



gathered
into one

DEVOTIONS FOR
LENT 2024

Day 1: What Does God Require of His People



Dave Johnston

This is simply put in Micah 6:8 which says, *“He has told you, O mortal, what is good, and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice and to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God?”*

This verse is a concise and powerful summary of the kind of life that God desires of us. It emphasizes the importance of justice, mercy, and humility in our relationship with God and others. To Act Justly, Love Mercy and Walk Humbly with God.

But what does this mean?

1. **Act Justly:** This encourages us to uphold justice, fairness, and righteousness in our interactions with others. It implies treating people equitably and ethically, standing up for what is right, and ensuring that one's actions align with moral principles.

2. **Love Mercy:** This emphasizes the importance of showing kindness, compassion, and forgiveness. It encourages us to extend mercy and grace to others, recognizing that everyone falls short and makes mistakes. Loving mercy involves not only receiving forgiveness but also extending it to others.

3. **Walk Humbly with Your God:** This speaks to the attitude and posture we should have in our relationship with God. Walking humbly involves acknowledging our dependence on God, submitting to His will, and recognizing the need for humility in all aspects of our life.

Ponder, how can I do this in my life?

Let us pray:

Dear Lord,

Thank you for showing us the path of righteousness and for instructing us on how to live a life that pleases you. Grant us the strength to act justly in all our dealings, to be champions of fairness and advocates for righteousness. May our actions reflect your justice, and may we stand firmly on the side of what is right and good.

Fill our hearts with a deep love for mercy. Help us to extend compassion, kindness, and forgiveness to those around us. May our lives be marked by a genuine and selfless love that mirrors your boundless mercy.

Teach us to walk humbly with you, O Lord. May we approach each day with a humble heart, recognizing our dependence on you and submitting to your will. Guide our steps, and may our lives be a testament to the beauty of walking in humility before you.

Lord, we ask for your grace to live out the principles of Micah 6:8 in our daily lives.

May we be your instruments of justice, mercy, and humility in the world.

In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen

Day 2:

Psalm 100



Jane Christenson

*“Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth!
Serve the Lord with gladness!*

*Come into His presence with singing!
Know that the Lord, he is God!*

*It is he who made us, and we are his;
we are his people and the sheep of his pasture,*

Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise!

Give thanks to him; bless his name!

For the Lord is good; his steadfast love endures forever, and his faithfulness to all generations.”

Every morning of vacation bible school we spoke this Psalm to the point I know it by heart. We did this for all the years I was there. It still is one of my favorite Psalms. The message is still the same! He wants us to make a joyful noise, thanking Him and praising His name. It is not how good we do it, but that we do it as He told us to. We respond to what He has done for us and praise Him in all we day and do.

Dear Lord,

You are worthy to be praised and glorified. Help me to do that in all I say and do.

Amen.

Day 3: What You Have Done for the Least of These, You Have Done for the Lord.



Christine(Feutz) Schultz

Scripture: Mathew 25:35–40 and Mathew 6:9-13

Blessed are the Caretakers who have stepped up and answered God's Call to care for family, community, someone in need. Who do you care for?

Caregivers, whether for family, parents, children, friends, elderly, disabled, handicapped, or strangers, often give up much of their time and self needs, wants, and dreams, to use their time to care for others. At times they may feel burdened, isolated, alone, or cheated that their own wants have gone unmet. When they follow "God's Will," they choose to do hard things.

MATTHEW ³⁵ *For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me,* ³⁶ *I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.'* ³⁷ *Then the righteous will answer him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you,*

or thirsty and give you drink?' ³⁸ *And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you?'* ³⁹ *And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?'* ⁴⁰ *And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, and sisters, you did it to me.'*

When you agreed to be a caregiver and put others before yourself, you may not have thought about it, but you have answered Gods call. For the prayer taught to us says it is not "My Will" be done, but "Your Will" be done.

1. Rejoice and be glad that God has entrusted you with the care of his most treasured children.
2. God knows your name. Even if the person you care for does not.
3. God sees you. Even when your hard work goes un-thanked and unnoticed by others.
4. God forgives you. Even when you have a moment of weakness and show your frustrations.
5. God does not require perfection. He develops your talents as you serve.
6. God supports your care and strength, but he waits for you to ask.
7. God will give you rest. It is only a matter of time.

How often do you pray out of habit and memory without thinking?

When you pray clear your mind and think about the words.

Mathew 6:9-13 Teaches us to Pray like this: *Our Father, who art in heaven, HALLOWED be thy name. THY kingdom come, THY WILL be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and FORGIVE our debts, as WE forgive our debtors. And lead US not into temptation but deliver US from evil. For THINE is the kingdom, and the power and the glory forever. AMEN*

FOOTNOTES:

- a. Mathew 6: 12 Some manuscripts translate "Forgive our debts as we forgive our debtors" to "Forgive our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us."
- b. Matthew 6:13 Some manuscripts add "For yours is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen."
- c. The words THY and THINE can be substituted by YOUR and YOURS for clarity.

Day 4: Knowing God



Mary Hershoff

Psalm 46: 1-11

Vs. 10 – *“Be still and know that I am God”* that’s the verse that I usually remember and call to mind when I realize that my “Martha” side has taken over my life. When I realize that I have been so busy that I haven’t stopped to honor God, ask His forgiveness, and to ask for His help. I’ve been too busy handling it all myself.

But as I reread this verse I realize that there is even more important words after this – “I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth.” It is God who is in control. He will rule the earth. He is almighty. He will protect us and stay with us through all peril, every anxiety, every fear of what may – or may not – come.

So, where I thought this was a reminder to me to depend on God, not myself; or to stop being so busy that I forget who it is that gives me the strength to handle things, it really is about - stop worrying and be assured that God is in control. As verse 1 reads, “God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble.”

Give God the glory. Know that He is God!

Dear God, even as the busy-ness and chaos of the world surrounds us, we know that You are beside us, protecting us. Help us to remember and give praise to You, O Lord.

Day 5:



George Monis

1 Corinthians 3:6-9 *Now he who plants and he who waters are one; but each will receive his own reward according to his own labor. For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building." In this passage, Paul is emphasizing the importance of planting and sowing the seeds of faith into others.*

The average large cash grain farmer (4-5000 acres) will have at one time a million dollars of corn or soybean seed in bags waiting to be planted in Spring. That same farmer could have a million dollars tied up in equipment to plant his seeds.

That farmer knows that if he plants his seed in **good soil**, there will be a crop that grows and as the Lord blesses him with adequate rainfall, there will be a bountiful crop. **The farmer has faith that his actions will provide a result.**

Whether a farmer plants 50 acres or 5000, there is a risk of crop failure. The risk is the same for both farmers. Both farmers must have the same faith that their actions will produce a crop.

Having grown crops for years, it is a dramatic thing to see your seeds disappear in the ground when planted and you have to wait sometimes as much as 2 weeks to see if there will be growth and months to see the harvest. Having faith that that will occur helps to get through that ominous period of time where you have just buried a lot of money in the ground not knowing what will happen.

Oh Lord, guide our planting and sowing of seeds of faith into others. Amen.



Day 6:



John Christenson

In the book of Ezra, Ezra was told by God to give the Israeli people His Law after they were returned to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple from Babylon. The Jews had intermarried with neighboring cultures and started worshipping the false idols of their spouses. God commanded Ezra to bring the people to Jerusalem and demand that they return to the Jewish faith. Ezra reminded the people that God had not abandoned them.

The people of Israel had lost their way in Babylon and it was only through God using Cyrus and Darius, then Artaxerxes of Persia to bring the Jews back to Jerusalem to rebuild the Temple that marked a spiritual revival for the people of Israel.

Are there ways that we need a revival to reaffirm our faith and realize that God has not abandoned us?

Day 7: Come to the Table



Pr. Tom Pietz

I remember my mom calling all of us to the dinner table with the words, “Come to the table”. Weekly you are invited with these same words at holy communion, as Jesus invites us once again to the table to break bread together and drink from the vine together to remember what he did for us through his body and his blood on the cross. The Lord’s Supper is such a holy moment.



The song, “Come to the Table” by Sidewalk Prophets combined with scenes from The Chosen move us to the beauty of Jesus’ mission on earth...watch and listen https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IEpMhdoJ_VA

What touched you? Who could you relate to? Who do you know who needs to be invited to the table too?

Lord, thank you for this sacrament...this tangible taste of grace you instructed to savor when we get together. May we be your people who constantly extend such table grace to all people who need you Lord. Amen

Day 8: Earthly Reminders



Lily Mireau

On my drive to school each morning, the sunrise reminds me to pray. Often, I think we take the sun rising for granted. We know it will happen day after day, so we neglect to see its beauty every morning. Lamentations 3:22-23 reads “The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is Thy faithfulness.” With the rising of the sun, we are forgiven. With the rising of the sun, we are reminded that we are loved. With the rising of the sun, we can find hope in the assurance of his compassion. God promises us that when the sun comes up each morning, we are forgiven and we are renewed.

Light is so universal. There are over 235 passages in the King James Bible that reference light in some capacity. This one from Lamentations though, is my favorite. I personally feel so connected to God when he is compared to the earth. Weather that be rain: (Psalm 72:6), rivers and lakes: (Psalm 65), the moon: (Job 25:5), or the forests: (Psalm 29:9). When we arise each morning, the light within us does the same. Each morning when this occurs, we awake and we start our day. We are reminded that we are forgiven every morning when we wake up, and it is something we fail to notice as often as we should. The earth is so kind to even give us a gentle reminder. When the sun comes up each morning let it remind you to pray. Let it remind you that God forgives you fully, and he loves you so much. His mercies are new each morning, without fail. Let this also be an opportunity for you to restart. Each day can be better than the last. Each morning when we wake, we are able to start fresh, just as the earth does each morning when the sun rises. As Muhammad Ali once said “Even the sun has a sinking spell each evening. But it always rises the next morning. At sunrise, every soul is born again.” Let our souls be born again each morning.

Let us pray. “In every dawn, Lord, help us to witness your faithfulness. Help us to feel your ever-present grace. Aid us in feeling your renewal each morning. Just as the sun's light is put back into the sky each day, so is ours. Help us to mentally restart each day, no matter what the previous days have brought us. As the sun rises today, we are given a new chance to *be*. Help us to just *be* Lord. Amen. The light is within you, go and shine.

Day 9: Forgiveness



Pr. Tom Pietz

We all are carrying something. You may be carrying something so burdensome, so heavy, so destructive, that it steals your joy and sucks the marrow out of your life. It may be something you have done. It may be something done to you. But it kills your spirit. It exhausts you. It can consume you with worry, sorrow, and excessive suffering.

Turn it to the Lord in prayer. I know you have. Turn it to the Lord...again...and again and again and again.

There's a scene in one of my favorite movies of all time, "The Mission" (go to the library or get it on Amazon and watch it). There's a man who killed many people, captured others, betrayed his brother, and the list goes on. He is living out his chosen penance (a way of restitution to make things right with God, used at times in the Catholic Church or in this case, with the Jesuits. What do you carry that needs to be completely cut off and thrown down a cavern never to be scene, heard from, or bothered with ever again? Watch this: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ui91q7Y9xPk> [Greatest scene in The Mission]

Name your burden(s)...turn it over to God and pray for relief and complete forgiveness of your sins.



Merciful God,

This burden (name it) I carry continues to overwhelm and wreak havoc on me. Release me of its bondage. Set me free of its hold on me. Cleanse me. Make me whole again. Conform me into the image and likeness of your son, Jesus, in whose name I pray, Amen.

Day 10:

Romans 8:37-39



Jane Christenson

“No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. 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.”

Nothing can separate us from God’s love, not even ourselves! Christ died and took on our punishment by dying on the cross for our sins and the sins of the whole world.

How can we ever pay Him for that.

I kept remembering my outstanding sins and not understanding how God could forgive me for it and restore me to fellowship with Him. I thought I knew better and was more realistic. But then I thought, am I going to make Jesus a liar? He said my sins were forgiven and as far from Him as the east is from the west. I couldn’t hold on to them if He put them away from Him. How could I act like I know better than God, and try to keep them with me.

It took a while for me to realize the truth and accept it. But now I have peace in my heart since I accepted what Christ did for me and the whole world.

What He did brings me into His fellowship and family. Nothing can separate me from Him ever again.

Jesus, thank you for what you did. Help me to share this with others so they might find the same peace and love I have now. Amen.

Day 11: How About That for an Assignment



Scott Siegrist

Mary took on the greatest responsibility of any human ever, and as a teenage girl. The pregnancy alone, not by her fiancée, could cost Mary her reputation and perceived as cheating, could get her stoned. Luckily, God sent an angel to Joseph, letting him in on the plan. Mary was tasked with giving birth to and raising up the Son of God. Being of strong faith, Mary was up to this assignment and accepted with little argument.

Luke 1:26-38

²⁶In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, ²⁷

to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸ And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." ²⁹ But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be.

³⁰ The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. ³¹And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. ³² He will be great and will be called the

Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. ³³ He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." ³⁴ Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" ³⁵ The angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. ³⁶ And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. ³⁷ For nothing will be impossible with God." ³⁸ Then Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.



When God is calling us to step up, step out in faith and be bold, "do not be afraid". Trust that He is God. He has got a plan that will not fail. He has made a way for us, and will see it through. Would you say "yes" when you are called upon? Do you praise Him for the challenge He places before you?

Day 12: Faith



George Monis

Having faith in Jesus Christ means relying completely on Him—trusting in His infinite power, intelligence, and love. It includes believing His teachings. It means believing that even though we do not understand all things, He does.

As an electrician, the greatest example of faith is turning on a light switch. We know that if something is not broken, the light will give us light. Faith becomes second nature and relieves us of stress in our lives.

Just as in the air we breathe, we do not stop having faith if we cannot see it. It is a marvelous gift, that of faith. We live our lives with a comfort that our faith will make us whole. Praise to God for making us his and giving us the faith that leads us through our daily lives.

The closest that the Bible comes to offering an exact definition is Hebrews 11:1 – *“Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.”* From this particular passage we see that the central feature of faith is confidence or trust. In the Bible, the object of faith is God and his promises.

Praise to you O Lord our God for giving us Faith in You. Father, in the Name of Jesus, I ask You to open my eyes to any hidden areas of fear in my life. Lord, Your Word says faith comes by hearing the Word of God, and I will build up my faith today by reading Your Word and acting on it. Amen!



Day 13:



Susie Grulke

John 3:16

For God so loved the world, that he gave his one and only son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

YouTube: Lamb of God “Adagio for Strings” by Rev. Deon Gladden.

I Love classical music. When I came across this piece it took me to when Jesus was going to be crucified on the cross. Take a moment to sit quietly and either close your eyes and listen or watch the video. Picture yourself being there at his crucifixion.

Here is an innocent man being ridiculed, torched, mocked, humiliated and crucified right in front of you for a crime he did not commit. What is going through your mind?

As Jesus is on the cross with the other 2 criminals, who are deserving of the punishment for their crimes, the 2nd criminal cries out to Jesus and basically asks Jesus to remember him when Jesus enters his Kingdom. His faith in Jesus is showing us that he believes Jesus is the Messiah.

As the music starts to crescendo and Jesus cries out “My God, My God, why has Thou forsaken me?” and the music stops! As the music slowly starts up again, Jesus cries out again “Into thy hands I commit my spirit”. He has fulfilled the scriptures. What are you feeling at that moment?

All God wants us to do is believe in him and be faithful to him. That is why he sent his one and only Son to take on the sins for you and I and for the world. So that we might be saved and that we believe and that our faith in him will grow, so that we might sow good seeds in one another.

Dear Lord,

Thank you for sending your son to help show us the path in which to follow in. By believing in him and being faithful to you, we can grow in love and share our faith with one another until we enter eternal life. Amen.

Day 14: Love



Cindy Schlieve

1 Corinthians 13:4-7, 13 (NIV)

⁴Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. ⁵It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. ⁶Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. ⁷It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. ¹³And now these three remain: faith, hope, and love. But the greatest of these is love.

Love is such a vital part of our lives – not just romantic love, but love for our families, friends, neighbors, and really everyone. In Matthew 22, verses 37-39, Jesus answers the Pharisee's question this way: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself."

I think the hate and violence in our world today must be so sad for God, for Jesus, and for the Holy Spirit, our Holy Trinity. While we cannot fix the whole world, we can surely start by extending our hearts, hands, and minds to those around us in order to ease some of the pain, some of the hate, and maybe even some of the violence. Let us pray.

Heavenly Father, we thank you for all that you have provided to us. We ask that you please help us to find the words, the deeds, and the love within us to help others around us. In the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior, we pray. Amen.

Day 15:



Mary Hershoff

Hebrews 12:1-3

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, ² fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. ³ Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

In the Old Testament the Israelites were led through the wilderness by a cloud – God was present in that cloud, guiding them as they grew to know Him and trust Him for their future. In addition to His presence, God sent leaders – Moses, Joshua, the prophets Elijah & Elisha - witnesses to His love for them, and encouragers in keeping steadfast in their faith.

In this passage in Hebrews, the author reminds his audience of God's support through the witness of many fellow believers, both past and present, who point us toward Jesus and the cross. Jesus, who endured so much for us, knows us and our struggles, is with us every day to carry us when we are weary, and inspire us when we lose sight of our goal – life everlasting with Him.

Be inspired and encouraged by God's witnesses in our lives. Reach out to them; reach out to Jesus who will carry us when we grow weary.

Lord, keep our eyes on Jesus, that we might persevere through hardships, struggles, and temptations. Remind us of the witnesses in our lives who have encouraged us on our journey. Amen.

Day 16: Living Boldly for Jesus



David Sutrick

Do not be afraid of what people will think or say, when you proclaim your faith in God. Because you have backup, God is with you always.

In Joshua 1:9 after Moses died, God spoke to Joshua and said: *Be strong and courageous, do not be afraid, do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go.*

And to truly believe He is with us; we must have faith.

What is faith? The dictionary says it is the complete trust or confidence in someone or something. How do we acquire such faith? How can we truly believe he is with

us when we can't see him? Typically, people have faith in something, because they know it to be true. They have seen it or experienced it.

I have found that the more I read my Bible, the more I learn and understand about God, and the stronger my faith becomes. And with that knowledge and strong faith comes the confidence to be bold in my convictions, and to live the way God wants me to.

Dear God,

Please give me strength when I am weak, and help me to remember to put others first.

To do your will the best I can, to have a grateful heart, a generous spirit, and the courage to live boldly for you. Amen.

Day 17: Self Improvement



Kuzenski Family

Matthew 6:16-18 *And when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites...But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.*

Self-improvement/Lenten fasting is personal and not for public acknowledgement.

Self-improvement, Lenten fasting or other forms of private, personal methods of improvement to bring one closer to GOD and the understanding of what He has done and does for you is just that...private and personal. It is not a competition of

look what/how much I am suffering and therefore am closer to God and hold a greater understanding of HIS works than you. *“Do not look gloomy like the hypocrites.”*

Someone else cannot tell you how to feel or how to change those feelings. That is why it's called self-reflection, self-improvement and not public improvement or group reflection. The only help one needs is from GOD the Father who provides all you need and is why you reflect on what HE has provided to help lead you through life. *“And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.”*

Only GOD can provide what you need. Only inner self evaluation can bring you to understand what has been provided you. Visible suffering doesn't provide this so the public doesn't need to know. The only people in self-evaluation are YOU and GOD.

What's the last self-sacrifice you did? Did you show it off and brag about your sacrifice or keep it private? Did you listen to the void to understand why HIS provisions are what you only truly need? Give up something of excess for Lent but don't tell anyone and see how much more you understand HE provides what you need.

Almighty Father,

Help us understand that YOU are the one who provides what we need. That YOU provide both the physical and spiritual needs to fulfill life. Help us seek only your approval and blessings. For in you all things are possible.

Amen

Day 18: The Freedom to do...What?



Michael Yohn

Imagine you are a student in school. Your teacher says “For the next week you’ll be working on a project to showcase your learning. It can be whatever you want it to be, and no matter what, you’ll get an A.” Now imagine you are at a job, and your boss says “Do whatever you want today, and no matter what you’ll still get paid and have your job tomorrow.”

What do you do? Do you go out with your friends during this time? Do you scroll endlessly on your phone? Do you sleep? Do you still make a project or do your work, just with less care and more slowly than you normally would? Do you sink down to the ease of the comfort of utter freedom, where nothing matters?

Or, do you try even harder? Do you take that wild idea in your head and bring it to life? Do you make an interpretive dance about the Pythagorean theorem for your project? Do you throw out the dolly and drive in a forklift? Do you rise to the security of utter freedom, where the end is always ok and the possibilities are endless?

We have this complete and utter freedom, right here and now, a gift from God. As Paul so eloquently puts it in his letter to the Ephesians, “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and it is not your own doing; it is the gift of God” (Ephesians 2: 8, NRSV) God has given us the freedom from failure, the freedom from death and sin, and with it the freedom *to do*.

So, what’s your wild and zany idea? What’s your interpretive dance of a situation in life that needs God’s love and our hands? In what ways could *you* strike out and serve God’s mission here on Earth in a way that *you* haven’t tried before?

Day 19: Come Out!



Steve Stretz

John 11:41

41 So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me. 42 I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me." 43 When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" 44 The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face. Jesus said to them, "Take off the grave clothes and let him go."



Maybe there is more to this story than we think.

The story of Lazarus is well known and on the surface sounds simple. It was a miracle, Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead. But in studying the story more deeply we find much more to it. For one thing Jesus knew Lazarus was dying but waited to come to him because he had to demonstrate his divine powers for the people to believe. And another, why if Jesus knew what he was to do, did he weep? Perhaps it too was something he had to do, for our sake, that was very hard for him when he realized how it impacted people he knew and was close to.

I heard a lecturer, some time ago, include this passage when addressing a group of Lutherans. He mentioned that Lazarus was already in a tomb when Jesus arrived. Jesus called him out of his tomb and told the people to "take off the grave clothes" and "let him go" to a new life. Maybe that also is an important part of the story.

There are many kinds of tombs, the presenter said. That resonated with me. There is the tomb of depression that some never leave. There is the tomb of prejudice that people find themselves in. There is the tomb of fear and isolation. I am sure you can think of many more. Jesus called Lazarus out of the tomb and perhaps demonstrated how he is the way out of the tombs many of us find ourselves in.

What might our place be in all of this? He taught us to love God and love one another. He taught us the importance of caring for others. How many could be brought out of their tombs if only we were more aware and reached out to listen and to care. We can ask that question "How are you really doing?". We can pray with and for them and try to show them and lead them toward the light.

In the days ahead consider the tombs other may have found themselves in, not as visible as the one Lazarus was placed. Reach out with a hand, a smile, a greeting, a prayer. You may be just what is needed to help someone come out, see the light, and find a new life.

Let us pray: Lord, give us the light to realize the tombs that others may find themselves in. Give us the ability to reach out, ask, listen and care. Give us the courage to pray for and with them. Allow them to see the light, protect them, care for them and give the peace.

Day 20: Puzzle



George Monis

Colossians 2:5

For even though I am absent in body, nevertheless I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good discipline and the stability of your faith in Christ.

A recent Christmas gift was a 1000-piece puzzle. Not being a fan of these types of puzzles, the challenge was there to complete the puzzle because it was a picture of something that has always been a favorite of mine, that being red tractors.



It soon became apparent that there was an order to the completion of the puzzle. Each piece was a different shape and sometimes in only the slightest way. Finding matching pieces was a challenge.

Our lives are like the puzzle in that there needs to be order in our lives and stability in our faith. Each day brings new challenges to being God's people. It is only by God's grace that we can receive the promise that we stand forgiven before **God** if you know Jesus. **God's grace** gives me the self-control to act with kindness, goodness, faithfulness, and gentleness. And yes, our lives will look like that puzzle, orderly and complete in all areas of our being.

Lord, we thank you for the Grace we receive every day of our lives. May our lives be complete in our love for you and others. Amen.

Day 21:

Philippians 4:6-7



Mary Hershoff

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Have you ever found yourself lying awake at night with all kinds of thoughts, worries, and ideas running around in your mind? I do quite often. I try the 'breathe deeply' approach, 'write things down' or 'read a book', and, if that still doesn't work, then I do the 'get up and get something done' advice.

You'd think by now that I would remember the most dependable approach – taking it to the Lord in prayer. God is always there to take on our burdens. All we need to do is ask, give our worries to Him, and He will give us peace.

Good night!

Thank you, Lord, for shouldering our cares, and giving us your peace instead.

Amen.

Day 22:

James 1:18-20



Jane Christenson

He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of first fruits of all he created. My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this; Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires.

How difficult it is to listen to someone's opinion without interrupting! I think about how I have to bite my tongue to stop from dominating discussions I am involved in. I have learned from spending time with Jesus and the Holy Spirit that I need to sit back and listen to what people are saying. They may not say what I think is important or right, but the Holy Spirit shows us what He wants us to know as it

reflects Jesus Christ's teachings.

I think about the scenes from 'The Chosen' where the 'Sons of Thunder' get so angry responding to perceived insults and Jesus helps them see what they were saying and advocating as contrary to His teachings. I have learned through the teachings of the Holy Spirit to listen to what people say without responding out of anger, pride or criticism, but hearing what someone is saying.

Thank you, Lord, for your patience with me as I learn to listen to you and to others with Your ears and responding in Your love.

Amen.

Day 23: Empowered By Christ



Dave Johnston

Philippians 4:13 *I can do all things through him who strengthens me.*

Kathy & I were watching a movie recently called “The Hill”. Born with a degenerative spinal disease, Rickey Hill is featured in “The Hill,” the true story of how he overcomes unbelievable odds to play Major League Baseball against his father's wishes. This verse was brought up by Ricky when his father, who was a Pastor, didn't want him to play ball because of his disability but wanted him to be a pastor. His father asked if he wanted to do God's will or his will. He didn't answer right away but eventually said “both”. The way I saw it was that his father had one way for Ricky's life, and he had another. What became apparent was that both were to follow God's will. To trust in God's direction.

So, in this verse the Apostle Paul shares a powerful truth that transcends circumstances and challenges. This verse is a declaration of empowerment, reminding us that our abilities are not limited by our own strength but are instead boundless through the strength that comes from Christ. That's what Ricky was trusting in (God's strength).

Looking at what Paul says, we:

Should acknowledge our dependence: Paul's statement is not one of self-sufficiency but rather an acknowledgment of his dependence on Christ. As believers, we recognize that our capabilities are not confined to our skills, intelligence, or resources alone. Instead, we draw upon the limitless strength that Christ provides.

Should face challenges with confidence: Life is full of challenges—physical, emotional, and spiritual. In the face of difficulties, this verse reassures us that we don't face them alone. Christ empowers us to navigate trials with confidence, knowing that His strength equips us for whatever lies ahead.

Should let God's guidance encompass 'all things': "I can do all things" is an expansive statement. It encompasses not only the trials and hardships but also the daily tasks, responsibilities, and opportunities that come our way. It's a reminder that every aspect of our lives can be infused with the strength of Christ.

Should live in faith: Embracing Philippians 4:13 requires living in faith. It means trusting that Christ's strength is sufficient for every situation, whether big or small. This verse invites us to step out of our comfort zones, pursue God-sized dreams, and face challenges with the confidence that we are empowered by the One who is greater than any obstacle. Ricky Hill did just this.

Reflect on areas of your life where you might be feeling inadequate or facing challenges. In those moments, remember Philippians 4:13 and the assurance that you can do all things through Christ who strengthens you. Allow this truth to fuel your faith and guide your actions as you walk through each day.

Let Us Pray: Heavenly Father, thank you for the promise of Philippians 4:13. Help us to live in constant awareness of our dependence on Christ's strength. May this truth empower us to face challenges with confidence and live a life that glorifies You in all we do.

Day 24: Our Dwelling Place

Read Psalm 90



Kris Pietz

My Bible says Psalm 90 was written by Moses. He is one of the few people in the bible that we can read about his whole life and ministry, from birth through death. Moses is one to emulate, and it is so interesting to me that he wrote this Psalm! Below are a few thoughts that stuck out to me as I read Psalm 90.

Verses 1 and 2 - God is our “dwelling place”, and “From everlasting to everlasting you are God”

These two verses bring me such peace. Not only did God make the world, but He continues to be in charge of the world. I can let my type A personality rest and trust God is in charge. Remembering how big God is helps me keep my life in perspective. My goal is simply to love others and point them to Jesus.

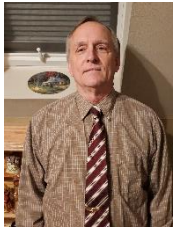
Verse 12 -Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.

As a teacher, these words mean a lot to me. My life verse has teaching as a main part of it, too. If I number my days, I think that’s reminding me to keep my priorities straight. May I use my time and energy to serve God by loving other people, rather than focus on myself.

Verse 17 - May the favor of the Lord our God rest upon us: establish the work of our hands for us - yes, establish the work of our hands.”

Our missionaries Bayo and Mary Beth Oyebade have chosen Psalm 90:17 as their ministry focus verse. Mary Beth and Bayo are amazing people, and I continue to glean insights from them to this day. Our missionaries do not get many breaks or rest from the unending needs around them. It makes my life look so easy and comfortable. If they can live in Jos, Nigeria, and ask God to guide their work, then I, too, can ask for God’s guidance.

Day 25: Finding Rest in Jesus



Dave Johnston

Matthew 11:28-30 ²⁸ *“Come to me, all you who are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ 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. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”*

In the hustle and bustle of life, it's easy to feel weighed down by the burdens we carry. We face various challenges, responsibilities, and uncertainties that can leave us feeling exhausted. However, in the midst of it all, Jesus extends a loving invitation: ***“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.”***

Jesus acknowledges our weariness and the heavy loads we bear. He understands the struggles we face, and in His compassion, He offers a solution – to come to Him. It's an invitation to lay down our burdens, to find solace in His presence, and to experience the rest that only He can provide.



But Jesus goes beyond just offering rest; He invites us to take His yoke upon us and to learn from Him. In ancient farming, a yoke was a wooden beam used to connect two oxen, allowing them to work together to pull a plow or a load. Jesus' yoke is a symbol of partnership and guidance. When we take His yoke upon us, we are joining with Him in the journey of life. We are choosing to walk alongside Him, allowing Him to lead and direct our steps.

What does it mean to learn from Him? It involves understanding His teachings, embracing His values, and adopting His perspective on life. Jesus describes Himself as "gentle and humble in heart," highlighting the qualities we should cultivate in our own lives.

The promise Jesus gives is profound: "you will find rest for your souls." It's not just physical rest but a deep, soul-satisfying rest that comes from being in a relationship with Him. In a world that often feels chaotic and overwhelming, Jesus offers a haven of peace and tranquility for our weary souls.

As we take a moment to reflect on these verses, let's respond to Jesus' invitation. Let's come to Him with our burdens, lay them at His feet, and allow Him to guide us. May we find true rest in His presence, and may His yoke be the source of strength and direction in our lives.

***“Come to me, all you who are weary and heavy-laden,
and I will give you rest”***

Day 26:



Tom Ziebell

Luke 2:28-32 ²⁸ Simeon took baby Jesus in his arms and praised God, saying: ²⁹ "Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you may now dismiss^[a] your servant in peace. ³⁰ For my eyes have seen your salvation, ³¹ which you have prepared in the sight of all nations: ³² a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel."

Or maybe the better question is; Where will Jesus meet me today?

Jesus met Simeon in the temple as an infant, and God opened his eyes to recognize his presence. Salvation in his presence! And Simeon experienced peace (vs. 29).

Jesus meets us in all things and all places and in all circumstances. Every breath and step we take. Jesus says "The kingdom is among you". Can we see as Simeon did!

Recently I ran into a brother in Christ in Menards. We stood there blocking the aisle for a half hour sharing life and having some deep faith discussions. Within that conversation I met Jesus that day. He came to meet with us in that store!!

Lord, open my heart to hear and see Your presence, Your grace and love in all things today and grant to me Your peace. Amen.

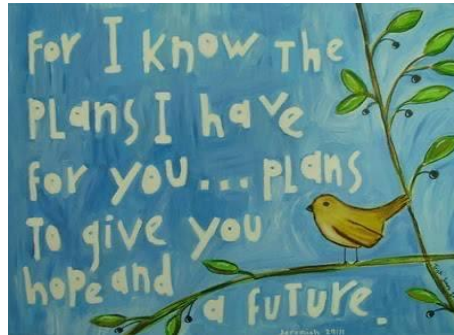
GOD'S PEACE BE WITH YOU.

Day 27:



Justine Cadena

Jeremiah 29:11-13 *“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. Then you will call upon Me and come and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. You will seek Me and find Me when you seek me with all your heart.”*



Do you ever wonder where you would be or what you'd be doing if the Lord didn't have a plan for your life?

Do you take time to reflect on what God is doing for you?

Do you pray and consult with God before making important life changing decisions?

Looking back on my own life, I never thought I would be living in Wisconsin and end up working in ministry for all the years that I did. I had plans to become an airline stewardess and travel the world. God knew that would not have been the life for me. I'm thankful and blessed that the Lord led me to St. Olaf Church where I learned more about living a Christian life, created many many relationships, and had the most memorable faith and Spirit-filled experiences.

Prayer: Lord God, Heavenly Father, thank you for always knowing what is best for us. We pray that we can see that when our own plans fail or change. Continue to lead and guide us to do your will and follow your ways. In Jesus name, we pray. Amen!

Day 28: Do Not Worry



George Monis

Matthew 6:25-34

²⁵ “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? ²⁶ Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? ²⁷ Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?

²⁸ “And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. ²⁹ Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. ³⁰ If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? ³¹ So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ ³² For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. ³³ But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. ³⁴ Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

Having lived a lifetime of 80 years, it is now evident that in my life I trusted daily in the goodness of God and his Grace. Certainly, as we were growing up there was the concern for money to buy essential living goods and for pleasure. We were raising a family that brought endless needs. It is now, after all this time that I realize that God did provide all that I need when I needed it.

There were times when the bank was looking for funds to keep me afloat and surely enough, a trip to the mailbox yielded a returned billing letter with a check that covered my needs for the day.

As life continued, I became more aware that God does look after his children in many ways. Yes, we were more than blessed and that enabled us to be a blessing to others less fortunate. We thank and praise God daily for his goodness and mercy. We pray for those less fortunate and trust in God’s goodness to provide all that is necessary. Amen

Day 29: Solitude



Pr. Tom Pietz

The gospel writer, Mark, describes Jesus as one always on the go. Immediately he heals people, teaches, preaches, travels...he's constantly going and doing something significant. Does that describe you? Are you able to sit still and just "be"? With no TV or even music on? Just BE in the quiet place.

After Jesus fed thousands of people with the disciples, Mark writes, ⁴⁵ *Immediately Jesus made his disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to Bethsaida, while he dismissed the crowd.* ⁴⁶ *After leaving them, he went up on a mountainside to pray.*

It was a part of Jesus' rhythm of life to turn to his heavenly Father and pray. Prayer is not complex. *It's simply a moment of talking with God.* We have one mouth and two ears, so it is best we be still and listen to God as well. The key thing is to SLOW DOWN, steal away, and find a sacred space to be alone, in solitude, with your heavenly Father.

Be still, take a few deep breaths in and out and invite the Holy Spirit to come and fill you. Share what's on your heart. Whatever comes to mind. Yes, your mind will wander. No worries. Just refocus. Possibly write down subjects, share, listen.



Day 30: All Bible Verses Are Useful



Michael Yohn

This past summer on the St. Olaf Mission Trip to Belize one of our guiding verses was from 2nd Timothy, 3:16-17 “All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work.”

While working with the children at the Pasadita Care Point we were able to participate in an activity where we would find the meaning in a random bible verse. In small groups we would flip open the Bible to a random page and read the first verse that our eyes landed on, and then discuss the meaning and lessons we could take from that verse. Sometimes we had to read a little ahead or a little

behind in order to get the context of the verse, but every small group was able to find the usefulness in their verses.

Try it out yourself! I did it while writing this devotional and arrived at 1 Kings: 1:26 - a verse in the middle of a story cautioning against greed and lusting for power (King David’s son Adonijah attempting to usurp the throne from his half-brother, the future King Solomon) but also showcasing mercy and forgiveness (Solomon sparing Adonijah’s life when he repents).

Just flip open your bible and get reading, it’s even better with a partner or small group to discuss with! Or, check out <https://randomwordgenerator.com/bible.php> for a way to do it on the go!

Day 31: You Can Rest Now



Pr. Tom Pietz

A few years ago, I got a text from my sister, Diane, who was flying home from visiting her granddaughter in Mexico City and then driving that Saturday to Colorado for our family Ski Trip. She's always on the go. She just can't sit still. She has very little margin or space in her life. Busy...busy...busy. I'm concerned she could crash and burn someday, sooner than later.

Jesus was hoppin' busy too. Some days he'd be healing people for hours, then walk for miles, minister in a village, and help set up camp at night. But he knew there needs to be a time for rest. Jesus was reinforcing this with his teaching and living of the Sabbath. Take a day off. Take a few hours a day, off.

My friend, Trish Bruxvoort- Colligan wrote this beautiful song. Perhaps you need to hear these very words... You can rest now.

Listen to: You Can Rest Now <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SdckXCIIyQ8>

Oh Jesus, you know our need for rest. Yes, you got tired...a good tired. Grant us the permission we need to just BE. That it's okay not to produce, to make things happen, to be at another meeting, do another thing. Rather, place in our soul the ability to let it all go and just rest, in your name Jesus, we pray, Amen.

Day 32:



Justine Cadena

We all know that everyday life can be stressful, especially when problems arise that we may not have control over. Worry, doubt, and fear creep in and make us feel anxious. God wants us to turn to Him in our times of trouble. He's there to listen and leads us to figure out ways to help us through whatever it is we are dealing with.

The following verses are ones I have repeated over and over again when praying hard during some difficult times in my life:

Philippians 4:6 *"Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your request to God."*

Philippians 4:13 *"I can do everything through Him who gives me strength."*

Matthew 11:28 *"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest."*

Reflect on these verses. Do they give you any comfort?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, you know what burdens we carry. You make ways to help us get through the tough times. Help us to reach out to you and to others when we need to. Thank you for providing family and friends, medical personnel, pastors and others, with listening ears, compassion, and love to help each other through the hard times and to celebrate the good times with. In Jesus most holy name we pray, Amen!

Day 33: ACTS1 Prayer



Pr. Tom Pietz

It helps me to have structure when I pray. One of my favorite tools is the acronym ACTS1. Again, in your quiet, sacred, secret space, with candle lit, be still and pray.

A for Adoration= Simply praise God. Something like this...You are an awesome, loving, merciful, amazing God. I praise You because I am fearfully and wonderfully made (read Psalm 139). Pray/read Psalm 100, 145, 103 and 8 silently or out loud.

C for Confession= Admit to God what you have done wrong, how you have sinned or harmed God or others. Dig deep. Sit still. Make a list. Name them. Recognize the ways you have spoken poorly/harshly of God/people. What things did you do OR didn't do that really fell short of loving God/people? Is there someone you need to reconcile with? Someone you need to apologize to? Ask for their forgiveness so that you may heal and be made well with your soul. Ask God for His forgiveness too. Then hear these words, "As a called and ordained ministry of the church of God, I proclaim the forgiveness of all your sins, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen!" You are forgiven. Be well with your soul.

T for Thanksgiving= Make an exhaustive list of EVERYTHING you are thankful to God for. Keep adding to it every day. More will come to mind. Yes, write it down in your journal and have lots of room on a large page. "Thank you God for..."

S for Supplication= That God would supply your personal needs. This is about you, not someone else. What do you need from God? Food, clothing, a job? Peace, wholeness, healing (physical, psychological, relational, emotional, spiritual), freedom from bondage to sin, hope, spiritual renewal, joy...?

I for Intercession= To intercede is to pray on behalf of others. Who/what to you want to turn over to God? Name or write down particular family members, friends, co-workers, neighbors, acquaintances. Name or write down their situations. Ask for God to do something. Listen to God's Holy Spirit that may be prompting you to do something. Give that person a call. Send them the prayer you said/wrote. Let them know how you are specifically praying for them. Ask them, "How may I pray 4 U?"

Day 34:



Marilyn Carlson

Read Luke 10:30-37

V 33 - *But a Samaritan came where the man was, and when he saw him, took pity on him...*

We need to realize that we can't save or help ourselves. We can't pull ourselves up! We are dead in our sins and need to accept God's grace in Jesus Christ.

Romans 3:10-11 says *"There is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God..."*

And Ephesians 2:4 says: *"But because of his great love for us, God who is rich in mercy made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions"*

So we are that person left by the side of the road, beaten and bruised by our turning to what the world offers instead of our Lord - but Jesus is the Good Neighbor who lifts us up, cleanses and redeems us and carries us to the cross where we receive his forgiveness!

Colossians 2:13-14 says: *When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave all our sins having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross.*

But not only that, He promises to return to totally fulfill all he's has promised just as the Samaritan promised to return!

Just as Jesus says in Revelation 22:20: *He who testifies to these things says, "Yes, I am coming soon"* Amen. Come Lord Jesus.

Prayer: Thank you, Jesus, for showing us what a good neighbor really looks like!
Lead on oh King eternal! How amazing then is this our Savior!

You can also read Psalm 145:14,18-19

Day 35: Come on Down to that River



Pr. Tom Pietz

Mac Powell is a southern rock Christian singer. I love his style. It was down at the river the many people gave their life to the Lord in baptism. In fact, there have been many spiritual revivals throughout the world and in the United States. People would come from all over to listen to the preacher, name all their sins and then they would repent, come on down to the river, be baptized, and let it wash it all away. These spiritual awakenings, as they were called, led to a massive uptick in worship attendance for decades to come throughout the region. Yes, God was up to something. And God is up to something now.



Each day is a new day. It's wise to start the day naming those sins/struggles before God, welcome that grace and forgiveness, so like a shower, it can wash all that sin away. That way you can live the day full of grace, full of joy and freedom, seizing the day and enjoying it to the fullest.

Watch *River of Life* by Mac Powell of Third Day <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ceVLJ2Xm1UM>

Day 36: Jesus is the Word, and the Word is God



Mary Hershoff

John 1:1-5 *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was in the beginning with God. ³All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being ⁴in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. ⁵The light shines in the darkness and the darkness did not overcome it.*

God came to us in human form to shine His light and show us the way to everlasting life with Him.

The more I study this passage, the more I see it's complexities and how profound John's statement is. The Word is Jesus, and Jesus is God. *God* came to us on earth in human form because He loves us, and wants us to live life fully with Him.

How John states this in words that convey rich meaning to his readers, both Hebrew and Greek, is marvelous. Thanks be to God that He gave this gift to John so that thousands of years later we are still being touched and transformed by his message!

In the first episode of the second season of "The Chosen" we see John interviewing the disciples and Mary so that he can write this message down for us. Take a look at how the writers have portrayed John's efforts.

<https://watch.thechosen.tv/video/184683594353>

Almighty God, thank you for coming to us in human form that we might know you and live our lives reflecting your light. Thank you for the light that John's gospel has shone for thousands of years. Amen.

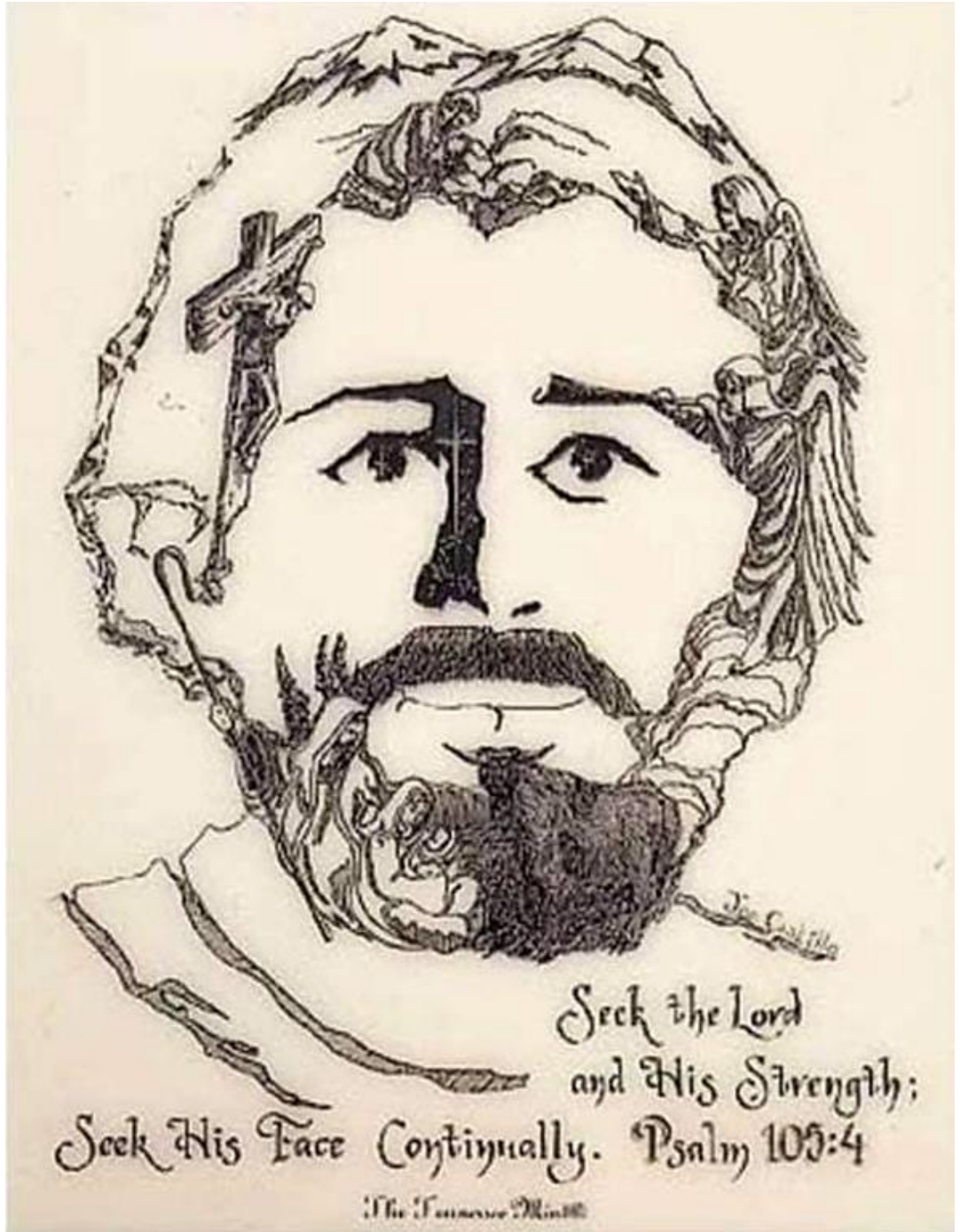
Day 37:



Justine Cadena

The longer you look at this picture of Jesus, the more you will see.

Look at the lines the artist drew and you will see scenes from Jesus' life.



Seek the Lord
and His Strength;
Seek His Face Continually. Psalm 105:4

The Famous Artist

Day 38: Gathering and Generosity



Steve Stretz

Hebrews 10:24-25 *And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, ²⁵ not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.*

2 Corinthians 9:6 *Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously.*

2 Corinthians 9:13 *Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, others will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else.*

What can happen when we gather to help others.

These may seem like an odd grouping of verses but for me it speaks about a mission where I have found joy. I am regularly asked if I am going to head down to Milwaukee this week. As many know St. Olaf and All Peoples Gathering Church are partners in mission. In summer each week some of us travel to Milwaukee to deliver fresh produce to give away to those in need. That is only possible because we, St. Olaf, work together to grow and gather that fresh produce. We “sow” generously. As time goes on, I see others recognize this work and I think it changes some of them. And I think some praise God for helping us do what we do.

Some also wonder why I go there even in the winter. The real reason, I think, is the people. It is the people that work hard, dedicated to helping others, the givers. It is those that are there to receive, that share their lives, talking about their joys and their sorrows. There are so many stories that play out when people come together to help each other.

Recently a gentlemen came to All Peoples gathering table (their outdoor garden where food is distributed) and shared a very sad story with me when I asked him how he was doing. Someone had broken into a friend's house and took some things of great value to him that he had stored there for safety. It is very unlikely they will be recovered or that he will be reimbursed for them. They were in fact part of his life savings. I couldn't imagine myself in that position. But his real reason for coming there was not to tell the story, it was to help clean up the boxes that accumulate from the produce and food that gets donated to the garden to give away. His focus was not on himself but on helping others.

A week or two before that I was unable to travel to Milwaukee because of the weather. Later in the day I received a text telling me they were glad I didn't try to come down because it was a slow day. It went on to say that there was a silver lining however. They were almost all out of produce and one of their guests had \$40 left in food stamps and asked if it would be ok if they went to a produce market to buy produce to give to others that needed it. I guess those that give out of little teach those who can give out of plenty.



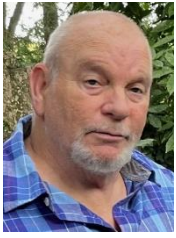
These are two of many stories. Perhaps God has a hand in these stories when people gather, spur one another on, come together to help each other. It's like the pieces of the puzzle are all there. God simply has to put them in the right place.

What is stopping us from being a piece in the much larger puzzle?

Let us pray: Heavenly Father, as we gather with a willingness to work together to help others, please use Your guiding hand to assemble the puzzle pieces, that is us, to best do Your will. Help us to prove ourselves to You. Help us to share generously. Open the hearts of others to see Your hand

in our work and want to be part of a much larger puzzle to care for and love one another. Amen.

Day 39: Reassuring That God Is Really with You



Jeff Daly

How many times in your life have you had your doubts about God, whether he really hears and cares for you? I know there have been a number of times that I have struggled with this in my life. I must keep reminding myself, "God CARES for you."

1 Peter 5:7 Give all your worries and cares to God for he cares about you.

I was brought up in a Catholic family, where we would go to church on Sundays. Well, some of us did because our moms made us. So, I knew about God, and he was in my life, but as a young kid you didn't talk about God or think about believing in God much, you just did.

Well, one day just before Christmas, that changed. I was 13 and my mom died suddenly from a heart attack. No warning, it just happened. My older siblings were already out of the house living their own lives. One of my older brothers was still at home, including my one brother who was 14 and the youngest, who was only 3 years old. So now my father, who did like to drink a lot, had to somehow take care of us. He did the best he could. What I can remember, he took my brother to school and picked him up every single day with his dog by his side. I could not understand why God would take away my mom who was such a wonderful person. As you can imagine, I was very angry with God. My father never went to church after that, and so we did not either. I lost touch with God, I felt he did not care about me because how could he do this to me?

At 20, I was ready to enlist in the Army, following in my dad and all my brother's footsteps. I was proud and excited; I knew exactly what I wanted to do in the Army. I talked with my brother about it for years. So, when the day came to enlist, I had to stand in line and take a physical. After the physical, they pulled me aside and said I needed to see a doctor right away. I was confused because I did not feel sick, but I went. I found out that I had an 11 lb. tumor in me. I immediately had to have surgery and had to go through radiation for 18 months. Once again, I felt that God let me down and did not care about me.

Philippians 4:6-7 Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

It was many years later, I got a sign from God that He was still watching over me even if I was not connecting with him like I should have. It was when my dad passed away. My 2 brothers and I all saw the exact same thing that night but were afraid to say anything because we thought people would think we were crazy. What we all saw that night, was our dog went up to my dad on the couch and put its paw into my dad's hand, but it actually was a human hand and around it was a circle of light. That same night, before my dad went to bed, instead of saying good night to my youngest brother, he said goodbye. That night he passed away. He did not make it to my brother's high school graduation a few weeks later, but he knew my brother could make it on his own now, and he could finally join my mom in heaven. I believe it was a sign from God to give me the hope that maybe he still cares for me even though I had given up on him. He got my attention, and I started to pray again and occasionally go to church.

Jeremiah 6:16 This is what the LORD says: "Stand at the crossroads and look; ask for the ancient paths, ask where the good way is, and walk in it, and you will find rest for your souls."

Through the years, I continued to struggle, I had more downs than ups and the thoughts came back. Does God really hear me, and does he really care about me? I had to have major heart surgery only 10 months after my wedding. I was not only worried about dying, but I was also very concerned for my wife who was already going through a sad and difficult time with her mother being ill and her father's passing. How can a caring God let this all happen? Once again, I felt God was not listening to my prayers.

When I finally found a job that I really was starting to enjoy, disappointment hit again. My body gave out on me, and I could not continue. Again, why was God not listening to my prayers to make me healthy? There are days when I am in a lot of pain and cannot do what I want to or should do. I feel bad when people ask for help, and I know I physically can't. I don't like going places where everyone is helping, and I am not able to. Again, I ask why does God not care about me?

Psalms 40:1-2 I waited patiently for the LORD; he turned to me and heard my cry. He lifted me out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and mire; he set my feet on a rock and gave me a firm place to stand.

Continued

I have finally realized that God has never given up on me but I, many times, gave up on him. Thinking back on my life, on how really blessed I have been. Through all the difficult and rough times, I have made it through, and I am still here. My wife does have to remind me from time to time that I could be much worse off. I then realize that I do need to be thankful for all that I have and can do.

I compare myself to an old car. My headlights (eyes) needed to be fixed, my tires (hip and shoulders) were worn out, my radiator (appendix) blew up, my motor (heart valve) needed replacing and my fuel lines (arteries) were rusty, so they were repaired (stents). I also got a new electronic ignition system (pacemaker/defibrillator), so I would say I am pretty well restored so far. I am also restored with knowing that God does care for me, even if I must continue to go through bodily repairs, I am restored by faith.

I now keep praying, and I enjoy going to church because it reminds me that God does care about me. Pastor Tom sends a message out every week that I can relate to and makes me think about my past, present and future. So, if you feel that God does not care about you and has given up on you, think again. Come back to church and prayer, and you will be amazed at what God can do for you as he has done for me.

Matthew 11:28 Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.

Day 40: Home

Psalm 88:1-2



Sonja Daly

O Lord, the God who saves me, day and night I cry out before you. May my prayer come before you; turn your ear to my cry.

God put a song in my heart when I was hurting most.

As a child or young adult, you don't think much about death. You especially don't think about your parents never being there. It was at a time where every happy or sad moment, every decision was discussed around a meal or on a call home. You wanted to be an adult and make decisions on your own but how comforting it was to be able to talk to your parents and see what they had to say.

My dad was always so interested to hear about how my day at work went. It was fun to talk to him about the ups and downs of the corporate world, you could see that twinkle in his eye when he would ask, "Anything new at work?". He was retired and sometimes I think he missed the days of going off to work, even though he had enough to do around the house and in the barn, taking care of his chickens. He knew my work colleagues by name and could not wait to hear about the new project that was starting, the great sale that was made or where the next distributor meeting was going to be. It was nice to be able to tell someone about your workday who really took interest in it.

It was such a blessing to have someone there to listen what was happening in your life, asking for second opinions when looking at purchasing a home or how to fix things. From the smallest happy moments to the biggest and hardest decisions, it was just such a good feeling to have my dad around to listen. Well then, the day came when that feeling was lost. He became sick and gave it his all, financially and physically to overcome the cancer that struck him. The doctors gave him five months and almost to the day, he was gone in five months. How devastating it is for a child to lose a parent at any age, since we think they are indestructible and will live forever.

I knew someday I would meet my dad again, but it was difficult to accept he was gone. At that time everything was such a blur, and it was painful to move on. The days continue to go by and there is still not a single day that I don't think of my dad and mom and miss them dearly.

God puts a song in our heart in good times and bad. When my dad passed, I heard the song Finally Home by Mercy Me, it was a song that went straight to my heart. Was it for me to meet with my dad again or was it me meeting the heavenly Father, I know it will be both when "I" finally make it home.

Finally Home by Mercy Me

I'm gonna wrap my arms around my daddy's neck
And tell 'em that I've missed him
And tell 'em all about the man that I became
And hope that it pleased him
There's so much I wanna say
So much I wanted you to know

When I finally make it home
When I finally make it home

Then I'll gaze upon the throne of the King
Frozen in my steps
And all the questions that I swore I would ask
Words just won't come yet
I'm so amazed at what I've seen
So much more than this old mind can hold

Continued

When I finally make it home
When I finally make it home

And the sweetest sound these ears have yet to hear
The voices of the angels

When I finally make it home
When I finally make it home

You can listen to this song at [MercyMe - Finally Home \(Video\) \(youtube.com\)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rlxFee1mRtE)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rlxFee1mRtE>

Psalm 23:6

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.

I understand that God is our Home. We will all, one day meet at Home.

Dear God,

I ask you to be with and comfort all those who have lost a loved one. All of those who find it difficult to understand why now, why a person that I love must leave this earth so soon. Could you have not given them one more day, one more week, one more year? Give them the understanding that it was their time, and we should not be selfish in wanting them to have stayed with us instead of having them gone to a place that is finally truly Home. A place that is more beautiful and wonderful than we could ever imagine. Give them peace in their hearts.

Amen.