fence and trot onto the highway. We pulled over and tried to grab that lamb, but we had to give up. As shepherds, we were a bust. As we pulled back onto the highway, we saw the farmer pull his truck up to the fence. The entire herd of sheep inside the fence, as well as the straying lamb, ran directly to him. They knew their shepherd.

Each day we fall into sin, running straight away from God. We complain amidst our blessings, speak spitefully and look the other way when someone needs help. Daily God calls us to confess our sins, and daily he forgives us because of the uncomplaining Lamb who bore the punishment for our sins on the cross. Jesus, both sacrificial Lamb and Good Shepherd, calls us by name and holds us in his loving arms. We navigate life's raging highways together, relaxing in his arms as we begin our eternal life.

Father, thank you for the forgiveness you freely give me in Jesus. In his name pray. Amen.

Bring: Bring a long-held grudge or remembered slight to God's attention. Ask for forgiveness.

Read: Is 53:4-7; Ps 23

Ruth Geisler

Sunday, April 29, 2012

I Shall Not Want

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.

Ps 23:1

“Not want” here means having enough, not like a child “wanting” everything he sees at Christmas. Has our Shepherd seen that we’ve had “enough”?

Try starting your morning prayers by saying “thank you” specifically—naming family members and friends, looking about the room, the house, thinking of the plans for the day ahead. When we do, we find out we don’t want for very much. And our Shepherd will continue to provide.

But there are folks in want who are our concern as Christians because our Savior identifies himself with them. “As you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me” (Mt 25:40). So the grandma eating cat food is Jesus. The starving child is the Christmas baby. The old man freezing is the Lord.

God counts on us as long as we live to use our energy, money and vote to help the needy. We thank our Shepherd by loving his needy sheep.

Lord Jesus, help me remember it is “our” daily bread, not “my” daily bread that you give. Amen.

Call: Call your local food pantry, homeless shelter or senior center, and ask what they need.

Read: Mt 6:25-31; 1 Tm 6:6-19; Phil 4:10-13

Robert Hereth

Monday, April 30, 2012

Retirement

He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son

...

Col 1:13

Retirement has its good points—time to relax or pursue personal interests like reading and traveling. Retirement can also be difficult and frustrating. We like to *feel* useful and *be* useful. When we can't work or earn or serve anymore, we feel useless.

We are so used to working and earning that we may be tempted to work or earn our salvation too. We try to bargain with God or meet him halfway. We don't need to come halfway. God has come all the way to us in Jesus Christ. Read today's Bible verse. Who is doing all the work? God *delivered* you from the darkness of sin. God *transferred* you to the kingdom of his Son. Good news—the work is done! How's that for a retirement package?

Heavenly Father, thank you for delivering me from sin and transferring me into Christ's kingdom. Amen.

Give: Give thanks to God for saving you through the work of Christ. Rest in him!

Read: Eph 2:4-10

Carol Geisler

Tuesday, May 1, 2012

Grandparents Who Care

Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.

Jn 15:13

According to a 2011 U.S. Census Bureau report, the number of children living with their grandparents has increased by 64% in the last decade!

For Helen, the granddaughter was her part-time child care, and when that care was no longer needed, Helen's heart was broken by the absence. For John and Karen, their grandson had no other adoptive option than their open home following their daughter's divorce and death.

Within those statistics are countless stories of older couples who relive their parenting heritage in order to faithfully live out their Lord's proclamation: "Love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this—that they lay down their lives for their friends." Or their grandchildren, we might add.

God of generations, we pray for grandparents who have taken unto themselves the care of their grandchildren. Through their love, may your precious children experience yours. Amen.

Support: How might you support someone who is caring for or raising their grandchildren?

Read: Gal 4:1-7

Donald and Margaret Hinchey

Wednesday, May 2, 2012

Prom Queen

But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ.

Phil 3:7

Were you voted most likely to succeed in high school? Were you a star athlete, top of your class or prom queen? Do you dream about those days? If so, you may have difficulty living in the moment since nothing can ever quite live up to those glory days.

St. Paul knows what this can feel like. He was once lauded as a Hebrew of the Hebrews and a Pharisee of the Pharisees because of his persecution of Christ's followers. But he was missing God's moment for his life as an apostle of Jesus Christ bringing salvation to the world. In a dramatic conversion, God made Paul see that his past gains were losses because of Christ's death and resurrection. Living in the moment for Paul became all about living for others in the present and preaching to them about the future glory that will be revealed when Christ returns. You can learn from Paul that past memories of glory are not worth comparing to the glory days to come in heaven.

Lord, thanks for past blessings and the present joy of knowing the future glory that awaits. Amen.

Live: Live in the moment for those glory days!

Read: Rom 8:18-25

Stephen J. Carter

Thursday, May 3, 2012

Old Game—New Twist

If you seek him he will be found by you ...

1 Chr 28:9

It was a strange “game” that David described to Solomon, his son, nothing like the hide-and-seek I played while growing up. In those days the one who was “it” closed their eyes and counted to thirty while everyone else looked for a place to hide. But the “game” David described was different. While God should be the one who is hiding, he is not. He doesn’t want to hide. He wants to be found, and to prove it, he hides right out in the open! Imagine. Sounds like something from *Alice in Wonderland*. And there’s more. Our God not only doesn’t hide, he anticipates our needs so that, “Before they call I will answer” (Is 65:24). What a twist!

I like the way he plays the game better than mine, especially as he explained it to Zacchaeus: “For the Son of Man came to seek and save the lost” (Lk 19:10). Is there no end to the delightful way he does things?

*Lord, make me a seeker that is found by you.
Amen.*

Find: Where and when have you found God “hiding” in plain sight?

Read: Ps 145:18; Mt 11:28

Charles S. Mueller, Sr.

Friday, May 4, 2012

Now and in 20 Years

My yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

Mt 11:30

Years ago when I lived in intense daily pain and my hands didn't always do what I wanted them to do, Satan tempted me with the thought, "If it's this bad now, what will it be like when I'm 70 or 80?"

One morning my pastor preached the above words of Jesus. Not willing to use names, he looked people directly in the eye as he said, "Perhaps your burden is a loss of income. Perhaps you dread your latest test results." He looked directly at me. "Perhaps you deal daily with pain. If Jesus says to you today 'My yoke is easy, and my burden is light,' he will be saying the same thing to you 20, 30 years from now."

A great weight lifted from my heart. Four major cervical spine surgeries later, Jesus still helps me handle the pain. He's been doing it for years and will continue to help me every day for the rest of my life. The burden will never become too great, for Jesus is lifting it with me. He will do the same for you.

Dear Jesus, thank you for helping me deal with my burdens each day. In your name I pray. Amen.

Call: Call someone who is bearing a heavy burden. Read this text with them and pray together.

Read: Mt 11:28-30; Ps 13

Ruth Geisler

Saturday, May 5, 2012

Don't Worry

So don't worry ... your heavenly Father already knows all your needs.

Mt 6:31-32

Scripture supplies little information about the time the twelve disciples spent with Jesus. Where did they spend most of their time, where did they sleep or get their meals, how did they do their laundry—personal questions aren't answered, aren't even raised.

We who have been called to be disciples by the same Jesus who said to those fellows, "Follow me," might do well to imagine ourselves in those men's sandals. They got hungry. They got seasick. And, of course, they fretted when faced with the problem of feeding five thousand who showed up for one of Jesus' lectures.

As age catches up with us, our concerns mount—Social Security, pension, prescriptions, mobility limitations and such loom before us. The Lord who may seem to be asleep, lovingly chides us for our "little faith," and has a word for us. With nail-scarred hands he reaches out and says, "Have no worry."

Lord, let me never be fearful of the future. Amen.

Visit: By phone, note or in person, visit a person you know is fretful about his or her future.

Read: Mt 6:25-34; Mk 4:35-40

Karl Lutze

Sunday, May 6, 2012

Teach Me to Grow Old!

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

Is 46:4

In his book, *Nearing Home*, Dr. Billy Graham says; “I had been taught all of my life how to die, but no one had ever taught me how to grow old.”

How are you doing “growing old”? Who is teaching you, and who are you teaching to age gracefully in the Lord? I think of my friend Dick who formed a personal Board of Directors to help him plan for his future. I remember Mel who began a blog to share his faith and life stories. I meet with Charlie who continues to mentor, coach and teach me about aging. And, of course, there’s Hazel, who faithfully nudges, challenges and forgives me each day.

Thank the Lord for people who are helping you to age well. Think of people younger and older whom you are teaching and telling and touching in Christ’s name. Watch for others who need encouraging words to remind them that it is the Lord who sustains them.

Lord, thanks for allowing me to grow old. Help me help others do the same. Amen.

Say: As you meet people today, look them in the eye and say, “My, you’re aging gracefully.”

Read: Ps 71:18; Prv 16:31

Rich Bimler

Monday, May 7, 2012

A Gentle Rustle

And after the fire a still small voice.

1 Kgs 19:12

I like reading about Elijah in his prophetic prime. But I also enjoy reading about him in his weaker moments, when he is more like me.

In 1 Kings 18, God had given him a magnificent triumph. But when Queen Jezebel came looking for revenge, he ran as fast and as far as he could. God came to him there by giving Elijah a glimpse of the divine power which Elijah had forgotten. When the fireworks were over, God spoke.

Some describe his speaking as “a still small voice.” Others, “a soft stillness,” “the daughter of a sound” or “a gentle whisper.” Elijah needed God’s quiet assurance that he had not given up on Elijah.

Ever wonder whether God has given up on you? Ask him about it. Sit still. Let him speak to you in his Word where softly and gently Jesus is calling.

Here am I, Lord. Use me as you will. As one who has been saved by your grace, help me to hear what you have to say to me. Amen.

Listen: God uses people like you in places exactly where you are. Listen to what God is saying to you. You’re not over the hill. You are on duty.

Read: 1 Kgs 19:1-15

Charles S. Mueller, Sr.

Tuesday, May 8, 2012

Fear of the Future

Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding.

Prv 3:5

My situation is precarious, and I don't know what the future holds. Is there a medicine for my current health problem? Is there a cure? As my situation progresses, will I still be able to take care of myself? Who will help me? There are so many questions. Sometimes I think there are few answers, but I continue to pray for resolution.

The grace of God allows me to trust. God loves me so much he sent his only Son to die for me. God will not forsake me and will continue to uphold me throughout any situation. *Who Do You Trust?* was a popular old television program. That question is for all of us to answer, and it can only be answered with the words "Jesus Christ." He has always been there for me in the past, and I know he will always be there for me in the future.

Dear Lord, continue to give me your grace and blessings in the future. Amen.

Share: Share your faith in Jesus with someone you know who has health problems.

Read: Mt 6:34; Phil 4:7

Jean Plesko

Wednesday, May 9, 2012

Good Pickings

Each tree is recognized by its own fruit.

Lk 6:44

A woman I know has spent the past few years in anger and revenge. She doesn't understand why so few people are left in her life. Luke says we bear what is stored in the heart. We may mask our appearance or words for awhile, but we can only bear what we have.

Prayerfully, each season we get stronger. Sometimes we are pruned; other times we grow. If our fruit is picked too quickly, it is sour and unusable. If we hold it for too long, it becomes rotten. But mature trees bear the absolute best fruit! Isn't that your experience?

How does your fruit sustain the world? Do the seeds scatter to the four winds? What does your "tree of life" feed us?

Lord, help me carefully tend to my actions and words, so I will continue to bear good fruit for others, in your name. Amen.

***Bear Fruit:** Feed a child today. Give a child—in your family, at church or on your block—some of your time and attention.*

Read: Hos 14:1-2; Jn 15:2

K. S. Wuertz

Thursday, May 10, 2012

When You Pray

He said to them, “Whenever you pray, say: “Our Father ...”

Lk 11:2

Do you pray? How much? If you are like me, you will have experienced those moments when you feel guilty that you haven't prayed enough. But what is enough?

When the disciples came to Jesus and asked him: “Lord teach us to pray,” it seems to suggest that they were experiencing the same kind of thing. Jesus' own prayer life was obvious. Theirs was nothing like it. There was something they needed to learn.

Jesus' answer to their request is heartening and helpful also for us. “Whenever you pray, say, ‘Our Father ...’” Our prayers come out of the Father/child relationship we have with God through Jesus—a relationship that is there all of the time because God has created it that way. And our prayers are *whenever*. Whenever we talk! In a close relationship, that is pretty much all of the time. It is as natural as that.

Father, help me to remember that my part in our conversations is prayer, talking to you as dear children talk to their dear father. Amen.

Rejoice: Consciously turn your quiet moments into times of conversation with your heavenly Father.

Read: Lk 11:1-13

Lionel Otto

Friday, May 11, 2012

A Spiritual House

... you, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

1 Pt 2:5

Jesus talked about building our spiritual house on the Rock, not the sand. Jesus is the Rock, the foundation of God's Church. Peter envisions God using each of us as living stones as he builds his spiritual house. God dwells in his Church, as he dwelt in the Temple of old.

Think about your church building. It is a "church" because God's church (his children) finds itself at home there. Your pastor gets to look at the "real" church each week. He gets to look at all of you! It is a wondrous sight.

How have you been blessed by being part of the spiritual house of God's people? What special spiritual blessings do you bring to the Church? Give God glory and thanks for all of that today.

Holy God, Creator and Builder of everything, thank you for your grace-full construction. Amen.

Pray: Say a prayer of thanks for people you know who are living stones of God's house.

Read: 1 Pt 2:1-10

Don Schatz

Saturday, May 12, 2012

This Old House

I praise you, for I am ... wonderfully made.

Ps 139:14a

Place your hands together and squeeze over and over. When I had an echo cardiogram, I saw my heart squeezing 70 beats a minute, as it has been hour after hour, day after day, year after year for 80 years. It's odd, but as the parts of my body wear down, I learn more about what I have been taking for granted.

Find that old encyclopedia or Google “eye” and “ear.” Learn of the 24,000 ear fibers that stimulate hearing nerves and the light-sensitive cells that enable you to see stars a billion miles away. Or sip your soup and imagine how the sun's energy in those tomatoes is transferred to blood cells and carried to the billion cells of your body.

When this body at last gives out, God promises us a “spiritual body” in heaven (1 Cor 15:44). If God can make something as miraculous as our present body from “dust” (tomatoes, wheat seeds, etc.), the spiritual body awaiting us must be some marvel!

Lord, help me care for this miraculous machine you've provided for my days here. Amen.

Be Healthy: Pick one “health tip” you're hearing about, and do it today.

Read: Ps 139:1-18; 1 Cor 15:35-58

Robert Hereth

Sunday, May 13, 2012

The Empty Nest

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

Mt 11:28

When Martha left for college, Bob and Helen wept for awhile. “Losing” their only child to another home was hard, but they soon discovered that they enjoyed their new-found freedom.

But now she’s back! After graduating with great grades and recommendations, the job market can’t find a place for her. So she moved into her old room where she sulks. She works a dead-end retail job and dreams of what might have been. They love their daughter but feel helpless to help. At least they can offer her a home.

Sound familiar? We get guidance on how to parent in every stage of life from our heavenly Father, who teaches us that a good parent always loves, forgives, gives hope and welcomes back with open arms.

God, our consistent, unwavering Parent, thank you for the home in your heart to which I might return when the world has no place for me. Amen.

Do Lunch: Do you know of an older child who has returned home? Take him or her out for coffee or lunch.

Read: Lk 15:11-24

Donald and Margaret Hinchey

Monday, May 14, 2012

Hope

Therefore ... we do not lose heart.

2 Cor 4:1

Someone recently wrote that the current recession is not only about money, but more importantly about hope. That is a scary phrase. Money can be managed. Even the lack of it can be handled for a certain time. But a lack of hope means that our horizons are too close, and our courage and joy are taken away.

Thanks be to God that the angels most often say, "Do not be afraid." Or translated, "Have hope." In the face of life unraveling, maintaining an attitude of hope is easier said than done. But when we face our limits, remember the gift of hope. When many voices despair, take a moment to breathe, a sweet breath of air. Feel your diaphragm expand, your lungs move up and then fill with air, breath, spirit, wind.

Maybe this is the primal prayer, to breathe with thanksgiving and hope in the face of everything, come what may. Breathe in and receive what God wishes to give. Breathe out and release your fears.

O Lord, help me to breathe, centered in the gift of life and the gift of hope. Amen.

Walk: Walk with someone who is afraid and support them simply with your presence.

Read: Lk 12:27-28; Lam 3:22-24

Jeffrey Loudon

Tuesday, May 15, 2012

Remembered

I will remember the deeds of the Lord; yes, I will remember your wonders of old.

Ps 77:11

We forget things. Sometimes it is little things, like pouring orange juice on cereal or putting sunglasses in the refrigerator. But it can become more difficult to remember other things, too, more important things. One day may bring more serious and frightening forgetting—the loss of past memories and the names and faces of loved ones.

There is much that we may forget, but through the gift of his Word, we can read and remember what God has done. We remember what he did for his people throughout the centuries. We remember the long years of blessing in each of our own lives. We remember with thanks and praise his promise kept, the promise of a Savior. If a day finally comes when you cannot remember even that, know that God cannot forget you. In Christ Jesus, you are his precious, redeemed child. He remembers.

*Thank you, Lord Jesus, for remembering me.
Amen.*

Remember: Remember your loved ones in prayer today.

Read: Is 49:14-16; Lk 23:39-43

Carol Geisler

Wednesday, May 16, 2012

Day After Day

I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

Phil 4:13

The disciples had fished all night and their nets had come up empty. But Jesus instructed them to cast their nets out once more, and then it happened. Fish everywhere!

There's a word for fishing all night and catching nothing: *boring*. There are advantages in organizing our schedules and finding ways to do things efficiently, but the repeated pattern can produce boredom.

These men weren't about to launch a new life of exciting fish-catching. They were, however, consciously accepting Jesus' invitation to be his followers. Wherever they would go, whomever they would encounter, they would be conscious of Christ's presence. They could not even begin to imagine how exciting their life would become. So when we complain, "Same old this" and "Same old that," remember that Christ is at our side. This raises our perspective—and provides us with gratifying purpose in our life-walk.

Lord, forgive my frequent forgetting of your presence with me. Amen.

Relate: Think of someone you see every day. How would Jesus relate to that person? How do you?

Read: Mt 28:16-19; Ps 37:3-6

Karl Lutze

Thursday, May 17, 2012

Former Days

For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.

Rom 15:4

It's important to preserve the past for the sake of the future. People write in diaries, assemble photo albums or prepare video journals, recording special events and family histories. We want to share our experiences and the lessons we have learned. Perhaps the next generation can be spared the errors we may have made.

St. Paul tells us that the Scriptures are a record of the past written for the sake of the future. We find encouragement in the Word as we read about the promises of God and his mighty acts in history. We have hope, knowing that God kept his promise to send his Son to be our Savior. In God's record of the past, we learn that our future is secure in Christ Jesus!

Lord, thank you for the encouragement found in your Word. Amen.

Write: Write or record your story of faith for the future.

Read: 2 Cor 1:18-22; 2 Tm 3:14-17

Carol Geisler

Friday, May 18, 2012

The “If Onlys”

Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding.

Prv 3:5

If only I were healthier! If only I were stronger! If only I could be more confident! The “if onlys” can lead us into a life of cynicism and selfishness. Thinking only of what we don’t possess leads us away from God’s plan for our lives. Constant negative introspection derails us from serving the God who loves us and gives us so many blessings.

So how do I get rid of my “if onlys”? We need to focus on what we have, not on what we don’t have. It has been said so many times, but it is true: count your blessings. Look for the good in your life. God has given life; Jesus came to give us a more abundant life. Visiting with family and friends is a joy. Seeing God’s beautiful universe is uplifting. Praying for others brings peace. We are truly blessed to be a blessing because of God’s love for us.

Heavenly Father, help me to see the positives you put in my life. Amen.

Be Positive: Think about how you can help others be more positive.

Read: Jn 15:16; Phil 2:15b-16

Jean Plesko

Saturday, May 19, 2012

The Gift of Time

And who knows but that you have come to a royal position for such a time as this?

Est 4:14

My grandfather used to tell me he was living on “borrowed time.” In fact, none of us are on borrowed time. No one’s purpose on earth has passed until their time on earth is past. Our time is a gift from God to be used for his purposes.

Look at your life. Can you identify moments when you, like Esther, were called to greatness on God’s behalf? How did God make it happen? What about your not-so-great moments? What can you learn from them?

We never know how we are going to be used by God. We cannot comprehend how our lives might intersect. But minute by minute, we take action in Christ’s name and follow our hearts. Because who knows but that you have come for a time such as this?

Lord, you’ve given me this moment. Use me as needed, to fulfill your purpose (and mine). Amen.

Minister: Each moment you are here is purposeful to God. Who, around you, is struggling in life today? Find them and minister.

Read: Ps 138:8; Eph 5:15-20

K. S. Wuertz

Sunday, May 20, 2012

Hang In There

My power is made perfect in weakness.

2 Cor 12:9

As I looked out the window of our cabin on a beautiful summer morning, I noticed the clothesline at the cabin next door. It had one clothespin in the center of the line as it stretched from tree to tree.

I couldn't help but think that this clothesline is kind of like our life as it stretches from beginning to end. God is our clothespin in the middle, our heavenly Father who anchors us to the line of life. We could think of ourselves as the dirty laundry, washed clean by Jesus' blood and hanging on the clothesline in the surging sunlight of the Holy Spirit. He holds onto us when we are dripping wet and fresh, and still holds us when we feel all dried out.

This is a picture to keep in our minds as we go through the day. Sometimes we feel like we might not have the strength to hold onto the clothesline. We must remember we don't need any strength; we can be limp or even all dried out. God is our clothespin. He will hold us tight.

Dear Jesus, thank you for always being my strength. Amen.

Relax: Relax and "hang in there." God loves you.

Read: Is 41:10; Is 40:31

Maggie Hilmer

Monday, May 21, 2012

Power-less Lunch

I want to know Christ [and] the power of his resurrection.

Phil 3:10

Remember the days when some of us were involved in what we called a “power lunch”? The concept of a power lunch was to attempt to influence your colleagues to buy your product, order more supplies, contribute to a charity or help our nephew land a promising new job. Sometimes it worked; sometimes it didn’t. I really do not miss those!

However, what I really enjoy now is what I call “power-less” lunches! This is when friends gather at a local eatery, not to sell or promote or convince anyone to do anything, but rather to talk and listen to each other, share family stories, find out about each other’s health, offer words of encouragement and hope, pray together, mentor and connect with other special people. Then leave with more joy and ideas than you brought! Come to think of it, these “power-less” lunches really are “power lunches,” in the Lord!

Lord, let your power launch me as I continue to celebrate your resurrection with others. Amen.

Invite: Invite someone to join you this week at a special “power lunch” in the Lord!

Read: Rom 9:17; Rom 15:19

Rich Bimler

Tuesday, May 22, 2012

No Place For Me?

They attempted to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them.

Acts 16:7, 10

“There is no place for us anymore,” many of my retired friends lament. But we can rephrase the question, “Is there no place for me?” to ask, “Is there a *new* place God has for me?” Paul was denied further work in Asia Minor so he would go to Macedonia. That’s how the Gospel jumped to Europe! If God closes one door, what other door opens?

Ruth, frustrated and alone, took the dreaded step of moving to a retirement community to find that her gifts were needed, from helping new friends at the dining table to pushing the cookie cart in the nursing home section. Bob discovered that his grandkids in college treasured his long letters as much as they did the \$20 he sent. And by our Christian attitude of hope and trust, at any time we can create an atmosphere that may prepare someone for the seed of God’s Word of forgiveness and love.

Lord, I offer myself to be your servant. Show me where and how. Amen.

Think: Think of one of your “Someday I should ...” ideas. See what doors God may open for you.

Read: Acts 16:6-10; Phil 3:12-15; Mt 7:7, 8

Robert Hereth

Wednesday, May 23, 2012

The Cloud of Witnesses

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses ...”

Heb 12:1

“She has had the same friends for a 100 years,” my husband told a friend. While I’m really not that old, friendship and connections are important to me. Friends, old and young, friends for 100 years or only 6 months, offer perspectives on life which enliven and enlarge my own.

As we get older, some friends pass from this life to the next. That, however, does not mean they are gone completely from our lives. In fact, our lives continue to be enriched by those physically present (or at least by telephone) and those who are “absent from the body.” Whatever the case, friends or the cloud of witnesses, whatever you call them, help us to be who we are or who we are to be.

Enjoy your friends or the memories you have of them. Thank God for them. Stay connected.

God, thank you for my friends, that cloud of witnesses which surrounds me. Amen.

List: Make a list of people who have been significant in your life.

Read: Heb 12:1-3; Jn 15:9-13

Linda Seyenkulo

Thursday, May 24, 2012

Signs of Aging

Do not cast me off in the time of old age; do not forsake me when my strength is gone.

Ps 71:9

Hair loss. Extra pounds. Suspicious lumps or spots. Daily pills and more pills. Forgetfulness. Knee and hip replacements. All these signs of aging can create anxiety and deflect us from our calling to live in the moment for Christ and not for ourselves.

The psalmist helps us to see aging from a different perspective. He certainly prays that God will not cast him off or forsake him in old age. But he remembers God as a rock of refuge at the time of his birth (Ps 71:3, 6) and as a teacher in his youth (Ps 71:17). Thankful for lifelong blessings, the psalmist prays with hope in God's deeds of salvation as hair turns gray, so that he can live joyfully in the moment by telling coming generations of God's power and righteousness (Ps 71:18-19). Welcome signs of aging as fresh opportunities to service and perhaps chances for more time to live in the present with members of the next generations.

Lord, thank you for your lifelong faithfulness. Use me each day to pass your love on to others. Amen.

Thank: Give thanks for signs of new life.

Read: Ps 71

Stephen J. Carter

Friday, May 25, 2012

Half Done

... that our God may make you worthy of his calling and may fulfill every good resolve and work of faith by his power ...

2 Thes 1:11

When you were growing up, were there those in your life who urged you to keep at something you had started, saying, “Well begun is half done”? Well begun may be half done, but half done isn’t worth much until it is finally all done. Right?

In my past there is a trail of any number of unfinished good intentions stored in the back of some closet or gathering dust in a file cabinet. None are worth much.

God doesn’t buy into the idea that half done is of any real value. At creation he said, “Let there be ...” And there it was. Done! On the cross our Savior said, “It is finished.” And it was. Done! No wonder we sing, “How great thou art.” He is a finisher of what needs doing. How about us?

Lord, I praise you for completing your saving work on my behalf. Help me finish my acts of love and kindness towards others. Amen.

Finish: Complete something today that needs to get done.

Read: Gn 2:1, 2; Jn 19:30

Charles S. Mueller, Sr.

Saturday, May 26, 2012

Loneliness

But, as it is written, “What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him.”

1 Cor 2:9

Loneliness is a common human experience. Loneliness can be described as a vague feeling that someone or something is missing from one's life. It can be a frequent problem for aging persons due to the multiplicity of losses than can occur as one grows older. It is lonely when one loses a spouse, a lifestyle, a trusted friend, a beloved home. Loneliness can make us feel sorry for ourselves. Coping and adjusting to such changes is a monumental task.

Turning to God for help is the answer. He has promised he will never leave us, so we can confidently trust him and follow the life he continues to give us. God provides us with comfort and help for our feelings of loneliness by sending people who love us, caregivers who care for us and people who pray for us. Joy awaits us in the future because our future is with God in heaven.

Thank you, dear Lord, for being with me at all times, especially during my lonely times. Amen.

Visit: Visit someone who struggles with loneliness.

Read: Heb 12:2-3; Phil 4:6-7

Jean Plesko

Sunday, May 27, 2012

Zapped Again!

Refresh my heart in Christ.

Phlm 1:20

Recently, on a tough day, I met a stranger and we really connected. We talked about many things, including our Christian faith. It turned out we both needed renewal. The Holy Spirit had ministered to us, and we gave thanks. I left with my heart refreshed and my spirit on fire. We never know when the Holy Spirit may need us or feed us.

We may refresh our hearts through worship, song, giving and receiving love, studying the Word or prayer. But renewal from the Holy Spirit still comes as an unexpected and welcome surprise. We never know the time, place, person or situation. Suddenly, our heart is being transformed, our spirit is “zapped” into action. We live anew with the vigor of Christ.

Let today be a day the Holy Spirit uses me to refresh the hearts of those around me, Lord. Amen.

Encourage: Give a stranger a message of encouragement and hope today. Start with a warm smile, a question and a listening ear.

Read: Is 7:14; Rom 12:4-8

K. S. Wuertz

Monday, May 28, 2012

Spiritual Gifts

Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers [and sisters] ... To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

1 Cor 12:1, 7

We are Spirit-gifted. It is not a gifting we have to seek. God gives it to us freely. The Holy Spirit gives all Christians spiritual gifts.

St. Paul wanted his readers to know about spiritual gifts. What are your spiritual gifts? How has God equipped you spiritually? Our gifts are important for the life and ministry of the Church. If Christians do not know their spiritual gifts, the Church's work is diminished.

If you don't know what your spiritual gifts are, start by listing your passions. What are you passionate about? The answer will point you toward your giftedness. Take a spiritual gifts inventory. Why not stop being uninformed and imagine how your congregation's impact on the community will be blessed with your gifts and with you!

Holy Spirit, thank you for your gifts of grace. Show me my gifts; teach me to use them; use me for the good of the Church. Amen.

Do: Take an inventory of your gifts.

Read: 1 Cor 12:1-30

Don Schatz

Tuesday, May 29, 2012

The Signs of the Times

You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times.

Mt 16:3

Everybody predicts the weather; we know the signs. In fact, we delight when the weatherman gets it wrong and we get it right! According to Jesus, it's more important to know "the signs of the times."

The morning sun appears. It's not just a sign of a pleasant day. It's a sign that the God of all shines his sun on all people, loves all the people of the world and sent his Son to be the Savior of all.

An earthquake shakes the earth. It's not just a sign that something moved deep down in the earth. It's another sign that all things are moving toward that day when our Lord will come again, raise the dead and give eternal life to all believers. It's a sign that each day we can lift up our heads in hope-full living to see our salvation drawing near.

Dear God, lift up my head each day with forgiveness and hope in Jesus, my Savior. Help me to share the good news with others. Amen.

Challenge: Lace your weather conversation with the signs of the times: "God has given us another fine day." "The Lord is coming soon!"

Read: Ps 19; Mt 24

Lonie Eatherton

Wednesday, May 30, 2012

Storms Anyone?

“Why are you afraid, O you of little faith?” Then he rose and rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was a great calm.

Mt 8:26

I am fascinated by storms—the darkness, the flashes of lightning and the roaring thunder that soon follows. Now, as I am growing up, that excitement is turning into concern that the storms could devastate my friends, my neighbors, maybe even my home.

Storms are similar to sin. Sin can be exciting, but in all cases it shall prove to be devastating. That is why God constantly and fervently reaches into our lives to bring hope, strength, guidance and forgiveness through his Son, Jesus. Through Jesus, we find true excitement. Because of Jesus, we are able to see the storms of our lives pass to see another day blessed by the grace of God. As we see on the horizon of our lives the wake of waves and sin, we are ever more comforted by the calming works of Jesus as he rebukes the havoc around us and gives us peace.

Help me to know your calming ways, O Lord, and to tell others of your saving ways. Amen.

Monitor: Keep track of your storms, and place them into the hands of God.

Read: Ps 107

Cory A. Wielert

Thursday, May 31, 2012

Gentleness

Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near.

Phil 4:5

Although we are born with gentleness, it doesn't stick with us. When we became impatient as little children, most of us lost our God-given gentleness. So gentleness is a strength that is reacquired with age.

My professional training in human services taught me to combat violent behavior with gentleness. Repeatedly, I was amazed how quickly gentleness overpowered anger and rage. Remaining calm and quiet in a threatening situation goes against our "fight or flight" human nature. But it works.

In many situations, we may question whether being gentle is appropriate. Paul gives us clear guidance. Being gentle throughout our lives is always a good thing. Just in case we don't get it, Paul adds a little incentive to "grow up and get gentle." "The Lord is near," he says. So why not be gentle to all today?

Lord, because of you, I have grown into gentleness. Help me to continue my gentle journey. Amen.

Look: Look for situations where you can use your gentleness to move things along today.

Read: Ps 37:7-11; Mt 11:25-30

K. S. Wuertz

Friday, June 1, 2012

Wonderful! Wonderful?

When anxiety was great within me, your consolation brought me joy.

Ps 94:19

It was vintage Lawrence Welk. A song or dance routine ended, and Lawrence exclaimed: “That was wonderful, wonderful!” And it usually was. But there are so many real-life moments when there is a big question mark behind wonderful.

Have you ever had an anxiety attack (not so wonderful)? Have you ever had a medical diagnosis that centered on “the C word” and your anxiety level went way up (not so wonderful)?

There are medications to lessen anxiety symptoms, but the psalmist had a better prescription: “Lord, your consolation brought me joy.” Now that’s wonderful!

Consolation means the gift of personal peace, throbbing with hope and experienced in the midst of anxiety: “My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus’ blood and righteousness.” Now that’s wonderful!

Jesus, you are my consolation in all times of anxiety. You are wonderful! Amen.

Share: Share your wonderful consolation with someone who is anxious.

Read: 2 Cor 1:3-7

Randy Shields

Saturday, June 2, 2012

Living Legacy

Who am I, Lord God and what is my family, that you have brought me this far?

1 Chr 17:16

David, a man who held God's heart, prayed to him with an awestruck understanding of God's powerful intervention in his life. David didn't always get it right, but he did maintain an ongoing, lifelong conversation with God.

David chose God: when he was up or down, whether he agreed or disagreed, in sin or triumph. God loved him for many reasons, but David's awe-inspired faithfulness most pleased God. David was truly honored by God's presence in his life.

By making God the center of his life, David achieved greatness. His choices continue to affect every person who comes to know God and Christ. David's legacy is a testament to God-inclusive living. What will your legacy of faith be?

Lord, help me to understand from whence I came and act accordingly. Amen.

Tell: Tell someone about your history with God today.

Read: Col 3:15-17

K. S. Wuertz

Sunday, June 3, 2012

Chance

For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.

Jer 29:11

Louis Pasteur once said, “Chance always favors the well prepared mind.” I believe this is true. When you are well prepared, you may be able to succeed. Or you at least have a better chance. All our lives we are being prepared. Notice how I said being, in that we are not preparing ourselves, but that we are being prepared by something outside of our selves.

All our lives God is preparing us, molding us, shaping us to be his own. Every little detail—even the seemingly minute ones—play into this preparation. What are we being prepared for? For any time we are called upon by God to serve, of course. And each of us serves the kingdom in an entirely unique manner befitting our own preparation. Don’t you think it is amazing to be molded and shaped by God, as he has plans for us to prosper and to serve his people?

Prepare me to be of service to your kingdom, in Jesus’ name. Amen.

Journal: Write about how God has shaped you, and make a list of the gifts he has given to you.

Read: Gal 4:1-7

Cory A. Wielert

Monday, June 4, 2012

His Heart's Desire

You have given him his heart's desire ...

Ps 21:2

King David rejoiced that God had given him “his heart’s desire.” What is your heart’s desire? Fame? Fortune? Health? Power? Many people find their heart’s desire in being loved. You can take a lot of disappointment in life if you just know someone loves you.

King David had riches, power, fame and all the rest. But what was his heart’s desire? The love of the Lord. David was “a man after God’s own heart” because he knew the steadfast love of God for him. And that is what he desired above everything else. When David sinned, God was there to forgive him. When he felt weak, God was his refuge and strength. When things seemed hopeless, God gave him hope in the coming Savior. David lived a hope-full life every day because God had given him his heart’s desire. God gives the same to you in Jesus your Savior.

God, let me desire nothing more than to know your love and to love you with all my heart. Amen.

Thank: Go over your prayer list of all your heart’s desires. Thank God for all he has given you in Jesus your Savior.

Read: Ps 130; Mt 6:19-34

Lonie Eatherton

Tuesday, June 5, 2012

On the Road Again

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not of your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

Eph 2:8-9

When I was young, I spent nights confessing wrongs I had done. I swore that I would not repeat my sins, but I did. It was a hopeless road to travel. My real problem is that my whole being is infected with rebellion against God. I wanted to restore a relationship with God through my promises to God, when the real power lay in God's promises to me.

There is a line of thinking that as we grow older in the faith, we become less sinner and more saint. So what percent of saintliness is passing? Seventy? Or will fifty-one percent get us by? I believe I am always 100% sinner, even when I am reading the Bible. I believe I am always 100% saint, by the grace of God.

We travel God's road of forgiveness where the Holy Wind blows free and where we inhale his forgiveness with every breath. It is also the road home and into the arms of our ever-loving Father.

Thank you, Father! Keep me, Holy Spirit, on Jesus' forgiveness road. Amen.

Grasp: Hold the hand of another who is stumbling.

Read: Ps 32

Leo Symmank

Wednesday, June 6, 2012

Avoid the Danger

I want you to be wise as to what is good and innocent as to what is evil.

Rom 16:19

When Mark Twain applied to captain a river boat, the owner asked, “Do you know where every false channel, every hidden sandbar, every sunken log between St. Louis and New Orleans is?” “No, I don’t,” he replied. “But I know where they aren’t!”

Some people know all about the dark and dangerous sides of life. In the process, they forget where safety lies. Sad. Wooed by the siren call of sin, they damage their lives and that of many around them.

Others are not as wise about all that’s wrong in the world. Knowing that sin is “out there,” they ask God to show them where it isn’t by joining Jesus in his prayer, “Our Father who art in heaven ...” that earnestly ends up asking, “... lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.” God answers that prayer. He shows where the paths of righteousness and forgiveness in him are to be found. There’s safety there.

Savior, I want to follow on guided by you. Help me do that. Amen.

Find: Find his safe “paths of righteousness” in your corner of the world today.

Read: Ps 23—slowly.

Charles S. Mueller, Sr.

Thursday, June 7, 2012

On Asking for Favors

Father, not as I will, but as you will.

Mt 26:39

The disciples submitted to their Teacher a petition for a course in “Praying.” Jesus obliges by composing the Lord’s Prayer for them.

His response is remarkably different from what might be expected. Most who pray request favors, largely because people have so many personal needs or desires which, after all, initially prompt their praying. The Prayer Jesus gives them—and us—is not characterized by requests for favors. Instead, his focus is on commitment on the part of the one praying.

It may seem the petition for “daily bread” itself requests a favor. Clearly, however, this is not a request for abundance, but merely enough bread for “this day,” enough to insure us strength to carry out our commitment to serve the Lord.

Lord, who supplies all my needs, give me strength, wisdom and focus as I commit myself and my days to faithful service to you. Amen.

Commit: Pray prayers of commitment rather than requests for favors today.

Read: Lk 11:1-4; 1 Tm 6:11

Karl Lutze

Friday, June 8, 2012

Overwhelmed

And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up.

Gal 6:9

We all sometimes feel overwhelmed. Maybe you, like me, have said, “Lord, enough is enough!” The storms of life pour down buckets of struggles, and we have trouble keeping our heads above water. We focus our thoughts on moment-by-moment survival.

As Christians, we try to face difficulties with Jesus as our role model. What did Jesus do while on earth? He took care of others—his disciples and followers, the sick, the needy. He also took care of himself. He ate, slept, cried, rested and laughed. Most of all, he stayed focused, not on earthly needs but on why he was here—his Father’s plan for our salvation. What does Jesus do now? He gives us the strength to keep going. He helps us find a way when all paths seem to lead to a dead end. He gives us hope of someday resting in his arms in eternal peace. As we struggle moment by moment, we need to turn our thoughts to him, even when there doesn’t seem to be any time.

Lord, help me to stay focused on you even when I feel overwhelmed by life. Amen.

Breathe: Do some deep breathing today to relax.

Read: Jn 16:33; Heb 12:2; Mt 6:5-15

Maggie Hilmer

Saturday, June 9, 2012

I Am Blessed

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

Mt 5:3

Jesus begins his Sermon on the Mount, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” Being blessed means far more than being happy or having something good happen to us. God sees us where we are, no matter our condition, and says, “You are in the right place, a child in my kingdom, I will handle your troubles and give you everything you need.”

We are poor in spirit. We can lay no claim on God’s kingdom through our own merit. God’s grace through the sacrifice of his Son sets our feet on blessed ground. Humbly we reach out and cling to God in times of crisis and need. As he puts his healing, forgiving arms around us, we see the glory that will be ours with him one day in heaven.

Father, as you bless me, help me to be a blessing to others, in Jesus’ name. Amen.

Assure: Assure someone who is ill of God’s healing presence.

Read: Mt 5:1-11; Ps 1

Ruth Geisler

Sunday, June 10, 2012

A Drop in a Bucket

Behold the nations are like a drop from a bucket.

Is 40:15

Growing up, I used to milk the cow. A nearly full bucket twice a day was plenty for our big family. Once we had a cow that would regularly raise her right hind leg and bring it down on the edge of a nearly full bucket. A drop in a bucket was about all we had left after that.

We all know the expression “a drop in a bucket.” It comes from the Bible. Isaiah 40:15 reads, “Behold, the nations are like a drop from a bucket.” Nations are big and powerful. But up against our God, the Creator and Savior of the world, all those nations count for no more than “a drop from a bucket.” God has power over all the nations of the world. And God is our God who saves us and works together in all things for our good. We are not a “drop in the bucket” to God.

God, everything that troubles me is only a drop in the bucket compared to your great love for me. Let me live this day in the power of your love. Amen.

Watch: Watch the news today in the confidence that the world and you are in God’s good hands.

Read: Rom 8; Ps 46

Lonie Eatherton

Monday, June 11, 2012

A Boy and His Sailboat

For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

Eph 2:10

Jonah spent hours building a sailboat. He took his boat down to the lake and pulled it along the water's edge by a string. But the string slipped out of his hand. The wind caught the sail and carried the boat across the lake. His boat was gone.

Two days later Jonah passed the pawnshop. In the window, he saw his boat with a price tag of \$4.95. He rushed inside and shouted, "That's my boat. I made it." The storekeeper did not believe him. Jonah ran home, took money out of his piggy bank and returned to the store to buy back his boat. He said, "Little boat you are twice mine, once because I made you and twice because I bought you."

That is also our story. We are twice God's: once because he created us in our mother's womb, and twice because he bought us with Jesus' death on the cross. We belong to the Lord. That makes us very valuable.

Lord, thank you for giving me worth. Help me to give worth to others. Amen.

Tell: Tell the sailboat story to a young child.

Read: Eph 4:32—5:2

Leo Symmank

Tuesday, June 12, 2012

Surprise Party

“For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.” And they began to celebrate.

Lk 15:24

It had been a long time. I had told the old man I wished he were dead, taken half his net worth and left town. Now I was back—and really messed up. I figured no one would be expecting me, so I could sneak in the back door.

As I came over the last rise, I saw him standing at the gate, peering at the horizon. Eyes down, I continued down the path. I glanced up again only to see the old guy running toward me. “Great,” I thought. “There’s probably three or four field hands behind him ready to throw me off the property.” Then he was there, right in front of me, sweaty and breathless.

Incredibly, he began to smother me with hugs and kisses. So I started my well-rehearsed speech, but before I’d gotten a few words out, he was barking orders at the field hands to start the party! I was home again. I was alive.

Longing Lord, sharpen my vision to see and welcome those who are coming back. Amen.

Watch: Keep watch for someone trying to get home. Welcome her/him, and arrange a celebration.

Read: Lk 15:3-10

Mike May

Wednesday, June 13, 2012

Joy in Trials?

Count it all joy when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness.

Jas 1:2-3

I often struggled with James' pairing of *joy* and facing *trials*, until someone told me that to confront or face something really means to stand up to it, to deal with it. If we refuse to meet and face the trials that come, we forfeit the opportunity to grow in faith and also to bless others. Running away and seeking cozy comfort will not advance the kingdom or our faith.

We don't face trials alone. Jesus has promised to be with us and Paul reminds us to take up the armor of God. We witness to Christ's power in us when we use trials to grow in trust and perseverance and allow others to see God's work in us.

Lord, help me to meet difficulties with confidence, trust in you and be a witness to others of your power and grace. Amen.

Be Confident: Face your challenges today with confidence in Christ.

Read: Jas 1:2-4; Eph 6:10-18

Diane Bahn

Thursday, June 14, 2012

Cross-Tie Walker

Many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their destination is destruction ... But our citizenship is in heaven.

Phil 3:18-20

Cross-tie walkers were 20th-century migrant workers who often found temporary employment along railroad lines. While they looked for jobs, they often walked the wooden railroad cross ties from town to town. They were also called hobos. It is speculated that the word *hobo* is a symbolic abbreviation for **h**omeward **b**ound. If that is true, how ironic that a person known for staying in temporary shelters and working temporary jobs would be called a hobo.

As Christians, we are also hobos, people who are working temporary jobs and living in temporary shelters with the goal of being homeward bound. We realize that the comforts of this life are fleeting, and a greater place awaits us in heaven. Our citizenship is in heaven, where our eternal home was secured by Christ's life sacrificed on the wooden ties of the cross.

Lord Jesus, help me to live on earth with my eyes fixed on my heavenly home. Amen.

Remember: Remember that heaven is your true and eternal home.

Read: Phil 3:12-21; Heb 11:13-16

Kathy Chinberg

Friday, June 15, 2012

Every Day Is Easter

Whoever lives by believing in me will never die.

Jn 11:26

The fear of death can rob us of the joy of living. The drama *Lazarus* illustrates the Christian's hope that transforms the fear of death into a celebration of life.

Lazarus watches a funeral procession leave the village of Nain. He hears Jesus say to the dead man, "Young man, I say to you, rise." When the young man rises, Lazarus dances and shouts, "He did it! He really did it!" At the death of Jairus' daughter, Lazarus watches as Jesus says to her, "Little girl, get up." When the girl sits up, he shouts, "He did it! He did it again!" In the final scene, Lazarus has died and been buried. Outside the burial cave, Jesus calls, "Lazarus, come out." Lazarus comes out, looks in bewilderment at Mary and Martha and his own grave clothes. When he sees Jesus, he knows what happened. He dances in celebration, singing, "He did it! He did it again! He did it for ME!"

This is also your story. Celebrate Easter every day.

Thank you, Lord, for the promise of a life with you that is forever. Amen.

Do: Place a rock on your window sill as a reminder of Jesus' empty tomb.

Read: Jn 11: 38-45

Leo Symmank

Saturday, June 16, 2012

Letting Go

And he said to her, “Your sins are forgiven.”

Lk 7:48

Do you hold onto things? I do. My basement is filled with things my wife and I have collected throughout our marriage—photographs, videotapes, a wedding dress, mementos from when our children were small, souvenirs from vacations and the like. Some things hold incredible sentimental value. Others are things we just don’t want to part with yet. Some people hold on to too much. They become “hoarders,” an illness that causes obsession with holding on to everything.

Maybe you have become a hoarder of regret. You may recall moments in life when you hurt someone, made a regrettable choice or chose not to do something for someone else. The good news Jesus proclaims is that you and I are forgiven. Like the woman washing Jesus’ feet, we too receive his forgiveness. We just need to let go.

God, give me the courage to let go of my past sins and fully accept your forgiveness. Amen.

Clean: Take some time to clean out your “junk drawer” or another area where you collect stuff.

Read: Lk 7:36-50

Joe Iovino

Sunday, June 17, 2012

What *Might* Happen

We even saw giants there ... We felt as small as grasshoppers ...

Nm 13:33

Deciding whether to take on a new task these days means confronting issues of mobility, body functions, etc., as well as mental worries about what *might* happen. Do we let what *might* happen stop us?

When Moses sent scouts to the Promised Land, many came back terrified of what they might face. They saw the inhabitants there as “giants” and felt as small as grasshoppers. This proved not true. But their fears overwhelmed the people, and that generation never saw the Promised Land.

Growing older means accepting that we give up one thing after another, as if God is saying, “No more.” But do we let “imaginary giants” that *might* happen stop us? Rather, if God has opened a door, we can trust that God, who has brought us through already, will continue to carry us along no matter what *might* happen.

God, give me strength to deal with limitations and courage to leave what might happen to you. Amen.

Weigh: Weigh your fears of what might happen against all that God has done for you already.

Read: Nm 13:30-14:25; 1 Pt 5:7; Rom 8:28

Robert Hereth

Monday, June 18, 2012

Give Forgiveness

As the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.

Col 3:13b

Forgiveness is always a gift ... received with relief and rejoicing, a humble recognition of sin's ugliness and God's grace. David's desire for a clean heart in Psalm 51 took him on the journey each of us must make daily, on the road back to a joy-full life in the Lord. It begins with a look in the mirror and confession for what we see. It recognizes God's cleansing power—through Jesus' life, death and resurrection—to purify the heart, renew the soul and dwell within us. Look for Jesus' righteousness in the reflection. Forgiveness restores the joy of God's salvation and upholds us with a willing spirit to imitate Christ.

Like all of God's good gifts, forgiveness is meant to be shared. As we recognize God's forgiveness toward us, we more easily give it to others. God weaves this opportunity into the fabric of everyday life to be a blessing—for you and everyone else who needs it.

Make me aware of your constant forgiveness toward me, Lord. Amen.

Give: Drop a coin in a jar each time you choose to forgive. Give the coins as an offering to God.

Read: Ps 51:10-13; Col 3: 12-17

Sharolyn Sander

Tuesday, June 19, 2012

A Good Word

So shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose.

Is 55:11

A simple word is all it takes. An angry word can set the tone for a long and unhappy day. A kind word, a gracious word, may lift up and encourage someone whose day has not been going so well. A few words can accomplish a great deal.

God's Word always accomplishes its purpose. When the time was right, God kept the promises we have read so often in the written Word. He sent his Son into the world, Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh. Jesus, the Word, accomplished his Father's purpose as he died and rose to win salvation for us. Let your words today reflect the love of Jesus, the Word of God.

Lord, your Word always accomplishes its purpose. Help me to speak good and gracious words to others. Amen.

Offer: Offer a good word, a Gospel word, to someone today.

Read: Is 55:10-13; Ps 119:97-104

Carol Geisler

Wednesday, June 20, 2012

Things Change

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.

Heb 13:8

Things change. Two little words, but what an impact they have! Some people embrace change. Others refuse change in any form. We should probably live somewhere between these two extremes.

Change cannot be avoided; children grow up and leave home, vehicles wear out and employment often forces a change in location. We also see changes in worship. Again, some people embrace the changes, others let the changes grow on them gradually and still others vehemently oppose change in all forms.

No matter which group we fall into, the one thing we need to remember is God and his Word do NOT change. The presentation may change, but the message of salvation stays the same. God extends grace through his Son, Jesus Christ, and salvation is a gift to all who accept him as their Savior.

Thank you, Lord, for being the same every day and for the assurance that your Word never changes. Amen.

Try: Try to understand someone who views change differently than you do.

Read: Ps 90

Gloria Doty

Thursday, June 21, 2012

Children Who Care

... the word of our God will stand forever.

Is 40:8

There was a time when our parents grew old, and we children cared for them. They died, and we grew older and were cared for. Then we died, and so the generations passed away. The psalmist extends the boundaries of life to “seventy years, or eighty, if our strength endures” but still, “it’s all toil and trouble” and soon we are gone (Ps 90:10, 11).

But parents are living longer these days, and they require more and more care as they age. Loving, committed children are more often doing the caring. “The Sandwich Generation” describes families who care both for their children and parents. While it is a privilege to care for those who for so long cared for us, the stress of such older adult caring can emotionally wear us down. The Church can hold up the arms of those whose daily duty is to care for aging parents. In this body, *their* parents are our parents as well.

God, uphold those who care for their parents and send ministers of support and encouragement to them. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

Visit: Visit someone in an nursing home or assisted living center today.

Read: Is 40:6-8; Rev 21:1-4

Donald and Margaret Hinchey

Friday, June 22, 2012

We Are the Lord's!

We ought always to thank God for you because your faith is growing more and more.

2 Thes 1:3

Sing this hymn: “We are the Lord’s; his all sufficient merit, sealed on the cross, to us this grace accords. We are the Lord’s, and all things shall inherit; whether we live or die, we are the Lord’s.”

What a way to start our day or continue our day or end our day, knowing that we are the Lord’s, even when we do not look, act or even feel like it. We are the Lord’s because he has died and risen for us! We are the Lord’s, even when others treat us wrongly or when we treat others wrongly. God’s grace affirms and proclaims in us that we are his, forever.

That’s why we can sing another verse, “We are the Lord’s; no evil can befall us. In the dread hour of life’s fast loos’ning cords, no pangs of death shall even then appall us. Death we shall vanquish, for we are the Lord’s.” Amen, Amen, again we say Amen!

Lord, enable us to know that we are yours. Help us to know that life is all about what you have already done for us, in Christ. Amen.

Tell: See how you can tell others that they are the Lord’s also, in spite of how they feel or look or act.

Read: 2 Cor 1:3-4; Eph 1:3

Rich Bimler

Saturday, June 23, 2012

Harry Potter's Heart

One who loves a pure heart and who speaks with grace will have the king for a friend.

Prv 22:11

My teenage grandson realizes that the story of Harry Potter is about the conflict between good and evil. When asked about the most important quality of the series hero, he replied without hesitation: "Harry Potter's heart." Harry acts in the moment from a pure heart for others, against all odds. By contrast, the wizard Voldemort acts only from selfishness and evil.

This positive example of living in the present calls to mind Proverbs 22:11 and loving from a pure heart. Unfortunately, our sinful hearts are far from pure, often causing us to fail to act in the moment for others. But Jesus, who said, "I am gentle and humble in heart" (Mt 11:29), acted in the moment against all odds for us and the world by giving his life on the cross. St. Paul revealed that purity comes through Christ, who dwells in our hearts through faith (Eph 3:17). How will you act today for others, against all odds with the Savior's self-giving love?

Lord, give me purity of heart to live now for others by your grace. Amen.

Love: Love from the heart today.

Read: Jn 13:34; 1 Jn 4:18; 2 Kgs 22:18-20

Stephen J. Carter

Sunday, June 24, 2012

Count Your Blessings

Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!

Jn 12:13

It seems we're always counting something to improve our health—calories, carbs, fat grams. Then there's fiber, calcium and sodium. Did you have enough of this or perhaps too much of that? At our house we also count falls, trying to limit the number of times my husband falls.

While we're thinking about counting, how about counting our blessings from God? That may sound trite, but keeping count of blessings has a positive, balancing effect on our life, especially our spiritual life. It takes practice and isn't always easy, especially if we are feeling tired and overwhelmed. What will go on your list? A beautiful sunrise? A carefree grandchild? A great meal? But what about the ones that are tougher to spot?

Another blessing is the happy memories we have, memories of good times. They won't change the present difficulties, but they will offer a welcome balance and a reminder that God is always with us and will never leave us. What more could we ask for?

Lord, thank you for your many blessings. Amen.

Count: Count your blessings.

Read: Eph 1:3-10

Maggie Hilmer

Monday, June 25, 2012

Talking to Ourselves

... sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves, singing and making melody to the Lord in your hearts ...

Eph 5:19

Do you talk to yourself? This Bible passage gives us permission! The words “among yourselves” should be translated “to yourselves.” It has the same sense as “talking to yourself.” This is underscored in the next clause with the encouragement to sing and make melody to the Lord “*in your hearts.*” Do you ever get a song stuck in your head? Paul suggests we put the songs in our own head—psalms, hymns and spiritual songs!

Do you have a favorite Psalm? Do you have a favorite hymn? Do you have a favorite spiritual? Do you have a favorite contemporary Christian worship song? Put it in your head, heart and soul today. Paul encourages us to make this a daily spiritual habit. It can make a difference. It will add a true spiritual blessing to your day. It will make you smile.

God of music, may the music of my heart give you glory today. Amen.

Sing: Sing a song to yourself or aloud today.

Read: Ps 96

Don Schatz

Tuesday, June 26, 2012

Hang It All on Jesus!

Leave all your worries with him, because he cares for you.

1 Pt 5:7 (TEV)

As our health becomes less stable, we worry. We worry about our loved ones. Worry! Worry! Worry! Like a rocking chair, worry gives us something to do, but it gets us nowhere. In our discouragement we may cry out, “Oh, hang it all!”

Hang it? Where are we to hang our cares? 1 Peter encourages us to hang all our anxiety on him, “because he cares for you.” When we hang our worries on Jesus, we can stop worrying about them as well. Jesus gives us rest and peace. He takes away all our sins. When we hang up a wrinkled garment at night, we may discover in the morning the wrinkles are gone. As we hang the dirty linens of our lives on Christ, he makes us new for the morning.

This evening, hang all your sins and worries on Jesus. Accept God’s good gift of sleep so that you can rise refreshed to embrace the new day.

Lord, grant me the refreshment of sleep tonight and the gift of a bright new morning. Amen.

Do: As you read Matthew 6, insert into the text the things about which you tend to worry.

Read: Mt 6:28-34

Leo Symmank

Wednesday, June 27, 2012

Given and Received

Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God.

1 Jn 4:7

“Trust me, I would be helping you if I could move around better.” That is what my Uncle Roger always says when I am helping him around the house. He hates to see me doing his chores. What he does not realize is that I love to help him out! When I was young, he showed me tremendous love and service. Finally, it is my turn to help him.

God has empowered us to love one another. Sometimes we are on the giving end of love and other times we are receiving someone’s love. When we reject help, we take away a person’s ability to joyfully serve another. It is a blessing from God to give or receive the love that he has given us. God has filled his creation with love—now let us share the love!

Author of all love, I thank you for allowing me to assist others just as I allow others to assist me. Amen.

Love: Show love to someone who is showing you love.

Read: Mt 22:37-40; 1 Thes 3:11-13

A. Trevor Sutton

Thursday, June 28, 2012

Get Wet!

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Rom 15:13

Carry a full-to-overflowing bucket of water and you will get wet! That's what happened to the people of Jesus' day. Jesus came into their dry world of rules to offer cleansing, refreshing, life-changing hope. Those who came near to listen, to be healed and forgiven, were forever changed. They got wet.

The Spirit will fill your bucket with "all joy and peace in believing," as you read God's Word. Walk through the day "dripping wet," knowing that your baptism made you his own dear child. Plunge into prayer with this "living water" day or night. It rinses away your worries and regrets. It spills over with acceptance and understanding into your conversations, so that your dialogue reflects God's answers for today's problems. Stay so connected to the Lord today, that those around you get wet.

Lord, make me aware of your guidance in my life. Let your hope and joy saturate those I meet. Amen.

Notice: Be aware of people who respond positively to your hope and joy this week.

Read: Jn 7:37-38; 1 Pt 3:15

Sharolyn Sander

Friday, June 29, 2012

Sleepless Nights

But [Jesus] was in the stern, asleep on the cushion. And they woke him and said to him, “Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?”

Mk 4:38

Those twelve men were scared to death when the winds suddenly whipped down on them, blasting their little ship out of control. A few of them were fishermen and acquainted with the temperamental sea. Even they were frightened. Jesus, worn out from a busy day, is curled up, sleeping through the storm. In panic and desperation, the terrified men scream for his help. Well, you know the rest of this story.

We might not be able to match this storm-stopping moment, but you don't have to be “up in years” to have known times when others around you slept but your mind was so troubled you simply couldn't.

We do well to remember the good counsel of the Psalmist who assures us of God's role in our lives: “God who watches over you will not slumber.”

You have invited me to call upon you when troubled and have promised, “I will give you rest.” Lamb of God, I come, I come. Amen.

Discuss: Discuss with one or more: Is sleeplessness prompted by troubledness?

Read: Ps 127:1-2; Ps 121

Karl Lutze

Saturday, June 30, 2012

Witness Where You Are

You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

Acts 1:8

Wherever you are, whatever you do, whenever you are with someone, you have the opportunity to witness to your faith.

Recently a grandmother was visiting her 8-year-old grandson in the hospital. Before she went into his room, she was told that he did not have long to live. What was she going to say? She went into his room and after a brief conversation, she took his hand and said, “Mark, God made you and me. God has been taking care of us and watching over us. God loves us so much that he sent his Son, Jesus, to live, to suffer and to die for us, and then God raised him from the dead. Now God has a plan for us. Then God will call us home.” Mark opened his eyes and whispered, “Say that again!” Grandma repeated the same words. Mark replied, “Tell God, thank you!”

The next day God called Mark home.

Heavenly Father, wherever I am, help me to share my faith story about you and your Son, Jesus. Amen.

Reflect: I need help, God’s help, to be a witness of his love as I age gracefully to his glory.

Read: 1 Tm 6:11-16; 1 Pt 3:13-15

Walter M. Schoedel

HOLY HABITS for **HOPE-FULL HEALTH**

I have a friend whose goal in life is to “live forever.” As he states, “So far, so good!”

Even though I admire his positive outlook, hopeful living is not about trying to live forever on this earth, but rather it is about knowing that we are living well right now, because of Christ Jesus!

That is what these devotions are all about: to enable us to live joyfully and hopefully each day because we know that the Lord has already made us well through his death and resurrection!

Here are a few Holy Habits to practice as we “live forever,” here and in heaven:

1. Remind yourself and others that it is not helpful to accept your current mood as permanent.
2. Laugh early, and often, throughout the day. Do not be like W. C. Fields who said, “Always laugh the first thing in the morning ... and get it over with!”
3. Practice smiling and saying hi to everyone you meet.
4. Look at a different Bible verse each day in a new way. Listen to the Lord through his Word.
5. Know that you are forgiven, even if you do not practice the four Holy Habits above!

Celebrate today God’s gift of aging!

Hope-Full Praying

Springtime

Lord, signs of your resurrection are all around us as spring pops out from all of the bushes, plants and trees. Help us to think of you every time we see a new flower blooming, even dandelions! Help us to capture the joy of your creation as we hear the chirps of the birds and the zooms of the lawn mowers! Spring is a time to start over again, Lord, beginning today with me. Amen.

Reunions

Lord, as people gather to celebrate reunions, help me to thank you, Lord, for all of the people you have put in my life. Help me to forgive those whom I never did get along with, and help them to forgive me as well. For friends, family, festivals and forgiveness, I say thanks to you, Lord, as I await that final reunion in heaven with you. Amen.

Milestones

Lord, bless all of the special times that happen during these months, like weddings, graduations, confirmations, even the start of the baseball season. As we celebrate new milestones, help us to remember that our baptism is the milestone that keeps us anchored in knowing who we are and whose we are. Amen.

Preserving the Environment

Lord, the earth is yours and you have given it to us to cherish and to keep. So often we are too wasteful and selfish with the gifts of water, food, air and oil. Forgive us for taking these gifts for granted and for keeping these goods for ourselves. Move us, Lord, to share what you give us and to conserve what we do not need so that others may also enjoy your gift of this universe. Amen.

Grandchildren

Lord, you created grandparents to assist you in sharing love and joy! Never allow us to take for granted the grandchildren that you have given to us. Thank you for the gift that they are to us, to their parents and to the world. You have created a unique relationship between grandparents and grandchildren. Thanks for making these gifts called “grand-kids,” especially ours. Amen.

Summer

It is summer, Lord, when we begin to complain about the heat that you bring to us! Forgive us for complaining. Help us to see the beauty in the summer skies, the summer breeze and the summer activities with loved ones. When we complain about the heat, remind us of the winter when we complain about the snow! May we rejoice in you always, in the sun and in the snow to come. Amen.

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