

Prayer Fasting Works of Love



40 Days

Enterprise First United Methodist Church
217 S. Main Street, Enterprise, AL

2020 Lenten Devotional

Lenten Devotional Booklet

This devotional booklet is comprised of devotionals from members of the congregation of Enterprise First United Methodist Church. We give a heartfelt "thank you" to each person who contributed a devotional to make this a reality. We pray you enjoy this devotional as it prepares each of us for the season of Lent.

We are reprinting several devotionals that were written by cherished members of our congregation who "fought the good fight, finished the race kept the faith" (2 Timothy 4:7; adapted) and have gone on to their eternal home.

EFUMC Prayer Ministry

The Meaning of Ash Wednesday

Ash Wednesday is a Christian holy day of prayer and fasting.

Ash Wednesday derives its name from the placing of repentance ashes on the foreheads of participants to either the words "Repent, and believe in the Gospel" or the dictum "Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return."

The scriptural impetus for Lent is the forty days that Jesus spent in the wilderness after his baptism. The three earliest Gospels – Matthew, Mark, and Luke – all state that after his encounter with John the Baptist at the river Jordan, Jesus was led out into the desert by the Spirit. There he spent 40 days and night being tempted by Satan before calling the disciples in Galilee.

Lent recalls times of wilderness and wandering, from newly freed Hebrew slaves in exile to Jesus' temptation in the desert. Despite our culture of self-indulgence, we, too, are called to walk an alternative path—one of humility, justice, and peace. The season of Lent invites us to consider the challenging, beautiful life that comes with walking in the way of grace.

February 27, 2020

Take Off Your Shoes, for You Stand on Holy Ground

By Mady Flohr

"Now Yahweh saw him go forward to look, and God called to him from the middle of the bush. "Moses, Moses," he said. "Here I am," he answered. "Come no nearer," God said. "Take off your shoes, for the place on which you stand is holy ground."

-Exodus 3:4-5

This Lenten season we might address the question, what shoes do we need to take off to better hear God's voice and recognize where it is, we stand on holy ground? The place where God dwells where is that? Perhaps, the shoes we wear represents our busyness, our fears or worries, our ambitions, our addictions, obstacles which get in the way of recognizing that holy dwelling place may be right where we are. We feel how raw and miserable, how unbecoming our shoes have become. We've become blind and deaf with worry and fear. No wonder, our beloved Creator says, "Take off your shoes." In taking off our shoes, we are allowed to feel the earth beneath the soles of our feet, to touch the holy and become more sentient. The soul of our feet joined to sand, to earth, to water, we feel it, we relish the sense of being connected to something outside of ourselves, the things of God. We form an awareness which reshapes us into something finer, into that spiritual image of God. Perhaps, the holy ground is you, or can become you.

Prayer: From one of my favorite spiritual writers, Macrina Wiederkehr, a paraphrased excerpt from one of her meditations as a prayer. "Dear God. 'Take off my shoes of distraction. Take off my shoes of ignorance and blindness. Take off my shoes of hurry, worry and fear. Take off anything that prevents me from becoming holy ground, where You, Oh Lord can dwell.'" Amen.

February 28, 2020

A Vision of Teamwork

By John Fergus

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

-Matthew 11:29-30

What does striving side by side look like? An image that comes to my mind is a team of draft heavy horses. Harnessed together, they can pull very heavy loads and do incredible work.

An owner chooses which horses to team together because he knows their individual strengths and he understands how each horse's strengths will complement the other's. He knows that when they're paired together they'll become stronger, more capable, more confident. He knows that they'll work together to carry the load over whatever terrain and under whatever conditions he chooses for them. Only the owner can determine the eventual destination of the team and the load they're carrying, and only he can determine when the journey is complete.

As members of our church, we need to ask how we will be yoked together. And, once we're yoked together, we need to ask how well we will work together. Those are important questions for us right now. How we answer those questions will determine how well we, as a body of Christian brothers and sisters, hear and understand our Master's guiding voice and then move forward at the same speed, in the same direction, for the best results.

Prayer: Father God, give us the eyes to see and the ears to hear your directions. Help us to lend our talents to those of others so, as a team, we move our church forward toward what you want it to be. Amen.

February 29, 2020

Recovery By Frank Zerbinos

“Prophets hang on these two commandments.” -Matthew 22: 37

Being a late entry into this Lenten message program, I prayed for guidance for the right scripture and the right message. At 4:00 a.m. I awoke - the message was clear – Recovery. Never really thought I needed this, but after months participating in a Celebrate Recovery Step-Study, I concluded that this is something pretty much universal. Why choose what Jesus proclaimed as the “greatest commandment in the Law?”

I ask these questions and try to move to a YES answer to guide me on the pathway to Recovery:

Do I LOVE God with all my Heart, and love nothing in comparison?

Do I LOVE God with all my Soul - with all my life?

Do I LOVE God with all my strength - exerting all the powers of my body and soul in the service of God?

Do I LOVE God with all my mind, applying myself only to know God, and His Holy Will: - who receives with submission, gratitude, and pleasure, and the truths which God has revealed to me?

Do I LOVE my neighbor as myself?

The pathway to Recovery is winding, with many obstacles... However, a focus on putting a check in the boxes for each of the questions above, will help us to the finish line.

Prayer: Lord, Help me to Love You with All my Heart, my Soul, my Mind and with all my Strength, and my Neighbor as myself. Amen.

March 1, 2020

First Sunday in Lent

“After his baptism, Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing at all during those days, and when they were over, he was famished. The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread." Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone.'"

Then the devil led him up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. And the devil said to him, "To you I will give their glory and all this authority; for it has been given over to me, and I give it to anyone I please. If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours." Jesus answered him, "It is written,

'Worship the Lord your God,
and serve only him.'"

Then the devil took him to Jerusalem, and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, for it is written,

'He will command his angels concerning you,
to protect you,'

and

'On their hands they will bear you up,
so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.'"

Jesus answered him, "It is said, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'" When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him until an opportune time."

- Luke 4:1-13

March 2, 2020

Walk Through Life

By Bill Schwartz

Original devotional March 4 2009

“Unless you are like this little child you can not enter the kingdom of heaven.” -Matthew 18:3

Last Saturday, as we worked in the FLC and watched the children play basketball and cheer lead, I watched a young baby taking its' first steps between it's mother and father. They knelt down and encouraged the youngster to take those little steps between them. As the youngster waddled back and forth, it seemed to gain a little more confidence each time.

The thought of our “walk through life” started as we came to believe. First it seemed as though the Holy Spirit placed a void in our minds or beings, though we didn't realize what it was. It was the same as that little child knowing there was something that he should be doing. The nudge of the Holy Spirit caused me to listen intently to some person who was talking about a man named Jesus and what He could do for me. The urge to know more encouraged me to seek more about Jesus. Then a person, who felt the same spiritual urge, told you to accept Him as your Lord and Savior if we truly believed. And then the gradual assurance that we can be safe in the arms of Jesus as that little child knows the safety in his mother and father.

Prayer: Thank you, Lord, that from the actions of children we can learn so much. Praise the Lord.

March 3, 2020

Family Secret

By Denver Sasser

“Do not conform yourselves to the standards of this world, but let God transform you inwardly by a complete change of your mind...”
-Romans 12:2

I spend time each week trying to help men that struggle with challenges that are beyond their ability to overcome alone. Many of us have some sort of challenge that we struggle with. We can sometimes feel all alone and maybe even unwanted.

One young man that I know lives in a prison that I visit each week. His name is “Tim” and he is in his twenties. Not long ago he was in a study group that I was leading. The study is designed to ask probing questions that awaken one’s thoughts and help to discover the inner person. One question asks, “What was the family secret in your family of origin?”

“Tim” answered the question, “I am the family secret. I was placed in a group home when I was very young and my family didn’t come back to see me. I think they were ashamed of me and didn’t want anyone to know.” I told him that there is One who will not leave us. That no matter how messed up our lives have become we are not so bad that he won’t forgive us. His name is Jesus and He died for us a long time ago... and when it is time He will come back.

“Tim” and I have decided that for this Lent we are going to “give up” our hearts and our minds to the One who gave all for us.

Prayer: Lord help me to realize that being willing to submit my life to the transformation that only You can bring is the most important thing I can do today. Amen.

March 4, 2020

Cultivate Thankfulness

By Deanna Dionne

“Let the peace of Christ keep you in tune with each other, in step with each other. None of this going off and doing your own thing. And cultivate thankfulness. Let the word of Christ have run of the house.”
-Colossians 3: 15-16

There is a business man, who is CEO of a company, named Sheldon Young. He hand-writes birthday cards to EACH of his 9200 employees as a way to say thank you! He has done this for 35 years! He lets his employees know they are appreciated and that their efforts don't go unnoticed.

May we all focus our attention outward rather than inward and show appreciation for others. Kindness goes a long ways, you can make a difference

Prayer:

Gracious God,
For this new morning and it's light
For rest and shelter of the night,
For health and food, for love and friends,
For every gift Your goodness sends,
We thank you. Amen

March 5, 2020

Living for the Lord

By Mike Arnold

Original devotional March 28, 2009

"Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another." -John 13:34

Mickey Longsworth is our friend. Mickey is a painter. He painted our house for Amy's wedding. He is a singer and a musician. He sang at Roberta's Daddy's funeral. He is an Ordained Minister, a fireman, a father, a husband, and a true witness. Mickey was diagnosed with a terminal cancer several years ago. Yet we have never heard Mickey complain about anything, not even his cancer. He has spent his life being more concerned about others than himself. He always reaches out to, ministers to, and witnesses to others. He never preached at you, but would quietly witness, often just by prayer and listening.

In 2005, while in the Cardiac Intensive Care Unit awaiting surgery, Mickey came to visit. My visitors were very restricted. Mickey told the nurse that he was there to minister to me and pray for me. Roberta and I both welcomed this opportunity. Mickey came in and we had an old fashioned "laying on of the hands prayer service." This while his cancer grew and spread. Mickey was getting worse, but he kept on LIVING FOR THE LORD, for his family, and for all of us.

God called up Mickey's number of days in 2007. In John 15: 13 Jesus said "Greater love hath no man than to lay down ones' life for his friend." Mickey did this daily, quietly, lovingly. Mickey was a painter, a singer, and a musician. He was an Ordained Minister, a true witness. Mickey was a father, and a husband. Mickey IS our friend. I truly believe that Mickey is a saint in heaven, and is doing what he always did. He is still praying for us, each and every one.

Prayer: Lord God, we pray that you will bless the Mickey Longsworth's of this world, and bless those they minister to. We pray for ourselves, Lord God, that we can all be a Mickey Longsworth to each and every child of yours. Amen

March 6, 2020

Where Is Your Treasure?

By Perry Dillard

“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

-Matthew 6:19-21

One of my favorite hymn growing up was a song titled *Heaven Holds All to Me*. Written by Tillit S. Teddlie in 1915 it is based on Jesus’s message in the Gospel of Matthew where he reminds us where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. As child my Grandmother lived with us and she would often share her love for music and her Faith with me through song. I can still remember her singing as she worked in the kitchen “*Earth holds no treasures but perish with using, However precious they be; Yet there’s a country to which I am going: Heaven holds all to me.*” My Grandmother understood the importance of where to place your priorities. Unfortunately all too often we allow our selves to be distracted and we forget our true purpose. This hymn and the memories of my Grandmother remind me where my treasure is.

Where is your treasure?

Prayer: Father we thank you for the gift of your son and that he willing gave his life so that we may live. Prepare our hearts so that we may seek you in all that we do. Amen

March 7, 2020

God's Judgment

By Rex Bynum

In David Jeremiah's book, *The Book of Signs*, there is a chapter entitled "Martyrs" that deals with the issue of God's judgment. Religious scholar, W. A. Criswell, wrote these words:

"Whenever there is a true prophet of God, he will preach judgment. These modern so-called ministers of God speak all things nice...There is not any hell and there is not any Devil and there is not any judgment of God...In our enlightened and sophisticated day...we stand up and we speak of the love of Jesus, and we speak of peace, and we speak of all things pretty and beautiful. But remember...the same Book that tells us about the good, tells us about the bad. The same Revelation that speaks to us about heaven, speaks about hell. The Bible that presents the Lord Jesus as the Savior, is the same Bible that presents to us the Devil as our enemy and adversary of damnation and destruction. The two go together. If there is not anything to be saved from, we do not need a savior."

I believed I needed to be saved and I found my Savior! I have been saved by grace through faith by the shed blood of Jesus Christ and through His resurrection will have the hope of eternal life in Heaven! Do you need to be saved?

Prayer: Thank you, Lord, for your saving grace

March 8, 2020

Second Sunday in Lent

“Some Pharisees came and said to Jesus, "Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you." He said to them, "Go and tell that fox for me, 'Listen, I am casting out demons and performing cures today and tomorrow, and on the third day I finish my work. Yet today, tomorrow, and the next day I must be on my way, because it is impossible for a prophet to be killed outside of Jerusalem!

Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! See, your house is left to you. And I tell you, you will not see me until the time comes when you say, 'Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.'"

Luke 13:31-35

March 9, 2020

God's Vision

By Frank McCormack

Original devotional April 11, 2003

“Unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build it...”
-Psalm 127:1

The proud heritage of Enterprise First United Methodist Church stretches back to 1883 when thirteen charter members formed our church, establishing the earliest church of any denomination in Enterprise. Throughout the 120 year history of EFUMC our growth both spiritually and numerically has brought us many times to major decisions. We thank GOD for the vision He provided to those who came before us. Each time a crossroad was reached, the congregation stepped forward in faith and made decisions that furthered the mission and ministries of our church.

Prayer: Father, we pray for your help and guidance as we, the current membership, embrace a journey of faith and commitment that will make it possible to reach more people with GOD'S love by the provision of new and expanded facilities.

March 10, 2020

WERE YOU THERE?

By Rev. Billy Luttrell

United Methodist Hymnal page 288

“It was the third hour when they crucified Him.” Mark 15:25

I love many different genres of music. I especially like Folk songs, as they express the heartfelt traditions and experiences of a culture. Many of the origins of folk music have been lost, but the feel, the passion has been carried on for generations. One of my favorite hymns for lent and the Easter season comes from this rich American spiritual tradition which was developed in the early 1800s by African American slaves.

This spiritual, like most spirituals, has a lot of emotional feeling and places the singer at the crucifixion. We feel the “tremble” as we sing and the pounding of the hammer as the Roman soldiers nailed Jesus to the cross. We “tremble” as the sun suddenly goes dark and refuses to shine. We smell the burial spices and weep as they take Jesus’ body and seal it in the tomb. We are called to the reality of what has just taken place. Jesus is dead!

Then that final triumphant verse! Again we “tremble” as we feel the rumble of the stone rolling away and we hear the angel announce, “He is not here...” and we can hardly restrain ourselves from shouting, “Glory, Glory, Glory”!

During this Lenten and Easter season, I would challenge you to put yourself at the foot of the cross where Christ was tortured and crucified. Place yourself outside the tomb and feel the emotion as the stone is rolled away and the angel announces, “He is not here”! Try to place yourself into this scene and imagine how it might have felt to be present. Allow this song to minister to you through this season.

*The optional verse 6 and chorus have been added by popular use. “Were you there when He rose up from the grave”. And chorus, “Sometimes I feel like shouting glory, glory, glory! When I think how God raised Him from the dead.”

Prayer: Glory! Glory! Glory! Hallelujah! You are alive!

March 11, 2020

Precious Time

By Jean Johnson Sasser

Find rest, O my soul, in God alone;
my hope comes from him.

He alone is my rock and my salvation;
he is my fortress, I will not be shaken.

-Psalm 62:5-6

My heavenly Father has given me the opportunity to care for each of my parents in their old age, first my father and now my mother. My father struggled with moderate, then severe, Alzheimer's disease for over two years before he died. Through frequent visits and time spent caring for him near the end, I was able to fully experience a love and connection that, although difficult at times, was my opportunity to give back to him and help my mother deal with her gradual loss. Since his death in 2017, Mother has lived with my husband Denver and myself in our home, giving us a chance to bond like never before. My soul finds rest in the Lord as I pre-grieve the loss that will inevitably occur. My hope comes from the Lord alone that He will be my rock and my fortress in dealing with this grief. I have faith that my Heavenly Father will see me through every dark valley.

Prayer: Dear Lord, thank you for precious time spent with loved ones, especially those who need our help. Lord, give us rest and comfort when we grieve. Soothe our sorrows with your words of comfort from the Bible. Because you live in our hearts, we can face tomorrow. Amen.

March 12, 2020

Accounting 101

By Billy Warren

Original devotional March 5, 2010

“To who much is given, from him much will be expected.” -Luke 13:48

Our Lord in heaven gives us many gifts and talents. How we handle these gifts as stewards and ‘grow in the sight of God’ is how we will be judged. All of us want and enjoy these gifts, but are we willing to accept the obligations that go with them? Using today’s jargon we may be able to ‘talk the talk,’ but this also requires us to be able to ‘walk the walk.’

I have probably issued thousands of administrator or guardian bonds. When appointed by the courts this person is expected to faithfully look after the property, and assets of the estate. The courts require a bond to ensure this is done faithfully. When the estate is settled, the administrator gives a final accounting. Many good and loyal persons perform their duties and are released. Unfortunately, some fail miserably, neglecting their obligations and converting assets for their own enrichment.

I compare the duties of a court appointed administrator with our own personal stewardship and the management and use of the gifts and talents that God has given each of us. GOD does not require a bond!!!! But sooner or later we will have to appear in His court to give a final accounting, and hopefully we will hear the words “well done thy good and faithful servant.”

Prayer: Dear Lord help me be a good steward and accept the gifts and responsibilities you have given me and to be able to ‘walk the walk.’

March 13, 2020

Love

By Charlie & Tammy Ezzell

“Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children, and walk in the way of love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrificed to God.” -Ephesians 5:1-2

How do we define Love?

Our bond of love is extremely strong this week since our family was blessed by the birth of a beautiful baby girl, a gift from God.

When a child is born, it is a precious possession. Immediately a bond is formed between the mother and child. This bond of love is formed when a mother gives herself up for the child's needs. This love for the child is unconditional.

As we approach the season of Lent let us remember Christ's love for us.

When we look into our children's eyes let us feel that unconditional love and remember Christ's love for you.

Prayer: Dear Lord, when we look into our children's eyes let us remember Christ's love for you.

March 14, 2020

Christian Soldier

By Allen Dunham

“Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No soldier gets entangled in civilian pursuits, since his aim is to please the one who enlisted him.”
-2 Timothy 2:3-4 (ESV)

Sabine Baring-Gould had a brilliant mind. Born on this day in 1834 in Exeter, England, he mastered six languages, became an author, archaeologist, architect, artist, teacher, and folk song collector. He also was a full-time minister.

In 1865, the school at the church where he was pastor planned to join with the school in a neighboring village. He wanted his children to sing while marching but could not think of “anything quite suitable.” He sat up that night and composed a hymn called “Onward, Christian Soldiers.”

He pictured the Christian life as a battle. Like soldiers, we should march as to war, “with the cross of Jesus going on before.” We are imitating the leading of Jesus, our “royal Master.” He saw the church as “a mighty army” that was following in the footsteps of saints who had lived before. “We are not divided, all one body we, one in hope and doctrine, one in charity.” He knew that “Crowns and thrones may perish; kingdoms rise and wane” but the church would remain. The gates of hell never can prevail because “we have Christ’s own promise, and that cannot fail.”

Remember you, too, are a soldier in God’s army, fighting a non-stop spiritual war. Do your part to win the battle by serving God with all your time, talents, and treasures. With God on your side, you can be confident of victory! Be bold and go into battle today.

Prayer: Father, I dedicate myself to be a soldier for You. I dedicate my life to Your kingdom. Use me to bring victory. In Jesus’ name, amen.

March 15, 2020

Third Sunday in Lent

At that very time there were some present who told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. He asked them, "Do you think that because these Galileans suffered in this way they were worse sinners than all other Galileans? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish as they did. Or those eighteen who were killed when the tower of Siloam fell on them--do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others living in Jerusalem? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish just as they did."

Then he told this parable: "A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came looking for fruit on it and found none. So he said to the gardener, 'See here! For three years I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree, and still I find none. Cut it down! Why should it be wasting the soil?' He replied, 'Sir, let it alone for one more year, until I dig around it and put manure on it. If it bears fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.'"

-Luke 13:1-9

March 16, 2020

The Psalms - Songs Meant to Be Sung

By Page Dionne

“I will be filled with joy because of you. I will sing praises to your name, O Most High.” -Psalm 9:2

Music has always been a large part of my life, and I have been playing guitar for 44 years now. It has only been in the past 15 or so years that I have come to realize that the only music I really want to play is the kind that glorifies God. The psalms were songs that were meant to be sung, by choirs or individuals, and King David was the author of many of them. When you read the psalms, look for the attributes of God, and dwell on them.

Frequently, I hear criticism of contemporary Christian music, that it is repetitive and not very deep theologically, and that contemporary Christian music doesn't have the richness of the hymns of old. Just like all generalizations there is an element of truth in such a bold statement, but it doesn't do justice to the genre as a whole. Gary Daniel, Pastor Emeritus of Enterprise First United Methodist Church and long time pastor who previously had no background in contemporary worship once made a comment to me that he was surprised about the amount of scripture there is in the songs we sing. Like the psalms of old, most of the songs Narrow Road plays tell of the attributes of God, and the story of Jesus. More importantly, those songs brought me back to the church after a long absence. How many others have found their way back home because of the music they heard in a contemporary setting?

Prayer; Lord, O Most High, I am filled with joy because of you. Allow me to sing your praises forever, here on Earth and in Heaven.

March 17, 2020

Second Chances

By Janis Luttrell

Each Sunday, I mark the pastor's chosen scripture reference in my Bible with the date and the name of the pastor or speaker bringing the message. It's just something I've done for many years. Most times I highlight the reference and oftentimes write notes in the margins beside the scripture. Sometimes, I will go through and reread what I've written, bringing to my mind the message that was given that particular day.

I was looking through my Bible recently and saw that on November 17, 2013, Pastor Danny preached in the traditional worship and he chose Jeremiah 18:6b-10. Verse 6b of this scripture passage says, "As the clay is in the potter's hand, so are you in my hand..." (TLB)

Most of us have heard that we are "clay in the Potter's hands," that God is shaping and molding each of us to be who He created us to be and, as you know, we all fall short *each* and *every* day. But, when we truly repent of these shortcomings and ask God to forgive us, He is faithful to do just that...to forgive us and give us a "second chance" – every time! But our repentance must be earnest...humble...sincere. In other words, we *must mean it* from our hearts, and we *must turn* from those sins. This is what brought Jesus to the cross – our unworthiness and our second chances.

Each time we earnestly try to turn from our sins, our Potter reshapes us, using those times of repentance to change us and mold us more into the person, the Christian, He so wants us to be.

Danny asked, "How are you living your second chances? Your redemption? How is God molding you?" When you truly repent of your sins, think about how He is using this time to change your heart, to change the way you see things, to change the way you live your life! Remember, He's molding you and shaping you to be like Him! Strive to honor His efforts!

Prayer: Abba Father, thank you for your abundant grace and Jesus' death on the cross that gives us second chances every day. Amen.

March 18, 2020

Hear My Prayer, O God!

By Bill Schwartz

Original devotional 2/15/2014

“Let not your heart be troubled. You believe in God;
believe also in me.” -John 14:1

Some time ago, I laid in a hospital recovering from a broken hip. My beautiful wife of 54 years, Dottie, slept on the sofa across the room. As I gazed upon her, I was thinking how very much I had loved her for these many years and I could feel my love growing more intense for her.

This love brought me back to the time years before when I had committed my life and soul to Jesus Christ. In the stillness of my room, I thought, “why can’t I love God with the same feeling of intensity that I love Dottie?” You see, all of these years, God was God, just a spiritual being that I didn’t worship like I did my Jesus.

I asked God to help me change and he heard my prayer immediately. I could see and hear Him give the Holy Spirit the command to grant my wish. I felt the same glow and powerful feeling of being in the presence of a supernatural being as I had felt when I fully accepted Jesus as my Lord and Savior! Alleluia!

Now, I’ve accepted my God as my Father. Being raised without an earthly father created a void that is now filled with the abundant graces of my beloved heavenly Father.

Prayer: Father, thank you for hearing our prayers and for the abundant grace You bless us with. Amen.

March 19, 2020

I Can Make a Difference

By Janice Moore

“That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.” -2 Corinthians 12:10

Sometimes I think how can I make a difference? What do I have, to offer others to help them be encouraged and to overcome.

And then I realize through church attendance, Bible study and my quiet time, I do not have to have a terrible life or a perfect life to show others I am an overcomer. I just have to be real and be true to myself, God and others.

Just sharing my faith in someone’s life could make a difference. Please think about these words as you look back and share your faith, the good, and the not so good, about your life. Confidence, contentment, integrity, peace, depression, guilt, condemnation, and often REJECTION when we share our faith.

Jesus knew rejection through His life. The people of Nazareth, His own hometown, rejected Him. (Luke 4:26-30) After they rejected Him, still others wondered about Him because of that hometown.

He will give us the power and strength to overcome too, by His Holy Spirit. So share your faith and if you are rejected then remember what Jesus says;

I will set my dwelling in and among you and my soul shall not despise or reject or separate itself from you. Leviticus 26:11

Prayer: Lord Jesus, help me be sensitive to others and share my faith with them and may you make a difference in their lives by the seeds you ask me to plant. Amen

March 20, 2020

His Plans

By Joann McCormack

“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”
-Jeremiah 29:11

This is a bible verse I chose many years ago and it has helped me walk through many valley's of sorrow.

I am 87 years old and until recently, very healthy for my age. That changed with a doctor's visit where I was diagnosed with several chronic health problems. As I thought about my health, it came to me, I could no longer do the things I had been involved with in serving our Lord through my church.

I will confess I was feeling sorry for Joann (me) and the Lord brought Jeremiah 29:11 to my mind. No, I can no longer do the many things I had done (and enjoyed) for so many years, but there is always something I **can** to do to serve the Lord, no matter where I am on life's journey. “For I know the Plans I have for you,” says the Lord.”

Prayer: Thank you for the plans You have for us, no matter where we are on life's journey.

March 21, 2020

We Wish to See Jesus

By Matt Jordan

“They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, with a request. ‘Sir,’ they said, ‘we would like to see Jesus.’”
-John 12:21

I always grew up playing sports as a child; mainly playing football. Life lessons permeate sports especially in football, but spiritual lessons are also there. My teams were never great teams; as a matter of fact, my team had the record for most consecutive losses in 3A football...48. We had the *Get Lost* part down. However, one of the lessons I learned from a few of our players was how they found success in their positions. The players who abandoned everything; were never late to practice; stayed late to do extra drills; begged to come in before school for extra workouts, and those who went to every camp affordable, made the difference. They were the ones with college offers despite being a part of a losing program.

Why do I tell this story? If you're not careful you'll miss the lesson. These players wanted to see *victory*. What did it cost them? It cost them time, sacrificing their bodies in the weight room, finances to attend camps, and it cost them friends, because they would be watching film while we were all doing whatever we wanted. Jesus is teaching us something similar.

If we wish to see Jesus, then we must not be willing to love our life, but instead be willing to lose it. Dietrich Bonhoeffer says, “When Christ calls a man he bids him to come and die.” How true this is!

When I worked with the Fellowship of Christian Athletes, we had a chant for camp that said, “Salvation is free!” but, discipleship and following Jesus will cost you everything. If you love your life and try to save it, you will lose it. However, if you love Christ and you hate your life in this world and seek eternal life, then you will find it. “Get Lost” this Lenten season, and rediscover the victory found in Jesus by laying down your life and picking up your cross to follow Jesus.

Pray this hymn today:

Now let us from this table rise renewed in the body, mind and soul; With Christ we die and live again, His selfless love has made us whole. With minds alert upheld by grace to spread the Word in speech and deed; we follow in the steps of Christ, at one with man in hope and need. To fill each human house with love, it is the sacrament of care; the work that Christ began to do we humbly pledge ourselves to share. Then grant us courage, Father God, to choose again the pilgrim way and help us to accept with joy the challenge of tomorrow's day.

IN the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. AMEN.

March 22, 2020

Fourth Sunday in Lent

“So for the second time they called the man who had been blind, and they said to him, ‘Give glory to God! We know that this man is a sinner.’ He answered, ‘I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.’ They said to him, ‘What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?’ He answered them, ‘I have told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples?’ Then they reviled him, saying, ‘You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from.’ The man answered, ‘Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. We know that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will. Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.’ They answered him, ‘You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?’ And they drove him out. Jesus heard that they had driven him out, and when he found him, he said, ‘Do you believe in the Son of Man?’ He answered, ‘And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him.’ Jesus said to him, ‘You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he.’ He said, ‘Lord, I believe.’ And he worshiped him. Jesus said, ‘I came into this world for judgment so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind.’ Some of the Pharisees near him heard this and said to him, ‘Surely we are not blind, are we?’ Jesus said to them, ‘If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, ‘We see,’ your sin remains.’”

-John 9:24-41

March 23, 2020

Come Home

By Mike Arnold

Original devotional March 17, 2014

“Jesus said “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies, and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?”
-John 11: 25-26

We are leaving the season of Advent and Christmas, having celebrated the greatness of Emanuel “God with us”, and so quickly moving into the season of Lent and Easter. This was always the most wonderful time of the year for me.

But in February 2011, my Momma passed away. Roberta and I were with her during her last few days. Momma was in a coma. Roberta went back to the motel the 2nd night to get some rest, and I stayed. I spent the night just talking to Momma, sing hymns she liked, praying and reading scriptures. The scripture I kept going back to was John 11.

Roberta, my Aunt Gwen, and stepfather Bud came the next morning and insisted I go get some rest. As soon as I got to the motel, the phone rang, Momma had passed. When I got back and we started trying to coordinate everything, Bud asked if I would do Momma’s final service. It was the biggest honor and the hardest task I had ever been given to do. The scripture passage was easy, John 11. It really hit home with great realization that, just as with Jesus calling Lazarus to “come out”, Jesus was calling Momma to “come home”.

This was February 5th, the same day He called Bob Penton to “come home.” I had lost someone that I had known and loved a short time and wanted to know better, and I lost someone I had known and loved all my life, and wanted to know better. I am grateful for both.

I do realize that God does nothing by chance. Everything has a purpose. Everything happens for God’s honor and glory. We simply need to give thanks and listen to Jesus’ call. He is calling all of us to “come out” from our graves, to step into the light and be free from the bindings of sin and death.

Prayer: Father, I pray that each of us will step into the light that Is Jesus and live forever, and that we invite others to come and “live” with us. Amen.

March 24, 2020

Stay Focused

By Richard "Blue" Martin

God says, "Here I am! I stand at the door and knock."

-Revelation 3:20

I've been a farmer my whole life. I started drinking at an early age. The older I got, the heavier I drank. It wasn't too long ago that I would wake up early in the morning for a hard day on the farm. Everyone knows most farmers get their morning chores done first, then have breakfast, and that's what I did. My first chore was to make sure I had a 24-pack of beer iced down in a cooler. Of course, even before it was strapped to the tractor, I'd already had a few. There was no need for breakfast or coffee for me. Sometimes that 24-pack would last me till lunch, maybe even dinner, but I knew when the cooler was empty, it was off to the store for more. My life pretty much revolved around me in a war with myself filling the cooler and then quickly emptying it again. In looking back, I don't know that I had a sober moment all day.

I was in my late fifties when a good friend helped me get into New Life Christian Recovery Program in Enterprise, AL. It's a 12 step, 16-week process that teaches you that God is the only way to get your life back. It reinforces that your life is unmanageable and you need a higher power to help you. I am proud to say that I completed the program and I know that God has control of my life now. The help I've gotten from Enterprise First United Methodist Church, and Celebrate Recovery (CR), I can not put into words. Because of God's help, I now have more respect for myself and others than I have ever had.

All I have to do is stay focused on God's word and let Him be in control. I'm not cured, everything isn't OK now, but with God's guidance, love, and mercy, my days are brighter now than they have ever been.

Prayer: Father, thank You for loving me even when I don't deserve it. Keep us safe and continue to lead us to Your glorious salvation. Amen.

March 25, 2020

Who Do YOU Say I Am? By Wendy Zeller

"But what about you?" He (Jesus) asked. "Who do you say I am?"
Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."
-Matthew 16:15-16

There I was in February 1977 sitting in a lovely small Gasthaus in Dettlebach, Germany, eating schnitzel and pomme frites (French fries), sipping a luke warm coca cola with two dear friends, talking about Jesus. Oh, I could tell you lots about Jesus. I had been baptized as an infant, went to Sunday School and church faithfully, ate at more pot luck suppers than I can count, was confirmed at age eleven, was an active member (and President for two years) of Methodist Youth Fellowship, and even sang in the church choir as a teenager. Yes, I knew a lot about the man named Jesus. But that evening I was asked the question that was asked of Peter, "But what about you? Who do you say He is?" and the answer changed my life.

That evening the Holy Spirit revealed to me that, while I knew a lot about Jesus, I didn't have a personal relationship with Jesus. I wasn't going to spend eternity with Him if I didn't accept Him into my life as Lord and Savior. Fully recognizing His sacrifice on the cross for me, His sacrifice for my sins solely to redeem my life brought me to my knees, first to confess to Him my need for Him, and then to thank Him for what He had done for me. No longer did I just know about Jesus. Now I knew Him personally, intimately as the Son of God, the Prince of Peace, Savior – my Savior.

This awesome experience is by no means mine alone. It is what God wants everyone to receive. He loves us with such an unconditional love, accepting us just as we are. God loves us more infinitely than we can imagine. There is not anything anybody can say or anything anyone can do that is "too bad" to receive salvation if they just believe and ask Him into their heart. But each person must, like Simon Peter, come to that place and answer the question: "Who do you say that I am?"

Prayer: Thank you Father for the gift of salvation. Thank you Jesus that you willingly went to the cross on our behalf so that each of us would have the opportunity to say, like Simon Peter, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Amen.

March 26, 2020

Peacemaker By Rev. Ryan Martin

“Jonathan spoke up for David to his father Saul and said to him, “Sir, do not wrong your servant David; he has not wronged you; his achievements benefitted you greatly.” -1 Samuel 19:4

David often found himself between a rock and a hard place. As the youngest of nine brothers, he was prophesied to be King of Judah. The problem was that there was already a king, and a vindictive one at that. As King Saul’s leadership continues to crumble, David stands out all the more. He was mighty in battle, and loyal to the king. At heart, he did not desire to dishonor Saul or undermine his leadership, but he couldn’t control how others felt about him. The books of Samuel detail the reigns of Saul and David, and the often tense relationship between them. David was stuck between the divine calling placed upon his life and the loyalty that he felt

As you observe the Lenten discipline, you will feel compulsion from others to pick up whatever you have let go. You might feel pressured to violate your conscience in order to save face. You might feel tension between what God is calling you to do and your loyalty to people who have little regard for your commitment. In these crises of faith, what will you choose to do?

Thankfully, David had a loyal friend in Jonathan, King Saul’s son. Jonathan could tame his father’s jealousy and spare David’s life. While David seemed stuck in a quagmire, Jonathan was all the more. He was caught between loyalty to both his father and his best friend, but he did his best to be neutral and seek the right outcome.

Maybe you have a Jonathan in your life who helps mediate these difficult crises of loyalty. Maybe you are a Jonathan. In this season of progress, we are often fraught with tension between one another.

Prayer: May we all seek peace, so that as we progress, we progress together.

March 27, 2020

God's Mighty Power

By Dave & Paulie Thill

Original devotional March 13, 2009

“Blessed is he who has regard for the weak; the Lord delivers him in times of trouble. The Lord will protect him and preserve his life; he will bless him in the land and not surrender him to the desire of his foes. The Lord will sustain him on his sickbed and restore him from his bed of illness.” Psalm 41:1-3

After Dave returned to the United States from his second Vietnam tour, we went out with friends to eat at a restaurant in a nearby town. We were in the back seat chatting with our friends who were seated in the front. At a notoriously dangerous intersection at which we had the right of way, another car ran the stop sign and hit us broadside. Our car did three-360 degree turns, coming to rest on the other side of the highway, pointed opposite the direction of our travel. Time literally slowed down during the accident sequence and we both prayed. When we came to rest, we were stunned, and other than having glass fragments in our hair and clothing, we were unhurt. We both felt strongly that God protected us that evening.

We all want protection. When the many trials and tribulations of life come at us we want God to help us and protect us. For those of us who seek to live within the will of God, there is a mighty power in our lives. Even when we are put on trial, when we are persecuted, when we are sick or injured, or when we are in physical danger, we have His mighty power within us. As we are willing to give our hearts to God, God is willing to live within our hearts, and be present with us and protect us as we show and tell the world about His love.

Prayer: Dear God, we ask that you protect us, our families and friends, and our church as we live our daily lives. We know that you are with us always, good times and bad, and we are eager to share your love with others. Amen.

March 28, 2020

Open My Eyes By Joe Zeller

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

-Isaiah 6:8

When I accepted Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior, He gave me a desire to help out. Fortunately, He clarified that desire by specifying something I’m qualified to help out with, our Youth programs.

My two older daughters were involved with the Youth Group, so I jumped in! As a fairly new Christian, I learned more about the love of Jesus and my faith through that ministry than by attending church services. I also built many great relationships with young people who were also searching for their purpose. I participated in Youth mission trips and retreats where I could see God at work. The joy I experience with young people has meaningfully affected my Christian walk and I’ve stayed involved with youth for the past thirty plus years.

It is really amazing just how many activities of this or any church require our help. All you have to do is ask!

I guarantee that getting involved in any ministry of your church will result in great memories. You’ll make many long-lasting friendships and find yourself in a closer relationship with our Lord.

God Bless You!!

Prayer: Father, open my eyes to see the needs around me and guide me to joyfully fill them. Amen

March 29, 2020

Fifth Sunday in Lent

“When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, some two miles away, and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them about their brother. When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary stayed at home. Martha said to Jesus, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him.” Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise again.” Martha said to him, “I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.” Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?” She said to him, “Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world.”

When she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary, and told her privately, “The Teacher is here and is calling for you.” And when she heard it, she got up quickly and went to him. Now Jesus had not yet come to the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. The Jews who were with her in the house, consoling her, saw Mary get up quickly and go out. They followed her because they thought that she was going to the tomb to weep there. When Mary came where Jesus was and saw him, she knelt at his feet and said to him, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.” When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. He said, “Where have you laid him?” They said to him, “Lord, come and see.” Jesus began to weep. So the Jews said, “See how he loved him!” But some of them said, “Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?”

Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. Jesus said, “Take away the stone.” Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, “Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead four days.” Jesus said to her, “Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?” So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upward and said, “Father, I thank you for having heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me.” When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out!” The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, “Unbind him, and let him go.”

John 11:17-44

March 30, 2020

A Season of Reflection

By Rev. Gary Daniel

“Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and God will give you everything you need.”
-Matthew 6:25-34

We are in that time of the Christian year known as Lent. The Lenten season is the most intensely devotional and personal time in the church year. Christians are called to spend time in self-examination and reflection, taking inventory of our commitments and reestablishing our priorities. In my own preparations for Lent, I have thought of the great need we all have to prayerfully and clearly determine what is truly important in life. How fleeting life can be in this world.

Shortly before her death, Erma Bombeck put things into perspective when she wrote an unforgettable article titled, *“If I Had My Life To Live Over.”* Let me share with you just a few lines:

“If I had my life to live over, I would have talked less and listened more.

I would have invited friends over for dinner, even if the carpet was stained and the sofa faded.

I would have taken the time to listen to my grandfather ramble on about his youth.

I would never have insisted that the car window be rolled up on a summer day, because my hair had just been teased and sprayed...

I would have sat on the lawn with my children and not worried about grass stains...

I would have gone to bed when I was sick instead of pretending the earth would go into a holding pattern if I weren't there for a day.

I would never have bought anything just because it was practical, wouldn't show dirt, or was guaranteed to last a lifetime.

There would have been more ‘I love you's’ . . . more ‘I'm sorry's’ . . . but mostly, given another shot at life, I would seize every minute . . . look at it and really see it . . . live it . . . and never look back.”

How foolish we are to put off until tomorrow, things that should be said and done today.

Prayer: Father, in this season of Lent when we reflect on the love of Christ, and his sacrificial death on the cross for our sin and the sin of the whole world, let us make love, kindness and worship priorities for our lives.

March 31, 2020

Acts of Christian Love

By Keith & Nancy Riegle

Original devotional March 9, 2009

“Then the righteous will answer him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?' And the King will answer them 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.'”

-Matthew 25:37-40

Several months ago I had surgery for the replacement of my left knee joint. During my hospital recovery time, I received numerous visits from friends and family with get well cards, plants, reading materials and plenty of caring support. I had a visit from a friend before the anesthesia had completely worn off. Obviously it meant a great deal to me to feel the support of so many, but these acts of Christian love are also honoring God and His Son Jesus Christ.

Take the time to honor God by reaching out to someone who needs your support.

Prayer: Thank you Lord, for reminding us through this passage, that by serving others selflessly, we give honor and glory to you. Amen.

April 1, 2020

Distractions

By Nancy Williford

“Set your mind on things above, not on earthly things.”

-Colossians 3:2

I used to let distraction get in the way of spending time with God through things like prayer and Bible reading, I am not saying distractions don't happen, such as pain in my body or just life, I've learned to not let that pull me away from my relationship with God. I used to let distractions, like house work, phone calls or whatever be my priority.

I found with life's journey, that my way of dealing with any situation is not the way God wants things done. It's been through our church, Celebrate Recovery, Sunday School, Bible reading, and prayer (I can't say enough about prayer), to learn how important it is to stay with God above anything else.

Prayer: Lord, I need you daily, some days moment by moment. I know you are always there for me. You are the best Father anyone can have. Amen.

April 2, 2020

Experience True Greatness

By Judene Fluker

“I tell you, something greater than the temple is here. And if you had known what this means, I desire mercy, and not sacrifice,’ you would not have condemned the guiltless. For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath.”
-Matthew 12:6-8

Stop for a moment and imagine the most beautiful, prestigious and grandiose place you have always admired, like the White House, Buckingham Palace or even the Taj Mahal. There is a special event at your place of admiration and you are a special guest. In your excitement, you wonder about the appropriate attire and if there is a proper etiquette for this event. You dress in your finest attire and upon arrival you are taken aback by the beautiful design of the building and the way it beautifully compliments its surroundings. As a guest, you follow protocol exactly as you should knowing whose hand to shake and which fork to use. The night is going perfectly, but you are instantly stopped in your tracks by the host. Oh no! You realize that you haven't even acknowledged the most important person there. This person is certainly greater than the building right? You were so mesmerized by the venue and protocols that you have not acknowledged or even thought of who gave you the invitation or the real meaning of the event.

Just like the Pharisees in Matthew 12, we often get so caught up in the beauty of things, protocols, and tradition that we forget why we have come to this place. Every week we attend church service, but are we there for Christ or are we there out of habit? Are we showing others the love of Christ? Are we letting traditions hinder us from realizing the true Glory of God? Whether your answers are yes or no, always remember that Jesus is certainly greater than the temple (place of worship) and we should regard him as such. We honor our worship places, but we should honor Jesus even more. Traditions are great, but don't let them take your focus away from Christ!

Prayer: During this season of Lent, show us those things or actions that cloud our vision of you. You have given each of us a purpose and it is time to stand strong. Help us let go of hindrances that keep us from becoming closer to Christ!

April 3, 2020

Ask for Directions

By Harvey Post

“Seek His will in all you do, and He will direct your paths.”

-Proverbs 3:6

A few years ago when I was living in Arkansas, I went on my first long distance motorcycle trip. We were going to ride “Route 66” as far as we could (and return) in a week. There were many sights and attractions we wanted to see and our route took us away from major highways, thru small towns, and off the beaten path.

Trying to rely on our memory of the maps and with a good sense of direction (right), we missed several turns and made some we didn't need to. Being guys, we naturally didn't want to ask for directions or stop and consult the map. Our stubbornness resulted in delays, frustration, and unneeded seat time. “Lost” wasn't something we wanted to admit, but true it was at times!

In life we are also on a journey, and failure to seek advice can potentially lead us down the wrong path. It is not enough to consult God and His Word once in a while and then try to rely on our memory to guide us. God and His Word need to be our constant guide. We need to continually rely on God to lead us and not just look to Him when we're lost. By searching God's word and seeking His direction each day, our journey through life can be a successful one.

Prayer: Lord, help us to seek Your guidance regularly so that You can direct us on the right paths. Amen.

April 4, 2020

After the Storm

By Anne Black

Original devotional March 13, 2010

"And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose."

-Romans 8:28

Hurricane Eloise jettisoned destruction over the Florida Gulf Coast through central Georgia and Alabama. The destruction struck the garden of my dear friend, 82 year old Mrs. Latimer, a garden created through painstaking hours of labor and love. In our initial phone calls I caught a note of discouragement and a broken-hearted tremble to her voice. When I can finally arrive to be with her, the old humor shines in her eyes and I feel her calm restored. But how? I see only the ruins of a garden, but looking closely, here and there are spots of vibrant colored flowers pushing daintily through layers of pine straw. My eyes meet hers questioningly. "Like the chaff," she said wisely. "Like the chaff which the wind driveth away.' Even the grass is greener now. Before, there was so much rubbish in this garden, suffocating even the grass."

Could that be part of our difficulties, too? Is there so much clutter in our daily lives that the good acts we intend to do get pushed under? Tomorrow - no today! - I will begin to search for God's signposts. Planning that dinner party, cleaning the patio, reading that book - all seem trivial. It took a hurricane and my friend's insight to see them in proper perspective and get my own values straight. I will take time to speak words of love and encouragement. I will begin to seek out the unloved and unlovely and be a friend to some without friends.

Prayer: Father, how good it is to know, to really know, that all things work together for good to those who love God.

April 5, 2020

Sunday of the Passion: Palm Sunday

As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage on the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, “Go to the village ahead of you, and at once you will find a donkey tied there, with her colt by her. Untie them and bring them to me. If anyone says anything to you, say that the Lord needs them, and he will send them right away.”

This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet:

“Say to Daughter Zion,
‘See, your king comes to you,
gentle and riding on a donkey,
and on a colt, the foal of a donkey.’”

The disciples went and did as Jesus had instructed them. They brought the donkey and the colt and placed their cloaks on them for Jesus to sit on. A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. The crowds that went ahead of him and those that followed shouted,

“Hosanna to the Son of David!”

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

“Hosanna in the highest heaven!”

When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, “Who is this?” The crowds answered, “This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee.”

Matthew 21:1-11

April 6, 2020

God's Sacrificial Love

By Margaret Gorum

“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whosoever believes in him shall not perish, but have eternal life.”
-John 3:16

For believers in Jesus Christ, our living Lord, Lent should be a reminder and time to look deep into our hearts and souls, to count our many endless blessings, and treasure His promise of Eternal Life. Then with humble gratitude and thanksgiving, we can offer our praise to God for our Savior's sacrificial love.

It is not hard to see why John 3:16 is one of the most cherished and most often memorized verses in the Bible. What could be more important than God, love, the world, the Son of God, faith, perishing forever or eternal life? What could be more important for you, for everyone!

Prayer: My prayer, dear Lord, is: You gave us Your all, help me to give my all in return.

April 7, 2020

God Is Always Faithful

By Mike Arnold

Original devotional March 12, 2018

“I will sing of the Lord’s great love forever; with my mouth I will make your faithfulness known through all generations. I will declare that your great love stands firm forever.” -Psalm 89: 1-3a

Recently, I was experiencing serious health issues that required extended hospital and rehab time. During my rehab stay, I had plenty of time to read and study scripture, and other readings to try to figure out life (ha-ha). One I came across on Facebook went like this; “Life has knocked me down a few times, it showed me things I never wanted to see. I experienced sadness and failures. But one thing for sure, I have always gotten up.” (through God’s grace and mercy).

I know that I am not the only person who has experienced the ups and downs of life, we all have. What separates those in Christ Jesus from the world is that we have a peace and hope that just cannot be described. Faith not only provides assurances but prepares us for the true life with God. Lamentations 3 reminds me, “Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope. Because of His great love, we are not consumed, for His compassions never fail. They are new every morning, great is Thy faithfulness. I said to myself, “The Lord is my portion, therefore, I will wait for Him,” The Lord is good to those who wait for Him.”

Prayer: We pray that we will be faithful to you in thought, word and deed such that we are witnessing to your faithfulness to us; and that we will always be sharing your love.

April 8, 2020

Faith of a Mustard Seed

By Bill Schwartz

Original devotional April 6, 2003

“If ye have the faith of a mustard seed...nothing is impossible unto you.” -Matthew 17:20

In Wyoming, where mustard seeds grows freely, a fifth grade teacher took some seeds to class for her students to examine and after they looked them over, she asked them to read Matthew 17: 20 from the Bible. As they compared the size of the mustard seed to the required amount of faith needed to move mountains, a hush swept over the class. Then someone whispered: “WOW!”

“Is that all that’s needed? Awesome! Simply Awesome! Awesome Indeed!”

When we have faith, God’s grace is given to us which leads to our Salvation.

Prayer: To God be the Glory! Amen.

April 9, 2020

I Can Do All Things

By Ivan Ramos

“I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”

-Philippians 4:13

Not a day goes by that I do not think about this passage. This is such an encouraging verse because it is good to know that there is a Father who loves you so much that he will give you strength in anything you do.

Back in high school, I played soccer and before every game I thought about this verse. Just thinking about that calmed my nerves before the game started. I am currently in flight school beginning my career in aviation. Every time I go up in the air, I know that God is watching over me. There is no way I could have gone through life without knowing that there is a God who loves and supports me and gives me strength in everything I do.

Prayer: Father, thank you for watching over me in all that I do.

April 10, 2020

Good Friday Tradition

By Ann Wilson

Original devotional April 6, 2017

“I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength”

-Philippians 4:13

On January 30, 1947, my husband and I were married in the First Methodist Church in Geneva by Rev A. B. Carlton. We came to Enterprise to spend our honeymoon night in the Rawls Hotel. A few days later we traveled to Detroit by Greyhound bus where Paul was employed by the U. S Rubber Company. He had rented us a sleeping room with kitchen privileges from a lady named Mrs. Zack.

Mrs. Zack was Polish and a devout Catholic. That spring when we were approaching Lent she told me she was giving up Saunders Candy for Lent. To prepare for the decision she began preparing some luscious tidbits made with dates stuffed with pecans and rolled in powdered sugar or coconut. We enjoyed those treats all through Lent.

In Detroit at that time you were allowed to leave your job on Good Friday and go to the church of your choice for the three hours Christ hung on the cross. All stores were closed during that time. We lived in Detroit for 30 years and I still long to see everyone remember our Savior the way they did in 1947 in that big city.

Prayer: Father God, let us remember you each day with a tradition of our own. Amen.

April 11, 2020

Keep the Faith

By Steve Rutland

“I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race,
I have kept the faith.” -II Timothy 4:7

Several years ago around 4:30 am a group of flight instructors sat around a classroom at Lowe Airfield waiting for the daily briefing to begin. The days were long; the tempo fast, and the syllabus flight time was 90 hours a month. Obtaining waivers to exceed the maximum crew endurance limitations was a matter of routine. Most of us were wondering how long we could keep up the pace. As the briefing came to an end, an Army Chaplain happened to drop by, and he read the scripture from II Timothy 4:7. The Chaplain's point was clear. We all have our own fight-to-fight, course to follow, and faith to keep.

When Jesus prayed at Gethsemane, He knew the course He would have to take. There are no words to describe the distress He felt in the human side of His heart. Without any hesitation, He fought the good fight on the cross for all of us.

As we follow the course we are assigned, we may find the way is long, and the trials are many. When human endurance is stretched beyond its perceived limit, we can all “keep on keeping on,” if we remember to “keep the faith.” Faith is the one miracle that we all have within ourselves.

Prayer: Dear God, help me to remember that my greatest strength is in the faith that you have placed in my heart.

April 12, 2020

Easter Sunday

Then Peter began to speak: “I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right. You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, announcing the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all. You know what has happened throughout the province of Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached— how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him.

“We are witnesses of everything he did in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They killed him by hanging him on a cross, but God raised him from the dead on the third day and caused him to be seen. He was not seen by all the people, but by witnesses whom God had already chosen—by us who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead. All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.”

Acts 10:34-43

