

HOPE-FULL LIVING

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

January • February • March • 2016

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Hope-Full Living Mission Statement

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

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Friday, January 1, 2016

Sweet (20)16!

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

Psalm 119:103

Hello 2016, but goodbye forever to the phrase “Sweet 16!” from our distant past. We enter a new year knowing that the Lord is already there! Sure, it is fine at times to look back at those “Sweet 16” years, and to remember our many blessings, but it is also good to see and accept the aging process as God’s gift to us. Enjoy the memories of when you turned “Sweet 16,” but savor even more the sweet sounds of God’s presence and promise right now.

Someone once said, “Yesterday is a cancelled check; tomorrow is a promissory note; today is cash, ready for us to spend.” Are we ready to spend each day sharing the sweetness of God’s Word with those around us? And all of God’s people said, “Yes!”

Lord, thanks for another year of life. Let us live it one day at a time, starting today. “How sweet the name of Jesus sounds, to a believer’s ear! It soothes our sorrows, heals our wounds, and drives away our fear.” Amen.

Greet: Wish everyone today a blessed “sweet” 2016!

Read: Psalm 119:103-105; Hebrews 13:6-8

*Rich Bimler
Bloomingdale, IL*

Saturday, January 2, 2016

Take Time

My times are in your hand.

Psalm 31:15

God is giving us the gift of time—a whole year of it—2016. What can this gift mean for me?

It can mean another year of weakness and worry—or as the hymn writer tells us, “another year of grace.” God gives that, too—bushels of it—“freely bestowed” (Ephesians 1:6 NRSV), grace to set our priorities, not just to include God on the fringes of our plans, but to put our commitment (yes, and some of our precious time) to him—first.

Develop the habit of talking everything over with the One who does not need to be informed, but awaits your confidence that he might help. We pray each day, “Into thy hands I commit myself, all that I am, all that I have, and all whom I love.” Some commitment! But nothing compares to God’s committing his beloved Son to leave his heavenly home for a life that included time for prayer, healing and suffering death for my sins.

Lord, keep my commitment to love and serve you strong. Amen.

Pray: Find time each day to pray, praise and give thanks.

Read: Ecclesiastes 3:1-17; Philippians 4:13

*Connie Bretscher
Valparaiso, IN*

Sunday, January 3, 2016

Resolutions

I know that my Redeemer lives!

Job 19:25

Leona had lost her home, her savings and her zest for living. “New Year’s resolutions?” she scoffed. “No, I don’t make ’em and I don’t break ’em.” I wish Leona could have met Job.

Job lost everything too. His wife suggested a resolution: “Curse God and die!” But Job had a better one: “I know that my Redeemer lives!”

If our life resolutions are based on who we are and what we can do, we are without hope. If our resolve is based on who God is and what he does for us, we have hope. My Redeemer lives, and because he lives, I also live, this day, every day and into eternity.

As he sat in dust and ashes, Job too was discouraged. But Job never lost faith in his God. Hopeful living was his faithful resolve because his God was faithful to him.

Lord of my days and years, lift me up from the discouragements that weigh me down. Give me daily hope in your eternal love and good purposes for me. Amen.

Share: Share your God-centered resolution for the new year with someone like Job or Leona.

Read: Job 1; Psalm 46

*Lonie Eatherton
Fenton, MO*

Monday, January 4, 2016

Confidence in Our Hope

Such is the confidence that we have through Christ toward God.

2 Corinthians 3:4

Thankfully, most of us are able to enter the new year with hope. We may hope that the new year will be better than the last one. We may look forward with hope to a new adventure that we have been planning. There may be hope of relief or cure for a long-standing illness. Whatever fills our lives comes with us into each new year.

Paul faced some difficulties with the Corinthian Christians, but he is full of hope as he faces the future. For Paul, it is not just a hope that God will come through for him. He says that he has real confidence toward God—because of Christ.

And isn't that the difference for all of us? If our lives are in God's hands because of Christ, then we can be filled with confidence about our future. That, too, is in God's hands.

Dear Lord, strengthen my confidence in you. You are my God. Amen.

Share: Share your hopes and dreams for the future with someone close to you.

Read: 2 Corinthians 12; Romans 8:18-39

Lionel Otto
Adelaide, Australia

Tuesday, January 5, 2016

Good Thinking

Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just ... pure ... lovely ... commendable ... think about these things.

Philippians 4:8

A catchy song from the 1940s encouraged folks to “accentuate the positive” and “eliminate the negative.” In a lighthearted way, those lyrics reflect the spiritual focus of today’s verse. Thinking positive thoughts is always better; and with the new year just beginning, Philippians 4:8 makes a great resolution.

Sadly, it’s almost always easier to think negative thoughts. Have you ever tried to keep bad thoughts out of mind? They have a way of creeping back in. When that happens, reread today’s verse plus Philippians 4:7, “And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” Through faith in Christ, God provides a way to “be transformed by the renewal of your mind” (Romans 12:2). Here’s to a new year of good thinking with God’s help!

Lord, continue to transform and renew my mind. Guide my thoughts in a positive direction. Amen.

List: List things to think about that are true, honorable, just, pure, lovely and commendable.

Read: 1 Corinthians 2:11-16; Romans 12:2-3

*Marj Maynard
Billings, MO*

Wednesday, January 6, 2016

Love That Shines Clearly

Nations shall come to your light and kings to the brightness of your rising.

Isaiah 60:3

Do you remember when we used to cover our leftovers with a clear film of cellophane? The letters *phan* in cellophane are also found in *Epiphany*. They come from the Greek word meaning “to show.” God caused a bright star to shine in the sky, leading astronomers in the east to the house where Joseph and Mary had moved with Jesus. God showed clearly that his Son was the Savior of the whole world.

We live today in Jesus’ light. When we share his love with neighbors who need to know Jesus, and with people around the world through our offerings and prayers, we are a glowing light in Jesus’ epiphany. We show others the way to Jesus as clearly as we used to look through cellophane and see spaghetti.

Jesus, fill today and every day with the light of your love. Help me to share that brightness with everyone around me. In your name. Amen.

Do: Each time you try to guess what’s in a covered dish in the refrigerator, thank Jesus for lighting your way to heaven.

Read: Isaiah 60:1-6; Matthew 2:1-12; Matthew 5:14-16

*Ruth Geisler
Aliso Viejo, CA*

Thursday, January 7, 2016

New!

I am making everything new!

Revelation 21:5

In the Robert Frost poem, “Dust of Snow,” a crow knocks snow on a man. As a result the man’s mood changes. The dusting of snow had “saved some part of a day I had rued.”

Imagine such a common January event “saving part of the day.” Have you had an experience like that, when something common caused you joy, provided a pleasant surprise, made you suddenly laugh out loud?

In the midst of winter the cheeriest of us can “rue” the day, or the cold or the long, dark nights. When most of our days are likely behind us, we can grow wistful, even melancholy. God is at work, though, dusting snow on us. He lightens our hearts with memories of his faithfulness. He cheers us in worship. He makes us smile, thinking of dear Christian brothers and sisters. You remember, don’t you? God is making everything new today!

*Lord, you make me new every day. Thank you.
Amen.*

Remember: Remember a time God changed your day and made it new.

Read: Isaiah 42:1-9

*Don Schatz
Kenmore, WA*

Friday, January 8, 2016

Joy Is an Inside Job

In your presence there is fullness of joy.

Psalm 16:11

Online communication has given us a whole new way of expressing our feelings. Today we can punctuate our emails and text messages with emoticons, tiny drawings that show a variety of facial expressions. Even people who have difficulty talking about their emotions can express them visually by adding emoticons to their messages.

Most of our emotions come from the outside in. A friend's gift makes us happy; an angry word makes us sad. Happiness, sadness and other emotions can change quickly as those outside influences change.

The psalmist wrote, "In your presence is fullness of joy" (Psalm 16:11). Through the power of the Holy Spirit, we know that God has redeemed us through his Son Jesus. We experience the joy of his presence in this life, and look forward to eternal joy in heaven. His joy overflows from the inside out and touches everyone around us.

Fill me with joy, Lord, and let it bubble over to everyone I know. Amen.

Share: Share your joy with someone whose happiness is fleeting.

Read: Isaiah 12

*Eileen Ritter
Byron Center, MI*

Saturday, January 9, 2016

Good-News Bringers

Look, there on the mountains, the feet of one who brings good news, who proclaims peace!

Nahum 1:15

When you get a message, would you rather have it be good news or bad news? What kind of messenger are you? When people see you coming, do they all of a sudden get really quiet? Do they walk the other way? Do people want to hear what you have to say? Jesus didn't say, "Go and make disciples of all nations by scolding them," or "A new command I give you, judge one another." He said "baptize," "teach," "love," "forgive." Certainly the Law has its place, to convict us of sin, but as soon as the Law has its effect, we must always be bearers of the good news of Jesus!

Lord, help me to live in the joy of your salvation and bring good news to everyone. Amen.

Do: Smile at the people you see today and tell them that Jesus loves them.

Read: Matthew 28:18-20; John 13:34-35; John 20:22-23

*Jeremy Klaustermeier
Warrenton, MO*

Sunday, January 10, 2016

Beloved of God

God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good.

Genesis 1:31

Soon I will fly to the Galapagos Islands. What excitement to think of the many indigenous animals of this area. As I contemplate the wonders of God's creation, I do not pretend to know how our Almighty God created this magnificent earth and all its wonders. I only know that he did. Not only did he create all the creatures of this world, but he created you and me.

We are created in his image and redeemed by him through the death and resurrection of his Son, our Savior. At Christ's baptism, God called Christ his beloved Son. Through him, we have also been so called. Can you imagine? Our Creator calls us his beloved! It's exciting to think of meeting our Father and thanking him for his love and his creation.

Thank you, Father, for the wonders of your creation, especially for calling us your beloved through our baptism. Amen.

Watch: Go outdoors and quietly observe and give thanks.

Read: Genesis 1:1-31

*Ann Eissfeldt
Ballwin, MO*

Monday, January 11, 2016

Be Still!

Be still and know that I am God.

Psalm 46:10

A group of rowdy children crowded into the kitchen, teasing, arguing, whining—causing chaos and worrying their mother. The calamity continued until two strong words rose above the noise. “Be still!” Then there was silence. Those children knew who uttered the command. They recognized their father’s voice and acknowledged his authority.

Sometimes I’m like the children, whining or uttering useless nonsense. Sometimes I’m like the mother, allowing the chaos around me to cause unrest and stress. In either case, I need to hear the Father’s voice telling me to calm myself and return to the knowledge of who my God is. He is exalted above the trouble of this world. I need only to be still before him.

Heavenly Father, thank you that I can be still before you, knowing that you rule above the struggles of this world.

Be still: Begin each day with quiet time, remembering God’s care in the past and for the future.

Read: Psalm 46:10; Philippians 4:10; 1 Kings 19:12

*Lynne Waite Chapman
Fort Wayne, IN*

Tuesday, January 12, 2016

I'm With Jesus

They will call upon my name, and I will answer them. I will say, "They are my people"; and they will say, "The LORD is my God."

Zechariah 13:9

I recently agreed to meet some friends at a popular restaurant. Because it was new, people stood in line for hours to get a seat. My friends made certain they arrived early so they could avoid the wait. I knew I would be late, but all I had to do was tell the hostess, "I'm with the Smiths," and I was ushered inside. If I had forgotten the name, I would have been denied admittance.

God tells us this same principle applies to our daily lives. He has prepared a banquet for us, but we aren't worthy of attending. However, Jesus has reserved our table with his death on the cross. We only need to mention his name as our Savior and we will be ushered into the banquet hall to sit at his table.

Father, I am thankful I can say I am with Jesus. You see only his perfection instead of my sins. Amen.

Dine: Take someone out for lunch and tell them how Jesus has saved us a place at his table.

Read: Matthew 22:1-10

*Gloria Doty
Fort Wayne, IN*

Wednesday, January 13, 2016

Fear Not, My Little Flock

I will never leave you nor forsake you.

Hebrews 13:5

Fear is a self-taught negative emotion. It will disable us and smother our emotions. It will rule our life, and keep us from living life to the fullest. Are you really ready to let your life go by without participating in that life?

Fear is False Evidence Appearing Real. We can ban this frightening negativity from our brain without much problem. All we need to do is keep reminding ourselves: I can do all things through Christ, my strength and Redeemer. Then sit back and relax.

God, may we always remember when you walk by our side we are safe within your protection, no matter what calamity befalls us. Amen.

Do: When you see someone being fearful, remind them that God promises to never leave or forsake them.

Read: Isaiah 41:10-13; Psalm 7:10; Psalm 34:4-12

*Edna Jakobsky
Fort Myers FL*

Thursday, January 14, 2016

Old and Gray

Even when I am old and gray, do not forsake me, O God.

Psalm 71:18

It's been quite a while since I had to ask for a senior discount. They give it to me automatically now.

Thankfully, we know by faith that God will never forsake us when we are old and gray or when our strength is gone (Psalm 71:9). He will continue to be our guardian and guide through all of the changes and challenges of life.

No matter how old or frail we may be, God gives us an important purpose in life—to declare his message of salvation to the next generation (Psalm 71:18). Most of us were privileged to have our faith in Christ passed on to us by previous generations. Now it is our privilege and purpose to share Christ's light and love and saving grace with younger generations.

Gracious God, grant me the faith and courage to speak of your righteousness and salvation to the next generations. Amen.

Do: When you send birthday cards to your offspring and friends, include a word of encouragement for their Christian faith.

Read: Psalm 71

*Gil Duchow
Hilliard, OH*

Friday, January 15, 2016

How Are You ... Really?

O Lord, you have searched me and known me.

Psalm 139:1

“How are you?” I’m sure we’ve all used those three words to start conversations with friends we haven’t seen in a while. Most of the time you wouldn’t consider the response to that greeting to be a full disclosure of one’s human condition; generally the two words “I’m fine” are sufficient. But have you ever had someone greet you with the words, “How are you ... REALLY? And in your heart of hearts you knew the question was sincere.

Remember that old saying, “A friend is someone who knows all about you and likes you anyway.” A true friend is more than just an acquaintance. A true friend is someone who is genuinely interested in how you are. For me that friend is Jesus. He knows all about you and loves you as you are.

Lord Jesus, as you have known and loved me as I am, help me to love others the same way. Amen.

Pray: Ask the Lord to help you truly listen to the next person who longs to have you understand them.

Read: Jeremiah 12:3-4; 1 John 5:1-5

*Edward Arle
St. Charles, MO*

Saturday, January 16, 2016

A Century of Grace

With long life I will satisfy him and show him my salvation.

Psalm 91:16

I recently attended an event of significance. We celebrated a friend's 100th birthday. What a blessing he has been to his church and his family. Quiet and unassuming, he is present at most Sunday services. Since his birthday, he has accompanied his son to work in the church yard. Granted, his activity is limited, but if he can, he still willingly serves.

Surely he has questioned his longevity. Surely he has wondered when God will call him home. And yet, he knows God is his refuge and he is safe.

Having pondered the same questions myself, I am thankful for the faith of a friend that refreshes and encourages me. I am blessed. I don't have to worry about tomorrow because God is holding on to me, just as he is holding on to my friend.

*Thank you, heavenly Father, for a life of blessings.
Amen.*

Review: Recall God's faithfulness throughout your life.

Read: Psalm 91

*Lael Hoerger
Niles, MI*

Sunday, January 17, 2016

All About Him

That God may be all in all.

1 Corinthians 15:28

This fallen world operates by the motto, “It’s all about me.” Advertisements convince us to take care of number one, and we buy into the “me first” plan. We are sinfully turned inward on ourselves, and we do what pleases us instead of what pleases God. We live as Israel did in the days of the judges: “Everyone did what was right in his own eyes” (Judges 17:6).

God sent his Son to save us from sin and death, to save us from ourselves. Jesus put us first, and carried our sins in his body to the cross. Through faith in Jesus, we will live forever in God’s presence and finally understand what has been true all along. We will know that God is “all in all.” It’s always been about him and his love, and it always will be—for all eternity.

God and Savior, help me to remember that it’s not about me, it’s about you, and always will be. Amen.

Change places: Put God first by putting others first.

Read: 1 Corinthians 15:20-28; Ezekiel 36:22-23

*Carol Geisler
Manchester, MO*

Monday, January 18, 2016

Whiter Than Snow

Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.

Psalm 51:7

When I looked outside, the world was a dazzling white. The snow that fell during the night covered everything in an undisturbed blanket of blinding whiteness.

A few hours later, snowplows had thrown salt and sand on the street and traffic made tracks where the pristine surface had been. It was no longer beautiful.

The next morning, everything was white once again due to the new snow that fell during the night. Of course, it didn't last long and was soon dirty.

Our lives are similar to the snow. When we ask for forgiveness, God promises we are forgiven because of Jesus' death on the cross and we are washed clean. It isn't long before our sinful nature causes us to be stained again. No matter how many times we sin, God will forgive us and send a new snowfall of his forgiveness.

Lord, thank you for forgiving our sins and always seeing us as whiter than snow. Amen.

Consider: Think about God's goodness as you look at freshly-fallen snow.

Read: Isaiah 1:18; Psalm 51:3

*Gloria Doty
Fort Wayne, IN*

Tuesday, January 19, 2016

Share

Jesus said to Philip, “Where are we to buy bread, so that these people may eat?”

John 6:5

Sharing is something we learn in preschool (“Share your truck with Timmy!”). It was hard then and it’s difficult now, especially when we’re asked to share those things that symbolize our security—our money, our time, our privacy and our privilege. Jesus calls us to share not out of our excess, but out of our essence; not out of our surplus, but out of our sustenance; in doing this, we believe, we will know abundance. Overwhelmed by the great needs of our world, it is easier to say like the disciples in John’s gospel, “There’s not nearly enough.”

Sharing even when it’s difficult, bringing the tiniest bit of bread to the hungry, opening our hands to share what we have with others—this is what Christ calls us to do in his name.

God of abundance, fill us with an overwhelming desire to pour ourselves out for the sake of others. Amen.

Give: Share something, anything that you hold dear, in the name of Jesus.

Read: John 6:1-15

*Jessica Gazzola
St. Louis, MO*

Wednesday, January 20, 2016

Soul Food

Keep falsehood and lies far from me; give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread.

Proverbs 30:8

God gives us bread to nourish out bodies. The bread of his Word nourishes our souls. He gives us strength to cling to the truths in the Holy Bible so we aren't swayed by deceptive beliefs.

Life in Christ does not guarantee an easy earthly existence, but his words fill us with a desire to do the work he calls us to do. No matter how weak our physical bodies or discouraged our minds, we are members of the body of Christ. We find prosperity in God's promise of eternal life to keep us from the poverty of sin's hopelessness.

From his grace comes the faith to stand firm and to testify to the end of our earthly life the hope we have in Christ.

Lord of all hope, keep us in your Word so we are able to share your truths with those who would distort them. Amen.

Consider: How do we demonstrate God's love for the sinner without approving the sin?

Read: John 6:35-40

*Beth Bieberich
Fort Wayne, IN*

Thursday, January 21, 2016

God's Word Is Love

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.

John 1:14

“What’s the word?” In everyday speech, giving the word is giving people the “straight scoop,” the real story, the truth. We all want the truth, and we prefer it in person. No one wants to be fired over the phone. Proposing marriage is done in person if at all possible. People often travel many miles to celebrate special events with others, rather than just sending a card or email.

God understands that the “medium is the message.” He sent his Son as the Word to us on earth. Jesus didn’t just deliver a message. He is the message. John calls Jesus “the Word” in the first verse of his gospel, and then makes the message very clear when he writes: “God so loved the world that he gave his only Son” (John 3:16). God’s message, wrapped up in Jesus, is love. God said, “I love you,” in person—in the person of Jesus, who was born as a baby and later gave himself into death. God’s Word is Love.

*O Lord, because you first loved us, we love you.
Thank you. Amen.*

*Do: Write a note or an email to someone that says,
“I love you.” Better yet, say it in person!*

Read: John 1:1-16

*Eldor Kaiser
Lenexa, Kansas*

Friday, January 22, 2016

Our Sheltering God

He will cover you with his pinions, and under his wings you will find refuge.

Psalm 91:4

It's smart to put outdoor equipment like grills, gliders and folding chairs under waterproof covers. It protects them from the elements and prevents rust and other damage. Human beings are no different. We need shelter to prevent the forces of this world from rusting and corroding us. The Bible uses a rich variety of expressions to describe the hiding, sheltering, protecting care that God provides physically and spiritually. Our Maker knows how we're put together and therefore knows how to maintain us against the ravages of life and time. As we grow more frail with age, it is a great comfort to know that God is active through Jesus his Son, watching over us and ushering us through the changes of life.

Lord, make me always ready to run for cover to your ever-protecting care. Amen.

Mark: Underline words in the Bible passages below that describe God's protecting action for you.

Read: Psalm 91; John 14:3; Romans 7:1, 4; Ephesians 6:10-17; Philippians 4:7; Colossians 3:1-4; Galatians 3:27

*Mike May
Kansas City, KS*

Saturday, January 23, 2016

Life's Instruction Book

Make me know your ways, O Lord; teach me your paths. Lead me in your truth and teach me; for you are the God of my salvation; for you I wait all the day long.

Psalm 25:4-5

The One who was at the beginning and already knows the end has provided for us his Book of Life: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (John 1:1). Self-help books written by humans are as flawed as ourselves, although they may help with a specific problem from time to time. The Bible has promises that are given from God who never changes and always keeps his word. The Word became flesh and dwelt among us! The Word gives us his body and blood to strengthen us and for the forgiveness of our sins. We can open the Bible and he speaks clearly to us and comforts us.

Dear Lord, make me a lifelong learner who looks to you for truth. Amen.

Share: Spend some time today sharing your favorite Bible stories with a child or friend.

Read: Proverbs 9:10; 1 Corinthians 1:30; Proverbs 3:5-6

*Nancy Rapp
Crestwood, MO*

Sunday, January 24, 2016

Sunday Houses

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

Psalm 122:1

On a trip to the Texas Hill Country, we toured a restored Sunday house and were fascinated by this bit of history. In the late 1800s, farmers and ranchers who lived many miles out in the country built simple one- or two-room houses in town to make it easier to attend church. Families would spend weekends in their tiny house, devoting Sunday to church services, Sunday school, choir practice and fellowship. What a commendable commitment to the Lord's Day!

The commitment of these early settlers is echoed in the verse above and in Psalm 26:8, "O Lord, I love the habitation of your house and the place where your glory dwells." Both psalmist and settlers knew that the Lord's house is a delightful place. It's where people meet to hear God's Word, worship, sing, pray and especially rejoice that believers "shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever" (Psalm 23:6).

Lord, help my love for your house on Sunday be reflected in my words and deeds all week. Amen.

Encourage: Set an example for neighbors, friends and family by your commitment to God's house.

Read: Psalm 27:4; Isaiah 2:2-3

*Marj Maynard
Billings, MO*

Monday, January 25, 2016

Rehabilitation Instructions

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

Matthew 11:28

People of any age may require some form of professional rehab. Falls, long hospital stays and mental confusion are some of the reasons professional help may be needed. The need for a professional usually results from an order or a prescription given by a medical professional and covers a specific period of time or number of visits.

Our souls are in constant need of rehabilitation. Our professional Provider is God, who brought about our salvation through his Son Jesus Christ. The Bible contains the prescription or order—we are sinners in need of forgiveness. It is a prescription of love that lasts forever. Eternal life with our God is the certain outcome.

God, you sent your Son to save us, May we follow him into our certain eternal life with you. Amen.

Start now: Read the Bible. Look for God's prescription of love.

Read: John 3:1-21

*Don Hollmann
Ballwin, MO*

Tuesday, January 26, 2016

God Calls You by Name

I have called you by name, you are mine.

Isaiah 43:1

My friend Shirley loved going to church when she was a little girl. The pastor called her by name the entire service. “Surely God loves you.” “Surely your sins are forgiven.” “Surely you will live in heaven forever.”

God speaks just that directly to you. He knew you before you were born. In baptism he called you by name into a loving friendship. He treasures you with the powerful love that sacrificed his Son for you. Every promise for care, healing, forgiveness and support in trouble made in his Word is spoken directly to you. Listen as you worship and read his Word. Surely you will hear him call you by name.

Father, thank you for speaking to me in your Word as an intimate friend. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Do: Say your name as you begin reading the Bible this week. Then listen to God talking to you.

Read: Isaiah 43:1-4; Genesis 2:4-7; Acts 8:26-39

*Ruth Geisler
Aliso Viejo, CA*

Wednesday, January 27, 2016

Build Them Up

If there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.

Philippians 4:8

I'd like to introduce you to two neighbors of mine. Two widows who live nearby are very skillful at building people up. They seem to see only that which is good, beautiful and honorable in people—and they speak words of affirmation. Both these women live alone—one for many years, the other for about two.

How can they be so positive about people day after day? I think it is a reflection of their faith. They both know a God who looks at sinners and sees not the filth of sinfulness, but the purity of Jesus, who carried all our sins to the cross. When we get down on ourselves and groan in the grip of guilt, remembering how God sees us will help build us up. If, like my neighbors, we can see others in the same way that God sees us, we will see that which is good, beautiful and worthy in them—and then we can build them up.

Lord, teach me words that are affirming and build up rather than tear down. Amen.

Do: When someone begins to get under your skin, try to find something positive in them.

Read: Philippians 4:8-9

*Eldor Kaiser
Lenexa, KS*

Thursday, January 28, 2016

When I Need Spare Parts

Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day.

2 Corinthians 4:16

Over the years I've lost some parts of myself and I've also gained a few spare parts. Thyroid cancer saw me wave farewell to my thyroid gland and then a few years later I welcomed two shiny new titanium hips.

It's true that our bodies won't last forever, but growing older isn't all about wearing out. Just as our outward body is slowing down, inwardly we are growing by leaps and bounds. While our joints may ache, our attitude is being refined, our capacity to love is expanding and our intimacy with God is blossoming. Inside, our soul is strong and courageous, nurtured and loved by God.

Thank you, Lord, for renewing me on the inside, day by day, regardless of what is happening on the outside. Amen.

List: Write a list of your physical "spare parts" and also a list of the inner qualities God is renewing.

Read: 2 Corinthians 4:1-18

Kerry Osborne
Sydney, Australia

Friday, January 29, 2016

Remember the Good Old Days

I remember the days of long ago.

Psalm 143:5

A friend of mine says that most of the memories people have of their past are best described as “the good old days of never was.” The memories of earlier years are often distorted and twisted out of shape.

The psalmist recalled his own yesterdays differently. He did not focus as much on what was happening in his world as on the God who rescued him again and again. The good old days were not all that good, but his God was good! He saw his yesterdays as God’s great days of old.

There were some days in my past that left a lot to be desired. But as I think back on them, I do not remember if they were good or bad, but I recall the wonderful ways God cared for me.

Dear Lord, I praise you that your presence has always been greater than my problems. Amen.

Look back: Dig into your yesterdays. Think of a person, action or experience that God used to meet one of your needs.

Read: Psalm 25:6-7; Psalm 23

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

Saturday, January 30, 2016

The Troubles

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

Psalm 46:1

On a recent tour of Northern Ireland, we came face to face with the reality of “The Troubles,” the violent terrorist strife in the 1960s through the 1990s between the Provisional IRA and British-leaning Unionists. Belfast and Derry still bear the scars of those years.

What troubles scar your life in today’s unsettled world? The psalmist, amidst constant threats to Israel’s security, affirms, “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.” He adds, “The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress” (Psalm 46:7). Jesus on his way to the cross assures his disciples and us, “Let not your hearts be troubled.” He explains, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:1, 6).

Lord, calm our fears with your saving help in times of trouble. Amen.

Claim: Name a trouble today and claim God’s forgiving presence in Jesus.

Read: Psalm 46; John 14:1-6

*Stephen J. Carter
Oakville, MO*

Sunday, January 31, 2016

What a Friend We Have

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

Matthew 28:20

This morning our daughter-in-law posted the following on Facebook, “You’ve gotta love it when leaving church your child belts out at the top of his lungs, ‘SEE YOU LATER JESUS!!!’ (Caleb, my loving, gregarious, exuberant little boy!)” The joy of faith in the heart of a three-year old!

That “see you later” phrase is a deep, inwardly personal feeling that is most often communicated with a close friend or family member. How grand that we can share it with Jesus himself. And that is precisely how it is with our relationship with both our dearest friend and Savior. A grin just simply has to be plastered across our face as we utter those words. Maybe the next time we exit church we ought to stop and turn around and audibly say, “See you later, Jesus!” What a witness it will be to those who hear.

*O Lord, how grand it is to be in your presence.
Amen.*

Look up and sing: Sing the hymn “Blessed Assurance”

Read: 1 Chronicles 16:2, Psalm 16:11

*Don Luepke
Fremont, IN*

Monday, February 1, 2016

The Lord Smiles on You

The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.

Numbers 6:24-26

The kindergarten girl put her head down after a rough recess. Her classmate rested her hand on her head and whispered, “The Lord bless you and keep you.”

When God told Aaron to use these words of blessing, the Children of Israel knew from experience that God’s face looked terrifying to his enemies. Now they learned that he turns his face to us with the overwhelming grace of salvation. He promises every blessing and tempers every trouble with comfort, healing and peace. Whisper the blessing when you go to bed tonight and fall asleep with God’s face shining on you.

Father, thank you for your blessing, which surrounds me with your loving kindness, mercy and grace. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

Do: Place your hand on the heads of people you love and say, “The Lord bless you and keep you.”

Read: Psalm 28; Matthew 28:19-20

*Ruth Geisler
Aliso Viejo, CA*

Tuesday, February 2, 2016

Keep Dancing

Let them praise [God's] name with dancing!

Psalm 149:3

My favorite childhood classes began after school: tap and ballet at Diggins' Dance Studio. There I learned to shuffle-ball-change, pirouette and express the rhythm and joy God created in my soul.

I still love to dance, but my balance and twirls are not what they used to be; I'm more prone to stumbles and missteps. Words on my coffee mug sum up my new attitude: "When you stumble, make it part of the dance."

Continue to sing in the choir, serve as lector, wield your hammer or lead a class, just as Anna and Simeon continued their service in the temple long ago. Use the unique gifts God has given you to bless others. Mistakes are inevitable at any age, but God loves, forgives and provides the desire to "keep dancing!"

Lord, enable us to see your hand and give you praise in all we do. Amen.

Laugh: Laugh at your mistakes today as you "dance" through life.

Read: Luke 2:22-38: Colossians 3:17

*Sharolyn Sander
Lincoln, NE*

Wednesday, February 3, 2016

Who's the Greatest?

An argument arose among them as to which of them was the greatest.

Luke 9:46

“I’ve paid my dues!”

How many times have we heard someone say that—or said it ourselves? Age does have its privileges, but none of us should ever get to the point where we think life is “all about me.”

Jesus said he came not to be served, but to serve. He reminded his disciples that since this was his mindset, even though he was their Master, it should certainly be their attitude toward one another.

The next time you’re tempted to “pull rank” on someone, think about ways you can bless them instead.

Lord, sometimes it’s so hard not to be selfish and demanding. Help me become a little bit more like Jesus every day. Amen.

Be aware: Look for opportunities to do little acts of kindness to those you come in contact with this week.

Read: John 13:1-17; John 15:9-17

*Carolyn I. Jones
Westerville, OH*

Thursday, February 4, 2016

Who You Gonna Call?

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.

Psalm 51:10

I have a problem. The basement floor drain is backing up when the bathroom is in use. The plumbers have come and diagnosed the problem. Tree roots have penetrated the tiling that provides clear access to the city sewer system. It looks now as if the solution to the problem lies in having the front yard dug up and the tiling totally replaced. Such is life.

So also is the way of sin. Sin corrupts the free flow of God's love when the cares of the world threaten to choke it out. That's why God sent Jesus. His love breaks through the brokenness and frees us to love God and in his Spirit begin to love our neighbor as ourselves.

Drain plugged up? Call a plumber. Hungry for new life and God's love? Go to Jesus.

Lord Jesus, take my life and let it be consecrated Lord to you and you alone. Amen.

Carry: Take the things that trip you up in your faith and give them to God.

Read: Philippians 4:4-9; John 14:25-31

*Edward Arle
St. Charles, MO*

Friday, February 5, 2016

Wrinkles

All flesh is like grass ... The grass withers ... but the word of the Lord remains forever.

1 Peter 1:24-25

As I write this we are in our fourth year of drought in San Diego. Lawns are brown, trees limp, crops in danger. Phony grass and rock-filled yards are becoming the norm. We feel dry and wrinkled. Walking this morning, I spotted a lemon on a neighbor's tree that looked like a very old wrinkled (and cranky) face. Do you see "wrinkled (and cranky)" when you look in a mirror? Or do you see a child of God blessed with years of grace, spiritual wisdom and the endless forgiveness and love of a gracious Savior? Put on the face of grace today and find someone with wrinkles to share your wrinkles with as well as the love of our Lord.

Lord, let every wrinkle on my face remind me of your faithful love. Amen.

Share: Reassure someone today of God's forever love for them.

Read: Psalm 91

*Lois Scheer
San Diego, CA*

Saturday, February 6, 2016

Mix It Up

Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is necessary.

Luke 10:41-42

Martha does not come off too well in this story. Jesus gently rebukes her for her busy worry. Mary, however, does the necessary thing. She sits at the feet of Jesus and listens to him.

Christian teachers from earlier centuries sometimes gave Martha a little more credit. Listening Mary and busy Martha were held up together as models for what was called the mixed life, a life of both devotion and service. Like Mary, we read and meditate on God's Word, listening to Jesus. Like Martha, we serve Jesus by serving others. Listen to Jesus; spend time in the study of his Word. Serve Jesus; go about your daily tasks, doing the work that God has set before you. Live like Mary—listen to Jesus. Live like Martha—serve others in his name. Mix it up a little!

Jesus, stir my life into a mix of devotion and service. Amen.

Listen: Read God's Word and, as you find opportunity, help others in Jesus' name.

Read: Luke 10:38-42; 1 Corinthians 12:4-11

*Carol Geisler
Manchester, MO*

Sunday, February 7, 2016

Listen to Him

He was still speaking when, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him."

Matthew 17:5

During the whole time that Jesus lived on this earth, the Father only spoke twice: at the baptism of Jesus and at the transfiguration. Each time the Father said exactly the same thing: "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased." At the transfiguration, he added three words: "Listen to him!" When the frightened disciples looked up, they saw no one but Jesus only.

How significant and important is that word of the Father. The only word the Father addressed to us is about Jesus. God the Father directs us to Jesus for all that we need to know about God and our relationship with him. In Jesus we discover what God thinks about us, wants for us and does for us. Listen to him!

Dear Father, fix my eyes upon Jesus. Open my ears and heart to his words. Amen.

Meditate: Spend some time thinking about what the Father's words mean to you.

Read: Matthew 17:1-8; Matthew 3:13-17

*Lionel Otto
Adelaide, Australia*

Monday, February 8, 2016

You Light Up My Life

I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.

John 8:12

In 1977, Debby Boone, daughter of the legendary singer, Pat Boone, sang the popular song, “You Light Up My Life.” In the song, she sings of light and hope. Have you ever had someone in your life that you considered the light of your life? Maybe a parent, spouse, child or grandchild brought an extra ray of sunshine and hope to your life.

While you may have someone in your life that brings “light” to your life, Jesus is our constant source of light and hope. He was brought into our lives to guide us with the light of his love through an earthly world of darkness and give us the eternal light of life.

Dear God, thank you for the eternal gift of light through your Son, Jesus. Help me to continue to walk in the light of your Son. Amen.

Share: Share the good news of Jesus’ love today.

Read: John 8:12-20

*Betsy Becker Niedringhaus
Ballwin, MO*

Tuesday, February 9, 2016

Abode

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

John 15:4, 9

Abode is an old-fashioned word, seldom used, but it is similar to our use of the word *home*. Thinking of it as a dwelling place, a nurturing center, lends a deeper meaning to the word *abide*, especially the way it is used by Jesus in John 15.

To abide is to stay and be connected, in this case to Jesus. In his discourse on the vine and the branches, Jesus uses the word *abide* nine times, and in verse 7 completes the image by telling us to let his Word abide in us. He is our dwelling place; in turn, his Word dwells in us. In that all-encompassing place of safety, we have his love and joy.

Father in heaven, you have given us all we need. May we stay connected to Jesus, our dwelling place, as we face our daily ups and downs. Amen.

Be confident: The sustenance from Jesus the vine runs through us.

Read: John 15:1-11

*Judy Scherr
Lemay, MO*

Wednesday, February 10, 2016

Complete!

It is finished.

John 19:30

Today, on this Ash Wednesday, we mark the start of the Lenten season. Lent is a time to appreciate the great cost of our salvation: Jesus paid the complete cost by his death on the cross. It is also a time to remember why we needed saving. We have a problem. We are sinners, and the penalty for sin is death. The Bible tells us, “The wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23).

God did something about our problem. He sent his Son to save us. From the cross Jesus announced, “It is finished.” The Bible tells, “But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8). Jesus’ death made our salvation complete—finished—perfect. There’s nothing we can do to add to the perfect salvation Jesus has completed for us. Let’s thank God for sending Jesus.

We can never thank you enough, Father, for sending your Son to be our Savior! Amen.

Remember: Reflect on the complete salvation Jesus has won for us.

Read: Psalm 103; John 3:14-17

*Steve Hess
Ft. Myers, FL*

Thursday, February 11, 2016

Dearest Jesus

This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him.

Matthew 17:5

Many German hymns begin with *Liebster Jesu*—dearest Jesus—“O dearest Jesus, Holy Child.” A baptismal hymn starts, “Dearest Jesus, we are here.” Johann Cruger’s incomparable hymn begins, “Jesus, priceless treasure.”

Beloved Son—the Father loved him so much and yet it was his will to bruise him (Isaiah 53:10). This suffering is the glory of the beloved Son—as is his death and resurrection—the glory of our dearest Jesus who forgives me, comforts me, empowers me and promises me eternal life.

Who can explain that love—a love that willingly submits to the crack of the whip, the piercing ridicule of the crown of thorns, the scornful looks and jeering words, the very cross? We cannot explain, only believe by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Abide, O dearest Jesus, among us with your Word, and thus now and hereafter, true peace and joy abound. Amen.

Read: As you read Scripture, listen to the words of Jesus, your priceless treasure.

Read: John 19:23-30

Connie Bretscher
Valparaiso, IN

Friday, February 12, 2016

The Best of Friends

Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.

2 Corinthians 5:20

One of the saddest experiences is trying to reach out to a person in friendship, only to have the other person reject the offer. When serious splits occur in relationships, the journey to healing and restoration can be difficult and long.

During the season of Lent, we are reminded of the difficult and terrible journey that God took to restore us to himself in friendship. It took the life, death and resurrection of his only Son to heal the rift.

God wants to be our friend. That is the message God wants our whole world to hear. As the quality of our relationship deepens with people who still do not know this, the opportunities will also emerge for us to tell them: God wants to be your friend. Lent is a good time to do this.

Lord Jesus, help me to be your ambassador to my friends who still need to experience your friendship. Amen.

Identify: Write down the names of those whose lives you can touch for Jesus.

Read: 2 Corinthians 5:11-21

*Lionel Otto
Adelaide, Australia*

Saturday, February 13, 2016

With All Your Heart

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

Matthew 22:37

A director of a drama readies his actors for the first performance. They master their lines and the director shouts, "Now put your hearts into it." The drama comes alive.

In his ministry, Jesus didn't do anything halfheartedly. Tempted by Satan, he had a crisp biblical rebuttal for each temptation. When he healed the official's son in Capernaum, he did so with a simple word. When he fed the hungry 5,000 with five loaves and two fish, he did it quickly. Do you think he had anything else on his mind but his love for us when he died on the cross for us? Or when he rose from the tomb?

Does this not empower us to put our whole heart into interacting with others?

O Lord Jesus, empower us by your Spirit to live today wholeheartedly. Amen.

Surprise: Surprise someone with a random act of kindness today.

Read: Psalm 20; Acts 5:25-32

*Gordon Beck
Williamsburg, VA*

Sunday, February 14, 2016

Loving Lent

*Your steadfast love, O Lord, extends to the heavens,
your faithfulness to the clouds.*

Psalm 36:5

Today is the First Sunday in Lent. Today is also Valentine's Day. Though it began as St. Valentine's Day in the church calendar, it has now become primarily a secular holiday associated with romantic love. Most of us know to send a card or flowers to a special "valentine" on this day.

The coincidence of the two dates is a good reminder to use Lent to fall in love with God ever more fully and deeply. Romantic love is a great blessing, but it is only a shadow of the deeper love that God offers us in Jesus Christ.

While it is a common practice to "give up" something for Lent as spiritual preparation, you might think instead about "giving in" to God's love more completely during Lent this year.

Lord, you so loved the world in Jesus Christ that we might come within reach of his saving embrace. Help me to surrender ever more completely to your love for me. Amen.

Show: Live surrounded in God's love today.

Read: John 3:16; 1 Corinthians 13:1-13

*Paul A. Metzler
Shrewsbury, MO*

Monday, February 15, 2016

The Man at the Top

Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

Philippians 2:11

Today is Presidents' Day. Most people who have met a president personally count it as one of the special honors of their lives. Not many people get to meet the man at the top.

I sometimes envy even more the people who met Jesus personally when he walked on this earth. That would have been the greatest honor of all. He is the one who humbled himself and saved us. Therefore he has been given the name that is above every name. At the name of Jesus every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.

You and I meet Jesus every time we read and hear God's Word. There is Jesus, living, dying and rising for us, forgiving our sins, loving us, keeping us, treasuring us as God's own. The Man at the Top comes down to meet and be with us.

Dear Lord Jesus, with the Father and Spirit, you are the greatest. I look forward to seeing you face to face. Amen.

List: Make your personal list of the ten greatest people. Where does Jesus fit in?

Read: Philippians 2:1-11; John 14:1-14

*Lonie Eatherton
Fenton, MO*

Tuesday, February 16, 2016

So What Do You Do?

Abraham answered and said, "Behold, I have undertaken to speak to the Lord, I who am but dust and ashes."

Genesis 18:27

I once attended a Christian lawyers' function in London. My English boss kindly took me along to meet people, as I was new to the city. I struck up a conversation with a friendly, grey-haired gentleman, who was fond of Australians, as his son was about to marry an Australian girl. We talked animatedly for over an hour, when finally I asked the question, "So what do you do?" "I'm a High Court Justice," he replied, "And you?" "I'm a secretary," I responded and we began to laugh.

We realized our widely differing positions in the legal world made no difference at all in God's kingdom, where each of us are equal, regardless of position, gender or financial success. What a refreshing insight for both of us!

Lord Jesus, thank you for making me your child and a citizen of your kingdom. Amen.

Answer: Write down who you are and what you do in God's world.

Read: Galatians 3:23-29

*Kerry Osborne
Sydney, Australia*

Wednesday, February 17, 2016

Shifting Priorities

So the woman left her water jar and went away into town.

John 4:28

Circumstances shape priorities, sometimes dramatically. A gas gauge nearing “Empty” moves refueling to the top of our list. A flat tire en route changes everything. Even basic needs can be unexpectedly reshuffled. Such was the case for the woman at the well.

It was hot. Another hike to the well awaited her. Her priority? Water, first and only. Until, that is, she encountered Jesus. Initially she needed to make sense out of an illogical event. Soon, however, a craving for what Jesus offered superseded all else.

Following Jesus means putting him first. It is impossible if attempted alone, but it is done in the Spirit’s power. The woman set down her water jug. A most valued possession became disposable.

Lord, may I seek only that which you so mercifully offer, an eternity in your presence. Amen.

Consider: Identify those things you need to set aside in favor of following Christ.

Read: John 4:7-29; Matthew 11:25-30

*Robert Stephens
Glen Allen, VA*

Thursday, February 18, 2016

Our Prayer Life

Remembering you in my prayers.

Ephesians 1:16

How goes it with you in your prayer life? What are your thoughts as you spend time praying? In our retirement years, I believe, we have more time for praying. At least, that's what my peers tell me.

In today's reading, the apostle Paul sets a good example. He suggests that we pray for fellow believers, express gratitude for their faith and plead for a spirit of wisdom and revelation as they age. Ask for a heart that focuses its attention on Jesus, the Resurrected One.

In praying, let's spend time praying for others. Don't focus your attention on petty petitions. Rather pray for the enrichment of others' faith in Jesus and the working of the Holy Spirit in their lives.

Lord Jesus, may your followers grow in the grace and knowledge of your will and way for daily living. Amen.

Plan: Make a plan in your prayer life to pray daily for a member in your congregation.

Read: Ephesians 1:15-23

*Walter M. Schoedel
Webster Groves, MO*

Friday, February 19, 2016

Helping Hands

Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth.

Psalm 124:8

Do you have a hard time asking for help when you need it? It takes courage to ask for help from others. Usually people who have a hard time asking for help are the very ones who are ready to lend a hand to someone in need. Today, notice one thing you need help with, and simply ask someone for assistance. Then, observe that person's reaction. The helper often gives a positive response.

The Lord helps us day and night. It takes vulnerability to turn toward the Lord, and not try to do everything on our own. Rely on the Lord and you can rest in gratitude at the end of the day, recalling all the ways the Lord has been there for you.

Thank you, Lord, for all your help today. I am so grateful for your constant care. Amen.

List: Write down or recall each moment the Lord helped you today.

Read: Psalm 117

*Annette L. Sherwood
St. Louis, MO*

Saturday, February 20, 2016

Wit's End

If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there.

Psalm 139:8

When we were children, our family had its share of pets. One was a hamster named Oscar. Every night Oscar would climb into his exercise wheel and run as fast as he could. Oscar never got anywhere on that wheel, but that did not stop him from trying. I wonder if you ever feel like that hamster; you run in circles as if your life depended on it and still you never seem to get anywhere.

Here's something I heard just the other day: "When you get to your wit's end, you'll find God lives there." Do you suppose that while hamsters may never get very far on their wheels, there's hope for us if we trust God to show us where we're going and who's waiting for us when we get there?

Lord Jesus, when I find myself feeling that my life is going nowhere, help me to see and believe that you are always close at hand. Amen.

Believe: Wherever you go, there goes Jesus.

Read: Matthew 28:19-20; Isaiah 41:8-10

*Edward Arle
St. Charles, MO*

Sunday, February 21, 2016

Memories

But we were eyewitnesses of his majesty.

2 Peter 1:16

In the movie *Inside Out*, Riley, an eleven-year-old girl, moves from Minnesota to San Francisco. Riley has difficulties adjusting. She doesn't have any friends and cannot play hockey, the sport she loves. Five emotions (joy, anger, disgust, fear and sadness) are in conflict in Riley's mind. Joy tries to help Riley by recalling good things of the past, but doesn't realize that sadness over what is lost is also important in adjusting and developing new relationships.

When Peter recalled the majestic experience of Jesus' transfiguration, did he also remember how he denied Jesus three times? Or when remembering the how Jesus called him on the road to Damascus, did Paul mourn the way that he persecuted Christ before that time? In the end, both men's sad memories made them bolder to spread the good news of Christ.

Christ, grant us the strength to share with others what makes us sad about our lives as well as what gives us joy in you. Amen.

Tell: Share with someone today the story of your weakness, as well as your strength, in Christ.

Read: Psalm 105; Acts 26:12-23; Galatians 1:13-24

Gordon Beck
Williamsburg, VA

Monday, February 22, 2016

The Lord Is My Rock

The LORD is my rock and my fortress.

2 Samuel 22:2

God's Word gives us various pictures using rocks: the Rock of our salvation (Psalm 95:1), the Rock that is Christ (1 Corinthians 10:4) and a Rock as a sure foundation (Psalm 40:2).

We can use rocks for fun and games like skipping them on water, but we can also use rocks to hurt animals and people or break windows. The good news is that God uses rocks to bless us and not harm us. He sent his Son Jesus to be our Rock of salvation through his death and resurrection. He gives us faith to trust Jesus as our Rock, the foundation of our lives. We can say much more than "Jesus rocks." We can with all confidence and joy say, "Jesus is my Rock."

Thank you, Father, for sending your Son to be my Rock of salvation and the Rock that is my foundation. Amen.

Stand: Are both of your feet standing on the "Rock of Ages"?

Read: 2 Samuel 22

*Ken Holdorf
Frisco, TX*

Tuesday, February 23, 2016

Touching You, Touching Me

Jesus answered [Jairus], “Do not fear, only believe, and she will be well ... taking her by the hand he called, saying, “Child, arise.”

Luke 8:50, 54

Holding hands, walking with my wife and our sons and grandchildren when they were young, creating a feeling of being connected and comfortable—these are truly special times and memories.

Imagine Jairus’ anxiety. He is told his daughter is dead and he hears Christ’s loving words, “She is not dead but asleep.” Jairus watches Jesus take her by the hand and say, “Child, arise.” Like Jairus, we are told “Don’t be afraid.” God’s touching words in the Bible reaffirm his love. He will one day take us home. Today, just believe his touching words and his love.

Our Father, may we always keep in our minds that you always care for us, touching us with your words, actions and love. Amen.

Relax: God our Father may not be physically touching you or me, but we know he is always with us.

Read: Luke 8:40-56

*Don Hollmann
Ballwin, MO*

Wednesday, February 24, 2016

Loch Lomond

The sun shall be no more your light by day ... but the Lord will be your everlasting light.

Isaiah 60:19

After some days of clouds and rain, our Scotland tour arrived in full sunshine at the bonny banks of Loch Lomond, where we enjoyed a boat ride on the placid waters, surrounded by wooded slopes, green islands and a blue sky. It was a wonderful taste of God's creation to be sure, but also a foretaste of the new heavens and new earth awaiting believers in Christ as Savior.

Isaiah describes the return from exile in creation language, with a sure promise of the Messiah, who will bring God's people out of darkness into his marvelous light. With no more need for sun and moon, "the Lord will be your everlasting light." Memories of Loch Lomond linger to connect us with God's created sunshine, Jesus as Light of the world, and the Lord God as our light where we "will reign forever and ever" (Revelation 22:5).

Lord, shine in our hearts this winter day with your eternal saving light. Amen.

Consider: Remember your Loch Lomond experiences as a reminder of Jesus' everlasting light.

Read: Isaiah 60; Revelation 22:1-5

*Stephen J. Carter
Oakville, MO*

Thursday, February 25, 2016

Praising the Lord

Praise the Lord ... flying birds.

Psalm 148:7, 10

What a privilege my wife and I have every day! As we dine at our table, we can look out and watch the birds flying about, feeding from our bird feeders.

That view reminds us of the psalmist's observation in Psalm 148. We are not alone in praising God. We are part of a tremendous chorus praising God—the angels in heaven, the sun, moon and stars in the sky, the living creatures on earth—like the birds—and people throughout the world, especially the saints like us who are aging.

Every day on our life's journey we can pause to praise God, who has raised up for us “a horn for his people” (Psalm 148:14), namely his Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. He is always ready to hear our praise.

O Lord, may we always be among the chorus of believers praising you. Amen.

Join: Spend time this week joining the psalmist in praising God. Read one psalm a day—Psalms 145 through 150.

Read: Ephesians 1:3-10

*Walter M. Schoedel
Webster Groves, MO*

Friday, February 26, 2016

He Knows

He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he would do.

John 6:6

When Jesus saw the large crowd coming, he asked his disciple Philip how so many people could be fed. It was a test, because Jesus already knew what he would do. Philip may have failed—he really didn't have a plan for the impending crisis. Jesus had a plan; everything was under control—his control. With a few loaves and two fish he fed more than five thousand people.

Jesus knew what he would do to save us. He came to give his life on the cross, and we now love and serve others in his name. Often enough, like Philip, we fail in the tasks before us. But Jesus knows what he will do. He forgives us, restores us and works through our feeble efforts and our less-than-brilliant failures to accomplish his purpose.

Jesus, lead me, for you know what you will do through me. Amen.

Watch: As you go through the day, look for opportunities to serve others, knowing that Jesus is at work in you.

Read: John 6:1-14; Philippians 2:12-18

*Carol Geisler
Manchester, MO*

Saturday, February 27, 2016

Like Ripe Cranberries

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ.

1 Corinthians 12:12

After seeing the Cranberry Museum in New England, it occurred to me that cranberries can provide apt metaphors for our life and growth in the Body of Christ.

First, cranberries grow in cool regions of the U.S. and Canada, in marshy, swampy land. Growers add even more sand and more water at planting time. So, too, we grow spiritually from experiencing a certain amount of “grit,” or adversity.

Second, those who nurture cranberries find many applications for the fruit’s use. Alone, cranberries taste too sharp. They need to be mixed with other fruits into tasty juice blends. Mixed with other members of Christ’s Body, our “flavor” is enhanced. We become a fine blend, fit for the table of our King.

Dear Holy Spirit, please help us to blend with our Christian brothers and sisters. Amen.

Affirm: Avoid sharp-tongued responses in conversation. Affirm others who also speak gently.

Read: Ephesians 4:29-32

Deane Schuessler
Woodbury, MN

Sunday, February 28, 2016

Children in Church

Let the children come to me; do not hinder them.

Mark 10:14

My husband and I sit in front at church to hear and see better. Our church encourages families with young children to sit wherever they wish, but we also have an enclosed soundproof area near the back, where small children can be taken. One Sunday morning, young children behind us were chattering quietly and sometimes a bit louder. We missed hearing some of the sermon, but being grandparents, we didn't complain. Near the end of the service the congregation prayed the Lord's Prayer and even the youngest child behind us recited it perfectly! After church was over, I complimented them, especially the parents, for teaching them well. They all smiled and thanked me. Jesus welcomed children and they even sat on his lap. We'll follow his example and welcome them too, even in the front of church.

Dear Jesus, thank you for being our example in welcoming children to worship. Amen.

Remember: Always keep in mind that Jesus is our role model in all things.

Read: Mark 10:13-16; Deuteronomy 6:5-9; Psalm 127:3

*Annette Schumacher
Muskego, WI*

Monday, February 29, 2016

When Are We Thankful?

But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession.

2 Corinthians 2:14

According to author David Brooks, our society is a *meritocracy*, which means you earn what you deserve and get what you pay for. Brooks adds, however, that some people seem to have a grateful disposition. They realize that everyone has had help from others.

I believe that Christians are among those grateful people, because we recognize that life itself is a gift from our Creator God. Many Christians give thanks to God at meals for food, health and the energy food gives. Mealtime prayer can remind us of all of God's gifts; all is included when I give God thanks at the table.

We praise and thank God for his forgiveness through the blood of Jesus, who sealed his promise of life by rising from the dead. For his gifts we stretch our gratitude through every hour of every day for a lifetime.

Lord, I recognize the giftedness of life. Help me to live gratefully. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Give thanks: Try to say "thanks" as often as possible today.

Read: 2 Corinthians 9:10-18

Eldor Kaiser
Lenexa, KS

Tuesday, March 1, 2016

Take Your Time

So teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom.

Psalm 90:12

“Take your time,” Grandpa would say, especially if we were in a car. Years later, Mom said, “I can’t hurry.” Now I’m saying to myself, “Slow down,” in order not to become flustered or make a mistake.

Taking my time irks me. I used to schedule more than I could do in a day, and ended up being irritated when I didn’t accomplished what I set out to do. No more. God was not in a hurry with Noah, giving him time to build an ark; he was not in a hurry with Israel, giving them generations to learn; he is not in a hurry with us, giving us Jesus to show us our weaknesses. He has given me time to know his grace.

Our Lord and our God, you know us and our needs. Be patient with us, especially in those moments when we are impatient. Amen.

Consider: We are where we are because it is God’s time and place for us.

Read: 2 Peter 3:8-9; Ecclesiastes 3:1-14

*Judy Scherr
Lemay, MO*

Wednesday, March 2, 2016

A Day at a Time

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

Lamentations 3:22-23

We tallied 3,385 miles on the odometer by the time we got back home from a reunion. While the miles were many, we were delighted because we got a chance to see the whole family.

Many of us have accumulated a good number of “traveling” years, and at times the going hasn’t been easy. There have been health “delays” and “detours” along the way; there have been troubles and difficulties we’d just as soon have avoided; but it’s all been part of the journey. The Lord allots his mercies a day’s worth at a time, providing for us along the way. When we finally arrive, by the grace of God, we will see—to our great delight—the whole forever family of God!

Heavenly Father, see us through this earthly trip, that we may rejoice forever in the family reunion of the faithful. Amen.

Enjoy: Celebrate the love of your earthly family every day, a foretaste of the heavenly reunion to come.

Read: Psalm 86; Hebrews 12:18-24; Revelation 7:11-17

*David P. Schmidt
St. Louis, MO*

Thursday, March 3, 2016

There Is Hope

So that your faith and hope are in God.

1 Peter 1:21

As I grow older and observe what is happening around me and in the world about me, I wonder what is in store for me. At times I am perplexed and troubled.

I found the answer the other day as I read the words of Jesus in John 15. His words give me hope. “I have loved you” (vv. 9 and 12). “I have called you friends” (v. 15). “I chose you and appointed you” (v. 16). Jesus knows me. He is aware of my doubts, my weaknesses and my fears. He is always with me, comforting, consoling and caring for me.

I cling to his promises. I abide in his presence. I listen to his voice. I can experience peace and joy and hope. He helps me discover and rediscover my purpose for daily living. So I keep asking the Holy Spirit to strengthen my faith as I journey through life here and on into eternity.

Lord Jesus, help me listen to your voice day in and day out. Amen.

Listen: Read and reread John 15 and listen carefully to the Lord's blessings.

Read: 1 Peter 1:3-12

Walter M. Schoedel
Webster Groves, MO

Friday, March 4, 2016

Our Kitchen Table

So that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.

Ephesians 3:17

Each morning my wife and I sit at our kitchen table, lingering over a cup of coffee while we read a devotion with Scripture, reflect on its meaning for that day and then pray out loud together—overwhelming insights, surprise discoveries and guidance for prayer requests are unique each day. Sins are confessed. Specific tasks are often revealed. Forgiveness and Gospel comfort are received. The once noisy kitchen table filled with children and grandchildren now stands quiet with the two of us. But thankfully, we are meeting God at our kitchen table each morning, or rather he is meeting us as our guest with his gifts.

In what ways is God blessing your kitchen table, morning, noon and night? Paul's prayer to the Father for the Ephesian believers and us asks that we be "strengthened with power through his Spirit ... so that Christ may dwell in our hearts through faith." Meet God at your kitchen table!

Come, Lord Jesus, be our guest. Amen.

Meet: Experiment this week with one new way to meet God at your table.

Read: Ephesians 3:14-21

*Stephen J. Carter
Oakville, MO*

Saturday, March 5, 2016

Use Your Gift!

As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another ... in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ.

1 Peter 4:10-11

Sometimes I talk to people who feel frustrated they are not using their gifts and education because they can't find the right job. A similar frustration comes as people age and cannot function at their previous skill level or perhaps even care for themselves as before. Yet in any context, God gives us gifts to use for others.

During a recent illness I wasn't of service to anyone, but I discovered I did have a simple gift—the gift of a smile and words of appreciation to those who cared for me. Not able to do what you once did? Maybe God is gifting you in a new way now—to serve others and glorify him!

Father, help me to use whatever gifts you give me for the good of others and to honor Jesus. Amen.

Do: Look for a way to bless someone today ... and do it!

Read: 1 Peter 4:8-11; Romans 12:4-8

*Diane Bahn
Cypress, TX*

Sunday, March 6, 2016

Level Ground

Jesus came down with them and stood on a level place, with a great crowd of his disciples and a great multitude of people.

Luke 6:17-19

While I was on a retreat last year, I spent some of my quiet time reading from the Gospel of Luke. I came across this short passage about Jesus standing with the crowd on level ground.

I was amazed. I knew about the mountaintops and the valleys, but I had never reflected on what it was like to spend time with Jesus at a level place.

Shortly after my retreat, I found myself driving to a church meeting through some flat farmland, and this Scripture passage came back to my mind. I smiled as I drove the rest of the way to my meeting, thinking of Jesus with me on this level place.

*Dear Jesus, help me be with you on a level place.
Amen.*

Ponder: Can you recall a time when you and Jesus met on a level place? Share this moment with a friend.

Read: Psalm 26:12

*Annette L. Sherwood
St. Louis, MO*

Monday, March 7, 2016

Kingdom of Heaven

The kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed that a man took and sowed in his field.

Matthew 13:31

What is the kingdom of heaven like? Does it have pearly gates and golden streets? Will you hear angels rejoicing? Or, is it a marvelous city on a hill?

Jesus described the kingdom of heaven in the image of the mustard seed. As the smallest of seeds, it grows beyond our imagination into a great tree. Something insignificant becomes something special. The final product is an unexpected place where God's creatures live and prosper.

Like the creations of God, the kingdom of heaven is beyond our wildest dreams. As Christ promised, our heavenly experience will be joyful beyond measure. What is the kingdom of heaven like? Through our eyes of faith, we discover the smallest images of an astonishing heaven every day.

God, open my eyes to catch a glimpse of your heavenly kingdom each day. Amen.

Think: Describe how the kingdom of heaven is revealed to you.

Read: Psalm 119:129-136, Matthew 13:31-33

*Matthew Smucker
Chicago, IL*

Tuesday, March 8, 2016

I Can't Hear You!

You shall say, "Speak, LORD, for your servant hears."

1 Samuel 3:9

My wife suggests that I am either hearing-impaired or that I practice selective listening. My grandkids say they think my favorite word is "What?"

Samuel assumed it was Eli who was speaking to him. Samuel did not realize that the Lord was talking directly to him. The good news for us is that the Lord speaks to us each day through the Word and Sacraments and through the people he puts around us, even if some of us can't hear one another. There's a story of a pastor who was praying at the altar when an usher from the back shouted, "We can't hear you!" The pastor devoutly turned around and replied, "I wasn't talking to you!"

The Lord does talk to us each day as he enables us to share his love and hope with others. Join with me today and respond, "I hear you, Lord!"

Lord, you hear our pleas and promises even when we do not listen. Keep speaking, Lord, as we keep working on the listening part of it. Amen.

Hear: Try to "really" listen to your family and friends today.

Read: 1 Samuel 3:1-18; 2 Peter 1:16-21

*Rich Bimler
Bloomington, IL*

Wednesday, March 9, 2016

The Heritage of Faith

Your testimonies are my heritage forever, for they are the joy of my heart.

Psalm 119:111

We were unsure how to decorate the guest room in our home. One day my husband and I began to pull out special items from the past: pictures of the farms where we grew up and churches where we served, my parents' wedding ring quilt, an oil reading lamp and our grandparents' Bibles and hymnals. "The Heritage Room" now reminds us (and anyone who stays there), of God's love and care through many generations.

We inherited far more than these relics from our ancestors. Because of their faithful witness in word and deed, we learned to know our Savior. What a blessing to share the faith with children, grandchildren and others God places in our path. All praise and thanks to God for each opportunity.

Lord, make us mindful of your command to teach the next generations. Amen.

Collect: Gather "relics" of your life of faith, and share them with friends and relatives.

Read: Hebrews 12:1-2; Deuteronomy 6:5-7

*Sharolyn Sander
Lincoln, NE*

Thursday, March 10, 2016

Your Call Is Important

Wait for the Lord; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the Lord!

Psalm 27:14

It happened again: I needed help understanding my bill, and when I called, the voice said, “Please hold. Your call is very important to us.” But after 7 minutes on hold, I questioned how important my call was to them.

Have you ever felt when you prayed for help that God was saying, “Please hold”? Moses reminded the people, “What great nation is there that has a god so near to it as the Lord our God is to us, whenever we call upon him?” (Deuteronomy 4:7). The Bible says, “Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (Hebrews 4:16). Our prayer is important to God.

Thank you, Lord, for the privilege of prayer. Amen.

Pray: Call on God to help, knowing your call is very important to him.

Read: Psalm 27; Romans 8:31-39

*Steve Hess
Ft. Myers, FL*

Friday, March 11, 2016

From Generation to Generation

God also said to Moses ... “This is my name forever, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations.”

Exodus 3:15

God is the Creator of generations. The psalmist declares, “We will not hide them from their children, but tell to the coming generation the glorious deeds of the Lord, and his might, and the wonders that he has done” (Psalm 78:4). God revealed himself in the person and work of his Son Jesus. As we believe and trust in Jesus, we are to live in such a manner that people of the next generation will come to hear and believe in the glorious deeds of the Lord. God works in and through us to declare his name from generation to generation: “Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and your dominion endures throughout all generations” (Psalm 145:13).

Lord, empower me to reflect you to the next generation. Amen.

Reflect: How are you passing on the name and power of God to your generation and the next one?

Read: Ephesians 3:1-6

*Ken Holdorf
Frisco, TX*

Saturday, March 12, 2016

Faith's Basic Recipe

He has told you, O man, what is good ... to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God.

Micah 6:8

It's a favorite remembrance: my mother in the kitchen preparing yet another scrumptious meal. Managing numerous things at once, she appears nonetheless serene. Without fail, each dish tasted delicious and yet the recipes called only for the most basic of ingredients.

The prophet alluded to the recipes others relied upon when attempting to please God: burnt offerings, oil, offering a firstborn. He offered an alternative. Efforts to practice religion should be set aside in favor of simply living for God.

The preparation of those meals was but one way in which I witnessed how one person chose to live out Micah's recipe of faith. God came first, everyone merited respect, and love was the indispensable ingredient. Sounds like a recipe worth trying.

Not in my strength, O Lord, but though yours may I heed Micah's sage advice. Amen.

List: List the ingredients of your recipe for spiritual growth.

Read: Micah 6:6-8; Luke 10:25-28

Robert Stephens
Glen Allen, VA

Sunday, March 13, 2016

Hugging in Heavenly Prayer

In your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect.

1 Peter 3:15

We came from five different states to be reunited for fun, fellowship, food and fond memories, and it was a blessing for all of us.

The week included hiking, golfing, rafting, exploring, reading and enjoying concerts and parades. But the highlights of the week were the circle prayer hugs, as we asked our Lord to bless and keep us, to strengthen and empower us to fulfill his will in everything we do. We especially hugged up in prayer for one young woman who waited table on us, to whom we witnessed about Christ's redeeming love and forgiveness. We prayed that, by the grace of God, she will be part of our heavenly reunion.

*Lord Jesus, thank you for inviting us to pray.
Amen*

*Share: Share your confidence in Christ with others.
Invite them to know Jesus.*

Read: 1 Peter 3:8-22

David P. Schmidt
St. Louis, MO

Monday, March 14, 2016

Sewn Together

One generation shall commend your works to another, and shall declare your mighty acts.

Psalm 145:4

Mabel told our class that she was sewing on a Cub Scout patch for her great-grandson, remembering how she did the same thing for her son two generations ago. Her great-grandson and toddler great-granddaughter stood by, she said, and watched her intently. What a picture, what a lesson. She served where God had placed her, and in doing so, she taught those who knew her and glorified her God.

Generations link us. God told Abraham, and later the nation of Israel, of his promises. Jesus fulfilled the plan for all generations and gave us a new task, to tell of his saving sacrifice. That's the big picture. Our job is to be in the small pictures, like Mabel sewing on a Cub Scout patch.

Our Father in heaven, as our parents have taught us, may we tell of your grace to our children. Amen.

Resolve: Every task has its worth, and each generation enriches the next.

Read: Psalm 78:5-8; 2 Timothy 1:5; Deuteronomy 7:6-9

*Judy Scherr
Lemay, MO*

Tuesday, March 15, 2016

Name Above All Names

Praise the Lord because he is good. Make music to praise his name because his name is beautiful.

Psalm 135:3

Song writers sometimes immortalize their objects of affection by naming them in their songs. Think of “Ida,” “Georgia,” and “Jeanie” with the light brown hair. Surely, the composers had someone specifically in mind—someone beautiful and well-loved. The name of their beloved is beautiful in their ears. The psalmist in today’s Bible verse urges us to sing of the Lord’s goodness, to praise God’s beautiful name.

Think of all the ways you experience God’s goodness in your daily life: protection, healing, forgiveness, love, joy, peace, guidance, comfort ... complete the list. Then use the Lord’s beautiful name to praise and thank your Creator, Redeemer and Helper.

Dear Lord, your names describe your nature, your glorious acts and your relationship with those who love and trust in you. Help me always to use your name in ways that honor you and witness to others. Amen.

Sing: Sing a song of praise that uses one or more of the beautiful names for the Lord. Invite someone to sing with you.

Read: Psalm 113

*Donna J. Streufert
South Bend, IN*

Wednesday, March 16, 2016

Good News!

[God] will put breath in you ... and you shall know that I am the Lord.

Ezekiel 37:6

The daily news often reminds me of the valley of dry bones described in Ezekiel. So much in our world is depressing and hopeless, a culture in death's spiral. How will this world return to God's Word and a focus on faith?

Like Ezekiel, we are commanded to prophesy, or speak, God's truth. We are called to broadcast the Good News of Jesus' life, death and resurrection. God breathed this life-changing message into our hearts, and God alone can change the hearts of others.

Take a deep breath, trust his plan and simply say what you believe. Tell the truth about our Creator, Redeemer and Forever Friend. The Spirit will breathe faith and life into today's "dry bones."

Lord, renew my heart and spirit, that I may share the hope within me. Amen.

Respond: Respond to today's news with the positive assurance of God's Word.

Read: Ezekiel 36:22—37:14; 1 Peter 3:15-16

*Sharolyn Sander
Lincoln, NE*

Thursday, March 17, 2016

Potato Day

Seed for the sower and bread for the eater.

Isaiah 55:10

My dad was not superstitious, but he liked to get the seed potatoes in the ground by St. Patrick's Day. One of our three gardens was dedicated solely to potatoes. In our family of ten, potatoes were a staple at nearly every meal.

In our Christian lives, every day is a "potato day." The seed is the Word of God. The seed is planted in you in this devotion. You plant the seed in others by a word of praise to God and a word of forgiveness to others. The growing plant is nurtured as we sing praise, engage in Christian conversation and pray. All the day we harvest the blessings of God's grace.

God who loves us and saves us in Christ puts potatoes on our table and a banquet of his love in our lives.

Dear God of every good and perfect gift, we thank you for every good thing you so graciously put into our lives. We thank you for springtime and harvest in our world and in our hearts. Amen.

Tell: Tell someone about the family garden when you were a child.

Read: Isaiah 55; Psalm 65

*Lonie Eatherton
Fenton, MO*

Friday, March 18, 2016

God Rejoices Over Us

As the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you.

Isaiah 62:5

Think about a wedding you have attended. Perhaps it was your own, maybe your best friend's or even your child's. Recall the festive atmosphere. Picture the joy and happiness on the couple's face. Remember how radiant the bride looked and how her groom beamed proudly to take her as his wife.

Even though we do not deserve it, God sees us with that same joy, happiness and pleasure. He welcomes us as happily and eagerly as the groom waited for his wife. We are loved beyond measure!

Thank you, heavenly Father, for allowing us to have the gift of happiness and marriage on earth. Amen.

Give thanks: If you are married, celebrate your special bond together. If your spouse has died, thank God for the gift of a faithful companion while you were married. If you were never married, recall the marriage of a couple who made an impact on your life.

Read: Genesis 2:18-25; 1 Corinthians 13

*Celeste Cummins
Storm Lake, IA*

Saturday, March 19, 2016

Deeply Rooted

Walk in [Christ], rooted and built up in him.

Colossians 2:6-7

As I prepared to move, I dug up some plants I wanted to take with me. I potted them, hoping the roots would live and re-establish in our new location. That same week I talked with a younger friend who had just moved to a different state. She was struggling with feeling “uprooted” from her home state, her friends and familiar surroundings. She was fearful, not knowing how to get connected and “rooted” again.

We too may feel uprooted when we move in order to downsize, to be near children or because we need care. My friend was encouraged as we shared this verse, remembering that we are rooted, not in a place or in things, but in Christ.

Lord Jesus, may I be deeply rooted in you, the Source of life, strength and hope. Amen.

Do: Take a small plant or flower to someone who has moved out of a longtime home and remind them they are rooted in Christ.

Read: Colossians 2:6-10

*Diane Bahn
Cypress, TX*

Sunday, March 20, 2016

With a Song in Your Heart

I will sing unto the Lord for he has been good to me.

Psalm 13:6

Kenny loved to listen to the birds in his backyard. Their chirping and trilling was music to his ears. When he asked his grandmother why birds sing, she smiled and said, “I guess they do so because they have a song in their heart that needs to be sung.”

Her answer is not as clear as that the reason the psalmist gave for singing. He sang as a way to tell the world, “God has been good to me!”

My grandmother was a lifelong singer who couldn't stop making music, in church or as she moved around the house. She loved to hum or sing songs that praised God for his care and goodness. Among her favorites were “Jesus Loves Me” and “The Lord's My Shepherd.” Do you have a favorite song or two that praise God for his goodness?

Lord, on this Palm Sunday, put a song in my heart that I can sing to your glory. Amen.

Think: Think about your past and three great things God has done for you. What song applies to one or all of them?

Read: Isaiah 12:5; James 5:13; Psalm 103:1-2

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

Monday, March 21, 2016

Spring Cleaning

A man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.

Luke 12:15

Spring is a great time to get rid of the stuff that tends to clutter up our lives. The average home today is almost three times larger than in 1950, but it is still too small to hold our stuff. 75% of homeowners cannot park their cars in the garage because they will not fit. This spring is a good time for us to “right size” and begin to give some of our “treasures” away to others, through various ministry organizations in our neighborhoods. One friend is even wrapping his “gifts” and giving them to his grandkids for birthday presents.

And while we are at it, perhaps we can also consider cleaning up the personal clutter, like fear, greed, gossip and (insert your favorite here). Let's celebrate these spring days by cleaning up our homes and ourselves, all in the name of the Lord.

Lord, spring us into action as we rid clutter from our lives so there is more room for you. Amen.

Place: Place a broom on your door step to remind you that it is the Lord who has already come to sweep away our sinful lives.

Read: 1 John 1:7-9; Psalm 51

*Rich Bimler
Bloomingdale, IL*

Tuesday, March 22, 2016

Shed the Shroud

Jesus said to them, “Take off the grave clothes and let him go.”

John 11:44

After Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, the last thing Lazarus needed was grave clothes. “Take them off,” ordered Jesus, “and let him go.”

Like Lazarus, we have experienced death—the death of our old sinful selves. “We are buried with him [Christ] by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life” (Romans 6:4).

In this new life we have no need for grave clothes—so take them off. Pull off past hurts and hard feelings, and put on love and hope. Discard jealousy and anger, and dress yourself in gentleness, patience and peace. Freed from our grave clothes, we, like Lazarus, are free to live.

You, O Lord, you have covered me with the robe of righteousness. Now let me live for you. Amen.

Reflect: What “grave clothes” are keeping you from living as someone Christ has freed from sin and death?

Read: Isaiah 61:1-11

*Eileen Ritter
Byron Center, MI*

Wednesday, March 23, 2016

Weeds and the Father's Heart

For those who love God, all things work together for good.

Romans 8:28

My wife, a former elementary teacher, has a collection of bird's nests for teaching purposes. One nest is especially endearing to her. Its avian creators employed dried weeds for the structure, then lined it with soft, down-like material. The weeds employed have tiny heart-shaped leaves. We often curse weeds, but the birds used them, in love, to bless their offspring.

Our Fatherly Creator is a masterful weaver. Neither wealth nor woe are "accidents." God, who loves his children dearly, weaves all things together so they ultimately work out for their good. Even the "weedy" events in life, which we are tempted to deem a curse, have a Father's heart attached and support a blessing.

Father, when troubles come, help us to trust in your unfailing love and power to bless. Amen.

Service: Reach out to someone struggling with "weedy" events and by word and presence assure them of God's unfailing love.

Read: Roman 8:28-39; Genesis 50:15-21

*Ted Zimmerman
Napa, CA*

Thursday, March 24, 2016

Grace, Mercy and Peace

To Timothy, my true child in the faith: Grace, mercy, and peace, from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.

1 Timothy 1:2

In every greeting, Paul mentioned God's grace and peace. In his letters to Timothy, Paul added the word *mercy*. It was as if he was thinking about how God's mercy brought this "child" into his life.

On this Maundy Thursday I look at the order of the words and see how Paul encourages and instructs through this formula, that God in his grace exercised his mercy and sent his Son that we would have peace. Whenever I have to ask myself how to react, all I have to do is remember grace, mercy, peace, and know that the answer is eluding me because I want to assert my human judgment.

These words embodied Paul's wish and prayer for those he taught; they are also words for us.

Our Father, may your grace, mercy and peace be the center of our lives. Amen.

Resolve: As parents and grandparents, siblings and friends, apply Paul's formula in our decisions.

Read: 1 Timothy 1:1-2; 2 Timothy 1:1-2

*Judy Scherr
Lemay, MO*

Friday, March 25, 2016

Timing Is Everything

At the right time Christ died for the ungodly.

Romans 5:6

Timing is critical in everything. But how often haven't we all messed up by saying or doing something at the wrong time.

In heavenly contrast, God's timing is perfect. Ever since he created time (Genesis 1), he's been doing things at just the right time, especially when it comes to fulfilling his plan of salvation through Jesus. "But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son" (Galatians 4:4). When Mary urged Jesus to act at the Cana wedding, he delayed, saying, "My hour has not yet come" (John 2:4). By Maundy Thursday, Jesus declared, "My time is at hand" (Matthew 26:18). Today's verse on this Good Friday points out that Christ died for our sins at the right time. Believing that, we can proclaim, "Behold, now is the favorable time; behold, now is the day of salvation" (2 Corinthians 6:2). Finally, we trust that God will take us home at just the right time.

Father, forgive me for wanting things done in my time. Assure me daily of your perfect timing. Amen.

Remember: Look back on how often God worked out his plans for your life in his own time.

Read: Mark 1:14-15; 1 Peter 5:6-7

*Marj Maynard
Billings, MO*

Saturday, March 26, 2016

Final Expenses

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

Romans 6:23

Watch TV channels aimed at seniors these days, and notice the number of commercials touting plans to cover “final expenses,” a euphemism for funeral costs.

On this Holy Saturday, we are reminded Jesus had no plan for final expenses. Jesus died penniless. A faithful friend asked for his body, wrapped him in a shroud and buried Jesus in the man’s own tomb.

Yet, Jesus had paid for the final expenses of us all. While it’s wise to plan ahead for most things, there is no way we could ever pay enough to meet the cost of sin. Only Jesus could pay our debt with his own life. Jesus paid all expenses required for our salvation. Praise God!

Lord Jesus, your Word assures me my debts are paid, my life with you guaranteed. Thanks and praise to you, dear Lord. Keep me close until that day you call me to you in heaven. Amen.

Ponder: How will you include an expression of personal faith in your end-of-life plans?

Read: Luke 23:50-56; Romans 6:1-11

*Donna J. Streufert
South Bend, IN*

Sunday, March 27, 2016

A Bright Easter Future

For like the days of a tree shall the days of my people be, and my chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands.

Isaiah 65:22

When you look at your past what do you see? Mistakes? Guilt? Brokenness? What about your future? With the risen Lord it's different. Your future is bright. Your future is fantastic. Your future is perfect in Jesus your risen Savior. There may still be difficult things to endure in your life; but the end, which is really the beginning of an eternal future, is extremely bright and wonderful.

Be encouraged by these words from Christ on this Easter Day: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matthew 3:2). The kingdom of heaven has been brought to you in Jesus. He lives in you. Turn from the guilt in your past and look forward to your eternal future in Jesus.

Lord, help me to put my past behind me and live in the future of your resurrection. Amen.

Think: Think about all the ways the risen Lord is with you now and in your future.

Read: Philippians 3:13-14

*Jeremy Klaustermeier
Warrenton, MO*

Monday, March 28, 2016

That Was Then, This Is Now

When you were young, you used to dress yourself and walk wherever you wanted, but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will dress you and carry you where you do not want to go.

John 21:18

I am sometimes surprised by my physical and emotional limitations these days. Things I used to do with ease I can no longer do as well or at all. It is tempting to soften this with the proverbial notion that there are compensating factors. But there is no replacement “of equal or greater value” for what aging removes from our lives. So I can either be resentful and angry, or figure out how to go forward. As a follower of Jesus, the best way forward is with Jesus. This is precisely what Peter did when Jesus called him back into faithful discipleship. Today, that same Jesus invites me—and you—to go forward with him.

Lord, when I get disheartened by my limitations, set me back on your path for me. Amen.

Ponder: What does Jesus’ command, “Feed my lambs, feed my sheep,” call me to do today?

Read: John 21:15-23

*Mike May
Kansas City, KS*

Tuesday, March 29, 2016

Now and Not Yet

He was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God.

Hebrews 11:10

You know those moments when you get a taste of heaven—fleeting but real? On a recent afternoon in southern Manhattan, walking from the movie theater to the Lego Store, my NYC grandkids and I rounded the corner of 21st Street and ran smack dab into Gramercy Park. Our vision was filled with spring green, exploding and glowing with yellow and pink blossoms. It was transcendent. “Ohhh, can we go in?” the kids wondered. Sadly, no. Gramercy Park is a two-block private park and only residents who live around it have keys. The rest of us are locked out. But we got a taste of heaven that day, and ultimately we shall not be locked out. God in his mercy only gives us foretastes of what is in store for us, and it looks heavenly indeed. Christ is with us now, but one day we shall see him face to face.

O God, I'm looking forward to spending eternity with you. Thank you for the harbingers. Amen.

Watch: As you walk outside or watch out the window, look for tastes of heaven.

Read: Revelation 21:1-4; Isaiah 11:6-9

*Sally Beck
Williamsburg, VA*

Wednesday, March 30, 2016

Walking with Jesus

While they were talking and discussing together, Jesus himself drew near and went with them.

Luke 24:15

Walking is good exercise, and walking with a friend or companion is even better. Even though focusing on the route or terrain keeps walkers alert and safe, we still find satisfaction in talking together as we walk. For some, it's a perfect time to open our hearts, sharing our deepest concerns with a trusted friend. Often that fellow walker helps us sort things out.

That's what happened on the road to Emmaus. The resurrected Jesus walked and talked with two troubled friends, helping them understand who he was and what he had accomplished. Jesus pointed them to the Scriptures. There they would learn God's plan of salvation for all people through himself. That walk, that conversation changed their lives!

Walk with me, Lord Jesus, and fill me with fervor to walk and talk of you with others. Amen.

Walk: Invite someone for a walk. Take Jesus along. Share the joy of his resurrection and the anticipation of your own.

Read: Luke 24:13-35

*Donna J. Streufert
South Bend, IN*

Thursday, March 31, 2016

The Lord Watch Over You!

The Lord will watch over your coming and going both now and forevermore.

Psalm 121:8

Ray, a dear friend, had a unique way of saying goodbye at the end of our phone conversations. His last words to me were always the same: “The Lord watch over you!” I was surprised the first time he said it, but after the next time, I looked forward to his brief blessing every phone call after that.

Ray’s blessing is God’s promise to all of us: He will watch over us. No matter what life brings, our God promises, “Do not fear, for I am with you” (Isaiah 41:10). Maybe you have a special blessing, which points to God’s loving presence in our lives, to share with family and friends.

Thank you, Lord, for reminding me that you are near to watch over me. Amen.

Share: When you end your next phone call, say goodbye with a blessing: “The Lord watch over you!”

Read: Psalm 121; Isaiah 41:1-10

*Steve Hess
Ft. Myers, FL*

HOLY HABITS for **HOPE-FULL HEALTH**

How to Be a Blessing to Others

- First, know that you ARE a blessing to others, because Christ lives in you.
- Get in the habit of saying to yourself every morning, “I am a blessing today.”
- When people ask how you are, firmly remark, “I am blessed.” (Sure sounds better than saying, “Not so good!”)
- Develop a “Blessings Journal.” Each day write down how you were blessed, as well as how you blessed others. Review it weekly, and thank the Lord.
- Do a study of the word *blessing* in the Bible and reflect on how and how often it is used.
- Ask family and friends how they have been blessed this day. Listen to them and rejoice with them.
- Ask a server in a restaurant or grocery store clerk how you might pray for them today.
- Record a special outgoing message on your phone that says something like, “Thanks for blessing me with your phone call. Please leave your number so I can share my blessings with you.”
- Put a note on your refrigerator that says, “Instead of counting sheep, count your blessings and then thank the Shepherd!”
- Each day, be intentional about a new experience you have, name it as a blessing and thank the Lord for it.

Thank the Lord for everyday blessings, every day!

Hope-Full Praying

In Bad Weather

When the storms of life hit me, Lord, remind me as you reminded your disciples that you are “still in the boat.” Let me feel your presence through the worrisome winds of winter and the sometimes scary and soggy spring. As lightning lights the sky, touch me with your love and quiet my storms, inside and out. Amen.

The New Year

Thanks for a brand-new year called 2016. Without you, I never would have made it. I do not know where this year will take me, but I do know that wherever it is, you are already there. Through you and me, Lord, let us label this new year “2016 Supreme.” Amen.

For Loved Ones

Please watch over and safeguard my loved ones, Lord. I know they are always safe in your arms, but make me remember this fact as I worry and pout. Nudge me to know, Lord, that as they travel through danger and darkness, your Light is always lighting the way. Amen.

For Government Leaders

Lord of all of life, I ask you to help me pray for our government officials, even when I do not always agree with them. You have placed them in office to govern and protect me. Help me discern who best can lead this nation during this election year. Guide them so they can guide me. Amen.

For the Sick

Today, Lord, I pray for the sick and sorrowful around me, especially _____ (add special names here). You are the healer, Lord. Heal my friends and family as only you can do, as you work through doctors and nurses and health care staff, and also through me. Amen.

For the Blessings of Life

I take life for granted so often, Lord, so my prayer today is simply to say “Thanks” for blessing me every day, even when I do not look like it or act like it or feel like I am blessed. I am blessed, Lord, because of your cross and resurrection. Wow, what a blessing! Amen.

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