

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, October 1, 2018

No Two Alike

Out of the ground the Lord God made to spring up every tree that is pleasant to the sight.

Genesis 2:9

At the house where I lived for 35 years, we had woods in our back yard. Every fall the leaves changed colors and how beautiful they were! In our northern climates, God continues to paint a beautiful picture every fall. Guess what happens when the leaves die? We have an abundance of leaves to rake.

There were a few times that my kids and I tried to see if we could match up two identical leaves. But after a few minutes, we found it hopeless.

However, the positive lesson in all of this is realizing that our changeless Creator has the power not to duplicate any leaves. Knowing that God our Father is able to do this, how comforting it should be for us to know that he takes care of each of his unique creatures until he calls home those who believe in his Son Jesus Christ.

*Lord, help us focus on the beauty of your creation.
Amen.*

Focus: Watch God's creation of leaves change color.

Read: Ezekiel 31:1-9

*Ken Schilf
New Haven, IN*

Tuesday, October 2, 2018

Oh Happy Day!

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

Psalm 118:24

Fall is my favorite color! What a great time to celebrate a Lord of falling leaves, special holy days and even exciting baseball playoff games. Fall is also a great time to affirm that God does not love us because we are good; God loves us because God is good. Nothing we can do will either increase or decrease God's love for us in Christ Jesus.

A comic strip says it well: A person quips, "This is a special day. I'm so happy." Another adds, "This isn't a holiday!" The first one responds, "I know. So many people wait until a holiday to be happy, which leaves all the rest of the year to me!" So, let's celebrate this fall day, because the Lord has made it, just for us.

Lord, thanks for this fall day, holiday or not. Let us rejoice and be glad, simply because you love us, always. Amen.

Rejoice: Talk with a friend about ways to celebrate this day in a special way, just because!

Read: Psalm 19

*Rich Bimler
Bloomingdale, IL*

Wednesday, October 3, 2018

Doing It the Right Way

I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

John 14:6

As a young boy I rode my new pony to the pasture to bring home the milk cows. The pony refused my neck reigning, so I dropped the reins and said, "Then you do it." She herded the cows together in one group and brought them home. She had more experience than I did.

Sometimes it is important to let people render service in their own way. It may also be God's way. If their way fails, then be ready to lift them up with kindness. We look to Jesus as our example. He prayed to his Father to find another way to carry out his plan for mankind. His Father insisted on his way, and Jesus obeyed. It was the Father's way to bring his children back home. It is the only way to be in his family. Praise to the Father, Son and Holy Spirit!

Lord, be our guide as we walk the Jesus road, sharing Jesus, the Way to eternal life, with others. Amen.

Help: Work with someone to reach out to those in need.

Read: John 14:15-21

*Leo Symmank
Seebrook, TX*

Thursday, October 4, 2018

Crush Time?

Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word.

Acts 8:4

It's crush time in wine country! Grapes look lovely on the vine, but lose their appeal if not harvested, crushed so the juice flows, fermented, bottled and aged. Wine also looks beautiful in bottles, but they must be uncorked and poured for thirsty palates to enjoy.

Christ's disciples gather like clusters of grapes in communities of faith, embracing the Gospel of Jesus Christ. However, we cannot fully bless others unless we are "crushed," so to speak, and the fruit of the Gospel flows from our churches and, indeed, from within our own skins as we carry the Gospel into our communities. The earliest Christians were "crushed" by persecution. Yet these intrepid followers of Jesus freely shared the Gospel wherever they went. May the Lord employ more gentle means of "crushing" to encourage us.

Lord, work in me to encourage me to share your message more freely! Amen.

Pray: Intercede for Christians undergoing persecution, while drawing inspiration from their example.

Read: Acts 7:54-60; Acts 8:1-4

*Ted Zimmerman
Napa, CA*

Friday, October 5, 2018

Reflections of Our Creator

So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

Genesis 1:27

When you look at yourself in the mirror, what do you see? No, this is not a trick question! Do you see reflections of family like your parents or grandparents? I know the older I become, I am beginning to see more physical traits of several family members.

All comparison aside, what we say and do is a reflection of who we are as people created by God and as Christians. But more importantly, whom do you see in your reflection? Do you see your Savior? How do you treat others?

We are all sinners and live in a sinful world, but we can ask the Holy Spirit to help us love others as Jesus would. We can share the love of Jesus with the people we meet each day.

Dear Father, help me always to reflect your love and grace to those I meet in my earthly life. Amen.

Action: Show kindness and compassion to someone you meet today.

Read: Matthew 7:12

*Betsy Becker Niedringhaus
Ballwin, MO*

Saturday, October 6, 2018

Our True Home

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

Psalm 46:1

Earlier this year fires ravaged bushland close to our home in southern Sydney, Australia. From our balcony we could see the bright glow of the flames and plumes of grey smoke. We packed our precious belongings, just in case we had to evacuate. I chose photographs of loved ones, my computer and our pet bird, and my son, an avid reader, chose four bags of his favorite books. Thankfully, firefighters tamed the fire and although a vast area of bushland was burnt, no lives or homes were lost.

Fear looms large when we are faced with the loss of our home and valued possessions. As I gazed at those glowing embers, I was reminded of how fragile our physical home really is and that our true, unshakable, everlasting home is found as we rest in the loving presence of our heavenly Father. No matter what we may lose in this life, God is our true home and our refuge forever.

Heavenly Father, thank you for sheltering us with your love, now and forever. Amen.

Reflect: What are the false shelters in your life?

Read: Psalm 91:1-2

*Kerry Osborne
Sydney, Australia*

Sunday, October 7, 2018

Latch On

I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.

Isaiah 41:10

The smoke detector gave our family a jolt. There was no fire but the blaring siren scared us all. My grandson's first thought was to latch onto his mother's legs. His two-year-old arms held tight, immobilizing her. He refused to let go until she lifted him into her arms.

What is my first reaction when trouble threatens like unexpected bills, or things that go “bump” in the night? If I learn from my grandson, I'll bypass the worry and latch on to the one I know I can count on. I'll run to the Lord who has promised to care for me—not letting go until I rest in the peace of his arms. Who better to turn to than the Creator of the universe, who formed me and called me to be his?

Heavenly Father, you are with me. I will not be afraid. Amen.

Share: Tell someone of how God has cared for you in the past.

Read: Isaiah 43:1-7; Romans 8:31

*Lynne Waite Chapman
Fort Wayne, IN*

Monday, October 8, 2018

Chocolate Moments

Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God.

Revelation 21:3

Chocolate for many of us is a guilty pleasure. One brand, Dove, wraps each little morsel in a foil wrapper. Inside is a fun little message to savor along with the sweet richness melting on your tongue. A favorite urged me to “Read the last page first.” It brought my thoughts to the Bible. At the end of the Bible we read the assurance that we will see the face of Jesus our Savior. He will be the only light needed and we will reign forever with him (Revelation 22:3-5). Jesus is coming soon. Come, Lord Jesus!

For now, share the good news! Live in the joy of knowing your Book of Life ends happily forever after. Go ahead! “Read the last page first!”

Dear Lord, thank you for all of life's simple pleasures. Thank you that we can live each day assured that we will live with you forever. Amen.

Taste: Savor a piece of your favorite chocolate with a friend, and attach your favorite Bible verse so your friend can savor God's promises.

Read: Revelation 21:1-7; Romans 1:16-17

*Nancy Rapp
St. Louis, MO*

Tuesday, October 9, 2018

Fear, Focus and Faith

The Lord is on my side; I will not fear.

Psalm 118:6

I remember the first time I thought about retiring from teaching. All sorts of fears flooded my mind. Would I miss the interaction with the students? Would I be able to support myself with only Social Security and my pension? The fear of it all invaded my mind, making it impossible for me to enjoy the prospects of a new phase in my life. I wasn't focusing on the Lord's power, and I certainly wasn't living out my faith.

What does the Lord have to say about fear, focus and faith? Psalm 34 says he delivered me from all my fears. Zephaniah 3 reminds us that God is in your midst. Mark 5 tells us to just believe. So, how do we overcome our fears and focus on the Lord? We look to Scripture daily and cling to his comforting words.

Thank you, Jesus, for taking away our fears and for strengthening our faith during our weakest times. Amen.

List: Write each of your fears on slips of paper. Read them aloud and then shred them.

Read: Romans 8:38-39; Psalm 27:1; 2 Timothy 1:7

*Jan Bathke
Neenah, WI*

Wednesday, October 10, 2018

Life and Purpose

In him was life, and the life was the light of men.

John 1:4

A scientist discussing DNA research said, “Science used to be about discovery, but now it is about creation. We rewrite the sentences of life to our purposes.” It is a frightening statement that pretty well summarizes human pride and our rebellion against our Creator. In our fallen state, we want to be like God and replace his purposes with our own plans.

Our Lord Jesus was born among us to restore what was lost, and “in him was life.” He lived, died and rose from death, obedient to the purposes of his heavenly Father. Through faith in Jesus, we are restored to a right relationship with our God and Creator. The sentences of our lives don’t need to be rewritten; God himself has given us purpose: “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).

Lord Jesus, through faith in your name we have life and purpose—to love and serve you through serving others. Amen.

Serve: Look for ways, great and small, to serve others in love.

Read: John 1:1-5; John 10:7-11

*Carol Geisler
Manchester, MO*

Thursday, October 11, 2018

A Spiritual Treasure Box

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

Do you have a special box of personal treasures? Maybe they are mementos from happy times, cards, photos and drawings. All these things are reminders of treasured relationships and experiences. You can build a keepsake box of spiritual treasures too, things that are true, honorable and just and treasures that are pure, lovely and commendable. Anything excellent or praiseworthy can go in the box.

Think about the blessings in your spiritual treasure box anytime you need a lift. Jesus will be happy to look through the box alongside you.

Lord Jesus, thank you for the spiritual treasures you've given me. Help me to focus on them instead of my worries. Amen.

Talk: Tell someone about one of your spiritual treasures and ask them about one of theirs.

Read: Matthew 6:21; Luke 12:21

*Sarah Geringer
Jackson, MO*

Friday, October 12, 2018

Ready, Fire, Aim

For it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.

Matthew 10:20

When we converse with friends and fellow believers, we may be reluctant to share an item of our faith, thinking that we don't know enough or are not well "prepared" to speak. But remember, Jesus does not send out his disciples like preprogrammed robots, incapable of responding to changing situations. He readies them, launches them and then stays in constant contact with them to correct the "aim." When we listen carefully to others and their stories and listen carefully to the Father through prayer and the Word, we are readied by the fire of the Holy Spirit. The words are not ours but the Father's and accomplish God's aims. It is no longer our goal, our word, but that of Jesus. He continues to ready, fire and aim you through all of the changing scenes of life.

Jesus, let me hear your Spirit encouraging and leading me to speak the faith you have given me. Amen.

Practice: The next time you read Scripture, pause and frame a prayer based on its direction.

Read: Matthew 10:16-20; Isaiah 55:8-13

*Mike May
Kansas City, KS*

Saturday, October 13, 2018

Behind and Before

You hem me in, behind and before, and lay your hand upon me.

Psalm 139:5

One time when my children were young, we were at a campground with other families. It was nighttime when the park ranger came through announcing we needed to take shelter as a tornado was headed directly toward the camp. The adults quickly lined the children up, tied a rope around each one's waist and started the trek to a ravine. The children were understandably terrified, but stayed calm as long as we continued to remind them there was an adult in front of them and another at the back, assuring them they would not get lost. It was much like God's protection of the Israelites.

Our adult fears may be different but are still very real. If we remind ourselves of God's promise to go before us and behind us, we can move forward with confidence and without fear.

Heavenly Father, help us to remember we are tied to you and will not become lost. Amen.

Share: Tell someone about a very real fear that you have.

Read: Exodus 13:21

*Gloria Doty
Ft. Wayne, IN*

Sunday, October 14, 2018

Slipping Up

For when I am weak, then I am strong.

2 Corinthians 12:10

One day I awoke feeling blue and prayed to God to show me that he loves me. On my way out to lunch I slipped on a discarded piece of lettuce and fell painfully, twisting my knee. As I hit the ground with a thud, I thought ruefully: “Well, God, that’s a funny way of showing it!”

As the pain set in and I realized I couldn’t get up, several kind-hearted people came to my aid. Strangers sometimes seem cold and distant, but the faces peering down at me were warm and compassionate. The doctor ordered complete rest, so my husband and sons miraculously produced delicious food and endless cups of tea. I had time to read and reflect.

As I switched off my lamp several nights later, I smiled as I realized God really had answered my prayer, albeit in an unusual way. In my weakness, he had shown me his love, through the helping hands of strangers, my family and the gift of rest.

Lord, let us rest in you each day. Amen.

Reflect: Have you ever had an unexpected answer to prayer?

Read: 2 Corinthians 12:9-10; John 4:9-12

*Kerry Osborne
Sydney, Australia*

Monday, October 15, 2018

In Good Hands

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

Matthew 11:28

We all know the TV commercial that goes, “You’re in good hands with Allstate.” It is comforting to know you are in good hands. A nurse says to a patient going into surgery, “He is an excellent surgeon. You are in good hands.”

Christians are in the best hands of all, the nail-scarred hands of our Lord and Savior. They are the hands that reached out to touch and heal countless sick people. His hands raised the dead. Parents brought their children to Jesus and he put his hands upon them and blessed them (Matthew 19:13). Moses assures believers, “The eternal God is your dwelling place, and underneath are the everlasting arms” (Deuteronomy 33:27). Our risen Redeemer takes you by the hand and leads you day by day. When you are weak, he upholds you in his eternal arms. Rest assured, you are in good hands, right now and forever.

Loving Lord, thank you for comforting me with your wounded and healing hands. Amen.

Reach out: When a friend or neighbor is in need, offer a helping hand.

Read: Romans 12:10-16

*Chuck Conner
Festus, MO*

Tuesday, October 16, 2018

Because He Lives

He has fixed a day on which he will judge the world ... of this he has given assurance to all by raising [Christ] from the dead.

Acts 17:31

Do you make a list before you go to bed at night of what you want to do tomorrow? It's a good exercise, especially for us who are retired. Now there is no rush to get things done as when we were fully employed. But lingering in our minds is the eerie question: Why even do it?

If you have been given good health and skills, I believe God wants us to make the most of them. Have you ever thought about what God did on the seventh day after he had created all things? I think he looked back over what he created and took great satisfaction in what he did. It was that good. We can also take great satisfaction in believing what he did when he raised his Son, Jesus, from the tomb. Because of this, we do not need to fear what tomorrow will bring. It will be filled with many blessings.

O Jesus, bless us with the hope that tomorrow will bring many resurrection blessings. Amen.

Anticipate: Name one positive thing that you anticipate happening tomorrow.

Read: Romans 8

*Gordon Beck
Williamsburg, VA*

Wednesday, October 17, 2018

No Separation

For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Romans 8:38-39

Have you been separated from family or friends because of a job transfer, retirement, move across the country, sickness or death? Indeed, we've all faced separation from others, and seek the love and presence of others nearby. Oftentimes, when we don't visit with others on a regular basis, we feel distant and separated from them.

More importantly, what separates us from God? What takes us away from his love? Nothing! Nothing can take us away from his love. He speaks with us through the reading and hearing of his Word. No wall is too high and no beast too strong to separate us from the nearness of God.

Thank you, Lord, for placing no barriers between you and me. Your nearness brings comfort and joy to me. Amen.

Remember: God is near you right now.

Read: Romans 10:8-13

*MaryAnn Sundby
Castle Rock, CO*

Thursday, October 18, 2018

Fear of Rejection

Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine.

Isaiah 43:1

A couple in my extended family adopted a boy last year from China. He had been found in a box in a park when he was about one year old. He grew up in an orphanage. At age five he was welcomed into their loving family.

Overall, he is assimilating well. Most days he feels secure. But sometimes he fears that his family will reject him. Recently he asked his grandma, “Will you always love me?” She reassured him with a hug and a word, “Always!”

Even though we are often assured in God’s Word that our heavenly Father loves us, we may still worry that we will be rejected because of our weaknesses and failures. Thankfully, we can always trust God’s sure promise, which was fulfilled for us by Jesus: “Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine.”

Loving God, thank you for your blessed assurance that I will always be part of your family. Amen.

Comfort: Assure the members of your extended family that they are loved by God and by you.

Read: Isaiah 43:1-11

*Gil Duchow
Muskego, WI*

Friday, October 19, 2018

A Place in the Choir

Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.

1 Corinthians 12:27

Have you heard this Irish tune? “All God’s creatures got a place in the choir; some sing low, some sing higher, some sing out loud on the telephone wires.” If you hear it once, it sticks with you all day. But more than that, it draws you into a truth about the community of faith created by our love for Christ Jesus, namely that we’re all in God’s love together.

Martin Luther King, Jr., once said, “We may all have come on different ships, but we’re all in the same boat.” St. Paul takes this one step further: “Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.” All God’s creatures got a place in the choir. And that includes you and me.

Dear Lord Jesus, let all my songs be music to your ears. Amen.

Trust: God can take even our sour notes and turn them into song.

Read: 1 Corinthians 12:12-27

*Edward Arle
St. Charles, MO*

Saturday, October 20, 2018

Here Am I—Send Her!

I heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” Then I said, “Here am I! Send me.”

Isaiah 6:8

In all honesty, I must confess that the title above, “Here am I—Send her!” is a more accurate assessment of my living out my Christian faith. How about you? After all, we older adults have put in “our time,” haven’t we? We’ve done our jobs as Bible class teachers, council members and food pantry helpers, and we certainly have done much more than some of “those people” we can name! Isn’t it about time to let the younger folks get more involved in ministry? Well, to be perfectly honest, no!

It is always good to encourage and train others for ministries. However, perhaps the Lord is giving us more years to live so we can take up new ministry challenges now. Could the Lord possibly be “sending us” to that lonely neighbor or distraught teen, or to a person who just needs a hug?

Here am I, Lord! Send me now to do new miracles for you. Amen.

Wait: Watch and wonder what the Lord has in store for you today.

Read: Isaiah 6:1-8

*Rich Bimler
Bloomington, IL*

Sunday, October 21, 2018

Power from Above

But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from above.

Luke 24:49

Near our home in Napa County, California, stands the Bale Grist Mill. Built in 1846, this fully restored mill still grinds grain, and does so exceedingly well. Old timers used to say, “When meal comes to you that way, like the heated underside of a setting hen, it bakes bread that makes city bread taste like cardboard.”

This grist mill is an “over-shot” type, which means the water hits the wheel from above, adding the weight of the water to the force of its movement to turn the wheel. So it is with Christ’s disciples. They are enabled to be a blessing to others by the promised “power from above” that Jesus imparts in the waters of their Baptism.

Lord, stir up your power within me that I may serve others exceedingly well. Amen.

Give thanks: Look around at all the appliances in your home that require a power source. Then look up to heaven, acknowledging the source of your power.

Read: Luke 24:44-49; Galatians 5:22-25

*Ted Zimmerman
Napa, CA*

Monday, October 22, 2018

Music as Prayer

Sing to him, sing praises to him; tell of all his wondrous works!

Psalm 105:2

As an aging pilgrim, I find myself humming hymns during the day and especially at night when I fall asleep. This new practice in my life finds me using music as an aid to prayer, or as prayer itself.

This practice is nothing new for God's people. The Psalms were not only prayers, but sung prayers (Psalm 145). In the New Testament the apostle Paul encourages the early Christians, and us as well, to sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in our hearts to God (Colossians 3:16). I find that spiritual songs and hymns put me in the mood for further prayers. Won't you join me?

Lord Jesus, remind me that hymns and spiritual songs express hope and trust and praise and joy and gratitude and direction for daily living. Amen.

Exercise: Take out your hymnbook and select hymns that encourage a lifestyle pleasing to the Lord.

Read: Psalm 105

Walter M. Schoedel
Webster Groves, MO

Tuesday, October 23, 2018

The Touch

And Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him.

Matthew 8:3

Being small, our parents held us; being married, our spouse embraced us; feeling low, a gentle hand was placed on our shoulder; being fearful, a soft hand patted ours: we were touched. Nothing calms our fears like a gentle touch or a warm embrace. But we've aged some and it seems we are touched less often these days, as though age might be contagious.

The leper wasn't touched much. Touching a leper was thought to be life-threatening. Jesus wasn't afraid to touch him. When Jesus touched him, the disease didn't flow to Jesus; instead Jesus' healing power flowed to him.

The first time Jesus touched you he had water in his hand. It was the day of your Baptism. Your sins flowed to him. His grace flowed to you like a river. Remembering our baptisms reminds us that Jesus is not afraid to touch us.

Jesus, embrace me today and hold me fast unto eternal life. Amen.

Consider: Add a gentle touch to the words of encouragement you speak today.

Read: Luke 24:39

*David Boyd
Staunton, VA*

Wednesday, October 24, 2018

God's Guarantee

I will protect those who know my name.

Psalm 91:14

A guarantee is given for a home, a car, a washing machine and clothing, but can we get a guarantee from God? Yes, God gives us one! Here's how the psalmist expresses this guarantee in Psalm 91: The Lord God will deliver you (v. 3), give you refuge (v. 4), take away terror (v. 5), guard you (v. 11) and answer you, be with you in trouble, rescue you and honor you (v. 15).

How do I get this guarantee? Do I buy it? Must I do something special? Must I meet the right person? We do nothing to get this guarantee! God lovingly and willingly acts with us and for us. Out of love for us, God's Son has come to us and into our lives. He forgives us. He promises eternal life to us. Jesus personifies the heavenly Father's guarantee to us.

Saved. Freed. Guarded. Rescued. Forgiven. That's God's guarantee to us, and this guarantee will never expire!

Lord, remind me that when things go badly in life, your guarantee is still valid. Amen.

Think: Why would God make such a guarantee with me?

Read: Psalm 91

*Neal A. Orabka
N. Las Vegas, NV*

Thursday, October 25, 2018

Of Infinite Value

Even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not; you are of more value than many sparrows.

Luke 12:7

How wonderful to think that God knows everything about me! “You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from afar” (Psalm 139: 2). I feel comforted knowing that I am of infinite value to a God who loves me. God is as close to me as the air that I breathe. Mindful of God’s love for me, I breathe in God’s goodness and breathe out all fear and worry. All anxious thoughts I release into the care of our loving God and, in return, God lifts me up and carries me. I am never alone with God by my side.

May I be a sign of God’s tender loving care to those I meet today, and may they, too, get a glimpse of how precious they are in the sight of God.

Thank you, Lord, for keeping me safe in your care. Amen.

Share: Smile and greet everyone you see today.

Read: 1 John 4:16

*Sally Macke
St. Louis, MO*

Friday, October 26, 2018

Where's Jesus?

Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid.

Matthew 14:27

Our daughter walked with her husband and their three children along a crowded pier, deep water swirling below. Suddenly concerned for the safety of her youngest child, she urgently shouted, "Where's William?" Amazed and amused, a response rang out, "I'm holding your hand!" And so he was.

There may be times in our lives when we are unaware of Jesus' presence, causing us to urgently exclaim, "Where's Jesus?" Where's Jesus in the challenges of life, in the news of the day, in joy and in sorrow? Then in worship, in Scripture, in prayer, in faith shared by caring friends and family we are reminded, "Jesus is holding your hand!" Reassured, we continue on our life's journey confident of our Lord's presence and comforted by his love. Whatever our circumstances, walking hand-in-hand with Jesus we can trust his loving care, joyfully expressing gratitude for his saving grace.

Savior Jesus, when I fear, thank you for always being near. Amen.

Help: Offer your hand to someone who needs assistance or assurance.

Read: Matthew 14:22-32

*Judith Christian
St. Louis, MO*

Saturday, October 27, 2018

Signs

Always be prepared to give an answer to anyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.

1 Peter 3:15

Back in the early 1970s, there was a song that was performed by a group called the Five Man Electrical Band. The song went something like this: “Signs, signs, everywhere a sign. Blocking out the scenery, breaking my mind. Do this, don’t do that, can’t you read the sign?”

The Bible would seem to suggest that as believers we serve as a sign to others, not to block others from the glory of God, but that they may experience it. There are times when our sign seems to say, “Out of Order,” as is evident in a life of pain. Yet as we experience the love of God and his forgiveness through the Gospel, and by the Holy Spirit, God uses us as signs that point to the hope and peace that is ours through faith in Jesus.

Dear Lord Jesus, help me to serve as a sign that points to you. Amen.

Consider: What gifts do you have that may serve to point others to Jesus?

Read: John 1:29-34; 1 Corinthians 12

*Jonathan Vierkant
West Bend, WI*

Sunday, October 28, 2018

Get Up and Go

Fear not! Behold, your God ... will come and save you.

Isaiah 35:4

After decades of exile in Babylon the Israelites had the opportunity to return to their homeland. But they were empty of hope. No temple. Jerusalem in rubble. A daunting wilderness journey confronting them. How? “Strengthen the weak hands, and make firm the feeble knees. Say to those who have an anxious heart, ‘Be strong; fear not!’” (Isaiah 35:3-4). Aging, we understand the language of weak hands, feeble knees and anxious hearts. Winter is coming and the cold is already felt in hands and knees. The journey “home” seems hardly worth the effort. But the prophet speaks God’s command and promise. Get up and go on today’s leg of the journey, knowing the powerful God who loves you and sent Jesus will go before you to prepare the way.

Remind me, Lord Jesus, that you are both journey and destination. Send me out joyfully and without fear. Amen.

Encourage: Call or, if possible visit, an “anxious heart” whose arthritis pains and limits them. Let them lead the conversation.

Read: Isaiah 35

*Mike May
Kansas City, KS*

Monday, October 29, 2018

Good Enough

[God] will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.

1 Corinthians 1:8

In the film *Saving Private Ryan* there's a touching scene at the American cemetery in Normandy. Ryan fought there in WWII but is now a grandfather. The soldier who saved Ryan's life at the cost of his own is buried there. His last words to Ryan: "Earn it." Fifty years later, kneeling at his savior's gravesite, he wonders if he truly earned it. He asks his wife, "Am I a good man?" He's led an honorable life, but still he doesn't know if it was good enough.

Even we Christians might wonder, "Am I good enough?" The answer to that question is found in God's Word: "If righteousness (before God) were through the law (through my good life), then Christ died for no purpose" (Galatians 2:21). Christ lived the life you couldn't. His life is your life. In Christ you are a good man, a good woman, more than good enough.

Jesus, thank you for presenting me guiltless before your Father. Amen.

Consider: Rest today at the foot of the cross.

Read: Matthew 13:43; Jude 24-25

*David Boyd
Staunton, VA*

Tuesday, October 30, 2018

It Is I

Immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, “Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid.”

Matthew 14:27

When the disciples in the storm-tossed boat saw Jesus coming to them, walking across the water, they were terrified and cried out, “It is a ghost!” But of course it was no ghost. It was the Lord, who—after rescuing Peter in his failed attempt to walk on the water—joined his disciples in the boat and quieted the storm.

We too may be terrified in the storms of our lives, in circumstances of illness, grief or loss. We imagine all kinds of “ghosts” in fearful outcomes, anxiety over the future and unending sorrow. But no ghost is there. It is Jesus. In the midst of all of the pain and grief and fear, he has been standing beside us all along, saying “Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid.”

Lord Jesus, in all of the frightening circumstances of life, comfort me with your presence and still the storms of fear with your Word of peace. Amen.

Remember: Even in the most anxious and frightening circumstances, Jesus is present, saying, “Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid.”

Read: Matthew 14:22-33; Psalm 139:7-12

*Carol Geisler
Manchester, MO*

Wednesday, October 31, 2018

Cobwebs on Our Minds

But we were afflicted at every turn—fighting without and fear within.

2 Corinthians 7:5

Some days, my mind feels like massive cobweb decorations at Halloween. We are bombarded with endless information, both necessary and pointless. It is bad enough trying to remember things that affect us; we don't want useless information. Time to de-clutter.

Mentally and physically, we describe the process with similar words, as in downsize, simplify or focus and eliminate. Decisions can become tortuous, complicated by emotions and memories. To clear the mind, a sure remedy is to go back to the Bible. Jesus said to Martha, "One thing is necessary" (Luke 10:42). He pointed out that what Mary had chosen would not be taken away. When we focus on the everlasting, all other things will fall in place.

Dear Lord, may we strengthen our faith through your Word, knowing that you have given us all we need in this life and the hope of heaven. Amen.

Observe: Halloween decorations aim to scare or disguise fear of the unknown. Think of how Jesus has taken away fear.

Read: 2 Corinthians 7:5-7; Luke 10:38-42

Judy Scherr
Lemay, MO

Thursday, November 1, 2018

Oh, What a Relief It Is!

For God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control.

2 Timothy 1:7

I've been a procrastinator for as long as I can remember. Once, as I complained about leaving things until the last minute, my friend asked what I was afraid of. It was then I realized that my procrastination was rooted in a fear of failure. Fears come in all shapes and sizes. What makes you afraid? Whatever it is, know with all assurance that whenever we say, "I'm afraid," God says, "I have not given you a spirit of fear." Instead, God gives us a spirit of power and love and self-control (2 Timothy 1:7).

Remembering that love and self-control are fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22), we realize that trading fear for power and love and self-control is not something we do for ourselves, but something God does for us. Oh, what a relief it is!

Lord, take my fears and replace them with power, love and self-control. Amen.

Think: What part does fear play in your life?

Read: Galatians 5:16-26; 2 Timothy 1:3-14

*Jane Wilke
Woodbury, MN*

Friday, November 2, 2018

Use the Gift!

As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace.

1 Peter 4:10

My beloved mother-in-law saved many cards that her loved ones sent. In sorting through them we discovered an unopened envelope: it contained a \$100 gift card to her favorite restaurant, dated six years earlier. She would have enjoyed using that gift had she opened it.

God has given us gifts: “To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit ... who apportions to each one individually as he wills” (1 Corinthians 12:7, 11). God has made sure that each of us has a gift to use, to honor him and to serve others. Let's open our gift—discovering how we can serve him—and then let's use that gift to serve him by serving others.

Thank you, Father, for giving us gifts. Help us to use them to serve you and others. Amen.

Expect: Find a way to use God's gift in you today.

Read: 1 Corinthians 12:1-11; 1 Peter 4:7-11

*Steve Hess
Ft. Myers, FL*

Saturday, November 3, 2018

Are We Rich?

The riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us.

Ephesian 1:7-8

As the seventh daughter of a country pastor, I did not have an allowance. My middle-school classmates sometimes said, “You are poor.” After one such episode, I came to my mother, who was kneading bread at the kitchen counter. “Are we poor?” I asked. Without hesitation, she said “No. We are rich,” and continued her work. Then she stopped, looked right at me and said, “And someday we’ll have money.”

As I matured, these words became more meaningful. Our real riches consist of God’s unfathomable love, care, forgiveness and grace. That grace is not given sparingly. It is lavished upon us: “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich” (2 Corinthians 8:9).

Thank you, dear Lord, for those riches in your unconditional love. Amen.

Remember: You are cherished. “As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love” (John 15:9).

Read: John 15:7-11; Ephesians 1:3-10

*Connie Bretscher
Valparaiso, IN*

Sunday, November 4, 2018

An Easy Climb

I lift up my eyes to the hills. From where does my help come? My help comes from the LORD, who made heaven and earth.

Psalm 121:1-2

Visiting our daughter in Colorado, my husband and I noticed a 7000-foot “hill” near her home. We saw several hikers climbing to its peak. It looked like fun, but already winded in the high altitude, we avoided the challenge. Then our daughter insisted we make the climb, promising it was easy. She was right. The switchback trail made for a gradual climb to the top, where we stood breathless—not from fatigue, but because of the majestic view.

When mountains of trouble surround us, God is in our midst to help us. But sometimes, when we are breathless from anxiety and fear, he seems out of reach. But don't be fooled. Jesus made the path accessible. In times of trouble, he draws us to look to himself, where we find security in the heights of his love and majesty.

Strengthen me, Lord, to run to you in every trouble. Amen.

Climb: Hike through God's Word this week. Notice what comfort and beauty there is to behold.

Read: Psalm 18

*Sandi Geis
St. Louis, MO*

Monday, November 5, 2018

God Has Your Back

The Lord will fight for you, and you have only to be silent.

Exodus 14:14

The Israelites were terrified. Pharaoh's chariots were charging after them and they were cut off by the Red Sea. Moses told them not to fear, that the Lord was in the fight for them, and "the Egyptians you see today you will never see again" (Exodus 14:13). You will encounter fears and worries in life that interrupt sleep or distract during waking hours. They are not imagined. They are real. But in the face of those realities, you are graciously invited to lean into a greater reality. The Lord will fight for you. Let God's powerful presence still your troubled heart, knowing that whatever is troubling your life, your heart and mind today, these "Egyptians" will never be seen again!

Dear Jesus, whatever seeks to plant fear in my heart today, I trust that your saving death and resurrection makes sure I "will never see them again." Amen.

Shout: "The Lord is my light and my salvation. Whom shall I fear?" (Psalm 27:1).

Read: Exodus 14; Psalm 27:1-5

*Mike May
Kansas City, KS*

Tuesday, November 6, 2018

Fear, Begone!

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

Romans 8:1

What is the scariest scenario you can imagine? Being helpless? Adrift without hope? Being guilt-ridden and alone? Those images pretty well describe what it would be like for those who wander in unbelief.

John Newton, well-known for his beloved hymn, “Amazing Grace,” was once such a wanderer and a slave trader. The Holy Spirit changed John. He became a believer in Christ. John Newton also wrote these words to another hymn: “How sweet the name of Jesus sounds in a believer’s ear! It soothes our sorrows, heals our wounds, and drives away all fears.”

John understood there is no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus. Those who know and believe that Jesus, God’s Son, died on the cross, in the sinner’s place, are by faith in Christ, loved and forgiven. Fear, begone!

Praise and thanks to you, Holy Spirit, for the gift of faith in Jesus, my Savior. Amen.

Write: List the fears that sometimes creep up on you. Turn them over to God.

Read: Romans 8

*Donna J. Streufert
South Bend, IN*

Wednesday, November 7, 2018

No Expiration Date

Even when I am old and gray, do not forsake me, my God, till I declare your power to the next generation.

Psalm 71:18

Have you ever pulled a canned good from the back of your pantry, wiped the dust off, and discovered it's been sitting there too long? My shelves require periodic cleaning. Undoubtedly there will be a container with a date indicating its usefulness is over. That container gets thrown into the trash bin.

I'm grateful God doesn't stamp expiration dates on his people. The Bible tells me my usefulness doesn't expire. 2 Corinthians 4:16 tells me even though I may look dusty—more gray hair and age spots—I'm being renewed inwardly every day. That renewing helps me encourage others—both young and old. From experience I assure them God has used every circumstance for my good. From experience I testify his words are true.

I thank you, Father, that life with you never ends, for surely your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. Amen.

Watch: Look for someone to encourage today.

Read: Psalm 148:12-13; Titus 2:2-6; Psalm 23:6

*Lynne Waite Chapman
Fort Wayne, IN*

Thursday, November 8, 2018

Age of Anxiety

Fear not, for I have redeemed you ... you are mine.

Isaiah 43:1

W. H. Auden's 1947 poem, *The Age of Anxiety*, put a label on the fear that the world was feeling then and which seems to have grown ever since. I recently heard music based on that poem, and its choppy, nervous strains captured the worry and fear that so many people have. What do believers do with that feeling when we are told in Scripture many times not to fear? You know—the birds of the air and the lilies of the field. The Scripture above is from Isaiah 43, and the writer goes on to say, “When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned.” That’s the promise: not that we won’t go through tough times, perhaps tragic times (we will walk through fires), but the Lord will bring us through. He will protect us, deliver us and love us with an everlasting love. We belong to him.

O Lord, I know I'm yours. Let me sleep in peace and wake up, ready to assure someone else of your love. Amen.

Comfort: Offer help and hope in Christ to someone who is going through difficult times.

Read: 2 Corinthians 1:3-5

*Sally Beck
Williamsburg, VA*

Friday, November 9, 2018

Grace Upon Grace

From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace.

John 1:16

Zacchaeus only wanted to see Jesus. The tax collector of Jericho, being slight of stature, climbed a sycamore tree to get a vantage point above the crowds. Jesus, who had come “to seek and to save the lost,” walked right over to the tree, looked up and invited himself over to the home of that particular lost sinner. Zacchaeus just wanted to catch a glimpse of the miracle-working rabbi from Nazareth, but he received so much more. As Jesus said, “Today salvation has come to this house” (Luke 19:9). The small tax collector responded to the gift of salvation in a big way, giving to the poor and restoring fourfold what he had stolen from his customers.

We too ask for so little, and receive so much. We pray for mere earthly blessings, and we receive forgiveness and eternal life from the Lord who came to seek and to save us!

Lord Jesus, thank you for the gift of salvation that is ours through faith. Amen.

Give: Look for ways to share your blessings with others.

Read: Luke 19:1-10; 2 Corinthians 8:9

*Carol Geisler
Manchester, MO*

Saturday, November 10, 2018

God's Job, and Yours

Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.

1 Peter 5:6-7

In my days of youthful naiveté, I was confident that I could handle whatever life threw at me. Life has long since punctured my pride and taught me that humility is an essential virtue. St. Peter reminds us that God has claimed the job of caring for us, so let him do it! Our job is to humbly trust him to care for us as his infinite love dictates. Our human pride wants to tell him how and when to do his job. How conceited is that!

The cross of Jesus is the sign that assures us we can trust him absolutely to come through for us, giving us the care we need as his loving wisdom determines. He will “lift us up in due time.”

Thank you, loving Lord, for taking charge of my life. Give me the grace to humbly trust you to care for me as you know best. Amen.

Reflect: Remember times when God lifted you up in his good time.

Read: Philippians 4:4-9

*Paul Scheidt
Chesterfield, MO*

Sunday, November 11, 2018

Pray

Be constant in prayer.

Romans 12:12

While interviewing a WWII Naval veteran I asked, “Did your faith help you during the war?” He replied, “Yes, a typhoon hit our ship off the coast of Guam. The waters were extremely rough and the ship kept bouncing up and down. Everyone aboard the ship was sick and praying too!”

Like the people on the naval ship, during the rough waters of life (illness, death of a loved one or other difficulties) we quickly turn to God in prayer. But when the waters in our lives are peaceful and life is good, talking to God in prayer is often forgotten. Paul wrote to the church in Rome, “Be constant in prayer.” He meant we should offer prayers of praise and thanksgiving in the peaceful waters of life as well as asking for God’s help and guidance through the stormy waters.

Lord, my prayers often ask so much and thank so little. Forgive me. Amen.

Listen: Record a veteran’s faith story.

Read: Romans 12:12; Philippians 4:6-7

*Stan Torsen
Stewartville, MN*

Monday, November 12, 2018

Aging Beautifully

And we all, with unveiled faces, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another.

2 Corinthians 3:18

I'm getting older. There's no denying it. Every time I look into the mirror, I can count a new wrinkle or a few more gray hairs. Or maybe just fewer hairs. My friends seem to be experiencing the same phenomena.

The amazing thing is that God says he is making us more beautiful. He says we are being transformed into the image of his Son. With every year of loving the Lord, every step on the path of following Jesus, we look more like him. A few hairs and wrinkles are a small price to pay for such honor. And we are promised that one day, when our Lord appears, we will see him as he is and we will be like him. Hallelujah!

Lord, thank you for making me like Jesus and for the opportunity to shine his light for others to see. Amen.

Give: Think of someone who needs the love of Jesus. Give them what God has given you.

Read: 1 John 3:2; Galatians 2:20; Romans 8:29

*Lynne Waite Chapman
Fort Wayne, IN*

Tuesday, November 13, 2018

Peace

Peace I leave with you.

John 14:27

Jesus' words recorded here in John are so comforting. In this life, we face doubts, trials, illness, wars, disasters, even death, but Jesus comes to bring us something else. Peace. He offers his peace to us. His peace will calm us and comfort us. It will quiet our fears and tame the doubts. It will wipe away the disasters that can befall us.

We do not know what each day will bring our way in this world. However, Jesus assures us that he has overcome the world and that in him we “may have peace” (John 16:33). Each day, we can live confident that Jesus' peace is with us and that one day we will have the ultimate peace—peace forever in heaven with Jesus.

Dear Savior Jesus, thank you for the gift of your peace to calm our troubled lives. Amen.

Share: Discuss with someone a time in your life when you felt God's peace.

Read: John 14:15-31; John 16:25-33; Philippians 4:4-7

*Celeste Cummins
Storm Lake, IA*

Wednesday, November 14, 2018

Celebrate Every Day

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

Psalm 118:24

Thanking God for each day comes easily when everything's going well. What's challenging is doing so when we face adversity.

I once learned a lesson about the importance of always appreciating life. A neighbor's husband had been diagnosed with terminal cancer. She had always showed great faith in God. This was even more apparent when her husband was near the end of his life. I asked her how they were doing. "This is the day the Lord has made; we will rejoice and be glad in it," she said.

I was amazed by her response. She had the spiritual wisdom to see even difficult times as gifts from God. She inspired me to do the same. The older we are, the more we can see that everything that happens can strengthen our faith.

Lord, let me always be grateful. Amen.

Recognize: Recall struggles that made you appreciate life.

Read: Psalm 145:2; 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

*Jan Kilby
San Antonio, TX*

Thursday, November 15, 2018

Face Everything And Rise

But they who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles.

Isaiah 40:31

Recently I saw this acronym for overcoming F.E.A.R.: Face Everything And Rise. It's a song title, but I'm not interested in the song or the artist who sings it. I'm intrigued by what it says about facing my fears and rising above them. Some fears are small (I can't sleep with the closet door open, remembering childhood fears of monsters in the closet) or they may be huge (I don't want to die alone). Whatever my fear, this verse from Isaiah offers wonderful imagery. How do eagles soar so high above, seemingly without a care in the world? The updraft lifts them.

Fears exist because sin exists. Just as Christ overcame sin, he can give me strength to face the fears that weigh me down, lift me above them, and replace them with the peace that only he can give.

Lord Jesus, release me from my fears and grant me peace that passes understanding. Amen.

Consider: What fears are weighing you down?

Read: Psalm 27; Isaiah 40

*Jane Wilke
Woodbury, MN*

Friday, November 16, 2018

God Sends Angels

In God I trust; I shall not be afraid.

Psalm 56:4

I converted a walk-in closet into a bedroom for our small son and painted the walls sky blue. A few days later I saw figures drawn all over the walls. My son explained, "I was afraid of the dark so I painted angels to protect me." I explained that God sends real angels to watch over us, but we left the drawings on the wall to remind us of God's angels.

There are many things in our lives that strike fear in our hearts. Our heavenly Father sends angels to protect us and serve us. There are stories of help that appear in human form out of nowhere and then just as suddenly vanish. Many believe these are angels sent by God. The Lord sends angels to guard us in all our ways (Psalm 91:11). The Father sent an angel to Gethsemane to strengthen Jesus before he died on the cross for us. Our Father still sends angels today to strengthen and protect us.

Lord, send an angel to banish all my fears. My trust is in you. Amen.

Serve: Open your heart to be a caring messenger of hope to someone in need.

Read: Psalm 91

*Leo Symmank
Seabrook, TX*

Saturday, November 17, 2018

Fix Your Focus

Fix your eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith.

Hebrews 12:2

When I was learning to drive, I panicked at the sight of oncoming traffic. Though the cars coming toward me were safely in their own lanes, I still feared a collision. My driving instructor warned me that if I focused on the oncoming traffic, my car would actually veer toward them. Instead, he told me to keep my focus straight forward.

Likewise, when we focus on the obstacles we encounter, we steer ourselves into a collision course with fear! Instead, when we fix our eyes on Jesus, he gives us faith to trust him in every trouble that comes our way. After all, Jesus willingly collided with sin, death and Satan head-on when, “for the joy set before him, he endured the cross.” His victory over these real dangers assures us he will drive away all our fears and keep us on course until we reach our final destination in heaven.

Thank you, Jesus, for your sacrificial love that keeps me safe now and for eternity. Amen.

Focus: What troubles and fears have your attention? Turn your focus toward Jesus.

Read: Hebrews 12:1-3; Psalm 127

*Sandi Geis
St. Louis, MO*

Sunday, November 18, 2018

Don't Be Dismayed

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

Deuteronomy 31:8

“Dismayed” implies that we feel appalled, horrified, unnerved, fearful, apprehensive or disconcerted, at a loss as to how to deal with something. I can identify, can you?

I suspect when Joshua had to fill the boots of Moses, the longtime leader of the children of Israel, he felt dismayed. But read those precious words of encouragement from Moses in the above verse one more time. Understand as Peter did, that God shows no partiality: “I see very clearly that God shows no favoritism” (Acts 10:34). How can we fear if the Lord leads the way? How can we be anxious if we know God himself is with us? Dear child of God, the promise is for you too. God will never leave you nor forsake you. Step out confidently!

Almighty God, you go before me and with me and will never leave me. I need fear nothing. Amen.

Step: Go forward with confidence as you take on a new task or experience.

Read: Deuteronomy 31:7-8; Hebrews 13:5; Acts 10:34-35

*Terry Weber,
Williamsburg, VA*

Monday, November 19, 2018

Pilgrimage

Now the Lord said to Abram, “Go from your country ... to the land that I will show you”... So Abram went, as the Lord had told him.

Genesis 12:1, 4

Three simple words, “So Abram went,” tell quite a story of faith. Following God’s direction, Abram set out on a pilgrimage from his homeland of Haran to an unknown destination. His journey sounds much like the opening line of a hymn, “Guide me, O thou great Jehovah, pilgrim through this barren land.”

The Pilgrims who colonized Massachusetts and held a fall harvest feast first had to journey from England to America. Abram’s journey led him from Haran to Canaan. All of us are on a journey, too, called life. Sometimes our journey feels unsettling and dangerous, like that of Abram and the Pilgrims. But, like Abram, we follow God by faith and hear his promise, “I will bless you” (Genesis 12:2). Moving faithfully forward on life’s pilgrimage, we draw closer each day to our heavenly destination.

Guide me, O thou great Jehovah. Hold me in thy powerful hand. Amen.

Learn: Read about the Pilgrims in a book or online.

Read: Genesis 12:1-3; Psalm 23

*Marj Maynard
Pipe Creek, TX*

Tuesday, November 20, 2018

Gratitude Attitude

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

Psalm 107:1

Thanks-giving leads to thanks-living. When we give ourselves to God, give Christ's love to our neighbors and share the Church's mission and ministry, we discover the joy of giving. We are blessed with a heart filled with thankfulness. That's why Christians have the "gratitude attitude."

Jesus summarized God's commandments: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength ... You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Mark 12:30-31). The secret is giving as God has given to us. He loved us so much that he gave his only-begotten Son to suffer, die and rise again for our forgiveness, salvation and eternal life in his forever family. He gave his all for us, and we give thanks. Realizing God's great gift of love for us, we will have the gratitude attitude.

Heavenly Father, we can never thank you enough for all the blessings you give us. Amen.

Think: How many ways can I show forth God's love by thanks-living?

Read: Psalm 105; James 1:27

*Chuck Conner
Festus, MO*

Wednesday, November 21, 2018

ThanksgivING!

I will praise God's name in song and glorify him with thanksgiving.

Psalm 69:30

There are many thanksgiving-themed devotions that focus on different parts of the word “thanksgiving.” Some draw our attention to the root word, “thanks.” Others highlight the word “give.” My favorite part of the word, however, is “ing”!

This salient suffix provides a sense of movement and urgency. When we have a thankful heart toward God, we can't help but put that thankfulness into action: praisING and worshipING God; servING our neighbors; tellING the good news of Jesus; sharING our bounty; lovING unconditionally, and pointING others to the livING hope we have in Jesus. God is glorified when our lives are continually overflowing with these expressions of thanks. So, go ahead and say “thank you” to God for all his goodness. But remember, your words are only the beginnING!

Thank you, Jesus, for your outpouring of love and forgiveness. Help me live a life of thanksgivING to your glory. Amen.

Mobilize: Consider how you can express thanks to God by serving others this week.

Read: 2 Corinthians 9:12-15; Romans 12:1

*Sandi Geis
St. Louis, MO*

Thursday, November 22, 2018

Ingathering—Let's Have a Party

Celebrate the Feast of Ingathering at the end of the year, when you gather in your crops from the field.

Exodus 23:16

The Feast of Ingathering was an Old Testament harvest festival in the late fall. It was also called the Feast of Tabernacles, or Booths, commemorating the temporary shelters used during the 40 years in the wilderness after God's people left Egypt and before they entered the Promised Land.

The Lord wanted his people to celebrate the harvest. Not many of us lived on farms, but many of us have had gardens. We go grocery shopping. We see the bounty of what the Lord provides for our daily needs. It's wonderful that the Lord encouraged Israel to "party," to celebrate the harvest. We too take great delight in enjoying the Lord's creation. Celebrate today! Be glad in all that the Lord gives you daily, especially this day.

For providing me with all that I need for body and soul, I give you thanks, O Lord. Amen.

Celebrate: Open your refrigerator and cupboards today and see all that God provides for you.

Read: Psalm 66

*Don Schatz
Kenmore, WA*

Friday, November 23, 2018

A Well-Stocked Pantry

Set their hopes ... on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy.

1 Timothy 6:17

Whether it's Thanksgiving dinner or throwing together something at the last minute, cooking is easier in my own kitchen with familiar utensils and my pantry within reach. Figuring out what basics to stock can be gleaned from millions of sources, but many of us probably relied on our mothers and experience based on our families' needs.

As a cook relies on a well-stocked pantry, so a Christian must rely on the Word of God. While information and teachers abound, the Lord gives us an unfailing source, the Holy Spirit in our hearts. To further support us, we can turn to our well-stocked spiritual pantry, the Bible, with the perfect ingredients.

Our heavenly Father, you have given us all we need, for the special times and the everyday routines. Guide us and lead us to listen to the Spirit speaking in your Word. Amen.

Rejoice: Take inventory of the pantry in your kitchen, read your Bible and remember the constant presence of the Holy Spirit.

Read: Deuteronomy 8:1-10; John 6:27-35

*Judy Scherr
Lemay, MO*

Saturday, November 24, 2018

The Solution for Worry

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

Philippians 4:6

Worry can hang around like a morning fog, clouding our vision and blocking the light of God's truth. The Bible's solution for worry is prayer. God invites us to bring everything to him, no matter how small, with both thanksgiving and requests.

Lift up a prayer every time anxiety grips your heart. Tell God exactly how you feel; he can handle it. He cares about all the details in your life, and he will comfort and strengthen you. Even in a difficult time, you can always thank God for his loving presence and his goodness that never changes. You can let worry hang around like a fog, or you can chase it away with prayer. Let prayer be your solution for anxiety.

Lord Jesus, help me to replace worry with prayer this week. Amen.

List: Write your worries in one column and requests in another. Pray over both.

Read: Matthew 6:25; Matthew 10:19

*Sarah Geringer
Jackson, MO*

Sunday, November 25, 2018

Crown of Life

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

Revelation 2:10

Recently my wife and I were at a restaurant when a little girl came by holding the hand of her mother. She was wearing a bright princess dress and a tiara on her head. Every step she took was a dance of joy that made me want to dance right along with her.

Maybe you think, “It’s easy at that age to get excited about life; in time she’ll snap out it.” But when I saw that little girl come dancing by with the tiara on her head, I suddenly recalled the day of my Confirmation. When the pastor put his hand over my head, he read this verse from Revelation 2:10: “Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life.”

I thought then, let the little girl dance. In fact I think I’ll join her.

Lord, help me to rejoice with every day you give me, and teach my heart to keep on dancing. Amen.

Rejoice: Let the world hear about the crown Jesus has given you.

Read: Psalm 8; Luke 10:20-21

*Edward Arle
St Charles, MO*

Monday, November 26, 2018

A Fixer-Upper Sort of Christian

Restore to me the joy of your salvation.

Psalm 51:12

If you feel like a fixer-upper sort of Christian, you're not alone. Many people sense that they need some spiritual restoration. Some have neglected their faith practices like attending worship services. Others have become rusty about praying because they've been busy, even in retirement. More than a few are discouraged by life's problems. Whatever the cause, they need their faith rebuilt.

God can provide transforming hope that refreshes souls. God says, "Behold, I am making all things new" (Revelation 21:5). We can ask for God's help. Like the psalmist, we can say, "Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit" (Psalm 51:12). Trust that the Lord will help us become what he's intended.

Lord, please help me to grow in faith so that I can continue to do your will. Amen.

Identify: Make a list of all that God has done to restore you to a relationship with himself.

Read: Isaiah 40:31; Matthew 7:7-8

*Jan Kilby
San Antonio, TX*

Tuesday, November 27, 2018

He Loves Me Not, He Loves Me

With everlasting love I will have compassion on you.

Isaiah 54:8

Among the fears we have in life, the fear of losing someone's love might be the greatest. Christopher Reeves (of the Superman movies), after he'd been injured, was asked about his fears. He said the loss of his wife's love was his greatest fear. Losing the love of someone we thought loved us results in insecurity and fear.

After what they'd seen on Good Friday, the disciples believed, with good reason, that they'd lost Jesus and with him, his love. They were afraid without his love. The first words out of Jesus' mouth after his resurrection were: "Peace be with you." Translation: When I died, you thought my love for you died. But I am more than merely alive, and so is my love for you.

O Lord, nothing can separate me from your merciful love. Abide with me, Jesus. Speak comfort back into my heart with your great "Peace be with you!" Amen.

Consider: Be alert for others who are afraid. What word might you speak to them?

Read: 1 John 3:1

*David Boyd
Staunton, VA*

Wednesday, November 28, 2018

Our Trust Fund

By the Holy Spirit who dwells within us, guard the good deposit entrusted to you.

2 Timothy 1:14

A trust fund is made up of assets belonging to a trust held by the trustees for the beneficiaries. God's great grace is composed of the assets of his love, hope and faith (trust). We are both beneficiaries and trustees of God's assets. We live energized by them and are entrusted by God with sharing them unselfishly with others.

God has entrusted us with the most valuable assets in the universe, the great news of his rich kindness and love through Jesus' death and resurrection. And God asks us to be faithful to the extent of his grace we've received: "Everyone to whom much was given, of him much will be required, and from him to whom they entrusted much, they will demand the more" (Luke 12:48). What an honor and privilege!

O Lord God, guide us to generously share the gifts with which we have been entrusted, through Christ our Brother and Savior. Amen.

Share: Discuss with someone how carefully you handle a borrowed tool, a book or item of clothing.

Read: 2 Timothy 2:1-2

*Deane Schuessler
Woodbury, MN*

Thursday, November 29, 2018

The Key

I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven.

Matthew 16:19

I have a key problem: I misplace them! (Note: “misplace” is less indicting than “lose.”) I have multiple sets, several of which are safely held by friends and family. I’m seriously considering attaching keys to the dog’s collar!

Fortunately, the keys of the kingdom of heaven are not dependent on my ability to locate them. They are a gift—forgiveness found only in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. Jesus is the key that opens the arms of God to the world. No need to search through purses or pockets, drawers or closets for a key that fits a lock. We have only to hold the hand of our Savior, gratefully walking with him into eternal life.

Savior Jesus you are the key; into heaven you walk with me. Your sacrifice has set me free, to live eternally with thee. Thank you, Jesus. Amen.

Pray: Hold each key on your ring (or hold your key card) as you pray for people and places behind the door each unlocks.

Read: Matthew 16:13-20

*Judith Christian
St. Louis, MO*

Friday, November 30, 2018

Lord, Take My Hand

I will not leave you or forsake you. Be strong and courageous.

Joshua 1:5-6

I am not leading a group of complaining Israelites across the Jordan River, but sometimes fear creeps into my thoughts and I need those words from my almighty God, too. He also tells me that “perfect love casts out fear” (1 John 4:18). That perfect love comes only from our perfect God as a gift to us. Can we cast out fear? We must remember that God “is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us” (Ephesians 3:20).

Power? In me? It is the all-powerful God who gives us that power, making the unbelievable believable; the unforgivable forgivable, transforming our weakness into strength and fear into courage. With that strength, we can boldly face our fears, whatever they may be.

Creator of the universe, work through your power within me. Amen.

Share: You can pass on God’s strength to others who need it.

Read: Joshua 1:1-9; Ephesians 3:14-20

*Connie Bretscher
Valparaiso, IN*

Saturday, December 1, 2018

Gracious Receivers

It is more blessed to give than to receive.

Acts 20:35

December is sometimes called “the season of giving,” as we search for just the right gifts for our family and friends. It’s also a time when people give year-end gifts to churches and charities. But sometimes our giving is done with selfish motives—expecting something in return or seeking a tax break.

However, our Christian giving from the heart, in response to Christ’s complete giving of himself for our forgiveness and salvation, is blessed by God. Whether our giving is in the form of money, time or loving actions, we are blessed as we seek to be a blessing to others. But in order for there to be blessed givers, there must also be gracious receivers. As we age, we increasingly become the receivers of others’ care and kindness. We can be a blessing to others, as we graciously receive their gifts of love.

Blessed Redeemer, help us to be gracious receivers, as others share your love and kindness with us. Amen.

Receive: Be a gracious receiver as well as a generous giver.

Read: 2 Corinthians 8:9-15

*Gil Duchow
Muskego, WI*

Sunday, December 2, 2018

For Heaven's Sake

For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

John 3:17

“What is this world coming to, for heaven’s sake?” Corruption and scandals, accusations and investigations, terrorism and war surround us. The nightly news informs us we are “going to hell in a hand basket.”

But Advent brings good news! Grace and mercy come to this world, for heaven’s sake, in the person of Jesus Christ. Because “God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16). In place of worry, he gives us hope; in place of sadness, joy. In place of war, he brings peace with God; in place of death, he offers new life, here on earth and eternally in heaven.

Thank you, heavenly Father, for giving your Son for our salvation. Help us to focus on you when the worries of this world surround us. Amen.

Focus: Instead of despairing about the state of this world, focus on the new life in Christ you have received through faith.

Read: John 3:16-21

*Eileen Ritter
Byron Center, MI*

Monday, December 3, 2018

Hold My Hand

Nevertheless, I am continually with you; you hold my right hand.

Psalm 73:23

I saw a picture of a teenager and a young child on a roller-coaster, going downhill at full speed. The teen was laughing while the child, who was clutching his hand, had a look of sheer terror on his face. It made me laugh and also relate. I'm certain there've been times in my life when God is leading me in a direction I may not want to go and I have that same look of terror on my face. The comfort of someone holding our hand is undisputable. We held onto our children when they were small and now they occasionally have to hold onto us. New experiences, unfamiliar places, uneven surfaces ... these all require a hand.

Scripture doesn't tell us, but I imagine Mary held tightly to Joseph's hand on the unfamiliar trip to Bethlehem. God promises he will never let go of us. He holds us by our hand and leads us through the most terrifying circumstances.

Father, be with me as I follow, clutching your hand. Amen.

Grasp: When you take a child's hand, remember God is holding yours.

Read: Matthew 14:31; Psalm 139:10

*Gloria Doty
Ft. Wayne, IN*

Tuesday, December 4, 2018

He's Coming!

Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he.

Zechariah 9:9

“She’s coming! She’s coming!” A few days before Christmas, my four-year-old shouts rang through the house. I had watched from the window and saw the bus stop at our country driveway. I knew that my older sister, Ester, was coming. I was also pretty sure that she would bring a five-pound box of chocolates as she had other years—a big Christmas treat for our big family.

In Advent, we can all shout, “He’s coming! He’s coming!” We know he is coming and we will soon celebrate his birth. He brings with him, not just a mere treat, but he comes “with healing in his wings” (Malachi 4:2). He comes as God’s gift to the world. Jesus, God’s Son, is the message of God’s love for the world, for he comes to live and die and rise again to make us children of God and heirs of salvation.

Heavenly Father, thank you for sending your Son, who came for us. Amen.

Greet: Find the courage to say, “He’s coming! Alleluia!” to someone today.

Read: John 10:7-10

*Eldor Kaiser
Lenexa, KS*

Wednesday, December 5, 2018

Advent Fruitcake

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

Psalm 27:14

Some long-distance hikers love fruitcake because slices store well and are packed with vitamins and minerals. But some people find festive-looking fruitcake too densely packed with candied fruits and nuts. Each chewy bite brings unexpected flavors and textures.

At times, Advent may seem like a densely packed fruitcake because of our worldly expectations of the season. Festive preparations call us to accept joy, hope and peace. But we miss loved ones who have passed away or we hear of family or friends who can't come for Christmas. We may fear being alone for Christmas, part of no gathering at all. We wait for Jesus with mixed feelings instead of waiting for Jesus with a longing to be changed and restored. Fear not. Trust God! He knows our needs and will bless us with the strength and comfort of his presence.

Lord Jesus, help me to anticipate your coming with joy. Amen.

Comfort: Call someone who might be dreading Christmas this year.

Read: Colossians 3:2, 15; Psalm 38:15

*Catherine A. Welch
Southbury, CT*

Thursday, December 6, 2018

Treasures of the Heart

But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart.

Luke 2:19

As a mother of eight children, I recall many a Christmas where I sat in the rocker by the Christmas tree and looked into the face of the infant resting in my arms. Often in those times I thought of Mary, the mother of Jesus, and wondered about the thoughts and emotions she must have experienced as she looked into the face of her holy Child that first Christmas.

Advent is the perfect time for pondering. What was it like for the shepherds to be ushered into the presence of God? How did Joseph feel when he first held the Child? Was this what the Wise Men expected to find? The wonder of it all is that the story of Christmas never gets old, even when we do! Christmas is coming! Welcome, Baby Jesus!

Come, Lord Jesus, be a guest in my heart this Advent season. Amen.

Do: Share with others meaningful memories of past Christmases that you have treasured in your heart.

Read: Matthew 6:19-21

*Katherine Klemp
St. Paul, MN*

Friday, December 7, 2018

Fear of the Impossible

It is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

Philippians 2:13

When the angel announced to Mary that she would bear a son, Mary was fearful, but answered: “Let it be to me according to your word” (Luke 1:38).

God has come to you in his written Word, using Scripture as his angel to bring you his messages. Have you received a message that caused you to be afraid? Were you afraid that you weren’t good enough to receive God’s forgiving love? Were you afraid that you would fail at what God asks you to do? We all have fears of some kind. We can admit our fear and present it to Jesus, saying: “Let it be to me according to your word.” May we cling to the promises of God, responding in faith as he carries out his will in our lives.

Thank you, heavenly Father, for working in our lives and doing what we find impossible to do on our own. Amen.

Reflection: What Word of God comforts you during times of fear?

Read: Luke 1:26-38

*Ken Holdorf
Frisco, TX*

Saturday, December 8, 2018

Godly Fear

And fear fell upon him.

Luke 1:12

How would you feel, if you, like the priest Zechariah, were chosen to enter the temple's Holy Place and burn incense in the presence of the Almighty? Humility, awe and even fear. How would you react when you saw an angel standing on the right side of the altar of incense? Luke writes that "fear fell on him." Godly fear! The angel's message was good news from God: "Do not be afraid, Zechariah ... your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son" (Luke 1:13).

Godly fear brings us humbly before the Almighty, aware of our unworthiness and sin. But godly fear is always based on the good news of salvation through Jesus. Zechariah doubted the angel and was unable to speak until John's birth. But God would use that silence to create godly fear in many others. The good news would bubble up from Zechariah's heart as he spoke of God's redemption.

Lord, help me fear, love and trust in you above all things. Amen.

Share: Display godly fear as you share Jesus with others this Advent.

Read: Luke 1:18-25, 57-80

*Stephen J. Carter
Oakville, MO*

Sunday, December 9, 2018

Picture Confidence

Do not be afraid, Mary.

Luke 1:30

Picture this: a beautiful young woman sitting calmly with an expression of acceptance and wonder. Before her is Gabriel, who does not appear as a typical angel with white gown and wings. Instead, he is an alarming glowing yellow form, relaying his message to Mary not to fear. That's how artist Henry Tanner depicted the Annunciation. Tanner, an early 20th-century artist, saw Mary facing fear with immense confidence in her God, trustfully looking ahead to her role as the mother of the Savior of the world. Henry Tanner faced fear too, of another kind. He was an African American, who, even as his paintings drew international praise, repeatedly faced racial discrimination. He bravely continued to give glory to God with his exquisite images of biblical scenes, and his life, like Mary's, was filled with brave acceptance and wonderment at the beauty around him.

O God, replace my fear with courage and wonder in your day-by-day plan for me. Amen.

Look: Give God glory for his wonderful creation and for his saving work in Christ Jesus.

Read: Luke 1:46-55

*Sally Beck
Williamsburg, VA*

Monday, December 10, 2018

Get Ready!

Prepare the way of the Lord; make his paths straight.

Matthew 3:3

Construction of an enormous new apartment building is an imposition in my neighborhood. As I try to walk past the obstruction, a yellow-vested man in a hard hat greets me with an enthusiastic smile. He raves about several modern enhancements to my community as he escorts me to the brand-new cross-walk signal. I have to admit, his charm and flattery lift my spirits. He is softening my heart toward the inevitable 350 new neighbors.

I don't need to fear the congestion and change in my small town. Likewise, we need not embrace chaos in our Christmas preparations. We can follow this bold construction worker's example and prepare our neighbors to give a warm welcome to our Savior!

Lord, show me how to share the true meaning of Christmas this month. Amen.

Consider: Think of someone who helped you prepare for a change. How did God's servant help you see the light?

Read: Isaiah 40:3-8

*Lisa Heule
Littleton, CO*

Tuesday, December 11, 2018

Sweater Weather

Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding.

Proverbs 3:5

When weather turns chilly, we grab our favorite sweater. We may not understand the science of sweaters—the way yarn is made with fibers combed and twisted or how air pockets trap warm air; but we don't care. We're happy that special sweater keeps us warm and we keep reaching for it.

We reach for God in the same way, not fully understanding how God works in us and in our lives. But it doesn't matter. We know the power and comfort of reading Scripture and praying. We learn of God's love for us in Christ and we feel less afraid and more hopeful. We feel protected and wrapped in God's love. The chilly days of aging are nothing to fear. God will always keep us warm.

Loving God, I can always count on you to quiet my fears. Amen.

Share: Donate a sweater or knit a scarf for someone in need of God's love and warmth.

Read: Philippians 4:4-7

*Catherine A. Welch
Southbury, CT*

Wednesday, December 12, 2018

A Change of Plans

The heart of man plans his way, but the Lord establishes his steps.

Proverbs 16:9

Often we think we are in control of the plans for our life. But we fail to realize God is the One who is really in control. Can you imagine what Mary thought when the angel appeared to her and told her that she would give birth to a son named Jesus, who would bring eternal salvation to mankind? I'm sure Mary and Joseph didn't foresee this change of plans!

I don't think any of us could say our lives have gone exactly as planned. But is that really a bad thing? I have experienced several times throughout my life the certain knowledge that God was in control. His plans have saved my life on more than one occasion. His plans are much better than anything I could have imagined!

Father, thank you for guiding my life according to your will. Amen.

Reflect: How has God changed your plans for your ultimate good?

Read: Proverbs 16:1-9

*Betsy Becker Niedringhaus
Ballwin, MO*

Thursday, December 13, 2018

Repurposed People Blossom Still

So even to old age and gray hairs, O God, do not forsake me, until I proclaim your might to another generation.

Psalm 71:18

Summer flowers are long gone. Yet my wife and I have flowers that bloom throughout winter. These are a creation of a friend who makes use of old dishes she finds in yard sales and consignment shops. She repurposes them by gluing saucers to plates, adds other touches of glass or ceramics, fixes them to a piece of rebar for ground placement—and behold, flowers that grace our yard all seasons!

Christ can repurpose people who may have grown tired in life or career. You may feel like a “has been,” and think your better days lie in the past. But don’t worry, Christ is not finished with you yet!

*Here I am, Lord; repurpose me as you see fit!
Amen.*

Consider: Moses, once a mighty prince reduced to lowly shepherd, was 80 years old when God called him to his greatest work! (Exodus 2-3; Acts 7:20-30)

Read: Psalm 71:17-24; 2 Corinthians 5:17

*Ted Zimmerman
Napa, CA*

Friday, December 14, 2018

Be Kind

Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

Ephesians 4:32

I am embarrassed to admit how many times I become impatient with others, especially during the holiday season. Why do I think that my stresses and deadlines are important, but the person at the check-out counter, or the driver in the car ahead of me, has no right to his or her concerns?

Satan is a roaring lion, seeking to devour the Christian in any way possible, and making me feel stressed during the holidays is one of his favorite ploys. So, this year, instead of striving for the perfect party dish or gift, I'm asking Jesus to remind me to always celebrate all the folks I run into each day. You know, the ones he came to save.

Lord Jesus, remind me daily of the love you have for others and help me to love and care for them as you do. Amen.

Welcome: Mentally prepare to be kind to all you meet this holy season.

Read: Colossians 3:12-17

*Katherine Klemp
St. Paul, MN*

Saturday, December 15, 2018

Merry Hope!

For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

Romans 8:24-25

The word *hope* is often part of a conversation. Hoping something good will occur or hoping nothing bad happens are normal expressions. Hope is a wish without certainty. When something hoped for occurs, there is joy; when it doesn't, there is sadness or disappointment. Hope has no certainty, or does it?

Many, many years ago in Genesis, and later by the prophet Isaiah, we are told of an event that is certain, the coming of a Savior. Believing in him changes our hope into certainty. Trusting in our Savior of hope is our completeness.

God in heaven, your faithfulness of never-ending love gives us the certain hope we have in the glorious life you have set aside for us in heaven. For that, we praise you! Amen.

Remember: God's promise is certain.

Read: Isaiah 9: 6-7

*Don Hollmann
Ballwin, MO*

Sunday, December 16, 2018

You Gotta Love It!

Rejoice in the Lord always.

Philippians 4:4

My father-in-law had an expression he repeated often after experiencing an unexpected blessing. Whether it was a perfect golf shot, reeling in a nice perch, or watching the sun set, he would say with a grin, “You gotta love it!” It was his way of marking the occasion with a special note of wonder and a thankful heart for God’s surprise blessings.

Why can we rejoice? The psalmist proclaims, “This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it” (Psalm 118:24). And Peter writes about our reason to rejoice, even in our troubles, because Jesus has risen from the dead: “In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials” (1 Peter 1:6). Let’s rejoice at all times with thankful hearts!

Thank you, Father, for filling our days with special blessings, which fill us with joy. Amen.

Praise: Give God thanks for all his blessings.

Read: Psalm 118:21-29; Philippians 4:4-8; 1 Peter 1:3-9

*Steve Hess
Ft. Myers, FL*

Monday, December 17, 2018

The First Christmas Concert

*Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace
among those with whom he is pleased!*

Luke 2:14

Have you ever wondered, as I do, what the tune and the meter were of the angels' song on Christmas? Was it like an "Hallelujah Chorus," or were there somber notes foretelling the future suffering of God's baby Son? Whatever the music, the message—as in all choral singing—was more important than the melody. In the centuries that followed, this message has been sung by earthly choirs, from the stately music of Handel and Bach to the rousing "Go Tell It on the Mountain." In the midst of your busy preparations, free your heart to read, and even sing: "Glory to God in highest heav'n, who unto us his Son has giv'n! While angels sing with pious mirth a glad new year to all the earth."

*Help me, Lord, to share my thanks and rejoicing
with all who need joy. Amen.*

*Ask: Invite someone to attend a Christmas concert
or special worship service with you.*

Read: Luke 2; Isaiah 9:2-7

*Connie Bretscher
Valparaiso, IN*

Tuesday, December 18, 2018

Sometimes Words Are Not Enough

So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord.” But he said to them, “Unless I see ... I will never believe.”

John 20:25

God spoke in many and different ways to his people throughout their history, but in these last days God has spoken through his Son (Hebrews 1:1-2). Words were not enough.

The angels proclaimed the good news of Jesus' birth to the shepherds, but it wasn't enough. They had to go to Bethlehem to see for themselves.

The women told the followers of Jesus that he has risen. But they didn't believe. Only when Jesus stood among them did they believe.

Sometimes the words of the Bible are also not enough for us. We need someone to come to us, to bring the presence of Christ to us, for faith to fill our hearts.

Lord Jesus, help me to surround my life with people who bring me into your presence. Amen.

Identify: List the people who make Jesus real for you.

Read: John 20:24-29

*Lionel Otto
Adelaide, South Australia*

Wednesday, December 19, 2018

Christmas Programs

And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths, and laid him in a manger,

Luke 2:7

When I was in elementary school, as soon as Thanksgiving was past, we began learning the songs and recitations for our Christmas program. On Christmas Eve, dressed in our best, we enthusiastically presented the program to the congregation, then walked home, sometimes through falling snow, clutching our box of hard candy, two pencils and an orange—gifts presented by the school board.

Many of us have happy memories of those years and those programs and now enjoy watching today's children doing presentations during the Christmas season. It is good to continue this tradition, handed down from one generation to the next. Their participation helps them, and us, keep the focus on Jesus' birth, hopefully more than on all the secular traditions and widespread commercialism. May it always be so.

Dear Father, help each of us to see Jesus' birth with a childlike wonder and faith. Amen.

Do: If you are able to do so, attend a children's program as part of your Christmas worship.

Read: Luke 2:8-14

*Harriet Stennfeld
Fort Wayne, IN*

Thursday, December 20, 2018

The Christmas Cup

Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above.

James 1:17

It is a white ceramic cup. Pictured in red silhouette is a teacher leading a classroom in song. The bold-faced black letters proclaim: “Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so.” The four-ounce cup holds a “ton” of memories. It reminds me of my Sunday school teachers. It reminds me that my parents bought a home near our church. It reminds me that I have known Jesus’ love for many, many years.

The cup emphasizes just how “purpose-full” a gift can be. It was passed down by the hand of a Sunday school teacher. It reminds me that good gifts, perfect gifts, come from the heavenly Father’s hand. This cup helps me to focus on how I choose gifts and receive gifts at Christmas, and at other times, too.

Thank you, Jesus, for being active in the family of believers through all generations. Amen.

Request: In prayer, ask the Holy Spirit for gift-giving advice.

Read: Luke 11:1-13

*Harry Edenfield
Brownstown, MI*

Friday, December 21, 2018

Christmas Stress

I bring you good news of great joy.

Luke 2:10

At the beginning of a class about stress, the instructor asked us, “What causes stress in your life?” An elderly lady sitting across the table from me blurted out, “Christmas! My adult children come home and revert to fighting like teenagers again. They all expect that I will do all the cooking and cleaning up. And the presents I give them are never the right thing. I hate Christmas!”

Whether we want to admit it or not, we all have experienced the same stresses to some degree. When Christmas stress hits us, we need to use stress relievers. Deeply breathe in the message the angel gave to the shepherds, “Fear not (don’t be stressed out), for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.” Block the negative Christmas commercialism from your mind. Instead, meditate on God’s grace; he sent his Son, the Christmas Child, for our salvation. Love Christmas again!

Lord, help me praise and thank you this Christmas. Amen.

Comfort: Reach out to someone experiencing Christmas stress.

Read: Luke 1:26-38; Luke 2:1-20

*Stan Tordsen
Stewartville, MN*

Saturday, December 22, 2018

Oh! Thank You!

Giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Ephesians 5:20

Christmas is a time of anticipation and excitement and receiving gifts, with at least one of those gifts hopefully being an item wanted above anything else. Receiving such a gift brings excitement and a loud “This is just what I wanted!” followed by “Thank you so much!”

The coming of a Savior as announced by God in Genesis thousands of years ago was a promise of hope. Wondering and waiting for such a long time can create skepticism that the child lying in a manger in Bethlehem is truly the Savior. But from the shepherds’ first viewing until his death and resurrection, Christ let us know he is the promised Savior. “God, this is just what we need! Thank you so much!”

Heavenly Father, your promise of old for a Savior was proven by the arrival of our Lord Jesus. May we never forget your caring love and may we daily give you thanks. Amen.

Reflect: In God’s divine goodness, he promises and he provides.

Read: Psalm 107:8-9

*Don Hollmann
Ballwin, MO*

Sunday, December 23, 2018

Can't Wait!

The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary ... behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus."

Luke 1:30-31

Everything points to Christmas. Children are already filled with excitement and anticipation: "I just can't wait!" God's Old Testament people must have said it often: "When is God going to send the promised Savior? I just can't wait!" Mary and Joseph must have wondered: "What is this miracle child from God going to be like? I can't wait!"

Would the Savior be a warrior-king like David? Would the Christ Child be born with a visible halo? A child may think his dreams will come true in a present wrapped up under the tree. But the real gift, the precious gift of God, was wrapped up in swaddling clothes. And so, we wait, not in idle speculation about some fanciful dream, but with eager anticipation to celebrate the birth of the One who came as a little child to be our Savior.

Dear God, grant me quiet moments in this noisy season to meditate on the gift of Jesus. Amen.

Reflect: Write down and share a Christmas memory about Jesus from your childhood.

Read: Psalm 130; Luke 1

*Lonie Eatherton
Fenton, MO*

Monday, December 24, 2018

Where Is Home?

There was no place for them in the inn.

Luke 2:7

Many of our friends are changing their residence from a house to a senior living apartment or villa, locally or in a different state. With this major transition, the emotional question arises: Where is home? What does it mean to be “home for Christmas”?

The familiar Christmas story in Luke 2 suggests a simple but powerful answer: Home is where Jesus is, the Word made Flesh who dwells among us. Home was with Jesus for Mary and Joseph, whether in a Bethlehem manger, a house, Egypt or Nazareth, a worship home for shepherds and later Wise Men or home for itinerant disciples in Galilee, Samaria and Judea. Jesus’ earthly dwelling led to a Jerusalem cross, a borrowed tomb and a brief physical resurrection presence with his followers. Ascended, he prepares a heavenly home for us and is present always with us on earth until he comes again to take us home.

Comfort us, Lord, with your presence now and forever. Amen.

Welcome: Share your home in Jesus’ presence with someone this week.

Read: John 14:1-3

*Stephen J. Carter
Oakville, MO*

Tuesday, December 25, 2018

To and From Bethlehem

Let us go over to Bethlehem.

Luke 2:15

To and from Bethlehem—that was the journey of the shepherds in response to the message of the angels. To and from Bethlehem—that has been our response through the years to the very same message.

However, for many, the journey has lost its enthusiasm. It has become stale. We need a fresh look. Why not this Christmas look for new insights as we celebrate the birth of our Savior? Why not identify with the shepherds as they worshipped, witnessed and were filled with wonderment? Why not share the message of Christmas wrapped around the announcement of the angel “For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, Christ the Lord.”

Lord Jesus, help us ponder anew the miracle of your birth, the message of your coming and its meaning for our daily living. Amen.

Respond: Take time during the 12 days of Christmas to remember the response to the birth of Jesus by the shepherds, Mary, Joseph, the Wise Men, Simeon and Anna.

Read: Luke 2:1-40; Matthew 2:1-12

*Walter M. Schoedel
Webster Groves, MO*

Wednesday, December 26, 2018

Fear Not, Shepherds!

And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people."

Luke 2:10

Have you ever thought of yourself as a shepherd in your family? As seniors, we've had a lot of experience "shepherding" our children, grandchildren, nieces and nephews. Like shepherds, we've guided them on the right paths, counseled lost sheep, and rescued them from dangerous situations. Through his Word and other Christians, God instructs us regarding his will and how to find the lost sheep. We learn how to protect and comfort our families when they are threatened by sickness, problems and dangers on their life journeys, and on our own journeys as well! Like the shepherds, we worship the Christ Child and share the Christmas story with our family and others.

Dear God, glory to you in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom you are pleased. Amen.

Share: Like the shepherds, glorify and praise God by sharing the story of our Savior's birth.

Read: Luke 2:1-20

*Annette Schumacher
Muskego, WI*

Thursday, December 27, 2018

The Three Wise Women

And his mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation.

Luke 1:50

We hear a lot about the three Wise Men at Christmas. Have you ever considered what we can learn from the three Wise Women: Mary, Elizabeth and Anna? All three of these women likely experienced fear. Mary was an unmarried, pregnant teen. Would she be disgraced? Elizabeth was pregnant well beyond child-bearing age. Would the baby be healthy? Anna was getting older. Would she see God's redemption before she died?

All three also trusted that the Lord would carry them through fear to joy. What a marvelous lesson for all of us, no matter what age we are, no matter what we face. Today's Bible verse comes from Mary's song of praise. It reminds us that God's mercy and love did not fail those before us, nor will it fail those who follow. And it certainly will not fail us.

Lord, you are mighty and have done great things. Lead us, too, through fear to joy. Amen.

To do: Make a list of your blessings.

Read: Luke 1:5-25, 39-45; Luke 1:26-38, 46-56; Luke 2:22-38

*Jane Wilke
Woodbury, MN*

Friday, December 28, 2018

Perfect Peace

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

Philippians 4:7

When the angels appeared to the shepherds the night Jesus was born, they sang about God's peace coming to earth. The angels' song was not only beautiful. It was a declaration that God's peace had come through Jesus Christ.

Sometimes our world can feel anything but peaceful. Life is full of stress and changes, and we all have our struggles. But deep in our hearts, we are searching for peace that will carry us through our trials.

This Christmas season, meditate on verses about the perfect peace available through Jesus. His peace surpasses all understanding because it is not of this world. He sends it to our hearts through the Holy Spirit. His peace guards our hearts from fear and our minds from anxiety.

Lord Jesus, you provide peace that the world cannot. Let your peace flood my heart and mind. Amen.

Share: Find a verse in Scripture about peace and share it with a friend.

Read: John 14:27; Colossians 3:15

*Sarah Geringer
Jackson, MO*

Saturday, December 29, 2018

He Knows Your Name

Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine.

Isaiah 43:1

My grandma frequently called us kids by each other's names. Now I am experiencing this same disorder. I catch myself starting to call my daughter by my sisters' names. Thank goodness Jesus knows each one of us by our name. He has known it since before we were born and it is now forever written in the Book of Life.

Even before Jesus was born, his own mighty name was known: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father and Prince of Peace. So even if we sometimes stumble over names, we know we are known by the name that is above every other name.

Everlasting Father, you number my name among those in your book. May I always give your name the ultimate honor and praise. Amen.

Learn: Look up the meaning of your name and share with someone the hope you have in Jesus who formed you, redeemed you and will one day, face to face, call you by name.

Read: Isaiah 9:6; Psalm 139:16; John 20:13-16; 1 Corinthians 13:9-12

Nancy Rapp
St. Louis, MO

Sunday, December 30, 2018

In These Last Days

Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son.

Hebrews 1:1-2

More than 19 centuries ago, the writer of the Book of Hebrews refers to his present time as “these last days.” That’s a long time ago! Yet, here we are, still living in the same last days.

As another year draws to a close, and as we watch the deteriorating condition of this world and its people, we often get the feeling that we’re living in the last days. That era began, as today’s verse explains, when Jesus came to earth and began speaking directly to the people. That era will end when Jesus returns the second time. As we wait, living in these last days, we find great comfort in knowing that God has spoken to us by his Son. His Word is a blessing and revelation, showing us the way to eternal life through faith. When Jesus speaks, we listen!

We treasure your Word, Lord, as we wait patiently in these last days. Amen.

Listen: As you read the Bible, imagine Jesus speaking the words directly to you.

Read: John 2:22; Acts 2:16-21

*Marj Maynard
Pipe Creek, TX*

Monday, December 31, 2018

A Blessing

They shall call his name Immanuel (which means, God with us).

Matthew 1:23

Throughout my ministry, when I conducted a baptism, a confirmation, a wedding or a funeral, I offered a special blessing. It was my paraphrase of the fifth-century Celtic lyric written by St. Patrick: “Christ be with you. Christ beside you. Christ before you. Christ behind you. Christ within you. Christ to win you. Christ to comfort and restore you.” Then I would add a personal thought for those present.

Today in my retirement, I pray the words as a prayer for myself, for family, friends and many others. I close the blessing with a personal thought for the occasion. Might I suggest that you follow my example? With the blessing, you are asking God to go with you as you live out your life in his name.

Lord Jesus, fulfill your promise of your presence in my daily life. You are my Immanuel. Amen.

Pray: Develop your own prayer inviting Jesus to go with you, with his grace, his mercy, his forgiveness, his guidance and his strength.

Read: Matthew 1:22-23; Matthew 13:23; Matthew 28:20

*Walter M. Schoedel
Webster Groves, MO*

HOLY HABITS for **HOPE-FULL HEALTH**

TOP 5 LIST OF THINGS WE “SHOULD” WORRY ABOUT!

As we reflect devotionally on Christ’s affirmation to us that there is no need to “worry” because the Lord has already died and risen for all of us, here is a list of items for us to consider if we still want to consider worrying about “something”:

Spend time “worrying” about:

1. Older adults who are alone and have no one to tell their stories to.
2. Younger people who need an older person to relate to and share with, like someone we needed when we were growing up.
3. Congregations who still see aging as a burden to bear rather than a blessing to celebrate!
4. The lost, the least, the last, the lonely in our world, young and old, who are waiting to hear and feel the message of love and forgiveness in Christ that comes through physical and spiritual ways of giving them purpose in life.
5. People of all ages who simply need to hear a word of joy, a hug of love, a message of hope, from you and from me—today!

Go ye forth and “worry” about these things, or better yet, let us go forth ... and celebrate God’s gift of aging, by doing and being the Lord’s hands, feet and voice to others!

Hope-Full Praying

Finding Peace

Help me find your peace, Lord, somewhere. We certainly do not find it on the TV news or in the newspapers. At times, we do not feel it in our churches, or even within our own families. Give me lots of pieces of peace, Lord, beginning with me and always ending with you. Amen.

Being with Family

Lord of all families, help us to live and breathe together as your “holy huddle”! Bring us together—physically, emotionally, and spiritually—through meals, worship, memories, vacations, the internet, and special celebrations. We are your family, Lord, whether we are gathered or scattered. Keep us praying, “Our Father,” as you bless and guide us all. Amen.

For Healing

Heal me, Lord, in body, mind and spirit. I do not ask you to take away all of my physical aches, my mental lapses or my wandering faith. I know you could do this, but I only ask you to enable me to deal with these daily issues, knowing that your death and resurrection is all I ever need for daily healing. Heal me, Lord, so that I may heal others. Amen.

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