

HOPE-FULL LIVING

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

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Hope-Full Living Mission Statement

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

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Thursday, January 1, 2015

Happy New Year!

For everything there is a season.

Ecclesiastes 3:1

Another year is beginning. With each new beginning comes a bit of uncertainty. What will this new year bring? What new experiences will we face? What new challenges will we overcome?

Just as the seasons change due to the weather, our lives also change. At times, we welcome the changes and rejoice in them—retirement provides a time to slow down and enjoy life more, moving to a new place to live provides opportunities to meet new people. Still, other changes are not quite as pleasant—the death of a spouse brings sadness and grief, the diagnosis of a health problem opens the door for worries.

None of us knows what challenges and opportunities this new year will bring. But we are all assured of Jesus' promise to us, "I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:20).

Dear Heavenly Father, help me to trust in you and believe that you are always with me. Amen.

Think: Remember all the past New Years you have experienced.

Read: Matthew 28:16-20

*Celeste Cummins
Storm Lake, IA*

Friday, January 2, 2015

Treasuring Today

Seek the Lord while he may be found; call upon him while he is near.

Isaiah 55:6

It might be interesting to take a peek into the New Year that we are beginning—if that were possible—to see what God has in store for us and our world. On the other hand, this might spoil the fun of what the future holds. However, if what lies ahead is turbulent, then to see it before its time would only bring premature fear and feelings of futility.

Since we can't control or manipulate the year that awaits us, why fret about it or anticipate what may not be? Treasure today the gifts with which God has surrounded us, for they are many; the time God has entrusted to us, for it is precious; the people with whom God has placed us, for they are beloved.

Thank you, Lord, for each day of life you give to me; help me to spend it in service to people, giving glory to you. Amen.

Begin: Approach the day with a renewed sense of God's presence.

Read: Luke 2:25-40

*Steve Albers
Kirkwood, MO*

Saturday, January 3, 2015

Shalom

Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you."

John 20:19

Shalom—Jesus' greeting to his disciples—is a wonderful Hebrew greeting packed with meaning. It's the Hebrew word for peace and means everything is balanced and whole. Isn't that a great way to start the year—or each day? That kind of peace is found only through faith—knowing that our God is with us and that whatever happens, we are God's people.

Because we easily forget that, it would be good to greet one another by saying, "Shalom," or if that seems awkward, "Peace." Some Christian congregations "pass the peace" as part of the worship service and say "Peace be with you" to each other. Do we dare use those words as greeting or farewell instead of "Hi" or "See ya"? Try it and see what happens. May your new year be filled with *shalom* and all that word implies.

O Prince of Peace, we pray for peace on earth and peace in our hearts. Amen.

Greet: Say "Peace" instead of "Hi" to someone.

Read: John 14:25-27

*Eldor Kaiser
Lenexa, KS*

Sunday, January 4, 2015

Ever New

“I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord.

Jeremiah 29:11

To walk with the Lord by faith is to be ever new. God makes us a new creation, gives us new life and transforms us by the renewing of our minds. God’s children are all about the “new”!

That’s not all. Our “ever new” is full of God’s own rich plans for us. He plans to prosper us, to give us hope and a future. Read the rest of Jeremiah 29:11—it’s all there! There is no expiration date on God’s plans. No one is too old, or too young for that matter, to be the continual object of God’s “ever new” plans.

Israel likely thought the good times were all in the past. They weren’t; God was just getting started. He is with us as well.

Wonderful Father, grow me into your plans for me with joy. Amen.

Plan: Make your own plan for how you will praise our “ever new” Lord today. Then follow that plan.

Read: Jeremiah 29:4-14

*Don Schatz
Kenmore, WA*

Monday, January 5, 2015

Reinventing Yourself ... God's Way

All things were created through him and for him.

Colossians 1:16

The New Year often causes us to reflect on the past year and our lives. Consequently, this can lead us to feel the need to reinvent ourselves.

When we feel the need to reinvent ourselves, however, we need to ask one question. How can I reinvent myself God's way? The answer is simple: through prayer.

While we may want to improve ourselves in some way, God is always reinventing us. Think of God as the artist and we are his canvas. He is always creating new paintings with various scenes that are forever changing. Throughout our journey, he wants us to touch the lives of others through the knowledge and skills he has graciously given us.

Dear Heavenly Father, guide me so that I might live my life according to your will. Amen.

Give thanks: God has made you a new creation in Christ!

Read: Jeremiah 29:11-13; Ephesians 2:8-10

*Betsy Becker Niedringhaus
Ballwin, MO*

Tuesday, January 6, 2015

Epiphanize!

Arise, shine, for your light has come and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.

Isaiah 60:1

Admittedly, Christmas is a hard act to follow, but Epiphany could give it a run for its money. Epiphany is that season of the church year between Christmas and Lent when the Christmas message of the incarnation (“God with us”) is put into action (“God through us”). The Magi come and go, Jesus grows quickly, is baptized and begins his ministry of proclaiming and doing the works of God’s Kingdom.

If Christmas is reflection, Epiphany is action.

Though it’s not in any dictionary, I would suggest that we as God’s people get about the business of “Epiphanizing” in these new weeks of a new year. It’s another way of saying, “Shine!” Let the light of Christ, our “God with us,” glow through us. We as God’s older people must never claim that the Christ light has gone out of our lives. We have much to give, much to contribute and lifetimes of experience to share with others.

Shining, glowing God, let the full radiance of your love and mercy shine through me this day. Amen.

Shine: Be a light for Christ to someone today.

Read: Isaiah 60:1-6

*Donald F. Hinchey
Englewood, CO*

Wednesday, January 7, 2015

Let the Light Shine

The star they had seen when it rose went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was.

Matthew 2:9

In the ancient Church, long before electric lights, each worshiper carried a candle to worship on the Day of Epiphany so that there would be an abundance of light in the sanctuary.

Are you aware that, even on cloudy days, the sun rises and provides more light than we can handle? We tint our windows and wear special glasses because there is too much light. Isaiah says, “The people that sat in darkness have seen a great light” (Isaiah 9:2). That darkness was not from lack of sun, but because they didn’t know that God loved them and would forgive their wrongs, until Jesus, *the Light*, came into the world. When you see the first light of the sun each morning, remember that Jesus is the Light of the world and the Light of your life.

Thank you, Jesus, for making me a child of the Light. Amen.

Do: Tonight light one or more candles in a dark room. Remember the Light of faith in your life, and give thanks.

Read: Matthew 4:12-17

*Eldor Kaiser
Lenexa, KS*

Thursday, January 8, 2015

Dealing with the Dark Hours

This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.

1 John 1:5

Ask almost anyone, “Do you ever experience hours of darkness?” Without pausing very long at all, people will rather quickly be able to recall a situation or time when they were unable to see their way through disappointment, loss or loneliness.

That’s because there have always been people navigating their way through life described by the prophet Isaiah as “the people who walked in darkness.”

Remember that he who was crucified for us and rose from death has this word for us for our darkest hours: “I am the light of the world,” and then he tells us, “You are the light of the world—walk as children of the light. Let that light shine!”

O Lord, carry me through the dark times of life, leading me ever toward the light of your love. Amen.

Find: Find some people who are in dark hours. And let your light shine!

Read: Matthew 5:14; Isaiah 9:2

*Karl Lutze
Valparaiso, IN*

Friday, January 9, 2015

Needless Worry

Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?

Luke 12:25

One night I couldn't sleep. All sorts of "what if's" in my mind kept me awake. "What if my savings won't last the rest of my life?" "What if the strength in my already weakening arms and legs weakens even more?" "What if I have to go to a nursing home?" I had all these worries about the future over which I have no control.

Then the next morning I attended a worship service. The gospel for the day was Matthew 14:13-21, Jesus feeding the hungry crowd of five thousand people, plus the band of worrying disciples. Jesus handled the crisis.

Jesus can handle my imagined crises. To me Jesus says, "I have your future in my hands. Follow me into the future."

O Holy Spirit, strengthen the connection between my Savior and me. Help me to trust this Savior who promises to be with me throughout my life. Amen.

Share: Share your worries with a trusted friend and leave them there when you go your way again.

Read: Matthew 6:25-34

*Paul Eggold
Greendale, WI*

Saturday, January 10, 2015

“I’ve Got a Little List”

The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.

James 5:16

I don’t know about you, but I’ve always got a little list going nowadays. Perhaps it is in the making of a little list that we can best remember those for whom we wish to pray. And as we get older, we often feel a greater need to use a memo pad to remind us of what we want to do.

As we tell someone, “I’ll remember you in my prayers,” we have every intention of doing just that. But how easy it is to forget! Perhaps a little list would call to mind the sick friend, the troubled child, the pastor in ministry or others we wish to remember. That list could be a real reminder as we start our daily devotional time with the Lord. We can even add reasons for giving thanks—the safe trip, restored health, a loving letter. Approaching the Lord with thanksgiving and with prayers for others, we ourselves will face the day with confidence and joy.

Lord Jesus, thank you for hearing and answering my prayers. Amen.

Pray: Make a list and use it as you pray.

Read: James 5:13-18

*Joan Scheele Mueller
Webster Groves, MO*

Sunday, January 11, 2015

Baptism: Not Just History

[Jesus] cried out with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out."

John 11:43

My baptismal certificate records an event in history, but my baptism is not "just history." It's not a life insurance policy, kept in a file until the day I die. My baptism follows me around, tagging along, tapping me on the shoulder every day reminding me of the promise of life sealed in me forever by the power of the Holy Spirit. It tells me that life in the Lord is not just about what happens after my body dies. It's about new life for today. Each day I retreat into the grave of sin. And each day Jesus stands in front of my grave just as he did at the grave of Lazarus. He weeps. He shouts the command, "Come out!" He unbinds the grave wrappings of sin and sends me off as a new person with a new day to live in his image. As I age, that fresh start every day means more and more.

Thank you, Lord Jesus, for making me a new creation. Help me live the life you've given me to the fullest. Amen.

Repeat: Several times today, remind yourself: "I am a baptized child of God. I am with Christ in God."

Read: John 11:17-44; 2 Corinthians 5:14-17

*Mike May
Kansas City, KS*

Monday, January 12, 2015

Your Lifeguard

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

Philippians 4:7

I recently went swimming with two of my grandchildren. It was a kid-friendly pool with fountains and slides. Grandpa Randy had a splashing good time!

It was a safe place. There were six lifeguards. Some patrolled the perimeter of the pool. Others were perched in elevated lookout posts. The guards were there to protect.

In the swimming pool of life, you have a personal Lifeguard. Without him, you would drown in your sin. Without him, you would die forever. Jesus Christ guards your hearts and minds. His saving work—the cross and the empty tomb—has bathed you in the peace of God. Human understanding doesn't get it. But the truth is, you have a Lifeguard who walks on water. Jesus is your Savior, your spiritual protector, so rest in peace!

Jesus, thanks for saving my life. Amen.

Recall: Recall your baptism when you bathe or swim.

Read: Isaiah 52:1-12

*Randy Shields
Florissant, MO*

Tuesday, January 13, 2015

Tool or Treasure?

For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Matthew 6:21

My grandfather was a banker. At 19, he began sweeping the bank floor. At 82, as bank chairman, he worked in that same bank until the day he died. As a young girl, I never understood how my interesting grandpa could work with boring money. So I asked him why he did what he did. “Banking isn’t about the money; it’s about people,” Grandpa answered. “Money’s just a tool.” Tools are to be cared for, but treasures are the center of life. His treasures were his family, friends and community relationships. Over thirty years past his death, what he treasured remains untarnished. The love of God in Christ that flows through us just doesn’t rust.

Dear Lord, I’ll use the tools on earth for your work but store my heart’s treasure with you in heaven. Amen.

Chart: Draw a circle. Chart the time you spend on your treasures, then your tools. Need changes? Discuss your chart with a Christian friend.

Read: Psalm 119:11; Matthew 16:26; 1 Timothy 6:17

*K.S. Wuertz
Leslie, MO*

Wednesday, January 14, 2015

The Best of the Best

Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.

John 1:12

Every year at some point my grandfather would tell me out of nowhere, “Cory, if you ever want the best bratwurst, you have to go to Sheboygan, Wisconsin. That’s where the best brats come from.” My grandfather loved his bratwurst, and to this day, long after he has been gone, I still love bratwurst too—especially the best brats from Sheboygan.

We all have our ideas and opinions as to what is the best, whether it is ice cream or music, a team or even a type of car. We have so many bests, but for God *we* are his best. We are the best to him because of Jesus. Since Jesus was the best, so, too, we become the best. We don’t have to be from Sheboygan: we only need to be from God. As his children, we show that we are from God.

He makes us the best of the best.

Heavenly Father, thank you for making me the best of the best through Jesus. Amen.

Help: Help others to know they are the best of the best by sharing a Bible story with them today.

Read: John 1:1-18, John 3

*Cory A. Wielert
Crown Point, IN*

Thursday, January 15, 2015

God's "New Thing"

Do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing!

Isaiah 43:18-19

Remembering the past can be very important—to help us see how far we've come, to bring delightful memories and to remind us how God has cared for us. Those are good things, as long as we don't get stuck in the past.

The people in Isaiah's day were living in hard and fearful times. They remembered the Exodus, but saw no hope in the present. The Lord told them to look for the new thing he would do to refresh and revive them—"that they may proclaim my praise" (Isaiah 43:21).

Aging can get us stuck in the past and feeling useless or hopeless for the future. Listen to Isaiah and look for the new thing that God is doing in your life, and then praise him for it!

Father, thank you for your work in my life—past, present and future. I rejoice in you. Amen.

Praise: Look for something new—a new acquaintance, a flower, a new purpose—and praise God!

Read: Isaiah 43:14-21; Psalm 42:1-5

*Diane Bahn
Cypress, TX*

Friday, January 16, 2015

Not Again

Then Peter came up and said to him, “Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?” Jesus said to him, “I do not say to you seven times, but seventy-seven times.”

Matthew 18:21-22

Our driveway was buried under huge snowdrifts after a brutal winter storm. My 20-year-old grandson tackled the drifts so he would be able to go to work.

He shoveled until there was a path cleared to the street. Soon after, the snowplow went down the road, closing the entire end of the drive. Exasperated, my grandson said, “How many times will I have to shovel it out?”

I replied, “As often as the plow closes it in.”

Peter asked Jesus the same sort of question. How many times did he need to forgive someone? Jesus told him as many times as God has forgiven us, which is, of course, more times than we can possibly count.

Father, give us strength to keep forgiving those who wrong us. Amen.

Count: Attempt to count the number of times God has forgiven you. Is it even possible?

Read: Luke 6:37; Mark 11:25

*Gloria Doty
Fort Wayne, IN*

Saturday, January 17, 2015

To Do or To Be?

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

Revelation 2:10

Some days my “to do” list isn’t very long. Other days I can check off quite a few things. One day I had an “aha” that made me smile. I realized that as a Christian, I don’t need to have a long “to do” list of accomplishments each day of my life. God has asked us to “be” not necessarily to “do.” What a refreshing thought!

God asks us to be cheerful givers, to care for the widows and the fatherless, to clothe the naked and to visit those in prison. We are to feed the hungry, pray for the sick, comfort those who mourn and worship him. But above all we are to be faithful!

Tomorrow my “to be” list will have one item—be faithful. I can’t wait to check it off and put it on my list for the next day.

Lord God, when I am so concerned about “doing,” help me always to be faithful to you. Amen.

List: Make a list of the “to be” activities you have been part of this past week.

Read: Galatians 5:22-24; 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24

*Margaret Rickers Hinchey
Englewood, CO*

Sunday, January 18, 2015

A Good Beginning

I was glad when they said to me, "Let us go to the house of the Lord!"

Psalm 122:1

There's an old German saying that goes like this: "Gut begonnen, halb gewonnen." Translated, it literally means: "Well begun, half won." Or as we might say: "Get a good start, and you're halfway to a good finish." It's something like when a runner hopes for a perfect jump off the starting block to finish a race strong.

We as children of God might think of Sunday worship as the perfect way to start another week. We might also think of beginning every day in worship, prayer and praise. We know how difficult life can be, and some of the things a person has to face may cause feelings of dread and fear of defeat. We know that not everything we experience will turn out the way we would like, but one thing is certain: "All things work together for good for those who are called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28). And so: "With the Lord begin your task."

Lord, I want to begin today, tomorrow and every day with you. Amen.

Worship: Worship the Lord today.

Read: Isaiah 2:2-5; John 4:19-26

*Edward Arle
St. Charles, MO*

Monday, January 19, 2015

The Peaceful Path

It is the Lord who goes before you. He will be with you; he will not leave you or forsake you. Do not fear or be dismayed.

Deuteronomy 31:8

The city built a new walking path in my neighborhood. They leveled the land and created a path that leads through wooded areas and along streams. I'd never been in the area before, and I might never have experienced this peaceful trail if the city hadn't laid the concrete sidewalk. I wouldn't have known the way or trusted that it was safe to go there.

In much the same way, I know that the Lord is on my life path before me and is clearing the trail. I'm not afraid to go where he leads me because I trust him. Even better, he goes with me on my journey and promises that he won't leave me alone. The road of life is infinitely better with him on it.

Heavenly Father, thank you for the guidance you give me each day. I believe you when you say you will never leave me or forsake me. Amen.

Encourage: Encourage someone to look for God's guidance and to trust God to stay with him or her on the journey.

Read: Psalm 73:24; Psalm 32:8

*Lynne Waite Chapman
Fort Wayne, IN*

Tuesday, January 20, 2015

God's Kid

See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are.

1 John 3:1

“Oh, to be a kid again!” You might hear someone yearn for the olden days, lost youth, carefree and sweet. Parents and guardians bore all the responsibility. There was no working to make ends meet. There were no worries for the future.

But wait! Remember, you *are* a kid again, a child of God. Once you were lost. Now you are found. Once an enemy of God, now a beloved adopted son or daughter of the Heavenly Father. Once a wanderer, now on a mission for God. Once a bleak future lay ahead, now a blessed eternity is in store.

Isn't it good to be a kid again?

Lord, thanks for choosing me to be your child. Help me love my brothers and sisters as you love all of us. Amen.

Do: Do something fun today. Play a board game with a friend. Reminisce about favorite games you played as a kid.

Read: 1 John 3:11-18

*Donna J. Streufert
South Bend, IN*

Wednesday, January 21, 2015

Opening the Door

I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved.

John 10:9

In biblical times, one important accessory—a gate—was missing from the sheep pen. After the shepherd had carefully counted his sheep and put them safely inside their stone fence, he lay down on the ground to fill the opening. The shepherd was the door to the pen. No wolf or lion could attack his sheep without matching wits with the shepherd first. The shepherd would lay down his own life for the sheep.

Our Good Shepherd opened the door to heaven by giving his life on the cross for us. Life is his gift to us, and he himself is life. When we open our door and go out into the world, he helps us share the Good News of what he has done for us. Let your neighbors hear the voice of the Good Shepherd, leading us through the door he has opened into eternal life.

Jesus, thank you for guiding me through the door to heaven. Help me as I witness to your love and lead others to that door. Amen.

Do: Write an encouraging note about Jesus' love and slide it under a friend's door or doormat.

Read: John 10:7-18; Psalm 23

*Ruth Geisler
Aliso Viejo, CA*

Thursday, January 22, 2015

Bright Spot in Winter

Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow.

Isaiah 1:18

Cardinals live year-round in the woods by our house. Spotting that bright flash of red is a treat in all seasons but especially in winter. Perched on a snow-covered pine bough, cardinals appear to be posing for a calendar photo. What's most striking is the contrast between red plumage and white snow.

That color contrast is used by Isaiah to describe forgiveness received from the Lord. Snow and white provide a picture of purity and perfection. That is what God graciously gives when we confess our sins and turn to him. We recall the sacrifice Jesus made so that we can receive this perfection, this righteousness, through him. The refrain to an old hymn says it simply: "Jesus paid it all, all to him I owe; sin had left a crimson stain, he washed it white as snow."

Heavenly Father, thank you for sending Jesus to wash me clean and make me fit for heaven. Amen.

Watch: As you observe nature, look for more pictures of God's grace and mercy.

Read: Psalm 51:1-12; Revelation 7:13-14

*Marj Maynard
Billings, MO*

Friday, January 23, 2015

The Carpenter

Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

Matthew 11:29-30

Only one familiar with the shaping of wooden yokes would suggest that “his yoke is easy, and his burden is light.” Jesus could do that. He grew up in the home of a carpenter. He would have watched Joseph measure carefully and shape skillfully yokes for his customers. He undoubtedly promised that if it pinched or blistered, he would make it right. Jesus may well have done the same thing.

Jesus knew that not all loads were physical. Some very heavy loads might be physical, but they could also be emotional or psychological. Jesus’ promise is that when you let him know where it pinches or where it causes blisters, he may not remove the load, but he will stay with you so that the “yoke is easy and the burden is light.”

Lord, when my load is heavy, make the yoke easy and the burden light. Amen.

Identify: Identify your load, and see Jesus making adjustments to your yoke.

Read: Matthew 11:25-30; 1 Peter 5:6-11

*Vern Gundermann
Webster Groves, MO*

Saturday, January 24, 2015

“Wonderful!” and “Wow!”

But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called “today.”

Hebrews 3:13

Seeking the attention of her father, a little girl asked if she could sing and dance for him. “I’ll sing and dance, Daddy, and you clap your hands and shout, ‘Wonderful!’ and ‘Wow!’”

In a self-obsessed world, so many people seem to be stuck on looking for others to encourage them and shout, “Wonderful!” and “Wow!” Yet perhaps we can make a far better impact with our lives as we age gracefully. Instead of seeking out clappers to motivate us, what if each of us would become clappers and cheerleaders for those around us? What a “wonderful and wow” world this is as we encourage one another daily, because of Christ’s encouraging words and actions towards us.

Lord, thanks for your encouragement so we can encourage others. Amen.

Applaud: Be proactive in “clapping” for others today, starting with a neighbor, clerk, mail carrier or even that little girl who wants to dance for you.

Read: Acts 4:32-37; Colossians 4:2-9

*Rich Bimler
Bloomington, IL*

Sunday, January 25, 2015

Fear Not

Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God.

Isaiah 41:10

Avoid saturated fats, but polyunsaturated fats are OK. (Or is it the other way around?) Don't drink bottled water that's been left in a hot car. (Actually, don't drink bottled water at all.) Stand back from the microwave. Drink eight glasses of water, no more than 4 oz. of wine and only two cups of coffee daily. Whew, the list goes on and on with admonitions from science and the media, and we feel slightly panicky. As Bilbo says in *The Lord of the Rings*, "It's a dangerous thing, Frodo, going out of your door." For us who had barefoot summers without sunscreen and carted kids around sans seat belts, it's overwhelming. We are to make wise health decisions, remembering our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit. Isaiah's words, though, allow us to take a deep breath and remember that God is in charge. He has redeemed us! Fear not!

Lord, help me breathe more easily, remembering you are in charge. Amen.

Be healthy: Try to follow good health practices today—and tomorrow too!

Read: Psalm 139; 1 Corinthians 6:19-20

*Sally Beck
University City, MO*

Monday, January 26, 2015

My Life Journey

You search out my path ... and are acquainted with all my ways.

Psalm 139:3

As we grow older, we often think a lot about our past and the shape our life journey has taken. We reminisce about the paths we have followed and the paths we did not take. We might remember things we are grateful for and those things we regret.

Thanks to Dr. Robert Butler, an expert on aging who studied the natural processes of growing older, this tendency to slip into old memories is now recognized as “life review” and is appreciated as an important aspect of aging.

Reading Psalm 139 can help you look back to see the many ways that God was with you on the path, guiding and sustaining you. Life review will help you remember with gratitude the loving people God put in your life along the way. Take time today to review what God has done in and through you and rejoice.

God of love and grace, you have accompanied me every step of the way. Help me to continue to trust your loving presence in my life. Amen.

Recollect: Each day write down a memory from your life journey for which you are grateful to God.

Read: Psalm 23

*Paul Metzler
Shrewsbury, MO*

Tuesday, January 27, 2015

Sticks and Stones

Let the words of my mouth ... be acceptable in your sight, O Lord.

Psalm 19:14

“Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me!” Many of us uttered those playground words long ago, but they were not true. Words can hurt. Some ring in our ears for a lifetime. Each day our words have the power to inflict pain or provide a healing balm, to blame or support, to complain or give thanks.

When “the Word became flesh and dwelt among us,” his words were “full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). Crowds gathered to hear Jesus teach heavenly truths with authority. Words of healing and forgiveness accompanied his miracles. Even Jesus’ words from the cross brought comfort and hope. May our words reflect his love today!

Lord, fill my speech with your grace, encouragement and peace. Amen.

Tally: Keep an ongoing mental tally of your godly, positive words today.

Read: Ephesians 4:29; Psalm 141:3; Proverbs 16:24

*Sharolyn Sander
Lincoln, NE*

Wednesday, January 28, 2015

Always

I will be with you always.

Matthew 28:20

Traveling down the road of life, I invite you to ponder the word *always*. What does it mean? My dictionary tells me, “continually; forever; every time; for all time.”

Now ponder the words of Jesus to his disciples before he ascended into heaven. “I will be with you always.” What a promise! No matter what happens to me in my life’s journey, Jesus will be there to help me face life’s issues always.

Now ponder the words of the apostle Paul as he directs the lifestyle of God’s people: “Rejoice always” (1 Thessalonians 5:16) and “Give thanks always” (Ephesians 5:20). Hear the words of the evangelist Luke, “always to pray” (Luke 18:1). And consider the confession of the psalmist, “I have set the Lord always before me” (Psalm 16:8).

Have a great day thinking about your faith in terms of the little word *always*.

Lord Jesus, be with me always here, always there, always everywhere. Amen.

Exercise: Check your concordance, and look up the passages that use the word always.

Read: Psalm 41:13; Matthew 28:16-20

*Walter M. Schoedel
Webster Groves, MO*

Thursday, January 29, 2015

It's All About Family

*I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.
We will come to him and make our home with him.*

John 14:18, 23

For many years we lived almost a thousand miles from our children. We missed them, and we missed the interaction with our grandchildren. The occasional visit was always looked forward to, and we could not wait to be closer to them when we retired. To be away from family is often a difficult experience.

In the days before his crucifixion, Jesus reflected on what it would be like when he was no longer with his disciples. He assured them that they would not be alone; in fact, he and the Father would come and make their home with them. They would not be like orphans. They would be family.

That is also Jesus' promise to us. We are his Father's family. In the family of Jesus, no distance can ever come between. His home is always with us.

Dear Father, thank you that you have made your home with me. Amen.

Remember: Think about the different places where you have lived and what was special about each place.

Read: John 14

*Lionel Otto
Adelaide, Australia*

Friday, January 30, 2015

Grandma's Birthday Book

... but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life.

Revelation 21:27

Grandma had an amazing birthday book. Inside were the names and birthdates of everyone in our family. Grandpa had ten siblings, and Grandma had four sisters. Each birthdate was noted from the 1880s and 1890s.

When the next generation arrived (my dad and uncle), Grandma noted the time and date of each birth in this cloth-covered book. Years later when my siblings, cousins and I were born, we got even more coverage—birthdate, time and a description of the baby (“blonde curls and blue eyes” for me). It was a joy for each child or grandchild to find his or her special notation in Grandma's book.

As Christians, we can share in the delight of knowing that God has chosen us for salvation and our names are written in God's book of life. You are part of God's family!

Heavenly Father, we thank you for the promise that someday we will be in heaven with you. Amen.

Pray: Say a special prayer for someone whose birthday is this month.

Read: Isaiah 43:1-7

*Margaret Rickers Hinchey
Englewood, CO*

Saturday, January 31, 2015

Your Mission Statement

The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.

Mark 10:45

As the pastor of congregations and the director of charitable organizations, I have experience helping write and rewrite “mission statements.” As difficult as this often was, none of these experiences compares with writing a personal mission statement in retirement. My “job” used to dictate much of what I did. In retirement, I discovered you can only travel so much, read so many books and play so many rounds of golf. It is challenging to determine what my purpose is in these new circumstances.

Did Jesus ever have a personal “mission statement”? If he did, I suspect it came close to the words of our text today. He came to serve, and to give his life as a ransom. Amidst all the busyness and the distractions he encountered, he kept that life purpose in focus. He accomplished his ministry’s mission in only three years!

Jesus, give me a clear and godly purpose for my life today.

*Answer: What has God put you on earth for?
Write out your answer.*

Read: Mark 10:35-45; Philippians 2:1-11

*Ted Zimmerman
Napa, CA*

Sunday, February 1, 2015

Our Father

Your kingdom come, your will be done.

Matthew 6:10

The prayer that Jesus taught us, the Lord's Prayer, is a treasured prayer and a pattern for all of our prayers. It is a prayer that comes to life, a prayer that takes on flesh, in our Lord. Jesus is the Father's Son, who by his obedient life and death hallowed his Father's name.

Jesus came to earth to do his Father's will and in him the kingdom comes. He is the Bread of life who supplies our daily needs and in his name we are forgiven and we forgive. Jesus stood in the place of sinners, led into temptation and resisting it for our sake. By his death and resurrection we are delivered from the evils of sin and death. When you speak the words of this treasured prayer, remember through its words our Lord Jesus, the Word made flesh.

*Lord Jesus, Son of the Father, teach us to pray.
Amen.*

Pray: Pray the Lord's Prayer. Remember Jesus in its words.

Read: Matthew 6:5-15; Philippians 4:4-7

*Carol Geisler
Manchester, MO*

Monday, February 2, 2015

Revive Us Again

Will you not revive us again, that your people may rejoice in you?

Psalm 85:6

Feeling a bit low today? A bit down in the dumps? Perhaps you've taken your eyes off your Savior and are trying to rely on your own strength and righteousness. Let me remind you of God's love for you through Jesus Christ. Let your disquieted spirit bask in the cheer of your Savior.

Isn't it a marvelous gift that Jesus' sacrifice on the cross covers our sins? Isn't it an incredible blessing that despite our sinful nature, God forgives our sins and restores our relationship with him through that same Savior? It's by God's steadfast love for us and his faithfulness to us that we are covered by Jesus' righteousness. And we are the recipients of peace, a peace beyond all human understanding.

Rejoice! God restores and revives you again and again.

God of our salvation, restore us, revive us and refresh us through your precious Word. Amen.

Reach out: Talk to and pray for those who feel "low." Remind them of God's love.

Read: Psalm 85; Psalm 71:20

*Terry Weber
Williamsburg, VA*

Tuesday, February 3, 2015

No Fair!

Whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

John 3:16

Our pastor recently gave chocolate kisses to each child coming forward for the children's message. All was going well until the last child received a large chocolate bar. "No fair!" responded the entire circle of previously happy children. They listened closely to the message—about God's abundant and undeserved grace.

Regardless of your life circumstance today, the "ultimate unfairness" is that God loves and saves us. Nothing we have done or will do can erase our sin, yet God's grace and mercy are ours simply because he chose us. He "calls us by the Gospel, enlightens us with his gifts, sanctifies and keeps us in the one true faith." That's not fair. That's the Father's favor and our good fortune!

Lord, make us mindful of the magnitude of your love and grace toward us. Amen.

Remember: When tempted to say "No fair!" say "Thank you!" instead.

Read: Romans 5:8; Psalm 107:1; Colossians 3:15-17

*Sharolyn Sander
Lincoln, NE*

Wednesday, February 4, 2015

Attitude Is Everything

Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus.

Philippians 2:5

Recently, I ran across a card from a late relative that was sent to me nearly eighteen years ago. The front of the card read, “Attitude ... a little thing that makes a big difference.”

In the card, my relative wrote a statement that has great truth in everyday life. She said, “You never can say enough about attitude—it permeates everything we do.” How true!

In letters by the apostle Paul, he writes that our attitudes should be like that of Christ. Unfortunately, we are all sinners and fall short of a Christlike attitude. We are called to remember how Jesus treated others and follow his example.

Every day we have opportunities to show Christ’s love to others. It can be as simple as periodically helping someone in need with an everyday task to make his or her life a little easier.

Heavenly Father, continue to work in my heart so that I may show your love to others. Amen.

Action: Help someone in need or listen to his or her cares.

Read: Ephesians 4:20-24

*Betsy Becker Niedringhaus
Ballwin, MO*

Thursday, February 5, 2015

Still Time

You shall love your neighbor as yourself.

Mark 12:31

I'm preparing meals these days, and I timed the chicken Kiev in the oven with the baked potato in the microwave and the corn on the stove. All came together as I divided the hot potato, lifted the chicken on our plates and spooned the corn, calling, "Dinner's ready."

"Be there in a minute," my wife responded.

I was about to explode when I recognized those words. How often I had spoken them over the years when Barbara had called me to dinner. How often I've heard, "Do unto others as you would have done to you." Now, cooking, I was on the receiving end of an indifferent put-down.

Our relationships are replete with opportunities to be sensitive to the efforts of others. There's still time to respond as we would have folks respond to us. After all, someday we may be doing the cooking.

Lord, help me to treat others the way I would like to be treated. Amen.

Be kind: Compliment the work of a loved one.

Read: Mark 12:28-34; Romans 12:8-10

Bob Hereth
Grayslake, IL

Friday, February 6, 2015

The Greatest Thing

But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

1 Corinthians 15:57

In a scene in Peter DeVries' book *The Blood of the Lamb* a group of friends is discussing what the greatest thing in life is. Ideas fly: a fulfilling career, financial success, a happy family, living a simple, sustainable life. The narrator, however, knows it's something else: the return to "normal" after normal has been taken away. He has just learned that his daughter's leukemia is in remission, and now their lives will be full—normal—again. A return to normal is the greatest thing for Christians too. "Normal" was togetherness with God in the Garden of Eden, but disobedience shattered that togetherness. The good news is that normal has been restored through Jesus, and we live again in a full relationship with God.

Lord, when I feel like I'm missing something, remind me that you, the greatest thing, are there and have been there all along. Amen.

Do: List some other "greatest things" that come from God.

Read: 1 Corinthians 15:51-58; 2 Corinthians 5:17-21

Sally Beck
University City, MO

Saturday, February 7, 2015

Killing Time

*But I trust in you, O Lord; I say, "You are my God."
My times are in your hand.*

Psalm 31:14-15

It's a common phrase, yet it's a very sad expression: "killing time." It means letting the clock's seconds, minutes, hours go by with no purpose in mind.

"Killing time" is sitting before a television screen, half-aware of what the program is or "channel surfing," a kind of aimless search for whatever might entertain you. It's flipping through a magazine or newspaper, not really open to engagement with a column or article, but mindlessly scanning headline and print. "Killing time" in the age of the Internet is mouse-clicking from link to link with no particular goal.

The psalmist would suggest that we begin each day realizing that the next 24 hours are in God's hand, not yours to "kill," but to "spend," trusting God, serving others and growing in your relationship with Jesus Christ.

*All of my time is in your hands, gracious God. Let me hold my hours sacred and spend them wisely.
Amen.*

Begin: Begin tomorrow with the awareness that your day, your time, is holy.

Read: Psalm 31

*Donald F. Hinchey
Englewood, CO*

Sunday, February 8, 2015

J.O.Y.

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.

Philippians 2:3-4

We received a phone call from an excited, proud grandmother. Her granddaughter was recognized at her eighth-grade graduation as the student who most lived the J.O.Y. life. This indeed would make anyone proud since J stands for Jesus, O for Others and Y for Yourself.

Because of sin, our priorities can sometimes become the reverse of J.O.Y.—Yourself, Others and, then, Jesus. Jesus said love the Lord first and love your neighbor as yourself. A life pleasing to God is always spelled J.O.Y.

O Lord, guide me in my priorities, with your Son as my first priority. Allow my actions to show that I view others as more important than myself. Amen.

Practice: Practice living the J.O.Y. life.

Read: Philippians 2:1-11

*Don Hollmann
Ballwin, MO*

Monday, February 9, 2015

Open the Door

Behold, I stand at the door and knock.

Revelation 3:20

I am going to visit my daughter soon. It's a two-day trip ending on back roads I've never been on before to get to her new house. That long journey will mean nothing unless two things happen: I have to knock on her door, and she has to open it. Jesus says he stands and knocks on our door, and if we open, he'll come in and eat with us—the closest fellowship of our day. His Spirit led us to open the door and let him in.

Now he calls us to open doors for others. People face closed doors every day: doors of hunger, rejection, poverty; doors of loneliness, illness, broken relationships; even doors of impending death. We can open those doors by inviting those folks to the source of strength, healing, acceptance and new life. It's true that we can't change the world. But we can open a door and change a life.

Lord, you opened to us the door to eternal life. Help us open doors for others, that in us, they may see you. Amen.

Open: Open at least one door for someone today.

Read: Revelation 3:19-22; Psalm 84

*Al Schenk
St. Louis, MO*

Tuesday, February 10, 2015

Courageous Words

Then Caleb silenced the people before Moses and said, “We should go up and take possession of the land, for we can certainly do it.”

Numbers 13:30

During the forty years when the Israelites wandered in the wilderness, most of them had complained to God. God said, “Because they have not followed me wholeheartedly, not one of those who were twenty years old or more when they came up out of Egypt will see the land I promised ... not one except Caleb ... and Joshua ... for they followed the Lord wholeheartedly” (Numbers 32:11-12).

When Caleb and Joshua were asked to spy out the Promised Land, they did not say anything about the giants that made them look like grasshoppers or the huge fortified cities. They said we should go up and take the land. If God was for them, who could be against them? In Christ we can say, “We can do all things through Christ who gives us strength” (Philippians 4:13).

Mighty and gracious God, empower us to be the courageous people you intend us to be. Amen.

Consider: Think of a difficulty you face, and consider how Caleb and Joshua responded.

Read: Luke 22:39-46

*Gordon Beck
University City, MO*

Wednesday, February 11, 2015

Cheer Up!

A glad heart makes a cheerful face.

Proverbs 15:13

Winters in northern Illinois can be cold, snowy and gray. The days are short, and the nights are long. One morning in late winter, I decided to take a walk. As I sloshed along through the dirty snow, I heard a sound that stopped me in my tracks. “Cheer up! Cheer up!” rang out from a bare tree. And there he was—the first robin of the year. The cheerful sound brought a smile to my face because it reminded me that spring will come before I know it.

In Proverbs 15:15 it says, “All the days of the afflicted are evil, but the cheerful of heart has a continual feast.” Because of Christ’s redeeming work on the cross and his resurrection, sin, death and the devil have been defeated. That truly makes us glad of heart. Cheer up!

Father, thank you for the changing seasons and for your love that never changes. Amen.

Love: Let the love of Christ show in your cheerful attitude.

Read: 2 Corinthians 9:6-15

*Jeanette Dall
Batavia, IL*

Thursday, February 12, 2015

Let It Go

What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?

Romans 6:1-2

I'm sure you have heard your grandchildren, perhaps even your great-grandchildren singing "Let it Go" recently. The song from the Disney movie *Frozen* is catchy, and it has a great theme.

Let what go? Sin. Tension. Frustration. Disgust. Let it go! Why live life being grumpy? Why hold on to the things that ruin your day or your relationships? Why let anything stand between you and others, or worse yet, between you and God. Let it go!

You have been freed through Christ—forgiven and given his grace. Hold onto that, but let the ways of sin dissipate. Let it go, for as St. Paul says, "Sin shall no longer be your master, because you are not under the law, but under grace" (Romans 6:14).

Enjoy that grace, and as for any sin in your life, my friends, just let it go.

Dear God, help me to let the sin of my life go, and allow me to revel in your grace. Amen.

Watch: Watch the movie Frozen with your grandchildren, and talk to them about letting sin go.

Read: Romans 6

*Cory A. Wielert
Crown Point, IN*

Friday, February 13, 2015

You Are Spoken of in Heaven

But now thus says the Lord ... “Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine.”

Isaiah 43:1

“We were speaking about you the other day!” When people tell us that, it usually means good things. We were remembered for something, and people are happy to tell us that we were thought of.

Isn't that what our loving God is also saying to you when he tells you that he has called you by name and that you belong to him? God is telling you that you are spoken of in heaven. You are not a stranger there. God knows you. He doesn't hide you away as some kind of secret. He speaks about you. He remembers you, watches over you.

What an amazing blessing, that already in heaven God is speaking about us.

Dear Father, I cannot even begin to know the love you have for me in Jesus. You know me by name. You speak of me with love. Thank you. Amen.

Ponder: What does it mean to you that you are spoken of in heaven?

Read: Isaiah 43:1-7

*Lionel Otto
Adelaide, Australia*

Saturday, February 14, 2015

Hearts for Jesus

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart.

Deuteronomy 6:5

When I taught in a church school, we had a Hearts for Jesus program every February to celebrate Valentine's Day. In addition to exchanging valentines with their friends, the children made hearts for Jesus with messages of thanks and love for their Savior. The valentines were beautiful: decorated red, white and pink hearts with messages full of love for Christ in the simple language of young children. Every year these hearts for Jesus were distributed in nearby nursing homes and gladdened the hearts of many older seniors.

All of us who have Jesus in our hearts can share the Gospel message not only on Valentine's Day, but any day. We can look for opportunities to share the love of our Savior. We are blessed to be a blessing to others!

Dear Jesus, please help me express the love in my heart from and for you. Amen.

Share: Show God's love every day.

Read: Matthew 22:37-40; Colossians 3:16

*Annette Schumacher
Muskego, WI*

Sunday, February 15, 2015

Love Comes Down Like Snow

For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven ... so shall my word be.

Isaiah 55:10-11

The 1960s Medical Mission Sisters song called “Joy Is Like the Rain” extols the wonder of rain, clouds and Jesus carrying us through storms. After a tough winter, I wrote new lyrics reflecting Isaiah’s comparison of both rain and snow to God’s Word. “Snowflakes drifting past my window, love comes down like snow. Sometimes softly, piled so high; like God’s love so deep and wide. Love comes down like snow.”

God’s Word brings us new life, even when snow becomes oppressive. The changing seasons reflect Jesus’ death and resurrection and our own rebirth daily in baptism from death to life.

Lord of earth and weather, bring us through the stormy seasons of life to the bright “Sonshine” of your love. Amen.

Encouragement: Keep safe in stormy weather and await the brightness of a new day.

Read: Psalm 118:24; Mark 4:35-41

*Rodney Otto
Grand Rapids, MI*

Monday, February 16, 2015

God's Thoughts

How precious to me are your thoughts, O God!

Psalm 139:17

What does God think about? He thinks about you! There are lots of other things God thinks about, of course. But never forget that he thinks about you—and he loves you. The psalmist continued today's verse about God's thoughts with this declaration: "How vast is the sum of them!" You couldn't count God's thoughts. We don't need to. It's enough to know he thinks about us.

God was thinking about us at the birth of Christ, throughout his Son's life, in the Garden as Jesus prayed, at the cross when the Lord died and on Easter Sunday when our Savior rose. He never stops thinking about us. The Holy Spirit leads us into the Scriptures where we discover over and over how much God thinks about us—which is to say, how much God loves us. Never doubt it.

Holy God, thank you for never forgetting about me. Amen.

Think, then act: Think of those who need to be reminded that God thinks of them. Then tell them.

Read: Psalm 40:1-8

*Don Schatz
Kenmore, WA*

Tuesday, February 17, 2015

Remember To Forget, and Forget Not

Praise the Lord, my soul, and forget not all his benefits.

Psalm 103:2

Now is a great time to remember to forget—about past failures, unfulfilled dreams and the pains we have caused others. Remember to forget about things we cannot change from the past. They are gone, over, finished. Remember, too, that the Lord has also forgotten them. You and I are cleaned and claimed by Christ through his death and resurrection. As we remember to forget many things of the past, we also do not forget the blessings and presence of the Lord.

So today, remember the joys, forgiveness and blessings that the Lord heaps upon us, even when we forget. It is one thing to forget where we put our glasses or where we parked the car, but the Lord provides his Word and Sacraments so that we never forget his benefits!

Lord, thanks for forgetting our sins and remembering us with your forgiveness each day. Amen.

Remember: Remember to read Psalm 103:1-5 again and again.

Read: Jeremiah 31:31-34

*Rich Bimler
Bloomington, IL*

Wednesday, February 18, 2015

Renewed on the Inside

... and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

Ephesians 3:19

“Dust you are and to dust you shall return.” That’s the truth we are reminded of with ashes on our foreheads when we worship on Ash Wednesday. The redeeming footnote to that worship experience is that the ashes are shaped in the form of a cross. Christ died and rose from the dead so that our mortality can put on immortality, as St. Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 15. This perishable body will be raised imperishable—sown in dishonor, raised in glory.

“I’m wasting away on the outside,” an aching, aging gentleman told me, yet in the same breath he shared, “but I’m being renewed on the inside.” I pray every day for him that he will be “filled with all the fullness of God.”

Lord, send your Spirit to renew our trust in you, no matter how much our bodies waste away. Fill us up with your love. Amen.

Share: Share an encouraging word with your aging friends and neighbors.

Read: Ephesians 3:14-21; Colossians 2:6-15; 2 Corinthians 4:16-17

*David P. Schmidt
St. Louis, MO*

Thursday, February 19, 2015

The February Blahs

Rejoice in the Lord always.

Philippians 4:4

In winter you and I have to be extra careful on slippery walks, put on another sweater and drive with care. It's a good thing February is a short month. These are just the minor irritations. We can all list some major problems in our lives that seem without solutions. We all need Lent to remind us not of what we can (and can't) do, but of what our gracious God has done.

Unless we realize that, we will not know the overflowing abundance of God's blessings. He who muzzled hungry lions and rolled up the waters of the Red Sea can surely help you. You have only to ask, seek and knock.

God has sprinkled the world with perennial optimists, and I consider the readers of this epistle among the foremost in those ranks because we know ourselves baptized and thus bearers of the guarantee of the Holy Spirit. There is always room for "three cheers for God" in the hearts of God's people.

Give us, gracious God, the vision to see the good you have planned for us in every situation. Amen.

Do: Be the hope and joy to others in God's world.

Read: Matthew 7:7-11; Hebrews 12:1-2

*Constance Bretscher
Valparaiso, IN*

Friday, February 20, 2015

Life Wish

For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.

Philippians 1:21

St. Paul said he longed to “depart and be with Christ, for that is far better” (Philippians 1:23) than continuing to live in this mortal body. Was this a death wish? Hardly. It was a life wish that no doubt we all share, when suffering and death become a way of life.

“For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.” That is Paul’s way of describing the moment when Christ becomes everything in the mind and heart of one who comes to know Jesus and wants to make him known. “I am his and he is mine” is the confession of one who believes you don’t have to be dead in order to live in Christ. That life comes in the death and resurrection of Jesus who says, “Because I live, you shall live also” (John 14:19). And that life can begin now.

Jesus, help me always to know that life is in you and you are in me. Amen.

Remember: In faith, wherever you go, remember that Jesus goes with you.

Read: Philippians 1:15-26; John 12:20-26

*Edward Arle
St. Charles, MO*

Saturday, February 21, 2015

Daily Forgiveness

Give us today our daily bread, and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.

Matthew 6:11-12

It was taught to me: “We eat in order to live; we do not live to eat.” Have we reversed that emphasis today? Do we plan the greater portion of each day around the meals we will eat? We sense a different emphasis when we read that God provided for the Children of Israel in their desert wanderings a daily supply of manna and quail (Exodus 16). God knows that the bodies he gave us need food daily for us to stay alive, remain active and live the life he intended. So he gives us “daily bread.”

Note, however, in the very next petition of the Lord’s Prayer that Jesus knows that forgiveness is also a daily need. The conjunction *and* between the petitions makes forgiveness as necessary as food. Relationships that start with this assumption have the capacity to grow stronger each day.

O Lord, give us a hunger for your forgiveness as much as for food. Amen.

Recall: Recall a time you hungered for something to eat, and compare it to a time when you longed for forgiveness from someone.

Read: Genesis 50:15-21

Gordon Beck
University City, MO

Sunday, February 22, 2015

A Difficult Journey

And he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan.

Mark 1:13

After wonderful vacation time with family, the drive from Galveston to St. Louis became a difficult journey—stop-and-go holiday weekend traffic from Houston to Dallas, road construction delays, a late-night arrival in Oklahoma City and a long ride home to St. Louis the next day. Exhausted at our age, we reached journey's end, thankful for God's provision of safe travel.

Jesus received great affirmation from his Father at his baptism and was eager to begin public ministry in Galilee, but a difficult journey loomed in between. The Spirit drove him out into the wilderness for forty days, where he was tempted by Satan. Only after defeating temptation was Jesus ready to arrive in Galilee for a journey ending at a cross. His victory over Satan at Calvary and the empty tomb makes possible our difficult journey through temptation for a joyful life of celebration and service.

Lord, thank you for defeating Satan during your difficult, saving journey. Amen.

Walk: Walk with Jesus every step of the way.

Read: Mark 1:9-15

*Stephen J. Carter
Oakville, MO*

Monday, February 23, 2015

Jesus, Re-member Me

And he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.”

Luke 23:42

I don't know about you, but I can remember some sermons as if I had heard them only yesterday. It's that way with one particular Lenten sermon I heard years ago.

My pastor was recounting the words of the thief on the cross: “Jesus, remember me!” Then he re-framed them in such a way that they became a personal cry: “Jesus, re-member me!”—as if to say, “Re-attach me to you.” My eyes were opened anew into seeing how my sin tears me away from God my Father, and that only through Christ can I once again be brought into a right relationship with him.

Not unlike the thief on the cross, I daily sin much and am in need of re-connecting to him. Jesus, remember me!

Heavenly Father, help me to remember today that through the death and resurrection of your Son, my Savior, you remember my sins no more. Amen.

Tell: Do you know someone who needs to be re-contacted to Christ? Share the news of Christ's forgiveness with them today.

Read: Jeremiah 31:31-34; Psalm 103:12

*Jane P. Wilke
Woodbury, MN*

Tuesday, February 24, 2015

Patience

So Jacob served seven years to get Rachel, but they seemed like only a few days to him because of his love for her.

Genesis 29:20

I bet you can't wait for winter to be over, especially if you are experiencing any snow or ice, let alone the cold. But waiting can be hard, especially when the calendar says it's still February. Truthfully, waiting for anything can be difficult.

Jacob may not have always shown great patience in his life, but he did when he waited for Rachel. He showed us a good example of waiting. God does too. He is patient with us every day. In fact, we are told "The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love" (Psalm 103:8).

Waiting is something we encounter every day, and I know winter can be a long season, but spring is on its way. It will take patience to make it through, but we will, with the help of God.

Lord, help us to have patience this winter and look to you in times of need. Amen.

Tell: Share the story of Jacob with someone today, and tell of his patience.

Read: Genesis 29:15-30

*Cory A. Wielert
Crown Point, IN*

Wednesday, February 25, 2015

“I” Witness

You will be my witnesses ... to the end of the earth.

Acts 1:8

What would happen if someday we found *ourselves* involved in a mystery—a real-life thriller? What if someday we turned a corner in our life and found ourselves called upon to serve as witnesses to something that happened personally to us? And what if that something was the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ?

Now, of course, we can't testify as EYEWITNESSES of an event that happened thousands of years ago, but we can testify as “I” witnesses to what we believe in our heart. Hear this from St. Paul: “If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved” (Romans 10:9).

Because of Jesus Christ, we are made part of the wonderful mystery of God's salvation, and we stand ready to tell about it.

Lord Jesus, grant me the Spirit to share my faith with others. Amen.

Witness: Think of someone who needs Jesus and then share your faith with them.

Read: 1 Peter 3:13-18; Matthew 10:5-15

*Edward Arle
St. Charles, MO*

Thursday, February 26, 2015

Never Run Out

And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.

Philippians 4:19

When my family lived more than ten miles from the nearest store, the words, “Don’t run out” were uttered quite often. Whether it was coffee, toilet paper, animal food or propane in the tank, we made certain there was enough of each commodity so we didn’t run out.

Running out wasn’t just an inconvenience; it could mean disaster if it was the grain for the animals or the propane, especially in the winter.

Some people feel as though they have run out of God’s forgiveness or his love and blessings. That is never the case. We are told in God’s Word that his love for us will last forever and his blessings are packed down and overflowing. We don’t have to worry about it, as we do with earthly necessities. God is the supplier, and we will never run out of his love.

Jesus, we know you love us; remind us that you supply all our needs. Amen.

Talk: Have a conversation with someone who lives or did live far from a store, and discuss not “running out” of something.

Read: Psalm 23; Deuteronomy 7:9

*Gloria Doty
Fort Wayne, IN*

Friday, February 27, 2015

Marvelously Made

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

Psalm 139:14

Compared to my car, my old parts are doing pretty well. After nearly 70 years, most of them still work fully and others continue to function with just some regular maintenance like medication or repair through surgery. I know one thing: I never had a car last this long.

Psalm 139, especially verses 13-16, gives praise to God for the creation of our bodies. The psalmist celebrates the intricate and mysterious process of how God created us. It is not a scientific statement; it is a joyous declaration of faith and gratitude.

As seniors, we naturally grow in appreciation for our bodies, for their resilience and for their strength. If we are blessed from time to time to see a newborn baby, this appreciation for how fearfully and wonderfully we are made by God only deepens.

Lord Jesus, you took on a human body to redeem me. Deepen my gratitude for the creation of my body and your love of me. Amen.

Take good care: In gratitude to God, treat your body each day with good nutrition, rest and exercise.

Read: Genesis 1:27-31

*Paul Metzler
Shrewsbury, MO*

Saturday, February 28, 2015

Mt. Rush-no-more

Wait for the Lord.

Psalm 27:14

In former years there were things I had to do before I could leave for church: clear the table, bring in the paper, put gas in the car, etc. I had to hurry or I'd miss the ringing of the bells.

Those were the days. Fortunately, those days have passed for me. Would you believe that now I get to church early enough to pray quietly before the service? I have retired from hurrying to my place on Mt. Rush-no-more. There are some advantages to growing older. I can name a few disadvantages, too, and I'm sure you can add to that list. But with all my forgetting, I must remember that God is still in charge—of the disadvantages as well as the advantages.

I use my quiet times not only to remember past blessings, but gratefully to accept whatever today may bring, knowing that I do not have to worry about tomorrow. God is there already.

Lord, help me to use my time each day to thank, praise and serve. Amen.

Do: Share with others the unhurried peace which the Lord gives us.

Read: Psalm 31:14-15; Exodus 33:14; Matthew 11:28-29

*Connie Bretscher
Valparaiso, IN*

Sunday, March 1, 2015

I'm Aging!

I will hope continually.

Psalm 71:14

My body is weakening. My senses of hearing, sight and smell are declining. I no longer can do what I used to be able to do. I am slowing down. "My strength is spent" (Psalm 71:9).

Today is a time for mellowing. I can reflect upon the blessings of the past. I can remember how God has taken care of me through my earthly travels. I can recall the support of my family and friends. I can sing God's praises for his mighty deeds in creation, in the ministry of his Son, Jesus, and in the outpouring of his Holy Spirit. I can tell others of his marvelous goodness. I need not give up hope as my body ages.

In fact, I can spend time with the psalmist as he offers this prayer in his old age: "I will hope continually." I can join him in putting my hope in God's salvation.

Give me help, O Lord, to praise you all the days of my life. Amen.

Opportunity: Don't hesitate to share the hope that you have in God's promises.

Read: Psalm 71

*Walter M. Schoedel
Webster Groves, MO*

Monday, March 2, 2015

Nestling

He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will abide in the shadow of the Almighty.

Psalm 91:1

The pastor was preaching. As I listened, my eyes strayed upward to the window high above the pulpit. I spied something dark in a niche on the outside of the church wall. Curious, I kept my eyes on an object packed into that corner. The pale green of the window pane couldn't obscure the shadow of a mother bird moving in her nest. What a wise choice, I thought, to build her nest in the protection of God's house.

A familiar hymn talks about a nestling bird. A nestling is a bird too young and frail to leave its nest. I smiled. Tended by mother bird, the young ones need not fear.

At times we may be too infirm or frail to leave our nest. Yet God assures us we are safely under his wings, where we are loved, protected and nourished.

Father, you are my refuge. Amen.

Thank: Thank those who serve as God's hands, providing protection, love and nourishment for you each day.

Read: Psalm 91; Psalm 84

*Donna J. Streufert
South Bend, IN*

Tuesday, March 3, 2015

This Old House

... if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

2 Corinthians 5:1

My body just isn't what it used to be. One man told me: "My back goes out more than I do." For many the "golden years" resemble fool's gold.

St. Paul compares the body to a tent. Tents are great if they can stand up to wind and rain. But tents wear out over time, just like the body. My doctor told me, "You live long enough, and something's bound to happen." That's not cheerful news.

But Paul's news *is* cheerful news for hopeful living: because of Jesus, we have a heavenly mansion waiting for us. Until our eternal building is ready for us to move in to, this tent should do just fine.

Lord Jesus, teach me to be patient as I wait for the life to come. Amen.

Visit: Visit or call "old" friends to encourage them in the trials of life.

Read: 2 Corinthians 5:1-10; John 2:18-22; John 14:1-7

*Edward Arle
St. Charles, MO*

Wednesday, March 4, 2015

An Uncommon Reunion

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

Acts 2:42

Recently we attended the 150th anniversary of the church where I first served as pastor. While there, we shared a meal with five other couples who belonged to a home Bible study I began in 1968. While some of us now live elsewhere, three of the couples continue in the same home group 46 years later. What an uncommon reunion around God's saving Word!

The marvelous description of that Jerusalem church after Pentecost in Acts 2 captures the Holy Spirit at work in the early Christian community and in our home Bible study group, still devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, the breaking of bread and prayer. The crucified and risen Christ lives in and through them. How about you?

Holy Spirit, let the Word of Christ dwell in us richly as we study your Word together. Amen.

Join: Join together with friends in Bible study and prayer.

Read: Colossians 3:16-17

*Stephen J. Carter
Oakville, MO*

Thursday, March 5, 2015

Waiter and Server

For the Lord is a God of justice. Blessed are all who wait for him!

Isaiah 30:18

In the restaurant the person came over and said, “My name is Bill, and I will be your waiter today.” The next week the words were: “Hello, I’m Jenny. This evening I will be your server.” That got me to thinking. Is a “waiter” the same as a “server”?

At our age we are often called on to “wait.” We wait in doctor’s offices, for meals to be ready, even to be called home to heaven. We are indeed experienced “waiters.” But the Lord also wants us to be “servers.” Time after time when Jesus was on earth he showed us how to be a servant. Is God calling us to wait precisely so that we can serve?

Generally, waiting is not the most pleasant of experiences. But if we think of these times as opportunities to serve, they can bring a quiet joy to our hearts in addition to those we serve.

Lord, show me every day that you do just what you say in your time. Amen.

Serve: Serve someone today a whole platter of kindness topped with the goodness of God.

Read: Psalm 130

*Don Luepke
Fremont, IN*

Friday, March 6, 2015

Crossword Puzzles

Be renewed in the spirit of your minds.

Ephesians 4:23

Recently I read a newspaper article that said one of the best ways to slow the process of aging is to do crossword puzzles. The next morning I opened the just-delivered paper to do the crossword. I was happy to discover that I finished it in half the time it usually takes me to do it in the evenings. Regardless of when we do it, though, the activity of working on a crossword adds to our mental agility.

Then, a short time later, my wife printed off an Internet article revealing another vital fact: our brains continue to produce new cells until we die. We had assumed our brain cells just gradually diminished and died as we get older. Instead, God creates new brain cells day by day. So do not lose heart: “Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day” (2 Corinthians 4:16).

Father, continue to renew my mind and refresh my spirit in my devotion to you. Amen.

Do: Do a crossword puzzle today to stimulate your mind, and plan on doing your devotions in the morning this week, when our brains are usually at their sharpest.

Read: Ephesians 6:13

*Deane Schuessler
Woodbury, MN*

Saturday, March 7, 2015

What's Your Mindset?

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

Colossians 3:2

Discussions about mindsets fill magazines and talk shows today. We hear about the mindset of successful individuals and read about the mindset necessary to lose weight or handle stress. Churches encourage a mindset of outreach or service. But what kind of mindset does a Christian need?

Paul dealt with the issue of mindset almost 2,000 years ago. "Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth," he wrote to the Colossian Christians. Paul does not despise the things of this world, but he realizes this fallen world should not be our focus. "For you have died," he continues, "and your life is hidden with Christ in God" (Colossians 3:3).

What's your mindset? Finances, health, family and friends present legitimate causes for concern. But "set your mind on things that are above" and on the Savior who died to make you his own.

Help me, Lord, to set my mind on you. Amen.

Remember: Think of a time when focusing on Christ helped you when you were troubled.

Read: Romans 8:1-11

*Eileen Ritter
Grand Haven, MI*

Sunday, March 8, 2015

Peace to All Things

Peace! Be still!

Mark 4:39

Mark 4 contains the familiar story of Jesus calming the storm. Usually when Jesus speaks the word *peace*, he is addressing people. Here he is speaking to the sea. He wants peace in all things ... people, seas, all of creation. The disciples' boat and the other boats on the water are saved from certain destruction. The peace of Christ was extended to everyone floating on the sea that day in a very unique way. The disciples knew who brought peace to the sea. The other people on the other boats probably thought the storm suddenly died out. Nevertheless, the word of peace spoken by Jesus benefitted all.

The peace of Christ carries us through every hardship in life. Through illness, loss, loneliness and aging, Jesus promises to be with us. We, in turn, are privileged to extend his peace to one another. It is then that we experience what the peace of Christ is all about.

Lord, fill us with your peace that we may share it with others. Amen.

Speak: Speak a word of God's peace to someone today.

Read: Mark 4:36-41

Lael Hoerger
Niles, MI

Monday, March 9, 2015

Forget the Sawdust

You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.

Luke 6:42

In these words, the Master Carpenter gives great direction and application when cleaning up the workshop of our lives. Obviously, you start with the big planks and chunks of wood and then sweep up the sawdust. However, all too often, you and I are quick to go after the sawdust, judging the weakness and issues in the lives of others instead of tending to our own flawed outlook first. Why is it that with age we become such experts at noting all the faults of others and overlooking our own? Here our Lord gives incredibly practical advice for healthier and happier relationships with our families, our friends, our congregation and our community. He says simply with great humor and exaggeration, “Start at home in your life first.”

Lord, help us to clean up our own lives first in your name and with your help. Amen.

Ask: Ask God's help and forgiveness as you clean out the “planks” in your life.

Read: Romans 8 and 14

*John Herzog
Chesterfield Township, MI*

Tuesday, March 10, 2015

Learning New Things

For this purpose I have raised you up, to show you my power, so that my name may be proclaimed in all the earth.

Exodus 9:16

My friend knits the most beautiful hats, scarves and sweaters. Her needles fly as she works an intricate pattern into her creations. I tried my hand at knitting. I learned the two basic stitches: knit and purl. She offered to show me how to make more stitches, but I resisted. I was satisfied with the knowledge I had. I could make a scarf and that was good enough.

We often live our faith lives like that. We know the basics, but at times we are unwilling to learn anything new. We resist hearing about a more effective way to reach unbelievers or to share our faith experiences. If we ask God to help us learn and practice, we will be better equipped to be useful in his kingdom-building.

Lord, help me to be open to learning new ways to win people to you. Amen.

Research: Research one new way you can approach people to share the Gospel.

Read: Philippians 4:13; Exodus 9:16

*Gloria Doty
Fort Wayne, IN*

Wednesday, March 11, 2015

Reach Out

... to slander no one, to be peaceable and considerate, and always to be gentle toward everyone.

Titus 3:2

“Reach out and touch someone” originated with a phone company to encourage phone usage. What about a slogan, “Reach out and acknowledge someone”? Acknowledging a person with a greeting can be an uplifting practice. “Good morning. How are you?” “Can I help?” “Have a good day!” These words are simple ways to extend friendship. Get in the habit and do it. Don’t let anyone pass you by without an acknowledgment.

Jesus said it all in Matthew 22:37-39: “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’”

Father, guide me in my relationship with your creatures, that it be one of love and compassion. Amen.

Practice: Work hard at being a loving neighbor to everyone you meet.

Read: Titus 3:1-8

*Don Hollmann
Ballwin, MO*

Thursday, March 12, 2015

Time for New Grapes?

Every branch in me ... that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit.

John 15:2

Ever feel that your “fruitful” days are over because you can’t do the things you once did? I spoke with a friend who was frustrated with her decreasing physical ability to serve God as she once did. We spoke about John 15, that perhaps God was “pruning” her back so she could be more fruitful in a new way.

She mentioned she had joined a ministry that provides encouragement to others through phone calls, something she could do from home. Suddenly she saw God’s hand in this and was able to let go of the “old fruit” and trust God to bring fruitfulness in this new area.

God’s “pruning” is often hard to accept, but trusting him as our Vinedresser may lead to new and abundant grapes.

Father, help me to trust you and accept your pruning in my life. Make me a fruitful branch. Amen.

Thank: Thank God for his faithful tending and trust him for new fruitfulness.

Read: John 15:1-17

*Diane Bahn
Cypress, TX*

Friday, March 13, 2015

Still at It? Of Course!

Now Moses was eighty years old, and Aaron eighty-three years old, when they spoke to Pharaoh.

Exodus 7:7

Our most recent census reported that there are 40.3 million people over 65 years of age in the United States. That's a lot of older people, actually twelve times more post-65 men and women alive today than there were in 1900. What might God have in mind for all those older people? The answer to that looks simple. Judging by his past actions, he is keeping them around to do his work. Age notwithstanding, in his eyes they are still useful, as in "full of use."

As an example of our Creator's attitude, remember that Moses was 80, Aaron 83 and Miriam 85 when God had put before them the challenge to lead his people from Egypt to the Promised Land. One thing is for sure: accumulating birthdays is not an acceptable excuse for shirking God's duty calls.

Lord Jesus, help me to be as faithful in my service to you. Amen.

Celebrate: When you celebrate a birthday, rejoice in God's purpose and plans for you in Christ.

Read: Isaiah 6:1-9

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

Saturday, March 14, 2015

Complaint Department

I pour out my complaint before him.

Psalm 142:2

Complaint departments may not exist anymore; companies have customer service divisions to handle the concerns of their customers. Some dissatisfied customers may not even bother with a call—they may just make their complaints public on Facebook or Twitter.

David the psalmist is hiding in a cave fearing for his life, so he has something to complain about. His complaint isn't routed through customer service. The Lord himself hears his cry, and the complaints pouring out sound very much like our own: My spirit faints. No one notices me. No one cares for me. This feels like a prison. But David already knows the answer to his prayer, and so do we. He concludes: "You will deal bountifully with me" (Psalm 142:7). The Lord notices and cares, and by his death and resurrection he has set us free.

Lord Jesus, I know that you notice and care for me because you died for me. Amen.

Listen: Listen to someone's complaints and bring those complaints before the Lord in prayer.

Read: Psalm 142; Romans 8:31-39

*Carol Geisler
Manchester, MO*

Sunday, March 15, 2015

Peaceful, Peace-filled

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you.

John 14:27

What is the key to peace these days? Is it eternal youth? Is it limitless wealth? How about good looks or popularity? A slim waistline? A successful job? Or, as some would say, “If you’ve got your health, you’ve got just about everything.”

St. Paul thought differently about peace. “[Christ] himself is our peace,” he said (Ephesians 2:14).

His idea of peace had to do with Jesus. We may not have all the good things in life that others have. We may even have things that others wouldn’t care to have, such as poor health or financial troubles, but since we have Jesus, we have what Paul refers to as “the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding” (Philippians 4:7).

No matter what comes our way in this life, we have the Spirit of Christ to meet it head-on in the peace and power of our Lord.

Lord Jesus, give me your Spirit of peace. Amen.

Share: Share the peace you have in Jesus with someone you know.

Read: John 16:25-33; Romans 8:1-11

*Edward Arle
St. Charles, MO*

Monday, March 16, 2015

Old Vine Goodness

I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide.

John 15:16

Zinfandel grapes were once widely planted in California, but now they are largely replaced by other varieties. The fruit of those plants remaining, some close to a century old, is again in demand. The trunks are gnarled and the branches produce smaller grapes. Yet what is lost in tonnage is compensated for in quality.

As I grow older, I may not deliver the tonnage of work I once did. But I am quite capable of producing quality. My years of life experience in the Lord make the difference. I am glad the Lord considers me an important part of his earthly vineyard and hasn't ripped me out. Even when he chooses to do so, I will still abide in and with Christ.

Thank you, Lord, that there is room in the economy of your kingdom for the contributions I can make. Amen.

Ponder: After reading the lessons below, what constitutes the "quality" of the fruit the Lord expects of us?

Read: John 15:1-17; Galatians 5:22-25

*Ted Zimmerman
Napa, CA*

Tuesday, March 17, 2015

St. Patrick's Legacy

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations.

Matthew 28:19

It's St. Patrick's Day, and while most of us know it is customary to wear green today, St. Patrick's legacy is not as widely known. Until he was 16 he considered himself a pagan. Then at 16 he was sold into slavery by a group of Irish marauders. During his captivity, he drew closer to God. After six years he escaped and entered a monastery. During his training he became aware that his calling was to convert unbelievers to Christianity.

He traveled throughout Ireland and set up schools and churches that would aid in the conversion of the local people to Christ. His mission in Ireland lasted thirty years. He died on March 17, 461, and this day has been commemorated to him ever since.

That was Patrick's legacy. What will yours be?

Father, thank you for setting before us exemplars like St. Patrick. Guide us that we might be always zealous for you. Amen.

Write: Send a note to someone who is in need of the touch of Jesus.

Read: Luke 24:44-49

*Don Luepke
Fremont, IN*

Wednesday, March 18, 2015

Jesus Comes to Your House

And Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.”

Luke 19:9-10

When Jesus entered the town of Jericho, this short fellow—a tax collector—spotted a tree along the way where he would get a good view of Jesus.

Jesus, seeing the man in the tree, surprised him and invited himself to dinner. There, Jesus, in a face-to-face conversation, asked Zacchaeus to confront his own selfishness and begin a new life of sharing the love of God with the poor and the needy.

In that brief moment of confrontation lies our devotional thought for today: As Jesus knew Zacchaeus in the tree, we know Jesus best when we look up at the tree of the cross and hear the very same message for us to live for him.

Lord, keep me from being a mere onlooker. Help me listen to you calling out to me that I might follow you more closely. Amen.

Discuss: If you were in Zacchaeus’ situation, what message would Jesus have particularly for you?

Read: Luke 19:1-10; John 14:23-24

*Karl E. Lutze
Valparaiso, IN*

Thursday, March 19, 2015

The Walk

Let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.

Hebrews 12:1

I was enjoying my morning walk when I heard fast-paced footsteps closing in from behind. I moved to the right to let the runner pass. It wasn't long before another runner made his way around me, then a bicyclist. I was tempted to run and attempt to keep up, but I've learned that my body is built for walking, not for running. I gave the faster travelers the right of way, as I kept my steady plodding pace toward my goal.

God created each of us for his purpose, mapping out our path before we were born. By keeping our eyes on him, we reach the goal he has set for us by walking or running according to his perfect plan.

Heavenly Father, I am thankful that I am uniquely made for your purpose. Keep me focused on your path for me. Amen.

Invite: Invite someone to walk with you, so you can encourage them in their walk of faith.

Read: Psalm 139:1-16; Psalm 56:8

*Lynne Waite Chapman
Fort Wayne, IN*

Friday, March 20, 2015

A Lesson in the Weeds

Mary has chosen what is better.

Luke 10:42

Last summer my wife and I spent an afternoon pulling weeds in one of the neglected flower plots on our church property. The wet spring we experienced gave weeds of every kind a healthy head start. I couldn't believe the height of the thistle plants—and the depth of their roots. They were set for a long life in that flower plot. They could have withstood a long drought because their roots reached deep into the soil. A strong wind could not have toppled them.

As I dug out these thistles, I thought of the importance of being rooted deeply into Jesus Christ and the words of Scripture, especially the life-giving words of God's love. I am retired. I have the time to read Scripture more often and for longer lengths of time. What could be a more important use of my time?

Lord, forgive my procrastination. Forgive my tendency to waste your valuable gift of time—to “major in the minors.” Keep opening my eyes and my heart to the riches of your loving Gospel message. Amen.

Do: If you haven't already done so, determine a time and place for daily Bible reading.

Read: Luke 10:38-42

*Paul Eggold
Greendale, WI*

Saturday, March 21, 2015

Eyes Forward

One thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal.

Philippians 3:13-14

I try to walk for 30 minutes each day. As I walk, I look ahead to avoid crashing into a tree or one of my neighbors. Looking over my shoulder as I walk would be foolish and dangerous.

Sometimes in our lives we look backward. We think about our past sins. We remember broken relationships, angry words and things that we wish we could “undo.” Then we need to remember that Jesus took all those sins to the cross and died for them. We are forgiven and there is no need to look backward. We can keep our eyes forward looking at the end goal of eternal life.

Heavenly Father, help me always to look forward to my heavenly home. Amen.

Think: Think of someone who feels guilty about past mistakes and reassure him or her of God’s love and forgiveness.

Read: 1 Corinthians 9:24-27

*Jeanette Dall
Batavia, IL*

Sunday, March 22, 2015

Gathered Together

Proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

1 Peter 2:9

Distinctive and often interesting names have developed for groups of creatures. It is a band of jays, a murder of crows, a charm of hummingbirds and a parliament of owls. It is a herd of cattle, a flock of sheep, a pride of lions and a pack of wolves.

What is a group of Christians called? A church? A congregation? In the New Testament they were called *ekklesia* (those called out). Originally the word meant people called to assemble for a political meeting. We are called from our usual activities to assemble weekly for worship. Peter says we are called out *from* the darkness of ignorance and wickedness ... *for* spreading God's fame in the world by our words and deeds.

Help us, Father, to proclaim your excellencies to a world yet steeped in darkness. Amen.

Consider: The name for groups of creatures often suggests something about their nature. What should be distinctive about those called to be ekklesia?

Read: 1 Peter 2:1-12; Acts 26:12-23

Ted Zimmerman
Napa, CA

Monday, March 23, 2015

Still Working

Jesus answered them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent."

John 6:29

Every day before retirement was jam-packed. My calendar was penciled full of notes. Finally after all the good-byes, packing and moving, I turned my calendar to a new month and saw ... nothing. All those empty days made me think guiltily, "I should still be working." It took me awhile to realize that, even in retirement, Christians are still working.

Our first job, as Jesus himself says in John 6:29, is to believe in him. Through faith, then, he gives us power and gifts to do all kinds of other good work. We can pray, encourage, share, uphold, mentor, witness, help, love and care for others. This is important work from which we never retire. Even when age or ability makes some work impossible, faith remains as the first and most important work of the heart. Through faith, we draw ever closer to Christ.

Gracious God, keep me in faith always, and keep me working faithfully for you. Amen.

Prioritize: Keep faith as job #1 while you continue to work for the Lord.

Read: John 9:4; Ephesians 2:8-10

*Marj Maynard
Billings, MO*

Tuesday, March 24, 2015

The Invitation

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

Psalm 118:24

He drifted away from the church many years ago, but was happy to accept her invitation to the church picnic. After all, she was the young lady he had long admired and cared about, so the opportunity to be with her was more than welcome. The time together with kind and friendly people and a warm greeting from the pastor made for a delightful day. So when she asked him to attend services with her the next Sunday, he agreed.

Today he is a second-career student at the seminary, married to that young lady and the father of their two little boys. A fairy tale? Not really. It is a lesson for us all to extend that invitation, then allow the Holy Spirit to touch another heart. How many times do we hesitate to take that first step? Let's ask someone to rejoice and be glad with us on a day that "the *Lord* has made."

Lord, help me to be a bold witness for you. Amen.

Invite: Invite a friend to church.

Read: Psalm 118:19-29

*Joan Scheele Mueller
Webster Groves, MO*

Wednesday, March 25, 2015

Giving and Receiving

It is more blessed to give than to receive.

Acts 20:35

An 85-year-old friend of mine was lamenting recently that he had always enjoyed this Scripture verse, but as he grows older, he is not so sure about it. After all, if we find ourselves not having the energies or opportunities to be able to give as much to others as we have given in the past, does this mean that we are “less blessed”?

Perhaps we can look at it this way: Even when we seem to be “receiving” more than we are “giving,” we are growing in our awareness that our receiving care and support from others is actually a way of giving to those that give to us. Makes sense to me!

Lord, thanks for opportunities both to give to and receive from each other. Thanks for being the Lord of both the giver and the receiver. Whether we are on the giving end or the receiving end, we know you are the gift to us. Amen.

Keep Track: Keep track of those who give gifts of love to you today, and thank them. As you receive their gifts, gift them with the message of God’s love for them.

Read: 2 Corinthians 9:6-15

Rich Bimler
Bloomington, IL

Thursday, March 26, 2015

Who's Holding On?

He will not let your foot slip.

Psalm 121:3

Walter was taking his granddaughter Sally across the creek to see the horses. The stream was fast, and the bridge was narrow. Sally was frightened.

“Just hold tight to my hand,” Gandpa encouraged.

“No,” Sally pleaded, “you hold *my* hand, Grandpa!”

Ah! From the lips of children. Our efforts to “hold on to God” seem weak. We are not strong enough. But God reaches down in Jesus to take hold of us with love and forgiveness. He will not let us go.

The bridges may be narrow. The stream may be fast. But nothing will separate us from the love of God that is ours in Christ Jesus our Lord. And he's got more to show us than just horses.

Loving Father, hold on to us with your forgiving love. Never let us go. Amen.

Take: Take a child for a walk. Hold a hand, and tell about Jesus.

Read: Romans 8; Psalm 121

*Lonie Eatherton
Fenton, MO*

Friday, March 27, 2015

Closure

*Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me,
bless his holy name!*

Psalm 103:1

Have you recently labored in a storeroom to sort through dusty boxes of faded photos, yellowing letters and once important memorabilia? Oh, the struggle of what to discard and what to save! In the middle of that task, a lifetime of memories has stirred my soul—people from my youth, events in family and professional career, joyful experiences and sad moments of loss and regret. I realize that God has been using this storeroom time to bring closure in my life—sins forgiven and grief acknowledged in the discarded trash, wonderful memories of God’s blessings preserved in cards and letters, peace in my soul for ongoing purpose, service and thanksgiving to God.

Find new meaning in Psalm 103 that points you and me to a God who daily brings benefits, forgiveness, healing, redemption, steadfast love and compassion, flowing from closure in a lonely storeroom.

Lord, thanks for closure through storeroom memories so that I may honor your salvation with a daily life of praise. Amen.

Remember: Open a box of memories without fear.

Read: Psalm 103

*Stephen J. Carter
Oakville, MO*

Saturday, March 28, 2015

When God Is Silent

O Lord; be not silent! O Lord, be not far from me!

Psalm 35:22

On the cross Jesus cried out, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Mark 15:34). God sent no angels to strengthen him as he did in the Garden of Gethsemane. No voice from heaven called out, “This is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased” (Matthew 3:17). There was only a stony, grey silence.

What does Jesus do? He prayed to his silent Father, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit” (Luke 23:46). He trusted God and completed his assignment. His suffering and death reconciled us to God. On the third day his Father raised him from the dead and guaranteed our resurrection.

When God is silent, it does not mean that he has stopped caring for us. We can trust a heavenly Father to see us through whatever it is that we face. He will not fail us! Trust in him.

Lord, even in your silence, may your Holy Spirit touch my spirit to trust in your unfailing love. Amen.

Do: In your quiet spirit perform an act of kindness for someone.

Read: Matthew 27:46; Luke 23:46; Matthew 15:21-28

*Leo Symmank
Seabrook, TX*

Sunday, March 29, 2015

Faith in the Foxhole

But we preach Christ crucified.

1 Corinthians 1:23

Jim shared his story with our Sunday Bible class. “When I was in Korea, the Protestant chaplain would come in his Jeep. Eight or ten of us at a time would leave the foxhole for worship—no more than that, in case a shell would come. The chaplain spread a cloth across the radiator and placed a wooden cross on it. We sang some hymns, and he preached about Jesus from his Bible.

“When I returned home after the war, I went back to my old church. There was organ music and liturgy and all the other trappings of church. But everything we needed to worship was there beside that foxhole.”

Traditional or contemporary music, spoken or chanted liturgy, padded pews or folding chairs—they’re all nice. But the core of our faith and of our worship is the same as Jim experienced in Korea. “We preach Christ crucified,” our only hope in this world and the next.

*Lord, I believe; help my unbelief (Mark 9:24).
Amen.*

Share: Share the core of your faith with a friend or neighbor.

Read: John 4:19-26

Eileen Ritter
Grand Haven, MI

Monday, March 30, 2015

If the Lord Wills

Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done.

Luke 22:42

Prayers often end, “If it is your will” or “Your will be done.” Jesus taught us to pray, “Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” Jesus himself, fully and painfully aware of his Father’s will, prayed that way in Gethsemane.

A prayer asking that God’s will be done is not a prayer of doubt. To pray that God’s will be done is to acknowledge that he is God and we are not. God’s will surrounds us like a great, shielding wall. Because of that shield, Joseph could say to his brothers, “You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good” (Genesis 50:20), and Paul could write, “For those who love God all things work together for good” (Romans 8:28). Because of that protecting wall, Jesus prayed, “Not my will, but yours be done,” and went to the cross for our salvation.

*Lord Jesus, teach me to pray, “Your will be done.”
Amen.*

Pray: Pray for those in need and assure them of the protective wall of God’s will.

Read: Luke 22:39-46; Matthew 6:7-15

*Carol Geisler
Manchester, MO*

Tuesday, March 31, 2015

On Your Way

Sir, we wish to see Jesus.

John 12:21

This is the most climactic week of all for Christian review and celebration. This is the week when our Savior completed the work he was sent to do—to take the sin of the world upon himself, to suffer and die for us, and to rise from the dead to save us.

During that final week of his life on earth, the great crowd that was with Jesus when he raised Lazarus from the dead continued to spread the word about his redeeming work. I can't think of anything better to do this Holy Week than to spread the word about him. Telling people about Jesus dying and living for them, about securing a place for them for all eternity—that's what I want to do. When you're on your way to worship this Holy Week, take someone with you to the cross and empty tomb. It could be an eternal, life-changing time for them.

Lord, show me who I can bring to you this Holy Week. Amen.

Invite: Celebrate the privilege you have in inviting someone new to meet Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world, this Holy Week.

Read: John 12:12-32; 2 Corinthians 5:14-21

*David P. Schmidt
St. Louis, MO*

HOLY HABITS for **HOPE-FULL HEALTH**

Intentional “Random” Acts of Kindness

Holy Habits grow out of our faith in the Lord. Let’s look at specific ways that we can “plan” random acts of kindness to those around us:

1. Hold the door open for a younger person.
2. Befriend a salesperson who calls on the phone by asking how she is doing today and if she has any prayer requests for your prayer list.
3. Pay for a cup of coffee for the person behind you at the coffee shop.
4. Bake cookies for your neighbor for no other reason than to say, “You’re nice!”
5. Call or email an old friend just to say “Hi, I’m thinking of you!”
6. Send a handwritten note to someone and share a Bible verse.
7. Offer to let someone with more groceries than you step in front of you at the checkout counter.
8. Pretend you do not hear a person’s negative comments about someone and instead mention a positive attribute instead.
9. Give an extra-big tip to the waiter in the restaurant, in spite of the service.
10. If you see a person without a smile, give him one of yours.

Enjoy planning and doing these “random” acts of kindness, in the Lord!

Hope-Full Praying

In Bad Weather

Storms come and go in our lives, Lord. Sometimes it is snow, sometimes strong rains and wind, and sometimes storms come in the form of disappointments, dysfunction, disease and even death. Protect me from all kinds of storms, Lord, for you are my only Protector. Amen.

Keeping Warm

There is nothing like the warmth of a crackling fire, Lord, except, of course, the warmth of your love that surrounds us. Fires are extinguished, furnaces break, jackets wear out and hot coffee turns cold, but the welcoming warmth of your presence continues to ignite us in the glow of your love. Amen.

For Caregivers

Lord, we thank you this day for caregivers and also for care receivers. As more of us grow older, more of us will need the care of others. Thanks for the gift of aging, and also for the gift of those who bring your hands and heart to people in need of care. Help me both to give care and receive care. Amen.

For Adult Children

You have provided families to live in generations, Lord, and today I thank you for my adult children. I marvel at them, even though at times I wonder who really taught them all that they know! Keep them growing in your love, forgive them when they do foolish things that their parents might have done, and bring them the joy of living hope-fully in you. Amen.

For Those Who Do Not Follow You

Lord, you have created all people, and you continue to love us, even when we turn away from you. Today we ask for a special measure of your grace in order for us to turn our attention to those people, young and old, all around us who perhaps feel that you have forgotten them. Help us to introduce them to you in all that we do and say. Amen.

For Those Who Are Sick

We pray for those who are sick today, Lord, in body, mind or spirit. Heal them as only you can. Use doctors and nurses, and us, to bring your healing power to them, as we listen to, care and encourage them. Rest your helping hand on us, Lord, as we reach out with your hope and grace to a hurting world. Amen.

For Valentine's Day

When we think about love, Lord, we think first about your love for us. Only then can we think about Valentine's Day and proceed to give cards, candy and flowers to those whom we love. Thanks for loving us and for loving the people who love us as well. Your valentine heart to us is in the form of a cross and an empty tomb. Keep on loving us so we can keep on loving you and others. Amen.

When Feeling Out of Sorts

Lord, it is hard for me to be happy all day. I must confess that there are days when I am depressed, frustrated and even hard to live with. Forgive me, Lord, and do not forget me during these times. Send me someone to talk to, to lighten my load, to share your love and presence with me. Lord, thanks for being here with me, even when I am such a grouch. Keep sending me your resurrection. Amen.

Looking For Guidance

I need your guidance, Lord, each day. Help me to stay on your path of love, hope and peace. And when I do get off track, keep me following in your footsteps, even though I know that your path leads to the cross. I do not want an easier life, Lord; I only pray for an Easter life. Amen.

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