

# HOPE-FULL LIVING

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

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## Hope-Full Living Mission Statement

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

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Monday, January 1, 2018

# The Year of Our Lord

*The Lord has anointed me ... to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor.*

*Isaiah 61:1-2*

Official documents often end with a date, expressed in the phrase, "In the year of our Lord." This is a translation of the ancient Latin term *Anno Domini* (AD). A happy thought now, as we begin AD 2018, is that every year is the year of our Lord.

Many years before Christ, Isaiah wrote words that Jesus himself one day would repeat (in Luke 4:18-19). Jesus affirms that he has come "to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." This year and every new year, the Lord's favor means "good news to the poor" and "liberty to the captives" (Luke 4:18). Yes, we are the poor and captives. Poor in spirit because we lack the means to save ourselves. Captives because of the curse of sin. But thanks be to God! Jesus proclaims liberty and the good news of salvation. Happy New Year of our Lord!

*Father, fill our hearts with joy at your gift of a new year of good news and liberty. Amen.*

*Find: Locate a document bearing the words, "In the year of our Lord," as a reminder of God's gifts.*

*Read: Luke 4:17-19; 2 Corinthians 6:1-2*

*Marj Maynard  
Billings, MO*

Tuesday, January 2, 2018

# Radical Resolution

*I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.*

*John 10:10*

The top three New Year's resolutions are to get healthier, get organized and live life to the fullest. Nice goals, but I've experienced enough failure to know I should just keep my secret stash of chocolate and be content with the status quo of life.

Jesus' words, however, convince me that he wants more for me than status quo. He wants me to be healthier, more organized and to live life to the fullest, but with his twist: Healthier—to read and digest his Word, and exercise the spiritual gifts he provides; organized—to know Scripture well enough to recall words that counsel, comfort and convict me at the very times I need them; to have abundant life—filled with the joy, hope and purpose found in him. I cannot achieve this on my own, but because of Jesus' radical resolution to die for my sins to give me a new life, I can succeed!

*Thank you, Jesus, for your resolve to save me and give me abundant life. Amen.*

*Resolve: Commit to meditate daily on Scripture and file verses in your memory!*

*Read: Ephesians 2:1-10; Colossians 1:9-14*

*Sandi Geis  
St. Louis, MO*

Wednesday, January 3, 2018

# Something New

*I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.*

*Isaiah 43:19*

The beginning of a new year marks a welcome change for many of us and hope for a better tomorrow in upcoming months. No matter our age or stage in life, we all experience a journey through the wilderness. But as we are reminded in Scripture, God will make a way for us amid bleak circumstances. When our road seems the darkest, he provides us with all that we need to find our way and nourish our body and soul throughout the journey.

Throughout my life, I have found that challenges are often learning experiences placed before us. We experience everything for a greater purpose. It is through these journeys in life we learn things about ourselves and those around us. While it may be difficult to understand, these challenges produce growth and insight within all of us.

*Heavenly Father, help me see your everlasting presence and guidance in my life. Amen.*

*Mentor: Share with someone how God has shaped your life.*

*Read: Isaiah 43*

*Betsy Becker Niedringhaus  
Ballwin, MO*

Thursday, January 4, 2018

# A Pattern for Living

*[Christ] died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him.*

*1 Thessalonians 5:10*

In writing to the Christians at Thessalonica as well as to us, the apostle Paul concludes his letter with the way we should live. The start of the new year is a good time to ponder his thoughts as we follow Christ as pilgrims through the days to come.

Day and night live with your Savior. He died for you (5:10).

Speak encouraging words to your brothers and sisters in Christ (5:11).

Honor your pastor and teachers of the faith (5:12-13).

Strive to do what is good for each other (5:15).

Spend time rejoicing, praying and thanking God in all circumstances (5:16).

Then the apostle concludes his letter with a blessing: May the amazing grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you (5:28).

*Lord Jesus, bless our going out and coming in every day. Amen.*

*Study: Read a chapter of First Thessalonians each day of the next three days.*

*Read: 1 Peter 1:13-19*

Walter M. Schoedel  
Webster Groves, MO

Friday, January 5, 2018

# Treasure Today

*Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation.*

*Luke 2:29-30*

Simeon was ready to go home to heaven, for all that he had lived, hoped and waited for had been accomplished, namely, holding the baby Jesus—the Savior of the world. His peaceful exit from this world and entrance into the holy house of heaven would come when and as God willed. Until that time, he would rejoice and savor the moment.

Since we can't control or manipulate the year that awaits us, why fret about what may or may not be? Rather, treasure the gifts with which God has surrounded us, for they are many: the time that God has entrusted to us, for it is precious, and the people among whom God has placed us, for they are beloved. Treasure life and hope, which are ours this very day. How? By holding onto the Christ Child in simple faith and faithfulness in whatever awaits us.

*Thanks, Lord, for giving me this new day and the promise of eternity in heaven. Amen.*

*List: Acknowledge some simple things as gifts from God.*

*Read: Luke 2:25-32*

*Steve Albers  
Kirkwood, MO*

Saturday, January 6, 2018

# Where Is He?

*Where is he who has been born king of the Jews?*

*Matthew 2:2*

Where is Jesus in your world? Is he hard to find when terrorism strikes in London or Washington, D.C.? Does he seem absent from national or local politics? Are you looking in the wrong place at the wrong time?

The wise men came at the right time, but they looked for Jesus at the wrong location, in Jerusalem. God's Word and the star led them to Bethlehem to worship the Christ Child. Jesus moved from Bethlehem to Egypt and then to Nazareth in Galilee. His journey would finally lead him to Jerusalem and a cross, at the right time and in the right location for our salvation. Before he ascended into heaven, he promised, "I am with you always" (Matthew 28:20). You can find him with God's people as they gather around Word and Sacraments. He lives in your heart every day and is present throughout the world. Every day is the right time and every place is the right location with Jesus!

*Lord, be with me today wherever I am. Amen.*

*Tell: Share Jesus today with someone in the place where you live.*

*Read: Matthew 2:1-23*

*Stephen J. Carter  
Oakville, MO*

Sunday, January 7, 2018

# My Re-Birth Mark

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

*John 3:5*

I have a small brown birthmark on the back of my left hand. This mark is insignificant, except that it has always helped me tell right from left—as long as I can see my hands.

I've had another significant mark since I was a baby, a re-birth mark, if you will. When I was baptized, the pastor made the sign of the cross over my forehead and heart to show that I have been redeemed by Christ the crucified. My baptism was sealed with water, in which my original sinful self “should by daily contrition and repentance be drowned and die” and a new me “should daily emerge and arise to live before God in righteousness and purity forever.” In baptism God has indelibly marked me as his redeemed child for all eternity.

*Help me, Lord, to remember my baptism and live as your redeemed child. Amen.*

*Show: No one can see your re-birth mark, but they can see its results. How will your new life in Jesus show itself today?*

*Read: Romans 6:1-11*

*Eileen Ritter  
Grand Haven, MI*

Monday, January 8, 2018

# Say and Do Love

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

*Micah 6:8*

We Christians know we live in grace. But what is expected of us? Some would say nothing, and in a way, they would be right. However, within us resides a Spirit-inspired desire to please God with our lives. We need help. We need direction. Micah suggests a roadmap for life—justice, mercy (or kindness) and humility. A big order, but it is done with the Spirit's help.

Years ago there was a Vacation Bible School theme entitled "Say and Do Love." That theme applies to kids, and even to big kids with gray hair. When that becomes our mission, we realize that we are experiencing the kingdom of God.

*Lord, help us to love the things that you love—justice, mercy and humility. May your kingdom come among us. Amen.*

*Be aware: Notice concerns in your community where Micah's roadmap is needed.*

*Read: The book of Micah*

*Lael Hoerger  
Niles, MI*

Tuesday, January 9, 2018

# Winter Dreams

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

*Ecclesiastes 3:1*

Winter in northern Illinois can be gray, dreary and boring. By the middle of February, I've had enough. And then they start arriving—the seed and plant catalogs. As I look through them, I dream of the beautiful flowers that I'll have in my garden in a few months. I can imagine a profusion of bright blooms where I only see snow and dead plants right now.

It helps me to remember that God is always with me—during the dreary winter and in the blooming season. He's also with me during my “life” seasons. He's there when I feel great and on top of the world. And God's also there when I feel lousy and nothing seems to go right. Christ promises, “I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:20).

*Lord, help me to remember that you are with me through all the seasons of my life. Amen*

*Greet: Brighten someone's day with a friendly visit.*

*Read: Ecclesiastes 3:1-8*

*Jeanette Dall  
Batavia, IL*

Wednesday, January 10, 2018

# Every Morning

*His mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning.*

*Lamentations 3:22-23*

“Not a scratch on it” doesn’t surprise us if said about a new car. What about a new day? Can you open your eyes to 1440 sparkly new minutes each morning? Jesus did. You can too! With the Spirit inside, you’re becoming daily more like Christ. If you start the day thinking about problems from yesterday or adding leftover chores to today’s to-do list, make a new habit! Jews in Jesus’ day were taught from childhood to say “Blessed be the Lord” as they woke up in the morning. That phrase can remind you that the Lord is in his temple and all is right with the world.

*Jesus, I want to make a new habit starting tomorrow. Turn my first thoughts to you. Let me know that your mercy starts out a new day with none of yesterday’s scratches. Amen.*

*Consider: What do you see first thing when you open your eyes? Put something there to remind you that it’s a new day. God has good new mercies coming your way!*

*Read: Isaiah 43:19; 2 Corinthians 5:17*

*Julaine Kammrath  
Aurora, IL*

Thursday, January 11, 2018

# It's Good!

*And God saw that it was good.*

*Genesis 1:10*

Sometimes, when we read the Scriptures, we wonder why God does what we read. For instance, in the creation story, God repeats “it is good” two times after the third and sixth day (Genesis 1:10, 12, 25 and 31) and only one time after the other days. Why is that?

My conclusion? Maybe he wants me to show a special respect for the earth, for its beauty and vegetation (the third day), and a new appreciation for all living creatures as well as human beings (the sixth day).

What do you think and what might be your response? As we age, do we catch a new glimpse of God's message for our journey?

*Creator God, thank you for the wonders of nature and for creating us as your special creation. Amen.*

*Search: Read Genesis 1 and 2 and look for some new insights for your earthly pilgrimage.*

*Read: Psalm 104*

*Walter M. Schoedel  
Webster Groves, MO*

Friday, January 12, 2018

# Touch of Grace

*His mercies ... are new every morning.*

*Lamentations 3:22-23*

Each morning begins for me with a touch of grace. When I step outside to pick up the morning paper, I find it on my front porch! This is not where the paper girl normally tosses it. Rather, a neighbor begins her day early by walking her dog. Finding my paper in the bushes, she delivers it to my door.

I could protest that she doesn't need to do that. I can still walk, stoop down and pick up my paper (although my arms do seem to be getting a bit shorter). Instead, I simply accept her act of kindness and watch for an opportunity to return it or pass it on to someone else.

*Father, thank you for this touch of grace from a neighbor that leads me to consider all the grace that comes from you in many forms. Amen.*

*Share: With whom can I share an act of kindness today?*

*Read: Lamentations 3:22-26; Psalm 103*

*Ted Zimmerman  
Napa, CA*

Saturday, January 13, 2018

# Not Broken

*Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful.*

*Hebrews 10:23*

Outside, ice encases every twig, weighing it down. The ice reflects the sunlight's brilliance, but the twigs might break.

When I feel weighed down like a twig in ice, I have to remind myself that breaking is not an option. The apostle Paul reminds the Corinthians that God gave us "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." We have the knowledge of that glory and the power that keeps us from being crushed or driven to despair (2 Corinthians 4:6-9). The writer of Hebrews tells us not to "grow weary or faint-hearted," but to look to Jesus our light so we can lift our "drooping hands" and strengthen our "weak knees" (Hebrews 12:3,12). Resting on God's promise, we can wait out the ice and not break.

*Heavenly Father, when we feel weighed down, point us to Jesus, our strength and Redeemer. Amen.*

*Observe: The winter landscape may look barren, but we know that God will revive it.*

*Read: 2 Corinthians 4:6-18; Hebrews 12:3-13*

*Judy Scherr  
Lemay, MO*

Sunday, January 14, 2018

# A Sea Change

*Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid.*

*Mark 6:50*

A “sea change” is a phrase used by some to talk about dramatic changes in life. When you were born, it was a sea change day for your parents. The day you retired—yep—sea change. You’ve had many sea changes in your life, some of them thrilling, some not.

Mary had a sea change day at the empty tomb. “Jesus said to her, ‘Mary’” (John 20:16). Hearing her name spoken by Jesus changed everything. Paul had a sea change the day his world went dark just before Jesus lit it up.

It may not seem so now, but the greatest sea change of your life was the day you were baptized in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. God adopted you and wrote your name in the Lamb’s book of life. It changed everything.

*O Lord, stay with me through all the sea changes of my life. Amen.*

*Share: How might you help someone who is going through a challenging sea change day?*

*Read: Hebrews 13:5*

*David A. Boyd  
Staunton, Virginia*

Monday, January 15, 2018

# Satisfied

*Feed me with the food that is needful for me.*

*Proverbs 30:8*

The proverb asks of God, “Give me neither poverty nor riches.” We would all likely refuse an offer of poverty, but would it be so bad to have a few riches? Yet either alternative can be a path to spiritual ruin. Wealth may lead us to believe that we have no need for God; we can take care of ourselves, or so we imagine. Poverty may lead to theft that dishonors God’s holy name.

So we pray, “Feed me with food that is needful for me.” Our Lord taught us to pray this way: “Give us this day our daily bread” (Matthew 6:11). Our heavenly Father provides for our daily needs and much more as well. He gave us his only Son, and in Christ Jesus our Savior, we have riches beyond imagining and food that satisfies for eternity.

*Lord Jesus, Bread of life, feed me with food that is needful for me. Amen.*

*Give thanks: As you seek to manage finances, rejoice in the free gift of salvation that is yours in Christ.*

*Read: Proverbs 30:7-9; Isaiah 55:1-3; Romans 8:31-39*

*Carol Geisler  
Manchester, MO*

Tuesday, January 16, 2018

# Now I See

*One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.*

*John 9:25*

The clouding of our vision is slow, imperceptible. When I was young, I could see life clearly, with glasses, but as the years wore on, the world became filmy, colors muted. “Cataracts,” said the doctor, and after a fairly simple surgery, the world appears crisp again. “Wow!” I said, looking around me. The man in John’s story was “blind from birth,” so moving from darkness to sight went beyond, “Wow!”

Blindness is not only physical. We can be blind to our brokenness and our need for God’s forgiveness. We can be blind to those around us and to the opportunities to serve. We can blindly walk through God’s creation each day, never exclaiming, “Wow!” at the beauty and wonder of it all. Simple surgery cannot help spiritual blindness. Rather, we raise a daily prayer that God would open our eyes in new ways, and that looking through the lens of the cross, we would say, “Wow!”

*Open my eyes to see you, Lord, to see others, to see your world through your eyes. Amen.*

*See: Practice “re-visioning” today.*

*Read: John 9:1-41; 1 Peter 2:9*

*Donald F. Hinchey  
Denver, CO*

Wednesday, January 17, 2018

# A Fragrance Made New

*For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved.*

*2 Corinthians 2:15*

As we journey through a new year with new experiences and new challenges, I am reminded of a little object that always sat on the bathroom vanity in our home while I was growing up. It was a conical-shaped air freshener called Renuzit, designed to bring a pleasant fragrance to the surroundings. That got me to thinking that God has a “Renews It” product of his own. “Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow” (Isaiah 1:18). And now he calls on us to be the fragrance of his grace and mercy to all those he sets before us. “His young shoots will grow. His splendor will be like an olive tree, his fragrance like a cedar of Lebanon” (Hosea 14:6).

*Father, make me the “Renews It” for someone in need today. Amen.*

*Scent: Take time today to be aware of aromas and scents.*

*Read: Ephesians 5:1-2; Proverbs 27:9*

*Don Luepke  
Fremont, IN*

Thursday, January 18, 2018

# Birthdays

*For by me your days will be multiplied, and years will be added to your life.*

*Proverbs 9:11*

Good news or bad? How long you hope to live often depends on your health and other circumstances. Ask a person's age, and you'll hear anything from the proverbial "39" to "How old do I look?"

Whatever your age, your faith places you far to the left on a number line that vectors right on to infinity, or more appropriately, eternity. Need more good news? Your faith was, is and forever will be the best birthday gift ever. You will live forever—in glorious health and the best of circumstances—because Jesus lived, died and rose to give you the gift of life. The Holy Spirit delivered that present on the day you were baptized.

*Heavenly Father, thank you for the gift of endless birthdays! I look forward to the party at your place. Thanks for your presence! Amen.*

*Recall: Remember past birthday celebrations. Which one was the most sentimental? Funniest? Best ever? How has God blessed you and others through those special days?*

*Read: Romans 8:22-23*

*Ed Grube  
Addison, IL*

Friday, January 19, 2018

# Fountain of Youth

*Bless the LORD ... who satisfies you with good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.*

*Psalm 103:1, 5*

I don't have to look in the mirror to be convinced that I'm getting older. My body reminds me every day that I'm not as resilient or pliable as I was in my youth. Exercise and changes in diet are helpful, but ultimately, there is no magic fountain of youth to prevent all the effects of aging.

There is, however, a divine fountain of youth that flows abundantly, from which I am renewed daily. Through the waters of Baptism, God lives in me, continually refreshing my faith and satisfying my soul's desires. It is my source of a vigorous life, regardless of the condition of my body. Even more, I have the assurance of eternal life, with a new body that will never wear out. So, with every creak in my bones or new gray hair, I will remember the baptismal waters that flow within me and praise the Lord!

*Thank you, God, for sending Jesus, whose blood flowed that I may have eternal life! Amen.*

*Splash: Remember your Baptism and enjoy the refreshment God provides today.*

*Read: John 7:37-38; Colossians 2:6-12*

*Sandi Geis  
St. Louis, MO*

Saturday, January 20, 2018

# Hooray for Today!

*This is the day that the LORD has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it.*

*Psalm 118:24*

What a great way to start each day, reminding ourselves and others that today is a gift from the Lord. This calls for a hooray and a loud “Amen.” A friend paraphrases this text by shouting, “This is the day that the Lord has made, and he’s done a pretty good job of it!” Indeed!

Today is a free gift to us from a loving and gracious Lord. It has nothing to do with how we feel, look or act, and everything to do with him. Watch for ways to share this gift with others today, especially those who need a word of cheer and a nudge of hope. Yesterday is gone; tomorrow has not yet come. We only have today. Let us begin!

*Lord, thank you for the free gift of today. Help us to bring hope and joy to those you put into our lives, right now, through winsome words, graceful grins and cheerful chuckles, all in your name. Amen.*

*Cheer: Greet everyone with a holy hug today, and see how it helps them, and you, rejoice in the Lord.*

*Read: Philippians 4:4-5; Psalm 33:1-5*

*Rich Bimler  
Bloomington, IL*

Sunday, January 21, 2018

# Great Is the Lord

O LORD God of hosts, who is mighty as you are, O LORD?

*Psalm 89:8*

If you are anything like me, there are often nights when you wake up for no apparent reason and have trouble falling back to sleep. For me, that sleeplessness can last an hour or more. Instead of getting upset, I have come to cherish those quiet times. That's when I pray—not the worry kind of prayer, the praise kind.

I start with “A” and praise God for an attribute of his that starts with “A”: almighty. Then I move to “B”: beautiful, bountiful. By the time I have worked my way through the alphabet I am reminded how powerful and loving and all knowing and ever present is the God I worship. Eventually I fall back to sleep, knowing he is more than able and willing to meet all my needs.

*Thank you, Lord, for your loving care and for peaceful rest. Amen.*

*Reflect: Try praying your own alphabet of praise.*

*Read: Psalm 3 and Psalm 91*

*Katherine Hussmann Klemp  
St. Paul, MN*

Monday, January 22, 2018

# Can We Talk?

*Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear.*

*Ephesians 4:29*

Reflecting on the early period of my life and comparing that time to today, much has changed: The telephone with a four-party line waiting and getting anxious until a person on the line hangs up. No television, only radio and the many serials exercising our minds to envision what was happening. Now, communication is instantaneous and easily recalled, thanks to the computer and smart phone revolution. You could say, “We’ve come a long way.” Or have we? The communication offered is many times questionable or unwholesome.

God has encouraged us to think about what we say or do. Do our words build up or tear down? Do they reflect the love God has for us and the love we have for him?

*Loving God, help me to be mindful of your caution to communicate with love. Amen.*

*Reflect: Would my words please God?*

*Read: John 15:7; Colossians 4:6*

*Don Hollmann  
Ballwin, MO*

Tuesday, January 23, 2018

# Sometimes

*Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.*

*James 1:17*

The Father does not change, but the life of God's people is full of variety. Sometimes we hurt a lot, sometimes a little. Sometimes there's energy, sometimes lethargy. Sometimes financial resources are adequate, sometimes not. Sometimes visitors, sometimes not. Maybe a lunch date, maybe not. Without explanation, we feel "up" or "down."

We lovers of Christ also experience variety in our spiritual life. Sometimes a Bible reading hits home, sometimes not. Sometimes we feel connected in worship, sometimes not. Sometimes there seems an unusual closeness to God, sometimes not. Sometimes we know we have a Friend in Jesus, sometimes we wonder. God observes our change and promises not to abandon us. That promise is changeless.

*Holy Spirit, thank you for holding me during times of change. Amen.*

*Remember: Be patient with a friend's sometimes.*

*Read: Hebrews 13:1-9*

*Harry Edenfield  
Brownstown, MI*

Wednesday, January 24, 2018

# Renew!

*And he who was seated on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new."*

*Revelation 21:5*

Near the very end of the Bible, we find this beautiful passage about the new wonders God is preparing for us when all things will once again be made new. I encourage you to read the entire chapter. Surely our precious and glorious God loves us very much. When I meditate on this chapter, my heart is filled with joyful anticipation and I am moved to ask God to lead me today into a renewed relationship with him. Where do I begin? Read Psalm 25:4-5: "Make me to 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."

*Lord, I am amazed by your love for me. Let me know you more! Amen.*

*Do: Renew your relationship with God today.*

*Read: Revelation 21; Psalm 25*

*Terry Weber  
Williamsburg, VA*

Thursday, January 25, 2018

# Soul Search

*I will not forget you ... I have engraved you on the palms of my hand.*

*Isaiah 49:15-16*

What do you dream about? Or better, whom do you dream about? Sometimes I'll wake up with the memory of someone I knew from long ago and wonder why that person came to mind after all these years. I've even done a Google search trying to discover whatever happened to this person. Occasionally I will even receive an e-mail connected to my high school graduating class that says, "Someone remembers you and would like to connect."

It's nice to think that someone remembers you. It's also kind of nice to think that perhaps your image came up in someone else's dream across the landscape of so many years. But what's even nicer is knowing that you are on God's mind too.

*Lord, the very thought that you know my name is beyond my comprehension. Thank you for remembering me. Amen.*

*Share: Call friends from the past and tell them that remembering them made you smile.*

*Read: Isaiah 49:8-18*

*Edward Arle  
St. Charles, MO*

Friday, January 26, 2018

# The Gift of Listening

*Every person should be quick to listen, and slow to speak.*

*James 1:19*

When the person talking pauses, Navaho Indians are taught to wait and to continue listening. The person speaking may be collecting his or her thoughts to say more. Recently, a pastor told me that in his visit to the hospital, the patient said, “Nobody listens to me.” He kept repeating it. The pastor did not reply. He listened for forty-five minutes. The patient saw that the pastor cared.

Listening is ministry. It speaks care and gives value to the person speaking. Jesus listens to our frustrations, our hurts, our feelings of not being valued. He listens because he cares deeply for us. The Holy Spirit empowers us to listen to the concerns of others. When others speak about their cares, frustrations and grief, continue listening instead of interrupting with words to quickly solve the problem. Often our ministry may be simply to listen and show care and love.

*Jesus, help me learn to be a good listener, slow to speak and quick to be there for others. Amen.*

*Listen:* In your next conversation, practice listening.

*Read:* Proverbs 18:13; James 1:19

*Leo Symmank  
Seabrook, TX*

Saturday, January 27, 2018

# Ablaze

*Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the Scriptures?*

*Luke 24:32*

My husband loved making campfires. He passed that love on to our five sons, so that was one camping task that never fell to me. Well, the boys are grown, and my husband, Paul, died last year, so last night I made my first campfire. I admit to using a “fire starter,” but any time you get the big logs burning, it is a win.

Many times our churches are like that. We have lots of “fire starter” events like Vacation Bible School, mission trips and Rally Sundays, but God uses us best when the big logs catch fire. It is when hearts of faith burn steadily within that those around us feel the warmth of God’s love. When the big logs catch fire, we are ready for God to use us any way he chooses.

*O Holy Spirit, enter in, and in my heart a fire begin, that I may serve with joy. Amen.*

*Reflect: Were there times when you and your church seemed especially on fire for Jesus?*

*Read: Philemon 1:4*

*Katherine Hussmann Klemp  
St. Paul, MN*

Sunday, January 28, 2018

# A Little Light

*To give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.*

*Luke 1:79*

The power was out. No light in the house. Not even moonlight. I wasn't worried. I knew the way to the flashlight. I'd walked that path a million times. On my way, I stubbed my toe on a chair, redirected, and stumbled into a table. Funny how disoriented I became without light. Then headlights shone through the window—for an instant. The car passed on the street, leaving it dark again, but I'd regained orientation. With my flashlight in hand, I shined the light on the floor to guide my steps and save my toes.

Even in familiar territory, I'm lost without light. How much more do I need the light of God's Word to guide my life steps.

*Thank you, Jesus, for being a lamp to my feet and a light to my path. Amen.*

*Share: The little light you share may direct someone to the true Light.*

*Read: 2 Samuel 22:29; Psalm 119:105; John 1:3*

*Lynne Waite Chapman  
Fort Wayne, IN*

Monday, January 29, 2018

# Keep Your Sails Raised

*Hold fast to the hope set before us. We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul.*

*Hebrews 6:18-19*

*Iced In* is Leonard Mizerek's winter painting of a schooner locked in an icy harbor. The ship won't be going anywhere until spring, but its sails are raised so they stay dry and don't freeze. They're raised with hope for better days.

God calls us to be that schooner when we are moored in an icy harbor. He wants us to freely choose hope over despair. We can trust God and believe in the power of his grace or we can cling to gloom, shelter in place and let inactivity freeze our minds in a dark space. We can dock in a chair with our hands idle and dwell on upcoming doctor appointments and other dreaded future events. Or we can use our hands—and raise our sails!

*Lord, I trust that your grace will strengthen me when I need it. Amen.*

*Choose: Reject despair and accept hope. Make a list of joyful spring projects. Maybe start one now!*

*Read: Psalm 16:11*

*Catherine A. Welch  
Southbury, CT*

Tuesday, January 30, 2018

# God's Workmanship

*For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.*

*Ephesians 2:10*

The world around us reveals God's eternal power and creativity. You are part of that creation, already equipped to accomplish his purpose. God has already prepared the good works you were created to do. You don't have to fret, manipulate the moments or make elaborate plans to carry out those good works. Just go ahead and do whatever God puts in your path, mind and heart.

God will show you who to forgive, pray for, befriend, feed, comfort or support. You may never even know how God uses your efforts! But our Creator uses people like you to show and tell the story of Jesus.

*Lord, help us to relax and enjoy the good works you give us to do each day. Amen.*

*Volunteer: Think about the words of Isaiah 6:8 and pray, "Here am I. Send me!" Seize the opportunities God puts before you.*

*Read: Romans 12:9-21; Philippians 2:1-11*

*Sharolyn Sander  
Lincoln, NE*

Wednesday, January 31, 2018

# Becoming New

*I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.*

*Isaiah 43:19*

Leave it up to God to make something out of nothing. He said a few words and the world came into being. This verse tells us he “will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.” The wilderness is a vast area. You can wander around forever and not find your way out. Deserts are known to be dry and dusty, yet God says he’s going to make rivers in them!

There’s a popular phrase, “You can’t teach an old dog new tricks.” But the Bible tells us that is wrong. Matthew 19:26 tells us, “With God all things are possible.” Is there something you have never had the chance to do? Is there something you’ve always wanted to try? Now is your chance! Believe in God’s promise!

*Heavenly Father, I am thankful that you are a God of second chances. Amen.*

*Try: Do something you have never done before.*

*Read: Isaiah 43:16-21; Lamentations 3:22-26*

*Celeste Cummins  
Storm Lake, IA*

Thursday, February 1, 2018

# Rainbow Promises

*I have set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth.*

*Genesis 9:13*

We all know the story of Noah and the ark. God sent a rainbow promise that he would never send a Great Flood again. We've all probably experienced a thunderstorm when the sun breaks through a cloud and a rainbow appears, as sometimes happens in life. In the storms of life, we know God's "rainbow promises" are with us, but sometimes that's difficult to discern. When that happens, we need to trust God and be patient. In his time he will show us his rainbow promises with something positive, even during a storm in life!

*Dear Father, thank you for all your rainbow promises in the past year. Help us to watch for more.  
Amen.*

*Do: Trust in God to show you rainbow promises in his time.*

*Read: Psalm 121; Proverbs 3:5-6; 1 Corinthians 10:13*

*Annette Schumacher  
Muskego, WI*

Friday, February 2, 2018

# Can You See It?

*The things that are unseen are eternal.*

*2 Corinthians 4:18*

What things do you like to see? Name something that you cannot see that is important for the believer. The things that we see are the things of this present life. The things that we see comprise a large part of God's world. The things of this world are temporary but important for daily living.

As believers we are to concentrate our time on the unseen things that are from God. This includes spiritual things such as grace, hope and salvation. As seniors we are to concentrate on the spiritual elements that will last forever. We see the unseen things of God with eyes of faith. We believe in God's promises. We are to fix our hearts on what is eternal, such as eternal life. We have the confident anticipation of sharing in eternal glory, joy and peace in heaven when Jesus comes again on Judgment Day.

*Jesus, help me to focus on your Second Coming.  
Amen.*

*Observe: Watch in church; notice the things that are unseen and seen.*

*Read: 2 Corinthians 4:16-18*

*David Bever  
Las Vegas, NV*

Saturday, February 3, 2018

# Perspective

*Behold, I am making all things new.*

*Revelation 21:5*

You've lived long enough to see a grumpy neighbor gradually change to someone who nods at you. You can remember a time when a church committee killed a good idea, but you know too that somehow God still got it done. You got discouraged with a family member but saw how God worked things out. God is still renewing people today, tomorrow and the next day. When discouragements come, you can be confident that encouragement will follow eventually. That's the reality of living with an involved, creative God. The Lord works out something unexpected and new on a regular basis. It's such a relief to know his ways go far beyond what we can think or perceive.

*Father, you involve yourself in my life because you care. You are over all things, including each of my days. Alleluia! Amen.*

*Check: Write and date your next disappointment. Tape it to your calendar 6 months from now. When that date comes, see what changed.*

*Read: Lamentations 3:22-23; Romans 15:5-6*

*Julaine Kammrath  
Aurora, IL*

Sunday, February 4, 2018

# Behind the Camera

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

*Matthew 28:20*

Sorting through the family photos recently, I couldn't help but notice how often I am the photographer, and not in the pictures. We have so many great shots of our family without me in them. I am usually the one behind the camera.

My relationship with God can seem like the piles of photos. God is the photographer and I am the subject of the photo. God is always helping me to capture the moments of my life. God is with me in an important role, but sometimes God is not in my view. As I try to get into more family pictures, I also hope to grow in my awareness of God's presence with me daily. God is there, in the picture, if I take the time to notice.

*Dear God, help me to include you in the images of my day. I know you are with me. Amen.*

*Picture: Look at family photographs and imagine God in the picture.*

*Read: Psalm 27:13*

*Annette L. Sherwood  
St. Louis, MO*

Monday, February 5, 2018

# Let's Make a Deal

*From this time forth I announce to you new things, hidden things that you have not known.*

*Isaiah 48:6*

Even though there is a new version, you are probably old enough to remember Monty Hall's game show *Let's Make a Deal*. Contestants came in crazy outfits and traded for items hidden in Big Boxes or behind Curtain #1, #2 or #3. Sometimes there were great prizes and sometimes not.

As we journey through life and grow older, there are many things that are hidden from our view. But God doesn't offer a chance game; he gives us a sure thing. As a matter of fact, he is ready to give us everything in all of the boxes and behind all of the curtains: New love, new hope, new peace, new grace.

*Father, you are ready and even anxious to give all new and grand things. Thank you for your generosity. Amen.*

*Give thanks: Think about all of the boxes and curtains and doors that God has opened for you, each with a special blessing.*

*Read: Ephesians 1:7-9; Psalm 65:9-13*

*Don Luepke  
Fremont, IN*

Tuesday, February 6, 2018

# The Meter Man

*Behold, I stand at the door and knock.*

*Revelation 3:20*

As I was growing up, one thing we could depend on was someone coming to our door. If someone in the neighborhood died, a neighbor would come to our door to get a donation for flowers. The gas man knocked to read the gas meter in the basement. The insurance agent knocked to collect the monthly premium.

The Lord knocks on our door every day. “Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me” (Revelation 3:20). He comes daily with an invitation: “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28). He comes knocking each day, reminding us that he is the door through which we enter eternal life with him.

*Merciful Lord, forgive us when we slam the door in your face through neglect, denial or anger. Thank you for coming to the back door when we close the front door. Amen.*

*Knock: Whose door might you knock upon?*

*Read: Psalm 141; John 10:7-9*

*Jerrold Lloyd Nichols  
Fort Wayne, IN*

Wednesday, February 7, 2018

# A New Spirit

*And I will give them one heart, and a new spirit I will put within them.*

*Ezekiel 11:19*

As I see the energy young children have, I get a bit jealous. As the old saying goes, “Youth is wasted on the young.” I wish I could have that new spirit, that new energy back again. I would do so much more with it than I did the first time.

Unfortunately, we’ll never have the energy we had when we were ten. Fortunately, it will and does happen to our spirits. As we confess our sins, God is “faithful and just to forgive our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). He creates new hearts and right spirits within us daily. Even though your body might not have the energy it once had, always remember that your spirit will have the eternal energy of the Holy Spirit living in it.

*Lord, thank you for daily filling me with your Spirit. Amen.*

*List: Think of all the ways you can use your Spirit-given energy today.*

*Read: Psalm 51*

*Jeremy Klaustermeier  
Warrenton, MO*

Thursday, February 8, 2018

# Wonderfully Made

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

*Psalm 139:14*

The next time you are in a doctor's office, take time to notice the charts and diagrams on the walls. The eye doctor has side views of parts of your eye. Your primary care physician has diagrams of the circulatory system, the skeletal system, all your organs and even the brain.

If you take a few minutes to look closely at those graphics, you will walk away in awe of what is really inside of each of our bodies.

Our Creator God made us in such amazing ways that all of our different body functions work together to make a whole human being. How can we do anything but shout with the psalmist, "I will praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well" (Psalm 139:14).

*Lord, thank you for making me in your own special way. Amen.*

*Praise: As you brush your teeth tonight, think about all the parts of your body that work together to accomplish that simple task.*

*Read: Psalm 139*

*Margaret Rickers Hinchey  
Denver, CO*

Friday, February 9, 2018

# Face Time

*To make an apt answer is a joy to a man, and a word in season, how good it is!*

*Proverbs 15:23*

I love the way social media provides an inexpensive and easy way to make connections with distant family and friends. I have never before wished so many people a “Happy Birthday!” When those names appear on my screen, it encourages me to reach out, share a blessing or prayer and thank God for these relationships.

Everyday social interaction (talking, helping, being friendly) is also inexpensive and a delightful way to make connections with the people around you. Your smiles, words and simple acts of kindness tell friends, neighbors and even strangers, “Happy Today!” Who knows what might open the door to more conversation, a deeper relationship and even a link to Jesus? God may choose to make the connections through you.

*Lord, thank you for being our forever friend! Enable us to join hands with others and bring them along to heaven. Amen.*

*Watch: Notice the needs and interests of people around you. Be quick to respond or lend a hand.*

*Read: Philippians 1:9-11; Matthew 25:31-40*

*Sharolyn Sander  
Lincoln, NE*

Saturday, February 10, 2018

# I Appreciate You

*Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit.*

*1 Corinthians 12:4*

Look around and see all the wonderful blessings God has given to us in people! If we train our minds to search for positive things about people, we might be surprised at how gifted our friends have become. The Lord continues to be the giver of all of these wonderful gifts called people. Many years ago, our daughter and her friend Sue were into sending “love notes” to people. They wrote a note to their pastor, which read, “Dear Pastor, we really like you. We think you are neat. We love your sermons. We can’t wait until we’re old enough to understand them.”

How can we continue to say, “I appreciate you” to those around us? Let’s affirm and encourage one another in love.

*Lord, you have given us the many supportive people around us. Help us to give thanks to you and to them for their gifts of love and understanding. Amen.*

*Send: Write “love notes” to your friends, telling them how much you appreciate them, but make sure you and they are “old enough to understand them”!*

*Read: 2 Corinthians 3:1-3*

*Rich Bimler  
Bloomingdale, IL*

Sunday, February 11, 2018

# The Best Day Ever

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

*Psalm 118:24*

My grandnephew Julian is a child of wonder. He comes to each day as though it were a precious present to be carefully unwrapped and appreciated. Each occasion is savored and at the end of a trip to the zoo or a Disney film or merely a day with Grandma and Grandpa, Julian will pronounce a benediction: “This is the best day of my life, ever!” It is not said with finality because tomorrow and the tomorrow after that, Julian is there, expectations high, to exclaim again, “This is the best day of my life, ever!”

Might we unwrap each day in expectation, confident in our Lord’s care? Might we not offer the same blessing and prayer of thanks before sleep? May this day be your “best day ever.”

*Fill my heart with childlike gratitude, Father, that each day be “the best day ever” until my final day with you forever. Amen.*

*Ask: How might today be your “best day ever”?*

*Read: Psalm 118:19-24; Hebrews 13:8*

*Donald F. Hinchey  
Denver, CO*

Monday, February 12, 2018

# Get Dressed!

*Clothe yourselves with love.*

*Colossians 3:14*

Do “clothes make the man” (or woman)? There are certain pieces of clothing that affect our behavior or demeanor. A worn, woolen sweater makes us feel cozy and warm. A well-tailored suit can give us confidence.

Paul isn't looking for well-dressed people. He's not interested in such external factors. Paul wants his friends to be dressed for real success, that is, to live and love the way the Savior lived and loved. So wear these “clothes”—compassion, humility, meekness and patience (Colossians 3:12). These words describe our Lord Jesus, who humbly and in forgiving love changes people's lives. Do these clothes fit you?

If not, it's time for an alteration! Through the power of the Holy Spirit you can change your look. The Spirit can tailor you into a new self, one filled with forgiving love and caring understanding. Isn't that the kind of love which “binds everything together in perfect harmony”? (Colossians 3:14).

*Lord, clothe me in your love. Amen.*

*Think: Are you dressed for true success?*

*Read: Colossians 3:12-17*

*Neal Orabka  
North Las Vegas, NV*

Tuesday, February 13, 2018

# Love You Forever

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

*1 Chronicles 16:34*

Heart-shaped boxes of chocolates, rows of red and pink greeting cards, displays of sparkling jewelry and dainty bouquets. It's difficult not to notice that Valentine's Day is near. Celebrating love, given and shared with another person, is a joy and a blessing.

Even more worthy of celebration is the fact that love means much more than any card or gift from a person can represent. When God says, "I'll love you forever," he means it! God's love is the only kind that lasts forever. Certainly we cherish the cards and gifts and love that we've shared with people; but things and people are bound by earthly limits. God's love has no limits. "For the Lord is good; his steadfast love endures forever, and his faithfulness to all generations" (Psalm 100:5). Rejoice in and lean on his forever love.

*Father, when I feel unloved, remind me of your steadfast love that endures forever. Amen.*

*Share: Show God's love to someone today.*

*Read: 1 John 4:7-12; 1 Corinthians 13:1-13*

*Marj Maynard  
Billings, MO*

Wednesday, February 14, 2018

# Valentines and Ashes

*We love because he first loved us.*

*1 John 4:19*

On February 14 this year, there are two observances listed on most calendars. Which one do you think will receive more emphasis—Ash Wednesday or Valentine’s Day? The displays in the stores give us a hint. I doubt if you will find any Ash Wednesday cards or displays.

However, as we gather for worship on February 14, repenting in dust and ashes, we experience a love that is far greater than the finest expression of love on a Valentine’s Day card. We look to the cross and see a love that is infinitely stronger and deeper than the greatest human love. We hear from the Scripture and sermon of the selfless, sacrificial love that led Jesus to the cross, where he paid in full for all of our wrongs and failures. God’s love in Christ is the motivation for our selfless, sacrificial love for one another, not just during Lent but the whole year through.

*Lord Jesus, help us to love one another as you have loved us. Amen.*

*Share: Reach out with Christ’s sacrificial love to someone who is hurting or in need.*

*Read: Job 42:1-6; 1 John 4:7-11*

*Gil Duchow  
Hilliard, OH*

Thursday, February 15, 2018

# Reflect and Renew

*Be still, and know that I am God.*

*Psalm 46:10*

I live at Meramec Bluffs, a senior resident community near St. Louis. A resident recently donated a reflection garden with a beautiful stone fountain. This garden overlooks the foothills of the Ozarks and the Meramec River. Its setting on the river bluffs is a place for quiet meditation in God's magnificent creation. I often walk to the garden and sit, reflecting on God's gift to me in Christ Jesus.

It is easy to become depressed with one's own cares and concerns. Take time this Lenten season to find a special place for quiet meditation on God's plan for your salvation. Be inspired to serve in new ways with energy and enthusiasm.

*Dear Lord, help me to take time to set my eyes on you. May I reach out to others and share my joy and love with them. Amen.*

*Reflect: During Lent, take time to reflect on Christ's love for you. Then share with others how much God's love means to you.*

*Read: Psalm 121; Psalm 143*

*Ann Eissfeldt  
Ballwin, MO*

Friday, February 16, 2018

# Clean Slate

*Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."*

*Luke 23:34*

Do you remember those "magic slates" we had when we were kids? They were wonderful. We had a small stylus that we used to draw and if we made a mistake, we just lifted the plastic screen and it would all go away. Wouldn't it be wonderful if life included something like that, something that would allow us to clear the slate of all the day's mistakes?

This is exactly what our Lord has done for us through his death on the cross and his rising from the grave. Our heavenly Father invites us to come to him with our "less-than-perfect slates." Scripture tells us: "The blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin" (1 John 1:7). It's good to know God gives us a clean slate!

*Lord Jesus, when I think of you on the cross, all I can say is "Forgive me." Amen.*

*Remember: Tell others what Jesus means to you and say it with conviction.*

*Read: 1 John 1*

*Edward Arle  
St. Charles, MO*

Saturday, February 17, 2018

# If Only

*In hope of eternal life which God, who never lies, promised ages ago.*

*Titus 1:2*

If only I had arrived earlier, if only my arthritis wasn't so painful—if only, if only! Are you an “if only” person? “If onlys” usually result only in dissatisfaction with past events that didn't happen the way we wished or with future events that possibly won't be realized. How thankful we can be that nothing about our salvation is an “if only.” With faith in Jesus' death and resurrection, we have a sure hope that we can cling to every day of our lives. What a comfort! If you came to faith late in life and find yourself thinking, “If only I had known Jesus sooner,” be content. You know him now, and as our Chief Shepherd, he knows you and calls you by name.

*Dear Lord, on the cross you took care of all our “if onlys” regarding our salvation. Thank you for making our heavenly home a certainty we anticipate with joy. Amen.*

*Assure: Don't let “if onlys” cloud your mind. Make a conscious effort to remove them from your thoughts and from your vocabulary.*

*Read: John 3:16; Romans 10:9*

*Harriet Stennfeld  
Fort Wayne, IN*

Sunday, February 18, 2018

# Our Old Phone

*The Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words.*

*Romans 8:26*

When I was a child, our phone was a brown, wooden box on the wall. To make a call, we turned a crank on the side of the box, and then gave the number we wanted to a woman at “Central.” She took the wire for our line and plugged it into the line of the person we were calling. Sometimes the connection was bad. We then called Central again and our message was relayed to our party.

When our prayers stumble and our words aren’t clear, the Spirit steps in, for he knows what we need and want to say. We don’t have to “say it just right,” or even know fully what we are praying for. We can simply open our hearts, our jumbled thoughts and our feelings to God, and the Spirit intercedes for us. That’s better than going through Central.

*O Lord, accept our thanks and praise. Hear us when we call. Amen.*

*Suggestion: Write a short prayer of praise and thanks. Read one of the last five Psalms for inspiration.*

*Read: Galatians 4:4-7*

*Eldor Kaiser  
Lenexa, KS*

Monday, February 19, 2018

# Pay Attention

*Apply your heart to instruction and your ear to words of knowledge.*

*Proverbs 23:12*

Visualize a second-grade language lesson on imperative sentences as children take turns giving commands. One young jokester commands another: “Give Mrs. S. a kiss!” Donnie did it. He walked to where I sat and planted a peck on my cheek without so much as a blush. Good for him. He got it.

Think of all the imperatives Jesus gave his beloved. You will find almost 130 stated or implied in the gospels, including: “Trust me.” “Believe in me.” “Obey my teaching.” “Love each other.” “Follow me.” “Repent.” “Rejoice in persecution.” “Love your enemies.” “Do not worry.” “Do not be afraid.”

How easily, how quickly, and without hesitation do we follow Jesus’ commands?

*Lord Jesus, each of your commands, given in love, given for our good, comes heaped with blessing. Send your Spirit. Prompt my heart to a faithful response. Amen.*

*Look: Search the gospels for Jesus’ commands. Recall the blessings you have received in a lifetime of obedience, walking with Jesus.*

*Read: John 13:34—15:17*

*Donna J. Streufert  
South Bend, IN*

Tuesday, February 20, 2018

# Transformed

*Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind.*

*Romans 12:2*

What happens when Jesus transforms a life? Is it smooth sailing? No, but worries can become opportunities, and mistakes offer creative possibilities. One of my favorite mediums as an artist is collage, combining disparate pieces of paper or other materials into a work of art. Some of my best little papers for collage come from failed artwork. All those little pieces from failed projects become beautiful parts of a whole new collage. Something new is created from failure—and from forgiveness for that failure. That's what Christ offers us. He takes our failures, forgives us, and creates a new being. We can admit defeat, and that is the beginning for a whole new creation. It actually happens every day, and it's beautiful.

*Lord, thank you for transforming my failures into something through which I can show your love to others. Amen.*

*Rejoice: Praise God for his transforming forgiveness!*

*Read: Ephesians 2:8-10; 2 Corinthians 5:17-18*

*Sally Beck  
Williamsburg, VA*

Wednesday, February 21, 2018

# Why?

*Do you think these Galileans were worse sinners?*

*Luke 13:2*

When we hear of a tragedy, we often ask “Why?” Why did those people suffer? Why did my loved one die? Even as we trust God’s will, we may still ask the question.

The people of Jesus’ day very likely had the same question concerning two tragedies in Jerusalem. Pilate’s soldiers slaughtered Galilean pilgrims. Eighteen people died in a tower collapse. Before his listeners can ask what was surely on their minds, Jesus answers. No, those people were not worse sinners than anyone else. But Jesus doesn’t satisfy them—or us—with any other reason. Instead, he turns our attention to a terrifying, eternal tragedy: “Unless you repent, you will all likewise perish” (Luke 13:5). At such times, we are not to be concerned with the guilt of others. We repent of our own sins and look to the forgiveness won for us when Pilate’s soldiers crucified our Savior, who bore the crushing weight of our sin on the cross.

*Lord, forgive my sins. Amen.*

*Ask: In times of tragedy, pray for first-responders, survivors and the families of those who were lost.*

*Read: Luke 13:1-5; Romans 5:1-8*

*Carol Geisler  
Manchester, MO*

Thursday, February 22, 2018

# I've Fallen

*The Lord helps the fallen and lifts those bent beneath their loads.*

*Psalm 145:14*

I am sure that we all have seen the security alert commercial and may even have joked about it; the classic line is “I’ve fallen and I can’t get up.” Indeed, as the years pile on and we become a little less secure in our steps, falls pose a real and definite threat. Often those alerts are vital to personal safety.

But we all have fallen spiritually through our sin. And truly we cannot on our own “get up.” There is simply nothing that can help us rise again by ourselves. It is only by mercy that the Lord extends us his hand and lifts us to uprightness. We don’t even have to pay for a special device with a button to push. It is a free, no-hands gift. It is simply God’s grand grace.

*Lord, you reach out to help me through all my “fallen” times. You are an awesome God! Amen.*

*Help: Extend your hand to someone near you who needs a “lift.”*

*Read: Psalm 146:8; Psalm 118:13*

*Don Luepke  
Fremont, IN*

Friday, February 23, 2018

# The Coda

*They who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.*

*Isaiah 40:31*

Seeking a small, calm female dog, we brought our last Golden Retriever puppy home. Fittingly named for the finale of a musical composition, our male dog, Coda, is everything we didn't want, but is exactly what we didn't know we needed. Now weighing in at 100 pounds, he is big, bold and keeps us physically active. God often provides us with that which we don't know we need. Musically, the coda is written to be the most impactful part of a composition. As we age, we may be challenged with circumstances we don't want and certainly didn't ask for. Yet in the coda of our lives, God, in infinite wisdom, provides us with exactly what we need to impact others with his immeasurable love.

*Lord, weary though I may be, guide me in service to thee. Amen.*

*Consider: Has something unexpected occurred in your life, which resulted in a blessing?*

*Read: Isaiah 40:27-31*

*Judith Christian  
St. Louis, MO*

Saturday, February 24, 2018

# Fresh Fallen

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

*Isaiah 1:18*

As a Chicago native, my image of snow is not of the beautiful, glistening winter wonderland scenes depicted in movies and on Christmas cards. I know the reality of dirty, slushy, trampled-on snow tainted by salt, heavy traffic and dogs. Soon after a fresh fallen snow, there is very little of it left that is actually white!

The Bible tells us that God's forgiveness makes our sins as white as snow, leaving us completely clean and pure in his sight. That's not the kind of snow familiar to me! That's why I often doubt that God could truly see me as pure. All I see is all the dirt caused by my sin. Yet God's promises are sure. My forgiveness was won by the harsh reality of Jesus' blood, shed for my purification. Through Jesus, grace is fresh fallen with every sin, making me glisten in the light of his unconditional love and forgiveness.

*Jesus, let your mercy fall fresh on me today, that I may be beautiful in your sight. Amen.*

*Check the forecast: Read God's promises in the Bible and anticipate a blizzard of grace.*

*Read: Hebrews 9:11-14; Psalm 51*

*Sandi Geis  
St. Louis, MO*

Sunday, February 25, 2018

# We Can Change ... Some Things

*For I the Lord do not change.*

*Malachi 3:6*

There are numerous things about ourselves we have the ability to change. If we don't like the color of our hair, there are many new colors to choose from. If we aren't pleased with the reflection in the mirror, we can adjust our eating and exercise habits and either gain or lose weight. It's possible to have our appearance altered with surgery or injections.

However, the one thing we can't change by ourselves is the condition of our heart. Our hearts are full of sin and until we accept Jesus into our lives and allow him to make changes, they will remain that way. Only the unchanging God, who sent his Son to make the ultimate sacrifice, can make the ultimate change in our hearts and in our lives.

*Father, we like to be in control and often believe we can change by our own will. Forgive us and help us rely on you to make the changes. Amen.*

*Change: Consider the many things you change about yourself.*

*Read: 1 Corinthians 15:51; Hebrews 6:17-18*

*Gloria Doty  
Fort Wayne, IN*

Monday, February 26, 2018

# New Things!

*See, the former things have taken place, and new things I declare; before they spring into being I announce them to you.*

*Isaiah 42:9*

Isaiah 42:1-8 is the first of the famous Servant Songs of Isaiah. The Lord speaks of his Messiah as a servant. This is the new thing God speaks of in verse 9. God, the mighty Creator God, will come as a Servant Messiah. Why is this new? Because no other god in any other religious system does this.

God is still doing this new thing for you. Every day is a new day in the Lord. Every day the Lord forgives you, loves you and calls you his beloved child. In that way, something else is completely new about life in Jesus—the older we get, the newer we are! No matter our age, we are part of the new things the Lord is doing. How many years new are you today?

*Lord of all, thank you for the surprising newness of my life in Jesus. Amen.*

*Celebrate: Celebrate how many years new you are!*

*Read: Isaiah 42:1-9*

*Don Schatz  
Kenmore, WA*

Tuesday, February 27, 2018

# Blessings

*We give thanks to God always for all of you.*

*1 Thessalonians 1:2*

Blessed are the people who are with us every day. Blessed are those who live far away but stay in contact and those who live close and are always there. Blessed are our daughters and sons, neighbors and friends. Blessed are those who play cards with us, who enjoy gardening with us, who swing a golf club with us, who share meals with us. We remember the laughter of friends, their good will, their help and their presence.

God knows what is good for us. He always has and always will. He knows when we need to be lifted up by others. In the last chapter of Romans, Paul lists a number of people who served him by their friendship. There are names about which we probably know little, maybe nothing, but they were all valued by Paul. So we, too, give thanks to the Lord for friends and friendship.

*Lord, thank you for sending people who befriend me and lift me up. Amen.*

*Give: Share the blessings of friendship with someone who may need a friend today.*

*Read: Romans 16; 1 Thessalonians 1:2-7*

*Jerry Groth  
Jackson, WI*

Wednesday, February 28, 2018

# Attorneys

*But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.*

1 John 2:1

We human beings are natural-born lawyers. Lawyers have one of two roles: they prosecute the accused or defend the accused. We do that too, but with a twist—we take on both roles. Mostly we “prosecute” others, while defending ourselves. But they are not always guilty, and we are not always innocent.

It is good news then, that in the heavenly courtroom, the verdict has been given. We wait—our eternal destiny in the balance. The verdict is read: “Innocent of all charges.” Innocent? Yes, innocent—our Attorney took the floor and argued our case. The evidence he brought forward? His nail-marked hands. “Enough said,” declared the Judge. Knowing the verdict cannot be overturned, we can now live a life of freedom, serving our Advocate by serving our neighbor.

*Thank you, Jesus, for winning my case upon the cross. Amen.*

*Share: I am now free to live a full life. How does my new freedom change the way I see others?*

*Read: 1 John 2:2*

David A. Boyd  
Staunton, VA

Thursday, March 1, 2018

# Eyes on Jesus

*And as Moses lifted up the servant in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up.*

*John 3:14*

Do your eyes distract you from Jesus? Do you look at smartphone social media with endless screens or engage in mindless television channel flipping? Do your eyes fixate on troubles all around?

Constant complaining against God in the wilderness caused many Israelites to be bitten by fiery serpents and to stare death in the face. Then God's grace provided a bronze serpent on a pole with the words: "Everyone who is bitten, when he sees it, shall live" (Numbers 21:8). Jesus applies that message of salvation to himself. He will be lifted up on a cross. No wonder the writer to the Hebrews admonishes us to look "to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross" (Hebrews 12:2). During Lent, keep your eyes on Jesus!

*Lord, free us from sinful distractions to see only you. Amen.*

*Share: Point someone to Jesus and his cross this week.*

*Read: John 3:14-21; Numbers 21:4-9; Hebrews 12:1-2*

*Stephen J. Carter  
Oakville, MO*

Friday, March 2, 2018

# The Wind of the Spirit

*And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh.*

*Acts 2:17*

March is known as the windy month. When strong winds blow, trees and buildings may be damaged, but the wind may also be a gentle breeze. The wind can chill us or feel like a blast from a furnace. It can be soft or sting with sleet and rain or choke with dust (I know, I grew up in the Kansas Dust Bowl years). Elijah once hid in a cave. God sent a powerful wind that “tore the mountains” (1 Kings 19:11), but God was not in that wind.

By contrast, on Pentecost, the sound of a violent wind came from heaven and brought fire and the energy of the Spirit to all believers there. Because God’s wind came to you through the waters of baptism, you have the Spirit of adoption, and are part of God’s forgiven family. God breathes blessings on you each day. Rejoice!

*Spirit, blow on me the breath of renewing, reviving faith. In Jesus’ name. Amen.*

*Think: When you are outside and feel the wind, think of the Spirit blowing on you.*

*Read: Acts 2:1-4*

*Eldor Kaiser  
Lenexa, KS*

Saturday, March 3, 2018

# New in Jesus

*Behold, I am doing a new thing ... I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.*

*Isaiah 43:19*

Isaiah told of God's anger and mercy. While captivity was coming because of the wilderness of Israel's disobedience, so God's mercy would continue like the River Jordan flowing through Israel's deserts. God's mercy extends to us through the "new thing," Jesus dying on the cross. The cross, the river of grace, has transformed our wilderness of sin.

Baptized into Jesus, we are washed for our yesterdays, todays and tomorrows. On the days when we feel lost in the wilderness of pain and sorrow, we need only look to the cross and remember that God gave us a river of hope for today and whatever might happen in the future. He did not forsake Israel; he does not forsake us.

*Dear God, keep before us the cross, so that we see Jesus, the new thing you gave us. Amen.*

*Imagine: Trace the wanderings of the Israelites on a map and imagine what it felt like to be without water.*

*Read: Isaiah 43:16-21; Hebrews 10:19-23*

*Judy Scherr  
Lemay, MO*

Sunday, March 4, 2018

# Apply Liberally

*But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ.*

*Ephesians 2:4-5*

As I read the directions on a bottle of lotion, it stated to apply liberally. I grew up in a home where everything was used, recycled and used again. Nothing was wasted. When I had a home and five children, I made use of everything also. The toothpaste tube was squeezed until empty. I used the minimum amounts of shampoo and lotion, even if the instructions directed me to “apply liberally.”

While it may be a good idea to be conservative with some things, it is definitely not the way our God operates. He never runs out of kindness, understanding or tenderness. He applies his love and forgiveness liberally to everyone. He instructs us to do the same.

*Thank you, Lord, for showering me with your unlimited love and forgiveness. Help me to do the same to others with whom I come into contact. Amen.*

*Reflect: Think about God’s applications of love to you as you apply lotion.*

*Read: Psalm 147:5; 1 John 3:1*

*Gloria Doty  
Fort Wayne, IN*

Monday, March 5, 2018

# Psalms for Lent

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

*Psalm 119:105*

*Celebration:* The Lord has done great things for us and we are filled with joy (Psalm 126:3).

*Confession:* O Lord, wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin (Psalm 51:2).

*Conversation:* Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer (Psalm 19:14).

*Confirmation:* The Lord alone is my Rock and my Salvation. He is my Fortress. I will never be shaken (Psalm 62:2).

*Contemplation:* I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in his word I put my hope (Psalm 130:5).

*Continuation:* My mouth is filled with your praise, declaring your splendor all day long (Psalm 71:8).

*Completion:* Surely goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever (Psalm 23:6).

*Lord Jesus, guide me with your Word throughout my Lenten pilgrimage. Amen.*

*List: Develop your own "C" words as you read the Psalms.*

*Read: Psalm 119*

Walter M. Schoedel  
Webster Groves, MO

Tuesday, March 6, 2018

# How Does God See?

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

*2 Corinthians 5:17*

I love imagining what well-used items can become, often assigning them a new purpose. In our home, a pipe organ pedal board stands on end serving as a glass-top entry table. A child's chair has become a wall-hung shelf, ancient hinges are candleholders, and a church hymn board holds family photos. Looking around, I am daily reminded that God's vision for restoration and renewal is far greater than ours. God sent his Son to make of us a new creation. The life, death and resurrection of Jesus have given us new life. God sees us as people restored to serve in new ways.

*God the Father, hear my prayer. Fill my heart, your love to share. In Jesus you have made me new to live to serve in all I do. Amen.*

*Do: Try something new—meet someone new, sit in a different place, experience musical variety.*

*Read: 2 Corinthians 5:14-21*

*Judith Christian  
St. Louis, MO*

Wednesday, March 7, 2018

# No Guarantees?

*The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end.*

*Lamentations 3:22*

I worked to eat healthy and exercise so I could stay active in my work, my church and my family. I was so pleased at my progress ... and then I got sick and it all seemed for naught.

A friend began seeking God's direction through prayer and Scripture reading. She felt a strong sense of God's purpose for her. Then suddenly nothing seemed to go right and she was no longer sure that she had sensed God's direction at all.

Can you relate? We try to do the "right" thing—even in following God's will—but there is no guarantee that it will turn out the way we expect. In the midst of struggles, Lamentations reminds us that God's mercies never fail. Jesus said he has overcome the world and promised to take us to be with him eternally. That's a guarantee to count on!

*Lord, in challenging times, help me to trust in your unfailing mercy. Amen.*

*Help: Encourage someone today with the reminder that God is with us even in our challenges.*

*Read: Joshua 1:9; Lamentations 3:22-23; Matthew 28:20*

*Diane Bahn  
Cypress, TX*

Thursday, March 8, 2018

# Hold the Stone!

*Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.*

*Philippians 4:8*

When asked if a certain woman should be punished, Jesus taught that anyone without sin could feel free to condemn her. Why is it so easy for us to first fault others?

Isn't it often our own insecurities that cause us to criticize? Dale Carnegie said, "What we find fault in others we often are guilty of ourselves." Do my concerns about my appearance cause me to notice another's dated attire? Does my hesitancy to share feelings make me think others drone on?

Let's replace all criticism with thoughts of God's goodness, excellence and loveliness!

*Lord, help me to recognize my judgments and change them to compliments. Amen.*

*Consider: Hold a stone in your pocket today. If you have a negative thought grasp the stone and think of something praiseworthy.*

*Read: John 8:1-11*

*Lisa Heule  
Littleton, CO*

Friday, March 9, 2018

# Mulligans

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

*Matthew 18:21-22*

When good friends play golf, they pass out mulligans for the round. If you hit a disastrous shot, a mulligan is a second chance. You want to spend those mulligans carefully, though. A mulligan doesn't turn your first shot into a better one, but it offers you a new opportunity to hit a good one.

As baptized children of God, we get mulligans galore from our risen Lord. We live in a mutual mulligan society called the church, where we freely give each other mulligans. As ambassadors for Jesus, we get to tell everyone how great it is to receive God's mulligans. We hand them out and have the joy of watching others take another swing at life, all in the name of the author and giver of life, Jesus.

*Gracious Jesus, thank you for the mulligan that is today. Help me be a mulligan maker wherever I go today. Amen*

*Forgive: Find someone who has hit a disastrous shot and hand out a mulligan.*

*Read: Matthew 18*

*Mike May  
Kansas City, KS*

Saturday, March 10, 2018

# Be a Servant

*Even as the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve.*

*Matthew 20:28*

Years ago, an elderly friend went to buy a new car in the small town where we lived. The car dealer knew her well and became slightly impatient when several times she climbed in and out of the back seat of the two-door sedan she was considering. He reminded her that she was the driver and would never have to sit in the back. She then explained that some of the women she drove to doctor appointments and social events had bad knees and hips. She wanted to be sure that they could climb in and out comfortably. What a servant attitude! It is God-pleasing for us to concern ourselves with those in our lives who have difficulties doing certain things.

*Dear God, help me to look to the welfare of others, helping where, when and if I can. Amen.*

*Serve: Is there a friend, neighbor or fellow church member who has difficulty with everyday tasks? If you are still well and able enough to do those things yourself, lend a helping hand!*

*Read: Matthew 7:12; Ephesians 6:8*

*Harriet Stennfeld  
Fort Wayne, IN*

Sunday, March 11, 2018

# Nearsighted

*Whoever lacks these qualities is so nearsighted that he is blind.*

2 Peter 1:9

What kind of character traits do people associate with you? Are virtue, knowledge, self-control, steadfastness, godliness, brotherly affection and love among those qualities? Maybe it's time to read a few self-help books or listen to an expert discuss character development. These traits "keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful" in your faith (2 Peter 1:8). Most of us probably want to be effective and fruitful in our faith!

No self-help book is needed. If these qualities are lacking, it is because our eyes of faith have become nearsighted. We are not looking back far enough to see that we have been cleansed from our past sins! Look back to the cross. Jesus died for those sins and God has cast them far from his sight. These qualities, from virtue to love, are gifts of the Spirit that flow freely from the forgiveness we have in Jesus.

*Lord Jesus, turn my sight back to your cross and help me to grow in faith. Amen.*

*See: Take a look back and remember that you have been forgiven for past sins.*

*Read: 2 Peter 1:3-11; Romans 12:1-2*

Carol Geisler  
Manchester, MO

Monday, March 12, 2018

# On the Way

*I am the way, and the truth, and the life.*

*John 14:6*

In the book of Acts, we read that Christians were first called “disciples of the Way.” I liked being called a disciple of the Way. It reminds me that because I believe in Jesus, I am on the right Way. When our sinful acts cause us to fall into the ditch of despair or when we are ditched by a friend, it is Jesus who lifts us up. By his grace he puts us back on the way of righteousness.

Our hearts sing out, “We’re on the road again.” On that road, we are never alone. Jesus is our Good Shepherd who carries us on his shoulders. He is the waiting Father who rushes up the road to embrace his prodigal child with forgiving love. It is a love to which we cling, but not nearly as much as the Father’s love embraces us. This is the only way for us to live, to forgive and to love others.

*Lord, keep me on the way to life everlasting.  
Amen.*

*Walk: Go out of your way to walk a few steps with someone who needs a friend.*

*Read: Romans 8:26-39*

*Leo Symmank  
Seabrook, TX*

Tuesday, March 13, 2018

# Clean Inside and Out

*Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.*

*Psalm 51:2*

Bedtime approaching, Mama pumped well water into the galvanized steel washtub. Water sufficiently heated, she moved the tub from atop the woodstove to the kitchen counter. Then in I went, to be cleaned of the dirt from yet another day's play—always gently, always with a mother's love.

That ritual performed so long ago comes to mind whenever I contemplate my need to be washed yet again. Human, thus inherently weak, I continually need the cleansing power about which the psalmist wrote. I, too, need “a clean heart” and “right spirit.” My mother ensured I was clean from head to toe. She also taught me that, in matters of heart and soul, only a merciful, grace-filled God can and will keep us “whiter than snow.” Restored. Made new again. What an amazing God we serve!

*Merciful Lord, search me anew this day. Bathe me in your unending grace until I am once again of clean heart and renewed spirit. Amen.*

*Sing: Read or sing the words to “Spirit of the Living God.”*

*Read: Psalm 51:1-12; Matthew 8:1-3*

*Robert Stephens  
Glen Allen, VA*

Wednesday, March 14, 2018

# Bonds

*Two are better than one ... For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow.*

*Ecclesiastes 4:9-10*

This year my wife and I celebrate our 50th wedding anniversary. In 1965, my future wife knelt at the church altar and prayed that God would bring the right person into her life. As she walked out of the church door, I happened to be driving by and asked her if she needed a ride. Three years later, we were married at that same altar.

The Bible is filled with examples of God bringing the right friends (David and Jonathan), right relatives (Ruth and Naomi), and right spouses (Joseph and Mary) together to lift each other up. The Bible also tells us that God sent the right person, his Son Jesus, to save us from our sins. Throughout our lives, we need to be lifted up physically, emotionally or spiritually. God will provide the right person.

*Lord, use me to lift up others. Amen.*

*Recall: Share a time when your spouse, friend or relative lifted you up.*

*Read: Psalm 37:23-24; 2 Corinthians 1:3-5*

*Stan Torsden  
Stewartville, MN*

Thursday, March 15, 2018

# March Madness

*Because I live, you also will live.*

*John 14:19*

“March Madness” is used to describe the NCAA Basketball Tournament that takes 128 teams down to one winner in just three weeks. As Christians we observe a March Madness of our own. For us, however, it occurs in just three days during the week we call “Holy.”

During our Lenten sadness of March, we repent of our sins and remember the suffering that Jesus endured on our behalf. Our Lord is taken away by soldiers after the Last Supper and his time in Gethsemane. He is led before Pontius Pilate and sentenced to death. Jesus is beaten, pierced and nailed to a cross and left to die. He is taken from the cross and placed in a tomb, which is sealed for fear of grave robbers. On the third day Jesus rises again and gives us eternal life. That is truly March Madness!

*Jesus, thank you for suffering and dying on the cross for me, so that in this world of “madness” I might have the promised hope of eternal life. Amen.*

*Share: Talk to a friend about God’s help for you during times that seemed chaotic.*

*Read: Matthew 15; John 14:15-20*

*Margaret Rickers Hinchey  
Denver, CO*

Friday, March 16, 2018

# New Again

*And he said to them, "Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like a master of a house, who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old."*

*Matthew 13:52*

Two granddaughters opened a delightful shop where they recycle furniture and other household items. Their stock comes from auctions and garage sales; they take pride in showing each piece off to its best advantage. Now those "old things" are becoming new things for new owners.

Ever feel like an "old thing"? Perhaps, but sharing with others is a way to recycle memories and renew energy. Does your church need help serving seniors? There are wonderful resources out there to help you get started. Get together with some friends and see how experiences and talents can best be used. Become a New Thing!

*Thank you, Lord, for my full life. Help me to share my joys with others. Amen.*

*Give: Donate items that can be recycled and made new.*

*Read: Revelation 21:1-6*

*Gail A Lutz  
Valparaiso, IN*

Saturday, March 17, 2018

# Holding Hands

*But when the crowd had been put outside, [Jesus] went in and took her by the hand, and the girl arose.*

*Matthew 9:25*

When did you learn to hold hands? As a toddler, crossing the street with your mother? In school, learning a game with classmates? At the movies with your special someone? At the altar on your wedding day? At a hospital bedside? Throughout life, it pays to be “hands on.”

The gospels reveal Jesus our Lord as a “hands on” person. He healed in many ways, often with the touch of his hand. Knowing his nature, we imagine holding his hand as we live through hard times, relying on his guidance. We count on his hand leading us and loved ones to heaven.

Now God gives us hands to hold one another. Take someone’s hand. Hold it as Jesus would—in compassion, with love, to encourage, in celebration and with joy.

*Dear Jesus, hold me and all your children in the palm of your hand. Amen.*

*Touch: Whose hand will you hold today?*

*Read: Matthew 9:18-26; Luke 13:10-13*

*Donna J. Streufert  
South Bend, IN*

Sunday, March 18, 2018

# A Kingdom Like Kindergarten

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

*1 John 3:1*

At the funeral of a long-time colleague and fellow kindergarten teacher, the pastor said, “The kingdom of God is more like kindergarten than college.” So true! Expanding our knowledge by learning and studying complex theological truths is important and even necessary to fully understand the magnitude of God’s grace. However, regardless of the extent of our theological knowledge, the fundamental message is the same: Jesus loves me, this I know!

Jesus freely welcomes children (us) into his presence. With simple trust, enfolded in the arms of Jesus, we find ourselves in exactly the right place. It is there that we, his children, are truly blessed. There are no final exams, questionnaires, or entrance fees—just his welcoming arms granting us his eternal blessing.

*Jesus, thank you for welcoming me into your kingdom. Amen.*

*Sing or pray: “Jesus Loves Me, This I Know.”*

*Read: Luke 15:11-32*

*Judith Christian  
St. Louis, MO*

Monday, March 19, 2018

# Perfect

*Be transformed ... that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.*

*Romans 12:2*

Your dentist asks you to “open wide and hide your tongue.” After the third try he announces, “Perfect!” The checkout lady asks “Paper or plastic?” You say paper and she says, “Perfect.” I inform my good husband that it is leftover night and kindly he says, “Perfect.” One definition of that word is “entirely without fault or defect.” I would like to bake one perfect soufflé before I die and send one perfect email.

The above Bible verse indicates that “perfect” starts and ends with the will of God. The will of God also defines “good” and “acceptable.” At times I feel far from the will of God, but how thankful I am for a Savior that took care of “perfect” on a cross long ago, for you and for me.

*Perfect Lord, help me daily find what is good and acceptable in your sight. Amen.*

*Listen: Count the number of times you hear the word perfect this week. Smile and say a quick “thank you” to our loving Lord and Savior.*

*Read: James 1:17*

*Lois Scheer  
San Diego, CA*

Tuesday, March 20, 2018

# Out With the Old, in With the New

*But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.*

*Philippians 3:13-14*

I have a guilty secret. My side of the wardrobe is bulging and I can't fit any more clothing in. Many of my clothes are too small or out of fashion, but I hold onto them "just in case." Until I find the courage to cull these outdated items, there will be no room for anything new.

The state of my wardrobe paints a picture of life. Sometimes life gets cluttered by outdated pursuits and interests, unhealthy friendships and goals that we have outgrown. Sometimes God asks us gently to let go of unhelpful parts of our life to make room for something new.

*Dear Lord, please reveal areas in my life needing renewal. Help me let go of unhealthy thoughts and habits, making way for something new. Amen.*

*Write: List what came to mind as you prayed and share with a trusted friend.*

*Read: Proverbs 4:25; Colossians 3:2*

*Kerry Osborne  
Sydney, Australia*

Wednesday, March 21, 2018

# Restoration

*Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth.*

*Revelation 21:1*

No, I am not restoring a '57 Chevy. My restoration projects are much simpler. I like good polish on three-year-old shoes, new paint on this old house, and quality wax on my used car. I like to make things look new.

Jesus enjoys making things new. He pronounces new in baptism. He serves new in the Lord's Supper. He says new when we forgive each other. He lays new gently on my head as I rise each morning.

God has planned the largest of restoration projects: a new heaven, new earth. It's costly. Jesus shed his precious blood as payment. There will be a newness you and I have never experienced before: no tears, no mourning, no crying, no pain, no death ... no consequences of sin. All will worship the Triune God. Restoration complete.

*Triune God, thank you for restoring the "old" that came as a result of humanity's sin. Amen.*

*Remember: When life's moment seems worn out, God says, "Behold, I am making all things new" (Revelation 21:5).*

*Read: Revelation 21:1-7*

*Harry Edenfield  
Brownstown, MI*

Thursday, March 22, 2018

# Olly Olly Oxen Free

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

*John 8:36*

Remember playing Hide and Seek as a child? You hid nervously behind a tree or rock, terrified you would be discovered and tagged out before you could get away. And then that blessed shout rang out: “Olly Olly Oxen Free!” You could run home safely. No one knows for sure where that phrase originated, but many linguists believe it came from the German phrase “*Alle, alle, auch sind frei,*” translated, “All, all also are free.”

Harsh words spoken to family or friends, health or financial worries, broken relationships—these also leave us terrified and unable to escape. But from the cross we hear the blessed shout of Jesus, our Savior: “It is finished.” You are free. Welcome home.

*Heavenly Father, we have sinned against you and each other. Forgive us for the sake of Jesus, by whose death you have declared us free to come home to you forever. Amen.*

*Reflect: Remember the 1972 children’s entertainment project, “Free to Be You and Me”? For what has God’s Son set you free?*

*Read: Galatians 5:13-15*

*Eileen Ritter  
Grand Haven, MI*

Friday, March 23, 2018

# Put Your Hope in God

*Why are you cast down, O my soul? ... Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation and my God.*

*Psalm 42:5-6*

Hard knocks happen in life, like it or not. Losses, illness, tragedy, stress, anxiety—all this and more can leave you downcast, almost at the end of your rope. But at the end of the rope there is hope, the palmist reminds us. God our Savior gives hope to the hopeless, help to the helpless, faith to the fearful, new courage to the downcast. The cross of Christ speaks of hope in the midst of the hard knocks that befall us, for our Savior has defeated the worst that can possibly happen, even death.

Today put your hope in God. He will renew your hope and the courage you need to deal with hard knocks. Today, praise him, your Savior and God, for he is with you and within you for life, forever.

*Renew me, Lord Jesus, with the good news of the cross where you gave me everlasting hope. Amen.*

*Show: Display or wear a cross as a reminder that Jesus defeated the hard knocks of life for you.*

*Read: Romans 8:31-39*

*Paul Scheidt  
Chesterfield, MO*

Saturday, March 24, 2018

# The Real Thing!

*But whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected.*

1 John 2:5

On April 23, 1985, Coca-Cola announced that it was changing its 100-year-old formula by introducing “New Coke.” There was a firestorm of consumer protest over changing a formula that was thought to be tried and true. Protesters at a Coca-Cola event in Atlanta were seen carrying signs that read, “We want the real thing.” Ultimately, the folks at Coca-Cola brought back classic Coke.

Many people find excitement in things that are brand new. Yet there is value in something or someone who has been around for a while. The older we get, the more “mileage” or “experience” we have to share in shaping lives. Pointing to our experiences (including our errors), we then point to the love of God in Christ Jesus who comes to us in his Word and forgives our sins. The love of God never goes out of style.

*Dear Jesus, in sharing my experiences, help me to be a blessing to others. Amen.*

*Share: How has God used your experiences to mold you into the person you are today?*

*Read: Romans 8:28; 2 Corinthians 1:3-4*

Jonathan Vierkant  
West Bend, WI

Sunday, March 25, 2018

# Looking for Trouble?

*Religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.*

*James 1:27*

A family brought palm branches home from Palm Sunday worship and gave them to their eight-year-old who was ill and could not worship that day. The mother explained that they held the branches over Jesus' head as he walked by them. Showing disappointment, the son murmured, "Wouldn't you know it, the one Sunday I miss and Jesus shows up!"

Jesus always shows up, in and through us, as we live and serve him daily. We are "Jesus with skin on." The Lord empowers us to look for the lonely, the lost and the least. This is the message of Holy Week. Christ's death and resurrection move us to bring hope and peace to the poor and the pushed-down.

*Lord, open our eyes to see the hurts of others in our world. Let them see you through us in what we do and say. Amen.*

*Help: Focus on those, both locally and worldwide, struggling with troubles in life. Pray, visit and provide financial support, as you are able.*

*Read: 1 John 3:16-18*

*Rich Bimler  
Bloomington, IL*

Monday, March 26, 2018

# The Week That Changed the World

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

*Galatians 4:4*

On February 28, 1972, in a speech at the close of his trip to China, President Nixon said, “This was the week that changed the world.” However, the translator simply said, “This was a very important week.”

Today many people in our society celebrate Holy Week as an important week. They look forward to a family Easter celebration or a spring break trip. But for us who live by faith in our crucified and risen Savior, Holy Week truly is the week that changed the world.

Because of what Jesus accomplished for us during that first Holy Week, we have a new life with God and a new purpose for our life each day. Above all, we know where we will spend eternity.

*Heavenly Father, we praise you for sending your Son to redeem us from the powers of sin and death. Amen.*

*Invite: Ask someone to join you for a Holy Week or Easter service.*

*Read: Galatians 4:4-7; John 19:28-30*

*Gilbert Duchow  
Hilliard, OH*

Tuesday, March 27, 2018

# God Renews

*Remember your word to your servant, in which you have made me hope. This is my comfort in my affliction, that your promise gives me life.*

*Psalm 119:49-50*

As we age, our world shrinks. We can no longer go places and do exciting things as we used to. That roomy house gives way to a small apartment, a room in a care center, a hospital bed, a box in a hole in the ground. Depressing, isn't it?

God's promises open a totally new chapter for us. Jesus Christ was crucified for us, died and was buried. That is not the end! On the third day he was raised again. Now the living Savior promises that same future to all who believe in him. You, too, will be with him where he is. A door is waiting to open for you. Live today in the assurance of the promise of your crucified and living Savior.

*Thank you, Lord, for your gracious promise. Renew my hope and faith so I can live confidently today. Amen.*

*Comfort: Share with others the hope of the resurrection!*

*Read: John 14:19*

*Paul Scheidt  
Chesterfield, MO*

Wednesday, March 28, 2018

# The First Pioneer

*Looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith.*

*Hebrews 12:2*

*Pioneer* brings to mind images of early settlers crossing the American plains to begin new lives in the West. Have you ever considered Jesus as a pioneer? Hebrews 12:2 calls Jesus the founder of our faith. Some versions of Scripture use the word *author* rather than *founder*. But a few versions translate the original Greek using the word *pioneer*.

American pioneers crossed the plains and opened the way to the West. Jesus came to earth and opened the way to heaven. When Jesus on the cross declared his work finished, the curtain in the temple was torn in two. No longer was there a barrier in front of the holiest place. By the shedding of his blood for our sins, Jesus opened the way for us to be saved by faith. Jesus is the pioneer, the author, the founder of our faith. We look to him for our salvation.

*Thank you, Jesus, for being the first pioneer and opening the way to heaven by faith. Amen.*

*Consider: How does a covered-wagon trek westward compare to a life-long journey heavenward?*

*Read: Hebrews 2:9-10; Hebrews 10:19-25*

*Marj Maynard  
Billings, MO*

Thursday, March 29, 2018

# Loving the Hard to Love: Us!

*By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.*

*John 13:35*

Some people are hard to love. Some people you love to love. God is love (1 John 4:8). Should my response of loving be different, dependent on how I am treated? This world would say yes. But God in his love for us, his wayward, hard-to-love children, loved us while we were still his enemies. How can we be more like him and love even the hard to love? We can't. That's why Jesus' sacrifice and resurrection made us new creations. We no longer live by the world's ways. We have the Spirit of love living in us. Jesus is the way. Pray for healing, for his powerful Spirit to work through our old self and be made new. Live in the truth that he will do it.

*Thank you, Jesus, you are the way, you are the love. Amen.*

*Ask: Pray for someone you know who is hard to love.*

*Read: John 14:6; Romans 5:8; 2 Corinthians 5:17*

*Nancy Rapp  
St. Louis, MO*

Friday, March 30, 2018

# Absolutely Needed

*Indeed, under the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.*

*Hebrews 9:22*

Our lives depend on air, water and the blood running through our veins. Without any of this life would not exist. Air is taken into our lungs without much thought. Water is taken when we are thirsty or when we need to stay hydrated. Blood, on the other hand, is basically hidden unless we cut ourselves or donate it. Without blood, our bodies cannot function as God designed.

On the first Good Friday, blood was shed as God planned. The plan was put into action when our earthly parents Adam and Eve sinned against God's instructions. God offered his Son Jesus for us and because of his love for us, Jesus gave his life for the sake of our eternal salvation.

*Heavenly Father, you gave us blood to give us life. You sent your Son to shed his blood for us so that we would have everlasting life. Amen.*

*Reflect: Think of Christ if you have a bleeding cut or scrape.*

*Read: Matthew 26:27-29*

*Don Hollmann  
Ballwin, MO*

Saturday, March 31, 2018

# New Every Morning

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

*2 Corinthians 5:17*

Morning! It's new, another beginning, with a fresh to-do list for the day. Plans are expressions of our earthly selves, but we need Scripture to ground our spirits.

New every morning describes our saved, forgiven souls. We can, because Jesus went to the cross, wake each morning knowing that the mistakes of yesterday, the weariness of the night before and all the things that made us say "I wish ..." have been lifted, covered up, forgiven. The Holy Spirit refreshes us with the strength to trust in God's presence in our struggles and our joys. The day is new because we have been made new by the grace of God who gave us Jesus, the perfect sacrifice.

*Gracious Father, you gave us your Son and peace with you. Draw us closer with each passing day and every new morning. Amen.*

*Do: Write the word NEW on a sticky note and put it on your Bible.*

*Read: Lamentations 3:19-24; 2 Corinthians 5:16-21*

*Judy Scherr  
Lemay, MO*

# HOLY HABITS for **HOPE-FULL HEALTH**

## A BUCKET LIST FOR 2018

Isaiah 43:19 gives us energy to seek out new ways to do “new things” as we serve and celebrate our faith in this new year. Check out these ideas, or, better yet, make your own “Bucket List” of ways that you can make new things happen in 2018:

1. Call, e-mail or write an old friend with whom you have not talked recently. Say hi, catch up and thank this friend for being your friend. Do it weekly.
2. Meet a new neighbor and bring a small welcome gift with you. Be your own “welcome wagon” service in your community!
3. Keep track each day of how many times you say “yes” and how many times you say “no” to people. Reward yourself on the days when the yeses outnumber the noes!
4. Decide where in the world you would like to visit—Australia, England, Nebraska. Then relax in a comfortable chair, close your eyes, and take the trip in your own mind! Imagine the kangaroos, the queen and the corn ... A very inexpensive but enjoyable trip!
5. Make it a habit to say, “My, you’re aging gracefully!” to everyone you meet this week. And believe it yourself!

# Hope-Full Praying

## *New Year*

In this new year, Lord, help me to reflect on how you loved and led me through last year, especially as you forgave me during the rough days. Get me off to a good start this year as you lead, direct and comfort me and as you give me the hope that I can only find in you. 2018 will be great, not because of me, but because you are already beside me. Amen.

## *Protection*

Today I do not ask you to prevent all bad things from happening to me, Lord, but rather to keep assuring me that you are always there to protect me from anything that could take me away from you. What a comfort, Lord, to know that, even through suffering and death, you are with me always. Amen.

## *Health Concerns*

Lord, I am sad this day as I struggle with pain, both my own and that of others whom I love. Help me to face death as though I've already been there, knowing that life is terminal but your love is not. Make today seem longer and go farther so I can bring more of your grace to others. I want to feel safe, in you, Lord, forever. Amen.

### *Worries*

Sometimes I feel that I am the chief of worriers, Lord! Why is that? I know you love and care for me and yet I sometimes doubt that you are really with me. Forgive me, and instill in me through your Word, sacraments and your people who surround me that even when things are not okay, things are okay, in you. Amen.

### *Sleeplessness*

Jesus, why is it that when I was younger I wanted to stay up all night and not go to bed but now I want to go to bed, but I cannot sleep! Please enable me to see sleep as not only a necessity but also as a gift. Help me to count my blessings instead of sheep, and yet don't keep me focused on the sheep, but rather on you, the Shepherd. Amen.

### *For Those Who Mourn*

Lord, while I am praying now, someone is dying. While I am living and making plans for tomorrow, someone is dying today. While I celebrate, someone is in sorrow. Comfort them, and keep me celebrating until the end, and then give me the greatest celebration ever, in heaven. Amen.

## *Abilities*

Thank you, Lord, for all of the gifts you have given to us. As we age, help us to continue to share these talents, and better yet, to acknowledge other gifts that we have but perhaps have not used as much—like listening to the young, encouraging the newlyweds and praying unceasingly. Thanks for the gift of life in you, Lord, the best gift ever. Amen.

## *Caring for Others*

Lord, where have all my neighbors gone? Where are those who have supported and forgiven me for all of these years? Many have moved away or journeyed to heaven. But your people are still around me, Lord, if I only would look for them and care for them. Push me to care for these new people, young and old, whom you have sneaked into my life. Amen.

## *Trying New Things*

Lord, convince me that, yes, “You can teach an old dog new tricks”! Wherever you are, everything is possible, and you are with me always! So encourage me, challenge me, empower me and make me dream new and exciting things to do, even today, because you indeed are with me. Look out world, here I come. Amen.

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